

GRANDPARENTS AS CARERS

TRENDS & SUPPORT SERVICES IN EUROPE



EUROPEAN SURVEY AND REVIEW

eurochild
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By **Lenia Samuel**

Adviser hors classe - European Commission

In charge of the European Year 2012 for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations

There is perhaps no more direct expression of both active ageing and solidarity between generations than grandparent's care for their grandchildren. Thanks to the Eurochild report on Grandparents as carers: trends and support services in Europe, this topic can now get the attention it deserves, and is an important follow-up to the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations.

The purpose of the European Year is to highlight the many important roles that older people play in our societies, and to enhance the opportunities for a more active life as we grow old. Active ageing means being able to live independently and remaining in charge of one's own life for as long as possible. That means raising the labour market participation of older people as well as enhancing the many different ways in which they contribute voluntarily to the lives of their families and communities.

Grandparent's care for their grandchildren is one of the most important unpaid forms of active ageing – and unpaid typically also means unrecognized. It does not come within the definition of GDP, and yet it may well have an important indirect economic effect insofar as the childcare provided by grandparents allows parents – and mothers in particular – to stay in employment.

As a grandmother myself, I know how rewarding it is to spend time with grandchildren. But grandparent care is often an economic necessity that results from a lack of affordable childcare services. This report points out that budget cuts may aggravate this lack and increase the need for childcare to be provided by grandparents.

Governments would, however, be ill-advised to regard grandparents as a cheap solution to the childcare problem. Adequate and sustainable pensions in the future will depend on women and men retiring later. As some countries are equalizing the retirement ages for women and men, women in these countries can expect to retire much later than now and will be less able to look after their grandchildren. Moreover, the importance of early education and childcare, particularly for the development of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, is now widely recognized.

The long-term prosperity of our societies depends on high levels of employment and the best possible environment for the development of our children. Grandparents have an important role to play in this regard, and they should be supported in this role. But grandparents cannot be a substitute for public investment in high-quality childcare services.

I do hope that this report will contribute to a well-informed debate on how we can build a new partnership between public authorities and extended families in the best interest of all generations – and of children in particular.

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The research was conducted and this report written by Tony Ivens and Lucy Akhtar of Children in Wales.¹

The report was revised and edited by the independent consultant Ed Thorpe of Thorpe European Services.²

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EUROCHILD

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Eurochild works to:

- promote wide recognition of children as individual rights holders
- convince policy and decision makers to put the best interest of the child in every decision affecting them
- encourage all those working with and for children and their families to take a child-centred approach
- give children and young people in Europe a voice by promoting participatory methods in child and family services, raising children's awareness of their rights and supporting child and youth led organisations.

Eurochild currently has 122 full members organisations across 37 countries.

Eurochild - Avenue des Arts 1-2; B-1210 Brussels; Belgium

www.eurochild.org - info@eurochild.org

Tel: +32 (0)2 511 70 83 Fax: +32 (0)2 511 72 98



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For more information see: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/progress/index_en.html

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¹ www.childreninwales.org.uk

² ed@thorpeeuropeanservices.co.uk

Foreword	0
Acknowledgements	2
Contents	3
About the authors	4
Executive Summary	5
Introduction	9
Background	10
Section One- Literature review	11
Demographic and family trends	11
Intergenerational transfers (financial)	12
Intergenerational learning	13
Grandparents as informal carers	14
The gender dimension	15
Kinship care	16
Grandparent-child relationships	16
Grandparents within family policy	17
Section Two - Survey results	19
Grandparents as carers	19
Information and support services for grandparents	20
Organisations providing support to grandparents	21
Section Three - Case studies	25
Case study 1: Belgium	25
Case Study 2: The Netherlands	26
Case Study 3: Slovenia	27
Case Study 4: Scotland, UK	28
Conclusions and recommendations	29
Conclusions	29
Policy recommendations	30
Annex One - The survey respondents	33
Annex Two - Additional comments	37

About the authors

Tony Ivens, Children in Wales

Tony Ivens has worked in the field of family and parenting support since the late 1990s, both at practice and policy level. He has conducted research (which is available on the Children in Wales website), lectured at on the subject and delivered papers at numerous conferences across Europe. He has also developed, and delivers, post-qualification training for a range of professionals from both the voluntary and statutory sectors.

Since 2004, Tony has been funded by the Welsh Government as the Fatherhood Development Officer at Children in Wales. Tony was responsible for developing the Welsh Government Guidelines for Involving Fathers in Early Years Services, and chaired the government working group which produced the Welsh Parenting Action Plan.

Tony was a founder member of the Eurochild Family & Parenting Support Thematic Working Group, and has chaired the group since its inception in 2009.

Lucy Akhtar, Children in Wales

Lucy Akhtar is Development Officer for Parenting at Children in Wales, aiming to develop and ensure the effective implementation of Children in Wales' policy and public education work on family and parenting issues across Wales. The role includes coordinating the Parenting Coordinators Network and North Wales Families First Parenting Learning Set and providing information, events and training to support practitioners.

Lucy is also on secondment for two days a week at the Welsh Government supporting the development of family support policy.

Lucy has worked for Children in Wales since 2001, in which time her roles have included Policy Information Officer on the 4 Nations Child Policy Network and coordinator of the End Child Poverty Network Cymru.

Outside of work Lucy has been Chair of Governors of her local primary school (2003-07). She was also a co-opted member of Cardiff Community Health Council (2010-11), which represents the interests of patients and scrutinises the operation of health services in Cardiff.

Europe is the continent with the highest proportion of older citizens, at the same time fertility levels are falling. A major preoccupation of European governments is thus around the challenges that such demographic change create. However, it is not clear that there is enough consideration given to the contribution made by older people, or that as much as possible is being done to support positive intergenerational exchanges.

As part of the NGOs Coalition for the 2012 European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity Between Generations led by AGE Platform Europe³, Eurochild - via its Working Group on Family and Parenting Support - decided to commission a small study to examine the situation of grandparents as carers in Europe. The methodology was to conduct a literature review of existing research, supported by an online survey of NGOs in the field and case studies of interesting support practices.

The research confirmed that families are changing through demographic trends and evolving trends in family choices and lifestyles. Economic factors, such as increased female employment, longer working lives and the need to move regions for work are also impacting on families. So, whilst grandparents have always played an important role in families and the lives of children, that role is necessarily evolving.

There is a common perception that adult children are having to pay both for their elderly parents and for their children. However, the evidence shows that grandparents are net financial contributors to the younger generations. Furthermore, grandparents are important educators and sources of advice and support for their children and grandchildren. Intergenerational learning, in fact, provides benefits to all generations.

Grandparents sometimes make their most important contribution as carers to younger generations. This benefits the child and enables intergenerational learning, but also often brings additional economic benefits in enabling the parents to remain in employment. Indeed, grandparents are more likely to take on a carer role in low-income families where the need for the mother to work and the inability to pay an alternative childminder are highest.

There is an important gender dimension to the caring role of grandparents, with evidence of much more grandmother care than by grandfathers. This may partly be explained by 'maternal instincts', although much is perhaps explained by the simple fact that grandmothers have more healthy life years on average and so are statistically more likely to be able to fulfil such a role.

There is evidence that increases in family breakdown are leading to increases in grandparents taking on the role of kinship carer – that is taking on full-time care of their grandchild(ren). This is often seen as preferable to placing a child outside the extended family. However it is neither consistently held as a likely preferred arrangement for children, nor adequately supported in terms of helping grandparents to deal with the role.

In general, there is a lack of policy focus on the important contribution made by grandparents to individuals, to families and to society as a whole, including economically. The only area where the role of grandparents and government policy regularly come together explicitly is in relation to kinship care and even here, it is a mixed picture. There are clear links to be made in areas including the fight against child poverty and the employment of women.

Furthermore, beyond supporting the existing work done by grandparents, thought needs to be given to how additional social changes may restrict this contribution in the future. For example, longer working lives and increased geographical mobility may reduce the ability of grandparents to be present in the lives of their grandchildren. Family breakdowns can increase the role of a grandparent in a child's life; but in other circumstances such a breakdown can cut the grandparent out entirely.

³ www.age-platform.eu

The online survey gathered 120 responses from 30 European countries. Key findings on the support provided to grandparents were:

- Only around 20% of all the respondents felt that information specifically designed for grandparents was provided in their country.
- Nor was there much evidence of available funding to provide such support. Of those that provided an answer, 65% said there was none in their country.
- The most common areas of support identified were advice and 'parenting' support, which were more than twice as likely to be provided by NGOs than the State.
- The main form of State support to grandparents was identified as financial – although not likely to be explicitly for their role as a grandparent.

Respondents from 15 countries said there was an organisation providing information, support, advice and/or advocacy to grandparents in their countries. Examples of such organisations were provided for ten European countries and included in this report. Four of the strongest examples of support for grandparents were selected for case studies:

1. The Grandparents and Senior Action programme of the Flemish Family Bond provides dedicated information, advice, events and peer-support opportunities to grandparents as part of its overall work to support families.
2. The Dutch Advocacy Foundation for Foster Grandparents advocates for grandparent kinship carers in dealings with relevant authorities and supports them via a dedicated helpline, website, newsletter, events and peer-support groups.
3. Two intergenerational community centres in Slovenia provide a space for multiple generations to mix and learn together around organised activities. They provide particular support and opportunities to otherwise isolated grandparent kinship carers.
4. A National Kinship Care Training and Outreach Service run by CHILDREN 1ST in Scotland provides support and advice, information packs, skills development, networking opportunities, and mediation services specifically for kinship carers.

Based on the combined findings of the literature review, the survey and the case studies of support services, as well as the experience and reflections of the researchers, this brochure makes the following policy recommendations related to the issue of grandparents as carers in Europe:

➔ **Member states should do more to recognise and support the vital contribution of grandparents to social and economic well-being in Europe**

The contribution to economic activity that grandparents make directly through financial transfers and indirectly through provision of flexible, informal childcare – which often allows parents to stay in work - is currently neither recognised, nor sufficiently valued. Governments should ensure that grandparents are not disadvantaged, either financially or socially, through taking on these responsibilities, but rather be supported in doing so.

➔ **Flexible working should be extended to grandparents**

The flexible working arrangements currently available to mothers and fathers in many countries should be extended to include grandparents, many of whom are themselves still in full-time employment and risk being unable to fulfil their important role within the family

➔ **Fiscal policy should encourage financial transfers from old to young**

Financial transactions across the generations from old to young are an important protective factor in the fight against child poverty – increasingly so in the current economic climate. Such intergenerational transfers should be encouraged through tax allowances.

→ **Intergenerational-learning good practice should be rolled out across the EU**

Intergenerational learning provides real benefits to both old and young, both in terms of the development of new skills, but also as a means of personal development and the improvement of understanding between generations. Positive examples to foster such exchanges - such as the Slovenian Case Study in this report - should be promoted and rolled out across Member States.

→ **Grandparents' access to a child should be legally protected after family breakdown**

Family breakdown and separation is generally on the increase. Judicial systems (family courts, etc.) that rule on the access of parents and formal care placements for the child need to recognise the importance of the grandparent-child relationship to both parties. Contact arrangements should routinely include grandparents, providing this is in the best interests of the child.

→ **Grandparent kinship carers should receive greater support**

Grandparents fulfilling the role of kinship carer should receive the same levels of support as other foster carers, and enjoy the same entitlements to state benefits as the parents themselves had previously received. Supporting kinship carers is still a more affordable solution than other full-time care placements. The children and young people in these situations should also receive appropriate support.

As part of the 2012 European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity Between Generations, Eurochild decided to commission a small study to examine the situation of grandparents in Europe fulfilling a caring role for their grandchildren. This brochure sets out the findings of that study.

Tony Ivens and Lucy Akhtar of Children in Wales were commissioned to undertake this work. Tony and Lucy were able to build on experience they had acquired in 2011 when they canvassed the views of grandparents in south Wales through an on-line survey, at two events and through two focus groups.

The methodology for the study was firstly to conduct a literature review to collate what information was already available from research in Europe on the role of grandparents in the lives of their grandchildren, including through financial, educational and caring support.

The researchers were secondly to launch a survey to gather information on the situation of grandparents, particularly when fulfilling a caring role for a child and what support is currently available to them across Europe.

There were 120 respondents to the survey, from 27 different countries, representing a wide range of NGOs. This report does not claim to provide a definitive and comprehensive account of all the support services that are available to grandparents as carers. What it does is highlight the kinds of services that are currently provided and reveals some of the variable nature of this support across Europe.

More detailed case studies were made of four interesting examples of promising practice in relation to important issues for grandparents, including kinship care, social and legal information and advice, support around family breakdown and intergenerational learning. The case studies are from Belgium, the Netherlands, Slovenia and the UK (Scotland).

This report presents the findings of these three elements – literature review, survey, case studies – and goes on to draw out important conclusions on the contribution of grandparents and associated trends. It finally makes recommendations for the future of policy and practice in the field of supporting intergenerational solidarity and the role of grandparents as carers in particular.

The report hopes to feed in to ongoing policy discussions and the development of knowledge around the topic of grandparents as carers. It seeks to build on the European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity Between Generations 2012 in delivering the message that older people often make invaluable contributions to society as grandparents; and that they are currently under-valued and under-supported by policies in Europe in fulfilling these roles.

Background

Europe is the continent with the highest proportion of older citizens, at the same time fertility levels are falling.⁴ A major preoccupation of European governments is thus around the challenges that such demographic change create for the sustainability of funding for pensions and elderly care, particularly within a challenging economic climate.

Policy-makers and the media often focus on the intergenerational challenges of an ageing population. However, it is not clear that there is enough consideration given to the contribution made by older people - to individuals, families and society as a whole - or that as much as possible is being done to support positive intergenerational exchanges.

Grandparents have always played a significant role in supporting their own children to raise a family. This support can be as advisors to the parents, educators to the children, informal carers or simply through financial transfers. The support provides direct benefits to children and parents, but also makes an important indirect contribution to the economy, notably by enabling parents to remain in the labour market.

However, the world is changing. More thought is needed around how modern trends in family life, the labour market and the economy are impacting on the role of grandparents in the family and how that role is facilitated or hindered by public policies.

Since 2009, Eurochild has been involved in an awareness-raising campaign to attract the attention of politicians at all levels on how both to rethink the concept of solidarity between generations and support civil society initiatives on intergenerational co-operation⁵.

In spring 2011, the European Parliament and European Commission officially declared 2012 to be the European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations. The year is intended to raise awareness of the contribution that older people make to society. It also seeks to encourage policymakers and relevant stakeholders at all levels to take action to support and promote such contributions and solidarity between generations.

In the context of the European Year, Eurochild's Thematic Working Group on Family and Parenting Support⁶ decided to focus attention on the contribution of grandparents to families across Europe. This brochure is an important resulting output.

⁴ Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) is a multidisciplinary and cross-national panel database of micro data on health, socio-economic status and social and family networks of more than 55,000 individuals from 20 European countries aged 50 or over.

⁵ This work fed into the campaign carried by the EY2012 NGOs Coalition led by AGE. For more information please visit AGE website: <http://tinyurl.com/ct7qmd3>.

⁶ The group provides a forum for Eurochild members to exchange experience and know-how, thereby contributing to improved policy and practice across Europe.

Section One - Literature review

The researchers examined the existing literature around a range of topics relevant to the issue of grandparents as carers, particularly demographic and family trends, intergenerational transfers, the gender dimension of care, full-time kinship care, intergenerational learning, family policy and the grandparent-child relationship.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND FAMILY TRENDS

Previously, extended families consisted of more children than adults, showing family trees that were wider at the bottom like pyramids. More recently, the number of children per generation has steadily gone down and life expectancy has increased.⁷ This has resulted in what academics refer to as the “beanpole family” - a family tree that looks tall and thin, with more generations alive at the same time and a similar small number of people in each.⁸ There are even increasing numbers of families that consist of “inverted pyramids” - with more old than young members. This is creating the wider phenomenon of ageing societies.⁹

At the same time, family life has undergone a period of substantive change since the 1960s. There are higher levels or rates of: co-habitation; individuals choosing to marry at a later age; separation and divorce; re-marriage; single-parent households; couples living ‘together apart’; and same sex couples.

These two trends have combined to change the make-up of ‘typical’ households, which has important consequences for intergenerational relationships within families. The traditional family consisting of a married couple with children has become much less widespread. Instead, there is a trend in Europe today towards more independent living - both in the nuclear family as well as in the older generation.¹⁰

At the same time, more people are living in three- or even four-generation families. A quarter of all individuals aged 50-60 in Austria, Denmark, France and Sweden are in four-generation families.¹¹

With particular reference to grandparenting, the following trends can be observed:

- Grandparenting has become a role that bridges middle and old age.¹²
- It is no longer unusual for the grandparent-grandchild bond to exist for 30 or even 40 years.¹³
- Today’s children are likely to have more grandparents and great-grandparents than siblings.
- A British study found that 80% of twenty-year-olds had at least one grandparent living.⁸

It is interesting to note that people are more likely to have a grandmother still present in their life than a grandfather. Norwegian survey data revealed that mothers’ mothers were, on average, born seven years later than fathers’ fathers.¹⁴ The study showed that among Norwegians in their thirties, around 40% had at least

⁷ Grundy, E., Murphy M. and Shelton (1999) “Looking beyond the household: intergenerational perspectives on living kin and contacts with kin in Great Britain, Population Trends 97, pp. 19-27

⁸ Bengtson, V.L. (2001) Beyond the Nuclear family: the increasing importance of multi-generational bonds. Journal of Marriage & Family, 63, 1-16

⁹ Pearl, A. Dykstra (2010) Intergenerational Family Relationships in Ageing Societies. United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

¹⁰ Tomassini, C., Glaser, K., Wolf, D.A., Broese van Groenou, M.I. & Grundy, E. (2004) ‘Living arrangements among older people: An overview of trends in Europe and the USA’, Population Trends, vol. 115, pp.

¹¹ Kohli, Kunemund & Ludicke (2005) Mannheim Research Institute for the Economics of Ageing

¹² Wilton, V. and Davey, J. A. (2006) “Grandfathers - Their Changing Family Roles and Contributions”, Wellington: New Zealand Institute for Research on Ageing: Blue Skies Report No 3/06

¹³ Hagestad G. & Herlofson K., (2010) Micro and macro perspectives on Intergenerational relations and transfers in Europe, Agder University College and Norwegian Social Research

¹⁴ NorLAG/LOGG: The Norwegian Lifecourse Generation Study: Statistics Norway is responsible for conducting the GGP in Norway, in cooperation with Norwegian Social Research (NOVA).

one grandparent still living. Among these adult grandchildren, 62% still had their maternal grandmother while only 15% had their paternal grandfather.

It is nevertheless worth remembering that these trends do not apply universally. The Netherlands Central Bureau of Statistics estimates that 25% of individuals born in the 1960s will never become a grandparent.¹⁵

There are also substantial regional differences in household make up across Europe. The prevalence of extended-family households varies from just 0.2% of all households in the Nordic countries to more than 10% in the New Member States.¹⁶ The make-up of these extended-family households also shows marked differences across the regions. In the Nordic countries extended-family households mostly consist of adult children living with a partner and one (or both) of their parents. In the New Member States - and to a lesser extent in the Southern European countries – extended-family households predominantly consist of multi-generational households, in which a couple live with both parents and children.¹³ In the UK and Ireland, the majority of extended households consist of a lone parent living with one or both of her own parents.

Table 1: The living situation of children across the EU regions

	% Lone parent	% Cohabiting couple	% Married couple	% Extended Family
Sweden	17.0	27.3	54.4	0.5
UK	20.8	12.8	65.1	3.1
Greece	4.8	2.1	91.8	5.7
Bulgaria	14.4	15.6	66.9	44.1

Source: "Household Composition Across the new Europe: Where do the new member states fit in?", Iacovou, M. & Skew, A.J. (2011), *Demographic Research* Vol 25(14), pp. 465-490

Increasing geographical mobility, particularly in search of work, has also had an impact on intergenerational relationships. In north-western Europe (UK, France, Germany, Austria, Belgium, Luxemburg and Ireland) roughly 50% of all parents do not have any child living within 25 km (excluding those living in the same household). This figure falls to 40% in the Nordic countries (Sweden, Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands), and is similar in the southern Member States (Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece).¹⁷ The implication of this trend is that fewer families will have constant contact between grandparents and their grandchildren.

INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSFERS (FINANCIAL)

There has been increasing talk of "intergenerational conflict" in recent times. Much of the debate has focussed on its public dimension, especially in terms of social security, pensions and healthcare systems. However, a significant part of the generational contract has to be understood as informal interactions, which often take place in the family.

A common view is that adult children are net contributors in terms of their support to elderly parents. There is also a popular perception – which figures prominently in both public and policy debate - of a "sandwich generation" which is caught having to provide simultaneously for both their children and their parents.¹⁸

However, the distribution of responsibility within families is often more complicated than the simple image presented of the "sandwich generation". In many families, the younger generation – as they become young adults – are taking on a caring and support role for their grandparents. Also, many people are increasingly

¹⁵ Prins (1994) Probability of grandparenthood not down yet. *Maanstadt bevolking*, 42(1), 6-8

¹⁶ European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC)

¹⁷ SHARE data, (Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe)

¹⁸ Agree, E.M., Bissett, B. & Rendal, M.S. (2003) Simultaneous care for parents and care for children among mid-life British women. *Population trends*, 112, 27-34

looking to leave responsibility for caring for elderly relatives to the State.¹⁹ In the Nordic countries (along with Italy) care for older people is part of public social care.

Research in fact shows that, on average, older generations make important financial transfers to younger generations:

- Overall financial transfers from elderly parents to their children are far more frequent than those in the opposite direction. The positive balance decreases with age, but even those over the age of 70 clearly remain net givers.²⁰
- On average across Europe, 25% of all parents aged 50 or older provide their children with significant financial support.¹⁰
- Again there are regional variations, with the greatest financial transfers from older parents in the Nordic countries and lower levels in southern and eastern Europe.
- Greater frequency of contact between grandparents and their grandchildren is positively associated with higher financial transfers.²¹

The counter-argument can nevertheless be made that financial support from the elderly to their children and grandchildren is often only possible on the basis of public pension incomes and benefits, which is paid for by those in employment.

INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING

Research shows that there is a consistent downward flow of social transfers from older to younger generations. Grandparents are often important educators to their grandchildren. This may take the form of formal learning, such as teaching grandchildren basic literacy or numeracy skills. However, of greater importance often is the informal learning, which typically takes place within the family.

Grandparents can be an important source of advice and someone trusted to talk to outside of the immediate parent-child relationship. Interactions with grandparents can also provide young people with an opportunity to encounter new concepts and ways of understanding the world around them. Informal learning is, by definition, difficult to measure. However there is a general consensus in the literature of its value.

Furthermore, this “intergenerational learning” works in both directions; grandparents often benefit from many of the skills their grandchildren possess in relation to such areas as internet use, mobile-phones, or other new technologies.

Intergenerational learning can also take place in more formal settings. There are indeed examples in Norway and the UK of local initiatives in which grandparents work as volunteers within a school. A 2009 Flash Eurobarometer survey - conducted by GALLUP and sponsored by the European Commission - found that 90% of people across the 27 EU countries agreed that local authorities and schools should support associations and initiatives that foster stronger relations between younger and older people.²² Just over 60% of Europeans disagreed that their government does a good job in promoting a better understanding between young and old.

¹⁹ Ipsos Mori (2011) “Public opinion research on social care funding: A literature review on behalf of the Commission on the Funding of Care and Support”

²⁰ Albertini, M., Kohli, M., & Vogel C. (2009) Intergenerational transfers of time and money in European families: common patterns *Journal of European Social Policy*

²¹ Lennartsson, C., Silverstein, M. & Fritzell, J. (2010) ‘Time-for-Money Exchanges Between Older and Younger Generations in Swedish Families’, *Journal of Family Issues*, vol. 31, no. 2, pp. 189-210

²² As reported in the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research Policy Brief, “Intergenerational Solidarity: Policy Challenges and Societal Responses”, July 2010

Recent research from the UK²³ has suggested some key factors in ensuring the success of intergenerational work:

- The ratio of older people to younger people – one-to-one appears to be preferable
- Ensuring there is a match of interests between older and younger people
- Preparing participants and involving them in the planning and design of sessions
- The skill of the facilitator
- Having a champion who can drive intergenerational work forward at a strategic level

The Beth Johnson Foundation - with the European Map of Intergenerational Learning (EMIL)²⁴ and partners from Bulgaria, Sweden, Spain and Slovenia - has recently gained two-year funding to develop a distance-learning course that will enable people across Europe to develop their skills and expertise in organising projects between generations.

GRANDPARENTS AS INFORMAL CARERS

Sometimes the most important contribution that grandparents make is in the form of informal childcare. Indeed, in some regions of Europe there seems to be a distrust of providing childcare for young children in formal facilities such as nurseries. Parents perceive grandparental child care as the most trustworthy, providing a safe and emotionally nurturing environment that benefits their children.²⁵

Older generations serve as a significant help and support for parents raising children, especially to mothers who want or need to remain in the labour market. Interestingly, first-born or only children seem to receive grandparental care more often than second or subsequent children, as caring for more than one child becomes a more difficult task for grandparents.²⁶

The availability of grandparents to provide childcare is an important factor in influencing mothers' decisions to return to work.²⁷ This is particularly true for lower-income groups who are less likely to be able to afford a professional child-minder²⁸:

- In the UK, grandparents provide 40% of all childcare for parents who are either at work or studying.²⁹
- In the UK, 65% of managers and other professional mothers use the services of a professional child care provider, whereas for unskilled or semi-skilled mothers the figure drops to around 7%.³⁰ In this latter group the extra childcare required by working mothers is provided by other family members such as fathers, and increasingly, grandparents.
- Around 60% of grandmothers and 50% of grandfathers provide some kind of care for a grandchild aged 15 or younger, in an average year.

However, discussions around the important contribution made by grandparents may become increasingly necessary given relevant trends in the economy and labour market, including:

²³ Martin, K.; Springate, I. & Atkinson, M. (2010) "Intergenerational practice: outcomes and effectiveness", (LGA Research Report). Slough: NFER.

²⁴ www.emil-network.eu

²⁵ Jappens & Van Bavel (2012) Regional family norms and child care by grandparents in Europe. Demographic research Vol 27/4/DOI

²⁶ Fergusson, Maughan and Golding (2008) When children receive grandparental care and what effect does it have? Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry 49(2)

²⁷ Gray, A. (2005), 'The changing availability of grandparents as carers and its implications for childcare policy in the UK', Journal of Social Policy, vol. 34, pp. 557-577

²⁸ Fergusson, Maughan and Golding (2008) When children receive grandparental care and what effect does it have? Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry 49(2)

²⁹ Dex, S. & Joshi, H. (2004) Millennium Cohort Study. Institute of Education

³⁰ The Millennium Cohort Study (MCS), a multi-disciplinary research project following the lives of around 19,000 children born in the UK in 2000-01. It also collects information on the children's siblings and parents.

- Increased geographical mobility of the workforce, which can create the barrier of distance to grandparents taking on an informal carer role to their grandchildren.
- Increased retirement ages³¹ are likely to mean grandparents' are increasingly still in work themselves and not available to care for grandchildren

These issues are particularly important that the contribution from grandparents is at its highest in those families most at risk of experiencing child poverty.

THE GENDER DIMENSION

Whilst around 50% of grandfathers provide some kind of care for a grandchild aged 15 or younger, in an average year, the equivalent figure for grandmothers is around 60%. This not only highlights the high levels of grandparental child care, but also the fact that it is very much a gendered activity. Evidence shows that grandmothers - particularly maternal grandmothers - are more likely to be providers than grandfathers, particularly in more intensive child care.^{32 33 34}

The centrality of the mother-daughter bond and maternal instincts in the grandmother are often offered as an explanation for the overall gender difference. However, at least part of the phenomenon is explained by the simple fact – as we saw in the section on demographic and family trends above - that the mother's mother is generally the youngest. She is therefore likely to be more active for longer than a grandfather, sharing more years, on average, with the life of the grandchild.

Nevertheless, many grandfathers still perform a significant role in the lives of their grandchildren. Regardless of familial and personal circumstances, men describe engaging with their grandchildren in a range of ways that reflect their identities as men. These tend to be instrumental tasks such as taking grandchildren to appointments, doing activities outside the home, and educating them.³⁵

Davidson et al (2003) suggest³⁶ that the role of grandfather is a “potentially paradoxical” one for older men. “It is paradoxical because, on the one hand, men may be exhibiting a ‘gentler’, more nurturing relationship with a grandchild than they had with their own children but, on the other hand, may still be viewed, and view themselves, as having the traditional patriarchal role as ‘sage’ or ‘wise man’.”

Another aspect of the gender dimension is that following divorce, children are more likely to maintain contact with their maternal grandparents, reflecting the child's living arrangements. This was reflected in research in Flanders where children are more likely to spend most of their time living with their mother and consequently spent more time with their maternal grandparents.³⁷

³¹ OECD Pensions Outlook 2012

³² Dubas, J.S. (2001) How gender moderates the grandparent-grandchild relationship: A comparison of kin-keeper and kin-selector theories. *Journal of Family Issues* 22(4): 478-492.

³³ Brandis, J. (2003) Grandparents as child care givers for working mothers. A literature review in Spain and other advanced societies. Madrid: Universidad Carlos III de Madrid

³⁴ Grandparents Plus (2009) “My second mum and dad: The involvement of grandparents in the lives of teenage grandchildren” Research undertaken by Ann Buchanan and Julia Griggs at the Department for Social Policy and Social Work, University of Oxford and supported by an ESRC grant

³⁵ Tarrant, A. (2011) “Exploring the influence of intergenerational relations on the construction and performance of contemporary grandfather identities” PhD Thesis. Lancaster University UK

³⁶ Davidson, K., Daly, T. and Arber, S. (2003) 'Exploring the social worlds of older men', In Arber, S., Davidson, K. and Ginn, J. (eds.) *Gender and Ageing: Changing Roles and Relationships*. Maidenhead: Open University Press, pp. 168 – 185

³⁷ Jappens, M., Van Bavel, J. (2012) Echtscheiding en contacten tussen kleinkinderen en grootouders (Divorce and contacts between grandchildren and grandparents) Presentation at Dag van de Sociologie 2012, 24 Mei, Utrecht 2012

KINSHIP CARE

We define “kinship care” here as an arrangement where a child goes to live full-time with another family member; for anything from a few days to permanently.

Kinship care – which is most often provided by grandparents - is considered to be generally preferable to a placement with a stranger or institution. It offers a continued sense of belonging to a family, helps reduce trauma and increases the likelihood of retaining contact with the wider family (at least on one side).³⁸

Comparable data on the number of children living in kinship care arrangements across Europe is non-existent. There is especially little data on children living with grandparents on an informal basis. However, the scant evidence does suggest that this is happening more often due to factors such as increased abuse, neglect and parental drug misuse.^{39 40}

In the UK there is new legislation placing a duty on local authorities to give preference to a relative or friend when considering foster care. This is likely to be important since there has been evidence that authorities have not always even considered kinship options when making formal care arrangements up to now.⁴¹

In regions of the Netherlands, individuals are not eligible to become foster parents if they are aged over 47, or if there is an age difference with the child greater than 40 years. This may mean that the child is taken out of the family or that the grandparent cares informally without being able to access some support services.

Kinship foster parents are generally older and have lower incomes, poorer health, and less education than non-kin foster parents.⁴² At the same time, there is a general lack of practical, emotional and financial support to kinship carers in the EU to carry out their new parenting role. In the UK, for example, there are estimated to be up to 300,000 children living with other family members⁴³, but only 6,800 are classed as “children looked after” and in receipt of support from the state.⁴⁴ This compares to countries like Belgium where 33% of kinship care arrangements receive State support.

GRANDPARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

Two separate studies in the UK have found that young people talked to their grandparents about problems they could not discuss with their parents, especially when this involved family breakdown and problems with the parents’ relationship. Furthermore, the evidence suggested that closeness to a grandparent appeared to protect children from adjustment problems during times of family adversity.^{45 46}

However, the relationship between grandparent and child is not always easy when the grandparent has to take on the role of surrogate parent. In addition to whatever trauma had caused the young people to go into

³⁸ Hunt et al (2008) “Keeping them in the family: outcomes for abused and neglected children placed with family or friends”, Department for Children Schools & families (UK Government)

³⁹ Erbert & Elema (2008) Taking the grand out of grandparenting: Dialectical tensions in grandparent perceptions of surrogate parenting. *Journal of Social & personal relationships* 25(4)

⁴⁰ EU Kinship Carers Project (2011) *Forgotten Families - Key Findings*, Mentor UK with funding from the European Union in the framework of the Public Health Programme

⁴¹ Hunt et al (2008) *Keeping them in the family: outcomes for abused and neglected children placed with family or friends*. Department for Children Schools & families (UK Government)

⁴² Grinstead, L.N. Leder, S. & Bond, L. (2003) Review of research on the health of caregiving grandparents. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, vol44. No 3

⁴³ Richards, A. & Tapsfield, R. (2003) “Funding family and friends care: the way forward” Family Rights Group

⁴⁴ DCSF (2009) UK Department for Children & Families. “Children looked after in England (including adoption and care leavers, year ending 31 March 2009”

⁴⁵ Dunn, J. and Kirby Deater-Deckard, K. (2001) “Children's views of their changing families”, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

⁴⁶ Grandparents Plus (2009) “My second mum and dad: The involvement of grandparents in the lives of teenage grandchildren” Research undertaken by Ann Buchanan and Julia Griggs at the Department for Social Policy and Social Work, University of Oxford and supported by an ESRC grant

kinship care, it appears evident that living with grandparents can sometimes leave them feeling vulnerable and isolated in terms of their relationships with the outside world.

An emerging theme of research into the feelings of children living in such situations⁴⁷: is that they often did not want people at school to find out how they were living, feeling ashamed or simply different. Another trend was that children also feel concerned for their grandparents and worry about whether they are able to cope. Nearly all of the young people questioned (98%) thought there was not enough help for their families.

Different research by the Scottish organisation CHILDREN 1ST revealed some of the challenges facing grandparents taking on the kinship carer role. Respondents to a 2011 survey stressed how important it was to know that the children they look after are safe and living in a secure environment. However, they also reported difficulties with child behaviour, which can often be difficult due to past trauma and difficult/abusive relationships with the parents. Many complained of financial pressures and lack of support, but were also concerned about what would happen to the children if something happened to them.

Where grandparents do not become kinship carers, alternative issues can arise. Often little thought is given to the relationship between the child and surviving grandparents when a child is placed outside of the extended family. Grandparents are often excluded when children are placed, for example with a foster family, and told: "We are your new family now".

GRANDPARENTS WITHIN FAMILY POLICY

The de-familialisation of public policy refers to the movement away from seeing the family as the body responsible for the care and financial support of an individual - generally in favour of State responsibility. This has been seen as an important element of social progress in countries developing a strong welfare state.

However, it has also impacted on the family and intergenerational relationships. For example, in countries with high levels of de-familialisation, elderly grandparents are increasingly living in formal care settings. Little thought has been given in public policy or service delivery about making such arrangements conducive to strong grandparent-child relationships.

Family Platform – a consortium of 12 organisations that received EU funding 2009-11 to identify topics for research on families - commissioned a survey of family policies across the 27 EU countries in 2010.⁴⁸ This identified a trend towards giving family policy more importance.

For example, countries in Southern, and Central and Eastern Europe are expanding paternity and parental leave. Countries that had previously de-familialised a lot are reopening the door to families. For example, in Finland and Norway, parents are now able to use state benefits to purchase childcare directly from a family member if they prefer.

However, there is a general lack of policy focus on the role of grandparents in delivering important care services or contributing to e.g. the fight against child poverty or the employment of women. The only area where the role of grandparents and government policy would regularly come together explicitly is in relation to kinship care. Even here, there is a mixed picture across Europe.

Sometimes policies are serving to restrict the ability of grandparents to fulfil a caring role. In the Netherlands and the UK, some grandparents became registered childminders to access state support for looking after their own grandchildren. However, increasing regulations on childminders are making it harder for grandparents to qualify for such support.

⁴⁷ Grandparents Association (2010) "Children's Voices: The stories of children raised by their grandparents" Edited by Jan Fry

⁴⁸ Blum, S. & Rille-Pfiffer, C. (2010) "Major Trends of State Family Policies in Europe", Family Platform Existential Field 3, Austrian Institute For Family Studies, University of Vienna

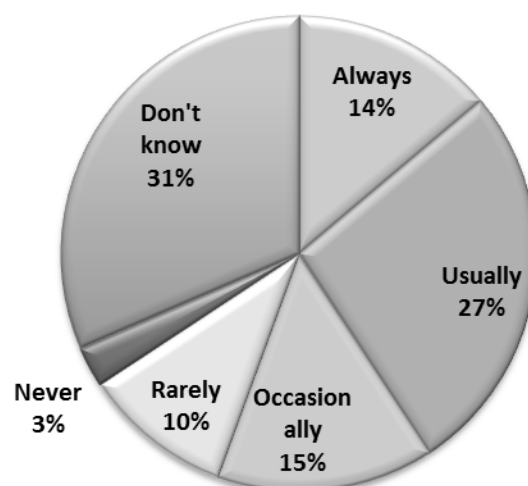
Section Two - Survey results

Information and opinion about services for grandparents across Europe was canvassed by use of a questionnaire posted online through Survey Monkey and distributed through Eurochild and AGE Platform Europe. In all, 120 questionnaires were completed from organisations in 30 European countries (for details, see Annex One: Survey Respondents). The key findings are summarised below:

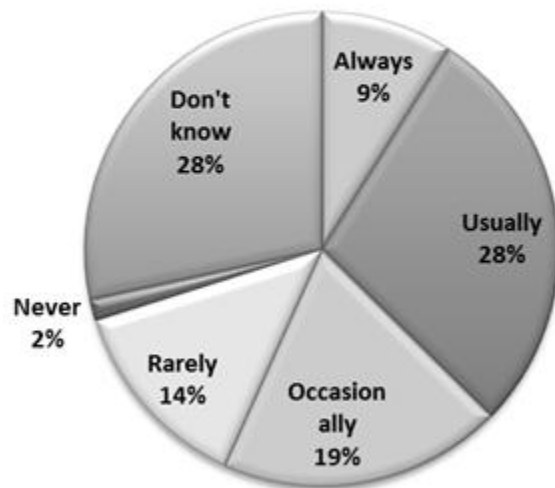
GRANDPARENTS AS CARERS

- A majority of respondents reported that grandparents take their grandchildren to access early years' services such as playgroups, nurseries, pre-school activities, etc.
- In some countries (e.g. UK and the Netherlands) grandparents are able to register as official childminders and therefore access childcare subsidies from the Government for looking after their own grandchildren on a part-time basis – although increasingly strict regulations for childminders are making it harder for grandparents to take on this role.
- Respondents reported that grandparents in disadvantaged areas are more likely to be involved in providing childcare.
- Half of respondents said that contact for grandparents and their grandchildren following family breakdown was seen as an issue in their country.
- An overwhelming number of respondents (85%) said that when a child could not remain in the care of their parents, primary care by grandparents or other relatives was explored before other forms of placement were considered.
- Of those that answered this question, less than half believed that children are 'usually' or 'always' consulted before arrangements are made in such cases.
- A majority (65%) said that when care arrangements were being made for children there was a specific person or organisation trained to find out the young person's views (e.g. special guardian or advocate).
- Only 37% of those that responded to this question (less than half of total respondents) said that children in kinship care arrangements are 'usually' or 'always' given specific support.

Are children consulted before care placement arrangements are made?



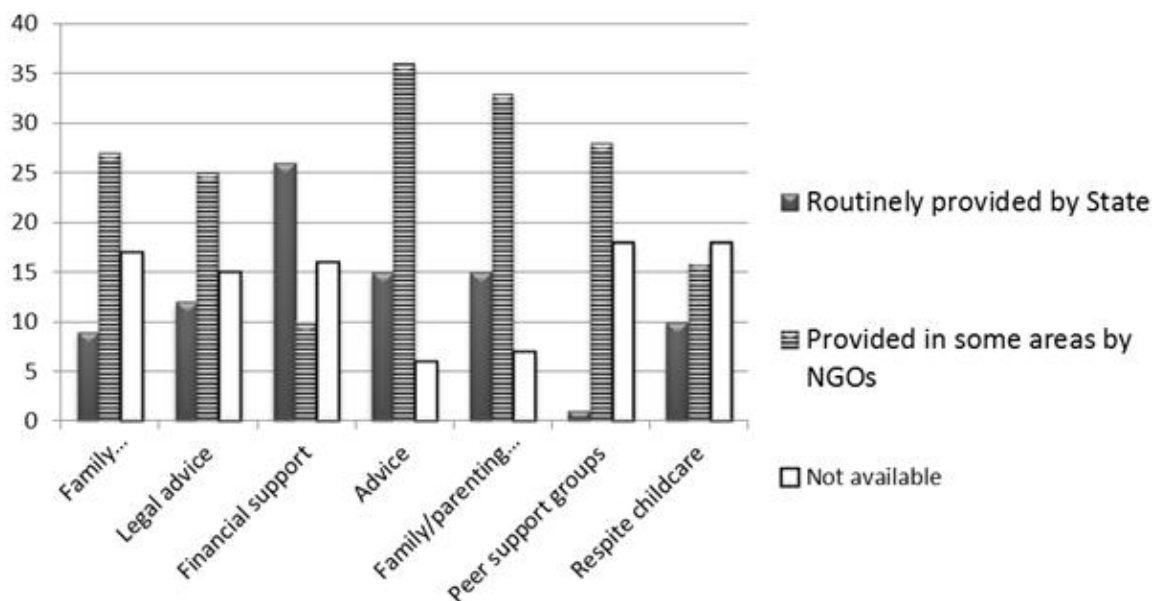
Are children in kinship care arrangements given specific support?



INFORMATION AND SUPPORT SERVICES FOR GRANDPARENTS

- Only around 20% of total respondents said that information specifically designed for grandparents was provided either on a local or a national level in their country
- Information was most commonly thought of as being provided through websites, followed by leaflets/booklets, face-to-face and via telephone helplines.
- Of those that provided an answer, 65% said there was no funding available on a local or national level to provide activities to support grandparents in their country.
- Less than a quarter of the total survey respondents stated that there were materials advising grandparents on the issue of contact and family separation.

When asked what services were provided and by whom, respondents provided answers in the following numbers:



Respondents indicated that the following services were also provided:

- Creative interventions to support health and well-being
- Community development
- Training and housing support
- Socio-cultural activities for grandparents
- Counselling
- Youth work
- IT support
- Storytime events

ORGANISATIONS PROVIDING SUPPORT TO GRANDPARENTS

Respondents from 15 countries⁴⁹ said there was an organisation providing information, support, advice and/or advocacy to grandparents in their country. The following is a summary of the examples identified and detailed for each of the ten countries where details were provided:

BELGIUM

- **The Flemish Family Bond** – for detailed information, see Case Study 1

CZECH REPUBLIC

- **Sdruzeni linka bezpeci** provides a telephone helpline offering counselling and crisis intervention for family members in situations affecting children, adolescents and young adults. E-mail counselling is also offered. www.linkabezpeci.cz
- **Zivot 90** provides a number of services and advice – including a crisis helpline and legal advice - to elderly people more generally. www.zivot90.cz

GERMANY

- **Mehrgenerationenhäuser** (Multi-generational Houses) provide people of all ages the chance to meet in a public space and benefit from inter-generational exchanges. The houses offer care services for families with children and dependent older relatives and volunteering opportunities for young school leavers. There are more than 450 across Germany, co-funded by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs and European Social Fund and supported by core staff and volunteers. www.mehrgenerationenhaeuser.de (Note: this information was provided by the contacts in Slovenia – see Case Study 3)

HUNGARY

- **Otthon Segítünk Alapítvány (OSA)** is the Hungarian adaptation of the international Home-Start Network which works to support families with young children. OSA provides volunteers – many of whom are grandparents – with 50 hours of training to support young families regularly with friendship, advice and practical help. In many cases the training enables older people to take on a surrogate grandparent role to a new family. OSA is a nationwide organization with 22 local schemes, of which seven are in Budapest. www.otthonsegitunk.hu

⁴⁹ Belgium, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Switzerland, and the UK (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland)

IRELAND

- **Treoir** is a membership organisation that primarily promotes the rights and best interests of unmarried parents and their children. They also provide information and advice for grandparents, particularly on access, contact and guardianship. www.treoir.ie
- **Age Action, Senior Helpline and Older & Bolder** provide advice and support to older people more generally, which will include the specific situation of grandparents. They also do intergenerational work, which can cover relationships within the family.

ITALY

- **ANTEAS** is a national association promoting solidarity between all ages. It has 62,098 members and provides information and advice to elderly people, although not explicitly on the grandparent role. www.anteasnazionale.it

MALTA

- **St Jeanne Antide Foundation** has developed Nanna Kola (Ladybird) Clubs to provide education, counseling and support to grandparents who regularly care for their grandchildren. The initiative is part of a wider strategy of holistically supporting very vulnerable and poor families. Ladybird Clubs are run by a married couple who are themselves grandparents, supervised by an early-years educator. They have developed detailed session plans for 3.5 hour sessions spread over 13 or 14 weeks. www.antidemalta.com

THE NETHERLANDS

- **The Dutch Advocacy Foundation for Foster Grandparents** – see Case Study 2
- **The KOG Foundation** is run by and for parents and grandparents experiencing problems caused by divorce and children being taken into care. KOG is run by volunteers who receive training to provide information, support, advice and guidance, including to grandparents who have contact issues with their grandchildren. www.stichtingkog.info
- **Nederlandse Vereniging Voor Pleeggezinnen** is the Dutch Association for Foster Families. It facilitates a specific support group for grandparents who are foster parents, which meets every 6 weeks for peer exchanges. www.denvp.nl

SLOVENIA

- **Intergenerational Community Centres** – see Case Study 3
- **Slovene Federation of Pensioners' Associations** has 230,000 members in over 500 local associations and 25 000 volunteers. A lot of the local associations provide different types of intergenerational learning, including grandchildren teaching grandparents about computers.
- **Slovenian Third Age University** is a voluntary organisation that provides lifelong learning for people over 50. The Third Age University encompasses 35 universities all over Slovenia, which organise study circles and lectures, as well as some summer programmes, study camps and visits. www.univerzazatretjeobd-drustvo.si

UNITED KINGDOM

- **Grandparents Plus** is a UK charity which champions the vital role of grandparents and the wider family in children's lives, especially in difficult family circumstances. They advise grandparents and

facilitate access to the support they need. They are developing new parenting support for grandparents and have been funded by the Big Lottery Fund to develop the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Network. www.grandparentsplus.org.uk

- **The Grandparent's Association** has a dedicated advice service for grandparents on accessing welfare benefits and other financial support available. It runs a helpline, support groups and disseminates tailored information in the UK. It also campaigns to raise awareness of the needs of grandparents. www.grandparents-association.org.uk
- **Family Rights Group** is a UK charity that campaigns on behalf of and advises families - including grandparents - whose children need or may need support services. Interactive web-pages provide information and advice to grandparent kinship carers. www.frg.org.uk
- **Two local peer support groups for grandparents** are known to be organised in Wales: by the Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations in Newport; and by Action for Children in Cardiff under the umbrella of the Parent Network.
- **Scottish** National Kinship Care Training and Outreach Service – see Case Study 4
- **Citizens Advice Bureau Scotland** – is also funded (Scottish Executive) to provide specialist financial and legal advice and training to kinship carers and those that work with them.
- **The Scottish Child Law Centre** is an independent charitable organisation which provides expertise around the use of Scots law and children's rights for the benefit of children, young people, their families and carers in Scotland, including grandparents. www.scllc.org.uk
- **Kinship Care Northern Ireland** is a registered charity providing help and support to grandparents and other kinship carers. It also seeks to promote kinship care as the primary care arrangement for 'looked after' children. www.kinshipcarenorthernireland.co.uk
- **The Centre for Intergenerational Practice (CIP)** is an initiative of the Beth Johnson Foundation, which promotes intergenerational learning, exchanges and community engagement throughout the UK. www.centreforip.org.uk

Section Three - Case studies

From the examples provided of services aimed at supporting grandparents, four were chosen for more detailed case study. These are presented below:

CASE STUDY 1: BELGIUM

THE FLEMISH FAMILY BOND GRANDPARENTS AND SENIOR ACTION PROGRAMME

The Flemish Family Bond (Gezinsbond⁵⁰) has provided information, advice and services to families since 1921. It has been working specifically with grandparents since 1979. Its Grandparents and Senior Action programme (GOSA) accounts for around 25% of its work. Furthermore, grandparents are included in, and contribute to, many of the other activities within the Bond at local, regional and national levels.

The aims of the organisation are to support families in different phases of their life and to work towards a child-and-family-friendly climate in society. It provides a good example of how work with grandparents can be incorporated into the mainstream work of a family support organisation, whilst at the same time recognising that the best interest of the child should be paramount.

Key services to/for grandparents:

- A Social and Legal Service for questions about care, visitation rights with grandchildren, retirement and pensions etc.
- A booklet of frequently asked questions for grandparents when their children divorce
- A “Letter to new grandparents” giving advice covering the grandparent-child link, reciprocal parent-grandparent expectations, their role as partner in education and challenges of ageing
- Opportunities for grandparents to meet together to share experiences and concerns.
- An annual national event and numerous local events for grandparents

The Gezinsbond additionally serves older people more generally, including through discount cards and other financial services, political representation via the Flemish Council for the Elderly, campaigns such as ‘Poverty doesn’t age’ and a companionship service for isolated individuals.

The Gezinsbond has also been involved in notable intergenerational learning initiatives. It is the lead partner of the EU-funded (Grundtvig programme) Grandparents & Grandchildren project.⁵¹ With partners in 14 other European countries, the project is based on grandchildren teaching their grandparents basic computer, internet and e-mail skills. Specific training is offered to the young people to support their own development and at the same time as upskilling the older generation. The project now forms part of a wider scheme across a number of EU countries.

Organisation

The Gezinsbond is funded by a membership fee of €35. Individuals will most often become members with the arrival of their first child and then stay for the next 30 years or more. It currently enjoys a membership of around 280,000 families, with around 900 local groups spread across the region of Flanders and Brussels.

Although the Bond has a full-time core staff, much of the work is carried out by the 13,000 local volunteers, the majority of which are over 40 years of age. Local groups are led by locally elected members with support

⁵⁰ www.gezinsbond.be

⁵¹ www.geengee.eu

from the staff in Brussels. Centrally, Gezinsbond publishes a bi-weekly magazine 'De Bond' and all new parents receive the 20-issue 'Letters to young parents'.

CASE STUDY 2: THE NETHERLANDS

THE DUTCH ADVOCACY FOUNDATION FOR FOSTER GRANDPARENTS

The Dutch Advocacy Foundation for Foster Grandparents (Stichting Belangenbehartiging Pleeggrootouders Nederland (SBPN)⁵²) works to support and advocate for grandparents who are the primary care givers to their grandchildren. The Foundation, which is active across the Netherlands, ensures that the best interest of the child underpins all their work.

Key services to/for grandparents:

- Dedicated telephone helpline for foster grandparents (+email etc.)
- A website with detailed information on financial and legal matters for foster grandparents
- Advocacy support with local services and authorities
- Newsletter 4-6 times a year with important information and advice for foster grandparents, as well as space for the exchange of ideas, experiences and support between grandparents
- Facilitated meetings of local peer-to-peer support groups for grandparents
- A popular annual event bringing together around 100 families and offering a programme of sessions/activities/exchanges for both foster grandparents and their grandchildren in a different location each year.

The SBPN has an open-door policy, providing advice, services and access to all foster grandparents. This is particularly important to the many individuals not known to the formal care and social services system who receive no support from the State. This can be a particular issue in the Netherlands where age and age-gap restrictions can prevent grandparents seeking official kinship carer status. In one instance, SBPN was contacted by a grandparent who had been caring for their grandchild for eight years without external support or recognition.

Foster grandparents will generally make an initial contact with the SBPN through the telephone helpline, which is advertised through local advertisements in a range of media, such as newspapers and TV. The Foundation also receives referrals from other NGOs working in the family support sector. During the initial contact, volunteers will try to build a picture of the circumstances within that family before deciding how best to proceed.

SBPN can act as an intermediary between a grandparent and a Youth Care Agency, identifying where the foster grandparent could benefit from additional support and advocating on their behalf. In other cases, it puts foster grandparents in contact with each other and facilitates local peer-to-peer support groups. The annual events are also used as an opportunity to engage appropriately with local Youth Care Agencies and to promote informal social and support networks.

Organisation

The SBPN foundation is run by a board of six members, all of whom are foster grandparents, and all of whom work on a voluntary basis. The Foundation receives no funding from either the state or any of the municipalities, but relies entirely on volunteers. This is felt to allow the Foundation a degree of freedom which might not otherwise be available. The project has existed for almost eight years in this way.

⁵² www.pleeggrootouders.nl

In addition to the core group, there are a number of local groups which come together on an ad-hoc basis. Nearly 350 grandparents have joined the SBPN, automatically receiving the newsletter and an invitation to the annual event.

CASE STUDY 3: SLOVENIA

HIŠA SADEŽI DRUŽBE (Intergenerational House of the Fruits of Society)⁵³

HIŠA PRAVIH SREČANJ RENČE (Intergenerational House of Real Encounters)

These two intergenerational community centres were opened in relatively large buildings that were converted from their previous use (a large house and a shop respectively) in small towns in Slovenia (12,000 and 2,000 inhabitants). The centres aim to increase and improve interaction and understanding between people of different generations and also to develop social and mutual support networks within generations.

The intergenerational programmes offered meet the needs and abilities of both older and younger local people, providing benefits, learning and the development of skills and confidence in both directions. In both centres, this has involved developing strong working links with local primary schools. Intergenerational activities mainly revolve around creative skills, including the exchange of skills around:

- a) traditional arts and crafts e.g. using straw, leather, wood and ceramics
- b) cooking, with an emphasis on healthy eating and traditional dishes
- c) gardening, including for use of plants grown in food and medicine (Murska Sobata)
- d) use of computers and mobile phones
- e) and also: music, photography, sewing, drama, creative writing, languages, sport and games

Key services to/for grandparents:

Both services highlight their particular relevance to grandparents who are carers. Grandparents bring their grandchildren to the intergenerational community centres, benefitting from:

1. Sharing the caring responsibility for the children – particularly important is the availability of services full-time during the school holidays when the demands on carers are greatest
2. Support and advice from volunteers and staff, and exchanges with other grandparents, which reduce feelings of isolation
3. Increased activities for the grandchildren than can be provided at home
4. Greater opportunities for safe inter- and intra-generational social interaction for the children

Organisation

Both centres rely on the time given for free by volunteers both young and old to build on the coordination, management and support role fulfilled by full-time staff.

1. In the first house, adverts and notices are placed in local media and people help in areas where they have particular skills. As many as 85% of the older volunteers are women. Volunteers are provided with training, particularly to support communication across the generations. A teacher from a local school acts as a mentor and supervises activities of the young volunteers. Some limited funding support is received from the local Municipality.

⁵³ www.hisa.sadezidruzbe.org

2. In Renče, in 2011, 30 volunteers provided 1,566 hours of voluntary work that benefitted nearly 200 people (aged 6-84). The volunteers include a core team of 15 retired people. The centre receives funding support from the national Government; the local Municipality and private donors

CASE STUDY 4: SCOTLAND, UK

CHILDREN 1ST & THE NATIONAL KINSHIP CARE TRAINING AND OUTREACH SERVICE

CHILDREN 1ST is a charity working primarily to support families under stress and protect children from harm and neglect. It operates in three main areas: service delivery in homes and communities; speaking out for children's rights; and sharing expertise with others through training and consultancy. The charity believes that the best way to help a child is often by helping their family.

Key services to/for grandparents:

CHILDREN 1ST were commissioned by the Scottish Government (until 2014) to develop and implement a national service to give information, advice and other support to kinship carers and children living in kinship care across Scotland. They developed the national kinship care training, helpline and outreach service.⁵⁴

The helpline is delivered by ParentLine Scotland – a CHILDREN 1ST service. The helpline is free, confidential and available also in the evenings and at weekends. Services and support offered through or alongside the helpline include:

- Emotional and practical support and advice
- A family 'group conference' mediation service bringing together the extended family including kinship carers to address issues affecting a child
- A welcome pack and survival guide for prospective and current carers
- Outreach, training, skills development and capacity building, including a policy and outreach worker who will travel to meet kinship care groups and local authority support teams
- Group meetings, including regional forums, networks and an annual national conference

CHILDREN 1ST has also actively supported kinship carers in advocacy work to improve their situation. It worked with ten kinship carers from a variety of locations across Scotland to produce a manifesto for the 2012 local elections. All council candidates were targeted and asked to sign a few key pledges for change. This is now being taken forward with the Scottish Government to influence their thinking on policy development for kinship care.

Between August and December 2011, CHILDREN 1ST conducted a survey of kinship carers in Scotland to establish base-line information about their current circumstances, support received and their thoughts on what would improve their situation and that of the children in their care.⁵⁵

Organisation

CHILDREN 1ST has a range of local services across Scotland that deliver support services and information to families under stress. These address issues for and with kinship carers as part of that work and may often benefit from local authority funding. For example, there is a dedicated Highland Kinship Care Service, enjoying funding from the Highlands Authority.

⁵⁴ www.children1st.org.uk/services/170/kinship-care

⁵⁵ See section on grandparent-child relationships

Conclusions and recommendations

CONCLUSIONS

All Member States are currently facing up to the demographic challenges posed by an ageing population. There has been an increase in “family-friendly” policies over the last few decades. However, little if any of it appears to have been written specifically with grandparents in mind. The role of grandparents within family life has, however, changed considerably over this period. Progress is hindered by the fact that family policy is, by definition, cross-cutting and rarely falls within the portfolio of a single Government Ministry.

The contribution of grandparents appears to be significant on a number of levels. Furthermore, these contributions are often largely unrecognised and unvalued in political discourse. This makes it extremely difficult for policy-making to adequately take into account either how new policies may negatively affect the contribution currently made by grandparents or how they could on the other hand support these contributions.

Firstly, and perhaps most significantly, grandparents contribute through the **provision of informal and flexible childcare**. This may take the form of looking after a grandchild on a very occasional basis when wanted or needed, through to regular and systematic care provision at designated times or for specific activities. The contribution of grandparents is particularly relevant in countries where the State takes less responsibility for providing care and support services.

By looking after grandchildren, they often allow their adult children to enter or remain in the labour market, thus making a significant, albeit indirect, **contribution to economic activity**. The research is also clear that the majority of **financial transfers between the generations** flow downwards from grandparents towards the younger generations. These transfers can have an important impact on the fight against child poverty.

Grandparents contribute on another level through **intergenerational learning**. Such education-focused exchanges have been seen to benefit both generations in terms of learning outcomes. They can also provide important personal relationships with wider social implications beyond just the transfer of knowledge. Support for this work is important but appears to be patchy across Europe.

Finally, grandparents are making an often unrecognised contribution to the **well-being of children and young people through taking on the role of primary care providers**. This is where the grandparent has taken on the role of kinship carer (effectively a surrogate parent) and is on a completely different level to the informal and flexible childcare referred to above. Such situations would appear to be more widespread than is recognised in the numbers for formal kinship care arrangements.

Respondents from 27 European countries replied to an on-line survey (see Annex One) asking about the situation of grandparents fulfilling a caring role and the provision of support services specifically to them. The respondents represented a wide range of NGOs and offer an interesting impression of the current situation in Europe.

The survey responses supported the view that grandparents often play a crucial role in providing support services – whether conceived of as such or not – to their grandchildren. This role was even more important in low-income families and in situations of family breakdown. It was generally considered preferable for children to remain in the extended family under a kinship carer – often a grandparent – than to enter other formal care arrangements.

Two particular trends raise important policy reflections. Firstly, the confirmation that grandparents are more likely to be providing childcare in disadvantaged areas has important implications both for the fight against child poverty and in the wider context of addressing disadvantage and deprivation – particularly in the context of widespread welfare cuts. Secondly, trends of rising retirement ages will have knock-on effects on the

availability of grandparents to provide some of these invaluable, but often unvalued, roles in the lives of their grandchildren.

Around half of those countries represented in the findings were able to present an organisation that provides information, support and/or advice to grandparents. However, the overview provided does not pretend to be a comprehensive nor necessarily balanced list of the services available. Nor does it attempt to assess how many services do not provide support to grandparents. What it does do is highlight interesting examples of existing practice and approaches in the field and suggest potential areas for future reflection across Europe.

Overall, the majority of the examples of the kind of support provided seem to take the form of indirect information and advice rather than the provision of direct contact through face-to-face services. In most cases support services are provided to families more generally and, although grandparents can usefully access these services, it is not typically the case that the specific situation of grandparents has been the focus of service delivery.

Some notable examples were nevertheless found of a more targeted and thoughtful approach to supporting grandparents as carers. Four such examples were presented in more detail as case studies:

- The Grandparents and Senior Action programme of the Flemish Family Bond
- The Dutch Advocacy Foundation for Foster Grandparents
- Intergenerational community centres in Slovenia
- A National Kinship Care Training and Outreach Service run by CHILDREN 1ST in Scotland

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the combined findings of the literature review, the survey and the case studies of support services, as well as the experience and reflections of the researchers, this brochure makes the following policy recommendations related to the issue of grandparents as carers in Europe:

→ Member states should do more to recognise and support the vital contribution of grandparents to social and economic well-being in Europe

The contribution to economic activity that grandparents make directly through financial transfers and indirectly through provision of flexible, informal childcare – which often allows parents to stay in work - is currently neither recognised, nor sufficiently valued. Governments should ensure that grandparents are not disadvantaged, either financially or socially, through taking on these responsibilities, but rather be supported in doing so.

→ Flexible working should be extended to grandparents

The flexible working arrangements currently available to mothers and fathers in many countries should be extended to include grandparents, many of whom are themselves still in full-time employment and risk being unable to fulfil their important role within the family

→ Fiscal policy should encourage financial transfers from old to young

Financial transactions across the generations from old to young are an important protective factor in the fight against child poverty – increasingly so in the current economic climate. Such intergenerational transfers should be encouraged through tax allowances.

→ Intergenerational-learning good practice should be rolled out across the EU

Intergenerational learning provides real benefits to both old and young, both in terms of the development of new skills, but also as a means of personal development and the improvement of understanding between generations. Positive examples to foster such exchanges - such as the Slovenian Case Study in this report - should be promoted and rolled out across Member States.

→ **Grandparents' access to a child should be legally protected after family breakdown**

Family breakdown and separation is generally on the increase. Judicial systems (family courts, etc.) that rule on the access of parents and formal care placements for the child need to recognise the importance of the grandparent-child relationship to both parties. Contact arrangements should routinely include grandparents, providing this is in the best interests of the child.

→ **Grandparent kinship carers should receive greater support**

Grandparents fulfilling the role of kinship carer should receive the same levels of support as other foster carers, and enjoy the same entitlements to state benefits as the parents themselves had previously received. Supporting kinship carers is still a more affordable solution than other full-time care placements. The children and young people in these situations should also receive appropriate support.

Annex One - The survey respondents

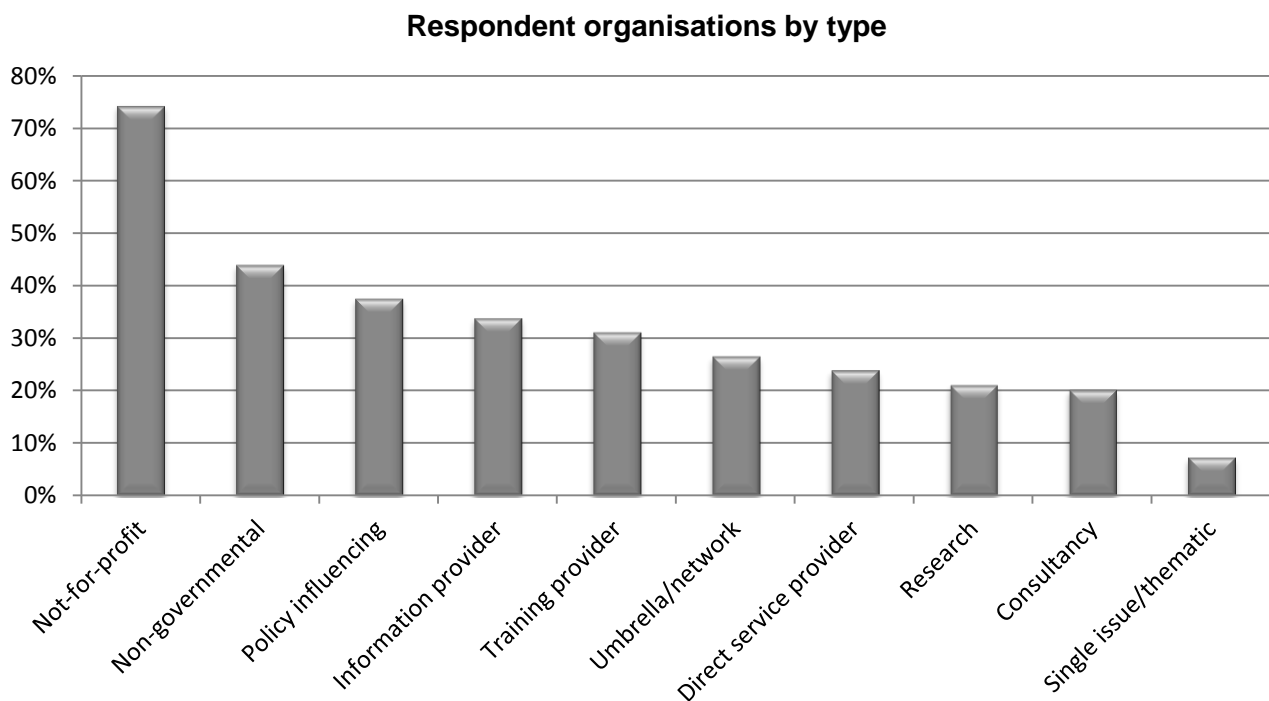
COUNTRY

120 organisations from 27 different countries responded to the survey. The following countries were represented:

1. Belgium	2. Bosnia and Herzegovina	3. Bulgaria
4. Czech Republic	5. Denmark	6. Finland
7. France	8. Germany	9. Greece
10. Hungary	11. Ireland	12. Israel
13. Italy	14. Lithuania	15. Malta
16. Netherlands	17. Norway	18. Poland
19. Portugal	20. Romania	21. San Marino
22. Serbia	23. Slovakia	24. Slovenia
25. Sweden	26. Switzerland	27. UK

CATEGORISATION

The respondent organisations can be characterised as follows (note that organisations can fit more than one category):



LEVEL OF OPERATION

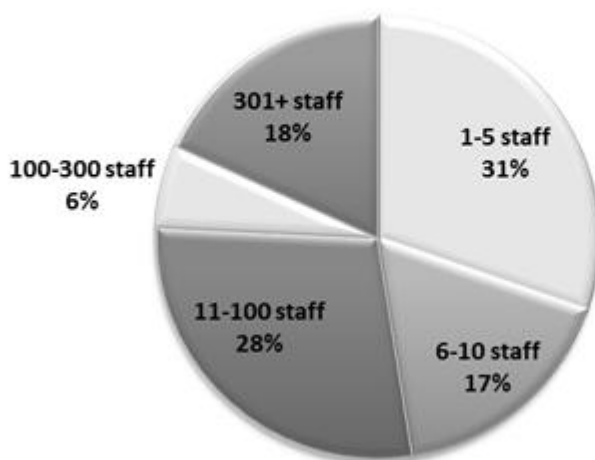
Of the organisations that responded:

- 40% work on a local level
- 63% work on a national level
- 17% work on a European level

SIZE

Respondent organisations were asked how many staff they employed. Collating the answers provides the following overview:

Respondent organisations by size



SERVICE PROVISION

Just under half the organisations that responded (43%) said that they provide direct services to families.

The most commonly provided services were:

- Family learning 58.6%
- Advice 72.4%
- Information 75.9%
- Helpline 37.9%
- Parenting education 34.5%
- Support Groups 41.4%
- Family mediation 27.6%

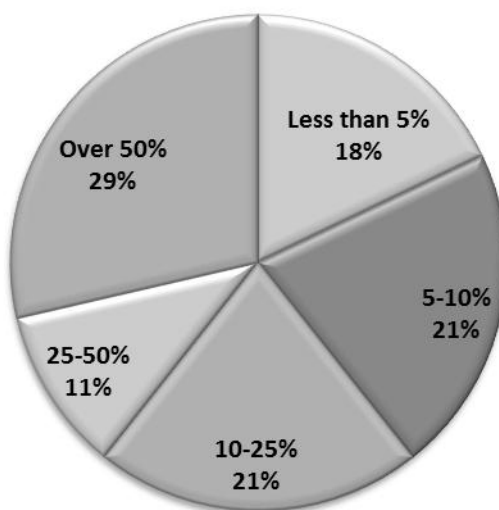
OTHER SERVICES PROVIDED INCLUDE:

- Creative interventions to improve health & well-being
- Socio-cultural activities
- IT training and support
- Training to informal carers
- Matching offer and demand of care services
- Residential care services
- Information and counselling
- Storytime events

SERVICE PROVISION TO GRANDPARENTS

The vast majority (93%) of services provided for families more generally were accessed by the specific sub-group of 'grandparents'. Organisations were asked to estimate what percentage of their service users were grandparents. The following picture emerged:

Estimated percentage of service users that are grandparents



Of the grandparents accessing services, providers estimated that the vast majority (70%) were grandmothers. Only 29% of service providers reported that equal numbers of grandfathers and grandmothers used their services.

When gathering the evidence base of need for services, the majority of providers (77%) claimed to take into account the needs of grandparents. Similarly the majority of organisations (81%) included grandparents in their evaluation when measuring the outcomes or impact of their services.

Annex Two - Additional comments

When completing the survey, respondents were given the opportunity to make any additional comments they saw as relevant. The following comprises the comments made by theme. This gives an additional flavour to the findings of the survey.

SERVICE PROVISION

"Our direct clients are parents themselves, however our outlying services, i.e. the helpline and counselling would have grandparents as clients, but they are very much in the minority." (Ireland)

"We always ask for feedback so we can improve our service to others and learn about their needs too." (England, UK)

"Often grandparents are our care givers and so their needs would be taken into account. If grandparents ask for specific help aimed at their needs we would include them as well." (England, UK)

"This is done through a number of feedback mechanisms, including regular visits to kinship care support groups, evaluation forms, forums, workshops, conferences and training activities, research and face to face consultation." (Scotland, UK)

"Occasionally [the needs of grandparents are taken into account] but our key focus is children and young people's wishes. Issues like Residency orders and Family Contact do enter into our work." (Wales, UK)

"We do not specifically record if they are grandparents, our service measures the age groups that access our service." (Wales, UK)

"All of our evaluations and needs assessments are equitable, which includes older people and grandparents." (Wales, UK)

FUNDING FOR ACTIVITIES WITH GRANDPARENTS

"The Flemish Government offers no direct funding/financial support for activities that we offer to grandparents; we get some but nonsystematic private funding that we use for our grandparent activities." (Belgium)

"Finnish Slot Machine Association funds NGO's for example Mannerheim League of Child Welfare [who] has provided for example a booklet for grandparents." Finland

"Through state and municipality funds." (Greece)

"By churches, by municipalities." (The Netherlands)

"Very limited funding mostly from voluntary grants. We are a small charity." (England, UK)

"Older people generally yes but specifically grandparents no." (England, UK)

"Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Network supported by lottery funds." (England, UK)

"We do not have 'ring-fenced' funding in Scotland but local authorities/health services can set up/commission/fund such services as they see as priority in their area - work with grandparents could be funded in this way." (Scotland, UK)

"Both services listed above are funded by the Scottish Government with the service provided by CHILDREN 1ST receiving 100% funding. Additional financial awards have been given to other organisations to provide

relevant information to kinship carers and grandparents. The BIG Lottery Fund also resources projects and services to support grandparents in kinship care through one of its funding streams.” (Scotland, UK)

“From the young people I've personally dealt with I do believe a great deal more advice and support should be offered to Grandparents, who often in our Locality (South Wales Valleys) are prime carers for a number of varied reasons.” (Wales, UK)

“But the funding is aimed at over 50's not specific to grandparents.” (Wales, UK)

“Beth Johnson Foundation is the intergenerational partner of the Welsh Government, and are active in all areas throughout Wales. National and Local Charities such as Age Cymru, Parents Network etc also are funded and support grandparents and families. As a Strategy for Older People Development Officer, encourage and source funding opportunities for such activities and organisations.” (Wales, UK)

CONTACT FOR GRANDPARENTS AND THEIR GRANDCHILDREN FOLLOWING FAMILY BREAKDOWN

“ParentLine Scotland is a free helpline and email service for anyone with a concern about a child. The helpline does receive calls from grandparents and provides support on a range of issues including contact and residence issues. The Scottish Child Law Centre is an independent charitable organisation which provides services to the whole of Scotland. The aim of the Centre is to promote knowledge and use of Scots law and children's rights for the benefit of children and young people in Scotland. The Grandparents Association has been working for and with grandparents for many years. They provide a number of services including a helpline, support groups, and welfare benefits advice.” (Scotland, UK)

“We 'often' take forward wishes and feelings of young people in care who have experienced Family breakdown and wish to request contact with their Grandparents.” (Wales, UK)

“I think there are 3rd sector supports but I am unaware of any specific ones. I would contact general charities for the elderly for help, advice and sign posting in these matters.” (England, UK)

“In Belgium, grandparents have a legal right to see their grandchildren, but this right is not always easy to enforce. As we know, there is no public advice service (other than the general juridical services) to help grandparents with this issue. In our organisation, our social-juridical service offers them information and advice.” (Belgium)

“Child rights protection agencies at the municipalities.” (Lithuania)

“Centres for social work provide advisors to the people in need, also grandparents.” (Slovenia)

“Information yes, services no. Very limited rights for a grandparent unless [they are] actually caring for the child.” (England, UK)

“Some counselling services for grandparents exist.” (Czech Republic)

“Sometimes they are involved in family mediation activities.” (Italy)

KINSHIP CARE

“The services provided for grandparents who are foster carers are mainly provided by an organisation operating nationally. This means that the services are provided in all areas. This does not apply to family/parenting support- this is offered in some areas. The situation regarding financial support is the same for all foster carers.” (The Netherlands)

"We are in a rural area and the money to do a lot of the above type of support is very limited and only available in intense need cases." (England, UK)

"It is difficult to judge as in our experience sometimes the state will provide services such as respite (if the child has disabilities). In our experience mostly the grandparents are left to cope and find help themselves from other 3rd sector services and charities." (England, UK)

"The Flemish government subsidizes the NGOs that support and accompany the grandparents which are fostering their grandchildren. We don't know any specific family mediation or family therapy for these grandparents, but we are not sure about it. There are no specific NGOs and self organisations of foster parents." (Belgium)

"Grandparents who have taken on fulltime care are treated by the state as parents and able to access the same benefits. Some additional support including for example allowances, legal advice, therapy, breaks, support groups is available from the state but only for a small proportion of those who have fulltime care and can be difficult to access with tight eligibility criteria. Most in this situation do not get support apart from benefits." (England, UK)

"All these things exist to some extent but not in a way that fits into the questionnaire. Legal Advice would depend on the income of the applicant. Financial support would depend on the legal status of the child - they would need to be formally 'looked after' by the local authority. Other things would vary geographically." (Scotland, UK)

"We provide a free phone advice service for families who are involved with or require children's social services. This includes family and friends carers. We assist family and friends carers who are setting up self-help support groups." (UK)

CHILDREN'S VIEWS AND CARE ARRANGEMENTS

"Family Group Conference (FGC) provided by CHILDREN 1ST works to offer families where there are child protection concerns, a child or young person has become looked after and accommodated, or is at risk of so being, the opportunity to participate in the decision making processes and find their own solutions to difficulties. The process builds on the strengths of the wider family and is based on the belief that given resources, information and power, families will make safe decisions for their children. CHILDREN 1ST also provides advocacy services in some areas which children moving into kinship care can access if they are looked after by the state. Other organisations, including local authority children's rights services, also provide support and advocacy. Some children who move into kinship care and who have been involved in the Children's Hearing process might have a safe guarder appointed. But the provision is patchy with no consistency as to which children and young people benefit from advocacy and in what circumstances." (Scotland, UK)

"There are specialists who examine the situations before the children are accommodated to the proper place." (Greece)

"Social services normally advocate for the child." (Italy)

"Cafcass" (England, UK) (Note: The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service Cafcass (and CAFCASS Cymru in Wales) looks after the interests of children involved in family proceedings in the courts. They work with children and their families, and then advise the courts on what they consider to be in the best interests of individual children.)

"Social services child advocates are used and sometimes people like Barnardo's would advocate if this is what the child requests." (England, UK)

"We have a special regulation on this matter, the 'decree on the position and rights of minors', the decree regulates the rights of children in care systems." (Belgium)

"Usually Child Protection Services formally participate in the process - however, generally they do not demonstrate involvement or initiative in understanding the child's position." (Lithuania)

"In some circumstances, where the child is taken into local authority care this should happen. But not routinely." (England, UK)

"There is a range of services - Who Cares? Scotland is the national advocacy organisation for children in the care system; there is legal entitlement for children involved with the Children's Hearings system; local authorities have Children's Rights Officers etc.." (Scotland, UK)

ANY OTHER COMMENTS

"This is an area that needs development although we have concerns, i.e. women are having children later this means that grandparents tend to be older and may not have the emotional/physical energies necessary to look-after children." (Ireland)

"Ourselves have recently identified the gap of grandparents not having support. Therefore we now have a support group running weekly" (Scotland, UK)

"Don't forget to include IT in the training. Young people have the advantage of computers at school - in our experience grandparents feel 'out of touch' if they don't get IT help and advice they need" (England, UK)

"We work with the entire family (if that is what they would like to do). All members of a family are invited to our parenting groups and often Grandparents access these. In my experience on average I would say we have at least one grandparent (normally Grandmother) attend our parenting course. I also often split my home visits to alternate between Grandparents and parents so that both have equal time and input." (England, UK)

EUROPEAN SURVEY AND REVIEW

GRANDPARENTS AS CARERS

TRENDS & SUPPORT SERVICES IN EUROPE

As part of the 2012 European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity Between Generations, Eurochild decided to commission a small study to examine the situation of grandparents in Europe fulfilling a caring role for their grandchildren. This brochure sets out the findings of that study.

Tony Ivens and Lucy Akhtar of Children in Wales were commissioned to undertake this work.

The methodology for the study was firstly to conduct a literature review to collate what information was already available from research in Europe on the role of grandparents in the lives of their grandchildren, including through financial, educational and caring support.

The researchers were secondly to launch a survey to gather information on the situation of grandparents, particularly when fulfilling a caring role for a child and what support is currently available to them across Europe. The research was launched in the name of Eurochild and AGE Platform Europe, using financial support from the European Commission and the Oak Foundation.



eurochild