

Balancing work and unpaid care

A critical issue

September 2026



About the research

The polling undertaken for this research was carried out by Opinium and has a total sample size of 4,000 UK adults.

Fieldwork was undertaken between 14-17 July 2026. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted to be nationally representative of all UK adults (aged 18+). The poll repeated questions from polling carried out in 2019, including a key question on whether people had given up paid work to care.

In the polling, we asked the following question: ***“Are you currently giving unpaid support to someone because they are older, ill, or have a disability?”*** We clarified for respondents that by “giving support”, we meant helping someone who could be finding it hard to manage because of mental or physical illness, needing extra help as they grow older or because they have a physical or learning disability. This could be for anyone that they know (eg family, a friend, neighbour, colleague etc). We also clarified that their support might include shopping, helping to find or arrange care or support, helping with managing money, giving regular emotional support, helping with transport, picking up prescriptions or providing hands on care (eg help with bathing, dressing etc).

Contents

About the research	02
Foreword	04
Introduction	05
Key research findings	08
Balancing work and unpaid care – a critical issue	10
Wider impacts of balancing work and care	13
Public expectations of workplace support for employees with caring responsibilities	19
Supporting employees in the workplace	28
Best practice case study	32
How many people are caring across the UK?	33
Detailed findings from the nations	35
Conclusion	38
Recommendations	41

Foreword

Claire Hawkins
 Director of Corporate Affairs
 and Chief of Staff,
 Standard Life



Few people see themselves as ‘carers’ at first. They’re simply doing what families, friends and loved ones do. Alongside jobs, careers, families and countless other responsibilities, millions of people across the UK provide unpaid care.

Although caring often comes from a place of love and commitment, it can also bring significant challenges, particularly when juggled alongside paid work. It often means navigating financial pressures, sacrificing career opportunities, and often putting their own wellbeing last. When that pressure becomes too much, carers can reach a tipping point where balancing work and care becomes unsustainable, forcing them to reduce their hours or leave employment altogether.

This report shines an important light on that reality. It shows the challenge of balancing work and unpaid care is growing, and that the consequences for individuals, employers and the wider economy are becoming increasingly significant.

Today, 6.7 million people in the UK are juggling paid employment with unpaid caring responsibilities. That means 6.7 million people making difficult choices day in, day out. Despite the vital role they play, too many are struggling to access the support they need.

At Standard Life, we’ve spent many years listening to our colleagues who are carers, understanding their experiences and thinking about how employers can do more. Through our Caring for Carers initiative and our partnership with Carers UK we’ve seen the difference that meaningful support can make.

We introduced ten days of paid Carer’s Leave, alongside an additional five days of unpaid leave. We offer flexible working arrangements and support a thriving carers’ network that has provided peer support and community for more than a decade. We have dedicated resources and guidance for carers, provide access to specialist care concierge services, and have achieved leading accreditation through Carer Confident and Carer Positive schemes. Together, these initiatives

create a culture at Standard Life where people feel able to talk openly about the challenges they face and access support when they need it.

We’re proud of what we’ve achieved, but we’re not sharing this because we think we’ve got all the answers. We’re sharing it because our experience shows that supporting carers is not only achievable, but it also brings benefits for everyone. Colleagues feel valued, engaged and supported, employers retain talent, reduce absence and protect valuable skills, and the business benefits from a more engaged workforce and stronger employee wellbeing. Supporting working carers is both a social imperative and a business necessity.

This is why the Government’s recent consultation on employment rights for unpaid carers was so important. The introduction of unpaid Carer’s Leave in 2024 was a welcome and significant milestone, recognising that carers need dedicated support. However, this research highlights a simple reality: for many people, unpaid leave is not enough. If taking time off means losing income, many carers simply cannot afford it.

That’s why we strongly believe paid Carer’s Leave has a critical role to play. It can provide carers with the flexibility they need without creating additional financial strain.

At Standard Life, we’re proud to work with Carers UK to shine a light on these issues, and we’re committed to continuing to play our part in helping create workplaces where people don’t have to choose between earning a living and caring for the people they love.

Introduction

Balancing paid work with unpaid care is becoming an increasingly critical challenge for millions of people across the UK.

As our population ages, more people are living with long-term health conditions and disabilities, and the pressures facing our health and social care services continue to grow, increasing numbers of people are providing unpaid care for family members and friends alongside their paid employment. For many, remaining in work is essential – not only to maintain financial security and protect future pension income, but also to sustain their health, wellbeing, social connections and career aspirations. Yet, for too many carers, combining paid work and unpaid care is becoming increasingly difficult.

At the same time, there is a significant opportunity to strengthen the support available to working carers (those providing unpaid care alongside their paid employment). In recent years, important progress has been made through the introduction of unpaid Carer's Leave (in Great Britain) alongside improvements to flexible working rights. As the UK Government considers the next phase of employment rights reform in England, Scotland and Wales,¹ and has wider ambitions to increase labour market participation, support economic growth and reform adult social care, there is an opportunity to build a more comprehensive framework of support that enables carers to remain in work while continuing to provide the invaluable care on which families, communities and public services depend.



¹ Employment Law is devolved to Northern Ireland.



This report provides further evidence on the scale and impact of this challenge. New polling, undertaken by Opinium for Carers UK, shows that one in five UK workers (20%) are now juggling paid work with unpaid care, equivalent to an estimated 6.7 million people. This represents a significant increase since 2019, when 15% of workers (4.9 million people) were combining paid work and caring responsibilities.²

The findings also highlight the growing impact that caring responsibilities are having on people's ability to remain in employment. An estimated 3.3 million people have left work to provide unpaid care, while 4.1 million have reduced their working hours because of their caring role. Around 1.1 million people have left work within the last two years alone – equivalent to approximately 1,500 people every day. This compares with Carers UK's equivalent polling in 2019, which estimated that around 600 people a day were leaving employment because of their caring responsibilities.³ The direction of travel is clear: the pressures facing unpaid carers have intensified significantly in recent years, with more people reaching a point where balancing work and care is no longer sustainable.

These findings should not be viewed in isolation. They build on a substantial and growing body of evidence from Carers UK, Governments across the UK and other organisations, demonstrating the impact that caring responsibilities can have on people's ability to remain in employment. Over many years, our research has consistently shown that carers often reach a point where the demands of paid work and unpaid care become impossible to reconcile. Our State of Caring research has documented the increasing intensity of caring, the financial hardship experienced by many carers, and the detrimental effects caring can have on physical and mental health.⁴ More recently, our *Tipping point* report, supported by Standard Life, found that almost half of working carers were considering reducing their working hours or leaving employment altogether because of the pressures they face.⁵

² [*Carers UK \(2019\) Juggling work and care: a growing issue*](#)

³ [*Ibid.*](#)

⁴ [*Carers UK \(2025\) State of Caring: The cost of caring – the impact across carers' lives*](#)

⁵ [*Carers UK \(2026\) The 'tipping point': when unpaid carers can no longer combine caring with paid employment*](#)

The UK Government's own evidence reinforces these findings. The Department for Business and Trade's evaluation of unpaid Carer's Leave,⁶ alongside wider evidence gathered across Government, has highlighted the challenges carers experience in managing unpredictable caring responsibilities while remaining in employment, as well as the importance of flexible workplace support. At the same time, employers increasingly recognise that supporting carers is not simply an issue of employee wellbeing but also one of workforce resilience, recruitment, retention and productivity. With millions of people combining paid work and care, creating carer friendly workplaces is becoming increasingly important to meeting the UK's economic and workforce ambitions.

The UK Government's current review of employment rights for unpaid carers⁷ comes at a pivotal moment, particularly in light of the wider reforms to adult social care that are being considered under Prime Minister Burnham's leadership, and which are being spearheaded by Baroness Casey's Independent Commission.

The introduction of unpaid Carer's Leave in Great Britain in 2024 through the Carer's Leave Act 2023, together with improvements to flexible working rights, represented important steps in recognising the needs of working carers. However, the evidence presented in this report demonstrates that these measures alone are not sufficient to meet the realities faced by many working carers today. For many, taking unpaid leave is simply not financially viable, particularly at a time when so many are already experiencing financial pressures associated with caring.

Better employment rights, combined with continued employer leadership and wider access to proven workplace support, would enable more carers to remain in employment, help employers retain skilled and experienced staff, strengthen household finances and reduce the wider economic costs associated with people leaving work because of caring responsibilities.

This report sets out new evidence on the experiences of working carers, drawing together polling, wider research and practical experience from employers across the UK. It examines the scale of the challenge, explores the workplace support that enables carers to remain in employment, and sets out recommendations for Government and employers. Together, our recommendations provide an opportunity to build on recent progress and establish a stronger framework of support that enables more people to balance work and care successfully throughout their working lives.

Carers UK is grateful to Standard Life for supporting this research and for its continued partnership in advancing understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing unpaid carers in the UK.



⁶ [Department for Business and Trade \(2026\) Carers' experiences of managing paid work and care, and perspectives of Carer's Leave](#)

⁷ www.gov.uk/government/publications/employment-rights-for-unpaid-carers-review-terms-of-reference/employment-rights-for-unpaid-carers-review-terms-of-reference

Key research findings

Record numbers of workers are balancing employment with unpaid care

Evidence: One in five workers (20%) are now combining paid work with unpaid care, equivalent to an estimated 6.7 million people. This has increased significantly (by 37%) since 2019, when 15% (4.9 million workers) were balancing work and caring responsibilities.

20%

of workers are balancing paid employment alongside caring responsibilities



Growing numbers of carers are cutting back hours at work or leaving work altogether

Evidence: An estimated 3.3 million people (6% of UK adults) have given up work to provide unpaid care, compared with 2.6 million people (5%) in 2019. A further 4.1 million people (7.5%) have reduced their working hours because of caring responsibilities, double the proportion recorded in 2019 (4%, or around 2 million people).

3.3 million

people have left paid work to provide unpaid care, compared to 2.6 million in 2019



The rate at which people are leaving work to care has accelerated dramatically in recent years

Evidence: Of those 3.3 million people, a third (1.1 million people) have left work to care *in the last two years* alone, more than double the equivalent figure in 2019 (nearly 500,000 people). This equates to around 1,500 people leaving work every day over the last two years, compared with around 600 people a day in 2019 – an increase of 150%.

1,500

people leave paid work to provide unpaid care every day, compared to 600 people a day in 2019



Balancing work and care creates significant employment pressures for many carers

Evidence: Over half (59%) of current employees with experience of providing unpaid care reported that their caring responsibilities had had an impact in the workplace, compared with 37% who reported no employment impacts.

59%

of employees with caring experience reported their caring responsibilities had an impact in the workplace

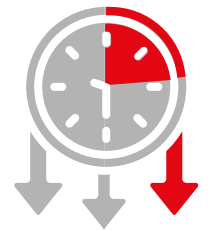


Reducing working hours is the most common employment impact

Evidence: 18% of people with experience of caring (current and former carers) had reduced their hours of paid employment because of caring responsibilities, rising to 22% among those currently balancing work and care, and 24% among current carers.

24%

of current carers have reduced their hours of paid employment



Many carers are leaving paid employment altogether

Evidence: 16% of current and former carers had left paid employment because of caring responsibilities. This rises to 22% among those currently providing unpaid care. Around one in eight working carers (13%) reported that they had had to leave employment entirely at some point because of their caring role.

16%

of current and former carers had left paid employment because of their caring responsibilities



The number of people providing unpaid care has increased markedly since 2019

Evidence: One in five (20%) UK adults are currently providing unpaid care, equivalent to an estimated 11 million people. This has increased from 17% (8.8 million people) in 2019, indicating that many more people are taking on unpaid caring responsibilities than previously.

1 in 5

UK adults are currently providing unpaid care, an estimated 11 million people



Balancing work and unpaid care – a critical issue



This research reinforces a growing evidence base which clearly demonstrates that providing unpaid care is increasingly affecting people's ability to participate in the UK labour market.

Who is balancing work and care?

Table 1: Caring by employment status

	Working status									
	Total	Working full time (30 or more hours per week)	Working part time (8 – 29 hours per week)	Working part time (less than 8 hours a week)	Full time student	Retired	Un-employed	Other not working	NET: In paid work	NET: Not in paid work
Currently caring	20%	19%	22%	34%	22%	16%	17%	30%	20%	20%
Not currently caring	76%	76%	73%	63%	72%	82%	71%	64%	75%	76%
Don't know	4%	4%	5%	3%	6%	2%	12%	7%	4%	4%

Around one in five people employed full-time (19%) are currently providing unpaid care, representing a substantial proportion of the workforce. This suggests that most employers will have employees with caring

responsibilities, whether they are known to their employer or not. This rises slightly to 22% among those working part-time (for between eight and 29 hours per week).

The highest prevalence of caring is found among respondents working part-time for fewer than eight hours per week, where around one-third (34%) report currently providing unpaid care.

The higher prevalence of caring among people working very limited hours or outside paid employment also strongly indicates that caring responsibilities influence labour market participation for some individuals.

How caring is impacting people's paid employment

Around one in five UK adults (21%), an estimated 11.6 million people, report that caring for an elderly parent or a seriously ill or disabled person has had a negative impact on their employment at some point. Among people who identify as having current caring responsibilities, this rises to more than half (52%). This demonstrates that negative employment impacts are a common consequence of caring.

Caring responsibilities can affect employment in a range of ways, from changes to working patterns through to leaving the labour market altogether. While some people are able to remain in work, many report having to make significant changes to balance employment with caring responsibilities, highlighting the considerable pressures associated with combining the two.

Leaving work and reducing working hours

One of the most significant employment impacts identified is withdrawal from the labour market. Overall, 6% of UK adults (3.3 million people) say they have given up work in order to care for an elderly parent or a seriously ill or disabled loved one at some point. Among respondents who are currently caring this increases to 16%. This means around one in six current carers report having left employment at some point because of their caring responsibilities.

A larger proportion report reducing their working hours. Overall, 7.5% of UK adults (4.1 million people) – and one in five people currently caring (20%) – say they have reduced the hours they work in order to provide unpaid care at some point. This suggests that many carers seek to remain in employment where possible but often do so by reducing their participation in the labour market to accommodate caring responsibilities.



Taken together, these findings indicate that caring responsibilities frequently influence both whether people remain in employment and the extent to which they are able to participate in the workforce. For many, caring results not in a single, immediate decision to leave work, but in adjustments to working patterns that may have longer-term consequences for income, career progression and future financial security.

The wider impact on working life

8% of UK adults report that caring has negatively affected their work through factors such as stress or tiredness at some point. Among those currently caring, this rises to 18%, suggesting that almost one in five carers experience adverse effects on their wellbeing or ability to perform at work.

The impact of caring is therefore not limited to those who leave employment or reduce their hours. Even where carers remain in work, the physical and emotional demands of unpaid care can affect their experience of employment, potentially influencing productivity, attendance, wellbeing and job satisfaction.

A further 3% of respondents reported that caring had affected their work in other ways at some point, reinforcing that caring responsibilities can have diverse and sometimes complex consequences that extend beyond predefined categories. This rose to 8% for those currently caring.



Caring does not affect everyone equally

Not all caring experiences result in negative employment impacts. Around one in five UK adults (19%) – equivalent to 28% of respondents who are currently caring – said they had cared for an elderly parent or seriously ill or disabled loved one without their work being affected.

This demonstrates that while negative employment impacts are common, they are not inevitable. The variation in experiences is likely to reflect differences in the intensity and duration of caring, the availability of formal and informal support, the flexibility of employers, and the nature of respondents' employment. We can infer – as is supported by wider evidence – that workplace support and wider social care provision may play an important role in determining whether caring responsibilities translate into adverse employment outcomes.⁸

Limited differences by gender

The polling found relatively little variation between men and women in the overall likelihood of reporting negative employment impacts. 22% of women and 20% of men reported that caring had affected their work in some way.

Women were slightly more likely than men to report leaving employment to provide care (7% compared with 6%), while men were marginally more likely to report reducing their working hours (8% compared with 7%). Both men and women were equally likely (8%) to report that caring had negatively affected them through stress or tiredness. These relatively small differences suggest that the employment consequences of unpaid care are experienced by both men and women, reflecting the increasingly diverse profile of unpaid carers within the UK workforce.

Overall, the findings suggest that unpaid care frequently requires people to make significant adjustments to their working lives. For many, the challenge is not simply balancing competing demands on a day-to-day basis but making difficult decisions about whether to reduce their working hours, alter their career trajectory or leave employment altogether. The fact that more than half of carers report some form of employment impact highlights the importance of workplace practices and wider support systems that enable people to remain in work while continuing to provide care.

⁸ Carers UK (2026) *The 'tipping point': when unpaid carers can no longer combine caring with paid employment*

Wider impacts of balancing work and care

As part of the polling conducted for Carers UK by Opinium, we also asked those who have ever balanced paid work with their unpaid caring responsibilities to report on wider impacts that caring had had, including on their financial situation and their employment situation. We explore both of these impacts in more detail, below.

Financial impact of balancing paid work with unpaid caring responsibilities

The polling demonstrates that providing unpaid care has a significant financial impact for a substantial proportion of carers, with those in employment particularly likely to experience financial pressures. While 38% of current or former carers said that caring had not had any financial impact, a majority (57%) reported at least one financial consequence, highlighting that the costs of caring extend well beyond the time and emotional demands involved.

The financial impact of caring was particularly evident among carers who are balancing work and care. Among those with experience of balancing work and care (both current and former carers), 65% said caring had had a financial impact, compared with 44% of those not in work. This suggests that many people who remain in employment are still absorbing extra costs associated with caring, while also managing the practical challenges of combining paid work with unpaid caring responsibilities.

Caring creates extra additional household costs

One of the most common financial impacts reported was increased household costs, with almost one in four current and former carers (23%) saying that caring had increased their household costs, for example through paying for transport or purchasing items needed to provide care. This rises to 29% of those currently providing care and 26% among those balancing work and care (compared with 19% of carers not in paid work).

65%

of current and former carers said that caring had had a financial impact, compared with 44% of those not in work



The impact is particularly pronounced among people working full time, where over a quarter (27%) reported increased household costs. This suggests that even where carers remain in the labour market, they often face additional financial pressures alongside their existing household commitments, for example having to pay for social care while also providing unpaid care themselves.

The findings highlight that caring often carries a financial cost, including practical expenses associated with providing care, such as travel, equipment, home adaptations or paying for additional support, and may place further pressure on household finances at a time when many carers are already balancing competing demands.

Many carers are using savings to manage the costs of caring

Almost one in four people (23%) with experience of providing care – either now or previously – said they had needed to use savings because of their caring role. This rises to 29% of those currently caring. It is also particularly common among working carers (25%), compared with 21% of carers who were not working. Full-time employees were among those most likely to have used savings (26%), while 29% of full-time students also reported this impact. This suggests that caring responsibilities can affect people's financial resilience across different stages of life, reducing the ability to build or maintain savings for future needs.

Using savings may provide a short-term coping mechanism, but it can also undermine carers' longer-term financial security, particularly if caring responsibilities continue for many years or affect future pension contributions and retirement income.



Employment and income are being affected

The findings show that caring responsibilities can directly affect carers' ability to maintain their income. Nearly one in five people with experience of caring (18%) said the unpaid care they provided had had a negative impact on their income. This rises significantly among part-time workers, with more than a quarter (27%) reporting an income impact.

This reflects the difficult choices many carers face when trying to balance employment with unpredictable or increasing caring demands. For some, reducing working hours may be the only option available when workplace flexibility, formal care services or wider support are insufficient.

Among those currently balancing work and care, 20% reported an income impact, compared with 14% of those not working. This highlights that employment does not necessarily protect carers from financial hardship; rather, many carers who remain in work are having to make adjustments that affect their earnings and financial security.

Caring affects future financial security

The longer-term financial consequences of caring are also evident. Around a fifth of those currently caring (19%) and one in eight people with any experience of caring (13%) said they had reduced their pension contributions because of their caring responsibilities. This rises to 15% among working carers and 16% among those working full-time.

15%



of working carers have reduced their pensions contributions because of their caring role

Reducing pension contributions can have significant long-term consequences, particularly for carers who provide support over many years. Time spent caring can affect not only current income but also future financial security, increasing the risk that carers face financial hardship later in life.

Some carers are taking on debt

More than one in ten current or former carers (11%) said they had taken on debt because of their caring role. This rises to 13% among working carers and 14% among those working full-time. The impact is highest among unemployed carers, where 22% reported taking on debt.

The fact that carers are taking on debt to manage caring responsibilities highlights the extent to which some are facing unsustainable financial pressures. Where caring costs increase but income falls or remains constrained, debt can become one of the few options available to meet everyday costs.

The financial impact reinforces the need for stronger support

Taken together, these findings add to the body of evidence that demonstrates clearly that unpaid caring responsibilities can have a profound effect on carers' financial wellbeing.⁹ The impact is not limited to those who leave work altogether; many carers who remain in employment are experiencing increased costs, reduced incomes, are drawing on savings, building up debt, and compromising their future financial security.

That is why improving support for working carers is essential. Stronger employment rights, including a statutory right to paid Carer's Leave, alongside flexible working and better access to social care, would help reduce the financial pressures that force many carers to reduce their hours or leave employment. Without greater support, increasing numbers of carers risk reaching a point where balancing paid work and unpaid care is no longer financially or practically sustainable.

The impact of unpaid caring responsibilities on employment, careers and progression

Through the polling, we also asked those with caring responsibilities whether they had ever had to make any difficult workplace decisions due to the challenges they face combining paid work and unpaid care. The findings demonstrate that unpaid caring responsibilities can have a profound impact on carers' ability to sustain and progress in paid employment. While some carers are able to continue working without experiencing significant employment consequences, many are making difficult adjustments to their working lives in order to manage their caring responsibilities.

Table 2: Various workplace impacts that caring has had by caring status and employment status

	Total (current and former carers)	Currently caring		Employment status ¹⁰	
		Yes	No	NET: In paid work	NET: Not in paid work
Reduce your hours of paid employment	18%	24%	15%	22%	13%
Leave paid employment entirely	16%	22%	13%	13%	22%
Decline training opportunities	9%	11%	8%	13%	4%
Take on a lower paid or more junior role	9%	13%	7%	13%	3%
Turn down a promotion at work	9%	11%	7%	12%	3%
Change employer	8%	10%	8%	12%	3%
Other (please specify)	1%	1%	2%	1%	2%
None of the above	46%	35%	55%	37%	59%
Don't know	5%	4%	3%	4%	5%
NET: Unpaid care had an impact in workplace	50%	61%	42%	59%	36%

⁹ Carers UK (2024) *State of Caring 2024: The impact of caring on finances*

¹⁰ Both the columns under 'Employment status' refer to current and former carers

Table 3: Various workplace impacts that caring has had by all employment status

Working status (current and former carers)									
	Working full time (30+ hours per week)	Working part time (8-29 hours per week)	Working part time (Less than 8 hours a week)	Full time student	Retired	Un-employed	Other not working	NET: In paid work	NET: Not in paid work
Reduce your hours of paid employment	21%	26%	19%	27%	12%	15%	10%	22%	13%
Leave paid employment entirely	13%	13%	11%	11%	18%	22%	36%	13%	22%
Decline training opportunities	14%	11%	10%	7%	2%	14%	6%	13%	4%
Take on a lower paid or more junior role	14%	13%	4%	5%	2%	7%	4%	13%	3%
Turn down a promotion at work	13%	10%	6%	6%	2%	7%	3%	12%	3%
Change employer	13%	10%	7%	8%	1%	12%	3%	12%	3%
Other (please specify)	1%	1%	4%	3%	2%	2%	2%	1%	2%
None of the above	36%	38%	43%	35%	71%	32%	47%	37%	59%
Don't know	4%	5%	6%	13%	2%	12%	7%	4%	5%
NET: Unpaid care had an impact in workplace	60%	57%	51%	51%	27%	57%	46%	59%	36%

Among all carers (both current and former) surveyed, half (50%) reported that caring had affected their employment in at least one way. However, the impact is substantially greater among those who are currently working. Only 37% of working carers reported no employment impact, while over half (59%) had experienced at least one consequence of balancing work and care.

These findings reinforce wider evidence that many carers reach a point where the demands of paid work and unpaid care become increasingly difficult to reconcile.¹¹ Without sufficient workplace support, flexible working options, employment rights and access to social care, carers can be forced to make decisions that affect their income, career development and long-term attachment to the labour market.

¹¹ Carers UK (2026) The 'tipping point': when unpaid carers can no longer combine caring with paid employment



Reducing hours at work to manage caring responsibilities

The most common employment impact reported by people with caring experience (current and former carers) was reducing hours of paid employment, with almost one in five (18%) saying they had done so at some point because of their caring role. This is the case for a quarter (24%) of those currently caring.

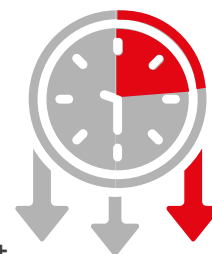
The impact is particularly pronounced among those working part-time, with over a quarter (26%) of carers working 8–29 hours per week reporting that they had reduced their hours. This suggests that even those who have already adapted their employment around caring responsibilities may continue to face increasing pressure as their caring role changes or intensifies.

Among full-time workers, 21% reported reducing their hours at some point because of caring. This highlights that the impact of caring is not limited to those already working reduced hours; many full-time employees have had to reconsider their working patterns in response to increasing demands at home.

Reducing hours may provide a temporary or short-term solution for carers trying to remain in employment – and for some this can be positive – but it can also have longer-term consequences, including reduced earnings, slower career progression, reduced pension contributions and increased financial insecurity.

24%

of current carers
have reduced their
hours of paid employment



Some carers are leaving employment altogether

16% of current and former carers reported leaving paid employment at some point during their career because of their unpaid caring responsibilities. This rose to 22% of those who are currently providing unpaid care. The increase in the number of people leaving employment to care is likely linked to the growing intensity of caring responsibilities, alongside insufficient access to social care, limited employment protections and inconsistent workplace support.

Among those in employment with experience of balancing work and care, 13% said they had had to leave paid employment at some point previously in their career because of their caring responsibilities. This reinforces research we produced earlier this year which found that, without adequate support, working carers too often reach a ‘tipping point’ where leaving employment entirely feels like the only option available to them – rather than, for example, gradually reducing their hours or exploring more flexible options.¹²

¹² Carers UK (2026) *The ‘tipping point’: when unpaid carers can no longer combine caring with paid employment*

Caring affects career progression and future opportunities

The findings also show that caring responsibilities can have lasting consequences for carers' careers. Among current and former carers in employment:

- 12% had changed employer because of caring responsibilities
- 13% had taken on a lower paid or more junior role
- 12% had turned down a promotion
- 13% had declined training opportunities.

These impacts are slightly higher among full-time workers. Around one in seven full-time working carers had declined training opportunities (14%), taken a lower paid or more junior role (14%), turned down a promotion (13%) or changed employer (13%).

This suggests that many carers are not simply making temporary adjustments to manage caring responsibilities; some are having to make significant career compromises. Over time, this can affect earning potential, career progression, job satisfaction and future financial security.

For employers, these findings demonstrate the importance of recognising carers as a key part of the workforce and ensuring that caring responsibilities do not become a barrier to development and progression.

The impact is felt by all types of workers

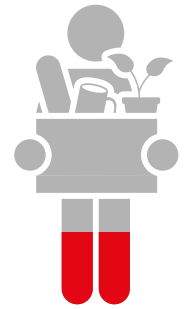
The data shows that employment impacts are experienced across different groups of working carers. Full-time workers, part-time workers and those working fewer hours all report having to make adjustments because of caring responsibilities. This demonstrates the importance of ensuring that support is flexible and responsive throughout someone's caring journey, rather than assuming that a particular working pattern automatically enables carers to balance work and care.

The findings underline the need for stronger employment support

These findings demonstrate that unpaid caring responsibilities can have significant consequences for carers' employment, careers and financial security. While many carers want to remain

22%

of those who are currently providing unpaid care reported leaving paid work



in work,¹³ too many have reduced their hours, missed out on progression opportunities or left employment altogether.

The evidence reinforces the need for stronger employment rights, including a statutory right to paid Carer's Leave, alongside improved access to flexible working and better workplace support. Paid leave would provide carers with essential time away from work without the financial penalty associated with unpaid leave, while flexible and supportive workplaces can help carers remain connected to employment.¹⁴

However, workplace support alone cannot address the full challenge. The ability of carers to remain in work is closely linked to the availability of appropriate social care and wider support.¹⁵ Without action to address the underlying pressures driving unsustainable levels of unpaid care, increasing numbers of carers will continue to face difficult choices between their job and their caring responsibilities.



¹³ Carers UK (2024) *State of Caring: the impact of caring on employment*

¹⁴ Carers UK (2024) *Taking the next step for working carers: introducing a new right to paid Carer's Leave*

¹⁵ Carers UK (2026) *The 'tipping point': when unpaid carers can no longer combine caring with paid employment*

Public expectations of workplace support for employees with caring responsibilities

This research and polling demonstrate a strong public expectation that employers should support employees who are balancing paid work with their unpaid caring responsibilities.

Across every type of workplace support that we tested with respondents, a clear majority of UK adults considered it important that employers offer assistance to employees who are balancing paid work with their unpaid caring responsibilities.

Key findings

- **There is strong public support for introducing a new right to paid Carer's Leave, particularly among those with direct experience of caring.** Around three-quarters of UK adults believe an additional paid leave entitlement would be important, with 73% supporting five days and 72% supporting ten days. Support is higher among current carers (76% for five days and 75% for ten days) and people currently in work (77% and 76% respectively). Women are also more likely than men to support additional paid leave, with 75% supporting five days compared with 71% of men.
- **Flexible working is seen as one of the most important forms of support for people balancing work and unpaid care.** Almost eight in ten UK adults (79%) believe flexible working would be important, rising to 83% among current carers and 81% among those currently in work. Support is similarly high among those not currently caring (80%) and those not in work (76%), demonstrating broad recognition that flexibility is essential to enabling people to remain in employment while managing caring responsibilities. Women (81%) are also more likely than men (77%) to identify flexible working as important.



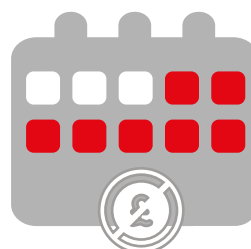
73%

of UK adults support introducing a new right to paid Carer's Leave





72%



of UK adults believe employees should have the option of taking longer-term unpaid leave or a sabbatical

- **A supportive line manager or understanding employer is valued across all groups as a key enabler of combining work and care.** Almost eight in ten UK adults (79%) believe this would be important, including half (50%) who consider it very important. This rises to 83% among current carers and those currently in work, compared with 80% among those not currently caring and 76% among those not in work. Women place particular importance on supportive management, with 82% identifying this as important compared with 77% of men.
- **There is strong support for more flexible approaches to leave when caring responsibilities become more intensive.** More than seven in ten UK adults (72%) believe employees should have the option of taking longer-term unpaid leave or a sabbatical. Support is highest among current carers (74%) and those currently in work (75%), while remaining high among those not currently caring (73%) and those not in work (67%). Women are also more likely than men to value this option (74% compared with 70%).
- **Most people believe employers should play a role in helping carers access information and advice.** More than two-thirds (68%) think employers should provide access to information and advice about caring. This rises slightly among current carers (69%) and those currently in work (72%), compared with 68% of those not currently caring and 62% of those not in work. Women are also more likely than men to see this as important (70% compared with 66%).
- **Workplace networks and practical tools such as Carer Passports attract support from a majority of the public, particularly among those with caring experience.** Around six in ten UK adults support peer support networks (62%) and Carer Passports (61%). Support for peer networks rises to 66% among current carers and 66% among those currently in work, while support for Carer Passports is highest among current carers (69%) and women (64%), compared with 58% of men. These findings suggest that people with direct experience of caring place particular value on practical workplace mechanisms that recognise and respond to their needs.

Public backing for different forms of support

Table 4: Public expectations of workplace support for employees with caring responsibilities

	Very important	Fairly important	Not very important	Not at all important	Don't know	NET: Important	NET: Not important
Additional paid leave entitlement of 5 days from work to arrange care or to support a relative or friend	36%	37%	9%	4%	14%	73%	13%
Additional paid leave entitlement of 10 days from work to arrange care or to support a relative or friend	35%	37%	9%	4%	15%	72%	14%
Peer support network at work (ie support from other colleagues who are caring, unpaid outside work)	26%	37%	15%	6%	17%	62%	21%
Flexible working offered (eg flexible hours or the option to work from home)	46%	33%	6%	4%	11%	79%	10%
Carer Passport (a document to help employees record caring responsibilities and support needed)	26%	35%	14%	6%	19%	61%	20%
Option to take long-term unpaid leave or sabbatical	33%	39%	11%	4%	14%	72%	15%
Supportive line manager/ understanding employer	50%	30%	6%	3%	11%	79%	9%
Access to good information and advice through your employer to find help with caring	32%	36%	14%	5%	14%	68%	18%

Paid leave to manage caring responsibilities attracted strong public support. Nearly three-quarters (73%) said it would be important for employers to provide an additional five days of paid leave to arrange care or support a relative or friend, while a very similar proportion (72%) supported an entitlement of ten days' paid leave. Around one-third of respondents considered each option to be *very important* (36% for five days and 35% for ten days).

The findings placed particular value on practical support that enables people to remain in work while managing caring responsibilities. Flexible working arrangements and supportive line management emerged as the most highly valued forms of workplace support, with almost four in five (79%) respondents saying each would be important. Half of respondents (50%) considered having a supportive line manager or understanding employer to be *very important*, the highest proportion recorded for any measure, while 46% said the same of flexible working arrangements, such as flexible hours or the option to work from home.

These findings reinforce the importance of workplace culture alongside formal employment policies and recognise that day-to-day support from managers and flexibility in how work is organised are fundamental to enabling employees to combine work and unpaid care successfully.

Longer-term flexibility also received substantial support. Almost three-quarters of respondents (72%) considered it important that employees should have the option to take a period of longer-term unpaid leave or a sabbatical where caring responsibilities require more sustained periods away from work. One-third (33%) regarded this as very important.

Information and practical guidance available through employers were also valued. More than two-thirds (68%) of respondents said it would be important for employers to provide access to good information and advice to help employees find support with caring responsibilities, suggesting that employers are seen not only as providers of workplace adjustments but also as an important source of signposting and practical assistance.

Support for more targeted workplace initiatives was positive. Around six in ten respondents said it would be important for employers to provide a Carer Passport (61%) or a peer support network for colleagues with caring responsibilities (62%). While these measures attracted lower levels of support than flexible working or paid leave, they nevertheless received majority backing, indicating recognition that employees may benefit from mechanisms that help identify caring responsibilities, facilitate conversations with managers, and connect carers with colleagues facing similar experiences.

Gendered differences

Women consistently placed greater importance on every form of support than men. Flexible working and supportive management emerged as the highest priorities. More than four in five women (82%) and over three quarters of men (77%) said that having a supportive line manager or understanding employer would be important. Similarly, 81% of women and 77% of men identified access to flexible working, such as flexible hours or the option to work from home, as important. These findings reinforce the critical role that workplace culture and day-to-day management play in enabling carers to remain in employment.

There was also substantial support for stronger practical entitlements to help employees manage caring responsibilities. Around three-quarters of women (75%) and over seven in ten men (71%) said that an additional five days of paid Carer's Leave would be important, with almost identical levels of support for a ten-day entitlement (74% of women and 70% of men). Seven in ten women (74%) and men (70%) also valued the option of taking longer-term unpaid leave or a sabbatical when caring demands become more intensive. Other forms of support also attracted broad backing, including access to information and advice through employers (70% of women and 66% of men), peer support networks (64% and 61% respectively) and Carer Passports to record caring responsibilities and agreed workplace adjustments (64% and 58%).

Taken together, these findings suggest that there is strong public support for a comprehensive package of workplace support for unpaid carers, combining flexible working, effective line management, practical workplace tools and enhanced employment rights such as paid Carer's Leave.

Table 5: Public expectations of workplace support for employees with caring responsibilities by gender
Men (M), Women (W)

	Very important		Fairly important		Not very important		Not at all important		Don't know		NET: Important		NET: Not important	
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
<i>Additional paid leave entitlement of 5 days from work to arrange care or to support a relative or friend</i>	32%	39%	38%	36%	11%	7%	6%	3%	12%	16%	71%	75%	17%	10%
<i>Additional paid leave entitlement of 10 days from work to arrange care or to support a relative or friend</i>	32%	38%	38%	36%	12%	7%	5%	3%	13%	16%	70%	74%	17%	10%
<i>Peer support network at work (ie support from other colleagues who are caring, unpaid outside work)</i>	24%	27%	36%	37%	17%	13%	8%	5%	15%	18%	61%	64%	24%	17%
<i>Flexible working offered (eg flexible hours or the option to work from home)</i>	43%	50%	34%	31%	8%	5%	5%	3%	10%	12%	77%	81%	13%	7%
<i>Carer Passport (a document to help employees record caring responsibilities and support needed)</i>	23%	28%	35%	35%	16%	12%	8%	5%	18%	12%	58%	64%	24%	16%
<i>Option to take long-term unpaid leave or sabbatical</i>	31%	35%	39%	39%	13%	9%	5%	3%	12%	15%	70%	74%	18%	12%
<i>Supportive line manager/ understanding employer</i>	44%	55%	33%	27%	8%	5%	4%	2%	11%	12%	77%	82%	12%	7%
<i>Access to good information and advice through your employer to find help with caring</i>	29%	34%	37%	36%	15%	12%	6%	3%	13%	15%	66%	70%	21%	16%



More than

8 in 10

current carers (83%) said that flexible working would be important in helping people balance work and care

Differences between carers and non-carers

The findings show consistently strong support for workplace measures among both current carers and those who are not currently providing unpaid care, with current carers placing slightly greater importance on most forms of support. Flexible working and supportive management were identified as the highest priorities. More than eight in ten current carers (83%) said that flexible working would be important in helping people balance work and care, while the same proportion (83%) valued having a supportive line manager or understanding employer. These were also the two highest-ranked measures among those not currently caring (both 80%), suggesting broad recognition that workplace flexibility and supportive management are fundamental to enabling people to remain in employment while caring.

Current carers also expressed particularly strong support for practical workplace measures designed to help them manage caring responsibilities. Around three-quarters supported both a five-day (76%) and ten-day (75%) entitlement to paid Carer's Leave, while 74% valued the option of taking longer-term unpaid leave or a sabbatical during periods of intensive caring. Nearly seven in ten current carers supported the introduction of Carer Passports (69%) and access to employer-provided information and advice (69%), with two-thirds (66%) valuing peer support networks in the workplace. While support for these measures was also high among people who were not currently caring, current carers consistently reported higher levels of support, particularly for Carer Passports (69% compared with 60%) and peer support networks (66% compared with 63%). This suggests that people with lived experience of caring place particular value on practical workplace policies and tools that help them remain in employment, while the broad support across both groups reinforces the case for employers to adopt a comprehensive package of support for unpaid carers.

Table 6: Public expectations of workplace support for employees with caring responsibilities by caring status
Caring (C), Not caring (Nc)

	Very important		Fairly important		Not very important		Not at all important		Don't know		NET: Important		NET: Not important	
	C	Nc	C	Nc	C	Nc	C	Nc	C	Nc	C	Nc	C	Nc
<i>Additional paid leave entitlement of 5 days from work to arrange care or to support a relative or friend</i>	38%	36%	37%	37%	10%	9%	4%	4%	10%	14%	76%	73%	14%	13%
<i>Additional paid leave entitlement of 10 days from work to arrange care or to support a relative or friend</i>	38%	35%	37%	37%	10%	9%	4%	4%	11%	14%	75%	72%	14%	14%
<i>Peer support network at work (ie support from other colleagues who are caring, unpaid outside work)</i>	30%	25%	36%	37%	16%	15%	6%	6%	13%	17%	66%	63%	22%	21%
<i>Flexible working offered (eg flexible hours or the option to work from home)</i>	48%	47%	35%	32%	7%	6%	3%	4%	8%	10%	83%	80%	10%	10%
<i>Carer Passport (a document to help employees record caring responsibilities and support needed)</i>	32%	35%	37%	35%	14%	14%	6%	6%	11%	20%	69%	60%	20%	20%
<i>Option to take long-term unpaid leave or sabbatical</i>	36%	33%	38%	40%	12%	10%	5%	4%	10%	13%	74%	73%	16%	14%
<i>Supportive line manager/ understanding employer</i>	54%	50%	29%	30%	7%	6%	3%	3%	7%	11%	83%	80%	9%	9%
<i>Access to good information and advice through your employer to find help with caring</i>	35%	32%	34%	37%	16%	13%	5%	5%	10%	14%	69%	68%	21%	18%



Differences between those in and out of paid work

The findings demonstrate particularly strong support for workplace measures among people who are currently in employment, reflecting both the relevance of these policies to their day-to-day lives and the practical challenges of balancing work with other responsibilities. Flexible working and supportive management were identified as the most important forms of support. More than eight in ten people in work (82%) said that having a supportive line manager or understanding employer would be important, while a similar proportion (81%) highlighted the importance of flexible working, such as flexible hours or the option to work from home. There was also strong support for practical workplace measures, including additional paid Carer's Leave, with more than three quarters of those in work supporting both a five-day (77%) and ten-day (76%) paid entitlement. Around three-quarters (75%) also valued the option of taking longer-term unpaid leave or a sabbatical when caring responsibilities become particularly intensive.

While support was consistently higher among those currently in paid work, there was also clear backing from people who were not in employment. Around three-quarters (76%) regarded flexible working and supportive management as important workplace supports, while around two-thirds supported additional paid Carer's Leave (67% for five days and 65% for ten days), longer-term unpaid leave (67%), access to employer-provided information and advice (62%), peer support networks (56%) and Carer Passports (56%). The consistently higher levels of support among those in work suggest that people with direct experience of the workplace place particular value on policies that enable them to remain in employment while caring. At the same time, the broad support across both groups indicates a wider public consensus that employers have an important role to play in helping unpaid carers balance work and care, strengthening the case for both improved workplace practice and enhanced statutory employment rights.

Table 7: Public expectations of workplace support for employees with caring responsibilities by employment status

In paid work (Pw), Not in paid work (Npw)

	Very important		Fairly important		Not very important		Not at all important		Don't know		NET: Important		NET: Not important	
	Pw	Npw	Pw	Npw	Pw	Npw	Pw	Npw	Pw	Npw	Pw	Npw	Pw	Npw
<i>Additional paid leave entitlement of 5 days from work to arrange care or to support a relative or friend</i>	37%	33%	39%	33%	10%	7%	4%	5%	9%	22%	77%	67%	14%	12%
<i>Additional paid leave entitlement of 10 days from work to arrange care or to support a relative or friend</i>	37%	32%	39%	33%	10%	9%	4%	4%	10%	22%	76%	65%	14%	13%
<i>Peer support network at work (ie support from other colleagues who are caring, unpaid outside work)</i>	28%	22%	39%	34%	16%	13%	6%	6%	12%	25%	66%	56%	22%	19%
<i>Flexible working offered (eg flexible hours or the option to work from home)</i>	47%	45%	34%	31%	8%	4%	4%	4%	7%	17%	81%	76%	12%	7%
<i>Carer Passport (a document to help employees record caring responsibilities and support needed)</i>	27%	25%	38%	31%	15%	12%	6%	7%	15%	26%	64%	56%	21%	18%
<i>Option to take long-term unpaid leave or sabbatical</i>	34%	31%	41%	36%	12%	9%	4%	4%	9%	20%	75%	67%	16%	13%
<i>Supportive line manager/ understanding employer</i>	50%	50%	32%	26%	8%	4%	3%	3%	7%	17%	82%	76%	11%	7%
<i>Access to good information and advice through your employer to find help with caring</i>	33%	30%	39%	32%	14%	13%	5%	5%	10%	20%	72%	62%	19%	18%

Supporting employees in the workplace

A key part of Carers UK's work over the past two decades has been to support employers to create workplaces where unpaid carers can remain and thrive in employment. Alongside stronger statutory employment rights, we know that employer action can make a significant difference to carers' ability to balance work and caring responsibilities, protect their wellbeing and remain in the labour market.

Latest evidence

Among employees currently providing unpaid care, flexible working is the most commonly reported form of workplace support available, with 36% saying their workplace offers options such as flexible hours or the ability to work from home. However, access to more targeted support remains much less widespread. Just under a quarter (24%) of working carers reported that their employer has clear policies to support people with caring responsibilities, while 23% reported access to an additional five days of paid leave to arrange care or support a relative or friend.

Other forms of practical support remain less common. Around one in five working carers reported access to peer support networks (19%), long-term unpaid leave or sabbaticals (21%), or information and advice through their employer to help them find support with caring (18%). Only 14% reported having access to a Carer Passport, a tool that can help employees and managers have conversations about caring responsibilities and agree appropriate workplace support.



Table 8: Types of workplace support currently offered by employers to help people balance work and care (by all in employment and those currently balancing work and care)

	All in employment	Working carers
<i>Flexible working offered (eg flexible hours, the option to work from home etc.)</i>	30%	36%
<i>Clear policies to support people who have caring responsibilities</i>	18%	24%
<i>Option to take long-term unpaid leave or sabbatical</i>	17%	21%
<i>Access to good information and advice through your employer to find help with caring</i>	17%	18%
<i>Additional paid leave entitlement of 5 days from work to arrange care or to support a relative or friend</i>	15%	23%
<i>Additional paid leave entitlement of 10 days from work to arrange care or to support a relative or friend</i>	14%	18%
<i>Peer support network (ie support from other colleagues who are caring, unpaid, outside of work)</i>	14%	19%
<i>Carer Passport (a document to help employees record caring responsibilities and support needed)</i>	10%	14%
<i>None of these</i>	23%	18%
<i>Don't know</i>	17%	8%

These findings highlight that, while some employers already recognise the importance of supporting carers, provision remains inconsistent. Almost one in five working carers (18%) said that their workplace offered none of the forms of support included in the survey. This means that many employees balancing work and care may still be relying on informal arrangements, individual manager discretion or their own ability to negotiate flexibility, rather than having access to consistent workplace policies and support.



Best practice support – Employers for Carers, Carer Confident, and Carer Positive

Through Employers for Carers (EfC), our membership forum for employers, we currently work with 250 organisations of all sizes and across all sectors to develop and embed effective policies and practices that support employees with caring responsibilities. Employers for Carers provides members with access to the latest evidence and research, practical tools and resources, expert advice, training and peer learning, helping employers better understand the experiences of working carers and implement measures such as flexible working, paid Carer's Leave, manager training, carers' networks and inclusive workplace policies.

Collectively, our Employers for Carers members represent over three million employees across the UK, demonstrating both the scale of employer engagement and the growing recognition that supporting carers makes good business sense.

We also deliver Carer Confident, our benchmarking and accreditation framework that helps employers assess, develop and gain recognition for the support they provide to working carers.¹⁶ Through a structured, tiered approach, Carer Confident enables organisations to benchmark their current provision, identify opportunities for improvement and embed good practice over time, helping to create workplace cultures where carers feel recognised, supported and confident to talk about their caring responsibilities.



¹⁶ www.employersforcarers.org/carers-confident



In Scotland, we deliver the Carer Positive scheme, which is supported by the Scottish Government and recognises employers that demonstrate a strong commitment to supporting unpaid carers through flexible working, supportive leadership and practical workplace policies.¹⁷

Our experience of working with employers across the UK shows that creating carer friendly workplaces is both achievable and beneficial. Organisations that invest in supporting carers in their workforce are better able to retain experienced employees, reduce absenteeism, improve wellbeing and access a wider talent pool, while carers are more likely to remain in employment, maintain their financial security and continue progressing in their careers.

However, the polling undertaken for this research demonstrates that access to this support remains uneven. While employees with caring responsibilities are more likely than those without caring responsibilities to report having access to workplace support, the majority still do not have access to many of the measures that can make the biggest difference.

This is particularly important given the wider evidence in this report showing that many carers are reducing their working hours, missing out on career opportunities or leaving employment altogether because of the pressures of balancing work and care.

Too often the support a working carer receives depends on who they work for, rather than on consistent minimum standards. This is why employer best practice must be complemented by stronger statutory employment rights. By combining improved legal protections – particularly the introduction of paid Carer's Leave – with greater adoption of proven initiatives such as Employers for Carers, Carer Confident and Carer Positive, we can ensure that all working carers have the support they need to balance work and unpaid care.

¹⁷ www.carerpositive.org

Best practice case study



Standard Life recognises that many of their colleagues currently balance work alongside caring responsibilities, often during periods of significant personal challenge. Supporting working carers is an important part of building an inclusive workplace and enabling people to thrive at work, whatever their circumstances.

Standard Life has taken a long-term, practical approach to supporting colleagues with caring responsibilities, informed by listening to colleagues and understanding the realities of caring. The organisation actively encourages other employers to consider similar measures to help carers remain in work and feel supported.

Key elements of Standard Life's approach include:

- 10 days' paid Carer's Leave, available since 2020, providing colleagues with dedicated time to manage caring responsibilities when they arise.
- An additional five days' unpaid Carer's Leave, reflecting the Carer's Leave Act 2023 and ensuring colleagues can access additional flexibility where needed.
- Flexible working arrangements, enabling colleagues to shape how, when and where they work to better balance caring and family responsibilities.
- A colleague-led Carers Network, established more than 10 years ago, which provides peer support, shared learning and a sense of community for colleagues who are caring for someone.
- A 'Carers Hub' with all of the relevant policies, guidance and information to support colleagues that are carers. This includes a financial wellbeing toolkit aimed at supporting working carers with their finances.
- Access to a care concierge service which provides specialist support to UK colleagues; from identifying care homes or agency carers coming in for a few hours a day, through to offering care cover for ageing family members during holiday periods, to ensure wellbeing and peace of mind.
- Being accredited as a Carer Confident employer, achieving Ambassador level 3 in 2025, and as an 'Exemplary' level Carer Positive employer in Scotland.

Together, these measures help create an environment where carers feel able to speak openly about their needs, access practical support, and remain engaged in their roles. Standard Life believes that normalising conversations about caring, alongside offering clear and consistent support, is key to retaining talent and building a more inclusive workplace.

How many people are caring across the UK?

The polling we undertook found that one in five respondents (20%) reported that they are currently providing unpaid support to someone who is older, ill or disabled.

This underlines that a significant proportion of the UK population are balancing caring responsibilities alongside other aspects of their lives and reinforces the understanding that unpaid caring is not a niche experience affecting a small minority of the population. Instead, it is a widespread social and economic reality that touches many households and communities across the UK.¹⁸

Differences by gender

The findings suggest that women are more likely than men to be providing unpaid care. 22% of women reported that they were currently supporting someone who is older, ill or disabled, compared with 18% of men.

This is consistent with wider evidence showing that women are more likely to undertake unpaid caring responsibilities. At the same time, the results demonstrate that unpaid care is by no means confined to women. Nearly one in five men also report currently providing unpaid support, reinforcing that caring is a significant issue affecting both genders.

This broad distribution of caring responsibilities has important implications for employers, public services and policymakers, who increasingly need to recognise that employees, service users and communities will include substantial numbers of people with caring responsibilities regardless of gender.



¹⁸ Estimates of the number of unpaid carers in the UK vary depending on the data source, methodology and definition of caring that is used. The Census provides an important benchmark but captures caring at a single point in time, while more recent surveys and nationally representative polling can reflect changes in caring prevalence and identify people who provide regular unpaid support but may not identify themselves as carers. Differences in question wording and the threshold for what constitutes unpaid care also contribute to variations in estimates. The findings in this report are based on nationally representative polling conducted in 2026 and indicate that around one in five (20%) UK adults are currently providing unpaid care, reflecting the growing number of people balancing caring responsibilities alongside other aspects of their lives.



Defining ‘unpaid care’ and identification

The survey’s broad definition of unpaid care is particularly important in interpreting these findings. By explicitly including emotional support, practical assistance and help with navigating services alongside personal care, the question captures the diversity of caring roles that people undertake.

Carers UK has undertaken decades of research looking at how best to identify unpaid carers and what the barriers to identification are. We know that many individuals who provide regular support do not necessarily identify themselves as ‘carers’, particularly where they are helping a parent, partner, neighbour or friend with everyday activities rather than providing intensive personal care. Indeed, it takes people on average two years to recognise their caring responsibilities and identify as a carer.¹⁹ Therefore, framing the question around the support provided, rather than around the label of ‘carer’, helps to identify people whose caring responsibilities might otherwise go unrecognised.

This suggests that unpaid caring is likely to be an even greater feature of everyday life than is often assumed, with many people undertaking significant caring responsibilities without necessarily recognising themselves within traditional definitions of caring.

The fact that one in five adults currently report they are caring underlines the scale of unpaid care within the UK and provides important context for understanding the employment, financial and wellbeing impacts explored elsewhere in this report.

¹⁹ Carers UK (2022) *State of Caring 2022*

Detailed findings from the nations

Scotland

In Scotland, 8% of people have given up work to care at some point – an estimated 362,182 people. This compares to 7%, and an estimated 307,632 people, in 2019. 7% have reduced their working hours to care – an estimated 316,910 people, and an increase from 5% (219,737 people) in 2019. 8% said caring has had a negative impact on their work (eg stress or tiredness).

Around one in five people (19%) in Scotland said they are currently providing unpaid care – an estimated 860,184 people. This is an increase from 17% in 2019.²⁰

The top three workplace support mechanisms that the public in Scotland deemed to be most important for unpaid carers were:

- having a supportive line manager (81%)
- flexible working (79%)
- being able to take a longer period of unpaid carers leave or a sabbatical (71%) and having access to 10 days of paid carer's leave (71%).

People in employment in Scotland were asked what support for unpaid carers is currently available in their workplace. The most commonly reported source of support was flexible working, which 32% of workers said they had access to, followed by clear policies to support carers (25%).



Current and former carers in Scotland were asked what impact caring has had on their employment. 17% said they had had to reduce their working hours, 14% had had to leave employment entirely, and 10% had taken on a lower paid or more junior role.

Many current and former carers in Scotland have experienced financial difficulties due to caring. Nearly a fifth (19%) said caring had increased their household costs, while 18% said they had had to use savings. Overall, half (50%) of current and former carers in Scotland said that caring had had an impact on their finances.

²⁰ This is a greater number of carers than the latest [Scotland's Carers Update](#) (June 2026), published by the Scottish Government. That estimated around 722,000 people are providing unpaid care. This difference may reflect the challenges in carer identification outlined in the preceding page and differences in how data was collected.

Wales

In Wales, 8% of people have given up work to care – an estimated 205,244 people. This is an increase from 6% in 2019, and an estimated 149,812 people. 5% have reduced their working hours to care – an estimated 128,278 people, and an increase from 3% (and 74,906 people) in 2019. 7% said caring has had a negative impact on their work (eg stress or tiredness).

One in five people (20%) in Wales said they are currently providing unpaid care – an estimated 513,112 people.

The top two workplace support mechanisms that the public in Wales deemed to be most important for unpaid carers were:

- having a supportive line manager (81%)
- flexible working (79%).



People in employment in Wales were asked what support for unpaid carers is currently available in their workplace. The most commonly reported source of support was flexible working, which 21% of workers said they had access to, followed by clear policies to support carers (19%).

Current and former carers in Wales were asked what impact caring has had on their employment. 14% said they had had to reduce their working hours, and 17% had had to leave employment entirely.

Some current and former carers in Wales have experienced financial difficulties due to caring. Over a fifth (21%) said they had had to use savings, while 17% said caring has increased their household costs. Overall, 44% of current and former carers in Wales said that caring had had an impact on their finances.



Northern Ireland

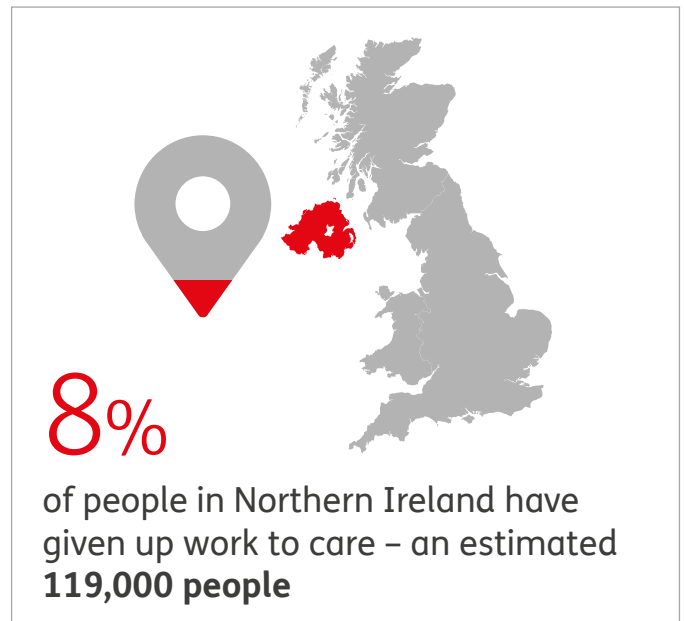
In Northern Ireland, 8% of people have given up work to care – an estimated 119,385 people. This is an increase from 5% and an estimated 71,700 people in 2019. 3% have reduced their working hours to care – an estimated 44,769 people, and a decrease from 4% (57,360) people in 2019. 5% said caring has had a negative impact on their work (eg stress or tiredness).

18% of people in Northern Ireland said they are currently providing unpaid care – an estimated 268,617 people. This is a small decrease from 19% in 2019.

The top three workplace support mechanisms that the public in Northern Ireland deemed to be most important for unpaid carers were:

- flexible working (85%)
- having a supportive line manager (80%)
- being able to take a longer period of unpaid carers leave or sabbatical (79%).

People in employment in Northern Ireland were asked what support for unpaid carers is currently available in their workplace. The most commonly reported source of support was flexible working, which 35% of workers said they had access to, followed by clear policies to support carers (22%).

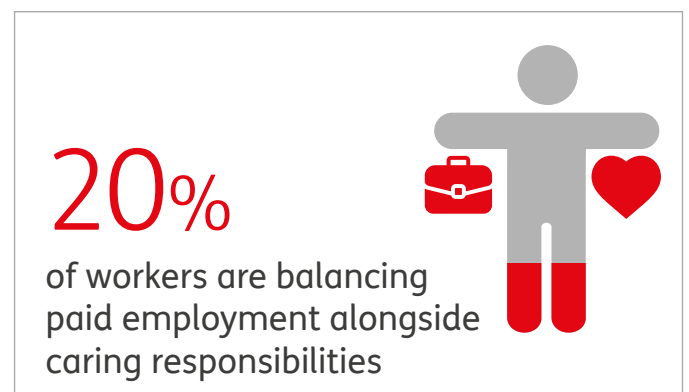
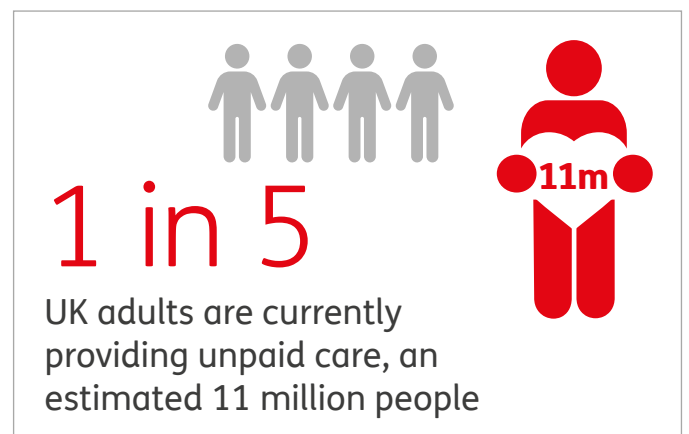


Conclusion

The findings in this report add to a substantial and growing body of evidence showing that balancing paid work with unpaid care is becoming an increasingly significant challenge for individuals, employers and Government.



Our research, carried out by Opinium for Carers UK, shows that one in five UK adults (20%) – an estimated 11 million people – are currently providing unpaid care, while one in five workers (20%) are balancing paid employment alongside caring responsibilities. Compared with equivalent polling undertaken in 2019, both figures have increased significantly, demonstrating that unpaid care is becoming an increasingly common feature of working life. At the same time, the number of people whose employment has been affected by caring continues to grow. More than half of carers (52%) report that caring has had an impact on their work, with many reducing their working hours, experiencing stress and exhaustion, or leaving employment altogether.



Most concerning is the growing number of people leaving the labour market because of caring responsibilities. Our polling estimates that 3.3 million people have given up work to provide unpaid care, while 4.1 million have reduced their working hours. The pace at which people are leaving work has accelerated dramatically since 2019. An estimated 1.1 million people have left employment to care within the last two years alone – equivalent to around 1,500 people every day, a 150% increase between 2019 and 2026. These are not simply statistics; they represent millions of people whose careers, financial security and future opportunities have been fundamentally altered because they could no longer balance work and care.

This report reinforces what Carers UK's research has consistently shown over many years. Caring rarely affects employment through a single event or decision. Instead, many carers reach a 'tipping point', where increasing caring responsibilities, inadequate support and inflexible workplaces combine to make remaining in employment impossible. Our previous *State of Caring*²¹ and *Tipping point* research²², alongside evidence from UK Government²³ and other organisations, has repeatedly demonstrated the significant personal, social and economic consequences of carers reducing their hours or leaving work altogether. The findings presented here strengthen that evidence still further.

1,500



people leave paid work to provide unpaid care every day, compared to 600 people a day in 2019

Importantly, the report also shows that these outcomes are not inevitable. More than one in four carers (28%) report that they have been able to provide unpaid care without it affecting their employment. This demonstrates that, where the right support is in place, many carers can successfully balance work and care. Employer-led initiatives such as flexible working, supportive line management, carers' policies and paid Carer's Leave are already enabling thousands of carers to remain in work. Through Employers for Carers, our Carer Confident accreditation scheme and the Carer Positive award, we have seen first-hand that supporting working carers benefits both employees and employers by improving staff retention, wellbeing and productivity.



²¹ Carers UK (2024) *State of Caring – the impact of caring on employment*

²² Carers UK (2026) *The 'tipping point': when unpaid carers can no longer combine caring with paid employment*

²³ Department for Business and Trade (2026) *Carers' experiences of managing paid work and care, and perspectives of Carer's Leave*

However, access to this support remains inconsistent and too often depends on who someone works for. While many employers are leading the way, millions of working carers have no access to dedicated workplace support and continue to rely on informal arrangements or the goodwill of individual managers. This variation in workplace support means that too many carers still face impossible choices between earning a living and caring for someone who relies on them for their support.

The UK Government's review of employment rights for unpaid carers presents a significant opportunity to address this challenge. The introduction of unpaid Carer's Leave in 2024 was an important milestone, but our findings – and the wider evidence base – demonstrate that it is not sufficient to meet the realities facing today's carers. For many people, taking unpaid leave is simply not financially viable, particularly when caring is already placing considerable pressure on household finances. If the UK Government is serious about supporting people to remain in work, strengthening labour market participation and delivering economic growth, employment rights for carers must go further.

At the heart of this should be the introduction of a statutory right to paid Carer's Leave. Paid Carer's Leave would provide carers with more financial security to manage caring without being forced to reduce their hours or leave employment altogether. Alongside stronger rights to flexible working, greater awareness of carers' rights and continued investment in employer best practice, it would represent a significant step towards creating a labour market that recognises the realities of unpaid care.

The evidence is clear. Unpaid carers make an enormous contribution to society, yet too many continue to pay a significant personal and financial price for doing so. As caring becomes an increasingly common part of working life, Government and employers must respond with ambition. By strengthening employment rights and supporting more employers to adopt proven carer friendly workplace practices, we can ensure that millions more carers are able to remain in work, protect their financial future and continue providing the care on which families, communities and public services depend.

Recommendations

To address the challenges detailed in this report, Carers UK recommends urgent action from governments across the UK, and employers, to ensure that people with unpaid caring responsibilities can remain in and thrive in paid employment.

Carers UK's key recommendations are:

For UK Government:

- Introduce a new statutory entitlement to 10 days of paid Carer's Leave per annum for employees with unpaid caring responsibilities. As a minimum, Government should introduce five days' paid Carer's Leave by the end of this Parliament as a practical first step that can be enhanced over time.
- Introduce a legal right to a longer period of unpaid leave, with a right to return to work, for carers experiencing particularly intensive or unpredictable caring responsibilities.

For governments across the UK:

- Recognise that supporting carers to remain in employment is an economic priority, including through improved access to social care services and tailored employment support.
- As Northern Ireland remains the only region of the UK without Carer's Leave enshrined in employment law, the Northern Ireland Assembly should introduce paid Carer's Leave without further delay.

For employers:

- Introduce at least five days of paid Carer's Leave per year to support employees to balance work and care and improve retention, going beyond the current unpaid statutory minimum.
- Build a carer friendly workplace culture through awareness, training for line managers, Carer Passports, carer networks and flexible approaches to work.
- Collect data on employees with caring responsibilities and use this insight to develop effective workplace support, including signposting to advice and information services like Carers UK to ensure employees get the right advice quickly.

Detailed recommendations for UK Government:

Strengthen employment rights for unpaid carers

- Introduce a statutory right to paid Carer's Leave by the end of this Parliament:** The UK Government should use the opportunity presented by its review of employment rights to legislate for a new statutory right to paid Carer's Leave. This should build on the existing right to unpaid Carer's Leave introduced through the Carer's Leave Act 2023 and provide employees with the practical and financial support they need to balance paid work with unpaid care. Carers UK would like to see the introduction of a new statutory entitlement to 10 days of paid Carer's Leave per annum for employees with unpaid caring responsibilities. As a minimum, Government should introduce five days' paid Carer's Leave by the end of this Parliament as a practical first step that can be enhanced over time.
- Extend the existing right to unpaid Carer's Leave to 10 days per year, complementing a new right to paid Carer's Leave:** The UK Government should extend the current entitlement to provide greater flexibility for employees experiencing periods of increased caring demands. However, this should complement, rather than replace, the introduction of paid Carer's Leave, as unpaid leave alone does not provide a sustainable solution for carers facing financial pressures.
- Introduce a longer period of protected unpaid Carer's Leave:** The UK Government should explore opportunities to introduce a longer period of unpaid leave of up to six months, with appropriate employment protections, including a right to return to the same job. This would support employees during particularly intensive or unpredictable periods of care, such as end-of-life care.



Detailed recommendations for governments across the UK:

Identify and support carers in employment

- **Ensure employment support programmes identify and support unpaid carers:** Governments across the UK should ensure that employment support initiatives (including the UK Government's Make Work Pay and Keep Britain Working agendas) identify unpaid carers, provide tailored advice and support, and measure outcomes for carers' employment journeys. This will enable services to better understand what works and continuously improve support.
- **Maximise awareness and uptake of employment rights for carers:** Governments across the UK should work with employers and representative organisations to increase awareness and uptake of Carer's Leave and wider workplace rights. This should include practical guidance on job design, flexible working, workplace adjustments and signposting to specialist support.
- **Lead by example as carer friendly employers:** Governments across the UK should ensure all Government Departments and the public bodies they fund become recognised as carer friendly employers by 2028, through schemes such as Employers for Carers, Carer Confident or Carer Positive in Scotland. Government should demonstrate best practice in supporting employees with unpaid caring responsibilities.
- **Improve the identification and measurement of unpaid carers across Government and public services:** Governments across the UK should strengthen the routine identification of unpaid carers across employment support, health, social care and public services, and improve the collection and publication of data on carers' employment, financial wellbeing and access to support.

Make supporting carers a cross-government economic priority

- **Make supporting carers to remain in employment an economic priority:** Governments across the UK should recognise the retention of carers in employment as a key economic priority. Supporting carers to remain in work will help address workforce pressures and reduce the significant productivity costs associated with carers reducing their hours or leaving employment due to a lack of support.
- **Deliver sustainable social care reform that enables carers to work:** Governments across the UK should take a strategic approach to social care funding and reform, recognising that access to appropriate, affordable and reliable care and support is fundamental to enabling unpaid carers to combine caring with paid employment.

- **The UK Government should encourage the Independent Commission on Adult Social Care to place unpaid carers at the heart of its recommendations:** The Independent Commission (and all work to reform social care across each nation of the UK) should be encouraged to fully recognise the contribution of unpaid carers to society and the economy and make recommendations that enable carers to combine work and care. This should include improving access to high-quality social care, respite and replacement care, reducing unmet need, and recognising supporting carers to remain in employment as a key measure of a successful adult social care system.
- **Take a life-course approach to supporting unpaid carers:** Governments across the UK should recognise that caring responsibilities change over time and ensure support is available at different stages of a caring journey. This should include early identification of carers and appropriate support to prevent long-term impacts on carers' health, finances and employment. The UK Government should use the recently published Carers Action Plan as the foundation to embedding a genuinely cross-government, life-course approach to supporting unpaid carers, ensuring that health, employment, social care, education, housing and financial wellbeing policies work together to enable carers to remain healthy, financially secure and, where they wish to do so, in paid employment.
- **Ensure pensions policy supports people to combine work and unpaid care throughout their working lives:** The UK Government should build on the recognition in the Pensions Commission's interim report of the vital role unpaid carers play in society and the importance of enabling people to remain in employment for longer. As Government considers the future State Pension Age and wider pensions reform, it should ensure that employment policies – including paid Carer's Leave, flexible working and improved workplace support for carers – form part of a coherent strategy to help people balance work and care across longer working lives. Supporting carers to remain economically active will help strengthen labour market participation, improve retirement outcomes and reduce the long-term financial penalties associated with caring.

Support and embed employer action

- **Embed support for unpaid carers across wider labour market and economic policy:** Governments across the UK should ensure that unpaid carers are recognised within workforce, skills, productivity and economic growth strategies. Supporting carers to remain in employment should be viewed not solely as a social policy objective, but as an essential component of tackling labour shortages, increasing labour market participation and delivering long-term economic growth.
- **Expand access to carer friendly workplace accreditation and good practice:** Governments across the UK should work with employers to increase participation in initiatives such as Employers for Carers,

Employers for Carers Wales and Carer Positive in Scotland. These schemes provide employers with practical support to benchmark, improve and share good practice.

- **Require larger employers to demonstrate how they support carers:** Governments across the UK should ensure that larger employers consider how they support employees with unpaid caring responsibilities as part of wider workforce strategies, including through mechanisms such as Equality Action Plans.
- **Encourage employers to proactively identify and support employees with caring responsibilities:** Governments across the UK should work with employers to encourage the routine identification of employees with unpaid caring responsibilities through staff surveys, wellbeing conversations, induction processes and line manager training. Employers should be supported to create workplace cultures in which carers feel confident disclosing their caring responsibilities and accessing available support at the earliest opportunity.

Detailed recommendations for employers:

Provide effective workplace support

- **Introduce paid Carer's Leave:** Employers should introduce at least five days of paid Carer's Leave per year to support employees to balance work and care, improve retention and realise the benefits of supporting carers in the workplace with an ambition to increase this to 10 days to match the most ambitious employers.
- **Ensure employees understand their rights and available support:** Employers should regularly raise awareness of Carer's Leave, flexible working rights and workplace support available to employees with unpaid caring responsibilities.
- **Train managers to support carers effectively:** Employers should provide line managers with training and guidance to help them identify carers, understand the challenges they face and respond appropriately to requests for support.
- **Build a carer friendly workplace culture:** Employers should introduce practical mechanisms such as Carer Passports, carer networks and carer champions to ensure carers are visible, recognised and supported across the organisation.
- **Collect data to understand and support carers:** Employers should collect information on employees with caring responsibilities, where appropriate, to understand workforce needs, identify barriers and develop effective solutions.

Recognise, retain and support carers

- **Recognise the skills and contribution of carers:** Employers should recognise the valuable skills gained through caring responsibilities, including organisation, communication, advocacy, problem-solving and resilience, and ensure carers have equal opportunities for progression and development.
- **Ensure carers can access appropriate health and wellbeing support:** Employers should ensure clear links with occupational health and other workplace support services to help employees manage the impact of caring responsibilities.

Promote and share good practice

- **Become recognised as a carer friendly employer:** Employers should join initiatives such as Employers for Carers, Employers for Carers Wales, Carer Confident or Carer Positive in Scotland to benchmark and improve their approach to supporting carers.
- **Share learning on effective approaches:** Employers should share examples of successful support through employer networks, conferences, surveys, case studies and workplace communications to encourage wider adoption of good practice.
- **Signpost employees to trusted sources of information:** Employers should signpost employees to trusted sources of advice and support, including Carers UK, so carers understand their rights and can access further help.
- **Participate in national awareness activity:** Employers should take part in Carers Week and Carers Rights Day to improve recognition of carers, encourage identification and promote a supportive workplace culture.

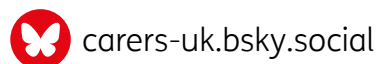


Across the UK today, 5.8 million people are carers – supporting a loved one who is older, disabled or seriously ill. Carers UK is here to listen, to give carers expert information and tailored advice. We champion the rights of carers and support them in finding new ways to manage at home, at work, or in their community.

We're here to make life better for carers.

Carers UK 20 Great Dover Street, London, SE1 4LX

T 020 7378 4999 | **E** info@carersuk.org



Carers UK is a charity registered in England and Wales (246329) and in Scotland (SC039307) and a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (864097). Registered office 20 Great Dover Street, London SE1 4LX.

© Carers UK, September 2026 | Publication code: UK4155_0926 | ISBN 978-1-918310-03-0

carersuk.org