

Who cares?

Caregiving, career and culture in Belgian finance

Survey of 1.615 professionals · Wo.Men in Finance annual event, 25 September 2026

Belgium's first survey on caregiving and careers in the financial sector. 1.615 professionals answered. Every finding is read through gender, position in the hierarchy, and ethnic or cultural background. Each percentage names the group it refers to: all respondents, women, men, or a smaller group such as senior women. Figures are the share of that group who agree or completely agree.

93%

of all respondents report at least one career decision shaped by caregiving

78%

of all respondents carry a significant mental load of care

90%

of all respondents say it gets harder at senior levels

24%

of all respondents have considered leaving their organization

FOURTEEN FINDINGS

1. Career impact is the norm

93% of all respondents name a career decision they attribute to caregiving; women are more likely than men to report one (95% against 86%). Women are 1.4 times more likely to have adjusted their ambitions downward (68% against 49%) and 1.2 times more likely to have reduced their visibility (67% against 54%) or postponed career moves (65% against 47%).

2. Care is unequally divided

Women are 3 times more likely than men to be the primary caregiver (54% against 18%) and 1.9 times more likely to work part-time (43% against 23%). 85% of all part-timers are women.

3. The mental load is the heaviest part

78% of all respondents carry a significant mental load of planning and coordinating care. Women are 1.2 times more likely than men to carry it (81% against 66%) and to say it drains their focus at work (67% against 54%).

4. Hiding and adapting

61% of all respondents hide their caregiver self at work and 59% adapt to norms built around colleagues without care. Women are 1.3 times more likely than men to hide (64% against 51%) and 1.2 times more likely to adapt (62% against 50%). At senior level the hiding gap widens to 1.6 times (66% against 42%).

5. Two barriers at the top

90% of all respondents say the senior job is organized around long hours, travel and constant availability, women slightly more often than men (91% against 87%). 84% say combining care with leadership increases the pressure to adapt: 87% of women against 77% of men, and 92% of senior women against 67% of senior men.

6. The assimilation tax

47% of senior women carry 21+ hours of care a week, as many as women employees (45%), and they ask less often for support: 63% of senior women want better workload redistribution, against 84% of women employees. Work actually redistributed falls from 35% of women employees to 18% of senior women, while for men it stays around 38% at every level.

7. Psychological safety is uneven

Women feel less safe than men on all three measures: raising caregiving with their manager (68% against 76%), seeing vulnerability as risky (58% against 48%) and belonging without constantly adapting (66% against 73%). Senior men are the most at ease of any group (82%, 36% and 79%), and the least likely to carry the care: 15% of them are the primary caregiver, against 55% of senior women.

8. Ethnicity leaves its mark

92 women identify as an ethnic or cultural minority. They are 1.3 times more likely than other women to see vulnerability as risky (73% against 56%), 1.4 times more likely to say career considerations shaped their family planning (68% against 48%), and less likely to feel they belong (53% against 67%). The survey gives a first indication here: hearing from more minority women would show how far these patterns reach.

9. Managers are kind, and rarely a model

Women and men are equally likely to say their manager considers their personal situation (86% and 87%). The gap is in the example: women are less likely to see a manager model a realistic balance (58% against 64%), to see role models combining seniority with care (43% against 50%), to see senior leaders acknowledge caregiving (23% against 32%) and to say their organization acknowledges the effort care takes (47% against 62%).

10. Office politics and unwritten rules

Women and men report manager discretion equally (52% and 49%), and they report different treatment across teams equally too (54% and 50%). What differs is the reading: women are 1.2 times more likely to say informal signals shape progression and assignments (53% against 43%) and 1.4 times more likely to say caregiving is read as a lack of ambition (43% against 31%). In middle management the gaps are widest (56% against 43%, and 44% against 25%).

11. Men who carry primary responsibility pay the same price

Men who are the primary caregiver are 1.5 times more likely than other men to hide their caregiver self (69% against 47%) and to adapt to non-caregiver norms (68% against 46%). In that role they report the same as women (69% and 65%). What differs is how many carry it: 54% of women against 18% of men.

12. Four days of pay, five days of career cost

Women working 80 to 99% report more career impact than women working full-time: 77% adjusted their ambitions (against 61%), 71% reduced their visibility (against 64%), and 28% considered leaving (against 22%). Only 20% of them see a proportional cut in workload.

13. The sandwich generation asks least

270 respondents care for both a child and an adult. They are more likely than those caring only for children to have adjusted their ambitions (74% against 64%), to hide their caregiver self (67% against 59%) and to have avoided asking for support out of fear for their reputation (56% against 44%), even though fewer of them carry 21+ hours a week.

14. What moves people toward the exit

24% of all respondents have considered leaving their organization and 18% the sector; women are 1.5 times more likely than men on both (25% against 17%, and 19% against 13%). Weighed together in one model, the invisible experience predicts leaving (fitting in 1.31x, structural barriers 1.25x, mental load 1.20x, part-time work 1.44x), while gender, seniority and hours of care lose their edge.

“Without career penalty.”

sans pénalité · zonder nadelige gevolgen voor de carrière

The most repeated phrase across the 958 written answers, in all three survey languages and at every level. Flexibility was the most recurring ask, 27% of all coded mentions, almost always paired with this qualifier.

SEVEN PRIORITIES

FIX THE STRUCTURE OF WORK

1. Decouple flexibility from penalty

Reduced and flexible working stays career-safe, with proportional workload and protected progression.

2. Manage the invisible load

Name and measure the mental load, and organize redistribution of work by design (not discretion of the manager).

3. Remove what pushes senior women out

Redistribute workload for real at senior levels and make asking for support blame-free.

WIDEN WHO CARE BELONGS TO

4. Recognise care beyond children

Extend language, leave and permission to adult, disability and sandwich-generation care.

5. Normalise caregiving for men

Make extended partner leave real and penalty-free, and back the men who carry care openly.

LEAD IT AS CULTURE

6. Make care visible at the top

Sponsor senior role models and protect the managers who carry care and currently hide it.

7. Treat care as culture

The organization designs the experience that drives people out, and it can redesign it.

AT YOUR TABLE

Pick one priority. What would it look like in your organization, and what stands in its way today?

WHAT RESPONDENTS ASKED FOR, IN 958 WRITTEN ANSWERS

Share of all coded mentions in the written answers.

Flexibility, remote or hybrid, usually paired with “without career penalty”	27%
Open dialogue, destigmatization, cultural change	13%
Financial compensation or pension protection	13%
Workload redistribution and genuine proportional part-time	9%
Societal revaluation of care, supported by public policy	7%
Visible senior role models and leadership example	7%

WHO ANSWERED

The sample	Where they sit	Who they care for	How much care
1.615 professionals	62% of respondents non-managerial	61% of respondents children only	30% of respondents spend 11 to 20 hours a week
76% of them women, 23% men	31% middle management	17% children and an adult	22% spend 21 to 30 hours
7% an ethnic or cultural minority	7% senior management or above	13% an adult only, 9% other care	17% spend 31 hours or more

Kindness makes the day bearable; only structural change moves people away from the exit.

Who thinks about leaving depends more on how people experience their organization than on gender, seniority or hours of care. An organization cannot redistribute care at home, but it can change what care costs at work.

Self-selected sample: the findings describe this respondent base rather than the sector as a whole. Two groups are small, so their figures are indications: senior men (33 respondents) and minority women (92). Analysis: Nathalie Delaere, In a Different Voice, for Wo.Men in Finance Belgium.