



Caring for family carers The Gezinsbond's plea for recognition

Care and family, two concepts inherently connected. Governments talk about community based care and call out to their citizens to be part of it. Informal care and home care will definitely be part of the solution to the increasingly ageing population and the growing need for care. The question is, however, can we take informal care so easily for granted and does the informal carer get enough recognition ?

The Gezinsbond (Flemish League of Families) underlines the fact that too little consideration is given to the family life in families that provide informal care. The patient is certainly to be put at the heart of the care, yet we must not forget his or her environment. Certainly when it involves young informal carers. Looking after the care taker *and* the care giver is crucial to provide a good quality of (family) life during those periods when more care is needed.

Many families are prepared to be caregiver when necessary yet at the same time face challenges by having only a small family network to fall back on, more distance between family members or by the call to all work longer.

The Flemish League of Families wants to support informal caregivers and at the same time respects people who, for various reasons, choose not to be one. Being an informal caregiver must always be a positive choice, both for the care giver and the care taker, a choice to be made without pressure from government or environment.

The government should facilitate this choice to become informal carer and not consider it as obvious. Informal care must be acknowledged as a formal type of care and caring families should be registered in a register at local level.

Professional care and informal care should be fully aligned. This could be done by appointing a guidance counsellor who maps the needs of the care taker and the other family members.

Support to informal carers is also about providing adequate information, coaching and training to guarantee the quality of care. The needs and wishes of the caretaker, his/her family and the direct environment must be placed at the centre. A variety of support is necessary. Accessible and affordable local and home based services can support the caregiver and occasionally take some care off his or her plate.

A specific offer for young informal carers should be developed.

Specific attention should go to perspectives after the caring period. Work – life balance for carers is extremely challenging, especially when dealing with long term care. Leave schemes can ease the situation but are not sufficient to overcome longer periods of care. The Flemish League of Families pleads for long leave schemes with no negative impact on retirement and for actions that support the return to work.

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The Gezinsbond's plea for political action : 10 principles

1. **Informal care must always be a voluntary and positive choice for the sake of the care giver and the care taker – without pressure from government or environment ;**
2. **Formal and informal care must be attuned and must complement each other to develop a caring society ;**
3. **Governments at local, regional and national level must play their part by providing support (information, coaching and training, financial incentives) to informal carers ;**
4. **Recognition of informal care as a formal type of care is a crucial step to develop a policy and strategy that stimulates community based care ;**
5. **Registration of caring families - with respect for personal choice and privacy - is important to actively support caring families ;**
6. **Developing affordable and accessible services to support the informal carer is necessary to meet the care givers and care takers needs ;**
7. **Provide the best information and guidance to informal carers by developing a one-stop-shop at local level;**
8. **Give special attention and develop a specific approach for young informal carers ;**
9. **Support informal carers in achieving a healthy work-life-balance by developing adequate leave schemes, also for long term care and facilitate return to work after long term care ;**
10. **Minimize the impact of long term care on the pension.**

Who is Gezinsbond? (the League of Families in Flanders and Brussels)

- ✓ a pluralistic, inclusive family-organisation for all types of families with **260.000 member families**, representing over 1 million Flemish citizens.
- ✓ an organisation based on the efforts of **13.500 local volunteers** organised in 995 local sections and 33 regional committees. These sections and committees send delegates to the General Assembly and the Administrative Council, from which the President, also a volunteer, is elected.
- ✓ a team of **200 professionals** support the work of our volunteers in our three pillars of activities:
 1. **political action** on behalf of families, including advocacy and awareness raising at the national, European and international level;
 2. **supporting social life at the local level** with cultural and educational activities, such as family-oriented activities, parenting support ;
 3. **benefits for members** such as a babysitter's service, reduction cards.