B3: Changing gender inequality in care provision requires more than financial incentives.

Women provide most family care to older parents, but BB-Future evidence suggests that wage and labour market differences explain only a small part of this gap. Policies that aim to change who provides care therefore need to look beyond economic incentives and focus more broadly on reducing caregiving burdens and expanding families' options.

Recommendation:

- **Do not rely on wage, tax or labour-market incentives alone** to rebalance the provision of informal care between women and men, if that is the policy objective.
- **Reduce the overall burden of family caregiving** through better access to affordable formal care, respite services and workplace flexibility.
- **Address social and institutional barriers that may shape caregiving roles**, while recognising that current evidence cannot fully disentangle the effects of social norms, individual preferences, and family relationships.

Why this matters

Daughters still provide most care to older parents

Informal care within families remains strongly gender-biased. BB-Future evidence shows that daughters account for around 67% of primary family caregivers for older parents without a spouse. Their share rises to 75% in countries with less generous long-term care systems.

Contrary to expectations, proximity to parents alone cannot explain this pattern. Daughters and sons are almost equally likely to live within 25 kilometres of their parents, while sons are actually more likely to co-reside with them. Nevertheless, even when daughters and sons live equally close to a parent, daughters remain significantly more likely to provide informal care.

Economic factors matter, but they do not fully explain the gender gap in informal caregiving. Even after accounting for earnings, partnership status, birth order, and family structure, daughters remain much more likely to provide care than sons.

This difference may reflect social expectations placed on women, individual preferences, closer relationships with parents, or a combination of these factors. In other words, non-economic considerations appear to play an important role in caregiving decisions.

Economic incentives change the gender gap only slightly

Furthermore, BB-Future models show that changing women's economic incentives would have only a modest effect on who provides care, further proving the point. In two separate simulation exercises, the gender wage gap and the gender labour force participation gap were closed, leading to a decrease in the share of daughters providing care by only **1.5 and 1.2 percentage points,** respectively, compared with the baseline.

By contrast, removing the daughter-specific non-economic caregiving component in the model reduced the share of daughters providing care to 58.4%, bringing caregiving patterns much closer to gender balance. These findings suggest that factors beyond economic incentives play an important role in shaping caregiving decisions.

These results suggest that differences in earnings and labour-market participation explain only part of the gender imbalance in caregiving. This has important implications for policy. While financial incentives can influence caregiving decisions, measures that focus solely on altering the relative economic incentives faced by sons and daughters are unlikely to produce a substantial rebalancing of care responsibilities within families.

Closing gender gaps in wages and employment remains a worthwhile policy objective in its own right. However, BB-Future results indicate that these measures, by themselves, would not eliminate the gender gap in informal caregiving.

The analysis in this document is based on the following BB-Future sources:

- Barczyk, D., M. Kredler and Y. K. Koh (2026) 'The gender composition of informal caregiving', BB-Future Digest 14, 21 August, BB-Future, available at: https://www.bb-future.eu/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/BB-Future-Digest-14_21082026.pdf
- Barczyk, D., M. Kredler and Y. K. Koh (2026) 'Can economic incentives encourage sons to provide more care?', BB-Future Digest 15, 28 August, BB-Future, available at: https://www.bb-future.eu/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/BB-Future-Digest-15_28082026.pdf.