

# Working Families Strategy

2021 - 2024

Empowering working parents & carers

Supporting employers

Driving policy change

# Foreword

COVID-19 has tested the UK's working parents and carers like never before. The clash between work and family life has been writ large in workplaces and on video calls across the country. The fact that a third of the nation's workforce are also parents has never been more obvious.

Parents found their lives upended overnight with the closure of schools and childcare settings, while employers had to make sweeping changes to the way that they organised work – changes which, for many, could become permanent.

But from the very first day of the pandemic, we knew that the parents and carers in secure and flexible jobs would fare far better than the 'flexible working have-nots' – those who either had no flexibility in their job, or who had flexibility at the expense of securities such as guaranteed hours and pay, and the right to take emergency time off to care for their children. Progressive employers, especially those who are members of Working Families, stepped up to the plate to support the parents and carers in their workforce to continue to contribute at work as fully as they could.

There is an emerging consensus that the world of work has changed forever, but the opportunity that this represents is tempered by legitimate concerns about the economic outlook and the likelihood of fierce competition for jobs. In fact, there is no trade-off between flexible work and good work: flexibility is the key to ensuring that all people of working age across society can bolster the economy and is also the right way to future proof against future economic shocks. Regressing back to traditional and constrained working patterns would be a false economy.

After four decades of pushing for flexible jobs, this is our moment. And the last thing we plan to do is stand still.

The pandemic has also inevitably prompted Working Families as an organisation to do things differently – adapting to an ever-changing situation in real-time to provide crucial advice to working parents and carers, showing up to support our employer members through unprecedented challenges, moving our events and discussions online, and working fully remotely for the first time. We plan to build on the digitisation of our services further, working closely with our beneficiaries to ensure we are delivering the right information in the right formats.

The only way to build back better is by enabling people with caring responsibilities to play their full part in the economy, with diverse and thriving flexible workplaces and the job security that underpins harmonious and flourishing family life. And at Working Families, we're ready to help make this happen.

**Jane van Zyl**  
Chief Executive,  
Working Families

**Tim Oliver**  
Chairman,  
Working Families



# About our strategy

Working Families has been at the heart of successive changes to enable parents to balance work and care over the last four decades. From our beginnings around a kitchen table in south London in the late 1970s, we have advocated for changes including the Right to Request Flexible Working and more generous parental leave provision. We directly empower thousands of parents and carers to get the outcomes that they need in their working lives, we support employers to create genuinely flexible and productive workplaces, and we drive policy change to enable those with caring responsibilities to balance work and care.

Our work with both employers and parents gives us a unique ability to see the whole picture and pinpoint the legal and policy changes needed to remove the barriers that people with caring responsibilities face in the workplace. We are committed to making a difference in the here and now, as well as investing our resources in transformative social change.

The changes to working practices brought by COVID-19 coupled with the complete removal of childcare and education provision have resulted in extraordinary challenges for the UK's working parents. Sadly, many parents have already lost their jobs as a result and others will follow – estimates suggest that parents could be at a three-fold risk of redundancy.<sup>1</sup> But countless parents and employers have also been able to see the benefits of flexibility at work afresh, with just one percent of parents and carers we surveyed in the summer of 2020 telling us they didn't want more flexibility going forward.<sup>2</sup> For flexibility to be genuine, it needs to be built on a secure foundation of rights and protections: ending the use of insecure employment contracts and bolstering access to justice are crucial to ensure that more widespread flexible working doesn't simply benefit higher paid, professional workers.

Our agenda has never been more needed.



<sup>1</sup>Citizen's Advice [An unequal crisis](#) 6 August 2020

<sup>2</sup>Working Families [COVID-19 and flexible working: the perspective from working parents and carers](#) June 2020



In developing this new strategy, we re-examined our organisational values. These are at the heart of how we will deliver and measure our activities and outcomes.

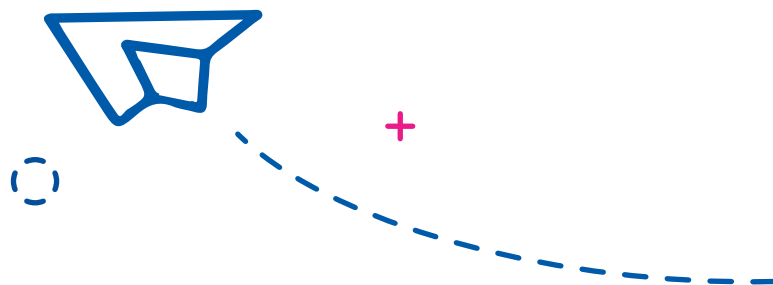
Like many charities, our services were tested to the extreme during 2020, and we have emerged more convinced of the rigour of our approach. We are confident that our practical model – directly empowering working parents and supporting employers, and using both perspectives to drive policy change—is the right one to deliver our mission. However, the enforced digitisation of our services has also sharpened our resolve to reach more parents and more employers.

We plan to take advantage of changes in the post-pandemic labour market to support more employers who have been compelled to test more flexible ways of working, keeping up the momentum on a journey that might otherwise have taken a generation. We will also drive huge opportunities over the strategy period. We want to use new mechanisms and methods to empower more parents and carers to use their workplace rights—putting them in the driving seat when it comes to getting the best outcome for their families.

And, crucially, the UK Government has signalled that it will be bringing forward an Employment Bill that will make flexible working the default. Meaningful measures to make good on this promise would end the UK's flexible working lottery once and for all.



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## Our vision

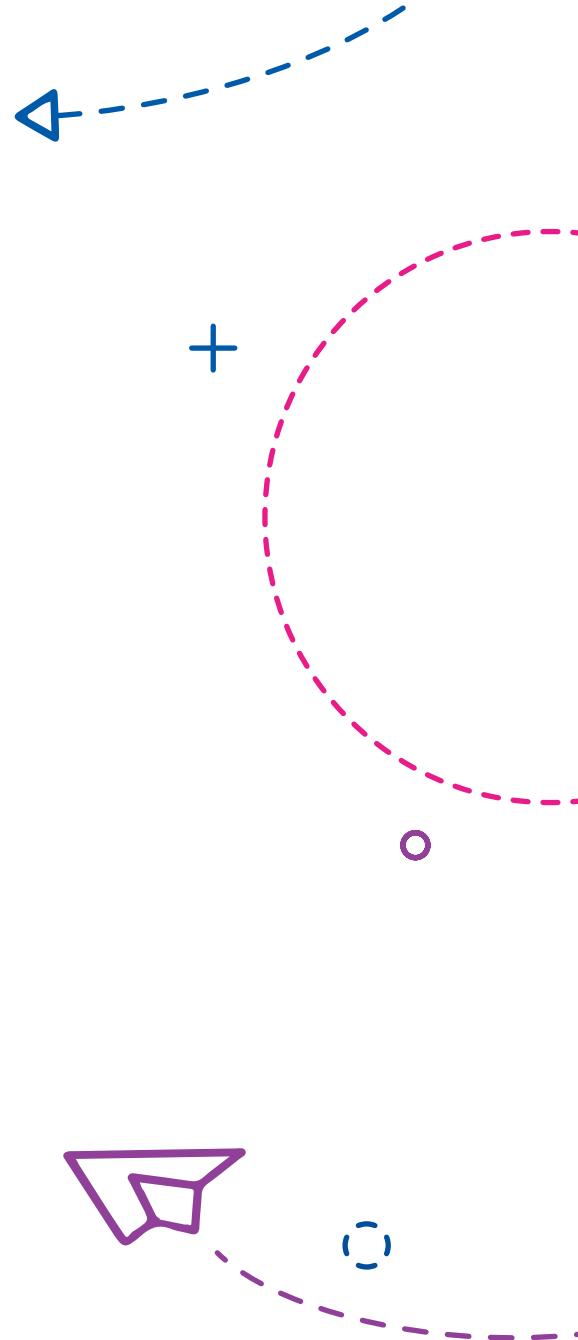
We want to achieve a society in which everyone can fully meet their work and caring responsibilities, where all parents and carers have an equal opportunity to find and progress in secure, paid work.

## Our mission

Our mission is to remove the barriers that people with caring responsibilities face in the workplace. We drive positive change by supporting and advocating for working parents and carers, collaborating with employers to build flexible and family-friendly cultures, and influencing government policy.

## Our values

- **Collaborative:** We are one team working in a connected and communicative way internally and externally to maximise achievement of our shared goals.
- **Practical:** We see the whole picture and use this authoritative perspective to deliver tangible support to families and employers.
- **Inclusive:** We nurture an open and safe culture that enables everyone to be themselves at work. We strive to ensure that our work reaches a full range of families and employers.
- **Driven:** We leverage our collective knowledge, commitment, and skills to do an expert job for our beneficiaries, supporters, and colleagues.



# By the numbers:

## Why we're needed



**13 million**

There are 13 million working parents in the UK, a third of the UK workforce.

(Source: ONS)



**9 in 10**

9 in 10 people want to work flexibly, but only 2 in 10 jobs are advertised with flexible options.

(Source: Timewise)



**7 in 10**

Seven out of ten working parents consider their childcare needs before applying for a new job or promotion.

(Source: *Modern Families Index 2020*)



**71%**

In 2019, 71% of parents who were senior managers or directors work flexibly, compared to 48% of parents in junior-level roles.

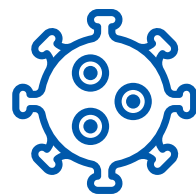
(Source: 2020)



**54,000**

54,000 pregnant women and new mothers lose their jobs each year because of maternity discrimination.

(Source: EHRC)



**1 in 7**

At the height of the first COVID-19 lockdown, one in seven people had their work disrupted by the closure of school and childcare settings.

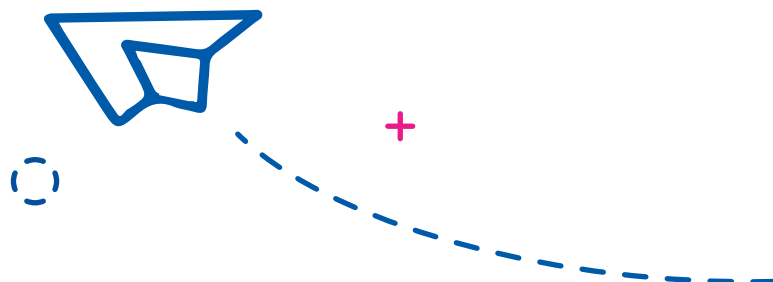
(Source: ONS)



**1 in 5**

One in five working parents felt they had been treated less fairly at work due to their childcare responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

(Source: Working Families)



# How we work



Our work focuses on our core beneficiaries—working parents—but the outcomes we achieve will have a lasting positive impact for all people with caring responsibilities in the UK.

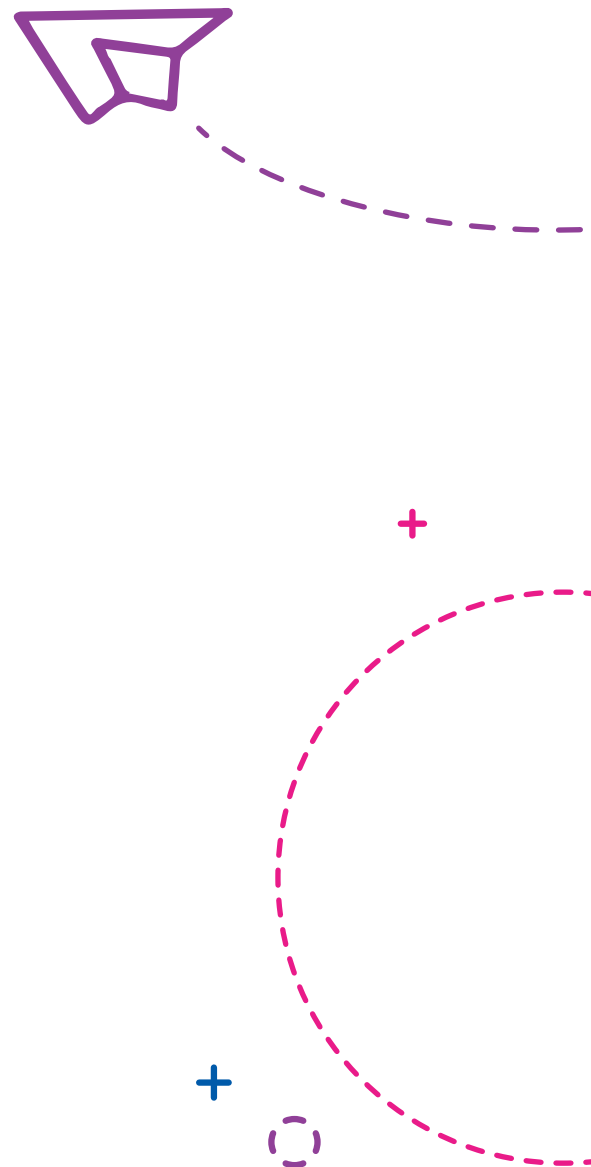




# Our objectives at a glance: 2021-2024

Over the next three years, we will work to ensure that more people with caring responsibilities have the opportunity to attain—and thrive within—secure and flexible jobs. Our objectives provide a roadmap for achieving this.

- 1. Support more employers to create and sustain successful flexible and family-friendly workplaces**
- 2. Empower more parents and carers to understand and use their workplace rights**
- 3. Drive meaningful policy and legal changes to engender secure and flexible jobs as the norm, and advocate for a baseline of protection that delivers equality in the workplace**







# Achieving our objectives



**To support more employers to create and sustain successful flexible and family-friendly workplaces, we will:**

- Support the policies, practices, and cultures of employers through membership, products and services that demonstrably meet employer needs. Our ambition is to increase our membership take-up 20% year-on-year over three years.
- We will take a co-creation approach with our members and other relevant organisations to ensure all employers we support are getting what they need to begin and progress on their journey towards flexible and family-friendly workplaces.
- We will expand our reach to small and medium sized employers by 50% annually, and create new products and services specifically tailored to their needs.





**To empower more parents and carers to understand and use their workplace rights, we will:**

- Increase our existing online reach to 1 in 10 UK working parents accessing the rights-based information that we provide.
- Improve the quality and accessibility of our legal advice content to ensure working parents have the practical resources they need and are empowered to deal with the issues they face at work. This will increase the number of working parents and carers whose query is addressed in full by the online information we provide.
- Increase the volume of bespoke advice that we provide to parents who are likely to have least access to justice and be least able to understand and assert their workplace rights, either because of the difficulties of their personal circumstances or because of the complexities of their workplace challenges.
- Embed participatory mechanisms across our organisation to ensure that we are delivering the right information to parents in the right ways.

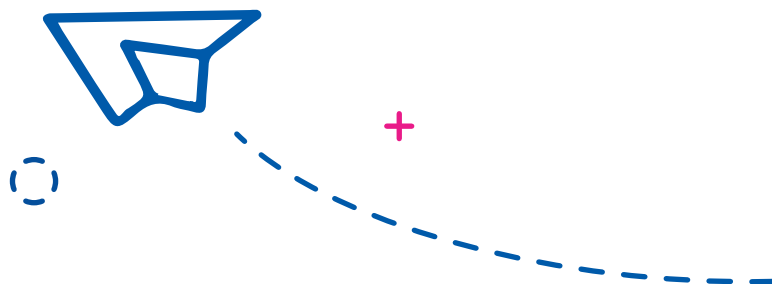




**To drive meaningful policy and legal changes to engender secure and flexible jobs as the norm, and advocate for a baseline of protection that delivers equality in the workplace, we will:**

Increase our existing online reach to 1 in 10 UK working parents accessing the rights-based information that we provide.

- Leverage existing and new alliances to influence the forthcoming UK Employment Bill and other legislative and policy opportunities to shift the norm towards flexible and secure job creation and design.
- Seek and utilise insights from both employers and parents to strengthen our position as the authoritative voice on working parents, work-life balance, and flexible working.
- Influence policymakers to retain existing parental employment rights now that the UK has left the European Union.
- Push for policy and legal changes that learn the lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic. These include levelling up parental rights between all employment statuses, enshrining caring responsibilities in equality legislation, and creating more generous parental leave entitlements.
- Amplify the individual and collective voice of working parents, connecting their experiences to policymakers and the media.





## A strong organisation

Our vision, mission, and strategy are ambitious—we are committed to delivering system change for working parents and carers right across the UK. We need to ensure that our organisation is in the strongest possible position to realise our aspirations.

2020 brought unprecedented challenges for UK charities, but the crucial work of our Legal Advice Service was rightly recognised as a plank of vital support in the fallout from the pandemic. Our employer members also confirmed that the support we offer has never been more relevant to their workplaces.

These factors mean that we are starting our strategy period from a position of stability, but with a challenging and uncertain economic outlook ahead of us. This volatile economic context that means we expect the need for our services to continue to grow even after accounting for the record numbers of working parents and carers who sought our support in 2020.

To ensure we can best serve working parents during the period of this strategy, we will:

- Nurture and retain our people—our most important asset. We will ensure that our working practices exemplify the letter and spirit of the measures we advocate that employers take in creating flexible and family-friendly workplaces. We will actively work to increase the diversity of our team at all levels.
- Build on the strength of our brand by refining our visual identity and focusing on increasing engagement of not only parents and carers, but also employers, policymakers, and donors.
- Invest in analysis and collation of the data that we hold in our services to better understand how things are changing for employers and parents, and the impact that we have.
- Sustain our rigorous approach to governance, financial management, and cost allocation so that we anticipate fluctuations in the operating environment.



*We are committed to delivering system change for working parents and carers right across the UK.*





Working Families  
c/o Buzzacott LLP  
130 Wood Street  
London EC2V 6DL

📞:020 7253 7243

✉️ [office@workingfamilies.org.uk](mailto:office@workingfamilies.org.uk)

★ [workingfamilies.org.uk](http://workingfamilies.org.uk)



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For more information on our work and mission, please visit

**[workingfamilies.org.uk](http://workingfamilies.org.uk)**