

AWAKENING FOUNDATION

Caring Should Not Cost Us Our Job

Work, Time Poverty and Gender in a Rapidly Ageing Taiwan

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Taiwan's first feminist advocacy organization after WWII

1982

Founded as Taiwan democratised

A non-profit civil society organisation advancing gender equality through advocacy for policy and institutional reform; funded mainly by individual and group donations.

14

board members, mostly
lawyers & scholars

7

full-time staff, each a
policy specialist

30

family-law helpline
volunteers

21

expert advisors across
gender issues

We advocate and reform — rewriting gender into the law

The areas below are illustrative examples only; our work spans a much wider range.

Equal decision-making

Advancing institutions for women's political participation and parity in decision-making.

Reforming patriarchal family law

Abolishing rules that gave fathers automatic custody after divorce and required wives to live with husbands.

Drafting the Gender Equality in Employment Act

Drafted the first version in 1987 and campaigned for over a decade; it bans workplace sex and sexual-orientation discrimination and grants parental, menstrual and family-care leave.

Issue areas (selected examples)

Gender-equal political participation · gender equality at work · social policy for women's economic autonomy · gender-equal marriage & family · women's sexual & bodily autonomy · gender mainstreaming ... and more

What we'll cover: the problems, and where reform must go

01

A demographic shift like no other

Structural pressure with almost no time to react

02

A long-hours work culture

Overtime rewarded, carers sidelined

03

Care leave is almost non-existent

Neither family-care nor annual leave suffices

04

The real scale of care-related quitting

Newly revealed by an official survey

05

Long-term-care arrangement leave

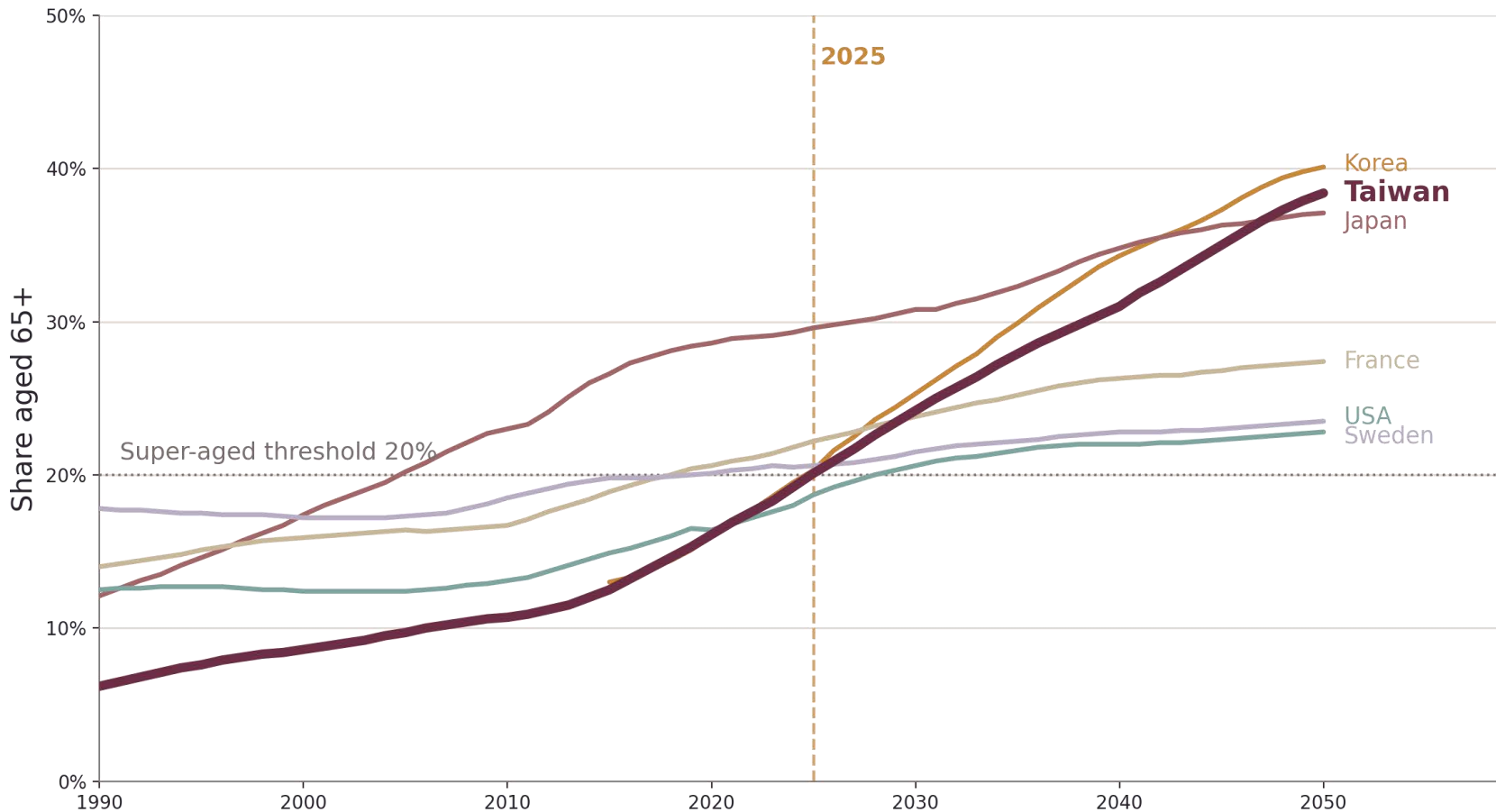
A first-response policy design

06

Working-time sovereignty

From employer flexibility to employee control

Taiwan is ageing faster than almost any country



2025

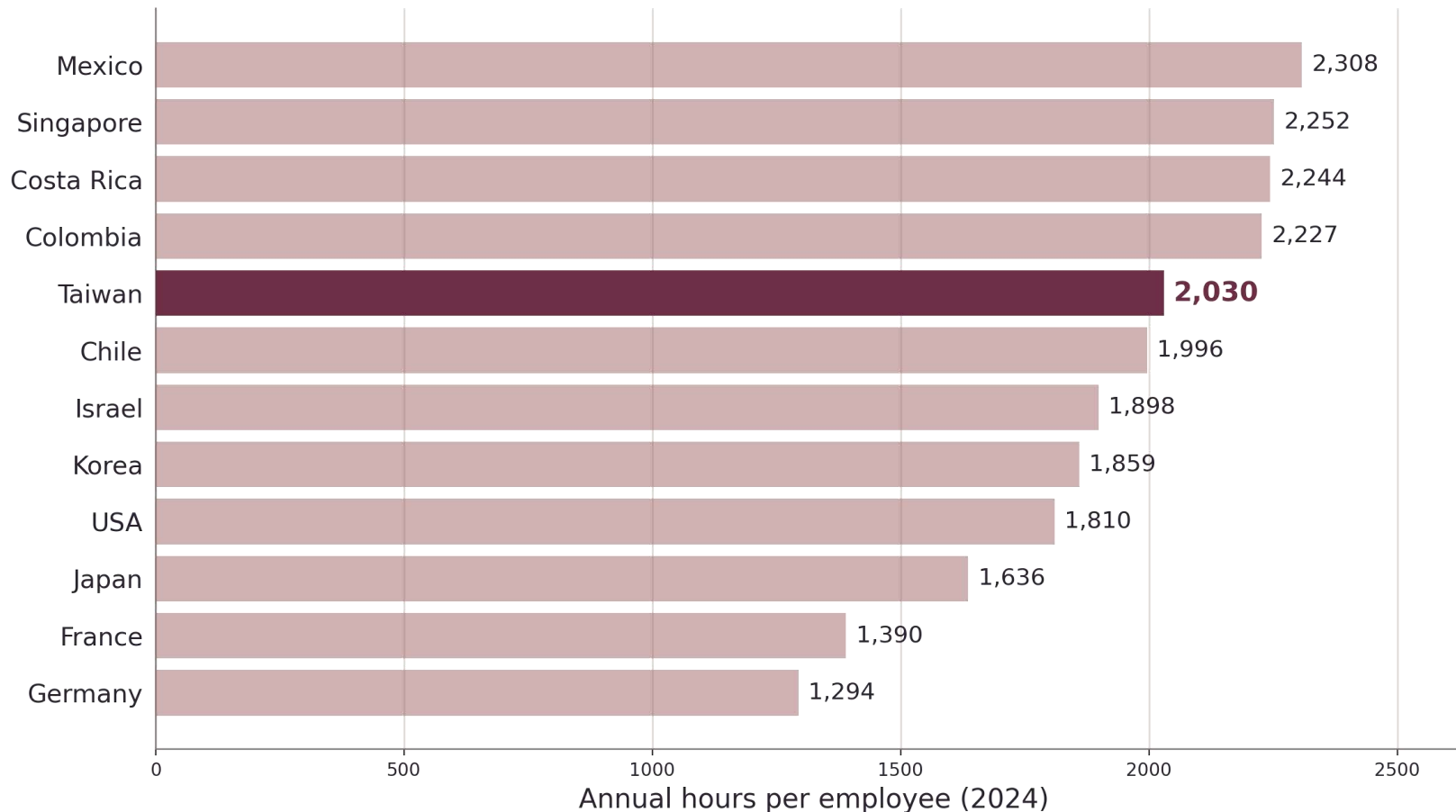
20.06%

of the population is aged 65+. Taiwan is now a super-aged society.

Little time left to respond

Every area of life will be hit fast — and the shock could deepen social inequality.

Taiwan works among the longest hours in the world



Rank among OECD + Singapore

No. **5**

2,030 hours per year (2024)

Long hours breed an overtime culture

Workplaces reward those who comply, not those who care for themselves and their families. Carers are seen as “substandard” workers — hard to promote, and often pushed out.

The right to take leave for long-term care barely exists

7 days

**family-care leave
per year**

The only non-childcare
leave — and far too short

Unpaid

**private-sector
leave means lost
pay**

Only civil servants, public-
school teachers and the
military are paid

**Childcare leave
reforming**

— eldercare left behind

To address the falling birth rate,
the government has reformed
parental leave in recent years
— but employees caring for
elderly or disabled family
members still have very limited
leave rights.

CARE LEAVE

In 2021, when reform was sought, the government's reply amounted to this

Carers can just use their annual leave.

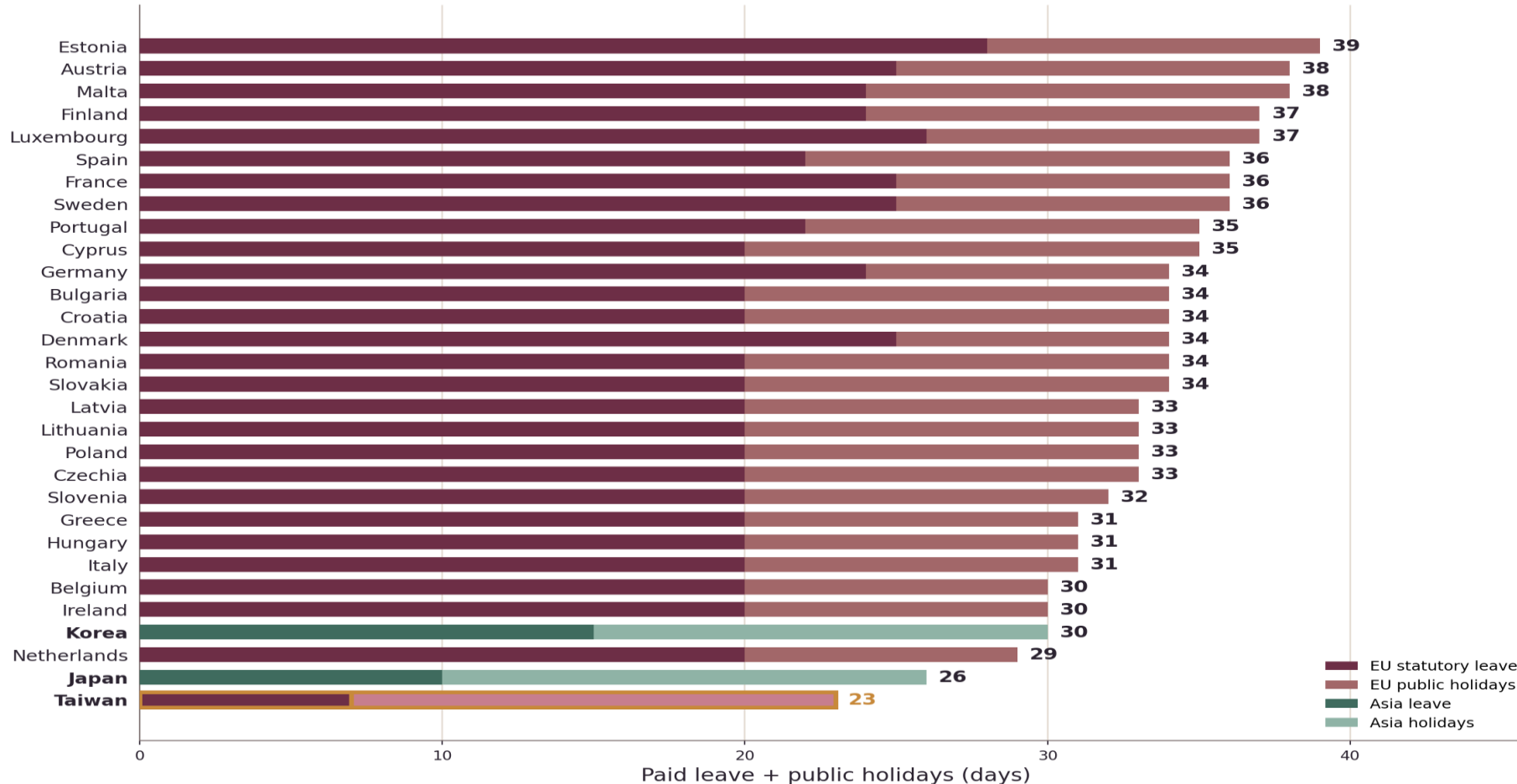
— the gist of a labour-ministry official's response to civil-society reform calls (paraphrased, not a verbatim quote)

But annual leave exists for rest.

Carers aren't resting — so this asks employees to sacrifice their own rest in order to provide care.

MINIMUM ANNUAL LEAVE + NATIONAL HOLIDAYS

Against the EU-27, Japan and Korea: Taiwan ranks last



23 days

Taiwan, after 1 year of service

Last of all 30

Even the lowest EU state, the Netherlands, has 29 days; most have 33–39. Taiwan's 23 is below every EU country, and below Japan (26) and Korea (30).

MINIMUM ANNUAL LEAVE + NATIONAL HOLIDAYS

Annual leave alone: just 7 days after one year of service

7 days

Taiwan, after 1 working year

vs.

20+ days

Many EU countries, 1 year of service

3 days at 6 months; a fresh 7 at one year; 30 only after 24 years — and it resets when you change jobs.

In a high-turnover labour market, 30 days of leave is out of reach for most.

MINIMUM ANNUAL LEAVE + NATIONAL HOLIDAYS

"30 days only after 24 years" — almost no one gets there

90%+

work for SMEs

48.2%

of SMEs are under 10 years old

28.7%

of SMEs survive past 20 years

Leave resets when you change jobs. Most people switch jobs within 20 — even 10 — years, so very few ever reach the 24 years needed for 30 days.

The deeper problem: annual leave is meant for rest — but a carer using it isn't resting.

Long without data — until this year's new survey

The data gap

Surveys of care burden and leave needs have mostly been run ad hoc by civil-society groups; the government has no regular survey. The time-use survey used widely abroad was run in Taiwan in 2004, then discontinued.

A hard bind: reform is urgent, yet there is no evidence base for public debate.

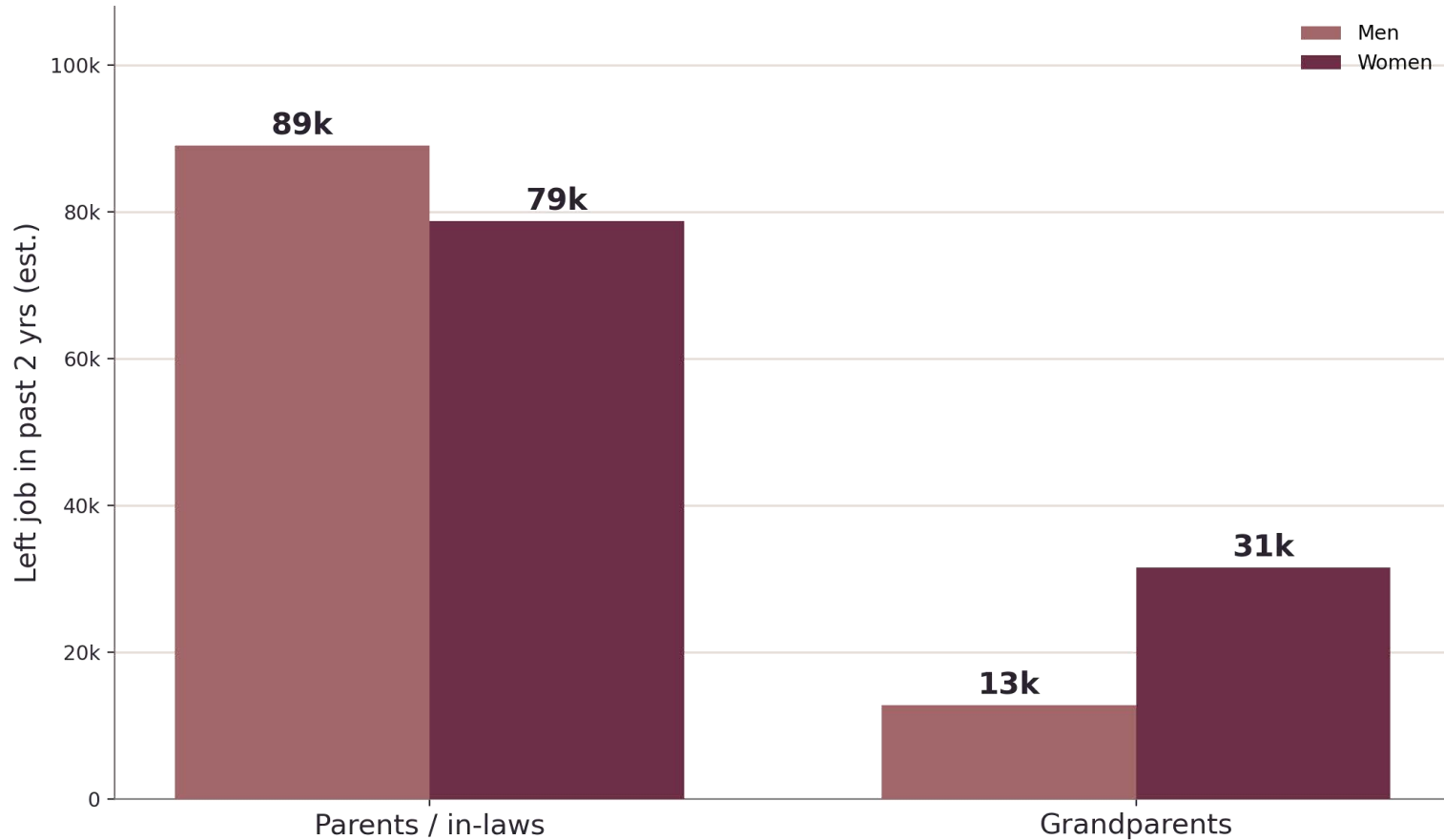
May 2025: a new Ministry of Labor survey

For the first time it asks whether workers left a job in the past two years to care for family, and why:

- Children
- Parents / parents-in-law
- Grandparents
- Spouse
- Siblings / other family

CARE-RELATED QUITTING

Over 200,000 left work in 2 years just to care for elders



168,000

left to care for parents / in-laws

~10,000 more men than women

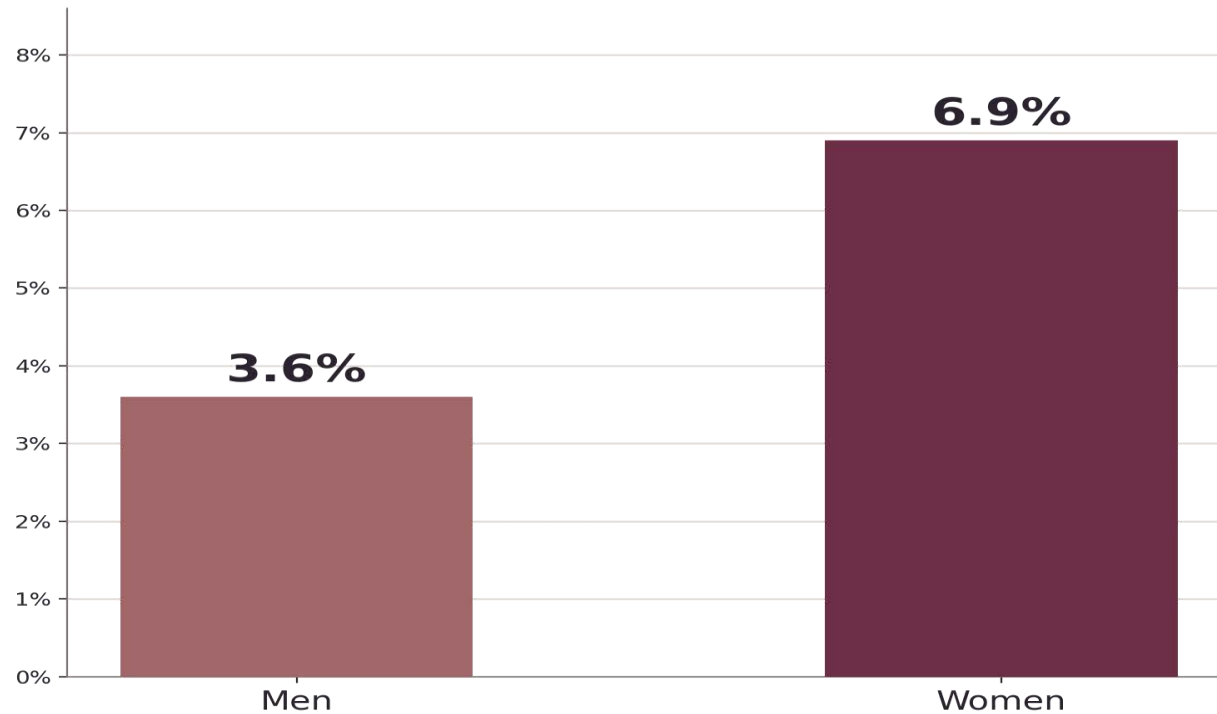
44,000

left for grandparent care

~19,000 more women than men

CARE-RELATED QUITTING

Women quit for care at roughly twice the rate of men



Share who left a job for family care

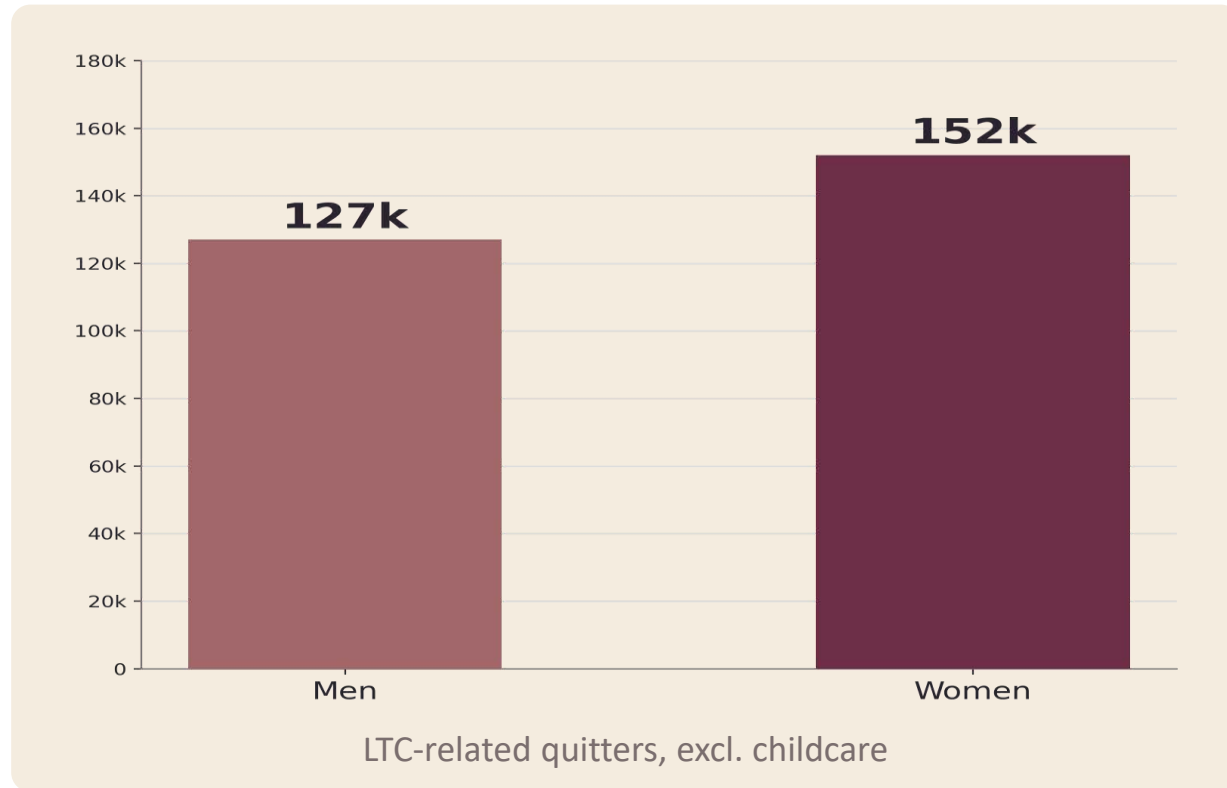
6.9% women

3.6% men

Care still falls disproportionately on women.

CARE-RELATED QUITTING

Beyond childcare, women still quit more — and risk peaks at midlife



Midlife is the danger zone

Over half

of those who quit for long-term care are aged 45–64

And the trend is worsening: the 45+ workforce is growing — fastest among older women, exactly the group most likely to quit for care.

WHY THIS MATTERS

A midlife exit from work echoes into old age

1

Quit at midlife

Women are more likely to leave work in midlife for long-term care



2

Income lost

The most immediate hit is lost earnings



3

Pension shrinks

Eroding pension savings for years to come



4

Poverty in old age

Women live longer, so the poverty risk is higher

This is why — even with a severe lack of basic data — we have pushed for reform since 2019.

Care-arrangement leave: time to arrange care, not to be the carer

Why "arrangement" leave, not "care" leave?

Taiwan already has a basic long-term-care service system that can meet care needs to some degree. But arranging care still involves much that family members must take time to discuss and organise.

This leave is for arranging that care — applying for services, assessing or hiring a caregiver — not for the worker to become the full-time carer.

The design: 30 days to respond + 150 days of flexibility

FIRST RESPONSE

30 days

Job-protected leave, 60–80% wage allowance

For the chaotic early weeks when care first begins: arrange services, assess or hire a caregiver, and steady a household under strain.

ONGOING

150 days

Flexible leave, taken by the day

Once care is stabilised, take days as needed to handle sudden emergencies, such as accompanying a family member to clinic visits.

A necessary first response — but on its own, not enough

The advocacy bottleneck

The reform window is closing fast — yet the government's response to the proposal for arrangement leave remains lukewarm.

Why one leave policy can't carry it all

- Care needs will surge as the population ages fast
- A shortage of care workers; carers stretched for time
- We must still tackle reducing overall working hours
- **And turn around a long-hours culture that sidelines carers**

Next: give flexibility back to employees — working-time sovereignty

Whose flexibility do we mean? Countries often cite flexible hours when protecting carers' jobs — but in Taiwan, “flexibility” usually means the employer's.

Today: the employer's flexibility

- Control over flexible work sits with the employer
- Workers are told when to work for profit and efficiency
- So “flexibility” — but whose?

Our call: the employee's time sovereignty

- Once outcomes are agreed, staff negotiate when and where they work
- Not set unilaterally by the employer
- Balancing career prospects, income security and care

THE CHANGE WE SEEK

Give carers more control over their time — so they never have to choose between work and family.

1

More leave rights

Reasonable time to arrange care

2

Change the workplace

End practices that sideline carers

3

Better data

To underpin real public debate

4

Time sovereignty

Let employees negotiate their hours

Thank you.