

Intergenerational justice is not only about climate protection and balanced budgets – but that the members of the next generation have at least the same chances to fulfil their needs as the members of the present generation. Preferably, they would have *better* chances to fulfil their needs than we do.

In most of recorded human history, care has been a family task. Only recently, it became a matter of public policy, predominately in the Global North. But even there, it is still to a large extent a family task, usually performed by adults.

But in a few cases, children and young people are involved on a regular basis in informal care settings. ‘Young carers’ are young people who provide care, assistance, or support to another family member. The person receiving care is often a parent but can be a sibling, grandparent or any other relative who is disabled, has some chronic illness, mental health problem, or other condition. The young carers carry out substantial caring tasks, including physical, emotional, and medical support for the person with the illness or disability. Young carers thereby take on a level of responsibility that would usually be associated with an adult. Studies from different countries show a prevalence rate of 6–8 percent within the age group of 18–25 years, although a number of unreported cases must be assumed.

The possible effects experienced by young carers are as varied as the tasks they undertake. Some young carers report negative physical, emotional, social, and educational effects. Being a young carer can lead to higher drop-out rates from education, difficulties to find a partner, and lower employability than their peers without an ill or disabled family member. However, positive aspects related to caring responsibilities are also mentioned by young carers themselves and experts who are familiar with the field. It is unclear whether or not young (underage) carers should be safeguarded from caregiving. What is clear is that the effects that young carers experience often shape their whole lives in different ways. How young carers experience and perceive their situation seems to be influenced, among other things, by whether children, adolescents, and young adults have a real choice in deciding whether and to what extent to provide support to family members.

Until now, underage carers – in particular – have received little or no recognition for their caring work in the form of relief or other forms of compensation.

IGJR 1-2023 and IGJR 2-2023 are special issues with a focus on the specific situation of young carers. This is done through re-published articles. The first article, written by a consortium of 21 authors as one outcome of an EU Horizon 2020 funded research project, reports the findings of a Delphi study on young carers with 66 experts from ten European countries. It highlights that the level and type of support available for young carers differs, with most countries mainly offering support on a local level. The question of new legislation was contested. Some experts were in favour of new laws to formalise the rights of young carers. Some experts raised that young carers might not self-identify as being in need, because they may find caring normal and they may not be aware of the concept of young carers. Furthermore, according to a number of experts, young carers rather do not want to draw attention to themselves.

The second article, originating from the same EU project, displays the results of the first cross-national study of young carers aged 15–17 years in six European countries. This study sheds light on the difficulties to identify young carers and to assess their number. It provides, for the first time, a cross-national profile of adolescents who provide unpaid care to their ill or disabled family members. Using an online survey, 2099 young people were identified in Italy, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK. The article focuses on the impact of unpaid care on their mental health, well-being, physical health, and education. Their preferences for informal and formal support were also examined. These groundbreaking findings help promote a ‘rights’ approach to adolescent young carers, which can serve as a critical driver for supportive policy creation on both a country-specific and pan-European level.

There will always be young people growing up in families faced with illness or disabilities. One takeaway from many studies seems to be that whenever starting from a whole family approach, it can open up opportunities for identifying the roles and needs of all family members. This can certainly improve the situation of young carers, but possibly also the situation of the (mostly) older adults for whom they provide care.

Finally, this issue concludes with the book review section. As the topic of young carers is so far an under-researched field, the reviewed books engage with intergenerational issues more generally. First, Michael Haiden reviews Brian Christian’s monograph *The Alignment Problem: How Can Artificial Intelligence Learn Human Values?* (2020), exploring the ethics of AI and methods of machine learning. Continuing this theme, Philipp Köbe reviews John Lennox’s *2084: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity* (2020), which presents a sobering outlook on the potential consequences of an AI-dominated world from a Christian perspective.

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