



Compendium Summary

TRANSVERSAL MOTHERHOOD SKILLS IN
A DIGITAL PROFESSIONAL ENVIRONMENT.

Compendium of inspiring practices, useful tools, and testimonials.



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
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1. Introduction

The Mom Virtual Assistant (MAV) project, funded by the Erasmus+ program, aims to enhance diversity and inclusion in education and professional training across Europe. Led by Leader srls and partners from Italy The Apartment (Ciape's spinoff), Spain - Nantik Lum Foundation, and Belgium- Make Mothers Matter, the project started in November 2023 and will last 24 months. It focuses on addressing skills gaps, improving digital skills, and promoting gender equality.

The project aims to demonstrate the transferability of the soft skills acquired through motherhood in the digital sector. Recognizing the challenges faced by mothers in balancing work and family life, and therefore the high rate of women leaving the workforce after becoming a mother, the MAV project seeks to harness the valuable soft skills developed through motherhood, such as time management and empathy, particularly applicable in flexible digital sectors. It also aims to raise awareness among stakeholders in vocational training to support mothers in transitioning to careers that offer better work-life balance.

Consequently, the MAV project addresses two key gaps through its objectives. Firstly, it seeks to provide new mothers with access to high-quality training aimed at developing digital, flexible, and entrepreneurial skills. This training aims to enhance their ability to either remain in or re-enter the job market, by exploiting the soft skills harnessed in motherhood within the digital professions such as Virtual Assistant. Secondly, the project aims to enhance the training of trainers and stakeholders involved in inclusive digital training, focusing on the utilization of digital tools.

The training will take into consideration the time constraints and busy schedules of the target group which are mothers. Thus, the training program will emphasize flexibility and personalized content delivery methods. By addressing these needs and possible obstacles, the training aims to encourage mothers to successfully complete the program and effectively manage transitions in the labor market, especially in the digital sector.

By promoting an innovative methodology the project intends to make the training model replicable across various contexts and contribute to the overall attractiveness of vocational training in response to evolving labor market demands.

Furthermore, the project targets working-age mothers with preschool-age children (0-6 years old), a group identified by the OECD as particularly challenged in maintaining a sustainable work-life balance. Studies demonstrate that this target group experiences the highest rates of workforce dropout across many European countries due to maternity.

The compendium highlights the best practices and tools for applying the transversal skills of motherhood within the digital professions, specifically focusing on the role of virtual assistants. Additionally, it will develop tailored open-source digital training content alongside a toolkit for trainers, facilitating future adaptation. Through in-person learning activities led by skilled trainers from partner organizations, the project will equip trainers to conduct pilot courses for targeted mothers, imparting valuable digital, flexible, and entrepreneurial skills essential for virtual assistant roles. The innovative training program aims to bridge the gap between mothers and companies seeking workers with digital and soft skills.

All partners will disseminate project outcomes, including the compendium, aiming to establish a shared methodology that benefits diverse target groups. Ultimately, the project seeks to expand its impact across all European countries.

2. Key Findings

The widespread adoption of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in workplaces has reshaped skill demands and work practices (OECD, 2016, p.6/9). In response to this digital transformation, the European Union (EU) has implemented various initiatives, including the Pact for Skills, the European Agenda for Skills, and the European Year of Skills. In 2020, the European Commission introduced the European Skills Agenda, outlining 12 actions to address the green and digital transition over five years. The Pact for Skills, launched in November 2020, urges stakeholders to collaborate and commit to investing in training for all working-age individuals in the EU. Additionally, the EU initiated the European Year of Skills in May 2023 to tackle Europe's skill gap, particularly emphasizing digital and green technology skills. Through these actions the EU addresses the need to develop the hard and soft skills necessary to effectively tackle the transition. However, the

EU has not specifically addressed the soft skills developed through experiences such as motherhood, which are significant for millions of women in Europe. Gulati and Reaiche (2020) similarly emphasize the oversight of soft skills as crucial determinants of digital transformation. In the context of digital transformation, skill demands go beyond technical skills, including soft skills crucial for effectively using ICTs and therefore being effective in a digital profession. According to the OECD (2016, p.9), workers' ability to adapt to new environments relies on these soft skills such as communication and problem-solving.

S. Vasanthakumari defines soft skills “as a combination of interpersonal skills, social skills, communication skills, character or personality traits, attitudes, career attributes, social and emotional intelligence, and IQ, that enable people to navigate their environment, work well with others, perform well, and achieve their goal with complementing hard skills” (2019, p.67). Soft skills differ from hard skills in that they aren't solely obtained through formal education or work experience but rather, they encompass a broader range of acquired abilities (S. Vasanthakumari, 2019, p.67). Thus, any life experience contributing to the development of interpersonal skills should be valued. Mothers, in particular, face many obstacles in the job market. Failure to recognize the learning acquired from these experiences intensifies the motherhood penalty, defined as the specific obstacles mothers face, including the gender pay gap, difficulty in maintaining work-life balance and remaining in the workforce. According to COFACE (2024), “The gender employment gap is defined as the difference between the employment rates of men and women aged 20-64” remains significant. In their 2016 study, PWC highlights the decline in the number of women returning to work in the UK after a break, often due to caregiving responsibilities. 3 out of 5 women returning to work find themselves in lower positions than before. Damian Grimshaw and Jill Rubery (2015) suggest that combating the motherhood penalty involves preventing discrimination based on maternity and family obligations and fostering a family-friendly work environment. By addressing the undervalue of soft skills acquired during motherhood and eliminating discriminatory practices, opportunities for mothers to re-enter the workforce can be enhanced. Numerous studies confirm that motherhood fosters informal learning that translates effectively to various professions. Mothers develop critical soft skills essential in workplaces, including multitasking, problem-solving, and leadership (Skill 4, 2023). Soft skills, particularly those honed through motherhood, are increasingly valued in both hiring processes and the workplace. According to a Harvard University study cited by S. Vasanthakumari (2019), 85% of workplace success is attributed to soft skills, highlighting their importance over technical skills. Furthermore, research by Van Laar et al. (2017), as

cited by Fears, Heuss, & Miller (2023), underscores the necessity for continuous skill development to effectively utilize technical skills. Sousa & Rocha (2019), also cited by Fears et al., stress that adaptability and flexibility, considered soft skills, are crucial for navigating the evolving digital landscape. Moreover, Poláková et al. (2023) argue that the surge in technology and digitalization, particularly accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has heightened the demand for soft skills. These essential soft skills in the digital realm include flexibility, adaptability, and interpersonal abilities, vital for effective collaboration, communication, and problem-solving (Poláková et al., 2023).

Consequently, many of the soft skills required in the digital environment overlap with those developed through motherhood. These include time management, crisis management, communication, organization, critical thinking, leadership, problem-solving, multitasking, adaptability, collaboration, and flexibility (Susan Lander MD, 2024; Kumon; Dr. Salam Slim Saad).

3. Inspiring practices and Tools

The following projects and initiatives showcase inspiring practices for tackling the obstacles and discrimination mothers face in the workforce. From promoting motherhood as a learning experience essential for the workforce to creating inclusive and equitable workplaces, these initiatives reinforce the participation of women in the workforce, enhance flexibility and family-friendly workplaces, and empower mothers.

Inspiring Practices	Description
Maternity As A Master (MAAM)	<p>Pioneer in the transferability of motherhood soft skills in the workforce, MAAM and the Life Based Valued startup are offering workshops and lectures on the value of soft skills acquired through parenthood in the workforce.</p> <p>This project empowers parents in their profession and changes companies' attitude toward parenthood.</p>
Maternity Opportunities and Mainstreaming (MOM)	European initiative redefining motherhood as a valuable learning journey, providing mothers with necessary soft skills for

	<p>today's workforce. "Maternity develops new skills like soft skills. MOM's aim is to help unemployed women and mothers gain empowerment, awareness, and assessment of their maternal experiences and their skills. This provides them with more resources that help their employability".</p>
<p>Mothers Can</p>	<p>The European project empowers mothers to re-entry into the workforce and professional growth, promoting self-employment and entrepreneurial skills. It offers empowerment programs and specialized training to boost mothers' confidence and intention to return to work, alongside educating hiring managers on the benefits of employing mothers.</p>
<p>Mom to Virtual Assistant</p>	<p>The US-based project aims to empower mothers, enabling them to achieve a better work-life balance and develop valuable skills. Through a staffing firm, mothers are assisted in acquiring sought-after skills for flexible and fulfilling work opportunities worldwide. By facilitating positions as virtual assistants, the firm supports mothers in re-entering the workforce, providing income while allowing for childcare responsibilities, thus fostering improved work-life balance</p>
<p>La Tribu Digitale (The Digital Tribe)</p>	<p>The Digital Tribe is a French initiative providing training in digital marketing and communication. Made up of experts and entrepreneurs, it fosters mutual support for professional and personal success. By recognizing discrimination against mothers in the workplace, the initiative aims to eliminate the need for them to choose between career and personal life. The Digital Tribe offers training and mentoring programs in digital marketing and entrepreneurship, focusing on the digital sector due to its demand for skilled labor</p>

	and potential for work-life balance.
Be Family	French movement aiming to ensure that businesses and organizations implement inclusive and responsible practices for families and caregivers. They provide a range of resources, including reports, studies, business best practices, and employee testimonials, to raise awareness and encourage a shift from 'families adapting to companies' to 'companies adapting to families'. By participating, companies and organizations gain access to certification courses that help them enhance their practices, ensuring that all parents and caregivers feel supported in the workplace.
The Mom Project	Aims to support mothers' retention in employment. This initiative prioritizes workplace flexibility, diversity, equity, and inclusion. By targeting both mothers and companies, the Mom Project facilitates long-lasting changes beneficial to both parties, fostering a family-friendly work environment.
Catalyst	The aim of the project is to build workplaces in accordance with women's needs. When it was created in 1962 the initiative was aiming at enabling women to enter the workplace. Today its core objective is to increase the rate of women in leadership positions. Catalyst creates systemic changes through events, courses, workshops, research, and webinars and promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace.
MOVE-UP	Creates a flexible, high-quality upskilling pathway for women primarily focused on motherhood, who need to (re)enter education and the job market. The program allows these women to evaluate and enhance their Personal, Social, and Learning to Learn (PSL) competencies gained through motherhood. This initiative aims to develop essential skills and promote access to further training and employment

	opportunities.
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The following template gathers tools useful and essential for mothers to communicate, develop their skills, enhance their CV, reinforce their effectiveness, and allow them to have a better balance.

Online Tools	Description
Collaboration tools	Allow users to share information and resources with others and also create online meetings.
Slack	Cloud-based platform facilitating communication between people.
Google Drive	Secure storage in which users can save, create, and share documents.
Notion	Platform where users can create and organize documents and coordinate projects.
Zoom	Cloud-based video conferencing platform used to create and record meetings and webinars.
Microsoft Teams	Workspace and messaging application for organization. Facilitate communication between people.
Google Meet	Video conferencing platform facilitating communication.
Communication tools	Support users in building relationships and connections with others in their industry or potential clients. Some tools assist users in their social media management.
LinkedIn	Social media platform enabling users to connect with people and create a network. Moreover, this platform helps users find job positions and showcase their experience.
Hootsuite	Social media management tool facilitating

	the creation of design, schedule posting, and publishing content in the user's social media.
Buffer	Social media management tool facilitating the schedule for posting, analyzing the content results, and having better social media marketing.
Sprout Social	Facilitate the management and organization of the user's social media.
MailerLite	Emailing tool, facilitating sending emails to many people at the same time.
Problem-solving and project management tools	Help users in their project management and find solutions to problems.
Trello	Collaborating platform, enabling teams to work, create, organize, and plan together.
Asana	Assist users and team in the management of tasks, assigning duties, tracking progress, and engaging in real-time communication.
MindMeister	Offers tools for crafting to-do lists, organizing project plans, outlining timelines, and facilitating brainstorming sessions.
ClickUp	A project management tool that combines tasks, docs, chat, goals, and more.
Monday.com	A highly customizable Work Operating System (Work OS) that allows teams to plan, track, and manage their work visually.
Survey tools	Online tools used to collect information through questionnaires from a target group.
Google Forms	Help handle event registrations, conduct rapid opinion polls, design quizzes, create surveys, and manage answers and data.
SurveyMonkey	Online survey and form platform.
Poll Everywhere	Online pools that can be displayed on the web browser in real-time to display the results.

Productivity and Time management tools	Help users to organize, prioritize, and schedule.
RescueTime	Helps track your time use on apps and websites.
Toggl	Helps track your using time on apps, websites, and projects.
Clockify	Helps track your using time on apps and websites, and create a timesheet to track the using time.
TickTick	A to-do list and task management app with features like calendar integration, habit tracking, and Pomodoro timer.
Evernote	A note-taking app that helps you capture, organize, and find information across devices.
Focusmate	A virtual coworking platform that pairs you with a partner for focused work sessions, promoting accountability and productivity.
Freedom	An app and website blocker that helps you avoid distractions and stay on task.
Todoist	A task management app that helps you create to-do lists, set deadlines, and track your progress.
Focus@Will	A music service designed to enhance focus and concentration while working.
Stress management tools	Help users calm down, relieve stress, and improve their mood.
Headspace	Meditation applications help users to relieve stress.
Calm	Meditation and sleep application to relieve stress.
Unwind	Meditation and sleep application to relieve stress.
Noisli	A background noise generator that helps you create a calm and productive work environment.

Forest	An app that gamifies focus by allowing you to plant a virtual tree that grows while you stay focused.
Accounting and invoicing tools	Assist users in creating bills, and managing accounts and finances.
QuickBooks	Helps users keep track of their accounting, expenses, and income.
Invoicely	Helps users keep track of their accounting, expenses, and incomes and create invoices.
Fatture In Cloud (for Italy)	Invoicing software where you can create and send your invoice.
Pisco (for Belgium)	Invoicing software where you can create and send your invoice.
FreshBooks	An intuitive accounting software designed specifically for small businesses and freelancers. It focuses on making invoicing, expense tracking, and time tracking simple and efficient
FreshBooks	A free accounting software offering basic invoicing, accounting, and receipt scanning features. It's a good choice for freelancers and very small businesses with limited budgets who prioritize a no-cost solution.
Planning and appointment tools	Assist users in planning and scheduling appointments.
Google Calendar	Time management and scheduling service allows users to organize, coordinate, and schedule events that they can share with other people.
Calendly	Application used to schedule meetings and events.
Doodle	Online calendar to schedule meetings and collaborate with other people.
Graphics and website creation	Assist users in their designs and creations such as websites, CVs, posters, social media posts, etc.
Canva	Website helping users to create designs by proposing them models.

WordPress	<p>Free open-source platform that allows users to create their website.</p>
<p>Career Guidance tools</p>	<p>Assist and support users in their research of work but also in enhancing the skills they possess.</p>
Europass	<p>Effective tool to present and communicate your skills when looking for a position or applying to one by supporting you in the creation of your resume or your cover letter. It provides insight into the skills needed for a specific position but also facilitates the analysis of how well your profile aligns with the position requirements. Given that, Europass is a valuable tool to display your soft skills. It is a free and accessible tool that can be used with no need for specific digital skills. The Europass can also be used to enroll in courses and develop new skills but also find a position all over Europe.</p>
Skillbank	<p>Web-based toolkit facilitating career guidance. Through the aggregation of learning outcomes into qualifications, Skillsbank facilitates personalized career paths leading to formalized credentials and certificates. One of the key features of Skillsbank is its tool for creating learning outcomes, which are then organized into matrices to formulate specific qualifications. These learning outcomes can be further categorized into descriptions of competencies, knowledge, and skills following the ECVET model. Skillsbank is a multilingual toolkit: Bulgarian, German,</p>

	<p>Spanish, French, Italian, Norwegian, Polish and Portuguese, Slovenian, Turkish, Arabic, Dutch, and Estonian.</p>
<p>Lifeed</p>	<p>Digital platform enhancing the skills of parents and helping them find a good balance between their work life and their family life. The platform helps companies and their employees identify what skills acquired through life experience are transferable in their role at work. This process allows employees and companies to upskill and reskill their workforce and create a better work environment.</p> <p>Lifeed New Parents offers a program for new mothers and fathers empowering them with the new skills they acquired through their parenthood but also supporting them in finding a work-life balance. The self-coaching session allows parents to discover their new skills, understand parenting as a master's degree, and find balance at work.</p> <p>The program also encourages companies to offer the program to their employees and change their views on parenting.</p>
<p>Career Returners</p>	<p>Consulting, coaching, and network organization offering tailored support to mothers re-entering the workforce post-maternity leave, providing resources, guidance, and encouragement to ease the transition back into professional life. This</p>

	<p>assistance encompasses resume refinement, interview preparation, and clarification of legal entitlements. Transitioning back to work following maternity leave can be overwhelming, but the Online Returners program provides empowering resources to instill confidence and competence in mothers as they re-enter the workforce. This support may encompass coaching sessions, workshops, or networking events tailored to enhance self-assurance and drive. Additionally, it serves as a platform for continuous professional growth. Through providing access to training programs, skill-enhancing workshops, and networking events, the initiative facilitates mothers' ongoing career development and advancement in the long run.</p>
<p>Coursera</p>	<p>Offers a vast selection of courses, specializations, and even full degrees from top universities and companies worldwide. Ideal for learners seeking academic rigor and professional certifications.</p>
<p>LinkedIn</p>	<p>Provides a comprehensive library of video courses focused on business, technology, and creative skills. Perfect for professionals looking to upskill or re-skill for career advancement.</p>
<p>Skillshare</p>	<p>Offers a more creative and community-driven learning experience, with thousands of classes on topics like design,</p>

	illustration, photography, and writing. Ideal for anyone looking to explore new passions and develop practical skills.
Networking and community	Online tools to support you in creating or expanding a community and/or network.
Peanut	A social networking app designed for mothers to connect, share experiences, and find support.
HeyMama	A membership community for working mothers, offering resources, networking opportunities, and events.
The Mom Forum	An online forum where mothers can discuss various topics, seek advice, and connect with others.
Childcare and Family Support	Online platform offering childcare services or putting you in touch with social workers.
Babysits	A popular platform across Europe for finding babysitters, nannies, and au pairs.
Yoopies	Another widely used platform in Europe, offering services for childcare, tutoring, pet care, and household help.
Sitly	A platform for connecting parents with babysitters and nannies
Bsit (country specific)	A Belgium-based platform connecting parents with trusted babysitters.

4. Field Research: Interviews

A semi-structured questionnaire was developed for the field research, with 13 individuals interviewed across Belgium, Spain, and Italy. The interviews aimed to identify soft skills necessary in the digital environment and those acquired or strengthened during motherhood. Participants included mothers, companies, and virtual assistants from the three countries. Questions varied based on the target audience: 7 mothers from the digital sector were interviewed across the three countries, 2 companies in the digital sector, and 2 virtual assistants. The objective was to demonstrate the alignment between motherhood soft skills and those required for digital work, particularly as virtual assistants. The interviews confirm that soft skills gained through motherhood are applicable to the requirements of the digital sector, particularly for roles like virtual assistants. Mothers identified decision-making, problem-solving, creative and critical thinking, time management, and flexibility as key skills acquired through motherhood. Similarly, companies and virtual assistants highlighted these soft skills as essential for digital professions.

5. Conclusion

The compendium explores the transferability of soft skills from motherhood to digital professions, aligning with the EU's goal of investing in training for all working-age individuals. The project seeks to empower mothers, particularly those with children aged 0 to 6, by recognizing and promoting their soft skills as professional assets, thus facilitating their retention or re-entry into the workforce. The compendium displays examples of best practices highlighting the growing attention to the topic of motherhood in the workforce and the need for legislative improvement. These initiatives are changing perceptions of motherhood, promoting it as a valuable learning experience for the workforce and fostering family-friendly environments in companies. The digital sector, with its remote work opportunities and flexibility, stands out as particularly conducive to work-life balance. Additionally, the compendium gathers tools to support mothers in the workforce. These tools facilitate efficient collaboration and communication, problem-solving, project and time management, stress management, accounting tasks, appointment scheduling, website and graphic design, and career guidance. However, the compendium emphasizes the need for further research on this topic, citing limited available data and the lack of recognition of motherhood soft skills as transferable skills in the workforce. Recognizing these skills could enforce the hiring process

for mothers returning from maternity leave and bolster the EU's upskilling and reskilling strategy.