MAV
MOM VIRTUAL ASSISTANT

Compendium

TRANSVERSAL MOTHERHOOD SKILLS IN
A DIGITAL PROFESSIONAL ENVIRONMENT.
Compendium of inspiring practices, useful tools, and testimonials.

Abstract: The digital transformation and increased use of ICTs in workplaces have caused a shift in skill demand, creating a skill shortage in the European market. To tackle this, the European Union has implemented various instruments that validate different types of learning experiences transferable to the workforce, including hard and soft skills acquired through these experiences. However, this compendium emphasises the lack of recognition of motherhood soft skills and their transferability to the workplace. To this extent, it highlights the objective of the Mom Virtual Assistant (MAV) project, namely promoting the skills developed during motherhood, such as time and stress management, empathy, effective communication, multitasking, and problem-solving, as essential in the digital environment.

The findings show that the digital profession places great importance on soft skills, many of which are similar to those acquired through motherhood. Furthermore, the digital environment offers greater opportunities to mothers in terms of flexibility and work-life balance, which could prevent a high number of women from leaving their employment after childbirth. This compendium presents various inspiring practices implemented to challenge the systemic obstacles mothers face in the workforce. Additionally, it displays tools that are valuable for mothers in their digital professions and that assist them in returning to their careers.

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1- Introduction

A) Presentation of the Mom Virtual Assistant (MAV) Project

The *MAV - Virtual Assistant Mom* project is a European project funded by the Erasmus+ program, led by Leader srls (Italy) in partnership with The Apartment APS (Italy), Nantik Lum (Spain), Make Mothers Matter (EU Delegation, Belgium).

The project started in November 2023 for a duration of 24 months. By prioritising inclusion and diversity in the field of vocational education and training (VET), the MAV project addresses three different topics: **overcoming skills mismatch and addressing the needs of the labour market, the digital skills and competencies, and promoting gender equality.**

This project is founded on the hypothesis that motherhood represents a contradictory experience in a woman's life: on the one hand it expands and broadens her strength and skills, on the other hand, it is often perceived as an almost invalidating condition, especially in the working environment where it is mostly recognised as a penalty. This paradox leads to a **hard conciliation and balance between their work and family lives**. Moreover, the inadequacy of family support services and the Mediterranean welfare model that delegates more than 75 percent of care work to women (Eurostat), have led to a worrying increase in the number of mothers of working age who leave work in the first years of their children's lives in all European countries, especially in Italy, Greece and Spain.

The MAV project aims at promoting the skills developed during motherhood such as time and stress management, empathy and the ability to listen and communicate, multitasking, and problem-solving which are some of the soft skills endemic to motherhood. These soft skills can be concretely applied in alternative work contexts such as those offered in the digital sector where flexibility is a core characteristic of the work.

During this new period of motherhood, more and more mothers give up their ambitions or current position, to shift to new careers offering more flexibility and a better work-life balance that answers their new specific needs. However, for this process to be a success for mothers, two critical gaps need to be addressed: awareness among the actors in the VET sector (enterprises, educators, associations) on the urgency of including new approaches for mothers, and professionalising training that encourage mothers to participate in vocational training.

B) Aim and target group of the project

The MAV project aims to respond to these two gaps concerning VET actors' awareness and mothers' professionalisation. **The general objective of the project is to facilitate access by new mothers to a high-quality training path aimed at developing digital, transversal, and entrepreneurial skills in order to increase their ability to remain or re-enter the job market enhancing the application of the motherhood's endemic soft skills in the context of the new digital professions, such as that of the Virtual Assistant.**

The second objective is to improve the training of the trainers and stakeholders involved in the partnership on inclusive digital training related to the use of digital tools. To reply to the needs of the target group and their greatly full schedule, the training requires flexibility and customised methodology and content.

To address these conditions, the training will entice mothers to effectively complete the training and successfully manage the labour market transitions they face. This large scope, not limited to the scope of the project itself, will enable trainers and stakeholders to put into practice an innovative methodology that serves as a driver to stimulate long-term cooperation aimed at making the model replicable at different levels and helping to stimulate the very attractiveness of vocational training in relation to the changing labour market.

As mentioned above, the target group of this project is working-age mothers and more precisely, mothers with preschool-age children from age 0 to 6. As the OECD (2016, p.5) states, parents with children at a very young age have the most difficulties to create a sustainable work-life balance. Many studies show that in most European countries, this target group presents the highest dropout rate from work due to maternity.

C) Results sought and the appropriate use of the compendium

The aim of the project is to elaborate a **compendium identifying and gathering inspiring practices and tools utilised in the application of transversal competencies of motherhood within the digital professions and in particular the profession of virtual assistant**. In addition, the project will develop customised open-source digital format training course content in association with a toolkit for trainers including guidelines for future transferability.

Within the project trainers will be trained through in-person learning, teaching, and training activities (LTTA) by skilled trainers from partner organisations, enabling them to deliver pilot courses addressed to targeted mothers equipping them with digital, transversal, and entrepreneurial skills valuable to become a virtual assistant. Finally, all the partners will disseminate the project itself as well as the compendium and all the information gathered during the process.

The purpose of this compendium is to work on defining best practices to be included in a new shared methodology that benefits all target groups. The initial focus is on creating a bridge between mothers and companies/organisations in need of workers with digital and soft skills through the implementation of an innovative training programme piloted at first in the partner countries - Italy, Spain, and Belgium - and ultimately throughout all European countries.

2- Review of key findings and tools on motherhood soft skills in the digital sector

The increased use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in the workplace has created a shift in the skills demands and the way work is conducted (OECD, 2016, p.6/9). To tackle the changes resulting from the digital transformation the European Union (EU) has developed several actions such as the Pact for Skills, the European Agenda for Skills, and the European Year of Skills. In 2020 the European Commission elaborated a new European Skills Agenda establishing 12 actions to tackle the green and digital transition in a 5 years plan.

The Pact for Skills, launched in November 2020, aims at supporting private and public organisations in upskilling and reskilling to better overcome the digital and green transition by enhancing their resilience and competitiveness. Through the Pact for Skills, the EU encourages every stakeholder to "work together and make a clear commitment to invest in training for all people of working age in the EU."

In May 2023 the European Union (EU) started the European Year of Skills to address the skill gap Europe is facing focusing on digital and green technology skills. The European Year

of Skills aimed to empower individuals and businesses to develop future-proof skills for the green and digital transitions. It focused on upskilling and reskilling the workforce, promoting a lifelong learning culture, and ensuring that skills development was inclusive and accessible to all. The initiative also sought to match skills with labour market needs, supporting job creation and economic growth.

While these actions have allowed the EU to address the skill shortage and brought to light the importance of soft skills developed through several experiences such as volunteering, no reference was made to address the soft skills acquired during motherhood which concerns millions of women in Europe. Similarly, Gulati, R., & Reaiche, C. H. (2020) highlights that the importance of soft skills is not recognised as the determinant to digital transformation.

The skills demands do not only refer to hard skills (also called technical skills), especially in the digital transformation. Indeed, as the OECD states, the capacity to effectively use ICT also depends on soft skills which enables the worker to adapt to the new environment (OECD, 2016, p.9). As the following image shows, the higher the use of ICT is at work the higher the use of soft skills such as communication and problem-solving (OECD, 2016, p.10).

Figure 7. Correlations between daily use of ICTs at work and other tasks - by skill level

Averages across countries
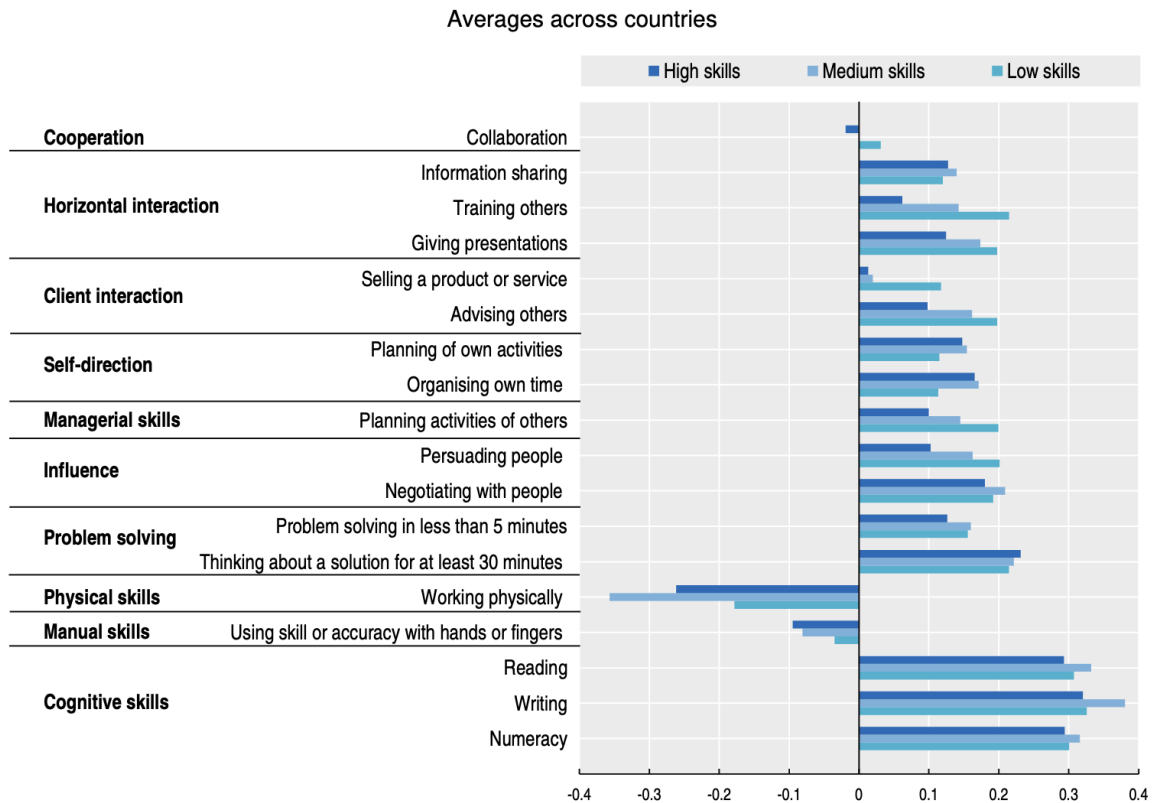
Source: OECD (2016), Figure 14b.

Soft skills are defined by S. Vasanthakumari "as a combination of people skills, social skills, communication skills, character or personality traits, attitudes, career attributes, social and emotional intelligence, intelligence quotients, that enable people to navigate their environment, work well with others, perform well, and achieve their goal with complementing hard skills" (2019, p.67).

In comparison to hard skills, soft skills are not only acquired through studies and work experience and therefore do not only depend on acquired knowledge (S. Vasanthakumari, 2019, p.67). Therefore, any experience enabling a person to acquire soft skills should be recognised as valuable.

Women are facing many challenges in the labour market and these challenges increase when they become mothers. By not recognising motherhood as a learning experience, the

challenges faced by mothers in the labour market deepen and reinforce the motherhood penalty. The motherhood penalty characterises these specific challenges mothers face in the labour market, namely the gender pay gap, difficulties in creating a sustainable work-life balance and staying in the labour market. "The gender employment gap is defined as the difference between the employment rates of men and women aged 20-64." (COFACE, 2024).

In 2016, PWC released the results of their study on the obstacles women in the UK face after taking a break from work, which is mostly due to caring commitments. PWC revealed that 3 out of 5 women returning to work after a break find themselves in a lower position than the one they previously held. Damian Grimshaw and Jill Rubery in their paper state that one way to address the motherhood penalty or motherhood pay gap is by "preventing and eliminating discrimination based on maternity and family responsibilities and creating a family-friendly workplace culture".

Many more solutions are proposed to tackle these discriminations based on maternity and family responsibilities such as family-friendly policies (BeFamily, Make Mothers Matter), better parental, maternity, and paternity leave, the redistribution of unpaid care work, and investment in higher quality care infrastructures (Make Mothers Matter, 2023; European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022; Lundari. B, 2018).

This compendium argues another solution to tackle these discriminations is the recognition of motherhood soft skills as valuable and transferable skills to the workforce. Indeed, the non-recognition of skills acquired during motherhood and the misconception that they are not as valuable and transferable to the workforce as any other soft skills acquired in a learning experience is preventing mothers from returning to the labour market. Many studies - like Lifeed White Paper on motherhood "La maternità da ostacolo a risorsa" - have proven that motherhood is a form of informal learning that is transferable to any employment. Motherhood enables mothers to develop important soft skills necessary in the workplace such as multitasking, problem-solving, or leadership (Skill 4, 2023).

The significance of soft skills, such as the one developed through motherhood, is increasing in the workplace and in the hiring process. According to a Harvard University study stated in S. Vasanthakumari's paper, "85% of success at the workplace is attributed to Soft skills and only 15% to technical skills" (S. Vasanthakumari, 2019). Moreover, Van Laar et al., (2017)

cited by Fears, T., Heuss, S. C., & Miller, B. T. (2020) emphasise that in order to efficiently use technical skills, employees have to continuously develop new skills. Sousa & Rocha (2019) cited by Fears, T., Heuss, S. C., & Miller, B. T (2020) asserts that to be able to develop new skills and in order to cope with the continuously changing digital environment, employees have to demonstrate flexibility and adaptability which are considered as soft skills. In addition, Poláková, M., Suleimanová, J. H., Madzík, P., Copuš, L., Molnárová, I., & Polednová, J. in their paper, argue that the advancement in technology and digitalisation as well as their increase use, especially after the COVID 19 pandemic, have increased the demand for soft skills. The soft skills considered essential in the digital environment are "flexibility, adaptability, and interpersonal abilities, enabling individuals to effectively collaborate in teams, communicate efficiently, and solve problems adeptly" (Poláková, M., Suleimanová, J. H., Madzík, P., Copuš, L., Molnárová, I., & Polednová, J., 2023).

The soft skills needed in the digital environment can be acquired during motherhood. Indeed, the soft skills acquired through motherhood are among others time management, crisis management, communication, organisation, analytical thinking, leadership, problem-solving, multitasking, adaptability, collaboration, and flexibility (Susan Lander MD, 2024; Kumon; Dr. Salam Slim Saad).

A) Best Practices

Many projects and initiatives are created to showcase the important value of skills developed in motherhood. Moreover, the following initiatives provide evidence that digital transformation creates new connections between skills people develop through their life experiences and the skills needed in the workplace.

One of the pioneers in affirming the importance of motherhood skills and their equal value to any other informal learning is Maternity As A Master (MAAM). Created by Riccarda Zezza, MAAM is a project offering workshops and lectures on the highly required soft skills mothers acquire through motherhood. Due to strong interest from the public and private sector, Riccarda Zezza launched the start-up Life Bases Value a digital programme providing

companies and employees a set of courses and seminars aiming at redefining maternity and motherhood as an added value and a learning experience as important as formal learning such as a Master (Lundari, 2019). The programme has demonstrated its effectiveness by enhancing individuals' professional skills by up to 35%, increasing their motivation, and improving organisational outcomes, resulting in high levels of satisfaction (Lundari B., 2019).

Based on the Life Based Value programme, the Maternity Opportunities and Mainstreaming (MOM) is a European project aiming at reframing maternity as a valuable learning experience that equips mothers with essential soft skills highly valuable and transferable to the current workforce. The following picture demonstrates how the MOM project operates: "Maternity develops new skills like soft skills. MOM's aim is to help unemployed women and mothers to gain empowerment, awareness, and assessment of their maternal experiences and their skills. This provides them with more resources that help their employability".
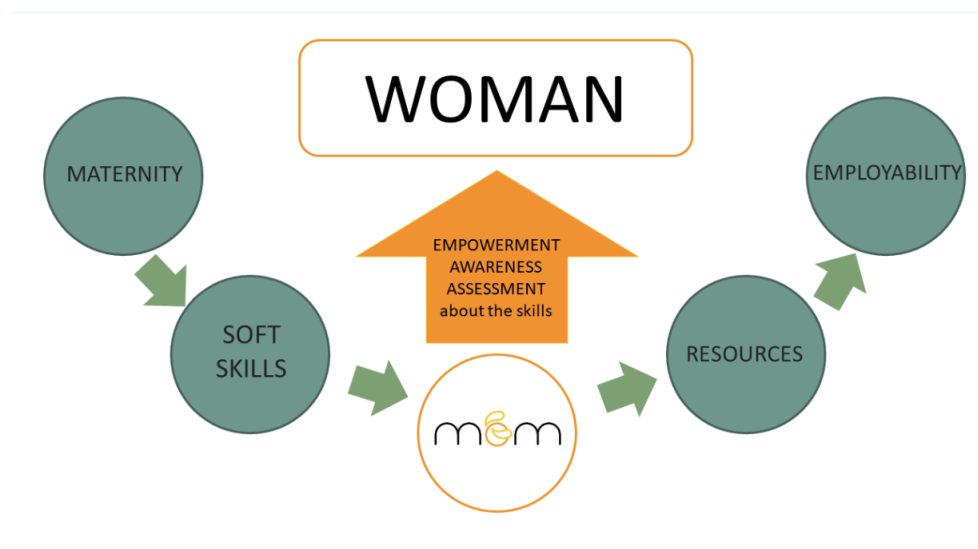
This project provides many tools for mothers to empower mothers in their assessment of their soft skills acquired through motherhood such as free online courses for mothers, open online courses for trainers, an e-campus that gathers resources, and a formal certification that will apply the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training principles.

The Mothers Can European project, is also tackling the subject with the aim of supporting mothers by empowering them, their reintegration into the labour market, and their professional development. This project promotes self-employment and the development of entrepreneurial skills which can offer flexibility to mothers. To empower women, the project

created an empowerment scheme for mothers and pregnant women enabling them to have confidence and efficacy and therefore their intention to return to the labour market. A training course demonstrating the benefits of hiring mothers was also designed for hiring managers.

These three projects enable mothers to highlight the skills they acquired through motherhood in their working journey. Moreover, these initiatives establish a positive conception of motherhood in the labour market. To obtain better results these projects are not only addressed to mothers but also the labour market and in particular companies and trainers. With this overall approach, the projects guarantee a systemic change.

Other private initiatives, like Lifeed, are created in order to help mothers and parents establish a better work-life balance, finding a job opportunity that regards their parenting skills as valuable and transferable skills in the workplace but also supports them in their reintegration into the labour market. Lifeed offers a program called "Genitori che nascono" (Emerging parents) specifically designed for new mothers (and fathers). This program helps new parents develop competencies that can be valuable in both their personal and professional lives. The program is designed to increase well-being and self-efficacy.

The first initiative is ***Mom to Virtual Assistant***. Based in the United States this project has the overall objective to empower moms to establish a better work-life balance and support them in cultivating valuable skills. This staffing firm "empowers moms by helping them build highly desired skill sets resulting in flexible and fulfilling work with clients all over the world." By helping mothers find a position as a virtual assistant in a firm, this staffing company supports mothers in their reintegration into the labour market. The virtual assistant position allows mothers to have an income-generating activity whilst having the flexibility to take care of their child therefore creating a better work-life balance.

La Tribu Digitale (The Digital Tribe), is a French initiative that follows the same approach as the Mom to Virtual Assistant. La Tribu Digitale is a training organisation in the field of digital marketing and communication, made up of experts and entrepreneurs who help each other to succeed both professionally and personally. The initiative is based on the idea that mothers are being discriminated against in companies and they should not have to choose between their professional career and their personal life. The organisation offers training for

digital professions and mentoring programmes in digital marketing and entrepreneurship. The programmes are targeting the digital sector because the latter is in high need of skilled labour and offers flexibility to mothers in their research of a work-life balance.

Be Family is another French movement seeking to guarantee that companies and organisations adopt inclusive and responsible practices towards families and those with caregiving duties. They offer various resources such as reports, studies, business best practices, and employee testimonials to raise awareness and inspire companies and organisations to shift the standard from 'families adapting to companies' to 'companies adapting to families'. By joining the movement, companies, and organisations will have access to certification courses during which they will be supported in the improvement of their practices to "have all parents and carers feel good at the workplace".

The overall objective of the Mom project is to help mothers stay in the workforce. Started by a mother, like the previous initiatives detailed above, in 2016 after appreciating how difficult it was for parents to stay in the workforce and for companies to keep their employees after birth. The organisation promotes flexibility, diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace and family-friendly companies. By addressing their programme to mothers and companies the Mom Project is ensuring long-lasting changes that benefit both parties.

Catalyst was created in 1962 when paying women less than men was allowed by the law. Even if the initiative has evolved with the law, the objective stays the same, to create an equal, just work environment for women. Their core goal is to increase the rate of women in leadership positions. By offering courses, workshops, webinars, and events, Catalyst is incentivising organisations to build diversity, equity, and inclusion in their workplace.

MOVE-UP develops a flexible and quality upskilling pathway for women who are dedicating most of their time and efforts to the role of mother and who need to (re) join education activities and the job market. The MOVE-UP activities offer the opportunity to assess and further develop the Personal, Social, and Learning to Learn competencies (PSL) acquired thanks to motherhood experience, both to develop key competencies and to promote and facilitate access to further training and employment opportunities.

A) Tools

Many free and accessible tools can be used by mothers to develop their skills, enhance their curricula, reinforce their effectiveness on the job, and allow them to have a better work-life balance. Returning to the workforce after a long period of leave can be intimidating, especially when you are a mother having to balance your personal and professional life. Nevertheless, many tools have been developed to facilitate everyday tasks, at work and outside of work.

Online Tools	Description
Collaboration tools	Allow users to share information, and resources with others but 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	A platform where users can create and organise 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 organisation. 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, analysing the content results, and providing better social media marketing.
Sprout Social	Facilitate the management and organisation 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, organise, 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, organising 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 to handle event registrations, conducting rapid opinion polls, designing quizzes, creating surveys, and managing

	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	Help users to organise, prioritise, and schedule.
[RescueTime](#)	Help track your time use on apps and websites.
[Toggl](#)	Help track your using time on apps, websites, and projects.
[Clockify](#)	Help 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 co-working 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
Wave	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 prioritise a no-cost solution.
Planning and appointment tools	Assist users in planning and scheduling appointments.
Google Calendar	Time management and scheduling services allow users to organise, coordinate, and schedule events which you can share with other people.
Calendly	An 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	A free open-source platform that allows users to create their website.
Career Guidance tools	Assist and support users in their research of work but also in enhancing the skills they possess.
Europass	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.
Skillbank	Web-based toolkit facilitating career guidance. Through the aggregation of learning outcomes into qualifications, Skillsbank facilitates personalised career paths leading to formalised credentials and certificates. One of the key features of Skillsbank is its tool for creating learning outcomes, which are then organised into matrices to formulate specific qualifications.

	These learning outcomes can be further categorised into descriptions of competencies, knowledge, and skills following the ECVET model. Skillsbank is a multilingual toolkit: Bulgarian, German, Spanish, French, Italian, Norwegian, Polish and Portuguese, Slovenian, Turkish, Arabic, Dutch, and Estonian.
Lifeed	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. Lifeed New Parents offers a programme 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. The programme also encourages companies to offer the programme to their employees and change their views on parenting.
Career Returners	Consulting, coaching, and network

	organisation 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 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, and 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.
Coursera	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.
LinkedIn	Provides a comprehensive library of video courses focused on business, technology, and creative skills. Perfect for professionals

	looking to upskill or reskill for career advancement.
Skillshare	Offers a more creative and community-driven learning experience, with thousands of classes on topics like design, 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 the creation or the broadening of a community and/or a 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 service or connecting you with care 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.

3- Analyses of the field research: Interviews

For the field research, a semi-structured questionnaire was elaborated. The partners of the project have interviewed 13 people in total, in Belgium, Spain, and Italy. The general objective of this interview was to understand what are the soft skills needed in the digital environment and what soft skills mothers have acquired or strengthened during their motherhood. To do so, we interviewed mothers, companies, and virtual assistants from Italy, Spain, and Belgium. Due to the different countries the interviews took place, the latter were translated from English to French, Italian, and Spanish. Because the interview targeted different audiences, questions varied depending on the target. At this stage, we did not target mothers with children from 0 to 6 but mothers in general because the goal was to gather information on soft skills developed during motherhood.

Through these interviews, we were expecting to provide proof that the motherhood soft skills are consistent with the skills needed to work in the digital environment and particularly to work as a virtual assistant. Concerning the interview targeting mothers, the aim was to grasp their understanding of soft skills, to appreciate to what extent motherhood has impacted their careers, and to perceive which soft skills they acquired through motherhood. Overall, 7 mothers in the digital sector were interviewed: 3 in Belgium, 1 in Spain, and 3 in Italy.

When asked what is the definition of soft skills in their language, most of them correctly defined it as a skill inherited from the person. The other mothers defined it as gaining skills such as flexibility or multitasking.
As shown in the following tables (1 & 2), when asked which soft skills mothers in Italy and Belgium have enhanced through motherhood, the most selected soft skills were

decision-making, problem-solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, time management and flexibility.

Table 1: What are the soft skills you acquired through motherhood? Answers from Belgian mothers

Quelles sont les compétences non techniques que vous avez acquises grâce à la maternité ? (En ce qui concerne la question précédente, quelles sont l...vous avez acquises au cours de votre maternité ?)
3 responses

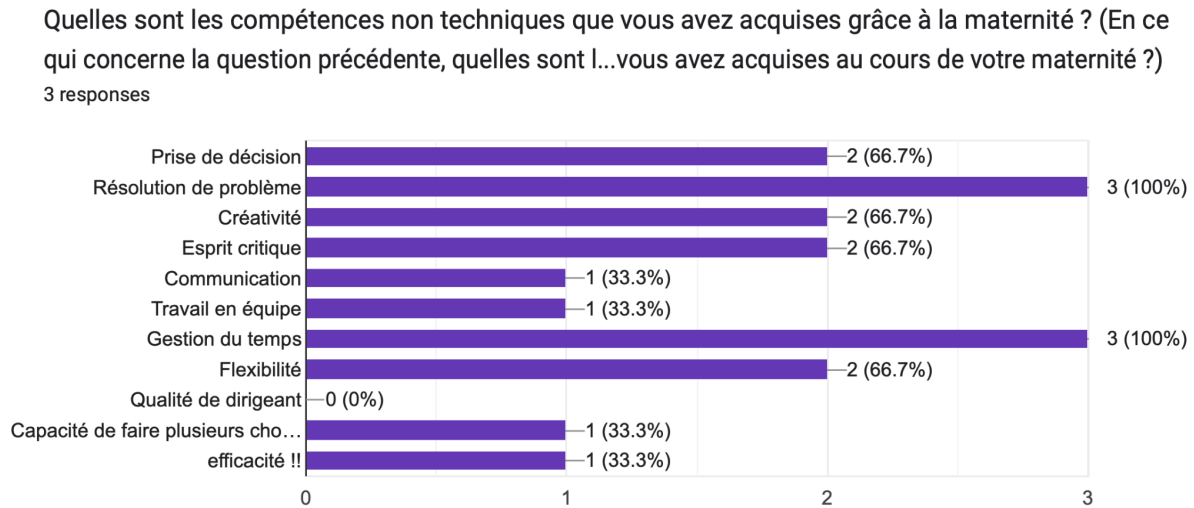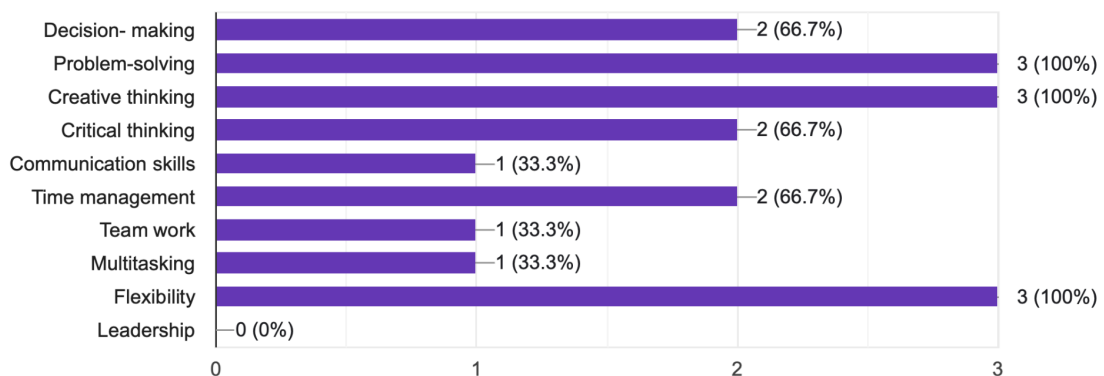| Compétence	Réponses
Prise de décision	2 (66.7%)
Résolution de problème	3 (100%)
Créativité	2 (66.7%)
Esprit critique	2 (66.7%)
Communication	1 (33.3%)
Travail en équipe	1 (33.3%)
Gestion du temps	3 (100%)
Flexibilité	2 (66.7%)
Qualité de dirigeant	0 (0%)
Capacité de faire plusieurs cho…	1 (33.3%)
efficacité !!	1 (33.3%)

Table 2: What are the soft skills you acquired through motherhood? Answers from Italian mothers

Lo

What soft skills did you develop through motherhood? (Regarding the previous question, what are the soft skills you develop during motherhood?)
3 responses

Skill	Responses
Decision- making	2 (66.7%)
Problem-solving	3 (100%)
Creative thinking	3 (100%)
Critical thinking	2 (66.7%)
Communication skills	1 (33.3%)
Time management	2 (66.7%)
Team work	1 (33.3%)
Multitasking	1 (33.3%)
Flexibility	3 (100%)
Leadership	0 (0%)

Two companies in the digital sector were interviewed for the project. One in Italy and one in Spain. The general objective of interviewing this target group was to understand what soft skills are needed in the digital sector and if soft skills have a consequence in the hiring

process. When asked what soft skills are needed to a great extent in the digital sectors, companies state the following: problem-solving, critical thinking, and communication (Table 3 & 4). The soft skills needed to some extent are decision-making, creative thinking, time management, flexibility, multitasking, and time management (Tables 3 & 4).

Table 3: What soft skills are needed in the digital sector? Answer from an Italian company

Table 4: What soft skills are needed in the digital sector? Answer from Spanish company

decision making	Problem resolution	Creative thinking	Critical thinking	Communication skills	Teamwork	Time management	Flexibility	Leadership	Multitask	Others
To a large degree	To a large degree	To some extent	To a large degree	To a large degree	To a large degree	To a large degree	To some extent	To some extent	To a large degree	To a large degree

The following tables (4 & 5) demonstrate the influence of soft skills in the hiring process. Both companies consider soft skills as important as hard skills when hiring a new employee.

Table 5: To what extent do soft skills influence the hiring process? Answer from Spanish company

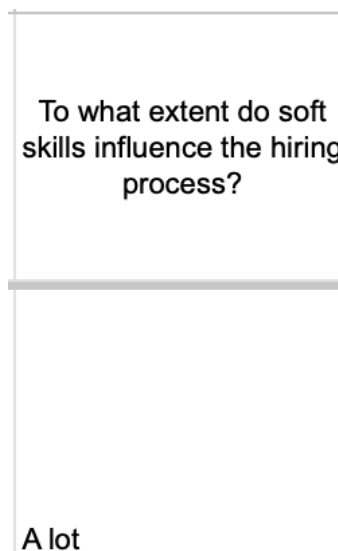To what extent do soft skills influence the hiring process?

A lot

Table 6: To what extent do soft skills influence the hiring process? Answer from Italian Company

To what extent do soft skills influence the hiring process? (When hiring a new employee, do soft skills play an important role compared to hard skills...t skills make a difference in the hiring process?)
1 response
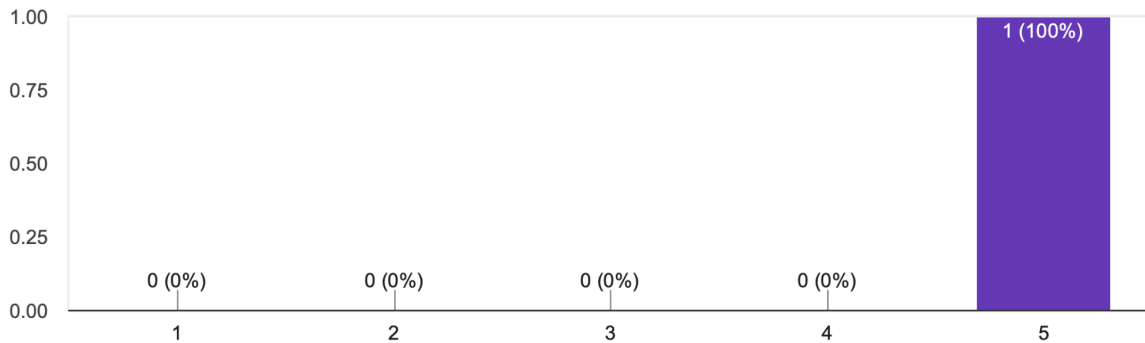
To address the subject in its entirety, virtual assistants were also interviewed in Italy and in Spain. A virtual assistant is a self-employed person offering technical and/or administrative support services to clients such as organisations, individuals, and businesses, remotely.

Consequently, this position offers a lot of flexibility and facilitates creating a sustainable work-life balance for mothers. The aim of the interview was to establish what are the soft skills needed in this profession and compare them to the ones developed through motherhood. As tables 7 and 8 demonstrate, all the soft skills listed are utilised to a great extent in the profession: decision-making, problem-solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, communication, time management, teamwork, multitasking, flexibility, and leadership.

Table 7: To what extent does a Virtual Assistant use soft skills in their digital work? Answer from an Italian Virtual Assistant

To what extent do you use the following soft skills in your digital work? (To be more efficient and succeed in your tasks what soft skills do you use? What soft skills are the most valuable in the digital sector?)
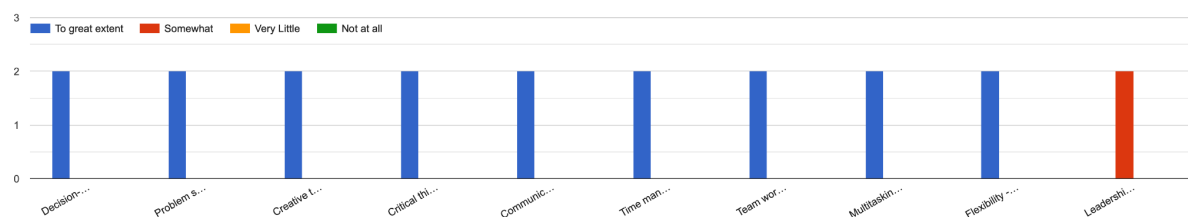
Table 8: To what extent does a Virtual Assistant use soft skills in their digital work? Answer from a Spanish Virtual Assistant

decision making	Problem resolution	Creative thinking	Critical thinking	Communication skills	Teamwork	Time management	Flexibility	Leadership	Multitask	Others
To a large degree	To a large degree	To a large degree	To a large degree	To a large degree	To a large degree	To a large degree	To a large degree	To a large degree	To a large degree	To some extent

Mothers' Perspectives

Seven mothers working in the digital sector were interviewed: three in Belgium, one in Spain, and three in Italy. While not all participants had children within the project's target age range (0-6), their experiences provided valuable insights into the soft skills developed through motherhood.

When asked to define "soft skills," most mothers accurately described them as inherent personal qualities. Others illustrated the concept by listing examples like flexibility and multitasking. The most frequently cited soft skills enhanced through motherhood were decision-making, problem-solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, time management, and flexibility.

Companies' Insights

Two companies in the digital sector, one in Italy and one in Spain, were interviewed to understand the demand for soft skills in this field. Both companies emphasized the importance of problem-solving, critical thinking, and communication as essential soft skills. They also valued decision-making, creative thinking, time management, flexibility, and multitasking to varying degrees. Notably, both companies considered soft skills as important as hard skills in the hiring process, highlighting their growing significance in the digital workplace.

Virtual Assistants' Experiences

Virtual assistants in Italy and Spain were also interviewed to assess the relevance of soft skills in their profession. Given the independent nature of their work, virtual assistants

heavily rely on soft skills like decision-making, problem-solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, communication, time management, teamwork, multitasking, flexibility, and leadership. Their responses further confirmed the alignment between motherhood-developed skills and the demands of digital professions.

Synthesis of Findings

The responses from mothers, companies, and virtual assistants reveal a striking correlation. The interviews clearly demonstrate that the soft skills cultivated through motherhood align with the demands of the digital sector, particularly for the virtual assistant position. Mothers frequently cited skills such as decision-making, problem-solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, time management, and flexibility as strengths developed during their parenting journey.

These very same skills were also highlighted by companies and virtual assistants as essential for success in digital professions. This convergence of perspectives underscores the transferability of motherhood-acquired skills and their potential value in bridging the skills gap in the digital workforce.

Overall Findings

Despite this, the interviews strongly support the project's hypothesis: soft skills acquired through motherhood are transferable and highly sought after in the digital sector, particularly for roles like virtual assistant. The findings emphasise the need for greater recognition and validation of these skills, both in formal training programs and in the broader labor market.

4. Conclusion

This compendium has sought to illuminate the often-overlooked connection between soft skills acquired through motherhood and the evolving demands of the digital workforce. Due to the scarcity of existing research on this topic, our approach was multifaceted, delving into soft skills in the digital sector, work-life balance, and the unique skill set cultivated through the experience of motherhood.

By collating and analyzing information from various sources, this compendium has established a clear correlation between the soft skills honed through motherhood and those sought after in the digital landscape. This alignment strongly supports the European Union's Pact for Skills initiative, which aims to invest in training for all working-age individuals in the EU. Specifically, our project seeks to address the underrecognition of motherhood-derived soft skills and empower mothers to actively participate in the workforce, thus fulfilling the objectives of the Pact.

Through the best practice examples presented in this compendium, we have witnessed a growing recognition of the value mothers bring to the workplace. From European projects like Maternity as a Master (MAAM) to private initiatives like La Tribu Digitale and the Mom Project, there is a clear momentum towards promoting motherhood as a valuable learning experience. These initiatives are not only transforming societal perceptions of motherhood but also fostering more family-friendly environments within companies.

The digital sector, with its inherent flexibility and potential for remote work, has emerged as a promising avenue for mothers seeking to balance their personal and professional lives. The private initiatives highlighted in this compendium, such as La Tribu Digitale and Mom to Virtual Assistant, are harnessing this potential by offering targeted training in digital professions for mothers. Additionally, organizations like the Mom Project, MAAM, and Lifeed are actively connecting mothers with companies that prioritize work-life balance and provide the support they need to thrive.

Furthermore, the extensive list of tools compiled in this compendium serves as a valuable resource for mothers navigating the digital landscape. These tools encompass a wide range of functionalities, from communication and collaboration to project management, stress management, and career development. By leveraging these resources, mothers can enhance their productivity, expand their skills, and build fulfilling careers in the digital realm.

The interviews conducted with mothers, companies, and virtual assistants have provided compelling evidence to support the project's central hypothesis. The convergence of their responses demonstrates the clear transferability of soft skills acquired through motherhood to the specific needs of digital professions, particularly the role of a virtual assistant.

However, this compendium also underscores the need for further research on the topic. The scarcity of existing data, often limited to unofficial sources, highlights the importance of

conducting more comprehensive studies to quantify and validate the link between motherhood and soft skills. More importantly, the current lack of recognition for these skills within the European Union's framework for skills validation presents a significant barrier to their full integration into the labor market.

To truly unlock the potential of mothers in the workforce, it is imperative to formally acknowledge the transferability of motherhood-acquired skills, aligning with the goals of the Pact for Skills. Such recognition would not only streamline the hiring process for mothers returning from maternity leave but also strengthen the European Union's broader strategy for upskilling and reskilling its workforce. By embracing the unique strengths and experiences of mothers, we can foster a more inclusive, diverse, and ultimately more successful digital economy.

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