

# Attitudes toward entrepreneurship and family life

Survey for startup founders  
June 2026

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# About the survey

This survey was conducted jointly by Maria 01, one of the leading startup communities in Europe, and Bamla, a Nordic PR and communications agency for tech, finance, and industry.

The goal of the survey was to explore one of the most untapped discussion in our ecosystem: how startup founders – with or without families – view the balance between building a company and family life.

We wanted to map attitudes, experiences, and perceived challenges to understand how can we better support founders who are parents, or aspire to be, in balancing career ambitions with family life, so that starting a business doesn't stand in the way of starting a family, or vice versa.

The survey was conducted online between September and October 2025.

The survey was designed as an exploratory study, capturing 55 responses from a targeted global group of startup founders, CEOs, operators, and aspiring founders for whom balancing family and startup life is a real consideration, regardless of their current family status. Participation was anonymous.

# How to read the report and things to keep in mind

- In addition to presenting the survey background and key findings, the report examines how entrepreneurship affects family planning, the support systems and cultural norms within startups, and founders' perspectives on creating a more supportive startup environment that allows for both career ambitions and family life.
- **The scope of the survey is limited:** The survey captures insights from a targeted global group of startup founders, CEOs, operators, and aspiring founders. While the results provide valuable qualitative insights, they do not constitute a statistically rigorous dataset. The results provide valuable qualitative insights into perceptions and experiences, but they do not constitute a statistically rigorous or generalizable dataset.
- **The survey is a conversation starter for ecosystem builders:** This report provides a snapshot of how founders experience the intersection of entrepreneurship and family life. By discussing and reflecting the results, there are opportunities to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges startup founders face, their perceived trade-offs, and potential actions or support systems that can help create an ecosystem that genuinely supports founders along the way.

# Key findings

# Key findings

1. **Family life is highly valued:** The survey respondents strongly value family, with many placing it as equally or more important than professional success. Family considerations play a significant role in founders' personal and professional decisions, influencing timing, career moves, and how they structure their startups.
2. **Startup founders want a more family-friendly ecosystem, and feel it's not there yet:** Founders describe the current startup environment as neutral at best and often unsupportive. Grind culture, unrealistic expectations, and investor-driven pressures make it difficult to imagine combining early-stage entrepreneurship with family life. Most believe the ecosystem needs major cultural and structural shifts to support founders with families.

# Key findings

3. **Flexibility and healthier work norms are desired:** Across the survey, the clearest theme is the need for greater flexibility in time, location, and pace. Founders call for an outcome-focused culture rather than one driven by long hours and burnout, highlighting the importance of remote work, variable schedules, and acceptance of slower periods. While founders recognize these changes as essential for balancing family life, many feel they lack the power to shape the broader startup culture themselves. Comments also suggest that current competitive pressures and rigid investor expectations reinforce a high-stress, inflexible environment, limiting the ability of individual founders to introduce healthier norms. Respondents see flexibility and sustainable work practices as critical goals, but acknowledge that systemic and cultural change is needed to make them a reality.
4. **Cultural stigma around parenthood remains a barrier, especially for women:** Many respondents report that talking about wanting children is still a taboo in founder circles. Women in particular feel judged, perceived as risks, or pressured to hide pregnancy or family plans. Meanwhile men taking parental leave is still not normalized. Founders want a culture where parenthood is visible, accepted, and not equated with lack of ambition.

# Key findings

5. **Practical support matters:** Founders emphasized that practical support structures are crucial for making family life compatible with entrepreneurship. They highlighted the need for childcare solutions such as options within co-working spaces, parental-leave models that work for founders, shareholder agreements that clearly address parental absences, and investor expectations that do not penalize taking family-related time off. Financial stability, whether through stipends, income support, or more predictable early-stage conditions, was also seen as important. The importance of supportive co-founders, partners, communities, and leaders who openly model healthy boundaries was also emphasized.
6. **Parenthood can complement entrepreneurship:** Most founders believe having children does not inherently hinder startup success. On the contrary, parenthood can enhance entrepreneurship by fostering creativity, perspective, focus, and better prioritization. Respondents noted that early parenthood may slow business velocity, but with realistic expectations, planning, and support, family life and business growth can coexist.

*“Startup culture needs to get real about how much physical and emotional energy entrepreneurship really takes. It would be fantastic, if the help would come from the ecosystem itself. It is important for established founders and CEOs to talk about what has helped them, and not put on a mask that they have not been deeply affected by what it took to be successful.”*

- Woman, Founder, Idea stage

*“Everybody talks about how building a startup is a marathon, not a 100-meter dash. That should mean that parental leave and making room for family are automatically a part of the race, not treated as an afterthought.”*

- Man, Founder of a Series B company

*“Across Europe, birth rates are at historic lows just as we urgently need more founders to drive the next wave of growth. We cannot afford to choose between the two. If we want more founders, more innovation, and healthier demographics, the structures around work, care, and entrepreneurship must change. Founders’ struggles with parenthood are not personal failings, but they do reflect deeper cultural norms and rigid systems that the entire ecosystem needs to rethink,”* says Sarita Runeberg, CEO of Maria 01.

# Experiences of founders with and without families

# How entrepreneurship shapes family planning

Entrepreneurship significantly influences founders' decisions about starting or expanding a family.

- More than half of respondents who **already have children** report that their startup career affected their family planning.
  - Almost 20% delayed having children, and over 14% limited the number of children due to the demands of entrepreneurship.
  - Yet not all effects were negative. Some respondents emphasized the flexibility entrepreneurship provides, with one expressing: *“I became a founder to have flexibility around my family.”*
- Among respondents **without children**, two thirds said entrepreneurship has influenced their decisions about starting a family. Nearly one in four felt they must choose between entrepreneurship and family life.
  - Over half have postponed having children due to startup pressures, and 9% expect to limit the number of children they want.
  - While some see entrepreneurship as a future enabler of freedom with family, others noted that broader factors, such as geopolitical and economic uncertainty, play an equally significant role in family planning decisions.

# How supportive are teams and the startup ecosystem

Founders generally feel supported by their immediate teams, but many believe the broader startup culture still falls short.

- Among founders **with children**, over 60% feel *always or almost always* supported by co-founders, teams, or investors when it comes to family responsibilities. Another 15% feel supported sometimes, and 10% feel almost never supported. Despite this relatively positive interpersonal support, many parents still experience significant stress: half report feeling stressed *always or almost always* when trying to balance entrepreneurship with parenting.
- For founders **without children or planning to start a family**, the level of support is more mixed. Nearly a fourth feel consistently supported by their teams or investors regarding future family plans, while almost 30% feel supported only sometimes. This suggests that while day-to-day team dynamics are often positive, the broader ecosystem norms still make future parenthood feel uncertain, sensitive, or difficult to integrate into the founder journey.

*“People rarely speak openly about what having kids does to your career or overall happiness. What truly helps are practical things: outside childcare support, financial stability, good daycare, nannies, a supportive partner, and supportive close colleagues, often co-founders if you’re an entrepreneur.”*

- Prefer not to say, Founder of a Series A company

*I made a personal decision to postpone having kids by a couple of years. Now the time is more than right, my wife is pregnant, and hopefully we’ll have more children after that. Back in the days, the very first few years of entrepreneurship were more difficult if combined with having kids than today. Now with the productivity increases from AI, founders should be able to balance the two. It is not about the hours but the output of your work that matters.”*

- Man, Founder of a Series D company

# Founders' thoughts

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# Founders' thoughts on building a more supportive startup culture for family life

## **Flexibility and healthier work expectations**

Across all respondents the need to replace grind culture with flexible, humane working conditions is highlighted. This includes autonomy over work hours and location, valuing outcomes over hours, acceptance of slower periods, and rejecting burnout as a norm.

## **Cultural normalization of family life**

Respondents want a shift in attitudes: family aspirations should not be taboo, and pregnancy, kids at events, or parental leave should not be seen as liabilities. Success stories involving families should be made visible, and family life should be treated as a natural part of entrepreneurial life rather than an exception.

## **Leadership, community, and shared learning**

Respondents want founders, CEOs, and investors, to model healthier boundaries and openly discuss the realities of combining family and entrepreneurship. Story-sharing, mentorship, and peer networks were seen as ways to reduce stigma, build resilience, and highlight the value of skills gained through parenthood.

## **Practical support from the ecosystem**

Founders emphasize that practical, structural support is essential. This includes childcare options, more founder-friendly parental leave models, lighter investor expectations during family-related absences, and stipends or financial safety nets that make family formation feasible during early-stage entrepreneurship.

*“I have a really good parenting team. We truly support each other. I wouldn’t be able to start a business if I didn’t have good support from home.”*

- Woman, Founder of a Pre-seed company

*“Share success stories of people with kids... or, more precisely, don’t hide how many kids people have when telling the story of successful companies.”*

- Man, Aspiring founder, Idea stage

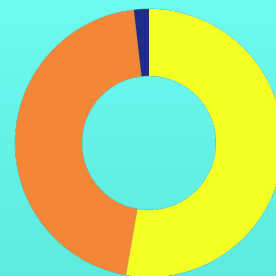
*“I haven’t attended any events while pregnant. It just felt uncommon, and I didn’t want to be seen as someone who would soon go on maternity leave, especially since that hasn’t been the case for me. It’s just that the startup industry is traditionally viewed in a way that feels very far from the traditional image of being a mom.”*

- Woman, Founder of a Pre-seed company

# Background information

# Background information on the respondents

- We received answers founders based in 9 countries and from 14 different nationalities most of whom were either based in Finland or Finnish.
- A little more than half of the respondents identified themselves as women and a little less than half as men.
- Most of the respondents described themselves as Founders or Aspiring Founders.
- Majority (around 63%) of the respondents described working in a startup in Pre-seed or Seed phase.

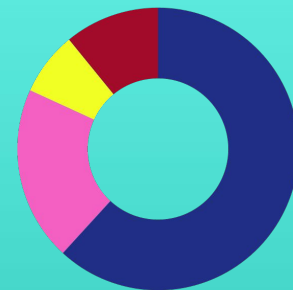


## Gender identity?

|                            |     |
|----------------------------|-----|
| Woman                      | 53% |
| Man                        | 46% |
| Prefer not to say or other | 2%  |

## Role?

|                  |     |
|------------------|-----|
| Founder          | 62% |
| Aspiring founder | 20% |
| CEO              | 11% |
| Operator         | 7%  |



## Your startup?

|                       |     |
|-----------------------|-----|
| Pre-seed              | 36% |
| Seed                  | 27% |
| Idea                  | 20% |
| Series A              | 7%  |
| Series D or B or Exit | 5%  |
| Series C              | 4%  |

# Family status of the respondents

- 90% of the respondents were married or in a long-term relationship and almost 70% had a family.
- Of those **with children**, 42% had two children, 37% one and 21% three or more.
- Nearly two thirds of respondents had become a parent prior becoming a founder. The rest had had children during their time as a founder.
- Of those respondents **without children**, over 70% wished to have children one day and almost a fourth were unsure. 6% did not wish to have any children.



**Have children?**

■ Yes.....69%

■ No.....31%

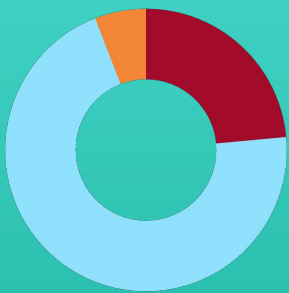
**How many children do you have?**

- Two.....42%
- One.....37%
- Three.....18%
- Four or more.....3%



**Do you wish to have children one day?**

- Yes.....71%
- Unsure.....24%
- No.....6%



# Thank you!

Contact

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