

European Care Strategy: Member States must act now!

Joint statement by the Federation of European Social Employers and the European Federation of Public Services Unions

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The European Commission published its European Care Strategy in September 2022. The accompanying Council recommendations on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and on Long Term Care (LTC) have now been adopted by the 27 Member States.

With the adoption, on December 8, 2022, all EU Member States commit to implementing the principles of the two Council recommendations at national level. The growing need for high-quality, affordable and accessible social services and associated challenges need to be addressed urgently and swiftly by the Member States.

Why this Care Strategy?

- The majority of EU Member States report significant staff shortages in the care sector, and the gap between workforce supply and demand is growing.
- The number of people in need of LTC will increase by 23% by 2050.
- The sector has a high job creation potential: more than 1.6 million long-term care workers will be needed by 2050 to keep coverage at the current level.
- Despite a growing demand, low pay and poor working conditions in the sector make it difficult to attract and retain qualified workers.
- More than 1/3 of the sector's employees are between 50 and 64 years old.
- As 90% of professional caregivers are women, low pay in this sector contributes significantly to Europe's gender pay gap.
- Due to a lack of affordable, accessible social services, many relatives, friends and neighbours – the vast majority of whom are women – take on informal care roles.

The Social Employers and EPSU support the principles included in the EU Care Strategy and the call for adequate, sustainable public funding for social services and the workforce.

In line with the Council recommendations, the Social Employers and EPSU call on EU Member States to act now, in order to:

- Provide adequate and sustainable funding for needs based LTC, ECEC and other social services.
- In cooperation with Social Partners, establish coordination mechanisms for LTC, ECEC as well as other social services, that will design, deploy and monitor policy actions and investment.



These actions, as well as public funding, must improve the quality and accessibility of care services as well as working conditions in the sector.

- Through universal access to affordable social services, ensure that informal care is always a choice, not a necessity. Member States must also promote intermediate solutions and support to facilitate women's participation in the labour market.
- Tackle staff shortages by ensuring quality jobs and good working conditions for professional carers through collective bargaining. In addition to sufficient funding, social dialogue is key to ensure collective agreements which provide for decent wages, good working conditions and to occupational safety and health. The strongly expected, quick establishment of an EU Level Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee for Social Services by the European Commission, as requested by EPSU and the Social Employers, will help.
- Cooperate with social partners to improve the attractiveness of the sector. This can be done by providing better vocational education and training, building career pathways and revaluing the professional status of care workers, regularising and protecting irregular migrant care workers, many of whom are domestic care workers, and combatting gender segregation.
- Involve social partners in the design and implementation of digital solutions in the sector so that they bring real benefits for workers and recipients, and do not in any way replace human interaction.

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The Federation of European Social Employers (short: the Social Employers) represents employers in social services at European level. It is the most representative European employer's organisation for the private sector part of social services. Its 30 members in 19 countries are active in care and support services for older persons, persons with disabilities, children, and other excluded or disadvantaged persons. The Social Employers contribute to quality service provision and quality jobs by strengthening the position of social services employers at EU and national level, establishing common positions between members, engaging in European social dialogue and negotiating with European Trade Union Associations.

The European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU) brings together trade unions from across Europe and represents over 8 million public service workers. It is the representative European trade union organisation in the social services sector. EPSU works hard to deliver better working conditions, improved health and safety and enhanced rights for its members. By sitting down with employers at European level, we negotiate best practice agreements that improve the working lives of public service workers and ensure quality services for citizens.

