

EUROPEAN CARE STRATEGY: Towards a more social Europe

The European Care Strategy has the potential to solve issues brought to light during the COVID-19 pandemic by tackling gender disparities in the sector of care and improving care practices and working conditions.
The Commission adopted this Strategy on 7 September 2022. OPP created this one-page guide with everything you need to know!

1 The Political Context

- MARCH 2021** ● The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan announced an initiative on long-term care and the revision of the Barcelona targets for early childhood education and care (ECEC).
- SEPTEMBER 2021** ● In her State of the Union address, President Ursula von der Leyen announced a European Care Strategy to address the often poor working conditions in the care sector which were leading to a lower quality of caregiving. The proposed initiative, which was confirmed in the 2022 Commission Work Programme, would consist of a Commission Communication, accompanied by proposals for Council Recommendations.
- JULY 2022** ● The European Parliament adopted the "Towards a Common European Action on Care" report in Plenary, jointly led by the EP EMPL and EP FEMM Committees. The majority of MEPs highlighted the importance of prioritising care in European and national policies, particularly by securing the necessary funding, in order to make the care systems resilient to long-standing challenges, which have been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, an ageing population, and the digital and green transition. MEPs stressed the importance of preventive care in order to limit the number of long-term care patients. While the FEMM MEPs mostly focused on issues linked to gender equality, the EMPL MEPs touched upon the issues linked to social protection, health and safety at work, and adequate wages.

The European Care Strategy also follows up on the public consultation launched in the context of the Green Paper on Ageing and the Gender Equality Strategy. It is closely linked to other Commission initiatives, such as the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the European Education Area Council resolution (including an ECEC target), the Council recommendation on high-quality ECEC, the European Child Guarantee and the EU Strategy on the rights of the child.

2 The Main Challenges

Gender Equality

Care responsibilities kept **7.7 million women** out of the labour market, compared to 450,000 men

14% of households have unmet childcare needs

8% of careworkers are particularly vulnerable (migrant women carrying out undeclared work)

Care

Access to long-term care is limited due to **lack of availability, limited social protection, insufficient quality** or **lack of awareness** about the options available.

People in need of long-term care are expected to increase from **30.8 million** in 2019 to **38.1 million** in 2050

Coming from **disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds** is often a barrier to accessing quality care.

Working Conditions

The **COVID-19 pandemic** highlighted **structural weaknesses** of care systems and put more pressure on **overworked and under-equipped workers**.

1 in 4 careworkers is a migrant
The share of undeclared work was estimated to be **36%**

Labour shortages caused by difficult working conditions and low wages **are expected to worsen in the future**, compounded by an ageing population and thus, an ageing workforce.



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The Goals

A greater realisation of women's labour market potential. EU action to foster the 'equal earner – equal carer model' (an approach based on men and women being equally involved in both paid labour and unpaid care work) could support women in transitioning from unemployment to employment, and from part-time to full-time employment. The European Care Strategy should enable women to participate in the formal care sector, be financially independent, and enjoy equal and fair social protection.

More affordable and quality care. Reducing unmet needs could also boost autonomy and independence for the elderly and children's cognitive development. As noted by MEPs, an extensive body of research shows the cognitive benefits of institutional childcare, which can lead to a potential for higher earnings in adulthood. The European Care Strategy aims at making care accessible for all citizens, throughout life, and to raise awareness on the types of care available to those needing it.

More and better jobs in the care sector. EU action to modernise and regulate the care sector could generate jobs to better address unmet needs, particularly for childcare and long-term care. Moreover, this action could reduce the prevalence of undeclared work and exploitation and abuse of workers, thus improving the quality of service provision. Better training of care staff, as well as higher wages, would contribute to attracting more workers in the care sector.

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The Actions

Early childhood education and care

The proposal for a Council Recommendation will revise the Barcelona Targets and propose measures for the affordability, accessibility, and quality of non-segregated and inclusive early childhood education and care.

Long-term care

The proposal for a Council Recommendation on long-term care will aim to put in place a framework for policy reforms to steer the development of sustainable long-term care that ensures better and more affordable access to quality services.

“**The European care strategy is the first step towards a Care Deal that guarantees the right to quality care. This calls for a well-trained, adequately paid workforce, decent working conditions, as well as support for informal carers. The Commission has a strong ally in us for legislative action and investment into a gender-transformative care economy that recognises care as the backbone of our society.**”
Co-Rapporteur Milan Brglez, S&D, Slovenia

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Stakeholder Reactions

The Strategy has been widely welcomed by social organisations as well as trade unions. Many stakeholders have described the European Care Strategy as a **key initiative** that could respond to the challenges of ageing and rising care needs.

The European Social Network highlighted that the strategy should be based on community, home, and family-based care throughout people's lives. It should also be people-centred and rights-based, promoting quality of life in an integrated manner, involving the individual in every stage of their care.



AGE Platform Europe highlighted the need for a rights-based approach, focused on letting people choose the type of care they wish to receive. They also pinpointed the need for public policies to be more inclusive in order to allow everyone proper access to care.



UNI Europa urged the European Commission to reflect the European Parliament's resolution "A common European Action on Care" in the strategy.



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