

Advancing towards a care society: addressing the gender care gap

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The European Parliament adopted by 263 votes to 83, with 154 abstentions, a resolution on advancing towards a care society: addressing the gender care gap.

Care in numbers

Parliament highlighted that around **6.2 million people in the EU** are employed as formal care workers, while more than 53 million people provide informal, often unpaid, care work within their social environment, such as for sick or elderly family members, or family members with disabilities. Informal care accounts for between 30 % to 85 % of all care work. Formal care work is often unrecognised, characterised by precarious working conditions, and physical and emotional strain, with wages 21 % below the average in long-term care and other social services, with women earning on average 20 % less than men. Around 60 % of informal care work is carried out by women.

Women represent 76 % of the 49 million formal care workers in the EU. The estimated number of undeclared workers in the personal and household services sector is 9.2 million people.

Parliament noted the importance of recognising and developing the personal and household services sector as key sector, while indicating that inadequate care systems are among the main obstacles to reducing gender inequalities in labour markets worldwide.

The resolution emphasised the need to:

- **address working conditions** in order to make full-time employment compatible with family responsibilities, and to promote a working environment that recommends paternity leave in order to encourage an equitable distribution of care tasks between couples;
- **close the gender employment gap** by combating discrimination in this area and simultaneously addressing cultural barriers and the traditional roles assigned to women and men in different areas of life.

Parliament stressed that by 2070, almost 30 % of the EU population will be aged 65 or over, which, together with other factors such as higher life expectancy and the growing care needs of persons with disabilities, may lead to higher demand for care services that put significant pressure on health and welfare systems.

Way forward

Parliament has formulated a series of recommendations to improve care policy (children, the elderly, disabled people) and better support caregivers, especially women, who still bear the majority of family responsibilities:

- to provide, together with the relevant agencies, **accurate, accessible and comparable data** measuring the gender gap in terms of taking on family responsibilities;

- systematically collect **gender-specific data** on long-term care and childcare responsibilities, income, pensions, working time, social protection coverage, contractual status of professional carers in the EU and the situation of third-country nationals and children providing care;
- collect data on the situation of **young carers**, to establish a structured dialogue on care and to set up an annual platform on this subject;
- apply **gender-sensitive budgeting** to ensure that spending on care services directly reduces inequalities faced by women and girls;
- **invest in a care economy** and implement the Council recommendations on the revision of the Barcelona targets concerning early childhood education and care services and on access to affordable and quality long-term care under the EU care strategy;
- implement strategies aimed at encouraging **greater participation of men in the care sector**, and at combating undeclared care work;
- ensure that the care provided to **disabled persons** promotes their autonomy, inclusion and access to employment, while supporting caregivers and families who provide long-term care to disabled children by guaranteeing them adequate financial support;
- fully implement the directive on work-life balance: it is necessary to progress towards adequately compensated **maternity, paternity and carer's leave** and to extend them, as well as to facilitate taking parental leave;
- **protect informal carers**, who are mostly women, including those interrupting their professional careers to provide care for a family member or any other person in need of assistance;
- introduce a **comprehensive gender-sensitive framework** to identify and recognise the different forms of informal care across Europe as part of the upcoming European care strategy;
- recognise unpaid carers by guaranteeing their **access to social protection** and investing in **affordable childcare and care services** for the elderly and disabled, as well as promoting equal participation of men in care tasks;
- ensure that periods spent providing informal care are taken into account fairly in **pension and social security systems**;
- **improve working conditions** in the formal care sector (guarantee of fair and equal remuneration, access to continued training, measures to prevent burnout and all forms of violence and harassment at work);
- invest more in **quality vocational training** and better recognise the skills acquired in the provision of formal and informal care (establish a certification process or other cross-border recognition mechanism for qualifications).

Lastly, Parliament called for the creation of a **European carers' status** and the development of a **European action plan** that contributes to closing the gender care gap and to supporting both formal and informal carers.