



## Position Paper

### On employment, recruitment and retention in European social services

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#### 1. Context

The European Pillar of Social Rights, proclaimed in November 2017, highlights the need of social services to face European citizens' social needs.

According to the last employment report, accompanying the European Commission's Annual Growth Survey 2019, strong job creation continues, with employment reaching a record level in the European Union (EU). In the second quarter of 2018, 239 million persons were in employment in the EU.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless:

- The risk of poverty or social exclusion remains a challenge particularly for children, people with disabilities and people with a migrant background. It must be noticed that these risks also concern people in employment.
- Even though the participation of women in the labour market continues to grow at a fast pace (the employment rate of women stood at 66.5% in 2017, almost 5 pts higher than in 2008), gaps in employment tend to be wider for women with caring responsibilities. Unequal access to quality and affordable childcare and long-term care services contributes to the negative effect of parenthood on the employment of women.
- A number of Member States are taking action to provide affordable and equal access to quality childcare and long-term care services, but important challenges remain.
- Demographic change and rising life expectancy present healthcare and long-term care systems with a clear need to adapt. The demand for long-term care and healthcare is growing and the needs are changing as populations age. Over the next five decades, the number of Europeans aged 80+ is set to double. The provision of formal accessible, high-quality and sustainable long-term care services remains a challenge in several Member States.
- Long-term care sustainability will also be challenging for those Member States which now rely heavily on informal care. The pool of informal carers is shrinking due to changing family patterns (fewer children, family members living further apart), with increasing female employment and the increase in the retirement age. Informal care also entails important costs for the economy, as informal carers reduce or leave formal employment, and thus pay little or nothing in taxes and contributions. There are also challenges in recruiting and retaining carers.

<sup>1</sup> See 2018 European Semester: Draft Joint Employment Report.

- A lack of monitoring of formal and informal care provision can lead to an increasing risk of abuse of persons in a state of weakness and dependence.

All these challenges create needs in term of care, which means the sector has to strengthen its workforce and to retain the one working for it. The Federation of European Social Employers recognises job creation, recruitment and retention in social services as issues that require immediate and urgent responses. With population ageing and changing family patterns, ensuring sufficient and well-trained social services staff is of high priority for the wellbeing of the EU's population. The Social Employers also recognises that different social and regional contexts require different policies and interventions.

For the purpose of this paper, the following definitions of recruitment and retention are used:

- **Recruitment:** The demonstrated capacity to attract the professionals with the required skills and qualifications to occupy defined positions in social services.
- **Retention:** The capacity to maintain social services staff in the sector, limiting unjustified (“voluntary”) losses to other organisations, sectors or geographical areas, within and out of the country.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. State of Play

The social services sector is one of Europe's biggest job creators. It directly employs over 10 million staff in Europe and has created over 1.7 million jobs since 2008. Together with health services, social services represent 7% of the total economic output in the EU.<sup>3</sup> With changing demographics and family patterns, the social services sector is one of the fastest growing economic sectors and is expected to further grow significantly over the next few decades.

However, many issues are currently limiting the sector's job creation potential. Even if their usefulness is recognized, the social services professions suffer from a bad image. They are considered as poorly paid, often exercised part-time and with constraining work shifts. Working in care is often considered a “woman's career” which is in fact confirmed, at least for direct services to people, where women make up almost 80% of all employment.

On the other hand, their diversity and technicality are little known to the general public.

It is therefore not surprising that social services are experiencing problems of attractiveness, especially in the states of the Union which are in full employment. This issue of attractiveness also questions the scope and modalities of the recruitment of social workers.

Even with regard to staff hired, organisations delivering social services are experiencing significant difficulties in maintaining their workforce, as a result of financial endowments that often only allow short term and part time contracts, a strong turn-over or working and career conditions that do not incite to work in social services in the long run.

In cases that are too frequent, the work in social services professions is the cause of health problems that call into question the physical or mental health necessary to take up or keep a job.

<sup>2</sup> European Commission: Recruitment and Retention of the Health Workforce in Europe, Final Report, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> European Commission: EU Employment and Social Situation – Quarterly Review. Supplement December 2014.

### 3. Which trails of solutions?

**In an obvious way, social services cannot provide affordable, accessible and quality support to vulnerable people unless they are provided with sufficient funding.**

That being said, the creation of employment, the recruitment and the retention of social workers require a holistic approach, including aspects of communication, human resources, recruitment methods, life at work, career paths and anticipating new issues.

#### 3.1 Communication – Public image of the sector

The sector and its professions should be better known by the general public. It is up to the professional organisations but also the actors in the field to communicate very broadly on the social professions and their diversity. It is also important to communicate that work in social services offers positive career paths for both men and women.

Launching of information and promotional campaigns that make social services more visible to the general public and targeting all talent available is an important approach to recruiting a workforce diverse in abilities, gender, age, culture, ethnic background and sexual orientation. For example, the participation in employment forums, as soon as young people begin their first reflection on their career orientation, is relevant and should be reinforced.

Changing the public image of social services work can help boost a trend among workforce (also among those who are looking for a career change) to work in sectors that reflect not only their professional ambitions, but also their values and goals. This is part of a wider change in society where the goal of a large income is replaced by the goal of gaining fulfilment through work.

#### 3.2 Human Resources Management

Affordable, accessible and quality support cannot be provided without an organisation's governance that takes the right measure of human resources issues into consideration.

This awareness of human resources issues must be found in the existence and practical implementation of a comprehensive human resources policy, discussed with employees' representatives.

This awareness of the issues and the implementation of human resources policies concerns all levels of the hierarchy. All managers must be trained and informed of the policy to be implemented. This policy must include the improvement of the gender gap between women and men at all levels of hierarchy. This means that access to equal career paths is guaranteed, where managerial roles in social services are taken up by people with different genders, ages, cultural and ethnic backgrounds and sexual orientation.

The necessity of developing a customized concept for volunteer work in long term care should not be underestimated.

#### 3.3 Recruitment

Recruitment must be professionalised and avoid discrimination, a priori and stereotype. Thus, a competency-based approach to make recruitment objective and based on only necessary skills that have been identified and prioritised must be privileged. In the same vein, job interviews should be structured so that the same questions, previously considered, are asked to each candidate.

Job offers must be disseminated through multiple networks to diversify recruitment, new technologies can help reach a broader audience. The title of the offers must be of a neutral kind and not imply that the jobs are reserved for one gender or another.

About jobs concerned by labour shortage, a dedicated investment in vocational training must be considered in order to acquire skills and competencies needed after hiring.

We must develop the mobility of employees between Member States, but in a smart, fair and ethical way.

This includes:

1. allowing people to work and live where they want;
2. limiting the brain drain hindering the development of social services in some countries, and causing some employers to turn to third countries in order to fill their demand;
3. being fairer to those who actually train the staff;
4. managing and regulating agency work in a way that is fair to the workers, service providers and end users;
5. finding ways to counteract undeclared work.

Another need is the development of strategies and incentives to guarantee sufficient care provision in underserved and rural areas.

### **3.4 Working life**

A holistic approach to human resources, a quality-of-support factor, must aim at the wellbeing of employees at work. Fostering a positive organisational climate is an important retention factor. Employees working in a good work environment are less likely to be exposed to occupational risks, such as accidents, occupational diseases (especially musculoskeletal disorders) and emotional exhaustion. A holistic approach also leads to the development of work schedules that reconcile care needs and employees' needs. Reconciling professional and private life by minimizing the impact of work on health is, of course, not confined to these aspects alone. The development of a good Social Dialogue is also key to foster good working conditions.

Providing good working tools, such as information and communication technologies and training opportunities also contributes to the quality of life at work.

### **3.5 Career paths**

Employers and employees must be involved in the professional career paths of the latter. Career path may refer to salary, hierarchical position, level of responsibility, work-life balance arrangements or professional specialisation.

A predictive approach to skills, which goes through forecasts of employment and evolution of their content, a regular dialogue between manager and collaborator to talk about the position, the needs of training and skills as well as the perspectives of career path is fundamental.

It is important that staff acquire qualifications and develop their skills to enable them to have an evolving career. Offering (time for) Continuous Professional Development (CPD) to the sector's workforce is an important mechanism for career progression. In this context, the possibility to acquire additional diplomas through vocational training, especially when there is lack of initial training, strongly contributes to securing a career path in the sector. Career

development needs to be done in a balanced way for women and men to make sure both have the same privileges in the career paths and take the necessary measures for it.

Re-skilling opportunities for a life-long career in the sector are another important means that can help to avoid career re-orientation, early retirement or emigration.

The career path is also influenced by the length of work and, in particular, by part-time work, which can be positive when chosen, but has negative impacts on careers and pensions.

### 3.6 New Issues

Social services are experiencing new issues:

- **Ageing of the population:** The ageing of the general population and of the population accompanied by social services, generates beyond the need for more staff, new accompanying needs which may require adaptations of professionals in terms of skills and new constraints in particular of physical nature.
- **Ageing of workforce:** The ageing of the population, combined with the retreat of the retirement age in a large part of the European countries, also raises new challenges in terms of maintaining the employment of professionals who are advancing in age, whether this maintenance is done within the organisation or outside.
- **Deinstitutionalisation:** The social professions should also evolve under the influence of the Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities (CRPD), in the sense of an inclusive approach to services, more focused on the person, not in the institution but in the society, which requires adaptations and new skills.
- **Digitalisation:** Digital technologies and working methods are changing the way in which social services are coordinated and delivered, a development which should be monitored and anticipated. With regard to the use of robotics in care, there is a need to 1. identify a European approach on robotics in care - staff assisting versus staff replacing and 2. to monitor ethical implications of the use of robotics in care.
- **Ethical issues:** rise of intercultural and ethical dilemmas due to cultural diversity (of staff and patients), multiple pathologies, medical progress etc. call for an investment in intercultural and ethical skills and competences. These are needed in order to ensure professionals staying in the field. The impact can be measured in terms of personal fulfilment, personal resilience – mental health, team work atmosphere, public reputation of care.
- **Research:** In order to fill the existing knowledge gaps on recruitment and retention in social services, gathering reliable data is a first crucial step for starting effective activities.

**The actors best able to meet all these challenges, for the benefit of both employees and employers, are the social partners, at all levels, in the context of a regular social dialogue.**

A constructive dialogue between the social partners is crucial to steer developments in recruitment and retention in social services into a sustainable direction. Maintaining and expanding information, consultation and participation rights of social partners in social services can help to ensure high quality jobs and service provision in the sector.

The European Union can be instrumental in encouraging and supporting such dialogue by providing funding for related social partner projects and joint initiatives.

## Annex

### Practical examples

#### Public campaigns on recruitment of workforce

##### France

The French Alisfa branch has launched, with its partners, a campaign aiming to attract new profiles to the social services sector, by presenting the branch, possible career paths and testimonials from male childcare workers. It comprises a Facebook page, a YouTube channel and a website.

<http://socialemmployers.eu/en/news/french-campaign-encourages-men-to-choose-career-in-childcare/>

##### The Netherlands

A similar public campaign was launched in the Netherlands in 2018. In the “Ik Zorg” campaign, more than 600 people with diverse professions and training courses show how versatile work in care is. “Ik Zorg” is a collaboration between the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS), sector and professional associations and employee and employer organisations in the Dutch care and welfare sector.

<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/actueel/nieuws/2018/11/01/publiekscampagne-ik-zorg-van-start>

##### Czech Republic

The “study and become a nurse”-campaign is a media campaign run by employers and professional association as well as educators in health and social care. The aim of the campaign is threefold: to retain personnel already working in the field, to bring nurses and healthcare assistants back into the sector that left the field, and to increase the number of people studying to become a nurse or healthcare assistant. It seeks to increase the prestige and attractiveness of the profession and thus the number of future graduates and to show the potential of career growth (both in education and in the profession itself).

<http://www.studujzdravku.cz/>

### Examples from Collective Agreements

#### A concept of quality of life at work developed by French social partners

The concept of quality of life at work has been negotiated in France and the social partners have given it a definition: it "designates and groups under the same title the actions that reconcile both the improvement of the working conditions for the employees and the overall performance of enterprises, especially when their organisations are transformed "; It "can be conceived as a sense of well-being at work perceived collectively and individually that encompasses the ambiance, the culture of the business, the interest of work, the working conditions, the sense of involvement, the degree of autonomy and accountability, equality, a right to error given to everyone, recognition and appreciation of the work done. »

Negotiations on this topic, between social partners, at company level has become mandatory by law since January 1, 2016.

**Do you have any practical examples on recruitment and retention strategies from your local context that you would like to share with us? Please do not hesitate to do so!**

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