



## Lares' Interview with Gregor Tomschizek, President of the Social Employers

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### 1. One of the main objectives of the Social Employers is to achieve quality social services across Europe. What are the main shortcomings in the sector?

The social services sector is one of the biggest job creators in Europe. Over 10 million staff are directly employed in the sector, with at least 2 million jobs created over the last 10 years. Simply put, it is one of Europe's biggest growing sectors today. With changing demographics and family patterns, the social services sector is expected to grow significantly over the next few decades. Yet, there are some factors that hinder the growth we need. One of the main challenges today are staff shortages. Looking at our workforce, we see that there is a significant gender gap in the sector, where women make up almost 80% of all employment. In addition, the share of workers aged 50 or older will continue to grow in the next decades. We need to find solutions that respond to those trends. How can we attract more younger workers and men to work in the sector? How can we adequately support an ageing workforce? And of course, social services cannot provide affordable, accessible and quality support to vulnerable people unless they are provided with proper funding. To face these challenges, we need to develop new strategies, innovative services and partnerships. Through the Social Employers, we have the chance to bring our membership together, share our expertise and learn from each other. We also engage with Trade Unions at EU level to provide a space for discussions outside of the sometimes difficult national exchanges. As a European organisation, we are also in direct contact with the European Institutions to lobby for our positions and make our voice heard.

### 2. As a benchmark entity in the third sector in the area of dependence, we call on the Administration to support greater economic contribution to the dependency system. Are these types of demands common in different European countries?

In short, yes. Social service providers across Europe nearly all rely on public investment; irrespective of their nature: not-for-profit, private or public. Whereas the investment levels and funding models vary across countries and regions, the economic crisis and the consequent

austerity had a big impact in most if not all EU Member States. This, of course, has consequences: it is harder and harder to attract and retain qualified workers throughout Europe and innovation in quality service provision is hindered. Put alongside the increase in demand for such services, this is not a very sustainable situation; neither for the service beneficiaries, the providers and their staff, nor for society as whole. A re-think is needed across Europe, not only in Spain.

### **3. What is the weight of GDP in social services linked to care for elderly people or in a situation of dependence at European level? And in the case of Spain?**

As is the case in most EU Member States, there is still a lack of data on the economic contribution of social services. What does exist is the weight in GDP of the health and social services sector together; which is around 7-8% of the EU GDP. The health and social services workforce is around 10-11% of the EU workforce; with big differences across country.

The Social Services sector itself employs well over 10 million staff in Europe, with 2 million new jobs created in the last decade. Simply put, the social services sector -which includes care for the elderly- is one of Europe's biggest job creators.

### **4. Lares, with almost 35.000 workers throughout Spain, defends an improvement in working conditions of the sector to make it more attractive. Why are there so many problems for recruiting professionals and for them to stay in the entities?**

It is true that despite the increase in demand in social services, many service providers report difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff. This is due to many different factors, such as cuts to public expenditure in social services, the public notion that working in care offers only few career opportunities and the lack of recognition given to the sector. This has led to some challenges, such as the rise in undeclared work and strong gender imbalances in the workforce.

With the help of Lares, the Social Employers have worked extensively on recruitment and retention in social services and have developed a Position Paper that outlines the state of play and possible solutions to the challenges we face as employers. We think that a first step has to be the improvement of the image of the sector. It is important to communicate very broadly on the social service professions, their diversity and possible career paths. Some of our members, for example in the Netherlands, in France and the Czech Republic, are involved in very promising recruitment campaigns, that tackle common stereotypes of the sector.

Regarding staff retention, it is important that staff acquire qualifications and can develop their skills for career progression. Re-skilling opportunities for a life-long career in the sector are another important means that can help to avoid career re-orientation and early retirement.

To foster good working conditions and meet the previously mentioned challenges, cooperation between social partners and a well-functioning social dialogue at all levels are also key.

### **5. What are the advantages of the growing digitalization of the sector? Do you think that the incorporation of new technologies loses warmth in care?**

Digital technologies can have a wide variety of advantages for the social services sector. There is a big potential to improve old and create new services, better responding to the needs of service

beneficiaries. Regarding benefits for staff: Technology can enable care and support professionals to work seamlessly from multiple locations and in multi-disciplinary teams, optimising work processes. Offering a workplace with modern, up-to-date equipment can also increase the employer's attractiveness, in particular for young professionals. For us as employers, Digitalisation can also help with recruitment processes, for example by using online portals that help us get in touch with the right target groups.

Despite all of this, digital technologies are still often misunderstood and underused by the different actors involved. This is because social services are by definition person-focused services. Despite digital developments, it is important to note that social contact and human relationships in the provision of services are and will remain a fundamental dimension of the social services sector. To answer your second question, I think if digital technologies are used in the right way, they can make administrative procedures quicker and reduce the physical strain of care work, therefore leaving more time for what really counts for care workers: the human interaction.

## **6. On the horizon of 2030, Europe faces important socio-economic challenges such as ageing population, demographic change or increased poverty and social exclusion What actions should the European Union take about this?**

That's a very big question! I'll start by talking about competences. Most of the challenges you refer to are now generally considered to be the responsibility of national -or even regional authorities: social policy or education policies; for instance. Unless there is a quite radical shift in mindsets, most of these challenges will therefore probably have to find solutions at national level, suited to the local context and culture.

This being said, there is quite a few actions the EU already takes to help Member States find the right responses to these challenges; including via the EU budget or regular discussions between relevant ministries on specific social economic issues.

European Social Dialogue – between Employers and Trade Unions- can also help social partners across Europe find common solutions to their challenges; which is a big part of what the Social Employers is trying to do.

The EU also agreed last year to the European Pillar of Social Rights, a set of principles which will act as a compass to help guide authorities in the development of policies affecting social rights. This can lead to European legislation such as the recently agreed Work-Life Balance package; which includes minimum standards for leave arrangements, flexible work requests, etc.

Specifically in the field of long-term care, the Social Employers is currently taking part in a series of expert workshops organised by the European Commission to provide fresh ideas and suggestions for the next European Commission. I believe there is a growing understanding that more should be done at European level to respond to the challenge of an ageing society.

But of course, the European Commission are not the legislators. They propose but cannot decide on European policies. This is up to the Member States and the European Parliament. So, if you want the EU to act more (or less) on these issues, don't forget to vote in the next European elections in May. The outcome of these elections will play a very important role in how the European Union deals with the social challenges in Europe over the next decade.

## **7. At Lares, we defend a radical change in the model of public procurement. What opportunities does the model of Social Concept open in Europe?**

The European Commission has quite a clear position on public procurement for social services. Firstly, public authorities can choose how they wish to organise their social services; with public procurement being one option among several (licensing model, personal budgets, etc). Secondly, the EU 2014 directive on public procurement calls for “increased flexibility and expanded possibilities to take into account social considerations in public tenders”. Thirdly, the European Commission continues to “advocate for increased and effective use of quality criteria” in public procurement. For instance, they will soon be publishing a Guide for “Socially Responsible Public Procurement” to help local authorities use these social considerations.

In other words, the European Commission Public Procurement directive allows for quite a bit of flexibility in how it is used at national level, especially for social services. This flexibility however has not always been fully transposed into national law.

### **8. Since 2018, Lares is part of Social Employers. How can an entity like Lares help make improvements in the employment sector?**

First of all, we are extremely glad to have Lares in our membership, both for their strong reputation in Spain and their commitment towards building a stronger voice for the sector at EU level.

In return, the Social Employers give a voice to Lares in Brussels and therefore the opportunity to lobby and to be kept informed on EU developments in fields such as funding programmes, labour law, social policies, legal frameworks, fiscal policies and much more. As such, Lares’ interests will be at the forefront of the EU policy-making process and have a seat at the right tables.

Secondly, the Social Employers is an opportunity to engage with other Employers from across Europe, to learn from one another, to develop partnerships and to find common solutions to the challenges which affect us. European Social Dialogue will also be the opportunity to engage with Trade Union representatives on a different level, looking at issues from a broader European perspective, rather than the nitty gritty of national social dialogue.

And last but not least, the Social Employers has just created an Observatory which will bring together data, research, practices related to workforce developments, funding and innovation in the field of social services from across Europe. This will help our work at EU level. It will also give more cross-country evidence and resources to Lares and their members for their activities at national, regional and local level

