

Thematic Seminar “How to manage diversity and mobility of the workforce in more attractive social services”

27 February 2020, Brussels (Belgium)

Summary report

The Thematic Seminar "How to manage diversity and mobility of the workforce in more attractive social services" offered an opportunity to discuss and exchange experiences on how to build diversity in the workplace, especially regarding gender and age, and on how to handle mobility and migration, ensuring ethical recruitment across borders.

The key learnings and take aways from the Thematic Seminar, reflecting the different points of views of employees' and employers' representatives, albeit not always consensual, are summarised below:

- The **forecast of skills demand and supply** is an essential tool to understand what will happen in the labour market in the future. CEDEFOP's Skills Forecast¹ shows that the **social sector is expected to grow by 18.5%** and will represent 4.9% of total employment by 2030. In this context, the three most common occupations in the sector will be personal care workers (20.5%), health professionals (19%) and health associate professionals (18%).
- Despite the growing demand, the **lack of attractiveness of the sector** currently leads to a shrinking workforce. The main reasons for this can be identified in the generally low level of salaries, emotionally and physically demanding working conditions and flexible working hours (e.g. work on the weekend, atypical working hours, etc.). The unattractiveness of the sector is reflected in education choices (i.e. young people tend not to choose education and training that lead to a career in the social sector), in the difficulties to recruit new staff, and thus on the availability of skilled and trained employees. The sector is subject to a **high turnover rate** (e.g. in some countries, trained people tend to leave the sector after around two years) and difficulties related to the retention of staff, especially employees that are over 50 years old, part of them leaving because of vocational health issues.
- The social services sector **lacks gender balance**, with a striking majority of women in the workforce, and men rather occupying managing positions. As sectors with more women are generally marked by more precarity, lower wages and more part-time work, some participants argued that better gender balance would contribute to fairer wages and better working conditions, thus enhancing the attractiveness of the sector.²
- Possible solutions to deal with an **ageing workforce** could be the availability of

¹ <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/data-visualisations/skills-forecast>

² https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/equal-pay/causes-unequal-pay-between-men-and-women_en

certain benefits (e.g. extra leaves, less or no night shifts) and advantageous retirement policies, the improvement and adaptation of the professional equipment and the allocation of alternative roles, such as training new employees. Long-life learning and continuous professional development would also be a useful approach to keep employees engaged and to update their skills.

- The inclusion of **persons with disabilities** in the workforce can be improved by setting up different and tailor-made working conditions (e.g. supported employment) and through the use of specific technical equipment that facilitates the completion of the tasks.
- As Europe lacks 2.3 million carers³, migration can be one opportunity to fill this gap. Moreover, migrants can also enrich workplaces providing new professional approaches and inputs. However, the **inclusion of migrants** in the labour market can be challenging due to language barriers, problems related to the recognition of professional degrees, qualifications and skills and the lack of a solid and comprehensive policy framework (especially for migrants coming from outside the EU). The main focus should be on workers that are already in the country and could undergo a specific training. The approach should be holistic and accompanied by measures of social, cultural and linguistic inclusion, encompassing individual follow-up and professional mentoring. Local authorities and social partners should also cooperate to provide support to migrant workers for access to housing, childcare and other public services. Specific professional and vocational training should also be foreseen. In addition, successful inclusion programmes will contribute to workforce retention.
- While workers tend to move towards countries with better wages and working conditions, sender countries are experiencing a serious **care drain**. In addition to emigration, the public investment in training and education of workers is 'exported' as well, generating a financial loss for the respective country. The improvement of salaries and working conditions in sender countries, for instance through collective bargaining, can contribute to improve the level of retention of social workers.

The key recommendations from the participants of the Thematic Seminar, both employers' and employees' representatives, are summarised below.

At National level:

- **Collective bargaining and social dialogue** are crucial elements at all levels: local, sectoral, national and European. Well-functioning collective bargaining is essential to guarantee adequate salaries and working conditions that can help to attract and retain the workforce across EU Member States.
- Member States should **increase the budget allocation for social services**, thus improving the working conditions of care work, as well as maintaining/improving safe staffing levels. Also, increasing the investment in education and vocational training would contribute to a more skilled workforce, adapting to new user needs.

³ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---soc_sec/documents/publication/wcms_407620.pdf

- **Communication and campaigning activities** should be carried out to provide a more positive picture of social work. This can include showing the social relevance of the sector and the possibilities offered by care work for women as well as for men, sharing positive news, privileging communication channels used by the younger generation, etc. These campaigns could be organised by social partners in collaboration with public authorities.
- In the framework of national, sectoral or company-level collective bargaining, social partners should develop **innovative working time models** that better respond to both employees' and employers' needs and expectations.
- The formulation of employment and migration policies should be closely interlinked. Speeding up the **legalisation process** for migrants with adequate qualifications, providing specific assistance and removing legal barriers for those who are already in the country would allow a faster integration in the labour market.

At European level:

- More attention should be paid to gather **knowledge and data** on the sector and its workforce. Evidences and statistics from the Member States should be used as a basis to develop policies to promote diversity in the workplace.
- EU funds should be used for **innovative solutions and projects** promoting and improving diversity in the workplace. The exchange of good practices and mutual learning should also be a priority.
- The organisation of an **EU-wide campaign**, carried out jointly by the EU Social Partners and the European Commission, to promote the sector and its career opportunities for women and men, would help to face current challenges such as ageing by boosting the recruitment of sufficient staff. A possibility could also be the establishment of information points across Europe.
- The EU should take measures related to **gender balance** in the social services sector by addressing gender segregation, pressuring Member States to implement the European Commission Recommendation on strengthening the principle of equal pay between men and women through transparency⁴ and adopt effective equality policies. The role of social services in promoting **gender equality and work-life balance** may also be highlighted (see EIGE Gender Equality Index 2019 - Work life balance⁵).
- It is important also to use the European Semester process to further foster the implementation of the **European Pillar of Social Rights** at Member State level, and in particular the principles linked to gender equality, equal opportunities and work-life balance.
- The adoption of EU-wide **common definitions and a more coherent job classification** would ease the process of recognising qualifications and skills and

⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32014H0124>

⁵ <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-index-2019-work-life-balance>

prevent care workers with diplomas and qualifications from abroad to work in a position below their level of training.

- More dissemination actions should be taken for raise awareness on the activities of the **EU Platform of Diversity Charters**⁶. The new European Labour Authority could also play a role in the implementation of a code of ethics concerning professional migration.
- A strong and adequately funded policy could be introduced to **compensate sending countries** for the cost incurred through education and training of social care professionals, as a way to mitigate care drain and empower these countries to better train and pay staff in the social sector in view of retention.
- A better **coordination of the social security systems** across Europe (e.g. unemployment, retirement, etc.) would allow a more fluid mobility of the workforce.

⁶https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/tackling-discrimination/diversity-management/eu-platform-diversity-charters_en