

## Feedback on the European Commission's green paper on ageing roadmap

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### Executive Summary

Social services enable older persons to live dignified lives within their communities. They also contribute to implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights, such as principle 18 on the right to affordable long-term care services. Services for older persons also allow higher labor market participation of women, who otherwise often take on the role of informal carers within their families.

Demographic change brings about many challenges for the social services sector. An ageing population means a growing need for care and support. Social care needs of older persons are often unmet due to a longstanding underfunding of the sector, underdeveloped services in some European countries and staff shortages due to low wages and poor working conditions.

Social services struggle to attract and retain their workforce because the above challenges also lead to a negative image of the sector in the general public.

Therefore, the forthcoming green paper on ageing should address the need for

- Sufficient funding to improve wages and working conditions,
- Recognition of the social services' key role in our societies,
- Development and use of innovation and digital technologies,
- More cooperation between the health and social care sectors,
- Social partner's cooperation and social dialogue at all levels, to improve working conditions, career paths, skills, gender balance, and make working in care more attractive.

## 1. Context

### Upcoming green paper on ageing

- The European Commission will publish in the first quarter of 2021 a green paper on ageing. This green paper on ageing is preceded by a roadmap, to which the Social Employers provide feedback to highlight the many challenges its members already face and that will become more and more evident in the near future.

## 2. Care needs

### Unmet care needs

- The share of older people in Europe will increase:
  - 65+: from 20.3 % in 2019 to 30.3% in 2070
  - 80+: from 5.8% in 2019 to 13.2 % in 2070
- A challenge: to be able to provide accessible, affordable and quality social care and support services for all
- Care needs are not always met: EU average of more than 50 % of 65 + are facing unmet needs with large disparities between countries<sup>1</sup>
- The obstacles vary a lot between countries, because the needs and nature of services vary a lot. Obstacles are often financial barriers or in certain countries an overall lack of availability of services<sup>1</sup>.

## 3. The impact of unmet care needs

### Human rights and the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR)

Unmet care needs mean that the rights of older persons are compromised, because they do not always get the care and support they need to live self-determined and dignified lives within their communities. The pandemic has worsened the situation.

Unmet care needs also challenge the implementation of principle 18 of the EPSR, which states that everyone has the right to affordable long-term care services of good quality, in particular home care and community-based services.

It also affects the economy, especially in a context where due to demographic change, the available workforce will shrink. In many countries, people have to provide informal care because of the lack of available services. This affects particularly women who stop working in their fifties to care for their own or their partner's parents (and sometimes, also for their grandchildren).

The availability of childcare services also has a positive effect on the participation of parents, especially women, in the labour market and may also, if availability of services is guaranteed, have positive effects on birth rates across Europe in the next years.

## 4. Workforce issues

### Underfunding for years has many consequences

- Since a long time, services for the older persons have been hindered by factors such as underfunding, which has many consequences for the workforce:
  - Low wages (particularly in homecare)
  - Work overload, linked to insufficient staff-user ratios, and health conditions
  - Part time work
  - Irregular working patterns
  - Fixed term contracts

<sup>1</sup> Source Eurostat EHS wave 2, 2014

The negative impacts of financial shortcomings are well documented e.g. by a forthcoming Eurofound report on LTC workforce, highlighting a poor “job quality indice”<sup>2</sup>.

At the same time, the social services workforce grows old with almost 35 % of the workforce being more than 50 years old (compared to 29,6 % in the whole economy). This workforce is also severely exposed to many occupational risks such as musculoskeletal disorders and psychological risks. Due to the physical and psychological strain, many workers believe they will not be able to keep working until their 60s. As a consequence, many workers are likely to leave the sector in the next years.

On the other side of the age pyramid, the number of young people following vocational training in social care is decreasing. As an example, in France the number of admissions in social work training institutions decreased from 32 225 in 2010 to 19 560 in 2017. This may be due to a poor image of the sector in the general public and will be one of the reasons leading to a staff shortage of 150/200 000 full time equivalents foreseen in 2030 in France.

This overall situation leads to increasing labour shortages in social services and particularly in elderly care. Especially since the Covid-19 crisis, more workers are in sick leave or leave the sector because they consider the risks level too high, and the compensation too low.

All of this makes it very clear that something must urgently be done.


## 5. How to be able to deliver accessible, affordable and quality services for all in the next years?

This question is the main issue for social services which already faced, since years, increasing needs with less financial resources. Now, services are additionally confronted with the pandemic and its many consequences. In the next years, providers will have to face an increase in needs, in terms of number of persons to support and care for, as well as new needs, in particular the growing move towards home care and community-based services.

That is why the Social Employers urge the European Commission in its forthcoming green paper on ageing to address some specific issues:

- The need for sufficient funding (EU, national and regional), understood as an investment and not a mere cost, to improve wages, staff availability, working conditions and updated skills to face increasing support needs of an aging population.
- The need to recognize the key role social services play in our societies and for upward convergence of social services at national level (the European Semester could play a key role)
- Capacity of Social Partners and Social Dialogue at all levels, in all EU countries, to work together on improving working conditions, career paths, skills, gender balance, etc. Improving Social Dialogue will also help make working in the sector more attractive.
- Capacity of social services to innovate, use and develop digital technologies to increase productivity of employers and staff and wellbeing of the services users.
- The reinforcement of the cooperation between the health and social care sectors (as highlighted during the pandemic), while respecting both sectors' specificities.

<sup>2</sup> Multifactor indicator from Eurofound to compare working conditions.



The Federation of European Social Employers represents the voice of employers in the field of social services at European level. The Social Employers understand social services to comprise all care and support services, especially for older persons, persons with disabilities, children, and other excluded or disadvantaged persons.

The Federation's objectives are to strengthen the position of employers in social services at European and national level, establish common positions between members, and negotiate with European Trade Union Associations, representing workers in social services. By doing so, the Social Employers contribute to quality service provision and quality jobs.