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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council

Subject: Europea CARE Strategy
- *Policy Debate*

Delegations will find attached the Presidency steering note on the above subject, with a view to the EPSCO Council on 8 December 2022.

European Care Strategy

INTRODUCTION

The European Care Strategy presented by the Commission sets an agenda to improve the situation for both carers and care receivers. It calls for boosting access to quality, affordable and accessible care services and increasing participation of women in the labour market, as well as improving working conditions and work-life balance for carers, thus contributing to the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. The Care Strategy aims to address the structural challenges in the care sector responding to calls from various stakeholders at EU and national level.

For many people, care services are still not affordable, available or accessible. Many parents are not able to enrol their children in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) because the services are not available or are too expensive, and others refrain from enrolment because of the poor quality of services. Care responsibilities for children do not stop when they enter primary school. Affordable and quality out-of-school care also plays an important role both for children and for parents.

Similarly, older persons and persons with long-term care needs or who require help with household activities are experiencing difficulties in accessing personal care services and other assistance either due to the lack of availability of such services or for financial reasons. Rural and remote areas and regions with a low population density are particularly affected by the lack or shortage of available care services. When it comes to residential care, the number of long-term residential care places varies significantly across Member States.

Through the *Council Recommendation on early childhood education and care: the Barcelona targets for 2030* Member States are invited to increase the availability of early childhood education and care services by 2030. Member States are invited to take measures to improve the quality, accessibility and affordability of inclusive early childhood education and care for all children and to improve the working conditions for staff, while also taking measures to improve work-life balance for parents and to close the gender care gap.

The *2021 Long-Term Care Report*¹ of the Social Protection Committee and the Commission highlights the fact that the demand for high-quality long-term care is set to rise and that increasing its provision can contribute to gender equality and social fairness. Therefore, care services should be expanded to meet current and future needs for care. Increasing the availability of care services needs to go hand in hand with improving their quality, affordability, and accessibility.

Through the *Council Recommendation on access to affordable high-quality long-term care* Member States are invited to take a number of actions with view to ensuring adequacy, availability and affordability of high quality long-term care services. Member States are invited to support quality employment and fair working conditions in the care sector. They are also invited to identify informal carers and support them in caregiving activities.

¹ European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion and the Social Protection Committee, [*Long-term care report: trends, challenges and opportunities in an ageing society*](#). Publications Office, 2021.

MAKING THE CARE SECTOR MORE RESILIENT AND ATTRACTIVE, AND TACKLING CARE-RELATED GENDER INEQUALITIES

The care sector has a high potential to create jobs, driven in particular by the rising demand for long-term care due to population ageing. However, labour shortages in the EU are increasingly prominent in this sector. Women make up 90% of the care workforce, often in low paid, precarious jobs. Care work is often undervalued and working conditions are difficult. Care workers are regularly exposed to physical and psychological health risks. Care workers often lack prospects for career progression and training.

The need to provide care also has consequences for informal carers, including negative effects on their work-life balance, income and mental health. Informal care responsibilities do not only predominantly fall on women but women are also most likely to have to adapt their working patterns to care responsibilities. In 2021, in the Labour Force Survey , 27.9% of women outside the labour force indicated that looking after children or adults in need of care was their main reason for not seeking employment, compared to only 8.0% of men. The employment rate for people with children below six years of age was 90.1% for men compared to 67.2% for women. This has a lasting impact on women's careers and contributes to the gender pay gap and to the pension gap which, on EU-average, stand at 13% and 29% respectively. Moreover, due to demographic developments, an increasing number of women simultaneously take care of both their children and parents, facing a double-burden of care.

Better working conditions and wages, supported by strong social dialogue, education and training, will make care jobs more appealing and the workforce more gender-balanced, thereby increasing the attractiveness and resilience of the sector. The availability of high quality, accessible and affordable care services is essential for enabling people, in particular women, to combine work and care duties, and needs to be accompanied by policies to promote work-life balance of carers.

There is a need to increase investment. Public support for the care sector is a social investment, which, in parallel with action on sustainable financing, brings multiple returns for individuals, society and the economy. Increasing investment in care also has a positive impact on children's development and on the wellbeing and dignity of care recipients, and it contributes to social fairness, gender equality and equal opportunities for all.

Furthermore, Member States could consider supporting informal carers and recognising their roles through social and pension systems.

STEERING QUESTIONS

1. How will you pursue efforts to improve the availability, quality, accessibility and affordability of care services, from early childhood to long-term care, including in the current context of inflation, high energy prices and the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine?
2. How can employment and skills policies at Union and Member State level ensure that work in the care sector is better valued, jobs are sufficiently attractive, gender inequalities are reduced and the quality of care services is improved?