

Seven steps forward for our carers:

## POLICY PROPOSALS FOR AN EU CARERS' STRATEGY

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### Collection of quality data

A variety of care services exist across the EU, including childcare with early education, care services for older persons and that for persons with disabilities or chronic diseases. However, the provision of quality care varies greatly both within and between the Member States: between private and public settings, urban and rural areas, and different age groups. The collection of quality data on the provision of care is essential in order to fully assess the current situation and identify what areas could be improved both at country level and with EU support. Such data could feed into an EU wide study paving the way for a European Carers' Strategy and would be beneficial for all European citizens.

### Quality, accessible and affordable childcare

While Member States are responsible for early childhood education and care systems as well as the provision of long-term care, cooperation at a European level coupled with the efficient use of EU funds can contribute to the development of quality services.

The EPP Group supports the revision of the 'Barcelona targets' for the availability of high -quality, affordable childcare facilities for pre-school children, i.e. 90 percent of children from the age of three years until mandatory school age and 33pc of children under three years. In general, the Barcelona target has been reached for children under the age of 3 for the EU-28, covering 32.9pc of children in the EU, but there are significant differences among individual Member States. The target of 33pc and 90pc has been reached in only 12 Member States according to the most recent data, therefore greater efforts are required.

### Increasing women's participation in the labour market

As the European Commission often states, care responsibilities are one of the main reasons for women's low labour market participation, amounting to a €370 billion a year loss for Europe. Therefore, ensuring access to high quality, affordable and accessible, public and private care facilities is of vital importance. The COVID-19 confinement period highlighted the problem further, with women at the forefront of providing care, despite juggling standard work responsibilities including through teleworking.

### EU funds for quality care

An efficient use of EU funds can contribute to the development of quality care services across Member States. We believe that all relevant EU financial instruments for lifelong learning, research and infrastructural development should contribute towards quality care access across the Member States. We are calling for an assessment of European Structural and Investment Funds with an adequate budget allocation to be invested in care, which would also enhance equality between women and men.

### Implement and protect carers' rights

We stress the importance of the implementation and monitoring of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the timely transposition and effective implementation of the Work-Life Balance Directive. It provides for the first time at EU

level, that each worker should have the right to carers' leave of five working days per year in order to provide personal care or support to a relative, or to a person who lives in the same household as the worker, and who is in need of significant care or support for a serious medical reason, as defined by each Member State.

## **Fair recognition of care provision**

The EPP Group supports all measures and efforts at Member State level that would recognise the value of the unpaid work of caregivers and believes that this work should be recognised in pension schemes in order to narrow the pension gap between women and men. In this regard, we must strive to find solutions for challenges such as those faced by informal carers and the possibility for the recognition of childcare periods counted for the purposes of pension entitlements.

## **Coordinate and cooperate on best practices**

A greater level of cooperation and exchange of best practices on care services at a European level would provide added-value. Given the demographic challenges the entire EU is facing and increasing pressure on public expenditure due to a rise in care needs, a European Carers' Strategy could pave the way for a more coordinated approach to the provision of care, tackling the labour market participation of women who usually provide care, and by providing long-term strategic investment for those who are in need of care. Such a strategy must respect the competences of the Member States as laid out in the Treaties, but could aim to improve the cooperation and coordination of measures that benefit both caregivers and care recipients. Demographic challenges also highlight the need for inclusive, positive active ageing policies across the EU.