



## A European Care Strategy for caregivers and care receivers

Brussels, 7 September 2022

Today, the European Commission presents the [European Care Strategy](#) to ensure quality, affordable and accessible care services across the European Union and improve the situation for both care receivers and the people caring for them, professionally or informally. The Strategy is accompanied by two Recommendations for Member States [on the revision of the Barcelona targets on early childhood education and care](#), and [on access to affordable high-quality long-term care](#).

### **High-quality, affordable and accessible care services with better working conditions and work-life balance for carers**

Affordable and accessible care services of high quality offer clear benefits for all ages. Participation in early childhood education has a positive impact on a child's development and helps reduce the risk of social exclusion and poverty, also later in life. Long-term care empowers people, who as a result of old age, illness and/or disability depend on help for daily activities, to maintain their autonomy and live with dignity. However, for many people these services are still not affordable, available or accessible.

Investing in care is important to attract and retain talents in the care sector, which is often characterised by difficult working conditions and low wages, as well as to address labour shortages and fulfil the sector's economic and job creation potential.

Investing in high-quality care also means improving women's participation in the labour market and gender equality, in particular gender pay and pension gaps. Women still bear the main brunt of care responsibilities, with 90% of the formal care workforce made up of women, and 7.7 million women out of employment because of care responsibilities.

To address these issues, the Commission is proposing concrete actions to support Member States in increasing access to high-quality and affordable care services, while improving working conditions and work-life balance for carers.

### **Early childhood education and care**

The Commission is proposing that Member States revise the targets on early childhood education and care to enhance women's labour market participation, also called 'the Barcelona Targets', set in 2002. The current targets call on Member States to provide childcare to 33% of children under 3 and to 90% of children from age 3 until mandatory school age. The Commission proposes to set new ambitious yet realistic targets so that by 2030 at least:

- **50% of children below the age of 3** are in early childhood education and care;
- **96% of children between the age of 3 and the starting age for compulsory primary education** are in early childhood education and care, as already agreed in the [European Education Area framework](#).

The Commission also recommends that, among others, Member States:

- Ensure that childcare services are affordable, accessible and of high quality, available in urban as well as rural or disadvantaged areas;
- Introduce a legal entitlement to early childhood education and care, ideally with no gap between the end of paid family leave and the legal entitlement; Have targeted measures in place to enable and increase participation of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, with disabilities or with special needs in education and care, to close the gap with the overall population of children;
- Look at the number of hours children spend in childcare ('time-intensity') and ensure that childcare is available for a duration that allows parents to engage meaningfully in paid work; and
- Encourage equal sharing of childcare between parents by combating gender stereotypes and

support family-friendly working-time arrangements.

### Long-term care

The Commission recommends that Member States draw up **national action plans** to make care in the EU more available, accessible and of better quality for all, for instance by:

- Ensuring that long-term care is **timely, comprehensive and affordable**, allowing a decent standard of living for people with long-term care needs;
- **Increasing the offer and mix** of professional long-term care services (homecare, community-based care and residential care), close territorial gaps in the access to long-term care, roll-out accessible digital solutions in the provision of care services, and ensure that long-term care services and facilities are **accessible** to people with disabilities;
- Ensuring **high-quality criteria and standards** for long-term care providers;
- **Supporting informal carers**, who are often women and relatives of care receivers, through training, counselling, psychological and financial support; and
- Mobilising **adequate and sustainable funding** for long-term care, including by using EU funds.

### Fair working conditions and training for care staff

To improve working conditions and attract more people – in particular men – to the care sector, Member States are recommended to:

- Promote **collective bargaining and social dialogue** with a view to improving wages and working conditions;
- Ensure the **highest standards of occupational health and safety**;
- Design **continuous education and training** for care workers;
- **Tackle gender stereotypes** around care and launch communication campaigns;
- Ratify and implement **ILO Convention 189 on domestic workers**.

For its part, the Commission will:

- Explore the creation of a new sectoral **social dialogue for social services** at EU level;
- Promote the establishment of a **skills partnership under the Pact for Skills** for the long-term care sector;
- **Fund projects and research** to assess the social and economic value of work and working conditions in the care sector;
- Review the application of **EU standards governing working conditions**;
- Map the current admission conditions and rights of **long-term care workers from non-EU countries** and explore the feasibility of developing EU-level schemes to attract care workers; and
- Promote the opportunities available for early childhood education and care staff under the **Erasmus+ programmes**.

### Members of the College said:

Vice-President for Democracy and Demography, Dubravka **Šuica**, said: *"Demographic change entails that Europeans are living longer lives, but this also leads to an increased demand for accessible, affordable quality long-term care. At the other end of the life cycle, parents, to be able to fully participate in the labour market, need to ensure appropriate care for their children who need care to develop their cognitive, language, physical skills and competences. Care workers play an essential role in our society, yet their work is often undervalued today. The European Care Strategy we are presenting today sets out how to effectively and efficiently address these challenges. It is time to care about care."*

Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, Nicolas **Schmit**, said: *"The European Care Strategy is about putting people first. The EU recognises the value of care work, which must be reflected in better working conditions and pay. People in need of long-term care must be guaranteed access to affordable services of good quality so they can live a dignified life. I hope that this Strategy will result in care – both professional and informal – being given the respect and investment it deserves."*

Commissioner for Equality, Helena **Dalli**, said: *"Investing in care is an investment in gender equality and social fairness. Our initiative is about ensuring that everyone with care responsibilities, especially*

women, has a real choice when combining private and professional life. Affordable and accessible quality care ensures that those who receive care, including children, older persons and persons with disabilities, are empowered and fully enjoy their rights. Investing in care is about ensuring equal choice, dignity and self-determination.”

## Next steps

The Commission's proposals for Council Recommendations will be discussed by Member States with a view to adoption by the Council. According to the Commission proposals, Member States should inform the Commission on measures to implement the Recommendations one year after adoption. For each Recommendation, the Commission will publish an in-depth report within five years to give an overview of the state of play of implementation. The Commission will also continue monitoring policy developments during the European Semester and supporting reforms and investment through available EU funding.

## Background

The [European Care Strategy](#) will support the implementation of the principles enshrined in the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#), in particular the principles on gender equality, work-life balance, childcare and support to children and long-term care. In March 2021, the [European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan](#) announced an initiative on long-term care and the revision of the Barcelona targets for early childhood education and care. In her [2021 State of the Union Address](#), President Ursula **von der Leyen** announced a European Care Strategy to support women and men in finding the best care and work life balance for carers. This was later confirmed in the [Commission Work Programme 2022](#).

The European Care Strategy will also contribute to achieving the three [EU social headline targets](#) on employment, skills and poverty reduction for 2030, welcomed by EU leaders at the [Porto Summit in May 2021](#) and by the [European Council](#). The Barcelona Targets Recommendation, as part of the 2020-2025 [Gender Equality Strategy](#), builds on other EU initiatives such as the [Recommendation on Early Childhood Education and Care](#), the [EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child](#) and the [Recommendation on the European Child Guarantee](#).

## For More Information

[Questions & Answers – European Care Strategy](#)

[Factsheet – European Care Strategy for carers and care receivers](#)

[European Care Strategy Communication](#)

[Proposal for a Council Recommendation on the revision of the Barcelona targets on early childhood education and care](#)

[Proposal for a Council Recommendation on access to affordable high-quality long-term care](#)

[2021 Long-term care report](#)

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### Press contacts:

[Veerle NUYTS](#) (+32 2 299 63 02)

[Flora MATTHAES](#) (+32 2 298 39 51)

[Christian WIGAND](#) (+32 2 296 22 53)

[Katarzyna KOLANKO](#) (+ 32 2 296 34 44)

[Daniel FERRIE](#) (+32 2 298 65 00)

[Tommaso ALBERINI](#) (+32 2 295 70 10)

General public inquiries: [Europe Direct](#) by phone [00 800 67 89 10 11](#) or by [email](#)

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