



Executive Summary

Peer Review on 'Work-life balance: promoting gender equality in informal long-term care provision'

Germany (online), 3 and 4 December 2020

The purpose of the Peer Review was to explore challenges and good practice of gender equality in informal long-term care provision. Despite legislation to promote gender equality and to enhance balancing employment and care responsibilities, most informal caregivers are women. Moreover, increased female labour market participation is not accompanied by a more balanced sharing of domestic and caregiving work between women and men¹.

Participants reflected on employment and long-term care policies that aim at a better work-life balance between work and care responsibilities, such as flexible working arrangements, support measures and care leave. In addition, the Peer Review focused on company culture and measures by employers to promote an equal sharing of care responsibilities.

The Peer Review was hosted by the German Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth and took place online. It brought together government representatives from the host country (Germany) and 7 peer countries (Czech Republic, France, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Latvia and Malta). In addition, representatives from the European Commission, as well as a thematic expert, who put the topic in the wider context of EU policy, were also present.

The German long-term care system relies heavily on home-based care provided by informal carers of working age. Recent legislation aims to support employees to reconcile work and care obligations by giving them the flexibility and security to remain in employment. In case a relative suddenly needs support at short notice, employees have the right to stay at home and take care of their relative for up to 10 working days. In addition, the Caregiver Leave and the Family Caregiver Leave allow carers to stop working for up to six months (total or partial release) or respectively, for up to 24 months (partial release from work).

In order to promote gender equality in unpaid care provision, an independent Advisory Board for the Reconciliation of Care and Work (comprising of 21 members representing social partners, senior citizens' organisations, private long-term care insurance providers, academia and local authority associations) suggested a range of measures², such as the introduction of a wage compensation benefit, a further development of the above mentioned leave, and investing into the formal long-term care sector. The Advisory Board moreover recommends that companies need to focus more on the

¹ European Commission, 2019. *Report on equality between women and men in the EU* Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/aid_development_cooperation_fundamental_rights/annual_report_ge_2019_en.pdf

² Advisory Board for the Reconciliation of Care and Work, 2019. *First Report*, https://www.wege-zur-pflege.de/fileadmin/daten/Beirat/first-report-of-the-german-independent-advisory-board-on-work-care--reconciliation-data_1_.pdf

reconciliation of work and care obligations. In addition, the 'Gender Care Gap' project³ reviews the allocation of unpaid care work between men and women and the Second Gender Equality Report⁴ promotes the establishment of the work-care reconciliation model, allowing carers to balance paid work and care.

In Europe's ageing societies more people will need long-term care, which is combined with a shrinking workforce. This puts pressure on family carers, especially those in employment. As mostly women provide informal care, they are more likely to reduce their working hours or leave their job entirely. Next to already existing disadvantages on the labour market, they therefore face additional wage loss, career breaks and reduced pension entitlements.

Thus, arrangements to support family caregivers whilst remaining on the labour market are needed. At EU level, the European Pillar of Social Rights relates to gender equality in care provision in many of its principles, such as principle 2 on gender equality⁵ or principles 9 and 18 on work-life balance⁶ and long-term care⁷ respectively. Concrete measures to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights include also the Directive on work-life balance for parents and carers⁸ which encourages an equal sharing of family leaves and flexible working arrangements between women and men with caring responsibilities.

The key policy messages from the Peer Review can be summarised as follows:

Factors that lead to gender inequality in informal long-term care provision

- Whilst people of retirement age provide often a substantial share of informal care, most caregivers are of working age who particularly feel the burden of reconciling work and care. Across the EU, women provide most of unpaid care, with the largest difference between men and women in working age. For example, in Germany, in 2017, 43 % of all family caregivers were women of working age, compared to 26 % men of working age⁹.
- Women spend more time on unpaid care work than men, which means they have less time for paid work and to build up a career. Hence, they are more likely than men to interrupt their working careers. For instance, in the Czech Republic, 18 % of women stated that they are not in employment because they are unable to combine employment and care obligations, in contrast to 0,5 % of men.
- The allocation of paid work and unpaid care work between men and women develops over the life course. People who take on responsibility for care are usually over 45 years of age. At this point in their lives, traditional role models prevail due

³ German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ). 2020. *Who takes care of children, household and the elderly?* <https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/meta/en/publications-en/who-takes-care-of-children--household-and-the-elderly-/160284>

⁴ German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ). 2018. *Second Gender Equality Report* <https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/meta/en/publications-en/second-gender-equality-report/122440>

⁵ Equality of treatment and opportunities between women and men must be ensured and fostered in all areas, including regarding participation in the labour market, terms and conditions of employment and career progression. Women and men have the right to equal pay for work of equal value.

⁶ Parents and people with caring responsibilities have the right to suitable leave, flexible working arrangements and access to care services. Women and men shall have equal access to special leaves of absence in order to fulfil their caring responsibilities and be encouraged to use them in a balanced way.

⁷ Everyone has the right to affordable long-term care services of good quality, in particular home-care and community-based services.

⁸ Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU, available here: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELLAR:4119596d-a475-11e9-9d01-01aa75ed71a1>

⁹ See Host Country Discussion Paper, available here: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1024&furtherNews=yes&newsId=9841>

to lacking childcare or gender-specific pay gaps in their earlier lives, resulting in full-time employment of men, and part-time or marginal employment of women.

- Moreover, decisions to take on care responsibilities are also guided by the availability, quality and affordability of formal long-term care services, and support measures that help carers to reconcile work and care. While leave schemes, cash benefits or services are more widely available for childcare and adults with disabilities, care for a dependent family member relies in many Member States on a 'familistic model' and work-life balance measures for those carers have not (yet) been recognised to the same extent.
- In many countries, long-term care focuses on care at home and is backed up by the willingness of family members to provide care, so that those in need of care can remain in their home environment for as long as possible, and to keep public spending on long-term care at fiscally sustainable level. For example, the German long-term care insurance supports primarily care at home, to a large extent provided by family members and support from volunteers. In Slovenia, where formal long-term care is still mostly provided in institutions, a new long-term care system aims to set up formal community based long-term care services.
- Inequalities in long-term care provision are influenced by social norms and gender stereotypes. As there are few male role models, more women are expected to take up care responsibilities. In addition, there is little awareness or social recognition for care for a dependent relative.

Policies to improve the reconciliation of care and work and the equal sharing of informal long-term care between women and men

- In general, leave arrangements aim to support informal carers to remain in their employment. Long-term care needs arise often suddenly and change over time. It is thus difficult to plan when and how much informal care is required. Next to flexible leave options, wage compensation benefits for family carers (similar to parental allowance), would allow informal carers to reduce working hours or to be absent from work, whilst obtaining a sufficient income. From a gender perspective, income replacement could encourage more men to take up care, which would also support more women to have time for paid work.
- Part-time working and job-sharing policies are mostly taken up by women, linked to the need to balance unpaid care work and paid work. This in turn results in reduced income which is likely to translate into lower pension entitlements. In order to mitigate this effect, incentives such as the above-mentioned wage compensation could be created to reconcile work and care, also promoting financial independence for women.
- While informal care has long remained unrecognised, the need to support informal carers is increasingly becoming more important on the political agenda. For instance, in Slovenia, the planned reform of the long-term care system includes the status of a 'Caregiver of a Family Member' who will receive partial income replacement, will be covered by social insurance and will receive training and professional advice. Portugal introduced a new 'Informal Care Statute' in 2019 which is currently being piloted to support family caregivers via an allowance and a caregiver plan.
- As mentioned above, the availability, affordability, and quality of formal long-term care services matter significantly for family carers. These services are also important as 'respite services' for work-life balance.
- Furthermore, people in need of long-term care and their carers need support and guidance. As a first step, counselling on services, finances and support for carers

can help to make decisions about care and work arrangements. The COVID-19 pandemic has also shown that hotlines are important, so people can reach out from their home. Moreover, peer support in internet forums or networking in the community provide help, particularly in acute or stressful situations. In addition, advice for full-time carers on ways to return to the labour market needs to be available.

Measures taken by employers to encourage a gender-equitable distribution of care

- Employers need to promote work-life balance issues for men and women, also in order to retain a skilled workforce. Social partners (employers' organisations and trade unions) are important stakeholders to raise work-life balance issues and to set up collective agreements that provide options to reconcile work and care. Secondly, cooperate culture needs to encourage more men to take up care responsibilities. This can be done via promoting male role models, career models based on part time working, career promotion for women and HR departments providing advice on the reconciliation of unpaid care and work.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has shown flexible and mobile working arrangements are possible. Teleworking needs to be preserved in the long term, legally framed and accompanied by measures that promote a balance of work, unpaid care and leisure at home.
- Caregivers must be able to plan their work, but also should be able to change their working time if long-term care needs change. Legal arrangements such as short and long-term leave arrangements need to become established tools on company level.
- Awards, benchmarking schemes or certificates are useful to encourage employers to follow certain commitments and to promote good practice. For example, in Germany and the Czech Republic, companies receive awards for their work-life balance measures.

To conclude, a wider societal dialogue about ageing and care responsibilities helps to raise awareness. For example, cooperation between multiple actors (NGOs, social partners, care providers) can help to support wider dialogue around gender equality and care provision. Some people may have to combine years of care and work, so it needs to be possible for women and men to generate sufficient income from work and to do unpaid care in live course. Hence long-term care is as a societal task and public responses and resources are needed to support people in need of long-term care and their care-giving family members.