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EUROPEAN RECOMMENDATIONS

QUALITY OF JOBS AND SERVICES IN THE PERSONAL CARE AND HOUSEHOLD SERVICES SECTORS

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forquality.eu



INTRODUCTORY NOTE

European recommendations have been prepared through the research of their authors, the eleven For quality! country reports and the general report, the contributions and suggestions of the project partners, the suggestions and remarks made by the participants-members of partners' organisations and by the Advisory Board members (AGE Platform, Eurofound). The authors wish to thank warmly all these persons for their time and contribution.

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The seven-year Programme targets all stakeholders who can help shape the development of appropriate and effective employment and social legislation and policies, across the EU-28, EFTA-EEA and EU candidate and pre-candidate countries. For more information see: <http://ec.europa.eu/progress>.

The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission.

I. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the European Union, personal and household services represent a growing sector in terms of employment, and meet a growing demand for Europeans wishing to live independently as long as possible, or to balance work and life, with the support of professionals. Personal and Household Services were described by the European Commission in its 2012 Staff working document¹ as a broad range of activities that contribute to the well-being at home of families and individuals through child care, long term care for the elderly and for persons with disabilities in terms of personal services, then cleaning, remedial classes, and other forms of home repairs and maintenance, regarding household services. These services may be provided by various kinds of structures from the public, private and third sector, have some common characteristics and experience a number of similar challenges.

The For Quality! project² “Improving jobs and services’ quality in personal care and household services across Europe” seeks to contribute to the improvement of working conditions and of quality of personal care and household services. In the context of the For Quality! project, three seminars were held in 2015 to discuss the current situation of these services and their characteristics in eleven EU countries, and eleven national reports have been drafted to summarise the situation in each of those countries. These reports have identified a number of issues in the quality of services and jobs in personal and household services, and a common desire to improve the working conditions and quality of services in the sectors, making jobs more attractive, and making the sectors more professional.

¹ Commission Staff Working document on exploiting the employment potential of the personal and household services, SWD(2012) 95 final

² <http://forquality.eu/>

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

On funding regulations and investment

- 1. It is important that the EU and its member states favour a strategic, long-term thinking on personal care and household services, and avoid austerity measures that only facilitate the development of undeclared work and exacerbate a vicious cycle of long-term exclusion and new demands for social services.**

More and more workers are needed in domiciliary services for dependent and non-dependent persons across the board in Europe. However, financial support to the households does not always support the job potential in these sectors nor improve access to affordable care services in various countries. In parallel, there is a growing concern on the rise in undeclared work and job insecurity in this field, generating precarious working conditions, and a loss in tax revenue and social security contributions.

Sustainable social investment should make personal and household services accessible to all who need them, and eligibility requirements that depend on the users' own finances to fund essential personal or household services should be avoided. This will also help curb undeclared and unregulated work. Several national reports of the For Quality! project have highlighted a wide disparity in public spending on care services per inhabitant between regional or national levels, due to devolution of the social security system, and further widened by the economic crisis and funding cuts.

- 2. The European Union should promote investment in the full range of social services and social protection systems. This includes promoting the social investment approach in EU policy guidance.**

Personal and household services show tremendous promise in terms of local job creation, including within families themselves, both at present and in the future, and they will support Europeans who wish to live in the community as long as feasible. Personal services need to be the object of a holistic strategy in order to unlock its potential. Its joint planning should include the collaboration of different actors (public, private, third sector and service users). Its development will require an important social investment. This will pay off in the long term through better social inclusion, access to the labour market and empowerment of people to live independent lives as long as possible.

On work regulations and employment quality:

- 3. The European Union should promote sustainable quality employment in personal and household services, in order to attract people to enter and stay in the workforce, and ensure that Europe can respond to emerging needs in the population and demographic challenges.**

The situation of workers in these sectors in some countries, their long working hours, the relatively low pay, the lack of adequate training and the high demands of the job, coupled with high instances of workplace accidents, need to be addressed at the European level in order to make personal and household services, more attractive professions. This is especially important considering that increasing numbers of Europeans will wish to receive support in their home, in order to balance work and life, or to live independently in the community as long as possible.

Several of the For quality! national reports highlight prevalence of household care workers working beyond the limitations of their contract, regarding the length of the work day, the non-standard work arrangements such as week-end and night shifts, limiting the possibility of balancing work and personal life. Only 5 EU member states so far have ratified the ILO Convention No 189 on decent work for domestic workers. Furthermore, governments need to ensure that their work regulations in relation to migrant workers do not lead to such a worsening of workers' rights that contributes to worker abuse. This is especially true in countries where migrant workers employed as domestic workers account for a major portion of the workforce. Another important aspect of this often overlooked is the importance of responding to the brain drain of care workers from southern, central and eastern European countries to West and Northern European countries, which can undermine the development of high quality health and social services in countries experiencing high levels of emigration.

- 4. The European Union and its member states should apply risk reduction initiatives to decrease the very high instances of labour accidents and psychosocial risks in the personal and household services regardless of the type of employment relationship between the worker and the service's beneficiary.**

In a lot of countries, the direct employer-employee relation in personal and household services makes it unlikely for the household to be inspected as a workplace for risk prevention measures in regards to work accidents and other risks, mainly for privacy reasons. Nonetheless, the harshness of this type of work entails carrying heavy loads, stress and other psychosocial risks, as well as concerns for one's own safety.

- 5. The European Union member states should promote the accessibility, quality and affordability of training and professional development schemes to all members of the workforce, and open up subsidised schemes when they exist for other employees. Access to professional training should be subsidised through sustainable public financial support.**

Many home carers directly hired by the service user do not have access to the same training subsidy schemes as employees of a service providing organisation. In the national reports of the For quality! project, most countries deplore the lack of available and affordable professional development activities for personal care and household workers who are self-employed or employed directly by the service user, and a lack of professional mobility for those who want to grow in the profession, including moving to a related care profession.

- 6. The European Union and its member states should promote schemes which recognise prior work experience and validate the skills acquired in that context.**

With the aim to provide an opportunity for service users to achieve a higher level of choice and control over the support they may need a greater inclusion in society for the benefit of all, several countries have put in place a system operating a personal budget or voucher system, some of them giving the possibility for the user to hire a worker through a direct employment relation. However, across Europe, the research shows that this system, when not well regulated, leads to negative situations regarding workers' rights and workplace safety, and fewer training, development and qualification opportunities for these workers compared to the original triangular system, in which a public, private or third sector entity serves as intermediary to uphold the qualifications and appropriate working conditions of the workers. A lack of upward professional mobility in the care professions careers, especially for those who start as domestic workers, can make the profession much less attractive, and lead to a higher turnover of professionals.

- 7. European Funds, such as ESF, could be used to provide access to qualifications and training programmes, in order to ensure that users receive the best services available.**

A distinction needs to be made between “care” and “non-care” activities in the context of Personal and Household services. Both require a different set of skills, qualification levels and training in order to deliver quality support and services. Although there is an interpersonal dimension also in household services, this interpersonal dimension plays a much more important role in social services, such as child care/long-term care. Recognised curricula and diplomas exist in many countries for care activities, but guidelines ensuring that employees who perform “care” or “non-care” activities are adequately trained are not always available.

- 8. The EU should promote and support social dialogue for all workers in personal and household services where appropriate, to help promote decent working conditions.**

With the exception of a few countries, there is insufficient coverage by collective bargaining in personal care and household services. While accounting for significant numbers in employment and GDP, some of the care professions are often under-represented, due to a number of factors. The domestic and care professions do not always have their own professional association at the national level; and being funded through a variety of schemes and types of employment contracts, some of which are public, private, or both, making social dialogue complex.

On service quality:

- 9. The Public Authorities responsible for the management and organisation of the provision of personal care and household services must ensure that national quality of service standards are developed, updated, fully monitored and evaluated.**

While it is not the case everywhere, a number of For quality! national reports highlight that there exist minimal regulations or monitoring on service quality in the social service sector, or that they exist but that there are wide variations in the enforcement of these quality guidelines or standards between regional or federal subdivisions of a single country. Occasionally, the Quality Assurance measures are thought to be weak because they only rely on self-evaluation.

- 10. The European Union and its members must promote the VQF on SSGI and quality frameworks in line with it, and support a continuous improvement and monitoring of both quality of working conditions and quality of the personal care and household service provided, at all levels. Funding authorities must ensure services are provided to all who need them, and not just the easiest to reach.**

The qualifications of the professionals together with adequate working conditions and adequate funding account for an essential part of the quality of the services. As identified in earlier EU policy documents³, these elements should be included in the development of quality standards in these sectors and based on human rights frameworks and key quality principles, as a precondition for quality services, as identified in the Voluntary European Quality Framework for Social Services⁴. These standards should be based on a person-centred approach and be developed through a participatory process involving all relevant stakeholders, including service user organisations.

Likewise, EU member states using pay-for-performance schemes as a guarantee for quality should be aware of their perverse effects, namely the exclusion of the service users that require more work and support, in favour of “easier” ones, and the increase of out of pocket expenses for service users for additional ‘options’ or services they need, thus increasing inequalities.

³ DG EMPL, A Quality Framework for Services of General Interest in Europe, COM(2011) 900 final, 2011

⁴ Social Protection Committee, SPC/2010/10/8 final, 2010

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