

Improving work-life balance in Europe through enabling social services

Policy Recommendations

Social Services and work-life balance

Principle 9 of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) states that “Parents and people with caring responsibilities have the right to suitable leave, flexible working arrangements and **access to care services**. (...)”. In view of addressing the challenges faced by parents and carers, the European Commission has launched in April 2017 a **proposal for a Directive on work-life balance**. The proposal is complemented by the European Commission Communication “An initiative to support work-balance for working parents and carers”, which outlines a set of non-legislative actions to improve the quality, affordability and access to childcare and long-term care.

Whereas the Directive proposal would strengthen legislation on leave and flexible working arrangements across Europe, it **remains weaker on access to care**. Social Services Europe understands this as partly due to a **lack of research** done on the relationship between access to care services and work-life balance.

To counter this, Social Services Europe launched a research project¹ aiming to provide greater clarity on the relationship between access to care services and work-life balance and employment, and female employment in particular. The research provides further evidence on the **need for the European Union to be more proactive in improving access to quality care services**. This is one of the single biggest factors to improve work-life balance in Europe, whilst also boosting job creation, inclusive growth, social cohesion, gender equality and human rights.

Recommendations

Social Services Europe recommends that the European Commission, the Member States and the Members of the European Parliament work together towards improving access to quality affordable care services as a pre-condition to improve the levels of work-life balance. We therefore make the following recommendations:

European Commission

- **Publish a Communication to disseminate information comparing access to affordable and quality care services.**
The communication would be based on benchmarking among EU Member States in order to analyse investment levels, unmet social care and support needs in Europe, build understanding of good practice and encourage upward convergence.
- **Produce a Staff Working Document to boost investment into Care Services across all current and future European Budgetary Programmes.**
This document would outline how the different funding programmes could be used to support care services including infrastructure, training and innovation. It would cover: ESF+, ERDF, InvestEU, Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, European Solidarity Corps, EaSI, etc.
- **Launch an EU-wide communications campaign to boost Job Creation in Care Services**, responding to the sector’s biggest challenge. It is essential that stakeholders undertake pro-active actions to improve the attractiveness of the sector, retaining quality staff and unlocking the sector’s full job creation potential. Social Services Europe therefore calls upon joint ownership of the objective to boost job creation in care services, including by the European Commission. In particular, efforts should target young people -and especially younger men- in order to balance the trend of an ageing and gender-segregated care workforce².

¹ The full research report *Improving work-life balance through enabling social services: From service provision to decent policies* can be found [here](#).

² More information on this topic can be found in our paper *Job Creation Potential in the Health and Social Service Sector*. Click [here](#) to read it.



- **Give a much stronger emphasis in the European Semester on analysing access to affordable care** by identifying the barriers in each Member State, recommending policy solutions and promoting enabling conditions for the promotion affordable and quality care services.
The 2018 Annual Growth Survey made a very powerful call for social protection systems that ensured equal access to quality services. The European Semester process should continue to promote social investment and make clear recommendations related to it.

Use the implementation of the EPSR to promote affordable, accessible and quality social services and the scoreboard as a tool to highlight good practice in the availability and affordability of care in Member States³.

EU Member States

- **Ensure a swift implementation of the work-life balance Directive.** The provisional agreement reached by EU institutions in January 2019 is a promising step towards an improved EU legal framework for working parents and carers. When adopted, EU Member States should take quick action to align their national legislation to the standards set out by the Directive.
- **Allocate adequate resources to promoting women’s labour market participation, work-life balance and access to childcare in the future European Social Fund plus (ESF+) Operational Programmes.** The objective 4(iii) of the future ESF+ programme provides a strong basis for channelling EU funds to improve work-life balance in Europe, including through the development of quality and affordable care services. This objective can only be effectively implemented if sufficient resources are earmarked in EU Member State’s ESF+ Operational Programmes.

All EU institutions

- **Increase the flexibility of the Stability & Growth Pact to ensure that investment in “quality care services” are excluded from the calculation of national deficits.** Achieving better levels of work-life balance calls for an enhanced social investment logic where public authorities can devote the necessary resources to ensure the provision of quality care services. Increasing resources for these services has however been hampered by the fact that such outlays are accounted as expenditures rather than investments and, therefore, have a negative impact on public finances and their compliance with macroeconomic stability rules at EU level. To prevent this, SSE calls upon increased flexibility in the Stability and Growth Pact to ensure that investments in quality care services are excluded from national deficit calculations and do not trigger corrective action by EU economic governance rules.

About Social Services Europe

Social Services Europe is the largest network of not-for-profit social and healthcare providers at EU level, representing over 100,000 organisations through its 8 members: Caritas Europa, Eurodiaconia, Red Cross EU Office, European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD), European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR), European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA), SOLIDAR and the European Council for Non-Profit Organisations (CEDAG). Our members provide services to people with disabilities, homeless people, migrants, children, the elderly, and other people in vulnerable situations. Social Services Europe aims to strengthen the profile and position of social services and promote the role of not-for-profit service providers in Europe. For more information visit www.socialserviceseurope.eu or contact us at info@socialserviceseurope.eu



³ More information on this topic can be found in our paper *Towards the Implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights – The Role of Social Services*. Click [here](#) to read it.

