

## Position paper

# EU Care Strategy

Caritas Europa<sup>1</sup> is eagerly awaiting the European Commission's proposal for a Long-Term Care (LTC) Strategy, expected to be presented in September 2022. This topic is of great importance to Caritas Europa as we are a service provider with vast experience in providing grassroots level, live-in home care services to many European households, in addition to running long-term care facilities, and providing social counselling and information to people about care service options and how to access them. Based on the experiences of our members in their different roles as care providers, policy advisers and advocates of people in situations of vulnerability, Caritas Europa's position paper on the EU Care Strategy calls on the EU and Member States to revamp and invest in the social care sector. We call for an **enabling EU care framework and strategy** that sets the standard and guides Member States on social care delivery at the national level. Such a framework should have a two-pronged approach, taking into account 1) the **quality and dignity of care** as well as 2) the **quality and decent working conditions of care workers** and should be based on an EU vision of quality care that places the individual at the centre. It should also address the many different care challenges<sup>2</sup> that currently exist.<sup>3</sup>

Care services should enable persons with support needs to live independently, to be active, to participate fully in society and to have their dignity respected. **Quality care and support services** must respond to the individual needs of those drawing on such services. Such services are provided in complementarity with other services through integrated approaches, e.g., to deliver seamless transitions between social care, healthcare, housing, employment, etc. Thus, an integrated response is required. In addition, delivering quality services can only be guaranteed by investing in staff to ensure quality and quantity.

The EU Care Strategy should also include a **link to EU migration policies**, recognising the interconnection between ensuring more safe and legal migration channels for purposes of work and to fill increasing labour market gaps in the care sector. **Access to social protection and fair working conditions for all care workers**, including migrants, should be guaranteed. Sanctions are needed against recruitment agencies and employers who rely on undeclared work. The gendered dimension of care work should likewise be considered in the EU Care Strategy.

## Core elements for an EU Care Strategy

### 1. Quality framework

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<sup>1</sup> Caritas Europa is the network of 49 Caritas organisations in 46 European countries. We work with people of all faiths to end poverty and to promote the dignity of all people. As part of the global Caritas Internationalis network with over 160 members around the world, we believe that people and the environment, not profits, should be at the heart of all policies. We oppose all kinds of exclusions and support all initiatives that promote sustainable development that benefit everyone and enable all people to find a meaningful role to play in society. For more info: [www.caritas.eu](http://www.caritas.eu)

<sup>2</sup> See Caritas Europa's op-ed from March 2021 highlighting some of the structural challenges related to care work in Europe: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/economy-jobs/opinion/the-carers-in-our-own-homes-are-essential-workers-too/>

<sup>3</sup> Refer to various publications in the annex to which Caritas Europa contributed and which elaborate further on many known challenges. See also the [2021 Long-term care report](#), jointly prepared by the European Commission and the Social Protection Committee and the related [country reports](#).

An EU Care Strategy should set an **EU quality framework**, empowering social care providers to deliver on the shift to person-centred and community-based services. Such a strategy should include:

- A **strategic vision**, setting out the direction for social care providers towards home and community-based provision of care services. Care work and its societal worth must be re-evaluated, recognised, and appreciated. Europe must promote a positive appreciation of the entire care sector and it should be communicated about positively, whether communicating with caretakers, the media, policy makers or the wider society, and valued as essential.
- A **human rights-based approach**. Care as a right has to be ensured, as do the rights of care workers. Care workers must be acknowledged for their professional roles, despite tasks in private households and despite the frequent informal nature of women taking on care tasks.
- The promotion of the **basic right to social, medical, and home care**. As the demand for care is set to rise due to an ageing population, it is crucial to reinforce provisions for long-term care. There is a need to strengthen the workforce, most importantly by improving working conditions and salaries in the care sector. The huge role played by informal carers must be acknowledged and the resulting, economic and social costs underlined, reiterating the importance of investing in community care.
- The provision of **timely access** to affordable, high-quality, and appropriate care services for all persons in need of care in the EU.
- The application and monitoring of **quality indicators** to measure social impact focused on quality-of-life principles.
- **Investment** in innovation, digital technologies and ensuring sustainable funding to modernise the social infrastructure.
- The promotion of **holistic partnerships and social innovation** by fostering partnerships between public authorities, social care providers and service users in an integrated way, considering both institutional and home care services.
- The recognition of and sufficient **funding for the not-for-profit sector** to deliver care services; it is the EU's strategic advantage to have a strong not-for-profit/social economy sector and an 11-million-person workforce incorporated in the further development of care services.
- The creation of attractive jobs, training and education, good and safe working conditions with access to social protection by replacing informal live-in care work<sup>4</sup> via **employment contracts with not-for-profit home care providers**, in line with ILO's Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204).
- Ensuring the **choice of providers** by enabling plurality and fair competition.
- **Integrating home care programmes** into professional health care training.
- **Promoting healthy lifestyles** and ill-health prevention, increasing the chances to postpone people's need for care. Overall, it is necessary to improve the quality of life of

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<sup>4</sup> According to [Eurofound](#), an **informal carer** is someone who provides unpaid help to a friend or family member needing support, perhaps due to illness, older age, disability, a mental health condition or an addiction, as long as they are not employed to do so. Eurofound estimates that there are 44 million informal carers in the EU, or 12% of the adult population. This is not synonymous with an **informal worker**, which is a euphemism for workers not formally employed. ILO estimates that globally more than six out of ten workers and four out of five enterprises in the world operate in the informal economy (aka in the black economy, unregulated economy, irregular employment, etc.). Certainly, this reality extends beyond the social care sector, emphasising the importance of linking the EU Care Strategy with EU migration policies and many other initiatives already taken at EU level (predictable working condition directive) and the need to unlock the job creation potential of the care sector across Europe by improving the attractiveness of jobs, working conditions, wages, up- and re-skilling, and better career paths, along with social inspection on informal/irregular employment. There are good practices and policies turning informal care work into formal, e.g., the care voucher system in Belgium, and the organisation of home care by not-for-profits. In the latter, the customer is no longer the direct employer, which protects the rights of both the customer and care worker.

older people, enabling them to remain in a familiar environment, to improve health programmes and to raise awareness about older people's needs within their own communities, for example, by strengthening volunteering programmes to encourage people of all ages to get involved in activities that promote intergenerational solidarity.

## 2. Quality indicators

The following section lists quality indicators for care followed by quality indicators for working conditions in the care sector, which should be included in the EU Care Strategy, i.e., in the Council recommendation(s). Quality indicators should guarantee access, availability, affordability, and adequacy of care services in an integrated approach. Following the presentation of quality indicators, the Member States would need to ensure they are respected and monitored at national level. Achieving quality in care would require initiatives in the following areas:

### Quality of care

- Set quality standards of care services and organise quality control, in particular for elderly care and childcare.
- Ensure availability of care services, addressing the rural/urban divide in provision of services.
- Ensure affordability through a collective insurance scheme and service users' contributions related to income. In the service providers' landscape, prioritise not-for-profit provision of care, ensuring a focus on quality care and care work, not on profits and private marketisation or reliance on exploitative recruitment agencies.
- Facilitate an integrated network of types of care services/layered system, ensuring complementarity between professional care providers and voluntary informal carers (i.e. family members, neighbours).
  - Invest in community-based services and concomitantly in home care service, allowing people in need of care to stay (longer) in their own home.
  - Consider the time spent on care work as eligible for the calculation of pension rights.
  - Prioritise the shift from institutional care facilities to home and community-based care, such as day-care centres or co-living housing, and invest in expediting this.

### Quality of working conditions in care

- The EU Care Strategy should contribute to ensure high-value care jobs, fostering good working conditions such as occupational health and safety and regulated working hours, decent training opportunities, opportunities for career progression, access to training, decent remuneration, upskilling and reskilling opportunities to improve qualifications and to have those acquired abroad be recognised, written employment contracts and respect for employees' rights, all of which are preconditions to ensuring the quality of service, treatment and respect of the dignity for users of care services. These preconditions should therefore be guaranteed according to national procedures and promoted through collective bargaining. The European Commission should monitor implementation of relevant EU directives regarding labour conditions and launch infringement procedures as necessary.
- Promote home care work: rather than live-in care work, home care work by care workers employed by a not-for-profit service provider should be the preferred option. This way the quality of service as well as the rights of care workers would be better protected than if they were directly employed by the person or family in need of home care.

- Ensure a work-family life balance, allowing informal carers to take up informal caring for family members and others.
- Promote harmonised standards for training for care workers and working conditions in care, possibly building on the experiences of Caritas' Fair Care Label.<sup>5</sup>
- Ensure compliance with labour rights in home care work through labour inspection.
- Promote unions of domestic workers, and the creation of collective labour agreements.
- Foster recruitment of foreign workforce:
  - Governments should collaborate to ensure that fair options are available for migrants to be able to acquire a secure and sustainable residence status to deliver quality care and provide social care services. In addition, clear, efficient, and accessible administrative procedures should be provided, enabling applications from a variety of qualified care workers, including migrants, allowing them to attain and renew their work and related residence permits. This should be possible while already within the country in order to avoid people falling into an irregular situation due to flawed or inefficient administrative migration policies.
  - European governments should provide more flexibility to ensure that the rights and residence status of migrants are not tied to one employer or one sector by taking into account the reality of the labour market when renewing a residence status, allowing bridges between different types of work and work permit statuses (e.g. employed, self-employed, entrepreneur) to avoid workers falling into an irregular situation when a job situation changes or in cases of exploitation.
  - European governments should consider regularisation as a policy option, instead of a taboo. Depending on each national situation and context, it can make sense for a variety of reasons (economic, social, humanitarian, public health) and help put an end to limbo situations. If regularisation mechanisms and programmes are set up, clear, transparent and proportionate criteria should be applied.

### **For an EU Care Guarantee**

As part of the EU Care Strategy, the European Commission should propose an EU Care Guarantee. The current COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the dire need for a more holistic approach to social care. There is a need for a comprehensive EU Care Guarantee that adequately addresses care demands from a life-cycle perspective. This means shifting the focus from only childcare and elderly care to embracing an approach that looks at care needs from “cradle to the grave”. For this to be achieved, the EU Care Strategy would need to ensure access to quality and affordable social care for everyone whenever needed, particularly for persons in situations of vulnerability. An EU Care Guarantee would thus complement other initiatives, such as the child and youth strategies. It would also help to deliver high quality services and enabling framework conditions for social care services across Europe and equally support upward convergence amongst Member States' care strategies. Also, as part of the Care Guarantee, Member States could adopt care schemes allowing workers wishing to exit their current jobs to provide care for relatives to receive poverty-proof wages. This should be in combination with adequate education and training opportunities for the carer.

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<sup>5</sup> For several years, Caritas organisations in Europe have been committed to improving the framework conditions under which workers from eastern EU Member States and Eastern European countries migrate to Central and Southern European countries in order to care for elderly people in private households, most of whom are in need of care (Live-In care). As part of the European Caritas network, they maintain cooperation between the countries of origin and destination for the preparation and deployment of migrants who work as live-ins. In 2018 Caritas Europa published a position paper [Fair Care Mobility and Migration in Europe](#) and has been incorporated into the standard. In 2019 the essentials for a fair employment of live-ins were again recorded in a [final declaration](#). The Caritas Fair Care Label is a standard for training and recruiting home care workers, organising their placements, and ensuring quality care and fair working conditions for the care workers.

## **Good practices and Caritas experiences**

Following the description elaborating the terms for an EU framework on care, this section briefly describes some of Caritas' promising practices related to care and provides a Member State practice related to care work(ers).

### **1. Fair Care Task Force - consisting of several Caritas organisations**

Caritas Europa works with its member organisations on “fair care migration and mobility”, exchanging experiences in the different countries, identifying challenges, promising practices, and innovative solutions, and carrying out awareness raising and advocacy at both national and European levels. One aspect of fair care reflects the standardisation of training and working conditions of live-in mobile EU and non-EU national migrant care workers and demands for greater recognition of these workers and this sector. This is linked to the Caritas Fair Care Label mentioned above.

### **2. Regularisation in Italy<sup>6</sup>**

The Italian government coalition launched a new regularisation programme in May 2020 as part of its economic stimulus programme. The programme targeted workers and their families in the agriculture, domestic, and care sectors. The official objective was twofold: to “guarantee adequate protection to individual and collective health”, and to “facilitate the emergence of irregular employment relationships” (so to bring informal and undocumented workers into regular employment, so called “legality”).

There were two ways to apply for a regular residence status. The first was through the employer scheme: with the aim of addressing undeclared work, an employer could apply for a residence permit on behalf of a worker (migrant or Italian) already employed irregularly, or who s/he wanted to employ and had to pay a 500€ fee. The worker also had to prove that s/he was present in Italy before 8 March 2020. The length of the residence permit granted equals the duration of the work contract, and the permit can be converted into another type later on.

The second scheme was a request for job seeker permits for individual migrants. This scheme concerned migrants who previously had a residence permit that expired after 31 October 2019, and who could prove that they had worked previously in one of the sectors concerned. Successful candidates received a six-month stay permit (starting from the application date) in order to find a job. Their permit could later be extended if they found a job.

### **3. Caritas Spain Santa Clara cooperative**

The cooperative of domestic workers is promoted by Caritas Girona and ensures dignified care work guaranteeing workers' rights. They offer information to families to hire people in domestic service as home occupants and they offer the cooperative for hiring of domestic service workers. The cooperative also offers information, training, and advice to women domestic workers.

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<sup>6</sup> See Caritas Europa's position paper calling on regularisation schemes for undocumented workers with additional information and examples: [https://www.caritas.eu/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/210326-Regularisation-of-undocumented-migrants\\_policy-paper.pdf](https://www.caritas.eu/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/210326-Regularisation-of-undocumented-migrants_policy-paper.pdf)

## Annex I

See also Caritas Europa's contributions to joint positions on the EU Care Strategy:

- Recommendations regarding migrant care providers and service users, together with PICUM, AGE, Eurocarers and others active on this topic: <https://caritas.eu/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Joint-recommendations-EU-Care-Strategy-migrant-care-providers-and-service-users-17-March.pdf>
- Social Services Europe <https://www.caritas.eu/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/SSE-Contribution-EC-Consultation-Roadmap-ECS-FNAL-18.02.22.pdf>
- EU Alliance for Investing in Children (care): <https://www.caritas.eu/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/EU-Alliance-for-Investing-in-Children.pdf>
- EU Alliance for Investing in Children (Barcelona targets): <https://www.caritas.eu/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/EU-Alliance-for-investing-in-Children-consultation.pdf>



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