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JOINT SPC-EC LONG-TERM CARE REPORT 2021

EUROPEAN EMPLOYERS' COMMENTS

General comments

- European employers believe that the modernisation of national social protection systems is an important objective in order to cope with the structural ageing challenge of the labour market as well as the short-term and long-term consequences of the Covid-19 crisis. In this context the delivery of adequate, affordable and high-quality long-term care (LTC) services is paramount to ensure a comprehensive policy response.
- The number of Europeans aged 80+ is forecasted to rise from almost 5% in 2016 to 13% in 2070. It will imply increases in public spending on LTC from almost 30% to over 51%, respectively. Increasing cost threatens sustainability of the current LTC provisions, if appropriate actions/reforms are not taken. European employers therefore welcome the focus of the SPC report on the circumstances of LTC delivery as it rightly puts an emphasis on the multi-layered challenges affecting this sphere of activities.
- Many Member States face shortages of LTC workers providing care in an institutional setting (nurses) or at home (personal care workers). It will be particularly important for Member States to ensure that quantitative and qualitative supply of these workers keeps pace with an increasing ageing population and its needs as well as taking account of technological developments which are changing LTC services delivery and supporting home-based care.
- The Covid-19 crisis hit the long-term care sector hard, considering that significant numbers of people dependent on care fell ill as well as the added exposure of long-term care workers to the risk of infection. In some Member States it has also halted or delayed the undertaken or planned reforms of the LTC provision.
- European employers recognise the importance of the quality, access, coverage, and affordability of LTC services. As highlighted in the European Pillar of Social Rights, principle 18, there is a need to ensure affordable and good quality long-term care services as quality care is vital to maintaining and improving the quality of life of dependent people in both residential and home care settings.
- To ensure the LTC sector's financial sustainability, the necessary measures must be taken at the national level to modernize social protection systems and to increase levels of employment overall, and contribute to economic growth. Only such an approach will ensure sustainable financing of the LTC services. Additionally, each Member States should reflect on an appropriate national cost-sharing model of financing LTC based on public funding (a tax- or social security contribution-based) and private insurance (compulsory or voluntary). National policy choices should be respected.



- Accessible, affordable and quality LTC provisions are essential for family members - caretakers to work. Given that women are still often predominantly in charge of caring duties, long-term care is particularly important in increasing women's employment, thereby making an essential contribution to gender equality and to reduce the gender pay gap.
- While we recognise the value of home-based, informal care by family members, we acknowledge, as the report indicates, that it can have adverse effects on carers' professional situation such as lower incomes or social security contributions, which can translate into lower pensions.
- An effective policy action requires measures to increase the attractiveness of the sector as a source of employment and to improve the productivity of LTC workers through better use of technology and a dedicated reskilling-upskilling approach.

Employment and skills

- The LTC sector is extremely diverse and ranges from improving elderly people's physical and cognitive state to ensuring a better quality of life for vulnerable elderly people and those with chronic illnesses. The workforce consists of a mix of professionals with different levels of training and skills, and different functions/tasks in both social and health care.
- All these so much needed services are likely to generate new jobs with different skills requirements. The "traditional" care-related skills and soft skills have been enriched with digital skills and technological expertise needed to use e-health option and technologies, for example telemedicine or smart apps that monitor general condition of a patient.
- There is also job creation potential related to services supporting families with LTC duties. They range from counselling and/or psychological support, through temporary spells in care homes while a family member-carer needs to take a break to special "rest homes" for relatives who care for their older family member (respite services).
- Increasing training participation, especially for some personal care workers, should help reaching the right mix of workers' competencies and make the LTC work more rewarding. This must be implemented in line with national systems. On-the-job training, to upskill/reskill and recognition of prior experience are interesting options for the experienced workers, often with lower levels of formal qualifications and need to be combined with career guidance as part of an overall approach to better motivate workers to take up training opportunities. Moreover, enhancing the use of digital training methods could represent an interesting solution to improve training flexibility without increasing its costs.
- Collective bargaining can be a useful tool to improve working conditions in the sector, as long as national industrial relations systems and practices are fully respected. The extent of social dialogue varies across and within Member States in the LTC sector. Capacity building activities to reinforce the LTC Social Partners or promote social dialogue is an important avenue to explore, in line with national relations systems and practices.

Attractiveness and working conditions

- Expanding recruitment pools is another important objective, particularly to attract more men in the sector. Incentivising male recruitment can be a promising avenue to address labour shortages while breaking down gender stereotypes about "male jobs" and "female jobs" serves a wider social and economic purpose.



- Increasing retention rates, including through more upskilling/re-skilling, including training, and offering opportunities for career progression could help motivation to stay in the sector. Recognition of the acquired qualifications is also a factor increasing attractiveness of the LTC sector. Digital skills and preparing carers to use them to organise their work and provide services can “modernize” the image of the profession and make it more appealing to the youth.
- Improving the organisation of work, including looking at flexibility in work schedules, better organisation of daily work and planning shifts in LTC, along with measures to enhance productivity are important, as well as health and safety prevention strategies. Diverse forms of work are beneficial for informal carers as they enable to combine caring duties and professional activity. This, in turn, maintains employability of the carer, allows to build up his/her pension rights and entitlement as well as offers a “break” from caring.
- Organising LTC provision is the national competence. Member States shall strive for effective partnerships in delivery of tailored LTC, home- or community-based, according to their traditions, social protection systems and preferences of individual families and patients.

Possible EU actions

- Given the diversity of national traditions and functioning solutions, the complexity of LTC being a mix of health and social care as well as the mix of formal and informal care, coordinating efforts at the EU level is challenging. Since there is no comparable data, the EU should exchange information with other data providers, namely the OECD and WHO, to improve knowledge and monitoring of LTC needs and provision. The EU’s SPC and its Indicators Sub-Group can play an important role in this respect. Last but not least, Member States should agree on a set of common indicators to assess the quality of LTC.
- The EU shall encourage Member States to closely monitor accessibility, affordability and quality of residential care, while semi-residential care should be a priority for investment as it can play a significant role between home and residential care.
- Monitoring and reporting on the adequacy of the quality LTC should be built into the European Semester process. At the same time, Member States should be encouraged to exchange good practices, i.e. via collecting cases studies, setting up networks of practitioners and providers or organising peer reviews on development of LTC provisions.
