



## Contribution from the Social Services Social Partners to the European Commission Consultation on a Quality Jobs Roadmap

Submitted by: The Social Employers, CEMR and EPSU

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### Background

*The EU social partners for the Social Services Sector welcome the opportunity to respond to the below questions to feed into the Commission's pending Quality Jobs Roadmap.*

Looking ahead, more than 1.6 million additional long-term care workers will be required by 2050 simply to maintain current levels of long-term care provision. The social services sector is already under pressure, facing a growing demand for care, as underscored by the European Care Strategy, alongside significant and persistent staff shortages. Moreover, as noted in the Quality Jobs background document, "supporting frameworks - such as access to affordable, high-quality early childhood education and care, healthcare, and long-term care services - indirectly influence the quality of jobs" across all sectors. These services thus serve as **horizontal enablers**, which must be considered integral to any comprehensive approach to enhancing job quality.

The present contribution responds to the consultation questions most pertinent to the Social Services Social Partners, based on our shared expertise and priorities within the sector.

In the first instance, we wish to highlight the following persistent challenges in our sector:

- Labour shortages has led to a deterioration in working conditions and also put at risk the health and safety of workers and care recipients, the quality of service provision, especially for citizens who need it most.

- An ageing workforce with an important proportion being close to retirement age, and with very little youth employment. In addition, a very gender imbalanced sector with more than 80 % of female workers.
- A rising demand for services from an ageing population who lives longer and, in general a larger share of the population needing more tailored social support.

## 1. What is necessary for quality jobs to be future-oriented and future-proof?

The evolution of social services in the EU requires a resilient, skilled, and valued workforce to meet the rising demand for care, support person-centred approaches, and integrate new technologies. For jobs to be future-proof, several key dimensions must be addressed:

- **Investment in skills and lifelong learning:** Accessible, inclusive and flexible training, especially in digital, intercultural and community-based care, across the social services sector to provide workers with a flexible combination of skillsets adapted to the labour market's evolution. A strong focus on modular and blended learning formats, mentoring, and career development is essential to adapt to evolving needs and attract new employees. Training (specially upskilling and reskilling as key factors to navigate future challenges), particularly in relation to digitalisation and AI and its effects on job content, work organisation and OSH is also key.
- **Improved working conditions:** Specific attention should be paid to Occupational Safety and Health, decent wages, work-life balance, predictable schedules, and safe staffing levels.
- **Recognition and career pathways:** To ensure long-term retention and motivation, workers should have clear job descriptions, opportunities for progression, and access to personalised career support within supportive and inclusive organisational structures.
- **Effective change management:** With the shift to digitalisation, climate adaptation, and new service models, structured and inclusive approaches are needed to build workforce resilience and adaptability.
- Employment security determines the quality of jobs and allows for long-term planning, including predictability of service provision based on care workers and service users' life long needs.
- Gender equality and broader diversity issues

## **2. In your view, which area(s) should be prioritised at the EU level, and why?**

### **What specific measures and tools should be used? (Distinguish between legislative, non-legislative, and funding instruments)**

Some areas should be prioritised at the EU level:

- 1) Education, training and career development;
- 2) Improved working conditions and OSH, with particular attention to Psychosocial Risks;
- 3) Gender equality and workforce diversity.

While these areas have known numerous legislative proposals being adopted in the recent years, the Commission must ensure that these directives were implemented and enforced in the Member States, guaranteeing their benefits to workers around the Union.

More precisely, the Commission can use the specific measures and tools:

#### **A. Education, Training and Career Development**

- **Implementation to monitor:** Directives 2019/1152 (working conditions) and 2019/1158 (work-life balance), particularly for precarious workers.
- **Non-legislative:** Support EU-wide skills forecasting, mutual recognition of qualifications, and exchange of best practices within the Pact for Skills.
- **Funding:** Issue targeted ESF+ and Erasmus+ calls for inclusive training, on-the-job mentoring, and re-skilling programmes, especially for low-qualified or migrant workers.

#### **B. Improved Working Conditions and OSH**

- **Implementation to monitor:** Directive 89/391/EEC on OSH
- **Non-legislative:** Promote the dissemination and national use of the upcoming Eurofound study (2025) on wages in the sector to inform discussions on wages and funding.
- **Funding:** Increase and safeguard funding for safe staffing levels and decent wages.

#### **C. Gender Equality and Workforce Diversity**

- **Implementation to monitor:** equal pay and anti-discrimination provisions under existing EU directives.
- **Non-legislative:** Promote national-level diversity and inclusion policies in hiring, training, and promotion practices.
- **Funding:** Support language and intercultural training, ethical recruitment and integration of migrant care workers.

### 3. Which initiative can you commit to deliver as social partners at the EU level?

The Social Services Social Partners jointly commit to:

- **Continue their activities on working conditions improvement.** Indeed, many social partners joint activities, supported by the European Commission, address major concerns, such as:
  - Musculoskeletal disorders prevention;
  - Psychosocial risks prevention
- **Build capacities regarding social dialogue** across EU Member States, targeting specifically countries with no sectoral social dialogue.
- Participate in the **Pact for Skills** activities. EPSU and the Social Employers are part of the Large Scale Partnership for Skills in Long-Term Care and contribute to Care4Skills, a large ERASMUS+ project aiming to assess the skills needs, develop a strategy for skills and innovative training tools equipping the long-term care workforce with digital and person-centred skills.

### 4. What specific measures can be implemented to increase collective bargaining coverage and strengthen social dialogue in the Member States?

Timely, meaningful consultation and negotiations between, national representative social partners, local trade unions and management will provide a strong platform to deal advantageously with the many challenges currently faced in the workplace.

- **Support the implementation of Directive 2022/2041** on Adequate Minimum Wages, particularly national action plans for collective bargaining coverage where it is below 80%.
- **Promote the establishment of employers' organisations** in countries lacking sectoral representation to enable dialogue with trade unions and collective bargaining.
- **Support the social services sector in:**
  - o Sharing practices.
  - o Contributing to the development of social dialogue.
  - o Build social partners' capacity through EU-funded projects.
- **Use EU funding tools** to support social dialogue capacity-building, especially in Central and Eastern Europe.

The **Federation of European Social Employers** (the Social Employers) represents social services employers at the European level. It defines social services as care and support for older people, persons with disabilities, children, and other disadvantaged persons. The Federation's goals are to strengthen employers' positions at both European and national levels, develop common positions among members, and engage in dialogue with European trade unions. In doing so, the Social Employers support quality services and quality jobs in the sector.



The **European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU)** brings together trade unions from across Europe and represents over 8 million public service workers. It is the most representative European trade union organisation in the social services sector. EPSU works hard to deliver better working conditions, improved health and safety and enhanced rights for its members. By sitting down with employers at European level, we negotiate best practice agreements that improve the working lives of public service workers and ensure quality services for citizens.



The **Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)** is the broadest European association of local and regional governments. It is the only organisation that brings together one million democratically elected European politicians, in 60 member associations from 40 countries since 1951. CEMR is also the European section of the world organisation United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), through which it represents European local and regional government on the international stage.

