



From Recommendations to Actions: Member States' practices to implement the European Care Strategy

National Practices on Workforce and Working Conditions in Care



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Introduction: Workforce measures for better care

Context

In 2022, the European Commission launched the **European Care Strategy** to improve long-term care (LTC) and early childhood education and care (ECEC) across the EU. The strategy focuses on expanding access to affordable, high-quality care, enhancing working conditions for care workers, and supporting work-life balance for caregivers. It also provides recommendations to Member States on LTC and ECEC, calling for **national reforms** to improve the availability, accessibility, and quality of care services.

The core of the Strategy consists of **two Council Recommendations** proposed by the European Commission and adopted by the Council on 8 December 2022:

1. on access to affordable high-quality long-term care
2. on the new Barcelona targets on early childhood education and care

To support policy reforms for high-quality, affordable long-term care, Member States appointed national long-term care coordinators and were asked to report to the European Commission on the measures taken or planned. By mid-2024, the coordinators submitted their implementation reports.¹

To support policy reforms in early childhood education and care, the Council adopted revised 2030 targets and encouraged Member States to increase children's participation in ECEC. The Recommendation also provides specific guidance to help Member States achieve these targets.

Methodology

With long-term care implementation reports available from 27 countries, the InGoodShape project partners reviewed the measures, highlighting those most relevant to **tackling workforce challenges** to inspire Member States and stakeholders. Developments in ECEC were also considered, drawing on data from Eurofound's 2025 report "Working for children matters: an overview of service delivery and workforce in Europe."²

For LTC, partners selected good practices based on the European Commission's initial analysis of the workforce-related initiatives reported by Member States. They compiled descriptions of these national initiatives, added their own observations, and highlighted additional initiatives, especially those involving social partners, to further enrich the overview.

¹ Country reports on the implementation of the Council recommendation on LTC :

https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?pager.offset=10&advSearchKey=ltlmprep&mode=advancedSubmit&catId=22&doc_submit=&policyArea=0&policyAreaSub=0&country=0&year=0&iframe=true

² Eurofound (2025), [Working for children matters: An overview of service delivery and workforce in Europe](#), Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.



The project partners also developed a **set of recommendations** for the European Commission, the Member States and Social Partners, to support the further implementation of the European Care Strategy.

About InGoodShape

The project supports the implementation of the European Care Strategy by showcasing good practices on the social services workforce. Its goal is to help improve working conditions, by addressing physical and mental health risks such as musculoskeletal disorders and psychosocial risks. It also aims to further strengthen the capacity for social dialogue in the sector.



Building career progression

Investing in career development for social services personnel is essential to ensuring high-quality care, attracting new talent, and retaining experienced staff. Well-structured career pathways not only motivate workers but also enhance professional skills, leading to better outcomes for service users.

Italy: Expanding roles and career Pathways

Decree No. 77 (2022) introduces **new models for local care** within the National Health Service, with several measures that support career progression for health, social, and home care professionals. The decree creates new roles, most notably the family or community nurse, which come with expanded responsibilities in coordinating person-centred, interdisciplinary care. The decree also establishes the case manager role, offering leadership opportunities within care teams.

In addition, the promotion of multiprofessional teams in Community Houses encourages collaboration and specialisation, advancing new career paths across health and social sectors. By integrating professionals such as general practitioners, nurses, pharmacists, psychologists, and social workers, the decree supports team-based care and opens up opportunities for advancement, skill development, and cross-sector mobility.

The Netherlands: An innovative labour market programme

The Future-proof Care and Welfare Labour Market programme (Toekomstbestendige Arbeidsmarkt Zorg en Welzijn (TAZ)) aims to create more time and space for (1) innovative ways of working, (2) employee retention and (3) learning and development of the workforce. TAZ aims to support a future-proof labour market for care & welfare, combining various initiatives to stimulate innovative working methods, improve employment practices and better retain employees, and encourage learning and development. Primary responsibility for important aspects lies with healthcare employers. With TAZ, the ministry supports them in this challenge together with other relevant parties, such as health care employees, unions, insurers and the education sector.

Education and training

Education and training are key to improving both working conditions and the quality of care in the social services sector. Across Europe, different strategies have been developed to attract new professionals, enhance skills, and adapt to evolving care needs. The following section presents examples from Austria, Belgium, and Finland illustrating how financial incentives, cultural reforms, and professional obligations can strengthen the LTC workforce.



Workforce training is also a priority in the Early Childhood Education and Care sector. Eurofound reports that of the 160 workforce-related measures in the European Child Guarantee national action plans, 70% focused on workforce training.

Austria: Two key financial support measures

Austria has introduced financial support measures to strengthen nursing education and attract more people into LTC. A **monthly education subsidy** of €600, established under the Nursing and Care Education Wage Increase Special Purpose Subsidy Act (PAusbZG), came into force in 2022. This subsidy provides financial assistance to individuals undergoing care-related training, helping to reduce financial barriers and encourage more people to enter the sector. In 2023, the Austrian government allocated €88 million to this initiative. During the first winter semester of 2022, around 8,400 trainees benefited from the monthly payments.³

In addition, the government introduced the **nursing grant** (Pflegestipendium) in 2023 as part of the broader long-term care reform. This grant targets individuals who wish to enter nursing professions later in life or retrain for higher qualifications. The nursing grant is based on existing unemployment benefits or minimum income support, providing at least € 53,56 (2025) per day. It supports various training pathways, including nursing assistant, specialist nursing assistant, and social care programmes. From January 2023 until June 2024 approximately 9,000 people received the nursing grant, 78% of whom were women.⁴

Belgium: Free training, coaching, and knowledge exchange to accompany the cultural shift in care for older adults

Following a reform of accreditation standards, Brussels partnered with the King Baudouin Foundation to support the cultural shift in facilities for older adults. The "**It Takes a Village**" initiative offers free training, coaching, and knowledge exchange for care staff. An online platform is also available to support both staff and institutions in this transition.

The goal is to transform care facilities into genuine living spaces, moving away from a purely care-oriented model to one that centres on the needs and preferences of older adults with care needs. The new standards aim to enhance well-being and care quality by promoting participation, freedom of choice, autonomy, and independence.⁵

Finland: Obligations for maintaining and developing staff competences

Under the Act on Healthcare Professionals (559/1994), healthcare professionals in Finland are required to **maintain and update their knowledge and skills** and stay informed about relevant

³ Austrian Wage Increase Special Purpose Subsidy Act:

<https://www.sozialministerium.gv.at/Themen/Pflege/Pflegepersonal.html#PAusbZG>

⁴ Austrian nursing grant:

https://www.oesterreich.gv.at/de/themen/arbeit_beruf_und_pension/stipendien/pflegestipendium

⁵ Belgium: "It takes a village" initiative, <https://itav.brussels/fr/>



laws and regulations. Employers must support this by monitoring professional development and providing opportunities for further training and other methods to ensure safe and competent practice. Additionally, healthcare professionals must have sufficient language proficiency to effectively perform their duties.

Under the Act on Social Welfare Professionals (817/2015), **client safety and the right to high-quality, respectful care** are supported by ensuring that professionals have the necessary education, qualifications, and capabilities. Employers must provide proper orientation and ensure access to continuing education to support the development of vocational skills.

Cyprus: Subsidised training opportunities in the social care sector

The Human Resources Development Authority (HRDA) of Cyprus offers funding to support the education, training, and development of the workforce, including professionals working in the social care sector. The HRDA plays a key role in promoting lifelong learning and enhancing the skills of workers in the social care sector.

The HRDA offers **subsidies and funding** for businesses and organisations (social care providers, such as nursing homes, healthcare centres, and NGOs offering social services) to support the training of their employees, including social carers. These funding schemes are designed to improve the skills of the workforce in line with market needs, including healthcare and social services professionals. There are various specialised training programmes for social carers that cater to the needs of vulnerable populations, such as the older adults, children, or persons with disabilities,

The HRDA also offers **free training** opportunities to individuals who are looking to enter the workforce or improve their skills, including the unemployed or those considering a career change, helping them gain qualifications and improve employment opportunities in social care.

Strengthening professional standards

Strengthening professional standards is essential to ensuring both quality of care and decent working conditions in the social services sector. Across Europe, initiatives are being developed to formalise skills, raise care quality, and improve the working environment of professionals. The following examples, identified by the project partners, highlight different approaches.

Austria: Quality certificate focusing on the work environment

The **National Quality Certificate for Retirement and Nursing Homes (NQZ)** is a standardised external assessment system used throughout Austria to evaluate and promote quality in residential LTC facilities. The NQZ serves as a voluntary quality development tool. Facilities that already have a recognised quality management system can apply for certification, but only measures that go beyond legal requirements are assessed. The certification process primarily focuses on two key aspects: the quality of life for residents and the work environment for staff.



As part of each certification, evaluation teams provide tailored recommendations to support continuous improvement. By 30 June 2023, a total of 178 certifications and re-certifications had been carried out across Austria.⁶

France: Professional standards recognising and formalising the skills of informal (family) caregivers

The "Acting for Caregivers" strategy (2023–2027) addresses professional standards through its emphasis on **recognising and formalising the skills of informal (family) caregivers**.

One of the cornerstones of the initiative is the extension of the recognition of Prior Learning (Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience, VAE) to family caregivers. This allows caregivers to have their practical experience formally recognised, potentially leading to certification or qualifications in the health and social care fields.

Spain: Programme centres committed to excellence in care

The BPSO® programme in Spain promotes the implementation of **evidence-based best practice guidelines in care**. Institutions such as the Hospital Universitario Torrecárdenas have integrated tools like the Visual Numeric Scale (EVN) and care plans, including post-discharge follow-up by phone. This approach has been recognised by WHO Europe as a good practice to transform health services.

The programme focuses on implementing best practice guidelines and creating healthy working environments. External quality assessments is a key element that ensures high care standards and safe, supportive conditions for workers. BPSO® implementation improves clinical practice, patient outcomes, and nursing work environments by actively involving nurses in the process.⁷

ICT tools for recruitment, training

Digitalisation is increasingly shaping the way social services are delivered and how professionals are trained. ICT tools can support recruitment, enhance skills, and create more flexible and accessible learning opportunities for care staff. The following examples illustrate how Belgium, Denmark and Spain are using digital solutions to strengthen professional training and improve service provision.

Belgium: Inclusive digital support and skill-building in Flemish care

Blended Hulp (blended support) is an initiative by the Flemish public authorities aimed at enhancing skills and providing mixed digital support for care providers and beneficiaries. It strengthens the skills of local actors, diversifies assistance through channels such as chat,

⁶ Austria: National Quality Certificate for Retirement and Nursing Homes, <https://www.nqz.gv.at/>

⁷ Spain: Best Practices in Care Implementation Program, <https://www.bpso.es/>



videoconferencing, and telephone, and adapts digital tools for people with specific needs, including those who are autistic or blind.⁸

Denmark: Expanding simulation training to strengthen practical skills and workforce readiness

Funding has been allocated to support schools in expanding the use of **simulation training**, reinforcing practical skills and improving student readiness for the workforce. Simulation training is intended to bridge the gap between theory and practice, helping students gain hands-on experience in a controlled environment. This method aims to reduce the practice and responsibility shock students often face when moving from classroom learning to real-world apprenticeships.

Fair wages and financial incentives

Ensuring fair wages and providing financial incentives are crucial to improving job attractiveness, retention, and recognition in the social services sector. Across Europe, governments and social partners have introduced measures to raise pay levels, align salaries with comparable sectors, and provide additional financial support to care professionals. The following examples, identified by the project partners, present different approaches from Austria, Denmark, Hungary and Spain.

Austria: Subsidy for salary increases

To improve pay conditions in the long-term care sector, Austria introduced the Act on the Special-Purpose Subsidy for Salary Increases (EEZG). Under this act, the federal government provided the federal states responsible for nursing and care staff with a total of up to €570 million in 2022 and 2023 in the form of **special-purpose grants**.

This measure benefited around 157,000 individuals working in the sector, including qualified healthcare and nursing staff, nursing assistants, specialist nursing assistants, and professionals in social care roles. With the 2024 amendment to the Long-Term Care Fund Act (PFG), this salary increase has now been made a long-term fixture, ensuring sustained financial recognition and support for care professionals in Austria.⁹

Denmark: Extraordinary tripartite agreement on salary adjustments

In 2023, the Danish Government and the Danish Social Partners made an extraordinary **tripartite agreement on salary adjustments and working conditions** for frontline personnel in the welfare sector, including social and health assistants, nurses, midwives, kindergarten teachers and social workers. The agreement aims to support and enhance recruitment efforts by both

⁸ Belgium (Flanders): Blended Hulp approach, <https://onlinehulp-vlaanderen.be/>

⁹ Austria: Wage Increase Special Purpose Subsidy Act (EEZG),
<https://www.sozialministerium.gv.at/Themen/Pflege/Pflegepersonal.html>

making it more attractive to take part in shift work and incentivising employees to work fulltime rather than part-time. With the involvement of the social partners and relevant stakeholders, this initiative aims at ensuring access to a qualified and sizable workforce to ensure a continuous high level of care.

Hungary: Convergence with health sector salaries

To support wage conditions in social services and prevent emigration, workers in social institutions receive **salaries comparable to those in the health sector**, especially for positions requiring medical qualifications. This goal led to the introduction of a health care supplement in January 2018, ensuring that wages for those working in social and health care fields, particularly in long-term and specialised care, are equal.

As of January 2023, the wages in the social sector increased by an average of 11.8% due to the increase in the minimum wage and the guaranteed minimum wage. From December 2023, the minimum wage was increased by 15% and the guaranteed minimum wage by 10%, resulting in wages in the social sector increasing by almost 9%.

Spain: Annual salary increases in 2023-24-25

The **VIII State Framework Agreement (2023)** introduces key measures to improve fair wages for professionals in the care sector for dependent persons. It establishes annual salary increases of 4% in 2023, and 2.5% in both 2024 and 2025. To protect workers' purchasing power, the agreement includes a salary updating clause: if the cumulative annual Consumer Price Index (CPI) in December of each year exceeds the agreed increase, salaries may be adjusted accordingly, up to a maximum of 3%. Additionally, the agreement enhances income protection during periods of temporary incapacity due to professional contingencies. Workers are entitled to 100% of their salary from the 22nd to the 90th day of incapacity, 95% up to 120 days, and 90% up to 180 days, ensuring financial stability during illness or injury. These provisions aim to strengthen wage fairness and economic security for care sector employees.

Social Dialogue and Collective Bargaining

Social dialogue and collective bargaining are key mechanisms for shaping fair working conditions, improving pay, and strengthening the voice of workers in the social services sector. Across Europe, governments and social partners have promoted structured dialogue and binding agreements to enhance job quality and ensure sustainable workforce development. The following examples, highlighted by the project partners, showcase Belgium's tripartite agreement for stronger care professions, Germany's use of collective agreements to set pay standards across the care sector and the Netherlands' promotion of dialogue on career development, work-life balance, and employee participation.



Belgium: Tripartite agreement to strengthening care professions

In Wallonia, agreements are concluded between the government, employers and trade unions in the social and health sectors. They aim to improve the attractiveness of essential professions (nurses, nursing assistants, educators, etc.). These agreements provide for salary increases, career improvements and measures related to working time.

The 2021-2024 agreement (260 million €) affects more than 60,000 workers. It has led to the introduction of the IFIC pay scale, offering sometimes significant pay rises, the possibility of reducing working hours at the end of a career with compensatory recruitment, as well as specific improvements depending on the sector (increased end-of-year bonus, higher pay scales in adapted work companies, etc.). This agreement marked an important step in attracting new professionals and improving the quality of employment in the sector.

Germany: Collective agreements become the standard for pay across the sector

The Concerted Action on Care (Konzertierte Aktion Pflege, KAP) represents a landmark initiative in Germany's long-term care reform. It was launched in 2018 by five federal ministries and involved a wide range of stakeholders, including social partners, care professionals and providers, education and training institutions, and policymakers. It aims for more trainees, uniform staffing levels across the country, higher pay, and better working and training conditions in care.

The KAP process led to the **introduction of binding collective pay standards**. Since 1 September 2022, all approved long-term care facilities must pay carers wages in line with regional collective agreements, even if they are not formally bound by them. This requirement, detailed in the Care Bonus Act (Pflegebonusgesetz), has made collective agreements the standard for pay across the sector. Remuneration for care workers providing care to older adults and for LTC workers was thus improved, also with the aim of closing the pay gap between nurses and care workers providing care to older adults.

The Netherlands: Social dialogue promotion

The **Integral Care Agreement** (Integraal Zorgakkoord, IZA) promotes social dialogue and addresses career progression within the broader context of improving job satisfaction and retention of health and care workers. The ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport signed the Integral Care Agreement with a range of representatives from the health and care sector including umbrella organisations of hospitals, mental health care and elderly care, and the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG), to drive solutions needed to keep healthcare accessible, affordable and of good quality. Specifically, the IZA states that providers must pay explicit attention to training and career opportunities, recovery time and work-life balance. The IZA encourages employers to involve employees and their representatives not only in operational decisions but also in strategic and policy-level discussions.



Health and safety at work

Health and safety at work are central to protecting care professionals, ensuring their well-being, and safeguarding the quality of services provided. According to Eurofound's European Working Conditions 2023 report, healthcare and social work employees experience higher exposure to adverse social behaviours, such as bullying, harassment, and violence, than the EU-27 average across all sectors.¹⁰ EU-OSHA also highlights significant exposure to physical risk factors.

In ECEC, Eurofound reports that 14 countries have implemented well-being-related training to equip workers with skills for managing both physical and mental health challenges.¹¹

In long-term care, European countries have introduced various measures to reduce physical and psychosocial risks, improve recovery, and strengthen occupational safety, including time credits, well-being tools, job risk classifications, workplace cooperation, and targeted action plans.

Austria: Time credits

Austria introduced the “**relief week**”, as part of Austria’s broader long-term care reforms. From 2023, care professions, including qualified nurses, nursing assistants, and specialist nursing assistants, became entitled to an additional week of paid leave once they reach the age of 43, regardless of years of service or work setting (e.g. hospitals, nursing homes, mobile services).¹²

In addition, since 2023, all employees in institutional long-term care have received two hours of time credit for heavy night work. This is intended to promote longer recovery and reduce the mental and physical stress of care staff.

Belgium: Well-being at work

The **Well-being at Work Tool** aims to promote the well-being of workers in the non-profit sector. Developed as a practical tool rather than a legislative reform or investment initiative, it targets all workers in the sector and is currently being implemented. The tool focuses on several key outcomes: preventing and managing burnout, protecting beneficiaries from abuse, ensuring the health and safety of workers, improving the safety of beneficiaries, and addressing psychosocial risks in the workplace. It is supported by both national and European funding and is being implemented through a partnership between public authorities (Cocof) and ABBET, the Brussels association for well-being at work.

¹⁰ Eurofound (2024), [Living and working in Europe 2023](#), Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

¹¹ Eurofound (2025), [Working for children matters: An overview of service delivery and workforce in Europe](#), Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

¹² Austria: Relief week for nursing staff,

<https://www.sozialministerium.gv.at/Themen/Arbeit/Arbeitsrecht/FAQ-Entlastungswoche.html>

Another initiative is **Grenswijs** ("Boundaries"), aimed at improving aggression management in the care and service sectors. It provides information, tools, and sector-specific support to help prevent abuse and better handle incidents. Key features include a dedicated website, clear reporting procedures, and tailored pedagogical frameworks. The goal is to reduce inappropriate behaviour toward both care recipients and providers.¹³

Czech Republic: Job classifications reflecting level of risks exposure

According to Act No. 258/2000 Coll. on the protection of public health, employers are required to ensure occupational health and safety (OHS) by classifying all jobs into one of four categories. This classification reflects the level of exposure to factors that influence health at work. It is based on a characteristic shift and focuses on determining factors, those known to significantly impact health.

The Ministry of Health supports health and social care professionals in **managing psychologically stressful situations** related to their work through targeted measures. This support is guided by the Methodological Recommendation for the Provision of Psychosocial Support in Healthcare, which aims to help healthcare providers establish a network of trained psychosocial support providers and integrate them into practice.

Finland: OSH supervision and monitoring

The **Act on Occupational Safety and Health Enforcement and Cooperation on Occupational Safety and Health at Workplaces** lays down provisions on how the occupational safety and health authority supervises compliance with occupational safety, the employment relationship and other provisions on occupational safety and health. The Act also lays down provisions on how the cooperation on occupational safety and health between the employer and the employees is monitored at the workplace.

At workplaces with at least ten regular employees, workers must elect an occupational safety and health representative and two vice-representatives. The representative acts as a liaison between employees, the employer, and occupational safety and health authorities.

Portugal: Action plan with funding to prevent violence in LTC

The Active and Healthy Aging Action Plan 2023-2026 is a strategic policy that defines concrete activities approved with allocated funding, for implementation between 2023 and 2026 in Portugal. A key priority of the plan is **providing training for caregivers and care recipients on the topic of violence**, with a focus on promoting its detection, reporting, and preventive action. The plan also emphasises the adaptation of workplaces and the application of the highest standards of occupational health and safety in the long-term care sector.

¹³ Belgium, Grenswijs initiative, <https://www.grenswijs.be/>

Labour and social protection for vulnerable workers

Labour and social protection measures for vulnerable workers are crucial to ensuring fairness, dignity, and equal treatment in the social services sector. Many initiatives across Europe focus on improving working conditions for groups at higher risk of exploitation or discrimination, such as live-in carers, domestic workers, and minority staff. The following examples, highlighted by the project partners, show how Austria and Spain are addressing these challenges through targeted support services, anti-discrimination measures, and strengthened labour rights.

Austria: Support to live-in carers

To support live-in carers, **advisory centres** have been established that provide personal or telephone consultations in multiple languages. These centres help with social, labour, and company law issues, as well as offer information on further education and training opportunities.

To improve quality in 24-hour care, Austria introduced a **voluntary quality certificate** for agencies that recruit live-in carers in 2019. It aims to enhance the care situation for people in need and their families and promote sustainable care services. Agencies that meet higher standards than the legal minimum can apply for certification, which is granted by an independent body.¹⁴

Spain: Protecting vulnerable domestic workers

Spain has taken key steps to protect vulnerable domestic workers, mostly women, by improving their labour rights and social protections. Royal Decree 1620/2011 first regulated their employment, requiring Social Security registration and increasing job stability and transparency. However, gaps remained, such as lack of access to unemployment benefits.

In 2022, Spain ratified ILO Convention 189, committing to **fairer conditions and equal rights for domestic workers**, including protection against abuse and unjust dismissal. This led to Royal Decree-Law 16/2022, which aligned their rights with other workers by granting access to unemployment benefits, improving health and safety protections, and ending the practice of termination without compensation. In addition, Royal Decree 629/2022 reformed the Foreigners' Regulation to support regular migration, improve labour market access, and reduce periods of irregularity.

¹⁴ Austria: Quality certificate for placement agencies in 24-hour care:

<https://www.sozialministerium.gv.at/Ministerium/Preise-und-Guetesiegel/OEQZ24-Oesterreichisches-Qualitaetszertifikat-fuer-Vermittlungsagenturen-in-der-24-Stunden-Betreuung.html>

Examples of ICT tools for better working conditions

ICT tools are increasingly being used to improve working conditions in social services by reducing administrative burdens, enhancing coordination, and supporting person-centred care. Digital solutions can streamline workflows, facilitate cooperation between professionals and families, and strengthen the integration of health and social care.

Austria: Examples of ICT use

Digitalisation and AI are increasingly important, particularly in documentation, care planning, and information management. Tools such as electronic or voice-controlled care documentation systems, AI-supported duty scheduling, and data collection platforms are being used to streamline workflows. These technologies also aid transition processes between healthcare providers and social services and help integrate retirement and nursing homes with the ELGA (Austrian electronic health record system).

Numerous pilot projects across Austria showcase innovative applications. "**Workvision Home Nursing**" in Salzburg, for example, improves coordination between health and social services, while the "**Salve.care**" app¹⁵ in Vorarlberg standardises applications for long-term or short-term care placements.

Belgium: Digital support for cooperation and communication

Alivia (Flanders) is a digital care and support plan that aims to provide digital support for cooperation and communication between beneficiaries, professional care and health providers, and family caregivers. Alivia integrates these three key actors into a shared care plan focused on individuals with complex or long-term care needs. The care plan, centred on the person with support needs, sets out the objectives, the division of tasks and the exchange of information, promoting integrated, person-centred care in a home setting.¹⁶

MaSanté (Belgium) is an online platform that centralises medical records, official medical documents (insurance, certificates, etc.), communication with care teams, and general health information. It enables beneficiaries to access and manage their health data in one secure location, supporting informed decision-making and smoother coordination with healthcare professionals.

Germany: Digital 'data highway' for LTC facilities

All long-term care facilities will be connected to Germany's **national digital health network**, the telematics infrastructure (TI). The connection to the digital 'data highway' for healthcare was

¹⁵ Austria: App salve.care, <https://www.connexia.at/kompetenzzentrum-betreuung-und-pflege/projekte/salvecare/>

¹⁶ Belgium: Alivia digital care and support plan, <https://www.departementzorg.be/nl/alivia-uw-digitaal-zorg-en-ondersteuningsplan>



voluntary up to now and will become mandatory for LTC facilities from 1 July 2025. This connection enables secure access to electronic patient records, digital prescriptions and referrals and better information sharing among care providers. The costs of connecting care facilities to the digital infrastructure will be covered by the long-term care insurance for the first-time set-up and ongoing operating costs to support widespread adoption.

In addition, a national digitalisation competence centre was established, aimed at identifying and promoting innovations to enhance care delivery for both care recipients and caregivers.

Finland: Programme on technology supporting smart ageing and care at home

As part of the National Programme on Ageing, the **KATI programme on technology supporting smart ageing and care at home** (2020–2023) implemented by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) and VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland built a sustainable, client-oriented and participatory national operating model. Its goal was to fully make use of technological and digital solutions to support independent living, in-home services, and home care for older adults and others needing support.¹⁷

Recruitment Strategies

Recruitment strategies are critical to addressing workforce shortages and ensuring the long-term sustainability of social services. Countries across Europe are implementing targeted initiatives to attract new workers, improve the visibility of care careers, and support students and jobseekers in entering the sector. The following examples, identified by the project partners, highlight how Belgium and France are promoting careers, supporting vulnerable learners, and strengthening recruitment channels.

Belgium: Promotion of careers in the care sector

The **care-er.be web portal** promotes careers in the care sector. The initiative supports the recognition of skills acquired outside traditional training pathways, allowing individuals to obtain formal qualifications linked to care professions. Care-er.be aims to raise the sector's visibility and attractiveness, particularly among male workers, and to centralise information on career paths, training, and job opportunities. It also contributes to expanding skills training and increasing the inflow of new workers, a crucial step in addressing staffing shortages across all regions. The project is funded by the Flemish public authorities and targets all potential care sector workers.¹⁸

To address workforce shortages in the care, support, and social services sectors, several podcast initiatives have been launched to attract talent and raise awareness about these professions. “**En quête de dignité**” (AViQ) is an upcoming podcast series promoting careers in care and social

¹⁷ Finland: KATI Programme, <https://thl.fi/en/research-and-development/research-and-projects/technology-supporting-smart-ageing-and-care-at-home-programme-kati>

¹⁸ Belgium: Care-er.be project, <https://care-er.be/nl>



services. Initiated by RTBF, it will air in September on Vivacité and RMB, showcasing the experiences, challenges, and rewards of social and healthcare professions.

“J'aime mon métier” is Belgium’s first podcast highlighting inspiring social and healthcare careers. Every two weeks, a professional shares their journey and challenges in a 40-minute episode, covering roles from social workers and nurses to psychologists and educators.

France: Recruitment campaigns and dedicated staff in employment agencies

To support recruitment and enhance professional mobility in the long-term care sector, an **emergency recruitment campaign** has been underway since 2022, coordinated at the regional level. In parallel, the Employment and Skills Development Commitment (EDEC) and a call for projects supported by the National Solidarity Fund for Autonomy (CNSA) have contributed to the development of 19 specialised, localised recruitment platforms. These platforms serve as mediation hubs between job supply and demand in LTC, with an annual budget allocation of €10 million from the CNSA.

Additionally, France Travail (formerly Pôle emploi) will gradually equip its 3,200 local employment agencies with a recruitment advisor specialised in LTC. A pilot phase began in around 100 employment areas in January 2025, with broader implementation planned for 2026.

Mobility, legal migration pathways and international recruitment

Several European countries have introduced targeted initiatives to address labour shortages in social services by facilitating mobility, legal migration pathways, and the recruitment of foreign workers. The examples below illustrate different approaches to attracting, recognising, and integrating care professionals from abroad.

Belgium: Think Tank on attracting foreign care talent

Flanders has launched the **Think Tank on Attracting Foreign Care Talent** (Thinktank ‘aantrekken van buitenlands zorgtalent’) to address workforce shortages and promote inclusive employment in the care sector. This think tank brings together experts to identify challenges, obstacles, and best practices, with the goal of formulating policy proposals to help political authorities adopt effective measures to attract and integrate foreign care professionals.

Another initiative is **Be-Assist (FPS Economy, Belgium)**, which is an assistance centre that helps citizens from the European Economic Area (EEA) have their professional qualifications recognised in Belgium. It provides guidance on regulated professions, access conditions, and the procedures for recognition based on foreign qualifications. Recognition may be automatic or require proof of qualifications and professional experience. The initiative aims to integrate foreign

professionals into the Belgian labour market, address workforce shortages, and ensure fair and transparent recognition.

Germany: Streamlining the recognition of foreign nursing degrees

Under an act to strengthen tertiary nursing education (Pflegestudiumstärkungsgesetz, 2023), Germany has streamlined the recognition of foreign nursing degrees by a standardised federal framework. Applicants can be fully recognised if their qualifications are equivalent or take an exam or adaptation course otherwise. The law remains embedded in the regulated nursing profession framework (Pflegeberufegesetz) and extends simplified processes and documentation standards.¹⁹

Finland: Qualification's supervision

The National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health (Valvira) grants the professional practice rights in healthcare and social welfare on application to professionals educated both in Finland and abroad. The professional qualifications of a healthcare and social welfare professional can be verified in the public information service of the registers of healthcare and social welfare professionals maintained by Valvira.

Slovenia: Measures aiming at supporting migrant workers

The 2024 “Act on Urgent Measures to Improve Personnel and Working Conditions and Capacity of Providers of Social Welfare Services and LTC” aims to improve social welfare and long-term care by addressing workforce gaps.

The Act includes specific measures aimed at **supporting migrant workers**. It allocates funding to strengthen the Infopoint for foreigners, which assists employers in hiring foreign workers by promoting job opportunities in Slovenia and offering online Slovenian language courses. The initiative also involves advising employers, organising international job fairs, and providing language training. Foreign workers and their families are registered to participate in these programs.

In addition, an integration programme is in place to help new foreign employees and their families adapt to both work and social life. This program covers costs related to temporary housing, qualification recognition, and language courses. To ensure accountability, employers must report annually on the activities and outcomes of these programmes.

¹⁹ Germany: Tertiary Nursing Education Act, <https://www.bundesgesundheitsministerium.de/service/gesetze-und-verordnungen/detail/pflegestudiumstaerkungsgesetz-pflstudstg.html>

Tackle gender stereotypes and gender segregation

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) reports in “Gender Inequalities in Care and Pay in the EU” that strong gender segregation in the ECEC sector contributes to pay gaps and poor working conditions.²⁰ Similar issues are noted for LTC in the relevant Council recommendation.

Across Europe, governments and social partners are taking steps to challenge gender stereotypes and reduce occupational segregation in the care sector. The following examples highlight national measures aimed at promoting gender equality, improving pay equity, and encouraging more balanced participation of women and men in social services.

Denmark: Action plan for gender equality for men and boys

To address the overrepresentation of women in care work, the Danish government has launched initiatives to challenge gender stereotypes and make LTC professions more appealing to all genders. For instance, in the first ever **action plan for gender equality for men and boys**, launched in May 2024, the Government and Parliament parties allocated funding for two initiatives aiming at recruiting and retaining more boys and young men in care work and care educations.

Spain: Requirement for equality plans

Royal Decree-Law 6/2019 expanded the **requirement for equality plans to companies with 50 or more employees**, promoting work-life balance, shared parental responsibilities, and mandating equal pay for work of equal value. Royal Decree 902/2020 further strengthens pay equity by introducing transparency tools like pay registers, company audits, and job evaluation systems to identify and correct wage discrimination. It also encourages collaboration between ministries and social partners to tackle the gender pay gap. Royal Decree 901/2020 requires equality plans to include negotiated diagnoses, pay audits, and cover all workers from hiring to exit, ensuring these plans are actionable and registered. These measures aim to address not only wage gaps but also job precarity and work-life balance challenges, helping to reduce women's economic dependency and prevent vulnerability and gender-based violence.

Support LTC workers' cooperation with informal carers

LTC systems across Europe increasingly recognise the importance of cooperation between professional staff and informal carers, who provide a significant share of support to persons in need of care. The following examples illustrate national initiatives to strengthen collaboration, provide guidance and training, and ensure that informal carers receive adequate recognition and support alongside professional services.

²⁰ European Institute for Gender Equality (2020), [Gender Inequalities in Care and Pay in the EU](#).

Austria: Nurses as local contact points for health and care issues

The Community Nursing project, launched in 2021, introduced **qualified nurses as local contact points for health and care issues**. They offer low-threshold advice, coordinate services, and focus on prevention and integrated care. Funded by the EU's NextGenerationEU with EUR 54 million, the initiative had 116 active projects by January 2024. As of January 2024, community nursing became a permanent service through its inclusion in the Long-Term Care Fund.²¹

Belgium: Recognition of Informal Caregivers

The Royal Decree of 16 June 2020 implements the law of 12 May 2014 on the **recognition of informal caregivers**, defining the conditions, the concepts of caregiver and care recipient, and the rights of caregivers. Recognition can take two forms: formal (symbolic) recognition and recognition with social rights, which may include access to benefits such as caregiver leave.

This framework aims to acknowledge the essential contribution of informal caregivers and provide them with tangible support while respecting their role in the care ecosystem. In particularly complex care situations, a case manager may be appointed to represent the interests of the care recipient. Working closely with the beneficiary, informal caregiver, care coordinator, general practitioner, and other involved professionals, the case manager ensures that care remains aligned with the goals defined by the beneficiary and their support network. This role facilitates coordination, optimizes care delivery, and ensures that all interventions are consistent with the individual's needs and preferences.

Czech Republic: Legal recognition and support for informal carers

In June 2024, the amendment to the Social Services Act formally introduced the **definition of a “caring person”**. Informal carers are now explicitly included among those who can benefit from social services such as counselling, personal assistance, respite services, and day centres. The law also recognises training and skill-building for carers as a core activity eligible for funding, ensuring the sustainability of support. Alongside the legislative change, a joint working group of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is developing systemic measures to strengthen carers' confidence and guidance, including the planned establishment of a network of dedicated carers' advisors. These steps represent a significant move towards improving cooperation between professional long-term care workers and informal carers and increasing recognition of carers' roles in the system.²²

Spain: Personalised care by involving family members and partners

Informal care forms a major part of Spain's care system. About 57% of people over 65 needing care receive it solely from informal caregivers. The **Accreditation and Quality Agreement of**

²¹ Austria: Community Nursing project, <https://cn-oesterreich.at/>

²² Presentation “Lessons from the Czech Republic: [Policies and Initiatives for Carers](#).”



SAAD centres and services strengthens collaboration between informal and professional caregivers. It supports personalised care by involving family members and partners in the care process, whether the person is in a residential centre, attending a day centre, or receiving home help.

Finland: Support the informal carer's wellbeing and care task

The **Act on Support for Informal Care** (937/2005) promotes the provision of high-quality informal care by ensuring both carers and care receivers obtain appropriate support. Wellbeing services counties must provide coaching and training if needed, as well as health checks and support the informal carer's wellbeing and care task.

Under the Act, informal carers are entitled to time off, during which the county must arrange care for the recipient. A care allowance is granted based on the level of commitment and care required. A care and service plan on support for informal care is created jointly with the carer and care recipient, forming the basis of a formal agreement. Carers with such agreements must also be insured under the Workers' Compensation Act. The Act supports carers by recognising their role and ensuring they receive necessary training, support, and fair conditions.

Conclusions

Following the Council Recommendations on long-term care (LTC) and early childhood education and care (ECEC), Member States were called upon to take measures to improve the situation of caregivers. Both sectors face persistent understaffing and challenging working conditions, highlighting the urgency of action.

This report, compiled by the InGoodShape project partners, presents examples of initiatives undertaken by Member States, specifically in response to the LTC Recommendation and the new targets for childcare. By highlighting these initiatives, the report aims to inspire further action. Good practices exist across various domains, yet additional efforts are needed to address working conditions and staff shortages in care.

Building on this report, the project partners developed a set of recommendations for the European Commission, the Member States and Social Partners, to support the further implementation of the European Care Strategy (see next chapter).



Policy Recommendations to Further Implement the European Care Strategy and Strengthen Europe's Care Workforce

Towards a Sustainable and Valued Care Workforce

Europe's long-term care (LTC) and early childhood education and care (ECEC) sectors face persistent challenges, including a retention and recruitment crisis resulting in staff shortages, difficult working conditions, strong gender imbalance, limited opportunities for upskilling, reskilling and career progression.

The national policies reported by Member States as part of the European Care Strategy implementation process show that progress is possible when reforms address, among others, quality jobs, working conditions, career progression and gender equality. This has also been underscored by the InGoodShape report "From Recommendations to Actions: Member States' practices to implement the European Care Strategy".

Implementing the European Care Strategy needs strong coordination, investment, and monitoring at different levels. The European Commission must lead by supporting systemic reforms, and Member States must invest in professionalisation and fairer working conditions. Employers and workers' representatives should work together to embed, for example, genuinely open and participative dialogue, wellbeing, and innovation into everyday practice. Together, these and other progressive measures can transform care work into a more attractive and sustainable career.

The following recommendations address three main targets: the European Commission, the Member States and the social partners in social services.



Recommendations for the European Commission

In recent years, the European Commission, recognising the challenges an ageing EU population will face, has taken significant steps to urge Member States to strengthen care services. However, much remains to be done.

1. Strengthen EU coordination and monitoring

- Reinforce regular, ongoing dialogue with social partners on the Care Workforce to facilitate policy learning and peer review. Support and encourage exchange among Member States and social partners.
- Integrate care workforce indicators into the European Semester cycle and Social Scoreboard, tracking pay, staffing ratios, and training access.
- Monitor countries and uphold their implementation of relevant directives and initiatives.

2. Enhance EU funding and capacity-building

- Prioritise and safeguard care workforce investment through dedicated EU funding for professionalisation, training, and digital upskilling.
- Support cross-border projects, for example on digitalisation and technology in care, gender equality, elimination of violence, training of staff, etc. An example is the Care4Skills project²³, co-funded by ERASMUS+.

3. Promote fair labour mobility and ethical recruitment

- Develop an EU framework for ethical recruitment in care upholding fair working conditions for EU and third-country migrant workers and mutual recognition of qualifications.
- Facilitate partnerships between sending and receiving countries to prevent “care drain” and ensure mutual benefits.

4. Support social dialogue

- Support capacity-building and practice sharing for social partners and sectoral social dialogue.
- Strengthen and improve collective bargaining in all Member States.

²³ Project website: <https://care4skills.eu/>

Recommendations for Member States

Although the European Commission can point Member States in the right direction, it is ultimately the Member States that hold decision-making powers in the field of social policy. Yet many of them, faced with competing demands for investment in defence or competitiveness, prioritise short-term budget constraints and overlook social investment, even though it can reduce costs and improve population wellbeing in the medium term. The care economy is a strategic pillar of sustainable development, bridging economic, social, development and gender equality agendas.

The 2024 ILO Resolution on Decent Work and the Care Economy reinforces this point, highlighting the essential links between competitiveness, the care economy, gender equality, decent work, sustainable development, and social justice.

The following paragraphs call on Member States to set medium- and long-term objectives and to invest substantially in the care sector.

1. Invest in career progression and lifelong learning

- Create structured career pathways across care roles, with recognition of skills and prior learning.

→ **Example: Italy's Decree No. 77 (2022) introduces new roles such as family and community nurses and case managers, expanding leadership opportunities.²⁴**

- Develop and fund Vocational Education and Training, linked to licensing and quality standards.

→ **Example: Finland's Acts on Healthcare and Social Welfare Professionals creates an obligation to provide regular training and monitor competence.**

- Encourage cooperation between education providers and employers to align curricula with real care needs.

→ **Example: The Netherlands' "Future-proof Care and Welfare Labour Market" (TAZ) links ministries, unions, and schools to align skills with sectoral needs.**

2. Ensure fair pay and decent working conditions

- Promote and fund collective agreements that improve pay equity, working hours, and occupational safety.
- Efficiently transpose into national law all EU directives regarding pay and working conditions, such as (but not limited to) the Work-Life Balance, Minimum Wage and Pay Transparency Directives.

²⁴ All the following initiatives are drawn from the national implementation reports submitted by Member States to the European Commission.

- Social care workers earn 20% less than the average wage across Member States' economies. Beyond the need to close the pay gap, additional measures are needed to help care workers make ends meet, including targeted housing support for workers in high-cost areas and better access to social housing.²⁵

3. Strengthen occupational health, safety, and well-being

- Develop preventive frameworks and tools against physical and psychosocial risks and establish support services for burnout and mental health.
- Follow and as a minimum maintain the requirements of the OSH Framework Directive (1989), which sets essential principles for preventing workplace risks, protecting workers' safety and health, and guaranteeing consultation, participation, and training for workers and their representatives.

4. Professionalise and support informal care

- Recognise and certify the competences of informal carers, integrate them in care coordination and training programmes.
- Provide respite services, financial allowances, and access to counselling for carers.

→ **Example: Finland's Act on Support for Informal Care guarantees training, health checks, and insured leave for carers.**

- Promote community-based models that link formal and informal care.

5. Promote gender balance and attract new talent

- Launch campaigns to recruit under-represented groups.

→ **Example: Denmark's Action Plan for Men and Boys (2024) funds initiatives to engage more men in care education.**

- Improve career visibility through national campaigns and partnerships with employment agencies.

→ **Example: The Czech Republic's "Srdce na pravém místě" campaign showcases real care workers to boost the sector's visibility and attract new talent into social care.**

- Support migrant integration and language training to sustain a diverse and qualified workforce.
- Promote gender-responsive workforce plans to address gender segregation, gender pay gaps, work-life balance needs of a heavily feminised workforce.

²⁵ Eurofound (2025), *A decade of low pay: Social services workers still earn around one-fifth less than the average*, article. URL: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/publications/all/a-decade-of-low-pay-social-services-workers-still-earn-around-one-fifth-less-than-the-average>

→ **Example: The Spanish Royal Decree-Law 6/2019 requires companies with 50+ employees to implement equality plans promoting work-life balance and equal pay. Royal Decrees 901/2020 and 902/2020 strengthen these plans with pay audits, transparency tools, and measures covering all employees to reduce the gender pay gap.**

6. Digital transformation, innovation and preparedness

- Support digital infrastructure (electronic health records, shared care plans, simulation training).

→ **Example: Germany's telematics "data highway" will connect all LTC facilities to e-health systems.**
- Fund digital competence centres and ensure digital tools are inclusive, accessible, and ethically governed.
- Build resilience and preparedness for challenging situations and future crises (pandemics, climate change, migration, etc.).

Recommendations for Social Partners in Social Services

Both employers and workers' representatives must, of course, also assume their share of responsibility for improving services and working conditions.

1. Advance decent employment and participatory workplaces

- Engage staff and their representatives more in organisational decisions and invest in social dialogue at organisation level.

→ **Example: The Netherlands' Integral Care Agreement (IZA) promotes staff involvement in strategic planning.**

- Define and implement clear job roles, transparent pay structures and internal promotion paths to improve retention.

2. Use technology for improving working conditions and quality of care

- Adopt digital tools that reduce administrative tasks and support coordination.

→ **Example: Belgium's "Alivia" shared care plan integrates professionals, beneficiaries, and families in person-centred digital coordination.**

- Ensure technology complements, not replaces, human care, maintaining dignity and person-centred approaches.
- Evolving ways of working, including the adoption of digital technologies, should be guided by strong, inclusive change management, including comprehensive communication and consultation with workers and their representatives.

3. Build partnerships with education and training institutions

- Co-develop curricula, internships and apprenticeships to ensure skill relevance.

→ **Example: Cyprus' HRDA funding schemes help social care providers finance staff training aligned with market needs.**

- In addition, encourage and duly recognise mentoring and peer learning within teams.

4. Strengthen occupational health, safety, and well-being

- Involve workers and their representatives in designing preventive measures against physical and psychosocial risks and on overall workplace health, safety and wellbeing initiatives.
- Invest in ergonomic workplaces, digital technologies, violence prevention programmes, etc. with consultation of workers and their representatives
- Develop clear protocols and incident reporting systems, using digital tools to improve occupational safety and health, such as digital reporting platforms.