



2025/2039(INI)

01.09.2025

DRAFT REPORT

on advancing towards a care society: addressing the gender care gap
(2025/2039(INI))

Committee on Employment and Social Affairs
Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

(Joint committee procedure - Rule 59 of the Rules of Procedure)

Rapporteurs: Eleonora Meleti, Rosa Estaràs Ferragut

CONTENTS

	Page
MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION.....	3
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT	9
ANNEX: DECLARATIONS OF INPUT	12

MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on advancing towards a care society: addressing the gender care gap

(2025/2039(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Treaty on European Union, in particular Article 2 thereof,
- having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, in particular Articles 8, 19, 153 and 157 thereof,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 5 March 2020 entitled ‘A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025’ ([COM\(2020\)0152](#)),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 7 September 2022 on the European care strategy ([COM\(2022\)0440](#)), the Council Recommendation of 8 December 2022 on early childhood education and care: the Barcelona targets for 2030¹ and the Council Recommendation of 8 December 2022 on access to affordable high-quality long-term care²,
- having regard to the European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan, 2030 headline targets and the EU Social Scoreboard,
- having regard to Directive 2006/54/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation³,
- having regard to Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU⁴ (the Work-Life Balance Directive),
- having regard to its resolution of 21 January 2021 on the EU Strategy for Gender Equality⁵,
- having regard to its resolution of 5 July 2022 entitled ‘Towards a common European action on care’⁶,
- having regard to Directive (EU) 2022/2041 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on adequate minimum wages in the European Union⁷,
- having regard to the report by Mario Draghi of 9 September 2024 on the future of

¹ OJ C 484, 20.12.2022, p. 1.

² OJ C 476, 15.12.2022, p. 1.

³ OJ L 204, 26.7.2006, p. 23, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2006/54/oj>.

⁴ OJ L 188, 12.7.2019, p. 79, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2019/1158/oj>.

⁵ OJ C 456, 10.11.2021, p. 208.

⁶ OJ C 47, 7.2.2023, p. 30.

⁷ OJ L 275, 25.10.2022, p. 33, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2022/2041/oj>.

European competitiveness,

- having regard to Directive (EU) 2023/970 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 May 2023 to strengthen the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value between men and women through pay transparency and enforcement mechanisms⁸,
 - having regard to the Commission proposal of 15 November 2023 for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on establishing an EU Talent Pool ([COM\(2023\)0716](#)),
 - having regard to Directive (EU) 2024/2831 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2024 on improving working conditions in platform work⁹,
 - having regard to the Council conclusions of 3 December 2024 on ensuring work-life balance and gender equality for all generations in the context of demographic challenges, approved by the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) at its meeting held on 2 December 2024,
 - having regard to the Council conclusions of 4 December 2024 on labour and skills shortages in the EU: Mobilising untapped labour potential in the European Union, approved by EPSCO at its meeting held on 2 December 2024,
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 20 March 2024 entitled ‘Labour and skills shortages in the EU: an action plan’ ([COM\(2024\)0131](#)),
 - having regard to the Commission’s Social Protection Committee Annual Report 2024,
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 5 March 2025 entitled ‘The Union of Skills’ ([COM\(2025\)0090](#)),
 - having regard to the 2025 Commission report on gender equality in the EU, in particular its section on the gender care gap,
 - having regard to Rule 55 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the joint deliberations of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs and the Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality under Rule 59 of the Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs and the Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality (A10-0000/2025),
- A. whereas the European Union is founded on the value of equality between women and men;
- B. whereas a care society recognises care as fundamental to the functioning of economies and societies, which should be valued and equitably shared;

⁸ OJ L 132, 17.5.2023, p. 21, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2023/970/oj>.

⁹ OJ L, 2024/2831, 11.11.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2024/2831/oj>.

- C. whereas care is often undervalued socially and economically; whereas much of care work is unseen and the people providing it risk being inadequately supported;
- D. whereas women bear most care responsibilities, with 90 % of the formal care workforce made up of women¹⁰;
- E. whereas women play a key role in the care sector, and after entering the labour market continue to bear the primary responsibility for household work and care work;
- F. whereas the Work-Life Balance Directive has not been fully implemented in several Member States;
- G. whereas the care sector remains undervalued and underfunded in the EU;
- H. whereas the successful implementation of the European care strategy requires monitoring, transparency, and integration into EU funding and policies;

Care in numbers

1. Highlights that in the EU over 12 million people¹¹ provide unpaid care for sick or elderly family members, or family members with disabilities, and that this use of informal care ranges between 30 % and 85 % of care work¹²;
2. Underlines that 76 % of unpaid care work is carried out by women¹³, and that paid care work is often characterised by low wages and precarious working conditions;
3. Observes that the economic value of unpaid domestic and care work represents 10 % to 39 % of gross domestic product (GDP) worldwide¹⁴, with women carrying out the majority of this work;
4. Highlights that women represent 76 % of the 49 million carers in the EU¹⁵ and account for 93 % of childcare workers and teaching assistants¹⁶, 86 % of personal care workers in health services and 95 % of domestic cleaners¹⁷;
5. Notes that inadequate care systems are among the main barriers to closing gender gaps in labour markets worldwide¹⁸;
6. Notes that public expenditure on long-term care is expected to rise to 1.7 % of GDP by 2050 from 0.8 % of GDP in 2022¹⁹;

¹⁰ European Commission, European care strategy, 2022.

¹¹ Eurostat, Reconciliation between work and family life – statistics, 2019.

¹² European Commission, long-term care report, 2021.

¹³ [International Labour Organization, report on care work and care jobs for the future of decent work, 2018.](#)

¹⁴ 2021, UN on the care economy: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/csw61/redistribute-unpaid-work#notes>.

¹⁵ European Policy Centre (EPC) study entitled 'Gender equality: Who cares? Do you?', 2022.

¹⁶ Eurostat, 'Childcare workers and teachers' aides in the EU in 2020'.

¹⁷ EPC study entitled 'Gender equality: Who cares? Do you?', 2022.

¹⁸ World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report, 2023.

¹⁹ Commission staff working document accompanying the Commission proposal for a Council recommendation on access to affordable high-quality long-term care, 2022.

7. Highlights that by 2070, almost 30 % of the EU population will be aged 65 or over ²⁰, resulting in increased demand for care services and significant pressure on health and welfare systems, while the number of people requiring long-term care is expected to increase from 30.8 million in 2019 to 38.1 million in 2050²¹;

Towards a care society

8. Considers that a care society recognises the central role of care and integrates it into its policies, including all types of care mostly carried out by women, early childhood education and care and long-term care; supports gender equality in care responsibilities through equal sharing of care, parental leave, adequate work conditions and support in the workplace;
9. Considers that care responsibilities should not fall solely on women and that the Member States should promote equal participation by men and women in childcare and elderly care, as well as care for family members with disabilities;
10. Stresses the importance of work-life balance measures and policies to support carers and women's employment and to reduce the gender care gap, together with the measures provided under the European care strategy;
11. Highlights that a care society integrates various care models and promotes the deinstitutionalisation of care to preserve dignity, autonomy, independence and well-being, through a rights-based approach;
12. Emphasises that targeted skill-enhancement programmes for women who have experienced career interruptions because of their caregiving responsibilities are essential to support their continuous professional development and equal opportunities in the labour market;

Care at the heart of the economy

13. Considers that the care economy encompasses care work delivered through the public and private sectors, including small and medium-sized enterprises, non-governmental organisations, the social and solidarity economy, and households, including care providers and recipients, as well as employers and institutions offering care services²²;
14. Stresses that a care economy recognises care work as being vital to Europe's resilience, contributing 11 % to the EU's GDP and employing over 6 million people, most of whom are women²³;
15. Considers that future investments are required to equip care workers with training, including targeted upskilling, especially in digital and interpersonal skills, as well as to deliver quality, person-centred care; considers, furthermore, that certification should be promoted to meet evolving needs, ensuring jobs with long-term prospects that foster inclusion and growth;

²⁰ European Commission, 2021 Ageing Report.

²¹ European Commission, 2021 Ageing Report.

²² [International Labour Organization, *https://www.ilo.org/topics-and-sectors/care-economy*](https://www.ilo.org/topics-and-sectors/care-economy).

²³ [European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 'Care workers: skills opportunities and challenges \(2023 update\)', *https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/data-insights/care-workers-skills-opportunities-and-challenges-2023-update*](https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/data-insights/care-workers-skills-opportunities-and-challenges-2023-update).

16. Underlines the challenges faced by informal carers, mostly women, who provide unpaid care with limited social protection, and whose contributions need targeted support;
17. Highlights that more efforts are needed to strengthen the professional status of care workers through fair wages, career paths and better working conditions, as reducing the gender care gap helps to close the gender pension gap;
18. Emphasises its support for young carers, who make up 4-10 % of children in the EU and whose responsibilities affect their education, mental health and social development²⁴;
19. Acknowledges that most care work is carried out by women originating from non-EU countries; considers that well-managed legal migration can address evolving care labour needs and skills gaps, and that the Member States should align talent attraction policies with migration pathways to maximise the benefits for care work;

The way forward

20. Calls on the Commission, together with the relevant agencies, to provide accurate, accessible and comparable data measuring the gender care gap, in order to enable the Member States and public authorities to share best practice and address this gap;
21. Calls on the Member States to implement the recommendation regarding childcare and long-term care under the EU care strategy, and for their implementation reports to include the identification of good practices, gaps and progress mapping;
22. Emphasises that the care strategy should be aligned with and take into account the disability strategy, through improving care conditions for persons with disabilities, innovation, inclusivity and employment;
23. Calls for the Work-Life Balance Directive to be fully and effectively implemented and for an extension of the maternity and paternity leave in that regard to be considered;
24. Urges the Commission and the Member States to promote the recognition of the role of informal carers, acknowledging their vital contribution to social cohesion and helping with the sustainability of care systems across Europe;
25. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to improve working conditions in the formal care sector, focusing on ensuring fair remuneration and access to continuous training and safe working environments, while promoting the attractiveness of care professions through long-term perspectives;
26. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to strengthen the recognition of skills acquired through caregiving by integrating these skills into lifelong learning and upskilling policies, while also considering a certification process;
27. Calls for the creation of a European carers' statute through a common EU framework and definition;
28. Encourages the Commission and the Member States to ensure that periods of unpaid caregiving are fairly recognised in pension systems; encourages, furthermore, the

²⁴ European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, In-depth policy briefing: 'The situation of young carers in Europe', 2024.

Member States to explore fair and sustainable solutions to protect the predominantly women who dedicate significant parts of their working lives to caring for dependents;

29. Calls for a European action plan to support single parents and vulnerable families, focusing on access to employment and training, childcare, psychosocial support and improved work flexibility;
30. Calls on the Member States to fully utilise EU funds to develop accessible, affordable and high-quality care services across all age groups, from early childhood to long-term care for older people and persons with disabilities;

◦

◦ ◦

31. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

The demand for care in the European Union is growing rapidly due to demographic change, labour market pressures and social transformations. At the same time, care provision remains under-recognised, under-resourced and unequally distributed, with women still bearing a disproportionate share of both paid and unpaid care responsibilities. This imbalance contributes significantly to gender gaps in employment, earnings, pensions and career progression, and limits women's full participation in society and the economy. In this context, the report "Advancing towards a care society: addressing the gender care gap" aims to provide a coherent political vision and policy recommendations to reduce inequalities in care, strengthen the resilience of care systems, and advance gender equality across the European Union.

Care is a central element in ensuring well-being, dignity, and social equity. Effective care systems are essential for the realisation of human rights, as they enable individuals to fully exercise rights such as education, health, and participation in society. Recognising the social importance of care is crucial to addressing inequalities and promoting a fairer model of social development.

Care responsibilities are shouldered by women, both in domestic settings and in paid care work. Women form the invisible backbone of care systems, yet this central role has often been accompanied by economic inequality, lack of recognition, and restricted opportunities for personal and professional development. Addressing the gender dimension of care entails professionalising care work and fostering shared responsibility between men and women in domestic and societal contexts.

- **The importance of a care economy at the heart of a stronger Union**

The care economy constitutes a key pillar of Europe's social and economic systems. It contributes significantly to GDP and employment, with over 6 million people working in the care sector¹, the majority of whom are women. Despite this, care work remains undervalued and marked by low pay, difficult working conditions and limited career prospects. Enhancing the status and attractiveness of care professions is vital to addressing persistent labour shortages and to delivering quality, person-centred care. Investing in professional training, lifelong learning and improved working conditions will support the long-term sustainability and resilience of care systems.

Informal care, which continues to be provided primarily by women, represents a significant share of care provision in the EU. Yet it is often invisible in economic statistics and poorly supported in terms of social protection, pensions and mental health. The recognition and support of informal carers is crucial. Their role should be acknowledged through adequate rights, respite services, and the integration of caregiving experience into skills and employment frameworks. Particular attention must be given to young carers, whose education, well-being and development may be affected by their responsibilities.

In addition, the care economy is increasingly shaped by migration. Many care workers in the EU are women from third countries. Legal and well-managed migration policies can contribute to addressing care labour shortages, provided that they are based on fair recruitment practices, decent working conditions and access to rights. The alignment of care workforce needs with skills and migration pathways, including through the EU Talent Pool

and the Union of Skills initiative, is essential to ensure a rights-based, inclusive and future-oriented approach to care provision.

The report makes a series of recommendations to reduce the gender care gap and promote structural changes. It calls for the full and effective implementation of the Work-Life Balance Directive and urges Member States to promote equal sharing of care responsibilities. It calls on the Commission and the Member States to improve working conditions in the formal care sector, including through fair remuneration, continuous training, career development and safe working environments. The attractiveness of care professions must be enhanced through long-term employment perspectives and professionalisation.

The report further encourages the recognition of periods of unpaid caregiving in pension systems and calls for the integration of care-related skills into upskilling and lifelong learning policies. The role of EU funding, including the ESF+, EU4Health and the Recovery and Resilience Facility, is highlighted as essential to developing accessible, affordable and high-quality care services across all life stages.

- **Transforming the Future of Care – The importance of a care society**

A first step was made at EU level through the first EU Care Strategy, from which we should build on in order to benefit from the EU added value of a common action.

Building on the 2022 European Care Strategy, further EU-led reform and investment in three areas could help to narrow the gender care gap:

- (1) Work-life balance;
- (2) Working conditions in the care sector and
- (3) Availability and accessibility of formal care services.

The European added value of further EU action could be driven by the extent of upward harmonisation in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights, the promotion of free movement of workers, and leveraging European economies of scale for reform and investment.

This reports highlights that efforts to strengthen care systems should encompass political, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions. Politically, care must be incorporated into national policies and social protection frameworks. Economically fair wages, and dignified working conditions for care workers is essential, alongside mechanisms to make the contribution of unpaid care visible . Culturally, raising awareness about the social value of care, promoting shared responsibilities, are fundamental to creating equitable and sustainable care systems.

The role of EU funding, including the ESF+, EU4Health and the Recovery and Resilience Facility, is highlighted as essential to developing accessible, affordable and high-quality care services across all life stages.

Finally, the report calls for improved data collection on the gender care gap and the systematic monitoring of the European Care Strategy's implementation. It also calls for the alignment of the European care strategy with the Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030, to ensure inclusive, innovative and accessible care systems. A

dedicated European action plan to support single parents and vulnerable families is also recommended, with a focus on employment, childcare, psychosocial support and flexible working conditions.

The transition to a care society is a necessary condition for social sustainability, economic resilience and intergenerational solidarity in Europe. Reducing the gender care gap will require coordinated policy efforts, as well as adequate investments. This Report affirms its commitment to placing care at the centre of the EU's policy agenda.

- **Towards a Society Centered on Dignity and Equity**

Care is central to human life, social cohesion, and the realisation of human rights. Building robust care systems strengthens the conditions for human dignity, facilitates the exercise of other rights, and contributes to more equitable, cohesive, and humane societies.

ANNEX: DECLARATIONS OF INPUT

Pursuant to Article 8 of Annex I to the Rules of Procedure, the rapporteurs declare that they included in their report input on matters pertaining to the subject of the file that they received, in the preparation of the draft report, from the following interest representatives falling within the scope of the Interinstitutional Agreement on a mandatory transparency register¹, or from the following representatives of public authorities of third countries, including their diplomatic missions and embassies:

Entity and/or person
1. Interest representatives falling within the scope of the Interinstitutional Agreement on a mandatory transparency register ⁽¹⁾
TOUR4EU - Tuscan Organisation of Universities and Research for Europe
2. Representatives of public authorities of third countries, including their diplomatic missions and embassies ⁽²⁾

The list above is drawn up under the exclusive responsibility of the rapporteurs.

Where natural persons are identified in the list by their name, by their function or by both, the rapporteurs declare that they have submitted to the natural persons concerned the European Parliament's Data Protection Notice No 484 (<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/data-protect/index.do>), which sets out the conditions applicable to the processing of their personal data and the rights linked to that processing.

¹ http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_interinstit/2021/611/oj