

Dear readers,

Here we are with the fourth issue – the first of 2012 – of EuCaNews, the Newsletter of EUROCARERS (or EuCa), the European Association Working for Carers! In this issue you will find the periodical updates from the Executive Committee in the form of a summary of the main decisions taken during its last teleconference on 14 March, and those prepared by Christine Marking on recent EU policy developments. The section dedicated to the contributions coming from our members is this time opened by a contribution coming from Ireland, with Frank Goodwin reporting on the campaign “Listening to Carers”, aimed at collecting carers’ opinions to review current policies. This is followed by an update by Licia Boccaletti on the “WeDO” project to promote EU-wide the wellbeing and dignity of older people, while Stan Trnovec provides a detailed description of the situation of carers in the Slovakian context. The newsletter is closed by the presentation of the Carer Awards launched by an international company.

*As usual, **your feedback, comments and ideas for the Newsletter are important** to help us understand how it can be improved. We would be pleased to include any contributions relating to your own organisation, experiences or relevant events which you would like to disseminate to a larger audience interested in caregiving issues in Europe. So please do not hesitate to email them to us: we will use them in future editions of the Newsletter.*

For those of you who celebrate it, we would like to wish you a peaceful Easter.

Enjoy reading and take care

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News from the Executive Committee

In this section of the Newsletter, we report the core issues discussed during the teleconferences that take place periodically between the members of the Eurocarers Executive Committee, who are the following: Robert Anderson (President), Hanneli Döhner (Treasurer), Frank Goodwin (Secretary), Giovanni Lamura (Vice President Research), Stanislav Trnovec (Vice President Carers Associations), Licia Boccaletti and Åke Fagerberg (the Executive is furthermore supported by two advisers, Christine Marking and Marja Pijl). After a reminder of our approaching Annual General Assembly (AGA), you find therefore the description of the main items discussed during the Executive's last teleconference on 14 March.

Eurocarers Annual General Assembly (AGA) on 22-23 May 2012 in Varberg (Sweden)

This year, our Annual General Assembly will be held in Varberg in Sweden, followed by a conference. Both of these events are being hosted by Carers Sweden, and arranged by our colleague Åke Fagerberg. The dates for your dairy are the 22 and 23 May. Full details, including booking arrangements and the registration form, are available on the Carers Sweden website: www.ahrisverige.se. The conference programme and the AGA agenda in English are also available on the Eurocarers website: <http://www.eurocarers.org/news.php?id=27>. Members interested in attending might be eligible for financial support, please contact for more information eurocarers@gmail.com.

Teleconference on 14 March 2012

Present Executive: Robert Anderson, Frank Goodwin, Giovanni Lamura, Åke Fagerberg, Stanislav Trnovec. **Present Advisers:** Christine Marking and Marja Pijl. **Apologies:** Hanneli Döhner and Licia Boccaletti

The following items were discussed:

EU matters:

1. **Horizon2020:** Christine drafted a report, on behalf of Eurocarers, to comment on the Horizon2020 document. This will be submitted – after comments from the Executive – and circulated to key Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). The report will be added to the Eurocarers website asap.
2. **European Parliament Interest Group on Carers:** Christine noted the strong response to attend the Interest Group meeting on 27 March. Christine is working with the Commission to add this meeting to the European Year 2012 website, as one of the official events.
3. **Active and Healthy Ageing - Call for Commitments:** While it was noted that we cannot commit financially, or indeed with person-time resources, for this call, we still need to ensure we respond and represent carers' interests. The Commission understands that many NGOs have limited resources but still value their input. The deadline is 31 May to commit to be part of an Action Group. Integrated care was a suggested area for our input. There are two possible areas of engagement: the Commitment and the Market Place (see website: http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/index_en.cfm?section=active-

[healthy-ageing&pg=commitment](#)). The Executive is asked to facilitate an agreed way forward. This item will be further discussed in Brussels.

4. **Grundtvig Project on “Carer’s Self Assessment Tool”:** Both Eurocarers and COFACE are involved in this project (as well as some other national members of Eurocarers). While there is no financial gain for Eurocarers in this, there is visibility which is valuable. Robert met with COFACE last week and they are seeking a meeting on 26 or 28 June to launch the Tool; they have asked Eurocarers to support the launch of this event. Stan will circulate the list of participants in this project.

Research:

1. **IPTS:** Following previous contacts, Robert reported about the possibility of participating in a tender to be issued in the near future by IPTS (Institute for Prospective Technological Studies), focussing on the updating of the database of good practice in the field of ICT-based initiatives to support informal carers.

2. **Quantitative study on carers of relatives with incontinence:** Giovanni reported about the presentation of the findings from a quantitative study funded by SCA, which he will deliver at the Global Forum on Incontinence (GFI) on 24-25 April in Copenhagen. In the light of the contribution received to design the survey, prepare the questionnaire and comment on findings, SCA will grant 2000 Euros, of which 90% (1.800 Euros) will go to Eurocarers. This presentation will complement the one by Elizabeth Hanson, who will focus on the qualitative study carried out last year. Robert agreed to do an interview, focussing on Eurocarers and the study, for the SCA newsletter to be issued for the Copenhagen conference.

3. **AIDA project:** Giovanni noted that this project is delayed due to administrative issues that are being addressed and hopefully will proceed in the near future.

4. **Overview:** Robert noted that we have responded to most approaches received so far to be involved in projects; now, we wait to see what will be funded. For the next meeting Frank will try to prepare a list of events which members of the Executive have participated in.

Members:

1. **Poland:** Áke informed the Executive that the Polish network has agreed to apply to Eurocarers for membership. This was welcomed by all. Áke noted that the model used in Poland may well work for other countries and he is exploring this.

2. **Mezzo:** Due to serious funding cuts to its budget, Mezzo will not be able to attend the Annual General Meeting and Conference.

3. **Russia and other non-EU countries:** Áke said that he had had an approach from the SCA representative from Russia, who said that there are organisations (NGOs) in Russia involved in the care area that might want to join Eurocarers, and was this permitted? Frank circulated extracts from the Statutes and all agreed that they would be welcomed, as associate members or observers, if they meet the defined criteria. Christine noted that many EU NGOs have members from outside the EU countries.

Fundraising:

1. **Fundraising brochure:** Áke requested opinions and views from Executive on the Fundraising Brochure. Christine offered to assist Áke with this project. Giovanni noted the

importance of not having text that is too dense heavy, making it easy and appealing to read. Marja noted the helpfulness of the question and answer approach. All agreed.

2. **Factsheet:** In addition to the Fundraising Brochure, Áke noted that the Factsheet on Carers in Europe (available on our website) is now being printed and 700 copies will be made and paid for by SCA. Concerning the Factsheet on the website, Frank noted that it has to be removed as it is not easily accessible due to its size (mainly composed of images of text, rather than text, which takes up much less space). It is hoped that we can locate the original text (2007) and correct this, in order to have a much more easily downloadable file.

3. **Secretarial support functions:** Frank will have a report for the Executive ready for next teleconference on Secretary support functions, in order to assess what can be done – on the fundraising side – to facilitate them.

4. **Shire Carer Awards:** Following discussion with Robert and keeping in mind the comments from the Executive, Frank has agreed to be the Eurocarers representative on the Selection panel for the international Carer Awards proposed by Shire. Frank will consult with Áke on the possible funding opportunities arising from this contact. Frank will circulate information on the awards to members (see also last contribution to this Newsletter for details).

Annual General Assembly (AGA):

a. **Preparation:** AGM plans are going well, while Áke is seeking additional funds to support all aspects of the conference, including additional printing and financial support for members to attend.

b. **Eastern European Countries:** Following the discussion held at last AGA, Robert noted that we need to give more consideration to the issue of ensuring a useful and productive engagement by members from these countries. Áke suggested that Poland can make a presentation on their experience. Lithuania has already expressed an interest in following the Polish example. Áke noted that the local SCA, where they exist, may be able to assist in whatever plans emerge. He also noted that SCA are in Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia.

c. **Executive members' terms of office:** The issue here is that the mandates of three key members of the Executive expire in 2013 (the President, the Secretary and Vice-President Research). Marja noted that the change in the Statutes at the last AGM could be used to extend the period of one or more for a further one year, without further alteration to Statutes. After a brief discussion, it was decided to add this item to the AGM agenda. Giovanni noted that Licia wishes to seek a second term. Frank will shortly circulate the members about the nomination procedure.

The next Teleconference will be on 11 April 2012.

Policy developments at EU-level

by Christine Marking

In this section, Christine highlights recent developments at the European policy level, providing details concerning two relevant initiatives: the “European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing”, and the recently published “White Paper on adequate, safe and sustainable pensions”.

Communication: European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing

The European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing, set up to meet the challenges of an ageing society, delivered a Strategic Implementation Plan (SIP) in November, identifying priority areas and specific actions, for public authorities, businesses and civil society. As a follow up to that Plan, the Commission published a Communication in which confirmed its commitment to support the implementation of the SIP, in particular by:

- launching a first invitation for stakeholders to commit to specific actions on innovation in active and healthy ageing;
- putting in place, as of April 2012, a "[marketplace for innovative ideas](#)", helping stakeholders find partners, share good practices and disseminate evidence;
- aligning and effectively using EU funding instruments such as the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP), the 7th Framework Programme for research and the Health Programme;
- addressing regulatory and standardization issues, e.g. by supporting the development of a new EU framework for interoperability testing, quality labelling and certification on e-Health.

Call for commitment in relation to Active and Healthy Ageing

On 1 March, the Commission’s European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing formally launched its “Invitation for Commitment”. This is a call to all stakeholders who would like to be involved in implementing the Partnership’s Strategic Implementation Plan (SIP) adopted in November 2011. As reported earlier, the Strategic Implementation Plan outlines a common vision and a set of operational priority actions to address the challenge of ageing through innovation. The SIP foresees a first set of specific actions to be launched during the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations 2012:

- Innovative ways to ensure patients follow their prescriptions – a concerted action in at least 30 European regions;
- Innovative solutions to prevent falls and support early diagnosis for older people;
- Co-operation to help prevent functional decline and frailty, with a particular focus on malnutrition;
- Spread and promote successful innovative integrated care models for chronic diseases amongst older patients, such as through remote monitoring. Action should be taken in a number of the EU’s regions;

- Improve the uptake of interoperable ICT independent living solutions through global standards to help older people stay independent, mobile and active for longer.

All stakeholders who wish to be involved in the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing can do so as follows:

- [Invitation for Commitment](#)- A process allowing interested parties to submit their commitments to be an active partner in the implementation of the Specific Actions of the EIP on Active and Healthy Ageing;
- [Invitation for Expression of Intent for candidate Reference Site](#)- A process enabling interested parties to submit their intention to be a candidate to become a Reference Site of the EIP on Active and Healthy Ageing;
- [Marketplace for innovative ideas](#) - An interactive online platform, open to all stakeholders willing to get involved in the Partnership;
- [Innovation support](#)- All stakeholders, who provide online digital services, and are willing to contribute to the development of the EIP by providing innovation support and acceleration are welcome.

For more information:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/index_en.cfm?pg=home§ion=active-healthy-ageing

The Communication will be discussed in the European Parliament and Council. Web-link to the Communication:

http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/newsroom/cf/item-detail-dae.cfm?item_id=7852.

White Paper on Pensions

On 16 February, the Commission published its long-awaited White Paper on adequate, safe and sustainable pensions. It looks at how the EU and the Member States can work to tackle the major challenges that confront pension systems. It also puts forward a range of initiatives to help create the right conditions so that those who are able to can continue working - leading to a better balance between time in work and time in retirement; to ensure people who move to another country can keep their pension rights; to help people save more and ensure that pension promises are kept and people get what they expect in retirement.

The White Paper builds on the results of a consultation with stakeholders launched in 2010. Even though pension systems are largely the competence of EU member states, the EU level has some say as national reforms are evaluated as part of the Europe 2020 strategy. In 2011, 16 member states received country-specific recommendations concerning pensions and a further five signed up to pension reforms. The Commission focuses on pension sustainability in order to ensure a better balance between time spent in employment and time spent in retirement; in this context the Commission supports increasing the retirement age, linking it to life expectancy, while restricting access to early retirement.

The White Paper proposes, in particular, to:

- Create better opportunities for older workers by calling on the social partners to **adapt work place and labour market practices** and by using the European Social Fund to bring older workers into work;
- Develop complementary **private retirement schemes** by encouraging social partners to develop such schemes and encouraging Member States to optimise tax and other incentives;
- Enhance the **safety of supplementary pension schemes**, including through a revision of the directive on Institutions for Occupational Retirement Provision (IORP) and better information for consumers;
- Make **supplementary pensions compatible with mobility**, through legislation protecting the pension rights of mobile workers and by promoting the establishment of **pension tracking services** across the EU. This can provide citizens with information about pension entitlements and projections of their income after retirement.
- Encourage Member States to promote **longer working lives**, by linking retirement age with life expectancy, restricting access to early retirement and closing the pension gap between men and women.
- Continue to **monitor** the adequacy, sustainability and safety of pensions and **support pension reforms** in the Member States.

Meanwhile, the Paper has met a fair amount of criticism: a coalition of NGOs led by AGE Platform Europe stresses that a sustainable and long-term strategy to guarantee balanced financing of the pension schemes has to be based also on increasing the young entrants in the labour market and not only on prolonging the pension age; financial sustainability should go hand-in-hand with social sustainability and the pension plan should be supported by a stronger agenda for quality job creation. Moreover, according to the critics, the Commission could have gone further on its proposal to push Member States to develop complementary private retirement schemes.

For more information: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=752&langId=en>

Contributions from our members

Listening to carers

by Frank Goodwin

Below you find the call to contribute to the campaign “Listening to carers”, circulated by Carers Ireland to collect carers’ opinions to review existing policies to support them. It is an impressive example of how advocacy role in this field can actively contribute to improve legislation recognising and supporting carers’ role.

“The coming months will be a critical time for Family Carers in Ireland. In terms of policy, the Government has assigned a team of civil servants to resume drafting the “National Carers Strategy”. It is also in negotiations with the funding troika about a restructuring of social protection payments to people of working age. These two developments are likely to determine the impact of Budget 2013 and subsequent years on the income and general welfare of Family Carers.

At the same time, as these strategic issues are being decided, individual Carers are under siege from operational policies such as the current review of the “Domiciliary Care Allowance” scheme. We are struggling to address the volume of cases that are coming to our attention. Whilst we accept the principle of such reviews, we are strongly challenging the fundamental unfairness of certain aspects of the application and review process.

Against this background, it is vital that we are able to produce comprehensive and up-to-date evidence about the circumstances of Family Carers throughout Ireland in 2012. And so, with this in mind, we plan to repeat the 'Listening to Carers' exercise last carried out in 2007, by organising a series of meetings in strategic locations during March and April 2012. These forums will give you, the Carer, an opportunity to tell us what you would like to have included in your National Carers Strategy. The meetings will also afford you an opportunity to feed into your organisation’s Strategic Plan, by giving us your thoughts on how the Association can best continue to support and advocate for Ireland’s Family Carers.

This will be a very important initiative and I would ask as many of you as possible to participate in the events in your local area. Please contact your local centre to confirm your attendance and with any special requirements. Looking forward to meeting you all at the events”.

John Dunne, Acting C.E.O. of Carers Ireland

For more information: www.carersireland.com.

Update on the WeDO project

by Licia Boccaletti, Anziani e Non Solo, Carpi, Italy

WeDO (Wellbeing and Dignity of Older people) is a European project (2010-2012) involving 18 partners from 12 countries. It is coordinated by AGE Platform Europe and co-financed by the European Commission, Directorate General for Employment and Social affairs. The objective is to develop a lasting and growing partnership of organisations at all levels to promote the wellbeing and dignity of vulnerable and disabled older people and prevent elder abuse at all levels and in all settings through the promotion of quality long-term care. The project seeks especially to develop a **European Partnership Guide including a set of fundamental principles (the Quality framework), inspired by the Voluntary Quality framework for social services of the Social Protection Committee.**

The WeDO partnership is currently working on the following documents:

1) The **Guide for the partnership**, a more practical document, which will contain:

- The EU quality framework for services for older people in need of care and assistance decided to use the European Quality Framework for SSIG as a basis and adapt it to LTC services to ensure coherence between our document and the EU quality framework adopted by the Council. This is why we are trying to stay as close as possible to the SPC Quality framework for SSIG. We will then add examples of issues/problems illustrating what happens when a service is not respecting that principle, followed by an explanation in plain language of what the principle means and then examples of good practice of measures implementing the principle;
- Recommendations for quality tools and a methodology on how to develop a participatory approach in quality improvement;
- A methodology that will explain how to develop a participatory approach in a quality improvement process. This methodology will derive from the [World Health Organisation improvement cycle of the Age-friendly Cities Program](#).

2) **The EU strategy for the wellbeing and dignity of older people**, a more 'advocacy' based document, containing recommendations from the EU coalition to the EU level policy makers on how to implement the quality framework. A similar document is prepared by the national coalitions for recommendations in their respective countries.

Eurocarers is a member of the European Coalition which is periodically involved in discussions about the project outcomes. Of course, our contributions mainly concentrate on having carers mentioned in the Guide and in the Strategy.

A European event is scheduled in Vienna on 24 March (see invitation below).

Documents & more information are downloadable from the website: <http://www.wedo-partnership.eu/>. From the website, it is also possible to have access to a collection of best practices related to the Principles of the Quality Framework, which is open to more input: <http://www.wedo-partnership.eu/good-practices>.



For the Wellbeing and Dignity of Older people

**SAVE THE
DATE!**

2nd EU Event in Vienna, Austria 24 April 2012 - 9.00 – 16.00

You are kindly invited to attend the second WeDO EU event. This event will aim at gathering representatives from the 12 national coalitions and from the EU coalition. Together, we will have a discussion on the Guide for the partnership and on the recommendations made at national and EU level. The event will also be a good opportunity to get information on successful practices in Austria and in the EU regarding the wellbeing and dignity of older people.

WeDO (Wellbeing and Dignity of Older people) is a European project (2010-2012) involving 18 partners from 12 countries. It is coordinated by AGE Platform Europe and cofinanced by the European Commission, Directorate General for Employment and Social affairs. Our objective is to develop a lasting and growing partnership of organisations at all levels to promote the wellbeing and dignity of vulnerable and disabled older people and prevent elder abuse at all levels and in all settings through the promotion of quality long-term care. The project seeks especially to develop a European Partnership Guide including a set of fundamental principles (the Quality framework).
More information on www.wedo-partnership.eu.

Carers in Slovakia: the “promised land”?

by Stanislav Trnovec (Club of Large Families, Slovakia)

Slovakia joined the EU on 1 May 2004, along with other post-communist countries. The country managed this date at the very last moment, because after the fall of communism in Slovakia “meciarism” (Mr. Mečiar was prime minister in the period 1992–2002) came to power. This was a partially totalitarian system, where it was necessary to make a decision about whether Slovakia would continue to stay in the sphere of interest of our Eastern European neighbours, or instead focus on the community created by Western European countries. The explanation of the process goes back to the history. It is not needless to say that “historia mater et magistra”.

Some background information on Slovakian history

In the early Middle Ages, Slovak territory formed part of one state entity called “Samova ríša” (Sam empire). After its collapse, it became a buffer zone from the attacks of Tatars in the 12th and 13th centuries, and later on it became the place of historical battles between the Habsburg Empire and the Turks. After a period in which Slovakia was part of a common state entity under the Hungarian crown, and later of the multinational Austrian–Hungarian Empire, which collapsed with World War I, Slovakia formed together with Bohemia a Czechoslovak republic on the basis of the Trianon agreement. Forcefully split on the eve of World War II, the Slovak state was forced to collaborate with Nazi Germany, despite a strong resistance against fascism.

Once World War II was over, Slovakia came under the sphere of influence of Communist Russia on the basis of the Yalta Agreement. After the communist putsch in 1948, the second Czechoslovak republic adopted Stalin’s communist terror methods, a period in which the “bright future” was pursued through imprisonments, concentration camps and liquidation of inconvenient people. Land was taken away from farmers, who were forcefully expelled to cities, lost their independence and employed in the armaments industry. Citizens living in such isolated conditions, losing connection to nature and their own community, are easy to be manipulated. All this did not end in 1968 – when the “Prague spring” froze as the Warsaw pact armies entered the territory of Czechoslovakia – but came to a breaking point 20 years later, when the communist ideology could not keep up with the political and economic challenges associated with the “Glasnost” announced by Gorbačov and the system started to disintegrate internally.

The “velvet revolution” in November 1989 returned Czechoslovakia seemingly to Europe. Until today, we have no condemnation of evil and distancing from it, and we miss a definition of moral principles. Nineteenth century wild capitalism came connected with dubious privatization and robbery of national property. Czechoslovakia split, fortunately in a peaceful way, tolerance being a basic feature of life in Slovakia throughout its whole history. People had a general desire to get into the EU (which still has a high support in Slovakia), because we see our rescue there and protection from our “big brother” in the East (we experienced fear a number of times, when pipelines were closed through which oil or gas flows into our country).

Freedom gave us a possibility to decide, but also responsibility for one's actions. Paternalism of state which controlled everything and made often decisions on our behalf disappeared. We feel it as a loss of security, as shown by the fact that 20 years after the collapse of communism, elections in Slovakia were won by a political party which promised security. Communism can be also characterized as a cage into which they bring feed every day. Awakening in freedom is even more cruel, due to the fact that EU-15 is experiencing a moral and a resulting economic crisis. Corruption has become a method of economic growth. Under such circumstances, many people are against participation on the bailout of countries which do not always act responsibly and have a significantly higher standard of living than Slovakia. Irresponsible lending and life which is not in line with performance of economy focused on banking operations is perceived by many Slovakian as a big disappointment from Western reality.

Carers in Slovakia

The above described historic and economic background can help understand the situation concerning family care for dependent persons in Slovakia. During communism, flats of unified type were constructed in cities designed for one generation only. They had one to four rooms, with a maximum floor area of 70 m² (usually 50 m²). They envisaged one to three children. At the same time, there was an extensive construction process going on in the country, where old farmers' houses were replaced by new houses with a relatively high standard of living. Young families mainly settled down in towns and now, after 20 to 40 years, have to care for their ageing parents still living in the country. There is therefore a dilemma about how to take care of the "silver generation", mainly right now when people born in the baby-boom years after the second World War reach pensionable age. A similar problem occurs when it is necessary to take care of a disabled child or sibling, because the layout of flats did not take into account this sort of a need.

The solution under communism was simple: everybody should be perfect and therefore disabled people were often isolated and therefore invisible. Until today, there has been a tendency to place older people in special institutions, even though they are often not in need of special care. The problem remains that they are in the country and there is not enough space in city flats. People have recently become dissatisfied about having to pay more for provided services. The facilities differ according to the service provider founder, that is whether they are municipal (public) institutions or run by a private body (NGOs or private companies). Discrimination of people caused by this fact could be removed by approval of a minor legislative change, but for the moment there is no political will in this direction.

Family carers do not officially exist in Slovakia. The law does not know them. According to a new Act on Volunteers, they do not meet criteria to become volunteers. In spite of that, the function of family carers is mentioned in various laws under various names. In extreme cases, when the care recipient requires permanent care, the family may become eligible to receive financial support from the state. In theory, this support may reach 220 Euros per month, but in reality it is lower and averages around 120 Euros. It is also usual that, if the carer does not have a family relationship with the care recipient, he/she is eligible to get the state allowance. What happens in practice is that carers „exchange“ the cared-for persons, in order to be able to receive at least minimum social security.

The problem connected with the care of older persons is that city flats are not appropriate to properly meet the needs for care. The layout does not take into consideration cohabitation of more generations, which requires enough intimacy and space. Neither flats, nor common premises were constructed as barrier free. The decision to take a dependent person (parent, sibling or child) depends also on other factors, including for instance the possibility to take time off from work and to work part-time.

According to a survey carried out for the project “Self-identification of family carers”, the identification with the function of family carer is often rejected. The analysis of the reasons for this reveals that respondents mostly state that care for a dependent person is taken for granted in a family, as a traditional obligation. Unless family carers identify themselves as a family carer, it can be difficult to seek support for them in relevant places, e.g. in government, parliament or local self-government. Work overload of a family carer can lead to burn-out, bad quality of provided service, absence at work and in extreme cases the need of another carer. Although the support of family carers is beneficial for the state in economic terms, it is very difficult to apply this well known argument in practice because family carers do not demand it. Moreover, family carers often have a bad experience with state administration, providers of health care and care services, reporting as reasons for this: corruption; extremely long waiting lists for institutional care (it often takes a number of years!); and such a low level of support for dependent persons that family carers often do not even apply (consider that the monthly allowance for some increased hygiene needs – e.g. permanent eczema or incontinence – or for dependence on individual transport does not reach 18 Euros).

Family carer support strategy in Slovakia

Social and family policy is not differentiated in Slovakia. Family policy should solve a long-term status of need in families and cannot contribute therefore to create the necessary conditions, which must instead be solved by social policy, which in turn is however rather focused on solving issues resulting from a temporary state of need on a long-term strategy e.g. removal of poverty. Failure to cover family carers is rather a part of social policy, but it should only be a temporary situation. A proposal for an appropriate strategy could be based on the extensive work carried out by the Institute of Work and Family Research lead by Ms. Repková, who has been working on this issue for a long time, mapping the situation and providing documents useful for a factual argumentation as well as for the review of submitted proposals coming from the field (grass root).

Obviously, our Club of Large Families must adjust its strategy to its role to represent family carers. Therefore, it needs to map the situation of family carers according to informal criteria which may approach family carers who are not covered by current legislation. As an example, the questions included in the questionnaire used for the Irish census in 2011 can be used as a possible criterion. Since programs to support family carers do not exist in Slovakia, or are so few that family carers themselves are not aware of their role and position in self-identification, it is necessary to highlight the role of family carers with awareness raising campaigns, media presentations etc., thus bringing them to the attention of the general public and gradually changing public opinion. To this purpose, it is a good idea to use the potential of ongoing European Year 2012 on active ageing and

intergenerational solidarity. We propose therefore to use possibilities to work with public opinion and to approach the public by pointing out the value of work and dependence of society on invisible work, e. g. on the first Tuesday in April. Last year the Club of Large Families sent a few thousand e-mails on the Day of invisible work.

A good knowledge of the character of family carers would allow us to approach them more easily. Only after their identification and the submission of appropriate support proposals can it be expected that they will be interested in cooperation. Approaching family carers can be done directly, or through various associations focused on different disabilities. A change of their status can be achieved through a change of the legislative environment, mainly through an Act on Volunteer Work and Social Assistance. The main goals would include the following:

- Recognition of family carer as a socially important function;
- Granting social security to family carers;
- Allowing work benefits in employment (holidays, shortening working time, flexible working time, home office) for family carers and support for employers who provide such benefits;
- Financial support for family carers to enable them to have a reasonable standard of living;
- Since most family carers are women, to follow strict gender equality principles. This is evident especially in the case of the feminization of poverty, which penalises family carers who perform their care work during their productive age, when they have no appropriate basis, or no basis for pension. Surveys have shown that large proportions of family carers (who often cannot undertake paid employment) are women who are themselves bread winners. They mainly include older women, widows and younger women, where their life partner did not handle the role of family carer. These women are potentially an extremely threatened group, in spite of the fact that they perform an extraordinarily important social role;
- To solve the situation of family carers when there is a different domicile of the cared-for family member;
- To solve the issue of the rising pressure on families with dependent family member due to insufficient support from the state and experiencing difficulties when accessing institutional or semi-institutional care;
- To solve the problem of mass migration of persons who could work as family carers in Slovakia. For financial reasons they go abroad to provide care under much better conditions and, thus, they often become family breadwinners;
- To use EU structural funds for funding holistic support services for family carers, as one of the priorities for the period 2014-2020 (e.g. change from institutional to community care and reconciling work and family life);
- To propose vocational training for family carers and professionals in the social care field and in that of health care and education, in order to raise awareness about the importance of family carers among professionals, to strengthen family carers and to support the partnership between family carers and professionals.

Upcoming event: the presentation of the results from the EU project "Self-assessment of family carers' needs"

A challenge which Slovakia faces and shares with other EU member states is to solve family carers' issues in a speedy way. Since we should learn from each other, the Club of Large

families accepted the invitation to participate in the Grundtvig project “Self-assessment of family carers’ needs: the pathway to support”, including EUROCARERS and COFACE as silent partners. Project results will be presented in the European Parliament at the end of June 2012. A proposal for partnership recommendation at EU level was elaborated, based on a common framework within the Grundtvig learning partnership program, pointing to those measures and initiatives which are necessary to ensure that a proper social and political environment is created at a European level to support self-assessment and expression of family carers’ needs all over the EU.

For more information on the Club of Large Families (in Slovak only): <http://www.kmr.sk/>

To contact the organisation write to: kmr@kmr.sk.

Carers Awards

The company "Shire", an international Pharmaceutical company, has approached Eurocarers to nominate a member to be on their Carers Awards selection panel. This initiative does not seem to clash with other awards and is another opportunity for publicity for carers, provides generous awards for a few and represents at the same time a source of (badly needed!) financial support for Eurocarers. In the light of these considerations, the Eurocarers Executive Board decided that the Secretary, Frank Goodwin, will carry out this function, representing Eurocarers.

Shire started in the UK and then the USA and has now opened an office in Dublin. Their Carers Awards started last year. The awards are international, managed from the USA and there are about 10 winners selected, with an award of plus \$10,000 US for each.

The website below, which is now open for nominations, gives fuller information on the company, the awards and the procedures to be followed. The **17 June 2012** (Pacific Standard Time) **is the deadline** for nominations. The awards will be given in October.

For more information: <http://www.shirebraveawards.com/braveawards/en/submitnomination>.

About EUROCARERS

EUROCARERS was officially established in Luxembourg in December 2006. Its origin lies in two European networks: Carmen, a network on integrated care and Eurofamcare, a research network on carers of older persons. In the Carmen project researchers, practitioners and policy makers, among them representatives of the carers' movement, found each other and came to the conclusion that it was time for carers to be heard at European level. The Eurofamcare network - consisting of researchers who mapped the situation of carers of older persons and the policy measures developed for this category in the EU and who did quantitative research on the support of carers of older persons in six countries - also diagnosed a strong need for carers to make themselves heard in Europe.

Representatives of the two networks and other interested persons met in Maastricht in 2004 on the initiative of NIZW, the Dutch Institute of Care and Welfare (later reorganised into the two organisations Vilans and Movisie), to discuss the feasibility of establishing a European organisation and decided to go ahead with this task. Christine Marking had written a preparatory paper which helped those who met in Maastricht in formulating decisions about some crucial issues. An interim board was established consisting of: Brigid Barron, President; Patrick Michielsseune, Treasurer; Marja Pijl, Secretary; and the following other members: Judy Triantafillou, Isobel Anderson, Hanneli Döhner, Caroline Glendinning and Henk Nies. Several working groups were formed. Geraldine Visser and Nicoline Tamsma made a report of the meeting. Several meetings took place in the following months and some activities were already developed before EUROCARERS was formally registered in Luxembourg at the end of 2006.

Since then the association has increased remarkably, especially in the last year, and includes now over 60 organisations and several individual associates from all 27 European Member States. Members of the current (2011-13) Executive Committee are: Robert Anderson (President); Stanislav Trnovec (Vice-President - Carers organisations), Giovanni Lamura (Vice-President -Research); Frank Goodwin (Secretary); Hanneli Döhner; Licia Boccaletti; Åke Fagerberg. The association can also count on the support of two advisers: Christine Marking and Marja Pijl. For more information on the members of the Executive Committee: http://www.eurocarers.org/about_executive.php.

For more information on the aims and guiding principles of EUROCARERS please go to the link: <http://www.eurocarers.org/about.php>.

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EUROCARERS is an NGO & non-profit organisation registered in Luxembourg in 2006 (registration no. F6854).

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