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PRESS RELEASE

**European Parliament Informal Carers Interest Group calls for action to support young carers**

Meeting on 6 March in the European Parliament in Brussels, the European Parliament Informal Carers Interest Group addressed the challenges and issues faced by young carers, i.e. children and young persons under 18 who provide care, assistance or support to another family member – a parent, sibling or grandparent affected by chronic physical or mental health conditions.

These young carers carry out significant caring tasks and assume a responsibility that would usually be associated with an adult.

A UK Census, carried out in 2011, revealed that some 215.000 carers under the age of 18 provided care; an increase of 19 % since 2001. Every week, these carers spend 177.918 hours providing care.

Providing this care can have a number of profound consequences for these young people: they may miss out on their childhood, due to the responsibility they have taken on. In addition, they often miss out on school and education (depriving them of peer contact as well as impacting on employment opportunities in later life). In many cases, there are no support services. In addition to the impact at individual level, the failure to adequately support young carers can have long-term negative consequences for society as a whole.

However, while the general issue of informal care seems to be (slowly but increasingly) recognised by policy makers, young carers do not yet feature on national or European policy agendas. Powerful and moving testimonials made by a number of young carers present in the meeting strongly reflected the invisibility of young carers in terms of service providers and decision makers.

Today's meeting aimed to remedy this. Host MEP Sirpa Pietikainen underlined the crucial contribution of carers in general to the well-being of those cared for as well as to Member States' stretched health and social budgets and called for a dedicated EU level strategy on carers, which would also address the specific issues of young carers. Marian Harkin MEP stated that young carers, as a specific group, deserve full attention as the burden of care can have such devastating consequences for their immediate life as well as for their future. Heinz Becker MEP underlined the crucial need for policy action, as there is no time to waste.

Professor Saul Becker (University of Sussex), speaking in the meeting, emphasized that *'it is our job and our duty to move young and young adult carers from their current position of vulnerability to a position of growth, where they learn, thrive, achieve, enjoy, and flourish as human beings'*.

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## NOTES FOR EDITORS:

- 1 The Informal Carers Interest Group (new name) was launched in 2007 and has held some 30 meetings since its inception, closely following EU level policy development and advocating change. It is currently co-chaired by MEPs Marian Harkin, Jean Lambert, Sirpa Pietikäinen Heinz K. Becker and Julie Ward.

For more information:

[http://eurocarers.org/euactivities\\_mepsinterestgroups](http://eurocarers.org/euactivities_mepsinterestgroups)

- 2 Eurocarers brings together carers' organisations as well as relevant universities & research institutes to ensure that care is valued and unpaid care is recognised as central to the sustainability of health and long-term care systems. The organisation aims to act as a voice for informal carers by:
  - Documenting and raising awareness about the significant contribution made by carers to health and social care systems and the economy as a whole, and of the need to safeguard this contribution;
  - Ensuring that EU and national policies take account of carers, i.e. promote their social inclusion, the development of support services, enable them to remain active in paid employment and maintain a social life.

For more information: [www.eurocarers.org](http://www.eurocarers.org)

- 3 Eurocarers Policy briefing on young carers:  
<http://eurocarers.org/userfiles/files/Eurocarers%20Policy%20paper%20Young%20Carers.pdf>

For more information on Eurocarers activities on young carers: <http://eurocarers.org/Young-Carers>