

European Parliament Informal Carers Interest Group

2007–2017





✉ 3, Rue Abbé Cuypers – 1040 Brussels – Belgium
☎ 0032 (0)2 741 24 05 | 📧 info@eurocarers.org
💻 www.eurocarers.org | 📘 [EuropeanAssociationWorkingForCarers](https://www.facebook.com/EuropeanAssociationWorkingForCarers)
🐦 [@Eurocarers_info](https://twitter.com/Eurocarers_info)



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INTRODUCTION

The European Parliament Interest Group on Carers was founded in 2007 by MEPs Kathy Sinnott and Marian Harkin, supported by MEPs Anna Zaborska and Magda Kosane Kovacs, at the initiative of Eurocarers.

The Groups original mission was

- 1 to provide a forum for debate: to discuss and debate European policy development for their impact on carers and their interests
- 2 to initiate policy action: to take initiatives that can lead to/influence EU policy initiatives, i.e. Parliamentary Questions, amending policy proposals, discussions with the relevant policy makers, host events/hearings on carers and their interests.

During its first ten years, some 35 meetings were organised in the European Parliament, attended by MEPs, representatives of the European Commission, Council of Ministers and stakeholders active in the social and/or health arena, including Eurocarers' members.

Meetings usually address current EU policy developments with a potential impact on carers as well as relevant topics which are not yet on the EU policy agenda.

The meeting programme usually consists of an introduction by a European Commission official who is involved in the issue under discussion, followed by commentaries from relevant stakeholders and experts.

Not only do these meetings provide an opportunity to meet and engage with MEPs who are interested in carers and their issues; they also enable Eurocarers and its members to exchange information and experiences with representatives from other European social and health and research organisations; in other words, they also function as a means of building partnerships and raising awareness.

Meanwhile the Group has changed its name and is now called the European Parliament Informal Carers Interest Group, in order to make the distinction between formal and informal care.

Its mission statement is as follows:

The Interest Group on Carers aims to critically monitor and analyse EU policy development for its impact on carers and to propose and advocate concrete action in order to improve the day-to-day situation for Europe's many carers, working in close partnership with relevant stakeholders.

MEETINGS HELD UNTIL NOW

PARLIAMENTARY TERM 2005-2009

Co-chairs:

MEPs Kathy Sinnott, Marian Harkin, Magda Kosane Kovacs and Anna Zaborska

2007

Founding meeting

Formal launch of the Interest Group

2008

The EU Health Strategy

2008 Open Method of Coordination Joint Report

Mental Health

The Social Package/ Discrimination and Social Inclusion

PARLIAMENTARY TERM 2009 – 2014

Co-chairs:

MEPs Marian Harkin, Sirpa Pietikainen, Heinz K. Becker, Jean Lambert

2009

EU2020 Strategy

European Commission Green paper on the Workforce for health

European elections Manifesto

Constituent meeting after 2009 elections

2010

The EU and long term care

The Future Communication on Pensions, Social Affairs Commissioner Laszlo Andor

Carers, Social Affairs and planned Commission work on ageing, pensions and long-term care

Poverty and social exclusion: The European Year and future policy development

2011

The Active and Healthy Ageing Innovation Partnership: content, progress and next steps

Carers in the Active and Healthy Ageing Partnership, with Digital Society Commissioner Neelie Kroes

2012

2012 European year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between the Generations – joint meeting with the European Parliament Intergroup on Ageing

The employment potential of personal and household services

2013

Social Investment Package and Staff Working Document on Long Term Care

EU Joint Action on Mental Health (focus on community care provision), joint meeting with Interest Group on Mental Health, Well-being and Brain Disorders

A campaign for an EU Carers' Strategy, making the case for the need, feasibility and content of a potential strategy

2014

Carers and work/life balance, with Health Commissioner Tonio Borg

Carers in Horizon 2020

The Social Protection Committee report on long term care

PARLIAMENTARY TERM 2015 – 2019

Co-chairs:

MEPs Marian Harkin, Heinz Becker, Jean Lambert, Sirpa Pietikainen

2015

Carers and EU action in the field of social exclusion

Family vs. state responsibility for long-term care across the EU

Carers in the European Semester process

2016

Experiences of family carers for people with a severe mental illness – Joint Meeting with the Interest Group on Mental Health, Wellbeing and Brain Disorders

The need for an EU initiative to facilitate work/life balance

2017

European Pillar of Social Rights

10th anniversary meeting: looking back, looking ahead

HIGHLIGHTS

- Participation of three Commissioners, for Health, Employment and Social Affairs and Digital Society (2010, 2011, 2014)
- Launch of the European Carers Strategy (2013)
- Campaign to insert carers in the 2011 EU budget (PROGRESS programme, enabling Eurocarers to apply for funding (2010)
- Jean Lambert report on 'Impact of the crisis on access to care for vulnerable groups' which calls for directive on carers' leave (2013)
- Insertion of amendments strengthening the carers in a variety of Parliament reports e.g.:
 - Green Paper on pensions (2010)
 - Budget 2011 (2010)
 - European Year on Active and Healthy Ageing and Solidarity between the Generations (2011)
 - Horizon2020 (2012)
 - Social Investment Package and Staff Working Document on Long Term Care (2013)
 - Communication on accessible, effective and resilient health systems (2014)
 - Employment guidelines (2015)
 - European Semester for economic policy coordination: Employment and Social Aspects in the Annual Growth Survey 2016 (2016)
 - Poverty, a gender perspective (2016)
 - Creating labour market conditions favourable for work-life balance (2016)
 - Budgetary control of financing NGOs from the EU budget (2016)

Written Questions (tabled by co-chairs):

- Carers in the Semester Process (2015)
- Adequate social protection for carers (2015)

Carers also featured in a number of Written Questions tabled by other MEPs.

THE FUTURE

It is fair to say that the Interest Group has made an active contribution towards the inclusion of informal carers and their issues in EU policy development. Examples include the increased attention for informal carers in the current discussions on work-life balance, the development of integrated community-based long term care services (recognising the role and contribution of carers) and the need to take better account of carers in the future of social protection systems.

However, the work of the Group is by no means completed. Much remains to be done to develop a policy environment that recognises, supports and empowers informal carers. According to recent EU research, informal carers across the EU currently provide over 80% of all care, with women providing approximately two thirds of care mainly as daughters (in law) and wives/partners. If not adequately supported, caring can have challenging consequences in a variety of ways: for the (physical and mental) health and well-being of carers, their capacity to balance paid work with care responsibilities, their financial situation, their social integration as well as their access to employment

and education. Yet, there are many EU policy domains which – directly or indirectly – impact on carers and which take no or insufficient account of carers.

Recent initiatives – such as the EC proposal for an EU pillar of social rights – provide a new favourable context and offer great potential for the work of our network and the development of ‘carer-friendly’ societies.

The main focus areas of the Group will therefore be:

- **Caring as a barrier to social inclusion and employment;**
- **Young carers;**
- **Informal care in the future of care and caring in Europe (e.g. health systems)**

Eurocarers will be delighted to continue its role as coordinator of the Informal Carers Interest Group.

If you are interested in the work of the Interest Group or would like to receive invitations to the meetings, please contact Francesca Centola at fc@eurocarers.org



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