

To: Dr. António Luís Santos da Costa, Prime Minister of Portugal, gabinete.pm@pm.gov.pt

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Ms. Marta Temido, Minister of Health
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Brussels, 26 April 2021

Dear Prime Minister, Dear Ministers,

Re: Adoption of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan and action on long-term care provision in Europe

On behalf of Eurocarers, the European organisation working for carers, we would like to call on you, **as holder of the EU presidency, to ensure the full adoption of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan by the European Council at the upcoming May Social Summit.**

We strongly believe that this Action Plan provides an adequate roadmap to a more equitable and social Europe and resonates well with EU citizens, especially in the context of the current pandemic and its economic aftermath.

As an organisation working to promote the best interest and improve the quality of life of informal carers, we also strongly believe that the Plan **offers an adequate framework for the development of a much-needed, comprehensive and ambitious EU Strategy on Care and Caring, addressing both formal as well as informal care provision.**

Research has demonstrated that as much as **80% of all long-term care in Europe is provided by informal carers** (i.e., family, friends and neighbours who provide – usually – unpaid care to someone with a chronic illness, disability or other long-lasting care needs, outside of a professional context), with women providing the lion's share of care as daughters (in law) and wives/partners. These carers make a huge contribution to social welfare systems and the economy as a whole in all EU Member States; without them, our care systems would simply collapse.

However, the provision of informal care without proper recognition or support can have a negative impact on the health, social and economic wellbeing of carers themselves – and threaten this resource. For example, many working carers have to perform a difficult balancing act and may be forced to reduce their working hours (involuntary part-timers) or drop out of the labour market, thereby reducing their income and pension entitlements; in other words, rather than being rewarded for their service, carers often suffer negative consequences instead.

The important role played by carers across Europe – as well as the challenges attached to it – were made particularly apparent during the COVID-19 crisis. The policy responses to the pandemic and, in particular, the strict confinement measures put in place across Europe and the reallocation of care services to patients with urgent needs have indeed further exacerbated the challenges facing carers. The crisis has increased their isolation and deprived them from many of the tools at their disposal to maintain an acceptable balance between their social, professional and caregiving responsibilities (e.g., home care services, respite care, etc.) This situation cannot be sustained in the long run and must be address as a matter of urgency.

Fortunately, the political and societal importance of long-term care - and of the crucial role played by informal carers– is on the increase, both at EU and national policy level. The Social Pillar’s Action Plan, the recent Commission Green Paper on Ageing and the ongoing work of the Social Protection Committee stand witness to these developments – and there are other examples. This is only right, given that long-term care needs are also on the rise (due, inter alia, to demographic ageing and increased longevity) while on the other hand, formal and informal care resources are under increasing pressure. Here again, these trends concern all Member States.

Given these shared challenges and the urgent need to address them, a comprehensive EU Strategy on Care and Caring should be developed without delay. This should address **all aspects of formal and informal care** in order to ensure dedicated support to improve the situation of informal carers and actively address the current shortfalls in the formal care sector, including staff shortages, equal access, quality and affordability of care services, and eHealth development.

We strongly believe that the Action Plan can function as an **opportunity** to put in place such a Strategy as it provides the appropriate framework for concrete initiatives in this field. Not only does it directly stipulate the right to health and long-term care, many of the other targets, commitments and recommendations also relate to care and caring (e.g. access to social protection, adequate income and pensions, life-long learning, young carers...).

We are aware of the Commission’s limited remit in the field of long-term care but, the EU level can:

- Assess the impact of all its policies and initiatives on long-term care and vice versa;
- mainstream long-term care into wider policy development;
- Encourage investment in long-term care provision in the broadest sense;
- Support the collection of comparative data and transnational research;
- Agree on ambitious common targets with regards to long-term care provision;
- Help assess and disseminate good practice.

Combined, these actions could be the **backbone** of a future Strategy.

In conclusion, and in light of the above, we again urge Member States to endorse the Action Plan in May and act upon it. The time is right for the EU to come forward with a comprehensive Strategy on Care and Caring; we should not let the opportunity offered by the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan go to waste.

With many thanks in advance for your attention and interest,

Yours sincerely,

Sari Tervonen
President



Stecy Yghemonos
Executive Director

