

Eurocarers Gender Equality Plan

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1. Introduction

Europe's overall increase in life expectancy and ageing demographics generate a growing prevalence of age-related and chronic conditions, a growing demand for care and a serious sustainability and quality challenge for our health and social care systems. This is compounded by structural problems in the long-term care (LTC) sector, as well as the need for new skills due to new care patterns and the rise of new technologies. These challenges are common to all EU member states.

Research shows that informal carers provide the bulk of all care in Europe today, **with women providing the lion's share as daughters (in law) and wives/partners**. The estimated economic value of this unpaid care is huge and the central role played by informal carers in the provision of care in Europe therefore cannot be overstated, ignored or replaced altogether.

The negative impact of caregiving on carers' social and professional life is well documented: being a carer can be a determinant of negative health outcomes, a barrier to education and employment, and a driver of discrimination, social exclusion and poverty. The gender dimension of all of these challenges is particularly clear. Against this backdrop, our organisation aims to promote the best interest of informal carers in the development of quality, people-centred, community-based care systems. This calls for a comprehensive and multidisciplinary set of policies (in the fields of integrated health and social care, employment, social exclusion and poverty, education, youth, gender equality, etc.) that not only recognise and support the contribution of carers to society but also provide them with alternative and emancipating options to informal caregiving.

Naturally, these objectives also concern our responsibilities as an employer and we therefore attach great importance to the creation of equal opportunities for all of our employees via the introduction of flexible working conditions and a proactive approach to tackling entrenched gender norms and stereotypes.

2. Work-life balance and organisational culture

In order to help ensure fair and effective operations, internal provisions have been put in place as part of our employment policy and secretariat structure *in addition to* specific individual contractual rights and responsibilities. These work rules apply to all Eurocarers employees, irrespective of their age, gender or nationality, and regardless of the duration of their employment contract.

Eurocarers seeks to be a fair employer. Good practice at work and a fair working environment are therefore important components of our ethical, equitable and sustainable ethos, taking into account the financial and practical restrictions of the nature of our organisation.

Eurocarers will seek, to the best of its abilities and resources as a small not for profit employer based in Brussels to be a good, equitable and empowering employer and support all employees – and where we can, our partners, stakeholders and others, to uphold such practices.

As a network of carers' organisations working for a society that respects, values and supports carers, Eurocarers is committed to supporting carers within its workforce. We aim to encourage an open and inclusive culture where employees who are carers feel supported.

Balancing work and a caring role may pose challenges for employees. Employees are not obliged to disclose to Director / Office Administrator that they are caring for someone but are encouraged to do so in order to benefit from the support available within Eurocarers. Director / Office Administrator will have due regard to issues of confidentiality concerning this information.

Employees may have caring responsibilities but may not have recognised themselves as a carer. All members of the staff are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the Eurocarers materials on carers to recognise their own circumstances and those of their colleagues.

To help employees to achieve a balance between work and personal commitments Eurocarers aims to allow flexible working time (e.g. work from home, occasional changes in work schedule, part time work) when possible. Further details on organisation of working hours are provided under articles h, l, k and l of chapter 1 of this policy. Eurocarers also encourages its employees with caring responsibilities to familiarise with, and if applicable, seek the status of 'aidants proches' as set in the Belgian legislation on recognition of informal carers implemented in October 2019.

In addition, Eurocarers commits to support its employees in finding information and understanding their statutory rights for different type of reduced working time arrangements available to private sector employees in Belgium. Depending on the employee's individual situation this could be for example carers leave, parental leave, leave for palliative care, educational leave or other type of sabbatical leave (crédit-temps). More information on the framework for such leaves can be found in here:

<https://www.onem.be/fr/citoyens/interruption-de-carriere-credit-temps-et-conges-thematiques>

All employees with caring responsibilities will also be entitled to make telephone calls/send texts associated with their responsibilities during their time at work. Where possible this should be done during the breaks but Eurocarers understands that this will not always be possible.

Eurocarers welcomes comments and suggestions from all staff on how the association may further support its employees who have caring responsibilities. All staff should be open to conversations about further improving the working environment for carers.

3. Gender balance in leadership, decision-making, recruitment and career progression

Women represent the majority of informal carers across Europe (59%). As the European voice of informal carers in all relevant policy and research arenas, Eurocarers continuously seeks to ensure that its governance and employment practices foster and comply with the principle of equality of treatment and opportunities between women and men.

Accordingly, these principles are reflected in the gender distribution of our staff and Board of Directors which are both composed of 60% women and 40% men proportion. Eurocarers is committed to preserving this representativeness in the future.

4. Integration of the gender dimension into our research and policy content

Eurocarers subscribes to EU institutions' concept of engaging in gender planning throughout research (and other) activities, namely by exploring gender as a key variable and by seeking to integrate an explicit gender dimension into policies or action. Our network is aware about the difference between sex – biological and physiological characteristics that define humans as female or male – and gender – the social construction of women and men, of femininity and masculinity, which varies in time and place, and between cultures.

Applying a "gender lens" throughout our activities: The starting point to our analysis of gender equality in care goes beyond merely analysing differences between women and men, but recognises that differences in access to resources shapes gender inequalities across different types of unpaid work and individual and societal activities. This approach recognises the existence of gender gaps and structural gender inequalities in each context. Moreover, our organisation uses an intersectional approach, moving past the binary of grouping together all men and all women and comparing them, to recognise the layered and interconnected impact on time use of multiple identities or affiliations and social positions. Gender analysis also features prominently in

our critical assessment of potential biases underlying the use of certain indicators, e.g. when it comes to how women and men perceive informal care. When it comes to data collection, Eurocarers systematically ensures that its data collection tools are gender-sensitive, use gender-neutral language, and should make it possible to detect gender differences. Furthermore, our organisation is also aware about the fact that gender is not a binary concept and that there is a spectrum of gender identities that are not exclusively masculine or feminine. Whenever possible we allow participants in our research activities to self-identify (i.e. choose the category to which they assign themselves).

5. Measures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment

The employer and employees undertake to abstain from all acts of violence, moral or sexual harassment in the workplace in conformity with Belgian laws.

An employee (or trainee) who believes they have been subject to an act of violence or moral or sexual harassment in the workplace can address themselves to the:

- Director or designated confidante (Board member designated as responsible for staff liaison, currently the Eurocarers President);
- Prevention counsellor (Mensura external prevention services); or
- Medical services.