

# Contribution to the EC consultation for an Action Plan to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights

## Introduction

The [Portuguese Platform for Women's Rights](#) (PpDM) welcomes the Commission's initiative for an Action Plan to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) at EU and national level. The pandemic COVID-19 has been showing the interdependence of all countries and the need to work together to support each other, to end inequalities and to reinforce interrelated and integrated approaches to a global problem. Now, more than ever, the European Union and its Member States need to strengthen the social and economic spheres that link all people in the EU. Social protection, social security systems and public services are essential.

The Action Plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) can be reflected in a call for action at EU and national level in the promotion of the well-being of all people living in the EU. And, in that respect, it is always important to consider the differences at the starting point: women and men do not share the same conditions and quality of life in the EU.

In fact, the pandemic has shed light to an invisible and undervalued issue: **it is the care work that makes our societies work**. People who care for the older people and the sick, who clean offices and public infrastructure and who care and educate our children and young people, need better conditions to do such essential jobs. On the other hand, those who receive care should have the right to receive quality services, a quality that can only be guaranteed if the care work is properly qualified and valued.

The PpDM is the European Women's Lobby national coordination in Portugal and therefore we build our contribution on EWL's [Purple Pact](#) – for a Feminist approach to the economy, and in particular its proposal for a **Care Deal for Europe**. Our contribution has also been influenced by two focus groups that were organized by the PpDM, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation Portugal and the Res Publica Foundation in November 2020 in the context of the common initiative **“Valuing care work as a driving force for societies: recommendations for the present and the future”**. The focus groups brought together representatives of different stakeholders in these fields, in particular trade unions, government and public bodies responsible for policies on care and equality between women and men, political representatives, associations of people with care needs and their families, associations of senior citizens, local authorities and communities, women's rights NGOs, researchers and other stakeholders operating in areas such as youth and older people, education and migration. The outcomes of the focus groups were included in this document.

The sexist roles and stereotypes associated with women and men and the persistence of male dominance over women continue to have a strong influence on the division of labor between women and men at home, in the workplace and in society in general, and tend to perpetuate a vicious circle of obstacles to equality between women and men and to women's empowerment. Women of all ages remain the main providers of care for children, older people, people with disabilities and families and communities, at home and in private and public institutions. Unpaid work also falls disproportionately on them, including providing unpaid care and domestic work.

There is an **urgent need to eliminate discrimination and sexist stereotypes associated with women and men and to move towards a reality in which both men and women are equally responsible for care**. The Plan of Action of the European Pillar of Social Rights can be the beacon for this.

#### PRINCIPLE 1: EDUCATION, TRAINING AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING

- Education for equality between women and men in schools, at all levels of education.

We must also consider that the care sector is characterized by great diversity: diversity from the point of view of the type and nature of the entities providing services; diversity in the areas of care; diversity at the level of training / qualifications and competences necessary for the exercise of care; diversity as to the type of work, that is, it is necessary to consider not only paid work but also voluntary work that is carried out in the context of service providers (entities of the area of social action and health). This has a direct impact on the need for education, training and life-long learning focusing on care for all.

The Action Plan of the EPSR should consider:

- Training aimed at informal caregivers.

#### PRINCIPLE 2: GENDER EQUALITY

Mainstreaming equality between women and men is essential and must be implemented with a high level of political commitment, responsibility and responsiveness.

The Action Plan of the EPSR must be coherent with the European Commission Gender Equality Strategy (2020-2025), adopted in March 2020, and more than merely stating the overall principle of gender equality, the Action Plan of the EPSR must include women and men as main drivers for employment and labor policies and as main beneficiaries of social protection by:

- clearly identifying the differences faced by women and men – **sex-disaggregated data is essential to plan, monitor and evaluate public policies**; Examples: availability of data on dependent people by sex, type and degree of dependence, and on existing care services, both at home and in institutions.
- developing **temporary special measures aiming at women and girls** in education, training and labor fields that are male dominated – such as the digital sector.
- developing **temporary special measures aiming at men and boys** in education, training and labor fields that are female dominated – such as the care sector.
- Women have the right to work as men do. However, the right to work must be assured by the EU and Member States without having any consequences on the private sphere of lives: women cannot pay the price of caring for all!

#### PRINCIPLE 3: EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

It is important to deliver an approach to all policies and measures that takes in due consideration the multiple discriminations people live in. In that sense, intersectionality is a basic concept to mainstream, having in mind that “the discrimination of women based on sex and gender is inextricably linked with other factors that affect women, such as race, ethnicity, religion or belief, health, status, age, class,

caste and sexual orientation. Discrimination on the basis of sex or gender may affect women belonging to such groups to a different degree or in different ways to men. States parties must legally recognize such intersecting forms of discrimination and their compounded negative impact on the women concerned and prohibit them. They also need to adopt and pursue policies and programmes designed to eliminate such occurrences, including, where appropriate, temporary special measures” (§18 of the CEDAW General Recommendation No. 28 on the Core Obligations of States Parties under Article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women).

Migration policies must be sensitive and responsive to the trend of having more women than men coming to Europe to work and to live.

Taking into account the growing number of migrant women employed in the care sector, legislation must make sure that migrant women’s rights are protected and care work needs are not covered through the exploitation of migrant female labour. In that sense, The EU and its Member States must accede to the UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.

For instance, in Portugal the entry of migrant women into domestic service accentuated the deregulation of the sector: in recent years the number of people in domestic service with social security discounts has decreased, adding low wages to an almost absence of social protection in illness and retirement. In addition, migrant women performing domestic service are more vulnerable to extreme labor exploitation, violence and sexual abuse.

#### PRINCIPLE 6: WAGES

**End gender pay gap immediately!** The EU and Member States must assure that there are no differences in the wages of women and men – this is about basic social justice and social protection.

**Implement an equal earner-equal carer model** and the equal sharing of care responsibilities between women and men.

There is a strong need to valuing professions in the care sector through higher, fairer and more dignifying wages - ending the “dictatorship” of the minimum wage in all professions applied regardless of education / qualification levels and responsibility required.

#### PRINCIPLE 9: WORK-LIFE-BALANCE

#### PRINCIPLE 11: CHILDCARE AND SUPPORT TO CHILDREN

#### PRINCIPLE 16: HEALTH CARE

#### PRINCIPLE 18: LONG-TERM CARE

**We need a Care Deal for Europe!** Care policies and the provision of care services are intrinsically related to the achievement of equality between women and men and equality of all with regards to access to good quality, affordable public services. The fact that care work is not equally shared between women and men has a direct negative impact on women’s ability to participate in all aspects of social, economic, cultural and political life.

Care is a societal need that requires robust, shared collective responses that are holistic and cover caring needs throughout the life-cycle. A Care Deal encompasses this whilst focusing on specific care needs at every stage. In this context, care can be considered as part of a sustainable model with the potential of

creating quality jobs for both women and men and addressing gender stereotypes. Given the EU's priority for a sustainable green continent, a link can be made between a Care Deal and the European Green Deal, to ensure that care is part of a continuum for a sustainable economy.

We should also account for the emergence of a “new generation” of older people (with higher education levels than previous generations and more qualifying professional experiences), as well as a new perspective on the right to an independent life of people with dependence to an increasing preference of services at home and for the respective need for a greater focus on expanding this type of responses. This should not mean, however, the “extinction” of care in the context of institutionalization but rather a strong commitment to diversifying responses which will also allow to meet a greater multiplicity of needs and people profiles.

The Action Plan of the EPSR must consider:

- Adopting a Care Deal for Europe, a holistic approach to care across the life-cycle and a continuum of the European Green Deal which caring for each other and for the planet on an equal level.
- Provision of services and infrastructures to provide care to children, the elderly and dependents, which are accessible, affordable and of quality.
- Public funding of childcare and older people care facilities.
- Promotion of decent jobs in the care economy sector, namely by increasing the professionalization and professionalism of health care workers and workers through better training and clearer accreditation based on competency and standards referring to better practices, performance and behavior demanding, focused on the users of the services, without forgetting the guarantee of the exercise of the rights, dignity and protection of the people who work in this sector.
- Dignification and regulation of care services provided in domestic contexts by defining the competences of the caregivers and providing training to meet these competencies.
- Develop structures for monitoring the quality of care work adjusted to the various spaces for care.
- Produce Quality referential for care work and effectively make it an instrument strategic for organizations.
- Labor and employment policies aimed at informal care providers and the creation of good quality jobs in households, for both women and men, in the context of job creation policies.
- Provision of innovative and flexible care services for dependent people, adapted to the current needs of female and male workers and to the multiplicity and changing needs of both those in need of care and those providing care.
- Combating sexist stereotypes associated with care delivery, as limiting opportunities and professional choices for both girls and boys, and encouraging men to assume their domestic responsibilities and as caregivers.
- Existence of policies that promote the articulation between professional, family and private life centered on domestic and care responsibilities that should be centred on both women and men.

- The economic value of unpaid work linked to the provision of care, its visibility and the promotion of its social value.
- Adequate and sustainable public funding of quality services for the care of dependents integrated into public social protection systems.
- Measures to support family and domestic caregivers and regulations to guarantee the enjoyment of their human rights - political, civil, economic, social and cultural, including their physical and mental health (such as the right to free time and vacations, substitution in illness, the acquisition of skills necessary to provide care to disabled people), their social inclusion and their dignified survival in economic terms, including pension rights according to the number of years dedicated to care provision.
- Support for the creation of adequate housing conditions for people with disabilities or persons with reduced mobility and for the acquisition of equipment for their more dignified life and to facilitate the work of caregivers.
- Measures to combat violence against those who care and those who are cared for.
- Maternity, paternity and parental leave, due consideration to their duration, degree of payment and flexibility in how the leave can be taken.
- Leaves for providing care to ascendants, and spouses.
- Set targets for men's take-up of paternity, parental and carer's leave.
- Campaigns and policies that encourage men as fathers to use their rights to paternity and parental leave and as caregivers in the private and in the social sphere.
- Campaigns and policies aimed at increasing the social value and recognition of care work and care workers.

#### PRINCIPLE 19: HOUSING AND ASSISTANCE FOR THE HOMELESS

**There can be no social justice and care justice with poor housing policies!** Furthermore, care has a space dimension. That is, the work of care is always carried out in a space (house, facility...) which, frequently, translates (and reproduces) existing social inequalities. Note that older people, people with more economic difficulties, tend to live in areas with less equipment and in houses with poor conditions, being also those that most frequently present architectural barriers and the absence of equipment that can facilitate and support care in their houses.

Regarding housing and its linkage to care, Member States should:

- Support the adaptation of housing spaces to the needs of people temporarily or permanently disabled (such as remodelling of houses, provision of equipment - purchase or rental).

#### PRINCIPLE 20: ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL SERVICES

The EU must consider services to protect victims of male violence against women as essential services.

Male violence against women is a long-term systemic issue across Europe. There is an emergency situation threatening the security of women's lives that precedes the COVID-19 pandemic crises, which has indeed resulted in an increase of risk of harm for different forms of violence against women and

girls. Helplines, shelters and all judiciary services as urgent response to cases of violence against women and girls should be declared as essential.

The Action Plan of the EPSR should:

- Declare services to protect victims of male violence against women as an essential service.
- Shelters for women and girls who are victims of violence, including for homeless, asylum seeking women and women with disabilities, must be kept open with appropriate measures taken to protect women and workers in these shelters from the spread of COVID-19. To enable the physical distance this requires, additional shelter space must be made available.
- Ensure that all groups of women and girls get equal access to shelter spaces, support services and social benefits, without discrimination.
- Provide urgent funding to frontline support service providers, given the tremendous increase in the risk of harm they face. There should also be a recognition that services will need to support the cumulative effects of need by victims in the long term.
- Develop a comprehensive EU Strategy and EU Directive to prevent and combat all forms of violence against women and girls, and to address all the structural issues that fuel this violence, in accordance with the comprehensive provisions of the Istanbul Convention that should be applied at all times. This requires adopting a gender-sensitive perspective, victim-centered and human rights-based response to the crisis; and in close co-operation with specialized women's organizations: their expertise should be recognized and their work should be fully funded in a sustainable way.
- Ensure adequate EU funding for women's civil society organisations combating violence against women and supporting its victims, including in the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 and Next Generation EU.
- Adopt common standards for mandatory data collection standardised across all EU Member States.