

## Domestic & Home Care EU Congress, Summary Note



*On the 14<sup>th</sup> of November 2023, in Brussels, the European Federation for Family Employment and Homecare (EFFE) organized the European Congress on Domestic & Home Care, as part of the celebrations for its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in service of structuring the household employment sector in Europe. The event, organized under the high patronage of the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the European Year of Skills, provided a high-level dialogue space for social partners and policymakers to enable a genuine discussion and exchange on EU social policies and associated challenges affecting workers in the sector and the households or individuals that employ them.*

The European Union and its Member States face complex challenges that must be addressed in the medium and long term, notably **population aging** and **workforce decline**. By 2070, the working-age population is projected to decrease from approximately 65% in 2019 to a proportion between 56% and 54% of the total population of the EU27.

Demographic aging lies at the heart of all major contemporary societal issues and represents a major challenge for the domestic & home care sector, encompassing over 10 million workers at the European level. This sector must anticipate **the growing demand for home care** while also addressing another major demographic trend: the aging of its predominantly female workforce. This need for labour comes at a time when the sector faces significant **recruitment difficulties** in the labour market, and social partners are implementing numerous programs to enhance the **attractiveness** of these professions to address these shortages.

EFFE's Congress aimed to highlight, through the prism of the domestic & home care sector, the complexity of the challenges facing professional branches in Europe and in the various Member States to meet these needs: highly sought-after professions, due to the increasing desire of European citizens to age at home. It also provided an opportunity for sector actors to demonstrate the difficulty of accounting for the sector's true reality, its boundaries, and its needs to policymakers at regional, national, and European levels, as key deadlines approach such as the implementation of the European Care Strategy, the presentation by the European Commission of tools available to Member States to manage demographic change, strengthen social dialogue, improve the attractiveness of care professions for workers from third countries, and the perspective of European elections.

This Congress brought together over 350 policymakers, researchers, high-level experts, social partners, and advocates for families, households and workers' rights from across Europe. The conference provided an excellent opportunity to share concerns and aspirations and initiate dialogue with public authorities and stakeholders.

Thirty-three speakers succeeded each other, including Vice-President of the European Parliament **Marc Angel**, Spanish Secretary of State for Social Affairs **Ignacio Álvarez Peralta**, Maltese Minister for Social Policy and Children's Rights **Michael Falzon**, as well as many other

representatives from European institutions, Member States, social partners, and civil society to report on the progress made and measure the remaining progress to be achieved.

This rich day of exchanges and reflections on the sector's future for the decade to come, was structured around three key themes.

The first panel focused on demographic challenges and labour shortages in the sector. Several studies have shown that domestic & home care professions are among those experiencing the most strain in the labour market. The origin of these tensions is multifaceted and varies depending on the category of profession considered. Various speakers identified the lack of available labour force, **working and employment conditions**, and the link between employment and training. The results matched the conclusions of the EFFE Lab, thus illustrating the relevance of the research conducted to support Member States in designing their policies.

The second panel highlighted the difficulty of attracting new talent if the sector, and notably its workers, remains invisible and lacks decent social protection. The lack of specific structure allowing **organized social dialogue** severely hampers the **recognition of domestic & home care professions**. Social partners in the PHS (Personal and Household Services) sector echoed an innovative voice, supported by the European Commission, explaining the various initiatives aimed at laying the foundations for European-level social dialogue for access to **decent work** based on the **specificities of personal and household services** to make it a recognized, quality job with rights through constructed national and European social dialogue. Dialogue between social partner plays a central role in **structuring the sector**. By facilitating exchanges between employee and employer representatives, this dialogue contributes to formulating policies and defining sectoral guidelines. By involving all stakeholders concerned, it enables decision-makers to benefit from diverse perspectives and collaborate with them to find the most appropriate solutions for domestic & home care workers. In this way, it promotes the evolution of **social rights**, the improvement of **employees' protection**, and the assurance of increased rights for all.

---

*During the numerous interventions that followed one another, a real momentum and willingness to act to recognize and protect workers but also the households that employ them were observed.*

---

Finally, with 2023 being the European Year of Skills, the Congress was also an opportunity to address the topic of **professionalization** to discuss perspectives for improving the skills for workers and listen to their experiences and expectations. The **attractiveness** of home care professions, more than ever, is a crucial issue, and this challenge must be met through facilitated access to vocational training to **develop the skills** of employees and enable underqualified or distant-from-employment individuals to turn to personal and household services for a rewarding future career that meets the real care or work-life balance needs of our society. However, to promote appropriate professionalization policies for home professions, it is necessary to define a

European-level strategy to **recognize these jobs and their social utility** to value qualifications appropriately and offer **career prospects**.

---

*It is not possible to develop a sectoral logic without giving workers as well as households or individuals in need of care, who employ them, a voice, free choice, and recognition of their status as employers or employees*

---

Through the three panels, it is observed that "care," the care sector, has become crucial for European societies. During the numerous interventions that followed one another, a real momentum and willingness to act to **recognize and protect workers but also the households that employ them** were observed.

The various speakers expressed their wish for the **upcoming European Parliament and the next European Commission to recognize personal and household services as a reliable alternative to care needs**. They emphasized the importance of **continuing efforts initiated during the adoption of the Care Strategy**, considering it a priority, and will also use the results and proposals from this Congress to implement it.

To bridge the significant gap between what governments implement and the reality experienced by families and workers, it is necessary to **develop tools leading to collective bargaining and easy declaration**. Otherwise, it will be impossible to **reduce the strong propensity for undeclared work**. **Professionalization, recognition of informal learning, implementation of fiscal incentives, improvement of working conditions and social protection** are necessary for the social and societal recognition of workers. But to achieve this, legislators must recognize that it is up to those receiving care to **decide** how and where they want to live, regardless of their age, disability, or dependency status. It is not possible to **develop a sectoral logic** without giving workers as well as households or individuals in need of care, who employ them, a voice, free choice, and recognition of their status as employers or employees.

It is also noted from this day that **the issue of gender equality was at the heart of discussions**. Historically, the **burden of care** and so-called informal tasks has mainly fallen on women, which hinders their access to the labour market, empowerment, balance, and career development. Moreover, an overwhelming majority of workers in the sector are women. Difficult working conditions, low wages, and lack of social protection strongly contribute to their precariousness. Today, more than ever, it is essential to **recognize the work of women, support formal and informal caregivers, and combat gender stereotypes**, still deeply rooted in this sector.

To conclude this Congress and look towards the future, the President of EFFE, **Marie Béatrice Levaux**, along with the two Vice-Presidents, **Andrea Zini** and **Karmele Acedo**, presented EFFE's manifesto for the upcoming European elections. **The federation puts forward eight recommendations to future European legislators to support and preserve homecare employment in Europe:**

1. Fully recognise **domestic and home care work in all its diversity** – with a special focus on households that directly employ these workers – and fight undeclared work to ensure these unsung contributors to social Europe and the silver economy benefit from the same social rights as any other worker in the EU.
2. Continue to implement an **ambitious social agenda** to support all European workers.

3. **Promote home care integration into the wider care sector**, so that citizens can maintain their independence, benefit from flexibility and choice in combining formal and informal care services, and so that national budget sustainability is secured.
4. Empower domestic & home care workers via the **European Skills Agenda**, bringing high-quality services and their accompanying benefits to citizens all over Europe.
5. Call on the EU and its Member States to **give the home care sector the funding it needs** to provide affordable home care to every citizen who chooses it.
6. **Improve social dialogue and collective bargaining** to guarantee decent working conditions and training opportunities in the care sector.
7. Encourage EU Member States and the European institutions to implement policies that **recognise the vital role of the domestic sector in integration of people with a migration background** into the formal workforce, including:
8. Encourage EU Member States and all European institutions to **tackle the gender gap in the sector**.