

## Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **European Union Advances Social Agenda with La Hupe Declaration, but Challenges Remain in Care Sector Representation**

*Brussels, the 17<sup>th</sup> of April 2024* – The culmination of the Belgian presidency of the European Union saw the hosting of the EU Summit on the European Pillar of Social Rights on April 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> in La Hulpe. This conference marked a significant milestone in advancing the social agenda within the EU, building upon the momentum initiated by the tripartite declaration signed at Val Duchesse earlier in the year.

The conference in La Hulpe provided a vital platform for reinvigorating discussions around the concrete implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, three years after the Porto Social Summit. While acknowledging that the Pillar serves as a general framework covering competences beyond the EU's exclusive remit, **EFFE recognizes its crucial role in driving progress across numerous dimensions during this mandate.**

Despite the challenges posed by difficult negotiations, a Declaration on the Future of the European Pillar of Social Rights was signed by 25 EU Member States, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee, ETUC, SGI Europe, SME United and the Social Platform.

This declaration not only reaffirms the Pillar as the guiding framework for EU social policies but also proposes initiatives for the EU's future social agenda in the next legislative term. It serves as a significant contribution to the Council's Strategic Agenda 2024-2029, addressing critical gaps in priorities set by Member States.

However, **it is important to note that the declaration did not receive unanimous support from all Member States and social partners**, despite recent Eurobarometer survey results indicating strong public support for a social Europe. While 88% of European citizens consider a social Europe important to them personally, **work remains to be done to garner consensus among EU stakeholders.**

The European Union has taken significant strides towards a more socially oriented future with the adoption of the La Hupe Declaration, a landmark document reaffirming the EU's commitment to fostering fairness, solidarity, and inclusivity across member states. The declaration, a culmination of collaborative efforts following the Porto Social Summit, **represents a pivotal moment in shaping the EU's social policies and priorities.**

At the heart of the La Hupe Declaration lies a recognition of the **indispensable role of civil society** in driving social progress. Emphasizing the importance of social dialogue, the declaration underscores the need for inclusive policymaking processes that engage stakeholders from all sectors of society. This commitment to dialogue sets a promising precedent for fostering cooperation and understanding in addressing complex social challenges.

One area of particular significance highlighted in the declaration is the EU's dedication to improving **long-term care and early childhood education and care**. With an aging European population and increasing demand for care services, the declaration acknowledges the pressing need to invest in these sectors to ensure accessibility, affordability, and quality of care for all. EFFE commends this forward-looking approach, recognizing the crucial role these services play in supporting families and promoting social inclusion and gender equality.

Furthermore, the declaration places a strong emphasis on **professionalization** within the care sector, recognizing the valuable contributions of care workers and the importance of providing them with

adequate support and recognition. This commitment to professional development and fair working conditions aligns with the principles of social justice and dignity for all workers.

Moreover, EFFE welcomes the declaration's recognition of the **need to strengthen social dialogue** mechanisms, including collective bargaining, to address the evolving needs of the labour market. By empowering workers and employers to negotiate fair terms and conditions of employment, the EU aims to create a more balanced and inclusive labour environment that prioritizes the well-being of all stakeholders.

Despite these positive developments, concerns linger regarding the representation of certain "atypical" professions within the care sector. While the La Hupe Declaration signals a promising commitment to social inclusion, **EFFE worries that the unique challenges facing caregivers, particularly in homecare settings, may be overlooked in current dialogue frameworks.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the essential role of care workers in safeguarding public health and supporting vulnerable populations. Yet, these workers, and household employers, continue to face systemic challenges, including inadequate representation in social dialogue structures, which hinder their ability to advocate for their rights and address sector-specific issues effectively.

EFFE urges the European Commission, the Parliament, and Member States to prioritize the **inclusion of caregivers and domestic and home care receivers in social dialogue** processes and to implement measures that ensure their voices are heard and their concerns addressed. By doing so, the EU can uphold its commitment to social justice and solidarity, creating a more inclusive and sustainable future for all.

As it was stressed during the debates, it is imperative to recognize the value of care workers, which is not the case at present, leading to persistent shortages. Failure to adapt to evolving formats perpetuates the exclusion of certain sectors from vital initiatives and frameworks, hindering professional development and undermining the quality of care services.

By ensuring comprehensive representation and support within the European social dialogue framework, the EU can pave the way for a more inclusive and sustainable care sector that meets the needs of both workers and care recipients.

As the EU charts its course towards a socially oriented future, EFFE looks forward to continued progress and commitment to addressing the challenges facing the care sector, ensuring that no sector, including domestic and home care, is left out of vital policy measures.

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About EFFE:

*The European Federation for Family Employment and Home Care (EFFE) is one of the main actors involved in the Personal and Household Services (PHS) sector at EU level by representing household and individuals directly employing domestic & care workers. Personal and Household Services (PHS) define the work performed by an individual for any household, taking care of household members or performing tasks that other households are usually able to do themselves. PHS encompass direct (such as feeding a baby or nursing an ill partner) and indirect (such as cooking and cleaning) care activities carried out by a worker, who is subject to remuneration, irrespective of the nature of the legal relationship with the household.*