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Eurodiaconia welcomes the EU Care Strategy and calls for a European Care Guarantee

Eurodiaconia welcomes the much-anticipated European Care Strategy, published by the European Commission, together with two proposals for Council Recommendations on Long-Term Care (LTC) and on the revision of the Barcelona targets on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). This initiative is a crucial step towards addressing the challenges the care sector has been facing over the last years, and we are glad to see some of our network's recommendations taken on board.

The Care Strategy recognises the main challenges in the care sector - **availability, affordability, accessibility, quality, workforce, funding and governance challenge** – and points in the right direction regarding the needed actions.

While we regret that the Care Strategy in itself is not putting forward many concrete actions, we welcome that the Council Recommendation on LTC includes more concrete measures. We strongly agree with the recommendation for Member States to nominate long-term care national coordinators, equipped with adequate resources and mandate who will effectively coordinate and monitor the implementation of the recommendation. Furthermore, the effective involvement of all relevant stakeholders is key in improving the provision of care services across the EU.

Regarding the proposal on ECEC, we welcome the ambitious revision of the Barcelona targets, as well as its strong child-centred approach and focus on children from disadvantaged groups and at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Also, the proposal importantly highlights the relevance of an inclusive, high-quality, non-segregated ECEC and out-of-school care, that is affordable and accessible for everyone, particularly for children with disabilities, with a migrant background, and from Roma communities.

We especially welcome the call to Member States to ensure that, for children not covered by the Child Guarantee, the net cost of ECEC is reasonably proportionate to other household expenses and disposable income, paying particular attention to low-income households. Equally, the call to Member States to introduce a legal entitlement to ECEC for all children is a positive advancement. However, we regret that this Proposal does not call on Member States to produce national action plans, or national targets, nor to appoint national coordinators.



The Care Strategy emphasises the role of migrants in the provision of care services and we recognise the role of migrants, particularly migrant women, as they comprise a high percentage of care workers in the EU. While an emphasis must be put on creating attractive and well-compensated jobs that attract workers, including migrant workers, there is a need to counteract the negative effects of the care drain in sending countries. There is also a need to avoid the commodification of migrants by presenting them as the cure for Europe's aging population.

Moreso, we regret to see that there is no real recognition of the not-for-profit care providers. Across the Member States, non-profit organisations play essential roles in providing social services to persons who need them. There is a great need for policymakers to recognise the position as well as the contribution of non-profit organisations in terms of service delivery, civic participation, and social innovation. Therefore, while we welcome the Commission's intention to work jointly with Member States, national long-term care coordinators, the Social Protection Committee and social economy actors, non-profit organisations should also be consulted. Also, the Commission and Member states should offer concrete support to ensure not-for-profit organisations can thrive and provide the services needed, through empowering policy frameworks, and adequate funding opportunities.

We now call on EU Institutions and Member States to ensure full and ambitious implementation of the Care Strategy to ensure everyone in the EU will have access to quality care services whenever needed. Eurodiaconia, which represents 56 members in 32 countries with long-standing expertise in the provision of social and care services, believes that the Care Strategy now needs to be completed by a **European Care Guarantee**. We already have an EU Child Guarantee and a Youth Guarantee. We need a European Care Guarantee.

This Care Guarantee will allow Member States to leverage ESF+ funding and other structural funds to effectively support the transition from residential to community-based care and home care. It should set a framework for the Member States to adequately fund and structure the delivery of high-quality and person-centered services. The Care Guarantee will guarantee everyone living in the EU, including people in vulnerable situations, access to available, affordable and good quality care services. The framework should include life-cycle care strategies, covering decent working conditions, training opportunities for carers, and support for informal and family carers.