



PHS Social Partners Statement on the European Commission's Roadmap to Strengthen Women's Rights

Brussels, 7th April 2025

Introduction

The Personal and Household Services (PHS) social partners – EFFE, EFSI, EFFAT and UNI Europa – have come together in the context of the publication of **the EU Roadmap for Women's Rights** to advocate that stronger PHS sectors and workforce is a key opportunity for the European Union, its Member States and Social Partners at the national level. The Personal and Household Services (PHS) social partners are committed to contributing to the formalisation of employment and quality work in domestic and home care work. We call on the EU to recognise Personal and Household Services as foundational to achieving its gender equality goals, which will be published with the **upcoming Gender Equality Strategy**.

Background

While all economic sectors have a role to play in advancing gender equality, the PHS sectors are essential in ensuring gender equality for both workers and users of these services. The PHS sectors, which employ more than 10 million workers across the EU, encompass a wide range of essential activities that are foundational to the functioning and well-being of families and individuals at home and to women's participation in the labour market. These services include childcare (CC), long-term care (LTC) for the elderly and people with disabilities, cleaning, cooking, remedial classes, home repairs, gardening, and ICT support. A uniting characteristic of all these activities is that they take place in one's household, which in turn becomes another person's workplace.

The PHS sectors play a crucial role in addressing gender inequalities across the European Union. The European Care Strategy (2022) underscored that significant gender disparities persist in care provision.

PHS promotes women's participation in the labour market as women dedicate an average of 3.5 hours per day to direct and indirect care activities, whereas men spend only 1.5 hours. The burden of unpaid care and domestic work primarily falls on women, often at the cost of their professional careers, health, and work-life balance. The economic cost of this 'unpaid care penalty' – the potential earnings lost by women due to unpaid caregiving – is estimated to be at least €242 billion annually¹.

Moreover, in the EU, 91% of PHS workers are women, and the sectors represent nearly 7.5% of overall female employment². Due to the high prevalence of undeclared work in PHS, female domestic and homecare workers are disproportionately vulnerable to exploitation, social exclusion, and poverty.

¹ [What if care work were recognised as a driver of sustainable growth?](#), EP Briefing, 2022.

² [Domestic workers in Europe getting the recognition they deserve](#), EFFAT Position Paper from the EFSI PHS Industry Monitor, 2018.



Women frequently face the necessity of reducing their working hours or withdrawing from the labour market entirely. Approximately 7.7 million women across the European Union are excluded from paid employment due to caregiving responsibilities. This situation is neither sustainable nor acceptable, as it perpetuates broader gender inequalities. EU action is vital to promote an 'equal earner – equal carer' model, supporting women in re-entering the labour market or transitioning from part-time to full-time employment.

The EU Roadmap for Women's Rights underlines that women in the EU continue to be time-poor compared to men due to a disproportionate share of household duties and care responsibilities. This is exacerbated by the low uptake of family leave by fathers, lack of family-friendly working time regimes, and difficulties in accessing quality care services. This reality translates into an untapped economic potential that could be addressed through stronger policy commitments in the upcoming **Gender Equality Strategy post-2025**.

Recognising the domestic and home care sectors as priorities and calling for the formalisation of employment and decent working conditions are important steps. As the Roadmap remains a non-binding document, it is crucial that the forthcoming **Gender Equality Strategy** builds upon these commitments and ensures the implementation of policies that directly support PHS workers and users alike.

Ensuring that women with informal caregiving and household responsibilities have access to alternative support systems – such as Personal and Household Services – plays a crucial role in reducing gender disparities. This approach benefits all parties, increasing employment opportunities for informal carers while strengthening and professionalising the PHS and care workforce.

To advance this goal, the EU PHS Social Partners – EFFAT, EFFE, EFSI, and UNI Europa – are working together to ensure women's access to the labour market and improve work-life balance. At the same time, they advocate for decent working conditions, fair wages, and equal treatment for PHS workers, recognising their vital contribution to society.

Recommendations

The EU PHS Social Partners call on the European Union to take decisive action to **reduce the gender pay gap, enhance work-life balance, and eliminate violence and harassment in the PHS sectors** by implementing the following measures:

- **Promote accessible, high-quality, and affordable PHS** to support work-life balance, boost employment (especially for women), combat undeclared work, and ensure the recognition, valuation, and professionalisation of women's labour in the sectors and in the EU.
- **Recognise access to PHS as a key factor in increasing women's labour market participation**, fostering economic independence, and enabling greater inclusion in social protection schemes, which in turn strengthens women's financial security and overall contribution to the economy. This would be essential for improving the situation of vulnerable groups, including single mothers and those at risk of poverty. By relieving women of the caregiving burden, access to PHS allows them to participate more fully in the workforce, unlocking their potential for personal, professional and financial growth.
- **Regularisation of migrant PHS workers.** Approximately one in four paid care PHS workers is a migrant, many of whom face exploitation due to a lack of adequate regularisation pathways.



The EU and Member States should facilitate legal pathways to formalise the status of migrant PHS workers, recognise their skills, and provide access to quality jobs in line with the forthcoming quality jobs roadmap. This would not only ensure fair working conditions and protection for migrant women but also contribute to reducing gender inequalities by empowering these women, recognising their contributions, and promoting equal opportunities within the sectors.

- **Invest in skills development, training, and education** to address labour shortages and meet evolving workforce needs. The lack of recognition for acquired experience and insufficient training opportunities exacerbate gender stereotypes in the PHS sectors. The EU should integrate PHS within the Union of Skills framework, ensuring professional recognition and fostering sector-specific education and training.
- **Invest and strengthen collective bargaining and social dialogue in the PHS sectors, where it remains critically low. This effort should be accompanied by strong support for social partners' capacity-building.** Such initiatives will empower social partners to play a more effective role in tackling gender inequalities and closing the gender pay gap.
- **Combating sexual violence and harassment in the workplace, particularly gender-based violence.** Given the unique nature of household-based employment, the EU PHS Social Partners call on the European Commission to ensure the full implementation of the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. Additionally, the EU should push Member States to ratify and effectively implement ILO Convention C190 and adopt new EU policies that align with these international treaties to protect workers from all forms of violence and harassment.

Conclusion

Advancing gender equality requires guaranteed access to affordable, high-quality domestic and home care services. Strengthening the PHS sectors not only benefits the social economy but also acknowledges the vital contributions of women to society. Expanding access to PHS services relieves families of caregiving burdens, enables women to fully engage in the labour market, and fosters greater gender equity.

The EU PHS Social Partners remain committed to engaging in the upcoming **Gender Equality Strategy** consultations and working with EU policymakers to ensure that gender equality objectives are met through reinforced and sustainable Personal and Household Services.



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EFFAT is the **European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions**. As a European Trade Union Federation representing 120 national trade unions from 35 European countries, EFFAT defends the interests of more than 22 million workers employed along the food chain. EFFAT is a member of the ETUC and the European regional organisation of the IUF.

EFFE, the **European Federation for Family Employment & Homecare**, represents the interests of national stakeholders, including social partners organisations operating in the field of direct employment. This model is characterised by a contractual work relationship between two private individuals without any trading or profit-making objective.

EFSI, the **European Federation for Services to Individuals**, is the voice of the Personal and Household Services industry at the European level, representing national associations, employers' organisations, PHS providers and companies involved in the development of personal and household services, and currently operating in 21 EU Member States.

UNI-Europa is the **European Trade Union Federation for 7 million service workers**. It speaks for the sectors that constitute the backbone of economic and social life in Europe. Headquartered in the heart of Brussels, UNI Europa represents 272 national trade unions in 50 countries, including: Commerce, Banking Insurance and Central Banks, Gaming, Graphical and Packaging, Hair and Beauty, Information and Communication Technology Services, Media, Entertainment and Arts, Postal Services and Logistics, Private Care and Social Insurance, Industrial Cleaning and Private Security, Professional Sport and Leisure, Professionals/Managers and Temporary Agency Workers.