

**Advisory
Committee on
Equal
Opportunities for
Women and Men**

**Opinion on
The care gap in the EU:
a holistic and
gender-transformative
approach**

The Opinion of the Advisory Committee does not necessarily reflect the positions of the Member States and does not bind the Member States

13 September 2021

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Introduction - A Widening Care Gap

The relevance of care has been clearly highlighted by the Covid-19 pandemic. As societies came to a standstill and the health crisis intensified, the high value of care and healthcare was underlined in an unprecedented manner in modern times. The importance of a well-functioning health and care sector has become evident and the central role of care workers was given attention and value during the pandemic. As schools and childcare services were closed, parents were struggling to combine work with domestic and care responsibilities at home, including home-schooling children. Preliminary survey data shows that this situation further reinforced the traditional and stereotypical division of unpaid work between women and men during the periods of lock-down¹. To a large degree, women have been carrying a disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care and household work during the pandemic, while also being disproportionately represented among frontline workers providing care and other essential services.

The objective of the Opinion is to reflect on the value of care in our society with a holistic approach, especially in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. The opinion collects approaches and measures taken and to be taken at Member State and European level to address the care gap and care work in a gender-transformative way, in order to help the Commission develop its policy further to tackle the issue of the gender care gap as well as to provide support for policy development.

Care policies and the provision of care services are intrinsically linked to the achievement of gender equality. The lack of affordable, accessible and high-quality care services in most EU countries, and the fact that care work is not equally shared between women and men, have a direct negative impact on women's participation in all aspects of social, economic, cultural and political life.

Paid Care Work

Segregation in the Labour Market

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought to the fore the challenging realities in the feminized sectors of employment within the gender segregated European labour market. These are the sectors where temporary, atypical and part-time contracts are more common and where workers tend to be affected by low wages, lack of career opportunities, precarious² and/or irregular working conditions³, and therefore with low pay and lower pensions.

¹ See Eurofound (2020), living, working and COVID-19, as well as several national surveys, such as the Belgian COVID Time Use Survey and COGIS-NL COVID-19 Gender (In)Equality Survey

² European Parliament, *Precarious work from a Gender and intersectionality perspective, and ways to combat it*. Study requested by the FEMM Committee. PE662.491, November 2020:

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/662491/IPOL_STU\(2020\)662491_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/662491/IPOL_STU(2020)662491_EN.pdf) (pages 40-42 on the definitions of precarious work)

³ Ibid.

The majority of workers delivering care and other essential services in the EU during the crisis have been and are women, including 76% of healthcare workers (doctors, nurses, midwives, staff in residential care homes), 82% of cashiers, 93% of child care workers and teachers, 95% of domestic cleaners and helpers, and 86% of personal care workers⁴. This also means that women are at a greater risk of being infected by the virus.

Women with migrant background constitute a significant part of this workforce. The feminisation of international migration in the context of the global and intra-European care chains, means that migrant women often fill the care gap created by insufficient investment in the care sector. They are frequently engaged by private households without full access to adequate pay, social protection and labour rights⁵. Migrant women in irregular situations are especially at risk of discrimination and abuse⁶.

Partly due to their overrepresentation in precarious and low-paid care jobs, women, particularly young women, women with low qualifications and migrant women, find themselves at a disadvantage when facing a new period of crisis such as the current pandemic.

The reality of women's different life experiences and how these are shaped by factors such as age, ethnic origin, class and disability, has become more apparent than ever. The pandemic has disproportionately impacted women from certain social groups such as migrant workers and single parents, who were placed in an even greater vulnerable situation⁷.

Value of Paid Care Work

To date, abilities associated with work that is traditionally carried out by women, such as care and domestic work, are valued less than those associated with work traditionally carried out by men. Paid care work is often considered low-skilled and is socially and financially undervalued and underpaid⁸.

The Covid-19 pandemic is an opportunity to reassess jobs in the care and welfare sectors, in terms of their value and contribution to the economy and wellbeing of society as a whole, upgrading it, in relation to both pay and working conditions. In France, the Ministry of Health,

⁴ <https://eige.europa.eu/covid-19-and-gender-equality/essential-workers>

⁵ Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, *Opinion on challenges for gender equality in a rapidly ageing society*, October 2019: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/aid_development_cooperation_fundamental_rights/opinion_challenges_gender_equality_rapidly_ageing_society_2019_en.pdf

⁶ See FRA report on "Migrants in an irregular situation employed in domestic work: Fundamental rights challenges for the European Union and its Member States", July 2011: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/1668-FRA-report-domestic-workers-2011_EN.pdf

⁷ European Institute for Gender Equality, *Gender equality and the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic*, May 2021: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-and-socio-economic-impact-covid-19-pandemic>

⁸ European Institute for Gender Equality, *Gender, skills and precarious work in the EU: Research note*, May 2017: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-skills-and-precarious-work-eu-research-note>

launched the *Ségur de la Santé* consultation process in 2020⁹ that led to the allocation of a budget of €8.2 billion for the revaluation of care workers' salaries in hospital and in the health system. A similar process within the education sector could lead to the investment of €400 million in 2021 to support teachers and educational workers.

Investing in care work can contribute to reducing workforce shortages and to fighting gender segregation in these occupations by making care work more attractive to both women and men. The Covid-19 pandemic has also underlined the necessity of having a well-functioning care and healthcare system. Investing in the quality of care through better equipment, salaries, conditions of work and professional training and development, including career opportunities, would lead to an increase in the general wellbeing of the patients, the care workers and the informal carers, who would be able to rely on better professional assistance.

To achieve this, there needs to be comprehensive long-term care strategies¹⁰ with adequate funding and resources. It entails investing in robust and resilient health and social protection systems, supporting essential workers such as health and social workers by ensuring safe and equal working conditions, providing appropriate equipment, professional and career development, and ensuring access for all to services such as childcare, long-term care for dependent people, and mental health services¹¹.

Investing in the care economy is potentially also part of moving towards a sustainable economic model ensuring that care needs across the life cycle – from childcare to care for the elderly - are met whilst addressing gender equality and closing gender employment gaps in a sustainable way.

The working-age population in the EU has been shrinking for a decade and is projected to fall by 18% by 2070 due to demographic ageing. Boosting the employment rate of women through a larger and more inclusive labour market has become of critical importance, not just to gender equality but also to the economy¹². Care jobs are green jobs: investing in care is three times less polluting per job created overall than the equivalent investment in the construction industry¹³.

Investment in the care economy is also particularly important for women and men in rural areas. Their work is indispensable throughout rural economies, often taking on a multitude of roles, which include agricultural production and marketing, food processing and distribution, domestic chores, child rearing and education, caring for the elderly and sick, growing fruits and vegetables and caring for animals. Women in rural areas are at the forefront of environmental protection and contribute to sustainable development. Their paid and unpaid

⁹ *Ségur de la Santé*, dossier de presse, July 2020

¹⁰ Council of the European Union, *Impact of Long-Term Care on Work-Life Balance - Presidency Conclusions* June 2020: <https://www.politico.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Presidency-Conclusions-Long-Term-Care-and-Work-Life-Balance-10-6-2020.pdf>

¹¹ European Parliament, *REPORT on the gender perspective in the COVID-19 crisis and post-crisis period (2020/2121(INI))*, November 2020: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2020-0229_EN.pdf

¹² European Commission, *Report on the Impact of Demographic Change*, June 2020: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/demography_report_2020_n.pdf

¹³ Women's Budget Group, *Creating a caring economy: a call to action*, October 2020: <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/WBG-Report-v10.pdf> (pg.5)

care work has to be recognized and supported through the development of robust and accessible care infrastructure.

Gender Pay Gap

Vertical and horizontal segregation in the labour market, coupled with the devaluation of feminised sectors, is one of the root causes of the gender pay gap.¹⁴ Besides the clear horizontal segregation in the care sector, vertical segregation is also evident. On a European level, even though women make up the majority of the education and healthcare sector workforces, they are still under-represented at management level, and segregation is higher in these sectors than in any other¹⁵.

Transparency in pay is a key factor in addressing the gender pay gap. A declaration by the Committee of the Ministers of the Council of Europe underlines, *inter alia*, the importance of relevant statistics allowing for pay comparisons¹⁶. The European Commission launched its proposals for binding pay transparency measures in March 2021¹⁷, and a number of Member States have over the years implemented legislative and other measures to ensure gender equality in pay. For instance, the Swedish Discrimination Act goes over and above forbidding sex discrimination when setting pay. It requires employers to pro-actively prevent, discover and rectify unjustified pay differences based on gender by analysing and surveying pay differences between women and men. In Malta, an Equal Pay Tool that accurately checks the organisations' equal pay for work of equal value between women and men was developed¹⁸. The Tool enables the identification and revaluation of undervalued work, potentially including care work, within the same company. In Spain, different instruments and tools that assess equal pay and evaluate jobs from a gender perspective, both at company level and in collective bargaining, have recently been introduced as part of regulations on equal pay and pay transparency¹⁹. In Austria, employers are legally bound to publish minimum wages in job advertisements and an online wage-calculator helps users understand average wages in specific professions, sectors or regions. Companies with more than 150 employees are also required to draw up income reports.

Unpaid care work determines a notable part of the gender pay gap. Statistics show that the more unpaid care work women provide, the less time they have to spend on paid work; the

¹⁴ European Commission, *A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025*, March 2020: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0152&from=EN>

¹⁵ European Institute for Gender Equality, *Gender inequalities in care and consequences for the labour market*, January 2021: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-inequalities-care-and-consequences-labour-market>

¹⁶ Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, *Declaration on equal pay and equal opportunities for women and men in employment*, March 2021: https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=0900001680a1cb97

¹⁷ The proposal envisages several measures such as: pay transparency for job-seekers; prohibition on employers to ask prospective workers about their pay history; the right to information for employees; public reporting on the gender pay gap for employers with at least 250 employees; and joint pay assessment between employers' and workers' representatives where there is a gender pay gap of 5% or more: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_881.

¹⁸ Developed by the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality as part of the EU co-funded project 'Prepare the Ground for Economic Independence'

¹⁹ Royal Decree 902/2020, 13th October, on Equal Pay between women and men <https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2020-12215>

more paid work men pursue, the less time they are able to spend on unpaid care work²⁰. In fact, inequalities intensify when women become mothers. The difference of status and economic position between mothers and non-mothers, and even more telling, between mothers and fathers - the 'motherhood pay gap' - clearly illustrates that parenthood interferes in the professional development and achievements of mothers much more than it does for fathers²¹.

1. *The Advisory Committee recommends that the Member States target measures to proactively combat gender stereotypes in educational curricula, in professional paths and in roles within the household and the family, as per the recommendations of the Advisory Committee's Opinion on Combatting Gender Stereotypes*²².

2. *The Advisory Committee recommends that the European Union allocates funds for campaigns and measures that aim to challenge gender stereotypes highlighting the important role of men in both paid and unpaid care work.*

3. *The Advisory Committee reiterates its recommendation to the European Union and its Member States to address migration from a gender perspective, through the regularization and empowerment of migrant women workers, ensuring that these workers fully enjoy their rights, in compliance with ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189)*²³.

4. *The Advisory Committee recommends that the European Union and its Member States promote job evaluation from a gender perspective, at both sectorial and company level, in order to develop fair job classification systems and adequate remuneration. Measures against precarious work should be adopted and enforced, and collective bargaining should be supported, strengthened and safeguarded.*

5. *The Advisory Committee recommends that the European Union and its Member States: re-value paid care work when developing or negotiating pay structures to ensure that it is given due recognition and pay; promote the professionalization of care workers by providing them with customized professional training and professional development; and provide a sustained investment to improve wages, working conditions and infrastructure in feminised sectors of the economy.*

6. *The Advisory Committee recommends that the European Union and its Member States implement the recommendations put forward by the Council Conclusions of 1 December 2020,*

²⁰ Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on Tackling the Gender Pay Gap: Valuation and Distribution of Paid Work and Unpaid Care Work*, December 2020: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/47063/st13584-en20.pdf>

²¹ Damian Gimshaw and Jill Rubery, *The motherhood pay gap: a Review of the issues, theory and international evidence*, International Labor Office, 2015

²² Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, *Towards a Stereotype-Free Union: Opinion on Combatting Gender Stereotypes*, March 2021: [opinion_combatting_gender_stereotypes_2021_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/equal-opportunities/files/2021/03/opinion_combatting_gender_stereotypes_2021_en.pdf) (ec.europa.eu)

²³ Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, *Opinion on challenges for gender equality in a rapidly ageing society*, October 2019: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/aid_development_cooperation_fundamental_rights/opinion_challenges_gender_equality_rapidly_ageing_society_2019_en.pdf

on *Tackling the gender pay gap: valuation and distribution of paid work and unpaid care work*. These adopt a two-pronged approach and call on the Member States to invest in the provision of public infrastructure and external services to meet care needs across the lifecycle, and to ensure the proper implementation of the Work-Life Balance Directive enabling both women and men to share care responsibilities. Funding is available from the Structural Funds (ESF+ and ERDF) for these investments.

7. *The Advisory Committee reiterates its recommendation²⁴ that the European Union and its Member States work for the adoption of binding legislation to promote pay transparency and to combat the gender pay gap. Building on the European Commission proposal of a Directive to strengthen the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value between men and women through pay transparency and enforcement mechanisms, pay transparency provisions should be balanced and proportionate, empowering workers in enforcing their right to equal pay for equal work and work of equal value, and when necessary, triggering action by employers to address structural gender bias and discrimination in pay settings, where it exists²⁵.*

Unpaid Care Work

Gender inequality has persistently continued to manifest itself in the distribution of unpaid care work. Almost all women in the EU (92%) are regular unpaid carers, and 81% are unpaid daily carers. Conversely, only 68% of men provide unpaid care work at least several days a week while only 48% do so every day²⁶. The EU has a long way to go to implement the dual-earner/dual-carer model, where both women and men equally take on care responsibilities and paid employment.

The Covid-19 pandemic continued to exacerbate these already existing inequalities. Thus, women continue to struggle with juggling paid work and unpaid care work, assuming a greater physical and mental burden in these unprecedented times when care services and schools are more likely to close-down due to health measures.

According to surveys carried out by the ILO²⁷, women's participation in the labour market has been, generally, negatively impacted with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly since their participation, or lack thereof, is directly affected by domestic and caregiving responsibilities. It is also significant that, although the start of the pandemic led to large declines in employment for both women and men in the EU, employment rebounded more strongly for men than for women in summer 2020²⁸.

²⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/adopted_opinion_gpg.pdf

²⁵ Recommendation 7 does not reflect the employers' views.

²⁶ Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on Tackling the Gender Pay Gap: Valuation and Distribution of Paid Work and Unpaid Care Work*, December 2020: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/47063/st13584-en20.pdf>

²⁷ <https://ilostat ilo.org/fallout-of-covid-19-working-moms-are-being-squeezed-out-of-the-labour-force/>

²⁸ European Institute for Gender Equality, *Gender equality and the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic*, May 2021: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-and-socio-economic-impact-covid-19-pandemic>

A heightened share of care duties saw more employed women than employed men facing difficulties in concentrating on their job or giving due time to work. The decrease in informal help from grandparents and domestic workers because of mobility restrictions and social distancing exacerbated the difficulties faced by parents and people with other care responsibilities. Women's higher withdrawal from the labour market may be one of the major consequences of the crisis management-induced shock to care arrangements²⁹. All this points to an intensification of the 'care penalty' for women. It is primarily due to the care penalty that many women do not enter the labour market or leave the labour market; others only manage temporary work or employment on a part-time basis; and others have a career lacking progression to decision-making positions³⁰.

Changes in the organisation of paid work, public infrastructure, state benefits, taxation and social norms need to take place in order to advance the dual-earner/dual-carer model where both women and men equally work and care for their family. "Earners", most often men, must be supported in performing more unpaid care work, and "carers", most often women, must be supported in allocating more time for paid work. The achievement of this model becomes possible if the career opportunities, income and social protection of earners do not decrease significantly when they take on more unpaid care responsibilities; and when paid work becomes economically viable for carers.

The use of pension credits provides an example of state benefits that take into account the needs of unpaid carers who are also in employment. In some EU countries, such as Malta, pension contributions are credited to employees for a specified number of years out of employment in order to take care of dependants. In Spain social security contributions for non-professional carers of people in a situation of long-term care are also provided, thus, the contributions for workers, mainly women, that leave their work to care for dependant people, will not be interrupted. In Austria, a four-year pension credit is given for child-rearing – regardless of one's employment status - and, under certain conditions, for the care of dependent family members.

8. The Advisory Committee recommends to its Member States to provide adequate pension credits for care-related career breaks, for both women and men.

*9. The Advisory Committee recommends to the European Union to develop guidance for Member States on how national tax and benefits systems can impact financial incentives or disincentives for so-called second earners, as set out in the *Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025*, and to encourage Member States to establish national action plans that effectively promote the dual-earner/dual-carer model.*

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ European Institute for Gender Equality, *Gender inequalities in care and consequences for the labour market*, January 2021: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-inequalities-care-and-consequences-labour-market>

Care Support Structures

Work-Life Balance

A crucial component for narrowing the care gap in both paid and unpaid work is the promotion of work-life balance, such as paid paternity³¹ and maternity³² leaves, and paid parental leave³³, as well as concerted action to promote the equal take-up of work-life balance measures by women and men.

Sweden has made great strides in the provision of paid parental leave to both mothers and fathers since 1974. Along the years, multiple reforms were implemented to achieve a more gender equal parental care system.

In France, legal amendments were made with the purpose of encompassing a wide definition of family. In December 2012, paternal leave became the '*paternal leave and child-welcoming leave*'. In December 2020³⁴, this leave was extended from 11 days to 28 days and made mandatory for the first seven days following the newborn's birth.

In Spain, up to 16 weeks of maternity and paternity leave (now called childbirth leave) are fully paid, non-transferable and equal for both parents, who are also entitled to an additional breastfeeding leave on an equal footing.

On the European level, the EU Work-Life Balance Directive is a major initiative that aims to address the care gap by introducing mandatory Europe-wide measures that allow female and male employees to better reconcile work and family life³⁵. Its transposition into national laws by August 2022 should be closely monitored.

Care Services

Many EU Member States have not reached the Barcelona targets on the provision of childcare³⁶ and face issues relating to the access to and financing of long-term care systems³⁷. The lack of affordable, accessible and quality care services in most EU Member States,

³¹ A period of absence from work granted to a father after or shortly before the birth of his child

³² A period of absence from work granted to a mother before and after the birth of her child

³³ Time when a parent is allowed to be away from work to care for a child..

³⁴ Loi n° 2020-1576 de financement de la sécurité sociale pour 2021, December 2020

³⁵ Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32019L1158#PP4Contents>. The Directive's provisions include the introduction of at least 10 working days paid paternity as well as four months of paid parental leave, two months of which are non-transferable, and provisions about carers' leave and the right to request flexible working arrangements.

³⁶ European Commission, *Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the development of childcare facilities for young children with a view to increase female labour participation, strike a work-life balance for working parents and bring about sustainable and inclusive growth in Europe*, 2018: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/bcn_objectives-report2018_web_en.pdf

³⁷ European Commission, *Challenges in long-term care in Europe: A study of national policies*, August 2018: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=9185>

especially in the context of an unequal distribution of caring responsibilities between women and men, has a direct negative impact on women's participation in all life aspects. In 2018, 7.8 million women in the EU aged 20-64 were prevented from entering the labour market due to care responsibilities, as opposed to 460,000 men.³⁸

Care policies and the provision of care services are intrinsically linked to the achievement of gender equality. In some Member States, this is evident in the increased rates of women's participation in the labour market which correlates to the introduction of quality, affordable and accessible childcare. For instance, in Malta, since 2014, free childcare for children aged 3 months to 3 years has been available to parents, when they are both working or in education. This measure has left the desired effects as the female activity rate in Malta for the age group 15-64 increased from 54.3% in 2014 to 65.5% in 2019³⁹.

Women are also the main caregivers for the elderly since they carry out the bulk of informal care-giving in many Member States, in a context where informal care is sometimes the only option available due to a lack of accessible and affordable formal care⁴⁰. The share of the population above 65 years in the EU is expected to increase from 20% in 2019 to 29% by 2080 and the percentage of people above 80 years will more than double to 13% in that time.⁴¹ Overreliance on informal care comes at an increasing economic and social cost since it can negatively affect the carers' physical and mental health and well-being, as well as make it difficult for them to reconcile care with paid work⁴².

In this context, it is crucial that accessible and affordable care services lessen the reliance on informal care and meet the increasing demands for long-term care brought about by an ageing population. For example, Sweden has been able to combine a large public welfare commitment with a legal and financial public responsibility for the elderly, making the state's role as main caregiver a corner stone for achieving gender equality. Swedish municipalities are legally obliged to provide publicly-funded home care and institutional care to those who need it⁴³.

10. The Advisory Committee recommends that the European Union and its Member States closely monitor the effective implementation of the Work-Life-Balance Directive to ensure its full transposition by August 2022. National provisions should go beyond the minimum entitlement laid out in this Directive⁴⁴ whilst the take-up of carers' leave, and paternity and parental leave, including whether they are paid or not, how much, whether they are mandatory

³⁸ European Institute for Gender Equality, *Gender equality and long-term care at home*, June 2020: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-and-long-term-care-home>

³⁹ National Statistics Office (Malta), *Key Indicators on the Labour Market: 2014-2019*, October 2020: https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/Documents/2020/10/News2020_167.pdf

⁴⁰ Social Protection Committee and European Commission, *DRAFT 2021 Long-Term Care Report: Trends, challenges and opportunities in an ageing society*, May 2021

⁴¹ European Institute for Gender Equality, *Gender equality and long-term care at home*, June 2020: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-and-long-term-care-home>

⁴² Social Protection Committee and European Commission, *DRAFT 2021 Long-Term Care Report: Trends, challenges and opportunities in an ageing society*, May 2021

⁴³ Bettina Meinow et al., *Long-Term Care Use During the Last 2 Years of Life in Sweden: Implications for Policy to Address Increased Population Aging*, *Journal of the American Medical Directors Association*, Volume 21, Issues 6, June 2020 (pg. 800)

⁴⁴ This recommendation does not reflect the view of BusinessEurope.

and whether they are on a use-it-or-lose-it basis, should be monitored through comparable sex-disaggregated data with set targets.

11. *The Advisory Committee recommends that the European Union supports Member States to improve the availability and affordability of quality care and early education services for children, revising upwards the Barcelona targets, and setting a policy framework for sustainable long-term care including measures that support its upward convergence, as outlined in *The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan*⁴⁵ and the Council Conclusions on the Socio-Economic Impact of Covid-19 on Gender Equality. This can be done through investments from the European Social Fund Plus, the European Regional Development Fund, the Invest EU programme and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, as set out in *Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025*.*

12. *The Advisory Committee recommends that Member States strengthen the provision of publicly-funded care services and ensure that the enhancement of care services is adequately covered in their national Recovery and Resilience Plans.*

Going Forward: A Care Deal for Europe

A holistic and gender-transformative approach to the care gap urgently requires a Care Deal for Europe with more robust policies in the field of care throughout the lifecycle, whilst addressing the gender care gap and challenging gender stereotypes.

To better grasp the different dimensions of the care gap and its underlying dynamics, there needs to be more research and data collection, disaggregated by sex, that covers issues ranging from the phenomenon of undeclared work, the migrant care drain and the needs of informal carers throughout their lifecycle, to the value of unpaid and paid care work for the sustainability of our societies and economies.

It is essential that Covid-19 response plans and recovery measures are gender mainstreamed, including implemented with a gender-responsive budget, and with the involvement of women and women's organisations at all levels, so that the gendered impact of the pandemic is taken into account in the design, implementation and monitoring of these plans. The response to Covid-19 should aim to transform inequalities in paid and unpaid work by designing and implementing socio-economic plans that challenge stereotypical behaviour and enhance care services for both women and men.

13. *The Advisory Committee recommends that the European Union and its Member States develop a Care Deal for Europe that includes investment in care provision, work-life balance policies and the re-evaluation of the care sector, particularly with regard to training provision, working conditions and pay. This Care Deal should be prioritized in the context of the European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan.*

⁴⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-action-plan_en: (pg.26 and pg.29)

14. *The Advisory Committee recommends that the European Union and its Member States link the Care Deal for Europe with the European Green New Deal to complement caring for the planet and caring for each other. There needs to be a comprehensive effort to gender mainstream the Green New Deal and ensure that care is an integral part of a sustainable economic model.*

15. *The Advisory Committee recommends that the European Union and its Member States develop an EU-wide indicator for measuring the gender care gap as set out in the Council Conclusions on Tackling the Gender Pay Gap. Periodical reporting by Member States on the gender care gap should be required.*

16. *The Advisory Committee recommends that the European Union provides opportunities for Member States to share best practises on closing the gender care gap and mitigating its effects.*

17. *The Advisory Committee recommends that the European Union ensures that its recovery funds invest in robust care infrastructure and that this is included in National Recovery and Resilience Plans as part of the recently adopted Recovery and Resilience Facility, the main funding instrument under Next Generation EU (€672 billion).*

18. *The Advisory Committee recommends that the European Union and its Member States implement the gender mainstreaming strategy at both EU and national level to ensure that all policies and measures take into account the needs, concerns and experiences of both women and men. A Gender Impact Assessment of the pandemic, and of the recovery measures so far, should be carried out to enable the development of gender-responsive recovery measures and structural change.*