



JOINT PRESS RELEASE

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day

Precarious working conditions in care services: The dignity of older people and care workers at risk

Brussels, 15th June 2018

Care services for older people are facing a dramatic crisis across Europe. Underfunding and pervasive undervaluing of such services translates into a precarious working sector, in which professionals find themselves unable to deliver quality care. The lack of qualifications and training, understaffing, lack of collective bargaining and the resulting low wages and long shifts result in an explosive combination that put workers in the sector under unbearable pressure.

This has dramatic consequences on the ability of older persons needing such services to live dignified lives and to remain integrated in society. There is evidence that violence, abuse and the neglect of older persons are widespread realities driven by many factors, amongst which we prominently find the inability of care professionals to deliver the quality services they aspire to due to poor working conditions.

On the occasion of the 2018 World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, [UNI Europa](#) and [AGE Platform Europe](#), together with the [European Network of National Human Rights Institutions](#) (ENNHRI) and the European Commission, organised in Brussels on 5th June, a joint workshop on **“Working conditions in care: Implications for labour rights, quality of services and the dignity of older people”**. For the first time at the European level, organisations of older persons and trade unions, together with other civil society organisations, national human rights institutions, policymakers and researchers, gathered to explore the precariousness of the care workforce and how, as a result, the dignity of older persons needing care is at stake.

“We all have the right to age in dignity; but we know this may not be possible if care services remain underfunded and understaffed”, said **Anne-Sophie**

Parent, Secretary-General of AGE Platform Europe, adding that “older people are more and more concerned with the precariousness that care professionals are experiencing all over Europe. Undignified care services often result from underinvestment and weak social protection for care needs, made even worse by austerity-driven reforms. The expansion of private providers that focus only on making profit at the expenses of workers and older persons is also a worrying development. Care services must be the expression of solidarity within society, and that involves offering dignified conditions to workers as a critical action towards ensuring the dignity of those they care for. This is one of the key areas where we need the European Pillar of Social Rights to deliver”.

Adrian Durtschi, Director of UNICARE, stated that “good care and good working conditions go hand in hand. That's why strong unions and collective bargaining in elderly care are important, not only for employees. UNI Europa will fight with AGE for the best possible care and working conditions”.

Debbie Kohner, Secretary General of ENNHRI, stated that “we believe that the best way of enabling the full enjoyment of human rights by older persons in long-term care is by choosing a Human Rights-based approach in national policies. [ENNHRI's project](#) on The Human Rights of Older Persons and Long-term Care identified key trends in the human rights situation relating to LTC in Europe and led the way to a [Human Rights-based Approach to Long-term Care](#) in Europe. The findings of the project show, among others, that there is a greater need for investment in the long-term care sector throughout Europe to ensure an adequate supply of services as well as adequate staffing levels and human rights trainers for care workers. This points to a need for a human rights-based approach in all aspects of service planning, policy and practice”.

The workshop helped identify a wide range of common interests and converging views between all stakeholders involved. In particular, UNI Europa's trade union affiliates and AGE members agreed on the mutual interest for further joint action that can be mutually beneficial, both for older persons and for workers in the care sector. A long-term dialogue will now be established between both organisations to continue deepening collaborative reflections and advocating jointly at European and national levels. The outcome of this joint workshop will also be taken on board in AGE's input to the discussions on the right to long-term care in the United Nations Open Ended Working Group on Ageing, next 23 to 26 July.

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