



## An ambitious future for Europe's women after COVID-19: mental load, gender equality in teleworking and unpaid care work after the pandemic

3 March 2022

The COVID-19 pandemic and its associated economic crisis have impacted women differently than men in the European Union. Even if gender issues have never been so high-up in the European political agenda, the effects of the COVID-19 crisis are putting in jeopardy the progress achieved in the past decade in terms on the reduction of gender inequalities in European member states. The effects of the COVID-19 sanitary crisis have also served to highlight the need for member states to develop proactive – rather than reactive – gender mainstreaming policies.

This year's International Women's Day is a perfect opportunity to look back on the past EU initiatives and reflect how to address the future, post-COVID- 19, challenges.

### Women's situation in the European Union before COVID-19

It is undeniable that even if women's labour market participation has experienced a substantial progress over the past decades, long-standing inequalities could still be found in the pre-pandemic EU. According to the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), [inequalities are the result of discriminatory norms and attitudes, the unequal distribution of care responsibilities in the household and the way institutional structures consider and integrate gender](#).

These deeply entrenched stereotypes highlighted the problems that need addressing, such as the unequal share of unpaid care work and responsibilities. According to the [Beijing Platform for Action 2020 report](#), gender differences across the Union regarding unpaid care work were striking. Women still took on most of the unpaid care work at home, whether they were employed or not: the study showed that 92 % of EU women were regular carers -several days a week, while 68 % of men provided unpaid care work with this frequency.

On a daily basis, 81 % of women and 48 % of men provide care. We can observe a repeating pattern among employed men and women: almost all of the latter (94 %) were involved in unpaid care several times a week, compared to 70 % of male workers. [As the BPfA stated](#), women's participation in unpaid care was very high, standing at over 85 % in all Member States when considering both daily and weekly engagement. Nevertheless, the research points out to considerable differences in men's engagement across countries - from 41% in Cyprus to 90% in Denmark.



Before COVID-19, 37.5% of women in the EU cared for children, the elderly, or people with disabilities every day, compared with 24.7% of men. This time difference adds up to an average of some additional 13 hours of unpaid work per week for women. Furthermore, [the EIGE underscored](#) the fact that caregiving responsibilities keep some 7.7 million women out of the labour market. The consequences of this inequality could be seen in employment rates of men (78 %) surpassing the Europe 2020 target of 75%, while employment rates of women reached only 66.5%.

A report from the European Parliament concluded that [gender is the factor that ultimately decides the contrasting control both women and men have over the socioeconomic factors](#) that affect their lives, mental health and susceptibility to particular mental problems -especially depression, anxiety- as well as social position and status. Moreover, mental health risks, which differ from psychiatric disorders, vary across genders: women had higher rates of depression and anxiety (internalising disorders) while men had higher rates of substance abuse and antisocial disorders (externalising disorders). An average of 6% of overall workers were at risk of mental health problems, women (7%) being at higher risk than men (5%).

Finally, before the pandemic, only a small share of EU workforce was teleworking occasionally (ranging from 10% in Mediterranean countries such as Italy and Greece, up to 30% in Denmark and the Netherlands). However, we could see that lockdowns and social-distancing measures prompted these numbers to skyrocket, with its negative consequences. It should be pointed out that even if theoretically speaking, [flexible working arrangements such as teleworking](#) could contribute to achieve work-life balance, men tend to use them for 'performance enhancing purposes', while women normally use them to better manage their work-life balance when family responsibilities are present.

### **The pandemic, Member States Governments' responses and the EU Recovery Plan**

In contrast with past economic recessions, the COVID-19 crisis has especially affected women, thus being characterised in a [recent European Parliament study](#) as a 'she-cession'. Namely, the pandemic has had a greater impact in those economic sectors that employ a majority of female workers, it has unequally increased the amount of unpaid care and housework hours of women, and it has also increased violence against women (VAW) by intimate partners as well as online, due to stress-related factors. [A recent EP study](#) supported the conclusion that COVID-19 has increased gender inequality in the EU, as women have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic and the related economic downturn.

COVID-19 has been a step back on some positive elements of social change that had developed over recent decades, namely the reorganisation of care work, domestic work and paid employment in many households. Indeed, mounting evidence strongly suggests that gender inequalities in unpaid care work have been re-established or exacerbated due to the reduction of care services and the increase of unpaid care work carried out by women.

European governments' measures to counteract the effects of the pandemic have been diverse across the EU, and thus women have been affected in different degrees in some MS vs others. Those [Member States which failed to mainstream gender equality in their policies, or which did not prioritize gender mainstreaming altogether before this pandemic saw a greater rise in gender inequality](#). Furthermore, women have been underrepresented in COVID-19 decision-making bodies, policymaking and leadership positions. In fact, women have been more negatively affected by this pandemic than past crisis in contrast to men because government measures have had the greatest 'indirect impact' on those economic sectors dominated by female workers, namely healthcare, hospitality, domestic work, etc. It should be pointed that the impact is said to be 'indirect' because governmental actions and measures were implemented to stop the spread of COVID-19, and did not foresee impacting women so negatively and disproportionately.

Even if many MS established emergency measures and national stimulus packages to mitigate the pandemic's impact, [little to no attention was paid to the core of the pandemic: care work, both paid and unpaid](#). This sector, where women are severely overrepresented, needs to be placed at the spotlight of social

and economic transformation, and needs to become more gender-sensitive and inclusive. Emergency shutdowns of certain economic activities, more related to female workers, has prompted a steep increase in women's unpaid work.

Several countries [extended their care support policies](#) or created new exceptional parental leave schemes to protect working parents against job and income losses. However, these measures did not homogeneously deem teleworking parents as eligible, thus failing to adapt to the new labour situation created by the pandemic, and underestimating the advantages related to childcare that working from home offers. Therefore, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) issued an [opinion](#) on March 2021 entitled 'Teleworking and gender equality – conditions so that teleworking does not exacerbate the unequal distribution of unpaid care and domestic work between women and men and for it to be an engine for promoting gender equality', to prevent teleworking from further widening the unequal division of work at home between women and men.

[As the previous studies concluded](#), Member States need to incorporate gender-sensitivity in their policies and prospective crisis measures, to prevent the inequality cycle to persist in the long run, and to avoid next crisis becoming 'she-cessions'.

In addition, the European Commission established an unprecedented major funding system, based on collective borrowing, to support economies coming out of COVID-19 and in the post-crisis period. [The EU Recovery Plan for Europe \(NextGenerationEU\)](#) is the largest stimulus package ever financed through EU budget and is designed as a temporary instrument to boost the recovery of the Union. However, as stated by the recent [study](#) on the subject it notes that while the digital and green economies are already highlighted, the diverse [care activities and a diverse care sector are not supported](#) for the most part by this unprecedented recovery fund. There is no mention of unpaid work, references to gender equality are sparse and care is mentioned in the context of early childcare only. The spotlight should also shine on care and the care sector and economy as much as it does on green and digital economies, due to its already more than proven importance in the functioning of the economy, and the way in which it has been impacted by COVID-19.

[A recent EP Report](#), adopted by a strong majority vote in EP in January 2021, called for targeted actions to improve gender equality to be incorporated into national recovery and resilience plans. 'Supporting independence and a rights-based approach within the care system means increased investment in childcare, eldercare and disability services that place children's needs at the centre of quality childcare services, older people at the centre of quality eldercare, those with disabilities at the centre of diverse disability services.'

Care is a spectrum of activities that reveals the critical, although largely unrecognised, interdependence and interconnectedness of society. The findings of the study suggests that funding for the care economy should account for at least 30 per cent of the expenditure under the EC Recovery Plan for Europe to create equal standing with the 37 per cent already allocated to green transformation investments and 30 per cent to digital transition investments.

### **Gender equality in teleworking**

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a drastic change from the mainstream work modalities to telework for a significant percentage of EU workers. Women were more likely than men to report having started working from home as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic: 38.6% and 34.9%, respectively according to an Eurofound e-survey (Eurofound, 2020). [Early data showed](#) that in the youngest generation (18-34 y.o) more women than men (50% and 37%, respectively) started teleworking during the pandemic, which could result in female workers bearing a disproportionate amount of unpaid work (childcare, house chores, education, etc.) while keeping their paid work. This drastic shift has been observed in non-essential workers in most MS. [Research](#) showed that the gender gap in childcare was reduced in comparison to pre-pandemic levels,

although women still spent more time on childcare than their male partners. It also underscored the equal growth of the division of childcare in those households where men were either unemployed or teleworking.

[According to the EIGE](#), the rates of people working from home were higher in households with children, namely among single parents, which indicates that flexible or Information and Communications Technology (ICT) work is used to balance family life and jobs, especially among women. However, mothers are interrupted by children more often than fathers when teleworking, which hinders their performance and could reduce their career progression and pay, resulting in gender gap in pay and pensions.

In fact, as the EIGE states, [telework can both decrease and increase work–life conflict](#): research from Germany found that flexibility at work does not always result in an equal increase in men's contribution to childcare. The study showed that men working flexibly spend less time on childcare than those doing office hours. This discovery is related to the use that men make of flexible working arrangements: they are expected to benefit from FWAs to enhance their performance, thus increasing their work intensity or working hours and receiving additional rewards. In contrast, women often work flexibly to meet increased family responsibilities, which does not lead to any financial rewards. Therefore, work flexibility is a double-edged sword, which could make job and family more compatible while simultaneously cementing the classic role divisions between women and men.

Due to the pandemic, millions of women and men shifted to telework overnight, while schools and day-care centres were closed. "This meant that the amount of domestic chores and unpaid care they had to perform went up" [explained the Director of the ILO Conditions of Work](#) and Equality Department. Early data indicates that women shoulder the brunt of this additional pressure, confirming the pre-pandemic pattern of an unbalanced care work division. The share of the daily time spent on unpaid care borne by women ranging from 80% in Portugal and 74% in Italy, to 57% in Denmark. So, even if teleworking makes it easier for mothers to achieve work-life balance, [evidence](#) shows that they do an unreasonable and unequal amount of the housework and childcare in contrast to fathers. This indicates that teleworking may help solve childcare problems, but does not necessarily equal co-responsibility between parents of different gender.

However, [women were also made redundant due to the impossibility of transposing the female-dominated labour sectors](#) (healthcare, hospitality, domestic care, etc.) to a teleworking modality. These service sectors are challenging to transpose into a flexible work system, so the shutdown of said sectors resulted in a considerable share of women being made redundant. This entailed a temporary reversal of gender roles, meaning that men held a greater share of house and childcare activities, with a promising future outlook.

[The EESC opinion on teleworking and gender equality](#) stressed the risk that teleworking can pose for gender equality if women are expected to bear the double burden of paid and unpaid work, which would exacerbate existing inequalities, and drew attention to the need for gender mainstreaming in policy making. The opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee 'Teleworking and gender equality – conditions so that teleworking does not exacerbate the unequal distribution of unpaid care and domestic work between women and men and for it to be an engine for promoting gender equality' stated that:

- 'While teleworking is a well-known form of work, its uptake was boosted substantially by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in more than 1/3 of employed people working from home, with a greater share of women than men (Eurofound report "Living, working and COVID-19". Compared to 2018, when less than 5% of employees worked remotely regularly and less than 10% occasionally, as reported by the EC 2020). As women usually take on most of the caring and household work, teleworking was seen by them as the only possibility to combine this unpaid work and paid employment. The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) wants to call attention to the risk of using teleworking as a possibility of taking up the double burden of paid and unpaid work.'
- Teleworking provides many opportunities to contribute to gender equality such as: improved participation in the labour market; increased flexibility in the organisation of working time and in

combining unpaid care responsibilities with paid employment, which can improve labour market participation; productivity gains through higher performance, (...) etc. At the same time, teleworking carries some risks, such as possible challenges related to: the worker becoming invisible in the work community; missing out on formal and informal support structures, personal contacts with colleagues and access to information, promotion and training opportunities; possible worsening of gender inequalities and increased risk of violence and harassment. For women, this can exacerbate existing gender inequalities. Mitigating such risks successfully calls for a proper gender analysis – as even policies that might look gender neutral may, in reality, be gender blind and affect women negatively – so every effort must be taken to strive for a positive impact.

According to a recent [European Parliament study](#), the prevalence of ICT and telework in specific occupations or sectors is also reproduced in the gender and age pattern of its workers and their working arrangements. The study showed that female workers tended to be involved in regular home-based telework, in contrast to male workers who engaged more in telework and ICT arrangements. This pattern was reproduced both in the case of employees (3.7% versus 2.7%) and the self-employed (23.4% versus 17.4%), mirroring their over-representation in occupations with high and low 'teleworkability' respectively.

### Unpaid care work

According to [Eurostat's findings](#) and projections of demographic trends, Europe has low population growth and an ageing society. The population is steadily ageing thanks to advanced healthcare and rising living standards. Currently, 20% of people in Europe are aged 65 or over, but this will rise to an estimated 30% by 2070. This will also lead to an increase in the number of people requiring care and a greater demand for qualified care workers. Additional requirements due to a flexible world of work, changing social structures and declining family cohesion make both professional and informal care for people in need more difficult.

Regarding the care-division between the genders, COVID-19 lockdowns increased the burden of unpaid care for women, which has resulted in a worsening of working and living conditions, especially for working mothers of young children. The increased demands of care work due to lockdowns and closures of schools, childcare, eldercare homes, etc. have propitiated women's abandonment of paid work. This situation will probably have negative effects in the long run for the affected women in subjects such as social protection entitlements and future income, [according to the EP study](#). To further exacerbate the state of things, some emergency measures linked to employment history and attachment penalised women as they are more likely to give up their job to shoulder the brunt of unpaid care.

[This crisis has widened the gender gaps regarding poverty risks and financial vulnerability](#), with the isolating effects of lockdowns. COVID-19 has drawn increased attention to the gendered patterns of paid and unpaid work in both the health and social care systems, where women make up the majority of the employees. Historically, a great share of said care work carried out by females has not been remunerated. On top of that, even if formal care services play a key role, a great share of the care provided is provided by close family or relatives.

Furthermore, inasmuch as life expectancy increases, so does the number of people that need healthcare or long-term care (LTC). Women have a longer life expectancy than men and make up most of the population highest aged group (80 or older), as well as being the majority in long-term residential care. Simultaneously, parents of dependent children also want to achieve a better work-life balance between with their caring responsibilities. Increasingly more people look for flexibility to combine their responsibilities of care and their job, for access to good quality childcare services that are affordable, and for a solution to the care needs of the elderly and disabled people.

Even if women are increasingly entering the paid workforce, they still have the greater responsibility of caring for family members and carrying out domestic work, which has turned into a real challenge if we take into account they are expected to do so while juggling their jobs. In its [Beijing Platform for Action report](#),

the EIGE stated that during lockdown, women in Belgium dedicated some 30 minutes more than men every weekday to childcare and domestic work. Men enjoyed 6 hours and 28 minutes of free time, while women had an hour less with 5 hours and 26 minutes.

According to a recent [study from the EP, 'Gender equality: Economic value of care from the perspective of the applicable EU funds'](#), employed women spend on average an hour and a half more every day than their male counterparts on housework and direct care activities. These inequalities are heterogeneous across different family circumstances: for example, women living in couples with children spend more than twice as much time on care work (5.3 daily hours) as those living in couples without children (2.4 daily hours). Job characteristics should also be taken into account when analysing unpaid care, since women in temporary jobs or with no formal contract spend twice as long engaged in unpaid care every day than women employed in permanent jobs.

The strategy used by many female employees is to work part-time to help balance family and work life. Part-time jobs undermine their earnings and therefore future pensions, because women work fewer hours, and these wages are also lower than for the equivalent full-time positions. Moreover, women are more likely to take career breaks because of unpaid care work responsibilities. As stated in EIGE's [Beijing Platform for Action 2020 report](#), 29% of EU women say that the main reason for working part-time is because of caring responsibilities, compared to only 6% of EU men.

[Women's employment opportunities are directly affected by gender inequalities in caring responsibilities at home](#). This affirmation is reflected in the unadjusted gender pay gap, (difference between the average gross hourly earnings of female and male employees), which as of 2019 stood at 14,1% across the EU. A second, even more precise measure is the gender gap in overall earnings; reaching in some parts to almost 40% at EU level, it considers gender gaps in employment rate and working time.

[Women's participation in the labour market is hindered by the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work they shoulder](#). Unpaid care work responsibilities prevent around 7.7 million women from entering the labour market, compared to just 450,000 men. Among employed women, some 18% reduced their working hours because of their childcare responsibilities, compared to only 3% of male workers. In contrast, those countries that show low inequalities between men and women in time spent in unpaid care (for children, grandchildren, elderly people and people with disabilities) the employment rate for women tends to be higher and gender pay gaps lower.

## **Mental load**

Inasmuch as pandemics are known to affect women and men in different ways, COVID-19 is no different and presents a gendered mental health impact. [According to a study requested by European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality \(FEMM\)](#), the burden of finding work-life balance has seriously undermined women's wellbeing, with more female workers suffering from anxiety because of COVID-19 than their male counterparts. Women also reported increased anxiety and worry about their family and wellbeing, and about their finances; this second concern is linked to their role of informal unpaid carer. Mothers of younger children have been disproportionately affected. Furthermore, [women also shoulder the majority of the mental load related to organising care](#) (budgeting for, planning and scheduling care and household chores).

The ongoing socio-sanitary crisis has worsened mental health disorders related to gender, disproportionately affecting women, both at work and at home (53% of women vs. 37% of men reported a significant undermining of their mental health). Certain groups of women, namely pregnant, miscarrying, in postpartum or those victims of intimate partner violence, have an even higher risk for developing mental health disorders during the pandemic.

According to the recent «[Headway 2023 – Mental Health Index](#)» report, some 83% of women vs. 36% of men have experienced a significant increase in depression, and 53% of women vs. 37% of men experienced an

adverse impact on their mental health. Besides, gender inequality may have been further accentuated, especially for women working in paid jobs or lone parents. The disparities continue increasing as the pandemic evolves. A proactive approach to outreach to the aforementioned women could facilitate prevention, early detection, and prompt intervention for the treatment of mental health disorders.

Regarding the newly adopted flexible and distance working modalities, the increased use of online monitoring and surveillance methods, the sense of isolation associated with ICT and telework modalities and longer working hours may altogether negatively affect the mental health of teleworkers.

The right of employees to disconnect from their work is another important means to prevent anxiety and burnout and allow for work-life balance. Even though the European Union does not yet have a specific legislation addressing mental health in the digital world and the digital world of work, there are pre-existing EU legislation, such as directives on health and safety at work, organisation of working time, screen work, improvement of working conditions, work-life balance, etc. [The EP study 'Mental health and well-being in the digital world of work post-COVID'](#) enumerated the following relevant frameworks:

- EU legislation (Directive 2003/88/EC, Directive 89/391/EEC, Directive 90/270/EEC, Directive 2019/1152, Directive 2019/1158).
- Other EU policy instruments: the European Pillar of Social Right Action Plan (2021) and the new EU Strategic Framework on OSH (2021-2027).
- EU Framework Agreement on Telework (2002).
- EU Framework Agreement on Digitalisation (2020).

Finally, the new [Occupational Health and Safety Strategy 2021-2027](#) and European framework agreements on telework and digitalisation develop these pre-existing legal instruments, including the ongoing changes experienced the pandemic and teleworking context in the EU.

The core aim that all these legal instruments have in common is the prevention of damage to health in the work-related environment or all work aspects. In fact, the foregoing legislation illustrates the crucial importance of protecting workers' mental health for the continuity of economic and social activities and overall functioning of our society. Thus, work should be adapted to the worker rather than the other way around, and risks and mental challenges should be tackled at their origin. The new approach to improving the safety and mental health and preventing its damage is now collective, and will concentrate on new technologies and work conditions. Ultimately, ['the aim of the Strategy is, inter alia, to mitigate any emerging challenges post COVID, but also to be ready for any other health crises, which includes digitalisation and its effects on the mental health of workers'](#).

## Conclusions

Although the care sector and work, both paid and unpaid, have experienced a newfound recognition during the COVID-19 pandemic, this has not materialised in drawn attention to the care economy either at MS or EU levels. It is undeniable that this pandemic has affected women in an unproportionate manner, especially regarding women on the frontline, women burdened by the absence of 'teleworkability' of their occupations, hence unequally affected by new modalities of work, unpaid or long-time carers. There has been an absence of a targeted policy response on these matters and unless the care economy is shifted into the core of the EU and MS's strategic thinking, gender inequalities will persist and aggravate.

The [EESC opinion on teleworking and gender equality](#) states that, in considering the gender dimension of teleworking, we can learn some lessons from the pandemic period. This crisis has stressed the key role women play in the economy – as essential care workers, in most cases working "on the frontlines". Besides, more women than men have been teleworking during the pandemic, and female workers are also more

likely to temporarily stop working. The likely cause behind it is the increased domestic care responsibilities during COVID-19 because of work, school and childcare centre closures, that women have shouldered for the most part.

Working from home via ICT was [particularly difficult for women with care responsibilities](#), due to different reasons, such as a lack of available time to work coupled with a tendency to work longer and not respecting the modalities of connecting-disconnecting. The EESC has called for a 'better enforcement of the relevant existing legislation and closer monitoring by labour inspections, as well as an assessment of whether the existing framework is adequate'.

It is of paramount importance that Member States approach policy making with the aim of ensuring equal economic opportunities for women after the COVID-19 crisis. As the [study 'Gender equality: Economic value of care from the perspective of the applicable EU funds'](#) recalls, the European Parliament called for the Commission and Member States to evaluate to a full extent "the gender-specific impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, its socio-economic consequences, the new needs arising, and to allocate extra and targeted budgetary resources to ensure that women are supported through the recovery".

The [extraordinary Recovery Plan for Europe \(NextGenerationEU\)](#) should be especially implemented in areas regarding the care sector and its funding, even if this sector was not given the spotlight when allocating the funds. This shift in the recovery approach would support the most severely affected sectors, which are also female dominated. All measures should have specific in-built gender equality targets, goals, and timeframes.

MS measures should also promote women's financial literacy, since women usually have less financial education and therefore reduced independence. The [EESC opinion on teleworking and gender equality](#) also emphasises the need for a "Care Deal for Europe", adducing that an investment in the care sector would result in better quality services for everyone throughout our lifetime, and it would also recognise women and men as equal carers and earners. Member States are encouraged to invest in all kinds of care infrastructures.

Moreover, [women need to be increasingly included in policy-making positions](#). Previous data indicates that women can act as catalysts for paradigm shifts, yet they tend to be underrepresented in decision-making positions. Even if COVID-19 response teams were not conformed according to gender-parity, MS are recommended to increasingly work towards inclusive and gender equal policymaking bodies. This will ultimately ensure that EU standards are followed in MS.

Now we have a chance to transform the re-arrangement in family relations brought about by the pandemic to be institutionalised and normalised, even if such paradigm shifts often require sustained public policy efforts. Member States are additionally encouraged to work cooperatively in this direction. As [the EESC stated in its opinion on teleworking and gender equality](#), the pandemic has demonstrated that telework only works if there is a good formal care infrastructure. Access to 'affordable, reliable and high-quality childcare and elderly care is essential if people are to concentrate on their work without constant interruptions due to family care or domestic chores', especially for young children under the age of three.

In this context it is important to note that one of the deliverables of the European Pillar of Social Rights is the [Work-Life Balance Directive](#), which seeks for care responsibilities to be more equally shared amongst genders. This directive introduces legal alternatives such as paternity leaves and care leaves to be taken by both women and men, which could provide a start for MS' to develop increasingly accessible economies. As [the EESC confirmed in its opinion on teleworking and gender equality](#) "during the pandemic, many countries have broadened, on a temporary basis, the circumstances under which paid parental leave is granted. This is the case of the special coronavirus-related parental leave to assist parents working from home in Belgium or the introduction of unpaid leave for childcare as part of job retention schemes. However, available evidence shows that women mainly took up these leaves. This underlines the importance of designing maternity, paternity and parental leaves in ways that do not reproduce or reinforce the unequal gender division of unpaid care work".

Finally, Member States are also [encouraged to take into account the consequences of the care economy](#), especially on ageing women. Women are both the main providers and recipients of care during the entirety of their lifetime; likewise, they are the main providers of childcare support. Therefore, it is recommended that MS increasingly provide formal care in order to narrow the gender care gap in the EU, as well as to allow younger women to have more opportunities of access to the labour market. Likewise, the care packages and special provisions established by MS are recommended to be extended during the recovery period.

Considering this critical but largely unrecognised, interdependence and interconnectedness of society that the care sector represents, the EU should develop a clear policy framework that designates funding and supports to the care economy as public investments in social infrastructure that are defined as key priority areas in EC economic and budgetary policies.

To this end, and as recommended by the [study on the subject](#), Eurostat should collect disaggregated data on care, the provisions of different types of care and profiling the composition of both formal and informal carers, paid and unpaid care workers in relation to gender, age, nationality, disability and ethnicity in different care settings.

Data on care should be used in the development of an EU Care Strategy, with a focus on the care economy as social investment and encompassing a strategic approach towards care providers and care recipients.

It is important to highlight budgetary prioritisation and targeted allocation of budgetary resources to address the shortage of skilled workers in the health and care sectors, in particular with regard to the European Commission's labour market policy agenda in [the European Semester](#) cycle.

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