Policy Briefing - Helpcare Project: Pathways to Professionalization for Care workers

# Introduction

The Helpcare Project was funded by the European Union Erasmus + funding stream and took place in the UK, Greece, Italy, Bulgaria and Poland, ending in August 2017. The headline findings of this project pinpoint that the current legislative and structural framework for the provision of and access to long-term care require fundamental reforms and improvements in order to ensure that long-term care in minimum professional and ethical standards is accessible by all European citizens. To date, there is no consistency across Europe with regard to long-term care provision or regulation. In many countries most aspects of long-term care often are poorly regulated or unregulated, driven by models of financial sustainability that do not efficiently or effectively regulate the quality of the services provided. The provision of long term care to European citizens relies heavily on informal caregivers, in most cases without a formal acknowledgement of their role or the availability of accessible training in realistic terms. Reforms in this area are of paramount important. The establishment of regulations that describe the role, the rights, and the demands (in terms of qualification and responsibilities) in order to assume care giving duties both as a formal or as an informal caregiver, needs to acquire a European perspective, as it touches upon fundamental European ideals, principles, and goals, such as respecting human rights, dignity and access to health care for all, combating extreme poverty and elder abuse.

The findings of the HelpCare project illustrates that the need to build a larger body of skilful care workers in the future, as well as the need to stem the high drop-out rates among health professionals that work as caregivers to date. Our findings show efforts to elevate the status of this profession, by facilitating training, developing a career path, encouraging greater compensation for formal and informal caregivers, and by imposing a European Quality Framework for care workers (EQFC) would be an effective strategy to improve recruitment and retention. The absence of an EQFC is to be regretted, as it does not promote a national or international dialogue for the formation of a political strategy that can lead to the development of a skilled and professional body of care workers. In this context, the HelpCare project team proposed the following:

# Key Policy Recommendations

1. MEP’s should put political initiatives in motion, so that the European Commission and the European Parliament initiates the process of drafting a Green Paper for long term care, including statements as the following:
   1. Training and professional rights for care workers needs to be formalised, with national or EU-wide validation of qualifications within a carefully designed EQFC. All formal and informal caregivers should be registered and recognized as health workers within the health or social care sector.
   2. The role of those who provide care to family members or relatives should be particularly stressed, acknowledged and officially recognized, providing a framework of realistic training opportunities and allowances, further supported with clearly stated prospects of how they can validate and capitalize their experience on care for future employment as care givers.
   3. All care workers with minimum qualification required for this role (as described in the EQFC proposal of this project) should be registered professionals. A directive should be formed in order to encourage all member states to form such Registries, as well as to form Local Offices for Long Term Care, where individuals in need for long-term care and assistance can acquire information and have access to a list of skilful, certified, and registered caseworkers that can cover their needs.
   4. The issue of migrant workers in care needs to be addressed across the EU, because there are implications for modern slavery in some countries, and structural issues in others.
   5. Inspection by long term care commissioners needs to be more effective, should pay more attention to training and specialization, staff retention and management of care alongside care standards. There should be a formalised procedure for whistle blowing as well.
   6. Integration of health and care services is essential and could assist in raising the status of care workers as well as ultimately ensuring a more cost-effective service, and in places where care is largely in the shadow economy could reduce the likelihood of this type of provision
2. Although funding is not part of the remit of Helpcare it is clear that care is chronically under-funded and that the shortfall in funding underpins many of the problems in commissioning care, recruiting and retaining staff and in staff training and development. We recommend that all EU countries establish a task force for care with a remit to consider this important issue and draw up detailed recommendations.