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### **All we want for Christmas is a care revolution!**

Let us embark you on a time trip far away from the current pandemic straight to 2024. In this idealistic place, we all live in a feminist Europe. All people enjoy equal rights and opportunities, regardless of their gender. They get paid equally, for work of equal value. Chores and care duties are shared in a fair way whilst access to high quality care is guaranteed at affordable rates. Gender quotas belong to the past with women and men now equally represented in political office, corporate boardrooms and workers' unions. Women have equal say in decisions affecting their lives, their bodies and their environment. Girls are as much valued as boys are, and people of all gender expressions feel safe and equal in all aspects of life. Isn't that fabulous? Do you, back in 2020, wonder how this seemingly unachievable paradigm shift became possible in the first place? The answer is quite simple: finally, *Europe cares for care!* The European Union (EU) radically changed its approach by valuing care highly as part of our economy and as a core value. The EU made sure everyone has access to high-quality and affordable care services and made women in all their diversity count in economic policy with an economic system placing gender equality, diversity, wellbeing, solidarity and justice at the center.

After this blast of fresh air we can all do with in the midst of this pandemic, we have to acknowledge that this kind of Europe only exists in our imaginations. The latest EIGE Gender Equality Index namely points in the opposite direction. On the one hand, it highlights how no single country has achieved gender equality and that progress remains painfully slow with an improvement of merely 4.1 points in ten years.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, it also reveals a significant step backwards since 2017 as unequal distribution of housework and caring responsibilities perpetuating traditional gender roles has increased, only taking into account during pre-COVID-19 times.<sup>2</sup> Eurofound surveys conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic further support evidence that this unbalance has only become more acute with family responsibilities preventing 24 percent of women from giving the time they needed to work (compared to 13 percent of men in the same situation).<sup>3</sup>

Care provision systems across Europe, as diverse as they may be from North to South and East to West, have failed to bring care to the core of their functioning. Therefore, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) and the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) have joined forces to build a stronger progressive narrative asking ourselves "Does Europe Care for Care"?

**Defining care.** First of all, we need a shared, progressive understanding of the very notion of care. Care namely lies at the heart of humanity. Without a single exception, every human being

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<sup>1</sup> <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/country>

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/blog/covid-19-fallout-takes-a-higher-toll-on-women-economically-and-domestically>



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depends on care, which is a precondition for the existence and survival of our society. As will be underscored in a forthcoming FES-FEPS publication, care work consists of two often overlapping activities: *direct*, personal and relational care activities, such as feeding a baby or nursing an ill partner; and *indirect* care activities, such as cooking and cleaning. The ethics of care was coined by feminists back in the 1980s. They posited that caring is socially engendered with women primarily assigned to it, but that instead of being devalued it should be taught as a human strength and expected of men as well as of women. Feminist literature namely distinguishes four phases of care: *caring about*, *taking care of*, *care giving* and *care receiving*. Any care relationship incurs a (non-)monetary cost for the care giver or receiver, e.g. salary but also time, effort and employment opportunities. Hence, it is important to distinguish between *paid* and *unpaid care work*. Whereas both are essential for the functioning and well-being of society and the economy, the former refers to care work performed for profit or pay and the latter entails caring without explicit monetary compensation.

The “**5 Rs Framework for Decent Care Work**” set forth by the International Labour Organisation<sup>4</sup> offers a useful lens to set forth effective legislative and policy measures towards a fair European Care Deal based on these five principles: **recognize**, **reduce** and **redistribute** unpaid care work, and **reward** and **represent** care workers. Through the lens of this framework, we can namely identify the key areas of action for a real paradigm shift to take place across Europe whilst taking regional specificities into account:

- **Recognise unpaid care work.** More gender-disaggregated data is needed to shed light on the real scope of (un)paid care work. In Germany for instance, the Gender Care Gap was calculated at 52.4 percent<sup>5</sup> and serves as a useful compass to raise the issue in public debate. However, we hold relatively little data enabling comparative analysis across EU countries. That is precisely why a harmonised, European Care Indicator would be a first step to measure both the gender care gaps but also the care needs in each care regime.
- **Reduce unpaid care work.** On the receiving end, care can be prohibitively unaffordable causing a reliance on unpaid care work mostly performed by women with on average 4h30 per day.<sup>6</sup> According to an EU wide survey conducted in 2017, 58 percent of respondents reported the availability of childcare as very or a little difficult, 53 percent of women reported that they do not work (or only part-time) because of childcare costs.<sup>7</sup> When it comes to long-term care, 63.4 percent of Europeans consider that there is limited access to such facilities and over 60 percent consider costs to be prohibitive.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> ILO (2018). *Care work and care jobs: for the future of decent work*.

<sup>5</sup> BMFSFJ (2019). *Gender Care Gap – ein Indikator für die Gleichstellung*.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid* footnote 8

<sup>7</sup> European Commission (2017). *Study on the costs and benefits of possible EU measures to facilitate work-life balance for parents and care givers – Final Report*.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*



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- **Redistribute unpaid care work.** The very notion of labour has to be re-assessed by means of a redistribution of work overcoming gender stereotypes along with measures to encourage decent and fair minimum wages and reduced working time for all workers. The 4-day week is gaining increasing support including notable examples from the largest German trade union to the social democratic Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin. Besides overall positive impacts ranging from increased productivity to lower unemployment and reduced carbon footprint, women would be the first to reap the benefit thanks to a reduction and fairer share of paid and unpaid work.<sup>9</sup>
- **Reward care workers.** While women in the EU account on average for 90 percent of personal care workers,<sup>10</sup> a typical care worker receives between 50 and 80 percent of the average income.<sup>11</sup> Compared to other sectors, care workers frequently suffer lower levels of labour protection, especially women and minorities who tend to be over-represented. Migration background, along with disability, when coupled with gender, multiply the odds of unfavourable working conditions and increased informality rates.<sup>12</sup> Female migrant care workers from low- to middle-income countries have increasingly filled the demand for care jobs ranging from domestic work to child-minding and nursing. This trend poses care as a major class and social inequity issue which needs to be tackled in a fair way ensuring care solidarity amongst EU countries and beyond.
- **Represent care workers.** Workers in female-dominated jobs such as domestic or care work tend to be more challenging to reach for trade unions due to their scattered localisation across a range of different workplaces.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the identification of care workers' employers is not always so straightforward, especially in the case of employment by individuals or triangular relationships involving agencies or the state. As care workers often lack representation, it is urgently needed that trade unions in the care sector are strongly supported by strengthening the social dialogue as well as the right to collective bargaining.

This utopia of a feminist Europe is a place that we can all aspire to build. To give care the value and place it deserves, we need a feminist economy as called upon in PES Women's publication *A Feminist Economy for Europe!* By showing solidarity and committing ourselves, within our respective capabilities, to the implementation of the 5 Rs principles we are getting closer to a European care paradigm shift that places care at the centre of our economic activities. Building on the momentum gained with the current health crisis, progressive forces

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.ips-journal.eu/regions/europe/why-women-deserve-a-four-day-week-4610/>

<sup>10</sup> EIGE (2018). *Study and work in the EU: set apart by gender*.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. FEPS & TASC (2020). "Cherishing All Equally 2020: Inequality and the Care Economy". [https://www.feps-europe.eu/attachments/publications/report-care%20economy\\_tasc-feps.pdf](https://www.feps-europe.eu/attachments/publications/report-care%20economy_tasc-feps.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> ILO (2019). *A Quantum Leap for Gender Equality – A Better Future of Work For All*.

<sup>13</sup> OECD (2020). *Can collective bargaining help close the gender wage gap for women in non-standard jobs?*



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have to seize this turning point to turn this crisis into an opportunity to finally live up to Simone De Beauvoir's call for a "care revolution"!<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Simone de Beauvoir: « La révolution par la répartition des tâches ménagères » (1975) *France Culture*. Retrieved from: <https://www.franceculture.fr/societe/simone-de-beauvoir-la-revolution-par-la-repartition-des-taches-menageres>