Care Services for Older People in Europe - Challenges for Labour

by Jane Lethbridge, PSIRU - February 2011

This report is published (March 2011) at a time when Europe stands at a crossroads. The economic crisis, austerity measures and the proposed European economic governance package risk not only to increase poverty and social exclusion but to have a devastating impact on the potential to build a sustainable and cohesive Europe.

As the report notes, there is growing demand for more and better care services to address the needs of an ageing population. Potentially, Europe has the capacity to create millions of well-paid, good jobs delivering much needed services to older people and people needing long-term care.

A regulated, formal care sector has the advantages of achieving high employment rates, quality jobs with decent working and employment conditions and giving possibilities for men and women to combine professional and family responsibilities. It is also often a preferred choice of older people themselves. However, in countries where formal care provisions exist, these risk being decimated because of cuts, imposed by governments as a result of wrong policy choices.

In others, as as our report shows, there is literally no public spending on formal care, with the gap filled by a mix of individual arrangements. Such arrangements often provide insecure jobs and poor quality care. They also often involve female migrants in out-patient care as care workers and family assistants with low pay, reduced or no labour and social rights, partially lacking a residence and/or work permit.

As Commissioner Damanaki said in the joint EPSU/ETUI conference on the austerity measures in February 2011: “Employment is crucial for our future…. We need to care about creating jobs now, because growth alone won't bring new jobs automatically. An IMF study showed that a 2.5% growth rate is just enough to maintain current employment, let alone to create new. So, in the absence of a

prospect of high growth rates, we will have to intervene….."

She added: "Public spending cuts can be more selective and spare the transfers to the vulnerable population groups as much as possible. On the revenue side, raised tax should not only serve to reduce deficits and pay interests, but to support recovery and job creation. We should support employment actively, through tax incentives and monetary or fiscal policy that stimulates job-creation."

The EU should seize the challenge of creating good quality and secure employment in the eldercare sector with both hands. In the report we make a number of recommendations about how this can be done. As underlined in a statement on the legal, policy and quality framework for social services at European level issued in January 2011, EPSU calls upon the relevant bodies in the Member States and European institutions to make full use of the new EU legal framework when designing and implementing policy initiatives, action plans and/or funding programmes.

We suggest giving priority to the elaboration of specific sectoral policies with tangible goals in the years to come – e.g. in the fields of long-term care for disabled and elderly, mental health, child care (to build on the Recommendation on Childcare, aiming at an implementation of the Barcelona targets) and housing in order to illustrate the potential EU added value. When developing and implementing policies to ensure and improve the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of SSGI, EPSU considers that it is important for EU institutions to give particular weight to working and pay conditions in view of ensuring decent work and quality jobs.

Carola Fischbach-Pyttel, EPSU General Secretary

- Full report (in English)

- Executive Summary & Recommendations

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