

If we wish to meet our growing demands for live-in care, we must recognise the rights of care workers



The EESC conference in Rome pointed to many shortcomings in Italy's live-in care sector, which is on the rise in the country shown to be the second "oldest" in the world according to recent figures

Despite the high demand for live-in care services, Italy's live-in care sector is still plagued by many irregularities, such as inadequate recognition of social and labour rights of carers, undeclared work and insufficient public spending on care. This was revealed by a meeting held on 16 May by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) at the CNEL in Rome.

Speakers at the meeting in Rome – the third of five EESC country visits that are part of its ongoing consultation procedure on the future of this rapidly growing sector in Europe – said that more than half of the care workers in Italy were not legally employed. Some 75 percent of live-in care work in the country is done by migrant women, many of them coming to Italy from Eastern Europe.

The EESC's "going-local" meetings are a follow-up to its [own-initiative opinion](#) on the rights of live-in care workers, adopted in September 2016 as the **first policy document at European Union level dealing with the sector of live-in care work in Europe**, which has long remained almost invisible to EU and Member State policy-makers.

Their aim is to shine a spotlight on the precarious situation of these workers in Europe's labour markets, but also on many uncertainties faced by care recipients who often recruit carers through informal networks or the internet.

The meetings are organised by the EESC Member and rapporteur of the opinion, **Adam Rogalewski**, who advocates the regularisation and professionalisation of the live-in care sector and the inclusion of live-in care workers in the long-term care system, with all the rights arising from relevant EU and Member State employment regulations.

The Rome meeting follows the one held in Berlin this March and the one held in London last November. Two more are planned for Poland and Sweden, representing some of the countries of origin and destination of live-in care workers.

The situation in Italy is often described as a telling example, with a growing number of domestic workers in the rapidly ageing Italian society and a welfare system which is unable to meet the increased demand for care, forcing families to almost exclusively bear the burden of care costs.

At the same time, Italy's care workers – both foreign and Italian – share the fate of their European counterparts who work in difficult conditions, often with an unregulated employment status.

"Live-in care work entails a series of difficulties for carers. Most of them are migrant women and it is very difficult for them to reconcile work and private life. They live in solitude, far away from their loved ones, facing language barriers and having difficulties integrating into society", **Dr Luciana Mastrocola** from CGIL, Italy's largest trade union federation, told the conference.

She also pointed to the fact that neither foreign nor Italian carers in Italy enjoyed full protection of social rights, unlike most workers in other sectors, and that social recognition of their work was missing, despite the fact that it has today become indispensable, compensating for the shortcomings of the Italian care and welfare systems.

"The Italian government did not start implementing sustainable policies early enough. If we wish to keep meeting our demands for care, we must recognise the rights of these workers", **Dr Mastrocola** said.

Many live-in carers in Italy have no documents, and, while families want to "legalise" these workers, the authorities are not willing to do so, said **Sara Gomez**, a live-in care worker and a member of CGIL. She stressed that people working in the sector were very isolated but, thanks to the efforts made by

CGIL, a considerable number of them had now become unionised.

Italy introduced its first law on paid domestic work in 1958, its first special collective agreement in 1974 and ratified the ILO's Convention 189 in 2013. The same year saw the signing of the collective agreement on domestic work between Italian trade unions and employer associations.

In her keynote speech at the meeting, **Professor Sabrina Marchetti** from the Ca' Foscari University of Venice highlighted the strong need for inclusive measures for non-EU migrants and called for the "Italian collective agreement to be adapted to the requirements of the ILO Convention 189, particularly in regard to the maternity rights and sick leave of all care workers."

She maintained that the Italian situation was different to other countries and affirmed that neither employment through agencies nor self-employment status were a suitable strategy for delivering live-in care.

Dimo Barlaan from the disability advocacy organisation "FISH onlus" called for the current situation of a 54 hour work week to be addressed through collective agreements for live-in care workers by creating part-time working arrangements.

Andrea Zini, vice president of the home care employers' association Assindatcolf and of the European Federation of Domestic Workers (EFFE) put the number of legally employed care workers in Italy at 900 000, whereas as many as 1 250 000 million were in irregular employment.

According to Italy's National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), Italy is the second "oldest" country in the world, which means the demand for assistance and care can only grow, **Mr Zini** said.

"For this reason we are convinced that family, work and housing can be crucial factors for the revival of both the Italian and the European economy. But for this to happen, the government must become aware of this, because now the burden, including the economic burden, is entirely borne by employer families. If we could fully deduct the cost of domestic work, we would create a "virtuous" circle: more jobs and less irregular work, more professionalism and better well-being for families", he said.

Mr Zini called for the professionalisation of domestic care work and for the creation of a European database for the sector, for the implementation of training and certification systems, and for the coordination of supply and demand at the European level.

The EESC Member **Pietro Vittorio Barbieri** stressed that it was impossible to achieve the transition from undeclared to declared work without addressing the issue of insufficient public spending in the sector. "Families are under strain. It is about time the government did more regarding demographic change which is a threat to Italy", he said.

Another EESC Member, **Pietro Francesco De Lotto**, insisted on the role of national and local bilateral collective bargaining and on the need to increase tax deductions to families hiring live-in care workers. "We also

need to invest more in training to upskill the existing workforce,” he added.

Concluding the meeting, **Mr Rogalewski** urged all stakeholders to implement Principle 18 of the European Pillar of Social Rights on long-term care before it is too late. According to Principle 18, “everyone has the right to affordable long-term care services of good quality”.

BACKGROUND:

The EESC opinion adopted in 2016 presented eight recommendations for Member States and 12 recommendations for EU legislators to improve the overall capacity of the sector to create quality jobs and deliver quality care. They include implementing processes for recognising qualifications and experience acquired by live-in care workers, improving the way they are posted and incorporating their rights into the European semester. A rigorous application of the Victims’ Rights Directive in cases where workers are victims of exploitation, and the improvement of safeguards in the Employers’ Sanctions Directive to protect labour rights of undocumented workers should also be high on the agenda. It is also necessary to collect adequate data on live-in care workers and carry out research into their working and living conditions.

The findings of the EESC country visits will be presented in a report which will be published later in 2018.

<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/news-media/press-releases/europe-needs-proactive-policy-long-term-care-sector>

<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/news-media/press-releases/live-carers-face-precarious-conditions-despite-shortage-care-workers-eu-labour-market>

<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/news-media/press-releases/eesc-shines-spotlight-vital-role-live-carers>