

EU-level Stakeholders' Views on Personal and Household Services in Central-Eastern European Countries and Social Dialogue in the Sector



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This policy brief focuses on the conceptualisation of and reflection on social dialogue in personal and household services (PHS) in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries from the perspective of European institutions, policies and stakeholders. Drawing on policy analysis and interviews with selected stakeholders, we identify the strategies of European institutions and stakeholders in strengthening the PHS agenda in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and analyse the barriers encountered at the European level.

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THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS AND CHALLENGES OF PERSONAL AND HOUSEHOLD SERVICES

- The agenda of personal and household services became a concern for the European Commission during the 1990s but lacked formal attention through binding policies. It primarily remained within the jurisdiction of individual member states, and it never became a part of the official European social dialogue.
- The main PHS stakeholders such as EFFAT, EFFE, EFSI, and UNI Europa* recognise each other as partners within a potential social dialogue at the EU level, and they continue to work together with a strong focus on combatting undeclared work through professionalisation and formalisation of working standards and integrating migrant workers in a sustainable manner.
- Despite relative differences in how the development of the PHS sector is normatively argued, with EFSI and EFFE stressing the economic potential of the sector and trade union organisations highlighting the working conditions of employers, as well as the safety of users, all main stakeholders are generally aligned in their efforts towards the professionalisation and the formalisation of the sector.
- An important mobilising activity of this type of cooperation is the PHS Dialogue project, which has the ambition not only to monitor the situation of PHS workers, but also to establish sectoral observatories at the national level - including selected CEE countries.
- From the perspective of EU level stakeholders, the European Commission's proposal for the European Care Strategy fails to address the needs of personal and household care and domestic workers, including undeclared workers and undocumented migrants.

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* Abbreviations used: EFFAT (European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions) EFFE (European Federation of Family Employment) EFSI (European Federation for Services to Individuals) UNI (European Services Workers' Union)

EU-LEVEL STAKEHOLDERS' VIEWS ON SOCIAL DIALOGUE IN PERSONAL AND HOUSEHOLD SERVICES IN CEE

- While transnational cooperation in the establishment of a pan-European platform for the development of PHS has registered significant progress over the years, national actors and social dialogue grounded in the CEE region remains underrepresented at the European level, due to underdeveloped or isolated local capacities, as well as persistent regional differences.
- Empirical data on the PHS sector in CEE countries remains scarce, making it difficult to conclude whether the drivers of PHS are consistent across all EU countries. The most recent effort to remedy the missing data is 'The PHS Employment Monitor', a survey covering workers in PHS jointly commissioned by the social partners, the European trade union federations UNI Europa and EFFAT, and the employers' organisations EFFE and EFSI, collected responses from more than 6 500 PHS workers, employers and service users from 26 countries (including Slovakia, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Latvia and Croatia).
- The CEE region is perceived only as a 'sending region', rather than a 'receiving region' for female migrant care workers (e.g. from Ukraine) who often work in undeclared jobs in the PHS sector. Although the CEE region is identified as a 'sending region' for intra-EU migrant (live-in) care workers, their situation is not sufficiently addressed in the PHS agenda at the EU level (due to their large numbers).
- An alarming fact in the region is that no CEE country has ratified the ILO Convention on Domestic Work No. 189.

SOLUTIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING THE PHS AGENDA IN CEE

- Enhance the expert knowledge on PHS in the CEE region. The PHS agenda should have a regional focus and use local knowledge on the ground. Given the lack of information, there is a need to support the production of the necessary analytical material (research) to deepen the knowledge of the region.
- Raise awareness of the PHS sector in CEE. The social awareness of the specifics of the PHS sector in the region is very low, and support for it needs to be increased among national stakeholders and the public - in the form of social campaigns, professional workshops and by sharing good practices from countries where the PHS sector is already more developed, formalised and regulated.
- Intensify support for the ratification of the ILO Convention on Domestic Work No.189 in CEE countries as an important instrument to recognise the rights of domestic workers.
- Revise the European Care Strategy in order to reflect and incorporate the specificities of the PHS sector. This should be done on the basis of expert comments from stakeholders in the PHS sector.
- Bring the attention of experts to the working conditions of EU live-in care workers coming from Central and Eastern European countries.
- Develop more effective monitoring of the working conditions of Ukrainian refugees in the PHS sector in CEE countries.

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To strengthen social dialogue in the PHS sector in the CEE region, we propose the following:

Continue to strengthen the expertise of social partners in designing and implementing social dialogue at the European and national levels in CEE countries in the PHS sector through national social dialogue initiatives.

Proactively identify and address CEE regional partners, use the potential of grassroots movements in the PHS sector and motivate them to participate in social dialogue.

Project information

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