

ESIP feedback to the call for evidence on the European Care Strategy

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The European Social Insurance Platform (ESIP), which represents statutory social security institutions from 17 Member States and Switzerland, welcomes the European Commission's initiative to introduce a European Care Strategy. Overall, ESIP shares the analysis of the challenges highlighted by the Commission, especially as regards the need to ensure the availability and affordability of care while preserving the financial sustainability of social protection systems. We welcome the emphasis on how EU funds and other instruments can support Member States' action as well as the development of innovative best practices by social security institutions.

As regards digitalisation, ESIP members actively support and develop digital technologies for better access to healthcare and long-term care. Availability to and access of digital solutions, especially in rural areas, should be a key priority and combined with community-based services. At the same time, ESIP would like to emphasise the need to account for the digital divide and existing inequalities due to lower income, lower digital skills, lack of IT infrastructure or simple choice.

In order to tackle increasing demand for long-term care brought by the ageing of the population, fostering health promotion, prevention and health literacy across the lifespan is key. The loss of autonomy is an increasingly prevalent risk which is considered within social protection systems, with some countries having a dedicated branch of social security. Social security institutions are also developing innovative best practices to provide formal long-term care at home, to support informal carers, including through rehabilitation programmes, and provide online resources on facilities, costs and reimbursement. Informal carers are especially exposed to psychological and physical stress factors. Health prevention should be provided to them including through targeted information, increasing supporting services, and better communication channels with formal carers. The Commission's action can further support the dissemination of these best practices and policies. ESIP members also share the Commission's analysis of the need to shift towards further formal care provision, to alleviate the burden of care on informal carers, a vast majority of which are women. EU funding could help support the Member States' action, including investment in a qualified workforce. The Commission should also ensure synergies between the long-term care initiative and other relevant initiatives in the field of health such as the EU's Beating Cancer plan.

ESIP members also welcome the proposal for a Recommendation on the revision of the Barcelona targets on early childhood education and care (ECEC) and emphasise the need for higher EU ambitions in this regard. We would like to emphasise the crucial role of ECEC not only in ensuring the work-life balance and labour market participation of mothers, but also in providing many benefits for children. Access to affordable and high quality ECEC is essential

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to support the inclusion of all children into society, including the most vulnerable, and foster their future employability and autonomy. It thus helps break the intergenerational cycle of poverty. In addition, it generates additional social contributions and tax revenues from parents' increased work activity. The Commission could also play a role in this context in supporting the collection of statistics on the effectiveness of investing in ECEC.

When designing the Strategy, the impact of COVID-19 which has further increased the strain on social protection systems should be taken into account. Social protection systems have acted as key economic stabilisers, helping to limit the impact of the crisis on employment, implementing measures such as exceptional sickness benefits, support for healthcare and long-term care workforce, as well as solidarity aids for the most deprived and for students and young people in precarious situations, financial support for ECEC services and additional leave to support parents faced with the closure of childcare facilities.

