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POSITION PAPER ON EMPLOYMENT

How to make labour markets inclusive

socialplatform

KEY MESSAGES

I. Accessible labour markets

Establish at national, regional and local level inclusive labour markets as part of integrated Active Inclusion strategies. Such labour markets should, for all women and men that can work, ensure access to quality employment and jobs, facilitate progressive reintegration into society and the labour market of those of those who are most excluded in particular, and enhance their professional inclusion.

II. Creation of jobs

Create quality and sustainable jobs, including in the social, health and care services sector and in the social economy. Furthermore, jobs need to be created that are appropriate for people with lower skills and accessible to people most excluded by the labour market.

III. Quality employment

Invest in quality and sustainable employment to counter the increase of in-work poverty, the gender pay gap, precariousness, poor working conditions and labour market segmentation.

IV. Progression in employment

Provide adequate support for people, in particular to those who are most vulnerable, to progress in employment and ensure that discriminatory practices in the field of employment are fully and effectively prohibited. Reconciliation between work, family and private life should be promoted.

V. Civil dialogue for employment policies

Involve civil society organisations and the people they represent, in particular unemployed people and people experiencing poverty and/or social exclusion in employment and other related policies and programmes.

INTRODUCTION

Following the economic crisis, the European focus has been on economic growth. At the same time, unemployment has been rising to unacceptably high rates while the quality of employment has been degraded. Fixed term contracts, zero-hours contracts, involuntary part-time and flexible working patterns, attempts to replace real jobs with traineeships, as well as low and inadequate wages have become characteristic in the EU. This in turn is creating in-work poverty with jobs no longer guaranteeing a decent income. It is undermining a proper work-life balance and impacting on gender equality, social protection rights creating a liquid labour-market[1], where job security is minimised in order to have a workforce that is as flexible as possible.

Civil Society Organisations are calling for an investment in the creation of, and equal access to, quality and sustainable employment. Employment and social inclusion must be addressed from a rights-based perspective, particularly as many people face discrimination when trying to access the labour market. Social NGOs and other civil society groups have an important role to play and can bring their own expertise and experience on specific issues.

Special attention should be paid to **social, health and care services and the social economy**. Social NGOs are strongly represented in these sectors and are reporting about continuous cuts, despite the increasing relevance of these sectors in the 21th century demographic context and despite their great potential for job creation and growth.

CONTENT

In this paper we will look in particular at the following issues taking an integrated approach to employment: [2]

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[1] The expression 'liquid labour market' was used by Francesca Bettio, Professor of Economics, University of Siena and member of the EC Network ENEGE – European Network of Experts in Gender Equality, to describe how current employment patterns (temporary work contracts, internships..) prevent people from gaining access to employment-related social protection rights. See Francesa Bettio, *Revisiting challenges in the work-place*, Irish Presidency, Gender Equality Conference, Dublin April, 29-30 2013

[2] Specific recommendations on how to guarantee migrants access to quality and sustainable employment, can be found in Social Platform's position Paper on Migration, June 13, 2013, p. 9-10.

I. Accessible labour markets

We call for the establishment at national, regional and local level of inclusive labour markets as part of integrated Active Inclusion strategies. Such labour markets should, for all women and men that can work, ensure access to quality employment and jobs, facilitate progressive reintegration into society and the labour market of those who are most excluded in particular, and enhance their professional inclusion.

How?

a. **Ensure the full implementation of the Commission's Recommendation on Active Inclusion.** This requires combining the equally important strands of adequate minimum income schemes, inclusive labour markets and access to high-quality social services .[3] A proper Active Inclusion approach goes beyond activation and the "one-stop-shop" idea, and does not include negative conditionality.

b. **Ensure decent income levels for job seekers and for those who cannot access employment**, through unemployment benefits or other forms of social protection such as adequate minimum income. This will keep people socially included, a precondition for their inclusion in employment.

c. **Invest in personalised approaches** through employment and recruitment services, including personalised job counselling and supported employment. Such approaches start from the needs and circumstances of the person, recognising individual barriers.

d. **Invest in Public Employment Services** to avoid understaffing and unmanageable case loads, to provide for training in gender equality, anti-discrimination and personalised approaches, and install follow-up after job placement to ensure quality and sustainability.

e. **Provide quality flanking and other services** (a.o. child care and transport, housing support, debt counselling and health care) to support people in their search for work.

f. **Invest in inclusive quality education, training and lifelong learning, and request from employment services to recognise and validate skills, competences and knowledge** acquired through informal and non-formal learning, and including skills and qualifications obtained in third countries. Ensure that education and training are accessible to all, promote diversity and meet the needs of local economies as well as people's personal aspirations.[4]

g. **Make it sustainable and attractive for employers to hire people** who have more difficulties in finding a job.

h. **Improve the transition of young people from school and training systems to the labour market** through the implementation of the Youth Guarantee and through cooperation between educational establishments, governments, educational and social service providers, civil society and social partners.

i. **Adopt the Article 19 Equal Treatment Directive** which would complete the equal treatment legislation by providing protection for access to goods and services on all grounds of discrimination.

Why?

- According to the European Commission only seven member states have an inclusive labour market with low segmentation, high activation as well as no low wage trap.[5]

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[3] EC Recommendation on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market, of October 3, 2008.
[4] It goes without say that education cannot be limited to a tool for preparing people for the labour market.
[5] EC, Social Investment Package – SWD on implementation Active Inclusion Recommendation, Feb. 20, 2013.

- A personalised approach and a focus on the particular needs of specific groups have already proven their effectiveness. For example, the Irish programme "Ready for Work" is solely dedicated to formerly homeless people trying to find employment, and helps them by increasing their confidence and motivation for finding employment.[6]

- Access to affordable, quality services, including employment and flanking services, will avoid social exclusion and support people in bridging social and labour market transitions.

- Negative conditionalities - threatening people that do not want to accept any kind of job with losing benefits - are pushing people further away from the labour market and from society as a whole. It damages the inclusiveness of the labour market and increases the barriers for people to be (re-)integrated.

- There is overwhelming evidence that people with disabilities are prevented or hindered from accessing employment. They face barriers which hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with other people.[7]

[6] More info on the "Ready for Work" programme can be found on this website.
[7] As specified in the EU Disability Strategy 2010-2020; these barriers include discrimination as well as the lack of personalised support on the job – or reasonable accommodation - to which people with disabilities are entitled in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) ratified and signed by the EU and the majority of its Member States.

II. Creation of jobs

We call for the creation of quality and sustainable jobs, including in the social, health and care services sector and in the social economy. This includes jobs that are appropriate for people with lower skills and accessible to people most excluded by the labour market.

The social, health and care services sector will definitely expand and ought to be considered as an important labour supplier and as an answer to the ageing population, the need to support early childhood interventions, and the marginalisation of vulnerable groups. We will look more in depth at some sector specific issues in the "special focus" section at the end of this paper.

How?

a. **Provide financial support to test social and labour market policy innovations**, in order to better anticipate and develop the job creation potential.

b. **Promote access to, and increase the availability of, micro-financing for business start-ups**, especially with regard to unemployed, socially excluded and other vulnerable people, as well as existing micro-enterprises and social enterprises.

c. **Promote diversity management in companies** to enhance the creation of jobs for people who are now often under-valued and discriminated against.

d. **Support social economy initiatives that contribute to society both in social as well as economic terms.** This includes among others initiatives creating and providing social, health and care services, and Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs), offering training and employment to those having the hardest time accessing the labour market.

e. **Protect people from being pushed into involuntary or false self-employment**, the latter used by some employers to evade taxes and engage workers without having to respect employment rights and entitlements such as holiday pay, sick pay and pensions.

Why?

- Net job creation has decreased both at EU level and across member states. It has been reported that compared to 2008, the number of jobs lost now totals 5 million.[8] Labour market forecasts show that Europe should not expect a significant increase of jobs in the years to come.

- While some job creation efforts can be observed in member states, NGOs report that these are too few, of poor quality (including wages) and sustainability (duration of contracts) and fail to reach those most in need and most excluded by the labour market.[9]

- The social economy is very important both in economic and social terms, employing over 11 million people. The contribution to European society made by cooperatives, mutual societies, associations, foundations and other social enterprises far transcends their strict economic contribution in terms of GDP. This includes a fairer distribution of income and wealth, the creation and provision of welfare services and the support of sustainable development.

- While setting up an own business and becoming self-employed can be a way to create employment, it should not be perceived as a remedy applicable for all.

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[8] Eurofound, *Shifts in the job structure in Europe during the Great Recession*, August 2011 AND JER 2013.
[9] EAPN 2012, *An EU Worth Defending: Beyond Austerity to Social Investment and Inclusive Growth, EAPN analysis of the 2012 National Reform Programmes (NRPs) and National Social Reforms (NSRs)*

III. Quality employment

We call for an investment in quality and sustainable employment to counter the increase of in-work poverty, the gender pay gap, precariousness, poor working conditions and labour market segmentation.

Quality work and employment implies *that workers need a job which gives them enough salary allowing them and their families to lead a dignified life, which gives them stability, personal safety, holidays and decent working hours, which is conducive to their mental and physical health, in which people can join a union to represent their rights, and in which they are protected by individual and collective labour law.*[10]

How?

a. **Propose a comprehensive definition and implement an EU framework for job quality,** incorporating crucial aspects such as living wages, sustainability of contracts, employment protection, employment rights, and the mental health dimension of employment[11], and enforce this framework on the labour market.

b. **Establish adequate minimum wages in all member states** to protect people against in-work poverty and raise the level of these wages where insufficient and close the gender pay gap.

c. **Provide on-going support for people with a vulnerable background and help them in bridging transitions into work**, to ensure that adequate income and access to services are maintained and to help them to keep their job.

d. **Raise the level of employment protection for temporary contracts** to the standards of permanent contracts. This will also help facilitate the transition of newcomers, including young people, from jobs with short duration to more stable jobs.

e. **Ensure that no one has to take up a part-time job involuntarily** and improve employment protection, working conditions and social security coverage of part-time workers.

f. **Ensure universal access to affordable and quality services of general interest** including childcare, healthcare, public transport and social housing, in particular for workers in vulnerable positions.

j. **Ensure implementation of the UN CRPD principle of reasonable accommodation at work** to provide appropriate working conditions for people with disabilities including personalised support on the job if needed.

k. **Monitor the quality of traineeships and apprenticeships,** in particular when financed by the European Social Fund, looking also at the further job opportunities they deliver.

Why?

- In 2013, the Commission estimated that 9.4 % of people employed were living under the poverty threshold.[12] In some of Europe's most developed economies people are working for as little as 55 cents per hour.[13] The Commission has stated that wage adjustments,

[10] See *SOLIDAR (2010): Social dialogue: a tool to promote and defend decent work and quality jobs in Europe. p. 4* AND *EAPN's 10 Principles on Quality Work*.
[11] There is now sufficient evidence and best practices available that show that mental health care has a positive effect on health and safety at work and on economic recovery (OECD, Sick on the Job, 2012; Matrix, 2013). See also: MHE Response to the EC consultation on Operational Safety and Health Policy framework, August 2013.
[12] EC, Social Investment Package – SWD on implementation Active Inclusion Recommendation, Feb. 20, 2013.
[13] Reuters, *Insight: The dark side of Germany's jobs miracle*, February 8, 2012.

reduction of working hours, short time working arrangements and increased part-time and temporary contracts may have contributed to the increase of in-work poverty.[14]

- The ILO confirms that low-skilled workers and female workers are among those most hit by the crisis[15], adding to the already existing gender pay and pension gaps.

- Very often, people who work part-time (whether or not voluntarily) are pushed to work extra hours. Part-time employment accounted for a significant share of the job growth experienced during the crisis while the number of fulltime workers shrank by 6.2 million. Between 2007 and 2011 the share of employees working in involuntary fixed-term or part-time jobs increased in 21 out of 27 Member States.[16]

- The ILO has pointed out that insufficient progression of wages and increased inequalities over the last decade were the roots of the economic crisis. Work inequalities have been increasing leading to an accumulation of household debt.[17]

- People who suffer low-quality employment are more vulnerable to mental health problems. This leads to loss of productivity due to absenteeism or 'presenteeism', and an increased risk of job loss and long-term unemployment. Furthermore, job insecurity is among the leading causes of stress at work, which is in turn responsible for about half of all working days lost in Europe according to EU research.[18]

- Despite traineeships being very important for the access to employment, there are serious concerns about the quality of traineeships on offer and their added-value when there is insufficient learning content, inadequate working conditions and repeated traineeships that in reality are used as substitutes for real jobs.

[14] JER 2013.
[15] ILO 2012, *Work Inequality in the Crisis: Evidence from Europe*
[16] European Commission 2012, Employment and Social developments in Europe 2012
[17] ILO 2012, *Work Inequality in the Crisis: Evidence from Europe*
[18] Together with other psychosocial risks: EC, Fourth edition of the EU Social Dialogue newsletter, Oct. 18, 2013

IV. Progression in employment

We call for the provision of adequate support for people, in particular to those who are most vulnerable, to progress in employment and to ensure that discriminatory practices in the field of employment are fully and effectively prohibited. Reconciliation between work, family and private life should be promoted.

How?

a. **Enforce the Framework Directive[19] for equal treatment in employment and occupation** which prohibits direct and indirect discrimination, harassment, instructions to discriminate and victimisation on the grounds of religion or belief, age or sexual orientation and disability.

b. **Promote the investment in diversity training for employers** that can result in equal opportunities and increased profit.[20]

c. **Ensure the protection of people that are subject to (sexual) harassment and other forms of abuse at work**.

d. **Ensure equal access and opportunities to training and up skilling as a part of life-long learning**, especially for the low-skilled, to achieve equal opportunities for all. Ensure that education and training are accessible to all, without harassment, discrimination or bullying.

e. **Request from employers to recognise and validate skills, competences and knowledge acquired through informal and non-formal learning, to achieve equal opportunities, social inclusion and full participation.** Promote mechanisms that systematically document the skills, competences and knowledge acquired outside the formal education system and promote the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

f. **Develop broader legislation and measures to reconcile work, family and private life for women and men.** This includes the adoption of a carer's leave directive and a coherent framework for all types of care leave (maternity, paternity, parental, adoption, non-child related and filial leave), as well as the promotion of flexible working time arrangements by choice. Ensure that leave recognises the increasing diversity in family structures and that time out of the work place for caring responsibilities is guaranteed a decent income which is at least equivalent to the average national wage.

g. **Adopt the European Parliament's proposal for a revised Maternity Leave directive,** ensuring women keep their full salary throughout their leave, and strengthens their legal protection against dismissal and working time arrangement on return to work.[21]

h. **Provide accessible, affordable and good quality care facilities and services for children[22], dependents and elderly people** to allow people with care responsibility to reconcile progression in employment and family life.

Why?

- Once in employment, many people still face exclusion as a result of having to reconcile care responsibilities with professional life, lacking access to further skills-development or discrimination on the basis of gender, age, parenthood, ethnic background, sexual orientation or social origin, and disability. Furthermore, women as well as migrants and other minorities are often facing the glass-ceiling when they try to build up a career.

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[19] The Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000
[20] Read more on the Commission's website on Diversity Charters
[21] See Social Platform letter to the Council, November 2010 AND the joint EWL/ETUC letter sent to Heads of States and governments, November 2012
[22] In line with the 2002 Barcelona targets.

- Psychological violence in the workplace – such as sexual harassment or bullying - is widespread[23] and may hinder the person's ability to participate productively and progress in their job.

- Austerity has reduced access to and financing of childcare services and care services for the elderly and other dependents.[24] In some countries access to public day-care for children has been limited to families where both parents are employed, leading to an increased care-work load on the unemployed and limiting their possibility to look for a job.[25] In 2010 28.3% of women's inactivity and part time work was explained by the lack of care services against 27.9% in 2009.[26]

[23] Daphne, Booklet on Violence, 2011
[24] In the Netherlands, as of January 2012 most parents received a smaller proportion of their childcare costs back from the tax agency, Nederlandse Vrouwenraad 2012, EWL members' report, May 2012; In the UK the share of childcare costs covered by the state have been cut from 80% to 70%, Daycare Trust 2010. *Policy Briefing: The impact of the Spending Review on Childcare*. Quoted in Fawcett Society 2012, p. 29.
[25] For example: EWL Survey Portugal Barry & Conroy/TASK 2012, p. 6;Nederlandse Vrouwenraad, 2012
[26] Eurostat 2009

V. Civil dialogue for employment policies

We call for the involvement in employment and related policies and programmes of civil society organisations and the people they represent, in particular unemployed people and people experiencing poverty and/or social exclusion.

How?

a. **Establish appropriate cooperative and participative structures at EU, national, regional and local level that involve different organisations:** [27]
   - organisations representing and working with people experiencing poverty and social exclusion;
   - organisations that represent service providers, end users and organisations working on the issue of health promotion and social protection;
   - organisations promoting equality and non-discrimination and organisations working on the issue of discrimination in the workplace and women's organisations;
   - organisations aiming at ensuring access to all to education and training, and in particular, those who tackle discrimination as this has a very negative impact on under-achievement, early-school leaving, unemployment and mental health issues.

b. **Acknowledge the involvement of civil society in the processes by providing appropriate funding and structural support,** including through the next Multi-annual Financial Framework and the European Social Fund in particular.

c. **Develop clear guidelines on meaningful and structured involvement of stakeholders,** including the unemployed and their representative organisations, when developing employment and related policies at all levels.

Why?

- Based on Article 11 of the European Union renewed Lisbon Treaty – we consider participatory democracy as a fundamental democratic principle of the EU and propose ways to organise dialogue with "representative associations and civil society".

- The European Commission's PARES initiative is already showing how to make civil dialogue work. This Initiative is fostering cooperation between Public Employment Services, involving also the Social Partners and civil society organisations.

- Non-governmental organisations have an expertise in dealing with specific issues of the labour market that can complement the valuable work of the social partners. They bring forward the concerns of people that are most excluded by the labour market and which are often unheard in the EU political debate and raise attention to issues that are not very visible on the agenda, thereby contributing to a more democratic and participatory debate.

- A proper civil dialogue at all government levels will reinforce legitimacy, accountability and adequacy of measures proposed. CSOs working with and for people in difficult situations are witnessing the worsening social situation daily, and are gathering facts and expertise beyond official statistics. They are also exploring different ways to address these issues.

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[27] Among others, in the development of National Reform Programmes.

Special focus – Employment in the social, health and care sectors

INTRODUCTION

Following the economic crisis, essential social, health and care services have been capped, curtailed or cut altogether over the last years in a number of countries, and jobs in the health and education sectors were hit the hardest by austerity led cuts.

At the same time, there is need for job creation in the social, care and health sectors. However the job potential of these sectors is not been fully developed, nor is it always recognised.[28] The societal need for these services has increased and will only grow in the future. In the short term, the consequences of the crisis, such as increasing homelessness[29], are likely to require the creation of services to prevent and address such social emergencies. In the longer term, the ageing of the population will increase the demand for long-term care services.[30]

The vast majority of the people working in health and social services are women and belong to the age group 25-49 years. Yet, between 2000 and 2009 the share of people above 50 years working in this sector increased from approximately 20% to 28%. Many skilled workers in these sectors will therefore retire in the coming years. More in general, the EU's workforce is ageing. Consequently, the workforce in the younger age groups has decreased throughout the period and staffing shortages pose major challenges for health care systems.

Reasons why the sector is not perceived as attractive include: frequent non-standard working hours, lack of clear career paths, lower than average salaries and lack of adequate training or re-training. Social and health service providers sometimes do not receive sufficient public financing for their services to be able to provide their workforce with the working conditions that they would wish to. At the same time, it is essential to raise the recognition and professional status as well as to alleviate the gender gap in the sector. If these issues were addressed, more people, including some unemployed and younger people, could be motivated to work in this sector and existing staff shortages could be eliminated.

Structural reforms to health and care systems should not compromise patient safety and quality of care by wasting the human capital potential of the "white work force". Structural reforms should consider evaluating skills levels and training systems to ensure a balanced mix of different staff skills, to meet unmet care needs and to prepare for potential staff needs.

I. Creation of jobs

How?

a. **Develop a comprehensive job creation strategy** aiming for strategic investment in the social, health and care sector involving member states.

b. **Facilitate the anticipation, due to demographic and societal changes, of future needs in terms of employment and training of the workforce.** Monitor and forecast possible labour force and skills shortages through cooperation between member states and relevant civil society stakeholders. This will ensure that there is sufficient comparable data for EU wide health and social workforce planning. The shortage of careers and the health workforce should be addressed as part of a wider strategy, which includes policies for recruitment, retention and training.

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[28] During the 2008-2011 period, the 'health and social work' sector created about 1 866 000 new jobs. Moreover, the demand for new positions in this sector is expected to increase with a projected 8 million of total job openings between 2010 and 2020 (twice the employment growth overall), EC Communication: Towards a job-rich recovery of April 18, 2012 page 6 AND JER 2013.

[29] See FEANTSA reports of increases in15 Member States from 2007 to 2012

[30] Between 2008 and 2060, the population aged over 65 will increase by 79% while the population aged over 80 is expected to increase by 181%.

c. **Ensure greater financial support for social economy initiatives** for developing employment in quality, accessible and affordable care services in the 2014-2020 Operational Programmes to be financed by the Structural Funds.

d. **Invest in increasing the availability of affordable and quality social and health services and facilities**[31], ensuring stable funding and investment in public infrastructures and providing qualified staff.

e. **Invest in the potential of non-profit organisations** in delivering quality social and health services.

f. **Provide adequate information on employment opportunities and provide necessary tailor-made training and lifelong learning opportunities** to create and promote jobs in the social and health sector.

g. In the context of efforts to tackle youth unemployment, **present the care sector as a viable option for young people,** both women and men, for example through training programmes that emphasise the multiplicity of skills required in the sector in the future.

II. Quality employment

How?

a. **Ensure the introduction in member states of regulations for minimum standards of employment in the social, health and care sectors,** including decent wages and the closing of the gender and migrant pay as well as pension gaps, decent working hours and conditions, access to social security, training and lifelong learning opportunities, professional and career development, non-atypical contracts, and adequate benefits.

b. **Make concrete recommendations to member states on how to step up social dialogue and tackle labour market segmentation** with measures addressing precarious employment and undeclared work in the social, care and health sectors. Ensure cooperation between public authorities and service providers to improve salaries and working conditions in the sectors.

c. In the frame of the implementation of the Commission's initiative to develop personal and household services, **make sure that the provision of care services at home is not left to a bilateral relationship between the user, the family and/or the care giver**. The difference between care services and comfort services must also be made clear.[32] Public authorities have a role to play as guarantor of this relationship, in cooperation with social partners, service providers and other relevant stakeholders, including organisations representing users and patients. This is a pre-condition to ensure the quality of the service, to prevent risks of user's abuse and exploitation of the domestic carer. For this reason it is also important that in public procurement procedures, more emphasis is put on the quality rather than on the costs of services.

d. **Organise training systems to be person-centred rather than task-oriented.** They should support the acquisition of the required skills and development of competences to alleviate stress and prevent burn outs in this high risk group.

e. **Promote a Charter on professional care givers' rights,** reinforcing their right to decent employment, work-life balance, and access to specific services such as counselling and training, and recognition of qualifications, including those acquired informally or non-formally.

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[31] With due consideration for de-institutionalisation in favour of community-based services.

[32] For Social Platform a clear distinction should be made between services provided at home for the comfort of people (cleaning, ironing, gardening, home repairs, ICT support etc.) and home care services, Social Platform response to the consultation on personal and household services, July 2013.

f. **Encourage member states to ratify the ILO Convention 189 and Recommendation on "Decent work for domestic workers"** and duly implement its provisions, in particular article 7 concerning migrant domestic workers.

g. **Ensure decent working conditions by guaranteeing migrant care workers equal treatment comparable to the rights of EU citizens** including pay, working hours, leave, social security, access to education and training and rights at work, in addition to collective bargaining and unionisation. Ascertain the portability of carers' rights and benefits when moving to another country or, if applicable, to the country of origin.

h. **Implement the WHO Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel.** It is a response to the large-scale migration of skilled health personnel from low income source countries to middle and high income receiving countries, including the European Union (EU).[33]

III. Progression in employment

How?

a. **Establish a common reference for qualifications and training in the "white sector",** to define clear career paths and to raise the professional status of carers and social workers.

b. **Support the creation of vocational training courses and qualifications for careers in social services.** Providers should develop care workers' roles, giving them more responsibility and widening their skills and knowledge base.

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[33] In the EU as elsewhere, demand for health workers is rising due to the effects of demographic change. Currently there is a massive 'brain drain' from developing and transition economies driven by complex 'pull' (e.g., higher wages, opportunities for career development and training) and 'push' factors (e.g., inadequate resources, poor lifestyle conditions, political instability). Since the adoption of austerity measures to mitigate the ongoing economic crisis, thousands of doctors and nurses have migrated from Eastern to Western Europe. This is compromising the self-sustainability of health systems all over Europe, with severe service provision gaps experienced in rural and economically deprived areas on the one hand, and dependency on qualified migrant professionals in the rich countries on the other.