

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 conceptualization of and reflection on social dialogue in the 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 the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and analyse the barriers encountered at the European level.

Project PERHOUSE (funded by the European Union; Ref. 101052340)

Project outputs include a comprehensive report on personal and household services and social dialogue in [country] and a comparative report for 12 CEE countries. All project outputs are available at <https://celsi.sk/en/projects/detail/209/>. Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are, however, those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS AND CHALLENGES OF PERSONAL AND HOUSEHOLD SERVICES

- EFSI, EFFAT, UNI Europa and EFFE* are some of the main stakeholders activating at the EU level in the PHS sector.
- Collaboratively, they draw attention to the need for EU policy making that aims to strengthen processes of formalisation and professionalization of work in PHS.
- The need for the institutionalization of PHS is motivated both through its economic potential in terms of its role in non-relocatable jobs and support for work–life balance, as well as through the necessity of protecting the most vulnerable workers, such as migrants and women in general.
- A particular success in this sense was the introduction of the International Labour Organisation Convention 189 (‘ILO C189’) on rights for domestic workers, whose adoption, however, remains within national competencies.
- Domestic work remains characterised by below-standard working conditions in terms of the value of labour and safety standards.
- The vulnerability of workers is particularly evident in cases of undeclared or migrant labour.
- Although the main PHS stakeholders, such as EFSI, EFFAT, UNI Europa and EFFE, recognise each other as partners in a potential social dialogue at the EU level, their collaboration remains situated outside care-related established social dialogues.
- In policy documents, CEE is rarely addressed beyond the quality of countries of origin.
- Normative backgrounds and the policies that inform PHS-related policymaking at the EU level remain grounded in realities specific to Western Europe and tend to ignore both the specifics and relevant actors activating in Central and Eastern Europe.

*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 Europa (European services workers union)

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

- According to the stakeholders, the PHS agenda is conceptualized in a transnational way; that is, it does not refer to regional specifics (including CEE).
- The CEE region is **perceived only as a “sending region,” not as a “receiving region” of female migrant care workers** (for example, from Ukraine) who often work in undeclared jobs in the PHS sector.
- There is a lack of functional industrial relations in CEE, which contributes to a weak or inadequate regulatory framework and less progressive policies.
- An alarming fact in the region is that no CEE country has ratified the ILO Convention on Domestic Work No. 189.
- **From the perspective of 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. Moreover, **European Care Strategy does not acknowledge that care work migration has become a specifically intra-European phenomenon**, which exacerbates the care shortage in CEE countries and contributes to regional inequalities along the East–West division.

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The framing of PHS at the EU level is largely informed by the national economies, demographics and social histories of Western European member states. As such, limited consideration is typically given to regional disparities and differences between national contexts beyond such member states. In policy documents, CEE regions are rarely addressed beyond their quality of countries of origin. **Minimal discussion has been made regarding specific national regulations concerning labour protection standards or migration governance.** CEE countries are viewed in this context as countries of origin of potential domestic workers rather than as a context in which PHS must be regulated.

SOLUTIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS TO STRENGTHEN THE PHS AGENDA IN CEE

- Enhance expert knowledge of the PHS agenda in the CEE region. The PHS agenda should have a regional focus and use local knowledge on the ground. Given the lack of information on it, there is a need to support the production of the necessary analytical material (research) to deepen knowledge of the region.
- Raise awareness of the PHS sector in CEE. Since the social awareness of the specifics of the PHS sector in the region is low, supporting it among national stakeholders and the public is necessary by holding social campaigns and professional workshops and sharing good practices from countries where the PHS sector is already more developed, formalized and regulated.
- Intensify support for the ratification of the ILO Convention on Domestic Work No. 189 in CEE countries as an important instrument towards decent rights for domestic workers.
- Enhance the potential for effective use of the social media communication platforms of PHS workers for information dissemination and mobilization (to share information campaigns, organise discussions or provide online legal consultancy).
- Revise the European Care Strategy to consider the specificities of the PHS sector. This revision should be based on expert comments from stakeholders in the PHS sector.
- Bring the working conditions of EU live-in care workers coming from CEE countries and beyond to the attention of experts.
- 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:

- **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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