

Personal and household services in Central and Eastern European countries Improving working conditions and services through industrial relations



Project PERHOUSE

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Policy Brief - SLOVAKIA

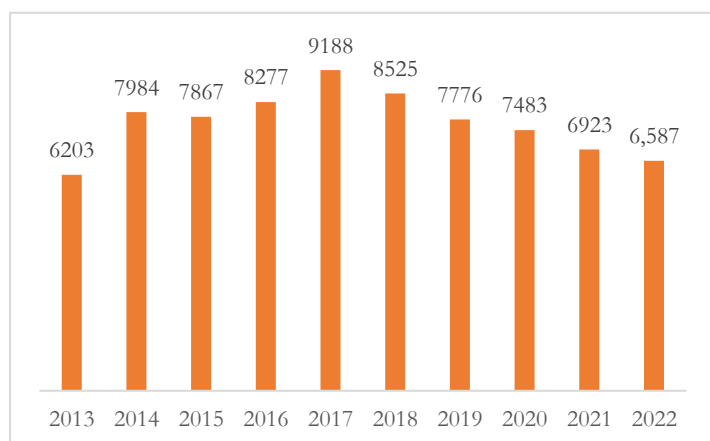
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The main characteristics and challenges of the personal and household services

- Personal and household services (PHS) are vital for the well-being of families and individuals, transforming households into workplaces. Despite their importance, this sector faces poor working conditions and undervalued work, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, due to weak regulations and ineffective industrial relations.
- The PHS sector in Slovakia faces challenges due to a lack of standardised definitions, complex regulations, and disparities in worker recognition, rights, and compensation.
- According to data from the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, the total employment in the PHS sector is approximately 36,000 people, based on the relevant NACE classification. Care PHS services make up about 38% of total PHS employment.
- In 2022, over 6,500 home care employees in Slovakia worked an average of 33.3 hours per week. The average age of employees was 52 and women comprised 96% of the workforce (see Graph 1).
- The share of people who self-reported using home care services is 1.3 % out of the population of 15 years old and over annually, whereas the EU average was 4.2 % in 2019. Slovakia's share is also low compared to other CEE countries, where, for example, the share in Hungary is 5.4%, in Slovenia 2.6%, and in Latvia 2%.
- Family caregivers in Slovakia often receive little financial support, leading to a strain on their physical and mental health as they try to balance caregiving with formal employment. The lack of public care services and respite care options further contributes to caregiver burnout.
- According to Eurocarers (2023), the number of informal caregivers in Slovakia is 428,496, representing 7.9% of the population. Many caregivers are forced to leave their jobs, reducing their income potential. More flexible care options, community support, and transformation of informal caregivers into regular employees are needed to address these issues for better support and integration into the labour market.
- According to an online survey conducted as part of the Perhouse project, 79% of respondents in Slovakia have purchased at least one of the listed PHS within the last five years. The primary reasons for ordering PHS were time and skills constraints.
- Conversely, the most common reason for not purchasing PHS was that people prefer to care for their homes and family members themselves. This suggests an inclination among Slovak households towards self-service. Further analyses confirm that the responsible municipalities do not ensure sufficient home care services for all in need.

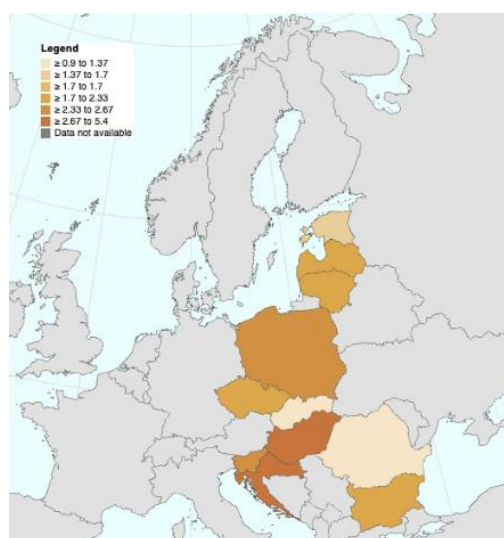
Graph 1: The number of employees in home care services (in persons, 2013 – 2022)

Source: Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family



Graph 2: Annual use of home care services in CEE countries (% of the population 15 +, 2019)

Source: Eurostat, EHIS survey



In 2023, around 3.4 thousand requests for home care services were filed, out of which 77% were processed. The average duration on the waiting list was around 21 days (Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, 2023).

Key findings on social dialogue in personal and household services

- The PHS sector in Slovakia unequivocally lacks distinct social dialogue and collective bargaining. While healthcare and social care workers are represented by multiple trade unions with sector-level collective agreements covering various professional groups, PHS workers in non-care subsectors currently have no representation.
- The broad spectrum of stakeholders, including unions, associations, chambers, and NGOs, demonstrates significant potential for collaborating effectively to address challenges and influence policy decisions. It is imperative for these organisations to actively engage in regulatory discussions and advocacy to enhance working conditions and ensure fair practices within the PHS sector.
- The evident gaps in representation, particularly for the self-employed, call for immediate expansion of union representation. Overall, the findings strongly emphasise the critical importance of ongoing dialogue and collaboration among diverse actors to strengthen the effectiveness and equity of the PHS sector in Slovakia.
- Social partners and stakeholders involved in PHS are working towards enhancing the care sector's overall environment and working conditions.
- For instance, the Association of Social Services Providers raises concerns about the low recruitment of care workers and insufficient funding. The Association is calling for increased healthcare services and fair competition regulation.
- The Chamber of Carers of Slovakia calls for defining caregivers as an independent profession, establishing qualification standards, and increasing wages by 500 euros. The Chamber proposes several measures for caregivers working abroad to prevent exploitation.
- The Trade Union of Healthcare and Social Services highlights the need for professionalisation, better education, and improved working conditions and discusses upcoming legislative amendments to enhance workers' standards and competencies.
- According to the social partners, the PHS sector grapples with critical workforce shortages, poor working conditions, and inadequate compensation. Addressing these issues is crucial for retaining and attracting skilled workers. Increased investment and improved regulatory frameworks are imperative to ensure high service quality. The sector further faces significant social and economic challenges, including recognising and supporting informal caregivers, tackling undeclared work, and supporting vulnerable workers.

Ratify the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers to provide a basis for more adequate regulations on PHS workers' labour status and minimum working conditions requirements.

Solutions and policy implications

- Several social partners confirmed that they are members of or affiliated with EU-level social partners or organisations relevant to the PHS sector. These include EPSU, EASPD, ETUCE, and Eurocarers. The trade union for healthcare and social services is a member of EPSU and the Chamber of Carers in Slovakia is a member of Eurocarers. The Association of Social Services Providers, representing employers, is a member of Social Employers Europe and the European Ageing Network.
- The European Care Strategy has limited impact on the discussion of personal and household services (PHS) because PHS are not directly included in the Strategy as part of care services.
- The ILO Convention on Domestic Workers has not been ratified by Slovakia, and there is no mention of any discussion on this convention. It was confirmed at the PERHOUSE national workshop that the Convention will not be ratified because the terms "domestic work" or "domestic worker" are not included in Slovak legislation. Implementing the convention would require significant changes to Slovak labour law and other relevant legislation.
- Stakeholders recommend a comprehensive approach involving regulatory, financial, and professionalization strategies to tackle challenges in the care sector, including the migration of workers abroad. Ongoing dialogue and collaboration among unions, associations, and government bodies are crucial for driving improvements in the PHS sector.
- Based on the findings, we propose the following policy implications:
 - Ensure that sufficient funds are available to implement the Social Services Financing Reform. Without increased investments, the reform may not improve the situation in PHS.
 - Expand respite services for all persons who care for persons with a severe disability, regardless of whether they receive a cash allowance for compensation.
 - Promote greater cooperation between social partners representing the interests of people working in the sector, thus increasing their unionisation to formulate common goals.
 - Create a common platform to support cooperation with EU-level social partners to enhance the voices of PHS social partners nationally.

Project information

Project outputs include comprehensive reports on personal and household services and social dialogue in 6 partner countries and a comparative report for 12 Central and Eastern European Countries. All project outputs are available at <https://celsi.sk/en/projects/detail/209/>

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