Care4Care: tackling discrimination and improving working conditions in the care sector

Belgium

GENERAL INFORMATION	
Name of the organisation	European Federation for Family Employment and Home Care (EFFE)
Type of organisation	Civil Society Organisation (NGO)
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Web page	https://www.care4care.net/
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Topic of the good practice	Labour and skills shortages in the health and care sector National practices (legal and administrative) to detect and prevent bogus self-employment Undeclared work
Geographical focus	Cross-country
Duration	1/1/2023 – 12/1/2025
Summary of the good practice	The EU-funded CARE4CARE project (https://www.care4care.net/) addresses labour and skills shortages in the health and care sector by focusing on a comprehensive and rights-based approach to improving the working conditions of care workers across six EU Member States: France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, and Sweden. These countries represent diverse legal, economic, and social care models, making the project's findings highly relevant and scalable across Europe. Care work is predominantly carried out by women and migrants, making it a key area to investigate labour market segregation, discrimination, and the impact of intersecting inequalities. The COVID-19 pandemic further

exposed the vulnerabilities within the sector, including underfunding, precarious employment, lack of social protection, and widespread undeclared work.

CARE4CARE takes a comparative and multidisciplinary approach to:

• Assess the legal, socio-economic, and psychosocial working conditions of care workers;

• Design effective, evidence-based tools and policy recommendations to improve job quality;

• Combat discrimination based on gender and nationality;

• Empower care workers and their representatives in shaping policies that directly affect their working lives.

The project foresees the development of a range of tools and resources aimed at structural change in the care sector. Some of these have already been implemented, while others are currently under development. These include:

• A web platform providing accessible, multilingual information for care workers about their rights and working conditions (Care4Care);

• Development of training programmes for trade unions, employers' associations, and family carers to enhance social dialogue and advocacy capacities;

• Establishment of a permanent observatory on care work to ensure continuous monitoring and data-driven policy guidance;

• Delivery of a Policy Paper summarising key legislative and governance proposals aimed at systemic improvement in the sector.

The CARE4CARE Policy Paper, (https://www.care4care.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Care4Care-Policy-Paper.pdf) launched in April 2025, identifies six priority areas critical

to transforming the care sector:

1. Job Quality & Undervaluation – Strategies to recognise and reward care workers' skills and complex competences.

2. Health & Safety – Enforceable measures for workload, working time, and psychosocial risk prevention.

3. Live-in & Domestic Care – Advocacy for ILO Convention 189 ratification, better regulation of placement agencies and presumption of employment.

4. Labour Migration – Promotion of safe, legal pathways with portable social security rights and mobility-friendly residence permits.

5. Gender Equality – Closing gender pay and pension gaps and embedding equality principles across reforms.

6. Funding & Governance – Linking public subsidies to decent work and creating an EU-wide quality assurance framework.

This integrated approach, developed through collaborative research and refined in dialogue with stakeholders including DG EMPL, regional authorities, and social partners, offers a replicable model for other Member States. It contributes to the ELA's priority of addressing labour shortages in the care sector by not only increasing the sector's attractiveness but also ensuring fair and sustainable working conditions for one of Europe's most essential, yet undervalued, workforces.

By tackling the root causes of poor job quality and discrimination, CARE4CARE positions the care sector as a driver of inclusive growth and social cohesion, ready to meet future demographic and labour challenges in Europe.

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

Background/context	▶ The CARE4CARE project addresses the persistent challenges affecting the working conditions and social

What challenge, need or gap were you trying to solve or respond to? **Why was this issue relevant or urgent in your context (sector, region, country)?**	inclusion of care workers in Italy, France, Germany, Poland, Spain and Sweden. The care sector, essential for ageing societies and social cohesion, remains characterised by precarious employment, weak bargaining power, undervaluation of female-dominated professions, and high levels of undeclared work. Moreover, intersectional discrimination – particularly affecting migrant and female workers – has led to inequalities in pay, social protection, and access to rights. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed systemic weaknesses, revealing the critical yet fragile position of care workers in maintaining public health and social care systems. Within this context, the project seeks to generate comparative, evidence-based knowledge and practical tools to enhance job quality, strengthen anti-discrimination measures, and support fair and sustainable employment in the care sector. By integrating multidisciplinary research with stakeholder engagement, CARE4CARE fills a crucial gap in EU-level understanding and policy coherence concerning care work and its regulation.
Objectives What were the main goals of this practice (e.g. better compliance, faster processing, improved worker protection)? (Please limit to three) Who or what were these goals intended to help or change? (Please limit to three)	▶ The CARE4CARE project pursues three main objectives. First, to analyse the working conditions in the care sector in the six countries involved, enabling the development of policy strategies that address labour market inequalities and institutional shortcomings, by drafting of a Policy Paper. Second, to empower care workers' representatives with national, comparative and European knowledge on the regulation of the sector, in order to strengthen their action and the coverage of collective agreements. Third, to establish a multilingual web platform providing accessible, country-specific information on care workers' rights, working conditions, and protection mechanisms. These objectives aim to strengthen compliance with EU labour and equality legislation, improve job quality and well-being, and foster inclusive labour markets by supporting social partners and policymakers in implementing effective, evidence-based reforms.

Main activities What were the main steps or actions you carried out to put the practice into effect? Were any tools, materials, partnerships, or processes created?	▸ The project is implemented through a series of interconnected work packages encompassing research, consultation, training, and digital innovation. Key activities include: the comparative assessment of job quality and inclusive working conditions; the development of a "Discrimination Map" focusing on gender and migratory status; and the evaluation of care workers' well-being using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Policy recommendations are elaborated based on these findings, complemented by training programmes targeting trade unions, employer representatives, and family associations. Furthermore, a multilingual web platform is designed to provide user-friendly access to relevant legislation, collective agreements, and protection mechanisms. These activities are supported by continuous dialogue with stakeholders at national and EU levels to ensure that research outcomes are aligned with real policy needs and that the resulting tools are practical, inclusive, and sustainable.
Funding/organisational resources	▸ CARE4CARE is funded under the Horizon Europe Programme, within the cluster "Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society," specifically targeting social and economic transformations. The project brings together ten partners from seven EU Member States, coordinated by the University of Florence. The consortium includes academic institutions, social partners, and organisations specialising in dissemination and advocacy. This interdisciplinary structure ensures both scientific rigour and practical relevance. The project leverages existing institutional capacities, data infrastructures, and professional networks to optimise resources and ensure cost-effectiveness. Through shared responsibilities, in-kind contributions, and a decentralised implementation model, CARE4CARE maximises the impact of EU funding and ensures balanced engagement across research and policy communities.
PARTICIPATION	

Stakeholders involved Organisations or entities actively contributing to the design, implementation, monitoring, or support of the good practice (e.g. labour inspectorates, social security institutions, trade unions, employers' associations, or other).	▶ The consortium involves a broad network of actors representing the academic, social, and institutional dimensions of care work governance. Core partners include universities from Italy (Università degli Studi di Firenze, Florence), France (Université De Bordeaux and Centre de droit comparé du travail et de la sécurité sociale, Bordeaux), Germany (Europa-Universität Viadrina, Frankfurt/Oder), Poland (Uniwersytet Rzeszowski, Rzeszow), Spain (Universitat De Girona, Girona; Universidad De Sevilla, Seville), and Sweden (Lunds Universitet, Lund), alongside TOUR4EU, the European Federation for Family Employment and Homecare (EFFE), and the European Federation for Services to Individuals (EFSI). The European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) provides strategic guidance and dissemination support. National and EU-level stakeholders engaged in consultations include trade unions, employer associations, family organisations, equality bodies, ministries, and civil society organisations. Their involvement ensures that the research reflects real-world conditions and that resulting policies and training materials are relevant, inclusive, and implementable across different institutional contexts.
Target groups Main groups or categories that the practice is directly aimed at, who should receive its services or who engage with it (e.g. employers, mobile or posted workers, labour inspectors and social security officers, or other).	▶ The primary target groups of the CARE4CARE project are care workers in the public and private care sector, and in formal and informal economies, who perform paid work and provide personal and/or health assistance to elderly persons, sick persons, or persons with disabilities, particularly those with at most a Bachelor's degree; as well as representatives of trade unions, family associations, and employers in the care sector, who are key intermediaries in promoting decent work and counteracting discrimination. The training activities are specifically designed for the stakeholders, equipping participants with the knowledge and tools to identify vulnerabilities among care workers and to promote fair employment practices. The easily accessible web platform directly helps raise care workers' knowledge and awareness of their rights. Additionally, the project directly addresses

	policymakers, labour inspectors, and equality institutions that influence national and EU policy frameworks on care work. By targeting these groups, CARE4CARE ensures that interventions are directed toward those capable of creating lasting structural change in the sector.
Final beneficiaries Individuals or groups that ultimately benefit from the outcomes of the practice, even if they are not the direct target or user (e.g. mobile or posted workers, vulnerable workers at risk of exploitation, employers benefiting from clearer rules or reduced admin burdens, or other).	▶ Ultimately, the main beneficiaries of CARE4CARE are care workers themselves, particularly women and migrants employed in both formal and informal segments of the sector. By improving access to information, strengthening protection mechanisms, and promoting fair employment policies, the project contributes to better working conditions, enhanced well-being, and stronger social inclusion. Employers and families who rely on professional care services also benefit from clearer rules, reduced administrative uncertainty, and more sustainable labour relations. Indeed, the involvement of relevant stakeholders is intended to both improve their positive impact in the sector and to support workers and employers in building a positive working environment. On a broader scale, EU institutions and Member States profit from the project's evidence base and policy recommendations, which support coherent regulation and fair labour mobility within the internal market.
GOOD PRACTICE CRITERIA	
Achievements and outcomes What specific results did the practice achieve? (e.g. How many workers or employers were reached, number of publications created? What processes became faster?) What kind of broader benefits did it bring? (e.g. Did it improve understanding of rights and obligations, enhance cooperation between authorities, or reduce legal uncertainty and inconsistent application of rules?)	▶ CARE4CARE delivers concrete and measurable results at research, policy and operational levels. As regards scientific results, the CARE4CARE project has produced: • Six national Reports (France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden) and one comparative Report on "Job Quality and Inclusive Working Conditions", available at [Work Packages' Reports and Results | Care4Care](#). • Six national Reports (France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden) and one comparative

Report on "Discrimination Mapping", available at Work Packages' Reports and Results | Care4Care.

- One Policy Paper, that contains a concise set of legislative and policy proposals for improving paid long-term care across Europe ; available at Work Packages' Reports and Results | Care4Care.

- Three reports on care workers' wellbeing, based on a general survey, completed by 696 participants, and weekly surveys, completed by 437 participants: « Country-based Descriptive Report of Care Workers' Well-being » ; «Care4Care Report: Insights into the Realities and Needs of Europe's Care Workforce » ; «Summary of Results with Practical Recommendations » ; available at : Work Packages' Reports and Results | Care4Care

- Scientific dissemination of the project, through participation in a number of scientific Conferences, such as the Labour Law Research Network (LLRN in Asia: Interrogating Labour Law's Orthodoxies, Comparing Its Futures), Bangkok 29th June – 1st July 2025 ; and the IX OIL Conference on Regulating for Decent Work Network, Geneva 2nd – 4th July 2025. The respective conference papers are available at : Lavoro Diritti Europa - Rivista nuova di Diritto del Lavoro.

▶ The project has also produced societal outputs and demonstrable impact on its target groups. The CARE4CARE web platform (Care4Care) – designed to increase care workers' awareness of their rights – underwent usability testing with 83 workers. Results show exceptionally high satisfaction: 38–40% rated accessibility, ease of use, structure and clarity at 10/10, and over 75% gave scores of 8–10 across all categories. These findings suggest that the platform is highly effective in communicating rights-related information, with workers explicitly reporting that it helped them better understand their entitlements and where to seek support. Qualitative feedback also led to

platform improvements such as clearer navigation cues, simplified language, and links to practical procedures.

▶ At capacity-building level, the project trained 141 stakeholders (trade unions, employers, NGOs, public authorities) across six countries through workshops and seminars ranging from 8 to 16 hours. Participants consistently reported a significant increase in knowledge regarding EU labour law, discrimination, working conditions and psychosocial risks. The evaluation's questionnaires answered by the participants highlighted the high relevance and quality of content, particularly on anti-discrimination rules and EU-level frameworks. The training also generated policy-relevant outcomes, including:
– joint proposals developed by German and French stakeholders,
– first-time engagement of Swedish trade union representatives in EU-level debates,
– identification of gaps regarding informal carers in Spain, feeding directly into national discussions.

▶ The project strengthened transnational cooperation, offering a shared space where stakeholders could compare national practices. The creation of these exchanges – reported as one of the most valued aspects – enhanced mutual learning and the alignment of national discussions with EU standards.

▶ The study itself generated insights that directly inform policy. Evidence that one-third of migrant home-care aides lack formal work permits, or that carers across Europe consistently demand improvements in workload planning, emotional support and contractual protections, has provided policymakers with data-backed priorities for legislative and organisational reforms. These findings have already been used in policy papers and recommendations developed under the project, supporting better coordination among social partners and public authorities.

▶ Overall, CARE4CARE has:

	• directly reached over 800 individuals (study participants, web-platform testers, trainees);
	• improved understanding of rights through a tested digital tool with very high usability scores;
	▶ strengthened cooperation between national stakeholders through 141 trained participants; produced evidence-based proposals grounded in one of Europe's most comprehensive datasets on care work.
	▶ Collectively, these outcomes contribute to greater rights awareness, reduced legal uncertainty, stronger stakeholder cooperation and clearer pathways for addressing discrimination and inequalities in one of Europe's most undervalued labour sectors.
Cost effectiveness How did you keep costs low while still achieving results? (e.g. Did you reuse existing tools, automate processes, or share resources across teams?) Can you show that the outcomes were worth the investment? (e.g. Did small changes lead to big improvements, or were expensive tools avoided?)	▶ CARE4CARE ensures cost efficiency through optimal use of existing academic networks, open-source digital tools, and shared infrastructures. Research activities build upon established data collection methods and prior EU-funded projects, avoiding duplication of effort. Training sessions employ blended learning techniques to reduce travel costs and maximise outreach. The use of digital questionnaires, online consultations, and the central web platform enhances dissemination while minimising administrative expenditure. The outcomes – ranging from comparative analyses to transferable training templates – demonstrate that relatively modest investments can yield significant systemic benefits, such as strengthened evidence bases, improved rights awareness, and greater policy coherence at EU and national levels.
Transferability What are the key features that make this practice work well? (e.g. a digital platform, clear guidelines, a joint inspection process, or strong coordination) What would another country or organisation need to make this work for them? (e.g. certain laws, IT systems, or staff training)	▶ The CARE4CARE model is inherently transferable due to its modular structure, comparative design, and reliance on open-access tools. The project's analytical framework, policy grid, and training curricula can be easily adapted by other countries or institutions seeking to enhance job quality in the care sector. Particularly, the training curricula have been designed to be replicable. Essential prerequisites include commitment from national authorities, availability of relevant labour

	data, and engagement of social partners. The multilingual web platform and sustainability plan provide replicable examples of how to maintain and update shared resources beyond project duration. The methodology's flexibility ensures its applicability to other service sectors facing similar challenges, such as domestic work, social services, and healthcare.
Sustainability **How is the practice sustainable from a social, financial or environmental perspective?** **What makes this practice able to continue over time? (e.g. It is now part of regular work or has been built into law or procedures?) and how are you making sure it lasts beyond the pilot or project phase?**	▶ Sustainability is embedded in CARE4CARE's institutional design. The project establishes the CARE4CARE Network (CCN) to maintain collaboration among partners, support dissemination, and ensure the long-term maintenance of the web platform. The network's functions, integrated within partners' regular operations, guarantee continuity beyond the project's lifetime. Financially, sustainability is secured through low-maintenance digital infrastructures and alignment with EU and national policy priorities on social inclusion and decent work. Socially, the project strengthens stakeholder capacities, enabling continuous promotion of fair working conditions in the care sector. The integration of CARE4CARE outputs into training, policy development, and advocacy frameworks ensures that its impact extends well beyond the pilot phase.
Innovativeness What makes this practice new or different in your field or country? (e.g. Is it the first of its kind, or does it combine actors who don't usually work together, or activities not performed before?) How does it improve older or less effective approaches? (e.g. By reaching more people, using data better, or simplifying complex procedures)	▶ CARE4CARE introduces a novel, intersectional, and multidisciplinary approach to addressing inequalities in the care sector, combining legal, sociological, and psychological analyses across six EU Member States (Spain, Germany, France, Poland, Sweden, Italy). Unlike traditional top-down initiatives, it engages social partners, employers, and workers from the outset, fostering co-creation of actionable tools that bridge research and practice. Key outputs include the Discrimination Map, policy papers, a web platform, and training programs. ▶ The practice improves older approaches by linking evidence-based insights with practical implementation, enhancing scalability, accessibility, and worker-centeredness. As regards workers' well-being, the CARE4CARE study surveyed 696 care workers across

five professional levels, revealing urgent needs in working conditions, psychosocial support, recognition, training, and legal protection. Concrete proposals from participants included structured work schedules, emotional support programs, inclusion of commuting time, formalized contracts, and international advocacy mechanisms. These insights directly informed the web platform and training curricula.

▶ The CARE4CARE web platform supports workers' awareness of rights, offering intuitive, accessible content validated through usability testing with 83 participants across six countries. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive: 40%–38% rated accessibility, intuitiveness, clarity, and structure at the top of a 10-point scale, with fewer than 5% giving low scores. Participants highlighted its usefulness in understanding labour rights, though suggested clearer navigation and additional practical resources. These data demonstrate real-world uptake and usability across diverse user profiles, including informal and migrant workers.

▶ Training sessions for stakeholders (trade unions, employers, NGOs, public institutions) were delivered in all partner countries between July and October 2025, reaching 15–35 participants per session, with an average of 22 participants per country. Quantitative and qualitative evaluations show significant knowledge gains, particularly regarding EU law, anti-discrimination legislation, and working conditions. Interactive methods, including Q&A, case discussions, and role-play, promoted engagement, cross-sectoral dialogue, and transnational learning. Outcomes included joint proposals in Germany and France, identification of non-professional carers in Spain, and increased EU-level engagement among Swedish trade union representatives. Hybrid formats expanded access, demonstrating potential for replication and long-term sustainability.

▶ In summary, CARE4CARE is innovative because it:

	• Combines multiple disciplines and actors rarely brought together in the sector.
	▶ Integrates worker-centered evidence into actionable tools, directly shaping policies, platforms, and training.
	• Produces measurable outcomes: 696 surveyed workers to assess workers' well-being in the care sector and development of specific improvement proposals; 83 users confirming web platform usability; and 132+ stakeholders trained across six countries, reporting increased knowledge and collaboration.
	• Offers scalable, cross-sectoral solutions that improve accessibility, data-driven decision-making, and participatory policy development, surpassing traditional top-down methods and fostering systemic change in care work governance.
Digitalisation What kind of digital tools or platforms were used in this practice? (e.g. online portals, automated case tracking, data sharing, digital databases or other) How did these tools help in reaching your goals? (e.g. Did they save time, facilitate access to data in real time, reduce errors, help detect fraud, or improve coordination between authorities?)	▶ Digitalisation is a central enabler of CARE4CARE's implementation and outreach. The project uses digital tools for research (e.g., online surveys via Qualtrics), stakeholder engagement (virtual consultations and webinars), and dissemination (web platform). The CARE4CARE web platform serves as a comprehensive digital hub providing user-friendly, multilingual access to information on rights, national legislation, collective agreements, and equality mechanisms. Optimised for mobile devices, it ensures accessibility for care workers with diverse linguistic and technological backgrounds. These tools significantly enhance efficiency, accuracy, and inclusion—reducing administrative burdens, enabling real-time feedback, and supporting the digital transition of labour governance systems in the EU's social sector.