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EFFAT – EFFE – EFSI – UNI-Europa Joint Statement on the COVID-19 Pandemic in Personal and Household Services (PHS)

The statement is supported by [IDWF](#) (International Domestic Workers Federation)

Across Europe, personal and household services (PHS) provider organisations, private employers and workers are mobilising to address the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The ultimate goal is to continue the provision of support to families and communities, while ensuring rights and protection of PHS workers (domestic and home care workers).

There are 8 million formal PHS workers¹ in the EU and at least as much working undeclared. They provide care-related services in people's homes such as childcare, care for older people and people with disabilities (approximately 60% of PHS activities) as well as household support services such as cleaning, ironing, home repairs, gardening, etc. (approximately 40% of PHS activities). Rather than being currently identified as a single occupational sector, PHS main feature is the place where work activities take place, namely the private household.

EFFAT, EFFE, EFSI and UNI-Europa highlight the dedication of PHS workers to their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, we share two main concerns for the PHS sectors and call upon authorities to urgently take appropriate actions towards the sectors. Furthermore, we express our mutual commitment in implementing and sharing best practices aimed at protecting PHS workers in this time of crisis.

Firstly, given the nature of PHS which is to provide care and support to people, including to people who can be far more at risk to COVID-19 than the general population, the continuity of services must be ensured while guaranteeing the safety of PHS workers and users.

PHS workers are already experiencing a substantial increase in workload to ensure cleanliness and hygiene. Overcoming anxiety, they continue to provide care to many older people or persons with disabilities and take care of children, enabling health professionals and workers in other key occupations to work. However, PHS workers' health and safety must not be neglected. They must be adequately protected so they can effectively be part of efforts fighting the virus.

Therefore, **EFFAT, EFFE, EFSI and UNI-Europa** call authorities to:

- issue detailed health and safety instructions towards PHS workers including guidance on how to behave with clients suspected to have COVID-19 and how to limit the risks to PHS workers at this time, especially taking into consideration that some people infected with COVID-19 are asymptomatic. Likewise, accurate information should be given to households on the prevention measures they must take in their home in order to protect their PHS worker's health as much as their own. Decent visitor protocols and guidelines should be in place for the safety of PHS workers and households whether they are PHS workers' employers or users, as well as protocols for clients to report exposure and potential exposure prior to visits. These are all prerequisites to avoid stressful and hazardous environment both for PHS workers and the people to which they provide care and support.

¹ Unless otherwise stated, we use the term "PHS workers" according to the definition of domestic work(ers) in the [ILO Convention 189](#), Article 1: "(a) the term domestic work means work performed in or for a household or households; (b) the term domestic worker means any person engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship; (c) a person who performs domestic work only occasionally or sporadically and not on an occupational basis is not a domestic worker."



- ensure access to appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) to PHS workers, such as masks, gloves, sanitising gel, etc., given the risks of contagion in care and support provided in private homes and especially to vulnerable people. Adequate training on how to properly use these PPE should be provided, as well as on COVID-19 and infection disease prevention. PHS workers working as home care workers are part of the general health system and must enjoy the same protective measures as other workers in the health sector. They should be given priority access to COVID-19 tests as workers need to know if they themselves are contagious.
- avoid that due to a lack of equipment, staff shortages or financial constraints, PHS providers find themselves in a situation where they are unable to continue to provide essential care services to vulnerable people and are forced to freeze or close their activities. Consequently, authorities should consider temporary flexibility regarding services requirements and guarantee the full payment of home care services at pre-crisis levels.
- ensure sick leave and access to healthcare for PHS workers in order for them not to be forced to choose between getting paid and possibly putting at risk the people they are providing support to. Likewise, when PHS workers get sick, they should be able to stay at home and be covered by sick leave, including those who are in quarantine and infected, without fear of losing job or income.
- provide exceptions for PHS workers to cross national borders as many PHS workers are migrants and are currently in some countries unable to cross borders and deliver essential work.

All those measures are of the utmost importance as demand is expected to increase due to both increased illness and the early release of many patients to alleviate pressure on hospital beds.

On the other hand, many users have made the choice or are forced to self-isolate themselves, including from their PHS workers. Likewise, many PHS workers self-isolate themselves upon public health advice or abide by the containment measures taken in many Member States. As a result, many PHS workers are going unpaid and the sectors face an unprecedented fall in their activity. Consequently, **EFFAT, EFFE, EFSI and UNI-Europa** underline the necessity to guarantee the economic safeguard of both the domestic and home care sector and its workers and urge public authorities to:

- guarantee that the PHS sectors are eligible to measures aiming at mitigating the financial impact of the crisis such as extra delay in the payment of social security contributions and taxes; right to apply for temporary economic unemployment or short-time work allowances for their workers in case of reduced activities; etc. Those measures should be accessible to all PHS employers be they organisations or private individuals. Those measures will make it possible to avoid a high number of layoffs and the closing down of many PHS organisations.
- support the adoption of income substitution benefits for PHS workers. Wage levels in the sectors are low, and a temporary economic unemployment allowance covering only a percentage of the initial wage (percentages vary between countries) puts at risk the subsistence of PHS workers, as well as of relatives depending on them. Following agreements with trade unions and in line with national law, employers should adopt measures preventing workers' falling into poverty, such as stocking up allowances to net wages.
- ensure PHS workers' access to clear information about their rights and to social protection, including paid sick leave, hazard pay and health services. In the event of dismissal, PHS workers must be paid their wages and all other entitlements according to their contracts, collective agreements, and law. Particular attention should be given to the situation of



migrant PHS workers and in this regard, Member States should e.g. consider granting an extension of resident rights in case of job loss, if permits are linked to employment or specific employers. Information must be provided in languages migrant PHS workers understand. In the case of undocumented migrant PHS workers, Member States should consider putting in place a supplementary welfare allowance, which is accessible for undocumented migrant workers in case they lose their jobs. The immigration status should not be affected if migrant workers apply for social welfare allowances in this period, and no data should be shared with other government departments².

- support and strengthen social dialogue in the PHS sectors and listen to the advice from social partners in order to safeguard this crucial industry and support their workers.

EFFAT, EFFE, EFSI and UNI-Europa call upon European and national authorities to recognise the crucial role played by PHS workers in the prevention and the fight of the COVID-19 pandemic. We consider that the sectors deserve special attention in order to ensure service continuum during the crisis for the benefit of the most vulnerable and in order to alleviate the burden on the healthcare sector.

However, it is just as crucial to ensure that PHS workers will be able to resume their activity in adequate conditions once the crisis will be over and the sectors must become a priority investment for recovery after the crisis. With enough investment, the PHS sectors, in light of the COVID-19 crisis, could become some of the largest job growth areas for millions of workers who will be looking for work in a post-COVID-19 reality. On the contrary, if adequate support is not granted to PHS formal provision, there is a high risk that a large share of the workforce will be forced to work undeclared, worsening the situation for millions of workers throughout Europe and outweighing past gains in the area.

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EFFAT is the **European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions**. As a European Trade Union Federation representing 120 national trade unions from 35 European countries, EFFAT defends the interests of more than 22 million workers employed along the food chain. EFFAT is a member of the ETUC and the European regional organisation of the IUF.

EFFE, the **European Federation for Family Employment & Homecare**, represents the interests of national stakeholders including social partners organisations (workers and employers) operating in the field of direct employment. This model is characterised by a contractual work relationship between two private individuals, without any trading or profit-making objective.

EFSI, the **European Federation for Services to Individuals**, is the voice of the Personal and Household Services industry at European level, representing national associations, employers' organisations, PHS providers and companies involved in the development of personal and household services, and currently operating in 21 EU Member States.

UNI-Europa is the **European Trade Union Federation for 7 million service workers**. It speaks for the sectors that constitute the backbone of economic and social life in Europe. Headquartered in the heart of Brussels, UNI Europa represents 272 national trade unions in 50 countries, including: Commerce, Banking Insurance and Central Banks, Gaming, Graphical and Packaging, Hair and Beauty, Information and Communication Technology Services, Media, Entertainment and Arts, Postal Services and Logistics, Private Care and Social Insurance, Industrial Cleaning and Private Security, Professional Sport and Leisure, Professionals/Managers and Temporary Agency Workers.

² For more information see: <https://www.mrci.ie/2020/03/26/covid-19-emergency-payment/>