

Does Europe Care for Care?



FRIEDRICH
EBERT
STIFTUNG

FEPS
FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN
PROGRESSIVE STUDIES



PART-TIME WORK: RISK OR OPPORTUNITY?

DR JANNA BESAMUSCA AND DR MARA A. YERKES
Utrecht University

OCTOBER 2021

INTRODUCTION

Part-time work, in particular women's share in part-time work, is inextricably linked to care and caring.¹ In most European countries, part-time work is highest among mothers with children under the age of 12.² The intertwining of care and maternal employment has become very clear during the pandemic. Mothers in many countries reduced their working hours to take on the extra care resulting from the closure of schools and day care centres. In some countries, this has led to a reinforcement of women's roles as caregivers, potentially leading to a reinforcement of women's overrepresentation in part-time work. Multiple countries within and outside Europe struggle with this gendered and unequal nature of part-time work and its effects (see Figure 1 below).

But to move forward from the pandemic and develop sound policy solutions to the problems associated with part time work, we first need to clarify the issue. Thinking of care and part-time work as primarily about mothers combining paid work and care is not an accurate picture of the part-time issue. Crucially, part-time work

is no longer exclusively a mother's issue, as young men, childless women, low skilled and ethnic minority workers are regularly found in increasingly precarious part-time work positions. For example, migrants are not necessarily more likely to be employed part-time but are clearly overrepresented among involuntary part-time workers.³ Part-time work can also be more disadvantageous for certain groups, such as single parents, with single parents more likely to be earnings-poor in countries where work-care flexibility is higher.⁴

The part-time work force is thus diverse both in terms of composition (who works part-time) and working conditions (with what types of part-time jobs). When we broaden our view, we see that part-time work is often more precarious than full-time work and a substantial share of those employed part-time consists of workers who would prefer to work more hours. Part-time work is also common among shift workers, who are mostly employed in low to medium paid blue-collar occupations that require staff to work outside the 'usual' 9 to 5 hours to accommodate opening hours in service and health care industries, like supermarket workers, restaurant workers, or nurses.

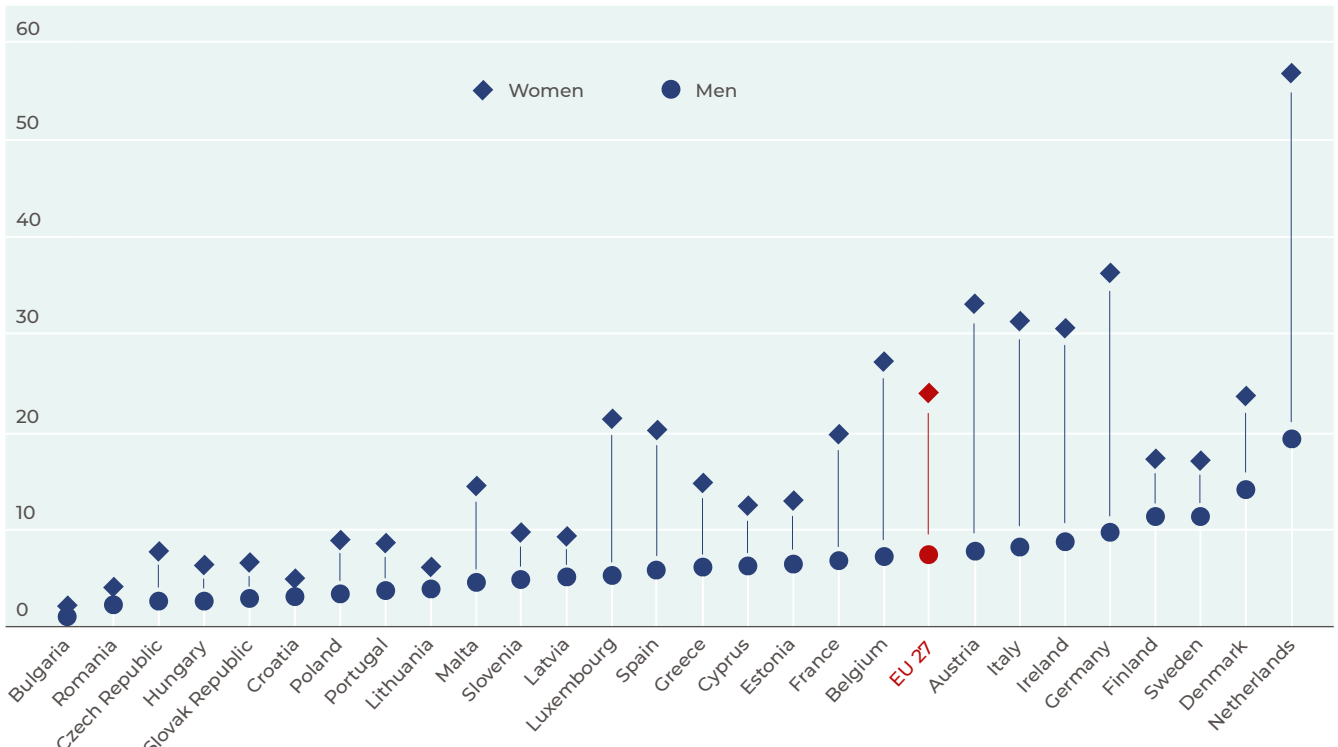
¹ Yerkes, M.A. 2009. Part-time Work in the Dutch Welfare State: the ideal combination of work and care? *Policy and Politics*, 37(4), 535–552. <https://doi.org/10.1332/030557309X435510>.

² https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Part-time_work_by_sex_and_age_of_children_2018.jpg.

³ Rubin, Jennifer, Michael S. Rendall, Lila Rabinovich, Flavia Tsang, Constantijn van Oranje-Nassau, and Barbara Janta, 2008. *Migrant women in the European labour force: Current situation and future prospects*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, https://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR591.html.

⁴ Horemans, J. & I. Marx. 2018. Doesn't anyone else care? Variation in poverty among single working parents in Europe. In *The Triple Bind of Single Parent Families*. R. Nieuwenhuis & L. Maldonado. Bristol: Policy Press. <https://library.open.org/viewer/web/viewer.html?file=/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/30531/645375.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

Figure 1: Part-time employment as a share of employment by gender in the EU27



Source: OECD (2021), Part-time employment rate (indicator). doi: 10.1787/f2ad596c-en (Accessed on 31 August 2021)

The position of part-time workers was already a key policy issue prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. The EU’s Social Pillar and the Gender Equality Strategy launched in March 2020 emphasized the need to improve women’s economic independence, the reconciliation of work and family life, and to halt labour market polarization. With this policy context in mind, and accounting for the diversity of the part-time workforce, is it possible to organize part-time work in such a way that it offers more opportunities than risks? And what policy measures are needed to achieve this? Drawing on discussions held at an online stakeholder event between academics and non-academic stakeholders across Europe and the US in February 2021, we outline the risks and opportunities associated with the diverse forms of part-time work and part-time workers. Following, we outline a number of policy measures for moving the part-time policy and academic debate forward in a post-pandemic climate.

RISKS

Part-time work in most countries is associated with significant risks to workers, such as lower pay, in-work poverty, scheduling problems, reduced career progression,

and diminished social security (e.g., access to unemployment benefits or building up pensions). Crucially, what these risks look like, and which workers are affected the most, differs across and within countries, and can even differ within employment organisations. Some employers may offer qualitatively good part-time jobs to attract certain workers, while offering qualitatively bad part-time jobs to workers seen to be more ‘disposable’ to employers in order to enhance organizational flexibility.⁵ We highlight the risks associated with scheduling problems and poorer pay and career prospects.

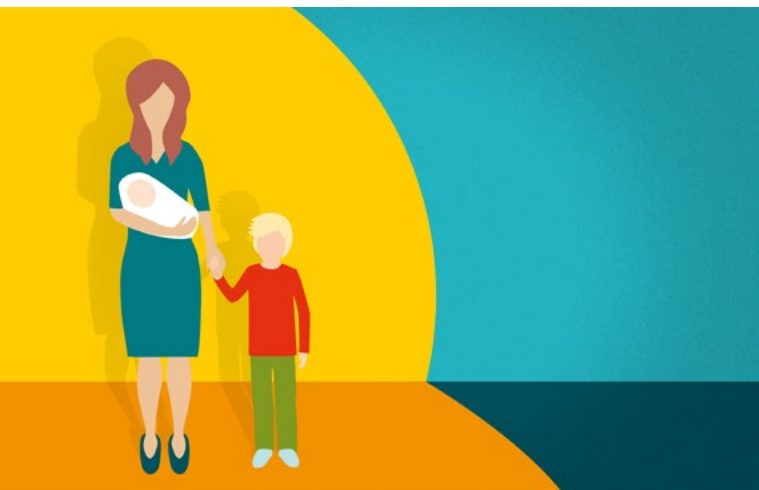
SCHEDULING

Scheduling patterns of part-time work matter in relation to work, but also in relation to leisure, care responsibilities, or other activities outside of one’s job. In relation to part-time work, there are significant differences between working in a part-time job with regular hours (e.g., 9:00–12:00, Monday to Friday) versus irregular hours (e.g., with the number of hours changing each week or month, and/or days or times of work changing). While the former can provide opportunities to reconcile work and care, the latter effectively makes scheduling of care

⁵ Nicolaisen, H., Kavli, H. C., & Jensen, R. S. 2019. *Dualisation of part-time work : the development of labour market insiders and outsiders*. Bristol: Policy Press.

time *more* difficult. Yet many part-time jobs are found in sectors where shifts and on-call work are common, such as the retail sector, cleaning, and health care.

Unpredictable work schedules, oftentimes combined with low autonomy over working time, can also clash with the temporal realities of life outside of work, such as school or childcare opening times, but also opening times of shops, doctors' offices and the like. Scheduling patterns can also make it difficult for workers to be employed full-time, even if they would like more hours. In home (health)care services for the elderly, for example, many organizations address high demand in the mornings and evenings by having employees work in two shifts that avoid the idle hours around mid-day.⁶ Such scheduling patterns make it impossible to work full-time hours in one job. These structural, often sectoral issues were a common theme in many discussions and highlight the tension between part-time work having become standard practice in some sectors, while full-time hours remain the formal benchmark for entitlements to leaves, premiums and allowances. In such cases, part-time workers lack access to overtime premiums, which are commonly assigned to work hours over formal industry standard hours only, and thus work their extra hours for their normal pay.



NEGATIVE PAY AND CAREER EFFECTS

No matter the working conditions, part-time work generally comes with pay and/or career penalties for workers (except perhaps for high school or university students who work part-time temporarily). The negative conse-

quences can build up over time, causing significant inequalities between groups. For example, recent calculations suggest that Dutch mothers earn up to 46% less than Dutch women without children in the first seven years after having a child, a 'child penalty' that Dutch fathers do not experience. Combined social expectations that mothers will take up the majority of care tasks and the high acceptance of part-time work therefore have a significant impact on mothers' pay and career prospects. Formally, legislation can prevent part-time workers from receiving lower hourly wages but does little to address the real-world consequences of working fewer hours, such as insufficient monthly income (e.g., in-work poverty), greater economic dependence on a partner or the state, and stalled career progress.

RISK MITIGATION

It can be difficult to mitigate the negative pay and career effects associated with part-time work. Even in countries well-known for the protection of part-time workers and the right to adjust working hours, like the Netherlands, it has proven easier to *reduce* one's working hours than to *increase* them. The Dutch foundation [Het Potentieel Pakken](#) (Capturing the Potential), works with companies facing staff shortages (e.g., in the health care sector) to increase the work hours of part-time employees. The foundation points out the low awareness of rights and possibilities among part-time workers alongside complicated welfare state and tax policies (e.g., means-tested health care subsidies or housing subsidies) that can make it difficult to gain insight into the financial benefits or pitfalls of increasing one's working hours.

OPPORTUNITIES

With the diversity of part-time jobs and the part-time workforce, it might be tempting to think part-time work is inherently 'bad'. Certainly, part-time work is associated with multiple risks, and the short and long-term negative effects should not be ignored. In the second feminist wave in the 1960s and 1970s, and again now during the Covid-19 pandemic, shorter working time, including the four-day workweek, has been proposed as an ideal – a way of countering long-hours work cultures. Dutch feminists in the 1960s, for example, called for high-quality part-time work in the belief it would entice women to work and men to share domestic tasks. In other words,

⁶ Besamusca, J. 2012. Protecting low wage workers: making industrial relations work for decent work: briefing on the situation in the Netherlands. *Solidar briefing papers*, (46). https://issuu.com/solidar_eu/docs/web_46_solidar_dwir_ii_holland.

part-time work – in some forms – also carries potential opportunities, such as improved work-life balance, increasing wages through premium pay, and opportunities for inclusive leadership.

INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP

Part-time workers are sometimes portrayed as lacking ambition or dedication.⁷ And until the Covid-19 pandemic, it was common to reward presenteeism (i.e., physical presence at work) as a sign of work devotion. From such a perspective, it can be easy to forget that at least a share of the part-time work force is career-oriented and has the ambition, as well as the skills, to enter and successfully take-up leadership positions. Leadership positions filled in large part-time jobs, such as four days per week, can provide a much needed counterbalance to long working hour cultures that are increasingly commonplace in professional occupations. Offering leadership positions to part-time workers offers career opportunities to those workers, primarily women, thereby creating an opportunity for inclusive and diverse leadership. It also potentially addresses the underemployment of highly educated women, whose lack of career progression into higher-level jobs matching their skills can also serve to crowd out their lower educated peers.

SCHEDULING ADVANTAGES

Multiple potential opportunities arise from the scheduling advantages of part-time work. For example, part-time work can offer scheduling advantages when workers have autonomy over working time or at least the possibility to choose and swap shifts. Common strategies among parents include off-shifting or split-shifting, in which spouses work different shifts in order to maximise childcare provided by parents.⁸ Moreover, among low-wage workers, working evening or weekend shifts can provide access to premium pay to complement base incomes.

Part-time work also offers the opportunity to take up valued activities outside of paid work. A substantial share of European workers would prefer to work fewer hours and value the time they spend on leisure and care.⁹ For these people, part-time work offers opportunities for a

better work-life balance and the reduction of work-family conflict. Theoretically, part-time work also offers employment opportunities for those parents, especially mothers, who would not want to engage in paid work on a full-time basis. In practice, working hours preferences, both in terms of the number of hours worked each week and how these hours are scheduled (for example 2–3 full-time days or 4–5 days with shortened hours adjusted to primary school hours), are not static. Parents, for example, may want to reduce hours while children are young, and increase hours once children are older. Policies enabling these kinds of adjustments (i.e., the ability to increase one's hours and not just decrease them) are largely absent except for a few Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands.



BALANCING OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS

The opportunities part-time work offers are not available to everyone. For example, improved work-life balance is an advantage that is absent for people working multiple part-time jobs in an attempt to secure sufficient income. Scheduling benefits are not available to those workers lacking work hours autonomy in their job. Given the diversity of part-time workers and part-time jobs, the risks and opportunities associated with these diverse workers and work forms are multifaceted. Without discounting this complexity, we consider a number of policy measures discussed as ways of moving forward towards a situation where the opportunities associated with part-time work outweigh the risks.

⁷ Cf. Berdahl JL, Cooper M, Glick P, et al. 2018. Work as a masculinity contest. *Journal of Social Issues* 74: 422–448; Blair-Loy, M. 2009. *Competing devotions: Career and family among women executives*. Harvard University Press.

⁸ Verhoef, M. 2017: *Work schedules, childcare and well-being: Essays on the associations between modern-day job characteristics, childcare arrangements and the well-being of parents and children*, <http://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/348797>.

⁹ Steiber, N., & Haas, B. 2018. Too much or too little work? Couples' actual and preferred employment patterns and work hours mismatches in Europe. *Zeitschrift für Familienforschung*, 30(3), 269–292. <https://doi.org/10.3224/zff.v30i3.03>.

POLICY MEASURES FOR MOVING FORWARD

Several policy measures can contribute towards ensuring that part-time work is not synonymous with precarious work or negative outcomes.

- Introducing a right to stable, predictable schedules can help workers plan their time outside of work and lowers the need for last-minute patchwork-solutions to care. Policies can be developed to ensure that employers who require their workforce to work irregular and varying hours bear the cost of this flexibility, rather than the employees. Possible measures include paying on-call hours at rates closer to hourly wages and guaranteeing minimum weekly working hours at a level that ensures sufficient income.
- Second, to make it possible to work part-time and still make ends meet, wages at the bottom of the income distribution, including minimum wages, need to be raised. The COVID-19 pandemic, during which workers in health care, food-related stores and value chains among others were labelled as “essential”, presents a compelling case to reinforce efforts to raise wages in these sectors, where part-time work is prevalent, as progressive parties in many member states have called for in the past year.
- Third, enabling those who want to work reduced hours to do so in decent jobs means having attention for the diversity of workers, regardless of parental status. For parents in particular, enabling reduced hours in decent jobs requires the consolidation of equal rights for part-time workers, full entitlement to leave policies and access to childcare. To improve access to childcare, it is crucial to address the link between the scheduling of work and childcare for part-time workers who work irregular hours. Large-scale flexibility (e.g., childcare centres accepting children on different days each week, or during evenings or weekends) is difficult, even with public-sector provision.¹⁰ However, the provision of employer-based childcare facilities available to both mothers and fathers, a practice that has largely disappeared in most member states, could be considered for employment organisations working with rotating shifts.
- Policies should also reflect that well-protected part-time work can be a tool to improve work-life balance. Better legal frameworks (e.g., to guarantee the right to return to full-time or larger-part-time hours) are a good start but insufficient in and of themselves. A coherent set of policy measures mitigating the risks of the diverse group of part-time workers is needed. Finally, as many workers return to offices as pandemic measures ease, we need to resist the temptation of seeing more hours as inherently better, whether we are physically present or not. Protect and value free time; protect and value worker wellbeing.

¹⁰ Yerkes, M. A., & Javornik, J. 2019. Creating capabilities: Childcare policies in comparative perspective. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 29(4), 529–544. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0958928718808421>.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Dr. Mara A. Yerkes is Associate Professor of Interdisciplinary Social Science, Utrecht University, the Netherlands. Her research broadly centres on comparative social policy (including welfare states, family policy, industrial relations and citizenship regimes) and social inequalities (around work, care, communities and families, in particular in relation to gender, generations, and sexuality). Yerkes is the principal investigator of the European Research Council (ERC) project CAPABLE, a comparative study on gender inequalities in work-life balance in eight European countries, and of COGIS-NL (COVID-19 Gender (In)equality Survey Netherlands), a longitudinal research project involving researchers from Utrecht University and Radboud University Nijmegen. She is the author of numerous articles and books, including *Transforming the Dutch Welfare State: Social Risks and Corporatist Reform* (2011; Policy Press) and two co-edited volumes appearing in 2022: *Solidarity and Social Justice in Contemporary Societies: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Understanding Social Inequalities* (from Palgrave), and *Changing European Societies: The Role for Social Policy Research* (Edward Elgar).



Dr. Janna Besamusca is assistant professor of Interdisciplinary Social Science at Utrecht University. She's a labour sociologist interested in work and family issues, (minimum) wages and working hours. She has conducted research into decent work in low wage sectors, wages in collective bargaining, self-employment and motherhood, and the effects of work-family policies on mothers' labour market position. She is a part of the multi-university COGIS-NL team that researchers how Dutch parents combine work and family in times of COVID-19. Besamusca is a member of the FEPS-FES expert group analysing the EU Gender Equality Strategy by placing the role of care work and jobs at the center of our common activities in 2020. From a progressive perspective we are raising the question: does Europe care for care?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank the stakeholders and academics who participated in the online stakeholder event *Part-time Work: What's at Stake?* on 11 February 2021. Their insights and contributions form the basis for this report. The event and this report were also made possible through funding from Utrecht University's [Gender and Diversity Hub](#) and the [ERC CAPABLE](#) project, a project that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon2020 Research Innovation Programme (grant agreement no 771290).

ABOUT THE PROJECT

It took us a global pandemic to realise that we depend on care. But despite all the clapping from the balconies, caregivers continue to live and work in precarious and vulnerable conditions. It is high time for a care revolution! We need to move away from a profit-driven model of growth to a care-driven model. In this spirit, the Foundation for European Progressive Studies and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung launched a Social Democratic Initiative for the EU Gender Equality Strategy, placing the role of care work and care jobs at the center of our common activities. By raising the question "Does Europe Care for Care?", we focus on care as a cross-cutting issue and promote the cross-fertilization of progressive thinking between stakeholders across Europe. Building on our network of care experts, this Care4Care Policy Brief Series gives center stage to a long overseen phenomenon that deserves the fullest political relevance and attention. The series identifies common challenges and possible good practices across countries, whilst drawing concrete recommendations with the objective of feeding into national and EU level policy responses.

ABOUT FEPS

The Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) is the think tank of the progressive political family at EU level. Our mission is to develop innovative research, policy advice, training and debates to inspire and inform progressive politics and policies across Europe. We operate as hub for thinking to facilitate the emergence of progressive answers to the challenges that Europe faces today. FEPS works in close partnership with its members and partners, forging connections and boosting coherence among stakeholders from the world of politics, academia and civil society at local, regional, national, European and global levels. In addition to this network of organisations that are active in the promotion of progressive values, FEPS also has an extensive network of partners, including renowned universities, scholars, policymakers and activists.

ABOUT FES

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is a non-profit German foundation funded by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany, and headquartered in Bonn and Berlin. It was founded in 1925 and is named after Germany's first democratically elected President, Friedrich Ebert. FES is committed to the advancement of both socio-political and economic development in the spirit of social democracy, through civic education, research, and international cooperation. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung is the oldest political foundation in Germany.

This publication series was produced with the financial support of the European Parliament. It does not represent the collective views of the Foundation for European Progressive Studies and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, but only the opinion of the respective authors. The responsibility of the Foundation for European Progressive Studies and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung is limited to approving its publication as worthy of consideration for the global progressive movement.

Foundation for European Progressive Studies

Avenue des Arts, 46
1000 Brussels (Belgium)
T: +32 2 234 69 00
Email: info@fepe-europe.eu
Website: www.fepe-europe.eu
Twitter @FEPS_Europe

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

Hiroshimastraße 17/28
10785 Berlin (Germany)
T: +49 (0)30 269 35-6
Email: info@fes.de
Website: www.fes.de
Twitter @FESonline

Editors and Project Coordinators

Laeticia Thissen (FEPS, Policy Analyst for Gender Equality) & Agnes Mach (FES EU Office, Policy Officer for Political Education and Gender Equality)

Design and Layout

pertext, Berlin | www.pertext.de



FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE CARE4CARE PROJECT



Care4Care Project @ feps-europe.eu



Make Europe care for Care! Towards a fairer, care-focused Europe

Only a few handclaps in peak times of the COVID-19 pandemic will not suffice! Women bear the lion's share of paid and unpaid care work and they deserve a fair recognition thereof. And that is precisely where this year-round joint project of FES and the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) comes in with a series of analyses, events and concrete policy recommendations.

Care4Care Project @ fes.de

ON THE SAME TOPIC



It took a pandemic to understand the essential nature of care and to realise that it is embedded in every aspect of life. Contrary to mainstream economic thought, the functioning of our economy, social cohesion and social reproduction depends heavily on care. Giving and receiving care still remains undervalued due to deep-seated, socially constructed gender roles assigning women to unpaid or underpaid care work. Care has been treated, not as an essential value worthy of social investment, but a drain on budgets. A new care deal for the EU needs to embrace a more holistic approach to care. Setting such a framework could well be a European task, as not only does it include specific policy objectives for care, it also needs to be reinforced by care objectives within the current governance framework. Though limited by the framing of its treaties, the EU has instruments and means to establish a coherent care framework for the next generation that heeds the value of care and gender equality. To foster such an approach, the EU needs to integrate care into its macro-economic strategies, ensure better care regimes through its governance structures, intervene on public procurement rules as they apply to care; establish a human-centred working-hour regime; and promote a minimum wage floor directive. This paper sets forth an initial 10-point plan to address the current shortcomings of the existing provisions of care through a European approach.



In this first article of the FEPS-FES Care4Care Policy Brief Series, Dr. Petra Ezzedine (Charles University, Prague) questions the migration angle in the face of late modern societies' chronic care shortage. Their populations are ageing, and the traditional assumption that families (and predominantly their female members) represent an unlimited, endlessly flexible reservoir of care has been challenged. There is an indisputable social need for institutions to care for elderly people and for hired domestic care workers. The author explores how the EU relies on internal (predominantly female) migrants to provide much of the workforce to meet these needs. In view of how current care policies put them in a highly vulnerable labour position, this policy brief concludes with a set of short- and long-term conclusions.