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POLICY BRIEF AT EU
LEVEL

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The platformisation of home care: Navigating EU regulatory frameworks for care and digitalisation

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Introduction

This Policy Brief has been developed as part of the ORIGAMI Project (hOme caRe dIGital plAtforM and Industrial relations), funded by the European Commission and implemented by a consortium of academic institutions across six Member States and two Brussels-based organisations, namely the European Social Observatory (OSE) and the European Confederation of Industrial and Service Cooperatives (CECOP).¹ Conceived as part of the project's European-level analysis, it explores how the EU's digital social agenda – in particular the Directive on Improving Working Conditions in Platform Work (2024), hereafter the Platform Work Directive (PWD) – will reshape the governance of work in care and domestic services performed through digital platforms. Domestic work, in particular, now makes up a growing and already important part of the platform economy, estimated at around 22% of all platform work performed in Europe (Council of the European Union, 2024). While the primary focus of this analysis is on understanding the social dimension of digitalisation and its regulatory implications for platform work, a secondary focus situates these developments within the broader European policy framework for long-term care (LTC), which includes the European Care Strategy (2022) and the Council Recommendation on Long-Term Care (2022), hereafter the 2022 Council Recommendation.

This is done through the specific lens of the home care sector, as this sector emerges as the most prominent and rapidly expanding segment in national contexts, as documented in the case studies underpinning this analysis. Home care platforms represent a significant share of digital intermediation in personal services, and thus provide a particularly relevant starting point for exploring how digitalisation reshapes employment relations, working conditions, and the provision of essential social services. Besides, the broader landscape and typologies of digital labour platforms (DLPs) have been comprehensively analysed by Bonifacio and Pais (2025). Building on that work, the present analysis does not aim to replicate this mapping, but rather to extend the discussion by situating home care platforms within the European policy agenda for care and digitalisation. Moreover, the focus on home care reflects the EU's own prioritisation of the care sector in recent policy initiatives, including the European Care Strategy and the 2022 Council Recommendation. In any case, the dual perspective, examining digitalisation and situating it within the European policy framework for LTC, allows the Policy Brief both to engage with the digital

¹ The ORIGAMI project investigates the platformisation of home care and cleaning services in Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, and Spain – countries representing distinct welfare regimes and industrial relations systems. The comparative evidence gathered through these case studies informs the EU-level reflections developed in this Policy Brief.

transformation of labour markets and to contextualise it within the EU's evolving approach to care as a *social right*.

The EU's ambition to create a Digital Europe is intended to be accompanied by social requirements and legislation. This vision is captured most clearly in the long and toughly negotiated Platform Work Directive, which situates fairness, transparency, and workers' rights at the core of digital regulation. The Directive is a milestone in improving conditions in the digital market and governance. Within this broader framework, the ORIGAMI Policy Brief examines how the principles embedded in the Platform Work Directive – such as the presumption of employment, algorithmic transparency, and worker participation – apply to the growing field of platform-mediated care work. The national case studies conducted under the ORIGAMI project reveal how digital platforms are reshaping home care and domestic services, often reproducing informality and fragmentation while also creating new opportunities for regularisation and visibility. By linking these findings to the EU's digital regulatory instruments, the Brief asks whether and how European legislation can secure fair working conditions and adequate social protection for workers operating in these often-invisible labour markets.

At the same time, the analysis acknowledges that platformisation is occurring within a policy ecosystem already shaped by the European Care Strategy and the 2022 Council Recommendation. Moreover, the Council Recommendation on Access to Social Protection for Workers and the Self-Employed (2019), and earlier directives such as the Temporary Agency Work Directive (2008), are also relevant to this reflection, as most of these workers are in non-standard employment or are self-employed. These instruments form the institutional backdrop against which the digital transformation of care should be understood. Together, they express the EU's commitment to modernising social protection systems, ensuring universal access to quality care, and promoting fair labour standards across diverse employment forms.

Yet challenges persist, since the Directive's one-size-fits-all model is hard to implement in the home care and domestic work sector. Furthermore, the ORIGAMI Policy Brief argues that the convergence between digitalisation and LTC offers both challenges and opportunities for the future of Social Europe. It invites reflection on how the EU can harness the digital transition to reinforce, rather than weaken, social rights. How can the Platform Work Directive be implemented in a way that captures the specific realities of care and domestic work? What role can EU institutions and Member States play in aligning digital governance with the objectives of the European Care Strategy? And how might this intersection contribute to building a fair, inclusive, and sustainable European care economy for the digital age?

The Policy Brief is structured as follows. Section 1 sets the scene and describes the challenges, trends and perspectives relevant to the home care sector in the EU. Section

2 introduces the EU Care Framework, i.e. the European Care Strategy and 2022 Council Recommendation, and its interrelation with national practices. Section 3 presents the core of the Brief, examining how DLPs are transforming home care and domestic work, offering flexibility but also increasing precarity in several cases. Section 4 reviews the Platform Work Directive – its rules on employment status, algorithmic management, and collective rights – and its potential impact on care and domestic platform workers. Section 5 discusses platform cooperatives as fairer alternatives. The final section outlines policy reflections and recommendations, highlighting avenues for strengthening consistency between the EU's digital and social policy frameworks.

1. Setting the scene: the home care sector in the EU – challenges, trends and perspectives

The home care sector across the EU plays a crucial role in enabling independent living and supporting ageing populations, while also complementing family care responsibilities. However, the provision of care services remains highly fragmented and uneven, reflecting the diversity of welfare models, funding mechanisms, and regulatory frameworks across Member States. Growing demand for LTC has intensified pressures on national systems to expand access, ensure affordability, and maintain quality standards.

The organisation of home care across the EU involves a diverse mix of public, private, and informal actors operating under varying national regulations and financing schemes. In many Member States, service provision is characterised by decentralisation, limited coordination between health and social care systems, and uneven access across regions (European Commission and Social Protection Committee, 2021). While some countries have moved toward greater professionalisation and formalisation of home care, others continue to rely heavily on informal or family-based arrangements. In this context, the expansion of digital and platform-based services has further diversified the care sector, introducing new actors and delivery models but also raising concerns about quality assurance, equity, and accountability in care provision (Bonifacio and Pais, 2025).

Access to formal home care services in the EU is highly unequal due to variations in eligibility rules, funding, and regional availability, with rural areas particularly affected by workforce shortages and limited infrastructure. High costs and limited public provision force many older people and persons with disabilities to rely on unpaid family care, reinforcing gender inequalities and risking greater disparities as demand for LTC grows (European Commission and Social Protection Committee, 2021; Ghailani et al., 2024; Pavolini and Marlier, 2024). Available data confirm the limited access to formal

home care services: in 2022, the EU average share of people aged 65+ receiving public home care services was only 5.5%, with Malta (18.2%), the Netherlands (17.8%) and Belgium (15.2%) reporting significantly higher rates and Croatia (0.3%), Portugal (0.6%) and Bulgaria (0.7%) showing the lowest rates among EU Member States (European Commission, 2025).

Ensuring high-quality home care across the EU is hindered by inconsistent training standards, fragmented oversight, and the absence of comprehensive national and EU-wide quality frameworks. Weak regulation of home-based and digitally mediated care further complicates monitoring and accountability, leading to uneven service quality despite ongoing national reform efforts (European Commission and Social Protection Committee, 2021).

Home care governance and financing across the EU are highly diverse, with decentralised systems often producing regional inequalities in access, quality, and funding. Limited coordination between health and social care, combined with growing fiscal pressures and reliance on private or informal care, threatens the equity and financial sustainability of long-term care systems (European Commission and Social Protection Committee, 2021).

In this Policy Brief, the main focus is on employment and working conditions.

1.1. Employment and working conditions

Behind the growing demand for home care lies a workforce that is predominantly female, often migrant, and frequently employed under precarious or non-standard arrangements (Ghailani et al., 2024). Despite their essential role, home care workers face persistent challenges including low pay, limited access to social protection, and ambiguous employment status. The sector's high level of informality and fragmented regulation contributes to weak enforcement of labour rights and inconsistent working conditions across Member States.

1.1.1. Fragmentation of employment arrangements and informality

A key challenge facing the home care workforce across many EU Member States is its persistently high levels of fragmentation and informality. Even in cases where formal employment exists, the nature of these arrangements varies significantly across national frameworks and contract types, encompassing a mix of formal and informal work. Domestic and home care workers frequently operate under precarious or ambiguous employment conditions, often engaged in non-standard forms of work (e.g. part-time, temporary, or platform-based arrangements) that limit access to social and labour protection (Ghailani et al., 2024). The widespread use of bogus self-employment further complicates employment classification, making it difficult to ensure compliance with labour rights and social contribution obligations. This is even

more problematic in the case of domestic work provided through DLPs (see Section 3).

In many EU Member States, domestic workers may be employed: (a) directly by private households on the basis of various employment relationships, including self-employment and undeclared work; (b) indirectly through platforms or intermediary recruiting agencies; and (c) under micro-entrepreneur regimes (Bonifacio and Pais, 2025; Ghailani et al., 2024). This diversity of employment arrangements results in different social security entitlements and contributes to the overall fragmentation of the sector, hampering efforts to establish coherent regulatory standards across the EU.

1.1.2. Poor working conditions, enforcement gaps and regulatory challenges

The legal and regulatory ambiguity that characterises the home care sector undermines the consistent application of EU labour law, particularly in relation to minimum wage entitlements, working time limits, and access to social protection. Ambiguous or non-standard employment relationships, along with the prevalence of self-employment in the sector, make it difficult to identify employer responsibility and ensure compliance with statutory obligations. This creates a regulatory grey zone in which many home care workers are effectively excluded from labour rights and social security coverage. In addition, low pay and poor working conditions are widespread across the sector (Eurofound, 2020; European Commission and Social Protection Committee, 2021). The persistence of undeclared and informal work in the home care sector exacerbates these issues (ELA, 2021).

Monitoring and enforcement mechanisms remain especially difficult due to the nature of the workplace, where tasks are performed outside standard oversight mechanisms. This, in turn, makes home care workers especially vulnerable to exploitative conditions and non-enforcement of labour law (Ghailani et al., 2024). Labour inspectorates frequently lack the legal authority or operational capacity to access private homes, which are protected by privacy laws. As a result, oversight of working time, pay, and occupational safety is often limited or entirely absent. Even in cases where domestic workers formally enjoy the same legal rights as other employees, these rights are seldom realised in practice (Ghailani et al., 2024; Pavolini and Marlier, 2024). The combination of weak inspection mechanisms, fragmented regulation, and limited cross-agency coordination creates significant enforcement gaps at national level.

1.1.3. Skills and professionalisation

Another important challenge concerns the lack of a skilled, adequately trained, and professionalised LTC workforce. Despite growing and increasingly complex care needs, training systems and career structures remain fragmented and undervalued,

limiting both service quality and the attractiveness of care jobs. In many Member States, provision of LTC services does not require formal qualifications, and available training programmes are short, inconsistent, or voluntary. Robust professionalisation frameworks – including mandatory basic qualifications, comprehensive training programmes, and certification systems to validate existing skills – are needed to ensure more consistent standards of care and improve career prospects for workers (Ghailani et al., 2024).

1.1.4. Collective bargaining and social dialogue

Evidence highlights that social dialogue in the home care and domestic work sectors remains fragmented, sporadic, and often confined to isolated pilot initiatives (Bjerre, Ilsøe and Larsen, 2025). The limited integration of home care into national collective bargaining frameworks is closely linked to the private and individualised nature of the work, as well as to the composition of the workforce (predominantly women, migrants, and part-time workers) who are often in a weak bargaining position (Bonifacio and Pais, 2025). The combination of weak collective representation, ambiguous employment relationships and limited regulatory oversight continues to undermine the establishment of fair and sustainable labour standards in an increasingly digitalised and fragmented home care and cleaning sector. These deficits in representation and protection not only exacerbate precarity among workers but also have direct implications for the continuity, quality, and reliability of care provision.

2. The EU care framework and the interrelation with national practices

This section focuses on the findings of four ORIGAMI national Policy Briefs in the light of the EU-level provisions on LTC.

2.1. An overview of national practices

The countries under scrutiny embody distinct welfare logics, shaped by their institutional traditions, labour market structures, and cultural understandings of care (for more information see also Pavolini, 2022).

In **France**, LTC operates under a strongly state-regulated and fiscally incentivised structure, based on instruments such as the *Chèque emploi service universel (CESU)* and multiple service models (direct employment, *mandataire*, and *prestataire*). These models encourage formal employment yet perpetuate fragmentation and regulatory ambiguity, particularly in cases involving digital platforms that blur the lines of employer responsibility (Teke-Laurent et al., 2025). By contrast, the **Dutch** system is an archetype of multi-level governance, coordinated through statutory frameworks

that separate medical, community, and domestic care. Although universalistic in design, it remains administratively fragmented and marked by much informal labour in households.

Italy occupies an intermediary space between Mediterranean familialism and corporatist hybridisation. With decentralised regional competences, Italy relies heavily on migrant and informal labour. However, initiatives such as the *Family Assistant* demonstrate emerging attempts to formalise digital care mediation under municipal partnerships, including training and certification consistent with European social service standards (Bonifacio et al., 2025).

Ireland, with its predominantly privatised provision and lack of a statutory right to home care, has a residual welfare configuration. The proliferation of private agencies and platforms such as *Home Care Direct* reflects both innovation and vulnerability: while flexible, these mechanisms perpetuate the invisibility and precariousness of care labour in a fragmented regulatory landscape (Murphy et al., 2025).

While France and the Netherlands, then, display higher formalisation, Italy and Ireland rely on fragmented, market-oriented frameworks. Nonetheless, all of them face similar challenges regarding workforce sustainability, gendered labour divisions, and how to integrate technology without diminishing social protection.

2.2. The EU Care Framework – what scope for convergence?

The European Care Strategy (European Commission, 2022) and the 2022 Council Recommendation constitute pivotal reference points for understanding EU policies regarding LTC governance. Both frameworks express LTC as a social right under Principle 18 of the European Pillar of Social Rights, encompassing universal access, quality assurance, and fair working conditions. The Recommendation explicitly addresses three structural dimensions: adequacy and affordability, workforce conditions, and governance coordination. It calls on Member States to develop balanced care mixes (home, community, and residential), professionalise care occupations, and embed quality assurance through national frameworks aligned with EU quality principles (Council of the European Union, 2022).

As widely found by previous research, the comparative evidence from the Policy Briefs confirms the uneven alignment between EU guidance and national practice.² In France, the Recommendation's call for enhanced quality frameworks and labour protection is mirrored in state supervision and fiscal measures, yet undermined by fragmented regulation across employment models. The Netherlands demonstrates compatibility with EU principles on decentralised quality governance,

² The objective of this Brief is not to assess how the 2022 Recommendation has been implemented or taken into account in the different countries – doing so would require an in-depth process-tracing analysis. In other words, the Brief does not evaluate the causal impact of legal frameworks or national systems; it simply juxtaposes or superimposes these elements to provide a comparative overview.

though the system lacks coherence in addressing informality. In Italy, the EU's emphasis on professional pathways and collective bargaining aligns with ongoing efforts to integrate training and migrant workforce programmes, partly funded through EU cohesion policy instruments. Ireland remains most distant from the 2022 Council Recommendation's expectations: while reform is underway, reliance on private provision and delayed statutory reform expose gaps in accessibility, coordination, and social rights.

2.3. Professionalisation, workforce equity and digitalisation

The European Care Strategy and the 2022 Council Recommendation provide the EU's social-policy compass for LTC, organised around access/adequacy, workforce conditions, and coordinated governance with quality assurance. While legally non-binding, the package commits the Commission to support implementation via guidance, indicators, peer learning and EU funding (ESF+, EU4Health, InvestEU), with monitoring by the Social Protection Committee.

The European Care Strategy and the 2022 Council Recommendation have certainly provided a valuable policy framework and resulted in concrete measures at both EU and national levels. Monitoring of the 2022 Council Recommendation has been strengthened through thematic reporting and mutual learning events (European Commission and SPC, 2024; 2025). Moreover, a key element introduced by the European Care Strategy – the establishment of national long-term care coordinators – is addressed explicitly: all Member States have designated coordinators or coordination mechanisms, although their mandates, capacities, and involvement in policy planning vary widely (European Commission and Social Protection Committee, 2025). In the national monitoring plans, most Member States refer to reforms and measures taken or expanded since the adoption of the Recommendation in December 2022, while others also refer to measures planned for the future. Overall, the reporting indicates a high intensity of policy reforms and related investments in LTC over the past few years (European Commission and the Social Protection Committee, 2024).

On the social dialogue side, a European Social Dialogue Committee for social services, set up in 2023, brings together European employers and trade union organisations in the sector, representing approximately 9 million workers across the EU. Its work programme includes actions to retain and attract social service workers (related to upskilling, improving job quality, etc.), socially responsible public procurement for social services, and capacity-building activities for national social partner organisations, with a clear focus on the LTC sector. A self-assessment tool for a structured qualitative analysis of national LTC systems is also being developed as part of the strategic partnership with the World Health Organization.

With regard to monitoring Member States' progress, the European Semester also plays a key role in tracking reforms linked to the European Care Strategy. LTC has clearly gained visibility in the Semester cycles since 2022: LTC-related Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs) were issued in the 2024 and 2025 cycles, focusing on expanding service capacity, improving affordability, strengthening workforce development, and ensuring financial sustainability (European Commission and Social Protection Committee, 2024;2025).

Importantly, as far as broader digitalisation is concerned, the 2022 Council Recommendation also explicitly mentions the deployment of accessible digital solutions to support autonomy and independent living. It highlights, moreover, the gender dimension of care, noting the critical role of women as both carers and care recipients, and calls for decent working conditions, social dialogue and employment protection in the LTC workforce.

Funding and governance arrangements also emerge as areas where Member States need to further strengthen alignment with the European Care Strategy. It is important to note that no dedicated funding has been created for the European Care Strategy; instead, it is supported through a mix of national resources and several existing EU funding instruments. While Member States remain primarily responsible for financing and organising LTC, they are encouraged to use EU funding sources such as the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), Horizon Europe, Digital Europe, EU4Health, and the Technical Support Instrument to promote reforms and investments. These instruments provide financial support for modernising care systems, without replacing national responsibility for securing sustainable LTC funding. However, it remains up to each Member State to decide whether and how to use these EU funding opportunities for LTC. According to a recent European Commission thematic analysis, total reforms and investments in LTC under the RRF across all Member States amount to €8.1 billion. This funding covers care-facility construction and renovation, social and home-care services, community-based care, workforce training for caregivers and care workers, and support for home- and community-based social services (European Commission, 2025). In addition, €6.7 billion has been earmarked for health and LTC under the ESF+ for the 2021–2027 programming period (European Social Fund, 2023). Taken together, the RRF and ESF+ account for approximately €14.8 billion invested (i.e. €8.1 billion from the RRF and €6.7 billion from the ESF+). Additional funding has been channelled through the Technical Support Instrument, Digital Europe, and the EU4Health programme.

Although important progress has been made, implementation gaps persist, and monitoring tools require greater granularity, especially regarding territorial inequalities, unmet care needs, and the effectiveness of informal carer support measures. Progress remains uneven: accessibility, affordability and quality of LTC continue to be identified

as structural challenges in almost half of Member States, with persistent unmet needs linked to workforce shortages, insufficient service capacity and inadequate financing (European Commission and the Social Protection Committee, 2024; 2025).

Digital platforms further magnify these tensions. Across all contexts, digitalisation has emerged as both a tool of formalisation and a source of new precarity. While the European Care Strategy supports digital innovation to improve access and coordination, national developments are ambivalent: platform-mediated models enhance flexibility but often evade regulatory oversight. EU guidance encourages technological integration consistent with fairness and accountability principles, but enforcement remains a national competence, revealing a structural asymmetry between European intent and local implementation capacity.

Despite setting out a coherent EU-level vision for LTC, implementation across Member States remains fragmented and uneven. Persistent gaps in financing, data, and coordination mechanisms limit the Strategy's capacity to translate social-rights principles into enforceable entitlements (FEPS and FES, 2023). The absence of binding targets and indicators, combined with the soft law nature of the framework, has hindered progress toward structural reform and the reduction of workforce precarity (FEPS and FES, 2023). Early civil society monitoring shows that, while the Strategy has successfully raised the political visibility of care, national uptake has been slow and inconsistent, with several countries yet to develop concrete action plans or quality frameworks (Eurocarers, 2024). Stakeholder assessments highlight that progress on improving employment and working conditions for care workers remains modest, with many continuing to face low pay, informality, and weak social protection (AGE Platform Europe, 2022). In addition, the Strategy has been criticised for lacking enforceable rights and adequate resourcing to support a shift from institutional to community-based care, a concern particularly emphasised by the disability movement (EDF, 2022). For platform-based home care, the Strategy's social aims can intersect with the binding provisions of the Platform Work Directive on employment status and algorithmic management, suggesting a combined route to professionalisation, quality, and fair working conditions in care conducted in private households.

3. Old and new challenges in the era of digital labour platforms

The emergence of DLPs has reshaped multiple sectors, including service provision and employment relations in domestic and care work – an area traditionally underrepresented in debates on the platform economy (De Stefano et al., 2022; Flanagan, 2019). In France, for example, regulation has so far been focused on mobility platforms (Teke-Laurent et al., 2025). Nevertheless, some of the attention in the policy

and academic date has now shifted to domestic platform work (Pulignano et al., 2023). Between 2010 and 2020, the number of platforms in this sector grew from 28 to 224 globally (ILO, 2021).

While platform-based models enhance flexibility, accessibility, and visibility for domestic and care work – previously hidden within private households – they also replicate and intensify long-standing sectoral vulnerabilities (Aloisi, Murphy et al., 2024; Potocka-Sionek, 2025). Existing problems in the home care sector – such as working time insecurity, income instability (Pulignano et al., 2023) and physical and psychosocial strain – are often amplified by digital platforms (ILO, 2021).

Algorithmic scheduling leads to unpredictable hours, very short or long hours (Kirsten, 2021) and unpaid stand-by time (Durri, 2023), including waiting for assignments, commuting between households, or performing emotional labour (Aloisi and Potocka-Sionek, 2025; Pulignano et al., 2023). These dynamics contribute to unstable earnings and in-work poverty, disproportionately affecting women, who make up the majority of care workers and are already systemically undervalued (Sedacca, 2022).

The employment status insecurity of domestic workers is further exacerbated by the fact that the majority of platforms apply a self-employment model, notwithstanding the reality of the work relationship between the parties. This deprives platform workers of statutory entitlements, such as minimum wage, working time, paid leave, health insurance, and pension schemes (Bonifacio and Pais, 2025).

A significant challenge facing the home care workforce across the EU is the limited representation of workers and the low coverage of collective agreements, issues that are even more pronounced in the case of platform workers (Eurofound, 2018). Fragmented workplaces, algorithmic management, and dependence on customer ratings further undermine collective organising (Novitz, 2021). Platforms frequently resist collective agreements, claiming that they are not employers, which exacerbates workers' precarity.

In addition to perpetuating previous challenges experienced by home care and domestic workers, the platformisation of care brings forth a combination of high vulnerability and algorithmic control. "Algorithmic management comes home" (Aloisi and Potocka-Sionek, 2025), and with it, magnified control over workers. The control is not always direct and can be exercised indirectly, notably through the rating/ranking system (Adams-Prassl, 2018). Worker performance is monitored, ranked, and disciplined through opaque rating systems that determine access to future work. This indirect form of control heightens performance pressure (Bonifacio and Pais, 2025) and can lead to deactivation for perceived underperformance or client dissatisfaction. The blurred responsibility between platforms and clients makes accountability for working conditions and rights violations more difficult to determine (Aloisi and Potocka-Sionek, 2025).

Without effective regulatory intervention at both national and EU levels, digital platforms risk intensifying insecurity in home care rather than improving its quality or sustainability.

4. The EU Platform Work Directive's response to key challenges

4.1. Some considerations on the specifics of platform-enabled care and domestic work

ORIGAMI researchers focus on four main organisational models in the personal and household services sector (Bonifacio et al., 2025). These models differ according to the degree of platform control over the matching process and/or the employment relationship:

- *Marketplace* – the platform manages neither the matching process nor the employment relationship;
- *Digital agency* – the platform manages both matching and regularisation (either as an employer itself or by formalising the employment arrangement between the parties);
- *On-demand* – the platform manages the matching process but not the employment relationship;
- *Regulated marketplace* – the platform does not directly manage matching but ensures the regularisation of the employment relationship, either directly or indirectly.

The business model adopted, with varying degrees of control over workers, is crucial for the legal responsibility of platforms and the employment status of workers.

Domestic platform work presents distinctive challenges compared to other segments of the platform economy. Work is performed within private households, limiting direct platform supervision. Responsibility for working conditions is often shared or blurred between platforms and clients (Aloisi and Potocka-Sionek, 2025), which makes it more difficult to identify the employer and classify the employment appropriately. Platforms such as Helpling and Hups in the Netherlands are examples of platforms operating within legal grey zones of the Domestic Work Regulation (*Regeling Dienstverlening aan Huis*) (Hesselink and Been, 2025).

Home care introduces additional complexities due to its emotional and relational nature, as well as the vulnerability of clients. Unlike typical platform work based on short-term tasks, care work is inherently relational and depends on stable, continuous and trustworthy relationships, making fragmented, short-term or task-based platform models poorly suited to delivering quality support. The private home setting, moreover, raises safety concerns for both parties, including risks of harassment or abuse.

Given these considerations, the unique features of domestic platform work make the application of a one-size-fits-all solution challenging.

4.2. The Platform Work Directive's impact on domestic platform workers

The EU Platform Work Directive aims to respond to these structural challenges, offering a potential regulatory lever for improving conditions in platform-mediated care and domestic work.

4.2.1. Employment classification

A central pillar of the Directive is the rebuttable legal presumption of an employment relationship (Article 5), designed to address widespread misclassification of workers. The employment presumption does not lead to an automatic reclassification of all platform workers as employees (Durri, 2025). Instead, it functions as a procedural facilitator making reclassification easier when factual indicators of control and direction are present. These need to be established in an administrative or judicial proceeding. Given that DLPs have a complete overview of the facts of the case (Recital 34), the presumption shifts the burden of proof onto the platform. Member States retain discretion over implementation but must respect the principle of effectiveness, ensuring that procedural criteria are not unduly restrictive (Recital 31, Article 5, Article 30). To ensure effective implementation of the presumption, the PWD mandates Member States to ensure effective controls and inspections by their national authorities (Article 6 (c)). This obligation is particularly difficult to fulfil given the privacy constraints that arise when private homes serve as workplaces.

When effectively applied, the presumption could lead to the reclassification of domestic platform workers from self-employed to employees, granting them access to basic labour and social protection rights. Since most carers are women, it is essential that they are granted rights such as maternity and parental leave. The collective agreement between the cleaning platform Hilfr and the union 3F in Denmark highlights that employment-based models are a viable option, particularly in sectors such as domestic and cleaning services (Bjerre et al., 2025).

The diversity of business models in the domestic work sector has significant implications for employment classification. It is worth noting that the Directive applies only in cases where a DLP³ is present (Article 2) and where a relationship of control and direction can be established. The two contrasting and most common business models

³ A DLP is a natural or legal person providing a service which meets all of the following requirements: (i) it is provided, at least in part, at a distance by electronic means, such as by means of a website or a mobile application; (ii) it is provided at the request of a recipient of the service; (iii) it involves, as a necessary and essential component, the organisation of work performed by individuals in return for payment, irrespective of whether that work is performed online or in a certain location; (iv) it involves the use of automated monitoring systems or automated decision-making systems.

– marketplace and digital agency – show that different employment outcomes are possible.

In **marketplace models**, where platforms exercise no control over workers and play no role in matching, the PWD's presumption does not apply. Instead, other EU legal frameworks can be applied to improve the legal situation of self-employed platform workers. The 2019 Council Recommendation on access to social protection for workers and self-employed⁴ provides for access to social protection for all workers, including the self-employed. It promotes legal, effective, adequate and transparent access to social protection. Although it is not legally binding, it sets out a common direction and political commitment across the EU to modernise and make social protection systems more inclusive, especially in the light of new and non-standard forms of work, such as platform work. The 2019 Platform-to-Business Regulation (P2B)⁵ may also be partially relevant, as it provides safeguards ensuring fairness and transparency for self-employed persons performing platform work, as long as they qualify as business users under Article 2 (1) of the Regulation. However, this definition requires business users to act in a professional capacity rather than as private individuals, thereby excluding a large share of domestic – and indeed many – platform workers from its scope (Verhuyck, 2024). Another relevant instrument is the 2022 European Commission Communication, which gives guidelines on the application of Union competition law to collective agreements regarding the working conditions of solo self-employed persons.⁶ Despite their soft law nature, the guidelines constitute an important step for the collective bargaining rights of genuinely self-employed platform workers. They highlight the antitrust position of the European Commission, affirming that collective agreements between genuinely self-employed platform workers and DLPs do not infringe EU competition law (Durri et al., 2025). The guidelines are also explicitly referenced in the Platform Work Directive (Recital 29).

Conversely, in **digital agency models**, which go beyond simple matchmaking and involve elements of control and direction by the platform or the client, the presumption of employment could be applicable. In this case, the PWD explicitly provides that “where a party is found to be an employer and fulfils the conditions of being a temporary work agency in accordance with Directive 2008/104/EC, the obligations under that Directive apply” (Recital 26). In other words, if a domestic service platform hires workers and then sends them to households who direct their work, it could be

⁴ Council Recommendation of 8 November 2019 on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed (2019/C 387/01).

⁵ Regulation (EU) 2019/1150 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on promoting fairness and transparency for business users of online intermediation services.

⁶ Communication from the Commission, Guidelines on the application of Union competition law to collective agreements regarding the working conditions of solo self-employed persons, 2022/C 374/02, OJ C 374, 30 September 2022.

covered by the definition in the Temporary Agency Work Directive (Article 3 (b) and (c)). National cases show that platforms act as temporary work agencies. In the Dutch *Helping* case,⁷ for instance, the court ruled that the platform constituted a private employment agency, whereas employers' obligations remained with the individual households. Under Dutch law, the DLP had to comply with related regulatory requirements, such as registration and record-keeping duties, even though it was not the employer.

However, without registration as an employment agency, a platform risks not being recognised as bearing the responsibilities of an employer (Bonifacio et al., 2025). A useful point of reference in this context is the French *mandataire* model, in which the household has legal employer status, while the agency (the platform) – authorised through a simplified state accreditation procedure that is less stringent than that for traditional employment agencies – may carry out key employment functions such as payment, leave management, and terminations, in line with the national collective agreement (Teke-Laurent et al., 2025). The relationship is governed by a delegation contract specifying the respective responsibilities of each party.

As Bonifacio et al. (2025) rightly observe, the registration of digital platforms operating in the domestic work sector as temporary employment agencies may also give rise to bureaucratic challenges, such as the practice of issuing separate payslips for each individual assignment, even when multiple assignments come from the same employer. To this end, the authors propose policy solutions such as a monthly administrative aggregation obligation, the standardisation of payroll processes and the monitoring of contribution flows.

Overall, the typology of the platform – ranging from marketplace to digital agency – plays a decisive role in determining whether the presumption of employment applies and which EU legal instruments govern the employment relationship. Effective implementation will require Member States to adapt the presumption in a way that recognises this diversity while ensuring that domestic and care workers benefit from fair working conditions. Thus far, practical developments suggest that Member States remain uncertain about how to implement the presumption and have been slow in transposing the PWD.⁸ As Murphy and colleagues note, Ireland has been particularly slow in adapting to and regulating platform work, with a landmark legal case on employment rights emerging only in 2024 (Murphy et al., 2025).

⁷ Gerechtshof Amsterdam, 21 September 2021 – ECLI:NL:GHAMS:2021:2741; Hoge Raad der Nederlanden, 24 March 2023 – ECLI:NL:HR:2023:443.

⁸ This is reflected in the ongoing discussions between social partners and the European Commission regarding the adoption of a Transposition Report, scheduled for publication at the end of 2025.

4.2.2. Algorithmic management

The inclusion of an algorithmic management chapter in the PWD is a major innovation in EU labour regulation (Durri et al., 2025). It extends key rights and protections not only to employees but also to genuine self-employed platform workers (Rainone and Aloisi, 2024). Regardless of the typology adopted by the platform, platform-based carers and domestic workers benefit from transparency, fairness, and accountability in algorithmic monitoring and decision-making.

In terms of transparency, platform workers must be informed about the use of automated systems, the actions monitored and the purpose of monitoring, the categories and grounds for decisions taken, especially if they have a detrimental effect on workers (Article 9). To this end, platform-based carers and domestic workers can gain clarity about essential aspects of their work, such as how work is allocated, how ratings affect them, and the rationale for deactivation of their account. Furthermore, the protection against termination by the platform includes a right to ask for explanations for unfair deactivation and to contest unfair decisions, if the explanation is not satisfactory (Article 11).

An important provision for the protection of home care and domestic workers from discriminatory algorithmic practices is the obligation introduced for DLPs to carry out impact assessments evaluating how the processing of personal data by means of automated systems affects protection of the workers' personal data (Article 8). This ensures that platforms identify and mitigate algorithmic bias and discrimination, particularly on grounds such as gender, race, or age. This is especially relevant in domestic and home care work, where women, migrants, and older workers are overrepresented. Furthermore, given the potential detrimental impact of automated systems, especially in producing discrimination, platforms are required to put in place human resources to monitor and evaluate them (Article 10).

The algorithmic management provisions of the PWD have been impactful even before implementation and transposition. A notable example is the renegotiated 2024 Hilfr agreement – widely known as Hilfr2 – which introduced new provisions on algorithmic management, including a worker's right to contest algorithmic decisions before labour courts (Bjerre et al., 2025).

Despite these advances, risks of superficial compliance remain. Platforms may provide only generic algorithmic disclosures or invoke trade secrecy to avoid meaningful transparency. Without robust enforcement and clear disclosure standards, workers' ability to exercise their new rights could be undermined.

4.2.3. Collective voice

The PWD marks a significant step forward for collective labour rights, by extending many (but not all) protections to self-employed platform workers. The Directive

promotes the right to collective bargaining (Article 25) and introduces an obligation for DLPs to facilitate communication channels between workers and their representatives (Article 20). Recital 62 explains that these channels are necessary due to a lack of a shared workplace. These measures aim to promote social dialogue in digital labour contexts, though their practical implementation remains uncertain for various reasons, such as the security of such channels from the platforms which are ultimately responsible for providing them (Ebenhöh et al., 2025).

The Hilfr2 agreement provides a practical illustration of how collective bargaining can be applicable in the platform economy. It allows the union to include on the platform a link featuring its logo, which directs workers to a dedicated digital space — a “digital union club” — that is exclusively accessible to workers and not to the company. “Digital union clubs” offer workers a safe, independent online space for interaction — anticipating Article 20 of the Directive (Bjerre et al., 2025). The union 3F has undertaken to provide multilingual services in the “digital union clubs” for workers with a foreign background. In addition to these union-operated channels, platforms can outsource the creation of such channels to for-profit third parties, dedicated not-for-profit organisations, or to internal teams created for this purpose (Ebenhöh et al., 2025). The establishment of effective communication channels means that domestic platform workers can interact with each other and with the union, elect their own representatives (including health and safety representatives and trade union delegates), and collectively discuss their working conditions (Bonifacio et al., 2025).

The PWD also sets out the right to information and consultation on decisions involving automated systems (Article 13). Nevertheless, restrictions placed on the representatives of self-employed platform workers result in a fragmented regulatory landscape, which can hinder the effective exercise of the right to collective bargaining (Article 15; Durri et al., 2025). In addition, multiparty constellations, such as the use of intermediaries, further complicate collective organisation, as it is unclear who unions should bargain with, given that platforms deny being employers.

Challenges to the representation of domestic platform workers have also been identified. In Ireland, traditional unions, such as the Industrial Professional Technical Union (SIPTU), which have experience representing domestic and migrant workers, face challenges in engaging and representing platform workers, who often remain fragmented and invisible (Murphy et al 2025). Similarly, trade unions in the Netherlands struggle to adequately represent household and platform-based labour (Hesselink and Been 2025). Bonifacio et al. (2025) therefore propose more flexible and innovative representation models specifically tailored to the unique characteristics of digital domestic work.

4.2.4. Health and safety

Under the PWD, the health and safety obligations extend to platform workers who have an employment relationship. Article 12 requires platforms to take preventive measures and establish reporting channels to protect workers' safety and health, including protection from violence and harassment. These provisions are especially important for care and domestic workers, who often work alone in private households and may face physical and psychosocial risks. Article 12 also obliges platforms to assess and mitigate such risks, including psychosocial hazards, which is particularly relevant for care and household workers exposed to stress, isolation, or client-related risks.

5. Unlocking the potential of platform cooperatives in the care sector⁹

While the Platform Work Directive is a top-down regulatory intervention, bottom-up initiatives such as platform cooperatives demonstrate how digitalisation can align with social justice and decent work.

Platform cooperatives, based on the more-than-a-century-old cooperative model (democratic governance and reinvestment of profits) have emerged as a powerful response to the challenges posed by the platform economy. Though still developing, their potential to reshape care work organised by digital platforms is enormous. This chapter explores how the platform cooperative model can help build a more inclusive, sustainable, and democratic platform care sector in Europe.

Digital labour cooperative platforms have appeared mainly in order to overcome social disruption linked to digital platforms, provide better work conditions for platform workers and to use technology to serve the community. These cooperatives are owned and governed democratically by their workers and/or users, ensuring that the value generated is shared equitably among all stakeholders. Unlike traditional capitalistic platforms, which prioritise shareholder profits, platform cooperatives emphasise ethical commitments such as social justice, workers' rights, sustainable consumption practices and support to their community. They fulfil their obligations toward the workers by providing them with the right status, as well as adequate protection for both employees and the self-employed. By combining cooperative principles with digital platforms, these cooperatives offer a viable alternative that leads to a more democratic and fairer digital space, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and just platform economy.

⁹ This section presents the voice of CECOP, the European Confederation of Industrial and Service Cooperatives.

Transposed to the care sector, platform cooperatives can empower care workers to become co-owners and co-decision-makers in their workplace. This drastically shifts the power dynamic, replacing top-down management and profit extraction with democratic governance, solidarity, and long-term community investment. By reinvesting their profits into the cooperative, prioritising fair contracts, decent pay, and work-life balance, platform cooperatives can directly respond to systemic issues in the care sector such as burnout and high turnover. Workers are more engaged, motivated, and likely to remain in the sector when they have ownership and a voice.

Platform cooperatives are embedded in the communities they serve and are often established by them to address a specific unmet need. Their governance models promote transparency, accountability, local adaptation, and inclusive services that reflect the needs of diverse populations; this is especially important in elder care, disability support, and domestic help, as they help build the communities they serve. Also, rather than using algorithms to control or monitor workers, platform cooperatives deploy technology to empower them. Crucially, workers own and control the data generated through the platform, ensuring that it serves their interests, instead of those of any external shareholders.

While the model has strong potential, several hurdles prevent it from achieving its potential. One of the most pressing issues highlighted by the cooperatives across EU and beyond¹⁰ is the existing monopoly/oligopoly and unfair competition from large capitalistic platforms, and, crucially, the lack of an appropriate legal framework for DLPs. These platforms often compete dishonestly by misclassifying workers and applying bogus self-employment, avoiding taxes and other employers' obligations, and using discriminatory algorithms. This creates an uneven landscape in which cooperative platforms, which prioritise ethical practices, higher work and social standards, struggle to compete. The lack of specific legislation intensifies this problem, allowing capitalistic platforms to operate with impunity and undermine the efforts of good-faith actors such as platform cooperatives. The Platform Work Directive is a great step forward, since it will remove some ambiguity and legal uncertainty and thus contribute to a more level playing field among platforms, especially for those applying higher social standards for workers, such as cooperatives.

Platform cooperatives have the power to reimagine care, placing dignity, equity, and community at the centre of a digital future. With the right legal frameworks, financial tools, public support and cooperative support structures, they can scale up from promising experiments to a widespread model for delivering fair, high-quality care across Europe, while providing more tailored solutions for communities and workers.

¹⁰ See the results of the survey organised by CICOPA (the International organization of Industrial and Service Cooperatives): https://www.cicopa.coop/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/CICOPA_report-survey-platform-coop.pdf

6. Conclusions and policy recommendations

6.1. Conclusions

The ORIGAMI Policy Brief highlights that the digitalisation of care and domestic services is one of the most tangible expressions of Europe's social transformation. What emerges from the analysis is a picture of profound institutional complexity: a field that combines technological innovation with persistent social inequalities, and that sits between two evolving policy domains – *digitalisation (especially platformisation)* and *care*. The EU has entered this space seeking, to some extent, to ensure that the digital transition strengthens rather than weakens the foundations of *Social Europe*.

The Platform Work Directive is the clearest manifestation of this ambition. By addressing employment classification, algorithmic management, and collective voice, the Directive offers a framework for rebalancing power in digital labour markets and extending significant protections to new forms of work. Yet, application of this framework to the care sector reveals both opportunities and limitations. Care platforms often operate in contexts marked by informality, gendered segmentation, and weak collective representation. The effectiveness of the Directive in this area therefore depends on its interaction with broader social policy instruments –such as the *European Care Strategy* (2022), the *Recommendation on Access to Social Protection*(2019), and national LTC policies.

The ORIGAMI findings suggest that platformisation in care may act as both a *driver* and a *mirror* of structural change. On the one hand, digital mediation can increase visibility, accountability, and traceability in sectors historically characterised by undeclared work. On the other hand, without adequate regulation and enforcement, it can deepen fragmentation, individualisation, and precarity. The challenge for EU policy is thus to align digital innovation with social rights, ensuring that algorithmic management and online intermediation are used to professionalise care, not to erode it.

The Platform Work Directive marks a significant step toward addressing the structural challenges of platform-mediated domestic and care work, yet its effectiveness will depend on national implementation. Its presumption of employment is a crucial tool to combat misclassification, but the diversity of business models – ranging from marketplaces to digital agencies – means that it must be applied in a nuanced way. The presumption does not apply to the marketplace model, due to a lack of control and direction. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the presumption may apply to digital agency models, where platforms exert control over workers. Effective implementation of the presumption will therefore require Member States to acknowledge the diversity

of business models within personal and household services, while ensuring that domestic and care workers enjoy fair working conditions.

The Platform Work Directive's chapter on algorithmic management introduces unprecedented transparency and accountability requirements, extending protection even to self-employed workers, although meaningful enforcement remains a concern. The PWD is a major step towards strengthening collective rights in the platform economy. Innovative examples, such as Denmark's Hilfr "digital union clubs," show the potential of digital tools for representation. Yet, the effectiveness of these measures will depend on robust implementation, protection from platform interference, and the capacity of unions to engage fragmented and migrant workforces through more flexible and inclusive models. Finally, the Directive's extension of health and safety obligations to platform contexts is particularly vital for the domestic and care sectors, where isolation and psychosocial risks are endemic. Overall, the PWD offers a robust framework to re-balance power asymmetries in the platform economy, but real progress will hinge on Member States' willingness to adapt its provisions to the complex realities of platform-enabled care and domestic work. On top of this, the potential for enhancing protections for domestic platform workers also lies in future EU and international legal instruments. In 2026, the ILO is expected to adopt a Convention on Platform Work (International Labour Conference, 2025) and the European Commission plans to introduce a Quality Jobs Act, designed to foster quality jobs in a competitive economy.¹¹ At the same time, however, the Commission's proposed Digital Omnibus¹² – intended to simplify the EU's digital regulatory framework – may, it seems, end up weakening some of the existing protections in this area.

The analysis reveals the need for stronger horizontal coordination between the EU's digital and social policy frameworks. While the digital transition is governed through binding regulation and enforcement, care policy remains anchored in soft coordination and voluntary convergence. Bridging these two governance modes – and ensuring that they reinforce rather than contradict one another – is essential for building a coherent European model of fair digitalisation in social services.

The interaction between national LTC trajectories and EU social governance embodies a broader process of gradual Europeanisation through soft coordination. The 2022 Council Recommendation's promotion of national coordinators, stakeholder involvement, and harmonised monitoring indicators reflects the EU's incremental move

¹¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and The Committee of the Regions, Quality Jobs Roadmap, Brussels, 4 December 2025 COM (2025) 944 final.

¹² Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulations (EU) 2016/1679, (EU) 2018/1724, (EU) 2018/1725, (EU) 2023/2854, (EU) 2024/1689 and Directives 2002/58/EC, (EU) 2022/2555 and (EU) 2022/2557 as regards the simplification of the digital legislative framework, and repealing Regulations (EU) 2018/1807, (EU) 2019/1150, (EU) 2022/868, and Directive (EU) 2019/1024 (Digital Omnibus).

toward shared policy goals. Rather than imposing convergence, this “coordinated subsidiarity” enables Member States to adapt EU benchmarks to national contexts, fostering experimentation under a common normative umbrella.

From an analytical standpoint, the ORIGAMI cases demonstrate how European policy discourse has begun reshaping national LTC debates. Hence, the EU’s Care Strategy and the 2022 Council Recommendation could be assessed as a paradigm of sustainable care, starting from fragmented welfare subsidiarity and moving towards a vision of social cohesion grounded in universal access, gender equality, and workforce recognition.

Important reforms in several Member States demonstrate tangible progress under the European Care Strategy and the 2022 Council Recommendation, with support from the RRF, ESF+ and the TSI helping to catalyse change. Yet implementation still varies widely, and persistent gaps in sustainable financing, data, coordination and territorial equity continue to limit the Strategy’s capacity to translate social-rights principles into enforceable entitlements. The soft-law nature of the framework – together with the absence of binding targets and robust indicators – also constrains its transformative potential, especially in tackling workforce precarity and unmet care needs.

The *platformisation* of care amplifies these challenges. While digital tools can support coordination, formalisation, and independent living, their rapid diffusion is outpacing regulatory capacity and can introduce new forms of precarity. Platform-mediated home care sits at the intersection of EU digital and social governance, revealing a structural asymmetry between binding digital regulation and voluntary convergence in care policy. Moreover, the implementation of the Platform Work Directive will also be shaped by national contexts, with divergent institutional capacities likely to produce uneven outcomes. Without stronger horizontal coordination and enforcement pathways, there is a risk that digitalisation will deepen inequalities rather than reinforcing the foundations of Social Europe.

In this context, the interaction between the European Care Strategy and the Platform Work Directive becomes essential. The Strategy’s vision for professionalisation, gender equality, and decent work in long-term care complements the Directive’s binding provisions on employment status and algorithmic management. This interaction offers a unique opportunity to ensure that platformisation supports, rather than undermines, fair working conditions and quality care provision in private households. Only by embedding technological change within the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights can the EU’s digital social agenda deliver on its promise of decent work and quality care for all.

Ultimately, the ORIGAMI Policy Brief calls for a redefinition of “innovation” in the care economy: one that recognises digital tools as not merely instruments of efficiency, but

as potential vehicles of inclusion, combatting undeclared work, promoting gender equality and professional recognition.

6.2. Policy Recommendations

1. Reinforce the social dimension of the digital transition.

Implement the *Platform Work Directive* with explicit attention to sectors where digital labour intersects with social care. The Directive's presumption of employment, algorithmic transparency provisions, and data access rights should be interpreted through a social lens that reflects the relational and gendered nature of care work.

When implementing the PWD, particular attention should be paid to strengthening the capacity of Member States to ensure effective labour inspections.

2. Strengthen the link between the digital and care agendas.

Ensure structured coordination between the European

and the Platform Work Directive. Establish joint monitoring processes to assess how digitalisation affects employment quality, working conditions, and access to care.

3. Support national implementation through dialogue and capacity building.

Encourage Member States to integrate the digitalisation of care work into their National Long-Term Care Action Plans and to strengthen the capacity of labour inspectorates, social partners, and local authorities to enforce new digital labour rules. EU funding streams (such as ESF+ and the Digital Europe Programme) should support training and data infrastructure for fair platform governance.

4. Promote collective representation and social dialogue in platform-based care.

Facilitate collective bargaining mechanisms and the establishment of sectoral agreements covering care platforms, drawing inspiration from the Danish Hilfr model and other emerging examples. The EU should promote guidance, exchange of good practice, financial support and social partner networks.

The Commission and social partners should support the European Social Dialogue Committee for social services and promote sector-specific agreements that cover digital care platforms. There should be a special focus on reaching fragmented, migrant, and self-employed care workers through inclusive organising models.

5. Transpose platform cooperatives to the care sector.

Transposed to the care sector, platform cooperatives can empower care workers to become co-owners and co-decision-makers at their workplace. By reinvesting their profits into the cooperative, prioritising fair contracts, decent

pay, and work-life balance, platform cooperatives can respond directly to systemic issues in the care sector, such as burnout and high turnover.

6. Develop a European framework for quality and professionalisation in digital care.

Complement the digital and labour dimensions with a common EU approach to the recognition of qualifications, training, and quality standards in home and care services. This would help reduce informality and strengthen worker mobility within the single market.

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