

UNI Care Conference

Warsaw 23-24 November, 2022



UNI Care Europa held its statutory meeting in Warsaw on 23-24 November. It was the first in-person meeting since the Covid-19 crisis.

UNICARE Europa President Frédéric Favraud and OPZZ-KP's Ania Bacia opened the meeting. Ania Bacia thanked UNI Care Europa affiliates for their support in helping her win her job back. Amongst others, video messages from Evelyn Regner, MEP for the S&D Group, and Grace Papa, EFFAT's Political Secretary Domestic Work sector, underlined the broad political support that UNI Care Europa has garnered in recent years.

Cooperating with UNI Equal Opportunities, the first day was dedicated to tackling violence and harassment in the care sector. Participants, especially care workers from Poland, shared their experiences of how third-party violence and harassment affects them physically and psychologically. The discussion was followed by a motion proposed by Belgian affiliate SETCa-BBTK, which was endorsed unanimously.

Building on the first session and UNI Care Europa's successful RETAIN project, the conference also discussed how high levels of labour turnover and staff shortages undermined workers' health and safety. Presentations from Christoph Zeiselberger from the Austrian union GPA and Pitt Bach from the Luxembourg OGB-L showed how UNI Care Europa affiliates have been campaigning on safe staffing levels and using their collective agreements to win improvements for workers in the sector.

Health and safety issues and violence and harassment of staff is particularly accentuated in nursing homes owned by Private Equity Groups (PEG). This ownership model has been on the rise in Britain, France, Germany, Switzerland. Rachel Harrison from the GMB Union showed the devastating consequences of Private Equity on social care, how these companies push their debt down on to the nursing homes, sell off the real estate and force nursing homes to pay rent. Despite these challenges, the GMB Union has been successful in winning recognition agreements and raising these issues associated with Private Equity with a larger public. The motion proposed by Force Ouvrière-FEC was unanimously endorsed.

The second day of the conference started with UNI Europa Regional Secretary's speech on Care, Collective Bargaining and the Cost-of-Living Crisis. In the speech he detailed the tasks ahead for unions to ensure that those care workers employed by private companies or working in persons' households don't become second class care workers but enjoy equal rights to those working in the public sector. According to Oliver Roethig, organizing is key to building union power in the care sector.

Over the last few years, UNICARE Europa and the COZZ Organizing Centre have been successful in organizing care workers in nursing homes in Central Eastern and Southeast Europe. Tereza Táborská from ALICE union in Czechia and Malgorzata Maciejewska from COZZ in Poland outlined the methods they had used to win collective agreements at company-level and rebuild power at the sectoral level. Moreover, UNI Care affiliates discussed how to build union power for homecare workers and use the new social dialogue structure between employers' organisation EFSI and EFFE and sister union EFFAT to enhance these efforts. This message was driven home by Croatian affiliate RITU, Italian affiliate Filcams-CGIL and the Maltese General Workers Union, whose motion was also unanimously adopted.

UNI Care Europa also held its elections for the presidium and steering committee. Pierangelo Raineri from FISASCAT-CSIL was elected President, while Frédéric Favraud will assume the role of Co-President from now on. In his first speech as UNI Care Europa President Pierangelo Raineri detailed UNI Care Europa's successes in advocating for enhanced trade union access and rights in the sector in the context of the European Commission's European Care Strategy. All participants were keen to ensure that UNI Care Europa the establishment of an inclusive and representative Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee in Social Services.

The conference closed with an inspiring guest lecture by Professor Emma Dowling from Universität Wien & author of „The Care Crisis: What Caused It and How Can We End It?“, who spoke about the future of the care sector and its role in the just transition.

For more information on UNI Care Europa's activities, please contact: Mark Bergfeld, UNI Care Europa Director, mark.bergfeld@uniglobalunion.org