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# Job Quality and Industrial Relations in the Personal and Household Services

National report Slovakia (based on the research report n.34 for the project PHS-QUALITY)

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## Key points

- While some European countries adopted legislative framework, which operationalizes the provision of services at home and even the quality of PHS work, Slovakia does not recognize the term “personal household services” or “domestic work” in its national legislation.
- Slovakia did not ratify the ILO Domestic Workers Convention no. 189/2011.
- There is an intersection of long-term care services (LTC) and personal and household services (PHS) in Slovakia. PHS sector combines all activities carried out at user's home, i.e. formal care and informal care (also informal home care) and household support activities.
- The number of personal care employees has been increasing since 2011, with a slight decrease in 2018, reaching 57,800 employees in 2019 which equals to approximately 2.7% in terms of share on total employment. Overwhelming majority of personal care employees are women (83%).
- Hidden nature of domestic work leaves the PHS workers vulnerable: since households are private places, securing decent working conditions behind the close remains challenging and hard to measure.
- There is no formal social dialogue in the PHS sector and PHS workers in Slovakia lack collective representation in the labour market.

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## 1. ABOUT THE PROJECT

The project PHS-QUALITY - Job Quality and Industrial Relations in the Personal and Household Services Sector is an international research project funded by the European Commission under the grant agreement number VP/2017/004/0049.

The aim of the PHS-QUALITY project is to study, from a comparative and multidisciplinary perspective, the existing public policies and social partners' strategies towards personal and household services in ten EU countries, namely, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Spain, Germany, France, Finland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and the UK. Personal and household services (PHS) cover a range of activities that contribute to the well-being at home of families and individuals, including child care, care for the elderly and persons with disabilities, housework services (such as cleaning, ironing and gardening), remedial classes, home repairs, etcetera. PHS are provided within the household, mostly by women, mainly working part time, with relatively low skills and often from a migrant background. It is a rapidly growing sector where a large share of the work is done informally, which often negatively affects both the quality of work and the quality of the services. Improving the quality of work in PHS is high on the policy agenda of the EU and the ILO. The aim of the here project is to analyse legislation, public policies, and social partners' actions/campaigns specifically oriented to protect PHS providers.

The project answers two research questions: 1) How can regulation, public policy and social partners' actions improve job quality and fight informality in the PHS sector? 2) What are the responses of social

partners to challenges of lowering informality, fighting precariousness, providing visibility, improving job quality and social protection in the PHS sector?

## 2. NATIONAL CASE STUDY: SLOVAKIA

The study offers an overview of all services that can be described as, and fall under the description of, personal household services in Slovakia. The report then narrows the focus and analyses the sector based on its formality: formal (regulated) and informal (less/not regulated). Taking into account that there is a range of PHS services from the most formal to informal, the report presents an evidence on elder care (both formal and informal) and household services such as cleaning, cooking and similar (mostly informal). The report looks at the period of last 10 years (2010-2020), but if necessary, refers to earlier periods (e.g. in case of national legislation).

The report is based on several sources. It combines available statistical evidence concerning domestic workers with the analyses based on desk research on available literature, current legislation and relevant legal regulations at the national level, including the ILO Domestic Workers Convention. Several semi-structured interviews with the representatives of social partners/relevant actors and experts were conducted. Due to the limited collective representation of domestic workers and a case study of crossborder home careers, interviews with individual workers were used as a supplementary evidence. The evidence is supported by the media articles and any other relevant documentation.

### 3. MAIN FINDINGS

The report finds that in Slovakia, the PHS sector is not distinctly defined in the Slovak legal system and work in the sector falls under the intersection between the long-term care services (LTC) and personal and household services (PHS). Similarly, the concept of domestic work and domestic worker is not recognized in the Slovak legislation.

Since PHS sector is not statistically recognized as a distinct economic activity, there is a lack of reliable data on PHS, both in terms of a size of the sector and its employment. For Slovakia, Eurostat does not provide statistics on services of households as employers of domestic personnel (NACE 97) because of the low reliability. Self-reported use of home care services in 2014 reached 1.3% and 6.9% of users were over 65 years old. The number of personal care employees has been increasing since 2011, with a slight decrease in 2018, reaching 57,800 employees in 2019. In terms of share on total employment, this equals to approximately 2.7%. Overwhelming majority of personal care employees are women (83%).

The hidden nature of domestic work has a potential to influence all aspects of work and working conditions of domestic workers. Several negative consequences of home care-giving on workers related to the nature of their work have been identified, including consequences on personal health and economic consequences of care work. Concerns about safety of both workers and clients, and liability of domestic work was also seen as problematic. The employment status of workers differs based on the level of formality in the sector. In

the formal parts of the PHS sector, workers enjoy the standard employment contracts. Workers of more informal sub-sectors, such as housekeeping, can have any formal or informal status: they can be full-time employees, agency workers, self-employed, or informal workers with no contract at all (undeclared work). Wages of workers in PHS sector are on average lower than the national average. Their working time is often without resting periods.

Slovakia did not ratify the ILO's Domestic Workers Convention no. 189/2011 and there are no plans for its ratification in the near future. According to the valid legislation, anyone who is performing dependent work should have a status of an employee. Therefore, domestic workers do not require special legal status according to the Ministry of Labour. The ratification of the Convention would require several amendments to the legislation, mostly related to the definition of domestic work, domestic workers, and the subsequent adaptation of certain provisions and the implementation in relation to the specific characteristics of domestic work. The analysis of social partners' positions and identified problematic aspects of work in the PHS sector, however, show a need to reevaluate this position and address various aspects of poor(er) working conditions of domestic workers.

The voice of workers in PHS sector is weak and PHS workers lack collective representation in the labour market. However, sub-sectors of the PHS sectors are to a certain extent included in the existing structures of social dialogue. There is no social dialogue and collective bargaining distinct for the PHS sector, as defined in this report. Thus, the level of collective representation of various types of workers depends on the existence of social partners in the respective sub-sector, presence or absence of social dialogue

in the sub-sector and on a possibility to sign a valid collective agreement.

Slovakia is a donor country for care workers to Austria and working conditions of Slovak migrant workers in Austria influence the “domestic debate” on care sector, especially availability and quality of elderly care services. Comparably to the situation of platform workers in Slovakia, who lack representation in the labour market, domestic workers are not included in the existing trade unions’ structures.

## 4. RESEARCH AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a great potential for further research related to the various aspects of quality of services and quality of working conditions in the PHS, and on the cooperation of various actors such as non-governmental organisations, policy makers and social partners and in the sector. The lack of quantitative and qualitative data on the domestic work in Slovakia, however, remains a challenge to overcome. Policy makers face additional challenges and opportunities: with COVID pandemic around the world, which will have severe consequences not only for the economies but also for the healthcare and social care sectors, they can use these challenging times to further develop and improve policies, regulations and working conditions of various groups of PHS workers.