

# Why thousand of social and care workers demonstrated the last months

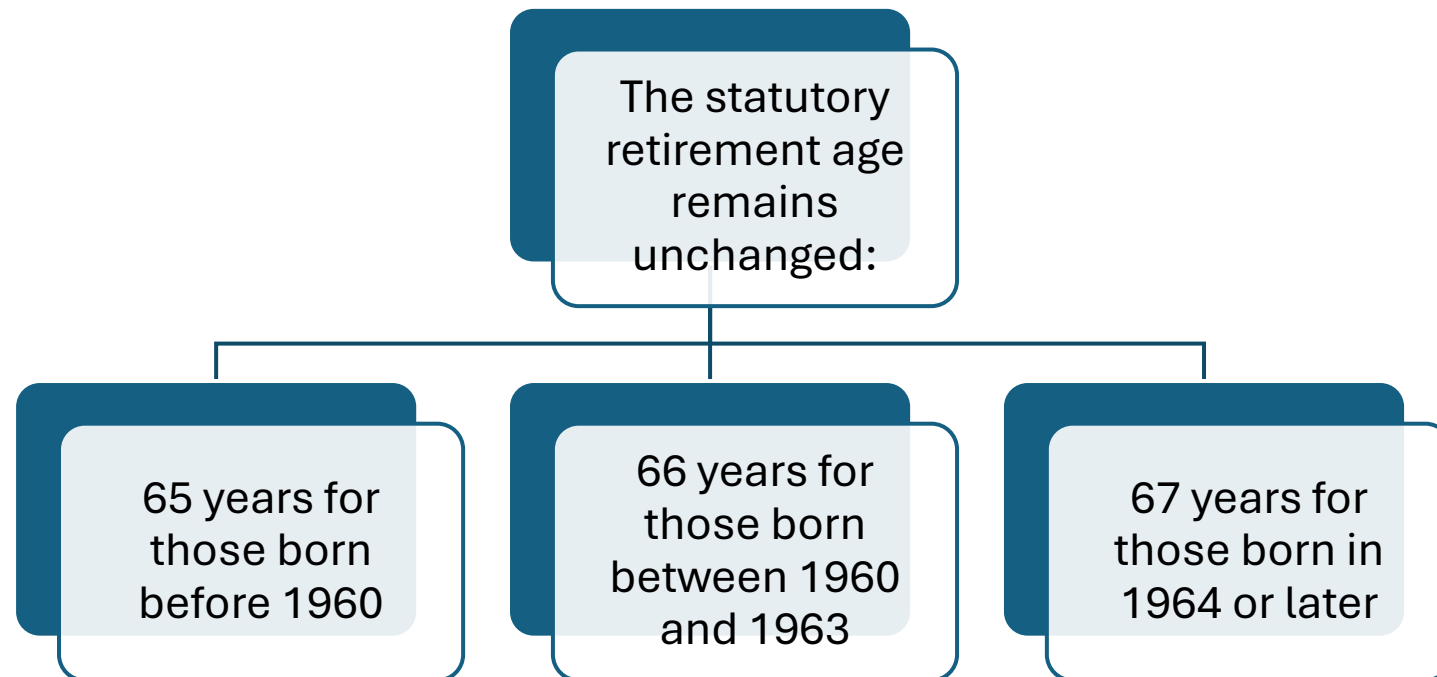
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# A major pension reform



# A major pension reform

- Stricter definition of a career year: From 2027, a year will only count as a full career year if it includes at least **156 days of work (previously, this was 104 days)**.
- **Early retirement:** Retiring early is possible at age 60, 61, or 62, subject to stricter career requirements (**156 days of work per year required**). For those who started working early (between the ages of 18 and 20), early retirement at age 60 remains an option, provided they have 42 career years.
- **Bonus and penalty:** Those who continue working beyond the earliest possible retirement date receive a bonus (an extra 2% to 5% for each additional year worked, depending on the year of birth). Those who retire early without a full career of actual working days risk a penalty.
- **Care and illness: Maternity leave, care leave, and periods of illness remain well-protected and count as equivalent periods for the purpose of avoiding a penalty.**

# A major pension reform

- Minister of Pensions Jan Jambon sparked fierce criticism by **stating that women would "have to adapt" and that a "change in behavior" was expected so they would work more under the new pension reform**
- This did not sit well with the healthcare and social profit sectors, where many women work part-time out of necessity to combine demanding care duties, childcare, and informal caregiving.
- It mainly exposes how little our gouvernement value care work - paid and unpaid. That is exactly why thousands of employees from care, welfare and culture were on the street on March 12.
- Their unpaid work remains completely out of the picture, while the thresholds for professional care work are once again raised by the new pension policy.

# Unpaid care work

According to the OECD, (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development)

- **women spend an average of four hours a day on unpaid care work.**
- Men about two and a half hours.

Economically, all this work is anything but negligible: in Belgium, its value is estimated at around 180 billion euros, accounting for a third of the gross domestic product.

**Unpaid care is therefore one of the largest economic 'sectors' in the country.**

# Professional care work undervalued

In Flanders, **360,000 people work in the social profit sector,**

- which is 15 percent of the total labour market.
- Eight out of ten of them are women
- more than 40 percent are highly educated.

This means that 280,000 women often take on an average of four hours of unpaid care after their working day in care. In comparison, men perform an average of 2.5 hours of care after their day's work.

# Two-thirds of employees in the care sector work part-time, more often not than by choice

If you look at the social profit sector through the lens of the recent pension measures, the problem becomes clear.

- Those who study longer retire later.
- Those who stop earlier are punished financially.
- Those who work part-time or interrupt a career to provide care gain less pension.

And that is precisely the reality in healthcare.

- **Two-thirds of employees in the sector work part-time, and this is more often not by choice.**
- A quarter even have a contract of less than 55 percent.

# Two-thirds of employees in the care sector work part-time, more often not than by choice

**Healthcare institutions often organize their work around peak times:**

- busy in the morning and the evening,
- quieter in the afternoon.

From a **budgetary and organisational point of view**, employers therefore opt for part-time employees instead of full-time jobs.

The result is a sector full of **small contracts**:

- difficult to combine with a second job because of the flexible schedules,
- and good for a lower salary
- and ultimately a lower and more difficult to access pension.

## Vacancies for after-school childcare worker 25/08/2026

### Contract

Tijdelijke job (niet via uitzendkantoren)

Deeltijds - 4 uren per week, te presteren in 4 dagen

Dagwerk

Startdatum: 1 september 2026

Einddatum: 30 juni 2027

Contract van bepaalde duur

Je werkt 30,75 uren per week. Tijdens de schoolvakanties ben je vrij, maar je kan ook werken in onze kleuteropvang. Als je graag meer uren werkt, dan schakelen we jou ook in voor vervangingen voor school en op woensdag.

maandag, dinsdag, woensdag, donderdag en vrijdag:

- ochtendshift: 6.45 u tot 8.30 u
- middagshift: 11.30 u tot 13.30 u, op woensdag van 11.30 u tot 15.55 u
- avondshift: 15.15 u tot 17.45 u, op woensdag niet (zie middagshift)

# Behavioral change ?

- "Working more"(like the minister said) therefore sounds like a bad joke to the staff in the sector.
- Not because they don't like their job. On the contrary: for many, care is a kind of calling.
- But recognition is more than applause during a crisis.
- Recognition also means policies that take into account the realities of the sector. The pension measures threaten to hit the workers who keep our society going the hardest

# Behavioral change?

The message to healthcare workers today seems to be:

- work more,
- work longer,
- and in the meantime also take care at home.

But don't expect that to be really appreciated in policy or pension calculations.

That is what makes the minister's call from government for a "change in behavior" so bitter.

# Behavioral change is necessary!

Because perhaps a change in behavior is indeed necessary.

But not with the women and men who keep our healthcare running, but with our political leaders who have structurally underestimated the work of hundreds of thousands of care workers for decades.

And that is why the social-profit marched along at the trade union demonstration. Because recognition is more than applause every night during a crisis. Because the pension measures hit the caring women twice as hard.