

EPSU Collective Bargaining Annual Report – Summary

Collective bargaining developments

Pay: During the period 2002-04 pay negotiations across EPSU's four sectors have in the main resulted in real increases for members. Out of 116 pay increases across four sectors in 22 countries, over three quarters (89) were higher than inflation. There are some important exceptions where affiliated unions are facing a tough fight to win improvements. For example, unions in France, Italy and Portugal are all in the middle of lengthy campaigns that have involved demonstrations and strike action to ensure that pay increases for public service workers compensate for recent years when rises have fallen below inflation.

Working time: Working time has become a key issue with the media keen to uncover new examples of employers forcing through increases in weekly working time. In fact, the EPSU survey reveals that the most common experience in recent years (in Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, France and Spain) is for public service workers to see weekly working hours reduced. It is particularly in the German public sector where pressure is growing for longer working hours, following the unilateral increase of working hours for civil servants who are not covered by collective bargaining.

Equal pay: Unions in Sweden and Norway have taken initiatives on low pay that should lead to progress towards equal pay as they have particularly benefited occupations dominated by women. An EPSU/PSI survey and report on equal pay highlighted a number of other initiatives in this area but emphasised the need to make equal pay a priority in collective bargaining.

A benchmarking exercise comparing public and private sector jobs carried out in Ireland as part of the national pay negotiations is particularly notable for significant pay rises for public service workers, although unions are challenging some of the outcomes in terms of equal pay.

Strikes, protests and demonstrations

EPSU affiliates are often forced to take action to win improvements in pay and conditions or even to just defend their rights. In fact, in some countries, such as Bulgaria, Estonia and Turkey there are still restrictions on the rights of some public service workers to take strike action. EPSU is aware of over 50 actions in 23 countries over the period 2002-04 but believes that there have probably been many more examples. This year Italian public sector workers, particularly those in the health service, have taken repeated action to try to maintain their real pay levels and prevent government cutbacks. French energy workers have also been very active in their campaign to stop the privatisation of the EDF/GDF state energy companies. Unions in the Netherlands were involved in a massive demonstration at the beginning of October 2004 in protest at the Dutch government's proposed welfare cutbacks.

Outlook for 2005

The end of 2004 and beginning of 2005 will see several major negotiations in the public services. In Germany ver.di is not only negotiating a new pay deal for public sector workers starting from February 2005 but is also working on a new, simplified discrimination-free pay structure. Major agreements covering local and national government workers in Denmark

and Sweden are also due for renewal by the end of March 2005. National agreements in Finland (expires February 2005) and Belgium (expires December 2004) are also under negotiation.

European works councils

EPSU is involved at various levels in the setting up or running of European works councils in over 20 companies and its network of EWC co-ordinators meets once a year. EWCs are often confronted with issues that have a collective bargaining dimension and can agree social charters with minimum standards that can be used in negotiations. An EPSU/European Trade Union College seminar for the utilities sector in May 2004 raised the possibility of a role for EWCs in getting companies to support some kind of agreement or code of practice on outsourcing.

Social dialogue

The now well-established social dialogue in the **electricity** sector has led to a number of joint statements in the last couple of years on life-long learning, equality and diversity and the future of skill needs.

After resolving difficulties around representativity a formal social dialogue committee for **local and regional government** met for the first time in January 2004 and agreed a two-year work programme.

In the **hospitals** sector informal discussions continue to develop important areas of work such as recruitment and retention of nurses but a formal social dialogue committee is still some way off.

EPSU continued its efforts to resolve the questions of representativity that are proving a stumbling block to formal social dialogue in the **national administration** sector.

EPSU Collective bargaining co-ordination initiatives

Since the 2000 General Assembly EPSU, in line with policies adopted by the ETUC and other industry federations, has taken a number of initiatives leading to improved co-ordination of collective bargaining among its affiliated organisations. The first steps involve improving the collection, storage and dissemination of information on pay negotiations in the public services.

Network: In 2003 EPSU established its epsucob@ collective bargaining network, adopting a model similar to that initially developed by the European Metalworkers Federation. The network now has 80 correspondents from EPSU affiliates who are responsible for supplying and distributing information on collective bargaining. The secretariat has used the network to collect data on pay and conditions, equal pay initiatives and lifelong learning.

Database: Members of the epsucob@ network have sent in 40 questionnaires giving details on pay and conditions in their sector. This database will be made available via the EPSU website so that affiliates and the secretariat will have easy access to key data on pay and conditions in the public services. The database will also include links to recent reports, news stories and other information about particular countries and/or sectors.

Newsletter: In March, in order to contribute to the flow of information and encourage responses from epsucob@ correspondents, the secretariat started to distribute a regular

email bulletin reporting on collective bargaining developments in the public services. So far most of the material has come from affiliates' websites and other sources of information on industrial relations but affiliates are beginning to send in short reports with the latest news on strikes, demonstrations and negotiations.