



# **The EPSU Firefighters' Charter**

*version 2007*

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## Introduction

The Charter has been drawn up by members of the EPSU Firefighters' Network (see [appendix](#) for list) and with the support of the UK Fire Brigades Union.

The Charter sets out a number of principles and rights that can inspire guide and support Firefighters and their trade unions in their daily work. It also aims to provide a framework for the development of EPSU policy regarding firefighters.

In EPSU the firefighters' network is part of the Standing Committee for Local and Regional Government.

Information about the work of firefighters network and the Standing Committee can be found on the EPSU website: [www.epsu.org](http://www.epsu.org)

## Definitions, status and role of firefighters

Firefighters across Europe carry out a wide range of tasks and functions including saving and protecting life and property from fire, providing other rescue services including emergency medical assistance and providing humanitarian services.

Firefighters fall into four general employment categories;

- ✓ *Public sector firefighters:* firefighters who provide protection from fire and a rescue service within their communities.
- ✓ *Industrial firefighters:* firefighters who provide protection from fire and provide a rescue service for a specific hazardous site or industrial complex, for example, nuclear, chemical and biological installations. These firefighters may also provide support beyond their site to the public sector fire and rescue services.
- ✓ *Military Firefighters:* firefighters who are members of the military services and are subject to military laws and discipline. These firefighters may also provide support beyond their site to the public sector fire and rescue services.
- ✓ *Airport firefighters:* firefighters who provide protection from fire and a rescue service for an airport site or complex. They may also be public sector or military firefighters. These firefighters may also provide support beyond their site to the public sector fire and rescue services.

The Charter focuses on the first of the categories, that is public sector firefighters. This category can also be categorised into two distinct groups:

- ✓ workers whose primary paid employment is that of a firefighter in the fire and rescue services; and
- ✓ workers whose primary paid employment is not within the fire and rescue services, but who respond to incidents when required. The arrangements vary between countries but in many cases these workers are known as '*volunteers*'.

While some differences between these two groups are unavoidable, the aim of firefighters' unions is to reduce these as much as possible.

It should also be understood that the term '*firefighter*' includes all members of a fire and rescue service, irrespective of their rank or role, who attend and participate in resolving incidents.

The neutrality of the public sector firefighters' role is very important. Firefighters should only be employed by civilian public, regional or municipal authorities. They should be separated in all aspects of their duties and at all levels from the police, military and any paramilitary forces. Public sector fire and rescue services and any of their equipment should not be used by the police, military and any paramilitary forces for the purpose of any law enforcement function or action.

Firefighters are first and foremost public sector workers and their trade unions should be an integral part of the public sector and wider trade union movement.

## **Trade union rights and collective bargaining**

Firefighters shall enjoy the same trade union and employment rights as other workers, including the right to strike and to take industrial action, as set out in the international labour standards of the Internal Labour Organisation (ILO), the Council of Europe and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

The right of firefighters to strike and to take industrial action should only be used when all agreed negotiating (and where appropriate conciliation procedures) with an employer have failed.

There should be no limitations, sanctions or penalties either collectively or individually upon the ability of firefighters and their trade unions to take industrial action including strike action.

Firefighters shall have the right to determine their pay and working conditions through collective bargaining.

## **Employment conditions**

Firefighters are skilled workers and should be recognised as such.

The pay and conditions of service for firefighters should recognise that being a firefighter is a hazardous and unpredictable job. All hours on duty should be compensated for, and firefighters should receive extra pay when they are required to be on duty in excess of their normal hours of work or on public holidays.

Pay and conditions of service for firefighters should be determined through collective bargaining at national, regional, and local level, according to national systems and trade union preferences. Pay levels should reflect responsibilities and any special roles or additional skills. Firefighters should be entitled to at least the same amount of paid holidays as other public sector workers. Local agreements should not undermine any national or regional agreements.

All firefighters should be covered by collective agreements / regulations that set out the maximum number of hours per week on average a firefighter may work, in conformity with the EU working time directive. This maximum should not exceed the maximum working week for other workers. Work organisation should be adapted to meet the needs of older firefighters.

The number of firefighters and the geographical spread of fire and rescue stations and firefighting and rescue equipment should be based upon a nationally agreed formula that takes into account the fire risks and hazards present throughout the country. Regular overtime working by professional firefighters, or the use of volunteer firefighters, should not be used as a substitute for the employment of adequate numbers of professional firefighters.

## **Pension and insurance rights**

Firefighters should be entitled to receive, in addition to any general state pension, a pension that recognises the hazardous and arduous nature of the tasks and all the skills that they have acquired during their period of service. . This means that they should be able to retire on a full pension entitlement before the normal national retirement age for other workers. Ideally, firefighters should be able to retire at 55 years if they wish.

The pension rights of firefighters should, in the event of death, be transferable to their partner for the term of their partner's life and for any children they may have until they reach adult age.

Where firefighters retire early due to injury or illness linked to their duties as a firefighter, they should receive a pension which takes account of the service that they might have had and any loss of earnings due to the rank or role they might reasonably have been expected to achieve during that service. Where early retirement is due to illness or injury not caused by service as a firefighter, then pension entitlements should be based on years of service and the possibilities for alternative employment within and outside the fire service.

Where a firefighter is killed or dies as a result of injuries received whilst on duty then his or her partner shall be entitled to receive an enhanced pension for life and for any children until they reach adult age.

In addition to any pension entitlements, a firefighter who is either killed or dies while on duty, or as a result of injuries received while on duty should be covered by a scheme provided by the employer which gives compensation payment equivalent to at least a minimum of two years gross salary.

Pension and insurance schemes should take into account growing mobility of professional firefighters between the fire and rescue services of the EU Member States.

## **Fire and rescue service organisation**

The provision of an effective and efficient fire and rescue service is a requirement of all countries and there should be equal access for all members of society to the service.

Ideally, one government ministry (if appropriate at regional level) should be responsible for setting, and/or coordinating, laws and standards relating to the provision of an effective and efficient fire and rescue service throughout the country.

Advisory committees on matters relating to the duties and standards of efficiency and effectiveness of the fire and rescue service should have a broad membership, and include representatives of both the managers and trade unions of the public sector fire and rescue service. Advisory committee should not discuss matters relating to the pay or conditions of service of firefighters.

There should be regular and independent assessment of the fire and rescue service to ensure its effectiveness and efficiency. Assessments may be carried out or assisted by independent inspectorates, composed of inspectors with practical knowledge and experience of the work of the fire and rescue services. Assessments should be made public.

Responsibility for the provision, control, and adequate financing, of a fire and rescue service should rest with elected representatives.

## **Training and equipment**

All firefighters should have equal access to training and life-long learning.

There should be a set of common training standards that have been agreed with trade unions, which all firefighters should achieve. This means *both* professional and volunteer firefighters. For the safety of the public as well as the firefighters, all firefighters need to achieve a basic level of training and familiarity with their equipment before being allowed to attend incidents.

Wherever possible a fire and rescue service training centre should be established. This may be a residential centre. Such a training centre should be appropriately funded and be responsible for training all firefighters forming the fire and rescue services. The training centre should include realistic training facilities.

There should be a system of national examinations for firefighters to enable them to gain promotion up to and including chief officer level within the fire and rescue services.

Only firefighters who have passed the national fire and rescue service promotion examinations should take charge of firefighters at a fire or any other emergency incident.

All firefighting equipment used by firefighters shall be designed and rigorously tested to the appropriate EU or international standards to ensure that it is capable of performing the required function safely and correctly under the most arduous conditions and that it is compatible. Trade unions should be involved in standardisation processes.

In cross-border areas there should be agreements between public authorities regulating how firefighters from different counties can assist each other. Agreements should contain provisions for the compatibility of firefighting equipment, firefighting procedures and the safety of firefighters.

Firefighters who are involved in cross border firefighting operations or rescues shall be covered for pay and insurance purposes exactly as if they were in their own country.

## **Equal opportunities**

No person should be refused access to a public sector firefighter's job on the basis of race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, religion, or social origin. Access to training and promotion opportunities within the fire and rescue services should be determined on the basis of ability and merit.

Public authorities and social partners shall at all levels respect EU equality principles and legislation and actively promote equality of opportunity and treatment through collective bargaining.

Public authorities and social partners should jointly draw up, publish, and promote a positive equal opportunities policy.

Any person who harasses or carries out discriminatory practises against another individual or group should be sanctioned appropriately.

A public sector firefighter employer should ensure that they provide separate toilet, changing, washing facilities for both women and men.

## **Health and safety**

Firefighters should be treated no differently from any other worker for the purpose of general health and safety legislation. This means that there should be no exclusion of firefighters from EC Directives relating to the health and safety of workers.

Employers should take all necessary steps to assess risks properly and to systematically monitor the health and safety of firefighters. They should involve trade unions fully, as called for by the EU health and safety directives.

Firefighters should receive regular and full medical examinations at no cost to themselves. They should also be active participants in preventative medicine and health education programmes.

An occupational health scheme should provide all firefighters with full and correct provision for psychiatric and stress counselling services both before and after incidents.

Firefighters and their employers should have the power to inspect and make themselves familiar with any fire, explosion, toxic, chemical, nuclear, military stores or transport hazards within their area of fire cover.

Firefighters' employers, as well as national (or regional) governments through national fire standards committees, should agree in negotiation with trade union an occupational health and safety policy covering all firefighters.

## APPENDIX - EPSU Firefighters Network (June 2007)

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