

Unions discuss quality employment in childcare services



(7 December 2017) Twenty representatives of childcare unions from 11 countries and the European institutions met in Brussels yesterday (6 December) to discuss the challenge to achieve quality employment in the sector. The meeting was part of a European Commission-funded project run by EPSU which is examining the criteria for quality employment and how childcare services across Europe match up to those criteria.

EPSU policy staff Richard Pond and Luca Scarpiello began the meeting by explaining the project and EPSU's recent work focusing on social services and childcare. This was followed by a presentation by Monique Ramioul of the HIVA unit at Leuven University who provided a definition of quality employment and then related this to the experience in different countries. With some detailed presentations from several countries, the discussion identified a number of key issues in the sector. These include:

- low pay, in some countries little more than the statutory minimum wage;
- low status and undervaluing of work;
- work intensification and pressure to do other tasks;
- health and safety issues around musculo-skeletal disorders and stress;
- staff shortages, an ageing workforce, difficulties in recruitment and high staff turnover;
- limited career development and inconsistent approaches to training and qualifications;
- inadequate public funding and investment; and
- wide variations in staff:children ratios and whether there are any regulations or guidelines on these.

While the extent of these varied from country to country there were many common challenges for trade unions in the sector who also acknowledged the difficulties they faced in recruiting and organising workers. Colleagues from Hungary, Bulgaria, the UK - specifically England and Scotland, Italy and Ireland gave detailed presentations illustrating these points (see below).

Following this debate, Mathias Maucher (EPSU policy staff) gave a short overview of how EPSU's work in the sector had been shaped by developments at European level, in particular the Barcelona Targets on Childcare, the Social Investment Package and the European Semester linking it also to some of the federation's initiatives in the health and social services sector around staffing levels, health and safety and professional training. He also highlighted the work done on trade union organising in the field of child care.

The information exchanged at the meeting was important input into the research being carried out for the project by the colleagues at Leuven University and a draft report will be presented to the next project meeting which will take place in

Brussels on 7-8 June 2018.

This meeting was organised with the financial support of the European Commission

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