

Thousands join health and care action day - more staff and better pay and conditions to deliver the care people deserve

Date

Friday, October 30, 2020 - 12:00

Many thanks to all who participated in the European Action Day for health and care workers. Your engagement made it a success and underlines the pressure workers feel as the pandemic reaches new heights. The stories we receive from nurses, doctors and other staff in hospitals are dramatic and alarming. The Day of Action, linked to the ITUC's Global Day on "Investing in care", highlighted common demands across Europe and the rest of the world. Safe working environments are needed for staff and patients. It is unacceptable that workers with COVID19 are called on not just to continue working, but often with long hours overtime on top. The pandemic has revealed that union demands for safe staffing levels are entirely justified. And workers in care need better working conditions and higher pay, especially those in elderly and home care, where workers are predominantly women on low pay.

Action to see a bigger EU4health budget

With our Belgian affiliates, the ITUC and social movement networks we organized a symbolic action in Brussels. The future is in public health and care. EPSU is demanding that the EU delivers on the 9.4 bn Euros for the EU4Health programme as proposed by the European Commission. Member state governments have slashed it to 1.7 bn Euros. This does little to assist countries that see the health system buckling under. The European Parliament, ETUC and many others support our demand. As I write this negotiations are underway to find a compromise and one MEP has even gone on hunger strike to support a bigger budget.

A People's Recovery and conditionality

Many countries are again starting to see partial or even full lockdowns. The economy will take a further hit with more jobs under threat. The ETUC Executive

Committee discussed its campaign for a People's Recovery on 28-29 October. Funding needs to be available for Member States as quickly as possible to invest in the economy and this has to come following discussions with the social partners at national level. The European Parliament has made clear that it wants a strong Rule of Law conditionality attached. Indeed why should public funds go to countries that do not have a good record with regard to social dialogue for example. The Hungarian government gave the trade unions just four hours to respond to complex legislation that changed the public service status of health care workers which was then rushed through parliament. This is totally unacceptable and should certainly not be rewarded.

Fair, or rather “adequate” minimum wages

The ETUC Executive had a first exchange on the Commission's proposal for “adequate minimum wages in the European Union.” Its [draft directive](#) was published 28 October. The accompanying impact assessment states that if statutory minimum wages across Europe were all at least 60% of the gross median wage this would increase minimum wages in about half of the Member States and between 10 and 20 million workers would benefit. For several countries minimum wage protection would result in a reduction of in-work poverty and wage inequality by over 10% and a reduction in the gender pay gap by about 5% or more. With this outcome many women in care services would benefit as our research has shown they are often on low pay. Unfortunately, such a threshold is not part of the directive.

What is part of the directive is an article on the promotion of collective bargaining on wage setting. Member States are “required to take action to promote the capacity of social partners to engage in collective bargaining on wage setting, and to encourage constructive, meaningful and informed negotiations on wages.” Where collective bargaining coverage does not reach at least 70% of the workers, Member States would have to draw up an action plan to promote collective bargaining. Another article says that collective agreements should be respected in public contracts. This is a long-standing trade union demand and goes in the direction of [ILO convention 94 on labour clause in public contracts](#).

Discussions will now start in ETUC and we will assess the proposals. Is it enough? Is more needed? The ETUC has set [six tests](#) for the draft directive. EPSU has organised a Collective Bargaining Working Group for 12 January 2021 (online) to have an

exchange of views. We can expect difficult discussions and more importantly the legislation will face opposition from employers and right-wing governments. They will do everything they can to prevent the strengthening of trade unions and collective bargaining. That workers will lose out is of little concern to them. This is part of our struggle for the redistribution of wealth. It will be the dominant issue of 2021 as corporations and the rich will argue that public services workers will have to pay to reduce the debts. Hell no...

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