

European and national sectoral social partners calling for the need to strengthen involvement of social partners to boost the recovery of the pandemic



(Brussels, 16 June 2021) In the framework of the final dissemination workshop of EPSU and HOSPEEM's joint project on [Strengthening Social Dialogue in the Hospital Sector in the East, South and Central Europe](#), participants stressed that the involvement of sectoral social partners in European Semester is crucial to bridge the currently existing democratic and social gap.

As the latest Eurofound [research](#) has shown, HOSPEEM and EPSU are the most representative European sectoral social partners in the hospital and healthcare sector. This means that the European Commission has the legal obligation to consult HOSPEEM and EPSU on any draft proposals concerning social policies in the hospital and healthcare sector. This legal provision allows the European sectoral social partners to benefit from an early sight on the draft proposals and to have a direct voice on healthcare and workforce-related issues at European level. At the moment, there is still plenty room for improvement their involvement both at national and European level. Recent EU initiatives to boost recovery from COVID-19 pandemic require concrete investment, in particular recognising the sector as a critical infrastructure at the national level.

The online workshop gathered together national social partners from the three regions along with other European social partners and stakeholders active in employment and health policy, discussing the project findings and lessons learnt, including social partners' involvement in the European Semester.

The event allowed for an in-depth discussion on the current functioning of the regional and national social dialogue's structures in the respective countries. It helped with identifying common challenges faced by social partners in their participation in the EU level social dialogue and the European Semester process.

Participants welcomed the presentation of Ricardo Rodriguez Contreras, Researcher in charge of the Eurofound study on the [involvement of social partners in policy making during the COVID-19 outbreak](#), which highlighted the importance of social dialogue and the vital role of trade unions and employers organisations during the time of the pandemic.

Ana Carla Pereira, Employment and Social Adviser at the Cabinet of European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, Nicolas Schmit and Margarida Albuquerque Arenga from the Portuguese Permanent Representation, stressed the Council and the Commission's commitments to support social partners and provided a comprehensive overview on how the European Commission and the Council Presidency are strengthening national sectoral social dialogue structures. Instruments mentioned range from the [Action Plan on the European Pillar of Social Rights](#), the new [Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work \(2021 - 2027\)](#) and the [review of the Sectoral Social Dialogue Committees](#).

National social partners underlined the interconnections between sound national sectoral social dialogue and the well-functioning EU social dialogue. To that end sectoral social partners should not only be supported by the EU but, more importantly, by their national governments to be able to represent their position and participate at the EU and the local level. The better involvement of national sectoral social partners in the hospital and healthcare sector in the European Semester is also highly dependent on this relationship. It is vital that national trade unions and employers' organisations join EPSU and HOSPEEM to make their voice heard at the EU level and the European Semester.

The project also highlighted that sectoral social dialogue in the hospital sector is important in addressing challenges such as an ageing workforce and health workforce shortages, which would make the sector more resilient and prepared for future health pandemics.

Participants called on the European Commission to address the responsibility of Member States to strengthen national sectoral social dialogue and better support the involvement of social partners in the EU level Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee. In doing so, Member States can deliver on the Action Plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights, strengthening collective bargaining and their involvement in health policies at the national level and throughout their organisations such as EPSU and HOPSEEM at the EU level.

Concluding the conference, the General Secretary of EPSU Jan Willem Goudriaan said: *The project is vital improving and strengthening social dialogue in Europe, in particular now COVID-19 restrictions are relaxed and we move into the possible post pandemic period. One of the lessons learnt from the pandemic is that strong social dialogue and strong social partners are needed with a high level of collective bargaining coverage to ensure the sound functioning of our health systems and making the hospital sector resilient for future challenges.*

Marta Branca, Secretary General of HOSPEEM, said: *Together with the project's country fact sheets, the findings of the [Eurofound representativeness study for the hospital and healthcare sector](#), (the result of the Eurofound study on the involvement of social partners in the European Semester), national and European sectoral social partners have now the unique opportunity to address European institutions and Member States to take concrete actions to increase the involvement of national sectoral social partners in the national recovery and resilience plans and the European Semester to create more resilient health systems in the future.*

Workshop' materials will be available soon on HOSPEEM and EPSU websites.

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