

European Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA) must focus more on Health and Social Care Workers



EPSU contribution to the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC).

(18 January 2022) On 14 January, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) organised a public hearing on the European Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA), which was launched in 2021 in response to the COVID-19 crisis. The goal of the event was to gather information and input from EU institutions, international organisations, social partners, civil society, academia and health professionals, in order to prepare the EESC's opinion on the new HERA proposal by the European Commission (EC). Among members of the EC and Committee of the Regions, other speakers were from the WHO, Eurohealthnet and the European Public Health Alliance.

EPSU is welcoming the opinion draft prepared by the EESC, agreeing on the point that the inclusion of social partners (including trade unions) under the current proposal is not sufficient. We underline the strong need to make health and social care systems more resilient and prepared for future health emergencies by increasing investments and addressing staff shortages. Member States need to

[Position of EPSU Standing Committee on Health and Social Services on lessons learnt so far from the pandemic and resilience of European health and social care systems\)](#)

The pandemic has shown that health needs sufficient investment and public funding, as privatisation and austerity measures have weakened healthcare systems enormously, and EPSU agrees with the EESC that HERA should work as transparently as possible, especially regarding public financing.

The Omicron wave shows again that [the health system and its workforce are at their limit](#), making the demand for safe staffing, better protection at the workplace and greater investment ever more pressing, which is why HERA should bear the potential of improving this. EPSU therefore agrees on the point of collecting disaggregated data, adding that this should be expanded to also collect data on the number of workers, to achieve adequate needs-based staffing levels. The shortage of healthcare professionals continues to be a problem that needs to be addressed. Therefore, HERA should be able to check if Member States (MS) are able to provide enough staff, instead of only relying on the supply-chain.

Additionally, the concerns and opinions of the Director of Eurohealthnet, Caroline Costongs, expressed during the hearing resonate with EPSU's position, as she also emphasized that HERA should closely work with civil society organisations and should focus on strengthening public health systems in EU Member States.

Furthermore, Elise Rodriguez, Head of Advocacy at the European Public Health Alliance, contributed important points to the hearing, demanding global health justice and criticising the predominant role given to the industrial sector by HERA.

The EESC's opinion will be adopted shortly.

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