

EPSU achieves important success for health, social and home care workers

Date

Wednesday, May 18, 2022 - 12:00

The pandemic has hit many workers hard, especially those exposed to infected persons like in health and social care. They had – and continue to have – a higher risk of contracting COVID-19. Thousands of health and care workers died. The European Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work, a tripartite body, was asked to review the *Occupational Diseases Recommendation* in light of the pandemic. EPSU demanded recognition that not only health workers, but also social and home care workers should be recognised as at-risk. The workers' group led by EPSU and ETUI convinced the employers and governments to add a new entry:

*“COVID-19 caused by work in disease prevention, in **health and social care and in domiciliary assistance**, or in a pandemic context, in sectors where there is an outbreak in activities in which a risk of infection has been proven.”*

This is important as it promotes the **prevention, recognition and compensation** of occupational diseases. It further encourages convergence in the recognition of scientifically recognised occupational diseases between Member States. Although rules have been relaxed, many people continue to be infected. With new outbreaks, workers at high risk – often women with precarious jobs and low pay, such as those in home care – should now get more attention and not be cast aside as we saw at the beginning of the pandemic.

International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia 2022

Many unions were active to highlight the work of trade unions against discrimination of workers and members of the LGBT+ community on 17 May. It is unfortunately still necessary to draw attention to and condemn the harassment and violence they face on a daily basis – for example, in Hungary and Poland.

The newsletter has many stories of the work we are doing – but it is only the tip of the iceberg at EPSU. Much of our day-to-day work does not find its way into these newsletters – such as our work on Orpea as we follow developments. Beyond the financial revelations mentioned below, the French unions also came out strongly in the media against the agreement made by UNI. ORPEA shows no signs of change and attacked trade unionists further. Our work also continues with Ukraine. Contacts are being made between unions and lasting connections are being built.

Human rights defenders

And on a personal note, I was extremely pleased to see and talk to Osman Isci this week in Brussels. Osman, a trade union comrade of the Turkish union KESK, was arrested in 2012 after a seminar in Brussels. He ended up in jail for months and his passport was taken away. Osman not only works for the unions, but also for human rights organisations. He is part of the human rights defenders in Turkey. Recognised in Turkey, the EU and beyond for the quality of his judgement and integrity, he recently had his passport returned allowing him to travel. He came to speak with various organisations to brief them about the situation in Turkey. I felt honoured he had the time to meet up.

Last week I had the opportunity to meet with Mariya, one of our comrades from Belarus in exile in Berlin and working for the independent trade unions in BKDP. We spoke of the extreme pressure unionists are under; facing arrests, harassment and jail. As if to illustrate this - on Monday, 16 May, Maxim Pazniakou of the independent Belarus union BITU was arrested. He had just been appointed to represent the confederation as other leaders are in jail – and immediately he faced arrest. It is our trade union comrades like Mariya, Maxim, Osman and so many others that deserve and inspire our continued solidarity.

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