

EPSU speaks to the COVI Committee in the European Parliament



(17 November 2022) On November 14, 2022, the COVI Committee held the first of a series of discussions to assess the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic. This was the first time that the committee established to draw the lessons of the pandemic invited trade union and employers' representatives. EPSU was invited as it represents workers in the health and care sector.

The Covid-19 pandemic is certainly one of the most devastating health crises in recent history. Yet, it was not just a health crisis; the world is still coming to grips with its lasting political, social and economic impacts. It is essential that countries draw important lessons from the management of the Covid-19 pandemic quickly, so that we are better prepared for the future. With [extreme weather events](#) on the rise, such shocks may unfortunately, become more frequent. Partly owing to calls by EPSU, in March 2022, the European Parliament decided to set up a [special committee on 'COVID-19 pandemic: lessons learned and recommendations for the future' \(COVI\)](#). In recent week the committee visited Italy to discuss with [workers and bosses](#). EPSU was present at that event as well.

The meeting was opened by Lieve Verboven (Director, ILO Office to the EU and the Benelux countries) highlighting that the effects on employment of the Covid-19 pandemic have been unprecedented, unmatched even by the 2008 global financial crisis. In 2020, 8.8 per cent of global working hours were lost relative to the fourth quarter of 2019, equivalent to 255 million full-time jobs. Out of the 2 billion informal workers worldwide, 60% suffered a loss in income due to the pandemic. Verboven emphasised that robust social protection schemes are absolutely crucial to maintain purchasing power in times of economic crises and to prevent people from falling into poverty.

Jan Willem Goudriaan, EPSU General Secretary, remarked that any assessment of the economic effects of the Covid-19 pandemic needs to place public service workers at the centre stage; health and social care workers, local and regional government officials, prison guards, firefighters, utility workers etc... were working round the clock during the pandemic, often at the cost of their personal health and safety. He added that the pandemic exposed existing economic and gender inequalities. Sectors with a higher concentration of female workers, such as the care sector, [continue to suffer from low pay](#). This is one of the many reasons why the delivery of crucial public services, like social care, is hindered by chronic staff shortages.

EPSU, echoing the statements made by Verboven, argued that “preparedness rests on resilient, robust and equipped public services and social protection systems.” He also encouraged the committee to organise more events like the one held in Parliament in September on “[Stories from the Covid Frontline](#)”, wherein the health and care workers got an opportunity to narrate their personal experiences of working during the pandemic. Goudriaan concluded his contribution by urging various EU bodies such as DG SANTE to ensure the social partners are involved closely at all stages of policy making.

Claes-Mikael Ståhl (Deputy General Secretary, ETUC) emphasised that the Covid-19 pandemic isn’t just a public health issue, but also an occupational health issue. After several months of campaigning by EPSU and other social partners, an EU-level agreement was finally reached in May 2022 to include [covid in the list of occupational diseases](#). This would be an important instrument to, for example, ensure fair compensation for health workers who continue to suffer from the effects of long covid. Véronique Trillet-Lenoir (FR MEP, Renew) supported the statements made by EPSU and ETUC, underlining the importance of public investment to address staff shortages in health and care sectors. She also suggested that Commissioners from DG SANTE and DG EMPL be invited to upcoming meetings of COVI, as a way to deepen their engagement with the social partners.

Kathleen Van Brempt (BEL MEP, S&D and Chair of COVI committee) concluded the meeting by lauding the collaborative efforts of trade union federations and employer organisations in the management of the Covid-19 pandemic. On November 28 and 29, the COVI Committee will continue with three sessions which will focus on how the restrictions during the pandemic affected women and vulnerable people. The series will conclude on December 8, 2022, with a hearing on socio-economic impact of the pandemic on children.

References & Further Reading

- [Recording of the COVI meeting](#) held on November 14, 2022.
- [ILO updated estimates and analysis](#) on the impact of COVID-19 on the world of work
- [EUROFOUND report](#)- “Recovery from COVID-19: The changing structure of employment in the EU”



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