

## Social partners in health share concerns on the energy crisis and its impact on the hospital sector



(22 November 2022) Health workers and employers came together for a Sectoral Social Dialogue meeting to discuss the European Year of Skills, hazardous medicinal products, the energy crisis and its impact on the hospital sector and more.

On 15 November 2022, representatives from EPSU (European Public Service Union) and HOSPEEM (The European Hospital and Healthcare Employers' Association) met, in a hybrid format, for the Sectoral Social Dialogue in Hospital and Healthcare Sector Plenary meeting.

Several delegates, including Marta Branca (Secretary General, HOSPEEM) and Kirsi Sillanpää (President of the EPSU Standing Committee for Health and Social Services) objected to the insufficient time allocated for the sectoral social dialogue this year; three hours for hybrid meetings were simply inadequate to have a rich discussion on all the topics on the agenda. Delegates underlined that at least a full working day be dedicated to sectoral social dialogue meetings going forward, irrespective of the format.

In the beginning of the meeting Jan Behrens (Policy Officer, European Commission) urged the social partners to contribute to the European Commission's top priority for the upcoming year i.e., further supporting lifelong learning and filling existing skill gaps in the EU. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen had declared 2023 to be the European Year of Skills in her State of the Union address this year.

Sonia de Melo Xavier (DG EMPL) presented one of the key initiatives of the European Commission as part of its skills agenda – the Pacts for Skills and Large-Scale partnerships. These skills partnerships aim to provide up- and reskilling opportunities to close to six million people in the coming years. Large Scale Skills Partnerships in twelve key industrial ecosystems have been launched already. EPSU and HOSPEEM are two of the many partners in the skills alliance in the health sector, referred to as [BeWell](#) (Blueprint Alliance for a Future Health Workforce Strategy on Digital and Green Skills).

While the delegates welcomed the Commission's focus on creating relevant life-long learning opportunities, there was some scepticism from the EPSU delegates around the overall skills agenda. Nina Bergman (International Secretary, Swedish Association of Health Professionals) *remarked that* skill-mix gives the impression that we just need more people around the patient. Rather, we need people who are highly qualified and have the necessary skills. Cyrille Duch (CFDT Santé Services Sociaux, France) emphasised that the main problem is that we don't have enough people in the health sector due to ageing population, lack of public investment etc. He inquired if the skills strategy was going to address this problem. De Melo Xavier, empathising with the concerns, argued that the Pact for Skills is based on a philosophy of cooperation between people who do know what's happening and what's needed on the ground. Moreover, the aim is not just to encourage workers to do more training but also to provide opportunities for young skilled people in other sectors to move into sectors such as healthcare.

In the next part of the meeting, Ralf Kleinschmidt (DG EMPL) provided an update on the guidelines for Hazardous Medicinal Products. The guidelines aim to cover workers involved in the whole lifecycle of hazardous medicinal products – from their production to their waste management. The researchers have conducted several pilots to ensure the guidelines are relevant across departments and countries. The final guide is expected to be ready by December 2022. EPSU and HOSPEEM will be providing further feedback on the guidelines and will contribute to the dissemination of the final guide.

Adam Rogalewski (Policy Officer, EPSU) reminded delegates that the European Council adopted the directive on adequate minimum wages in October 2022. What is most important for trade unions and employers in the health sector is the clause which requires member states to achieve 80% collective bargaining coverage. Member states have two years to transpose this directive into national legislation.

Ivana Břeňková (OSZSP Czech Republic) presented initiatives in the health sector taken by the Council of the European Union under the Czech Presidency. The Czech Presidency proposed a legislation on the regulation of the European Health Data Space (EHDS), which would among other things, help establish a single European area for sharing health data. The Presidency has also made various non-legislative proposals, such as the revision of the Council Recommendation on cancer screening.

Next, Kirsi Sillanpää opened the discussion on the energy crisis and its impact on the hospital sector. UK representatives from both employer organisations and trade unions agreed that the NHS has been suffering from almost a decade of underinvestment and won't be able to bear any funding cuts. Inflation in the UK is at around 10% but the government has only budgeted for a 3% pay rise. Cyrille Duch argued that not all institutions should be expected to reduce their energy consumption. Hospitals, for example, are often dealing with frail people who need higher temperatures for warmth. Phil Ni Sheaghda (General Secretary, Irish Nurses & Midwives Organisation) pointed out that it is becoming increasingly difficult for nurses to bear their cost of travel. Also, there is lack of policy action on ensuring adequate accommodation for healthcare staff coming from abroad, from countries like India, the Philippines and many parts of Africa.

The presentation by Katarzyna Ptak-Bufkens (DG SANTE) could not take place due to time constraints. Adam Rogalewski and Leonie Martin (Policy Officer, HOSPEEM) apologised to Katarzyna for the same and invited her to present at the next social dialogue meeting, scheduled to take place on 10 March 2023. Rogalewski also informed the delegates about EPSU's [upcoming demonstration](#) for health and care workers on 9 December 2022.

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