

## Care workers on the streets to demand higher pay, more staff and public funding

Date

Friday, December 9, 2022 - 12:00

Nearly a thousand health and care professionals and other workers took to the streets of Brussels today (9 December) to protest about the lack of urgent action by governments and the European Commission to address the growing crisis in health and care. Coming from right across Europe, the workers called on employers and ministers to improve pay, increase the recruitment of qualified staff to reduce workloads and prevent stress and exhaustion. The demonstration was joined by union leaders, organisers and members, making sure our demands were heard loud and clear by the health ministers meeting to discuss the long-term care strategy and the European Union's preparedness to cope with new pandemics.

Many thanks to all who travelled from afar to join the activists from our Belgian affiliates, marching with the EPSU banner – *#Applauseisnotenough* – in support of our core demands for higher pay, more staff, more funding and to prevent the commercialisation of health and care. We have seen many [actions and strikes across Europe](#) this year and more are foreseen in the coming weeks. Health care workers are taking industrial action in Northern Ireland with a one-day strike set for 12 December while the RCN nurses' union is planning its historic first days of strike action in England, Wales and Northern Ireland on the 15th and 20th. Meanwhile ambulance staff in the UK organised by UNISON, UNITE and the GMB have announced a one-day strike for 21 December. In Italy, workers across the public services, including in public and private health and care, are staging actions and strikes between 12 and 16 December and in Portugal nurses will organise further local actions on 14-15 December for better pay, more staff and a 35-hour working week to cope with stress.

Dr Hans Kluge, World Health Organisation regional director for Europe has stated that health and care systems face a ticking time bomb created by high work pressures, structural staff shortages and the failure to recognise that decent pay and conditions for care workers are part of the solution. However, you do not get a sense that this is an issue for the European Commission when its Health Commissioner, Stella Kyriakides, refuses to meet with trade unions and not even

with EPSU and its employer counterpart HOSPEEM, the social partners for the health sector.

In contrast, we did meet a representative of the current Czech Presidency – the Deputy Minister for Health Jakub Dvoracek, and EU Employment Commissioner Nicolas Schmit who is responsible for the European Care Strategy. Both showed that they understood the feelings and reasons behind the protest. For Commissioner Schmit, the care strategy will provide a framework for addressing many of the issues that care workers face, including low pay and the lack of collective agreements in many countries. We expect health ministers to work with the trade unions to find solutions and a long-term path to enable workers to deliver the quality care people need.

Care is a public good and a human right that we need to value, along with the workers that provide these services. Publicly funded health and care should be the way forward and not the extraction of wealth through privatisation. Workers, children, the elderly, and other users are not assets that can be commodified. That was the clear message coming from all those involved in the Brussels protest as well as the many thousands of others taking part in local and national actions around Europe for quality care, higher pay and better conditions. Solidarity to all.

- [Printer-friendly version](#)