

Working time legislation must be respected!



(9 March 2023) In a recent debate on volunteering in the European Parliament, a few MEPs raised the importance of the work of volunteer firefighters. EPSU joins the MEPs in thanking these women and men that engage in activities for their communities and give part of their free time to help others. When it comes to firefighters, however, it is important to remind that these women and men are highly trained in order to operate in emergency operations and they may be required to sign in for shift that are as long as 12 hours, exactly like professional firefighters. Additionally, with recruitment frozen and pay blocked, it is not rare to have professional firefighters (or people wanting to be professional firefighters) picking up shifts as volunteers to make ends meet.

Proportionality and investment in public services are also key elements to be taken into account: in countries like France, 70% of all firefighters are volunteer and with structural lack of staff in many countries, the employment of volunteers firefighters has become a cheaper way to provide emergency services and to reduce costs. While we honour the engagement of these women and men, EPSU cannot overlook what seems to become a deliberate attempt to replace public services with volunteers.

Finally, EPSU stands firmly with the European Commission asking Member States and employers to respect the Working Time Directive and the EU Court of Justice case law. EPSU firefighters' network has been calling for compliance with the [Matzak](#) court case [since 2019](#) and will continue doing so, at the side of the European Commission.

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