

International Nurses Day 2023: fed up nurses call for higher pay and safe staffing



(11 May 2023) As we celebrate International Nurses Day on 12 May, we honour the immense contributions of nurses in our society. Although the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic may be behind us, we must never forget the bravery demonstrated by nurses throughout the crisis. But celebrating and applauding is nothing if we do not address the ongoing challenges faced by nurses, including staff shortages and rising costs of living. Despite their vital role in our healthcare system, nurses continue to be undervalued and underpaid, enduring both financial and psychological hardships. These issues have only been exacerbated by years of austerity and liberalisation policies, highlighting the need for immediate measures to support Europe's nursing workforce.

Nurses in Europe have reached their breaking point, and they are making their voices heard. In December 2022, workers from across Europe [marched in Brussels](#) , calling on Europe's health ministers to address staff shortages. The demonstration, organised by EPSU, was just one part of a movement that has seen unprecedented numbers of health and social care workers taking industrial action across Europe. Many countries have witnessed health and care workers participating in [protests or strikes in 2022](#) . The message is clear: Europe's nurses are fed up, and they want their voices to be heard.

Health and care are not commodities

Europe's profit-driven care system puts [both workers and care recipients in jeopardy](#) , with private operators of long-term care facilities taking exorbitant amounts of public funding and private fees. These operators prioritize profits and expansion over the quality of care, which has been a long-standing issue for EPSU. The pandemic has further highlighted these concerns. The [French Orpea scandal](#) in early 2022, along with other exposes, has brought the consequences of this flawed system to public attention.

Transform applause into concrete action

It's past time for policymakers to recognise the crucial work of nurses and ensure higher pay and better working conditions. The message from EPSU and unions organising nurses is clear: applause is not enough. Policymakers urgently need to move from rhetoric to action.

Adequate staffing and good working conditions for nurses are essential to build a pandemic-resilient society. Workplace health and safety must be prioritised, which includes addressing the risks of third-party violence and psychosocial factors. Unfortunately, inadequate staffing levels and ongoing underinvestment greatly intensified the work of health and care staff during the pandemic, negatively impacting their mental health. These high stress levels continue to be a serious Occupational Health and Safety (OSH) issue – one that the EU can address through a dedicated Directive on Psychosocial Risks, [as proposed by EPSU and other European Trade Union Federations](#). Health and care workers should not be forced to endure exposure to psychosocial risk factors - it's time to put an end to workplace stress in the nursing profession.

We cannot let the applause of 2020 fade into a mere memory. It is time for policymakers to show their genuine appreciation for the health and care workers who nursed Europe through the pandemic - it's time to take action.

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