

Pensions debate focuses on portability, equality and socially responsible investment

The portability of individual pension rights was one of the main debates with Henri Lourdelle of the ETUC explaining the implications the current draft directive on portability. While EPSU supports measures to improve the portability of pension rights across Europe there was a feeling that the directive didn't go far enough in improving individual rights. Delegates also revealed some concern that the directive might compromise their collective agreements in this area. EPSU will be monitoring the directive's progress closely and will work with the ETUC to push for amendments in key areas.

The gender pensions gap across Europe is often much wider than the gender pay gap and there was a discussion about how EPSU affiliates could tackle this issue. PCS, one of EPSU's UK affiliates, provided some background on current negotiations in the civil service where one of the specific aims is to introduce a scheme which improves the pensions potential for the thousands of low-paid women who lose out because of the way the existing scheme is geared more towards higher paid, longer serving workers. The working group agreed that it would be very useful to exchange more information on how EPSU affiliates are dealing with equality issues in pensions schemes and to debate this in more detail at the collective bargaining conference in Brussels on 30 November-1 December.

David Boys of PSI introduced a discussion on socially responsible investment which highlighted the massive potential power that public service workers could wield if they had greater control of their pension fund investments. Some progress in this area had been made in countries like the Netherlands and in other countries union influence had led to restrictions on investments in companies which infringed certain criteria. However, David also stressed the potential of socially responsible investment for supporting positive initiatives such as investment in the water industry in the third world.

Twenty-five delegates from 12 countries met in Luxembourg on 1 June in a working group aiming to develop EPSU policy on pensions. Richard Pond and Jan Willem Goudriaan participated for the EPSU Secretariat.

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