EPSU Statement on the European response to COVID 19



(Brussels, 12 March 2020) Hundreds of thousands of health care workers across Europe are working hard to treat and stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus. In many cases, their task is made harder because of staff shortages, inadequate facilities and lack of personal protective equipment and testing kits. Many health workers are also in a risk group making them extra vulnerable. In Italy, 5% of all cases are health workers.

EPSU, the European trade union for public service workers, calls on national governments to take immediate measures to ensure that health services receive much needed emergency funding and to boost staffing levels in the short term through whatever means are possible.

In the medium and longer term, increased public spending on health and increased investment in public health are crucial, not just to reverse years of underspending in many countries but also to ensure that health staff and facilities can cope with

future demands. Europe had a shortfall of around one million health workers even before the COVID-19 outbreak. Governments need to radically change their approach to public health and public services: short-term contracts and precarious jobs in the health sector are not enough to tackle emergencies such as this.

A major boost in public spending and investment will also contribute significantly to economic growth and will help counteract the negative impact of COVID-19 on production and incomes. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development recognises the importance of public health spending and investment in its recent report on responses to the virus. As can be seen in Italy, it is not just the public health system but the entire public sector that is now being put under stress after a decade of austerity: a different approach is needed across the public sector so that prison services, schools and public transport are all able to cope with this, and future, crises.

EPSU reiterates the argument made by ETUC: “We cannot accept that the economic burden of this crisis, which is likely to be far more severe than the financial crisis of 2008, falls on the public finances, public services, and ultimately the workers of Europe.”

At European level, the European Commission has indicated that one-off spending on emergency action related to COVID-19 will be excluded from public spending rules. It must go beyond this and relax the Stability and Growth Pact rules so that Member States can adjust their spending in the medium term to support for well-functioning public health systems. Member States will have much greater capacity to act if the rules of stability are lifted for as long as the emergency lasts.

EPSU supports the ETUC’s call for the protection of the incomes and jobs of workers across all sectors that are affected by the virus or the economic fallout from the outbreak.

Finally, EPSU extends its sincere gratitude to the health care workers who are dedicating their lives to helping those affected, and sends its condolences to the friends and family of those who have passed away.

Statement in **EN** / **FR** / **DE** / **ES** / **SV** / **RU** / **IT**

Background

- Coronavirus / COVID-19 outbreak
- Coronavirus outbreak is affecting society at multiple levels

- Coronavirus in Europe: Guidance for EU action

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