

Waste sector: challenges and opportunities for workers

(14 December 2017) On 7 December, workers' representatives and shop stewards from ten different countries, working in public and private companies, came together at an [EPSU seminar](#) to discuss the future of the waste sector in Europe.

On one hand, the waste sector is facing major developments regarding models of waste management (transnational companies, remunicipalisation and public control) and challenges such as precarious working conditions, low wages, weak collective bargaining and the need to improve organizing and recruitment activities.

On the other hand, the industry is facing many changes in structure and working patterns at the moment. The focus in the sector is shifting from disposal ("how to get rid of waste") to re-use ("how to regain the most of the resources in waste"). The concept of the circular economy is gaining more attention and recognition and a representative of the European Commission presented its Circular Economy Package the key components of which are the prevention and reduction of waste and the increase in the re-use and recycling of products. However, it has to be noted that the social dimension of such an ambitious policy is missing.

This workshop was therefore an excellent opportunity to present how these challenges affect workers on the ground. Vera Weghmann, researcher at the Public Services International Research Unit, presented a comprehensive report on waste management in Europe, providing a valuable introduction to the discussion. The report will be published soon.

EPSU's short, medium and long-term strategy in the sector was also discussed with a strong emphasis on the need to further develop social dialogue and collective bargaining at all levels and to strengthen union density.

The impact of digitalisation, liberalisation and the circular economy's implementation have been central to the discussions; health and safety issues and skills upgrading were also identified as major challenges for the future of the workers in the waste sector.



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