

She works hard for the money - tackling low pay in sectors dominated by women



(12 July) Low pay is a major problem in certain parts of the public services - particularly those where women make up the majority of workers. [*She works hard for the money*](#), a new report, commissioned by EPSU from the European Trade Union Institute, investigates the situation in the health and social care sectors and reports on what trade unions are doing to address the issue.

This study provides data confirming that workers in lower-skilled health and social care assistant positions earn considerably less than the national average wage in their country. It also shows that the higher the proportion of women in the sector, the lower the average relative income.

The report argues that the wage penalty for working in female-dominated sectors and occupations such as health and social care can be explained by the

underfinancing and privatisation of social care, weaker bargaining power in these sectors than many male-dominated sectors and the fact that care work is subject to a general undervaluation of what often continues to be seen as “women’s” work.

The ETUI found various measures being used by EPSU affiliates and other trade unions to tackle the problem, including:

- prioritising above-average pay increases for lower wage groups and/or typically female-dominated occupations and flat-rate increases that are more beneficial for the lower paid;
 - changing pay systems, for example, by abolishing the lowest pay grades and changing the criteria on which the pay scheme is based by ensuring that prior experience is given equal importance to formal qualifications; increasing the focus on the content of the job performed and on the transparency of the criteria on which pay is based;
 - ensuring equal access to training for female workers to help improve their career prospects and their chances to move up the pay scale;
 - pursuing legal action by bringing equal pay claims;
 - addressing the cultural undervaluation of female work by changing the public perception of the work performed in female-dominated sectors like health and social care; and
 - a range of measures that may involve action by the government and/or public sector employers such as increasing in the minimum wage, ending austerity-induced pay freezes, more supportive conditions for the extension of collective agreements, improved regulation on pay transparency and the development of gender-neutral job evaluation schemes.
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