

International women's Day 8 March 2010: EPSU brings new evidence that care workers deserve a pay rise

(8 March 2010 - Press Release) EPSU wants to dedicate this year's International Women's day to the millions of underpaid care workers, most of whom are women and many of whom are migrants.

A report carried out for EPSU examines wage levels and gender gaps in the health and social care of 8 EU countries. In all the countries surveyed, workers earn below national average earnings. Earnings of unqualified or lower skilled workers are often at minimum or basic wage levels or not much higher; whereas qualified and professional staff earn salaries below those in comparable jobs in other sectors of the economy. In addition to low pay and low status, precarious contracts, irregular working hours and few career opportunities complete the picture.

Even though staff shortages and the demand for care workers are expected to grow exponentially in an ageing Europe, governments fail to improve the attractiveness of this sector, and prefer to rely on cheap labour.

"The report brings alive what we mean by a persistent undervaluation of women's work as the key cause of inequality based on gender. As the European Commission is about to launch the second phase of its campaign on closing the gender pay gap, we urge all public authorities to recognise that raising wages in women-dominated jobs and sectors, as called for by the EPSU congress last June, is part of the answer." says EPSU General Secretary Carola Fischbach-Pyttel.

The report also shows that the age profile of home carers means many will retire in the next ten years. Unless we take steps to encourage young people into the profession, with a clear career development, we will be turning the current recruitment difficulties we've got now into a full-blown crisis.

Current reforms and restructuring in this sector have to be gauged against their effects on quality working conditions especially decent pay levels and their contribution to gender equality, not against public deficit reductions. Ensuring that

the pay levels of services that are contracted out are equivalent to rates in the public sector must be underpinned by EU regulations, including a revised equal pay directive.

This report is an alarm bell for actions to improve public care services, which are critical to any serious strategy aiming at closing the gender and migrant pay gap and getting the right balance between work and family life. Should these women stop working one day, it is the whole economy that would be in a standstill.

“A pay rise for Europe’s care professionals is long overdue”, adds Mrs Fischbach-Pyttel.

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