

European countries failing to provide adequate migrant support services Public sector unions propose solutions

(Press Release, 26 October, Malaga, Spain)

There are not enough public services or qualified public service workers available to assist migrants, and, migrants are forced to wait too long to get the necessary information they need to make important life decisions, concludes a new survey of frontline public service workers in “migration gateway” Euro-Mediterranean countries. At the same time, despite the reality that the global financial and economic crises are forcing migrants into increasingly desperate situations, European countries are cutting back on urgently-needed migrant support services.

Members of the global union federation Public Services International and its European branch, the European Federation of Public Service Unions, are proposing to address these concerns through a number of trade union initiatives. These include supporting cross-border trade union exchanges of best practices in assisting and organising migrants, and lobbying governments to invest more in migrant services such as language and job training and employment placement, and improving professional training for public service workers on migrant issues. Members of nine public service unions in six Euro-Mediterranean countries participated in the Public Services Meeting Migrants survey. The results were released on 21 October in Malaga, Spain at the Public Service Conference on Migration hosted by Spanish affiliates and sponsored by PSI-EPSU.

PSI general secretary Peter Waldorff welcomed the comments of Malaga’s local government representatives who expressed support for the unions’ efforts and underlined the need to protect the rights of migrants, both documented and undocumented, who come to Europe seeking a better life.

“Working together over the long term, we hope to shape and influence policies on labour migration and development; strengthen the links between labour migration, development and quality public services; and strengthen our working relationships

with civil society and inter-governmental organisations around migration issues,” Waldorff said.

The conference report outlined that there are approximately 18.5 million third party nationals living in European countries today. Waldorff noted the vulnerable situation of migrants, including the tragic deaths of 44 migrants who tried to cross the Evros river between Turkey and Greece this year.

Welcoming the participation of union members from Europe as well as Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, union leader Rosa Pavanelli emphasized, “We are facing a humanitarian and social crisis that can only be solved through adequate funding for public services that support migrants.”

She noted that almost 75 percent of the public service workers surveyed said that professional training on migration and asylum-related issues would be relevant to their daily work, but 70 percent have never received training in these areas.

“EU policy on migration is a mess that goes against the EU fundamental right to equal treatment. We call for a European framework on migrant workers’ rights, based on the UN Convention on migrants of 1990 that has yet to be ratified by EU governments, and for long-term investment in quality public services inside and outside of Europe,” said EPSU policy officer Nadja Salson.

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