

EPSU Social Services Working Group meets in Brussels to discuss key issues in the care sector



(14 March 2023) At the end of February, the EPSU Social Services Working Group met in Brussels to discuss a number of important topics, including effective collective bargaining coverage of social care workers in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), and the European Commission's Skills and Talent Package which explores avenues for legal migration for carers.

In the morning session, Barbara Surdykowska, expert at the Institute of Public Affairs and Center for Social and Economic Analysis, presented the initial findings from research commissioned by EPSU on collective bargaining in the care sector in CEE. This research was commissioned in light of the recently adopted European Minimum Wage Directive, which sets a requirement for any Member States where collective agreements cover less than 80% of employees to establish national plans to promote collective bargaining. As it stands, collective bargaining coverage of social care workers in Central and Eastern Europe is particularly low. Barbara's presentation addressed some of the barriers, including trade union capacity and organising narrative, lack of clarity over who the employer is, legal obstacles to non-company level collective bargaining agreements, the gender dimension, and decentralised funding and organisation of LTC. The final report is expected in the summer.

In the afternoon, Nadja Salson, EPSU Policy Officer for National and European Administration, Prison Services, Tax, Defence and Migration, presented the European Commission's recently announced Skills and Talent Package. The initiative includes three pillars: a legislative pillar, to revise the Long-term Residents Directive and Single Permit Directive; an operational pillar, to develop EU talent partnerships and an EU talent pool; and a 'forward-looking pillar', to explore avenues for legal migration in three areas - care, youth and innovation. Whilst protecting and improving the rights of documented and undocumented migrant care workers is of utmost importance, the Skills and Talent Package does not take into account the need to improve pay and conditions in order to retain and attract a local workforce nor does it provide a role for EU and national social partners. Nadja outlined the new package and discussed some of the risks. In the following discussion, some participants suggested organising a conference specifically on the Skills and Talent Package as it is such an important topic for the care sector. The EPSU Secretariat is looking into a possibility to do so.

Other topics on the agenda included a follow-up to the Europe Care Strategy and how affiliates can use it to take action at national level, and updates on European projects EPSU is involved in, such as the Pact for Skills in long-term care.

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