Social Service Working Group focusing on childcare, digitalisation and social dialogue

(22 October 2018) The Working Group Social Services on 3 October 2018 in Brussels was attended by 46 colleagues from 19 countries and 32 EPSU affiliates. It focused on three issues, early childhood education and care, digitalisation in the field of social services - including in the framework of social dialogue - and the ongoing efforts by EPSU and EPSU affiliates towards setting up European works councils in the sector of health and social services.

The meeting started with an exchange of information and views about the EC's priorities in the field of early childhood education and care with Géraldine Libreau, Policy Officer "Early Childhood Education and Care", DG EAC. In her intervention she focused on the Council Recommendation on "High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems" and the "Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care" annexed to it. She informed about the Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) that should start working as of November 2018 and that would deal with questions around the professionalisation of childcare staff.

EPSU Priorities on Childcare Workers and Services were endorsed. EPSU affiliates organising childcare workers and interested in a more focused exchange will soon be linked by means of a virtual network coordinated by the EPSU Secretariat.

Colleagues also gave orientation on EPSU's priorities regarding the topic of digitalisation, robotisation and automatisation in the field of social services, not least in view of the second technical seminar in the context of the PESSIS+ Project on 24 October 2018 in Brussels (read here the report written by the Social Employers, a report by EPSU will follow). A thematic page has been set up in order to bring together the main deliverables from and bits and pieces of information on all 4 "PESSIS Projects" since 2012. The EPSU Secretariat gave an update on the main activities in the context of this ongoing (January 2018-June 2019) and forth project in which EPSU again is the trade union partner to the Federation of Social Employers ("Social Employers") and EPSU.

Leena Kaasinen, SuPer, Finland, gave a presentation on “Digitalisation in homecare” to illustrate trade union work - with own members on the basis of a survey, with local authorities as regulatory and funding body and with IT companies having designed the application used - to successfully address as a trade union new types of challenges in relation to the work organisation, workloads and stress due to the use of apps. This contribution was embedded in a general presentation of and exchange on EPSU’s work in relation to the challenges stemming from the spreading digitalisation and robotisation in the field of social services. It is reflected in the recommendations of the report (in EN, currently translated into FR and DE) on the FES/ver.di/EPSU seminar on digitalisation in public services held on 26 and 27 June 2018 in Berlin.

In addition the insights and recommendations from a report on the impact of digitalisation on job contents were introduced. It was elaborated by the Observatoire Social Européen (OSE) issued in June 2018 and contains i.a. a case study on homecare workers. One of the key questions is how the risks and opportunities for the workforce, the users and the quality of the service provision stemming from the digitalisation, robotisation and automatisation of health and social care can best be addressed in the interest of and with the full involvement of the workers and trade unions. EPSU in this context advocates for the use of a range of instruments to regulate the organisation of work such as collective agreements, enterprise-based agreements and legislation.

The participants assessed the insights from the final conference of the project “Building company networks and European works councils in health and social services” that had taken place on 4 September 2018 in Brussels. This event was instrumental to review the progress made – including of the negotiations so far in the Special Negotiation Bodies (SNB) – in setting up European Works Councils (EWC) in KORIAN and ORPEA. The aim of EPSU’s work is to have two EWCs operational in 2019. The colleagues present had an update on an ongoing dispute in Celenus, a German ORPEA subsidiary and re-affirmed their support and solidarity with the ver.di members targeted by the management of one rehabilitation clinic. The EPSU affiliates will be approached in the weeks and months to come in order to assess their interest and support to aim for the setting up of further EWC in the sector of health and social services.

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