

European and national policies must strengthen public healthcare systems



(19 February 2016) How can Europe ensure good quality healthcare for all people and counter increasing pressures brought about by under-investment and lack of cooperation amongst different healthcare systems? This question was a central theme of EPSU's Standing Committee for Health and Social Services (HSS) that met on 16 February.

Some 60 representatives from 25 countries took part in the meeting, a sign of the depth and interest of EPSU's membership in the sector. A special focus was given during the discussions to challenges facing healthcare unions in south eastern

Europe.

Following-up a report prepared for the meeting (see [here](#)) Razvan Gae from Romania and Slava Zlatanova and Kamen Danov from Bulgaria highlighted the main challenges trade unions face in their countries. Against a backdrop of a continuing exodus of trained healthcare workers to wealthier parts of Europe, unions struggle to build up a stable trade union membership base that could more effectively address the challenges. In this context cooperation with sister unions across borders is essential. Many participants mentioned difficulties with ensuring safe and adequate staffing levels in healthcare.

The problems demand a approach that goes beyond looking at individual workplaces and addresses broader questions of the supply (and demand) for healthcare workers, investment in training and funding in general. Commissioner Andriukaitis affirmed his support for this approach when he recently “Encouraging public investment, improving patient safety, ensuring training and decent working conditions for all health workers are issues I support very much” (see [report of meeting with the Commissioner on 11 January](#)). Trends regarding the privatisation, marketisation and commercialisation of health (and social) care run counter to the need to increase funding in public systems and to step up coordination and cooperation of policies across Europe to ensure universal access to high quality healthcare. Well-funded and democratically controlled healthcare systems are extremely efficient when compared to these where market forces are allowed to play too big a role.

Participants warmly welcomed an initiative by the Belgian members to organise an Action Day on 7 April 2016 (World Health Day) in Brussels - "orchestrated" by activities in different European countries - to draw attention to the failures of policies that treat health as a commodity. The Action Day will be backed up by an analysis of current policies and instruments that are pushing privatisation, marketisation and commercialisation of health and social services. More information about the Action Day - including a press conference, a seminar and a mediatised action - will be posted on the EPSU website soon - see [here](#)).

Other items discussed during the meeting included the European social dialogue with hospital employers HOSPEEM. Here health and safety and access to and the quality of professional training are key concerns.

Two colleagues of the ETUI, Marianne de Troyer and Fabienne Scandella, shared their expertise with participants regarding the risks of musculoskeletal disorders and psycho-social risks and stress at work. These risks are interlinked and stem increasingly from intensification of work. A full report of the meeting will follow. EPSU members show their support for the campaign by Romanian healthcare unions to tackle work-related violence and harassment

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