In the lead up to the next Congress in June 2019, EPSU is producing a series of briefings that focus on some of the main areas of work for the next Congress period. Each briefing will provide an overview of EPSU’s recent activities and will highlight the developments and challenges to be faced over the next few years.
Europe needs a pay rise.
With membership overall in decline and increasing in age, the trade union movement is facing a massive challenge. This affects the strength of the workers’ voice in our workplaces, our sectors, at national and at European and global level. This will be a key issue of debate for the next EPSU Congress.

While recruitment and retention are matters for local and national action, EPSU can make a contribution. Not only can we provide a platform for an exchange of information but, along with support from our major affiliates, we can help with advice, training and resources for unions who want to implement recruitment and organising strategies and campaigns.

This briefing gives examples of our recent initiatives that EPSU wants to see reinforced and extended over the next Congress period. Please get involved in this vital debate and let’s work together to build and strengthen our movement.

Jan Willem Goudriaan
EPSU General Secretary
Building union power
Recruitment and organising

Main initiatives taken

- 12-month project focusing on training and support for affiliates in Central and Eastern Europe
- Direct provision of training and advice thanks to contributions from major affiliates
- Improved planning and follow up of seminars provided by European Trade Union Institute

EPSU’s affiliates recruit hundreds of thousands of new members every year. However, it remains a challenge to ensure that these numbers translate into net growth by exceeding the number of members who leave through retirement, job cuts or career changes.

Most countries in Europe have seen a long-term decline in trade union membership and density and these can pose problems in terms of unions’ power, representativeness and finances. This has been recognised in resolutions to the last two EPSU Congresses.

Over the years EPSU has been able to offer training seminars with the support of the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) where affiliates have been able to discuss and learn about different recruitment strategies and tactics. However, in 2015 EPSU was able, for the first time, to provide direct support and training to affiliates. Experienced organiser and trainer Eddy Stam was seconded to EPSU for a year, thanks to the support of his union, the FNV in the Netherlands.

This meant that EPSU could move beyond the occasional and one-off training seminars and take a more strategic approach, with the possibility to work more closely with affiliates over a longer period.

During his year with EPSU, Eddy took part in over 40 meetings with some 1000 participants, providing some initial training as well as shorter presentations on recruitment and
organising techniques and strategies. He also worked closely at national level with a number of affiliates to help them develop their strategies and plan specific campaigns. By the end of the 12-month project, six trade unions, from Hungary, the Czech Republic, Romania and Serbia, had taken a number of steps to implement new recruitment and organising initiatives including:

- Analysing membership trends and employment developments in their sectors;
- Identifying key target groups for recruitment campaigning;
- Mapping workplaces to identify members, potential members and supporters;
- Practising and carrying out face-to-face recruitment;
- Improving effective information flows to members and activists;
- Increasing the visibility of trade unions in the workplace; and
- Changing union structures and processes.

Hungary is a country where the recruitment challenge is particularly acute with trade union density of only 10%. Testimony from colleagues from three affiliates in the country reveal the impact of the advice, training and support they received.

Viktória Szűcs, president of the BDDSz childcare workers’ union, says that the union now encourages activists to map workplaces, identifying existing levels of membership and potential membership. Viktória says that an important lesson for her was that: “recruitment is primarily about listening to workers and not telling them what the union can do. We have to find out what their concerns are and then move on to what can be done about them. It is about establishing a relationship.”

Orsolya Dobrovits, international secretary at the KKDSz culture workers’ union said that a key message from the training for her was the need to ensure that “even at the local level you have to progress according to pre-planned steps, and to feel you’re achieving something, systematically achieving realistic, small objectives helps build self-confidence.” KKDSz has managed to stabilize its membership after many years of decline.

Zsuzsanna Farkas of the HVDSz 2000 municipal union developed a recruitment campaign following the step-by-step approach outlined in the training. She said: “Personal contact is essential. It is important to communicate our successes and to ensure that we only promise what we are sure
we can deliver. We approach potential members with honesty and openness. Putting all this into practice meant we were able to recruit 138 new members in the first stage of a local campaign and then a further 94 in a follow up action.”

These three unions have since been working together to develop more ambitious recruitment strategies and plan their training needs. Three other unions, all in the health sector – OSZSP in the Czech Republic, Sanitas in Romania and GSZSZ in Serbia – have also been putting into practice a range of new practices. EPSU continues to work with these unions and provides support where possible to ensure they can build on their recent successes.

In order to continue to provide the training and support that was offered during the 12-month project, EPSU will be working closely with Greg Thomson, former head of strategic organising at UNISON in the UK and Adam Rogolevski of the OPZZ confederation in Poland who has had organising experience in the UK, Germany and Switzerland.

EPSU is also grateful for funding from FNV Mondiaal which contributed to the cost of follow-up meetings in Prague, Belgrade and Budapest and for the contribution of Geraldine O’Brien, Assistant General Secretary of Irish affiliate IMPACT (now Fórsa).

The recruitment challenge is a long-term one facing public service trade unions and consequently EPSU has decided to plan for staffing changes to address this. These will take effect over the next Congress period. The federation has three regional officers in Central and Eastern Europe and as they retire, their replacements will be recruited on the basis of their experience in recruitment, organising and campaigning. This means they will be available to support affiliates at national level in terms of training and advice.

### Main priorities

- **Staffing support for affiliates developing and implementing recruitment and organising strategies and campaigns**
- **Support for training initiatives for trainers and activists, working with larger affiliates and the ETUI**
- **Financial support, where urgently needed by affiliates to help launch recruitment initiatives**
- **Monitoring and evaluation of affiliates’ strategies and campaigns where they have received support from EPSU**
The **European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU)** brings together trade unions from across Europe. Our eight million members work in local, regional and national government and European administration, health and social services and energy, waste and water.

EPSU works to influence the policies and decisions of employers, governments and European institutions that affect public service workers, their families and communities. We mobilise for action and change and are committed to achieving another, social Europe.

Improving workers’ rights and pay and conditions by strengthening collective bargaining and defending the right to strike are core to our work.

EPSU is the European region of the global public services federation PSI and is a member of the European Trade Union Confederation.

By sitting down with employers in the European social dialogue in electricity, hospitals and health services, local and regional government and central government administrations, EPSU negotiates best practice agreements that improve the working lives of public service workers and ensure quality services for citizens.

Women represent the majority of our members and gender equality is at the heart of everything we do. From negotiating with employers on women’s rights in the workplace to exposing the scandal of the gender pay gap, EPSU is taking action for real equality.

EPSU fights against tax avoidance by the wealthy and multinationals that undermines our public finances. We are making the case for cast-iron exclusions of public services from international trade deals and we stand up for the rights of migrants, both in the workplace and in the services our members deliver.

EPSU provides a platform for our members to regularly share good practices in organising, recruitment and campaigning.

We campaign for well-funded public services and our members know that the services they deliver are not a cost to society but an investment in our communities. We’re taking that message to the heart of Europe.
EPSU is the European Federation of Public Service Unions. It is the largest federation of the ETUC and comprises 8 million public service workers from over 260 trade unions across Europe. EPSU organises workers in the energy, water and waste sectors, health and social services and local, regional and central government, in all European countries including the EU’s Eastern Neighbourhood. It is the recognised regional organisation of Public Services International (PSI). For more information please go to: www.epsu.org