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 expected developments and challenges to be faced over the next few years.
Climate change, the largest single threat to current and future generations, is posing fundamental challenges for public services and public service workers. In recent years, we have seen extreme weather events, flooding and forest fires for example, leading to loss of life and widespread damage and destruction of buildings and infrastructure. Our members across many services have been part of the immediate and longer term response – in emergency and rescue services, energy and water, local and regional government.

Urgent action is required to tackle climate change, as called for by the hundreds of thousands of young people who have been taking to the streets across Europe. EPSU has been working hard to influence policies at global and European level aimed at decarbonising our economies and pointing out that the pursuit of profit maximisation and growth at all costs are a driver of climate change. At the same time the priority has been to ensure that a more sustainable society is achieved through a just transition whereby no one is left behind. We need to cut carbon dioxide emissions, invest in renewables, assist developing countries and address the employment and training needs of workers most directly affected.

EPSU will continue to lobby hard to ensure that the policies of European countries, particularly the larger energy users and exporters like Russia, and of the European Union, are the most effective possible in mitigating and adapting to the demands of climate change.

Jan Willem Goudriaan
EPSU General Secretary
Climate change

Main initiatives taken

- Joining the trade union lobbying at the Paris climate change conference in 2015 and the follow-up COP conferences to ensure the inclusion of just transition.

- Working with the ETUC, other trade unions and civil society to influence European Union policy in relation to energy and the circular economy in order to ensure ambitious climate measures and strong social dimension.

- Negotiating and lobbying with the electricity employers to deliver on a just transition that addresses training and quality job creation.

EPSU worked with its sister organisation, Public Services International, the ETUC and the International Trade Union Confederation in the lead up to the United Nations climate change conference in Paris in December 2015, mobilising for the event in particular with a week of action in June 2015. The PSI and EPSU trade union delegations were very active in Paris in the lead up to the formal talks and the campaigning by trade unions and civil society was vital to ensure the final agreement included, in its preamble, a reference to “just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs”.

This is long-term work for the trade unions and EPSU had a presence as part of the delegation of the International Trade Union Confederation at the December 2018 COP 24 conference in Katowice in Poland. The delegation was able to celebrate success on the first day with the adoption of a statement on just transition by a large group of governments.

The key issues have also been taken up by EPSU’s firefighters’ network that issued a statement in 2015 linked to COP 21 and highlighting the issues of adaptation and disaster risk reduction.
EPSU had also been successful in negotiating a joint statement on COP 21 with the electricity employers, Eurelectric, emphasising that social partners need to work together to address climate change and particularly its social and employment impacts.

This collaboration with Eurelectric in the European sector social dialogue has continued in relation to a number of other policy developments relating to climate change. In November 2017 the social partners agreed a joint declaration on just and clean energy transition. It emphasises the need to focus on quality job creation, reskilling/upskilling, involvement of social partners/local communities and specific financial instruments to ensure a just and clean transition in the electricity sector. A joint advocacy effort has been developed since then.

In December 2018 EPSU, industriAll and the employers met European Commission Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič in December to discuss issues related to long-term climate change.

EPSU has been active in relation to European Union energy policy, highlighting its implications for decarbonisation and climate change, for example, in relation to proposals on the internal energy market design in 2016. In 2018 it contributed to the European Commission’s public consultation on the 2050 long-term, low carbon emission strategy and worked on the European Commission’s Clean Energy Package, focusing on the importance of securing the key zero-net carbon emissions target by 2050 while ensuring the social dimension of climate change policies.

As part of this effort to ensure a just transition for workers, EPSU has been strongly advocating for ambitious measures to eradicate energy poverty which affects millions of Europeans. In 2017, together with the European Anti-Poverty Network, EPSU published a policy paper, demanding the Right to Energy for all Europeans. EPSU then joined forces with other social and greens groups to launch the Right to Energy coalition whose main aims are to secure a ban on disconnections to protect low-income households, to get homes renovated to cut emissions and energy bills and to put energy in people’s hand.

In 2017, in preparation for the European Commission’s review of its adaptation strategy, EPSU commissioned a report from the European Trade Union Institute on Public services and adaptation to climate change. This underlined the need for urgent action at national level to develop adaptation strategies and plans with a clear recognition for increased
public investment across local and regional government, health, emergency and other vital public services.

The circular economy, particularly the reduction and recycling of waste, has important implications for climate change and for EPSU’s members in the waste sector. In 2016 EPSU produced a position paper on the European Commission’s circular economy package and in early 2018 published a report by the PSIRU research organisation, Waste management in Europe – good jobs in the circular economy, that highlighted the need for action on employment, training, health and safety standards and working conditions.

EPSU has worked with many other progressive organisations to get across the need for urgent policy change in Europe focusing on sustainability in 2016 and on the European Union budget and alternative scenario for the future of the EU in 2017. Similarly it joined another broad coalition in 2017 to call on the European Central Bank to stop funding polluting corporations. EPSU has been participating for several years in the Trade Unions for Energy Democracy research and campaign network which is very active on climate change issues. Our work with the ETUC is important in advocating public investment in publicly owned energy companies and a just transition to mitigate the negative impacts of decarbonisation policies on workers and local communities.

EPSU has been arguing for remunicipalisation and public ownership of utilities as the most effective way to reach a net-zero carbon emissions economy and ensure action is taken to mitigate climate change. Liberalisation of water, waste and energy sectors has only had negative consequences for the fight against climate change. EPSU proposes a different model, based on the public service principles of universality, access, equality, solidarity, affordability and cooperation.

**Man priorities**

- Maintain lobbying activities in relation to the European Commission over energy and the circular economy and policies to adapt to and mitigate climate change.

- Support European and international union action and campaigning to ensure implementation of the Paris agreement, advocating public alternatives.

- Continue to work with other trade unions and energy employers to ensure a just transition to a decarbonised economy.
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