

8. BRIEFING

Migration

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.







In 2015 about 1 million migrant workers and refugees moved into and across Europe, as a result of conflicts, wars, inequalities and climate change. This large number by EU standards however paled in comparison with the millions of refugees in the Middle East or Africa. This, nevertheless, has posed major challenges for public institutions and their workers. Unfortunately, the European and national response to asylum-seekers has often fallen pitifully short of what should be expected from one of the wealthiest regions in the world.

EPSU has been arguing hard for a change of approach, criticising the European Union's policies which continue to focus on tightening borders, pushing back refugees and outsourcing asylum duties to third countries.

EPSU has also been calling for an end to privatisation and for increased public investment in the public services that are vital to ensure the safe and effective integration of migrants and asylum-seekers into society.

The contribution of migrant workers to the provision of public services is crucial in many European countries and this contribution needs to be recognised.

Jan Willem Goudriaan
EPSU General Secretary



Migration

Main initiatives taken

- ✓ **Working with the ETUC and PSI to challenge the policies of the European Union and national governments**
- ✓ **Highlighting the situation of workers providing services to migrants and refugees and supporting a new network to strengthen links between them**
- ✓ **Commissioning research to expose the underfunding of services to migrants and refugees and the negative impact of privatisation**

EPSU has been a consistent critic of European Union policy on migration and refugees and this intensified in 2015 when hundreds of thousands were risking their lives to reach Europe. In April of that year the EPSU Executive Committee agreed a **statement** which set out a number of key demands, including:

- immediate restoration of EU-funded search-and-rescue operations;
- sufficient and well-trained public service workers in reception and asylum processing centres;
- increasing efforts to ensure suitable living conditions for asylum-seekers and refugees;
- compliance with the UN Geneva Convention establishing safe, legal routes for those who flee war and persecution, and increasing the number of recognitions of refugee status; and
- immediate suspension of the Dublin Convention according to which the EU country of arrival is responsible for processing the asylum claims of applicants, which places disproportionate responsibility on border countries.

Later that year, EPSU joined with its sister organisation, Public Services International (PSI) in issuing two statements **before** and **after** the extraordinary Justice and Home Affairs Council meeting of 14 September. These called for a fair distribution of resettlement of refugees across the European Union supported by sufficiently staffed public services.

The two organisations worked together several times in 2016 firstly in joining many other trade union and refugee groups to **condemn** the refugee exchange deal between the EU and Turkey and in supporting a rally in Brussels calling for an end to the deal. EPSU and PSI also used **World Refugee Day** that year to call on European leaders to live up to their international responsibilities.

EPSU has remained highly **critical** of the European Union's asylum and migration policies which continue to focus on tightening borders, pushing back refugees and outsourcing asylum to third countries in Africa and the Middle East. In 2018, briefings on the European Council meeting in **July** and Commission President Juncker's State of the Union address in **September** highlighted the failure of the EU to adopt a human rights based approach to the issue.

EPSU has also taken initiatives to highlight the role of trade unions and workers in the services that welcome, support and defend migrants and refugees. In 2016 it organised a joint **meeting** with PSI, financed with the support of Swedish affiliates and the European Trade Union Institute, to showcase the role of public service unions both from the perspective of migrant-sending and migrant-hosting countries in Europe, North Africa and Middle East.

In 2018 EPSU supported its Spanish and Italian affiliates in initiatives focusing on the perspective of workers involved in welcoming and delivering services to migrants and asylum-seekers. Two major events in Melilla (the Spanish enclave in Morocco) and Palermo in Sicily brought together hundreds of workers involved in migration services, search and rescue, healthcare, reception centres for adults and unaccompanied minors, and asylum-processing.

Following the meetings, EPSU agreed to establish a **network** of workers involved in the reception of migrants and refugees. The network aims to strengthen European links, support workers in delivering a public service of hospitality that respects the dignity and rights of migrants and asylum-seekers and provide a platform to discuss migration policy developments at European and national levels. On 18 March 2019, EPSU together with the Socialist & Democrat, Green and Green/Left (GUE) political groups held a meeting in Parliament. MEPs Cofferati, López, Schlein, Urtasun and Kashetu Kyenge welcomed the EUcare network and shared many of EPSU's policy demands.

The sector social dialogue has provided opportunities to work with employers, particularly in local and regional government. In 2014 EPSU and the CEMR employers' organisation signed joint **guide-lines** on Migration and Strengthening Anti-Discrimination in Local and Regional Governments. These aim to help promote workplace strategies and employment for migrant workers and to combat racism, discrimination and xenophobia towards them.



Integration of migrants into society was also an important issue for the sector and at the beginning of 2016, EPSU and CEMR held a joint **seminar** in Berlin to discuss migrants and the impact on jobs and working conditions, with a **report** published in February. Later in the year, in the lead up to International Migrants Day they issued joint guidelines on the **integration of migrants** into society.

EPSU has been calling for increased public investment in public services for asylum-seekers and against privatisation. The call for more investment was reflected in a **report** published in 2017 by Greek affiliate ADEDY with the support of PSI. The report revealed the desperate situation on the island of Lesbos and lack of resources available to local public services. Around the same time EPSU and PSI published a **report** on the privatisation and outsourcing of migration and asylum-related services. Commissioned jointly from the Public Services International Research Unit it provided damning information on the detention conditions of migrants.

International Migrants' Day on 18 December has been an important date for campaigning and in 2015 EPSU and PSI used it to draw attention to the situation of refugees and to urge governments to ratify and implement the **United Nations Convention** on the protection of rights of migrant workers. The following year EPSU worked with the ETUC and the PICUM platform for undocumented migrants to show what trade unions could do to organise and defend undocumented migrants and EPSU supported a joint statement by ETUC/PICUM.

Work on migration and refugees has not just focused on the flows from North Africa and the Middle East. In 2015 EPSU and PSI held a **meeting** in Armenia, in cooperation with the International Labour Organisation's Workers' Activities bureau in Moscow, to discuss the migration of health workers across Eastern Europe and the impact on health service delivery and staffing numbers.

EPSU has also been concerned to address the particular issues facing women and children who are migrants and refugees. In 2016 the Gender and Women's Equality Committee adopted a **statement** on the labour market integration of refugee women. The following year, EPSU joined with PSI and 47 other organisations in signing a **statement** calling upon EU governments to take immediate steps towards ending child immigration detention and ensuring alternatives to detention are accessible and available.

Man priorities

- ✓ **Continuing to hold the European institutions and national governments to account over their migration and refugee policies and to press for a human rights, solidarity-based approach;**
- ✓ **Campaigning to stop privatisation and increase public investment in services to migrants and asylum-seekers;**
- ✓ **Strengthen the EU Care network of workers providing services to refugees and migrants across EPSU affiliates and develop the notion of "a public service of hospitality".**

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.



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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