



Declaration of EPSU Health and Social Care Pan European Conference **Better working conditions means high quality health care**

It is imperative to move from applause to concrete action to save the health and social care sector

We, the delegates at the EPSU pan-European Health and Social Services Conference call for urgent improvements to working conditions of the health and social care workforce before it is too late. Better working conditions means high quality healthcare!

The COVID- 19 pandemic exacerbated the existing problems in the health and social care sector, which EPSU and its affiliates had underlined for a long time. Among them were a lack of investment, privatisation, austerity measures, low collective bargaining coverage and the manifold disregard for occupational safety and health protection. This led to deteriorating working conditions, which in turn contributed to growing staff shortages. According to [Eurofound](#), in the EU alone there is a shortage of 2 million health care workers, whereas globally the shortage will reach around 180 million by 2030. Moreover, most European countries report shortages in the long-term care workforce, which is worsening due to the demand of the ageing population. Many workers have already left the sector because of the poor working conditions, many more are considering to leaving, whilst intake rates for training are falling.

This should raise an alarm among countries and relevant decision makers, who are not recognising the urgency of the problem.

Across the Pan- European Region we are observing widespread unrest among health and social care workers. From the balloting for strike action in the NHS the UK, threat of mass resignation in Finland, to national demonstrations of health workers in Italy and France, the region faces increasing discontent in the health and social care sector.

Health and social care workers cannot wait for the sector to collapse due to staff shortages. The problems are urgent and need to be addressed now.

To that end we call on policy makers and employers to:

- Recognise the urgency of the crisis in health and social care
- Negotiate with trade unions the measures to deliver adequate, needs-based staffing levels;
- Ensure sufficient public funding and investment to enable health and social care workers to deliver high quality care which meets the needs of care recipients;
- Negotiate with unions for workers to have fair wages, at least in line with inflation;
- Exclude health and care from any austerity measures;
- Promote social dialogue and collective bargaining. This is crucial not only to improve working conditions but also to ensure patient centred quality care. European employers (HOSPEEM)

and trade unions (EPSU) recently adopted a [Framework of Action on Recruitment and Retention](#) which shows the way forward;

- Protect health and social care as a public good; prevent the commercialisation of health and care; and ensure that if profit is made it is fully reinvested to improve working conditions and healthcare delivery. The commercialisation of health and care should be reversed to safeguard the sector's resilience and focus on the rights of care recipients;
- Increase protection of occupational health and safety, including against psychosocial risks (mental health), and funding for relevant inspections to ensure healthy workplaces;
- Promote collective bargaining and protect workers and trade unionists from anti-union activities; prevent companies that do not have collective agreements from accessing public funds
- Reduce health inequalities by ensuring universal access to health services.
- Rebuild the public nature of care services and recognise the crucial role social services play in our societies;
- Develop adequate measures to support workers suffering from post-COVID conditions (such as long-COVID);

On the Pan- European level we call for:

- Active contribution to the development of the Health Treaty, which should address staff shortages.
- Improved cooperation between the relevant European organisations, including WHO-Europe, ILO- Europe, the Council of Europe and the EU institutions, to tackle issues in the health sector;
- Protection of medical data under relevant current and future regulations;
- Increased funding from EU Institutions to improve the training, working conditions and health and safety conditions of health and care workers;
- A dedicated [Directive on Psychosocial Risks](#) to protect workers from stress and burnout caused by work;
- A Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee in social services, as requested by [EPSU and the Social Employers](#);
- Implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, particularly the right to health and care;
- Recognition of COVID-19 as an occupational disease as recommended by the [Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work](#).
- Improved and continuous dialogue between the European institutions and EPSU.

In addition to our demands above, the conference supports a call for action in Brussels on 9th December on the occasion of the European Health Council.

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EPSU is the European Federation of Public Service Unions which represents almost 8 million workers, of which the vast majority are in the Health and Social Care Sector.