

EPSU-CEMR DRAFT JOINT STATEMENT ON THE FUTURE OF EMERGENCY SERVICES IN THE EU

Heatwaves, climate changes and extreme weather events such as wild and forest fires, thunderstorms and floods are becoming even more regular across the European Union. Such events lead to inevitable changes in working conditions and public service provision: on one hand how to adapt to work in extreme weather for all Local and Regional Governments' workers but also, on the other hand, how to adapt emergency services that find themselves working in longer and larger emergency operations. For example, the large forest fires occurred in the summer required very long and complex operations also covering large surfaces, requiring therefore more people and longer shifts, at the same time.

If operations change, it is important to think how to face them, how to staff emergency services and how to finance them. Proper financing of emergency services equals to a better protection for the whole population. Local and Regional Governments (LRGs) need adequate and sufficient financing in order to respond to the needs of the population with properly staffed and equipped emergency services.

In this time of climate crisis, we need to equip LRG with adequate means and resources in order to guarantee adequate working conditions to cope with the increasing need for emergency services as a result of the climate crisis. Currently, a number of local emergency services do not have the capacity to cover all personnel needs and risk to rely on volunteers to cover the basic emergency needs.

As during the COVID-19 pandemic, municipalities and regions are at the forefront of the climate crisis as they are large employers of emergency workers and also responsible for a considerable part of public procurement of emergency goods (such as protective personal equipment) and services. The COVID-19 pandemic has proven the resilience of emergency services and how social partners can and need to contribute to social dialogue in the LRG sector in order to develop sustainable, inclusive, socially just and well-funded public services that are able to respond to emergency situations. It is of fundamental importance thereof to ensure quality investments in local and regional emergency services and adequate working conditions for emergency services workers.

Adequate and sufficient protective personal equipment is important in a context of increasing exposure to carcinogens following the repeated forest fires during heatwaves. The level of exposure to carcinogens for firefighters is so high that on 1 July 2022, the [IARC WHO classified occupational exposure as a firefighter as carcinogenic to humans \(Group 1\)](#).

Occupational cancer is the first cause of work-related deaths in the EU, with as much as 78% of recognised occupational cancers related to asbestos. In 2019 alone, [more than 70,000 people in the EU](#) died from past exposure to asbestos at work. LRGs employ many workers that are exposed to asbestos. Firefighters and emergency services, for example, are exposed to asbestos fibres every time they intervene in an explosion, fire, collapse of a building containing asbestos. Mostly the presence of asbestos is unknown, as there are no accessible registers with these data. Waste workers are exposed during the disposal phase.

The EU will have to engage in a massive process of asbestos removal and renovation wave to reach its objectives of greening the Union. As LRGs we are fully committed to move towards a greener and asbestos-free Union and as employers and unions in LRG we believe that, in order to achieve these objective, LRGs and LRGs Social Partners must be involved in all steps of the process, at all levels. At this end, we underline the need of the establishment of national registries on asbestos, that we call the EU Commission to include in [its proposal in early 2023](#). These registers must be drawn at national level and be easily and fully accessible by all LRGs and emergency services. Moreover, alongside prevention it is important to protect those workers that have been exposed and recognise the risks for their health, with a stronger acknowledgement of all asbestos-related occupational diseases.

We also stress the challenges that LRGs are facing due to lack of resources and, as LRG social partners we call for adequate funding from national government in order to be able to adequately fund local emergency services, to both respond to the current emergencies but also to adapt to the changing needs emerging from the climate crisis. This would include funding and measures to provide trainings and ensure availability of personal protective equipment.