

Policies for recovery and change in response to the pandemic

Summary version

Adopted at the 65th meeting of the EPSU Executive Committee, 24-25 November 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an enormous impact on workers and our communities. It has required a massive response on the part of European countries both in terms of dealing with the direct health impact and addressing the knock-on effect of emergency measures.

Substantial and in some cases unprecedented initiatives have been taken to tackle the economic and social side effects. The aim should not be a return to pre-COVID world but one that provides solutions to some of the fundamental problems in relation to public service funding, public investment and inequality that hampered a full and effective response to the pandemic.

National governments and European and global institutions now need to be put under pressure to convert these short-term initiatives into long-term policy changes. This must involve a fundamental transformation of the funding and provision of public services and the running of the economy that works to end inequality and exploitation and ensures a just transition to tackle climate change.

This means facing up to the short-, medium and long-term challenges that include the need to:

- reinforce public health and social services and improve the pay and conditions of workers in the sector, including achieving the safe and effective staffing levels essential to respond to the needs of those receiving care;
- guarantee the health and safety of public service workers;
- increase the funding of and investment in public services in general to guarantee the quantity and quality of provision, ensuring the financing of cities and municipalities who have suffered lost revenue while being on the frontline of the fight against COVID-19;
- consider measures to increase public revenues through progressive taxation that could include targeting wealth and property while also looking at initiatives to avoid further accumulation of debt that could undermine the long-term recovery in some countries;
- take measures to ensure a sustainable economic recovery in a way that also tackles both inequalities and climate change;
- strengthen collective bargaining and social dialogue and the rights of public service workers and trade unions, recognising in particular the vital role of frontline workers that have kept our societies together during the emergency; and
- rethink the role of European and global institutions in providing effective coordination in response to the pandemic, in particular in key sectors such as health and social care.

Europe's public service unions will work:

1. to improve the organisation and funding of public health and social services to deliver on the human right for health and care;
2. to increase the funding of and investment in public services in general to contribute to a socially just society;
3. to ensure the funding of the recovery and use of funds in line with the Green and Social Deal and conditionalities related to collective bargaining and tax compliance;
4. for stable public finances in the longer term based on tax justice;
5. for strengthening collective bargaining and social dialogue and the rights of public service workers and trade unions;
6. to address new ways of working;
7. on proposals for a reset for the Eurozone, European Union and the broader Europe; and
8. on the communications, lobbying and campaigning needed to realise our aims.

Policies for recovery and change in response to the pandemic

Response to the COVID-19 pandemic has required a massive response on the part of European countries both in terms of the direct health implications and the knock-on effect of emergency measures, including strict lockdowns that have closed broad swathes of the economy. The fact that such policies have been adopted and implemented at short notice shows what is possible if governments are willing to take radical action. National governments and European and global institutions now need to be put under pressure to convert these short-term initiatives into long-term policy changes, in such a way that involves a fundamental transformation of the funding and provision of public services and the running of the economy that works to end inequality and exploitation and ensures a just transition to tackle climate change.

A series of fundamental questions and the action that needs to be taken in the short-, medium and long-term that address:

- The reinforcement of public health and social services and improvements to the pay and conditions of workers in the sector, including provisions for staffing levels according to the needs of those receiving care.
- The health and safety of public service workers and the crucial link with public health
- The funding of and investment in public services in general, to guarantee the quantity and quality of provision, ensuring financing for cities and municipalities who have suffered and will continue to suffer lost revenues while being on the frontline of the fight against COVID-19.
- The need for measures to ensure a sustainable economic recovery that also address the need to tackle inequalities, climate change and the urgent provision of training and quality jobs, particularly for younger workers.
- Strengthening collective bargaining and social dialogue and the rights of public service workers and trade unions, recognising in particular the vital role of frontline workers that kept our societies together during the emergency
- Rethink the role of European and global institutions in providing effective coordination in response to the pandemic, in particular in key sectors such as health and social care.

Short-term

The impact of COVID-19 has exposed the long standing weakness of many health systems in terms of their lack of preparedness to tackle the outbreak. The workers in the public health system rose to the challenge often at great risks to themselves and their families. They worked to stop the spread of the infection, with those in social care – eldercare establishments and home care, in particular – working under extremely difficult circumstances, often without access to even basic personal protective equipment.

The spikes in infections in many European countries during August showed that the pandemic was still not under control and health systems and healthcare workers continue to face serious pressures. Governments need to ensure that hospitals, health and social care systems have the capacity and equipment to cope, noting that many workers endured excessive workloads during the initial outbreak. Our health and care systems need more staff and better working conditions to deal with the work-related stress. Health systems and workers were often stressed beyond the limit even before the crisis. Preparedness for crises means there needs to be a buffer in staffing to be able to cope with extraordinary events.

In the short-term, problems with the provision of PPE and safety protocols, remain to be solved. While health workers should continue to have priority, many other groups of workers,

particularly those in direct contact with the public, and for whom physical social distancing is difficult or near impossible to comply with in social care and closed institutions, are lacking the PPE that they need to carry out their jobs safely. These include workers in care homes, home care, other social and education services, asylum and migration centres, waste services, fire services and the public offices of ministries and public administrations etc.

Risk assessments of COVID-19 infection should be carried out, taking into account both workplace conditions and the psychological and physical characteristics of the workers. The necessary preventive and protective measures should then be taken or an alternative risk-free job provided in the case of particularly vulnerable workers.

Such assessments should also address the specific risks that have been identified as faced by workers from black and minority ethnic communities.

The point here is not just to protect the health of the workers themselves but also to ensure the safety of the service users as well as workers in many other key sectors such as retail, delivery, the justice system and public transport, etc.

There is also the urgent need to ensure production and distribution of other medical equipment such as ventilators and provide increased facilities for testing. This raises questions about the capacity of the EU and national governments to procure these as well as demands for conversion and/or requisitioning productive capacity. Governments should be urged to adopt industrial policies that include setting up or converting local factories to produce these goods to guarantee supply while at the same time preventing heightened risks of corruption. There is also the role the EU can and should play in supporting neighbouring and other countries.

Where countries have been taking steps to relax lockdown measures it is crucial that trade unions are involved in negotiating rules and procedures that apply in advance of any gradual return to work. These rules and procedures, including COVID-19 testing, provision of masks and relevant health and safety practices are even more important where there is evidence of an increase in infection and where restrictive measures are being re-introduced nationally or locally. Unions need to insist on their role and call for agreements to be negotiated as a condition of any return and to ensure the involvement of occupational health and safety services.

The challenges in the medium to longer term

The main challenges to address are covered the following eight sections:

1. The organisation and funding of public health and social services (page 5)
2. The funding of and investment in public services in general (page 7)
3. Funding the recovery (page 9)
4. Public finances in the longer term (page 11)
5. Strengthening collective bargaining and social dialogue and the rights of public service workers and trade unions (page 14)
6. New ways of working (page 14)
7. Eurozone, European Union and the broader Europe - proposals for a reset (page 16)
8. Communication, lobbying and campaigning (page 17)

1. The organisation and funding of public health and social services

The crisis has revealed how some countries and regions with better public healthcare networks have been better able to deal with the pandemic while others have had inadequate policies to respond to an outbreak like COVID-19 and have failed to invest properly in more general public health and prevention strategies including occupational health and safety. However, there is also the failure to maintain or increase funding for health and social care to meet the growing demands of an ageing population and respond to the particular health and social care needs of rural areas.

While in many cases it is national governments themselves that have failed to provide adequate funding for health services, within the European Union the role of the European Commission has to be taken into account.

The early pressure to impose austerity shortly after the last financial and economic crisis 2008-09 has left a legacy of underfunded services while its country-specific recommendations on health have focused more on the question of cost efficiency rather than quality and access, effectively pressuring governments in some countries to reduce capacity in terms of beds and intensive care units. The inadequacies of the social care sector, above all elder care, have also been cruelly exposed in this crisis. Underfunding and inadequate staffing already characterised the sector with an inadequate supply of beds for medical treatment and/or outpatient services which was widely ignored in the early days of emergency response until major shortages of PPE along with the shocking death toll in some care homes were revealed. This raises the important question of having effective data collection on infections and deaths and full public access to these statistics. Public service unions need to put pressure on governments to focus efforts on strengthening public healthcare and addressing the structural problems related to understaffing and low pay and reverses the trend to private provision by progressively increasing direct public management in both health and social care and ensure effective coordination between the two sectors.

Both health and social care services rely on a predominantly female workforce, often from migrant and/or black and minority ethnic groups. Most are underpaid, their work undervalued and, especially in social care facing precarious employment conditions dictated by private companies and multinationals who have won contracts offered by local authorities with a view to cut costs in response to funding cuts from central government. There is clear evidence from some countries that black and minority ethnic workers have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, with many working on the frontline and concentrated in low-paying, often outsourced jobs and in lower-income households. They would also be disproportionately affected in terms of jobs and incomes if austerity measures are imposed.

Strengthening collective bargaining in health but particularly in social care will be key to ensuring that trade unions can negotiate improvements to pay, working time and other conditions, especially health and safety. It is also important to recognise their role in containing the pandemic. While in the short-term this may involve special bonuses for working long hours in high-risk environments, there needs to be a longer-term perspective to address the need for fundamental revaluation of jobs across these sectors.

Key points

- Recognise the effort and the role of the healthcare staff in fighting COVID-19 and ensure funding to include provision for a steady increase in health and social care salaries that reflect a revaluation of jobs predominantly done by women.
- Put a stop to privatisation of any health and social care services and plan for bringing privatised services back under public ownership and control.
- Bolster the capacity of and access to essential public health services, increasing coverage and effectiveness as well as their public ownership and management, taking account of the citizens' needs.
- Provide additional funding for public health and social care provision and investment to ensure safe and effective staffing levels, quality employment and spare capacity and to avoid the excessive working hours that additionally expose workers to infection
- Ensure that nursing homes and other residential care services have safety protocols in place to react quickly and to protect residents and staff in the case of an outbreak and introduce mechanisms to coordinate exchange of information and response in case of pandemic.
- Ensure the continuity of care and support services and the stability of social care workers. All instruments to support social services' access to EU and national funds for immediate financial support for wages and other costs, including funding of innovative responses to the crisis, such as providing distant support.
- Fully integrate long-term care into social protection systems including long-term care insurance covering all care-related expenses.
- Guarantee permanent contracts and prioritise full-time work and quality employment across health and social care and take steps to integrate the students and precarious staff who have contributed to the fight against the pandemic; The strengthening of health and social care should ensure that improvements respond to the needs of local communities, particularly where health systems have been focused mainly on hospital provision.
- Increase the capacity of national preparedness plans.
- Ensure the provision of good quality medical equipment and create a European strategic stockpile of personal protective equipment and call for a full report on the situation at national and European levels.
- Increase the EU budget for emergency health care provision and improve the EU's capacity to coordinate preparedness plans. Include the candidate countries, Eastern Neighbourhood into these plans and work to coordinate such plans at European and global level.
- Clarify the roles, relationship and coordination mechanisms in health and social care system governance at EU and European level and monitor the effectiveness of European rules to ensure proper coordination.
- Strengthen the role of social partners and social dialogue in healthcare and including in the EU
- Implement fundamental changes to the European Semester to ensure it works towards improving health and social care including proper planning of preparedness for health crises.
- Psychosocial support should be provided for staff in essential sectors – health, social and health care, security forces, etc. Given high workloads, long working hours and the emotional burden of certain jobs, cases of post-traumatic stress, depression or anxiety are emerging.

2. The funding of and investment in public services in general

Public welfare spending has been absolutely critical in the response to the crisis not just in its role as an automatic stabiliser but in ensuring protection of the most vulnerable.

While health and social care are at the forefront of concern, it is clear that many other public services have been affected by the crisis, from the key services such as waste, water and energy to the social security and employment services that have been crucial to dealing with the fallout from closing down large swathes of the economy. In many countries, these services and the workers that provide them were significantly affected by the austerity that followed the initial boost to public spending in response to the economic and financial crisis of 2009 and their contribution to economy and society undervalued for many years. Energy workers have kept hospitals and other important infrastructure operating despite the impact of liberalisation which has undermined the capacity and coordination of energy systems. The legacy of austerity has taken a significant toll and it would be devastating if the response to the COVID-19 crisis were similar – a short-term boost to get the economy going again followed by years of public spending restraint which would also undermine measures to create a sustainable economic recovery.

In many cases public services have become more expensive for citizens as public control over supply, demand and prices has weakened and economies of scale have been lost. Priority needs to be given to public provision and planning along with research and development focused on public service goals not private profit.

As with health and social care, the priority should be proper public funding for quality services and quality employment in public services and not budget squeezes or privatisation or reliance on public-private partnerships.

Further liberalisation of services of general interest should therefore be avoided and those of the past reversed. This pandemic has exposed the fact that not all have the human right to water, leaving some people unable to comply with minimum hygiene recommendations and exposed to additional dangers. This must be eliminated for all future pandemics by banning liberalisation and requiring Member States to make the human right to water a reality for all.

With the massive loss of income for municipalities due to the impact of the measures to contain the pandemic, governments and the EU in the recovery plans will have to ensure that funding is easily accessible. Local governments are large employers and through public contracts and subsidies indirectly employ many.

The spread of the pandemic has exposed inequalities across society as it is often low-paid workers who are less likely to do jobs where they can work from home and so face either redundancy, short-time working or continuing to work but often with the necessary safety measures in place either at work or on the daily commute. They are also more likely to live in small and/or (over-)crowded accommodation where the virus can spread more rapidly. This raises serious questions about the distribution of financial support and the balance between supporting business and those most in need.

The role of the European Union is central to the debate on public funding for public services and public investment. The suspension of the Stability and Growth Pact and the fiscal compact is a positive measure to ensure that member states are not constrained from increasing public spending and investment by the 3% and 60% deficit and debt thresholds. The EU needs economic and social governance focused on fundamental, long-term changes to support a

long-term recovery by increased public spending and investment. The kinds of structural reforms in the EU and other European countries that have often involved privatisation, cuts in social spending and pensions and attacks on labour laws to drive down wages, are not what are needed

Key points

- The fundamental review of the Stability and Growth Pact and the cancellation of the fiscal compact in the EU, accompanied by a fundamental revision of economic governance with the aim of focusing on ensuring convergence, reducing inequalities and a coordinated effort towards innovation, research and social cohesion
- For all countries a “golden rule” that excludes specific areas of public investment from the calculation of debts and deficits could also include special treatment of public funding for public health and social care potentially at least for the next 10 years
- Funding of other key areas of public services, particularly local and regional government, also needs to be ensured.
- Supporting and improving public services will be crucial to tackling many problems that have been exposed by the crisis not least the social and economic inequalities that contribute to greater health risks
- the European Union and other global bodies must shift their thinking from their narrow view of public finance and balanced budget and recognise the central social and economic role of public services
- There is a need for action to support the most affected states and strengthen coordination at pan-European level. This will help counter the nationalist views that fail to recognise the social and economic impact of the pandemic on Europe as a whole.

3. Funding the recovery

The lockdown of societies and closure of broad swathes of economic activity have had a massive impact on economic impact. A collapse in GDP of anything between 20% and 30% during the main three-month lockdown period will translate into annual falls in GDP of 5%-10% for 2020, well above the average 4% decline registered in Europe 2009 at the height of the last crisis.

National governments have been putting in place a range of measures to support the economy and protect jobs and these have been complemented by action by the European Union. The European Commission estimates that such initiatives total over €4 trillion broken down as follows:

€2450 billion	National liquidity measures (including some taken under suspension of state aid rules)
€750 billion	EU Recovery and Resilience Facility (€672.5 billion) plus other budgetary measures (€360 billion of which in loans)
€330 billion	National measures taken under the flexibility of EU budgetary rules
€240 billion	European Stability Mechanism (ESM) Pandemic Crisis Support for member states
€200 billion	European Investment Bank Group financing for businesses
€100 billion	SURE – EU funding for short-time work schemes
€70 billion	Direct EU budget support

Much of these are in the form of loans or loan guarantees rather than transfers and they do not include the €750 billion Pandemic Emergency Purchase Programme of the European Central Bank (ECB) which, in addition to €120 billion already committed, covers purchases of public and private sector bonds. This crucially helped calm the bond market in mid-March when there was a spike in bond yields in particular affecting Greece and Italy.

The ETUC has welcomed these moves while underlining the importance that any lending to member states such as the ESM initiative should not impose conditions such as the need to undertake the kinds of structural reforms that have been a core part of the EU's system of economic governance. Any lending should also be over the (very) long-term with action by the ECB to keep interest rates low. The European Commission's Recovery Plan is a step in the right direction with the commitment to raise revenues at European level to fund grants and loans to support Member States. There are concerns, however, that the proposed rules will allow Member States to block endorsement of other countries' national recovery plans in an attempt to impose fiscal or other conditions. The EU should set out measures to prevent this from happening.

It remains to be seen how the allocation of grants and loans will play out for individual countries but with a risk that they will still add to the burden of those countries already with high debt levels then more radical measures might be needed. These could involve some kind of debt write-off or restructuring or debt monetisation. In the latter case this would mean changing the remit of the European Central Bank so that it does become fully a lender of last resort and can operate in the same way as central banks in countries with their own currencies. This would open up the possibility of dealing with debt as is done in economies like Japan, the UK and the USA, where central banks guarantee to buy government debt. The interest that the central bank is paid is then paid back as dividends to the national government.

While there is general recognition of the need for a massive and urgent boost to the economy in various forms this raises the question of how this support is provided to private sector companies. This is an opportunity to set conditions which will require companies to meet a range of green and social conditions that will help transform our societies and economies. As a start, access to public money must be restricted to companies that respect workers' rights, pay decent wages, provide public country-by-country reports, don't use tax havens and other measures to avoid tax. Governments should ensure proper public oversight of all bailouts, which may, in some countries, involve being represented on boards, to prevent corruption and mismanagement and to check what investments are being made. Further criteria should be developed in relation to collective bargaining and trade union rights as well as low carbon economy.

There is also the opportunity to prioritise action on climate change rather than use concern about economic recovery to defer action. Funds should be made available to support the conversion of ecologically damaging industries, such as air travel, the automotive and plastics industries. There should be support for green industries, recycling, downscaling and more focus on sustainability rather than growth. Indeed, there is the combination of evidence that on the one hand of high pollution levels contributed to the underlying health conditions that made people more vulnerable to COVID-19 while on the other dramatic reductions in transport and other polluting activities have already led to major improvements in air quality. Criteria for bailouts should also be attached to climate-relevant investments and not only the low carbon economy. These should include the aspect of just transition.

Key points

- The scale of the economic impact is set to be much greater than the economic and financial crisis and so requiring coordinated action on a greater scale
- EU borrowing to fund €750 bn in grants and loans is welcome but it will be crucial how this is allocated, particularly the grant element.
- For the worst hit countries more radical measures which might include, for example, very long-term loans at favourable interest rates and a longer term commitment to bond purchases from the ECB may be necessary to prevent that their capacity to recover in the longer term is not inhibited by a higher debt burden
- Action at EU level should not be on the basis of requiring member states to undertake structural reforms and Member States should not be able to block endorsement of other countries' national recovery plans or impose fiscal or other conditionality
- Public financial support for private companies should be on the basis of applying a range of strict green and social conditions, including tax

4. Public finances in the longer term

The economic support measures introduced in many countries often include deferral of tax for companies hit by the crisis. While this may be acceptable as a short-term initiative for small business and self-employed, the challenge will be to ensure that this does not become entrenched in longer-term responses to the crisis. Debt-based measures and quantitative easing, however useful they are to finance a public health emergency, might not be sustainable in the long run. The level and scope of taxation need to be fundamentally reassessed to allow for a new approach to public finances with progressive, transparent and effective taxation at its core, and the use of public money closely related to socially and ecologically useful activities. Urgent action is required to address the longstanding lack of tax justice which has contributed to increasing inequalities and deteriorating public services.

In recent years, repeated revelations of the way that companies and wealthy individuals use tax havens and exploit other means of reducing their tax bills has led to more initiatives to revise tax legislation and plug some of the loopholes but these have often been either disappointingly weak or have yet to be implemented.

More progressive taxation systems can include property and wealth taxes as well as higher rates of corporation and income tax. The European Commission has talked a lot about shifting taxation away from labour and to other forms of taxation, such as carbon taxes, but this shouldn't preclude a more progressive income tax system with higher rates for higher earners and corporate profits as well as a debate about maintaining lower rates for lower earners rather than increasing thresholds before any tax is paid.

At EU level the proposed directives on country-by-country reporting (CBCR) and a common, consolidated, corporate tax base (CCCTB) remain to be improved and adopted in Council but have become all the more urgent, as has the need to ensure a minimum 25% rate for corporate tax to stop the downward trend in corporate tax and achieve more balanced tax systems between capital and labour.

As well as more drastic action on tax havens, the EU definition of which remains inadequate, there remains the need to introduce effective rules for the taxation of digital companies' turnover or profits who feature among the major corporations that have seen increasing, not to say booming, profits since the beginning of the crisis.

One response to the last crisis was growing support for a financial transactions tax (FTT). This was not only seen as a measure to raise a potential source of income at European level but also to regulate the way the finance sector operated. While progress towards an FTT stalled, this time round, there may be great understanding of the need for coordinated EU measures to underpin the recovery and potentially scope to revisit the idea of a European tax which could be based on higher incomes and/or personal wealth not excluding corporate tax measures as well.

Key points

- As a short term goal, at EU level, to close and prevent new tax loopholes, reinforce calls for enactment and implementation of public CBCR, CCCTB and a 25% minimum tax rate and FTT and relaunch the idea of an EU digital tax, with a clear directive for its creation in each country.
- The urgent need to boost public finances at both national and European levels warrants discussion about a range of possible measures that could include the introduction of an EU progressive solidarity wealth tax to go to an emergency fund to assist the poor;

short-term taxes on dividends; taxes on digital companies; higher taxes on top incomes and reduced VAT (for example, on personal protective equipment) as part of a shift to more progressive taxation.

- Invest in public tax and labour administrations where almost 100000 jobs have gone missing between 2008 and 2018 in 28 European countries with many such jobs still under threat.
- Counter the argument that tax cuts are a good way to put money in people's pockets so they can spend and kick start the economy with alternative proposals to boost the economy.

5. Strengthening collective bargaining and social dialogue and the rights of public service workers and trade unions

The ILO has set out a four-point plan to respond to the crisis including the call to strengthen social dialogue, collective bargaining and labour relations institutions and processes. Indeed, in many countries, but with Italy as a prime example, trade unions have played a key role in responding to the crisis, negotiating agreements on health and safety, short-time working and other measures. In Sweden, public service trade unions had already negotiated a new agreement to cover pay and working time and emergency situations, which came into effect for the first time in the health service in Stockholm.

In stark contrast, governments in Hungary and Poland have taken advantage of the situation to push through legislation to weaken trade union and collective bargaining rights. Other governments, including Lithuania and Croatia, have considered such measures but pulled back in the face of trade union and political opposition.

In recent years, public service unions – particularly those in health and social care – have been campaigning on staffing, highlighting overwork and burnout among workers as they try to compensate for inadequate staffing levels. While acute in many countries in health care there are also problems in other sectors such as prisons. The failure to tackle these problems has contributed to intensifying the impact of COVID-19 and underlines the importance of getting safe and effective staffing levels on the collective bargaining agenda as well as, of course, having strong collective bargaining rights to deliver the improvements to pay and conditions that will also help address staffing problems.

It is crucial that in the recovery from what is set to be the worst ever economic crisis that workers are not forced to choose between secure and decent working conditions and the possibility just to keep their job. The threat is that employers will push hard for negative changes to pay, working time and other conditions as they call for “sacrifices” to generate growth. We reject this.

Key points

- Trade unions and collective bargaining should be central to the efforts to tackle the crisis rather than being undermined by measures to reduce workers' rights under the cover of emergency legislation and to combat any attempts to reduce workers' wages or taking any other unilateral measures to the detriment of civil servants and public service workers.
- Workers and their trade union representatives should be consulted on compulsory health and safety risk assessments at the workplace as provided for in any relevant national legislation and the 1989 EU Framework directive on occupational health and

safety and reiterated in the EU's Occupational Safety and Health Agency's guidance on COVID-19 and the return to work;

- In the face of serious risks of infection trade unions and workers need support when they withdraw labour in the face of a grave or imminent danger, as guaranteed by the right provided for in many national legal systems as well as in the 1989 EU health and safety directive
- Relaunch the EU sector social dialogue in particular in sectors such as health and care, where it is essential to address issues like training, occupational safety and health, ensure preparedness for future pandemics and tackle the structural weaknesses that have led to so many infections and deaths among healthcare staff.
- The European Commission should better value the role of collective bargaining, sectoral social dialogue at EU and national levels. Information and Consultation Rights have shown how they contribute and the Commission should reconsider its refusal to implement the central government agreement on workers' rights to information and consultation on restructuring by a draft directive for adoption in Council
- Governments, in close consultation with trade unions, should remove all exemptions of public sector workers from EU social minimum standards, as concrete recognition of their invaluable role in responding to and preventing the spread of COVID-19.

6. New ways of working

Responses to the COVID-19 crisis have included major changes to working arrangements, including especially a massive shift to telework. This has often been carried out at short notice without the appropriate procedures in place to ensure health and safety as well as appropriate equipment and any relevant compensation. This has helped maintain thousands of jobs and ensure continuing operation of public services and contributed to a reduction in travel to and from work as well as travel to and from meetings, helping to reduce congestion and pollution. However, emergency measures should not become the rule and proper processes of negotiation are needed to ensure appropriate provision of equipment, training and health and safety protocols and appropriate compensation of costs, including insurance schemes for work-related accidents during telework.

While telework can provide opportunities to improve work-life balance, it should be introduced on the basis of agreement with trade unions. Employers can potentially make considerable savings by cutting office space but that shouldn't be at the expense of workers' health and safety in general or without taking specific measures to address psycho-social risks and the need to disconnect. The shift to telework at a time of school closures also raises questions about the impact on women, who in some European countries make up the majority of the public sector workforce, with increased pressure to combine care and work. There is also the increased risk of domestic violence when couples face extended periods of lockdown. Measures need to be taken by public authorities but support can also be provided through negotiated agreements. Reorganisation of public administration should be properly planned with a view to explore new ways of work and guarantee improved effectiveness and work-life balance.

For many public service workers the response to COVID-19 has required longer hours, particularly where infection of colleagues and quarantines have led to more staff being away from work. Public service employers need to negotiate with trade unions over innovations in work organisation and, in particular, over measures to address problems arising during the crisis, such as increased stress and pressure arising from pandemic-related anxiety and social isolation. Workers should not have to face the burnout and other negative effects associated

with being online for excessive periods,. The use of smart working must become one of the tools to improve work-life balance and guarantee the right to disconnection, data security and trade union participation. Radical short-term changes such as short-time working should generate some reflexion of how working time is addressed in the longer term and the response to any further crises. The impact of online public services on the access to and quality of services provided to citizens in a vulnerable situation should also be assessed

Key points

- Negotiate over innovation in work organisation and address problems related to increased stress and pressure arising from pandemic-related anxiety and social isolation, and explore the potential for the right to work from home and other smart ways of working.
- Any long-term shift towards more telework or smart work needs to be agreed on the basis of collective bargaining, including the right to disconnect.
- The crisis has raised issues around the distribution of working time and emergency arrangements covering pay and conditions that need to be subject of negotiations of potential long-term changes.

7. Eurozone, European Union and the broader Europe - proposals for a reset

The COVID-19 crisis required an effective, coordinated response at European level but the EU institutions were not fully up to the challenge. National initiatives often pre-empted EU-level action which was hampered by a lack of unity and solidarity between member states. The EU's key role as a coordinator was also limited by resources and lack of clarity as to its role in health policy. The lack of cooperation on PPE and opposition to future debt mutualisation through any form of euro bonds risk leaving long lasting damage not least in countries like Italy and Spain that faced some of the worst outbreaks. This risks increasing anti-EU feeling and allowing the far right to gain further ground.

Improved coordination needs to be extended to other European countries and at global level like through the WHO which needs to be reformed with increased public rather than private funding and better public control. EPSU will engage with the EU level discussions on the European Health Union. In relation to this, as EPSU calls on the European Commission to raise questions with the WHO about the need for guidance that guarantees workers' protection, ensuring that frontline workers get optimal personal protective equipment, for example, respirators not just face masks. WHO recommendations on public health and social measures in the workplace have been prepared without worker involvement and those on social distancing, risk assessment and testing strategy are inadequate to safeguard workers' lives and well-being.

Within the Eurozone, the challenge remains to win the argument that radical action is required in the mutualisation of debt and the role and remit of the European Central Bank, calling into question the way that both institutions are run in terms of democratic accountability.

Attacks on trade union and workers' rights under the cover of emergency legislation underline the importance of applying ILO standards This raises the question of how these can be more effectively implemented within the European Union and the role of the EU in responding to attacks on fundamental rights, including in relation to candidate and neighbouring countries.

The Council of Europe could also play a role in this regard but also in the light of its recommendations that have proved useful in relation to refugees or prison services in broader EU policies.

In response to the impact of the pandemic on migrants, refugees and the continuing flows of people to Europe, the eucare network should be strengthened and it should carry out a survey of the impact of COVID-19 on migrant workers and refugees covering their health as well as their working and living conditions. A new European policy on migration, including a change to the Dublin rules, must remain at the centre of the European trade union policy on this issue even in this time of crisis.

8. Communication, lobbying and campaigning

This document outlines the major changes in institutions and policies that will be required to ensure a comprehensive response to the crisis. The challenge will be to implement a range of communications, lobbying and campaigning initiatives to push these through. Some of the key issues to consider include:

Need for clarity in message and to develop a number of key slogans/themes such as Fighting for a Future for All, People and Our Planet Before Profits, a green and social new deal for the future

The fight against a return to austerity will be key and valuable to review and reuse earlier studies criticising austerity.

This will involve new tactics and methods in how we lobby governments and European institutions, learning from affiliates' experience with different initiatives such as photo campaign, petitions, virtual public meetings with politicians etc. While major demonstrations are likely to be impossible for some time, joint action will be important and co-ordinated industrial action and other initiatives, including legal action, have to be on the table particularly where trade unions face the imposition of austerity, including threats of pay cuts or pay freezes and where they face the same pressures from international institutions, whether the EU, the International Monetary Fund or a new form of Troika.

Working in coalitions can be important in driving key demands as experience in various initiatives around trade, procurement, the right to water and the right to energy have shown. There is a range of bodies such as those campaigning against poverty, for tax justice, the green deal and other issues where cooperation will boost EPSU's campaigning and lobbying capacity.

There is the potential to build on the support expressed for public service workers and, for example, create some form of lasting memorial, such as turning 23/6 (Global Public Service workers day) into an annual European day of remembrances of the sacrifices and dedication of all PS workers; to call for it to be a European/ global public holiday and for us to use it as an annual action day for the rights of public service workers and for quality public services.