



REPORT OF ACTIVITIES

JANUARY - DECEMBER 2023



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Introduction

EPSU at 45

2023 saw EPSU celebrate a landmark anniversary: its 45th birthday. Since its formation in 1978, EPSU has worked tirelessly to promote and defend the interests of public service workers in Europe, becoming the leading voice for the rights of workers in the public sector. Over the decades, EPSU has influenced EU policies on public services, health and safety, employment rights, and social protection, achieving significant milestones such as establishing formal social dialogue committees across all major EPSU sectors – including, as of 2023, a sectoral social dialogue committee for social services. Read more on EPSU’s history, values and vision [here](#). Happy 45th anniversary, EPSU!



On the road to Congress

As you will read in section 23, this year was marked by a series of meetings leading up to EPSU’s 11th Congress in Bucharest. You won’t get an understanding of what’s been achieved in this mandate from this Report of Activities alone – you’ll have to read this together with the reports from [2019](#), [2020](#), [2021](#) and [2022](#) to understand all the work that has been done. It’s a remarkable read considering that shortly after EPSU’s 10th Congress in Dublin, a global pandemic forced us to change our ways of working and campaigning for over two years. We’re putting the finishing touches on what is sure to be another excellent EPSU Congress and another remarkable mandate – [see you in Bucharest this June!](#)



Social dialogue: navigating challenges, pushing for progress

In 2023, EPSU actively advocated for strong, transparent and robust European social dialogue amidst significant developments in EU policy. The Commission's package on "Strengthening social dialogue in the EU," released on January 25, garnered mixed reactions from EPSU, ETUC and other ETUFS. While the package offered potential to bolster national social dialogue and collective bargaining, concerns loomed regarding its enforcement mechanisms and the fate of sectoral social dialogue committees. Throughout the year, EPSU diligently pressed for clarity on the legal implementation of social partner agreements, notably the 2022 central sectoral social partner agreement on digitalisation. Despite setbacks such as the collapse of cross-sector negotiations on telework, EPSU's efforts saw success with the establishment of the Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee for Social Services in July – the first new committee in a decade. This accomplishment underscored EPSU's commitment to safeguarding social dialogue's pivotal role in fostering economic and social welfare.

No return to austerity!

In 2023, EPSU continued its long standing fight against austerity measures in the European Union, emphasising the detrimental impact on essential public services and workers' well-being. EPSU repeatedly stressed the need for increased public investment and spending to address critical staff



Picture 1

shortages across public services. These efforts culminated in significant demonstrations in Paris and Brussels, where workers and trade unions rallied against the EU's austerity plans as part of ETUC's "Together Against Austerity" campaign. Public service workers have not forgotten the ordeal Member States imposed on us, on our services and on our communities. Wages were held down, collective bargaining was suspended, and privatisations were

forced on certain Member States. Many countries still suffer the consequences. Staffing shortages accumulate and public services workers cannot deliver the quality of care they want and the people we care for deserve. As negotiations unfolded – and continue to unfold - regarding the reform of economic governance rules, EPSU urged policymakers to prioritise investments for the green transition and the European Pillar of Social Rights while guarding against anti-worker reforms and privatisation pressures.

Promoting peace in times of conflict

In 2023, EPSU remained deeply engaged in advocating for peace and justice amid ongoing conflicts. The devastating toll of the war in Ukraine has been staggering, with thousands of civilians and soldiers losing their lives, and millions displaced, particularly women and children. The European and global labour movement's solidarity has been remarkable, providing crucial support to affected communities and hosting displaced individuals. EPSU's stance against pro-war unions underscores its commitment to defending human rights and promoting peace. Additionally, amidst the conflict in Israel and Gaza, EPSU condemned the violence and called for an immediate and durable ceasefire to protect civilians and essential services workers. EPSU advocates for diplomatic solutions and the implementation of UN resolutions to achieve lasting peace and ensure the rights and security of all people.

Defending the right to strike



Picture 2

Across Europe, the right to strike faced serious challenges. Trade union activists in various countries were increasingly targeted for their participation in strikes and demonstrations. In France, union activists were summoned on public safety charges relating to their participation in actions such as demonstrations, strikes, and other activities in connection with France's pension reform.



Picture 3

Legislative measures in [France](#), [Belgium](#), and [the United Kingdom](#) aimed to restrict union activities, criminalising protests and demonstrations. These actions not only undermine workers' rights but also pose a threat to fundamental democratic freedoms. EPSU defended the right to strike across Europe, joining and organising solidarity mobilisations and protests, sending letters to policymakers, and amplifying the struggles of EPSU affiliates.

2 Climate change

Summer of 2023 proved to be once again a very difficult summer for emergency services, with the largest wildfires in Europe since decades. The EPSU Firefighters' network was active in the press delivering interviews and highlighting the needs of the sector. For more details see the section on the firefighters' network.

EPSU continued to campaign for an EU exit from the Energy Charter Treaty in 2023. We [welcomed](#) a leaked Commission recommendation that an exit from the Treaty is "inevitable" and called on the Commission to move from its plans for Treaty reform and instead prioritise exiting the Energy Charter Treaty.



Picture 4

The European Commission published its draft proposal to reform the EU's electricity market design in March 2023. EPSU [criticised the proposal](#) as a 'band-aid applied to a failing electricity market', failing to consider the shortage of workers in the electricity sector. A provisional agreement was reached between the Council and Parliament on the file in December, and while previous criticisms remain valid, [the agreement provides that](#): "Member

states shall ensure that vulnerable and energy poor customers are fully protected from electricity disconnections... including the prohibition of disconnections". the outcome is a step forward which will better protect citizens, especially the most vulnerable.

The Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive moved through the European Parliament in 2023. The Commission is a recognition of some of our longstanding demands such as a right to sanitation, and the inclusion of the "polluter pays" principle to the wastewater sector is welcome and long overdue.

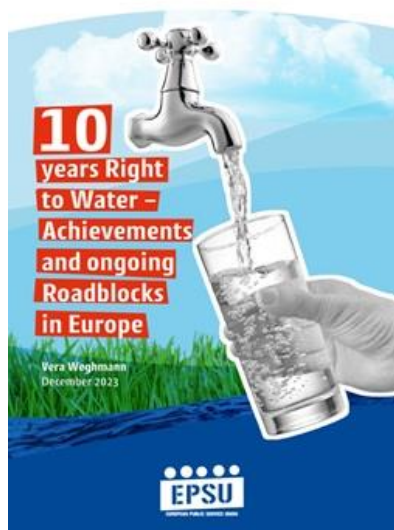
EPSU joined a number of other organisations [to call on the Parliament](#) not to water down the ‘polluter pays’ principle, calling for legislation that holds polluters responsible for the environmental damage they cause and makes them pay through contributions to wastewater collection and treatment costs.

In October, the Fossil Free Politics coalition launched the People Over Polluters Declaration in Brussels, urging the reform of the energy system, corporate accountability, and recognition of workers in a just transition. The declaration protests the undue influence of fossil fuel companies in EU policymaking, especially post-Russian invasion, calling for a shift towards fossil-free politics prioritising public interest groups like trade unions and NGOs, rejecting austerity, and holding companies accountable for environmental and social impact. In November EPSU joined a protest organised by the ETUC calling for a just Directive on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence (CSDD). The protest came as the Council examined the CSDD Directive text – a text that fails to include workers and trade unions. EPSU echoes and supports the ETUC’s call for a Directive that regulates business conduct for all companies and the entire supply chain.

3 Right to Water

2023 was a notable year for EPSU as it marked ten years of the landmark Right to Water campaign. The Right to Water campaign was the first ever successful European Citizens’ Initiative, gathering nearly two million signatures from citizens across Europe calling for water to remain a public service and public good. The campaign called for an end to the liberalisation of water services; guaranteed water and sanitation for all in Europe; and universal access to water and sanitation for all.

The successful ECI resulted in the European Commission partially addressing our demands with the Drinking Water Directive, adopted by the European Parliament in 2020. The directive includes a new article on access to water, requiring Member States to improve or maintain access to water intended for human consumption for all.



Picture 5

EPSU marked the ten year anniversary of the successful ECI by publishing an op-ed in Brussels Times on World Water Day (22 March) outlining the importance of water as a public good and of continuing the fight for the Right to Water into the future.

We reflected on the state of play of the right to water in Europe in [a report](#) published to mark Human Rights Day (10 December). The report reveals that 48 million people in Europe lack access to piped water at home, while 31 million lack access to basic sanitation. Globally, 2.2 billion people face a similar plight. The report gives an overview of some of the achievements since and due to the ECI, while also pointing to some of the key challenges that still lie ahead. The study highlights the importance of public ownership to put the human right to water agenda into practice. EPSU met with the UN

Rapporteur on Water in October 2023 to discuss ways to work together to guarantee the right to water.

4 Digitalisation

Digitalisation was once more an important element of EPSU’s work as we pushed for the landmark sectoral social partner agreement on digitalisation in central government to be considered for legislative implementation. See the section on social dialogue for more on this important agreement.

Two major projects came to a close during the year. EPSU had been cooperating with PSI on a three-year training and information project, [Our Digital Future](#), and the last round of training sessions took place in the first half of 2023. The project, supported by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, involved a wide range of participants from different levels in the unions and generated some valuable content in terms of briefings, guides and the collective bargaining and digitalisation [hub](#) on the PSI website. The [DIGIQU@LPUB](#) project was funded by the European Commission, led by the OSE research organisations and ran until October 2023. It provides insight into the impact of digitalisation on public services and public service workers in three sectors and in eight countries.

The European Health Data Space was a key issue for EPSU in 2023. Throughout the year EPSU highlighted key concerns on data privacy, the role of big tech companies and the risk of overburdening



Picture 6

health and care workers. We published [a position](#) on the proposed Regulation. EPSU [co-hosted an event](#) with AK Europa in March, highlighting the need for the EHDS to involve unions in order to ensure the stakeholder buy-in of an already overburdened health and care workforce. EPSU joined several other organisations to call on lawmakers to protect sensitive health data by adding an ‘opt-in’ consent mechanism to the EHDS, joining WeMove EU and EDRI to

[present a petition](#) of over 100,000 European citizens calling on the Parliament to prioritise patient privacy over corporate interests in the EHDS.

The Parliament approved its position on the EHDS in December 2023, and while improvements were made – including the recognition of the need for increased funding and capacity building – the text failed to deliver the comprehensive consent system needed to protect patient health data, nor the recognition of social partners in the healthcare sector. The Council position introduces an opt-out consent mechanism but decentralises the decision on whether to enforce said mechanism to individual countries. Policymakers will enter trilogue negotiations on the EDHS in early 2024.

The European Parliament and the Council of Ministers agreed on criteria to recognise and protect platform workers' employment rights on December 13, 2023. The compromise includes a reversal of the burden of proof, making platforms prove no employment relationship, and emphasises the role of trade unions in the evolving platform economy. However, the French government led a coalition to block the deal, disappointing millions of workers seeking improved social protection and working conditions. EPSU [described this as](#) “very disappointing for tens of millions of workers who thought they could look forward to better social protection and working conditions.”

Parliament and Council [reached an agreement](#) on the EU Artificial Intelligence Act in December 2023. ETUC welcomed the recognition of the high-risk nature of workplace applications of AI and called for specific protections for workplaces to deal with AI systems. Employers must be accountable for decisions to workers. EPSU [joined several organisations](#) calling for the inclusion of fundamental rights impact assessments, a provision which was retained in the compromise.

Social partners in the LRG sector are currently implemented a project called “local social digital” aiming at mapping local collective agreements on digitalisation in view of negotiating sectoral guidelines.

5 Solidarity

Action by French trade unions in opposition to pension reforms was the largest and most sustained of



Picture 7

any involving EPSU affiliates with 14 days of action from January to June. EPSU sent several messages of solidarity and an EPSU delegation joined the national protest in Paris in January, March and [May](#). There was further solidarity with French colleagues in [September](#) when EPSU joined with industriAll Europe in organising a protest outside the French embassy in Brussels to protest against the persecution of trade union activists in the CGT-FNME energy union.

Trade union rights were also under attack in Belgium and EPSU joined a major demonstration in [May](#) in opposition to government plans to restrict the right to protest and to show solidarity with a major dispute at the Delhaize retail group where trade unions faced attacks on their rights to strike and organise.



Picture 8



Picture 9

Unions in Türkiye continued to face repression and EPSU again expressed solidarity with union members facing trial for their union activities. The latest cases involved members of the SES health and social care union with the EPSU general secretary joining an international delegation in [March](#). One union leader was released from detention that month and another in [June](#) but they still faced charges and further legal action followed in [September](#).

In October a delegation of the Serbian Army Soldiers Trade Union (VSS) [visited EPSU](#), as well as several members of the European Parliament and other international and European trade union organisations. The delegation was composed of the union's president Novica Antić, who has been dismissed from his army job; Predrag Jevtić, the General Secretary of the union and also victimised by the authorities; and Mitar Krstić, the lawyer of the VSS union.

Strike action in public services in the UK rolled over from 2022 into 2023 as unions struggled to secure pay increases to compensate for inflation and years of below-inflation pay rises. The response of the UK government was to tighten up strike laws and in [February](#) EPSU joined with other European trade union organisations to express support for the campaign to defend the right to strike. Towards the end of the year



Picture 10



Picture 11

EPSU's Finnish affiliates were also campaigning to defend basic trade union and workers' rights as well as the welfare state. Campaigns over trade union and workers' rights were also supported in [Georgia](#), [North Macedonia](#) and [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#).

There were many other strikes and demonstrations across Europe calling for pay rises for public services workers, including in [Germany](#), [the Netherlands](#),

[Portugal and Greece](#) among others.

EPSU also raised its voice in support of those facing violence, harassment and discrimination, including LGBTQI+ people in [Russia](#) and in other parts of [Europe and Central Asia](#) and the many, particularly women, facing repression in dictatorial regimes such as [Myanmar](#) and [Iran and Afghanistan](#).

Beyond EPSU's support for trade union and political struggles, it also expressed solidarity for workers and citizens facing natural disasters and armed aggression. These included the conflicts in [Israel-Palestine](#), [Nagorno-Karabakh](#) and the continuing war in [Ukraine](#) along with the devastating earthquake in [Türkiye](#) and the various [extreme weather events](#) driven by climate change.

6 Gender equality

EPSU's Women's Committee [held its flagship conference](#) in Rome on 24 November. The conference brought together women's voices, with delegates and speakers from across Europe. After opening speeches by Johanna Lehmann (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung), Jan Willem Goudriaan (EPSU) and Maria Eugenia Rodriguez Palop (MEP GUE/NGL), the conference delved into critical facets of gender equality, focusing on the overarching themes explored in three panels: equality in EPSU and its affiliates; equal pay for work of equal value; and violence against women.

The first panel focused on equality within EPSU and affiliates, featuring initiatives promoting support for young women and gender equality training. The second panel discussed equal pay, presenting insights on the Pay Transparency Directive and addressing structural pay gaps. The third panel explored violence against women, urging a shift from a "monster narrative" to addressing societal patriarchy. Discussions covered collective bargaining's role in fighting gender-based violence and the possibility of framing austerity as a form of gender-based violence. The conference emphasised the multifaceted nature of achieving gender equality and the pivotal role of unions in combatting and preventing violence against women.

The Conference concluded with [the adoption of](#) EPSU's landmark Rome Declaration, a declaration outlining the conference's resolute commitment to stand up for women's rights and gender equality. The Declaration will guide the work of EPSU's Women and Gender Equality Network in the coming years, underlining the goals to mainstream the priorities of the Declaration across all EPSU sectors.

The Conference was held on the eve of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, a theme which resonated strongly throughout the conference. After the conference, the speakers and delegates participated in a flash-mob protesting violence against women, organised in cooperation with FP-CGIL. Participants were loud ([very loud!](#)) and clear as they shared their message



Picture 12

from Piazza Trilussa in the centre of Rome: women will not be silenced! A large EPSU delegation also participated in the demonstration in Rome marking the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women on Saturday, 25 November – joining tens of thousands of protesters against Italy calling out for urgent change.

On International Women's Day (8 March) EPSU took to the streets in Brussels, joining a number of demonstrations. We joined ETUC's 'Get Me Home Safely' campaign launch as well as a demonstration held by Belgian trade unions and the city's Women's Day march. The previous day (7 March), EPSU joined workers marching in the streets of France in protest against the proposed pension reform that even the government itself admits unfairly penalises women. EPSU also [released a statement](#) focusing on the fight for equality and economic independence.

EPSU [issued a statement](#) expressing solidarity with women in Iran, Afghanistan and those fighting for women's rights and human rights across the world, joining the international trade union movement calling for the immediate release of imprisoned trade unionists, protestors and those detained in violation of international law.

EPSU was also very active, together with the ETUC, in lobbying for the adoption of the Pay Transparency directive, the first EU law to include the concept of and the right to equal pay for work of "equal value".

7 Recruitment and organising

EPSU's recruitment and organising (R&O) team continued to work with affiliates to help them draft, develop and implement their organising strategies. A second workshop for advanced unions took place in May, while a workshop in November was the seventh for unions beginning the process and involved individual consultations with each of the ten unions taking part. EPSU expresses its thanks to the continued contributions from Orlagh Fawl, head of strategic organising at Irish affiliate Fórsa, and Greg Thomson, former head of strategic organising at UNISON in the UK.



Picture 13

There were important developments in terms of employing organisers to work with affiliates. Along with existing support for the BDDSz childcare workers' union in Hungary, EPSU also helped fund an organiser working with the Public Services Secretariat of NSZZ Solidarnosc in the Malopolska Region of Poland. Furthermore, thanks to funding from Kommunal in Sweden, two organisers are being employed for

three years from March 2023, one each by the health care trade unions, OSZSP in the Czech Republic and GS ZSZ in Serbia. EPSU also submitted a project to the European Commission seeking funding to employ five more organisers, but this had not been evaluated by the end of the year.

The R&O team prepared and implemented three events (two workshops and one conference) with the [youth network](#), involving some basic training and exchanges on strategies on youth organising.

During the year, the team ran several basic R&O training courses for affiliates in Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Poland, Lithuania, Kazakhstan, and the Czech Republic.

The R&O team participated in the conference run by the Ella Baker School of Organising in the UK in September and has been asked to share EPSU's organising experiences during the next conference.

The team also used the opportunity to meet with colleagues from UNISON to discuss their organising efforts.



Picture 14

EPSU is continuing to share organising experiences with other European Trade Union Federations and the ETUC joined these discussions in 2023. Meanwhile, one of the R&O team has joined the network of trainers and experts on trade union renewal set up by the European Trade Union Institute.

The main goal for 2024 will be to develop a training course for union organisers.

8 Privatisation and remunicipalisation

EPSU continued to promote its report on the impact of consultancies in public administration. In March, EPSU [published an op-ed](#) in the EU Observer, which highlighted the report's findings and built upon media interest in books such as 'The Big Con' by Mariana Mazzucato and Rosie Collington and 'When McKinsey Comes to Town' by Walt Bogdanich. The report was highlighted [in a Swiss](#)

[documentary](#) by RSI News on the role of consulting firms during the pandemic, including an interview with Nadja Salson.

The EPSU LRG European Conference focused on [the theme of remunicipalisation](#) in Local and Regional Government (LRG). Speakers emphasised the shift towards remunicipalisation in response to failed



Picture 15

outsourcing cases, emphasising the involvement of local and regional governments for improved accountability. The conference also showcased PSI's "Public Services 2.0" plan, championing remunicipalisation and democratic control to counter profit-driven management in public services.

In 2022, EPSU, along with PSI, successfully applied for European Commission funding for a project on remunicipalisation. After a delayed start the project on Insourcing and Outsourcing – Quality Public Services and Employment ([INQPS](#)) was fully underway by April 2023 with the appointment of experts to help design and implement an online training programme. By the end of the year, progress had been made on several videos as well as the web pages that would be integrated into the PSI website. The training programme was due to be launched in March 2024. The project steering committee met several times during the year, with the meeting in September linked to EPSU's Local and Regional Government (LRG) pan-European conference on remunicipalisation (for further details see the LRG section).

To coincide with Public Services Day, EPSU organised an exchange with a [group of researchers](#) to discuss the potential to work closely together to develop positive images of public services and the benefits of remunicipalisation and to continue to expose the negative impact of privatisation and the role of multinationals in delivering public services.

9 Migration

EPSU [joined PSI on 20 June to mark](#) World Refugee Day in an article highlighting the alarming global forced displacement surpassing 100 million people, driven by conflicts, climate disasters, and economic crises. Refugees undertake perilous journeys, with increased Mediterranean crossings and dangerous sea routes. The article called out government responses, citing violations of human rights and humanitarian laws, and called for a shift towards humane and inclusive policies, urging states to establish safe and legal pathways for asylum and migration.

PSI and EPSU [issued a joint statement](#) for International Migrants' Day on 18 December reaffirming the right to healthcare for all migrants regardless of their legal status. While global commitments and regional charters support migrants' right to health, national policies often fall short, exposing undocumented migrants to specific health risks and exclusion from public services. We urged governments and EU institutions to align migration and asylum policies with human rights. This should

ensure inclusive, well-funded public health services with established firewalls to safeguard the integrity of service delivery and protect the rights of both migrants and healthcare workers.

EPSU joined several other European networks [to call on](#) European policymakers not to trap migrant workers in exploitation by ensuring a meaningful right to change employer and to ensure full equal treatment. The call came as the Spanish Presidency and European Parliament negotiated on the revision of the EU Work and Residency Permit Directive. This creates a simplified application procedure for both work and residence permits and aims to promote equal and fair treatment of migrant workers.

10 Collective bargaining

The Adequate Minimum Wage Directive (AMWD) was agreed in October 2022. Member States have until 15 November 2024 to transpose the directive. In 2023, EPSU participated as part of an ETUC delegation in the expert group set up by the European Commission to discuss transposition. The group reported in November and EPSU organised an [online meeting](#) in December to brief affiliates on the key aspects of the directive, including in particular the new rights related to collective bargaining. EPSU commissioned a report on the care sector in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) (due to be published in early 2024) to assess the potential for using the AMWD to strengthen and extend collective bargaining. It also took part in the launch meeting of a new two-year European Commission funded project (CECAW) that will provide research on collective bargaining in three sectors in 12 CEE countries and opportunities for affiliates to exchange information on how best to make use of the AMWD and, in particular, the national action plans that will have to be drawn up in countries where collective bargaining coverage is below 80%.

11 Health and safety

Revised EU legislation on asbestos at work formed a significant part of EPSU's work on health and



Picture 16

safety 2023. In February EPSU [reacted jointly](#) with EFBWW and ETUC to the Parliament's recommendation on protecting workers from asbestos, calling the recommended asbestos exposure limits completely inefficient. EPSU continued to work with EFBWW and ETUC to encourage the lowered limit, [issuing a joint press release](#) in March. The Parliament [ultimately lowered the exposure limit](#), including two key measures that will protect firefighters: the

establishment of compulsory decontamination processes, to be negotiated by sectoral social partners, and the creation of national asbestos registries so that exposure can be tracked and diseases recognised. The Asbestos at Work Directive was agreed between Parliament and Council in June and

approved in October, reinforcing mandatory decontamination for exposed workers and recognising firefighters and emergency services workers as an at-risk group, though the agreement did not maintain the national registries. EU Member States must now work with trade unions to develop decontamination protocols on a national level.

The call for a dedicated Directive on Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSDs) continued into 2023. Researchers, social partners and European Commission representatives met on 12 September for a seminar titled ‘Musculoskeletal Disorders in Health and Social Care beyond COVID-19: how to improve protection for European workers in the sector.’ Despite a significant increase in physical and psychosocial risk factors (PSRs) in the healthcare sector from 2014-2019, there is currently no dedicated directive addressing MSDs, leading to unequal protection for workers across EU member states. While stakeholders emphasise the importance of addressing this issue, the European Commission is currently not in favour of implementing a dedicated directive on MSDs.

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) [published a new set of guidelines](#) for the safe management of hazardous medicinal products (HMPs) at work in April 2023. The guidelines set out that workers need to be protected throughout the whole life cycle of HMPs, setting out a baseline for good practice by healthcare and veterinary workers handling HMPs across the EU. As part of the Stop Cancer at Work coalition EPSU also [welcomed](#) the Parliament’s amendments to the Carcinogens, Mutagens and Reprotoxic Substances Directive (CMRD) approving the legal definition of HMPs to be included in the main body and Annex of the CMRD, underlining their classification as category 1A or 1B carcinogens, mutagens or reprotoxic substances. However, the final text approved by triilogue did not include the definition of HMPs, but only in the recitals underlined that CMRD covers HMP. We have been successful in including the need for a definition and the list in the consultation for the forthcoming sixth revision.

The European Commission proposed its Mental Health Strategy in June. In its reaction, EPSU cautioned that the strategy cannot achieve its goals without directly addressing the serious problems already facing the workers who will be instrumental in its implementation. EPSU also called for a dedicated Directive on PSRs and greater investment in the health and social care sectors in order to ensure the success of the Mental Health Strategy.

The EPSU Expert Group on OSH – established in December 2022 – [continued to meet in 2023](#). The group focused on the campaign for a dedicated Directive on Psychosocial Risk Factors (PSR), an interactive risk assessment tool in healthcare, and revisions to directives on Carcinogens and Mutagens and Reprotoxins (CMRD 5) and asbestos.

12 Economic policy

EPSU continued to work closely with the ETUC to raise concerns about the role of public investment in the European Semester and the need for major reforms of the [fiscal rules](#). EPSU used the annual



Picture 17

Semester [consultation](#) meeting to highlight not only the need to maintain and increase levels of public investment but also to ensure that national governments are not hindered from boosting public spending on measures to tackle the urgent staffing shortages across public services.

EPSU also contributed to the “beyond growth” debate, supporting the publication of a

[working paper](#) by the European Trade Union Institute, taking part in a major [conference](#) in the European Parliament and organising a [webinar](#) to mark Public Services Day.

13 Social dialogue

EPSU was part of the ETUC delegation that was involved in cross-sector negotiations on telework and the right to disconnect. The negotiations began in September 2022 with an aim to conclude an agreement that would be implemented as a directive. The ETUC agreed to extend negotiations beyond the deadline of June 2023 but they ended in [November](#) without an agreement. While both the ETUC and the public sector employers – SGIEurope – considered that there was a good basis for an agreement neither of the private sector employer organisations – Businesseurope and SMEUnited – said that they could put the text to their members for approval. Neither organisation was able to

specify the points on which they disagreed or indicate what amendments might lead to an agreement.



Picture 18

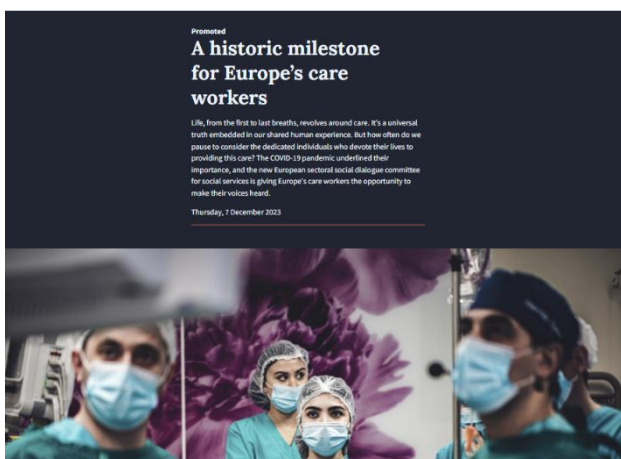
On 25 January, the Commission published a long-awaited package on “Strengthening social dialogue in the EU”. The package consisted of a Communication on EU level and a draft Council Recommendation on the national level of social dialogue. [EPSU](#), ETUC, [social partners](#) and other

ETUFs were critical of the package, stating that the communication lacks a clear framework to make social partner agreements legally binding in the EU, leaving it subject to the Commission's discretion. Serious concerns were raised about the Commission's outsourcing plans for sectoral social dialogue

committees, leading to uncertainty about the future of these committees. Despite these issues, the Council Recommendation, if agreed upon, has the potential to strengthen national social dialogue and collective bargaining, recognising their importance in both public and private sectors. Delegates at the 70th meeting of EPSU’s Executive Committee [expressed similar concerns](#) about the Commission's proposals. The 72nd Executive Committee continued the discussion on social dialogue, Commission support and the need to be critical regarding the outcomes.

The lack of a clear framework for social partner agreements was keenly felt throughout the year – notably felt as EPSU pushed for the Commission to return a decision on whether to transpose the 2022 social partner agreement on digitalisation for central government administrations. The Commission initially indicated that they intended to address the digitalisation agreement in conjunction with the cross-sector agreement on telework and the right to disconnect. While the scope of the sectoral agreement surpasses telework and the right to disconnect, the Commission expressed reluctance to pursue two directives on similar topics. The new Communication’s lack of clear and transparent procedure for assessing whether or not to implement social partner agreements by a directive led to a strong feeling of uncertainty as social partners awaited an answer on the digitalisation agreement. EPSU continued to highlight the groundbreaking agreement through 2023 – in an [op-ed in Brussels Times](#), at [a fringe event](#) at PSI’s congress, with [a flyer](#) explaining the content and next steps of the agreement.

The collapse of the cross-sectoral negotiations on telework amplified the call for the digitalisation agreement to be implemented. The sectoral agreement on digitalisation in central government administrations was touted as a success story for the social dialogue process and a potential way



Picture 19

forward for what was termed ‘the digitalisation dilemma’. Introducing a European Parliament debate on the Right to Disconnect, Commissioner Schmit referenced the agreement as an important factor in considering the next steps towards regulating the right to disconnect, acknowledging the request of the social partners for central government administration to transform the agreement into a directive.

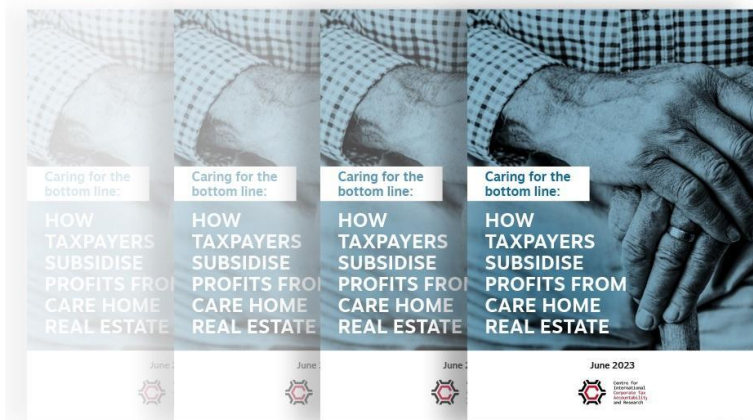
Following EPSU’s calls, the European Parliament urged the European Commission to enhance its financial, legal, and technical support for EU sectoral social dialogue in response to the Commission's plans to reduce support for the European Sectoral Social Dialogue Committees. EPSU [supported the Parliament's resolution](#), emphasising that social dialogue is crucial for economic and social welfare, sustainable growth, and collective bargaining for fair wages. EPSU joined over 30 sectoral social partners to criticise the Commission’s plans, urging Commission President von der Leyen to reconsider the plans. In June 2021, EPSU and the Social Employers [officially submitted the request](#) to the European Commission to establish a Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee in Social Services. After two years of gathering support for the request, the Commission [announced the establishment](#) of the Social Dialogue Committee for Social Services in July, marking the first creation of an EU Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee in over a decade. This was a massive achievement for EPSU and the social services sector. In [an op-ed for Brussels Times](#) in December, EPSU outlined the importance of the new committee for the sectoral social dialogue

process and the sector itself. The new sectoral social dialogue committee [met for the first time](#) in December, represented by Social Employers and CEMR for the employers side and EPSU for the workers.

Commission President von der Leyen announced a social partner summit in Val Duchesse for January 2024. Despite concerns over the Commission and employers' attitude to social dialogue, the ETUC Executive approved a mandate for negotiations for a Val Duchesse declaration. Discussions began in December 2023 between ETUC, BusinessEurope, SME United and SGI-Europe, the Commission, and the Belgian Presidency. Discussions concluded in January 2024.

14 Tax justice

For-profit care continued to dominate EPSU's work on tax justice in 2023. In April, EPSU, PSI and the Centre for International Corporate Tax Accountability and Research (CICTAR) published [an analysis](#) of the impact of market approaches on long-term care. Private operators of long-term care facilities extract excessive revenues from public funding and private fees, prioritising profits and expansion over quality of care. The report finds that these issues are present across ownership types, including private equity, private business, public company and large-scale not-for-profit. The report proposes solutions such as greater worker involvement in decision-making processes, increased engagement with public health systems, and prioritising direct public provision to reduce profit extraction by private operators. These reforms and funding increases should be aimed at ensuring adequate standards of care and building public support for fair and transparent public funding.



Picture 20

to a large extent, on subsidies from the public purse and very low tax rates on property income. EPSU highlighted the disparity of companies making such large profits while struggling care systems across Europe are in urgent need of public investment.

EPSU also worked with CICTAR [on a report](#) exposing care home real estate investment and the huge profits made by dedicated healthcare property companies. These companies – notably Cofinimmo, a Belgian real estate company with a healthcare portfolio valued at €4.5 billion - buy up care homes and rent them back to their operators. They provide no care services and shift property risk to the operators of care homes. Their profits depend,

15 SECTOR: National and European administrations

A strong focus for NEA in 2023 was pushing for the implementation of the sectoral social partner agreement on digitalisation for central government administrations. Throughout the year, EPSU



Picture 21

continued to highlight the groundbreaking agreement – in an [op-ed in Brussels Times](#), at a [fringe event](#) at ETUC’s congress, with a [flyer](#) explaining the content and next steps of the agreement. The collapse of the cross-sectoral negotiations on telework and the right to disconnect amplified the need for swift implementation of the agreement, and EPSU will continue to campaign in 2024.

The NEA committee continued to lead work on a multisectoral project on the role of social partners in preventing and tackling third party violence and harassment (TPVH) at work. The project, funded by the European Commission, aimed to assess the scale and impact of external violence and harassment in the workplace; legislative and policy responses; and the extent to which the multisectoral Guidelines adopted in 2010 remain relevant. A [final research project was published](#) in 2023, providing an overview of data on TPVH, including data from the project’s own survey across six sectors, legal frameworks related to TPVH, 55 examples of good practice from six sectors and across different themes, conclusions and recommendations for the updating of the Multi-Sectoral Guidelines. The research was also presented in a dedicated project website. At the end of the year, the Commission confirmed that it will provide the EU sectoral social partners with financial support for negotiating a set of revisions to



Picture 22

the 2010 multisectoral Guidelines in the course of 2024.

During the October meeting of EPSU’s Standing Committee for National and European Administrations, the committee elected Karin Brunzell (ST Sweden) and Alain Parisot (UNSA France) as co-chairs of the Committee, and Federico Trastulli, UILPA, Italy as vice-chair.

15.1 Social dialogue

EU social partners for central government European Public Administration Employers (EUPAE) and Trade Unions’ National and European Administration Delegation (TUNED, coordinated by EPSU) [finalised and adopted a statement](#) calling for an effective transposition of the EU directive on

whistleblowers' protection in central or federal governments. In December, social partners for central government [issued a joint press release](#) urging the Commission to enforce the digitalisation agreement.

15.2 Prison officers

The EPSU prison services network met in Brussels on 19 October and discussed latest data from the Council of Europe on prison population and staffing levels as well as detailed research on the prevalence of post-traumatic disorders in Denmark and Norway's prisons.

The network approved a statement to reaffirm the need to reduce the number of pre-trial detainees, who represent one out of five persons behind bars in the EU, and in favour of EU common minimum standards in this area as laid down in a Commission's Recommendation adopted in December 2022.

16 SECTOR: Health and social services

2023 was yet another extremely busy year for the health and social services sector.

The European Parliament launched a sub-committee on health in 2023. EPSU [criticised](#) the new



Picture 23

committee, questioning whether the ill-defined mandate and priorities of the sub-committee would achieve much without addressing staff shortages and the commercialisation of care. The European Parliament's report on lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic was adopted in July. EPSU [expressed concern](#) that the section dedicated to health and social care workers comprises only 19 out of 616 paragraphs, lacking

emphasis in recommendations. We called for a more precise and future-oriented approach, particularly in recognising the crucial role of social partners and reinforcing the strategic importance of the public sector in addressing healthcare challenges.

A report [examining registration of health care assistants](#) across Europe was launched in January. The report found that the introduction of a mandatory register for HCAs is an important goal to raise training and qualifications, standardise roles, define a professional category and establish permanent career paths for those at the lowest tiers of the health and social care workforce. This can then promote a more stable workforce with reduced turnover, build union power and facilitate collective bargaining to raise wages and conditions to levels that are commensurate with other professional categories at a similar level.

On World Health Day 2023 EPSU [called for action](#) to enhance working conditions for health and social care workers, emphasising that healthcare is impossible without their dedicated efforts. The statement



highlighted 2022s unprecedented actions, with demonstrations and strikes across Europe addressing staff shortages. EPSU called for urgent policy changes, highlighting the need to recognise the crisis, strengthen collective bargaining, ensure adequate funding, and prevent the commercialisation of health and care services. EPSU highlighted the significant contributions of nurses [in a statement](#) issued on International Nurses Day. While acknowledging

Picture 24

their bravery during the COVID-19 pandemic, the statement emphasised the ongoing challenges nurses face such as staff shortages and inadequate pay. EPSU urged policymakers to move beyond applause and take concrete actions to address these issues, advocating for higher pay, better working conditions, and a dedicated Directive on Psychosocial Risks to safeguard the mental health of health and care workers.

Staff shortages remained a priority for EPSU's Standing Committee for Health and Social Services following on from 2022's protest of health and care workers. Prof Roland Erne from University College Dublin delivered a presentation to the HSS Standing Committee in February on the growing competencies of the EU in health care and how the EU could contribute to addressing staff shortages.

An EPSU delegation [met with](#) Swedish Health Minister Acko Ankarberg Johansson in the framework of Sweden's EU Presidency. Safe staffing, mental health (including the EU Mental Health Strategy and a



possible dedicated Directive on Psychosocial Risks) and the European Health Data Space were key areas of discussion.

Picture 25

In August, [EPSU met with](#) European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety Stella Kyriakides to discuss critical staff shortages in European healthcare. The meeting emphasised the urgency of concrete steps to tackle personnel gaps to ensure the success of Commission initiatives

such as the Beating Cancer Plan and Mental Health Strategy. EPSU highlighted the importance of the updated Framework of Action on Recruitment and Retention and urged consistent monitoring of health workforce issues, expressing concern over the EU's lack of urgency in addressing shortages.

In July, EPSU [launched a report](#) exposing the collapse of Orpea, a leading for-profit care chain, revealing a profit-driven system prioritising shareholder interests over the well-being of workers and residents. The report highlights EPSU's long-standing warnings about the consequences of commercialising care. The report follows Victor Castanet's 2022 exposé which led to management changes, legal defeats, and investigations, emphasising the need for public involvement in elderly care. EPSU coordinated efforts with unions across Europe, supporting workers and advocating against care commercialisation, showcasing the challenges and exploitation within the industry.

In October, EPSU affiliates from Central Asia and South Eastern Europe [gathered in Almaty](#), Kazakhstan, for the second joint EPSU/ILO-ACTRAV Regional Health Conference on improving working conditions for health workers. Discussions addressed challenges such as staff shortages, violence against healthcare workers, and the impact of the COVID pandemic. Key topics included the Bucharest Declaration's ten priority areas, the role of social partners in preventing third-party violence, and the European Union Pact for Skills in health. The conference emphasised the importance of protecting health and care workers and affirmed EPSU's commitment to ongoing collaboration with ILO/ACTRAV.

EPSU participated in the [WHO–Europe conference in Astana](#) in October 2023, where the WHO-Europe



Picture 26

region adopted a framework for action on the health and care workforce for 2023-2030. The framework echoes many of EPSU's demands on tackling staff shortages in the health and social care sectors, as well as prior calls for an integrated approach towards health and social care including actions to improve working conditions of both health and care workers.

16.1 HSS social dialogue

In March European Social Partners in the Hospital and Health Sector (EPSU and HOSPEEM) met in person for the first time since the pandemic to discuss recent developments in the sector. Almost 40 participants from EU and non-EU countries, including Norway and the UK, exchanged information and views on the situation of workers and employers in their countries and on the European level. Topics discussed were The most discussed topics were the Commission Communication on Social Dialogue, followed by the state of play on staff shortages, following on from the social partners' [Framework of Action on Recruitment and Retention](#).

Social partners [adopted](#) the Action Plan on Preventing Third Party Violence and Harassment in their June meeting. Social partners [met in November](#) to discuss social dialogue, third-party violence, and working conditions. During discussions on proposed cuts to social dialogues, concerns were raised about the importance of maintaining these democratic tools, especially in the healthcare sector.

16.2 Social services

In February, EPSU's Social Services Working Group met to address key issues, notably the insufficient collective bargaining coverage for social care workers in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Barbara

Surdykowska (Institute of Public Affairs and Center for Social and Economic Analysis) presented findings on this topic, revealing barriers like trade union capacity and legal obstacles. Nadja Salson discussed the European Commission's Skills and Talent Package, emphasising concerns about the neglect of improving pay and conditions for local care workers.

During October's Social Services Working Group, discussions focused on the new Social Dialogue in Social Services, early childhood education and care challenges, and collective bargaining in Eastern Europe. The group welcomed the designation of October 29 as the International Day for Care and Support by the UN.

EPSU [participated in the online launch](#) of the 'Partnership for Skills in Long Term Care' organised by the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities. Commissioner Nicolas Schmit emphasised the need for long-term learning and career development for care workers, citing a requirement for 1.5 million care workers in the EU. EPSU underscored the importance of training for the well-being and safety of social service workers, linking higher qualifications to salary increases and expanded responsibilities for sector attractiveness, especially amid digital transformations and the shift to home care.

In 2023 EPSU hosted, participated in and co-organised a series of events and seminars discussing the



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care sector. The series followed the publication of a policy study, [‘The European Strategy: A Chance to Ensure Inclusive Care for All?’](#), in which several authors (including chapter 5 from EPSU) took a critical look at different aspects of the Strategy. EPSU, the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) organised the [Care4Care Policy Lunch Series](#) to explore the study's findings in more detail. The series

of seminars covered fair working conditions in childcare, the future of care work, care as a driver of wellbeing and enhancing sustainable long-term care.

In June, the European Commission presented a proposal for a Council Recommendation on social economy framework conditions. EPSU [emphasised the need](#) for a common European definition of social economy entities, clearer relations with the profit-making sector, and strengthened legal frameworks. We raised concerns that the proposal promotes the social economy as an investment opportunity for profit-making investors, potentially undermining its non-profit tradition and urged Member States to enhance legal frameworks for non-profit providers and engage social partners in implementing the Recommendation, particularly in health, social services, and welfare sectors.

16.2.1 Social services social dialogue

In December, the inaugural meeting of the European Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee for Social Services, involving the Social Employers, CEMR, and EPSU, marked a significant step in addressing key



Picture 28

issues in the sector. With a focus on improving working conditions for over 9 million social services workers, the Committee aims to enhance accessibility and quality of services. European Commissioner Nicolas Schmit expressed confidence in the Committee's potential to strengthen collective bargaining and bipartite agreements. The Committee adopted a work program for 2024-2026, emphasising actions on reducing

critical staff shortages as a priority, and also including topics like workforce diversity, job evolution, working conditions, capacity building, socially responsible public procurement, and the follow-up on the European Care Strategy. The planned actions align with the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

16.2.2 Health Care Assistants Network

During the Healthcare Assistants network meeting on November 8, [members discussed](#) issues related to safe staffing levels, wages, and the overall situation of healthcare assistants (HCAs) in Europe. A presentation by Stuart Tuckwood highlighted concerns about inadequate staffing, with 77% of workers reporting insufficient staff for safe patient care. The meeting also addressed task shifting in Sweden and an HCA wage comparison across several European countries.

16.2.3 Childcare

EPSU's Childcare network met in September, focusing on monitoring and evaluation in early childhood education and care. [Discussions included](#) the European Commission's work, emphasising involvement of stakeholders and addressing staff shortages. Presentations highlighted OECD's work on recruitment and retention, including insights from the Starting Strong survey. discussion revealed challenges in working conditions, safety, and issues like staff shortages leading to unqualified hires in some countries.

17 SECTOR: Local and regional government

The Pan-European Local and Regional Government (LRG) Conference [was held on 29 September](#). The conference convened over 40 delegates and speakers to explore the remunicipalisation of public services in LRG, with a focus on the climate crisis, gender equality, and democratic ownership. Discussions highlighted the impact of climate change on public service workers, emphasising the role



Picture 29

of local trade unions in addressing these challenges. Gender equality was a central theme, with insights into the gendered impact of outsourcing services and successful examples of insourcing presented.

The conference underscored the significance of public ownership, trade union influence, and democratic control in driving positive transformations. The final panel emphasised the shift

towards remunicipalisation as a response to failed outsourcing cases in Europe and stressed the importance of involving local and regional governments in policy development for improved accountability and public services. The event also featured PSI's plan for "Public Services 2.0," emphasising remunicipalisation and democratic control to replace profit-driven management with people-centred public services.

17.1 Social dialogue

The main areas of work in 2023 for LRG social dialogue were the Working Time Directive, the Pay Transparency Directive, public procurement and the future of emergency services. In 2023 the Committee promoted the joint statement adopted at the end of 2022 to lobby for better protection of emergency workers in the framework of the revision of the Asbestos Directive and the upcoming legislation on renovation of buildings. The committee worked on digitalisation via the project "Local, Social, Digital".

The LRG social partners are involved in a project that will map the local, sectoral and national agreements on digitalisation, with a focus on telework and right to disconnect, but not limited to it. The aim of the project is to gather enough knowledge as a basis to start negotiating guidelines on digitalisation, either as a sectoralisation of a cross-sectoral agreement or as a stand-alone document. The first fact finding seminar was held in Cagliari (Italy) in June 2023. The inputs of the seminar will feed into research that will be presented at two webinars around summer/autumn 2024.

17.2 Firefighters network

EPSU's Firefighters Network [participated in a hearing](#) held by the European Parliament's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) as part of the debate on legislation on the exposure of asbestos. Speakers did not represent a national or European organisation, but rather spoke as 'expert workers'. Raffaele Cozzolino, a firefighter from Italy, addressed the hearing as an expert worker while Mikael Svanberg, National officer and former Firefighter from Sweden, represented EPSU. Speakers outlined not just the risks they face to save us from the elements, but also the invisible elements of

toxic carcinogenic particles that slowly wear down the health of both firefighters and the people they interact with. They highlighted the results of continued austerity: the number of firefighters has been dwindling; personal protective equipment is insufficient; and firefighters often do not have the means to properly decontaminate their equipment before going back in to save someone else.

The EPSU Firefighters Network [met in June in Stockholm](#). Over 40 firefighters from 14 countries addressed lobbying for mandatory decontamination, increased training funds, and accessible asbestos registries during negotiations on asbestos legislation. Barbo Andersson (Kommunal) and Peter Arneval (Chief Fire Officer in Stockholm) opened the meeting, highlighting challenges and civil protection



FIREFIGHTERS DESERVE STRONGER PROTECTION!

6 DEMANDS OF FIREFIGHTERS

- 1 Recognition of professional exposure as firefighters as carcinogenic.
- 2 No more cuts! More firefighters and more equipment.
- 3 Compulsory decontamination and mandatory health screening.
- 4 Stop using volunteer firefighters as a cheaper way to provide emergency public services.
- 5 Harmonised equipment and training in joint operations and EU solidarity efforts.
- 6 EU strategy on firefighters and emergency services.

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growth. Discussions covered firefighter protection, recognition of the profession as carcinogenic, and concerns about toxic substances. The meeting emphasised the need for EU recognition of IARC-WHO's carcinogenic classification, diverse workforce, and the importance of addressing climate change with more professional firefighters. A field visit showcased local decontamination procedures at Kungsholmen fire station.

The summer was unfortunately a busy one for Europe's firefighters, as fires burned across the continent, exacerbated by heatwaves and drought. EPSU [issued its first press release](#) of the summer in June, calling for the EU to show that it is serious about addressing climate adaptation and mitigation by investing in public services, particularly fire fighters. In July, EPSU shared its solidarity with firefighters and emergency service workers across Europe as devastating wildfires burned in some areas while storms hit others. In August, [Eurostat figures revealed](#) that the number of firefighters has been cut in ten EU member states despite the climate crisis increasing the risk of fires, floods and other emergencies. In a [joint press release](#) with the ETUC, Jan Willem Goudriaan, EPSU General Secretary underlined that EU-imposed austerity measures have cut funding for firefighters and created far worse problems for our communities. EPSU [published an op-ed](#) in Social Europe, emphasising the need for strong investment in not only firefighting and emergency services, but also in forest management in order to protect communities.

MEPs underlined the urgent need for protection and better working conditions for firefighters in an [oral question and debate](#) in July. The oral question was voted on in plenary in September.

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Ahead of the plenary vote, EPSU [published a list of six key demands](#) for stronger protection of firefighters. Members of EPSU's Firefighters Network travelled to Strasbourg ahead of the plenary vote to speak to MEPs and publicise the six key demands.

The Directive on Protecting Workers from Asbestos saw several key wins for firefighters. The new text introduces mandatory decontamination for firefighters, introduces the obligation for employers to provide practical and theoretical training to every firefighter who is likely to be exposed to asbestos in

their profession and recognises the specific risks which firefighters incur in their jobs. See the section on Occupational Health and Safety for more information on the Asbestos Directive.

18 SECTOR: Utilities

EPSU's Standing Committee on Utilities met in Brussels on 1 March. [Positions were adopted](#) on the



Picture 31

reform of the EU electricity market, emphasising the need for stronger public planning and control, and on the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive, supporting the 'polluter pays' principle while advocating for the retention of the producer responsibility scheme in public hands. The meeting also highlighted ongoing negotiations in the gas sector for a legally binding agreement and addressed concerns about plastic waste

exports to Türkiye, emphasising the poor working conditions for migrant workers.

EPSU's [report on waste management in Europe](#), launched on the International Day of Zero Waste, highlights the crucial role of quality jobs and collective bargaining in achieving the EU's circular economy goals. The report calls for increased waste avoidance, emphasising the need for a social and cultural transformation. It also raises concerns about the EU's Circular Economy Strategy prioritising recycling over waste reduction and private ownership of waste-to-energy facilities leading to inefficiencies and hindering recycling efforts.

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) worked on water as a cross-cutting theme in 2023, collecting several opinions from different perspectives and summarising them in a Declaration. EPSU participated as an expert in [two EESC hearings](#). The first concerned Sustainable and resilient water infrastructures and distribution networks on 29 March. We addressed the importance of a human rights approach, public funding and the growing movement for remunicipalisation of water operations. The second concerned Access to water: tackling water poverty and its implications for social policy 13 April, where EPSU highlighted the success of the Right to Water campaign, emphasising that all policies relating to water should begin from a human rights position.

The EESC [adopted a series of opinions](#) underpinning demands for an EU Blue Deal and EU Water Agenda in July 2023, expressing the importance of involving workers including in looking at the longer-term labour market issues, health and safety, skills and decent working conditions. EPSU contributed its expertise to the opinions. EPSU Vice-President Thomas Kattnig was rapporteur of the opinion on water infrastructures. The right2water EU Citizens initiative was also referenced in several opinions. EPSU also participated in an event on the EU Blue Deal organised by Brussels Office of the Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB European Office), the Brussels Office of the Austrian Federal Chamber of Labour (AK EUROPA) and the Daseinsgewerkschaft (Younion) where EPSU stressed the need to ensure that all water policies begin with a human rights approach and should not be used to promote PPPs and further liberalisation. The EESC presented its call for an EU Blue Deal in October 2023 at a

launch event, presenting its call and a Declaration for a new and ambitious water strategy for the EU. EPSU presented a report marking ten years of the Right to Water ECI – see the section on Right to Water for more information.

At the October Standing Committee on Utilities meeting [discussions centred on EU policies](#), ongoing negotiations, and critical issues like decarbonisation, upcoming European Parliament elections, and the Circular Economy. Ida Skiaker Knudsen (Dansk Metal) was elected the new Vice-President. Updates were given on legislative processes, including the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive, the Renewable Energy Directive and the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive.

18.1 Electricity sector social dialogue

We applied for a project on skills with Eurelectric and IndustriAll.

18.2 Gas sector social dialogue

The European social partners in the gas sector - EPSU, industriAll Europe, and Eurogas - concluded their joint project on just transition [during the final conference](#) held on 26 January. Independent consultants



Picture 32

presented a set of recommendations, emphasising the continued importance of gases, particularly hydrogen and biomethane, in Europe's domestic energy production to meet climate goals, enhance energy security, and provide affordable energy. The report underscores the necessity of addressing the conditions for a just transition, with implications for the workforce and future skills planning. The social partners

expressed a strong commitment to effective social dialogue and collective bargaining, aiming to negotiate a binding European-level agreement on a framework for a just transition.

In April, Eurogas, EPSU, and industriAll Europe [notified the European Commission](#) of their intention to enter into negotiations towards a European Framework Agreement. The negotiations are the first of their kind to focus on a just transition. Negotiations are now in the final stage.

18.3 Right to energy

EPSU continued its work with the Right to Energy coalition in 2023. The coalition is a group which unites trade unions, anti-poverty groups, social housing providers, environmental campaigners, health organisations and progressive NGOs to end energy poverty across Europe. The Right to Energy coalition [launched a manifesto](#) in May advocating for a European ban on energy disconnections, emphasising the need to address the pressing issue of more than 35 million people experiencing fuel poverty in 2021. The manifesto calls on the European Parliament to leverage this demand during the review of the European Commission's energy market proposal, highlighting the far-reaching consequences of energy disconnections on health, well-being, and education, and stressing the importance of the EU's commitment to consumer protection in ensuring universal access to this essential resource. Article 8 of the provisional agreement on the reform of the EU's electricity market design [was a significant win](#) for the Right to Energy coalition, stating that: "Member states shall ensure that vulnerable and energy

poor customers are fully protected from electricity disconnections... including the prohibition of disconnections”.

18.4 European works councils

The European Parliament adopted an own-initiative legislative report on the revision of the European Works Council (EWC) Directive in February. EPSU, EFBWW, EFFAT, EPSU, ETF, industriAll and Uni Europa [welcomed the report](#) in a joint press release. The report supports trade unions’ call for better compliance and enforcement and sends a clear message to the European Commission that urgent action is needed to improve the rights of workers’ representatives on EWCs. A proposal for a revised EWC Directive is expected in early 2024.

EPSU and ETUI [hosted a seminar](#) in Berlin on utilising European Works Councils (EWCs) to organise



Picture 33

workers in health and social care companies, addressing the growing demand for care provision. EPSU actively coordinates and establishes EWCs in companies like Fresenius and Orpea, emphasising the crucial link between strong EWCs and trade union participation. Presentations covered EWC roles, EPSU's experiences, and EWCs as organising tools, highlighting the importance of information exchange. Future plans include a

conference to enhance coordination among EPSU-led EWC representatives.

18.5 Company developments

Unions and the union representatives in the European works council [negotiated a Charter on Social Dialogue](#) in the French multinational care company Clariane (formerly Korian). The charter sets out a series of principles and stresses the value of social dialogue and collective bargaining. EPSU [commenced negotiations](#) in Veolia for a new transnational agreement on diversity and inclusion. An agreement is being negotiated with Suez on new health and safety risks in the waste sector. We are negotiating an EWC agreement with Colisee. The process of setting up and negotiating an EWC agreement in Norlandia is progressing. The Commission proposed a project proposal to begin the process of setting up EWCs in Domus Vi and Dibber. Agreements were concluded in care company Ramsey and waste company Prezero. An agreement in Orpea was updated after the near collapse of the company following the scandals exposed in 2022.

19 Youth network

The EPSU Youth Network [unveiled an action plan](#) in January, acknowledging the pressing need to enhance the active engagement of young workers within EPSU. Recognising the disproportionate impact of growing job insecurity on the youth, the plan underscores the importance of placing young workers at the core of union solutions. However, it also addresses the decline in union membership

among the youth, warning of potential consequences for the overall union movement. Building on the [2021 EPSU Youth Network report](#) on Organising Young Workers, the action plan emphasises the necessity for creative and ongoing initiatives to attract and retain young members. The report identifies demographic change, climate change, and digitalisation as crucial areas where young workers' input is vital, aiming to actively involve them in shaping structural changes that will impact their working lives. Supported by the Friederich Ebert Stiftung, the report advocates for incorporating the energy and activism of youth into union structures, fostering a more dynamic labour movement with greater leverage in collective bargaining and positive societal impacts. These proposals will form the foundation for the EPSU Youth Network's preparations leading up to the 2024 EPSU Congress.

On International Youth Day, EPSU Youth [endorsed the ETUC initiative](#) for quality traineeships amid rising living costs and uncertainty. In a statement, the network highlighted that actions are needed to enhance traineeship quality and prevent them from replacing entry-level jobs, particularly as unpaid internships disproportionately affect young women and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

35 EPSU Youth Network representatives from 17 countries [met in Sofia](#) in September to discuss and propose recommendations on youth organising in trade unions. All participants were very committed,



Picture 34

understood that growing unions is essential and bringing and retaining young members in unions is their future. Different tools and mechanisms were discussed, with lots of input from the Network. Unions' social media were evaluated from young workers' points of view and a set of recommendations has been produced. Working with students and pupils of secondary education was explored, as a means to

attract future workers to the unions. The issue of empowering youth was debated and the participants called on union leaders to make necessary changes to assure generational change in the unions. The final point discussed was youth participation and visibility in the EPSU 2024 Congress.

Three strategic workshops aimed to equip youth network steering group members with skills and knowledge to mainstream recruitment and organising of young people into all their union's actions and activities were held in 2023. The workshops were delivered by the EPSU recruitment and organising team and were partially supported by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. The objective of the strategic workshops was to equip the steering group with the skills and knowledge to start organising young workers in their own workplaces and sectors. Based on two organising workshops held in Vilnius and Sofia, the youth steering group prepared strategic organising strategies which they presented at a follow-up meeting in Rome in November.

20 Central and Eastern Europe



Picture 35

Preparations for the PSI Congress in October 2023 and the EPSU Congress in June 2024 along with recruitment and organising and the continuing Russian aggression in Ukraine were among the common issues addressed by the four constituency meetings in Central and Eastern Europe. The [Central Asia](#) constituency met in Tashkent in March, the first time that the meeting had taken place in Uzbekistan. The constituency discussed the situation in the country, climate change and cooperation between health trade unions. The [South East Europe](#) constituency met in Istanbul in March and participants expressed their sympathy and solidarity with the people of Türkiye following the devastating earthquake that hit the country in February. The [Central Europe and Western Balkans](#) constituency met in Budapest in March and discussed the pay campaign of the Hungarian childcare workers, attacks on trade union rights in Kosovo and concerns about the right to strike in Montenegro and the implications of the anti-defamation law in the republic of Srpske in Bosnia and Hercegovina. The [North East Europe](#) constituency met in Warsaw in April with colleagues from Ukraine reporting on the latest situation there as EPSU affiliates try to maintain their activities despite the invasion and continuing missile attacks. The meeting also expressed solidarity with the independent unions in Belarus.

21 Communications

In 2023, EPSU continued adapting its communication to the “new normal”, where teleworking and different aspects of digitalisation became new rules. We had impactful initiatives, vibrant social media



growth, and innovative campaigns throughout the year. While we sustained an active website attracting over a quarter-million visits, we amplified the voices of workers and our affiliated unions on various platforms. We utilised the experience we gained in digital communication in the last few years to provide further

visibility to European labour movement’s achievements. We also continued the production of in-house videos and branded visual content this year.

The EPSU website kept last year’s audience size, with 258,000 visits by 113,153 users. We published 426 articles, including meeting documents articles but not including newsletter editorials. 23 EPSU newsletters and 25 Collective Bargaining newsletters were sent in 2023.

The growth in social media continued over 2023, supported by improvements in visual content. Similar to last year, we saw significant audience growth across all platforms. Our Twitter (with its new name, X) followers increased to 10,898, representing a 19.75% growth in 2023, and EPSU remained the most popular ETUF on X, as last year. Facebook followers increased to 8,266; Instagram followers were up by 1,088, and LinkedIn followers grew to 1,550.

With the growth of our presence on digital media, we started to use this potential more effectively for EPSU’s solidarity campaigns. In September, in response to the persecution of our French affiliate CGT-FNME’s leader Sebastien Menesplier and other CGT militants due to the pension reform protests, along with IndustriAll Europe, we launched a campaign in support of them. Before the court hearing of arrested leaders of the Health and Social Care Workers’ Union SES in October, EPSU affiliates mobilised around the campaign “Trade unionism is not a crime”, demanding to drop all the charges against them. In October, following the dismissal of Independent Healthcare, Pharmacy, and Social Sphere Workers’ Union of Georgia (HSMCTU) members due to their involvement in a pay rise campaign, we organised a solidarity campaign on LabourStart. More than 4,000 signatures were handed over to the Georgian Embassy in Belgium in a symbolic action.

In order to deliver our message more effectively, we developed the Labour Dictionary concept offering both accurate and humorous definitions of terms related to labour struggle. Through the lens of the Labour Dictionary, we featured 44 words (almost one every week) and published them on our social media channels. Another significant campaign was around EPSU’s 45th anniversary. As part of the #EPSU45 campaign, a special logo was designed and we shared stories and pictures from EPSU’s 45-year history throughout the year, reflecting the EPSU’s role in shaping EU policies on public services, health and safety at work, employment rights and social protection. On 23 June Public Service Day, EPSU organised a webinar with Juliet B. Schor on the role of public services and working time reduction.

The podcast series we started to publish last year have remained available on various platforms. Our twelve episodes on various themes, including health and safety, gender-based violence, the crisis in the care sector, and waste management are now accessible on Apple Podcasts, Spotify and Google Podcasts, in addition to SoundCloud. We continued to use the Telegram news channel to connect with audiences who were not on traditional social media platforms.

EPSU continued to receive good press coverage throughout the year. A range of articles and op-eds were published in Brussels based media to mark international days such as World Health Day (7 April) and Public Service Day (23 June). Moreover, EPSU published its views in the mass media channels about the agendas concerning the European labour movement - such as European Health Data Spaces, Asbestos Directive, the right to disconnect and digitalisation, staff shortages in childcare, and public banking - to impact decisions in European Parliament.

22 Executive Committee

The [April](#) meeting of the Executive Committee expressed solidarity with a range of actions across



Picture 36

Europe as affiliates fought for pay increases in the face of surging inflation. Members also signed a letter protesting against the French government's imposition of a major pension reform without negotiations with the unions. Trade union rights topped the agenda with guest speaker Henrik Kristensen from the Council of Europe's European Social Charter committee discussing the monitoring and enforcement of the Charter. His contribution was

complemented by Stefan Clauwert, senior advisor on trade union and human rights at the ETUC.

On social dialogue, the Executive Committee expressed criticism of the Commission and its claims to promote the process through its social dialogue initiative while pushing through cuts and outsourcing at sector level. The EC also noted the two year delay in the Commission approving the setting up of the committee for social services and refusal to deal with the agreement on digitalisation in central government administrations.

Members were updated on a wide range of horizontal and sector issues including implementation of the Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages; the reform of economic governance; migration and asylum; the remunicipalisation project with PSI; the work of the Firefighters Network on asbestos; demands for changes to the Urban Wastewater Directive and reform of the EU's electricity market.

There were also reports on work in health and social services such as the meetings with the Presidency of the Council, the Commission, the joint demo of 9 December and input into the Bucharest Declaration of the WHO-Europe on health and care workforce.

Members also dealt with the preparations for the Women’s Conference in November as well as three congresses – ETUC in May, PSI in October and the EPSU Congress in June 2024. They approved the report of activities for 2022, the final annual budget for 2022, the mandate for negotiations with Eurogas on an agreement on skills and just transition and updated guidelines on the role of European Works Council coordinators.

The [November](#) Executive Committee meeting expressed support for the ETUC’s anti-austerity demonstration set for 12 December in Brussels. It also heard of the many actions by affiliates to secure higher pay and better conditions.

Further steps were taken in preparation for the EPSU Congress in 2024 with discussion of affiliates’ amendments to the Programme of Action (PoA) and debate around several amendments to the Constitution. EPSU President, Mette Nord, announced that she would not seek another mandate due to retirement while General Secretary Jan Willem Goudriaan confirmed he would be available for another mandate.

There was disappointing news from the ETUC with the failure of the cross-sectoral negotiations on telework and the right to disconnect but this underlined the need for the European Commission to propose the Central Government Administration agreement on digitalisation to the Council. There was a further discussion on the European Social Dialogue and concern was expressed over cuts to funding. The Executive Committee agreed to set up a working group on European industrial relations and social dialogue after the EPSU Congress.

An ETUC draft resolution on wealth taxes was supported along with the ETUC’s position on the reform of the EU’s fiscal rules and input into the preparation of the 2024 European Semester. A paper with key demands for the European Parliament elections in June 2024 with the aim to use it in contacts with EU level political parties as well as to assist unions at national level to argue for Social Europe. Reports on sector work were noted along with updates on the activities of the youth committee and recruitment and organising team. The [Women’s Conference adopted its Rome statement](#) stressing the importance of public services the fight for equality and women’s rights for Europe’s public service workers.

23 EPSU Congress



The first discussions around the main themes of the programme of action (PoA) took place at the Executive Committee at the end of 2022 and these were then developed into an initial draft text in

consultation with the Congress Resolutions Committee which met first in January and then again in April and November. There were also early consultations with standing committees and constituencies and the formal, draft PoA was circulated for amendment in June. A Constitution Working Group was also convened to discuss possible changes to the constitution and this met in January, March, April and November. Members of staff coordinated with affiliates in Romania throughout the year and made several visits to the Congress venue as part of the preparations.

24 Working with other organisations

EPSU continued its close collaboration with PSI in 2023. EPSU actively participated in [PSI's 31st](#)



Picture 37

[Congress](#), where workers' struggles, particularly in Myanmar and Belarus, were highlighted. The discussions revolved around supporting trade unionists facing repression, advancing the agenda for trade union rights, and sharing inspiring stories of workplace organising. The Congress also addressed crucial issues such as changing power structures, fighting profiteering, and developing public services for a better world. Additionally, attention was given to climate change, just transition, and

the challenges faced by LGBT+ workers. EPSU expressed solidarity with various causes, condemned attacks, and welcomed new leaders Britta Lejon (President) and Daniel Bertossa (General Secretary), emphasising ongoing collaboration with them.

EPSU [participated in the ETUC Congress](#) in 2023, marking 50 years of collective effort for European workers. The Congress concluded with the election of a new leadership team and the adoption of an action plan titled 'Together for a Fair Deal for Workers in Europe,' emphasising support for public service workers and the need to fund public services. Jan Willem Goudriaan, EPSU's General Secretary, highlighted key moments in the history of ETUC, including efforts to better represent trade union youth. EPSU President Mette Nord emphasised the importance of organising for stronger workers' voices, aligning with the ETUC's positions on trade union renewal.

The Congress also addressed issues such as gender-transformative public services, economic governance reform, and solidarity with various global causes, including workers in Ukraine, Iran, and Afghanistan. EPSU organised fringe events on psycho-social risks and artificial intelligence, advocating for European directives and legislation on these issues.

EPSU was active across many of the ETUC's committees and its Executive Committee, as well as a number of working groups that met regularly to discuss European legislation and other issues fundamental to European workers. EPSU also participated in the ETUC's anti-austerity campaign, with strong EPSU participation in demonstrations in Paris in October and Brussels in December.

EPSU works regularly with other European trade union federations, including with industriAll Europe in the gas and electricity social dialogue committees, with EFBWW on asbestos and a number of other European federations on events and webinars.



Picture 38

25 Organisational matters

Finance EPSU ended the year with a surplus. A first meeting of the Finance Working group took place in November 2023 and it agreed that it is important to strengthen our Federation over the next Congress period. In order to ensure the financial stability of EPSU in the coming years, a finance resolution will be presented to Congress in 2024 for an increase of the affiliation fees for the next Congress period.

Membership The Executive Committee endorsed the affiliation of five unions during the year: the FESZ healthcare union (Hungary, 2050 members), the SSZB prison staff union (Bulgaria, 1840 members), the Keprof power workers' union (Kazakhstan, 20000 members), the culture workers' union (Bulgaria, 350 members) and the firefighters and rescuers' union (Bulgaria, 2004 members). Only two disaffiliations were enacted during the year: the OZDLV wood, water and forestry workers' union (Slovakia, 1512 members) and the ATESZ public services union (Hungary, 567 members).

Staff There were several changes among staff during the year:

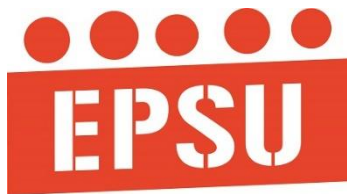
- Can Kaya of the communications team became a permanent member of staff, following a period on temporary contracts.
- Jakob Embacher, policy staff responsible for utilities, left in September after nearly four years with EPSU to take up a position at the ÖGB confederation in Austria.
- Tuscany Bell, who joined EPSU as a policy assistant in October 2019 was appointed as Jakob's replacement.

- Samantha Howe, was then appointed to take over Tuscany's position as policy assistant, after working in EPSU as administrative assistant since February 2020.
- Yancy Castro Gaitan was recruited to replace Samantha as administrative assistant and was due to begin work in early 2024.
- Chloe Kenny, communications assistant since September 2021, took over the coordination of youth activities from Tuscany.
- Miloš Vlaisavljević, recruitment and organising officer since autumn 2019 successfully applied for the position of policy staff for economic policy, collective bargaining and workers' rights and was due to transfer to that role from spring 2024 in anticipation of the retirement of Richard Pond in June 2024.

Stagiaires EPSU encourages stagiaires to contribute to EPSU's work as part of their studies and during the year we welcomed Lorenzo Schutte (University of Gröningen), Yagmur Dönmez and Alexandru Petre (Global Labour University), Ruben Máté Jengibarjan (Central European University, Vienna), Andrea Puletto (Ca' Foscari University, Venice), Lova Andersson (Lund University), Nicola Vizzuso (University of Bologna) and Théo Cappeliez (Université Libre de Bruxelles).

Photos captions

1. ETUC demonstration “Together against austerity and for a Fair Deal for Workers”, 12 December, Brussels
2. EPSU solidarity with striking workers in the United Kingdom, 1st November, Brussels
3. EPSU solidarity with French trade unionist CGT-FNME, 9 June, Brussels
4. Rally “people over polluter”, 25 October, Brussels
5. EPSU Report “10 years Right to Water”
6. Presenting Petition urging EP to safeguard patient data privacy in EHDS, 7 September, Brussels
7. French unions’ protest against pension reform, 1s May, Paris
8. Belgian unions’ action for the right to strike, 31 May, Brussels
9. Solidarity with Turkish union SES, from left to right/top to bottom: ST - Sweden, FP-CGIL – Italy, Yunion – Austria and Fórsa, Ireland
10. Solidarity with striking workers in the U.K., 24 February, Armenia
11. EPSU President and Vice-Presidents meeting with ver.di, 16-17 January, Berlin, Germany
12. EPSU Women’s and Gender Equality conference, 24 November, Roma, Italy
13. Health workers training Recruitment & Organising, 27-30 June, Astana, Kazakhstan
14. EPSU-ETUI Advanced workshop Recruitment & Organising, 16-17 May, Prague, Czech Republic
15. EPSU Local & Regional Government European conference, 29 September, Brussels
16. EPSU meeting with European Commission’s Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO)., 7 September, Brussels
17. Webinar with Prof. J.Schor, Boston College, USA, Public Services Day, 22 June, online
18. Digitalisation agreement banner
19. Op-ed in the Brussels Times on the Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee for Social Services, 7 December
20. EPSU-CICTAR report “how taxpayers subsidise profits from care home real estate”, 29 June
21. Third-party violence at work project final conference, 25 November, Madrid, Spain
22. Third-parti violence and harassment project dedicated website
23. Standing Committee on Health and Social Services, 23 February, Brussels
24. World Health Day 7 April banner
25. EPSU delegation meets the Swedish Health Minister, 16 May, Stockholm, Sweden
26. ILO ACTRAV Regional health conference, 20-21 October, Almaty, Kazakhstan.
27. Care4Care Policy Lunch Series banner
28. Social Services Social Dialogue Committee, 12 December, Brussels
29. EPSU Fire fighters Network at European Parliament hearing, 30 March, Brussels
30. EPSU leaflet 6 key demands from Firefighters, September
31. EPSU Standing Committee on Public Utilities, 4 October, Brussels
32. EPSU, IndustriAll and Eurogas joint project on just transition final conference, 26 January, Brussels
33. ETUI-EPSU European Works Councils in health and social care companies seminar, 20-21 November, Berlin
34. EPSU Youth Network meeting, 26-29 September, Sofia
35. from left to right, top to bottom: South East Europe Constituency, 14-15 March, Istanbul – North East Europe Constituency, 3-4 April, Warsaw – Central Asia Constituency, 16-17 March, Astana - Central and Eastern Europe Constituency, 23-24 March, Budapest
36. EPSU Executive Committee sending letters of protest to the French President Macron against the pension reform, 18-19 April, Brussels
37. European representatives at the PSI 31st Congress, 12-18 October, Geneva
38. EPSU President M. Nord, EPSU General Secretary J.W. Goudriaan, EPSU delegation and EPSU Vice-President, F. Geng at the ETUC Congress, 22-26 May, Berlin



EUROPEAN PUBLIC SERVICE UNION

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. In our sectors we organise workers in the public, the non-profit, mixed and private sector including in multinational companies. It is the recognised regional organisation of Public Services International (PSI). For more information please go to: www.epsu.org.

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EPSU is a member
federation of the ETUC
and represents
PSI in Europe