

## Protecting Gender Equality Gains

The **European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU)** will work to protect the gains made on gender equality, a major priority area, in the next four years.

This drive to reach closure on the achievement of wage and all other forms of equality between men and women in the workforce is defined in **Resolution: R.4. Gender Equality**. This will be tabled at EPSU's Congress in Stockholm (14-17 June).

There are more women than men in the public sector and they are usually the main interface between public services and the family. Public-spending cuts and privatisation threatens the hard won progress made on gender equality. Erosion of trade union rights and undermining of industrial relations practises also add to the looming threat to women's working conditions.

The EPSU document points out that the European Commission's initiation of legislation on gender equality is approaching the closure stage. Therefore, it says that the main focus in coming years will be on implementing current law, gender mainstreaming, the open coordination method, the employment strategy and social dialogue.

This, it is indicated, will entail maintaining the momentum set in motion by the policy statement adopted at the last Congress in 2000. EPSU General Secretary Carola Fischbach-Pyttel reinforces this point: "Significant gains have been made regarding gender equality, but much of the legislative and other progress has yet to be implemented. It is therefore ironic that the trend towards privatisation and policies pursued at both the member state and European level, threaten to undo what has been achieved in theory, and has yet to become practise. We aim to see that these gains become practice."

The "internal trade union" focus, has led to the establishment of a dedicated EPSU mechanism for gender equality: Gender Equality Committee. There will, according to the Congress document, be a shift towards "more outcome, campaign-based policy areas".

This, based on what the document says can be summed up: "To re-ascertain the positive link between quality, well-funded public services and gender equality together with a collective, trade union rights based approach." Complementing other resolutions, priority areas will include work on collective bargaining, pensions and social dialogue.

Despite its largely positive legislative action on gender equality, the EPSU document highlights the inherent contradiction at the very heart of EU and Commission action. "The growing tension between on the one hand EU belief in the supremacy of the market and the virtues of deregulation and competition and, on the other hand, the pursuit of gender equality which often requires opposition to market forces is not sustainable."

Collective bargaining and social dialogue form the core of trade union priority actions recommended by the Congress document. Highlighting this is EPSU collaboration with its sister organisation Public Services International (PSI), in that the two organisations are jointly drawing up a checklist on the gender dimension of collective bargaining. Coordination and cooperation with the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) is also envisaged, according to the Congress document. This is indicated by EPSU support for the implementation of the ETUC action plan 2003-2007, as adopted at the ETUC Congress in May 2003.

Finally, a gender equality action plan 2004-2008 will be drawn up that will deal with various policy headings aimed at specific target groups.

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