

EPSU Firefighters Statement in reducing, mitigating and adapt to Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction

Hannover, 11 June 2015

1. The EPSU Firefighters Network met on 11 of June 2015 in Hannover to discuss climate change and disaster reduction and the impact on public services and their workers.
2. In December 2015 the next and crucial climate change conference will take place in Paris, the so-called COP21. The overarching goal is to achieve an ambitious and binding agreement that will be the follow-up to the “Kyoto-Protocol” and ensure that average temperature rise will not exceed 2 degree Celsius. To achieve this our society must change towards sustainable development, that implicates other forms of energy production and consumption. For EPSU and for the trade union movement a key demand to raise in the negotiations is that this transition to sustainable development will be a Just Transition for Workers and Employment.
3. The EPSU Firefighters Network supports the five ETUC key demands for the Climate COP21 as adopted by the ETUC Executive Committee on 17-18 June 2015.
 - Legal commitments for all parties based on shared but differentiated responsibilities
 - Just transition and decent work must be part of the agreement – so workers do not pay for the transformation to a low-carbon economy
 - Equity as a cornerstone
 - Participation of all groups must be promoted and acknowledged
 - Respect for human rights and workers rights
4. The most efficient and cost-effective way to meet the renewable and energy efficiency targets is government intervention in the development of publicly regulated and publicly owned renewable and energy efficiency sectors. Market-based solutions are not suited to the pace and magnitude of energy efficiency improvements to address climate change.
5. Concrete and sustainable steps are necessary to deal with adaptation and mitigation of climate change. Examples of adaptation include preparing risk assessments, protecting ecosystems, improving agricultural methods, managing water resources, building settlements in safe zones, developing early warning systems, instituting better building designs, improving insurance coverage and developing public services to assure social safety nets. These measures are linked to a sustainable development, as they reduce the risks to lives and livelihoods and increase the resilience of local communities. Adaptation and mitigation measures should be developed jointly to reduce and not inadvertently exacerbate disaster risks. Investing in disaster risk reduction will reduce

the negative impacts of flooding, landslides, heat waves, temperature extremes, droughts and intense storms.

6. Adaptation to climate risks and disaster reduction requires enhanced governments' regulatory capacity and the strengthening of public services, recruiting new staff and equipping public sector workers, in particular first responders, nurses, firefighters, emergency responders, medical assistants and doctors who are the forefront to reduce and prevent climate risks and disaster reduction with the skills required to ensure risk preparedness and addressing the needs of the most vulnerable. More focus is needed to ensure that public sector workers find the appropriate recognition in the European framework of Civil Protection and Disaster Risk Reduction. Evidence shows that Public-Private Partnerships, market-based instruments and private insurance will not deliver on adaptation to climate change. Given that shortage of adequately-trained personnel is affecting almost all services in the area of disaster preparedness and response adequate staff is necessary along with financial and technical capacities.
7. All groups of public sector workers involved in climate change and disaster preparedness and risk reduction should be equipped with the necessary training and personal protective equipment. The conditions for public sector workers involved in climate change reduction and disaster risk reduction put a strain on working conditions and can mean difficult operations, extra workloads and long hours at work. Psychosocial risks and post-traumatic stress are well documented for e.g. firefighters and prevention and specific measures are needed before, during and after operations and interventions. Firefighters' safety and health can be adversely affected by exposures in floods, wildfires and storms.
8. The European Commission in particular should further assess the impact of climate change and adaptation policies on employment and vulnerable groups. It should also include the impacts on occupational health and safety and working conditions for public sector workers. Measures to address the negative impacts and maximise the benefits of adaptation should be proposed and the financial means to support skills-development and occupational health and safety programmes for all occupational groups of the public sector and services.
9. Integrating social and environmental criteria in public procurement remains an absolute priority, ensuring that public investment is to deal with upholding quality public services that are vital to reduce poverty, social dumping and climate change and disaster reduction. Given expensive equipment and the need for cross border solidarity, a pan-European approach would help firefighters across Europe carry out this climate work most effectively.