



EPSU Press Communication - 5 May 2011

Time to speak out about the silent crisis - years of work on equal pay and gender equality under threat

At its annual meeting, the European Federation of Public Service Unions' (EPSU) Women and Gender Equality Committee, debated the impact that the economic crisis and the austerity policies being imposed by Governments across Europe are having on women workers in the public sector and on gender equality generally. The meeting discussed the preliminary findings of EPSU commissioned research on the impact of public sector pay and job cuts on women in four countries¹, which show that the first wave of austerity measures has had a heavier burden on low paid public sector workers' who, in the majority of European countries, are women.

Trade unions have been at the forefront of the long campaign to secure equality for women at work and have been instrumental in securing action to tackle the gender pay gap and other gender based inequalities both at European and national level. However, there are already indications that the financial and economic crisis and the subsequent focus on slashing public spending could roll back the important gains that have been achieved after many years of hard work.

The research found that despite the fact that women make up a large part of the public sector workforce, none of the Governments concerned had assessed the gender impact of their austerity measures to reduce public deficits. Gloria Mills, the President of the Women and Gender Equality Committee, said "*this silent crisis is having a major impact on women - both in terms of the threats to their jobs and also the disproportionate impact on them of the cuts to public services and social security benefits, on which they and their families rely. We cannot tolerate this situation. It is time for working women to speak up and speak out and demand that Governments' fulfill their legal and moral obligation to ensure that their policies do not set us back on the road to securing gender equality in the workplace and society in general*".

EPSU has criticized the shortsighted view shown by the European Governments, the European Union and the International Monetary Fund, whose policies are making workers pay for a crisis they did not cause. In July 2010, EPSU urged the European Commission to urgently carry out a gender equality impact assessment of the ongoing cuts in public services². Those pleas were ignored. The EPSU research suggests that those policies are indeed now having a disproportionate negative impact on women. The Committee endorsed the general EPSU position that there is an alternative to austerity – more progressive taxation and an alternative economic model which focuses on fairness and equality. It also echoed the concerns of the global trade union movement regarding the attack on trade union rights, particularly in relation to collective bargaining and the autonomy of the social partners.

The Europe 2020 Strategy and the European Commission's Gender Equality Strategy 2010-2015 set out a number of commitments on increasing female participation in the labour market³, improving gender equality and actions to close the gender pay gap⁴. These commitments will be pie in the sky unless different policies are put into place.

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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 250 trade unions; EPSU organises workers in the energy, water and waste sectors, health and social services and local and national administration, in all European countries including in the EU's Eastern Neighborhood. EPSU is the recognized regional organization of Public Services International (PSI). For more information on EPSU and our work please go to: <http://www.epsu.org>

¹ Ireland, Latvia, Romania and Spain

² <http://www.epsu.org/a/6713>

³ The Europe 2020 Strategy includes the headline target to raise the employment rate for women and men to 75%

⁴ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=89&furtherNews=yes&langId=en&newsId=890>