

European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU)

Press Communication – 19 June 2014

EPSU's message to the European Council: promote healthcare – boost the economy

The health ministers meeting in Luxembourg today and tomorrow (19-20 June) urgently need to push for sweeping changes to the European Commission's country-specific recommendations on health and long-term care. EPSU, the trade union federation for health care workers across Europe, argues that the Commission is failing to acknowledge the increasing urgency of health problems in many countries in Europe and is more concerned with budgetary issues than improving and extending the provision of quality and affordable health and long-term care.

This year, 20 countries have been given draft country-specific recommendations referring to health and/or social services, including in particular long-term care. For most, the recommendations focus only on the cost-effectiveness of care and in several cases the references to health and social are simply part of the paragraph on budgetary issues. In only five of the 20 cases is there any reference to the quality of care or access to services and nothing at all about effective measures on health promotion or disease prevention.

There are no country recommendations for Greece or Cyprus as they continue to face the demands set by the Troika and for Greece this has meant a serious attack on its health and social care systems. The latest assessment¹ documents the sharp fall in access to healthcare, rising infant mortality rates, increased HIV infection, the return of malaria and a surge in suicides.

Health ministers need to recognise not just the short-term damage² that austerity is doing to people's health across Europe but the, as yet, unquantifiable long-term negative consequences that this will have.

They also need to reconsider the evidence on the impact of public spending and in particular health spending. The International Monetary Fund admits it was wrong on the fiscal multiplier but the European Commission is still in denial. The evidence³ on health is even more dramatic and a major increase in healthcare spending and investment will provide a major boost to the European economy.

"EU Health ministers should focus on making care jobs attractive, address intolerable stress levels and recruit the staff needed to provide the sick, the old, the dying with the quality

¹ "Greece's health crisis: from austerity to denialism", Kentikelenis, Karanikolos, Reeves, McKee and Stuckler, *The Lancet*, volume 383, number 9918, 22 February 2014

² For further information EPSU's website: www.epsu.org/a/9895 and www.epsu.org/a/10360

³ "Health, education and social protection programs have among the highest fiscal multipliers. In the case of the health sector, public investment boosts the economy by more than three dollars for every dollar spent." From *The Body Economic – Why Austerity Kills*, Stuckler and Basu, Allen Lane, 2013

*services they deserve" says **Jan Willem Goudriaan**, EPSU General Secretary. " Improving pay and conditions and investing in care will give the EU economy a boost to grow out of the crisis. The austerity path with cuts in jobs and pay freezes, the privatisation and marketisation of care should end."*

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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 265 trade unions; 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 Neighborhood. EPSU is the recognized regional organization of Public Services International (PSI). For more information please go to: <http://www.epsu.org>