

EPSU Resolution and Roadmap on Gender Equality and Women's Rights "Re-vitalising the commitment to gender equality in times of crisis"

Adopted by the EPSU Executive Committee on 7 April 2017

At the 2014 Congress EPSU adopted comprehensive and ambitious commitments to advance equality against a backdrop of austerity, cuts in public services and increasing precariousness in the labour market. Despite difficulties we can show gains made because of our solidarity, cooperation and strong trade union actions. The resolution sets out the main priorities until Congress comprising initiatives regarding equal opportunities/treatment, work-life balance over the life-course and addressing low pay of women in public services. The Roadmap more specifically sets out how EPSU will follow-up concretely on the issues arising from the resolution. A separate text in appendix also addresses how EPSU can further support actions in relation to the right of women to control their reproductive rights.

RESOLUTION

Closing the gender gaps

The commitment to equality needs revitalizing because progress has stalled in many, if not all European countries. Nearly 60 years after the Treaty of Rome and the right to equal pay, the gender pay gap is still over 20% in 15 EU countries and over 30% in Lithuania and Estonia, compared to the overall EU average of around 17.5%. Low pay and the undervaluation of women's work is still a major problem, both within and outside the EU.

We need closing other gender gaps, for example the average 30 percent EU gender pensions gap and the gender employment gap which remains at 12 per cent as of the 3rd quarter of 2016. Extreme inequality has been particularly detrimental for women as a result of the crisis and women have fallen deeper into poverty. These gender gaps have exacerbated the disadvantageous position for women. Gender inequality affects the jobs women have access to, the money they earn and the way society values their work. The unequal economics of the work of women is not inevitable.

Women, Public Services and Austerity

In recent years women have lost jobs in public services in disproportionate way. Women (and men) in other sectors of the economy have lost access to public services. While austerity has lessened, it has not been replaced by the necessary public investment in employment and public services. Even in areas where employment has grown, such as health and social services, this has not translated into higher wages for women and a narrowing of the gender pay gap. Amongst the public services cuts have been in social services that support citizens and public bodies that champion gender equality. These cuts impact disproportionately on vulnerable women and girls.

Standing up for Women and Women's Rights

These cuts are compounded by new threats to making progress on gender equality. In a number countries the right of women to control their reproductive rights has recently been questioned, for example in the US but also in Spain, France or Poland. EPSU is concerned

about these developments and welcomes movements such as 'She Decides'¹ that stand up against attempts to turn back the clock on abortion rights and for women to freely decide over their bodies. We condemn the gagging order of the new US administration and the silence of the EU and many European governments to take a clear stance on this issue.

Restrictions on access to safe abortion only make things worse for women, and especially poor women, who have fewer possibilities to find alternatives elsewhere and who are most at risk. Such restrictions risk to put back gains made regarding women's health, emancipation, education and financial independence.

EPSU encourages support for the efforts of the 'She Decides' and other similar movements. We stress that proper information on sexual reproduction and birth control should be part of public education and health systems. We call for investment in education, family planning and public health and in other measures that empower girls and women rather than curtail their rights.

We call on the European Commission and all European governments to contribute and ensure implementation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs), such as Goal 3 to ensure healthy lives and well-being and Goal 5 on gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls.

EPSU remains at the forefront of the fight for gender equality and against discrimination in all its forms. Today more than ever we need to uphold fundamental values and show solidarity with each other.

EPSU will further remain committed to its gender equality work in European Works Councils to address inequalities in multinational companies.

EPSU will use its campaigning and collective bargaining strategies to raise the living standard of workers and to close the gender employment, pay and pensions gap.

ROADMAP

Introduction

Renewed efforts to achieve gender equality are strongly needed. The economic crisis has eroded progress achieved in the last 20-30 years. In a number of Member States, austerity measures, often imposed without proper consultation with social partners, did not include any gender assessment and had a strong negative effect on the quantity and quality of female employment.

Gender equality has also fallen off the radar of several Member States and in some respects at European level as well. Despite the lobbying of trade unions, civil society organizations and the adoption of several European Parliament resolutions calling for a robust EU policy on gender equality, very little has happened over the last five years.

According to a Eurobarometer survey realized in 2015, nearly all Europeans (94%) agree that equality between women and men is a fundamental right and a large majority (76%) think that this should be a priority for the EU. Nevertheless, what seems to be a priority for EU citizens has not been reflected by EU action.

¹ For more information including on how to support see <https://www.shedecides.com/>

In fact, among the incongruities detected at EU level we can mention: the EC withdrawal of the proposal to revise the maternity leave directive; the blocking in the Council (since 2013) of the proposed Directive on improving the gender balance among non-executive directorships of companies listed on stock exchanges; the lack of a systematic gender approach in the economic governance process / European Semester, and finally the downgrading of the Gender Equality Strategy for the period 2016 – 2019 to a staff working document.

It is worth mentioning the recent initiative to address the 'challenges of working parents', which has been included in the Commission work programme 2016 and has been followed by the first stage consultation and second stage consultation of the social partners.. The EC intends to undertake to improve work life balance, via legislative and non-legislative proposals.

EPSU Action

At the 2014 Congress EPSU adopted comprehensive and ambitious commitments to advance equality against a backdrop of austerity, cuts in public services and increasing precariousness in the labour market. This roadmap for discussion proposes some further steps to re-inforce our commitment to gender equality how we can further address inequalities, discrimination, ensuring quality employment and defend worker's rights.

EPSU will also further ensure that its activities are gender-mainstreamed. To mainstream gender equality into EPSU sectoral work and social dialogue work remains the priority.

EPSU is currently preparing a larger conference (50-60 participants) on gender equality, which will take place in January 2018. This conference will give an impetus in the policies we want to adopt at Congress 2019.

The 8th of March (International Women's Day) 2018 and 2019 could be come key moments to mobilize again. (see under 1) The themes below relate to EPSU's WGEC Work Programme. Affiliates might like to take the lead on some of the thematic priorities outlined below to ensure we can cover all

EPSU will continue its efforts to reach gender equality agreements in multinational companies in the utilities sector to increase women's participation and realize gender equality action plans.

It would be important to maintain the objectives of increasing the participation of women, younger delegates (below 35) and of non-EU members in this work. Therefore, EPSU will update the report on representation of women in EPSU's affiliated unions for the next EPSU Congress.

EPSU will contribute and is actively involved in the ETUC and PSI work on gender equality. To have the best impact affiliates should address the themes below with their confederations.

1) Closing the Gender Pay Gap

A focus on closing the gender pay gap is one of EPSU's priorities for the ETUC pay rise campaign. EPSU input into ETUC's work on the European Pillar of Social Rights and Social Protection is equally stressing closing the gender pay. We will explore how we make closing the gender pay gap a priority for action for example through the European Semester. EPSU will further continue highlighting the developments on the gender pay gap around International Women's' Day. The actions in many countries to stop working (demonstrate and strike) on the afternoon of 8 March could be coordinated for 2018 and 2019. We want to

team up with women's organizations to address the impact of the economic crisis on public services and women in particular. Addressing low pay of women in the health and social services sector remains a priority. EPSU is currently preparing a survey for affiliates to address low pay in Health and Social Services The Working Group Social Services of EPSU is a central platform to address closing the gender employment gap.

Raising the profile on the need to invest into childcare and strengthening the capacity of our affiliates to organize childcare workers is another area of work. The Sustainable Development Goals include specific targets on gender equality where EPSU will contribute and ensure implementation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs), such as Goal 3 to ensure healthy lives and well-being and Goal 5 on gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls in monitoring COMM and the EP.

2) Work-Life Balance

EPSU will highlight work-life balance measures in particular with European sectoral employers organisations and support the ETUC in its lobbying strategy to get a balanced legislative and non-legislative proposal on work-life balance measures. Proposals are expected end of April 2017. The crisis has been undermining rights of pregnant workers. The Maternity Leave Directive has to remain a Health and Safety Instrument. The strengthening of the dismissal period of pregnant workers should be a priority for EPSU's affiliated unions to prevent so-called "white-dismissals, which have been on the increase since the economic crisis started from reports of our affiliates Digitalization is also changing the world of work. EPSU will ensure to have a gender approach to digitalization and monitor the impact on job content and the quality of work. Commissioned research is in preparation. More action is needed how to address part-time work with employers at affiliated and EPSU level either through the "work-life balance initiative" or in the framework of the European Social Pillar.

3) Preventing and raising awareness on violence against women and men

The economic crisis has further enhanced violence in the public sector as evidence shows. EPSU has been very active in raising third-party violence and has produced guidelines on third-party violence in the health and local government sector. The sector NEA is currently discussing to endorse guidelines for its sector. Addressing violence, and third-party violence in collective bargaining should be a priority for EPSU's national affiliates. EPSU will further support the ratification of the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention to prevent violence against women and girls.

4) Women's Rights

Women's rights are workers rights. Trade union rights and fundamental rights are enshrined in the European Convention of Fundamental Rights and the European Social Charter. The input of EPSU into the work of the European Pillar of Social Rights is an important contribution to enhance women's rights. Strengthening Social Protection (via input into ETUC work) is the best guarantee to strengthen women's rights. We continue our coordination with ETUC and PSI on improving women's rights. The European input into the UN economic and Social council's Commission on the Status of Women will be very important in 2019. It will discuss social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

5) Representation of Women in EPSU

EPSU will update its report on representation of women in affiliate structures for the next EPSU Congress. EPSU has gender-mainstreamed statutes. The WGEC Committee is drawn from the Executive Committee. In practice, very few Executive Members take part in

the EPSU WGEC committee. EPSU affiliates should ensure that EPSU's statutes are lived in practice in the way it has been designed. The representation of women in EPSU's statutory meetings NEA, LRG, UT, HSS is monitored through EPSU's Annual Activity Report. It should be mentioned that no significant developments took place in raising the representation of women in EPSU's statutory bodies. More action is needed from EPSU's affiliates to ensure a good representation of women. The Executive Committee should discuss how more progress could be reached also on younger female delegates. An action plan could be presented at the Gender Equality Conference organized by EPSU in January 2018.

6) Collective Bargaining and Organising

EPSU's affiliates are encouraged to address low pay of women through collective bargaining in the public sector. EPSU will ensure to have a gender perspective in its work around organizing and recruitment. First steps were already taken in EPSU's pilot project on organizing in the health and social services sector. The EPSU Collective Bargaining Newsletter will further ensure visibility on EPSU's affiliates' actions and how they address gender equality in collective bargaining.

Appendix: EPSU Standing Up for Women's Reproductive Rights

Since the beginning of the crisis, there has been a regression not only in social rights, but also in the right of expression.

With each restriction of freedom of expression, that of women is more greatly affected.

In many countries, both inside and outside the EU, the first budgetary cuts in this austerity context have targeted the policies in favour of gender equality. These withdrawals reduce both the freedom of expression of women and their right to defend it in equal measure.

This is the case with respect to the guarantee to be in charge of their own bodies and of abortion. Many countries are trying to call into question this acquired right or to restrict the conditions of access to it.

Access to abortion, where it exists, is in some cases increasingly difficult to obtain, as some doctors or healthcare institutions quite simply refuse to apply it, disregarding the law.

In other countries, attacks, including on the initiative of parliamentarians, threaten the existing conditions of access to abortion, even if they are minimal.

Confronted by these many obstacles, women are forced to have recourse to alternatives, which are either financially unaffordable or clandestine, at the risk to their health and even their lives.

Abortion is a fundamental freedom inscribed in international conventions to which almost all States have subscribed. Calling this right into question has an impact on women's health, their emancipation, their education, their access to work and therefore their financial independence.

The EPSU lends its support to all the actions undertaken to guarantee freedom of choice to women and reaffirms that these setbacks are unacceptable.

Women have long campaigned, alongside trade union and citizens' organisations, to secure their rights. The EPSU will tirelessly pursue the defence of the existing rights by committing to an unrestricted right of access to abortion.