



World Water Day in times of crisis – right to water crucial – No disconnections

EPSU Statement, 22 March 2020

22 March is World Water Day. It comes as workers and people respond to prevent the rapid spread of the Corona virus (Covid 19). Hundreds of thousands are faced with job uncertainty or loss. Many will not be able to pay their bills. We call on all governments and on the water utilities to prevent the disconnection of drinking water.

This year was to be a celebratory one. It is the 10th anniversary of the UN General Assembly vote to recognize the human right to water and sanitation. EPSU alongside many others demand that access to drinking water and sanitation is declared a human right in the EU. We organized the first ever successful European Citizens' Initiative to this end. Some governments are banning disconnections of water as well as of electricity and gas in response to the pandemic and the generalization of these measures will benefit many workers and self-employed people who face a loss of income. This is positive and a recognition that water is an indispensable human right.

In the coming months, the Drinking Water Directive (DWD) is up for adoption by the European Union. However, It still lacks recognition of the human right to water. This crisis shows that the timid measures that are promoted in the directive are not fit for purpose to ensure that every citizen has access to water as governments recognize themselves. It is not too late to legislate and to ensure that all European citizens have access to good quality water and sanitation. We want an EU that we can rely on with positive rights, especially in times of crisis.

Water bills are only one part of many issues that workers and families are faced with. Electricity, gas, heating bills will come due. People are asked to pay their mortgages and rents. We welcome all steps to ban cuts in utility bills and to prevent house evictions. Water and a warm homes are essential human rights. We call on the European Commission and the Council of Ministers to support these rights, and on Member States to clearly state that people's basic rights will be guaranteed.

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