

UE CARE Statement, Palermo

European solidarity?

A European network of public service workers to welcome migrants

This statement, initiated by FP-CGIL and CC.OO-FSC, was discussed and amended by a European trade union delegation of EPSU's affiliates at a meeting on 27 September 2018 in Palermo, Italy. It was then adopted by the EPSU Executive Committee on 6 November 2018.

Migration is a global, social and economic phenomenon. Migration has existed since the beginning of time, it has benefited socially and economically. It cannot be dealt only as if it were an emergency and a security issue, as it has been the case until now, but as a structural phenomenon that involves the whole European Union and across the world and will continue to do so.

Without a common coherent, solidarity and human rights framework, the ad-hoc security-based approach to migration at national and EU level contributes to fear and causes racism and xenophobia.

Racism is real. In the last few months in Italy and many other European countries we have witnessed a resurgence of racism, outburst of verbal and physical violence involving fascist and populist right wing groups but also ordinary people victim of fears and insecurity who are led to believe that migrants are the enemy to persecute, insult, and reject. Those who hold racist views feeling emboldened to express them and carry out racist and xenophobic abuse and hate crimes.

The European Union cannot be conceived of as a mosaic of national borders: the Mediterranean countries form the southern frontier of the European Union and carry out activities for the EU in the field of migration processes to promote reception and integration. These are important activities that involve all public sectors: from health to local and central government, from rescue at sea to education, from security to social services, from processing of asylum claims and related services to local social services, housing, training, promoting integration in the labour market and society.

It is fundamental to understand that workers in those services are European, far beyond that of a single nationality; their fundamental, transnational job is to welcome and integrate migrants on behalf of the whole of Europe.

Until now, their national isolation, the lack of adequate resources and investment and the need to always work in emergency situations have created stressful working conditions and objective problems. This means that the work being done does not always meet the needs of the citizens concerned.

Indeed, the key issue of staff shortages throughout Europe, due to the economic crisis approach, in particular in the public services dealing with the reception, care and integration of the newcomers, and the absence of a common European policy, is ignored for squalid political and electoral reasons.

To build a European sense of solidarity that can accommodate and manage migration in a qualitative, adequate manner, creating a single, structured and coherent system for the whole Union, it is necessary to develop common standards and tools to allow all public workers in the Union, regardless of their country of origin, to work in the same direction. In particular, as called for by EPSU, the ETUC as well as the European Parliament, the Dublin Rules, that place disproportionate responsibility on the countries of the southern frontier must be changed based upon an EU-wide asylum-seekers' relocation system that takes into account social, economic criteria of host countries as well as preferences, and language and family connections of the asylum-seekers concerned.

It is also necessary to place at the centre of the political debate the importance of the role played by the public institutions, at national and local level, the working conditions of workers who deal with the reception of migrants and the search for solutions that allow a genuine system of integration, based on the European Charter of Fundamental Rights and International standards for refugees and migrant workers' rights (i.e. UN Conventions, as the UN 1951 Refugee Convention and Core Human Rights Conventions of the UN, including the ones on migrant workers and ILO conventions) as well as the national constitutions.

Appropriate resources must be allocated by the Union to increase the budget for migratory issues which, on the one hand, take into account the dignity and rights of the migrants and, on the other, invest in and enhance the work of all workers dealing with migrants in cooperatives, NGOs, public administrations that should all be working within a public sector ethos, developing a fundamental role of integration and defending the democratic values of the European Union.

Further, the public security services of the various states working at the borders must guarantee the respect of human rights of newcomers and be able to work in a safe and healthy working environment. In this sense it is necessary to respond to the needs of the security forces members. Governments must therefore provide sufficient technical and human resources, qualified training, relevant to the work done by people working in this sector; there is no doubt that if police personnel and other security workers do not operate safely, they can hardly guarantee the security and safety of others.

In our view, relaunching EU safe channels for regular migration are essential to guarantee security and legality as well as reducing so-called irregular migration, the consequences of which are often conditions of widespread illegality and the exploitation of migrants at work. Furthermore, the creation of humanitarian channels, for all those fleeing wars (conflict, poverty, persecution, climate change) and inhumane conditions, could avoid the terrible escalation of deaths at sea which in recent months has increased as reported by UNHCR.

As the European public service trade union delegation underlined at a meeting in Melilla on 13 and 14 June last, "It is at the basis of the values of the Union to ensure the saving of lives and the protection of asylum rights and this has to be a central element of reception policies."

As public workers' unions, we therefore believe that to build and support these demands it is necessary to create a **European network of reception workers**, and for this reason we ask our European union federation, EPSU, to support this call and help connect all workers in Europe who are operating in the migration area to encourage decent reception and a human-right based approach to migration. We invite other unions affiliated to EPSU representing those workers to join the network and build a powerful voice to represent our interests towards the EU institutions (Parliament, Council and Commission).



Through this virtuous connection it will be possible, building upon the European trade union meetings in Melilla and Palermo, to share valuable experiences on the ground that might initiate a dialogue in Europe with the institutions.

The aim is to achieve adequate “EU legal minimum social standards” including through European sectoral and cross-sectoral social dialogue, to give much more emphasis on the importance of the work in public services dealing with reception and to overcome the difficulties of workers.

The European network of reception workers can also be a means to strengthen the role of public service unions internationally as key stakeholders in promoting access of migrants to basic services, a commitment stipulated in the *United Nations Global Compact on Migration* agreed last July, and underlined by the PSI, our global union federation.

The network will also aim to influence the European elections in May 2019, asking progressive political forces to defend in their programmes the need for a humane response to migration and for quality of public services, also as an extraordinary antidote to the resurgence of fascism, racism and xenophobia. We know well that in Europe there is a general situation of crisis and social injustice, a failure to enforce human rights, not the least at work, and there are those who use and exploit the fears and uncertainties of ever broader social categories, accentuating dangerous divisions between workers and citizens.

We also know well that the European Union is based on strong values so it is necessary to mobilize citizens and cultural, philosophical and militant forces.

We know well where this road can lead and we cannot stand and watch. We all have to affirm strongly: no to racism and xenophobia, yes to human security, and yes to a quality reception through public services and public work.

