

INVESTMENT IN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE WORKFORCE VITAL TO ADDRESS INCREASING STAFF SHORTAGES

World Health Day Statement

7th April 2022



The past two years have shown that the survival of health and care systems strongly depends on the work of health and social care workers. It is only thanks to their commitment - sometimes paid with [heavy price](#) - that our societies were protected and our daily lives are returning to normal. The commitment of health and social care workers cannot be forgotten.

Now is the moment to transform our [applause](#) into visible, long lasting and direct measures. Many of the workers - over 80% of whom are women - who kept Europe afloat during the pandemic now struggle with long-COVID, depression or even post-traumatic stress disorders. We must improve their working conditions, health and safety, and financing of the health and social care sector to safeguard its future resilience. One crucial part of building preparedness is ensuring the sector's attractiveness by guaranteeing safe staffing levels. This is fundamental to providing the quality of care that recipients deserve. In many countries, trade unions are using collective bargaining to ensure [safe staffing levels](#). The right to health and care is enshrined in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and European Pillar of Social Rights. The only way to honour these commitments are through safely staffed sectors.

Commercialisation of health and care needs to be reversed

The Orpea Group, Europe's largest for-profit care provider, has been embroiled in scandal since the publication of *Les Fossoyeurs* ('The Gravediggers') in January 2022. The book exposed the consequences of the group's cost-cutting and mismanagement, from elder abuse to workers' rights violations. The [scandal](#) shows that the current approach of multinational companies making profits at the expense of care recipients and workers needs to be changed. EPSU and its unions have long criticised the commercialisation of these sectors, and the pandemic and ongoing Orpea scandal has proven this criticism to be accurate. With the hard lessons learned, now is the moment to implement change.

Relevant measures to improve workforce shortages

As the representative of 8 million workers across the continent, the majority in health and social care, EPSU calls on the EU and the governments to urgently address workforce shortages. To that end we call for the implementation of the following measures:

On a European level:

- Ensure that funding provided by various EU facilities including EU-4Health can be spent on improving the training, working conditions, and health and safety conditions of health and care workers;
- Develop a dedicated [Directive on Psychosocial Risks](#) to protect workers from stress and burnout caused by work;
- Approve [EPSU's and Social Employers' request](#) to establish the Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee in the social services sector and support Sectoral Social Dialogue in the Health sector in member states. [Health and social services is one of the largest sectors in the EU](#), employing 11% of the total workforce;
- Ensure the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, in particular the right to health and care;
- Include COVID in Commission Recommendation 2003/670/EC concerning the European schedule of occupational diseases.

On a national level:

- Urgently address workforce shortages by putting in place measures to assure adequate needs-based staffing levels;
- Increase health and care funding with a significant proportion of it being directed to improving working conditions;

- Protect health and social care as a public good and ensure that any profit made is reinvested to improve working conditions and healthcare delivery. The commercialisation of health and care should be reversed to safeguard the sector's resilience and focus on care recipients' rights;
- Support the work of the WHO to establish the Pandemic Treaty with measures to address workforce shortages to provide safe staffing levels;
- Support the introduction of a "waiver" of intellectual property rights on the COVID-19 vaccine to accelerate vaccine production and make it accessible to all workers and citizens across the globe;
- Increase protection of Occupational Health and Safety including psychosocial risks (mental health) and greater funding for relevant inspections to ensure healthy workplaces;
- Support and protect collective bargaining and sectoral social dialogue;
- Protect workers and trade unionists from anti-union activities;
- Rebuild the public nature of care services and recognise the crucial role social services play in our societies;
- Develop adequate measures to support workers suffering from Long-COVID.

The future of the health and care sector depends on the workers. More than ever we need to support them to make our public services resilient.