

# EPSU Congress 2019: Draft Programme of Action Fighting for a Future for All

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## X. Introduction

- X1. This programme of action highlights the main priorities for EPSU over the next Congress period and is set out on the basis of three main themes:
- X1.a Future of public services
  - X1.b Future of work in public services
  - X1.c Future of public service trade unions
- X2. These three elements form the basis of EPSU's contribution to building a Europe where people and the environment are free from exploitation and welfare for all comes first. Our vision of work and society is shaped by our shared values. These highlight the need to protect and promote democracy, peace and civil, economic, social and cultural rights and to uphold the right for everyone to have access to quality public services to guarantee their fundamental rights and well-being.
- X3. The main challenge for EPSU is to defend, promote and strengthen what we know as Social Europe. This is a Europe where sustainable development, high quality public services, full employment, workers' rights, citizen's well-being and a well-funded welfare state take centre stage. This is a Europe whose social model continues to set an example at global level but where this social element needs to be fostered through stronger public finances and increased public investment based on progressive taxation, a fairer distribution of income and wealth and stronger and more extensive collective bargaining and trade union rights. This is a Europe that puts its full weight behind realising the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals both in the EU, in Europe and globally and which leads on implementing the Paris Climate Agreement. Our Europe contributes to social justice, solidarity and peace on our continent and in the world. Welfare for all comes first
- X4. The tentative moves to a more positive social agenda in the European Union after years of austerity needs to be maintained and built upon by the new Parliament and European Commission. There is a lot of work still to do. The European Pillar of Social Rights provides a starting point and a basis to assess policies at national level but much more needs to be done to strengthen workers' and social rights at European level. This includes rebalancing the economic and social dimension and to ensure that EPSU's core values are properly reflected in budgets, policy and legislation in the European Union and at national level.
- X5. These values are under threat from a range of reactionary, xenophobic and nationalist forces whose growth has been fed by national and international policies that are more about markets and profit-making and say nothing about workers' and citizens' rights and well-being. In response, it is all the more important that public service trade unions work together to vigorously restate the need for solidarity and fairness in the face of the damaging effects, both social and economic, of increasing inequalities. Our vision of an alternative Europe, with public services at its core, must be a real alternative to the current system. With its narrow focus on markets and profits, this prioritises privatisation and liberalisation over the public spending and investment needed to deliver high levels of welfare and quality employment.

- X6. Political changes are posing new questions for EPSU and its affiliates. While the United Kingdom is leaving the European Union, other countries are closer to joining and some existing member states are looking at measures to create a closer Economic and Monetary Union. At the same time relationships with neighbouring countries also continue to throw up new challenges. The European Union, Russia and other European countries play an important role at global level and we expect all to promote our shared values. EPSU must continue to respond to these developments with a clear focus on their impact on democracy, peace, public services and workers' and citizens' rights.
- X7. The legacy and persistence of austerity continues to blight many countries. Millions of people have been affected by cuts to public spending and investment. Women have been disproportionately affected, both as service users and public service workers while young people have seen job opportunities dry up as youth unemployment in some countries soared. For many workers migration has been seen as the only option, often leading to major staffing shortages in public services, particularly health and social care. There is an urgent need for progressive and fair, social and economic policies to deliver a more united Europe and radically reduce inequalities both within and between countries.
- X8. This programme of action will provide the basis for work developed in EPSU's different committees and working groups, covering health and social services, local and regional government (including firefighters), utilities (including company and European works council policy), central governments and EU administration (including prison services), women and gender equality and young workers.

## **A. Future of public services**

A1. Quality public services are at the heart of fair societies and essential in tackling the social, economic and environmental challenges that face Europe. EPSU and its affiliates have developed a range of policies and actions to defend and support universally accessible and democratically-organised public services that are responsive to citizens' needs. These include economic policies to promote social justice and equality, progressive taxes helping to finance the necessary levels of public spending and investment. Building support for more and better public services involves arguing for public ownership and democratic control and management and against the processes of liberalisation, privatisation and commercialisation that undermine the quality and democratic accountability of those services.

### **A2. Fighting for stronger public finances and tax justice**

A3. Public finance, backed up with transparent and democratic processes to ensure the best use of resources, is the most effective way of funding and delivering universal and high-quality public services. These should be accessible, affordable and based on need. Fair, solidarity-based financing should be promoted over cuts to meet arbitrary debt and deficit targets. A progressive tax policy must address both income and wealth inequality, eradicate tax fraud and close down tax havens.

A4. Action points

- A4.a support policies to promote strong public finances and public investment
- A4.b lobby for more effective action to tackle tax fraud and evasion, especially by transnational companies, with disclosure of special tax deals between them and national governments, as part of a move to fairer and more progressive taxation and social contribution systems
- A4.c ensure that the benefits of public investment are shared and support more equal societies

### **A5. Arguing for an alternative economic policy**

A6. EPSU calls for a radical change in economic policy to a system that puts people before profit, where proper weight is given to social and environmental issues and public spending is seen not as a burden, but as playing an essential role in driving the economy. This model prioritises progressive measures for a fairer distribution of income and wealth and to prevent financial speculation and ensure the economy is not dominated by financial interests.

A7. Action points

- A7.a promote the adoption of economic policies across Europe that recognise the role of public investment and public spending in fairly distributing economic and social well-being rather than focussing on competition, markets and profit
- A7.b support a shift in economic and budgetary policy in the European Union and beyond where social issues and the role of public services are prioritised. This should also be reflected in the EU budget

### **A8. Getting more and better public services for all**

A9. Public finance and investment in quality public services and infrastructure are vital in ensuring they are universally available and affordable for all. This means support for all public services – from energy, waste and water, through health and social services to the many services provided by local, regional and national governments. All these levels of public service need to be well funded to meet the needs of an ageing society and to respond to new and existing challenges such as supporting migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers.

A10. Action points

- A10.a secure the fundamental right for all to quality public services, including the right to water, energy, health care and education

- A10.b campaign to ensure adequate funding for public services for migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers
- A10.c ensure that all public service users have access to quality public services and fight any discrimination whether relating to race, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, age, religion, disability, political opinion, social or economic status, or national or ethnic origin

### **A11. Defending democracy and the rule of law and fighting corruption**

A12. Democratic control over public service provision and trust in public institutions are essential in guaranteeing the fair and equitable delivery of public services. Public service workers and their trade unions play a vital role in protecting these principles and exposing those whose actions undermine the rule of law.

A13. Action points

- A13.a support action by workers and trade unions to fight corruption and anti-democratic practices
- A13.b fight for laws to protect whistleblowers

### **A14. Resisting privatisation and liberalisation to defend quality public services**

A15. Privatisation in its many forms, including public-private partnerships, outsourcing, concessions and processes such as marketisation and commercialisation, has a negative impact on the quality public services. Providing research and campaigning material to prevent privatisation and advocating the return of services to public ownership and democratic control are core areas of work across all levels of government, health and social services as well as energy, waste and water.

A16. Action points

- A16.a expose the negative effects of privatisation and highlight the benefits of public provision and the return of services to public ownership and control
- A16.b support initiatives to improve the quality and quantity of publicly provided services
- A16.c strengthen the regulatory frameworks for public services, including through information and transparency rules and social partner representation in regulatory bodies
- A16.d defend domestic regulation from being undermined by trade and investment agreements

### **A17. Getting the best from the digital transformation of public services**

A18. Digital transformations, whether in the form of artificial intelligence, automatisisation or robotisation, raise major questions about the quality of public services. They have considerable potential to increase efficiency and effectiveness and deliver positive benefits for citizens where they open up new ways of providing better services to more people. However, they also threaten to dehumanise services and make them more remote from users. Trade unions must have a role in the introduction and use of digital processes to help ensure that the benefits are fairly distributed. The same is true of measures to regulate the control of data and the right to privacy, promoting the role of public services in the provision of digital services in the face of their domination by private sector interests.

A19. Action points

- A19.a lobby for democratic control over the digitalisation process and fair sharing of its benefits
- A19.b develop policies to ensure that the potentially positive impacts of digitalisation are fully exploited while protecting against the threat that it might reinforce inequality or impair access to public services
- A19.c press for effective protection of personal data and the right to privacy

## **A20. Demanding fair trade and investment agreements**

A21. Trade and investment agreements should not prevent countries from developing quality public services. This means ensuring that public services and the public interest take precedence over investors' rights.

A22. Action points

- A22.a call for public services to be excluded from trade agreements
- A22.b oppose processes, like the multilateral investment court system, that give investors precedence over the rights of workers, consumers and public authorities
- A22.c monitor negotiations of trade and investment agreements and react where they pose a threat to public services, environmental protection or workers' and consumers' rights
- A22.d demand transparency and information on trade agreements
- A22.e demand that trade and investment agreements do not undermine domestic regulation to protect public services and the general interest

## **A23. Tackling climate change and environmental damage**

A24. Public services play a key role in responding to climate change both in the short and long term. Public investment, particularly at the level of local and regional government, is crucial in mitigating the impact of climate change and adapting public services to deal with severe weather events. Climate change means major changes for the energy sector in terms of restructuring and the mix and security of energy supply. EPSU will work to prevent the exploitation of our natural environment.

A25. Action points

- A25.a press for increased and sustained public investment to tackle climate change
- A25.b ensure involvement of trade unions in the development of policies to mitigate and adapt to climate change and in relation to energy supply
- A25.c continue to lobby for effective implementation of the Paris Agreement and deliver the environmental targets set out in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals

## **A26. Improving services for migrants and refugees**

A27. The movement of millions of migrant workers and refugees into and across Europe, as a result of conflicts and climate change, has posed major challenges for public institutions and their workers. The European and national response to asylum-seekers has often fallen pitifully short of what should be expected from the wealthiest region in the world. Public services to migrants and asylum-seekers are vital to ensure their safe and effective integration into society and these services need the appropriate funding, staffing and protection against the threat of privatisation. Migrant workers are an essential part of the public service workforce in many European countries without whom those services would not be able to function and their contribution needs to be recognised. Migrant workers contribute towards public services through taxation and refugees should be allowed to work whilst their status is being assessed to allow them to integrate into society.

A28. Action points

- A28.a lobby for fairer treatment of migrants and asylum-seekers
- A28.b work to ensure that services to migrants and asylum-seekers are properly funded, with the appropriate levels of trained staff
- A28.c organise migrant workers in trade unions and campaign for refugees to be allowed to work
- A28.d call for action to tackle the reasons behind refugee flows relating to climate change, economic stagnation and conflict

## **B. Future of work in public services**

- B1. Quality employment and quality public services should go hand-in-hand. Thanks to strong trade unions and well-established collective bargaining and social dialogue structures, working in the public services has been widely associated with good pay and pension provision, employment security and a range of other positive benefits. Public service trade unions are also at the forefront of promoting gender equality and tackling discrimination.
- B2. However, pay cuts and pay freezes, increased working time and more insecure working conditions have had a major impact on thousands of public service workers across Europe. Job cuts, recruitment freezes and blocks on promotion have also reduced employment opportunities in many public services, particularly affecting younger workers. Staff shortages mean that many workers face excessive workloads leading to increased stress and burnout. In many cases secure employment conditions have been undermined with workers facing various forms of precarious employment from fixed-term and zero-hours contracts to poor quality internships. Again it is the young who are often the worst affected.
- B3. EPSU affiliates across Europe are striving to tackle these challenges, rebuild and strengthen collective bargaining and resist moves to attack employment and trade union rights. Stronger unions and more effective collective bargaining and social dialogue also mean being prepared to address new threats or opportunities as digitalisation creates a new world of work.

### **B4. Defending fundamental rights at work**

- B5. Public service workers and their trade unions have often faced challenges to, and restrictions on, their rights to organise, negotiate and take strike action, with some groups of public employees and civil servants still denied these basic rights. National governments continue to threaten or push for further constraints, particularly on the right to strike and to carry out trade union work.
- B6. Action point  
 B6.a defend and promote the rights of all public service workers and their unions to organise, negotiate and take industrial action

### **B7. Strengthening collective bargaining and improving pay and conditions**

- B8. The right to collective bargaining in the public services has not always been fully guaranteed and has been further undermined as a result of austerity. Strengthening and extending collective bargaining is the most effective way of protecting and improving the pay and conditions of public service workers, whatever the form of their employment contract or civil service status. This covers a broad range of issues including: training, pensions – particularly for heavy work, working time, health and safety, work intensity and increasing workloads, work organisation and supervision, safe and adequate staffing levels, career development and permanent contracts.
- B9. Action points  
 B9.a promote, defend and extend the right to collective bargaining in the public services on the basis of the broad rights promoted by ILO Convention 151 (Labour Relations (Public Services))  
 B9.b support affiliates' strategies to defend and improve pay and working conditions and our working environment and to tackle low pay and precarious work, including in a cross-border context  
 B9.c address the need for safe and adequate staffing levels as they affect different sectors – including in relation to health and social services, prison services and the provision of services to asylum-seekers  
 B9.d develop working time policies that address workers' needs for a positive work-life balance that ensures workers have full control over their free time

## **B10. Promoting and extending the European social dialogue**

B11. The sector social dialogue committees in EPSU sectors have made progress on a number of fronts over the past five years, especially in terms of health and safety. The impact of this work still needs to be strengthened through the negotiation of binding agreements and improving the representativeness of both trade union and employer organisations. In the light of the European Commission's refusal to support the implementation of information and consultation agreement in central government as a directive, it will be vital to step up pressure on the European institutions to deliver on their commitment to social dialogue.

### **B12. Action points**

- B12.a coordinate policy development across EPSU's social dialogue committees and with the cross-sector social dialogue
- B12.b aim to negotiate more binding agreements that are relevant at the national level and evaluate their implementation
- B12.c assess opportunities to build social dialogue in other EPSU sectors, particularly in waste and social services
- B12.d review, evaluate and promote the outcomes of social dialogue

## **B13. Defending workers against privatisation and outsourcing**

B14. There is clear evidence that privatisation, outsourcing, sub-contracting and liberalisation negatively affect the jobs, pay, pensions and other employment and working conditions of public service workers, particularly where there is poor coverage by sector agreements in the private sector. Socially responsible procurement provides the possibility to defend the rights of private sector workers who deliver public services.

### **B15. Action points**

- B15.a expose the impact of all forms of privatisation on workers' rights and pay and conditions and support action to protect workers and reverse privatisation and outsourcing
- B15.b organise and protect workers in private companies delivering public services and other outsourcing companies, defending their pay and conditions and existing rights
- B15.c promote sector-wide collective agreements to ensure a level playing field
- B15.d promote and monitor the use of social and environmental clauses in public contracts
- B15.e challenge obligatory tendering and attacks on the in-house provision of public services

## **B16. Ensuring that workers benefit from digitalisation**

B17. Employment conditions and forms of employment in public services are being fundamentally and rapidly changed through digital transformations whether in the form of artificial intelligence, automation or robotisation. There are potentially both positive and negative elements to this change. While ridding work of repetitive tasks could make it more fulfilling, the risks include job losses, 24/7 availability and increased supervision and control. Either way public service workers need the protection of effective collective agreements and rights to information and consultation to ensure that trade unions can influence and control the restructuring taking place. More broadly the changing labour market is throwing up new challenges for workers in the form of false self-employment, zero-hours contracts and highly flexible and unpredictable working time.

### **B18. Action points**

- B18.a analyse the impact of digitalisation on employment and workers' rights
- B18.b address the pressures on pay and working conditions, particularly working time and the spread of telework and push for the right to disconnect – the right not to be on permanent call outside working hours

- B18.c secure binding rights to information and consultation to regulate the changes brought about by digitalisation, through collective agreements or legislation
- B18.d demand appropriate training and education to ensure that workers affected by digitalisation remain in employment
- B18.e support initiatives to regulate, through agreements or legislation, new forms of labour market flexibility

## **B19. Getting more and better jobs from tackling climate change**

B20. Climate change has major implications for the jobs and working conditions of public service workers from the many thousands affected by the energy transition to those on the frontline in dealing with the impact of severe weather.

B21. Action points

- B21.a assert rights to information and consultation and negotiation to regulate the process of transition, protecting the rights and jobs of public service workers
- B21.b promote a just transition from reliance on fossil fuels to a zero-carbon sustainable economic model, including measures to protect employment and retain public service workers, providing them with training and skills for new jobs and responsibilities

## **B22. Delivering gender equality at work**

B23. Public service trade unions have often taken the lead in fighting for gender equality at work. EPSU has monitored the impact of austerity and its Gender Road Map and Prague Statement set out the main priorities for action. Key to closing the gender pay gap is securing higher wages in low-pay sectors and occupations dominated by women. There is an urgent need to revalue jobs. The quality, quantity and affordability of childcare services must be improved and more progressive work-life balance policies are essential.

B24. Action points

- B24.a improve the strength and enforcement of equal pay legislation and other measures to reduce the gender pay and pensions gaps
- B24.b highlight initiatives to improve pay in sectors and occupations dominated by women.
- B24.c implement the priorities agreed in the Gender Road Map
- B24.d turn International Women's Day and European Equal Pay Day into major events for public service workers

## **B25. Fighting discrimination in the workplace**

B26. Many public service workers face discrimination that affects their pay and working conditions, whether because of their race, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics, age, religion, disability, political opinion, social or economic status, or national or ethnic origin. Public service unions have often led the fight to tackle all these forms of discrimination.

B27. Action points

- B27.a develop common strategies to fight discrimination in the workplace
- B27.b use social dialogue and collective bargaining to develop policies that reflect the diversity of public service workers and strengthen protections against discrimination

## **C. Future of public service trade unions**

C1. Strong unions stand up for our values and our vision in our workplaces, in our sectors, in communities and our countries and in the European and global institutions and policy arenas. We promote the interests of our members and workers. The voice of public service trade unions is vital in national trade union centres and the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). Trade unions are more effective in negotiating and campaigning where they can count on an active membership, high union density or broad support from workers.

C2. EPSU affiliates across Europe recruit hundreds of thousands of new members every year but the challenge is to ensure that these numbers more than make up for the members who leave, to reverse the decline in union density experienced across many countries and to build an active membership. This also has to reflect the predominance of women workers in the public services and the need to ensure that they are properly represented in trade union bodies.

C3. Action point

C3.a Widely promote the principles and objectives of public service trade unions

## **C4. Boosting recruitment and organising**

C5. A number of EPSU's initiatives to support affiliates in developing their recruitment and organising strategies and campaigns have begun to bear fruit with some membership recruitment successes. Strengthening and extending these initiatives to more affiliates would provide the basis for a long-term strategy to reverse falling membership with examples of good practice relevant for all affiliates.

C6. Action points

C6.a encourage and support affiliates in taking up new initiatives to boost their recruitment and organising activity

C6.b focus regional resources in Central and Eastern Europe on support for recruitment and organising activities

C6.c ensure that recruitment and organising initiatives take account of any specific measures to increase the membership among young and migrant workers

## **C7. Improving the representation of women and young workers**

C8. EPSU has taken steps to increase women's and young workers' representation in its structures and meetings and encouraged affiliates to take similar measures. These need to be maintained and developed to ensure women and young workers play an active role at all levels of the Federation.

C9. Action point

C9.a monitor women's representation in EPSU organisations and promote measures to increase women's participation across the Federation

C9.b continue to support a vibrant young workers' network and its initiatives around mentoring and other measures to ensure participation of young workers

## **C10. Building a stronger EPSU**

C11. Better coordination within EPSU and with other labour movement organisations can improve the effectiveness of campaigning, lobbying and other forms of trade union action. EPSU needs to be financially sound, autonomous and increase its capacity for legal and political action. Public service unions have a major role to play in shaping the priorities of trade union confederations. At European level EPSU contributes to building an effective ETUC that reflects the concerns of all workers and their families, including public services workers, and that stands up for universal access to quality public services and fights against privatisation. EPSU will be more targeted in its engagement with European and other institutions and its

work with other labour and social movement organisations to achieve change. We will all be stronger if workers and our members feel part of a European trade union movement and affiliates inform and involve all in our work.

C12. Action points

- C12.a increase EPSU's strength by ensuring that workers are informed about our joint work, and that affiliates are fully involved in EPSU's planning processes so that campaigning, lobbying and other forms of trade union action get the widest possible support and participation
- C12.b raise the profile of EPSU initiatives to shape an alternative Europe based on solidarity and fairness
- C12.c work within the ETUC and Public Services International and with the broader labour and social movements to fight for a social Europe that also influences the EU's impact on the wider Europe and on global developments