

# Programme of Action (PoA)

Adopted at



**Bucharest, Romania  
June 2024**



# Table of Contents

Introduction.....	5
A. Securing peace, democracy, equality, rights and freedoms.....	7
B. Reclaiming and strengthening public services .....	9
C. Fighting for a green, digital and socially just transition .....	12
D. Quality jobs make for quality services.....	16
E. Building and strengthening public service trade unions .....	21



## Introduction

EPSU has been at the heart of the European fight to defend and improve public services and the pay and conditions of public service workers. For the past 45 years, it has been campaigning, negotiating and advocating for positive social change, greater equality, for more and better public services for all and for urgent action to ensure a just climate transition. From the start, EPSU has sought to build a strong, independent federation capable of uniting members across Europe and advancing a common agenda. We draw strength and pride from our achievements as we continue to deliver for public service workers and our communities, by fighting against a society based on the quest for profit and putting the general interest of humanity and the environment at the heart of our actions and demands.

EPSU is part of a common struggle for political, social, economic and environmental justice, for the fight against climate change, for equal rights and opportunities, peace and democracy, freedom of expression, the rule of law, and for strong European and national social dialogue and workplace democracy. EPSU's activities are very wide-ranging, since they transcend geographical and political borders, uniting members right across EPSU's broad, pan-European region. To successfully implement its priorities within this framework, EPSU relies on its membership of ETUC and PSI, with which it cooperates closely.

In the next Congress period, we will continue to support the development of quality public services for everyone and quality jobs for public service workers while responding to new threats to peace and security, to democracy and to human rights and the conditions of life on earth. We will maintain our determination to tackle growing inequality and poverty, the climate crisis, global warming and environmental degradation, wars and the rise of politics based on promoting a narrow nationalist agenda. We will remain vigilant to support the ongoing digital revolution, so that it benefits workers and citizens alike. We know for certain that working people, our families and communities will be the losers if we are not able to provide an effective answer to growing problems of violence, fascism and the far-right, and to social, economic and ecological injustice.

Strong, independent and inclusive trade unions are essential to defend and strengthen democracy, the rule of law, non-discrimination, gender equality, social and economic justice and building peaceful, sustainable, fairer and more equal societies. We demand freedom of association everywhere and continue to fight against the growing repression of union leaders and restrictions on trade union rights. We oppose all forms of racism, xenophobia and discrimination. We stand for unity over division, for equality for all regardless of ethnicity, origin, nationality, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, age and/or religion.

Developing public services is therefore central to addressing the challenges faced by workers and our communities. Together we can make change. The Future is Public. It is time for public services!

This programme of action provides the basis for our joint work in the coming Congress period, to be developed with members across all the 49 countries in EPSU's European region; in our sectors (health and social services, local and regional government, utilities, central government and EU administration); and transversal groups and networks (including women and gender equality, and young workers); and in close cooperation with both the ETUC and PSI. The programme of action sets out the overall direction for our work and the main areas where we want to focus our collective resources.

The Programme of Action is set out in five sections:

- A. Securing peace, democracy, equality, rights and freedoms
- B. Reclaiming and strengthening public services
- C. Fighting for a green, digital and socially just transition
- D. Quality jobs make for quality services
- E. Building and strengthening public service trade unions

Thanks to the many affiliates who have contributed to the drafting of the PoA through the Congress Resolutions Committee, the Standing Committees, Constituency Meetings, Executive Committee and other networks and meetings.

## **A. Securing peace, democracy, equality, rights and freedoms**

The invasion of Ukraine has shattered Europe's peace, stability and security. We condemn the Russian war of aggression and support the Ukrainian people's fight for democracy, sovereignty and territorial integrity. We call for a cessation of the war, the withdrawal of Russian troops from all occupied territories, and for peace negotiations. We call for war criminals to be prosecuted and for reparations to be made to Ukraine for damages caused. We support the efforts of the EU and the international community to help rebuild Ukraine and insist that these efforts strengthen human, social and trade union rights and democracy. Trade unions must be fully involved in this effort. We expect and demand that the rule of law, freedom and trade union rights be upheld and not further undermined under the pretext of war. As with all conflicts, we will support diplomatic initiatives to find a way out of the conflict.

The future of Europe cannot be founded on further militarisation and there will be no lasting peace without social and economic justice, democracy and respect for human rights. EPSU supports the rebuilding of security arrangements based on these principles. Action is needed to address the growing violence and aggression evident in some parts of Europe. Within the European Union (EU) there is a need for better coordination of foreign and defence policy in support of long-term disarmament, peace and stability in Europe and beyond. Public services are a crucial element in ensuring and maintaining peace, as well as an effective and efficient economy. EPSU therefore opposes further privatisation in Ukraine that is sought by the International Monetary Fund and calls instead for the strengthening of Ukrainian public services. It is vital that they get the structural funding and investment necessary to strengthen and extend this role, with governments applying a 'golden rule' supporting socially and environmentally friendly investments. This is all the more important in economies devastated by war and other disasters.

The undermining of social justice and democracy in Europe is a factor in the emergence of, and increase, in conflicts. Attacks on human and trade union rights, on freedom of expression, on civil liberties and press freedom are linked to the weakening of democracy and shrinking of public space. The rise of fascism and the extreme right is a threat to workers and our communities. We refuse all contact or cooperation with representatives from far-right organisations. We must strongly denounce fascist ideas at every opportunity and train union members to expose how the ideology of the far right is harmful to employees.

The concentration of wealth in the hands of the few is fuelling the erosion of collective, solidarity-based values that protect people. The growth of extreme wealth, irresponsible consumption, corruption and a concentration of political, economic and media power goes hand in hand with inequality, tax dumping, the weakening of public services, attacks on workers' rights and environmental degradation. A fair distribution of wealth and income underpins more democratic societies and decision-making.

We note and condemn the worrying increase in attacks on fundamental rights and freedoms, particularly against women's rights and against the goal of full gender equality. Tolerance of gender-based violence, restrictions on the right to free, safe and legal abortions, underinvestment and undervaluation of workers in sectors that are still dominated by women, in particular eldercare and childcare services, risk removing or reducing women's rights and the fight for gender equality. The rights of many others are under attack and it will be crucial to fight back against all forms of racism and discrimination including harassment and violence directed against refugees, migrant workers, Roma and LGBT+ people, and all populations stigmatised because of their disability, origin or religion. EPSU strongly opposes all political, religious, fascist and far-right ideologies that undermine the fundamental rights, freedom and dignity of every individual.

Achieving greater wealth and income equality between and within countries across Europe and beyond is important for long-term peace and stability. Strong, universal public services, European and national social dialogue and quality, socially useful jobs, are a motor for sustainable growth and development and key to address regional and other forms of inequalities.

Congress commits to:

- a) defend trade union and human rights using European and international instruments, including the European Convention on Human Rights monitored and enforced by the European Court of Human Rights and the legal framework provided by the Council of Europe;
- b) strengthen democracy at work, including rights to organise, to information and consultation, collective bargaining and collective action, including the right to strike, in accordance with Article 28 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the European Convention of Human Rights and Article 6 of the Social Charter of the Council of Europe and for a strong and effective European and national social dialogue;
- c) support independent and inclusive trade unions and support coordination of solidarity among EPSU members, especially in defence of democracy and of women's rights, LGBT+ rights, and trade union rights;
- d) push for legal frameworks guaranteeing sexual and reproductive rights, including the right to safe and legal abortions that are free of charge for all women;
- e) oppose the far right and support initiatives, like the anti-fascist trade union network, to limit the far-right's influence on working people and infiltration of trade unions and commit to training activists;
- f) lobby for policies to support refugees and migrants and to defend an open Europe that provides legal pathways for migration, equal treatment for migrant workers and inclusive workplaces in all countries;
- g) build the EPSU EuCare network to coordinate trade union actions in defence of the rights of migrants;
- h) ensure migrants and mobile workers can exercise democratic rights, for example, to support their right to vote in national, regional and local elections under certain conditions;
- i) contribute to initiatives to strengthen the global and European regulatory frameworks that to defend human rights and build fairer societies;
- j) demand that the EU's foreign, enlargement and neighbourhood policies give more emphasis to democracy and social and economic justice, trade union rights and collective bargaining and to addressing inequality and regional disparities.



## **B. Reclaiming and strengthening public services**

EPSU defends and promotes universal and democratically-organised public services, opposes liberalisation and privatisation and works to develop alternative economic policies. Developing and extending public services is key to bringing about positive structural change, addressing inequalities in power, wealth and knowledge and achieving a just climate transition. We support a rights-based approach: the right to health, social care, education, energy, water and sanitation, housing and culture, transport, as well as access to a safe environment and to affordable digital services enables people to realise their human rights and play a full part in society.

Public services, particularly health and social care, were crucial to support people in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Public service workers did their utmost to maintain services. In many cases, the pandemic showed that countries with sufficient investment in public services came through comparatively better than countries where underinvestment and understaffing caused by austerity meant many services were at full stretch and workers stressed and overloaded. It will be a key objective to ensure that this situation is reversed and ensure that public services and the public sector will have the staffing levels and investment needed to guarantee their resilience and capacity to cope with the climate and other crises and pandemics. It is also crucial to always guarantee access to medicines. This means challenging the international bodies – the European institutions, International Monetary Fund and World Bank – whenever they impose austerity and undermine the financing of measures essential to social and environmental progress. Any increase in defence spending must not be at the expense of spending on other public services or on measures to tackle climate change.

The same considerations apply to the energy sector, where deregulation and liberalisation has led us into a deep crisis. We urgently need to remove energy from the market by regulating prices through public control. Our focus must be the general interest and the response to needs, ensuring that services are close to users and that energy is affordable. Energy is a vital commodity, and there cannot be an effective fight against climate change without a social policy that makes low-CO2 technologies and products accessible to all. We need to push for an overall European vision accompanied by long-term European planning and coherence that supports the shift to renewable energy, while leaving each Member State free to choose its own low-carbon, controllable energy mix.

Public finance, backed by transparent and democratic processes is important to ensure the best use of resources while direct public provision is an efficient way of funding and delivering universal and high-quality public services. Fair and progressive taxation is at the heart of Welfare States. Commercialisation of public services sees resources being diverted to profits and dividends rather than the improvement of those services. Over-dependence on external consultants weakens good administration. The track record of profit-making companies providing public services is poor. Prioritising profits can put the quality of services at risk, along with the pay and conditions and trade union rights of employees. It is a myth that the private sector can deliver quality services while also reducing costs.

Intergenerational solidarity is deeply linked with strengthening public services. The investments made in education and social and physical infrastructures are key commitments to future generations. Quality early childhood education and care is a springboard for equal opportunities. These investments are becoming all the more important as many areas of Europe face major demographic challenges with a decline in the working age population and inadequate supply of skilled and educated workers.

Protecting space for public services at national level will be important in the coming years both within and beyond the EU. In the EU specifically, there is pressure to develop the Single

Market in healthcare, education, energy and other public services, for which liberalisation would be contrary to the general interest and to that of the workers in these sectors. The energy crisis has dramatically exposed that liberalisation at European level has failed to deliver the necessary expansion of renewable and where necessary for the transition period low-carbon energy and failed to create an environmentally-friendly energy market at a cost that is affordable for users, even though it is a strategic sector for businesses, citizens and the fight against climate change. EPSU will oppose such a move that risks to increase the already problematic commercialisation of these services or any new opening up of public service markets that is contrary to the general interest and to the interests of workers in these sectors. In the EU we can build on the citizens' panels of the Future of Europe Conference and the demands of people for more public services and social policy.

Congress commits to a European Agenda for Public Services to bring human rights, solidarity, and sustainable development back into the heart of the European project and to:

- a) (i) strengthen public services, oppose further liberalisation of public services, including at EU level; (ii) review, challenge and reverse where feasible, the commercialisation of public services such as health, social care, establishments for young children, social and medico-social establishments, water, housing or energy by implementing remunicipalisation; (iii) lobby for regulation of private service providers, particularly with regard to social and environmental standards and in controlling the use of public funds and to the quality of the services provided; (iv) share the value produced in a way that is favourable to workers;
- b) develop research and campaign materials showing that public services are key to address the challenge of green and digital transformations, realise human rights, address inequality and bring about structural change; to oppose commercialisation, prevent privatisation and support the return of public services to public ownership and democratic control;
- c) work to ensure that public authorities, employers and governments take effective action to ensure they deliver on their commitments to net-zero / carbon-neutral and environmentally-friendly economies;
- d) press for stronger anti-poverty strategies, equality and redistribution of wealth through effective, fair and progressive tax systems to support peaceful, equal and cohesive societies;
- e) contribute to getting wealth taxes on the political agenda and seek stronger penalties, such as exclusion from state aid and public contracts, on tax evaders and those who facilitate evasion; as well as combating the offshoring of profits and intangible assets to avoid taxation;
- f) support the ETUC policy at EU level for qualified majority voting on tax matters to counter tax dumping, evasion and fraud and make it easier to agree minimum standards and favour more resources for common EU public service policies through fairer taxing of corporations and a tax on financial transactions;
- g) push for greater efforts to tackle poverty taking into account the disproportionate impacts on women and children and vulnerable persons and addressing the growing number of the working poor;
- h) promote policies to strengthen the welfare state and implement the rights set out in the European Pillar of Social Rights, including on health and social care, 'essential' services and fundamental rights;
- i) campaign to anchor the right to public services in legal frameworks that set minimum common standards for services, salaries and rights, including the right to water and sanitation, energy, health and care, education, housing, good administration, communications and public transport, among others;
- j) ensure that public contracts are not based on lowest-price / standards and should only be awarded to contractors that negotiate good quality collective agreements, pay their fair share of taxes and meet high social and environmental requirements;
- k) defend direct public provision of services and seek to regulate and reduce the reliance by governments on private consultants;

- l) ensure that the grants and loans that are supporting economy recovery are properly monitored and that any support for the private sector is on the basis of meeting clear social and environmental conditionalities;
- m) support policies that reduce the for-profit sector in public services and encourage alternatives to commercialisation across the whole economy;
- n) engage in discussions on EU Treaty changes, notably on macro-economic policy, public finance, taxation and healthcare to secure support for public spending and investment in quality public services and oppose any austerity policies, especially where they lead to pay cuts in the public sector and reductions in social benefits;
- o) demand transparent European economic governance that generates full employment, includes environmental constraints and improves working and living conditions. European budgetary dogmas must under no circumstances prevent the investment needed to achieve this nor impose rules that would lead to too rapid or too sharp reductions in debt levels. EPSU supports the ETUC in its demands on the economic governance of the EU. It demands that the social partners be consulted at the various stages of the European economic and social policy coordination (the “European semester”) and that they be authorised to submit proposals during the country-specific recommendations;
- p) strengthen cooperation on public service issues with other trade unions, civil society, professional organisations, political groups, researchers and others;
- q) contribute to PSI public service campaigns, including the *Future is Public* global manifesto for public services;
- r) give visibility to the value of public services for people and ensure demands for quality public services are mainstreamed in strategies to advance workers’ rights, decent work and gender equality; and
- s) protect public services against any attempt to (re)impose austerity measures and ensure that the new economic governance policies in the EU are public-service friendly, including through the introduction of a ‘golden rule’ for public investment.

## **C. Fighting for a green, digital and socially just transition**

### **1. Tackling the climate and environment crisis**

Our economic system drives the climate crisis and environmental degradation. Commitments to reduce global warming and to protect biodiversity remain far from the agreed targets and add to the argument that a fundamental shift is required from an economy based on over-consumption and all too often driven by short-term private interests. We need to turn the page on growth as measured by GDP to one focusing on low-carbon industry and services, well-being and equity. It is not acceptable that the current system encourages speculation that results in the benefits of economic activity being privatised while the losses are socialised. Responding to the environmental crisis and combatting social and climate injustices must be the two overarching objectives of our economic model.

Public services are a central and important part of the solution to meeting the challenges of the transition to a green and digital economy in a fair and sustainable way. Addressing the climate crisis effectively poses additional challenges for public services that they must be equipped to deal with. Weak public services make it difficult to allocate scarce resources efficiently and fairly, as we saw during the COVID-19 pandemic. Strengthening public services and ensuring sufficient funding is vital to support the transformation of all sectors, ensuring that quality green jobs are created and that there is the necessary investment in skills and training. Privatisation and cuts to public services have the opposite effect and also hit women harder, widening inequalities between men and women. Given the increasing environmental challenges, governments must invest financially and humanely in public services to both mitigate and adapt to climate change, and to finance the necessary measures including renewable energy and energy efficient renovation of buildings. A fair tax policy with higher taxation on the wealthy, on securities and foreign exchange transactions, and on companies and the fight against tax evasion is an important basis for this.

Changing the economic model will be increasingly important to tackle speculation and high-frequency trading that lead to volatile and high prices. We have seen this recently in the energy sector but it is also a growing problem in food production, as well as in land use and water and sanitation resources.

Trade unions have a key role to play in promoting a future 'beyond growth' in support of more differentiated, fair and sustainable growth. As political actors representing the interests of working people unions need to engage in the debates about how to deliver a fair and green transition that protects everyone and leaves no one behind. This requires a rebalancing of our economy towards socially and ecologically useful activities.

Congress commits to:

- a) strengthen union work to mitigate and adapt to the climate crisis and protect biodiversity and prevent the further destruction of our environment;
- b) support the expansion of renewable, and where necessary for the transition period, low-carbon energy to ensure a planned, fair and just transition
- c) contribute to reflections on how the economy can be orientated more towards meeting human needs, supporting well-being and socially and ecologically useful goods and services;
- d) continue to press for alternative economic models that respect people and the planet; that support public provision and ownership of essential goods and services and encourage remunicipalisation;
- e) ensure that the climate crisis is mainstreamed into sectoral work and work on gender equality and negotiate with EU sectoral employers to address the implications of the climate crisis and the measures necessary to protect public services and public service workers;

- f) press for more initiatives in terms of skills, qualifications, education, training and life-long learning that are necessary for a just transition and the restructuring of our economies;
- g) continue to develop strategies to tackle low pay and secure regular and good quality employment in so-called 'low skilled' sectors that are vital for a just transition respecting trade unions and human rights: no job can be "green" if it is not of high quality;
- h) require the conditionality of public aid to ensure companies adhere to better environmental and social practices;
- i) support initiatives to strengthen unions' capacity to address climate and environmental concerns not least in collective bargaining to support a fair transition;
- j) establish together with PSI and other organisations a "collective bargaining hub for just transition" to be used by affiliates as an online resource to share collective bargaining developments.

## **2. A socially just transition for all public service workers**

Climate change is posing new challenges for many public services. The measures to be taken to adapt to the climate crisis and achieve the energy transition will have an impact on resources and staffing levels and may lead to major shifts in some sectors as measures are taken to mitigate or adapt to climate change. EPSU and affiliates need to be fully involved in the consultations and negotiations that aim to ensure that all workers are treated fairly in this transition. EPSU will work with affiliates to:

- a) track, monitor and help shape the impact of the climate crisis and energy transition on public service jobs and working conditions in each of EPSU's sectors;
- b) achieve fair and secure pay and conditions for employees affected by the changes in energy supply resulting from the energy transition;
- c) put pressure on governments and employers to take responsibility for achieving the commitments in the Paris+ climate change agreements;
- d) promote a sustainable future with high employment rates, through active employment policies and training programmes for new skills to support workers during the transition;
- e) exchange on measures that can be taken in negotiations with employers to protect workers and provide them with the necessary skills through training and education, and to ensure that workers themselves and their representatives are involved in the planning of these transition process;
- f) research and analyse how to adapt the world of work to the climate crisis and its effects on different groups workers, such as those working outside, older workers, those with health problems and those in workplaces without air conditioning;
- g) research and analyse how new approaches to working time and workplace design are part of the response to the climate crisis; and
- h) call for measures to cushion the effects of job losses on workers and facilitate their re-entry into the world of work while preparing for the potential impact of increasing climate migration on the labour market.

## **3. Getting the best from digitalising public services**

The digitalisation of many public services has helped make them more easily and widely accessible. However, this development comes with additional challenges. Many citizens, for example those of older generations or living in low-income households, lack the skills and equipment necessary to use online services while the dominance of large technology companies in computer and information technology poses a threat to public provision. Workers and their trade unions have to be part of the debate on the direction of digitalisation and actively shape this process. Both the aspect of gender-equitable digitalisation and the need for barrier free access must be taken into account. The uneven distribution of digital infrastructures increases inequalities between countries and between urban and rural communities.

Digitalisation will have profound changes in the labour market, leading to many jobs being destroyed and many new ones created. In response, it is essential that measures are taken at the earliest opportunity that provide job guarantees, training and retraining programmes.

The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) will lead to change in society as a whole and in the world of work in particular. AI tools may simplify work in many areas but may also replace workers and are already creating dangers of automated discriminatory hire and fire practices but also random checks on users and workers. Measures are needed to ensure no harm to people or the environment.

Congress therefore calls for:

- a) the direct involvement of workers and their trade unions in shaping and implementing digitalisation strategies to ensure that digitalisation processes bring tangible benefits to citizens and workers, including to help address the climate crisis, restore environmental degradation and enable the energy transition;
- b) continuing action to guarantee the provision of quality public services accessible to all citizens with support where necessary and ensure guaranteed minimum non-digital and face-to-face access;
- c) measures to increase political governance and control over digitalisation. This requires measures to increase the staffing, skills and resources of inhouse IT services supporting and providing digital infrastructures and services, in order to make the public sector digital infrastructure stronger and more independent and also strengthen the position of citizens and workers;
- d) the development of digital infrastructure to address inequalities between countries and within countries; and
- e) further regulation and control of private sector access to and use of citizens' data across the public services. We support strong implementation of European and national legislation on data security and reject the commercialisation of data gained through public services like health, social and medico-social services, utilities and public administration.

#### **4. Digitalisation, telework, mobile work and the right to disconnect**

The agreements on digitalisation at cross-sector level and in Central Government Administrations provide important new possibilities to drive the digitalisation agenda at the workplace. Telework and mobile work can deliver flexibility for workers but raise major issues in relation to workloads and work intensification, leading to workers being cut off from the workplace and to reductions in the quality and quantity of workplace provision. For these reasons, telework and mobile work must never be imposed unilaterally by employers. Employers must fulfil their responsibilities and duty of care, for example by maintaining inclusive office spaces and not pushing workers into telework. EPSU will work with affiliates to:

- a) fully implement the Central Government Administration (CGA) agreement on digitalisation and telework at national level and seek to extend such agreements across all EPSU sectors;
- b) continue to monitor and publicise collective bargaining developments relevant to digitalisation and feed into PSI's collective bargaining hub;
- c) seek to get the best out of digitalisation which must not be seen solely as a means of cutting costs for public services, and ensure that work remains decent, humane, without isolating workers, or increasing work intensity; and
- d) press for any productivity gains from digitalisation to be shared with workers and citizens by aiming to reduce working hours and improve public services, and that the benefits also translate into improved pay.

**5. Training, lifelong learning and continuous professional development**

The rapid uptake of digitalisation across public services and other new ways of working highlight the importance of vocational training, lifelong learning and continuous professional development for all public service workers as they seek to improve their quality of employment and career development. EPSU is working to address these issues across its sectors and will aim to:

- a) ensure employers meet their responsibility to invest in quality training, education and professional development for all workers;
- b) negotiate at the appropriate level to ensure access to training for all workers, paid for by employers and counted as working time, and particularly targeting those groups who may face barriers to acquiring the training that they need;
- c) press for a gender-responsive approach that supports women in accessing quality and inclusive training, upskilling and reskilling programmes, that validates their skills and competences, and that also facilitates access to guidance and counselling;
- d) highlight the importance of good quality training provision in supporting decent work and helping public service workers improve their skills and qualifications;
- e) Negotiate training and employment guarantees within the framework of the digital and green transitions.

## **D. Quality jobs make for quality services**

Quality employment and quality public services go hand-in-hand. Strong and influential trade unions and good collective bargaining and social dialogue structures can deliver good pay and pension provision, employment security, health and safety and a range of other positive benefits. In many cases, public service trade unions have taken the lead in negotiating to ensure equal treatment and tackle discrimination. However, in some countries public service trade unions are denied their full rights to freedom of association, to information and consultation, to their right to freedom of expression, to negotiate, to take collective action including their right to strike, limiting their ability to achieve decent employment and working conditions.

EPSU affiliates need the means to negotiate effectively to defend and improve public service workers' pay and conditions combating job insecurity. Extending and strengthening collective bargaining in the next Congress period is vital in order to deliver for all workers across our sectors.

### **1. Defending and strengthening workers' and trade union rights**

The basic rights to organise, to information and consultation, to negotiate and take collective action, including the right to strike, must be strenuously defended and asserted right across Europe. EPSU should seek to:

- a) develop its dialogue with the Council of Europe's European Committee for Social Rights, including in support of the ratification of the addition Protocol on Collective Complaints;
- b) continue to highlight attacks on trade union rights in the public services and work with PSI to expose such violations in the ILO; and to fight against the criminalisation and repression of trade unions in many European countries and around the world;
- c) challenge any attempt to deny or limit the application of EU or national social legislation to public service workers and specifically to prevent or reverse any exclusion from being applied in the implementation of the EU Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions (TPWC) Directive;
- d) work to defend and strengthen the right to strike in the public services and maintain the co-operation with the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) to provide information on the situation in all EPSU countries;
- e) further explore the scope to extend the ratification across Europe of the International Labour Organisation conventions on collective bargaining (154) and labour relations in public services (151);
- f) ensure the implementation of procurement rules that require private contractors to comply with clauses on collective agreements and other social and environmental issues; and
- g) contribute with ETUC to lobbying on EU legislation and economic policies.

### **2. Collective bargaining for all public service workers**

Extending and strengthening collective bargaining, particularly sector-level bargaining across all public services whether directly provided or contracted-out to the private profit and non-profit sectors, is crucial. The 2022 EU Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages provides important new rights for trade unions in the European Union that can also be applied in candidate countries and set an example for other European countries. EPSU will work with affiliates to:

- a) take full advantage of the new rights enshrined in the Adequate Minimum Wages Directive and explore how these can be extended to countries outside the European Union;



- b) ensure that public service trade unions are included in the national action plans to strengthen collective bargaining that are obligatory in countries where collective bargaining coverage is below 80%;
- c) reactivate European sectoral social dialogue with aim of achieving progress for workers;
- d) develop specific campaigns to strengthen and extend collective agreements in sectors with low coverage;
- e) provide training and support on bargaining for equality, with the strong involvement of women negotiators; and
- f) defend and improve specific civil service statutes and legislation in countries where they exist.

### **3. Delivering fair and equitable pay**

The sharp rise in inflation in 2022-23 posed a major challenge for trade unions across Europe in their negotiations to defend workers' pay and purchasing power. It also exposed how many public service workers had seen real pay eroded over an extended period, often as a legacy of austerity. Public service workers, particularly those in health and social care but also many other groups, deserve recognition for the massive efforts made during the pandemic to maintain and deliver services to protect people. EPSU will:

- a) continue to support affiliates in their negotiations, protests and industrial action to achieve fair pay for public service workers, particularly those initiatives that target the lower paid and workers in undervalued jobs;
- b) encourage affiliated unions to provide practical solidarity and be present in each other's actions;
- c) ensure that public sector pay does not fall behind the private sector;
- d) develop strong actions to close the gender pay gap and support equal pay for work of equal value between men and women; and
- e) address any other form of discriminatory pay, *inter alia* linked to age, ethnicity, origin, nationality, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion or location.

### **4. Improving working time and work-life balance arrangements**

EPSU has continued to participate in debates about working time and work organisation and how to ensure public service workers have access to working time arrangements that can guarantee a decent level of income along with the flexibility to provide a positive work-life balance. The four-day week campaign has helped renew the debate across Europe about a shorter working week. EPSU will work with affiliates to:

- a) explore the various options to reduce working time without loss of pay and actively support initiatives to achieve this;
- b) deliver better work-life balance;
- c) promote agreements that ensure workers can exercise their right to disconnect;
- d) help ensure fair and equitable working time arrangements for all workers across their working lives; and
- e) advocate for right for trade union to negotiate pension systems and changes to them.

### **5. Achieving safe and effective staffing levels**

Many public service workers face pressures to work overtime and additional shifts, leading to excessive hours that pose a threat to health and safety. Urgent action is needed to address this problem which is most often related to staffing shortages exacerbated by austerity and that are having a massive impact on many public services across Europe. These staff shortages are not only a problem for workers facing stress and burnout but also pose a threat to the level and quality of services, as workers leave highly stressful jobs and so posing further challenges to maintain services. The problems related to the recruitment and retention of staff specially concern the social and health sector. The availability of social and healthcare services is also the basis for the functioning of our societies and for example workers' ability to work. Therefore, the problems in the sector affects everyone not only those

working in this sector. The COVID-19 pandemic particularly exposed the scale of staff shortages and problems related to the recruitment and retention of staff in health and social care. The availability of social and healthcare services is also the basis for the functioning of our societies and for example workers' ability to work. Therefore, the problems in the sector affects everyone not only those working in this sector. The 2022 revision of the Framework of Action on Recruitment and Retention by EPSU and the HOSPEEM hospital employers' organisation is a good example of how to respond. EPSU will continue to:

- a) expose the extent of staffing shortages in public services across Europe and their impact on workers and services by defining staffing levels and quotas in public services particularly in the care sector, support for vulnerable people, and those faced with managing health and human resources emergencies;
- b) campaign for action to address the problem through the increased recruitment and retention of staff, with the focus on the improvement of pay and conditions through good collective agreements and the strengthening of health and safety protection. This objective requires resources in terms of staff, equipment and materials, as well as the involvement of professionals in decisions affecting their work;
- c) ensure that the recruitment of migrant workers in public services takes into account ethical concerns and gives a say to trade unions; and
- d) advocate for an increase in all public services of direct employment, in particular by negotiating agreements on this point in the European sectoral social dialogue committees.

## **6. Tackling inequality and discrimination**

The 2023 EU Pay Transparency Directive marked an important step forward in the fight for pay equality between men and women. This has long been a major concern for EPSU along with supporting collective negotiations and legislation that address any kinds of inequality at work and, in particular, the undervaluation of jobs in women-dominated sectors. There are many other forms of inequality and discrimination that must be addressed and public service trade unions should be ready to take action to face up to racism and xenophobia and defend LGBT+ workers, Roma, migrant workers and others vulnerable to unfair treatment, harassment and violence. EPSU will work with affiliates to:

- a) ensure effective implementation and enforcement of EU and national legislation in the fight against inequality and discrimination at work that impacts pay, pensions and other employment conditions;
- b) monitor, support and report on trade union successes in negotiating agreements that address any forms of inequality or discrimination in pay and other conditions;
- c) continue to press for the implementation of the principle of equal pay for work of equal value, including in relation to the gender pay gap;
- d) ensure that pay and working conditions reflect the standards that apply where work is carried out; and
- e) work to ensure that all countries in the EPSU region ratify and fully implement the Istanbul Convention.

## **7. Health and safety**

Public service workers face many physical and psycho-social risks and EPSU has been very active in campaigns and lobbying to improve health and safety legislation in key areas such as the regulation on the use of and exposure to asbestos and action in relation to workplace cancers, provision of protection from hazardous drugs as well as from psychosocial risks and getting Covid-19 recognised as an occupational disease for health and care workers and possibly other affected workers in the EU. We have worked with employers and other federations to address the increasing extent of third-party violence. EPSU and its affiliates will continue to:

- a) fight for better European and national legislation to improve health and safety and provide improved protection, and support stronger powers for labour inspectorates, to demand more labour inspectors and to draw up agreements on health and safety;
- b) exchange information on national initiatives – legislative or negotiated – that provide new solutions for health and safety problems;
- c) press for preventive measures to counteract increasing psycho-socio risks and be actively involved in the campaign to develop a directive on psychosocial risks;
- d) explore how to address the loopholes in the EU legislation on musculoskeletal disorders (MSD) or develop a dedicated directive related to MSDs; and
- e) tackle violence and harassment, including third-party violence that is often related to employers' failure to adopt effective prevention measures as well as to staff shortages.

## 8. Pensions

Pensions are a key element of both social protection systems and the pay-related benefits provided by employers. In both cases, funding by the State and by employers has been under threat in many countries, with individual workers increasingly bearing the burden of ensuring a decent income in retirement. A combination of reduced pension levels, increased retirement ages and longer contribution periods have often led to more structural inequalities, penalising women in particular and those with interrupted careers.

For EPSU, a strong first pillar of secure, State-funded pensions is the basis for an effective pensions systems based on solidarity between the generations and an equitable share of societal wealth.

Congress agrees to:

- a) strengthen the first pillar of pensions systems and ensure adequate and secure funding;
- b) support efforts to ensure that pensions systems deliver incomes that allow pensioners to live comfortably and with dignity;
- c) demand that unions have the right to negotiate pensions systems and schemes and any changes to these; and
- d) push for action to address the gender pensions gap and other forms of discrimination in pensions systems.

## 9. Fighting for a strong and effective social dialogue

The European institutions indicated their support for European and national social dialogue in their backing for the 2023 Communication and Recommendation. However, the European Commission's desire to cut costs, and its tendency to consider the European social partners as mere project promoters, is leading to a weakening of sectoral social dialogue. To bring about a real difference in practice, EPSU needs to work with the ETUC, other federations and national affiliates to:

- a) put pressure on the European Commission to clarify the rules on social partner agreements, with clear criteria that encourages social partners to negotiate;
- b) ensure that the European Commission delivers the level of funding needed for an effective European social dialogue as required by the EU Treaties;
- c) engage with the European institutions in ensuring that social dialogue is strengthened and promoted right across Europe, particularly in those countries where it is weak and/or under attack;
- d) continue to deepen social dialogue in EPSU sectors and link EU social dialogue with national collective bargaining; and
- e) continue to develop its company work, including in European works councils by supporting the revision of the directive so that it provides legally binding guarantees for special negotiating bodies and European works councils to have access to

justice and ensure that companies face dissuasive sanctions if they fail to meet their obligations.

## **E. Building and strengthening public service trade unions**

Trade unions can be more effective and successful in their negotiations and campaigning where they are independent, have an active and engaged membership, adequate financial resources, high union density and/or the broad support of workers. Many unions have been trying to address the decline in trade union membership but there is still a lot to do to stop and reverse the negative trends of recent years and particularly to boost the number of young members and retain our existing base. In some countries we are however witnessing a worrying rise in trade union repression. Supportive national and European legislative frameworks are needed to underpin trade union action.

The challenge involves a broader need for renewal at all levels of the trade union movement, including new and innovative approaches to organising, to the relationship with members and non-members, and to union structures. It also may require working with other trade unions – or at least not actively working against them - when there are many unions active in the same sector. Investment in digital technologies is important – from membership databases to communications with members and potential members.

EPSU has been developing its work on recruitment and organising (R&O) since 2015 and major progress was made in 2019 with the setting up of the R&O team. The team is taking a structured approach to its work in support of affiliates, primarily those in Central and Eastern Europe, with the focus on encouraging and helping them draft and implement their own R&O strategies. It is vital that this approach is maintained and strengthened over the coming Congress period.

Mobile (EU) and migrant workers are an essential part of the public service workforce in many countries. Their contribution needs to be recognised and valued. Unions must ensure non-discrimination and equal treatment of all workers and adapt their organising and recruitment strategies in light of the changing composition of the workforce.

EPSU's work in the sectors, with employers, with ETUC and PSI, with broader movements includes a strong focus on communication, lobbying and campaigning on our common agenda. We seek to build worker power through engagement and co-operation at all levels. New tools can support our work, with coordinated actions around photo campaigns, petitions, virtual public meetings, European actions and other initiatives that can complement more traditional methods. Stronger pan-European actions will be needed to counter a return to nationalism, sectionalism or an increase in divergence between and within countries.

Congress agrees to:

- a) facilitate further exchanges and debates on trade union renewal;
- b) provide long-term support to affiliates in their recruitment and retention of members and building of engaged workplace organisations where unions are active and visible;
- c) establish a voluntary fund to support recruitment and organising efforts;
- d) work with affiliates to develop innovative responses to new ways of working and to adapt recruitment and organising techniques to make the best of digital tools, reaching out to public service workers no matter where and how they work;
- e) encourage cooperation between unions to develop strategies to increase overall trade union density;
- f) build progressive, democratic, gender-balanced and independent trade unions at all levels, through solidarity work and support, in particular, for trade unions struggling against repressive regimes;

- g) call for measures to prevent union-busting by employers and governments and ensure trade union access to workers, taking full advantage of the provisions of the Adequate Minimum Wages Directive that support this;
- h) give a strong place in unions to young workers (supporting national youth structures and leadership renewal) and encourage the recruitment of students and trainees;
- i) support inclusion and the rights of LGBT+, migrant and ethnic minority workers, facilitate and promote networks of these workers, and ensure that they are well represented across union structures within the EPSU and among affiliates;
- j) strengthen coordination around solidarity actions in support of local and national negotiations, campaigns and industrial action as well as European and international initiatives such as public services day; and
- k) strengthen our capacity to advance and defend our pan-European agenda, through coordinated actions and making the best use of our common and collective resources; and
- l) to make the demands and successes of European trade unionism better known, and to promote their dissemination and use by our members on the ground.