

Comments on agenda 9.2 Work-programme

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We are very happy to share this important moment together with all EPSU and other trade union affiliates, Employers and the Commission!

We have been preparing ourselves for social dialogue in social services for over 10 years. I personally remember it was already in 2005 in Budapest, Hungary, where we, the affiliates of EPSU Health and Social Sector and Local and Regional Government Standing Committees started to figure out the role of social services and also defining what was meant by social services.

After Budapest, a series of seminars in Finland and Greece was held. Soon there were joint meetings with employers and finally Pessis 1, the first joint project. The aim of Pessis was to provide us with an understanding of how the social services sector social dialogue was organized and structured. Pessis mapped the social dialogue. After Pessis came Pessis 2, 3 and Pessis+, Dialogue S, Foresee and Forte (still running). EPSU affiliates and employers have been practicing social dialogue together with good collaboration.

In recent years the European Commission has provided guidance with the European pillar of social rights and its 20 principles. It also launched the European Care Strategy in July 2022 which aims to ensure quality, affordable and accessible care services across the European Union and to improve the situation for both care receivers and the people caring for them.

Better working conditions and work life balance for carers has been on the agenda for trade unions for a long time and now it is time to work together to achieve all of this. Without the wellbeing of workers there cannot be quality services. Workers need quality jobs and decent pay, prospects, and want to be seen, heard and respected. Employee skills and employer leadership are two sides of one coin.

There are 4 main themes in our work programme. We are very pleased with the themes. The footnotes (like there is on page one) are a good way to make the deliverables even more concrete in the years to come. We have a common goal: we need to make this sector visible, together we need to convince the decision makers in the EU, and especially in members states. Social services are important if we think about security, cohesion, and prosperity. Social services also provide societies emergency supply. Well-functioning social services can add productivity and well-being of all citizens. We can also say, that well-functioning social services prevent polarization, chaos and war.

Member states are different and not all actions are needed in all countries; for example, capacity building is important in the countries where there are not yet developed social dialogue structures. Also, the training needs of staff are very different in EU countries. Some countries have very well qualified and trained staff, working full-time. Some countries rely more heavily on voluntary work and informal care. All countries are facing staff shortages, and we need to find ways to retain and attract new staff. We find it very important to speak of continuous professional development, not only about upskilling and reskilling. For example, in Finland and other Nordic countries staff are very highly qualified and it is kind of offending while they are not able to use their skills and competences in their work and their skills are not matched with recognition, whether in terms of salary increases or shift in tasks and responsibilities. Skills and training should lead to professional development and that is one element of an attractive workplace. Higher skills and higher training cannot compensate for staff shortages - skills and training must be linked with career development and better pay in order to make the sector more attractive.

Member state governments must finance these public and fundamental services properly. Only together we can convince the politicians. We know this sector! And we know that policy without money is poetry. We do not want to make poetry; we do not want politicians to make poetry either. Let's work together and roll up our sleeves!