

4. BRIEFING

Getting to grips with digitalisation

In the lead up to the next Congress in June 2019, EPSU is producing a series of briefings that focus on some of the main areas of work for the next Congress period. Each briefing will provide an overview of EPSU's recent activities and will highlight the expected developments and challenges to be faced over the next few years.





Digitalisation has the potential to positively transform public services and the jobs of public service workers. Quicker and easier access to services and increased participation of citizens can be combined with better quality jobs as repetitive work is replaced with more fulfilling tasks. However, trade unions must be involved in the transformation process not just to ensure that workers have their fair share of the benefits of digitalisation but also to deal with the potential downside. Significant changes in work organisation and increased work intensity are among the factors that can undermine workers' wellbeing.

Public service trade unions need to assert their rights to information and consultation and use collective bargaining to get the best from the digital transformation. We need to ensure that transparency, democratic involvement and privacy for workers and people are guaranteed. Over the next Congress period EPSU will build on its recent initiatives – influencing the European institutions, working with employers in our sectors, coordinating with other European trade union organisations and commissioning research on the impact of digitalisation.

Jan Willem Goudriaan
EPSU General Secretary



Getting to grips with digitalisation

Main initiatives taken

- ✓ **Commissioning of research to investigate the impact of digitalisation on public services and public service workers**
- ✓ **Highlighting the main trade union concerns about the impact of digitalisation on workers and citizens through voicing workers' interests at EU level**
- ✓ **Examining ways to support affiliates' capacity to shape the digital transformation through collective bargaining**
- ✓ **Coordinating with ETUC and other European trade union federations**
- ✓ **Addressing the impact of digitalisation in the European social dialogue**

Digitalisation – shorthand for a range of developments linked to digital technologies, robotisation and artificial intelligence – has major implications for public service workers and public service users. The challenge is to ensure that the rights of trade unions, workers and citizens are recognised. In particular, it is about ensuring that the restructuring process resulting from digitalisation is properly regulated through collective bargaining, social dialogue and the appropriate processes of information and consultation.

There is potential for positive outcomes from digitalisation in as far as it can help promote more citizen and worker participation in the design and delivery of public services. It could also improve job quality and health and safety by reducing the strain and repetitiveness of work. However, there are major concerns about the potential negative effects the process of digitalisation where the focus is narrowly on rationalisation, increased productivity and efficiency and cost savings.

EPSU activity

EPSU has taken a number of major steps since its last Congress to develop its work around digitalisation. Its first major initiative was to commission a literature review of research on digitalisation and to start an informal digitalisation **network** with the ETUC and other European trade union federations.

In the last three years, EPSU has been involved in several **meetings** and exchanges with DG Connect and other European Commission departments and has responded to consultations on **e-government** and digitalisation in **health and social care**. EPSU's approach has been to underline the need to give due regard to the employment and social impacts of digitalisation and the role of trade unions in the process, the importance of providing high quality digital training and taking proper account of the gender equality implications.

In the sector social dialogue EPSU has been working with the CEMR local government employers' body on a range of initiatives including a seminar on digitalisation of local authority services, following which a **joint statement** was agreed that stressed the need to ensure a fair distribution of the benefits of digitalisation. The two organisations also worked together on a **video** to highlight the key issues for the sector.

In 2016 a digitalisation **position paper** was endorsed by the Executive Committee and later in the year EPSU cooperated with one of its Austrian affiliates, yunion, in organizing a **seminar** on how digitalisation can help deliver high quality public services and employment. A major conference on the future of work organized jointly by the ETUC and the European Trade Union Institute included an EPSU-organised **session** on digitalisation and public services.

EPSU's response to the European Commission's public consultation on the transformation of health and care in the digital single market highlighted the need for an EU framework to protect the privacy of patients and workers against any commercialisation and commodification of big data.

Over the past year, EPSU's **Utilities committee** has been discussing the effects of digitalisation on workers in the sector, noting in particular the scope for increased monitoring and surveillance and the potential this has to increase psycho-social stress. The Committee agreed to further study both the potential damage and possible opportunities of digitalisation for the utilities sector and the social impact is also being addressed in the European social dialogue in the electricity sector.

EPSU has also begun to investigate how collective bargaining can help address the challenges of the new digitalised world of work



A conference in Berlin at the end of June 2018 made a major contribution to this work. Organised jointly by EPSU its main German affiliate ver.di and the Friedrich Ebert foundation, the conference attracted more than 55 participants from 35 public service trade unions. It covered a wide range of issues from surveillance to quality services and from the right to disconnect to the impact on health and safety. This included a presentation of the [draft technology agreement](#) developed by the Unite union in the UK. Participants shared of experiences how works councils are addressing digitalisation at their workplace.

EPSU used the conference to publish new [research](#) by OSE, the Brussels-based research organisation that examines the impact of digitalisation on job content in home care and public employment services. The research found both positive and negative impacts ranging from better work organisation and planning to increased stress from a higher pace of work and workloads. A key point was the concern of workers about inadequate training provision.

EPSU will follow up with plans for two major projects – the first with a focus on collective bargaining and digitalisation and the second aiming to produce more detailed research on the impact of digitalisation on public services and public service workers.

More information

EPSU's activities on digitalisation are regularly updated in the [digitalisation](#) section of the website covered in the [annual report](#).

Main priorities

- ✓ **Monitor, evaluate and carry out research on the impact of digitalisation on working conditions of public service workers and the provision of public services**
- ✓ **Coordinate with European trade union organisations on developing policy and action and ensuring that trade union organisations play a full role in consultations and discussions about EU policy**
- ✓ **Assist our affiliates in increasing their capacity to shape digitalisation through collective bargaining**
- ✓ **Maintain pressure on employers to ensure that digitalisation is properly addressed through collective bargaining, social dialogue and information and consultation**

The **European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU)** brings together trade unions from across Europe. Our eight million members work in local, regional and national government and European administration; health and social services and energy, waste and water.

EPSU works to influence the policies and decisions of employers, governments and European institutions that affect public service workers, their families and communities. We mobilise for action and change and are committed to achieving another, social Europe.

Improving workers' rights and pay and conditions by strengthening collective bargaining and defending the right to strike are core to our work.

EPSU is the European region of the global public services federation PSI and is a member of the European Trade Union Confederation.

By sitting down with employers in the European social dialogue in electricity, hospitals and health services, local and regional government and central government administrations, EPSU negotiates best practice agreements that improve the working lives of public service workers and ensure quality services for citizens.

Women represent the majority of our members and gender equality is at the heart of everything we do. From negotiating with employers on women's rights in the workplace to exposing the scandal of the gender pay gap, EPSU is taking action for real equality.

EPSU fights against tax avoidance by the wealthy and multinationals that undermines our public finances. We are making the case for cast-iron exclusions of public services from international trade deals and we stand up for the rights of migrants, both in the workplace and in the services our members deliver.

EPSU provides a platform for our members to regularly share good practices in organising, recruitment and campaigning.

We campaign for well-funded public services and our members know that the services they deliver are not a cost to society but an investment in our communities. We're taking that message to the heart of Europe.



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FOR ALL
10TH EPSU CONGRESS 2019
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EPSU is the European Federation of Public Service Unions. It is the largest federation of the ETUC and comprises 8 million public service workers from over 260 trade unions across Europe. EPSU organises workers in the energy, water and waste sectors, health and social services and local, regional and central government, in all European countries including the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood. It is the recognised regional organisation of Public Services International (PSI). For more information please go to: www.epsu.org