



Global Health Day 2021 Statement

NO PROFIT FROM THE PANDEMIC | VACCINE FOR ALL

On the 7th of April, we celebrate Global Health. The COVID-19 pandemic has showed us how vital health and care services are to our lives and our societies. The pandemic has also demonstrated that only publicly owned, not for profit health and social care services are able to efficiently cope with major health crises and, most importantly, ensure accessibility for all citizens, regardless of economic status. Finally, COVID-19 has shown that health and social care are public goods.

Public services can guarantee the right to care for all. They can ensure the preparedness and resilience of health and care services for future health emergencies. One of the main lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic is that, more than ever, we need to protect health and care from commercialisation and privatisation. No one should be making a profit from the pandemic.

On this day, World Health Day 2021, EPSU calls on the EU and European countries to:

1. Protect health as a public good and prohibit private companies from making a profit from the pandemic;
2. Work to ensure a vaccine for all. The crucial first step is to introduce a “waiver” of intellectual property rights on the vaccine to accelerate vaccine production and make it accessible to all citizens across the globe;
3. Increase investment in health and social care systems, ensure adequate staffing levels, and improve safety and working conditions, so that health and social care workers can deliver safe health and social care services for all.

Vaccine for all

A “waiver” of intellectual property rights for COVID-19 vaccines is needed urgently to increase production and accessibility for all people around the globe. We will not be protected from the virus until the global population is vaccinated. The public interest should come above patent protections and the profits of private pharmaceutical companies. The EU and European governments should take control of production and distribution to deliver safety for all. “No one is safe until everyone is safe”

Applause is not enough

On this day, we applaud the heroism of the hundreds of thousands of health and social care workers. For more than a year, they have fought against the virus and protected our societies. We commemorate the deaths of many of these workers, who have lost their lives whilst protecting those of others. A recent Amnesty International report, prepared in collaboration with EPSU¹ and affiliates, shows the appalling number of COVID-19 related deaths amongst health and social care workers, and the lack of transparency in many countries in recording and reporting these fatalities. We are very concerned by the lack of data on the progress in

¹ <https://www.epsu.org/article/covid-19-death-toll-health-and-care-workers-continues-rise>

vaccinating of health and social care workers in many countries, including the in the EU². Governments need to be more transparent in providing information on COVID-19 related deaths and vaccination progress amongst health and social care workers.

Applause and commemoration are not enough. For years, EPSU and its affiliates have raised the issue of understaffing and low pay in the health and social care sectors, especially for care workers. The EU and European governments should increase pay and improve working conditions, including relating to workplace health and safety. Although the lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) has been addressed, there is an urgent need to tackle the increasing levels of stress and burnout among health and social care workers. Many are exhausted and increasingly consider leaving the profession. There is an urgent need to ensure adequate staffing levels. In the wake of previous crises, such as the 2008 financial crisis, staffing levels have been decreased due to cuts in the public sector and persistent underinvestment. Improving working conditions is crucial if the public health and social care sectors are to survive the pandemic and become an attractive sector for next generations of health and care workers.

The future of long term care and addressing the failures of the sector in managing COVID-19.

In light of the ageing of the population, EPSU is calling on the EU and European governments to present a clear vision for the long-term care sector after decades of neglect. It is unacceptable and inhumane to treat older people as commodities from which private companies can profit. EPSU has called for investigations into the appalling death rate in elderly care homes across Europe. Health and care must not be commodified. We need to rebuild the public nature of our care services and recognise the crucial role social services play in our societies. The work of long-term carers and of all those in the health sector, the majority of whom are female, should be recognised through higher pay, improved working conditions, better health and safety and sufficient staffing levels.

² <https://gap.ecdc.europa.eu/public/extensions/COVID-19/vaccine-tracker.html#target-group-tab>