

# ETF ETUCE EPSU Joint Statement on Austerity

## Defend public services to defend Europe's democracy and economy

On 23 June 2024, UN Public Service Day, we join forces once again to send a clear message: austerity measures are a danger to Europe's people and economy. Our three federations represent over 12 million workers in Europe, from education (ETUCE) to public administration, health and social services, utilities (EPSU) and transport sectors (ETF) and we stand united to defend Europe's public services, because there is no flourishing economy, no industrial development, no innovation, and no end to discrimination without quality well-funded public services. They are the backbone of our society, interconnected and intertwined with the very principle of democracy, ensuring a high quality of life; driving economic development and underpinning growth and innovation. We have seen after the Great Recession what a wave of austerity measures led to; we must stop history repeating itself.

## Public Services: Cornerstones of Democracy

Public services are the foundation of a fairer society, essential for fostering social inclusion and reducing socio-economic inequalities. They ensure that all individuals, regardless of their socio-economic background, have access to fundamental rights and opportunities. Quality education, accessible public administration and healthcare, and effective public transport systems all empower citizens, enabling them to participate fully in democratic processes and society. Austerity policies threaten public services and lead to the closure of hospital wards and schools, leaving some communities without access to basic services like general practitioners and public transport. We have a clear message: no more cuts to public services because no one in Europe can be left behind.

## Public Services: quality jobs for workers

Public sector employment is most often synonymous with good working conditions and fair wages, setting a benchmark for other sectors to follow. Many of the public service sectors, like education or care, employ more women than men and, in the same way, the majority of public services users are women. Stable employment and good working conditions are major factors for gender equality and to promote women's economic independence. However, cuts to public budgets means reduced availability of services or the replacement of workers with digital technologies. Further staff shortages created by budgetary cuts will lead to increased violence at work. We are seeing the number of threats and aggressions rising across the board, including from service users, patients or

pupils and their families. Being able to have enough staff is a prerequisite for providing quality services, austerity will make this impossible.

## Public Services: Catalysts for Economic Growth

A strong public sector is indispensable for a resilient and dynamic economy. Public services facilitate the implementation of comprehensive European industrial, social and environmental policies by providing the necessary infrastructure and support. However, what we see is the disappearance of public services from rural areas and a lack of qualified staff necessary to implement the Green Deal and Europe's industrial strategy, from public administration to education and judiciaries that are crucial to implement the Green Deal and Europe's industrial strategy.

## Opposing Austerity and Privatisation: we want a change of course

EPSU, ETF, and ETUCE vehemently oppose the new EU economic governance review, which will translate into new austerity measures, budget and service cuts and precipitate a new wave of privatisation. Such policies would undermine vital public services that rely on public funding and are crucial for democracy, quality jobs and quality services for people and economic prosperity.

The newly elected European Parliament and next Commission have the power to reverse the course of austerity. We call upon the EU institutions and the Member States to recognize and reinforce in the next strategic agenda 2024-2029, the fundamental role of public services in promoting democratic values, protecting workers, and stimulating economic growth. We urge policymakers to reject austerity and privatisation and instead commit to investing in and strengthening public services. By doing so, we can build a more inclusive, equitable, and prosperous Europe for all.