

**PESSIS+ Project Technical Seminar 1  
24 April 2018  
Brussels**

**EPSU Scoping Document 1  
(DRAFT Version, 8 April 2018)**

**TOPIC 1: DIGITALISATION**

**EPSU Compilation on Digitalisation in Social Services**

**EPSU main initiatives**

- **Commissioning of research to investigate the impact of digitalisation**
- **Interaction with European Commission through meetings and consultations to highlight the main trade union concerns about the impact of digitalisation on workers and citizens**
- **Coordination with ETUC and European trade union federations**
- **Work in sectors and in particular with local government employers on implications of digitalisation**

Digitalisation – the widespread adoption of digital technologies to process information – has major implications for public service workers and public service users. As with other forms of restructuring 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 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's 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, younion, 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.

The first steps were taken in commissioning research on the impact of digitalisation on jobs and job content in the home care and public employment services sectors. The study, including interviews with workers and trade union representatives, was due to be published in mid-2018 at a conference organised jointly with EPSU's German affiliate ver.di and the Friedrich Ebert foundation.

## Main concerns

Digitalisation has a wide range of implications for workers' rights and the quality of public services. The EPSU Executive Committee's position paper outlines these while also focusing on the kinds of measures that are needed to respond to these challenges.

Potential measures needed to protect workers' rights and working conditions:

- Ensure the trade union role in regulating the impact of digitalisation through collective bargaining, social dialogue and information and consultation;
- Provide digital training as part of continuous professional development;
- Ensure that workers know what data their employer holds on them, with clear guidelines on internet use at work and if and how employers monitor this;
- Ensure gender equality in employment and training provision;
- Develop health and safety policies and practices that take account of new systems;
- Protect working time and negotiate the right to disconnect.

Potential measures needed to protect and improve the quality of public services:

- Invest in infrastructure and trained staff when introducing and maintaining new systems;
- Guarantee open access to the internet to all citizens;
- Safeguard public digital resources against private interests;
- Protect public records and digital content in libraries and museums from privatisation;
- Improve citizens' digital skills, particularly the elderly and most vulnerable;
- Prevent a small number of private software or hardware providers from gaining a monopolistic position.
- Promote open source software and public-public partnerships, where public administrations pool skills and knowledge
- Invest more in data protection infrastructure, ensuring effective staffing levels and well-trained staff.

## 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 EU policy**
- **Maintain pressure on employers to ensure that digitalisation is properly addressed through collective bargaining, social dialogue and information and consultation.**

### Concerning digitalisation and social care:

- As EPSU we consider that technological innovation offers an opportunity to drive improvement in healthcare services, and to offer more convenient access for patients to advice, treatment and medicines. We actively support new ways of delivering care that are designed to improve the quality of care for people, provided they are implemented safely and responsibly with the active participation of workers in driving and shape such a transition. The challenge and opportunity for social partners is indeed to embed **safety and dignity of workers in new ways of working and collaborating**, giving answers to the new needs and rights connected with the rise of new technologies.
- We are particularly working on three **main vectors of change** in the social services sector:
  - **Automation of work:** the replacement of (human) labour input by machine input . Advanced robotics, artificial intelligence and machine learning.
  - **Digitisation of processes:** use of sensors and rendering devices to translate (parts of) the physical production process into digital information (and vice versa). Internet of Things, 3d printing, virtual reality, augmented reality and telepresence.
  - **Coordination by platforms and use of blockchain**
- **The Data issue:** health ecosystem is complex and structured with many public and private actors. Health data is very sensitive, and does not only contain medical but also financial information about one's social protection situation or medical expenses. Yet, e-health apps are not regulated and the data generally ends up within the remit of the GAFAs. EPSU considers a priority to make sure that the introduction of new technologies and use of big data in social services is agreed and regulated through collective bargaining as well as through an ad hoc legislation that protects and regulates the use of such data by professionals.
- The Social services profession itself is also at risk of precariousness seeing as algorithms are getting better at organizing and rationalizing their tasks and work. We consider fundamental to invest in **social dialogue** and **collective agreement** as a way to regulate the following aspects:
  - Transfer of rostering and timesheets from paper to mobile applications
  - GPS tracking, in some cases at all times
  - Verifies arrival and departure for each visit
  - 'Optimises' routes and cut out 'deadtime'
  - Used to sanction lateness
  - Adds safety for lone workers
  - Real-time assignment, reassignment and cancellation of visits
  - Ratings systems
- Austerity forces the public sector to change its ways of delivering social services: Local authorities have to deal with the changes occurring with digitalisation, while also tackling gaps across Europe in terms of digital readiness. EPSU would be interested to investigate particularly this aspect
- Also in terms of **staff digital skills**, the issue is very disputed among employees: the majority of staff used digital devices such as smartphones and tablets more extensively in their personal lives than at the workplace, and managers and staff were united in wanting to see more widespread use of digital technologies. Focus should be on supporting learning and development for staff in a range of ways, including peer support in the workplace.