



EFN Policy Statement on Social Dialogue in the EU

Social dialogue – defined as negotiation or consultation between representatives of workers and employers or between these and government representatives – is the cornerstone of the European social model. In line with Articles 152–155 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), the EU shall promote social dialogue, while fully respecting the autonomy of the social partners and the diversity of national industrial relations systems. Furthermore, in 2017 the EU institutions proclaimed the European Pillar for Social Rights aiming to build a fair and more inclusive European Union. The principle 8 “Social Dialogue and involvement of workers” states the importance of consulting the social partners on economic, employment and social policies.

Importantly, there can be no real social dialogue without a solid basis of freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining and action. Effective social dialogue requires representative and autonomous trade unions and employer organisations able to engage in bipartite and tripartite dialogue, a culture of dialogue and compromise, and a degree of underlying respect and trust that survives the inevitable and tumultuous conflicts of interest between the parties. The two Commission initiatives from January 2023, the proposal for a Council Recommendation and the Communication, state that social dialogue is a cornerstone of the European social model, and the involvement of social partners who are representative of their members improves policy-making and law-making. The EFN expects the EU institutions to put action behind these words and invest in strong social dialogue both nationally and at the EU level.

According to Eurofound (2022) the hospital sector responded more effectively and quickly to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic when social dialogue and collective bargaining played a key role. To better prepare for future public health crises and to improve health security, social dialogue is essential.

The Council still needs to adopt the Recommendation during the Belgium EU Presidency. The EU must show they really want to promote the role of social partners. The nurses and their representatives are ready to be involved to the benefit of strong national and European policies. EFN believes that from an economic and social policy to climate policy, what matters most to nurses’ work is their employment and income, economic security, health,

and well-being. It is evident that these factors effectively and efficiently affect service provision and have a positive impact on safe and high-quality care and the recruitment and retention of staff. Post Covid19, it is crucial that the EFN social dialogue focuses on legislative and non-legislative initiatives concerning improving working conditions of nurses and safe staffing levels in different working environments.

The EFN reaffirms that proper social dialogue is key to ensure that all nurses receive proper, decent, and lawful working conditions across all health care settings. Where this is not achieved, nurses have the right to call for the establishment and restoration of such conditions by appropriate means. The EFN calls on all national governments to ensure nurses can exercise their social rights, including the right to strike as guaranteed under international law.

There is an increase in privatisation of health care across the EU, particularly in long term care settings. It is therefore critically important to ensure that privatisation of health and social care is appropriately monitored and that the terms, conditions, pay, and welfare of nurses working in private care settings are protected. Social dialogue must be central to delivering decent work and conditions for all and is crucial for a well-functioning and productive economy as stated in the ILO Centenary Declaration.

The EFN calls on the European Institutions and Member States to promote social dialogue to:

- Secure a sound future for the organisation and funding of sectoral social dialogue. The Commission's political responsibility for social dialogue is crucial for sustainability. Outsourcing the organisation of social dialogue is unacceptable. The Commission must prioritise defined criteria and strong logistical and financial support if it truly wants to deliver on its promise of strengthening social dialogue (Commission President Von der Leyen State of the Union 2022 & 2023).
- Establish an inclusive policy-making process must be established in consultation with key stakeholders. This will strengthen the ownership of policy interventions especially within the design and implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Plans. The regulation establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility (Regulation 2021/241) stipulates the indication on how the input of stakeholders is reflected in the recovery and resilience plan.
- Strengthen social dialogue in the digitalisation of the healthcare sector. The green and digital transitions are one of the greatest challenges that the European Union will face in the upcoming years and decades. Although digital transformation was accelerated by the COVID-19 crisis and highlighted the need to develop a new generation of public policies, supporting professional development and evidence-

based practice for the nursing workforce and emerging challenges for health and safety at work will need specific attention in social dialogue.

- Social dialogue has an important role to play in ensuring emergency preparedness for crises.
- Ensure social partners are systematically involved in the design and implementation of employment and social policies including in the context of the European Semester.
- Shape a stronger recovery from the pandemic and as such be better prepared for the next healthcare crisis in the EU and Europe.
- Support the development of a well-functioning labour market that can swiftly respond to a revival of aggregate demand by matching demands with an available, highly qualified nursing workforce. Therefore, it is key to develop the nursing workforce capacity in line with the EFN Workforce matrix 3+1, with a specific focus on the implementation of the Directive 2013/55/EU and the further development of APN in the EU and Europe.
- Ensure that a skilled and experienced nursing workforce remains available by implementing retention schemes with investments in continuous professional development for the nursing workforce.
- Establish a much clearer and transparent procedure for processing social partner agreements into EU Directives.
- Protect against violence and harassment at work.
- Support quality employment and fair working conditions in long-term care as set out in the adopted Council Recommendations (2022/C 476/01) on access to affordable high-quality long-term care.

Further readings:

- Eurofound (2022), Social dialogue and collective bargaining in the hospital sector during the COVID-19 pandemic, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.
<https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/system/files/2022-12/ef21030en.pdf>.
- European Commission, Communication Strengthening social dialogue in the European Union: harnessing its full potential for managing fair transitions, COM/2023/40
[EUR-Lex – 52023DC0040 – EN – EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)
- European Commission, Proposal for a Council Recommendation on strengthening social dialogue in the European Union, COM/2023/38
[EUR-Lex – 52023DC0038 – EN – EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

- European Parliament, Strengthening social dialogue
[Procedure File: 2023/2536\(RSP\) | Legislative Observatory | European Parliament \(europa.eu\)](#)
- European Parliament, Committee on Employment and Social Affairs
[MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION on strengthening social dialogue | B9-0259/2023 | European Parliament \(europa.eu\)](#)
- Council, Proposal for a COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on strengthening social dialogue in the European Union
<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10542-2023-INIT/en/pdf>
- Unlocking the potential of social dialogue for long-term care (2023)
<https://www.theglobaldeal.com/resources/brief-unlocking-the-potential-of-social-dialogue-for-long-term-care.pdf>

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