



## Resolution on public services

Adopted at the Executive Committee Meeting of 10-11 March 2026

### High-quality, universal and rights-based public services

High-quality, universal, accessible to all and rights-based public services constitute the backbone of the European Social Model and one of the essential components for a renewed Social Contract for Europe's workers. Without strong public services, there cannot be improvement of living and working conditions, social and territorial cohesion, economic and social progress.

Major investments in public services are urgently needed to deliver rights, equality, social cohesion and security for all. Defending and investing in high-quality public services is essential to rebuild trust, tackle inequalities, support the economy to thrive, achieve gender equality and ensure that every community benefits from Europe's economic and social success, including EU peripheral and ultraperipheral areas. Also, public investments in research are essential for the future of our society and economy. These investments require a different economic governance framework, overcoming the current rules that structurally limit states' ability to finance and invest in public services.

It is above all a political choice in favour of quality public services capable of delivering to people's need, of ensuring the respect of their rights and of guaranteeing equal and universal access. Strong public services are a foundational pillar of democracy. Defending and reinforcing public services means defending and reinforcing democracy itself. Strong public services protect democracy against authoritarianism, clientelism and far-right capture by ensuring transparency, accountability and professional independence of public administrations. Insufficient administrative capacity and fragmented governance at local and regional level can lead to discriminatory practices, including towards mobile and cross-border workers, undermining trust in public institutions and weakening democratic accountability.

Women are the majority of the public service workforce in most countries and in particular in health, care, education and childcare and parts of public administration. High-quality public services contribute to greater equality.

Strong public services are essential for economic progress. The discussion on competitiveness all too often ignores people. It is the homes that workers need to live in, the transport that will bring them to work, the childcare and schools, canteens serving healthy food, cultural and sporting facilities for their children, etc. It is the health care, it's the public services and social protection they can rely on, it is the facilities and services in the communities they live in. These are all essential components for economic progress and to improve living standards. Being serious about competitiveness means being serious about a strong commitment to strong public services and infrastructures, to and public administrations, to social protection.

Mobilising for strong, rights-based, universal and autonomous public services is of high importance in the framework of the struggle against the far-right and anti-democratic movements. Neo-liberal policies have undermined public services through austerity, liberalisation and privatisation processes. The undermining or absence of public services in certain regions and areas have caused inequalities and abandonment among part of the population, often the most vulnerable, and a lack of trust in democracy and in the state, which have fuelled the rise of the far-right and anti-democratic movements.



Also, the far-right, when in power, has often taken action against the autonomy, universality and quality of public services, against the rights of public servants. In many cases, far-right and authoritarian movements and parties do not only seek to undermine the state, but to capture and weaponise it.

### **The fight for high-quality public services as a key ETUC priority**

The ETUC 2023 Congress identified the fight for high-quality public services as a key priority. The [Berlin Manifesto](#) included the call to “*Fight for universal rights-based access to high-quality public services and advocate the role of public ownership in order to better guarantee equal access to public services for all*”. The importance of universal rights-based access to high-quality public services was also underlined in the [ETUC Manifesto for the 2024 European elections](#).

This resolution is a key step in delivering on the ETUC’s strategic commitment to ensure that public services remain at the heart of Europe’s democratic and social model.

Various ETUC resolutions and positions highlight the need for the EU to take action to ensure well-funded, universally accessible and high-quality public services (including the [ETUC response to the Draghi report](#), the [ETUC response to the Letta report](#), the [resolution on Strong public welfare and social protection in transitioning to EU](#), the [ETUC response to the High-Level Group report on the Future of Social Protection and of the Welfare State](#), the [resolution on the Economic governance reform: ETUC priorities against austerity and for investments](#), the [resolution on a 3-year Taxation Action Plan \(2025–2027\)](#), the [resolution on peace and security](#), the [resolution on a European industrial policy for quality jobs](#), the [resolution on the Energy Union Regulation - Taking Decisive Action to Protect Industry, Households, and Create Quality Jobs](#), the [resolution on the right to adequate, decent and affordable housing](#), the [position on EU Digital Trade Agreements with 3rd countries](#), etc.). In May 2025, EPSU launched its [Public Services Agenda](#). In 2024, ETUCE launched the [Go Public! Fund Education](#) campaign together with Education International.

The ETUC has been mobilising and working to deliver on this priority, making the case for high-quality public services, with communication activities (see for example [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#)), in engaging with Letta, Draghi and Niinistö in view of their reports, in the contacts with European parties before the European elections, in social forums and summits (e.g. the La Hulpe and Porto Summits).

The ETUC is active on various legislative and policy discussions that will have an impact on public services, including the implementation of the economic governance rules and the Semester process, the Multiannual Financial Framework, the revision of the public procurement Directives, the Quality Jobs Roadmap, the new Action Plan for the Implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, the Anti-Poverty Strategy, education policies (including the European Education Area, the European Research Area and the Union of Skills).

### **EU background: economic governance framework & policy developments**

Neoliberal and austerity policies, in particular following the 2008 financial and economic crisis, have hit public services across Europe hard, and in many cases they have yet to recover. These effects continue to undermine service quality, staffing levels and working conditions. They impact disproportionately on women, being the majority workforce like in education, health and care, and using public services including public transport and childcare.

The EU-level approach to public services must amongst others ensure upward convergence in funding, wages and working conditions, and staffing, including objectives regarding public sector recruitment, improvement of working conditions and wage increases. This is also essential to tackle labour shortages.



The ETUC has long identified the consequences for working people of the chronic under-investment in the EU, including in public services. The European Commission's own figures show investment in Europe's social infrastructure is already more than €200 billion a year less than required to meet the needs of citizens. Amongst others, investment needs to be raised annually by more than €120bn in health and €57bn in affordable housing. Reinforced investments in education and research are also needed to ensure the achievement of SDG4 and UNESCO spending targets. However, the European institutions have not recognised these needs for investments in public services. Instead, they have pushed for austerity approaches, liberalisation, under-development of and under-investment in public infrastructures and services and common goods, negative reliance on public-private partnerships.

The revision of the EU economic governance framework completed in 2024 has been assessed negatively by the ETUC also with regard to its potential negative impact on public investments and funding for public services. While EU objectives require Member States to mobilise additional public investments, the fiscal rules aim for overly rapid fiscal consolidation and set insufficient investment levels equivalent to pre-COVID periods. The ETUC continues to work for a suspension and reform of the EU economic governance rules. The Letta report on the Future of the Internal Market recognised the negative impacts of the austerity policies and budget cuts to public administrations and public services. The report positively stressed the urgency to address the gaps in provision of universal services, including education. Recommendation for an Action Plan for High Quality Services of General Interest was also positive. The report stated clearly that SGIs are about more than market failures. There were also references to the importance for the Single Market of universal access to services, with implicit recognition that this (should) entail territorial or other obligations on providers.

Mario Draghi's report on the future of European competitiveness recognised the critical importance of the European welfare state to provide "strong public services, social protection, housing, transport and childcare". It stated that "besides job conditions, other circumstances including housing and connectivity can play a significant role in attracting workers". In order to ensure higher labour market participation, in particular for women, it called for – amongst others – "additional investment in high-quality early childhood education and childcare infrastructure" and "fair wages to childcare workers". The report also recommended the improvement of working conditions of teachers. Also, the report positively recognised the current crisis of lack of investment and recommended additional investments of more than 800 billion Euros a year (this figure does not include the necessary social investments).

The Niinisto report "Safer Together Strengthening Europe's Civilian and Military Preparedness and Readiness" did not make the case for reinforcing public services and their funding as an essential pillar to ensure preparedness, and includes negative references supporting the further development of public-private partnerships. The Commission subsequently published a Communication on the European Preparedness Union Strategy, which underlined the importance of well-functioning public administrations and public services, but did not include specific actions to reinforce public services nor to ensure the necessary funding.

The issue of preparedness will likely remain high on the EU institutions' policy agenda. The Commission announced it will organise a Social Partners Preparedness Summit "to enhance involvement of social partners in developing and implementing initiatives on strengthening preparedness and exchange good practices".

European Commission President von der Leyen included in her political guidelines references to the importance of public services, but specific actions to reinforce public services are still missing from the initiatives presented or planned by the Commission. However, Europe's economy and society will only thrive if proper investment is deployed



to support and reinforce public services. A different direction will inevitably weaken Europe and its capacity to stand strong in the global arena.

The Quality Jobs Roadmap includes the important recognition that “by providing accessible early childhood education and care, long-term care, and healthcare, these services empower millions of workers – especially women – to engage in paid work and career advancement. Robust health systems with adequately staffed health workforce play a critical role in ensuring the health and well-being of communities”. The Commission also committed to “working towards a more coherent framework for addressing long-term care workforce challenges” and to present a European Care Deal in 2027.

Quality public services underpin many EU policies and initiatives. **It is essential that the public services dimension is raised in all relevant EU policies**, including enlargement, industrial policy (industrial policy cannot succeed without strong public capacity, investment and long-term planning), just transitions, digitalisation and innovation, single market, simplification, defence and security, migration, housing, gender equality, climate adaptation, democratic resilience, anti-corruption, etc.

Strong public services, including inspectorates, are of high importance also in the enlargement process including in order to prevent social dumping and ensure upward convergence. In the context of the support the ETUC provides to affiliates in accession negotiations, focus will be put amongst others on the importance of upward convergence also on the quality of public services and public administrations, and adequate financing for them. There is a need for EU active support to candidate countries in developing their public services in order to align standards with those of the Union and ensure social cohesion and equal access across all regions.

Public services are a solution to climate change as they give room to greater planification and further economies of scale. Regulatory authorities are playing a key role to support the sustainability of economic activities, safeguarding public interests including public safety and the protection of the environment and biodiversity *inter alia*, and must therefore be protected from the ongoing deregulation’ wave and growing deregulatory sandboxes.

### **Rights-based high-quality public services**

Universal access to rights-based high-quality public services constitutes a fundamental pillar of democracy. Public services must be rights-based, ensure quality standards and act as a shield against the desertification in the access to fundamental goods and services across all regions of Europe. Public services must not be reduced to residual safety nets. High-quality public services are essential to guarantee the full respect of human and social rights and to ensure equality, social and territorial cohesion and economic progress. They also constitute an essential bulwark of solidarity, equality and social justice.

This rights-based approach is enshrined in international, European and EU human rights instruments, including the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. High-quality public services are necessary to ensure the full implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Strong and high-quality public services are essential to deliver on EU objectives, including a strong industrial policy and sustainable competitiveness, preparedness, just transitions and climate and digital transformations. Investments in and resources for public services should not be considered costs but investments in collective economic, civic and social success. Transparency, accessibility, and citizens’ interaction with public administrations should be safeguarded and enhanced.

Underpinning a successful European economy based on quality jobs must be strong and well-funded public services. A strong role of the state and public authorities is needed to



proactively drive the shaping of the transitions, intervene in economic affairs, and ensure social progress, quality jobs and sustainable economic activities. A robust European industrial policy must be based on resilient and well-resourced public services and public administrations.

Strong public administrations, in particular strong labour inspectorates, is essential to ensure the respect of workers and trade union rights and the protection of workers, and a level-playing field for companies. The Quality Jobs Act should include strong measures to improve the frequency and effectiveness of labour inspections and to ensure that national labour inspectorates and the European Labour Authority be strengthened with substantial additional resources and staffing while respecting the roles and prerogatives of trade unions at national level, as well as strengthening cooperation with them ([ETUC reply to the first stage consultation of social partners on the Quality Jobs Act](#)). The Fair Mobility Package should also include provisions to strengthen enforcement and labour inspectorates.

The role of Public Employment Services must be safeguarded and strengthened. As key public institutions, they are essential for the design and delivery of effective active labour market policies, supporting labour market participation and the integration of the most vulnerable groups through targeted outreach and personalised support. In the face of growing risks of privatisation and the expansion of public-private partnerships, it must be reaffirmed that employment services are a public responsibility. They are a public good and must remain well-funded, publicly accountable and guided by social objectives rather than profit. Social partners must be fully involved in the governance, monitoring and evaluation of PES to ensure that labour market policies respond to workers' needs and uphold social standards.

Universal, rights-based and high-quality public services must ensure equality and non-discrimination, including by guaranteeing access to frontier, mobile and cross-border workers and their families, in line with EU law and the principle of equal treatment.

Utilities – including water, energy and waste management services – are essential infrastructure for citizens' fundamental right to basic services, for the security of economic and social systems and for the democratic cohesion of our communities. These utilities integrate and operationalise the concept of public service and must therefore be protected, developed and financed through adequate public investment.

The right to safe drinking water and sanitation must be guaranteed through a stable and continuous commitment of resources, protecting it as a common good and guaranteeing quality and resilience, within a framework of transparent and efficient public management. Energy services are recognised as an essential right and basis for economic development, which require strong public governance and long-term planning. This is essential to meet growing supply needs and combat energy poverty. Waste management is a public service of general interest that is intertwined with the objectives of the circular economy and environmental sustainability. An integrated view of the material cycle, promoted by public investment and effective regulation, is essential to ensure health, safety and quality of life.

### **Public services as an essential dimension of preparedness**

Preparedness has become an increasingly relevant concept after the COVID-19 pandemic, amid growing conflicts and accelerating transitions. However, EU and national institutions still treat preparedness too narrowly, focusing mainly on defence while overlooking the public services, welfare, workforce and social resilience dimensions that are essential for real preparedness. The current state of underfunding of public services, resulting from years of austerity, neo-liberal policies and marketisation, constitutes a major vulnerability for Europe's capacity to face crises and emergencies.



Understaffing, labour shortages, worsening working conditions, lack of quality training, privatisation processes and ageing infrastructures have left public services ill-equipped. Preparedness requires building up sufficient surge capacity in public services to respond to systemic shocks such as a pandemic. Preparedness is not only a question of capacity, but also of competence, continuity and stability. Secure employment, permanent positions and low turnover are essential to ensure institutional memory, professional learning and effective crisis response. High levels of temporary contracts, project-based employment and reliance on external staffing arrangements constitute structural vulnerabilities for preparedness and societal resilience. Socio-economic and geographic disparities have increased, undermining equal access and weakening preparedness. In most Member States, preparedness strategies have also been developed without meaningful social dialogue.

The ETUC reiterates its priorities outlined in the [Resolution on peace and security](#). As a political union, the EU must contribute to guaranteeing peace, the rule of law, human rights and social progress – including through coordinated and improved security policies. The EU must focus on a broader concept of security, and funding for social objectives and public services must be safeguarded from depletion by reallocation to defence or security initiatives and should instead be increased.

The ETUC calls on the Commission and Member States to make high-quality public services a key component of their preparedness strategies. This must include in particular:

- ensuring quality jobs and social dialogue in public services as part of preparedness planning;
- reinforcing public services, administration and infrastructures, as well as emergency services, severely harmed by old and new austerity measures, to create sufficient service resilience and capacity;
- strengthening the health system and building sufficient capacity for greater resilience in times of crisis;
- ensuring that enforcement authorities have the necessary resources to fight crime, including illicit financial flows, tax evasion and avoidance, and to ensure fair working conditions, including occupational health and safety, and the livelihood of their staff, including police officers;
- strengthening public education and developing collective capacity to resist misinformation and manipulation, while protecting democratic values and institutions, including those responsible for education, media, research, civil protection and the rule of law;
- ensuring resilience to cyberattacks and investing in fair digitalisation, while rejecting outsourcing of core public digital infrastructures and advancing strategic autonomy in the digital sector;
- reservists can play an important role in defense, but must not replace professional personnel. It is essential to ensure robust employment and social protection guarantees, as well as trade union representation and involvement;
- all emergency measures must be negotiated with trade unions, strictly time-limited and must not result in permanent restrictions on collective bargaining, the right to strike or social dialogue;
- ensuring that preparedness strategies are prepared and delivered through social dialogue at all levels.

Corruption poses a serious threat to social justice, the quality of public services, and citizens' trust in democratic institutions. The ETUC calls on the European institutions and on governments to take more decisive and systematic action against corruption. Effective enforcement and respect for the rule of law are essential elements to ensure that public money is directed towards the common good and to guarantee high-quality resilient public services.



## Ending austerity: investment and funding for public services

Trade unions have consistently denounced the unacceptable situation of underfunding of and lack of investments in public services. Funding for public services and welfare has not kept pace with the additional pressure connected with transformations and demographic changes. This has caused deterioration in service quality and accessibility, processes of privatisation, ageing infrastructures, understaffing and labour shortages, worsening working conditions and lack of quality training. Also, local authorities have been left increasingly exposed and underfunded, increasing local authorities' and municipalities' debt undermining public policy needs at local level. It is essential to ensure coordination between the different levels of government, to ensure the adequacy of resources for the different public authorities, so that sufficient funding is available to fulfil their obligations and responsibilities.

Delivering increased and adequate funding is essential to restore public services quality, ensure universal access, tackle labour shortages and rebuild democratic governance capacity. Investments in public services and staffing are crucial to reduce dependence on outsourcing and private consultants, strengthen accountability, and ensure that the state has the capacity to deliver social progress. Funding mechanisms must guarantee high-quality, universal, accessible to all and rights-based public services, with quality jobs for public services workers. Social protection and assistance systems should also be reinforced in parallel.

More than one year after the adoption of the new EU economic governance framework, its negative consequences are becoming evident, with renewed cuts and underinvestment in public services. A new economic and social model is needed that places people before profit, supports quality jobs, promotes investments and strong public services, and contributes to achieving European social and environmental objectives.

**The ETUC reject austerity policies that weaken public services and undermine the European social model, and reiterates its call for an urgent suspension and revision of the EU economic governance rules** that structurally limit the ability of states to adequately finance and invest in public services. Fundamental social rights must take precedence over competition rules and fiscal discipline. In particular, the ETUC calls for:

- the introduction of a golden rule for public investments and sufficient flexibility for Member States to adequately fund public services, including investments in education, health, care, housing, public infrastructures, etc.;
- permanent EU funding instruments that can also support high-quality public services, along with effective controls and transparency to ensure that funding supports the improvement of public services and to tackle corruption;
- the promotion of the necessary public services investment levels, and the assessment of public service capacity, staffing, access and fair working conditions in the European Semester, ensuring effective involvement of social partners;
- ensuring that budgetary reasons or so-called reforms cannot be used as pretext to restrict workers' and trade union rights or undermine collective bargaining and working conditions, including in public services;
- safeguarding funding for social objectives from depletion through reallocation to defence or security initiatives;
- developing the EU's public banks at local, national and European level (EIB, EBRD, etc.) and that investments include support for the financing of public services and public-public cooperation;
- support for candidate countries to develop public services and ensure upward convergence and social and territorial cohesion.

It is of high importance for the new Action Plan for **the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights** to include concrete and ambitious initiatives to reinforce public



services, in particular on principle 20 on essential services. It is of high importance that the Commission engages with social partners and trade unions, including through the relevant social dialogue committees, in developing the Action Plan.

### **Fair taxation**

It is urgent for the EU and Member States, as well as candidate countries and other European countries, to deliver a fairer taxation system and tackle tax evasion and avoidance. Today, labour income and pensions sustain most of the financing of the welfare state, while the taxation of other kinds of income does not include necessary criteria of progressivity.

Greater progressivity in taxation of all kinds of income is needed. Measures to be implemented include: (i) increasing taxation rates of the richest and (ii) raising capital taxation rates at the same level as labour taxation (iii) a taxation framework that better targets wealth accumulation and capital gains to increase taxation on wealth and real estate - while stressing the need for upward convergence of this progressive tax system. This should include a proposal for an EU directive on wealth taxation.

A strong and fairer Company Taxation framework is necessary and should be based on the implementation of the Commission's BEFIT plan for corporate taxation, which should include a minimum effective corporate tax rate of 25%.

It is necessary to put an end to tax havens and tax avoidance. Fair taxation and fighting against tax evasion and avoidance should be included in the work in different dossiers (e.g. tax conditionalities, public procurement...).

Fair taxation must also address the specific situation of cross-border workers, ensuring that taxation rules do not lead to double taxation or exclusion from public services.

### **The ETUC will advance on the implementation of its Taxation Action Plan (2025–2027).**

#### **Quality jobs in public services**

Working conditions in public services have been worsening in many countries, with insufficient staffing, excessive workload, low wages, absence of quality training and labour shortages. Outsourcing and precarious contracts undermine workers' rights and the sustainability and quality of service provision.

It is essential to ensure quality jobs, improved working conditions and higher wages in public services. Higher wages are necessary also to keep jobs in public services attractive and to tackle labour shortages.

Strong social dialogue – including at European level – and sectoral collective bargaining are a structural condition for quality jobs and high-quality public services. It is essential for Member States to promote and strengthen collective bargaining including in public services. Social dialogue should be a mandatory component of EU and national governance on public services (for example on basis of Santiago consensus for education sector). Trade unions must be involved in the definition of all aspects of public services, including with regard to their design, regulation, funding, provision, and coverage. The full respect of information and consultation rights must be guaranteed.

It is essential to ensure the full respect of workers' and trade union rights (including the right to strike), and their protection against restrictions. Restrictions on the right to strike, including through stricter minimum service obligations, and the normalisation of emergency powers undermine workers' voice, weaken bargaining outcomes and ultimately damage service quality and democratic accountability. Defending the right to strike in public services is necessary both for workers' rights and to ensure high-quality public services. The ETUC will amplify the actions of its affiliates to defend and improve workers and trade union rights in public services. Trade unionism is not a crime!



In addition, ensuring quality jobs in public services requires binding frameworks and adequate resources. This includes transparent and participatory workforce planning and enforceable staffing standards (“safe staffing”), predictable working-time and rostering arrangements with effective compensation for overtime, and a right to disconnect. It is necessary to urgently and significantly increase staff levels, with mass recruitment programmes to restore service quality and administrative capacity, respond to labour shortages and understaffing in public services. It is also urgent to take action to avoid the temporary filling of structural positions and activities.

The ETUC calls for ambitious actions to be taken to ensure gender equality. Public services with a predominately female workforce often see lower wage developments. This is even most poignant for care (elderly and childcare, home and domestic care), where wages remain particularly low and workers often are not covered by collective agreements. The ETUC calls on public authorities as employers and funders of care to take action to ensure higher wages and to close the gender pay gap. No public funding should go to non-profit and private care providers without a collective agreement.

Public service workers must also have a right to paid training and upskilling during working time, in particular in the context of digitalisation and AI-driven change.

Ensuring occupational health and safety for all public services workers must be a priority for institutions at European and national level, including to ensure regular, independent, and high-quality monitoring of workers’ health. The ETUC work to support the implementation of the CMRD (Carcinogen, Mutagen and Reprotoxic Directive) and its revisions to include new BOELs on CMR substances is of high importance also for public services workers.

Understaffing is increasing stress at work, including ethical stress. It is necessary to urgently and significantly increase staff levels. Binding legislation on psychosocial risks is necessary to contribute to tackle the epidemic of stress at work, including in public services (include reference to ETUC Quality Jobs Act first stage reply).

Protecting public service workers’ right to speak up, including through strong whistleblower protections and a supportive organisational culture, is essential to safeguard service quality, professional integrity and democratic accountability.

In too many case, public services workers are exposed to work-related violence and, particularly women, to harassment, including perpetuated by third parties. Employers’ duty of care requires comprehensive prevention measures, clear reporting pathways, and effective support and follow-up mechanisms for victims, to guarantee workplaces free from violence and harassment. ETUC supports the implementation of the joint employers-trade unions multi-sectoral guidelines on addressing third party violence.

It is essential to guarantee that the integration of AI in public services is guided by the concrete bottom-up needs of workers and citizens, not by big tech interests, and to ensure full transparency, responsible use and the full respect of human rights, including workers’ and trade union rights and workers’ privacy. It is essential to strengthen the role of collective bargaining in managing any digitalisation processes and introduction of AI systems in public services, including to . AI systems, in particular in public services, must always be designed and operated on the basis of the human-in-control principle. From a democratic perspective, it is crucial that citizens are able to follow and understand public authority decisions. It is of utmost importance that there is never any ambiguity regarding who is responsible when an AI algorithm or system causes harm or makes incorrect decisions. The introduction of AI or other digital tools must not cause a further reduction of staff. . Binding legislation on AI at work would constitute an important step in this direction. The ETUC reiterates its support for the central government administrations European social partners agreement.

Monitoring the effects of outsourcing and privatisation on employment standards is also an important area of action for the trade union movement. In this framework, equal



treatment of directly employed workers and outsourced / subcontracted workers should be guaranteed, and is included in ETUC demands for public procurement and regulation of subcontracting.

The EU and Member States must address the structural workforce crisis in public health and care systems, including staff shortages, burnout, precarious contracts, and intra-EU labour mobility driven by wage disparities. Special attention must be given to ethical stress, exposure to violence in healthcare settings, and excessive working time arrangements, including on-call duties. Binding safe staffing frameworks should be promoted at EU level, particularly in healthcare and long-term care, based on population needs and quality of care standards.

Disinformation and delegitimisation campaigns against public sector workers that have taken place in certain countries must be rejected, and it is essential that all actors recognise the crucial role of high-quality, and universally accessible public services, as a foundation for social cohesion, economic development, and overall societal progress.

### **Advocating the role of public ownership in order to better guarantee equal access to public services for all**

The ETUC Congress stressed the role of public ownership in guaranteeing equal access to high-quality public services.

Privatisation processes have not only undermined the quality of public services and worsened working conditions, they have also opened in certain cases windows of opportunity for organised crime. Evidence shows that the privatisation and marketisation of healthcare and long-term care services negatively affect service quality, equity of access and working conditions.

It is essential to safeguard the centrality of public services and to oppose and reverse processes of privatisation and liberalisation. Processes of remunicipalisation (or 'reinternalisation', 'reconquest', 'reintegration of outsourced services', etc.) are of high importance and should be supported. The marketisation of public services and PPPs (public-private partnerships) must be rejected. Public services must remain out of the scope of any trade or investment agreements, and part of a reinforced democratic control. Participatory governance models involving workers and users can strengthen transparency, equity and trust in institutions. The EU should develop and support – including through investment tools – EU public goods, including in the areas of digital public infrastructure and energy. The creation of EU public companies in key areas (e.g. critical medicines, space, etc.) should be considered and promoted. Publicly owned companies, including companies jointly owned by different public authorities or entities (for example municipalities or regions), play an important role and should be safeguarded and not undermined.

The EU should actively promote a re-municipalisation agenda and communicate the benefits with respect to service delivery and outcomes, the workforce and state resilience and preparedness.

The ETUC will:

- Call for EU-level support for re-municipalisation processes, insourcing, public-public cooperation, as well as for the reduction of dependence on consultants and outsourcing (including cap reliance on consultants in core public functions);
- Amplify affiliates' re-municipalisation campaigns;
- Make the case for public ownership/control of key infrastructures, including energy grids, digital infrastructures, data systems, AI used in public services. For SGEI, public service obligations, including continuity of supply, territorial coverage and affordability, must be given the utmost centrality;



- Stress that smart city projects must be based also on public well-being and environmental objectives and be subject to democratic control, ensuring transparency in decision-making and citizens' participation.

It is essential for the EU to promote actions to ensure universal access to essential services in all regions and areas, including high-quality public education, as well as reinforced funding and investments for public services in all regions. This should be part of an action plan on Services of General Interest (as proposed in the Letta report), which should also aim at ensuring the full implementation of principle 20 of the EPSR and at promoting the “right to stay” in every region. Trade unions and social partners should be involved in the definition of such an SGI action plan.

The reform of the public procurement directives should promote collective bargaining and quality jobs. The revision must ensure that public money goes to organisations that respect workers' and trade union rights, that negotiate with trade unions and whose workers are covered by collective agreements. The new rules should introduce strong social conditionalities, a ban of the award on the basis of the lowest price only, and stricter regulation of subcontracting. The directives should ensure the full autonomy of public authorities – including regional and local authorities - and not exert any pressure towards privatisation. The revision should also exclude companies engaged in tax abuse from access to public procurement contracts.

The ETUC will continue to campaign for the introduction of strong social conditionalities in EU and national funding and support to companies to ensure quality jobs and promote collective bargaining. Tax and environmental conditionalities are also of high importance.

### **Sectoral dimensions**

For example, aspects to be tackled:

- **Transport:** it is essential to recognise the key role of public transport as a response to transport poverty; the ETUC calls for the recognition of railways as a public service, and for Europe's railway network to be put under public control; we also call for public authorities, especially regions and municipalities, to be given sufficient resources to deliver or procure high-quality services and infrastructures;
- **Energy:** It is vital for Europe to recognise energy as a public good. Public control of transmission and distribution electricity grids and support to affiliates campaigning to promote public ownership are of high importance. The grids are a natural monopoly and universal service. Electricity is a public good and access to electricity is key for social and economic participation, for regional cohesion and preparedness. Continuity of supply, long-term planning, and affordability must come before profits and are best assured by public control;
- **Health and care:** We support public health and care. We ask public authorities to address the persistent gender pay gap as employers and funders by raising wages of women in care and ensure workers are covered by collective agreements;
- **Arts and Entertainment sector:** public funding is a vital backbone for a flourishing sector. Public funding ensures that culture can thrive at a local level, with local theatres, operas and orchestras being key institutions for artists and cultural workers to develop a career and hone their craft. These public institutions and publicly funded or subsidized artistic projects can also be a cradle for innovation and a driver of new ventures, offering a space for experimentation that is often lacking in purely commercial ventures;
- **Culture:** Public funding upholds the democratic value of access to culture. Public cultural institutions can ensure affordable access to culture for all, with special consideration of those on low incomes or with additional needs. They are an excellent way of ensuring youth access and involvement in culture, to the benefit of quality education. Work in the cultural sector is also precarious, patchy and paid at a very low rate relative to educational levels of its workforce. Public funding, particularly



where there is social conditionality foreseen and where conditions are underpinned by collective bargaining, can be a vector to raise employment standards and address unfair working conditions and exploitation, including unpaid, undeclared or underdeclared work and bogus self-employment;

- **Public service media and broadcasting:** Public service media are among the largest employers and investors in European audiovisual content. They ensure universal access to trusted content across platforms, and play a central role in sustaining Europe's democratic life, cultural diversity and Europe's unique dual audiovisual ecosystem. Public service media remain among the most trusted sources of information for citizens, a trust that is built on the professionalism, independence and commitment of public service media workers. The ETUC also highlights the importance of public service broadcasting, which is under threat throughout Europe and whose political independence and stable funding must be guaranteed by strict implementation of the recent European Media Freedom Act (Article 5 of the EMFA);
- **Postal services:** European postal trade unions through the Save Our Post 2026 campaign call for comprehensive reform of the EU postal regulatory framework to safeguard the financial sustainability of the Universal Service Obligation (USO) and protect postal services as essential public infrastructure. It demands that all delivery operators contribute fairly to financing the universal service and comply with common social, fiscal, and environmental standards, ending unfair competition based on social dumping. The Campaign urges expanding the USO to include parcels, strengthening regulation to cover all actors in the delivery chain, guaranteeing decent work and collective bargaining rights, and ensuring universal access to affordable, reliable services. Through a unified EU Delivery Act, postal trade unions seek to modernise and fairly fund postal networks as services of general economic interest that underpin Europe's territorial cohesion, social inclusion, and economic participation.
- **Education:** Member States must invest adequately, meeting the widely recognised benchmarks for education of 6% of GDP and 20% of public spending, and ensure robust, democratic governance and effective social dialogue with education trade unions at all levels. This is essential to maintain high quality, equitable and democratic education systems. This investment should ensure that education and research are based on respect for professional autonomy and academic freedom, and provide quality jobs, including fair wages, good working conditions and sustainable workloads, high-quality initial and continuous professional development, and respect for professionally appropriate qualification standards for all their workers. The education and research sectors require strong national public frameworks that promote and support the provision of high quality, inclusive, equitable, public education that is accessible to all (and that, where contextually applicable, provide for re-municipalisation).

## Conclusions

The ETUC calls on the European institutions and Member States to ensure a decisive commitment to universal, rights-based and high-quality public services as a pillar of democracy and the European social model.

Ensuring high-quality public services is a necessary condition for Europe to achieve its objectives of economic and social progress, as well of preparedness and fair mobility, and to fully implement the European Pillar of Social Rights. Supporting high-quality public services should be a key objective for the European institution. The ETUC calls on the European Commission to ensure that this objective is included in the preparation of all relevant policy and legislative initiatives. The ETUC, with the support of its affiliates, will continue to engage and reinforce its initiatives on the objectives and areas of action highlighted in this Resolution.



The ETUC reject austerity policies that weaken public services and undermine the European social model, and reiterates its call for an urgent suspension and revision of the EU economic governance rules that structurally limit the ability of states to adequately finance and invest in public services.

The ETUC will continue to mobilise for quality jobs in every sector and in every region, including in public services. The Quality Jobs Act must be delivered as a matter of urgency and tackle quality jobs deficits head on.

The ETUC supports the mobilisation of EPSU on 23 June, UN public service day, to celebrate the work of public service workers, to resist austerity and commercialisation of public services and to increase visibility and support for our demands.

The ETUC will amplify with determination its affiliates' actions, mobilisations and campaigns for high-quality public services, including in the area of remunicipalisation (or 'reinternalisation', 'reconquest', 'reintegration of outsourced services'...) and continue to advocate the role of public ownership in order to better guarantee equal access to public services for all.