



PSI sectors critical to implementing climate change policies

Regardless of the outcomes of the Paris negotiations, public sector workers need to be directly involved in finding and implementing the solutions to the climate crisis.

Local and regional government (LRG) workers are especially critical, as more than half of humanity now lives in cities, and the rate of urbanization is accelerating. Changes are needed to make our cities equitable, safe and environmentally sustainable. PSI affiliates in LRG have the potential to help develop, implement and scale innovative, climate-friendly, fair solutions and policies to respond to the challenges of urbanization. Any sustainable solution must address the problems of slums, which trap hundreds of millions in conditions of desperation. We will have sustainable and resilient cities when residents have universal access to core public services, such as waste collection and recycling, water and sanitation, transport, energy, health and social services, education, and when public sector workers are treated with dignity and respect. Among the key issues for local and regional governments is finance. The 20-year experiment with decentralization has brought decisions about services closer to the people who receive them, however, this process has not been accompanied by decentralized tax powers or guaranteed financing. Thus, most city and municipal governments are starved for funds. This will be further aggravated by the investment needs for moving to low or zero carbon communities. As it stands, the majority of so-called “green funds” appear to be oriented towards market-based solutions.

For the **health sector**, climate change is stretching already limited health systems and staff, especially in developing countries. Warmer weather allows the spread of more diseases. More frequent and severe storms cause more injuries and deaths and displace more people. Wildfires grow in intensity and severity. Droughts damage the ability of countries to ensure appropriate nutrition. These realities require that governments strengthen health services and hire and train more health personnel, in a sector where there is already a global shortage of qualified staff. Again, relying on market dynamics will not solve the problem, as most threatened populations are among the poorest, unable to afford private health services. The health sector is involved in initiatives for green hospitals to limit medical waste and develop new forms of disposal for toxic chemical and radioactive waste while searching for safer chemicals. Healthcare workers can advocate for and support these initiatives while demanding safe workplaces and safe working conditions.

In the **energy sector**, serious conversion towards renewable energy requires coordinated action between local, regional and national governments. The current model of government subsidies to private corporations has too many flaws: it allows excessive profiteering; it does not ensure universal access to energy services, and it is not sufficiently integrated into the dynamics of the communities that rely on these energy services. Many of the jobs in renewable energy are precarious and the workers are not organized. More needs to be done to deal with the power of the fossil and nuclear lobbies, which continue to promote unsustainable solutions, including in developing countries. A number of unions have joined the global campaign against hydraulic fracturing (fracking) for natural gas and oil. We need to add the practice of coal seam gas mining, which, similar to fracking, has significant environmental impacts. PSI is working with the Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED <http://unionsforenergydemocracy.org/>) on the range of issues facing the sector.

In the **water and sanitation sector**, our work has resulted in a global push towards re-municipalization and the growing acceptance of the [alternative of public-public partnerships to the neo-liberal PPPs](#). The re-municipalized utilities demonstrate their abilities to integrate social and environmental issues more easily

than under for-profit manager. This work depends on solid alliances between trade unions and civil society organizations.

Even if we are able to limit global warming to 2°C, it is clear that we must adapt to the new climate reality, which includes more frequent and extreme weather events. PSI's work on [emergencies and disasters](#) is designed to raise awareness amongst our unions of the need to prepare public service workers for the increased burdens they will face. Public service workers are called in to deal with more aggressive hurricanes and floods, more frequent wildfires, new and stronger diseases, etc. Unions representing first responders and frontline workers will need to engage in more advocacy to ensure that their members are adequately protected. This is another area where privatization will not deliver. Special attention needs to be paid to developing countries, as it is clear that the poorest will suffer the most.

Ongoing PSI climate change and related initiatives

Many PSI affiliates are actively engaged in the move to low-carbon economies. Some have developed guidance tools for workers already affected by the transition - to help in collective bargaining and advocacy in order to defend the rights and interests of their members. Others have developed sectoral briefings to influence policy decisions in their countries. PSI is gathering these materials and placing them on the PSI website under a section dedicated to climate change for all affiliates to access and to promote and disseminate their experiences and good practices.

- **PSI Unions wishing to share their good practices on a socially sustainable transition to low and zero carbon economies and green jobs can share their materials on the PSI website by writing to David Boys, Deputy General Secretary, at climatechange@world-psi.org.**

PSI campaigns that support climate solutions

A number of **ongoing PSI campaigns** relate to the changes required to meet the challenges of climate change.

PSI's [global advocacy on tax justice](#) relates to public finance, which must play a central role in solving the climate challenge. Corporations must not be allowed to continue to shift profits to tax havens and avoid billions in domestic taxes. We must renew the push for a financial transaction tax, which could also be applied to environmental and social justice agendas. These approaches to financing should replace the current misguided expectation that [privatization and public-private partnerships](#) will provide the funds needed.

PSI is mobilizing to ensure that the capitalized **pension funds** for public sector workers do not fall into the trap of increased privatization and financialization of public services. As well, these funds should ensure that all the corporations in which they own the shares implement responsible tax policies and practices. A number of pension funds already have progressive climate investment guidelines, which can be shared among affiliates.

PSI's campaigns against the current round of so-called ["free trade" deals](#) are aimed to ensure that governments retain the necessary policy and regulatory tools to address societal issues, including climate change. These new deals will seriously limit government policy options for dealing with climate change, as they will firmly entrench corporate privilege and capture of economic and political space.

PSI has been lobbying within the United Nations in order to ensure that the new **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs), now known as **The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, enable universal access to quality public services. The 70th General Assembly of the United Nations recently adopted the SDGs, and the work now will focus on developing indicators and measurements for all the targets under the 17 overarching goals. Challenges remain on specifics around proposals for Social Protection Floors (SPF), as well as a number of sector-specific issues.

Regrettably, the [Financing for Development](#) Summit in Addis Ababa in July 2015 did not produce progressive and innovative policy recommendations. Thus, PSI needs to continue to push back against the global initiative to have the private sector finance public infrastructure and services.

The effects of global warming are likely to lead to more **conflict**, as people are forced to migrate in order to survive. Access to and control over natural resources may become more conflictual. Armed conflict is creating more refugees, putting pressure on all levels of governments. PSI's current work on migration can be adapted to deal with these issues.

Time to act: now!

The UN climate negotiations have been going on for many years. The scientific evidence is irrefutable, global coordinated action is urgent if humanity is to avoid cataclysmic environmental crisis. Even if the UN negotiations fail to reach a binding agreement, governments must move - this is what people across the globe demand, and governments must listen and must act. PSI and its affiliates can provide important contributions to the many challenges we face, not only from global warming, but also systemic inequality and injustice. The perspective that we bring, focusing on universal access to quality public services, is fundamental for people and planet.

More information:

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Public Services International (PSI) is a global trade union federation representing 20 million working women and men who deliver vital public services in 150 countries. PSI champions human rights, advocates for social justice and promotes universal access to quality public services. PSI works with the United Nations system and in partnership with labour, civil society and other organisations.