



UN Habitat Second Global Stakeholder Forum - Nairobi, Kenya 3-4 June 2023

**Submission by the Workers and Trade Unions Major Group
Delivered by Public Services International (PSI)**

(3 June 2023)

Thank you very much Chair,

Public Services International (PSI) the Global Trade Union Federation with a direct membership of over 700 national unions, representing over 30 million workers in 154 countries, territories and international institutions, two-thirds of whom are women. We are a member of the Trade Union and Workers UN Major Group and of the General Assembly of Partners (GAP) of Habitat III.

I have a mandate to speak on behalf of the whole global trade union movement, representing a direct membership of over 210 million workers worldwide. But first and foremost I am here to bring you the voice of PSI members, who daily deliver vital, life-saving public services across the spectrum of local, municipal and community services, including social services, health care, essential public utilities of water, sanitation, electricity and solid waste management, as well as public and social housing, green and public space maintenance, urban planning, and many more.

You can see many of PSI members in public services professions on the [video slideshow](#) displayed on the plenary screen. Our members are the experts and professionals of urban policy implementation and public service delivery; the employees of Local and Regional Governments (LRGs) – the constituency of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG).

They are the ones in the trenches to deal with the multiple crises we face – from pandemics, poverty, war and violence and extreme climate events. Many of them work under difficult conditions, with precarious jobs and lack of social protection mechanisms, including Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) measures, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and necessary working tools. Over 50 years of austerity measures to shrink government to the smallest size possible means that understaffing in key public services has become endemic. Many countries deny public servants the right to join a union and bargain collectively over their working conditions, on which the quality and access of public services often depends, in violation of the UN Charter of Human Rights.

Yet, since this morning, in this Second UN Habitat Stakeholders' Forum, no one has mentioned – not even once - workers and trade unions as key stakeholder to UN Habitat and its work. As opposed to business and the private sector, which have been mentioned profusely, with a much larger space to talk.

Trade unions are not just any stakeholder or civil society group. We are not NGOs, advocacy groups, or lobbies advancing a cause through private donations or business resources. We are global, democratic, membership-based organisations and a global progressive movement. Our resources come from the dues workers pay out of the wages they earn in exchange for their labour.

Trade unions have existed since before the creation of the UN. PSI was founded in 1907 by European municipal workers unions representing urban lighting and urban space maintenance. Trade unions

have been a party to the creation of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 1919, to which we are Constituents and Social Partners.

Unions are not about “*leaving no one behind*” and viewing the poor and workers in informality as recipients of help. We are about addressing structural inequalities and advancing social justice through creating Decent Work opportunities - as per the ILO definition - and through enabling equitable access to quality local public services for all, so that workers themselves, their families and their communities can be empowered to lift themselves out of poverty with safe, productive and meaningful work. This is a transformative, empowering, progressive bottom-up approach.

Yet we continue to be invisible and frankly ignored by UN Habitat. We have not been invited to be part of SAGE. Our Assembly in World Urban Forum 11 was initially cancelled and we had to fight tooth and nail to get it re-opened. We never managed to meet with the UN Habitat Executive Director, despite multiple letters co-signed by General Secretaries of three global union federations.

Nevertheless, we continue to stay engaged and work to improve our multilateral institutions. Therefore, our recommendations for meaningful involvement of Workers and Trade Unions in UN Habitat include the following:

1. Ensure the appropriate recognition and attention by UN Habitat for our members expertise and professionalism in all local government services and as key actors in confronting the current multi-crises.
2. Meaningful, systematic inclusion and consultation of Workers and Trade Unions in UN Habitat urban policy formulation and implementation and in strategic expert groups (e.g., we have expertise on digitalisation/smart cities, SDG11/sustainable cities, housing, LRG funding, waste management and water systems, public transport, climate change and disaster, etc.).
3. UN Habitat should review examples of other UN agencies where such involvement already exists, notably the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), UN Water and GWOPA and draw inspiration from those.
4. Create an adequate space for regular, continuous dialogue between LRG authorities - via the Global Taskforce and UNACLA and local public service workers’ unions – PSI – over local public service delivery and LRG policy formulation and implementation.

I include below a link for an article on these proposals and as Workers and Trade Unions group we request that these recommendations be duly incorporated in the final Declaration from the Second Stakeholder Forum and related conclusions and follow-up that will emerge from this process.

- [Inclusive multi-level governance: the case for the meaningful involvement of local and Regional governments and public service trade unions in the multilateral system of the future](#) – UCLG-PSI (2023)