



## REGIONAL REPORT TO IAMREC – SEPTEMBER 2021

### ➤ Subregions

#### **Mexico, Central America and the Dominican Republic**

- Progress in vaccination is uneven among countries in the sub-region. While countries such as Costa Rica, El Salvador and Panama already have more than 35% of their population fully vaccinated, and the Dominican Republic and Mexico at more than 25%, others report very little progress. This is quite worrying given the increase in the incidence of delta and lambda variants. Guatemala and Honduras have not yet reached 5%.
- The daily struggle against labour rights violations continues. Governments in the sub-region continue to directly challenge the basic rights of trade unions including the right to collective bargaining. As a result, labour relations remain at an unfortunate impasse.
- The decentralisation processes of central administrations have regressed in some countries, which has affected the autonomy and budgetary sovereignty of municipal governments, in turn impacting local and municipal workers.
- The political situation in Nicaragua under President Daniel Ortega and his wife Rosario Murillo (Vice President) has provoked warnings from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHCR) on the serious violations of human rights. Between the end of 2020 and the beginning of 2021, the current government has promoted the approval of a set of laws aimed at criminalising the political opposition and restricting human rights. The IACHR and the UNCCRC call on the government to restore citizens' freedoms and rights and to promptly find a negotiated and peaceful solution to this new political crisis that has its origins in 2018.
- The approach of the government of El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele, who has the Executive, Legislative and Judicial branches under his absolute control are also worrying. PSI's affiliates from El Salvador have been expressing great concern and calling for international intervention.
- Guatemala is also experiencing a complicated political situation. In August 2021, there were a series of demonstrations, blockades and permanent blockades by the peasant, indigenous and trade union sectors, who are standing up to fight corruption. PSI's Guatemalan affiliates have played a leading role in the battle against corruption, in the struggle to promote ILO Convention 190 and against the increased precarization of working conditions.

- There has been notable progress on the implementation of a progressive strategy to involve young people in some important activities, especially on issues such as trade union development, the climate crisis, tax justice, digitalisation and information and communication technologies.

## **Brazil**

- On 7 September 2021, the date on which Brazil celebrated its 199th anniversary of Independence, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro and his supporters organized antidemocratic demonstrations. These events were focussed on Brasilia, Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The president himself spoke out against the Supreme Court (STF) - which his supporters threaten to close. His supporters have also made clear that they will not accept the result of the 2022 presidential elections, in case of defeat. In reaction, left-wing forces also took to the streets on the same day, albeit in smaller numbers. There is much apprehension about the upcoming events and actions of the president and his allies. At the same time as he retreats, bowing to pressure from the judiciary, media and population, he incites his supporters to radicalise.
- In March 2021, PSI Brazil filed a complaint with the Organization of American (OAS) States Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). This formal request for a 'Precautionary Measure' was based on the results of PSI's national survey on working conditions in the pandemic - conducted from March to July 2020 as part of the international "Safe Workers Save Lives" campaign - a survey by the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (FIOCRUZ). PSI's request for a Precautionary Measure requested six specific measures. The request has not yet been evaluated by the IACHR.
- A large number of Brazilian trade union organisations continue to face serious financial and political crises due to the 2017 Labour Reform, which, among other measures, abolished the system of dues collection without establishing alternatives for trade union financing.
- The pandemic in Brazil has continued to decline in recent months, with a decrease in the moving averages of cases, hospitalisations, and deaths. The delta variant is expected to spread precisely as the economy is being fully reopened in most states. About 34% of Brazilians are fully vaccinated against covid-19 (70 million people), while about 66% have received the first dose. A booster dose for the elderly began to be offered in September. There is no scheduled date for the start of this booster for health professionals.
- It is necessary to highlight the strikes for vaccines organized by PSI affiliates SINDSEP - when municipal education workers struck for 120 days, and won - and SIEMACO, when urban cleaning workers struck for 24 hours, but unfortunately did not achieve the right to be included in the priority public for vaccination.
- Brazilian Congress passed a law providing for the payment of compensation to health professionals who are unable to work because of covid-19 (Law 14.128) in March 2021. The law was drafted at the initiative of the PSI-affiliated National Confederation of Social Security Workers (CNTSS), basing their justification (in part) on data from the PSI and FIOCRUZ surveys mentioned above. President Jair Bolsonaro vetoed the law, but the presidential veto was overridden in Congress.

Bolsonaro then appealed to the Supreme Court, claiming there is no provision for funding. PSI will intervene in this lawsuit as *amicus curiae*.

- Brazil's SUBRAC was held on July 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> 2021. 106 trade unionists participated: 67 women and 39 men. The activity was also attended by PSI's general secretary Rosa Pavanelli and Interamerica's regional secretary Jocelio Drummond. Three newly affiliated trade union organisations were also present: the São Paulo Doctors' Union (SIMESP), the São Paulo Union of Workers in Cleaning, Conservation and Urban Cleaning Services Companies (SIEMACO), and the Confederation of Municipal Public Service Workers (CONFETAM).
- By consensus and acclamation of all participating organisations, SUBRAC Brazil approved support for Geici Maiara Brig, leader of Brazilian affiliate, SINTRASEB and member of the Coordination of the Brazilian Young Workers' Committee, to become a member of the Global Young Workers' Committee after comrade Vinicius Saldanha, from Brazilian affiliate SINPSI, formally resigned.
- Among the challenges for the next period are the restructuring of the trade union movement, the struggle against privatisation that attacks many sectors (such as water, energy, food, health and education), the defence of services and public policies that still persist, the breaking of the patents on vaccines against covid-19, the change in the course of tax reform to achieve Fiscal Justice, the struggle against PEC 32 (Proposed Constitutional Reform) that proposes an "Administrative Reform" that could destroy public services and against the Tax Amendment, the change in the course of tax reform to achieve Fiscal Justice, the fight against PEC 32 (Constitutional Reform Proposal) that proposes an "Administrative Reform" that could destroy public services and against Constitutional Amendment 95 that froze public investments for the next 20 years. Progress will also be sought in the negotiations in municipalities and states for the ratification of ILO Convention 190. And finally, it is necessary to fight to prevent President Jair Bolsonaro from carrying out the coup d'état he promises to carry out, and to join forces to defeat him in the 2022 presidential elections.

## **North America**

- The 20-year US war on Afghanistan has been a devastating mistake. It has come at an enormous cost to the Afghan people and to the United States and to all countries involved. After more than \$2 trillion, countless deaths and broken lives, Joe Biden has finally fulfilled his promise of withdrawal, the manner in which it has been done, however, without a prior evacuation of those whose safety would be at risk under Taliban rule, is shocking.
- The application of a third dose of the covid-19 vaccine is starting in the United States and other countries on the continent, a morally questionable move, since the vast majority of the world's countries - the poorest - still have a very low rate of vaccination of the first dose. So, it would be more ethical to distribute the vaccines to these countries. In epidemiological terms, global vaccination is the most efficient strategy to prevent the emergence of new, more transmissible variants and thus end the pandemic. Joe Biden has recently signed an executive order requiring all federal employees to be vaccinated.

- A serious issue in the United States with respect to the pandemic is the high percentage of people who have never been vaccinated and will not be vaccinated, despite the fact that the US is once again experiencing an increase in covid-19 cases and deaths due to the relaxation of restrictive measures and the spread of the delta variant. Canada is also seeing a significant denialist movement although not as strong as in the United States
- Back-to-school is a topic of wide debate in the United States. The debate over vaccination and mask wearing has become an intense political debate in many parts of the United States. Both the AFT and the NEA have taken positions in support of mandatory vaccination for teachers and education support staff.
- In Canada, the discovery of the remains of children on the grounds of former residential schools has provoked widespread reactions. In May, the remains of 215 children were found at the Kamloops Indian Residential School in British Columbia in western Canada, which closed in 1978. In June, the Cowessess First Nation reported the discovery of 751 unidentified graves on the grounds of the Marieval Indian Residential School in the province of Saskatchewan. These findings have led to further investigations into the abuses that occurred at these schools.
- More and more union leaders in North America are participating in trainings on digitisation. There is a need for more and more education on the subject with a goal of bringing the decisions on digitalization to the bargaining table..

## **Caribbean**

- Unfortunately, the Delta variant has been plaguing the entire Caribbean. Countries that had previously recorded relatively low numbers of COVID-19 infections and deaths are now seeing new waves, spikes in infections, increased deaths and many more cases of community spread. This is also a blow for already exhausted health systems – especially the under-resourced health workforce. The increased presence of the variant is linked mainly to the re-opening of the tourism sector.
- Vaccination rates vary widely among Caribbean countries, with some countries more advanced - for example, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago, which have started vaccinating girls and boys from the age of 12 - while others are moving more slowly - for example, Jamaica. Vaccine hesitancy as well as a vibrant infodemic are creating major challenges for health officials.
- Mandatory vaccination has been pushed by the private sector in the tourism, restaurant and retail sectors. and other public places. In a few countries, there is mandatory vaccination for public sector workers, such as teachers. Coercion is widespread, and legislative changes in some countries allow for mandatory vaccination or testing.
- The sub-region is preparing for participation in global and regional events. One of these is the Caribbean Workers' Forum II scheduled for September 15 to 18. The theme is "Re-imagining the New Normal. The online conference is organised by the Elma Francois Institute for Research and Debate of the Cipriani College of Labour & Cooperative Studies, in partnership with the Ministry of Labour of Trinidad and

Tobago, the Caribbean Congress of Labour (CCL), the Caribbean Office of the International Labour Organization (ILO), Public Services International (PSI) and The Global Labour University (GLU).

- The other event is UNCTAD XV, hosted virtually by Barbados from October 3 to 7. PSI is a member of the International Civil Society Facilitation Group (ICSFG) that organises the Civil Society Forum prior to the Conference. PSI is represented in various panels during the CSO Forum and the Gender and Development Forum.
- In recent months the sub-region has been able to engage with regional bodies in developing the Caribbean's climate justice agenda, through the Climate Justice Project. In addition, on-going research as part of the Union to Union project has provided spaces for affiliates and the sub-regional office to add the workers' voices to the Caribbean's position going forward to CoP 26 in Glasgow.
- An issue to be discussed in PSI is Up until July 2021, Haïti had not received any COVID-19 vaccines. Then there was the assassination of the president. An earthquake in the country's south-west districts closely followed by Tropical Storm Grace further contributed to an overwhelmed and demoralised public service. It is critical to evaluate previous efforts, to strategize and renew PSI's and affiliates' efforts to strengthen public services unions in the country.

## **Andean Countries**

- The covid-19 pandemic remains a central problem in the countries of the sub-region. The pace of vaccination is generally slow, with Ecuador reaching almost 50% of its population vaccinated, Colombia around 30%, Peru and Bolivia around 25%, and Venezuela just over 10%. The emergence of new strains means that a new peak is expected in October. Despite these low rates of vaccination, Andean governments have opted for an almost complete end to restrictive measures to combat transmission. Once again, the debate over whether the economy is being prioritised over the health and the lives of the population is apparent. This situation suggests that critical socio-economic conditions will continue to deepen.
- Most governments in the sub-region have been applying neoliberal economic policies, giving a greater role to foreign investment, Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), and austerity in the public sector. Austerity implies either the reduction of the state and the number of workers, or the freezing of the latter's salaries. All measures taken by governments have had disproportionate impact on women and young people.
- Some economists and progressive forces promote other kinds of measures, such as more investment at all levels of the economy and in state workers, as well as the adoption of a basic income. These are the types of policies can contribute to a real economic revival.
- In the midst of these difficulties, collective bargaining for state and public service workers remains a priority. Significant progress in bargaining has only been made in Colombia.

- Between the end of 2020 and the first months of 2021, presidential elections took place in three countries in the sub-region. In Ecuador, the neoliberal right emerged victorious, while left/progressive governments were elected in Bolivia and Peru after periods of deep political crisis.
- Pedro Castillo's election victory in Peru has led to a conversation among PSI affiliates, who, in order to take advantage of the window of opportunity, drew up a platform with ten proposals for the new president, with a focus on workers and public services.
- In Venezuela, a process of negotiation and dialogue has been established in the last period between the opposition and the government. Labour relations dialogue has resulted in a rapprochement on labour-related solutions.
- An extreme right-wing government in Colombia is about to come to an end. The current government has treated the April 28 2021 social outbreak as a war, resulting in serious human rights violations by the security forces. Following strong international pressure, the country was visited by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), which produced a report with fundamental recommendations to protect human rights. It is necessary to put pressure on the Colombian government to discuss and accept these recommendations.
- Fiscal and tax policies are once again occupying an important place in public debates in various countries, given that resources are needed to address the difficult social situations generated by the covid-19 pandemic. Once again, the debate is between continuing to apply regressive fiscal and tax policies or opting for new progressive sources of revenue, taxing large fortunes, the financial sector, multinational companies and eliminating the multiple benefits for investment, as well as putting an end to tax evasion.
- Gender-based violence has worsened in all Andean countries during the pandemic, which suggests the importance of continuing to promote the ratification of Convention 190 and Recommendation 206 with greater force. Currently Ecuador is the only country taking concrete steps towards ratification.
- Finally, there is evidence in the Andean countries that the relevance of care services has increased. Care workers have had to deal with the pandemic, which has provoked reflection on direct lines of action to strengthen our work with the workers in these services, always under the premise of guaranteeing them decent work.

## **Southern Cone**

- During 2021, the health and economic crisis produced by the covid-19 pandemic dramatically impacted the way we organise work and our lives all over the planet. Specifically in the Southern Cone, since last year countries have experienced an increase in unemployment and informality and has exposed weaknesses in labour legislation to deal with new forms of employment in the public sector, such as telework, temporary work and telecommuting. This is coupled with an acute care crisis and an increase in gender-based violence in the countries of this sub-region.
- For those who have kept their jobs, the problems have been linked to having to accept salary reductions (in the case of Paraguay's energy sector) and the violation of rights

promoted by the intensification of the use of technologies and/or the modification of traditional workspaces and working hours. These transformations have affected the physical and mental well-being of workers.

- Governments in the Southern Cone have adopted various measures aimed at mitigating the effects of the pandemic on the economy, work, income, the care crisis and gender-based violence. However, with some exceptions, the measures have been insufficient.
- Argentina is the country that has suffered the worst economic crisis, with a 6.5% increase in poverty, and inflation of over 40%. This has impacted the purchasing power of workers whose bargaining processes and outcomes have worsened. The progressive government of President Alberto Fernández is going through a difficult time, which has allowed the growth of right-wing factions that promote the neoliberal discourse of the 1990s.
- Chile is currently experiencing its unprecedented constituent process (with gender parity and plurinationalism), the result of the social revolt of October 2019, which has given Chileans new hope of defeating the orthodox neoliberalism that the former dictator Augusto Pinochet implanted with blood and iron. The National Coordinating Committee of organisations affiliated to PSI has carried out permanent lobbying work with the constituents in 2021 and has continued to demand in parallel an end to the violation of human rights and the rejection of the "tie-in" laws that the government of President Sebastián Piñera has tried to pass before the new Constitution in order to strengthen the neoliberal model imposed during the dictatorship.
- As part of this work, the Coordinator launched a document with Constitutional proposals from public sector unions on June 23rd. The proposal has three fundamental axes: quality public services with decent work; a progressive tax system that makes it possible to finance public services; and the social and economic valuing of care work, with its recognition as a human right in the new Constitution.
- In Paraguay, the outlook is one of worsening problems in the management of the health crisis, the economic deterioration of the country, and elements of corruption in the management of resources dedicated to dealing with the covid-19 pandemic. The latter has led to social tensions and citizen demands that have provoked political instability which was expressed at the beginning of the year with massive protests.
- In the midst of the growing conflict with Paraguayan workers, some struggles found a way out during this period. This is the case of health workers, particularly nurses, who played a fundamental role throughout the pandemic and achieved a longed-for law regulating Nursing. The law establishes new levels for professional development with a transparent and formalised character.
- In Uruguay, the workers of the Obras Sanitarias del Estado (OSE), which is part of FFOSE, in addition to taking care of the country's sanitation services in times of crisis, have been organising to achieve better working conditions through strikes, mobilisations and occupations of different workplaces. These mobilisations demand, among other things, increased staffing levels, administrative career paths on equal terms, and more stable budgeting for civil servants. Workers are also fighting attempts to privatise and outsource public services.

## ➤ Sectors

PSI Interamerica continues our sectoral organizing in the Inter-American region. The next steps towards consolidation of this work are yet to be determined. There is currently a diversity of organising models, as described see below:

### EDUCATION

- Affiliates in the Inter-American region participate in the Global Group, which has Steve Porter as its organiser. In addition, university support staff workers in Latin America organise CONTUA.

### HEALTH

- Health is the least structured sector in the region. We need to improve our regional organization, as all affiliates in the sector are invited to global events but there is still no regional coordination. The proposal is to elect a Regional Health Coordination, composed of two titulars and two substitutes from each sub-region, to respond to global demands, support national struggles and coordinate actions when necessary.

### MUNICIPAL WORKERS

- Affiliates in the sector participate actively in PSI's global activities. In addition, CONTRAM was organised in Latin America, which facilitates coordination between trade union organisations in the sub-regions of the region.

### WATER AND ENERGY

- Workers in the water and energy services are organised separately in Latin America through CONTAGUAS and the PSI Energy Network. In the electricity sector, there is also coordination by companies, with which we have signed global framework agreements.
- We need to establish coordination with the Caribbean and North America.
- We are currently undertaking the organisation of solid waste workers in Latin America.

### OTHER ORGANIZING

- Latin America is the only region where we have organised workers in the judiciary, state control bodies and tax authorities. We have no contact at the moment with the workers in the legislative branch and customs.



## ➤ Regional Work

### Gender equality and equity

Two areas have been integrated into the work of the region in a cross-cutting manner

- [Reconstructing the social organisation of care](#)  
The pandemic generated an economic crisis and a crisis in care, at the heart of which is the historical work of women, as the main and "natural" responsible for the integral reproduction of life. The World Women's Committee took the decision in 2020 to make a strategic shift in the understanding of care, the causes and consequences of the care crisis and a proposal on how to confront this crisis by putting the importance of care on the public stage and shifting the debate from the care economy to the social organisation of care and its reconstruction.
- The Regional Women's Committee has been an active participant in the actions that PSI has undertaken on this issue in four areas:
  - a) Global governance level during the 65th session of the UNCSW,
  - b) The Equality Generation Forums in Mexico and Paris; and the follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action.
  - c) Global Partnership for Care promoted by the government of Mexico and UN Women
  - d) Manifesto for Social Reconstruction of Care
- At the regional level, [studies](#) have been carried out on the impact of the pandemic on public service workers, with particular emphasis on gender impacts and the care crisis in Mexico, Costa Rica, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Argentina and Paraguay.
- The emblematic case is Chile, where the Women's Committee, together with the country's affiliates, presented [a proposal](#) to the Constituent Convention to include the human right to care in the constitution and, from there, to politically include the proposal for the reconstruction of the social organisation of care, from a perspective of a public system, decent work and multiculturalism, a proposal that is included in the study that was carried out on the material.
- Violence and harassment in the world of work: Three countries in the region have completed the process of ratification of ILO C190: Uruguay, Argentina and Ecuador. There are ongoing processes in other countries following public commitment made by several governments such as Canada, Barbados, Mexico, Costa Rica, Panama; as well as PSI advocacy work in Guatemala, Chile and Peru to move the legislative agenda in this direction.
- The campaign for the ratification of C190 has been developed with a focus on research, training and on identifying ongoing mechanisms through which the content and provisions of C190 can enter into force, beyond ratification, for example through collective bargaining and national social dialogue.
- At the level of the sub-region of Central America, Mexico and the Dominican Republic, a study on Feminicide was carried out, the only one of its kind, which puts the importance of assuming the problem as part of trade union gender agendas in the regional debate, especially as teleworking seems to be here to stay and the world of work has unified the private and public spheres.

### Regional Committees

PSI Regional Young Workers Committee

- Young workers are on the frontline. Whether in the streets, fighting against neoliberal and genocidal governments throughout the Americas, or at work, with new technologies, high unemployment rates, precariousness, and privatisation of public services. In this aspect of facing challenges and transforming society, PSI's young workers, with the support of international cooperation projects, with different and complementary approaches, continue to work to empower affiliates in each sub-region. The FORSA Project, focusing on communication and research on legal frameworks, the DGB Project, focusing on advocacy in PSI structures and international spaces, the FES Project on digitalisation and the future of work, and the Union to Union Project on climate change. This Committee is moving forward with the organisation of transversal actions that go from the local to the regional level. In this framework, the Inter-American Virtual Young Workers Festival will take place in December 2021, a space for visibility, art and struggle of young workers in the region.

### PSI Regional Committee of LGBTI+ Workers

- This Committee has developed an important tool that strengthens education and advocacy work. The 'Guide to Inclusive Spaces', which has been translated into several languages, constitutes an instrument to achieve true respect, inclusion and access to rights for all people and to eradicate prejudice and confront discrimination in the world of work. However, there continues to be a need for greater visibility in the workplace, in trade union agendas, and in collective bargaining instruments for inclusive public policies that guarantee rights and promote and increase participation in decision-making. In 2021, the Committee held the first virtual LGBTIQ+ Pride Parade with wide participation from all sub-regions, which demonstrated once again that colours and diversities are increasingly raising their voices for social justice.

### PSI Regional Committee to Combat Racism, Xenophobia and All Forms of Discrimination

- This committee has strengthened strategic alliances with GAW-Global African Workers and national indigenous associations. The Committee organized a virtual public event on the International Day of Afro-Latina, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women. Additionally, within the framework of the DGB Project, the Committee will promote an education course called 'Equal Opportunities in the World of Work: Recognising and Confronting Structural Racism', which will contribute positively to provide workers with training and possibilities to collectively reflect on racism and its impacts. The organisation of indigenous peoples within PSI has begun, and in November 2021 the first Inter-American encounter of indigenous peoples will take place.