



Public Services International (PSI)
**“Perspectives from the world of work, the informal sectors and indigenous peoples
in the effort to tackle plastic pollution”**
ILO INC 5.2 multistakeholder side event

Geneva: August 4, 2025, 14:20-15:10
Location: Palais de Nations, Assembly Hall

Mr. Chair, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, dear Colleagues and Friends,

Thanks to the ILO and to the Government of Switzerland for inviting us to this panel discussion.

Public Services International (PSI) is the Global Trade Union Federation representing over 30 million public service workers worldwide. Our members – a majority of whom are women - work across at all levels of government. They operate national and local utilities. They are waste collection, sorting, management, recycling and disposal workers, as well as those who work in water and sanitation. They are your nurses, your firefighters and emergency workers.

The workers we represent are directly exposed to the hazards of plastic pollution and its toxic chemicals and additives either because plastics makes up their working tools, uniforms and protective gears; and/or because the removal and safe disposal of waste – including plastic waste - is part of their daily jobs.

Many of them work in extremely dangerous and poor working conditions that are comparable to those of waste pickers, even when they are technically considered as “formal” – but in many countries there is a large grey area between “formal” and “informal” employment.

We welcome and value the inclusion of the voices of waste picker and indigenous workers as their perspectives bring long-overdue visibility to precarious and informal labour. We are proud that earlier this year in Geneva we negotiated side-by-side with the International Alliance of Waste Pickers the text of the [ILO Policy Guidelines for the Promotion of Decent work in Recycling](#) in the interest of all workers.

However, we find the substantial absence of organized labour from the Chair’s text, UNEP processes and conversation around the Instrument problematic and deeply troubling. The non-inclusion of organized labour – which is the global, collective and institutionalized representation of all workers - is a *de-facto* form of de-institutionalisation of labour and industrial relations.

This is why we continue to ask that the reference in the Preamble and in the other relevant sections of the text should be consistently to **“all workers along the full lifecycle of plastics, in all forms of employment be them in the formal or informal economy, including waste pickers and other vulnerable workers”**. There should not be an overfocus on the downstream part of the supply chain only; and we should not establish a hierarchy of vulnerabilities and priorities among workers, who are all concerned or affected both in their livelihoods and health.

Similarly, we demand an **explicit mention in the text to “Occupational Health and Safety (OSH)”**, which is integral to the core objective of the treaty: the protection of human health (and of the environment). The instrument cannot effectively protect human health if OSH is not mentioned and meaningfully addressed in the text. There needs to be a reference to the existing **ILO fundamental OSH conventions: C. 155 on**

[Occupational Safety and Health; C. 187 the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health](#) and [C. 170 on Chemicals](#), which provide the internationally agreed standards to ensure the right to a safe and healthy working environment for all workers and have already been agreed through a tripartite process involving states, workers' and employers' organisations the social partners.

We agree with the IAWP representative that the text under **Article 10 on Just Transition** as it currently stands is very general and voluntary, whereas we need a clear, mandatory framework for countries to refer to as they deal with a massive social transition. We demand among others that:

- States submit yearly National Just Transition Plan reports;
- the creation of a multilateral fund to finance a Just Transition;
- the inclusion of trade unions in the treaty's governance architecture; and
- social indicators to monitor progress, as we not only need to measure how much plastics is eliminated but also how many decent jobs are created and informal jobs formalised, so we can turn the scourge of plastic pollution into an opportunity to create decent work.

Finally, we need a bolder vision: the plastic pollution crisis is not going to be solved by vulnerable workers in extremely poor conditions working on informal dumpsites, by start-ups and voluntary clean-up days. We need to open up and zoom out the focus from informal waste workers and the downstream plastics value chain.

What we need is a **modern, safe and effective waste management system (Article 8)**. For that we need **public investment**, including the resources raised through the **taxation of producer companies as per the polluter's pay principle** – to **(re)build adequate waste management infrastructures and hire and train the necessary staff and employ them in decent conditions**.

This (vision) needs to include water and sanitations facilities that are safe for users, workers and the environment, as if there is one single thing that can cut plastic waste by tons right away is direct access to safe, drinkable in homes and communities.

These utilities need to be public and operated in the public interest, not for profit.

Thank you.