

“Strong local public services for a safe world” UCLG – PSI Joint Statement in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic

The global Covid-19 pandemic has as a universal health crisis exposed the fragility of our consumption and production patterns. At the same time, it has highlighted the critical role of local and regional government (LRGs) services in times of crisis. Millions worldwide are turning to their closest level of government – their local authorities and their frontline staff – seeking guidance, support and responses to the major threats to their health and livelihood they face.

Local public services are holding our societies together and covering basic needs but they will also be critical in mitigating the consequences of the crisis and in re-building the aftermath. There are many services which are key pillars for the successful management of the sanitary crisis, these include water and sanitation; waste collection and disposal; energy; emergency services; social/elderly/disability care; social security and employment; local public administration; municipal police; public/social housing and shelters; body handling and burials; childcare and day nursery (crèches), and many more.

In a nutshell, quality public services are a cornerstone of social cohesion and a precondition for business to operate and trigger inclusive local economic development. Listening to the voices of LRG workers and engaging in structural dialogue with their organizations and unions is crucial to effectively tackle the current crisis and prepare for the aftermath.

Recalling the spirit of the *UCLG Decalogue for the Post COVID Era*¹ and acknowledging the great sacrifices made by local and regional government staff worldwide while securing the continued provision of essential public services, UCLG and PSI call their respective membership to:

- Engage in constructive dialogue and collective bargaining to find shared solutions to guarantee essential service continuation, while maintaining the highest standards of safety for public service workers and users, including all possible steps to provide adequate PPE to all LRG workers according to the specific needs incurred by their professions.
- Refer and implement the reviewed ILO Guidelines on decent work in public emergency services² to adequately protect workers on the front lines of the coronavirus response. Where not yet done, jointly urge central governments to adopt and uphold them as national policy.
- Ensure adequate service staffing levels, training and decent working conditions to guarantee continued public service delivery.
- Release or redeploy non-vital public service staff. Redeployment should be consensual and come with adequate training, PPE and conditions.
- Ensure health care and social security coverage, medical testing and treatment and address work exhaustion and psychosocial risks for all LRG frontline workers, including sub-contracted workers.

¹ UCLG, [Decalogue for the post COVID-19 era](#), Barcelona, 2020

² ILO, [Guidelines on decent work in public emergency services](#), Geneva, 2018

UCLG and PSI also call on national governments, multilateral and international/regional financial institutions to:

- Provide adequate resources to LRGs to mitigate the aftermath of the crisis and support recovery from the pandemic. Invest on a priority basis in ever stronger, quality public services with universal access to ensure a swift recovery and avoid a post Covid-19 social and environmental catastrophe.
- Set the legislative and policy frameworks to empower LRGs with long-term financial sustainability - including via stronger municipal taxation systems and the access to adequate financing- and the accessibility and affordability of essential services for all to beat Covid-19 and effectively confront future crises.
- Listen to LRG leaders and to workers organizations and unions in the design and implementation of recovery strategies to deal with Covid-19 aftermath. LRGs should have a voice at the table in the building of national strategies to ensure that the legitimate needs of their local communities are adequately addressed.
- To foster recovery, bailed out companies should be required to integrally fulfil their social and environmental obligations, generate quality employment and re-invest profits in territories where they are established, contributing to social and environmental sustainability.
- Introduce a tax on digital services and a financial speculative movements tax ensuring that a fair share is channelled to the territories most in need and used in strengthening the resilience of public services.

The experience of the Covid-19 pandemic calls on all levels of government to draw lessons from this tragedy and re-think roles and priorities, redesign policies, reallocate resources and power, prioritise dialogue and cooperation to ensure the future resilience of cities, territories and communities by re-building strong and sustainable local public services in the crisis aftermath.

Only together, hand in hand, governments, community's workers and all actors will we be able to ensure a better future for all where the sacrifices asked from this and future generations contribute to a sustainable planet. UCLG and PSI stand ready to contribute to foster dialogue towards that transformation.

United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) represents over 250,000 cities, regions and metropolises as well as more than 175 local and regional government associations worldwide. **Public Services International (PSI)** is a Global Union Federation of more than 700 trade unions representing 30 million workers in 154 countries, including local and regional government workers.