GLOBAL PSI OSH NETWORK
(draft concept note for consultation)

Background and rationale

- Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) is a core trade union activity and an almost exclusive turf of trade unions, regulatory state agencies and public health authorities. OSH is often the key entry point to open construtive social dialogue and collective bargaining with employers, showcase the value of social dialogue with unions and build trust in the process. Simple OSH trainings, guidance and check lists can have an immediate, beneficial, transformative and empowering effect on workers and workplaces, especially for women and vulnerable workers. When they exist or can be set up, joint OSH workplace committees are the main entry point and training ground for union building.

- Public service workers face many specific challenges to access labour and trade union rights, including OSH rights. Many public service professions face daunting risks due to the nature of their jobs and are particularly exposed to a wide range of both physical and psychosocial hazards, including third-party violence as they deal directly with service users. Some public service jobs can be particularly dangerous by default (e.g. waste collection and disposal, water and sanitation, public emergency services; green space, public building and road maintenance; public emergency workers; firefighters; burial services; nurses and medical janitors; social care services; culture and library workers, etc.). Many others are user-facing jobs and can be subject to psychosocial risks. Climate change and the multi-crises the world is going through affect public service workers OSH conditions directly, with new and re-emerging threats (e.g. heat stress, zoonoses, spread of vectors of disease to new areas, etc.)

- Public service unions have a long tradition of expertise, trade union education and training in OSH. Some of them still have dedicated OSH leads who have extremely valuable expertise that PSI can leverage and build upon, cross fertilise and refer to in its advocacy at the ILO, WHO, UN Habitat and other international policy and standard-setting organisations as well as with employers. This expertise is especially precious at time of new emerging and re-emerging OSH risks.

- New OSH challenges have emerged for public service workers (1) during the Covid pandemic, (2) with the fast rise and largely unregulated development of digitalisation and AI at the workplace, and with (3) the climate crisis. At the same time, old risks ones have become much more apparent. For example, during Covid, waste workers – already at great risk of contamination and disease in normal times – have had to collect and dispose of contaminated medical waste, while disinfecting public space, sometimes with no PPE, very poor and inadequate means and scant access to vaccines and other protective OSH measures. Nurse and firefighter unions, among others, are very active and focussed on OSH.

- In 2022 the International Labour Conference approved the [right to a safe and healthy working environment as the 5th fundamental principle of Decent Work](#) as intended by the International Labour Organisation (ILO). This means that as of now, even ILO member states that have not ratified key OSH conventions have an obligation to comply with them to all workplaces - both in the public and private sector - and the obligation to respect, fulfil and promote OSH covers both workers' physical and mental health.

PSI work on OSH:

- PSI has generally worked on OSH on an ad hoc basis, notably at the WHO with a specific focus on nurses, health and care workers. At the ILO, PSI played the leading union role in the negotiation of the ILO Guidelines for Decent Work in Emergency Services (2018) and on the development and the ratification campaign of ILO [Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment (2019)](), and has developed education materials around the latter.

- This work continued with the PSI work in support of the inclusion of OSH and in support of public service workers at the [International Negotiation Commission for an international Treaty on plastic pollution at UNEP (2022-2025)](); the [ILO Standard Setting Commission on Biological Hazards (2024-2025)]() that led to [Convention 192]() and its accompanying [Recommendation 209](); the negotiations of the [ILO Policy guidelines for the promotion of decent work in recycling]() that attracted the attention of the ILO OSH department. PSI has also recently developed a [Trade Union Guide on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Public Services]() in collaboration with the ILO, and is now working on a baseline study on the OSH situation of Public Emergency Service (PES) workers with its OSH Department. Besides, PSI is currently developing OSH training materials for care workers (both formal and informal) in collaboration with the Global Labour Institute (GLI).

- PSI Regions and Projects have local initiatives and resources on OSH, but we currently are yet to build a full picture of these and connect them to build a common baseline. EPSU has been always active on OSH and is building its own EPSU OSH Network.

- All GUFs have started or are starting engagement around OSH issues within their industries and with their corporate employers. BWI has had a long standing OSH policy and activities. IndustriALL and ITF are currently setting up global OSH networks.

A Global PSI OSH Network: an opportunity to build global union power in public services

- The area of OSH and the unique expertise angle PSI affiliates bring to it represent an exclusive wealth of global and cross-sectoral knowledge that can be turned into actionable union power. Together, we can exercise this power collectively to demand institutions, employers and decision makers to uphold the highest standards for healthy and safe workplaces for all public service workers worldwide. Building a Global PSI OSH Network is therefore an important opportunity to:
  1. Engage, convene, inform, consult and mobilise affiliates around OSH issues
  2. Pool together PSI affiliates' OSH expertise and resources and build PSI' unique space in the global OSH community
  3. Build a network of public service union OSH experts and practitioners who can be rapidly mobilised to inform and influence multilateral, regional and national organisations (e.g. the WHO, ILO etc.); work with the ITUC and other GUFs as needed; and respond to public health emergencies (e.g. covid, M-pox, etc.)
  4. Share and develop OSH materials and good practices among public service unions (e.g. articles, manuals, resources, fact sheets, workplace assessment checklists, etc.) and make them readily available for PSI unions on the PSI website with a dedicated page
  5. Identify key OSH issues and events to monitor and act upon
  6. Build joint OSH campaigns, advocacy and initiatives to help protect public service workers in concrete manners at their workplaces
  7. Use OSH to engage employers and negotiate and win better working conditions
  8. Seize opportunities for resources among programmes (e.g. the UN Chemical Convention Framework) or donors sensitive to this critical labour issue

Format and Next Steps

- For a start, we propose: (1) holding an annual Global PSI OSH Network session (if needed repeated across 2 different time zones to ensure maximum participation) with work carried out in between; (2) building a database and distribution list of PSI unions OSH experts, practitioners and interested members; and (3) building an OSH web-page on the PSI website where to make OSH union resources easily available in different languages.