



**PUBLIC SERVICES
INTERNATIONAL**



In a World of Multiple Crises
PEOPLE OVER PROFIT
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Forced Displacement in the Context

of

CONFLICTS & CLIMATE CHANGE



Middle East and North Africa: Public Service Workers Addressing Forced Displacement, Conflicts and Migration

Background

Over the last decade, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has faced serious economic and political crises: from the collapse of the economy and banking system in Lebanon, political upheavals and union repression in Tunisia and Algeria, and rising incidents of poverty and inequality in Jordan and across the region. As if life could not get any harder, the COVID-19 pandemic struck in 2020, further exacerbating the hardships of the population. Home to 11.8 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), 9 million refugees and host to more than 40 million migrants, the region is also a global hotspot for climate change. Projected to see a temperature rise by two degrees that will result to increasing water scarcity, drought and desertification, loss of jobs and livelihoods and more conflicts and violence, the climate crisis in the MENA will see unprecedented levels of forced displacement and migration in the coming years. In a region that is gripped with on-going economic, social, political and environmental crises that are exacerbating poverty, inequality and forced migration, it is crucial to strengthen the trade union movement and to support workers' solidarity. However, the low level of awareness and misperceptions about migrants and refugees as "competitors" for jobs and social services presented a barrier in the full inclusion of refugees and migrant workers in unions. It was high time to change this scenario.

In Forced Displacement: Public Service Workers Promote Human Rights and Deliver Quality Public Services Escalating conflicts, climate change, loss of livelihood, extreme poverty and hunger continue to drive forced displacement to unprecedented levels each year. Amidst all these, public service workers are on the frontlines braving the impacts of climate disasters and conflicts. They save lives and deliver essential services to communities. PSI upholds the human rights of all migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons to access human rights and quality public services. We fight for the rights of public service workers to safety, decent work and social protection. We amplify the voice of workers and communities to socially just and equitable transition, climate justice and well-funded quality public services

The Project and its Partners

In 2018 to 2022, PSI unions in the MENA Region embarked on a Project on Human Rights, Trade Unions and Quality Public Services for Refugees and Migrant Workers, in partnership with PSI Swedish Affiliates (Vårdförbundet, ASSR, ST and Vision) and Union to Union. The project aimed to build the capacity of public service trade unions in addressing migration and refugee issues from the human rights-based perspective.



PSI Leaders site visit to a dispensary for refugees in Bekaa Valley, Labanon in 2019 (Photo PSI)

The project involved 4 countries, namely, Lebanon, Jordan, Tunisia and Algeria. These countries have been dealing with large movements of migrants and refugees for many decades.

Workers' Power, Union Values and Social Dialogue for Social Justice

By reinforcing union values and building workers' power, trade unions can take up their role in correcting injustices and work in social dialogue to pursue an inclusive, gender-responsive, human rights-based trade union agenda that puts people over profit. Such agenda includes the most vulnerable part of the workforce, i.e. refugees and migrant workers who are often concentrated in informal and precarious work, with no access to rights and representation and no social protection.

Key Strategies carried out:

Capacity Building, Advocacy and Organizing – The project engaged union leaders and members in evidence-based and participatory research, outreach and field visits to refugee and migrant communities, training workshops on international human rights norms and labour standards, organizing drives, advocacy events, and campaigns with a view to increasing union members' understanding of migrant and refugee rights, promoting inclusion and fighting racism and xenophobia.

Networking and Alliance Building at the National Level – PSI established a Trade Union Network for Migrant and Refugee Rights Activists in the MENA and joined other networks and civil society alliances in defending migrant and refugee rights.

Influencing Regional and Global Policy through Solidarity-Building - PSI unions in the MENA engaged in regional and global policy advocacy on migrant and refugee rights, such as the UN Global Compact on Migration and the UN Global Compact on Refugees, in alliances with other Global Unions and civil society.

Project Outcome The project contributed to building the capacities and creating awareness of PSI Affiliates

in Tunisia, Algeria, Lebanon and Jordan on migration and refugee issues. It increased understanding of migrant and refugee rights among trade union leaders and members. The unions changed their perception towards migrants and refugees from that of indifference to sympathy and solidarity, thereby including migrant and refugee rights in their trade union agenda. As a result of the project, PSI unions in the MENA joined networks and built alliances with civil society and the wider trade union movement to defend the human and labour rights of migrant and refugee workers, promote their access to quality public services and fight racism and xenophobia. Throughout the project, the unions carried out numerous activities and produced materials for organizing, advocacy and lobbying.

Moving Forward

Conflicts and the climate crisis will continue to drive forced displacement in the MENA region. Thus, in the next five years (2023-2027) the project will continue to strengthen the role and capacity of public service unions in defending human rights, climate justice and access to quality public services for refugees and migrant workers. Key strategies will include implementation of the recommendations from previous research, taking on a sectoral approach in union advocacy, promoting social dialogue and organizing of workers, development of information, education and communication (IEC) materials, training and capacity building, advocacy and alliance building.

Public Services and the Triple C's: Covid, Conflicts and the Climate Crisis

Public Services and the Triple C's (Covid, Climate crisis and Conflicts) present the biggest challenges to public service workers who are on the frontlines delivering life-saving public services.

In the midst of economic, social, political, health and environmental crises, public services have always remained as the fabric that hold societies together. Investments in health care, social care, disaster management and response, clean water, sanitation, public infrastructures and all range of public services are the only way that societies, migrants, refugees and their host communities can adapt to the 3C's and build resilience. Public service workers and their unions play a unique role as they are the ones providing the essential services to refugees, migrants and their communities, while they also defend safe and decent working conditions, trade union rights, and access to social protection for workers. They are the main advocates in defending access to quality public services for everyone.

The project is implemented in partnership with:



Nigeria: Unions Defending Human Rights, Climate Justice and Quality Public Services for internally displaced persons (IDPs)

Background

Nigeria, with a population of 213 million people, is the third country in Sub-Saharan Africa that has the highest population of IDPs. Since 2009, violent clashes between government troops and the Boko Haram Islamic extremist group have affected 14.8 million people in the northeastern part of the country, covering Adamawa, Gombe, Borno and Yobe States. The conflict has claimed an estimated 20,000 lives. In 2018, 2.2 million people have been internally displaced, including among them public service workers. IDPs lived in camps and some lived in host communities. Public facilities such as schools, primary health care centers and government buildings were vandalised. Health workers were killed or kidnapped by the insurgents. Workers were displaced and traumatized. Workload has become unbearable, as health workers work 24-hour shifts. Basic public services like schools and hospitals were overstretched. There was no adequate social protection for affected workers. Health and social care workers in the camps were not provided with any benefits, and many of them were also internally displaced. Nigeria has a draft national policy on IDPs emanating from the 2009 African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons (Kampala Convention) and guided by the UN Guiding Principles on IDPs. For more than a decade, the policy remained pending approval by the Federal Executive Council. Absent the policy, government's response to displacement was fragmented, uncoordinated, inadequate and non-transparent. Civil society pressure was diffused due to lack of coordination. Unions were not seen nor recognised as stakeholders, even though they represented the workers who were critical in the delivery of services, and whom many of them were also IDPs.



PSI Unions with the UN Special Rapporteur on IDPs at the Rally for the Kampala Convention in Abuja in 2019 (Photo PSI)

Climate Crisis: Invest in Quality Public Services, Not in Migration
We have seen in the pandemic, disasters and conflicts how essential it is for public services to remain available, accessible and universal. Migration is not the core solution for adaptation to climate change. Not everyone wants to migrate, to be separated from their land, culture and livelihood. Often, it is the poorest and most vulnerable who are unable to migrate or would not want to migrate. Our core adaptation strategy must first and foremost be about allowing people to stay, to adapt and build resilience. Funding for loss and damage due to the impact of climate change must go to building quality public services for developing countries. Investing in public services is the best strategy for societies, displaced communities and host and least developed countries. Communities to adapt, build resilience, and pursue equitable and sustainable development.

The Project and its Partners

In response to the situation, Public Services International (PSI), with the support of U2U and PSI Swedish affiliate, ASSR, initiated the project in 2018 through 2022. The aim of the project is to build the capacity of PSI health and social care sector unions, namely, the National Association of Nigerian Nurses and Midwives (NANNM) and the Medical and Health Workers Union of Nigeria (MHWUN) to defend the human rights of IDPs to quality public services. The project covered the Northeast states of Nigeria, namely Borno and Yobe, which together host around 1.7 million IDPs, as well as the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), which is the seat of government and host to some 7,000 IDPs who managed to reach the capital. The project has seen very successful results:

- PSI health and social care sector unions built the capacity to engage the government on the issue of internal displacement, and over time gained recognition as important stakeholders on the issue. The unions engaged the government in social dialogue on broader social issues, such as, IDP workers' human rights, access to quality public services and advocated on universal right to health, including access to covid vaccines for everyone. PSI unions engaged with all critical stakeholders to advocate for the domestication of the Kampala Convention and through vigorous lobbying, saw the successful adoption of the Nigeria Convention and through vigorous lobbying, saw the successful adoption of the Nigeria
- Upon the invitation of PSI, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs came to Nigeria. The presence of the Special Rapporteur highlighted the role of public service unions in defending IDP rights and brought weight towards the passage of the IDP Policy.
- Building union power is key to organizing workers, including IDP workers, representing them and winning workers' rights. Through the project, the unions carried out project

activities improving the conditions of health and social care workers on the frontlines.

- In the midst of the covid pandemic, PSI health and social care sector unions carried out the "Safe Workers, Save Lives" campaign, calling for safety and decent working conditions for frontline workers through the provision of protective personal equipment (PPE's), training on infection prevention and control (IPC), distribution of health and safety posters and leaflets, and vigorous awareness campaigns in the hospitals, health facilities, IDP camps and in the communities. Around 250 health workers benefited from the training in Borno and Yobe states.
- To respond to the workforce shortage, the unions were able to negotiate with the state governments of Borno and Yobe to hire an additional 150 health workers, and 300 Nurses and Midwives, whom the unions were able to recruit as new members.
- The unions negotiated with the Borno and Yobe state governments for the safety and security of health and social care workers, ensuring that workers only report to health facilities that are guaranteed safe from attacks, provided workers with safe accommodation near the health facilities and ensured security escorts when health workers have to travel to remote areas to carry out their duties.
- The unions successfully negotiated for the release of delayed salaries and payment of hazard allowances and indemnities.
- For the health workers who were infected with covid, the unions mobilised support services, including financial support and food subsidies for the workers and their families. All these proactive measures were crucial in controlling the spread of the infection and minimizing the negative impacts. Despite the widespread infection, death rate among the workers was very low.
- When the 2 young female nurses were abducted by the Boko Haram in April 2021, PSI affiliate NANNM, mobilised and pressured the government, and won the safe release of the 2 nurses.
- The project developed the *Trade Union Charter of Rights and Charter of Demands on the Rights of IDPs to Quality Public Services*, which was transformed into a manifesto that solicited support from a broad range of stakeholders. PSI unions used the charter as basis for lobbying and advocacy at state and federal levels towards the passage of the Nigeria IDP policy. The charter is an example of how unions address broader issues, such as the human rights impacts of forced displacement from the perspective of social justice, access to public services and human rights.



PSI visit to the Wassa IDP Camp in Abuja in 2019 (Photo PSI)

The Way Forward

While the project has been very valuable in building the capacity of PSI unions, it concludes in 2022 when internal displacement in Nigeria remains a major problem. From conflict displacement, Nigeria is moving into climate displacement as it struggles to deal with storms, flooding, droughts, other climate calamities and resource-related conflicts resulting to the displacement of millions from poor communities.

Thus, a new project is launched in the next five years (2023-2027) with the objective to strengthen the role and capacity of public service unions in addressing internal displacement from the perspective of human and labour rights, climate justice and access to quality public services.

The project is designed to carry out strategies at two levels:

- 1) At the policy level, by bringing the voice of PSI unions in addressing the broad issue of internal displacement, driven by conflicts, climate change and other disasters.
- 2) At the practical level, supporting unions in fighting for improvements in the conditions of public service workers on the frontlines who are affected by conflict and the climate crises.

The project is implemented in partnership with:



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