

## Our digital future: launch of three-year project



(14 May 2021) On 11 May, over 160 trade unionists from across the world participated in the online launch of “Our Digital Future”, a three-year project run by EPSU’s global sister organisation Public Services International (PSI).

The project is supported by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) which is linked to the Germany Social Democratic Party and backs many trade union initiatives around the world. Mirko Helseg of FES kicked off the meeting by highlighting the way that some digital trends have delivered positive benefits during the pandemic but warning also of the threats to public services and democracy and the over-reliance of big tech companies.

PSI general secretary Rosa Pavanelli thanked the FES for its support and noted that public administration is one of the sectors facing the biggest impact from digitalisation with the process posing fundamental challenges about working in the public interest. Public authorities of all kinds need to have the resources and expertise to deal with data management, protection and privacy while trying to ensure they are not at the mercy of the multinational contractors that dominate the sector.

Deputy general secretary Danny Bertossa also announced the launch of PSI's action guide on digitalisation that focuses on four key areas that would feature in the "Our Digital Future" project:

- the impact of digitalisation on the workplace in terms of a broad range of issues such as jobs, training, surveillance, data privacy and telework;
- the effect on public service provision and the importance of the public authorities developing their own digital tools;
- the major question of data rights across society and the need to regulate international data flows; and
- the need to improve the capacity of trade unions to exploit digital processes to help recruit, organise and respond to the challenges posed by digitalisation.

## **Training**

Digital expert Christina Colclough would be playing a key role in the project and the training of trade union leaders, workplace representatives and new digital rights organisers (DROs). She explained that the project would aim to build union expertise so that PSI affiliates would be able to lead the public debate on digitalisation and respond effectively to issues such as the widespread and growing use of artificial intelligence. She argued that trade unions need to play a key role in providing safeguards against the indiscriminate use of algorithms without checks on their impact of workers, services and citizens.

Christian Daigle of the SFPQ Canadian public service union and Nigerian tech expert Ridwan Oleyede also joined the debate, citing their experiences around trying to regulate digital processes through collective action or legislation.

Christina rounded up the discussion, saying that the project would support PSI affiliates in developing research, advocacy and coalition-building and that DROs would play an important role throughout the project both in relation to their own trade unions but also in supporting other PSI affiliates in their country and region.

### **Looking for digital rights organisers**

All PSI affiliates have been approached to nominate DROs for the project and to participate in the training. For the European region EPSU has already been active in recruiting DROs and would be following up with affiliates between now and the first training course. The three, three-hour training sessions are set for 15.00 (CET) on the 1st, 8th and 15th of June.

If you wish to nominate someone as a DRO or would like more information on the project please get in touch with Richard Pond ([rpond@epsu.org](mailto:rpond@epsu.org)) who will be EPSU's contact for the project.

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