



**COVID-19 GLOBAL
SURVEY:
Protecting Workers'
Rights in a Time of
Crisis**



Foreword

**by Christy Hoffman, UNI Global
Union General Secretary**



Many UNI members are on the front lines and face great risks. Workers caring for the elderly, cleaners and security officers, workers in grocery stores and all centers, postal workers, are all essential for society. They bravely face the risk of infection every day.

Others are seeing their careers and futures put on hold. In television and film production, activities have ground to a halt. And the World Players have lost entire seasons in some sports.

UNI has been busy in the recent weeks reaching out to affiliates to hear the word from the ground up. We want to share unions' successes and support their battles to protect their members. We want to bring our collective power to bear in our sectors in order to achieve standards which apply to workers across the world. The coronavirus does not respect borders and our challenges require global solutions.

About two weeks ago, before the virus had spread so widely in all continents, UNI initiated a survey of its affiliates to take the pulse and better understand where things stand. Surpassing our expectations, over 170 unions participated in the survey, representing nearly 5 million workers, from over 60 countries, five continents and every sector. What we learned is not so surprising: Unions are making a difference for workers around the world.

The following report documents what we heard from UNI member unions.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christy Hoffman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Christy Hoffman, General Secretary, UNI Global Union

Introduction

With the accelerating spread of COVID-19, UNI Global Union launched a major worldwide survey to explore unions' responses to this devastating pandemic.^[i]

The results show the especially vital role unions play both in times of crisis and in building best practices that improve workers health and safety.

Over 150 unions participated in the survey,^[ii] representing millions of workers, from over 60 countries and five continents working in sectors as diverse as healthcare, telecommunications, cleaning and security, graphical and packaging, media and entertainment, gaming, platform and agency workers, post and logistics, finance, professional athletes, and retail and commerce.



Unions play a vital role in prevention and mitigation

COMERCIO
MEDIDAS PREVENTIVAS FRENTE AL
CORONAVIRUS

- Lavarse las manos con asiduidad
- No compartir objetos personales
- Cubrirse la boca con el brazo al estornudar o toser
- Evitar tocarnos la nariz, los ojos o la boca
- Evitar saludos con contacto
- Mantener una distancia de, al menos, un metro

La permanencia de los y las clientes en el establecimiento será la estrictamente necesaria. En todo caso, se evitarán aglomeraciones y se controlará que clientela y plantilla mantengan la distancia de seguridad de, al menos, un metro para evitar contagios

CCOO
servicios

APPELLO
ALLA CLIENTELA DEI
SUPERMERCATI
E FARMACIE

ASGB CGIL FILCAMS FISASCAT UILTUCS

ASGB FILCAMS FISASCAT UILTUCS desiderano fare un appello alla clientela che in questi prossimi giorni si recherà a fare la spesa o a comprare farmaci.

1. Andate da soli a fare la spesa nel negozio più vicino a casa.
2. Non andate nelle ore di punta. Fermatevi poco tempo a fare la spesa.
3. Attendete il vostro turno. Mantenete le distanze.
4. Le lavoratrici e i lavoratori devono essere protetti e rispettati, si stanno sacrificando per tutti.

Grazie
alle lavoratrici e ai lavoratori che sono in prima linea tutti i giorni

E DOMENICA STAI A CASA !! HAI GIÀ SCORTE A SUFFICIENZA

Over 90% of unions have been pro-actively reaching out to their members with COVID-19 information, thus supporting the global prevention and mitigation effort.

This widescale effort has been widely appreciated by workers, and also been well received by several employers as described by the Colombian union Asociación Colombiana de Empleados Bancarios (ACEB) which “has sent communications to all banks in Colombia, calling for measures to protect workers’ health during the pandemic, and in general, banks have responded by implementing these protocols.

Some banks even thanked ACEB for their intervention. "Other unions, like Comisiones Obreras in Spain, have rolled out a series of videos and graphics explaining to members—especially those who work in commerce, employers, and the public the measures that must be taken to prevent the virus’ spread.



In every sector, COVID-19 is disrupting workers' lives

A significant proportion of unions say that workers have had their workplaces shut down or hours cut. The entertainment industry, which has a number of precarious workers in the best of times, is especially hard hit.

Numerous countries have shut down events, live venues, cinemas, and theatres, putting scores of workers out of a job. The Schweizer Syndikat Film und Video (SSFV) in Switzerland reports of "cancellation of filming (cinema, TV, advertising)."

More than half of the unions reported that their members are faced with forced/voluntary isolation (51%) and having to work from home (53%). Coupled with this, 60% of their members have had to cope with school closures. And this number is climbing dramatically by the day.



Collective bargaining strengthens the social safety net in a time of crisis

With widespread closures and disruptions, collective bargaining is making a difference: 90 per cent of respondents indicate that workers get full pay thanks to a collective bargaining agreement in case of workplace closures, quarantines and other disruptions, which prevent people getting to work such as school closures or transportation stoppages.

The Federation of Labour Bank Workers' Unions of Japan reports: "As a result of school closures, union members taking care of their children can take leave without worry. . .they can take leave on a special paid leave basis."

In multiple countries, unions are reporting successful collaboration between social partners, as described in Denmark by Finansforbundet Denmark where the union has "very good cooperation with employers, and in all fairness, they are acting quite decently in this situation."

In other countries discussions are ongoing, such as reported in the United Kingdom by ACCORD: "daily discussions with employers - some progress is being made."

While some economic sectors are grinding to a halt, pressure grows on others

Significantly, 15% of respondents indicated that workers have seen their workload or hours increase. Much has been written about strains on healthcare staff, grocery workers, and delivery service employees, but increased activity can be found in other sectors, such as commercial cleaning and in contact centers.

For example, the Sindicato de Trabajadores Obreros/as de la Empresa Innova Ambiental S.A. in Peru notes, “We are in a state of emergency, but we are carrying out cleaning tasks as essential workers.” Some unions point out this increase may only be temporary.

For example, the National Association of Letter Carriers in the United States reports that “hours have increased somewhat because e-commerce volume has increased (about 30%). However, the U.S. Postal Service is expecting a massive decrease in mail volume because so many businesses have closed. We have not seen this impact yet, and this may end up decreasing work hours.”

Shortages for personal protective equipment are global

Union members who continue to work are overwhelmingly impacted by jobsite shortages of personal protective equipment such as masks, gloves, sanitizing wipes. Over 60% of respondents reported that this was the case.

For example, the Korean Health and Medical Workers' Union are among the many who spoke out about these shortages and are actively campaigning for more trainings, equipment, and health and safety meetings with their employers. Working during this crisis is taking a toll on union members. NSZZ Solidarność Commerce in Poland, for instance, speaks of the “stress caused by working non-stop with customers who might be infected.”





Unions are on the frontline in pushing employers to improve occupational health and safety policies

Over 70% of respondents said they were negotiating or campaigning for paid sick leave, additional sanitation/health training, health insurance coverage for all, protective equipment, or other measures.

This ranges from the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union in Ghana demanding basic safety rules and protections at worksites to unions in Austria, Belgium, France and Peru successfully securing workers' salaries during shop closures.

In Peru, a union representing security officers has spoken out about employers not allowing voluntary isolation or providing protective equipment.

In Italy, Amazon workers who are members of Filcams-Cgil are striking to demand that

the company impose stringent health and safety procedures.

In addition after this immediate crisis has passed, a resounding 83% plan to push for permanent reforms to conditions in the workplace and health and safety legislation including improved paid sick leave, expanding mobile working policies, ensuring the right to disconnect, and more benefits for contracted workers.

The U.S. Service Employees International Union has launched its massive #ProtectAllWorkers campaign targeting elected leaders on every level and CEOs of major corporations. And in Korea, healthcare workers are calling for National Infection Prevention Hospitals, a National Graduate School for Public Healthcare, and more staff in public hospitals.

When the workplace becomes the home, the right-to-disconnect matters more than ever

With millions of workers now working from their homes, the right-to-disconnect is more pressing now than ever. More than half of the unions reported that some of their members are faced with forced/voluntary isolation or having to work from home. Coupled with this, 60% say their members have had to cope with school closures. And this number is climbing dramatically by the day.

Unions are fighting for job security for gig workers

For those unions representing precarious or gig workers, unsurprisingly the number one priority is job security (48%), followed by fighting for medical coverage (35%) and ensuring sick pay (33%). IATSE, the North American entertainment workers' union and UNI affiliate, is urging the U.S. and Canadian governments to take decisive action to protect the livelihoods of workers during the pandemic.



Photo credit: Sarah L Wilson photography.



Unions cannot do it alone

A number of unions are working in a crisis situation as described by one Italian union: “The emergency here is at such a high level that we are inundated by different types of requests by workers and have not enough time and resources.”

Many unions draw attention to the need for better public policies. The Philippine Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Workers Union states that “our problem is not in the workplace but on how government addresses the issue.”

The current pandemic shines the spotlight on some stark contrasts, for example in Australia the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance, reports that “Australia has a universal health care scheme that is among the world's best so medical coverage is provided by the government.”

Endnotes

i) The survey ran from March 13 to March 23, 2020.

ii) Antigua, Argentina, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bermuda, Botswana, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cameroun, Chile, Macao Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, Colombia, Croatia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Republic of Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Korea, Malaysia, Marocco, Mexico, Mozambique, Nepal, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Palestine, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Senegal, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay, Zimbabwe.



UNI
global
union

UNI Global Union
8-10 Avenue Reverdil
1260 Nyon