

## The XV GLU Conference presented the challenges to build a Post-Pandemic World of Work with Social Justice



March 30 – April 5, Online - The XV GLU Conference took place online between the 30<sup>th</sup> of March and the 5<sup>th</sup> of April of 2022, organized by the Penn State University with the support of the AFL-CIO, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the steering committee of the Global Labour University and the ICDD. After two years of cancelled conferences due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the GLU conference provided a space for academic analyses and

daily activism, a dialogue between academia, unions, informal workers and activists that has become one of the key features of the GLU. Students from around the world and from different academic backgrounds participated and intervened in panels and breakout sessions, some of them with translations from English, the official language of the event, into Portuguese, Spanish and German. The participants of the XV GLU Conference reasserted the need of global solidarity to continue the struggle for a decent work and a decent life. The war in Ukraine, the rising of authoritarian regimes around the world, the skyrocketing inflation that hits the working class, and the social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic were some of the topics discussed during the five days of online plenaries and parallel breakout sessions. The scale, scope and complexity of the challenges demand the building of transnational efforts to struggle together for better working and living conditions. The Global Labour University offered an open room for discussions and reaffirmed its role as a leading intellectual and strategic network to increase the capacity of workers' organisations, and strengthening relationships between trade unions, UN organizations, and the scientific community.

Academics and workers pointed out the changes in the world of unions. Presenters spoke about on-line platform strikes of drivers in Nigeria, taxi drivers in Russia that use apps to communicate and associate despite the authoritarian circumstances. Moreover, panelists explained the cases of communities that strive towards just transition and sustainable practices like Fuorimercato in Italy, and nurses of the Maine Medical Center of the USA spoke about the experience of creating their union in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic. Some academics from Argentina, USA, and Germany made an urgent call to transform the traditional structures of the unions, decentralize their power and potentially link with other progressive struggles like the feminist, antiracist, and environmental movements. One of the tasks is to place work as intervenient of the nature-society nexus.

Union workers, panelists and academics convene to the workers to call back the nature and environmental issues from the exclusive leadership of companies. Workers need to assess the discussions about sustainability and just transition to challenge the green-washing discourses of worldwide institutions and corporations. The ITF (International Transport Workers' Federation) presented its participation in the Maritime Just Transition Task Force, the DGB (German Trade Union Confederation) explained parts of its Revierwende project, and researchers from Latin America showed the circumstances of waste pickers in Sao Paulo and the "Cartoneros" movement in Buenos Aires. Moreover, the Global Team of Trainers and Tutors (GTTT) of the GLU Online Academy showed the potential of empowering workers with the popular education project emerged during the "Just and Green: Labour's Ecological Question" course from 2021. To include nature in workers research and activism is an urgent task that demands to look carefully the social democratic mechanisms and the care's role in society.

Workers need to review the existing democratic mechanisms and they need to advance in the demand of a full recognition of the care in order to regain agency in the discussions of climate and social crises. Conveners made the call during the Conference of being aware of the threatens to democracy in governments tending towards authoritarianism, the need of a constant review of the unions' structures to ensure democratic mechanisms inside the organizations, and the call to strengthen a global solidarity movement that shouts out against authoritarian regimes. Moreover, if societies recognized the care and the care work as cornerstones of a good life during the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, it has also shown how structural uneven conditions that ignore the care and prioritize competition and profit maximization remained untouched. To re-center care is to demand social and economic justice, to struggle for a decent life and to keep alive the discussion that strives for a workplace free of fear.

**Furter Information:**

Conference website: <https://www.fes.de/en/global-labour-university-conference>

Find information on the seven tracks <https://padlet.com/david10/glu2022>

Watch the opening plenary <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3QArHINO270>

Watch the closing plenary <https://youtu.be/hfrv5JC2rKI>