

PSA LINK

4/2021

PSA SHOP STEWARD NEWSLETTER

2021 Year of Challenges

From early in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic placed additional and extreme pressures on shop stewards, with many of them being infected and some sadly losing their lives.

These challenges peaked during the initial wave of the pandemic, with employers not complying with occupational health and safety (OHS) regulations. Shop stewards also had to deal with inconsistencies in the public sector in compliance with COVID-19 protocols. Many members were denied opportunities to work from home and those who could work from home often did not have sufficient resources to perform their duties. Shop stewards had to engage managements and enforce rules and regulations in relation to the implementation of remote working and rotational work arrangements. In addition, there were ongoing issues with OHS compliance. Some workers continued to work in buildings that are not properly ventilated, with no social distancing, no access to clean water, etc.

2021 did not bring relief. Staggered work schedules owing to COVID-19 are a challenge. Shop stewards are unable to have face-to-face meetings with members and connectivity remains a challenge for many members. There is also an impact on the completion of disciplinary processes with hearings often being postponed owing to reported infections, etc.

The distribution of personal protective equipment at some institutions, especially health facilities, remain a worrying factor. The COVID-19 vaccine rollout also continues to pose challenges.

In addition, public-sector employees have been denied two consecutive salary increases. The PSA, however, remained undeterred and was the first Union to take the non-implementation of the 2020-salary increase to the courts. The Constitutional Court hearing on 24 August 2021 is eagerly awaited. The PSA empowered shop stewards with information by means of various methods to ensure that information is shared whilst members' work life remains disrupted. The PSA's wide media coverage during this period further assisted in spreading the Union's messages.

Developments in 2021 further enforced the PSA's stance that collective bargaining is clearly under attack. In the wake of a 0% -salary offer for public servants this year, the PSA is preparing to mobilise members in support of their right to fair remuneration and in protection of their negotiated benefits. In this process, shop stewards will once again play a critical role. The PSA values the selfless contributions of the Union's shop stewards in service of members.

