

## • COUNTRY INFORMATION SHEET •

# HONDURAS



## GENERAL COUNTRY DATA



**Surface Area:** 1112.490 km<sup>2</sup>



**Total Population:** 9.354.894 (2020)



**Life Expectancy:** 76 años



**Economically Active Population (EAP):** 3.944.802



**GDP per capita (annual):** U\$S 2378

### Brief Overview of the Socioeconomic Scenario

According to its share in the total, Honduras's main commodity is coffee and coffee-containing products, with **26.8%** of exports. The remaining goods produced are far from that percentage and stand at approximately or less than **10%**, such as wires and cables, fresh, frozen and refrigerated seafood, palm oil and bananas, among others. The country's demographic structure shows a life expectancy of around **76** years (**78** years in the case of women). Unemployment was **5.7%** prior to the pandemic, and of those employed, **44.5%** are salaried workers, **38.4%** self-employed and **3.3%** domestic workers. **55.7%** of the population is poor, of which **71.7%** belong to the rural sector. Extreme poverty affects **19.4%**

of the population and, according to ECLAC, the Gini coefficient was **0.48** in 2018.

According to these and other measurements, Honduras is among the poorest countries of Latin America.

As in other countries in the region, the economic paralysis caused by the **COVID-19** pandemic has affected the most vulnerable sectors of the world of work, such as domestic and self-employed workers, especially street vendors, for whom no social protection instruments exist or are implemented. Social security is very weak in the country and there are no unemployment benefits or subsidies to buffer the drop in income of the salaried population. In other words, the system has not recognized **COVID-19** as an occupational disease. Food assistance programs are insufficient, and according to the trade union movement, their management is prone to corruption.

Initially the national government instructed a strict lockdown as health response to the pandemic, to then flexibilize the measures and adopt certain safety protocols, the implementation of which was the responsibility of companies themselves and did not have the necessary scope.

## Main Violations of Workers' Rights

**As in the other the countries of the region, Labor law is recognized by the Constitution of Honduras, in addition to a Labor Code that establishes the main regulations that govern labor relations.**

Honduras was a member of the ILO between 1919 and 1938, and has been a member from 1955 to date. It has ratified **26** international conventions: all those referring to Fundamental Rights **(8)**, plus **3** on Governance, and 15 technical conventions.

The latest observations made to Honduras by the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEARC) (2019) have related to non-compliance with Conventions **42** (occupational diseases), **81** (labor inspection), **87** (freedom of association, especially, the cases of murders and other acts of violence against unionized activists), **100** (equal remuneration) and **169** (indigenous and tribal peoples).

Special mention should be made of the breaches in working conditions and freedom of association in the so-called "free trade zones", where the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations observed deficient labor inspection mechanisms.

In general, the extreme gravity of the violations of trade union rights, with an unprecedented number of murders and other acts of physical violence, merited raising the case to the Committee on the Application of Standards of the 2019 International

Labor Conference which, in addition to pointing out other shortcomings in the country's labor protection, concluded that the legislative framework needs to be reformed - in particular, the Labor Code and the Criminal Code, in order to ensure compliance with international conventions - and called for the approval of the rules of procedure of the Sectoral Roundtable for Conflict Prevention of the International Labor Organization (MEPCOIT).

## Important Issues of the Context <sup>1</sup>

The following are among the most serious repercussions of the pandemic on labor and social policies: the intensification of the lack of labor protection materialized in unjustified dismissals and non-payment of compensation, an increase of cases of harassment and violence at work, situations that could not rely on an effective judicial control given to the difficulties to access institutional mechanisms. Similarly, the Labor Inspectorate of the Ministry of Labor has been inoperative for much of this period, thereby confirming all the observations that the **ILO** has been making to the country for many years in relation to non-compliance with International Labor Convention 81, included in the last **CEACR** report, as noted above.

There has been no collective bargaining whatsoever to allow a social dialogue on these issues, thereby intensifying the difficulties faced by workers and their organizations to protect the already precarious working conditions in many production sectors. The approval of the Law on Assistance to the production sector and workers

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<sup>1</sup> The considerations hereinafter are based on the survey to trade unions on the effectiveness of public policies in response to the COVID-19 crisis and on information systematized by the TUCA.

## Trade Union Proposals and Initiatives

in the face of the effects of **COVID-19**, addressed in decree 33-2020 dated April 3, 2020, contributed to reduce workers' protection and to increase the number of companies suspending contracts.

At the beginning of the pandemic, the Confederación Unitaria de Trabajadores de Honduras (CUT Honduras) and the Federación Independiente de Trabajadores de Honduras (FITH), affiliated to the CUT, denounced the massive suspension of maquila workers, without payment, for a period of **120** days. Eight thousand workers of the Tegra Global company informed of their suspension through notifications sent out by the company on social networks. The decision was made without a dialogue with trade unions and without mediation of a legal procedure with the Secretariat of Labor & Social Security. In February 2020, with government support, Tegra Global signed an agreement with Kattan Group in Honduras to become the main supplier in the region of the transnational sportswear and apparel brand Nike. These suspensions were followed by suspensions in the maquila sector, which in March alone had already affected approximately **20,000** workers throughout the country. The situation got worse in May 2020 with **140,000** workers affected, despite demands for the government to establish protection mechanisms for the working class.

TUCA has denounced the maquila sector as the worst example of the last link in a global production chain which establishes exploitative labor relations. Women are especially affected, especially in the textile sector where the workforce is highly feminized and work is performed in extremely precarious conditions and subject to harassment and violence.

**Trade unions have publicized their demand for improvements in the way in which the country is addressing the pandemic. They demand more hospital supplies and materials, biosafety protocols in companies and compliance with the commitments made in the framework of COVID-19, in addition to filing complaints on corruption in the health system.**

In this regard, together with a group of representative civil society organizations, CUT Honduras has publicly denounced the "ongoing looting" of State institutions, such as the Honduran Social Security Institute, the Teachers' Social Security Institute, the Retirement & Pension Institute, and others. They state: "We are all aware of the Pandora case, the network of deputies, the impunity pact [...] where leaders of the National Party, the Liberal Party and the current deputies of these political parties are accused of acts of corruption by the Public Prosecutor's Office." They add: "With outrage we received the news that a court of law acquitted these deputies of all guilt and liability." They also denounce the "big business" on occasion of **COVID-19** with protective face masks, biosecurity equipment and mobile hospitals (August 2020).

Similarly, a statement in July of this year denounced the kidnapping and disappearance of multiple Garífuna ethnic leaders who "simply defend their cultural heritage, their ancestral lands, and raise their voice against big capital [...], which has displaced them from their lands of origin". They blame "the government and repressive State entities" and demand the prompt release of social activists.



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