



VENEZUELA

A TRADE UNION FOCUS ON THE SDGS

#HLPF2022

WORKERS DEMAND A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT FOR RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE

COVID-19: WORKERS NEED DURABLE RESPONSES TO THE CRISIS

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Venezuelan government declared a state of emergency and appointed a presidential commission for prevention, care and control. With support from the UN system, a national coronavirus prevention and containment plan, and humanitarian response plan, were put in place. There was a moratorium on the payment of mortgages, rents and loans. A “stay at home” bonus to compensate the self-employed was provided until October 2020.

The pandemic exacerbated serious problems already present in Venezuela as a result of decades of poor governance and economic crisis, including a collapsed health system. Trade unions call on the Venezuelan government to urgently improve health supplies and facilities, ensure better access to Covid-19 and universal vaccination schedules, and put in place transparent and timely data collection. A sustainable recovery plan and emergency labour law are needed to generate jobs and provide a minimum income for all. Universal social protection and access to health services, as well as childcare services for essential workers, are required. Inclusive social dialogue and respect for human rights must be reinstated.

ARE TRADE UNIONS AT THE TABLE?

The government of Venezuela, continuing the implementation of the Bolivarian Revolution, has developed a series of national plans for economic and social development, each entitled “Plan de la Patria”. The government maintains that the objectives for the 2019-2025 Plan correspond with the SDGs.

However, the independent Venezuelan trade union movement is not consulted on the development or implementation of the Plan de la Patria, as the government consults only with its own supporters. Nor are there adequate mechanisms for reporting. Official, up-to-date data on SDG progress is not available; access to SDG monitoring on the national statistics office website is restricted.

Independent evaluations show that performance on social, economic, political and rights indicators has worsened in recent years. Despite some signs of growth recovery in 2022, Venezuela is still effectively in a state of economic, social and political collapse. After years of hyperinflation and economic mismanagement, the scale of poverty is such that the country is far from achieving the SDG goals. Salaries, including the minimum wage, have declined in purchasing power to the extent that they are insufficient to live on. Food insecurity and hunger are having a devastating impact, with evident signs of malnutrition among children. Retired people are particularly vulnerable as they are not eligible for food vouchers.

TRANSPARENCY



No access to information

CONSULTATION



No consultation process

SOCIAL DIALOGUE



No social dialogue on the government's SDG national plan



IS THE (DECENT) WORK GETTING DONE?

Major challenges remain to meet **target 1.1 (eradicate extreme poverty)**: in 2021, total poverty stood at 94.5 %, extreme poverty at 76.6 % and multidimensional poverty at 65.2 %. Under **target 1.3 (appropriate social protection systems)**, trade unions report that the situation has worsened since 2017 when only 54.2 % of the population were covered by at least one social protection benefit. Rights to health and benefits are enshrined in law but the government has introduced the “Patria system” for access to benefits, which excludes part of the population. With regards to **target 1a (adequate resources)**, overall expenditure on social welfare contracted significantly in 2019-2021, but still made up a significant part of the annual budget (76.4 % in 2021). There is a lack of transparency about how money is spent. Public services including the healthcare system are in crisis, and corruption is a significant problem, including in the main food assistance programme (“CLAP”).

Women and girls still face challenges in Venezuela, although equal rights and opportunities are protected by law. Access to sexual health and contraception has declined and the teen pregnancy rate has increased as a result. The pandemic also deepened gender inequalities. The ratio of female to male labour force participation was 68 % in 2021 and women still take on more **unpaid care and domestic work (target 5.4)**. Under **target 5.5 (women’s full and effective participation)**, the proportion of parliamentary seats held by women was 22 % in 2021. More women than men now complete their secondary education, but the gender pay gap persists.

Venezuela is far from reaching **target 8.3 (formalization)**; employment is becoming more informal, vulnerable and precarious. Major challenges also remain to meet **target 8.5 (full and productive employment and decent work for all)**. Unemployment stood at 6.4 % in 2021, however the inactive population was 32.1 %. The share of **young people not in employment, education or training (target 8.6)** was 22.8 % in 2017; ASI has raised concerns that the government’s “Chamba Juvenil” youth employment policy undermines the SDG 8 goal of decent work. Evaluating progress on **target 8.7 (end forced labour, modern slavery, human trafficking and child labour)** is hampered

by a lack of data, but 174,000 people were estimated to live under modern slavery in 2018, a situation exacerbated by the Orinoco Mining Arc. There are serious concerns under **target 8.8 (protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all)**. Occupational injuries are not being reported and 33 labour rights violations were reported in 2017. Workers’ and employers’ organisations that do not support the government are repressed and excluded, with systematic violations of freedom of association and collective bargaining, although social dialogue to address this is now underway following the 2019 ILO Commission of Inquiry. There is a serious shortage of labour inspectors.

Inequality in Venezuela has led to the forced migration of millions of Venezuelans in recent years. Major challenges therefore remain to meet **targets 10.4 (policies to achieve greater equality, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies)** and 10.7 (orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility).

With regard to **target 13.2 (integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and plans)**, environmental policies are in the national plan, but proper implementation is needed. Other policies are having a detrimental impact on the environment and human rights, including oil production and the Orinoco Mining Arc. Social partners are not being included to ensure a just transition.

Venezuelans live in a worsening situation of violence and insecurity. The judiciary is partisan and politicised, jeopardising **target 16.3 (promote the rule of law and ensure equal access to justice)**. With regard to **target 16.10 (ensure public access to information and protect civil liberties)**, trade unionists, journalists, health workers and human rights defenders critical of the government have been subject to arrests, attacks and ill-treatment.



TRADE UNION ASKS TO LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

To ensure an SDG-led recovery and resilience from the crisis, trade unions urge the Venezuelan government to:

- Develop an institutional framework that promotes a sustainable recovery and creates a democratic, participatory environment where human rights are respected.
- Engage in structured social dialogue, with full participation of autonomous worker, employer, and civil society organisations, to develop and implement plans to achieve the SDGs.
- Introduce an emergency labour law that addresses wages, employment and social security.
- Approve a solidarity fund with multilateral support to provide emergency income support for all active and retired persons.
- Expand social protection coverage.
- Implement a decent work and youth employment country programme within the framework of development cooperation.
- Guarantee fundamental labour rights and ratify specific ILO Conventions as requested in the social commission for dialogue, peace and national reconciliation.



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