COVID-19: WORKERS NEED RESPONSES FOR RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE

The national government’s response to Covid-19 has prioritised measures to protect lives and employment, wages and production, focussing on vulnerable population groups in particular. On 19 March, “compulsory and preventive social isolation” measures were set in place.

Despite the very fragile economic situation inherited from the previous administration, the government adopted key measures, such as: exceptional work leave; a 60-day ban on dismissals; credit lines for basic inputs; the extension of debt repayment deadlines for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises; the bolstering of unemployment insurance; extra payments of non-contributory allowances (such as the universal allowance for each child and for pregnancy); a bonus for retired persons; emergency income for small taxpayers, informal and self-employed workers; the suspension of utility service cut-offs for non-payment (e.g., electricity, gas and water); the freezing of rents and suspension of evictions, and the creation of the Emergency Assistance Programme for Work and Production. Covid-19 was declared an occupational illness.

Trade unions are playing an active part in the crisis committees, consulted within the framework of social dialogue on measures linked to the pandemic. They have also reiterated the need to work towards universal health and social protection coverage, a more progressive taxation policy, and to protect the rights further jeopardised by the pandemic.

ARE TRADE(Unions) AT THE TABLE?

Argentina’s new government, which came to power in December 2019, has mainstreamed the 2030 Agenda into its national plans. The priority sustainable development goals (SDGs) are goals 1, 2 and 6, which are being implemented through actions such as the national programme “Argentina against Hunger” and “The First Thousand Days”, a programme linked to children’s rights and nutrition.

The National Council for Social Policy, overseen by the Ministry of Social Development, is in charge of follow-up on the 2030 Agenda. Implementation of the SDGs at local level focuses on the specific needs of individual regions, and technical assistance is offered at every stage in the process.

The outgoing government organised a briefing for civil society, including trade unions, on the progress made towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, but trade unions were not given an opportunity to provide feedback on the information presented or to shape the national plans for the implementation of the SDGs. The outgoing government had, however, started a formal dialogue with trade unions on this matter, and as a result, the National Council for Social Policy organised an exchange between the different ministries in charge of the SDGs and the civil society platform “PAMPA2030”.

The new government has requested the setting up of an inter-institutional and inter-ministerial dialogue on the SDGs with the participation of civil society, including trade unions, to serve as a means of consultation on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The social dialogue structure recently began discussing the SDGs, assessing the impact of any proposed reforms on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

TRANSPARENCY

Regular access to limited information

CONSULTATION

Informal or ad hoc consultation

SOCIAL DIALOGUE

Social partners submit joint contributions to the government’s SDG national plan
ARGENTINA

• Ensure the traceability of the supply chains for food and essential goods, to stop the speculative practices that affect workers' purchasing power.

• Ensure direct support to help micro, small and medium-sized companies to withstand the sudden fall in demand (as an indirect way of protecting jobs).

• To boost economic growth, combined with active employment policies to help promote decent work.

• Ensure the effective implementation of programmes to make public investments into infrastructure and housing, as well as policies to stimulate aggregate demand, via a taxation programme.

• Strengthen the social protection system and public investment in essential services, especially health, ensuring financing and sustainability via a progressive taxation programme.

In addition, in light of Covid-19, the trade unions consider that urgent measures are required to:

• Strengthen the social protection system and public investment in essential services, especially health, ensuring financing and sustainability via a progressive taxation programme.

• Ensure the effective implementation of programmes to make public investments into infrastructure and housing, as well as policies to stimulate aggregate demand, to boost economic growth, combined with active employment policies to help promote decent work.

• Ensure direct support to help micro, small and medium-sized companies to withstand the sudden fall in demand (as an indirect way of protecting jobs).

• Ensure the traceability of the supply chains for food and essential goods, to stop the speculative practices that affect workers' purchasing power.

Argentina must intensify its efforts towards meeting target 10.4 (adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality), as between 2015-2019, the gap between the richest and poorest sectors of the population grew by 33 per cent. In 2019, the share of the top 10 per cent income earners in overall GDP stood at 32.8 per cent, as compared to the meagre 4.4 per cent share of the bottom 20 per cent.

In 2018, the government convened the fifth national climate change cabinet, in which trade unions were invited to participate. Based on a series of sectoral plans developed over 2018-2019, a national mitigation strategy on climate change was drawn up as a first step towards reaching target 13.2 (integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning).

With regard to SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), trade unions continue to report restrictions on access to justice for the most disadvantaged groups, set against the background of continuously worsening labour conditions. Between 2016 and 2018, 538 acts of repression and criminalisation against popular protest movements were registered.