




ARGENTINA

A TRADE UNION FOCUS ON THE SDGs

#HLPF2020

COVID-19:
WORKERS DEMAND
JOBS, INCOME AND
SOCIAL
PROTECTION

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



IS THE (DECENT) WORK GETTING DONE?

Against the background of recurrent economic crises, resulting from the implementation of erroneous economic policies (over-indebtedness, capital flight, public spending cuts, etc.), there has been a downward trend in the progress towards meeting the SDG targets. The new government is trying to reverse this trend, but is confronted with various obstacles, such as the unsustainability of Argentina's foreign debt.

With regards to SDG 1, the indicators for **target 1.1 (eradicating extreme poverty)** have worsened. Multidimensional poverty affected 37.5 per cent of the population in 2019, increasing by 8 points since 2010. This is largely a product of the decrease in real household income and the resulting impact on access to food and healthcare. While 66.1 per cent of the population was covered by at least one type of social protection, only 9.8 per cent of the unemployed were receiving support, making **target 1.3 (implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures)** a difficult target to reach. In 2019, 63.3 per cent of government spending was dedicated to essential services (health, social assistance, social security, education and culture, science and technology, work, housing and urban planning, drinking water and sewerage), but within the context of ever-shrinking GDP and high inflation.

To progress with the implementation of **SDG 5 (gender equality)**, on taking office, the new government created the Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity. Women in Argentina perform nearly twice as many hours of unpaid domestic labour as men, suggesting challenges for reaching **target 5.4 (recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work)**. With regard to **target 5.5 (ensure women's full and effective participation in political, economic and public life)**, in 2017, 65.9 per cent of women aged 25 or over had completed at least some secondary education.

With regard to **SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth)**, progress on reaching **target 8.5 (full and productive employment and decent work for all)** has been stalled, as unemployment levels grew to 9.7 per cent in 2019, with youth unemployment being particularly high – 17.9 per cent for men aged 14-

29 and 22.6 per cent for women in the same age bracket. Thirty-five per cent of workers receive a salary below the legal minimum.

In addition, 35 per cent of workers are in the informal sector, with their work classified as precarious. Underemployment has risen to 13.1 per cent, affecting more women (15.7 per cent) than men (11.1 per cent). Indicators for **target 8.6 (reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training)** stand at a high 19 per cent. In 2019, the number of collective bargaining agreements rose, with almost four times more being concluded than during the same period the year before, promising improvements with regards to **target 8.8 (protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers)**. Only 51.8 per cent of workers are, however, covered by collective bargaining agreements.

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.

TRADE UNION ASKS TO LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

Trade unions are urging the Argentinian government to institutionalise social dialogue through the creation of a Council for Socio-Economic Development, as announced by President Fernández in March 2020, to design a national development strategy based on a fair and equitable new social contract. This strategy should include structured multi-stakeholder dialogue processes to consult on the 2030 Agenda and the reactivation of the decent work country programme, which was suspended in 2015.

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.



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