



BRAZIL



A TRADE UNION FOCUS ON THE SDGs

#HLPF2019



Photo: Lula's Institute

ARE TRADE UNIONS AT THE TABLE?

Obstacles in the way of effective implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Brazil have only increased in the past year. In 2016, the Brazilian government announced a plan to achieve the SDGs by appointing a National Commission for their implementation, composed of relevant ministries (foreign affairs, social development planning, development and management and the environment) as well as the Government Secretariat. However, trade unions fear that under the newly established government, the previously existing, although insufficient, efforts of the Commission to ensure transparency and lead a dialogue with civil society will be discontinued.

Currently, no consultations in the implementation of the SDGs are being organised, and social partners have not been invited to provide input towards

ongoing policy reforms, which are being designed and implemented without regard for the 2030 Agenda or democratic and participatory standards.

Trade unions continue being highly critical of the Brazilian government and are increasingly concerned about the policies and proposed reforms of President Bolsonaro. The new government has upheld the previously introduced spending cuts in areas crucial to the fulfilment of the SDGs, such as health, employment and the fight against gender-based violence; in addition, labour and retirement reforms proposed by the government threaten to roll back workers' hard-fought-for rights and reverse Brazil's progress towards fulfilling the 2030 Agenda. There are serious concerns about the safety of industrial sites in the country following the collapse of a dam in the district of Brumadinho, which killed over 190 people.

TRANSPARENCY



Irregular access to limited information

CONSULTATION



There is no consultation process at all

SOCIAL DIALOGUE



There is no involvement of social partners by the national government on an SDG national plan definition and implementation



IS THE (DECENT) WORK GETTING DONE?

Brazilian trade unions alert that in view of the ongoing and planned reforms, the country is facing significant challenges in achieving the **SDGs, in particular SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth)**.

Indicators for **target 1.1 (eradicating extreme poverty)**, which until recently had been showing steady improvements, have declined for two years in a row. The percentage of the population living on less than US\$3.20 per day has reached 4 per cent in 2017, up from its historic low of 2.9 per cent in 2015. While 59.8 per cent of the population was covered by at least one social protection benefit in 2016, and 14.4 per cent of the GDP was spent on social protection in 2015 – in line with **target 1.3 (implement nationally appropriate social protection systems)** – trade unions warn that the government has frozen its spending in this area and is planning to reform the social protection law and the pension system, decreasing pensions and increasing the retirement age.

Efforts to reach **target 5.4 (recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies)** continue to be necessary, as 2012 indicators showed women performing nearly four times as much unpaid labour than men per day (2.7h for women versus 0.7h for men). **Target 5.5 (ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life)** has only slightly improved since the last reporting period, with only 61 per cent of women attaining some form of secondary education.

The number of workers in precarious employment has risen for two consecutive years, standing at 27.9 per cent in 2017 and posing a significant obstacle to reaching **target 8.3 (support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation)**. While, until recently, indicators for **target 8.5 (full and productive employment and decent work for all)** had been steadily improving, with unemployment rates dropping from 12.9 per cent in 2003 to 4.3 per cent in 2014, the current situation in Brazil is

highly concerning, with unemployment standing at 12.6 per cent in 2018. Underemployment remains a problem, especially for young women (affecting 10.6 per cent of women 15–24 as compared to 8.3 per cent of men in the same age group), although they are more likely than men to be underemployed in all age groups. NEET indicators for **target 8.6 (reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training)** stand at a worrying 24.2 per cent: 19.5 per cent for men and 29 per cent of women. Some very concerning developments have taken place in relation to **target 8.8 (protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers)**, as trade unions alert that the employment law reform has worsened labour conditions, lowered occupational health and safety standards, increased working hours, lowered salaries and allowed for collective bargaining negotiations to reach agreements below the legal minimal standards. The new government has additionally disbanded the Ministry for Work and Employment. The recent collapse of a dam in the district of Brumadinho, Brazil's largest-ever industrial disaster, demonstrates the insecure and exploitative labour conditions in the country, which have only been aggravated by recent reforms and the weaknesses of the labour and environmental control systems.

Significant progress remains to be made for Brazil to reduce social inequalities and reach **target 10.4 (adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality)**, as the share of the top 10 per cent of income earners accounted for 40.5 per cent of overall GDP in 2015, while the bottom 20 per cent of income earners accounted for a miniscule 3.2 per cent of GDP in 2017.

Trade unions warn that significant concerns remain with regards to Brazil's fulfilment of **SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions)** in view of the continued weakening of the country's democratic institutions and legitimate political processes. The public statements made by President Bolsonaro supporting violence against his political opponents, as well as against trade unionists and minority groups, are particularly worrying in this regard.

WHERE TO NEXT? TRADE UNION RECIPE TO LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

Brazilian trade unions are prioritising their struggle for decent work, social security and access to civil and political rights, such as the right to a fair trial and the fight against impunity.

They call on the government to:

- Reverse the labour law reform and withdraw from plans to introduce a reform of the pension system.
- Reinstating spaces for social and democratic dialogue to allow civil society to contribute to a debate on public policies.



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