



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

# COVID-19: WORKERS NEED RESPONSES FOR RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE

Since the start of the pandemic, President Bolsonaro has downplayed the severity of the disease, attacked the policy of social isolation and fired the Minister of Health for following WHO guidelines for COVID-19.

In terms of measures, the government approved a basic income package, but reserved for certain categories of workers (in the informal economy, self-employed or receiving social assistance) and only covering half of their average monthly income. In addition, a national moratorium on most loans was approved as well as a moratorium on mortgages and rentals in most states and municipalities.

The right to paid sick leave has only been partially recognised as well as the possibility of reducing working hours (in which case the government covers only part of the wage loss). Due to the cuts in the health system in recent years, the public health network faces serious difficulties in responding to the pandemic. In this context, CUT Brazil asks the government to prioritise the extension of coverage in social protection and free access to health services, the protection of wages and income, and the forecast of paid sick leave.

## ARE TRADE UNIONS AT THE TABLE?

The process of implementation of the SDGs is in sharp regression in Brazil. Following the coup d'état which removed President Dilma Rousseff and the period of instability that resulted, the Bolsonaro government is taking actions which fail to integrate SDG targets and are contrary to the principles of sustainable development.

The government of President Bolsonaro has reorganised political priorities and ministries, including those that had previously dealt with the SDGs. Under the previous government, a commission uniting key ministries oversaw the implementation of the SDGs; however, since the ministerial reorganisation, it is not clear which ministries will form part of this committee or if its work will continue.

Trade unions denounce the lack of transparency and access to information with regard to all government policies, including those on the SDGs. While the previous government had put in place a forum for discussion on Agenda 2030 with the

participation of social partners, the current government shows no sign of wishing to continue this practice. Trade unions believe that the Bolsonaro government is actively dismantling all social dialogue spaces.

Trade unions further state that, far from providing additional resources to the implementation of the SDGs, the government has cut spending in areas which were contributing to the fulfilment of the goals. Of particular concern is the pension reform introduced by the current government, which raises the retirement age and lowers the value of the transfers. The government's approach to funding environmental protection is also highly concerning, as at a time of unprecedented forest fires in the Amazon, it has reduced funding to combat deforestation by a third, cut more than \$4 million dedicated to firefighting in the Amazon as well as 95 per cent of funds allocated to combatting climate change.

### TRANSPARENCY



Irregular access to limited information

### CONSULTATION



No consultation process at all

### SOCIAL DIALOGUE



Social partners not involved in defining and realising government's SDG national plan



# IS THE (DECENT) WORK GETTING DONE?

Brazil is regressing with regard to **SDG 1 (end poverty in all its forms everywhere)**. Indicators for **target 1.1 (eradicating extreme poverty)**, which had once been showing steady improvement, have begun worsening again, as the percentage of the population living below the international poverty line has been rising since 2014, when it stood at 4.5 per cent, reaching 6.5 per cent in 2018. 61.5 per cent of the population was covered by at least one social protection benefit in 2016, with an estimated 78 per cent of persons of retirement age receiving a pension in 2016. However, only 7.8 per cent of the unemployed received unemployment benefits in 2016, suggesting uneven progress on **target 1.3 (implement nationally appropriate social protection systems)**. In addition, the recently passed pension reform plan raises the retirement age and lowers the transfers for significant numbers of pensioners.

There is still need for progress on reaching **target 5.4 (recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies)**, as 2017 indicators showed women performing over twice the amount of unpaid labour than men per day. **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)** is also far off being reached, with only 61 per cent of women attaining some form of secondary education between 2010-2017.

There are substantial obstacles to Brazil meeting the targets set by **SDG 8 (promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all)**. In 2015, 38.3 per cent of non-agricultural work was informal, suggesting that reaching **target 8.3 (support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalisation and growth of MSMEs)** remained far off. In addition, 2018 data show that 27.6 per cent of jobs are precarious, a number which has remained stagnant since 2016. On **target 8.5 (full and productive employment and decent work for all)**, unemployment stands at a high 11 per cent, with women affected more (13.1 per cent) than men (9.2 per cent) and youth between 14-17 (39.2 per cent) and

18-24 (23.8 per cent) worst off overall. NEET indicators for **target 8.6 (reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training)** stood at a worrying 23.5 per cent in 2019, with women significantly more affected (28.4 per cent) than men (18.8 per cent). Indicators on **target 8.7 (take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour)** remain worrying, as 8.5 per cent of girls aged 14-17 and 15 per cent of boys of the same age were engaged in child labour; in addition, the number of people affected by forced labour more than doubled between 2016 and 2018 (from 0.08 per cent to 1.8 per cent). Performance on **target 8.8 (protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers)** is poor, with 23 violations of labour rights noted in 2017 – the highest number since 2012. Trade union density has been steadily dropping and stood at a low 12.5 per cent in 2018.

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 labour share of GDP has been steadily dropping in the past years, standing at 60.4 per cent in 2017. Furthermore, the share of the top 10 per cent of income earners has been growing, accounting for 42.5 per cent of overall GDP, while the share of the bottom 20 per cent of income earners has been dropping, accounting for a miniscule 3.1 per cent of GDP in 2018.

Trade unions warn that far from taking action on **SDG 13 (take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts)**, the Bolsonaro government is contributing to aggravating the climate crisis.

With regard to **SDG 16 (promote peaceful and inclusive societies)**, trade unions warn that the situation in Brazil has been deteriorating since the coup d'état which removed President Rousseff. Violations against labour rights and trade union leaders, indigenous and community leaders are widespread, and the persecution of political opposition leaders continues.

## TRADE UNION ASKS TO LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

CUT Brazil calls on the government to:

- End instrumentalising the pandemic to attack democracy, freedom and life, and re-establish social dialogue and civil society participation in finding solutions to the upcoming economic, social and humanitarian distress.
- Invest in quality and universal public services (including health, education, transportation and social protection) by repealing Constitutional Amendment 95/2016, which limits public investments in these areas, and by revoking the recent labour and pension reforms.
- Ensure the protection of all workers from contagion, including by distributing personal protective equipment to workers in all activities that cannot be suspended; ensuring that primary health care teams reach rural and traditional communities; and suspending all non-essential activities and expanding teleworking.
- Establish a universal basic income. During the pandemic, guarantee a living emergency income for all unemployed, informal, self-employed and platform workers; moreover, suspend the payment of services (water, energy, telephone and internet) and other expenses such as rent, medical insurance, public transport, loans and financing.
- Create an Emergency Fund financed by the State, the private sector and by taxing the wealthiest sectors. Beyond the crisis, a progressive tax reform must be pursued, in order to tax digital services for technology giants, large fortunes, financial transactions and large profits. In the context of the health emergency, rescue financing should not be granted to companies that operate through tax havens.



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