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 combating climate change.

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.
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.