



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

COVID-19: WORKERS NEED RESPONSES FOR RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE

On 24 March, the government decreed a nationwide lockdown. The support measures announced by the government include an increase in the social protection and health system budget for the most vulnerable groups, moratoria on credit repayments, and access to loans for companies (mainly benefiting big capital). Access to these measures has, however, been slow for micro, small and medium-size companies, and the provision of assistance to families has been marred by corrupt practices.

The trade union movement and social organisations as a whole consider the state measures to be inadequate and counterproductive in some respects. The Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT) has denounced the government's attempt to exploit the pandemic to promote a labour reform that would reduce wages, suspend collective bargaining agreements and affect the pension system. The trade union movement considers it urgent that the government prioritise universal social protection and free access to health services, ensure safe working conditions, protect wages and incomes and save jobs, introduce a basic income and provide effective support to micro, small and medium-size enterprises (which account for 80 per cent of employment), while extending the moratoria on credit repayments and lowering the high interest rates.

ARE TRADE UNIONS AT THE TABLE?

The Colombian government is implementing the 2030 Agenda through its National Development Plan for 2018-2022, called "Pact for Colombia, Pact for Equity". The plan focuses on three areas: legality, aiming to consolidate the rule of law throughout the country; entrepreneurship and productivity, aiming to reduce the country's dependence on fossil fuels; and equity, focusing on guaranteeing equal opportunities for social inclusion. In addition, issues such as sustainable development, provision of public services, women's, disabled people's and ethnic minorities' equality are mainstreamed throughout the plan.

The High-Level Interinstitutional Committee on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is in charge of the 2030 Agenda's preparation and effective implementation and oversees the implementation of the SDGs. It is chaired by the director of the National Planning Department and consists of the ministers for foreign affairs, finance, environment and sustainable development, the Administrative Department

of the Presidency of the Republic, with the participation of the minister counsellor for the government and the private sector, the director of the National Administrative Department of Statistics and the director of the Administrative Department for Social Prosperity.

The trade unions report that no consultations were organised with them on the 2030 Agenda and that the government does not see them as partners in the implementation of the SDGs. The 2030 Agenda is not discussed within the country's social dialogue structures, which are failing, more generally, to respond to the workers' demands and people's most pressing needs.

With no resources allocated to the implementation of activities related to the 2030 Agenda, trade unions fear that the government is not serious about acting on its stated intentions.

TRANSPARENCY



Regular 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?

Data from 2018 indicate that 27 per cent of the Colombian population was living in poverty (24.4 per cent in urban and 36.1 per cent in rural areas); 20.4 per cent of employed people were living below the poverty line and 26 per cent of workers earned less than half the national legal minimum wage. Colombia's GINI index (0.517 in 2018) is among the highest in the region, which suggests that **target 1.1 (eradicate extreme poverty for all people)** is very far from being reached.

The indicators on **target 1.3 (implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures)** are worrying: in 2016, only 40.8 per cent of the population was covered by at least one social protection benefit; only 4.6 per cent of the unemployed population received unemployment assistance and only 51.7 per cent of persons above retirement age were receiving a pension. Government spending on social protection was just 5.5 per cent of GDP in 2018. Improvement is needed to achieve progress on **target 5.4 (recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work)**, as women spend more than twice as long on unpaid work as men, on average. Performance on **target 5.5 (ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels)** is satisfactory, as 49 per cent of those enrolled in preschool, primary and secondary education were women and girls, as were 51.6 per cent of those enrolled in higher education.

Regarding **target 8.3 (promote policies that support productive activities, decent job creation)**, in 2019, 65.3 per cent of workers were in the informal sector, most often those working in agriculture, commerce, hotels and restaurants, construction, transport and manufacturing; 25 per cent of workers were in low paid jobs; 56 per cent of workers earned less than the legal minimum wage and 47 per cent were in vulnerable employment. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, at least 15 million precarious workers have lost their income or part of it. As for **Target 8.5 (achieve full and productive employment and decent work)**, the 2019 unemployment rate was 9.7 per cent and was much more likely to affect women (12.7 per cent) than men (7.4 per cent); the

situation was even worse among young people (aged 15 to 24), whose overall unemployment rate was 19 per cent (25.5 per cent for young women and 14.5 per cent for young men). The young people "not in employment, education or training" (NEETs) indicators for **target 8.6 (reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training)** was 23 per cent in 2019 (31.9 per cent for young women compared to 14.4 per cent for young men). Progress is still needed to reach **target 8.7 (end child labour in all its forms)**, as 2019 indicators showed that 5.4 per cent of children (aged 5 to 17) were engaged in child labour. **Target 8.8 (protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers)** is very far from being met as, in 2019, an average of 318 workplace accidents took place every hour and 492 work-related deaths were registered. Collective bargaining coverage was just 15.7 per cent in 2017, while the unionisation rate was just 4.7 per cent in 2019.

Significant progress is still needed for Colombia to reach **target 10.4 (adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies and progressively achieve greater equality)**, as the top 10 per cent of income earners had a 39.7 per cent share of GDP, while the bottom 20 per cent of income earners had a 4 per cent share of GDP, in 2018.

With regard to **target 13.2 (integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning)**, a National Climate Change Policy was established in 2014, followed by a National Energy Plan and a National Plan for Adaptation to Climate Change. A national tax on carbon was introduced in 2017.

Meeting **target 16.10 (protect fundamental freedoms)** remains far off, as trade unions reported a total of 226 violent incidents that directly affected union members and leaders in 2019: 12 killings, 198 death threats, 11 cases of harassment, four attempted murders and one forced disappearance. The government's rhetoric on SDG 16 contrasts with its lack of commitment to fulfilling the national Peace Agreement.

TRADE UNION ASKS TO LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

The unions are calling on the government to ensure the open and transparent participation of the social partners in the 2030 Agenda implementation processes, and to allocate adequate resources.

In the context of Covid-19, the trade union and social movement is urging the government to:

- Protect people's lives with a health and social protection system designed to meet people's needs; ensure access to food, public services and utilities for the unemployed; introduce a basic income and biosecurity measures, and put an end to its regressive labour and pension reform, which in no way contributes to protecting workers' jobs and incomes or ensuring economic recovery.
- Call on all political and social forces to take part in a national pact to establish a public social security system as a basic human right, and to establish a pact to protect decent and dignified work and to stimulate the economy and economic growth.
- Adopt economic, monetary and fiscal policy initiatives that are more conducive to economic recovery and the defence of decent work by making use of primary credit and part of the international reserves, renegotiating foreign debt and reviewing the tax system to remove the exemptions benefiting big business, etc.



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