



# BELGIUM

## A TRADE UNION FOCUS ON THE SDGs

#HLPF2017



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### ARE TRADE UNIONS AT THE TABLE?

In Belgium, the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is undertaken at federal and regional level.

An Inter-Ministerial Conference for Sustainable Development (IMCSD) is the central coordination mechanism for SDG implementation. In 2017, the IMCSD approved a National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSSD), which envisions integrating the SDGs into the Belgian context by selecting priority themes for enhanced coordination between public authorities.

Through the Federal Council for Sustainable Development (FRDO-CFDD), civil society - including trade unions - was consulted on the NSSD, through online consultations and sessions organised by the Federal Institute for Sustainable

Development (FIDO). Trade unions note that the input requested by the FRDO-CFDD is required to be brief, not allowing for in-depth analysis; in addition, very few recommendations were felt to have been taken on board.

The Belgian government has granted a big role in the SDG process to *The Shift*, a cross-sectoral platform for dialogue on the SDGs, and leads a communications campaign raising public awareness of the SDGs. However, a number of issues have lead the three Belgian trade unions to question *The Shift's* transparency and commitment to the consultative process.

The Inter-Federal Institute for Statistics is responsible for monitoring progress towards the SDGs; relevant information is made publicly available online.



#### TRANSPARENCY

access to key documents on SDGs programming and/or implementation



#### CONSULTATION

existence of an official multi-stakeholder platform on the SDGs



#### SOCIAL DIALOGUE

dialogue among worker, employer and government representatives on SDG implementation



## IS THE (DECENT) WORK BEING DONE?

Belgian efforts to achieve **SDG 1 (eradicating poverty)** are channelled through the Third Federal Plan to Combat Poverty (2016-2019). Trade unions highlight that certain government policies prevent progress on this goal. These notably include the suspension of salary indexation, the restriction of access to unemployment benefits, the increased labour market flexibility and raising the age of retirement.

Further progress must be made on reaching **target 5.4 (recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies)**. While officially all employees are covered by social protection, this protection is low or inexistent for those in part-time employment. As 80% of all part-time workers are women and 41.5% of women work part-time (compared to 10% for men), women are clearly more vulnerable to being left out of social protection policies and their access to employment should be improved.

In addition, while the gender pay gap has dropped by 8% over the past 14 years, more must be done to reach **target 8.5 (full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men)** as, at the current rate, the gap will only be eradicated by 2051. Furthermore, Belgian workers' purchasing power has been steadily declining since 2009 and is now at 2006 levels. In spite of this, the government refuses to index salaries to match increasing prices.

Legal and political limitations hamper the achievement of **target 8.8 (protecting labour rights and promoting safe and secure working environments)** in Belgium. Cases of judiciary interventions in collective disputes undermine the effective exercise of collective bargaining rights. A trade union complaint to the Council of Europe for non-compliance with the European Social Charter has not yet prompted Belgium to change this practice.

Some progress towards the achievement of **target 10.4 (progressive achievement of greater equality)** is visible. Figures show that income inequality has decreased. Worryingly however, the minimum monthly wage is only 51.1% of the median wage. The country has a persistent problem of poverty linked to long-term unemployment, which disproportionately affects migrants.

Achieving **target 13.2 (integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning)** is stilted as Belgium has yet to adopt an integrated national plan for climate and energy due to protracted political discussions. Trade unions have been able to put climate and energy issues on the agenda at various levels, but have not been invited to participate in discussions on the country's industrial transition. While Belgium profiles itself as a contributor to the Green Climate Fund, trade unions note that the resources provided for the fund do not meet the criteria of being new and additional, as required by the COP 15.

## WHERE TO NEXT?

### TRADE UNION RECIPE TO LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

Trade unions advise the government of Belgium to prioritise the following objectives: ensure decent work and fight inequalities, especially with regard to working people at risk of poverty; provide greater social protection and improving salaries; promote social dialogue; promote lifelong learning.

To ensure the effective implementation of these objectives, the Belgian government should:

- Engage in a genuine and transparent dialogue with social partners on SDG implementation and follow up.
- Focus on reaching those key transformative goals that have an impact on the realisation of other objectives, and therefore merit particular attention, such as SDGs 8 and 10.
- Specify how the goals and targets selected by the government are to be effectively integrated into national and foreign policy and how they will be implemented, including resource allocation for each of them.



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