




ARGENTINA

A TRADE UNION FOCUS ON THE SDGs

#HLPF2021

WORKERS DEMAND A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT FOR RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE

COVID-19: WORKERS NEED SDG-DRIVEN RESPONSES TO THE CRISIS

The government of Argentina responded to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic with policies to prevent the growth of poverty, loss of jobs and the closure of SMEs. A fiscal package of 1.5 billion US dollars (equivalent to 3 per cent the country's GDP) was introduced, and all negotiation channels with social partners were opened to ensure that the social and labour needs resulting from the crisis were met.

Argentina was one of the few countries which recognised COVID-19 as an occupational disease and took measures to address it as such: supporting companies and SMEs in maintaining employment by providing a minimum living wage for each employee by the state and banning dismissals and suspensions from work without just cause or due to the lack of or reduction in work volume or force majeure. Furthermore, the government introduced social measures such as the emergency family income: an exceptional monetary benefit for all residents between 18-65 who are unemployed, who work in the informal economy, or who are freelance or domestic workers. Measures designed to minimise the cost of living were also adopted, notably the fixing of maximum prices for a set of essential goods, such as food, medicines and personal hygiene products, which was in place for eight months from March 2020.

ARE TRADE UNIONS AT THE TABLE?

In November 2020, the government adopted the UN Strategic Development Cooperation Framework with Argentina for 2021-2025 (MECNUD), which recognises the importance of the SDGs for public policy and their close relationship with the country's human rights priorities. The MECNUD outlines four dimensions for action: economic, social, environmental and governance. These dimensions are intersected by six thematic priorities: the human rights approach, the gender approach, leaving no one behind, territory, environmental sustainability, and the impact of COVID-19. In its second VNR, Argentina reported picking up over 200 indicators and the achievement of 80 targets, with clear links to governmental objectives and the national budget.

The National Council for the Coordination of Social Policy (CNCPS) oversees the mainstreaming and follow-up on Agenda 2030. The CNCPS is in charge of adapting the SDG implementation process to the national level and technically accompanying

the provincial and municipal governments that express their interest in participating in it; it further develops actions with trade unions and with civil society.

The MECNUD takes a participatory approach based on a dialogue with trade unions, civil society, the private sector, and other strategic actors. The government has consulted trade unions on several dimensions of the national SDG plan, notably the programme against hunger, the 2020 VNR, and preparedness and response to COVID-19. Furthermore, the government has created the Economic and Social Council, a multi-stakeholder dialogue platform, with a strong participation from trade unions, for the elaboration of National Development Programmes. While they welcome the greater transparency than under previous governments, trade unions call for better reporting mechanisms on the implementation of the SDGs in the provinces and for the construction of a centralised repository gathering relevant information of this kind.

TRANSPARENCY



Regular access to limited information

CONSULTATION



Informal or ad hoc consultation

SOCIAL DIALOGUE



Social partners submit joint contributions to the government's SDG national plan



IS THE (DECENT) WORK GETTING DONE?

Indicators for **target 1.1 (eradicate extreme poverty)**, already worrying before the COVID-19 pandemic due to the pre-existing economic crisis in the country, have continued to worsen, with poverty affecting 40.9 per cent of the population in the first half of 2020, a 10-point increase since 2016. While 66.1 per cent of the population was covered by at least one type of social protection in 2019, only 9.8 per cent of the unemployed were receiving support, suggesting that **target 1.3 (implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures)** was far off being reached. On **target 1.a (implement programmes and policies to end poverty in all its dimensions)**, 49.8 per cent of the 2020 national budget was earmarked for social security spending, 4.95 per cent for health and 4.87 per cent for education and culture.

Progress on **target 5.4 (recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work)** is still needed, as women spend significantly more of their time performing unpaid work (58 per cent for women without their own source of income and 42 per cent for women with their own source of income) than men (respectively 24.5 per cent and 28.6 per cent). With regard to **target 5.5 (ensure women's full and effective participation in political, economic and public life)**, more women (35.2 per cent) than men (30.7 per cent) had achieved a higher education level by 2020. The government has announced that 1.3 trillion pesos within the 2021 national budget will be earmarked for combatting violence against women and LGBTBI+ people and reducing inequality. An important landmark in the fight for gender equality was made with the approval of Law 27610 on the Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancy in December 2020.

Target 8.3 (promote policies that support productive activities, decent job creation) is far off being met, as in 2019, 51.4 per cent of jobs were in the informal economy, the share of low-paid work stood at 25.8 per cent (25.6 per cent for men and 26 per cent for women) and 29.4 per cent of jobs were considered precarious. **Target 8.5 (full and productive employment and decent work for all)** is far off being reached, as unemployment levels stood at 9.8 per cent in 2019, with women (10.7 per cent) affected more than men (9.2 per cent) and the situation being worst for youth 15-24, 25.9 per cent of whom were unemployed. Underemployment stood at 9.6 per cent in the third quarter of 2020 and was especially high for people under 24 (12.5 per cent). NEET ("not in employment,

education or training") indicators for **target 8.6 (reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training)** stood at a high 19 per cent in 2019. On **target 8.8 (protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers)**, 47.7 per cent of workers were covered by collective bargaining agreements in 2019, and trade union density stood at 27.7 per cent in 2021. The Argentinian government is addressing **target 8.b (develop and operationalise a global strategy for youth employment)** by introducing the "Youth with More and Better Work" Program aimed at unemployed people between 18-24 years of age with incomplete primary or secondary studies. The programme aims to accompany them in obtaining a job placement and includes a mandatory labour rights course.

Argentina must intensify its efforts towards meeting **target 10.4 (adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality)**, as in 2019, the share of the top 10 per cent income earners in overall GDP stood at 32.1 per cent, as compared to the meagre 4.4 per cent share of the bottom 20 per cent. The labour share of GDP, comprising wages and social protection transfers, stood at 58.5 per cent in 2017.

The government is in the process of creating a national mitigation strategy on climate change and has set up a National Climate Change Cabinet (GNCC), the first steps to reaching **target 13.2 (integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning)**. In October 2020, the Ministry for Productive Development issued a strategy paper stating its commitment to investing in sustainable development and promoting the Green New Deal as part of the post-pandemic recovery strategy.

Indicators on **target 16.10 (protect fundamental freedoms)** appear to be improving, as trade unions report that at the national level, no violations of freedoms or restrictions of civic and democratic spaces were noted in 2020. However, occasional negative developments were observed at the provincial level, such as the setting up of detention centres for people who did not comply with lockdown restrictions and the harassment of defenders of workers' rights by the local police.

TRADE UNION ASKS TO LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

To ensure an SDG-led recovery and resilience from the crisis, trade unions are urging the government to:

- Launch the Decent Work Country Program, the implementation of which has been suspended since 2015; in this context, proactive employment policies should be introduced and the labour market restructured to promote the creation of decent work and universalise social protection in the framework of recovery and resilience from the COVID-19 crisis.
- Upgrade consultation with trade unions to a systematic program of participation in the construction of the work agenda, effective dialogue, joint execution and effective monitoring of Agenda 2030 in Argentina.
- Provide for a greater role for government agencies and social partners in the implementation of Agenda 2030.
- To address the challenges posed by the pandemic, provide citizens with wage and income protection, introduce policies aimed at supporting people with low incomes, ensure universal social protection and free access to healthcare, and place a moratorium on the payment of mortgages, rents and loans.
- Begin the transition to a more sustainable and circular economy, including through a tax reform designed for the improvement of income distribution.



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