



# PAKISTAN

## 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

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Pakistani government responded through the National Disaster Management platform, introducing a lockdown and cash grants, relief in the payment of utility bills and loan rebates. Under the Ehsaas Emergency Cash programme, the government provided cash grants and other support to those facing economic hardship and struggling to buy food; the programme covered 12 million families. In addition, provinces launched their own programs, such as providing cash grants and distributing food.

The second wave of the pandemic is being addressed through smart lockdowns (only closing off the affected area) and a second financial relief package and measures such as paid sick leave from day one, wage and income protection, and applying limited mortgage, rent and loan relief. Factories and other workplaces remain open and work has not been affected. However, trade unions stress that these measures are being implemented in a limited manner and must be expanded on. In addition, trade unions are calling for the development of a database of workers in the informal, agriculture and formal sectors to ensure the correct distribution of the relief package.

### ARE TRADE UNIONS AT THE TABLE?

The Pakistani government has adopted the SDGs as its own national development agenda, mainstreaming them in national policies and strategies, including the Five-Year Plan and provincial growth strategies, aligned with its long-term development perspective, 'Vision 2025'. All of the SDGs are covered by one or more of the seven pillars of 'Vision 2025' (people first, growth, governance, security, entrepreneurship, knowledge economy and connectivity). The Federal Ministry of Planning, Development and Reform is charged with the integration of Agenda 2030. A dedicated SDGs unit has been established under the ministry to monitor and to coordinate with similar units established with the departments of planning and development in provinces and administrative regions.

While consultations on priorities for SDG implementation in the country were organised by the government, trade unions have not been consulted or involved in this process, and neither have employers' representatives. Agenda 2030 and its implementation in the country has not been included on the agenda of the tripartite or social dialogue processes.

The realisation of SDG targets has been linked to the implementation of existing or planned policies in Pakistan. The most prominent one of these is Ehsaas, the largest scale programme ever launched to tackle poverty in the country. It is an umbrella initiative of 134 policies and programs addressing state capture, social protection, livelihoods and human capital development. Through various campaigns at the national, regional and district levels trade unions demand workers protection in neglected sectors and their coverage under the existing social protection schemes. At the National and regional levels, PWF has launched a special campaign for recognition of the basic rights of the workers of informal sector, agriculture workers, domestic workers and construction workers. Furthermore, a new universal health coverage initiative has been launched in 2021 to fill the gaps in health insurance coverage. However, trade unions alert that the overall resources allocated to reaching the goals of Agenda 2030 are limited, in particular in the areas of education, social protection and health.

#### TRANSPARENCY



Irregular access to limited information

#### CONSULTATION



Informal or ad hoc consultation

#### SOCIAL DIALOGUE



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



# IS THE (DECENT) WORK GETTING DONE?

In 2019, 2 per cent of the population of Pakistan was living in extreme poverty, 41 per cent near poverty and 25 per cent in moderate poverty, which suggests that **target 1.1 (eradicate extreme poverty for all people)** is far from being reached. The COVID-19 pandemic together with the pre-existing inflation of prices of essential items is expected to further increase poverty in the country.

The indicators on **target 1.3 (implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures)** are far off being met: in 2019, only 9.2 per cent of the total population was covered by at least one social protection benefit, and only 8.4 per cent of the population was affiliated to a social healthcare protection scheme. In the 2018-2019 financial year, government spending on health stood at 2.5 per cent and on social protection at 0.05 per cent.

Significant challenges remain to reach **target 5.4 (recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work)**, as women and girls spend 19.9 per cent of their time on unpaid care and domestic work (compared to 1.8 per cent of time spent on this by men). More efforts are needed to reach **target 5.5 (ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels)** as only 26.7 per cent women and girls in Pakistan have achieved at least a secondary level of education and women account for nearly 90 per cent of the bottom 1 per cent of wage earners in Pakistan. While Pakistan is implementing gender-based budgeting, differences in gender-based resource allocation and spending still prevail.

**Target 8.3 (promote policies that support productive activities, decent job creation)** is far off being met, as in 2018, the informal sector accounted for 72 per cent of non-agricultural employment – more so in rural (76 per cent) than urban areas (68.3 per cent). 37.5 per cent of workers earn less than two thirds of the median hourly wages; this is especially the case of female workers, 75.4 per cent whom are in this category, compared to 31.3 per cent of men. As for **target 8.5 (achieve full and productive employment and decent work)**, the 2017-18 unemployment rate stood at 5.8 per cent and was more likely to affect women (9 per cent) than men (5 per cent). The number of NEETs mentioned in **target 8.6 (reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education**

**or training)** stood at 31.2 per cent in 2020, with a massive disparity between the sexes: 56.2 per cent of young women compared to 8 per cent of young men were NEET in Pakistan. Significant efforts are needed to reach **target 8.7 (eradicate forced labour, end child labour in all its forms)** as 2011 indicators showed that 11.3 per cent of children (aged 5 to 17) were engaged in child labour and that over three million people (1.8 per cent of the population) were living in modern slavery in 2018. **Target 8.8 (protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers)** is far from being met as 42 violations of labour rights (28 in law and 14 in practice) were noted in 2017, relating to workers' right to establish and join organizations, union activities, the right to collective bargaining and the right to strike. Trade union density is low, standing at just 2.3 per cent in 2018.

Further progress is still needed for Pakistan 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 28.9 per cent share of GDP, with the bottom 20 per cent of income earners holding an 8.9 per cent share in 2015.

Pakistan is amongst the countries most affected by the impacts of climate change. To reach the objectives of **target 13.2 (integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning)**, the government has introduced priorities on climate change and the environment into its 12th Five Year Plan (2018-2023). In addition, Pakistan has created disaster risk reduction and disaster risk management plans and introduced policies addressing deforestation, biodiversity, sustainable land management, flood mitigation and climate-smart agriculture. However, trade unions warn that the government has no strategy to accommodate the needs of workers arising from the technological shift associated with the introduction of environmental policies.

Indicators on **target 16.10 (protect fundamental freedoms)** are highly worrying, as NGO operations are restricted by the government and workers and supporters of social movements have been subjected to intimidation or detention on charges of sedition and terrorism in 2019.

## TRADE UNION ASKS TO LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

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

- Introduce universal social protection.
- Introduce a managed reduction of hours where necessary, with government support to maximize income security.
- Protect those most vulnerable i.e., workers in the informal sector, home based workers, domestic workers, brick kiln workers and agriculture workers.
- Develop a database of workers in the informal, agriculture and formal sectors to secure the distribution of relief packages.
- Ensure a more effective implementation of laws and policies, involve social partners in the SDG prioritisation and implementation process.
- All workers should be protected under labour laws, industrial relations laws and existing schemes of social protection. To ensure this, eradicate child and forced labour, focus on the social protection of all vulnerable categories of workers by extending labour and social protection coverage to workers of the construction sector, agricultural workers, domestic workers and workers of informal sector as a priority.
- Collect data and maintain statistics to ensure that the employment, skill development and universal social protection policies can be adequately implemented and reach the target demographics.
- Improve the effectiveness of the existing gender budgeting and gender-sensitive policy making approaches.
- Pursue a 'just transition' towards environmentally friendly and climate-neutral growth in close involvement with social partners.



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