



NETHERLANDS

A TRADE UNION FOCUS ON THE SDGS

#HLPF2022

WORKERS DEMAND A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT FOR RECOVERY AND RÉSILIENCE

COVID-19: WORKERS NEED DURABLE RESPONSES TO THE CRISIS

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Dutch government launched various temporary programmes for income and job support for households, employers and independent entrepreneurs without personnel. Companies could also receive financial support for fixed costs. The Ministry of Social Affairs coordinated and consulted with trade unions from the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis. Despite all this, many health workers – who lacked adequate protective masks and clothing and were considered heroes in the first period of the pandemic – now face dismissal because of the consequences of “long Covid”. So far, the Dutch government refuses to take additional measures.

Trade unions call on the Dutch government and employers to be better prepared for future pandemics by taking sufficient protective measures, including the provision of protective equipment. This applies particularly to crucial professions in the care, health, safety, and education sectors. Pay in these sectors should also be reviewed and adjusted, and excessive workloads in all workplaces should be addressed. Social security regulations should be adapted to those suffering from “long Covid”. The government should also put in place better assistance for more vulnerable workers, including better income protection for those on flexible temporary contracts and better social protection for freelancers.

ARE TRADE UNIONS AT THE TABLE?

The Netherlands has incorporated the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into its overall policy process. An action plan to implement the SDGs was sent to the parliament in September 2016. A national report on progress, the “Monitor of Well-Being and SDGs”, is compiled by Statistics Netherlands and submitted to the parliament annually. However, the SDGs tend to be integrated into existing national policies and priorities, rather than being taken as the starting point.

There is a government-appointed national SDG coordinator, who works closely with other ministries and organisations working towards SDG implementation. Trade unions participate in some of the consultations and multistakeholder meetings organised by the

national SDG coordinator. They have provided input on the themes of energy transition, circular economy, inclusive societies, and global responsibility. There is no structured tripartite or bipartite dialogue on SDG implementation, however.

The Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands (SER) is the main policy advisory body representing employers and workers through which trade unions participate indirectly in certain SDG groups. There is a need to establish an SDG platform at the SER; this would also help private parties and trade unions consider each other as partners in SDG implementation. Trade unions call for more explicit attention to the SDG implementation plan in the SER.

TRANSPARENCY



Complete access to information

CONSULTATION



Structured multi-stakeholder platform

SOCIAL DIALOGUE



Social partners jointly agree and submit contributions to national government



IS THE (DECENT) WORK GETTING DONE?

While **target 1.1 (eradicate extreme poverty)** has been achieved, poverty still exists: in 2018, 13.3 per cent of the population had an income below the risk-of-poverty threshold (60 per cent of median income) and 16.7 per cent of the population was at risk of poverty or social exclusion. **Target 1.3 (appropriate social protection systems)** has been achieved. The Netherlands ranks 8th in the world on the UN Human Development Index.

Progress is still required to meet **target 5.4 (recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work)**. Women in the Netherlands spend a third more time (14.7 per cent) on unpaid domestic and care work than men (9.2 per cent). The Netherlands has not yet ratified ILO Convention 189. Domestic work is not formalised, except for the Household Services Act. However, this act exempts domestic workers who work three days or less for the same household from certain forms of social security. More efforts are also needed on **target 5.5 (ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels)**. The proportion of women in managerial positions remains at about one quarter (25.7 per cent in 2018); the number of seats held by women in the national parliament declined to 33 per cent in 2020 (target of 50 per cent). Equality in terms of secondary education is on track. However, trade unions stress that the Netherlands does not currently use gender budgeting to work towards greater gender equality, and highlight a general deterioration in literacy and numeracy of pupils.

More efforts are needed on **target 8.5 (full and productive employment and decent work for all)**. In a context of low wage growth over the past decade, the gender pay gap persists with a corrected pay gap of 4 per cent in the public sector and 7 per cent in the private sector in 2020. The underemployment rate has decreased over the years, with particularly marked improvements for women and young people. The Netherlands performs well in terms of the percentage share of **young people not in employment, education or training (target 8.6)**, which is the lowest in the EU. With regard to **target 8.7 (end forced labour, modern slavery, human trafficking and child labour)**, although the proportion of the population living in modern slavery is low by global standards (1.77/1000), the Netherlands Court of Audit reported in 2021 that enforcement efforts remain ineffective. Trade unions also highlight some areas of concern under **target 8.8 (protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers)**. Fatal occupational injuries

are rare, but there has been a considerable increase in non-fatal injuries. The level of national compliance with labour rights is high, and all ILO labour conventions are ratified. However, trade union membership and collective bargaining coverage are declining, reflecting the increasing flexibilisation of the labour market with more temporary jobs and false self-employment. Also, there is an increasing tendency to close collective agreements with yellow unions.

Some challenges remain to meet **target 10.4 (adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies and progressively achieve greater equality)**. The labour share of GDP has slightly declined over the last decade, in particular in the sectors with the most employees. The decline is driven by slow wage growth, particularly for lower earners. The minimum wage has not increased sufficiently and the share of working poor is growing. These trends are of particular concern given the current increase in inflation. Social partners are actively involved in the formation and implementation of migration policy under **target 10.7 (orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility)**. They note that while migrants are free to join trade unions, many are afraid to do so, as they are on temporary contracts and can also be dependent on employment agencies for housing, health insurance and transport to work. The meat sector in particular has a high number of vulnerable migrant workers. Employers in this sector block unions' access to the work floor for organising.

The Netherlands is implementing integrated strategies and dialogue with social partners to meet **target 13.2 (integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and plans)**. However, further efforts are needed to accelerate progress on climate goals, as affirmed by the recent Urgenda and Friends of the Earth court cases brought against the Dutch government and multinational companies.

Under **target 16.3 (promote the rule of law and ensure equal access to justice)**, legal aid is available but has become more difficult to access for those on low incomes due to cutbacks made by the previous government.

TRADE UNION ASKS TO LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

To ensure an SDG-led recovery and resilience from the crisis, trade unions urge the Dutch government to take the following action:

- ensure equality of opportunity and truly democratic participation for all, with policies to bring about greater redistribution of wealth and power in Dutch society;
- guarantee decent work, a living wage and social security for everyone, including temporary workers and the self-employed; increase the minimum wage to €14 per hour;
- take measures to prevent the excessive outsourcing of labour and exploitation of migrant labour; combat precarious working contracts (including zero-hour contracts) and the continuous renewal of temporary contracts;
- increase the capacity and effectiveness of labour inspection;
- ensure a just and social transition to a green economy;
- guarantee a better implementation of fundamental labour rights, such as freedom of association and bargaining;
- apply special measures to compensate the essential workers in the care and education sector who are suffering from "long Covid", losing their job and income; and
- ratify ILO Convention 189 to make sure domestic workers enjoy the same rights as any other worker.



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