





VENEZUELA

A TRADE UNION FOCUS ON THE SDGS

#HLPF2023

WORKERS DEMAND A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT FOR RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE

WORKERS NEED DURABLE RESPONSES TO THE MULTIPLE CRISES

To address the ongoing food crisis, the Venezuelan government is implementing policies such as the Local Supply and Production Committee (CLAP) programme and the School Meals Programme (PAE). However, trade unions believe that the meals provided through the school programme are inadequate in terms of their nutritional value, food quality, and regularity of service.

In response to the health crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, programmes that provide primary healthcare services in the poorest areas of the country and integrated diagnostic centres staffed by Cuban doctors continue to be rolled out. Shortages of medicines, supplies and surgical/medical material, the deterioration in the hospital infrastructure and deficit of medical and care staff are, however, putting the health of the general population at risk.

In response to the climate crisis, Venezuela has signed the Paris Agreement. In its first nationally determined contribution (NDC), the government committed to reducing emissions by at least 20% by 2030, compared to baseline levels, through national mitigation and adaptation plans. Trade unions are, however, warning that no action had been taken in this direction until at least November 2021, when an updated NDC repeated the same commitments. Trade unions regret the fact that they were not consulted in the course of the design or implementation of any of the above policies, in order to ensure a just transition for workers.

ARE TRADE UNIONS AT THE TABLE?

The Venezuelan government states that it has integrated the SDGs and their objectives into its National Economic and Social Development Plan 2019-2025. The implementation of the national plan is being led by the president and executed through the bodies of the National Planning System, the Ministry of Popular Power for Planning and the Vice-President of Planning.

In September 2022, the government signed a framework cooperation agreement with the UN that anticipates that the national plan will address areas such as health, education, food, science and technology, social care, the economy and women.

There are concerns regarding the implementation of Agenda 2030 in Venezuela, as it is the country with the greatest decline in its SDG Index score between 2015 and 2021; the 2022 Index ranks it 120th out of 163 countries. Trade unions doubt the government's capacity to fund its development objectives, as the amount Venezuela received in development assistance fell from \$2,609.2 million in 2000 to \$309.2 million in 2020. They are also sceptical towards Venezuela's 2023 Voluntary National

Review (VNR) as they believe that the 2016 VNR exercise was a rhetorical one and failed to reflect the multiple crises the country is facing.

The unions regret the impact of unilateral coercive measures against Venezuelan state institutions, which have worsened the situation of public services already in crisis. This has had a negative effect on the quality of life and well-being of workers and constitutes an obstacle to achieving the 2030 Agenda.

Trade unions report a lack of transparency and access to official information relating to the implementation of the SDGs and they have been unable to verify whether or not the SDG indicators have been incorporated into the statistical system of the National Institute of Statistics.

They are neither consulted nor invited to provide input into the design of policies on Agenda 2030. Finally, SDG implementation is not discussed during tripartite social dialogue meetings.

TRANSPARENCY



No access to information at all

CONSULTATION



No consultation process

SOCIAL DIALOGUE



No social dialogue on the SDGs



IS THE (DECENT) WORK GETTING DONE?

With regard to **SDG 1**, indicators for **target 1.1 (eradicate extreme poverty)** are highly concerning because, due to inflation and the cost-of-living crisis, 76.6% of the population were living in extreme poverty in 2021, compared to 25.2% in 2014.

Poverty has worsened and inequalities are rising because public sector workers, retirees and pensioners receive their salary in national currency, the purchasing power of which is 1% of the food basket, while some private sector workers receive their salaries in US dollars and have greater purchasing power, with marked wage inequalities. At 0.691, Venezuela is in the middle of the development index scale, having registered a sharp drop in its human development since 2014. On **target 1.3 (nationally appropriate social protection systems)**, 54.2% of the population were covered by at least one social protection system in 2017; in 2022, despite 76.8% of the total budget being allocated to public spending, social protection for workers is still very poor.

Some progress remains to be seen on the implementation of **SDG 5**. 2021 data for **target 5.5 (women's full and effective participation)** showed that half of the seats in the Supreme Court of Justice, 34% of cabinet ministers and 22.2% of the elected representatives in Parliament were held by women. Trade unions report that the proportion of the national budget allocated to the promotion of gender equality is exceedingly low.

On **SDG 8**, much remains to be done to implement **target 8.3 (decent job creation)** as informal sector rates remain high. While 55.6% of workers outside of agriculture were in informal employment in 2017, national data suggest that this proportion had risen to 80.8% by 2021. Trade unions attribute the growth in informal employment to a lack of adequate government policies to combat the informal sector. In March 2018, the ILO appointed a Commission of Inquiry for Venezuela to analyse repeated complaints of increasing informality and precariousness as well as disrespect for labour standards. On **target 8.5 (full and productive employment)**, the unemployment rate stood at 7.5% in 2021. The gender pay gap in Venezuela is one of the worst in the region, with women's average earnings standing at only 43% that of men's in 2021. Underemployment stood at 13.7% in 2019 and was

particularly high among youth between 15 and 24 (22.4%). NEET (not in education, employment or training) indicators for **target 8.6 (reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training)** stood at a high 37.1%, with men (44%) being more affected than women (30.1%). There is a lack of exact data on **target 8.7 (eradicate forced labour and the worst forms of child labour)**. However, in 2020 the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights reported that child labour was increasingly being used in mining and that children between the ages of 7 and 10 were being exploited for prostitution in Venezuela. Venezuela performs poorly on **target 8.8 (protect labour rights)** as the ITUC Global Rights Index classifies the country as suffering from systematic labour rights violations.

Progress remains to be seen in terms of Venezuela reducing social inequalities and achieving **target 10.4 (achieve greater equality)** given that it was the most unequal country in the Americas in 2022 and one of the most unequal countries in the world. The labour share of GDP stood at only 10.2% in 2019. The Venezuelan context is marked by significant emigration from the country (more than 7 million people) as the population seeks to escape poverty and inflationary pressures.

With regard to **SDG 13** and **target 13.2 (integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning)**, trade unions report that they are not involved in a dialogue on a just transition although they have petitioned the government to streamline the necessary measures into national development plans.

There is an urgent need to make progress on **SDG 16** in Venezuela, as **target 16.10 (protect fundamental freedoms)** remains unmet. In 2022, 274 individuals were reported as political prisoners and 87 cases of threats against trade union activists were recorded. Venezuela occupies an extremely low position in the global ranking of press freedom, 159th out of 180 countries.



TRADE UNION ASKS TO LEAVE NO-ONE BEHIND

Trade unions are calling on the Venezuelan government to:

- Use resources from funds frozen abroad due to sanctions to create an emergency income as a supplement to the minimum wage for workers, retirees and pensioners.
- Establish a fund for wage stabilisation, economic recovery, social benefits, social security and wages with resources from sanctions, oil funds and funds derived from international cooperation donations.
- Increase the minimum wage and pensions to the equivalent of the price of 50% of the food basket, with quarterly progressive adjustments until 100% of the basic basket is covered.
- Increase the level of bonuses provided to public sector employees.
- Include all active workers, retirees and pensioners in all social non-salary bonuses awarded by the national system.
- Widen the food voucher system ("cestaticket") to also cover transport and health expenditure for all workers, retirees and pensioners.
- Ensure compliance with collective agreements across sectors.
- Extend social and labour rights to informal workers.
- Include trade unions in the consultation process on the implementation of the SDGs. Establish mechanisms allowing for the active participation of trade unions in the monitoring and accountability of Agenda 2030 implementation.



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