



# ZIMBABWE

**A TRADE UNION  
FOCUS ON THE SDGs**

#HLPF2024

**WORKERS  
DEMAND A  
NEW SOCIAL  
CONTRACT**

## WORKERS NEED DURABLE RESPONSES TO MULTIPLE CRISES

Zimbabwe is facing multiple crises: recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic, food shortages and the impacts of climate change. While an economic recovery programme and stimulus package were introduced to combat the pandemic's impacts, trade unions and business representatives have criticised the lack of transparency on how the package was distributed and whom the stimulus measures benefited. Food security remains a challenge due to droughts and flooding. To address this, the government is working with the World Food Program to provide food to 2.7 million rural people.

To mitigate the impact of climate change, Zimbabwe is focusing on climate smart agriculture solutions to strengthen agricultural value chains and markets; enhance early warning and climate-related disaster risk reduction systems; ensure climate resilient infrastructure designs and development; and develop resilient and sustainable water resources management. The country's revised Nationally Defined Contribution Implementation Plan applies Just Transition principles to evaluate how green and climate policies affect job creation for women and youth, income distribution, skills development and economic growth.

## ARE TRADE UNIONS AT THE TABLE?

The government of Zimbabwe has integrated the SDGs into its 2021-2025 National Development Strategy (NDS), aiming to achieve Vision 2030. While all SDGs are integrated into the NDS, 14 are prioritised – in line with the Africa Agenda 2063. The Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare oversees the overall implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Other government ministries and agencies are responsible for implementing, monitoring and reporting on specific goals.

Local authorities, trade unions, civil society organisations (CSOs), traditional leaders and churches have been involved in drafting Zimbabwe's Voluntary National Review, with a trade union representative appointed as an official drafter. This has ensured open and transparent reporting on SDG implementation and alignment with national development programmes. However, without a stable consultation framework, there is no guarantee that such transparent consultation processes will continue. Additionally, trade unions regret the absence of higher-level decision makers in this process, limiting

its impact on future budget allocations. They also highlight significant data gaps in government reporting on SDG implementation.

While the national Tripartite Negotiating Forum, established in 2019, offers a tripartite platform for discussion, it does not discuss the SDGs and is only involved in policy development, not in overseeing implementation and monitoring. As such, SDG 8 has only been discussed in the context of the negative impact of Covid-19 on workers and the decent work agenda.

Trade unions warn that insufficient resources have been allocated to implementing the 2030 Agenda. They attribute this to a lack of concrete efforts to cut back on recurrent non-productive expenditures to create fiscal space; corruption and rent-seeking behaviour; failure to plug loopholes and eliminate leakages and illicit financial flows; and the slow pace of reform in state enterprises providing social services.

### TRANSPARENCY



Irregular access to limited information

### CONSULTATION



There is informal or ad hoc consultation

### SOCIAL DIALOGUE



There are individual contributions from social partners to the national government



# IS THE (DECENT) WORK GETTING DONE?

Zimbabwe faces significant challenges in meeting **SDG 1**. In 2019, the proportion of the population living below the international poverty line increased to 39.8 per cent from 34.2 per cent in 2017. In addition, 35.4 per cent of the country's workers were living below the national poverty line, indicating that **target 1.1 (eradicating extreme poverty)** is still far from being met. The increase in extreme poverty in rural areas is attributed to a worsening economic environment. In urban areas, deindustrialisation and job losses have led to increased informalisation of the economy. Reaching **target 1.3 (implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures)** is far off the mark, as the country lacks an unemployment insurance scheme, and in 2021, only 16.4 per cent of the population was covered by at least one social protection benefit, far below demand. This is partly due to the high reliance on funding from development partners rather than the government's own resources.

On **SDG 5**, reaching **target 5.4 (recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work)** remains distant, with women in Zimbabwe spending far more time than men on unpaid care and household tasks: 14 hours per week on looking after children under five (compared to seven hours for men); 12 hours per week on cooking (compared to 5.4 hours for men) and 11 hours per week caring for ill adults (compared to nine hours for men). Women also represent a larger share of informal workers than men (65 per cent of the informal workforce), which means that they are more often exposed to vulnerable employment.

Decisive progress is needed on **SDG 8**, as the Zimbabwean economy is dominated by informality: in 2022, the proportion of informal employment outside of agriculture stood at 76.6 per cent, with women (90.7 per cent) impacted at far higher rates than men (75.6 per cent). This poses a challenge to reaching **target 8.3 (support decent job creation)**. The 2022 unemployment rate stood at 10.1 per cent but was higher for the 15 to 24 age group (17.5 per cent), suggesting challenges in fulfilling target 8.5 (full and productive employment). NEET indicators for **target 8.6 (reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training)** stood at a high 32.3 per cent in 2022 – higher for young women (37.7 per cent) than for men (26.6 per cent). These numbers are particularly worrying given that 60 per cent of the

country's population is under the age of 25. Indicators on **target 8.7 (eradicate forced labour and the worst forms of child labour)** remain worrying, as trade unions warn that due to the harsh economic environment, vulnerability to exploitation, modern slavery and human trafficking remains high. While Zimbabwe has sectoral collective bargaining agreements in place, delivering on **target 8.8 (protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers)** seems far off due to the high levels of informality, rampant inflation, a weak judicial system and policy inconsistencies.

On **SDG 10**, **target 10.4 (progressive achievement of greater equality)** remains unmet while inequalities are increasing due to corruption and the stagnant wages and salaries compared to the cost of living. In 2017, the top 10 per cent of income earners had a 34.8 per cent share of GDP, with the bottom 20 per cent of income earners holding a 6 per cent share.

On **SDG 13**, while the Zimbabwean government has passed several policies to meet **target 13.2 (integrate climate change measures into national policies)**, trade unions report that the lack of political will and insufficient allocation of financial resources is likely to limit their implementation.

On **SDG 16**, trade unions report that Zimbabwe's performance on **target 16.10 (protect fundamental freedoms)** remains highly troubling, as violence against and attempts to dismantle independent unions continue, as does the prosecution of union leaders through violence, threats and kidnappings. In the 2024 Global Rights Index, Zimbabwe remains rated 5 which means there is no guarantee of rights for workers in the country.

## TRADE UNION ASKS TO LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

Trade unions call on the government of Zimbabwe to:

- Ensure a consistent dialogue in the Tripartite Negotiating Forum (TNF) and the implementation of its agreed positions.
- Provide meaningful budgetary support to the TNF secretariat for sublevel structures, data sharing and participants' capacity building.
- Provide for social partners' involvement not only in policy development for the 2030 Agenda but also its implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- Ensure wide and transparent dissemination of information on the implementation of the SDGs, including through the improvement of data collection and availability.
- Secure adequate funding for the priority goals identified in the National Development Strategy.
- Respect the principle of separation of powers in development policies and programmes to enable a rights-based and results-oriented approach.
- Develop and implement an action plan to combat informal employment and promote the transition to formality.
- Strengthen the Labour Inspectorate System to increase the protection of labour rights.
- Expand the coverage of occupational health and safety and specialised safety training programmes to the informal and public sectors.
- Strengthen labour migration governance and secure the portability of social security benefits.



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