

**COVID-19:  
WORKERS DEMAND  
JOBS, INCOME AND  
SOCIAL  
PROTECTION**

## COVID-19: WORKERS NEED RESPONSES FOR RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE

On 13 March, the government ordered social confinement measures and the suspension of all activities. The support measures announced include the following: the extension until December 2020 of job security (“inamovilidad laboral”) legislation to protect workers against dismissal; the suspension of rent payments for six months; the payment of a payroll subsidy to small and medium-sized enterprises, and solidarity vouchers for workers in the informal economy. ASI Venezuela, however, has underlined the delay in some payments, as well as their selective nature, favouring persons affiliated to the ruling party.

Considering the deep humanitarian crisis that the country is undergoing, the ASI trade union centre is calling on the government to urgently request humanitarian aid, not only to tackle the coronavirus crisis but also the permanent food and basic public services crisis. The pandemic has given rise to an urgent need to guarantee everyone a sufficient income to cover their basic needs and to extend access to universal social protection and free health care to all, along with unemployment or compulsory work suspension benefits. In terms of public services, it is essential that drinking water, electricity and gasoline supplies, which are scarce even for health service, food and medicine providers, are guaranteed.

### ARE TRADE UNIONS AT THE TABLE?

The Venezuelan government has stated that its Third Homeland Plan, which sets out its development objectives for 2019-2025, incorporates all the sustainable development goals (SDGs). The office of the president oversees the Economic and Social Development Plan, which is implemented by the National Planning System, led by the Ministry of Popular Power for Planning.

The Venezuelan government has announced that 75.9 per cent of the 2020 budget will be allocated to social investment, establishing social and economic plans to protect the poorest segments of society. However, trade unions warn that these measures exclude anyone who does not belong to political organisations supportive of the government.

There is a lack of transparency with regard to the progress made in meeting the SDGs – the Venezuelan government’s Voluntary National Review (VNR) presented at the 2016 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) did not include reliable or updated data on what measures were taken to implement the SDGs in the country and with what outcomes. On the contrary, trade unions believe that many targets have seen a regression, considering that the country is facing an aggravated humanitarian crisis, with widespread levels of malnutrition, the collapse of the public health system and the forced displacement of millions of Venezuelans.

#### TRANSPARENCY



No access to information at all

#### CONSULTATION



No consultation process at all

#### SOCIAL DIALOGUE



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



# IS THE (DECENT) WORK GETTING DONE?

Trade unions warn that the profound political and economic crisis in Venezuela has caused a humanitarian disaster and substantial regression in terms of the SDGs.

In 2019, 81.9 per cent of the population of Venezuela was living below the poverty line – 63.8 per cent in poverty and 18.1 per cent in extreme poverty – a highly alarming rate in relation to **target 1.1 (eradicate extreme poverty for all people)**. In 2018, 89 per cent of the population did not have sufficient means to buy food. Only 13 per cent of Venezuelan households are considered not to be poor, suggesting an 80 per cent increase in poverty between 2013 and 2018, measured by income line, and 3.7 million Venezuelans are in a state of malnutrition.

With regard to **target 1.3 (implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures)**, in 2016, 28.3 per cent of people with disabilities were covered by social protection systems, 5.1 per cent were covered by unemployment benefits and 59.4 per cent received a pension (70 per cent men and 50.2 per cent women). Trade unions also warn of a crisis in the health care system (lack of supplies, medication and infrastructure) which is particularly devastating now, in the context of the coronavirus pandemic.

More effort is required for Venezuela to achieve **target 5.4 (recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work)**, as women are nearly 50 times more likely than men to be entirely dedicated to unpaid domestic labour. Indicators on **target 5.5 (ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership in political, economic and public life)** show that in 2017, 71.7 per cent of women had attained at least a secondary education.

Venezuela is far from meeting the targets set by **SDG 8 (promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all)**. Of all the countries in the Americas, Venezuela is the country with the most rapid loss of formal employment. Estimates suggest

that around 60 per cent of the country's working age population may be in the informal sector.

The situation with regard to **target 8.3 (support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation)** is particularly worrying, as the current regulations on the minimum wage are insufficient and discriminatory, covering only a third of the economically active population employed within the formal sector. In addition, the economic collapse and hyperinflation reaching 1,300,000 per cent in November 2019 make the minimum wage increases virtually meaningless. Venezuela is very unlikely to achieve **target 8.8 (protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers)**: ASI Venezuela warns that the state violates trade union rights on a regular basis, interfering in trade union elections, threatening, arresting and laying off trade union representatives and placing legal restrictions on the right to strike. The situation is alarming both in the context of **target 8.8** and **target 16.10 (ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements)**.

The high levels of forced migration among Venezuelans, due to the humanitarian situation, are extremely worrying in the context of **target 10.7 (facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people)**. An estimated four million people fled the country between 2015 and 2018.

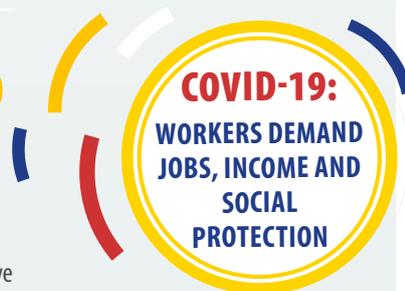
With regard to **target 13.2 (integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning)**, the government has included the protection of the environment among the goals of its National Plan but has refused to discuss it with the social partners. Furthermore, the establishment of the Orinoco Mining Arc clearly undermines environmental goals, as it reduces local indigenous groups' access to basic services such as drinking water and electricity, and it poses a threat to the biodiversity in the area.

## TRADE UNION ASKS TO LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

With regard to the SDGs, ASI Venezuela is urging the government to adopt social and economic policies that will curb the increase in inflation and the economic stranglehold on Venezuelan families and that will reduce poverty in a way that is sustainable and respects human rights. It is also essential that the social partners and civil society be included in the formulation of strategic plans for the achievement of the SDGs, as a prerequisite for designing a sustainable and inclusive development model.

In view of the Covid-19 pandemic, ASI Venezuela urges the government to issue an urgent request for humanitarian aid and multilateral cooperation to:

- Extend the distribution of food and medicine to the entire population, without any kind of discrimination, as well as the supply of drinking water, electricity, gas and solid waste collection.
- Guarantee job stability and extend social protection coverage to maintain the income of all workers affected by the crisis, ensuring an emergency minimum living income.
- Extend health service access to the entire population; establish a Covid-19 Scientific Committee, within this framework, to provide guidance and information regarding its development, as well as a tripartite mechanism to monitor compliance with the safety protocols in the workplace.
- While the crisis lasts, exempt workers from paying taxes and utility bills (electricity, water, gas, telephone), and suspend eviction proceedings for non-payment of rent.



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