



VENEZUELA

A TRADE UNION FOCUS ON THE SDGs

#HLPF2019



Foto: Mariela Alonso

ARE TRADE UNIONS AT THE TABLE?

The Venezuelan government's development goals are set out in the 2013-2019 Economic and Social Development Plan for the Nation (Homeland Plan), currently underway, which does not cover the SDGs or establish concrete strategies for their implementation, since the plan was drawn up prior to the approval of the 2030 Agenda. Since then, measures have been announced such as the Programme for Recovery, Growth and Economic Prosperity (2018), which seeks to address the challenges faced by the Venezuelan working class and is seemingly framed around the targets within SDG 8. The 2019-2025 Homeland Plan, currently being drafted, is said to fully incorporate all 17 SDGs.

The Homeland Plan is headed by the president and is implemented through the bodies and instruments set up within the National Planning System, under the aegis of the Ministry of Popular Power for Planning.

The development measures implemented by the government, however, lack transparency and cannot be audited by civil society, trade unions included. In 2018, the

policies adopted included measures to combat the impact of high poverty rates on the quality of life within society, such as providing food aid for 16.3 million people, which cannot be seen as positive, as it implies greater reliance on the government. Trade unions were not consulted regarding the design and implementation of the 2013-2019 Homeland Plan, and no consultation or reporting process was established to assess its implementation. Although the government claims that it has launched a consultation process for the drafting of the 2019-2025 Homeland Plan, the trade unions point to the impossibility of assessing it and taking part in the consultation, as the mechanism is only open to those who hold a "homeland card".

There is no tripartite social dialogue in place in Venezuela, nor any such dialogue on the SDGs. The government does not recognise autonomous or independent trade union organisations. ASI Venezuela has nonetheless attempted to present its position and observations to the government through declarations, press conferences and press releases.

TRANSPARENCY



No access to information at all

CONSULTATION



There is no consultation process at all

SOCIAL DIALOGUE



There is no involvement of social partners by the national government on an SDG national plan definition and implementation



IS THE (DECENT) WORK BEING DONE?

The deep political and economic crisis in Venezuela has given rise to serious reverses in relation to numerous SDG targets.

In 2017, 87 per cent of the Venezuelan population was living on the poverty line, an alarming rate and one that places the country very far from meeting **target 1.1 (eradicate extreme poverty for all people)**. In addition, 61.2 per cent of the population was living in extreme poverty. All households have suffered a fall in purchasing power as a result of the skyrocketing hyperinflation; and Venezuelan workers are the worst paid and the most impoverished in Latin America and the Caribbean. This is echoed by the levels of social discontent: 12,715 protests were recorded in 2018, 89 per cent of which were fuelled by demands related to economic, social, cultural and environmental rights. Nearly half of the protests were linked to the loss of workers' rights, the fall in the purchasing power of salaries and the lack of raw materials for industries and transportation.

The Venezuelan government introduced a series of measures in line with **target 1.3 (implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures)**, to supplement existing social security provisions, such as the additional allowances for vulnerable groups – disabled people, pregnant and breastfeeding women, school children, pensioners, etc. ASI Venezuela, however, considers these programmes to be exclusionary, in practice, as they are only accessible to those who support the government. Moreover, these ad hoc measures fail to address the underlying problem, bearing in mind that social investment during 2018 amounted to 72.5 per cent of the national budget and yet the social crisis is deepening.

More effort is required for Venezuela to meet **target 5.4 (recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work)**, as almost 50 times more women than men devote their time exclusively to unpaid domestic work. The female labour force participation rate, according to ILO estimates, was 52 per cent in 2018, and women represent 36.3 per cent of the labour force in the informal sector. The more than 18 per cent gender wage gap is, in fact, linked to the shift in the female labour force towards the informal economy. With regard to **target 5.5 (ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public**

life), the portion of women educated to at least secondary school level was 71.7 per cent. Women study more than men, and yet the gender pay gap persists across the board. As regards leadership at decision-making levels, the average participation rate among women is just 21 per cent.

There are serious doubts about Venezuela's ability to meet the targets set under **SDG 8 (promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all)**. The political and economic crisis in the country has contributed to job cuts in both the public and private sectors, the outsourcing of public administration tasks, the closure of companies or their transfer to neighbouring countries, and the rapid growth of informal and precarious employment. Of all the countries in the Americas, Venezuela has the highest number of subcontracted, outsourced and informal workers within its public administration.

It is very unlikely that Venezuela will meet **target 8.3 (support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation)**, given the high rate of informal employment – 41.3 per cent of the economically active population (EAP) works informally. In addition, 67 per cent of the EAP and 21 per cent of public sector employees receive pay that is not in line with the national minimum wage, and the wage tables are not adjusted in accordance with the collective agreements in force. Venezuela is very far off the mark when it comes to target 8.8 (protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers): 29 violations of the right to the freedom of association and collective bargaining (12 in law and 17 in practice) were reported during the period up to 2016. ASI Venezuela warns that the Venezuelan state systematically violates trade union rights, interfering in trade union elections, threatening, disqualifying and dismissing trade unionists and placing legal restrictions on the right to strike. Particularly worrying 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)** are the cases of trade union leaders Erick Zuleta and Carlos Navarro, who have been facing harassment and persecution since September 2018, seemingly in retaliation, in the case of the latter, for the complaints filed with the ILO regarding violations of international conventions.

WHERE TO NEXT?

TRADE UNION RECIPE TO LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

ASI Venezuela is urging the Venezuelan government to include all the social partners in the drawing up of strategic action plans aimed at reaching the SDGs. The participation of actors such as workers' representatives, civil society and other actors such as the private sector must be fully recognised as essential and crucial to the design of an effective and inclusive development model.



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