



PAKISTAN

A TRADE UNION FOCUS ON THE SDGS

#HLPF2022

WORKERS DEMAND A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT FOR RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE

COVID-19: WORKERS NEED DURABLE RESPONSES TO THE CRISIS

After the first wave, the federal and provincial governments of Pakistan coordinated their response to the Covid-19 pandemic via a national platform. Vaccination is now provided free of charge to all citizens. Individuals and households were supported with an emergency payment via the national social protection “Ehsaas” programme, which is being extended to low-income workers through the specific “Mazdoor Ka Ehsaas” initiative. Fuel, rent and loan payments were deferred for a limited period and paid sick leave was partially provided. Food parcels were distributed to the most marginalised. Financial support was also provided to businesses, including SMEs, to protect jobs and incomes. A targeted approach allowed certain sectors and areas to stay open.

Trade unions call on the Pakistani government to ensure social protection for all, including workers in informal and vulnerable employment. Women and Pakistani migrant workers abroad were particularly affected by the measures taken to contain the pandemic. Trade unions emphasise the importance of a multilateral approach to sustainable development, combining social, economic and environmental priorities. Investments in the care economy must be a priority for Pakistan’s resilience strategy.

ARE TRADE UNIONS AT THE TABLE?

Pakistan has integrated the SDGs into its national and provincial plans, including its “Vision 2025” growth strategy. The federal and provincial ministries of Planning, Development and Reform each have a unit dedicated to monitoring and coordinating SDG progress. However, resources allocated to the SDGs, particularly for education, health and social protection, are limited. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the economy already faced significant challenges in terms of foreign debt, a current account deficit and an energy crisis.

Trade unions call for full, structured participation in the development and monitoring of policies and programmes to realise the SDGs, given that they have not been involved in their implementation. There is scope for greater collaboration with social partners in the government’s efforts towards sustainable recovery and resilience in key areas, including the green economy, environmental protection, creation of productive employment, decent work, skills development, and social protection for all.

TRANSPARENCY



Irregular access to limited information

CONSULTATION



Informal or ad hoc consultation

SOCIAL DIALOGUE



No involvement of social partners by national government on SDG plan



IS THE (DECENT) WORK GETTING DONE?

While poverty rates in Pakistan have declined over the past decade, the Covid-19 pandemic reversed this trend and significant challenges remain to meet **target 1.1 (eradicate extreme poverty for all people)**. 21.9 per cent of the population were living under the national poverty line in 2018. Pakistan ranks 154 out of 189 countries with a “medium” HDI of 0.557. Under **target 1.3 (appropriate social protection systems and measures)**, the most significant development in recent years has been the introduction of the “Ehsaas” national social security and poverty alleviation programme, with new initiatives to extend coverage to informal workers and other vulnerable groups, and a supporting database. A new universal health coverage scheme was launched this year. However, coverage (only 9.2 per cent) and public spending on social protection are still very low, and a shift from a poverty-reduction to a lifecycle-based framework is needed to build a more inclusive system.

Major challenges remain on gender equality in Pakistan, a situation exacerbated by the pandemic. Female labour force participation was only 21.4 per cent in 2020-21; women are overrepresented in informal, low-paid and vulnerable work and still undertake most **unpaid care and domestic work (target 5.4)**. There is a large gender pay gap. Progress on **target 5.5 (full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership)** has stagnated in recent years. The proportion of women who have completed secondary education (27.6 per cent up to 2019) and who are in managerial positions (4.9 per cent in 2018) is still very low by international standards. Gender budgeting efforts still need to become more embedded.

Target 8.3 (formalisation) is still far from being met, as in 2021, the informal sector accounted for 72.5 per cent of non-agricultural employment. 37.5 per cent of workers earned less than two thirds of median hourly wages; this is especially the case for female workers, 75.4 per cent of whom were in this category, compared to 31.3 per cent of men (2018 figures). As for **target 8.5 (achieve full and productive employment and decent work)**, the unemployment rate stood at 6.3 per cent in 2021 and was more likely to affect women (8.9 per cent) than men (5.5 per cent). The number not in employment, education or training (NEET) mentioned in **target 8.6 (reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training)** stood

at 31.2 per cent in 2020, with great disparity between the sexes: 56.2 per cent of young women compared to 8 per cent of young men were NEET in Pakistan. The “Kamyab Jawan” initiative was launched to tackle this in 2019. Significant efforts are still needed to reach **target 8.7 (eradicate forced labour, end child labour in all its forms)**. Recent statistics are lacking; however, 2011 indicators showed that 11.3 per cent of children (aged 5 to 17) were engaged in child labour and that over three million people (1.7 per cent of the population) were living in modern slavery in 2018. **Target 8.8 (labour rights and safe and secure working environments for all)** is far from being met, as 42 violations of labour rights (28 in law and 14 in practice) were noted in 2017. Trade union density is low, standing at just 2.3 per cent of the total labour force in 2018. There are too few labour inspectors.

Further progress is still needed for Pakistan to reach **target 10.4 (adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies and progressively achieve greater equality)**, as the top 10 per cent of income earners had a 25.5 per cent share of GDP, with the bottom 20 per cent of income earners holding an 9.6 per cent share in 2018.

To reach the objectives of **target 13.2 (integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning), priorities on climate change and the environment are addressed in the government’s 12th Five Year Plan (2018-2023)**, disaster risk plans and other policies. However, trade unions warn that the government has no strategy to accommodate the needs of workers arising from the technological shift associated with the introduction of environmental policies.

Regarding **target 16.3 (promote the rule of law and ensure equal access to justice for all)**, labour courts are too expensive for poorer workers to access. Indicators on **target 16.10 (protect fundamental freedoms)** are also worrying. NGO operations are restricted by the government, workers and supporters of social movements have been subjected to intimidation or detention, and labour unionisation is discouraged at all levels.

TRADE UNION ASKS TO LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

To ensure an SDG-led recovery and resilience from the crisis, trade unions urge the government of Pakistan to:

- Ensure more effective implementation of laws and policies, supported by better statistics, and involve social partners in the SDG prioritisation and implementation process.
- Ensure that universal social protection is available to all, including the most vulnerable.
- Ensure a living wage.
- Ensure decent work, safety in the workplace and labour rights for all. Recognise and protect the basic rights of workers in the informal sector, home-based workers, domestic workers, brick kiln workers and agricultural workers. Ratify ILO Conventions 176 (mines), 177 (homework), 189 (domestic workers) and 190 (violence and harassment).
- Eradicate child and forced labour.
- Continue to expand skills development and job creation programmes in order to meet the needs of youth, women and marginalised segments of the workforce. Improve the effectiveness of the existing gender budgeting and gender-sensitive policymaking approaches.
- Pursue a just transition towards environmentally friendly and climate-neutral growth in close involvement with social partners.
- Put in place a comprehensive legal aid system.



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