



PHILIPPINES

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

The Philippines government responded to the Covid-19 pandemic with militarised lockdowns and continues to rank poorly in terms of Covid resilience. Financial assistance to workers was not inclusive, was insufficient to meet basic needs, and was only temporarily available. Wage subsidies were only provided to SMEs. There was a 30-day extension on mortgages, rents and loans. While some companies provided reduced working hours or paid sick leave from day one, Covid-19 was only classed as a compensable occupational disease after a trade union campaign. The government released issuances that effectively amended labour laws without any act of Congress and suspended its labour inspection function. There was no childcare support for frontline workers.

Trade unions continue to call for adequate financial assistance and income protection for all, and for a safe return to work. The government missed opportunities to strengthen the overwhelmed free public healthcare system and provide free mass testing; to provide emergency employment, including transport services; and to develop a just transition, including a more efficient transport system. Furthermore, the Anti-Terror Law passed hastily at the height of the pandemic has been used to justify arrests and extrajudicial killings of union leaders and labour activists.

ARE TRADE UNIONS AT THE TABLE?

The Philippine government has integrated the SDGs into the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2017-2022. SDG implementation is coordinated via a National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) secretariat and a Development Budget Coordination subcommittee. SDG implementation was discussed but once at the Tripartite Industrial Peace Council (TIPC), the formal social dialogue mechanism at the national level, but there was no meeting involving social partners called for the purpose of VNR consultation.

Information on the SDGs is generally available. However, the government is not fully transparent, for example on extrajudicial killings or on freedom of association cases that are misleadingly classified as non-labour-related. There are mechanisms to gather input from national actors, both online and offline, including multi-stakeholder platforms that include civil society organisations. While social partners mostly submit individual contributions

to the government, these are not necessarily considered in SDG planning and implementation.

There are also formal institutions for social dialogue, although limited to the Department of Labour and Employment, including the Social Security System, the Home Mutual Development Fund and the national health insurance system PhilHealth. Despite the legal mandate to appoint workers at policy making boards of these institutions, workers are not genuinely represented in these and their inputs are hardly considered for decisions. Unions call for social dialogue to apply more widely to all labour-related issues across government and for workers to be treated on an equal footing with employers, as SDG implementation is not currently discussed in tripartite fora. Unions also warn that insufficient resources have been allocated for SDG implementation.

TRANSPARENCY



Irregular access to limited information

CONSULTATION



Information sessions but no interaction

SOCIAL DIALOGUE



Individual contributions from social partners to the national government



IS THE (DECENT) WORK GETTING DONE?

Challenges remain for the Philippines to meet **target 1.1 (eradicate extreme poverty for all people)**. In 2021 only 2.8% of Filipinos lived below the international poverty line (US\$1.90/day), but 23.7% of the population were estimated to be living below the national poverty line. The Philippines has a “high” HDI ranking of 0.718. Under **target 1.3 (appropriate social protection systems)**, 36.7% of the population were covered by at least one social protection benefit in 2020. While 98% are covered by health insurance, and education spending has increased, out of pocket spending on both remains high and corruption in PhilHealth is a problem.

Under **target 5.4 (recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work)**, women take on more of this work, and this increased during the pandemic. Under **target 5.5 (ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership)**, women held 52.7% of managerial positions in 2018 and 27.6% of seats in the national parliament in 2020. 75.6% of women have at least some secondary education (72.4 % of men). Gender budgeting exists but needs to be more effective.

Much progress is still to be made on **target 8.3 (formalisation)**: 40% of employed people work in the informal sector; 22.3% were in low-paid work in 2017; and 34.6% were in vulnerable work in April 2022. Regarding **target 8.5 (full and productive employment and decent work for all)**, in April 2022 unemployment stood at 5.7% and underemployment at 14%, a decrease since pandemic levels. The **proportion of youth not in employment, education or training (target 8.6)** has decreased over the past decade but was still high at 18.6% in 2020, with more women affected than men. A youth development plan is in place. Under **target 8.7 (end forced labour, modern slavery, human trafficking and child labour)**, the estimated prevalence of people living in modern slavery is 7.7 per 1,000 and 2.8% of children aged 5 to 17 were estimated to be working in 2020. Reaching **target 8.8 (protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers)** is still of concern. While occupational accidents are decreasing, at least one in five businesses does not comply with labour or occupational safety and health

standards. Unions report that rights on freedom of association and collective bargaining are not guaranteed in practice, with 39 violations reported in 2017. More insecure, flexible and informal employment has led to trade union density declining to 7.3% in 2019 and collective bargaining coverage to 1.6%. There are still too few labour inspectors. The Philippines has ratified ILO C.151 several years ago but there is still no implementing law for it.

Major challenges still remain to achieve **target 10.4 (adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies and progressively achieve greater equality)**: labour share of GDP decreased to 26.6% in 2017. Despite a recent increase, the minimum wage is still too low, given soaring commodity prices. Trade unions and employers are consulted on migration policies under **target 10.7 (migration and mobility)**, but social dialogue is not institutionalised in the main responsible agency. Over half of Filipino migrant workers are in Middle Eastern countries where their right to freedom of association is restricted.

The Philippines has a National Climate Change Action Plan (NCCAP) and submitted its nationally determined contributions in line with **target 13.2 (integrate climate change measures)**; however, unions have expressed concerns over weak targets, adaptation programmes, and lack of consultation regarding just transition.

A “Single Entry Approach” exists to make the resolution of labour issues more accessible in line with **target 16.3 (promote rule of law and ensure equal access to justice for all)**. The situation under **target 16.10 (ensure access to information and protect fundamental freedoms)** is alarming: there is no guarantee of rights. State repression includes the “red-tagging” of trade unionists, which means that the government labels them as rebels or supporters of communist insurgency, a tactic used to justify harassment, arbitrary arrests, intimidation or, in the worst case, extrajudicial killing, of workers and trade union leaders. At least two media companies critical of the government, were shutdown.

TRADE UNION ASKS TO LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

In May 2022 the new president, Ferdinand Marcos Junior, was elected in an alliance with Sarah Duterte. To ensure an SDG-led recovery and resilience from the crisis, trade unions urge the Philippine government to:

- fully recognise social dialogue as a means of SDG planning, implementation and monitoring, with workers as equal partners;
- impose a wealth tax to pay for Covid-19 measures and fund economic recovery, including social protection and labour market programmes that address inequality;
- pass a security of tenure law that totally ends contractualisation;
- stop extra-judicial killings, resolve existing cases, end impunity and prosecute those responsible for the deaths and disappearances of workers and other rights defenders;
- abolish the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict;
- disband the Joint Industrial Peace and Concern Office (JIPCO)/Alliance for Industrial Peace Program (AIPP), as it violates ILO Convention No. 87 on Freedom of Association;
- include workers representatives in the Administrative Order 35 Inter-Agency Council that looks into cases of extra judicial killings;
- create green, decent, and climate-friendly jobs with just transition;
- strengthen social protection systems and improve the existing unemployment insurance schemes to include an active labour market component; and
- end violence against women and girls, including by fully implementing the Magna Carta of Women and the Safe Spaces Act and ratifying the ILO Convention 190.



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