



CANADA

A TRADE UNION FOCUS ON THE SDGS

#HLPF2023

WORKERS DEMAND A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT FOR RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE

WORKERS NEED DURABLE RESPONSES TO MULTIPLE CRISES

To address the challenge posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Canadian government introduced emergency pandemic benefits, which reduced poverty despite an unprecedented rise in unemployment. As the findings of the 2021 Canada Income Survey show, the withdrawal of income support benefits caused poverty rates to return to pre-pandemic levels, and in some cases (e.g. unattached seniors), exceed them. In 2021, over 18% of Canadians (nearly 7 million individuals) lived in households reporting marginal, moderate or severe food insecurity, up from 15.7% (5.8 million people) in 2020. Families with children, particularly female single-parent families, were at higher risk of food insecurity. Food prices this year have been increasing at or near twice the pace as overall Consumer Price Inflation, compounding the effects of high shelter, transportation and home heating costs. Despite downward pressure on living standards, falling average real wages, and the unwinding of COVID-era fiscal stimulus, monetary policy remains focused on slowing business investment and increasing labour-market slack.

To tackle the challenges presented by the climate crisis, the Canadian government has presented an interim Sustainable Jobs Plan and committed to introducing a Sustainable Jobs Act by the end of 2023. The legislation is set to include guiding principles, governance structures and reporting requirements, including a requirement for the government to prepare and implement Sustainable Jobs Action Plans starting in 2025, and every five years thereafter.

ARE TRADE UNIONS AT THE TABLE?

The Canadian government launched a national strategy on Agenda 2030 in 2021. The Minister of Families, Children and Social Development has the overall responsibility for Canada's SDG implementation, in collaboration with all other ministers and their departments. The Minister of International Development champions Canada's international SDG efforts. All federal ministers, departments and agencies are accountable for implementing the SDGs within their areas of responsibility. An SDG unit coordinates efforts, raises awareness, monitors and reports on implementation. The Canadian government reports that it has committed \$59.8 million in funding over 13 years (2018 to 2031) to the implementation of the Agenda 2030. In addition, several federal programmes are supporting partnerships under various SDGs.

Progress on implementing the SDGs is reported through the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) and other government reporting mentioning the

SDGs. Canada is currently preparing for its second Voluntary National Review (VNR). The government launched a public consultation, inviting all citizens and civil society to provide input into the VNR, and the answers received are set to inform the report. Additional engagement activities will include targeted outreach to engage stakeholder groups, included trade union organisations, such as Government of Canada departments, provinces and territories, municipalities, Members of Parliament, indigenous peoples, youth and key SDG stakeholders.

Trade unions are able to raise issues relating to SDG implementation through existing platforms, such as bilateral discussions, ILO tripartite discussions, or through the submission of briefs and occasional opportunities such as at annual tripartite roundtables.

TRANSPARENCY



Regular access to limited information

CONSULTATION



Structured consultation/multi-stakeholder platform

SOCIAL DIALOGUE



Individual contributions from social partners to the national government



IS THE (DECENT) WORK GETTING DONE?

On **SDG 1**, indicators for **target 1.1 (eradicating extreme poverty)** show that Canada ranked as the 15th most developed country in the world in 2021, with an HDI score of 0.936. While in 2018 only 0.2% of the population lived below the international poverty line, 7.6% of Canadians aged 18-64 were working poor. The proportion of working poor was particularly high among black men and women, First Nations people and recent immigrants. With regards to **target 1.3 (nationally appropriate social protection systems)**, in 2018, coverage stood at 100% of the population covered by at least one social protection benefit. However, in 2019, only 69.1% of employees were covered by workplace injury benefits and only 68% of persons with severe disabilities were covered by disability social protection benefits. In 2017, Canada's social spending represented 23.1% of GDP, above the OECD average of 20.9%.

Further progress must be made on reaching **SGD 5** and **target 5.4 (recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work)** as in 2015, more women performed housework (89% compared to 76% of men) and women spent more time on caring for children (one hour vs 30 minutes per day for men). They were also more likely to provide care to an adult family member or friend (3.3% vs 1.2% for men). On **target 5.5 (women's full and effective participation)**, the proportion of seats held by women in parliament increased from 20.6% in 2000 to 30.5% in 2022 but remains far off parity. In 2018, the government approved the Gender Budgeting Act and developed a Gender Results Framework to track progress in meeting gender-equality goals.

On **SDG 8**, efforts to promote **target 8.3 (decent job creation)** still need to be made, as in 2019, 10.8% of employment could be categorised as vulnerable. On **target 8.5 (full and productive employment and decent work for all)**, the rate of unemployment in 2022 stood at 5.3% (5.4% for men and 5.1% for women) —the lowest reported since 1976, despite sharp rises registered in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The rate of underemployment has also fallen, reaching 7.3% in 2022. NEET indicators for **target 8.6 (reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training)** stood at

12.9% in 2021 (down from 17.9% the year before). Trade unions report that indigenous youth are twice as likely to be NEET than their non-indigenous peers. Progress on **target 8.8 (protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers)** requires some improvement, as after a sustained decline, non-fatal occupational injuries have been on the rise since 2016.

On **SDG 10** and **target 10.4 (progressively achieve greater equality)**, in 2019, the income share held by the highest 10% stood at 25.3%, while that of the lowest 20% at 7.1%. The share of GDP from labour, comprising wages and social protection transfers, increased only slightly from 60.1% in 2004 to 60.8% in 2019. On **target 10.7 (migration and mobility)**, while the government regularly consults stakeholders on its immigration-level plans, trade unions are not involved in these discussions. Trade unions express significant concerns about the rights of migrant workers, who do not have full protection of their rights and are subject to exploitation.

To implement **SDG 13**, in 2023 Canada launched a Sustainable Jobs Plan, following a consultation, including with trade unions. A Sustainable Jobs Secretariat was established to coordinate policies, and a Sustainable Jobs Partnership Council will promote consultation with trade unions among others. More funding has been allocated to support training for green jobs.

On **SDG 16 (peaceful and inclusive societies)**, it is concerning that occasional cases of arbitrary arrest of workers and trade unionists have been recorded, alongside violations of the right to association and the right to strike. Trade unions report that increases in online attacks on public office holders, journalists and human rights advocates has harmed media freedom in Canada.



TRADE UNIONS ASK THAT NO-ONE IS LEFT BEHIND

Trade unions call on the Canadian government to:

- To promote the creation of decent jobs:
 - Restore full employment as a primary objective of macroeconomic policy
 - Invest in sustainable jobs and training, lifelong learning, and literacy and essential skills.
 - Replace tied work permits for migrant workers with open permits and pathways to permanent residency
 - Improve job quality by ending employee misclassification, prohibiting contract-flipping, ensuring equal treatment for part-time workers, and strengthening the rights of remote workers and those working on digital platforms.
 - Remove barriers to unionisation and introduce robust anti-scab legislation preventing companies from using replacement workers in the event of strikes.
 - Ensure a just transition by making sure that investments in clean energy create good jobs.
- To promote social protection:
 - Reform employment insurance to improve access to adequate regular and special benefits
 - Provide dental care and universal medical insurance (pharmacare).
- Raise minimum wages and ensure they increase in line with the rising cost of living.
- Promote gender justice at work, ensure pay parity, prevent gender-based violence in the workplace.
- Invest in public care services to reduce and redistribute unpaid care.
- Strengthen federal and provincial labour standards, ensure compliance with ILO conventions and obligations.
- Promote social dialogue all levels – with federal, provincial and territorial governments and employers.



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