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# **MAKING THE 2030 AGENDA A REALITY THROUGH A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT**

**WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONS MAJOR GROUP  
SECTORAL POSITION PAPER TO THE HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM**

**#TIME FOR**



**THE CLOCK IS TICKING FOR  
A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT**



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# CONTENTS

<b>A. The SDGs under review: modest progress at an insufficient pace .....</b>	<b>4</b>
SDG 6: Universal access to water and sanitation .....	5
SDG 7: Access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all .....	6
SDG 9: Resilient infrastructure, inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and innovation .....	6
SDG 11: Inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities .....	7
SDG 17: Partnerships for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda .....	8
<b>B. Reversing the trend: the importance of SDG 8 and trade unions .....</b>	<b>9</b>
SDG 8 as a driver for sustainable development.....	10
SDG 6: Decent work in the water and sanitation sectors, a key requirement for ensuring universal access to quality public services .....	13
SDG 7: Ensure inclusion and labour rights protection for an effective energy transition that is fair to working people and communities .....	16
SDG 9: Skilled workers with full labour rights for truly inclusive and sustainable industries and technologies.....	19
SDG 11: Valuing the essential work of those who underpin the workings of cities, a key component in building more just and liveable urban spaces.....	23
SDG 17: Social dialogue at the centre of the transition to sustainable, inclusive and democratic societies .....	27
<b>C. Conclusions and recommendations .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>D. Trade union messages for the High-Level Political Forum 2023 .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>E. Bibliography and sources consulted .....</b>	<b>37</b>

**A.**

**The SDGs under review:  
modest progress at an  
insufficient pace**

The world is faced with the growing uncertainty and complexities surrounding multiple crises – armed conflict, inequality, climate crisis, etc. – which interact with and reinforce each other, hampering progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>1</sup>.

It is a context that calls for a strengthening of the overall commitment to the 2030 Agenda and more determined and urgent action to make headway with meeting the SDGs under review this year.

Access to water and sanitation (**SDG 6**), as well as the development of sustainable and affordable sources of energy (**SDG 7**) and the construction of sustainable and inclusive cities (**SDG 11**) are key to promoting local economic development, reducing inequalities and the risks to which people and communities are exposed, particularly those already in vulnerable situations. Fostering sustainable innovation, industry and infrastructure (**SDG 9**) is key to boosting economies and generating new jobs and incomes at the same time as protecting the environment. Finally, dialogue and partnerships are central to meaningful implementation (**SDG 17**) and to ensuring a socially and environmentally just transition.

Despite their importance, only modest progress has been made to date, and the situation has worsened over the last three years with the interlocking or deepening of various crises. At the current pace, progress towards meeting these SDGs by 2030 is far off target<sup>2</sup>.

## **SDG 6: Universal access to water and sanitation**

Today, around a quarter of the world's population is still without access to safe drinking water and almost half to safely managed sanitation. Furthermore, almost a third of the global population do not have the facilities needed at home to wash their hands with soap and water. If the current trend continues, by 2030, there will be 1.6 billion people without access to safe water sources and 2.8 billion without access to adequate sanitation. Reaching the target of universal access would require a four-fold increase in the rate of progress observed between 2015 and now<sup>3</sup>.

Intensive water use and pollution by industry, agriculture and other unsustainable activities, as well as inadequate water and sanitation management systems, increasing urbanisation and the deterioration of critical ecosystems, such as wetlands, are adding to the threat of climate change. Many regions of the world are already suffering from water stress. The rate at which ice and glaciers are melting is accelerating, and extreme events, which are ever more frequent and intense, are damaging critical infrastructure for the provision of safe water and sanitation, for example<sup>4</sup>.

Water is an irreplaceable resource on which all life depends and a crucial input for many production processes. There is no SDG that does not depend to some extent on access to water. Lack of access to water and sanitation deepens inequalities, causes preventable diseases and affects food and energy production. In addition, the lack of access to safe water means that many women and girls spend several hours a day securing water for their homes as part of the care responsibilities they often assume. It is a situation that impedes their access to the full enjoyment of their rights and deepens existing gender inequalities. In some countries, access to safe water in rural settings has been found to have a direct impact on reducing child labour<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations (2022).

<sup>2</sup> United Nations (2022).

<sup>3</sup> United Nations (2022).

<sup>4</sup> IPCC (2023).

<sup>5</sup> ILO (2021a).

## SDG 7: Access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

At present, over 700 million people are without **access to electricity** and 2.4 billion people still use **inefficient and polluting energy sources** for cooking in their homes. If the current trend continues, an estimated 679 million people will still be without access to electricity by 2030 and about a quarter of the world's population will continue to lack access to safe energy sources for cooking<sup>6</sup>.

Access to reliable and affordable energy is critical to economic performance and people's development. Lack of access deepens inequalities and hinders the exercise of other **rights**, leading to: greater educational and digital exclusion and inequalities; an added workload for those tasked with cleaning and cooking in the home – predominantly women and girls; limitations on productive activities; transport and mobility difficulties; health problems due to the use of polluting fuels, among many other impacts on everyday life. Many of those without access to safe energy sources are also excluded from water and sanitation services, which further reinforces inequalities and exclusion<sup>7</sup>.

Also, despite the headway made in terms of **energy diversification**, the share of renewable energy in total energy consumption is less than 18 per cent, and international financial flows to support the deployment of renewables in the developing world are declining. Improvements in **energy efficiency** are also falling far short of the pace needed to meet the 2030 targets. Should the current trend continue, the international commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by incorporating renewables and improving energy efficiency will be very far from being met – and all the more so given that some European countries are considering a return to coal to ease the energy crisis caused by the war in Ukraine.

## SDG 9: Resilient infrastructure, inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and innovation

The pandemic severely impacted economies and employment around the world. Following the crisis in 2020, the **manufacturing industry** slowly recovered and has now returned to pre-pandemic levels, although the rate of recovery is uneven. As regards **employment**, a third of those working in the manufacturing sector at the time of the pandemic either lost their jobs, had their working hours or wages cut, or experienced a deterioration in their working conditions<sup>8</sup>.

**Small industrial enterprises** – and micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in general – were particularly hard hit by the pandemic-related crisis due to their limited access to financial resources, difficulties in adapting to digitalisation and supply chain constraints, among other issues. Small informal businesses had difficulty accessing government assistance<sup>9</sup>. Financial support is vital to sustaining small businesses and yet only a third of small-scale enterprises are estimated to have benefited from a loan or credit between 2021 and 2022<sup>10</sup>.

**Internet** access was crucial to the survival of many small businesses during the crisis and to those who had to work from home as well as to ensuring continued access to education<sup>11</sup>. Although most of the global population is now covered by mobile broadband networks, the primary means of internet access, there are quality issues and blind spots in many countries, especially in rural settings in lower-income countries, where an estimated 17 per cent of the population was not covered in 2021. Even where there is coverage, barriers to access persist given the cost of the devices and the lack of digital literacy among

<sup>6</sup> United Nations (2022)

<sup>7</sup> International Energy Agency (IEA) et al. (2022).

<sup>8</sup> ITU (2022).

<sup>9</sup> OIT (2023a).

<sup>10</sup> United Nations (2022).

<sup>11</sup> ITU (2022).

a significant share of the population, especially women and older people<sup>12</sup>. Countries with **diversified industries and solid transport, services and internet infrastructures** sustained less damage and their economies recovered more rapidly. In 2022, high- or medium-tech industries reached production levels similar to those in 2019.

Regarding global **CO2 emissions**, after the 5.8 per cent fall in 2020, emissions rose again to higher levels than in 2019, despite a global improvement in energy intensity since 2015<sup>13</sup>.

## SDG 11: Inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities

This remains a major challenge. Around one billion people – a quarter of the urban population – currently live in **slums or informal settlements**. Slums often have inadequate housing, poor access to services such as water and sanitation, transport problems and are more vulnerable in the event of disasters<sup>14</sup>. They are also more likely to be in close proximity to sources of pollution, such as landfill sites<sup>15</sup>.

It is estimated that 99 per cent of people living in urban areas are exposed to air pollution above the **air quality** limits set by the World Health Organization (WHO). Air pollution from transport, industry, power generation or waste incineration causes 4.2 million premature deaths a year, 91 per cent of which occur in low- and middle-income countries<sup>16</sup>.

As regards municipal **solid waste management**, globally, 82 per cent of waste is collected and only a little over half is managed in controlled facilities; the rest ends up in landfill<sup>17</sup>. The lack of suitable management causes pollution, contributes to global warming and is a cause of disease; plastic waste is one of the biggest pollution problems and has a huge impact on our oceans<sup>18</sup>.

Only 37 per cent of cities are served by **public transport**, which means that only 52 per cent of the urban population has access to a convenient public transport system<sup>19</sup>. In addition to improving people's mobility, an efficient and well-designed public transport system would help reduce traffic congestion and pollution and make cities more inclusive and safer. Furthermore, only 45.2 per cent of urban dwellers have access to open **public spaces**, such as squares or parks, within 400 metres of their place of residence<sup>20</sup>.

In terms of disaster risk reduction strategies, the number of countries where local strategies have been developed has doubled since 2015, but efforts need to be scaled up in light of the growing and accumulated risks<sup>21</sup>. In this regard, the latest IPCC report (2023) points out that, in any future scenario, projected risks and impacts will escalate dramatically, interacting with and exacerbating other risks and warns of the need to significantly increase efforts and financial flows to strengthen risk reduction and adaptation in the countries that will be most affected<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> United Nations (2022).

<sup>13</sup> United Nations (2022).

<sup>14</sup> United Nations (2022).

<sup>15</sup> Kaza, S. et al. (2018).

<sup>16</sup> WHO (2023).

<sup>17</sup> United Nations (2022).

<sup>18</sup> UNEP (2021).

<sup>19</sup> It is considered convenient when the place of residence is within 500 metres of a bus or tram system, or within 1000 metres of a ferry or train system.

<sup>20</sup> United Nations (2022).

<sup>21</sup> United Nations (2022).

<sup>22</sup> IPCC (2023).

## SDG 17: Partnerships for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda

According to the United Nations (2022), in 2021, **ODA flows** to low-income countries increased by 3.3 per cent in real terms compared to 2020. The total volume, however, is equivalent to 0.33 per cent of the combined gross national income (GNI) of Development Assistance Committee donor countries, which is well below the 0.7 per cent target. Furthermore, the pandemic led to an increase in **external debt** that is unsustainable for low- and middle-income countries in all regions, which is likely to place significant constraints on investment in social, economic and environmental policies<sup>23</sup>.

As regards the means of implementation, the **development of data and statistics** remains critical for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, however, funding for the development of this sector has stagnated following the cuts experienced in 2020. The lack of reliable data makes monitoring difficult and poses a problem for transparency and accountability.

Lastly, target 16 of SDG 17 recognises the importance of countries establishing multi-stakeholder partnerships to monitor progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. Yet, according to reports prepared by national trade union centres on the implementation of the SDGs in their respective countries, the ITUC has noted that there is a **persistent lack of transparency and mechanisms for consultation and dialogue with the social partners** in many countries<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> ILO (2021e).

<sup>24</sup> Based on trade union reports from 13 countries: Argentina, Botswana, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Mali, Netherlands, Pakistan, Philippines, Senegal, Somalia, Uruguay, and Venezuela. ITUC (2022b).



**B.**

**Reversing the trend:  
the importance of SDG 8  
and trade unions**

Each of the aspects involved in achieving the SDGs under review involves challenges and opportunities from a labour perspective, it is therefore essential to keep in mind the spirit of SDG 8 on decent work to ensure that the – necessary and urgent – efforts to make progress on each of the targets do not affect working conditions or opportunities for the labour force. Efforts to ensure decent working conditions in the sectors involved will also have a direct impact on the effectiveness of the policies and measures implemented to achieve the other SDGs.

## **SDG 8 as a driver for sustainable development**

In light of the situation described above and the worrying forecasts, accelerating action on all dimensions of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs is imperative. Although the 17 goals that make up the 2030 Agenda are equally important, from a trade union perspective, SDG 8 is particularly important given its multidimensional nature and the fact that it is a catalyst for accelerating progress on the rest of the SDGs, especially the targets on innovation, productive diversification, environmental sustainability and decent work.

### **Box 1. Trade union priorities for the targets under SDG 8**

8.2. Achieve higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation, including through a focus on labour-intensive and high value-added sectors.

8.3. Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalisation and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services.

8.4. Progressively improve global resource efficiency in production and consumption by 2030 and endeavour to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation, in line with the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns, with developed countries taking the lead.

8.5. By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value.

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) has developed its own tool to track progress on SDG 8: the SDG 8 Monitor. Using a composite indicator, this tool makes it possible to assess progress or setbacks with regard to the various dimensions of SDG 8, to establish comparisons between regions and countries and to identify correlations with other indicators of the 2030 Agenda.

### Box 2. What is the ITUC's composite indicator on SDG 8?<sup>25</sup>

- The composite indicator on SDG 8 shows the centrality of the social and labour dimension within the 2030 Agenda.
- It covers 150 countries, representing more than 98 per cent of the world's population.
- It is built on a selection of indicators based on reliable, relevant and available statistical data collected from official international sources.
- It is calculated on the basis of four sub-domains or composite indicators:
  1. economic wellbeing, including indicators on economic performance, financial markers of development, living standards and inequality;
  2. employment quality, which includes indicators on labour market performance, labour income share and working poverty;
  3. labour vulnerability, which includes indicators on exposure of workers to risks, under-protection and exclusion; and
  4. labour rights, which includes indicators on violations of fundamental rights at work.

## Findings of the ITUC Global Monitor on SDG 8

The 2023 version of the SDG 8 index covers 150 countries corresponding to more than 98 per cent of the world's population. The composite indicator for SDG 8 is calculated as the average of four composite indicators: economic wellbeing, employment quality, labour vulnerability and labour rights. Its value ranges from 70 to 130, with 100 being the world average and its distribution by geographical region and income group for 2023 is presented in the table below:

### Box 3. Composite indicator by region and income. Year 2023

	No. of countries	Economic wellbeing	Employment quality	Labour vulnerability	Labour rights	SDG 8 Composite Indicator
<b>UN Region</b>						
Asia	22	100.3	100.9	98.7	85.0	96.2
Europe	36	111.3	104.1	116.8	118.6	112.7
Latin America and the Caribbean	23	95.6	100.3	97.3	104.1	99.3
Northern Africa	6	94.9	72.5	94.2	80.6	85.6
North America	2	112.4	107.0	119.2	102.0	110.1
Oceania	3	110.0	108.2	98.8	109.8	106.7
Sub-Saharan Africa	42	83.5	92.1	77.8	96.8	87.5
Western Asia	16	101.3	90.2	100.5	86.5	94.6
<b>Income group</b>						
Low	26	80.3	88.4	72.1	92.1	83.2
Lower Middle	40	91.4	94.1	88.0	89.8	90.8
Upper Middle	39	98.0	95.1	102.5	98.0	98.4
High	45	113.3	106.3	115.5	115.3	112.6

Source: ITUC, own calculations of the SDG 8 composite indicator.

<sup>25</sup> For details of the methodology, see ITUC (2020b).

As can be seen, Northern Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa are the lowest scoring regions, with a difference of around 25 points compared to Europe and North America. Asia and Western Asia also score below average and perform particularly poorly in the area of labour rights. Latin America is also below the average. In this case, the indicator is affected by its particularly poor performance in the area of economic wellbeing. When looking at the breakdown by income group, huge differences can be seen between low-income and high-income countries, with a gap of around 30 points.

When comparing successive measures of the indicator, we see that high-income countries have improved their overall score, moving away from the world average in a positive direction, while low-income and lower middle-income countries have worsened their score, moving away from the world average in a negative direction. When looking at the regions, Europe and North America have seen the greatest improvement in their overall indicator, while Northern Africa has worsened. The figures show a progressive widening of the gaps.

#### Box 4. Composite indicator by region and income (2021,2022, 2023).

	2021	2022	2023
<b>UN Region</b>	<b>97.18</b>		
Asia	108.38	95.7	96.2
Europe	99.18	112.55	112.7
Latin America and the Caribbean	91.26	96.86	99.3
Northern Africa	107.35	87.53	85.6
North America	106.25	110.04	110.1
Oceania	92.80	104.40	106.7
Sub-Saharan Africa	94.38	86.93	87.5
Western Asia		94.49	94.6
<b>Income group</b>	<b>90.70</b>		
Low	94.35	83.7	83.2
Lower Middle	98.28	90.05	90.8
Upper Middle	107.39	96.96	98.4
High		111.65	112.6

Source: ITUC, own calculations of the SDG 8 composite indicator.

Although a North-South divide clearly emerges, it does not necessarily follow that high-income countries have full employment and decent work. Analysis of the various components shows that economic growth alone does not prevent inequalities; the lack of adequate wages and labour inclusion are still major obstacles to job quality in many countries, as is workers' exposure to risks and inadequate protection. Although high-income countries scored better than average on the labour rights front, the crisis brought with it restrictions on freedom and infringements of labour rights around the world, even in the most developed economies. This included violations and non-compliance with labour standards, unfair dismissals, cuts in working hours and wages and disregard for occupational health and safety standards<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> ILO (2021c)

Both the latest data from the ILO, the United Nations<sup>27</sup> and the ITUC's Global Monitor provides compelling evidence of the huge distance still to be covered to meet SDG 8: persistent labour rights violations, over half of the world's population without social protection coverage, close to two billion people in informal work and inequality gaps that are not being narrowed.

At the same time, through its targets on worker protection, decent work, social protection, gender equality at work, inclusive and environmentally sustainable growth, SDG 8 is key to addressing the structural social and economic challenges that are at the root of the multiple crises affecting the world, as well as to advancing the 2030 Agenda and acting as a catalyst for progress on the other SDGs.

This is why it is essential that SDG 8 play a central role in the Decade of Action to achieve the SDGs, as proposed by the ITUC in its #timefor8 campaign.

Analysis of the correlations between progress on SDG 8 and some of the SDG indicators under review – 7, 9 and 11 – shows that, in almost all cases, an improvement in the SDG 8 composite indicator correlates with improvements in the other indicators<sup>28</sup>.

## SDG 6: Decent work in the water and sanitation sectors, a key requirement for ensuring universal access to quality public services

The management of water and sanitation services requires the intensive participation of a workforce that does not always enjoy working conditions that are compatible with decent work.

In the **sanitation** sector in particular, many people work informally, without protection and without rights, especially those who work in septic tank, sewer, toilet or latrine cleaning services<sup>29</sup>. It is **low-paid and invisible work** that is often carried out by people from traditionally discriminated groups and women<sup>30</sup>. In addition to **exposure to chemical and biological hazards**, the nature of the work they do reinforces their stigmatisation and the discrimination they face<sup>31</sup>.

The sector's workforce also includes people working in public sector and private enterprises, who are more likely to enjoy the coverage of the labour rights enshrined in the applicable legal framework. Despite this, there is evidence of **disparities between the private and public sectors**: for example, wages tend to be lower in the private sector than in the public sector, and outsourcing, downsizing and barriers to unionisation are prevalent<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> United Nations (2022) and ILO (2023b)

<sup>28</sup> See <https://www.ituc-csi.org/sdg8-as-a-new-social-contract-for-a-job-rich-recovery-and-resilience>

<sup>29</sup> World Bank et al. (2019).

<sup>30</sup> WaterAid (2019).

<sup>31</sup> Equal times (2014).

<sup>32</sup> PSI (2022) and Kishimoto, S. et al. (2014)

## Areas where progress needs to be made

It is essential that efforts be stepped up to ensure the **universal human right to safe water and sanitation services**. The pandemic clearly showed the particularly vulnerable situation of households without adequate facilities; the build-up and possible exacerbation of future crises represent an urgent call for action to universalise access and improve the quality of services and infrastructures, which necessarily includes improving the working conditions of the people working in the sector.

The **right to adequate facilities in the workplace**, as stipulated in international labour standards (ILS)<sup>33</sup>, must be secured, including for those working in transportation, in the open air or in the informal economy; the specific needs of women, young people, people with other gender identities or with disabilities must be taken into account.

Ensuring **broad social dialogue mechanisms for the public and democratic management** of water and sanitation services is essential. Experience has shown that when management is privatised, when water is treated as a commodity or as a financial asset, the human right to water and sanitation is put at risk, inequalities in access for the most impoverished groups are deepened and sustainability is affected<sup>34</sup>.

Expanding the coverage of public water and sanitation services should be an opportunity to **bring dignity and value to the work** of those already working in the sector, in addition to creating new jobs, improving investment and implementing measures that are **gender-responsive** and respect the **just transition** criteria in accordance with the ILO Guidelines<sup>35</sup>.

Recognising the **essential nature** of the work performed by people employed in water and sanitation services, whether in the public, private or informal sector, and ensuring that they have **decent working conditions** is imperative: **decent pay, health and safety standards, adequate training and the right to organise and take part in decision-making** processes. It should be noted that occupational health and safety has recently been recognised by the International Labour Conference as one of the five fundamental rights and principles at work<sup>36</sup>.

## The contribution of trade unions towards progress on SDG 6 targets

Trade union organisations linked to the water and sanitation sectors in different parts of the world are promoting initiatives that contribute significantly to progress on SDG 6 targets. Examples include the creation of the University Institute of Water and Sanitation (IUAS) by the SGBATOS trade union in Buenos Aires, Argentina, or trade union involvement in the management and monitoring of the Paris water company.

<sup>33</sup> At least 10 ILO Conventions and 18 codes of practice for different sectors refer to ensuring access to water, sanitation and hygiene in the workplace.

<sup>34</sup> Heller, L. (2021) and Arrojo Agudo, P. (2021).

<sup>35</sup> ILO (2015a).

<sup>36</sup> "International Labour Conference adds safety and health to Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work". ILO, 10 June 2022.

See: [https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS\\_848132/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_848132/lang-en/index.htm)

### **Box 5. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Training of workers and social actors to improve water and sanitation services management**

SGBATOS (Sindicato del Gran Buenos Aires de Trabajadores de Obras Sanitarias) brings together employees of AySA, a company deprivatised in 2006, which provides drinking water and sanitation services to the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area (AMBA).

The AMBA covers an area of 3,363 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of almost 15 million people, of which only 11 million have access to drinking water and 9 million to sanitation<sup>37</sup>; coverage below the national average, mainly due to the concentration of slums or informal settlements, where coverage barely reaches 11.6 and 2.5 per cent of their inhabitants, respectively<sup>38</sup>.

SGBATOS is firmly committed to improving quality and expanding service provision and has always placed emphasis on the training of the company's staff. In 2021, the organisation took a qualitative leap forward with the creation of the University Institute of Water and Sanitation (IUAS).

Through the IUAS, the union provides training on health and safety, water and sanitation management systems, environmental protection, climate change adaptation and mitigation, targeting people who are formally employed in the sector and those involved in neighbourhood associations, cooperatives and other trade unions, such as training for cooperatives taking part in programmes of the Ministry of Social Development.

The union is also working with the company to develop projects such as the installation of solar panels at the treatment plants and the generation of biogas from sewage waste.

It is also a very active partner in social dialogue with the company and the government. It takes part in structures such as the National Water Roundtable and the Expanded National Cabinet on Climate Change.

Source: PSI (2022b).

### **Box 6. Paris, France: Public water management with trade union participation**

In Paris, trade unions are represented on the board of directors of the Eau de Paris water company, which is in charge of the city's drinking water supply.

The company was re-municipalised in 2010. Since then, considerable investments have been made towards the maintaining and improving the supply network and the water bill for consumers has been reduced by 8 per cent.

The company has also created the "Paris Water Observatory", a body that promotes the participation of all stakeholders: local authorities, workers, consumers and civil society representatives.

Source: PSI and UCLG (2021).

<sup>37</sup> See: <https://www.aysa.com.ar/Quienes-Somos/nuestros-numeros>

<sup>38</sup> Government of Argentina (2021).

## SDG 7: Ensure inclusion and labour rights protection for an effective energy transition that is fair to working people and communities

The International Energy Agency's (IEA) first global report on employment in the **energy sector**<sup>39</sup> notes that the recovery of employment in the sector after the crisis triggered by the pandemic was largely driven by the growth of clean energy<sup>40</sup>, which employs over half of the people working in the energy sector. Employment in the fossil fuel sector also increased over the last two years, but the recovery was more modest and was mainly in the gas sector, with coal falling sharply.

Beyond the employment gains or losses, the transformation of the energy grid will entail, among other things, the **re-skilling** of fossil fuel workers; it will also involve **training and the development of certification systems** to meet the demand for new professional profiles, many of which are highly skilled. The **skills gaps, geographical displacement and time lag** between job losses and new employment opportunities are major challenges, both for the effectiveness of the transformation and for ensuring a just transition for the workforce and the communities affected.

Attention should be paid to the **working conditions of the new jobs** created. While working conditions in the energy sector are often in line with legal requirements, this is not necessarily the case for the new jobs created. In addition to monitoring working conditions, it is crucial that job categories and the corresponding trade union registration be properly defined, to ensure representativeness in **social dialogue processes**.

### Areas where progress needs to be made

Universal access to affordable, secure and modern sources of energy is a matter of **social justice**, given its key role in addressing the structural inequality gaps that have been widening in recent years. Likewise, the transition towards cleaner energy cannot be postponed, for ecological and economic reasons. It is also a matter of **environmental justice**, since, in addition to being the main cause of global warming, the dominant forms of energy production are also responsible for a variety of impacts, such as excessive water use, pollution by hazardous substances, or the displacement of communities and traditional productive activities, which often results in conflicts with the local population<sup>41</sup>.

**Removing fossil fuel subsidies and drastically and urgently reducing fossil fuel emissions** to the levels needed to reach the internationally agreed 1.5°C target is essential. **Increased funding and support for renewables** is also essential to reducing emissions and impacts, without losing sight of the ecological and social challenges involved in implementing new energy sources.

It must therefore be ensured that the process of transforming the energy system at every level – generation, distribution and consumption – takes on board the principles of a **just transition**, with the widest possible participation of the communities and individuals concerned, as part of a genuine process of **democratising access to and the management of energy**.

**Social dialogue** between the actors in the world of work is therefore crucial to decision-making, as tackling the labour challenges is one of the core components in delivering the energy transition. In accordance with the **ILO Guidelines for a Just Transition**<sup>42</sup>, industrial, sectoral and energy policies should include measures to ensure skills development and the protection of labour rights, as well as to promote the creation of decent jobs in the renewables and other emerging sectors.

<sup>39</sup> International Energy Agency, IEA (2022).

<sup>40</sup> Broadly speaking, what the IEA classes as clean energy jobs are those where energy is generated from renewable sources and from fossil and nuclear fuels equipped with carbon capture and storage; energy efficiency and electrification in buildings, industry and transport – with exceptions; and low-emission fuel supply – liquid biofuels and biogases and hydrogen-based fuels.

<sup>41</sup> ILO (2021e).

<sup>42</sup> ILO (2015a).



A just transition also implies **gender mainstreaming** with regard to access to safe and modern energy sources and women's participation in decision-making on energy management, as well as their inclusion in the labour force in the transformation process.

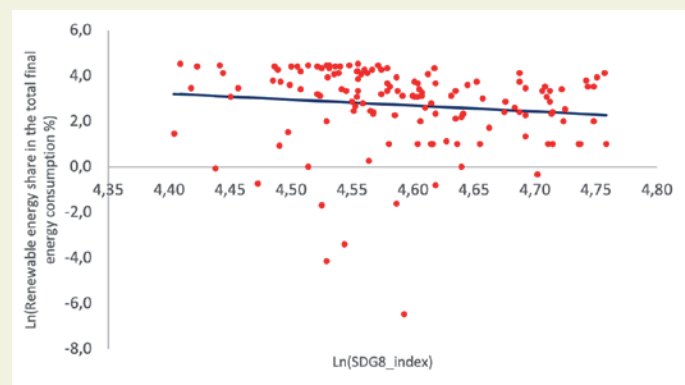
It is important that future reviews of the **Nationally Determined Commitments (NDCs)**, as an obligation under the Paris Agreement, **incorporate just transition measures** in line with the ILO Guidelines. An analysis carried out in 2020 by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) showed that out of 52 NDCs analysed, only 10 included a reference to just transition, and only 15 to social dialogue<sup>43</sup>.

Lastly, it is essential that the people working in the sector see that the energy transition will not lead to their exclusion or a worsening of their working conditions, or it will be very difficult to secure their engagement in and commitment to the process. It is also important that the affected communities be able to envisage the **opportunity to benefit from the transformation**, by generating local training and employment opportunities that take into account **women and young people**, for example, or promoting **coordination with the local productive fabric**, such as micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (**MSMEs**) and social and solidarity economy (**SSE**) initiatives.

**Making progress on and securing the various targets under SDG 8**, in particular those on decent work, working conditions and support for small businesses, is an essential part of the strategy to drive the achievement of the targets under SDG 7.

The **SDG 8 composite indicator** developed by the ITUC shows that, under the current production model, there is a trade-off between progress on SDG 8 and SDG 7 (sustainable energy). Proactive policies therefore need to be implemented in the decarbonisation of energy and industry to ensure a transition that does not exclude working people and their communities. There is also, under this model, a direct link between economic growth and CO2 emissions, so more ambitious progress needs to be made on the SDG 8 target to decouple GDP growth from environmental degradation (target 8.4).

**Graph 1. Composite indicator of SDG 8 and the share of renewable energy in total energy consumption.**



<sup>43</sup> ITUC (2020a).

## The contribution of trade unions to progress on SDG 7 targets

Trade union organisations in various parts of the world are promoting actions that contribute in a very positive way to the achievement of SDG 7, such as the project led by Germany's DGB trade union federation to ensure a just transition in regions affected by the phase-out of coal, COSATU's Just Transition Blueprint for Workers or SEWA's (Self-Employed Women's Association of India) solar energy technical training for women.

### Box 7. Germany: Just transition in the coal mining regions

Revierwende is a project initiated in 2021 by Germany's DGB trade union federation to support a just transition in regions affected by the phasing out of coal mining and coal-based energy production. Its main objectives are to strengthen workers' participation in the inclusive development of former coalfields and to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and good practices between regions.

The project is cross-sectoral and inter-regional, involving the main coal regions of the country. Its workstreams include: knowledge transfer, together with networking and public outreach; training to improve the skills of the local workforce – especially young people – as well as members of trade unions and works councils; and consultancy assistance for the development and implementation of regional policies.

All the activities are designed to keep a strong focus on decent work and ensure that all workers are covered by collective bargaining agreements.

The project has already succeeded in expanding trade union outreach with governmental, business and social organisations working on regional restructuring in the just transition away from coal. It has also developed inter-regional capacity building to enable the transfer of experiences<sup>44</sup>.

Source: European Commission (2023).

<sup>44</sup> The project remains active for the time being, but the current energy crisis and the policies being implemented in the country to cope with it could lead to changes (European Commission, 2023).

### **Box 8. South Africa: Trade union just transition blueprint for people working in coal, transport and agriculture**

In South Africa, the Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), together with its affiliates, has developed a Just Transition Blueprint for workers linked to the coal energy, agriculture and transport value chains.

The blueprint includes support for trade unions in the design of policies and promoting the use of collective bargaining to ensure that working people and their unions take an active part in a radical transformation of the economy.

It builds on COSATU's 2011 Policy Framework on Climate Change, which sets out the general principles of a just transition and serves as a launching pad for future debates and negotiations in the world of work as well as for further research on the challenges posed by transition for various sectors and contexts.

COSATU's five main demands for a just transition are: job creating and sustainability policies, universal basic income, re-skilling and up-skilling, land redistribution and an end to austerity and a just macroeconomic framework to address the climate challenge.

Source: COSATU (2022).

### **Box 9. Gujarat, India: Women salt workers train as solar technicians**

In 2022, the Self-Employed Women's Association of India (SEWA), an umbrella organisation of nearly two million women from 18 states in India, together with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and ReNew Power, the country's leading renewable energy company, launched the 'Project Surya' initiative to train low-income women working in the salt pans of Rann of Kutch in Gujarat as renewable energy technicians.

The programme aims to train 1,000 women, preparing them to contribute to the transition to clean energy in regions where there are significant gaps in coverage. It also offers them the opportunity to significantly improve their incomes and working conditions.

Source: United Nations India (2022).

## **SDG 9: Skilled workers with full labour rights for truly inclusive and sustainable industries and technologies**

As we have seen, the industrial recovery after the pandemic was uneven and at a pace that was not matched by job creation. In most countries, employment levels have not yet reached pre-pandemic levels<sup>45</sup>. In a global context of uncertainty, the productive system as a whole has been heavily affected, in particular micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), which employ two thirds of the world's workforce. In addition, wages are losing purchasing power to inflation, inequalities are deepening and decent work deficits are widening.

<sup>45</sup> OIT (2023b).

The recovery from the pandemic could have been an opportunity to transform the productive system and create quality jobs. Yet, in almost all countries, recovery strategies have reinforced **support for polluting sectors** that are not necessarily characterised by good working conditions, and **extractive activities are continuing to expand** in many countries, with **poor value chain integration, low employment generation and little value added**<sup>46</sup>.

The composite indicator for SDG 8 developed by the ITUC shows that there is a positive correlation with SDG 9 indicators, such as increasing value added in production.

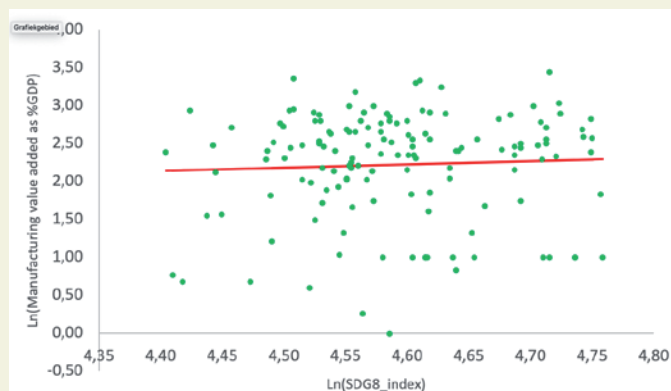
As regards technological developments, **innovation in the digital sector** is particularly rapid. Under the sector's current format, however, employment growth is limited to the supply of very high-skilled jobs in a few technology companies. Moreover, the incorporation of digital technology is leading to **increased outsourcing and subcontracting, at the expense of rights, job security and pay**. In many countries, trade unions lack the power and resources to negotiate the terms around the introduction of new technologies<sup>47</sup>.

## Areas where progress needs to be made

**Public investment in green and resilient infrastructures** to cope with the long-term impacts of climate change, as well as the **diversification and greening of industry**, could be major drivers of job creation, at the same time as reducing environmental impacts and contributing to a more robust and resilient economy and society<sup>48</sup>. To be able to achieve this, it is essential that this process be aligned with SDG 8, to ensure that the transformation leads to greater opportunities for MSMEs, and improved working conditions for the billions of people who currently face a range of labour rights deficits.

Among other measures, it is essential that public bodies play a greater role in allocating credit and support for research and technological development. Help with access to finance and assistance programmes for **micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises** is also essential, as is promoting the **formalisation of the economy** in accordance with the principles of ILO Recommendation 204<sup>49</sup> on the transition from the informal to the formal economy, including **social and solidarity economy (SSE)**<sup>50</sup> initiatives, and taking on board the specific needs of women, young people and migrants.

**Graph 2. Composite indicator of SDG 8 and manufacturing value added as a percentage of GDP**



<sup>46</sup> ILO (2021e).

<sup>47</sup> ITUC (2022e).

<sup>48</sup> ITUC (2022c).

<sup>49</sup> ILO (2015b).

<sup>50</sup> ITUC (2022a).

Furthermore, ensuring decent work is directly linked to higher **value added in production** and contributes to stronger social protection systems that are better able to respond to future challenges. Likewise, a diversified productive system in which there is **coordination and complementarity between productive units of different scales** will provide greater plasticity, adaptability and resilience in the face of future crises. This includes the design, coordination and implementation of policies to **decarbonise industry**, to reduce dependence on imports in key sectors such as food and energy, and to increase the **value-added component of primary commodity exports**.

**Technological innovation** is central to the transformation. Technology is being incorporated at a rapid pace in all industries and in all spheres of human activity, and not least the innovations in the digital sector. The **benefits are, however, concentrated** within a small group of corporations and the impacts of technological developments are uneven, depending on where countries are positioned in global supply chains<sup>51</sup>. Moreover, the full benefits they could bring to society as a whole are still not being reaped; for example, progress is slower than expected (and needed) in technological breakthroughs to promote sustainable mobility or energy<sup>52</sup>. Expanding access to the internet and technology would enable the inclusion of hundreds of millions of people, mostly women and girls, who are currently excluded from the digital world; universal broadband coverage by 2030 could create 24 million jobs, of which around a quarter would be filled by young people<sup>53</sup>.

There are also growing concerns about the **regulatory gaps in the digital economy**, especially with regard to the opacity surrounding algorithms and the management of data, which is controlled by a small group of large tech companies<sup>54</sup>. This monopoly on the data that governments rely on for their day-to-day operations has serious implications for the provision of strategic public services<sup>55</sup>; it also impacts on companies, especially MSMEs, which use the services of digital platforms to reach their customers, without control over the algorithms determined by search engines or access to the data of their own customers<sup>56</sup>.

Regulations must also be put in place to ensure the labour and trade union rights of people working remotely, on digital platforms or in the technology industry, to avoid their classification as false self-employed workers and to guarantee fundamental rights such as organising and collective bargaining<sup>57</sup>. There is also a need to invest in gender-responsive training and capacity building and to design and implement national skills certification systems, including the recognition of migrant workers' skills and qualifications.

In sum, it is essential that the extent to which the decent work dimensions of SDG 8 might be affected be considered when promoting SDG 9 and assessing its implementation. Without a workforce that is skilled and has full enjoyment of labour rights, transformation and innovation will neither be inclusive nor sustainable.

## The contribution of trade unions to progress on SDG 9 targets

Trade unions in many countries are already playing an active role in the transformation, promoting or taking part in spaces and measures that promote the transformation of production systems, the strengthening of infrastructures and the restoration of degraded environments.

<sup>51</sup> ITUC (2022e).

<sup>52</sup> ILO (2023b).

<sup>53</sup> ITUC (2023).

<sup>54</sup> ITUC (2023).

<sup>55</sup> PSI (2019 and 2021a).

<sup>56</sup> James, D. (2023).

<sup>57</sup> ITUC (2023).

### **Box 10. Spain: Agreements between trade unions, government and companies to manage the phase-out of coal and the transformation of mining villages**

In 2020, the Spanish government adopted the Climate Change Law, which establishes the Just Transition Strategy for the energy sector as part of the process of decarbonising the economy. Social dialogue, with the active participation of trade union organisations, is one of the central elements of the process.

The trade union centres Comisiones Obreras (CCOO), Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT) and Unión Sindical Obrera (USO), through their respective industrial branches, reached an agreement with the government and companies on the transition strategy for the closure of coal mines and coal-fired power plants<sup>58</sup>, which serves as a basis for regional agreements in the areas affected by the closures.

The Just Transition agreement includes a variety of investments for the implementation of sustainable development plans in mining areas. It includes measures such as: training and re-skilling for those left jobless by the closure of the mines and a specific job bank; the ecological restoration and regeneration of former mining sites, prioritising the hiring of people formerly employed in the mining industry; improving the infrastructures in mining communities, such as waste management, public services infrastructure and gas and lighting distribution, reforestation, cleaning up the atmosphere, and reducing noise pollution; local action plans for renewable energy development, energy efficiency improvement and investments for new industries.

Source: JTC (2022).

### **Box 11. Nigeria: Trade unions and environmental organisations drive an industrial transformation with a just transition for communities and workers**

In Nigeria, land grabbing and the introduction of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) by large producers are displacing tens of thousands of people working in small-scale farming. At the same time, the environmental degradation caused by oil and gas extraction operations is destroying livelihoods and undermining the full enjoyment of human rights. The fight for environmental and climate justice therefore overlaps with the fight for labour rights.

It is against this backdrop that the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), in partnership with Environment Rights Action (ERA), launched the "Just Transition in Nigeria" project, with support from the ITUC Just Transition Centre, the Dutch trade union FNV and Friends of the Earth. The initiative is aimed at supporting a rapid transition to other forms of production whilst ensuring positive outcomes for the workers and communities.

One of the challenges is securing the involvement of communities where there are concerns that the transformation could lead to the loss of jobs or income. The NLC is therefore working with its trade union representatives on the ground to identify the people who can lead the process in the hardest-hit communities.

The initiative has been recognised by the Nigerian government, which has called on the NLC to develop a roadmap for a just transition in the country, taking into account the principles of the Silesia Declaration on Just Transition, agreed at the COP 24 climate change conference, and bringing a trade union perspective to the Nationally Determined Commitments (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement.

Source: JTC (2022).

<sup>58</sup> Government of Spain (2019a and b).

### Box 12. New Zealand: Building the leadership capacity of trade union representatives to drive change in carbon-intensive sectors

The New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (NZCTU) has been working to put the concept of just transition on the political agenda as one of the key responses to climate change.

One of the challenges for trade unions has been to build the capacity of their representatives to address the issue of climate change, highlighting the role of the union in creating a clean and sustainable future by ensuring a just transition for the workforce.

The NZCTU is therefore encouraging unions to build union leadership capacities, especially in unions representing workers in carbon-intensive sectors. New Zealand's unions recognise that postponing the transition is no longer an option and are working to ensure a transition that provides secure and decent work.

Source: JTC (2022).

## SDG 11: Valuing the essential work of those who underpin the workings of cities, a key component in building more just and liveable urban spaces

Making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable means providing urban populations with quality public services: safe water and sanitation, sustainable mobility, efficient housing, proper waste management, access to energy, green spaces and protection from disasters. Much of these responsibilities fall on local or regional governments that are confronted with various constraints and growing challenges and are often under-represented in national policy discussions or international negotiating platforms<sup>59</sup>. Most of the sectors mentioned above are considered **essential** in various ILO international labour standards, yet the people working in them are often exposed to **high levels of risk** and a range of **shortfalls in their working conditions**<sup>60</sup>.

As mentioned previously, work in the **water and sanitation** sector is often precarious and invisible, which, in addition to violating labour rights, also results in poor quality services. People working in **municipal waste management** experience similar issues: working conditions – whether in the public, private or informal sector – are often precarious, exposure to health risks are high, wages are low, and they are often faced with stigmatisation and discrimination. The situation is particularly dire for people working informally, who often rely on waste collection as their only means of survival. When waste management is privatised, many of the difficulties are exacerbated: increased costs, loss of technical know-how and control, deepening inequalities between the neighbourhoods that can pay and those that cannot, and more precarious work<sup>61</sup>.

Similarly, measures to improve the urban **passenger transport sector** are essential. People working in the sector often have to endure a range of decent work deficits, exposure to violence and poor access to basic sanitation, such as water and toilets. The situation is more precarious for those working informally – the majority, in many countries – and the share of young workers tends to be high<sup>62</sup>. As with other

<sup>59</sup> PSI (2021b).

<sup>60</sup> ILO (2023b).

<sup>61</sup> Cibrario, Daria (2019).

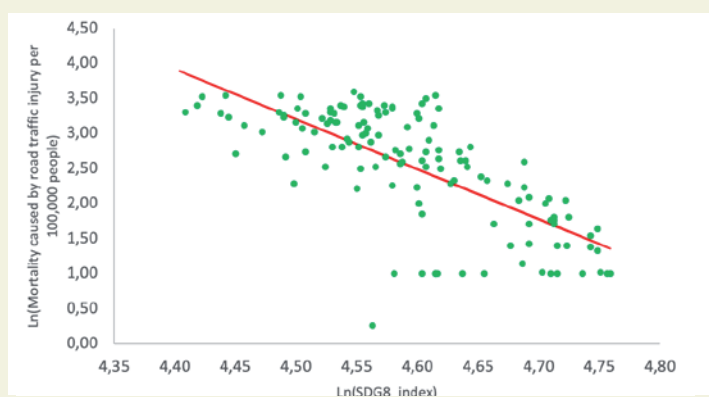
<sup>62</sup> ITF (2021).

public services, digitalisation could contribute to the quality and sustainability of transport, but there are growing concerns about the opacity of algorithms and data management, as well as the risk of increasing the level of informal employment<sup>63</sup>.

The correlation analysis of the ITUC's **SDG 8 composite indicator** with selected SDG 11 indicators shows that progress on SDG 8 translates into more inclusive urban environments, as well as a decrease in road traffic-related deaths.

Finally, people working in the **public emergency services** – police, fire, emergency medical services, search and rescue – are at the forefront of responding to crises of various kinds: earthquakes, industrial accidents, fires, pandemics and extreme events. They are often at high risk and work excessively long hours, irregular hours and under great stress, and do not always have the right tools, equipment or protection<sup>64</sup>. In many countries, they are denied basic labour rights, such as the right to organise (ILO C87) or collective bargaining (C98)<sup>65</sup>.

**Graph 3. Composite indicator of SDG 8 and traffic accident mortality per 100,000 people.**



## Areas where progress needs to be made

The transformation of cities into safe, inclusive and sustainable environments provides a very good opportunity for the creation of socially and environmentally just jobs. There is significant room for improvement, for example, in the **municipal waste** sector, where management and recycling rates are very low, and public investment in adequate infrastructure and job training could help improve working conditions in the sector and create quality jobs, contributing with the commitments of the New Urban Agenda<sup>66</sup> and ILO Recommendation 204 on the formalisation of the informal economy, as many of those currently working informally could be incorporated into formal structures.

Also, in the **housing and infrastructure** sector, the implementation of public policies for the renovation of existing buildings and the construction of social housing with efficiency criteria could provide significant employment opportunities, reduce inequalities in access to housing and contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions from energy consumption in cities. In addition, the **rehabilitation and restoration of degraded urban and peri-urban areas** often requires significant labour input, while also improving air quality, facilitating access to green spaces and increasing resilience to disasters. Similarly, **decarbonising transport** and promoting **sustainable and accessible mobility** for all could also be a source of employment and inclusion. This type of investment, as well as helping to generate quality jobs and reduce environmental impacts, provides an opportunity to increase access to services, infrastructure and decent housing for a large part of the urban population that is currently excluded from this possibility.

<sup>63</sup> OIT (2021d).

<sup>64</sup> OIT (2018).

<sup>65</sup> ISP (2021b).

<sup>66</sup> New Urban Agenda. Habitat III. Available at: <https://habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda>



In all cases, the transition towards sustainability in any of these sectors implies major challenges for the world of work, which is why the guidelines of SDG 8 and the ILO's Guidelines for a Just Transition must be taken into account to actively create quality employment, guaranteeing opportunities for re-skilling and re-employment, secure conditions, decent wages, and the full enjoyment of labour rights, including the right to organise and collective bargaining. It is also important to consider the new risks that may be faced by people working outdoors or exposed to extreme conditions, such as heat waves.

As previously mentioned, the privatisation of public services often results in a loss of technical and action capacity for local governments, workers and communities, as well as more unequal access and poorer working conditions. In times of crisis, like now, and considering the numerous successful experiences of deprivatisation or remunicipalisation processes, political agendas are increasingly highlighting the importance of recovering the public management of privatised services as a viable political option for democratising access to and the management of quality local public services<sup>67</sup>.

## The contribution of trade unions to progress on SDG 11 targets

Trade unions around the world have been working for years to improve the quality, accessibility and sustainability of public services in cities.

### Box 13. Uganda: Formalisation of transport workers

The Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union (ATGWU) suffered a major loss of membership under the impact of the Structural Adjustment Programmes of the 1980s, which led to the informalisation of the transport industry.

In recent years, the ATGWU pioneered an organising strategy involving the large-scale affiliation of informal workers' associations, especially those representing minibuses and motorbike taxis ('Boda-Boda') drivers. Their unionisation had a major impact: police harassment was reduced, substantial improvements were achieved through collective bargaining, internal conflicts within the associations were reduced and the social standing of people working in the sector improved.

Rapid expansion brought new challenges for the union, particularly with regard to the transition to becoming a union that includes both formal and informal workers.

Source: Spooner, D. et al. (2017)

<sup>67</sup> The ILO report for the Technical Meeting on the Future of Decent and Sustainable Work in Urban Transport Services, the UN Secretary General's quadrennial report on the New Urban Agenda (2022) and UN-Habitat's World Cities Report 2022, among others, make explicit reference to this.

#### **Box 14. Nairobi, Kenya: Promoting dialogue and giving transport workers a voice**

In Nairobi, Kenya, the authorities are implementing a change in the mode of public transport (Bus Rapid Transit or BRT) to help reduce congestion and pollution and improve the quality of transport. The minibus owners were involved in the discussions on the design of the new system, but not the trade union organisations in the sector.

In light of this exclusion and the concerns about the impact that the new transport model might have on employment (it is estimated that half of the jobs in the sector could be lost), three transport unions – the Transport and Allied Workers Union (TAWU), the Matatu Workers' Union (MWU) and the Public Transport Operators' Union (PTOU) – with the support of the International Transport Workers' Federation, presented the government and other social actors with an assessment report on the possible labour impacts of BRT. This initiative gave visibility to and raised the profile of the workers' organisations in the sector, which had previously been excluded from any space for discussion on the issue.

Source: ITF (2019).

#### **Box 15. Montevideo, Uruguay: Involving trade unions in integrated waste management**

In Uruguay, the PIT-CNT national trade union centre has been working for years with urban waste pickers to improve their working conditions, contributing, among other things, to the formation of the UCRUS union of urban waste pickers. Joint efforts were made for the municipality of Montevideo – which represents more than 50 per cent of the national population – to address integrated waste management and generate a value chain for municipal solid waste. The organisation played an active part in the discussions for the drafting of a National Waste Law, approved in 2019, which prioritises the reduction, reuse and repurposing of waste, while promoting the inclusion of informal waste sorters and improvements in their working conditions.

Source: PIT-CNT: <https://ucrus-pit-cnt.weebly.com/>

### Box 16. Belgium: Contributing to sustainable mobility at workplace level

In June 2018, the General Confederation of Liberal Trade Unions of Belgium (CGSLB) launched a project to build the capacity of trade unions to work on the implementation of the SDGs at workplace level. The aim was to provide trade union representatives with the skills needed to put sustainability issues on the agenda of bipartite dialogue spaces within companies, to contribute to social change both inside and outside the workplace.

Sustatool, a tool originally designed by the government for employers, was adapted to the needs of the trade union organisation and its activities. The union organised workshops in which more than 250 trade unionists took part with the aim of learning about the initiatives being carried out in workplaces on sustainability and how to use Sustatool to put forward initiatives on the agendas of consultative committees, such as joint health and safety committees. As part of the efforts linked to SDG 11, the union is developing a number of proposals related to promoting sustainable mobility within company operations and travel to and from workplaces.

Source: CGSLB.

## SDG 17: Social dialogue at the centre of the transition to sustainable, inclusive and democratic societies

**Social dialogue** is one of the strategic pillars of the ILO's decent work agenda and a key element of the Just Transition Guidelines. The ILO defines social dialogue as any kind of negotiation, consultation or simple exchange of information between government, workers' and employers' representatives on matters of common interest<sup>68</sup>. The power of social dialogue was demonstrated during the pandemic, where it served as a key tool in cushioning the social and economic impacts of the crisis. Through various tripartite and bipartite dialogue mechanisms, the social partners agreed on measures to protect jobs and extend social protection coverage, designed safety protocols for essential sectors and those returning to work.<sup>69</sup>

The decent work dimension of SDG 8 recognises the importance of social dialogue through indicator 8.8.2: "Level of national compliance with labour rights (**freedom of association and collective bargaining**) based on International Labour Organization (ILO) textual sources". To make progress on SDG 8, governments should therefore prioritise ensuring social dialogue and exploit its potential for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda as a whole. The participation of stakeholders from the world of work should also be suitably recognised in the new global **governance architecture**.

In addition, the development of **reliable data and information** is crucial to decision-making and policymaking processes. **Transparency and access to information** are key to enabling the participation of all stakeholders, both in decision-making and monitoring.

<sup>68</sup> See: <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/dw4sd/themes/s-dialogue-tripartism/lang--en/index.htm>

<sup>69</sup> ILO (2022).

Another area where progress should be made is on the **quantity and quality of official development assistance (ODA)**. Consideration should also be given to the criteria for allocating ODA and other financial flows, ensuring that they take on board the provisions of SDG 8 and the Just Transition Guidelines. The ILO's guidelines on sustainable transport, for example, point out that while infrastructure projects financed by international development banks consider their environmental and social impacts, they rarely consider the potential labour impacts, and their budgets do not provide for compensating workers that may be affected<sup>70</sup>.

Discussions on the relief, **restructuring or cancellation of many countries' unsustainable external debt** are also crucial. As the UN Secretary General's report to the 2023 HLPF insists: "Recovery from the pandemic and rescuing the Sustainable Development Goals will also require a full-scale transformation of the international financial and debt architecture. In the immediate term, concrete and coordinated action is needed to provide countries with adequate fiscal space and liquidity, including by rechannelling unused special drawing rights to countries in need, providing effective debt relief and in the interim suspending or cancelling all International Monetary Fund (IMF) surcharges."<sup>71</sup>

<sup>70</sup> ILO (2021b).

<sup>71</sup> United Nations (2022).

# **C.**

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

The 2023 High-Level Political Forum is taking place amidst a complex context of multiple, interacting, overlapping and interlocking crises, making the need to strengthen the overall commitment to the 2030 Agenda more urgent than ever.

It is important to stress that **SDG 8 can act as a catalyst for other SDGs** through a variety of synergies. As has been demonstrated, improvements in SDG 8 implementation drive improvements in the indicators of the SDGs under review. A workforce with full labour rights, decent pay, job security and access to appropriate training is more likely to contribute to the overall achievement of the SDGs and particularly the SDGs under review.

Trade unions are equipped with their own tools to contribute to this process and are already doing so through proactive dialogue with the other social actors.

Trade unions have made a key contribution to the global governance system by driving the inclusion of core sustainability issues on the political agenda and supporting UN initiatives such as the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection and the Global Care Alliance. The trade union movement's demand for a New Social Contract, reflected in the latest ITUC World Congress Statement<sup>72</sup>, is in line with these principles and clearly sets out the priorities for making progress on SDG 8 and, in so doing, contributing to the goals of the 2030 Agenda as a whole:

- a) Jobs**, to achieve full employment by creating 575 million jobs globally through investment in care, green jobs and infrastructure and formalising employment in the informal sector.
- b) Wage rises**, with decent minimum wages to reverse decades of decline in the workers' share of prosperity and to ensure a decent life for all and revitalise economies.
- c) Rights**, to guarantee workers' organising and bargaining rights, to ensure safe and healthy work, to protect against discrimination, forced labour and child labour, and to build a sustainable world through a just transition.
- d) Equality**, to ensure equal pay for men and women and to fight racism and homophobia.
- e) Social protection**, to invest in covering the three quarters of the world's population that is wholly or partially denied this basic human right, starting with a global social protection floor.
- f) Inclusion**, to eliminate the colonial structural framework of the world's financial and trading systems that deny prosperity to billions of people.

<sup>72</sup> Ver <https://www.ituc-csi.org/5co-final-statement-es>

**D.**

**Trade union messages for  
the High-Level Political  
Forum 2023**

## SDG 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

- Recognise universal access to safe drinking water and sanitation as a **human right**. Water and sanitation are basic needs for survival and are essential to the fulfilment of many other human rights and core labour standards, including health, food, education, occupational health and safety and freedom from discrimination.
- Ensure that the planning, development and management of public infrastructure and services provides for workers, including mobile transport workers and those in informal employment, and users to have **regular access to safe drinking water and safe, secure, decent sanitation**, with appropriate safeguards.
- Recognise the **provision of adequate, accessible, safe and secure sanitation for workers** as a gender-responsive issue that affects men, women and workers of different sexual orientation and gender identities in different ways, which must be accommodated through an inclusive gender-responsive approach following consultation with union representatives.
- Recognise that the **right to sanitation is meaningless without workers having the right to paid rest breaks and regular toilet breaks, to enable access to sanitation facilities during working hours** when they need them, without delay, loss of income or any other detriment.
- Manage water as a common good and **invest in public safe drinking water and sanitation services**. Water and sanitation are essential services that should be led by the public sector, as experiences of privatisation of these services have proved to put at risk the exercise of human rights and the sustainability of aquatic ecosystems.
- Invest in decent and **climate-friendly jobs** in water resources management, sanitation services and related infrastructure, based on gender-responsive just transition measures.
- Extend **social protection** coverage, including income security and healthcare services, to those exposed to water insecurity (often women and girls).
- Establish **social dialogue mechanisms on water and sanitation management** to achieve integrated management of water resources at all levels, in order to improve water quality, increase water-use efficiency across all sectors and restore water-related ecosystems.
- Support a **global treaty on plastic pollution** as a key element to improve water quality, which must include just transition measures for all workers in the life cycle of plastics, from fossil fuel fracking to production to waste and include just transition measures.
- **Counteract drought, desertification and famine** through strengthened adaptation and mitigation actions to climate change, respecting the commitments to limit the increase in global average temperature to 1,5°C.
- **Improve public water management**, limiting the use of groundwater extracted through electricity and promote innovative practices and incentives to save water.



## **SDG 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all**

- **Recognise access to energy as a human right and ensure the universal access** to affordable, reliable and modern energy services, by implementing democratic, inclusive and gender-responsive energy policies that respect and promote human and labour rights.
- **Tackle the increasing phenomenon of energy poverty** through development of renewables capacity and efficient transmission systems which bring energy to all, as well as by supporting households facing energy insecurity.
- **Implement Just Transition industrial and sectoral policies and investment plans** based on timely social dialogue, skills development, the protection of labour rights, the creation of **decent and climate-friendly jobs in renewable energy sectors**, and across all traditional and emerging economic sectors.
  - Introduce gender-responsive **just transition measures** related to energy in countries' national climate plans (NDCs) with effective participation of the social partners, as established by the ILO Guidelines for a Just Transition.
  - **End wasteful government subsidies to fossil fuel companies** and act to prevent their profiteering while ensuring protection of households against energy poverty.
  - **Step up international climate finance** to support renewable energy production in developing countries, ensure engagement with key stakeholders including workers and affected communities on the amount, form and oversight of financing, and establish **accountability mechanisms for sustainable and "green" investments**, to avoid greenwashing and ensure that all labour rights are respected and all investments are measurably climate friendly.
  - Accelerate the energy transition, substantially **increasing the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix**, meeting IPCC science guidance on emission reduction allowances needed to meet the 1.5°C target.

## **SDG 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation**

- **Increase public sector-led investments in public infrastructure** (energy, roads, integrated public transport infrastructure including non-motorised transport, building, machinery and equipment, ports, etc.) with the lowest possible adverse environmental impact to meet development needs and support decent job creation while minimising climate harms.
- Advance with reforms to **increase the share of industry and industrial employment**. Increase the participation of state agencies in the allocation of credit, technological development and markets expansion.
- **Support micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises and cooperatives to ensure employment retention and the formalisation of the informal economy** by implementing the ILO Recommendation 204 on the transition from the informal to the formal economy. Ensure equitable access to financial services for young people, women, migrants and forcibly displaced persons.
- **Implement just transition industrial policies** that provide a foundation for national jobs plans and development. Plan and coordinate the **decarbonisation of industries through social dialogue**, including labour impact assessments (particularly where new technologies are incorporated) while ensuring social security, retraining of workers and decent and climate-friendly jobs in the transformation.
- **Reduce dependency on foreign products in crucial sectors** (food, energy, transportation infrastructure, pharmaceutical, etc.) by advancing domestic investments and regional integration.
- Ensure that industrialisation and structural transformation produces shared outcomes by **ensuring minimum living wages, collective bargaining and universal social protection**.
- **Increase the value added content of the exports of primary products**.
- **Ensure access to quality and affordable internet and put in place proactive digitalisation policies** to increase value added in domestic digital enterprises, govern data and privacy rights, integrate risk assessments and monitoring (before, during and after deployment of new technologies) with appropriate engagement of unions, as well as rules to ensure labour and union rights for homebased, platform and remote workers.
- **Invest in gender-responsive strategies for skills development and life-long learning**, especially for young people, to integrate workers in modern productive practices and a green economy. Design and implement national systems of skill certification as well as systems for the recognition of skills and qualifications of migrant workers.
- Reorganise production activities taking into account the limits of the planet and the objective of a fair distribution of resources, promoting the circular and regenerative economy.

## **SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable**

- **Ensure support for and investment in a just transition towards sustainable cities.**
- **Promote cities that respond to the increasing ageing of the population** and the vulnerability of elderly people due to their poverty exposure, especially of women.
- **Accelerate the decarbonisation of urban transport** with a ramp up of investments in and expansion of public transport infrastructure and operations, and a focus on sustainable solutions that provide decent work and contribute to worker-led formalisation, negotiated with unions and employers.
- **Improve equitable access to public transport**, considering the particular needs of users in terms of route planning, pricing and safety, with particular attention to eradicating violence and harassment, via consultation with transport users, workers and unions, diversity in local government decision-makers and innovative and feminist city planning.
- **Oppose the privatisation of existing public entities** and instead support democratic reform to make them more accountable, in partnership with unions and service users.
- **Undertake energy efficiency measures such as programs to deeply retrofit social, public and low-income housing**, reducing energy demand and lowering energy bills, while creating decent and climate-friendly jobs, especially for low-income and marginalised communities.
- **Ensure fundamental changes to infrastructure and buildings through renovations** of existing buildings, CO2 reduction from building operation, and fossil-free building sites in cities.
- **Expand access to decent housing and infrastructure** for all urban residents, including migrants and forcibly displaced persons, while addressing climate change.
- **Ensure resilience to extreme weather conditions** and disasters: adopt and implement urban disaster risk reduction and management and emergency response systems; integrate safety and health measures and protection protocols for urban workers most exposed to extreme weather events and climate-related health and safety concerns, including transport workers, and for others particularly vulnerable, including children and young persons, persons with disabilities, migrant workers, refugees and displaced persons; and protect populations from price shocks or disconnection from services.
- **Invest in local and proximity quality public services for all deployed by cities, including municipal, distributed, and community-based energy**, to tackle energy poverty and assist families and hard to reach groups.
- **Make cities liveable by spreading the centre of economic activity across different cities** to prevent overcrowding of cities and avoid making them uninhabitable.

## **SDG 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development**

- **Reinforce the role of social dialogue as a key means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda and in strategies to build recovery and resilience from the Covid-19 crisis.** To be sustainable, crisis response measures must be built on the engagement of social partners. Social dialogue and industrial relations help to rebuild democracy and trust in institutions and contribute to crafting equitable and sustainable policies.
- We need **a new model of global governance** to redress the current imbalance of power and uneven distribution of wealth at international level: a truly inclusive multilateral system where social partners are on board and have a say.
- **Ensure the implementation of adequate financing strategies** that include an increase in the quantity and quality of Official Development Assistance (ODA); debt relief restructuring and cancellation; the implementation of progressive taxation systems and a multilateral reform of the current corporate tax architecture, including a minimum tax floor of 25 per cent for all corporations, a billionaires' or wealth tax, and a financial transactions tax; tackling tax evasion, tax avoidance and illicit financial flows; reallocation of Special Drawing Rights and business accountability.
- **Improve the quantity, quality and accessibility of data** to input into transparent and inclusive national policy and decision-making processes.
- **Implement digitalisation strategies that promote Just Transitions and lifelong learning**, while minimising intrusive monitoring, surveillance and algorithmic control over workers.

# **E.**

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