



GERMANY

A TRADE UNION FOCUS ON THE SDGs

#HLPF2021

WORKERS DEMAND A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT FOR RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE

COVID-19: WORKERS NEED SDG-DRIVEN RESPONSES TO THE CRISIS

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the German government introduced measures designed to preserve jobs, compensate wage losses and provide easier access to apprenticeships and training programs. There were further measures supporting enterprises and the self-employed, improvements in remuneration and working conditions in specific sectors, an introduction of new regulations on occupational health and safety and a simplification of access to basic social security. A loan moratorium and deferral scheme was introduced for a period of three months in 2020, which trade unions consider to have been too short, calling for an extension.

Trade unions note that as a result of the crisis, there has been a re-orientation of the German federal state's budgetary policy and the European Union's fiscal policy away from the logic of austerity policies. However, in order to ensure a just economic recovery, trade unions stressed the need for a long-term public investment programme to support the social-ecological transformation, a key element of which should be support for higher wage growth through a higher statutory minimum wage and measures strengthening collective bargaining.

ARE TRADE UNIONS AT THE TABLE?

In its 2017 revision of its National Sustainable Development Strategy, the German government committed to the implementation of all 17 SDGs and set out concrete measures for how to achieve them, including through the selection of indicators.

Due to the high political significance of the commitments made and a cross-policy area approach, the responsibility for strategy is under the direct leadership of the Federal Chancellor, through the Committee of State Secretaries for Sustainable Development. In addition, all ministries hold primary responsibility for their contributions to the implementation of the strategy and Agenda 2030 in their respective policy fields. The Parliamentary Advisory Council for Sustainable Development and the German Council for Sustainable Development also play a key role in monitoring the implementation of the strategy; negotiations within the HLPF are led by the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU) and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

Information on the data collected by the Federal Statistics Office to meet indicators set out by the government is freely available, and trade unions have full access to it. Trade unions are also part of a regular forum for dialogue within which the implementation of the sustainability strategy is discussed with the federal government, providing trade unions with a space to negotiate a greater focus on their priorities. Trade unions are further part of the official German delegation to the HLPF.

Nevertheless, trade unions are critical of the fact that key indicators for measuring decent work are missing among those selected by the German government. In addition, a discussion on the SDGs among social partners as part of an official tripartite dialogue is lacking, aside from a joint sustainability initiative of social partners in the chemical industry.

TRANSPARENCY



Complete access to information

CONSULTATION



Structured multi-stakeholder platform

SOCIAL DIALOGUE



Social partners submit joint contributions to the government's SDG national plan



IS THE (DECENT) WORK GETTING DONE?

With an HDI of 0.947 in 2019, Germany ranked as the sixth most developed country in the world. However, indicators on **target 1.1 (eradicate extreme poverty)** show that in 2019, 8 per cent of workers above the age of 18 were living under the nationally defined income line, with part-time and fixed-term employees most at risk. Women, youth and older people were in general more likely to be at an increased risk of poverty. With regard to **target 1.3 (implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures)**, 99.5 per cent of the population was covered by at least one social protection benefit in 2016. 100 per cent of children, the unemployed, older persons, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, newborns and work-injury victims are estimated to enjoy social protection coverage. Indicators on **target 1.a (ensure significant mobilisation of resources to implement programmes and policies to end poverty in all its dimensions)** show that in 2019, health expenditure as a proportion of GDP was at 7.4 per cent, while the share for social protection stood at 19.7 per cent of GDP, both slightly above the EU average.

On **target 5.4 (recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work)**, last figures from 2016 show that women do more unpaid domestic and care work (over 4h) than men (2.5h) per day, with the highest unpaid workload among rural women in the 25-44 age group. With regard to **target 5.5 (ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life)**, in 2019 there were 29.4 per cent of women in managerial positions in Germany. Two laws have been adopted since 2015 to address this relatively low figure, establishing fixed supervisory and executive board quotas for women.

Significant challenges to meeting **target 8.3 (promote policies that support productive activities, decent job creation)** remain. In 2013 10.1 per cent of workers were in informal employment, with a tendency for informality particularly high in non-standard forms of employment, such as marginal employment, live-in private care, temporary agency work, work in subcontracting chains, posted employment, self-employment, etc. Migrant workers with no residence or working permit are also highly vulnerable to informality. While the rate of low-paid work stands at 21.8 per cent, there is a significant regional disparity in its distribution, with rates in eastern states, such as Thuringia, over triple (34.1 per cent) those in the West of the country (e.g., Hamburg – 10.7 per cent). Trade unions report that nearly 40 per cent of all new

hires in Germany are temporary. There are almost one million temporary jobs and 2.5 million people of core working age working exclusively in “mini-jobs” – of these, 70 per cent are women. In addition, there are at least one million part-time jobs that are taken because no full-time job could be found. On **target 8.5 (achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all)**, the 2019 unadjusted earnings gap between men and women stood at 19 per cent, significantly higher than the EU average. NEET (“not in employment, education or training”) indicators for **target 8.6 (reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training)** stood at 5.3 per cent of youth aged between 15-24 in 2021; strong regional differences must be noted, with youth unemployment in eastern Germany being significantly higher than in the west. On **target 8.8 (protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers)**, collective bargaining coverage stood at 44 per cent in 2019 and trade union density stood at 16.5 per cent in 2018, both with a trend towards declining.

Progress remains to be made for Germany to reach **target 10.4 (adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality)**, as the share of the bottom 20 per cent income earners in overall GDP in 2016 was 7.6 per cent, compared to the 24.6 per cent share of the top 10 per cent income earners, whose share has been continuously increasing.

To reach the objectives of **target 13.2 (integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning)**, Germany has adopted the 2050 Climate Action Plan in 2016 and the Climate Action Programme 2030 together with a Climate Change Act in 2019. However, trade unions note that a blind spot of this plan is the lack of a just transition strategy. A good example for a Just Transition was the German commission on Growth, Structural Change and Employment in 2019, where the relevant stakeholders, including trade unions, formulated a socially and economically acceptable path to a politically desired phase-out of coal-fired power generation.

Trade unions report that Germany is meeting its obligations under **target 16.10 (protect fundamental freedoms)**, as a Legal Aid Act ensures that people with low incomes receive legal advice and representation.

TRADE UNION ASKS TO LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

German trade unions call on their government to address the consequences of the global pandemic and improve the implementation of the SDGs in the country by:

- Integrating the SDGs within national policies in a more effective manner while insisting on the centrality of SDG 8 for a sustainable and just transition and for the reduction of poverty and inequality.
- Reducing inequalities that were deepened by COVID-19 by raising wages, strengthening decent work and reducing precarious working conditions as well as reducing the number of working poor.
- Strengthening decent work and workers' participation by adjusting the national indicators for SDG 8 so as to actually be able to map the progress in the quality of employment.
- Establishing fairness along global supply chains to tackle unfair competition at the cost of the environment and fundamental workers' rights by ensuring preconditions of human work and social progress through binding guidelines and responsibilities.
- Developing and implementing a suitable framework for the transformation, one which intertwines climate protection, equally distributed prosperity and decent work with workers as directly affected core drivers of sustainable development.



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