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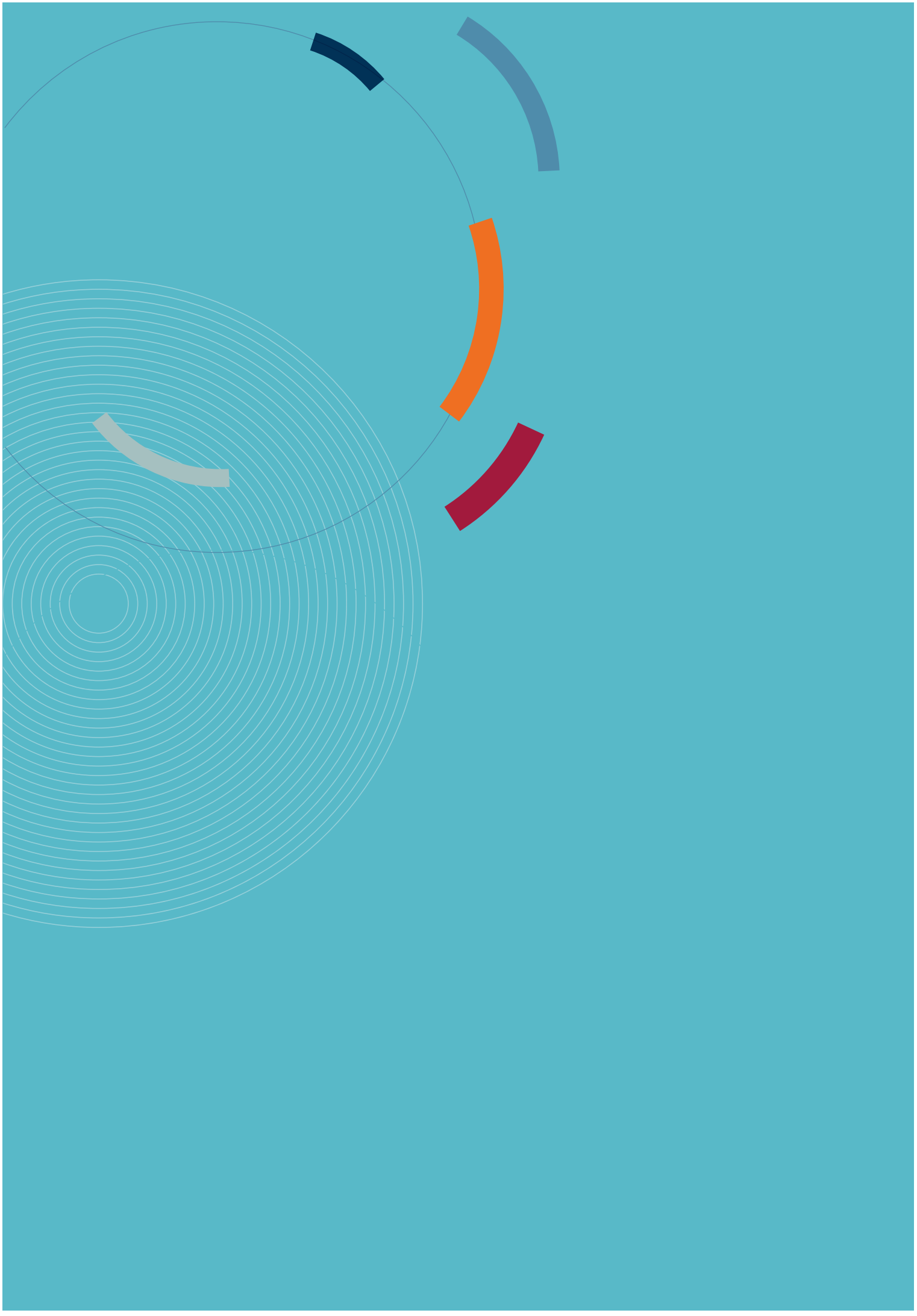
A TRADE UNION TAKE ON THE SDGs

2026



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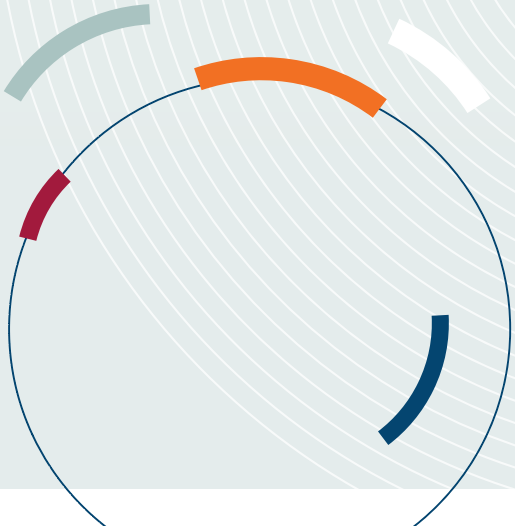

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INTRODUCTION

The 2026 edition of " A Trade Union Take on the SDGs" gives an independent workers' perspective on how governments are delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Ongoing conflict, increased militarisation, continued cuts in official development assistance as well as shrinking domestic resources allocated to the SDGs, the rising debt crisis, and continued environmental degradation and climate impacts, alongside declining civic space, increased inequality, attacks on democratic institutions, and attempts to dismantle multilateralism, are seriously impeding progress on the SDGs. Less than five years until 2030, global progress on the SDGs is far too slow, with only one-third of SDGs making even moderate progress.

Amidst these circumstances, trade unions are steadfast in their support for multilateralism led by the UN, human rights, and democratic institutions. In spite of and in response to the challenging global and national contexts, the international trade union movement continues to call for a New Social Contract that centers SDG8: the creation of decent, climate-friendly jobs with just transition; rights for all workers; living wages; universal social protection; equality to end all forms of discrimination; the inclusion of all countries in decision-making processes to build a rights-based development model. Further, through its "For Democracy" campaign, the international trade union movement reiterates its commitment to defending democratic and rights -based multilateralism, with the UN at its core.

A Trade Union Take on the SDGs compiles findings and analysis of the SDG country reports produced by trade union organisations in 14 countries in 2026: Algeria, Argentina, Brazil, Egypt, Estonia, Italy, Jordan, Moldova, Rwanda, Senegal, Somalia, Switzerland, Tanzania, and Uruguay. These reports examine how governments are performing on developing, implementing and monitoring their SDG plans, in terms of transparency of processes and the level of engagement of trade unions in consultations and social dialogue. They also assess the efforts of countries to reach key SDG targets. This effort is central to the labour movement's contribution to the SDGs Decade of Action.

This year's review includes reporting from trade unions on their government's response to multiple, interlinked crises, including key issues such as the climate crisis, growing poverty and inequalities as well as the impacts of growing geopolitical tensions.

Trade unions report that SDGs are being integrated into national policy, but they also recognise constraints, including lack of trade union inclusion in SDGs implementation and lack of adequate funding to carry out the planned actions.. Trade unions call for a human-centred approach to planning and recovery that includes meaningful and effective social dialogue to ensure the most marginalised workers and their communities are not left behind. They also call for sustainable and adequate financing for SDGs based on a structural reform of the international financial architecture.

ASSESSING PROGRESS

TRANSPARENCY

Irregular access to limited information

CONSULTATION

Information sessions but no interaction

SOCIAL DIALOGUE

Individual contributions from social partners to the national government

Trade unions from the 14 countries surveyed (Algeria, Argentina, Brazil, Egypt, Estonia, Italy, Jordan, Moldova, Rwanda, Senegal, Somalia, Switzerland, Tanzania, and Uruguay) evaluated their governments' performance based on three indicators: transparency, consultation, and social dialogue. While the average score was in the 2 range for all three categories, transparency and access to information scored highest, with consultation hovering in the middle, and social dialogue the least prevalent across the countries.

TRANSPARENCY

Trade unions assessed the transparency of the SDG implementation process based on their ability to access information on decision-making procedures, policy documents, and the existence of reporting mechanisms. The input reveals clear limitations, with **trade unions in the majority of surveyed countries reporting irregular access to limited information or a complete lack of transparency.** In Argentina, for example, the government has explicitly abandoned the 2030 Agenda entirely, resulting in no access to information or reporting mechanisms whatsoever. Similarly, in Italy, Egypt, and Jordan, transparency was rated as highly deficient, with official reporting mechanisms deliberately omitting crucial practical realities such as labour market erosion, wage depreciation, and the lack of occupational safety and collective bargaining metrics.

However, positive progress in transparency can be observed in a select few nations. Trade unions in Uruguay, Moldova, Switzerland, and Brazil reported complete access to official information regarding SDG policies. In Uruguay, the government recently launched a comprehensive new data visualisation tool that tracks 240 indicators to monitor progress on the 2030 Agenda, significantly furthering public access to information.

CONSULTATION

Multistakeholder monitoring frameworks are crucial to ensuring a truly participatory 2030 Agenda that leaves no one behind. However, assessments show that unions are frequently excluded from meaningful participation in the fora set up to monitor and implement the SDGs. **Countries such as Argentina, Italy, and Tanzania reported having no consultation processes in place at all**, with Italian unions noting the complete absence of a multi-stakeholder platform and an existing forum that lacks any real consultative authority on labour issues. In the majority of countries, including Estonia, Moldova, Rwanda, Somalia, and Uruguay, consultations remain highly informal or ad hoc, often relegating trade unions to peripheral roles without clear mechanisms to integrate their feedback into the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs).

Despite these hurdles, **structured consultation platforms are successfully operating in some regions**. Both Brazil and Switzerland reported having structured multi-stakeholder platforms in place. In Brazil, the National Commission for the SDGs (CNODS) was successfully re-established as a joint government-civil society body, and the government is organising a structured National Conference on the SDGs for 2026, marking a meaningful institutional re-engagement with social partners.

SOCIAL DIALOGUE

Engaging in social dialogue is essential for realising the 2030 Agenda because it helps state authorities, businesses, and trade unions reach a consensus on approaches to promote decent work. However, the 2026 reports reveal **an insufficient integration of social dialogue into the national planning and implementation process of the SDGs**, making it the weakest area of progress globally. In Argentina, Italy, and Tanzania, the national governments do not involve social partners at all in the definition and implementation of an SDG plan. In Estonia, Algeria and Moldova, social dialogue remains weak and tangential, relying heavily on individual contributions rather than formal tripartite co-governance over SDG strategies.

Positively, active tripartite instances to implement and monitor the SDGs were reported in a few countries. In **Uruguay**, a strong tradition of Tripartite Wage Councils exists, and the new administration actively strengthened mechanisms by convening a broad Social Dialogue in 2025 to drive changes in the social protection framework. In Somalia, tripartite dialogue through the Somali National Tripartite Consultative Council successfully yielded a revised Labour Code, demonstrating the tangible benefits of incorporating workers' perspectives into national frameworks.

ASSESSING PROGRESS

SHARED ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

There is a polarised picture when extreme poverty is analysed in the reporting countries. While some surveyed countries are nearing the eradication of extreme poverty, Estonia at 0.3%, Italy with near-zero figures, and Uruguay with negligible rates, extreme poverty remains structurally entrenched elsewhere. In Rwanda, 36% of the population lives below the international poverty line, while in Tanzania, extreme poverty affected 51.3% of the population in 2018. Senegal has made progress, dropping its extreme poverty rate from 53.3% in 2011 to 17.9% in 2021, yet it remains far from the 2030 target. Furthermore, i**ndicators of income inequality show that economic growth is frequently failing to reach those furthest behind.** The highest 10% of earners continue to capture a vastly disproportionate share of total national income, securing 39.8% in Brazil, 31.2% in Argentina, and 28.8% in Senegal, leaving the bottom 20% of earners with fractional shares of the wealth generated.

QUALITY OF EMPLOYMENT

Employment quality, measured by unemployment rates, the labour income share of GDP, female-to-male labour force participation, and working poverty, exposes significant decent work deficits. **Official unemployment rates often mask deeper crises of working poverty, showing that having a job no longer guarantees an escape from destitution.** For example, while Somalia reports an 11.1% official unemployment rate, a staggering 78.2% of its employed population lives below the national poverty line. Working poverty is similarly critical in Tanzania, affecting 44.7% of the workforce, and structurally present in high-income nations like Italy, where 10.2% of employed people are at risk of in-work poverty. Disparities in female-to-male labour force participation are also deeply entrenched; female participation is exceptionally low in Egypt at 20.6% and merely 16% in Jordan. Additionally, **the labour income share of GDP highlights that workers are not equitably sharing in productivity gains**. While Switzerland boasts a 71.2% labour income share and Estonia saw its share rise to 58.6%, workers in Somalia receive only 37.5% of their respective national incomes.

LABOUR VULNERABILITY

Labour vulnerability is tracked through the exposure of workers to risks, measured by vulnerable employment, time-related underemployment, fatal occupational injuries, the proportion of youth not in education, employment or training (NEET), and social protection coverage. **Vulnerable and precarious employment remains the norm rather than the exception in many developing region**s, 89.3% of working women in Tanzania, 63% of the workforce in Senegal, and 58.6% of the workforce in Moldova experience precarious employment. This vulnerability is compounded by high time-related underemployment, reaching 19.2% of the active urban population in Argentina. **The NEET rate is another alarming indicator of labour exclusion,** climbing to 51% in Somalia, 35.2% in Senegal, 27.3% in Rwanda, and 24.4% in Tanzania. Workplace risks remain severe, with fatal occupational injuries actively compromising worker safety; Brazil records an occupational mortality rate of 6.87 per 100,000 workers, and Moldova reports 4.3 fatal injuries per 100,000 workers. Unfortunately, the lack of data from some countries creates further concern. Crucially, social protection floors vary drastically. While Estonia covers 100% of its older persons with pensions and Brazil reports near-universal theoretical coverage, systemic under-protection leaves only 19% of the population covered in Senegal, 11.4% in Tanzania, and reveals a total absence of a social safety net in Somalia.

LABOUR RIGHTS

The protection of fundamental rights at work, directly assessed through the ITUC Global Rights Index, illustrates a deteriorating environment for workers' freedoms and collective bargaining. **Several nations are ranked as the worst places in the world for working people, grouped in Category 5 ("No guarantee of rights").** Argentina was downgraded to Category 5 due to an aggressive anti-union agenda, strike restrictions, and violent repressions of protests. Egypt and Jordan also sit in Category 5, characterised by structural barriers blocking independent trade union registration and collective bargaining. Somalia faces an even more severe reality, classified as Category 5+ due to a broader breakdown of the rule of law. **Systematic violations of rights (Category 4)** are documented in Brazil and Senegal, while Switzerland sits at **Category 3 ("Regular violations of rights")**. Conversely, countries like Estonia, Italy, and Moldova demonstrate better formal legal compliance, scoring in **Category 2 ("Repeated violations of rights")**, and Uruguay stands out globally as a top-performing country in the region, ranking 28th globally for human rights with few recorded violations of ILO core conventions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the multiple ongoing crises, trade unions call for a New Social Contract reflected in national policies, along with specific recommendations from this year's country profiles.

1. Revive the **political commitment to achieving the 2030 Agenda**. Mainstream the SDGs into national development plans and budgets, ensuring adequate financial resources including through progressive taxation, domestic resource mobilisation, debt relief and Official Development Assistance (ODA).

2. Create **decent, climate-friendly jobs**. Develop national gender-responsive employment plans focused on decent jobs creation and formalization including in the care, digital and green sectors. Institutionalise a participatory national framework for a Just Transition negotiated through tripartite social dialogue.

3. Achieve gender responsive universal **social protection** in line with ILO standards, including the implementation of an social protection floor for all.

4. Ensure respect for **labour rights for all workers**. Secure freedom of association, collective bargaining and the right to strike; give migrant workers full access to labour markets and rights-based pathways to permanent residency. Significantly increase inspection capacities to meet ILO benchmarks.

5. Promote **living wages and equal pay for work of equal value**. Establish binding legal mechanisms to automatically link statutory minimum wages to the inflation index or the average national wage to protect the purchasing power of working families.

6. Promote a transformative agenda for **gender equality and non discrimination** in the world of work. Promote decent work for women, equal pay for work of equal value and gender-responsive occupational health and safety frameworks, as well as policies tackling violence and harassment in the world of work; establish universal care systems financed by the State in line with the ILO " 5R" framework; and promote policies for workers with family responsibilities.

7. Centre **social dialogue** as a key mechanism in SDG implementation and in building responses to the multiple crises. Formally and explicitly include independent trade union organisations as official stakeholders in the consultation, drafting, and evaluation phases of all Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). Establish formal SDG-budget dialogues prior to state budget formulation to ensure adequate resources are allocated to social goals, and guarantee tripartite oversight of SDG implementation.

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