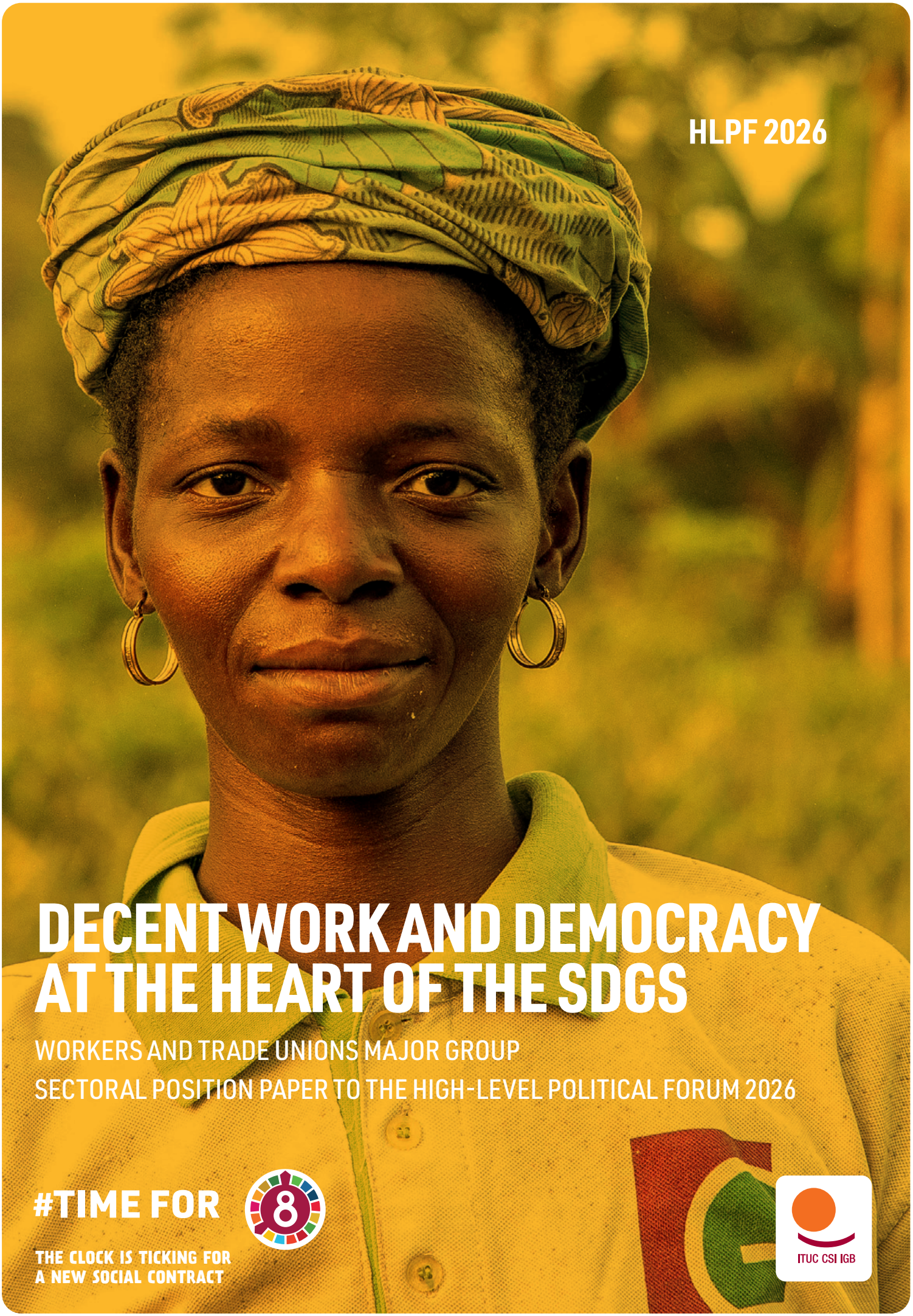

HLPF 2026

DECENT WORK AND DEMOCRACY AT THE HEART OF THE SDGS

WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONS MAJOR GROUP

SECTORAL POSITION PAPER TO THE HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM 2026

#TIME FOR 8

THE CLOCK IS TICKING FOR
A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT

ITUC CSI IGB

#TIMEFOR8

THE CLOCK IS TICKING FOR
A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT

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Introduction: The 2030 Agenda, the Democratic Crisis, and the Catalyst of SDG 8

The 2026 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) convenes amidst a complex landscape of interconnected crises and deepening global inequalities. Progress toward the 2030 Agenda is currently imperilled by severe and coordinated pressures on democratic institutions. A confluence of authoritarian political factions and concentrated private wealth is actively undermining workers' representation, expanding corporate influence, and eroding the democratic frameworks essential to the working class.[1] Furthermore, this dynamic threatens to destabilize multilateral institutions, including the United Nations and the International Labour Organization (ILO), through restrictive funding measures and the withdrawal of institutional cooperation. It is against this backdrop that the international trade union movement has focused its For Democracy campaign on the Fight for Democracy[2], reiterating its commitment to defending democratic and rights-based multilateralism, with the UN at its core.

This democratic regression is inextricably linked to a profound crisis in international solidarity, jeopardizing the viability of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The year 2025 recorded an unprecedented 23.1 per cent contraction in Official Development Assistance (ODA), precipitated by significant withdrawals from major donor nations[3]. Consequently, aid to the least developed countries declined by nearly 26 per cent, while humanitarian assistance experienced severe reductions exceeding 35 per cent.[4] This historic contraction of resources critically diminishes the capacity of developing nations to establish resilient public institutions and universal social protection systems, thereby hindering the pursuit of shared prosperity and the eradication of extreme poverty.[5]

The structural origin of these compounding crises resides in a global economic model that disproportionately prioritizes corporate capital accumulation, thereby institutionalizing systemic inequality. This paradigm has resulted in big segments of the global workers lacking adequate remuneration, while facilitating the exploitation of millions within opaque global supply chains. To reverse this trajectory, salvage the 2030 Agenda, and advance comprehensive reform of the international financial architecture, a paradigm shift is required. A New Social Contract represents the most viable mechanism to ensure equitable growth, mandating that socioeconomic development be anchored in human dignity rather than the commodification of labour.[6]

Central to the operationalization of this New Social Contract is Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth). Owing to its multidimensional nature, SDG 8 functions as a critical catalyst for accelerating progress across the broader 2030 Agenda. Advancing these global objectives necessitates a steadfast commitment to the foundational pillars of SDG 8 and the New Social Contract:

- the creation of climate-friendly, decent jobs through Just Transitions;
- the rigorous enforcement of fundamental principles and rights at work
- the establishment of minimum living wages and equal pay
- the implementation of universal, rights-based social protection funded by fair taxation;
- the dismantling of structural inequalities through robust gender equality and anti-discrimination measures;
- and the democratic inclusion of workers in the definition of development policies through social dialogue, from the national to the global level.

The Workers and Trade Unions Major Group reiterates that fulfilling the commitments of the 2030 Agenda is contingent upon the global defence of democratic institutions and the prioritization of the decent work objectives enshrined in SDG 8 within all multilateral recovery strategies.

1 More information on the current state of labour and workers' rights is available at ITUC's Global Rights Index Webpage.
2 ITUC. (2026) Fight for Democracy Webpage
3 OECD. (9 April 2026) "A historic decline in foreign aid: Preliminary 2025 ODA data"
4 ibid.
5 ITUC CSI IGB (2026) "Record fall in international aid puts global solidarity at risk"
6 ITUC 5th World Congress (2022) "A New Social Contract: Congress Statement"

SDG 6

Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Interplay between SDG 6 and SDG 8

SDG 6 is fundamental to our human rights, health and well-being and interconnects with SDG 8 on issues of services, technology, labour rights and ensuring safe workplaces. With less than five years left to achieve Agenda 2030, the world is off track to meet SDG6, despite some improvement across key indicators in access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services. Data show 3.4 billion people are living without safely managed sanitation, 2.1 billion people lack safely managed drinking water and 1.7 billion lack basic hygiene services at home.[7] Human caused climate change is a known risk multiplier, with implications for achieving the human right to water and sanitation through impacts on infrastructure, water quality and access to WASH services, especially for marginalized groups and those in vulnerable situations.[8]

Fulfilling SDG 8.6, reducing substantially the proportion of youth not in employment, education, or training, is directly tied to fulfilling multiple targets in SDG6 (especially 6.2, 6.3, 6.A and 6.B), but schools are lagging in providing basic WASH services, with only 68 per cent providing basic hygiene.[9] These gaps are especially impactful for adolescent girls who often have to stay home when adequate services for menstrual health and hygiene are unavailable; missing four to five days of school monthly has impacts not only on school achievement, with some dropping out completely, but also on employment opportunities, health, and gender equality.[10] Thus, efforts to support youth and expand education and economic opportunities need to target adolescent girls.

The worsening impacts of climate change intensify links between water scarcity and economic stability and underscore the need for improvement in integrated water management systems and governance (6.4 and 6.5). While all regions are impacted, water stress is highest in North Africa and Western Asia (80 per cent), and Central and South Asia (70 per cent),[11] which directly impacts health, livelihoods, and decent work, particularly workers in water-intensive sectors like agriculture and industry. Global trends in artificial intelligence and energy consumption, without sufficient regulation, are further straining water quality and resources, underscoring the need for progress on SDG 8.4 to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation. Adapting to climate change and improving water-use efficiency relies on smarter water management systems, better governance, transboundary cooperation, and technological innovation, as well as significant investments in workers to provide capacity building and support for labour-intensive, decent work in irrigation and related rural infrastructure (8.2), while advancing disaster risk reduction.

To make progress on SDG8 and SDG6 together, it is imperative to take a rights-based and gender-responsive approach that ensures social protection and decent work within the water and sanitation sector. This includes addressing so-called 'low-cost solutions' that rely on unpaid labour, in particular that of women and girls.[12] Target SDG 8.3 aims to promote development-oriented policies that support decent job creation and the formalization of small and medium enterprises, which is crucial for sanitation workers. Workers in the informal economy are filling the gap where formal public sanitation services are inadequate, leading them to face adverse health impacts due to working without personal protection equipment, in dangerous conditions, and with less protection from labour laws. Gender inequality is a pervasive issue that especially exposes women and girls to water insecurity; extending social protection through income security and healthcare services can mitigate the impacts. Finally, WASH services are crucial to women and girls as well as workers regardless of their gender identity and more effort is needed to counter the additional stigma for sanitation work, on top of existing underrepresentation in WASH leadership.[13]

7 UN DESA (2025) "UN Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025"
8 OHCHR (2022) "Special thematic report on climate change and the human rights to water and sanitation"
9 UN DESA (2025) "UN Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025"
10 UN Women (24 May 2024) "Period poverty costs too much, take action to end it"
11 UN DESA (2025) "UN Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025"
12 UNESCO (2026) "The United Nations World Water Development Report 2026, Water for all people: equal rights and opportunities; executive summary"
13 Florence Dery, Elijah Bisung, Bernard Abudho, Ophelia Soliku, George Dery (2023) Examining the health and wellbeing of women sanitation workers in Ghana and Kenya

Trade Union Demands & Contributions

Trade Union Demands

- **Implement the human rights to water and sanitation**, by adopting and enforcing national legislation and policies to ensure availability, accessibility, acceptability, and quality of water and sanitation for all people, without discrimination.
    - States must recognize and address the varied and substantial impacts on marginalized communities and vulnerable populations, including Indigenous Peoples, persons living with disabilities, older persons, and people living in informal settlements or rural communities, and those living in frontline climate communities and affected by conflict or disaster.
    - This is of particular importance to workers; numerous ILO Conventions require ensuring WASH in the workplace and states must "ensure that the planning, development and management of public infrastructure and services provide 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."[14]
- **The provision of safe drinking water and sanitation must remain public and be treated as a common good**. Water and sanitation are public goods and must not be treated as commodities. The state has the primary responsibility to ensure the provision of these essential services. The state should invest in the infrastructure, maintenance, and accountability mechanisms to ensure high-quality, reliable, and climate-resilient water and sanitation systems. Governance must be transparent and engage local communities through participatory management. The principle of non-commercialization[15] of these essential services is key to achieving this.
- **Invest in decent, climate-friendly employment in water and sanitation services, underpinned by institutionalized social dialogue mechanisms**. A gender-responsive just transition framework must be applied to the water sector to ensure no one is left behind and to counter entrenched discrimination. Prioritize public investment to build skilled, green, and decent jobs across integrated water resource management, infrastructure and maintenance, water conservation and testing, wastewater treatment, sanitation services delivery, and governance and policy. This investment must prioritize local employment and skills development, particularly for women and youth and marginalized groups including Indigenous Peoples, LGBTQIA+, and persons with disabilities.
    - Establish effective social dialogue mechanisms, involving governments, trade unions, and employers, to (a) ensure fair wages, equal pay for work of equal value, formalization of informal employment, safe working conditions, and workers' participation in decision-making within the water and sanitation sectors, and (b) to achieve an integrated management of water resources at all levels, improve water quality, increase water-use efficiency across all sectors, and restore water-related ecosystems.
- **Commit to a robust and legally binding global treaty on plastic pollution**. A plastics treaty must improve water quality and drastically reduce plastic production. The treaty must include just transition measures for all workers, including water and sanitation workers, in the lifecycle of plastics, from extraction to production to waste management.

14 ITUC (2023) "HLPF 2023: Access to water and sanitation is a human right"
15 Trade Union Confederation of Americas (2019) "PLADA X 2030 AGENDA"

- **Prioritize water use efficiency to mitigate the compounding pressures of climate change and the intensive water footprint of artificial intelligence data centers**. The climate crisis and the increasing energy demand for technology are a major challenge for managing freshwater resources.
    - Ensure that climate change mitigation, adaptation and resilience efforts integrate water use efficiency and labour rights, including through nationally determined contributions and national adaptation plans.
    - The fast-growing construction of water-intensive data centres for AI is a global concern. Governments must improve regulatory structures to safeguard public water, ensuring transparency, stipulating where centres can be located, addressing water extraction given the volume required for cooling data centres, as well as managing how water is released after use in cooling.

Trade Union Contributions

India - Hinda Mazdoor Sabha: Union secures water and sanitation improvements for coal miners

Hinda Mazdoor Sabha (HMS), one of the largest unions in India, has been working to rectify the issue of lack of clean water and sanitation for workers in the coal industry in the Hasdeo area during the last decade. It is a long-running problem. Even after nationalizing coal mines between 1971 and 1973, conditions in remote mining areas were poor, with miners drinking boiled "run of mine" water. Violent protests brought water treatment plants in 1987, most of which are out-dated and poorly maintained.

Today, the fifty year-old pipelines are calcified, rusted, and leaky, causing drinking water to mingle with drain water, which poses a burden to miners' health and quality of life. Additionally, while National Coal Wage Agreements require Coal India Limited Management to provide a minimum of 15 gallons of clean water daily to the miners, they are frequently not meeting the quality specifications. HMS has taken decisive action.

- Following several rounds of union protests, HMS led a Torch Procession in December 2023 demanding clean water, electricity, and sanitation. It succeeded in shaking "the management from his slumber" and tangible improvements in water infrastructure. They replaced over 7 kilometers of branch and main pipelines leading to the miners' quarters were replaced, and relocated 3 kilometers of pipeline drains.
- Miners and HMS independently tested the water quality of the 15 gallons provided by Coal India Limited. An accredited West Bengal government lab found the quality fails to meet the Bureau of India Standard and that the company lab reports were manipulated. Following the reports by the union, management was forced to focus on water cleanliness and initiated some improvements.

HMS continues to demand improvements to meet union standards.

Global - PSI: Trade Unions join forces against privatisation of water and sanitation

The global water and sanitation sector faces escalating threats from austerity policies, climate pressures, and aggressive privatisation schemes that prioritise capital extraction over public well-being. In response, the trade union movements, within the Global Water Justice Movement, have been instrumental in organising robust political resistance to halt the commercialisation of these fundamental public goods. Recognising that protecting essential services requires confronting broader macroeconomic structures, trade unions have also spearheaded the push for systemic financial reform. Crucially, relentless union advocacy alongside civil society allies helped secure the ongoing negotiation of a landmark United Nations Tax Framework Convention to democratise the global tax system, a vital step towards ensuring multinational corporations adequately fund resilient, publicly owned water infrastructure and combat the sovereign debt crises weakening the well-being of people in developing nations.

Beyond high-level multilateral advocacy, trade unions are intervening directly on the ground to organise and protect the water and sanitation sector's most vulnerable labourers. Across the globe, frontline sanitation workers who perform critical public health services, often manually clearing waste without personal protective equipment or formal recognition, endure severe occupational hazards and systemic discrimination. To rectify this, global union federations are actively partnering with national affiliates and the International Labour Organization (ILO) to mobilise these marginalised workers into formal unions. By demanding adequate occupational safety standards, formalising precarious employment, and enforcing fundamental labour rights, trade unions are ensuring that the pursuit of SDG 6 is inextricably anchored to SDG 8.

16 Public Services International (PSI) (2025) "World Water Day: Unions Unite for Public Water Rights and Sanitation Justice"

SDG7

Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Interplay between SDG 7 and SDG 8

Access to energy is vital for engaging in education, economic activities and even social outlets. Such an energy intensive economy is leading to dire planetary consequences which cannot be avoided without a focus on achieving SDG7, and a transition to affordable and clean energy. A fundamental link between SDG7 and SDG8 is the imperative of a gender-responsive just transition in the energy sector. The urgency of this transition is heightened by the need to rapidly increase the share of renewables (SDG 7.2) to meet climate targets, a goal that requires substantial investment. While the transition is under-resourced and the deployment of renewables is expensive, it is crucial to note that fossil fuel subsidies totalling over $7 billion[17] are artificially lowering the cost of fossil fuels and externalizing the environmental and health damages they cause.[18] This money should be repurposed to support a just transition.

A transition that is just, equitable and inclusive is crucial to meet the needs of both those already in the energy sector and those who have been historically excluded. Ensuring a just transition for all workers, whether in formal or informal sectors, who are affected by transitioning away from fossil fuels requires proactive industrial policies and equitable investment plans. Further, the shift away from fossil fuels must ensure social and economic sustainability by actively ensuring that the benefits are shared equally through the application of principles ensuring distributive justice, social dialogue, and the inclusion of marginalized communities in decision making.[19] This approach requires not only the necessary reskilling and transition support for workers displaced from the fossil fuel industry but also the strategic expansion of the number of skilled workers in the energy sector by bringing in those who have historically not had access, for example due to gendered division of labour, discrimination on another basis, or educational disparity, by providing targeted training and making newly created jobs decent and inclusive. It also means formulating policies that protect labour rights and create decent jobs in the clean energy sector, including as outlined in the ILO Guidelines for a Just Transition.[20]

A just energy transition also requires gender-responsive policies to ensure it does not reinforce existing inequalities in the world of work. Key measures include: embed gender equality and inclusion across all just transition policies and climate strategies; promote a robust plan for skills development and lifelong learning; strengthen gender-responsive social protection systems to cushion climate-related job losses, especially for women in informal or precarious work; invest in the care economy as part of just transition pathways; ensure women's full participation in social dialogue and decision-making on energy transition policies.

Globally, electricity access has made strides, with 92 per cent of the world's population having basic access, and 45 countries having achieved universal access between 2010 and 2023. Digging into the statistics, the inequities start to emerge however: there is slow progress for Sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania, as well as rural areas where 84 per cent of the world's population without electricity lives.[21] Additionally, the overall "access" rate masks household energy poverty where, for example, reliable energy is negligible despite nearby grid access points due to weak transmission or a grid with old technology or that is too small.[22] Together with growing demand from industry, technology, agriculture and Global North countries, along with the increased energy required just to meet development needs in the Global South, current trends will not bring us to universal access by 2030.

The global deficit in energy access is an impediment to decent work and is contributing to a public health crisis. Lack of access to clean, modern cooking fuels affects 1.8 billion people,[23] leading to severe indoor air pollution that primarily impacts women and girls. This health burden, along with the time burden

17 The IMF breakdown finds that in 2024 there were $725 billion (0.6 pe rcent of GDP) in explicit subsidies and $6.7 trillion (5.8 per cent of GDP) in implicit subsidies

18 International Monetary Fund (IMF) (2025) "Underpriced and Overused: Fossil Fuel Subsidies Data 2025 Update"

19 Anis ur Rehman, Mohammad J. Sanjari, Rajvikram Madurai Elavarasan, Taskin Jamal (2026) "Sustainability-aligned pathways for energy transition: A review of low-carbon energy network solutions"

20 International Labour Organization (ILO) (2015) "Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all"

21 UN DESA (2025) "UN Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025"

22 Brian Min, Zachary P. O'Keeffe, Babatunde Abidoye, Kwawu Mensan Gaba, Trevor Monroe, Benjamin P. Stewart, Kimberly Baugh, and Bruno Sa´ nchez-Andrade Nun˜ (2024) "Lost in the dark: A survey of energy poverty from space"

23 UN DESA (2025) "UN Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025"

that comes from having to collect the fuel, limits their educational and economic opportunities,[24] directly restricting the fulfillment of SDG 8.5 (full and productive employment) and SDG 8.6 (reducing the proportion of youth not in employment, education, or training). Improving resource efficiency in consumption, as per SDG 8.4, through clean cooking technologies will help reduce indoor air pollution.

The renewable energy sector presents significant opportunities for decent jobs and clean energy that is good for people and planet, and SDG 8.5 on full and productive employment and decent work can guide the process. Expanding the number of renewable energy workers must not, however, simply replicate the labour structures of the old industry; targeted training for those already in the energy sector, alongside programs to increase employment, is crucial. It is crucial that target SDG 8.8, protecting labour rights and promoting safe working environments, is built into national energy policy and new renewable energy companies, particularly in areas like the extraction of critical minerals necessary for clean energy technologies. This objective, alongside development-oriented policies that foster decent job creation (SDG 8.3), can support micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that are essential for formalizing employment and building a comprehensive clean energy economy.

Finally, finance and international cooperation (SDG 7.a and 7.b) are essential for achieving energy equity, but both have seen regression recently as the UN and international governance systems are under attack making cooperation more difficult, and as donor governments are reducing international financial support across the board due to shifting priorities, including militarization in the name of security. Further, the limited public finance that is flowing is targeted to a small number of countries, does not match the level of need of developing countries,[25] and often contributes to indebtedness through loans. Without "accelerated deployment of cost-effective renewable solutions", Least Developed Countries will remain far behind in renewable energy generating capacity.[26]

Trade Union Demands & Contributions

Trade Union Demands

- **Formally recognize and operationalize access to energy as a human right**. Ensure that all individuals, regardless of their race, socio-economic status, ability, sexual orientation or gender identity, migrant or refugee status, or geographical location have access to the safe, reliable, affordable, and sustainable energy services necessary for health, education, employment, dignity and basic well-being. People in communities without access to sustainable energy face marginalization, poverty, health impacts from polluting energy sources, significant unpaid care work, and reduction in economic opportunities. Recognition of energy as a human right should underpin all national and international energy policies and development strategies, which must be gender-responsive and promote human and labour rights.
- **Systematically address the escalating crisis of energy poverty through a rigorously gender-responsive framework**. Collect, analyze and use data that acknowledges that women, girls, gender-diverse people, and marginalized groups disproportionately bear the burden of lack of access to clean energy. Ensure the data is disaggregated by gender, age, and other relevant factors to ensure targeted and effective interventions across the lifecourse. Design gender-transformative policies to address the specific needs of these groups: addressing unpaid care work, supporting clean cooking solutions and decentralized renewable energy systems, skills training, economic development, promoting leadership and decision-making through energy access.
- **Operationalize gender responsive Just Transition frameworks that are fundamentally anchored in social dialogue and international labour standards**. Dialogue among government, employers and workers should explicitly engage women in all their diversity, ensuring they are supported to attend,

24 Philippe Benoit and Siyuan Ding, Center on Global Energy Policy (2024) "Estimating the Number of Women Household Biomass Producers, the Largest Segment of the Global Energy Labor Force"
25 ibid.
26 ibid.

not just invited. Build mechanisms that create decent work opportunities for all in the shift away from fossil fuels, with a specific focus on training, retraining and upskilling women and workers from affected communities for roles in the renewable energy sector and other green industries, including leadership training, and technical skill development. Guarantee labour rights such as equal pay for work of equal value, safe working conditions, end to gender-based violence and harassment, and the right to organize and collectively bargain.

- Phase out fossil fuel subsidies and redirect these public resources toward sustainable energy deployment. Redirect these public funds towards accelerating the transition to renewable energy, including the just transition for workers, and supporting frontline and marginalized populations affected by climate change and energy price volatility. Establish an ambitious, clear, time-bound phase-out plan for fossil fuel subsidies. Require transparent reporting on subsidies and their environmental, social, and economic impacts.
- Align international climate finance frameworks and flows to support the transition to renewable energy. This finance must be accessible, predictable, transparent, grant-based and concessional; ensure alternatives to traditional, debt-creating mechanisms that lead to high debt payments and syphon funds from social protection, health and national sustainable development. Prioritize decentralized, community-owned, and resilient clean and sustainable energy infrastructure. Establish accountability mechanisms and ensure meaningful participation of local communities, Indigenous Peoples, women's rights groups, environmental human rights defenders, workers and unions in the planning and execution of projects.

Trade Union Contributions

Senegal: The social dimension of the energy transition

The Confédération Nationale des Travailleurs du Sénégal (CNTS), Sénégal's largest trade union federation, has launched a one-year project that aims to build the capacity of trade union leaders in the energy sector so that they are sufficiently equipped to engage in a just transition in Sénégal. The country has submitted its climate goals and is increasing its share of the renewable energy mix, but it is also launching an oil field due to limited climate finance to accelerate its decarbonization.

The CNTS sees an opportunity to create decent, green jobs, as well as an unmissable opportunity to forge a future of work in an economy that is green, equitable and socially inclusive. The project, which started in April 2025, includes four capacity building workshops with 25 union leaders, including at least 10 women; and it includes additional awareness-raising activities for the broader base of workers. The sessions will be in two different cities to engage with both conventional and renewable energy sector union leaders and support the energy sector to speak with one voice.

CNTS identified lessons for trade unions: (1) be proactive to ensure trade union involvement in future climate plans, anticipating the just transition; (2) reach out to donors and other partners for support, whether financial or technical; (3) full engagement of trade unions is crucial to ensure a truly just low-carbon transition; (4) build alliances with researchers, civil society and women's organizations to ensure unions and civil society work together.

South Africa - COSATU: Blueprint for a Just Transition

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) stands as a pioneer in championing a just, green energy transition. Recognizing that climate change severely intensifies the historical poverty, unemployment, and inequality rooted in colonization and apartheid, COSATU insists that decarbonization must center the most vulnerable. South Africa's transition poses a monumental challenge. In 2023, the nation was among the top 20 global greenhouse gas emitters, with coal powering 82 per cent of its electricity. Simultaneously, the state utility Eskom struggles with acute power shortages, relying on disruptive "load shedding" to manage the grid.

To navigate these challenges, COSATU developed its "Just Transition: Blueprint for Workers," and adopted it as a policy position in its 2022 Congress. Building on comprehensive climate policies adopted since 2011, this blueprint equips union affiliates with concrete policy proposals and best practices for climate negotiations. It envisions a low-carbon, climate-resilient economy driven by the working class. Crucially, COSATU acknowledges that this transition is a multi-pronged, cross-sector endeavor. Beyond safeguarding jobs and labour conditions for coal and mine workers, the union actively advocates for systemic reforms in energy provision, equitable economic management, and fair land distribution to secure a just future for all.

Brazil - CUT: Pioneering Green Unionism and Ecological Transformation

In May 2025, CUT Brazil participated in the 5th National Environment Conference. This pivotal event was part of a massive civil society mobilization, encompassing over 900 conferences nationwide, aimed at shaping government policies for the ecological transformation required to tackle the climate emergency. For CUT, the whole process was extremely important because while it was initiated by the government, it provided unions with a vital opportunity to exchange information on what is happening in different regions of Brazil. It also allowed CUT to deepen the discussion about what just transition really means and looks like with its affiliates.

Brazil is currently facing severe impacts from environmental destruction and climate change, manifesting in rising temperatures and extreme weather events such as floods and wildfires. As the primary custodian of the world's largest tropical rainforest, the Amazon, the country has long been at the forefront of global environmental and climate action.

Reflecting this national imperative, CUT Brazil, the largest national trade union center in the Americas, has established itself as a leading force in the international labor movement's push for a just transition. The union's proactive environmental engagement is deeply rooted; as early as 2009, CUT Brazil created a dedicated National Environment Secretariat. Furthermore, the union's involvement during the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) provided critical momentum for the rise of "green unionism" across the nation. Through these ongoing efforts, CUT Brazil continues to leverage its substantial influence to ensure that workers remain central to the country's climate resilience strategies.

Indonesia - KSBSI: Linking energy transition policies with labour protections

In East Kalimantan, the center of Indonesia's coal industry, the Mining and Energy Federation (KSBSI) is driving a green and just energy transition through robust partnerships. Embodying SDG 17, this pilot initiative under the IKI-JET Program links energy transition policies with vital labour protections by uniting trade unions, government, employers, civil society, academia, and international partners.

To ensure workers are not left behind, the initiative advocates for placing people at the center of climate policy. This includes strengthening social protections and securing government and industry support for upskilling mining workers for emerging green sectors.

Central to this collaborative effort is the Regional Consultation Forum, which institutionalizes transparent, cross-sector dialogue. By fostering collective solutions, East Kalimantan demonstrates how inclusive, multi-stakeholder partnerships can effectively tackle global challenges, proving that clean energy and social justice can advance together.

SDG 9

Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Interplay between SDG 9 and SDG 8

The global pursuit of Sustainable Development Goal 9 (SDG 9) has entered a highly critical phase, constrained by a global macroeconomic environment that threatens the core objectives of the 2030 Agenda. Amid these changes, the realization of SDG 8 still remains "not only central to the economy but also foundational to the 2030 Agenda"[27], functioning as a prerequisite for poverty reduction and climate resilience. However, the realization of full, productive employment is inextricably linked to the structural transformations driven by SDG 9; without resilient infrastructure and inclusive industrialization, the economic engines required to generate decent, formalized work cannot function.

Current data from 2024 to 2026 reveals a structural decoupling between industrial value generation and labour absorption. While global Manufacturing Value Added (MVA) per capita experienced accelerated growth of 17.3 per cent from 2015 to 2024[28], this expansion has failed to translate into proportional employment gains. Global manufacturing's share in total employment actually regressed to 14.1 per cent by 2025.[29] Manufacturing is becoming increasingly capital-intensive and technology-dependent allowing for higher output but requiring fewer workers. This represents a direct threat to the symbiotic relationship intended by SDG 8 and SDG 9: if industrialization does not guarantee mass job creation, developing nations face an acute demographic crisis, driving workers into the informal economy, as argued in a recent paper published by ITUC Africa.[30] Recognizing this blockage, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) observed in 2026 that "Business as Usual is no longer an option" for developing nations.[31]

This decoupling is exacerbated by rapid digital transformation and the integration of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), which introduces further complications to labour market inequality. Generative AI represents a significant threat to gender equality, with 29 per cent of women's employment exposed to disruption or automation, compared to 26 per cent for men.[32] The broader digital divide heavily compounds this vulnerability and bridging the gender digital infrastructure gap is a macroeconomic necessity that could yield a $1.5 trillion windfall to the global GDP by 2030.[33] Furthermore, the rapid expansion of digital public infrastructure (SDG 9) has fueled the platform and gig economy, a sector that is decoupled from traditional employment protections, expanding highly precarious labour conditions that directly contravene the tenets of decent work (SDG 8).[34]

In the context of the climate emergency, the push for green industrialization represents the most globally consequential intersection of these two goals. The global energy transition is projected to create up to 30 million new decent jobs globally by 2030.[35] However, for the Global South, the traditional export-led industrialization model is becoming increasingly difficult as markets are saturated, energy routes are blocked and many countries and regions are turning to protectionism in the face of rising geopolitical tensions.[36]

To prevent the total decoupling of industrial output from human employment, industrial policy must move beyond the sheer pursuit of production efficiency actively aligning the innovation mandates of SDG 9 with the decent work objectives of SDG 8, ensuring that technology serves as an enabler of human capabilities rather than a mechanism for worker replacement.

27 UN DESA (2025) "SDG8 and Interlinkages with other SDGs – Decent Work and Economic Growth: Secretariat Background Note"
28 UN Statistics Division (2025) "SDG 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure".
29 United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) (2025) International Yearbook of Industrial Statistics: Global Highlights 2025.
30 Hod Anyigba, Ph.D. (2026), Africa Labour Research and Education Institute (ALREI), Africa's Growth Paradox : Jobless Growth, Informality, and the Rise of the Platform Economy.
31 UNIDO (2026) "Industrial Development Report 2026"
32 International Labour Organisation (ILO) (5 March 2026) "Gen AI, occupational segregation and gender equality in the world of work: Research Brief"
33 UN Women (2025) "Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot 2025"
34 International Labour Organization (ILO) (2025) "Realizing decent work in the platform economy"
35 IRENA (2023) "World Energy Outlook 2023"
36 UNCTAD. (2026) "Trade and Development Foresights 2026: Global economy faces a geopolitical challenge"

Trade Union Demands and Contributions

Trade Union Demands

- **Increase public sector-led investments in infrastructure** (energy, roads, building, machinery and equipment, ports, etc.) to meet the development needs of the people, support decent job creation and adapt to climate change.
- **Advance reforms to increase the share of industry and industrial employment**. Increase the participation of state agencies in the allocation of credit, technological development and market expansion.
- **Support micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises** 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 access to financial services for women, migrants, and forcibly displaced persons.
- **Ensure that multinational enterprises are held accountable for labour rights and environmental standards across their supply chains**, including through mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence.
- **Integrate labour rights as a core pillar of industrialisation and technological upgrading**, including by strengthening labour inspection systems, ensuring workers' representation at the workplace through trade unions, and addressing new risks to workers arising from automation, digitalisation, and decarbonisation.
- **Strengthen climate resilience and adaptation in industrial and infrastructure development**, including protection of workers and communities from climate-related disruptions and just transition measures such as job protection and social protection.
- **Ensure a Just Transition in Green Industrialization.** Navigating the shift to a green economy requires placing the creation and protection of decent, unionized jobs at the absolute center of climate policy. Developing countries require interlinked industrial and energy strategies backed by international collaboration in financing to foster new, localized green industrial hubs. Institutionalise social dialogue and workers' participation in the design, implementation, and monitoring of industrial, decarbonisation, and digitalisation policies, ensuring the meaningful involvement of trade unions at all levels of decision-making.
- **Reduce dependency on foreign products in crucial sectors** (food, energy, pharmaceutical, etc.) by advancing domestic investments and fair regional integration.
- **Ensure that industrialisation and structural transformation produce equitable outcomes** by ensuring minimum living wages and equal pay for work of equal value.
- **Support the adoption of a new set of ILO standards**, in the form of a Convention and Recommendation, on decent work in the platform economy.
- **Invest in gender-responsive strategies for skills development and life-long learning**, especially for youth, to integrate workers in modern productive practices. Design and implement national systems of skill certification as well as systems for the recognition of skills and qualifications of migrant workers.

- **Proactively Regulate the Digital Platform Economy**. Technological innovation must not be permitted to act as a permanent loophole for evading fundamental labour protections. Governments must strictly regulate digital platforms to ensure they are structurally responsive and responsible to human welfare, enacting comprehensive legal frameworks that legally compel platform operators to provide labour protections and rights.
- **Bridge the Digital Divide and Mitigate AI Disruption**. Urgent, massive investments are required in technical and digital reskilling, specifically for women who are disproportionately threatened by the algorithmic divide. Proactive state interventions are needed to facilitate transitions of workers to these new areas and expand broadband infrastructure to marginalized groups. Ensure that innovation and technological upgrading of industrial sectors do not come at the expense of jobs and sustainability through increased energy and water consumption of data processors.
- **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 and close the gender digital divide.
- **Invest in Human Capital and Aligning Technical and Vocational Education and Training with Industrial Demand**. Governments must comprehensively modernize Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) systems, aligning training curricula directly with industrial demand to facilitate the transition of youth from informal, low-productivity labour into decent, formal, high-productivity jobs, and to substantively support the physical and digital infrastructure investments.

Trade Union Contributions

Germany – DGB: Shaping Germany's 'Coal Consensus'

The Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (DGB, or the German Federation of Trade Unions) lobbied the central government to actively shape the country's 'Coal Consensus' (2019), its plan to transition away from coal, so that it would combine climate action with sustainable wealth and decent work for all. It also opened information hubs across the country to ensure that workers can access training and information about new jobs and life after coal. The DGB is an umbrella organization for eight member unions with 5.7 million members across all sectors, focused on the political framework in Germany.

DGB was among 31 stakeholders, including trade unions, the energy industry, environmental groups, businesses and scientists. DGB aimed to address affected workers; bring in renewable energy, energy security and price security; and ensure the transition was in line with Germany's national climate goals. The final Consensus combines economic (investment) and social measures (compensation for lost wages) to mitigate adverse impacts on workers and communities in coal-dependent areas. The 'blueprint' guarantees the participation of trade unions and co-decision making in the process, including structural policies with collective bargaining.

The project provides support to young workers, staff councils and trade unions in affected areas and ensures their perspectives are taken into account. It also has hubs for training, job seeking, etc. DGB identified several lessons: (1) involve the relevant and affected actors to have a seat at the table; (2) ensure capacity on the ground; (3) the hub supports productive contact between DGB officials and German municipalities.

One example of the impact of the project has been helping former open cast mineworkers in eastern Germany transfer to train maintenance. Although the Revierwende project is funded by a special fund which was due to end in 2025, the DGB has put in an application for the project to be extended for another four years, which was accepted, and its second phase started on 1 September 2025.

India - ASSRGWA: Driving Sustainable Industrialization in Ship Recycling

The Alang ship recycling yards, located on the Gulf of Khambhat in the state of Gujarat, in India, is the world's largest ship "graveyard." Thousands of migrant workers are subjected to hazardous, uncertain conditions, daily, in the Alang. In 2003, efforts began to organize these workers into a union. Supported by organizations like Steel, Metal & Engineering Workers Federation of India (SMEFI), Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS), and IndustriALL Global Union, the movement slowly built trust and collective strength. By standing with families to secure Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) benefits after a fatal 2009 fire, and by providing extensive relief during the COVID-19 pandemic, the union proved its essential role as a support system.

Crucially, continuous advocacy has helped transform the sector from a dangerous workplace into a greener, structured industry. Following the enforcement of the Hong Kong Convention and India's Ship Recycling Act, nearly 90 per cent of Alang's yards have now been upgraded to "green plots". Today, representing over 19,000 workers, Alang Sosiya Ship Recycling & General Workers' Association (ASSRGWA) continues to drive vital improvements in safety, living conditions, and sustainable industry standards.

SDG11

Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Interplay between SDG 11 and SDG 8

SDG 11 remains significantly off track, particularly concerning housing, informal work, disaster resilience, inclusive governance, and climate adaptation. This slow progress is exacerbated by intersecting global crises, including climate disruption and macroeconomic instability, which all have a major impact on workers. Accelerating progress toward sustainable cities is fundamentally linked to addressing the goals of SDG 8 and SDG 11 simultaneously, particularly by focusing on the conditions and protections for the urban workers.

The global housing crisis is a critical barrier to achieving resilient human settlements and decent work. An estimated 1.12 billion people live in slums and informal settlements without access to basic public services like water, sanitation, and transportation. The global housing cost burden is high, averaging 31 per cent, with higher rates in Sub-Saharan Africa.[37] Workers, especially low-income and informal sector employees, are disproportionately impacted by high housing costs and overcrowding, which affects their health, productivity, and ability to fully participate in the urban economy. To resolve this, achieving SDG 11.1 requires upgrading slums to provide the basic services (water, health, transport) necessary for residents to achieve decent work (SDG 8). Comprehensive public investments in slum upgrading and infrastructure can support employment opportunities in construction and formal job sectors that lead to economic development.

A central challenge at the intersection of SDG 8 and SDG 11 is the prevalence of informal work, including street traders, transport workers, waste pickers, home-based workers, and care workers. Approximately 74 per cent of urban workers are in the informal sector in sub-Saharan Africa[38]; those rates tend to be higher for women, who make up 65 per cent of care workers[39]. A further 708 million women[40] are outside the labour market due to unpaid care responsibilities. Care jobs are often low paying, lack safeguards, social security, and legal protection, and many of these workers live in slums and other settlements that lack infrastructure and services. This widespread precarity hinders inclusive development and efforts under 8.3 toward formalization should support job-creating municipal policies. Efforts under 8.8, which aims to protect workers in precarious urban jobs can complement this, for example for waste management workers who often face occupational hazards due to pollution, for public emergency service workers[41] who are frequently denied basic rights, or for care workers who provide essential services in health, child and elder care. Urban strategies must integrate efforts to formalize these jobs, guarantee safety, ensure labour rights, and extend protection, including through social dialogue and participatory decision-making.

Effective mobility systems are fundamental for both sustainable cities and economic access, yet data shows that less than four in ten urban residents have accessible public transport options. Expanding this labour-intensive public transport industry supports climate mitigation, reduces air pollution, and promotes economic productivity, thereby supporting global resource efficiency (SDG 8.4) and helping to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation. Furthermore, investments in public amenities are diminishing, with green spaces in cities shrinking from 19.5 per cent in 1990 to 13.9 per cent in 2020;[42] and access to green spaces is not equitably distributed or accessible to all.[43] The development and maintenance of these spaces (SDG 11.7) and services like waste management (SDG 11.6) create essential labour-intensive jobs in urban planning and ecological stewardship.

Finally, cities must take a leading role in climate resilience and equitable governance, but they face major deficits in finance and participation. In 2021, cities received only $831 billion compared to an estimated need for $5 trillion for resilient infrastructure. Climate adaptation efforts are tied to disaster

37 UN DESA (2025) "UN Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025"
38 ILO (2025) "Overview of the informal economy in Africa"
39 ILO (2025) "Advancing decent work and the care economy An essential component of social development"
40 ILO (2024) "The impact of care responsibilities on women's labour force participation"
41 Public Services International "Emergency Workers"
42 UN DESA (2025) "UN Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025"
43 Stockholm Environment Institute (2025) "Pursuing more equitable access to urban green spaces"

risk reduction (DRR), which is crucial as disasters impact public services, leading to economic loss and putting vulnerable workers at higher risk of injury or displacement. Investing in resilient infrastructure safeguards workplaces and ensures continuity of employment. Beyond infrastructure, achieving sustainable cities requires inclusive and gender-transformative governance, yet only 19 per cent of cities indicated high civil society participation in urban planning,[44] and women and girls, especially from marginalized communities are underrepresented in decision-making. National urban policies must be based on comprehensive, gender- and age-disaggregated data to ensure inclusive planning, linked to sustained economic growth (SDG 8.1) and ensuring equitable job creation.

Trade Union Demands & Contributions

Trade Union Demands

- **Direct strategic investment toward Just Transition frameworks for sustainable urban development, including:**
    - **Prioritize quality public services:** Ensure universal access to public services including healthcare, education, transport, clean water, sanitation, waste management, and reliable, affordable broadband internet as fundamental urban rights.
    - **Expand, integrate and decarbonise urban public transport:** Shift toward multi-modal transportation through massive public investment in expanded, integrated, affordable, and fully electric public transit networks (trains, trams, buses), alongside dedicated infrastructure for walking and cycling. Prioritize equity, access and universal design, ensuring low-income and marginalized communities benefit most from improved access and reduced pollution. Ensure formal employment for all transport workers.
    - **Support and increase energy efficiency measures** in infrastructure and buildings: update building standards to mandate high energy performance in new construction; implement ambitious retrofitting programs for existing housing, including low-income housing, and commercial stock; integrate decentralized renewable energy sources (like solar on rooftops) and cooling and greening features (like parklets and green roofs) across the urban landscape.
    - **Increase stock and accessibility of affordable, sustainable and decent housing:** focus on increasing the supply of public and non-market housing options (co-operatives, community land trusts) to combat gentrification and transition unhoused people, with a goal to ensure housing stability for all residents, particularly marginalized groups.
    - **Build resilience of communities and infrastructure to increasing climate impacts including workplace heat stress:** integrate climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction measures into all urban planning, through inclusive processes; focus on green infrastructure and integrated solutions to manage stormwater, reduce the urban heat island effect, and protect vulnerable communities from floods, heatwaves, and other climate impacts.
- **Recognize access to care and decent care jobs as an indispensable foundation for sustainable cities.**
    - **Ensure decent work for care workers:** provide the proper recognition, representation, remuneration and reward of care workers, develop laws and policies ensuring inputs from care workers, labour unions and women; provide training and skills development; require safe work environments, safeguard labour rights, and implement wage standards.

44 UN DESA (2025) "UN Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025"

- **Promote the equal sharing of responsibilities within the household:** recognize, reduce and redistribute women's and girls' disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work by promoting the equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women within the household and promoting work-life balance;
- **Substantially increase public investments to develop universal, integrated care systems** throughout the life course: include early childhood education and care, elder care, and support for persons with disabilities, ensuring services are culturally sensitive, accessible within local neighbourhoods, and free or highly subsidized; and accompany with parental leave and other care policies for workers.
- **Make urban spaces accessible:** design cities that prioritize proximity, accessibility, and the time needs of carers and care recipients, including sufficient green spaces, public seating, safe pedestrian areas, and easily accessible public services and transportation links.

Trade Union Contributions

Chile - Trade Union Confederation of Chile: Trade Unions contributing to the care economy

The Trade Union Confederation of Chile (CUT) has supported a 2024 initiative of the progressive Boric government to establish a new National System of Support and Care, covering a wide gamut of services supporting infants and children, the elderly and frail, those with disabilities and those with special needs. Dubbed Chile Cares,[45] this initiative is intended to recognize care, caring and self-care as social and human rights, and improve the lives of both those receiving and providing care. Caregivers in the home and informal sectors are being promised increased support and training, with paths to certification and increased professionalization.

Australia - Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU): Tangible care economy outcomes

In Australia, the government aims for a "sustainable and productive care and support economy that delivers quality care and support with quality jobs." The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) is the country's sole national confederation representing 1.8 million workers, and along with affiliates, it has played a leading role in mobilising support for a robust care economy, securing significant gains in wages and working conditions for care workers. For example, the ACTU's National Care Compact influenced the Labor government's reforms to improve wages and job security. The Secure Jobs, Better Pay and other reforms facilitated the ACTU and affiliates to several wins, including:

- **Wage Increases in Aged Care:** Following a decade-long campaign by the Health Services Union (HSU) and the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF), the Fair Work Commission (FWC) approved wage increases of 20.9 to 28.5 per cent for direct care workers over three years (2022–25).
- **Sectoral Bargaining Gains:** The "Secure Jobs, Better Pay" reforms enabled multi-employer bargaining, leading to a landmark collective agreement in December 2024 covering over 12,000 childcare workers. This agreement facilitated a government-announced 15 per cent pay increase for all early childhood education workers covered by such an instrument.

45 'Chile Cuida' in Spanish

- **Addressing Gender-Based Undervaluation:** Trade unions pushed for a statutory mandate in the Fair Work Act to promote gender equality. This led the FWC to proactively review priority occupations for gender-based undervaluation, resulting in proposed wage increases ranging from 1.8 to 35.2 per cent for selected sectors.
- **Improved Parental Leave and Pensions:** Paid parental leave is set to increase to 26 weeks by July 2026, with a "use it or lose it" design to encourage non-birth parents to take at least one month of leave. Additionally, unions secured a "key gain" effective July 2025: mandatory pension (superannuation) contributions during parental leave to help close the gender retirement income gap.[46]

Philippines: Labor rights for community health and domestic workers

The Philippine context is challenging for unions. The government is often hostile to organized labour, with restrictive labour laws and violent attacks, intimidation and arbitrary arrest of workers and their representatives. Additionally, thirty-six per cent of employed people are in the informal sector, and it is estimated that women's and girls' unpaid work contributes 36 per cent of GDP. With four labour confederations, unions are campaigning for the formal recognition and standard remuneration of community health and domestic workers. For example:

- The Trade Union Confederation of the Philippines (TUCP) advocated for national legislation (Magna Carta) that would **recognize barangay health workers**, who are often women, formalizing their status and guaranteeing minimum rights. Key provisions included minimum monthly wages, provisions for training, certification, job security, pension coverage and social protection. While the Philippine House and Senate initially approved the bill, it was withdrawn by the House of Representatives at the end of the session. While disappointing, TUCP will continue to fight for the legislation.
- The Alliance of Filipino Workers (AFW) succeeded, after a long and hard-fought campaign, in securing a **COVID-19 health emergency allowance**, which will provide payouts up to 150,000 pesos (USD 2,650) for workers who served for 25 months during the pandemic.
- Unions are working through **social dialogue** to recognize care work as real work, and codify national minimum wages and rights in legislation. The Federation of Free Workers (FFW) is represented on tripartite committees with government and employers for the education sector, to positively influence care policies that represent workers' priorities.
- Unions in the Philippines are leading campaigns for standardized living wages; recognizing domestic workers as foreign workers; protections and better working conditions for domestic workers; and policies under a 15-point agenda for women workers.[47]

46 Adapted from "Trade unions advancing the care agenda in three countries: Australia, Chile and the Philippines" ITUC (2025)
47 Adapted from "Trade unions advancing the care agenda in three countries: Australia, Chile and the Philippines" ITUC (2025)

SDG17

Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

Interplay between SDG 17 and SDG 8

Sustainable Development Goal 17 provides the indispensable financial and cooperative infrastructure, encompassing capital mobilization, multilateral partnerships, and rigorous data frameworks, that is absolutely requisite to drive the sustained, inclusive economic growth and productive employment targeted by SDG 8. However, as we are nearing the deadline for the SDGs, the international community is facing a synchronized development emergency. The annual financing gap required to achieve the SDGs in developing countries has surged to a staggering USD 4 trillion.[48]

This discrepancy between the financing needed and the financing available is heavily exacerbated by an unprecedented crisis reduction in Official Development Assistance (ODA) budgets. In 2025, ODA suffered its largest ever annual collapse, dropping by 23.1 per cent in real terms. Driven by historic pullbacks from major donors, ODA has now fallen back to pre-2015 levels, with projections for 2026 indicating a potential third consecutive year of decline.[49] ODA remains a "vital tool to eradicate extreme poverty, strengthen democratic public institutions," and invest in the universal social protection systems foundational to SDG 8.[50]

Simultaneously, the developing world is trapped in a paralyzing sovereign debt paradox. In 2023, low- and middle-income countries faced a record USD 1.4 trillion in debt-servicing costs, with another spike in 2024.[51] Almost half of the world's population currently lives in countries forced to spend more on debt interest payments than on domestic health, education, or infrastructure.[52] This vicious macroeconomic cycle completely consumes the domestic fiscal space necessary for SDG 8 investments, drives vast numbers of workers into the informal economy and stalls labour productivity.

In response to this fragmentation, the "Compromiso de Sevilla", the outcome document of the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FFD4) in 2025, included commitments to investments in decent jobs and social protection. However, it fundamentally fell short of raising the ambition required to restructure the international financial architecture. International Financial Institutions (IFIs), including the IMF and World Bank, are in need of structural reform to include trade unions and civil society organizations in their decision-making processes. Public development banks must systematically integrate decent work into their results measurement frameworks and abandon harmful macroeconomic conditionalities, such as public sector wage cuts, the privatization of public infrastructure, and austerity policies.

The subsequent 2026 FFD Forum heavily emphasized private sector engagement to bridge the funding gap, yet failed to seriously look beyond commercial interests.[53] The Forum glaringly omitted commitments to creating decent jobs and failed to mandate compliance with ILO standards or human rights due diligence. Progress on SDG 17 will remain fundamentally broken if international bodies permit private finance to prioritize commercial gains above established developmental objectives. Ultimately, achieving the 2030 Agenda requires acknowledging that fostering inclusive economic growth and institutionalizing social dialogue (SDG 8) are the very engines that generate and mobilize the domestic and global resources needed for SDG 17.

48 UN Interagency Task Force on Financing for Development (2024) "Financing Sustainable Development Report 2024: Financing for Development at a Crossroads."
49 OECD (2026) "A historic decline in foreign aid: Preliminary 2025 ODA data"
50 ITUC (13 April 2026) "Record fall in international aid puts global solidarity at risk"
51 World Bank Group (3 December 2024) "Developing Countries Paid Record $1.4 Trillion on Foreign Debt in 2023"
52 UN Secretary-General's Expert Group on Debt (2025) "Confronting the Debt Crisis: 11 Actions to Unlock Sustainable Financing"
53 International Trade Unions Confederation (ITUC) (30 April 2026) "Pivot from commitment to delivery: ITUC statement on the FFD Forum"

Trade Union Demands and Contributions

Trade Union Demands

Following up on the UN "Compromiso de Sevilla", ensure the implementation of adequate financing strategies include:

- **Restore ODA and Protect Financing for Social Protection**. Donor countries must reverse the devastating cuts to international aid and establish clear, time-bound pathways to meet the internationally agreed target of allocating 0.7 per cent of GNI to ODA, including for climate finance, with clear timelines and indicators that guarantee transparency, accountability and impact. To build resilience and fulfill the mandate of SDG 8, donors must commit to allocating at least 7 per cent of ODA specifically to universal social protection, gradually increasing this allocation to 14 per cent.[54]
- **Establish a UN-Led Debt Workout Mechanism and Empower Borrowers.** To break the cycle of sovereign debt distress, governments must urgently implement a UN-led debt workout mechanism that provides adequate relief free from austerity conditions, based on UN General Assembly resolution 69/319 of 10 September 2015, titled "Basic principles on sovereign debt restructuring processes.". The international community must adequately fund and resource the newly established borrowers' platform to strengthen the collective bargaining power of debtor nations. Strong regulatory mechanisms must be developed to compel private creditors to participate fairly in debt restructuring.
- **Advance Fair and Progressive Global Taxation.** The FFD Forum must commit to an ambitious UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation, and to a multilateral reform of the current corporate tax architecture, to democratize global tax rules. To combat inequality and generate sustainable development financing, governments must implement a minimum tax floor of 25 per cent on corporate profits, establish a billionaires' wealth tax, introduce a financial transactions tax, tackle tax evasion and aggressively tackle tax avoidance and illicit financial flows.
- **Integrate ILO core labour standards to WTO's rulebook.**
- **Set ambitious targets for Special Drawing Rights (SDRs)**, which are urgently needed to anticipate and mitigate shocks related to climate, health, digitalisation and other emerging challenges.
- **Ensure Business accountability in development**, through compliance through compliance with ILO standards, mandatory human rights due diligence and responsible business conduct, as well as adoption of a binding UN treaty on business and human rights.
- **Bind Private Finance and Trade to Labour Standards**. Private finance and blended finance, mobilized for development, must strictly comply with ILO standards and the Just Transition Guidelines. The UN must urgently move forward with the Binding Treaty on Business and Human Rights to enforce mandatory due diligence and hold businesses legally liable for labour violations across their entire supply chains.
- **Reinforce the Role of Social Dialogue in Financing Frameworks**. Social dialogue must be legally recognized as a key implementation mechanism for the 2030 Agenda. Crisis response measures must be built on the engagement of social partners. Social dialogue and industrial relations help to rebuild trust in institutions and contribute to crafting equitable and sustainable policies.

54 International Trade Unions Confederation (2026) "Trade union priorities for the UN Financing for Development Forum 2026"

- **Improve the quantity and quality of data to** input into national policy making processes. Recognise the importance of citizen- and worker-generated data in SD progress monitoring

Trade Union Contributions

Spain- AECID: Feminist Cooperation Strategy

Adopted in January 2026, The Spanish Feminist International Cooperation Strategy has been developed in a highly inclusive manner in direct collaboration with trade unions, employers, and civil society organizations (CSOs) more broadly. To systematically guide its policies and effectively tackle structural inequalities, the strategy is anchored in four main pillars:

- **Rights:** Ensuring the full realization of human rights for women, adolescents, and girls, while protecting the civic space.
- **Representation:** Guaranteeing effective, equal participation of women in decision-making and transforming traditional power structures.
- **Resources:** Increasing the economic and human resources dedicated to eliminating gender inequalities globally.
- **Alliances:** Strengthening collaborative partnerships across all sectors to drive sustainable development and social justice.

Through this Strategy, the projects within the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation (AECID) will promote measures to foster equality and social dialogue, the training and empowerment of women workers and leaders, and their representation in social and trade union organisations, particularly in sectors where women are in the majority.

Trade unions continue to carry out various cooperation initiatives in partnership with the AECID, a range of international organisations and other stakeholders in Spanish development cooperation. They play a vital role in using social innovation to put forward proposals that improve working conditions for women of all backgrounds, including by promoting equal pay.

Uruguay – PIT-CNT: National Development Strategy

In 2025, Plenario Intersindical de Trabajadores – Convención Nacional de Trabajadores (PIT-CNT) submitted the workers' proposal on the National Development Strategy to the Office of Planning and Budget. This proposal was accepted and led to its inclusion in the National Budget Act in December 2025, resulting in the creation of a tripartite negotiating framework to address the National Development Strategy. Among other institutional actors, the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Uruguay, Pablo Ruiz Hiebra, participated in the launch of this process. Furthermore, for the first time since the pandemic, trade unions are structurally involved in the preparation of Uruguay's Voluntary National Review (VNR), which will be presented to the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF).

Global - ITUC: Advocacy on financing and development cooperation issues

The ITUC has been promoting workers' rights in financing for development processes since the adoption of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda in 2015.

In 2025, the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4) took place, and the ITUC actively and firmly advocated to ensure that the priorities of workers and trade unions were addressed.[55] The organisation took an active part in the formal processes, including the Financing for Development Forum and the FfD4 Preparatory Committees held in New York, where trade union delegations met with member states and the facilitators of the outcome document. The delegation also closely followed the negotiations, making statements both in plenary discussions and at side events covering various FfD4 areas of work, from the need to reform the international financial architecture to the financing of social protection. Aside from the FfD processes, ITUC delegations engaged with key actors in international fora such as the World Economic Forum (WEF), and urged world leaders to prioritise the strengthening of democratic governance and social safeguards in trade. Trade union leaders also urged the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to support multilateral cooperation and to work closely with the international labour movement to address global challenges and promote decent work, social protection, and sustainable development.

Trade union advocacy also focused on academic debates, such as the OECD-DAC Trade Union Forum, where trade unions took the opportunity to urge the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) to ensure that development cooperation prioritised decent work, workers' rights, and poverty reduction. In a rapidly evolving geopolitical context, the ITUC had to adapt quickly to new policies that could affect workers, such as the tariffs announced by the Trump administration. The ITUC closely monitored the impact of the resulting trade measures and continued to advocate for a worker-centred trade model based on the principle of international solidarity.

55 International Trade Unions Confederation (2024) ITUC submission to the UN Financing for Development Conference 2025

Conclusion

With only four years to 2030, the 2030 Agenda is increasingly constrained by a synchronized development emergency. This crisis is characterized by significant reductions in Official Development Assistance (ODA), a paralyzing sovereign debt burden, and severe, coordinated pressures on global democratic institutions. Progress across the specific Sustainable Development Goals under review, clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), affordable and clean energy (SDG 7), industry and infrastructure (SDG 9), sustainable cities (SDG 11), and global partnerships (SDG 17), remains obstructed by a global macroeconomic paradigm that prioritizes corporate interests over equity, human dignity and rights.

To reverse this trajectory, the trade union movement calls for a comprehensive structural shift toward a New Social Contract, with Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8) functioning as the essential catalyst for systemic transformation. The advancement of decent work is not merely a supplementary goal; it is the requisite foundation for building fairer societies.

Afterall, a resilient global future cannot be achieved through a fractured, profit driven economic model. The 2026 HLPF must recognize that fulfilling the commitments of the 2030 Agenda is entirely contingent upon defending democracy worldwide, empowering working people worldwide, and placing the decent work objectives of SDG 8 at the centre of development plans and multilateral cooperation.

Annex I
Summary Sectoral Paper to HLPF 2026, ITUC - Workers and Trade Unions Major Group

Key Requests on the SDGs Under Review

SDG 6:

- Implement the **human rights to water and sanitation**.
- Guarantee public safe **drinking water and sanitation services**.
- Invest in **decent and climate-friendly jobs** in water resources management and sanitation services and establish **social dialogue mechanisms**.
- Support a global treaty on **plastic pollution**.
- Ensure **water use efficiency** in view of shrinking water resources due to climate change and the growing water footprint of AI data centres.

SDG 7:

- Recognise **access to energy** as a human right.
- Tackle the increasing phenomenon of **energy poverty** from a gender perspective.
- Introduce gender responsive **Just Transition measures** based on social dialogue and international labour standards.
- End wasteful government **subsidies to fossil fuel** companies.
- Ensure **climate finance** supports renewable energy production in developing countries with accountability mechanisms for sustainable investments.

SDG 9:

- Increase public sector-led **investments in infrastructure** with decent jobs and adaptation to climate change.
- Ensure **decent work**, including **minimum living wages and equal pay for work of equal value**, in industrialization processes.
- Invest in gender-responsive strategies for **skills development and life-long learning**.
- Support **micro, small and medium enterprises** and promote **formalization of the informal economy**.
- Reduce **dependency on foreign products in crucial sectors**.
- Support the adoption of a **new set of ILO standards on decent work in the platform economy**.
- Ensure **business accountability** through mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence.

SDG 11:

- Invest in just transition frameworks towards sustainable cities, including: quality public services, decarbonisation of urban transport, energy efficiency measures in infrastructure and buildings, access to decent housing, and resilience to extreme weather conditions and disasters.
- Expand **public investment in universal, affordable, quality care services and decent work for care workers**, as essential components of sustainable cities.

SDG 17:

- Following up on the UN "Compromiso de Sevilla", raise the ambition in the overall financing for development agenda, particularly regarding the urgent **reform of international financial architecture**, based on democracy and solidarity.
- Ensure the meaningful **participation of trade union in the implementation of the SDGs through social dialogue**.
- Improve the **quantity and quality of data** to input into national policy making processes.

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