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**ECONOMIC &
SOCIAL RIGHTS
REPORT
GUATEMALA**



ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RIGHTS REPORT GUATEMALA

Summary

Since the advent of democracy in Guatemala, national social expenditure increased. However, major problems, such as social inequalities, persist and impact particularly indigenous people, women, and citizens from rural areas. Although some progress has been made, the country is still distressed by social unrest, stigmatization of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and individual Human Rights Defenders (HRDs), and increasingly frequent violence. Guatemala seems a long way from achieving decent work and social protection for all. Indeed, over half the population live below the poverty line, and there are still dramatic income differences between urban and rural areas.

How can the European Union (EU) better contribute to developing an enabling space for CSOs in Guatemala? And how can the EU support the realization of economic and social rights – in particular, decent work and social protection for all – in line with the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?

FOCUS ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

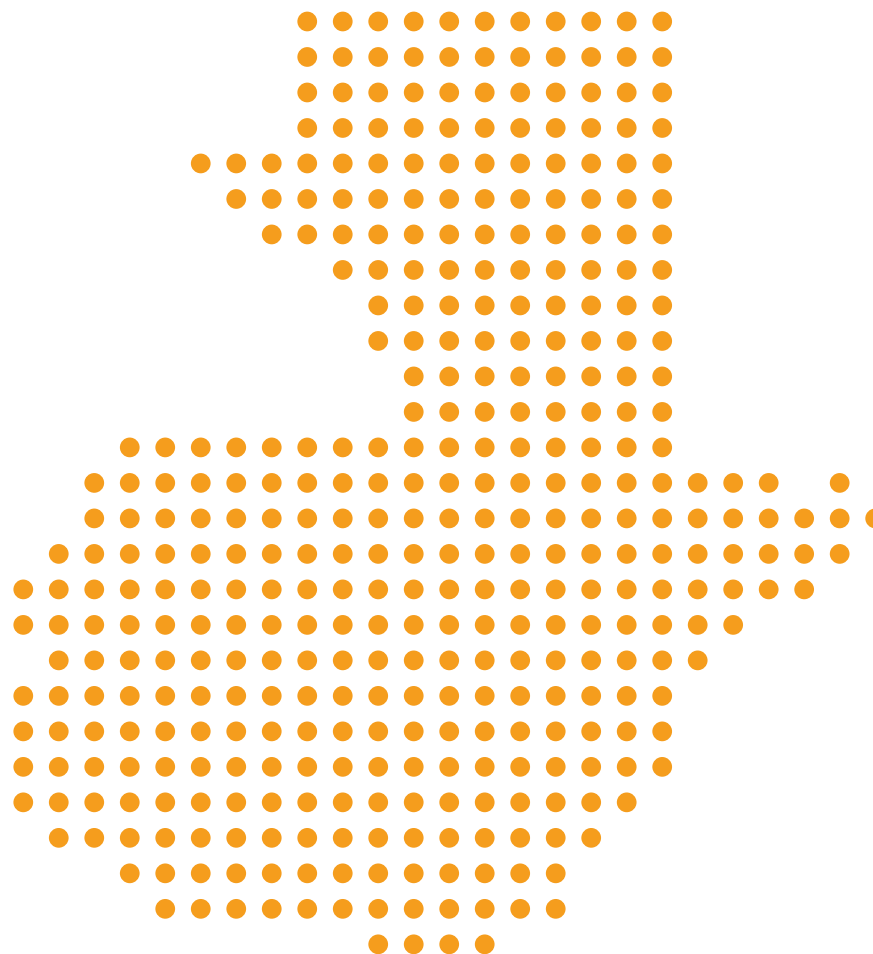


Led by the Movement for Peace (MPDL), the present Economic and Social Rights Monitor (ESRM)¹ summarizes the views of the SOLIDAR network in Guatemala on how these goals can be achieved.

¹ The SOLIDAR Economic and Social Rights Monitor has been developed in the framework of the EU funded program "Organising International Solidarity": <https://prezi.com/view/9zuxuivoqUSD3w1pGJSz/>

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Source: MPDL

1. ABOUT THE SOLIDAR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS MONITOR

How can the European Union (EU) better contribute to developing an enabling space for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)? How can the EU support the progressive realization of economic and social rights, namely decent work and social protection for all, in line with the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development? The SOLIDAR Economic and Social Rights Monitor (ESRM)² summarizes the views of SOLIDAR members and partners in 26 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America on how these goals can be achieved.

The ESRM is based on a questionnaire that rests on two main benchmarks: an enabling environment for CSOs and decent work and social protection for all. It also uses three sub-benchmarks –

including access to the policy-making process, support for human rights defenders and freedom of association; and three indicators, including fundamental labour rights, universal access to healthcare and universal access to education. The questionnaire plays a central role in in-country consultations facilitated by SOLIDAR members.

SOLIDAR’s Country Monitoring Reports are the main output of this consultation process. They provide a tool for CSOs in the field to engage in a structured dialogue with the EU over the progressive realization of economic and social rights and to participate in the definition of the EU’s cooperation priorities.

² The SOLIDAR Economic and Social Rights Monitor has been developed in the framework of the EU funded program “Organising International Solidarity”: <https://prezi.com/view/9zuxuivqUSD3w1pGJSz/>

2. INTRODUCTION

The EU's strategic relationship with Guatemala focuses on supporting the transition towards a more democratic and inclusive society based on the rule of law and respect for human rights. According to Guatemala's national development priorities, the Multiannual

Indicative Program (MIP) 2014-2020 includes three main sectors of intervention: food and nutritional security; conflict resolution, peace and security; and competitiveness. In this way, the EU aims to improve the effectiveness, impact and coherence of its aid.

TABLE 1. GUATEMALA AT A GLANCE

Population ³	17.245,807 million (2018)
Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ⁴	USD 78.46 billion
Human Development Index (HDI) and ranking ⁵	0.650 (127 out of 189 countries)
Total social protection expenditure including health (percentage of GDP) ⁶	4,4% of GDP (2011)
Percentage of population covered by at least one social protection benefit (effective coverage), 2015 or latest available year ⁷ (SDG indicator 1.3.1)	NA
Total envelope of National Indicative Programme (NIP) ⁸	EUR 186.8 million
Sustainable Development Dashboard Global Index Score ⁹	59.6 (122th out of 162 countries)

³ <https://data.worldbank.org/country/guatemala>

⁴ *Ibidem*

⁵ <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/GTM>

⁶ The expenditure on social protection and health refers only to the central government sector. <https://www.social-protection.org/gimi/gess/ShowWiki.action?id=594#tabs-3>

⁷ The proportion of the population protected in at least one area (SDG indicator 1.3.1 (a): Proportion of the total population receiving benefits at least under one of the contingencies (contributory or non-contributory benefit) or actively contributing to at least one social security scheme.

<https://www.social-protection.org/gimi/gess/RessourcePDF.action?ressource.ressourceId=54887>

⁸ 2014-2020 Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP), https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/mip-guatemala-2014-2020-080814_en.pdf

⁹ <https://dashboards.sdginde.org/#/GTM> [Regional average score 67.1; Guatemala's Global Index Score is 11.2% lower than the regional average]



Guatemala's transition to democracy started less than two decades ago following the end of a 36-year old internal armed conflict. Since then, the country has made progress in the transition towards a more developed democracy, with free elections and democratic handovers of power. Guatemala has also increased its social expenditure during the last decade and progressed towards universal primary education.¹⁰

Nevertheless, some significant problems persist, such as social inequalities. Indeed, although Guatemala is considered a lower-middle-income country, there are striking differences in income distribution between rural and urban areas. Moreover, the implementation of the Peace Agreements signed in December 1996 has been limited. The country has not yet overcome long-standing structural inequalities. Hence, major institutional, social and economic difficulties still prevent Guatemala from becoming a more equitable and inclusive society. The National Development Plan, "*K'atun, Nuestra Guatemala 2032*", represents the national long-term development policy encompassing policies, plans, programmes, projects and investments. The plan aimed to address the precarious living conditions of large sectors of the population, especially indigenous people, women and inhabitants of rural areas, who have been suffering from social inequality and exclusion for a long time.¹¹

On freedom of association, the International Labour Organization (ILO) Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations has expressed its deep concern over the murders of trade union leaders and the persistent climate of impunity in the country.

¹⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/mip-guatemala-2014-2020-080814_en.pdf

¹¹ https://www.segeplan.gov.gt/downloads/Plan_Nacional_de_Desarrollo_Katun_2032.pdf

The SOLIDAR network in the country, led by Movement for Peace, highlights the urgency to address the following issues:

Benchmark 1. Enabling space for CSOs

- The current government has scaled down the space for the participation of CSOs by approving restrictive amendments to legislation on freedom of association (FoA).
- The right to freedom of association has increasingly been hindered, and union leaders have in recent years been victims of violence and attacks, even murders. New unions or trade unions are hardly recognized unless they are in line with the economic and political interest of the government. In addition, many private companies have adopted union-busting practices and anti-union dismissals to prevent the formation of unions. These practices contribute to job precariousness and the violation of workers' rights.

Benchmark 2. Decent work and social protection for all

- In 2018, seven out of 10 people employed were involved in the informal sector. The limited access to decent, quality employment is one of the most significant issues affecting the population, especially youth. Moreover, the current trend of outsourcing represents a risk factor for forced labour, especially for women and children under 14, who belong to vulnerable groups.
- The commodification of the health sector, such as the ongoing privatization of pharmacies, puts universal access to health at risk. Other key priorities to be tackled are food and nutritional insecurity, as well as maternal and child mortality.
- Public primary and preschool care are inadequate, and many children drop out of school due to migration. Malnutrition also negatively affects school attendance: malnourished boys and girls have difficulties in achieving good results at school. Secondary school is not covered, and the university sector is characterized by a lack of facilities, gender inequality and discrimination.



Source: MPDL

3. ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS (CSOS)

The European Union considers civil society to be a crucial component of any democratic system, as it plays an essential role in fostering inclusive development and peace. The 2012 Communication, “The Roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe’s engagement with Civil Society in external relations”,¹² made official the EU commitment to a more strategic engagement with civil society organisations (CSOs) and paved the way to EU Country Roadmaps for Engagement with Civil Society.

The Guatemala - EU Country Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society sets three main priorities. i) Strengthen dialogue spaces in civil society (promote inter-sectoral coordination, agendas and strategies, and construct a country agenda). ii) Strengthen the participation of civil society in public policies and dialogue with authorities at both central and municipal levels (in terms of sector, decentralized and municipal policies). iii) Strengthen the contribution of civil society to EU policies (based on structured dialogues, bilateral programmes and thematic lines). The EU also revived its support to the CICIG (UN International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala), which was hampered by pressure and a lack of cooperation from public authorities, especially during the last trimester of 2018.¹³

Despite professing commitment to the creation of favourable platforms for civil society, the current government has scaled down

the space in which CSOs can participate, by approving restrictive amendments to legislation on freedom of association. Several CSOs – including the CIVICUS Monitor – reported an increasing level of violence against human rights defenders (HRDs), particularly defenders of land rights.¹⁴

3.1 Access to the policy-making process

The EU Country Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society process gave CSOs a forum in which to discuss the national and local situation with the EU Delegation, which provides an enabling environment for CSOs in Guatemala. However, the roadmap and the weight given to CSOs and HRDs rely very much on the Delegation’s continuous engagement. Besides, the meetings of CSOs with the EU Delegation are often used to manage EU funds and for coordination purposes rather than to build joint actions and awareness-raising campaigns. At this moment, open spaces for indigenous peoples are diminishing; the deployment of security forces represses civic mobilization; and the murder of CSO leaders discourages participation. Unfortunately, the reduction in development cooperation funds for Guatemala has decreased CSOs’ room for manoeuvre and led to a fragmentation of CSOs, where they are becoming rivals for funds instead of strengthening collaboration.

¹² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/lexuriserv/lexuriserv.do?uri=com%3a2012%3a0492%3afin%3aen%3apdf>

¹³ https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/complete_eu_country_updates_on_human_rights_and_democracy_in_the_world_2018_4.pdf

¹⁴ <https://www.civicus.org/documents/PeoplePowerUnderAttack.Report.27November.pdf>

The SOLIDAR network in Guatemala considers that the EU should apply a structured dialogue mechanism for sectorial exchanges between CSOs and the EU to analyse the challenges and elaborate joint actions. This dialogue should not be restricted to those CSOs receiving EU funds but should be as inclusive as possible.

The national development plan entitled K'atun¹⁵ recognizes citizen participation in political dialogue as one of the fundamental pillars for social development and democracy. Nevertheless, **the criminalization of social leaders increased over the last year, significantly reducing their capacity for active and coordinated participation in the decision-making process.** Nowadays, the System of Urban and Rural Development Councils (SCDUR), institutionalized by the Congress of the Republic in May 2002, should ensure citizen participation *“by encouraging wide participation of all the towns and sectors of the Guatemalan population in the determination and prioritization of their needs and the corresponding solutions”*. In addition, the reform of the justice system also fostered open spaces for dialogue between CSOs and indigenous authorities, a process driven by the CICIG, which is an independent body supporting the Public Ministry. In the same way, the COCODES system (Community Councils of Urban and Rural Development – 11/2002) and the COMUDES (Concejos Municipales de Desarrollo) should promote civic participation.

However, these schemes are not promoted at the national level or implemented effectively. The only governmental interventions with a positive impact are the national rural development plan¹⁶ and the referral networks, coordinated by the Public Ministry, in which individuals and civil organisations play a fundamental part.

¹⁵ https://www.undp.org/content/dam/guatemala/docs/publications/undp_gt_PND_Katun2032.pdf
¹⁶ Análisis de la Realidad Nacional n.16* April-June 2016 IPNUSAC



3.2 Support for human rights defenders

In recent years, Guatemala has experienced a visible setback in human rights. The authorities have grown intolerant towards opponents and violence in conflict resolution has intensified. As a consequence, the work of human rights defenders is harder and more dangerous.

*“They also threatened us with death. There is a representative of the company that tells us we are whores...that at any time we can end up dead, and that they don’t fear us” – Woman land rights defender.*¹⁷

According to the Movement for Peace (SOLIDAR Central American Coordinator), these worrying trends are caused by several factors.

(1) The **criminalization of social protest**: due to high levels of misinformation or informational bias, mostly in the mass media, the stigmatization of work of defenders, and high levels of discrimination against the indigenous population. (2) The **excessive use of criminal law** against social protest actions by human rights defenders, even with imprisonment while awaiting trial. (3) **Weakness and lack of coordination in the social movement for the defence of human rights** due to inadequate access to protection mechanisms, and poor knowledge of institutional processes. (4) **weak and insufficient institutional responses** to attacks on human rights defenders. Because of all these factors, the people are frightened and worried about daily survival and lack mechanisms to enforce human rights.¹⁸

Support for human rights defenders is a priority in the EU agenda in Guatemala. The EU has several tools to create space for human rights defenders. For example, the EU renewed its financial support for the fight against impunity and corruption through the strengthening of the Attorney General’s Office¹⁹. EU Member States representatives meet

annually with human rights defenders. The EU provides funding for projects under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and the Civil Society Organizations-Local Authorities (CSO-LA) programme. These projects support local CSOs on topics including indigenous peoples’ rights; protection of HRDs, human rights and business; prevention of violence against women and children; conflict prevention; land governance; environment and climate change. The EU Delegation has also financially supported the formulation of a new policy for the protection of human rights defenders by the Presidential Commission for Human Rights (COPREDEH), which will be resumed once the political situation normalises.²⁰

The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) is a valuable mechanism for CSOs in the country. Still, the widespread perception is that only very targeted CSOs can benefit from it. Moreover, country-specific actions should be made. Even though the crisis did not reach the levels of Nicaragua, Guatemala is still a country in permanent conflict and with tremendous levels of violence. Assassinations and acts of aggression against HRDs and against indigenous and land rights activists occur. Most of them are related to the extractive industries, corruption and illegal armed actors. The government has failed to protect activists and investigate attacks properly, thus creating a climate of impunity that aggravates the violence.

Conversely, efforts have been made at government level to limit the work of human rights institutions, such as the ombudsman, or to intimidate peaceful protesters. For instance, in September 2018, the government blocked protests that erupted due to its decision not to renew the mandate of the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala.²¹

¹⁷ Movement for Peace (2019), <https://www.mpdl.org/sites/default/files/191204-defensoras-guatemala.pdf>

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/complete_eu_country_updates_on_human_rights_and_democracy_in_the_world_2018_4.pdf

²⁰ https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/complete_eu_country_updates_on_human_rights_and_democracy_in_the_world_2018_4.pdf

²¹ <https://www.civicus.org/documents/PeoplePowerUnderAttack.Report.27November.pdf>

Human rights defenders are essential for the construction of real democracy and to guarantee the participation of CSOs in public policymaking. Nevertheless, the SOLIDAR network in Guatemala, coordinated by the Movement for Peace (MPDL), highlights that in the last year, the number and intensity of attacks against human rights defenders have increased. HRDs' activities are increasingly criminalized, and they are becoming victims of pressure and threats. The government offers no support for their actions. On the contrary, the government and media often present a negative narrative that denigrates their reputation and undermines their safety and credibility. In this context, emergency and protection funds should be established. These funds should be independent of mechanisms that already exist, to enable access for countries like Guatemala, which is not considered a priority compared to other nations in the region. The funds should strengthen open spaces for human rights defenders and protect them from violence, pressure and harassment.

3.3 Freedom of association

The right to freedom of association (FoA) is increasingly being hindered. Unions are hardly accepted unless they fall in line with the economic and political interests of the government. In addition, many private companies have adopted union-busting practices and anti-union dismissals to prevent the formation of unions. All the previous result in job precariousness and the violation of workers' rights.

The ILO Governing Body completed the compliance procedure concerning non-observance by Guatemala of the ILO Convention on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise (C87) in its session from 25 October to 8 November 2018.²² Based on the 2019 ILO Report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, union leaders have been victims of violence and attacks – and even murders – during recent years. In

²² https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/complete_eu_country_updates_on_human_rights_and_democracy_in_the_world_2018_4.pdf

²³ <https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/2019-06-ituc-global-rights-index-2019-report-en-2.pdf>

total, over 90 trade unionists were assassinated since 2004, and no concrete action was taken at the national level to prevent such crimes or investigate and prosecute the perpetrators.²³ The ITUC Global Rights Index 2019 also highlights that Guatemala remains plagued by endemic violence and a climate of impunity.

SOLIDAR Network in Guatemala believes that collaboration between the EU and the government should, among others, aim to promote legislation in favour of independent trade unions.



4. DECENT WORK AND SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR ALL

Under its joint programming for Guatemala, the EU has identified several key challenges for development in Guatemala: i) ensuring human security; ii) fighting structural economic and social inequality and discrimination; iii) guaranteeing the respect of human rights; iv) combating widespread poverty and malnutrition, in particular in rural areas. The EU has also requested the national ILO Office to implement a technical assistance programme to ensure the sustainability of the current social dialogue process. The EU will support the implementation of this technical assistance through the “Programme to support decent employment in Guatemala”.²⁴

Guatemala ranks 127th out of 189 countries²⁵ in the Human Development Index, and over half of the population (53.7%) lives below the poverty line.²⁶ Indeed, although considered a middle-income country, there are dramatic differences in income between rural and urban areas.

The indigenous community scores significantly lower on social indicators than the rest of the population.²⁷ The Multiannual Indicative Programme represents the EU and Guatemala’s commitment to work together to eradicate poverty and foster environmentally sustainable social and economic development.

4.1 Fundamental rights for workers

Limited access to decent, quality employment is one of the issues that most affects the population, especially youth. Indeed, although the

unemployment rate in 2018 was only 2.8%, seven **out of 10 people employed were involved in the informal sector**. At present, the dynamics of outsourcing represent a risk factor for forced labour, especially of women and children under 14 belonging to vulnerable groups. Between 2015 and 2017, 178 cases of child labour were detected, according to The Report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations. However, approximately 50% of the cases were closed, after either unilateral decisions by the victims or agreement between the parties. The most exposed sectors include activities related to crops, harvesting, the transfer and processing of sugarcane and sugar exports, palm oil, hotels, restaurants and finally, the production and distribution of pyrotechnic games.

In its December 2017 human rights report in Guatemala, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights noted that the country is a location for human trafficking – origin, transit and destination – involving people forced to do sexual, beg or other similar work.²⁸ Sadly, the primary victims of this exploitation are indigenous people, including children and teenagers. Migration, whether forced or voluntary, is a big risk factor for falling into the hands of traffickers. Combat trafficking requires repressive measures. But they are not sufficient; they must be accompanied by preventive actions designed

²⁴ https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/complete_eu_country_updates_on_human_rights_and_democracy_in_the_world_2018_4.pdf

²⁵ <https://data.worldbank.org/country/guatemala>

²⁶ ENCOVI 2011.

²⁷ EU-Members States joint programming with Guatemala

²⁸ <https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/informes/pdfs/Guatemala2017-es.pdf>

to address structural poverty and exclusion, as well as the forced displacement of populations. A Safe Third Country agreement signed between Guatemala and the United States in July 2019 increases the potential target base for human traffickers. Under this agreement, asylum seekers in the U.S. can now be deported to Guatemala.

After the entry into force of the EU-Central America (EU-CA) Association Agreement, Guatemalan institutions and the private sector will have to comply with EU requirements and international standards. With EU support, the government is aiming to increase annual economic growth to 6 % over the next five years to tackle poverty and create employment, with a special emphasis on sectors that are lagging.²⁹ The 2014-2020 MIP will support objective 3.3 (competitiveness) with a total expenditure of EUR 64.8 million. The actions aim to i) promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth and contribute to social cohesion to reduce poverty; ii) improve the competitiveness and trading abilities of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and cooperatives; iii) strengthen the capacities of national institutions, MSMEs and cooperatives, so that they comply with international standards and the requirements of the EU-CA Association Agreement. Reducing inequalities is very important for Guatemala to meet the SDGs and represents one of the key points of the national development plan.³⁰

The SOLIDAR network considers that: 1) The EU should encourage the government to implement policies to support victims of forced labour and child exploitation, a phenomenon that mainly affects women, children and people living in rural areas. 2) The EU should promote coherence between its cooperation and trade policy objectives in its relations with Guatemala, as framed by the EU-CA Association Agreement.

²⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/mip-guatemala-2014-2020-080814_en.pdf
³⁰ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/memberstates/guatemala>



Source: MPDL



Source: MPDL

4.2 Universal access to health

Under the leadership of the International Cooperation Council and the Secretariat for Planning and Programming of the Presidency and with the support of the international bilateral and multilateral donors (G13), Guatemala has made some progress towards better health service delivery. In addition, the ‘wellbeing for people’ axis in chapter 11 of the K’atun plan recognizes inequality gaps and ethnic cultural specificities and prioritizes strategies and actions to guarantee people access to universal social protection. The plan includes comprehensive quality services in health and education, basic services, safe habitability, access to food and resilience to ensure the sustainability of livelihoods.³¹

Nevertheless, universal access to health and education still represents a challenge, and the commodification of the health sector puts at risk access to services for the most vulnerable parts of the population. The current government cuts the inclusive health model supported and driven by international cooperation. **A network of private pharmacies is being developed, leading to higher costs for access to medicines, and health and malnutrition indicators have recently been deteriorating.**

Food and nutritional insecurity are one of the key strategic priorities identified by the MIP. Indeed, it is one of the main issues to be tackled in the country, and it is closely related to income inequality. Based on the MIP 2014-2020, the EU and the Member States propose to focus their support on eight strategic priorities, including better access to high-quality social services for all, with an emphasis on health and education. The MIP identified an overall objective to reduce chronic malnutrition, as well as food and nutritional insecurity, by supporting the national policy for food and nutritional security and the accompanying strategic plan.³² The EU has been supporting measures

³¹ https://www.undp.org/content/dam/guatemala/docs/publications/undp_gt_PND_Katun2032.pdf

³² https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/mip-guatemala-2014-2020-080814_en.pdf

to improve food security and nutrition in Guatemala since 2000. For instance, school and family gardens were created and local offices for agricultural extensions were opened.

Food insecurity is closely related to poverty, wealth distribution and income. However, increasing the income of poor people is not enough to remove food security. The consumption and proper use of food are also a crucial part of the solution: health and nutrition programs are essential for reducing malnutrition. The joint programming for Guatemala works alongside government policy and the national plan to combat hunger (the zero hunger plan), which aims to reduce maternal and child mortality and improve family income. The joint programming includes the following specific measures: i) A Scaling Up Nutrition initiative that focuses on primary medical care and nutrition for pregnant women, nursing mothers and children up to 24 months in age; ii) Support for small landowners in the agriculture, agriculture, soil conservation and forest and water management sectors; and iii) Strengthen local governance in food security.

The real challenge is to strengthen the public health system, especially primary care, and to prevent corruption and economic interests from prevailing in government decision making. **Special attention should be paid to the quality of medicines the government buys and to chemicals contained in food. Food contamination and the lack of a system to monitor the presence of agrochemicals in food are a problem that puts the population's health at risk, especially for the most vulnerable groups.**

The SOLIDAR network in Guatemala, led by MPDL, reached three conclusions. 1) The recent trend towards privatization and the emergence of private pharmacy networks create obstacles to universal access to health services. Investments in the public health system, especially primary care, are needed, as well as measures to prevent corruption and economic interests from influencing decision-making

processes. The problem of agrochemicals in food is a top priority for the protection of health. 2) The international community, through policies and advocacy campaigns, should help CSOs build capacity. It should also support civil society organisations specialized in health with programmes and funding lines.

4.3 Universal access to education

Education is a human right recognized by the Political Constitution of the Republic of Guatemala, and the state is obliged to provide an education service. Guatemala is also a signatory of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and according to Article 26, *“Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory.”*

The K'atun National Development Plan aims to move the country from its current development model towards one of sustainable human development. The plan is to expand opportunities for people and improve their skills so that people can live long healthy lives; have access to education and a decent standard of living; and participate in their communities and the decisions that affect their existence. Despite advances in the coverage of primary school, the expected goals have not yet been reached. Indeed, public preschool care is inadequate, and a lot of pupils drop out due to migration. Food malnutrition also negatively affects school attendance and achievement. Secondary school is not covered, and universities are characterised by a lack of facilities, gender inequality and discrimination.

Overall, the educational sector suffers from poor quality. The absence of a comprehensive national policy means that fewer and fewer young people have access to the education system and, consequently, to the labour market. At the same time, the few who complete their studies do not return to their community of origin. Other factors in the educational system are



Source: MPDL

language and violence. Education appears to be monolingual despite several linguistic communities in the country. And violence and bullying hinder the educational paths of young Guatemalans.

The MIP 2014 – 2020, supported by the EU and the Member States, promotes improved access to high-quality education. The government also launched a national competitiveness agenda, named Agenda Nacional de Competitividad 2012-2021,³³ with the objective of promoting a prosperous and equitable country. One of the most important goals of this agenda is to raise the country's human capital, by improving food security, health, education, training and other basic needs. The current government considers education highly relevant to fully developing the potential of a young population and to reducing social, ethnic and gender discrimination. It is a national priority to improve access to and the successful completion of quality formal and nonformal secondary education, particularly for young Guatemalans in rural and indigenous areas. Therefore, secondary education is being reformed. In the framework of the EU-Member States joint programming with Guatemala, Germany will continue its cooperation in the education sector, with a special focus on secondary education and vocational training. This will focus especially on civic education and improving secondary school students' access to the formal labour market.

Based on the data analysis and information gathered during the in-country meeting in Guatemala, the SOLIDAR network found that: 1) The primary education sector needs to be reformed. Governmental policies do not provide any support for primary or pre-school education, and malnutrition negatively affects children's learning. 2) Investments are also needed in secondary schools and universities. A poor educational offer makes reform urgent, but the sector is also at risk from a recent trend towards privatization.

³³ https://www.segeplan.gob.gt/downloads/clearinghouse/politicas_publicas/varias/Agenda_Nacional_de_Competitividad.pdf

6. CONCLUSIONS

Since the advent of democracy in Guatemala, social expenditure has increased, and progress has been made towards achieving both the Millennium Development Goals and the more recent Sustainable Development Goals. However, major problems persist, including social inequality – notably having an impact on indigenous people, women and the rural population.

Although some progress has been made, the country is still distressed by social unrest. CSOs and HRDs are stigmatized. And violence is becoming more frequent. Achieving decent work and social protection for all still seems far away. Indeed, over half of the population live below the poverty threshold, and there are still dramatic differences in income between urban and rural areas.

The SOLIDAR network in Guatemala, led by Movement for Peace (MPDL), considers that to **promote an environment that enables civil society organizations and enhances decent work and social protection for all, the following steps should be taken:**

- A better-structured dialogue mechanism should be encouraged to allow for exchanges between CSOs and the EU. **Open spaces** should be activated, not only for CSOs receiving EU funds but for **the whole third sector**, according to common priorities identified at EU and local level. **Emergency funds** should also be made available so that countries like Guatemala, which are not listed as a top priority, have access to new funding opportunities not provided by other instruments. Finally, the EU should **systematically involve the government and trade unions in its programming mechanism**. EU-government collaboration should aim for

legislation in favour of free trade unions. Also, the involvement of trade unions in the decision-making process would enable better coordination in the formulation of policies, as well as legitimizing unions, so strengthening their power of action.

- **Consistency** between EU policies, notably **between trade and development cooperation**, is necessary to achieve the EU's goals. Hence, the European Union should ensure that trade agreements, such as the EU-CA Association Agreement, contribute to the objectives of its cooperation and development policy. In addition, **investments in the public health system**, especially **primary care**, are needed, as these are **measures to stop corruption** and prevent economic interests from influencing decision-making processes. In education, the primary system needs reforms. Governmental policies do not provide for any support for primary or pre-school education, and malnutrition negatively affects children's learning. Investment is also required in secondary schools and universities, where the recent trend towards privatization is putting the quality of educational services at risk.

ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT

1. Movement for Peace – MPDL
2. AWO International
3. Seguridad en Democracia – SEDEM
4. Asociación Coordinadora Comunitaria de Servicios de Salud – ACCSS
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