

Key Takeaways from the G20 Social Summit 2024

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From November 14 to 16, we took part in the 2024 G20 Social Summit in Rio de Janeiro—an international forum that convened civil society groups, research centers, and grassroots actors from around the world to reflect on today’s major global challenges. Under Brazil’s presidency, the summit introduced an ambitious agenda focused on sustainable development, social inclusion, and international cooperation. It also became a space for people of different generations to come together, with youth voices playing a leading role and offering new perspectives on the future.

This note captures key takeaways from our experience and brings a Latin American perspective to the ongoing global conversations on employment, social protection, and global cooperation—focusing on how these areas need to evolve to support a just transition.

1. Why did this summit matter?

Brazil's G20 presidency in 2024 marked a turning point for the forum. It was the country's first time leading the G20, following in the footsteps of Mexico (2012) and Argentina (2018), and it did so by placing social priorities, Latin American perspectives, and the core concerns of the Global South at the heart of its agenda.

This was also the third year in a row that a developing country led the G20. For the first time, the leadership troika—which helps ensure continuity from one presidency to the next—was made up entirely of countries from the Global South: India, Brazil, and South Africa. This combination made it possible to put long-standing regional concerns on the global agenda in a more visible and meaningful way.

Guided by the theme *"Building a Just World and a Sustainable Planet"*, Brazil outlined three main priorities for its G20 presidency: fighting hunger, poverty, and inequality; advancing sustainable development, addressing climate change, and promoting a just transition; and reforming global governance. To advance these goals, it launched new initiatives such as The Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty and The Global Mobilization against Climate Change.

These efforts were closely connected to global conversations—aligning with the 2030 Agenda and the UN's Pact for the Future. Ten years after the adoption of the SDGs, Brazil used its G20 leadership to give these goals new political backing and encourage more ambitious multilateral commitments. With COP30 set to take place in Brazil in 2025, the country is positioning itself as a key voice in shaping the global sustainability agenda.

Perhaps one of the most visible steps taken during Brazil's presidency was the

launch of the G20 Social Summit—a new participatory space that brought together over 17,000 people and 200 organizations in Rio. Across three days, the event hosted plenaries, open debates, and hundreds of self-organized sessions that bridged civil society groups, youth networks, research groups, and public institutions. This process, built through collaboration throughout the year, culminated in a shared declaration with concrete proposals for a fairer and more inclusive global agenda.

Brazil's decision to open the G20 to broader civic engagement sent a clear message: meaningful responses to today's global challenges must include the voices of those historically excluded from international decision-making spaces.

2. Three points for thinking from the South

The G20 Social Summit opened up a wide range of discussions. The agenda of activities in Rio reflected the diversity of voices, priorities, and perspectives shaping global debates today. Among the many ideas shared, we at Red Sur decided to focus on three themes that felt especially relevant from a Latin American perspective: the creation of quality jobs for sustainable development, the role of social protection in a just transition, and the urgency of developing financing strategies to support these transformations.

Jobs for a Sustainable Future

More than a decade ago, the World Bank noted that "*development happens through jobs.*" That insight still holds true. In a world marked by deep and persistent inequality, employment is not just important—it's a key pillar of any strategy to foster sustainable development.

The link between employment and development regained relevance, aligned with Brazil's focus on building a just world and a sustainable planet. Inequality was framed as a cross-cutting concern, running through many of the summit's debates. In this context, employment emerged as a central pathway for enabling a just transition—bringing together environmental goals, social inclusion, and decent work. Both the Leaders' and Labor Ministers' Declarations reaffirmed this vision by stating that *“creating quality employment and promoting decent work to ensure social inclusion, eliminate poverty and combat hunger”*.

Turning that vision of employment as a driver of inclusion and sustainability into concrete policies is no simple task—especially in a context where new technologies, climate change, and demographic transitions are rapidly reshaping labor markets around the world. While these changes can open up opportunities—to create new jobs, raise productivity, and support more sustainable economies—real impact depends on how countries respond. Unlocking that potential requires public policies that are tailored to national contexts and focused on promoting quality employment: jobs that are decent, inclusive, sustainable, and resilient in the face of ongoing change.

Thinking about the future of work from this perspective means advancing a strategy that fosters the creation of quality, future-oriented jobs—those that, as a result of ongoing transformations, are becoming increasingly relevant and offer new opportunities. These jobs are emerging in key sectors such as science and technology, green jobs, and care work. To ensure this growth is inclusive, it must be supported by policies that not only reduce gender gaps but also facilitate the transition from vulnerable occupations to better jobs with improved working conditions and better opportunities.

Raising the voice of the Global South in these debates is crucial to fully understand the challenge. Today, 85% of the world's working-age population lives in developing countries. Promoting quality employment in these contexts is not only a social urgency but also a structural condition for advancing toward sustainable and inclusive development.

In many cases, gaps in access to technology, training, and institutional capacity continue to limit the ability to translate these processes into real opportunities. Any international debate on the future of work and global well-being must take this reality into account and be informed by more grounded perspectives that recognize the specific contexts. Only then will it be possible to advance toward quality jobs for more people, capable of driving sustainable development that leaves no one behind.

Social Protection for a Just Transition

In a world shaped by overlapping crises—climate-related, geopolitical, and economic—social protection systems play a crucial role in strengthening resilience and achieving sustainable development. At the G20 Social Summit, this issue was closely tied to the broader debate on inclusive growth and equity.

In this context, SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) takes on particular significance. As highlighted by the G20's Employment Working Group (EWG), labor formalization is a key pillar for advancing this goal, as it not only guarantees basic rights such as fair wages and regulated working hours but also expands social protection coverage, particularly in emerging economies with high levels of informality, like those in Latin America. Formalization strengthens social protection systems by increasing the base of contributors, which is crucial for financing pensions, unemployment insurance, and public health. This approach aligns with the ILO's Decent Work Agenda, discussed at the EWG. The G20 emphasized the role of technology as an ally in this process, proposing tools such as electronic employment records to formalize non-standard jobs, ranging from platform work to remote work. Brazil, for instance, presented its Digital Work Card as a model that can be replicated in other countries.

Another key aspect is the just transition to green and digital jobs, a priority for the EWG.

For this change to leave no one behind, it is essential that social protection systems safeguard workers during the labor conversion process, preventing them from falling into informality. Ultimately, the synergy between labor formalization and social protection is not only a driving force for SDG 8 but also an essential step toward more inclusive and sustainable economies. The challenge now is to scale these policies in regions where access to social protection remains an unfulfilled goal, transforming it into a universal right.

Financing the green transition

Another central issue is the need to mobilize greater resources and establish democratic governance frameworks for their use. During the G20 Social Summit, the importance of addressing, in a joint manner, the challenges presented by the current climate and economic crises was highlighted, understanding that the global debt crisis is affecting many emerging economies, limiting their ability to direct funds toward environmental projects.

In this regard, it is crucial to increase international cooperation, recognizing that environmental protection is a common good. By coordinating efforts to overcome the current restrictive environmental financing contexts, better policies could be developed. One of the main consensus points from the summit was the need to standardize the mechanisms for accessing funding for environmental projects.

As an event that involved civil society, the discussions were enriched by academic, political, and social considerations. This exchange emphasizes the challenges that the transition to more sustainable economies requires.

3. Youth for a Sustainable Future

Participating in the G20 Social 2024 was a valuable opportunity to listen closely to a variety of voices. Organizations from different regions came to engage in dialogue, share experiences, and express their priorities, finding common ground beyond regional differences. As one of the participants from Brazil pointed out: *"This event was key for us. It allowed us to have a voice in international forums that don't always consider our perspectives. We were able to bring a closer look at the reality of everyday life into the debate. This space also made it clear that young people are not spectators: we are key actors in building solutions for global challenges."*

The G20 Social has established itself as a space particularly conducive to connecting with knowledge networks in the region, thanks to the level of participation from civil society organizations, research centers, and academic institutions. It was a springboard for strengthening ties and building new connections, essential for continuing to think about common agendas in an increasingly interdependent global scenario.

One of the most powerful aspects of the meeting was the youth presence. From the outset, many of the activities were designed by and for young people, with open spaces for exchanging ideas and connecting with peers. One participant from the University of São Paulo shared: *"Democratizing access to youth participation is key. Being in the forum not only allows us to get involved, but also helps more people understand Brazil in the international context. It is often hard to understand that we are also part of the periphery and the Global South. We need more spaces for civil society, more voices thinking about new horizons and how to create real access to these debates."*

During the three days of the G20 Social, we met young people from different countries and backgrounds. Some were participating in an international forum for the first time, while others, like a facilitator from Working Group 3 of the C20

had been engaged in this space for some time and arrived with clear objectives. In our conversation, she shared: *'My role is to show that youth must be an active part of this process. We aim to bring concrete public policy recommendations and integrate ourselves into local participation mechanisms to channel the concerns of our communities in international spaces. We think locally, but with a global perspective in mind'.*

"Despite the differences, a common thread in many conversations was the need to expand and ensure the long-term sustainability of these dialogue spaces.

4. Final Reflections

The 2024 G20 Social Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro, marked a milestone in integrating diverse voices—especially from the Global South—into discussions on sustainable development. Under Brazil's leadership, the summit highlighted the need to address challenges such as inequality, climate change, and global governance reform with an inclusive perspective focused on social justice.

From our participation, we chose to focus on three key areas that we consider essential for thinking about the future from Latin America: the creation of quality jobs linked to sustainability, the expansion of social protection systems to support a just transition, and the strengthening of international financing to make these transformations possible.

The active participation of youth and civil society organizations made it clear that building lasting solutions requires dialogue, listening, and cooperation among all actors—including those who have historically been marginalized. The summit not only reaffirmed the relevance of the 2030 Agenda but also underscored the urgency of advancing concrete actions, especially in regions marked by high levels of informality, inequality, and vulnerability.

In conclusion, this event was an opportunity to open the debate, build bridges, and bring different perspectives together. Moving toward a more just and sustainable future requires strong commitments, transformative policies, and, above all, spaces where all voices can be part of the change.