

# The Crisis of Relevance: Challenges Facing Indian Trade Unions in A Changing Labour Market

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the evolving role of trade unions in labour protection within India's dynamic employment landscape. From their colonial origins to post-liberalization challenges, trade unions have adapted to shifting economic policies while maintaining their core mission of safeguarding workers' rights. The study analyzes the constitutional and legislative frameworks governing trade union activities, including recent labour code reforms that have restructured industrial relations. Particular attention is given to trade union engagement with vulnerable populations, including women workers and those facing caste discrimination in labour markets. The research further investigates how technological change and the emerging platform economy have disrupted traditional employment patterns, forcing unions to develop innovative organizing strategies and policy advocacy approaches. Despite structural challenges—declining membership, political fragmentation, and the prevalence of informal employment—trade unions continue to serve critical protective functions through collective bargaining, compliance monitoring, and worker representation. The paper concludes by exploring pathways toward sustainable and inclusive labour movements that can effectively respond to contemporary challenges while maintaining their fundamental commitment to labour justice.

**Keywords:** Trade unions, labour protection, collective bargaining, labour law reforms, platform economy, technological change, gender inclusion, caste discrimination.

## 1. INTRODUCTIONS

Since India's independence, there are dynamic changes in the Indian labour market due to the changing economic policies, globalization, technological progress, change in the labour laws etc. Under these circumstances, trade unions have always played a crucial role in protecting and upholding the rights of the

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workers. Thus, trade unions as the representatives of working people as their collective bargaining agents, political actors and institutions, have had an important part in influencing the labour policies and becoming the voice of a population of a country where the divide between the rich and the poor and the share of the informal economy remains significant. Thus, trade unions play a crucial role in advocating for labour rights, which is important taking in consideration the current state of employment in India.<sup>5</sup> Globally, the International Labour Organisation estimates that as many as 90% of workers are in informal employment (ILO, 2018), which puts the existing union structures under immense pressure in terms of being able to provide adequate protection to the impacted workers.

Furthermore, the past decades have seen significant transformations in industrial relations following the economic liberalisation policies starting from 1991 that have redefined the employer-employee relations and forced the trade union movement to be Action Controller shortly. In the context of the current labour law reforms such as the enactment of four labour codes that replaced several labour laws it considers possibilities and challenges that arise for both bargaining rights of the workers. It also discusses how innovation with characteristics of technology such as automation and platform-based work is changing the employment relations and in turn how it is demanding new ways to organize and protect work.

Lastly, the paper concludes with a discussion on the future of trade unions in India and areas for development in order to provide better advocacy for workers in the new and evolving labour market. In this way, this paper hopes to shed light on the present and future status of trade unions in labour protection in India, the existing issues, and potential prospects for workers in the country.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF TRADE UNIONS IN INDIA

### 2.1 Colonial Origins and Early Development

Trade unionism in India is said to have started in the late nineteenth century during the industrialisation of the country under the colonial masters. The trade unions movement can be traced back to 1877 when workers at Empress Mills, Nagpur went on a strike under the leadership of N.M Lokhande who is often referred to as the father of trade unions movement in India. Labour organic movement was intensified during the early part of the twentieth century and got its shape in the form of All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) was formed in 1920 under the leadership of Lala Lajpat Rai, N.M. Joshi and others. This period saw a fusion between labour movement and the nationalist movement whereby most trade unions used the analysing workers against colonialism.<sup>7</sup>

One more important aspect of the growth and change in this period was the distinct labour unrest experienced in the early 1920s and in the early 1930s. In textile mills, railway and other industries, extensive strikes were staged. This fact was noted by the Royal Commission on Labour (1929-1931). Hence important legislation was passed for the recognition of Trade Unions like the Trade Union Act of

<sup>5</sup> “International Labour Organisation (ILO). *Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture (Third Edition)*. Geneva: ILO Publications, 2018.”

<sup>6</sup> “Government of India, Ministry of Finance. *Economic Survey 1991-92*. New Delhi: Controller of Publications, 1992. The New Economic Policy (NEP) of 1991 marked India's transition from a socialist to market-oriented economy.”

<sup>7</sup> “Narayan Meghaji Lokhande (1848-1897), pioneering labour leader and social reformer known as the 'Father of Trade Union Movement in India.' See: Karnik, V.B. *Indian Trade Unions: A Survey*. Bombay: Manaktalas, 1966.”

1926. Nevertheless, the colonial government also implemented measures to suppress militancy in labour movements during those struggles which included fight against colonial rule.<sup>8</sup>

## 2.2 Post-Independence Development: Fragmentation and Political Affiliation

It is after the independence of the country in 1947 that the trade union movement severely fragmented along the political divides. INTUC has its origin in 1947 and it was affiliated to the Congress party. In 1970, the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) was formed which is an affiliate of the Communist Party of India.<sup>9</sup> This period also saw the passing of labour protecting laws of political socialism like Industrial Disputes Act of 1947, Factories Act of 1948 as well as the Minimum wages Act of 1948. The state thus became authoritarian in industrial relations though negotiations between government, employers, and workers, became structured and standardized through the Indian Labour Conference.<sup>10</sup>

## 2.3 Post-Liberalization Era: Challenges and Adaptation

To some extent, eventually, the economic liberalization, which was set under PS 1991, can be pointed as the major phase for the change in the formations of the Indian trade unions. The emerging trends of democratization, liberalization, opening up the economies, and moving towards market-oriented economies posed new problems before trade unions. These were realized in aspects like increasing subcontracting, employment of contract workers and more generally, damaging the employment security. Employers were allowed free access to desiring for employees without state interference and vice-versa, the state also reduced its intervention in industrial relations. According to the data, the number of union members even went down by about 16% between 1991 and 2002.<sup>11</sup>

Big foreign companies and newly-formed domestic companies set up their businesses in places where there were few unions or implemented policies that would not allow them to be unionized. Thus, in response to these challenges, some of the unions started to change their approaches. From the late 1960s this evolved to collective bargaining and demand for job improvement and increased power to resolve conflicts from approaches that were military styled with more geared towards negotiation and what was in the best interest of both the management and the worker.<sup>12</sup>

# 3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK GOVERNING TRADE UNIONS AND LABOUR RIGHTS

## 3.1 Constitutional Provisions

The Indian Constitution provides the foundational framework for labour rights and trade union activities. “Right to freedom of religion is guaranteed by Art. 19(1)(c), though subject to reasonable restrictions under Article 19(4). Articles 23 and 24 prohibit forced labour and child labour, respectively. The Directive

<sup>8</sup> “Government of India. *Report of the Royal Commission on Labour in India* (Whitley Commission). London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1931, The Indian Trade Unions Act, 1926 (Act No. 16 of 1926), Government of India, Ministry of Labour and Employment.”

<sup>9</sup> “Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) was founded on May 3, 1947, and remains affiliated with the Indian National Congress party. See: INTUC. *Constitution and Rules of the Indian National Trade Union Congress*. New Delhi: INTUC, 2019.”

<sup>10</sup> “The Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 (Act No. 14 of 1947), Government of India, Ministry of Labour and Employment., The Factories Act, 1948 (Act No. 63 of 1948), Government of India, Ministry of Labour and Employment., The Minimum Wages Act, 1948 (Act No. 11 of 1948), Government of India, Ministry of Labour and Employment.”

<sup>11</sup> “Government of India, Ministry of Finance. *Economic Reforms: Two Years After and the Task Ahead*. New Delhi: Controller of Publications, 1993.”

<sup>12</sup> “Government of India, Ministry of Finance. *Economic Reforms: Two Years After and the Task Ahead*. New Delhi: Controller of Publications, 1993.”

Principles of State Policy, particularly Articles 41-43A, further emphasize the state's responsibility to secure just work conditions, living wages, and workers' participation in management.<sup>13</sup> ”

### 3.2 Key Legislation Governing Trade Unions

Trade union laws in India remain rooted in the Trade Unions Act of 1926 that was strengthened by an amendment in the year 2001. According to the Act, trade union means any association whether on a permanent or temporary basis that is mainly formed for the purpose of controlling the relationship between employees and employers. They can be registered by any seven or more members and gives some legal protections and a legal entity status to the trade unions that enrol.<sup>14</sup> The Industrial Disputes Act 1947 outlines how industrial disputes can be handled and affirms the place of trade unions in presenting workers' cases of industrial disputes. They guarantee provisions for collective bargaining, conciliation, arbitration, as well as labour courts and tribunals. It also governs strike and lock out, insisting on notice in public utility service and prohibits during the pendency of the conciliation proceeding.<sup>15</sup>

“ Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act of 1946 provides other related legal provisions are provided under the, under which it is mandatory for employers to formulate and notify the employees as to the terms and conditions of employment. the practically identical Factories and Workshop Act of 1934, and the Factories Act of 1948 that deals with the working conditions in manufacturing premises. These laws in a combine way offer the legal framework within which trade unions function in order to defend the rights of the workers.<sup>16</sup> ”

### 3.3 Recent Labour Law Reforms and Their Implications

The labour laws regulating the Indian workforce have been through a stream of reforms in recent years and essentially 29 central labour laws were recoded into four effective labour codes. The first is the Code on Wages, 2019<sup>17</sup>, the second is the Industrial Relations Code, 2020<sup>18</sup>, the third is the Occupational Safety, Health and working Condition Code 2020<sup>19</sup>, and the last is the Code on Social Security, 2020. That notwithstanding, the formulation of these codes has been severely hampered by the failure of the state governments to implement the same since they have never been operationalized. The new labour codes also widen the definition of ‘workers’ to certain classifications of informal workers which might lead to amplified legal reformism to marginalized sections. But there are ways to get around these, and doubts about the adequacy of the implementation and particularly enforcement processes regarding vulnerable workers in non-standard employment relationships.<sup>20</sup>

### 3.4 Judicial Interpretations and Their Impact

“ Indian courts, particularly the Supreme Court, have played a crucial role in interpreting labour laws and

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<sup>13</sup> “ Constitution of India, Article 19(1)(c): "All citizens shall have the right to form associations or unions.", Constitution of India, Articles 23-24 prohibit traffic in human beings, forced labour, and employment of children in hazardous occupations., Constitution of India, Directive Principles of State Policy, Articles 41-43A outline state obligations toward workers' welfare and social security. ”

<sup>14</sup> “ The Trade Unions (Amendment) Act, 2001 (Act No. 35 of 2001), Government of India, Ministry of Labour and Employment. ”

<sup>15</sup> “ The Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 (Act No. 14 of 1947), Government of India, Ministry of Labour and Employment. ”

<sup>16</sup> “ The Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946 (Act No. 20 of 1946), Government of India, Ministry of Labour and Employment., The Factories Act, 1948 (Act No. 63 of 1948), Government of India, Ministry of Labour and Employment. ”

<sup>17</sup> “ The Code on Wages, 2019 (Act No. 29 of 2019), Government of India, Ministry of Labour and Employment. ”

<sup>18</sup> “ The Industrial Relations Code, 2020 (Act No. 35 of 2020), Government of India, Ministry of Labour and Employment. ”

<sup>19</sup> “ The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 (Act No. 37 of 2020), Government of India, Ministry of Labour and Employment. ”

<sup>20</sup> “ The Code on Social Security, 2020 (Act No. 36 of 2020), Government of India, Ministry of Labour and Employment. ”

defining the scope of trade union rights. In landmark cases like *Balmer Lawrie Workers' Union v. Balmer Lawrie & Co. Ltd.* (1985), the Supreme Court affirmed that the right to form unions is a fundamental right, though subject to reasonable restrictions.<sup>21</sup> ”

In *TK Rangarajan v. Government of Tamil Nadu* (2003), the Court controversially ruled that government employees do not have a fundamental right to strike, leading to concerns about restrictions on collective action in the public sector (Sen, 2012).<sup>22</sup> More recently, in *Gujarat Mazdoor Sabha v. State of Gujarat* (2020), the Court invalidated a notification exempting factories from labour laws during the COVID-19 pandemic, reaffirming the importance of labour protections even during extraordinary circumstances (Sood, 2020).<sup>23</sup>

#### 4. TRADE UNIONS AND VULNERABLE WORKERS: GENDER AND CASTE

##### 4.1 Gender Dimensions of Trade Union Activity

Indian trade unions have traditionally exhibited low sensitivity towards gender issues, which can be attributed to the overall patriarchy existing in Indian setting as well as in the labour force. There is still a minimal representation of women in union leadership even though they have a large representation in the workforce according to the ILO's global report on women's representation in the trade union where it was noted that only 14% of the membership of trade union executives is composed of women. This under-representation can be attributed to a number of reasons such as, gendered division of labour where many women are employed in informal and insecure employment, cultural norms denying women right to engage in certain activities, and practices within unions that reinforce women subordination.<sup>24</sup>

In most of the mainstream unions, there are women's wing or committees that meet women's needs and concerns. Lakhs of women, through organizations such as the AITUC Women's Committee, fight the causes like sexual harassment at the workplace, maternity allowance and equal wages and salaries.<sup>25</sup> Another example in this context is the New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI), which has also developed clear guidelines for women's leadership and inclusion of gender dimensions in the work of the union. However, there is still continued Key Challenges in Gender mainstreaming with in the Trade Unions. The continued employment of women in the informal, home-based, and other casual work means that unions also have to adjust their strategies and demands to address the issues that relate to employment insecurity that is mostly experienced by women employees.<sup>26</sup>

##### 4.2 Addressing Caste Discrimination in Labour Markets

Social discrimination based on caste equation persists in certain labour market status in India with cross-sections of Dalits and Adivasis exposed to job insecurity, dangerous, and lower wages. While caste discrimination is prohibited by the Constitution of India, caste discrimination persists in Indian workplaces in the form of employment segregation, wage disparities, and the unfair treatment due to one's caste status. Conventional labour organisations can be said to have had varied or even paradoxical approaches to caste discrimination. Despite advocating for equality and anti- discrimination policies, most unions have in the

<sup>21</sup> “ *Balmer Lawrie Workers' Union v. Balmer Lawrie & Co. Ltd.*, (1985) 2 SCC 384, Supreme Court of India. ”

<sup>22</sup> “ *T.K. Rangarajan v. Government of Tamil Nadu*, (2003) 6 SCC 581, Supreme Court of India. ”

<sup>23</sup> “ *Gujarat Mazdoor Sabha v. State of Gujarat*, 2020 SCC OnLine Guj 565, Gujarat High Court. ”

<sup>24</sup> “ International Labour Organisation (ILO). *Women in Labour Leadership: Taking on Challenges, Creating Opportunities*. Geneva: ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities, 2019. ”

<sup>25</sup> “ All India Trade Union Congress. *Report of the AITUC Women's Committee: 16th Conference*. New Delhi: AITUC, 2019. ”

<sup>26</sup> “ New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI). *Gender Policy and Guidelines*. New Delhi: NTUI, 2015. NTUI was established in 2006 as a progressive trade union federation. ”



past given priority to class identity rather than caste identity. Sceptics have observed that this strategy has some erasing the specificity of Dalit oppression at work and reproducing repression inside workers' movements.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, it is possible to notice essential exceptions and tendencies toward progressive changes. The Dalit Bahujan Shramik Union in Andhra Pradesh has an especially clear dual focus on caste and class oppression, organizing Dalit agricultural labourers and demanding both wage and recognition. Likewise, one can also argue that the National Federation of Dalit Land Rights Movements also employs mainstream unionism along with anti-caste movements to challenge employment precarity at its root. Some of the common trade unions have also started openly admitting the need to combat caste discrimination.<sup>28</sup> The New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI) has amended its charter of operation to restrain discrimination on the basis of caste and has specifically focused its campaign in factories and industries where the employment of Dalit is most likely such as those in the sanitation and leather processing and construction sectors.<sup>29</sup>

The issues of caste and labour rights are complex interrelated issues for the trade union as it is both a problem as well as an asset to the trade union. In this way, the recognition of caste discrimination directly can help unions in extending their appeal toward the minority groups as well as positively influence the change in the society. However, this presents a challenge of eradicating hierarchies that are internal to unions and coming up with strategies that provide for the differences between the working- poor from different caste backgrounds.

## 5. TRADE UNIONS IN THE DIGITAL ECONOMY: CHALLENGES AND INNOVATIONS

### 5.1 Impact of Technological Change on Labour and Unions

Technological advancement is affecting the labour structure in India in a significant way, therefore is posing various challenges to trade unions. The increasing use of technologies in production in different industries is creating new forms of employment, changing the employment quantities and quality as well as employment security. Advanced robotics and automation technologies in manufacturing have eased the burden of labour intensity here also but at the same time generating skill demands of technical nature in sectors. A World Bank analysis suggested that 69% of all jobs in India were at risk of automation to some extent though the risk of total loss of jobs is not high. Automotive industries, electronics industries and textiles industries are some of the industries that have faced a dramatic rise in productivity due to automation in their production lines alongside this reduction in employment or changes in the type of employment.<sup>30</sup>

However, it should also be recognize that technological change brings in new organizing opportunities. Some sectors with high density of workers for collective action include e-commerce warehouses, data centres, and digital content moderation centres. Furthermore, technological disruption is likely to lead to a rise of grievance sources including work intensification, algorithmic management, and loss and violation of privacy, which can act as a signal of worker organization. Trade unions have gone from rejection of technological change to seeking to engage with technology in more positive ways. Modern unions want

<sup>27</sup> "Constitution of India, Articles 15 and 16 prohibit discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth."

<sup>28</sup> "Dalit Bahujan Shramik Union, Andhra Pradesh. For analysis, see: Gorringe, Hugo. *Untouchable Citizens: Dalit Movements and Democratisation in Tamil Nadu*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005."

<sup>29</sup> "National Federation of Dalit Land Rights Movements. See: Thorat, Sukhadeo and Katherine S. Newman (eds.). *Blocked by Caste: Economic Discrimination in Modern India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010."

<sup>30</sup> "World Bank. *Automation and the Future of Work in India*. Washington D.C.: World Bank Group, 2018."

governments to adopt what they call just transition policies that guarantee a fair distribution of the benefits of technology-based productivity increase and social protection of workers laid off by new technologies. For example, the New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI) has articulated clear policy imperatives for technology governance that accords workers a major voice in choice procedures.<sup>31</sup>

## 5.2 Organizing in the Platform Economy

The platform or "gig" economy represents a particularly challenging frontier for trade union organization. Platform-based work arrangements—ranging from ride-hailing and delivery services to remote freelancing—typically classify workers as independent contractors rather than employees, placing them outside traditional labour protections and complicating collective organization. Despite these obstacles, notable organizing initiatives have emerged among platform workers in India. “The Indian Federation of App-based Transport Workers (IFAT)”, established in 2019, coordinates organization among ride-hailing drivers across multiple cities and platforms. Through digital mobilization tools, strategic service disruptions, and policy advocacy, IFAT has advocated for fare regulation, grievance redressal system, and social security coverage for drivers.<sup>32</sup>

Similarly, the All India Gig Workers' Union organizes food delivery personnel across platforms like Swiggy and Zomato. The union employs innovative organizing tactics, including digital community building through WhatsApp groups and social media, strategic use of consumer solidarity, and collaborative research to document working conditions. These efforts have achieved some improvements in fee structures and working conditions, though platforms continue to resist formal recognition of collective representation.<sup>33</sup>

Union strategies in the platform economy often combine traditional and innovative approaches. Traditional elements include mass demonstrations, service withdrawals, and demands for regulatory intervention. Innovative aspects include algorithm transparency demands, data rights advocacy, and efforts to establish sectoral standards across multiple platforms. For instance, IFAT has advocated for a tripartite sector council to establish minimum standards for the ride-hailing industry, regardless of specific platform affiliation. International collaboration increasingly features in platform worker organizing, reflecting the global nature of many platform companies. Indian platform worker organizations maintain connections with similar groups worldwide, sharing strategies and coordinating simultaneous actions. The "Global Day of Action" against Uber in 2019, which included participation from Indian driver associations, exemplifies this transnational approach.<sup>34</sup>

## 5.3 Policy Advocacy for Regulating Digital Work

When employment has been decentralized through the use of technology, trade unions have acted as a voice seeking to ensure that there is legislation to regulate the structures of the digital economy. Instead of playing defence on emerging technologies, or managing responses to them, progressive unions aim to both define and advocate for the regulation of digital work in ways that afford employee interests, as well as technology advancement. The central trade union organizations actively engage in consultations with

<sup>31</sup> “International Labour Organisation (ILO). *Guidelines for a Just Transition Towards Environmentally Sustainable Economies and Societies for All*. Geneva: ILO, 2015.”

<sup>32</sup> “Indian Federation of App-based Transport Workers (IFAT). Established 2019. For analysis, see: Srnicek, Nick. *Platform Capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017.”

<sup>33</sup> “All India Gig Workers' Union. For context, see: Woodcock, Jamie and Mark Graham. *The Gig Economy: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020.”

<sup>34</sup> “Global Day of Action” coordinated protest against Uber, May 8, 2019. See: International Transport Workers' Federation. *Uber Global Day of Action Report*. London: ITF, 2019.

the government on digital economy policies as regards the government's efforts to set up inclusive regulatory environment for protection of workers and ensuring that all classifications of employees are provided appropriate protection. In the case of the Code on Social allowances, for first time unions drove hard for the inclusion of measures conferring platform workers as social protection category, although the multitude of measures remains a contentious issue.<sup>35</sup>

Unions have also interfaced new policy orientations on data management since data is critical for digital work relations. New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI) launched a general platform of demands for workers' rights to workplace data, and proper reporting on collection practices, restrictions on monitoring, and collective ownership of data produced through work. These link conventional era labour concerns with the more modern Human Right paradigms. Another of the important areas currently championed by unions is skills development and transition policies. Since trade unions understand that change in technology requires workforce transformation, unions have been demanding skills enhancement drives, redeployment support measures for laid off employees and education revamping mechanisms as suffices the demands of the current labour market. India's largest central trade union INTUC has prepared concrete ideas of sectoral transition fund for attending the concerns of affected workers due to automation.<sup>36</sup>

Globalisation leads to incorporates International policy processes into advocacy union plans given the prevalence of the shift to digital. The following paper analyses how Indian trade unions are involved in the discussions that happen at the " International Labour Organization (ILO) " regarding the future of work, interact with United Nations digital cooperation, and are a part of the international civil society that debates the governance of digital technologies. These multilevel approaches envisage that regulation of digital work can still take place at different levels of jurisdiction.<sup>37</sup>

## 6. CONCLUSION

From this survey on the trade unions and their contribution to protecting labour in India, it is evident that the work environment can be rife with strife, but may also be fraught with praiseworthy steps. This means that the trade union motion has to address a tremendously diverse set of contexts: across sectors, regions, forms of employment, and identities of the workers. This is in light of the fact that historical evolution offers direction for demystifying modern phenomenon. From their colonial beginnings to the independent and liberalized context phase, the trade unions have adjusted the ever-shifting economic and political contexts as they have stuck to their basic objective of protecting workers.

Trade unions can often be legally characterized in terms of certain rights and freedoms because the legal regulation of trade unions has recently changed due to labour code amendments. While some of them help to enhance the protection, others preclude particular means of collective actions. Exploring the legal environment, unions are directed to employ elaborate methods based on the traditional legal activity interaction models with certain adjustments for the new conditions. To provide protection for their members, trade unions use bargaining, monitoring of compliance, provisions of protection policies for employees and identifying and discussing new organizing tactics for employees that are often exploited.

<sup>35</sup> " The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 (Act No. 37 of 2020), Government of India, Ministry of Labour and Employment. "

<sup>36</sup> " New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI). *Platform for Workers' Data Rights: Policy Document*. New Delhi: NTUI, 2020. "

<sup>37</sup> " International Labour Organisation (ILO). *Work for a Brighter Future: Global Commission on the Future of Work*. Geneva: ILO, 2019. "



The efficiency of those approaches depends on the external environment and internal characteristics to a great extent.

New threats are expected to persist in the next decades, mostly related to technology, platform employment, and the decentralization of workforce. On the one hand, digital technologies call into question long-held assumptions about the creation of work and employment relations. On the other hand, the same digital technologies offer new means for reinvigorating union activism and organization. The very structures of conventional unions make them no longer capable of offering protection to workers, which means that the search for new organizational solutions and institutionalized forms of workers' representation based on new strategies and tested ideas and practices. To assess the future of trade unions in promoting and defending of the workers' rights one should stress on the fact of their continuous effort in defending human rights and their compromises with realities of the present-day world.