

2021 ITUC Global Rights Index



The world's worst
countries for workers
Executive Summary

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Foreword

The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated jobs, communities and lives. Governments and employers have exploited the pandemic to dismiss workers who exposed vital information about the spread of the virus in workplaces; violated collective bargaining rights; increased surveillance of workers and undermined the right to privacy; and restricted free speech and assembly.

The 2021 Global Rights Index documents a shameful roll call of governments and companies who have pursued an anti-union agenda in the face of workers who have stood on the front line providing essential work to keep economies and communities functioning.



The government in India passed three laws that severely restricted basic workers' rights and severely limited the activities of trade unions, such as limiting the right to strike.

Credit: STR / AFP

- In **Zimbabwe**, union leaders were prosecuted after workers took strike action to secure outstanding pandemic allowances.
- COVID-19 was used as excuse to single out trade union members for forced unpaid leave in **Turkey**.
- **Volkswagen South Africa** (VWSA) shop stewards in **South Africa** were dismissed for “inciting” workers to stop work after they exposed high numbers of workers testing positive for COVID-19.
- In **Morocco**, a subsidiary of the multinational **Veolia** refused to register 500 employees with the national social security office, depriving them of government aid.
- Nearly a third of **Haiti's** 57,000 garment workers, struggling to survive in the midst of the pandemic, were suspended or terminated and had yet to receive any compensation from the government in spite of earlier promises.
- **Falabella**, a multinational home retailer, dismissed 22 warehouse workers in **Peru** who had requested health and safety protections against the coronavirus.
- In **Cambodia**, collective bargaining negotiations were postponed by the **Cambodian Airport Management Service** (CAMS) and then came to a halt due to the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing the company to impose work suspensions unilaterally in all three airports without consulting the union.
- In Brazil, **Embraer** and **Nestlé** used the pretext of economic difficulties due to the COVID-19 pandemic to violate collective agreements and union consultation and massively lay off workers.
- In **Nigeria**, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) declared that the police and other security forces killed eleven people during the enforcement of the COVID-19 lockdown and violated human rights, including through unlawful arrests and torture.

The breakdown of the social contract between workers, government and business has seen **the number of countries where authorities impeded the registration of unions increased from 89 countries in 2020 to 109 countries in 2021**, with state repression of independent union activity in **Belarus, Egypt, El Salvador, Jordan, Hong Kong, Kyrgyzstan** and **Iraq**. To deny workers the right to representation in the midst of a global pandemic is abhorrent.

The eighth edition of the ITUC Global Rights Index ranks 149 countries on the degree of respect for workers' rights. For the first time, the 2021 ITUC Global Rights Index has an interactive www.globalrightsindex.org where cases of violated rights and national ratings can be viewed by country and region. A comprehensive review of workers' rights in law in 149 countries provides the only database of its kind.

Five new countries have been included for the first time in 2021: **Armenia, Gabon, Guinea, Kyrgyzstan and Niger**. **Saudi Arabia** has not been rated in the 2021 Global Rights Index while the extent of its new Labour Reform Initiative is assessed and implemented.

Eight-year trend data analysed in the 2021 Global Rights Index exposes attacks on the right to strike and the right to establish and join a trade union, as well as on the registration of unions; arbitrary arrests and detentions; and the denial of freedom of speech and assembly, which is at an all-time high.

Eighty-seven per cent of countries have violated the right to strike. Strikes in **Belarus, Indonesia** and the **Philippines** to oppose authoritarian governments and in **Myanmar** to oppose the military junta have been met with brutal repression.

Seventy-nine per cent of countries have violated the right to collective bargaining. In all regions, collective bargaining is being eroded and is used by authoritarian governments in **Belarus, Brazil, Honduras, Hungary** and **Hong Kong** to dismantle a key tenet of workplace democracy.

Seventy-four per cent of countries excluded workers from the right to establish and join a trade union. In 2021, thirty-two countries had legislation prohibiting migrants from establishing and joining trade unions, restricting migrants' ability to hold office in a trade union or otherwise denying them full rights to engage in union activities. The practice of union-busting has seen more and more workers blocked from being able to form and join trade unions. In 2020, **Uber, Lyft** and **DoorDash** mounted the most expensive such campaign in California's history, Proposition 22, to fight AB5, a new state law that classified certain categories of gig workers as employees.

The ten worst countries for workers in 2021 are the following: **Bangladesh, Belarus, Brazil, Colombia, Egypt, Honduras, Myanmar, the Philippines, Turkey and Zimbabwe.**

Belarus and **Myanmar** are new entries in 2021. Myanmar has joined this group for the first time. Belarus was one of the ten worst countries in 2015 and 2016 and makes a return in 2021.

Belgium, Canada, El Salvador, Haiti, Hungary, Jordan, Malaysia, Myanmar and **Slovakia** have all seen their ratings worsen in 2021. **Myanmar** has increased to category 5+, No guarantee of rights, due to the breakdown of the rule of law.



Working people in Indonesia took to the streets to oppose the Omnibus Law that slashed workers' protections and violated international human rights law.

Credit: Fajrin Raharjo / AFP

Eight countries have seen their ratings improve: **Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, Mexico, North Macedonia, Panama, Sudan** and **Togo**.

Trade unionists were killed in six countries: Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Myanmar, Nigeria and the Philippines. With three of the six countries, the Americas is the deadliest region for workers. Twenty-two trade unionists were murdered in Colombia alone.

Workers were exposed to violence in 45 countries.

The number of countries where freedom of speech and assembly was denied or constrained increased from 56 in 2020 to 64 in 2021, with extreme cases reported in **Hong Kong** and **Myanmar**.

Workers had no or restricted access to justice in 65% of countries, with severe cases reported in **Belarus, Honduras, the Philippines** and **Zimbabwe**.

Workers experienced arbitrary arrests and detentions in 68 countries. Trade union leaders from **Cambodia, Hong Kong** and **Myanmar** were among high profile arrests in 2021.

Surveillance of workers and attacks on the right to privacy are on the rise. In the **USA, Amazon, Facebook** and **Google** have been exposed using illegal or underhand surveillance activities. Amazon's surveillance of workers in **Europe** and the USA has become a global scandal.

It will take a New Social Contract with jobs, rights, social protection, equality and inclusion to rebuild the trust that has been shattered by repressive governments and abusive companies. While there have been some positive legislative developments from the PRO Act in the **USA**, to processes for a due diligence legislation in the **European Union** which would hold companies to account, much more needs to be done.

Workers have been on the front lines of the global pandemic holding communities together. If governments don't look after workers with rights and labour protections, workers can't look after the economy. The risk to our democracies and economies is too much of a threat for governments to ignore.

Sharan Burrow
General Secretary
International Trade Union Confederation

Read the findings of the 2021
Global Rights Index at
www.globalrightsindex.org



Lee Cheuk-yan, general secretary of the independent Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU), and other civil liberties activists were arrested under the new National Security Law for participating in pro-democracy events.

Credit: Isaac Lawrence / AFP

At a glance

This is the eighth edition of the ITUC Global Rights index. It documents violations of international recognised labour rights by governments and employers.

The 10 worst countries for working people

Bangladesh	Honduras
NEW – Belarus	NEW – Myanmar
Brazil	The Philippines
Colombia	Turkey
Egypt	Zimbabwe

The worst region in the world

Middle East and North Africa

Violations of workers' rights



Right to strike
87% of countries violated the right to strike.



Right to collective bargaining
79% of countries violated the right to collective bargaining.



Right to establish and join a trade union
74% of countries excluded workers from the right to establish and join a trade union.



Right to justice
In 65% of countries, workers had no or restricted access to justice.



Right to trade union activities

The number of countries which impeded the registration of unions increased from 89 countries in 2020 to 109 in 2021.



Right to civil liberties

Workers were detained and arrested in 68 countries.



Violent attacks on workers

Workers experienced violence in 45 countries.



Right to free speech and assembly

The number of countries where freedom of speech and assembly was denied or constrained increased from 56 in 2020 to 64 in 2021.

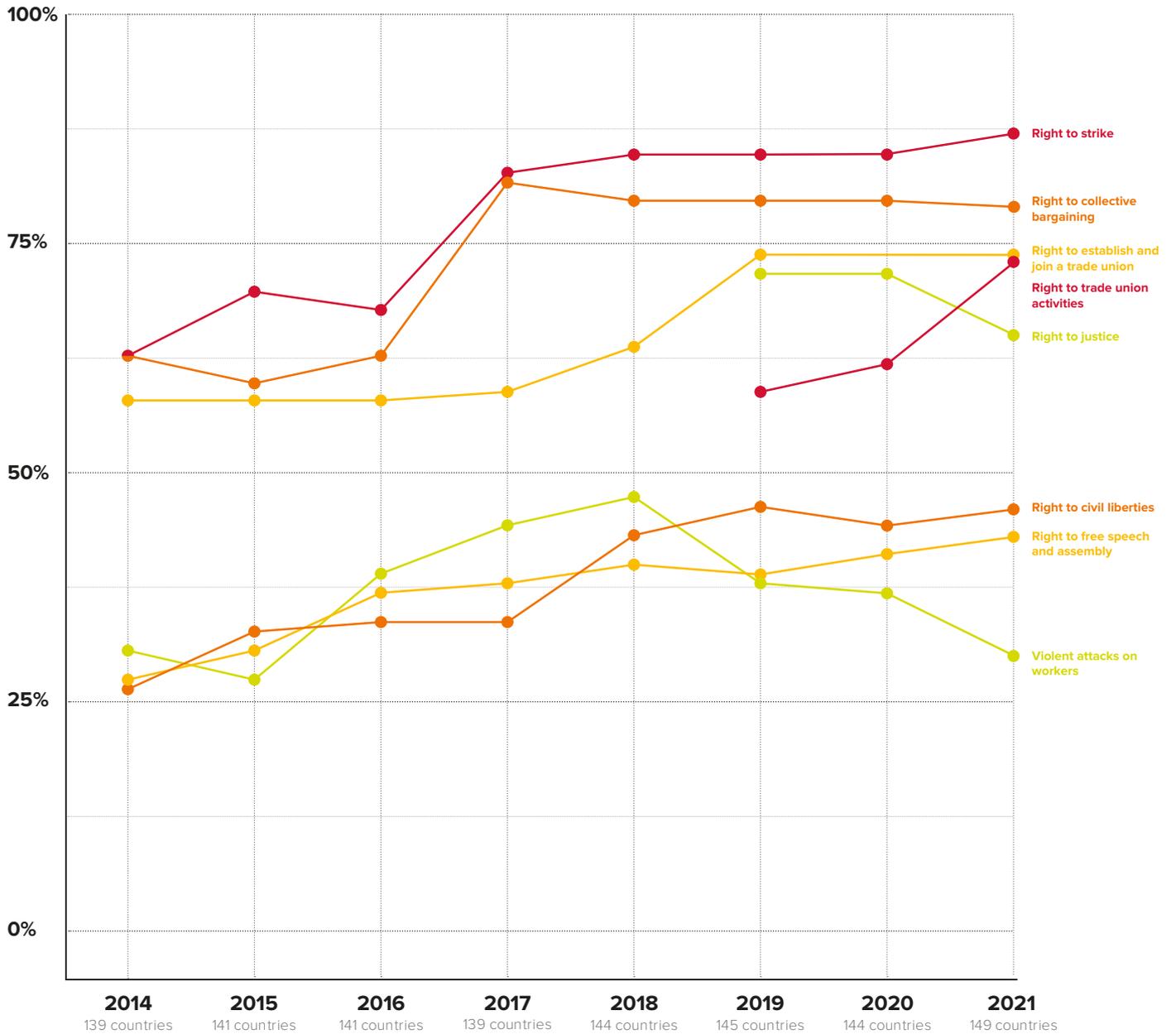


Murders

Trade unionists were murdered in six countries: Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Myanmar, Nigeria and the Philippines.

The ITUC Global Rights Index depicts the world's worst countries for workers by rating countries on a scale from 1 to 5+ on the degree of respect of workers' rights. Violations are recorded each year from April to March. The annual 2021 Global Rights Index with searchable data can be found at www.globalrightsindex.org. Information on violations of workers' rights in countries is published throughout the year in the ITUC Survey found at survey.ituc-csi.org

Eight-year trends: Violations of workers' rights

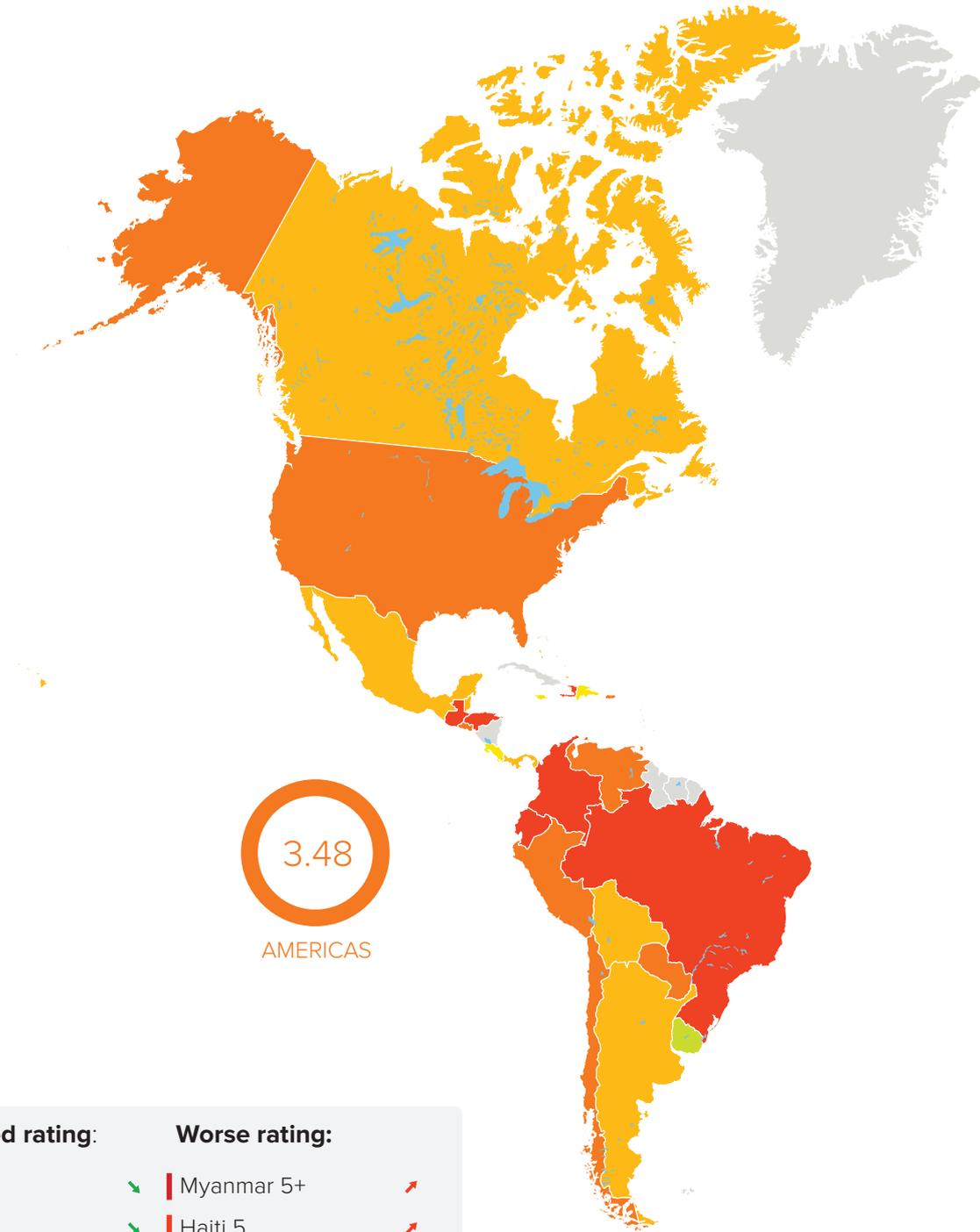


Companies violating workers' rights

- AlbChrom, **Albania**
- Saybolt Tex, **Bangladesh**
- Tanaz Fashion, **Bangladesh**
- Windy Wet & Dry Process, **Bangladesh**
- Naftan, **Belarus**
- EPAM Systems, **Belarus**
- JSC Peleng, **Belarus**
- OJSC Grodno Azot, **Belarus**
- Polotsk-Steklovolokno, **Belarus**
- Embraer, **Brazil**
- Nestlé, **Brazil**
- Cambodian Airport Management Service, **Cambodia**
- Superl, **Cambodia**
- Greenfield Industry, **Cambodia**
- Co-op Refinery Complex, **Canada**
- Brinks, **Colombia**
- Tapachula, **Costa Rica**
- Fyffes, **Ecuador**
- Ceramica Granito, **Egypt**
- Delta Company for Fertilisers and Chemical Industries, **Egypt**
- Orascom, **Egypt**
- FTM Garments, **Eswatini**
- Ikea, **France**
- Satram, **Gabon**
- The Georgian House, **Georgia**
- Foodora, , **Germany**
- Marriott Sheraton, **Guinea**
- Premium Apparel, **Haiti**
- Cervecería Hondureña (AB InBev), **Honduras**
- Cathay Pacific, **Hong Kong**
- Bull Clothing, **Lesotho**
- Bozashy Trans Kurylys LLP, **Kazakhstan**
- Oil Construction Company LLP, **Kazakhstan**
- West Oil LLP, **Kazakhstan**
- APM Terminals, **Liberia**
- Malaysia Airlines, **Malaysia**
- Airports of Mauritius Ltd., **Mauritius**
- Mauritius Post Ltd., **Mauritius**
- Aroma, **Moldova**
- Amanor, **Morocco**
- Compagnie Minière de Touissit, **Morocco**
- Rössing Uranium Mine, **Namibia**
- Backus and Johnston (AB InBev), **Peru**
- Falabella, **Peru**
- Summit Autotech, **Poland**
- Truda Foods, **South Africa**
- Volkswagen, **South Africa**
- Samsung, **South Korea**
- State Railway of Thailand, **Thailand**
- Gartex, **Tunisia**
- Özer Elektrik, **Turkey**
- Ünal Kablo, **Turkey**
- Sampa Otomotiv, **Turkey**
- Deliveroo, **UK**
- Doordash , **USA**
- Amazon, **USA**
- Facebook, **USA**
- Google, **USA**
- Uber, **USA**
- Lyft, **USA**
- Bata, **Zimbabwe**

These companies violated workers' rights, are linked to a violation of workers' rights, or failed to use their leverage to address workers' rights violations. The violations can be read at www.globalrightsindex.org

The 2021 ratings



3.48
AMERICAS

Improved rating:

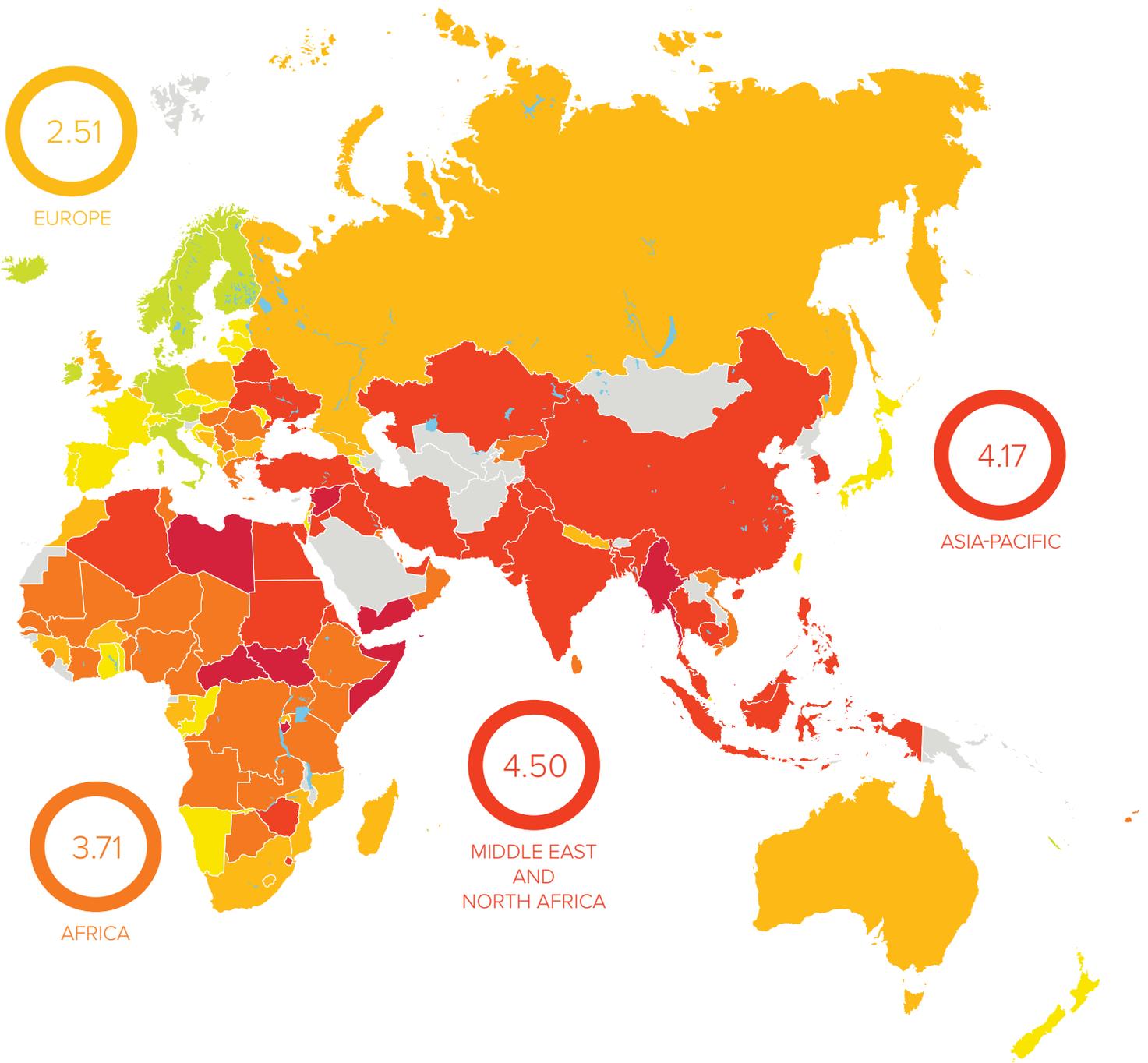
- █ Sudan 5
- █ Greece 4
- █ Bolivia 3
- █ Bosnia and Herzegovina 3
- █ Mexico 3
- █ North Macedonia 3
- █ Panama 3
- █ Togo 2

Worse rating:

- ▼ Myanmar 5+ ↗
- ▼ Haiti 5 ↗
- ▼ Jordan 5 ↗
- ▼ Malaysia 5 ↗
- ▼ El Salvador 4 ↗
- ▼ Hungary 4 ↗
- ▼ Belgium 3 ↗
- ▼ Canada 3 ↗
- ▼ Slovakia 2 ↗

NEW in 2021:

- █ Armenia 2
- █ Gabon 3
- █ Guinea 3
- █ Kyrgyzstan 4
- █ Niger 4



- 5+** No guarantee of rights due to the breakdown of the rule of law
- 5** No guarantee of rights
- 4** Systematic violations of rights
- 3** Regular violations of rights
- 2** Repeated violations of rights
- 1** Sporadic violations of rights
- No data

Rating 5+

No guarantee of rights due to the breakdown of the rule of law

• Burundi	• Myanmar	↗ South Sudan	•
• Central African Republic	• Palestine	• Syria	•
• Libya	• Somalia	• Yemen	•

Rating 5

No guarantee of rights

• Afghanistan	• Eswatini	• Kuwait	•
• Algeria	• Guatemala	• Laos	•
• Bahrain	• Haiti	↗ Malaysia	↗
• Bangladesh	• Honduras	• Pakistan	•
• Belarus	• Hong Kong	• Philippines	•
• Brazil	• India	• Sudan	↘
• Cambodia	• Indonesia	• Thailand	•
• China	• Iran	• Turkey	•
• Colombia	• Iraq	• Ukraine	•
• Ecuador	• Jordan	↗ United Arab Emirates	•
• Egypt	• Kazakhstan	• Zimbabwe	•
• Eritrea	• Korea (Republic of)	•	•

Rating 4

Systematic violations of rights

• Angola	• Hungary	↗ Senegal	•
• Benin	• Kenya	• Serbia	•
• Botswana	• Kyrgyzstan	• Sierra Leone	•
• Cameroon	• Lebanon	• Sri Lanka	•
• Chad	• Mali	• Tanzania	•
• Chile	• Mauritania	• Trinidad and Tobago	•
• Congo (Democratic Republic of)	• Niger	• Tunisia	•
• Côte d'Ivoire	• Nigeria	• Uganda	•
• Djibouti	• Oman	• United States of America	•
• El Salvador	↗ Panama	• Venezuela	•
• Ethiopia	• Peru	• Vietnam	•
• Fiji	• Qatar	• Zambia	•
• Greece	↘ Romania	•	•

Rating 3

Regular violations of rights

Albania	•	Canada	↗	Mozambique	•
Argentina	•	Gabon	•	Nepal	•
Australia	•	Georgia	•	North Macedonia	↘
Bahamas	•	Guinea	•	Panama	↘
Belgium	↗	Lesotho	•	Paraguay	•
Belize	•	Liberia	•	Poland	•
Bolivia	↘	Madagascar	•	Russian Federation	•
Bosnia and Herzegovina	↘	Mauritius	•	Rwanda	•
Bulgaria	•	Mexico	↘	South Africa	•
Burkina Faso	•	Morocco	•	United Kingdom	•

Rating 2

Repeated violations of rights

Armenia	•	Ghana	•	Namibia	•
Barbados	•	Israel	•	New Zealand	•
Congo (Republic of)	•	Jamaica	•	Portugal	•
Costa Rica	•	Japan	•	Singapore	•
Croatia	•	Latvia	•	Slovakia	↗
Czech Republic	•	Lithuania	•	Spain	•
Dominican Republic	•	Malawi	•	Switzerland	•
Estonia	•	Moldova	•	Taiwan	•
France	•	Montenegro	•	Togo	↘

Rating 1

Sporadic violations of rights

Austria	•	Iceland	•	Norway	•
Denmark	•	Ireland	•	Sweden	•
Finland	•	Italy	•	Uruguay	•
Germany	•	Netherlands	•		

Comparison with 2020 score:

No change or new in 2021

Worse rating

Improved rating

•

↗

↘

Countries in **bold** are the ten worst countries for working people in 2021

Worst Region in the World

REGION		2021	SCALE	
MENA	18 countries	4.50	(4) Systematic violations of rights to (5) No Guarantee of rights	
Asia-Pacific	23 countries	4.17	(4) Systematic violations of rights to (5) No Guarantee of rights	
Africa	42 countries	3.71	(3) Regular violations of rights to (4) Systematic violations	
Americas	25 countries	3.48	(3) Regular violations of rights to (4) Systematic violations	
Europe	41 countries	2.51	(2) Repeated violations of rights to (3) Regular violations	

Middle East and North Africa is the worst region for working people



- Exclusion of workers from labour protections
- Dismantling of independent unions
- Prosecuting and sentencing of workers participating in strikes

In 2021, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) continued to be the world's worst region for workers' rights. The average rating for countries in MENA is 4.50, an increase from last year's 4.44 average.

Libya, Palestine, Syria and **Yemen** were still beset with conflict, and fundamental liberties, and rights in those countries were trampled.



Public health workers in Tunisia protest against the government in a general strike. The country recorded violations against the rights to collective bargaining and to establish a trade union.

Credit: Fethi Belaid / AFP

Violations of workers' rights in Middle East and North Africa



Right to strike

94% of countries violated the right to strike.



Right to collective bargaining

94% of countries violated the right to collective bargaining.



Right to establish and join a trade union

All 18 countries excluded workers from the right to establish and join a trade union.



Right to justice

83% of countries in the Middle East and North Africa denied workers access to justice.



Right to trade union activities

All 18 countries impeded the registration of unions.



Right to civil liberties

44% of countries arrested and detained workers.



Violent attacks on workers

Workers experienced violent attacks in 44% of countries in the Middle East and North Africa.



Right to free speech and assembly

83% of countries in the Middle East and North Africa restricted free speech and assembly.

Asia-Pacific

Asia-Pacific was the second worst region in the world for workers' rights. India was one of several countries to adopt laws that severely violate civil liberties, leading to a general strike.

Credit: Sanjay Kanojia / AFP

The Asia-Pacific region again followed the MENA region as the second worst region in the world for workers' rights, with an increase in its average rating from 4.09 to 4.17.

In 2021, **Myanmar, Cambodia** and **Hong Kong** descended into violence with the suppression of workers' protests and the prosecution of prominent union leaders. **The Philippines** saw an escalation of violence against workers and their representatives. A number of countries in the region adopted regressive laws which severely violated civil liberties and workers' labour protections (**India, Indonesia, Hong Kong, the Philippines**).



Violations of workers' rights in the Asia-Pacific



Right to strike

87% of countries violated the right to strike.



Right to collective bargaining

91% of countries violated the right to collective bargaining.



Right to establish and join a trade union

87% of countries excluded workers from the right to establish and join a trade union.



Right to justice

74 % of countries in Asia-Pacific denied workers access to justice.



Right to trade union activities

91% of countries impeded the registration of unions.



Right to civil liberties

83% of countries arrested and detained workers.



Violent attacks on workers

Workers experienced violence in 35% of countries in Asia-Pacific.



Right to free speech and assembly

61% of countries in Asia-Pacific restricted free speech and assembly.



Murders

Workers were murdered in Myanmar and the Philippines.

Africa

Burundi, Central African Republic, Somalia and **South Sudan** were still plagued by internal conflicts which further deteriorated the humanitarian situation and deprived millions of basic protection. In other African countries, the year was marked by increased retaliation against workers during protests and union-busting.

In Sudan, a trade-union-led alliance forced President Omar al-Bashir from power, but basic workers' rights continued to be violated.

Credit: Ebrahim Hamid / AFP



Violations of workers' rights in Africa



Right to strike

95% of countries violated the right to strike.



Right to collective bargaining

95% of countries violated the right to collective bargaining.



Right to establish and join a trade union

90% of countries excluded workers from the right to establish and join a trade union.



Right to justice

76% of countries in Africa denied workers access to justice.



Right to trade union activities

79% of countries impeded the registration of unions.



Right to civil liberties

36% of countries arrested and detained workers.



Violent attacks on workers

Workers experienced violence in 33% of countries in Africa.



Right to free speech and assembly

50% of countries in Africa restricted free speech and assembly.



Murders

Workers were murdered in Nigeria.

Americas

The Americas remained plagued by the pervasive climate of extreme violence and repression against workers and union members, with two trade union leaders murdered in **Brazil**, twenty-two in **Colombia** and seven in **Guatemala**.

Health workers in El Salvador demand action to fight the pandemic. The government violated the right to trade union activities by decertifying all democratic unions.

Credit: Yuri Cortez / AFP



Violations of workers' rights in the Americas



Right to strike

88% of countries violated the right to strike.



Right to collective bargaining

72% of countries violated the right to collective bargaining.



Right to establish and join a trade union

72% of countries excluded workers from the right to establish and join a trade union.



Right to justice

76% of countries workers in the Americas denied workers access to justice.



Right to trade union activities

88% of countries impeded the registration of unions.



Right to civil liberties

56% of countries arrested and detained workers.



Violent attacks on workers

Workers experienced violent attacks in 40% of countries in the Americas.



Right to free speech and assembly

20% of countries in the Americas restricted free speech and assembly.



Murders

Workers were murdered in Brazil, Colombia and Guatemala.

Europe

In Europe, the average regional rating increased to 2.51. In several European countries, social movements and strikes have been curbed by the authorities, leading to arbitrary arrests and some violence, while in some Eastern European countries, independent trade union movements were still heavily suppressed.

In Italy, Amazon violated its workers' right to privacy by placing them under surveillance for trade union activities.

Credit: Manuel Dorati / NurPhoto via AFP



Violations of workers' rights in Europe



Right to strike

73% of countries violated the right to strike.



Right to collective bargaining

54% of countries violated the right to collective bargaining.



Right to establish and join a trade union

41% of countries excluded workers from the right to establish and join a trade union.



Right to justice

34% of countries in Europe denied workers access to justice.



Right to trade union activities

37% of countries impeded the registration of unions.



Right to civil liberties

29% of countries arrested and detained workers.



Violent attacks on workers

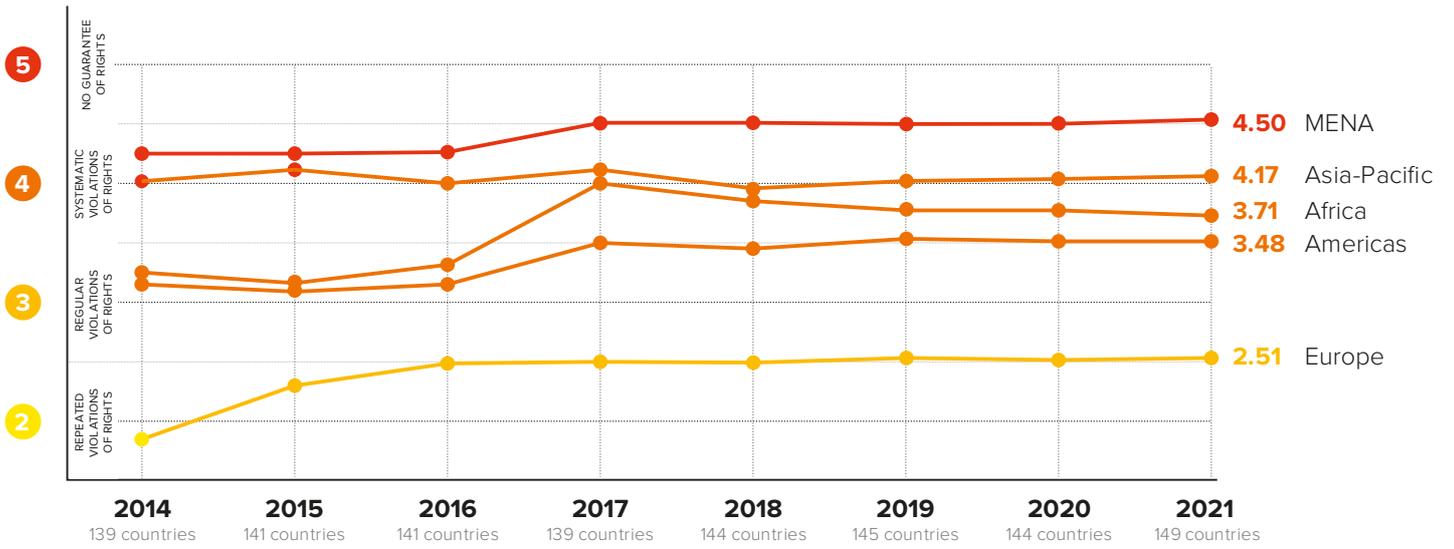
Workers experienced violent attacks in 12% of countries in Europe.



Right to free speech and assembly

22% of countries in Europe restricted free speech and assembly.

Eight-year trends: Regional ratings



The world's ten worst countries for workers

Bangladesh



- Regressive laws
- Obstacles to union formation
- Brutal repression of strikes

Workers in Bangladesh have long had their rights curtailed. It was virtually impossible for workers in the garment sector, the country's largest industry, to form or join trade unions, as their attempts were regularly met with employer threats, physical violence and mass dismissals. The authorities also frustrated establishment of unions by imposing an extremely burdensome registration process. Even where workers succeeded in forming a union, registration could still be arbitrarily denied by the authorities. Between 2010 and 2021, more than 1,100 union registration applications were deposited to the authorities. The Department of Labour rejected 46% of them – an extraordinarily high rejection rate.

Workers in Bangladesh were exposed to mass dismissals, arrests, violence and state repression against peaceful protests. In the garment sector, strikes were often met with extreme brutality by the police, who used batons, gunshots, tear gas and sound grenades against workers.

Right to establish and join a trade union.

Union-busting

In June 2020, 3,000 **Bangladeshi** garment workers were dismissed as part of a union-busting exercise from three factories owned by the same company: **Saybolt Tex**, **Tanaz Fashion** and **Windy Wet & Dry Process**



People in Bangladesh demand government relief during the COVID-19 lockdown. The country is one of the worst for working people, with protests often violently suppressed.

Credit: Syed Mahamudur Rahman / NurPhoto via AFP

factories in Gazipur and Dhaka, Bangladesh. The three unionised factories are owned by the Windy Group (which owns an additional five non-unionised factories). 1,600 workers were fired from SAYBOLT TEX, 1,200 from Tanaz Fashion and 200 from Windy Wet & Dry Process. The dismissed workers have been staging hunger strikes and other protests at Windy Group factory premises to call for reinstatement.

Violent attacks on workers

On 25 July 2020, the police in Dhaka, **Bangladesh**, violently attacked garment workers from **Viyellatex** and **Shofi Tex** who were protesting unpaid wages and allowances. Police used disproportionate force to suppress the protest, using batons, gunshots, tear gas and sound grenades against workers. As a result of the attack, twelve workers were severely injured.

NEW – Belarus



- Repression of strikes and assemblies
- Arbitrary arrests
- Obstacles to union registration

Since Alexander Lukashenko claimed victory in the rigged presidential elections in early August 2020, repression of the independent trade union movement in Belarus has continued unabated as all meetings, pickets and demonstrations organised by trade unions were banned by the government.

Several union offices were raided, and the police have been forcing unions to hand over personal information about their members, causing serious concern about action against people who have exercised their right to join a union. Union representatives were abducted on their way to work by security services and subjected to interrogation and arbitrary detention. Workers were sentenced to long prison sentences for supporting strike action and protests.

In addition, the authorities continued to deny registration to independent unions.

Right to justice

In **Belarus**, union activists and workers received harsh court sentences for their participation in the peaceful protests following the result of presidential elections in August 2020.

On 20 January 2021, the Belarus Supreme Court rejected the appeal of the Belaruskali strike committee and judged last year's strike illegal. **Daria Polyakova**, youth network coordinator of the Belarusian Radio and Electronic Industry Workers' Union (REP), was sentenced to two years of house arrest for "violence or threat of violence against an employee of the internal affairs agency". Two members of the Belarusian Independent Trade Union (BITU), **Vladimir Berdnikovich** and **Andrey Prilutsky**, were also accused of violence against the police. Vladimir Berdnikovich



Belarus is a new entry in the ten worst countries for working people as rigged elections were followed by repression of protests, attacks on unions and arbitrary arrests.

Credit: Stringer / AFP

was sentenced to four years after managing to escape the police round-up as the armed forces brutally dispersed protesters. While helping an elderly man who was being beaten up during the protest, Andrey Prilutsky was severely hit, arrested and sentenced to fifteen days in prison.

Right to free speech and assembly

In 2020, the **Belarusian** government imposed a ban on holding meetings, pickets, processions and demonstrations organised by trade unions. The situation was further complicated by Council of Ministers Ruling No. 196 of 3 April 2020, pursuant to which the organiser of a mass event, prior to submitting an application to the local executive and administrative body, must meet a long list of exorbitant requirements, including ensuring the maintenance of public order during the rally, the provision of medical services and cleaning services, all expenses being borne by the organiser. The law further provides for the possibility of liquidating a trade union for even a single violation of its requirements. These regulations amount to a de facto ban on all public assemblies and strikes for unions.

Brazil



- Murders
- Repression of strikes
- Collective bargaining undermined

In 2021, the situation of workers in Brazil further worsened as strikes were met with violence by police forces who regularly used tear gas, pepper spray and rubber bullets at close range against protesters. Several union representatives received death threats, often in retaliation for organising strikes, and two trade union leaders were murdered.

Since the adoption of Act No. 13467 in 2017, the entire collective bargaining system has collapsed in Brazil, with an immediate and drastic decline of 45% in the number of collective agreements concluded. The situation was compounded by President Bolsonaro's abysmal management of the coronavirus pandemic. On 22 March 2020, the president issued a controversial Provisional Executive Order 927 that allowed companies to adopt measures undermining workers' labour protections, including the suspension of employment contracts without the payment of salaries for up to four months. Faced with unanimous outcries from workers and unions, the measure was withdrawn, but other arrangements remained, like the unilaterally imposed 25% salary reduction.

Right to collective bargaining

In **Brazil**, many companies used economic difficulties due to the COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext to violate collective agreements and union consultation and massively lay off workers. On 3 September 2020, **Embraer**, a Brazilian aerospace products company, announced the dismissal of 2,500 workers. The dismissals were carried out without negotiation with the metalworkers' union of São José dos Campos, in violation of a job preservation agreement signed on 9 April 2020.



Workers for food delivery companies in Brazil call for decent working conditions. The situation for workers in the country worsened in 2021.

Credit: Gustavo Basso/ NurPhoto via AFP

Murders

In Brazil, trade unionist **João Inácio da Silva** was shot dead by two motorcyclists while he was sitting in front of his house in Parauapebas, Pará, on 6 November 2020. He was president of the Montes Belos Workers' Cooperative. Da Silva had recently received death threats. To date, no arrest has been made.

On 23 July 2020, **Hamilton Dias de Moura**, president of the Union of Drivers and Employees in Companies of Freight Transportation, Logistics in Transportation and Differentiated of Belo Horizonte and Region (SIMECLODIF), was murdered. Moura's body was found with several bullet holes in the passenger seat of his own car in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais.

Colombia



- Murders and impunity
- Union-busting and dismissals

Colombia remained the deadliest country for workers and union members, with 22 assassinations in 2020-2021. Most of these crimes remained unresolved, as the government still failed to allocate the necessary means for the timely investigation and prosecution of the cases. Without any adequate protection provided to them, trade unionists and their families remained under constant threat to their lives.

Trade unions were also hindered in their activities as employers regularly violated workers' right to form unions and got rid of workers' representatives through targeted dismissals and non-renewal of contracts.

Right to free speech and assembly

On 15 May 2020, **Brinks Colombia** terminated national union president **Frank Gualdron**, claiming that he had posted images of a work-related protest on Facebook. Gualdron was among eight union officers at Brinks who had been notified of their termination since Colombia declared a COVID-19 health emergency in March 2020, in what appeared to be a deliberate anti-union strategy.

Murders

Between April 2020 and March 2021, twenty-two trade unionists were murdered in Colombia: **John Fredy Alvarez Quinaya, Yordan Tovar, Sandra Mayerly Baquero, Albeiro Silva Mosquera, Luis Hugo Silva Mosquera, Mario Talaga, Arley Hernan Chala Renteria, Alexis Vergara, Hamilton Gasca Ortega, Jairo de Jesus Jimenez Isaza, Candelaria Acendra, Edgar Erney Guejia Dizu, Rubilio Papelito Limon, Jose Gustavo Arcila, Carlos Mario Congo Alvarez, Erminso Trochez Ilamo, Jaider Esteban Quintana Salinas, Nelson Ramos Barrera, Douglas Cortes Mosquera, Bayron Alirio Ravelo, Omar Moreno Ibague** and **Carlos Vidal**.



Working people continue to organise in Colombia, the deadliest country for workers and union members, with 22 assassinations.

Credit: Sebastian Barros / NurPhoto via AFP

Egypt



- Severe obstacles to union registration
- Prosecution of strikers
- Union-busting and dismissals

Workers in Egypt remained deprived of their basic right to form and join unions. Since the arbitrary dissolution of all independent unions in 2018, workers and their representatives have sought the re-registration of their unions but have faced an arduous and arbitrary process.

Strikes were systematically suppressed, with workers arrested and detained by police forces. The authorities regularly prosecuted strikers before the State Security Court, an extraordinary judicial process entailing long prison sentences and heavy fines if found guilty.

Right to strike

Prosecution of union leaders for participating in strikes

On 30 September 2020, twenty-six workers from the National Steel industries in **Egypt** were ordered to appear before the State Security Court. The company accused workers of disrupting production and violating freedom of work during a strike organised in May 2019 to protest the non-payment of outstanding wages.

Orascom group, which owns the National Steel Industries, filed a complaint against them on the basis of Law No. 34 of 2011, which mandates a prison sentence and a fine of up to 50,000 Egyptian pounds (US\$3,184) for participating in strikes.

Right to trade union activities

In **Egypt**, all independent unions were dissolved in March 2018. Since then, they have faced countless administrative hurdles, and many of them are still seeking official registration with the authorities.

On 13 December 2020, the president of the **Trade Union of workers in Gharbia directorate's real**



“The workers of Delta support the head of state” – workers at the Delta fertilizer company in Egypt call on the government to save their jobs. The country is one of the worst for working people, with basic rights denied.

Credit: Mahmoud Hefnawy

estate taxes – whose status has been pending since April 2018 – presented a file requesting the license for establishment. Documents were received informally by the Manpower Directorate, and no official acknowledgment of receipt was given. On 31 December 2020, members of the trade union committee were stunned to receive a letter from the Directorate stating that it was forbidden to establish another union committee in the same enterprise and claiming that there was already one holding the same name. Moreover, the Directorate informed the independent union that the membership of workers would be automatically transferred to the already existing committee.

Honduras



- Violence
- Union-busting and dismissals
- Collective bargaining undermined

Honduras remained plagued by endemic violence against workers and their representatives. Engaging in trade union activities remained extremely dangerous and often resulted in death threats and physical violence. The situation was compounded by a climate of impunity, with the government failing to investigate and prosecute anti-union crimes.

Moisés Sánchez, a prominent union leader in the agricultural sector, was the victim of a frame-up and faced criminal proceedings based on fabricated charges. The legal framework in Honduras also tightened as a new penal code was adopted, under which social protests are now criminalised. Employers used anti-union tactics to avoid collective bargaining, while workers' representatives were regularly fired or their contracts were not renewed.

Violent attacks on workers

Violence against trade union leaders and workers is endemic in **Honduras**, especially in the agricultural sector, where companies do not hesitate to resort to thugs to threaten, harass and assault workers who attempt to form or join a union. In a recent study conducted among workers in the banana industry, 59% of women surveyed in non-union banana packing plants said that they faced sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence at work compared with nine per cent of women at unionised packing plants. Non-union workers are 81% more likely to face verbal abuse than union workers.



Working people in Honduras experienced a year plagued by violence against them and their representatives.

Credit: Orlando Sierra / AFP

Legislative power

Repressive laws

On 25 June 2020, a **new penal code** came into force in **Honduras**, posing a clear threat to fundamental freedoms, as its provisions severely curb the right to peaceful assembly. Under the new code, public protests and assemblies were criminalised and sentences could amount to up to 30 years' imprisonment.

NEW – Myanmar



- Brutal repression of strikes and protests
- Arbitrary arrests
- Repressive laws

In 2021, Myanmar descended into systemic violence against workers and harsh suppression of civil liberties as the military junta, which seized power on 1 February, relentlessly cracked down on the crowds of protesters calling for the return of democracy.

Daily demonstrations were met with increasing brutality, and at least 550 persons were killed while hundreds more have been wounded and over 2,700 have been arrested, charged or already sentenced.

The Myanmar military continued unabated its oppression as it planned the adoption of a cyber law to extend control and repression of freedom of speech.

Right to free speech and assembly

As **Myanmar's** military coup escalated with the violent suppression of popular dissent, hundreds of people were arrested and detained without any due process. The military junta continued its descent into authoritarianism with its planned **cyber law**, which would give the authorities sweeping powers to block any content, placing the entire population under surveillance and eliminating freedom of speech.

The military released the planned law on 9 February 2021 with a spurious six-day “consultation” window. Even questioning an action of the junta online will lead to imprisonment and heavy fines. The law includes under its cyber-crime framework “written and verbal statement against any existing law” and “offences committed locally and internationally”, meaning that persons outside Myanmar who criticise the junta face the prospect of action by the Myanmar military.



Myanmar is one of the ten worst countries for working people as a military coup led to systemic violence against working people.

Credit: Stringer / Anadolu Agency via AFP

Murders

Since the military coup of 1 February 2021 in **Myanmar**, crowds have turned out in force to call for the return to democracy and the restoration of the rule of law. Despite being faced with extreme brutality by the state forces who resorted to lethal force and mass arrests, their determination did not abate.

In early March, a coalition of labour unions called a strike with the goal of a “full, extended shutdown of the Myanmar economy”. Workers in several industries joined the protest movement, most notably from the state railway and the banking sector. Police intimidated railway workers in Mandalay, the country’s second biggest city, by roaming through their housing area one night, shouting and randomly firing guns.

In Yangon and elsewhere, raids are carried out nightly after the 8 p.m. curfew by police and soldiers, firing guns and stun grenades and staging selective raids to arrest people. The arrests are often carried out at gunpoint, without warrants.

The total number of people killed in weeks of unrest has risen to at least 550 at the time of this report, while hundreds more have been wounded and over 2,700 have been arrested, charged or already sentenced.

The Philippines



- Violence and murders
- Arbitrary arrests
- State repression

Workers and their representatives in the Philippines remained particularly vulnerable to violent attacks, intimidation and arbitrary arrests. Trade unionists, maliciously red-tagged by President Duterte with even extra judicial killings sanctioned in his speeches, remain under immediate threat of the police and the army, which conducted targeted raids against them. Twenty-eight union representatives were illegally arrested and detained in March and December, and seven union leaders were killed between March 2020 and April 2021.

The situation was likely to worsen for workers as the Anti-Terrorism Act, which came into force in July 2020 and granted even more extended powers to the police and the military to attack and harass workers and trade union activists.

Right to strike

Prosecution of union leaders for participating in strikes

On 30 November 2020, police dispersed an indignation rally staged by Cebu workers at the Mactan Economic Zone to commemorate Bonifacio Day and denounced the government's red-tagging of trade union activities. Five workers were arrested when police broke up the gathering: **Dennis Derige, Myra Opada, Joksan Branzuela, Jonel Labrador** and **Cristito Pangan**, all affiliated with Sentro ng Nagkakaisa at Progresibong Manggagawa (Sentro) and Partido Manggagawa (PM). They were detained for alleged violation of quarantine guidelines and disobedience. The five labour activists were freed after paying a fine of P1,000 (US\$20).



Twenty-eight union representatives were illegally arrested, and seven union leaders killed in the Philippines, making it one of the worst countries for working people.

Credit: Maria Tan / AFP

Right to justice

On 3 July 2020, the president of **the Philippines**, Rodrigo Duterte, signed the **Anti-Terrorism Act**, a law that gravely undermines civil liberties and endangers rights at work by placing workers, trade union activists and other human rights actors and defenders under pressure from the police, the military and other security forces and exposes them to more arbitrary arrests, indiscriminate and baseless attacks, harassment, intimidation and extrajudicial killings.

Under the Act, an "Anti-Terrorism Council" appointed by the president can order the arrest of anyone designated a "terrorist" without a warrant or due process and hold them for up to 24 days. The law applies as well to alleged "incitement" "by means of speeches, proclamations, writings, emblems, banners or other representations tending to the same end", opening the way to even greater suppression of all forms of dissent and civic and social activism. Conviction under the law carries a penalty of up to twelve years' imprisonment.

Turkey



- Brutal repression of strikes
- Union-busting

In 2021, the government of Turkey continued to impose severe restrictions on civil liberties, and workers' freedoms and rights were relentlessly denied with police crackdowns on protests, while trade union leaders were arbitrarily arrested and their homes raided.

Employers engaged in systematic union-busting by methodically dismissing workers who attempted to organise, especially in the metal, glass, leather and plastic industries.

Right to free speech and assembly

In **Turkey**, on May Day 2020 the Istanbul police blockaded the DİSK Confederation Central Office in Istanbul in the early morning hours and arrested DISK president **Arzu Çerkezoğlu**, DISK general secretary **Adnan Serdaroğlu** and twenty-five members of DISK. The confrontation took place as police blocked the march to Istanbul's Taksim Square, using the COVID-19 curfew as a pretext. The trade unionists were released later in the afternoon. It was the third time the leaders had been arrested that year.

Violent attacks on workers

On 24 November 2020, **Turkish** police cracked down on members of Birlesik Metal-Is union, which had organised a march from Gebze to Ankara to protest the unfair dismissal of workers in several companies and the use of COVID-19 as an excuse to single out trade union members for unpaid leave. A massive police presence prevented the start of the march, and 109 members of Birlesik Metal-Is were taken into police custody. Video footage of the arrests shows extensive police brutality in the process.



On May Day in Turkey, the authorities violated the right to freedom of speech and assembly by blocking a trade union march and arresting union leaders. Several other violations make it one of the worst countries for working people.

Credit: Ozan Kose / AFP

Zimbabwe



- State repression
- Arrests during strikes
- Violence

Zimbabwe remained one of the most hostile countries in the world for trade unionists as ZANU-PF, the ruling party, called the Zimbabwean Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), the main trade union organisation in the country, a “terrorist organisation”.

Following the violent attacks against workers during the general strikes organised in October 2018 and January 2019, ZCTU leadership remained under constant harassment and surveillance by the police, and its president, Peter Mutasa, was placed on the most-wanted persons list by the police.

Strikes were severely repressed with arrests and dismissals.

Right to strike

Prosecution of union leaders for participating in strikes

On 6 July 2020, the **Zimbabwean** Nurses’ Association (ZINA) organised strikes in Harare and Bulawayo to request a salary review and their outstanding COVID-19 allowances as well as the adequate provision of personal protective equipment. Prior to the protests, the government had rendered the Bipartite Negotiating Panel for the sector useless, unilaterally declaring that it would not be engaging in any form of collective bargaining for the next three months. Instead of opening dialogue, the government ordered the arrest of thirteen nurses. They have since been released on bail, but all have been dismissed. Strikes continued for 33 days without a return to negotiations.

Right to justice

On 27 July 2020, the **Zimbabwean** ruling party, ZANU-PF, convened a press conference in which the spokesperson, Patrick Chinamasa, attacked and



Workers’ unions and protests, such as this one by health workers, are routinely repressed in Zimbabwe, one of worst countries for working people.

Credit: Philimon Bulawayo / Reuters

labelled the **Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions** (ZCTU) a “Trojan Horse of the MDC-Alliance and a terrorist organisation together with the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition”, a civil society organisation.

On the same day, the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) issued a statement that they were hunting down ZCTU president **Peter Mutasa**, as well as **Obert Masaraure** and **Robson Chere**, leaders of the Amalgated Rural Teachers Union (ARTUZ), with regard to the 31 July 2019 strike. The day after, police began a manhunt for ZCTU member **Godfrey Tsenengamu**, Peter Mutasa and eleven other political and union members, requesting members of the public to supply information on the location of the activists. No statement was released on the reasons behind this manhunt.

Most violated rights in the world

1. Increasing criminalisation of the right to strike

In 2021, strikes have been severely restricted or banned in 129 out of 149 countries. In a number of these countries, industrial actions were brutally repressed by the authorities, and workers exercising their right to strike often faced criminal prosecution and summary dismissals. Violations of the right to strike are grouped into two categories: prosecution of union leaders for participating in strikes and cases of dismissals for taking part in strike action.



87% of countries have violated the right to strike.

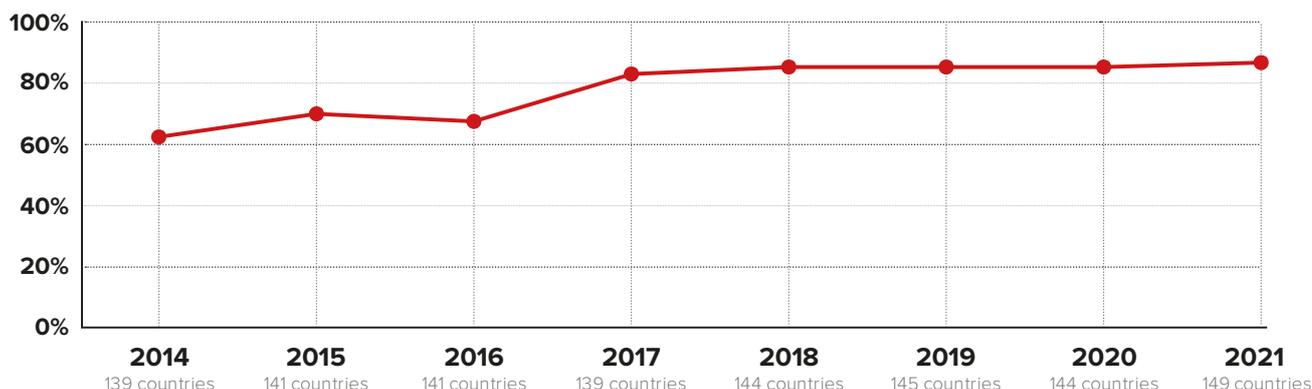
Countries violating the right to strike have increased from 63% of countries in 2014 to 87% of countries in 2021.



In Costa Rica, the right to strike was curtailed by the courts, and workers were fired for joining a trade union.

Credit: Ezequiel Becerra / AFP

Eight-year trends: Right to strike



2. Erosion of collective bargaining

Attacks on collective bargaining by governments and employers are at an eight-year high. The lack of good-faith bargaining by employers illustrates the broken social contract. Instead, collective bargaining agreements are being torn up, with mass layoffs in **Brazil, Cambodia, Hong Kong** and the sacking of workers' representatives in **Mauritius** and **Nambia**. Delay tactics by employers denied workers their rights in **Israel, Malaysia, Oman** and **South Korea**.

Countries violating the right to collective bargaining increased from 63% of countries in 2014 to 79% of countries in 2021.



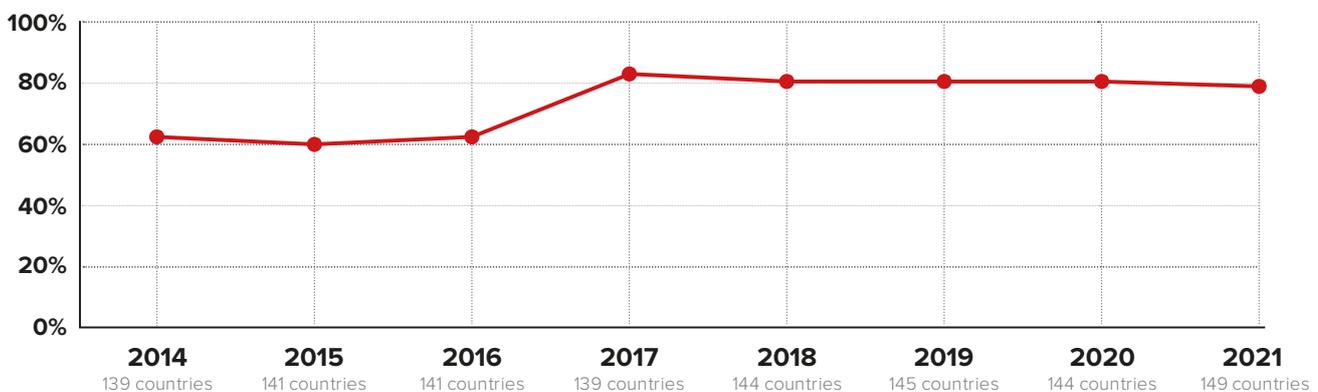
79% of countries violated the right to collective bargaining.



The National Union of Tunisian Journalists (SNJT) organised protests against the delay to publish the new collective agreement for journalists.

Credit: Fethi Belaid / AFP

Eight-year trends: Right to collective bargaining



3. Blocked and excluded from labour protection

Under international labour standards, all workers without distinction have the right to freedom of association. Violations of the right to form and join a trade union are grouped by cases where workers are excluded from labour protection and cases of union-busting, which denies workers their right to form and join a trade union.

Excluded from labour protection

Many workers are excluded from labour protection by being denied the right to form and join a trade union, including migrant workers, domestic workers, temporary workers, and those in insecure work and the informal economy. Workers in the platform economy usually fell outside of the scope of labour legislation, while certain categories of public employees were still denied the right to freedom of association.

In 2021, thirty-two countries had adopted legislation prohibiting migrants from establishing and joining trade unions, restricting migrants' ability to hold office in a trade union or otherwise denying them full rights to engage in union activities. Other countries excluded large sectors dominated by migrant workers, such as agriculture, construction, domestic work or work in export processing zones, from existing legal protections for union activities, while others still restricted trade union membership to workers in the formal sector.

In sectors that were almost entirely migrant-staffed, the prohibition on migrants' forming or leading their own trade unions acted as a



74% of countries excluded workers from the right to establish and join a trade union.

Countries which excluded workers from labour protections increased from 58% of countries in 2015 to 74% of countries in 2021.



Riders for Italian food delivery companies call for basic workers' rights to be respected in the sector. A court found that Deliveroo violated the right to establish and join a trade union.

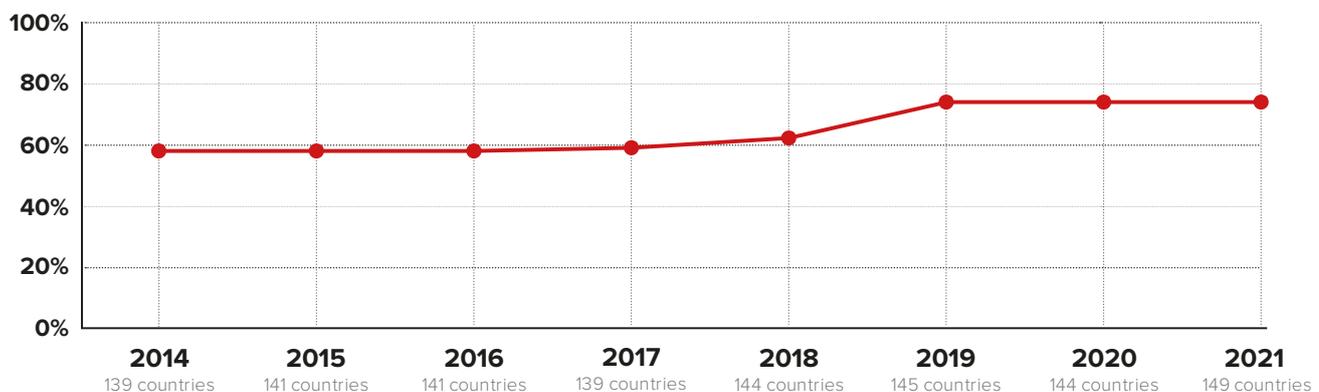
Credit: Christian Minelli / NurPhoto via AFP

significant bar to unionisation. Migrant workers face significant obstacles to union organising, including concerns over further stigmatisation, loss of status or deportation, remoteness or isolation of the workplace (in the maritime and domestic sectors), which impeded their ability to access unions. Despite the many hurdles, migrant workers continued to push for the recognition of their right to establish and join unions and defend their interests collectively.

Union-busting

The practice of union-busting has seen more and more workers blocked from being able to form and join trade unions. Union-busting refers to a wide range of activities undertaken by employers to hinder the functioning of unions and to disrupt or prevent the formation of trade unions or their attempts to grow their membership in a workplace. ILO Convention No. 98 enshrines the right of workers' organisations to adequate protection against any acts of interference by employers in their establishment, functioning or administration. However, in reality, many employers resorted to underhanded and illegal practices to impede workers from establishing a union in the workplace and to neutralise unions' ability to operate freely.

Eight-year trends: Right to establish and join a trade union



4. Restrictions on access to justice

Access to justice and due process of law are basic principles of the rule of law. In their absence, people are unable to have their voice heard and to assert their rights. In 97 countries out of 149, workers had no or reduced access to justice, and the due process of law and justice was denied. Trade union leaders were often detained and prosecuted on trumped-up charges, and their trials were frequently fraught with disregard for due process and lack of impartiality.



In 65% of countries, workers were denied access to justice.

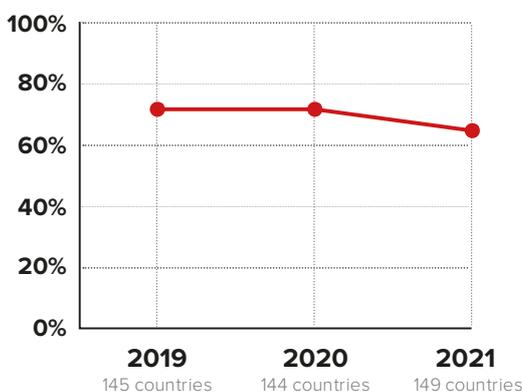
Countries which denied workers access to justice increased from 52% of countries in 2015 to 65% of countries in 2021.



Students in Hong Kong protest against the new extradition bill. Thousands of people were arrested for opposing the law and were routinely denied their right to justice. A new National Security Law made the situation even worse for rights' activists.

Credit: EyePress via AFP

Three-year trends: Right to justice



5. De-registration of unions

The right to official recognition through legal registration is an essential facet of the right to organise, since that is the first step that workers' organisations must take in order to be able to function efficiently and represent their members adequately.

Between April 2020 and March 2021, authorities impeded the registration of, de-registered or arbitrarily dissolved unions in 109 countries out of 149.



73% of countries impeded the registration of unions.

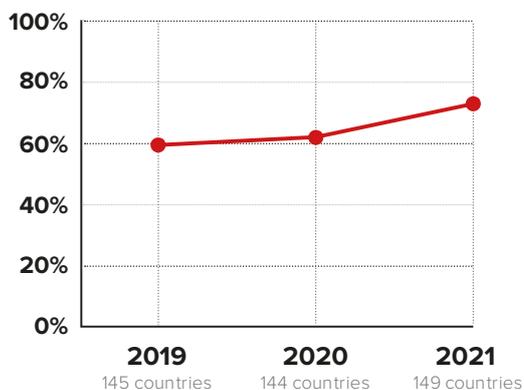
The number of countries which impeded the registration of unions increased from 89 countries in 2020 to 109 in 2021.



Protesters in Kazakhstan call for the release of political prisoners. The authorities used various tactics to suppress trade unions, such as preventing them from registering and deregistering them in the courts.

Credit: Ruslan Pryanikov / AFP

Three-year trends: Right to trade union activities



6. Arbitrary arrests, detention and imprisonment

Workers were arrested and detained in 68 out of 149 countries in 2021. A large number of governments increased pressure against workers asserting their rights and unions supporting them by specifically targeting prominent trade union leaders.



Workers were detained and arrested in 46% countries.

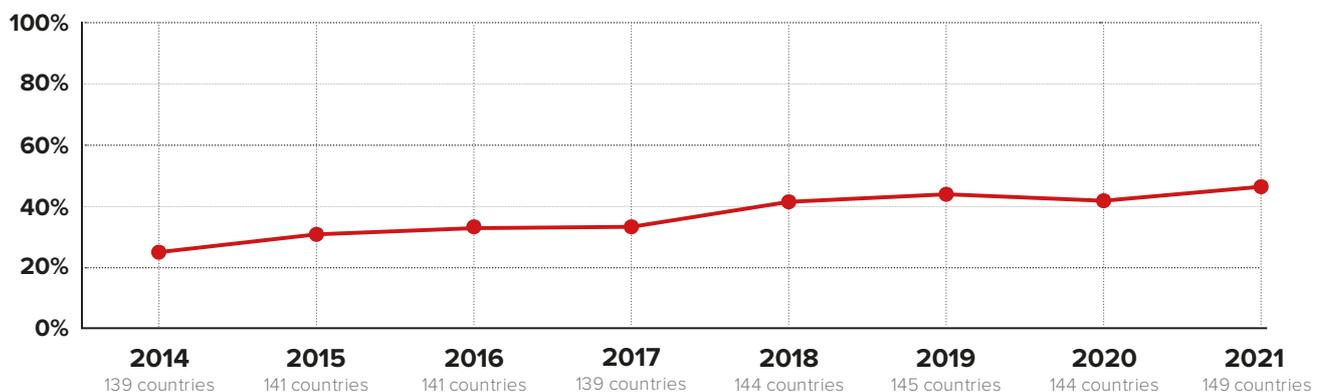
Countries arresting and detaining workers increased from 25% of countries in 2014 to 46% of countries in 2021.



Rong Chhun, the president of the Cambodian Confederation of Unions (CCU), was arrested for public comments about farmers losing land to Vietnam.

Credit: Tang Chhin Sothy / AFP

Eight-year trends: Right to civil liberties



7. Violent attacks on workers

Workers were exposed to violence in 45 countries in 2021. In several countries, strikes and social protests were repressed with disproportionate force by the state armed forces. Endemic violence in the Americas and the Philippines continued to affect workers and their representatives. While workers in fewer countries were exposed to violence in 2021, this trend could be related to the COVID-19 pandemic, which restricted mass gatherings of people.



Workers experienced violence in 30% of countries.

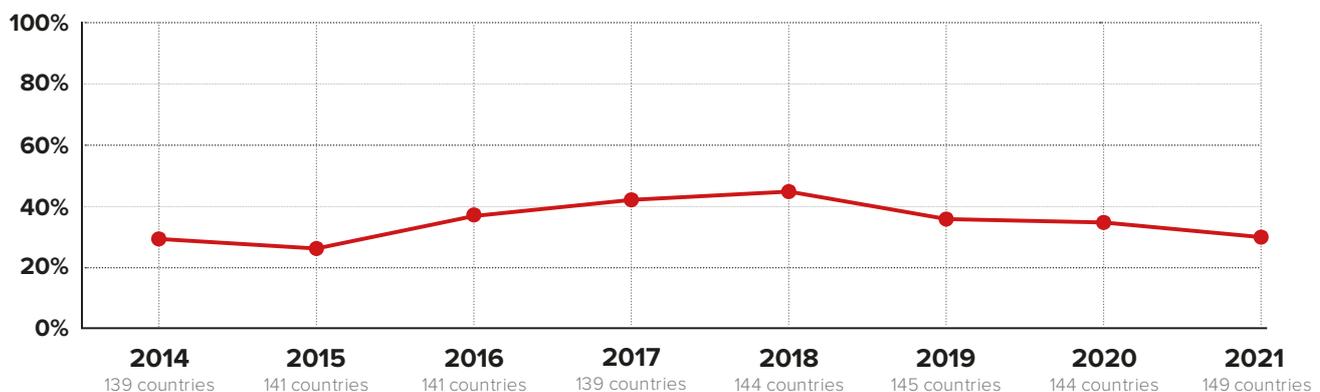
Countries which exposed workers to violent attacks increased from 29% of countries in 2014 to 30% of countries in 2021.



Workers experienced violent attacks in 45 countries. In Hong Kong, state armed forces used violence to repress pro-democracy demonstrations.

Credit: Isaac Lawrence / AFP

Eight-year trends: Violent attacks on workers



8. Cases of murder

Trade unionists are being murdered as they represent workers and their collective rights. Too often there is no justice for workers and their families as government and employers act with impunity. In 2021, trade unionists were murdered in six countries: **Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Myanmar, Nigeria** and **the Philippines**.



Trade unionists were murdered in six countries. Colombia was the deadliest country for trade union leaders in 2021.



Medical students in Myanmar remember Khant Nyar Hein, killed by the military during a protest calling for a return to democracy. Trade unionists were murdered in six countries, including Myanmar.

Credit: Anadolu Agency via AFP

Global trends for workers in 2021

1. Democracy in crisis

The Global Rights Index has tracked the key elements of workplace democracy for eight years, including the right to establish and join a trade union, the right to collective bargaining and the right to strike as well as the right to free speech and assembly, which symbolises a healthy democracy. In many countries, COVID-19 has been used as a pretext to curb free speech.

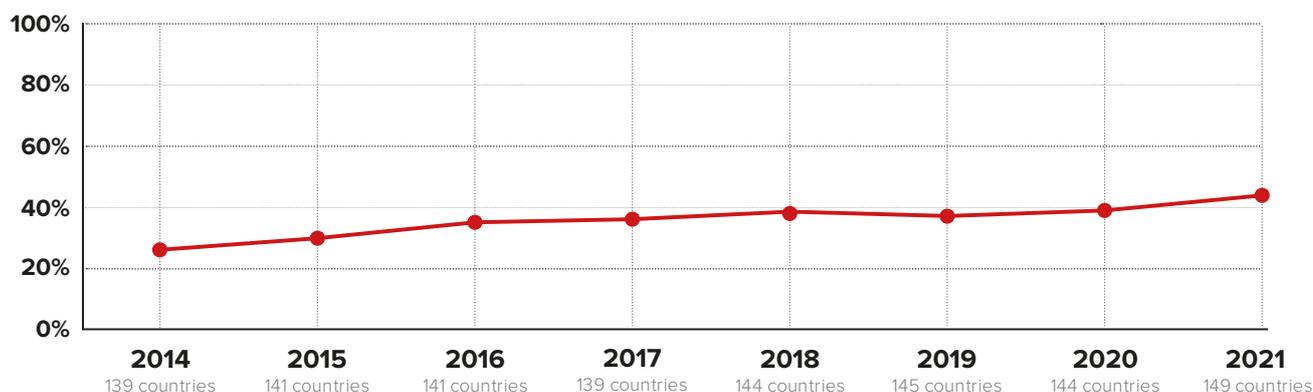
Free speech and assembly under attack

The systematic dismantling of the building blocks of freedom and democracy is taking place through sustained attacks on workers' rights and workplace democracy as governments suppress free speech and assembly. In the past eight years, the Global Rights Index has recorded an unprecedented increase in attacks on free speech and assembly from 26% of countries in 2014 to 43% of countries in 2021.



Countries where freedom of speech and assembly was denied or constrained increased from 56 in 2020 to 64 in 2021.

Eight-year trends: Right to free speech and assembly



2. Surveillance of workers



Surveillance work without judicial authorisation and without knowledge of trade union organisations and their representatives violates freedom of association and protection of workers' representatives, as per ILO Conventions Numbers 87 and 98. It is also a serious attack on individual freedoms and personal security. The increased level of surveillance by governments and companies of individuals is an ever-growing threat to human and labour rights.

The right to privacy

In 2021, some governments continued their surveillance of prominent trade union leaders in an attempt to instil fear and put pressure on independent unions and their members. A number of scandals emerged over surveillance instigated by companies to track and frustrate union organising efforts and strike actions.

In the USA, Amazon violated its workers' right to privacy by spying on union activists as it aggressively opposed their attempts to unionise.

Credit: Patrick T. Fallon / AFP



3. Legislative power

The ITUC analysis of workers' rights in law of 149 countries profiled in the 2021 Global Rights Index provides a unique insight into national laws and practice. Lawmaking is an effective and powerful instrument for social transformation and the protection of labour rights. Legislative power can be used for both repression and reform. While the balance in 2021 tips towards repression, the power of legislation is key for maintaining and progressing workers' rights.

Repressive laws



In too many countries, governments passed regressive legislation that seriously undermined workers' basic rights at work. **India's** continual dismantling of worker protections has seen the Modi government pass three key labour laws through undemocratic means, fundamentally rewriting Indian labour laws. The Indonesian government passed, without any prior consultation with the national unions, an **Omnibus Law** which introduced sweeping changes to workers' entitlements and environmental regulation.

Legislative reform



In the last year, positive legal steps were taken to further advanced workers' rights and social progress.

In the **United States**, the House of Representatives passed the **Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act** (H.R. 2474), legislation that would increase protections for workers' freedom of association, adding

penalties for companies that retaliate against workers who organise (up to US\$50,000 per violation). Among other significant improvements, the PRO Act would grant some hundreds of thousands of workers collective bargaining rights and allow more people currently classified as contractors to be given the status of employees for the purposes of union organising, potentially paving the way for gig workers at companies like **Lyft** and **Uber** to organise. It would also weaken "right-to-work" laws in twenty-seven states that currently allow employees to be exempt from paying fees to unions while still benefiting from union-negotiated collective agreements.

The **European Commission** published its **proposal for a directive on adequate minimum wages in the European Union**. The Commission's draft is two-pronged. It aims first at ensuring that workers across the European Union are protected by adequate minimum wages, allowing for a decent living wherever they work.

In addition, the Commission initiates, for the first time, legislative action to strengthen collective bargaining in the European Union. Against the background of declining coverage of collective bargaining, the directive aims to increase the collective bargaining coverage.

The Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act, USA, would mean that drivers at companies such as Lyft and Uber can be classified as employees, allowing them to organise unions.

Credit: Robyn Beck / AFP



The Global Rights Index explained

1. Documenting violations

The ITUC documents violations of internationally recognised collective labour rights by governments and employers. The methodology is grounded in standards of fundamental rights at work, in particular the right to freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining and the right to strike.

Questionnaires are sent to 331 national unions in 163 countries to report violations of workers' rights by indicating relevant details.

Regional meetings with human and trade union rights experts are held where the questionnaire is disseminated, explained and completed.

The ITUC contacts unions directly by phone and email when it becomes aware of violations to confirm relevant facts.

Legal researchers analyse national legislation and identify sections which are not adequately protecting internationally recognised collective labour rights.

2. Publication of violations in the ITUC Survey

Documented information is summarised and consolidated by ITUC staff in the form of text. This information is publicly accessible on the website of the ITUC Survey at survey.ituc-csi.org.

3. Coding of text

The text under each country in the ITUC Survey is read against a list of 97 indicators derived from ILO Conventions and jurisprudence and represents violations of workers' rights in law and in practice. A country receives a point for each time textual information corresponds to an indicator. Each point has the value of 1. After coding the text for a country, the number of points is added up to arrive at a total score.

4. Rating countries

Countries are rated in clusters from 1-5+ depending on their compliance with collective labour rights. There are five ratings, with 1 being the best rating and 5+ the worst rating a country could get. The level of economic development, size or location of the country is not taken into account given that fundamental rights are universal and workers in all parts of the world must have access to them. A high-rated cluster means that workers in the country have no right to their collective voice due to government failure to guarantee rights.

Description of the ratings

1. Sporadic violations of rights

Collective labour rights are generally guaranteed. Workers can freely associate and defend their rights collectively with the government and/or companies and can improve their working conditions through collective bargaining. Violations against workers are not absent but do not occur on a regular basis.

2. Repeated violations of rights

Countries with a rating of 2 have slightly weaker collective labour rights than those with the rating 1. Certain rights have come under repeated attacks by governments and/or companies and have undermined the struggle for better working conditions.

3. Regular violations of rights

Governments and/or companies are regularly interfering in collective labour rights or are failing to fully guarantee important aspects of these rights. There are deficiencies in laws and/or certain practices which make frequent violations possible.

4. Systematic violations of rights

Workers in countries with the rating 4 have reported systematic violations. The government and/or companies are engaged in serious efforts to crush the collective voice of workers, putting fundamental rights under threat.

5. No guarantee of rights

Countries with the rating of 5 are the worst countries in the world to work in. While the legislation may spell out certain rights, workers have effectively no access to these rights and are therefore exposed to autocratic regimes and unfair labour practices.

5+. No guarantee of rights due to the breakdown of the rule of law

Workers in countries with the rating 5+ have equally limited rights as countries with the rating 5. However, in countries with the rating 5+, this is linked to dysfunctional institutions as a result of internal conflict and/or military occupation. In such cases, the country is assigned the rating of 5+ by default.

List of indicators

ITUC Global Rights Index. List of composite indicators

The methodology is grounded in standards of fundamental rights at work, based on international human rights law, and in particular ILO Conventions Nos. 87 and 98, as well as the jurisprudence developed by the ILO supervisory mechanisms¹.

I. Civil liberties

A. Violations in law

1. Arrest, detention, imprisonment, charging and fining of trade unionists
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 119-159
General Survey 1994 paras. 31-32
General Survey 2012 paras. 59-62
2. Violation of trade unionists' basic freedoms (freedom of movement; rights of assembly and demonstration; freedom of opinion and expression)
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 190-201; 202-232; 233-268
General Survey 1994 paras. 35-39
General Survey 2012 paras. 59-62
3. Violation of trade unions' and trade unionists' right to protection of their premises and property
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 275-292
General Survey 1994 paras. 40
General Survey 2012 paras. 59-62
4. Lack of guarantee of due process of law and/or justice re violations nos. 1-3
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 160-189
General Survey 1994 paras. 29-32
General Survey 2012 paras. 60-62

B. Violations in practice

5. Killing or enforced disappearance of trade unionists
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 81-118
General Survey 1994 paras. 28-30
General Survey 2012 paras. 59-62
6. Committed against trade union leaders
Violation of (5) is committed against a union leader
7. Other types of physical violence
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 67-118; 275-298
General Survey 1994 paras. 28-30, 33; 35-39
General Survey 2012 paras. 59-62
8. Committed against trade union leaders
Violation of (7) is committed against a union leader
9. Threats, intimidation and harassment
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 67-118
General Survey 1994 paras. 28-30, 33
General Survey 2012 paras. 59-62
10. Committed against trade union leaders
Violation of (9) is committed against a union leader

11. Arrest, detention, imprisonment, charging and fining of trade unionists

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 119-159

General Survey 1994 paras. 31-32

General Survey 2012 paras 59-62

12. Committed against trade union leaders

Violation of (11) is committed against a union leader

13. Infringement of the right to freedom of expression

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 233-268

General Survey 1994 paras. 35-39

General Survey 2012 paras. 59-62

14. Infringement of the right to freedom of assembly and demonstration

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 202-232

General Survey 1994 paras. 34-39

General Survey 2012 paras. 59-62

15. Restrictions to the right to freedom of movement

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 190-201

General Survey 1994) para. 34

General Survey 2012 paras 59-62

16. Committed against trade union leaders

Violations (13) to (15) are committed against a union leader

17. Attacks against trade unions' and trade unionists' premises and property

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 275-292

General Survey 1994 paras. 40

General Survey 2012 paras. 59-62

18. Severity

Widespread and/or systematic violation regarding violations re (5)-(17)

19. Lack of guarantee of due process of law and/or justice

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 160-189

General Survey 1994 paras. 29, 31-32

General Survey 2012 paras. 59-62

1. Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR), Committee on the Application of Standards (CAS) and Committee on Freedom of Association (CFA). See in particular:

- the Compilation of decisions of the Committee on Freedom of Association (<https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:70001:0::NO>),
- ILO General Survey 1994 on Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining, 1994 ([https://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/P/09661/09661\(1994-81-4B\).pdf](https://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/P/09661/09661(1994-81-4B).pdf)) and
- ILO General Survey 2012 on fundamental Conventions (https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_174846.pdf).

The list of indicators is adapted from David Kucera and Dora Sari. 2018. "New Labour Rights Indicators: Method and Trends for 2000-2015", International Labour Review (Accepted manuscript online: 9 MAR 2018 05:10AM EST | DOI: 10.1111/ilr.12084)

II. Right to establish and join unions

A. Violations in law

20. General prohibition of the right to establish and/or join trade unions

General Survey 1994 paras. 12, 93

General Survey 2012 para. 51

21. Exclusion of specific categories of workers from the right to establish and/or join trade unions

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 315-418

General Survey 1994 paras. 45-67

22. Restrictions on the freedom of choice of union structure and composition

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 472-513; 546-560

General Survey 1994 paras. 79-90

23. Previous authorisation requirements for union registration

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 419-444; 448-471

General Survey 1994 paras. 68-70

General Survey 2012 paras. 82-87; 89-90

24. Union monopoly

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 475-501

General Survey 1994 para. 91

25. Dissolution/suspension of legally functioning trade unions

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 979-1013

General Survey 1994 paras. 180-188

General Survey 2012 para. 162

26. Provisions in law allowing for anti-union discriminatory measures (dismissal, suspension, transfer, downgrading)

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 1072-1185

General Survey 1994 paras. 199-210, 213

27. Lack of effective legal guarantees against anti-union discriminatory measures

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 1134-1162

General Survey 1994 paras. 214-224

General Survey 2012 paras 166-167; 173-193

28. Provisions in law allowing for interference of employers and/or public authorities

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras 1215-1219

General Survey 1994 paras. 225-234

General Survey 2012 paras. 194-196

29. Lack of effective legal guarantees against acts of interference

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras 1187-1230

General Survey 1994 paras. 189-198

General Survey 2012 para. 163

30. Right to establish and/or join federations and confederations and to affiliate with international organisations of workers

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 1014-1071

General Survey 1994 paras. 189-198

General Survey 2012 para. 163

31. Lack of guarantee of due process of law

Lack of due process regarding violations (20)-(30)

B. Violations in practice

32. Serious obstacle to exercise the right to establish and/or join trade unions

The vast majority of the population is excluded from this right in practice

General Survey 1994 paras. 12, 93

General Survey 2012 para. 51

33. Exclusion of specific categories of workers from the right to establish and/or join trade unions

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 315-418

General Survey 1994 paras. 45-67

34. Restrictions on the freedom of choice of union structure and composition

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 472-513; 546-560

General Survey 1994 paras. 79-90

35. Previous authorisation requirements for union registration
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 427-444
General Survey 1994 paras. 68-70
General Survey 2012 paras. 82-87; 89-90
36. Union monopoly
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 475-501
General Survey 1994 para. 91
37. Dissolution/suspension of legally functioning trade union
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 979-1013
General Survey 1994 paras. 180-188
General Survey 2012 para. 162
38. Anti-union discriminatory measures (including dismissal, suspension, transfer, downgrading)
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 1072-1185
General Survey 1994 paras. 199-210, 213
39. Committed against trade union leaders
Violation (38) is committed against a trade union leader
40. Lack of effective legal guarantees against anti-union discriminatory measures
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 1134-1162
General Survey 1994 paras. 214-224
General Survey 2012 paras 166-167; 173-193
41. Acts of interference of employers and/or public authorities
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras 1215-1219
General Survey 1994 paras. 225-234
General Survey 2012 paras. 194-196
42. Lack of effective legal guarantees against acts of interference of employers and/or public authorities
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras 1187-1230
General Survey 1994 paras. 189-198
General Survey 2012 para. 163
43. Infringement of the right to establish and join federations and confederations and to affiliate with international organisations of workers
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 1014-1071
General Survey 1994 paras. 189-198
General Survey 2012 para. 163
44. Lack of guarantee of due process of law and/or justice
Lack of due process regarding violations (32) - (43)

III. Trade union activities

A. Violations in law

45. Infringement of the right to freely elect representatives
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 585-665
General Survey 1994 paras. 112-121
General Survey 2012 paras. 101-107
46. Infringement of the right to freely draw up constitutions and internal rules and administration
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 561-584; 666-679
General Survey 1994 paras. 108-111
General Survey 2012 paras. 100,112-114
47. Infringement of the right to freely organise and control financial administration
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 680-715
General Survey 1994 paras. 108, 124-127
General Survey 2012 paras. 108-111
48. Infringement of the right to freely organise activities and to formulate programmes
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 716-750
General Survey 1994 paras. 108-112, 124-127
General Survey 2012 paras. 100,112-114
49. Lack of guarantee of due process of law
Lack of due process regarding violations (45) - (48)

B. Violations in practice

50. Infringements of the right to freely elect representatives
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 585-665
General Survey 1994 paras. 112-121
General Survey 2012 paras. 101-107
51. Infringement of the right to freely draw up constitutions and internal rules and administration
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 561-584; 666-679
General Survey 1994 paras. 108-111
General Survey 2012 paras. 100,112-114
52. Infringement of the right to freely organise and control financial administration
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 680-715
General Survey 1994 paras. 108, 124-127
General Survey 2012 paras. 108-111
53. Infringement of the right to freely organise activities and to formulate programmes
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 716-750
General Survey 1994 paras. 108-112, 124-127
General Survey 2012 paras. 100,112-114
54. Lack of guarantee of due process of law and/or justice
Lack of due process regarding violations (50)-(53)

IV. Right to collective bargaining

A. Violations in law

55. General prohibition of the right to collective bargaining

General Survey 1994 paras. 12, 93

General Survey 2012 para. 51

56. Insufficient promotion of collective bargaining

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras 1318; 1322-1326; 1517-1567; 1569-1578

General Survey 1994 paras. 235-236, 244-247

General Survey 2012 paras. 166-167, 198-199

57. Exclusion of specific categories of workers from the right to collective bargaining

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 1239-1288

General Survey 1994 paras. 261-264

General Survey 2012 paras. 168; 209

58. Exclusion/restriction of subjects covered by collective bargaining

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 1289-1312

General Survey 1994 para. 250

59. Compulsory arbitration imposed on collective bargaining

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 1415-1419

General Survey 1994 paras. 254-259

General Survey 2012 paras. 246-250

60. Excessive requirements and/or lack of objective, pre-established and precise criteria for the determination/recognition of trade unions entitled to collective bargaining (including infringements to the rights of minority unions)

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 1342-1403

General Survey 1994 paras. 238-243

General Survey 2012 paras. 224-240

61. Acts of interference in collective bargaining

(including imposing the level of bargaining, discouraging time-limits, offering better working conditions through individual agreements)

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 1420-1470

General Survey 1994 paras. 244-249

General Survey 2012 paras. 198, 200, 208, 214, 222-223

62. Violation of concluded collective agreements

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 1313-1321; 1327-1341

General Survey 1994 paras. 251-253

General Survey 2012 paras. 201-207

63. Infringements of the consultation with workers' organisations

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras 1318; 1322-1326; 1517-1567; 1569-1578

General Survey 1994 paras. 235-236, 244-247

General Survey 2012 paras. 166-167, 198-199

64. Lack of guarantee of due process of law

Lack of due process regarding violations (55)-(63)

B. Violations in practice

65. Serious obstacle to exercise the right to collective bargaining

The vast majority of the population is excluded from this right in practice

66. Insufficient promotion of collective bargaining

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras 1318; 1322-1326; 1517-1567; 1569-1578

General Survey 1994 paras. 235-236, 244-247

General Survey 2012 paras. 166-167, 198-199

67. Exclusion of specific categories of workers from the right to collective bargaining

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 1239-1288

General Survey 1994 paras. 261-264

General Survey 2012 paras. 168; 209

68. Exclusion/restriction of subjects covered by collective bargaining

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 1289-1312

General Survey 1994 para. 250

69. Compulsory arbitration imposed on collective bargaining

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 1415-1419

General Survey 1994 paras. 254-259

General Survey 2012 paras. 246-250

70. Excessive requirements and/or lack of objective, pre-established and precise criteria for the determination/recognition of trade unions entitled to collective bargaining (including infringements to the rights of minority unions)

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 1342-1403

General Survey 1994 paras. 238-243

General Survey 2012 paras. 224-240

71. Acts of interference in collective bargaining (including imposing the level of bargaining, discouraging time-limits, offering better working conditions through individual agreements)

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 1420-1470

General Survey 1994 paras. 244-249

General Survey 2012 paras. 198, 200, 208, 214, 222-223

72. Violation of concluded collective agreements

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 1313-1321; 1327-1341

General Survey 1994 paras. 251-253

General Survey 2012 paras. 201-207

73. Absence of consultation with workers' organisations

ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras 1318; 1322-1326; 1517-1567; 1569-1578

General Survey 1994 paras. 235-236, 244-247

General Survey 2012 paras. 166-167, 198-199

74. Lack of guarantee of due process of law and/or justice

Lack of due process regarding violations (65)-(73)

V. Right to strike

A. Violations in law

75. General prohibition of the right to strike
General Survey 1994 paras. 152-153, 170-171
General Survey 2012. paras. 122, 140, 144, 159
76. Exclusion of specific categories of workers from the right to strike (including overly broad definition of essential services)
General Survey 1994 paras. 154-160
General Survey 2012 para. 127
77. Exclusion/restriction based on the objective and /or type of the strike
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 758-786
General Survey 1994 paras. 165-168, 173
General Survey 2012 paras. 124-126, 142
78. Excessive prerequisites required for exercising the right to strike
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 789-814
General Survey 1994 paras. 170-172
General Survey 2012 paras. 144-148
79. Compulsory arbitration imposed on strike action
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 816-823
General Survey 1994 para. 153
General Survey 2012 paras. 153-156
80. Provisions in law allowing for the suspension and/or declaration of illegality of strikes by administrative authorities
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions Paras. 907-913
General Survey 2012 para. 157
81. Infringements of the determination of minimum services
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras 864-906
General Survey 1994 paras. 161-162
General Survey 2012 paras 136-139
82. Absence or inadequacy of compensatory guarantees for lawful restrictions on the right to strike
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 824-852
General Survey 1994 paras. 164
General Survey 2012 paras. 141

83. Interference of employers and/or authorities during the course of strike action allowed under the legislation (including back-to-work orders, hiring of workers during a strike, requisitioning orders)
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 917-926; 927-929
General Survey 1994 paras. 163; 174-175
General Survey 2012 paras. 149-152
84. Excessive sanctions for the legitimate exercise of the right to strike
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 951-976
General Survey 1994 paras. 176-178
General Survey 2012 paras. 157-160
85. Lack of guarantee of due process of law
Lack of due process regarding violations (75)-(84)

B. Violations in practice

86. Serious obstacle to exercise the right in practice
Vast majority of population is excluded from this right in practice
87. Exclusion of specific categories of workers from the right to strike (including overly broad definition of essential services)
General Survey 1994 paras. 154-160
General Survey 2012 paras. 127, 129-135
88. Exclusion/restriction based on the objective and/or type of the strike
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 758-786
General Survey 1994 paras. 165-168, 173
General Survey 2012 paras. 124-126, 142
89. Excessive prerequisites required for exercising the right to strike
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 789-814
General Survey 1994 paras. 170-172
General Survey 2012 paras. 144-148
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ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 816-823
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ILO Compilation of CFA decisions Paras. 907-913
General Survey 2012 para. 157
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General Survey 1994 paras. 161-162
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ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 824-852
General Survey 1994 paras. 164
General Survey 2012 paras. 141
94. Interference of employers and/or authorities during
the course of strike action (including back-to-work
orders, hiring of workers during a strike, requisitioning
orders)
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 917-929
General Survey 1994 paras. 163; 174-175
General Survey 2012 paras. 149-152
95. Excessive sanctions for the legitimate exercise of
the right to strike
ILO Compilation of CFA decisions paras. 951-976
General Survey 1994 paras. 176-178
General Survey 2012 paras. 157-160
96. Committed against trade union leaders
Violation (95) is committed against a trade union leader
97. Lack of guarantee of due process of law and/or
justice
Lack of due process regarding violations (86)-(96)

About the ITUC

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) is a confederation of national trade union centres, each of which links trade unions in that particular country. It is the global voice of the world's working people. The ITUC represents 200 million workers in 163 countries and has 332 national affiliates.

The ITUC Global Rights Index depicts the world's worst countries for workers by rating 149 countries on a scale from 1 to 5+ on the degree of respect of workers' rights. Violations are recorded each year from April to March. Information on violations of workers' rights in countries is published throughout the year in the [ITUC Survey](#).

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