

## LABOUR RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS

by  
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Labour rights are under threat around the world. Although labour rights are human rights, they are still violated in many places. In addition, workers and trade unionists are exposed to massive attacks in their struggle for a better world of work.

### Attacks on workers' rights worldwide

According to the International Trade Union Confederation's Global Rights Index, in 2020, in 123 out of 144 countries, strikes were seriously restricted or banned. 80 percent of countries have violated the right to collective bargaining. In 62 percent of countries, the authorities have hindered the registration of trade unions. In 72 percent of countries, working people had no or only limited access to justice. In numerous countries, people risk their lives when they assert their fundamental rights at work: Workers and trade unionists are harassed, arbitrarily arrested, and murdered to silence them. A government justifies the mass arrests of trade unionists and the dissolution of trade union organizations on the pretext of fighting terrorism. Agricultural workers are forced into debt bondage. They are deprived of their identity cards and physically harassed and punished by armed guards. Some have been killed while trying to escape. In collective bargaining agreements, there were different wage groups for men and women, which automatically meant that women earned less just because they were women. Children are forced to leave school in the spring and fall to help with the cotton harvest.

All these violations of workers' rights have one thing in common: These rights belong to the core labour standards - the central, international labour rights that are recognized as universal human rights in the world of work.

- **Freedom of association and right to collective bargaining:** Workers have the right to join trade unions free from external interference. Unions have the right to bargain collectively and to strike.
- **Elimination of forced labour:** Everyone has the right to work in freedom and freely choose one's work. Forced labour, slavery and debt bondage are prohibited.
- **Abolition of child labour:** Children have a right to be protected from exploitation and they shall be protected by a minimum age for admission of children to employment and by the abolition of the worst forms of child labour.
- **Prohibition of discrimination in employment and occupation:** Everyone has the right to equal treatment, regardless of "race, color, sex, religion, political opinion, nationality or social origin". This also includes the principle of "equal pay for equal work" for women and men.

These rights are negotiated, adopted, and monitored by the by the International Labour Organization, or ILO.

### Labour is not a commodity - the International Labour Organization

The ILO was founded in 1919 after the First World War, convinced that lasting peace is only possible on the basis of social justice. Social policy issues and labour rights should be guaranteed through the creation and monitoring of international minimum standards - such as core labour standards. Trade unions demanded international enforcement

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ITUC Global Rights Index 2020

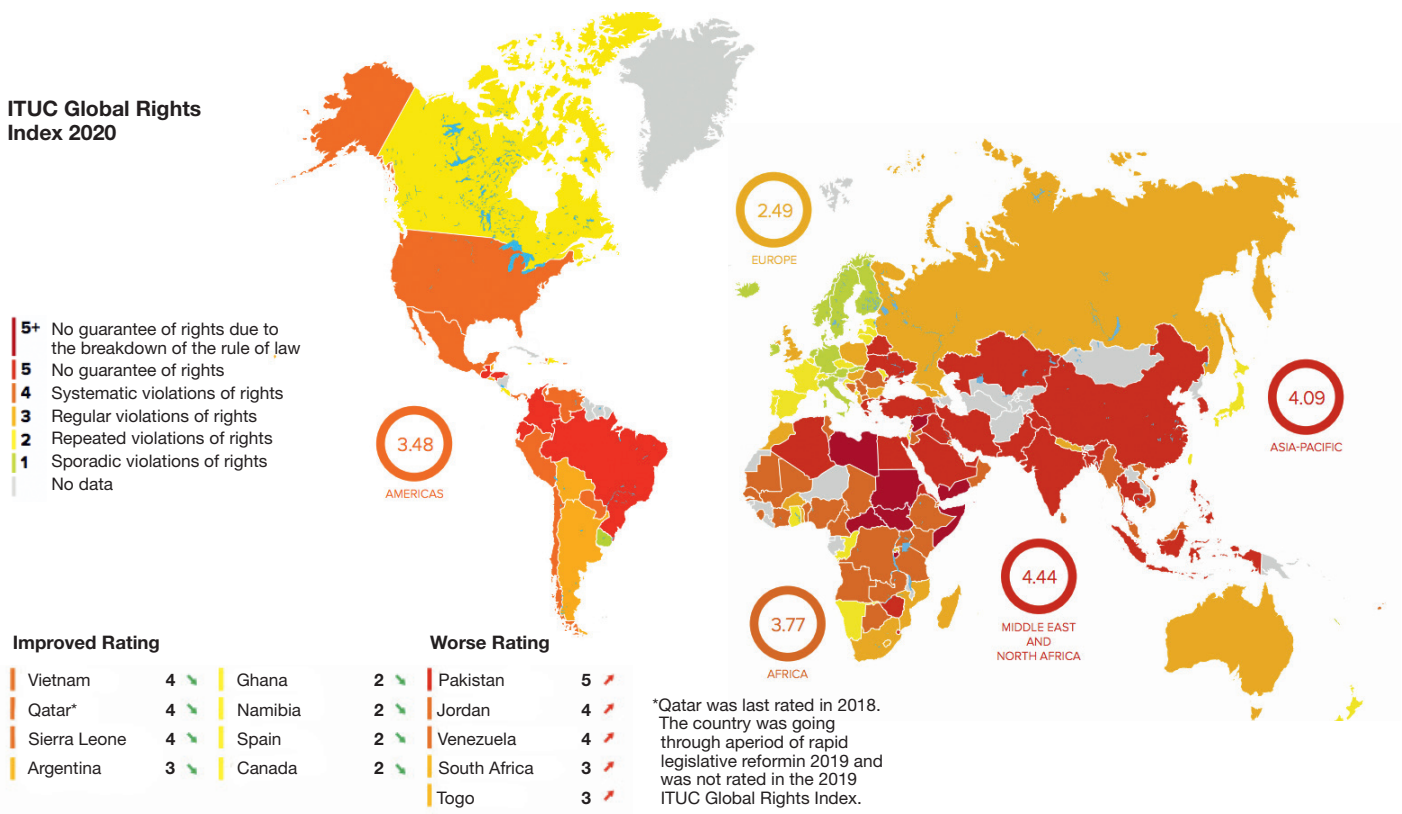


Chart based on: ITUC Global Rights Index 2020; www.ituc-csi.org

rights of the minimum standards at the state level, but this did not succeed. However, political pressure from the international community can certainly achieve some things, such as improving labour rights in member states or the release of trade unionists from prison. The struggle for decent working conditions worldwide has not lost any of its relevance today. Meanwhile, the ILO is a specialized agency of the UN with 187 member states. What is unique about it is that not only governments are represented, but also trade unions and employers' associations. Problems are to be solved through social dialogue.

The ILO is the only international organization that sets and monitors minimum standards for the world of work. The standards are negotiated and agreed on between governments, employers' associations, and trade unions at the International Labour Conference, which meets annually in Geneva. The member states are regularly reviewed by means of national reports and must answer to

the Committee on the Application of Standards at the Labour Conference. The trade unions have also the right to comment these national reports. An important player at the conference is the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) with 332 trade union organizations from 163 countries worldwide.

**International Trade Union Confederation**

The ITUC was founded in Vienna in 2006 to promote and defend workers' rights and interests at the international level. With over 200 million members, it is the most important international trade union organization. The ITUC works closely together with national trade unions, organizes and coordinates global campaigns and lobbies the major global institutions. Every year the ITUC publishes the Global Rights Index to document the violations of workers' rights and to highlight deteriorations as well as improvements.