



الاتحاد العربي للنقابات
ARAB TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

Annual Report on Violations of Trade Union Rights and Freedoms in the Arab Region 2025



**Legislative dumping is a new means of
restricting trade union rights and freedoms.**

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Forword

This report documents the state of trade union rights and freedoms in the Arab region during 2025. It is rooted in the lived experience of workers, migrant workers, women workers, and trade unionists who continue to organize, bargain, mobilize, and defend fundamental rights in increasingly restrictive environments.

Across the region, workers face serious and recurring obstacles to the exercise of freedom of association, collective bargaining, the right to strike, and meaningful social dialogue. While many constitutions and labor laws formally recognize these rights, the evidence reviewed in this report points to a persistent and widening gap between legal guarantees and practice.

A particularly alarming trend is the growing use of legislation and administrative regulation to restrict legitimate trade union activity. Laws related to national security, public order, cybercrime, digital expression, and public assembly are increasingly being used to limit workers' ability to speak out, organize collectively, and defend their economic and social rights. These practices raise serious concerns regarding states' compliance with international labor standards, particularly ILO Conventions No. 87 and No. 98.

At the same time, workers across the Arab region are facing a deepening social and economic crisis. Rising living costs, declining purchasing power, precarious work, unemployment, informality, and widening inequality have placed enormous pressure on working people and their families. In this context, independent, democratic, and representative trade unions are not a threat to stability. They are essential actors for social justice, accountability, fair wages, inclusive development, and peaceful reform.

Yet many trade union organizations continue to operate without adequate legal or institutional protection. They face administrative obstruction, restrictions on registration and activity, interference in internal affairs, limitations on the right to strike, and, in some cases, reprisals against members and leaders. Women workers and migrant workers are particularly exposed to intersecting forms of discrimination, exclusion, and exploitation, which further restrict their access to representation, protection, and justice.

In countries affected by war, occupation, political instability, and institutional collapse, these violations are even more severe. Conflict and fragility have weakened trade union structures, disrupted collective representation, and left workers without effective protection at moments when they need it most.

Despite this difficult context, the report also identifies spaces of resilience and possibility. Where inclusive social dialogue is respected, where independent unions are able to operate freely, and where workers' voices are included in decisionmaking, rights-based approaches have contributed to social cohesion, institutional trust, and more sustainable development outcomes.

The Arab Trade Union Confederation affirms that respect for fundamental rights at work is not optional. It is a legal obligation, a democratic necessity, and a cornerstone of social justice, good governance, and a just transition.

No credible reform can take place while trade union activity is restricted. No effective social dialogue can exist without independent and representative unions. No sustainable development can be achieved while workers are denied their rights in law or in practice.

The persistence of the gap between formal commitments and lived reality is not only a violation of international standards. It is also a threat to social and economic stability across the region. Weakening independent trade unions does not produce stability; it deepens crises, silences workers, and excludes them from shaping the policies that determine their lives.

This moment requires clear political will, concrete legal and institutional reforms, and genuine accountability. Governments, employers, social partners, and the international community must assume their responsibilities to ensure the full and effective realization of trade union rights.

This report is a contribution to that effort. It is a call to defend freedom of association, protect collective bargaining, guarantee the right to strike, and open genuine spaces for democratic social dialogue.

Without these rights, social justice will remain a promise deferred.

Hind Benammar

Executive Secretary Arab Trade Union Confederation

Introduction: 2025: A Year of Deep Contradictions

The Arab region entered 2025 under the weight of unresolved structural crises. Workers faced a convergence of economic hardship, shrinking civic space, and intensified attacks on trade union freedoms. Inflation, currency depreciation, unemployment, informality, and declining purchasing power deepened the social crisis for millions of workers and their families.

At the same time, trade unions were confronted with an expanding arsenal of legal, administrative, and security measures designed to limit their independence and weaken their capacity to organize. In many countries, governments did not only repress trade union action directly; they also reshaped the legal environment to make independent organizing more difficult, more risky, and, in some cases, punishable.

The year 2025 may therefore be understood as a year in which workers' demands were increasingly contained, redirected, or absorbed by the state. In several countries, authorities sought to transform trade unions from independent organizations of struggle and representation into controlled structures of social management, service delivery, or political loyalty.

This report documents three major patterns that shaped the situation of trade union rights and freedoms in the Arab region during 2025.

I. Legislation as a Tool of Control

The year 2025 was marked by the growing use of law as an instrument to restrict rather than protect rights. Across the region, authorities increasingly relied on what may be described as preventive or preemptive legislation: legal frameworks designed not only to punish protest after it occurs, but to deter workers and trade unions from organizing in the first place.

Independent trade union activity was pushed into a zone of legal uncertainty. In several countries, ordinary acts of organizing, criticism, protest, collective bargaining were exposed to administrative obstruction, criminalization, judicial harassment.

Cybercrime and digital security laws were among the most visible tools of restriction. In countries including Egypt, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Tunisia, trade unionists and labor activists faced investigation or prosecution because of online posts criticizing living conditions, wage erosion, public policies, or restrictions on trade union freedoms. Legitimate labor criticism was often framed as a threat to public order, national security, or the prestige of state institutions.

Authorities also used political and professional exclusion to narrow the space for independent trade union leadership. In Bahrain and Kuwait, restrictions linked to political participation, public office, or professional eligibility affected the ability of trade union leaders to stand for election or exercise leadership roles. Such measures risk emptying trade union elections of genuine competition and undermining workers' right to freely choose their representatives.

This pattern reveals a profound contradiction. Many Arab constitutions formally recognize freedom of association, the right to organize, and, in some cases, the right to strike. Yet these guarantees are often undermined by secondary legislation, emergency powers, public order provisions, terrorism laws, protest laws, and restrictive administrative practices. The result is a widening gap between rights on paper and rights in practice.

In 2025, freedom of association remained formally protected in many legal texts, but in reality it was often treated as a conditional right, subject to security approval, administrative tolerance, or political loyalty.

II. Conflict and Fragility: Trade Unions Held Hostage by War

In countries affected by war, occupation, institutional collapse, or de facto authorities, trade union rights deteriorated further in 2025. In contexts such as Yemen, Syria, Libya, and Palestine, workers faced not only economic devastation but also the breakdown of legal and institutional protections.

In these settings, trade unions were often weakened, fragmented, coopted, or placed under the control of forces exercising power on the ground. Their ability to represent workers independently was severely

limited In some cases, trade union structures were used as instruments of mobilization, surveillance, or political control rather than as organizations defending workers' rights

Teachers, health workers, public employees, and other essential workers faced the risk of dismissal, arrest, intimidation, or nonpayment of wages when they demanded basic rights Claims for unpaid salaries, safer workplaces, social protection, or decent working conditions were often treated not as legitimate labor demands, but as threats to authority, security, or public order

Trade union pluralism was also undermined In some conflict-affected contexts, independent representation was replaced by controlled committees operating under security or political oversight These bodies often lacked the autonomy needed to defend workers effectively and were used to contain collective action rather than enable it. War and fragility do not suspend workers' rights On the contrary, they make protection, representation, and social dialogue more urgent The erosion of trade union freedoms in conflict settings leaves workers exposed at precisely the moment when they are most vulnerable.

III. The Gulf: Modernization Without Full Freedom

The Gulf countries in 2025 reflected a sharp contradiction between economic modernization and continued restrictions on fundamental labor rights.

Several states continued to promote labor market reform, social protection initiatives, digital transformation, and economic diversification Yet these reforms did not always translate into full respect for freedom of association, collective bargaining, or the right of migrant workers to organize.

The Sultanate of Oman offered some positive developments, particularly through the activation of its new labor law and the strengthening of social protection mechanisms These measures created openings for improved tripartite social dialogue and could provide a basis for further reform, provided that restrictions on independent trade union activity are lifted and workers are allowed to organize freely.

In Kuwait, by contrast, the dissolution of parliament and the suspension of constitutional life created a more restrictive political environment Trade unions were left operating under tighter oversight and faced the risk of being drawn into confrontation with decisions issued without full democratic scrutiny.

Across the Gulf, the continued legacy of the kafala system remained one of the most significant obstacles to the full enjoyment of labor rights by migrant workers Despite announced reforms in some countries, many migrant workers continued to face restrictions on mobility, dependency on employers, barriers to complaint mechanisms, and exclusion from genuine trade union representation

This remains a central test for the region No labor reform can be considered complete while migrant workers — who form a substantial part of the workforce in several Gulf economies — are denied the effective right to organize, bargain collectively, and seek protection without fear of retaliation, dismissal, detention, or deportation.

Conclusion: Rights on Paper Are Not Enough

The central contradiction of 2025 is clear: many governments continued to speak the language of reform, social protection, and development, while maintaining or expanding legal and administrative tools that restrict workers' collective power.

This contradiction is not technical It is political Independent trade unions are being weakened not because they obstruct stability, but because they give workers a voice in decisions about wages, work, social protection, public services, and economic policy.

The lesson of 2025 is that social stability cannot be built by silencing workers It cannot be built by criminalizing protest, controlling unions, restricting strikes, or reducing freedom of association to a constitutional promise without implementation.

Across the Arab region, the defense of trade union rights is inseparable from the defense of democracy, social justice, and human dignity Workers do not need symbolic recognition They need enforceable rights, independent unions, collective bargaining, protection from retaliation, and a genuine seat at the table where economic and social decisions are made.

Tunisia:

A “White Year” for Social Dialogue and a Test for Trade Union Freedoms



Introduction:

The year 2025 marked a critical turning point for rights and freedoms in Tunisia. The government's stated ambition to rebuild the “social state” unfolded alongside a continued narrowing of civic and political space. While the executive authorities advanced legislative measures presented as social reforms, public freedoms and trade union activity remained under pressure from a restrictive legal framework, most notably DecreeLaw 54 on information and communication systems.

At the trade union level, relations between the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) and the government remained largely frozen. This paralysis did not prevent important social gains, including measures to end subcontracting and outsourcing arrangements that had kept thousands of workers in precarious employment. Yet these gains occurred in a broader context of tension, judicial pressure, and restrictions on collective bargaining.

At the same time, protest dynamics shifted. Social mobilization increasingly emerged from grassroots and spontaneous movements, often outside traditional organizational frameworks. These protests reflected mounting frustration over the cost of living, deteriorating public services, unemployment, and the failure to implement previous agreements.

This chapter examines the state of rights and freedoms in Tunisia in 2025, focusing on the intersection between freedom of expression, freedom of association, the right to organize, and trade union practice. It also assesses the extent to which state practice is consistent with Tunisia's international obligations, in a political climate dominated by official discourse on “national sovereignty” and the “cleanup of public administration.” These narratives raise serious concerns when used to justify restrictions on dissent, trade union independence, and workers' collective action.

Economic and Social Situation in 2025:

Tunisia's economic situation in 2025 showed signs of partial recovery, but the social crisis remained deep. Macroeconomic indicators suggested some improvement, yet this did not translate into meaningful relief for many workers and households.

Economic growth was supported by agriculture, tourism, and construction, particularly following improved rainfall and the recovery of some productive sectors. However, this recovery remained fragile and uneven. It did not address the deeper structural problems facing the Tunisian economy, including debt pressure, limited fiscal space, unemployment, informality, regional inequality, and dependence on domestic borrowing.

Inflation showed signs of decline compared with previous years, but food prices and basic living costs remained a major burden on workers. For many households, the statistical improvement in inflation did not correspond to an improvement in daily life. Purchasing power continued to erode, especially among low-income workers, precarious workers, young people, women, and families in marginalized regions.

Public finances also remained under pressure. Although the state succeeded in mobilizing a significant share of the resources planned under the 2025 Finance Law, this relied heavily on domestic borrowing, reflecting continued difficulties in accessing external financing. Debt service pressures eased in some periods, but Tunisia's long-term financial constraints continued to affect public investment, wages, social protection, and public services.

Unemployment remained a central social challenge. Young people and women continued to be disproportionately affected, while regional disparities persisted. Social protection programs, including the Amen Social Program, continued to play an important role in reducing poverty, but they remained insufficient in the face of rising needs and the continuing deterioration of living conditions.

The key contradiction in 2025 was clear: Tunisia recorded signs of macroeconomic stabilization, but workers continued to experience economic insecurity, precarious employment, and declining trust in public institutions.

Legislative Framework for Rights and Freedoms

Constitutional Guarantees and Legal Reality

Tunisia's legal framework continues to formally recognize a broad range of rights and freedoms. The Constitution of 25 July 2022 includes provisions guaranteeing individual and public rights, freedom of expression, and the right to trade union activity and strike action. These rights have historically formed part of Tunisia's social and democratic contract.

However, the central issue in 2025 was not the absence of constitutional guarantees. It was the gap between the text of the law and its implementation. Rights that are formally protected on paper were frequently limited in practice through restrictive laws, administrative decisions, judicial proceedings, and security-based interpretations.

This gap was particularly visible in relation to freedom of expression, trade union freedoms, and the right to protest. Decree-Law 54 continued to cast a long shadow over public debate. Although presented as a tool to combat cybercrime and disinformation, it has been widely criticized by human rights defenders and trade union actors for enabling the prosecution of journalists, activists, bloggers, and trade unionists for legitimate expression.

Social and Labor Legislation

In 2025, Tunisia also witnessed important legislative developments in the field of social and labor rights. Measures aimed at ending subcontracting and outsourcing arrangements represented a significant victory for workers who had long been trapped in precarious forms of employment. These reforms strengthened the principle of decent work and responded to longstanding trade union demands for job stability, social protection, and equality of treatment.

The 2025 Finance Law also contributed to the establishment of new social protection mechanisms, including the Job Loss Insurance Fund. This mechanism is intended to provide protection for workers who lose their jobs for economic reasons and reflects an important recognition of the need for stronger social safety nets.

Yet these positive steps were undermined by ongoing restrictions on trade union dialogue and negotiation. Government circulars requiring prior authorization for negotiations with trade unions continued to obstruct direct social dialogue in many sectors. These procedural barriers weakened collective bargaining and limited the ability of workers' representatives to respond effectively to workplace grievances.

Judicial Oversight and Protection Mechanisms

Effective rights require effective remedies. In Tunisia, institutions such as the administrative judiciary and the National Authority for the Protection of Personal Data continue to play important roles in protecting rights and monitoring abuses.

The administrative judiciary remains a key mechanism for challenging unlawful administrative decisions that affect rights and freedoms. It has historically served as an important safeguard against arbitrary state action.

The National Authority for the Protection of Personal Data also has growing relevance in a context of accelerated administrative digitization and increased state reliance on digital systems.

However, institutional safeguards cannot compensate for a broader political environment in which critical voices are exposed to prosecution and trade union activity is increasingly subjected to administrative and judicial pressure. The effectiveness of protection mechanisms depends not only on their legal mandate, but also on their independence, accessibility, and ability to operate without political interference.

The status of trade union rights and freedoms in 2025:

The situation of trade union rights and freedoms in Tunisia in 2025 was marked by a sharp contradiction. On one side, workers secured important material gains, particularly through the move to end subcontracting. On the other, trade union activity faced escalating restrictions, prosecutions, and administrative pressure.

Social Gains and Legal Challenges

The prohibition of subcontracting in the public and private sectors was one of the most important labor developments of the year. For thousands of workers, it opened the possibility of job stability, social security coverage, and recognition after years of precarious work. Trade unions rightly considered this a historic achievement.

The activation of the Job Loss Insurance Fund also represented an important step toward stronger social protection for workers affected by economic dismissal.

Yet these gains did not occur within a healthy social dialogue framework. Instead, they took place against a background of frozen relations between the government and the UGTT, continued restrictions on negotiation, and unilateral decisionmaking. Social gains imposed from above cannot replace genuine collective bargaining. Workers' rights are strongest when they are negotiated through independent and representative unions, not when they depend on political will alone.

Prosecutions and Pressure on Trade Unionists

The relationship between public authorities and the trade union movement remained marked by mistrust, tension, and judicial conflict.

In 2025, several trade union leaders continued to face legal proceedings linked to their trade union activity, including charges related to “disrupting freedom of work” or “incitement” during sectoral strikes, particularly in transport and education.

The government's decision to end the system of fulltime trade union secondment in the public administration was viewed by trade union organizations as a direct attempt to weaken union structures and reduce their capacity to represent workers. Trade unions considered this measure inconsistent with the principles of freedom of association and the protection of workers' representatives, including those reflected in ILO Conventions No 87 and No 135.

Freedom of trade union expression also remained under pressure. DecreeLaw 54 continued to be used against trade unionists, labor activists, and bloggers for criticism of government economic policies and public administration. This contributed to a climate of self-censorship and fear, undermining the ability of workers and their representatives to speak openly about social and economic conditions..

Protest Movements and Social Mobilization

According to monitoring by the Tunisian Social Observatory, 2025 witnessed more than 4,500 protest movements, most of them linked to professional, social, and economic demands.

The education and health sectors remained among the most active areas of mobilization. Workers demanded the implementation of previous agreements, improved wages, better working conditions, and stronger public services.

A notable feature of 2025 was the rise of spontaneous protests, particularly in interior regions. These movements often emerged outside traditional trade union structures and reflected the depth of social frustration over the cost of living, unemployment, and the deterioration of public services.

This development should not be misread as a weakening of trade unionism. Rather, it reflects the urgency of rebuilding trust, renewing organizing methods, and reconnecting formal trade union structures with workers and communities experiencing economic and social abandonment.

International Concerns

International actors continued to raise concerns about the state of rights and freedoms in Tunisia.

The International Labour Organization has repeatedly emphasized the importance of tripartite social dialogue between government, employers, and workers, and the need to avoid unilateral measures that weaken collective bargaining and social peace.

Human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, have warned of the shrinking space for civic action and freedom of expression in Tunisia. These concerns are directly relevant to trade union rights. Independent trade unions cannot function in an environment where criticism is criminalized, protest is restricted, and public expression is treated as a security threat. Trade union freedom is not separate from democratic space. It is one of its foundations.

Examples of Violations of Trade Union Rights and Freedoms in 2025

The following cases illustrate patterns of pressure on trade union rights and freedoms in Tunisia during 2025.

Prosecutions Against Trade Union Leaders

Trade union leaders and representatives faced legal proceedings linked to their trade union activity, including:

- ✦ the Secretary General of the General Transport Federation;
- ✦ the Assistant Secretary General of the General Transport Federation;
- ✦ the Secretary General of the Municipalities' Regional Federation in Ben Arous;
- ✦ the former Secretary General of the Regional Union of Sfax;
- ✦ the Secretary General of the Union of Officials and Staff of the Ministry of Culture.

These cases reflect a broader pattern in which trade union activity is exposed to judicial pressure, particularly when linked to strikes, public criticism, or workplace mobilization.

Prosecutions Linked to Freedom of Expression

Trade unionists also faced proceedings related to public statements and media interventions, including:

- ✦ a member of the General Federation for Basic Education, in connection with statements concerning the return to school;
- ✦ the Secretary General of the Secondary Education Regional Federation in Kairouan.

Such cases raise serious concerns about the use of legal proceedings to deter trade union expression and weaken public debate on education, labor rights, and public policy.

Disguised Disciplinary Transfers

In the transport sector, the General Transport Federation reported the transfer of union-active technicians and drivers from Greater Tunis depots to workstations in interior regions shortly after they participated in protest actions.

In the agricultural sector, members of a basic union within the Office of State Lands were reportedly subjected to arbitrary transfers after exposing alleged misconduct in the management of state farms.

These measures appear to function as disguised disciplinary sanctions. Transfers used to punish workers for trade union activity violate the principle of protection against anti-union discrimination.

Suspensions and Dismissals of Trade Union Activists

In the Ministry of Culture, cases were reported of trade unionists being suspended on allegations such as “mismanagement” and “spreading confusion” after publicly criticizing administrative and financial practices related to major cultural festivals.

In municipalities around Tunis and Sfax, rights monitors reported dismissals of members of basic unions on allegations of serious misconduct. Trade unions argued that these measures were retaliatory and linked to the exposure of alleged corruption or mismanagement.

In the textile and cable sectors, particularly in Ben Arous and Sousse, trade unionists were reportedly dismissed after submitting strike notices or raising demands related to occupational safety and health. Employers justified some of these dismissals by citing the economic difficulties of the enterprise.

In petroleum service companies in southern Tunisia, particularly in Tataouine, trade unionists were reportedly dismissed after leading movements demanding the integration of outsourced workers.

Conclusion

Tunisia's experience in 2025 reveals the limits of reform without freedom. Social measures that improve workers' material conditions are important, but they cannot substitute for independent trade union rights, collective bargaining, and democratic social dialogue.

Ending subcontracting was a significant victory for workers. But this gain will remain fragile if trade unions are weakened, if collective bargaining is restricted, and if workers' representatives face prosecution, transfer, suspension, or dismissal for exercising legitimate rights.

The Tunisian state cannot build a credible social state while restricting the very organizations that defend social justice. A social state without independent unions risks becoming a state of social administration, not social democracy.

The urgent task is clear: lift restrictions on trade union activity, end prosecutions linked to legitimate expression and organizing, restore genuine tripartite social dialogue, protect workers' representatives from retaliation, and bring national practice into line with Tunisia's international obligations.

Workers in Tunisia do not need symbolic recognition. They need enforceable rights, independent representation, and the freedom to organize without fear.



Morocco

The Strike Law Shackles Workers and Restricts the Right to Protest



Introduction:

The year 2025 was a defining moment in Morocco’s institutional and legislative trajectory. The country continued to present itself as engaged in a process of modernization, social protection expansion, and legal reform. Yet this reform agenda unfolded alongside persistent concerns over public freedoms, freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and the effective exercise of trade union rights.

This dual reality marked the Moroccan human rights landscape throughout the year. On the one hand, the state advanced the “social state” agenda, expanded social protection mechanisms, and continued major legislative debates, including the reform of the Family Code and the Criminal Code. On the other hand, civil society organizations and trade unions continued to warn that the space for protest, collective action, and independent labor mobilization remained constrained.

The year 2025 therefore became a test of whether Morocco’s legal reforms would genuinely align national legislation and practice with the country’s international human rights and labor obligations. While official institutions, including the National Human Rights Council, pointed to progress in some areas of economic, social, and environmental rights, trade unions and human rights organizations continued to document obstacles affecting freedom of assembly, the right to organize, and the right to strike.

Economic and Social Situation in 2025

Economic Indicators: Resilience Under Pressure

In 2025, Morocco continued its policy of economic diversification while facing persistent climate, social, and employment challenges

The economy recorded growth estimated at around 3.5 percent. Nonagricultural sectors, particularly the automotive and aviation industries, continued to perform relatively well. However, water stress and repeated drought conditions continued to affect agricultural output and rural livelihoods.

Inflation declined compared with previous years, averaging around 2.1 percent, supported by cautious monetary policy from Bank AlMaghrib and relative stability in global commodity prices. Yet for workers and low-income households, the easing of inflation did not fully reverse the impact of earlier price increases. The cost of living remained a daily concern, especially for families affected by precarious work, unemployment, or low wages,

Major investment activity accelerated, particularly in connection with preparations for the 2030 World Cup. This contributed to growth in construction, public works, infrastructure, and related sectors. However, these investments also raised important questions about labor rights, occupational safety, fair wages, subcontracting, and workers' representation in largescale development projects.

Social Conditions: The Promise and Limits of the “Social State”

Morocco continued to implement the “social state” agenda launched under King Mohammed VI. Social protection programs expanded, including direct social support for vulnerable families and the extension of compulsory health coverage. The reform of the Family Code also remained a central legislative and social debate in 2025, with the stated aim of strengthening the rights of women and children.

Despite these developments, unemployment remained a structural challenge, estimated at around 13.5 percent nationally, with significantly higher levels among young people and in urban areas. Youth unemployment, precarious employment, informality, and regional disparities continued to undermine the promise of inclusive development.

The central contradiction of 2025 was therefore clear: Morocco advanced social protection reforms while many workers continued to face low wages, job insecurity, weak collective bargaining, and restrictions on protest.

Legislative Framework for Rights and Freedoms

Constitutional Guarantees and International Commitments

Morocco's 2011 Constitution remains the main legal reference for rights and freedoms. It devotes an entire chapter to fundamental rights and recognizes key civil, political, economic, and social guarantees. It also affirms the importance of international conventions ratified by Morocco, creating a constitutional basis for aligning domestic law with international human rights and labor standards. However, the gap between constitutional recognition and practical implementation remained a central concern in 2025. Rights formally guaranteed in law were often constrained by administrative practice, restrictive interpretations, or criminal provisions used against protest and labor mobilization.

Major Legislative Debates in 2025

Several major legislative processes shaped public debate in 2025.

The reform of the Family Code remained one of the most politically and socially significant reforms, with the stated objective of strengthening the protection of women and children while taking into account Morocco's social and legal context. Debate also continued around the Criminal Code and Criminal Procedure Code, including provisions related to alternative penalties, prison overcrowding, and procedural guarantees.

These reforms were presented as steps toward modernizing the justice system and protecting individual freedoms.

However, for the trade union movement, the most decisive legislative issue was the strike law. The regulation of the right to strike became a major point of confrontation between the government and trade union centers. While the government presented the law as necessary to organize a constitutionally guaranteed right and ensure continuity of public services, trade unions warned that several provisions imposed excessive procedural restrictions that risked emptying the right to strike of its substance.

Social Protection and Economic Rights

In 2025, Moroccan legislation continued to move toward framing social protection as a rights-based obligation rather than a discretionary form of assistance.

The extension of compulsory health coverage was a major element of this shift, reinforcing the right to health and access to care. Direct social support programs also strengthened the legal framework for state responsibility toward vulnerable households.

These reforms are important. But social protection cannot substitute for labor rights. Workers need both protection against poverty and the power to organize collectively, bargain, strike, and influence the conditions under which they work.

Digital Rights and Data Protection

Digital transformation also advanced in 2025. The National Commission for the Control of Personal Data Protection played an increasingly visible role in relation to privacy, digital governance, and the challenges posed by artificial intelligence; At the same time, the broader digital environment remained linked to concerns about freedom of expression, online criticism, and the use of criminal law in cases related to public speech. Human rights organizations continued to warn that digital regulation must not become a tool for restricting legitimate civic and trade union expression.

Human Rights Challenges

Reports by Moroccan human rights organizations, including the Moroccan Association for Human Rights, continued to identify a gap between the legal text and practice; Freedom of assembly remained unevenly protected. Authorities' interpretation of the laws governing public gatherings, vigils, and demonstrations continued to differ from that of civil society and trade unions. In practice, some protests were restricted, dispersed, or surrounded by security forces.

Freedom of the press also remained a concern. Debate continued over the use of the Criminal Code rather than the Press and Publication Law in cases involving journalists, activists, or public critics. This practice has a chilling effect on public debate and weakens the ability of workers, trade unions, and civil society actors to speak freely on social and economic issues.

Trade Union Rights and Freedoms in 2025

The situation of trade union rights and freedoms in Morocco in 2025 was marked by difficult negotiations and growing concern over the legal framework governing collective action; The government continued to express its intention to institutionalize social dialogue. However, trade unions faced serious challenges linked to the new legal environment, restrictions on protest, and the continued use of criminal provisions against labor mobilization.

The Controversial Strike Law

The year 2025 was decisive for trade union rights because of the adoption of the law regulating the right to strike.

Article 29 of the Constitution recognizes the right to strike. However, trade unions warned that the new law imposed procedural conditions that could make the exercise of this right excessively difficult in practice. These included requirements that unions considered disproportionate, restrictive, or incompatible with the

practical realities of labor disputes; The government defended the law as a mechanism to regulate strikes and preserve the continuity of public services. But regulation must not become restriction. A strike law that burdens workers with excessive procedural obstacles risks transforming a constitutional right into a right that exists only on paper. Following parliamentary debate, the law was approved and its provisions were upheld by the Constitutional Court. Yet its implementation will remain a critical test for Morocco's respect for freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to strike.

Labor Code Reform

A national debate also began on amending the Labor Code to adapt it to new forms of work, including remote work and fixed-term contracts. Trade unions expressed concern that reform could be used to weaken job security and normalize precarious employment unless it is anchored in workers' rights, social dialogue, and collective bargaining.

Social Dialogue Outcomes

In 2025, Morocco continued to implement the outcomes of the April 29 social dialogue agreement between the government, trade unions, and employers. The second tranche of the general wage increase for public sector employees was activated, amounting to an additional 500 Moroccan dirhams and completing a total increase of 1,000 Moroccan dirhams.

The minimum wage also increased further in the private sector and agriculture, with an additional 5 percent rise bringing the cumulative increase to 10 percent since the agreement was launched; the 2025 Finance Law also introduced income tax reductions that improved net wages for some workers, particularly segments of the middle class; these gains were important. But they did not resolve the deeper issue: workers cannot rely on periodic agreements alone. They need enforceable rights, continuous collective bargaining, and protection against retaliation when they organize, protest, or strike.

Field Challenges

Despite wage gains and social dialogue outcomes, serious challenges persisted. Article 288 of the Criminal Code remained one of the most controversial legal tools used against labor activism. The provision criminalizes "obstruction of freedom to work" and has been used in some cases against trade unionists following sit-ins or workplace protests. Trade unions continued to demand its repeal, arguing that it criminalizes legitimate collective action.

The right to organize also remained under pressure in some sectors. Trade unions reported difficulties establishing union offices in offshoring, large agricultural estates, hotels, commercial units, and other private sector workplaces. Workers' representatives faced dismissal, pressure, or obstruction after attempting to organize.

Restrictions on protest also continued. In 2025, security forces intervened to disperse or restrict vigils and demonstrations by certain professional and sectoral movements, including in education and medical training. Human rights organizations described these practices as part of a broader narrowing of the space for peaceful assembly.

Examples of Violations of Trade Union Rights and Freedoms in 2025

Prosecutions Under Article 288 of the Criminal Code

Article 288 remained one of the most contentious instruments used against trade union action in Morocco.

In the textile and services sectors in Casablanca and Kenitra, judicial proceedings were reportedly initiated against members of union offices affiliated with the Moroccan Labour Union following strikes demanding implementation of the minimum wage and improved occupational safety conditions.

In the cable sector in Tangier's Industrial Acceleration Zone, trade unionists were prosecuted after a sit-in protesting the dismissal of colleagues. The labor dispute was treated through a criminal lens, raising concerns about the use of criminal law to deter collective action.

Arbitrary Dismissal Linked to Trade Union Organizing

Dismissals targeting workers involved in establishing trade union offices continued in the private sector in agricultural estates in the SoussMassa region, the Democratic Confederation of Labour reported cases of mass dismissal of agricultural workers shortly after the legal file for establishing a union office was deposited with local authorities. Employers reportedly justified these dismissals by referring to the expiration of fixed-term contracts; In the trade and services sectors, workers' representatives in major hotel and commercial establishments in Marrakech and Agadir were reportedly dismissed after calling for institutionalized dialogue at the enterprise level.

These cases reflect a pattern in which employers use contract status, restructuring, or economic arguments to remove workers who attempt to organize.

Restrictions on Sectoral Coordinations in Education and Health

The year 2025 also witnessed tension with sectoral coordinations, particularly in education and health. Authorities often treated these movements as informal or illegal structures competing with the most representative unions; In the medical and pharmacy faculties file, security forces intervened to disperse sit-ins by students, interns, and medical trainees. Disciplinary sanctions, including suspensions from study and work, affected prominent figures in student and professional mobilization; In the education sector, the issue of temporarily suspended teachers remained unresolved. Salaries of a number of teachers affiliated with coordinations were suspended, a measure human rights organizations considered punitive and linked to the exercise of the right to protest.

Suppression of Marches and Vigils

Security restrictions were also imposed on protests against the strike law. In Rabat, demonstrators demanding the withdrawal of the draft law regulating strikes were reportedly prevented from accessing the square in front of Parliament. Incidents of pushing and crowd pressure were reported, resulting in injuries among some trade unionists. Such practices undermine the right to peaceful assembly and send a message that workers may be allowed to negotiate only within limits set by the authorities, but not to mobilize freely in public space.

Wage Deductions Against Strikers

In 2025, the administration expanded the application of the “no work, no pay” rule, particularly in territorial communities and the education sector. Wage deductions were imposed on workers who participated in strikes.

Trade unions described this practice as a form of financial pressure designed to weaken the right to strike before and after the adoption of the strike law. When wage deductions are applied broadly or punitively, they can deter workers from exercising a constitutionally guaranteed right.

Conclusion

Morocco's 2025 rights landscape was defined by contradiction. The state advanced social protection reforms, wage measures, and legal modernization. Yet the space for protest, organizing, and strike action remained restricted.

The adoption of the strike law represents a turning point. Its implementation will determine whether Morocco respects the right to strike as a living constitutional guarantee or reduces it to a regulated formality emptied of power.

Workers do not need a right to strike that exists only in legal theory. They need a right that can be exercised in practice, without fear of prosecution, dismissal, wage retaliation, or police intervention.

A genuine social state cannot be built by restricting the collective power of workers. Social protection, wage increases, and development projects must be accompanied by freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to protest without independent unions and enforceable labor rights, modernization risks becoming a project built over workers rather than with them.

Mauritania

Significant Progress, but at a Slow and Uneven Pace



Introduction:

The year 2025 marked an important moment in Mauritania's path toward political and social opening. The human rights situation continued to reflect a tension between legal modernization and the realities of implementation on the ground. In a rapidly changing regional and international context, Mauritania continued to take steps to address the legacy of slavery and promote social justice. At the same time, public freedoms, freedom of expression, and civic space remained contested issues between the authorities and civil society organizations.

At the trade union level, 2025 witnessed significant developments linked to major economic transformations, particularly in the extractive sectors, including mining and gas. While reports by national institutions pointed to progress in institutionalizing social dialogue, trade union organizations continued to face concrete obstacles to the exercise of the right to strike, the right to organize, and the right to represent workers, especially within foreign companies operating in strategic sectors.

The year was also a test of the compatibility of national legislation including the Law on the Protection of National Symbols and the Law on Associations with Mauritania's constitutional guarantees and international obligations. Progress in combating impunity for slavery-related crimes remains an important development. Yet human rights defenders and trade unionists continued to express concern over digital harassment, prosecutions, and restrictions on criticism, particularly at a time when the state is seeking to present itself as a stable destination for investment.

This chapter provides a critical assessment of rights and freedoms in Mauritania in 2025. It examines the relationship between legislative reforms, public freedoms, trade union activity, and the lived reality of workers, drawing on available field information and reports issued by national, trade union, and international bodies.

Economic and Social Situation in 2025:

The year 2025 represented a strategic turning point in Mauritania's development trajectory. The country began to benefit from its entry into the gas-exporting economy, while also strengthening social safety nets for vulnerable groups. However, economic growth did not automatically translate into full social protection, decent work, or trade union rights for all workers.

Economic Indicators: The Age of Gas and Minerals

Mauritania recorded strong economic performance in 2025, driven largely by the extractive sector. Economic growth was estimated at around **51 percent**, one of the stronger rates in the Maghreb region, supported by the start of gas exports from the Greater Tortue Ahmeyim field shared with Senegal.

The mining sector also remained central to the economy. The National Industrial and Mining Company continued to benefit from favorable global prices and the development of mining projects, including the F'Dérik mine.

Inflation stabilized at around **45 percent**, a significant decline compared with previous years. This contributed to relative stability in the prices of basic goods. However, workers continued to face pressure from the cost of living, especially in sectors where wages remain low and social protection coverage is weak.

Social Conditions: Social Protection and the Fight Against Inequality

The state continued to promote a policy of social equity aimed at reducing poverty, unemployment, and historical exclusion. The national **Taazour** social protection program expanded in 2025, including through the enlargement of the social registry and the extension of direct cash transfers and health insurance to vulnerable families.

Efforts to address the legacy of slavery also continued. The year saw measures aimed at strengthening the legal and judicial framework for prosecuting slavery-related crimes, alongside development projects intended to support the economic integration of victims and historically marginalized communities, particularly in rural and vulnerable areas.

Despite economic growth, unemployment remained a major challenge, estimated at around **115 percent**. Job creation efforts focused heavily on the gas, mining, and infrastructure sectors. Yet many workers, especially young people, women, informal workers, and workers from marginalized communities, continued to face exclusion from stable employment and social protection.

Infrastructure and Digital Transformation

Mauritania also advanced major infrastructure and energy projects in 2025. Progress was reported in green hydrogen initiatives, through which Mauritania aims to position itself in emerging global energy markets. Electricity interconnection and infrastructure development between major cities also continued. In transport, important phases of the strategic Tindouf–Zouérat road were completed, while work continued to develop the infrastructure of the Autonomous Port of Nouakchott to respond to increased trade and export activity. These projects may support economic development. However, they also raise urgent questions about labor rights, occupational safety and health, subcontracting, migrant labor, local employment, and the role of trade unions in monitoring working conditions.

Legislative Framework for Rights and Freedoms

Mauritania's legislative framework in 2025 reflected a policy of legal modernization under the weight of complex social balances. The year saw progress in institutionalizing some economic and social rights, but debate continued over the limits placed on public and digital freedoms.

Constitutional and Legal Foundations

The 1991 Constitution, as amended, remains the primary legal reference. It enshrines principles of freedom, equality, and human dignity. Mauritania has also ratified key international human rights instruments, including the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Convention against Torture.

In 2025, the role of national institutions, including the National Human Rights Commission, remained important as mechanisms for monitoring, reporting, and early warning. However, their effectiveness depends on their independence, resources, and capacity to respond to violations without political pressure.

Legislative Developments in 2025

The year witnessed legislative developments aimed at addressing longstanding human rights issues; Antislavery legislation was strengthened, including through tougher penalties and measures intended to support victims. The creation or strengthening of mechanisms for victim support and reparations represents an important step toward justice, provided that implementation is effective and accessible to affected communities.

The Law on Associations also moved toward a declaration or permit-based system rather than a prior authorization system. This contributed to an increase in the number of legally registered civil society and human rights organizations. This is a positive development, but the practical test remains whether organizations can operate freely, receive support, criticize public policy, and engage with communities without administrative pressure.

The Karama Law on combating violence against women also remained an important legislative issue. After years of controversy, 2025 saw efforts to strengthen women's legal protection, although debates continued over the scope, content, and enforcement of these protections.

Public and Digital Freedoms

Despite legal progress, serious concerns remained regarding public and digital freedoms.

The Law on the Protection of National Symbols continued to raise concern because of the broad interpretation of provisions that can restrict political criticism, including online expression. Human rights defenders warned that such laws may be used to silence criticism of state institutions.

Cybercrime legislation also remained controversial. While authorities presented amendments as necessary to combat hate speech and online abuse, media and human rights organizations warned that these texts could be used to restrict digital journalism, civic activism, and trade union criticism; In a rights-based legal order, public institutions must be protected through accountability and transparency, not through criminalizing criticism.

Trade Union Rights and Freedoms in 2025

Labor and Trade Union Legislation

In the context of the gas and mining boom, labor legislation was updated to respond to new economic realities. Revisions to the Labor Code included provisions requiring foreign companies operating in the gas and mining sectors to prioritize Mauritanian workers and respect the right to organize in extractive sites. These provisions are significant because extractive industries are central to the country's economic future.

Social protection reforms also sought to institutionalize the Taazour program as a legal right for vulnerable groups, transforming assistance from a discretionary measure into a state obligation.

However, the existence of legal provisions is not enough. The real test is whether workers in mining, gas, ports, education, public services, and informal sectors can organize freely, elect their representatives, bargain collectively, and strike without fear.

Trade Union Organization and Representation

The permit-based system contributed to greater flexibility in establishing trade unions and professional federations. By 2025, the number of sectoral trade union structures reportedly exceeded 30, including central and independent organizations.

This pluralism is positive. Yet pluralism without protection remains fragile. Trade unions continued to report obstacles in strategic sectors, particularly where foreign companies, subcontractors, and security considerations restrict access to workers.

Social Dialogue and Sectoral Agreements

In 2025, several rounds of social dialogue took place under the auspices of the Ministry of Public Service and Labor. In the education sector, a framework agreement was signed in mid-2025 to improve teachers' conditions and increase allowances related to distance, housing, and work location. This helped reduce the intensity of strikes compared with previous years. A 10 percent increase in the minimum wage in the private sector was activated from January 2025, in response to rising living costs and global inflationary pressures. These steps are important, but they remain insufficient as long as more than 70 percent of the workforce remains outside effective trade union protection and social security coverage. Informality remains one of the deepest rights gaps in Mauritania.

Workers from Historically Marginalized Communities

As part of social justice initiatives, thousands of workers from vulnerable groups, including former victims of slavery and communities affected by its legacy, were reportedly integrated into public works projects through the Taazour agency.

This is a significant development, but integration must not be limited to employment access. These workers must also have the right to organize, join unions, bargain collectively, and benefit from full social protection. Social inclusion without labor rights risks reproducing dependency under a new form.

Examples of Violations of Trade Union Rights and Freedoms in 2025

Based on reports by Mauritanian trade union centers, human rights organizations, and national monitoring bodies, the following cases illustrate the main challenges facing trade unions and workers in 2025.

Crackdown on Mining Workers' Protests in Chami and Zouérat

Gold exploration areas in the north, particularly Chami and Zouérat, witnessed serious tensions in 2025. Security forces, including the National Gendarmerie, intervened to disperse sit-ins by traditional and semi-industrial mining workers protesting high taxes and the lack of adequate occupational safety and health conditions. Leaders of the Prospectors' Coordination Committee were reportedly arrested on charges of "inciting an unauthorized demonstration" and "obstructing a public facility." Some received suspended sentences.

These cases reflect the criminalization of labor protest in a sector marked by hazardous working conditions and weak social protection.

Restrictions on Union Activity in the Gas Sector

With the start of gas production in the Greater Tortue Ahmeyim field, union representation within foreign contracting companies became a major concern. The Free Confederation of Mauritanian Workers reported that its delegates were denied access to offshore platforms and logistical support sites where they sought to meet workers. Companies reportedly invoked "security reasons" and the confidentiality of international contracts.

Trade union reports also identified threats of contract termination against Mauritanian workers who attempted to establish union offices within foreign subcontracting companies operating in the energy

sector these practices undermine freedom of association and create a climate of fear in one of the country's most strategic sectors.

Use of the Law on National Symbols Against Labor Activists

The Law on the Protection of National Symbols was reportedly used in 2025 to restrict digital trade union criticism trade unionists in the education and health sectors were summoned for questioning by cybercrime authorities after publishing videos criticizing the failure of social dialogue with relevant ministries They were reportedly accused of harming the prestige of state institutions.

Such measures risk turning legitimate labor criticism into a criminal offense Workers and trade unionists have the right to criticize public policy, expose failures, and demand accountability.

Violations Against Dockworkers at the Port of Nouakchott

Dockworkers at the Port of Nouakchott continued to face serious violations of employment and trade union rights several vigils organized by dockworkers demanding retirement rights and health insurance coverage were reportedly prohibited.

Human rights organizations also documented cases in which unionized workers were replaced with nonunion or irregular workers in order to break strikes Such practices violate the principle of protection against antiunion discrimination and weaken collective action.

Administrative Pressure Against Teachers

Teachers also faced administrative reprisals linked to collective action within the framework of mobilizations led by the Joint Coordination of Education Unions, dozens of cases of punitive transfer were reported Unionized teachers were transferred to remote areas in Hodh Ech Chargui and Tiris Zemmour shortly after participating in national strikes.

In 2025, the Ministry of Education also expanded salary deductions against striking teachers In some cases, deductions reportedly exceeded proportional limits and deprived teachers of more than half of their monthly salary

Salary deductions used as punishment for strike action weaken the right to collective protest and place disproportionate pressure on workers already facing difficult living conditions.

Conclusion

Mauritania made visible progress in 2025, particularly in social protection, antislavery measures, legal modernization, and the development of social dialogue These gains should be recognized ,but progress remains slow, uneven, and fragile Legal reform will have limited impact if workers cannot organize freely, if protests are dispersed, if union leaders face prosecution, and if strategic sectors such as mining, gas, and ports remain closed to effective trade union representation.

Mauritania's new economic phase must not be built on restricted freedoms Gas, mining, infrastructure, and green energy projects must be accompanied by decent work, occupational safety, collective bargaining, and full protection of trade union rights.

A development model that excludes workers from decisionmaking cannot produce justice Economic growth must be matched by freedom of association, enforceable labor rights, social protection, and genuine social dialogue.

Mauritania's challenge is no longer only to modernize its laws It is to ensure that those laws protect workers in practice especially the most vulnerable, the most precarious, and those historically excluded from power.

Libya

When Political Rivals Unite to Weaken Trade Unions



Introduction:

The year 2025 was an exceptional and deeply complex moment for rights and freedoms in Libya. The human rights situation continued to be shaped by political fragmentation, institutional division, and the absence of a unified rule of law framework. In a context of “neither war nor peace,” and amid stalled efforts to unify executive authority, public freedoms remained under severe pressure. In some areas, security restrictions were systematic; in others, legal guarantees were eroded by the power of armed actors and competing authorities.

Democratic and civic life remained hostage to shifting military and political balances. The absence of a permanent constitution, the weakness of judicial oversight, and the persistence of parallel institutions created an environment in which rights were unevenly protected and frequently violated.

At the labor and trade union level, 2025 witnessed growing protest activity driven by declining purchasing power, liquidity shortages, delayed salaries, inflation, and exchange rate instability. The General Union of Libyan Workers and independent professional federations sought to defend workers’ interests in education, health, oil, and public services. Yet these mobilizations were met with restrictive administrative decisions, security pressure, and prosecutions against leaders of labor movements. Charges such as “destabilization,” “disrupting production,” and “obstructing vital facilities” were used particularly in the oil sector, where labor demands became entangled with political struggles over the country’s main source of revenue.

The year also tested the ability of civil society and trade union organizations to operate under restrictive laws and regulations, including Regulation 186 on associations. Human rights organizations, including the National Commission for Human Rights in Libya, have criticized this framework as a tool for imposing security and administrative control over civic space.

Although 2025 saw a relative decline in direct armed confrontation, restrictions on digital freedom of expression increased. The Cybercrime Law continued to be used against activists, bloggers, and trade unionists. This created a climate of intimidation that directly affected the ability of workers and their representatives to demand basic rights.

Economic and Social Situation in 2025

Oil Under the Guillotine of Politics

Libya's economic situation in 2025 remained unstable and heavily dependent on oil production, which continued to be vulnerable to political conflict, local demands, and security disruption; Oil production stabilized during much of the year at around 12 million barrels per day. However, repeated shutdowns affected major fields such as Sharara and El Feel, either because of demand-based protests or political pressure. According to reports by the National Oil Corporation, these disruptions caused major revenue losses during the year.

The banking system continued to face acute liquidity shortages. Many Libyan citizens struggled to access cash, while the Libyan dinar fluctuated sharply on the parallel market. At certain points, the exchange rate reached approximately 75 dinars to the US dollar before the Central Bank intervened through adjustments to the tax on foreign currency sales.

Libya recorded economic growth estimated at around 4.8 percent in 2025. However, this growth was fragile and highly exposed to oil prices, export stability, and political control over revenue. The economy remained largely undiversified, leaving workers and households vulnerable to every disruption in the oil sector.

Eroding Purchasing Power and a Widening Social Gap

Middle and low-income groups were directly affected by the economic crisis. Inflation reached around 12 percent in 2025, with increases concentrated in imported basic goods, medicines, and daily necessities. This sharply reduced the purchasing power of public employees and low-income workers; Youth unemployment remained extremely high, exceeding 40 percent according to international estimates. Poverty expanded to include households that had previously been considered part of the middle class, particularly where salaries were delayed or paid irregularly.

Public services showed limited improvement in some areas, including greater stability in the electricity network and fewer loadshedding hours compared with previous years. However, the health sector remained severely weakened by shortages of medicines, medical supplies, and specialized staff, many of whom had emigrated.

Structural and Institutional Crisis

Financial division remained one of the main obstacles to economic governance. The split between financial authorities in Tripoli and Benghazi continued to obstruct the adoption of a unified national budget for 2025. This created confusion in development spending, increased public debt, and weakened accountability over public resources. Reconstruction projects continued in Benghazi, Derna, following the floods, and Tripoli. However, these projects faced criticism over transparency, financing, public procurement, and the exclusion of workers and communities from meaningful oversight.

Legislative Framework for Rights and Freedoms

Libya's legislative framework in 2025 remained transitional, fragmented, and fragile. It was caught between inherited laws, controversial new legislation, and a security reality in which armed actors often imposed rules beyond the reach of a unified judiciary. State institutions, including the judiciary, remained divided. This affected the consistency of legal interpretation, the distribution of jurisdiction, and access to justice. Security challenges persisted, particularly in relation to armed groups and organizations described by authorities as terrorist threats. These challenges were used to justify exceptional measures that often restricted public freedoms.

Judicial Fragmentation and Institutional Division

The division of the judicial system led to inconsistent interpretation and application of laws, especially those governing jurisdiction between civil and military courts. Security-related cases were handled differently across regions, reflecting the absence of a unified legal framework and the weakness of national oversight.

This fragmentation undermined equality before the law. Workers, trade unionists, and activists faced different levels of protection depending on the authority controlling the area where they lived or worked.

Law No 3 of 2023 and Trade Union Independence

Law No 3 of 2023 on trade unions remained in force in 2025, together with its executive regulation, Decision No 29 of 2023 and subsequent amendments. This framework altered the nature of trade union work in Libya by shifting unions away from independent worker representation and toward structures subject to state control.

The law grants broad powers to government bodies, including the House of Representatives and affiliated committees, to:

- ✦ approve union statutes;
- ✦ supervise the formation of unions;
- ✦ intervene in union procedures;
- ✦ assign the High National Elections Commission to supervise trade union elections.

These provisions violate the principle of trade union independence. Workers must have the right to establish organizations of their own choosing, elect their representatives freely, and conduct trade union activities without interference from public authorities. In practice, the law risks transforming trade unions from organs of worker struggle and representation into administrative bodies operating under state supervision.

The Unified Salary Law: Reform Undermined by Division

In 2025, attempts were made to implement the Unified Salary Law as a tool to promote social justice and unify the wage system. However, the absence of a unified national budget led to partial, unequal, and inconsistent implementation. This emptied much of the law's reform content.

The practical application of the law revealed serious inequities. It failed to distinguish adequately between high-risk occupations and routine administrative functions. This imbalance affected vital professional categories, including:

- ✦ maritime pilots;
- ✦ doctors and nursing staff;
- ✦ radiology and laboratory technicians;
- ✦ air traffic controllers.

A salary reform that does not account for occupational risk, skills, responsibility, and working conditions cannot achieve genuine fairness. For workers, wage justice is not only about unification; it is about recognition, dignity, and the value of labor.

Constitutional Vacuum and Weak Oversight

In 2025, Libya still lacked a permanent constitution and continued to rely on the interim Constitutional Declaration of 2011 and its amendments. This constitutional vacuum produced several consequences;

First, legislation remained fragmented. Competing authorities in the east and west continued to issue conflicting laws and decisions, creating confusion around citizenship rights, labor rights, and access to justice.

Second, constitutional oversight remained weak. At certain periods, political tensions affected the ability of the Supreme Court to rule on constitutional challenges concerning fundamental freedoms.

Third, rights protection remained vulnerable to political and military power. Without a permanent constitution and unified institutions, workers and trade unionists lacked stable guarantees against arbitrary interference.

Laws Restricting Public Freedoms

In 2025, authorities increased reliance on digital and civic control through laws described by human rights organizations as repressive. The Cybercrime Law remained in force and continued to be used to prosecute activists, bloggers, and trade unionists on vague charges such as “undermining public order” or “violating public morals.” These broad provisions restricted digital freedom of expression and created a climate of fear for trade unionists. Digital repression has direct consequences. Workers increasingly use online platforms to expose delayed wages, unsafe conditions, corruption, and failures in public services. Criminalizing online expression therefore undermines both freedom of speech and trade union activity.

Regulation 186 on Associations

During 2024 and 2025, civil society organizations and trade unions faced increasing pressure under restrictive legal and administrative frameworks. In the context of continued political and institutional division, competing authorities used laws and regulations to limit civic work and public freedoms. Regulation 186, governing the work of associations, remained one of the most serious obstacles. It granted the Civil Society Commission broad powers of supervision and control, including the authority to inspect premises, freeze bank accounts, suspend activities, and dissolve organizations without a court order.

The regulation also requires prior approval for receiving funding or communicating with foreign entities. These restrictions undermine the independence of organizations and limit their ability to operate effectively.

For trade unions and labor organizations, such provisions create a hostile environment. Unions cannot function freely if their finances, communications, structures, and activities are subject to broad administrative control.

Judicial Protection and Criminal Justice

Despite attempts to reform the judiciary in 2025, major gaps remained. Military justice continued to be used in eastern Libya, including against civilians. This practice contradicts constitutional guarantees and international human rights standards.

Reports of prolonged pretrial detention without formal charges also increased, particularly in prisons and detention facilities controlled by armed groups. The lack of full implementation of criminal procedure safeguards exposed activists, workers, and trade unionists to arbitrary detention and intimidation.

Economic and Trade Union Rights: Laws Without Effective Protection

Labor Relations Law No 12 of 2010 remained the main legal framework governing labor relations. However, its implementation remained weak, especially regarding the right to strike. Administrative decisions frequently blocked strikes on the grounds of “national security” or the protection of vital facilities. Such restrictions were particularly severe in the oil sector and other strategic industries. The Unified Salary Law was also intended to reduce social inequality, but without a unified national budget, its application remained inconsistent and unfair across sectors. A legal framework that exists but cannot be enforced does not protect workers. Rights without implementation are not rights; they are promises without power.

Trade Union Rights and Freedoms in 2025

The situation of trade union rights and freedoms in Libya remained marked by contestation, restriction, and institutional interference. Trade union work faced structural obstacles arising from political division, legal fragmentation, and the absence of a modern framework that protects workers’ representatives. Instead of guaranteeing freedom of association, authorities in both the east and west continued to interfere in trade union structures and activities.

Restrictive Legacy and Absence of Reform

Trade union practice remained governed by outdated and restrictive legal provisions. Decisionmaking was centralized, and executive authorities in different parts of the country directly interfered in the appointment, suspension, or freezing of union executive boards.

This emptied the principle of trade union independence of its substance Independent unions also faced obstacles in obtaining licenses, opening bank accounts, and operating legally These obstacles were reinforced by Regulation 186, which treated independent civic and trade union activity as something to be monitored rather than protected.

The Oil Sector: Trade Union Rights Under Security Scrutiny

Because oil remains Libya's main source of public revenue, labor mobilization in this sector was especially vulnerable to repression

In 2025, armed formations intervened to break up sit-ins by oil field workers, including in fields such as Sharara, where workers demanded better wages and improved occupational safety and health conditions leaders of labor movements were summoned for questioning before security and military bodies on charges of "disrupting production" and "damaging the national economy" These charges were used to intimidate workers and deter them from exercising the right to strike;The oil sector illustrates Libya's core contradiction: workers are essential to the country's survival, yet their collective demands are treated as threats to national stability.

Examples of Violations in 2025

Suspensions in Education and Health

In the education and health sectors, trade unionists in Tripoli and Benghazi were temporarily suspended after calling for general strikes to protest delayed payment of unified salaries and the deterioration of purchasing power;These measures appeared punitive and were aimed at deterring workers from collective action.

Prosecution Under the Cybercrime Law

The Cybercrime Law was used against trade union activists who published social media posts criticizing the performance of the Ministries of Labor and Finance Their statements were treated as acts "undermining civil peace";This practice criminalizes legitimate labor criticism and restricts the ability of workers to expose failures in public policy.

Travel Restrictions on Trade Union Leaders

Human rights reports in 2025 documented cases in which trade union leaders were prevented from travelling to participate in international conferences, including meetings of the International Labour Organization The stated justification was the absence of prior security approval such restrictions violate the right of trade unions to communicate with international labor organizations and participate in global mechanisms for the protection of workers' rights.

Conclusion

Libya's trade union crisis in 2025 was not only the result of war or institutional collapse It was also the result of political choices made by rival authorities that, despite their divisions, often converged in one objective: weakening independent worker representation

Political rivals may disagree over power, territory, and institutions, but they have repeatedly acted in ways that restrict trade unions, control civic space, and silence workers' demands;This is the central danger for Libyan workers In a country where oil wealth remains contested and public institutions remain divided, workers are being asked to carry the burden of instability while being denied the right to organize freely.

Libya cannot rebuild social peace by suppressing trade union activity It cannot achieve wage justice while interfering in unions It cannot protect national wealth while criminalizing the workers who keep vital sectors functioning,the urgent priorities are clear: guarantee trade union independence, repeal or amend restrictive laws and regulations, end security interference in labor disputes, protect the right to strike, stop prosecutions under vague cybercrime provisions, and ensure that workers are represented in national reconstruction and economic reform without independent unions, Libya's reconstruction will remain incomplete Without workers' rights, stability will remain fragile.

Algeria

A Law Reshaping Trade Unions to Fit the Authorities' Design



Introduction:

The year 2025 marked a decisive test for rights and trade union freedoms in Algeria. Under the banner of the “new Algeria,” the authorities continued to consolidate a dense legal framework adopted in recent years. Official discourse emphasized the construction of a state based on law, institutional modernization, and the preservation of public order. In practice, this produced a complex rights landscape: limited and controlled openings in some areas, alongside procedural restrictions on protest, organizing, and independent trade union activity.

At the trade union level, 2025 was the first major test of the full implementation of Law No 2302 on the exercise of the right to organize. This law redrew the map of labor representation in Algeria. While national institutions highlighted progress in institutionalizing social dialogue and promoting social stability, independent unions faced significant obstacles in adapting their structures, membership base, and representation to the new legal requirements.

The year also saw the continuation of public debate over the limits of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. New media laws, cybercrime provisions, and legal measures presented by the authorities as safeguards against “information disorder” and “fake news” were viewed by human rights defenders as tools granting the administration broad discretion. These measures risk restricting civic space and weakening the ability of workers, journalists, activists, and trade unionists to criticize public policy.

Economic and Social Situation in 2025

Growth Momentum and the Challenge of Diversification

Algeria's economy in 2025 showed signs of stability, supported by energy revenues and the early results of investments outside the hydrocarbon sector

Economic growth was estimated at around **42 percent**, driven by the performance of the hydrocarbons sector, the development of mining projects, including Ghar Djebilet, and growth in desert agriculture and manufacturing industries

Algeria also continued its strategy to increase nonhydrocarbon exports, which reached approximately **USD 9 billion** by the end of 2025 Iron and steel, cement, and fertilizer emerged as key sectors in this diversification strategy

The country maintained a comfortable trade surplus, supported by import rationalization and stable natural gas revenues Foreign exchange reserves increased to more than **USD 75 billion** by the end of the year

Yet this relative macroeconomic stability did not eliminate the structural dependence on hydrocarbons Diversification remained incomplete, and the benefits of growth were unevenly felt by workers, especially those in precarious employment, young jobseekers, and workers outside secure publicsector positions

Social Conditions: Purchasing Power and Social Protection

Social policy remained a central priority for the authorities in 2025, particularly through measures presented as strengthening the "social state"

The final phase of wage increases came into effect in January 2025, bringing the cumulative increase to around **47 percent** since 2023 The unemployment allowance was also increased, and eligibility was expanded to include additional categories of university graduates

Inflation stabilized at around **75 percent**, a slight decline compared with 2024 However, prices of several consumer goods, including meat and basic food products, continued to place significant pressure on working and middleclass households Government interventions through subsidized markets and import controls helped ease some pressure but did not fully restore purchasing power

Housing policy also remained a major component of social policy In 2025, the state distributed large quotas of housing units across the country and launched the AADL 3 housing program, which attracted millions of applicants

Labor Market and Structural Transformations

Unemployment declined slightly to around **108 percent**, supported by investment projects and the definitive integration of preemployment contract holders into permanent positions

Digitization also accelerated in the tax, customs, postal, and financial sectors Electronic payment became more widespread in major commercial spaces, with coverage reportedly exceeding 60 percent

These developments were presented as evidence of modernization However, modernization cannot be measured only by digital systems and macroeconomic indicators It must also be measured by the ability of workers to organize independently, bargain collectively, strike, and participate in shaping economic and social policy

Legislative Framework for Rights and Freedoms

Algeria's rights framework in 2025 was shaped by the 2020 constitutional amendment and a series of organic and ordinary laws that sought to balance institutional modernization with what the authorities described as the requirements of national stability

Constitutional Reference: The 2020 Constitution

The November 2020 Constitution remained the main reference for rights and freedoms. It recognizes several fundamental rights, including protections for women, freedom of expression, and freedom of the press.

Article 40 requires the state to protect women from all forms of violence in all places. In 2025, this provision was reflected in efforts to strengthen criminal penalties and legal protections.

Article 54 prohibits the suspension of media outlets without a judicial decision, recognizes journalists' right to access information, and protects professional secrecy.

These guarantees are important. But as in many contexts, the central question is not whether rights exist in the constitutional text. It is whether they are protected in practice, especially when workers, journalists, trade unionists, and activists criticize public authorities or organize collectively.

Pivotal Legislative Reforms

The period from 2023 to 2025 saw the full implementation of laws that redefined the boundaries of public activity.

The new media framework introduced regulatory structures for print and electronic press. The law prohibits foreign funding of local media and requires disclosure of funding sources. While the authorities present these measures as tools of transparency and sovereignty, human rights defenders have warned that they may restrict independent journalism and limit critical reporting. Law No 2302 on the exercise of the right to organize became one of the most significant legal developments affecting workers. In 2025, the law's standards of representativeness were strictly applied. The law also separated trade union responsibility from political activity, prohibiting trade union leaders from simultaneously holding responsibility within political parties.

Amendments to the Penal Code and Criminal Procedure Code sought to reduce the use of pretrial detention by requiring judges to justify its exceptional character. This reform is important, but its impact depends on whether courts apply it consistently in cases involving protest, labor mobilization, and freedom of expression.

Digital Rights and “Cyber Sovereignty”

With accelerated administrative digitization, Algeria also expanded legal tools governing digital space, specialized courts and cybercrime provisions were used to combat hate speech and the spread of “fake news.” Authorities stated that the legal framework distinguished between political criticism and harm to public order. However, broad concepts such as “fake news,” “destabilization,” and “harm to institutions” remained vulnerable to restrictive interpretation.

The National Authority for the Protection of Personal Data became fully operational in 2025, requiring institutions to protect citizens' data under financial and criminal penalties. This was a positive step for privacy protection, provided that data governance is accompanied by transparency, independent oversight, and safeguards against surveillance.

Economic and Social Rights

In 2025, Algeria prioritized material and social rights as part of its social state agenda. The unemployment allowance was institutionalized as a permanent legal right for first-time jobseekers. Housing laws and urban planning measures were also adopted or strengthened to improve access to social housing and regulate construction.

These measures improved social protection for parts of the population. Yet social rights cannot be reduced to state assistance. Workers also need collective power, independent representation, and meaningful participation in decisions affecting wages, employment, social protection, and public services.

Trade Union Rights and Freedoms in 2025

The situation of trade union rights and freedoms in Algeria underwent a significant shift toward strict institutional control. The new legal framework completed the process of redrawing the trade union landscape.

Enforcement of Law No 2302

The year 2025 was marked by the full application of Law No 2302 on the exercise of the right to organize. The separation between trade union activity and political activity was strictly enforced. Several trade union leaders reportedly resigned from political responsibilities in order to preserve the legality of their trade union mandates.

The representativeness threshold of **25 percent** was also adopted as a condition for participation in social dialogue within institutions. This pushed some smaller unions to merge or form broader coalitions in order to meet the new requirements.

The stated aim of representativeness criteria is to organize social dialogue. But when thresholds are applied rigidly, they can exclude independent unions, restrict pluralism, and limit workers' freedom to choose their representatives. Representativeness should strengthen collective bargaining, not become a mechanism for filtering unions according to administrative preference.

Social Dialogue and Material Gains

The authorities prioritized social peace in 2025 through measures to improve purchasing power. The completion of the wage review in January 2025 brought cumulative wage increases to around 47 percent since 2023. In the education and health sectors, unions signed "stability contracts" with relevant ministries, including revisions to compensation systems in exchange for adherence to mediation mechanisms before resorting to strike action.

These agreements produced material gains. But trade union rights cannot be reduced to wage settlements negotiated under pressure. Social dialogue must be free, independent, and based on the right of workers to organize, bargain, and strike without administrative or judicial intimidation.

Field Challenges and Restrictions

Despite financial gains, independent unions reported serious rights challenges. Restrictions on the right to strike remained a major concern. Authorities made broad use of requisition mechanisms in health, transport, and other essential sectors to maintain minimum service. Unions argued that the scope of these orders emptied strikes of their substance and weakened workers' bargaining power.

Administrative and judicial prosecutions also continued. Human rights reports monitored cases involving trade unionists prosecuted for "unauthorized assembly" or "obstruction of freedom to work" following workplace protests, particularly in local administration and postal sectors. Some newly established unions continued to face delays in receiving registration receipts or accreditation documents because of the complexities of aligning their structures with the new trade union law. Without registration, unions cannot open bank accounts, legally represent workers, or participate effectively in collective labor disputes.

Examples of Violations of Trade Union Rights and Freedoms in 2025

Application of Article 12 of Law No 2302

In 2025, authorities strictly enforced provisions preventing the combination of trade union responsibility and political activity. Trade union leaders in the education and higher education sectors reportedly faced administrative pressure and legal actions aimed at revoking their trade union status because of political affiliation or publications considered to fall outside a "strictly professional" framework.

Some trade unionists in the public administration sector were forced to choose between their union responsibilities and the exercise of political rights that are constitutionally guaranteed. This approach risks undermining both trade union freedom and civic participation. Trade union independence means independence from state control and employer interference; it should not be transformed into a tool to isolate workers' representatives from public life.

Obstruction of the Right to Strike Through Requisition Orders

In 2025, requisition orders became a central tool for limiting strike action. In university hospitals, during strikes by resident doctors and nurses, the administration expanded requisition orders to include large numbers of strikers under the pretext of guaranteeing minimum service. Unions argued that these orders deprived strikes of their practical and demands-based impact. In the transport sector, including railways and metro services, public authorities reportedly enforced requisition orders against striking workers, with threats of immediate dismissal if they did not return to their posts. Minimum service requirements may be legitimate in strictly defined essential services. But they must be proportionate, negotiated, and limited. When used broadly, they become a strikebreaking mechanism.

Restrictions on Unaccredited Unions

Despite the legal recognition of a declaration-based system, an “access crisis” persisted in 2025. New trade union confederations, particularly in the services and manufacturing sectors, complained that the Ministry of Labor delayed issuing registration receipts. These delays prevented them from opening bank accounts or representing workers before courts in collective labor disputes.

Trade unionists in major national companies were also prevented from holding general assemblies inside workplaces on the grounds that they did not meet the 25 percent representativeness threshold required under the new law. These restrictions undermine freedom of association by preventing workers from organizing at the earliest and most critical stages of union formation.

Prosecutions for “Obstruction of Freedom to Work”

Trade unionists and local branch leaders in provinces in eastern and central Algeria faced prosecutions for “obstruction of freedom to work” after closing administrative offices during protests over delayed payment of allowances. In other cases, media and cybercrime laws were used against trade unionists who published statements about working conditions or alleged mismanagement in health institutions. Their posts were reportedly treated as destabilizing national institutions or spreading “fake news”. These prosecutions blur the line between legitimate labor criticism and criminal conduct. Workers and trade unionists must be able to denounce unsafe conditions, wage delays, corruption, and mismanagement without fear of prosecution.

Conclusion

Algeria's 2025 experience shows the limits of a model that combines social measures with tight control over civic and trade union space. Wage increases, housing programs, unemployment support, and social protection measures are important. But they cannot substitute for freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to strike. A social state that restricts independent trade unions risks becoming a system of managed social peace rather than genuine social justice. Law No 2302 has become the central test of Algeria's commitment to trade union freedom. If applied to strengthen pluralism, protect workers' representatives, and support collective bargaining, it could contribute to social dialogue. If used to filter unions, restrict strikes, delay accreditation, and isolate independent voices, it will reshape the trade union movement to fit the authorities' design rather than workers' will. Workers in Algeria need more than material concessions. They need independent unions, protection from retaliation, legal recognition without obstruction, and the ability to protest and strike without being treated as a threat to public order. No durable social peace can be built by weakening the organizations that give workers a collective voice.

Egypt

Judicial Overload as a Tool to Weaken Trade Unions



Introduction:

In 2025, Egypt's human rights landscape remained marked by a sharp contradiction between the state's reformist discourse and the persistence of systematic repression. While the government continued to promote the National Human Rights Strategy for 2021–2026 and the "National Dialogue," civil society organizations documented an increasingly hostile environment for fundamental freedoms.

The year was particularly significant because Egypt entered its Universal Periodic Review process before the United Nations. Despite official commitments to close politically motivated cases and improve rights protections, the authorities continued to use prolonged pretrial detention, special courts, vague security charges, and administrative restrictions to silence peaceful opposition voices, journalists, rights defenders, workers, and trade unionists.

Violations documented in previous years continued without meaningful remedy. Trade union activity, including the establishment of independent unions, the exercise of freedom of association, and the right to organize remained severely restricted. Independent unions continued to face administrative obstruction, refusal of registration, and denial of their right to operate freely.

The labor and professional movement was therefore placed before unprecedented challenges. While the state sought to project a reformist image through the adoption of Labor Law No 14 of 2025, practice on the ground continued to reflect a restrictive approach toward independent trade union activity.

In 2025, violations targeting trade union leaders and labor activists escalated. Human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch, documented the continued use of vague security charges against workers who demanded economic rights amid a severe cost-of-living and inflationary crisis.

Economic and Social Situation in 2025:

Between “Rescue” and Debt

Egypt’s economy in 2025 remained under severe pressure despite major inflows of foreign currency. Large investment agreements, including the Ras ElHekma deal, together with international financing from the International Monetary Fund, provided liquidity that helped prevent a currency collapse. However, the economy remained heavily dependent on foreign direct investment and external financing to offset the current account deficit. The flexible exchange rate regime continued and contributed to relative stabilization of the parallel market. Yet inflation remained high, exceeding 25 to 30 percent in some sectors, with a direct impact on workers’ purchasing power and household survival.

The government also faced difficulties in securing fuel for power stations, leading to the continuation of electricity loadshedding during parts of the year. This affected industrial production, small enterprises, and working families who already faced rising prices and reduced income security.

Living Pressures and Social Protection Gaps

Repeated increases in the prices of basic goods and services, particularly electricity, fuel, food, transport, and medicines, eroded the living standards of large sections of the middle and working classes. The government expanded the coverage of the Takaful and Karama program to mitigate the effects of structural reforms. However, rights reports indicated that such assistance remained insufficient in relation to the scale of price increases and the collapse in purchasing power.

Labor Law No 14 of 2025 was adopted with the stated aim of regulating relations between employers and workers. However, trade unions raised concerns over whether the law provides adequate guarantees for job security, particularly in the private sector.

Demographic and Refugee Pressures

Egypt also faced additional social pressures linked to the arrival of refugees, particularly from Sudan. This placed further strain on public services, including education, health, housing, and municipal infrastructure in urban areas. The government imposed strict regularization procedures, which in some cases led to deportations and raised serious human rights concerns. These pressures must not be used to justify restrictions on the rights of refugees, migrants, workers, or communities already facing poverty and exclusion.

Legislative Framework for Rights and Freedoms

Egypt’s legislative framework in 2025 was characterized by legal duality. On one side, constitutional provisions and national strategies promised reform. On the other, procedural laws, decrees, and security practices expanded the powers of the executive and security agencies.

Constitutional and Strategic Framework

The 2014 Constitution, as amended, remained the main legal reference and formally guarantees a broad range of rights and freedoms. The National Human Rights Strategy for 2021–2026 continued to serve as the official framework through which the state presented its commitment to legal reform. In 2025, the government began preparations for a second phase of the strategy for 2026–2031, with the declared aim of further aligning national legislation with international conventions.

However, strategies and constitutional provisions cannot substitute for actual guarantees. The central test remains whether workers, trade unionists, journalists, rights defenders, and ordinary citizens can exercise their rights without fear of detention, dismissal, surveillance, or prosecution.

Criminal Legislation and Judicial Practices

The new Criminal Procedure Code remained one of the most controversial legislative files in 2024 and 2025. Although it was presented as a reform intended to reduce the duration of pretrial detention, the Bar Association and human rights organizations criticized provisions that weakened defense rights and granted excessive protection to law enforcement officials. Counterterrorism laws and legislation regulating terrorist

entities continued to be used as tools to restrict political and civic activity. Individuals continued to be placed on terrorism lists, resulting in deprivation of civil and political rights.

For workers and trade unionists, the broader criminal justice environment matters directly. When vague charges are normalized against peaceful dissent, labor protest can easily be reframed as a security threat.

Civil and Trade Union Freedoms

Labor Law No 14 of 2025 represented a development in the legal framework for economic and social rights. It sought to regulate labor relations and provide protections for workers in the private sector, yet its real test lies in implementation: whether it protects independent trade union pluralism, enables workers to organize freely, and allows unions to monitor and enforce the law in practice.

The law regulating civil society organizations, despite amendments that reduced some custodial penalties, continued to impose strict control over foreign funding, field activities, and the operational space of human rights associations.

Digital Space and Freedom of Expression

The Anti-Cyber and Information Technology Crimes Law continued to be widely used against content creators, activists, and critics. Charges such as violating “Egyptian family values” or “spreading false news” created a climate of self-censorship in the digital sphere. This has direct implications for trade union freedoms. Workers increasingly rely on digital platforms to expose unsafe conditions, wage violations, dismissals, corruption, and abuse. When digital speech is criminalized, workers’ capacity to organize and denounce violations is weakened.

Trade Union Rights and Freedoms in 2025

Trade union freedoms in Egypt in 2025 were caught between new legal texts and ongoing administrative and security restrictions. The year became a test of whether recent labor reforms would lead to real change or merely provide a reformist façade.

Labor Law No 14 of 2025

The adoption of Labor Law No 14 of 2025 was the most significant labor development of the year. Officially, the law aims to modernize labor relations by balancing workers’ rights with investment incentives in the private sector. It also seeks to strengthen job security by restricting the use of pre-signed resignation forms, commonly known as “Form 6,” and replacing dismissal by unilateral administrative decision with procedures before labor courts. These provisions are positive in principle. However, independent unions criticized the law for failing to provide sufficient guarantees for the right to strike. They also warned that procedural restrictions remain so burdensome that the exercise of the right to strike is almost impossible in practice.

A labor law that regulates employment without guaranteeing workers’ collective power cannot deliver justice. Job security, fair wages, and safe workplaces require independent unions and collective bargaining.

Trade Union Pluralism and Independence

Reports by the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights and other organizations indicated that the Ministry of Labor continued to refuse or obstruct the filing and registration of documents for independent unions. This reinforced the dominance of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation, which remains closely aligned with the authorities. There was also growing concern over trade union elections scheduled for March–May 2026. Trade union activists demanded guarantees against security interference in candidate selection, recalling previous electoral cycles in which independent candidates faced obstruction.

The independent trade union movement was further alarmed by moves in Parliament to amend Trade Union Organizations Law No 213 of 2017. The proposed amendment sought to postpone all labor union elections for at least one year, extend the trade union term from four to five years, and keep existing boards in place at all levels, regardless of the decisions and will of general assemblies.

This move was reportedly made at the request of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation and in coordination with the government, represented by the Ministry of Labor and members of Parliament. The proposed amendment focused only on postponing elections and extending terms, without addressing the wider problems in the law or the concerns raised by independent unions and international labor standards bodies such as interference undermines internal union democracy. Workers must have the right to choose their representatives freely and periodically, without political control, administrative manipulation, or security screening.

Prosecution and Repression of Trade Unionists

In 2025, labor and trade union leaders continued to face prosecution on vague charges such as “spreading false news” or “belonging to a banned group,” particularly after organizing peaceful protests demanding wage increases to confront inflation. The threat of dismissal or imprisonment for “disrupting production” continued to hang over workers, especially in companies where shares had been sold to foreign investors or sovereign funds.

This pattern transforms labor disputes into security cases. Instead of treating workers’ demands as social and economic grievances, authorities and employers often frame them as threats to public order, investment, or national security.

Economic Pressures and Social Rights

The collapse in purchasing power in 2025 led to an increase in informal labor mobilization. Workers protested over wages, inflation, dismissals, delayed payments, and deteriorating working conditions. The government often refused to recognize these protests as legitimate exercises of trade union rights. Instead, they were treated as threats to national security or disruptions to production. This deepened the gap between the state and the labor movement. During the Universal Periodic Review process before the Human Rights Council, Egypt was called upon to comply with international labor standards, including ILO conventions on freedom of association and the right to organize.

Examples of Violations of Trade Union Rights and Freedoms in 2025

The year 2025, extending into early 2026, witnessed concrete cases that reveal the gap between the new Labor Law and actual security and administrative practice.

Repression of Demand-Based Protests: The Samanoud Weaving Workers’ Case

The case of workers at the Samanoud Weaving Company remained one of the clearest examples of the criminalization of labor protest, with consequences extending into 2025. A number of male and female workers, including women trade union leaders, were arrested after a peaceful strike demanding implementation of the state-approved minimum wage.

Instead of being treated as a labor dispute, the case was criminalized. Prosecutors brought charges of “incitement to strike” and “spreading false news,” which the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights described as a blatant violation of the right of workers to express their economic interests.

Administrative Restrictions on Independent Unions

The refusal to register independent unions continued in 2025. The Ministry of Labor persisted in refusing to receive founding documents for independent trade union committees in the services and education sectors. The Independent Union of Real Estate Tax Workers, the Independent Teachers’ Union, and other unions faced difficulties renewing official documents. This deprived their members of legal representation in collective bargaining and weakened their ability to defend workers’ rights.

The rejection of trade union pluralism remained one of the most serious violations of international labor standards. A legal opinion issued in November 2021 by the Alexandria Fatwa Department of the State Council explicitly rejected trade union pluralism at the same level. It interpreted Trade Union Organizations Law No 213 of 2017 in a manner that denied independent unions the right to coexist with unions affiliated with the official federation.

The impact of this opinion remains severe. It blocks existing independent unions and prevents the establishment of new independent unions in institutions or workplaces where a union affiliated with the official federation already exists. To date, no new legal opinion has been issued to reverse it. Nor have the Ministry of Labor or the government publicly rejected the opinion, despite its contradiction with international labor standards and the principle of freedom of association.

Prosecution of Professional Unionists: The Doctors' Syndicate

At the beginning of 2025, members of the Doctors' Syndicate Council continued to be summoned for questioning because of statements concerning the deterioration of health services or objections to provisions in the new Medical Facilities Law. Cases of arbitrary transfer and referral to administrative investigation were also documented against health sector unionists in Upper Egypt as punitive measures linked to their trade union activity. Such measures weaken professional unions and deter health workers from speaking publicly about the state of public services, working conditions, and patient care.

Arbitrary Dismissal in the Private Sector After Investment Deals

With major foreign investments entering the food industries sector in 2025, cases of collective dismissal were documented against trade unionists who attempted to establish union committees in newly acquired companies. Employers used the legal pretext of "partial closure of the establishment" to remove workers considered "troublemakers" because of their union activity. This pattern contributed to Egypt remaining under close ILO scrutiny in recent reviews.

Interference in the 2026 Trade Union Elections

From late 2025, security agencies reportedly began exerting pressure on independent labor activists to prevent them from running in trade union organization elections scheduled for March–May 2026.

More seriously, efforts were made to postpone the entire labor union election process and keep current boards in place for at least one additional year. This would allow authorities and the Egyptian Trade Union Federation more time to rearrange the trade union landscape, screen labor activists, and strengthen control over representation. Reported methods included threats of security exclusion through criminal record and background checks, commonly known as "fish wa tashbih," as well as transferring activists to remote company branches to prevent them from communicating with their worker base.

Conclusion

Egypt's 2025 labor rights landscape exposes the limits of reform without freedom. Labor Law No 14 of 2025 may contain positive provisions, but these cannot produce justice while independent unions are obstructed, labor protests are criminalized, and trade unionists face security charges.

The state's reformist discourse cannot hide the reality that freedom of association remains severely constrained. Workers cannot bargain collectively if their unions are denied registration. They cannot elect representatives freely if elections are postponed or manipulated. They cannot defend wages if strikes are treated as crimes. They cannot expose violations if digital expression is prosecuted as "false news".

Egypt's economic crisis has made trade union freedom more urgent, not less. Workers facing inflation, debt, privatization, and declining purchasing power need independent representation and collective bargaining, not judicial overload and security pressure. No genuine social dialogue can exist where one side is controlled, silenced, or criminalized. No labor reform can be credible without independent unions.

The urgent priorities are clear: end the obstruction of independent union registration, guarantee trade union pluralism, stop criminal prosecutions linked to peaceful labor protest, protect the right to strike, ensure free and democratic trade union elections, and bring Egyptian law and practice into line with international labor standards. Workers in Egypt are not asking for privilege. They are demanding the basic rights without which social justice, dignity, and stability cannot exist.

Palestine

The Occupation Destroys Everything



Introduction:

This chapter examines the state of public freedoms and trade union rights in the occupied Palestinian territory during 2025, a year marked by the deepening of multiple and overlapping crises facing the Palestinian people. Under the weight of systematic violations by the Israeli occupation, economic collapse, mass displacement, and the fragmentation of political and legal institutions, fundamental freedoms continued to erode. The rights to freedom of expression, association, trade union organization, political participation, and collective representation were severely undermined.

The year 2025 witnessed grave developments. The Israeli occupation authorities continued to attack the infrastructure of Palestinian civil society, including through the designation of human rights and civil society organizations as “terrorist” bodies, the targeting of their staff, restrictions on their work, and measures aimed at isolating Palestinians from their legal, social, and institutional defense mechanisms.

At the same time, Palestinian organizations, including the Independent Commission for Human Rights, continued to document the consequences of the absence of general elections. This prolonged democratic vacuum entrenched executive authority, weakened judicial and legislative oversight, and further restricted political participation in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Economic and Social Situation in 2025

The economic and social situation in Palestine in 2025 was defined by catastrophic collapse in the Gaza Strip and systematic economic suffocation in the West Bank. These conditions were driven by the continuing impact of the war, the destruction of productive capacity, and the tightening of Israeli restrictions on movement, trade, labor, and public revenues.

Historic Economic Contraction and Liquidity Crisis

The Palestinian economy recorded an unprecedented contraction, exceeding 35 percent in some estimates. Productive activity in Gaza was brought to an almost complete halt, while the West Bank experienced a sharp decline in economic activity.

Israel continued to withhold Palestinian clearance revenues, depriving the Palestinian Authority of the resources needed to pay public sector salaries regularly. Payments were limited to partial disbursements of around 50 to 60 percent, paralyzing commercial activity, deepening the liquidity crisis, and pushing thousands of households into further insecurity.

The labor market suffered a dramatic shock. Unemployment rose to alarming levels, with more than 500,000 workers losing their jobs. This included workers previously employed inside the Green Line, who have been barred from work since October 2023 and throughout 2025. The loss of this income deprived the Palestinian economy of a major source of household revenue and intensified poverty.

Poverty, Food Insecurity, and Public Service Collapse

Estimates for 2025 indicate that more than 70 percent of the population in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank were living below the poverty line. In Gaza, large parts of the population became entirely dependent on scarce humanitarian assistance, including assistance provided by UNRWA.

The Gaza Strip faced a real risk of famine in 2025, with more than 90 percent of the population suffering from acute food insecurity. In the West Bank, prices of basic goods doubled in many areas due to checkpoints, movement restrictions, supply disruption, and the fragmentation of towns and cities.

Public services were severely degraded. In Gaza, most hospitals were forced out of service or operated under impossible conditions. In the West Bank, budget shortages led to a decline in the quality of public education, health services, and municipal services.

Structural and Social Challenges

The economic and psychological pressures caused by war, displacement, loss of income, and repeated trauma placed immense strain on family and social ties. Thousands of orphans, injured people, persons with disabilities, and displaced families required long-term protection and support in conditions where public institutions were already weakened. In the West Bank, the escalation of settlement expansion and settler control over grazing and agricultural land in 2025 destroyed the livelihoods of thousands of rural families. This contributed to what can be described as silent forced displacement from Area C, as communities were pushed out not only by direct violence but also by the systematic destruction of their economic survival.

International Aid and Reconstruction

Despite international pledges, reconstruction in Gaza remained extremely slow or effectively stalled in 2025 because of restrictions on the entry of essential materials and the absence of a clear political horizon. Hundreds of thousands of people remained in tents, temporary shelters, damaged buildings, or other inadequate housing; The humanitarian response was not enough to address the scale of destruction. Reconstruction cannot be reduced to emergency relief. It must include employment, social protection, public services, workers' rights, and the participation of Palestinian workers and unions in rebuilding their society.

Legislative Framework for Rights and Freedoms

The legislative framework for rights and freedoms in Palestine in 2025 remained marked by structural fragmentation, the disruption of the constitutional process, and the absence of a functioning legislative authority. Palestinians continued to live under a permanent state of exception, shaped by occupation, political division, and the prolonged absence of democratic renewal.

Erosion of the Constitutional Reference

The Palestinian Basic Law remained the main constitutional reference. However, by 2025, the Palestinian Legislative Council had long been absent, having been paralyzed since 2007 and formally dissolved in 2018. The continued absence of general elections deepened the constitutional vacuum and weakened the separation of powers.

This vacuum was compounded by the Israeli occupation's restrictions on political life, movement, and elections, including in Jerusalem. The result was a legal environment in which executive decrees and administrative decisions often replaced democratic legislation and public accountability.

Restrictive Legislation on Digital Freedoms and Expression

The Cybercrime Law, Decree Law No 10 of 2018, remained one of the main legislative instruments used to target activists, journalists, and critics in 2025. Its broad and vague provisions, including references to "undermining civil peace" or "inciting sectarian strife," have been used to justify political arrests and restrictions on expression, according to documentation by media freedom organizations.

In relation to civil society organizations, 2025 also saw continued attempts to restrict funding, field activities, and independent work. These measures threatened the autonomy of Palestinian civil society at a time when the population's need for legal, humanitarian, social, and trade union protection was greater than ever.

Legislative Situation in the Gaza Strip

Reformulated without mentioning Hamas

In the Gaza Strip, a parallel legal and administrative framework continued to operate under the de facto authorities. In 2025, the conditions of war and mass destruction sharply reduced ordinary legislative activity, while emergency-style administrative and security decisions increasingly shaped public life.

Laws and regulations imposing strict controls on social conduct, media work, public expression, and association continued to be applied under the justification of protecting internal order and preserving social cohesion during wartime. In practice, these restrictions further narrowed civic space and limited the ability of workers, journalists, civil society organizations, and trade unionists to operate independently.

The Impact of Emergency Laws and Occupation

Palestinians continued to be subjected to overlapping legal systems: Palestinian Authority legislation, Israeli military orders, and inherited Mandate-era laws. In 2025, Israeli occupation authorities expanded the use of emergency measures to legitimize administrative detention, house demolitions, movement restrictions, land confiscation, and punitive measures.

In Area C and Jerusalem, these measures emptied Palestinian legal guarantees of much of their meaning. Workers and communities were left facing a system in which occupation law, military orders, and settlement expansion override basic protections.

Trade Union and Labor Rights

Palestine still lacks a modern and comprehensive law regulating trade union work. In 2025, the Palestinian Authority continued to rely on outdated decrees and administrative measures to restrict or dismantle demand-based strikes, particularly in essential sectors. The Ministry of Economy adopted legislation related to e-commerce and the platform economy. However, these laws failed to address the rights of workers in the platform economy adequately. The trade union movement was not meaningfully involved in drafting these policies, and the legislation did not refer clearly to relevant international standards concerning platform work. This omission is serious. Digital and platform workers cannot be left outside labor protection, social security, collective bargaining, and occupational safety frameworks.

Trade Union Rights and Freedoms in 2025

The situation of trade union rights and freedoms in Palestine in 2025 was defined by exceptionally complex conditions. Internal restrictions intersected with the repressive practices of the occupation, placing trade union activity in direct confrontation with the risk of comprehensive dismantling.

The Destructive Impact of Occupation and Aggression in Gaza

In 2025, trade union activity in the Gaza Strip became almost administratively paralyzed because of the destruction of union offices, the collapse of workplaces, the mass displacement of workers, and the killing of hundreds of trade union cadres, particularly in health, education, journalism, and public services.

More than 200,000 workers in Gaza lost contractual rights and trade union guarantees because of the total collapse of the economic sector and the absence of effective legal protection.

The destruction of workplaces is also the destruction of workers' rights. When factories, schools, hospitals, offices, farms, and public institutions are destroyed, workers lose not only wages, but also representation, protection, social security, and the ability to organize collectively.

Professional Unions and Electoral Processes

Available information indicates that electoral processes in some professional unions were affected by measures and restrictions imposed by the occupation, including restrictions on movement, limitations on assembly and organization, and indirect interference with the regular democratic functioning of unions. These restrictions undermined the ability of workers and professionals to elect their representatives, renew their institutions, and maintain democratic accountability within union structures.

Jerusalem and Trade Union Activity

Trade union work in Jerusalem faced direct obstruction. Trade unionists were subjected to repeated arrests, restrictions, and administrative measures under regulatory and security pretexts, despite the existence of a broad Palestinian worker base in the city.

These restrictions are part of a wider system of control over Palestinian civic, political, and labor activity in Jerusalem. They limit workers' ability to organize in their own city and weaken Palestinian institutional presence.

Internal Restrictions and Decree Laws in the West Bank

In 2025, the Palestinian Authority continued to use decree laws and presidential decisions to restrict demand-based strikes, particularly in the education and medical sectors. These measures were justified by reference to the specific security situation in Palestine; however, exceptional conditions cannot justify the systematic weakening of workers' rights. Teachers, doctors, nurses, public employees, and other workers must be able to organize, bargain, and protest without being treated as a threat to public order.

Workers Inside the Green Line

The crisis facing West Bank workers previously employed inside Israel worsened in 2025. Work permits were cancelled, and workers were prevented from reaching their jobs without compensation. Palestinian unions were unable to provide them with effective legal protection before Israeli courts or secure alternative economic options; this contributed to a rise in spontaneous workers' protests. These protests reflected the anger of workers who had lost their income overnight and were left without remedy, protection, or a credible employment alternative.

Serious and Systematic Violations Against Trade Union Work

Israeli army forces raided the headquarters of the General Federation of Palestine Trade Unions, vandalized its contents, destroyed equipment, and turned the premises into an interrogation center for Palestinian civilians; the General Federation of Palestine Trade Unions submitted a full report on this incident to the ILO Commission of Inquiry, together with an overview of violations documented against Palestinian workers and trade unionists by the occupation forces.

The report indicated that unemployment had risen to around 550,000 people, alongside the continued prevention of Palestinian workers from returning to their workplaces inside the 1948 territories. It also documented the pursuit and targeting of workers, including the killing of 47 workers while attempting to earn a living. The report further referred to arrest campaigns exceeding 35,000 cases, as well as injuries suffered by workers who fell from the separation wall while attempting to reach their workplaces. It also cited threats by Israeli officials regarding the establishment of special detention facilities for Palestinian workers.

Military checkpoints continued to obstruct movement between governorates, isolate cities, villages, and towns, and prevent workers from reaching workplaces, hospitals, schools, farms, and markets. These restrictions intensified economic paralysis and deepened the social crisis. The report also highlighted the termination of contracts of more than 7,000 UNRWA employees, further worsening the economic crisis and weakening public services for Palestinian refugees.

It referred to the closure of institutions and suspension of funding during the administration of former US President Donald Trump, which disrupted employment for more than 20,000 workers and contributed to long-term instability in the humanitarian and service sectors. The Federation also documented pressure against trade union activity, including the prevention of a delegation from Building and Wood Workers' International from entering the Palestinian territories, raids on union premises, vandalism of union headquarters, and the use of these premises for interrogation. These acts violate the principles of freedom of association protected under ILO Convention No. 87.

The General Federation of Palestine Trade Unions called on the ILO Commission of Inquiry to prevent the importation of foreign labor for Gaza reconstruction projects and to prioritize the employment of 550,000 unemployed Palestinian workers. It also called on the ILO Governing Body to exert pressure to ensure the return of Palestinian workers to their workplaces.

The Federation noted that, since 1969, approximately 25 percent of the Palestinian labor force had been employed in the Israeli labor market, a reality that entrenched the dependency of the Palestinian economy on the occupation.

The Federation's Secretary General also called for a comprehensive investigation into funds deducted from Palestinian workers since 1970, estimated at around 16 billion shekels in financial entitlements owed to workers. He noted that amounts transferred to the Amitim company did not exceed 3 billion shekels, despite far larger sums reportedly owed. He added that no clear financial report has been available since 1993, following the signing of the Oslo Accords, to clarify the fate of these funds or the mechanisms for their management. He also stated that the German Hans Böckler Foundation had begun preparing statistics related to this file, but that the work stopped before final results or a public report were issued.

Conclusion

Palestine's 2025 reality shows that occupation destroys not only land, homes, and infrastructure. It destroys the material foundations of labor rights, social protection, union representation, and collective life. Workers in Palestine faced a convergence of violations: war, displacement, unemployment, poverty, movement restrictions, administrative detention, raids on union institutions, blocked access to work, withheld revenues, and internal restrictions on protest and organization.

The Palestinian trade union movement is operating under conditions that would test any labor movement in the world. Its institutions have been attacked, its members killed, arrested, displaced, or impoverished, and its ability to organize has been severely weakened by occupation and internal political fragmentation.

Yet the central principle remains clear: workers' rights do not disappear under occupation, war, or emergency rule. They become more urgent. The protection of Palestinian workers requires an end to attacks on trade union institutions, the restoration of freedom of movement, the reopening of access to work, the payment of withheld entitlements, the protection of workers in reconstruction, and the adoption of a modern trade union law that guarantees freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to strike.

Reconstruction in Gaza and economic recovery in Palestine must not be built on the exclusion of Palestinian workers. They must be at the center of any recovery plan, any reconstruction process, and any future political settlement.

Without workers' rights, there can be no social justice. Without freedom from occupation, there can be no real freedom of association.

Jordan

Seventeen Labor Unions for 25 Million Workers



17

Nothing new to report.

Introduction:

This chapter examines the state of public freedoms and trade union rights in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan during 2025. The year was marked by the continued implementation of the political modernization agenda, alongside persistent tensions between reform commitments and restrictive legal and administrative practices.

While the state has sought to present a new model of political participation through reforms to political parties, elections, and institutional representation, the trade union space remained constrained by structural restrictions that affect the very essence of freedom of association.

The central contradiction in 2025 was clear: Jordan advanced political modernization on paper, while workers' freedom to organize remained confined within a narrow legal framework. The continued limitation of labor organization to **17 officially recognized unions** leaves large segments of the workforce without the right to form unions of their own choosing. The year also saw the continuation of legislative stagnation on labor law reform. Article 183 of the Penal Code remained a serious concern because of its potential use against peaceful strike action and collective labor protest. In practice, workers continued to face a legal environment in which collective action could be treated as a threat to public order rather than a legitimate exercise of labor rights.

Economic and Social Situation in 2025

Jordan's economic and social situation in 2025 was characterized by resilience under pressure. The government continued to implement the Economic Modernization Vision 2022–2033 amid severe regional tensions, particularly the repercussions of the war in Palestine and instability in Lebanon.

Modest Growth and Debt Pressures

Jordan's economy recorded modest growth of around **24 to 26 percent** in 2025. This level of growth remained insufficient to generate enough decent jobs for new entrants to the labor market. Regional instability also affected key sectors. Tourism declined due to security concerns across the region, while shipping costs rose as a result of Red Sea disruptions. These developments increased import costs and added pressure on consumers, businesses, and public finances. Public debt remained high, estimated at around **90 to 94 percent of GDP**. This pushed the government to maintain restrictive fiscal policies in coordination with the International Monetary Fund, with the stated aim of ensuring monetary stability and protecting the dinar's exchange rate.

For workers, this meant that economic stability was often pursued through austerity, wage restraint, and pressure on public spending. Such policies may protect macroeconomic indicators, but they do not automatically protect households from unemployment, low wages, and declining living standards.

Unemployment and Livelihood Insecurity

Unemployment remained Jordan's most urgent social challenge in 2025. The overall unemployment rate remained high, at around **21 percent**, while youth unemployment exceeded **40 percent**. This contributed to rising frustration among young people and increased pressure to seek employment opportunities abroad.

Although the Central Bank succeeded in keeping inflation relatively contained at around **2 to 3 percent**, the cumulative rise in prices of basic goods, fuel, transport, rent, and services continued to erode purchasing power. Many working families experienced a gap between official inflation figures and the real cost of daily life.

The minimum wage remained a central issue. For years, it had been fixed at **260 Jordanian dinars**, despite rising living costs and trade union demands to align it with the poverty line and the real cost of living. In 2025, trade union pressure contributed to an increase in the minimum wage to **290 dinars**. This was an important gain, but it remained insufficient to guarantee a dignified standard of living for all workers.

Public Services, Water, and Refugee Pressures

Jordan continued to face a severe water deficit in 2025. Work accelerated on the National Carrier project, based on Red Sea desalination, as a long-term strategic solution. However, the project also placed additional financial pressure on the public budget. Jordan also continued to host large numbers of Syrian refugees. With international support to humanitarian agencies declining in 2025, pressure increased on education, health care, housing, municipal services, and local labor markets. These pressures affected both refugees and host communities, particularly in poorer governorates.

Social Protection

The government expanded National Aid Fund programs to include new categories of informal workers and people affected by economic crises. However, these forms of assistance remained insufficient compared with the scale of poverty, unemployment, and social need, especially in rural areas and governorates outside Amman. Social protection cannot be reduced to targeted assistance. Workers need decent wages, secure employment, social security coverage, collective bargaining, and the right to organize freely.

Legislative Framework for Rights and Freedoms

Jordan's rights framework in 2025 was marked by legal duality. On one side, political modernization reforms promised broader participation. On the other, procedural laws and security-based restrictions continued to limit the exercise of basic freedoms.

Constitutional Framework and Political Modernization

The year 2025 saw the practical implementation of constitutional amendments adopted in 2022 and laws emerging from the Royal Commission for the Modernization of the Political System, the new laws on political parties and elections strengthened party representation in Parliament, including through the allocation of seats to party lists. This offered a formal boost to political participation.

The reforms also included measures to encourage the participation of youth and women, including lower candidacy ages and quotas within political parties. These measures represented progress in the recognition of group participation rights.

However, political modernization cannot be credible if it excludes the workplace. Democracy must not stop at the factory gate, the office door, the school, the hospital, the farm, or the construction site. Workers must have the right to organize, elect representatives, bargain collectively, and strike.

Cybercrime Law

The 2023 Cybercrime Law remained one of the most controversial instruments shaping the human rights environment in 2025. Authorities continued to rely on provisions related to “fake news,” online speech, defamation, and criticism of official bodies. These provisions contributed to self-censorship and narrowed the space for digital freedom of expression. This has direct implications for workers and trade unionists. Social media has become a vital space for exposing wage violations, unsafe working conditions, discrimination, harassment, and restrictions on labor rights. When digital expression is restricted, workers lose an important tool for collective voice and accountability.

Trade Union Legislative Framework

Jordan's Labor Law continued to restrict the right to organize by limiting labor union representation to **17 officially recognized unions**. This framework excludes large numbers of workers, particularly in sectors such as services, construction, platform work, domestic work, agriculture, logistics, and informal employment; This restriction is incompatible with the principle that workers should be able to establish and join organizations of their own choosing. The continued existence of Article 183 of the Penal Code also remained a serious concern. The provision can be used to prosecute or intimidate workers involved in strikes or collective protest, particularly in sectors considered “vital” by the authorities.

Civil Rights and Justice

Jordan continued to pursue judicial reform and institutional modernization. However, procedural complexity and slow implementation limited the effectiveness of these reforms. For trade unionists and workers, access to justice remains essential. Rights cannot be meaningful if workers cannot challenge dismissal, wage theft, discrimination, anti-union retaliation, or restrictions on protest in a timely and effective manner.

Trade Union Rights and Freedoms in 2025

The state of trade union rights and freedoms in Jordan in 2025 was marked by tension between official reform narratives and restrictive realities on the ground.

Legal Restrictions on Freedom of Association

The most serious restriction remained the legal limitation of trade union organization to 17 official labor unions. This system denies many workers the right to form independent unions that reflect the reality of their sectors, occupations, and workplaces.

Large numbers of workers in services, construction, informal work, platform-based work, and emerging sectors remain outside effective union representation. This leaves them exposed to low wages, unsafe working conditions, irregular contracts, and weak bargaining power. A system of 17 unions for 25 million workers cannot reflect the diversity of Jordan's labor market. It narrows worker representation and prevents the emergence of new forms of organizing needed for new forms of work.

Criminalization and Restriction of Strike Action

Article 183 of the Penal Code continued to cast a shadow over the right to strike. Workers risk prosecution or intimidation on charges linked to "disrupting work" or "harming public interests," especially in sectors classified as essential or strategic. The right to strike is not a threat to public order. It is a fundamental tool of workers' collective power. Restrictions on strike action must be narrow, proportionate, and consistent with international labor standards. They must not be used to silence workers or break legitimate labor disputes.

Economic and Social Rights

Economic pressures intensified the importance of trade union action in 2025. Labor unions faced difficulties negotiating wage increases and stronger protections, as government and employer arguments continued to emphasize the need to preserve investment stability. Trade unions demanded that the minimum wage be raised from 260 dinars and aligned with the poverty line and real cost of living. These efforts contributed to an increase to 290 dinars. This gain matters. But it also exposes the deeper problem: minimum wage policy remains weak without strong collective bargaining and independent union representation. Workers should not have to wait years for modest increases that still fall short of the cost of living.

Conclusion

Jordan's 2025 experience reflects a contradiction at the heart of political modernization. The state expanded formal political participation, but the labor movement remained confined within restrictive legal boundaries. There can be no genuine modernization while millions of workers are represented through only 17 official labor unions. There can be no real social dialogue while large sectors of the workforce are denied the right to organize freely. There can be no decent work while strike action remains vulnerable to criminalization.

Jordan's workers need more than consultation. They need enforceable rights: freedom of association, collective bargaining, protection from antiunion retaliation, and the right to strike without fear. The increase in the minimum wage to 290 dinars was a trade union achievement, but it is not enough. Workers need a wage system linked to the cost of living, stronger social protection, and a labor law that recognizes the full diversity of the modern workforce. Political modernization must include democracy at work. Without independent unions and collective bargaining, reform remains incomplete.

Lebanon

Political Classification and Sectarian Sorting as Tools to Weaken Unions



Introduction:

This chapter provides an analytical and fieldbased assessment of public freedoms and trade union rights in Lebanon during 2025. The year was marked by a dangerous convergence of crises: the continuing consequences of the financial collapse, the paralysis of constitutional institutions, Israeli military escalation, and widespread internal displacement.

Under these conditions, Lebanon's civic space historically known for its pluralism faced existential pressure. The foundations of citizenship, equality before the law, and legal protection for individuals and groups continued to erode. Workers, public employees, trade unionists, refugees, displaced people, and low-income families bore the heaviest burden. The year 2025 recorded a serious decline in rights and freedoms. State weakness and institutional paralysis strengthened the power of political and sectarian actors at the expense of the rule of law. This created a fertile environment for impunity, political interference, and selective prosecutions against activists, journalists, and trade unionists under accusations such as "defamation," "incitement," or "threatening civil peace".

For workers, the crisis was not only economic. It was also institutional. The collapse of the state, the paralysis of labor courts and labor arbitration councils, and the political capture of several union structures left workers with little effective protection at a time when they needed collective representation most.

Economic and Social Situation in 2025

In 2025, Lebanon entered what many observers described as a “sustained crisis bottom” The consequences of years of financial collapse deepened and were compounded by Israeli military escalation in late 2024 and early 2025.

War Economy and Dollarization

After a fragile period of relative stabilization in 2023, Lebanon’s economy contracted again in 2025, with estimates pointing to a decline of more than 10 to 15 percent The contraction was driven by infrastructure destruction, disruption of agriculture and tourism, displacement, and the paralysis of productive sectors

The Lebanese economy became almost fully dollarized This excluded large parts of the population paid in Lebanese pounds including publicsector employees, security personnel, teachers, pensioners, and many informal workers from the functioning economic cycle Dollarization widened class inequalities and deepened the gap between workers with access to foreign currency and those trapped in collapsed localcurrency wages.

Public finances remained in crisis IMFbacked reforms remained stalled, Lebanon continued to default on sovereign debt, and the state relied on taxes, fees, and customs duties to finance minimum publicsector salaries and basic functions Workers were effectively made to pay for a collapse they did not create.

Displacement, Poverty, and Social Fragmentation

The year 2025 witnessed one of the largest internal displacement movements in Lebanon’s recent history, with more than 12 million people displaced This placed enormous pressure on shelters, schools, municipalities, hospitals, and public services in areas considered safer Poverty exceeded 80 percent of the population, with extreme poverty spreading even among families formerly considered middle class The crisis destroyed the social floor beneath millions of people Food and medicine insecurity worsened Supply chains were disrupted, basic food prices rose sharply, and access to health care declined Thousands of doctors, nurses, and health workers had already left the country, while subsidies on most chronic medicines had ended or become ineffective.

Public Utilities and Electricity

State institutions continued to deteriorate In 2025, administrative work in public departments reached one of its lowest points due to repeated employee strikes, fuel shortages, lack of stationery, weak electricity supply, and collapsing salaries.

The electricity sector remained in crisis Citizens continued to rely almost entirely on private generators and solar systems, while Électricité du Liban was unable to provide more than two to four hours of electricity per day in many areas.

This system deepened inequality Families with access to dollars or private resources could secure energy, while poor households were left without reliable electricity, heating, cooling, or safe storage for food and medicine.

Education and the Future of Children

The 2024–2025 school year faced grave challenges Hundreds of public schools were turned into shelters for displaced people, threatening the right to education for thousands of students school dropouts increased, and the risk of child labor grew as families lost income and survival needs took priority over education Teachers themselves faced collapsed wages, unstable attendance, delayed incentives, and unsafe working conditions.

Housing and the Rental Crisis

By early 2025, rental contracts in Lebanese pounds had almost disappeared Rental prices in Beirut and Mount Lebanon reached record levels, with rents in vital areas often starting at around USD 400 more than double the monthly salary of many publicsector employees

Internal displacement from the south, the Bekaa, and the southern suburbs created intense pressure on housing in areas considered safer. Some landlords exploited the crisis by increasing rents, turning displacement into a market opportunity.

Old Tenancies and the Absence of Housing Policy

The conflict between landlords and longterm tenants over the implementation of laws liberalizing residential and nonresidential rents continued in 2025. Calls increased for legal amendments that would ensure justice for landlords without forcing lowincome tenants, elderly people, and working families into displacement, the tenant support fund faced near total collapse because of the state's inability to finance it. This left thousands of lowincome families at risk of eviction.

Lebanon still lacked a coherent housing policy. Affordable housing loans remained largely inaccessible. The Housing Bank was unable to provide meaningful support to most citizens, making rent both the only option and an impossible burden.

Judicial paralysis worsened the situation. Thousands of eviction cases and landlordtenant disputes accumulated before courts, while some parties resorted to political, sectarian, or social pressure to impose outcomes outside the rule of law.

Social and Human Consequences

The crisis produced forms of hidden homelessness. More than one family increasingly shared the same apartment to divide costs. Refugees, displaced Lebanese families, and migrant workers faced growing restrictions and discrimination in access to housing, some municipalities imposed strict conditions on leases for Syrian refugees and displaced people under the language of "regulating foreign presence" or "security". These measures deepened social fragmentation and exposed vulnerable groups to arbitrary treatment.

Legislative Framework for Rights and Freedoms

Lebanon's legislative framework in 2025 was characterized by institutional erosion. Constitutional and legal protections existed on paper, but financial collapse, political paralysis, and sectarian powersharing severely undermined their enforcement.

Constitution and International Commitments

The Lebanese Constitution, particularly its preamble, affirms Lebanon's commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, these principles were increasingly hollowed out by the absence of effective executive authority, prolonged institutional paralysis, and the inability of Parliament to legislate regularly and independently. Rights without functioning institutions become fragile. In Lebanon, the problem was not only the content of the law, but the collapse of the institutions supposed to enforce it.

Judicial Independence and Impunity

The investigation into the Beirut port explosion remained stalled as Lebanon entered 2025, due to political interference and legal obstruction. This reinforced a culture of impunity and confirmed the inability of the judiciary to hold powerful actors accountable. Parliament had still not adopted a modern law guaranteeing full judicial independence. Judicial appointments and formations remained vulnerable to sectarian quotas and political bargaining.

For workers and trade unionists, this matters directly. Without an independent judiciary, workers cannot rely on courts to protect them against dismissal, wage theft, antiunion discrimination, or employer abuse.

Public Freedoms and Expression

Authorities continued to use defamation provisions in the Penal Code and the Publications Law to prosecute journalists, activists, and critics. In 2025, the Cybercrime Bureau expanded its role in summoning people over social media criticism of political actors and public institutions.

Lebanese law also continued to allow civilians to be tried before military courts in certain cases linked to opinion, protest, or security allegations. This remains inconsistent with fair trial standards and has a chilling effect on civic and trade union activism.

Economic and Social Rights

The failure to adopt a fair capital control law left depositors exposed to arbitrary banking practices. Banks effectively imposed their own rules, restricting access to people's savings and violating the right to property.

Social protection remained dangerously weak. Despite previous initiatives such as cash assistance schemes, Lebanon still lacked a comprehensive legal safety net capable of protecting people from collapse in health, education, housing, and income security.

Refugee and Migrant Rights

In 2025, administrative and municipal measures restricting Syrian refugees increased. Some municipalities imposed curfews, movement restrictions, and housing limitations in the absence of a national asylum framework consistent with international standards. Human rights organizations also documented cases of forced deportation. These practices placed refugees, migrant workers, and displaced communities at risk and intensified social tensions.

Trade Union Rights

Trade union rights in Lebanon remained governed by outdated frameworks, particularly the 1946 Labor Law. Public sector employees are still prohibited from formally establishing unions, forcing them to organize through associations or "leagues" that lack full legal personality and collective bargaining power.

In 2025, proposals were submitted by several members of Parliament to amend the Labor Law. The Ministry of Labor also initiated discussions, but independent unions, including the National Federation of Workers and Employees in Lebanon, were excluded from meaningful participation. Labor law reform cannot be credible if the most independent and representative workers' organizations are excluded from the table.

Trade Union Rights and Freedoms in 2025

In 2025, trade union freedoms in Lebanon faced structural paralysis and sharp decline. The economic collapse, war-related displacement, political fragmentation, and institutional failure combined to weaken traditional trade union work and leave workers largely unprotected.

Public Sector: Associations Without Real Power

Lebanese law continues to prohibit public employees from establishing official unions. As a result, workers in the public administration and education sectors organize through associations and leagues, including public administration employees' associations and education associations.

In 2025, the bargaining power of these bodies collapsed further. Hyperinflation and dollarization meant that salary increases often had only symbolic value. Public sector strikes shifted from being a tool of pressure to being a declaration of institutional exhaustion, as the state claimed it lacked the funds to respond to workers' demands.

Private Sector: Political Control and Labor Fragmentation

Attempts to establish independent unions in technology, services, media, banking, domestic work, agriculture, transport, and other sectors continued to face administrative obstacles at the Ministry of Labor.

The Ministry remained reluctant to grant licenses to unions outside the umbrella of established power structures. This restricted the emergence of new worker organizations capable of representing sectors transformed by the crisis.

Professional Unions: Independence Under Political Pressure

In major professional unions, including the lawyers' and engineers' syndicates, conflict continued between independent or reformist currents and traditional political parties

Some trade union activities were disrupted because of political disputes over major national issues such as depositors' funds, the Beirut port investigation, and control over professional funds and pension systems.

Doctors' and nurses' unions faced the largest wave of emigration among their members, weakening their organizational structures and reducing their capacity to influence collapsing health policies.

Violations and Prosecutions

Security forces intervened to disperse sit-ins by bank employees, military retirees, and depositors demanding access to their savings and pensions; Independent trade unionists in the education sector were summoned for investigation on allegations such as "contempt of the administration" or "incitement" after criticizing the Ministry of Education's policies on the distribution of international aid

The movement of construction workers and related unions affiliated with FENASOL also faced repression Union leader Castro Abdallah and other trade unionists were subjected to prosecution linked to their labor activism.

Impact of Displacement and War on Trade Union Work

The widespread displacement in late 2024 and early 2025 scattered labor bases in southern Lebanon, the southern suburbs, and the Bekaa Trade union work in these areas was severely disrupted or halted unions were forced to shift from rights-based organizing to limited relief work While solidarity and emergency support are essential, they cannot replace collective bargaining, legal protection, and organized worker power.

Examples of Violations of Trade Union Rights and Freedoms in 2025

Suppression of Public Education Associations

The public education sector was one of the most affected by violations in 2025 because of financial collapse, displacement, and the use of schools as shelters members of the Basic Education Teachers' Association and independent education trade union groups were subjected to work suspensions and salary deductions by administrative decisions from the Ministry of Education.

These sanctions followed criticism of the distribution of financial incentives in dollars and the deterioration of teaching conditions in shelters Allegations such as "contempt of administration" were used to intimidate union activists.

The Ministry of Labor also refused to grant licenses to several founding committees of private sector unions submitted by FENASOL, including the agricultural workers' union, the Port of Beirut drivers' union, the orphanages and welfare institutions workers' union, and the women domestic workers' union.

Targeting of Health Workers and Paramedics

In early 2025, paramedics and health workers in southern Lebanon and the Bekaa were directly affected by Israeli military attacks Dozens were killed while performing humanitarian and professional duties; These attacks violated the right to life, the protection owed to health workers, and the right of professional and humanitarian workers to operate during armed conflict.

Political Interference in Engineers' Syndicate Elections

The 2025 elections for branches of the Engineers' Syndicate in Beirut and the North were marked by strong political pressure aimed at weakening independent trade union currents

Reports indicated the use of political clientelism and complex administrative procedures that limited the voting participation of expatriate engineers These practices appeared designed to keep the syndicate under the influence of traditional political parties and preserve control over contracting and pension funds.

Crackdown on Military Retirees and Depositors

In the first half of 2025, security forces used force to disperse sit-ins by military retirees in front of the Central Bank of Lebanon and the Grand Serail. Tear gas and force were used to prevent retirees from reaching decision-making centers to demand fair pensions and access to their financial rights. This violated the right to peaceful assembly and the right to express social and economic demands.

Restrictions on Alternative and Independent Unions

The Alternative Press Syndicate and independent bank employees' groups continued to face refusal by the Ministry of Labor to grant official licenses or recognize their representation in negotiations without legal personality. These groups were prevented from filing collective complaints or representing workers dismissed by banks or media institutions.

Labor arbitration councils also remained suspended or ineffective for long periods, both before and after the 2019 financial collapse and the Beirut port explosion. Independent unions were excluded from membership in these councils without justification.

Independent unions were also excluded from the Economic and Social Council, further denying them participation in national social dialogue.

Arbitrary Dismissal Under the Pretext of Security Conditions

In 2025, hundreds of arbitrary dismissals were reported in tourism and service sectors in Beirut and Mount Lebanon. Employers justified these dismissals by citing the decline in business caused by war and insecurity.

Workers were often dismissed without fair compensation. The General Confederation of Lebanese Workers was unable to intervene effectively, while labor arbitration councils remained paralyzed. As a result, many workers were left without legal remedy or trade union protection.

Conclusion

Lebanon's 2025 crisis exposed the collapse of protection for workers. The state's weakness, political paralysis, sectarian interference, economic collapse, and war-related displacement combined to weaken trade unions and strip workers of effective representation.

Political classification and sectarian sorting were used to divide workers, weaken independent unions, and keep organized labor under control. The result was a labor movement fragmented at the very moment when workers needed unity, protection, and collective power.

Lebanon cannot rebuild on the ruins of workers' rights. It cannot address financial collapse while excluding independent unions. It cannot restore public trust while impunity governs the courts, banks, ministries, and political institutions.

The urgent priorities are clear: guarantee freedom of association for all workers, including public sector employees; recognize independent unions; revive labor arbitration councils; end prosecutions against trade unionists; protect workers from arbitrary dismissal; ensure social protection; and include independent labor organizations in any economic recovery plan. A recovery that excludes workers is not a recovery. It is a continuation of the same system that produced collapse.



Syria

Unions Struggle to Find Their Way Amid Political Upheaval



Introduction:

The year 2025 marked another year of profound hardship for workers and trade unionists in Syria. The military conflict remained frozen without a comprehensive political settlement, while the country continued to be divided into multiple areas of control. This fragmentation had direct consequences for public freedoms, trade union rights, and the ability of workers to organize independently.

Across Syria, workers faced a devastating combination of economic collapse, political repression, insecurity, displacement, and institutional fragmentation. Trade union rights were shaped less by law than by the power of the authority controlling each area. In government-controlled areas, unions remained closely tied to the state. In other areas, trade union activity was exposed to interference by de facto authorities, armed actors, or political administrations.

The result was a deeply restricted environment in which trade unions struggled to act as genuine organizations of worker representation. In most cases, they were either subordinated to political authority, weakened by insecurity, or pushed into charitable and relief functions instead of collective bargaining and rights-based advocacy.

Economic and Social Situation in 2025

Syria entered 2025 facing one of the harshest economic and social crises in decades. The middle class had largely disappeared, and most of the population lived below the poverty line. Workers' wages lost almost all real value, while prices of food, fuel, medicine, transport, and basic goods continued to rise beyond the reach of ordinary families.

Monetary Collapse and Runaway Inflation

The Syrian pound continued its historic decline in 2025, with the exchange rate reaching record lows. This collapse fueled extreme inflation in the price of basic commodities. The cost of a basic food basket rose far beyond the capacity of ordinary wages and household income. Food insecurity affected millions of Syrians, with more than 12 million people reportedly lacking reliable access to sufficient food.

For workers, the wage crisis became existential. Salaries no longer covered even a fraction of basic needs, forcing many families to rely on remittances, debt, humanitarian aid, informal work, child labor, or multiple jobs to survive.

Energy Crisis and Production Paralysis

The fuel and electricity crisis worsened throughout 2025. In government-controlled areas, electricity rationing reached critical levels, with some areas reportedly receiving only one hour of electricity against more than 20 hours of outage.

This reality led to the closure or suspension of hundreds of workshops, small industrial facilities, and informal businesses. Workers in manufacturing, services, repair work, food production, and small commerce were directly affected.

Those who could afford it turned to solar panels and alternative energy sources. Those who could not were pushed further into poverty. The energy crisis deepened class inequalities and further weakened productive work.

Social Conditions and Migration

The year 2025 witnessed renewed waves of migration. This included not only young people, but also families, skilled workers, medical professionals, small investors, and professionals whose livelihoods had collapsed. The health sector remained severely depleted. More than half of health facilities were reportedly out of service or only partially functioning, while shortages of quality medicines continued. Health workers faced unsafe conditions, low wages, overwork, and continued pressure to leave the country. Education also deteriorated. Many children were pushed out of school and into child labor to support their families. Teachers faced poverty wages, deteriorating school infrastructure, and declining public investment in education.

Economic Disparities Between Areas of Control

Economic conditions differed across Syria's fragmented areas. In northwest Syria, inflation was linked to instability in the Turkish currency, supply disruptions, and dependence on humanitarian assistance. In areas under autonomous administration in the northeast, oil and agricultural resources provided some economic capacity. However, export limitations, border closures, political uncertainty, and pressure on infrastructure continued to restrict livelihoods and public services.

This fragmentation produced unequal rights, unequal access to services, and unequal protection for workers.

Legislative Framework for Rights and Freedoms

Syria's legislative environment in 2025 was marked by legal duality. Constitutional texts formally recognize certain freedoms, but exceptional laws, security practices, and executive control emptied many of these rights of substance.

Constitution and Exceptional Laws

The 2012 Constitution formally guarantees public freedoms, privacy, and freedom of expression in several provisions. However, legislative and judicial practice continued to prioritize exceptional laws and security logic. The Anti-Terrorism Law No 19 of 2012 remained one of the main legal instruments used to prosecute activists, critics, and trade unionists. Its broad definitions allowed peaceful expression and labor-related criticism to be treated as security offenses. Cases brought before terrorism-related courts continued to raise serious concerns regarding fair trial guarantees.

Digital Legislation as a Tool of Control

In 2025, the Cybercrime Law, amended by Decree No 20 of 2022, became a key instrument for restricting public debate. It was used to prosecute criticism of economic policies, corruption, wage deterioration, and administrative failure on social media charges such as “undermining the prestige of the state” or “spreading false news” contributed to widespread self-censorship. Workers and trade unionists were discouraged from speaking openly about poverty wages, unsafe workplaces, corruption, or the failure of official unions to defend them.

Trade Union Legal Framework

Trade union work remained governed by a centralized system that prevents the emergence of independent trade union pluralism in government-controlled areas, the General Federation of Trade Unions retained a monopoly over labor representation. Trade union structures remained organically and functionally linked to the state, limiting their independence. No legal reform in 2025 allowed workers to establish unions of their own choosing outside the official framework. Regulations allowing executive interference in professional syndicates, including lawyers’, doctors’, and engineers’ associations, remained in force under broad justifications related to national security.

Property Laws and Social Rights

Property legislation, including Law No 10 of 2018 and related measures, continued to raise serious concerns in 2025. Human rights organizations warned that these laws could be used to deprive refugees, displaced people, and opponents of property rights under the cover of urban planning and reconstruction.

For workers and displaced families, property rights are directly linked to livelihood, return, housing, and social protection. Reconstruction cannot be used to dispossess those already uprooted by war.

Legislation in Areas Outside Government Control

In northwest Syria, the legal system remained fragmented. A combination of older Syrian laws, administrative circulars, and decisions by de facto authorities created a fragile environment lacking judicial independence and separation of powers. In northeast Syria, the Autonomous Administration relied on its social contract, which includes progressive language on women’s rights and pluralism. However, criticism continued regarding the dominance of a single political authority and the limited space for independent opposition or autonomous labor organizing.

Trade Union Rights and Freedoms in 2025

In 2025, trade union rights and freedoms in Syria remained subject to the control of dominant authorities in each area. Trade union work was largely transformed from a tool of worker representation into a mechanism of social management, political control, or limited relief.

Monopoly and Suppression of Pluralism

In government-controlled areas, the General Federation of Trade Unions remained the only officially recognized workers’ organization. Independent union pluralism was not permitted. This monopoly deprived workers of the right to establish and join organizations of their own choosing. It also weakened collective bargaining, because unions that are structurally tied to authority cannot freely challenge state policy, employer abuse, or wage collapse.

Lack of Legal and Practical Independence

The executive authorities retained broad powers to interfere in the elections and functioning of professional unions, including lawyers', doctors', and engineers' associations. Workers continued to face significant obstacles in forming independent organizations without prior authorization. In practice, obtaining authorization outside the official structure remained nearly impossible.

The right to strike was effectively frozen. In 2025, no officially licensed labor strikes were recorded in government-controlled areas. Individual or collective attempts to stop work in protest against living conditions risked accusations of "incitement," "disrupting work," or threatening public order.

Targeting Independent Trade Union Voices

Security pressure against trade unionists who attempted to raise independent demands continued. Reports indicated that trade unionists in the education and health sectors faced harassment, arbitrary transfers, and administrative pressure after criticizing incentive distribution mechanisms, corruption, or deteriorating working conditions.

This policy drained trade union work of active and independent cadres. It sent a clear message to workers: demand relief, but do not demand rights; complain privately, but do not organize collectively.

Fragmented Trade Union Activity Outside Government-Controlled Areas

In northwest Syria, professional syndicates, including teachers' and doctors' bodies, lacked a stable legal framework protecting them from interference by armed or political authorities. During 2025, union headquarters were reportedly raided, and professional decisions were subject to external pressure.

In northeast Syria, although workers' unions existed, trade union activity faced criticism because of its close association with the Autonomous Administration. Independent labor organizing outside the approved framework remained severely limited, and there was little space for union activity that opposed official political orientations.

Economic Collapse and the Transformation of Union Work

With inflation reaching devastating levels, official unions focused largely on charity, food baskets, emergency assistance, and small loans. These forms of support were necessary but insufficient.

Trade unions cannot be reduced to welfare providers. Their central role is to defend wages, working conditions, social protection, occupational safety, and the right of workers to bargain collectively. In Syria, the collapse of wages and the absence of independent trade union power left workers without an effective mechanism to confront poverty.

Examples of Violations of Trade Union Rights and Freedoms in 2025

Due to security restrictions and the multiplicity of authorities across Syria, 2025 witnessed serious violations of trade union rights, including prosecution, administrative interference, intimidation, and obstruction of collective action.

Use of "Undermining the Prestige of the State" Against Trade Unionists

In the first half of 2025, arrests were reported against members of teachers' and doctors' syndicates in Damascus and Latakia following social media posts criticizing the failure of unions to demand wage increases in line with inflation.

The Cybercrime Law was used to bring politically framed charges against professional trade union activity. Some workers reportedly faced dismissal from government jobs before court rulings were issued, these practices criminalize legitimate trade union expression and silence workers who seek to expose poverty wages and institutional failure.

Security Interference in Professional Syndicate Elections

The 2025 elections for branches of the Bar Association in Damascus and rural Aleppo reportedly witnessed direct interference by security services to impose specific lists. Independent candidates were excluded on security grounds despite meeting legal requirements. This transformed the electoral process into a controlled mechanism for appointing loyal figures rather than a democratic process for professional representation. Such interference violates the principle of freedom of association and undermines the autonomy of professional syndicates.

Suppression of Demand-Based Movements in Northwest Syria

In northwest Syria, activists from the Free Teachers' Syndicate were harassed and temporarily detained in May 2025 after organizing protests demanding curriculum independence and payment of overdue salaries.

Trade union cadres were threatened with forced closure of their headquarters on accusations of "splitting the ranks" and working without authorization from the local administration. These measures restricted teachers' right to organize, protest, and defend professional independence.

Political Control in Northeast Syria

Local reports from Raqqqa and Hasakeh indicated that the Autonomous Administration imposed restrictions on the formation of labor associations outside the approved Workers' Union of North and East Syria.

Oil workers were reportedly prevented from organizing a peaceful strike to demand improved occupational safety and health conditions. Organizers were threatened with withdrawal of access cards or arrest on allegations of "incitement against the administration"; This demonstrates that even in areas with formal language of pluralism, independent labor action remained constrained.

Arbitrary Dismissal Under the Pretext of "Security Assessment"

In 2025, lists prepared by security services continued to be sent to public institutions, leading to the dismissal of workers and employees, particularly in the electricity and telecommunications sectors, because of alleged political views or family proximity to opponents. These dismissals deprived workers of livelihood without due process and reinforced fear across public institutions.

Conclusion

Syria's 2025 trade union landscape reflected the broader fragmentation of the country. Workers were trapped between economic collapse, political control, security repression, and institutional division.

In government-controlled areas, unions remained subordinated to the state. In the northwest, union activity was exposed to pressure from de facto authorities and armed actors. In the northeast, labor organizing remained constrained by political alignment with the administration.

Across all areas, workers were denied the essential elements of freedom of association: independence, pluralism, collective bargaining, and the right to strike.

The Syrian crisis cannot be addressed only through humanitarian aid or political negotiations. Workers' rights must be central to any recovery, reconstruction, or political settlement. No reconstruction can be just if workers cannot organize. No social peace can be real if wages collapse while unions are silenced. No political transition can be democratic if professional and labor organizations remain controlled.

The urgent priorities are clear: guarantee independent trade union pluralism, end security interference in union elections, repeal or amend laws used to criminalize labor expression, protect the right to strike, ensure due process in dismissals, and place workers' rights at the heart of any national recovery process. Syrian workers do not need unions that distribute charity under authority. They need unions that defend dignity, wages, safety, and freedom.

Iraq

Legislation and Practice Designed to Fit One Official Union



Introduction:

The year 2025 was a critical test for Iraq's human rights and trade union system. The country sought to strengthen state sovereignty, revive the economy, attract investment, and advance digital transformation. Yet these ambitions collided with structural challenges that continue to affect fundamental rights and freedoms.

For workers, the central problem remained unchanged: Iraq's trade union framework continues to be shaped by an inherited legal system that restricts freedom of association, especially for public sector workers. Despite Iraq's ratification of ILO Convention No 87 on freedom of association, millions of workers remained denied the effective right to establish and join unions of their own choosing.

The result is a deeply contradictory landscape. Iraq speaks the language of reform, development, and modernization, while the legal and administrative framework continues to weaken independent trade union organization and limit workers' collective power.

Economic and Social Situation in 2025

Iraq's economic and social situation in 2025 was marked by sharp fluctuations. Government ambitions for economic reform, investment, infrastructure, and digital transformation continued to face the reality of excessive dependence on oil and growing social pressure.

Oil Dependence and Budget Pressures

The 2025 budget, within the framework of the multiyear budget, recorded a large planned deficit due to high operational expenditure and the salary burden of a public sector employing more than four million people. The gap between the official exchange rate and the parallel market rate continued to create inflationary pressure. This directly affected citizens' purchasing power, despite measures taken through the electronic platform to control dollar transactions.

Iraq remained vulnerable to oil price fluctuations. The country's fiscal space continued to depend heavily on oil revenues, while productive diversification and decent job creation remained limited.

Development and Strategic Projects

The year 2025 was promoted as a year of major strategic projects, especially the Development Road project linking the Grand Faw Port to Turkey. Progress in infrastructure at the Grand Faw Port generated cautious optimism about Iraq's ability to diversify income sources beyond oil. The year also witnessed agreements with international companies, including Qatari, Emirati, and Saudi investors, in energy and new residential city projects such as AlJawahiri and AlGhazlani.

These projects may support economic development. But development without workers' rights risks reproducing inequality. Major infrastructure and investment projects must be accompanied by collective bargaining, occupational safety and health protections, transparent recruitment, and respect for trade union freedoms.

Social Conditions and Structural Crises

Iraq's population exceeded 45 million in 2025, increasing pressure on housing, employment, public services, and infrastructure. Unemployment remained high, especially among young graduates. Official estimates exceeded 15 percent, while the real level of underemployment and informal work was likely higher. Young people continued to face a labor market unable to absorb them into stable and decent work.

The water and climate crisis deepened. The decline in the flow of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers dried large areas of marshes and agricultural land, causing new waves of climate displacement from rural areas to cities. This intensified social vulnerability and increased pressure on urban labor markets.

Digital Transformation and Financial Inclusion

The year 2025 saw accelerated government automation. Electronic payment systems were expanded across public institutions and the private sector, gradually reducing reliance on cash and contributing to efforts to combat petty corruption.

However, digital modernization must not become a substitute for labor rights. Workers need not only electronic payment systems, but also fair wages, contracts, social security, protection from arbitrary dismissal, and the right to organize collectively.

Poverty and Class Inequality

Despite substantial oil revenues, poverty remained around 20 to 22 percent, with deprivation concentrated in southern governorates such as Muthanna and Diwaniya. Rising real estate prices in Baghdad widened class inequality. For workers and low-income families, housing became increasingly unaffordable, while public services remained uneven and social protection insufficient.

Legislative Framework for Rights and Freedoms

In 2025, Iraq witnessed intense legislative activity, much of it restrictive in nature. Under the banners of “protecting public morals,” “cybersecurity,” and “public order,” subsidiary laws and regulations widened the gap between the 2005 Constitution and actual practice.

Laws on “Values” and Social Controversy

Debate continued over amendments to the Personal Status Law No 188 of 1959. Human rights groups warned that proposed changes granting greater authority to religious endowments in marriage and inheritance matters could undermine the principle of citizenship, weaken equality before the law, and legitimize child marriage.

Authorities also enacted or advanced legal measures criminalizing same-sex relations and “sexual deviation” with harsh prison sentences. Such legislation further narrowed personal freedoms and strengthened a punitive approach to social issues.

Digital Space and Freedom of Expression

In 2025, Iraqi authorities increasingly used laws, instructions, and regulatory measures to control digital content.

Cybercrime provisions were used to prosecute so-called “degrading content” and criticism of public institutions. Broad language such as “destabilization,” “defamation,” or “harming public order” allowed authorities to target activists, journalists, and critics.

The Media and Communications Commission also issued regulations requiring content creators to obtain official licenses. Observers viewed these measures as a form of preemptive censorship over public debate.

For trade unionists, digital freedom is not a secondary issue. Workers use digital platforms to expose corruption, wage delays, unsafe conditions, and arbitrary dismissal. Criminalizing online criticism directly weakens worker voice and trade union activity.

Trade Union Legislative Framework: Legal Stalemate

The legislative environment for trade union work in 2025 remained burdened by the legacy of the past.

Decree No 150 of 1987

Decree No 150 of 1987, inherited from the former regime, remained one of the main obstacles to freedom of association. It prohibits public sector employees from establishing labor unions by classifying them as civil servants rather than workers with full trade union rights. This deprives millions of workers in state institutions of independent union representation. It leaves them exposed to unilateral administrative decisions without a genuine trade union body able to defend their economic and social demands.

Trade Union Organization Law

Despite parliamentary attempts in 2025 to adopt a new trade union law compatible with ILO standards, political interests and competition within established union structures continued to block real trade union pluralism.

A modern trade union law cannot be designed to preserve one official structure. It must guarantee all workers the right to establish and join organizations of their own choosing, without prior authorization, political interference, or administrative obstruction.

Right to Demonstrate and Peaceful Assembly

The draft Law on Freedom of Expression and Peaceful Demonstration remained stalled in Parliament in 2025. Disputes continued over whether demonstrations should require prior authorization or simple notification. Requiring prior authorization risks turning the right to demonstrate into a privilege granted by the authorities.

For workers, this matters directly: protest remains one of the few tools available when formal bargaining channels are blocked.

Kurdistan Region

The year also saw continued legislative divergence between Baghdad and Erbil. The Kurdistan Region faced pressure from the Federal Supreme Court to amend election and salary laws, while human rights reports documented a decline in protections for journalists and activists, including arrests under public security laws. This divergence produced unequal rights protections across the country and added further uncertainty for workers and unions operating across jurisdictions.

Trade Union Rights and Freedoms in 2025

The situation of trade union rights and freedoms in Iraq in 2025 remained marked by legal duplication, political interference, and field restrictions. Attempts at modernization continued to collide with an inherited legal system that limits the independence and effectiveness of trade union work.

Legal Duplication and Decree No 150

Decree No 150 of 1987 continued to divide workers by legal status. Public sector workers were denied full trade union rights, while private sector workers formally retained the right to organize.

This division is artificial and unjust. Public sector workers are workers. They sell their labor, depend on wages, and need collective representation. Denying them trade union rights weakens the entire labor movement and fragments worker power.

Trade Union Pluralism Versus Official Monopoly

Although Iraq has ratified ILO Convention No 87, implementation remained weak in 2025. Conflict continued between the General Federation of Trade Unions and independent unions over legitimacy, representation in international forums, and participation in collective bargaining.

Local human rights reports also documented interference by political parties in the elections of professional unions, including teachers' and engineers' syndicates, in order to control resources and use unions as instruments of political influence. Trade unions must belong to workers, not parties, ministries, or political blocs.

Right to Demonstrate and Strike

In 2025, Iraq witnessed widespread demand-based mobilizations, particularly by daily wage workers and contract workers in the electricity and oil sectors. Some sit-ins in front of ministries were met with restrictive measures. Security forces dispersed labor gatherings in Basra and Baghdad where workers demanded unpaid wages, arrears, or conversion to permanent employment.

Iraqi law still lacks clear protections for workers participating in strikes. This leaves strikers vulnerable to administrative prosecution, transfer, dismissal, or criminal accusations. In 2025, participating in a strike remained a professional risk rather than a protected right.

Professional Unions

Professional unions were active in 2025, but they also faced legislative and political pressure. The Journalists' Syndicate faced criticism for failing to adequately protect journalists arrested under cybercrime provisions. At times, it was accused of aligning with government efforts to control digital content.

The Bar Association played an important role in defending judicial independence, but it also faced legislative pressures aimed at reducing its authority to regulate access to the profession.

Women in Trade Union Work

Women's representation in senior trade union leadership declined slightly in 2025, despite Iraq's formal commitments under national plans for women's participation. Social barriers, legal constraints, political interference, workplace discrimination, and violence continued to limit women's access to decisionmaking positions in major labor unions.

No trade union movement can be democratic while women workers remain underrepresented in leadership.

Examples of Violations of Trade Union Rights and Freedoms in 2025

The year 2025 witnessed a sharp intersection between workers' demands and legal and security restrictions. The following cases illustrate key patterns of violation.

Prosecution of Health Workers' Mobilizations

In April 2025, the Coordination of Health Personnel organized major demonstrations in Baghdad and other governorates demanding job placement, payment of allowances, and improved working conditions.

Security forces confronted protesters in front of the Ministry of Health with water cannons and physical force. Administrative orders were also issued transferring dozens of active trade unionists to remote areas as punishment for alleged "incitement to strike".

These measures violated the right to peaceful assembly and exposed health workers to retaliation for raising legitimate labor demands.

Suppression of Oil Workers' Strike in Basra

In May 2025, workers at the Rumaila oil field in Basra attempted to organize a partial strike demanding improved occupational safety and health conditions after repeated workplace accidents.

Security forces intervened to disperse the sit-in and arrested five workers' representatives without clear warrants. The investigation reportedly relied on antiterrorism provisions under the accusation of "disrupting vital state facilities".

This reflected the use of criminal law to intimidate workers in a strategic sector and to turn legitimate labor demands into security cases.

Interference in Bar Association Elections

In March 2025, ahead of Bar Association branch elections, influential political blocs reportedly intervened to promote specific candidates.

A number of independent lawyers were excluded from nomination lists on grounds such as "security concerns" or alleged inclusion in accountability and justice procedures. These exclusions appeared arbitrary and undermined the independence of the Bar Association and the right of its members to freely choose their representatives.

Restricting the Teachers' Union and Banning Meetings

In October 2025, local authorities in a Middle Euphrates governorate prevented the holding of a trade union conference intended to discuss the deterioration of education. Authorities cited the absence of prior security approval, even though the union was officially recognized. Observers viewed the measure as an attempt to control the union and prevent it from exposing corruption in school construction contracts.

The right of unions to meet, debate, and hold conferences is a core element of freedom of association

Arbitrary Dismissal of Daily Wage Workers in the Ministry of Electricity

By the end of 2025, the electricity sector witnessed a campaign to terminate the services of hundreds of daily wage workers who had participated in union mobilizations demanding permanent employment

The dismissals were carried out without adequate respect for labor protections. The absence of effective intervention by the official trade union structure exposed the fragility of protection for precarious and informal workers

Daily wage workers are among the most vulnerable workers in Iraq. Their exclusion from stable contracts and effective union protection makes them easy targets for retaliation.

Digital Prosecution of Trade Unionists

Cybercrime provisions were used in 2025 to prosecute leaders of independent trade union committees in the municipal sector

Lawsuits were filed against trade unionists over posts in WhatsApp groups criticizing the distribution of residential plots to employees. Their comments were treated as defamation of government institutions. This type of prosecution criminalizes internal worker communication and threatens one of the most basic tools of modern organizing.

Conclusion

Iraq's 2025 trade union landscape exposed the gap between constitutional promises, international commitments, and the lived reality of workers. The country has ratified ILO Convention No 87, yet Decree No 150 of 1987 continues to deny millions of public sector workers the right to organize. Iraq speaks of reform, investment, and digital transformation, yet workers who strike, protest, or criticize public policy face transfer, dismissal, prosecution, and security pressure.

The problem is not only legal delay. It is political resistance to independent worker power.

A trade union system designed to fit one official structure cannot represent a diverse working class. Iraq's workers include public employees, private sector workers, daily wage workers, contract workers, oil workers, health workers, teachers, municipal workers, women workers, informal workers, and young workers. They need pluralism, not monopoly. They need protection, not permission.

The urgent priorities are clear: repeal Decree No 150 of 1987; adopt a trade union law fully aligned with ILO Convention No 87; protect the right to strike and peaceful assembly; end security interference in union activity; stop using criminal and cybercrime laws against labor activists; guarantee women's participation in union leadership; and ensure that precarious workers are covered by labor and social protection. Iraq cannot build sovereignty, reconstruction, and development while denying workers their collective voice. No real democracy exists without democracy at work.



Yemen

War Is Crushing Workers and Their Representatives



Introduction:

The year 2025 was another tragic marker in Yemen's deepening human rights crisis. Public freedoms and trade union rights, once recognized in constitutional and legal texts, continued to be transformed into instruments of conflict by the different parties exercising power across the country.

In a context of "no peace and no war," the continued division of national institutions left workers without effective protection. Across different areas of control, authorities and armed actors used security measures, administrative decisions, and politicized legal proceedings to fragment what remained of independent civic and trade union space.

For workers, the consequences were devastating. Salaries remained unpaid, poverty deepened, public services collapsed, and trade union representatives who demanded basic rights faced intimidation, dismissal, detention, or prosecution. In 2025, trade union activity in Yemen was not merely restricted. In many areas, it was treated as a threat to authority.

Economic and Social Situation in 2025

Yemen's humanitarian and economic crisis deepened in 2025 to the point of structural collapse. The consequences of prolonged war intersected with climate shocks, the suspension of oil exports, institutional fragmentation, and the spread of a war economy.

Monetary Collapse and Vanishing Purchasing Power

The year witnessed a sharp monetary divide that deepened the economic disaster. In areas under the control of the internationally recognized government, the Yemeni rial deteriorated dramatically, at times exceeding 2,000 rials to the US dollar. This led to sharp increases in food, fuel, medicine, transport, and basic goods.

In areas under the control of the de facto authorities in Sana'a, the liquidity crisis continued, while restrictions on the circulation of new currency created economic stagnation despite the appearance of relative exchange rate stability for workers, the result was the same across the country: wages, where paid at all, were no longer sufficient to secure survival.

Salary Suspension and Expanding Famine

By 2025, the interruption of civil servants' salaries, especially in northern areas, had entered its ninth year. Public employees, teachers, health workers, municipal workers, and other civil servants continued to work or wait without reliable income.

Food insecurity reached catastrophic levels. Yemen remained among the world's most severe hunger crises, with more than 18 million people in urgent need of food assistance.

Oil and gas exports from southern ports remained halted because of threats and attacks. This deprived the state budget of a major share of its resources and further weakened the ability of public institutions to provide salaries, services, and social protection.

Climate Displacement and Service Collapse

War was not the only source of suffering in 2025. Climate shocks became a major driver of displacement and livelihood destruction. Devastating floods affected governorates including Marib, Hodeidah, and Hajjah, destroying displacement camps, homes, agricultural livelihoods, and fragile infrastructure. These disasters increased the number of internally displaced people and pushed already vulnerable families deeper into poverty.

The health and education systems remained close to collapse. Less than half of health facilities were functioning, while shortages of medicines and medical supplies persisted. Epidemics such as cholera and polio continued to threaten communities already weakened by malnutrition and displacement.

Levies and the War Economy

In 2025, the shadow economy expanded across areas of control. Double taxation, informal levies, and arbitrary fees were imposed on merchants, workers, transporters, and citizens. Many small businesses closed, and capital continued to leave the country.

Humanitarian assistance was also vulnerable to political manipulation, unfair distribution, and obstruction. In some areas, aid was used as a tool of control rather than as a rights-based response to urgent human need.

Education and Child Labor

The year recorded an alarming rise in school dropout rates. Hundreds of thousands of children were forced out of education and into the labor market or recruitment networks to help families survive. This is one of the gravest long-term consequences of Yemen's crisis. The destruction of education today is the destruction of the country's future workforce, civic life, and social fabric.

Legislative Framework for Rights and Freedoms

Yemen's legislative system in 2025 was marked by legal fragmentation and the effective suspension of constitutional guarantees. Across different areas of control, legal texts were replaced or overridden by authoritarian decrees, security instructions, and administrative regulations serving the interests of the parties to the conflict.

The Suspension of Constitutional Guarantees

Although the Constitution of the Republic of Yemen formally guarantees freedom of expression, association, and assembly, these guarantees remained largely ineffective in 2025

In areas controlled by the de facto authorities in Sana'a, codes of conduct and circulars issued by ruling bodies continued to operate as parallel legal instruments Security and intelligence regulations were tightened, enabling civilians, activists, and trade unionists to be brought before military or state security courts on broad charges such as "high treason"

In areas under the internationally recognized government, fragmented loyalties within state institutions and armed formations led to inconsistent law enforcement Local security actors imposed their own practices, particularly in relation to land, detention, and protest, often outside effective oversight by the Ministry of Justice

Criminalization of Digital Space

The year 2025 saw intensified criminalization of digital activity through the use of outdated and broadly interpreted laws the Penal Code and the 1990 Press and Publications Law were used to prosecute social media users, journalists, and activists In Sana'a, new regulations imposed strict monitoring on internet cafés and network shops, requiring them to record user data These measures violated privacy and restricted freedom of expression.

For trade unionists, digital space is often the only remaining space to denounce unpaid salaries, corruption, arbitrary dismissal, or workplace abuse Restricting this space further silenced workers.

Labor Law and Trade Union Freedoms

Labor Law No 5 of 1995 remained largely ineffective in 2025 It offered little protection in a country where institutions are divided, salaries are unpaid, and armed actors exercise authority.

No legislation was adopted to address the longstanding salary crisis Instead, in some areas, disciplinary measures were used against employees who demanded payment of salaries, including accusations of breaching public service duties

The law governing associations and unions was emptied of its purpose by administrative restrictions requiring unions to obtain repeated security clearances for activities This turned the right to organize from a legal guarantee into a permissionbased privilege.

Politicized Courts and Punitive Judgments

The year 2025 saw the continued issuance of politicized death sentences and property confiscation orders following proceedings that failed to meet minimum fair trial standards Human rights reports indicated that courts in some areas functioned less as independent judicial bodies and more as instruments of violence and political punishment Judicial rulings were used to confiscate the property of opponents and critics through broad interpretations disconnected from ordinary legal guarantees.

Women's Rights and Movement Restrictions

Women's rights suffered severe regression in 2025 Restrictions requiring women to travel with a male guardian, although not grounded in Yemen's original legal framework, became a de facto rule imposed at checkpoints and by security actors in large areas

Efforts to amend the Personal Status Law to establish a minimum age for marriage remained stalled At the same time, poverty and displacement increased the risk of child marriage, which some authorities and communities tolerated as a coping mechanism for economic collapse

These restrictions directly affected women workers and women trade unionists, limiting their mobility, participation, representation, and access to training and international solidarity.

Trade Union Rights and Freedoms in 2025

Trade union rights and freedoms deteriorated further in 2025 Human rights reports described the situation as approaching the "clinical death" of civic work Unions were transformed from organizations defending workers' rights into arenas of political conflict or tools of de facto authorities.

Confiscation of Independence in Sana'a Controlled Areas

In areas controlled by the de facto authorities in Sana'a, the authorities advanced efforts to bring unions under full political and administrative control loyal figures were imposed in the administrative bodies of major unions, including teachers', doctors', and engineers' unions Elected leaders were dismissed, sidelined, or replaced, and union bank accounts were frozen in some cases.

Employees and trade unionists were required to sign a Code of Conduct that framed independent demands, including demands for salaries, as acts of disloyalty or service to the enemy This turned basic labor claims into alleged political offenses.

Repression of Salary Demands

The year 2025 saw severe repression of any union movement demanding payment of long suspended salaries arrest campaigns against leaders of the Yemeni Teachers' Club continued Teachers participating in strikes were threatened with final dismissal and replacement by loyal "volunteers".

Cases were also reported of trade unionists being abducted from their homes in Sana'a and Ibb on accusations of communicating with external parties, merely for organizing vigils demanding salaries and decent living conditions demanding a salary is not a crime It is the most basic claim of a worker.

Fragmentation of Trade Union Work in Southern Areas

In areas under the internationally recognized government, a relatively wider space for activity existed, but trade union work remained weakened by political division, inflation, and insecurity The trade union scene was dominated by structures aligned with local political forces, while other national unions were marginalized Labor demands were often politicized and absorbed into local conflicts or struggles over authority.

Unions in Aden, Hadramawt, and other areas were unable to protect workers effectively from inflation, currency collapse, and public service deterioration Strikes became instruments of political pressure between competing authorities rather than tools for improving workers' livelihoods.

Targeting Workers in International Organizations

In 2025, local Yemeni staff working for international and United Nations organizations faced growing danger They were prevented from engaging in internal trade union activity to protect their employment rights, and dozens were arrested on accusations of espionage

This created a climate of terror that paralyzed the ability of Yemeni staff to defend themselves, organize collectively, or demand fair treatment from their employers and authorities.

Child Labor and the Collapse of Labor Protection

With the absence of effective trade union oversight, labor exploitation expanded Occupational safety standards were widely ignored in the private sector Child labor increased sharply in workshops, markets, transport, agriculture, and informal work as families struggled to survive.

The collapse of trade union protection allowed exploitation to grow unchecked War destroyed not only workplaces, but the mechanisms workers need to defend themselves.

Examples of Violations of Trade Union Rights and Freedoms in 2025

In the context of expanding repression and multiple de facto authorities, Yemen recorded serious violations of trade union rights in 2025, including arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, unfair trials, interference in unions, and dismissal.

The Yemeni Teachers' Club

In 2025, abuses against leaders and members of the Yemeni Teachers' Club continued The Club had emerged to demand payment of salaries suspended for years Cases were reported of arbitrary detention and renewed detention orders against club leaders, including Abu Zeid alKumaim and others, on charges such as "espionage" and "disturbing public tranquility" Hundreds of teachers in Sana'a, Ibb, and Amran were reportedly dismissed and replaced by loyal "volunteers" as punishment for continuing partial strike action.

These measures criminalized the basic right of teachers to demand wages and defend public education.

Trials of Employees of International Organizations

Between June and September 2025, repression escalated against Yemeni staff working for UN agencies and international organizations, including UNICEF and the World Health Organization. The de facto authorities in Sana'a broadcast televised "confessions" by detained employees, accusing them of belonging to spy cells targeting union, educational, and agricultural work in Yemen.

These coerced confessions and public accusations created a climate of fear and effectively prevented local employees from demanding employment rights or forming committees to protect themselves from arbitrary arrest.

Suppression of the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate

Journalists' unions faced violations in both Aden and Sana'a

In Aden, armed groups continued to control the headquarters of the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate. Syndicate members were prevented from entering the premises and carrying out professional activities. An alternative entity was imposed as a political fait accompli. In Sana'a, courts issued rulings confiscating the property of journalists and syndicate members who had left the country. Others inside the country faced accusations of "high treason" because of their writings; these measures attacked both freedom of expression and the right of professional unions to organize independently.

Interference in the Syndicate of Physicians and Pharmacists

In early 2025, Sana'a witnessed an attempt to impose a new administrative body on the Doctors' Syndicate without lawful elections. Security agents stormed a preparatory meeting of the syndicate, and a list of loyalists was imposed as a "steering committee." This led to the suspension of independent union work by doctors who had been demanding an end to levies imposed on private hospitals and clinics.

Restrictions on Women Trade Unionists

The role of women trade unionists sharply declined in 2025 because of new social and security restrictions, including the male guardian requirement. Women trade unionists in the education and nursing sectors were prevented from traveling to participate in international trade union workshops on the grounds that they lacked a male guardian. This deprived women's trade union movements of international representation, training, and solidarity. Such restrictions do not only violate women's freedom of movement. They also silence women workers and exclude them from trade union leadership.

Conclusion

Yemen's 2025 reality shows how war crushes workers twice: first by destroying wages, services, and livelihoods; and again by dismantling the organizations that should defend them.

Trade unions were captured, fragmented, intimidated, or reduced to survival functions. Teachers demanding salaries were detained. Health workers and journalists faced repression. Women trade unionists were blocked from movement. Workers in international organizations were terrorized. Children were pushed into labor while official protection collapsed.

The Yemeni conflict has turned labor rights into a battlefield. But workers' rights are not conditional on peace. They must be protected during war, crisis, displacement, and institutional collapse.

The urgent priorities are clear: release detained trade unionists and labor activists; end interference in union leadership; restore payment of salaries; protect the right to organize and strike; stop using security courts against workers; end restrictions on women trade unionists; protect child workers from exploitation; and ensure that all parties to the conflict respect freedom of association.

Yemen cannot be rebuilt by silencing workers. No peace process will be credible if it excludes those who kept schools, hospitals, public services, ports, markets, and communities alive through war. Workers and their unions must be at the center of any future peace, recovery, and reconstruction.

Sultanate of Oman Promising Reforms, but Trade Union Restrictions Remain



Introduction:

The year 2025 marked an important moment in Oman's modernization process. The Sultanate continued to advance reforms linked to Oman Vision 2040, including fiscal consolidation, social protection, digital transformation, labor market modernization, and institutional development. These reforms created important openings for social dialogue and labor protection. However, the progress remains incomplete as long as trade union activity continues to operate within legal and administrative limits that restrict full freedom of association, collective bargaining, and independent worker power.

Oman's experience in 2025 therefore reflects both promise and caution. The country has moved forward in social protection and labor regulation, but the decisive test remains whether workers and their organizations can act freely, independently, and collectively without administrative restriction or employer retaliation.

Economic and Social Situation in 2025

In 2025, Oman entered a phase of consolidating the gains of fiscal balance policies. The country moved from recovery toward more sustainable growth, supported by stable oil revenues, fiscal discipline, and the continued implementation of Oman Vision 2040.

Fiscal Performance and Social Protection

The Sultanate continued to record fiscal surpluses in 2025, supported by stable oil prices and the results of the Fiscal Sustainability Plan. The government used part of these surpluses to reduce public debt, contributing to improved credit ratings by international rating agencies.

The full operation of the Social Protection Fund was one of the most significant social developments of the year. Monthly cash benefits for older persons, children, persons with disabilities, and other eligible groups strengthened income security and contributed to improving living conditions for Omani families. This represents a major social gain. Social protection, however, must be accompanied by decent wages, collective bargaining, and full protection of workers' rights.

Economic Diversification and Green Hydrogen

Oman emerged in 2025 as an important regional actor in green energy. Major hydrogen projects in Duqm and Salalah began to take shape, supported by large investment agreements and the work of Hydrom.

The logistics and tourism sectors also expanded, with Muscat International Airport and the Port of Duqm contributing to increased trade, tourism, and nonoil economic activity. These developments create new opportunities for employment and diversification. They also raise urgent labor questions: who benefits from the transition, what jobs are created, what protections are guaranteed, and whether workers have a seat at the table in shaping the future economy.

Labor Market and Employment Policy

The year 2025 saw continued focus on employment in the private sector. Omanization policies advanced in technical, leadership, and specialized sectors, while training initiatives for Omani youth expanded in areas such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and future skills.

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority also provided financing and legal support to small businesses, increasing their contribution to the national economy. Employment policy must not be reduced to nationalization targets alone. It must guarantee decent work, occupational safety and health, fair wages, gender equality, migrant worker protection, and the right of all workers to organize.

Sustainable Development and Digital Transformation

The Sultan Haitham City project advanced in 2025 as a model of sustainable and smart urban development. Government services were also increasingly digitized, reducing bureaucracy and improving access for citizens, residents, and investors.

Digital governance can strengthen transparency and efficiency. But it must also respect privacy, protect personal data, and ensure that digital labor market systems do not become tools for surveillance or exclusion.

Food Security and Social Stability

Oman invested in food security projects, including fish farming and modern greenhouse agriculture. These investments helped maintain relative stability in commodity prices despite global volatility. Food security and social stability are important achievements. But sustainable stability depends not only on state policy, but also on workers' rights, social dialogue, and the ability of unions to defend workers in all sectors.

Legislative Framework for Rights and Freedoms

Oman's legislative framework in 2025 reflected an effort to harmonize national priorities with international standards. The year saw progress in social protection, labor regulation, personal data protection, judicial digitization, and institutional reform.

Social Protection as a Legal Right

The Social Protection Law represented one of the most important legislative achievements in Oman's modern social policy. It moved social security from a welfare-based model toward a rights-based system regulated by law. This is a significant step. It recognizes that dignity across the life cycle—from childhood to old age—requires legal guarantees, not charity.

Labor Law and Trade Union Regulation

The implementation of the new Labor Law and its regulations created important protections for workers, including stronger safeguards against arbitrary dismissal and clearer rules for termination of employment.

The law also strengthened the role of the General Federation of Workers of the Sultanate of Oman and affiliated trade union committees in representing workers before employers and in international forums; However, legal recognition does not automatically mean full freedom of association. The key test remains whether trade union committees can operate independently, bargain collectively, organize workers freely, and take collective action without interference.

Civil Liberties, Data Protection, and Association

The Personal Data Protection Law provided an important framework for privacy in the context of Oman's digital transformation. New regulations also facilitated the registration of public benefit associations and volunteer teams, supporting civil society participation in development.

These developments are positive, but civil society and worker organizations must be able to operate freely and critically. Development needs independent voices, not only approved participation.

Judicial Independence and Access to Justice

Oman continued to digitize justice through remote litigation, electronic files, and administrative grievance systems. These reforms improved access to justice and accelerated case processing.

For workers, access to justice is central. Labor courts and dispute mechanisms must be fast, independent, affordable, and capable of protecting workers from retaliation, wage theft, dismissal, and antiunion discrimination.

Women and Children's Rights

The year 2025 saw continued attention to legislation protecting children and promoting women's participation in public life. Stronger penalties against child abuse and the activation of child protection committees were important steps; Women's participation in elected and professional bodies also increased. The next step is to ensure that women workers are equally represented in trade union leadership and collective bargaining structures.

Trade Union Rights and Freedoms in 2025

The year 2025 represented a significant stage in the development of trade union rights in Oman. The implementation of the new Labor Law created new opportunities for trade union committees and collective representation.

Strengthening Representation

The new framework gave trade union committees clearer authority to represent workers in collective bargaining and labor agreements. The number of registered trade union committees in the private sector increased, reflecting growing confidence among Omani and migrant workers in the role of organized labor.

This is an important development. But trade union growth must be measured not only by numbers, but by independence, bargaining power, protection from retaliation, and the ability to act without fear.

Protection of Trade Unionists

Protection provisions prohibiting antiunion retaliation came into force. The law prohibits dismissal based on trade union activity and provides for reinstatement and compensation. Rules on trade union leave also enabled members of union administrative bodies to carry out their duties while maintaining wages and benefits.

These protections are essential. But their effectiveness depends on enforcement. Employers must not be allowed to disguise antiunion dismissals as restructuring, performance management, or economic necessity.

Tripartite Social Dialogue

Tripartite dialogue between government, employers, and workers became more structured in 2025. The General Federation of Workers participated in discussions on labor market decisions, job security mechanisms, and Omanization rules. Labor reconciliation committees, including worker representatives, helped resolve disputes before they reached the courts.

Social dialogue is valuable only if it is genuine. It must allow unions to disagree, propose, object, and mobilize, not merely endorse policy after decisions have already been made.

Collective Bargaining and Peaceful Protest

The number of collective labor agreements increased in 2025. These agreements included improvements in wages, occupational safety and health, working hours, and other conditions beyond the legal minimum.

The law also regulates peaceful work stoppages as a last resort after negotiation. However, the right to strike must not be reduced to an exceptional privilege surrounded by excessive controls. It is a core tool of workers' bargaining power.

Example of Concern in 2025

Disguised AntiUnion Dismissals Through “Restructuring”

In 2025, labor reports indicated that some logistics companies terminated the contracts of workers and trade unionists under the pretext of economic restructuring. Trade unionists considered these cases disguised arbitrary dismissals intended to weaken bargaining power inside enterprises. Such practices exploit economic condition clauses to circumvent legal protections against the dismissal of union activists.

This is a central test for Oman's reforms. Protection on paper must become protection in practice.

Conclusion

Oman made meaningful progress in 2025. Social protection expanded, labor regulation improved, collective bargaining developed, and social dialogue became more institutionalized. But the work is unfinished. The next phase must move from regulated participation to full freedom of association.

Workers in Oman need independent unions, stronger collective bargaining, protection from disguised retaliation, and a meaningful right to strike. Social dialogue cannot be credible if workers' collective power remains limited.

Oman's reform path has opened a door. The challenge now is to ensure that workers can walk through it freely.

Kuwait

Trade Union Freedoms Between Institutional Continuity and a Narrowing Public Space



Introduction:

In 2025, Kuwait witnessed major political and institutional developments that affected public life and the broader environment for rights and freedoms, including trade union freedoms. These developments unfolded under the exceptional arrangements that followed the dissolution of the National Assembly and the suspension of certain constitutional provisions.

Trade union organizations were not suspended or abolished. The Kuwait Trade Union Federation, sectoral unions, and professional unions maintained their legal existence and continued to perform representative, organizational, and service-related functions.

However, the space in which unions operated became more sensitive and more restricted. Their ability to initiate action, influence policy, and connect workplace demands to broader social and economic issues was narrowed by the wider political environment.

The central issue in Kuwait in 2025 was therefore not whether trade unions existed. It was whether they could operate as independent social actors capable of defending workers' rights, shaping public policy, and challenging economic reforms when they harmed working people.

Economic and Social Situation in 2025

Kuwait continued to face economic and social challenges linked to the structure of its oil-dependent economy, high current expenditure, subsidies, wages, and the cost of social protection. The government continued to promote reform under the “New Kuwait 2035” vision, with efforts to diversify income, stimulate investment, reorganize public spending, and develop new sectors.

Fiscal Pressures and Social Balance

Kuwait remained highly dependent on oil revenues and vulnerable to fluctuations in global oil markets. Public finances continued to face pressure from wages, subsidies, and social obligations.

The question of fiscal reform remained directly linked to social protection. Financial sustainability cannot be achieved by weakening workers’ rights or reducing social gains. Any reform must protect decent living conditions and guarantee that workers do not pay the price of fiscal adjustment alone.

Labor Market and Demographic Policy

The issue of “adjusting the demographic composition” remained central in 2025. Workforce nationalization policies expanded, and migrant labor regulation continued through recruitment, residency, and occupational standards.

From a trade union perspective, such policies cannot be assessed only as administrative tools. They must also be measured against decent work, equality, nondiscrimination, and the rights of both Kuwaiti and migrant workers.

Cost of Living and Social Protection

The cost of living, housing, and the protection of pensioners and low-income groups remained major social concerns. These issues are not separate from trade union work. They are core labor questions because they determine whether wages allow workers to live with dignity.

The nationality file also remained highly sensitive, with major legal, social, and humanitarian consequences. Measures affecting citizenship status raised questions about due process, appeal mechanisms, legal security, and social stability.

Legislative Framework for Rights and Freedoms

Kuwait’s legislative and institutional framework in 2025 continued to operate under exceptional conditions. The absence of an elected Parliament weakened legislative oversight and reduced channels through which social actors, including trade unions, could influence policy.

Public Freedoms and Digital Space

The state continued to regulate public discourse and digital expression through laws and procedures related to state security, cybercrime, and media regulation.

This affected not only political activists and journalists, but also trade union actors. When public space narrows, unions become more cautious. Their ability to speak about wages, social protection, labor market policy, and vulnerable workers is reduced.

Labor Market Regulation and Migrant Workers

Regulatory measures concerning migrant workers continued in 2025, including measures related to labor mobility, contractual relations, national employment ratios, and workforce regulation.

Officially, these measures were presented as tools to balance the labor market and protect rights. In practice, their human rights impact remained contested, especially regarding freedom of movement, dependency on employers, and access to remedies.

Vulnerable Groups

The status of stateless residents, access to civil justice, and legal guarantees remained unresolved issues requiring stable, comprehensive, and rights-based solutions.

Trade Union Rights and Freedoms in 2025

Trade union rights in Kuwait were marked by a paradox. Institutions continued to exist, but the space for independent and expansive trade union action narrowed.

Trade unions maintained offices, legal status, and participation in some committees but this did not mean that they could fully act as independent social partners. The broader political context encouraged restraint and reduced the space for positions that could be interpreted as exceeding a narrow professional mandate.

The Legal Limits of Trade Union Action

Kuwaiti law restricts unions from engaging in political or religious issues or activities outside their professional mandate. Nationally, this is presented as a way to preserve the professional character of unions; However, from a trade union perspective, the distinction between “professional” and “public” is not always clear. Wages, social protection, migrant labor, economic reform, pensions, housing, and public spending are both workplace issues and public issues.

A narrow interpretation of trade union mandates risks reducing unions to administrative service bodies instead of organizations of worker power and social justice.

Migrant Workers and the Kafala System

Migrant workers remain central to any assessment of trade union freedom in Kuwait. They represent a large share of the labor market and remain vulnerable to unequal protection.

Kuwait has legal frameworks and institutional mechanisms addressing migrant workers, including a migrant workers’ office established in 1993 and specialized committees within some unions. These structures matter. But the central question remains whether migrant workers can effectively access representation, complaints mechanisms, remedies, and collective protection without fear of retaliation, deportation, or loss of residency; Procedures regulating departure and the relationship with employers continue to raise concerns. From a rights-based perspective, the test is whether these procedures protect workers’ freedom and autonomy or reinforce dependency on employers.

Trade Union Mobilization and International Scrutiny

Some sectors, including oil and services, maintained active trade union presence in 2025. Unions continued to raise professional and social demands and monitor working conditions. However, this activity took place in a more tightly controlled environment. The challenge was not the absence of union activity, but the ceiling imposed on it.

In May 2025, Kuwait underwent its Universal Periodic Review before the Human Rights Council and received recommendations related to strengthening legal protection for rights and freedoms, including freedom of association and civil and social rights. This reflected continued international attention to the country’s rights and labor environment.

Structural Concerns in 2025

In Kuwait, violations do not always appear as direct bans or public repression. They also appear as structural restrictions that limit the ability of unions to operate fully; The exceptional political environment weakened the public space in which unions act. The decline of parliamentary oversight reduced channels for labor influence. Legal restrictions on union mandates encouraged caution. Migrant workers continued to face barriers to equal representation and redress.

These structural imbalances limit equality of protection, the right to organize, and the ability of workers to defend their interests.

Conclusion

Kuwait's trade union reality in 2025 was complex. The institutional structure remained in place, but the space for independent and socially engaged trade union action narrowed.

A fair assessment must go beyond asking whether unions exist; the deeper question is whether they can act freely, defend workers, shape public policy, and represent all workers, including migrant workers and vulnerable groups.

The priority for the coming period is clear: expand public space, strengthen social dialogue, protect migrant workers, guarantee effective representation, and allow unions to address the full range of economic and social policies affecting working people.

Trade unions must not be confined to service functions. They must be recognized as democratic social actors.



Bahrain

Mounting Restrictions, Year After Year



Introduction:

The year 2025 was a pivotal moment for assessing rights and freedoms in Bahrain. The country continued to present its National Human Rights Plan 2022–2026 as evidence of reform and alignment with international obligations. Yet this reform discourse remained in tension with a restrictive security and legislative environment.

Trade union rights in Bahrain continued to operate under structural constraints. While union institutions remained active, their independence, freedom of action, and ability to represent all workers were limited by political exclusion laws, restrictions on strikes and assembly, and employer practices that weakened union leadership.

Economic and Social Situation in 2025

Bahrain achieved a degree of economic and social stability in 2025, supported by the Economic Recovery Plan and the Fiscal Balance Program. However, public debt, living costs, and labor market inequality remained significant challenges.

Fiscal Performance and Economic Growth

Bahrain moved closer to fiscal balance, supported by stable oil prices and growth in non-oil revenue. Tourism, logistics, airport activity, and port operations contributed to Manama's role as a regional business hub.

Labor Market and Bahrainization

The year 2025 was decisive for national employment policy. Bahrainization programs expanded, particularly in medical, engineering, technical, financial, and service sectors. Labor market regulations and fees on migrant labor were adjusted to encourage private sector employment of Bahraini nationals; These policies may support national employment, but they must not be implemented at the expense of migrant workers' rights. A just labor market protects all workers, regardless of nationality.

Cost of Living and Social Protection

The government continued to provide financial support, including cost-of-living allowances, to low-income groups. Housing programs also advanced through financing schemes and new urban developments. These measures provided relief, but inflation, housing costs, and employment insecurity remained sources of pressure for workers and families.

Digital Transformation and Public Services

Government service digitization advanced significantly. Health and education reforms also continued, including the development of national health insurance. Digital transformation may improve access to services, but it must not be accompanied by digital surveillance or restrictions on freedom of expression.

Legislative Framework for Rights and Freedoms

Bahrain's legislative framework in 2025 continued to reflect a tension between legal modernization and security control.

Political Isolation Laws

The political isolation laws remained in force, excluding members of dissolved political associations from running for elections or serving on the boards of clubs and associations.

These measures had consequences beyond political parties. They affected professional and trade union life by excluding people from leadership based on past political affiliation. Such exclusion weakens pluralism and undermines the right of workers and professionals to choose their representatives freely.

Alternative Sentences and Open Prisons

The expansion of alternative sentencing and open prison programs represented a positive development. These measures contributed to the release of some detainees and reflected a shift toward rehabilitation; However, alternative sentencing does not resolve the deeper concerns about prosecutions based on expression, association, or political background.

Cybercrime and Digital Control

The Anti-Cybercrime Law remained a major tool for controlling public expression. Broad charges such as "insulting a statutory body" or "spreading false news affecting civil peace" were used against activists and critics. This directly affects trade unionists. Workers must be able to criticize companies, policies, and public authorities without fear of criminal prosecution.

Labor Market Legislation

The replacement of flexible work permits with employment registration systems was presented as a measure to protect workers and regulate the labor market. However, the impact on migrant workers depends on whether these systems reduce vulnerability or create new forms of dependency.

Bahrainization measures also increased in 2025. They must be implemented in a way that prevents discrimination and protects both national and migrant workers.

Trade Union Rights and Freedoms in 2025

Trade union freedoms in Bahrain remained institutionally present but structurally restricted.

Bahrainization as a Trade Union Priority

Unions supported policies to increase Bahraini employment in key sectors. However, the focus on Bahrainization sometimes marginalized migrant workers, who form a significant part of the workforce.

Migrant workers continued to face barriers to genuine union representation, especially in cases involving wage delays, unsafe conditions, and abusive employment practices.

Restrictions on Strikes and Assembly

Bahrain continued to restrict strikes in sectors classified as critical, including electricity, water, aviation, and oil. In 2025, this concept was administratively expanded to include additional service sectors, weakening the practical content of the right to strike. Unionists also faced security summons after organizing protests without prior authorization in front of major factories to demand bonuses and wage adjustments; a right to strike that cannot be exercised in practice is not a right. It is a controlled exception.

Targeting of Trade Unionists

Some companies used restructuring as a pretext to dismiss prominent trade unionists. These dismissals were difficult to prove as antiunion retaliation before labor courts. The political isolation law also affected trade unionists with previous affiliations to dissolved political associations, preventing some from running for leadership positions in unions or professional associations.

Professional Associations

Professional associations, including lawyers' and medical associations, faced pressure over their autonomy. In late 2025, the Bahrain Bar Association faced legislative pressure to increase Ministry of Justice oversight of professional licensing.

Medical professionals also remained cautious when raising concerns about service quality, labor rights, and private sector conditions.

Examples of Violations in 2025

Disguised Dismissals in Aviation and Services

In the first half of 2025, companies in aviation and logistics used restructuring to dismiss workers, including heads and members of active union committees that had demanded better health insurance and increased cost-of-living allowances.

The General Federation of Bahrain Trade Unions considered these measures disguised arbitrary dismissals aimed at weakening bargaining power.

Political Isolation in Union Elections

The political isolation law continued to affect trade union and professional association elections. Trade unionists, doctors, and lawyers were prevented from running for leadership positions because of previous membership in dissolved political associations.

Reports documented the exclusion of candidates from major union elections on administrative and security grounds

Restriction of Construction Workers' Protest

In August 2025, workers in major construction companies attempted to hold a peaceful vigil over delayed wages and unsafe work under extreme heat

Security authorities dispersed the gathering on the grounds that prior authorization had not been obtained Organizers were summoned and warned against “creating chaos in vital facilities”.

Exclusion from Social Dialogue

Representatives of the General Federation of Bahrain Trade Unions were excluded from some government advisory committees on labor market policy Representation was instead limited to unions closer to official positions This weakened trade union pluralism and made social dialogue formal and unbalanced.

Digital Prosecution of Trade Unionists

In September 2025, a telecommunications sector trade unionist was arrested after publishing posts criticizing company policies related to replacing national workers with costly foreign contracts

He was charged with spreading false news affecting the company's economic interests and was administratively suspended pending trial.

Conclusion

Bahrain's 2025 trade union landscape shows that institutions can exist while freedom remains restricted Union structures remained active, but political exclusion, strike restrictions, digital repression, and disguised dismissals weakened independent worker representation.

The urgent priorities are clear: repeal political exclusion measures affecting trade union rights, protect the right to strike, end security summons against labor activists, guarantee equal representation for migrant workers, and ensure that social dialogue includes genuinely independent unions Workers cannot defend their rights under a ceiling of fear.



Saudi Arabia

Excessive Centralization as the Main Obstacle to Free and Independent Trade Union Practice



Introduction:

The year 2025 was a critical moment in Saudi Arabia's human rights and trade union landscape. It coincided with the accelerated implementation of Vision 2030 and efforts to reshape the Kingdom's international image as a global investment, tourism, and sports hub. Official discourse highlighted achievements in women's participation, economic competitiveness, legal modernization, and megaproject development. Yet international reports and workers' complaints continued to expose a gap between development ambitions and fundamental freedoms.

The central contradiction remained clear: Saudi Arabia expanded megaprojects, tourism, and global partnerships while keeping worker representation under strict administrative control and denying workers the right to form independent trade unions.

Economic and Social Situation in 2025

By 2025, Saudi Arabia had entered a decisive phase of Vision 2030 implementation. The country shifted from planning and reform toward largescale delivery of projects across tourism, entertainment, mining, logistics, technology, and infrastructure.

PostOil Transition

The nonoil sector continued to drive growth. Foreign direct investment increased, supported by the relocation of regional headquarters of global companies to Riyadh and by tax and regulatory incentives.

However, the rising cost of living and increased rents, especially in Riyadh, placed pressure on household purchasing power. Inflation remained controlled, but daily costs remained a major social concern for workers and families.

Saudi unemployment declined toward the official target, while private sector employment expanded in technology and services.

Social Transformation

Women's laborforce participation exceeded 36 percent, and women increasingly entered leadership roles in finance, diplomacy, and other sectors.

Major international events, infrastructure projects, and urban mobility systems such as the Riyadh Metro changed patterns of public life. A new generation of digital entrepreneurs also emerged.

However, social transformation must be matched by workplace democracy. Women workers, migrant workers, and young workers need not only access to jobs, but also the right to organize, bargain, and challenge exploitation.

Continuing Challenges

Fiscal sustainability remained a major challenge, particularly because of the cost of financing megaprojects such as NEOM and The Line amid global oil price volatility.

Regional inequality also remained a concern, as workers and communities outside major urban centers did not benefit equally from vision-driven growth.

Legislative Framework for Rights and Freedoms

In 2025, Saudi Arabia's legal framework stood at the intersection of legal modernization and political centralization.

Major Legal Reforms

The Personal Status Law strengthened some rights for women in areas such as custody, maintenance, and divorce. The Civil Transactions Law created a more predictable legal framework for individuals and investors and helped reduce inconsistency in judicial decisions. These reforms matter, but legal modernization cannot be selective. A modern economy also requires modern labor rights, including freedom of association and collective bargaining.

Labor Legislation and International Pressure

International pressure increased in 2025, particularly in the context of Saudi Arabia's preparations to host the 2034 FIFA World Cup.

Labor law amendments introduced improvements in wage protection and reduced some elements of the kafala system through the Labor Reform Initiative. However, the legal framework still prevents workers from forming independent trade unions.

Worker representation remains channeled through labor committees and the National Committee of Labor Committees, under the supervision of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development. These mechanisms may help resolve some disputes. But they do not replace independent unions.

Trade Union Rights and Freedoms in 2025

Saudi Arabia's trade union situation remained defined by excessive centralization.

Labor Committees Instead of Trade Unions

As of 2025, the Kingdom still prohibited independent workers' trade unions. The available alternative remained labor committees supervised by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development. These committees have achieved some improvements, including monitoring worker accommodation standards, contributing to policy discussions, and addressing some workplace concerns.

However, they remain limited by their dependency on the state and by the absence of genuine collective bargaining, strike rights, and independent worker organization.

International Complaints

In 2024 and continuing into 2025, the International Trade Union Confederation and Building and Wood Workers' International submitted a complaint to the ILO concerning alleged forced labor and exploitation of migrant workers in projects linked to Vision 2030.

International trade union organizations continued to insist that megaevents and major projects must be linked to the recognition of independent trade unions and the dismantling of remaining kafala-related restrictions.

Labor Reform Initiative

The government expanded technical mechanisms to improve working conditions, including digital documentation of employment contracts and broader job mobility. These steps can reduce individual labor disputes. However, field realities continued to show violations, especially in construction and domestic work. Migrant workers remained vulnerable to wage theft, recruitment debt, mobility restrictions, and retaliation.

Trade Union Assessment

Saudi Arabia's 2025 labor reforms cannot be dismissed as meaningless. Wage protection, contract documentation, and consultation platforms are important regulatory tools. But the central question is whether workers have collective power. Trade union freedom is not consultation. It is the right to organize freely, elect representatives independently, bargain collectively, strike, and defend rights without fear.

Saudi Arabia's main obstacle is not the absence of labor-related institutions. It is excessive centralization that keeps worker representation inside a controlled framework.

For Saudi Arabia's development model to become socially sustainable, it must move beyond administrative modernization toward rights-based transformation: independent unions, collective bargaining, migrant worker protection, and labor guarantees in all megaprojects and sporting events. Economic transformation without worker freedom is not social progress. It is modernization without democracy at work.



Qatar

The Erosion of the World Cup Labor Rights Legacy



Introduction:

This chapter reviews the state of public freedoms and trade union rights in Qatar during 2025. The year was marked by government efforts to preserve and integrate the labor reforms associated with the 2022 World Cup into the permanent legal system.

Qatar continued to lead the region in some human development and safety indicators. It also maintained important labor reforms introduced before and during the World Cup period. However, the gap between advanced legal texts and workers' lived realities remained clear, especially in relation to freedom of expression, freedom of association, and the right of migrant workers to form independent unions.

The central concern in 2025 was the erosion of the World Cup labor rights legacy. Reforms existed, but their enforcement and expansion remained incomplete.

Economic and Social Situation in 2025

In 2025, Qatar moved from the infrastructure spending phase of the World Cup era toward a period of sustainable returns, supported by the expansion of the North Field gas project

Gas Power and Diversification

The expansion of the North Field strengthened Qatar's position as one of the world's leading exporters of liquefied natural gas. Increased revenues supported public debt reduction and strengthened the assets of the Qatar Investment Authority. Non-oil sectors, including tourism, logistics, and financial services, continued to grow. Advanced infrastructure including Hamad Airport, Hamad Port, and the metro supported Qatar's role as a regional hub.

Legacy Sustainability

Tourism expanded as Qatar continued to host major international sporting and cultural events. The demographic profile shifted after the departure of large numbers of construction workers, with a greater focus on skilled labor in clean energy, technology, and artificial intelligence. Qatar continued to invest in education and health, including Education City and expanded health facilities.

Social and Economic Challenges

The cost of living, especially rent in Doha, remained among the highest in the region. This placed pressure on middle-income workers and migrant workers alike. Qatar also faced the challenge of balancing increased gas production with climate commitments, leading to investment in solar energy and carbon capture.

Legislative Framework for Rights and Freedoms

Qatar's legislative system in 2025 reflected a model of functional reform. Labor and economic laws were developed to meet international standards and support investment, while civil and political freedoms remained limited by national security and public order considerations.

Labor Law Reforms

Qatar remains one of the most advanced Gulf states in labor law texts, largely due to reforms adopted before and after the 2022 World Cup.

Legislation allowing workers to change employers without a no-objection certificate remained in place. Electronic platforms for labor complaints and dispute resolution continued to operate. Heat stress protections were strengthened and updated, giving Qatar one of the region's more advanced legal frameworks for protecting workers from extreme heat.

The nondiscriminatory minimum wage and wage protection system also remained in force, with electronic monitoring intended to identify wage payment violations. These reforms are important. But labor rights cannot stop at wage protection and complaints. Workers also need freedom of association and collective bargaining.

Public Freedoms and Expression

Although the Constitution recognizes freedom of opinion and expression, the legal framework continued to impose strict limitations. The Media Activities Law grants broad powers to regulate content and imposes penalties for publishing material considered "fake news" or harmful to the supreme interests of the state. The law on peaceful assembly continues to require prior permits that are difficult to obtain. Public gatherings remain rare and tightly controlled.

Justice and Digital Rights

The Investment and Trade Court contributed to the digitization of commercial dispute resolution, strengthening protection for financial rights.

Qatar's Personal Data Privacy Protection Law remains among the stronger frameworks in the region. However, the Anti-Cybercrime Law remains a major tool for restricting digital expression, criminalizing content considered to cause sedition or insult symbols.

For workers, restrictions on digital organizing matter deeply. Migrant workers often rely on WhatsApp, Facebook, and informal online networks to share information and organize claims.

Trade Union Rights

Qatari legislation still does not allow migrant workers, who make up the overwhelming majority of the workforce, to form independent trade unions.

The law provides only for joint labor committees. These are consultative bodies composed of management and worker representatives, but they do not have the right to strike or conclude binding collective agreements. This remains the central weakness of Qatar's labor reform model.

Trade Union Rights and Freedoms in 2025

Qatar's labor representation system continued to rely on joint committees instead of independent unions.

Joint Labor Committees

By 2025, joint committees expanded across large companies and service sectors, under the supervision of the Ministry of Labor and in cooperation with the ILO. These committees can help improve internal dispute resolution, housing conditions, and workplace communication.

But they remain structurally limited. They do not provide workers with independent collective power. They lack binding collective bargaining authority and the right to strike. Workers' representatives may remain exposed to employer pressure.

Ban on Migrant Worker Unions

Qatari law continues to distinguish between citizens and migrant workers in relation to association.

Qatari citizens may form professional associations, but migrant workers are prohibited from establishing or joining independent labor unions. Authorities justify this on grounds of labor market stability and national security.

This creates a two-tier system of rights. The workers who built and sustain much of Qatar's economy remain excluded from the most basic forms of independent representation.

World Cup Legacy and International Monitoring

Qatar continued cooperation with the ILO, whose Doha office monitored implementation of reforms. The Wage Protection System was updated to improve detection of salary delays. Online complaint platforms allowed workers to submit complaints, including anonymously. These tools are useful but cannot replace unions. Complaint mechanisms address individual violations after they occur. Trade unions build collective power to prevent violations from becoming systemic.

Examples of Violations in 2025

Suppression of Labor Protests and Deportation

In the absence of a legal right to strike, security forces continued to disperse labor gatherings. In the first half of 2025, dozens of Asian workers were reportedly deported after staging a peaceful protest over delayed wages at a contractor working on infrastructure projects in Lusail. Authorities relied on public security justifications to remove them before they could access effective labor litigation.

Limited Ceiling of Joint Committees

In the hotel services sector, workers' representatives on joint committees reportedly faced threats of contract termination or nonrenewal of residency when they insisted on raising demands related to wage increases or unpaid overtime this shows the limits of worker representation when it depends on employer tolerance.

Restrictions on Labor Organizing and Expression

Independent labor organizing continued to carry legal risks Workers attempting to establish informal associations outside Ministry of Labor structures faced harassment or detention In 2025, digital monitoring of WhatsApp and Facebook groups used by workers to coordinate collective claims reportedly increased Some collective activity was treated as incitement under the Cybercrime Law.

Discrimination in Trade Union Rights

Migrant workers, who make up the majority of the workforce, continued to be denied the right to form unions Qataris may form professional associations, but expatriate workers remain excluded from independent labor organization this discrimination drew continued criticism from international trade union organizations, which described it as a classbased system of rights.

Domestic Workers

Domestic workers remained among the least protected groups Because they work inside private homes, they are excluded from joint committees operating in large companies Reports continued to document passport confiscation, denial of weekly rest days, long working hours, and limited access to complaint mechanisms Without union representation, domestic workers remain isolated and highly vulnerable.

Conclusion

Qatar's labor reform legacy remains at risk The country has important legal tools: wage protection, heatstress regulations, minimum wage provisions, labor complaints platforms, and joint committees but the right to organize remains absent for migrant workers Without independent unions, reforms remain dependent on enforcement from above rather than worker power from below.

Qatar cannot preserve the World Cup labor legacy through administrative systems alone The next stage must include freedom of association, collective bargaining, protection from retaliation, and the right of migrant workers to organize, workers do not need only complaint platforms They need unions.

Conclusions

Freedom of Association Is Not a Formal Right It Is the Foundation of Social Justice

This report's review of trade union rights and freedoms across a number of Arab countries shows that 2025 was a decisive and dangerous year for workers in the region. The evidence presented in the country chapters reveals a contradictory reality: limited social progress in some areas, but persistent and, in several cases, escalating attacks on the core of freedom of association, collective bargaining, the right to strike, and trade union independence.

The Arab region is passing through a historic moment of profound economic and social transformation. Financial crises, rising public debt, austerity policies, inflation, unemployment, digitalization, informal work, migration, climate pressures, armed conflict, occupation, and political instability are reshaping the world of work. In this context, free trade unions and genuine social dialogue are not optional. They are essential tools for social stability, democratic accountability, and equitable development.

Yet the report shows that, in too many cases, these tools remain weak, restricted, or deliberately undermined across the region, a clear contradiction persists between constitutional guarantees and reality. Many constitutions formally recognize freedom of association, the right to organize, and the right to strike. But in practice, these rights are often restricted through labor laws, public order laws, security legislation, administrative procedures, registration requirements, political interference, and employer retaliation. Rights exist on paper, while workers face obstacles when they try to exercise them.

From the perspective of international labor standards, this gap is unacceptable. Freedom of association is not an abstract legal principle. It is a fundamental human right and a necessary condition for social justice. ILO Convention No 87 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise and ILO Convention No 98 on the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining affirm that workers and employers must be able to establish and join organizations of their own choosing without interference by public authorities.

The findings of this report show that many laws and practices in the Arab region still fall short of these standards. In some countries, legal restrictions limit the formation of unions or impose narrow conditions of representativeness. In others, criminal law, public order provisions, or national security legislation are used to prosecute labor protests, restrict strikes, or intimidate trade unionists.

A particularly alarming trend is the growing use of cybercrime laws and digital regulations against trade unionists, workers, journalists, and labor activists. Social media posts, online criticism, WhatsApp discussions, and digital campaigns have increasingly become grounds for investigation, prosecution, dismissal, or intimidation.

This marks a dangerous shift. Restrictions on trade union activity are no longer confined to the workplace, the street, or the picket line. They have moved into the digital space, which has become one of the most important arenas for modern worker organizing. Criminalizing online expression about wages, working conditions, corruption, social protection, or economic policy directly attacks the ability of workers to organize and defend their interests.

Freedom of expression and freedom of association are inseparable. Trade unions must be free to criticize economic policies, expose violations, mobilize workers, and participate in public debate. When workers are punished for speaking, collective bargaining becomes meaningless.

The report also shows wide differences between countries. In countries affected by armed conflict, occupation, or institutional collapse including Yemen, Libya, Syria, and Palestine trade union work has been severely weakened or pushed toward paralysis. In these contexts, workers face the double burden of economic devastation and the destruction of legal and institutional protection. Trade unions become vulnerable to political capture, security interference, fragmentation, or direct attack.

In other countries, social dialogue mechanisms and social protection reforms have developed, but often without a full legal guarantee of trade union independence. Reforms that improve wages, benefits, or social protection are important. But they cannot replace the right of workers to organize freely and bargain

collectively Social protection without freedom of association risks becoming a topdown policy, not a democratic right.

One of the central findings of this report is that the challenge facing the Arab trade union movement is not only the existence of violations It is also the transformation of the world of work itself Digital labor, platform work, informal employment, outsourcing, subcontracting, precarious contracts, migrant labor, and climaterelated displacement are creating new forms of vulnerability Trade unions must be able to organize these workers, defend them, and bring them into collective structures of protection.

At the same time, mounting economic pressures inflation, declining purchasing power, unemployment, wage stagnation, austerity, debt, and privatization place new responsibilities on trade unions Workers are being asked to absorb the cost of crises they did not create Trade unions must be able to challenge this injustice and demand a fair distribution of wealth, public resources, and development gains.

This is why social dialogue is central international experience shows that countries with strong, independent, and representative social dialogue institutions are better able to manage economic and social crises fairly But social dialogue cannot be reduced to consultation without power It cannot be genuine when unions are controlled, excluded, threatened, or forced to negotiate under fear.

The Arab Trade Union Confederation affirms that respect for freedom of association and trade union independence is not only a legal obligation under international labor standards It is a democratic necessity Free and independent trade unions are pillars of social democracy They create balance between economic power and workers' rights They give workers a collective voice in decisions that shape their lives.

Trade union rights are also inseparable from the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 8 on decent work and economic growth Economic development that excludes workers, suppresses unions, or denies collective bargaining is not sustainable Growth without rights deepens inequality Investment without decent work produces exploitation Stability without justice is fragile.

Based on the findings of this report, the Arab Trade Union Confederation stresses that the next phase must focus on rebuilding social dialogue, protecting trade union independence, and reforming the legal and institutional frameworks governing labor rights in the Arab region

In 2026, the Arab Trade Union Confederation calls for the following urgent priorities:

First, governments must review national legislation regulating trade union work and bring it into full conformity with international labor standards, especially ILO Conventions No 87 and No 98.

Second, authorities must stop using criminal law, cybercrime laws, public order provisions, and national security legislation to prosecute trade unionists, workers, and labor activists for legitimate organizing, protest, or expression.

Third, the right to strike must be guaranteed as a fundamental workers' right Procedural, administrative, or security restrictions that make strike action impossible in practice must be repealed or amended.

Fourth, tripartite social dialogue must be strengthened at national, sectoral, and workplace levels Trade unions must participate meaningfully in the formulation of economic, labor, social protection, migration, digitalization, and climate policies

Fifth, social protection must be expanded to all workers, including informal workers, platform workers, migrant workers, domestic workers, refugees, workers in conflict affected areas, and workers in precarious employment.

Sixth, governments and employers must protect trade unionists from dismissal, transfer, harassment, prosecution, surveillance, and retaliation Antiunion discrimination must be investigated and sanctioned.

Seventh, independent unions must be able to register, operate, open bank accounts, hold meetings, elect leaders, receive information, and engage internationally without administrative obstruction or political

interference.

Eighth, women workers and young workers must be fully represented in trade union leadership and collective bargaining structures There can be no democratic trade union movement without gender equality and generational renewal.

Ninth, migrant workers must enjoy equal labor rights, access to representation, complaint mechanisms, legal remedies, and protection from deportation or retaliation when they demand their rights.

Tenth, digital organizing must be protected Workers must not be criminalized for using social media, messaging platforms, or online campaigns to expose violations, coordinate demands, or build solidarity.

The future of the Arab region will not be determined by economic growth figures alone It will be determined by whether this growth is built on dignity, rights, democracy, and social justice

Freedom of association is not a narrow demand of trade unionists It is a foundation of democratic life It is the right that allows workers to defend every other right

Without free unions, workers stand alone before employers, markets, states, conflict, austerity, and exploitation with free unions, workers become a collective force for justice, equality, peace, and dignity.

The message of this report is clear: the Arab region does not need controlled unions, silent unions, or unions reduced to social services It needs independent, democratic, militant, and representative trade unions capable of defending workers and shaping a new social contract.

No social justice without freedom of association

No decent work without collective bargaining

No democracy without democracy at work

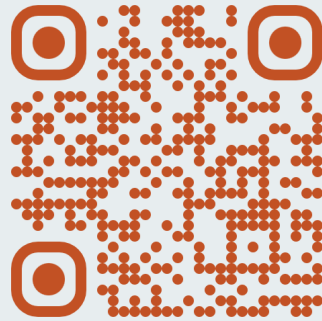


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