



# ITUC Global Survey on Jobs and Employment: Key Findings

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## Introduction and Executive Summary

The ITUC is committed to full employment and at its Fifth World Congress, in November 2022, affirmed a global target for the creation of 575 million new jobs by 2030 as well as the formalisation of at least one billion informal jobs, representing half of the total global informal economy. Achieving these targets will enable delivery on government commitments for “full and productive employment and decent work for all” as defined by the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG8).

In July 2023, the ITUC conducted a survey among its affiliates on union priorities and actions related to employment and the creation of new jobs. Organised by the ITUC with the primary objective of supporting learning between trade unions on their employment-related campaigns and negotiations with governments, as the survey was intended to identify scope for further international-level support to trade unions’ efforts. A strong emphasis was given to employment generation within green, sustainable and labour-intensive sectors, as well as those with high social dividends such as infrastructure and care. This report aims to synthesise the key findings identified through the survey.

Overall, the ITUC received responses from a diverse array of 27 countries across Africa, Europe, Asia-Pacific, and the Americas.<sup>1</sup> **The findings revealed major labour market disparities in terms of employment rates**, with Northern Europe enjoying strong

employment rates of more than 70%, while Latin America, Africa, and Eastern Europe lagged behind and Covid-19 worsened these gaps. Many countries saw their GDP and employment recover after the pandemic, though unions in Latin America and Africa reported continued employment challenges, as well as declining living standards, poor working conditions and persistent informality. In general, unions also reported that wages had struggled to keep up with inflation and GDP and real wages were declining, compromising workers’ income insecurity.

**The survey asked trade unions to identify their main job and employment priorities and revealed that over 82% of respondents considered that investing in skills development and enhancing education and training was a main concern.** Continuous learning and training are crucial means by which to address the demands of rapidly evolving labour market demands, particularly in the context of major structural transformations such as the transition to a low-carbon economy and increasing digitalisation. **More than half of the unions also emphasised the need for strengthened public investment in strategic sectors** to create quality jobs. Key strategic sectors where unions requested further investment included the public sector, the green economy, the care economy, infrastructure, tourism and manufacturing. Many also advocated for heightened allocations in national budgets for job creation and fiscal strategies for full employment. **Other union priorities included active labour market policies and public employment services**, followed by measures to support the formalisation of the informal economy, and measures to improve overall job quality and crack down on precarious and informal work.

<sup>1</sup> Argentina (CTA-T), Australia (ACTU), Bangladesh (BSSF), Canada (CSN), Colombia (CTC), Spain (CCOO), Finland (SAK), Georgia (GTUC), Honduras (SINTRAH), Israel (Histadrut), Italy (UIL), Liberia (LLC), Malta (GWU), Morocco (CDT), Mauritania (CNTM), Mauritius (CITU), the Netherlands (FNV), Niger (CDTN), Peru (CATP), Korea (FKTU), Romania (Cartel ALFA), Rwanda (CESTRAR), San Marino (CSdL), Senegal (SUES), Serbia (TUC Nezavisnost), Singapore (NTUC), Sweden (LO).

**A significant portion of unions (70%) reported their governments have national employment plans or strategies in place.** These plans often target specific underrepresented groups or aim to enhance career and wage progression in selected sectors. About 50% of unions also mentioned that their governments had incorporated jobs/employment plans into their climate plans or Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), however, 76% of unions expressed disappointment in insufficient green job investments.

**The survey results highlighted a worrying absence of any structured involvement of trade unions in shaping national employment strategies,** with only 17% of unions reporting consistent consultation with their governments, while 48% said they were only intermittently included in discussions. Regarding climate-related employment policies, 24% of unions were not actively engaged in the process around the development of NDCs, and 31% felt their contributions were insufficiently considered. Despite these challenges, unions showcased extensive knowledge and capacity in relation to the formulation of employment policy, including

skills-oriented education, labour reforms, and climate policies' impact on the economy.

**Overall, the survey results showcased the need for a comprehensive approach to fostering employment, with an emphasis on the urgency for governments to invest in jobs, as well as support improvements to job quality.** Such an approach would require a combination of increased access to skills and training, active labour market policies and public employment services, improved wages and working conditions, crackdowns on precarious and informal employment, and strategic public investment in labour-intensive sectors with high social, environmental dividends. Moreover, unions, as democratic representatives of workers, should be meaningfully involved in the development of national employment and jobs plans to ensure that workers' interests are adequately reflected; in this respect, the survey signals an urgent need to strengthen social dialogue in employment policy, as well as within the formulation of Just Transition plans as part of governments' nationally determined contributions (NDCs).

## Current labour market trends

The survey results point to considerable variations between countries and regions in the structure of the labour market, levels of employment and unemployment, levels of informality, and in the ways that governments have dealt with employment shocks over the past years, including in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Regarding **employment rates**, Northern European countries generally showcase robust labour market participation, with employment rates exceeding 70% (e.g., 82.2% in the Netherlands, 74.2% in Finland, and 69% in Sweden). Conversely, participation rates are significantly lower in regions such as Latin America (e.g., 50.5% in Colombia), Africa (e.g.,

45% in Morocco and Senegal), and Eastern Europe (e.g., 43% in Georgia).

These regional divergences are also evident in the context of **unemployment rates** – i.e., the share of the labour force registered as actively seeking work. High unemployment rates are particularly prevalent in Latin America and in Africa (e.g., 22% in Senegal). In addition, an alarming proportion of workers are engaged in the **informal economy** or **undeclared and underdeclared work**. Notably, in Peru, Honduras, and Colombia, the share of informal work reaches up to 50%, and in Africa, informality levels register strikingly high figures of up to 92%, as is the case in Rwanda.

**These disparities have been exacerbated by the repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic.**

This crisis triggered one of the most severe employment-related challenges in recent history, and contributed to heightened global poverty levels and aggravated inequalities.

**Countries' responses to the Covid-19 crisis varied significantly, yet the survey responses underscored the effectiveness of immediate support mechanisms for workers.**

Those countries with comprehensive social protection frameworks in place, as well as quality public services, were better equipped to respond to the crisis and support workers whose jobs and livelihoods were negatively impacted. The provision of paid sick leave, income support, and public health care provisions have correlated with more robust recoveries. Several countries also successfully extended measures to safeguard wages, income and jobs (e.g., through the provision of temporary unemployment schemes, hiring support measures), as well as extended social protection coverage to previously uncovered groups such as the self-employed and platform workers (as observed in Sweden and South Korea). Conversely, countries where robust responses to safeguard jobs and incomes were

lacking, tended to observe more persistent unemployment and greater incidences of informality.

**The survey results also showcase that for most countries, GDP growth and employment rates have recovered since the pandemic**

**and**, in some of them, employment levels are stronger than pre-pandemic levels (e.g., Netherlands, Australia, Spain). That said, for some unions in Latin America (e.g., Colombia, Honduras, Peru) and some African countries (e.g., Senegal, Rwanda, Mauritius, Morocco) the labour market has not fully recovered. Moreover, several unions have reported that even with recovering employment and GDP rates, **living standards and working conditions continue to decline**. Wages lag GDP, as well as the trajectory of inflation, resulting in a deteriorating job landscape characterised by poor quality work and a decline in real incomes. Several unions reported an increase in precarious employment, as well as heightened informality.

**Several unions pointed to major structural transformations in the labour market, such as the growing prominence of technology and automation**

, as risks for lower employment, as well as lower job quality. A share of respondents (69%) expressed apprehension over the job losses that technology and automation will lead to and 41% expressed that such trends would increase inequalities among workers. **Likewise, climate change and the industry transformations required to support a shift to a low-carbon economy** may have major potential implications on employment, both in terms of the phase out of certain jobs or sectors, as well as the potential to create new employment opportunities.

## Trade union priorities related to jobs and employment

The survey enquired about the main priorities on jobs and employment for trade unions. **More than 82% of trade unions who responded signalled that investing in skills development and improving education and training frameworks is a top priority.** Investing in high-quality education and training opportunities and continuous learning avenues are all crucial to addressing the demands of rapidly evolving labour markets. Investment in education and skills is also particularly relevant in the context of a transition towards a low-carbon economy, where jobs in high-carbon industries may be phased out and where new, climate-friendly jobs may be created.

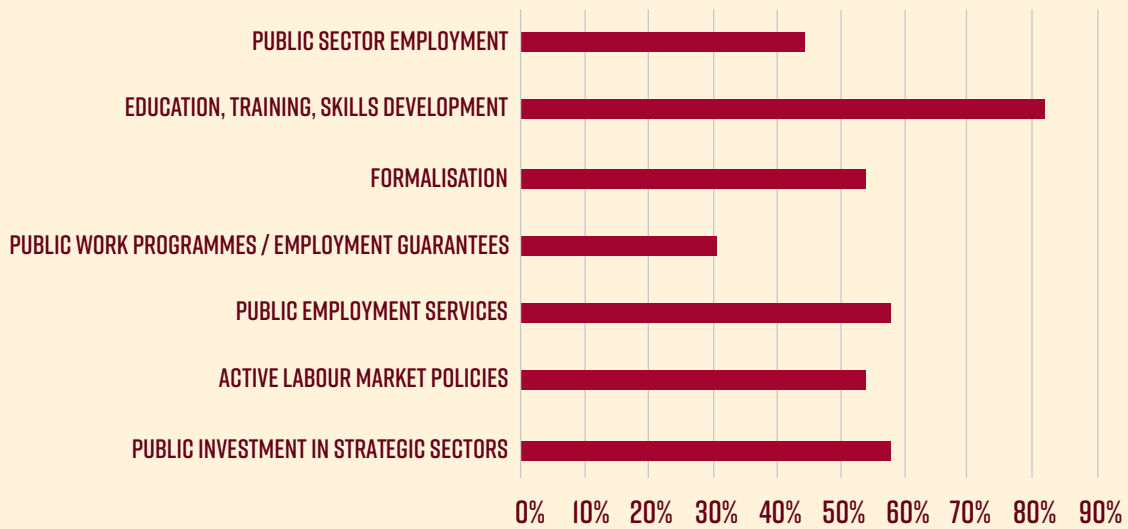
**Strengthened public investment,** particularly in strategic sectors where there is high potential for creating new quality jobs, was a crucial demand for more than half of the unions who responded. Unions put forward demands for increased investment in critical strategic domains, encompassing the public sector, the sustainable green economy, the caregiving sector, infrastructure development, the tourism industry, and manufacturing. Additionally, there was a consensus among many regarding the necessity for greater financial allocations within national budgets to foster job growth and the implementation of fiscal policies aimed at achieving full employment. Strengthening **active labour market policies** and **public employment services were considered important**

**priorities in more than half of the unions surveyed.** Such measures can play an important role in providing jobseekers with adequate means for finding employment, especially when such measures are of high quality and tailored to the individual.

Boosting **public sector employment** was reported as a priority for nearly half of all unions surveyed. The state is a significant employer in many countries, and expanding public sector employment can be an effective means of reducing unemployment in the short term. Public sector employment can moreover create demand in other sectors of the economy, such as private services.<sup>2</sup> In addition, for some unions (SAK Finland, FNV Netherlands, Cartel Alfa Romania, CNTM Mauritania, CTA-T Argentina) the **establishment of public works programmes or employment guarantees** was considered a high-priority issue. Such interventions seek to provide employment for workers who are unable to support themselves due to a shortage of market-based employment opportunities.

<sup>2</sup> For more information see ITUC (2021) Creating jobs: What can governments do?.

## UNIONS' MAIN PRIORITIES



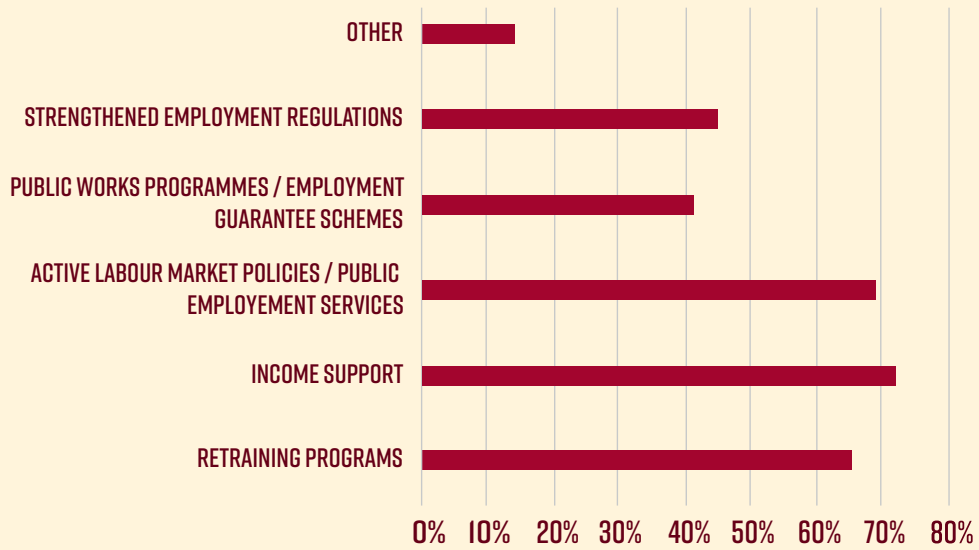
**The majority of unions reported that formalisation of the informal economy remains a major priority.** A large and persistent informal economy not only has negative implications in terms of the rights and protections that informal workers have access to, but also has a negative effect on public finances because of uncollected tax revenue. In several cases, unions reported taking specific initiatives themselves to support formalisation efforts, including pressing for legislative changes to recognise and protect informal workers (ACTU Australia), as well as organising workers in the informal economy (FNV Netherlands, CDT Morocco).

**In addition to measures that boost employment and generate new jobs, many unions stressed the importance of enhancing the quality of employment. In this regard, a number of unions reported that they were pressing for policies to ensure higher wages (CCOO Spain, CSN Quebec), safe and secure working environments (CSN Quebec, UIL Italy), and improved employment security (e.g., ACTU**

Australia), as well as taking action against precarious forms of work /bogus self-employment (e.g., FNV Netherlands, FKTU Korea).

**A substantial majority of trade unions (72%) emphasised the importance of income support to workers facing job losses or those in precarious employment situations.** This is closely followed by active labour market policies, the provision of public employment services, and retraining programs.

**WHAT STRATEGIES SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED TO SUPPORT WORKERS WHO ARE FACING JOB LOSSES OR WHO ARE IN PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT SITUATIONS?**



**Finally, a number of respondents reported that their trade union has concrete objectives and targets in relation to employment.**

For example, CC00 Spain aims to reduce unemployment to under 10% by 2026.

Some trade unions (e.g., CATP Peru, CESTRAR Rwanda) have set objectives based around the ILO Decent Work Country Programme objectives in their country.



## Unions' assessment of government action

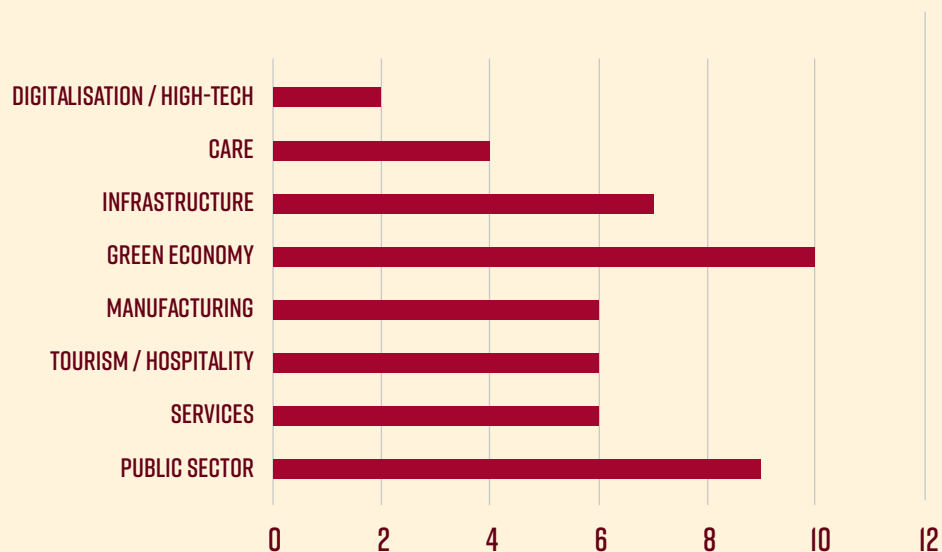
**A large proportion of unions (70%) reported that their governments had a national jobs/employment plan or strategy.** In some cases, such plans were focused on enhancing employability for specific underrepresented groups in the labour market. In Sweden, for instance, there was a strong focus on increasing employment amongst migrants, while in Senegal there was a specific target to create 65,000 new jobs for youth. Some plans have a specific focus on enhancing job conditions and job quality; in Singapore, for instance, the government's Progressive Wage Model (PWM) seeks to enhance career/wage progression for workers in selected sectors such as security, cleaning, landscaping, lift and escalator, food services, retail sectors etc. In addition, 50% of unions responded that their governments had incorporated

specific measures to support employment and foster job creation within their Climate Plans or NDCs.

Unions noted that national employment plans often focus on creating jobs in specific sectors. Among the respondents, 10 unions reported that their government was taking measures to support the **creation of new jobs in the green economy**. Additionally, nine unions reported that their government was supporting job creation within the public sector, while a number of other unions reported investments for job creation in infrastructure, manufacturing, services, care, as well as tourism and hospitality.

Overall, however, **trade unions decried insufficient government efforts to create jobs in the green economy**. In fact, **about 76% of trade unions would have liked to see their governments invest more seriously in quality**

### ARE THERE ANY SPECIFIC SECTOR THAT YOUR GOVERNMENT IS FOCUSING JOB CREATION EFFORTS?



**green-economy jobs. Additionally, over 62% of unions signalled that governments were not paying enough attention to creating good quality jobs in the care sector.** This concern was echoed by observations about insufficient investments in the public sector, infrastructure, and manufacturing.

**Even though the formalisation of the informal economy was a priority for the majority of unions surveyed, 55% of respondents also reported that their governments lacked specific policies to support formalisation processes. When asked about the most important policies that could support formalisation processes, around 80%**

**of respondents reported that enforcing employment laws was the most critical lever.**

Moreover, 55% of respondents reported that improving incentives for employers to register their workforce is the key policy in supporting formalisation. Following that, 38% reported that improving access to finance for small businesses and the self-employed would act as a further lever for formalisation. In short, unions signalled a variety of incentives and enforcement measures to support formalisation processes, in line with the multifaceted approach outlined by the ILO in Recommendation 204 on the Transition from the Informal to Formal Economy.

IN YOUR VIEW, WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT POLICIES THAT COULD SUPPORT FORMALISATION IN YOUR COUNTRY?

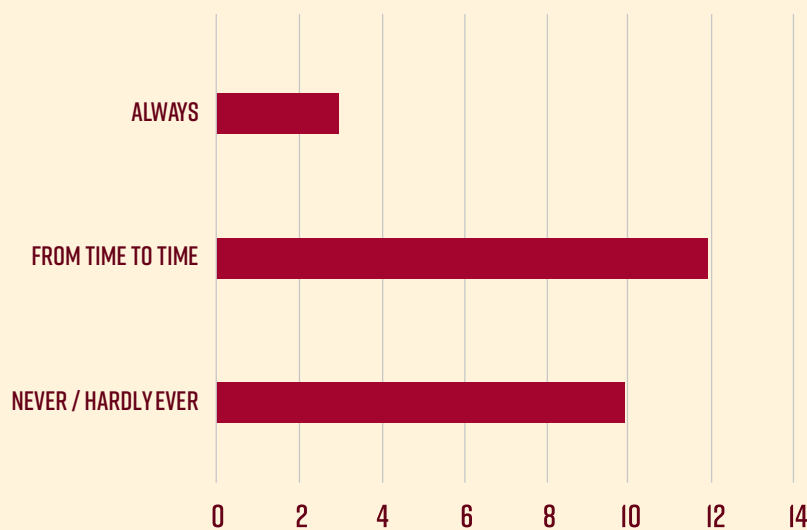


## Social dialogue in relation to employment and jobs strategies

The survey results revealed the lack of a structured involvement of most trade unions in the formulation of national employment and jobs strategies, despite the critical role that unions play in democratically representing workers and their interests. **A mere 17% of trade unions reported being consistently consulted by their governments in the**

**formulation of national plans on employment and job creation.** Around half (48%) reported being only intermittently included in social dialogue and negotiation structures on employment and jobs. **More than 20% of trade unions responded by stating that there was no established institutional tripartite body dedicated to employment and job creation strategies at the national level.**

IN RELATION TO JOB CREATION PLANS, UNIONS IN YOUR COUNTRY ARE CONSULTED BY THE GOVERNMENT, AND SOCIAL DIALOGUE AND NEGOTIATION STRUCTURES ARE INCLUSIVE AND WELL-FUNCTIONING:



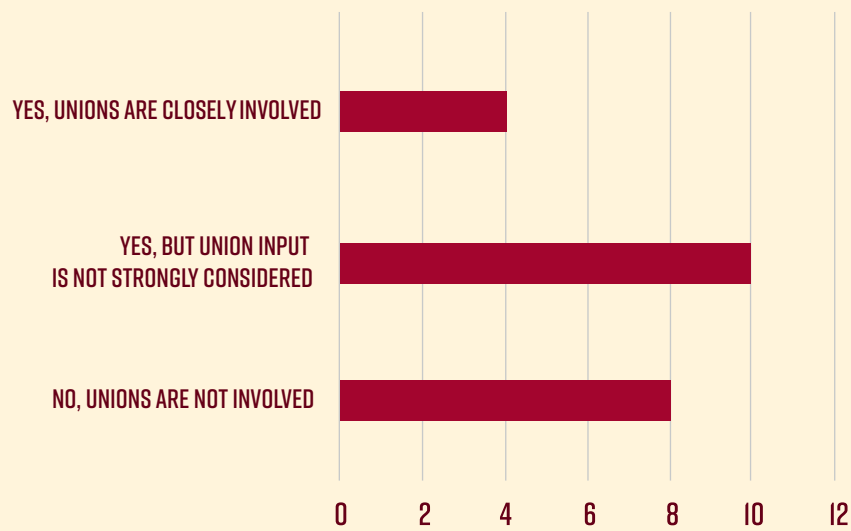
In addition, regarding unions' involvement in the formulation of employment-related policies linked to government's climate plans, **around 24% of trade unions indicated that they had not been**

**actively engaged in the processes linked to the formulation of national-level climate plans** (e.g., South Korea). Furthermore, 31% expressed concerns that their contributions were not substantially considered, despite their having

furnished recommendations for just transitions to their respective governments. These unions have conducted research focusing on specific sectors of the economy and the requisites for skills-oriented education and training to address

evolving job demands, studying the effects of labour reforms during the previous years, as well as research into the changes occurring because of climate policies.

#### ARE UNIONS INVOLVED IN YOUR GOVERNMENT'S CLIMATE PLANS/NDCS?



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