

# The Transformational Trends of New Trade Unions' Activities and Functions in New Uzbekistan

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in New Uzbekistan.

**Abstract:** *This study examines the transformational trends of trade unions' activities and functions in the context of New Uzbekistan. The main objective is to analyze how trade unions, as institutions of civil society, adapt to ongoing political, social, and economic reforms while maintaining their role in protecting the socio-economic interests of workers. The study employs a qualitative and analytical approach, drawing on legal frameworks, policy documents, and international experiences of trade union development. The findings reveal that the adoption of the Law "On Trade Unions" (2019) and the recent constitutional reforms have significantly expanded the rights and opportunities of trade unions, strengthening their independence and enhancing their role in social partnership. Furthermore, trade unions in Uzbekistan are increasingly aligning their practices with international labor standards and building regional cooperation, particularly through the Council of Trade Unions of Central Asian Countries. In conclusion, the study highlights that New Trade Unions in Uzbekistan are not only organizationally restructured but also functionally redefined to address modern challenges such as globalization, digitalization of work, and labor market transformations. These changes indicate that trade unions are becoming an important factor in building a democratic society and ensuring social justice*

**Keywords:** Trade Union, Civil Society, Social Partnership, State.

## Introduction

The transformation of trade unions in Uzbekistan represents one of the most significant aspects of the country's ongoing reforms in the era of New Uzbekistan. Trade unions, as institutions of civil society, have historically played an important role in protecting the socio-economic interests of workers and ensuring labor rights. Since independence, Uzbekistan has undertaken profound reforms to strengthen civil society and modernize its socio-political institutions, and trade unions have been central to this process.

In the past, during the Soviet period, trade unions functioned largely as extensions of the state apparatus, serving more as instruments of party control than as independent organizations for workers' advocacy. However, in the years following independence, and particularly under the leadership of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Uzbekistan has moved toward recognizing trade unions as independent institutions capable of representing and safeguarding the interests of their members. The declaration of November 11 as "Trade

Unions Day of Uzbekistan” and the adoption of the 2019 Law “On Trade Unions” symbolize this new stage of development.

These reforms are also taking place within a broader context of globalization, labor market transformation, and the digitalization of work, which create both opportunities and challenges for trade unions. Issues such as informal employment, remote work, and non-standard labor relations require new approaches to labor protection and social partnership. Moreover, Uzbekistan’s integration into the global economy necessitates the alignment of national labor standards with international conventions, particularly those of the International Labour Organization (ILO).

Against this backdrop, this study seeks to analyze the transformational trends in the activities and functions of trade unions in New Uzbekistan, exploring how they adapt to new realities while continuing to fulfill their traditional role of ensuring social justice, protecting workers’ rights, and contributing to the development of civil society.

## Methodology

According to international experience, a trade union is regarded as a voluntary association established to represent and protect the socio-economic, labor, and other rights and interests of workers. During the years of Soviet rule, trade unions were perceived as a branch of the state party nomenclature and transformed into an economic mechanism operating on the basis of directives rather than as independent institutions serving the interests of workers and employees [3].

In the years of independence, a number of legislative acts were adopted to ensure, from an organizational and legal standpoint, that trade unions could operate in line with the requirements of a market economy. Like other public organizations, the constitutional and legal foundations of trade union activities were enshrined in the relevant provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

In the new edition of the Constitution, the strategic goal of building a social state was defined, introducing the principles of social justice and solidarity, while strengthening constitutional foundations that establish fundamentally new mechanisms for the protection of human rights and freedoms.

New Uzbekistan is, first and foremost, a state where human dignity is held in the highest regard, and where, regardless of nationality, language, or religion, every citizen is provided with all opportunities to realize their potential. Based on constitutional norms and requirements, the pursuit of a fair social policy was identified as one of the key factors in building New Uzbekistan.

Article 73 of the new edition of the Constitution stipulates: “Trade unions express and protect the socio-economic rights and interests of employees. Membership in trade unions is voluntary” [4].

There are sufficient grounds to affirm that New Uzbekistan has also fostered the emergence of New Trade Unions. The new legal foundations of trade unions have developed rapidly. In particular, the adoption of the Law “On Trade Unions” by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on December 6, 2019, became a landmark event in the life of trade unions [5]. In drafting this law, international legal standards—particularly the conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO), as well as the experiences

of CIS countries, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Spain, Portugal, Germany, and other developed states—were taken into account, alongside national practices and legislation. In accordance with the ILO conventions, the rights and powers of trade unions, as well as opportunities for union membership, were significantly expanded.

At present, the Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan unites 14 sectoral trade unions, the Trade Union Organization of the Republic of Karakalpakstan, 12 regional and Tashkent city trade union organizations, with more than 7 million members. The supreme body of the Federation is the Congress, which is convened once every five years. In the period between congresses, the activities of the Federation are directed by the Council of the Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan. Members of the Council are elected at the congresses of sectoral trade unions, at conferences of territorial associations of trade union organizations, as well as at the Congress of the Federation itself.

From the very first days of independence, special attention was given to the development of non-governmental non-profit organizations under the new political, socio-economic conditions of the Republic. In particular, one of the very first laws adopted during the years of independence was the Law “On Trade Unions, Their Rights and Guarantees of Their Activities”, which defined the legal status of trade unions—one of the largest public organizations in our country [6].

The ongoing transformations in Uzbekistan today have undoubtedly marked the beginning of a new history of the nation. Indeed, the large-scale socio-economic, political, and other reforms taking place in our country are ensuring Uzbekistan’s genuine integration into the world community.

In short, today our nation is opening itself to the world, moving from isolation toward an open and pragmatic policy. Such an approach naturally requires the reform of existing systems and their harmonization with international standards [7].

In recent years, thanks to the openness policy pursued by our esteemed President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Uzbekistan’s international prestige has risen significantly. Strong and consistent relations of friendship, diplomacy, as well as socio-economic and other forms of cooperation have been established with countries across the globe.

Under the leadership and initiatives of the Head of State, profound reforms have also been carried out within the system of trade unions in Uzbekistan, resulting in significant achievements. In particular:

- On December 6, 2019, the Law “On Trade Unions” was adopted, under which a Labor Inspectorate was established within the trade union system;
- Pursuant to Presidential Decree PQ-5227 of August 23, 2021, “On the Establishment of the Academy of Labor and Social Relations”, the Academy of Labor and Social Relations of the Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan was established [8];
- In accordance with the Law “On the Establishment of the Day of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan”, November 11 was designated as Trade Union Day of Uzbekistan;
- The Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan was admitted as a member of the General Confederation of Trade Unions and established cooperative relations with the International Labour Organization;

- Notably, in 2021, on the initiative of the Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan, the Council of Trade Unions of Central Asian Countries was founded with the participation of the trade unions of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan. In 2024, the trade unions of Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia also joined the organization [9].

At present, more than 37,037 primary organizations uniting over 7 million members are operating within the country's trade union system. The system also brings together more than 6,700 employees and nearly 300,000 activists working effectively on a voluntary basis [10].

## Result and Discussion

Let us now focus on the role of trade unions in the lives of ordinary people in the global world of the third millennium, and on what exactly their goals and objectives primarily manifest themselves.

First and foremost, these include ensuring full and productive employment, fair remuneration for labor, access to social protection and dialogue, the elimination of poverty, guaranteeing human rights and trade union freedoms, eradicating any form of discrimination in labor relations, ensuring gender equality, the complete abolition of child labor and forced labor, as well as the protection of the environment.

Unfortunately, today the global labor market faces ever-new obstacles on the way to achieving these goals, and, figuratively speaking, they are undermining the very foundation of the modern structure of social and labor relations.

What are the main problems? The first problem is the growth of informal employment and the expansion of the informal sector, which leads to a decrease in tax revenues, a reduction in competitiveness in the formal sector, and most worryingly, the shrinking and underfunding of social programs.

The second problem is associated with the emergence of fundamentally new forms of work such as remote and freelance work, outsourcing and outstaffing. These, in turn, are radically changing the very nature of labor relations and are manifested in non-standard forms of employment that result in very low levels of social protection.

The third global problem stems from the increasing use of digital technologies in social life. It should be noted that due to the rapid development of information and communication technologies, it is estimated that within the next 25 years, the number of jobs worldwide will decrease by 47 percent. According to analysts' calculations, within the next 15 years, for example, positions in accounting, healthcare, law, higher education and public education will no longer be in demand. This means that the turbulent times of today require us to restructure the classical social protection systems, the foundations of which were laid more than 100 years ago.

At the international level, there are nine recognized minimum types of social protection: medical care, unemployment benefits, compensation for work-related accidents or occupational diseases, maternity and childbirth benefits, survivor's benefits, sickness benefits, old-age pensions, family benefits, and disability benefits. It is noteworthy that five of these services, and two partially, are funded by the employee through the social insurance

system. However, unfortunately, the number of employees covered by social insurance has been steadily declining.

According to ILO data, currently 55 percent of the world's population lacks social protection, while only 29 percent have access to comprehensive social security. Sixty-eight percent of elderly people of retirement age receive an old-age pension. This indicates that in many countries both contributory and insurance-based pension systems are insufficiently developed. Another serious problem is that even in the advanced 21st century, people's right to healthcare has not yet become a reality in many regions of the world. This is especially true for rural areas, where 56 percent of the population is deprived of this privilege.

Thus, there are more than enough issues to be discussed in this regard. Recently, the ILO appealed to the international community with a call—unprecedented in practice—to direct private donations toward ensuring the minimum level of social protection. With this, it acknowledged the possibility of using the voluntary contributions of individuals, enterprises, and foundations for the purposes of social protection.

Uzbekistan has accumulated sufficient experience in this field, having established state-private partnerships in social protection. In particular, the targeted redistribution of resources among citizens, as well as the central role of social security, social protection, and social assistance in the system of social policy, stand out.

In our country, 60 percent of state budget expenditures are allocated to the socio-cultural sphere: education, healthcare, culture, and social protection of the low-income strata of the population. Indeed, reliance on national values, mutual assistance, and collective forms of social support are among the unique traditions of our people. In particular, the mahalla institution plays a special role in this area [11].

## Conclusion

Today in our homeland, the human factor has been elevated to the level of the highest value. The principle advanced by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev—“People want to live happily not tomorrow, but today”—and its transformation into the priority direction of our current policy, embodies precisely this meaning and essence. As a result of the implementation of this principle, the humane policies being pursued in our country are giving new meaning to people's lives. In particular, taking into account the needs and demands of the population, the adoption of the program for the construction of affordable housing in rural areas based on updated model projects has changed people's outlook on life and work.

Expanding the system of training specialists demanded by the labor market, as well as widely involving the unemployed in vocational training, retraining, and skills development, also ranks among the most important tasks.

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