

MOLDOVA

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POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FRAMEWORK

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

The political year 2020 ended with a historic event for the Republic of Moldova – the election and swearing into office of pro-European president Maia Sandu, chairperson of the Action and Solidary Party (PAS) and the first female Moldovan president.

All of 2020 was marked by the presidential elections scheduled for the end of the year. The Socialists and their unofficial leader President Igor Dodon had chosen their election strategy back in 2019, when they removed their junior partner ACUM Block (PAS & Dignity and Truth Platform Party, PPDA) and Prime Minister Maia Sandu from the parliamentary majority and government. The ACUM's place was soon taken by the discredited Democratic Party of Moldova (PDM) once led by the oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc, who had fled the country during the political crisis of the summer of 2019. However, this coalition was short-lived since the PDM faction, still controlled by Plahotniuc, was dismantled with several MPs forming a new parliamentary group and later a party – Pro Moldova – and others joining the Șor Party faction. Unable to provide the necessary number of MPs for the Parliamentary coalition, PDM had to step down from government. Subsequently, the Socialists instead started an informal cooperation in parliament with the Șor Party faction, which, in the meantime, had increased its ranks with new colleagues from the Pro Moldova Party. All these political games, including party switching and the MP buying phenomena in addition to the disappointment to the electorate caused by political corruption mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic, not to mention the dysfunctional Parliament during the pandemic led to Maia Sandu's victory in the November 2020 presidential elections. Sandu has been a true record-breaker – the highest number of votes an electoral candidate has ever received, the first female president and the largest diaspora participation in elections.

Her victory was also a confirmation of the high expectations and demands of society for reform and justice. One of the electoral promises made by Maia Sandu and almost all presidential candidates, including the socialist Igor Dodon, was to dissolve the Parliament and hold snap elections. This move was intended to meet society's desire to get rid of the corrupt deputies represented by the Șor Party, whose leader is accused of the huge Moldovan bank fraud scandal, and various MPs from other parties, including the Socialists (PSRM), who are accused of political corruption and some of whom have managed to switch parliamentary factions several times in the current legislature. However, after the elections, no party except PAS has proven willing to fulfil this promise. The reason for that is the plunging popularity of the current parliamentary parties as shown in recent opinion polls, according to which PSRM would score 26.6 per cent (down from 31.15 per cent in the 2019 parliamentary elections), while other parties (e.g. PDM or PPDA), except for the Șor Party, might not make it into Parliament at all in new elections. With a provisional government and with President Sandu and PAS insisting on early elections, whilst other political forces opposing this, Moldova seems to have entered into a new phase of political crisis. Sandu's attempts to provoke early elections by appointing a candidate who received no votes and proposing the same candidate for a second time indicate that Sandu and PAS are not willing to give in to their political opponents, seeking solutions with the Constitutional Court. The latter, however, has ruled Sandu's disregard of the candidate proposed by the parliamentary majority to be unconstitutional. The outcome of this political crisis remains to be seen. One thing is clear though – 2021 is going to be a difficult year for Moldova and having a provisional government is complicating things even more, which means freezing relations with development partners. There was a positive dynamic at the beginning of 2020, when a new Memorandum with the IMF was discussed and a helping hand was given by development partners in the context of the pandemic. However, political instability and various controversial laws voted through by the Moldovan parliament in December 2020 – including the revocation of the »Billion« Law the reopening of the audio-visual market to major broadcasting from Russia and

changes to the pension system law – have severely undermined relations with development partners. Thus a new Memorandum with the IMF is highly unlikely and the country also risks forfeiting part of the EU's macro-financial assistance which is strictly conditional on a functional government and reforms.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SITUATION

The Moldovan economy in 2020 was marked by two major crises – the COVID-19 pandemic and the drought that caused the most severe economic decline in the last 20 years, with GDP shrinking by 7 per cent. The way in which the pandemic affected the Moldovan economy was conditioned by its structural characteristics which include a strong dependence on remittances (~16 per cent of GDP); a high share of informal activities (~40 per cent); a financially weak state due to underdevelopment and very weak fiscal compliance; the growing importance of industrial activities dependent on international value chains; a strong asymmetry in the distribution of economic value in favour of capital and to the disadvantage of labour; and flexibilization of labour relations and weakening of unions' capacity. All of these factors have contributed to a chronic economic and social crisis in the country.

The pandemic and the restrictions imposed by the authorities have directly and indirectly affected most economic sectors. The sectors most affected by the restrictions during the emergency period were hospitality/catering and transport, as well as industrial sectors dependent on external demand, such as the production of automotive components and the textile industry. Only sectors that were able to manage remote work more efficiently, such as IT, have maintained their previous growth rate. The impact of the pandemic on employees and the population in general was strong with over 100,000 employees (more than 15 per cent of the total) being affected in the sense of losing jobs, diminishing the working volume and remuneration, in addition to 30–40,000 thousand self-employed who stopped their activity during the state of emergency. The support provided by the Government to counteract the economic implications of the crisis was insufficient to cushion its effects. Thus, according to recent studies, the package of support measures accounted for only about 1 per cent of GDP, which was the lowest in the region, where support amounted to about 5 per cent of GDP on average. Metaphorically put, 20 per cent of the pandemic bill was paid by the employees, 10 per cent by the self-employed, 25 per cent by SMEs, 40 per cent by society in general through the decrease in budget revenues and about 5 per cent by remittances. However, the Government has barely covered 3 per cent of employees' and SMEs' costs through its support measures, although it had the resources to provide incentives comparable to those implemented by other states and thus retain jobs and maintain businesses' economic competitiveness through direct financing of pandemic-related technical unemployment.

Despite job losses during the pandemic, average wages have continued to rise, as the relationship between supply and de-

mand in the labour market did not change fundamentally. Thus, according to the National Bureau of Statistics, NBS, the average salary in the economy was 8074 MDL (~380 Euro), increasing by 9.3 per cent compared to the previous year. Although the number of employees has decreased during the pandemic, the number of unemployed – i.e. economically active people looking for jobs – has not changed fundamentally, remaining even below the 2019 level with an unemployment rate of 3.6 per cent.

A higher percentage increase in high-wage sectors has been observed compared to low-wage ones. Thus, one of the indirect consequences of the pandemic has been the accentuation of wage inequalities. The mechanisms to mitigate this trend – raising the minimum wage and collective bargaining – did not work in 2020. In a context in which the minimum wage in the real sector was frozen in 2020 at the level set in 2019, i.e. of 2775 MDL (131 Euro), the ratio between the minimum and the average wage dropped to 33 per cent.

TRADE UNION POLITICAL CONTEXT

The pandemic has been as a litmus test for Moldovan's trade unions revealing their weaknesses in defending and protecting their members' rights and interests as well as in relation to their social dialogue partners, especially the Government. At the same time, the social and economic crisis caused by the pandemic has boosted the interaction between the trade unions and the authorities. In the first months of the pandemic, the National Trade Union Confederation (CNSM) together with the National Employers Confederation modestly tried to seek state funding for technical unemployment in a letter addressed to the Prime Minister. However, the language of the letter and lack of follow-up actions revealed quite a passive attitude in their approach which led to no action by the Government to satisfy their request. It should be mentioned that in comparison to the situation of many European countries, technical unemployment in Moldova has been put on employers' shoulders, which has caused a lot of layoffs and temporary employment cessation. In an attempt to help those who lost their jobs, the Government increased unemployment benefits to minimum wage level. However, this seemed to have stimulated further layoffs instead of helping to retain jobs. The Economic Council which has been acting as a bipartisan dialogue (lobby) structure between the Government and business associations (AmCham, European Business Association, Association of Foreign Investors, Association of Moldovan Businessmen) has managed to promote several changes in the labour legislation, excluding the unions from consultations with the Government. Thus, during 2020, amendments were made to the Labour Code, at made the labour relations even more flexible: (1) provisions have been introduced to prevent unions from blocking dismissals; (2) a new article on the *flexible work schedule* was introduced, allowing employers to change employee's work schedule and consequently the remuneration; and (3) overtime pay was fundamentally changed: the minimum threshold for overtime pay (which was 50 per cent of the basic salary for the first two hours and 100 per cent of the basic sal-

ary for the following hours) was abolished and the possibility of overtime being compensated with free time was introduced. The latter change directly affects employees' rights. According to the new provisions of the Labour Code, employers can make the work schedule more flexible based on the evolution of the company's economic activity (the »employee agreement« being a formality in reality), without additional remuneration for employees for this flexibility, making them even more vulnerable. No attempts have been made by the unions to oppose the above changes to the Labour Code.

In the area of social dialogue, political instability, the tripartite nature of collective agreements in Moldova and state involvement in collective bargaining at the sector level have created impediments in recent years. The National Commission for Consultations and Collective Bargaining (NCCCB) met only once in 2019 and four times in 2020 (in February, August, October and November), although by law it should meet at least once a month. At the CNSM's initiative, social partners at the national level have concluded three collective agreements on the working time record model, the model of individual employment contracts, and the model for scheduling annual leaves. When it comes to the sectoral level, sector unions have had different results. For instance, the unions and employers in the construction sector negotiated at the beginning of 2020 an increase in the minimum wage for the first category of employees in the sector from 3,100 to 5,000 MDL. However, this provision could not be introduced in the sector collective agreement as it has been blocked by the Ministry of Economy, which is a party to the tripartite agreement. In response to the extreme conditions in the health care sector caused by the pandemic, health sector unions have contributed to an increase of 30 per cent in the wage of health care personnel; provision of an one-time allowance of 16,000 MDL to the medical staff infected with COVID-19 at work place; provision of an one-time allowance in the amount of 100,000 MDL to the deceased's family in the case of personnel who dying from COVID-19 contracted in the workplace.

Also, during 2020 new collective agreements were signed in the education, research, transport and road sectors, and modifications have been made to the collective agreements in the areas of social services and manufacturing of goods, according to CNSM. Other unions' requests such as increasing the minimum wage to 50–60 per cent of the average salary level, the creation of a wage guarantee fund in the case of insolvent companies, setting the minimum pension at the subsistence level for old-age pensioners and other proposals in the area of state social insurance and many others have remained at the level of recommendations. It should be mentioned though that the unions did not take active steps in promoting these recommendations and pushing for their implementation.

In a more positive development, after three years of advocacy and actions in partnership with the FES in Moldova and a number of civil society organisations, the unions obtained the reversal of the Labour Inspection Reform launched in 2016

that had resulted in the State Labour Inspection being deprived of the function to investigate labour accidents, which had caused a significant increase in such accidents. Control responsibilities in the field of occupational safety and health, and labour relations have been given back to the State Labour Inspectorate thus ensuring its functional integrity in accordance with the ILO Convention No. 81/1947 on labour inspection in industry and trade and Convention No.129 on labour inspection in agriculture, ratified by the Republic of Moldova.

TRADE UNIONS IN MOLDOVA – FACTS AND FIGURES

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

In the not-too-distant past, until the demise of the Soviet Union, the Moldovan trade unions were part of the all-soviet labour unions system. The soviet trade unions were regarded as a pillar of the party-state regime politically subordinated and used by the state to exert control over workers and society. They were more of a state instrument rather than genuine trade unions typical to market economies. In practical terms, soviet trade unions were a giant bureaucratic machine in the service of the Communist Party. They were in charge of collecting membership fees and organising members' lives around their place of employment, such as housing, transport to and from the workplace, holidays, childcare, canteens etc. Since wage fixing belonged exclusively to the state and, at the same time, employment was fully guaranteed, trade unions had no responsibility in relation to collective bargaining or securing jobs, not to mention organising strikes.

After Moldova gained independence in 1991 following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the trade unions became independent organisations from the political and legal points of view. By default, they inherited a vast membership (~1.5 million), an important amount of assets like sanatoria, hotels and holiday resorts as well as the distinctly soviet organisational culture. These assets were soon to become the centre of unions leaderships' corrupt behaviour, resulting in illegal transactions and personal enrichment as revealed by investigative journalism. As part of the transition process from a command to a post-socialist market economy, the unions had to deal with new challenges particularly in representing workers in collective bargaining. They have been slow and had low efficiency in taking over such roles as setting the price for labour and influencing the development of employee-friendly economic and social policies, for which they lacked both capacity and willingness. The latter has been to some extent a result of their corrupt behaviour and consequent political dependence. The soviet legacy in terms of the traditional understanding of trade unions' role has also hindered the unions' transformation into a genuine labour movement. The Moldovan state still retains the leading role in regulating the conditions of capital-labour relations, while the trade unions have limited capacity and power to influence policies and the price of labour despite the existing social dialogue platforms.

TRADE UNION LANDSCAPE

The union movement in Moldova has the following features in terms of the way representation of employees' interests is organised: (a) there is only one trade union confederation, which for a small country like Moldova seems to be a good solution to ensure a stronger representation of trade unions in the tripartite social dialogue between trade unions, employers and government; (b) centralization of resources and bargaining power at the level of sectoral union federations, hence the increased importance of their work in terms of sectoral collective agreements; and (c) a relatively limited role of enterprise-level trade unions with low bargaining power at the enterprise level and; consequently, collective agreements at the enterprise level most often transpose the provisions of higher collective agreements without offering additional rights and guarantees to employees.

The National Trade Union Confederation of Moldova (CNSM) comprise 24 sectorial unions in 2020 (25 in 2019) with a

membership of around 330,000, with women accounting for 58 per cent. Women have their own organisation within the CNSM as well as the youth. The chairperson of the CNSM, Oleg Budza and the three vice-chairpersons Sergiu Sainciuc, Mihail Hincu and Petru Chiriac form the CNSM leadership. The Moldovan CNSM has been a member of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) since February 2010 and also a member of the Moscow-based General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU) of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). CNSM congresses are held at 5-year intervals and have the competence to select the chairperson and members of the council and executive committees. They decide on the duties of the statutory organs and the programmes they are supposed to follow.

Moldovan unions' membership has experienced a dramatic loss over the past 28 years, from 1.5 million in 1993, to 568,375 in 2007, 397,536 in 2015 and 330,000 in 2021, according to data provided by the unions. This is mainly due to the general decline in the number of employees in Moldova,

Table 1

The most significant trade union confederations in Moldova

Trade Union Confederation	Chair and Vice Chair	Members	International Memberships
Confederația Națională a Sindicatelor din Moldova, CNSM (National Trade Union Confederation of Moldova)	Chair: Oleg Budza, Vice Chairs: Sergiu Sainciuc, Mihail Hincu, Petru Chiriac	330,000	ITUC, GTUC

Table 2

The largest industry associations and individual trade unions in Romania

Trade Union Association / Trade Union	Confederation	Chair and Vice Chair	Members	International Memberships
Sindicatul Educației și Științei din Republica Moldova, SES (Education and Science Trade Union)	CNSM	Chair: Genadie Donos Vice Chair: Nadejda Lavric	106,277	IE, ETUCE
Sindicatul »Sănătatea« (Trade Union »Health Care«)	CNSM	Chair: Aurel Popovici Vice Chair: Igor Zubcu	37,028	PSI, EPSU
Federația Sindicatelor de Construcții și Industria Materialelor de Construcții »SINDICONS« din Republica Moldova (Federation of Trade Unions in Construction)	CNSM	Chair: Victor Talmaci	4,083	BWI
Federația Națională a Sindicatelor din Agricultură și Alimentație »Agroindsind« (National Federation of Agricultural Trade Unions)	CNSM	Acting Chair: Vasile Mamaliga Acting Vice Chairs: Leonid Palii, Iurie Pojoga	34,069	—
Federația Sindicatelor Angajaților din Serviciile Publice SINDASP (Federation of Employees from Social Services)	CNSM	Chair: Vlad Cantir	27,951	PSI, EPSU
Federația Sindicatelor din Comunicații, FSC (Federation of Trade Unions in Communications)	CNSM	Chair: Ion Pirgaru Vice Chair: Elizaveta Iurcu	14,021	UNI Global Union, IndustriAL

continuous high levels of migration and members' withdrawal from unions as a result of perceived low efficiency and public distrust. According to the ILO, the unionization rate in Moldova in 2016 accounted for 23.9 per cent, while the coverage of collective bargaining was estimated at 43 per cent. Although the ILO data show a relatively stable situation, interviews with unions indicate several alarming signals: very low unionization in the private sector, an accelerated decline in unionization in some sectors (making continuation difficult for some union federations, thus forcing them to merge), a decrease in the number of collective labour agreements, and blockages in the functioning of social dialogue.

The industry unions in turn comprised around 6000 grassroots organisations in 2019 down from 7200 in 2014 based on the information made available by CNSM. The greatest union density is with the union federations in the public sectors such as education and science, healthcare, public services, as well as in agriculture and food processing, and construction. It is also the public sector that has most of the collective labour agreements (~80 per cent).

WORKING CONDITIONS OF TRADE UNIONS

Key legislation governing trade union rights and the social dialogue are Article 42 of the Constitution, the Law on Government, the Unions Law, the Employers Law, the Law on the Organisation and Functioning of the National Commission for Consultations and Collective Bargaining and of the Commissions for Collective Consultations and Collective Bargaining at the Sectorial and Territorial Level as well as Labour Code. Moldova's legislation on trade unions largely complies with the ILO standards on freedom of association.

The Moldovan Government has ratified 43 ILO Conventions and one Protocol, one Convention having been denounced. Another 43 ILO Conventions and five Protocols have not been ratified. As to the commitments under the Association Agreement with the EU, the Republic of Moldova has to transpose and implement 39 EU Directives: Eight Directives on labour law; 25 Directives on health and safety at work; Six Directives on anti-discrimination and gender equality. To date, the Moldovan authorities have transposed 27 EU Directives into the national legislation, including seven in the field of labour law, 17 in the field of health and safety at work, and three in the field of anti-discrimination and gender equality.

In regard to the working environment, the trade unions are in theory independent and can freely organise their activities, having also the right to strike. However, there are restrictions in the case of employees working in areas related to healthcare, energy and water supply, telecommunications, air traffic, the defence system, public and legal order, as well as some categories of public service employees. A major impediment in the work of trade unions is the continuous political instability in Moldova, which hinders social dialogue at the national level and blocks the negotiations in the tripartite format. The same applies to the social dialogue at sectoral level involving government representatives. An additional difficul-

ty at this level is the insufficient representation of employers' associations, which are missing in many sectors. Weak employers' representation also affects the enterprise level which comes together with the poor capacity and low bargaining power of employees' representatives.

TRADE UNIONS AND THEIR CORE TASKS

In Moldova, the organisation of employees has two legally recognized forms – unions and elected representatives of employees. But in practice there is only one form – the unions. Social dialogue in Moldova takes place at three related but still distinct levels: national, sectoral and enterprise. Due to the consolidation and centralization of resources and skills, the trade unions are active especially at the national and branch levels, where there is a certain parity of industrial relations, while at the enterprise level the balance in the employer-union relationship is often inclined in favour of employers. The social dialogue at the national and sectoral levels, is usually tripartite, which provides a central role for the government and sectoral ministries. This situation has often been a source of blockages as political crises and changes in government make the tripartite dialogue extremely difficult and inexistent at times.

At the national level, the tripartite social dialogue takes place within the NCCCB, composed of representatives of government, trade unions and employers. However, the government is given a central role, holding the presidency and the secretariat of the Commission. In this situation, although legislation provides for the NCCCB to meet at least once a month, the Commission has in practice met much less frequently: once in 2015, eight times in 2016, five times in 2017, six times in 2018, only once in 2019, after a break of almost 12 months, and four times in 2020. In recent years, the CNSM has faced another major problem, namely the increased role of employers associations in the dialogue with government and their promotion of the interests of business to the detriment of the interests of employees. As highlighted in an analysis by FES Moldova, the Economic Council under the Prime Minister, which acts as a bipartisan dialogue (lobby) structure between the government and business associations, has managed to promote several changes to the labour legislation, while excluding unions from consultations and actually replacing the NCCCB. Nonetheless, in recent years trade unions, employers and government have still managed to sign a series of collective agreements at national level on specific issues such as working time and rest time, the model collective bargaining agreement, the minimum guaranteed pay in the real sector, and the criteria applicable in case of collective layoffs. In the absence of a consolidated version available in the public space, the multitude of collective agreements limits their applicability and efficiency, especially in enterprises without trade unions. Unlike national collective agreements, which cover specific topics, the sectoral collective agreements cover the full range of minimum rules on employees' rights applicable at sectoral level. Thus, in 2020, there were 17 sectoral collective agreements registered in Moldova, covering the following sectors: public services, education, health, forestry,

sewage, defence, cadastre, agriculture and food industry, trade, communications, construction, culture, carriers and roads, energy, and light industry. At the same time, important sectors of the national economy, such as the automotive industry or accommodation and catering activities, are not covered by collective agreements. Very often the sectoral collective agreements repeat the minimum rules set by existing legislation and do not add value to the agreements, introducing pay systems based on the minimum wage set by the Government. According to a study conducted in 2016, about 85 per cent of the provisions of such agreements »are null and void, reiterating the provisions of labour laws«. Thus, the sectoral collective agreements have a lower impact than the legal framework allows by setting minimum rules.

As to the collective labour agreements at the enterprise level, together with the entry into force of Law No. 205/2015, it is no longer compulsory to register the agreements with the State Labour Inspectorate, which makes it difficult to estimate the number of existing collective labour agreements (CLAs) at the enterprise level in Moldova, especially given that the State Labour Inspectorate does not publish the number of valid CLAs, but rather the number of CLAs registered during one year and many contracts have multi-year validity. Even in these conditions, the decrease in the number of CLAs at enterprise level is obvious – in the year 2017–2018 there were 1,183 new contracts, down by 44 per cent compared to the 2015–2016 period, when there were 2,111 contracts. Starting from 2014, there has been an obvious and continuous degradation of collective bargaining at the enterprise level. At the same time, the total number of CLAs registered with the State Labour Inspectorate does not reflect the situation of collective bargaining in the real economy. About 80 per cent of all CLAs are signed in the public sector: public administration, social security, education, health and social assistance. The number of CLAs in other sectors is very small and has decreased considerably in recent years: from 213 in 2015 to 123 in 2018. In 2018, only 22 CLAs were registered in the manufacturing industry, two in the IT sector and only one in construction. The very low number of CLAs in the competitive economy is explained by the lack of legal obligation to sign these documents and the relatively weak trade unions at the enterprise level. In most cases, the contracts signed at enterprise level repeat mechanically the provisions of the sectoral agreements. Under these conditions, the enterprise-level collective agreements are an underused tool in the real economy and contribute only to a very small extent towards improving the situation of employees at national level.

TRADE UNIONS AND THEIR (POLITICAL) WEIGHT

The Moldovan trade unions have lost credibility and influence over the past 15 years, their popularity being in continuous decline. This is mainly caused by their inefficiency, integrity problems of some leadership representatives, and loss of independence. Over the years, the trade union leadership has been politically influenced by the ruling parties, mainly the Communists, the Socialists and the Democratic Party of Moldova. Thus, the trade unions have been instrumentalized in

the election campaigns and used to promote the agenda of the above political parties. The integrity problems of some union leaders as reported by investigative journalism and scandals such as the one involving the former chair of AGROINSIND and his deputy, who have both been condemned for abuse of office and embezzlement, have also had a negative impact on the image and credibility of the trade unions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed even more starkly the unions' weakness and inefficiency, showing their inability to offer viable solutions to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on their members. Their proposal to the government to subsidize technical unemployment, for example, was very weak with unions taking no further actions to push the issue forward. The recommendation of the trade unions to put employees on unpaid leave for the period of the state of emergency was also met with criticism. Moreover, the CNSM applied this to its own personnel, most of whom were sent on leave for one month, after which their contracts passed into the stationing regime, with employees being paid only 75 per cent of their basic salary and 50 per cent of their normal salary. At a one-year distance since then, CNSM has still not been able to find a solution to this issue.

In the context of further flexibilization of labour relations and diminishing of employees' rights, the unions have failed to prevent modifications to the Labour Code and thus protect the interests of their members. As to the unions' priority areas such as establishing a unified minimum wage in the economy and its increase to at least the minimum subsistence level, fighting the informal economy and undeclared work, and increasing the role of the CLAs – no results have been achieved. However, CNSM has been successful in restoring the functions of the State Labour Inspectorate with regard to occupational safety and health and investigation of labour accidents. This is an important step towards ensuring the functional integrity of the State Labour Inspectorate in accordance with international labour standards. Another important result is the unions' contribution to the ratification by the Moldovan Parliament of the ILO Convention no. 161 on occupational health services, a result of several years' effort.

In spite of some positive examples of unions' work, however, overall, public trust in trade unions and that of their members is quite low. According to the public opinion barometer, 61 per cent of respondents do not trust trade unions and only 15.6 per cent have some trust. A lower level of trust is reported only for the parliament and political parties. According to an opinion poll on employees' perception of their situation, employees do not see the trade unions as an institution able to ensure in a decisive manner the protection of the employees' rights and contribute to an increase in their income. Thus, in order to improve their public image and gain members' trust, trade unions need to reform, become independent from political factors, and play an active role in policymaking to the benefit of their members.

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