

**The Work in Freedom programme of the ILO
in collaboration with the Global Alliance Against Traffic
of Women presents**

Panel Discussion on Workers’ Centres in the 21st Century

**December 16, 2021 at 8:00 pm IST/2:30 pm GMT/3:30 pm
CET via Zoom Online**

The past two decades have witnessed a significant increase in the number of workers’ centres as facilities dedicated to migrant workers. The emergence of such centres has been correlated with the increased presence of migrant workers in specific sectors of the economy where outsourcing of production and services has been encouraged by public policies.

Workers’ centres are meant for all types of workers, however they tend to cater primarily to the needs of informal workers and migrant workers and tend to exist and be located in areas where fundamental principles and rights at work, such as non-discrimination, freedom of association and collective bargaining as enshrined in International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions No. 111, No. 87 and No. 98, are a distant reality for both informal workers and migrant workers.⁶

Workers’ centres can play an important role in creating more enabling environments that respect fundamental principles and rights at work in areas where, and for people for whom, such freedoms are restricted. For example, many types of workers do not enjoy full freedom of association as established under the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) Convention on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise, 1948 (No. 87). The nature of their jobs

leaves them limited possibilities to come together with other workers outside the scope of their jobs, and laws may exclude their occupations from freedom to associate. Similarly, they may not enjoy rights covered by the ILO's Convention on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation), 1958 (No. 111) and ILO's Convention on the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining, 1949 (No. 98).

In countries where such rights are guaranteed in national legislation, they tend to exclude migrant workers, informal women workers, indigenous populations, minorities and/or others, for whom special, less favourable conditions exist either by default or by design. Traditional unions often find it challenging to work in such contexts. They are often not used to working with such populations. Cultural, linguistic and other barriers may exist, or there may simply be limited familiarity with the occupations of such workers. Yet workers' centres can help in facilitating the roles of unions and of workers themselves in coming together and building awareness about the commonalities of the challenges they face.

Workers' centres cannot be understood outside the context of the industrial relations that govern labour practices in the regions where they exist. It is therefore important to analyse the history of relationships between workers and contractors and between managers and employers in the specific locations where workers' centres are situated. This calls for both a social and spatial analysis of labour relations.

The purpose of this event is to discuss a recently published WIF ILO background paper: [Reclaiming space for workers in the 21st Century: A literature review of workers' centres](#) which attempts to address the gap and need for analysis of social and spatial analysis of labour relations. The panel discussion will involve the authors of the report and guest discussants familiar with worker centres and challenges faced by them.

This discussion is part of a series of papers and events organized by the Work in Freedom programme on Workers' Centres. For more information about the different roles of workers' centres in supporting fundamental principles and rights



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at work, please see: [Worker Centers from a Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work Lens, 2020](#).