Protection against acts of interference for employers’ and workers’ organizations: Evidence from the updated IRLex database

February 2023

The ILO’s Legal Database on Industrial Relations (IRLex) provides country profiles containing legal texts and summaries on industrial relations issues in 70 ILO Member States. It covers thematic areas such as collective bargaining, dispute settlement or workplace cooperation in regions with different legal systems. IRLex is a tool for policymakers and advisers, government officials, representatives of employers’ and workers’ organizations, and legal and industrial relations specialists around the world. The database was updated and expanded in 2020/2021.

The IRLex database is concerned solely with the technical content of national legislation. It does not contain any information on how the law is applied in practice, nor does it include or imply any evaluation of its conformity with international labour standards.

Why is it important to protect employers’ and workers’ organizations against acts of interference?

The ILO’s Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work of 2019 regards freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining as enabling rights for the attainment of inclusive and sustainable growth. Employers’ and workers’ organizations can only effectively give voice to the interests of their members if they are free, autonomous and independent in their creation and functioning. In order to ensure that such essential prerequisites are met, such organizations need to be protected against acts of interference. Acts of interference can take many forms and may impact differently on them and on their free and independent creation and functioning. International labour standards protect employers’ and workers’ organizations against interference both by each other and by the public authorities.

What are the international labour standards around protections against acts of interference?

International labour standards, in particular the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87), recognize the right of employers and workers, without distinction whatsoever, to form and join organizations of their own choosing without previous authorization (Art. 2). The Convention provides that the public authorities shall restrain from interfering in the organizations’ right to draw up their constitutions and rules, to elect their representatives in full freedom, to organize their administration and activities and to formulate their programmes (Art. 3). Moreover, employers’ and workers’ organizations should not be liable to be dissolved or suspended by administrative authority (Art. 4).

While Convention No. 87 protects the free choice of employers and workers and the independent functioning of their organizations against interference by public authorities, the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98) extends this protection to any act of interference by each other or each other’s agents or members in their establishment, functioning or administration (Art 2). Employers and workers and their organizations should respect these principles of non-interference and effective procedures should be adopted to ensure their implementation in practice.
According to Convention No. 98, acts of interference include the promotion of the establishment of workers' organizations under the domination of employers or employers' organizations, or the support of workers' organizations by financial or other means, with the object of placing such organizations under the control of employers or employers' organizations (Art. 2). Laws and regulations should be put in place by ILO Member States to prevent such illegitimate organizations from undermining the establishment and functioning of free, independent and representative workers' organizations and hampering the functioning of genuine collective bargaining.

What have been the observations of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR)?

The ILO's Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) has emphasised in its “General Survey on the fundamental Conventions concerning rights at work” (2012) the need for legislation to make express provision for rapid appeal procedures, coupled with effective and dissuasive sanctions against acts of interference. It has also emphasized that it is essential for employers' and workers' organizations to maintain their independence so that they can defend the interests of their members effectively.

The CEACR has observed that some of the national legislative provisions that protect employers' and workers' organizations directly or indirectly against acts of interference are of a general nature, while others are more specific and stipulate the prohibited measures (such as interference in the establishment or administration of trade unions; activities aimed at restricting the right of workers to join together in trade unions or at exercising control over their organizations; means of pressure in favour of or against any trade union organization; payments intended to subvert trade union leaders; etc.).

What have been the decisions of the Committee on Freedom of Association (CFA)?

The CFA has stated on multiple occasions for specific cases that respect for the principle of freedom of association requires that employers, employers' organizations and public authorities should exercise great restraint in relation to intervention in the internal affairs of workers' organizations.

In 2020, 32 active cases were examined by the CFA, all of which originated from workers' organizations. Among these examined cases, 38 per cent included issues related to protection against acts of interference.

Among the forms of interference, the CFA referred in specific cases to the promotion of the establishment of parallel trade unions; the favouring of one group within a trade union at the expense of another or the favouring of one organization over another; requesting employees to state whether or not they belong to a union; offering bribes to union members to encourage their withdrawal from the union; expressing opinions that would intimidate workers in the exercise of their organizational rights; persuading or coercing members to leave an organization (including the drafting and/or distributing of resignation forms); or maintaining camera surveillance in rooms set aside for trade union meetings. Moreover, “[t]he employer’s consent to the establishment of the union should not be required as a condition for registration, […] such a requirement would constitute a clear violation of the principles of freedom of association.”

The CFA has also recalled that the existence of legislative provisions prohibiting acts of interference on the part of the authorities, or by organizations of employers and workers in each other’s affairs, is insufficient if they are not accompanied by efficient procedures to ensure their implementation in practice. Legislation should

1. The Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) is part of the ILO’s regular supervisory system and was set up in 1926 to examine the growing number of government reports on ratified Conventions. Today it is composed of 20 eminent jurists from different geographic regions, legal systems and cultures. The role of the CEACR is to provide an impartial and technical evaluation of the application of international labour standards in ILO Member States. For further information on the CEACR and the ILO’s supervisory system, see ILO, “ILO Supervisory System/Mechanism”.
3. ILO, Giving Globalization a Human Face, para.196.
4. ILO, Giving Globalization a Human Face, para. 195.
5. The CFA is a Governing Body Committee created in 1951 for the purpose of examining complaints of violations of freedom of association on the basis of the respective principles in the ILO Constitution – and therefore regardless of whether or not the country concerned has ratified the relevant Conventions. Complaints may be brought against a Member State by employers' and workers' organizations. For further information on the role, composition and jurisdicational significance of CFA decisions, see ILO, Freedom of Association: Compilation of Decisions of the Committee on Freedom of Association, sixth edition, 2018, 1–3.
For example, of “neglect of duty”, to prove that the real motive for dismissal was to be found in his or her trade union activities, particularly as the dismissed trade union leader would cease to hold a trade union post when dismissed by virtue of the law.12 In addition, legislation should establish sufficiently dissuasive sanctions against acts of interference by employers against workers and workers’ organizations and vice versa.13

**IRLex: How have authorities in different countries sought to protect against acts of interference?**

This factsheet14 presents a comparative overview of national legal frameworks, building on the IRLex database. It provides information on the legal protection for employers’ and workers’ organizations against acts of interference in about 70 ILO Member States. The information is presented around four safeguards: (1) safeguards to protect workers’ organizations, (2) safeguards to protect employers’ organizations, (3) remedies and sanctions and (4) procedural safeguards.

**1) Safeguards to protect workers’ organizations against acts of interference**

Table 1 organizes the information contained in IRLex regarding protection granted to workers and workers’ organizations against acts of interference. In several countries, these protective provisions include prohibitions for employers’ organizations to interfere directly or indirectly in the affairs of workers’ organizations, such as the prohibition of actions intended to promote the establishment of a workers’ organization dominated by an employer or an employers’ organization, financial assistance, or sponsoring the affiliation of workers to a specific workers’ organization. Several provisions also expressly prohibit the coercion of workers not to join or to leave a workers’ organization or threats and expressions of opinion aimed at discouraging workers from joining a workers’ organization.

In addition, IRLex refers to national provisions that establish protections against potential acts of interference by the public authorities. This includes safeguards against arbitrary administrative acts when establishing or dissolving a workers’ organization, such as unjustified denial or delay in registering a trade union.15 In some countries, no specific legal provisions to protect workers’ organizations against acts of interference could be identified in the national legislations contained in IRLex (see Annex, Global Overview 1).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General contents of the regulation</th>
<th>Specific contents of the regulation</th>
<th>Country examples16</th>
<th>Legal texts from IRLex</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prohibitions for employers’ organizations to interfere directly or indirectly in the affairs of workers’ organizations</strong></td>
<td>Prohibitions for employers’ organizations to interfere in the affairs of workers’ organizations, including the prohibition of actions intended to promote the creation of a workers’ organization dominated by an employer or an employers’ organization</td>
<td>Albania, Australia, Cambodia, Italy, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, and Republic of Korea</td>
<td>“It shall be considered to be unlawful for an employer to commit any of the following practices: a. To interfere in any way with workers in the exercise of their right to self-organization of a union; (...) d. To initiate [actions] to control, for instance, assisting or interfering with the formation or administration of any union or affiliation of unions, including for the provision of financial or other support to it or its founders or supporters in any manner other than that provided for in this law;” (unofficial English translation, Cambodia, art. 63 TUL)</td>
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<td>“Trade union organizations cannot be dissolved and their activity cannot be suspended on the basis of acts of public authorities or employers.” (unofficial English translation, Romania, art. 40 LSD)</td>
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<td><strong>Prohibition of financial assistance, or sponsoring the affiliation of workers to a specific trade union association</strong></td>
<td><strong>Argentina, Cambodia, India, Japan, North Macedonia, Viet Nam and Zambia</strong></td>
<td><strong>It will be considered unfair practices and contrary to the ethics of professional employment relations:</strong> (a) To directly or indirectly subsidize a union of workers; (b) To intervene or interfere in the constitution, operation and administration of a union; (...) (d) To promote or sponsor the affiliation of workers to a specific trade union association;” (unofficial English translation, Argentina, TUAL, art. 53)</td>
<td>Employers and their associations shall not be allowed to supervise the establishment and functioning of trade unions, i.e., higher-level associations thereof, nor shall they be allowed to finance or otherwise support trade unions, i.e., higher-level associations thereof, for the purposes of such supervision”. (unofficial summary and English translation, North Macedonia, art. 195 LRL)</td>
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<td><strong>Prohibition of coercion of workers not to join or to leave a workers’ organization or threats and expressions of opinion aimed at discouraging workers from joining a workers’ organization</strong></td>
<td><strong>Chile, Colombia, Hungary, India, Nigeria, Romania, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam</strong></td>
<td><strong>“No employer or workman or trade union, whether registered under the Trader Unions Act, 1926 (18 of 1926), or not, shall commit any unfair labour practice. (...) this includes:</strong> (…) Incentives/bribes offered to workers not to join a union.” (unofficial English translation, India, Industrial Disputes Act, sections 2 and 25)</td>
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16 The lists of referenced IRLex country profiles and national legal provisions are exemplary and non-exhaustive. The country examples cited in this table were chosen purely to illustrate and do not include or imply any evaluation of the conformity of that legislation with the relevant international labour standards.
(2) Safeguards to protect employers’ organizations against acts of interference

Table 2 presents specific provisions or summaries of relevant legislation listed in IRLex containing safeguards to protect employers’ organizations against acts of interference. Information contained in IRLex shows that legal protections against acts of interference usually apply equally to both employers’ and workers’ organizations. Moreover, some legislations that offer protection against acts of interference include specific measures protecting employers’ organizations against acts of interference concerning their establishment or dissolution by administrative authorities. However, for a significant number of countries no specific legal provisions for the protection of employers’ organizations against acts of interference could be identified in legislation contained in IRLex (see Annex, Global Overview 2).

Table 2: Safeguards to protect employers’ organizations

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Safeguards to protect employers’ organizations against acts of interference by administrative authorities, workers’ organizations and other parties</strong></td>
<td>Protection against acts of interference; legal protection usually applies to both workers’ and employers’ organizations</td>
<td><strong>Algeria, Jordan, Mexico, Paraguay, Poland, Rwanda and Sweden</strong></td>
<td>“Employers’ organizations, federations and confederations are self-governing and independent in their statutory activities from state government and local self-government bodies and other organizations.” (unofficial English translation, Poland, art. 3 EOA)</td>
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<td>“[e]xcept in cases expressly provided for by law, no legal or natural person may interfere in the operation of a trade union organization”. (unofficial English translation), Algeria, art. 15, Law on Trade Union Rights</td>
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<td>Please note that Law 90–14 of 2 June 1990 refers to both employees’ and employers’ organizations with the French term “organisations syndicales”, which is rendered into English as “trade unions”; however, in its original French formulation it is a broader concept that encompasses both employers’ and workers’ organizations.</td>
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<td>Protection from acts of interference concerning their establishment or dissolution by administrative authorities</td>
<td><strong>Denmark and North Macedonia</strong></td>
<td>“The trade union or employers’ organization may not be dissolved, or their activity may not be suspended by administrative measures, if they are established and pursue their activity in compliance with the law” (unofficial English translation, North Macedonia, Labour Relations Law, art. 186)</td>
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17 The lists of referenced IRLex country profiles and national legal provisions are exemplary and non-exhaustive. The country examples cited in this table were chosen purely to illustrate and do not include or imply any evaluation of the conformity of that legislation with the relevant international labour standards.
(3) **Remedies and sanctions foreseen against acts of interference**

Table 3 presents legal summaries or cites specific provision(s) (or equivalent sources of law) that regulate sanctions and remedies in cases of acts of interference. These provisions are less frequent than those intended to provide general protection to employers’ and workers’ organizations against acts of interference. In many instances the sanctions address anti-union acts in general. For a number of countries, no specific legal provisions foreseeing sanctions and remedies in cases of acts of interferences could be identified in IRLex (see Annex, Global Overview 3).

In addition, table 3 shows that in some countries, acts of interference are remedied by monetary compensation. The amount of the fine can depend on the size or turnover of the concerned company, or be increased in case of recidivism. Graver violations are sanctioned with imprisonment or fines or by informing criminal and administrative authorities. The remedy of injunction or cessation can be particularly important to guarantee the free exercise of workers’ organization’s activities and to provide effective protection against acts of interference.

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Remedies and sanctions against acts of interference</td>
<td>Monetary sanction; might depend on the size or turnover of the company or be increased in the case of recidivism</td>
<td><strong>Albania, Argentina, Burkina Faso, Chile, Moldova, Panama, Paraguay and Tunisia</strong></td>
<td>“Violations of the rules against acts of anti-union discrimination shall be sanctioned with fines of 100 to 2,000 balboas, depending on the gravity of the circumstances. Fines shall be successively doubled each time the employer repeats the breach and shall be imposed by the administrative authorities or labour courts.” (unofficial summary and English translation, Panama, Labour Code, art. 389)</td>
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<td>The law punishes anyone who intentionally obstructs either the free appointment of members of the corporate consultative committee or workers’ representatives, or the normal functioning of this commission or workers’ representatives, with a fine of 30 to 300 dinars plus imprisonment for between six days and one year, or one of these two penalties only. It is specified that “in the event of a repeat offence, a prison sentence is always pronounced” (unofficial summary and English translation, Tunisia, Code du travail, art. 241)</td>
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<td><strong>Chile, Cambodia, France, India, Republic of Korea, Romania and Tunisia</strong></td>
<td>“In cases of judging that the employer has committed any unfair labour practice after completing the inquiry ... the Labor Relations Commission shall issue an order of remedy to the employer.” According to art. 90 TULRAA, an employer conduct that fall within any unfair labour practices “shall be punished by imprisonment for not more than two years or by a fine not exceeding 20 million won” (unofficial English translation, Republic of Korea, TULRAA, arts 85 (1) and 90)</td>
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<td>Obstructing the exercise of union rights is punishable by one year’s imprisonment and a fine of €3,750 (unofficial summary and English translation, France, Code du travail, art. L2146-1)</td>
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<td><strong>Argentina, Italy and Spain</strong></td>
<td>Legislation establishes a right to file a complaint before a judge in case actions of interference are committed. Also, it prescribes fines for the employers who commit unfair practices. If applicable, another remedy is the cessation of acts of interference (unofficial summary and English translation, Argentina, Law on Trade Union Associations, art. 54-55)</td>
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<td>If the judicial body considers the violation of the right to freedom of association, it shall decree the immediate cessation of the anti-union behaviour, as well as the consequent reparation of its illicit consequences, referring the actions to the Public Prosecutor’s Office for the purposes of purging any possible criminal conduct (unofficial summary and English translation, Spain, Organic Law on Freedom of Association, art. 15)</td>
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18 See also ILO, Giving Globalization a Human Face, p. 80.
19 The lists of referenced IRLex country profiles and national legal provisions are exemplary and non-exhaustive. The country examples cited in this table were chosen purely to illustrate and do not include or imply any evaluation of the conformity of that legislation with the relevant international labour standards.
(4) Procedural safeguards recognized in the legislation

Table 4 organizes the legal summaries or provision(s) (or equivalent sources of law) contained in IRLex that recognize procedural safeguards for employers’ and workers’ organizations which have suffered or allege acts of interference. In some countries, these include the reversal or the sharing of the burden of proof.

Moreover, some countries stipulate a duty of the relevant administrative authority to conduct an investigation after receiving a complaint. There exists also the possibility of a reference to a special (fast-track) procedure to end acts of interference. For a substantive number of countries, no specific provisions for procedural safeguards for the protection of employers’ and workers’ organizations against acts of interference could be identified in IRLex (see Annex, Global Overview 4).

### Table 4: Procedural safeguards

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<tr>
<th>General contents of the regulation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Procedural safeguards</td>
<td>Special fast-track procedures</td>
<td>Chile, Colombia, Denmark and Italy</td>
<td>In Denmark, the Labour Court is a specialized court, which has both the specific expertise and a fast-track procedure to deal with claims for the disturbance of industrial relations, such as claims of interference with the conduct of business of the social partners. The Labour Court Guidelines set out a normal fast-tracked procedure with deadlines, as well as a procedure for urgent matters that has very short deadlines for the preparation of the case between the parties before the hearing by the court (unofficial summary and English translation).</td>
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<td>Reversal or sharing of the burden of proof</td>
<td>Chile and Kenya</td>
<td>“(b) the party who is alleged to have engaged in that conduct shall prove that their conduct did not infringe any provision of this Part;” (unofficial English translation, Kenya, Labour Relations Act, 2007, art. 11)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Duty of the labour administration to conduct an investigation</td>
<td>Japan and Republic of Korea</td>
<td>In Japan, art. 27 LUA provides that the Labour Relations Commission shall conduct an investigation without delay and can hold a hearing on the reasons for the motion. As for procedures, a sufficient opportunity to present evidence and to cross-examine witnesses shall be given to both parties. Art. 27-6 LUA provides that the Labour Relations Commission shall conduct a hearing to establish a plan of examination, in which crucial matters, including issues, evidence, duration and number of hearings, should be determined (unofficial summary and English translation, Japan, Labour Union Law, art. 27).</td>
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20 The lists of referenced IRLex country profiles and national legal provisions are exemplary and non-exhaustive. The country examples cited in this table were chosen purely to illustrate and do not include or imply any evaluation of the conformity of that legislation with the relevant international labour standards.
Global overviews of identified protective provisions in national legal frameworks in IRLex

The following global overviews present the information contained in IRLex on the four subjects outlined above related to the protection against acts of interference. The worldwide overviews are limited to indicate the existence of relevant legislation to enable the identification of regulatory examples in different regions of the world. The hyperlinks next to the world maps enable the reader to directly access the text of relevant national legal provisions providing protection against acts of interference for each country.

The IRLex database is concerned solely with the technical content of national legislation. It does not hold any information on how the law is applied in practice. Neither does it include or imply any evaluation of the conformity of that legislation with the relevant international labour standards. The comments by the ILO’s supervisory bodies should be consulted to assess the application of standards by Member States in law and practice.

Where to get additional information on protection against acts of interference in the legislation of different countries?

- The global overviews indicate the existence of relevant legislation on protections against acts of interference. The online database IRLex (www.ilo.org/irlex) can be used to get access to summaries and full texts of relevant national legal sources and to explore regulatory examples in more depth.

- Disclaimer: Summaries and full texts of legal sources in IRLex are provided for information purposes only and are not intended to replace the authentic legal texts. Each country profile has been verified by a country specialist. However, this is no guarantee that the laws identified and contained in IRLex are always complete, accurate and the most recent version. The database will be updated at regular time intervals. Please contact us if you have updated information or comments at inwork@ilo.org
Annex: Global overviews of identified protective provisions in national legal frameworks

Global Overview 1: Provisions protecting workers' organizations against acts of interference

Does labour legislation, or equivalent source of law, contain any specific provisions protecting workers' organizations against acts of interference?

- Relevant provisions on the subject have been identified for this country in the IRLex database
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- Country is not covered in the IRLex database

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Boundaries shown do not imply endorsement or acceptance by the ILO.

Direct links to the text of the relevant national legal provisions and summaries in IRLex

Albania  China  India  Myanmar  Rwanda  Uganda
Algeria  Colombia  Indonesia  Namibia  Senegal  Ukraine
Argentina  Costa Rica  Italy  Nigeria  Serbia  United Kingdom
Australia  Côte d'Ivoire  Japan  North Macedonia  Singapore  United States
Bangladesh  Denmark  Jordan  Norway  Slovakia  Viet Nam
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Botswana  Ethiopia  Korea, Republic of  Paraguay  Spain  
Brazil  Finland  Malaysia  Peru  Sri Lanka  
Bulgaria  France  Mexico  Philippines  Sweden  
Burkina Faso  Guatemala  Moldova, Republic of  Poland  Thailand  
Cambodia  Honduras  Montenegro  Romania  Togo  
Chile  Hungary  Morocco  Russian Federation  Tunisia  
Global Overview 2: Provisions protecting employers’ organizations against acts of interference

Does labour legislation, or equivalent source of law, contain any specific provisions protecting employers’ organizations against acts of interference?

- Relevant provisions on the subject have been identified for this country in the IRLex database
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Does labour legislation, or equivalent source of law, contain any specific provisions protecting employers’ organizations against acts of interference?
Global Overview 3: Sanctions and remedies protecting against acts of interference

**Does labour legislation, or equivalent source of law, contain specific provision foreseeing sanctions against and remedies in cases of acts of interference?**

- Relevant provisions on the subject have been identified for this country in the IRLex database*
- No relevant provisions on the subject have been identified for this country in the IRLex database*
- Country is not covered in the IRLex database

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Direct links to the text of the relevant national legal provisions and summaries in IRLex

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Global Overview 4: Procedural safeguards against acts of interference

Does labour legislation, or equivalent source of law, recognise any procedural safeguard for workers’ or employers’ organizations which have suffered or are alleging acts of interference?

- Relevant provisions on the subject have been identified for this country in the IRLex database*
- No relevant provisions on the subject have been identified for this country in the IRLex database*
- Country is not covered in the IRLex database

* The IRLex database is concerned solely with the technical content of national legislation. It does not hold any information on how the law is applied in practice. Neither does it include or imply any evaluation of the conformity of that legislation with the relevant international labour standards.

Boundaries shown do not imply endorsement or acceptance by the ILO.

Direct links to the text of the relevant national legal provisions and summaries in IRLex

Albania
Algeria
Argentina
Australia
Bangladesh
Belgium
Botswana
Brazil
Bulgaria
Burkina Faso
Cambodia
Chile
China
Colombia
Costa Rica
Côte d’Ivoire
Denmark
Eswatini
Ethiopia
Finland
France
Guatemala
Honduras
Hungary
India
Indonesia
Italy
Japan
Jordan
Kenya
Korea, Republic of
Malaysia
Mexico
Moldova, Republic of
Montenegro
Morocco
Myanmar
Namibia
Nigeria
North Macedonia
Norway
Panama
Paraguay
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Romania
Russian Federation
Rwanda
Senegal
Serbia
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Slovakia
South Africa
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