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Kerala Institute
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KILE LABOUR POLICY PERSPECTIVE SERIES - 2023

KILE Labour Policy Perspectives 2023 is a publication series launched by the Kerala Institute of Labour and Employment (KILE) to disseminate perspectives of renowned experts and practitioners on contemporary concerns related to labour and labour relations in Kerala within the larger context of transformations in the world of work.



ABOUT KILE

The Kerala Institute of Labour and Employment (KILE) is an autonomous body constituted by the Government of Kerala for the purpose of training and research in labour and allied subjects. The economic reforms are bringing far reaching changes in the industrial and employment scenario of Kerala and Kerala Labour has to face new challenges arising out of it. In order to equip them to cope with the changing economic scenario, to maintain a cordial industrial relations climate in the State and to cultivate a new work culture among the tripartite of industrial relations – the Government, workers and the management. The Institute is organising training programmes, seminars, workshops and undertakes research programmes.

VISION

Advance social justice and equity; promote harmony among social partners; contribute to the prosperity of the State and enhance quality of life.

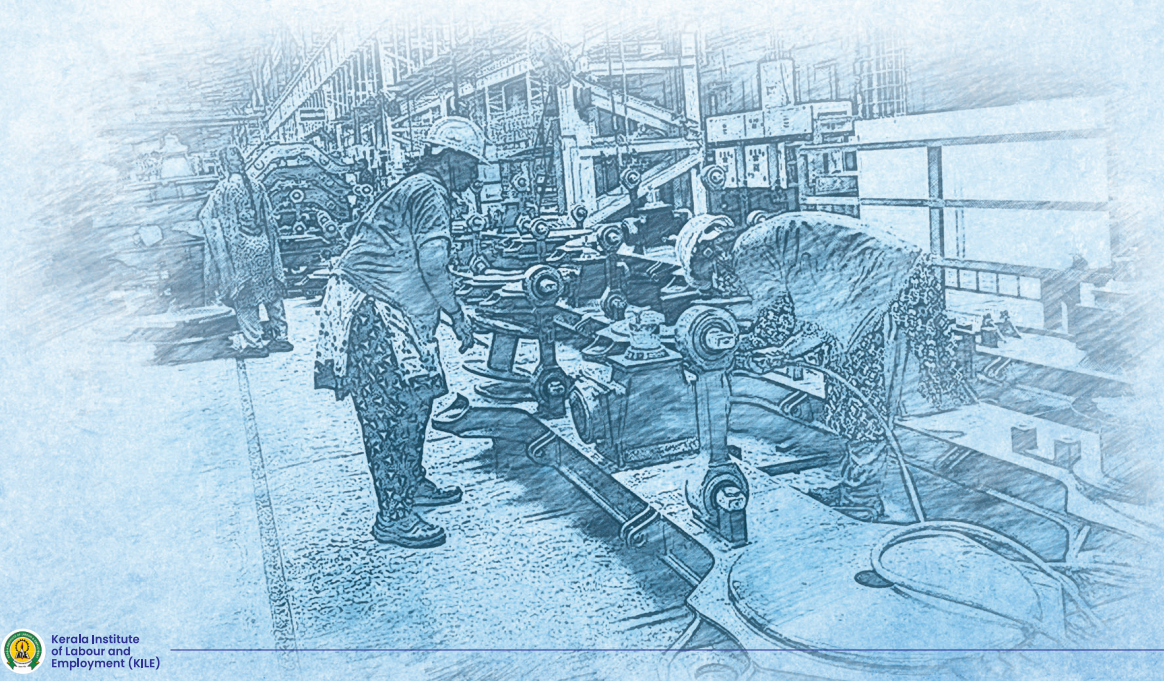
MISSION

The mission of the institute is to identify nurture promote and propagate the best practices in work, in labour relations and in Management through training, research and vibrant interaction among social partners.



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KILE Labour Policy Perspective Series 2023 is a publication series launched by the Kerala Institute of Labour and Employment (KILE) to disseminate perspectives of renowned experts and practitioners on contemporary concerns related to labour and labour relations in Kerala within the larger context of transformations in the world of work. We fervently hope this series will contribute towards highlighting the importance of labour in contemporary public policy discourses. The articles in this series will also focus on the strategies and interventions required in the domain of labour and employment to facilitate the transition of Kerala into a knowledge economy. We express our sincere gratitude to Shri. Elamaram Kareem, Member of Parliament and renowned trade unionist, for contributing an article for the Inaugural Issue of KILE Policy Perspectives.

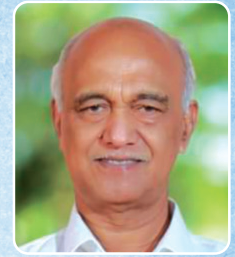


Protecting Workers' Rights, Promoting Skill Development and Fostering Harmonious Industrial Relations:

KILE Networking with Workers' Organisations

The efforts made by the Kerala Institute of Labour and Employment (KILE) to forge collaborations with International and National institutions and organisations in order to protect workers' rights, promote skill development and evolve a harmonious relationship between employees and employers in Kerala are highly commendable. It is significant to note that KILE has very recently forged a formal collaboration with International Labour Organisation (ILO) and International Training Centre of ILO, Turin (ITC) for conducting a Diploma Course on Social Dialogue and Industrial Relations.

Over the past two and a half decades, labour law reforms have posed significant challenges. These reforms have often been associated with economic changes imported from the 'neo liberal economic order'. Originally, labour laws were introduced by the British Government to meet the expectations of the international community following the establishment of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), with India being one of its founding members. One firm principle enshrined in the ILO's Constitution was that labour was not to be treated as an article of commerce or as a mere commodity (Part XIII, Treaty of Versailles, 1919). Ensuring dignified working conditions of all workers was considered



Elamaram Kareem
Member of Parliament

the best way to secure social justice and lasting world peace. The ILO was to carry out these high ideals by creating international standards of work through its Conventions and Recommendations. These standards were established through a unique mode of tripartite consultation among representatives of workers, employers and government. The inception of the ILO accelerated the formation of National Level Trade Unions in India.

The ongoing efforts to reform labour laws often does not recognise these basic ideals set out in ILO's Constitution and also does not consider certain structural features of the contemporary employment scenario. Such an approach can be detrimental to protecting workers' rights and promoting stable employment relations.

One of the major features of the contemporary employment scenario in India as well as in several countries of the world is that an overwhelming proportion of workers are engaged in informal employment. Globally, more than 61 per cent of the employment constituting over 2 billion employed population are presently engaged in the informal economy. In India, 434 million workers were in informal employment, constituting nearly 89 percent of the total employment (15-59 age group) in 2021. A significant percentage of the

informal sector workers are either own account self-employed workers or casual wage workers. The prevalence of a disproportionately high level of informal employment has adverse consequences, not only for workers but also for the nation as a whole. The informal sector fails to provide adequate learning and training opportunities, resulting in minimal investment in the skill development of workers and limiting their prospects for advancement.

The over dependence on informal employment exacerbates existing inequalities within the country. The informal sector becomes a source of income for impoverished families, often leading to the discontinuation of education for their children. Consequently, these families are unable to pursue formal education or training, perpetuating a cycle of low wages and low incomes. Historically, marginalized communities such as Dalits, Muslims and Adivasis are disproportionately affected by these circumstances. Informal employment is often characterised by the absence of labour contracts, social security coverage and legal support for redressal of workers' grievances, leading to vulnerable and exploitative conditions of work.

A healthy workforce is crucial for a progressive nation. Economically speaking, a healthy workforce translates into higher productivity levels. Moreover, it serves as a fundamental constitutional objective in and of itself. Despite the overwhelming presence of informal workers and the looming threat of automation and mechanisation impacting workers adversely, the efforts of Central Government towards skill development have primarily focused on the formal sector.

It is imperative to urgently assess the capabilities of the informal sector and enhance the skills of its workers. By assessing the capabilities

and skills of informal sector workers, policy makers can identify areas for improvement and develop targeted interventions to enhance their productivity and income levels.

By enhancing their skills through training and capacity- building programmes, workers can acquire the necessary knowledge and competencies for the transition into the formal sector. This will not only increase their access to formal employment but also open avenues for social protection benefits, including health insurance and legal protection against exploitation. Along with that, the skill enhancement will directly contribute to improving their productivity and competitiveness. This in turn, leads to economic empowerment and poverty reduction by providing better livelihood opportunities and enabling upward mobility.

Inclusive growth and social equity are important as the informal sector is often characterized by high prevalence of vulnerable and marginalized groups, including women, youth and migrant workers. Empowering them ensures that these groups are not left behind in the process of economic development.

KILE can develop the competencies of such marginalised segments through training programmes to unlock their potential and promote inclusive and equitable growth. Moreover, such efforts would contribute to building a resilient and sustainable economy that benefits all segments of society. Trade unions can take a convergence role with KILE for facilitating the empowerment activities.

The networking between the Kerala Institute of Labour and Employment (KILE) and workers' organizations play a vital role in shaping labour policies from a comprehensive and inclusive perspective. The collaboration will bring together the expertise and insights of both academia

and workers' representatives, fostering a strong foundation for evidence-based policy formulation and effective skill development interventions. Some of the key areas where joint efforts are needed includes representation and advocacy which ensures that the voices and concerns of workers are effectively represented in labour policy discussions. Trade unions serve as the collective voice of workers, advocating for their rights, welfare and interests. KILE can actively interact with trade unions to understand the ground realities, challenges faced by workers and emerging labour issues, enabling policy makers to develop policies that address these concerns. Both the partners can analyze labour market dynamics, assess the impact of existing policies and propose reforms or new policy frameworks. KILE can also enhance the capacities of the union leaders and workers by providing them

knowledge, skills and resources through training interventions and workshops on key domains like labour laws, collective bargaining, dispute resolution mechanisms and social dialogue. This will strengthen the effectiveness of trade union in negotiating for better working conditions, wages and benefits, ultimately contributing to improved labour policies. Providing effective platform for constructive discussions and negotiations between employers, workers and policy makers helps in finding mutually acceptable solutions, fostering harmonious industrial relations and preventing or resolving labour disputes. This will ultimately contribute to a fair and conducive labour environment for the workers of Kerala. In light of these circumstances, KILE's collaboration with the ILO and other agencies to prioritize worker skill development represents a positive step towards building a "New Kerala".





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