

# KILE NEWS

DECEMBER 2023



**KILE** joins hands with  
**International Labour Organization**

# **KILE**

## **CIVIL SERVICE ACADEMY**



**Kile Civil Service Academy**  
IInd floor, Labour Welfare Fund Board Building  
Near Uppidamoodu bridge  
Vanchiyoar, Trivandrum – 695035  
Ph: 0471 2479966  
Email: [kilecivilservice@gmail.com](mailto:kilecivilservice@gmail.com)





The present government of Kerala have tangible idea about the labour sector of Kerala. Major steps and plans have been already initiated for the upliftment of this sector. 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. KILE being the first State Level Labour Institute has a vital role in educating and empowering the labourers in Kerala.

The Memorandum of Understanding signed between KILE and International Labour Organisation (ILO) serves as a significant milestone in the labour history of Kerala. KILE is expanding its reach and activities for the improvement of the labour sector in Kerala. Along with that the International labour conclave organised by the Kerala State Planning Board and the Labour department was a successful event that brought about 150 distinguished delegates from around the world to discuss the challenges and solution in the global labour sector.

We believe that KILE play an important role in Kerala's labour sector and we are doing our best to raise our activities and expand our horizons. It is with great pride and pleasure that we announce the publication of the new volume of KILE News.

**K. N. Gopinath**

Chairman

---

# CONTENTS

7



LABOUR  
CONCLAVE  
International Labour Conclave

9



TRUMPING  
KERALA'S LABOUR  
SECTOR

20



Building back better:  
Towards a socially-  
responsible capitalism

11



"Kerala at the forefront of  
workers' rights"

24



Unionising  
the e-com giant  
Amazon

16



"Fostering a cordial work  
culture"

34



KILE-ILO MOU:  
A leap for Kerala's labour  
sector

38



Social Dialogue to boost  
KERALA'S LABOUR  
SECTOR

18



"Bolstering workers' part in  
digital economy"

36



"Equipping labour  
sector with  
Social Dialogue"

40



"Right-making /  
State-making"

48



The Decent Work Agenda  
of ILO and Its Impact on  
Domestic Workers





**Excellence Redefined**

**KILE**

(An autonomous body under the Ministry of  
Labour & Skills, Govt. of Kerala)

## KILE NEWS

**PUBLISHED BY KERALA INSTITUTE OF  
LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT (KILE)**

2023 DECEMBER

Patron

**V Sivankutty**

Minister for General Education &  
Labour, Kerala

Chief Editor

**K. N. Gopinath**

Chairman, KILE

Editor

**Sunil Thomas**

Executive Director, KILE

Resident Editor

**K. Mallika**

Member, Executive Council, KILE

Editor-in-Charge

**Kiran J.N**

Senior Fellow, KILE

Sub-Editor

**Surya Heman**

Publicity Assistant, KILE

Editorial Assistant

**Jisha A.S**

LD Typist, KILE

Designing, Layout and Printing

**Orange Printers Private Limited**

Thiruvananthapuram

Address:

**Chief Editor**

KILE News (English)

Kerala Institute of Labour and Employment (KILE)

4<sup>th</sup> Floor, Thozhil Bhavan, Vikas Bhavan.P.O,

Thiruvananthapuram -695033

E-mail: kiletvm@gmail.com

Web: www.kile.kerala.gov.in

Facebook: Kile Tvm

Authors are solely responsible  
for the content

**EDITORIAL**=====



It is with a deep sense of happiness that we publish the English Edition of KILE NEWS. This edition of KILE News mainly focuses on KILE's collaboration with the International Labour Organization and the International Labour Conclave that happened in Trivandrum. Being the first State level labour Institute, it was indeed a proud moment to collaborate with the ILO.

The Institute conducts careers and skill development courses, various training for the workers as well as research. The Research wing of the institute carries out regular and important studies that help in the upliftment of the labourers.

With huge pride, I bestow this issue to the public with satisfaction.

**Sunil Thomas**

Executive Director, KILE



Government of Kerala



**INTERNATIONAL  
LABOUR  
CONCLAVE  
2023**



# LABOUR CONCLAVE

## International Labour Conclave

### Declarations

The Conclave recognises that labour rights are an inalienable part of the struggle for economic and social justice, and the progress of society as a whole. The rights of workers are recognised as fundamental rights under the Constitution. India's workers have to face conditions of deprivation concerning livelihood, regularity of employment, and assurance of dignified working conditions. Decent and healthy conditions of work, social security, and an absence of precarious employment are essential components of a just society.

As an important location for the ILO, Kerala has been playing a pivotal role in uploading ILO's values and principles throughout its journey over the past years. The International Labour Conclave 2023 was an excellent platform to share knowledge, ideas, and best practices through different technical sessions. ILO and the Government of Kerala look forward to continued and strengthened collaboration.

As the Chief Minister of Kerala noted at the inaugural, workers' rights must be a part of public discussion everywhere, as they are in Kerala. We have pledged to remove extreme poverty by 2025. In Kerala, our path of development is distinguished by concern and care for all people, regardless of gender, caste, religion, or social group. We are proud of that tradition of inclusiveness and of secular, democratic advance in the world of work and labour. No person must be left behind in the cause of economic development.

The Conclave noted that the Government of Kerala is nearing completion of a specific bill for the protection of domestic workers' rights, the first of its kind in India. The Conclave discussed the move by the Government of India to enact four labour codes with the declared objective of "rationalising" existing labour legislation. These codes will shrink the worker's hard-won rights and displace many judicial interpretations now favourable to workers.

The Conclave underlined the value of the convention of discussing such codes in tripartite labour conferences before bringing it to Parliament. The exclusion of different types of employment from the purview of the Industrial Relation Code will leave whole categories of workers without alternative legal relief and will increase social and economic problems among working people.



Care work, paid and unpaid, is one of the main drivers of our economics and societies. Women dominate in care work. Scheme workers are all considered volunteers, honorary workers, social workers, or activists, and denied what is their due in terms of status and income. The Conclave is of the view that scheme workers or community workers, who are part of the various Government programs, must immediately be recognised as workers. A suggestion long overdue is the need for constituting a mechanism for fair remuneration to care and scheme workers. The Conclave recognised the need to put traditional industries on a new technical footing and to abolish conditions of drudgery. Workers' rights to healthy, well-remunerated work in traditional industries were emphasised.

Recent developments in digital technologies are fundamentally altering many of the traditional forms of work as well as creating new forms of work. Kerala will work with ILO to understand the emerging global regulatory and welfare framework to develop a path forward for the rights of gig and platform workers, and to ensure them just and dignified conditions of work. Kerala will take up this matter at the national level to ensure a consistent all-India framework for the future of work.

The Conclave recognises the critical importance of human resource development to create a knowledge economy with science and technology as the foundational base. In addition to strengthening the current program of job-responsive skills in traditional job categories, efforts must be made to develop sector-specific knowledge workers with interdisciplinary knowledge.

Every Government has to protect the rights and livelihoods of migrant workers and invest in the infrastructural requirements of migrant workers at their place of work. The State must provide welfare benefits including access to health facilities and decent housing. The details of migration and migrant workers must be the subject of regular statistical study.

The Labour Conclave recognised the importance of reliable and scientifically-generated labour statistics as a tool to ensure the social and economic development and progress of the working class. The Conclave stressed the importance of learning from worldwide experience and of international working-class solidarity. This Conclave will generate a series of policy recommendations for workers' rights and welfare for different governments.





# TRUMPING KERALA'S LABOUR SECTOR

In 1956, after independence, language became a cohesive factor and led to the formation of United Kerala. In 1957, the first ever democratically elected communist government led by EMS Nambudripad became a model to India and the world by drawing and implementing policies that brought development to the work environment, work, and workers. On the sixth day that they came into

power, the EMS government passed the Agrarian Reforms Bill, conferring a massive blow to feudalism. In 1958, the Minimum Wages Act ensured minimum rates of wages in various occupations. As we come to the state's present Chief Minister Pinarai Vijayan's Ministry, the government has brought out policies that have refined, reformed, and redefined the employment sector. Kerala stands

alone as the sole state in the country that ensures minimum wages across 84 sectors.

The ingenious income support scheme further enhances this progress by guaranteeing fixed wages for a minimum of 100 days to workers in traditional fields like handloom, cashew, coir, fishing, and more. Kerala's employment sector is undergoing remarkable growth by creating appropriate jobs for skilled youth.

Kerala shines as the state with the finest working environment in India, along with being the frontrunner in paying the highest wages to labourers. The influx of guest workers from all parts of India to Kerala in search of employment stands as living proof of this distinction. Sramik Bandhu Facilitation Centres operate in every district, providing assistance in the labourer's language, fostering a sense of belonging and support. The Awaas Scheme is specifically designed to facilitate the registration and insurance of guest workers. Under the leadership of the Pinarai government, Kerala has emerged as a shining example of prioritising women's

safety. Women workers have been granted the right to sit in the workplace alongside a range of other benefits, including essential provisions like maternity leave. In a thoughtful initiative, the Department of Vocational Skills runs the Sahaja Call Centre, offering vital interventions to address workplace challenges faced by women. Through Kerala Savari, the government has introduced the nation's first online taxi system.

This pioneering initiative has revitalised the once-monopolised sector. To ensure convenience and security, dedicated studio apartments have been arranged to provide working women with comfortable overnight accommodation. Trade union activities, which continually expanded the bargaining power of workers, served as a constant catalyst for renewing class-based political interventions.

The Apna Girl project focusses on constructing apartment complexes for unorganised sector workers and providing hostel facilities for guest workers. These initiatives aim to provide safe and affordable

housing options catering to the needs of workers in different sectors. Kerala is the first state in the country to honour organisations that provide a safe and friendly working atmosphere, as well as employees that showcase excellence in their field of work.

Eleven organisations are awarded these Excellence Awards. The Best Employee Award is given to 19 employees of varied fields who show exemplary talent and skill. Under the leadership of Chief Minister Pinaray Vijayan and Labour Minister Sivan Kutty, we are ready to face the challenges in the labour sector during these changing times.

By leveraging the Industrial Relations Committees under its purview, effective interventions are made to address and resolve issues arising in labour-employer relationships. The most significant change brought about by the Government of Kerala is the establishment of a non-discriminatory work environment that preserves the dignity and self-respect of workers.





## "Kerala at the forefront of workers' rights"

**Pinarayi Vijayan**  
Chief Minister, Kerala

Since 1957, when Kerala's first State Government came to power, we have implemented a rights-based strategy to accommodate the requirements of workers in the formal and informal sectors. By passing the Kerala Minimum Wage Rules in 1958, Kerala's first ministry showed the world how workers' rights can be protected by ensuring minimum wages. Kerala is the first State in India to establish welfare fund boards

for its workers, beginning with the Toddy Tappers Welfare Fund Board in 1969. It was in the same year that the Kerala Dinesh Beedi Workers Cooperative Society was also formed. Both experiments triggered the formation of a large number of welfare boards and workers' cooperatives all over the state, across various sectors.

A significant turning point in the welfare of the workers, however, was the Kerala Wel-



fare Fund Act which ensured financial contributions by the government, employers, and employees. As a result, a large number of Welfare Boards were set up to serve workers - including women - in the informal sectors. The coverage of traditional industries such as coir, handlooms, cashews, and so on is worth citing. In total, there are 24 Welfare Boards in the State which play a crucial role in reducing the livelihood crisis of informal workers. It was especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. A pathbreaking effort of the State Government came in 1980 with the implementation of the agricultural workers' pension scheme. It was the first major social assistance scheme in India.

Kerala is well renowned for its tripartite mechanism which operates in nearly all of its traditional sectors. The government, the employees, and the employers reached an agreement on the issues of bonuses, Onam and Christmas advances, and so on, thanks to the tripartite process. The tripartite system is strengthened through the Industrial Relations Committees which are functional in not less than 12 sectors.

An important dimension of Kerala's labour policy is that it is integral to the reforms initiated in the industrial sector. For instance, the tripartite system in the plantation sec-



tor has been strengthened by introducing a new plantation policy and also by strengthening the welfare measures of the plantation workers, including an increase in the pension age from 58 to 60. This is apart from the benefits from the Estate Workers Distress Relief Fund. New management systems are being introduced into the estates as well.

The Income support scheme to provide financial support of Rs 1,250/- to workers engaged in the traditional sectors like beedi, khadi, fisheries, coir, etc., has been progressing over the years with increased budgetary allocations. The scheme is implemented through the respective departments. Also, the Kerala Unorganised Social Security Scheme has been formulated by amalgamating various

schemes specifically aimed at artisans, barbers, beauticians, temple workers, and so on. As rapid urbanisation is taking place in the State, we have also come up with a new scheme of Affordable Housing for Unorganised Poor Urban Labourers.

The recognition of the rights of domestic migrant workers is an integral aspect of the labour policy in Kerala, with a slew of measures in place to support them. We honour them as guest workers. Kerala is one of the most migrant-friendly States in the country. They were especially aided during the COVID-19 pandemic with free accommodation, food, and medical care.

The Interstate Migrant Workers Welfare Scheme was introduced in 2010. It established a





welfare fund for migrant workers in Kerala under the Kerala Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board. Interstate migrant workers in the age group of 18 to 60 could enroll in the scheme. It provided them with financial support in the event of accidental or natural death. Aawaz, a health insurance scheme, was implemented for them in 2017. Apna Ghar envisages providing safe and hygienic accommodation for them.

During the COVID-19 crisis, many Labour Welfare Boards announced ex gratia financial assistance to workers. Besides the direct financial assistance, certain Welfare Boards also offered workers interest-free loans. The Government took steps to ensure food for all during the lockdown, by setting

up community kitchens and people's restaurants. Distribution of free food kits through the ration shops continued even after the lockdown. We even put up shelter homes for the homeless.

All the social security pensions were distributed two months in advance to around 5.4 million people. An economic revival package which included the distribution of interest-free loans amounting to Rs 2,000 crore through Kudumbashree was rolled out. Welfare Fund Board assistance, social security pensions, food kits, economic revival package, and interest-free loans were mainly intended to ensure the social security of informal sector workers and other vulnerable sections of the society who lost livelihoods during the lock-

down.

Through this conclave, we will be commemorating the century-old history of the International Labour Organisation's association with India and Kerala's contributions in upholding the objectives and principles of the ILO. We will discuss workers' rights and labour practices in Kerala as well as in India, in the larger context of the world.

The ILO came into being at the end of the First World War as a response to workers' struggles against the oppressive conditions of work and deep income inequalities. It has served and continues to serve as a platform for workers, employers, and governments across the world to come together and strive to create a legal architecture for the governance of the world of work.

India is one of the founding members of the ILO and became a permanent member in 1922. India has maintained a special bond with the ILO over the last 100 years. The Government of India, national trade unions federations, and major employers' associations are constituent parts of the ILO. India has ratified six of its eight fundamental conventions. The Employee State Insurance was enacted in 1948 by the Government of India which ensures state insurance to all employees with equal contri-





bution from employees and employers.

As far as Kerala goes, we have one of the best records concerning workers' rights in the global south. Kerala is exceptional in protecting and advancing workers' rights at a time when workers' rights are waning worldwide. In terms of providing decent employment, forming unions, workers' co-operatives, welfare boards, and pension schemes, and ensuring inclusivity and the protection of migrant rights, Kerala has evolved as a role model. We comply with the main principles of the ILO, including the tripartite structure, in which the government, employers, and employees meet to resolve disputes.

The right to work is upheld. Child labour has been out-

lawed. We affirm protection against discrimination. Social security is ensured particularly for women workers. Wage protection is offered. Workers' grievances are resolved. They have the right to organise and form trade unions. Collective bargaining and management participation are also available to our workers. All these are guaranteed by the State's safety net.

Now, we are on the path of transforming Kerala into a knowledge economy and innovation society. We intend to reap the benefits of technological advancement and modern management. As part of this, the Labour Department is increasingly being digitised and modern methods of governance are being practiced. An app has been created for guest workers to make their social protection

foolproof. Schemes like Aawaz can be more efficiently applied once this app is completely functional. Transparency in the payment of wages to employees in the private sector is crucial. An e-payment system has been introduced to ensure the same. This is in addition to the minimum salaries that are set in different sectors, which are the highest in the country.

We have recently created a programme called Karmachari which allows students to earn while they learn. Students in higher education who enjoy working along with studying are urged to take part in the project that will be run by the Higher Education Department. A Digital Workforce Management System has been developed by the Kerala Knowledge Economy Mission to enable students to sign up for the pro-





gramme and earn while they learn. We are giving importance to skills convergence, and for institutional strengthening at the national, state, and district levels. The Kerala Academy for Skills Excellence (KASE) has been designated as the torchbearer for the State's skill development mission.

Various departments have their skilling programmes, which inadvertently result in duplication. This emphasises the need for convergence across the departments under a mission at the state level. This mission would guide, coordinate, monitor, and evaluate skilling initiatives and bring all skill development activities of the state under a single umbrella.

The question of skill gaps and skill convergence are adequately addressed through the

initiatives of KASE, iSTEP (International Skill Training and Employability Programme), and ASAP (Additional Skills Acquisition Programme). Additionally, Centres of Excellence are being set up in various sectors and in higher education institutions to address this question. The Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana and the Skills Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood Programme are also being implemented in the state.

Self-employment and other employment opportunities are made possible in Kerala by supporting MSMEs (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises). In the last financial year alone, we have been able to set up close to 1.4 lakh MSMEs with a total investment of around Rs 8,500 crore which in turn generated employment for more than 3 lakh people. The government pays special attention to the rights of workers as well as the IT sector and other closely related technology-oriented sectors as part of the development of the knowledge economy.

Workers in the unorganised sector have access to several benefit programmes including pensions. The State has given special attention to women workers with a focus on their health, nutrition, working conditions, and other rights. Their 'right to sit' in the shops they work in has been legally assured.

Given the fact that as many as 84 sectors have minimum wages fixed and revised timely, Kerala stands ahead of many other States with respect to wages and benefits. The highest daily wage rate for male non-agricultural workers in rural India is in Kerala at Rs 677.6/- in 2020-21. It is more than double the India average at Rs 315.3/-.

The Government of India has introduced four new labour codes. Draft Rules appropriate for Kerala have already been prepared for discussion in the State Legislature. Workers' rights are part of Kerala's public discourse and ensuring them is part of our legacy. We will continue to uphold them.

We have pledged to remove extreme poverty by 2025. We believe that Kerala can be as prosperous as an advanced middle-income country in the next 20 to 25 years, with the qualification that no one will be left behind. Our path of development is distinguished by our concern and care for all people regardless of gender, caste, religion, or social background. We are proud of our tradition of inclusiveness and of secular, democratic advance, especially in the world of work and labour.





## "Fostering a cordial work culture"

**V. Sivankutty**

Minister for General Education & Labour, Kerala

The International Labor Conclave is a significant event that will bring together 150 distinguished delegates from around the world to discuss the challenges and solutions in the global labor sector.

The conclave will focus on the plans and policies of Kerala, which can serve as a model for labor welfare activities worldwide. The conclave will be attended by workers' repre-

sentatives, employers, administrators, legal experts, and ILO representatives.

They will discuss the challenges and potential solutions faced by various professions globally.

Kerala has always been committed to the social and economic upliftment of workers, prioritising their welfare through legislation and policies.

The conclave will address various issues, including workers' rights and duties, through seven sessions.

The Kerala government emphasises the protection of workers' rights and socio economic security. It has implemented numerous schemes and programs to maintain healthy labour-employer relations.

The Labor Department oversees 16 Welfare Fund Boards, benefitting over 7 million members. These boards provide support through pension schemes, educational benefits, and assistance funds during periods of unemployment.

Kerala is at the forefront of ensuring minimum wages in 84 sectors. In cases where employers struggle to meet the minimum wage, the state government provides income support.

Our guest workers, who are treated as guests, are beneficiaries of schemes such as health insurance, facilitation centers, and housing schemes. Through schemes like Kerala Sawari, an online auto and taxi system, Kerala has demonstrated excellence in seasonal job changes.

The government's Karmachari project offers employment opportunities alongside studies, enabling students to gain experience and secure better job opportunities.

Kerala strives to create non-discriminatory and women-friendly workplaces. It has implemented various schemes, including maternity benefits, night shift safety provisions, and call centers to address workplace issues. Skill development programmes cater to traditional occupations and technical jobs, such as porter training.

Kerala is known for its high wages with workers earning over twice the national average in sectors like agriculture, non-agriculture, and manufacturing. Furthermore, the state has instituted awards for labour excellence, recognising outstanding workers in organised and unorganised sectors.

This conclave serves as a platform to foster a development-friendly work culture, treating workers and employers as complementary. It encourages effective interventions, ideas, and suggestions that can equip educated job seekers to face the challenges of the new employment era.

The government will carefully consider all the ideas and suggestions put forth during this conclave. It will follow up diligently, announcing new policies and schemes that effectively cater to the needs of workers and the public.





## "Bolstering workers' part in Digital Economy"

**K. N. Balagopal**

Minister for Finance, Government of Kerala

The three-day international labour conclave is coming to a close today. Noted economists, trade union leaders, scholars, and other dignitaries from different parts of the country and abroad deliberated on major themes including:

1. Rights, legislation, and social protection
2. Traditional industries: Problems of transition
3. Internal migration and migrant workers' rights

4. Care workers, scheme workers, and domestic workers
5. Skilling and future forms of work
6. Gig and platform workers' welfare

I am sure that the pioneering roles played by Kerala in terms of forming unions, worker co-operatives, welfare boards, pension schemes, and the protection of migrant rights have been discussed and marked in this conclave.

We are currently experiencing the digital and artificial intelligence (AI) revolution, which has brought about profound changes in industries and economies worldwide. The advancements in technology have completely transformed our way of life, work, and interaction.

These developments will continue to disrupt traditional work patterns but present opportunities and challenges. Industries such as manufacturing, healthcare, finance, transportation, and communication have been greatly influenced by the digital revolution and AI. Companies across various sectors are now leveraging these technological advancements to enhance efficiency and offer innovative products and services. Consequently, the skills required in the workplace have undergone a significant transformation. It is crucial that the workforce must adapt and be prepared for these changing dynamics. The government of Kerala recognises the importance of embracing these advancements and taking appropriate measures to leverage their positive effects on the economy while minimising any adverse consequences.

We do acknowledge that the skills that were valuable in the past may not be sufficient in the context of digital and AI revolutions. Therefore, we are committed to upskilling and reskilling workers in various sectors, including both Kerala workers and domestic migrant

workers, to ensure their competitiveness in the evolving job market. Identifying the skill gap and addressing it is a priority for us. We will take proactive steps to equip people with the necessary skills and abilities in Kerala. Our focus will be on providing 100% basic computer literacy and promoting advanced computer literacy, especially among the youth. Upskilling and reskilling programs are already implemented to bridge the digital skills gap among the current workforce and empower individuals to actively participate and contribute to the digital economy.

As part of the government of Kerala's policy framework, we will promote digital and AI literacy. We advocate for the establishment of collaborative platforms involving government, industry, and educational institutions. This will facilitate skill development and ensure that digital and AI-related skills are integrated into the formal education system and vocational training programs. Additionally, we emphasise the importance of creating a supportive ecosystem that fosters entrepreneurship, innovation, and the creation of new job opportunities.

Through these initiatives, we aim to harness the potential of the digital and AI revolutions, equip our workforce with the necessary skills, and create an environment that nurtures growth and economic prosperity for the people of Kerala.



# Building back better: Towards a socially-responsible capitalism



**Alex Gordon**  
President  
National Union of Rail, UK

I want to consider first the material basis of workers' rights at the present stage of capitalism as a world system. Karl Marx wrote: "Right, law, etc. are merely the symptom, the expression of other relations upon which State power rests". The class relations of capitalist states today are characterised by a general crisis of economic stagnation, inflation, and falling wages.

Emerging from the global economic shutdown in 2021, some of Britain's largest employers embarked on a radical restructuring of workers' wages and conditions, exploiting the lack of protection for workers' collective conditions and employ-

ment rights in UK legislation by imposing 'fire and rehire' and wage cuts. As inflation and interest rates rose sharply in the post-pandemic era, trade unions in Britain resisted attacks on their members' living standards by organising the largest strike wave in thirty years. This strike wave developed from defensive actions against attacks on jobs and wages into a broad united front of organised labour across both private and public sectors, demanding real wage increases. The UK government responded by legislating to ban the right to strike in six key sectors (health, education, transport, fire and rescue, border securi-





lower investment, an erosion of human capital through lost work and schooling, and fragmentation of global trade and supply linkages.”

Despite such pessimism, the World Bank did not anticipate the inflationary crisis that gripped global economies two years later. By January 2023, in a foreword to ‘Global Economic Prospects’, World Bank President, David Malpass wrote:

“Our latest forecasts indicate a sharp, long-lasting slowdown, with global growth declining to 1.7 per cent in 2023 from 3.0 per cent expected just six months ago. ... Median income levels, moreover, are being eroded significantly—by inflation, currency depreciation and underinvestment in people and the private sector.”

Back in September 2020, as global economic activity plunged by 7 per cent across all advanced economies, a new initiative entitled ‘The Great Reset’ was unveiled in Davos at the World Economic Forum. Its authors’ idealistic call to reinvent capitalism as a system aligned with the needs of nature and humanity was an admission of global capitalism’s crisis and the reality of its failure.

“A true recovery from COVID-19 will not be about putting things back together the way they were: we need to ‘build back better’, to ‘reset’,

if we are to address the deep systemic vulnerabilities the pandemic has exposed. For businesses, building back better is about much more than corporate social responsibility: it is about truly aligning markets with the natural, social and economic systems on which they depend. It is about building real resilience, driving equitable and sustainable growth, and reinventing capitalism itself.”

Under the slogan ‘Build Back Better’, world leaders from Washington to London to Berlin proclaimed the need for a socially responsible capitalism.

However, this language of social responsibility was rapidly abandoned as capitalist economies emerged from the shutdown that commenced with the World Health Organisation’s official announcement of the pandemic on 11 March 2020, which lasted over 22 months with varying levels of restrictions through to December 2021.

As publicly funded furlough schemes tapered off in 2021, UK employers turned to tactics of mass ‘fire and rehire’ to drive down wage costs, casualise and outsource employment contracts, and in some cases end collective terms and conditions of employment altogether. Instead of corporate social responsibility, aligning markets with nature, and building equi-

ty, and nuclear waste management).

In June 2020, as global economic activity atrophied under the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the World Bank forecast a 5.2 percent annual contraction in global GDP — the deepest global recession since the Second World War. Global per capita income contracted in the largest number of countries since 1870. However, the Bank’s warnings for the future of capitalism itself were starker yet.

“Over the longer horizon, the deep recessions triggered by the pandemic are expected to leave lasting scars through

table and sustainable growth, central banks began to unwind Quantitative Easing, the long-term assistance to the financial and corporate sectors put in place in 2009 in the aftermath of the global financial crisis.

Britain and ILO Conventions: the importance of workers' rights

The ILO itself was, to a large extent, designed and originally created in 1919 as part of the Treaty of Versailles by British civil servants and trade unionists. Significant ILO figures include Director, Harold Butler (1932-38), Director-General, Wilfred Jenks (1970-73) and most recently Guy Ryder (2012-22).

UK was the first state to ratify core ILO Conventions CO87 (Freedom of Association and the Right to Organise, 27 June 1949) and CO98 (Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining, 30 June 1950), but the UK government adopted no new legislation because it regarded itself as already in compliance.

#### **ILO CO87 includes:**

- ▶ Art.2: Right of workers to establish and join organisations 'of their own choosing'
- ▶ Art.3: Right of organisations to 'draw up their constitutions and rules, elect their representatives in full freedom, organise their administration and activities

and formulate their programmes'. ILO supervisory bodies – the Committee on Freedom of Association and the Committee of Experts – derive from this provision the right of trade unions to take industrial action

- ▶ Art.11: requires states to take 'all necessary and appropriate measures to ensure that workers and employers may exercise freely the right to organise.'

#### **ILO CO98 includes:**

- ▶ Art.1: Protection against acts of anti-union discrimination
- ▶ Art.2: Adequate protection from 'acts of interference' designed to promote the establishment of workers' organisations under the domination of employers' ('Yellow unions')

- ▶ Art.4: Measures to 'promote the full development and utilisation of machinery for voluntary negotiation...with the regulation of terms and conditions of employment by collective agreements'.

Since ratifying CO87 (1949) and CO98 (1950) UK governments have refused to respond to questions from ILO Committees regarding UK laws that breach ILO core conventions. Early cases brought by the ILO concerned UK attacks on workers' rights in occupied or colonial territories (Guyana, the Gambia, Honduras, Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, Malaysia), rather than the treatment of trade unions in Britain itself.

A general tactic of UK governments is to promote ILO conventions on standards where these are already established in UK legislation or practice





so as to impose them on other countries and thereby protect the UK comparative advantage. Such standards relate not only to collective bargaining but also to individual workers' rights such as CO105 Abolition of Forced Labour (1957). The UK took 20 years to ratify CO100 Equal Remuneration (1951) - delayed until 1971 when the UK enacted its own Equal Pay legislation (Equal Pay Act, 1970), which was forced on employers and the government by a campaign of strike action by women workers demanding equal pay with male workers.

The British Trade Union Congress submission to ILO's committee of experts in September 2022 stated: "The UK government has shown a consistent record of failure to respect labour rights conferred by ILO CO87 (freedom of asso-

ciation and protection of the right to organise) and CO98 (right to organise and collective bargaining)." Unions in the UK are highly regulated to an extent that infringes these rights. Conservative governments from 1979 to 1997 and since 2010 placed restrictions on trade unions to hinder the right to strike and to interfere in unions' internal affairs.

These restrictions include a ban on unions lawfully taking protest strikes against a government ('political strikes'), a total ban on solidarity action ('secondary action') and balloting thresholds in education and transport in the 2016 Trades Union Act. In 2022, new laws to facilitate strike-breaking by agency workers were introduced and proposals for new laws to enable Serious Disruption Prevention Orders (by which people who have not

been convicted of any offence can be made subject to restrictions on liberty backed by criminal penalties) were to be imposed on trade unionists.

Unions in the UK are highly regulated to an extent that the British TUC (Trade Union Congress) believes that it infringes their rights. Conservative governments from 1979 to 1997 and since 2010 placed restrictions on trade unions through the Trade Union Act 2016 which hinder the right to strike and ensure state interference in unions' internal affairs. Currently, the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill 2023 enacted on 22 May 2023 gives the government power to set minimum service levels during strikes in six key economic sectors (health, fire and rescue, education, transport, nuclear energy, and border security). If unions or workers fail (or refuse) to comply, they lose legal protections against being sued or dismissed.

UK anti-union legislation is antidemocratic, authoritarian and a fundamental attack on democratic rights. Trade unions in Britain are building a mass movement of opposition to such laws, that makes the law unworkable through a strategy of non-compliance to defeat this attack on working people.





# Unionising the e-com giant Amazon

Interview by Jasmi Begum & Surya Heman



**Justine Medina**  
Member  
Amazon Labour Union, USA

Justine Medina, member of the organising committee of Amazon Labour Union talks to KILE on the historic achievement of forming a union of workers at the e-commerce behemoth Amazon

**Q:** How was the Amazon Labour Union called into action? What made you think about forming this union?

**A:** It started in response to COVID-19. At the beginning of 2020, the company was refusing to give time off to workers. They were refusing to imple-





ment safety measures like enforcing distancing or providing masks. There were some workers, including Chris Smalls, who is the current president of the Amazon Labour Union, who were agitating and urging workers to go to the management and demand fair treatment. But, nothing was happening. So they did a walkout. And, then in response to the walkout, some of the workers were fired, illegally. They thought that this would stop the agitation. But all it did was raise the agitation. So, that was sort of the genesis of it. But, it just continued because the

general treatment of Amazon workers is really bad. You're working these 10 to 12-hour shifts and you have to stand the entire time. If you take a break to go to the bathroom, you could get in trouble. Sometimes, you hurt yourself. A lot of injuries happen during your shifts. An ambulance comes to the warehouse almost every day to take someone to the hospital. There are casualties and so many other problems. And even the young people who work there, like 20-21-year-olds, have back problems. There were very serious injuries and safety concerns, which

was why we started the drive for a union and created one.

Q: At first, when you formed the union, what was the response from the management?

A: It was horrible. They started doing propaganda against the union to the other workers who were not part of the union. Because in the United States, to have a union recognised by the government, you have to hold an election. And to hold that election at your workplace, you have to petition enough workers to sign to say they want to have an election. And so, Amazon started firing workers who were signing the petition. And then they started threatening the leaders of the union, sending the police after them and arresting them. And then there would be surveillance, video and audio surveillance on all of us at all times. That was their response. But every time they attacked us, we were just empowered by it.

Q: What is the vision of this union? Is it labor welfare?

A: Well, yes, that is the start. But, we stand in solidarity with other unions and other struggles. We really do see that people are fighting against police brutality and we know that all of these struggles are interconnected.

Q: Did the management give any weightage to the union? What was the attitude of the





management after the union election?

A: They said that we didn't win. There are records. And they even sued us and we went to court and the court was like, no, they won. Even though the Labour Department and the National Labor Board are on our side, they don't have much money. Amazon has tons of it and they can just ignore them.

Q: We see in the news that Amazon is supporting its workers. If, as you said, people are getting spine and back issues, is Amazon not doing anything for their health? Don't they have any health policies?

A: No. If they say they are, they're lying.

Q: What are the welfare activities in your union?

A: The union helps get workers food and groceries. That is one of the things we like to do to help people. We don't have a ton of money ourselves because we're still a new union. But we do what we can to help. There are a lot of homeless workers at Amazon. And we try to help give them some funding and help them find shelter and things like that. If a worker comes to us with a problem, we





try to help them solve it.

Q: During this COVID-19 outbreak, did the management help workers in any way?

A: They only helped after the agitation started; and only because of government intervention. So, in response to COVID and workers' agitation, the government implemented some laws mandating that businesses be required to en-

force masking and implement social distancing. And, Amazon, sort of, followed this; but they also tried to not do as much as they could.

Q: Even when the court and other labor institutes supported you and accepted your union, why could the government still not do anything against Amazon?

Because Amazon just has that too much money and that much power. The consequences of breaking the law are very minimal. The fines are so small that for a company like Amazon, it's nothing.

Q: What made you come into this? What is your background and why did you initiate this from your side?

A: I'm a member of the Communist Party in the United States. We have been trying to look for initiatives to help the workers at Amazon because it's such an important struggle. And so when I heard about the union efforts on Staten Island and because they had reached out to ask if any of our members wanted to get jobs at the warehouse to help build the union, I decided to do that.

Q: How many members are currently part of your union there?

A: That is hard to answer. At my warehouse, there are about 8,000 workers. Every worker at my warehouse, according to the

government, is covered by the union. But a lot of them are not active in the union. And then also, there are other warehouses where people are organising with the Amazon Labor Union, but they have not yet won government recognition. So that is why it is sort of tricky to know how many members are there.

Q: How did you get people to register in the union? Did you conduct any campaign of some sorts?

A: Yes, we did. It is very simple to register, especially right now. Dues are completely voluntary, because we have not won a contract yet, and Amazon workers are very poor. So, we promised that until we win a contract, members don't need to pay dues to participate. So it is very easy, but it is also hard as there are so many hassles. There is not so much time as workers have these 10 to 12-hour shifts and a lot of workers live 2 to 3 hours from the warehouse. So it is very hard for them to find the time to participate in union work. But many of us who are organisers with the union, almost all of us, work there. So we try to hold meetings in the break room, and thus try to allow for more participation and get people more active.

Q: What are the major threats against organising such a union? Have you faced anything personally?

Well, they are, sort of, always threatening. There is this looming threat of being fired from work anytime; so we have to keep up with our own jobs and our own rate. And of course, during the election campaign, all of us who were the primary organisers were threatened and we received such write-ups at work. So the hardest thing actually, is making sure that the main leaders don't get fired. Because as long as we're in there fighting, we're good. If we are kicked out, then we have no access to the workers, because you are not allowed to enter the warehouse unless you work there.

Q: So after firing those workers, did the management reappoint them?

A: No. Even though the government said that they have to, they did not.

Q: Were the fired workers given any settlement amount? Why are they not hiring them back when the government has asked them to do so?

A: That is the crazy thing. Despite the government interfering in the matter, they don't comply and they don't really have to give a reason.

Q: Do you think the government can do something more than this?

I think they could. But it would take political will. There are a few politicians who are very



strong and who fight for workers. But the majority is not so strong at fighting for workers. It will help to have more allies in the government. Because they could absolutely do more.

Q: What are your plans for the future? Are you expanding the network?

Yes, we are working towards that. We are currently building towards a strike to force management to the table. Which is why we are trying to get more workers involved and participating. We are also trying to organise to have internal union elections and increase partic-

ipation as well so that people feel more ownership towards the union. We are always in touch with Amazon workers all over the country and all over the world. Anytime, people can reach out to us. We may not be able to provide financial support, but we are happy to provide advice and we are happy to talk. We are always encouraging people, like communists, socialists and other allies of workers, to get jobs at Amazon warehouses to help with the union drive. That is what it will take.

Q: How periodically do you





convene? Are there regular meetings?

A: It is not legal. So it is difficult to organise. But, we try.

Q: What is the medium of communication like? How are meetings organised then?

A: We have an office where we meet in person. But we also do a lot of online meetings and Zoom meetings, so that way, there can be more participation.

Q: So, is the digital platform mainly used for communication?

A: Absolutely. We use WhatsApp groups and such groups are really important for our union drive. They were very important for people to stay connected and to help spread information.

Q: So, about finance, how are you financed? Where does the union get money for protests and other union work?

A: Once in a while, we win a contract and then there are also dues from the workers, and that helps. Other unions donate to us and there are progressive organisations who offer help.

Q: Who are the main sponsors? Who gives you more money?

A: For instance, the postal workers' union; they gave a big donation. The Teamsters have helped and given us money. Primarily, other logistics workers help us. The logistics sector is so interconnected, and we understand that the capitalists in the logistics sector are trying to take over. Even though the government runs a lot of the logistics, the capitalists are trying to privatise more and more of it. So we're all trying to team up to stand in solidarity.

Q: How are communists supporting your union or your protest?

During the union drive, the Communist Party was really helpful in providing resources, printing out flyers, and helping with propaganda materials. And this was very necessary because we had no money until we won our elections. Once we won our elections, we started getting donations from the public. But before that, it was very small. As per US law, you cannot conduct a public protest without any permission.

Q: So can you conduct a public protest?

A: Yes. It's very common in the US to do unpermitted protests.

Q: Do you have a flag or any emblem for your union, a symbolic representation?

A: Yes, we do have a symbolic representation and it is a little box with the fists. That is our symbol. And for a lot of people in the US, it's just ALU or Amazon Labour Union.

Q: What is the proportion of men and women participating in union protests?

A: It is mostly 50-50, representing how it is in the workforce as well. There is a 50-50 gender split. At my warehouse, it's predominantly black and brown workers. So, we make sure that the union representation reflects the workforce.

Q: Earlier, you said that you do not have many active members. So, who are more active in the union, males or females?

A: It's about 50-50.

Q: Do female activists fear repercussions from the management? Are they threatened or sexually abused?

A: Yes, they are, and that is common. One of our protests, even before we won our elections, was against sexual harassment. And even when it is not the management and when it is other workers who abuse women, the management covers for such workers just to keep their good name. We protested against that and got the management to fire some of the workers who were harassing women.

Q: How often is an upskill-

ing program conducted? Does the management provide any training? Do you provide any training from your side to the participants?

A: There's no training. Training is minimal and there is none from the management side. But, we do try to provide training and education on the systems, upskill them, and teach how to work with human resources to get what you need. We try to provide training, not only on things that will help people to do their work better but also help them keep their jobs. Training on labour unions and the history of la-

bour unions and your rights as a worker in a union and such things are also taught by us.

Q: Can we say that Amazon is an iceberg and we are just seeing the tip of it and behind that, a lot of things are happening?

A: Yes absolutely. Absolutely.

Q: Do they talk about being a communist?

A: It can be dangerous. They reached out to me, knowing that I was a communist. I've been very open the entire time. But at the same time, I'm not sectarian.

Q: So there are other commu-





nists in the union, but there are also people who voted for Trump, right?

A: Yes, and we all work together. We stand in solidarity, honestly. I was about to talk on that point.

Q: What was Trump's reaction towards your protest? And how was Trump towards the management?

He will obviously be supporting the management. He didn't make one comment. I see him as a joker, to be frank. Biden did make positive comments about us and that is good. Even

though he made positive comments, he has not taken any action to help. That's the thing.

Q: So what is the current president Joe Biden's attitude towards the union?

He did make positive comments and was entirely the opposite of Trump. Entirely the opposite. But the thing about Biden is that there is no action regarding any good thing he says. It just stops verbally.

Q: So what can you do more in the future to empower your union in your State?

Well, we are going to keep do-

ing what we're doing. The thing is, you have to be present. You have to be there every day. As an activist, one has to be there every day. Even if one day goes by, and there is not an ALU person around, the workers notice. And then they are like, 'Oh! The union has abandoned me.' So you have to show up and show that you are present and that you care. Then that presence makes the workers trust us. And then they get more involved.







**KILE - ILO**





# Partnership





## KILE-ILO MOU: A leap for Kerala's labour sector

Kerala Institute of Labour and Employment (KILE), which is the first state-level labour institute in the country, mainly focusses on capacitation programmes for the labour sector with special emphasis on the unorganised sector. The Memorandum of Understanding inked between KILE and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) serves as a sig-

nificant milestone for KILE in expanding its reach and activities for the improvement of the labour sector in Kerala. During the meetings held on 3rd April this year with ILO officials, the partnership was endorsed, recognising the potential benefits it can bring to the partners, particularly at the State level.

One of the key objectives of this partnership is to enhance



the competencies of KILE in organising various programs, specifically focusing on the southern states. By leveraging the international expertise of ILO, KILE aims to improve its capacity to deliver effective programmes in all mandates. This is particularly relevant in emerging domains where practical experiences and insights are valuable, such as Labour Dispute Resolution and Social Dialogue, which is a priority for the ILO. The two-day workshop on Labour Dispute Resolution for Labour Administrators was conducted successfully on the 19th and 20th of June.

### **Diploma in Social Dialogue and Labour Relations**

The KILE-ILO-ITC partnership plans to start an online course on 'Labour Relations and Social Dialogue' for labour administrators, workers' organisations, employers' organisations, law researchers, and academicians as well as students of labour relations. This course will provide a sound foundation in theory, principles, and practice of Social Dialogue as defined by the ILO. On successful completion of the Diploma in Labour Relations and Social Dialogue, the participants will be able to analyse labour relations

and social dialogue topics, including practices, trends, and methodologies. It will enable them to explain and compare international labour standards, how they are adopted, promoted, applied, and supervised, as well as learn their content, reasons for their development, and how they are used today.

The course will detail and illustrate the fundamental principles and benefits of the implementation of collective bargaining, grievance handling, and workplace co-operation. The diploma will be awarded after satisfactory completion of the course.





## "Equipping Labour Sector with Social Dialogue"



**V. Sivankutty**  
Minister for General Education &  
Labour, Government of Kerala

The collaboration with Kerala's first State level Institute, the Kerala Institute of Labor and Employment and the International Labor Organization is a significant milestone, as it is the first time in India that the International Labor Organization has entered into a memorandum of understanding with

a labor institute under a state government.

This partnership signifies a powerful alliance aimed at advancing social dialogue and industrial relations. The diploma course in Social Dialogue and Industrial Relations is a testament to our commitment





to fostering harmonious relationships between employers and workers. It emphasizes the importance of effective communication, collaboration, and

understanding in the workplace.

Through this course, we seek to enhance the knowledge and skills of participants in the field of labor relations, equipping them with the tools necessary to navigate the complexities of the labor sector in Kerala. By providing relevant and up-to-date education and training, we aim to create a highly skilled workforce that can effectively address the challenges and opportunities in the world of work.

This course holds immense significance for the Kerala Institute of Labor and Employment, as it adds a new dimension to our involvement in the labor sector. It reinforces our commitment to promoting inclusive and sustainable growth, where the welfare and rights of workers are safeguarded. By aligning ourselves with the International Labor Organiza-

tion, we are setting a precedent for other labor institutes in the country to collaborate with international organizations, fostering greater synergy and exchange of best practices.

The benefits of this partnership extend beyond the classroom. The knowledge and expertise gained through this diploma course will not only enhance the careers of the participants but will also have a ripple effect on the labor sector in Kerala as a whole. By equipping our workforce with a deep understanding of social dialogue and industrial relations, we are empowering them to contribute to the growth and development of our state. It is through partnerships like this that we can create a brighter future for our workers, where their voices are heard, their rights are protected, and their aspirations are realized.





## Social Dialogue to boost KERALA'S LABOUR SECTOR



**Satoshi Sasaki**

Former Deputy Director/OIC  
ILO DWT/CO New Delhi

Through our Decent Work Country Programme for India (2023–2027), the ILO is committed to “[Strategic priority 1] Promote International Labour Standards and the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, strengthen social dialogue, and support constituents for effective policy responses”. We want to ensure that “workers and enterprises, including those in the informal economy, are effectively repre-

sented through strengthened social dialogue and tripartism”

The Diploma Course being launched today is part of this endeavour of the ILO DWCP. This course is a response to the findings of a research study undertaken by the ILO’s Decent Work Team for South Asia in 2020, on the status of social dialogue in South Asia. This research involved employers’ organizations, trade unions and the ILO Country Offices in



South Asia.

A key finding of the research was that social dialogue practices are weakening across South Asia. There are various reasons for this, including the capacity of the ILO constituents in respect of labour relations and social dialogue, inadequate functioning of both tripartite and bipartite social dialogue mechanisms, limited participation of women and informal economy workers in social dialogue processes, and weak labour dispute resolution mechanisms that are unable to adequately support social dialogue processes; particularly collective bargaining.

You would agree that this does not bode well for social and economic development in the sub-region. It also poses a risk to an effective recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which many devel-

oping countries are still struggling to overcome. The pandemic has had a severe impact on people and economies globally. South Asia has sadly not been spared. The pandemic has resulted in job losses, a disproportionately harsh impact on women and informal economy workers, sharp declines in international tourist arrivals, as well as high MSME output losses.

An effective recovery from the pandemic cannot be achieved by any one constituent alone. Achieving a “better normal” will require a robust partnership, built on social dialogue, and based on joint action and commitments. The ILO has therefore initiated a package of interventions that aims to build more resilient social dialogue systems in South Asia. These interventions include identifying tools that would assist (Employer and Business

Membership Organisations) and trade unions to strengthen their representation in the informal economy.

A further intervention aims to strengthen labour dispute resolution systems in South Asia. In this regard, I am pleased that the ILO is also working closely with Kerala’s labour department to assess its labour dispute resolution system, and to develop steps to strengthen this system.

We are all aware and appreciative of Kerala’s pioneering efforts in multiple areas of workers’ welfare. The state government has been providing strong support on crucial issues of freedom of association, social dialogue and social security –including for migrant workers. Kerala also leads the way with a forward-looking vision for a sustainable future and just transition.





# “Right-making / State-making”



**Dr. K. Ravi Raman**

Member,  
Kerala State Planning Board

In the context of European history, Charles Tilly (1975:42) asserts that "war made the state, and the state made war." This remark needs to be rephrased in light of current events, Kerala's historical backdrop in general, and interstate migration in particular: "Right making is state making; the state ensures the rights of the guest workers." As a symbol of appreciation and esteem for their contribution to the state's economy and society, we refer to them as guest workers.

Given the fact that the labour

migration in India is largely circular, an extensive analysis of the magnitude of workers' migration becomes difficult. In addition, there isn't a scientific method to assess the data accumulation upon the migrant workers, who move at regular intervals. One of the earlier studies estimated that there were 2.5 million migrant workers in Kerala in the year of 2013, with a net annual addition of 1,82,00 workers every year (Narayana and Venkiteswaran 2013). However, this study was based on the long distance trains which could have missed



out the workers from the neighboring states like Karnataka and Tamilnadu, who usually rely upon other modes of transportation. In a study carried out by Parida and Raman (2020), the size of the migrant labour was figured out around 3 million during the pre-Covid period of 2017-18. In this way, the outward migration of labourers from Kerala to the Middle East and elsewhere is counterbalanced by the inflow of guest workers to Kerala. The author has depicted this migration process through the metaphor of currents and eddies (Raman 2012). Here, the currents signify the trans-national migration while the eddies indicate the intra-national migration cycles. This migration process states that this movement from one place to other creates subsequent emigration as well a flow of people from peripheral sub-national states who occupy the niches vacated by the transnational migrants. In this way, these migrants are producing a new sense of social and economic inclusion/exclusion patterns. Being the 'welfare magnet' state in the nation as well, Kerala is flagging a net in-migrant state.

Given that a net in-migrant state is in the making as the outcome, the migration shifts would have far reaching consequences in the labour market. In addition to the demographic factors such as decline in the growth of population,

the increasing urbanisation has also played a crucial role in attracting workers to the urban centres in India and Kerala. The rate of urbanisation in the country is only increasing. During the period of 1971-1981 and 1981-1991, the urban migration growth rate was 4.5 per cent and 3 per cent respectively. However, there was a decline in the growth rate of -1.4 per cent during 1991-2001. Since 2001, the growth rate was increased by 11 per cent, indicating a sudden structural transformation and intensified urbanisation-migration dynamics (see Parida, Jajati and Raman, Ravi 2018; 2021). The declining population and increasing urbanization will only catalyse the process of in-migration, which would make the state's task of creating a welfare system for the workers more taxing and imaginative.

### **Right-making is state-making. State-making is right-making**

The idea of migrant rights as a standalone notion does not exist in the broader Indian context because becoming a migrant often robs people of their rights. Most often in the context of India, greater mechanisation, structural change in rural areas, and employment losses are blamed for rural-urban migration. A sizable portion was also brought on by rural strife, notably those involving caste and religion. We

are forced to map the labour market migration corridors as a result, and we discover that there are multiple migration channels from the rest of the nation to Kerala. The majority of the workforce, however, travels along the Assam, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh corridors. These states, which are lagging behind in terms of human development, are where more than half of the migrants living in Kerala from. A few of the guest workers who were asked about their motivations for travelling from Jharkhand and Odisha to Kerala said that in addition to the high pay, the rationing system (public distribution through ration shops) and the state's high standards of education also attracted them. This supports the "welfare magnet hypothesis" (Borjas 1999), which holds that generous welfare systems abroad would draw immigrants. The aforementioned anthropological insight offers a special starting point for comprehending the welfare programmes Kerala offers temporary employees. Now we focus on the same.

The state of Kerala sees it as its responsibility to uphold migrant rights. The 13th Five Year Plan document (2017-22) specifically states this, and according to the writers, Kerala is the first Indian state to adopt a social security programme for migrant workers (Srivastava 2020). The state has also estab-

lished a Working Group on Labour Migration as part of putting them under the planning process for the 13th and 14th Five-Year Plans (2022–2027). Kerala is the only Indian state that has regularly created welfare laws solely for the benefit of temporary employees. This is a direct result of the state's historically developed political will. Instead of state resources, it has more to do with the egalitarian and moral nature of the state. The guest workers in the state are being organised by almost all the mainstream trade unions. The left wing trade unions take the lead.

### **Kerala's best Practices**

In India, Kerala is the only state which considers the welfare of migrants as the “duty of state”. In 1979, the Inter-state Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act was passed by the government. Two of the primary objectives of this act was to create a registry of the persons who brings the migrant workers to the state and to provide comprehensive packages to these workers. Apart from this, in 2010, Kerala Migrant Workers Welfare Scheme (KMWWS) was also launched which initiated several social protection policies catering to the guest workers. These projects are often collaboratively executed by the Kerala Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Board (KBOWWB) and the La-

bour Department.

The 2010 scheme can be availed by any guest workers with a job in Kerala who is between 18 and 60 years of age. As of now, 55,319 workers have registered under the scheme. However, given the huge population of migrant workers in the state, this number is relatively less. The voluntary nature of the

scheme and the ambiguous definition of who constitutes migrant worker are often cited as the primary reason for the lower participation of the guest workers. For instance, it was specified that only contractors who employ at least 5 workers could be registered under the scheme. As per the data, 25,979 workers from West Bengal have







registered under this scheme, which is the highest, followed by 8,529 workers from Odisha, 6,036 workers from Assam and 5,263 workers from Bihar.

The scheme provides financial assistance for medical needs of the workers, school education of their kids in Kerala and also retirement benefits to those who have finished five years

under the scheme. For those who have enrolled, the scheme provides compensation in the case of injury, monetary aid to the family of the worker upon death and for the repatriation of the dead body. The government would cover up to Rs25,000 as the medical expenses for those who ail chronic diseases and up to Rs10,000

for the immediate family member in case of death. If the death is caused during work, an accident death benefit of Rs50,000 would be given to the immediate dependant. Moreover, depending on the distance to their native place, an amount between 5000-15000 would be given to the immediate family members for the repatriation. However, several reports show the poor living conditions of the guest workers without proper sanitation facilities and lack of unpolluted drinking water, which expose them to diseases such as cholera and malaria. Taking these issues into account, the government has launched a new scheme called Aawaz, a comprehensive health insurance scheme.

### **Aawaz and Apna Ghar**

Kerala maintains excellent performance in terms of health indicators, especially in comparison with the states from which the guest workers come from. Under the Aawaz scheme, more than 2 lakh guest workers have registered with the LD. This health insurance scheme aims at a cashless medical treatment using bio-metric cards in empanelled hospitals, including private hospitals. Since there are more than 300 empanelled hospitals across the state, this becomes a major welfare aid. This is in addition to an accidental death insurance of Rs.2 lakh. As this scheme comes under Rashthriya Swasthya Bima

Yojna (RSBY), the Government of Kerala has requested the federal government to share 60 per cent of the total expenditure.

The scheme is being implemented through digital technology which helps with coverage and identification and access to health facilities. For this purpose, separate portal has been created by the government in order to improve the functioning of the scheme. The enrolment of guest workers in the scheme commenced from November 1 (the formation day of the state in 1956), 2017 and is operational in all districts with enrolment offered round the clock. The task of enrolment is made simpler with any of the identity cards recognized by Central/State Government such as Aadhar, Passport, Election ID, or Driving License being acceptable as evidence of identity. As of now, more than five lakh guest workers have enrolled under this scheme (Economic Review 2022: 335).

In Kerala, the scheme Aawaz has changed its policy of health insurance to provide an Assurance model to guest workers. In the earlier scheme, the guest workers had to pay first and then claim reimbursement from the government. However, considering the incapacity of the guest workers to pay for their medical needs, the Assurance model provides free

treatment up to Rs 15,000 across 56 identified general hospitals. The state encourages the trade unions in helping the guest workers to enrol in these welfare schemes as many can be ignorant of the schemes and its significance. Mobile apps are being put to use to locate and identify those workers who have not yet registered and to bring them under the welfare schemes.

There are two major schemes aimed at the education of the guest workers and their families. They are provided education benefit in the range of Rs1000-3000 for school admission and for other associated expenses. The State Literacy Mission has launched a programme with the aim of in-

cluding the migrant workers in the state literate in Malayalam and Hindi (Kerala Development Report 2021); interestingly enough, the Malayalis who are otherwise reluctant to speak Hindi, now learn the language from the migrants through their everyday interactions. The cultural exchange that has taken place in the migrant dominant regions is particularly conducive for the Malayalis to learn Hindi. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan has also addressed the issue of language barrier by appointing volunteers in various places. It has been pointed out that the in-migrants are at the greatest disadvantage when they consult doctors and nurses, owing to language barriers, an aspect that the government





agencies have taken into consideration.

Accommodation for the guest workers is another major issue being addressed by the government. Apana Ghar is an ambitious project launched by the government of Kerala towards the resolution of the accommodation crisis of the workers (see Economic Review 2022; Kerala Development Report 2021: 252-255). The community housing project is aimed at catering decent hostel facilities at affordable rates basis to migrant workers while working in the state. The hostel will have proper beds, cupboards, kitchens, dining rooms, clothes washing area, bathrooms and toilets all within the building. This project is being imple-

mented in various phases. In the first phase, a flat complex, with the capacity to accommodate 620 residents, has already been completed in Palakkad in the Kinfra Industrial Area at Kanjikode. In the second phase, the LD intends to develop similar flats in Kochi followed by Kozhikode and Thiruvananthapuram. The project has been implemented by the Bhavanam Foundation of Kerala which also intends to implement such housing projects in the plantation belts.

Assurance of legal provisions is significant for the implementation these welfare schemes. Although the labour laws under the state and central governments are equally valid and applicable to the migrant

workers, Kerala has stressed on the well-being of its migrant workers through the Kerala Migrant Workers Welfare Scheme. The Central Government Act 1979 covers only the interstate migrants who are recruited through licenced contractors under a registering authority and whose establishments that employ five or more such workers on. The Contractors are required to issue a passbook to every worker, giving their basic details including payments (see Surabhi and Ajith Kumar 2007). There are several Inspectors recruited by LD, and Task Force consisting of representatives from Health, Factories and Boilers, SG departments and so on to oversee the implementation of the Act and provisions assured through the Building and other Construction Workers' (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act 1996. The Act 1979 assures basic rights and facilities such as drinking water, sanitation and safety measures as mandatory.

In addition, the Labour Department has also initiated a Legal Awareness camp, the first of its kind in India. This comprehensive programme aims at the legal empowerment of the migrant workers through various awareness programs regarding the government schemes available to them. The first such camp conducted by the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) was held in





Thiruvananthapuram district. On a single day, 916 migrant workers registered for the awareness camp which shows the fact that workers are sensitised and interested in getting enrolled in the schemes. In addition to these awareness programmes, a complaint redressal cell was also formed at the venue which helped the workers to express their own concerns and complaints. The same camp was also notable for the higher enrolment of workers in the Aawaaz health insurance scheme.

The state has also set up Facilitation Centres in various districts. Centres are aimed at assisting the migrant workers with their everyday grievances, and they are further assisted through direct contact with the Labour Department via the Labour Call Centre at Thozhil Bhavan in Thiruvananthapuram and in the KSRTC Bus Terminal Complex to make them easily accessible for the workers. The Government has also formed monitoring committees which would work as grievance redressal mecha-

nisms in various districts. The Labour Department has also been actively involved in organising medical camps, in association with the Health Department and the Kerala Legal Aid Centre.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic and Guest Workers**

During the pandemic period in Kerala 4,34,280 guest workers lost their jobs and income, as estimated by the Department of Labour. The state launched a helpline cell along with call centres run by the Labour Com-



missionerate in every district, working round-the-clock to address guest workers' grievances with the help of interpreter services in several languages such as Odiya, Assamese, and obviously Hindi. the Department of Labour estimated that the number of guest workers who lost their jobs and income would be 4, 34,280. These workers were sheltered in 21,556 camps all over the state. Food, water and recreational facilities, including television and indoor games were provided to them in these camps. These pro-active interventions from the Labour Department made sure that no guest worker was deprived of food, drinking water or other physical amenities. Building owners and landlords had been warned strictly against any kind of unlawful eviction of guest workers. Another welfare program by the State was the supply of food to workers through 'Community Kitchens', the first of its kind in India, managed by Kudumbashree women. During a crisis period especially for migrant workers, thanks to pandemic, (see Rajan S.I., Sivakumar P., Srinivasan A 2020), Kerala set an example for others by providing the guest workers with decent accommodation, health care and all the other needs during the lockdown period. In certain cases such as plantation sector, work was reinstated immediately after the quarantine period; other

sectors also provided employment on a part time, like the case of fish peeling factories. The workers were also provided 10 kg rice and 2 kg pulses under the ATMA NIRBHAR BHARAT initiative which was executed through the state civil supplies department in the state, which later implemented portable rights with respect to public distribution of rations. The Labour Commissioner had issued circulars which directed the employers that wage reduction should not be made upon the absence from duty during the period of lockdown and no worker should be dismissed from work as a result of lockdown. During this period, around 4,34,000 guest workers in the State were shifted to 21,556 relief camps with bedding and basic facilities and the necessary arrangements were made to ensure social distancing and other adequate safety measures. For this purpose, adequate budgetary allocations were also made.

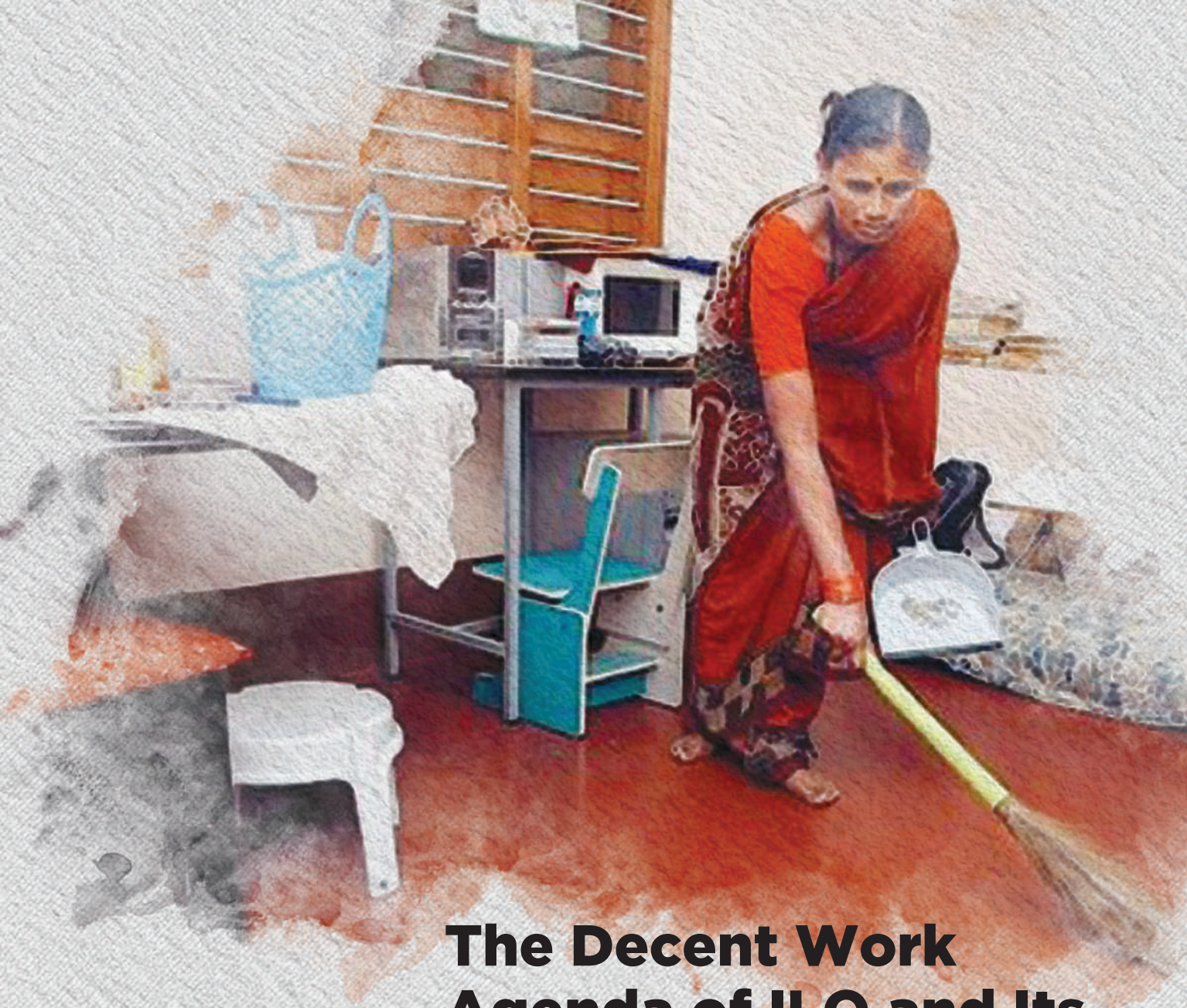
### Concluding remarks

The Kerala model of management of migrants, applauded by several scholars can be called as the Kerala Model of Migration and Development (KMMD). This Kerala Model of Development has undergone two stages, first, a significant human development experience and second, the consistent democratic processes for right-making. The third stage

is still in process, the Kerala Model of Migration and Development (KMMD). By recognizing, honouring and protecting the rights of guest workers, this state-making stage is advancing, which makes Kerala as India's welfare magnet state. Here, the process of right-making becomes state-making and conversely. This is what I call as the democratisation of democracy. Here, the modern welfare state isn't reduced to a state-machine which brings growth and development, but one that erases spaces of multiple exclusion, which is also constantly conscientised from below.

\*Expert Member, Kerala State Planning Board, Thiruvananthapuram. He is a former professorial fellow at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in New Delhi and visiting fellow at Oxford, Cambridge, and Manchester. He has published extensively in top journals including Harvard-Cambridge journals and is the author of He is the author of Global Capital and Peripheral Labour (Routledge, 2010b/2012/2015), editor of Development, Democracy and the State (Routledge, 2010) and Corporate Social Responsibility (with Ronnie Lipschutz) (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) and Political Ecospatiality: Protests and Power in Kerala, Cambridge University Press, forthcoming.





# The Decent Work Agenda of ILO and Its Impact on Domestic Workers



**Adv. P. Satheedevi**


Chairperson  
Kerala Women's Commission

The International Labour Organization (ILO) was established to be at the forefront of promoting social justice and fair labour practices globally. Its Decent Work Agenda, established in 1999, aims to ensure that all individuals have access to quality employment that respects their rights, pro-

vides fair remuneration, and promotes social protection.

The Decent Work Agenda encapsulates four pillars that contribute to the overall goal of providing decent work opportunities. These pillars include creating employment opportunities, guaranteeing fundamental labor rights, pro-





the changing global conditions and the emergence of the gig economy have dampened the progression of the labor market. A majority of low-wage workers, especially in the domestic work field, are deprived of the basic right to equal wages and a safe work environment.

Domestic work refers to the range of tasks performed within households, such as cleaning, cooking, childcare, and eldercare. Now, the need to broaden the definition is being raised by organisations and workers' movements. Historically, this sector has been characterised by informality, low wages, long working hours, and limited legal protection. Domestic workers often face exploitation, discrimination, and hazardous working conditions due to their vulnerable position within the informal labor market. It is high time to assess whether the Decent Work Agenda of ILO has made any impact on the domestic work industry.

Currently, there is no form of government-level agency to recruit home nurses and domestic workers. The fundamental rights of an employee are regularly violated in the case of care/domestic workers. Most of the time, the house owners where domestic workers work, do not come under the definition of employers, which gives them leeway in exploitation.

The unorganised nature of the job makes the workers vulnerable to exploitation.

The government should take the initiative to create awareness about healthy employee-employer relations in the domestic working field. There should be a functioning complaint redressal mechanism exclusively for domestic workers. It should cover workplace harassment as well as their concerns about their rights.

Currently, there is no concrete framework regarding leave and health benefits for domestic workers. They are being overworked most of the time. Maternity benefits and even leave for pregnancy are denied in the majority of the cases. The government or local bodies have to intervene and be more involved in the registration and regulation of these workers.

Government intervention by implementing rules and regulations in this field will reduce the nature of exploitation. Implementation of minimum wages and labor laws can improve the earnings of women workers. It should be insisted upon by the authority that payment should be done only through a bank account. A welfare board should be made exclusively for domestic workers. The formation of labor cooperative societies can ensure the upliftment of workers from the care/domestic sector.

moting social protection, and fostering social dialogue. The ILO aimed to achieve these goals by 2015. How deeply they failed in that is brazenly clear to whoever observes the global labor market.

The Decent Work Agenda emphasises the need to protect domestic workers' rights, including the right to fair wages, reasonable working hours, and safe working conditions. But,





Training for Asha Workers,  
Ernakulam



Training for Coastal Workers  
Kollam



Training for Unorganised  
Workers registered under  
Kerala State Unorganised  
workers Social Security  
Board, Thrissur



Training for Anganwadi Workers, Ernakulam



Training for Women Trade Union Leaders, Idukki



Participants at KILE Traing for Asha Workers, Ernakulam



# KILE NEWS

Labourer's Samaritan

