**SOLIDARITY OF THE INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION MOVEMENT IN THE POST COVID 19 ERA**

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*Summary: International cooperation is the basis of international solidarity, but international solidarity is not limited to international assistance and cooperation, humanitarian assistance and charity. International solidarity should be understood as a broader concept that includes the sustainability of international relations, the peaceful coexistence of all members of the international community, equal partnership and equal distribution of benefits and burdens, refusal to cause harm or create obstacles to the common good, including within the international economic system and the common ecological system. Solidarity is a fundamental element of the trade union movement and an essential aspect of the work of international trade union organizations. It can take many forms: from simple support to trade unions involved in local disputes, to trade union organizations’ massive action to engage affiliates and other trade unions to support federation members in major conflicts. It is critically important to make full use of social dialogue to fight the crisis and support the incomes of the workers in the post pandemic era. The cooperation with trade unions at home or together with other countries, internationally, allows respecting human rights in general and the rights of workers, in particular.*

***Key words: solidarity, trade union, trade union movement, post COVID 19***

The idea of solidarity became widespread in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This was due to the objective need to search for new forms of interaction between social actors in the context of the growing class conflict of the bourgeois society, when the former social institutions of traditional society, such as the family, the neighborhood community, and religion, began to lose their significance and strength and there was a threat to the stability of the society. The interpretation of the concept is the identification of the principles of interaction, which implies mutual understanding, consent and cooperation of different subjects of interaction.

The most famous concept among the classics was created by Emile Durkheim. He shared mechanical solidarity, characteristic of early, archaic societies, based on collective ideas, and organic solidarity, characteristic of differentiated societies, associated with the division of labor.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Mechanical solidarity is the social [integration](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/integration) of members of a society who have common values and beliefs. These common values and beliefs [constitute](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/constitute) a “collective conscience” that works internally in individual members to cause them to cooperate. Because, in Durkheim’s view, the forces causing members of the society to cooperate were much like the internal energies causing the molecules to cohere in a solid, he drew upon the terminology of [physical science](https://www.britannica.com/science/physical-science) in coining the term *mechanical solidarity*.

In contrast to mechanical solidarity, organic solidarity is social integration that arises out of the need of individuals for one another’s services. In a society characterized by organic solidarity, there is a relatively greater division of labor, with individuals functioning much like the interdependent but differentiated organs of a living body. Society relies less on [imposing](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/imposing) uniform rules on everyone and more on regulating the relations between different groups and persons, often through the greater use of [contracts](https://www.britannica.com/topic/contract-law) and laws.

Solidarity means a community of interests, like-mindedness, unanimity, interdependence, interconnectedness, mutual responsibility, joint responsibility. Thus, solidarity is defined as a principle of social existence, involving the pooling of resources and capabilities of the subjects to achieve common goals, while the interests of each of the subjects are in balance with the interests of the community.

The history of social movements shows that solidarity has been clearly localized over the course of a century and a half. It is a familiar political formula - the solidarity of workers, the solidarity of democratic forces, the solidarity of civil society. For years, even decades, sociologists and political thinkers have been talking about social movements or new types of communities. It is impossible to deny that the solidarity of the members of these social units is a quite obvious, easily observable phenomenon.

Solidarity is one of the main areas of joint work of the trade union movement. Many activities of trade unions such as raising wages and improving working conditions, protecting trade union rights, and combating privatization have common features. Trade unions welcome any form of solidarity that makes them aware that they are not alone and that their actions are part of a common struggle. Any expression of support of its members and other trade union organizations, as well as their protests against the actions of companies, employers and governments, could be an important impetus for the trade unions' own campaigns.

Even a simple expression of solidarity can have a positive effect on the mood of the workers participating in the campaign, as it will allow them to reassure themselves of the support of the entire trade union movement. This may be especially important in countries where union mobilization is particularly difficult. Letters of protest, in turn, can be effective by drawing public attention to employers and governments and thereby bringing a local or national conflict to the international level.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a test for trade unions in all countries, revealing not only existing weaknesses, but also creating a sense of urgency to mobilize around the protection of members and to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the labor market.

The global pandemic of COVID-19 has caused a crisis unlike any other in recent history. Millions have been infected and hundreds of thousands have lost their lives worldwide. In addition to the devastating health consequences, this pandemic has resulted in an unprecedented economic downturn that has affected people on a global scale. It is now more important than ever for the international trade union movements to come together in solidarity to protect the working people. The COVID-19 crisis exposed and exacerbated existing challenges, putting increasing pressure on the trade unions. Trade union membership was declining in both developed and developing countries. The future of trade unions depends on their response to pandemics.[[2]](#footnote-2) In the post COVID-19, it will be necessary to promote cooperation, offering basic services in a different way, recovering and creating decent employment through diverse and complementary organizational models of production.

The effects of the pandemic are far-reaching and affect workers from all the sectors of society. Those worst hit include precarious jobs workers who lack access to basic protective measures; informal or casual workers with no job security; migrant workers struggling with inadequate support from governments; young workers facing increased inequalities; women disproportionately affected by unpaid care duties; and retirees at risk due to reductions in pension schemes. The sheer magnitude of this crisis must be addressed through collective efforts and solidarity among unions around the world.

Social, economic, environmental and developmental changes affect the future of trade unions. The shift from manufacturing towards services, environmental change, the informalization of the economy, automation and technological change determine the capacity of trade unions to organize and service workers. Today, legal restrictions and violations of trade union rights, such as the right to organize and to bargain collectively for all workers, are widespread. Not surprisingly, trade union membership is lower where there are violations of trade union rights, but is declining in both developed and developing countries. This, in its turn, also erodes legitimacy in collective bargaining and social dialogue. Such decline in trade union influence has a strong impact on people in non-standard or precarious types of employment, such as temporary and own-account workers or workers in the informal and gig economies. In other words, the changing employment relationship is not only a threat to workers, but also to workers’ organizations.[[3]](#footnote-3)

To overcome this challenge, it is essential that international trade unions unite and work together to ensure decent living conditions for all workers, regardless of their location or background. It is important to mention that International Labor Organization had some important conventions and recommendation that was focused on the principle that universal and lasting peace cannot be established or maintained if it is not based on social justice. Crisis situations around the world destroy livelihoods; interrupt business activities, and damage workplaces. Societal institutions stop functioning effectively, countless workers lose their jobs and the rights and social protection they are entitled to. As a result, inequalities and social exclusion are worsened, which leads to a lack of respect for labor standards. Certain population groups, including minorities, children, women, the disabled and the elderly, are particularly affected as well as migrants and populations experiencing forced displacement.

The role of trade unions (as well as employers and governments) in the generation of employment and decent work for the purpose of prevention, recovery, peace, and resilience with respect to fragile environments gained renewed impetus following the adoption of the Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation (No. 205) by the International Labor Conference in 2017. This Recommendation replaces the Employment (Transition from War to Peace) Recommendation (No. 71), adopted in 1944, expanding its scope to crisis situations arising from all conflicts and disasters and extending action to prevention, preparedness, reconstruction and recovery.[[4]](#footnote-4) Recommendation No. 205 does not offer solutions – it is only a guide that invites social partners to reflect systematically on the ways in which the world of work can play a more sustained and central role in making the planet a safer and more secure world for everyone.

The pandemic has led to an unprecedented global health and economic crisis. In the face of this crisis, it is more important than ever for the international trade union movement to stand in solidarity with workers around the world.

The COVID-19 pandemic has become only a phenomenon that has been exposing accumulated problems. In the economic sphere, COVID-19 has transformed into a coronavirus recession; in the social sphere, it has revealed the problems of poverty and social justice, which for a long time have been pushed into the background under the pretext of prioritizing market mechanisms in the distribution of the social product. The pandemic has demonstrated that the basis for overcoming the crisis is provided by the primacy of sovereign interests and a reasonable share of national egoism, and that the object of anti-crisis measures is not to unite efforts to jointly resist the crisis, but to save the national economy in order to ensure social well-being of the population. The anti-crisis practice has called into question the prospects of the globalist model of the development of society, at least in the form in which it was presented in the pre-COVID period.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The pandemic has exposed the deep inequalities that exist in our societies. It has shown that our economies are not working for everyone, and that our social safety nets are inadequate to protect workers and their families against hardship. By 2030, the number of people living in extreme poverty is projected to rise by another 130 million. The pandemic has hit people in low-paying, low-skill jobs particularly hard, while more skilled workers have been hit the hardest. As a result, the income gap between the poor and the rich, both individuals and countries, will widen significantly in the world.

It should be stated that a crisis of this magnitude could only be solved by states in cooperation with private companies that will support the production of public goods. A coordinated international response will help confront new risks and disasters. The world is interconnected, so only by joint efforts can we cope with the challenges of the crisis. A new type of international cooperation is required to prevent future consequences, study diseases, innovate medical equipment and research, and redirect significant funds accumulated by private entities to general needs. This is a condition for the preservation of peace.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of strong and effective unions. Unions are essential to ensuring that workers have a voice in the decisions that affect their lives, and they play a vital role in protecting workers’ rights and advocating for better working conditions. We can name the possible impact on trade unions[[7]](#footnote-7):

* The balance of power between employers and their employees may look one-sided at present, with normal industrial levers like strikes being unrealistic during periods of economic contraction. Counter-intuitively, this could provide a chance for trade unions to grow, as they offer employees an established mechanism through which to apply collective influence in the workplace, for example based on confidence about safety at work, or through active engagement in restructuring processes.
* There is an opportunity for unions who wish to build a more prominent role to do so and to reassert their relevance in the modern workplace. We have already seen this as employers consult with their unions about tactical issues such as furlough, along with more strategic workforce reshaping.
* Trade unions with an eye to the future may see this as a moment to take the initiative and establish or build a stronger position. Their focus may shift quickly to those businesses where we have recently seen evidence of employee activism, including tech businesses and those in the gig-economy

Now, more than ever, the need to stand in solidarity to demand decent work for all workers is gaining momentum, regardless of where they live or what job they do; there is need to fight for a just recovery from this crisis that puts workers and their families first. And the trade unions together with the governments have to build a better future for all workers, wherever they may be.

For the Republic of Moldova, the coronavirus pandemic represented one of the biggest challenges in recent times. However, COVID 19 was more than a health crisis and has had an unprecedented social-economic impact. It was difficult to predict what would come next, but it was certain that more measures must be taken not only in that period, but also in the post-COVID period, measures that would reduce the consequences of this pandemic.

The International Labor Organization supported and provided expertise at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. In its analysis the "Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the labor market in the Republic of Moldova and political responses to the stages of restrictions, gradual reopening and recovery" the ILO presents a list of recommendations for priority economic and social recovery measures. This document was presented for discussion within the Permanent Council regarding the restructuring and development of the national economy, financial, fiscal and revenue policies of the National Commission for consultations and collective negotiations.[[8]](#footnote-8)

At the same time we should specify the measures in supporting workers, which were previously proposed by trade unions, and which were included in the Labor Code. These relate to the granting of days off to workers who receive vaccinations, allowances for employees with distance learning children and unemployment benefits following the establishment of a state of emergency, siege and war or as a result of restrictions imposed in a state of emergency of public health.

On the other hand, within the society the pandemic situation strained the communication process and relationship. For fear of not being infected, many employees who were physically active, felt stressed and were afraid of contacts with their colleagues. Apart from this, other components were also impacted: empathy, collaboration and direct communication, unity, sense of collective responsibility, trust, safety, stability, intra-organizational solidarity, team spirit, time management problems, initiative, creativity, psycho-emotional involvement, encouragement, exchange of opinions, personality culture, collective integration actions, employee stimulation, direct participation in decision-making activities, etc.

The Republic of Moldova remains among the world leaders in terms of the scale of the migration process for work purposes, as well as in terms of the degree of dependence of the economy on remittance flows. Given that the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus has affected all spheres of social life and, in particular, mobility, policies to reduce the impact of the pandemic must take into account the impact of the pandemic on migration processes. The COVID-19 crisis aggravated existing challenges for the Moldovan labor migrants. In March 2020 alone, more than 40,000 Moldovan citizens came back to the country and around 7,000 were seeking help to return home. Most of the workers were employed in Italy, Spain, France and Israel, and they were among those workers that were hit hardest by the wave of factory closures and temporary layoffs as well as the almost complete shut-down of certain sectors, such as tourism, across Europe.[[9]](#footnote-9)

The new dimension that humanity is experiencing is a scary one for some, but also turning into new opportunities of growth and development for others. The unknown and fear increased to some extent solidarity, concern for others, fairness, the ability to communicate, interact, putting the emphasis at the same time on the fact that health is priced the most, something that was often not taken into account. In general, it was concluded that emphasis must be placed on some values which encourages recognition of facts, actions, things that really matters to humanity. They have changed everywhere rules, priorities, hierarchies, social needs.

In conclusion we can say that one of the signs of a democratic trade union is the creation of conditions for the implementation of the principle of freedom of opinion and discussion, respect for the interests of each member of the trade union, the right of the minority to defend and clarify their position at the stage of discussing issues. But the basic principle of the union - solidarity - requires unity of action after decisions are made. The pandemic has led to a profound reassessment of how we work, where we work, and even why we work, all of which must be negotiated, and where unions and their members must play a leading role. In the post-pandemic world, there are serious changes in various spheres of society: unemployment increase, the forms of interaction between citizens and with the state change. It takes serious damage for business, which is unlikely to deal with without government support and assistance; digitalization of life continues, including in education. In the foreseeable future, the world is also expecting a serious adjustment (if not a change) in the economic model, which today demonstrates its vulnerability. The coronavirus has become a test of the mobilization capabilities not only of different countries, but also for trade unions and for trade union movement, during which the ability to quickly respond to events and effectively solve momentary problems was tested.

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