International Labour Organization

Using foresight to think and act upon an uncertain future world of work

Trade unions' experiences

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Abstract

The world of work is experiencing multiple transformations driven by automation and digitalization, environmental changes, (de)globalization, and demographic shifts, among other factors. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, worsening geopolitical tensions, environmental disasters and armed conflicts have further exacerbated these realities to the extent that today we are living in a poly- or perma-crisis. These multiple pressures and crises impact the world of work and oblige trade unions to reflect and act upon uncertainty and change. Increasingly, trade unions worldwide do this, while exploring different tools and methods to think and act upon their future readiness. One method that can be particularly useful is strategic foresight. The paper is the first of its kind, documenting trade union experience worldwide on doing foresight. The research was done through literature review, desk research and direct participation in foresight workshops. Foresight training courses and workshops were organized in various regions in the world (i.e. Europe, the Arab States, Africa, Asia and the Pacific) in the period 2019-2023. The objective of this paper is to provide concrete examples and lessons learned for trade unions that are willing to experiment with strategic thinking and foresight. The paper builds further on the foresight literature by paying particular attention to the context of trade unionism, and trade union realities in different regions.

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Acronyms

ACV	Algemeen Christelijk Vakverbond
AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations
AGOA	African Growth Opportunity Act
ATUC	Arab Trade Union Confederation
CETU	Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions
CISL	Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori
CLA	Causal Layered Analysis
EFFAT	The European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism
ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation
ETUI	European Trade Union Institute
FIFPRO	International Federation of Professional Footballers
GFJTU	General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions
GCSP	Geneva Centre for Security Policy
IFA	International Framework Agreement
ILO-ACTRAV	International Labour Organization Bureau for Workers' Activities
ITCILO	International Training Center of the International Labour Organization
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
OATUU	Organization of African Trade Union Unity
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SATU	South African Typographical Union
SATUCC	The Southern Africa Trade Union Coordination Council
SZEF	Szakszervezetek Együttműködési Fóruma
TQM	Total Quality Management

| UN | United Nations |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational and Cultural Organization |

▶ Introduction

The world of work is experiencing multiple transformations driven by automation and digitalization, environmental changes, (de)globalization, and demographic shifts, among other factors (ILO, 2019). The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, worsening geopolitical tensions, environmental disasters and armed conflicts have further exacerbated these realities (ILO, 2021), to the extent that today we are living in a poly- or perma-crisis.

> ▟▟ *These multiple pressures and crises impact the world of work and oblige trade unions to reflect and act upon uncertainty and change.*

(Peels and Mwamadzingo, 2022; Ramos et al., 2023).

There is a long history of research on organizational change applied to trade unions, mostly from the angle of **revitalization or renewal** – with emphasis ranging from internal organizing (e.g. trade union governance) and membership (e.g. representation of traditionally underrepresented groups of workers) and institutional factors (e.g. legal frameworks around trade union rights), to coalitions, alliances with civil society and campaigning. Trade unions, like any other organization, have undergone transformative processes over time. Today they face a *"Future Shock"*, characterized by an accelerating pace of change potentially causing increased stress and disorientation (Ringland and Lustig, 2020) around trade unions' readiness to confront ever emerging challenges.

The nature of trade unions' work is rooted in their mission, internal organizational structures and membership. They are societal organizations driven by a mission to protect workers' rights and interests. They face challenges both from internal and external factors. Internally, the most significant of these include the decline in the number of members, recruitment of traditionally underrepresented groups of workers (e.g. young people, workers in the informal economy, etc.), complexity of their structures, organizing strategies, research capacity, relationship with employers, governments and other organizations, and organizational culture.

External challenges encompass respect for trade union rights, international labour standards and human rights. Trade union rights are outlined in the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87) and the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98) – and enshrined in the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up, 1998 and amended in 2022. However, additional external challenges include a complex international socio-economic landscape, demographic changes (e.g. migration, the intergenerational composition of the workforce, etc.), changes in labour law, innovation, technological and political issues, the ecological and digital transitions, the impact of multiple crises and the adaptations of the labour market.

Trade unions need to address these issues and their consequences but, at the same time, they have to continue doing their core work – promoting and defending workers' interests and participating in social dialogue, both nationally and internationally. Accordingly, an important question is **to which extent these new or emerging developments alter the core of trade unions' work, values and principles**? This on its turn will determine the fundamental character of change.

Building further on ILO's Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, 2017 (No. 205), we start from a positive and proactive angle to uncertainty and change. The Recommendation uses the concept of **resilience – understood as the ability to bounce back, to cope, to resist or to emerge stronger from a crisis**. The Recommendation also uses the notion of **anticipating, and proactively preparing for and managing risks**. Strategic thinking, planning and foresight are tools and approaches aiming exactly at that.

In the following paragraphs, we will look into these three concepts, which all three stem from the discussion around organizational change and how organisations make sense of change.

Organizational change is defined as the *"the movement of an organization from one state of affairs to another"* (University of Minnesota, 2017). Signs that portray the need for change in an organization can be observed at many levels. These can be related to organisational structure, operations, sectors and type of jobs, leadership and management, or changes in organisational values and mission. For example, organizations change when they transform their structure and operations, but also their strategies (Quattrone and Hopper, 2001). To implement change properly, it is necessary not only to diagnose the type of change needed, but also to make – often hard – decisions and concessions (Armenakis et al., 2009).

Many established methods to address organizational change have been developed for profit-oriented organizations, focusing on financial outcomes, Key Performance Indicators (KPI) and growth. For example, Lean Thinking, was developed by Toyota; Six Sigma by Motorola; Total quality management (TQM), also known as Plan, Do, Check and Act developed by Juran. Although useful, these methods are difficult to implement in a mission-driven organization as it is not driven by competitiveness, KPIs or profit. Trade unions as membership-based organizations mainly have a value- and principle-based model often with less quantitative indicators. It is important to note that the number of members is still a key organisational objective and (quantitative) indicator of trade unions' power and influence. Literature on organizational change focusing on the non-profit sector is more limited. To properly assess organisational change of a non-profit organisation, appropriate attention should be paid to those dimensions that are central to the core mission, values and principles and that determine the specificity of organizational change and how the organization navigates change (Zimmerman, 2020).

Accordingly, some methods have been developed specifically by, or for, mission-driven non-profit organizations. Increasingly, *"Strategic Foresight"* has been adapted, and implemented, by trade unions to address the particular challenges they face.

▼▼　*Prepared organizations that gain more and better insights are more likely to survive.*

(Rohrbeck and Kum, 2018).

As highlighted later in this paper, recent years have marked a fragile moment in history that impact strongly on unions' actions and roles, and confronts unions with major evolutionary challenges, while also creating new awareness and opportunities for internal transformation. With an almost generalized decline in union membership, difficulties in organizing young people and the age structure within trade unions, as well as the emergence of other types of collective voice and representation, **the urge to experiment and innovate becomes obvious** (Vandaele, 2019).

In this paper we address the question of trade unions' experiences with strategic foresight. **Section 1** introduces the relevance and timely character of this research – that is, as trade unions are being confronted with rapid change, in order to not only survive but thrive, they have no alternative but to reflect and act upon that change. We take a positive and pro-active approach towards change, which is also the entry point towards strategic thinking and foresight. **Foresight is a way for organizations to address uncertainty and change in a long-term, strategic manner, allowing for thinking out of the box, to go beyond the obvious, to be open and adaptive organizations**. From an academic perspective, the rationale of the research is to map existing practices from all over the world, which is a first of its kind and a valuable contribution to the foresight literature. **Section 2** develops the theoretical and conceptual framework to assess trade union experiences worldwide with foresight. The paper positions foresight within the broader literature on strategic thinking and planning, while applying foresight literature to the particular trade union context. **Section 3 and 4** present an overview of cases of trade unions doing foresight around the world. **Section 5** discusses the main findings structured around lessons learned and the way forward. **Section 6** sets out the conclusions.

▶ 1 Strategic thinking, planning and foresight

Strategic thinking, strategic planning and foresight are key concepts and processes used for addressing uncertainty and change, for steering innovation and experimentation. Whereas they are often used interchangeably, we will emphasize the distinctiveness of foresight and its usefulness in a trade union context.

Strategic thinking has the objective to discover novel and imaginative strategies and to think long-term. As such, it is a process that involves intuition, creativity, the capacity to anticipate and other competencies or skills. Contrary to popular belief, strategic thinking is a competence that can be learned and put into practice by every individual in an organization, and not just by managers. Leaders can encourage the practice of strategic thinking among the workforce.

Molloy (2017) describes strategic planning as a process of gathering data to develop plans to decide on goals or objectives. Since there is no *"one-size-fits-all"* approach, strategic planning should be customized to suit the specificities of each organization. It typically involves reviewing evidence from the past and considering how things might be done better, faster, or more efficiently in the future (Streit et al., 2021). **Strategic planning also serves to operationalize and materialize strategic thinking in actual plans** (Heracleous, 1998; Mintzberg, 1994).

By contrast, strategic foresight is a scientific field and a practice anchored in strategic thinking. **Strategic foresight puts emphasis on seeking to explore multiple, plausible and contingent pathways that can shape and work upon an uncertain future** (Saritas and Burmaoglu, 2015). It differs from forecasting, which uses historical data to estimate or predict the direction of future trends (Tuovila, 2020). In an increasingly uncertain environment, foresight examines and identifies factors that may cause future changes. It then responds to these changes by creating long-term alternative scenarios that enhance an organization's agility and flexibility (Iden et al., 2017; Rohrbeck and Gemünden, 2011).

According to Saritas and Burmaoglu (2015), foresight has specific attributes that serve as a guideline for designing a foresight methodology. It is not predictive and encourages *"all plausible options, alternatives or pathways to be treated as more or less equal given the complexity of future realities, and consequences and risks of adhering to simple predictions"*. It relies on multiple disciplines, and complementary qualitative and quantitative methods, to gather collective intelligence and explore novel ideas. Strategic foresight and strategic planning are often connected and mutually supportive. Foresight is also collaborative, seeking diversity to reflect a wide variety of future viewpoints and perhaps the exploration or establishment of new networks.

As Pezzulo and Rigoli (2011) argue, the role of strategic foresight is not to anticipate the future as *"it exactly will be"*, but to prepare the organization to think about future challenges. Hence there is a key role of anticipation and planning so that organizations have the capacity to make informed decisions.

Foresight has not only shown capabilities to strengthen business models or corporate sustainability, but it also contributes to knowledge, networking and promoting public engagement in policymaking (Amanatidou, 2014). It has been a proven method used by governments for policymaking, especially for innovation, science and technology, and by international organizations such as the United Nations Educational and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) or the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and more recently the International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization (ITCILO) and the ILO itself.

Learning to do foresight is a process that confronts organizations with the complexity of their environment. It goes beyond brainstorming ideas; it also requires mastering an approach that fits

the organization. In most cases, the approach will include an analysis of key indicators, if available, followed by horizon scanning, stakeholder mapping, and an analysis of megatrends and weak signals. Then will come the bringing together of different stakeholder views, a mapping of critical uncertainties, the development of future scenarios, backcasting and roadmapping. However, these *"tools are only tools"* and it is key not to lose the overall aim of the exercise out of sight, which is increasing awareness and learning around organisational change.

Doing strategic foresight can allow trade unions to create new knowledge and practice, broaden networks and enable participation in the exploration of alternative futures and concrete action (Amanatidou, 2014). As described by Murray and colleagues (2020), it could be seen as a form of institutional experimentation that involves a structural and organizational change approach. Strategic foresight can be a useful tool in a trade union context, as various **foresight characteristics resonate well with trade unions' realities and principles** (see Box 1).

▶ **Box 1. Foresight principles**

Foresight is:

- **not prescriptive**, but rather offers a framework to support trade unions in strategic thinking;

- **participatory**, allowing for the involvement of workers and unionists from all layers in the organization;

- **democratic**, allowing for different and potentially divergent views;

- compatible with **complexity**, uncertainty and fragmentation;

- **transformative**, allowing for radical imagination (Haiven and Khasnabish, 2014), for speculation, for reclaiming and reinventing the future, beyond the limits of established forms of struggle, and with that, collectively reimagining the future world of work (Haiven et al., 2022); and

- **empowering**, entailing not only a reflection about the long-term, about future challenges and opportunities for trade unions in transformation, but also allowing to translate insights into concrete action, strategies and road maps (Wambeke et al., 2017; Ponce Del Castillo, 2019).

The following section describes trade unions' experiences in practising foresight in different countries and regions of the world.

▶ 2 Trade union experiences worldwide with foresight: ILO-ACTRAV and ITCILO cases

▶▶ *Everyone designs who devises courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones.*

Herbert A. Simon, political scientist (1978 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences)

This section discusses more in-depth a number of case studies, developed by ILO-ACTRAV and ITCILO. Whereas the multiple cases we discuss in this paper illustrate an increasing interest of trade unions worldwide in experimenting with the use of strategic foresight, trade unions' experiences on this topic are still relatively rare and limitedly documented.[1] A first example is the experience of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), which established the Commission on the Future of Work and Unions.[2] Whereas this initiative did not necessarily apply explicitly the foresight method, it was a broader *"Futures Thinking"* exercise, encompassing various elements that are central in foresight (for example, long-term thinking, assessment of key trends and drivers of change).

Another example is South Africa's response to dramatic changes in the publishing industry and its implications for trade union strategies. The South African Typographical Union (SATU) ran a foresight process in 2019, supported by the Institute for Futures Research from Stellenbosch University. A fully fledged foresight process was conducted, consisting of a *"Horizon Scanning"* to identify key trends and drivers of change, and the generation of scenarios based on an *"Intuitive Logics Approach"*, amongst others.

Similarly, the International Federation of Professional Footballers (FIFPRO) was confronted with the question of how to stay effective and relevant as a union in a quickly changing world of sports. FIFPRO started a foresight process, looking at key trends and drivers of change, possible future scenarios and the implication for the federation. One of the key results was increasing its research capacity, including carrying out research on anticipating change.

Seven cases were selected based on the experience of ILO-ACTRAV and ITCILO that conducted foresight training courses or workshops for trade unions in the period 2022–2023. Each of the organizations have considerable experience and to different extents an "*Insider*" view of trade unions' transformation agendas. The ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities (ILO-ACTRAV) is responsible for liaising with workers' organizations within the ILO. The International Training Centre (ITCILO) is the training centre of the ILO. The workshops that are presented were organized by the ACTRAV unit at the ITCILO, in collaboration with the Innovation Unit, which has developed a programme over the past years, applying futures thinking and foresight to ILO's tripartite constituency. ILO-ACTRAV carried out regional or subregional foresight workshops. Participants were selected according to the ILO's selection process, involving regional, subregional and international trade union confederations, and highlighting various selection criteria, such as political and/or youth leadership, and thematic knowledge. Workshops in different regions used the same format, but the key themes and exercises were tailored to the priorities of the region and the particular needs of the group. Whereas the workshops organized by ILO-ACTRAV focused on awareness-raising, workshops carried out by the ITCILO had a stronger training angle. Overall the methodology used included warm-up exercises on the future, scanning the horizon and doing trend analysis, setting objectives or framing guiding questions, building futures scenarios, and walking back from the future to the present – "*Backcasting*" – to set strategies (see figure 1).

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1   See Ramos et al., 2023 for a more comprehensive discussion of the illustrations mentioned here.
2   https://aflcio.org/reports/afl-cio-commission-future-work-and-unions.

▶ **Figure 1. Process of strategic foresight for trade unions**
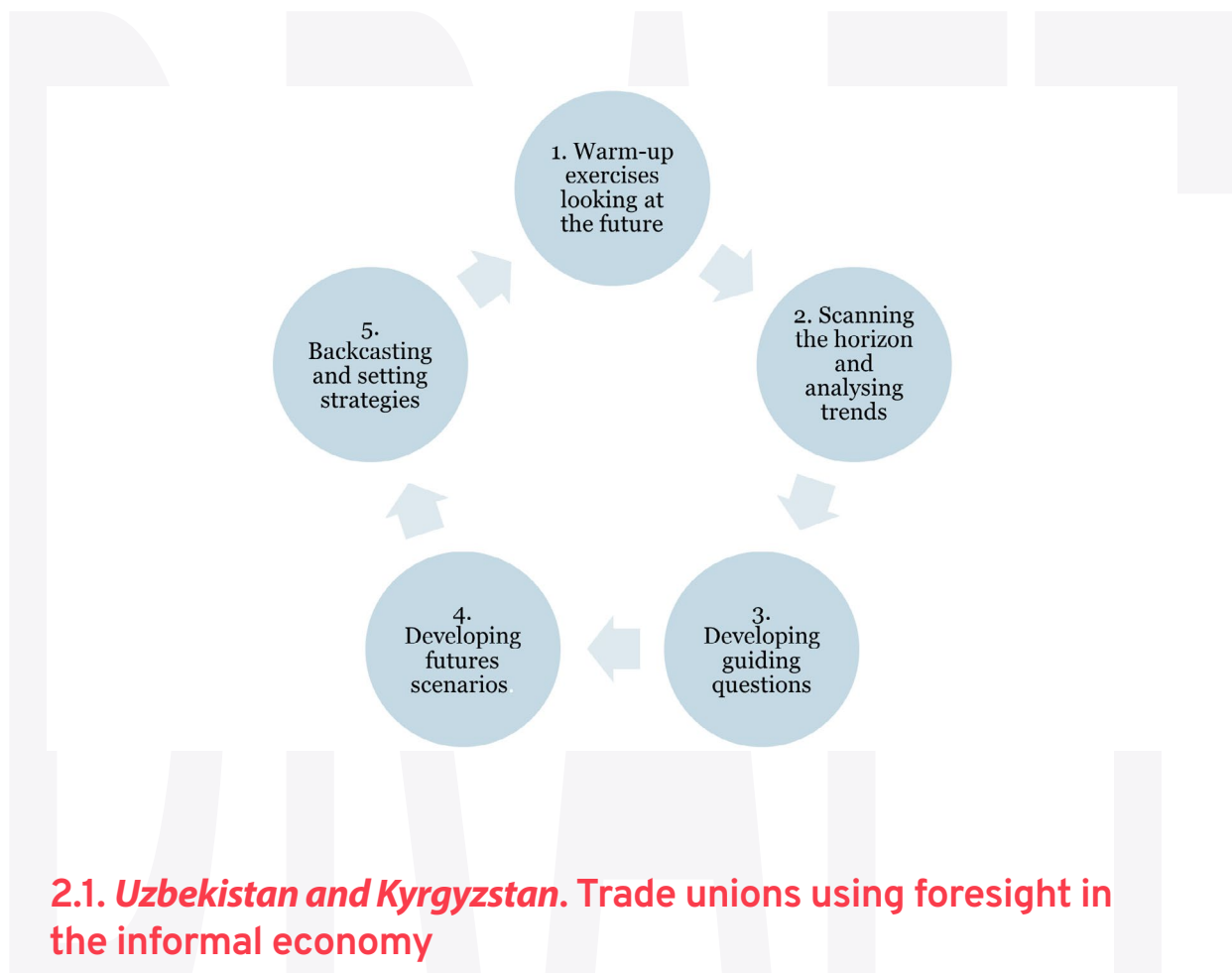
2.1. *Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan*. Trade unions using foresight in the informal economy

In a workshop held in May 2022 as part of the ILO-ACTRAV programme on Trade Unions in Transformations: Actors for Change, trade union representatives from Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan used foresight to critically reflect on the key challenges and opportunities in representing and servicing workers in the informal economy in different sectors, ranging from transport, tourism and information technology to construction.[3] The Uzbek-Kyrgyz exercise was developed around a priority for the unions in the region – the formalization of the informal economy and organization of informal economy workers. **Trade union leaders participated in the workshop, the exercise built on participatory background research and was highly diverse in terms of participation** (e.g. multiple sectors and both unionized and non-unionized workers).

The workshop consisted of three practical exercises: (i) Horizon scanning, aimed at developing a comprehensive, 360-degree view of the topic at stake, by assessing the social, economic, legal, political and environmental issues; (ii) Developing scenarios, using storytelling, with rich, ethnographic descriptions to steer an exercise that aimed at weaving in the various identified factors and drivers of change in multiple plausible scenarios; and (iii) Backcasting to translate scenarios into roadmaps and action plans. Backcasting starts from the future scenario, reflecting backwards to today on how to get there, by identifying key events (e.g. establishment of a new trade union to organize workers in the informal economy) and actions at the union level (e.g. develop an organization-wide strategy regarding workers in the informal economy).

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3   https://www.ilo.org/actrav/WCMS_851008/lang--en/index.htm

2.2. *Southern Africa.* Doing foresight in preparation of Congress

The Southern Africa Trade Union Coordination Council (SATUCC) is a regional trade union organization comprising 22 affiliates in 14 countries representing trade union federations in the Southern African Development Community (SADC). In collaboration with ILO-ACTRAV and the Institute for Futures Research from Stellenbosch University, SATUCC organized a foresight workshop in September 2022. Participants came from various Southern African countries: Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. **The outcome of the workshop was presented to the SATUCC leadership during the Trade Union Congress the following month**.

In preparation of the workshop, four themes were identified, which are key priorities of SATUCC, and which were on the agenda for the Congress: (a) Regional integration; (b) Organizing vulnerable groups of workers; (c) Violence and harassment; and (d) Just transition.

The workshop was designed as a three-day workshop, consisting of a half-day online *"teaser"* one week in advance of the face-to-face workshop. During that session, the principles of the foresight exercise were introduced, participants got acquainted with the objectives of the workshop and background reading was shared.

During the two-and-a-half-day face-to-face workshop, one full day was dedicated to in-depth discussions on the four identified key themes. This served as input to the actual foresight exercise, when these themes were weaved into the various exercises. The foresight – in all the ILO-ACTRAV cases – was structured around the three main exercises: (i) Identifying trends and drivers of change (e.g. horizon scanning); (ii) Scenario development; and (iii) Assessing what this entails in terms of trade union action today (e.g. backcasting).

As warm-up exercise and to stimulate creativity, participants were asked to imagine a gadget/beverage/food item/leisure of the future (*"Thing of the Future"*), and to prepare an advertisement for this. Afterwards, in order to identify and assess main trends and driving forces, the workshop used the intuitive logics approach.

The second exercise consisted of developing scenario narratives, through the drafting of compelling stories, based on thick descriptions and rich pictures. It is around pivotal uncertainties that were identified in the previous exercise that the scenarios were developed, based on two axes: success and speed. This resulted in four scenarios for trade union revitalization. Each group crafted a headline or hashtag that captured the salient features of their scenario.

▶ **Box 2. Trade union revitalization in Southern Africa – four scenarios for 2032**

Scenario 1. *"#IamAProudDomesticWorker"*, **characterized by gradually gaining success**

The Southern African Union of Domestic Workers is a vibrant, regional union of domestic workers. Free of violence and harassment, with better wages and efficient trade union services. The trade union has an App with a 24h Chatbot, enabling members to be supported on labour disputes at any time. The union's activities bear fruit: there is a destigmatized environment towards domestic workers. The newly elected President is a 25-year-old women.

Scenario 2. *"#Trade Unions at 70% density - WOW"*, **characterized by rapid success**

Trade unions in the Southern Africa region and across the world are united, strong and committed. Membership is diverse with a trade union density of 70%. Both trade union leadership and membership are crucial. There is efficient capacity-building among and within trade unions to ensure they are up to the task. The region also experienced strengthened democracy and sound worker-friendly labour regulation, reduced poverty and unemployment, and the creation of decent jobs. Over the past decade, there was strong collaboration between like-minded stakeholders and tripartite partners within social dialogue structures.

Scenario 3. *"#Stopunion BleedingNow"*, **understood as slow decline**

The Southern Africa region is seeing a notable decrease in trade union membership. Some sectors in the economy, where many members traditionally came from, are disappearing. There is a continuous failure to include young workers in leadership positions and decision-making structures. Furthermore, trade unions are ageing and fading out. Sadly, a few trade unions imploded due to corruption. In general, it seems as though trade unions are losing their relevance for the 2032 society at large.

Scenario 4. *"#Trade Unions on the Verge of Disappearing"*, **characterized by fast decline**

It is a sad time for the trade union movement in Southern Africa. There is no hope for revamping. The trade union movement is under serious threat. Over the past decade, trade union membership reduced radically due to infights. Some trade unions split, and members formed their own unions because of disagreements. There is general confusion. The world has been changing fast, but the trade union movement did not want to change. This led to fragmentation and eventual irrelevance of trade unions.

The third exercise aimed at thinking backwards from the future scenario to the development of roadmaps and concrete actions, starting today in order to get to the positive scenarios (or avoid the negative scenarios).

The workshop used an exercise *"STOP-START-GROW"* applied at different levels (e.g. trade union level, level of the national confederation, subregional level). STOP refers to what unions have to stop doing in order to create change. START refers to what unions have to start doing, i.e. new activities. And GROW refers to activities that are already in place but that can be strengthened or scaled up.

2.3. *Arab region*. Trade unions in transformation

In December 2022, trade union leaders from the following countries/territories participated in an ILO-ACTRAV 3-day foresight workshop: Algeria, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and Yemen. The workshop was held in collaboration with the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (GFJTU) and the Arab Trade Union Confederation (ATUC). It consisted of a half-day online warm-up to introduce the topic. The face-to-face session consisted of 1-day thematic discussions on key regional priorities in the field of trade union revitalization: (a) trade union autonomy, independence and trade unions rights; (b) technological change; (c) just transition; and (d) collaboration, alliances and joint campaigns. These thematic discussions served as input for the actual foresight exercise of a day and a half.

During the workshop, the following three practical exercises were conducted: (i) Horizon scanning, aimed at developing a comprehensive, 360° view of the topic by assessing the social-economic-legal-political environment; (ii) Future scenarios, using storytelling and ethnographic descriptions to steer an exercise that aims at weaving in the various identified factors and drivers of change in multiple plausible scenarios; and (iii) Backcasting, to translate scenarios into roadmaps and action plans.

The workshop incorporated some lessons learned from previous ILO-ACTRAV workshops, such as to support *"out-of-the-box"* thinking. A new exercise was introduced to interpret the results of the first exercise on drivers of change by:

- focusing on the **interplay between different dimensions**;
- addressing ***"Consequences-of-Consequences"*** of drivers of change;
- **identifying key stakeholders** beyond unions that affect the potential for change; and
- **prioritizing** three drivers of change among the large number of trends and forces.

The activity on scenario-building also incorporated some new elements. Whereas in previous workshops the result of the scenario exercise was relatively thematic, this was modified in the current workshop by providing clear examples and guidelines, stressing the need to draft a story around *"one day in the life of a worker and trade union leader"*. Additionally, the workshop used the *"Future Cards"* that were developed by ITCILO. These cards further elaborate certain trends (e.g. meta-companies, highly individualized societies, post-truth reality, etc.) to support participants with pushing creative thinking further. However, it has been challenging to balance on the one hand the internal/closed nature of the exercise (only trade unions), given the sensitive nature of the topic, and on the other hand, the involvement of outside views to promote out-of-the-box and critical thinking.

▶ **Box 3. Scenarios on trade unions in transformation in the Arab States region**

Scenario 1. *"Together-Meaan"*

Trade unions survived and have found positive solutions to organize workers in the informal economy and migrant workers by joining forces with community-based organizations and other associations that work with these groups.

Scenario 2. *"Heaven-Jannah"*

Trade unions and trade union rights are respected in the Arab region, which allow them to grow and thrive.

Scenario 3. *"Trouble-Mushkila – trade unions are in trouble"*

Trade unions have not been able to organize young workers who are uninterested in unions. Trade unions have been unable to reach out and to be attractive to informal economy and migrant workers.

Scenario 4. *"New-Aljadid – trade union rejuvenation"*

Trade unions have been able to address their internal governance issues, to be effective, to be inclusive to young workers and women, to be transparent and to be credible with the broader public. The General Secretary is 25-year-old women from the informal economy.

The last exercise was backcasting. The focus was on what trade unions can do (and not for instance governments or the private sector) in the different areas of trade union revitalization such as: introducing innovative practices of organizing and servicing; improving internal governance; representing young, female, migrant or workers in the informal economy workers in decision-making in the union; or collaborating with other actors such as community-based or civil society organizations.

2.4. *Asia and the Pacific.* Trade unions: actors for change

In March 2023, ILO-ACTRAV organized a foresight exercise for the Asia and the Pacific region. Participation has been broad, covering a diversity of countries with different trade union realities: Australia, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore and Viet Nam.

Participants had diverse functions and thematic expertise, ranging from more senior leadership to youth leaders, and from expertise on platform work, digital organizing to strategic thinking. Whereas the workshop followed the same threefold structure as previous workshops, a number of alternative exercises were tested. Preparatory background research was conducted to feed into the different thematic discussions of the workshop: digital activism; digital labour platforms; trade unions as development partners; and trade and labour.

One new exercise that was tested is the *"Futures Triangle"*, which is a futures or horizon scanning method, used to assess trends and drivers of change, but also inhibitors, organized around: (a) *Pulls of the future* – hopes, visions, intentions or goals; (b) *Weights of history* – continuities, inertia, barriers to change and resistances; and (c) *Pushes of the present* – ongoing processes or seeds of change; what we see happening and expect to continue. This exercise helps to understand how the past, present and future converge.

For the scenario development, the *"Alternative Futures Method"* was used, which is based on scenario archetypes, i.e. continued growth, collapse, transformation and discipline.

▶ **Box 4. Trade unions in transformation in the Asia and Pacific region – four scenarios for 2033**

Scenario 1. *"Voice - Futures of Young Workers"*

The relevance of unions for young people has never been higher. Young workers have found in unions a powerful ally and a platform for their voice. They have also brought new energy, ideas, and perspectives to the labour movement, revitalizing its role in society. Employers have recognized the value of unions for young workers and have encouraged their formation and participation.

Scenario 2. "*Transformers - Futures of Social Media"*

Social media have become a vital tool for union work. Unions have embraced the power of digital platforms to communicate with their members, organize their campaigns and mobilize their supporters. Unions have also enhanced their digital literacy, contributing to effective, ethical and safe usage that is free from online harassment, surveillance and censorship.

Scenario 3. *"Uprise Dawn - Futures of Digital Platform"*

Digital labour platform workers have achieved a historic breakthrough. They have secured their rights and interests through a global framework agreement with platform companies, an ILO Convention on digital platform work and a global union of platform workers. Digital labour platform workers are no longer isolated, exploited, or precarious. They are empowered, protected and respected. They are part of a global movement for decent work and social justice.

Scenario 4. *"Digital Utopia - Futures of Organizing Digital Platform Workers"*

Digital platform workers have become highly organized, empowered and influential. They have formed strong unions that use digital tools and democracy to negotiate better terms and protections for their members. They have also established powerful cooperatives that own and operate some of the largest tech companies in the world, giving them a stake in the profits and decisions of these platforms. They have successfully advocated for policies that regulate the tech industry, ensure fair taxation and promote social security and well-being for all workers. Digital platform workers have proven that they can transform the platform economy from a source of exploitation to a source of empowerment.

A second exercise that was tested is the *"Causal Layered Analysis"* (CLA), which is a tool to support in-depth assessments of causes and worldviews underlying each alternative scenario. It is based on four levels of analysis, ranging from more superficial to more subtle: (i) Litany (e.g. public comments, media); (ii) Systems (e.g. social, economic and political issues underlying the litany); (iii) Worldviews (e.g. culture, values, paradigms); and (iv) Myths and metaphors (e.g. underlying beliefs that make sense of the worldview). On the four levels, a distinction was made between current and transformed reality.

The last exercise was backcasting, which was explored in other workshops, but here an additional layer was introduced – creating a futures persona and crafting a day in the life of this persona from the future.

2.5. *Europe.* Using foresight to build the leadership of the future

The next two cases (*"EFFAT"* and *"Young workers and the future of trade unions in Africa"*) were led by the ITCILO. The European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism (EFFAT) represents 120 national trade unions from 35 European countries, defending the interests of more than 22 million workers in the sectors of food, agriculture, tourism and domestic work. In collaboration with ILO-ACTRAV and ITCILO, EFFAT has used foresight tools as part of the project, *"Build trade union power to create a fairer Europe"*.

The project aims at strengthening the capacities of trade unions – with a strong focus on youth leadership – to start transformational change towards more inclusive and rejuvenated unions by focusing on: (i) Growing membership and inclusiveness of vulnerable groups and workers in non-standard forms of employment; and (ii) Gender equality and non-discrimination.

These objectives are well aligned with EFFAT's priorities as established at its 2019 Congress. EFFAT leadership also participated in the three-day workshop, which was held in September 2022. The workshop focused heavily on replicating existing positive practices in different sectors.

The foresight exercise consisted of mainly three exercises: (i) *"World-building"*, designed to identify key factors of change and challenges, as a way to reflect about complexity; (ii) *"Futures Wheel"*, aiming at mapping the cascades of impacts that a single change might generate, and this to reflect about the interconnection of different drivers of change; and (iii) Backcasting.

To introduce the topic of complexity and plurality of views, participants were asked to position themselves on two axes: having a rather positive or pessimistic view on life; and whether technological change will rather have positive or negative impact on society. The group ended up being very scattered, pointing towards the diversity of opinions on rather simplistic questions, compared with for instance the trade unions in the transformation challenge.

A second icebreaker asked to name a *"Future Historic Quote"*, and this as warm-up towards future and out-of-the-box thinking. The world-building exercise had a strong gamification dimension. Particularly the youth leaders participated in a very engaged manner (*"this is like playing Risk"*), literally re-drawing the world, questioning existing structures and developing connections (e.g. *"gender bridges"* or *"equality island"*). Participants invented illustrative names for their worlds, ranging from *"Tumultuaria"*, *"Sindicalia"* to *"Crosslandia"*.

2.6. *Africa.* Young workers and the future of trade unions

In the period from November 2022 to April 2023, the ITCILO organized a hybrid training on *"Young Workers and the Future of Trade Unions in Africa"*. The workshop targeted youth leaders from trade unions in Africa. Participants attended from a diversity of countries with different socio-economic and sectoral realities: Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Eswatini, Ghana, Guinea, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Togo and Zimbabwe. The training was hybrid, consisting of a 5-week online part and a 4-day face-to-face workshop, held in Accra, Ghana. The seminar took place parallel to the 50th anniversary of the Organization of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU), allowing for **interaction between youth and senior leadership from the region**.

As a warm-up exercise, and similar to previous workshops, participants were asked to invent a thing of the future so as to steer **creative thinking and create an environment of trust and playfulness**. For the first time, the horizon scanning exercise used in a comprehensive manner the *"Future of Work Cards"* developed by the ITCILO. To save time, the facilitators translated the key discussions of the horizon scanning into four scenarios. Participants were asked to further develop these scenarios focused on youth leadership.

▶ **Box 5. Young workers and the future of trade unions in Africa – four scenarios**

Scenario 1. "*Kitengo – Trade union Pan-Africanism for young workers"*

Trade unions have survived and have found positive solutions to organize those workers who need it most. Young workers constitute 80 per cent of the union, and they matter in the union. The General Secretary is 20 years old and also head of the Youth Committee. Young workers' priorities – such as gender and sexual identity or climate justice – are high on the agenda of the union. Africa is thriving thanks to a booming green and blue economy. Kitengo is a Pan-African young workers trade union that is respected in a socio-economically and politically integrated ONE Africa.

Scenario 2. *"Pamoja - Strong and inclusive union"*

Pamoja is a strong and inclusive trade union at the national level. It has found innovative solutions to organize workers who need it most: informal economy workers, migrant workers and domestic workers. The priorities of these groups of workers are access to jobs, job security, decent wages and access to social protection, which are reflected in the agenda of the union. Informal economy, migrant and domestic workers have a voice in internal decision-making.

Scenario 3. *"Maguma - Trade unions in difficulty"*

Trade unions have not been able to organize young workers who are uninterested in unions. They have been unable to reach out and be attractive to informal economy, domestic, migrant workers or platform workers. The union faces serious challenges of violence and harassment in the world of work and the organization. Young workers have not been able to grow in the union. There are important levels of unemployment, informal economy and working poor: unions do not have any answers to that.

Scenario 4. *"Kidijitali - Digital union"*

Kidijitali is a 100% digital union. Trade union offices are decentralized in people's houses, offices or coffee bars, depending on where the union leaders are working. Membership is mostly made up of digital workers. Kidijitali has gained a lot of credibility and members through strong digital campaigns on the rights of delivery drivers: right to organize, to bargain collectively, decent wages, and access to occupational health and safety, and social protection. The General Secretary is a platform worker who combines different jobs like many of the members. Internal governance, such as elections, decisions and financing, are fully transparent through the use of block chain technology.

For the final part, and similar as in previous exercises, we opted for the STOP-START-GROW exercise, with a particular focus on what trade unions can do (that is, not other stakeholders). This allows the focus to be placed on concrete trade union action and on liaising with key topics of trade unions in transformation that were discussed earlier.

2.7. *Ethiopia.* Trade union revitalization

On 30 and 31 May 2023, ILO-ACTRAV organized a strategic foresight workshop in Addis Ababa, led by the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions (CETU). The workshop, entitled *"Policy Dialogue on the Revitalization of the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions to Achieve Decent Work, Social Justice, Inclusive, Resilient and Sustainable Development for All",* followed a similar structure as previous workshops – including an online webinar two weeks in advance in preparation for the actual workshop. Unique to the CETU event was the focus on the national level, working with one national union (and its nine affiliated industrial federations).

During the two-day face-to-face workshop, one full day was dedicated to in-depth discussions on a number of key themes. To set the stage, discussions were held on the complicated political (that is, ongoing conflict), legal (for example, legal obstacles for organizing workers in the informal economy) and economic (for example, high inflation) contexts in which the Ethiopian trade union movement is operating.

A cross-cutting issue through the workshop was how **challenges relating to trade unions in transformation differ across sectors**. The textiles sector, for instance, and organizing activities in the industrial parks was further discussed. The presentation by the UN Resident Coordinator supported the shaping of this context by addressing the broader development challenges in Ethiopia. A second issue discussed was internal governance (e.g. representation of women, youth, the rural sector, tourism, retail) and challenges related to organizing informal economy workers (e.g. legal barriers to organize informal economy workers).

A third issue was trade agreements and their implications for labour, addressing topics such as the role of brands/buyers, International Framework Agreements (IFAs), suspension of the African Growth Opportunity Act (AGOA). A fourth topic was effective and inclusive social dialogue, paying particular attention to the minimum wage debate in Ethiopia and challenges related to collective bargaining beyond the company level. This served as input to the actual foresight exercise. The workshop garnered considerable high-level political involvement from CETU (i.e. the Presidents of the Confederation and Federations), the ILO (i.e. Director of the ILO Country Office) and the UN (i.e. Resident Coordinator), which may contribute to **political support and fostering a conducive environment for change**.

As in the other cases, the foresight workshop was structured around three main exercises: Horizon scanning, scenario building and developing roadmaps. As a warm-up and to stimulate creative thinking, the thing of the future was used. Participants came up with inventions to improve farming processes, to strengthen food security, health, access to water and energy, and to maximize worker power. During the horizon scanning, participants were asked to identify key drivers of change between the present and 2033 in the following areas: economic, demographic, socio-cultural, environmental, technological and political-institutional. The future cards; Consequences-of-Consequences were used to steer discussions. To further delve into these trends, follow-up exercises were conducted to identify the level of control and impact for each trend; to identify consequences-of-consequences and to identify key actors. The outcomes of the exercises were used to feed into the building of scenarios. Participants were divided into groups and further drew up three scenarios. They choose not to delve into a fourth scenario where trade unions are increasingly marginalized.

▶ **Box 6. Trade unions in transformation in Ethiopia – three scenarios**

Scenario 1. *"Madegi – Trade unions thrive in the informal economy"*

Africa is thriving thanks to an economic boom, based on the formalization of the economy in key sectors. The union is made up of 80 per cent informal economy workers. The General Secretary is 18 years old and works in the informal economy. Priorities of the informal economy workers, including migrant workers, are high on the agenda of the union. Trade unions have found ways to negotiate collective agreements that cover workers in the informal economy.

Scenario 2. *"Limati: Trade unions broadening the agenda"*

Trade unions have found ways to keep membership stable and even increase in some new sectors. They have been able to tap into a new membership base through advocating on new topics and in emerging policy spaces. This has also allowed unions to enter into collaboration with new actors, to build expertise and analytical capacity on new topics and to mobilize new sources of funding. The broad membership base has also been reflected in more political power.

Scenario 3. *"Alemiākefi – Trade unions in a global economy"*

Thanks to strategic campaigning on the risks associated with international trade and investment and the increasing presence of Multinational Enterprises (MNEs) in Global Supply Chains (GSCs), policies are in place to make sure that economic openness does not undermine trade union and workers' rights and goes hand-in-hand with decent work for all workers in all sectors. Ethiopia's economy and society is thriving, and workers' rights are respected in Export Processing Zones (EPZs) and industrial parks. Unions negotiated inclusive collective agreements that cover whole sectors, including the most vulnerable workers, which have resulted in a significant increase in membership. Campaigning combined various innovative tools and the exploration of new spaces for activism.

The third exercise – STOP-START-GROW – aimed at translating the future scenarios into concrete roadmaps and actions for CETU, linking back to the core functions of organizing, servicing, internal governance, campaigning and social dialogue.

▶ 3 Trade unions in Europe experimenting with strategic foresight: ETUI cases

This section discusses the cases developed by the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI), which is the research and training centre of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). The following cases spined off from the training courses on strategic foresight provided by ETUI carried out during 2019 and 2022. The case studies originated from a larger foresight project, in which ETUI adapted existing foresight methods for the particular trade union context. Previously ETUI produced futures scenarios (Ponce Del Castillo and Meinert, 2017; Ponce del Castillo and Lustig, 2023; Stollt and Meinert, 2010). The cases studied here, stemmed from the various ETUI education training courses, and overall they have been carried out following the ETUI proposed methodology (Ponce del Castillo, 2019). Although supported by ETUI, **foresight processes have been caried out by the individual trade unions on their own and at their own pace**, which at the time of writing are still ongoing.

3.1. *Belgium.* ACV Pulse: a strong union in 2040

ACV Pulse represents various sectors, spanning healthcare, cultural, services and retail in the Flemish region of Belgium. The process started as an initiative of the top leadership. A group of 20 leaders took part in an ETUI immersion session on foresight and its objectives. The leadership designated a specific officer to pilot a foresight project that adapted the ETUI methodology. The project centred on the key questions: *"How to build a strong Belgian union in our sectors in 2040? - What will get us there?"*.

In 2022, a horizon scanning exercise was conducted over a period of five months in the Flemish region. This exercise involved a literature review of future studies, as well as interviews and focus groups with stakeholders who were not necessarily part of the network. The primary objective was to identify 16 trends, issues and challenges that needed to be addressed for navigating towards 2040.

Three future scenarios were developed: (i) "*Less inequality, more heat*", (ii) *"Inequality divides, union in resistance"*, and (iii) *"After the growth spurt"*. The 16 identified trends were integrated into these scenarios.

The scenarios were subsequently presented to 120 elected delegates at the company level. The objective was to share the results of the horizon scanning exercise, engage in discussions about the scenarios, and gather perspectives on how these scenarios would affect delegates in their roles as trade unionists, employees, or individuals. To complement this work, a short film was produced featuring testimonies from shop stewards who shared their perspectives from 2040 looking back to 2023.

At the managerial level, efforts were made to define long-term goals, and the inputs received from the participants would be used (the process is still ongoing) in the future development of roadmaps and strategies.

Foresight workshops were conducted at the 2023 Congress *"Time"*. The purpose of these workshops was to introduce the developed roadmaps and gather feedback, ensuring that everything fell into place starting from January 2024 and extending over a 4-year period until 2028.

The major achievement of the foresight project was learning about horizon scanning and developing a comprehensive long-term roadmap leading up to 2040, divided into four 4-year mandates.

The roadmap encompasses both external and internal goals. On the political front, it addresses crucial external challenges such as diminishing working time, securing funding for social security and responding to the rise of right-wing politics. These objectives are aimed at shaping the organization's response to the evolving political landscape and ensuring the protection of workers' rights.

Internally, the roadmap emphasizes goals that focus on enhancing member participation and engagement. This includes providing avenues for members and affiliates to voice their opinions and actively contribute to decision-making. Strengthening member organizations, investing in alliances and representing the labour force within various sectors are also key aspects of these internal challenges.

3.2. *Hungary*. Szakszervezetek Együttműködési Fóruma: a progressive, proactive organization with a long-term vision

In Hungary, the Trade Union Cooperation Forum (SZEF) represents white collar workers in education, social services and health care, cultural institutes and government agencies. Preparatory work by SZEF began after the Officer-in-Charge completed two training courses on foresight methodology at ETUI. Subsequently, in 2022, the Forum convened elected trade union leaders to **engage in discussions about the future and explore ways to create a long-term, sustainable project that would position the organization as a progressive, proactive organization with a long-term vision**. To facilitate this process, a 1-day foresight immersion session was conducted by ETUI for trade union leaders and labour activists. This session proved to be highly motivating, leading the participants to express their interest for launching their own foresight programme. Plans were then made to develop a long-term project, and the elected leaders provided their political support.

The primary objective of the leadership was to transform the trade union into a progressive, proactive organization with a long-term vision. The project is currently in the initial stage of the planning process. A first meeting is expected to take place as soon as sufficient financial resources can be mobilized.

3.3. *Ireland*. Fórsa: strengthening innovation

The trade union Fórsa in Ireland represents members from the public service, as well as the commercial sector, state agencies, private companies and the community and non-profit sector.

It started its strategic foresight process on its own initiative and developed a strategic plan 2020–2025 overseen by the union's National Executive Committee and senior management team. **The plan aims at developing a culture of innovation and continuous improvement**, establishing greater opportunities for staff, activists and members to innovate and generate new ideas. It also aims at ensuring that internal processes are in place to monitor and analyse economic, social and cultural trends for effective strategic and operational risk management.

A foresight team was set up. Two officers took two training courses at ETUI on the methodology and on building scenarios. Among its various responsibilities, the team is to assist the union in making well-informed, proactive decisions, guided by expert opinion and research.

A key focus is to develop national, divisional and organizational implementation plans across the union for each strategic objective, with clear responsibilities, reporting lines and time frames, to create accountability and to illustrate how overall objectives are met.

3.4. *Italy*. Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori – Veneto

The Veneto branch of the Italian Confederation of Workers' Unions (CISL) initiated a foresight process in 2019 following an ETUI training course for trade union leaders. The key question around which the foresight project developed was: *"How can CISL Veneto change to establish a robust representation by 2025?"*. The project comprised multiple phases.

Phase 1, which took place in 2020, a core group was established of 19 young union leaders representing various provinces and sectors within the region. Their primary task was to identify the key challenges both within and outside the union. To facilitate strategic thinking, they underwent practical and participatory training in analysis and strategic planning.

The union leaders consciously looked beyond immediate emergencies and recognized the potential for change through investing in young leaders. Their efforts culminated in the creation of an internal document entitled *"Strategic Thinking for Trade Unions: Time to Start Applying It."*

Phase 2 of the project focused on strategic planning. Guided by an expert in methodology, members of the regional Executive Committee analysed the identified issues and delved deeper into prioritizing objectives. They identified ten strategic macro-objectives to be achieved within the mid-term (five years), delineated action plans to accomplish these and formulated concrete proposals to catalyse the desired changes. The major achievement of this phase was the development of a shared strategic vision for 2025, along with a roadmap featuring the macro-objectives and prioritized actions, supported by an agreement around shared responsibilities.

During the implementation phase, the prioritized actions were put into practice, and progress was monitored in accordance with the agreement around shared responsibilities. CISL Veneto also published the report *"Un pensiero strategico per la rappresentanza"* (also *"Strategic thinking for representation"*), which was utilized during its 2022 Congress.

The group of young trade union leaders continues to play an active role, serving as ambassadors for strategic thinking. In future iterations of the project, an additional step will be introduced to further engage and leverage their insights.

▶ 4 Lessons learned and recommendations for the way forward

In this last section, we will discuss lessons learned and recommendations for future action.

4.1. Lessons learned: trade union experiments with strategic foresight

This is the first **extensive mapping** of trade unions' experiences doing strategic foresight.

Although trade unions have been confronted with change since the industrial revolution, **using strategic foresight is a relatively new practice for unions**.

The **potential added value of trade unions in doing strategic foresight** can be observed in various dimensions. It is a method that resonates well with trade unions' key values and principles, for being non-prescriptive, for being participatory, for allowing for multiple views and capturing complex questions, including uncertainty, and for enabling empowerment through both reflection and action.

It challenges trade unions to think strategically and to **introduce organizational experimentation**, beyond specific fixed periods of time (e.g. beyond 4-yearly trade union elections and Congress), proposing longer time frames, but also allowing them to translate insights into concrete action, strategies and road maps.

In terms of the **foresight methods used** in the workshops and training courses, the ILO-ACTRAV, ITCILO and ETUI have similar approaches to addressing and anticipating change and using strategic foresight in a trade union context. Their methodologies include: warm-up exercises that facilitate creative thinking and projection into the future, trend and megatrend analysis, scenario development and road mapping. However, there are also significant differences: whereas ILO-ACTRAV applied a stronger awareness-raising logic, the ITCILO comes more from a training angle and the ETUI cases focused on the follow-up given by individual unions to trainings facilitated by the ETUI.

In terms of **scalability**, ILO-ACTRAV, the ITCILO and ETUI have trained a considerate number of trade unionists on strategic foresight. Although the formats from each organization vary and interventions are adapted to the specific needs of each region, the substance and objectives remain the same. Overall the approach used has been broadly accepted by the participants. But to strengthen the scalability element, in further training courses it would be worth integrating more targeted selection criteria of organisations and participants to maximize follow-up action, and including specific evaluation indicators so as to assess factors for success (e.g. organizational, institutional or training-specific indicators).

While conducting the workshops and training courses, there was a **general demand from trade unions in the various regions of the world to further explore anticipation and future-oriented processes for trade union innovation**. Some of these needs have been documented in position papers or action programmes emanated from their Congress.

As with other foresight processes, foresight methods were **tailored to the local, national or regional trade union context**. This includes developing a workshop agenda that is in line with thematic priorities, background research and has the support of local foresight experts. In some cases, participants came from quite different backgrounds, in terms of responsibilities, trade

union capacities, etc., but also in terms of expectations. In future foresight projects, **maturity or readiness assessments** may help to better identify the needs of the organization and the objectives of the foresight exercise accordingly.

An important lesson learned is that **buy-in by the trade union leadership** is key in the foresight exercise. This can take the form of actual participation of trade union leaders in the exercise, feedback loops to the leadership or de-briefing to the trade union Congress. However, involvement has to go beyond the leadership. The cases for instance, show the importance of focal points or ambassadors that drive the process inside an organization and the need for commitment from the organization as a whole.

A number of elements were also raised by the participants in relation to the **difficulties of conducting foresight back in their organizations**. These included the need for ownership of the leadership in piloting or developing an internal foresight project, and the buy-in of both the staff and the affiliates. An important challenge is how to trigger a cultural shift to understand strategic thinking as an investment for the organization, and not as a *"loss of time"*, but also in terms of time frame, to go beyond the short-term mandate of the leadership. Other organizational issues include the union's internal structure, involvement of various departments, existing organizational culture and availability of resources and technical capacity. It is often not easy for unions to combine daily business and managing multiple crises and priorities with longer-term strategic thinking.

Whereas foresight aims at fostering **creative and out-of-the box thinking**, the case studies show that this can be challenging. Often there may be tension between, on the one hand, the need for a closed nature of the exercise, that is only for trade unions, seeing the sensitive nature of the topic, and on the other hand, the involvement of outside views to promote out-of-the-box and critical thinking.

4.2. Recommendations to maximize the potential of strategic foresight for trade unions

Foresight requires investment, and **different tools can be used depending on the particular needs, resources and local context**. For example, when the main challenge is to strengthen the ability to better understand the dynamics of change, assess trends and drivers, complexity, and inter-relatedness, foresight methods could be the most appropriate. We believe that gaming and data-driven methods could be used to inform anticipation and future exercises could possibly benefit from them. When the main challenge is the organization-wide ability to deal with uncertainty and internal change, methods that question mindsets, create openness to experimentation, and challenge long-held beliefs and assumptions, could be useful. Trade unions could also use other methods to put the outcomes of the strategic foresight into practice, such as quantitative modelling.

Build the necessary context and enabling environment to apply foresight. Support from the top leadership is fundamental, as is ensuring involvement all across the organization.

Trade unions need to own and conduct foresight activities by themselves. They need to do so in order to fully understand how foresight works and to tailor the methods to their specific needs, resources, and local context. The actual design of their own foresight journey is as important as its implementation.

Create a trade union community around strategic foresight. Strategic foresight exercises by individual unions, as well as the activities of ILO-ACTRAV, the ITCILO and ETUI have brought a diversity of trade unions together. Active exchange in practices and in how trade unions integrate foresight has been mentioned by the participants as useful way of learning. In the future, trade unions could integrate broader stakeholders (e.g. academics, journalists, civil society, etc.)

in their strategic foresight project and build dedicated foresight networks to maximize their foresight learning.

Despite many interesting and innovative actions undertaken by trade unions in thinking about the future and the changing world of work, future-looking activities need to be conducted systematically. The existing approaches are not always comprehensive, integrated or evaluated. For example, a trade union organization may first want to understand a given scenario better, as its leadership might be focused on internal managerial organizational issues, and then eventually take action and evaluate the outcome. There is therefore potential for a more **systematic integration** of strategic thinking and foresight in trade union revitalization, as well as potential for identifying indicators that can help in evaluating the processes.

There is an opportunity to do **more research**. In this study, we did not analyse, for instance, how trade union leaders made the diagnosis of change or the need to implement foresight. How trade unions can build sustainable foresight in their structures is a question that needs to be addressed. Further research may investigate which elements determine the success of foresight processes.

Whereas a number of **knowledge materials** already exist to support trade unions with strategic foresight, these can be complemented by regional or thematic case studies, hands-on guidance, exercises, games, presentations to support advocacy efforts towards the broader organization, and tools to assess organisational needs and foresight readiness.

▶ Conclusion

Trade unions around the world have started to explore and use strategic foresight. In this paper, we provided a first mapping and assessment of trade union experiences that exist and the suggested way forward. Strategic foresight provides a concrete means to introduce innovation and experimentation into trade union activities, as well as to build trade union intelligence. Our aim was to explore how trade unions use strategic foresight. The involvement of ILO-ACTRAV, the ITCILO and ETUI has been critical in bringing together diverse organizations, teaching foresight methods and promoting the value of collective and cross-border strategic foresight.

While strategic foresight is a complex process in itself, integrating it into trade unions has been challenging – due to internal and external factors and resource allocation. Nevertheless, it has proven beneficial in helping trade unions recognize the need for anticipatory and strategic planning.

In this paper, we demonstrate the relevance of incorporating the results into practice and decision-making within trade union organizations. We also underscore the importance of ownership, political buy-in and human resource investment. **Foresight interventions should be part of longer-term processes that are owned by the unions themselves and embedded within trade union structures and operations**.

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Acknowledgements

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