

Elshan Orujov
PhD in Economics, Lecturer,
Azerbaijan University, Baku, Azerbaijan;
Western Caspian University, Baku, Azerbaijan;
Economic Scientific Research Institute
under the Ministry of Economy, Baku, Azerbaijan
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-0996-912X>

Vusala Kamal ghizi Ismayilova
Master Student,
Azerbaijan University, Baku, Azerbaijan
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-0471-9862>

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CURRENT ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES OF TRADE UNIONS IN HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN AZERBAIJAN

Trade unions have historically been a key institution in labor relations, particularly in advocating for workers' rights, fair wages, and improved working conditions. In Azerbaijan, trade unions played a prominent role during the Soviet period when labor was centrally controlled. Post-independence, the shift to a market economy and the rise of private enterprises presented new challenges for the traditional trade union structure. Today, the role of trade unions in Azerbaijan is evolving, but many structural and external factors hinder their effectiveness, particularly in relation to Human Resources Management (HRM). This paper aims to explore the current issues trade unions face and the potential perspectives for their integration into modern HRM practices in Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijani trade unions trace their origins back to the Soviet era when they were part of the state's centrally planned labor management system. During this time, unions were involved in negotiations over

wages, working conditions, and social benefits, though they operated under tight state control. Following Azerbaijan's independence in 1991, the role of trade unions shifted as the country transitioned to a market-based economy. This transition posed significant challenges for unions, particularly as the private sector grew and the labor market diversified. Despite these changes, many unions retained their Soviet-era structures, leading to a disconnect between their operations and the needs of a modern, market-driven economy.

Trade unions in Azerbaijan operate under the Act on Trade Unions (1994) and the Labour Code (1999), which outline their rights to organize, strike, and engage in collective bargaining.

In the context of HRM, this poses a significant challenge as trade unions struggle to assert their role as partners in employee welfare, talent development, and workplace improvement. Without the ability to negotiate effectively, unions risk becoming sidelined in HR decision-making processes, reducing their influence in shaping HR policies.

To remain relevant in HRM, trade unions in Azerbaijan must adopt a more collaborative approach with HR departments. Rather than positioning themselves as adversaries, unions can offer valuable input on issues such as employee well-being, performance management, and professional development. By aligning their objectives with HRM goals, unions can enhance their role in shaping workplace culture and improving employee satisfaction.

Moreover, trade unions can expand their services to include professional training, career guidance, and legal support, thereby appealing to younger workers and those in emerging industries. These services can serve as a bridge between traditional labor protections and the career aspirations of modern workers.

Digital Transformation: A Pathway for Modernization

One of the most promising avenues for revitalizing trade unions in Azerbaijan is through digital transformation. Embracing technology can improve communication with members, streamline grievance handling, and enhance outreach efforts. Online platforms, social media engagement,

and digital tools for membership registration can make unions more accessible to tech-savvy workers and young professionals.

Azerbaijan's integration into the global economy and the increasing mobility of its workforce present both challenges and opportunities for trade unions. Globalization has introduced new dynamics, such as wage competition, outsourcing, and job insecurity, which require a more proactive and internationally connected approach. Azerbaijani trade unions, through organizations like the Azerbaijan Trade Union Confederation (ATUC), have sought to establish partnerships with foreign unions to protect Azerbaijani migrant workers and share best practices in labor rights. International cooperation, particularly with bodies such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), offers trade unions in Azerbaijan the opportunity to align with global labor standards and push for necessary reforms in national labor laws.

Future Perspectives and Strategic Reforms: To secure their future role in HRM, trade unions in Azerbaijan must focus on several strategic reforms:

Trade unions must extend their influence into sectors such as technology, finance, and freelancing, where labor representation is currently minimal. Offering specialized services and protections can make unions more relevant in these areas.

By working closely with HR departments, trade unions can play a more active role in shaping employee engagement, performance management, and workplace improvements.

However, by embracing digital tools, expanding into new sectors, and collaborating more closely with HR departments, unions can regain relevance and influence. To thrive in the modern labor market, Azerbaijani trade unions must undergo strategic reforms, aligning themselves with the needs of a rapidly changing workforce and labor market. Their future success will depend on their ability to adapt and integrate more effectively into HRM, ensuring they remain a vital force in protecting workers' rights and shaping the workplace of tomorrow.

While Azerbaijani trade unions have traditionally played a crucial role in protecting employees' rights, their influence has diminished in

recent years due to a combination of legal, social, and political challenges. The limitations posed by the legislative framework, declining membership, and political restrictions have significantly undermined their ability to effectively represent employees and contribute to labor reforms. However, by embracing digital transformation, expanding into new sectors, and actively advocating for labor law reforms, trade unions in Azerbaijan have the potential to regain their influence. The success of Azerbaijani trade unions will largely depend on their ability to modernize and align their objectives with the rapidly changing needs of the workforce. If they can achieve these reforms, they will continue to play an essential role in shaping labor relations and HR management in the country.

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