

Unifor submission in brief

Unifor is proposing sweeping changes to Ontario labour laws to better reflect the reality of modern work in an era of precarious, low-paying part-time jobs, and to make the process of forming a union more fair.

In its submission to the Ontario Changing Workplaces Review, Unifor is making 43 recommendations that together would make a significant positive difference in the functioning of Ontario labour market. These changes would also improve the lives of working people while boosting the economy as a whole.

Unifor's proposed changes fall into three main categories:

- Modernize employment standards to reflect today's increasingly precarious workforce.
- Bringing greater fairness to the ability of workers to speak with a collective voice.
- Expanding the tradition of sectoral employment standards to address the specific needs of unique industries and sectors of the economy.

Ontario's employment laws were written at a time when most people could expect to work for one employer, with relatively regular hours of work. Workplaces today increasingly do not fit that mold, and so the labour laws meant to protect them no longer fit their needs. Unifor is proposing several changes to the Employment Standards Act, including stricter rules for shift scheduling (pp34-35), making employers responsible for the actions of temp agencies (p36), prorated benefits (p36), no two-tier wages (p39), paid leave for those escaping domestic abuse (p40), greater protections for migrant workers (p41), pro-active rather than complaint-driven enforcement of employment standards (p46-47), and independent third-party investigators of violations (p47).

To improve the ability of workers to speak with a collective voice to resolve issues with their employers in a peaceful and respectful manor, Unifor is proposing several changes to the Ontario Labour Relations Act, including automatic certification when more than half of a workforce signs union cards (p54), the use of electronic union cards and votes (p64), votes in neutral locations (p62), expanded arbitration powers including first contract arbitration (p74), enhanced successor rights (pp82-85), particularly for contract workers, and stronger protections for workers engaging in collective activities (pp97-99).

Ontario has a long history of a sectoral approach to labour standards in sectors where workers in a sector – such as construction – move frequently from one employer to the next. With more sectors now fitting this model, Unifor is calling for other sectors to similarly develop regulations specific to their industries, with inputs from both labour (union and non-union) and employers (p119). Sectoral councils would be established to, among other things, set minimum industry standards and discourage competition based on low wages and precarious working conditions (p120).

The changes proposed by Unifor would improve the lives of working people in Ontario. As a number of studies attest, the province as a whole would benefit from such changes, both economically and socially. The OECD, for example, has found that that higher levels of union membership combined with centralized bargaining structures, tends to be associated with stronger macroeconomic and labour market indicators such as better human capital investments, lower unemployment, and reduced inequality (p125). Other studies have found that most OECD economies now are “wage led,” meaning we can expect significant economic payback from equality-enhancing labour policies – such as those being proposed by Unifor (p136).

[To read the full report, go to Unifor.org/ChangingWorkplaces](https://www.unifor.org/ChangingWorkplaces)