

SASK development cooperation programme 2018-2025

Annual Report 2023

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Summary

The year **2023 marked the second year** of SASK's four-year funding period (2022–2025) from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and the sixth implementation year of SASK's eight-year programme (2018–2025). The overall **volume of operations was 104 %** of the budget, reflecting an excellent performance. The total costs of the programme were **5.6 million euros**.

The largest segment of the programme, **international operations**, performed remarkably well, achieving **101 %** of the total budgeted figures. Within the international operations, a total of **29 projects and four Quick Action Support initiatives** were implemented. The budget of projects was a total of 3.9 million euros and realized expenses of the projects were 4 million euros. The operating environment in SASK's programme countries has been turbulent, influenced by the outcomes of national elections and geopolitical tensions. The strategic themes selected for SASK's programme have proven to be even more timely than anticipated in several target countries and sectors.

In Finland, the 2023 **parliamentary elections** and the program of the new government significantly impacted SASK's operations **domestically**. Prior to the elections, potential cuts to development cooperation funding emerged. A key focus of SASK's domestic activities was to influence the new administration's development cooperation policies. **Advocacy** efforts undertaken before the elections, during government negotiations, and after the new government took office have been relatively successful.

Significant **deviations** in the implementation of the programme were observed in domestic operations and within administration. These primarily resulted from the personnel changes and interim arrangements. Additionally, fundraising expenses increased mid-year as the decision to invest in a new fundraising system in connection with the SASK's website renewal project was made.

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1. Implementation of the programme 2023

SASK's programme consists of international and domestic operations, which are both steered by the ILO's fundamental rights at work and SASK's strategic themes. Implementation of the programme strongly contributes to the Agenda 2030 and integrates the cross-cutting objectives of the Finnish development policy, applying both mainstreaming and targeted actions in different operations.

1.1 International operations

The year 2023 was the second implementation year of the 2022–2025 funding period. The implementation rate of the project activities was **104 %** (2022: 72 %). A total of **29 projects** were implemented consisting of a total of 622 activities in which 55 966 people participated. In addition, **four Quick Action Support initiatives** were implemented. The budget for the projects was a total of 3.9 million euros. The realized costs of the projects in 2023 were 4.0 million euros (2022: 2.6 million euros). The state aid carried over from the previous year was also used well in 2023. There was no unallocated state aid left in the updated budget for 2023, as the unallocated support budgeted for 2023 and part of the unallocated support from 2022 were used for the Quick Action Support initiatives.

SASK's international operations are planned, monitored, and implemented under **nine sectors**. Figure 1 shows the distribution of expenses by sector.

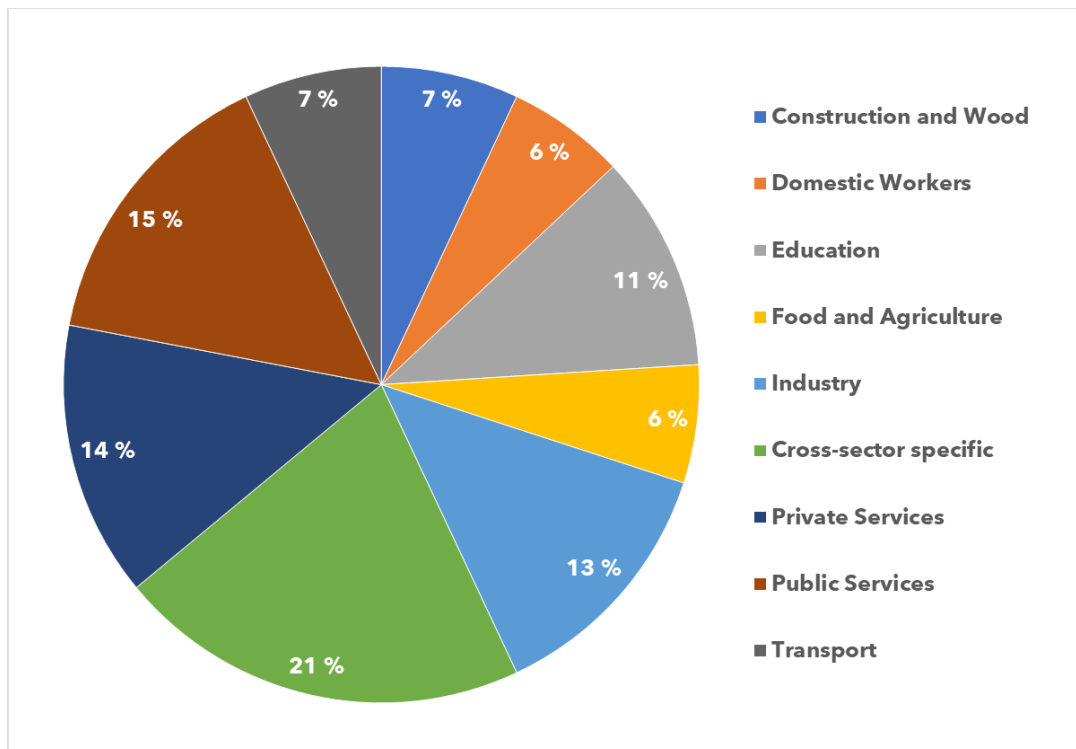


Figure 1. Distribution of expenses by sector in 2023.

From the totality of the Global South's programme, **48%** of operations were implemented in **Africa**, **40 %** in **Asia** and **12 %** in **Latin America**. Of the country-specific activities, **29 %** were carried out in the **least developed countries**, i.e., LDC countries, **35 %** in the **lower-middle-income countries** and **36 %** in **upper-middle-income countries**. SASK's international operations in the Global South are focused on countries where trade union rights violations are the most serious. Many of these countries are lower or upper middle-income countries. More details on Table 1 in Chapter 2.

1.1.1 Analysis of results regarding medium-term goals (outcome level)

As a result of successful implementation of the programme, some medium-term goals are already visible, as the local unions supported by SASK have been able to **protect the rights of workers** around the changing environments in the world of work. With the several interventions (Outputs 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3) and related activities, the local unions supported by SASK have gained institutional capacity and are better equipped to strengthen the awareness and capacities of workers. With member recruitment and competence building on different skills, such as human rights in the world of work, advocacy, campaign and organising work as well as negotiating, the confidence of workers to pursue better working conditions have grown.

In Nepal during September 2023, a strike of almost 100 000 teachers shut down schools for three days. SASK partners in the education sector along with several other teachers' organisations **protested against** the new Education Act which would severely **restrict the fundamental trade union rights** of teachers, such as right to organise and strike, and adversely affect the quality, working conditions and salaries. Eventually negotiations were held, and an agreement was reached to review the Act, ending the strike. The review of the Act would be expected to be brought to the parliamentary committee in 2024.

Collective bargaining agreements negotiated by SASK's partners are advancing towards living wages during 2023. In Malawi hospitality sector, the local union have negotiated minimum wages to several hotels which are three times higher than the national minimum wage. In South African wine farms, the local union have also succeeded in wage negotiations above inflation rate, increasing wages between 7 % to 10 %. Workers are earning well above minimum wage and in addition harvest bonuses have been increased. Also in the Philippines, average wages of the rank-and-file unions members surpass the regional minimum wage. In Koshi province Nepal, the first Memorandum of Understanding between local government, employer association and the federation union in commerce sector have been signed, ensuring basic rights of workers covering thousands of commerce workers.

The **number of workplaces covered by collective bargaining agreements** has increased significantly. In the financial sector in Brazil, a national agreement was achieved in 2023, now covering all the workplaces in the sector. Also in care service sector, a regional agreement was reached in Sao Paulo city covering all workplaces. Similar achievements have been established in Colombia during 2023, where the commerce sector union has signed national

agreement covering all the workplaces in all the regions, along with IT sector union signing national agreement covering all the workplaces in the most important cities in Colombia. With these substantial headways, the number of workers covered by collective bargaining agreements have increased concurrently.

One important measurement for organizational strength is the **number of union members**. Especially the development on dues paying members is vital for the unions to sustain their operations. Most of the projects have organising and member recruitment activities and have been able to gain more members. Still, it seems that the overall annual membership has decreased due to for example lay-offs or retrenchments of companies. In some cases, partner unions' membership registers might lack the up-to-date information of total or dues paying members as well as gender disaggregation of members. To ensure the quality of the reported outcome figures, there is an ongoing revision of the results with the partners, and possible changes will be brought forward with an updated Results Framework.

1.1.2 Analysis of the results regarding long-term effects (impact level)

The long-term effects of the SASK programme are slow but rigid when occurring. As can be seen in the Results Framework (Appendix 2), there were no changes in ITUC Country ratings on **violation of trade union rights** in the programme countries except for one positive case, Côte d'Ivoire, which improved its rating from 4 to 3, meaning from systematic violations of rights to regular violations of rights. Unfortunately, violations were still common and persistent especially in Eswatini, Guatemala and the Philippines. Also, Tunisia was ranked the first time as one of the ten worst countries for working people¹ as the president Kais Saied further tightened his grip on power. Although the results of the Index are far from positive, what it does signal is that SASK operates in highly relevant countries from the workers' rights point of view.

Despite SASK partners have made great efforts advocating for **ratification of various ILO conventions**, especially the Violence and Harassment Convention C190, the ratification processes take time. Across various programme countries of SASK, there is a noticeable trend towards increasing awareness and establishing legal frameworks to address workplace violence. After several years of strategic, collective and resilient efforts by the trade union movement, and together with other organisations in wide national coalitions, finally Lesotho, Uganda, Rwanda and the Philippines ratified C190 in 2023. For the Philippines, although the Convention was formalized in ILO early 2024, this was the biggest victory of the year as the country became the 38th country in the world, and the first country in Asia, to ratify the convention. Uganda was a positive surprise since the country is notorious for violence at work. These achievements provide a much-needed boost to end violence and harassment in the world of work, and pressure for other countries to ratify the Convention.

¹ [2023 ITUC Global Rights Index](#)

Looking at the volume of **workers covered by minimum wage agreements and social security schemes**, the trend is positive. This signals that the partner unions have the capacity for effective negotiating work. However, combining this figure with less encouraging development of the ITUC index as well as decreasing level of unionization, it is possible that more capacity for advocacy work towards the wide audience as well as legislators would be needed. Further, it is likely that these two trends could be a sign of increasing polarization: when the atmosphere towards union activity is continuously repressing, the unions become more militant to achieve their goals despite the decreasing resources.

In Nepal, the year 2023 was marked by expansion of contribution-based social security scheme **coverage to workers in the informal economy, self-employed and the migrant workers**. The registration of migrant workers under social security program and the social security coverage for informal sector workers were initiated by the government. SASK project partners in Nepal are closely following the development to ensure adequate coverage for migrants and informal sector workers. Also, the Nepalese female community health workers (FCHWs) have successfully secured 100 % free **health insurance** in Bagmati Province. This is a landmark initiative that underscores the resolute advocacy of unions.

In India, the **Rajasthan Platform Based Gig Workers Act** was announced in September 2023. The act was advocated by Indian Federation of App-based Transport Workers (IFAT) and its members, and it extends social security and welfare benefits to gig and platform workers operating in the state. Also, a tripartite Welfare Board was founded for overseeing the rights of gig and platform workers. The bill is considered a landmark step by agencies and authorities both nationally and internationally who are working to protect the rights of gig and platform workers.

The qualitative improvements in **Occupational Health and Safety (OHS)** are promising. Many companies still do not provide adequate personal protective equipment (PPE), implement proper OHS standards or provide OHS related training to workers. Unions are actively advocating for safer workplaces by training their members, setting up OHS committees, making OHS inspections at workplaces and engaging with employers and decision-makers in several sectors and countries.

Collective bargaining agreements in some sectors have successfully included provisions for improved **maternity leave**, demonstrating the potential for union-led initiatives to drive positive change. In Malawi, notable improvements have been observed in the hotel sector with terms for maternity leave being amended from 90 to 120 days. In Eswatini, partner union negotiated for the national maternity leave in the manufacturing sector to be increased from 6 to 8 weeks.

In Brazil, a bill is making its way through the Senate to increase the maternity leave from 120 to 180 days, allowing up to 60 days to be shared with a spouse or partner. There is also the potential for extending this leave through company negotiations, indicating opportunities for improving maternity benefits through collective bargaining.

In Indonesia, some CBAs in the metal sector have included 14 weeks of maternity leave. Further, two central organization in Indonesia were engaging with the Ministry of Manpower to advocate for better maternity rights through discussions on mother and children rights draft law. In India, the metro employees in the project scope are covered with maternity benefits, excluding contractual and outsourced workers who are not part of the unions yet.

There are positive developments also in **eliminating violence and harassment at work**. In Malawi, a sexual harassment policy was signed at the Crossroads Hotel, covering all employees and allowing them to take matters outside internal procedures. In the Philippines, campaigns against sexual harassment and the implementation of the Safe Spaces Act are ongoing. Similar policies are being discussed in other countries, indicating a growing commitment to creating safer work environments for women.

Further, improvements have been made concerning the **protective gear** at work. In Indonesia 300 construction workers received personal protective equipment facilities after striking. In Nepal, 32 wards were provided with masks and other safety equipment for the community health workers. In South Africa, the number of vineyards with protective clothing for workers increased slightly from 54 to 59. The workplaces where SASK partner union CSAAWU in South Africa organizes are fully provided with protective clothing.

These concrete impacts indicate that decent work and inclusive economic growth (SDG 8), including human rights in the world of work are receiving attention on the agenda of decision makers. Stronger unions are being recognised as actors to promote and defend workers' rights. Legislative advancements, trade union activities, and collective bargaining agreements have contributed to the progress of realizing workers' rights, but more comprehensive and enforceable measures are needed to ensure consistent social protection and safety for all workers, especially for the most vulnerable groups.

1.2 Domestic operations

In 2023, domestic operations were mostly focused on advocacy work and bringing workers' rights as human rights into the general discussion in Finland. The comprehensive efforts spanned in multiple levels, from the national decision-making bodies to local union chapters and activist networks.

1.2.1 Activities and their implementation

1.2.1.1 Communications

In 2023, the **focus of communication** was on the **Right to organize campaign** which was a continuation of the previous campaigns where the ILO fundamental rights in the world of work were introduced. By raising the topic in domestic operations, SASK wanted to strengthen the understanding of this fundamental right and the understanding that the basic rights defined by the ILO are human rights. This was a considerably smaller scale campaign

compared to the previous year's *Cost of the game* campaign, and the same visibility or media coverage was not received as in 2022. The material for this topic was gathered utilizing the vast networks of SASK. In addition, a study on the realization rate of the right to organize was conducted in Asia and Latin America. Another study was conducted on human rights, including the right to organize at the vineyards in South Africa, which is related to one of SASK's projects within the programme².

SASK's work was extensively covered in the **Red Nose Day campaign** of 2023. A filming trip was organised to Indonesia to gather material and interview the domestic workers who have faced human rights violations and who have been affected positively by the SASK's project in Indonesia. This brought wide coverage for SASK on national TV, on radio and in printed media.

SASK visuals were updated and the SASK website was renewed to be more accessible to all. The new website was launched in the beginning of 2024.

1.2.1.2 Advocacy

The work around **the parliamentary elections** was a big part of advocacy work done in 2023. SASK's advocacy goals focused on the significance of the long-term implementation and financing of development cooperation, the visibility of human rights in working life in Finnish development policies, and the importance of corporate responsibility. The advocacy work was carried out strongly in cooperation with Fingo, especially the topic of securing development funding.

SASK's position as a **strong domestic development policy expert** was promoted through, among other things, civil society organisations in Finland of which SASK is a member (For example Fingo and Fair Trade Finland). SASK's advocacy work is in general conducted in cooperation with SASK affiliates, such as central organisations SAK and STTK. SASK is also an expert member of the Finnish development policy committee.

Corporate responsibility was advanced by a further study on human rights risks in the operations and value chains of a selected group of Finnish companies relevant to SASK objectives. Based on these studies, the implementation of the corporate responsibility strategy will continue in 2024.

1.2.1.3 Global education

The year 2023 was a training intensive year for SASK. **Three basic training courses and two theme training courses** were organised. The theme trainings focused on trade union rights as well as digitalization and new forms of work. A training on corporate due diligence was organised in cooperation with Eetti ry. The number of **SASK ambassadors** (volunteers) was

² The mentioned studies are available upon request.

589 at the end of the year. Two trainings for the volunteers of SASK were organised: on social media advocacy and on trade union English.

The regional leading ambassador model continued to support the SASK activities around Finland. There are now 18 regional leading ambassadors in 10 different cities. SASK enhanced the local networks and provided the opportunity for more people to join in activities. The regional leading ambassadors oversaw the activities in their own regions, and they represented SASK in various local events.

The **annual study tour** was organized in Colombia, where ten SASK ambassador participants got deeper understanding of the work of SASK's partner organisations and the challenges related to labour rights in the country. The study tour has been a popular concept, and it is one of the activities that is offered to more experienced ambassadors only.

The peer-to-peer cooperation between the Nepalese and Finnish teachers continued in 2023. The network consists of five Finnish and five Nepalese teachers. The objective of the peer-to-peer cooperation is to create opportunities for direct communication and learning between trade union activists in Finland and in SASK's operating countries.

After a break in participation caused by Covid-19, SASK was present at the **World Village Festival** with a considerable program dealing with non-discrimination and equality. Tendai Makanza, an economist and representative of IndustriALL (the global organisation of trade unions in the industrial sector) visited Finland at the time of the festival and was interviewed on stage about the development of equality in working life in Africa, especially in the industrial sector.

1.2.2 Analysis of results regarding medium-term goals (outcome level)

Outcome level goals were met with satisfying results in 2023. Efforts put in advocacy work can be seen if not in participation in high level forums but in the **presence of ILO labour standards** in the Finnish public discussion and as references in policy papers, such as the ownership steering paper of Finnfund.

SASK participated in the campaign for the **Corporate Sustainability and Due Diligence Directive** in the EU with many other civil society organisations and this being finally passed in 2024 is a major common accomplishment and an improvement for workers' rights across the world. In addition, the fact that no major cuts were made to the SASK's funding in 2023, is a result of our strong advocacy work and cooperation with other CSOs.

A slight drop in indicator results can be seen in the **media hits and communication activities**. This is partly because the previous year's *Cost of the game* campaign increased these numbers greatly and in a normal year SASK does not have the same resources available for campaigning. There was also a lack of personnel in the domestic operations unit in the spring 2023 due to a long sick leave and this can be seen affecting the

implementation of the programme. The number of supporters has not increased and there is a strategy being developed for addressing this in 2024.

1.2.3 Analysis of the results in terms of long-term effects (impact level)

SASK aims to increase the understanding of workers' rights as human rights and to strengthen SASK's role as an expert organisation on human rights in the world of work. These objectives were brought closer during the activities done in 2023. SASK also managed to bring the discussion within the development work context to ILO core labour rights, which are at the core of SASK's work. Through the trainings, campaigns, and communications, the ILO core labour rights were brought to a concrete level and reflected to the Finnish labour market context. This increased the understanding of the international framework that SASK operates within and of what SASK promotes with its partners in the Global South.

1.3 Strategic themes

SASK strategic themes have proven to be even more timely than anticipated in several target countries and sectors. Challenges that workers around the world are facing due to climate crisis, harassment and discrimination as well as digitalisation are increasing, and this can be seen in the realities of local unions and workplaces. SASK's partners, Global Union Federations especially, are increasing the importance of these themes also in their global strategies, which gives broader support to move forward with the work and find solutions and opportunities for a collective workers' voice.

1.3.1 Gender equality and non-discrimination

SASK strategically prioritizes gender equality within its programme through a human rights framework, focusing on uncovering the gendered impacts within the trade union movement in the Global South and supporting these efforts via the twin-track approach (see Appendix 2 for Results Framework, Output 1.5). Gender equality is woven throughout SASK's programme work, either as a cross-cutting theme or a specific focus area in international projects and domestic activities such as campaigns and studies.

The **key areas of intervention** are:

- Equal participation and leadership (in all projects)
- Occupational health and safety and maternity protection (in 14 projects)
- World of work free from violence and harassment (in 21 projects)
- Rights of minorities and other vulnerable groups (in 18 projects)

Advances in 2023 for equal participation and leadership

Of the **project activity participants** in all projects and sectors 49,5 % were women and 50,4 % men. Less than 0,2 % or nearly 100 persons identified as non-binary, and although the number is relatively small, actions to promote the rights of sexual and gender minorities have to some extent increased.

The most **female-dominated sectors** in terms of participation are **domestic work** and **public services**. The most balanced are education and food & agriculture, while perhaps not surprisingly more male than female participants are found in transport, construction, and industry. Also, the high-level policy and advocacy work in the cross-sectoral initiatives is rather male-dominated, although serious efforts are made to balance the participation.

In many partner organisations, there are **systematic capacity development** and **empowerment programs** to facilitate and encourage underrepresented groups to get to decision-making bodies in their unions. Some unions have made **constitutional changes** in their organisation to ensure equal representation of genders and age groups in leadership structures.

Engagement of men in gender equality work has spread to new partner organisations. Equality trainings for men have been organized, and SASK has facilitated exchange of experiences about them between partner unions in different sectors and regions³.

The power of equally balanced participation in union actions and decision-making is witnessed through the growing interest of workers in joining unions that are seen as inclusive, dynamic organisations where everyone is welcome and gets their voice heard.

Advances in 2023 for gender sensitive OHS and maternity protection

Personal protective equipment and **work wear fit for all**, safe and adequate **restrooms, showers and dressing rooms**, and gender-sensitive occupational health and safety **risk assessments** have been achieved in several sectors and countries.

Extended maternity leave, improved maternity benefit packages and paternity leaves have been negotiated at company level or sectoral level in six countries. **Parental rights** concept is becoming wider than maternity protection among partner organisations. This is likely to be a consequence of men’s engagement in equality actions.

Flexible working hours for pregnant and breast-feeding women and lactation breaks at workplaces improve well-being of mothers and children.

In the construction, wood and forestry sectors, public services in Africa and private services in Latin America **linkages between** climate change and occupational health and safety, as well as gender-based violence and occupational health and safety have been identified and workers have been trained on how to tackle these issues.

³ <https://www.sask.fi/ilman-miehia-tasa-arvotyo-jaa-torsoksi/>

Advances in 2023 for world of work free from violence and harassment

C190 training and awareness-raising has been massive. In most of the projects at least some activities have taken place, many making use of the training material package jointly developed by GUFs and is since 2023 available in 14 languages⁴. Campaign materials have been useful to transmit information in visual user-friendly forms.

Storytelling in training sessions has been organized for instance in women speak-outs on South African wine farms, and in joint and open discussions between women and men in private service sectors in Ghana, Kenya and Mozambique. Public sector unions’ women’s focus groups on Senegal, as well as male leaders' discussion ring in Uganda have been reported successful.

C190 campaigns and advocacy for ratification, domestication and implementation of the convention have taken place for example in the domestic work sector in Mozambique, Colombia, Indonesia and the Philippines, industry sectors in Brazil, Lesotho, Eswatini and Malawi, transport sector in Côte d'Ivoire and Kenya, public services in the Philippines, Senegal and Uganda and construction sector in Indonesia.

Together with other organisations in wide national coalitions, SASK partners have successfully advanced the **ratification of ILO C190**, and in 2023 it was ratified in four SASK programme countries. In Namibia, South Africa and Nigeria the ratification was achieved earlier, and **monitoring compliance** was ongoing during 2023. South Africa Government adopted a code of good practice and shifted GBVH issues to the President’s office for monitoring processes to happen at the highest level.

C190 in workplace policies and CBAs were also successfully implemented worldwide. For example, Indonesian metal and mining unions managed to get anti-GBVH provisions in five company level CBAs. Indonesian transport workers, industry workers especially in the textile sector of Lesotho, and public sector workers in Colombia, Brazil and Guatemala have advanced well in this area.

C190 policies, regulations of unions and safer space guidelines in activities have been visible in several sectors, projects and organisations. Many unions review their existing gender policies to better address GBVH, and those that have not had a gender policy before started developing these. In most of the partner organisations, union activities are declared safe spaces for all, and the guidelines are presented at the beginning of each activity.

⁴ [Train the trainers toolkit: Violence and harassment in the world of work](#)

Advances in 2023 for rights of minorities and other vulnerable groups	
Persons with disabilities	Zimbabwe Musicians’ Union promotes the same rights for musicians with disabilities as for everyone else.
	In Malawi, the Textile, Garment, Leather and Security Service Workers’ Union TGLSSWU negotiated for transport and pension funds for workers in the Bangwe Weaving Factory where more than 85 % of the employees live and work with disabilities.
	The Independent Democratic Union of Lesotho IDUL made efforts to encourage PWDs to participate in union activities and to raise awareness of their needs among members. Shop stewards started engaging with management to employ more workers living with disabilities.
	The Zambia Institute for Labour Research and Development ZILARD coordinates a SASK supported pilot initiative, the aim of which is mutual learning between trade unions and organisations of people with disabilities, followed by an advocacy campaign to promote structural changes in the labour market and trade unions. The plan of action is based on research that ZILARD carried out in 2022-2023 and that was widely published in Zambia ⁵ . Preparations are underway to expand this work to Indonesia and Brazil starting in 2024.
Sexual and gender minorities’ rights	Seven projects in different sectors mention and recognize sexual and gender minorities, and for the first time six projects report smallish amounts of participants identifying as non-binary.
	The teachers’ union of Eswatini SNAT organized training about gender equality and sexual orientation, to reduce discrimination of gender-diverse teachers and students in schools. SNAT also joined hands with a civil society organisation called TranSwati, the mission of which is to improve transgender persons’ access to healthcare, education, culture and economic empowerment programs. TranSwati also advocates for improved legislation and law enforcement and aims at influencing wider social attitudes.
	The public sector unions in the Philippines consider the ILO C190 ratification is a pre cursor to the passage of the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity or Expression Bill (SOGIE) that is now being heard in the Senate.
	The India transport unions have taken the initiative to promote recruitment of LGBTIQ+ people.

⁵ Article on SASK webpages: <https://www.sask.fi/pilottihankkeessa-edistetaan-vammaisten-henkiloiden-osallistumista-tyoelamaan/> and the related report: [The study on rights of Persons with Disabilities in working life in Zambia.](#) (2023)

	In 2023, SASK prepared support to the LGBTIQ+ Workers' Network of all the Global Union Federations, and the pilot support phase has started in 2024.
Migrant workers	Migrant workers' issues are addressed in the South African wine farms, and the construction sector work in India and Nepal focuses on the rights and conditions of migrant workers.
Informal workers	Informal workers' rights come up in the domestic workers' unions support in Colombia, Mozambique, Indonesia and the Philippines, and community health workers' efforts to gain recognition as formal workers with decent conditions in Nepal, the Philippines, Malawi, South Africa and Zambia.
Precarious workers	Seasonal, short-term contract, agency, platform and other precarious workers consist of temporary agency or labour broker workers in industries in many countries, domestic workers everywhere, platform workers in India transport sector, and musicians , most of whom are freelancers and whose sector lacks any kind of regulation.
Indigenous people	Indigenous people and others marginalized due to their origin are entering the union fold in health and education sectors in Nepal (Dalit) and private and public service sectors in Latin America (indigenous and afro origin).

1.3.2 Climate resilience and just transition

SASK programme contributes to integrating climate resilience measures into national policies and planning by supporting trade unions to demand just transition with twin-track approach (see Appendix 2 for Results Framework, Output 1.4). The Output indicators on the number of **trade unions developing strategies or policy proposals on just transition** (OPI 1.4.1.) and the number of **trade unions implementing actions on just transition** (OPI 1.4.2) have already surpassed the original programme target, which shows the growing importance of this work.

The year 2023 deepened the work of SASK and partners in the theme of just transition and climate justice. The focus of the activities of SASK's partners, from local level up to global climate negotiations, is on **workers' participation, anticipation of changes** from the employment perspective, strengthening social security and consideration of local communities. The **Just Transition Work Program** (JTWP)⁶ approved at the COP28 climate negotiations in Dubai in 2023 includes references to workers' rights and social security and recognizes the work done by trade unions around the world to combat climate crisis. Global labour movement, including SASK partners, was the driving force in pushing for the JTWP.

⁶ UNFCCC pages on JTWP: <https://unfccc.int/topics/just-transition/united-arab-emirates-just-transition-work-programme>

This is a significant step forward and a backbone for the work of SASK's partners when **influencing the national and industry-specific climate and energy strategies.**

Throughout the year SASK has **deepened its networks** on just transition both in Finland with its member organizations as well as other trade union solidarity support organisations (SSOs), project partners, Global Union Federations and the ITUC. In Finland, SASK together with several of its member organizations, participated in the civil society coalition's **Just Transition Now! parliamentary election campaign** in spring 2023. In the campaign, the principles of a fair ecological transition were created together.

Advances in 2023 for just transition, climate justice and fight against climate crisis
Cooperation between central organizations in Nepal (JTUCC), the Philippines (SENTRO) and Indonesia (KSPI and KSBSI) has succeeded in opening doors for the representation of the trade union movement in national coordination groups where climate strategies are planned. This is hugely important in countries vulnerable to climate change as the involvement of trade union movement in the national planning on climate change issues is essential to ensure the inclusivity of the policies, so no one is left behind.
In Brazil, in the new political context, industrial unions under IndustriALL Brazil have gained significant new space to influence in industrial policies in the mining, automotive and energy sectors, where the principles related to a just transition are key.
Public sector unions in Nigeria, Morocco and Tanzania have done research on how climate change affects equality issues , especially in female-dominated sectors, and what kind of strategies unions should have in these matters.
In Malawi, the energy union (ESU) is influencing the Just Energy Transition process through social dialogue and seeks to improve national access to energy targets, including having Malawi develop a sustainable energy mix.
The Global Labour University in Africa has just transition as one of the core topics of its Engage-course where trade unionist around the continent come to learn and exchange on a worker-led just transition.
Construction workers in Namibia, Zambia and Mozambique increased climate change and just transition knowledge through the BWI's 'Heat Up Workers' Rights, Not the Planet' campaign.
Unions are developing proposals that could be included in CBAs for the protection of workers against extreme heat. Construction union MANWU in Namibia negotiated adequate drinking water in companies where this was previously not available.

During the year, in the **project work of SASK**, partners from different sectors have been trained to an increasing extent on approaches to just transition, supported on networking, campaigning, advocacy work as well as in deepening research knowledge. **Actions against climate change and for just transition advocacy are increasing in all sectors**, which

reflects the seriousness of the situation and priorities of the Global Union Federations and other project partners.

SASK is part of the civil society organisations' "Climate Finance and Climate Justice Working Group" and "Climate Group of Human Rights Organizations" coordinated by Fingo and Amnesty respectively. In the CSO working groups SASK has brought forward the **workers' perspectives on just transition** and climate justice. The joint learning, advocacy and communication (e.g. about the COP28 negotiation processes) has been very useful and strengthened SASK as an expert organisation on these topics.

1.3.3 Digitalization and new forms of work

Despite the limitations of the Agenda 2030 in responding to the challenges caused by digitalization⁷, the goals 8.5, 8.7 and 8.8 are especially relevant for workers in the Global South facing digitalization. SASK's focus on digitalization and new forms of work continued in 2023, bringing especially questions related to **automatization, data rights and platform work** into question. SASK strengthened its networks on the theme in the Finnish society as well as in international arenas.

SASK deepened its **connections** with other solidarity support organisations, researchers as well as global union federations (GUFs) around the theme. SASK participated in **international events** focusing on digitalization, bringing the point of view of the workers in the Global South into discussion. SASK **contributed** to a global civil society manifesto on AI⁸, writing an article to the manifesto from the workers' point of view and giving a presentation in the launch event of the manifesto.

As a result of the work in 2023, SASK succeeded in **building its expertise**, strengthening its networks and becoming a relevant actor on digitalization questions in the eyes of the partners and other stakeholders. This is a needed starting point for SASK to start building the capacities of its partners to respond to the effects of digitalization.

On the **project level**, digitalization was an emerging issue in the projects in 2023. Many project partners who did not discuss the theme the previous year, did raise the topic and held workshops on digitalization in 2023. There are two likely reasons for this development. On one hand, digitalization is a topic that is raised more and more by SASK and other SSOs as well as GUFs and societies at large. On the other hand, digital tools are increasingly introduced at workplaces bringing consequences to workers, which brings digitalization on the agenda of the unions.

As in 2022, **automatization** was the topic that raised most discussion among the project partners in 2023. The unions were worried about the job loss caused by automatization and highlighted the importance of unions to understand the upcoming technological changes

⁷ The SDGs were published in 2015 and many forms and effects of digitalization have intensified since.

⁸ [Forus international 2023: Civil society Manifesto For Ethical AI](#)

and their effects to workers. Data rights were discussed a few times showing the importance of the theme but also that the unions need more support on it. Platform work was a topic that was discussed also in other projects than the SASK platform work project in India, which shows the significance of the phenomenon.

Advances in 2023 for workers responding to challenges caused by digitalization
<p>In India, Delhi government took a decision to address the non-functional panic buttons in ride hailing vehicles, increasing the safety of platform workers.</p>
<p>SINTRAT, the transport sector union in Mozambique started to recruit also platform workers. In 2023, 150 platform workers joined the union already.</p>
<p>In India, through the cooperation with UNI Global Union and partnering with a local NGO named Kislay, the registering of the Amazon India workers association (AIWA) union was successful despite the oppression and harassment made by the company. This is a great pathway for ensuring decent work and living wage in over 70 warehouses in India. In addition, a petition was circulated among the public for better working conditions of Amazon and other warehouse workers in India. Also in Brazil, a union for the Amazon workers was founded.</p>
<p>Several finance sector unions in Brazil and Colombia incorporated CBA clauses related to financial digitalization.</p>
<p>The industrial sector unions in Brazil were demanding a seat at the table when the employers discuss technological changes.</p>
<p>A global framework agreement between UNI Global Union and a global telecommunications company Teleperformance was made.</p>
<p>SERBUK, an industrial sector union in Indonesia started to collaborate with a university on a study related to digitalization. The initiative was a spin-off of a seminar on Future of Work organised by the SASK project.</p>
<p>SENTRO FCCU, a federation in the food and beverage sector project in the Philippines, approved a congress resolution on automation and digitalization in August 2023. After persistent negotiations, three food and beverage unions in the Philippines concluded CBAs with improved provisions on the introduction of technology.</p>
<p>The regional federation of the health sector unions in the Americas added digitalization and data rights in its agenda.</p>
<p>The education sector unions in Nepal and Indonesia pushed training on technological tools for teachers in CBAs.</p>

2. Changes in operating environment

The following is a brief description of SASK's operating environment in countries where SASK has significant project activities. During 2023, the operating environments for democratic trade union activities remained difficult and dangerous. This can be seen especially in the case of Colombia, Eswatini and the Philippines, based on their listings in the Global Rights Index⁹ of the ITUC, the International Trade Union Confederation, which is the global voice of the world's working people.

Table 1. Classification of main programme countries according to ODA rating, ITUC Global Rights index rating 2020-2023 and share of funding.

Main programme countries	OECD / DAC	ITUC 2020 (1-5+)	ITUC 2021 (1-5+)	ITUC 2022 (1-5+)	ITUC 2023 (1-5+)	Funding for projects EUR	Share (%)	Number of projects	
Malawi	LDC	2	2	2	2	131 283	3,3	3	
Mozambique	LDC	3	3	3	3	278 125	6,9	6	
Myanmar	LDC	4	5+	5+	5+	27 200	0,7	1	
Nepal	LDC	3	3	3	3	326 570	8,1	5	
Total (LDC)						763 178	19,0 %	15	
India	LMIC	5	5	5	5	230 518	5,7	4	
Philippines	LMIC	5	5	5	5	506 404	12,6	6	
Total (LMIC)						736 922	18,4 %	10	
Brazil	UMIC	5	5	5	5	274 747	6,8	4	
Colombia	UMIC	5	5	5	5	183 078	4,6	3	
Indonesia	UMIC	5	5	5	5	510 678	12,7	6	
Total (UMIC)						968 503	24,1 %	13	
Country-specific projects (total)						2 468 603	61,5 %		
Africa, thematic multi-country projects (18 countries)						1 543 319	38,5 %		
GRAND TOTAL EUR						4 011 922	100 %	33	

2.1 Brazil

During 2023, a renewed political context in Brazil took place with the election of President Lula. The resumption of democratic normality, social, economic and sustainable development initiatives and international relations actions have brought a new perspective of improvements in workers' lives, in contrast to the previous years. The year 2023 demanded efforts and actions by the government and organized civil society to recover and rebuild a democratic rule of law.

⁹ [2023 ITUC Global Rights Index](#)

The process of reaffirming the recovery of democracy is being consolidated, which has allowed the government to begin discussions on labor reforms, but debates have not yet begun in Congress and the final proposal has not yet been finalized. The unions, through the Trade Union Confederations, have participated to explain the most important aspects of these reforms to their members. These reform proposals positively include the strengthening of collective bargaining, greater power for unions, recovering their membership capacity and giving them a new role in the country's economic and political agenda.

The country's new development program has labour as a central element and considers the participation of trade unions in industrial policy-making spaces, in forums and government bodies. Overall, the unity of the trade union movement will be essential for progress to take place. These reforms for workers' rights would have remarkably positive effects on the implementation of the SASK's work in Brazil.

2.2 Colombia

In Colombia, the filing of the health, labor, and pension reforms was carried out in the National Congress at the beginning of 2023. However, despite the efforts, the law reforms promoted by the government, such as the labor reform, have failed to pass the discussions in Congress and continue to be an ideal for workers. Although the executive has expressed positive political will in the legislative and judicial spheres, the opposition political forces, after the regional elections in 2023, have managed to reduce the possibilities of legislating and promoting policies for the population.

The unions are confident that these reforms will finally be approved in the next legislature of the national Senate in 2024. Despite facing significant obstacles, such as violence and repression, Colombian trade unions have continued to play a crucial role in advocating for workers' right and social justice by lobbying towards the national parliaments and continue to organize and mobilize workers across various industries.

Like in Brazil, the pro-workers political context and the position of trade union movement in participating in the labor reforms would have significant implications to the implementation of SASK's programme work. The resilience and commitment of the Colombian trade unions have inspired labor movements globally and fostered international solidarity.

2.3 Indonesia

Indonesia's democracy continued to fall short in protecting and promoting basic civil and political rights, mainly due to the ratification of Indonesia's new criminal code in January 2023. It contains controversial and oppressive provisions, including articles to limit the freedom of speech, belief, and association, e.g., right to protest, and weaken the rights of

women, religious minorities, as well as sexual and gender minorities. If implemented and enforced, the law comes into effect in 2026.

The working class and trade unions continue to face more challenges and limitations, particularly after the enforcement of Omnibus Law on Job Creation (under Law No. 6/2023). The position of workers has been heavily weakened with the expansion of outsourcing to non-core jobs, contractualization, less severance pays and leaves, easier mass layoffs, and abolishment of sectoral minimum wage. Despite the enforcement of Omnibus Law, which originally serves to boost the economy and foreign direct investments to the country, Indonesia's economy is slowing down due to weaker growth in exports as notable investments are going to other Asian countries.

The long-awaited Domestic Workers Bill took one step closer of being passed into law in early 2023 as it was approved as a House initiative. Since then, the bill has not progressed, and domestic workers have held hunger strikes to advance the passing of the bill. Indonesia's domestic workers still do not have legal protection because they are not recognised as formal workers by the country. The bill would secure fundamental rights and social security for the millions of domestic workers in Indonesia.

To further advance the workers agenda in the political sphere, the trade union movement has a huge boost with the surprising inclusion of the new Labor Party (Partai Buruh) as 1 of 18 political parties that will participate in 2024 election. Most of the founding members of the party are SASK partners. Indonesian trade unions are currently more united than ever, regardless of their different political stances and labor agenda. Strong and committed labor movement will be essential in achieving the objectives of SASK's work.

2.4 India

Still in 2023, most of the working class does not enjoy the benefits of India's economic boom, as most of the working population are still highly dependent on agriculture or informal sector. Indian authorities continued to restrict freedom of speech and peaceful assembly, as well as limit the operations of foreign NGOs. The country is also experiencing problems with ethnic violences.

However, a substantial landmark is the passing of the Women's Reservation Bill in September 2023. The bill, which passed both houses of Parliament almost unanimously will ensure that women occupy at least 33 per cent of the seats in state legislative assemblies and the Lok Sabha, the lower house of Parliament. It is a huge win for women, particularly in a country where patriarchal culture is deeply rooted in the society.

The trade unions in India are still highly fragmented based on political division. Union density is low, and most of the informal workers are still left unorganized. This underlines the importance of the work of SASK's partners especially on trade union unity as well as capacity to respond to organizing challenges in new areas such as platform workers.

2.5 Malawi

A significant rise in inflation in 2023 severely impact poor and vulnerable households. From a human rights perspective, there are concerns that inflation and rising food and fuel prices will hinder the realization of economic and social rights. Significant human rights issues have been reported, such as inhuman or degrading treatment by the government, restrictions on freedom of expression, gender-based violence, and corruption. In some cases, the government took credible steps to identify and prosecute officials who may have committed human rights abuses.

The Malawian economy is extremely vulnerable to climate change and natural disasters. In March 2023, severe tropical cyclone Freddy hit in the southern parts of the country, affecting heavily on the lives of hundreds of thousands and on the public infrastructure. The presence of SASK's partners in a crisis meeting with the government officials demonstrated the importance of trade union movement's participation in the acute recovery plan. SASK's partners are in a good position to push forward for worker-friendly policies within the national government.

2.6 Mozambique

In October 2023, Mozambique conducted municipal elections in 65 municipalities, of which Frelimo secured victories in 60 municipalities, Renamo in four, and MDM in one. Elections included violence and recounting of votes. Northern Mozambique is still plagued by a violent insurgency conflict, though some successes have been made in stabilizing the provinces. To address the crisis, government has approved a program, focusing on conflict prevention, recovery, peacebuilding, and resilience.

Mozambican government submitted a draft law on NGOs for parliamentary approval. The bill includes several requirements and restrictions on the creation and reporting of an NGO and allows government interference, e.g., to dissolve an NGO. According to the government, the law is for battling money laundering and terrorist financing and it's a result of the intergovernmental Financial Activities Task Force (FATF) adding Mozambique under monitoring. Civil society organisations have advocated against the bill to pass at the expense of fundamental rights.

With the publication of the new Labour Law, Law No. 13/2023, in the Official Gazette in August 2023, both businesses and workers in Mozambique are preparing for substantial changes in the labor market. This law, which replaces Law No. 23/2007, marks a pivotal step in updating Mozambique's workforce regulations to align with current socio-economic and technological developments. The new law aims to balance the needs of the business community with the rights and well-being of employees, promoting a more inclusive and modern workplace culture.

The Mozambican trade union movement plays a pivotal role in advocating for workers' rights amidst of these ongoing conflicts and political turbulence. SASK long-term presence in the country in key sectors of the economy makes it possible to support unions to have broader synergies to influence national policies.

2.7 Myanmar

Since the enforcement of the Martial Law in 2021, violations against human rights have been persistent. The junta even obstructed the humanitarian aid after Cyclone Mocha in May 2023. In July 2023, the military government confirmed the indefinite postponement of elections, which had initially been set for August.

Continuing throughout 2023, workers and trade unionists from various sectors have been arrested or imprisoned in the industrial zones. ILO Commission of Inquiry demanded end to union repression and forced labour. IndustriALL Global Union began discussions with garment brands on a responsible exit from Myanmar, due to the deteriorating human rights situation and the impossibility of doing due diligence. During 2023, several global brands announced withdraw production or stop sourcing products from Myanmar.

Still, activists continue to mobilise against the junta. SASK's partner The Building and Woodworkers' International (BWI) published a report on Myanmar that detailed the efforts of Burmese trade unions to restore democracy in the country¹⁰. Continuation of SASK's work in Myanmar remains to be seen.

2.8 Nepal

Nepal's democratic transition continued with the implementation of 2022 general election and 2023 presidential election. Political instability remains to be the main issue for current political constellation. Prime Minister Dahal and its coalition have been facing several votes of confidence from the parliament. Despite the pressure from the opposition, they have been able to retain the government with the support of the parliamentary majority.

The ongoing political instability provoked the rise of the pro-monarchy movement with thousands of pro-monarchy protesters taking the streets of Kathmandu in November 2023. The national economy has not shown any promising trend since the pandemic. Possibly approaching recession and economic uncertainties are causing over a million young people fleeing the country each year in search of job opportunities in foreign countries.

The recent developments in advancing workers' rights in several sectors are a result of strong labour movement in Nepal and the estimated favourable conditions in the operating environment will influence the society as a whole.

¹⁰ [Organising beyond borders. The Burmese trade unions' struggle to reclaim democracy. \(2023\)](#)

2.9 Philippines

For 2023, the human rights situation in the Philippines remained dire. President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos struggled in his first year in power. Despite being able to be more control in Philippines-China situation, improvements in media freedom, and attracting more investment coming to the country, the new government remained unable to manage food and agricultural spiking price, stop the ‘war on drugs’ killings, as well as finding concrete solutions for systematic corruption in the government.

The country finally welcomed the ILO High Level Tripartite Mission in January 2023 after being postponed for several years. The main agenda was to solve the past violence, harassment and killing cases targeted against trade unionists, as well as advancing Filipino labor agenda. In April 2023, President Marcos signed Executive Order 23 to highlight that workers welfare is on the government priority area by defining measures for the protection of workers and respect for their right to organize.

Despite Philippines still being one of the 10 worst countries in the world for working people according to the ITUC Global Rights Index, there can be seen positive improvements within the political context that brings affirmation on the commitment for human rights.

3. Ownership, accountability and transparency

SASK's programme is rooted in a **human rights-based** and **results-oriented approach**. The goal of the approach is to ensure that even the poorest individuals understand their rights (ownership) and can advocate for themselves (participation). Simultaneously, it requires that authorities and employers are aware of and can fulfil their human rights obligations. The basis of the SASK's programme is on **local trade unions having a strong ownership** in planning, implementation and monitoring of the work.

Being part of the global trade union movement, SASK's partners both locally and globally are **membership-based organizations with strong democratic decision-making structures**. Decision-making structures of Global Union Federations rise from the grassroots affiliates in all regions which gives a strong voice to the local trade unions around the world. They influence, shape and jointly develop the global strategies of their respective GUFs. This structure supports the **transfer of power** discussion as it gives a good balance when it comes to deciding on project work funded by solidarity support organizations such as SASK.

In 2023, the discussion on localization and transfer of power within the SASK global partners could be seen for example in the deepening of IndustriALL Global Union's process to **localize more the decision-making power to organization's regional structures**. Regional programme officers in Africa, Latin America and Asia have a greater say in programme implementation together with the local affiliates both content and budget wise. As SASK has also made similar decisions in recent years to give **more decision-making power to its Regional Representatives**, this combination takes the **discussion and decision-making even closer with the local partners**. This is a learning process, and it has already proven to be effective and more on the pulse of developments among SASK's local partners.

SASK fosters ownership by building **long-term relationships** and collaborating with partners beyond individual project scopes. These relationships form the foundation for accountability and transparency in project implementation. One challenge in more challenging operating environments and weaker partners, such as domestic workers, is to **measure the effectiveness of actions and to set realistic goals**.

Transparency and accountability arise from the actions of the programme itself in lobbying efforts of trade unions to promote transparency in both state and workplace decision-making processes as well as within their own union structures. SASK's partners are accountable to SASK as well as to their own members. SASK, in turn, is accountable to the MFA, to SASK's members, and to the public. Transparency is further supported through regular meetings between SASK staff, Finnish embassies and by involving Finnish union representatives in the planning and monitoring of projects. As **online, presential and hybrid participation** forms have become even common in 2023 with all partners, this gives broader possibilities to exchange and learn together.

4. Analysis of successes, key challenges and learnings

4.1 International operations

The main difficulties in accomplishing the goals are deeply rooted in the classic problems of the trade union movement, the fragmentation of movement based on political division. This has been the problem since the birth of trade union movements in several countries and is still becoming the issue for uniting the movement, which in most cases hinders the progress of organizing, advocacy, and campaigning. The primary successes in 2023, especially in Asia, are related to the **success of legislation through collective efforts of campaigns** carried out by SASK partners.

Despite facing numerous challenges, **Africa has shown notable improvements in democratic participation**. Countries such as Kenya and Zambia have made significant strides, with Zambia notably repealing restrictive laws and creating a more open civic space. The African Union has been instrumental in fostering democracy and mediating conflicts, thereby facilitating peace agreements and supporting democratic processes across the continent. The **role of the trade union movement in building democratic societies** in Africa has been important. On one hand trade unions have been making efforts to enhance their internal democracy and by doing so they gain legitimacy to influence these processes in the rest of the society.

The 2023 **elections** in several African countries (e.g. Mozambique, Nigeria and Zimbabwe) highlighted the critical role of youth in political participation. Despite challenges and allegations of electoral malpractices, the **involvement of young people** in the electoral process illustrated the importance of engaging the younger generation to foster a vibrant and inclusive democracy. This is essential learning and also a challenge for trade unions worldwide.

In 2023, the world continued to face significant challenges due to **severe climate-related issues**, which greatly contributed to food insecurity and economic instability. All the continents experienced extreme weather events, that severely impacted agricultural productivity and disrupted food supplies. These climatic disruptions were further exacerbated by global inflation, which drove up the cost of essential goods, placing additional strain on already vulnerable populations. SASK together with the global labor movement at large is in a steep learning curve on pushing forward the **worker-led just transition agenda**. There is a clear momentum for the labor movement to step up on this work as the challenges increase.

In 2023 SASK has taken significant steps forward on the work related to **people with disabilities**. The work done in Zambia with ZILARD on mutual learning, campaigning and advocacy between trade unions and organizations of people with disabilities has opened the eyes of both sides on the importance and power of collaboration. As it is paving the way for

similar pilots in Indonesia and Brazil in 2024, it has proven to be an excellent initiative and possibility to learn how trade unions can include issues related to people with disabilities in their advocacy work.

Work with **sexual and gender minorities** is also starting to build up. Merely the fact that non-binary is mentioned as an option in SASK documentation is raising the issue among local partners. For SASK it has been a significant learning experience to be integrated in the global GUF/ITUC coordination on LGBTIQ+ rights. SASK has successfully promoted the issue from the Global South's perspective among the Finnish member organizations. This mutual learning will be a good step forward in defending the rights of these workers.

SASK's work together with ITUC Africa and Labour Research Service (LRS) on promoting **workers' rights within the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA)** has been very successful. There is growing interest and preparedness among African national trade union centers to participate in the AfCFTA advocacy and capacity building work. Sub-regional African trade union organizations actively contribute to increasing the voice of workers in AfCFTA national implementation. There is a broad pool of Finnish trade unions supporting this work which enhances possibilities of mutual learning.¹¹

4.2 Domestic operations

In 2023, there were some personnel resource challenges within the domestic operations which were already acknowledged when the annual plan was made. Therefore, there weren't as many development objectives set for the year and it was expected that some activities might not be possible to implement because of this. Because of predicting the situation well on time and planning accordingly, it eventually had very little effect on the operations.

The **parliament election campaigning** that started in 2022 continued naturally until the elections in spring 2023. Through the campaign planning and activities that were carried out with SASK ambassadors, the role of ILO labour standards was increased and brought to the Finnish context. Otherwise, the year was somewhat of a gap year in terms of **parliamentary processes**. There weren't as many high level forum opportunities because of this during the year. For SASK, these kinds of high-level hearings are normally committee hearings in the parliament and SASK related topics were not in process during the year.

The **work of SASK is being increasingly perceived** through the international framework of labour standards among SASK's supporters and volunteers. Keeping the themes visible in SASK's trainings and events has increased the understanding of the connection between SASK's work and the ILO labour standards, as is written as one of the objectives in the SASK strategy. Also, the result of the government negotiations wasn't as harmful for the development organisations as it could have been. SASK was intensively involved in the cooperation especially related to development funding.

¹¹ See the project's pages: <https://tradeunionsinafcfta.org/>

The 2023 focus of **communications and global education**, the *Right to organize*, was very well received by SASK's main target group. The current labour market situation in Finland created a lot of resonance to the topic and increased the interest of SASK affiliates to utilize the materials provided by SASK. This was not a coincidence, but something that was foreseen and planned and therefore can be considered a successful effort.

4.3 Programme management

In the SASK's programme management, both successes and challenges were identified. The annual reporting for 2022 was done for the first time in SASK's **new programme management system** in the spring of 2023. Based on the user experience, enhancements were made to the reporting process and data entry. In addition, in the autumn of 2023, preparations were made for a version update, the aim of which was to improve the functionalities in use.

The **quality of partners reporting** is seen to improve within the narrative reports. They are better in describing the impact of the work and lessons learned which was one of the purposes for the new reporting templates designed for the current programme period. However, the quality of SASK programme indicator data seems to fall short as partners still struggle with the indicator reporting forms, as well as applying the indicator data logic that was set in the planning phase. Target setting have also been modest. As a result, some of the annual reports by partners were delayed along with the respective audit reports. Also, data validation and analyses took significantly more resources.

Internally, SASK was still in the process of **onboarding staff** to use the new programme management system effectively. Many enhancements have been designed and new functionality taken into use but due to resourcing and workload issues, the onboarding has been affected.

To be continued in 2024, there will be a high focus on re-orientating the project partners on the SASK programme, the related indicators, as well as reviewing the baselines and targets to be better equipped for the reporting of the remaining programme period. This will also **improve the data quality** of the SASK programme. Effective onboarding will also continue with further competence building and technical review of process flows during 2024. Challenges brought by the new system changes have been under control so that it would not be visible to project partners, or affect e.g., constant changes on reporting forms.

4.4 Evaluations

No programme or project evaluations were conducted during the reported year. The CSO audit commissioned by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs was conducted by KPMG Finland during the first half of 2024 and measures for the given recommendations will be included in the 2024 annual report.

A study on the impact and understanding of SASK work and themes¹² was conducted for the second time. The study showed an overall increase in the support of the public to SASK work as well as to the human rights and development cooperation conducted by the Finnish trade union movement. Out of SASK's themes abolishing child labour was still seen to be the most important as it was in 2021.

¹² <https://www.sask.fi/suomalaisilta-vankka-tuki-ay-liikkeen-ihmisoikeustyolle-kehittyvissa-maissa/>

5. Analysis of the realization of the risks

In accordance with the SASK's periodical risk management process, measures and responsibilities for the most significant risks were defined. Efforts have been made to implement the programme and its various activities to react flexibly to rapidly changing operating environments and global crises with different measures. No new risks were identified during the reported year.

Risk assessments of the risks recorded in the risk log are updated within the annual cycle at the beginning of each year, evaluating the measures that were taken to avoid or minimize the risks in the previous year (Appendix 3 Updated Risk Matrix 2023).

5.1 Risks related to the operating environment in the Global South

SASK's partners in the Global South encounter significant risks and obstacles linked with their advocacy work and union activities. These challenges predominantly stem from political instability, a culture of violence and impunity, societal conflicts and insecurity, caste and ethnic class, as well as constraints on civil society space. In response, SASK has urged partners to devise alternative operational strategies for potential constricted operating environments.

Political instability in implementing countries is monitored constantly through several channels. Within the periodic risk assessment, the overall likelihood of this risk was lowered from five to four. There are regional differences, for example the political situation in Latin America has improved but for parts of Africa, instabilities remain. Polarization is still happening, and societal insecurity is still a high risk worldwide.

The 2023 elections offer vital insights into democracy building in Africa. Firstly, they underscore that African citizens cannot rely solely on politicians' goodwill for a transparent transfer of power. The roles of courts and electoral bodies in conducting peaceful elections, and the tendency of executives to undermine their integrity, are pressing concerns shaping democracy across the continent. Many fear that in numerous African nations, courts and electoral bodies are perceived as extensions of the executive, evident in questionable decisions favoring the head of government or in the contentious conduct of elections that disenfranchise swathes of citizens.

Over the past years, most coups in Africa have been instigated by younger officers, often linked to longstanding conflicts between governments and jihadist groups in the Sahel. These coups, typically bloodless and met with some popular celebration, indicate a rising trend. Despite efforts by the African Union to establish robust anti-coup norms, each successive coup in this recent wave undermines the moral authority of these norms.

In Brazil, the threat of a coup against democracy persists. Despite the election of a progressive government in 2023, individuals associated with the Bolsonaro movement

attacked key democratic institutions like the National Congress, the Supreme Court, and the Planalto Palace in the initial week of the new mandate. To address these challenges, regular assessments and medium- to long-term planning are imperative. This involves considering potential adverse scenarios regarding executive and parliamentary power, prioritizing the mobilization of the trade union movement, and engaging various actors in Brazilian society, including citizens and political movements, to resist and garner support.

Generally, there were no major effects in the implementation of projects in programme countries due to political instability. However, in Senegal, the postponing of general elections followed by arrests of opposition political leaders affected to the suspension of planned activities of SASK's projects as any type of gathering could have posed a risk to union leaders and participants of the activities. This shows that SASK and its partners are prepared to work agile when needed.

Year 2023 did not change the **space for civil society** too much, but considering overall the situation with SASK's partners, there is some positive sights ahead. For example, the political situation both in Colombia and Brazil is more favourable for labour movement to operate and advocate for pro-labour policies. Therefore, the likelihood of the risk was lowered from five to four in the periodic risk assessment. Situation is monitored constantly with sharing information and regional updates.

SASK identifies **threats to trade union activists** and the harassment they endure as significant barriers to programme implementation. In 2023, activists and leaders of SASK's partner unions faced harassment, coercion, termination, and physical assault. In the case of Indonesia and Philippines, these violations are being legally backed by the presence of specific legislation¹³ made by the government, to further oppress the freedom and rights of SASK's partners. Partners have several types of safety precautions in place as these risks affect their and their families' daily lives. The objective is also to mitigate these risks through proactive engagement with local unions and demonstrating international solidarity with their endeavors through communication and discussions.

In 2023, the WHO declared an end to **Covid-19** as a global health emergency though many parts of the world can still see the impacts of the crisis. Considering the implementation rate of the SASK's programme, actions and measures for mitigating the effects of the crisis have been successfully completed. Many actions can be considered outdated, and the likelihood was lowered from five to four. During the periodic risk assessment in early 2024, the risk for pandemic was separated from other global crises, i.e., climate change and war in Ukraine, and these will be updated in the next periodic assessment.

Risks that were seen rising in the periodic risk assessment are related to the **financial situation** of Global Union Federations and the **division of the global trade union movement**. Funding sources are changing or being under threat and partners' collection of

¹³ For example, in Indonesia: Omnibus Law, Criminal Code, Electronic Information and Transaction Law; in the Philippines: Anti-Terror Law

membership fees are fluctuating, which is causing an unpredictability for the future. The situation is closely being followed. Different conflicts and wars have been seen to cause polarization, for example between the North and the South, and political atmosphere has come into the discussions. Partners potential disputes among each other is not a new risk but has been emphasized during 2023. For example, in Colombia and Brazil, union fragmentation, exemplified by the establishment of new National Confederations representing specific sectors, complicates coordination among union centers. This division of representation and communication hinders cohesive alignment between union bodies, posing challenges to collective action. SASK's position is to stay neutral and encourage unity. Necessary actions will be taken if project implementation is possibly seen to be affected.

5.2 Risks related to the operating environment in Finland

Year 2023 brought along a major change in the operating environment in Finland. The **new government** has a different approach to development cooperation and its focus. It remains to be seen how this will modify the way development cooperation is carried out but so far, during 2023, SASK has been able to make its relevance known to the new actors within the government.

Public opinion based on public discussion does not show strong support to civil society as a whole, to trade union movement or to development cooperation. Still, if one looks at the results of the impact study conducted by SASK in 2023¹⁴, the public support has only grown in the past two years. The tone of the public discussion therefore cannot be used as the only indicator for public opinion on development cooperation related issues.

SASK operating environment has also been affected by the **conflicts** between the current government and the trade union movement **in Finland**. SASK's affiliates have been more involved in their efforts in finding common ground with the government and not necessarily had so many resources towards SASK's operations. However, the support for SASK from the Finnish trade union movement is unwavering.

A unilateral funding base is a very significant risk for SASK. The programme is financed, for the most part, with programme support from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Another funding source is the Red Nose Day campaign, and during 2023, the partnership situation was closely followed along with other CSOs. Risk of reduction of the Red Nose Day funding realized early 2024 as the partnership with YLE ended.

During 2023 in some of the SASK's affiliates, the number of paying members continued to decrease leading to the need for savings. The organisation may question its affiliation to SASK but for the time being this has not affected SASK in a major way but may have a bigger impact in the coming years.

¹⁴ <https://www.sask.fi/suomalaisilta-vankka-tuki-ay-liikkeen-ihmisoikeustyolle-kehittyvissa-maissa/>

SASK regularly explores **possibilities to expand** the funding base. The SASK's Internal Audit Steering Group (STAKO) completed an assessment of risks related to SASK's funding base. Based on the conclusions, possible actions regarding e.g., strengthening fundraising, are being mapped out during 2024.

5.3 Risks related to misconducts

SASK Code of Ethics¹⁵ is reflected in all SASK's operations, procedures, and organisational culture. In 2022, SASK released its **Whistleblowing channel** to anonymously report any type of concern or suspicion of misconduct in SASK's operations. During 2023, SASK received one notification through the channel related to a misconduct in a workplace in Finland. The reported misconduct did not relate to SASK's operations directly resulting into no actions from SASK's side.

In the end of 2023, SASK received a notification from its contractual partner The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) about **possible financial misconduct** in an activity of a transport sector project in Ethiopia. The suspicion was reported to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs at the beginning of 2024. After comprehensive investigation by the contractual partner, there was no evidence of actual misconduct found, and the case was reported back to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in February 2024.

The **SASK Code of Ethics** has been introduced within the organisation but is not yet fully incorporated in other documentation, for example to financing agreements or project guidelines. Introductory sessions for example to project partners are planned to be hosted and related other documentation to be updated. Partners will also be trained to use the SASK's Whistleblowing channel to report possible concerns or suspicions of misconduct within SASK's operations.

SASK maintains a **strict zero-tolerance policy towards corruption**. SASK's regional representatives are actively engaged in preventing corruption and monitoring financial activities. This includes quarterly reviews of project expenditures by partner organizations and ensuring that regional representatives maintain regular communication through various channels, participate in project activities, and conduct monitoring visits. Additionally, the representatives meet annually with the financial personnel and auditors of partner organizations to discuss and review financial matters.

SASK has implemented comprehensive guidelines **against sexual harassment and inappropriate behavior** across all its operations, effective since 2019. These guidelines are reviewed and emphasized at various SASK events, such as training sessions, project planning meetings, and training activities within projects, as well as during monitoring trips. SASK has systematically implemented the **harassment contact person model** in all events and operations and recommends partners to develop a similar system in their operations. The

¹⁵ <https://www.sask.fi/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/SASKin-eettiset-periaatteet-ja-ilmastoteot.pdf>

prevention of sexual harassment and other forms of harassment is also integrated into other SASK guidelines, agreements, and training materials. To date, there have been no reports of sexual harassment involving SASK staff, partners, member organisations, or volunteers.

5.4 Functionality and development of the risk management system

SASK's risk management system is comprehensive and well incorporated into the organization's annual cycle. Identifying potential risks and maintaining the risk log have been considered as the strengths in the periodical process. **Risk analyses** and **assessments** are closely linked to the implementation of the programme. However, it has been recognized earlier that due to the large, continuous number of identified risks, the creation of an action plan and processing of the implemented measures need a lot of resources. Also, assessing the significance of risks needs versatile risk knowledge and understanding of different contexts. These have become some of the weaknesses within the process.

During 2023, it was discussed that continuous follow-up of risk management measures, division of risks (e.g., to internal and external risks), reducing the number of risks (by e.g., separating them into active or non-active risks), and utilizing better the signals from project partners' risk assessments are areas to consider when developing the risk management system to be more manageable, streamlined and effective. Due to these development factors and lack of personnel resources, the onboarding of the risk management system to the new programme management system was moved to 2024.

6. Contribution of SASK programme to Finland's other political agendas

SASK has been part of the movement advocating for the EU Directive on **corporate sustainability due diligence** for many years and this continued also in year 2023. In addition, SASK has conducted for some time now research on the **human rights risks** in the value chains of a group of Finnish companies, and the results of this research will be published in 2024. This work was much in progress during 2023.

Related to Finnish trade policy, SASK's has profound and extensive cooperation with the African trade union movement to advocate for **workers' rights to be included in the African Continental Free Trade Agreement**. The results of this cooperation levels the playing field and enables responsible Finnish companies to enter to the African markets.

As part of a CSO group, SASK **contributed** to the Finland's Development Policy Committee's **study on female human rights defenders in a digitalized world**¹⁶. This study as well as the guidelines of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs on supporting human rights defenders¹⁷ state that digitalization brings both security and support as well as challenges to human rights defenders. The study recommends Finland to take human rights into account in digital policies of the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry to define what it means by digitalization in development cooperation and development policy. In line with the study's findings, SASK raised the challenges related to digital surveillance, data protection and negative attitudes in the world of work and promoted the notion of digital rights as part of human rights in its work in 2023.

As part of EU's Digital Compass initiative, **Finland's Digital Compass** is based on values such as sustainability, trust, people-centeredness and digital safety. The Compass recognizes the intertwining of digitalization and foreign policy through challenges in safety and human rights. It also identifies challenges caused by the power imbalance between Big Tech companies and nation states. In its work in 2023, SASK **promoted** the values of the Finnish Digital Compass by encouraging workers in the Global South to engage in digitalization processes in workplaces and by spreading information especially about the importance of digital safety and about the power imbalance. This contributed to overall safety and human rights and understanding of the phenomenon. The work also advanced the Compass objectives of global responsibility and solidarity.

SASK is part of the Finnish CSOs coordination on **climate finance and climate justice**. In 2023 SASK has deepened its role in bringing forward the worker perspectives, especially related to **just transition**. Through the CSO collaboration, SASK is part of advocacy work towards the Ministry of Environment especially related to COP negotiations and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs especially related to climate finance issues. Through the CSO work, SASK

¹⁶ [Kehityspoliittisen toimikunnan julkaisuja 2023:2.](#)

¹⁷ [Publications of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2023:11.](#)

can provide support to the Finnish trade union confederations that are the main advocates of worker related aspects in the climate change discussion in Finland.

SASK, its affiliates and its volunteer network of 600 advocates of human rights in working life are a strong part of Finnish **civil society**. By offering these opportunities to participate in the human rights work that SASK does, it for its part strengthens the civil society and offers an avenue for Finnish activists to have their voice heard in the public discussion in Finland.

In Helsinki on August 19, 2024

Trade Union Solidarity Centre of Finland (SASK)

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