

# **Workers' Rights Are Human Rights**

**SASK Development Cooperation  
Programme 2026-2029**

**Updated version, with significant changes in *italics***

**sask<sup>i</sup>**

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## 1. Executive Summary

With 40 years of experience, the *Trade Union Solidarity Centre of Finland SASK* has established itself as Finland's leading **advocate for human rights in the world of work** in the Global South. SASK operates in a rapidly evolving global landscape where economic, political, social, and environmental shifts are reshaping the world of work. The workers' **right to decent work and living wages** must be secured even if the interconnected challenges of rising authoritarianism, shrinking civic space, growing inequality, climate change, and digital transformation threaten them.

SASK's modes of operation encompass **operations in the Global South, Ukraine, and Finland**. The instrumental tools to reach the programme objectives are democratic and independent trade unions founded by empowered workers. By supporting trade unions and social dialogue, SASK contributes to more just and stable societies where workers have a voice. The programme supports unions to increase their competence through project cooperation, mentoring and exchanges of experts, labour market research and networking (South-South and South-North), communications, and advocacy.

*Following an almost 40 % reduction in funding, SASK has adjusted its development cooperation programme significantly to safeguard long-term impact and financial sustainability. The revised programme focuses on a limited number of strategically selected countries and themes where there is realistic potential to achieve concrete results and broader societal change, particularly in contexts where trade unions play a key role in defending democracy, human rights, and social justice. Activities remain grounded in a human right-based approach, aligned with Finland's development policy priorities, and geographically focused to ensure cost-efficiency.*

**In Global South**, the programme forms a diverse project portfolio. The projects are strategically designed to promote ILO Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, social dialogue, gender equality advocacy, and trade union capacity building through **26 planned projects reaching 14 countries**. Countries included in the programme are primarily Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Lower Middle-Income Countries (LMICs), where labour rights and civic space are under serious threat. In Asia, the revised programme focuses on Indonesia, the Philippines, and Nepal; in Latin America, on Brazil and Colombia; and in Africa, mainly on Southern Africa, complemented by Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, and Kenya to ensure regional balance. In most programme countries, several projects are implemented across different sectors, enabling sustained, results-oriented engagement despite significantly reduced resources. **In Ukraine**, SASK promotes democratic governance through collaboration between trade unions, employers, and the government, strengthening labour institutions and fostering inclusive policymaking.

**In Finland**, significant financial and personnel reductions have been made in SASK's domestic operations. With limited human resources, SASK focuses on advocacy, communications, awareness-raising, peer network activities, and cooperation with Finnish private sector actors on Corporate Social Due Diligence ensuring that the realities and challenges of workers in the Global South are understood.

The work builds on the **achievements of previous programme periods**, ensuring continuity and sustained impact. Given the complexity of human rights in the world of work advocacy, four years is a short timeframe for systemic change. However, significant progress was made during

the 2022-2025 programme period, and these successes form a solid foundation for the next phase 2026-2029.

SASK is a respected actor in the extensive international trade union network, coordinated by sector-based **Global Union Federations (GUFs)** and the **International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)**. SASK engages in **multilateral** cooperation through eight GUFs and the ITUC, and **bilateral** cooperation with local trade unions in the Global South. Its global network consists of 200 local trade unions and national centers to support the realization of human rights in the world of work. In Finland SASK's main partners are its affiliates, 37 Finnish trade unions and national centers. Other important stakeholders are many civil society organisations that SASK collaborates with internationally and in Finland, especially in advocacy work.

Guided by the core values of the **United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, the **ILO Conventions** on international labour rights, and the tradition of solidarity, SASK's work is underpinned by the principles of democracy, equality, non-discrimination, and inclusiveness. These values shape its mission to combat poverty and inequality by promoting human rights in the world of work and empowering workers. The programme contributes to many **Sustainable Development Goals**, particularly SDG 8: Decent Work, and Economic Growth.

## 2. Global Trends: Changing World of Work

SASK operates in a rapidly evolving global landscape where economic, political, social, and environmental shifts reshape the world of work. **Workers' right to decent work and living wages** are threatened by the interconnected challenges of rising authoritarianism, shrinking civic space, persisting poverty, growing inequality, climate change, and digital transformation. All people have the right to a decent income to secure their and their families' well-being.

**The Global Rights Index**<sup>1</sup> highlights a persistent global decline in workers' rights. As many as 87 % of countries violated the right to strike and 80 % infringed on the right to collective bargaining. Political polarization and the rise of authoritarianism have further intensified challenges to democratic governance and civic freedoms. The trends reflect **sustained assaults** on workplace democracy and labour rights, regimes, and corporations undermining basic freedoms essential for equitable industrial relations. This makes the work of trade unions more difficult and their support even more vital.

Despite the efforts of *Agenda 2030* and the *Leave No One Behind principle*, two-thirds of the population lives in countries of **growing inequality**. Many trends affect the realities of the workers and actions that need to be taken to defend workers' rights. While economic inequality between countries has declined in recent decades, within-country inequality has risen sharply. Also, according to the World Bank<sup>2</sup>, 692 million people live in extreme **poverty** in 2024.

This underscores the critical need for action on SDG 10, particularly wage and social protection policies to reduce poverty and inequality. Trade unions are paramount in achieving this target, advocating for fair wages, equitable labour policies, and strengthened social safety nets.

**Women** continue to face significant barriers to full participation in the labour force as the gender gap in labour force participation remains persistent. In 2023, the global female labour force

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<sup>1</sup> [ITUC Global Rights Index 2025](#)

<sup>2</sup> [World Bank Poverty and Inequality Platform](#)

participation rate stood at just 64 %, compared to 80 % for men. This inequality is further compounded by women often relegated to lower-paying and less secure jobs. Women are also more likely to be employed in informal and gig economy roles, where job security, wages, and access to benefits are minimal. Trade union efforts to ensure women's voices are included in social dialogue and collective bargaining processes are critical. Women also face income and leadership representation disparities. Women hold only 32 % of senior leadership positions worldwide, a significant underrepresentation compared to their share of the overall workforce.<sup>3</sup>

**The climate crisis** profoundly disrupts the world of work and threatens entire livelihoods. Global warming intensifies phenomena such as extreme heat, which reduces work hours and diminishes income, especially in labour-intensive sectors. The climate crisis exacerbates vulnerability and presents heightened risks for women and marginalized groups. Precarity in employment is increasing as some industries face structural adjustments during the transition to a zero-carbon economy. Due to decarbonisation, key sectors such as energy, mining, manufacturing, and transport face significant job losses. Other sectors, including renewable energy installation and green construction, are projected to meet a surge in new job opportunities. Transitioning to a sustainable energy economy could create over 18 million<sup>4</sup> jobs by 2030, but these opportunities require targeted policies and skills development.

**Digitalisation** in the labour market holds immense potential for innovation, efficiency, growth, and improved working conditions. However, there are increasing signs that digitalisation leads to job loss, deskilling, worsening working conditions, and discrimination. While automation can improve productivity and safety, it often exacerbates job displacement and deskilling in the Global South. **Digital surveillance** infringes on privacy and autonomy, causing stress and distrust in the workplace. It can also lead to discrimination and hinder the right to organise. While platform work offers flexibility, it often results in job insecurity and unfair algorithmic management. In the Global South, these challenges are magnified by inadequate education, leaving workers vulnerable to exploitation. Also, digitalisation offers opportunities for workers and trade unions. By embracing these tools while addressing challenges, unions can empower workers to defend their digital rights in a rapidly changing world of work.

**Irresponsible business conduct** may deliver short-term gains for companies but often leads to long-term risks and costs for workers and businesses. Unsafe working conditions and unfair wages are violating workers' rights. Unsustainable practices can lead to the exhaustion of critical natural resources and environmental damage, threatening the livelihoods of workers and the long-term business viability. Companies are pivotal in ensuring sustainable business conduct in their value chains.

The diminishing power of democratic trade unions, coupled with irresponsible business practices and weak enforcement of labour rights, have exacerbated global disparities. **Democratic trade unions are pillars of free civil societies** – in the Global South, they are pivotal in defending democracy and human rights and protecting workers from exploitation – also in conflict zones. Social dialogue, the core work of trade unions, is vital for building gaps between business interests and human rights and securing decent work. A well-functioning social dialogue generates broad societal impacts and forms the foundation for an inclusive pro-poor development agenda that contributes to multiple sustainable development goals such as SDG 1, SDG 8, and SDG 10.

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<sup>3</sup> [World Economic Forum's 2024 Global Gender Gap Report](#)

<sup>4</sup> [ILO Greening with jobs 2018](#)

In the changing world of work, trade unions are indispensable in shaping a renewed social agenda that prioritises equitable growth, democratic participation, and social justice. Through social dialogue and collaboration with employers and governments, unions can advocate for policies that rebuild trust, strengthen democratic institutions, and leave no one behind.

### 3. Alignment to Global and National Policies

**SASK's work in promoting human rights in the world of work** strengthens democracy, the rule of law, human rights, equality, and non-discrimination. These efforts support the Government of Finland's (GoF) broader goal of fostering equitable, inclusive, and resilient global communities.

SASK contributes to Finland's foreign and security policy by addressing structural inequalities and enhancing social stability in the Global South. A key pillar of Finland's policy is **promoting peace, democracy, and human rights** to prevent conflicts and foster sustainable development. Through its focus on human rights in the world of work, SASK directly strengthens democratic processes by empowering trade unions to represent workers' voices, advocate for just labour practices and adequate income, and promote inclusive social dialogue.

By partnering with trade unions and amplifying workers' voices in the Global South, **SASK reinforces local civil society organisations** that serve as critical actors in advancing democracy and fostering inclusive political participation. Doing so SASK complements the GoF's efforts to bolster the resilience of the LDC countries and promote human rights as a cornerstone of foreign relations.

The programme contributes to many Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 8: Decent Work, and Economic Growth. This focus encompasses **improved human rights in the world of work**, including freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining, social protection for workers, enhanced working conditions such as living wages and occupational health and safety (OHS), and the elimination of discrimination of child labour and forced labour. In addition to SDG 8, SASK's programme supports many other sustainable development goals listed in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs application form.

SASK's approach complements GoF's **Report on International Economic Relations and Development Cooperation**<sup>5</sup> by reinforcing sustainable development preconditions such as democracy, human rights, and a vibrant civil society. The report emphasises the importance of engaging local actors in achieving long-term sustainable outcomes. By empowering unions and amplifying workers' voices in the Global South, SASK improves workplace conditions and strengthens the societal infrastructure needed for economic and political stability where business can thrive.

The report states three focus areas for Finland's development policy. SASK contributes to each of them. It highlights **gender equality** and the **rights of vulnerable groups** as core priorities. SASK aligns with this focus by systematically addressing gender-based inequalities supporting women's position in the job market and access to independent income as well as advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities and other marginalised populations. SASK's approach to preventing **child labour** is explained briefly on page 22. SASK contributes to protecting girls at

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<sup>5</sup> [Report on International Economic Relations and Development Cooperation. Publications of the Finnish Government 2024:39.](#)

risk of child labour by advocating for living wages for their parents, ensuring families can support their children without relying on their income.

For children to have access to **quality education**, it must be ensured that teachers providing education have the means and circumstances to deliver quality education. SASK and its partners work to empower teachers as rights-holders to advocate that their working conditions are decent and that they are paid living wages. SASK's support for teachers' unions in Africa complements Finland's support for the Regional Teachers' Initiative focusing on improving teachers' working conditions. Partner unions can improve the teachers' working conditions with ameliorated social dialogue and advocacy skills. This will contribute to quality education in Africa.

Besides core labour rights, SASK addresses the **digital transition of the education sector**. The work complements Finland's support of the UNICEF Global Learning Innovation Hub. In Asia, activities include training, awareness-raising and capacity building in teaching professions on digitalization of education, and the impact of digitalization on these professions.

**Just transition** secures the future and livelihoods of workers and their communities in the inevitable transition to a low-carbon economy. It guarantees better jobs, social protection, more training opportunities, and greater job security for workers affected by global warming and climate change policies. SASK's work on just transition complements Finland's development cooperation promoting climate action (page 25) aligning with Finland's objective of transparency and accountability of the extractive and energy sectors in climate action. SASK supports unions in advocating for occupational health and safety in rapidly growing green transition sectors, such as the **nickel industry** in Indonesia, where many companies have neglected health and safety standards. In the **industry sectors** in Brazil and Indonesia SASK supports trade unions to influence policy and legislative reforms, especially on a just energy transition, increasing industrial sector union density and human rights due diligence. In Brazil, trade unions build networks with civil society actors to promote accountability of the extractive sectors. They are enhancing dialogue with CSOs such as the Movement for Popular Sovereignty in Mining, the Movement of Dam-Affected People, and university study groups on mining.

The Government Report on International Economic Relations and Development Cooperation states the **steadfast support for Ukraine** as one of the priorities of the Finnish development policy. By empowering trade unions as advocates for workers and civil society representatives, SASK enhances the diversity of voices contributing to Ukraine's democratic discourse (page 35). SASK supports the development of democratic governance in Ukraine by fostering collaboration between trade unions, employers, and government authorities. This tripartite engagement strengthens labour market institutions and promotes transparent, inclusive policy-making processes. Such efforts are vital for creating a labour environment conducive to sustainable economic development and social stability, reinforcing the foundations of Ukraine's democracy.

SASK's work is strategically **aligned with Finland's global trade and development objectives**, as the Report on International Economic Relations and Development Cooperation outlines. The work is strongly connected to **promoting responsible business practices and strengthening corporate accountability**, particularly in the EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) and the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs). By empowering trade unions and amplifying workers' voices in the Global South, SASK ensures that their perspectives are integrated into global discussions on labour rights, corporate accountability, and sustainable development (page 27). This aligns directly with Finland's commitment to fostering fairer global systems where no one is left behind.

Through advocacy for workers' rights and decent working conditions, **SASK actively supports the implementation of the CSDDD**. SASK helps establish a foundation for businesses to adopt robust due diligence processes that respect human rights and foster sustainable development. Also, SASK enhances the capacity of local organisations to monitor and influence corporate practices, ensuring that businesses respect human rights and align with international labour standards.

## 4. Best Practices and Lessons Learned

SASK's work builds on the achievements of previous programme periods, ensuring **continuity** and **sustained impact** in strengthening human rights in the world of work. Given the complexity of labour rights advocacy, four years is a short timeframe for systemic change. However, significant progress was made during the 2022-2025 period, and these successes form a solid foundation for the next phase 2026-2029.

The most significant achievements of the past programme period were the **ratifications of ILO Convention 190** on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work (C190). Through sustained advocacy and campaigning, millions of workers, particularly women, now benefit from strengthened legal protections. With SASK's support, trade unions across the Global South played a crucial role in pushing for national-level ratifications, resulting in **seven countries—the Philippines, Lesotho, Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia, Colombia and Mozambique—ratifying the convention between 2022 and 2025**.

Another key success was the **expansion of collective bargaining coverage**. *By the end of 2024, 8.2 million workers in SASK operating countries and sectors were covered by collective agreements—an increase of over two million from the beginning of the programme. Additionally, access to social protection improved, with over 152 million people in SASK's focus countries benefiting from **enhanced social security** measures—an increase of over eight thousand over three years. Similarly, in countries and sectors where SASK-supported unions influenced **minimum wage policies**, 45.5 million workers were covered by minimum wage agreements by the end of 2024, an increase of over one million from the beginning of the programme.*

The **gender equality agenda advanced** significantly in the 2022-2025 programme period. Work on gender-based violence and harassment expanded rapidly across SASK-supported projects, with substantial potential for further intensification based on positive experiences. For example, in the construction sector in Africa, lactation breaks, and menstrual leave were introduced, and in public services, male leaders were engaged in the prevention of gender-based violence. In Asia, anti-gender-based violence provisions were introduced in collective bargaining agreements (CBAs), and in Latin America maternity rights were advanced in domestic work, and gender-sensitive workplaces were introduced in private service sectors. Additionally, SASK made significant progress in **just transition initiatives**, laying a strong foundation for continued work in this area in the upcoming period.

SASK's work promoting the **rights of persons with disabilities** (PwDs) began in Zambia and expanded with assessments conducted in Indonesia and Brazil. In the current programme period, the topic was broadly introduced to partners as a part of the cross-cutting objective of the non-discrimination of vulnerable groups. Thus, the mainstreaming is already visible in the Result Framework and programme indicators.

In the Results Framework of SASK, programme **indicators** were successfully reduced and streamlined during 2022-2025, improving the clarity in measurement. This work has been further refined and continued into the 2026-2029. The areas for development are enhancing partners' data collection skills and commitment to use indicators more comprehensively. The programme's **geographic focus** is **streamlined** from *26 to 14 countries* in the upcoming 2026-2029 period, ensuring a more focused approach. The monitoring and evaluation processes are also improved by enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of reporting.

Being effective in the Global South requires strong public and institutional support in Finland. A key lesson from 2022-2025 was the need for greater **alignment between international and domestic operations**. A new overarching modality ensures that Finnish activities directly support programme goals, particularly in global education and advocacy. This includes integrating learning, communications, and peer networks

SASK's work in Finland has expanded, with increased media visibility and rising public awareness since 2021. The SASK **volunteer ambassador network** has grown to nearly 800 trained advocates, with annual evaluations guiding its development. *In 2026-2029, the activities of SASK's volunteer ambassadors will be more independent of time and self-directed.*

A significant development during 2022-2025 was SASK's **engagement with private sector actors** to improve workers' rights in global value chains. Partnerships with companies like Alko and collaboration with Finnfund in training and knowledge exchange demonstrated that private sector engagement can drive positive change.

These experiences confirmed the need for SASK to facilitate dialogue and advocate for ethical business practices that respect labour rights. *Encouraged by these results SASK will maintain and further develop its private sector engagement in 2026-2029, ensuring that workers' voices are heard in responsible business initiatives.*

The mid-term evaluation of the programme was conducted in the spring of 2021. Evaluators presented **nine key recommendations** for SASK concerning its international and domestic activities, and programme management. SASK has successfully implemented eight of these recommendations in the 2022-2025.

## 5. Programme Objectives

As outlined in Chapter 2, workers and their unions face many persistent challenges and systemic barriers. In this challenging landscape, SASK's programme is a crucial tool for defending democracy and strengthening human rights in the world of work where collective bargaining and inclusive labour policies are a foundation for sustainable economic development. The following chapters outline the approach of SASK's Theory of Change and Result-Based Management in addressing these challenges.

### 5.1. Theory of Change

SASK's mission to promote human rights in the world of work is rooted in democracy, social justice, non-discrimination, and inclusiveness. The **approach** adopted in the programme 2026-2029 is an **Actor-Based Theory of Change**, which is well suited to SASK which operates through an extensive network of international and Finnish partners. The results emerge because of long

and demanding processes of social change influenced by positive and many negative factors in the operating environment which neither SASK nor its partners can influence.

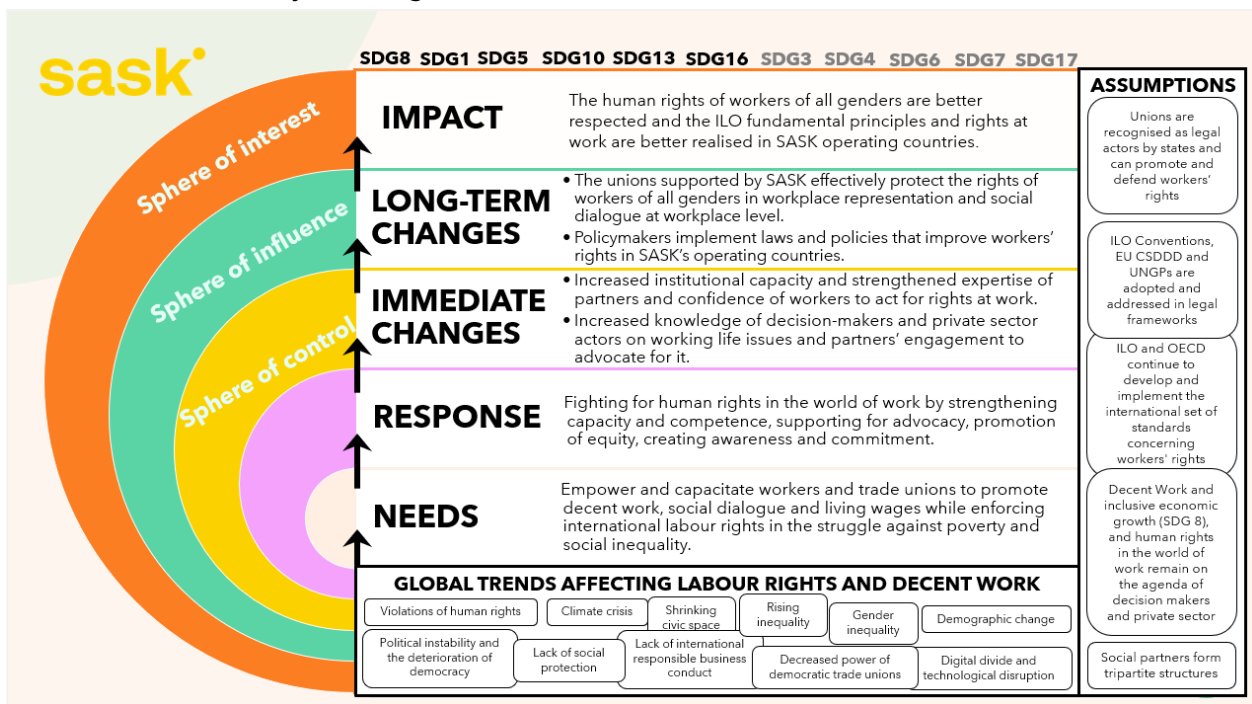
SASK’s Theory of Change (Picture 1) addresses systemic labour challenges by strengthening trade unions, advocating for labour-friendly laws, and fostering social dialogue among workers, employers, and policymakers. Social dialogue, collective bargaining, and agreements contribute to peace, stability, and the rule of law.

The Theory of Change employs three interconnected spheres:

- the **sphere of control**, encompassing immediate changes due to direct actions and outputs
- the **sphere of influence**, involving long-term changes and outcomes shaped by partners and stakeholders
- the **sphere of interest**, addressing broader, long-term societal impacts.

The spheres delineate causal relationships and intervention logic, ensuring focus, accountability, and adaptability in diverse environments.

Picture 1. SASK’s Theory of Change



Objectives of the programme are set at three levels (Impact, Outcomes, and Outputs) and a comprehensive set of indicators with baseline and target values have been defined in the annexed SASK’s Results Framework.

**IMPACT: Sustainable Change in Workers’ Rights in Societies**

SASK’s work has tangible impacts on workers’ lives, including improved social protections such as parental leave, sick pay, pensions, and access to decent working conditions. Also, the impacts include fair wages, regulated working hours, quality work contracts, workplace safety, and reduced gender pay gaps for formal and informal workers. The ultimate impact of these chan-

ges is the establishment of fair, safe, and dignified working conditions that empower workers, reduce inequalities and poverty, and contribute to social and economic stability.

Therefore, **the impact statement** of the SASK programme is:

**IMPACT: By 2030, the human rights of workers of all genders are better respected and the ILO fundamental principles and rights at work are better realised in SASK’s operating countries.**

**LONG-TERM CHANGES: Changes in SASK and Partners’ Influence**

Driving the realisation of workers’ rights requires agents of change. In SASK’s sphere of influence, these agents are trade unions and policymakers, each with its specific outcome statement reflecting their role and contribution to achieving systemic change. The programme empowers trade unions by strengthening their ability to recognise, mobilise, and strategically exercise the inherent power that workers already possess in their workplaces. By enhancing unions’ capacity to advocate for human rights in the world of work, engage in social dialogue, and assert their influence on policies, the programme enables them to navigate systemic barriers and protect workers’ rights.

Strong, resilient organisations are essential to safeguarding and advancing workers’ rights. In the Global South, unions often operate under persistent threats, including violence and repression. Support of SASK significantly amplifies their impact, enabling them to overcome resource constraints, counter repressive governance, and amend labour laws that fail to uphold human rights in the world of work.

Therefore, **the outcome statement 1** of the programme is:

**OUTCOME 1: By 2030, the unions supported by SASK effectively protect the rights of workers of all genders in workplace representation and social dialogue at the workplace level.**

Aligned with SASK’s Theory of Change, policymakers are pivotal stakeholders in shaping labour rights frameworks and driving systemic improvements for workers. SASK supports its partners in advocacy efforts and fosters social dialogue to create an enabling environment where governments can develop and implement transformational, human rights-based labour legislation.

**The outcome statement 2** of the programme is:

**OUTCOME 2: By 2030, policymakers implement laws and policies that improve workers’ rights in SASK’s operating countries.**

The legislative reform process often requires years of sustained effort. However, resulting policies have profound, life-changing impacts, ensuring the protection of workers’ human rights through robust labour laws, effective tripartite dialogue on the state level, and equitable policy measures.

**IMMEDIATE CHANGES: Changes that SASK and Partners Make Happen**

Intermediate changes reflect the outputs of the activities by SASK partners who implement the programme. The **output level objectives** of the programme are categorized as follows:

**OUTPUT 1.1: The supported trade unions have sustained organisational capacity to promote workers' rights in their sectors.**

Trade unions need increased capacity in several issues to promote workers' rights: to organise and negotiate effectively and to build a solid union with democratic structures and inclusivity. Further, the unions need to know how to anticipate the changing world of work and the effects of global trends such as climate change and digitalisation.

**OUTPUT 1.2: Workers of all genders are aware of human rights in the world of work and act for them.**

Workers from different sectors and backgrounds need to know about human rights. They must know they are entitled to them, and that unions exist to defend them. Only awareness can lead to workers acting for their rights by, for example, joining a union or participating in a campaign.

**OUTPUT 1.3: The private sector actors benefitting from SASK expertise have improved their understanding, access, and means to include workers' viewpoints in their sustainability due diligence processes.**

Companies as social dialogue parties are needed to promote human rights in the world of work. With SASK's connections, Finnish companies can build meaningful dialogue with the stakeholders. It is a win-win situation for Finnish companies and the workers in the Global South: the companies manage to fulfil their due diligence obligations, and the trade unions can effectively promote workers' rights in workplace representation.

**OUTPUT 2.1: SASK and its partners at different levels engage in social dialogue and deliver campaign messages to workers, employers, policymakers, and a wider audience.**

For the policymakers to promote human rights-based labour legislation, SASK supports its partners at various levels to engage in social dialogue and advocate for human rights-based labour legislation, ensuring their voices are amplified and their efforts are strategically aligned to influence policy decisions. Partners lead advocacy and campaign efforts, while SASK provides guidance, resources, and expertise to strengthen their capacity and effectiveness.

## **INTERVENTIONS**

SASK mobilises a combination of financial resources, expertise, and strategic partnerships. SASK support is needed in multiple project interventions:

- Knowledge and awareness raising for workers on human rights. This includes events for wider audiences, for example on ILO conventions.

- Advocacy for policymakers and campaigns for a wider audience for worker-friendly laws and socially just policies besides denouncing threats and violence against union leaders and activists.
- Research and studies on relevant themes such as just transition for the increased capacity of unions and for the awareness of companies and workers.
- Training and capacity building for partner unions and companies on themes such as due diligence. Capacity building includes also developing and reviewing partner unions' strategies, plans, and policies, such as gender equality plans and those addressing harassment and discrimination.
- Networking and peer learning between partner organisations and workers to share best practices and disseminate knowledge on, for instance, digitalisation.

## ASSUMPTIONS

The Theory of Change relies on several key assumptions that underpin its ability to drive meaningful impact. SASK's work assumes that engagement with trade unions and policymakers leads to improved labour rights and policy reforms. This recognition enables them to operate freely and advocate for workers' rights. It requires enforceable laws, supportive governments, and cooperative employers committed to harmonious industrial relations. Democracy and its associated freedoms, particularly freedom of association and expression, are indispensable in this context, as they provide the foundation for unions to organise and function effectively.

While the assumption of access to unions and policymakers is fundamental, SASK acknowledges the high-risk nature of this factor in certain operational contexts. To mitigate this risk, SASK employs a flexible, context-driven approach—leveraging international advocacy, coalition-building, and capacity-strengthening initiatives to ensure that progress can be made even in challenging environments. This strategic adaptability enhances programme resilience and ensures that SASK's interventions remain impactful and aligned with long-term objectives despite external constraints.

The capacity of trade unions to deliver impactful advocacy and raise workers' awareness of their rights depends on their ability to perform core functions without obstruction. This requires an **enabling environment** where unions can engage with governments, employers, and workers. A shared **commitment to human rights-based approaches** among trade union leaders and policymakers is essential to fostering such an environment.

Additionally, for **Finnish companies** operating in the Global South, promoting decent work must remain on the agendas of decision-makers and businesses, with states and enterprises ensuring the adoption and implementation of ILO Conventions, the UNGPs, and the EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive. These frameworks emphasise the **state's duty to protect**, the corporate **responsibility to respect human rights**, and the need to provide effective remedies for victims of business-related abuse. The realization of human rights in the world of work also depends on complementary efforts to promote other aspects of sustainable development, as reflected in the objectives of SDG 8. Achieving these outcomes requires **coordinated action** among decision-makers, businesses, and other stakeholders to ensure equitable economic growth and decent work opportunities.

**Broader societal efforts** in areas like poverty reduction, climate action, and quality education create the conditions necessary for advancing labour rights and ensuring a dignified standard of living. Achieving the programme impact is influenced by external factors beyond the control of

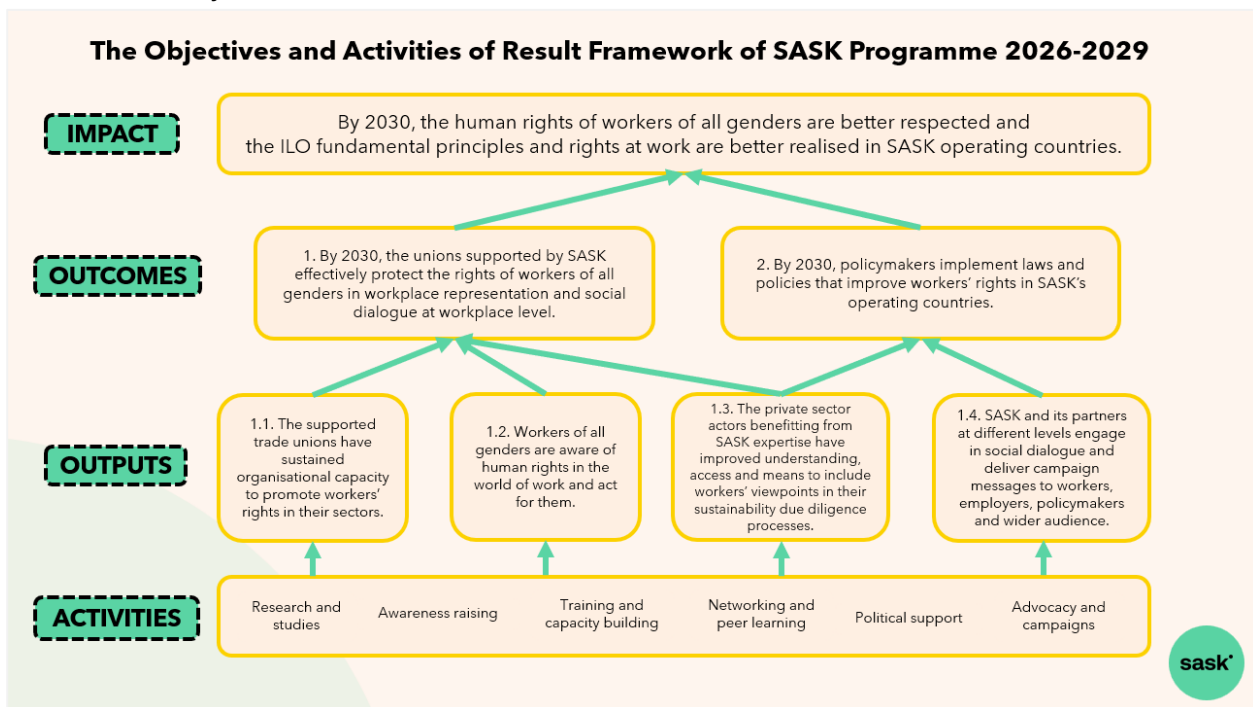
SASK and its partners. Political stability, the commitment of governments to labour rights, and economic conditions significantly affect the feasibility of legislative and structural reforms. Global trends such as economic downturns, shifts in labour markets, and technological changes can enable or hinder progress.

### 5.2. Results-Based Management and Results Framework

SASK utilises comprehensive **Results-Based Management**, supported by a *Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning system (PMEL)* to track progress and the needed adjustments toward the objectives. It is complementary and compatible with SASK’s **Human Rights Based Approach** (page 36). The annexed *Results Framework* concretises SASK’s Theory of Change with objectives and indicators, allowing monitoring progress towards the targeted results and impact.

The objectives and activities of the Results Framework are illustrated in Picture 2 to present the logic of how SASK’s support to different actors in the Global South, Ukraine, and Finland materialises in activities that lead to outputs, outcomes, and finally a long-term impact on societies.

Picture 2. The objectives and activities of the SASK Results Framework



The indicators to measure success and progress, detailed in the annexed *Results Framework*, underpin all activities and guide strategic decision-making across SASK’s operations. For the 2026-2029 programme, the Results Framework was updated, and the total number of indicators was reduced and streamlined from the 2022-2025 programme, improving the clarity in measurement. New indicators were formed for new operations, such as private-sector cooperation, and a more logical path for political advocacy work was designed. Many of the indicators used during the 2022-2025 programme that was found to be still relevant and functioning will remain in the new programme.

During programme planning in February 2025, SASK’s staff and partners developed **initial estimates for baseline and target levels**. For indicators already in use in the 2022-2025 programme,

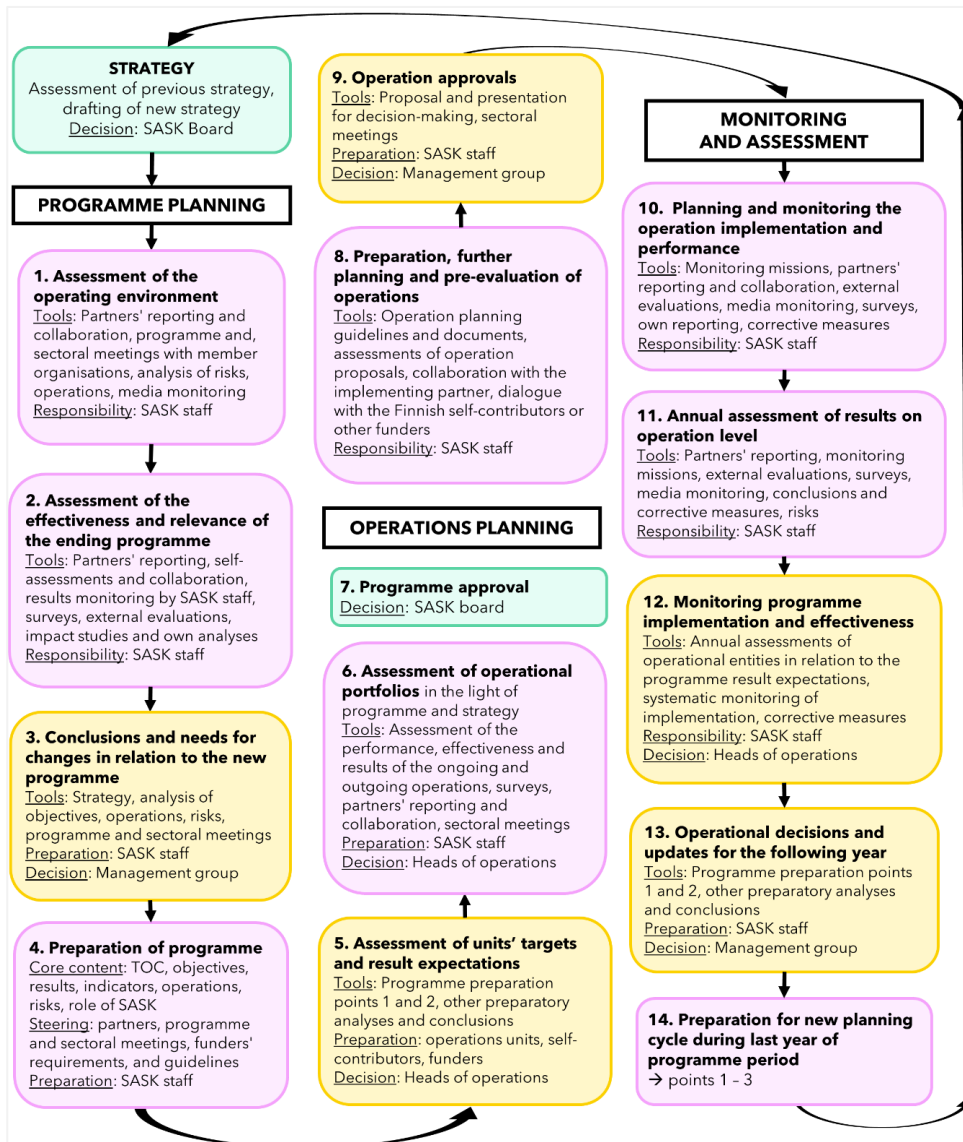
the baseline estimates are based on the year 2023 annual results. Target estimates are based on the progress from 2022-2023 results. The estimates for the complete Results Framework will be refined in 2026 through participatory project planning processes involving all partners, where partners will define context-specific data collection methods and identify relevant data sources to ensure the reliability and comparability of data across projects. SASK's staff will actively support partners in refining these baselines and targets, ensuring they align with programme objectives and remain realistic and measurable.

The finalisation process will also consider the confirmed programme scope, which depends on the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) funding decision. Once finalised, the updated Results Framework will be submitted to the MFA accordingly.

### **5.3. Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning**

SASK's Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning system (PMEL) is a continuous and participatory process that enables effective and accountable results-based management. It involves SASK's staff and stakeholders with tools to have an open dialogue about the achievements and results, enabling agile adaptation to the changes in the operational environment (Picture 3).

**Picture 3. PMEL system of SASK Programme**



**Green:** Decisions by the SASK Board, **Yellow:** Decisions by SASK Management group, **Purple:** Continuous monitoring, communications, and learning

## 1. Planning

**Programme planning** is based on several assessments and consultations by SASK staff where global labour market trends, regional analyses on operating environments, risks, partners' and member organisations' priorities, effectiveness, and relevance, as well as the experiences from the previous programme, form the core content of the new programme. The main tools administering the planning are operations' result monitoring and implementation reports, programme evaluations, partners' self-assessments or external evaluations, impact studies, surveys, and media monitoring.

In addition, the **needs for changes** in the programme are based on the conclusions from the operational environment and portfolio assessments. Possible **new operational areas**, such as private sector cooperation or Ukraine, are identified and included in the planning phase.

Planning of the **programme operations** in the Global South and Finland includes a comprehensive process and continuous discussions with international partners, sector-specific discussions with member organisations, domestic operations plans, and internal planning. **Sectoral meetings** with SASK staff, member organisations, and partners prepare the priorities and plans for the sector's operations in the Global South and Finland. Operational portfolios are designed to support targets and results expectations based on the thematic entities, content-related, geographical, and operational quality criteria specified for the programme. In practice, this includes modes of operation, choice of partnerships, obtaining sufficient self-contribution, and a focus on advocacy work and peer learning activities.

For **planning the operations** focused on the Global South, the process includes an open call for partners to ensure inclusivity and transparency in partner selection. Selected partners are then invited to submit concept notes through a call for concepts, placing partners' needs and priorities at the core of the operations. This approach reinforces local ownership, as the final programme is built around the rights-holders' initiatives and perspectives while aligned with SASK's strategy.

The **programme document** and **the results framework** frame the planning, implementation, and monitoring. All operations are aligned with and contribute to achieving SASK's objectives. The linkages between the programme and operations levels are facilitated by the operation-level administration tools and processes such as the instructions, forms, and participatory practices used in planning, monitoring, reporting, and evaluating operations.

## 2. Monitoring

Programme implementation is **systematically monitored** with programme and project-level indicators, and result data is maintained in the SASK programme management database for aggregation and analysis.

**The implementation of operations in the Global South** is monitored through quarterly activity and financial reports, annual activity, finance and narrative reports, audit procedures, risk assessments, yearly monitoring missions, regular liaison, and virtual meetings. **The implementation of operations in Finland** is monitored through monthly media monitoring, reach and efficiency of communications, annual surveys and opinion polls, and frequent reports e.g., statistics on event attendance and feedback, speaker requests, peer-to-peer activities, audit procedures, and risk assessments.

**Continuous monitoring tools** enable annual assessments of results on the operational level. They are used to monitor the reaching of objectives and outcomes, the relevance and quality of the operations, the actual progress compared to the annual plan and budget, the effectiveness of operational management, the collaboration between SASK, its partners, and stakeholders, and the risk analysis. The collection and analysis of the performance data are generated in the *annual programme report* which is shared with all partners and stakeholders. Results are communicated to Finnish audiences via SASK's website, social media, and newsletters. Affiliates receive tailored content for their platforms and events. Regional updates and annual reporting feedback sessions are held online regularly, providing space to discuss the achievements and challenges of different operations.

## 3. Evaluation

The entire SASK staff **assesses the functioning and effectiveness** of the organisation, and the progress of the different programme areas toward their objectives annually. The key successes

and challenges are analysed, and their causes and effects on programme implementation are studied and discussed to enable learning. SASK can react to changes with agile mechanisms and ensure the effective use of resources. Possible corrective measures are carried out with interventions aligned with policies and guidelines.

**External programme evaluation** will be carried out by external consultants at the end of the period, focusing especially on the effectiveness and impacts of the programme. Also, evaluation findings provide information for SASK to improve its work, processes, and organisation.

In addition, all **projects are evaluated** at the end of the funding period. Projects with an annual budget exceeding 150,000 euros go through an *external evaluation*. In other projects, the partners conduct a *facilitated self-assessment* evaluation process at the field level to provide an inclusive review, such as identifying accomplishments, impacts, successes and challenges, process functionality, and development needs. All evaluation reports are used as material for SASK programme evaluation.

In Finland, SASK operations are evaluated based on information gathered by regular surveys conducted amongst SASK's main stakeholder groups and with **continuous monitoring instruments** and results at the end of the programme period. A **study** on how well SASK and the themes SASK works with are known among the public in Finland is conducted every second year. Other studies, for example, impact studies on specific topics, are done systematically to support analyses and assessments.

#### 4. Learning

SASK uses **continuous evidence-based learning** to improve its effectiveness and impact. The mechanisms described in the PMEL system generate experiences, practices, and knowledge, that are utilised in a continuous cycle to promote learning and guide action for the development of SASK's programme and SASK as an organisation.

In a changing world, the PMEL system of SASK accommodates **change and flexibility**. Results-based data and more real-time information are dynamically used for learning and decision-making, supported by adaptation and innovation. Corrective measures, approach adjustments, and related decisions within the programme operations are reflected and recorded accordingly.

SASK is progressively **building capacity** and **space to learn** from the results and impact of the programme by finding interlinkages and synergies. As a collaborative organisation, SASK reinforces the ownership of learning to sustain long-term change. To collect the lessons learned, key instruments are the monitoring, assessment, and evaluation tools and materials. Important means of sharing the lessons learned are timely and interactive two-way feedback channels and equal dialogue with staff, members, partners, and other stakeholders in continuous discussions.

**Improving organisational culture** that values and supports learning is a key objective for SASK's organisational development. SASK has a continuous **competence development process**, which has resulted in a *competence map*. It is based on constant analysis of SASK's work and the need to increase and renew competencies. Based on the competence map, unit-level and individual development plans are prepared annually, based on which e.g. training resources are needed. Also, joint reflection and analysis of monitoring and evaluation results are core learning material, for example through an annual organisation-wide self-evaluation based on the annual reporting.

## 6. Programme Implementation

### 6.1. Modes of Operation

SASK's modes of operation encompass **operations in the Global South and Finland**, forming a comprehensive approach to strengthening human rights in the world of work. The **primary tool** for advancing these rights is capacitating democratic trade unions, founded and led by workers.

SASK's programme supports partners in the Global South to increase their competence through project cooperation, mentoring and exchanges of experts, labour market research and networking (South-South, and South-North), communications, and advocacy.

Planning of the modes of operation is **participatory**, ensuring inclusivity and transparency in partner selection through an open call for expression of interest. By inviting selected partners to submit project concepts, SASK **prioritises** rights-holders' **needs**, reinforcing **local ownership** and integrating their initiatives and perspectives into the programme's foundation. For the 2026-2029 programme, SASK received 50 expressions of interest and 70 concept notes. Out of these, the organisations and concept notes that best matched the SASK criteria (pages 19 and 28) were selected for the programme.

The programme consists of **a diverse project portfolio in Global South**, implemented through partners with SASK providing funding and expertise. *The 26 projects reaching 14 countries* are strategically designed to promote human rights in the world of work, gender equality advocacy, social dialogue, and trade union capacity building.

**In Finland**, SASK focuses on advocacy, communications, awareness-raising, peer network activities, and cooperation with Finnish private sector actors on CSDD ensuring that the realities and challenges of workers in the Global South are understood. The operations in the Global South provide rich material for global education and dissemination work of SASK, strengthening public engagement and policy influence in Finland.

**Shared ownership** of programme objectives enhances the overall effectiveness and sustainability of cooperation. Each party brings unique expertise to the collaboration: SASK, its Finnish member unions, and bilateral and multilateral project partners. Clearly defined and jointly agreed-upon roles and responsibilities ensure the success of these partnerships.

### Capacity Building

SASK enables its partners to enhance their capacities, including project cooperation, mentoring, expertise exchange, labour market research, and networking across South-South and South-North. The programme promotes human rights through peer networks, campaigns, and advocacy initiatives, ensuring broad and impactful reach. SASK enables individuals and institutions to safeguard and promote these rights, focusing on those most vulnerable to marginalisation.

To equip trade unions with the tools to operate effectively, even in difficult environments, SASK supports comprehensive **capacity building**. That includes training on issues like the *ILO conventions* and *Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*, negotiation and organising skills, advocacy, campaigning, gender equality, non-discrimination, leadership, organisational democracy, and sustainability. Through capacity building unions are prepared to navigate global trends

such as climate change and digitalisation. SASK uses its internal tool called *SASK Organisational Capacity Assessment (SOCA)*<sup>6</sup> to analyse the capacity needs of its partners.

Capacity building encompasses strategies development and review, plans, and policies such as gender equality policy that further enhance the institutional resilience of unions. Strengthened administrative structures, financial systems, and membership management, for example through digitalising the membership registry creates a solid foundation for sustainable operations. These efforts are complemented by events that raise awareness among workers about their rights, fostering a culture of empowerment, engagement, and networking.

## Advocacy

**Advocacy and campaigning** remain central to SASK's operations, targeting systemic injustices and raising awareness of human rights in the world of work. Campaigns influence policy and mobilize action, with target audiences ranging from policymakers and workers to the broader civil society. SASK also supports initiatives that **denounce threats and violence** against union leaders and activists for example in the Philippines, ensuring their protection and the continuation of their vital work.

To amplify its partners' voices in the Global South, SASK ensures that its messages reach relevant stakeholders. **Political support** from SASK's Finnish member organisations often includes participation in advocacy meetings with policymakers in the Global South or sending solidarity messages to partner unions during oppression and human rights violations. Member organisations of SASK have given political support to, for example, Colombian unions in their advocacy work to influence labour and health care legislation. These actions provide crucial moral and political backing, bolstering the legitimacy and impact of union advocacy in the Global South.

**SASK's advocacy in Finland** ensures that decision-makers in politics, the private sector, the trade union movement, and civil society recognise human rights in the world of work as essential for societal development and stability in the Global South. SASK's messaging is grounded in ILO fundamental principles and rights at work, relevant UN Sustainable Development Goals, and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. The goal is to integrate these themes into political debates in Finland, increase consumer and business awareness, and encourage consideration of human rights and living wages in their operations. *In addition, SASK's advocacy work raises awareness of the importance of equality, non-discrimination, and a just transition in the world of work in the context of digitalization and climate change, both in development policy discussions and in decision-making processes in Finland and globally.*

SASK collaborates with Finnish civil society organisations, such as *Fingo* and *Fairtrade Finland*, and participates in Ministry for Foreign Affairs' working groups and the Finnish Development Policy Committee. Through partnerships with member organisations and their international networks, SASK contributes to global labour market discussions in forums like the ILO and the Trade Union Advisory Committee of the OECD. SASK also engages with ITUC's Trade Union Development Cooperation Network (TUCN) to promote human rights in the world of work at the international and EU level.

## SASK Ambassadors and Awareness Raising

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<sup>6</sup> The SOCA tool assesses the core capacities of organisations, to exist, to operate and perform, to relate and mobilise, and to grow. SOCA was created in cooperation with SASK's partner organisations in Nepal in 2020.

SASK organises activities related to ILO's fundamental principles and rights at work and to different global phenomena in the world of work. Activities will be held live, online, and hybrid. The chosen activity platform enables simultaneous and time-independent work ensuring pedagogical and equal implementation.

Participants of the activities become **SASK ambassadors**, volunteers whose mission is to act as advocates for decent work and form a facilitated SASK volunteer network. The SASK ambassador network is a diverse group representing different professions, age groups, genders, educational, and political backgrounds. The diversity emphasises SASK's ability to address versatile audiences within and outside the trade union movement. The ambassador network shares information and experiences, thus increasing understanding of global working life issues.

Expertise exchange increases transparency among supporters and provides an opportunity for peer learning and sharing. A study tour will be organised to deepen their understanding of the global phenomena in the world of work or their knowledge of certain sectors. They connect people between the Global North and Global South and may create more twinning pairs within SASK operations. The programme will include one larger event, the Solidarity Days, where SASK's international and Finnish stakeholders gather to discuss and hear about SASK's work and themes. In addition, seminars are organised annually on themes related to the work of SASK such as occupational health and safety and digitalisation.

## Research Cooperation

SASK addresses emerging challenges in the world of work by fostering **research cooperation** between trade unions and academic institutions. For example, SASK supports South African research institution Labour Research Service and ITUC Africa's efforts to build knowledge and capacity of African trade unions to advocate fair labour practices, especially under the **Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)**<sup>7</sup>.

In Finland, SASK research cooperation focuses mainly on private sector actors' operations in the Global South. The research concerns human rights risks in companies' value chains, level of labour legislation, living wages, or local practices related to negotiation culture. It can also relate to the themes SASK focuses on in its communications and awareness raising, for example, occupational health and safety, non-discrimination, and digitalisation in the world of work.

## Communications

*SASK communicates its programme and the results in Finland through various channels, including its website, social media, newsletters, press releases, training sessions, and events. Additionally, member organisations—comprising 35 trade unions and two confederations—and having almost 1,4 million members support disseminating SASK's messages. Communication themes align with SASK's programme priorities, emphasising ILO fundamental rights and principles at work, and the importance of living wages to combat poverty and inequality.*

*SASK's existing **audience in Finland** is a diverse group representing different professions and industrial sectors, age groups, educational, and political backgrounds. SASK reaches a wide audience of all genders throughout Finland, also in the provinces, compared to many other deve-*

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<sup>7</sup> [Website of Trade unions and trade in Africa - AfCFTA](#).

lopment cooperation organisations, through its vast trade union network. New audiences to be targeted in the programme period 2026-2029 are the private sector actors in Finland.

Communication about the work and results of SASK and its partners is done together with SASK and its partners in Global South. During 2026-2029, SASK will aim to improve communication channels with and among its partners, working toward making communication in the Global South more aligned with SASK’s general communication approaches. By doing so SASK fosters a more cohesive and collaborative effort to promote human rights in the world of work.

## 6.2. Partners and Stakeholders

### International Partners and Networks

SASK is part of the extensive international trade union network, coordinated by sector-based **Global Union Federations (GUFs)** and the **International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)**. The ITUC represents 191 million workers across 169 countries through 340 national centers. GUFs are the international representatives of trade unions in specific industry sectors or occupational groups representing 149 million workers worldwide. These networks unite different workers’ organisations in their shared mission to promote democracy, human rights in the world of work, and social justice.

SASK employs **multilateral cooperation** through GUFs and ITUC and **bilateral cooperation** with local trade unions in the Global South. The cooperation is supported by work with certain labour research and education institutions. This dual approach is essential for **achieving systemic change** as influencing policies and legislation and empowering unions to advocate for workers’ rights requires time, resources, and collective action.

The **multilateral approach** benefits from a strong alignment between SASK, GUFs, and ITUC on strategic priorities, providing opportunities for large-scale impact on international, national, and regional levels, especially in campaigns related to ILO Conventions, Trade and Investments, and violence and harassment in the world of work. For example, SASK’s partnership with the ITUC contributes to initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and Global Rights Index, linking human rights in the world of work to trade and investments and advocating compliance with ILO Fundamental principles and rights at work. Multilateral partners bring professional expertise in project management, ensuring efficiency in implementation, and the larger project size under this model allows for cost-effectiveness. Additionally, the multilateral approach enables scalability and replication of successful initiatives across regions or globally.

**Multilateral partners** are selected based on their representativeness, alignment with SASK’s strategy, trusted collaborative relationships with SASK affiliates, and proven project management competence. Additionally, multilateral partners must demonstrate the ability to contribute expertise to the cooperation in the selected countries. In 2026-2029, SASK collaborates with seven **GUFs** and the **ITUC-Africa** representing workers across diverse sectors (Table 1).

**Table 1. SASK’s multilateral partners, number of projects, and countries**

Global Union Federation / ITUC	Number of projects	Countries
Building and Wood Workers’ International (BWI)	3	Brazil, Indonesia, Zambia

Global Union Federation / ITUC	Number of projects	Countries
Education International (EI)	3	Brazil, Colombia, Eswatini, Mozambique, Nepal and The Philippines
IndustriALL Global Union	3	Brazil, Eswatini, Indonesia, Namibia and Zambia
International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF)	2	Côte d'Ivoire, Indonesia, South Africa and Zambia
International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF)	1	South Africa
UNI Global Union	3	Brazil, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Nepal
Public Services International (PSI)	4	Brazil, Colombia, Indonesia, Nepal, The Philippines, South Africa and Zambia
African Regional Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC-Africa)	1	Ghana, Kenya, Namibia, South Africa and Zambia

The **bilateral approach** fosters local ownership, as project success is directly tied to the capacity and efforts of the partner organisation. **Bilateral partners** are chosen based on their active participation in civil society, and capacity to advance and defend human rights in the world of work. *In 2026-2029, the most important bilateral partners for SASK are SENTRO and FCCU in the Philippines and ZILARD in Zambia.* A bilateral approach enables SASK to work closely with grass-roots unions, tailoring its support to the specific needs of local trade unions. Additionally, **dialogue** between SASK and bilateral partner organisations facilitates the implementation of SASK's strategic objectives. This approach allows for quicker piloting and testing of new methods due to short lines of communication. On the other hand, the bilateral model has higher management costs per project, as smaller-scale projects require significant administrative and monitoring efforts.

In SASK's operations, **82 %** of the **funding is allocated** to partnerships with GUFs and the ITUC, while **18 %** is allocated to bilateral partners in the Global South. This distribution reflects SASK's strategic approach, balancing broad international advocacy and sectoral coordination through ITUC and GUFs with direct support to bilateral partners.

The GUFs and the ITUC work with their **national affiliates**, enabling coordinated efforts in SASK's projects to achieve meaningful change such as ratification campaigns for ILO Conventions, advocacy work, or strategic organising and capacity-building initiatives.

SASK's cooperation extends to other **global networks** to strengthen human rights in the world of work. SASK collaborates closely with other Solidarity Support Organisations (SSOs), including Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (Germany), Union Aid Abroad - APHEDA (Australia), Mondiaal FNV (Netherlands), Union to Union (Sweden), the Trade Union Development Agency (Denmark), and LO-Norway. Additionally, SASK actively contributes to the Trade Union Development Cooperation Network (TUDCN), coordinated by ITUC, ensuring that workers' perspectives are integrated into international development policy debates.

**Global coordination** enhances the impact of the international trade union network. A prime example of this is the coordinated efforts of IUF, SASK, and Union to Union, focusing on the due diligence of Alko and Systembolaget in South African wine production. SSOs from the Global North have established regional **networks in Asia, Africa, and Latin America**, allowing for collaborative planning and resource optimisation with local trade unions. Many SSOs also collaborate with the same GUFs, ensuring alignment at the international level. Projects are strategically coordinated to avoid unnecessary overlaps. Information-sharing between SSOs is regular and structured, with frequent cooperation on key thematic areas such as just transition, gender equality, and digitalisation. This multi-level cooperation extends to SASK's Finnish affiliates, who are key in providing expertise when project themes extend beyond the core competencies of SASK. Through the networks SASK can leverage its stakeholders' specialised knowledge and experience, strengthening its capacity to support global trade union development. In many countries, SASK collaboration extends to the Finnish embassies, sharing information on the operating environment and the local stakeholders.

### **Finnish Partners and Networks**

**In Finland**, SASK's main partners are its **affiliates**, the Finnish trade unions. Affiliates networked experts and their communication channels form essential additional expert resources for SASK in campaigning and advocacy. As the sole CSO advocating human rights in the world of work, SASK **collaborates with many civil society organisations (CSOs)**, particularly in advocacy and awareness-raising efforts on human rights issues. In 2026-2029 SASK collaborates with *Fairtrade Finland* in advancing the role of human rights in the world of work and living wages in the Finnish development policy, and regulations and legislation affecting corporate sustainability due diligence. Cooperation takes place also in campaigning for other themes relevant to both parties.

On **disability inclusion**, SASK maintains an ongoing consultative relationship with Abilis and Disability Partnership Finland, both of which focus on inclusive development cooperation. Cooperation started in 2022. In Nepal, SASK has worked with Physicians for Social Responsibility - Finland on the mental health of migrant workers from 2022 to 2024.

SASK is also an active member of several networks coordinated by Fingo, strengthening its role in broader civil society cooperation. Through involvement in the International Clean Clothes Campaign, SASK advocates for the rights and fair working conditions of garment workers worldwide, reinforcing its commitment to ethical and sustainable labour practices.

*Recognising the increasing importance of sustainable business practices, SASK is involved in **collaborating with Finnish enterprises to increase their understanding of value chains in the Global South**. SASK works with individual companies and with actors such as Finfund, Finnpartnership, and networks like FIBS and UN Global Compact Finland as members.*

## **6.3. Themes**

### **ILO Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work**

SASK's programme is firmly rooted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which asserts that everyone has the right to form and join a trade union. This foundational principle is guided by Agenda 2030, particularly SDG 8, and the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (Table 2). Another framework supporting these instruments is the UNGPs.

**Table 2. ILO labour standards and other human rights instruments supporting them**

ILO Principle/Right	ILO Convention	Other Human Rights Instruments
Freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining	C87 Freedom of Association and the Right to Organise	
	C98 Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining	
The elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour	C29 Forced Labour	
	C105 Abolition of Forced Labour	
The effective abolition of child labour	C138 Minimum Age	Convention on the Rights of the Child
	C182 Worst Forms of Child Labour	
The elimination of discrimination in employment and occupation	C100 Equal Remuneration	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
	C111 Discrimination	
A safe and healthy working environment	C155 Occupational Safety and Health	
	C187 Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention	

**Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining** are the cornerstones of ILO's fundamental principles and rights at work. According to the Global Rights Index, workers were denied the right to join or establish trade unions in 75 % of countries. This is particularly visible in Indonesia, Colombia, and the Philippines. Promoting freedom of association and collective bargaining is supported in all SASK's international operations.

*SASK addresses root causes of **child labour** indirectly by strengthening decent work, living wages, social protection and trade union capacity across the programme countries. The support to collective bargaining, organising vulnerable workers, and advocacy for living wages and labour rights, helps to improve income of their households and their working conditions. This reduces the pressure or need for households to rely on child labour for income and improves their possibilities to have their children attend school. Awareness-raising on labour rights, gender equality and safer workplaces also contribute to better and more stable incomes of households and supports children's access to education.*

SASK actively promotes workplace equality by **eliminating discrimination** based on gender, disability, religion, race, political views, sexual orientation, or trade union activity. For example, in **Zambia**, SASK supports ZILARD, an Organisation of Persons with Disabilities (OPD) to promote disability inclusion at work. Further, SASK supports unions in advocating for and ensuring the recently adopted ILO fundamental right to a **safe and healthy working environment**. For example, in **Côte d'Ivoire, South Africa and Zambia**, SASK supports unions in protecting transport workers from dangerous working conditions in Africa's supply chains.

## Gender Equality

SASK promotes gender equality through **Decent Work**, and **equal participation** for women, aligning with international human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the fundamental Conventions of the ILO. This also contributes to achieving **SDG 5**,

which calls for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Gender equality is also frequently highlighted in SASK communications and campaigns.

Trade unions are key actors promoting gender equality by ensuring women's voices are included in social dialogue and collective bargaining. SASK applies a **twin-track approach** to gender equality through **gender mainstreaming** and **specific actions** focusing on gender issues. The main areas of SASK's interventions include 1) Equal participation and leadership in trade unions, 2) Gender-sensitive Occupational Health and Safety (OHS), maternity protection, and parental rights, and 3) Safe workplaces free from violence and harassment, gender-based violence in particular.

SASK **promotes gender balance** and **tracks progress** through activities, policies, and collective agreements. Training sessions on equality increase men's participation and foster positive masculinity. SASK also focuses on including the issues of younger and older workers, such as those in Southern Africa, where trade unions address systemic problems like low wages, job insecurity, and lack of recognition.

SASK's work on gender-sensitive OHS includes **advocating for legislation** that protects all workers, including compliance with international standards like ILO Convention C183 on maternity protection. For example, in Indonesia, trade union leaders are trained to address gender gaps in collective bargaining agreements, including maternity protection.

Safe workplaces free from harassment are vital. SASK supports the **adoption** of the ILO Convention **C190 on violence and harassment in the world of work**. *Several projects take actions related to the Convention. These include the ITF transport sector project in **Indonesia**, which carries out awareness raising campaigns and sensitization, and promotes the inclusion of C190 provisions in collective bargaining. In **Nepal** the EI and UNI projects conduct advocacy, efforts for ratification and raise awareness on violence and harassment in education and commerce sectors. In **South Africa** and **Zambia**, PSI affiliates support policy advocacy and workplaces practices aligned with C190. Under the project implemented by APHEDA in **Indonesia** and **Nepal** unions for example in energy and manufacturing are supported to work on gender equality and awareness-raising, including campaigns for the ratification of C190.*

## **Non-Discrimination and Disability Inclusion**

*SASK promotes the rights of marginalized groups, including people with disabilities, migrants, and minorities, in line with human rights principles of non-discrimination. The focus is on improving opportunities for vulnerable groups, such as workers in sectors typically having precarious employment, young workers, women workers and informal and platform workers.*

The programme applies a **twin-track approach** by **encouraging all partners** to consider the rights of minorities across their work and introducing **pilot projects** to gain knowledge of strategies to address the issues. *For example, projects in Asia address discrimination and inequality faced by women, informal and precarious workers including in the context of digitalization and platform work, while projects in Africa focus on gender-based discrimination, workplace violence and broader labour rights of vulnerable workers such as Community Health Workers and those in the informal sector.*

The **reasons for the discrimination** are analysed with contributing factors in power structures, attitudes, competencies, and resources. Many unions have initiated measures to understand the issues better and include people with disabilities in trade unions to promote their access to edu-

cation, vocational training, employment, and reasonable accommodations at workplaces. SASK's human resources policy includes preventing inappropriate treatment, an equality and non-discrimination plan, and a policy against sexual harassment. SASK stresses the importance of equality and non-discrimination in all its operations, both in the organisation itself globally and in its interactions with external partners, as stipulated in its Code of Ethics. SASK upholds a culture of mutual respect and values creating a work environment that is free from harassment and discrimination, as through the Safe Space approach, applying these standards to all operations globally, including international work under this programme.

*The programme applies a **do-no-harm** principle as part of its human rights-based approach, ensuring that all activities are designed to prevent unintended negative impacts on vulnerable and marginalised groups. The programme is designed to actively prevent any unintended negative effects on human rights, gender equality, disability inclusion, and the safe involvement of marginalized groups, including people with disabilities and sexual minorities. It follows a human rights-based and do-no-harm approach that is integrated into the programme cycle. Since many projects focus on vulnerable workers—like women, informal and precarious workers, and those in high-risk sectors—preventive measures are put in place. These include ensuring non-discrimination, promoting gender equality, and including disability considerations in project design, guidance and capacity-building efforts. SASK advocates for accessibility standards in training and events, use inclusive participation methods, provide reasonable accommodations, and engage in context-sensitive advocacy to minimize risks of exclusion, stigma, or backlash. Regular risk assessments, disaggregated monitoring when possible, ongoing dialogue with partners, and the PMEL system help us identify any potential exclusion or safeguarding risks early on. While adjustments can be done as needed, the program emphasises proactive risk mitigation and inclusive planning to ensure that our interventions do not inadvertently reinforce existing inequalities but instead foster equitable and safe participation for all workers.*

**Disability inclusion** and **accessibility** are strongly recommended across all the programme operations, activities, and engagements, with all partners, including in the agreements with partners. All events organised by SASK will be accessible. In 2024, the SASK website was made accessible to users with vision impairment, and the same is promoted with SASK partners.

In 2023-2024, SASK commissioned research on the rights of persons with disabilities in the world of work in Brazil, Indonesia, and Zambia, partnering with local unions and disability rights organisations.<sup>8</sup> The research formed the basis of **awareness-raising** and **advocacy** work whereby political decision-makers, government entities, and employers are influenced to integrate people with disabilities into the labour market.

In 2026-2029, the **project in Zambia** aims to improve employment, leadership, and entrepreneurship opportunities for people with disabilities. This includes training public institutions on accessibility, raising their awareness further, and providing digital skills and financial support for people with disabilities to succeed in entrepreneurship.

## Climate Resilience and Just Transition

The concept of a **just transition**, championed by trade unions, offers a framework to ensure that environmental policies are implemented fairly and inclusively. A just transition addresses the

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<sup>8</sup> [Article and links to mentioned reseaches on SASK webpage: Syrjintää, työttömyyttä ja huonommat työsuhteen ehdot - Brasiliassa ja Indonesiassa vammaisten ihmisten asema työelämässä on heikko, 15.1.2025.](#)

needs of workers and communities promoting access to decent work, social protection, and participation in decision-making. This concept was enshrined in the *Paris Agreement* and has since been elaborated through guidelines by the ILO, emphasising the integration of labour rights into climate action policies and thus presenting critical opportunities for workers and trade unions. Under the just transition framework, improving environmental outcomes is coupled with addressing development challenges, poverty, and inequality. It embodies the "**Leave No One Behind**" principle of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, emphasising the need for tailored approaches that respect unique social, economic, and cultural contexts.

In the SASK programme, a **twin-track approach** will be applied in international and domestic operations to have targeted actions specifically focused on just transition. The objective of SASK's programme to fight the climate crisis is to support a **worker-led and inclusive just transition**. Just transition framework links SASK's programme to the climate work of the trade union movement from local to regional and global levels. *The Belém Action Mechanism for Just Transition*<sup>9</sup> agreed in COP30 is a major victory for the global trade union movement as it finally recognises that workers' participation, protecting labour rights, ensuring social protection and decent work are essential for ambitious and fair climate action. Together with the decision to recognise the needs of workers in the Just Transition Work Programme<sup>10</sup> of the UNFCCC, it forms the basis for advocacy on a worker-led just transition and inclusion of just transition principles in climate finance discussions. The ILO guidelines on Just Transition<sup>11</sup> provide tools and guidance to include ILO Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work in climate policies. By **advocating for workers' voices in climate planning**, including Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), unions contribute to climate mitigation and adaptation work and increase workers' adaptive capacity and resilience in the face of climate-related risks.

The core goal of the global trade union movement in promoting just transition forms the basis for climate work in the SASK programme. **Worker involvement** and **social dialogue** efforts focus on involving workers in planning, evaluating, and monitoring climate actions and strategies at all decision-making levels. Trade unions actively advocate for including local communities and vulnerable groups in assessing the effects of different climate and energy policies. Trade unions must be involved in the national, sectoral, and company-level climate and energy strategy discussions to ensure that the strategies include an analysis of the changes to employment and re-skilling needs of workers. If jobs are lost due to national climate policy, states must secure social security and workers' livelihoods.

SASK supports partners in creating impact through **legislative changes** and **pro-worker climate policies** such as climate strategies, NDCs, or sectoral just transition plans. Trade unions must have a **representation at a table** when decisions are made regarding the transition towards decarbonized societies. Together with its Australian sister organisation Union Aid Abroad Apheda, SASK supports national centers in **Nepal, Indonesia, and the Philippines** to have a seat at the table where national climate strategies and energy transition plans are decided upon and advocate for the inclusion of a just transition. In **Namibia**, SASK will support the strategy and organizing work of the Namibian industrial unions on a broad labour approach towards green hydrogen investments. In **Brazil**, SASK supports unions in influencing industrial policies and a just energy transition in the mining, automotive, and energy sectors.

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<sup>9</sup> [ITUC on BAM at COP30](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Just Transition Work Programme. UNFCCC.](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all. ILO 2016.](#)

Including worker-led just transition principles in **social dialogue processes** and **collective bargaining agreements** is a concrete outcome for trade unions to improve working conditions. SASK supports training for union leaders and negotiators for example in energy, construction, industry, education and public services, for example in Indonesia, Nepal, South Africa and Zambia. *Training on collective bargaining, occupational health and safety, just transition and risks related to climate change strengthens the capacity of trade unions to negotiate better working conditions, workplace safety and CBAs that include skills development related to changing needs, preparedness for increased climate hazards, or OHS clauses related to extreme weather conditions.*

## Digitalisation and New Forms of Work

SASK's programme addresses the growing **challenges of digitalisation to workers' rights**, following the principle "Leave No One Behind". SASK aligns its work with the UN Global Digital Compact<sup>12</sup> which recognises the risks of digitalisation for humanity. By focusing on **digital rights**, protection from precarious work, and **mitigating the impacts of automation** and **artificial intelligence (AI)**, SASK supports partner unions in defending workers' dignity, privacy, and fundamental labour rights in the digitalised work environment. The programme ensures that the ILO fundamental principles and rights at work – freedom of association, non-discrimination, and a safe and healthy working environment – are not undermined by technological advancements.

SASK addresses increased **surveillance, algorithmic discrimination**, and **erosion of privacy** by empowering unions to advocate for the inclusion of digital rights in CBAs and by enhancing their capacity through targeted training and advocacy initiatives. **Key efforts** focus on the co-governance of algorithms, combating digital discrimination, and defending collective data rights. For example, in the **public sectors** in the **Philippines and Indonesia**, SASK supports research and trade unions' advocacy efforts on **national data governance** and the UN Digital Global Compact.

SASK addresses **disruptions caused by automation and AI** by supporting life-long learning, robust social security systems, and worker-inclusive decision-making processes on digital tools. Partner unions are equipped to forecast technological disruptions, secure their participation in policy discussions, and negotiate CBAs that address these changes. The efforts focus especially on industrial and food and beverage sectors, where automation significantly threatens job security and working conditions. *For example, in Southern Africa, SASK supports local industrial sector unions to train its members on technological transformation.*

SASK **resists increasing precariousness** in new forms of work by strengthening the capacity of platform workers, enabling them to organise, network, and advocate for improved working conditions. The transport and private services, where platform work is most prevalent, are key sectors in these initiatives. *In the Philippines and Indonesia, SASK supports platform workers to strengthen labour protection and representation of the food delivery riders.* Additionally, SASK supports organisations' advocacy work, including their engagement with the proposed new ILO convention on platform work.

In addition to the above, SASK also leverages **digitalisation as an opportunity** for trade unions. Digital tools are used for strengthening unions by enhancing communication, organizing, and advocacy across borders. *For instance, in Namibia and Zambia, SASK supports trade unions in*

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<sup>12</sup> [UN Global Digital Compact](#).

**database development and digital organising**, enabling them to adapt to new challenges and expand their reach in a rapidly transforming work environment. Promoting fair and inclusive digital transitions, SASK contributes to achieving SDG 8 and SDG 10.

### **Corporate Social Responsibility and Private Sector Cooperation**

SASK works with trade unions and employers to ensure that human rights in the world of work are respected. Corporate sustainability due diligence has become a cornerstone of advancing workers' rights and corporate accountability in the global economy.

International frameworks, such as the binding conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO), the EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD), the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), form the foundation of efforts to safeguard labour rights and promote responsible business conduct.

By enabling Finnish businesses to fulfil their sustainability obligations, SASK provides tools and knowledge to **identify** and **address labour rights issues** in companies' value chains.

SASK has a prominent **history of collaboration** with private sector actors, such as Finnish enterprises Nokia, Metso, Wärtsilä, UPM, Stora Enso, Kesko, SOK, and Stockmann. Recognising the increasing importance of sustainable business practices, SASK is involved to **collaborating with Finnish enterprises** and their value chains in the Global South. Partnerships are particularly impactful in forestry, agriculture, and manufacturing, where adherence to labour standards mitigates risks and enhances supply chain resilience. For retail and consumer goods companies, human rights risks have become apparent long before.

SASK's **global network** consists of **200 local trade unions and national centers in 14 countries** across Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Europe. Through collaboration with *eight Global Union Federations* and their regional and local offices, SASK extends its reach beyond direct partners, connecting with workers' representatives even in countries with no current or past operations. SASK can offer private sector actors assistance in:

1. Building channels through the international trade union network and research institutions linked to labour markets to promote opportunities for meaningful dialogue with rights-holders.
2. Access to research into existing human rights risks by sector and region/country.
3. Receiving expert analysis on changes in the operating environment, for example, labour legislation affecting workers' rights or employers' requirements in different regions or countries.

Concrete **suggestions for cooperation** have already been drafted for selected **three Finnish companies**: Luhta, Ahlström, and Fazer. This selection and the concepts for possible collaboration are based on mappings conducted by SASK in the last three years around potential human rights risks in their value chains.

SASK has had an active **dialogue with Finnfund**, especially since 2020, which has involved exchanging information on operating environments, events participation, and training on ILO fundamental principles and rights at work. Discussions have been held around possible extended cooperation in increasing worker representation and dialogue with trade unions in Finnfund operating locations. Also, SASK **cooperates with Finnpartnership** as it offers a free consulting service (voucher consulting) to companies that have received *Business Partnership Support* and whose projects are challenging concerning environmental, social, and human rights impacts.

The consulting service provides companies with concrete tools for identifying and managing risks during the project's planning and implementation stage.

SASK maintains an active dialogue as a member in networks like FIBS and UN Global Compact ensuring that labour rights remain a priority in trade and investment activities, especially in ODA countries. Due to the extensive research and mapping of human rights risks in different sectors and analyses of labour legislation, the impact of this private sector cooperation is much larger than just entailing the direct private sector partners of SASK.

SASK's objective of operating with the private sector is based on the same principles and values as initiatives like the **EU Global Gateway**, focusing on aligning investments with international labour standards and SDGs with a special focus on the ILO fundamental principles and rights at work. By facilitating just transition efforts and advancing labour rights within clean energy and green technology projects, SASK contributes to Finland's climate and sustainability goals while ensuring social equity.

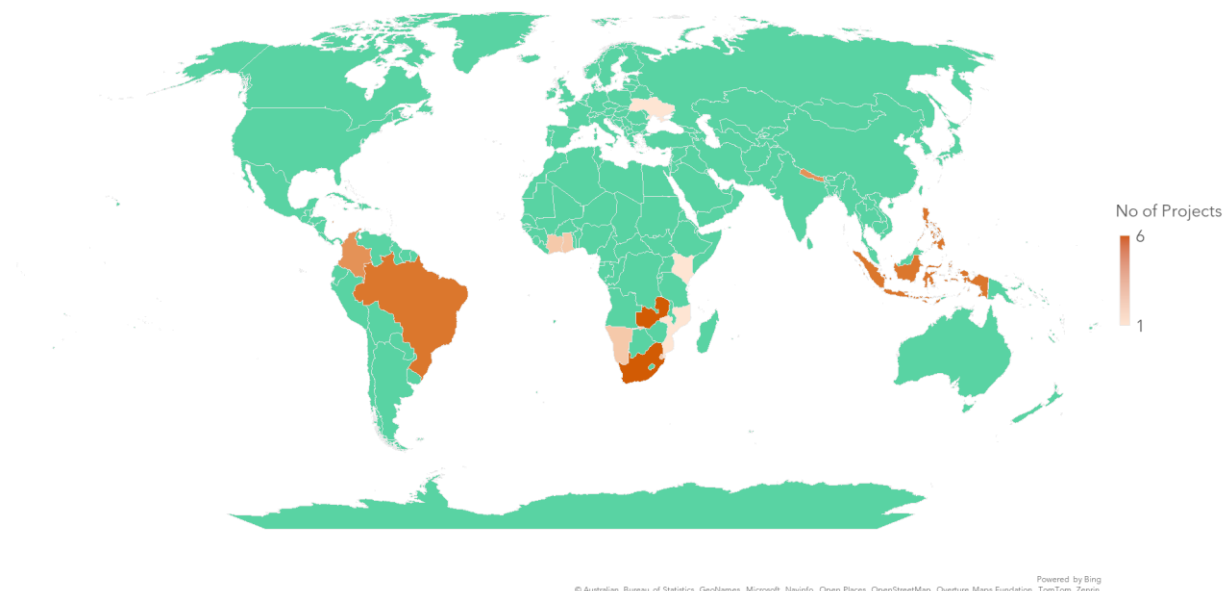
#### 6.4. Operating Environments

SASK has **extensive experience** operating in challenging environments where human rights in the world of work are severely violated, inequality is staggeringly high, and poverty is rampant. In the SASK's programme, the countries are selected using **objective and transparent criteria**, including the ITUC Global Rights Index, the CIVICUS Monitor, and the OECD DAC List of ODA Recipients. Country selection aligns with Finland's development cooperation priorities as outlined in the Report on International Economic Relations and Development Cooperation, which emphasises fostering human rights, democracy, and active civil societies to ensure sustainable societal and economic development.

The **ITUC Global Rights Index** depicts the world's worst countries for workers by rating countries from 1 to 5+ on the degree of respect for workers' rights, providing insights about areas where SASK's interventions are most needed. The **CIVICUS Monitor** identifies nations with restricted civic spaces, ensuring SASK targets regions where workers face heightened risks such as intimidation, violence, and imprisonment without trial. The **OECD DAC list** ensures alignment with Finland's development assistance limitations by focusing on ODA-eligible countries.

SASK's programme consists of **26 projects** and focuses strategically and in a balanced way on **four regions** and **14 countries** with severe human rights violations, high inequality, and deficits in decent work (Picture 4 and Table 3).

Picture 4. Geographical distribution of SASK's projects across continents and countries



In Least Developed Countries (LDCs) such as Mozambique, Nepal, and Zambia, these challenges are intensified by extreme poverty, vulnerability to economic and environmental shocks, and **weak enforcement of human and labour rights**. The LDCs, and LMIC countries like Kenya, The Philippines, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana also face fragility and **severely restricted civic space**, exacerbating the difficulties in advancing human rights and decent work.

Table 3. Operating countries of SASK ranked with relevant indexes and listings

SASK operating countries	OECD / DAC <sup>13</sup>	HDI <sup>14</sup> by UNDP	GINI index <sup>15</sup> 0-100	ITUC <sup>16</sup> (1-5+)	State of civic space <sup>17</sup>	Fragile state <sup>18</sup> (X=yes)	MFA's bilateral partner country (X=yes)	Potential country for private sector cooperation
Brazil	UMIC	0.760	52.0	4	Obstructed			X
Colombia	UMIC	0.758	54.8	5	Repressed			X
Côte d'Ivoire	LMIC	0.534	35.3	3	Obstructed	X		X
Eswatini	LMIC	0.610	54.6	5	Closed	X		
Ghana	LMIC	0.602	43.5	2	Obstructed			X
Indonesia	UMIC	0.713	36.1	5	Obstructed			X
Kenya	LMIC	0.601	38.7	4	Repressed	X		X
Mozambique	LDC	0.461	50.3	3	Repressed	X		X
Namibia	UMIC	0.610	59.1	3	Narrowed			X

<sup>13</sup> [DAC-list](#) of ODA recipients

<sup>14</sup> [UNDP statistics](#) on the human development index

<sup>15</sup> [World Bank statistics](#) on the GINI coefficient

<sup>16</sup> [ITUC Global Rights Index 2025](#) study into violations of trade union rights

<sup>17</sup> [CIVICUS Monitor](#): State of Civic Space (Closed, Repressed, Obstructed, Narrowed, Open)

<sup>18</sup> [OECD's States of Fragility platform](#)

SASK operating countries	OECD / DAC <sup>13</sup>	HDI <sup>14</sup> by UNDP	GINI index <sup>15</sup> 0-100	ITUC <sup>16</sup> (1-5+)	State of civic space <sup>17</sup>	Fragile state <sup>18</sup> (X=yes)	MFA's bilateral partner country (X=yes)	Potential country for private sector cooperation
Nepal	LDC	0.601	30.0	3	Obstructed		X	X
The Philippines	LMIC	0.710	40.7	5	Repressed			X
South Africa	UMIC	0.717	63.0	3	Obstructed			X
Ukraine	LMIC	0.734	25.6	5	Obstructed		X	
Zambia	LDC	0.569	51.5	4	Obstructed	X		

The country selection also covers **strategically selected** upper-middle-income countries, such as Brazil, Indonesia, and South Africa where extreme high-income inequality is coupled with obstructed civic spaces. Nepal and Ukraine are bilateral partner countries of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The country selection allows for opportunities for regional approaches, country-specific projects, and **private-sector collaboration** with Finnish businesses.

The SASK Programme covers **eight sectors**: 1) construction, wood, and forestry, 2) food and agriculture, 3) education, 4) industry, 5) public services, 6) private services, and 7) transport. In addition, the 8) cross-sectoral entity consists of a cluster of projects addressing a specific theme important for SASK such as just transition and trade and investments.

As shown in Table 4, the scope of the SASK programme is extensive. SASK allocates approximately **40%** of the project budget to projects **in Africa** (10 projects), **35%** for projects **in Asia** (9 projects), **19%** to **Latin America** (5 projects), **2%** to **Ukraine** (1 project), and **4%** to **global work** (1 project).

Regarding the government grant, the **allocation** to least developed countries is **23 %**, fragile states **21 %**, and the promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities **3 %**.

**Table 4. Operating countries of the SASK programme**

SASK operating countries	Total employment <sup>19</sup> (non-agriculture)	Total labour force <sup>20</sup>	Number of projects (some in several countries)	Number of local partners	Share of funding
Brazil	91 171 000	107 852 000	5	37	1 203 070 €
Colombia	22 788 000	25 209 000	4	26	649 231 €
Côte d'Ivoire	6 027 000	11 860 000	2	8	283 590 €
Eswatini	224 000	393 000	2	4	263 590 €
Ghana	7 481 000	12 021 000	2	13	368 616 €
Indonesia	99 170 000	144 006 000	5	21	1 419 173 €
Kenya	12 436 000	24 378 000	1	2	202 462 €

<sup>19</sup> [ILO ILOSTAT statistics](#) on employment by sex, status in employment and economic activity.

<sup>20</sup> [ILO ILOSTAT statistics](#) on labour force.

SASK operating countries	Total employment <sup>19</sup> (non-agriculture)	Total labour force <sup>20</sup>	Number of projects (some in several countries)	Number of local partners	Share of funding
Mozambique	3 239 000	13 083 000	1	3	126 154 €
Namibia	559 000	902 000	2	6	339 898 €
Nepal	6 685 000	8 280 000	4	19	894 873 €
The Philippines	35 370 000	47 060 000	5	27	979 488 €
South Africa	15 817 000	24 650 000	6	19	1 125 437 €
Ukraine	13 478 000	17 405 000	1	3	212 308 €
Zambia	2 977 000	7 182 000	6	10	1 052 104 €
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>317 422 000</b>	<b>444 281 000</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>9 120 000 €</b>

According to the ILO statistics, the total labour force in the operating countries is almost half a billion people. Trade unions in the Global South are campaigning at the regional and national level for the ratification and application of the ILO Conventions, for labour law amendments, and for enhancing social security and pension systems. Even a **small improvement in legislation** can have a **big positive impact** on the working population.

## Africa

**Sub-Saharan Africa** faces widespread systemic labour rights violations, with over 90 % of countries restricting workers' rights to unionize, collectively bargain, and the right to strike. Informal employment dominates, leaving millions without labour protection. The ITUC Global Rights Index highlights these challenges, ranking many countries in the region with **systematic** or **regular violations**. Trade unions in the continent are different in size, strength, and ideological and political orientation. They have historically played a crucial role in labour rights, political movements, and independence struggles. Despite government interference, restrictive labour laws, and fragmentation, some unions remain influential, particularly in countries with strong labour traditions like South Africa and Ghana.

SASK's support to Africa **complements Finland's deepening business cooperation**, especially with Mozambique, Zambia, and Kenya, all ranked as fragile countries by the OECD. Through education, capacity, and skills, SASK's support tackles fragility, contributes to the countries' **economic progress**, and improves the lives of many workers. SASK empowers a **broad network** of African trade unions to actively engage in trade and investment processes, particularly within **the AfCFTA framework**. This fosters sustainable industrialisation and regional economic integration, key drivers of Africa's trade transformation. These efforts also enhance the effectiveness of Finnish **private sector collaboration** with the continent.

Finland's work towards gender equality in Africa is complemented by SASK's support to eliminate highly prevalent harassment and discrimination in workplaces and promote women's leadership. **Equality work** includes challenging gender stereotypes and advocating for equal pay. Especially, the construction unions in Zambia participate in gender-sensitive training, mentorship and coaching initiatives, and advocacy and lobbying efforts.

While post-election tensions following the 2024 general elections have subsided somewhat, **Mozambique** continues to face serious political and security challenges that affect civic space, labour rights, and social stability. Electoral processes have been criticised for irregularities and restricted freedoms of assembly, and broader political unrest and protests in 2025 resulted in a harsh response and loss of life, according to human rights organisations.

Trade unions in Mozambique remain active but operate under constrained conditions, including difficulties with union registration and limited social dialogue with the government. Public sector unions have engaged in strikes over poor working conditions and lack of engagement from authorities, while CSOs have reported cases where union registration has been refused. In addition, ongoing insurgency in parts of the country continues to undermine stability and the broader operating environment for trade unions.

Classified as a fragile state by the OECD, Mozambique is lagging in, for example, girls' school enrolment. Finland's **prior focus on education** in Mozambique is fostered by SASK's support of the **education sector unions** to ensure that the Mozambican government meets its SDG 4 commitment. SASK supports them in engaging in social dialogue and policy advocacy for labour rights.

**Namibia** has significant potential in emerging industries and **renewable energy**. At the same time, it faces restrictions on collective bargaining, inadequate enforcement of labour laws, and rising inequality. SASK supports industrial sector unions' advocacy work to achieve labour protection in the **growing green hydrogen industry**, aligning with global sustainability standards. In addition, education sector unions are supported to engage in social and policy dialogue such as the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA).

As the most industrialized country in Africa, **South Africa** faces economic challenges and evolving political dynamics such as engagement in G20 processes. Systemic union busting undermines workers' safety and wages, and the membership rate is declining. Trade unions in the country have historically been instrumental in advocating workers' rights and influencing socio-economic policies. The policies are closely monitored and followed by other African countries and their trade unions. SASK supports South African unions in for example enforcing occupational health and safety standards and fair contracts, especially in the wine industry.

In **Zambia**, where mining and construction expose workers to hazardous conditions, SASK enhances unions negotiation skills and advocates for legislative reforms. SASK's support to **disability inclusion** contributes to Finland's prior cooperation for inclusive economic growth in Zambia. SASK resumes also Finland's work for public sector development: Ranked as a severely fragile state, SASK's support to public sector unions in Zambia will contribute to delivering primary healthcare to underserved communities, especially in rural and peri-urban areas.

In **Eswatini**, SASK combats **extreme political repression** by advocating for international intervention to safeguard union rights. Ranked as a severely fragile country by the OECD in the societal dimension, Eswatini fails in, for example, income inequality, a participatory environment for CSOs, and women's civil liberties. SASK enhances the capacity of the trade unions in Eswatini to **confront legal obstacles** and **anti-union tactics** by the government and promotes the rights to organize, bargain collectively, and promote gender equality.

In **Ghana**, poor governance has led to energy sector problems and emigration of young professionals, especially healthcare staff. The right to organize and join a union is not guaranteed and the right to strike is restricted. Despite the challenges, the country has active, albeit fragmented, unions involved in social dialogue, but their capacity to address, for example, gender equality,

OHS, and migration governance needs strengthening. SASK supports partner unions in strengthening their capacities in private services and confederation TUC Ghana to lobby for worker-friendly legislation, advocating fair labour practices under the AfCFTA.

In **Kenya**, economic instability and political tensions continue to shape the operating environment in 2026. High living costs, public debt, corruption concerns, and youth unemployment have fuelled recurring protests and social unrest, reflecting weakened trust in public institutions and ongoing political fragility. In this context, SASK supports national trade union confederations to advocate for worker-friendly legislation, fair labour practices under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), enhanced social dialogue, and the reduction of labour rights violations. By strengthening union capacity and engagement on economic and social policy, SASK aims to help ensure that labour rights and decent working conditions remain central to Kenya's development trajectory amid persistent instability.

Ranked as a highly fragile country for example in the political dimension, **Côte d'Ivoire** legal protections for labour rights remain insufficient and enforcement weak, and workers continue to face challenges including anti-union discrimination and violations of collective bargaining agreements. Recent high-profile cases have highlighted ongoing disputes over the respect of labour rights by employers, pointing to persistent gaps between law and practice.

In response, SASK supports unions in strengthening their negotiating power along value chains, particularly in the private services and transport sectors, to improve workers' ability to defend their rights and engage effectively with employers and other stakeholders. By building capacity for collective bargaining and advocacy, SASK aims to contribute to more robust respect for labour rights in the Ivorian context.

## Latin America

Although trade unions in Latin America are relatively more organised and have higher unionisation levels in comparison to the other regions of SASK's global work, the systemic labour rights violations, violence against union leaders and strong anti-union policies in several countries undermine the progress of labour rights and the strengthening of union density at a regional level. As highlighted in the ITUC Global Rights Index, the average rating in the Americas hit its weakest since the Index began, worsening to 3.68 from 3.56 in 2024 - Colombia's score is 5, while Brazil's is 4, both below regional average. At the same time, Latin America continues to be a region with growing potential for Finnish commercial and labour interests, as reflected in the recently signed EU-Mercosur agreement, in which key countries in the region, especially Brazil, have remained firmly committed to rules-based multilateralism in a world of multiple democratic, diplomatic, and multilateral crises.

In the 2026-2029 programme cycle, SASK's role is crucial in continuing to advance labour and gender rights alongside a just transition agenda by strengthening existing trade unions, supporting the sustainability of new unions in historically marginalised and fragmented sectors, and promoting international labour standards in Brazil and Colombia. SASK's work in Latin America improves labour rights and strengthens the region's economic ties with global partners and in global supply chains. By ensuring adherence to international standards, SASK empowers workers, enhances corporate accountability, and promotes sustainable economic growth aligning its efforts with SDGs.

Under new leadership since early 2023, **Brazil** improved its rating from 5 to 4 on the ITUC Global Rights Index, marking progress in restoring social dialogue, addressing economic inequality and

building foundation for union growth. SASK supports trade unions advocating compliance with international labour standards in manufacturing, public and private services. SASK supports unions in different sectors, such as public health workers linked to care, several industrial sectors advocating for worker-led just transition policies and energy transition encompassing the pulp and paper value chain and the formal representation of workers in the newly created Brazilian Industrial Council. Also, considering the strategic importance of new infrastructure corridors in Latin America, SASK will begin working with the construction and wood sector unions in Brazil to ensure alignment between these infrastructure projects, environmental protection, just transition and labour rights, therefore creating a stable framework for Finnish companies to align their supply chains with the EU CSDDD and expand business opportunities after the ratification of EU-Mercosur agreement.

In **Colombia**, ranked as the deadliest country for trade unionists for decades violence, systemic inequality, and barriers to unionization remain widespread. On the other hand, the current Colombian government has opened an unprecedented window of opportunity for unions to enhance pro-worker policies, which was utilized by Colombian unions to organise and strengthen unions in historically marginalized and dispersed sectors, achieving to negotiate CBAs for afro Colombian domestic workers, commerce sector workers in supermarkets and fast fashion, guards in private security, and workers in Amazon warehouses.

## Asia

According to the latest ITUC Global Rights Report, Asia remains the second **most treacherous** region for workers' rights, indicating that workers are still routinely exposed to the systematic violation of their rights. 9 of 10 countries in the region violated free speech, restricted right to strike, and impeded the union registration process. It is estimated that the incidence of violence against workers in Asia has almost doubled compared to previous years.

Against this backdrop, **SASK's role is crucial** in advancing labour rights and fostering equitable growth in the region. SASK's operations are centered in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Nepal, where strengthening labour protections, ensuring adherence to international standards, and enhancing corporate accountability are critical issues that must be addressed.

**Indonesia**, as reported by Amnesty International, experienced the most severe human rights setback in 2025, evidently reflected by the deterioration of democracy quality, high numbers of corruption cases, ecological crises, shrinking civic spaces and freedom of speech, as well as widening social gap amidst weak protection of labour rights and social security. SASK plays an integral role in addressing these crucial issues by empowering and building the capacity of trade unions to advocate for labour law reform, occupational health and safety, social security, and other fundamental labour rights, particularly in the country's critical sectors such as manufacturing, mining, energy, wood, and construction. These efforts not only benefit local workers but also align with ethical sourcing demands from Finnish companies under frameworks like the EU CSDDD.

For the past several years, **the Philippines** has remained grouped among the 10 worst countries for trade unionists, with workers facing daily struggle to exercise even the most basic rights in a venomous environment of endemic harassment, violence, and death. Despite changes in governments, corruption scandal, poor law enforcement, red-tagging and police persecution continue to present critical challenges for the country, making it increasingly difficult for workers and unions to struggle for decent wages, job security, and the right to organize. SASK supports the protection of workers' rights through union empowerment and promotion of adherence to ILO

conventions. Through its initiatives, SASK promotes **adherence to ILO conventions**, such as those guaranteeing freedom of association (C87), the right to collective bargaining (C98), and those addressing safe working conditions from violence and harassment, which recently enforced (C190). These efforts are particularly relevant in priority sectors including in health, water, garment, food and beverage manufacturing, and education. These interventions align with international standards, benefiting local businesses while helping multinational companies, including Finnish businesses.

**Nepal's** political landscape has recently undergone an extraordinary change, as the youth-led movement in 2025, fuelled by public frustration over corruption and censorship, has opened the country's path towards more democratic, transparent, and accountable. Although Nepal is not categorised within the same bracket as other Asian countries with more severe violations and harassment of workers, the country continues to face critical challenges stemming from political instability, economic inequality, and climate-related risks. By working collaboratively with trade union partners, SASK supports capacity building, campaigns for protection of fundamental rights protection, and promotes just transition principles, ensuring climate adaptation policies prioritise worker welfare, fostering inclusive and sustainable economic development. Beyond decent work and gender equality, quality education is the key to Nepal's long-term prosperity. SASK's work contributes to SDG 4 by supporting the teachers' unions and promoting an enabling environment for qualified educators and quality education in the country.

## Ukraine

As highlighted in the Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy, Ukraine's geopolitical context has underscored the need for international support to build resilient democratic institutions and the economy and active civil society. SASK programme strengthens the trade union movement as a crucial part of civil society in Ukraine.

Ranked 5 on the ITUC Global Rights Index, Ukraine struggles with **restricted freedom of association** and **insufficient enforcement of labour laws**. Since the start of the war, the Ukrainian government adopted martial laws which impacted political rights and civil liberties. The limitations were agreed by all parties as being necessitated by the conflict, but the martial laws have been augmented by emergency measures brought in without trade union consultation. Emergency laws have allowed employers to disregard fundamental labour rights, left workers with little choice or bargaining power, and sparked fears among trade unionists of being retained once the conflict ends.

During 2026-2029, SASK supports Ukrainian trade unions' capacity to advocate for workers' rights, promote social dialogue, and hold employers and authorities accountable to international labour standards. Ukraine's possible EU accession requires labour market reforms, including guaranteeing rights at work and social protection. These contribute to the realization of decent work.

SASK's work **aligns** with Finland's bilateral support for Ukraine's reconstruction. ILO estimates that almost 9 million workers will be needed to reach the Ukrainian government's GDP target by 2032. In this respect, there is a need to attract workers through decent working conditions and possibilities for skills development. SASK will support skills development training to give employees qualifications to work, for example, in Ukraine's construction sector.

SASK **complements** the Government of Finland's focus on women's role in the reconstruction of Ukraine. Since the country's labour market lacks a male workforce, most of the participants in

skills development training will be women. The huge burden of the reconstruction will be on women's shoulders. SASK's work will address the needs and risks faced by women and equip workers with knowledge on gender sensitivity in CBAs such as parental leave, personal protective equipment for women, and well-equipped restrooms.

## 6.5. Human-rights-based Approach

The programme strengthens the partners' competence and capacity for **promoting and defending human rights in the world of work**. SASK's work is based on the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, and the *UN and the ILO Conventions* on international labour rights—including the right to work, sustenance, living wages, and the right to take part in trade union activities:

- Article 4: prohibition of slavery
- Article 20: right to assembly and association
- Article 23: right to work and remuneration
- Article 24: right to rest and leisure
- Article 25: right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being

**The HRBA is integrated into all stages of SASK's programme**, guiding the identification of challenges, the formulation of objectives, and the implementation and monitoring of activities. The programme's transformative elements are visible in its efforts to address systemic barriers, support collective action, and advocate for improving labour rights and conditions. *The programme applies a **do-no-harm principle** in the HRBA in its planning, implementation, monitoring and cooperation with its partners in order to prevent unintended consequences, such as exclusion, discrimination or risks in safeguarding.*

The programme can be regarded as **human-rights-transformative** as human rights are applied as a process and are fully integrated within it, with an explicit focus on capacity development and advocacy work, seeking to transform societies and eliminate discrimination by addressing root causes. In this, the cornerstones of SASK's work are the **international fundamental rights at work specified in the ILO Conventions**<sup>21</sup> (page 22).

Fundamental documents are also **other global** and **regional human rights instruments** and **guidelines** defining and supporting the rights defined by the ILO, such as The Convention on the Rights of the Child, The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and The United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

A significant element of SASK's HRBA is its **focus on context-specific strategies**. The programme recognises that legislative and social environments vary widely, and in many cases, these frameworks may fall short of upholding workers' rights. In such instances, SASK supports its partners' efforts to influence legislation and advocate for its enforcement. This often involves engaging with local stakeholders, including governments and civil society, to create more inclusive and equitable labour policies. The programme also emphasises **participatory planning processes**, ensuring that the voices of workers and their unions are at the center of goal setting and strategy development.

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<sup>21</sup> [ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work](#)

## Rights-holders and Duty Bearers

The key **rights-holders** are **workers of all genders** across various sectors, who have the fundamental right to decent work, fair wages, and safe working conditions. Trade unions serve as essential tools for workers to organise, advocate for, and enforce their rights, ensuring that their rights are recognised and actively upheld. By strengthening the capacity of trade unions, the programme enhances workers' ability to understand their rights, collectively defend them, and negotiate for better conditions through democratic and representative structures.

The programme further reinforces trade unions' strategic capacity to influence states, **decision-makers**, and **public officials**, who are the **primary duty-bearers** responsible for ensuring that workers' rights are enshrined in national legislation, policies, and enforcement mechanisms. They have the responsibility to *protect* human rights. Also, **companies** are **duty bearers** as they must *respect* human rights.

**At the workplace level**, SASK's programme supports trade unions in representing workers' interests and advocating for the respect of workers' rights. **On the workplace and national levels**, influencing duty bearers to implement and uphold workers' rights remains a core focus of the programme. SASK continues its long-standing efforts to support the international networking of its partners and member unions, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), and the OECD's Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC). These collaborations strengthen partners' capacity to advocate for their members' interests internationally and enhance the visibility of trade unions from operating countries in global decision-making arenas.

## Role of States and Corporations

**Multinational corporations** play a significant role in shaping workers' rights in the Global South. While states are responsible for protecting these human rights, outsourcing the enforcement to corporations is a pervasive practice, particularly where corporations **negotiate exemptions** from **local labour laws**. The EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights provide critical frameworks for holding corporations accountable, requiring them to identify, prevent, and mitigate human rights impacts. These tools align with SASK's efforts to promote Decent Work (SDG 8) and strengthen trade unions in advocating workers' rights.

The programme leverages these frameworks to address gaps where corporate principles provide workers better protection than weak local legislation. By supporting unions to engage with multinational corporations, SASK ensures corporate accountability complements state obligations to safeguard labour rights. Through advocacy and capacity-building, SASK fosters adherence to international labour standards, empowering unions to hold states and corporations accountable. Integrating the CSDDD into SASK's strategic approach strengthens protections for workers and ensures corporations in the Global South contribute to decent work.

## Beneficiaries

**The direct beneficiaries** and key **rights-holders** are the working people of all genders employed in the sectors and countries covered by the programme. They are mainly workers in the formal

economy and informal economy workers who employ themselves in the formal economy's production chain. The estimated number of **direct beneficiaries** is over **5 million**<sup>22</sup> (Table 5).

The direct beneficiaries of the programme include SASK's partner organisations, **200 local implementing unions**, and their activists—even though both also occupy the parallel position of being SASK partners who implement the programme.

The **indirect beneficiaries** (and the rights-holders) are the workers' families who benefit from the trade unions' stronger role and sphere of influence. The average household size in SASK's programme countries is **3,9**<sup>23</sup>. The estimated number of *indirect beneficiaries* is **20 million people**.

**Indirectly**, all working people in the SASK operating countries benefit from the changes in income distribution and the improvement of human rights. Even a **small improvement** in legislation **can have a big impact** on the working population as trade unions in the Global South campaign at the national level for the ratification and application of the ILO Conventions, for labour law amendments, and for the enhancement of social security and pension systems. *According to the ILO statistics, it makes nearly 320 million people* (Table 4 and Table 5).

**Table 5. Beneficiaries of the SASK programme**

<b>Direct beneficiaries</b>	<b>Estimation of their number</b>
Participants in all project activities	150 000
Number of new trade union members	1 000 000
Number of workers covered by CBAs	2 000 000
Number of workers accessing social security schemes	2 000 000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5 150 000</b>
<b>Indirect beneficiaries</b>	<b>Estimation of their number</b>
Family members of workers (average 3,9)	20 085 000
Total employment in SASK operating countries	317 422 000

### **Accountability, Transparency, and Plan for Publishing Results**

The programme embodies the core principles of an HRBA, particularly emphasising **participation** and **accountability**. By fostering active worker engagement in trade union activities—both within their workplaces and broader societal contexts, the programme **empowers** workers to be more involved in shaping their working conditions and advocating for their rights. Additionally, it **enhances** the capacity of trade unions and workers to hold national decision-makers and public officials accountable, ensuring that workers' rights are recognised, respected, and enforced by employers and authorities alike.

A critical component of the programme is its **commitment to transparency**. Through the advocacy and representation of workers' interests, trade unions contribute to greater transparency in decision-making processes at national and workplace levels. Furthermore, SASK prioritises

<sup>22</sup> The estimate is based on SASK's activities in 2022-2024, including participation in project initiatives, the growth of trade union membership, the number of workers covered by collective bargaining agreements, and the number of workers gaining access to social security schemes in the supported sectors.

<sup>23</sup> [UN database on Household Size and Composition 2022](#).

**transparent communication** with Finnish audiences, sharing insights into the rights and conditions of workers in the programme regions, and its achievements and challenges. This is achieved by **programme results** being consistently communicated to Finnish audiences via news updates on SASK's accessible website, social media, and newsletters. Affiliates receive articles to be published on their platforms and channels. The SASK website's results section is regularly updated, with findings shared also in stakeholder events.

Partners within programme countries play a crucial role by relaying these results to rights-holders, ensuring that the programme's impact is understood and appreciated by those it serves. Special attention will be devoted to **enhancing communication** channels with and among SASK's partners, fostering a more cohesive and collaborative effort in promoting workers' rights.

## 7. Risk Management

SASK's risk management system consists of **two mutually supportive processes**: dynamic, which means continuous risk monitoring, and periodic, the annual risk review. The SASK Risk Management Guideline describes the processes, stakeholders, responsibilities, and related documentation along with the SASK's whistleblowing channel mechanism. The risk management plan is structured around the **Risk Management Action Matrix**, a central tool for identifying, monitoring, and mitigating key risks throughout programme implementation. **The most significant risks** and the related preventive measures identified in recent periodic risk assessments can be seen in the Risk Management Action Matrix.

The Risk Management Action Matrix is based on **periodic risk assessments** conducted by SASK staff and reviewed by the SASK Board, ensuring that proactive measures are embedded into the planning, execution, and reporting of the organisation and the programme. Risk management is **integral to the project management cycle**, with responsibilities shared between SASK and its partners. SASK is primarily responsible for overseeing the overall risk management framework, ensuring that risks related to financial accountability, operational capacity, security, and political developments are systematically identified and addressed. In cases where significant risks materialize, SASK works closely with project partners to determine appropriate interventions, whether through budgetary adjustments, resource reallocation, or strategic modifications to project activities.

To understand the significance of each risk and its relationships with other risks, the **first mapping** of the most significant risks' **dependencies or influences** in relation to each other was completed during the recent periodic risk assessment and presented in the Risk Management Action Matrix. The useability and analysis of the mapping will continue to be incorporated into the risk assessment processes during the programme years.

*Potential unintended negative impacts on human rights, gender equality, disability inclusion and the safe participation of marginalized groups are mitigated through inclusive planning, accessibility measures, partner guidance and capacity-building, regular risk assessments and continuous monitoring within the PMEL system.*

## 8. Resources

SASK operates with a **lean yet cost-efficient structure**, ensuring maximum impact with optimised resources. For 2026-2029, SASK has been granted **10 000 000 euros** in funding to implement its programme with 26 projects across 14 countries. SASK requests to withdraw the granted funding in equal shares divided between 2026 to 2029, meaning **2 500 000 euros** annually. SASK's programme budget includes a strong self-financing component from member unions and fundraising contributing **3 345 900 euros** (annually 836 475 euros). The commitment of member unions is also reflected in knowledge-sharing, and peer-to-peer engagement, reinforcing the sustainability and impact of the programme. The programme budget annexes present the detailed funding allocation, personnel, and organisational structure.

The programme is managed by a core team of **10 SASK staff members** (of whom eight are full-time and two are part-time employees) whose expertise ensures effective management, monitoring, coordination, advocacy, communication, and support to partners. Additionally, SASK funds the executive director at its own expense.

SASK has strengthened **its expertise in Ukraine** for the upcoming programme 2026-2029 by hiring a specialist with in-depth knowledge of the country, enhancing its capacity to support Ukrainian trade unions in rebuilding their movement amidst ongoing conflict.

The head office of SASK is in Helsinki and SASK operates **three regional offices** in Indonesia (Jakarta), Mozambique (Maputo), and Brazil (São Paulo) where three local regional representatives monitor the implementation of the programme and provide direct support to partners.