



UNION TO UNION

LO, TCO & SACO GLOBAL

ANNUAL REPORT 2025

UNION TO UNION

LO, TCO & SACO GLOBAL

© Union to Union 2026

Editors: Malin Fagerberg Wikström

Text: Union to Union

Graphic design: Lisa Jansson

Cover: Workers in Ukraine. Photo: Profbud

Illustrations: Lisa Jansson (page 5, 6), Lina Forsgren (page 26)

Print: MULTIPLY, 2026

Union to Union coordinates the work of LO (the Swedish Trade Union Confederation), TCO (the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees), Saco (the Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations) and their affiliates in international trade union development cooperation.

Union to Union

Upplandsgatan 3, SE-111 23 Stockholm, Sweden

Telephone: (Int.+46) (0)8-798 00 00

E-mail: info@uniontounion.org

Website: uniontounion.org

Contents

Foreword	4
Building for lasting impact: Local change through global support.....	5
How we work	6
An international movement	7
The year in figures	8
How we are changing the world	9
STRENGTHENING HUMAN RIGHTS AT WORK	
Independent and democratic trade union organisations	10
PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	
Social dialogue, sustainable supply chains and a just climate transition	12
ORGANISATION THE KEY TO JOB SECURITY AND POVERTY REDUCTION	
Informal sector, migration and precarious work	14
STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S RIGHTS	
Increasing gender equality in the workplace and in trade union organisations	16
Just Transition: Lessons from the Global South	18
“We lost our jobs after being stripped of our right to privacy”	20
The year in brief	22
Global Rights Index 2025	24
Media highlights	25
This is <i>Union to Union</i>	26
<i>Union to Union</i> – Governing Board	27

Foreword

The year 2025 reminded me, time and again, why the trade union movement matters – and why our work requires both patience and determination. We all hope for rapid improvements in workers' rights, but this year underscored something we already know: real, lasting change rarely happens overnight. It grows from the many small and steady steps taken every day by trade unions around the world. This was evident in the meetings and discussions we held with partners globally throughout the year.

One moment that stayed with me came from Bangladesh. There, the union organising metro rail construction workers described a highly mobile and often informal workforce facing significant risks of exploitation and unsafe conditions. Since most construction companies resist union organising, an important first step during 2025 was to engage employers on occupational health and safety (OHS). OHS is central for workers' wellbeing, but it also provides unions with a practical entry point to build trust, open dialogue and gradually organise workers – laying the ground for collective bargaining and decent work. It takes time, but these are the steps that eventually lead to better conditions.

Another important part of 2025 was the continued push for ILO Convention 190. Violence and harassment at work remain a reality for far too many, especially women. Together with our global and national partners, we have fought hard to make the rights in the convention real. By the end of the year, 50 countries had ratified C190. That gives me hope – because it shows what's possible when unions around the world pull in the same direction.

Still, 2025 was also a turbulent year. Democratic space continued to shrink, and reactionary forces gained ground in many places. The ITUC Global Rights Index again showed a decline in workers' rights, with more attacks on civil liberties, on the right to strike and on collective bargaining. These trends affect all of us.

In Sweden, we have seen major shifts in development cooperation since 2022. Sharp cuts in the aid budget and a new direction for international development policy have had real consequences for long-standing partnerships that have helped reduce poverty and strengthen rights for decades. I find this deeply worrying, but 2025 also made clear that *Union to Union's* role remains crucial. With the government's increased focus on Swedish companies and trade, social dialogue is more important than ever. When companies, the state and trade unions sit at the same table, stable labour markets and fair conditions become possible.

In difficult times, it becomes even more important to return to our core: our purpose, our values and the principles that guide our work. Empathy, optimism and courage are not just words – we need them to navigate the uncertainty ahead.

Finally, I want to express my sincere gratitude. To our Swedish union partners, to the global unions, and to national affiliates around the world: thank you for your tireless efforts throughout 2025. It is your persistence and your belief in a fairer world that make progress possible. I look forward to continuing this work together in the year ahead.

Lennart Reinius
Secretary General
Union to Union



PHOTO: ANDERS LÖWDIN

Building for Lasting Impact: Local change through global support

Over the past year, *Union to Union* has developed a new implementing model in preparation for the 2025–2028 program period. In cooperation with Swedish trade unions, their global organisations, and national unions in partner countries, the organisation has developed a model for cooperation that includes the transfer of funds directly to recipient countries. The model aims to make support more effective, context-sensitive, and results-driven.

“This model builds on our past experience while responding to new requirements. By combining local knowledge with global and Swedish union expertise, we can support unions effectively and achieve lasting results,” says Patrik Bergvall, Head of Programme Implementation.

By adopting this approach, *Union to Union* continues to leverage strong partnerships and global expertise, focusing on creating long-term impact for unions and workers. The model complies with Sida’s single-agreement-level require-

ment and is grounded in a systemic approach to sustainable labour market development.

Within the model, it is possible to support both single sectors and, where applicable, cooperation across multiple sectors aiming for similar goals.

1. Single-Sector

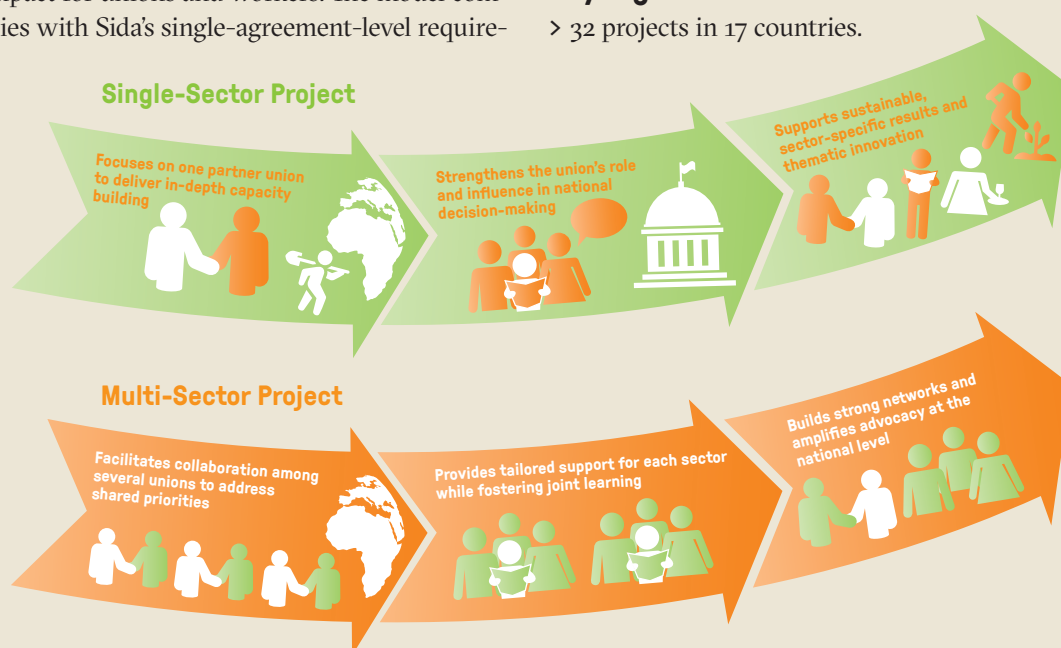
- > Focuses on one partner union to deliver in-depth capacity building.
- > Strengthens the union’s role and influence in national decision-making.
- > Supports sustainable, sector-specific results and thematic innovation.

2. Multi-Sector

- > Facilitates collaboration among several unions to address shared priorities.
- > Provides tailored support for each sector while fostering joint learning.
- > Builds strong networks and amplifies advocacy at the national level.

Key Figures

- > 32 projects in 17 countries.



How we work

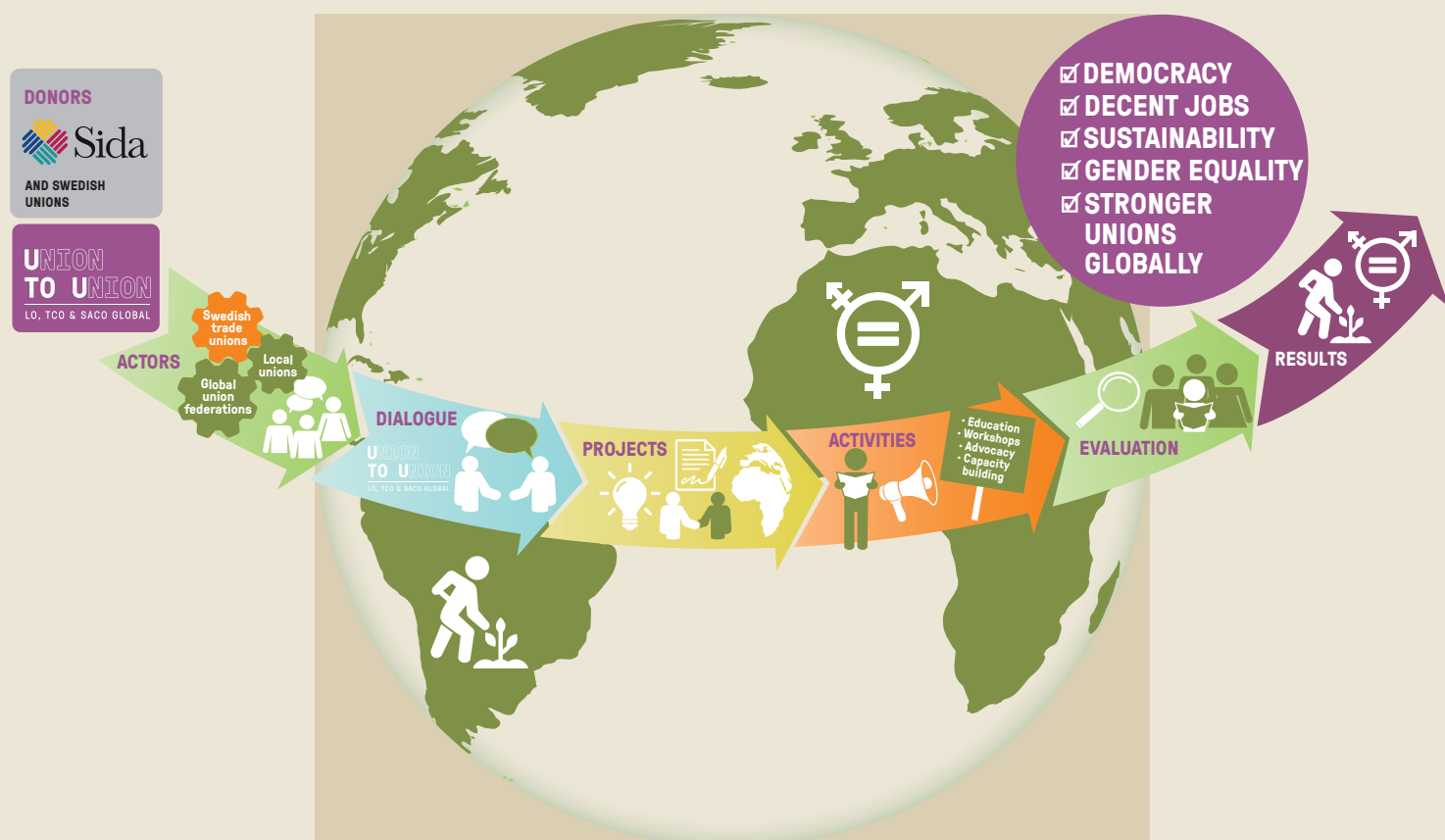
Our work on human rights consists of strengthening the trade union movement and the position of workers in low- and middle-income countries. The interventions we support are mainly focused on strengthening capacity in organising, bargaining, gender equality, a just climate transition and democracy.

Our project activities

In 2025, *Union to Union* supported 55 projects in 64 countries. We are engaged in a wide range of rights-based activities linked to organised and unorganised workers in the formal and informal labour markets. All projects are grouped into four thematic areas. Through our support, we improve the working conditions of people living in poverty and under oppression. This support takes the form of training of trade union repre-

sentatives and building the capacity of members and organisations. Through our advocacy work, trade unions and workers gain a stronger voice in local and international arenas, as well as greater force in the dialogue with companies and governments. Our projects promote good working conditions in production countries, contributing to sustainable global supply chains and a Just Transition.

This work is carried out through a network of *Union to Union* and 28 Swedish trade unions, partnering with global federations worldwide. The projects are based on the principle that every person has the same fundamental rights. Together, we develop our initiatives and adapt our activities to local conditions. In their expert role, the Swedish trade unions contribute experience and knowledge.



An international movement

With more than 200 million members, the trade union movement is the largest social movement in the world, and Sweden's trade unions are part of that network. Most of our projects are performed in partnership with Swedish trade unions and their global federations, but in some cases also with the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). This global, membership-based structure plays a key role in strengthening the local actors we support in their dealings with employers and governments.

Through this global network, we work long term to combat the decline in democracy, and our advocacy work has impact at local, national and international levels. The global federations monitor common trade union issues and influence decisions within the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and other UN bodies.

As companies and labour markets become globalised, this international trade union cooperation is taking on an increasingly important function. That's why global framework agreements exist, establishing fundamental conditions to protect the interests of workers. Agreements are becoming increasingly important tools in the fight to ensure that human rights at work are respected.

What are global framework agreements?

More and more international companies are signing agreements at international level between employers and trade unions. These are what are known as global framework agreements. A corporate group cannot breach the agreement, wherever it operates in the world. Framework agreements govern, for example, pay, safety, prohibition of child labour and trade union rights. Trade unions are able to monitor compliance with agreements and companies are, in turn, supported when they enter markets where it is not possible to sign collective bargaining agreements. For example, since 2015, H&M has operated a global framework agreement that also applies to employees of H&M's subcontractors.

The global federations

BWI – Building and Wood Workers' International
The construction and wood industry.

EI – Education International
The education sector.

FIA – International Federation of Actors
The actors' union.

FIM – International Federation of Musicians
The sector comprising musicians, performing artists and entertainers.

IndustriALL Global Union
The sector comprising the mining, energy/chemicals and manufacturing industries.

ICN – International Council of Nurses
The healthcare sector.

IFJ – International Federation of Journalists
Journalists and media workers.

ITF – International Transport Workers' Federation
The federation of trade unions in the transport sector.

IUF – International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations
The hotels, restaurants, tourism, catering, food and agriculture sectors.

PSI – Public Services International
Social services and the public sector.

UNI – Uni Global Union
The knowledge and services sector.

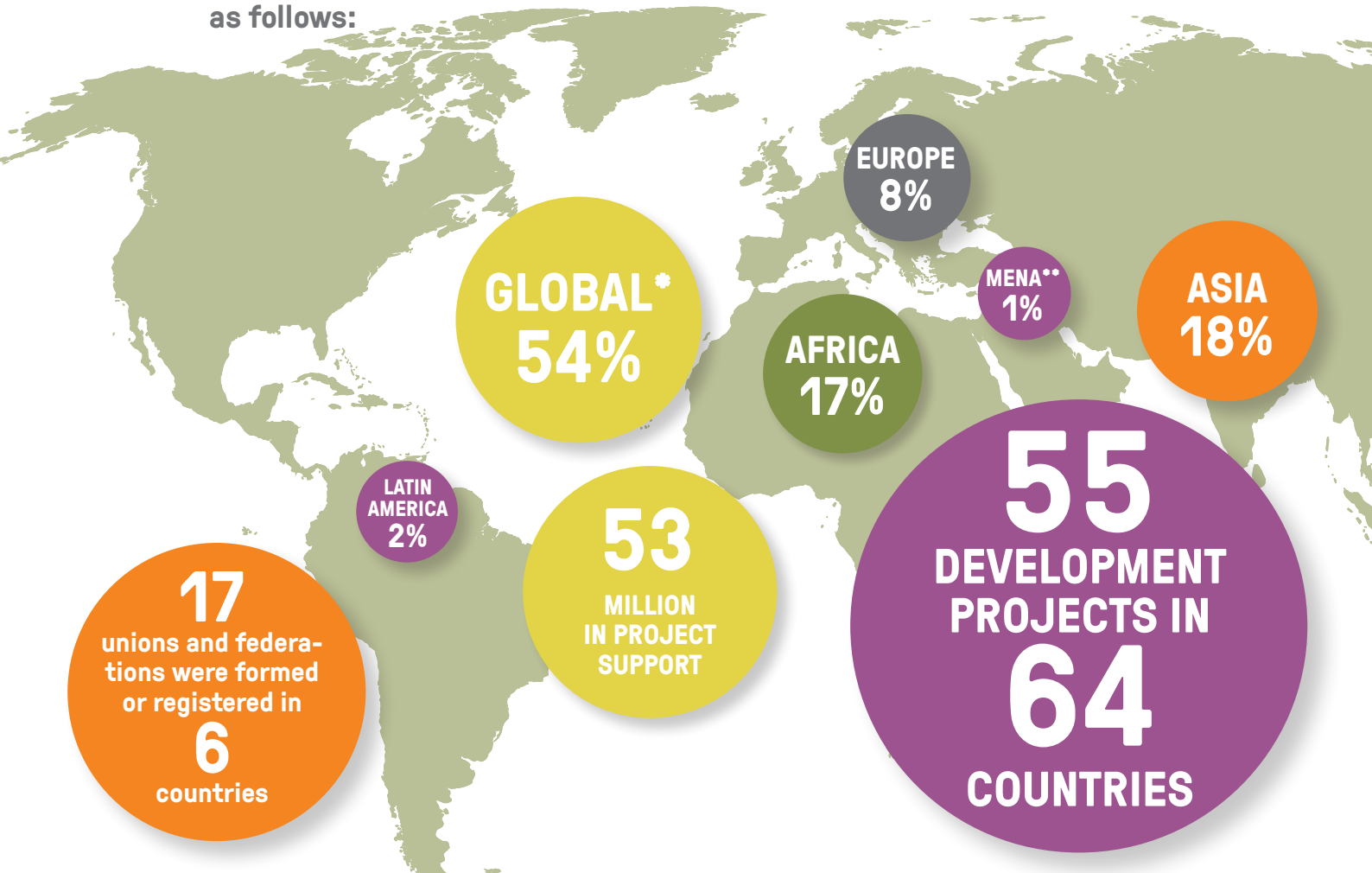
ITUC – International Trade Union Confederation
Federation of national trade union centres.



PHOTO: UNION TO UNION

The year 2025 in figures

In 2025, project support totalled 53 million SEK, broken down by region as follows:



734
collective bargaining
agreements concluded
or renewed by

104
unions in
30
countries

41
collective bargaining
agreements accomplished by

22
unions in
5
countries
introduced or improved
gender equality clauses

26
unions in
12
countries contributed to

20
new laws enacted to
improve
the safety and
security of workers

* Projects in the "global" category are being implemented in several countries, above all in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. In some cases, projects span different sectors, many linked to large multinational companies.

**MENA: Middle East and North Africa.

How we are changing the world

A SUSTAINABLE CLIMATE TRANSITION

The climate crisis affects, above all, those who are already the poorest and most vulnerable. Digitalisation and environmental impact are redrawing the map of the labour market.

As societies readjust, jobs will disappear, change and be created. That is why trade unions are working globally in support of a Just Transition.

Union to Union focuses on skills development to better equip trade unions in low- and middle-income countries for negotiation and engagement in dialogue on climate change, biodiversity and decent work.

Alongside the global trade union movement, we are pushing for the new jobs created to be green, socially sustainable and with decent working conditions.

INFLUENCE!

Today, democracy is under severe pressure and trade unionists are living a dangerous life in many countries. We and our partners are exerting pressure on policy makers, organisations, politicians and businesses to increase the scope for decent work, today and for the labour market of the future. The aim is that workers in low- and middle-income countries should be able to influence and improve their rights and lives by organising as trade unions.

MORE DECENT JOBS!

An estimated two billion workers currently work in the informal labour market, which often means that they lack basic security – the security that comes with formal employment and collective bargaining agreements.

An absolute condition for creating more decent jobs in the world is the existence of strong, independent and equal opportunity trade union organisations. With the support of *Union to Union*, local trade unions work to ease the path for, and develop, trade union organising around the world.

STRONGER DEMOCRACY!

All over the world, labour rights are being violated and restricted. To examine how human rights are being respected in the world of work, the ITUC presents the Global Rights Index every year. The survey is conducted with the support of *Union to Union*. In 2025, the Global Rights Index showed that workers were subjected to violence because of their trade union involvement in 40 countries, trade union activists were killed in 5 countries and were arrested or detained in 71 countries. We work to ensure that decision-makers in Sweden and around the world defend democracy and human rights.

GREATER GENDER EQUALITY!

Lower pay, poorer working conditions and harassment in the workplace are daily facts of life for many women across the world. Work to advance gender equality is integral to every trade union development project supported by *Union to Union*.

ILO Convention 190 – addressing violence and sexual harassment at work – is an excellent example of such work. The Convention was adopted by the UN's labour rights agency, the ILO, in the summer of 2019.

LESS POVERTY!

The aspiration for decent work focuses on living wages, social protection and a sustainable socio-economic environment that makes financial independence possible for workers and their families.

Research and experience show that strong trade unions and collective bargaining agreements are effective tools in the fight against poverty. By supporting the development of free, democratic and equal opportunity trade unions around the world, *Union to Union* is playing a part in reducing poverty.

28 unions in **7** countries

have made significant steps towards incorporating Just Transition demands into their agreements and planning and have succeeded in uniting their efforts in order to engage governments and companies in Just Transitions issues.

38 unions in **21** countries

have updated their policies and bylaws, to integrate gender equality and LGBTQI rights, including union-backed complaint and reporting mechanisms to tackle, investigate and address harassment and gender-based violence at workplaces.

STRENGTHENING HUMAN RIGHTS AT WORK

Independent and democratic trade unions

WHAT IS THE AIM?

To strengthen independent, representative and democratic trade union organisations that are able to efficiently organise new members and conduct successful trade union work with respect for human rights in the workplace.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Democratic space is shrinking across much of the world
- Millions of workers are not being paid a living wage and are working in dangerous and unhealthy conditions
- Strong unions are essential for decent conditions and sustainable jobs for the workers of the world
- The labour market is changing – increased digitalisation, more precarious jobs, the climate crisis and rising poverty following the Covid-19 pandemic.

ZAMBIA MINERS WIN HISTORIC WAGE INCREASE

In Zambia's volatile mining sector, unions coordinated bargaining across eight collective bargaining agreements (CBAs), securing a 15% wage increase in 2025. This safeguarded miners' purchasing power amid rising living costs and demonstrated the importance of collective bargaining for economic stability in high-risk industries.

CAMBODIAN UNIONS EXPAND WORKERS' VOICE

In a region with increasing restrictions on union access, Cambodian unions grew by 15% (8,307 new members), organised 23 previously unorganised factories, and secured a new collective bargaining agreement (CBA). This proactive expansion strengthened workers' voice in highly competitive export industries and showed that unions can grow even under challenging conditions.

EUROPE: WORKERS GAIN STRONGER AGREEMENTS

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the wood and paper union signed a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) covering wages, benefits, and severance pay. In Ukraine, construction unions negotiated the 2025–2027 Sectoral Agreement, improving wages, safety, and social protections. These achievements show how unions can strengthen social dialogue and secure better conditions for workers across diverse European contexts.



What was the most important insight from 2025?



Aaron Medina

Coordinator of the National Youth Committee of PSI Honduras, Youth Secretary of the Central Executive Board of the Union of Workers of Medicine, Hospitals and Similar Services of Honduras (SITRAMEDHYS)

For me, one of the main achievements in 2025 under the *Union to Union* project in Honduras was creating real opportunities for young people and women – groups that have historically faced multiple barriers to their full participation and development.

Beyond the numbers, what mattered most was the strengthening of collective confidence and the growing recognition of ourselves as agents of change within our communities and organisations.

The training spaces not only provided practical tools for leadership and decision-making, but also opened up new aspirations, increased participation and strengthened a shared vision for the future. This shift in mindset and collective commitment is, without a doubt, one of the most lasting impacts of the project.



Nikola Nikolić, CATUS, Serbia

One important lesson is the importance of turning knowledge into something that is useful in everyday union work. In occupational safety and health, stronger communication and exchange of experience helped increase awareness among members, especially younger workers.

The experience showed that progress depends not only on initiatives at leadership level, but also on how effectively information is shared and understood across the organisation.



Marko Subotic, Union of Free Trade Unions of Montenegro (USSCG), Montenegro

The experience in 2025 shows that trade union strength grows through dialogue and shared platforms. The Trade Union Consumer Basket has helped create a common reference point for discussing the cost of a dignified life, bringing together unions, institutions, employers and experts.

At the same time, activities such as the Trade Union Academy highlighted the value of engaging members in practical ways that strengthen participation and internal capacity. Overall, these experiences confirmed that cooperation increases both relevance and influence.

TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Social dialogue, sustainable supply chains and a just climate transition

UKRAINE UNIONS ADOPT FIVE-YEAR RIGHTS PLAN

Ukrainian construction union launched a 2025–2030 Program of Action focusing on workers' rights, social dialogue, training, safety, gender equality, and youth engagement. Establishing Youth and Women's Committees strengthened democratic governance and inclusive leadership, ensuring long-term organisational renewal.

JOURNALISTS' UNIONS SECURE RIGHTS ACROSS CONTINENTS

The project strengthened union capacity and social dialogue in the media. In Serbia, 160+ journalists gained permanent contracts and full labour rights, while in Colombia, unions influenced 2025 labour reforms to protect journalists. These results show how unions can protect workers' rights even in sensitive sectors.

EGYPTIAN UNIONS BREAK BARRIERS IN SOCIAL DIALOGUE

Despite severe restrictions on union freedoms, Egyptian public-sector unions increased membership by 30%, strengthened women's organising through new committees, and won three seats in the Supreme Council for Social Dialogue. This rare recognition opened new space for workers' voices in national policy debates.

WHAT IS THE AIM?

For trade unions to have the capacity to effectively engage in wide-ranging social dialogue and collective bargaining in order to make a contribution to sustainable global supply chains and a just transition.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Good relationships between the social partners are crucial
- Decent work reduces poverty and increases equality
- A just climate transition will create decent and sustainable jobs

What was the most important insight from 2025?



Reyna Concha, *Coordinator of the PSI Women's Committee in Peru*

One of the most important insights from 2025 was how targeted training can shift both confidence and influence. Through the Just Transition project, more women gained knowledge on climate change and took a stronger, more active role within our organisations. Trainings – both virtual and in-person – alongside a university course in Argentina, strengthened our capacity to engage and shape agendas.

Equally important was learning how to turn knowledge into action. It is not enough to participate in workshops; real change requires applying commitments in daily union work. This includes advocating internally and externally, and integrating environmental issues into union priorities.

A concrete result has been the inclusion of Just Transition clauses in collective agreements. This shows that when women are equipped with the right tools, they can influence outcomes.

Another key lesson is the need to raise awareness among workers about climate change and strengthen preparedness for natural disasters. Protecting the environment is inseparable from protecting jobs, health and futures. When women's voices are strengthened, they drive more inclusive and sustainable change.



Sandra van Niekirk, *PSI Climate Change Coordinator, South Africa*

Since 2016, there has been a clear shift in how climate issues are understood. Workers are now directly experiencing impacts such as heat, flooding and hazardous conditions, affecting both their safety and service delivery.

Focusing on these impacts, and using collective bargaining and social dialogue to adapt working conditions, has helped unions identify both practical improvements and broader structural changes needed for resilient and sustainable public services.

Public service trade unions in Zambia, Kenya, Tunisia and Egypt now have the confidence and knowledge to integrate climate change into their core work. A key entry point is highlighting climate-related occupational health and safety risks facing workers – from emergency responders to health and energy workers.

Leadership confidence has also strengthened, enabling unions to engage more assertively with governments on climate policy, particularly in Zambia where structured dialogue is emerging.

ORGANISING IS THE KEY TO JOB SECURITY AND REDUCING POVERTY

Informal sector, migration and precarious work

WHAT IS THE AIM?

For trade union organisations to have the capacity to improve conditions for workers in the informal economy, for migrant workers and for workers with insecure work.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- A growing global gig economy
- Migrant workers face discrimination and exploitation
- Negative trend from labour market deregulation

INDIA TRANSFORMS PRECARIOUS WORK INTO STABILITY

In India, unions helped 4,200 new members and regularised 500 temporary workers, providing social security, predictable income, and representation. Women especially benefited, showing that unions can convert precarious employment into stable jobs with rights protection.

NORTH AFRICAN UNIONS SECURE MIGRANT WORKERS' RIGHTS

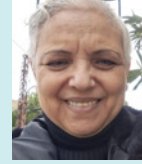
Thirteen unions in Jordan, Tunisia, and Algeria revised bylaws to guarantee migrant workers' right to organise. In Tunisia, migrants gained voting rights in union structures. Negotiations with the Ministry of Health and the World Health Organisation (WHO) ensured universal access to health services, turning human rights principles into daily practice.

NIGERIAN UNIONS DEFEND INTERNALLY DISPLACED WORKERS

Unions launched Nigeria's first IDP (internally displaced persons) training manual, recruited 200+ members in displacement-affected areas, and delivered medicines, vaccines, and food. Linking workers' rights with humanitarian needs positioned unions as key actors in national debates on displacement and public services.



What was the most important insight from 2025?



Nisreen Masri,
*Member of the Executive Board
of Social Work Specialists
Syndicate, Lebanon*

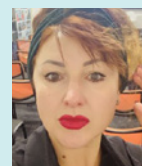
Real impact is built on trust and grounded in lived experiences. By working closely with migrant and refugee communities over time, we saw a clear shift – from being treated as beneficiaries to being recognised as rights-holders and potential union members.

The experience also showed how important it is to stay flexible and responsive. Whether during COVID-19 or the war in Lebanon, adapting to people's real situations made the work more relevant and grounded in lived experiences.

Another key lesson is that sustainability does not happen automatically – it needs to be built in from the start. Tools such as information and awareness-raising materials help ensure that knowledge and engagement continue beyond the project itself.

We also saw the importance of strengthening the role of trade unions in national and global discussions on migration and refugee rights, bringing a clear focus on public services and workers' rights perspectives.

In the end, the insight is simple: lasting change happens when people are seen, heard and organised – and when their experiences shape both the work and the solutions.



Yana Shcherbynska, *Advisor
and Lawyer, Confederation of
the Free Trade Unions of Ukraine
(KVPU)*

One key insight from 2025 is that labour market transformations driven by war, digitalisation and economic change are increasing vulnerability and pushing more workers into informal and precarious forms of employment.

We saw that reaching these workers requires new approaches. Decentralised support systems, such as consultation hubs, proved to be effective entry points for workers in informal or unstable jobs to access support, organise and connect with trade unions.

Another important lesson is that formalisation cannot rely on enforcement alone. Workers need to see clear economic and social benefits in order to move from informal to formal employment. Providing legal support, handling individual cases and building collective organisation are all essential parts of creating these pathways.

The experience also showed that trade unions need to engage early in emerging sectors – such as demining or platform-based work – to prevent informal and insecure conditions from becoming the norm.

Ultimately, the insight is clear: in rapidly changing labour markets, building trust, offering practical support and organising workers on their own terms are key to addressing informality and strengthening workers' rights.

STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Increased gender equality in the workplace and within trade union organisations

WHAT IS THE AIM?

For trade unions to lead the way in promoting gender equality and combating discrimination in the workplace, in society and in their own organisations.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Structural inequalities between men and women
- To increase safety and security
- To improve equality in the workplace and in society

WOMEN'S RIGHTS ADVANCE ACROSS MENA

In seven MENA countries, unions promoted women's rights, achieving legislative and policy reforms in Palestine, Lebanon, Egypt, and Jordan. Workplace interventions secured 25+ collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) or policies annually addressing gender inequality and preventing violence, reinforcing women's role in labour markets and unions.

BRAZIL SETS BENCHMARK FOR WOMEN & YOUTH INCLUSION

Five unions negotiated collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) with measures on gender-based violence, maternity protection, daycare, equal pay, and job security for workers with disabilities. These agreements promoted inclusion of women and youth in industrial workplaces, setting an example for gender-responsive collective bargaining.

NORTH AFRICAN UNIONS INTEGRATE GENDER & SAFETY

Membership in North African unions grew from 71,075 to 123,399 (2021–2025). Projects combined organising with gender equality and workplace safety measures, established a Just Transition unit in UGTA (Algeria), and increased attention to psychosocial work environments and climate risks, showing structural commitment to inclusion.



What was the most important insight from 2025?



Evrım Yaban, *project coordinator and gender expert, KESK*

A key insight from 2025 is that even in a restrictive environment, progress is possible through collective action and sustained cooperation. In Türkiye, where trade unions and women's rights organisations face increasing pressure, results depend on coordinated efforts rather than isolated initiatives.

Within this context, work on gender equality contributed to concrete steps, including the adoption of gender equality and anti-violence policy documents in several unions and stronger participation of women in union structures.

At the societal level, advocacy efforts also had visible effects. A joint campaign and legal action against the Directorate of Religious Affairs contributed to increased public debate and a reduction in openly hostile statements. These efforts, together with broader cooperation with women's organisations, helped strengthen collective responses to violence against women.

At the same time, the experience confirmed that formal commitments such as equal representation are not sufficient on their own. Sustained implementation and strong organisational structures are necessary for lasting change.



Juwairiah Salem, *President of Health Workers Union, West Bank, Palestine*

All project activities are coordinated closely with the unions, helping to build a stronger sense of ownership and belonging. The partnership has provided both technical and moral support – increasing visibility, credibility and offering structured tools for organising.

Workshops on gender equality, negotiation and international labour standards have helped strengthen how equality principles are integrated into union work. These spaces have not only provided training, but also contributed to new ways of thinking and acting within the union.

As one reflection puts it: "The trainings did not only build our skills; they changed how we think. We now use rights-based language and feel stronger in negotiations."

” The transition must focus on decent work—secure jobs in energy, mining, and technology. It is not only about more jobs, but sustainable jobs with good conditions.

Ramon Certeza, IndustriALL Asia-Pacific



Photo: Prashanth Vishwanathan/IWMI

Just Transition: Lessons from the Global South

While much has been written about the climate transition, the role of trade unions and workers is often overlooked. To fill this gap, *Union to Union* commissioned a study exploring how Just Transition is understood by local actors in the Global South. The findings reveal that climate action is not only a technical challenge – it is also a social, economic, and labour issue.

In many countries across Latin America and Asia, Just Transition is closely linked to labour conditions, inequality, informal work, and control over natural resources, rather than only energy or climate policy. Local actors often see it as part of a broader struggle for rights, security, and influence within their communities. As Manali Shah from India, interviewed for the study, emphasises:

“Workers’ needs cannot be determined from above. A just transition looks different in each country – solutions must be rooted in local realities.”

The Global Dimension of Fairness

The study highlights the global dimension of fairness. Transition frameworks shaped in the Global North often reduce Just Transition to decarbonisation, without fully addressing power, inequality, and broader socio-ecological change. Meanwhile, the rising demand for minerals for batteries and renewable energy is driving a new wave of “green extractivism,” shifting social and environmental costs to other regions. While emissions may fall in the North, pressures on land, water, and communities rise in supplier countries. A transition cannot be considered just

if it worsens conditions for workers and communities elsewhere.

Including Informal Workers

In many partner countries, more than half the workforce is employed informally, often without social protection or union representation. Ignoring these workers risks leaving the most vulnerable behind. Organising, social dialogue, and integrating local perspectives are essential for fair and locally owned transitions.

Concrete examples from the study illustrate these challenges. In Indonesia, the collapse of parts of the forestry industry forced unions to rethink strategies and ways of working. In Bangladesh, trade unionists stress that social dialogue – open conversations between government, employers, and unions – is central to managing change effectively.

Union to Union in Action

Union to Union works closely with local unions to support these efforts. In Bangladesh, for example, unions have facilitated discussions between government, employers, and workers to ensure that climate and energy transitions benefit communities and workers alike. Across interviews and case studies, three priorities emerge: social dialogue as a core governance mechanism, education and training to help workers navigate technological and environmental changes, and a focus on sustainable jobs with good conditions, aligned with the Decent Work agenda.

“The transition must focus on decent work – secure jobs in energy, mining, and technology. It is not only about more jobs, but sustainable jobs with good conditions,” says Ramon Certeza, IndustriALL Asia-Pacific.

Facts

- The first phase of this multi-phase study covers Latin America and Asia; future phases will include Africa and Eastern Europe.
- It takes place amid overlapping crises, where climate change intersects with inequality, democratic backsliding, resource conflicts, and declining living conditions—particularly in the Global South.
- The study combines documentary analysis with remote qualitative fieldwork, including semi-structured interviews and case material.



Sebastian Caballero Paz,
*climate expert at Union to Union
in 2025*

Why should trade unions work with climate issues?

Climate change is already affecting working conditions in many parts of the world – both in formal employment and in the informal economy. The impacts differ across sectors, but the common factor is that they affect people’s everyday lives and livelihoods.

Trade unions have an important role in defending rights, but also in shaping how the transition is designed. For it to be fair and sustainable, solutions must be based on local experiences, which means that trade union voices need to be included from the very beginning, not invited in afterwards. Trade unions can act as a bridge between global goals and people’s concrete realities.

Which climate issue should receive more attention in the global world of work?

One issue that is often overlooked is how the transition affects workers in informal and precarious employment, for example in agriculture and parts of the service sector. These groups are often invisible in climate discussions, even though they are affected both by climate change and by the measures introduced in response to it.

There needs to be greater focus on strengthening trade unions’ ability to analyse climate issues based on their own contexts, both locally and by sector. There is also a need to develop ways of working that enable dialogue and cooperation with other actors. This makes trade union action more relevant, grounded and effective.

If you could change one thing in global climate action, what would it be?

More open decision-making processes where local actors, including trade unions, have a clear place. This is not about more bureaucracy, but about making climate action more rooted in real-world conditions.

Trade unions also need to be equipped with the tools to analyse, influence and cooperate. This is a capacity that must be built step by step.

“We lost our jobs after being stripped of our right to privacy”

At the Yuanhua gold mine in Zimbabwe, women workers were subjected to illegal HIV testing and dismissed regardless of the results. With the support from the Zimbabwe Diamond and Allied Minerals Workers’ Union (ZDAMWU) the women took up the fight against the company.

When rumours about her HIV status began to circulate at the Chinese-owned mine, everything changed. “We were suddenly taken in a van to a clinic for testing. After that, I was dismissed.”

She had worked as a cook at the Yuanhua gold mine in Zimbabwe for over a year. Like many other women at the site, her job included cooking, cleaning and washing for the male workforce – in a workplace marked by unequal power and precarious conditions.

But what followed was not only a violation of privacy. According to the worker, who wishes to remain anonymous, the situation was linked to sexual harassment by a person in a position of authority.

“That’s when I realised that the Chinese who wanted to sleep with me was behind it.”

The HIV testing was not voluntary, it targeted women, and it was illegal. Under Zimbabwean law, no employer has the right to force workers to undergo HIV testing or disclose their HIV status. Yet the women were taken for testing without consent – and dismissed regardless of the results.

“We lost our jobs after being stripped of our right to privacy,” the woman continues.

The case is not isolated. Research by Industri-ALL Global Union, conducted together with the University of the Witwatersrand’s Southern Centre for Inequality Studies, shows that sexual harassment and exploitation are widespread in Chinese-owned mines in Zimbabwe. The study highlights how supervisors often prefer to hire so-called “small Maria” – women perceived as easier to control – reinforcing patterns of coercion, vulnerability and abuse of power.

At this mine, more than 60 male workers were not subjected to testing, while women were singled out.

The case could have ended there, with silence, fear and impunity. Instead, ZDAMWU intervened. The union engaged management, raised the violations, and pushed for change.

Justice Chinhema, General Secretary of ZDAMWU, says:

“This was a clear abuse of power and a violation of workers’ rights. We had the tools and capacity to document it, confront management and demand change.”

The pressure led to results. The illegal practice of mandatory HIV testing was stopped, management issued an apology, and workers reported a reduced sense of fear and an increased sense of dignity at work.



Photo: ZDAMWU



” This was a clear abuse of power and a violation of workers’ rights. We had the tools and capacity to document it, confront management and demand change.

Justice Chinhema, General Secretary of ZDAMWU

For the women affected, however, the consequences remain. The mine has since suspended its operations, and the workers are now seeking compensation for lost income and damages. The case is still under conciliation at the National Employment Council for the mining industry.

For the worker interviewed, the support of the union has been crucial:

“The union helped us understand that what had happened was a violation of our rights and encouraged us to pursue the matter.”

Union to Union and trade union capacity in Zimbabwe

The Zimbabwe Diamond and Allied Minerals Workers’ Union (ZDAMWU) is part of *Union to Union’s* broader support to trade unions in Zimbabwe. Through collaboration with IndustriALL Global Union and local partners, the work focuses on strengthening unions’ capacity to address workplace violations, improve organising, and respond to issues such as gender-based violence and harassment, precarious work and workers’ rights violations.

THE YEAR IN BRIEF



PHOTO: UNION TO UNION

Union to Union supports Ukraine's construction sector

At the end of 2025, *Union to Union* received funding from the Swedish Institute for an 18-month project to strengthen Ukraine's construction sector. The initiative brings together Swedish and Ukrainian trade unions and employers to increase cooperation, promote social dialogue, map occupational health and safety risks, and develop training for Ukrainian vocational teachers. Ukrainian teachers will participate in study visits to Sweden, digital learning modules, and workplace observations, while pilot projects will help companies align with EU standards, supporting both reconstruction and EU integration.

Global deal advances labour rights in football tournaments

Union to Union's Advocacy Officer Ruben Wågman was in Geneva for the signing of a historic agreement between the global union Building and Wood Workers's International (BWI) and International Federation of Association Football (FIFA), a major step forward for workers' rights at football tournaments worldwide. The five-year deal includes workplace inspections, rights training, and complaint systems, along with annual progress reports. These measures aim to improve safety, transparency, and trade union influence after years of labour rights concerns at World Cup construction sites.



Ruben Wågman, *Union to Union*.

A milestone for workers' rights in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is now the only country in South Asia to have ratified all ten fundamental ILO conventions, marking a historic step toward safer and more respectful workplaces. Ashutosh Bhattacharya, Regional Secretary of Industri-ALL South Asia Office, says, "This is the result of years of trade union work to stop violence and harassment, improve working conditions, and prevent risks. Now this must be translated into real legislative reforms."



PHOTO: INDUSTRIALL

From incident to action: Kenyan unions strengthen safeguards

When a female trade union employee in Kenya reported sexual harassment by a senior union leader, it became a catalyst for change. With support from *Union to Union* and technical expertise from Tarucca East Africa, unions addressed the case while launching broader initiatives to strengthen transparency, prevent harassment and corruption, and create safer organisational cultures. Seventeen unions have now reviewed



their systems and begun implementing concrete action plans. Desmond Katana Harrison of the Musicians' Union of Kenya says, "We thought we were already addressing these issues, but we realised that active and deliberate engagement is needed. An anti-corruption plan is important, but so are participation, practical approaches, and a clear path forward." With clear

methods and locally anchored work, tangible results are possible, and *Union to Union* will now apply these experiences in other countries.



PHOTO: UNION TO UNION

Trade union voices in Almedalen

During Almedalen Week – Sweden's annual Politicians' Week on Gotland – *Union to Union* highlighted global trade union rights amid war, aid reforms, and growing threats to workers' rights. We joined discussions on Ukraine's EU integration and the role of trade unions in rebuilding democracy. Together with Fair Action, we also hosted a seminar on migrant workers' role in global supply chains, featuring Annika Strandhäll (Swedish Social Democratic Party) and Gudrun Brunegård (Christian Democrats).

What was the biggest challenge of 2025?



Victoria Kirchhoff,
Chair of Union to Union

The biggest challenge this year has been ensuring effective cooperation between our partners under new conditions. This has required us to rethink our approaches, develop new ways of working, and at the same time stay focused on our shared mission. In a context where resources are more limited and expectations remain high, maintaining alignment and trust across different actors has been both demanding and essential.

A moment you remember from the year?

A particularly strong moment was receiving confirmation that funding has been secured for the coming years. This is crucial for our partner organisations, who work every day to improve working conditions and strengthen trade union rights – especially at a time when these rights are under increasing pressure in many parts of the world. The decision provides stability and enables long-term planning, which is vital for creating lasting impact.

What do you take with you going forward?

Looking ahead, I take away the strong commitment and broad expertise within the organisation, both at the secretariat and among our partner organisations. I am also encouraged by the resilience and dedication shown by our partners, often working under very challenging circumstances. Together, this provides a solid foundation and a sense of confidence for the work ahead, even in an increasingly complex global context.

UNION
TO UNION
LO, TCO & SACO GLOBAL

Global Rights Index 2025

The 2025 Index* reveals a worsening global crisis for workers and unions. Average country ratings deteriorated in three out of five global regions, with Europe and the Americas recording their worst scores since the Index's inception in 2014.



87%
OF THE WORLD'S COUNTRIES VIOLATE THE RIGHT TO STRIKE



ONLY 7 OUT OF 151 COUNTRIES RESPECT TRADE UNION RIGHTS

SWEDEN NORWAY DENMARK ISLAND IRLAND GERMANY AUSTRIA



HANDS OFF TRADE UNIONS

TRADE UNION ACTIVISTS ARE KILLED, IMPRISONED AND SILENCED



THE 10 WORST COUNTRIES FOR WORKERS

BANGLADESH BELARUS ECUADOR EGYPT ESWATINI MYANMAR NIGERIA (NEW) PHILIPPINES TUNISIA TURKEY



80%
VIOLATES THE RIGHT TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING



ONLY THREE COUNTRIES HAVE IMPROVED THEIR SCORE

AUSTRALIA (2) MEXICO (3) OMAN (3)



72%
INFRINGEMENTS ON WORKERS' LEGAL RIGHTS



SWEDEN IS ONE OF THE FEW COUNTRIES THAT STILL HAS THE HIGHEST RATING —BUT FOR HOW MUCH LONGER?

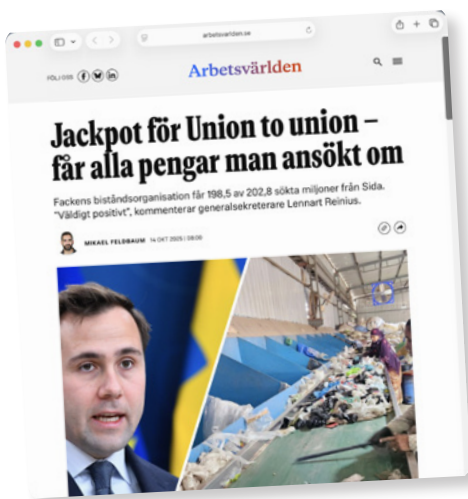


TRADE UNION RIGHTS = DEMOCRACY

*Countries are rated in clusters from 1-5+ depending on their compliance with collective labour rights. There are five ratings, with 1 being the best rating and 5+ the worst rating a country could get. The level of economic development, size or location of the country is not taken into account given that fundamental rights are universal and workers in all parts of the world must have access to them. Read more at www.ituc-csi.org/global-rights-index

Media highlights

During the year, *Union to Union* continued to engage in public debate and comment on developments in development aid policy. Through op-eds, statements and media coverage, we have brought trade union perspectives to the fore and stressed the importance of strong international support for decent work globally.



This is Union to Union

Union to Union is the joint international cooperation development organisation of The Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO), The Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees (TCO), The Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations (Saco) and affiliates. Our focus is on creating strong democratic trade unions and more decent jobs. We do this by providing financial support to projects involving workers' organisations and to democratic trade unions that stand up for workers' rights. Our work helps tackle poverty and promote democracy through the right to organise and bargain collectively for better economic and working conditions. We also engage in advocacy to help bring about a more just and equitable world.

Our vision

Union to Union's vision is a world in which trade union, and other, human rights at work are respected, protected and secured. This means giving all workers the opportunity to come together to improve their situation in the belief that acting as an organised group is more effective than acting alone. We operate in a spirit of gender equality, solidarity, democracy and sustainable development, where there is no place for poverty or discrimination.

Our activities

Union to Union supports and coordinates the activities of LO, TCO, Saco and their affiliates in international trade union development cooperation. Activities are funded by grants from Sida (the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency), Swedish embassies and funds from the Swedish trade union movement. *Union to Union* is a strategic partner organisation working with Sida.

Personnel and organisation

Union to Union has an office in Stockholm with 12 employees, where activities are guided by an overall strategy set for the 2022–2027 period. The Board consists of representatives of Swedish trade unions and is appointed by the central organisations LO, TCO and Saco. The Board sets the main direction of our work.

We have been in existence since 1977, originally operating under the title of LO-TCO Biståndsnämnd (the LO-TCO Secretariat of International Trade Union Development Cooperation). When the central organisation Saco joined in 2015, the name *Union to Union* was adopted, together with a new constitution for the organisation. *Union to Union* is a politically and religiously non-aligned organisation.



Union to Union – Governing Board

PHOTO: PRESS PHOTO



Chair: Victoria Kirchhoff, 1st Vice President, Unionen (TCO)

PHOTO: MAGNUS LANJE



Deputy Chair: Heike Erkers, Chair, the Swedish Union for Professionals (Saco)

PHOTO: LO



Deputy Chair: Louise Olsson, First Vice President, Swedish Trade Union Confederation, LO

PHOTO: DANIEL ROOS



Martin Gunnarsson, Secretary of the Swedish Metal and Industrial Workers Union, IF Metall (LO)

PHOTO: SKR



Barbro Andersson, Vice President, Swedish Municipal Workers' Union (LO)

PHOTO: TERESE PERMAN



Kim Söderström, Chair, the Swedish union for construction workers Byggnads (LO)

PHOTO: LO



Leif Isaksson, Ombudsman, (LO)

PHOTO: VISION



Sonia Koppen, 2nd Vice President Vision (TCO)

PHOTO: ULF HUETT



Sineva Ribeiro, President of the Swedish Association of Health Professionals (TCO)

PHOTO: EVA EDSJÖ



José Pérez Johansson, International Secretary (TCO)

PHOTO: KNUT CAPRA PEDERSEN



Peter Olding, Federation Secretary (Saco)

PHOTO: SWEDISH TEACHERS' UNION



Robin Smith, 1st Vice President, Swedish Teachers' Union (Saco)

**UNION
TO UNION**

LO, TCO & SACO GLOBAL

Union to Union

Upplandsgatan 3, SE-111 23 Stockholm, Sweden

Phone: +46 (0)8 798 00 00

E-mail: info@uniontounion.org

Website: uniontounion.org