

Global Union Outlook

2025

CHALLENGE FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

12.4%

of the world's young people are unemployed.

CLIMATE AFFECTS WORK ENVIRONMENT

71%

of the world's workers are affected by extreme heat.

THE BITTER TRUTH

87%

of the world's governments violate the right to strike.

Around the world



PHOTO: EAK/SHUTTERSTOCK/IT

Together we are strong – that is why over 190 million workers worldwide are members of free trade unions.

Theme: **Global trade union work**

Organising brings strength

Times change, but one truth remains constant: It is possible to change society. If we organise. That is why the trade union movement is the **world's largest popular movement** with 191 million members across the globe. [Page 2](#)

AROUND THE WORLD

Here you can read LO's annual overview of the world from a trade union perspective.

LO PRESIDENT



PHOTO: LO/ALMA WACH

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'If we allow those in power to weaken us in one country, it could happen here in the future.'

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PHOTO: ANDY REBER

Taking on Trump

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Year in review for the worlds brave trade unionists

At this time of year, the media begins to fill up with year-in-review articles covering every conceivable and inconceivable angle: economics, politics, sports, music. There are even annual reviews of train delays. But there is one topic that is not usually covered in annual reviews: **all those who devote their daily lives trying to improve wages and conditions for themselves and their colleagues**. In short: all the millions of people around the world who are active in trade unions.

This was one of the reasons why the Swedish Trade Union Confederation, LO, began publishing Global Trade Union Outlook a few years ago. It is a review of what has happened in the world during the year, but from a trade union perspective. We think that is important. Because what happens to workers in other countries also affects us. If we allow employers and politicians to weaken us in one country, it could happen here in the future.

Trade union rights are now being undermined in more and more countries. In many places, you even risk your life if you join a trade union. It can therefore be easy to feel discouraged when you look at the world in December 2025. But that is exactly what the world's dictators and big business executives want us to feel. They are wrong. Because the world can be changed, if we are many who decide to do so.

In this year's Outlook, we therefore do not only describe setbacks. You can also read about those who have not given up but are continuing to fight.

In July, cleaning workers in Colombia formed their own trade union, despite years of harassment from employers and authorities. In Mauritius, the union is working to protect migrant workers by providing them with training and other support in their native language. In Indonesia, the trade union movement succeeded in repealing a law that undermined employees' rights. In South Korea, the union won a historic victory when it got rid of legislation that allowed employers to hide behind subcontractor chains.

We report on all this and much more in Global Trade Union Outlook 2025. We hope that you and other readers will find it useful. Hopefully, our outlook will provide new thoughts and ideas, thereby contributing to our joint efforts to change the world.



Johan Lindholm
President of LO

An unequal world

There is considerable uncertainty surrounding the global economy and labour market. One important reason for this is **Donald Trump's various trade policy initiatives**.

US tariffs on imports have risen to their highest level since 1933, which is already beginning to show in rising unemployment and fewer job vacancies. According to the IMF, the International Monetary Fund, a strict immigration policy also risks reducing the number of people of working age, which could become a problem in countries with an ageing population.

More tariffs could also spread and trigger retaliation, leading to a race to the bottom that no one will benefit from in the long run. The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), of which LO, TCO and Saco are members, has long emphasised that working conditions and wages must not be sacrificed in order to attract investment or strengthen trade.

The fact that Trump's various whims have such an impact is because the US economy is large enough to influence the whole world. Almost 84 million jobs in 71 countries are linked to American consumer demand. Approximately two-thirds of these jobs are in Asia and the Pacific region. However, the countries with the highest proportion of jobs dependent on the US, 17 per cent, are Mexico and Canada.

European criticism

The US is the EU's most important trading partner. The risk of a decline in income from this trade is putting pressure on growth and jobs in Europe. Reduced trade between the US and China could also mean increased Chinese exports to Europe, which could hit industry. Above all, this affects broad groups of ordinary workers.

In September, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen delivered her annual State of the Union address. In her speech von der Leyen highlighted, among other things,



PHOTO: MINA RAD

Workers around the world have received an increasingly smaller share of total income.

the importance of strengthening the position of workers in the labour market and a proposal for a Quality Jobs Act. The proposal does not yet contain any details, but it was welcomed by the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC),

of which LO, TCO and Saco are members, provided that it contains real changes.

In a speech to EU leaders that same month, ETUC General Secretary Ester Lynch emphasised that Europe's path to greater competi-

tiveness must focus on increased investment in people and technology, not on undermining the protection of employees and their rights.

New living wage

In April, the UN agency ILO (International Labour Organisation), together with the ITUC and the international employers' organisation IOE, launched the first ever programme on living wages. According to the definition that has now been agreed, a living wage is 'the wage level necessary to provide workers and their families with a reasonable standard of living, taking into account the conditions in the country and calculated for work performed during normal working hours'.

At the same time, the ILO shows how inequality in the world continues to increase. The share of income earned by workers worldwide, known as the wage share of the economy, has fallen from 53 per cent to 52.4 per cent over the past ten years. This may not sound like much, but if the share had remained unchanged, global labour income today would have been over two billion higher in just one year.

Technological changes have also played a role in inequality. Technology has increased productivity, but workers have not received a fair share of the profits. The ILO also warns that recent developments in artificial intelligence (AI) could further widen the gap. According to the ILO, the only way to counteract this is through policies that ensure that everyone benefits from technological advances and that AI is not only used to reduce corporate costs but also leads to increased productivity.

The so-called platform economy¹ was one of the most important topics discussed at the ILO's annual Labour Conference (ILC) in June. The ITUC has called for this sector to be regulated, which employers and some governments have rejected. The decision was that the ILO should work towards a convention on the platform economy.

Reduced development aid

At the same time as the gaps have widened, extreme poverty has decreased in recent decades. However, there are still large differences between different parts of the world. Development in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, has virtually stagnated while the rest of the world has pulled ahead.

Development aid also plays a major role here. Donald Trump has drastically reduced aid by, among other things, closing down the US aid agency USAID. Although the US aid budget

amounted to only 0.2 per cent of GDP, the US has long been the world's largest aid donor in terms of actual money. The decision is a blow to many of the world's aid organisations and UN agencies, but above all, it has meant a crisis for the tens of millions of poor people who have relied on US support for education, healthcare, agricultural development and emergency relief.

The US withdrawal from the global stage also opens up space for other powers on the international arena, not least China. One major geopolitical change, for example, is the emergence of BRICS, the cooperation between China and other major emerging economies, particularly in the global South. The aim is to create a counterweight to the US and the rest of the Western world. The trade union organisations within BRICS have their own coordination, which together has far more members than the ITUC. Several of the organisations included in the BRICS coordination are neither democratic nor independent.

High youth unemployment

Global unemployment is currently just over five per cent. However, youth unemployment is more than twice as high, currently standing at 12.4 per cent. The global job gap, i.e. the number of people who want and are able to work but cannot find employment, currently stands at 402 million. This is a decrease from 500 million four years ago. In addition, two billion people work in the informal sector.²

The ILO also points out that more than a fifth of the world's young people are neither working nor studying. For young women, the figures are even higher. The proportion of young women who are neither working nor studying is 28.2 per cent in 2024, which is more than twice as high as among young men.

Work-related illnesses and injuries cause the deaths of almost three million people every year, according to the ILO. Nine out of ten deaths are due to work-related illness. The rest are workplace accidents. In addition, nearly four million employees suffered work-related injuries.

28 million people worldwide are subjected to forced labour. This is an increase of 2.7 million since 2016. Most forced labourers, more than half, are in Asia and the Pacific.

Child labour has decreased by 22 million since the turn of the century, according to the ILO and the UN Children's Fund UNICEF. However, there are still 138 million children in child labour, 54 million of whom work in hazardous

FACTS DEGREE OF ORGANIZATION

Trade union membership in the OECD³

| | |
|----------------|----|
| Australia | 13 |
| Austria | 27 |
| Belgium | 50 |
| Canada | 30 |
| Czech Republic | 11 |
| Chile | 20 |
| Colombia | 5 |
| Costa Rica | 15 |
| Denmark | 66 |
| Estonia | 67 |
| Finland | 56 |
| France | 10 |
| Germany | 17 |
| Greece | 20 |
| Hungary | 7 |
| Iceland | 90 |
| Ireland | 25 |
| Israel | 24 |
| Italy | 34 |
| Japan | 16 |
| Korea (South) | 20 |
| Latvia | 13 |
| Lithuania | 8 |
| Luxembourg | 33 |
| Mexico | 12 |
| Netherlands | 18 |
| New Zealand | 19 |
| Norway | 52 |
| Poland | 12 |
| Portugal | 15 |
| Slovakia | 11 |

environments that endanger their health and development.

Global union message

Ahead of the meeting between the finance ministers of the G7 countries, the world's seven leading industrialised nations, in Canada in May, the trade union confederations in all G7 countries, known as the Labour Seven, issued a joint statement.

The collective trade union message was clear: without a radical change in economic policy, governments and central banks risk further increasing inequality. The Labour Seven therefore called for interest rate cuts and increased investment in welfare and green energy. To finance this, the trade union movement proposes, among other things, taxation of wealth and capital income, a tax on financial transactions and strengthened international cooperation against tax evasion. ●

¹ Platform economy refers to economic activities mediated through digital platforms, which often lack fundamental rights for workers.

² The informal sector refers to jobs that lack formal employment, such as street vending, crafts, domestic services, barter trade and subsistence farming.

³ The OECD is an international organisation for economic cooperation.

Climate change – a trade union issue



According to the ITUC, at the current rate of development, the world **will not meet the Paris Agreement's target** of keeping global temperature rise below 1.5 degrees. Despite international agreements, many countries are not meeting their emission reduction targets. At the same time, progress is often thwarted by companies that profit from carbon dioxide emissions.

At the UN Climate Change Conference COP 30 in Brazil in November, the ITUC raised the following demands:

- Workers must be given a formal place at the negotiating table. Trade unions must be allowed to participate in climate negotiations through social dialogue and collective agreements, both nationally and internationally.
- Workers must be protected from the negative effects of climate change. Today, many people fall ill and lose income during heat waves, with women being particularly hard hit.
- Governments must ensure a just transition with jobs, training and security. Poverty, inequality and unemployment must be combated.
- A platform for international exchange of experience is needed where countries can share good examples, learn from each other and integrate the workers' perspective into national climate plans.

One issue that the international trade union movement has particularly highlighted is heat stress at work, i.e. the fact that more and more employees are forced to work in extremely high temperatures. A new report from the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the World

Meteorological Organisation (WMO) shows that extreme heat currently affects more than 2.4 billion workers worldwide, or 71 per cent of the global workforce. According to the report, an estimated 18,970 deaths and 22.87 million occupational accidents each year are linked

to excessive heat. The ITUC is therefore calling for, among other things, mandatory risk assessments of heat in the workplace, collective agreements on protection against extreme heat and laws that recognise high heat as a workplace hazard. ●

Trade unions for peace




PHOTO: AKHERE UNUABONA

Trade unions have always been a peace movement.

The trade union movement has always played an important role for peace and continues to do so. Trade unions help to reduce inequality, which reduces conflict. By promoting negotiations between employers and employees, we contribute to **resolving conflicts peacefully**. By supporting democratic processes and institutions, trade unions help to create societies where conflicts can be resolved through dialogue. The trade union movement also plays a major role in post-war reconstruction.

Today, we are seeing the largest increase in defence spending since the Cold War, a development that, in Europe, has been driven by the threat from Russia. The trade union movement in Europe has not opposed increased defence spending per se but points out that it must be weighed against other costs. Otherwise, there is a risk that many governments will instead cut back on welfare and social security.

Together with the International Peace Bureau and the Olof Palme International Centre, the ITUC has produced the report *For Our Shared Future*, calling for joint security measures such as mutual nuclear disarmament, demilitarisation and a new social contract for trade union rights, full employment and social justice. LO is actively participating in the collaboration on the report and in the work to  implement its proposals. ●

Democracy under threat

For the first time in over 20 years, there are now fewer democracies than authoritarian states in the world. **Less than a third**, 28 per cent, of the world's population **currently lives in democracies**. This is according to the latest annual report from the V-Dem research institute.

The downward trend includes both democratic breakdowns in countries that were previously democratic and further deterioration of democracy in already authoritarian states. But it also includes authoritarian developments in established democracies, such as the United States and Israel.

The extent of the democratic decline varies between regions. Democracy is more common in Western Europe and North America, as well

as in parts of East Asia and the Pacific, Eastern Europe and South America. Authoritarian regimes dominate in the Middle East and North Africa, South and Central Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa.

Anti-democratic corporations

In Eastern Europe, authoritarian rule has strengthened in countries such as Belarus, Hungary, Russia and Serbia. In South and Central Asia, democracy has weakened in India and Mongolia. Other populous countries are also moving towards authoritarian rule, such as Bangladesh and Pakistan. Among the bright spots is Brazil, where democratic development has strengthened since the left-wing Lula da Silva won the presidential election in 2022. Much of the de-democratisation is driven by economically powerful countries with significant international influence, such as China.

Democratic freedoms are also threatened by the concentration of economic power, which enables a small group of billionaires to exert



PHOTO: ERNIE JOURNEYS

Fewer and fewer countries are governed democratically.

disproportionate influence over global decisions.

The ITUC has reviewed global corporations that systematically oppose trade union and other human rights. The worst companies on the ITUC's list are Amazon, Anduril, Meta, Northrop Grumman, Palantir, SpaceX and Vanguard. Blackstone Group, ExxonMobil, Glencore, Meta, Tesla and The Vanguard Group. ●

Trade union rights

There is a worsening global crisis for trade union rights, according to the ITUC's annual Global Rights Index. At the same time, there are examples around the world where **trade union activists have fought and succeeded**. However, in a growing number of countries, trade unions are classified as 'foreign agents', especially if they receive support from sister organisations in other countries.

87 per cent of the countries surveyed violated the right to strike, 80 per cent violated the right to collective bargaining and 75 per cent excluded workers from the right to form or join a union. In 40 countries, trade union activists were subjected to violence. In 71 countries, they were imprisoned or arrested. Trade union activists were killed in Cameroon, Colombia, Guatemala and Peru, among other countries.

The right to strike was restricted during the year in Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Burundi, Costa Rica, Egypt, Finland, Nepal, Rwanda, Senegal, Tunisia and Zimbabwe. Several

countries introduced laws against strikes in the public sector, for example in Italy, or declared strikes illegal in municipal services, as in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In Moldova, Panama and the Philippines, employers routinely refused to apply collective agreements.

In around 30 of the countries surveyed, including Jordan, Mauritania, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Thailand, migrant workers are prohibited from organising in trade unions. Often, certain groups of public sector employees are prohibited from organising, such as security

FACTS COUNTRIES AT RISK

The ten most dangerous countries for trade union activists in 2025¹

- | | |
|---------------|----------------|
| 1. Bangladesh | 6. Myanmar |
| 2. Belarus | 7. Nigeria |
| 3. Ecuador | 8. Philippines |
| 4. Egypt | 9. Tunisia |
| 5. Eswatini | 10. Türkiye |

guards in Rwanda, firefighters, prison staff and coast guards in Japan, and prison staff in the Bahamas and Türkiye. In special economic zones, such as in Bangladesh and Haiti, no employees have the right to freedom of association. ●

¹ The list omits countries where the dictatorship is so harsh that the situation regarding trade union rights cannot even be investigated, such as North Korea and Afghanistan.

A look around the world

Europe

Western Europe remains the most democratic region in the world, according to V-Dem. In Eastern Europe, the picture is bleaker. One third of the region, including Georgia, Hungary, Moldova, Romania and Serbia, is now moving in an authoritarian direction. Belarus is today a pure dictatorship. Several countries have also been subjected to Russian influence operations, including Moldova, Armenia, Georgia and Romania. However, two countries are moving in a democratic direction according to V-dem: Montenegro and Poland.

Developments in Türkiye under Erdogan continue rapidly in an authoritarian direction. The latest example is the regime's prosecution of the largest opposition party, the social democratic CHP. Authorities and employers systematically suppress employees' rights and persecute trade union activists. The right to collective bargaining is severely restricted and workers who try to organise are dismissed.

Stronger rights in Britain

When it comes to trade union rights, Europe as a whole is clearly better off than the rest of the world. One bright spot in the past year has been the British Labour government's New Deal for Working People, which includes improved employment protection, higher minimum wages, stronger collective agreements and increased trade union influence. The proposal has been welcomed by the British trade union movement, which has long been pushing for such changes.

Almost three-quarters of European countries violated the right to strike, almost a third of them arrested workers and over half denied or restricted access to legal redress.

In countries such as Armenia, Greece, the Netherlands, Moldova and North Macedonia, so-called yellow, i.e. employer-controlled, trade unions have emerged and been encouraged by the authorities.

In North Macedonia, however, trade unions have rallied in opposition. After years of abuse, unpaid wages and discrimination, textile work-

ers in the North Macedonian city of Shtip, for example, started the country's first independent trade union in the textile sector, Glasen Sindikat. Despite attempts by the government to exclude them from national dialogues, the organisation has now built strong networks

and gained support from both the Palme centre and the Swedish union Handels as well as the ILO.

Arrests in Belgium

In Belgium, a new law has been introduced that criminalises 'malicious attacks on state authority', which can be used against protest actions. In June, several trade union members from the central organisation CSC-ACV were arrested during a strike against the privatisation of a supermarket chain. In October, the trade union confederations gathered thousands of demonstrators in Brussels to protest against the Belgian government's welfare cuts.

In Italy, the right-wing government led by Giorgia Meloni has restricted the right to strike. When thousands of striking metalworkers in



Paul Nowak, President of the British Trade Union Congress (TUC), has welcomed the Labour government's labour market reforms.

Bologna demonstrated for a new collective agreement this summer, it was reported to prosecutors under the new security legislation. The government has also ended most of the tripartite social dialogue between the state, trade unions and employers.

In France, President Macron and his government have implemented a series of changes that have been met with trade union resistance, such as the deterioration of labour law and restricted rights for the unemployed. On 18 September, the French trade union movement held nationwide protests against the social cuts the government was trying to push through in its budget.

Anti-union laws in Finland

Finland's right-wing government has implemented tough anti-union legislation, including weakened employment protection and restricted strike rights. Trade unions now risk fines of up to €150,000 for organising strikes that are later deemed illegal. Individual employees can be fined €200 for participating in a strike, money that must be paid to the employer. Finland's long-standing tripartite cooperation has been eroded to a mere formality, with a sharp decline in trade union influence.

Georgia has introduced a series of laws that weaken employees' rights. Parliament has also passed a law against 'foreign influence' whereby trade unions that receive financial support from sister organisations in other countries can be convicted of 'promoting the interests of a foreign power'. Serbia has shortened the time limit for bringing labour law cases to court and, by raising fees, has made it more expensive for employees to obtain legal protection.

Despite sustained international pressure, the government of Belarus has continued its systematic persecution of independent trade unions.

Trade union leaders and other opposition figures have been sentenced to long prison terms. In September, however, a large number of political prisoners were released, including Aliaksandr Yarashuk, president of the BKDP trade union confederation, and Hennadz Fiadynich, former president of the REP trade union. Those released have now been forced into exile. Through Union to Union and the Palme centre, LO continues to support the Belarusian trade union movement.

Oppression in Russia

Independent trade union organisation is not permitted in Putin's Russia. Those who try to organise are imprisoned or subjected to harassment. At JSC Blagoveshchensk Valve Plant, the chairman of the local trade union club was

assaulted by the plant manager. Despite documented injuries, the authorities refused to even investigate the incident.

In Ukraine, the situation is unique due to Russia's war of aggression. In the parts of Ukraine occupied by Russia, brutal oppression prevails. All attempts at independent organisation, such as trade unions, are crushed.

Even in free Ukraine, however, there are worrying examples of restricted trade union rights. The Ukrainian parliament has passed several laws that undermine employees' rights. Workers in companies with fewer than 250 employees are exempt from collective agreements. Other laws increase working hours in 'strategic sectors' and make it easier for employers to breach agreements. In June, government agents entered the premises of the trade union confederation FPU and ordered employees to leave the building.

Strong right wing in the EU

Since last year's European Parliament elections, the number of parliamentarians with ties to the trade union movement has decreased. The European Commission also has a clearer right-wing bias than ever before.

On 23 September, the ETUC organised a large protest march in Brussels against the erosion of trade union rights in the European Commission's so-called OMNIBUS Directive. The ETUC believes that the proposals currently on the table are insufficient to prevent unscrupulous companies from violating human rights and, on the contrary, increase corporate impunity.

In May, ETUC member organisations met in Belgrade for their mid-year conference. At the meeting, the so-called Belgrade Declaration was adopted, setting out the European trade union movement's goals for a fair, sustainable and democratic Europe. According to the declaration, the goals of the European trade union movement should be:

- A Europe where all people – regardless of what they do, where they come from and who they love – are fully respected and share in the benefits of the European values we advocate.
- A Europe where we work together to create a fair, sustainable, secure and inclusive economy that benefits workers – and where workers benefit from technological developments rather than becoming victims of them.
- A Europe that addresses social and security issues by creating a society and economy that suits our citizens today and tomorrow – a safe, peaceful, prosperous, fair, sustainable, respectful and inclusive Europe that all its citizens are proud to support and be part of. ●

North America

Both the United States and Canada are democratic countries, but there are significant differences between them. Canada has a social system that is more reminiscent of Europe than the United States. Canada also has a strong labour movement compared to the United States and a higher level of unionisation, at around 30 per cent. The social democratic party NDP is the country's third largest party and has close ties to the trade union confederation Canada Labour Congress (CLC).

According to V-Dem, democracy in the United States has clearly weakened since Donald Trump came to power. The independent judicial system has been attacked, as have the media and universities. According to the head of V-Dem, Staffan Lindberg, by autumn 2025 the United States can no longer be considered a full democracy.

Trump has also launched a broad attack on trade union rights. Shortly after taking office, he announced that no new collective agreements with government employees would be approved. In January this year, he dismissed the chief legal officer of the US National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). He has blocked a proposal to tighten workplace safety regulations for coal miners, abolished the minimum wage and overtime pay for home care workers, and scrapped a previous plan by Joe Biden that would have prevented employers from paying disabled workers less than the federal minimum wage.

Despite Trump and the Republicans' strong anti-union stance, public opinion among Americans has gradually become more union-friendly in recent years. According to a survey conducted by the American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organisations (AFL-CIO), two-thirds of Americans today have confidence in trade unions, which is the highest figure in a long time.

At the same time, opposition to Donald Trump is growing in the United States. In October, millions of Americans took part in nationwide demonstrations against Trump under the slogan 'No Kings'. In November, socialist Zohran Mamdani was sensationally elected mayor of New York, partly with the support of New York's AFL-CIO. The Democrats also enjoyed success in several regional and local elections. ●

Latin America

Most Latin Americans live under more or less democratic regimes with elected governments. Authoritarian states include Haiti, Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela. However, Haiti is so ravaged by gang warfare and conflict that it is questionable whether there is any government at all.

For trade union activists, Latin America has long been the most dangerous region in the world. In almost 90 per cent of Latin American countries, the right to strike is violated. In six out of ten countries, trade union activists were imprisoned. Death threats and physical attacks are common, and five trade union members were killed during the year. In Colombia, for example, Jhon Jarry Vargas Sarabia, a member of the oil workers' union, was shot dead in Tibú.

In Argentina, right-wing populist President Javier Milei has introduced a series of anti-union laws. Labour legislation has been severely undermined. Strikes and peaceful assemblies have been criminalised. Those who nevertheless attempt to organise such activities risk up to six years in prison. Argentina's trade union confederation, the CGT, has reported widespread police brutality and mass arrests during public demonstrations.

Violations in Costa Rica

In Costa Rica, trade union rights are restricted

by harsh laws and regularly violated by employers. In the public sector, strikes have been completely banned in areas that the government considers particularly important. In the private sector, it has become increasingly difficult to form trade unions because the authorities have made registration more difficult. The law also prohibits migrants from holding leadership positions in trade unions. As migrants make up 95 per cent of Costa Rica's agricultural and construction industries, this law means that a large number of workers have no trade union representation whatsoever.

Only one per cent of Panama's workers have access to collective bargaining, mainly due to threats and restrictive legislation. As a result, it is practically impossible to form trade unions in more than 90 per cent of companies. Workers who try to organise are regularly subjected to threats, dismissals and, in some cases, death threats.

The attacks have intensified during the year, including against the construction workers'

union SUNTRACS. In February, thousands of construction workers affiliated with SUNTRACS staged an hour-long national protest. The government responded with a violent police intervention and arrested 514 workers.

The conflict mainly concerns mining and a heavily criticised pension reform. Among other things, the union has criticised the government for handing over national assets to foreign mining companies. The government has responded by freezing union assets, imprisoning union leaders and forcing several of them into exile. Among them is SUNDTRAC president Saul Méndez.

Lawless Haiti

In El Salvador, President Nayib Bukele has implemented an increasingly undemocratic regime in which parliament and trade unions have been stripped of their influence. In Haiti, almost all representatives have been forced to leave their homes to escape violence. The general secretary of the CTSP union and his family were forced to flee to safety after their home was attacked and invaded by armed gangs.

Colombia has long been characterised by a hostile climate for trade unions. In July, however, SINTRALIMCO, a new Colombian cleaning workers' union, was formed in response to the long-standing discrimination faced by employees in the cleaning industry. SINTRIMACO has received support from the international industry federation UNI, of which Fastighets, GS, Handels, Seko and Transport are members.

Hope in Mexico

Since the left-wing politician Claudia Sheinbaum won the presidential election in Mexico last year, the country has implemented several reforms to strengthen employee rights and increase trade union influence, including increased opportunities for employees to obtain legal assistance and improved tripartite dialogue between the state, employers and trade unions.

Among the countries that have developed in a positive direction is Brazil, where democracy and trade union rights have been strengthened after former trade union leader Lula da Silva defeated right-wing populist Jair Bolsonaro in last year's presidential election. In September this year, Bolsonaro was sentenced to prison for his attempted coup after losing the election. The right wing in Brazil is now running an extensive campaign to have him pardoned, thereby enabling him to stand in the next presidential election. ●

PHOTO: CHINTA ANEMI KERAVUKI



Workers lack rights in large parts of Latin America.

Middle East and North Africa

The so-called MENA region, the Middle East and North Africa, remains the most undemocratic region in the world. Ninety-eight per cent of the population lives in authoritarian states. The remaining two per cent live in Israel. Under Netanyahu's right-wing government, however, developments in Israel have moved in an authoritarian direction, including attacks on the independent judiciary and opposition media.

The only states in the region that allow independent trade unions are Israel and the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. The trade union confederations Histadrut in Israel and PGFTU in Palestine are both members of the ITUC. In June, Palestine also gained formal observer status in the ILO, which is a major step forward for Palestinian workers' rights and representation in the international system.

Palestinian workers have been hit hard by the war in Gaza, which has cost tens of thousands of civilians their lives and destroyed infrastructure and job opportunities. The violence has also reached the West Bank, which is illegally occupied by Israel. According to the PGFTU, several Palestinian workers have been attacked and killed by settler extremists.

Many Palestinians have been unable to support their families because the labour market has completely collapsed and there is no social security system. Israel has also withheld employees' wages. In October, the Israeli army also attacked the PGFTU's office in Nablus in the West Bank.

Histadrut is strongly critical of the Israeli government. In November, the police arrested several of its leaders, including Histadrut chairman Arnon Bar-David, on allegations of corruption.

The ITUC has welcomed the ceasefire agreement reached in October and is now calling for comprehensive support for the reconstruction of Gaza, with the social partners, including trade unions, playing a role. The ITUC is also prepared to support dialogue and cooperation between the trade union movements in Palestine and Israel.

Concerns before the World Cup

Most MENA countries continue to violate fundamental rights. According to the ITUC, Saudi Arabia has implemented certain measures to modernise its labour market policy, including the introduction of labour courts and an improved social security system that now also covers migrants. However, it remains unclear whether these reforms have led to real improvements. No progress has been made at all on fundamental rights such as freedom of association and collective bargaining.

Concerns have also grown after Saudi Arabia signed an agreement with Somalia to recruit Somali workers for the 2034 World Cup in football. Despite clear recommendations from the ILO, the agreements do not contain any rules on worker protection in line with international standards. Last summer, the ILO's International Labour Conference (ILC) backed the complaint filed by a large number of trade unions against Saudi Arabia for widespread violations of migrant workers' rights. The complaint documented a brutal pattern of forced labour, wage theft, sexual exploitation and systematic racism. At the heart of these abuses is the so-called kafala system, which gives employers almost total control over the lives of their employees.

In Morocco, the trade unions CDT and UMT have led protests against a new law restricting the right to strike. Among other things, the law imposes harsh penalties on those who participate in what the authorities consider to be illegal strikes and allows employers to force employees to break strikes.

In Oman, some progress has been made, including the establishment of a dialogue committee to discuss labour market laws. The committee includes representatives from the government, employers' organisations and the trade union confederation GFW.

In Egypt, there is systematic repression of all independent trade union activity. The authorities impose absurd bureaucratic procedures on employees who wish to register a trade union. Over the past year, at least four trade union members have been imprisoned for 'membership of a terrorist organisation'. A large number of workers have been prosecuted for participating in strikes.

Continued repression in Iran

Extensive repression continues in Iran. Free trade unions are persecuted and a large number of trade union leaders are in prison. In November, two French citizens from the trade union organisation FO, Force Ouvrière, Cécile Kohler and Jacques Paris, were released after being imprisoned in Tehran for three years. They were accused of 'colluding to undermine the security of the country', a charge that can carry a prison sentence of up to five years.

Conflict and violence have long deprived workers in Syria and Yemen of even the most basic rights. In Yemen, the collapse of state institutions has directly affected trade union freedom. In Syria, however, workers have begun to organise following the fall of dictator Bashar al-Assad last year. In May, the ILO held a meeting in Damascus with Syrian government representatives, employers and trade unions to discuss the possibility of establishing a social dialogue. The focus was on decent jobs, social protection and workers' rights. The meeting concluded with a joint commitment to build on the dialogue.

In Tunisia, the democratic experiment that began with the so-called Arab Spring in 2011 is definitively dead. The Tunisian trade union movement, which in 2015 was awarded the Peace Prize for its work for democracy, is now systematically persecuted and all trade union rights are severely restricted. ●



PHOTO: AHMED ABU HAMEEDA

Palestine's observer status in the ILO is a step forward for Palestinian workers.

Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa is one of the world's poorest regions. Poverty has worsened during the pandemic and, according to the ILO, it will take a long time to return to the situation before 2020.

One important reason for this is that so many people work in the informal sector and therefore have no rights. In sub-Saharan Africa, only 15 per cent of employees work in the formal sector. Young people have much higher unemployment rates and little chance of finding permanent employment. In many African countries, women and girls spend more time on unpaid care work, which limits their economic opportunities.

In March, the African Union adopted a convention to end violence against women and girls.

The convention involves comprehensive measures to strengthen cooperation between African countries through a legally binding regulatory framework.

Approximately two-thirds of the population

in sub-Saharan Africa lives in authoritarian countries. According to V-dem, democracy levels in the region have declined in recent years, partly due to a series of military coups. There are two democracies in the region, Seychelles and South Africa.

Resistance in Cameroon

The trade union situation in Africa varies greatly between countries. In Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa, among others, the trade union movement is relatively strong. However, more than 90 per cent of countries in Africa regularly violate trade union rights.

Strikes and protests were met with violent repression in Cameroon, Kenya and Mauritania.

Employers sabotaged trade union activities in Botswana, Ethiopia, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia and Senegal. Military juntas in West Africa, including Burkina Faso, Chad, Gabon and Mali, prevented trade unions from operating freely.

At the beginning of the year, violent clashes broke out between police and sugar cane workers at Cameroon's largest sugar factory, SOSU-CAM. The unrest began when police intervened in a strike for higher wages and better working conditions. When the workers resisted, the police opened fire, killing one worker. In the ensuing unrest, at least 11 people were injured and around 20 were arrested.

Protection for migrants

In Niger, the military junta is seriously undermining workers' right to independent representation. In Chad, the authorities have shut down a newly formed teachers' organisation in order to 'guarantee a peaceful educational environment and prevent unrest that could affect students. In Mali, two trade union members in the

Asia and the Pacific

Asia and the Pacific is one of the world's most diverse regions. Its population of over four billion people includes some of the world's richest countries, but also two-thirds of the world's poor.

The Pacific region is dominated by developed democracies such as Australia and New Zealand, both of which have relatively strong independent trade union movements. Japan is also a stable democracy with strong and independent trade union organisations. Akiko Gono from the Japanese trade union confederation Rengo is currently president of the ITUC. Taiwan's democracy has been strengthened in recent years. The country also has an independent trade union movement led by the Taiwan Confederation of Trade Unions (TCTU).

However, nearly 80 per cent of the population in Asia lacks democratic freedoms and rights. This applies, for example, to China, Myanmar and North Korea. Many also live in countries that are in a grey area between democracy and authoritarian rule, such as India and Pakistan. According to V-dem, two countries are now moving in a democratic direction: the Maldives and Sri Lanka.

Violence in Nepal

Nine out of ten countries in the region violate trade union rights such as the right to strike and the right to organise. In almost half of these

countries, violence against trade unionists or striking workers has been reported.

A court in Baluchistan, Pakistan, has declared 62 trade unions illegal, which means that millions of public sector employees now lack collective representation. In Nepal, casino employees fought for almost a year to get their employers to apply a collective agreement from 2023. Nepal has also been marked by widespread protests against corruption in the government during the autumn. These protests have been met with brutal violence from the police and security forces.

In India, the ruling Hindu nationalist BJP, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has gradually restricted trade union rights. This summer, over 900 employees of an electronics company were arrested for organising a demonstration against their employer. Through nationwide strikes, the Indian trade union movement has demanded more secure jobs, higher minimum wages and the right to collective bargaining.

UNI recently presented a report showing that employees at Amazon's warehouses in India are forced to work in temperatures of up

to 55 degrees Celsius. The survey covers 474 warehouse and delivery workers. Of those surveyed, 75 per cent said that they or a colleague had needed medical attention, and 58 per cent described their workplaces as 'extremely hot and unsafe'. Almost 68 per cent said they had felt sick, dizzy or faint at work, and 85 per cent had seen a colleague become ill due to heat exposure.

ILO decision on Myanmar

Four years after the military coup in Myanmar, the oppression of trade union and other human rights continues. A total of 151 trade union members have been arrested. Two are serving life sentences, one has died in custody and one has been executed. Independent trade unions such as the Confederation of Trade Unions Myanmar (CTUM) are effectively banned. The ILO has now decided to invoke Article 33 of the ILO Constitution against the regime in Myanmar.



In Myanmar, popular resistance to the military dictatorship continues.

prison service were kidnapped for three days for criticising the military junta.

In Mauritius, the trade union confederation CTSP works to protect migrant workers, who are often trapped in debt bondage and subjected to threats from employers. The CTSP offers migrant workers free union membership and ensures that they have access to information and support in their native language. This work is carried out with support from the international trade union IndustriAll, which includes Swedish IF Metall, Elektrikerna and Pappers.

In Ghana, the Ghana Mine Workers Union ran a successful campaign to get the authorities to revoke British company Future Global Resources' licence for the Bogoso-Prestea gold mine. Among other things, the employees had not been paid since January 2024. The union's demands led to the authorities revoking the mining licence.

Nigeria has been included for the first time this year in the ITUC's list of the ten worst countries for trade union rights. Trade union activists are subjected to increasingly serious attacks, including harassment, assault and violent suppression

mar. The decision means that all ILO member states must review investments, supply chains and partnerships that may support the regime, as well as deliveries of weapons, aviation fuel and capital.

In Cambodia, Morm Rithy, president of the Cambodian Tourism and Service Workers Federation (CTSWF), has been sentenced to 18 months in prison and fined for incitement and for 'discrediting a legal decision'. The charges were based on comments Rithy made during a Facebook broadcast in which he criticised the arrest of a casino worker.

The trade union movement in Indonesia won an important victory when the Constitutional Court partially repealed a controversial law on 'job creation', a law that undermined employees' rights and weakened worker protection.

In the Philippines, trade union activists are fighting to exercise even the most basic rights in an environment marked by harassment, violence and death. The government has long blacklisted trade union leaders and members, accusing them of supporting the communist guerrilla group NPA.

Strikes in China

In China, no trade union organisations other than the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), which is closely allied with the ruling Communist Party, are permitted. However, strikes and other labour protests do occur and have previously been reported by the independent China Labour Bulletin (CLB) in Hong Kong.



PHOTO: KRISTIN WILSON

Unemployment is high among African women.

of peaceful protests. The right to collective bargaining is being systematically undermined.

The situation regarding human rights and civil liberties continues to deteriorate in Eswatini. The royal authorities ban political parties and independent trade unions are per-

secuted. Sticks Nkambule, General Secretary of the Eswatini Transport and Communications Union, is still living in exile after fleeing an assassination attempt three years ago. He cannot return home because he is wanted for 'criminal behaviour'. ●

However, the CLB was forced to cease its work during the year due to financial difficulties.

Since China took over Hong Kong, Hong Kong's free trade union movement, HKCTU, has been banned and its leaders imprisoned or forced into exile. HKCTU now continues its work in exile. A newly established offence – 'collusion with external forces' – criminalises cooperation between local trade union members and international trade unions. Trade union members can be sentenced to many years in prison if they are found guilty of 'acts that endanger national security'.

With threats from employers, violence, mass dismissals and restrictive rules on membership and registration, it is virtually impossible for workers in Bangladesh to organise themselves into trade unions. In February, more than 800 workers in the beverage industry went on strike and demonstrated to protest the unfair dismissal of ten trade union members. Transcom Beverages, Pepsi Cola's exclusive franchise in Bangladesh, responded by calling in the police, who attacked the demonstrators with batons. Twenty-three workers were arrested and prosecuted.

The government's actions have been strongly criticised internationally, including by the Swedish Construction and Woodworkers' Union (SBTF), which believes that the government's actions violate workers' right to organise and choose their own representatives, a right protected by ILO Convention 87, which Australia has ratified.

Victory in South Korea

In South Korea, the trade union movement won a historic victory when the law on trade unions and labour relations was amended after more than a decade of struggle. Among other things, the changes mean that employers can no longer hide behind subcontractor chains and that workers can no longer be silenced by devastating claims for damages.

The Labour government in Australia has recently strengthened the protection of trade union rights in consultation with the trade union movement. Penalties for non-payment or underpayment of wages have been tightened and employers can now be held criminally liable for non-payment.

At the same time, Australia is in the midst of a bitter conflict involving the CFMEU trade union, which organises employees in the construction, forestry, mining and energy sectors, among others. The background is criminal charges, which have led the Australian Labour government to place certain parts of the union under compulsory administration.

The Australian government has been strongly criticised by the international trade union BWI, which believes that the measures against the CFMEU are a violation of ILO Convention 87 on the right of workers to choose their own representatives. The conflict has divided the Australian trade union movement, with Australia's equivalent of the LO, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), taking a stand against the CFMEU. ●

What does LO want?

LO's international work is based on LO's overall priorities of equality, good working conditions and organisation.

To achieve these goals in its international work, LO will strive to ensure that:

- All states and companies respect the ILO's regulations on trade union rights. All trade is conducted on the basis of good social conditions for workers.
- Establishing global agreements and influencing important international institutions such as the ILO and the OECD. This will be done through trade union representatives on company boards and through cooperation within our international organisations, such as the ITUC and TUAC.¹
- At least one per cent of Sweden's gross national income to be allocated to development aid.
- That the necessary climate transition is fair and sustainable. That emission reductions are combined with high employment and good jobs with good wages and working conditions.
- That human rights are respected at major international events, such as sporting competitions.
- That competition in the EU's internal market takes place on fair terms and that EU legislation respects the Swedish labour market model.
- To actively work for organisation. For the global trade union movement to remain a force to be reckoned with in the long term, massive efforts are needed to increase membership.

¹ TUAC is the Trade Union Advisory Committee of OECD.

Our international tools

Much of LO's international work is carried out within the framework of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). The ITUC has 333 member organisations, which together represent 200 million workers worldwide. The ITUC's regional organisations are ITUC-AP for Asia and the Pacific, ITUC-AF for Africa and TUCA for the Americas.

European trade union organisations also cooperate within the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). The ETUC has 93 member organisations in 41 countries. Within the ETUC, there are ten regional industry federations of which several LO unions are members.

The trade union movement is also represented in TUAC, the OECD's advisory committee, and in EESC, the European Economic and Social Committee, which is an advisory body to the Commission, the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament.

The ITUC also includes the European regional organisation PERC, the Pan-European Council. PERC includes all European members of the ITUC, both within and outside the EU.

The trade union movement in the Nordic countries also works together within the Nordic Trade Union Confederation (NFS).

Another important part of LO and LO federations' international solidarity is trade union aid, our development cooperation with sister organisations around the world. Most of the trade union aid goes through Union to Union, the joint body of LO, TCO and Saco. Some of LO and LO affiliates' trade union aid also goes through the labour movement's joint organisation for international solidarity, the Olof Palme International Centre.

Through Union to Union, Swedish affiliates currently support around a hundred trade union development projects around the world.

News from the LO unions

LO's member unions are involved in extensive international work. Here you can read about your union's current international activities.



BYGGNADS



Elektrikerna



Handels



fastighets



H R F



GS-FACKET



IFMETALL



Kommunal.



Livs

LIVSMEDELS ARBETAREFÖRBUNDET



Musikerförbundet



PAPPERS



seko



FACTS FEDERATIONS

LO's member unions are also members of their respective global trade union federations, Global Union Federations, GUF:

- **Building and Woodworkers International, BWI**
Members from LO: Byggnads, Elektrikerna, Pappers, Seko and GS-facket.
- **International Arts and Entertainment Alliance (IAEA)**
Member from LO: Musikerförbundet.
- **IndustriALL.**
Members from LO: IF Metall, Elektrikerna and Pappers.
- **International Transport Workers Federation, ITF**
Members from LO: Kommunal, Seko and Transport.
- **International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations, IUF**
Members from LO: Hotell- och restaurangfacket, Kommunal and Livs.
- **Public Services International, PSI**
Members from LO: Kommunal, Seko and Transport.
- **UNI Global Union (UNI)**
Members from LO: Fastighets, GS, Handels, Seko and Transport.

**Global
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**Around
the world**

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