

ANNUAL REPORT



2024



Knowledge is too important
to leave in the hands
of the bosses

ABBREVIATIONS

ALREI	Africa Labour Research and Education Institute	NEHAWU	National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union
CCMA	Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration	NMWC	National Minimum Wage Commission
CEPPWAWU	Chemical, Energy, Paper & Printing Workers Union	NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions	NUMSA	National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa
DENOSA	Democratic Nursing Organisation of South Africa	Olof Palme Centre	Solidarity Support Organisation
DGB-BW	Solidarity Support Organisation	The OTHER FOUNDATION	Grantmaking organisation
DITIKENI	Ethical Investment Trust	POPCRU	Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union
DoEL	Department of Employment & Labour	PSI	Public Service International
EI	Education International	SACCAWU	South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union
FAWU	Food and Allied Workers	SACTWU	Southern African Clothing and Textile Workers' Union
FEDUSA	Federation of Unions of South Africa	SACWF	South African Care Workers Forum
FES TUCC	Friedrich Ebert Stiftung	SADSAWU	South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union
GENDER AT WORK	NGO	SADTU	South African Democratic Teachers Union
HOSPERSA	Health & Other Services Personnel Trade Union of South Africa	SAFTU	South African Federation of Trade Unions
IDWF	International Domestic Workers Federation	SAMWU	South African Municipal Workers' Union
IFWEA	International Federation of Workers Education Associations	SASK	Solidarity Support Organisation
ILO	International Labour Organisation	SATAWU	South African Transport and Allied Workers Union
ILRIG	International Labour Resource and Information Group	Solidarity Centre	Solidarity Support Organisation
IMATU	Independent Municipal and Allied Trade Union	The Coding Ground	Tech Consultancy
INDUSTRIALL	Global Union Federation	TIPS	Trade and Industrial Policy Strategies
ITUC AFRICA	International Trade Union Confederation - Africa	TOWU	Transport Workers Union
IZWI	Domestic workers alliance	UCT	University of Cape Town
JASS	Just Associates	UDWOSA	United Domestic Workers of South Africa
LT	Productions Audio-visual Production	UMP	University of Mpumalanga
MAWUSA	Maanda-Ashu Workers Union	UNI Global	UNI Global Union
MEWUSA	Metal and Allied Workers Union	UNTU	United Transport Workers Union
MIWUSA	Migrant Workers Union of South Africa	WIEGO	Women in Informal Employment Globalizing & Organizing
NALEDI	Labour Support Organisation		
NEDLAC	National Economic Development and Labour Council		

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CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT



Funeka Klaas (SACCAWU)

I begin by acknowledging the contribution of my predecessor, Comrade Nkosomzi Given Roji (NUMSA). This worker leader brought his considerable experience of the shop floor to Labour Research Service and helped craft a unity of purpose within the board of directors. It is no accident that the directors of this labour support organisation can transcend sectoral and political differences to provide effective governance oversight. Comrade Roji is a credit to the working class and his union.

As a worker, a trade unionist, a woman, and a mother, I am particularly proud of our efforts to engage with care work and care workers. The LRS has done much to theorise and support movement building among care workers by shining a light on this dimension of unpaid and underpaid labour, and to excavate the value that these workers contribute to our world and the dignity that they deserve.

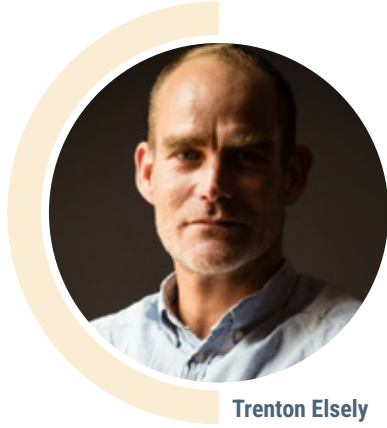
It is a difficult moment, wherein the working class, the trade union movement and progressive movements generally are under continuous pressure. We do not lament. We work for change from where we are located. The Labour Research Service and the network of organisations around it are one such place. We make a difference where we can, and we are encouraged by the difference we can make. This annual report describes our efforts to make that difference.

Funeka Klaas (SACCAWU)
Chair of LRS Board



The LRS has done much to theorise and support movement building among care workers by shining a light on this dimension of unpaid and underpaid labour, and to excavate the value that these workers contribute to our world and the dignity that they deserve.

THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT



Trenton Elsely

In 2024 in South Africa, we saw the rise of multi-party politics as the African National Congress found itself in a position where it had to share power for the first time in 30 years. Weak economic conditions, nationally and globally, do the trade union movement no favours. Socioeconomically, despite the astounding resilience and ingenuity of working class people, the country continues to manage a social and economic crisis rather than solve it. Geopolitically, there is a re-constellation of the world order under way and it is not yet clear how South Africa will relate to this re-ordering and how it will be impacted. What we do know, is that progressive forces continue to be overtaken by conservative, nationalist formations all around the world.

We continue to view the building of a vibrant civil society, with a special focus on the trade union movement, as our contribution to the deepening of democracy. Civil society are the machinery of democracy and create the possibility of governance and policy formations shaped by the interests of working class people, not just those of business and state.

This annual report is an effort to describe our modest contribution to this enormous task. We are ever grateful for the experience of working with and through our trade union members and the trade union movement in South Africa, regional and global organisations of the trade union movement, non-governmental organisations and community-based organisations, academic institutions, statutory bodies, selected private sector actors and solidarity support organisations worldwide.

Trenton Elsely
Executive Director, LRS



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DIRECT REACH, INDIRECT REACH, WHERE WE WORKED IN 2024, AND THEMES

DIRECT REACH



1,672

INDIRECT REACH



CAMPAIGN EMAILS

6,128



SOCIAL MEDIA:
FACEBOOK TOTAL LINK CLICKS

76,355

WEBSITE PERFORMANCE | LRS.ORG.ZA



USERS 2024

120,246

USERS 2023

117,214



PAGE VIEWS 2024

159,069

PAGE VIEWS 2023

128,423



DOWNLOADS 2024

5 757

DOWNLOADS 2023

5 361



AVERAGE PAGE
VIEW DURATION 2024

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AVERAGE PAGE
VIEW DURATION 2023

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THEMES



Collective bargaining
and organising



Future of work



Gig economy



Transforming unequal gender
relations in the world of work



Informalisation



Trade and investment



Corporate governance and
ethical investment



Technology
for trade unions



Climate
and just transition



2024 LRS ENGAGEMENT MAP

	COLLECTIVE BARGAINING	WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP	RESPONDING TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE	INCLUSION	JUST TRANSITION	TECHNOLOGY FOR TRADE UNIONS	TRADE UNION DEVELOPMENT	TRADE	GOVERNANCE	FUTURE OF WORK	INFORMALITY
ALREI							•	•	•		•
AMANDLA.MOBI						•					•
CCMA	•										•
CEPPWAWU	•										•
COSATU	•	•	•	•	•		•				•
DENOSA	•	•	•	•			•				•
DGB-BW		•		•			•				
DITIKENI									•		
DOEL	•										•
EARTH LIFE AFRICA		•			•						•
EI	•	•	•	•		•	•				•
EYE WITNESS NEWS		•	•								•
FAWU	•										
FORD FOUNDATION											•
FOUNDATION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS											•
FEDUSA	•	•	•	•				•	•		•
FES TUCC	•	•			•	•			•	•	•
GENDER AT WORK		•	•	•			•				•
HOSPERSA	•			•							
HELEN SUZMAN FOUNDATION		•		•					•		•
HEALA		•		•	•				•		•
IDWF		•					•				
IFWEA		•	•	•		•					•
ILO		•	•								•
ILRIG		•									
IMATU	•										
INDUSTRIALL	•	•	•	•	•		•				
ITUC AFRICA							•	•	•		•
INTUKELO EMBROIDERY		•		•							•
JAMAFO	•										
JASS		•	•	•			•				
LAWYERS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS	•										•
LETSEMA											•
LT PRODUCTIONS											•
MARKETWISE								•		•	
MAWUSA	•	•	•				•				•
MEWUSA	•										
MIWUSA	•	•					•				
MY DIGNITY RESTORED		•	•	•							•
NALEDI	•	•	•	•			•			•	•

	COLLECTIVE BARGAINING	WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP	RESPONDING TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE	INCLUSION	JUST TRANSITION	TECHNOLOGY FOR TRADE UNIONS	TRADE UNION DEVELOPMENT	TRADE	GOVERNANCE	FUTURE OF WORK	INFORMALITY
NAPTOSA	•			•			•				•
NASGB	•	•	•				•				•
NEDLAC								•			
NEHAWU	•	•									•
NELSON MANDELA SCHOOL OF PUBLIC GOVERNANCE							•	•			
NMWC									•		
NUM	•	•	•	•		•					
NUMSA	•					•					
OLOF PALME CENTRE	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	
ORIBI INCUBATOR					•						•
OTHER FOUNDATION	•		•	•			•				
POPCRU	•	•	•								
PSI	•	•	•	•			•				
RUTGERS UNIVERSITY	•	•	•	•			•				
SACCAWU	•	•	•	•			•		•	•	
SACTWU	•	•	•	•		•	•	•			
SACWF	•	•	•	•			•			•	•
SADSAWU	•	•	•								•
SADTU	•	•	•	•		•	•				•
SAFTU	•		•								
SAMWU	•		•			•					
SASK								•			
SATAWU	•						•			•	•
SECTION27											
SOLIDARITY CENTRE	•	•	•	•			•		•	•	•
SUSTAINABILITY MATTERS											•
THE CODING GROUND						•					
TIPS							•	•			
TOWU	•										
UOL											•
UCT	•								•		•
UDWOSA	•	•					•				
UMP			•	•					•		
UNGEI/UN WOMEN		•		•					•		
UNI	•						•		•	•	
UNTU	•	•	•	•			•				
WEBBER & WENTZEL ATTORNEYS	•						•		•		•
WORKERS WORLD MEDIA PRODUCTIONS											•
WIEGO	•	•					•				
ZONE 2 SOCIAL JUSTICE		•		•							•

Trade Union Development in Everything That We Do



We equip role-players in trade unions to negotiate the challenges of the contemporary workplace. We focus on the everyday experiences of workers, the experience of alienation in highly exploitative workplaces and the potentially liberating experience of taking action as individuals in worker collectives. Our participatory action research approach prioritises worker-led strategies and interventions for addressing gender-based violence and harassment.

We create and facilitate safe spaces for a broad layer of union representatives to reflect, share, and learn on topics of bargaining and organising. The LRS Facilitation Toolkit offers ideas for creative learning of new concepts and understanding of ideas.

We support a gendered approach in collective bargaining by elevating the participation of women in project activities and union negotiating teams. We support union gender teams to develop policies, such as a discussion document on a gender policy vision for DENOSA.

We value workers in precarity as sources of knowledge and practice, co-creating research, knowledge and advocacy tools with workers. We are engaging with new types of sustained interventions, such as the care workers' forum advocating for decent work and transformation in public care work programmes, to promote a focus on workers in informal and vulnerable sectors.

Trade unions can access various online support resources, including trade union specific bargaining reports, The Negotiator's Guide, Inflation Monitor, Bargaining Benchmarks, Wage Bargaining Review, and ad-hoc negotiator support.

Trade Union Specific bargaining reports

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https://lrs.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/The-Negotiators-Guide_FullVersion.pdf
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<https://www.lrs.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Inflation-Monitor-May-2025.pdf>
- 

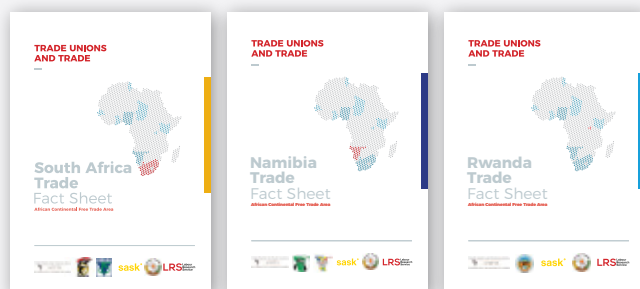
<https://lrs.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Bargaining-Benchmarks-July-2025.pdf>
- 

<https://lrs.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Wage-Review-Report-2024-1.pdf>

Online tools include the Actual Wage Rates Database (AWARD) and a library of collective agreements (AGREED), the South African Multinational Companies database, the wage calculator tool for negotiators, and the Labour of Love podcast.

We are part of continental and regional networks through collaboration with solidarity support organisations, labour support organisations, regional trade union bodies and global unions. These networks deliver unique research outputs and resources, including trade fact sheets co-authored with trade union federations in nine countries in Africa, a Southern Africa labour dynamics working paper with researchers from Namibia, Eswatini, and Zimbabwe, and a gender analysis of Friedrich Ebert Stiftung's regional project on just transition.

Trade fact sheets



South Africa

Namibia

Rwanda



Nigeria

Senegal

Chad



Tunisia

Ghana

Kenya

We have an international and continental presence through collaboration with global union federations, and we are in conversation with UNI Global Union, IndustriALL, ITF, PSI and EI.

In 2024, we continued tracking collective bargaining outcomes in South Africa. Unions consistently secured wage increases above inflation, and minimum wages rose across all sectors, including the National Minimum Wage.



Median Minimum Wages, Average Inflation and Real Wage Increases | All Industries 2024

	2024 Median Minimum Wage (Rands)	Actual Wage Increase (%)	Average Inflation (%)	Real Wage Increase (%)	Hours of work (weekly)
Median	6166	7	4.4	2.6	45
Average	8052	7	4.4	2.6	44

Source: LRS Actual Wage Rates Database (AWARD)

Note: The sample of 561 wage agreements covers 2,034,816 workers.

Shop stewards and officials improved their negotiation skills through our learning programme supported by the National Skills Fund. We equip worker leaders to address a variety of issues affecting workers, including wage bargaining, gender equity, retrenchments, and the future of work. Many participants found bargaining challenging before attending the LRS workshops, but now they use LRS resources and understand the value of a well-prepared team.

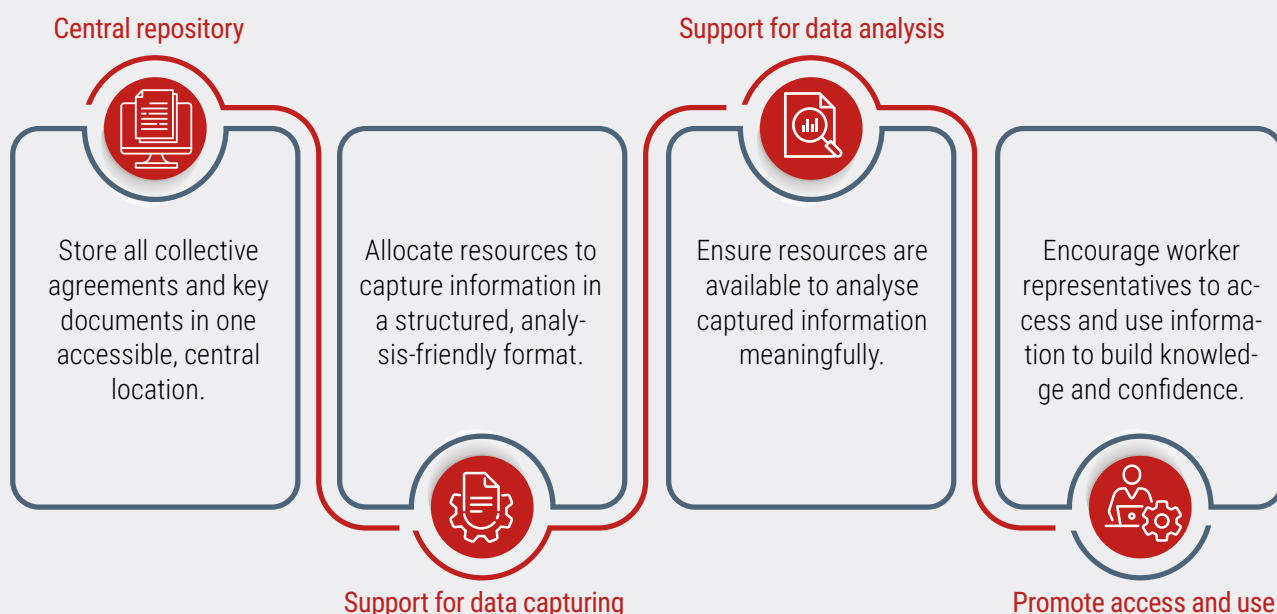
Building bargaining power through information sharing

Strong bargaining outcomes depend on effective information management and sharing of collective knowledge. We continued to maintain the Actual Wage Rates Database (AWARD), our open-access online database of wages. AWARD includes approximately 10,000 wage agreements, providing unions with valuable insights for formulating their demands. In 2024, we added data from 530 new collective bargaining agreements, with support from the trade unions that we work with. AWARD's impact grows through efficient information management and the active sharing of agreements among unions. Much the same can be said of the library of collective agreements for trade unions.

Our engagement with the National Union of Mineworkers on using agreements has positive results. Some regional secretaries and coordinators actively share agreements with the LRS and request training for their officials and shop stewards to improve their capacity to manage and share agreements.

Our online library of collective agreements (AGREED) is available to all trade unions and enables research and education, and also facilitates information sharing, analysis of collective agreements and benchmarking for collective bargaining.

Thinking About Effective Information Management



Negotiating for vulnerable workers and those in precarious jobs

The LRS is developing an understanding of organising and bargaining support for workers in more precarious employment. We provide safe spaces for workers to tell their own stories and develop strategies to address their unique challenges. We are working with different manifestations of vulnerable work, from Volunteer Food Handlers to care workers, but also location-based gig work.

The Migrant Workers Union of South Africa (MIWUSA) has participated in several LRS learning spaces.

A MIWUSA official noted that the LRS has helped clarify the implementation and enforcement of labour laws and CCMA case procedures. A victory in a dismissal case at the CCMA in 2024, where the LRS supported the official in developing a case approach resulting in reinstatement with full pay and interest, has spurred MIWUSA to develop this capability in the union. More officials have gained the skills and confidence to represent workers at the CCMA.

Transforming corporate governance

The LRS has long supported trade unions with research and strategies to challenge corporate power in JSE-listed South African retail multinationals. We engage companies directly through ACTIVE Shareholder, a non-profit organisation helping socially responsible investors exercise their rights by voting at general meetings. In 2024, we participated in eight company AGMs, opposing several remuneration policies and executive reappointments. Active Shareholder developed a Social Index. While the Index does not provide investment advice, it does rate the social capital generated by a shortlist of companies listed on the JSE.



Promoting the value of care work for a just and sustainable society

Unpaid and underpaid care work sustains economies, but is undervalued due to patriarchal and neoliberal ideologies that drive its informalisation, denying women in care jobs labour rights and pathways out of poverty.



We are witnessing a deepening of the exploitation of the work women do and an entrenchment of the notion that women should feel grateful for getting a stipend for the work they do.

Nina Benjamin, Coordinator of LRS Gender Programme.

The Expanded Public Works Programme relies on women's labour in essential services like the National School Nutrition Programme, Early Childhood Development and Home-Based Care and Community Health. Yet these workers remain underpaid, unprotected, and poorly trained. While the Expanded Public Works Programme aims for gender equality, it often reinforces inequality by treating care work as voluntary, temporary, and disposable.

Transforming Public Care Work Programmes in South Africa is an initiative that aims to make care work visible and to make the value of care work in the Expanded Public Works Programme visible. The initiative advocates for equitable public care policies and programmes.

We use feminist popular education to support Volunteer Food Handlers, Community



Health Workers and Early Childhood Educators in building a national platform that challenges the notion that care work is solely a woman's responsibility and advocates for its elevation to decent work.

This initiative builds on a four-year pilot with Gauteng Volunteer Food Handlers, who are mobilising for recognition and labour rights within the National School Nutrition Programme. Their advocacy has seen some success, with stipends in Gauteng increasing twice since late 2023, reaching R2,200, higher than in other provinces.

In 2024, we continued to support the group of food handlers in strengthening their advocacy and building movement and alliances.

Key moments in 2024

“I am not Tintswalo”

Despite political speeches reaffirming the National School Nutrition Programme’s role in providing meals to 9.6 million learners, the 61,000 women sustaining the programme remained invisible in national budgets and policy discussions. Food handlers launched their first advocacy action of the year, challenging this exclusion through a gender-responsive budget analysis.

Using feminist popular education methods, they analysed the national budget and the state of the nation address. The food handlers criticised the president’s narrative of Tintswalo, the symbolic child of democracy with access to services and opportunities, as being out of touch with their lived realities. Their discussions prompted to a letter-writing campaign addressed to the minister of basic education.

Phumalela from Sebokeng wrote:

“

I am not Tintswalo. I am Phumalela, a mother of three. When the president delivered the State of the Nation Address, I listened carefully to hear what he was saying about me as a woman. I did not hear anything about my job. I want to know how the work I do contributes to the state of the nation. I want to hear how the government plans to ensure we can continue feeding and supporting learners at school. I want my voice heard in decisions about the National School Nutrition Programme.”

The letters formed part of an Amandla.mobi petition demanding the national minimum wage and an article in Daily Maverick advocating for the valuing of care work.



Volunteer Food Handler's Budget reflection

[PETITION 101](#)
[START AN EVENT](#)
[+ START A CAMPAIGN](#)
[LOG IN](#)

To: Nomakhosazana Meth, Department of Employment & Labour

Increase the minimum wage for Volunteer Food Handlers (VFH) to R28,79 per hour.

* [Campaign update]: Food handlers have received an increase of only R100 so far.

629 of 800 signatures

Sign the petition

First Name *

Last Name *

Email *

Province

Phone Number

☐ Yes. Keep me up to date with this

Movement and alliance building

The Volunteer Food Handlers' collective strengthened its voice over the four years of the project. By the end of 2024, Volunteer Food Handlers explored new forms of accountability and representation, including a forum with representatives from four Gauteng municipalities. Teacher unions (South African Democratic Teachers' Union and National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa) and Volunteer Food Handlers expanded connections nationwide.

LRS applied embodied learning in its interventions, with Volunteer Food Handlers' in Gauteng using monthly workshops for cooking together, exploring indigenous ingredients and food sovereignty.

Volunteer Food Handlers' strengthened their identity as women nutritional activists, linking their fight for decent work to food poverty and sovereignty. They also engaged broader stakeholders beyond the initial focus on trade unions, the school community, media and the Department of Employment and Labour.



Volunteer Food Handler's monthly workshop



Volunteer Food Handler's monthly workshop

Advocacy and alliance-building tools



Volunteer Food Handler's roundtable

1. The Roundtable: Experts as "living books"

June 2024 | Gauteng Volunteer Food Handlers strengthened their campaign through a roundtable discussion with 'living books', experts in different fields, including labour rights, organising and nutrition, whom they chose based on the areas of knowledge they wanted to strengthen or confirm. They were in control of the conversations and called on the experts as needed. The roundtable was in preparation for the LRS colloquium.

2. The Colloquium: “Food in school is a social justice issue”

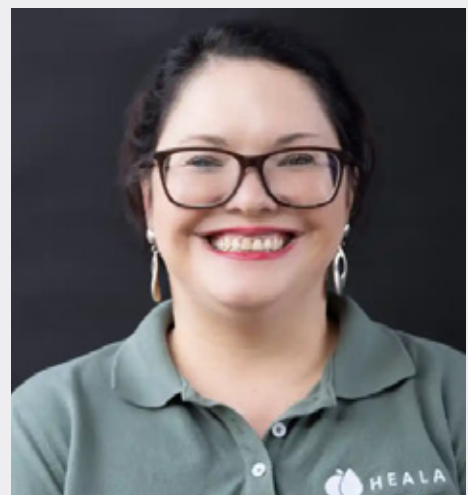


September 2024 | LRS hosted a colloquium, “Food in School is a Social Justice issue” at Constitution Hill, where Volunteer Food Handlers and learners led conversations on strengthening the National School Nutrition Programme and ensuring the rights of food handlers as workers are met. A broad range of stakeholders participated, including: Healthy Living Alliance (HEALA), Section 27, Amandla.mobi, South African Democratic Teachers’ Union, National Professional Teachers’ Organisation of South Africa, South African Federation of Trade Unions, representative from the International Labour Organisation, Webber Wentzel, Witwatersrand University, University of London, Five national ecological organisations, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung South Africa, Foundation for Human Rights, Community-based organisations from Gauteng, and the media.



Petronell Kruger, Programme Manager at HEALA, a food justice advocacy coalition:

The LRS Colloquium shed light on the systems involved in the National School Nutrition Programme and the social justice issues that not only accompany but also hinder good nutrition. Understanding the broader systemic failures helped HEALA understand the landscape and reevaluate its organisational demands. The asks from the Food Handlers for greater investment in staff and infrastructure are uniform to HEALA’s. This means training, access to fair wages, improved procurement, and a higher budget allocation.



3. Women's Day event – Valuing care work



Women's Day through the eyes of Volunteer Food Handlers in Gauteng.

“

Bayasibona kodwa
asibonakali”

(We are seen but we are invisible)

This quote from a Volunteer Food Handler in the Vaal reflects how many of the women felt when the PowerUp initiative began in 2021 - overlooked by both the Department of Basic Education and the learners they serve daily. Volunteer Food Handlers now know invisibility is rooted in gender norms, economic systems that devalue care work, weak policy support, and social attitudes that dismiss it as unskilled. We work to challenge these narratives and affirm the value of care work and those who do it.

“

The school expects us to act like superwomen, ensuring that children eat every day, even when we are sick. We must make the same ‘plan’ we make at home to receive praise and recognition once a year from our children and spouses.”

- Volunteer Food Handler in the Vaal.

On Women's Day, Volunteer Food Handlers compared unpaid domestic work with their school roles, sparking discussion on the skills and impact of care work, and the costs when it's not done. The conversation highlighted how roles like food handlers, community health workers, and early childhood educators remain among the lowest paid in the Extended Public Works Programme.

“

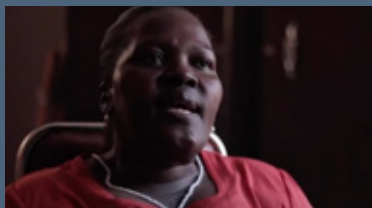
We grew up seeing our grandmothers grow food for the entire family, yet their labour was never regarded as work. When men do it, for example, as gardeners in domestic work, it suddenly becomes valuable and paid.”

- Volunteer Food Handler in the Vaal.

Food Handlers advocate for the inclusion of school gardening in the curriculum to help learners value food production, take responsibility for their nutrition, and support community-led food sovereignty.

Media advocacy tools co-created with Volunteer Food Handlers

1) A day in the life of a Volunteer Food Handler



Khuli Gumede is among thousands of women who are the 'hands' and 'heart' of the National School Nutrition Programme. Their care work sustains the nutrition programme, yet they remain invisible, unrecognised and underpaid.



<https://youtu.be/PBtWU-IVSdk?feature=sha>

2) Access Denied: A woman worker's struggle for social protection



We follow **Elizabeth**, a former Volunteer Food Handler, as she struggles to access her UIF benefits. Her experience is shared by many former Volunteer Food Handlers who worked under the National School Nutrition Programme.



<https://youtu.be/ElofXde57qQ?feature=shared>

3) 'Jabula' ('rejoice, be happy')

A song by Volunteer Food Handlers expressing their commitment and passion to ensuring that all learners under the National School Nutrition Programme have access to the nutrition they need to thrive in school.



https://youtu.be/uMh6Jau_v7o?feature=shared



Impact in 2024



The advocacy by **Volunteer Food Handlers** led to two stipend increases in a year and renovations and equipment upgrades in some school kitchens.



Pro bono legal support from **Webber Wentzel** will enable Volunteer Food Handlers to pursue formal negotiations with the Department of Basic Education in 2025.



Volunteer Food Handlers have gained confidence in engaging with budgets at micro and macro levels. The Justice Budget Coalition has shown interest in the remuneration of food handlers in the National School Nutrition Programme budget.



WiLPGSAI, a women's empowerment group in the gas industry, approached the LRS and offered learnerships to former Volunteer Food Handlers.



The **HEALA Schools Food Environment Assembly** provided a platform for food handlers to share their challenges with diverse stakeholders in the National School Nutrition Programme



LRS has partnered with the **Foundation for Human Rights** to secure a grant supporting the ongoing work with Volunteer Food Handlers.



Volunteer Food Handlers are bringing the issue of women and local food production into the public eye by showing how the National School Nutrition Programme can strengthen food sovereignty. Several ecological groups see synergies between their initiatives on food justice and food sovereignty and the work of Volunteer Food Handlers.

Thinking about more gender-just trade unions

Feminist pedagogy is central to our work on transforming unequal gender relations in the world of work. At the Congress of South African Trade Unions Feminist School, we introduced feminism as a vital framework for trade unions. Participants initially identified as trade union and social justice activists with little connection to feminist ideas. Using feminist popular

education methods, we created a space where participants could express their concerns, reservations, and discomfort with feminism. Tools like the LRS Leadership Journey Map deepened their understanding of key ideas and concepts. The participants embraced feminism as integral to their daily struggles and organising.

Key feminist spaces 2024



September 2024, Rwanda | The partners in the Power Up Initiative met in Kigali to build a shared vision for solidarity and transformation, through reflection, storytelling, and analysing power and feminist economic alternatives.



November 2024, Cape Town [Nina Benjamin, Coordinator of LRS Gender Programme.] The ILGA World Conference, the largest global gathering of LGBTI+ organisations, brought together various stakeholders to foster global solidarity on LGBTI+ rights and advocate for a world where no worker, regardless of their identity, faces discrimination, violence, or harassment. The LRS contributed by facilitating a pre-workshop for trade unions and providing panel input.



December 2024, Bangkok. [Left: Nina Benjamin, Coordinator of LRS Gender Programme.] December 2024, Bangkok. Amid global crises and rising oppression, thousands of feminist activists came together in solidarity to connect, heal and thrive. The 15th International Forum of the Association for Women's Rights in Development spotlighted bold visions for justice, resistance, and collective care.

A world of work without violence and harassment

Trade unions ensure workers' legal rights are recognised on paper and enforced in practice. When governments adopt new laws or ratify international conventions, it is often the unions that push for implementation and accountability on the ground. A key demand of trade unions globally is the ratification and implementation of ILO Convention 190 and Recommendation 206. This requires gender-transformative and intersectional reforms in national

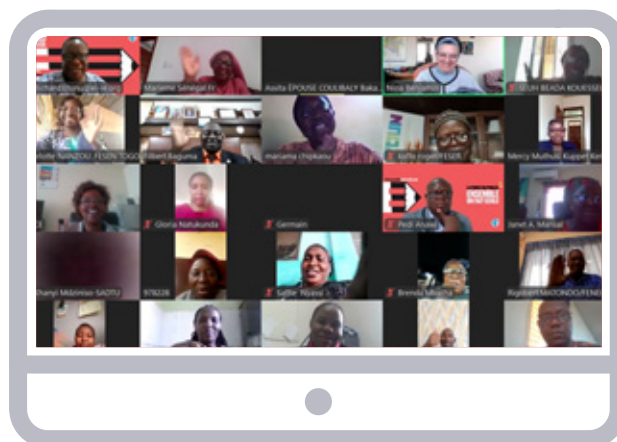
legislation, relevant workplace policies, and collective agreements that address the root causes of gender based violence and harassment.

The LRS partnered with two global union federations, Public Services International (PSI) and Education International (EI) Africa Region, to strengthen union responses to gender-based violence and harassment in the public sector in 2024.

Safe schools now

Teacher unions are united in a continent-wide campaign to end violence in schools Education International (EI) Africa relaunched its school-related gender-based violence campaign in October 2024 under the banner: 'Educators Determined to End school-related gender-based violence. This is the third phase of coordinated campaigns from 2016 to 2019 and 2021 to 2022, supported by UNGEI, Gender at Work, and the LRS.

A June 2024 webinar facilitated by the LRS served as the campaign's lead-up activity, bringing together 215 participants from unions, civil society partners, and education stakeholders across Africa. The space allowed participants to reflect on the progress of country campaigns, exchange ideas, and co-create new strategies for addressing violence in schools.



Teacher unions are more aware of the prevalence and impact of school-related gender-based violence and have lessons to share with other organisations working to address gender-based violence and harassment.



Anais Dayamba, Regional Coordinator, Education International Africa:



Despite the ongoing work, the reality is that for too many learners and educators, schools remain unsafe havens. The relaunch of our campaign against school-related gender-based violence strengthens teacher solidarity in ensuring that every educational setting in Africa is a safe and inclusive space where learners, educators and education support staff can flourish."



Strategies to end SRGBV: The experience of education unions in Africa

<https://bit.ly/4I3B1tw>

Violence, harassment and discrimination are occupational health and safety issues

The LRS collaborated with Public Services International to develop *A Practical Guide for Implementing Convention 190 in Public Sector Workplaces*. The Public Services International recognises the strong union advocacy for ratification of ILO Convention 190 and Recommendation 206 and the challenges of implementing in countries. The guide equips public sector unions with practical strategies, tools and steps for addressing

workplace violence and harassment, including gender-based violence using the convention. The guide urges unions to integrate Convention 190 into occupational health and safety frameworks and collective bargaining, as outlined in Article 12 of Convention 190. The convention identifies OHS frameworks as a strategic entry point for implementation.



Aisha Bahadur, PSI Projects Officer:

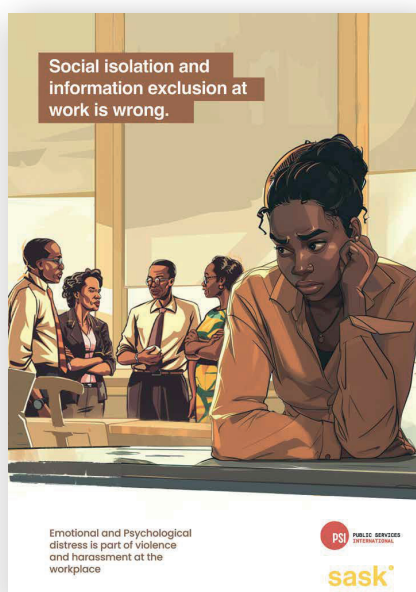
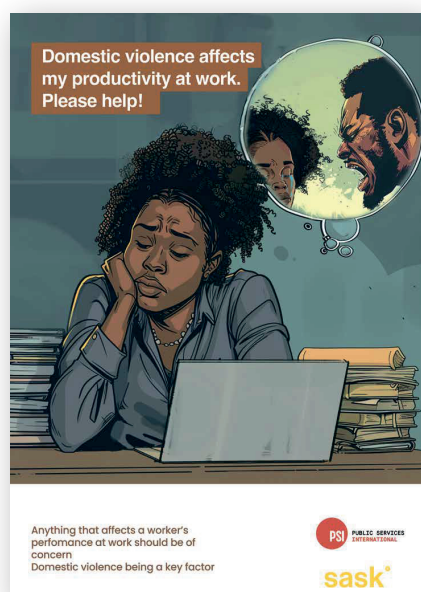
“

The guide helps us integrate Convention 190 into familiar frameworks like occupational health and safety and collective bargaining. By focusing on OHS, we can achieve better outcomes while also addressing domestic violence as a workplace issue. Women facing domestic violence need tailored support, and the guide offers practical approaches for unions to provide it.”



Practical Guide for Implementing C190 in Public Sector Workplaces

<https://bit.ly/3ZnczKx>



A continental free trade area requires a continental free trade union movement.

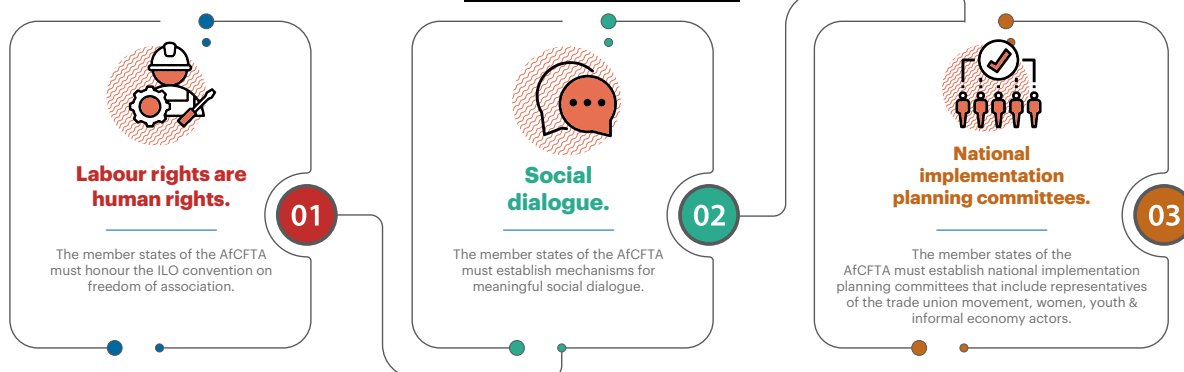
The LRS partners with the ITUC-Africa and its affiliates in nine countries to campaign for decent work and social inclusion in the African Continental Free Trade Area. Trade liberalisation under the African Continental Free Trade Area does not automatically benefit workers without active trade union involvement. We are building the capabilities of unions to engage with the African Continental Free Trade Area through providing research, strategy and advocacy support. Unions demand inclusion in formal social dialogue

mechanisms and the establishment of mechanisms in countries without. Influencing the African Continental Free Trade Area at the national level, where implementation occurs through national committees, is key for trade unions. In 2024, inspiring examples of trade union influence emerged, with the Trade Union Congress of Namibia (TUCNA) and the Central Organisation of Trade Unions – Kenya (COTU-K) securing commitments from their trade ministers to include unions in the National Implementation Committees.

Trade Unions in the AfCTFA

We the affiliates of the ITUC-Africa understand the possibility of the Africa Continental Free Trade Area. A continental free trade area requires a continental free trade union movement.

These are our demands.



LRS Labour Research Service

sask



Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland



Namibia



ITUC-Africa and TUCNA visit to trade ministry

The Minister for Industrialisation and Trade officially welcomed the Trade Union Congress of Namibia (TUCNA) to the National Implementation Committee in November. This achievement was due to the sustained advocacy and strategic engagement by the union, with support from LRS and ITUC-Africa.

TUCNA's initial discussions with the trade ministry officials revealed gaps in understanding the mandate of unions and labour provisions in free trade agreements. The willingness of the officials to learn helped TUCNA to advocate effectively, using evidence from a study on the impact of AfCTFA on Namibia and its workforce conducted with support from LRS. TUCNA's advocacy also ensured trade unions a seat at the Namibia Trade Forum. The federation will empower affiliates to participate in sectoral trade forums.

“

Mahongora Kavihuha, General Secretary of TUCNA:

Do not assume stakeholders know what you do. Begin with the basics and educate them until they understand who you are and why they should listen. This approach has been effective with the Ministry of Trade, the Bank of Namibia, and the Ministry of Finance. Now that the door is halfway open, we must be prepared to use the opportunity to influence the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area for the benefit of workers.”



ITUC-Africa and COTU-K visit

Kenya



In November, the Central Organisation of Trade Unions – Kenya (COTU-K) secured a commitment from the Cabinet Secretary for Trade, Investment and Industry to include unions in the AfCFTA National Implementation Committee. COTU-K strengthened its advocacy by drawing on its experience with trade agreements such as the EU Economic Partnership Agreement, Africa Growth and Opportunities Act, and the East African Community. COTU-K continues to develop trade expertise and to build cross-border solidarity for influence.

“

Rose Omamo, COTU-K Board Member and Deputy General Secretary of ITUC-Africa:

Trade is about capital and labour. We cannot truly achieve inclusive growth if workers are left behind. The Women and Youth Protocol is a welcome signal that no one should be excluded. But to ensure women in trade can thrive, we need more than aspirational language; we demand gender mainstreaming and actionable commitments.”



Supporting trade union advocacy campaigns across national, regional, and continental levels.

SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING PERFORMANCE @labourresearchservice

We built the online profile of our work on trade unions and trade and continue a coordinated continental campaign in 2025. Social media engagement and awareness increased across nine project countries through targeted campaigns.



TOTAL REACH
2024

1,200,000

TOTAL REACH
2023

703,472



TOTAL VIEWS
2024

661,700

TOTAL VIEWS
2023

-



TOTAL LINK CLICKS
2024

76,355

TOTAL LINK CLICKS
2023

52,316



NEW FOLLOWERS
2024

164

NEW FOLLOWERS
2023

33



TOTAL IMPRESSIONS
2024

3,265,265

TOTAL IMPRESSIONS
2023

1,379,795



TOTAL CONTENT
INTERACTIONS 2024

1909

TOTAL CONTENT
INTERACTIONS 2023

-



TOTAL AD SPEND
2024

\$1,025.96

TOTAL AD SPEND
2023

\$450.00

The project knowledge hub has shown steady growth over time. We provided tailored support to national centres, taking into account varying capacity levels across the continent

WEBSITE: tradeunionsinafcfta.org



USERS 2024

73,261

USERS 2023

11,974

USERS 2022

888



PAGE VIEWS 2024

94,942

PAGE VIEWS 2023

27,972

PAGE VIEWS 2022

2,819



AVERAGE PAGE
VIEW DURATION
2024

00:02:41

AVERAGE PAGE VIEW
DURATION 2023

00:03:30

AVERAGE PAGE VIEW
DURATION 2022

00:02:42



DOWNLOADS 2024

2,969

DOWNLOADS 2023

1,796

DOWNLOADS 2022

405

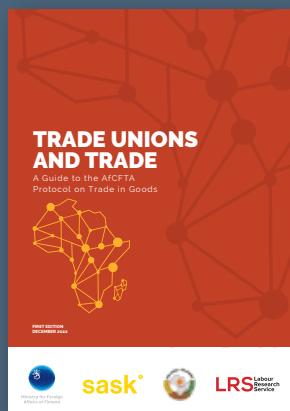
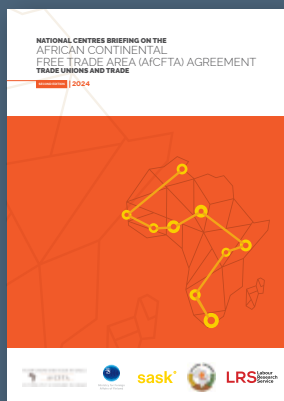
Research and strategy support for trade union advocacy on trade issues

We created quality trade resources for trade unions in Africa in both English and French. We authored and co-authored materials with trade unions across the continent. These resources strengthen union capacity, advocacy, and participation in the AfCFTA processes at national, regional, and continental levels.

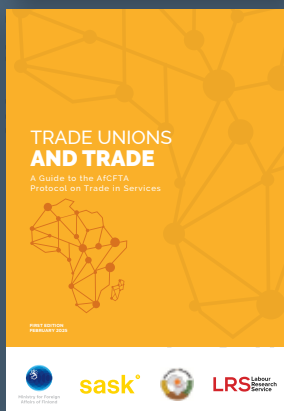
Publications in 2024

We co-authored country trade fact sheets with our research partners in nine countries in Africa.

<https://www.tradeunionsinafcfta.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/LRS-AfCFTA-Briefing-2nd-Edition.pdf>



<https://lrs.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/AfCFTA-Protocol-on-Trade-in-Goods.pdf>



<https://tradeunionsinafcfta.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Guide-to-AfCFTA-Protocol-on-Trade-in-Services.pdf>

A podcast episode introducing trade unionists to international trade through the lens of the South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union.



We are in conversation with several role-players in international trade, including the Nelson Mandela School of Public Governance at the University of Cape Town, Trade and Industrial Policy Strategies and Third World Network.

The LRS Executive Director sits on a technical sub-committee on trade within the statutory body for social dialogue in South Africa (NEDLAC).



A Labour of Love Podcast | Episode 3:

The Voice of Trade unions in Integration in Africa

<https://youtube/9TFRbdIBtGg?feature=shared>



“

We are deepening our support of trade union advocacy work on trade, whether they have been invited into a national implementation committee or remain outside of such structures in the meantime. We are co-creating quality audio-visual material to help raise the profile of national centres on trade issues. We are focusing on a leadership layer in the advocacy on international trade issues.”

-Trenton Elsely, Executive Director, Labour Research Service.

INCLUSION AS A GUIDING PRINCIPLE IN WHAT WE DO



Using an intersectional analysis to promote inclusion in the world of work

Inclusion involves tackling overlapping forms of discrimination. Unions must consider the needs of all members when organising and bargaining. The LRS advocates for a nuanced and intersectional approach to supporting LGBTI+ workers beyond a singular identity with a uniform set of demands.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

LRS provided a learning intervention for members of the United National Transport Union (UNTU) and facilitated a workshop for trade union participants at the ILGA World Conference.

Inclusion as a core union strategy

The United National Transport Union (UNTU) showed how a male-dominated union can embed gender-based violence and harassment strategies into mainstream bargaining and policy development. Their experience highlights the connection between inclusion, gender-based violence and harassment, and workplace safety advocacy.

Initially, UNTU's inclusion work focused on protecting individual LGBTI+ members. The union expanded its lens to view workplace violence as a structural issue affecting all workers. Many members operate in isolated environments and regularly engage with the public, exposing them to unique safety risks.

With support from the LRS and guidance from the International Transport Workers' Federation toolkit on

responding to violence at work, UNTU members critically examined systemic risks. They applied the Code of Good Practice and occupational health and safety measures in their contexts. For the first time, the union used an occupational health and safety risk assessment to identify workplace hazards and develop targeted interventions.



Maria Chonco, UNTU National Organiser:

The United National Transport Union has made a deliberate effort to move inclusion from the periphery to the core of our work. There is growing visibility and prioritisation of inclusion efforts, which are now a central part of our overall strategy, and with dedicated resources."

POSITIVE INFLUENCE OUT IN THE WORLD



Global unions recognise LRS as a key partner in advancing inclusion in the world of work

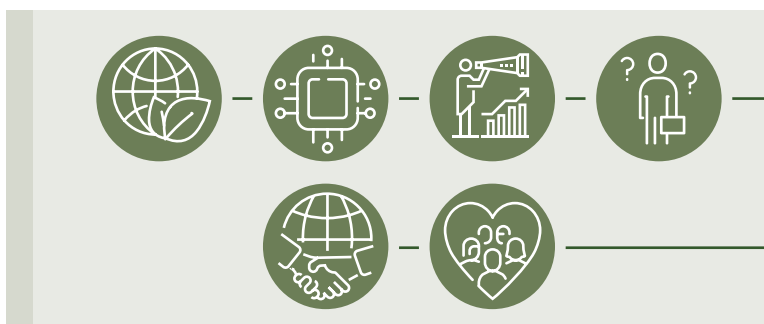
The LRS had a prominent role at the ILGA World Conference, the largest global gathering of LGBTI+ organisations. As part of the conference, the LRS facilitated a two-day pre-conference workshop for Southern African trade unions. The workshop equipped unionists with practical tools to counter the global backlash against LGBTI+ rights and strengthen advocacy for LGBTI+ workers within their unions and workplaces.

Participants deepened their understanding of workplace violence, harassment, and gender-based violence, using the Global Unions Toolkit on LGBTI+ Workers and the Public Services International guide on ILO Convention 190 and Recommendation 206. LGBTI+ unionists reflected on how culture, family, and lived experience shape their workplace realities, leading to conversations about visibility, voice, and representation.

Mamoholoane Folene, General Secretary of the Lesotho Teachers' Trade Union:

It was my first time attending a workshop of this kind. Until now, I carried out my work based on how I feel and see things. However, after such a session, I will do it with a broader understanding. LGBTI+ workers should be fearless and not be afraid to defend their rights. They have a right to elect and have the right to be elected in their unions."

SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT



We position ourselves as interlocutors for the trade union movement- interpreters or translators of knowledge in economy and society. The LRS is evolving by building knowledge, experience and networks in new thematic areas.

- Defining a Just Transition for sub-Saharan Energy Workers discussion paper
- Trade unions Going Green: Environmental issues in the world of work booklet
- Trade unions and just transition presentation at SOLIDAR and OPIC forum [<https://bit.ly/4hRenle>]
- We supported Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) South Africa and its Trade Union Competence Centre to integrate a feminist perspective into their regional Just Transition project and to develop actionable recommendations through this lens.
- Experiments with data warehousing, online databases, and digital communication tools for trade unions.
- Paper on care work and value (ILO) and a public care workers project.
- Paper on location-based gig work in South Africa.

FES STORY: Reimagining projects for a just transition

The LRS applies a feminist lens to just transition work by helping organisations understand how gender power dynamics shape climate impacts and the realities of the world of work.

In 2024, we partnered with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung to conduct a gender analysis for its just transition programme in Africa. The partnership led to a more gender-transformative approach in the programme.

We are developing intellectual capital, accumulating experiences and developing networks in thematic areas such as just transition, the future of work, technology and trade unions, international trade and the care economy.



John Mwanika, Senior Programme Manager, FES Trade Union Competence Centre, Sub-Saharan Africa:

What is exciting is that the challenge became an opportunity. Rather than simply implementing a project, we are encouraged to think more critically and expansively. We are bringing together three key concepts, just transition, social dialogue, and gender, and this intersection has opened up space for innovation and transformative thinking. We are building alliances with like-minded organisations, such as the LRS. We are empowering ourselves and our partners to identify the types of groups we need to work with and establish alliances based on shared vision."

TECHNOLOGY FOR TRADE UNIONS



The LRS continues to explore how technology can strengthen worker organisation and representation. We are interested not just in how the trade union can respond to new technologies, but how the trade union movement can deploy new technologies in service of its agenda to organise and represent working class people.

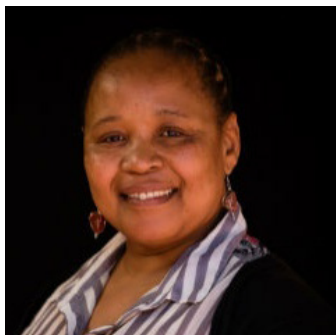
Digital tools are a part of workers' daily lives and we are experimenting with new ways to connect, learn, and share knowledge. These include podcasting, media advocacy

tools, a mobile organising app, and a WhatsApp group for women in precarious work. The LRS had a prominent role at the ILGA World Conference, the largest global gathering of LGBTI+ organisations. Technology is changing worker organising, and our WhatsApp group for Volunteer Food Handlers is an example of how technology can support advocacy, solidarity, and collective action. The group enables the 43 members to have real-time connection, knowledge-sharing, collaborative planning of project activities, and discussions on pressing issues. As one food handler said, the WhatsApp group is a place "to share love."

“

Nosipho Twala, Educator and Researcher, LRS Gender Programme

We created an online space where everyone feels empowered to learn and contribute. We don't provide all the answers. We pose thought-provoking questions that ignite our collective curiosity and drive our own research. We see ourselves as co-creators of knowledge, where lived experiences and online inquiry converge to deepen our understanding of public care work and to advocate for transformation. We apply feminist pedagogy in labour rights activism, and promote collaborative knowledge-building over hierarchical teaching.”



Technology does not implement itself. Setting up, administering, and facilitating online communication requires effort and intentionality. We view technology as a capability that unions must actively develop and sustain.

“

Zanele Chakela, Communications Co-ordinator at LRS:

In our work supporting and facilitating online spaces, we have seen how tech facilitation, especially in Zoom workshops, allows diverse feminist methodologies to come alive in virtual environments. The goal is to create safe, engaging, and accessible digital spaces. Tech support is central to movement-building, as it helps us create intentional spaces, navigate complex tools easily, and ensure that everyone's voice is heard, especially considering the digital divide.”



NETWORKING AND ALLIANCE BUILDING FOR INFLUENCE



We view networking and alliance building as a vital strategy for a small organisation that seeks to work on complex themes and amplify its reach. Our partners are trade unions, national trade union centres, regional and continental worker formations, global unions, universities and other academic institutions, solidarity support organisations, government and statutory institutions, community-based organisations, and private sector consultancies where there is value alignment.

LRS is an affiliate of International Federation of Workers' Education Associations (IFWEA). IFWEA and affiliates

offered new courses in 2024 through the federation's Online Learning Academy. LRS developed two courses:

Introducing Feminism to Members:

This course explores your relationship to feminism and how those around you perceive it, before examining the history and various contexts in which feminism has evolved.

Introduction to Company Financial Reports for Trade Unions:

Participants learn how to analyse a company's annual report and use it to support wage negotiations. The course helps them show that a company can afford higher wages, strengthening their bargaining position and securing better outcomes for workers.




We thank all our partners and worker-educators who contributed to building a vibrant, democratic education movement. The worker-educators who designed and facilitated workshops, study circles, online courses, dialogues, and webinars deserve special thanks for courageously experimenting with new methods and materials to deepen participation and awareness of our shared struggles for democracy and social justice in a fragmenting world. These are the educators who will inspire and guide us in strengthening a global movement for worker unity."

– Saliem Patel, General Secretary of International Federation of Workers' Education Associations (IFWEA).



- 1-2. Ditikeni Expo, Johannesburg
3. LRS and ILO Bureau for Workers Activities (ACTRAV), Abuja.
4. OPC partners meeting, Johannesburg.





Knowledge is too important
to leave in the hands
of the bosses