

Adopted by the Board 2019-02-08



PROGRESSIVE DEVELOPMENT FOR DEMOCRACY, EQUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Olof Palme International Center's strategy for international development work 2020-2025

Preamble	3
Our understanding of today’s challenges	4
Our understanding of progressive development	5
Our political priorities	6
Countering the threats to democracy and human rights.....	6
Advancing equality and worker’s rights – building new alliances and pushing progressive politics.....	6
Sustainability through a just transition – countering climate change	7
Promoting peace and dialogue – mitigating armed conflict and social tensions.....	8
Opposing the backlash – increasing gender equality	8
Our methods	10
Our international commitment	12
Middle East and North Africa	13
Western Balkans	17
Southern Africa	21
South East Asia	25
Eastern Europe	30
Latin America.....	32

PREAMBLE

Today we are faced with several global challenges that will define our future. Climate change is demanding immediate collective action, rapidly growing inequalities and destructive conflicts tear societies apart, and democracy is under attack in a way not seen in decades. Never has the need for global solutions based on international collaboration and solidarity been greater. Instead neoliberalism still prevails and populism, nationalism, sectarianism and racism flourishes.

We now see the establishment of a global movement for progressive development that advances democracy, equality and sustainability. A change that is necessary to achieve the aims of the labour movement of freedom, social justice, peace, workers' and human rights. This global movement is not uniform or singular, but rather a multitude of voices raised for a common cause globally *and* locally.

Our main task as the Swedish labour movement's international solidarity organisation is to work with our sister organisations around the world to be part of this global movement for progressive development. We see its positive effects in the organising work of the rural and political activists in the Philippines hardest hit by the increasingly fierce monsoon seasons, in the calls for genuine and meaningful participation by democracy activists in Palestine, and it is reflected in the global trade union movement's mobilisation for a Just transition.

The international labour movements ambition stands in sharp contrast to the predominating *neo-liberal perspective* that puts unregulated free markets and economic growth above every other societal dimension. The *social liberal view* that have few aspirations beyond rule of law, institution building, human rights and formal democracy. Or, the widely held *developmental narrative* of change and progress in relation to Agenda 2030 as something apolitical and technical. Our perspective is instead *social democratic*. We work on the premise that to fulfil the 17 goals of Agenda 2030 there is an immediate need for sustained collective organising, political actions and democratic representation that can advance progressive reforms, change societies and inevitably challenge existing power structures of social, economic, and political systems.

The strategy is the outcome of a collective process that has involved our organisation, representatives from our member and partner organisations as well as Swedish and international experts. It is based on an analysis of what makes progressive development possible in today's increasingly globalised and polarised world. It clarifies our added value, what we want to achieve, where we work, why it is relevant for us to work there, what issues and partners we prioritise, and how we aim to succeed. It will be used when developing operational plans, programmes and projects, as a basis for assessing initiatives, partnerships and proposals for cooperation, and it offers the framework for expanding as an organisation.

The Olof Palme International Center has a unique role in the Swedish development context as the international solidarity organisation of the Swedish labour movement. Based on this mandate we will work with the international labour movement to achieve progressive development for democracy, equality and sustainability.

OUR UNDERSTANDING OF TODAY'S CHALLENGES

Globalisation is two-faced. It has led to poverty reduction as well as improved access to rights, health, education, and security. And there is great potential for organising and mobilising progressive forces in a society that is increasingly interconnected and intertwined through the growing mobility of people, rapid technological advances, international cooperation, relations, and networks, and globally shared value systems and norms.

However, it needs to benefit all and leave no one behind. Its offshoots, the mechanisms and structures that divides, dominates and governs, are also shared around the world, even if they come in different shapes and forms. The crucial need for cross-sectoral, cross-community, cross-border alliances, social dialogue, and mobilisation for progressive change stem from this other, very negative aspect of our global society characterised by the fusion of:

1. Today's capitalist system including the dominance of the financial sector and multinational and transnational corporations paired with the globalisation of production and consumption, rising inequality and extreme concentration of wealth;
2. A development growth model that leads to rapid climate change and failing ecosystems, constituting an immediate threat to our very existence;
3. The increased production, scope and use of advanced military, security and police powers and technologies as means of domination and resolution of social and political conflicts;
4. The shrinking space for trade unions, civil society and oppositional forces that limits and circumscribes their influence.

Separatist or nationalist organising and discourse will not be enough in the face of these challenges. It will fall short of providing the platforms needed for organising, mobilising, and alliance building for a progressive development that are able to channel the growing engagement, anger, resentment and fear in a constructive way.

The vision required is global. However, the effects of the system are primarily felt locally and unequally and mobilising, organising and alliances for comprehensive reforms must therefore be sought and supported at several levels. At the same time, they need to be based on a shared sense of purpose and mutual understanding. The growing international consensus that advocates for common solutions, increased equality, decent work and sustainable development, represented primarily by Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement, offers such a purpose to rally around.

As the international labour movement, we find ourselves on the defensive in a lot of ways. In the middle of a crisis of both identity, organising principles and political vision, a new theory for progressive development is needed in the North and South alike. We should therefore relate to, engage with, and mobilise for these global processes at all possible and relevant levels as part of our renewal and revitalisation.

OUR UNDERSTANDING OF PROGRESSIVE DEVELOPMENT

What is then the basis for progressive development and how do we achieve it? Answering this question sustains our *theory of change* and makes us better equipped to support, contribute to and engage with progressive movements and processes. We define progressive development, in line with Social Democratic theory and our experience as a movement, as sustainable development (socially, economically and environmentally) based on social justice, and the liberal democratic politics required to get there.

A crucial factor for progressive development is when alliances of citizens are created among a broad range of political collectives such as trade unions, civil society organisations, social movements, protest movements, community-based organisations, interest organisations, religious congregations and/or political parties. The uneven development generated today is creating divisive interests that makes it difficult, if not impossible, to rely solely on our own movement. Sustained, and potentially long-lasting change happens instead when broad alliances gather behind political agendas for reform and proposals towards sustainable development, equality, freedom, social justice, democracy, peace, or human rights. Hence, progressive development is possible when these alliances are sustained for a common cause and translate their strength into political power and representation in economic and political spheres.

Our mission statement follows from this view of how change is achieved and is firmly rooted in the history and current experiences of our movement.

The Olof Palme International Center supports **democratic organisations** that come together in **broad, strategic alliances** in pursuit of **progressive development**.

1. *Democracy is the founding principle* of the international labour movement, and collective organising constitutes the basic means to achieve change, since without collective and democratic organising there are little prospects for broad and lasting progress. In our developmental work the word democratic refers to three main aspects (in order of priority):
 - i. a shared vision of the need for increased democracy and active participation,
 - ii. a shared understanding of the working methods used, i.e. inclusive, participatory, peaceful, non-violent, and non-discriminatory, and
 - iii. a shared ambition of how we are organised, i.e. the existence and practice of democratic values, structures and procedures.
2. *Broad, strategic alliances are essential* to achieve sustainable change based on the realisation that no organisation or movement, no matter how strong, can achieve inclusive and lasting progressive development alone. Change demands synergies and cooperation within and across societies. This refers specifically to collective actions that are centred around a goal, interest or purpose, and that gathers a variety of organisations from different sectors in society.
3. *Progressive development provides purpose and meaning*, to mobilise, organise and rally behind shared goals.

These three pillars amount to *social democratic politics* that strive to realise democracy and human rights, economic equality, peace and gender equality by democratic means, in such a transformative way that the realisation of these aims reinforce each other.

Furthermore, it has a direct bearing on how the international labour movement needs to develop, both in terms of strategies for organising, decision-making procedures, involvement of members, inclusion of and collaboration with other parts of society, as well as the development and application of progressive policy and reforms.

OUR POLITICAL PRIORITIES

Our five political priorities give further content to our theory of change and how we view and define progressive development. These priorities shall be used as a starting point for developing our operations, when defining purpose and aim of cooperations, alliance building and partnerships, when we develop common action plans, or as a point of departure for organisational and strategic development. Not all priorities are expected to be relevant for everything we do, but everything we do need to relate to one or more of them explicitly.

Countering the threats to democracy and human rights

The Olof Palme International Center will support democratic development and increased respect for human rights through;

- the spread of popular education and a democratic culture,
- the strengthening and organisational development of democratic civil society organisations, trade unions and political parties, and
- the development of strategies for broad alliances in their local contexts.

The space for civil society is shrinking and democratic culture, values and the democratic system as such is being threatened. The reasons are found in rising economic, political and social inequality, authoritarian regimes' oppression of personal and political freedoms, increased militarisation, and in the actions of dominating and powerful corporations. There are more formal democracies in the world than ever before but according to democracy indexes the state of democracy weakened in more than 70 countries in 2018. This inconsistency sheds light on the fact that genuine democracy, characterised by respect for human rights and social justice, that makes room for active political participation and representation, adds up to something more than mere electoral procedures.

Authoritarianism paired with populism has adapted to the universal acceptance of liberal democracy by using their electoral wins, however they are won, to push back personal and democratic rights and freedoms, to attack human rights and democratic institutions, and to pursue absolute control of the State. Democracy is undermined from within by a combination of deception, domination and dismantling. The efforts to protect and develop democratic values and institutions, to support a politically aware and conscious citizenry will be a key priority during this strategic period.

Democracy is the only system that one needs to learn. It differs from any other system in that it depends on citizens that have been educated not just in the functioning of the governing system but also of its values and *how* to act as a citizen. Citizens in a democracy therefore need to be encouraged to think critically, act independently and organise collectively. To this end we regard popular education not merely as means to an end but an end itself. It supports and fosters democratic culture and values. It creates aware and active citizens.

Our work to support a democratic and vibrant civil society and active citizens continues to be vital for protecting democracy, supporting the rule of law, and to achieve meaningful democratic participation.

Advancing equality and worker's rights - building new alliances and pushing progressive politics

The Olof Palme International Center will strengthen the work with the trade union movement by;

- promotion and support for innovative ways of mobilising informal and precarious workers,
- fostering of alliance building between the trade union movement, political parties and civil society organisations, as well as
- supporting the trade union movement to develop policy and reform proposals for progressive and sustainable economic development

Today's globalised economy is characterised by an increasing informalisation of the labour market due to corporate politics of out-sourcing production, application of new technologies and growing mobility of capital and people. These trends all pose challenges for the international trade union movement's organising principles and identity. The difficulties we face to defend basic rights amid growing inequality lead to a weakening in the trade union density and limits the effects of collective bargaining and existing platforms for social dialogue. At the same time, we are struggling to find new ways of organising our work in a growing informal sector, a widespread precariat, as well as in relation to emerging social and political struggles advanced by other parts of civil society. Trade unions across the globe are on the defensive trying to protect social gains and existing legislation and institutions, including ILO core conventions.

The tendencies dominating today's capitalist economy must thus be met with new strategies, partnerships and based on a new analysis. The aim is not only to defend and advance conquered rights in the developed world, but to promote the socio-economic principles of the welfare state as the norm in developing countries as well as social dialogue as the main mechanism to get there. The economic system creates divisive interests that challenges unity and alliances. The development and implementation of transformative reforms is crucial to overcome these divisions. These reforms should include areas such as sustainable growth, gender equality, decent work and decent life through universal social protection systems and the redistribution of wealth through progressive tax systems. Processes of social dialogue based on relevant ILO instruments and platforms are ways to move this forward and we will support the Global Deal as an important tool. It is therefore central to advance the unique role and voice of trade unions as the most representative of worker's rights, the legitimate partner in social dialogue and develop their role in developing and advancing progressive reforms. When trade unions and progressive political parties together with other civil society organisations construct broad alliances as a political force for organising and mobilisation to this end it has proven very effective.

Sustainability through a just transition - countering climate change

The Olof Palme International Center will increase our engagement to counter climate change in line with and beyond the Paris Agreement by;

- engaging the international labour movement broadly in the work for a Just transition,
- supporting partner organisations to develop local and regional reform proposals for a Just transition
- contributing to alliance building at all levels that pushes for these reforms

Climate change is an immediate threat to our very existence. If we don't find a way to counter it in the coming decade all other reforms and progressive developments will be for nothing. Already today the effects are visible with dire consequences for millions of people across the globe losing their homes in fires, floods and droughts in a vicious spiral that reinforces inequality and deepens poverty and injustice. Workers, farmers and poor are the worst affected by climate change today and has very limited options to deal with the effects. Further, countries in the developed world such as Sweden, are not just the main cause to the current situation, we owe much of our ongoing and excessive contribution to climate change to imports from countries where people and popular organisations are weak and poorly organised and environmental legislation is limited or non-existent. The international labour movement needs to increase its engagement drastically in the coming transition. Our way to do this is to develop responses that address inequality at the same time as climate change. If we are unable to do this, transforming our societies in the necessary way will prove impossible.

We are part of the international trade union movement's call for a *Just transition* towards a fossil free, socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable world. The agenda

encompasses a range of social interventions needed to secure workers' jobs and livelihoods when economies are shifting to sustainable production, it emphasises the centrality of ILO core conventions and the importance of social dialogue to get there. We align with and support the campaign for a Just transition that places increased equality at the centre of the necessary reform projects. Equality ensures sustainable change and more equal societies are better equipped to tackle the radical shift and structural changes needed of our societies, economies and production to address the climate threat.

Promoting peace and dialogue - mitigating armed conflict and social tensions

The Olof Palme International Center will increase our efforts to promote peace and dialogue by;

- contributing to the international labour movement's engagement for peace and the reduction of destructive conflicts,
- supporting local, national, regional and international peace efforts and movements, and
- promoting a peace, anti-war and anti-violence agenda for a demilitarised world free from the nuclear threat

In many of the countries and regions where we are working, a situation of armed, destructive conflicts and social tensions define the lives of people. This situation leads to massive loss of lives, forced migration, obliterated basic infrastructures, and damaged social fabrics. All this makes progressive development a distant dream. This is evident in relation to contexts of violent armed conflicts, but also in countries in relative peace and calm where social and political tensions repetitively sparks waves of violence and fear. From a long historical perspective research show that we live in more peaceful times, with fewer conflicts in the world and a lower probability to fall victim in an armed conflict. However, for many of our partners and their communities, this knowledge offers little comfort. For them, everyday life is plagued by state violence, persecution, deportations, and religious extremism. They are caught in fabricated group identity tensions fuelled and exploited by actors to advance tribal, sectarian, nationalistic, racist and discriminatory agendas and policies.

The labour movement's approach, today and historically, to manage and prevent harmful conflicts is humanistic and progressive. It seeks to prevent and eliminate armed or destructive conflicts through dialogue, mediation, conflict prevention and peacebuilding in inclusive, cooperative ways. It strives, furthermore, to achieve progressive development by using only nonviolent methods and engaging in open democratic organisations and movements. It promotes joint problem solving and integrative conflict resolution. We understand that challenging existing power structures will create conflicts of various kind, but this approach always seeks to avoid violent social tensions that could be originate from the dynamics of development. It strives to achieve mutual understanding. This realisation of interdependence was at the heart of the term *common security*, coined by Olof Palme in his international work for nuclear disarmament, and is still relevant today as this work continues.

Opposing the backlash - increasing gender equality

The Olof Palme International Center will work for increased gender equality and advancement of women's rights by;

- emphasising it as a core component in organisational development in civil society organisations, trade unions and political parties, and
- increasing the capacity to articulate policy proposals within the same target group, with the aim to strengthen women's rights and the implementation of the same

As a feminist organisation the Olof Palme International Center engages in the universal struggle for equal rights for all, against discrimination, gendered power structures and prevailing norms curtailing every individual's opportunity and freedom. We therefore support

initiatives that stand up against the current backlash against women rights and the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/-sexual and intersexed (LGBTI) persons as autocratic, conservative and racist right-wing movements gain strength and power across the world. The gains made for gender equality is among the first casualties whenever these reactionary forces come to power. It rolls back achievements and makes continued advancement more distant. The hatred, discrimination and prejudices towards women, LBGTI, ethnic and religious minorities are used as a call to arms when these forces are trying to get to power and in cynic processes for political gains. Violence, threats and conflicts is the result, limiting freedom, curtailing democracy and denying equal rights.

Working for gender equality is about achieving real democracy by challenging the prevailing norms of masculinity and femininity, by guaranteeing equal opportunities and meaningful representation. It is a decisive factor for true political participation, as well as for freedom of association and assembly.

Gender equality should be handled as a fundamental issue of freedom, justice and rights to the labour movement. We identify the labour market and the workplace as two of the most central arenas to effectively counter gender inequalities. Advancing the agenda of equal rights for all can only be done in a legitimate way if we ourselves are consistent with these principles. We need to analyse and question our internal structures, organisational culture and our methods of work to become more inclusive and open. This is true for the Olof Palme International Center as an organisation, in our operations and for the international labour movement. Alliances should be forged with women's organisations and social movements to develop as organisations and to increase our ambitions for more gender equal work places, labour markets and societies.

OUR METHODS

The Olof Palme International Center will increase our collaborations, align our programmes and deepen our relationships with the international labour movement during this strategy period. We will do this in Sweden, with our European sister organisations and foundations and internationally in relation to existing networks and political alliances.

We define the international labour movement as a broad gathering of civil society organisations comprising political parties, trade unions and popular movements working for progressive development. In a more formal sense it is defined by the various international organisations and platforms that our member organisations are part of and actively engaged in and their various regional and national structures and affiliates. In different countries and contexts this also involves close allies, civil society organisations and community-based organisations with a shared vision and understanding of progressive development.

We will increase our efforts to organise our development work in a way that strengthens and reinforces relationships of solidarity and partnership within the labour movement and strengthens alliance building more broadly. In a way, this means going back to the historic roots of our international movement focusing our attention more fully on the *relationship* with our sister organisations and the goals of our mutual efforts.

The Olof Palme International Center shall engage in a committed and true partnership with the international labour movement through financial and organisational support by;

- using methods to increase organisational development and organising skills,
- exploring creative strategies and forms of mobilisation and alliance building
- encouraging and supporting the empowerment and inclusion of marginalised and disadvantaged groups,
- contributing to policy development and reform agendas,
- facilitating exchanges of experiences and strategies as well as partnerships between existing and new partner organisations that bridge gaps between different sectors.

This implies that we shall part from an analysis of the needs, capacities and priorities of our member organisations, their sister organisations and the networks and alliances they are engaged in when choosing partners and planning programmes. Together with our member organisations we need to assess if our sister organisations in the labour movement in a specific context are dynamic, relevant and interested in advancing progressive development:

1. If they are – we work with them.
2. If they face challenges but are willing to develop – we support them.
3. If they are not, or there is no labour movement – we work with other, likeminded organisations and movements.

When developing the administrative systems and the planning, monitoring and evaluation tools for our development work we shall further strive to place the *organisations* at the centre and create systems that facilitates and supports mutual and equal partnerships guided by the principles of development effectiveness. Given the development challenges described above this also means that we need to find ways of organising our support that are more *flexible and adaptive*, ready to respond to unpredicted events, rapidly changing contexts, and unexpected effects of our interventions. To both threats and possibilities.

The strategy will be evaluated through a mid-term review in the beginning of 2023. The evaluation will be organised through structured, collective dialogue and reflection meetings with staff, member organisations, partner organisations and experts.

During the period, we shall initiate a process to partly *decentralise* as an organisation to increase our local presence in relevant networks and to be able to provide the necessary support to both our international partners in the labour movement as well as to our Swedish member organisations. This is also crucial to improve the work environment and security of our local colleagues and it is necessary for us to be able to sustain support to both big and small organisations, to possible loosely held networks and to increase our adaptability and organisational focus.

We shall broaden our funding and expand our operations to be able to better achieve the development aims and priorities of this strategy as well as to increase our sustainability and strength.

OUR INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENT

The Olof Palme International Center and the Swedish labour movement work with the international labour movement in various parts and regions of the world. In most of these regions we have a long commitment to progressive development, dating back to times of colonialism and fights for independence. This long trajectory of solidarity with workers, marginalised and poor communities offers us legitimacy and credibility in our continued work for change. This in a context defined by globalisation and the immediate threats to democracy, our climate and the gains already made in relation to human, social, economic rights and access to security, health and education.

There are many examples of successful alliance building in our shared history of solidarity. In South Africa when democracy and freedom won over apartheid. In the Philippines with the creation of a united and consolidated labour movement. When the new and progressive constitution was developed in Zimbabwe. With the adoption of ILO Convention 189 in country after country around the world safeguarding domestic workers rights. Or most recently, in Macedonia with the successful support to mass protests and civic alliances that got rid of authoritarian rule. It is with these and many similar experiences in mind that we direct our efforts the coming years.

The Swedish labour movements three legs; a social democratic party, a blue-collar trade union federation and popular civil society movements create opportunities for relationship building in key areas of society and for progressive development. We shall further explore the possibility of fostering dialogue amongst these organisations and beyond, advancing the ability of the labour movement to both exercise and hold power accountable in Sweden and internationally.

The existing relationships and networks of the international labour movement offers a constructive platform to engage in the many times sensitive issues of organisational renewal and policy development needed to meet these global challenges and join a global movement for progressive development. The international network of sister organisations within the international labour movement will be built on to facilitate exchanges of experiences, enable international advocacy as well as contribute to organisational development.

In the coming period we are focusing on the following regions: Middle East and North Africa, the Western Balkans, Southern Africa, Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America.

Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

The Swedish labour movement's engagement for progressive development in the MENA region continues with unabated persistence in a period of regression in most countries in relation to progressive visions and ideals. The basis for our work lays in the countries where we currently have most operations, such as Palestine, Turkey, and Western Sahara, but the strategy includes and opens possibilities for increased regional efforts and operations in other countries of the region to meet our goals. The aim of the Olof Palme International Center in MENA is to contribute to increased respect for human rights, workers' rights, democratisation, constructive conflict resolution and peace building. *Our strategic objectives are:*

- Our partner organisations, and empowered youth, women and workers within them, mobilise civil society to develop progressive reforms.
- Alliances between progressive forces in the region are forged with the capacity to advocate and carry these reforms forward.

The MENA region has been witnessing an upsurge in militarisation and use of violence in the last years. Free media and open oppositional and civic activism are facing political and institutional constraints in authoritarian or semi-authoritarian systems. People suffer from poverty, extreme levels of inequality and unemployment and there are severe limitations to the rule of law. Migration, lack of human security and extremism are direct consequences of this.

To support progressive development in the face of these challenges, we will work with relevant parts of the international labour movement, especially targeting youth, women and workers in member-based organisations, trade unions and political parties. One key strategy is to provide effective platforms for sharing of experiences, ideas and approaches between partners to promote potential collaborations and alliances. Broad, progressive alliances forged between vibrant and legitimate civil society organisations, trade unions, and political parties are of great importance in the MENA region. No actor or sector is capable to alone counter the massive attacks on rights and freedoms that come from both internal actors, regional players and their external allies.

Key development challenges

These authoritarian and reactionary forces in the countries of the MENA region together with external, regional and global powers have almost destroyed the powerful appeal of the Arab spring for progressive reforms. Instead, these forces have pushed most of the region back towards authoritarian systems and increased under-development, inequality and poverty. In 2017, MENA was the only region in the world without any progress in human development. Two thirds of the population, or 87 million people, live in contexts of war, aggression and violence, primarily in Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen. Palestine and Western Sahara are under occupation. Political contestations between elites and groups are often done in aggressive top-down, winner-takes-all power struggles within countries and between them. Against the backdrop of heightened geopolitical tensions, this way of political behaviour has led to dangerous levels of militarisation, civilian suffering, forced migration, extremism and conflict-ridden societies. Conservative gains that particularly threaten women's rights and freedoms.

As a result, the state of democracy and human rights in the region is further deteriorating. Israel, Tunisia and Turkey are considered as good examples in the region and continue to be classified as "flawed democracies", not taking into consideration Israel as an occupying country. Others, including Palestine, Iraq, and even Morocco and Lebanon are classified as "hybrid regimes". The bulk of the other countries are best described as "authoritarian".

Corruption and poor governance are widespread. The current governments generally lack the will to fight corruption and thus contribute to the deterioration of public services that exacerbates inequality and unequal access to rights. This is especially relevant in the health,

education, water, electricity and housing sectors. Corruption also adds burden to a weak rule of law and a deficient separation of powers. Social protection programs that could increase the resilience of poor and vulnerable people and the opportunities available to them, differ throughout the region, are generally skewed towards urban groups and not general enough. As an example, only about 40 percent of the region's population is covered by some form of social insurance and very few programs cover women. Social assistance programmes reach less than five percent of the households although 20-25 percent of the households live below national poverty lines.

These negative developments create a dire situation easily exploited by power-seeking actors appealing to various forms of tribalism, such as loyalties relating to family and relatives, and/or ethnic, religious and other forms of identities. State resources are used to favour certain groups at the expense of the poor and marginalised, including women and youth. As these tribal politics are spreading so is the disregard for the notion of citizenship and secularism, accountability of political power, and rule of law.

In this atmosphere, many progressive political parties, independent civil society organisations, trade unions and individual activists not only find their possibility to engage diminished by authoritarian legislation, but also find themselves under surveillance, prosecuted and threatened. The regimes and their allies use the fight against terrorism or protection of state sovereignty as a pretext for diminishing the space for independent civil society and oppositional political parties. This negative development is specifically noted in Egypt, Syria, Israel/Palestine, Turkey and Western Sahara.

Few positive examples of impact of civic action do exist. Tunisia stands out in this regard, where progressive civil society, trade unions and political parties have successfully kept reactionary tendencies at bay, at least compared to other states in the region. Albeit limited there are also positive examples to be found in Palestinian civil society that is diverse and developing. Broad and effective collaborations and alliances among trade unions, civil society organisations and political parties to promote shared objectives is also a rare phenomenon in the MENA region. There are a handful of interesting exceptions, including the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet and the Turkish conflict resolution processes that was initiated but later reversed by the ruling government. Apart from these and other few exceptions, ad hoc cooperation defines the map of synergy and alliances.

The public sphere has traditionally been reserved for men. A call for gender equality is effectively seen as a transgression of women into this space. The claim to share power and control is therefore generally taken as a threat to traditionally established power structures. The voices and actions to transform prevailing norms of masculinity and patriarchy exist, but questioning these structures entails risk, sometimes high, not only to organisations but also to the people engaged in them. There are some achievements related to the well-being of women in the region and we have seen progress especially in relation to education levels and life expectancy in recent decades. However, in terms of women's participation in the labour market and in political life there is little progress. There are no effective policies in place to remedy inequality between men and women or diversify the economy to provide opportunities for participation and employment for the young and women. Many local civil society organisations, trade unions and political parties regard the development and implementation of such policy as a priority and we share this ambition with them. This especially since the region has the highest share of youth in the world, with people under the age of 30 accounting for 60 percent of the population and with the unleashed potential of women being limited by cultural norms and few possibilities. The region must create more than 60 million new jobs in the next decade to be able to absorb a growing workforce.

The labour movement in MENA

The labour movement in the region is generally weak and with limited influence. There is a lack and, in some places, only sporadic existence of organisations that genuinely represent and promote the interests of workers, women and youth. This is true for both progressive trade unions, political parties and civil society organisations. The organisations are, with few exceptions, characterised by fragile internal democratic structures, mobilisation capacity and policy development. Many of the organisations are also dominated by a small group of men which leads to weaker participation and representation of women, youth and workers. In addition, these actors' engagement for reforms are often repressed, weakened and marginalised by the authoritarian structures. It therefore seems particularly relevant to support and engage in processes to forge strategic coalitions that push for tangible progressive reforms to succeed in achieving change as well as to strengthen the labour movements legitimacy and appeal as actors of progressive change. This needs to be done in collaboration with the organisations that historically and formally are recognised as part of the international labour movement's various platforms and networks as well as more broadly with progressive parts of civil society that does not necessarily define themselves as part of the labour movement. The need for revitalisation, reorientation, and increased collaborations are especially notable for our sister parties in the region that has adopted social democratic values and programmes, but which are still small and often in opposition (except for Fatah in Palestine and PUK in Iraq).

On the regional level there are some positive examples of collaborative networking and alliances. The Arab Social Democratic Forum (ASDF) is a network of 14 social democratic parties and movements from 12 countries in the MENA region. The network aims to build a unified Arab Social Democratic front that encourage partnership, coordination and exchange of ideas on social democratic vision for development. The network is still trying to find a constructive way forward, balancing sometimes conflicting interests among members and reaching tangible and realistic common reforms. We will follow and interact with the network and when possible and relevant engage and support the forum in processes of collaboration and networking during the period.

The Arab Trade Union Confederation (ATUC) was established in 2014, co-initiated by the General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT), who also serves as a role model for the other ATUC members. ATUC is formally recognised by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) as a sub-regional structure. ATUC has 17 member organisations from eleven Arab countries, and it seeks to unify and unite workers to defend their rights in the MENA region but does not exclusively include independent trade unions. ATUC is still very young and we will engage with the federation and its affiliates on issues of common understanding and processes of progressive reforms and alliance building in relevant countries and possibly at a regional level.

Worker's Rights Defence, Advocacy and Education Network (IFWEA/AC) has the ambition to function as a regional network of workers educators. It has 11 associate organisations from seven countries. The network has a strong potential, but the majority of the organisations are still weak and have small resources. There is a need for increased support and engagement with the network in this regard, possibly using stronger and efficient organisations (members and non-members) as capacity building and alliance partners. In Palestine and Egypt there are relevant organisations that could be engaged to this end.

In addition to these networks, it is worth highlighting that both the International Union of Socialist Youth (IUSY) and the International Falcon Movement (IFM) have partner organisations in the region, such as Israel/Palestine, Tunisia and Turkey, that are relevant for our work. In recent years IUSY and its member organisations have held activities together with

other civil society organisations based on shared values and objectives. These are processes that we will continue to support with the prospect of shared positions and articulation of reforms.

Outside the labour movement, civil society in MENA includes all types of organisations and associations from service providers to watchdogs, as well as those that are de facto front organisations for political elites or establishments. Member-based organisations exist but are marginalised and remain weak. Many of the progressive organisations relevant for our work depend mostly on a small number of individual activists and intellectuals. Given the current development challenges, such as tribalism, geopolitical tensions and corruption, there is a need to further support our partners with the specific aim to expand their membership base, strengthen their structures and roles as well as to develop and advocate for progressive reforms. We can and shall contribute to supporting the mobilising, organising and social impact of local progressive actors. There is also a potential to create platforms for dialogue and experience sharing between partner organisations from various sectors and countries.

From this outlook, it is essential to engage, and support actors regarded both as belonging to the more formal labour movement as well as actors outside of it. We strive to work with organisations in civil society more broadly, that share our analysis and values, and that are committed to processes of progressive change for democratisation. This is crucial for the necessary revitalisation and build-up of a vibrant, representative, and progressive labour movement.

Our role in the region

The Swedish labour movement has a long history of commitment to development and freedom in the MENA region. This both in relation to peace building efforts such as the Israel/Palestine and Iran/Iraq conflicts as well as to supporting democratic development and engaging civil society. The Olof Palme International Center, as part of the Swedish labour movement, has developed meaningful and strong relations with many progressive actors in the region. We have done this based on our understanding of partnership, and as part of the Swedish labour movement's networks. Our movement's experience of developing policy proposals, forming effective state institutions and governance, establishing democratic organisations and strategic alliances remain relevant in the continued support for a progressive and peaceful development in the MENA region.

The developments in the MENA region engages the labour movement in Sweden with a strong commitment to supporting democracy, peace and social justice. The situation in Palestine, Syria and Turkey as well as Western Sahara are particularly important and resonates in the broader Swedish political debate. As reactionary forces gain momentum, our task together with our partners is to provide an alternative and more progressive vision for the region and as a voice for marginalised communities and groups.

The Western Balkans

Our commitment to development in the Western Balkans has been strong and deep since the beginning of the 1990s and it continues in the coming period. We will, however, take a new regional and more politicised approach that is much needed at present and with a civil society that has transformed and developed. The aim of the Olof Palme International Center in the region is thus to strengthen regional cooperation and development in relation to good governance, socio-economic and worker's rights and active citizenship. We will promote cooperation and joint activities between our partners, the labour movement and beyond to build the strategic alliances necessary for transformative policies.

Our strategic objectives are:

- **Our partners have enhanced their legitimacy through re-aligning with their constituencies, strengthening their popular base, and increased engagement and activism.**
- **Promotion of political, transformative reforms and enhanced social rights to build a rights-based welfare system in targeted countries, by building strategic alliances pushing for the implementation of such reforms.**

The consolidation of democracy and the rule of law in the region is challenged by corruption, lack of trust in state institutions, poverty, high unemployment, gender inequality and the weak mechanisms for civic participation. The EU accession and integration process is the main driver of political and economic reforms in the region. However, regional economic and social imbalances are deepening, which contribute to further fragmentation of society, doubts in the prospects of EU integration and gives space for populism and destabilisation. There has been no consistent, robust societal push in the region to dislodge vested interests in the status quo, even though sporadic protests have occasionally voiced the public's discontent with the ruling political class (e.g. Macedonia). Western Balkan societies have been too preoccupied with economic survival and closing the wounds of the war and conflict in the 1990s to resist state capture by predatory elites.

The Olof Palme International Center has a long-term commitment to support sustainable change and a democratic development in the Western Balkans. The focus of the coming years is built on the accumulated experiences from the past two decades of work in the region as well as the continuous input and recommendations from our partners and other relevant stakeholders from civil society in the respective countries.

Key development challenges

The region is especially characterized by weak citizenry that makes the rights and obligations of both state and citizens to be based on parochial rather than political divisions. This is basically because power elites have been building their legitimacy and support on emphasising and fuelling historical, ethnical, language, cultural and religious differences rather than political and ideological visions. This has led to cementing the division and fragmentation of societies, creating a vicious circle. A common way of seeing politics for the parties in power is to view the distribution of resources in society as a zero-sum game where some must lose for others to benefit. This framework favours conservative and elitist political forces. Through state-capture and corruption, these power actors' control and benefit from public finances and private sector investments, building and maintaining clientelist loyalties. All alternatives based on equal, inclusive and active citizenships are labelled as un-patriotic, and from foreign agents that need to be excluded.

Corruption constitutes one of the biggest challenges to democratic development and to open and transparent political structures in the Western Balkans. The widespread corruption puts

strain on economic and social resources and development constituting a threat to poverty reduction and limiting access to socio-economic rights. In the whole region corruption is persistent and citizens show low levels of trust in the public and private sector alike.

The right to freely organise is generally accepted but remains at relatively low levels among especially trade unions, partly because of weak economic growth, the spread of precarious work, high unemployment and high poverty levels. Low levels of organising leave free room for the continuation of discrimination of workers and exploitation in the workplace, limiting their access to fundamental socio-economic rights, including social and welfare programmes. The growing informal sector benefit employers since there are no legal agreements that guarantees workers' rights and because of the divisive effects on the possibility to organise.

Within the framework of the EU process, the economy needs to be reformed and modernised further, putting extra pressure on vulnerable groups. The economic growth must be translated into wellbeing for most citizens, a process that would be facilitated by a well-functioning labour market based on a fluent dialogue between government, employers and workers. This would guarantee a balance between the need for reforms and the workers' rights with a focus on promoting decent working conditions. The weak cooperation and interaction between trade unions and political parties, as well as other parts of civil society need to be strengthened, working together on strategic issues like the conditions for efficient industrial relations including the promotion of collective bargaining and social dialogue.

At the same time, progressive political actors have not been able to offer a coherent, unified alternative to this narrative, practices and trends. There is a clear need to build credible agendas for progressive development based on inclusion and participation to foster inclusive economic growth that can benefit the majorities of the region through re-distribution. There are a few but good and encouraging examples of forces trying to build and enforce such agendas that we will continue to support.

Gender inequality constitutes a major barrier for women to enjoy equal rights because of the highly patriarchal structures that characterises the region. Some positive developments in relation to the protection of women's rights have been made, with new and improved legislation in place. However, men still dominate the governmental and political bodies as well as in the leading roles in our own movement. Domestic violence remains a serious problem and women are subjected to sexual harassments and discrimination in the workplace. We will support our partners in strengthening their organisations to be more representative and open, as well as the development of policy that advances women's rights, in the work place as well as society at large.

The labour movement in the Western Balkans

Civil society plays a key role as a democratic corrective force in all societies that undergo a transition. Usually it aims to help develop and sustainably embed a democratic political culture, thus preventing countries from lapsing back into authoritarian rule. All countries now have a wide range of organisations covering most aspects of society with institutional capacity and well connected to regional and European networks. Civil society organisations have contributed to the overall political debate through the education of citizens with research and analysis on different topics as well as facilitating dialogue with authorities and public institutions. But, over the past few years, a growing sense of disillusionment has emerged among civil society about their possibility to influence development as authoritarian tendencies are becoming stronger.

The labour movement in the region is generally weak, limited by low levels of trust in the social democratic forces that failed to change societies when in power, as well as remnant structures of the communist era that is still to be fully reformed. The trade union movement is no exception, it is in general weak, divided by political and personal conflicts, and lacks overall

legitimacy and representativity. The general perception is not very favourable, regarding unions as part of the past and as corrupt structures protecting the privileges of a few. Trade unions are better represented in the public sector while the private, and in special the new and growing sectors of the economy, is mostly un-organized.

But it is important to put the weakness of the labour movement in the overall economic context: high unemployment, wide-spread informal sector and a shrinking public sector with, in comparison, stable working conditions. It is a labour market where the employers set the rules with little opposition and where the employees lack collective representation.

The trade unions need to reinvent themselves in order to strengthen their public legitimacy as valid and useful organisations for progressive change, and that is where we can contribute the most with best practice experiences, organisational development and support. We will also work more closely with the main regional trade union networks such as PERC and different Global Unions. There is still little formal cooperation between civil society organisations and trade unions and the mutual lack of trust and information is high. We will support efforts to bridge this gap and to build alliances with civil society organisations based on issues like combating informal employment and precarious work, expanding the social dialogue and reforming the social protection systems. Alliances between trade unions and civil society organisations that agree on a minimum set of common demands, can play a crucial role in defending and promoting socio-economic rights in the region.

Progressive political parties in the region have a limited exchange of ideas and debate internally and limited political dialogue and cooperation externally. There is a lack of trust in the political parties from trade unions and civil society organisations. Relationships with actors in civil society are often weak and insufficient. Inadequate political programs and insufficient ideological anchoring further weaken the parties' participation in the political process and limits the possibility for durable and mutually beneficial alliances. By liaising with civil society and labour unions, our sister parties need to develop progressive reform proposals that can contribute to long term social change and meet the threats to democracy in their neighbourhood, the growing dissatisfaction amongst citizens and an accelerated regional brain drain. Several recent studies have highlighted the decline in voter turnout, membership of political parties, interest in politics and trust in political institutions, especially amongst young people.

We want to strengthen active citizenship both through political participation and through civic and trade union engagement. We remain committed to supporting a vibrant civil society, a reinvigorated trade union movement and social democratic sister parties in the region. Despite some bright examples and alliances that appeared in the region (e.g. protests in Macedonia), there is a strong need to support more collaboration between these actors to form powerful coalitions. We will encourage our partners to engage more politically as we see that an enhanced interaction and coordination between political parties, trade unions and civil society organisations would contribute to strengthening progressive development in Western Balkan societies.

Our role in the region

Through our experience of working in the Western Balkans, combined with the political vision of social justice and practice of equal partnerships, we have built credibility and recognition in the region. This enables us to contribute to creating links and actions between civil society organisations, trade unions and political parties. This credibility and legitimacy also enable us to engage our partners in the creation of alliances locally, nationally and regionally, as well as developing structures for social dialogue in the region.

As part of the Swedish labour movement we are well positioned to engage partners in an increased effort to once again politicise civic engagement, developing progressive policies and pushing a much agenda for social justice, democracy and increased equality. With our

experiences of good governance as well as building democratic and inclusive institutions is a specific added value in the efforts to advocate for progressive reforms including increased transparency and political accountability. This, in addition to our local experience of supporting organisational development, is also relevant when strengthening our partners and increasing their impact.

Southern Africa

The Olof Palme International Center's work in Southern Africa goes back to the establishment of our organisation. In the coming years we are looking at new ways of directing our work, with increased regional cooperation and alliance building to support both processes of consolidation and transition. The basis for our work lays in the countries traditionally prioritised, such as South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Eswatini, but the strategy carries the possibility for increased regional efforts as well as new operations elsewhere in the region to meet our goals. Our work aims to strengthen the labour movement, the participation of marginalised groups in the work for democratic reforms and reduce economic and social inequalities, while expanding civic and democratic space. We will seek to strengthen potential synergies between civil society and political parties through enhancing the focus on collaborations around shared interests and target groups. *Our strategic objectives are:*

- Our partner organisations have increased fruitful cooperation and partnerships within and between spheres of civil society, trade unions, and political parties, through strategic networking and exchange of ideas and experiences.
- The prospects for democratic reforms, social equality and environmental sustainability through a just transition have increased in targeted societies through capable political parties, a revitalised trade union movement and a vivid civil society that empowers marginalised groups.

Despite the importance of popular movements during the struggle for independence, a distance between these movements and the new generation of popular engagement can be traced, as the independence movement has gained political power and been institutionalised. Another part of the picture in the region are the issues of inequality, poverty and access to the labour market, matters that are highly gendered.

The Swedish labour movement has long standing relations with the region that goes back to the anti-colonial liberation struggle. Many capitals and cities in the region have streets, statutes, and squares named after Olof Palme. The operations in the region bring together trade unions and other civil society organizations to explore points of collaboration and exchange and seek to strengthen the voice of these organisations and their target groups. The political party cooperation promotes the exchange of experiences and capacity building relating to policy formulation, organisational democracy and multiparty systems.

Key development challenges

We are cautiously positive to the political changes in the region during the last years. In South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC) managed to change the party leadership, in Zimbabwe the freest elections since liberation was held in 2018 and, in Namibia, the South-West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) has shown that it is able to keep changing their political leadership. This is not to suggest however, that the elitist behaviour of the ruling political parties, including our sister parties, is not of continued concern. We also see developments of deterioration that are worrying in Eswatini (Swaziland), that held elections marred with violence.

Poverty and access to labour market opportunities are central issues in the region. Around half of the population in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region lives on less than one dollar per day. The World Bank has identified the SADC member states as some of the most unequal countries in the world, topped by South Africa. Poverty is further unequally experienced by men and women. The economic marginalisation of millions of women serves as the material base for their cultural and social oppression. In addition, land ownership and redistribution remain important issues to be solved in Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe alike and are subject to public debate. Culturally and economically, youth and women are marginalised.

Violence against women, continues to be a severe problem in the region. This horrific reality is much debated, but there are no indications of effective policies or development in a more positive direction. Government policies to challenge patriarchal cultural and practices are rarely effectuated, leading to laws not being implemented.

The situation for organising and active citizenship in the region is multifaceted. Civil society and mass movements played a significant role in the struggle for independence in Namibia and South Africa, and this legacy lives on. At the same time, with new issues at the forefront, the ascendance to the political power of elites from these movements has also created a distance, and to an increasing extent tensions, towards new forms of civil society organising and activism. Namibia and South Africa display progressive constitutions benign to civil society engagement. However, various mechanisms and legislation have been passed to regulate and curtail the space and influence of civil society. In Eswatini, being a monarchic dictatorship, the situation for organisation and active citizenship is even more difficult.

Climate change and environmental degradation threaten income and food security, labour productivity, workers' health, and overall working conditions. The region has suffered from some of its most severe droughts in recent years. Consequently, achieving environmental sustainability is pressing from a living and labour perspective. Specifically, declining water resources has been causing water shortage, reduced agricultural productivity, contributing to hunger, spread of vector-borne diseases to new areas and destruction of infrastructure. This problem risks to undermine the progress made in reducing poverty and improving socio-economic well-being. It hinders people from fully engaging in decent work, and as a result huge amounts of human potential remain untapped. Already exposed groups, the poor, children, elderly, women and persons with disabilities are particularly vulnerable.

With the lack of a fully functioning, broad-based, non-clientist social welfare states, people are at the mercy of traditional forms of protection and loyalties that impeded on their individual rights. It may take the form of strong tribal and clan structures or ethnicities. This has strong effects on building activism and change on the base of interest and issue representation. However, in Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe, local and national engagement within the civil society for specific issues remain strong, varying in scope and intensity between the countries. The struggle for democracy in Eswatini is championed by the trade unions, much like the role of trade unions in the struggle to abolish apartheid in South Africa.

The SADC cooperation do have transformative potential but is at the risk of remaining fully neoliberal, benefitting the rich and powerful. This will be the case if progressive parties, trade unions, women's and youth organisations fail to influence the regional agenda. The same goes for issues of land reform, labour market and poverty eradication policies, women's empowerment and the critical environmental challenges facing the region.

The labour movement in Southern Africa

The labour movement in the region remains quite strong and dedicated to progressive development, while also suffering from fragmentation and competition between especially trade union federations. Most countries in the region are governed by former liberation movements. Their struggles for independence against colonial rule have created many similarities in experiences and narratives in the region, which have forged strong alliances and bonds of loyalty. Parties like the ANC, SWAPO, MPLA and Zanu-PF are all dominant and have a majority of seats in Parliament. There are progressive elements to a varying extent in these parties, including our sister parties, but also practices, culture and structures from the days of the liberation struggle still in place, when the struggle at times was armed, secret and the space for internal critical voices almost non-existent.

An already well-established cooperation with sister parties, as a result of previous programmes, increases the likelihood of impact of our support in terms of organisational and leadership development, trust building between the parties and the civil society, as well as policy development. Particularly when most of the parties in power have structured relations, ties and alliances to the labour movement, which some of them defines themselves to be part of. In other parts the trade unions are more oppositional; in Zimbabwe they even were instrumental in forming an opposition party.

We see it as crucial to empower and capacitate youth for the political parties to increase their legitimacy, internal democracy and progressive policy development. We therefore also interact with several youth leagues that are IUSY members through our programmes and cooperation with their mother parties.

Trade unions in the various countries are generally a vibrant force, despite repressive mechanisms sometimes applied by the state. With unions having played a central role in the independence struggle, organisational splits and differing positions on the relationship to the now ruling parties, set the framework for organised labour. These differences have not hindered instances of coordination and cooperation, between trade unions and in relation to political parties, the state and other strategic parts of civil society. The competition between trade unions is not necessarily seen as a negative aspect either, but cooperation on different levels would be beneficial.

The trend of labour brokers/labour hire and informalisation of the labour market further define the conditions for trade union work. Unionisation rates have gone down in some sectors and locations, shifting the membership base from the domination of unskilled and semi-skilled workers towards skilled and professional workers, including white collar workers. This requires the development of new organisational strategies and targeting of domestic and informal sector workers. In Eswatini the trade union acts as force for democratisation. Trade unions achieve the most when engaging with other elements of civil society to further their positions. When reproducing patriarchal norms and failing to achieve internal democracy, they also fail to act as agents of progressive change.

The trade union movement is generally characterised by divisions between federations, especially in South Africa in Namibia. Not everyone is affiliated with ITUC-Africa; for instance, none of the Namibian trade unions are a member. We regard it as relevant and important to support ITUC-Africa affiliates, but we should not exclude non-members from cooperation, such as the Namibian trade unions. We also note that these potential partners do not compete with ITUC-Africa affiliates. Furthermore, we support our partners relations to and cooperation with ITUC-Africa.

For development of trade unions, we assess support through labour organisations as a strategic way of working. And, we will continue our support to initiatives of cooperation and alliances between the trade union movement and civil society organisations.

The International Federation of Workers Education Association (IFWEA) currently has its secretariat in South Africa. It is a global secretariat, but they have relations to some of our partners in the region and we consider them relevant for our popular education work in Southern Africa. Other actors outside the traditional labour movement with progressive potential are some of the churches, student movements, and women's organisations. Alliances may span over traditional demarcation lines by focusing on specific issues. The role of women organising to protect, and safeguard women's human rights is key to increased equality. Women's organizations work at all levels, from grassroots to parliament, creating the necessary linkages for issues and positioning of women in decision making processes. This

support is done with varying degrees in the different countries and we shall continue our efforts towards increased gender equality.

There is a need to increase the involvement of youth in the labour movement and civil society. Facing high unemployment rates, poverty levels, climate effects, the exposure to drug abuse and criminality, as well as the weakened ties to the struggle for independence are challenges in need of an articulate answer to achieve a regrowth within the labour movement. Organised youth need to build their capacity to avoid a culture of victimisation. Furthermore, young people often take the lead as change agents in order to improve their communities. This is a force to take seriously.

A fundamental aspect of social protection and progressive development is a functioning, efficient and effective government. Political parties tend to have weak internal democracy, deficiencies that are carried into government positions at all levels, increasing the risk of corruption. The role of civil society and trade unions as both watchdogs and partners in social dialogue is a central element in countering a continued development towards such a situation. However, many of these organisations lack sufficient democratic structures and processes as well as the necessary organisational skills to fulfil this task in a credible and legitimate way.

In the coming period we will mainly focus our efforts on strengthening organisations that form part of the various networks of the labour movement in Southern Africa. We will support the development of internal structures, strategies, and alliances with other actors.

Our role in the region

The Swedish labour movements unyielding support in the struggle for independence and against racist colonial rule, has given us a unique position and credibility. The name of Olof Palme resonates in the region. Trust and relations that have been cultivated for decades are key. In this regard we share an experience of the potential strength that lies in broad alliance building build around common agendas and reforms. When democracy and freedom was one, constitutions drafted, systems developed. We are well positioned to continue and be part of the finalisation of transition.

Based on these longstanding relationships of trust, we are in a position to contribute constructively to sensitive internal matters of internal democracy including membership driven internal agendas, as well as supporting the advancement of interest-based alliances and cooperation between and amongst organisations and movements. One successful example is the facilitation of exchanges between women's organisations and trade unions, leading to cooperation to promote women's participation and against gender-based violence in the workplace.

Southeast Asia

This strategy will try to expand our operations to new countries in the region, with the aim for the labour movement to be better equipped to counteract inequality and push for welfare reforms and improved social protection. The basis for our work lays in the countries where we are currently present, such as the Philippines and Burma, but the strategy opens possibilities for new operations in other countries as well as regional initiatives. We aim to increase the exchanges of experiences, cooperation and networking between our partners and beyond country-wise and regionally. This will be done by supporting existing and new alliances between democratic and progressive trade unions, civil society organisations and political parties. *Our strategic objectives are:*

- Trade unions, civil society organisations, and progressive political parties are strengthened, and strategic alliances are developed. to advance progressive development.
- These alliances advance progressive development, improving social and economic equality, specifically in relation to improved social protection and welfare-systems in their respective communities.

Southeast Asia plays a central role in the market-driven globalisation and continues to uphold the strong economic growth. But at the same time, inequality has risen dramatically, and the democratic space continues to shrink. The precarious situation for workers in the region is characterised by low wages, lacking security of tenure, informalisation and union-bashing practises. Generally, the progressive movement is scattered, and civil society organisations tend to focus on separate and individual issues rather than defining joint political projects with shared objectives.

Platforms, whether existing or new ones, will be used to bring together interest-based organisations and progressive political parties from the labour movements in the region to define and develop common reform policies, strategies and tools needed for their societies to become more equal, just and democratic.

Key development challenges

Across Southeast Asia, democratic and progressive development is facing a backlash. The region is not only experiencing a shrinking space for civil society and political opposition, but also an increasing threat to civil liberties, rise of populism, the rebirth of dictatorships and the erosion of judicial independence. A new tendency is that repression is not only state-led, but also conducted by parts of the civil society. And as protests and counter-movements are established, civil society is becoming more polarised. These negative tendencies are not limited to authoritarian states, but also visible in post-authoritarian and even democratic countries. In Burma, this is manifested through the army's genocide of the Rohingya minority, and the silencing of investigating journalists and human rights advocates. Other examples are the political persecutions in the Philippines for those questioning President Duterte's war on drugs, and in countries like Vietnam, and China alike, the growing economy paired with restrictive legislation and new forms of control has consolidated the authoritarian rule of the Communist Party.

The economic growth in the region has been steady during the past decades, but still the returns remain unevenly and divisively distributed. While the economy is booming, inequality has risen dramatically throughout the region, both economically and in terms of access to welfare, as the reach of the state and public services is uneven in most Southeast Asian countries. The Asia Pacific region remains a global manufacturing hub and holds some of the largest economies in the world. With its cheap labour costs, it has been a crucial part of the global supply chain and generated exports of goods and services to the rest of the world.

Despite some improvements in local labour market laws, the actual income levels of workers are still low and the situation for many workers in the region is still characterised by the lack of

social protection. This not the least within the garment sector which employs more than 40 million workers in the region. Underpaid women constitute most of those workers who continue to face a considerable wage penalty, with higher average monthly wages for men. The women's subordinate position in the industrial production reflects a growing gender inequality in the Southeast Asian countries.

Job security remain tenuous, and union bashing practices continue. Union organising is generally discouraged, and unionised workers are often targeted by employers. Moreover, almost 1,3 billion of the region's workers are found in the informal economy, comprising around 65 percent of the world's total informal work force. Development and modernisation have not led to an increase in the formal work. Instead the tendency is the opposite, largely due to a lack of progressive policies in the labour market area, combined with the global economy demands on increased flexibility. Migration and the expansion of the informal sector poses serious challenges for the traditional trade unions and for the workers who find themselves conducting the most hazardous and poorly paid jobs with no safety nets or social protection.

According to the ILO, more than 60 percent of people in the Asia-Pacific region had no effective social protection in 2017. In Burma, the almost non-existing welfare services have forced people to fend for themselves or rely on charity. In 2014, a new social protection strategy (NSPS) was endorsed by the government with a vision of reducing poverty. However, as of 2017, 26 percent of the population lived below the poverty line. In the Philippines, the social security and welfare systems are scattered and under-budgeted. The many social protection programmes only formally exist since they lack funding and suffer from weak coordination among relevant institutions.

The extractive development continues in the form of reckless exploitation of natural resources and the appropriation of rents by way of rural as well as urban land grabbing and displacement of vulnerable people. At the same time, the effects of global warming and climate change is very present throughout Asia, from the polluted air in Beijing to the typhoon-affected coast areas in the Philippines. The increasing numbers of natural disasters primarily hits the poor and marginalised, resulting in increased migration and impact on livelihoods and access to rights.

The labour movement in Southeast Asia

In Southeast Asia, the progressive movement is relatively scattered, however progressive actors face similar challenges throughout the region. A major challenge and opportunity this lay in bridging gaps between progressive organisations to foster the development of a coherent and unified labour movement. These gaps are multifaceted, sometimes based on security-precautions, mistrust, misperceptions or conflicts, and sometimes simply due to lack of cooperation or geographical distances.

In many of the countries there is no shortage of civil society organisations, but they are often focused on separate issues rather than defining joint political projects. In addition to the challenges mentioned above, the trade union movement is generally fragmented due also to power struggles and mistrust. As such, it is important to strengthen internal democracy and organisational development as well as dialogue. The true challenge lies in overcoming the disappointments, shortcomings and mishandlings of the past and defining a new, and joint vision for the future. Cooperation between political parties, trade unions, or other civil society organisations, is still to be developed in the region, with civil society's involvement in political advocacy for progressive development varying much between the countries.

In authoritarian contexts, progressive movements have been forced to adapt to survive, leading to unconventional structures and methods of organising. These realities have made it challenging or even impossible for the trade unions and civil society organisations to be

transparent and accountable towards its constituents, causing democratic deficit and lack of transparency.

Several of our sister parties in the region have a dual challenge in both defending democracy, democratic institutions and spaces, as well as being relevant to voters as political alternatives. In general, progressive parties in the region lack a social base and are thus weaker in representing their constituencies when in power. In several countries, the political and ideological awareness is low among citizens. Instead, political identities are formed on ethnic identity, clans and families, or clientelism basis, rather than political ideas and visions. Social democracy is widely misperceived as communism, which triggers memories and connotations to undemocratic rule and repression of the past.

In the Philippines, the labour movement is relatively mature, representative and well-coordinated through an alliance between popular organisations, trade unions and a progressive political party, pursuing structural reforms and societal change to combat inequality and poverty. In recent years, the fragmented trade union movement has overcome some historical and ideological conflicts and barriers and increased their collaboration on campaigning and advocacy for welfare and labour market policies. Developments that we will continue to support and engage with. In comparison, the young and fragmented workers and farmers movement in Burma has little cooperation with political parties and there is a lack of trust towards political representatives. Conflicts have arisen between persons and organisations within the trade union- and workers movement. The trade unions played a crucial political role during the uprising against the dictatorship in 1988. Today, a rift could be seen between activists coming back from exile, and those that stayed, working under ground.

Regionally, we are increasing our commitment and participation in national, regional and global coalitions, networks or platforms together with our partners such as The Network of Social Democracy in Asia, also known as SocDem Asia which is a regional network of foremost political parties or pre-party formations. Another example is the International Union of Socialist Youth (IUSY) which has a regional committee in Asia and efforts will be made to include them more in the regional alliance building. Positive improvements follow these efforts, and there is potential for bridging the gap and increase the coordination and cooperation between progressive movements and parties in the region. For the development of trade unions, we will assess future cooperation through existing labour network organisations, such as the ITUC-Asia Pacific, IFWEA, IUF among others.

Our role in the region

The Swedish labour movement's presence in Southeast Asia trace back decades. The Olof Palme International Center played an active role in supporting the peace-process and democracy development in Aceh, Indonesia. The cooperation with the Burmese democracy movement started already in the nineties when the movement was still in exile. In the Philippines, the cooperation with the Swedish labour movement played a significant role as a source of inspiration. It also provided practical support to build a labour movement, including trade union confederation, social democratic party and popular adult education.

The Palme Center has a long experience in working with and giving support to SocDem Asia and IUSY together with other likeminded political foundations such as FES, the Danish Social Democratic Party and the Australian Labour Party. The Swedish labour movement's historical experience of movement building is still relevant in Southeast Asia, as the more present experience of policy development, reforms and governance. On the other hand, the region's labour activists have important learnings to share around the tendency of informalisation of the workforce and increase our understanding and possibility for joint actions in relation to global value chains.

Eastern Europe

From our current limited levels, we have the ambition to increase our operations in Eastern Europe. The strategy for doing so focuses on processes in relation to the Eastern Partnership and their links and relations with eastern European countries within the EU. The aim of our work will be to improve the situation for democracy and dialogue, promote an active citizenship, and workers' rights, primarily through support to political parties, trade unions and strategic civil society actors, and the alliances between them. *Our strategic objectives are:*

- The labour movement is strengthened through organisational renewal, improved internal democracy and alignment with constituencies, as well as the specific development of relevant methods to recruit and train new leaders and representatives.
- There is an increased popular support in society for progressive development and the labour movement, developed as an outcome of platforms and opportunities to network and build alliances that advance progressive policies and reform agendas.

The transition to democracy, not least the introduction of multi-party systems, an independent civil society and the idea of free media, has fluctuated between progress and backlash over the last decades. Today the tide has shifted once again in the region and we see a general trend of shrinking civil space, increased threats to human rights and the uses of “traditional values” to manipulate and control. This presents challenges to the labour movement, the development of active citizenship, local engagement and the capability to democratically organise.

The Olof Palme International Center aims in the coming years to strengthen our regional approach in accordance with the eastern partnership priorities of supporting democratic development, dialogue and active citizenship. This falls in line with our political priorities at the same time as it promotes cooperation and joint initiatives between the countries, partners and member organisations aiming to build strategic alliances to assist the consolidation of democratic transitions in the east and reinvigorate and reinvent the labour movement as it currently stands.

Key development challenges

The region is characterised by a legacy of soviet dominance, torn between the eastern and western spheres of interest and relative isolation from the EU. It suffers from some of the highest poverty rates in Europe and are burdened by rising inequality since the recession of 2008. In addition to this, union activities are often met by open or more subtle repression, exacerbated by a labour market where short-time contracts means that complaints can lead to loss of employment. A situation that is engendered and defined by the unequal impact of men and women. The power actors and political elites including oligarchic actors builds legitimacy by playing out nationalist identities, conservative values and geopolitical power struggles. Effectively shadowing issues of redistribution or the need for welfare schemes and access to human rights. These elites who rose to power after independence dominate the political scene to a degree bordering to state-capture. Resulting in high levels of corruption and clientelism as well as an obscured separation of powers.

The transitional democracies of eastern Europe pose important challenges to the labour movement, civil society and political organisations, the conditions for active citizenship as well as for local engagement. Following the rapid introduction of democracy and pluralism of political parties, media as well as civil society actors, the situation has shifted strongly in the region, between stronger authoritarian tendencies and positive democratic development. Russia, for instance, took the authoritarian path under the leadership of Putin with a strong influence of oligarchs. The political situation has been getting worse after 2008. Opposition in political life, independent trade union organising and civil society activism have all been

severely impaired both through hostile rhetoric and legislation. Social Democratic parties have overall weakened their positions and far right movements have gained force. Countries in the Central Asia is generally also moving towards strong forms of authoritarianism with serious human rights abuses, limitation of political freedoms, and isolationistic tendencies.

The six countries included in the Eastern Partnership, Moldova, Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, took varying paths of development after their independence. They share however the need to balance the old dependence on trade and economic ties with Russia and new possibilities offered by European markets and other Western countries. China is also very active in the region and is obviously building connections with large investments. EU has invested a lot in the various Eastern Partnership programs to weigh into this balance act and offer an attractive alternative to Russian dependence in all areas of society. NATO's expansive ambitions in the region play a key part in this regard with an offer of military defence against Russian imperial ambitions and aggression. Provoking counter acts by Russia that still geopolitically regards the region as their own sphere of influence. In the case of Belarus, after 20 years of dictatorship, this balance between Kremlin and Brussels is expressed as a specific problem; to keep the country's sovereignty with the help of Brussels and fulfilling the demands of respecting human rights, or stay authoritarian, keep the subsidies from Kremlin that keeps the Belarusian economy afloat but, in the process, lose the independence. The situation in the region varies quite substantially between the countries, ranging from very small to extremely large countries, from dictatorship to possible democratic breakthrough and consolidation of democratic reforms, from active to frozen armed conflicts, from far reaching libertarian experiments to initial social welfare reforms.

The situation for women and LGBTI is generally defined by patriarchal systems and there has been several backlashes for women's and LGBTI rights in the past period of neo-conservative influence, advanced by authoritarian leaders and elites and enforced by an emboldened orthodox church with growing political ambitions. This is reflected in both legislation, state structures, labour market relations, organisational culture and access to power as well as a hardened and divisive rhetoric based on a portrayed difference between east and west used to influence national and regional debate. This far reaching and reactionary rhetoric leads to increased levels of violence, within families as well as directed towards specific groups, with impunity. The issue is thus central both as a point for organisational renewal and development as well as policy development. Long-term this can be curbed and brought back to a positive track with targeted work, promotion of regional cooperation and by moving the region closer to the EU.

The labour movement in Eastern Europe

In this multifaceted situation of disperse contexts there is a lack of broad alliances in the Eastern Partnership region, between trade unions, political parties and civil society. In general, the labour movement in this region post-soviet societies are weak, fragmented, and has difficulties recruiting new members and supporters. Characterized by old union structures and in some cases, close connections to the authoritarian leaders, the trade unions too often serve as bad role models with low legitimacy. New, more energetic and progressive movements are seen as rivals and are not welcomed by the traditional trade unions. There is a general awareness of these challenges that the labour movement faces and an acknowledgment of existing internal weaknesses, manifested in an expressed interest among labour organisations, party affiliated organisations, trade unions, civil society organisations with social aims, for education and training, new methods to reach out to the public and advocate for human rights values as well as basic knowledge of how to change the situation, both on a micro and macro level. This interest we aim to engage with and support during this period.

The International Union of Socialist Youth (IUSY) engages all of the political youth forums in the eastern partnership that are relevant for our ambitions. In recent year's IUSY and its member organisations gather under the Black-Sea Area Committee to have a joint regional approach to challenges based on shared values and objectives. These are processes that we will continue to support and connect to other initiatives with the prospect of shared positions and articulation of reforms.

Since 2012 there has been an interesting and constructive initiative run in the region, starting with the creation of organisations for popular education, rooted in youth movements and with clear democratic and organising objectives, catering to the needs and interests among young people. Popular education in the form of the study circle method has proven successful, and there is a momentum created with their skills and knowledge being sought after by other organisations, such as senior organisations and trade unions. A closer co-operation between the initiatives of popular education and the labour movement more broadly is a goal for this period.

The international networks of the trade union movement in the region, like PERC and ETUC, are active in eastern Europe, and an expansion of our engagement with the trade unions will be done in close cooperation and dialogue with the internationals. With failing political opposition in many of the traditional parties it is a necessity to find new partners and new ways to support progressive forces. The trade union movement is one of the ways we should explore. Initialising and supporting the rebirth of old connections between municipalities and other exchange programs is another possible way forward. To build peer-to-peer contacts in the current situation is important to counter conflicts and a heightened security situation in our hemisphere.

The current need for social and economic equality and progressive reforms generally offer opportunities for progressive ideas to take root. This despite a climate in the region where progressive ideas and social democracy as an ideology has been devaluated publicly by influential actors. The possibilities to be an active citizen are generally limited in the region's high level of centralisation and male-dominance in State, party and trade union structures, yet local initiatives and popular protests offer hope such as the recent Armenian case. Reform initiatives for better, more equal education, health care and pensions have the potential to involve and engage new generations of active citizens.

Although the situation for our sister parties vary between different countries in the region, the general tendency is that they face serious challenges. One example is Georgia where the broad and quite complicated alliance organised as the Georgian Dream party is on the brink of falling apart, as a result of infighting and embedded interests of oligarch support, taking the social democratic tendency with it. Another is Moldova where the situation is a bit more optimistic. The Democratic party, despite its challenges of oligarch dependency as well as serious and profound critique from the EU, can still be said to represent a progressive force that pushes a reform agenda reflective of the transitional period of the country.

Political foundations play a key role for our work in the region with potential to positively contribute to consolidating the democratic transition, as well as keeping the political parties in line with their ideological path. They serve as central actors in political education, promoting and fostering democratic principles, and offer possibilities of platforms for social and political dialogue. In the long-term they can also develop into central units for policy development once the region has surpassed the crucial stages of democratic transition. Relevant political foundations will be engaged as hubs to formulate grounded ideas on how to continue the work together with parties, trade unions, and civil society.

With the above-mentioned challenges in mind, there is a need for a coherent approach including actors that share a vision for progressive development and organisational renewal in the region. In order to achieve change in the region there is a need to work with existing labour movement structures as well as trade unions and civil society organisations currently outside, but with clearly expressed aims for progressive development.

Our role in the region

The Swedish labour movement enjoys good reputation and credibility in the region, much due to our persistent resistance and criticism of the communist ideology and support for freedom and independence after the wall. There is however a continued challenge in the reputation of social democracy more broadly, both in terms of its connotations in the public view with the left and the communist regimes, as well as with the forces that pushed for a rapid democratic transition that did not go as intended. This is a task for the international labour movement to take seriously and work strategically with in the coming period.

The Swedish labour movement's experience and solid European networks, with other parties and party affiliated foundations, trade unions and civil society organisations in Europe and in the region, is valuable for organisational development and provides good opportunities to contribute to a positive development of ideas and strategies exchanges as well as networking and forming of alliances.

Latin America

In the coming period we are opening to relaunch our operations and activities in Latin America, with a special focus on South America. After recent backlashes for progressive movements in the region there is an increased need to deepen relationships and find new forms of cooperation. Our work has the aim to contribute to strengthening progressive alliances that can build upon, and learn from, the last decades of left-oriented governments in the region. It further aims at promoting a social democratic view of progressive governance as an alternative to the more populist and short-term programmes that have been implemented. *Our strategic objectives are:*

- Our partner organisations are equipped to advance their positions as carriers of democratic culture and ideals, thereby contributing to increased popular confidence in democracy, its values and institutions.
- Progressive, interest-based reforms that promote increased transparency, political, social and economic rights are presented, facilitated and sustained by progressive alliances in targeted countries.

Latin America has made great progress during the last decades in most relevant areas but is still vulnerable in several political, social, economic and environmental aspects. Recent years are characterised by a stall and in some cases negative development, especially regarding democratic development and good governance. An adequate political response is key to prevent turn around further deterioration towards a more positive and prosperous direction.

The current crisis has, also in Latin America, lead to disappointment and resentment against political parties in general also affecting the credibility of the left as a progressive force. Past left-oriented governments were not capable of meeting the expectations of the citizens of inclusive growth, diminished corruption, nor manage the prevailing democratic and economic challenges. The labour movement overall, lack a coherent and comprehensive strategy to implement progressive and transformative politics. This strategy seeks to provide new tools for policy development, better organisational capacity and improved participation and openness for building broader alliance.

Key development challenges

In the 1990's almost all countries in Latin America, except for Cuba, had become democracies and have since then consolidated their political systems characterized by peaceful democratic elections and succession of government. The start of the 21st century was a renaissance for Latin America in terms of economic, social and democratic development, and the region progressed in several areas. From 2000 to 2010 popular satisfaction with democracy almost doubled, from 25 till 44 percent. This was accompanied by increased social development, a significant reduction of poverty and expansion of the middle class. Between 2002 and 2013 poverty drastically dropped from 42 to 24 percent, and people living in extreme poverty was cut in half. The middle class grew from 21 to 35 percent of the population. These positive developments were partly a result of the economic production and effectivity boom but also a result from political initiatives in the form of a range of social-, labour- and education policies.

Still, nearly four households out of ten are vulnerable and face economic insecurity, of which many are only one economic downturn away from sliding back into poverty. And the region is still home to some of the most unequal and unsafe countries in the world. After 2010, Latin America has been facing challenges in several if these areas and public opinion reflects a growing dissatisfaction in combination with a decreasing trust in democracy and its institutions. The democratic development has deteriorated in several countries and citizens' rating over and satisfaction with democracy has decreased, while the opinion that the government only govern for a few has grown.

Parallel to this, there are signs of how judicial institutions are becoming more politicised and used for private ends rather than to respect and strengthen the rule of law. Reciprocally, political institutions are becoming more “judicial” in the sense that political elites are increasingly using legal ways to address issues and problems in need of political solutions. As a result, corruption, violence and organised crime represent an increasing threat to the region, not only to the direct victims but also for democracy and growth. Organised crime networks, for example those connected to drug trafficking, influence the political sphere, especially on a local level in the most affected regions, through corruption and threats towards political activists.

The impact of climate change and environmental degradation are issues of great concern in the region both in terms of increased frequency of extreme weather, longer periods of drought and changed precipitation patterns, melting glaciers, rising sea levels, deforestation and uncontrolled land use. As the seasonal storms ravage coastal communities with devastating effects, the melting glaciers of the Andes changes the life patterns and challenges livelihoods for million of people. Increased deforestation and unsustainable food production add to these effects with the most marginalised, rural and indigenous populations suffering the consequences hardest.

Latin America is culturally a patriarchal society defined with a strong influence by the catholic church, effecting the rights of women as well as those of LGTBI. The affects are felt unevenly within and between countries in the region and differs with social belonging, ethnicity and citizenship status. In the past years over 100 million women have joined the formal work force, a massive change to the labour market, as well as progress in terms of levels of education and access to health. Generally, however, one can conclude that there is a persistent wage gap across sectors, limitations to positions of power and representation, most of the workers in informal sectors are women and domestic violence including femicides are recurrent features as well as highly discriminatory legislation are commonplace. There is a pressing need for more egalitarian and equal development and progressive policies to tackle this situation.

The labour movement in Latin America

The labour movement in Latin America needs to develop in creative ways both in terms of strategies for organising and in terms of decision-making procedures, involvement of members and the inclusion of, and cooperation with other parts of society. There is a need to work with platforms for exchanges of ideas, best practices, experiences and policy development and to support partnerships between existing and new partner organisations as well as broader interest-based advocacy.

The trade union movement is vibrant and active in Latin America and the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA), and its 48 national federations from 21 countries, representing more than 50 million workers, is a key reference point and potential partners in our work in the coming period.

The political foundations close to our sister parties play a potentially important role in this regard. Their partial independence enables them to engage in constructive criticism in a trusted way, offering platforms for policy dialogue and possible co-operations with other actors in society.

In Latin America we will mainly look for cooperation and alliance building within the labour movement. With some challenges and weaknesses, it is generally a force for progressive development.

Our role in the region

The Swedish labour movement and the Olof Palme International Center has long relations with Latin American partners as a strong promotor for democracy, respect for rights, and transparency. This especially during the time of military rule and dictatorship. The name of Olof Palme still carries weight and commends respect in the region with many streets and public places carrying his name.

The ties between our movements remain strong and exist at various levels and forums. Our long experience of supporting capacity development and organisation building gives us legitimacy and credibility. These existing platforms, networks and contacts offers a constructive point for exploring potential partnerships in a new development context. And, our existing networks and contacts through trade union cooperation, progressive alliances and sister parties provide potential for fruitful exchanges of experience and strategy.