



Fairwork

FAIRWORK AI SUPPLY CHAIN ASSESSMENT: SAMA

2025

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Executive Summary

Artificial intelligence (AI) relies on vast amounts of hidden human labour. Data workers (whether based in delivery centres or working remotely) perform the essential tasks of cleaning, labelling, and validating the data that makes machine learning possible. Yet, this type of work is often associated with insecure contracts, low wages, and limited protections.

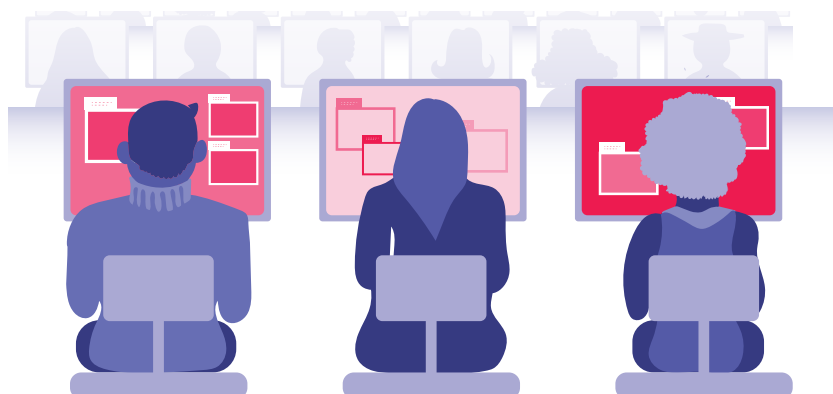
Without global standards, AI supply chains remain tilted, securing returns for companies while exposing workers to risk. The Fairwork AI Principles were created to address this imbalance, defining minimum standards for fair work and providing a benchmark for evaluating companies in the AI supply chain.

This report presents findings from Fairwork's follow-up assessment of Sama, a data annotation company with physical sites in Kenya and Uganda.¹ In 2023, Sama invited Fairwork to assess working conditions in its East African operations. After Fairwork's initial evaluation, Sama was not awarded any points. However, following engagement with Fairwork, Sama provided additional evidence to the Fairwork team and introduced 24 changes to company policies and practices, achieving a score in 2023 of 5/10.

This follow-up evaluation found that, while some

conditions for workers have improved since Fairwork's previous evaluation two years ago, gaps remain in areas such as living wage, social and employment security, management, and collective representation. Sama has once again introduced or committed to a range of changes, including salary increases, revised overtime policies, clearer contracts, stronger grievance procedures, and updated data collection practices. In total, 22 changes or commitments were recorded. These changes mark progress and present tangible improvements to workers' wellbeing. However, this year's evaluation found insufficient evidence to meet many of the thresholds set out in the Fairwork AI Principles.

Sama's Fairwork score for 2024/2025 is 3/10. Further engagement with Fairwork in the years ahead may contribute to improvements in company policies and practices.



Fairwork AI Research: Insights from Kenya and Uganda

The dominant narrative of AI is one of autonomy and automation; a technology that learns without human input and operates beyond human constraints. In reality, every AI system relies on vast amounts of human labour; work that is essential to its development yet remains largely invisible.

This labour is organised through global supply chains that push value and control to the top while externalising risk and precarity to the bottom. Workers often experience low wages, insecure contracts, inadequate protections, and a lack of meaningful avenues for voice or redress.² Despite this, AI is being positioned as a remedy to the most pressing socioeconomic issues in low-income countries, including youth unemployment. According to World Bank estimates, 10.1% of youth in sub-Saharan Africa (ages 15–24) are unemployed, with youth unemployment in Kenya standing at 11.9%, and Uganda at 4.5%.³ In response, governments and global institutions are promoting AI as an engine of job creation.

For example, Kenya's National Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategy 2025-2030 highlights that 'AI-driven jobs [...] can address unemployment, especially among youth, and contribute to economic stability and growth.'⁴ President Ruto has promised to create one million jobs through IT-

enabled services, prioritising the growth of BPO companies like Sama, CCI, and Teleperformance.⁵ This narrative feeds into Kenya's branding as the 'Silicon Savannah', a hub for digital innovation where Africa's young population is imagined as the workforce powering AI development.⁶

Behind this promise lies a harsher reality. Workers employed by BPO companies like Sama, Teleperformance, and their contractors, including those serving tech giants like Meta, have alleged conditions associated with risks of forced labour, human trafficking, modern slavery, mental health harm, and unfair dismissal. Legal cases and journalistic investigations have raised concerns about mass terminations and the severe psychological toll of repeated exposure to graphic and traumatic content.⁷ These developments are unfolding against a wider backdrop of policy debate in Kenya, where Parliament is currently considering the Business Law (Amendment) Bill 2024, a draft proposal that, if enacted, could limit the

liability BPO firms for labour and human-rights violations.⁸

At the same time, worker organising in Kenya's digital sector has been gaining momentum, with grassroots movements emerging as a forceful counterweight. Supported by international advocacy groups such as Foxglove, Kenyan data workers have mounted legal challenges against these companies and are actively resisting harmful corporate and state policies.⁹ Most recently, 35 workers affiliated with the Africa Tech Workers movement have filed a case challenging the draft Business Law (Amendment) 2024, pushing back against what they view as legal endorsement of exploitation.¹⁰

These examples point to a broader pattern; in the absence of binding regulation or global standards for data work, the default logic of the market prevails: speed, scale, and cost minimisation, leaving workers exposed to systemic exploitation. Fairwork AI research interrogates these dynamics, foregrounding the human labour on which AI systems depend. The Fairwork AI Principles, which form the basis of Fairwork evaluations, are structured around five core dimensions of fairness: Fair Pay, Fair Conditions, Fair Contracts, Fair Management, and Fair Representation. These principles define minimum standards for decent work, while also providing a practical framework for

evaluating working conditions at individual companies and for making visible the human labour underpinning AI systems.¹¹

The principles were developed through a global, multi-stakeholder consultation that brought together government representatives, regulators, international organisations, corporations, trade unions, and independent experts. They have been applied in evaluations of data annotation outsourcing firms, including Sama¹², Appen, and Humans in the Loop¹³.

Fairwork's approach is not limited to research. By scoring companies against the Fairwork AI Principles, the framework generates reputational and market incentives for firms to improve labour practices. These evaluations provide clients, investors, and workers with a clear picture of where companies uphold or fail to meet basic standards. Turning principles into publicly comparable benchmarks enables progress to be tracked over time, ensuring that fairness becomes a tangible standard rather than an abstract aspiration.

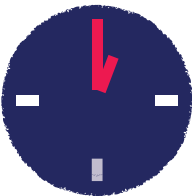


Fairwork AI Principles



FAIR PAY

Workers, irrespective of their employment classification or contract type, should earn a decent income and be paid on time and in full.



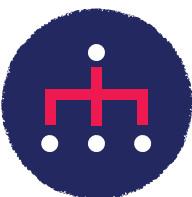
FAIR CONDITIONS

Companies should have policies to protect workers from foundational risks arising from the work processes and should take proactive measures to protect and promote the health and safety of workers.



FAIR CONTRACTS

Terms and conditions should be accessible, readable and comprehensible. The party contracting with the worker must be subject to local law and must be identified in the contract. Regardless of the workers' employment status, the contract must be free of clauses that unreasonably exclude liability on the part of the service user and/or the company. The employer should make reasonable adjustments in wages and conditions between workers in different contractual arrangements.



FAIR MANAGEMENT

There should be a documented process which guarantees that the employer will not discriminate and that workers have the right to appeal decisions affecting them. There must be a clear channel of communication for workers to appeal management decisions. Where AI systems are involved in work, employers must create explainability mechanisms such as transparency reports, and workers must be able to appeal decisions made by AI systems. Management should avoid excessive surveillance and should strive for data minimisation.



FAIR REPRESENTATION

Companies should provide a documented process through which worker voice can be expressed. Irrespective of their employment classification or contract type, workers should have the right to organise in collective bodies, and companies should be prepared to cooperate and negotiate with them.

Methodology: How Does Fairwork Score BPOs?

Fairwork evaluates companies using a threefold methodology comprising desk research, management meetings, and worker interviews. This process generates evidence against the thresholds defined in the Fairwork AI Principles, verifying company claims and capturing both positive and negative findings from diverse sources. Scores are based on this evidence, with points awarded only where sufficient proof is available for each threshold.

Desk Research

Each evaluation begins with desk research to gather publicly available information about the company, its operations, and labour practices. This stage helps the research team identify key issues, refine the research focus, and design appropriate instruments for data collection and worker recruitment. It also serves to establish initial points of contact with management where necessary, laying the groundwork for subsequent engagement and evidence gathering.

Management Engagement

The second element of the Fairwork methodology involves engaging with company management to obtain evidence. Management participates in meetings where the principles are outlined and is asked to provide supporting evidence of relevant policies and practices. Where necessary, written questions are also sent. The objective is to gain insight into the company's operations and business model while facilitating a dialogue through which the company may agree to implement changes aligned with the Fairwork principles.



Worker Interviews

The third element of the methodology collects data directly from workers, providing detailed evidence of their lived experiences at the company. The aim is not to create a representative sample, but rather to develop an understanding of work processes and how they are managed. This enables an assessment of whether policies and practices are applied consistently and working as intended. Workers are recruited through a range of methods, tailored to each evaluation. Where possible, unions, worker groups, and other stakeholders help disseminate calls for participation. Interviews are structured around the thresholds outlined in the Fairwork principles, last about one hour, and are conducted in strict confidence. Workers are compensated at an hourly rate above the local living wage for their time.

Providing a Score

Each principle is divided into two sub-principles. The first may be awarded independently, while the second is conditional on the first being met. Companies are scored out of 10, with a maximum of two points allocated per principle. A point is awarded only when a company provides sufficient evidence of implementing the relevant sub-principles. The absence of a point does not necessarily imply non-compliance; only that Fairwork was unable to substantiate compliance with the available evidence.

The scoring process involves several stages. First, the evidence is compiled, and preliminary scores are assigned. The evidence, in anonymised and summarised form, is then reviewed independently by external reviewers, who assign their own scores. Once this stage is complete, all scorers convene to discuss the evidence and determine a provisional score. The scores and their justifications are subsequently shared with the company for review, after which they can submit additional evidence in support of points not initially awarded. Final scores are determined on the basis of all available evidence.

The Application of the Fairwork Methodology to Sama

In 2024, Sama was invited to participate in a follow-up study using the same methodology as the first research cycle undertaken in 2023, to assess any changes in working conditions and evaluate whether earlier commitments were implemented.

While Sama agreed to participate, access to sites in Kenya and Uganda and approval for a company-wide survey were not granted. Interview participants were recruited instead through Fairwork's wider network of scholars, policymakers, unions, and worker organisations in Kenya and Uganda, as well as through a public call circulated on social media.¹⁴ Several dozen workers reached out to Fairwork to participate. The sample was selected to prioritise current Sama workers and those employed within the past 12 months (at the time of recruitment). In total, 32 workers were included in the sample. All identities were anonymised, and ethical approval was granted by the University of Oxford's Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC).¹⁵

Findings from desk research, worker interviews, and management evidence were used to produce a provisional scorecard, which was then shared with Sama, alongside a list of suggested changes to company policies and practices, as well as requests for clarification where evidence was incomplete or ambiguous. Sama then submitted additional evidence and held several meetings with the Fairwork team to review feedback and discuss possible improvements. Sama's final score was determined in October 2025, drawing together all of the evidence collected.

In 2023, Sama made 24 commitments to improve management practices, which contributed to the award of two points under Fair Pay, two under Fair Conditions, and one under Fair Contracts. In this follow-up evaluation in 2025, however, there was insufficient evidence to confirm that seven of those commitments had been implemented. To ensure that scores reflected actual conditions on the ground, the 2025 assessment awarded points only for existing policies and practices or for commitments that had translated into concrete improvements.

Background

Sama is a data annotation company that provides training data for computer vision and generative AI. It operates delivery centres in Nairobi, Kenya, and in Uganda, at Gulu and, until recently, Kampala.

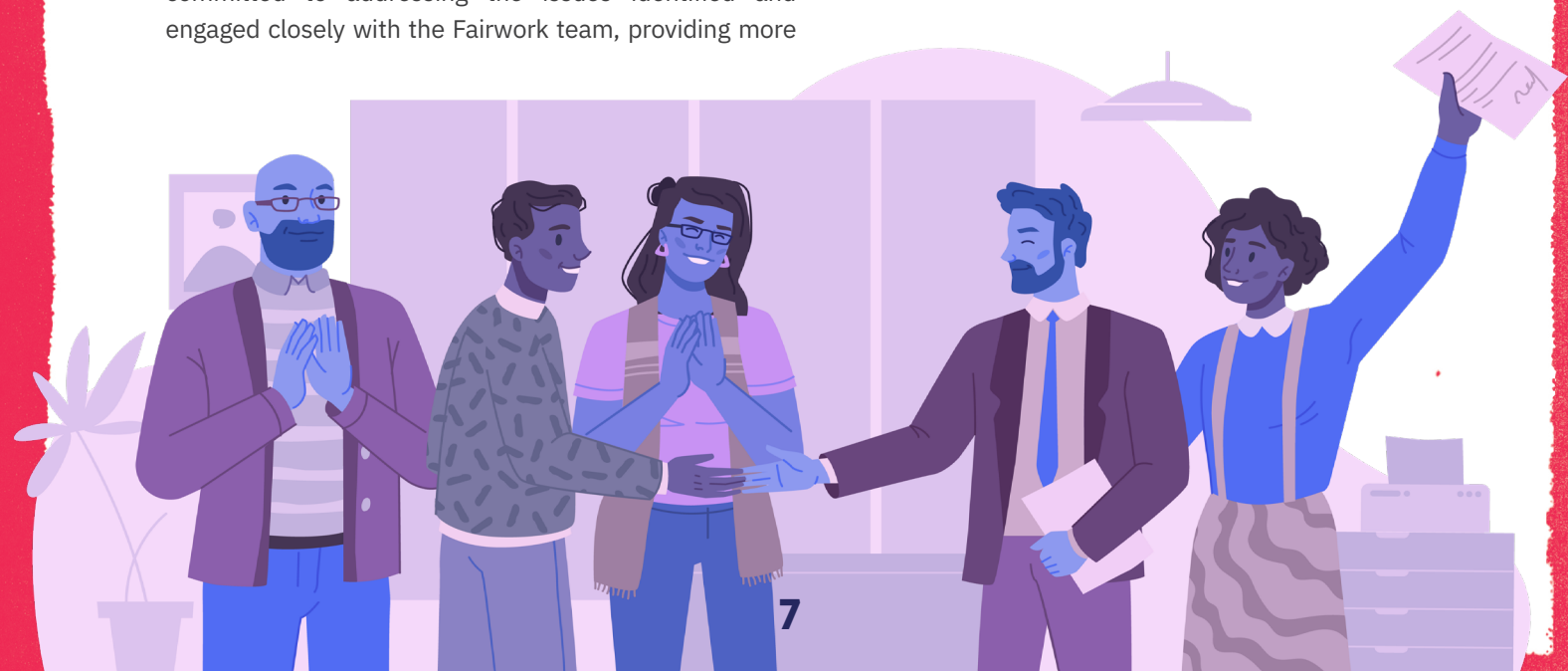
One percent of its workforce is also engaged through a managed services provider based in India. Its workforce in East Africa, comprising over 3000 workers in Kenya¹⁶ and approximately 300 workers in Uganda (based on Fairwork's 2025 assessment), performs a range of tasks including data annotation, validation, and model evaluation, supporting clients in sectors such as autonomous vehicles, retail and e-commerce, agriculture, consumer technology, media, robotics, and manufacturing.¹⁷ Sama's client list has included major organisations such as Meta, NASA, Microsoft, Sony, Verizon, and Walmart.¹⁸

Sama positions itself as a 'responsible AI' company, committed to ethical approaches in the development and deployment of AI systems.¹⁹ It is also a certified B Corporation.²⁰ In 2023, Sama invited Fairwork to conduct an independent assessment of working conditions in its East African delivery centres. The initial evaluation revealed that, despite its ethical branding, Sama did not appear to meet any of the Fairwork principles. After the initial findings were shared with management, Sama committed to addressing the issues identified and engaged closely with the Fairwork team, providing more

evidence and implementing policy changes. Following this, Sama achieved a Fairwork score of 5 out of 10.²¹

Sama, particularly its operations in Nairobi, has attracted public attention related to its former content-moderation business. Several lawsuits filed against Sama and its client Meta, as well as its competitors such as Teleperformance, concern alleged harms associated with content moderation work that Sama discontinued in March 2023 (prior to Fairwork's first evaluation).²² The plaintiffs include workers, many of whom are now members of Kenya's flourishing data workers' grassroots movements, such as the Data Labelers Association²³, the Global Trade Union Alliance of Content Moderators²⁴, and Tech Worker Community Africa²⁵, among others.

This report serves as a follow-up to Fairwork's 2023 evaluation, assessing the extent to which working conditions at Sama have changed and whether the company has followed through on its commitments to improve them. The scope of this assessment is limited to Sama's operations in Kenya and Uganda, and does not extend to its outsourced workforce in India.



Sama's Fairwork Score, 2024/2025

Table 1: Sama's Fairwork Score

Principle	First point	Second point	Total
 Principle 1: Fair Pay	 Pays at least the local minimum wage	 Pays at least the local living wage	 1
 Principle 2: Fair Conditions	 Ensures safe working conditions	 Ensures paid leave and a safety net	 1
 Principle 3: Fair Contracts	 Provides decent contracts	 Provides secure employment	 1
 Principle 4: Fair Management	 Treats workers fairly	 Creates clear and effective systems for data management, explanations and appeals	 -
 Principle 5: Fair Representation	 Assures freedom of association and expression of worker voice.	 Supports democratic governance.	 -

Sama's Total Score



Explaining the Scores



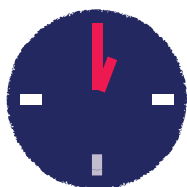
Fair Pay

Fair Pay assesses two thresholds: first, that all workers are paid at least the statutory minimum wage for all hours worked, and second, that they are paid at least a living wage. In 2023, Sama was awarded both points under Fair Pay after introducing measures to eliminate unpaid overtime and committing to pay all workers a living wage calculated using the Anker methodology.

In 2025, Fairwork's evaluation confirmed that Sama workers in both Kenya and Uganda earn above the statutory minimum wage and are paid reliably and on time. Testimony from workers, however, highlighted that certain compulsory activities, including meeting targets, correcting tasks ('rework'), attending meetings, and participating in wellness sessions, could fall outside recognised paid hours, leading to the persistence of unpaid overtime. Once these issues were highlighted to Sama, the management responded by updating its Overtime Policy to count these activities as payable working time, informing both workers and managers of the change. This was accepted as sufficient evidence for Sama to meet the first Fair Pay threshold.

On the second threshold, Sama explained its process for benchmarking and wage setting, which it describes as based on the Anker methodology. In practice, however, its calculations diverge from Anker standards by excluding dependents from food costs, even though food is typically the largest household expense in low-income settings.²⁶ In August 2025, Sama revised its salary floors to 30,805 KES (238.40 USD) per month in Kenya, 918,482 UGX (266.44 USD) in Kampala, and 850,814 UGX (246.81 USD) in Gulu. While this increase is a positive step toward aligning wages with living wage standards, the figures remain below independent estimates that account for household dependents.

Workers' accounts illustrate highlight challenges with pay. Interviews with workers in both Kenya and Uganda reveal that they live 'hand to mouth' and, in some cases, rely on loans. As one worker put it, 'The money there is little, you cannot use it for survival in Uganda. I knew people there for ten years plus, and they cannot show you anything [savings], and you wonder, where has the money gone.'



Fair Conditions

Fair Conditions considers whether workers are protected from the risks associated with work-related tasks, including job strain, traumatic content, and unsafe workloads, and whether they are supported with time off and healthcare if they are unable to work. In 2023, Fairwork found that workers reported experiencing high

job strain, worked long hours, and risked burnout and secondary traumatic stress. Sama responded by limiting the working week, expanding wellness provisions, and updating policies to address health risks. On this basis, Sama was awarded both points under this principle.

Sama has since introduced further measures to strengthen these protections. Following concerns about unpaid overtime noted above, Sama updated its Overtime Policy to clarify that compulsory activities such as meetings and wellness sessions are recognised as payable working time. Sama has also introduced an automated target-setting mechanism that calculates daily targets based on average team performance data. The system is intended to ensure that productivity expectations reflect standard working hours and that any revisions are supported by performance evidence. The Health and Safety Policy has been revised to explicitly cover task-specific risks, and the Workplace Illness and Injury Policy now includes work-related mental health conditions. Workers in both Kenya and Uganda are entitled to standard working hours and breaks, in line with

national regulations. In addition, Sama has introduced a Shift Accommodation Policy to provide flexibility for new mothers. These measures demonstrate progress in addressing the risks of strain, exhaustion, and work-related illness or injury, and as a result, Sama has been awarded a point for 2.1.

In relation to 2.2, Sama updated its Overtime Policy to include an option for time off in lieu, fulfilling a commitment made during the 2023 evaluation. The company also provided evidence of provisions for annual, sick, maternity, and paternity leave, as well as private health insurance for workers on fixed-term contracts. These provisions, however, do not extend to workers on casual contracts, creating a gap in protections for part of the workforce.



Fair Contracts

Fair Contracts asks whether workers are given clear, accessible contracts that reflect the law of the country they work in and, for long-term projects, extend at least for the duration of the project (3.1). It further evaluates employment security, including the option of permanent contracts after three years, protection in cases of redundancy or non-renewal, fair treatment of outsourced workers, and the right to independent representation in termination processes (3.2). In 2023, Sama was awarded one point under this principle after acknowledging the insecurity caused by short rolling contracts and committing to making one-year contracts the default, or to align them with client projects where possible.

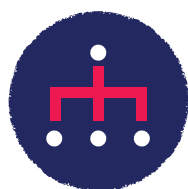
This round of evaluation showed that Sama continues to issue written contracts in Kenya and Uganda that are generally clear and comprehensive. Workers are initially engaged on training contracts lasting no more than ten days, before being moved onto standard employment contracts at the end of the training period.

Sama provided evidence that workers' fixed-term contracts are aligned with the duration of the projects to which they are assigned, ensuring that those on long-term projects have contracts of at least equivalent length. This marks a significant improvement from the 2023 evaluation, when contracts were not always tied to project duration. In this respect, Sama has reduced to some extent the contractual uncertainty faced by workers. The company has also revised certain contractual terms to improve fairness and transparency (see the Moving Forward section below for details). Together, these measures indicate progress towards greater contract stability and clarity. However, Sama has not yet made one-year contracts the default, as they had committed to doing in 2023.

Despite elements of progress, longer-term employment security remains limited. As of October 2025, Sama does not provide permanent contracts to workers, including those with several years of service. Workers described being 'benched'

between contracts, which translates, in practice, to waiting for a potential contract renewal without wages or benefits. As one worker explained during Fairwork's previous evaluation, benching is 'a sort of workplace purgatory in which laid off associates must wait, hoping and praying that they might one day, not too far in the future, be rehired'.²⁷ Workers, moreover, reported that the constant risk of non-renewal, including the fear of being out on the bench, drives them to work longer hours and prevents them from speaking up about problems. Sama does not provide

severance pay when fixed-term contracts are not renewed. When contracts end, workers may bring colleagues to meetings with HR, but they cannot be accompanied by external representatives, which limits the support available during termination processes. Overall, Sama has taken meaningful steps to align contract length with project duration and improve transparency, reducing some forms of short-term insecurity. However, issues of long-term job stability and security persist. Sama was therefore only awarded the first point under this principle.



Fair Management

This principle sets out to determine whether companies treat workers fairly, prevent abuse or harassment, and provide clear mechanisms for raising concerns. The first threshold focuses on the protection of workers from unfair management practices, including disciplinary measures and retaliation for raising issues. The second threshold assesses the existence of clear systems for data management, explanation of automated decisions, and channels for appeals.

Fairwork's 2023 study revealed serious problems in Sama's management culture. Workers described a 'culture of fear' and reported that managers relied on bullying and favouritism, with significant risks of retaliation for those who raised concerns. Workers' accounts highlighted sexual harassment as a structural issue. Evidence pointed to the use of intrusive surveillance methods, including screen monitoring. Sama responded by launching a 'Zero Tolerance Culture Campaign', expanding sexual harassment training, and promising to phase out screen monitoring.

Fairwork's current evaluation has found that Sama has established an extensive policy framework covering anti-harassment and non-discrimination and provides training to managers and workers on these standards. Sama has

also created channels for workers to raise concerns through grievance redressal and whistleblowing mechanisms. These measures represent important progress in addressing the issues identified in 2023. However, workers reported that coercion, bullying, and favouritism remain ongoing concerns. Some workers described feeling pressured to do unpaid overtime under threat of dismissal and feared that raising grievances may jeopardise their chances of contract renewal. In this context, Sama committed to sharing anonymised grievance handling data with workers to improve transparency around how complaints are resolved and to introducing safeguards to separate grievance history from contract renewal decisions. These measures are intended to strengthen confidence that workers can raise concerns without retaliation. Implementation is still underway, so their effectiveness cannot yet be assessed. Taken together, these actions represent positive developments; however, in line with Fairwork's scoring framework, points are awarded only where measures have demonstrably translated into changes in practice. Sama was therefore not awarded point 4.1. The next step will be to monitor Sama's implementation of its commitments to fair management and whether it succeeds in building greater trust and confidence among workers over time.

With regard to 4.2, Sama had discontinued the use of invasive screen monitoring software in 2023. The company has also confirmed that errors made by its proprietary annotation platform, SamaHub, are not attributed to workers, reducing the risk of unfair penalties. The existing consent form for personal data collection has been revised to give workers greater control over their data including by removing or modifying clauses that allowed wide third-party data sharing, created open-ended obligations, or suggested that refusing

consent might affect employment. Sama has also committed to introducing a data acknowledgement form at onboarding to ensure informed consent is recorded in advance. An AI governance committee is being established, with commitments to include worker voice in oversight processes. These initiatives underscore Sama's commitment to advancing transparency and fairness in the management of worker data and the operation of automated systems.



Fair Representation

The two thresholds of this principle are concerned with whether workers have the means to organise collectively, participate in decision-making, and be represented and collectively bargain through independent structures, such as unions. In 2023, Sama relied on forums and meetings to gather non-binding feedback from workers. Following engagement with Fairwork, the company also committed to rolling out a training programme on freedom of association for all staff. However, Fairwork was not able to evidence genuine guarantees of worker voice or independent collective representation during the 2023 assessment.

Since this previous assessment in 2023, Sama has taken a significant step by introducing a Freedom of Association policy. This policy explicitly commits to respecting workers' rights to join a union and to engage in collective bargaining without interference, and is shared with employees through onboarding, training, and internal communications. Meetings between workers and management also continue, providing a forum for concerns to be raised. In Kenya, these take the form of *barazas* (public meetings), while in Uganda, Ask Me Anything sessions are used. While such forums have the potential to become important mechanisms for expressing collective worker voice, at present they

remain management-led and moderated. The introduction of a formal Freedom of Association policy is a positive step towards enabling worker representation, but no independent collective body of workers has been recognised, and no steps have been taken towards establishing a collective bargaining agreement.

Interviews with workers also highlighted continuing challenges. Workers described feeling unable to organise collectively because of fears of retaliation. As one worker put it, 'We have tried to raise our voices, but we are afraid of losing our jobs.' Some reported that although they were told they were free to raise concerns, in practice, they felt discouraged from discussing issues such as pay or hours. 'Freedom of speech is there on paper but not in practice', explained one worker, describing how management's response to calls for salary increases or reduced hours was simply, 'You have a choice; you can quit.' Some workers described feeling as though meetings with management were symbolic, with little follow-up on matters raised. Others said they felt that speaking out risked being benched or even dismissed, reinforcing a perception that collective organising would not be welcomed. There was insufficient evidence to award Sama any points for this principle.

Workers' Stories

David*, Male, 38

David has been with Sama since 2021, on a series of fixed-term contracts renewed according to performance scores. Despite several years of service, he has not been offered a permanent position.

He describes the work environment as highly pressurised, with strict targets and close monitoring, where even toilet visits are controlled. 'You feel like you are always being watched,' David says.

He feels that management uses threats to enforce discipline and that the fear of dismissal shapes everyday life. 'Being fired is normal,' he explains. David feels that pressure flows through the hierarchy, from senior staff down to workers. Although some workers have tried to raise concerns, they are reluctant to push too far. 'We have tried to raise our voices, but we are afraid of losing our jobs.'

Faith*, Female, 26

Faith has worked at Sama since 2023, most recently as an image annotator on a fixed-term contract. Her contract is renewed every six months, but she says there is no guarantee of renewal. Faith describes the work as mentally draining: 'At the end of a shift, you feel like your brain has been locked in a tiny container.'

Although Sama has a policy guaranteeing freedom of association, Faith feels that workers are discouraged from raising issues in practice. 'On paper, you are told you are free to complain or talk,' she explains. 'But really, if you bring up salaries or hours, you are told you can quit if you don't like it.'

She says that the threat of dismissal hangs over many workplace interactions. 'When issues are raised, management reminds you [that] there are many people willing to take the job. You won't dare to express yourself.'

Michael*, Male, 30

Michael has worked at Sama since 2021. Although he recently received a pay rise, he says it has not kept up with the cost of living. 'You have to borrow money because the pay is not fulfilling your needs', he explains. He describes living 'hand to mouth', being unable to save and often trapped in a cycle of debt as a result.

The stress of performance management adds to the pressure. Missing targets can result in formal warnings, and Michael says repeated underperformance can escalate to HR meetings. He recalls periods of being benched without pay, which he found particularly stressful.

Michael also feels that he is constantly being monitored. Supervisors frequently walk the floor, and he says workers feel watched at all times. While there are meetings where staff can raise concerns, he feels issues are rarely acted upon. 'When workers raise concerns, they worry about being singled out,' he explains. 'There is a fear of retaliation.' He believes many workers would welcome union representation, but independent gatherings to discuss workplace issues are discouraged.



* Names and personal details have been changed to protect the anonymity of workers.

MOVING FORWARD

A Summary of Changes Implemented by Sama

Over the course of this evaluation, Sama implemented or committed to the following 22 changes across its East African operations.



Fair Pay

- Sama updated its Overtime Policy to:
 - explicitly state standard working hours;
 - clarify that ‘working time’ includes compulsory activities such as meetings, wellness sessions, and delays beyond the worker’s control;
 - confirm that all such time will be compensated, with these changes communicated to all workers and managers
- Sama increased its salary floors. In Kenya, the minimum monthly salary rose from 30,120 KES (233.09 USD) to 30,805 KES (238.37 USD). In Uganda, the floor rose from 877,072 UGX (254.25 USD) to 918,482 UGX (266.39 USD) in Kampala, and from 819,495 UGX (237.55 USD) to 850,814 UGX (246.62 USD) in Gulu.
- Trainee contracts in Kenya and Uganda were updated to specify that there would be no expectation of business travel beyond the daily commute without reimbursement.



Fair Conditions

- Sama updated its Leave Policy to clarify that workers returning from the ‘bench’ are entitled to sick leave provisions. Workers rehired in Kenya who have previously completed at least two consecutive months of service, and those in Uganda with at least one month of prior service, are entitled to paid sick leave immediately upon rehire.
- Worker evidence initially highlighted that workers were not able to take leave when they wanted and/or were forced by their managers to take leave at specific periods. In response, the Leave Policy was also updated to confirm that workers are, within reasonable bounds, free to choose when to take annual leave.
- The Overtime Policy was revised to include provisions for time off in lieu, which was one of Sama’s commitments from the 2023 evaluation.
- A Shift Accommodation Policy was introduced to support new mothers, ensuring that workers returning from maternity leave are not assigned night shifts for a minimum of 5 months following their return.
- Sama introduced an automated target-setting process intended to better align performance targets with actual working time.



Fair Contracts

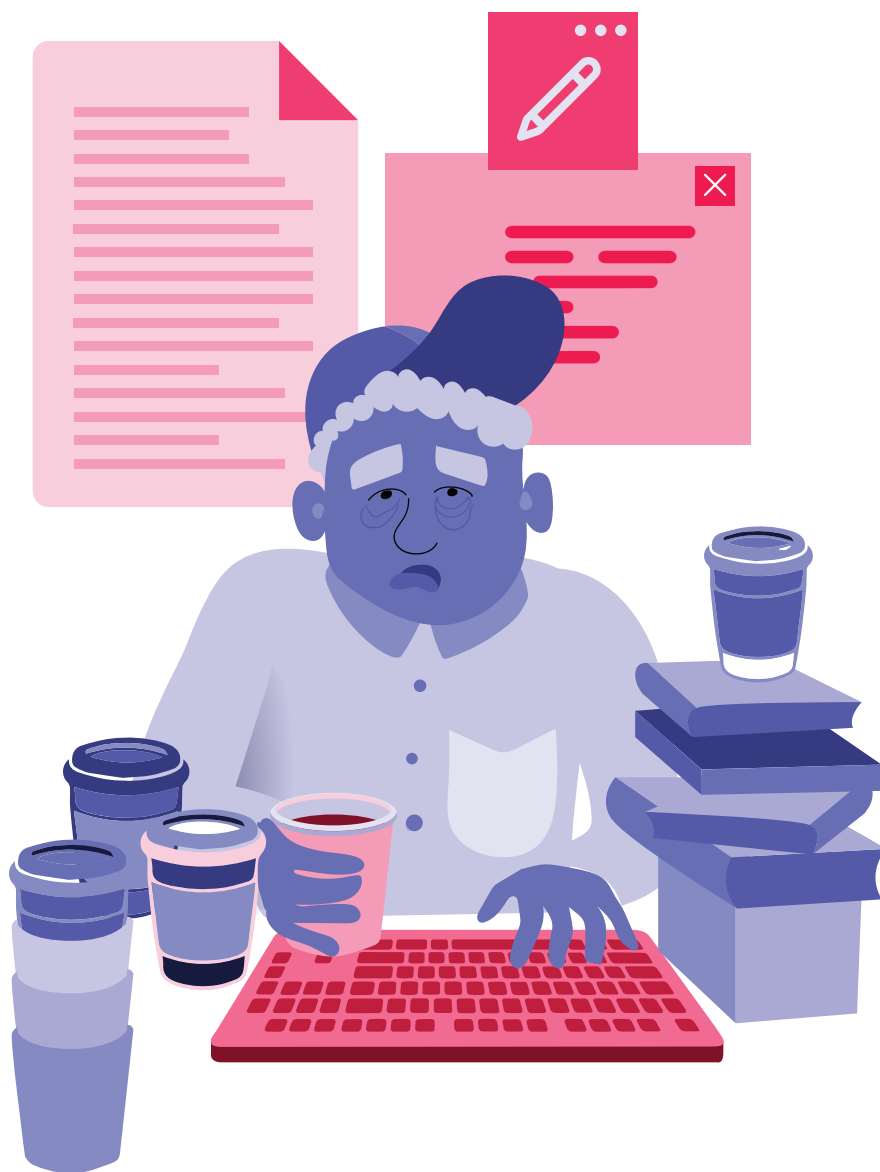
- Casual contract templates were revised to specify the governing law, clarifying the applicable legal framework.
- Contract templates previously included language permitting work beyond standard hours without additional remuneration; this wording was removed to reflect the actual practice of compensating overtime.
- Trainee contract templates were amended to remove a clause that allowed verbal extensions that created at-will contracts, bringing the contracts into alignment with the practice that all extensions must be formalised in writing.



Fair Management

- Sama updated its Sexual Harassment Policy to expand the reporting channels that are available to workers. They include: the whistleblowing channel, a member of HR, a director or other senior executive, or the Sama legal team.
- Company-wide training is now delivered to all workers and managers covering policies on sexual harassment, discrimination, occupational health and safety, and grievance redressal.
- Sama committed to introducing safeguards to ensure that grievance history does not influence contract renewal decisions.
- Sama committed to sharing aggregated data on grievance handling with workers annually to increase transparency.

- The Whistleblower Policy was updated to include additional examples of reportable matters, including concerns related to maternity leave.
- Information Security Awareness training was updated to include a section on the collection of workers' personal data.
- The consent form for personal data collection was revised to give workers greater control over their data, modifying or removing clauses that previously allowed broad third-party data sharing, created open-ended obligations, or implied that withholding consent could affect employment.
- Sama committed to introducing a data acknowledgement form at onboarding to ensure informed consent is recorded in advance.
- Sama committed to including worker voice in AI governance through twice-yearly performance reviews conducted by workers, with findings used to develop action plans and progress reported back to workers.



Fairwork AI Supply Chain Certification

Evaluating working conditions at Sama across two rounds of assessment highlights the wider challenges of ensuring decent work in AI supply chains.

While engagement with individual companies can prompt reforms, many problems are structural and persist across the industry. For any efforts to demonstrate ‘responsible AI’ to be credible, companies must consider the material conditions of the workers whose labour makes this technology possible.

To address these systemic issues, Fairwork has launched a certification scheme to encourage lead firms in supply chains to embed Fairwork standards into their supplier agreements and procurement policies. Its aim is to create accountability across the supply chain rather than relying on one-off reforms at the level of individual suppliers.

Why this matters

Ensuring decent work in AI supply chains is essential for building resilience, credibility, and long-term sustainability:

- **Regulatory Preparedness:** Proactively aligning with emerging labour laws and global standards helps mitigate legal and ethical risks before they affect compliance or reputation.
- **Transparency & Trust:** Demonstrating responsible labour practices builds credibility with customers, investors, and regulators, positioning companies as leaders in ethical AI.
- **Resilient Workforce:** Fair wages, job security, and decent working conditions help attract and retain skilled data workers, creating a stable and productive AI supply chain.
- **Sustainable Commitment:** Fairwork’s flexible, continuous-improvement model enables companies to embed lasting fair labour standards and ensure long-term accountability.

Evaluation Model

Fairwork’s structured four-phase evaluation model supports companies in identifying risks, implementing improvements, and embedding fair labour standards throughout their supply chains.

- **Discovery & Risk Assessment:** Mapping supply chains, reviewing contracts and codes of conduct, and conducting worker interviews and document reviews to identify risks.
- **Action Planning:** Prioritising risks by severity and impact, developing tailored remediation plans, and establishing clear metrics for tracking progress.
- **Implementation & Training:** Supporting companies and suppliers to deploy ethical sourcing and labour protection strategies and to embed due diligence practices in procurement.
- **Monitoring & Reporting:** Conducting follow-up audits 1–2 years later to assess adherence to the Fairwork principles and the effectiveness of remediation, with outcomes transparently reported.

Fairwork offers both audits and certification. Audits cover the first two phases and provide companies with a roadmap for improvement. Certification requires firms to go further by implementing reforms, undergoing follow-up audits, and demonstrating progress over time. Companies earn the Fairwork Onboard certification during Discovery & Risk Assessment, while the Fairwork Endorsed certification recognises sustained improvements confirmed through follow-up audits.

APPENDIX

The Fairwork AI Principles

Table 2: Fairwork Score System

Principle	First point	Second point	Total
 Principle 1: Fair Pay	 Pays at least the local minimum wage	 Pays at least the local living wage	 2
 Principle 2: Fair Conditions	 Ensures safe working conditions	 Ensures paid leave and a safety net	 2
 Principle 3: Fair Contracts	 Provides decent contracts	 Provides secure employment	 2
 Principle 4: Fair Management	 Treats workers fairly	 Creates clear and effective systems for data management, explanations and appeals	 2
 Principle 5: Fair Representation	 Assures freedom of association and expression of worker voice.	 Supports democratic governance.	 2

Maximum possible Fairwork Score



Principle 1: Fair Pay

1.1 – Pays at least the local minimum wage

To achieve this point, the employer takes appropriate steps to ensure ALL of the following:

- Workers, regardless of their employment status or contract type, must earn the local minimum wage²⁸ or the wage set by collective sectoral agreement (whichever is higher) for all hours worked.²⁹
- Workers, regardless of their employment status or contract type, are paid on time and in-full.

1.2 – Pays at least the local living wage

Minimum wage can be insufficient to ensure workers and their dependents a basic but decent standard of living. The living wage exists to set the benchmark of what is required to enable this decent standard of living.³⁰

To achieve this point, the employer takes appropriate steps to ensure the following:

- Workers, regardless of their employment status or contract type, must earn at least the living wage, or the wage set by collective sectoral agreement (whichever is higher) for all hours worked.

Principle 2: Fair Conditions

2.1 – Ensures safe working conditions

Workers face several risks in the course of their work, including strain, exhaustion, and exposure to traumatic content. They have a right to protection from these risks.³¹ Employers must show they are aware of task specific risks and take steps to mitigate them.

To achieve this point, the employer must satisfy ALL of the following:

- Implement policies and practices that protect workers' safety from task specific risks. This should, at a minimum, account for well-evidenced risks such as:
- High job strain, which can lead to a range of negative health impacts including cardiovascular disease and mental health disorders.
- Secondary traumatic stress, which can be associated with repeated exposure to traumatic content.
- Muscular skeletal injuries, which may emerge as a result of unsuitable equipment, excessive workload or perverse incentivisation in physical jobs.

- Risks related to a specific job are flagged to workers before they accept the job (such as indicating that they might be exposed to violent content.)
- The employer places a maximum limit on standard working time that meets either the applicable national regulation or, in cases where there is no applicable national regulation, the ILO standard of 40 hours a week.³²
- Workers are entitled to take breaks during working time that is defined under the applicable national regulation, or in cases where there is no applicable national regulation, is equivalent to a minimum of one hour for every eight hours worked.
- If the work arrangements require workers to work in shifts, workers are given the option to choose their shifts, and reasonable accommodations are made for workers with additional needs due to health, safety and other personal reasons (such as pregnancy, care requirements, disability and other health conditions.)

2.2 – Ensures paid leave and a safety net

Workers are vulnerable to the possibility of losing their income as the result of unexpected or external circumstances, such as sickness or injury. Most countries provide a social safety net to ensure workers don't experience sudden poverty due to circumstances outside their control. However, not all workers might qualify for the social safety protections due to their own personal circumstances (e.g. visa status, residency status). In recognition of the fact that most workers are dependent on income they earn from the work, employers must ensure that workers are compensated for loss of income due to inability to work. In addition, employers must minimise the risk of sickness and injury.

To achieve this point, the employer must ensure ALL of the following:

- Workers have access to paid time-off (such as bereavement, parental, sick and annual leave.)
- Where core medical treatment is not provided by a public system, such as a national healthcare scheme, the employer makes a meaningful provision to the health care costs of its workers.

Principle 3: Fair Contracts

3.1 – Provides decent contracts

Employment on temporary contracts can have significant

negative effects on job satisfaction, well-being and health. Short-term contracts, such as those lasting one to three months or with no guaranteed working hours, place workers in precarious positions and are likely to exacerbate these negative effects.

To achieve this point, the employer must meet ALL of the following:

- Workers must sign a contract and/or give informed consent to terms of conditions upon signing up, and for each subsequent contract extension.
- The contract or terms and conditions is presented in full, in clear and comprehensible language that all workers could be expected to understand.
- The contract or terms and conditions are easily accessible to workers in paper and/or electronic form. If these conditions differ for different contract types, reasonable steps are taken to inform workers about the differences in contract types.
- The party employing the worker must be identified in the contract or terms and conditions, and subject to the law of the place in which the worker works.
- Workers working on long-term projects that exceed the probation time are provided with the option to sign an employment contract lasting at a minimum the same length of time as the project.
- The contracts or terms and conditions do not include clauses that revert prevailing legal frameworks in the countries where workers work.

3.2 – Provides secure employment

Whilst fixed-term employment may be suitable for some workers' circumstances, secure employment is a fundamental improvement of working conditions for many others.

To achieve this point, the employer must meet ALL of the following:

- Workers with three years or more of consistent short-term employment should be provided with the option to move onto permanent contracts if they so desire.
- The employer should make reasonable adjustments in wages and conditions between both: fixed-term and permanent employees and outsourced workers; and any outsourced or indirectly employed workers and directly employed workers. Workers who

are outsourced or indirectly employed should be compensated for additional costs incurred, including visa/work permits and their extensions, insurance, pensions, and other social security premiums.

- In cases of justified redundancy or contract non-renewal, the employer should provide workers with severance allowance commensurate with tenure at the company and retraining opportunities. In cases where the redundancies are being made because reasons of an economic, technological, structural or similar nature, workers or their representatives are consulted, and steps are taken to minimise the resulting redundancies.³³
- If desired, workers should be able to invite worker representatives to their end of contract meetings with the relevant HR departments.
- In the case of subcontracting arrangements, where part or all of the work is subcontracted to other companies, management implements a reliable mechanism to monitor and ensure that the subcontractor is living up to the standards expected from the company itself regarding working conditions.

Principle 4: Fair Management

4.1 – Treats workers fairly

The employment relation is an unequal one, with managers being afforded significant legal and economic sources of power not available to most workers. The interests of these two groups may diverge, leading to sometimes opposed immediate interests in the workplace. This dynamic can lead to unfair management practices.

To achieve this point, the employer must meet ALL of the following:

- Management should refrain from deploying any form of depersonalised bullying or mobbing that aims to ensure organisational goals are met.³⁴
- There is a policy in place which guarantees that any form of harassment in the workplace will not be tolerated.
- There is a policy in place which guarantees that the employer will not discriminate against persons on the grounds of racial, ethnic, social or minority background, caste, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, language, gender, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, disability, age, geographical location, or any other status.

- Workers should have the right to appeal dismissals and other disciplinary measures.
- Workers are not disadvantaged for voicing concerns or appealing disciplinary actions.

4.2 – Creates clear and effective systems for data management, explanations and appeals

Contemporary workplaces are increasingly defined by data. The use of AI systems and automated management processes exacerbates both the incentives for employers to gather data from the work process, and diminishes the importance of workers' existing rights to receive explanations, appeal decisions, and access/own their data.

To achieve this point, the employer must meet ALL of the following:

- Where AI systems are involved in work, employers must create explainability mechanisms such as transparency reports or question and answer processes that allow workers to understand both the model behaviour of the system as a whole and specific decisions.³⁵
- Workers must be able to appeal decisions made by AI systems through a multi-stakeholder process that reflects collective worker voice. Successful appeals should lead not only to the revision of specific decisions but also wider revisions to the decision-making process.³⁶
- Management avoids excessive surveillance in the workplace, and avoids use of invasive technologies.
- Workers must not be subject to excessive data collection practices and should be informed about the data that is being collected about them. Employers must apply the principle of data minimisation (collecting the minimum amount of personal data required to fulfil a legitimate purpose) in their collection processes.

Principle 5: Fair Representation

5.1 – Assures freedom of association and expression of worker voice

Freedom of association is a fundamental right for all workers, and enshrined in the constitution of the International Labour Organisation, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The right for workers to organise, collectively express their wishes – and importantly – be listened to, is an important prerequisite for fair working conditions.

To achieve this point, the employer must satisfy ALL of the following:

- There is a documented mechanism for the expression of collective worker voice that allows ALL workers, regardless of contract type or duration to participate in collective groups without risks.³⁷
- There is a formal, written statement of willingness to recognise, and bargain with, a collective, independent body of workers or trade union, that is clearly communicated to all workers, and available on the company webpage.³⁸
- Freedom of association is not inhibited, and workers are not disadvantaged in any way for communicating their concerns, wishes and demands to the company management, or expressing willingness to form independent collective bodies of representation.

5.2 – Supports democratic governance

To realise fair representation, workers must have a say in the conditions of their work. This could be through a democratically governed cooperative model, a formally recognised union, or the ability to undertake collective bargaining with the employer.

To achieve this point, the employers must satisfy at least ONE of the following:

- Workers play a meaningful role in governing the company.
- In a written document available, the company publicly and formally recognises an independent collective body of workers, an elected works council, or trade union, and takes meaningful steps towards signing a collective bargaining agreement. This recognition is not exclusive and, when the legal framework allows, the company should recognise any significant collective body seeking representation.³⁹



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ENDNOTES

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- 28 The ILO defines minimum wage as the "minimum amount of remuneration that an employer is required to pay wage earners for the work performed during a given period, which cannot be reduced by collective agreement or an individual contract." Minimum wage laws protect workers from unduly low pay and help them attain a minimum standard of living. The ILO's Minimum Wage Fixing Convention, 1970 C135 sets the conditions and requirements of establishing minimum wages and calls upon all ratifying countries to act in accordance. Minimum wage laws exist in more than 90 per cent of the ILO member states.
- 29 This means not only that the rate of pay agreed with workers reaches that statutory level, but also that workers are accurately compensated for all hours worked. Underpayment (also known as 'wage theft') is a pervasive problem, with evidence suggesting that huge sums of value go unpaid due to unpaid overtime, and incomplete/inaccurate wage payments.
- 30 Where a living wage does not exist, Fairwork will use the Global Living Wage Coalition's Anker Methodology to estimate one.
- 31 The ILO recognises health and safety at work as a fundamental right. Where the company directly engages the worker, the starting point is the ILO's Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (C155). This stipulates that employers shall be required "so far as is reasonably practicable, the workplaces, machinery, equipment and processes under their control are safe and without risk to health", and that "where necessary, adequate protective clothing and protective equipment [should be provided] to prevent, so far as is reasonably practicable, risk of accidents or of adverse effects on health."
- 32 As endorsed by the ILO's Forty-Hour Week Convention, 1935 (No.47) and the Reduction of Hours of Work Recommendation, 1962 (No.116)
- 33 The ILO Termination of Employment Convention, 1982 (No. 158) defines worker representative consultation as sufficient when the employer provides "the workers' representatives concerned in good time with relevant information including the reasons for the terminations contemplated, the number and categories of workers likely to be affected and the period over which the terminations are intended to be carried out" and gives "in accordance with national law and practice, the workers' representatives concerned, as early as possible, an opportunity for consultation on measures to be taken to avert or to minimise the terminations and measures to mitigate the adverse effects of any terminations on the workers concerned such as finding alternative employment."

34 Depersonalized bullying is a form of workplace mistreatment where employees are unfairly treated not because of who they are, but because of the organization's system or structure, constitutes a situation where harmful behaviour, like intimidation or aggression, are applied impersonally across the workforce by supervisors or managers in the name of achieving company goals.

35 Workers have a right to understand how the use of AI impacts their work and working conditions. Organisations must respect this right and provide detailed, understandable resources to allow workers to exercise it.

36 The automation of decision making can lead to reductions in accountability and fairness. But building in human oversight into a decision-making loop does not solve this problem. Instead, the subjects of those decisions need to be empowered to challenge them, and a renewed emphasis should be placed on the liability of those stakeholders who direct the development and deployment of AI systems in the workplace.

37 A mechanism for the expression of collective worker voice will allow workers to participate in the setting of agendas so as to be able to table issues that most concern them. This mechanism can be in physical or virtual form (e.g. online meetings) and should involve meaningful interaction (e.g. not surveys). It should also allow for ALL workers to participate in regular meetings with the management.

38 For example, "[the company] will support any effort by its workers to collectively organise or form a trade union. Collective bargaining through trade unions can often bring about more favourable working conditions."

39 If workers choose to seek representation from an independent collective body of workers or union that is not readily recognized by the company, the company should then be open to adopt multiple channels of representation, when the legal framework allows, or seek ways to implement workers' queries to its communication with the existing representative body.



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