



International issues (draft) – The 29th Ordinary Congress of LO Sweden

The role of the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) in the international trade union movement

LO and its affiliated national unions work for a world in which free and democratic trade union organisations can grow strong and operate freely. LO and its affiliated national unions work for a world in which national and international regulations guarantee workers' fundamental trade union and human rights, both in working life and in society.

LO operates in a globalised world, where the conditions of working life are constantly being impacted. The daily struggle for a living wage, without risking your health at work and the right to influence your working life, knows no national borders. Trade union rights are always the same as human rights and something LO and its affiliated national unions fight for every day.

LO's international work is based on the global labour market. What happens for workers around the world has direct effects on LO union members. National boundaries in working life have less and less significance. The EU affects Swedish workers through political proposals and legislation and places high demands on LO and its affiliated unions to safeguard Swedish labour market conditions. For example, more than half of the issues on the national and municipal political agenda are affected by the EU. Global labour market conditions also affect wages and conditions to an increasing extent. More and more goods are produced in complicated production chains where workers are constantly at risk of violations in the global companies' pursuit of lower prices and higher profits.

Globalisation of the world economy is welcome and inevitable. Internationally mobile capital means efficiency in the economy that facilitates investments and creates job opportunities. Millions of people have been lifted out of poverty and given the possibility of work and better opportunities to influence their own lives. Nevertheless, the negative effects of globalisation are clear and serious. The workers who have enabled companies' profits are often the same workers who have to bear the burden of business relocations and unemployment. The negative effects of globalisation lead to increased polarisation through unequal distribution policies, protectionism and populism as a desperate way to protect jobs and income opportunities. For LO, it is of fundamental importance that the transition of economies due to structural rationalisation, digitalisation or climate change takes place sustainably and fairly.

The foundation of trade union success is a high organisation rate. The basis for better conditions in working life is that workers organise themselves in trade unions. Trade union membership in Sweden is directly linked to trade union strength in other countries, as a prerequisite for achieving changes that benefit the national union members but also for increasing trade union strength in the world. When workers in other countries have the collective strength to negotiate better pay and conditions, the global economy can work in everyone's favour in the long term. Trade union strength reduces the negative effects that globalisation can lead to. Studies show that the presence of trade unions makes a clear difference for income distribution in societies: the stronger the trade unions, the higher the level of equality and vice versa.

The importance of trade union strength and cooperation was manifested in Qatar, for example. The national unions and LO co-operated and demanded fundamental rights for migrant workers, primarily in the construction sector and for domestic workers. Together with the International Trade Union Confederation, ITUC, and the global trade union federations, joint trade union strength and massive efforts by the construction union, among others, meant that Qatar was forced to improve work environment legislation and the Kafala system of work permits and confiscated passports was abolished. The success in Qatar has also influenced change in labour market legislation in other neighbouring countries.

LO, together with the national unions, has developed ways to increase awareness of the impact of global production chains on members' jobs. LO, together with the national unions, has been involved in investigating and founding a Swedish initiative for ethical trade. ETI Sweden's aim is to promote sustainable business practices so that human rights and workers' rights are respected, as well as the relevant local communities and the environment.

LO union members are affected by international legislation and regulations being changed and challenged. LO works to influence the regulatory frameworks and participates in the structures aimed at promoting the conditions of Swedish workers, in joint solidarity with the global trade union movement.

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The 2030 Agenda is the UN's global agenda that seeks to end poverty and hunger, realise the human rights of all, achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, as well as to ensure the lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources. LO is encouraging the Swedish Government to put the Agenda into practice, both nationally and internationally. The Global Goals are integrated, indivisible, and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. The Agenda's 17 sustainable development goals have been developed over several years in broad consultation with states, authorities, organisations and the general public. The trade union movement actively participated in both the preparatory work and the negotiations, nationally and internationally. For LO, Goal 8 on sustainable economic development and decent working conditions is particularly important, together with Goal 5 for gender equality and Goal 10 for equality to balance the globalised economy by implementing the ILO Decent Work Agenda. LO contributes to the strategic work of the ITUC within the UN to influence sustainable development.

ILO

The UN labour organisation, the ILO, is a tripartite body in which representatives of employers, trade union organisations and governments gather. The ILO Conventions are legal

and political tools that regulate fundamental human rights in working life, both in Sweden and globally. The ILO's eight Core Conventions are universal and binding on Member States. Despite the fact that most countries in the world have ratified these and many other ILO Conventions, compliance is often deficient. According to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) Global Rights Index, violations of trade union rights are increasing every year and at present about half of the world's working population live in countries that do not even guarantee the right to form trade unions. Here the whole trade union movement is facing major challenges to drive developments in a positive direction in collaboration with progressive forces. During the last Congress period, LO successfully influenced the Government among other things to ratify Convention No. 189 on domestic workers' terms and the protocol to the ILO Convention No. 29 against forced labour.

Sweden should be a leader in the work for human rights in working life and show the way for other countries. This means above all that Sweden should ratify the following important ILO Conventions:

- ILO Convention No. 94 on labour clauses (public contracts), which was decided at the LO Congress in 2016. The Government has not responded to LO's repeated ratification demands and therefore the advocacy work needs to continue.
- Sweden should urgently ratify the newly adopted Convention No. 190 with the accompanying recommendation on the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work.

OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises

LO works with the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which are valuable tools in trade union work to improve human rights and conditions in working life. LO and its affiliated national unions are part of the National Contact Point, NCP, whose purpose is to report companies that violate the intentions of the Guidelines. The NCP works relatively poorly due to low efficiency and long processing times. LO considers that the NCP should be given increased resources. LO participates in the work of TUAC (the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD) to develop the guidelines. There are increased demands that the Guidelines should be changed into law, nationally, in the EU and the UN. LO takes the view that this should be investigated and be based on existing international and national tools for the regulation of companies and human rights.

Global Deal

The Global Deal is an initiative launched by Sweden with the aim of strengthening relations between the parties in the labour market through the social dialogue, in order to achieve good working conditions. The Global Deal is based on the Swedish experience that sound, well-developed relations between the social partners are a requirement for establishing decent working conditions and good business development, as well as promoting sustainable social development. The Global Deal has just over a hundred associated partners, including about 20 countries. The Global Deal is run by an office in Paris within the OECD, together with the ILO. LO has carried out several activities in the spirit of the Global Deal, including an international concept called Let's Talk, which provides the opportunity for workers, employers and representatives of governments and civil society to develop forms of social

dialogue in their local environment. Let's Talk provides a platform for participants to jointly over forty-eight hours formulate challenges that are solved through social dialogue.

Development cooperation

An important means to achieve the ambitions of the national unions and LO in international work is the possibility of financial support from Sida (The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency). LO and the national unions design development projects that are channelled via Union to Union or via the Olof Palme International Center. Financial support plays a central role in enabling unions to be core drivers for change. Right-wing forces threaten to reduce financial support; some have gone so far as to suggest that the support be stopped. Experiences from neighbouring Nordic countries show that when nationalists gain influence, financial support for trade unions has completely ceased. For LO, it is of central importance to find alternative financing opportunities to ensure long-term and stable international solidarity work. LO and the national unions carry out projects for example in Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Balkans. The projects aim, among other things, to strengthen trade union organisations and social dialogue, as well as provide training in negotiation techniques, the work environment, legal expertise and gender equality.

EU

LO welcomes the fact that the EU has been focusing on social conditions since 2017 through the Pillar of Social Rights. Equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions, social security and inclusion form the established way forward. The individual's life opportunities and quality of life are crucial, not only for economic development but also for democratic participation. The goals we set jointly affect the social climate here at home and in the outside world. The fact that income inequality has been allowed to increase and populism and anti-democratic elements have spread within the Union, is a consequence of past political choices and an under-regulated internal market. It is high time that the rights of citizens and employees are strengthened in relation to companies' and capital owners' right to free movement.

The EU can push for ethical and sustainable development with greater weight than a single nation. Not least because of this, it is particularly important that we participate actively in European cooperation. Together with our Nordic trade union colleagues, we have a strong voice at the European level, and together with our other European colleagues we strengthen the trade union voice at the global level. Areas where we are involved, and have made a difference, are in work environment issues, the right to equal conditions on the same labour market, responsibility for the climate and the environment, demands for good working conditions in EU trade agreements and in involving the social partners in decisions that affect the labour market.

During the Congress period, LO, supported by the national unions, has participated in analysis, positioning and advocacy in shaping the future of the EU. LO wants an EU where the political orientation and regulatory framework lead to equality and social progress. LO argues in favour of a "social protocol", which entails clarification in the EU Treaties that fundamental trade union freedoms and rights should be superior to economic freedoms in the internal market. The local wages and working conditions must apply to everyone who works in the national labour market. In the event of conflicts between the rules of free competition

and the protection of workers' rights to negotiate collective agreements, the social purpose must be assigned higher value.

Through strong unions and responsible partners, the Swedish model delivers the world's highest minimum wage, high employment, good working conditions and economic growth. In the discussion that has intensified within the EU, about ensuring decent living conditions for Europe's workers via minimum wages, LO's position is that the EU lacks the competence to establish common rules in this area, and that such rules would be incompatible with the Swedish model. A considerably more effective path towards better conditions for workers is increased organisation and capacity for social partners, as well as a well-functioning social dialogue. During the Congress period, in cooperation with the Nordic trade union group, LO has placed great emphasis on establishing knowledge and acceptance of the collective agreement model.

Together with its affiliated national unions, LO has initiated work on LO's international priorities to shape a strategy that will strengthen the role of members in the global efforts until 2025. LO is a clear, powerful voice in international work because LO and the national unions are represented in several international trade union organisations. This is a prerequisite for LO to be able to continue to safeguard its members' interests. In order to achieve equality, justice, gender equality, decent working conditions and respect for human rights, LO must work both nationally and internationally.