



The Swedish **Food Workers'** Union



www.livs.se

One industry, one trade union, one mission

We are 40,000 members throughout the Swedish food industry. We operate in a wide range of different workplaces and have a number of different occupations. Our members work in bakeries and slaughterhouses, the chocolate and ice cream industries, canneries and poultry-packing plants, breweries, flour mills and dairies.

We have members working in coffee-roasting plants and spice factories, distilleries, margarine product industries, the tobacco industry and the wine and spirits industry.

The wide spread of professions within the Swedish Food Workers' Union, Livs, reflects one of the basic principles of Swedish working life: namely, that all who work in a particular industry should be organised in the same trade union. This is generally referred to as the industrial union principle.

It gives us the collective strength needed to carry out our trade union work in the best possible way. Our task is to promote justice, equality and improved conditions for our members both at work and in a society marked by rapid changes and globalisation.

Many of the companies in which we work have international owners – and many are Swedish food groups with subsidiaries abroad. Solidarity with food workers throughout the world is therefore a self-evident principle for us at Livs. Trade union cooperation across borders must be developed and deepened if we are to protect the position of food workers throughout the world.



Hans-Olof Nilsson

PRESIDENT of the Swedish Food Workers' Union and of the IUF – International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations

Facts about the Swedish Food Workers' Union, Livs

- Livs is one of the unions within the Swedish Trade Union Confederation, (LO), which organises around 2 million Swedish workers
- Livs has 47,000 members
- Around 90 per cent of Swedish food workers are members of Livs
- We are organised in 270 local branches at around 1,500 workplaces all over the country.
- 12 district branches around the country work to support the local branches.
- More than 4,000 members are elected to positions of responsibility in Livs
- Livs has around 40 full-time officers at both regional and national level
- Arla, Carlsberg, Swedish Match and Unilever are examples of large, active, international companies that employ many of our members.



Our mission is higher wages and better conditions for our members

Our mission as a trade union organisation is to look after our members' interests in relation to employers and their organisations. We work to promote equality, justice and the equal value of all people at the workplace, on the labour market as a whole and throughout society.

Our job does not end at the factory gates. We are also responsible for supporting our members in the community as a whole. Their daily lives are affected by political decisions made by the Swedish parliament on taxes legislation and social welfare. We therefore take an active part in political discussions to ensure that the needs of our members are taken into consideration when decisions are made by the Swedish government and parliament.

Because of our combined strength, based on the industrial union principle, and our strong nationwide organisation, we are able to push for better wages and working conditions for our members with the help of trade union work carried out in a spirit of solidarity.

In recent years an increasingly important part of our job has been to promote an improved working environment for our members, many of whom are worn out and excluded as a result of insufficient investment by the food industry in improving the working environment.

In recent decades our job has also acquired a global dimension: as companies are becoming more international, we in the trade union must learn to operate across borders. We must cooperate with trade union organisations throughout the world if we are to create a long-term counterbalance to the often short-term profit-maximising strategies of the global companies.

We have always taken the democratic route

The Swedish Food Workers' Union has its roots in the trade union and political awakening that took place in Sweden at the end of the nineteenth century as a result of industrialisation. The Swedish labour movement grew rapidly and shaped the country throughout a large part of the twentieth century.

Like many other trade unions, today's Livs is the result of a long-term process in which smaller unions joined together over a period of years to form a powerful industrial trade union. The first foundation stone in the process was the Bakery Workers' Union, which was established in 1896. This was followed by about 10 other trade unions over subsequent years.

By 1889 the Social Democratic party had been formed with active involvement from the trade unions that had been established. When the party was formed, a division of tasks was agreed between the party and the rapidly-growing trade union movement.

It was decided that the job of the Social Democratic party was to work politically to establish a fair and democratic society while the job of the trade unions was to fight for workers' rights. By the middle of the 1910s the Social Democrats had become the country's biggest party and they have maintained this dominance for close on 100 years.

This cooperation is as deeply rooted today. The Social Democrats and the trade union movement each have their own specific roles, with close cooperation in terms of the big issues affecting society and at local level.

The bigger perspective involves protecting workers' rights and security of employment, reducing economic gaps, helping immigrants to integrate better into society,



and ensuring that Sweden becomes a country of equal opportunities with the same conditions for men and women.

The smaller perspective involves local and regional issues and includes public transport, social policy and childcare, areas in which the Social Democrats and the trade union movement have common goals.



Strong trade unions are even stronger together

Another important feature of the Swedish model is the deep collaborative relationship between the different unions in the trade union movement. Livs is one of 15 trade unions within LO. With the help of the other unions within LO we are becoming even stronger in negotiations with employers and at the political level.

The LO unions have almost 2 million members who work in private companies and in the public sector including local government.

LO coordinates the activities of the unions, for instance, on labour market issues, collective agreements, pensions and international operations.

Membership fees give independence

The Swedish trade union movement is based on solidarity among its members. One expression of this is the fact that the members themselves finance our activities. The fact that each person pays his or her fee every month means that the organisation can operate without pressure to give consideration to anyone other than its members.

An independent trade union movement can never be dependent on contributions from elsewhere, whether finance through the state or – even worse – some connection with companies and employers. In our view, the only exception to this principle is during the set-up phase for new trade unions in a particular country. Here it is possible that support from friends in other countries or international trade unions might offer a temporary financial solution.

Livs' members pay a monthly membership fee of between 50 and 80 Euro. Of this, roughly half is used

to finance the unemployment insurance. The other half of the fees goes to build up conflict funds, the ongoing trade union activities of negotiations, training and organisational work.

Collective agreements create stability and produce results that benefit everyone

The collective strength at Livs means that we can negotiate centrally with employers. This is an important part of the model that is applied on the Swedish labour market, where the collective agreement between employers and the union guarantees that all workers have the same basic conditions and are not exploited by their employers.

The collective agreement applies for all workplaces in the food industry where employers have accepted Livs as the opposite party. The collective agreement regulates wages and terms of employment at these workplaces. It specifies minimum wage levels and the terms of employment that must apply. Individual employers can never pay lower wages than the amount specified in the agreement, yet at the same time there is no obstacle to higher wages or better terms of employment.

Different branches of the food industry sign different collective agreements, but the differences are marginal and relate to such things as the scheduling of working hours, depending on the nature of the operation.

The collective agreement covers every person at the workplace, both those who are members of the union and those who are not. Those who are not members of the union therefore benefit from Livs' negotiations, though not through any solidarity – but this is an unavoidable result of the collective agreement principle.



Some of the areas covered by Livs' collective agreements include:

- Minimum wage levels
- Working hours
- Overtime payment
- Supplement for unsocial working hours
- Holiday pay
- Shift-work payment

The unemployment insurance fund and trade union insurance give security to members

Livs' work on wages, working conditions and working environment issues affects the situation for all members every day. But Livs also has a number of areas of work where we strive to ensure that our members benefit from security if they lose their job or experience occupational injury or illness. The unemployment benefit fund and the agreement-based insurance packages provide this security.

Livs' unemployment insurance fund helps members who are unemployed and offers security to those in danger of becoming unemployed. The remuneration from the unemployment insurance fund means that members are not entirely without provision during periods of unemployment.

The unemployment insurance fund works closely with Livs but is a legally independent body with its operation regulated through laws imposed by the Swedish

parliament. All unemployment insurance funds for the different trade unions have the same rules and conditions.

To join the unemployment insurance fund the prospective member must fulfil certain conditions in terms of the time worked over a specific period. Each member must personally apply for membership of the unemployment insurance fund and the fee is then included in the membership fee for the union.

The agreement-based insurance packages are included as part of the collective agreement. The premiums constitute a specified percentage of the wages and are paid by the employers. The five trade union agreement-based insurance packages supplement the social welfare systems, e.g. health insurance and occupational injury insurance.

Livs also has an agreement with the insurance company Folksam through which, among other things, all members are covered by a home insurance policy.

Agreement – based insurance packages:

- Long-term illness
- Occupational injury
- Unemployment
- Pension
- Death



A living democratic organisation

Livs is a democratic organisation where the trade union work is entirely based on the activity of the members out at the workplace. The local trade union branch will be what the members make of it. The basic security at a workplace is regulated through the collective agreement but local problems, e.g. working environment issues, should be solved through a local branch.

A branch can cover all the members at one workplace or all the members at several different workplaces in close proximity to one another. The branch makes collective decisions at branch meetings and the branch board is elected directly by the members, and the board shares working conditions and everyday matters with the members.

Livs also has twelve regional branches around Sweden. Their job is to assist the local branches. The regional branches employ officials who maintain contact with the local branches and take part in negotiations and training courses when needed. They also have an important role at many smaller workplaces where there is no local branch and give members the support and service they are entitled to.





At a central level in Stockholm Livs has its head office which ensures that the organisation is functioning efficiently and gives advice and support to the regional branches on various issues. The office has a number of officers with thorough expertise in different areas. This bank of knowledge is an asset at all levels in the work of the union and it also plays an important role in the contacts with other trade union organisations, in negotiations with employers and in discussions with politicians from different parties.

The common guidelines on how Livs should act over different issues are decided democratically at the union congress, which takes place every four years with the participation of around 190 elected members. In between congresses the union's general assembly and executive board are responsible for the day-to-day business of the organisation. The board is elected by the congress and the general assembly by the district branches.

A mission without borders

Many food companies are members of international groups with a variety of owners. Food production itself is largely globalised and sometimes companies literally make money out of the fact that some countries do not have free trade unions and are burdened with atrocious working conditions. Irrespective of where the production takes place, workers should have decent working conditions. This applies as much in Sweden and Poland as it does in China and Brazil.

As we keep pace with economic globalisation, we must collectively fight to ensure that human rights are also globalised. In what is known as core labour standards, there should be absolute minimum requirements

for what is acceptable: a ban on child labour, slavery and forced labour, the right to form a trade union and sign collective agreements, and a ban on discrimination.

But much more is needed. Globalisation of food production – and consumption – can only be met by strengthening and developing trade union contacts across borders. When raw materials and ready-made products move back and forth between countries and different parts of the world, the world's food workers must cooperate in all areas. It is only through international collaboration that we can prevent wage dumping and exploitation. Today the primary concern is the conditions for food workers in countries outside Europe, but globalisation is also changing the conditions for European food workers.

Livs is a member of the global union IUF (International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations) and of the Co-European organisation EFFAT (European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism workers). In March 2007 the president of Livs, Hans-Olof Nilsson, was elected president of IUF.

We run partnership projects to support the creation of free trade unions in various parts of the world, often in collaboration with IUF and other organisations but sometimes also through our own direct solidarity measures. Throughout the years we have actively worked with, among others, like-minded organisations in the Philippines, Hong Kong, Brazil and Latvia. Livs is also an active member of LO/TCO Secretariat of International Development Cooperation and the Olof Palme International Center.

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