

# SÓKN

-Offense is the best defense

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## Efling Condemns Genocide - Mass Rally “Nation Against Genocide”

At the beginning of September, the Efling board passed a resolution condemning the genocide carried out by Israel against the Palestinian people. The resolution calls for immediate action by the Icelandic government and the international community to stop attacks on civilians, children, women, hospitals, and schools.

Following this, Efling took part in a mass demonstration on 6th of September under the banner “Nation Against Genocide.” More than 180 organizations participated, including Efling, and the Delegate Council encouraged members to attend in large numbers and show solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Demonstrations were held across the country: in Reykjavík, Akureyri, Ísafjörður, Egilsstaðir, Stykkishólmur, and Húsavík.



Nation against genocide protest at Austurvöllur the 6<sup>th</sup> of september



# First Union Representative Training of the Autumn - Collective Bargaining



Snapshot from a well-attended union representative training course in September.

The first Union Representative training course of the autumn took place on the 8th of September, focusing on collective bargaining. Viðar Þorsteinsson gave an overview of the legal framework and environment for bargaining in Iceland, as well as the key concepts connected to collective agreements.

The course covered topics such as the form and scope of collective agreements, the rights and obligations of the bargaining parties, the concept of the peace clause, and the importance of formulating demands. It also highlighted how international commitments and rulings in legal cases can directly shape the content of Icelandic collective agreements.

This was the first session in a series on collective bargaining within this year's Union Representative training program. Future sessions will continue

to address bargaining, strike action, and Efling's proven methods in the fight for workers' rights.

## Dates of the Union rep courses for the winter 2025 – 2026

### PRIVATE MARKET

- 15 October 2025 (Wednesday)
- 13 November 2025 (Thursday)
- 18 December 2025 (Thursday)
- 13 January 2026 (Tuesday)
- 18 March 2026 (Wednesday)
- 21 April 2026 (Þriðjudagur)
- 28 May 2026 (Thursday)

### PUBLIC MARKET

- 8 September 2025 (Monday)
- 14 October 2025 (Tuesday)
- 12 November 2025 (Wednesday)
- 17 December 2025 (Wednesday)
- 12 January 2026 (mánudagur)
- 17 March 2026 (Tuesday)
- 20 April 2026 (Monday)
- 28 May 2026 (Thursday)

## Efling at the SUN Congress in Stavanger



Efling vice-chair Þórir Jóhannesson with Jimmy Ovesson, international officer of the Swedish Transport Workers' Union (Svenska Transportarbetareförbundet).

At the end of August, Efling took part for the first time in the congress of SUN, the Nordic federation of unions in cleaning, security, and property maintenance. The congress was held in Stavanger, Norway, and was attended by Efling chair Sólveig Anna Jónsdóttir, vice-chair Þórir Jóhannesson, board member Karla Barralaga Ocon, and three union staff members.

The congress marked the 80-year history of SUN and discussed the shared struggles of Nordic unions – from strikes in Finland and the Faroe Islands to the conflict with Tesla in Sweden. Special emphasis was placed on strengthening cooperation between countries in the fight against insecure work in the so-called gig economy – where people work as freelancers or contractors through apps without

normal rights – and against algorithmic management, where computer systems and apps assign tasks, monitor performance, and even determine working hours.

The congress also adopted a new action plan for 2025–2029, focusing on empowering workers in vulnerable positions, safeguarding rights in the green transition, and combating social dumping.

“It is invaluable for us to compare notes with our Nordic colleagues, gain advice, and exchange new ideas. Cooperation like this, and international cooperation more broadly, is essential in the struggle of working people – which is an international struggle,” said Sólveig Anna Jónsdóttir, chair of Efling.



# “Members Experience Efling as Their Community”

## - An interview with Adam Fishwick

“What Efling has done is move away from being a distant, bureaucratic unit and towards activating its grassroots. In this way, the union is strengthened – both in its ability to negotiate higher wages and to secure better conditions.”

So says Adam Fishwick, research director and visiting professor at the University of Akureyri. Adam, who holds a PhD in Development Studies, is currently researching the changes that have taken place within Efling since 2018, focusing on how the union has renewed its activities and re-engaged its membership. He has studied labor struggles and trade unions across the world, from South America to the UK.

Adam notes that the strategic shift in Efling’s work, as described above, can also be observed elsewhere. For instance, cleaning staff at British universities formed a new union when it became clear that the established unions there could not, or perhaps would not, defend their interests. Similar processes, though in different contexts, are also visible in South America, he says.

He also emphasizes the broader political role of trade unions: “Unions have a voice that matter – not just regarding wages, but also the daily lives of their members, such as housing, education, and access to services.” Unions cannot limit themselves to a narrow set of issues, he argues, since everything is interconnected – from climate change to global economic trends – all of which affect members.

One aspect Adam found especially interesting in his interviews with Efling members was the strong sense of community within the union. “Members experience Efling as their community,” he says. This, he argues, is tied to organizational and leadership changes that have strengthened the union’s activities and improved its ability to defend the interests of its members.

The research project formally began earlier this year and includes interviews with leaders, Union Representatives, and members, as well as focus groups planned for next year.



*Adam Fishwick is researching the changes that have taken place in Efling in recent years.*

The initial findings suggest that the renewal of the union is driven by its members themselves, rather than by outside factors, and shows how the union is building its strength “from below.”

Adam concludes that the Efling experience clearly demonstrates that unions can have both a social and political role. “This is the core of the renewal,” he says, “and what I find particularly interesting is how the union connects

its members to their community and strengthens their voice – both in the labor market and in society at large.”

*Freyr Rögnvaldsson conducted the interview with Adam Fishwick, who will present his research on the labor movement to Efling’s Union Representatives at training sessions in October.*



# Joy, Friendship, and Diversity - Food and Culture 2025

The festival **Food and Culture 2025** took place at Iðnó on Sunday, 21st of September. Efling members served food from more than 20 countries, filling the house with aromas, atmosphere, and joy.

Guests enjoyed a wide range of dishes from across the globe – everything from a whole roast pig prepared in the Filipino style, to a traditional Irani-

an “grandmother’s recipe” dessert, and hearty soup from the Dominican Republic. Alongside the food, members and their families contributed a lively cultural program with violin playing, singing, and dancing, creating a true celebration of diversity and solidarity.

“Food and Culture 2025 was fantastic! The food was incredible, and there

was a huge crowd of Efling guests. The atmosphere was wonderful, and everyone was in high spirits,” said Sólveig Anna Jónsdóttir, Chair of Efling, after the festival.

This was the third time Efling organized the popular event, which has now firmly established itself as an annual feast for members and their families.



*Food and Culture was celebrated beautifully at Iðnó on September 21<sup>st</sup>.*





# Visit from Mark Bergfeld

## - Justice for Cleaning Workers!



Mark Bergfeld attended a meeting of the Delegation council on the 4<sup>th</sup> of September.

Mark Bergfeld, representative of UNI Global Europe, visited Efling in early September. He met with the Delegation Council and the union board to discuss ways to strengthen the rights, wages, and working conditions of cleaning workers.

Mark emphasized that international cooperation is key to improving the position of cleaners, and praised the development that has taken place within Efling in recent years. He has himself worked closely with Nordic unions in the cleaning sector.

Efling is currently working to increase

the number of Union Representatives in cleaning to build the collective power of its members. The union also demands that public procurement and tenders be based on social responsibility – with clear requirements for safe work, fair wages, and decent working conditions.

“I am deeply impressed by the union culture that Sólveig Anna Jónsdóttir and her comrades have built within Efling. The union has changed the bargaining culture in Iceland and is now strengthening its international ties. Icelandic trade unions probably have the highest membership densi-

ty in the world – around 90 percent – but until now have had limited involvement in international cooperation. What Efling is building in terms of union representative structures and the participation of migrant workers is unique in international comparison. Often, we hear about new methods from the UK, the US, or Germany – but sometimes the most important innovations begin on the margins and spread from there. I am convinced that we will hear much more from this small island in the middle of the Atlantic in the years to come,” said Mark Bergfeld, UNI Global Europe.

## Efling Demands Radical Action on Housing

Housing costs in Iceland have grown much faster than wages in recent years and have become one of the biggest problems facing working people. Tens of thousands struggle with insecure rentals and extortionate rents while the government does nothing substantive.

Efling has repeatedly pointed out that the housing market is in deep crisis and requires radical action. According to Sólveig Anna Jónsdóttir, chair of the union, the government’s housing bill does little to solve the problem and will not secure safe, affordable housing for the public.

There will be no more agreements on moderate wage increases in collective bargaining unless the government cleans up the “dump” that the housing market has become. It is unacceptable that most of the disposable income for a large group of Efling members – in



Photo from Efling’s protest outside ráðherra-bústaðurinn on February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

some cases as much as 70 percent – goes directly into the pockets of landlords every month.

“The housing market has become a dump, and it must be cleaned up,” said Sólveig Anna, criticizing the government’s inaction. She emphasized that the lack of social housing and the free rein given to financial investors has created an intolerable situation in which tenants pay a huge share of their income in rent.



Efling has long argued that the solution lies in decisive government action: large-scale construction of social housing, the introduction of rent controls, strict limits on Airbnb, and stronger tenant protections. According to Sólveig Anna, the greed of financial capital must no longer set the terms – the priority must be ensuring secure homes for all.

## Union representative of the month - Ignacia Russell



Ignacia Russel is Efling's union representative at Íslenski textílnaðurinn hf.

*What do you enjoy doing outside of work?*

"I like to go longboarding with my dog, collect Pokémon cards, play

video games, watch horror movies, and enjoy life with my wife."

*What's the best thing about being a union representative?*

"The best thing about being a representative is gaining knowledge of labor laws, allowing me to defend workers' rights and improve working conditions and wages, thus contributing to a fair work environment."

*What's one proud moment you've had as an active Efling union member?*

"Being elected by my coworkers and making good changes to the company."

*If you could travel anywhere right now, where would you go?*

"Right now, I would go to Chile to celebrate my country's national holidays and enjoy time with my family. Or I would love to be in Japan enjoying the beautiful landscapes, eating delicious food, and spending my money on Pokémon."

*What's your favorite thing about autumn in Iceland?*

"I love the colors of the Icelandic autumn, the leaves on the trees, the beautiful sunrises, and the mountains. It's starting to get cold, and you already know winter is coming, but there's still a bit of sunshine to enjoy, and at night you can already begin to enjoy the wonderful northern lights."

*What advice would you give to a new union rep?*

"Go to the courses, because you learn a lot and you also meet incredible people, and always maintain good relationships with your coworkers."



## Tax Privileges for the Highest Earners - What Do the Numbers Show?

Stefán Ólafsson points out that people with the highest incomes receive a large share of their income from capital gains, which are taxed much lower than the wages of ordinary workers. In this way, the wealthiest enjoy major tax privileges compared to the general workforce.

Over time, the state's support for the highest earners – in the form of low taxation on capital income – has been far greater than the total state expenditure on child benefits and housing support for low-income households combined.

Stefán proposes that the taxation of capital income should be raised to the same level as the taxation of wages, in order to reduce inequality and strengthen fairness.



*Read Stefán's full article by following the QR code*