

“We are pillars, yet few see us” - Efling member delivers a powerful speech

„The children we work with are the future, but the staff who care for them are often invisible.“ With these words, Bozena Raczowska, an Efling member and representative on the Delegate Council, began her speech at the ASÍ symposium on the occasion of the Women’s Strike 2025. In her speech, she shed light on the status and struggle of women of foreign origin in the Icelandic labor market, who number around 32,000 and make up nearly half of all immigrants in Iceland.

Bozena, who moved from Poland in 2006 and has worked at a preschool in Iceland for 15 years, shared her personal experience of heavy workloads, low wages, and the feeling of being undervalued. She said her stories echo the experiences of countless other immigrant women working in the foundational pillars of society, such as caregiving and cleaning. „We are pillars, yet few see us,“ she said, adding that they are often expected to work more than before and not to stand up for their rights.

This constant pressure, combined with a lack of a support network, led to Bozena experiencing burnout in 2024. She pointed out that many women in similar situations are not aware of their rights or the resources available to them, such as the services of VIRK.

One of the biggest issues of justice, in Bozena’s opinion, is the housing crisis. As a single mother renting on the private market, about 70% of her disposable income goes to rent. „We cannot build a future if the founda-



Bozena Raczowska, member of the Efling Delegate Council

tion, the roof over our heads, is insecure,“ she said, calling for a secure, social housing system.

Despite the adversity, Bozena found a platform for her voice within Efling, where she has been a union representative since 2013. She said the union’s struggle and the support of Sólveig Anna Jónsdóttir, the chairwoman, have given her and other

women of foreign origin strength and visibility.

Bozena concluded her speech with a clear message: „We, women of foreign origin, are not fighting for lofty slogans. We simply want to live with dignity. We want to belong. We will not give up. We will fight for a better future, for ourselves, for our children, and for Iceland.“

A packed house at Efling's family cinema

Efling's family cinema event on October 27th was well attended.

It was a packed house at Bíó Paradís on Monday, October 27th, when Efling hosted a family movie screening during the elementary schools' winter break. The Oscar-winning film *Flow* was shown, and both children and adults had a wonderful time.

Events like these have become a regular feature in Efling's social life and are always very popular among members. They give families an opportunity to meet, share enjoyable moments, and have great fun.



The whole family at the movies! Union representative Roger J. Young with his family



Efling's family cinema was well attended

Thirteen thousand Efling members live in poverty



Photo from Efling's protest at Kringlan on January 11th regarding the sham union Virðing

A new report from Varða, the labor market research institute, shows that the situation of Efling members is much worse than that of other workers in Iceland. About 40% of Efling members experience a lack of material and social goods – twice as many as in other unions within ASÍ and BSRB.

In total, 45% of members have difficulty making ends meet, with 8% finding it very difficult. Only 40% can cover an unexpected expense of 100,000 ISK without taking out a loan, compared to 64% of other workers.

The difference is also significant when looking at material deprivation:

- 24% cannot afford meat or fish every other day (compared to 12%).
- 25% cannot pay bills on time (compared to 8%).
- 36% cannot afford an annual week-long holiday (compared to 23%).
- 52% cannot replace worn-out furniture (compared to 30%).



No more poverty wages! Photo from the visit of the union Unite to the Efling Delegate Council on February 6th

According to the findings, over 13,000 Efling members live in poverty, of whom about 7,000 face severe deprivation. The situation of about 5,000 members is very fragile, and it would take little to push them into the poverty trap as well. Kristín Heba Gísladóttir

presented the survey's findings to the Delegate Council on October 16th.

Read more by following the QR code here:



Majority of Efling members are positive about Reykjavík City's preschool model



Elżbieta Kołacz, Sólveig Anna Jónsdóttir and Niuvis Sagó Suceta

From October 10th to 17th, Efling conducted a survey among preschool staff about Reykjavík City's proposals for a new organizational structure for preschools. The survey was sent to 1,150 members, and a total of 594 responded — a response rate of nearly 52%, which is considered very good participation.

The results show that preschool staff are generally positive about the changes. Just over half of the respondents describe themselves as satisfied or very satisfied with the proposals, nearly 19% are negative, and just over a fifth are neutral.

When asked specifically about expectations for the success of the proposals, a

similar pattern emerged. About half of the respondents agree that the changes will achieve their goals, a quarter disagree, and 17% are neutral.

However, in open-ended responses about improvements in preschool work, it was clear that staff concerns primarily revolve around staff shortages and the heavy workload that follows. These issues are overwhelmingly considered the most urgent problems today.

Nearly three out of four respondents said they had familiarized themselves with the city's proposals to some or to a large extent, which indicates that the answers are based on solid knowledge and experience.

„It's great to see such a high participation rate in our survey, and I'm not surprised that Efling members are positive about changes in this direction,” says Sólveig Anna Jónsdóttir, chairwoman of Efling. „Now, the City of Reykjavík has a valuable opportunity to work with the staff for a better and safer preschool environment. I urge the city to consult with us on the further implementation and development of these proposals,” Sólveig concluded.

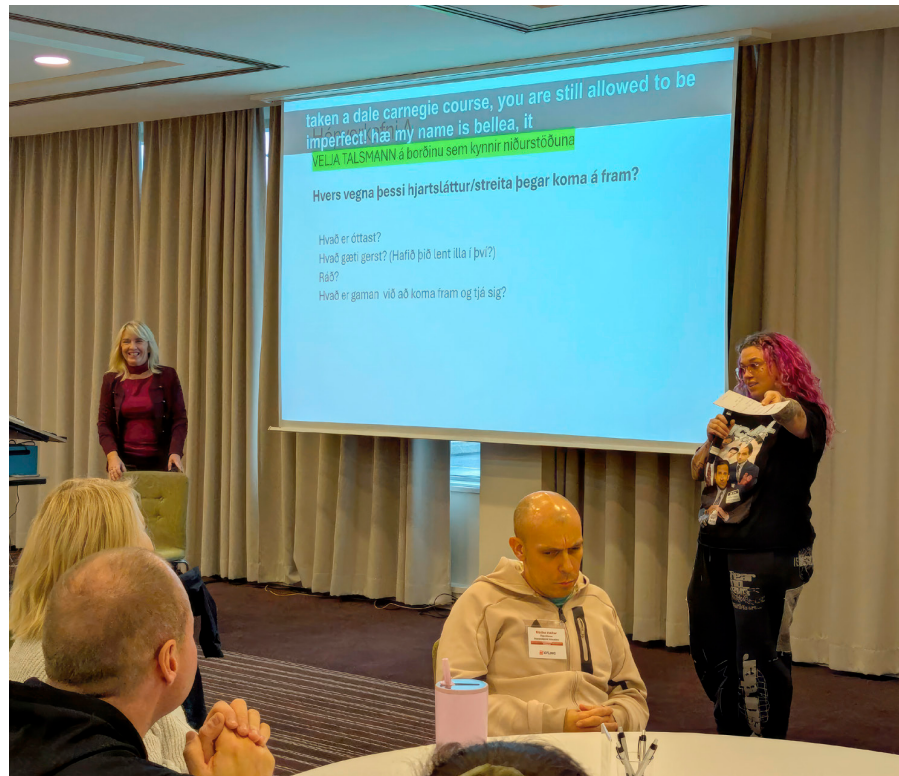
Education and training for union representatives this winter - Confident communication and important labor market issues

Efling continues to strengthen its union representatives with robust education and training. At the last union representative courses on October 14th and 15th, Sigríður Arnardóttir, or Sirrý, trained the group in confident communication and presentation. There, union representatives had the opportunity to try various practical exercises to strengthen them in their roles. Sirrý will continue with sessions in the union representative courses in November, December, and January.

New survey and EKKO cases at the next course

The agenda for the upcoming courses is no less ambitious. At the November course, Kristín Heba Gísladóttir from Varða, the labor market research institute, will present and discuss a new survey on the status of workers in Iceland. This analysis provides union representatives with important insights into the challenges and trends prevailing in the labor market today.

Additionally, lawyers from MAGNA will go over the so-called EKKO cases in detail and how to respond to them. The acronym EKKO stands for: Bully-



Union representatives expressed great satisfaction with Sirrý's training

ing, gender-based harassment, sexual harassment, and violence.

Union representatives will receive

education on which processes should be activated in such cases and how best to support victims.

Working women will not be free except through collective class struggle

In her presentation at the symposium „Modern Women's Struggle – The Status of Women of Foreign Origin in the Labor Market,” held on the occasion of the Women's Strike 2025, Sólveig Anna Jónsdóttir, chairwoman of Efling, presented a sharp critique of the systematic exploitation of working women. She emphasized that the problems of these women were not personal but a consequence of a persistent low-wage policy and systematic exploitation.

Sólveig Anna rejected the common explanation that immigrant women get „stuck“ in low-wage jobs due to a lack of education or language skills. She argued that such a narrative serves to absolve the government and employers of responsibility. The real problem,

she said, is a system that thrives on the cheap labor of indispensable women in the foundational jobs of society.

She also strongly criticized the myth of Iceland and the Nordic countries as a paradise of gender equality. She asserted that the „social liberation of women“ rests on the exploitation and overwhelming burden of other women – a class of low-paid women, often of foreign origin, who receive little respect in society.

Finally, she described Efling's methodology, which is based on activating the grassroots and building the union's power from the bottom up, with real inclusion and democratic participation of its members. She emphasized the importance of solidarity within



the working class and pointed to the success of the fixed-amount wage agreements from 2019 as an example of how the solidarity of Icelandic and immigrant Efling members, both women and men, has delivered the greatest increase in purchasing power to those with the lowest wages.

Union Representative of the Month - Hlynur Gauti Ómarsson



Hlynur Gauti Ómarsson is the Efling union representative at the Sand Hotel

What do you enjoy doing outside of work these days?

„What I mostly do is read books, mainly sci-fi/fantasy, although it's been on my agenda for a while to start reading more classic literature. And when Liverpool is playing, I rarely miss a game.“

What do you find most enjoyable or rewarding about being a union representative today?

What do you find most enjoyable or rewarding about being a union representative today? „It is, of course, being able to help my colleagues when they come to me. It has also been both enjoyable and rewarding to get to know the work that takes place at the union more closely. Meeting wonderful people at the union representative courses, getting the opportunity to work within Efling on the

Delegate Council, and experiencing that I, as a member, matter. None of us are just one of 27,000 names on a membership list; we can all have an impact.“

If you could invite any person—living or dead—for coffee, who would it be and why?

„This is a tougher question than I thought. Maybe Arne Slot, to ask what's going on with Liverpool these days?“

What is your favorite way to recharge your energy when it gets dark?

„I find it absolutely essential to have something to look forward to, both in the long and short term. Most recently, for example, it was Halloween with my 11-year-old stepdaughter, which, to everyone's surprise, turned from one day into a whole weekend. Not much is as contagious as the joy of children, which is why Christmas is next on the list.“

If you had to give advice to a new union representative, what would it be?

„Don't be afraid to ask for advice or help. There are plenty of people, both at the Efling office and not least at the union representative courses, who are willing to help and may have even encountered the same problem you are dealing with. No one expects you to have all the answers from day one; give yourself time to learn things.“

If you could describe your workplace in one word, what word would you choose?

„International. I work at a hotel, and around me are people from all corners of the world. It has been very enlightening for a white, middle-aged, cis man from little Iceland.“

Efling's office moved to the 3rd floor of Guðrúnartún 1

The office of Efling union has moved to the 3rd floor of Guðrúnartún 1, after being temporarily located on the 4th floor of the same building. The renovation of the union's office premises, which has been ongoing for the past few months, is now mostly complete. The renewed Efling premises represent a positive change in the union's operations.

The reception area for members has been significantly expanded, and the number of interview rooms has been increased. The entire design of the premises is built around the union's role of serving and assisting its members. Members are welcomed to the renovated premises.