



INTERNATIONAL



Trade union tools for local climate action

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Trade union tools for local climate action

THIS PUBLICATION IS INTENDED as a tool for trade union clubs and elected representatives who want to work to reduce the climate impact of their workplace, secure jobs and strengthen their position in the labour market.

The climate determines whether our future will be better or worse

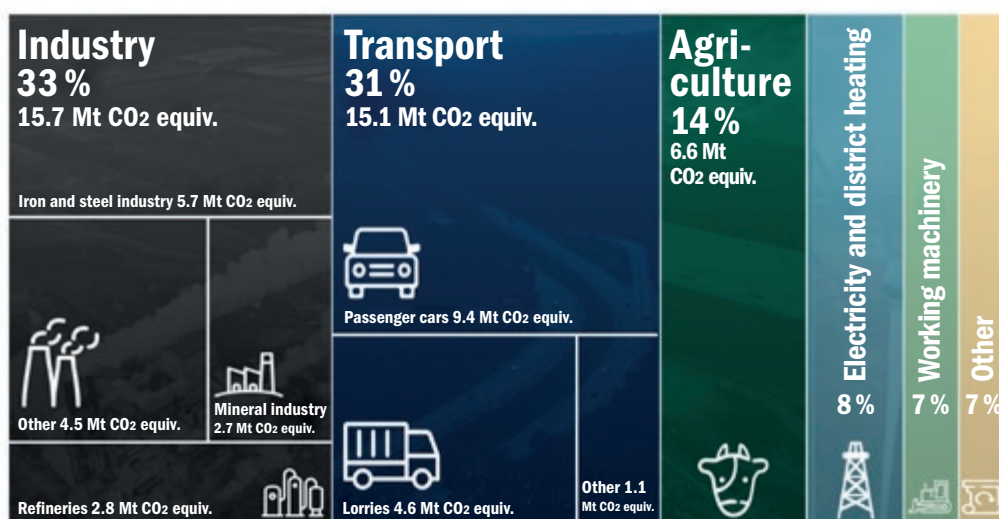
If humanity fails to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the earth will be a far worse place for people to live in. This insight led the countries of the world to adopt the Paris Agreement: To hold global warming to below 2 degrees and pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees. This requires a drastic reduction in global CO₂ and other greenhouse gas emissions and by 2050 we will be able to emit a maximum of 1 tonne of CO₂ per person per year¹. The emissions we Swedes cause through our consumption today amount to just under 8 tonnes per person per year.²

What and how we produce determines Sweden's emissions

Another way of measuring our emissions is called territorial emissions. These are the emissions that come from activities within Sweden's borders. That measurement gives average emissions per Swede of 4.6 tonnes per year³. The largest emissions come from industrial production and transport. One third of Sweden's emissions come from passenger and freight transport, mainly because so many vehicles today are powered by fossil petrol or diesel.

Sweden's climate emissions 2021

47.9 million tonnes CO₂ equivalents



SOURCE: SWEDISH ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

¹ How can I reduce my climate impact? (naturvardsverket.se)

² Emissions of greenhouse gases (scb.se)

³ Consumption-based greenhouse gas emissions by area – Sweden's environmental objectives (sverigesmiljomal.se)

A smart climate policy is a smart job policy

The market has proved to be bad at adapting at the required pace. This is why politics has taken increasing responsibility for reducing emissions and halting climate change. This is done through growing charges for emissions and prohibiting emissions. Operations that do not adapt to this will have to close down, with unemployment as a result. On the other hand, those who invest in climate-smart technology and products can be successful and safeguard jobs.

For climate-smart structural change to be successful, we need to act early. This will allow investment in new technologies and new products and services to develop at a reasonable pace. Not least, through our trade union work we can ensure that we get the skills development, further training and reskilling that is necessary to secure jobs and be able to carry out a fair structural transformation.

Three questions for a just transition

To find out what needs to be done to make workplaces climate smart and employment proof, clubs and elected representatives should at least be aware of the following three questions. The first two questions concern what is required to reduce climate impact and the third aims to ensure that employees have the appropriate skills even after a transformation into climate smart operations.

1. What emissions do operations cause in our workplace?
2. What technologies or options are available to avoid these emissions?
3. What skills are required of workers to implement this transformation and how are workers guaranteed to receive appropriate skills development?

The climate – a trade union issue?

Decisions about what is to be produced and how it is to be produced are usually made by the employers themselves. However, these decisions must be made in cooperation with the local unions. MBL (the Act on Co-determination at Work), AML (the Work Environment Act), the Development Agreement and various cooperation agreements regulate how the cooperation is to take place.

Climate change is an issue that has a decisive impact on future jobs and employment. Greenhouse gas emissions will be limited. Jobs are therefore threatened in operations with climate impact unless employers invest in and adapt the operations to become climate neutral. But even in companies that choose to become climate-smart, jobs may change, which may require new skills for workers.

It is therefore in the interest of the trade union movement that the trade unions have influence over these issues and can be a driving force so that the transition is fair. Imagination sets the limits, but local trade unionists can, for example, use the following methods:

1. Conversations in the workplace.

First of all, it is important that the issue is discussed at workplaces, between colleagues and management. Everyone should have a common interest in developing the operations and securing jobs.

2. Respond to the employer's information.

Ensure that employers comply with their obligations under the Act on Co-determination at work (MBL). Conduct primary negotiations and provide information. The task of the trade unions is to ask, question and make suggestions.

3. Initiate and request negotiations yourselves.

The Development Agreement and various cooperation agreements allow trade unions covered by these agreements to initiate work in cooperation bodies and, in some cases, to request negotiations with the employer.

The tools are there!

MBL is the foundation to drive climate change locally

Under Section 11 of MBL (Act on Co-determination at Work) the employer must negotiate with the trade union in good time before the process of making major changes at the workplace is initiated. This is called the primary obligation to negotiate and applies, among other things, to plans to change the work organisation, to make redundancies due to shortage of work, to introduce new systems for monitoring and control, or to purchase new machines and tools.

The task of the trade union is then to ask questions, make comments and make alternative proposals at all stages. If the work environment will be affected, an impact assessment in accordance with the Work Environment Act must be carried out and so on.

In these situations, we have the MBL regulatory framework. Use that opportunity!

The right to negotiate

Under Section 10 of MBL the trade union has the right to negotiate with the employer on all matters concerning the relation between employer and members of the organisation (who are or have been employed by the employer).

Cooperation agreements

There are cooperation agreements covering large areas of central and local government, but in some cases also the private side. The agreements are a development of the regulations in MBL (Act on Co-determination at Work) and AML (Work Environment Act). The aim is for the local parties to have ongoing and well-functioning cooperation on all matters relating to the operations. These include development of operations, the work, skills development, and the work environment. Adapting the workplace to climate change falls well within the scope of the agreements.

Development Agreement

The trade unions covered by the Development Agreement, which is a kind of cooperation agreement, have, in addition to MBL, additional opportunities to cooperate and request MBL negotiations. The agreement gives employers an enhanced obligation to negotiate on matters such as technological development and the company's finances and development in general. The trade unions have the opportunity to initiate work in cooperation bodies themselves and may also refer certain co-determination issues to MBL negotiations. The Development Agreement was made between the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise, the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) and the Council for Negotiation and Cooperation (PTK). MBL's regulatory framework forms the basis for the collective agreements that are affiliated to this agreement, but increased opportunities to raise and influence the question of climate adaptations are also provided here.

The Development Agreement came into being to develop collaboration between trade unions and employers on matters of common interest such as developing the company, the work environment, and the employees' skills.

The aim is to secure the company's operations and ensure secure employment. It contains provisions on how the joint work is to be carried out on issues such as market prospects, purchasing activities, competitive position, product development and employee skills development.

The Development Agreement is very well suited to jointly managing the transition to sustainable and climate-adapted operations.

How can the tools be used?

MBL (the Act on Co-determination at Work) is the basic legislation that governs the employer's obligations and the trade union's rights regarding information and negotiations. The cooperation agreements and Development Agreement augment these rights. What is set out below constitutes the minimum for all of them.

Even if the employer is not interested in sustainability issues and future-proofing operations, there are opportunities for clubs and the local trade union to act.

First of all, it is important that the issue is discussed at workplaces, between colleagues and management. Everyone should have a common interest in developing the operations and securing jobs. If the employer is not interested there are effective tools.

Obligation to provide information

An effective opportunity to raise the issue is given with Section 19 of MBL, which deals with information to organisations bound by collective agreements. The provision focuses on matters that are not subject to the primary obligation to negotiate under Section 11 of MBL.

The right to information can be divided into three different types:

1. Information that must be provided on the employer's own initiative.
The employer is obliged to continuously inform the local workers' organisation about the operations. This includes production, finances, and personnel policy, but also the general development of the company and forecasts for investments as well as future prospects in general. The information must be provided on a regular and timely basis with the employer having access to the data. For example, information meetings should be held once a week or month, depending on the size of the workplace and the design of the operations.
2. Information the employer is obliged to provide at the request of the local trade union.
The employer is also obliged to provide information at the request of the trade union. If the requested information is needed to represent the members and is within the scope of information under Section 19. This may refer to books, accounts, or reports, as well as investigations, analyses, statistics and agreements.

3. Investigations and transcripts that the employer is obliged to produce at the request of the local trade union.

Within the framework of Section 19 of MBL the trade union may also request that the employer carries out investigations into such things as why the company has a high rate of sickness absence or high staff turnover. But this obligation to investigate is limited. The request must be proportionate to the need for the investigation, the results the investigation can provide in the best case and the company's ability to cope with the costs and inconvenience resulting from the investigation.

The issue of climate adaptation of the workplace definitely falls within the scope of Section 19 of MBL.

Primary obligation to negotiate

In a primary negotiation under Section 11 of MBL, it is the role of the trade union to ensure that all climate aspects that may be relevant will be handled by the employer. Ask questions, make suggestions and so on. Request an adjournment if you need it or if the employer is unable to answer the relevant questions. The trade union need not have all the answers – just the right questions!

The right to negotiate

The right to negotiate in Section 10 of MBL applies to most matters at a workplace that relate to the relationship between the employer and the members. Be creative! Take every opportunity to influence the employer.

Collective agreements

As yet there are no central collective agreements on adaptation to climate change between the social partners. This does not prevent local collective agreements being made on how to conduct climate action at the workplace and how appropriate climate objectives are to be jointly developed.

Common goals can be environmental certification for the operations, climate-adapted purchasing policy, recycling, reduced energy consumption, environmentally friendly transportation, or skills development for employees in the environmental field.

Conclusion

It is of the utmost importance that the trade union movement is active in the transition to a sustainable society that will inevitably take place. It is the task of the trade union to ensure that it is just and equitable. MBL, cooperation agreements and the Development Agreement have tools to start the work already today. The trade union struggle is best pursued in the workplace – which is also true of this issue.

Remember!

Trade unions are needed to actively work for a just and equitable transition to a sustainable society. You are experts at your workplaces. You do not need to be experts on environmental and climate issues.

To find out what needs to be done to make your workplace climate smart and employment proof, you should at least be aware of the following three questions.

1. What emissions do operations cause in our workplace?
2. What technologies or options are available to avoid these emissions?
3. What skills are required of workers to implement this transformation and how are workers guaranteed to receive appropriate skills development?

What rules apply at your workplace? MBL (Act on Co-determination at Work), cooperation agreements and/or the Development Agreement?

Use the tools available to discuss the issues, make sure that the employer fulfils its obligations and initiates negotiation and collaboration. Take advantage of all the opportunities and create your own.

Without the union – no just and equitable transition!



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