



A REPORT FROM LO INTERNATIONAL DEPARTMENT

Trade Union Solidarity with Ukraine

Mats Erikson



The Swedish Trade Union Confederation

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Foreword

JUST NOW, AS YOU READ THIS, the members of a trade union club somewhere in Sweden are packing food, medicines and other necessities for shipping to trade union comrades in Ukraine. Elsewhere, members are gathering for a manifestation in which they express their disgust at Russia's war of aggression. And somewhere an LO member is currently using a mobile wallet on his phone to make a Swish payment to the Olof Palme International Center or one of our union solidarity funds.

That is trade union solidarity. And it is as old as the trade union movement itself. That is why it has long been a matter of course for us to support our trade union comrades in Ukraine and their efforts to build a young democracy. And that is why it was just as natural for us to quickly help them out when Russia attacked their country on 24 February 2022.

LO will not abandon its support to the Ukrainian trade union movement. We stand up for Ukraine's right to democracy and self-determination. We do it not only in words, but also in action. In this publication we present some of the trade union work of solidarity that is going on all over Sweden right now.

Sometimes it is easy to feel despair in the face of excessive violence and brutality. What can we counter with? My answer is clear: we have our international solidarity. And it is a force that dictators and attackers have always feared, as history shows.

No one can do everything, but everyone can do something. Those of you reading this can do something right now: make a donation to one of our trade union solidarity funds or the Palme Center's Ukraine fund-raiser. You will find the Swish number and account number at the end of this publication.

That way, you can show Vladimir Putin that the international solidarity of the trade union movement is stronger in the long run than he is.

Susanna Gideonsson

President of the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO)



1. Introduction

THE SOLIDARITY OF the international trade union movement with Ukraine has a long history. The International Trade Union Confederation, ITUC, of which LO is a member, has supported Ukrainian free and democratic trade unions since the country's independence in 1991. In Sweden, LO and its affiliated unions have supported our trade union comrades in Ukraine for just as long, both directly and indirectly through the joint organisation for international trade union development cooperation, Union to Union. The support has been long-term and focused on organising, mobilising, training and recruiting members.

Since Russia started its war of aggression, trade union solidarity work has changed rapidly. Now it is a matter of saving the lives and freedom of our comrades. We provide urgent humanitarian support and assistance to those members who are forced to flee with their families or in other ways are affected by the war. But at the same time, it is important to continue with support for their organisations so that peaceful trade union work can be rebuilt on the day the war ends. We are constantly in close contact with our Ukrainian sister organisations.

ituc-csi.org


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Ukraine: unions' humanitarian action



Since the ITUC launched its [emergency fundraising appeal](#) to help Ukraine's workers and their families, there has been an overwhelming response.

27-04-2022 Russian Federation Ukraine Peace

The funds are being used by the ITUC's member organisations in Ukraine to help people in desperate need, and trade unions in neighbouring countries are supporting the increasing number of refugees:

In Ukraine, support from the ITUC fund is allowing the **Federatsiya Profesiynykh Spilok Ukrayiny (FPU)** and the **Konfederatsiya Vil'nykh Profspilok Ukrayiny (KVPU)** to keep buildings open and heated and to assist people escaping the terror and destruction of Putin's war.

This shelter and basic humanitarian aid has already been given to hundreds of thousands of people.

To support this, the **Biocul National Sindical (BNS), Romania**, has been able to send life-saving supplies into Ukraine, such as water, canned food, bedding and medications. In the first month they sent

SHARES

2. The trade union movement in Ukraine

THE CONSTITUTION OF UKRAINE gives everyone the right to form trade unions and to join trade unions. The largest trade union organisation is the Federations of Trade Unions of Ukraine, FPU, with just over eight million members. Other important trade unions are the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine, KVPU, with about 250,000 members and the All-Ukrainian Union of Workers' Solidarity, VOST, with about 150,000 members. All three belong to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), where LO, TCO (Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees) and Saco (Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations) are also members.

War is not new to the Ukrainians. After Russia occupied Crimea and Russian-friendly separatists took power in the Donetsk and Luhansk areas, Ukraine has been forced to wage a defensive war for its independence. The war has also hit Ukraine's economy, with lower wages and higher unemployment among the consequences. Many Ukrainians have travelled abroad to get a job, not least in Poland. Trade union organisations have long been under pressure from the country's economic problems.

3. Many years of solidarity



Photo: Lars Forstvedt

WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF Union to Union, the Swedish trade union movement has long worked on long-term and democracy-promoting initiatives in Ukraine.

LO and TCO, together with ITUC and its Pan-European Regional Council, PERC, are implementing a project to promote trade union cooperation across the region. The project has for some years built up trade union networks in areas such as work environment, finance and communication. In Ukraine, the project contributed to the recognition of COVID-19 as an occupational disease by the State.

The LO affiliates the Electricians' Union, the Building Workers' Union and the Painters' Union have long been engaged in international solidarity and development work in Ukraine and other countries, together with the other Swedish building and wood workers' unions (SBTF). The work is coordinated through the Building and Wood Workers' International, BWI.

Since 2018 the LO affiliate Seko (Union for Service and Communications Employees) has been conducting a project together with the International Transport Workers Federation, ITF, to raise the standard of living for employees in the railway sector. The project is being conducted in several countries, one of which is Ukraine. The project objectives are organisation, member recruitment and training of elected representatives and members.

In 2020–2021 the Municipal Workers' Union worked on a project on gender equality and equal pay and men's violence against women in both Russia and Ukraine. The work was conducted together with the global union for food, farm and hotel workers, the IUF.

Through its UNI Global Union, the Swedish Commercial Employees Union supports a regional organising centre in Poland, COZZ, which works with trade union organisation in Ukraine and other countries in Central and Eastern Europe.

LO is also a member of the Olof Palme International Center, which has supported organisations and networks in Ukraine for many years. The support goes to a Social Democratic organisation inside Ukraine, a trade union youth network, and an activist organisation that, in exile from Lithuania, provides support to Ukrainian networks for education and organisation, as well as to an organisation that works for children's rights with a focus on children with disabilities.

4. After the invasion: Slava Ukraini!

SLAVA UKRAINI – GLORY TO UKRAINE – is the message heard both in Ukraine and worldwide since Putin launched the Russian war of aggression on 24 February. That is also what drives trade union solidarity since then.

The LO Executive Council decided immediately after the invasion to donate SEK 250,000 to start with to the Palme Center's Ukraine fund-raiser. It will be followed by additional support. And all over Sweden, national



Medical products via the Palme Center to Ukrainian hospitals.

Photo: Ivana Khrapko

trade unions, union branches and local clubs since then have devoted themselves to practical solidarity with their union comrades in Ukraine. Here are some examples:

The Swedish Building Maintenance Workers' Union has raised funds and donated SEK 52,000 to the Palme Center's solidarity work. The money is for medicines and food for those who evacuate civilians from the war.

The Transport Workers' Union has provided support to the dock workers of the Maritime and Transport Workers of Ukraine and their families. The Union has also allocated one krona per member to the work of the Red Cross and Doctors Without Borders in Ukraine. The Union also blockaded Russian-owned, Russian-controlled and Russian-flagged vessels.

The Swedish Food Workers' Union has donated SEK 25,000 to UNHCR's activities for Ukrainian refugees. In addition, the Union decided to donate SEK 4 per member to be distributed between the IUF solidarity account for Ukraine and the UNHCR.

The Municipal Workers' Union has decided to grant financial support to three organisations: the UNHCR for immediate humanitarian aid, the Palme Center's solidarity fund for humanitarian aid to related organisations' activities in Ukraine and support for ITUC's efforts for trade unions that continue to operate inside Ukraine and for the future reconstruction of trade unions.

Furthermore, through the Ukrainian trade union network Trade Union Lifeline, the Municipal Workers' Union has provided aid in the form of hygiene articles for women: pads, tampons, panty liners, wipes, nappies and baby food. The aid also includes products such as bandages, sterile compresses and plasters as well as money to cover transport costs.

The Swedish Commercial Employees' Union has contributed one krona per member to the UNHCR's Ukraine fund and the Palme Center's fund. The support given by the Commercial Employees' Union for a long

time to the regional trade union organisation centre COZZ continues. COZZ now works actively with the reception of Ukrainian refugees in Poland. In addition to humanitarian assistance, they receive information on employment opportunities, rights and employment rules in Poland.

Seko, the Swedish Union for Service and Communication Employees has contributed SEK 50,000 to the Palme Center's Ukraine fund-raiser. After the outbreak of the war, the Union immediately contacted the Ukrainian Railway Workers' Union to find out what support they now needed. Their answer was beds and medicines. Beds were ordered and delivered in Poland and then taken by train into Ukraine. The ETF and the Polish unions oversaw the arrangements on the Polish side and Ukrainian unions took over on the other side of the border. Seko seafarers also contributed to the ITF fund for Ukrainian seafarers. The fund has, among other things, arranged buses from Odessa for seafarers' families who wanted to leave Ukraine.

The Electricians' Union, together with the Building Workers' Union, has started a joint fund-raiser for Ukraine. The funds raised go to humanitarian aid such as clothing, blankets and food, as well as help to find accommodation during and after the ravages of the war. Both trade unions also support the Construction and Building Materials Workers' Union of Ukraine, PROFBUD, through their respective solidarity funds. Both the Electricians' Union and the Building Workers' Union keep in constant contact with PROFBUD about the current situation and possible needs. The Swedish building and woodworkers' unions are also discussing how to support the future reconstruction of the Ukrainian building workers' union.

The Swedish Painters' Union has an established solidarity fund and has called on members and others to give donations, which will then go to various kinds of support to our trade union comrades in Ukraine. The Union has also called on its branches to raise the issue of the Union's solidarity fund at annual meetings and other meetings, workplace visits and other gatherings, in order to highlight the issue of international solidarity work, the importance of trade unionism globally.

GS, the Swedish Union of Forestry, Wood and Graphical Workers, has sent one krona per member to the global trade union GWI's support to Ukraine. GS also has several local clubs that raised and contributed money, one individual club raised SEK 140,000.

The Swedish Paper Workers' Union has donated two kronor per member to the Palme Center's Ukraine fund-raiser and participates actively in LO's solidarity work.

The Musicians' Union acted early on against Spotify and demanded that the company join the Western world's sanctions against Russia to support Ukraine. The President of the Union, Jan Granvik, said it is incomprehensible if such a large company as Spotify does not join the sanctions.

IF Metall has donated a quarter of a million kronor to the Palme Center Ukraine fund-raiser and EUR 25,000 to the IndustriAll Global Union's fund-raiser for the Ukrainian trade union movement. IF Metall's clubs and branches are also very active in the solidarity work for Ukraine. Here are some of many examples:

The Palme Center's Ukraine fund-raiser has so far received more than half a million kronor from IF Metall's local workshop club at Luleåverken, local workshop club at Scania in Södertälje, IF Metall Stockholm county, IF Metall Norrbotten, IF Metall Gävleborg, IF Metall Dalarna, IF Metall Halland, IF Metall Högländet, IF Metall Dackebygden, IF Metall Bohuslän-Dal and IF Metall Värmland.

More than SEK 300,000 has so far been sent to the UNHCR and the Red Cross from IF Metall's local workshop club at Gestamp Hardtech in Luleå, the club at the Preem refinery in Lysekil, Volvo local workshop club in Skövde, Volvo Car Group trade union and the local Volvo workshop club in Umeå.

IF Metall Norra Västerbotten bought one hundred tickets to a Ukraine gala in Folkets Park, Skellefteå. The tickets were then raffled off among the members.

A members' meeting at the works club at SSAB in Oxelösund decided to donate SEK 500,000 to the UNHCR and the same amount to UNICEF.



GS members at Väst kuststugan in Mjölby emptied their entire club fund for Ukraine.

Photo: Mattias Redman

5. Trade union club donated its entire club fund

ONE OF MANY local trade union clubs that have involved themselves with Ukraine is the GS club at Väst kuststugan in Mjölby, a company in the wood industry with fifty employees. When the club's executive committee proposed that SEK 20,000 should be donated to Ukraine the members did not agree. They thought it was too little.

"After the executive committee presented the proposal, the members thought that we should donate the entire club fund of SEK 35,000 instead. They were in full agreement that those now fleeing the war in Ukraine need the money more than we do," says chair of the trade union club Johan Harrysson to the GS Unions' website.

He continues:

"We encourage more local trade union clubs to do the same. Slava Ukraini!"



Oscar Ernerot, Head of LO International Department,
speaking at a manifestation of solidarity with Ukraine.

Photo: Nordic Ukraine Forum

6. No one can do everything, but everyone can do something

Here is how you can support Ukraine:

It is important to show that many of us stand up for international solidarity. Participate in the demonstrations and manifestations that are taking place. Discuss with your co-workers. Raise the issue of support to Ukraine in your club or branch.

You can also send a contribution via Swish
to the existing solidarity funds:

Olof Palme International Center:	123 240 60 72
Building Workers' Union and Electricians' Union joint fund-raiser:	123 658 26 47
The Painters' Union Solidarity Fund:	123 307 35 41

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Sometimes it's like time stands still and things happen that make other things fade in comparison. This was surely the case for many on 24 February, 2022, when Russia began its brutal war of aggression against Ukraine.

LO and its affiliated unions have long supported our trade union comrades in Ukraine. Of course we continue to do so now when they are having to fight for their freedom and their lives. But we do it not only in words, but also in action. In this publication we tell you more about what we are doing and have done. And about what you and your co-workers can do yourselves.

Because international solidarity is as old as the trade union movement itself. And it is a force that Putin and other oppressors in the long run can never defeat.

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