



International Metalworkers' Federation

An introduction



Why we need the IMF

The world is changing at a very rapid rate. We often summarise all the changes taking place – in technology and communications, trade and economics, the power of politicians and companies – with one word: globalisation.

The IMF, the International Metalworkers' Federation, is a worldwide association of national metal trade unions. Our job is to support solidarity across national boundaries between blue- and white-collar workers in important industrial sectors, or, to put it more clearly, to improve pay and working conditions for millions of people.

These aims have been the IMF's guidelines for over 100 years.

Trade unions are being confronted by the new and difficult challenges of economic globalisation. Modern technology has in many ways erased national boundaries and increased the pace of change in industry. Twenty years ago, companies found it very difficult to move production from one country to another; today, it can be done very quickly. The driving force behind it is usually the search for the cheapest possible production. Every one of these decisions affects working people and their families.

The most important job for unions today is the struggle to make economic globalisation serve all people. The trade union movement must act as a global counterbalance to the power of international capital.

It is not only globalisation that is having an impact on the work of trade unions. The increase in the number of women workers and white-collar workers means that we urgently require changes in working practices and in trade union structures. Industry has new demands for knowledge, which means that trade unions have to think in new ways.

Increasing numbers of white-collar workers combined with a

“The trade union movement must be a global counterbalance to the enormous power of international capital.”

MARCELLO MALENTACCHI
General Secretary of the IMF

decrease in traditional blue-collar jobs is having an impact on trade unions at all levels.

Thus international trade union activities are more relevant than ever.

The aims of the IMF include working with affiliates to:

- organise new members and democratic associations for metalworkers all over the world;
- strengthen the rights of workers and women workers;
- ensure that International Framework Agreements are introduced into transnational companies;
- influence politicians so that their decisions lead to a fair distribution of growth and resources.

A worldwide presence

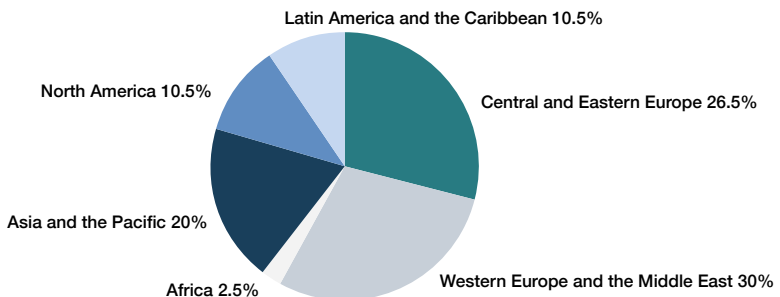
It was in August 1893 that the foundations of the IMF were laid in a small hotel in Zurich, Switzerland. Thirty delegates from eight metalworkers' unions in Europe and the USA agreed to create an international information office. Their idea was quite simple: they would learn from each other by exchanging information on trade union activities.

In 1904, the International Metalworkers' Conference in Amsterdam decided to establish a Metalworkers' Federation. The metalworkers' unions were to support each other at international level against employers, just as trade unions cooperated at national level.

IMF affiliates at that time had 440,000 members. Their numbers increased to some two million before the First World War, but fell during the 1930s. The number of members rose again after World War II. Today, the IMF represents the interests of 25 million metalworkers, with over 200 affiliates in 100 countries.

The IMF's affiliates organise working people in many industries, including: steel, engineering, shipbuilding, automotive, aerospace, electrical and electronics.

Membership distribution as of 2004:



“If we want globalisation to have a human face, a strengthened IMF is indispensable.”

JÜRGEN PETERS

President of the IMF, President of IG Metall

Some milestones in the IMF's history:

- **1957** The IMF opened an office in Tokyo for the Japanese metalworkers' unions.
- **1960** The IMF opened an office in Latin America.
- **1966** The first meeting of a world company council in the auto industry was held in Detroit, USA. Now the IMF organises dozens of world company councils within the large transnational companies.
- **1969** The IMF opened a regional office in New Delhi, India.
- **1984** An IMF office was opened in Johannesburg, South Africa.
- **1991** The IMF's Central Committee decided to admit trade unions from Central and Eastern Europe as affiliates.
- **1993** The IMF adopted its first action programme at its Centenary Congress in Zurich, Switzerland.
- **1998** The IMF opened a regional office for Southeast Asia in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- **2001** The IMF adopted its third action programme.
- **2004** The IMF signed its tenth International Framework Agreement.

Development in membership:

The IMF represents one-third of the world's 70 million blue- and white-collar workers employed in the metal industries. Below is a chart illustrating membership figures at IMF Congresses.



How the IMF works: International Framework Agreements:



In July 2002, the 400 workers at Ditas in Nigde, Turkey, went on strike. The main reason for their action was the employer's refusal to respect trade union rights at the workplace and to bargain with the union.

For a long time the case seemed to be lost for the workers. But after eight months of strike action, the dispute was over. The spare parts producer and the IMF-affiliated union Birlesik Metal-Is signed their first collective agreement, offering the majority of the union's members fulltime work.

The fact that one of Ditas' customers, DaimlerChrysler, and the IMF have signed an International Framework Agreement (IFA) played a crucial role in reaching the settlement. In the IFA, DaimlerChrysler (DC) not only acknowledges its social responsibility towards its own workforce, but also expects DC suppliers to apply comparable principles as the basis for mutual relations. With this made clear to the management of Ditas, the conflict could be solved.

IFAs are a tool now widely used by the IMF and other Global Union Federations to lay down the rules of conduct for transnational companies.

Since they are negotiated on a global level and require the participation of trade unions, IFAs are an ideal instrument for dealing with the issues raised by globalisation.

- The IMF is dedicated to pursuing IFAs in transnational companies where our affiliates have members.

How the IMF is run and financed

The IMF's top decision-making organ is the *Congress*. It meets once every four years and agrees an action programme, which shows the long-term direction of the IMF's work. Congress also determines the constitution of the organisation, i.e. the rules indicating how the IMF is run. All affiliates have the right to send delegates to Congress.

The *Central Committee* meets once every two years. It is responsible for all decisions made between Congresses.

The *Executive Committee* consists of 18 members and meets twice a year. All regions in the world are represented on it.

The *Finance Committee* consists of four members from the Executive Committee, plus the IMF president and general secretary. This Committee makes recommendations about financial planning and examines the IMF's annual budget.

The *Secretariat* carries out the decisions made by Congress and the Central Committee. It is managed by the general secretary.

The IMF's *head office* is located in Geneva, Switzerland, where the activities of the organisation are coordinated through a network of *Regional Offices*:

- East and Southern Africa - Johannesburg, South Africa;
- South Asia - New Delhi, India;
- Southeast Asia and the Pacific - Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia;
- Latin America and the Caribbean - Santiago, Chile and Mexico City, Mexico.

The IMF also has one *Project Office*:

- for the CIS, in Moscow, Russia.

The IMF's activities are primarily financed by affiliation fees from its member organisations.

How the IMF works: Shipbreaking in India



The shipbreaking industry is growing, employing over 160,000 workers in India alone. Scrapping ships is one of the most dangerous jobs on earth, but most of its workers have little or no protection from the risks.

In 2003 the IMF started a pilot project in Mumbai, India, where some 6,000 shipbreaking workers earn less than one US dollar a day. The project gives workers clean drinking water, safety advice, and first-aid training and

equipment. It also explains their rights and encourages them to form unions.

At the same time, the IMF was working with the International Labour Organization to establish new guidelines to help improve the safety and health of these workers. The guidelines were approved in March 2004.

Having proved successful in Mumbai, the project has been expanded to cover some 55,000 workers in the Alang and Sosiya shipyards in Gujarat. The IMF is also gathering data on pay and working conditions so that it can develop a model agreement.

- The IMF provides active support through education and by solidarity actions to build democratic, independent and representative trade unions.

How the IMF organises education activities

The IMF organises dozens of seminars and courses every year, often in developing countries or in countries with fragile or threatened unions. The courses are normally organised by the IMF's Regional and Project Offices, and subjects include how to organise a union, how to recruit and retain members, or how to negotiate and formulate collective bargaining agreements. Special seminars are organised for women.

Regional conferences are also organised by the IMF for special industries. The aim is often to prepare the ground for collaboration and exchanges of information within a sector. The IMF's World Company Councils have similar aims; they bring together trade union activists within transnational companies.

A Summer School is organised by the IMF in Geneva, Switzerland. Around 20 members from nearly as many countries attend.

The Summer School is aimed at young women and men who are active in affiliated unions. Recruiting more women activists – particularly younger women – is a matter of survival for the trade union movement all over the world.

How the IMF works: South Korea



In November 2001, Mun Sung-hyun, the president of the Korean Metal Workers' Federation (KMWF), took part in the IMF's World Congress in Sydney, Australia.

Soon after his return to Seoul, he was arrested and condemned to three years in prison. His alleged crime was that he had organised strikes and taken part in other trade union activities.

On January 22, 2002, the IMF organised a campaign to protest against his conviction. Thousands of metalworkers from all over the

world demanded that Mun and some 50 other union activists in South Korea be released.

While the IMF prepared for more protest actions, Mun's wife received a telephone call from the Blue House, the offices of the Korean president, announcing that her husband was going to be freed that very day. The message was that the government in Seoul didn't want any more demonstrations by the IMF.

Since the fall of the military dictatorship in South Korea in 1987, the IMF has contributed to building up a politically independent trade union movement.

- The IMF promotes international solidarity actions.

How the IMF communicates

The IMF communicates with its affiliates, their members and the rest of the world through a number of different channels.

The website, www.imfmetal.org, is updated regularly in English, French, Spanish and Russian.

A news bulletin, *IMF NewsBriefs*, is distributed every two weeks by e-mail or fax, in English and Spanish.

The magazine, *Metal World*, containing articles, interviews and analyses, is published quarterly in English, Japanese and Russian.

Reports are published frequently. One of them is a classic, “The Purchasing Power of Working Time”, a comparative study on the development of purchasing power in various countries. The constant

changes in the auto industries of the world are covered in the “IMF Auto Report”, which appears regularly.

All IMF publications are available for downloading from our website: www.imfmetal.org. Many are available in several languages.



How the IMF works: Latin America



The mining industry in Latin America has undergone radical change in recent years, with companies being privatised or merging. This increases insecurity for the workers, but causes problems for trade

unions too, because the membership is constantly changing – often decreasing. Some unions are even under violent attack.

From 2000 until 2004, the IMF ran a capacity-building project for unions in the copper, gold and silver industries in Argentina, Chile and Peru, funded by our Dutch affiliate FNV-Bondgenoten.

The project produced positive results: membership rose and new unions formed. Now information is being exchanged across national boundaries and several hundred workers have participated in education seminars and meetings. The next step is for these workers to reach out, share their knowledge and experiences and unite with others. A new project starting in 2005 will bring together the workers with others across the sector in the rest of Latin America, the USA and Canada.

- The IMF works to help affiliates strengthen mutual collaboration. Trade unions which communicate with each other are better equipped to assert their rights as workers against employers and politicians.

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