

AFL's Newsletter

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When we have no friends

- A message from the local Labor Union, AFL Starfsgreinafélag

In good times we usually have many friends. But when we have problems – friends are often few and far between. Unions don't literally replace friends but there are times you will need a union more than friends.

The Icelandic worker is basically unionized. Over 80% of all those active in the economy belong to a union. Those who aren't union members are mostly entrepreneurs and subcontractors – but we know that unions are not recognized as an integral part of society everywhere in the world. Therefore we'd like to use this issue of "Austurglugginn", the local weekly in Eastern Iceland, to shed some light on our operations and welcome our new members.

Fortunately, most employers are honest people who will safeguard the interests of their employees. They will help new employees apply for "kennitala" (social security number) and will automatically register them at the appropriate union and deduct their union fee and turn it in along with other "salary-based fees". But we also have crooks and dishonest people running businesses here as elsewhere.

Every year AFL handles tens and even hundreds of cases where foreign seasonal workers seek assistance. Sometimes these cases go all the way to be argued before the local court and even before the Supreme Court. But most often we manage to settle disputes with a satisfactory solution.

Although representing our members is our main objective – we do much more than that. We



try to advise our members, review their pay slips and inform them to the best of our ability of whatever they need to know to make sure that they are enjoying all the rights and benefits our struggle for more than a hundred years, guarantees them.

In this English language issue of Austurglugginn and AFL's newsletter we will try to cover the most important issues about our union and what you as a foreign worker need to be observant about during your time in Iceland.

AFL's inspectors

Two staff members from AFL go on inspection tours a few times a year. Each round takes about two weeks and the area they cover is about 600 km along the coast. During inspections

they will register your names and "kennitala". They will also listen to your concerns and pass them on to our offices. Look out for our inspectors and get their cards for future contact.

Documents

Please save all messages from your employer, pay slips and timesheets. Also take copies of all shift schedules.

Most common complaints

We handle hundreds of complaints a year – and many of them are from foreign seasonal workers. Among the most common complaints are regarding shift work, hourly rates and "orlof" (holiday pay). In this publication you can find further information about shift work.

Time-keeping app Klukk

In Play Store and App Store there is an app called "Klukk". It's in English and Icelandic. It's very helpful to keep track of hours worked and it saves your information in a spreadsheet. ASÍ

(Icelandic Federation of Labor) had the app programmed to make it easier for workers to keep their timesheets readily available should they be necessary.

The first and most important messages

A foreign worker coming to work in Iceland has usually been in contact with his/her future employer with email or with a social network messenger. It's very important to save these messages for future references. All the information you receive before you commit to work for a specific employer – can be considered as a binding promise. If you later have problems with your employer and you feel that you have been misinformed - we will need to see the messages that you based your commitment on. So if you talked about hourly salary, accommodation, shift schedule or other things that might be important - please save those conversations.

When do I become a member of AFL?

Usually about 10 - 20 days into the second month of your employment – your employer will deliver to AFL a list of all employees and their union fees. When we have processed the fees – your name will appear on our membership list and you'll have access to „my pages“ on www.asa.is.

To be able to log on, you need to have an electronic signature, an Icekey or send your contact information (email address and/or cell phone number to AFL (asa@asa.is)).

But we consider you a member of AFL from the day you start working in our area in a job covered by our General Contracts. We may need to see your employment contract to make sure that you “ticked” the union box – or your first pay slip to see that you are in fact paying a union fee. Thus – we regard all foreign seasonal workers in our area to be, by default, AFL's members, until we are convinced that you, by your own decision, are not a member of the union.

How to safeguard my rights?

Timesheets are the most important documents we need in salary disputes. Far too many people come to us because they feel that they are underpaid – but have little to show us apart from their pay slips. Some companies allow you access to their time manager programs – where you will be able to save your own timesheets.

But timesheets don't have to be complicated and we even issue a small notebook for keeping track of worked hours. You can also keep a spreadsheet and you basically just note the date and the time in and



time out. The rest we can work out later if needed.

The shift schedules are also very important as companies are not allowed to change the schedule without prior notice. When we compare your shift schedule with the actual timesheet – we will be able to determine when you should have been paid overtime.

So – please take good care of all documents. Photograph your shift schedules and save them in an organized manner. Take care of your hours and save them also in

contract are to be members of the appropriate union. Also – by trying to keep you out of an union – he/she is trying to save some money. As a union member you are a member of our sickness fund and will have access to our holiday homes and our educational funds. The monthly fees for those services are all paid by the employers.

In the last 20 years AFL has been involved in hundreds of cases where foreign seasonal workers are paid below minimal salary, have lived in unacceptable housing or have

Then you arrive and are greeted with a smile and welcomed. Perhaps the accommodation is not quite what you expected but – you are excited to start to work and earn some money, so you let that slide. Also, your boss is very friendly and you don't want to upset this happy occasion.

Then you start to work – and soon find out that the work is harder than you expected, the hours are longer, and breaks are few. Then payday arrives and you wait for your salary. The first day they blame the accountant. The day after – still no money – and now they blame the bank. Finally, some money appears in your account – but no pay slip.

Your trust in your employer begins to falter – but to whom do you turn? Who is your friend? Being alone in a foreign country – perhaps stuck somewhere in the middle of nowhere with the next town 100 km away and no means of transportation – is not an ideal situation. But your union is just one email or one phone call away.

In the most drastic situations, we have gone to a workplace and gathered the employees and taken them to our offices and in some cases assisted them in finding new employment or simply to go back home. Fortunately, this is usually not necessary.

If you have deliberately decided with your employer to stay outside of the union – then you are basically on your own. We may advise you and assist you depending on the situation – but we will not refer you to our lawyers or take on expenses on your behalf. That is reserved for our members.



an organized manner. Documents regarding your work, your contract, emails, and messages concerning your job – all communications with your employer. These documents will be the foundation of our argument in all disputes.

My employer says I don't have to be in a union

Well – he is wrong. The General Contract that stipulates all your rights and benefits also stipulates that everyone working under that

been denied most of the benefits that Icelandic workers enjoy. All the worst cases have one thing in common – the employers had convinced his/her employees that unions were bad – that talking to a union was dangerous and that he/she was their friend.

Your employment may begin in a bliss. You and your boss having communicated with messages for some weeks – the manager telling you how great his company is and how wonderful everything will be.

Icelandic trade unions / AFL Starfsgreinafélag

Trade union density, or the percentage of workers belonging to a trade union, is very high in the Nordic countries and by far highest in Iceland. Over 80% of working people in Iceland belong to a union, the rest are mostly entrepreneurs and self-employed. Unions in Iceland are “non-partisan” and the leadership of unions may belong to any of the political parties in Iceland or none.

Icelandic unions are organized either by sector or location. AFL is both. AFL was formed in steps, the last one in 2007, by unifying over 30 local unions all over Eastern Iceland. Members of AFL (around 6.000 full members) belong to different

sectors and AFL is affiliated with four different national federations. Thus, within AFL you will find unskilled workers, skilled workers and tradesmen, shop- and office workers and seamen.

Our geographical boundaries stretch from Langanes peninsula in the North to Skeiðará river in the South putting the national park Skaftafell within our boundaries in the South and the village Þórshöfn in the north.

AFL has offices in Höfn, Djúpvogur, Reyðarfjörður, Neskaupstaður, Egilsstaðir and Vopnafjörður. Our full-time staff is 13 persons and in addition to Icelandic we

speak English, Danish, Polish and Serbo-Croatian (please take into consideration that our multilingual personnel take holidays also). Also AFL has around 80 union representatives in workplaces around our area. Our union reps take part in courses organized by ASÍ (The National Federation of Trade Unions) every year and are a very important part of our union.

Our website is www.asa.is and our email is asa@asa.is.

Our board consists of 11 members – all of whom are working in their respective fields. Our president is Hjördís Þóra Sigurþórsdóttir, who before coming to work for AFL,



Hjördís Þóra Sigurþórsdóttir, president of AFL.

worked in Skinney's fish factory in Höfn. Our board is elected in our annual meetings.

Minimal salary

There is basically not one specific „minimal salary“ in Iceland – but a set minimal salary for each job. For example, a worker in the tourist industry, 18 years or older, working in shifts in a restaurant or a hotel should not be paid less than 1.799 kr. an hour for daytime work. But circumstances

can dictate that you should be paid more. Salary increases with seniority. For example, a worker 18 years and older after five years with the firm and more responsibility should have 1.843 kr. an hour for daytime work.

Housing and accommodation

Staff housing falls under the same legislation as general housing for rent. Therefore, the same law applies for staff housing as for “long term rent”. The condition of the accommodation is subject

to approval by the authorities. AFL and other unions have no direct authority regarding housing and we can't inspect staff accommodation unless we are invited in.



Þekkir þú þinn rétt?

Í efnahagsumróti eins og gengur yfir Ísland í dag er nauðsynlegt hverjum launamanni að eiga öflugt stéttarfélag að bakhjarli. Viða um land er verið að segja upp fólki, vinnutími er skertur, yfirborgarir teknar af. Fyrirtæki fara í þrot og geta ekki stadið við launaskuldbindingar.

Þegar fyrirtæki loka fyrirvaralaust eru oft mörg mál óuppgerð. Launafólk á inni uppsagnarfrest, ótekið orlof og jafnvel ógreidda veikindadaga. Oft eru vinnuslys enn óuppgerð og ófrágengin. Erlendir launamenn þurfa oft aðstoð við frágang sinna mála áður en þeir yfirgefa landið.

AFL Starfsgreinafélag annast alla hagsmunagæslu fyrir félagsmenn sína við slíkar aðstæður. Félagið innheimtir laun og önnur áunnin réttindi og tekur við slysamálum ef þau eru ófrágengin. Við tölum Íslensku, dönsku, ensku og pólsku.



Czy znasz swoje prawa?

W zmianach ekonomicznych, takich jakie obecnie panują na Islandii, każdemu pracownikowi potrzebne są silne związki zawodowe. W całym kraju wypowiedzia się pracownikom pracę, czas pracy jest skracany, zmniejszane są stawki. Firmy bankrutują i nie są w stanie dotrzymać obowiązku wypłat.

Kiedy firma bankrutuje z dnia na dzień jest wiele nierozwiązanych problemów. Pracownicy mają prawo do okresu wypowiedzenia pracy, świadczeń urlopowych i chorobowych, które nie zostały wyrównane. Często również żąda się, że nie zostały wyrównane odszkodowania w związku z wypadkami w czasie pracy.

Pracownicy zagraniczni często potrzebują pomocy w odzyskaniu świadczeń i zakończeniu wszystkich spraw związanych z pracą przed wyjazdem z Islandii. Związek Zawodowy Wschodniej Islandii AFL zajmuje się ochroną praw związkowców w takich przypadkach.

Związki ściągają niezapłacone wypłaty i inne świadczenia, pilnują zakończeń spraw związanych z odszkodowaniami. Mówimy po islandzku, duńsku, angielsku i po polsku.



Do you know your rights?

During times of economic trouble, such as Iceland is now experiencing, every wage earner needs to be able to look to a powerful trade union. All over the country, employees are being given notice, their working hours cut back, and their overpayments cancelled. The companies employing them are at risk of bankruptcy and may be incapable of paying wages owed.

When a company suddenly closes down, many matters may be left incomplete. The employees may have unused vacation and be owed for their notice period and even for sick days. Often, work accidents still need settling and finishing.

Foreign workers frequently need help so that they can finish all their affairs before leaving Iceland. In such situations, AFL - the East Iceland Federation of Trade Unions - takes care of any interests that affect its members. AFL collects their wages and other acquired rights, and takes on any unresolved accident issues. Note that we speak Icelandic, Danish, English and Polish.



What do I gain by being a member of AFL?

We are not even going to go through the history of unions and the need for solidarity. Let's just remind you that the salary you get and the rights you have – are the result of a long continuing struggle by common working people who have had the good sense of standing together. The struggle goes on and we can't afford to let down our guard for a moment. So please stand with us and other workers and don't undermine our work.

But apart from that – there are many advantages that come with AFL's membership. You get a discount on airfares with Ernir Airlines on the route Höfn - Reykjavík (handy for those working in South Eastern part of Iceland). After 10 weeks of work you can get your gym-membership subsidized. And if you want to end your stay in Iceland by chilling for a few days in Reykjavík or Akureyri you can rent one of our holiday apartments or one of our holiday cottages (Einarsstaðir, Illugastaðir, Ölfusborgir and in Lón).

If you plan to stay longer than just for the summer AFL can really come in to make your stay more beneficial. You can apply for educational grants for a variety of courses and education. Our sickness fund will help you with your new glasses or your gym subscription and a variety of other health-related expenses. You will have access to around 30 well equipped holiday apartments in Reykjavík and Akureyri and summerhouses in four different locations in Iceland.

And we are always just an email away – if you need reassurance about your job or your salary. Most important for all workers, and not least foreign workers – is that we have your back. We will help you in all “work related” disputes and even assist you and advice in matters that



Shift work?

For work outside regular daytime working hours you get paid either overtime pay or shift premiums. Shift premiums are significantly lower than overtime pay and therefore there are conditions set for when the payment of shift premiums is permitted.

The provisions for shift work may vary according to collective agreements -union contracts.

The following is shared:

- The shift schedule must be presented with specific advance notice. This differs depending on the collective agreement-union contract.
- Shifts have a fixed beginning and a fixed end – it is not permitted to send people home from a shift and in that way save on wage expenses. A shift must always be paid in full.
- All work that is performed in excess of a determined end of shift must be paid as overtime work.
- All those who do shift work are entitled to winter holiday.
- All work in excess of 173 hours per month must be paid as overtime.

The most common violations of the provisions of collective agreements-union contracts:

- Shift schedules made without adequate advance notice.
- The shift schedule is presented far too late.
- The shift schedule is changed arbitrarily – even daily.
- Shifts start and end at different times.

If the employer does not meet the requirements for shift work an overtime pay rate must be paid – this pay rate is 80% while shift premiums are 30% – 55%. (Differs according to collective agreement-union contract and the time within each 24 hour period).

Provisions regarding shift work are different according to which collective agreement-union contract is used. Therefore it is important to examine the relevant collective agreement-union contract in order to see which rules apply.

The principal collective agreements-union contracts of the members of AFL

- Collective agreement between SGS and SA
 - Collective agreement between SGS and SA for restaurants, places of accommodation, service providers, entertainment companies and corresponding activities
 - Collective agreement between SGS and the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities
 - Collective agreement between SGS and the Minister of Finance on behalf of the Treasury
- (In addition there are several other agreements with smaller entities – see further details on the association website)

www.asa.is

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are not strictly “union business”. One of the reasons people started unions was to enable common people to confront their employers from a position of strength and without having to bow to authority. The ruling classes love the idea of “divide and rule” where they can dominate each and every one of us individually. But when we unite and stand together, we don't have to bow anymore. If you are being paid below minimal wage or in any other way cheated of your right salary – we will handle your case from start to finish. We may even be busy in court on your behalf – long after you have left.



How to contact us

Our email asa@asa.is is monitored 12 – 18 hours a day and we respond right away in emergencies.

However, most enquiries are answered the next day. You can also reach us by phone during office hours, the number is 4 700 300. We have staff members that speak English, Danish, Polish and Serbo-Croatian. Please note that those staff members are not always available.