



IG-Magazin

The industry magazine of IG Metall

01/2026



INTERVIEW

Christiane Benner
on Global Solidarity

WORKS COUNCILS

Built to Last –
Made to Make a Difference

THINKING GLOBALLY

INTERNATIONAL WORKERS IN THE IT SECTOR

Peter Kippes
Head of Company Policy,
IG Metall Executive Board,
Frankfurt.



Photo: IG Metall

WHY WE THINK GLOBALLY

Dear Reader,

Our union, IG Metall, has always been a rather diverse and dynamic community. People from a wide range of professions and backgrounds come together here, working across equally diverse industries. Our members build cars, produce steel, and develop software. They work on factory floors and in office environments. And around a quarter of them have roots outside of Germany. For that reason alone, IG Metall has always taken a global view of the world. Recently, this international character has expanded further. In the IT sector, we are welcoming many new members among the many expats working here in Germany or for German companies—whether in global corporations or in small start-ups in Berlin’s vibrant tech scene.

As a result, we are becoming even more International – and that is shaping our work as a union. At the end of last year, IG Metall held its first semi-

nar for union activists in English—because many of our new members from the tech and IT community operate primarily in English, the lingua franca of this sector.

By the way: our IT Magazine has now been available in English for the second consecutive year. Like the previous issue, this one is also published as a reversible magazine—read it in German from one side and flip it over to read it in English. We have received a great deal of positive feedback for this innovation. Thank you very much for that, and I promise: we will continue to think globally.

These are exciting developments. That is why we have made internationality the central theme of this issue. In the interview, our President Benner explains why global thinking is part of our DNA: “Our solidarity knows no national borders.” We do not ignore exploitation elsewhere. And we certainly

do not ignore when well-paid jobs disappear from Germany and Europe and reappear as low-wage jobs in India or Morocco.

This latter issue is becoming increasingly problematic. Jobs are being relocated, for example from engineering service providers working for major automotive corporations. This “best-cost-country” logic has long been common in the IT sector—yet it is as old as it is flawed. Our political work in 2026 is therefore focused on preventing looming deindustrialization through our “Initiative for Jobs and Economic Recovery.” We are heard in political debates because we are many and deeply rooted in companies. Two million employees in the core sectors of German industry cannot simply be ignored.

Are you already with us? Then become a member—and part of a community that truly thinks globally and acts locally.

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IT AND THE GLOBAL MARKET

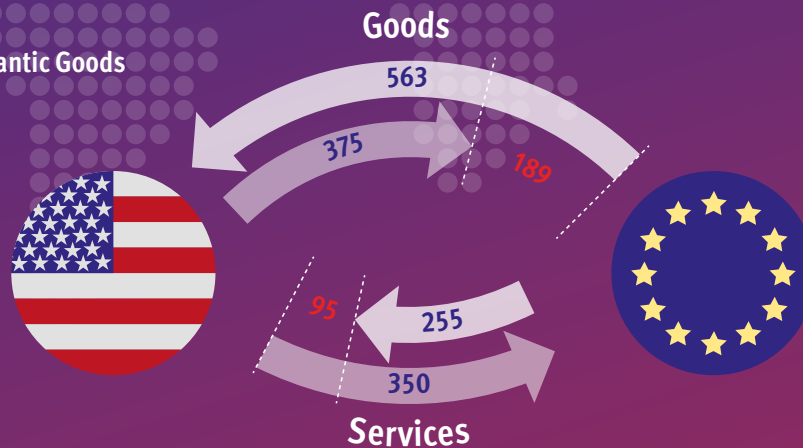
The trade dispute between the United States and Europe shaped much of the past year. U.S. President Donald Trump imposed tariffs on the EU, arguing that the United States was being treated unfairly. But how much substance is there to this claim?

THE TRADE BALANCE

It is true that the EU exports more goods to the United States than it imports. However, the picture changes when services are included — such as software licences, streaming services, and digital platforms provided by major U.S. tech companies. In this area, the United States runs a surplus. If both goods and services are considered together, the United States still records a deficit overall — but it is far less dramatic than often claimed

Comparison of Transatlantic Goods and Services

In billion US dollars, 2023
Source: OECD, BaTIS, IW

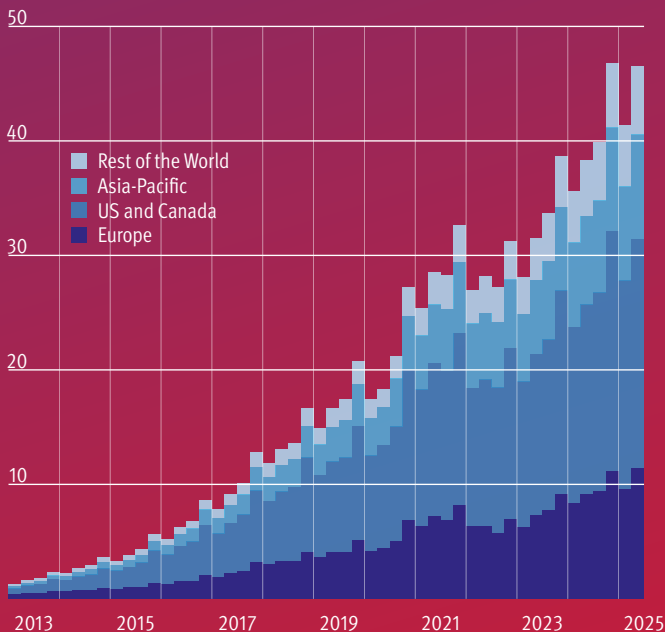


THE MARKET

Europe is a key market for major U.S. tech companies. This is reflected, for example, in the revenues of Meta, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram. The group generates around 36 billion US dollars annually in Europe, with growth rates of approximately 20 per cent.

Advertising Revenue of Meta by Region

In billion US dollars per quarter | Source: Statista

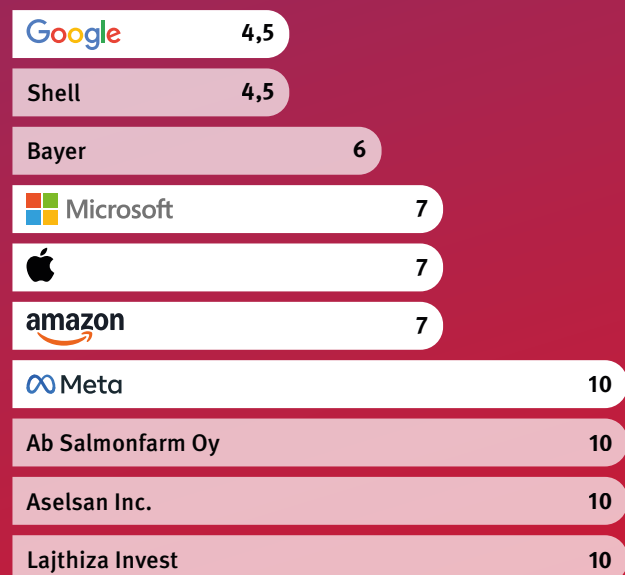


THE LOBBY

The importance of the EU market is also reflected in lobbying figures. According to a watchdog NGO, five of the ten largest lobby spenders in Brussels are U.S. tech companies. Their concern: increasing regulation by the European Commission, including potential digital taxation.

Top 10 Lobbying Expenditures in the EU

In billion euros | Source: Statista



“Unions and works councils protect our rights—they are our shield.” Fangfang Shen comes from China, has been living in Germany since 2010, and works for a subsidiary of Volkswagen developing software for battery cell production. She is passionately committed to IG Metall.



Photo: Michael Löwa

THE GLOBE AND US

Few sectors are as internationally connected as the IT industry. More and more skilled professionals with international backgrounds are coming to Germany — many of them working entirely in English. They build their lives and careers here, and they are also getting involved in the union. As a result, IG Metall is becoming more international too — and the clearest sign of that is its first-ever English-language shop steward seminar.

A hotel in Göttingen last autumn. A colourful and highly diverse group has gathered in one of the conference rooms: several Indians, a Chinese woman, a Russian man, a Turk, and several participants from Western Europe. Altogether, just under twenty men and women from across the globe, full of energy and initiative — all of them highly qualified IT specialists. They are part of a generation of young tech professionals for whom moving cities — even across thousands of kilometres — is simply part of pursuing the right job.

A tightly packed programme awaits them at the conference hotel. Yellow and orange cards are pinned to a display board. In thick black marker, someone has scrawled key themes in large letters: “One-on-One Communication,” “Solution Strategies,” “International Perspectives.” These topics are discussed in depth — naturally in English, the common working language of the industry. After two and a half days, these highly qualified professionals will return to their companies and put what they have learned into practice.

This is not the scene of an international corporate meeting, rolling out a new cross border software system. Instead, it is the setting for IG Metall’s first central English language seminar for shop stewards. All of the participants are members of the union and actively involved in its work. “Many highly qualified professionals from IT and engineering are coming to Germany,” says Jenifer Plater from the Company

Policy Policy Department of the IG Metall executive board and helped organize the workshop. “Particularly in the IT sector, more and more colleagues with international backgrounds are becoming active in IG Metall,” she says. “That’s why we launched the international shop stewards’ seminar.”

The number of IT professionals coming to Germany from abroad for work is indeed rising sharply. According to data from the federal employment agency, around 165,000 foreign IT professionals are now employed in Germany. In 2022, the figure was just over 130,000. In other words, well over 10,000 additional IT specialists are arriving each year. The industry association Bitkom reported 109,000 unfilled vacancies last year. Germany will therefore continue to need skilled workers from abroad in the year ahead. And they, in turn, need a union.

For Many, the Idea of a Union is Completely New

Fangfang Shen has been living in Germany since 2010. The mechanical engineer from China joined PowerCo in 2023. At the Volkswagen subsidiary she works on software for battery cell development. It was only at PowerCo in Salzgitter that she became aware of IG Metall. “I had heard the term ‘trade union’ before, but I didn’t really understand what a union or a works council actually does in Germany,” she says. Since then, she has joined. “Unions and works councils protect our rights—they are our shield,” says the 37-year-old. ▶

And when she speaks in the plural, she also means the more than 200 colleagues from China at PowerCo. With the support of IG Metall, she has become active on their behalf. “Hardly any of them know anything about German trade unions and works councils.” China has both, she explains, but their influence is limited. While both exist in China, their influence is limited. “I studied in Germany and have lived here longer than most of them. That means my German is better,” Fangfang explains. She uses this advantage to support her colleagues.

In January of this year, we support from the union and her own initiative, she organized an information event about IG Metall – both online and in person. Seventy colleagues took part. “They’re curious. They want to understand how works councils and unions actually function. Flyers alone are not enough,” she says. Germany’s system of code de-

all union-related matters—advising them, answering questions, and serving as the face of IG Metall within the company. Could she imagine becoming a works councilor one day? “No, not for the time being. I still enjoy my regular job too much, and that comes first,” says the mother of a four-year-old daughter. As works, counselor, she might have to be released from her normal duties.

For IG Metall, recruiting and supporting new members from migrant communities is one of its core tasks. After all, the union itself has long been shaped by migration, and integration has always been an important trade union issue. “Migrants often face very specific issues that we are well placed to address,” says Mariya Vyalykh, from IG Metall’s Migration Sub-Department, who, like Jenifer Plater, was one of the workshop facilitators. The challenges faced today by highly qualified migrants are not comparable to those ex-



Photo: IG Metall

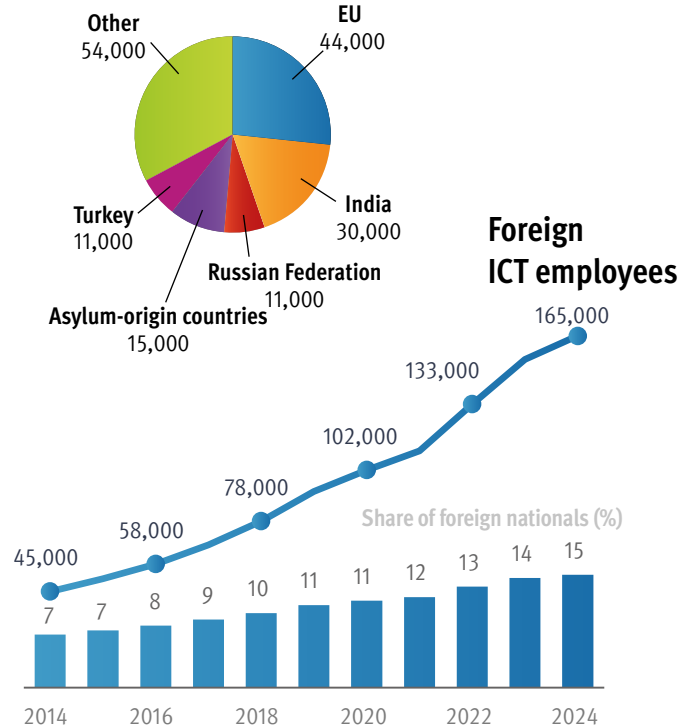
Meeting one another, understanding one another, fighting together: international tech workers at IG Metall’s first English-language shop steward seminar.

termination in particular requires explanation. There is the union, which is accountable to his members and has the right to negotiate collective agreements. And there is the works council, which are elected by employees – including non-members – whose rights are laid down in the Works Constitution Act, but who not allowed to negotiate collective agreements themselves.

Fangfang explained the difference to them. One colleague even joined remotely from China while waiting at the airport between flights. “I only received positive feedback, and some participants told me they joined IG Metall right afterward,” she says with a laugh. “The more of us there are, the stronger our voice becomes.”

Fangfang now wants to be elected as a shop steward. In this role, she would be the point of contact for colleagues on

Origin of foreign IT workers



As of: June 2024 | Source: Federal Employment Agency

perienced by the often less formally qualified people who came to Germany in the 1960s and 1970s as so-called guest workers to work in steel plants or car factories.

“Today, it is rarely about wages. IT professionals are generally well paid,” says Vyalykh. “Much more often, it is about labour law, residence law and discrimination — issues that can affect migrants across many areas of life. IG Metall’s work does not stop at the factory gate.”

Taking Unconventional Routes

That is something Dmitrii Kovalev understands very well. The IT specialist came to Germany from St Petersburg in 2019. He had already been active in trade union work in Russia, where he distributed leaflets and helped migrants enforce their labour rights.



“Things are tense in the tech sector, especially in smaller companies. That is why we need unions.”
Dmitrii Kovalev is originally from Russia. He was supposed to lose his job overnight — but with the support of IG Metall, he fought his way back in through the courts.



Photo: Markus Altmann

Before discovering IG Metall, Yonatan Miller founded the Tech Workers Coalition (TWC) in Berlin. Today, TWC and IG Metall work together.

That unusual combination of comedy and trade union work is not the only reason Dmitrii has become a sought-after point of contact among expats. In his view, many international IT professionals have grown a little too comfortable in their own bubble. “They communicate very well with one another in English, but that can also stop them from learning German.” As a result, many of them find it difficult to deal with conflicts with employers. “Two or three times a week, people ring me asking for advice. And the first thing I tell them is: join the union.”

Many have already followed that advice. Around one in four IG Metall members has a migration background. And 14 per cent of the union’s roughly 500,000 members with a migration background hold a university degree. That is according to a union study published in 2023. Highly qualified workers, too, often have real need of support. In the fast-growing digital sector, for example, collective agreements are still relatively rare. Yet IG Metall found last year that IT companies covered by collective agreements pay, on average, more than 15 per cent higher wages than companies without one.

Sparking enthusiasm for the union

Many IT specialists are probably unaware of this. Their image of the union is often incomplete. “For many people in the sector, IG Metall initially brings to mind a male-dominated organisation representing industrial production workers,” says Yonatan Miller. Miller is a software engineer in his early thirties who moved from New York City to Berlin in 2015. He, too, did not immediately think of IG Metall as the first place to turn when he was dismissed in 2018 after campaigning for greater pay transparency.

Instead, he went on to found his own workers’ network: the Berlin Tech Workers Coalition (TWC). With more than 1,200 followers on Telegram, the network brings IT professionals together and organises regular meet-ups. TWC now works closely with IG Metall. In April last year, they held their third international conference together with IG Metall and its sister union ver.di German trade union. Around 150 works council members attended. Miller is now one of them. As chair, he leads the group works council at the mobility provider Free2move mobility company and is also an IG Metall member.

With its first English-language workshop for shop stewards in Göttingen, IG Metall aimed to inspire international IT professionals to engage in long-term advocacy for workers’ rights. A first step has been taken. “We’ve sparked their enthusiasm for the union,” concludes Plater. A second workshop in this format is already planned for next summer.

Andreas Schulte ■

“There is friction in the tech sector, especially in smaller companies,” he says. “That’s why we need unions.”

Dmitrii Kovalev has experienced first-hand how unions can help. Since 2024, he has worked for plus.ai, a company developing automated truck driving technology. But last year he was dismissed one day before the election meeting for a works council vote that he himself had initiated — suddenly, and without any prior warning. With the support of IG Metall, Dmitrii successfully challenged the dismissal in court and won his job back. “There is still a great deal of pressure in the company. But I want to stay. The market for IT professionals is no longer nearly as strong as it was a few years ago,” he says, in a defiant tone. He also wants to pass on to the wider IT community what it means to stand up for yourself. “The biggest problem is the lack of a general union culture in the tech sector,” says Dmitrii. And he is helping to build one.

Dmitrii regularly speaks at IG Metall events to encourage people to join the union, and he also organises information evenings of his own. He has already held meetings for the Ukrainian community, the Russian-speaking community, and for IT professionals more broadly. And sometimes he takes unusual routes. In January, Berlin’s Russian-speaking community gathered for a stand-up comedy show on the subject of integration. In the middle of the event, Dmitrii answered questions from comedians and audience members about labour law.

THINGS WORK BETTER WITH CO-DETERMINATION

Photo: Jürgen Lösel

“Good working conditions require a strong IG Metall and active co-determination.” Jens Weickert is the first chair of the works council at ZDI in Görlitz.

Works councils are more important than ever—especially now, and especially in the IT sector. What they can achieve is illustrated by the example of ZEISS Group optics company Digital Innovation (ZDI) in Görlitz. There, employees recently elected a works council for the first time—for good reason.

They had been considering establishing a works council at ZDI for quite some time. “Initial thoughts go back to when we weren’t even part of the Zeiss Group yet,” recalls Jens Weickert, one of the initiators and the first chair of the newly formed works council in Görlitz, Saxony. That was before 2020. At the time, the company was still called Saxonica Systems and worked externally for what is now its parent company, Zeiss. Then Carl Zeiss AG optics company acquired its long-standing software development partner and integrated the external service provider into the Zeiss Group.

However, this did not immediately bring the same working conditions as at other Zeiss locations for the former Saxonica employees. For example, they still do not receive vacation or Christmas bonuses, work 40 hours per week, and their salaries remain noticeably below the collectively agreed standards typical at Zeiss. The active union members at ZDI learned that such favorable conditions do not come automatically. Zeiss is considered one of the “good” companies: it has an active IG Metall German trade union presence, and in 2021 the company announced that all non-unionized entities within the group would eventually be brought under collective agreements. However, the colleagues in Görlitz waited in vain. In late summer 2025, Jens Weickert and a colleague decided: “If it says Zeiss on the outside, it should be Zeiss on the inside as well.”

The activists turned to the group works council. The outcome: “We can have everything the group offers its employ-

ees—but we have to organize it ourselves.” And for that, as they learned in a phone call with the group works council, they first needed their own works council in Görlitz and a strong partner like IG Metall “by our side,” since only trade unions are allowed to negotiate collective agreements. After contacting the IG Metall office in Eastern Saxony in September, things moved quickly. Through numerous personal conversations, they rapidly convinced a large share of their colleagues to join IG Metall. “From the beginning, it was clear to us that only a strong works council, backed by a well-organized workforce, would have a real chance of success,” says Weickert.

The discussions were not automatic successes, he notes, “but we met our colleagues where their own concerns were and addressed what really mattered to them.” The union membership fee, they argued, should be seen “as a small investment in the future”—especially given the uncertainty about the site’s future once the current lease expires in two years.

These arguments were convincing. In record time, the majority of the workforce joined IG Metall. The election committee began its work, and by December, a three-member works council had been elected for the first time. “And that’s a good thing. A company that focuses on innovative and dynamic digital solutions should also provide modern and fair working conditions,” says Anna-Lena Brand, union secretary at IG Metall Eastern Saxony. “A works council is essential—especially since Carl Zeiss is considered a co-founder of workplace co-determination.”

For Jens Weickert, however, the election of the works council was only the first step. Now the next must follow quickly. “The goal can only be a collective agreement,” he says. “We are working intensively toward that here in Görlitz, because we want to achieve Zeiss-appropriate conditions for all employees at the site.” This is also in the company’s interest. In times of skilled labor shortages, a collective agreement can be the decisive factor in ensuring that “highly qualified employees choose ZDI as an employer.” **Kathryn Kortmann ■**

“WE WILL NOT LET OURSELVES BE DIVIDED”



Photo: Lando Hass

IG Metall President Christiane Benner on cross-border union cooperation, her new role as global president of the federation of industrial unions, the relocation of IT jobs from Europe, and the question: how can we organize an international division of labor that is fair and just?

Christiane, last autumn you were elected president of IndustriALL Global Union federation, the global umbrella organization of industrial unions. Why is IG Metall active at the international level?

For us at IG Metall, international cooperation with other unions is part of our DNA. It is not a “nice to have”; rather, it is enshrined in our statutes as one of our core responsibilities. We stand in the tradition of the labor movement and see ourselves as part of a global movement for the rights of employees. Our solidarity knows no national borders. If it is no problem for companies to cross borders and operate globally, then it should not be a problem for trade unions either.

What is the goal of this cooperation?

We want to prevent workers from being played off against one another in a race to the bottom in labor costs. As a trade union, we cannot ignore situations where people are exploited under catastrophic conditions. IndustriALL also addresses issues such as social justice, global solidarity, the future

of work, sustainability, and strengthening democratic union structures. We are a globally networked labor movement that aims to actively and fairly shape industrial transformation. At the same time, we advocate for a rules-based global order and fair trade, and we seek to strengthen the role of unions in promoting peace and democracy.

So, is the goal mainly to improve working conditions in low-wage countries?

Yes—but not only. It is equally about jobs and working conditions at home. If we want to maintain industrial jobs and related services in Germany, we must advocate for workers’ rights and strong unions worldwide. Otherwise, jobs will continue to move to places where labor is cheaper and regulations are weaker. We are seeing this very clearly in the IT sector—for example among development service providers working for German car manufacturers, who are increasingly relocating work to countries like Morocco or India. This creates a downward spiral, and in the end workers lose—both here and in those countries.

But international division of labor has long been common in the IT sector...

There is nothing inherently wrong with that. As the largest union in a country that is one of the world's leading export economies, we cannot argue for closed borders. That would benefit no one. We know we cannot compete with countries like China or India based purely on labor costs. But that perspective is too narrow. Jobs in Europe depend on innovation and technological advancement—and that requires well-trained, well-paid skilled workers. In the IT sector, however, a problematic corporate strategy has taken hold: work is shifted to wherever costs are lowest—the so-called “best-cost countries.” We strongly oppose this pseudo-logic.

So, division of labor is acceptable, but it must be fair?

Exactly. And that is why we need clear rules. However, we are currently experiencing a time in which the rules-based order is eroding. Trump does as he pleases, and what once applied no longer does. This makes it all the more important to defend and strengthen rules.

What can a global union federation actually achieve?

Information is crucial. Through cooperation, we learn what is happening—for example at suppliers of German companies in India, China, or Morocco. As the largest individual union, we are a natural point of contact for unionists working in subsidiaries or supplier firms of German multinationals. They ask us: can you do something? Through our seats on supervisory boards, for example, we can try to support colleagues at affected sites and raise awareness of their situation.

What kinds of problems are we talking about?

For instance, excessive working hours, which are unfortunately common in the IT sector in these countries. Workers who campaign for longer breaks or against night shifts risk dismissal. In India, long working hours are a major issue, especially for women, as it can be dangerous to be outside alone after dark. In such cases, it becomes a matter of ensuring that employers provide safe transport, such as bus services.

Is a strong IG Metall presence on supervisory boards enough to solve these issues?

Sometimes—but we also take a more fundamental approach. The key lies in organizing. In many countries, this is much more difficult than in Germany; unions often face systematic obstruction, and union busting is common. In Malaysia, for example, workers in an electronics company—with our project support—managed to organize 88% of the workforce. With that kind of backing, they can negotiate collective agreements much more effectively. Both sides benefit from such cooperation—and we learn a great deal as well.

Is that enough?

Supporting partner unions and helping them address their problems—essentially “help for self-help”—is an important part of international work. But it is equally crucial to establish binding rules at the international level so that workers have legal recourse when their rights are violated. Companies must take responsibility for working conditions at their sites abroad and throughout their supply chains.

Jobs in German industry are also under pressure from trade conflicts and geopolitical uncertainty. What is IG Metall's response?

We rely on Europe. The European Union is an important institution that can set rules—and does so. For two years, we have advocated for local content requirements at the European level. These rules stipulate that companies must ensure a certain share of value creation comes from Europe if they want to win public contracts. The European Commission's draft Industrial Accelerator Act includes such provisions. It is a good starting point, even if it does not go far enough. Europe's IT industry in particular needs strengthening—we have become heavily dependent on the United States. Companies must invest and become more independent. That will not happen if IT services are outsourced indiscriminately to distant countries.

What do you enjoy about your role as global president?

Exchanging with colleagues from around the world is incredibly enriching. I learn a lot about how struggles are fought elsewhere. And at the end of these conversations, there is always an encouraging realization: despite differences in cultures and contexts, trade unionists share a common goal—to fight for a dignified life. By doing so together within IndustriALL Global, we achieve more. ■



Photo: IndustriALL Global Union/Chérissse Fredricks Gasana

Christiane Benner is President of IG Metall. In November 2025, she was elected President of IndustriALL Global at its congress in Sydney. IndustriALL represents around 50 million workers in manufacturing, energy, and mining worldwide—vis-à-vis both companies and governments. IG Metall is its largest member organization.

IAV

Resistance against sweeping cuts



Employees at the automotive engineering service provider IAV automotive engineering company Germany are fighting against restructuring plans announced by management. The company had declared its intention to cut around 1,500 jobs by the end of the year. Back in 2024, the firm had already eliminated about 600 positions, coupled with a promise to restore economic stability. Employees accuse management of breaking its word and are protesting (see photo) against the renewed job cuts. IG Metall, the works council, and management have been negotiating for around five months over the company's strategic and staffing future. However, even after seven rounds of talks (as of editorial deadline), no agreement on a convincing overall concept has been reached. Nor have there been binding commitments regarding the jobs that are supposed to remain after the planned cuts. For IG Metall, it is clear: further restructuring must not proceed blindly but must be embedded in a viable long-term strategy. IAV operates as a development service provider in the automotive industry and specializes in software solutions for areas such as electromobility, connected systems, and autonomous driving.

Siemens

Digital and direct

IG Metall German trade union has secured a digital right of access for all Siemens Energy German energy company sites in Germany. This allows the union to contact all employees via email or address specific groups of employees directly. The use of the digital notice board is also now formally regulated. In an increasingly digitalized working world, this

represents a major union success, enabling IG Metall to maintain a presence in a company where much of the work is done remotely.

Cariad

Firmly in IG Metall hands

With a strong result, IG Metall has won the works council elections at Cariad Volkswagen software subsidiary in the Northwest region. All works council seats at Volkswagen's software unit went to IG Metall members. The new chair of the works council at Cariad in Wolfsburg is Dr. Claudia Richter. She succeeds Dr. Stefan Henze, who did not stand for re-election. The election in the Northwest region took place last December.

Works Council Forum

Momentum for Works Councils

The German Trade Union Confederation and its member unions are inviting participants to the Works Council Forum #BR26 in Berlin on September 16 and 17. The forum offers a valuable opportunity—especially for those newly elected in the recent works council elections—to gain orientation, further qualifications, and build networks. In addition to political debates, participants can look forward to expert forums and practical reports on current labor law, co-determination during transformation processes, and digitalization in the workplace. Further information and registration options are available on the website br26.berlin.



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