



Sustainability at MF: A survey among members of Medicinska Föreningen in March 2022

Students for Sustainable Development & Equal Treatment Commission

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1 Background

In March 2022, the Students for Sustainable Development (SSD) at Karolinska Institutet (KI) and the Equal Treatment Commission (ETC), conducted a survey among members of Medicinska Föreningen (MF) to assess the experienced social and environmental sustainability of MF. The following report will describe the findings of this survey and will discuss possible measures to improve sustainability at MF.

1.1 Introduction to Medicinska Föreningen

Medicinska Föreningen is the main student union at KI. The principal deciding body is the union council (Fullmäktige - FuM), which makes all key decisions concerning the union. FuM contains representatives from all the sections as well as representatives directly elected by the members of MF. The MF board (Styrelsen), led by the president and vice-president, is elected by FuM and is responsible for putting the decisions taken by the union council in place. FuM is also responsible for looking over the activities of the sections and the commissions, while the board looks over the committees and the employees of MF.

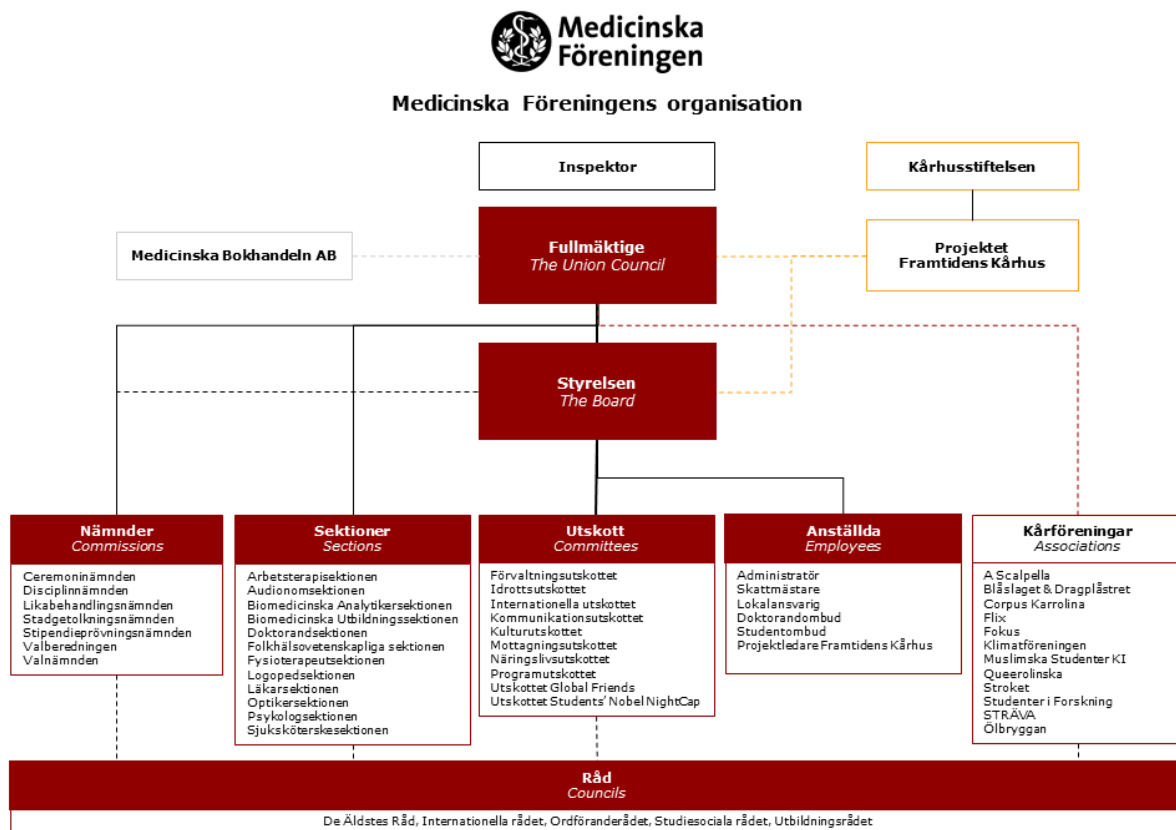


Figure 1: Organisational Structure of MF



1.2 Introduction to SSD and ETC

Students for Sustainable Development (SSD) at Karolinska Institutet (KI) was created in September 2021. The main goal of SSD is to bring sustainability awareness to the KI campus, create a forum for interdisciplinary cooperation in the field of sustainability and push for actions among students and faculties.

The Equal Treatment Commission (ETC) was formed with the mission to ensure that every student at KI, and particularly at MF, feels safe, supported, and free of discrimination. Our work includes raising awareness, monitoring, and driving change within MF and KI structures, and supporting diversity.

1.3 Sustainability at MF

Sustainability can be defined as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their economic, environmental and social needs. SSD and ETC focus on two different kinds of sustainability: social and environmental. Social sustainability in MF can be achieved by ensuring that every student can be a member of MF and take part in its activities, without needing to fear any form of discrimination or injustice. Welcoming everyone at MF and believing in the equality of all are defined values of MF (MF Värdegrund, 2020).

In addition to social sustainability, SSD and ETC argue that MF needs to take action to reduce the environmental impact of its properties, events and activities, and create an environment that supports members in making environmentally friendly choices, particularly in the face of the climate crisis. Previously, within MF, Klimatföreningen (Climate Association) was the main group that aimed to promote ecological and sustainable living inside and outside of campus. While some of their events were targeted to engage students in sustainability (for example by organising clothing swaps or seminars on sustainability and health), they were also focused on student representation at KI meetings. For this reason, they worked closely with the KI Council for Environment and Sustainable Development to ensure that ecological sustainability and student perspectives were also included in KI's decision making. In 2021, Klimatföreningen dissolved, and SSD continued their efforts and has since been operating as the main committee involved in ecological sustainability and promoting the creation of a climate-friendly campus.

2 Survey

The survey was conducted in February and March 2022 with the aim to assess the opinions of MF members on equality and sustainability of MF. Invitations to participate were sent to MF members through email with both English and Swedish descriptions. Additionally, the survey was promoted on social media channels of several KI-based organisations (e.g., SSD, ETC, KI Students).

The structure of the survey consisted of 22 questions on three main domains: 1) organisation of MF, 2) equal treatment and mental health, and 3) ecological sustainability along with questions on membership status, participant's role at MF, MF event participation frequency,

and Swedish fluency. The majority of questions were given in the format of asking the participant how they agree with a statement with responses given on a 5-point Likert-scale. The survey also included open-ended questions about issues regarding organisational structure, inclusion and non-discrimination, environmental sustainability, and potential solutions that participants can come up with. Any Swedish answer was translated into English by a person fluent in Swedish and English for analysis. In total, answers from 137 members were obtained, with 59.86% of participants being fluent in Swedish (Table 1).

A major limitation of this survey is that the number of students participating was only a small fraction of the total number of registered MF members, which is around 2,700 in the year 2022. Therefore, just around 5% of all MF members participated in the survey. Technical problems in the system or the e-mail being marked as spam likely contributed to the low participation rate. Additionally, since the survey was analysed by international students and qualitative data was translated from Swedish into English, understanding and interpretation of cultural aspects and context may be limited. Moreover, as data analysis was performed by members of SSD and ETC who are active MF members, bias may be present. Efforts were taken to minimize the presence of bias by reflecting on one's own views of MF and avoiding the data analysis and interpretation to be influenced by these. However, as the first survey among MF members about their opinion on MF's social and environmental sustainability, this project's results can provide valuable insight to guide further investigations and actions towards a more sustainable MF.

Characteristics of Participants (n=137)		
Role	No Role	38.97%
	Board or Active Member	42.65%
	Member of the MF council	18.38%
Language	Fluent in Swedish	60.29%
	Not fluent in Swedish	39.71%
Participation in MF events and activities	Never	11.03%
	Fewer than once a month	36.03%
	Once a month	27.21%
	Multiple Times a Month	25.74%

Table 1: Overview of characteristics of MF members that participated in the survey.

3 Results

3.1 Organisation of MF

This part focused on assessing how MF members perceive their understanding of the student union's organisational structure and their ability to actively get involved.

Among the participants, 37.32% (strongly) agreed that they understand the structure and organisation of MF. Better self-reported understanding of MF structure and organisation was observed among Swedish-speaking members. While 28.05% of Swedish-speaking

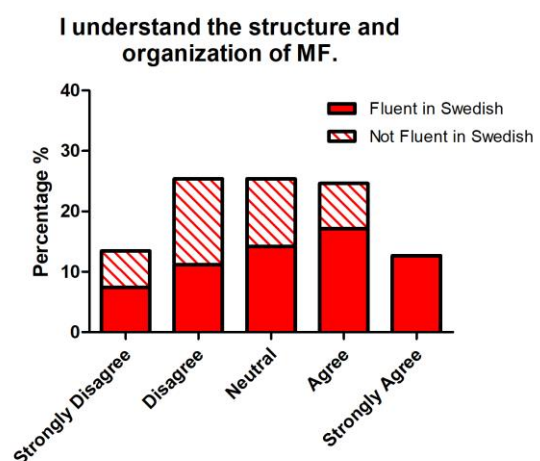


Figure 2: Level of agreement with the statement: "I understand the structure and organization of MF." dependent on fluency in Swedish.

participants reported that they do not understand MF’s structure and organisation, 51.92% of non-Swedish-speaking members said that they lacked understanding (see Figure 2). In addition, greater involvement corresponded with a better self-reported understanding of MF’s structure and organisation. Over 40% of participants who do not hold a role (48.08%) or are a board or active member of a committee, commission, section, or association (40.35%) reported lacking understanding vs. 8.00% of participants who are members of the MF council.

Regarding how represented members feel by MF, 44.44% of the participants gave a neutral position. MF members who are not fluent in Swedish stated more often to be on the “*not feeling properly represented*” spectrum (35.85% non-Swedish speakers disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, compared to 29.26% of Swedish-speaking members).

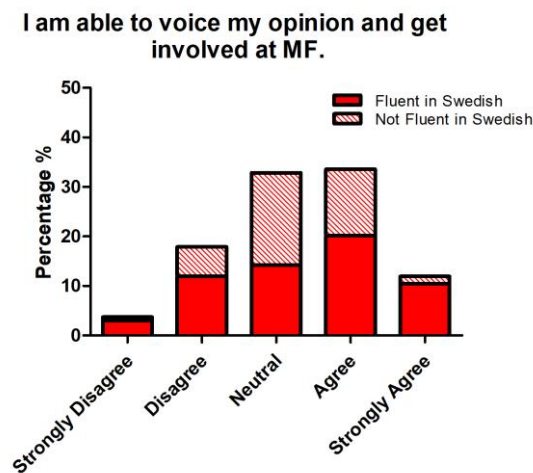


Figure 3: Level of agreement with the statement: “I am able to voice my opinion and get involved at MF.”, dependent on fluency in Swedish.

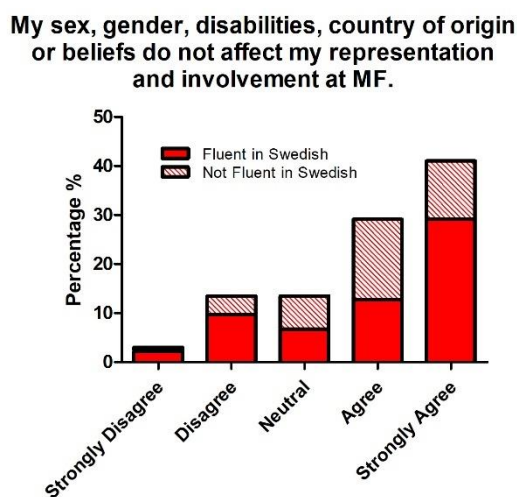


Figure 4: Level of agreement with the statement: “My sex, gender, disabilities country of origin or beliefs do not affect my representation and involvement at MF”, dependent on fluency in Swedish

In terms of the statements on the ability to voice opinions and get involved at MF, there was a tendency to agree (see Figure 3). Additionally, a majority (41.04%) agreed that their sex, gender, disability, country of origin, or beliefs do not affect their involvement at MF. It is notable though, that 16.42% of participants felt like one of those factors is affecting their representation and involvement at MF. There is a need to clarify what this portion is experiencing, and to understand if some (structural) discrimination is happening inside MF (see Figure 4).

The majority (53.71%) of non-Swedish-speaking students reported feeling excluded from MF due to the lack of speaking Swedish. When examining responses based on the non-Swedish-speaking participants’ role in MF, 44.44% of participants without a MF role; 68.19% of board or active members of a committee, commission, section or association; and 40.00% of members of FuM reported feeling excluded due to the lack of speaking Swedish.

Regarding the question of whether participants find the information about MF and its inner workings to be available and accessible to them, the most frequent response was “neither agree nor disagree/no opinion” (33.33%). More Swedish-speaking students (39.5%) than non-Swedish-speaking students (24.07%) (strongly) agreed that the information about MF and its inner workings is available and accessible to them. Participants with no role or who are members of FuM were more likely to indicate that the information was



available and accessible to them (37.73% and 45.84%, respectively) vs. participants who are board or active members of a committee, commission, section, or association (24.13%). This may indicate that students without a role might feel satisfied with the amount of information they have while other members may desire and require more information.

Similar trends were visible among the open-ended questions. The lack of clarity and structure within MF’s organisation were recurrent comments throughout the survey:

“I feel that very few MF members are aware of the organisational structures and processes, which gives an unfair advantage to those that do.”

“Made evident by the union meeting, the recent organisational structure in MF has been plagued with issues.”

“MF seems too complex and unapproachable as an organisation, it feels like different parts are not necessarily communicating that well with each other.”

In general, it was said that information and procedures, for instance regarding the elections, were not shared properly, thus impacting the overall transparency of the union. The need to improve the communication between MF’s board, the committees, and students was also touched upon.

3.2 Equal treatment and mental health

The following part focuses on how members experience the environment at MF in regard to equal treatment and mental health. In various cases participants reported abuse of power and inadequate conduct within MF. Participants indicated concerns that instead of being a student association thriving for unity, MF appeared to be governed by an individualistic culture.

I consider the work environment at MF to be healthy (healthy=based on respect for everyone and where everybody can feel comfortable)

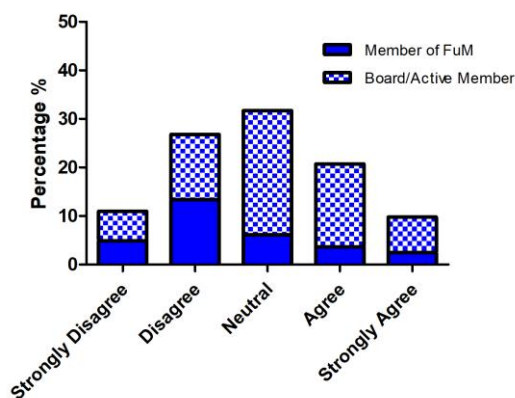


Figure 5: Level of agreement with the statement: “I consider the work environment at MF to be healthy (healthy=based on respect for everyone and where everybody can feel comfortable)”, dependent on form of involvement. The graphic only includes answers of involved members (n=83).

“Official testimonies and discussions of discrimination and exploitation of positions of power have been disregarded as chatter.”

A concerning point is that 29.75% of the respondents thought that MF is not a “healthy” work environment, defined as a place where everyone feels comfortable and respected. Among involved members, 30.49% of respondents (strongly) agreed and 37.80% (strongly) disagreed with the statement (see Figure 5). Nearly one out of five (19.38%) respondents indicated that their opinions and moral integrity are not respected and valued at MF. Moreover, 7.94% disagreed with the statement of feeling “safe being involved at MF”. Various MF members reported having experienced or witnessed discrimination. Of all respondents, 11.76% experienced discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, appearance, background, or



other personal characteristics. More than twice as many (28.15%) reported having witnessed discrimination based on these same characteristics (see Figure 6). This further highlights the need for improvement regarding MF's environment and respect towards its members.

“The discriminatory behaviour has been pretty self-evident lately.”

“The past year has been shocking as discriminatory behavior, exploiting of power, erratic and impulsive behaviour [...] has been witnessed and experienced by both members, staff and guests of MF.”¹

A lack of inclusivity in the association's board was brought up recurrently by international students wishing to be more involved in MF. There was also a wish for less separation between Swedish and non-Swedish students. The lack of perceived inclusivity may be, in part, explained by the language barrier. In fact, participants reported that not speaking Swedish was a significant barrier and made it difficult to be properly involved in the MF organisation.

“[A]s an international student, it sometimes feels as though there lacks inclusivity and opportunities in MF, as certain boards are usually made up of mostly international students or mostly Swedish students.”

“The fact of not speaking Swedish is a great representation barrier”

“I think having to speak Swedish to be involved in the majority of central MF, as well as the general atmosphere of MF favoring/targeting Swedish students from the big programs like medicine and psychology with eg. its events, presents a barrier to non-Swedish students and students from smaller programs.”

“Many events/spaces/groups seem to welcome non-Swedish speaking participants on paper, but in practice the language is almost exclusively Swedish, making it feel unwelcoming”

I have witnessed discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, appearance, background or other personal characteristics.

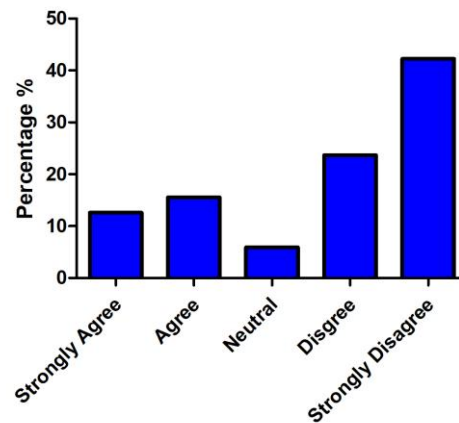
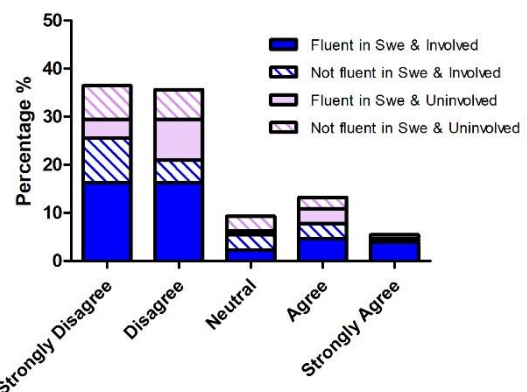


Figure 6: Level of agreement with the statement: “I have witnessed discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, appearance, background or other personal characteristics.”

I know who to reach out to within MF when I witness inappropriate behaviour towards me or others.



know who to reach out to within MF when I witness inappropriate behaviour towards me or others”, dependent on level of involvement at MF and fluency in Swedish.

¹ Modifications on the 26th of January 2023: Due to the severeness of this statement, identifiable parts were excluded from the quote.



The majority of respondents involved in MF indicated that they can handle the mental load related to their position within MF. However, 10.98% of them somewhat or strongly disagreed with this statement. Moreover, 37.80% responded that the social environment at MF is not supportive enough to ensure their long-term involvement. More than two third (68.22%) of the respondents reported not knowing who to refer to within MF when they need help or support to cope with stressful situations. Out of them, two third (67.47%) reported to be actively involved in MF. Furthermore, 72.09% of the respondents said that they don't know who to reach out to if they witness inappropriate behaviours, of which 64.52% are actively involved at MF (see Figure 7).

3.3 Ecological Sustainability

The following part will focus on members perceptions of the environmental impact of MF activities.

For the question on whether the environmental impact of MF events is low or not, nearly half of the participants (48.84%) answered that they have a neutral opinion. However, it is worth taking into account that participants who never participate or participate fewer than once a month in these events accounted for a large proportion of this choice. Also, the second most chosen options in these groups of participants were in the agree spectrum. Answers on the disagree spectrum were mostly given by people who participate at least once a month in MF events (see Figure 8).

To the statement “I feel like MF is actively working on reducing their environmental impact”, 43.07% of participants answered that they either disagree or strongly disagree, followed by neutral and only a small proportion said they agree. An interesting finding is that participants, who are board or active members, were more likely to disagree with the statement, than members with no formal role. The differences found between participants with role and without role were statistically significant (see Figure 9). Meanwhile, being a member of FuM seemed to not have any association with their answer.

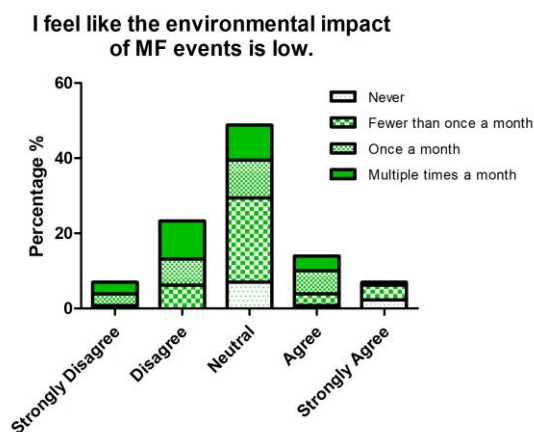


Figure 9: Level of agreement with the statement: "I feel like the environmental impact of MF events is low.", dependent on frequency of attending events.

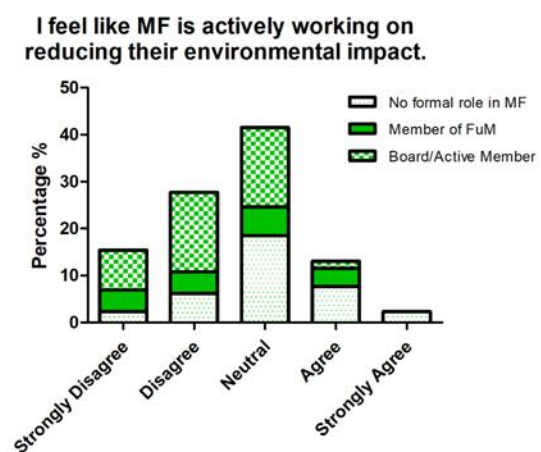


Figure 8: Level of agreement with the statement: "I feel like MF is actively working on reducing their environmental impact.", dependent on level of involvement.

When asked about their opinions on how resources are used at MF events, answers from participants followed a normal distribution with most of them saying they “neither agree nor disagree” (see Figure 10). There was no difference found regarding their roles at MF or their fluency in Swedish. This trend was also visible in the open-ended questions, where multiple members pointed out that they do not have any knowledge on that topic.

“To be honest, I feel that I don't know anything about MF in terms of environmental sustainability. Like nothing, none.”

Many participants identified the lack of recycling and trash management at MF as a problem regarding ecological sustainability. Especially the use of single-use plastics during events is something that was mentioned frequently. It was pointed out that a solution to this problem would include the introduction of reusable kitchen items at MF as well as proper dishwashing solutions that are accessible for everyone within the organisation.

“I have worked a lot of graduation parties on MF, and attended several parties hosted there, and the amount of single use plastic is ridiculous.”

Moreover, it was mentioned that the (red) meat consumption at MF events should be reduced. It was recommended that at big events such as the Lucia ball, vegan or vegetarian food should be served as the standard option to reduce CO₂ emissions. In addition, transparency about the food served, such as production origin and environmental footprint, was listed as an idea of improvement.

“[I would like to see] refill stations, stimulate plantbased food at events, turn off screens/lights at night, reduce waste, promote reusable dishes”

Additionally, it was brought up that the energy management at the Kårhuset leaves room for improvement. It was pointed out that many lights and screens within the house are constantly turned on, even at times when no one is there. An identified solution for this was the use of motion sensors that could reduce wasteful energy consumption of the Kårhuset. Additionally, as renovations of Kårhuset are in planning, more modern and sustainable standards for energy and heating management should be considered and if possible, implemented.

4 Conclusion

Overall, the survey identified multiple aspects in which improvement in terms of social and environmental sustainability in MF are needed. In terms of the organisational structure, key elements that came up were a lack of transparency and missing understanding of the structure

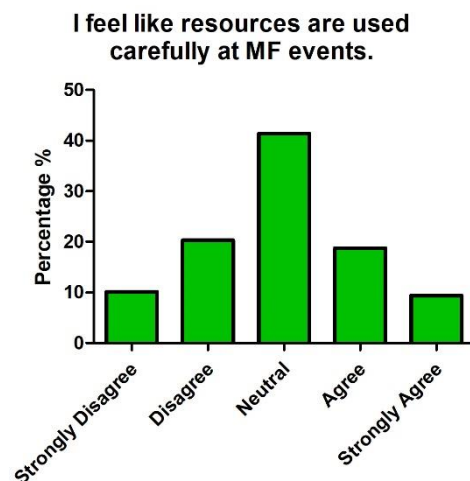


Figure 10: Level of agreement with the statement: “I feel like resources are used carefully at MF events”.

and organisation of MF. These patterns were especially visible among non-Swedish-speaking students.

The questions about mental health and social sustainability at MF indicate that there is a need to improve support and inclusion inside the organisation. The number of people that reported either to have witnessed or experienced discriminatory behaviour was not major, but big enough to be concerned about. The background of these discriminations are unclear and need further investigation. It is important to mention that many of the comments about social sustainability at MF were made in connection with the internal problems that led to a re-election of the FuM in February 2022 (- more information on this topic can be found in the protocol from union meeting of the 6th of January 2022). Nevertheless, they should not be disregarded because it can be assumed that the situation of January 2022 is not only representative of one person's failure, but of the systems. The results highlight the importance of establishing a key contact person/group whom to approach when any form of discrimination or other form of conflict/misconduct takes place in MF.

All questions concerning ecological sustainability of MF were mainly characterised by neutral answers, which could partially be explained by the missing knowledge about it. Still, it is notable that members who are more involved and attend more events rated the environmental efforts of MF worse than uninvolved members. This could be an indication that people who are more exposed to how MF and MF events operate, are more likely to be unhappy with the current situation.

5 Actions and Recommendations

In this part, SSD and ETC outline some possible actions to improve the environmental and social sustainability of MF:

1. **Whistleblowing Service:** As discussed in the union meeting, a whistleblowing service should be put in place to enable members to report discriminations anonymously. Furthermore, the role of the “ombudsperson” or anyone else able to listen to these types of issues should be made clear for every MF member on multiple occasions. Overall, there is a need to work on making clear, accessible paths to ask for help within MF.
2. **Mental Health Survey/Workgroup:** A survey sent out every year/semester to check students’ mental health and their feelings towards MF would be an effective way to be aware of current students’ mental health and act accordingly. This has already been started by a workgroup at MF and we hope it can keep occurring every year (ETC will likely take it over).
3. **Inclusion of International Students:** Since the start of the new academic year, progress has already been observed regarding the inclusion of international students. For example, hosting more events during the introduction week that facilitate the interaction between national and international students. However, as KI remains an international institution, MF should ensure this efforts continue and that important information (e.g. emails, official documents) are translated into English.



4. Workshops for Committees, Sections and Associations: SSD is hosting a Workshop for board members of committees, sections and associations of MF in January of 2023. The aim is to discuss ways to reduce the environmental impact of their events. Further, this workshop will include an introduction on how to use the facilities of the Union House, which possibilities it offers, and how to use it in the best ways.
5. Improve Communication: All committees, sections and associations of MF, as well as FuM and the MF board, should take action to improve the transparency of their respective organisational part e.g., by providing documents in English and Swedish language and by ensuring that all members have the possibility to understand the structure of MF.
6. Open Communication About Environmental Impact of MF: Yearly publications of Energy- and Water Usage of the MF premises are important, to assess the extent of MF' environmental impact, identify key target areas, and monitor progress.
7. Reusable Cups: Finding ways to reduce the amount of single-use cutlery, plates, and cups at parties, by introducing something like a pant-system, should be discussed.
8. Repair and Share Corner: SSD would like to establish a permanent space at MF where clothes, books, and other items can be placed to be taken by other people. This would promote second-hand use and a conscious consumption of items while also giving students the chance to spend less money by preventing unnecessary purchases. Further, SSD would like to provide tools, sewing kits, and other resources for repairs in this corner, giving members the chance to repair broken items instead of throwing them away.

MF is an integral part of many students' experience of studying at KI. Through discussion, collaboration, and the shared goal of creating a Student Union which welcomes all students, we can work towards making MF a more environmentally and socially sustainable space and organisation. Any questions regarding the survey and its results can be send to ssd@medicinskaforeningen.se and lbn@medicinskaforeningen.se.