



WORKSHOP BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

Social dialogue, collective bargaining, and trade union rights



The International Labour Organisation (ILO) recognises social dialogue, including collective bargaining, as a key instrument in the design of policies that promote social justice, ensures social and economic progress, and contributes to democracy and good governance.¹ Social dialogue also plays a central role in reinforcing social rights and enhancing sustainable and inclusive growth. Hence, across Europe, it holds a central role in the implementation of the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#). Equally, social dialogue remains vital to the achievement of [Sustainable Development Goal \(SDG\) 4](#) on inclusive and equitable quality education for all. The [Education 2030 Framework for Action](#) clearly states that government should “*set up or strengthen mechanisms for institutionalised social dialogue with teachers and their representative organisations, ensuring their full participation in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of education policy*”.

Despite the significant diversity of industrial relation systems across Europe, the systems historically also share a number of common elements such as:

1. Strong, or reasonably established and publicly guaranteed trade unions
2. Solidarity wage-setting based on co-ordination at the sectoral level or above

¹ ILO, Resolution concerning the second recurrent discussion on social dialogue and tripartism. Resolution adopted by the 107th Session of the International Labour Conference on 7 June 2018.



3. Generalised arrangement of information, consultation and perhaps co-determination based on the rights of workers to be involved
4. Routine participation of unions in tri-partite policy arrangements²

Social dialogue arrangements are not static but are the outcome of wider political developments and contexts. Taking account of the differences between the degree of institutionalisation of industrial relations, across Europe alike, social dialogue and collective bargaining in the education sector has been impacted by shifts in the dominant political and economic discourse. In particular, they have been in **turmoil as many governments turned to austerity** in the last decade, and education personnel started to feel the effects on their professionalism, employment and job quality.

The pursuit of “efficiency” in the education sector to “reduce expenditure”, alongside the push for greater labour market “flexibility” and improved “competitiveness” of the economy, have changed the world of work of teachers and other education personnel, and fundamentally altered the institution of social dialogue and collective bargaining. Evidence³ demonstrates that **unilateral legislative acts** attempting to commodify education and work have gone hand in hand with attempts to **decentralise collective bargaining**, and to **undermine wage policies**, which were the result of long-standing collective bargaining traditions across European countries making it even harder for education trade unions to secure broad gains through sectoral agreements.

Effective bargaining cannot be conducted in isolation from efforts to leverage all educators’ **right to organise** and to mobilise around the value of quality public education, even through an increased recourse to industrial action and the **right to strike** to defend pay and professionalism.

This **workshop** will favour exchanges on strategies, actions and tools for effective social dialogue and collective bargaining. It will explore the possibilities for more strategic interventions as a European organisation in support of capacity building initiatives.

Capacity building requirements vary from country to country, based on established industrial relations systems and linked organisational cultures and strengths. In a recent report, [Eurofound](#) (2019) identifies **structural gaps and needs** to address when it comes to increasing efforts to build the capacity for effective social dialogue such as:

- Weak trade unions and low membership levels within trade unions linked with de-unionisation of the workforce;
- Low or declining collective bargaining coverage;
- A fragmented landscape of actors;
- Lack of social partners’ autonomy, representativeness and capacity/mandate to negotiate;
- Lack of trust between the social partners;

² European Commission, *Industrial Relations in Europe 2008*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. (2009), pp. 20-24

³ M. Keune, N. E. Ramos Martín & M. Mailand, ‘Working under pressure. Employment, job quality and labour relations in Europe’s public sector since the crisis’. ETUI, (2020)..



- Representation gaps due to new forms of work and changes in the labour force composition.

The workshop is to exchange around the following questions:

- **What are the main factors, gaps, and needs, that we, as a European trade union movement, can address together to support capacity building for effective social dialogue at all levels?**
- **What is needed to expand the scope of social dialogue and collective bargaining to include professional issues, as well as education and budgetary policies affecting the world of work of teachers and other education personnel?**
- **Are there new communication or training strategies that can help trade unions achieve their goals?**

