

Recommendations to trade unions to redesign industrial relations and social dialogue practices

Experts stressed that a decline in trade union activities is a long-term problem that was aggravated, but not caused by financial crisis. They also admitted that, as far as labour movements and working conditions are concerned, trade unions are initiators within the social dialogue. Consequently, strong and modern trade unions are the most important component of an effective social dialogue.

The ultimate goal of revitalizing social dialogue is to increase the influence of social partners, primarily of trade unions, in order to create industrial relations that provide for improving living and working conditions that not only satisfy the needs of the population, but stimulate the economy as well. The power of social partners should be increased not only in decision making but also in the implementation. The primary role of trade unions is the normalisation of industrial relations, to safeguard the compliance with the labour regulations (“watchdog role”), but also to initiate necessary changes.

In order to be a valuable social partner, trade unions need to understand, promote, implement and update the major changes and become more communicative, more flexible, more integrated and able to cooperate in a network.

Based on the project findings, eight clusters of activities are recommended to trade unions to redesign their industrial relation systems and practices of social dialogue (Table 4).

Clusters 1- 2 are envisaged to strengthen trade unions as organisations. Clusters 3-8 focus on strengthening social dialogue. Indeed, trade unions can only be initiators in social dialogue when they are strong, friendly to partners, have a wide support in the society, are well understood and assisted locally and when they receive and are able to use the assistance of international organisations.

The following policy recommendations are drafted for the final project conference. The draft recommendations are to be discussed at the closing event (19-20 September 2016, Budapest). The fine-tuned policy recommendations are to be published on the project website (sodial.eu).

Table 4. Clusters for activities of trade unions to redesign IR and social dialogue practices

1. Organising of members

Measure	Result
Revise trade union mobilisation policies in connection with the transformation (segmentation) of the labour market, to develop a strategy targeting at non-standard groups of employees	Possibility of TU membership to individual members (employees in SMEs and self-employed), non-standard groups of workers and non-working members
Extend activities to the youth (work in schools, attractive measures, competitions and training, voluntary work in TU organisations)	Young people become more familiar with trade unions, understand the theory and practice of unionisation and its need for the society Reach other interest groups and involve them in common actions and platforms
Broadening the discourse and efforts to influence the public opinion	
Use the crisis (drastic austerity policies, stingy health, education policy) as an argument to improve impact	Most effective influence – proposing and fighting for legislative challenges

Overall effect: create and strengthen workplace representation, improve financial and organisational capacity of trade unions, increase collective negotiating and bargaining power of trade unions and improve the unions’ mobilising capacity and influence.

2. Organisational restructuring of trade unions (modernisation, structural reforms, internal reorganisation, management)

Measure	Result
Transform the organisations in line with the needs of liberalised labour markets	Possibility of TU membership for individual members, non-standard workers and non-working members
Improve strategic planning of trade unions’ activities	Precisely focused work, economical use of resources
Consider mergers and acquisitions	Achieving an economy of scale, consolidating financial and human resources, extending potential membership and avoiding mutual competition
Consider cooperation as a means to increase the power of small trade unions	
Improve internal communication and collaboration within the vertical and horizontal hierarchy of the trade union system (up and down and horizontal information flows)	Strengthen organization and rationalisation of unions; increase the unionised share of the labour market and the political power by eliminating competition or division among unions
Improve collaboration within the vertical and horizontal hierarchy of the trade union system (common tasks and measures)	
Develop information services to improve communication with the society, introduction of new forms of communication and interaction	Dissemination of information about the idea, benefits and achievements of unionisation. Connectivity and networking
Improve interaction with media	

Diversify and innovate benefits (“product”) provided by trade unions	Increasing attractiveness of trade unions
Provide training to improve organisational and negotiation skills and to develop the ability to find compromise	More effective trade union work. Increasing capacity to mobilise for industrial actions and stronger membership activity

Overall effect: more effective trade union work.

3. Fundamental trade union activities

Measure	Result
Improve collective bargaining at the company level	Stronger workplace representation
Improve sectoral bargaining, include wage bargaining in the sectoral agenda	Bargaining elevated to a higher level, stronger impact of decisions adopted
Improve social services (social funds ex. housing fund, strike fund), employment services, social benefits	Increasing attractiveness of trade union membership
Industrial actions	Strong voice in extreme cases

Overall effect: better protection for workers.

4. Partnerships with employers

Measure	Result
Develop common platforms of interests	Promoting alliance and collaboration between the social partners and other players in the social dialogue
National agreements (2008, 2009 in Lithuania, in Latvia)	Social peace and mutual respect
Cooperate in the creation of employers organisations	Partners for collective bargaining and social dialogue
Common representativeness and mutual considerations before formal and informal negotiations	Adoption of decisions at the final steps of social dialogue
Common social campaigns and measures	Strong solidarity between social partners

Overall effect: organising support against grassroots resistance, help to protect and develop bargaining institutions and allow them to pursue new kinds of interests, reduce employers’ and employees’ aversion to trade unions.

5. Coalition building with other social movements

Measure	Result
Develop common platforms of interest; establish	Alliance and collaboration between social partners

specific focal points to support interaction at local level	and other players in the social dialogue, such as: NGOs, local governments, science society
Agreements with local government organisations at the national level	Support in solving regional labour market problems and access to regional employers and public organisations
Cooperation with academic institutions	Expertise with the help of independent experts or academicians, occasionally of social partners

Overall effect (Frege and Kelly, 2003): organising support for grassroots resistance, better access to key individuals and networks within specific communities who could assist with organising campaigns; broaden the range of interests and the agendas that unions seek to represent; broaden their appeal to poorly represented segments, increase the perception of union instrumentality among non-union members

6. Political actions

Measure	Result
<i>Legislative initiative on industrial relations issues:</i>	
Taxation and insurance reforms desirable – proportional (progressive) taxation depending on income	A fair distribution of income and tax burden in the society
Abolish unfair and ineffective legislative norms, such as minimum insurance income (BG), legal right to be paid wages in full (BG), limitation of rights for repeated violation (BG); solidarity tax (LV)	Better living and working conditions.
Introduction of sectoral minimum wages	
Restrict the use of accumulated calculation of working time	
Provide for proportionate and dissuasive sanctions	
Set up special labour courts	
<i>Institutional setting of social dialogue</i>	
Binding nature of social dialogue	Provide for an effective legal environment for social dialogue
Increasing role of social partners in inspection	

Overall effect (Frege and Kelly, 2003): access to power resources resulting in more favourable labour legislation

7. International links

Measure	Result
Improve language skills of trade union officials	Access to international organisations and networks

	and efficient participation in discussion at international level
Increase efficiency of membership in international organisations	Reduced costs of formal participation in international meetings and events
Create the position of an international coordinator within the TU organisation	Explicit division of responsibility, coordinated actions focused on result

Overall effect (Frege and Kelly, 2003): improve the exchange of information about multinational corporations, enhancing unions' bargaining power; facilitating the mobilisation of members in campaigns, enhancing political power through the lobbying effort of international union bodies.

8. *Fundamental social dialogue activities*

Measure	Result
In countries where social dialogue was most hit by the crisis or was even abolished (HU) - return at least to the former (before crisis) model	Social dialogue in accordance with ETUC goals
Improve criteria and procedures for the selection of representatives; set clear criteria of representatives of employees and employers at all levels	Increase power of representatives (example of France)
Find a new generation of social partners	
Agree with partners on precise order and schedule of meetings	Efficient social dialogue
Set exact goals and areas of social dialogue	
Define issues and areas, where social partners have negotiation potential (legislation on gambling is probably not an issue for social dialogue)	
Organise platforms for the pre-discussion of issues so that the main meeting is able to take decision in time	
Sign national and sectoral agreements	
Take national situations and traditions into account.	
Consider the right of national organisations to conclude sectoral collective agreements	

Overall effect: more and efficient social dialogue