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1 Introduction

The UNI Europa project „Shaping Industrial Relations in a Digitalising Services Industry - Challenges and Opportunities for Social Partners“, in cooperation with “ZSI – Zentrum für Soziale Innovation” and funded by the European Commission, aims to identify and analyse change factors and explore new approaches for social partners to maintain effective industrial relations systems in a digitalising services industry. The project strives to provide policy advice for trade unions, social partners and policymakers on necessary adaptations of institutional frameworks for industrial relations, collective bargaining, social dialogue and capacity building for social partners. Challenges and opportunities are identified and analysed in particular with regard to workers’ representation at company level and collective bargaining as well as the work and organisation of trade unions in general.

Across the project, the investigation was divided into three aspects of services that are clearly interrelated.

- Under the heading of **“Service markets”** we look at changes in service production and delivery through digitalisation (for example, online services and self-service) and also on the impact of these changes on customers and society at large. It is one of the dimensions where rapid changes, disruptive innovations (for example platforms) need to be addressed. Here, we also address the status of services in “industrial” or economic policy in the context of your respective sector and country.
- **“Service labour markets”** addresses the development of service jobs, their quality and quantity. We focus on jobs with intermediate skill levels, and will also address atypical and precarious employment (including self-employment) in your sector/country, the development of skills and re-skilling and policies of addressing them.
- **“Company strategies and work organisation”** looks at the company level and your union’s information and experience with companies in your sector/country: We will address transnationalisation of service companies at large, outsourcing and offshoring, working conditions and ways of influencing them, interest representation and participation.

It resulted in a research report which is available in English, French and German (Holtgrewe, Salamon, & Haider, 2018) and three fact sheets on the respective subjects (Holtgrewe, 2017a, 2017b, 2018). Each aspect of services was the subject of a workshop organised by UNI Europa for national trade unionists involved with the subject. Service markets were addressed on October 19th at UNI Europa’s offices in Brussels, Service labour markets on December 11th, 2017 at ver.di’s headquarters in Berlin, and company strategies and work organisation on February 27th, 2018 at Unionen’s headquarters in Stockholm. The project’s intermediate conference took place t on May 15th and 16th,

2018 in Brussels. The workshops' and the conference contributions fed into the Final Policy Paper of the project (UNI Europa & ZSI, 2018) and into UNI Europa's developing services policy platform. Two reflection workshops complete the project. The present one took place in Brussels on November 21, 2018, involving both trade unionists and representatives of employer associations.

All project publications, including this one, are available under <https://unieuropaprojects.org/shaping-industrial-relations/>.

2 The project's outcomes: policies and recommendations on industrial relations in a digitalising services industry

In the first presentation, UNI Europa's Oliver Röthig introduced the project "**Shaping industrial relations in a digitalising services industry**". It addressed the various issues, both challenges and opportunities, that digitalisation presents to companies and social partners in the various service sectors.

Oliver Roethig pointed out that while there is much talk about the "future of work", this future "is very much here today", and digitalisation, company restructuring and changing modes of working are already happening. In a recent survey conducted by the Boeckler Foundation, only 16 % of German works councillors reported job losses due to digitalisation in their company whereas 36% had observed increases in employment. However, in financial services 33% of representatives had encountered job losses. At the same time, financial services took the lead in both increased work intensity and standardisation of work (Ahlers, 2018).

Hence, challenges are already making themselves felt in today's world of work. On a more global level, there is a sense of digital Europe lagging behind other global players and coming under pressure by the US and China with their specific varieties of free market and authoritarian capitalism respectively. However, Oliver Röthig argued that this should not lead Europe towards imitation of either model, but to realise the competitive and social advantages of Social Europe with its potential for innovation and quality-based competition. The historically established powers of social partnerships to stabilise capitalism and shape it in favour of society at large – as envisioned 100 years before in the German Stinnes-Legien Agreement¹ - can play a central part in this.

Aileen Körfer of UNI Europa then outlined the project's outcomes. It analysed both change factors and new approaches pursued by social partners in a European context to feed into the UNI Europa

¹ <https://www.iwkoeln.de/studien/iw-kurzberichte/beitrag/stinnes-legien-abkommen-grundlage-fuer-fast-100-jahre-flaechentarifvertrag-227081.html>

platform on industrial relations in a digitalising services industry. Key topics for the policy platform and for ongoing social dialogue are

- worker representation and collective bargaining in contexts where sector and company boundaries become permeable;
- an outline of an “employment relationship 4.0”, that offers decent work and security to workers as well as opportunities of flexibility and development;
- and skills and (re)training opportunities for workers on all skill levels that also ensure that their skills are utilised and recognised.

Conclusions are gathered in the project’s Final Policy Paper developed by UNI Europa and ZSI – Centre for Social Innovation² and will feed into UNI Europa’s Congress in 2020. UNI Europa’s follow-up project during the next year will look in detail at European trade unions’ cutting edge thinking and practices in addressing the challenges through collective bargaining. Specifically, the project will address the subjects of skills, life-long learning, and upskilling, and the regulation of non-standard employment in ways that do not create a dualised labour market.

This paper also outlines the varied profiles of the service sector in the European regions (also see the reports provided by the project: (Gasparri & Tassinari, 2017; Haider, Holtgrewe, Ramioul, Salamon, & Vereycken, 2018; Ilsøe, 2017; Kirov, 2017; Sharma, 2017)). In Southern Europe, in services small and medium-sized businesses predominate in many service sectors. In Continental Europe, job losses are observed in the Financial service sector, whereas Commerce and ICTS are expanding. Central and Eastern Europe’s service sectors are characterised by comparatively large shares of foreign direct investment. These countries have also emerged as destinations for offshored generic services such as back-office functions, customer service or ICTS. In the Nordic region, both foreign and home-grown multinationals play a large part, and the UK is striving for global leadership in financial services specifically.

The sectors represented by UNI Europa also vary in their respective digitalisation profiles. The ICTS sector obviously pursues all the disruptive technologies that digitalisation commonly refers to: cloud computing, big data, joining forces with traditional manufacturing and services around the Internet of Things, and increasing attention being paid to ICT security. The finance sector is occasionally aiming to copy or integrate the cross-sectoral strategies of key ICT companies, competing for integrated services across domains. Commerce is feeling the pressure of e-commerce and observes shifts of functions from retail to logistics. The media sector encounters various disruptions by platforms and new distributing channels. Post and Logistics find shifts between business activities: e-

² <http://unieuropaprojects.org/content/uploads/2018-11-12-final-policy-paper-en.pdf>

substitution means the replacement of letters by e-mail and messaging whereas parcel services boom. Postal companies diversify their activities accordingly, but like Commerce, feel the pressure of disruptors such as Amazon.

Service labour markets encounter a tangle of related changes: Tasks are partly being automated, partly outsourced or offshored, and partly upskilled, and these related tendencies make predictions difficult. Simultaneously, digitalisation enhances the use of atypical, flexible and hyperflexible forms of employment. Both developments, of skills and atypical employment, in many countries make a polarisation of the labour markets more likely. This could mean that digital opportunities concentrate among the highly-paid and highly-skilled, and disadvantages accumulate among the lower-paid and medium- or low-skilled, although job quality issues of work intensification or standardisation may cut across labour market segments.

Policy initiatives on the European level tend to either address the (Digital) Single Market or the European Pillar of Social Rights, with limited overlap between these policy domains. National initiatives do not always involve social partners. There is a range of tripartite initiatives, bipartite ones involving social partners only, and some purely state-led ones. However, a recent study by ETUC (Voss & Riede, 2018) finds that trade unionists' optimism or pessimism appears to be contingent upon unions' involvement in digitalisation policies.

UNI Europa's own activities are also presented in more detail in the Final Policy Paper. It promotes collective bargaining and social dialogue at large, aims to strengthen workers' participation rights, especially where the awarding of contracts, relocation and outsourcing of work are affected, aims to develop new organisation and communication structures, and to establish similar rights and collective bargaining structures to those of "conventional" employment in new forms of work. In the ICTS sector, UNI Europa has supported pioneering collective agreements of German ver.di with, for example, Deutsche Telekom (see section 4) and of French CFDT-F3C, GCT-FAPT and FO-COM with Orange. It has lobbied to dismiss the European services e-card and contributed to drafting a European directive on platform work. UNI Europa is also making connections with emerging grassroots worker movements, which in Denmark led to a collective agreement concluded by the 3F union with domestic services platform Hilfr.

With regard to an "employment relationship 4.0", UNI Europa aims for a definition that ensures decent working conditions for new forms of employment and lobbies for legislative measures that formalise it in collaboration with ETUC. This entails employers accepting the rights and obligations that are associated with the legal concept of an employer (which platforms often refuse to do, presenting themselves as intermediaries). In the Finance sector, UNI Europa is negotiating with both the bank and insurance EU social partners on joint declarations on the impact of digitalisation on

employment³. In the ICTS sector, property sector and with UNICARE, UNI Europa is working with the employer side in health and safety issues with regard to digitalisation.

With regard to skills and (re)training, it is demanding skill and (re-)training opportunities for all workers, with varied opportunities that allow a transfer of skills. It also aims for further development of mechanisms for the anticipation of skill needs, skill mapping and matching, and job Placement: Currently, the UNI Europa Commerce sector, in cooperation with EuroCommerce, is carrying out a project on managing job transitions by promoting and enhancing education and training for all kinds of work. Skills development is the main topic of discussion in the Media and Entertainment social dialogue, and the UNI Europa Post and Logistic sector is working on skills identification and development in the light of e-substitution, that is, the shift in postal services from letter to parcel logistics. UNI Europa is also represented by Oliver Röthig in the European Commission's Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition that brings together Member States, companies, social partners, non-profit organisations and education providers to improve the provision of digital skills in Europe.

With regard to trade unions' own structure, UNI Europa and its affiliate unions aim to develop new structures for communication and information, both to reach their existing constituencies and to organise new ones. It argues that the increasingly fragmented and individualised employment relationships need to be embedded in stronger collective frameworks.

In the discussion, Jens Thau of the German AGV Banken pointed out that in the financial sector, it is not just employers or investors but also regulators that demand that banks cut employment, especially among the middle-skilled. Standardisation organisations also look at banks' HR practices and key performance indicators, and consider job descriptions as well. Compliance creates more work and jobs, but these apparently require higher skills, contributing to polarisation of jobs. Hence, both employment and work organisation are no longer just in the domain of management, and social partners need to exert their influence to make regulators understand the impact of regulation on the quality of work and jobs in the sector.

Oliver Röthig pointed out that in the service sector, the social partnership is often embedded in multi-stakeholder constellations: relationship between the company, workers, and consumers come into play. For example, consumers' interest in lower prices puts pressure on working conditions, but on the other hand, consumer organisations can be allies with a joint interest in quality services. With that aspect, the social dialogue should exert more influence and provide some common advocacy in favour of good quality work and service provision.

³ For the insurance sector, a follow-up to the 2016 declaration, see <https://insuranceeurope.eu/sites/default/files/attachments/Joint%20declaration%20on%20the%20social%20effects%20of%20digitalisation.pdf>

Mauro Bossola of Italian FABI argued that collective bargaining is a tool to cope with digitalisation and ensure that it contributes to a kind of society we want. Digital technologies increasingly intrude into private life, for example using facial recognition for various transactions as the motto of Chinese WeChat „you can pay with your smile“. As large banks make connections with fintech companies, the question is how society can shape uses of technology and modes of consumption. A bank “buying up a start-up isn’t the problem, but what if it’s Amazon or GE Financial?” In the Italian financial sector, in the last five years some 50,000 jobs were cut but 20,000 newly created for young people with different skills. Collective bargaining provided joint funds with employers to support workers in this transition. However, these issues have wider political implication and need to be stressed at the political level, as they are also about the way of living, the standard of living, and finally, about democracy.

Other comments said that unions need to ensure that training does not leave people behind and that Europe ensures an equitably accessible infrastructure to use technologies, to keep itself “at the same speed”. European funds such as the Investment Europe Fund, and regulation need to keep an eye on the social sustainability of their investments.

Considering civil society and NGOs, collaborating and lobbying are well and good but they cannot enforce proposals whereas the social dialogue can implement solutions by itself, also keeping state intervention at a distance. Social partners regulating working life is considered constitutive of democracy.

Pia Desmet of the Belgian SETCA-BBTK pointed out that handling the digital transition in the financial sector remains a “big task”. At present, jobs in Europe are still good, and downsizing has been managed mostly successfully, but in the future, a banking employee could be “a woman in the Sahara with a smartphone”. While the incumbent banking sector is regulated, this regulation does not reach the new, disruptive players such as Alibaba, Google or Amazon.

A French participant pointed out the social implications of remote service delivery: in commerce, human contact tends to disappear. This may easily have an impact on democracy as service interactions are often also about navigating inequality and diversity in a civil way in the quasi-public spaces of high streets, shops and banks.

Pilar Rato Rodriguez of Spanish CCOO pointed out that currently, the future of retail appears somewhat unclear. Shops explore hybrid modes of delivery, being half present in the street and half operating remotely but in the sector, there is “a lot of talking but no one knows what to do”. While unions know what they want but receive “no answer on the other side of the table”.

3 Panel debate: skills and retraining opportunities

The panel debate on skills was facilitated by Aileen Körfer and brought together

- Christiaan Boiten, EuroCommerce
- Régis Crunchant, CGT-FAPT France, representing post and logistics
- Pilar Rato Rodriguez CCOO Spain and Vice President of UNI Europa Commerce,
- Pia Desmet SETCA-BBTK, Belgium and also Vice President of UNI Europa Finance
- Jens Thau of AGV Banken, Germany and the European Banking Federation.

Needs for skills and (re-)training of workers in the face of digitalisation clearly emerged as one of the consensual subjects both among the social partners and among representatives of the varied sectors. These needs are clearly related to the changing profile of jobs as some are replaced by automation and company restructuring whereas others emerge.

In financial services, Pia Desmets argued that generic office clerks, back office functions, bank tellers in branch offices, and also legal professionals appear to be the groups most at risk. Some of these groups still lack digital skills and generally the skills to work in larger banks or in the sales and advisory functions that are retained but increasingly centralised and digitally supported. They also need the capacity to adapt to constant change. Currently, 90% of new hires in the sector have university degrees, but graduates still require sector-specific training. However, the banking sector has provided training for decades. In Belgium, the sector's academy has been offering new skills and training in languages specifically.

In postal services and logistics, Régis Crunchant said postal services need to make the transition from distributing mail to taking over more logistics functions. Workforces are getting younger in line with the physical demands of the jobs, but rising retirement age means technical solutions are necessary to ensure healthy working. However, training is often provided on a small scale only, learning how to use a tool rather than being given a wider educational perspective. "People don't get the top quality training". In addition, workers find that "whenever there is something new they get new tasks". However, if postal services aim to provide new services in a digital economy, they need adaptable and acknowledged skills and a life-long learning perspective. Régis suggested a dedicated effort to bring both incumbent players and Amazon as an exemplary disruptor involved in the debate so that this company accepts some obligations.

With regard to Commerce, Christiaan Boiten pointed out that e-commerce is also an opportunity for retailers as consumer demand changes. Making use of the digital opportunities requires more skills. The same applies to strategies to make offline shopping more attractive. Either way, commerce needs to invest in training, service, soft skills, and the emotional side of shopping. However, retail has

limitations in investing due to its small profit margins of 2 to 3 percent in some segments. The German-based Media Markt pursues a different approach integrating service, installation and hardware support into its offerings. Here again, skill shortages come to the fore.

Jens Thau agreed that life-long learning needs to be developed and adapted in financial services as skill demands are contingent on the development of markets and business models. Hiring university graduates does not replace the need for banking-specific skills. Pia Desmet pointed out that such skills need to be transferable and that the joint declaration on the European level should be pursued.

Still skills are not an isolated subject but need to be treated in the broad context of social dialogue and collective bargaining, depending on national law and policy. -EU joint declarations do not have the same power. Still European and national social partners also need a role in monitoring skill needs and developments. The problem is that digitalisation is taking place so fast that even well-informed social partners and companies have difficulty gaining insight in what is happening.

There are national and sectoral efforts to map these changes. In Belgium, Pia Desmet reported that the government is asking all sectors to create an inventory of jobs and functions at risk of automation to direct training efforts. Christiaan Boiten cited Norway as a pioneering example where social partners in commerce jointly identify skill needs, key skills, and learning outcomes. “This is the revolution, social partners decide, what do we need to learn and require”. To weather digitalisation, commerce needs all the talent they can get but experience shows that for the highly skilled, entering the sector is often not the preferred option. Another example is the establishment of the “e-commerce merchant” (Kaufmann/-frau im E-Commerce) training in Germany.⁴ This offers transferable skills within the dual vocational training system. However, so far this model has rarely been transferred successfully outside of the VET systems of the German-speaking countries.

EuroCommerce is also conducting a project with UNI Europa on skill needs to find out what the sector can do at the EU level. Most suggestions amount to gathering best practices, inspiring and persuading members to influence national social dialogues. Particular attention should be paid to SMEs where training generally is a large investment. Possibly, ESF funds could be used for retraining and reskilling initiatives where social partners are unable to create sectoral funds.

Pilar Rato Rodriguez pointed out that in Spain, legislative changes complicate skill provision and apparently get in the way of social dialogue and practical initiatives on skills. Labour market reforms in Spain did not support social partners in defining job profiles or bargaining over skill needs and skill provision, and legislation is unlikely to move back into that direction. Trade unions see a very

⁴ <https://www.ausbildung.de/berufe/kaufmann-im-e-commerce/>. A similar occupation has been established in Austria, see <https://www.wko.at/branchen/handel/lehrberuf-e-commerce-kaufmann-frau.html>.

concrete need as people need key skills to move forward. Currently, individual training permits exist, but training needs to be agreed by the employer and the worker which is not a system that is easy to handle. The availability of funds is less of a problem than their use as bureaucratic requirements are high. Trade union representatives do not really monitor company training either. Indeed, they would need better skills for doing so. Precarious and atypical employment presents a challenge to life-long learning as the marginally employed are difficult to reach or may work unpredictable hours. In this context, many of the grounds of a practical provision of training need to be laid: training trainers and also creating a mindset among both stakeholders and workers that makes it possible to adapt to changes at work. Tripartite standardisation of vocational training would be an advance, but currently, unions have very little control in the process. Apart from the provision of training, she sees also a need to recognise workers' experience and informal skills as many workers have basic training and much informal learning takes place on the job.

Jens Thau commented that German labour law does not foresee a „right to training“ either. However, it is in the interest of the employer that workers have the necessary skills. So far, the rights of works councils or provisions of collective agreements do not regulate much in the financial sectors, and further training is varied, ranging from classroom training to individual online learning. Christiaan Boiten emphasised that providing learning opportunities, beyond the interest of an employer in a skilled workforce, is also “a good way to relate to workers”, signalling mutual commitment with workers and employers “investing in one another”.

Oliver Röthig commented on UNI Europa's role in the EU Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition. Here, UNI Europa is collaborating with the employer association ETNO and the European teachers' union. The Coalition's activities are frequently mirrored on the national level and funds are provided to do this. Unions need to show that they have “a real role” in assessing skill needs and providing necessary skills, also identifying adequate processes for timely and incremental updates of skills. Currently, the social partners are not the not strongest voice especially considering skill upgrading on the job, but it is necessary to “make sure it is not just outside providers who tell us” what future skills are supposed to be. Hence, social partners need to be more proactive, bringing their expertise and powers of implementation to the fore in talking to the commission.

4 Addressing digitalisation through collective bargaining: the collective agreement of Deutsche Telekom and ver.di

Jan Öhlmann, deputy chair of the works council “Private Customers” at Telekom Deutschland GmbH presented the collective agreement between Deutsche Telekom and ver.di that regulates mobile and

digital working. This was originally a local company agreement that then was fed into the collective framework agreement. Further details are being specified by company agreements for the respective DT companies.

A recent survey by the German ICT industry association BITKOM reported that in the industry, only 10% of workers currently work (partly) from home. Of those who do not, 37% would like to do so for a few days a week, 20% would like to work remotely every day, and the same percentage prefer going to the office every day. Working remotely may offer more autonomy to workers, better work-life balance and compatibility of family and social life and work as commutes are saved and working time can be adapted to individual rhythms. However, there are risks of extended working hours and round-the-clock availability, increased workload and unpredictable hours. To mitigate these risks, ver.di generally demands collective rules for mobile working:

- Voluntary participation by workers;
- A right to be inaccessible
- Workers' ability to plan through defined working hours and periods for mobile working, with practicable working time records,
- The right for unions to inform employees working remotely
- and assurance that mobile working regulations do not undermine existing laws and rules on working time, health and safety etc.

The German Ministry of Labour's whitebook "Arbeit 4.0" (BMAS, 2017) agrees that these are success factors for a good regulation of mobile working. It adds regular times to be spent in the company, business organisation adequate to mobile working, promotion of learning, awareness of preventative health protection, ergonomic and data security and privacy standards.

Deutsche Telekom has had a collective agreement on "teleworking" since 1998 which has been continuously updated since, and which also explicitly ensured unions' rights to inform employees through the electronic means commonly used in the company.

In the present framework agreement, participation in mobile working is voluntary for employees and there is to be no disadvantage for non-participants. However, as soon as a unit decides to introduce it, every employee is entitled. Exclusion of individual employees is possible if tasks have specific requirements, there are operational concerns (such as very confidential work) or reasons within the person. Currently, the agreement is not in use in service centres.

Mobile working is to be used for a part of working time only. Employees are supposed to spend on average over 50% of their working time at the company. Mobile working does not mean working at a client's site or taking business trips. It means the employee's free choice of the working location as

long as this location fulfils the required standards for data protection, availability, ergonomics etc. Indeed, all opportunities that employees consider adequate to working are accepted as recorded for working time. For example, it is possible to officially work on the train commute to the office. However, the employer can demand an employee's presence in the company at specific times due to operational processes, for example for face-to-face team meetings.

Mobile working is allowed on Monday to Friday between 6 am and 10 pm, in some units only until 8 pm. It is still necessary to apply for overtime, weekend work etc., and company agreements on the design of working times, required presence times in the company and times of availability & non-availability are mandatory. So is time recording, and existing laws and rules on working time must not be undermined. Company agreements and defined standards are mandatory, to guarantee data protection, provide for the necessary technical equipment, safeguard health protection, and for emergency plans in case of system failures. Unions are guaranteed access to necessary communication channels to inform employees off-site.

This agreement interacts with other ones addressing working time and workload: the collective agreement on protection against increasing workload ("Belastungsschutz") requires

- a mandatory recording of key performance indicators for workload and performance pressure;
- standards & structures to work out actions for better working conditions;
- defined escalation steps in case of disagreement between social partners in order to guarantee implementation.

The collective agreement on long-term working time accounts allows that

- • overtime, surcharges etc. can be accumulated, and the employer adds grants for lower and middle incomes;
- • deciding on time withdrawals from the accounts is up to employees,
- • and various ways to take advantage of accounts are provided.

In the discussion Jan Öhlmann said that the collective agreement is perceived to work reasonably well although not all managers are keen on it. Further questions addressed electronic surveillance. There is no additional surveillance and the company is required to pay damages if irregular surveillance happens. Reachability of workers is expected during regular working times with no extra requirements. For the union to reach employees, ver.di is also using the Telekom social internet the company is using, called "youandme". Some unionists created a ver.di pinboard on the site.

Colleagues from France and Greece reported that the agreement is setting an example internationally. A colleague from Greek OTE, a telco provider partly owned by Deutsche Telekom,

reported that the agreement is indeed setting standards internationally. The Greek employer association Community, for now consisting of Deutsche Telekom with other providers invited to join may adopt it, and a 5digit number of Greek telco employees is expected to make use of mobile working.

Concerning the right to unavailability, one comment referred to the paradox for trade unionists: “we are fighting for this right but we don’t use it” to be reachable for colleagues. Participants are aware of the ambiguities around the interest in unavailability which may not just mean time free from work, but also missing out on information, contact and helping colleagues. They concluded that “basically you have to switch the thing off”.

Oliver Röthig pointed out that existing solutions to the right to unavailability vary in the autonomy they assign to employees: Volkswagen has shut off internet servers during non-working hours, whereas the Telekom agreement relies on workers’ self-responsibility.

Nevertheless, the uses of such rights depend on workloads and working times. Hence, limiting work intensification and reducing working hours is one way for collective bargaining to bring the fruits of rationalisation to workers – also allowing more leisure time to spend using (and hopefully, enjoying) quality face-to-face services. The task is to achieve increasingly similar and similarly good conditions in that sense on the European level.

5 The future of social dialogue in the services sector

The final discussion looked towards current developments and future visions of social dialogue in the services sector. The project and also wider discussions on digitalisation show that developments overlap among service sectors. Services are becoming more integrated and interconnected and often face similar problems. Still challenges remain service-specific and different from industry. UNI Europa is currently involved in 12 sectoral social dialogues, which amounts to a considerable group of employer organisations to bring together.

In this context, the sectoral social dialogue on the European level provides specific added value for the EU as social partners are closer to the workplace and have a wider overview of working life and business than representatives of particular companies or consultancies. Skills, demographic change, new forms of work, and assuring a level playing field for both workers and companies are the key subjects. Digitalisation often provides a new angle on these subjects as it enables wider, more disruptive changes. Indeed, even in the Sectoral social dialogue with hairdressers, employers are hosting a conference on digitalisation. Some of these can be described as standardisation, both technologically and institutionally, that does not just affect tools but the entire provision of services.

This has an impact on collective agreements (for example on job descriptions, cf. section 2), but social partners share an interest that collectively agreed standards are not undermined or replaced by regulation or technology. The Digital Skills Coalition is one arena in which social partners can collaborate on this.

Building social partners' capacities is an issue especially in Central and Eastern Europe. Currently, there are few funds available for this and resources on the European level for social dialogue have been reduced. Better access to ESF funds would be needed as currently the ESF channels its funding through national governments. Hence, a budget line for such initiatives at the EU level would be needed.

Currently the European trade Union Council is about to approach the European Commission to enhance sectoral collective bargaining. The aim is to (re-) start the discussion at the EU level, work towards a joint statement by social partners and the Commission, the European Council and Parliament in favour of sectoral collective bargaining before the end of Juncker commission.

Gathering ideas and national good practices is one way of advancing. So is developing education on social dialogue for citizens at large, but also national and European stakeholders and political actors, especially in those sectors and regions where it is still weak and invisible. In Greece, for example, social partners are gradually rebuilding collective bargaining and a social dialogue. In Germany with its somewhat fragmented industrial relations, unions suggest a tax incentive for companies under a collective agreement. Local and regional projects on skill identification and provision (also through ERDF funds) can also involve social partners. UNI Europa's follow-up project addresses the subjects of skills and of atypical self-employment specifically in its exploration of good practices and successful strategies.

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