

Industrial relations and social dialogue

# Social governance of the Recovery and Resilience Facility: Involvement of the national social partners





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# Executive summary

## Introduction

The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) is a temporary financial instrument established by Regulation (EU) 2021/241 in February 2021. Its initial purpose was to support the EU Member States' recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and simultaneously to strengthen their economies and societies and prepare them for the green and digital transition. The RRF was initially framed by the pandemic but has been extended into the medium term (until 2026). The RRF is the cornerstone of the ambitious NextGenerationEU package and has been integrated into the European Semester framework for economic and social policy coordination; RRF funding is intended to address the challenges identified in the country-specific recommendations set out by the Council of the European Union.

The European Commission has encouraged Member State governments to involve the social partners in the European Semester, and the RRF Regulation requires them to be consulted in the preparation and implementation of the national recovery and resilience plans (RRPs). This report reviews the quality of the social partners' involvement in the ongoing implementation of reforms and investments included in the RRPs in 2023. It also examines the quality of their involvement in the preparation of the 2023 national reform programmes (NRPs) as part of the European Semester.

## Policy context

The 2023 European Semester cycle has taken place against the challenging backdrop of the war in Ukraine and the uncertain economic context, including high inflation and supply bottlenecks. These problems have affected the implementation of Member States' RRPs, although the overall operation of the RRF is on track. According to the Commission, by 1 September 2023 the RRF had received 31 payment requests from 19 Member States and had disbursed €153.4 billion. However, some issues related to administrative capacity, difficulties in meeting deadlines because of unexpected delays in works and incurred costs, and the achievement of milestones were reported by some Member States.

Following the amendment of the RRF Regulation, 23 Member States have voluntarily submitted modified RRPs that include a new REPowerEU chapter. Member States submitted these chapters in response to the disruption of the global energy market caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Under the REPowerEU

plan, the RRF supports additional reforms and investments to meet the plan's objectives, such as reducing energy consumption, supporting workforce reskilling for a green future, addressing energy poverty and generally accelerating the clean energy transition.

## Key findings

### Institutional settings for involvement

Each Member State has chosen the most appropriate governance structure for the implementation of its RRP, in accordance with national social dialogue frameworks. The institutional frameworks for involving the social partners are therefore very varied, since some Member States have established specific settings and procedures, and others have used existing social dialogue channels.

In most Member States, the social partners reported being involved through a combination of settings. In Member States where social dialogue is not conducted through formal or institutionalised settings, ad hoc or informal bipartite or tripartite consultations are the main setting for their involvement. In other countries, ad hoc consultation processes have been set up to involve the social partners as an alternative to their participation through well-established social dialogue institutions. In addition, some governments have held consultations as part of efforts to extend the scope of involvement beyond the social partners to civil society organisations.

Existing bipartite and tripartite social dialogue institutions are a common setting for the involvement of the social partners in a number of Member States (Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, France, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia and Slovenia), although in some cases this form of involvement is secondary or supplementary to other settings.

In a few countries, the social partners have been involved through new bodies or specific working groups created in the context of the European Semester or to monitor the implementation of the RRPs. This is the predominant setting in some central and eastern European countries (Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia) and in southern Europe (Italy, Portugal and Spain).

## Quality of involvement

In line with previous findings on the implementation of the RRFs, in most Member States insufficient time for consultations has been identified by the social partners as limiting proper and meaningful consultation.

Similarly, the quality of exchanges with national authorities is generally assessed negatively. The social partners are dissatisfied with their limited ability to influence the implementation of the RRFs, either because of time constraints or owing to a lack of appropriate information or feedback from the national authorities.

These assessments should be understood in a nuanced way, however, and their context taken into account, as they can be influenced by various factors. One of these is the varied pace of implementation across countries. In some Member States, the operation of national RRF monitoring committees is in its early stages, and the social partners' assessments may be affected by discussions related to the composition of these committees or the agreement of procedural rules regarding them.

Employer organisations overall tend to be more satisfied with their involvement in the implementation of reforms and investments in most policy fields than trade unions. This may be explained by the nature of the reforms and investments provided for in national plans.

The social partners' views, however, are influenced by the complexity of the governance structure for the implementation of the RRFs (including ministries, different administrative or regional departments and so on). As a result, it is difficult to provide a proper and meaningful assessment of the various bodies, institutions and committees involved.

According to the social partners, the European Commission has been active in informing them of and involving them in developments related to the RRF. This involvement has taken various forms, including regular exchanges with the Commission's European Semester officers, meetings with the Recovery and Resilience Task Force and participation in fact-finding missions. These opportunities to be heard were appreciated by most social partners that took part.

## Policy pointers

- Since the adoption of the RRF in 2021, during the COVID-19 crisis, it has evolved to adapt to a changing geopolitical environment and challenging economic circumstances. The lessons learned from the first stages of the RRF implementation process by both governments and the social partners should lead now to a more settled second phase during which the social partners should be more regularly and comprehensively involved at various levels.
- The more complex and uncertain the economic context is, the better and broader the social partners' involvement in economic, social and sustainability policymaking should be. This engagement will contribute to ensuring the effectiveness of the structural reforms and investments set out in the RRFs and will increase their legitimacy.
- In line with the recommendation to strengthen social dialogue in the EU adopted by the Council on 12 June 2023 and with the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, the systematic, meaningful and timely involvement of the social partners should receive greater priority in the development of employment and social policies and any other relevant policies during the second phase of the implementation of the RRF, which will run until the end of 2026.



# Introduction

It has been more than two and a half years since the adoption of the NextGenerationEU stimulus package in 2020 and the Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021–2027, the long-term EU budget. The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), the cornerstone of NextGenerationEU, has since entered the second half of its implementation period.

The RRF sets out an ambitious investment and reform agenda, aiming to boost growth in the EU. It is also expected to have a stabilising effect by maintaining investment levels in Member States in a context of rising prices and economic uncertainty. The RRF, as a flexible, performance-based instrument, has become a key component of the EU's future-oriented strategy and particularly of the European Green Deal, the EU's long-term growth plan to make Europe climate neutral by 2050. The integration of the RRF within the European Semester, the EU's annual macroeconomic governance process, streamlines both processes to ensure complementarity.

Similarly to the previous year, the 2023 Semester was strongly influenced by Russia's aggression against Ukraine and subsequent developments (notably the significant rises in energy prices), with far-reaching effects across the Member States. The 2023 European Semester cycle began with the release of the European Commission's Autumn Package, including the Annual Sustainable Growth Survey (ASGS), in November 2022. In May 2023, the European Semester Spring Package was published by the Commission (European Commission, 2023a). It included country reports, employment guidelines and proposals for country-specific recommendations (CSRs) that should be addressed by all Member States, along with other fiscal and financial reports, reviews and guidance concerning the Member States' compliance with deficit and debt criteria.

During the European Semester cycle, the implementation of Member States' RRFs, including the new REPowerEU chapters added in 2023, is monitored and assessed by the Commission. While the streamlined country reports provide an overview of the economic and social developments in Member States, including a forward-looking analysis of their resilience, they also identify the challenges that have been only partially addressed or have not been addressed by their RRFs. Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals is integrated into the European Semester through the assessment of each Member State in the country reports, which also shed light on the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

## Recovery and resilience plans in 2023

According to the European Commission's report on RRF implementation, published in February 2023, 'the RRF has been a vital response to the COVID-19 pandemic. ... With only two years since its inception, the RRF has already delivered significant financial support and kick-started the EU's economic recovery' (European Commission, 2023b, pp. 11–12). This concluding assessment is consistent with the previous interim assessment produced in 2022, which stated that 'the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Plans is producing tangible results on the ground, both for investments and reforms, across the six pillars covered by the Facility' (European Commission, 2022a, p. 2). Another report, published in September 2023, indicates that 'the implementation of the RRF is well underway, within the tight constraints due to its lifespan' (European Commission, 2023c, p. 5).

The work of the European Commission and the Member States on the RRF procedures (such as pre-financing agreements, operational arrangements, disbursements and payments) is now well established, bearing in mind the innovative nature of the RRF as a budgetary support instrument based on anticipation, *ex ante* exchanges and early dialogue between the Commission and the Member States. However, following some criticism drawn from the first phase of the RRF implementation, it has been acknowledged that 'implementation of the RRF requires flexibility on the means to achieve the milestones and targets while remaining firm on the delivery of the essential policy objectives of the measures agreed with the Member States' (European Commission, 2023b, p. 8). As an instrument that is evolving with experience, the RRF has introduced new tools aimed at adding predictability and transparency to the implementation process. These tools aim to recognise 'adverse and unexpected developments' that can influence the implementation, 'minimal deviations' in achieving milestones and targets (not involving more than 5% of agreed amounts) and delays that do not affect the fulfilment of the reforms and investments promised.

The deployment of reforms and investments as part of the RRF has been positive, although the speed and intensity vary widely across Member States. Up to 1 September 2023, the Commission had received 31 payment requests from 19 Member States and disbursed €153.4 billion, representing 30.6% of the approved allocations (EPRS, 2023; European Commission, 2023c). At that time, five Member States

had not yet received payments, either because their RRFs were submitted late and approved only in 2022 or because pre-financing was not requested in 2021, as is the case in Ireland (EPRS, 2023).

It must be noted that while the percentage of milestones and targets assessed as achieved so far (11%) and consequently triggering payments from the European Commission may seem low, other factors in the RRF's financial procedures (for example, the pre-financing step) may distort the overall picture. Equally, the time between pre-financing and payment may hide the fact that many of the quantitative objectives (targets) are associated with multiannual investments, and therefore take more time to achieve.

In addition, the preparation and submission of REPowerEU plans, including revised RRFs, may have slowed down the implementation process in 2023. The high rate of inflation, which has necessitated the review and recalculation of costs and investments, may also have had an effect.

## About this report

Since 2016, Eurofound has been monitoring the involvement of the national social partners in the European Semester and has produced a series of annual reports on the results of this exercise (see, for example, Eurofound, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023). With the RRF's implementation having reached the halfway point, and a substantial number of milestones and targets already achieved, this report reviews the quality of the social partners' involvement in the ongoing implementation of reforms and investments included in the RRFs and in the preparation of the 2023 national reform programmes (NRPs) and the quality of the settings for their involvement.

The report is a continuation of previous Eurofound studies on the involvement of the social partners in the European Semester, particularly the report *Involvement of social partners in the implementation of national recovery and resilience plans* (Eurofound, 2023), in the context of national policymaking. In this regard, the findings provide proxy indicators of the quality of tripartite social dialogue at national level.

The report covers all EU Member States and focuses on tripartite social dialogue related to the implementation of EU policies, in whatever form it takes at national level. As has been reported many times, there is a wide variety of national types of and mechanisms for consultation and participation of the social partners in policymaking. The scope of this variety is enlarged by the role played by regional or local and sectoral social partners in the implementation of the RRFs.

The need for the social partners and other stakeholders to be involved in the preparation and implementation of the RRFs is established in Article 18(4)(q) of the RRF

Regulation of 12 February 2021. The regulation stipulates that the RRFs should set out 'a summary of the consultation process, conducted in accordance with the national legal framework, with local and regional authorities, the social partners, civil society organisations and other relevant stakeholders, for the preparation and, where possible, the implementation of the plan'. The article also states that RRFs should summarise how the inputs of the stakeholders are reflected in the plan. These provisions were developed by the Commission in the document *Guidance to Member States: Recovery and resilience plans – Part 2*, in Part 3, Section 5, which states that 'the summary should cover the scope, type, and timing of consultation activities, as well as how the views of the stakeholders are reflected in the plan' (European Commission, 2021, p. 11).

In addition, the ASGS that launched the 2023 cycle stated that:

*The active involvement of stakeholders, through dedicated regular meetings, is important ... The Commission calls on all Member States to engage actively with social partners, local and regional authorities and other stakeholders, in particular representatives of civil society organisations, through regular exchanges.*

(European Commission, 2022b, p. 17)

This commitment was restated in the ASGS that launched the European Semester cycle for 2024:

*The involvement of the European Parliament, the Council, social partners and other key stakeholders will continue to be a key feature. Close cooperation is vital, achieved through regular meetings at key Semester and RRF stages. Member States are urged to actively engage with stakeholders, including social partners, local and regional authorities, as well as relevant civil society organisations.*

(European Commission, 2023d, p. 11)

The EU social partners from both sides of industry have highlighted the weak involvement of their national affiliates in some Member States and the need for stronger action to monitor and promote it (ETUI, 2023). Engagement will contribute to fully realising the potential benefits of the recovery plans, since the social partners can act as important bridge-builders through jointly agreed solutions to ensure that the measures foreseen are both economically feasible and socially acceptable (BusinessEurope, SGI Europe and SMEUnited, 2024).

In addition, an informal RRF expert group has been set up, and in one of its meetings Member States presented their good practices on three topics, one of which was the involvement of stakeholders in the preparation and implementation of RRFs (European Commission, 2023c).

## Methodology and analysis

The findings of this report are based on information collected by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents (NEC) from the social partners and national authorities (in other words, government representatives) in the Member States. Most of the views gathered were those of national peak-level organisations, such as confederations.

A standardised questionnaire was used to gather the social partners' and national authorities' views on the quality of the social partners' involvement in preparing the NRPs and the implementation of the RRP during the 2023 European Semester cycle, as well as other information such as their involvement in other exchanges with the European Commission in 2023.

The respondents were also asked for their views on the extent to which there had been changes in the features of the institutional framework for the social partners' involvement in the European Semester. To assess the quality of their involvement in policymaking, the social partners were asked to discuss their role in the implementation of a maximum of five relevant reforms or investments in the fields of employment and social and economic policy included in the RRP. A total of 73 policy measures (reforms and investments) were selected.

In the context of the survey conducted among the social partners and national authorities, involvement in implementation is understood as participation in any form in the preparation or design of a specific measure or in its practical implementation (as a key player, for example). Furthermore, similar to Eurofound's previous reports on this topic, this report applies the criteria that for a consultation to be viewed as involvement, it should be timely and meaningful.

The information for this report was collected mainly from June to July 2022. A total of 174 responses were gathered, which offer an overall picture of the degree of involvement of the social partners. These responses came from the following types of stakeholders:

- 68 trade union representatives
- 51 employer organisation representatives
- 51 representatives of national authorities
- 4 European Semester officers or other experts

While this survey is not statistically representative because of the number of measures analysed (73) and the number of stakeholders consulted, the breadth and consistency of the results across Member States allow indicative conclusions to be drawn.

The analysis of involvement in the implementation of the RRP and in the drafting of the NRPs was based on the social partners' assessments, using quality standards previously defined by Eurofound. These standards provide a normative framework for assessing

the quality of involvement, which allows the production of evidence-based results.

As a rule, the analysis gives greatest weight to views that employer organisations and trade unions share, but the opinions of all stakeholders interviewed are deemed worthy of attention. The results of the triangular exercise between employer organisations, trade unions and national authorities are shown in the various tables in the report using the labels 'employer organisations and trade unions agree' (with the assessment) and 'overall agreement among all parties' (employer organisations, trade unions and national authorities all agree with the assessment). Diverging views between employer organisations and trade unions are noted when they have strongly opposed positions.

The maps and tables in the report reflect the fact that for some countries, the views of more than one employer organisation or trade union are represented, and there may be internal disagreement within either side or both sides, whereas in other countries only one employer organisation or one trade union is represented, in which case just one view is expressed by either side. The size and representativeness of the organisations is not taken into account in the statistical analysis, which may distort the results in the country. In any case, caution is required when interpreting the results, as they are based on the subjective views of individual respondents, provided on behalf of their organisation only.

## Structure of the report

This report comprises five chapters following this introduction.

Chapter 1 analyses the institutional frameworks for and the overall quality of the involvement of the social partners in the institutional settings in the context of RRP implementation.

Chapter 2 analyses the involvement of the social partners in the implementation of the RRP in 2023 based on measures in which social partners have or have not been involved.

Chapter 3 assesses the social partners' involvement in the drafting of the NRPs for 2023.

Chapter 4 presents other types of social partner involvement corresponding to other stages in the European Semester cycle, namely information sharing and the exchanges between the social partners and the European Commission.

Chapter 5 discusses the key findings of the analysis and presents policy pointers based on them.



# 1 Institutional frameworks for social partner involvement in RRP implementation

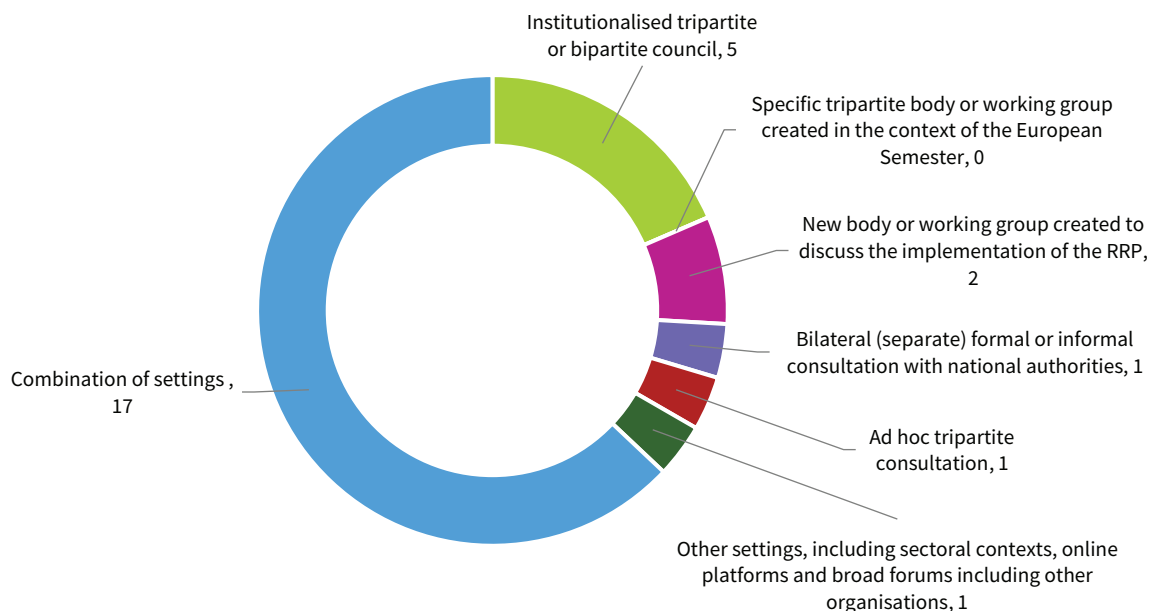
This chapter analyses the features of the institutional governance frameworks for involving the social partners in RRP implementation in the Member States and the quality of their involvement. It starts by describing the main features of the different institutional governance frameworks or settings established in the Member States. These settings are grouped into three categories, from more institutionalised to less institutionalised: existing social dialogue institutions, specific bodies or working groups set up for RRP implementation, and ad hoc or more informal settings. The quality of the social partners' involvement in the two most institutionalised categories of setting are analysed. In the case of the third category of less institutionalised, ad hoc or informal settings, the nature of the social partners' involvement is described.

## Institutional settings categorised

The RRF Regulation, as well as the European Commission guideline on it, gives the Member States the autonomy to set up procedures for the social partners' involvement in the RRF process in accordance with national social dialogue frameworks and practices. Previous Eurofound research found that the channels and settings in the Member States for this purpose are quite diverse.

The first step in the research was to identify all the settings and channels for involving the social partners in the implementation of the RRP reforms and investments as part of the 2023 European Semester cycle. Figure 1 shows the overall picture, with at least six different types of settings. Moreover, in 17 Member States, consultation was carried out in a combination of settings.

**Figure 1: Number of Member States that use each type of institutional setting for involving the social partners in RRP implementation**



**Note:** No Member State used only a 'specific tripartite body or working group created in the context of the European Semester', hence the 0 in the chart; however, this type of setting was used in combination with other types of setting.

**Source:** Authors, based on NEC contributions

**Table 1: Categories of settings for involvement of social partners in RRP implementation and associated Member States**

Existing social dialogue institutions	Specific bodies or working groups set up for RRP implementation or in the framework of the European Semester	Other settings
Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, France, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia	Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain	Austria, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden

**Note:** Some Member States are included in more than one category, as in many cases the social partners are involved in a combination of settings. 'Other settings' include ad hoc or informal tripartite or bipartite consultations, online platforms and so on.

**Source:** Authors, based on NEC contributions

Since in most countries the social partners have been involved through a combination of settings, the settings identified were grouped into three categories for the purpose of summarising the findings:

- existing social dialogue institutions, such as economic and social committees
- specific bodies or working groups created for RRP implementation, generally through specific legislation setting out the legal statutes of the body
- other forms of social partner involvement, for example through informal or ad hoc consultation processes, including sectoral processes and broader consultation procedures implemented through online platforms

These categories are not mutually exclusive, meaning that in some countries two categories of setting for social partner involvement can be found. Table 1 classifies the Member States according to the settings they have established.

A description of the social partners' assessments of their involvement in each category of setting is presented in the subsections below. The analysis aims to identify different patterns of social partner involvement in the implementation of the RRP based on their participation in different settings at national level.

### Involvement through existing social dialogue institutions

As can be seen from Table 1, in 12 Member States, the social partners were at least partly involved through existing social dialogue institutions. In some, namely Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, France and Malta, this was the only form of involvement reported. In the others – the central and eastern European countries Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, as well as Portugal – this form of involvement was supplemented by participation in other settings.

### Social dialogue institutions only

Below are summaries of the social partners' involvement in RRP implementation where this has taken place through existing social dialogue institutions only.

- In **Belgium**, the social partners participated in regular meetings of different tripartite institutions at national and regional levels to discuss updates to the implementation of the RRP (the Central Council of Economy, the National Labour Council and the Federal Council for Sustainable Development).
- In **Bulgaria**, the social partners were consulted on several resolutions issued by the Economic and Social Council in relation to the RRP. In addition, information exchange by email occurred through the European Affairs Council and its working groups, although the social partners' involvement is assessed as being a formality, with little room for meaningful exchanges.
- In **Croatia**, the social partners were consulted in the preparation and implementation of the RRP through the Economic and Social Council. However, they emphasised that they were only involved when the draft of the RRP was almost finished.
- In **Cyprus**, the social partners were consulted on RRP issues related to labour and social policies through the tripartite Labour Advisory Body, which is the main national institution for social dialogue. However, these policies constitute only a small part of the RRP. While the body was the main channel for consultation reported by most social partners (the Pancyprian Federation of Labour (PEO), the Cyprus Workers' Confederation (SEK) and the Democratic Labour Federation of Cyprus (DEOK)), some social partners mentioned alternative channels, such as the Joint Staff Committee for the public service (information provided by the Pancyprian Civil Servants Trade Union (PASDY)) and the Technical Committee for Strengthening the Circular Economy (information provided by the Employers and Industrialists Federation (OEB)).

- In **France**, the social partners are represented on the European and International Social Dialogue Committee, which is the main tripartite institution with responsibility for the implementation of the RRP. They are also involved in other institutions and legal procedures that enable consultation on economic and social policies.
- In **Malta**, the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development organises regular meetings between the social partners and the government to conduct consultations regarding the European Semester. This body also includes the Civil Society Committee and the Gozo Regional Committee. The social partners also noted that the Malta–EU Steering and Action Committee, which had a role in consultations for the European Semester, is no longer so relevant.

### Social dialogue institutions in combination with specific working groups or other settings

In Hungary, Poland, Portugal and Slovakia, the social partners' involvement through social dialogue institutions was supplemented with participation in bodies or specific working groups created in the framework of the European Semester or with the purpose of discussing the implementation of the RRP.

- In **Hungary**, some issues related to the European Semester were discussed by the National Economic and Social Council, but a specific RRP monitoring committee was established in September 2021. The committee comprises representatives of civil society organisations appointed by the national government. As discussed in a previous Eurofound report (Eurofound, 2023), the committee does not represent the major trade unions (for example, the Hungarian Trade Union Confederation (MASZSZ)) or employer organisations (the National Association of Entrepreneurs and Employers (VOSZ) and the Confederation of Hungarian Employers and Industrialists (MGYOSZ)) and, as a result, was criticised due to its lack of representativeness. In response to those concerns, the composition of the committee was amended to include other organisations after an open call for membership in early 2023. The new monitoring committee has 10 members. On the trade unions' side, the Union of Teachers (PSZ) and the Independent Healthcare Union (FESZ) have been included. On the employers' side, VOSZ has become a member. Some civil society bodies have also been included. The new committee was expected to start operating in September 2023.<sup>1</sup>
- In **Poland**, the social partners have been involved in RRP implementation through the Social Dialogue Council, with a focus on an RRP milestone related to the improvement of legislative procedures through an agreement on a resolution aimed at enhancing public consultation processes and transparency in the law-making process. The national RRP monitoring committee initially did not include representatives of the social partner organisations. This structure was criticised in a joint statement of the social partners that called on the government to strengthen social dialogue in the context of RRP implementation. Following the release of this joint statement, the government included six representatives of the social partners but excluded three social partners with legal representative status. The social partners therefore called on the government to increase the number of seats on the committee in 2022. According to the information reported in 2022, the government planned to fulfil the social partners' demands and include the nine social partners with representative status on the committee. In May 2023, the committee had a total of 60 members, including representatives of the social partners and other civil society organisations. The national RRP monitoring committee's core responsibilities include monitoring the implementation of reforms and investments associated with the RRP and issuing recommendations aimed at improving their effectiveness. Different subcommittees for monitoring implementation in critical areas were also created, even though the responsibility for executing individual reforms and investments lies with the government.
- In **Portugal**, the Standing Committee on Social Dialogue is the main forum for the discussion of the RRP. It is crucial for accessing specific consultative bodies set up to monitor and implement the RRP, notably the national RRP monitoring committee. The social partners are involved in different committees dealing with specific policy areas, depending on their interest (for instance, trade unions are involved in the social affairs committee, while employer organisations are not, and vice versa for the economy and enterprise committee). There is also a standing committee comprising the president of the national RRP monitoring committee and the members appointed by the managing body of the committee (the interministerial committee).

<sup>1</sup> From a broader perspective, in May 2023 Hungary set up an ad hoc subcommittee of the tripartite Permanent Consultation Forum to ensure that the design, implementation, monitoring and review of the strategic framework for active labour market policies (ALMPs) are conducted in cooperation with the social partners. Setting up this subcommittee is part of the enabling conditions under cohesion policy funding (European Commission, 2023e).

- In **Slovakia**, the social partners had some opportunities to share their views on the RRP through their representatives in the Council for Economic and Social Partnership of the Slovak Republic, although they had limited opportunities to influence its implementation. The social partners are also represented in the government's council for the RRP, along with regional governments and civil society organisations. The body was established in 2022 and performs an advisory role in relation to the implementation of the RRP. Its meetings are called by the National Implementation and Coordination Authority, normally twice a year.

In another two countries, Czechia and Slovenia, consultations through tripartite institutionalised settings were supplemented with bilateral consultations with national authorities.

- In **Czechia**, the involvement of the social partners through existing social dialogue institutions was organised by way of a tripartite EU expert team within the Council of Economic and Social Agreement. However, the social partners emphasised that the consultations were only partially or were not related to RRP measures but instead addressed broader measures to tackle inflation, the energy crisis and the fiscal imbalance.
- In **Slovenia**, the social partners were involved in the implementation of the RRP to a limited extent through the Economic and Social Council. The council coordinates legislative proposals provided for in the RRP, and reports on the implementation of the RRP are submitted regularly. In addition, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia (GZS) reported that it had had several meetings with the Ministry of the Economy, Tourism and Sport concerning the implementation of REPowerEU programmes.

### Involvement through specific bodies or working groups for RRP implementation

Stakeholders who were contacted reported that in seven Member States the social partners were at least partly involved through specific bodies or working groups set up for RRP implementation (Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Spain). However, as mentioned in the previous section, in most of these countries, the social partners' participation in these new settings was complementary to their participation in existing social dialogue institutions. In fact, Italy and Romania are the only countries in which participation through specific bodies or working groups

was reported as the main or only setting for the social partners' involvement, while in Spain this setting was supplemented with other forms of involvement through ad hoc tripartite consultations.

- In **Italy**, the newly established RRP steering committee assumed the advisory functions formerly developed by the Economic, Social and Territorial Partnership Table. An employer organisation (Confesercenti) mentioned that it was involved in other professional bodies or committees because of its role in the implementation of specific RRP milestones.
- In **Romania**, the Ministry of Investment and European Projects set up the RRP monitoring committee in 2022 as a special body with the explicit purpose of involving the social partners in monitoring the implementation of the RRP. The body includes all nationally representative trade unions (the National Trade Union Confederation (Cartel ALFA), the National Trade Union Bloc (BNS), the National Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Romania (CNSLR-Frațja), the Democratic Trade Union Confederation of Romania (CSDR) and the National Trade Union Confederation 'Meridian' (CSN Meridian)) and employer confederations (the General Confederation of the Romanian Industrial Employers (UGIR); the Romanian National Employers (PNR); the Romanian Employers' Confederation of Industry, Agriculture, Construction and Services (Conpirom); Concordia Employers' Confederation; and the National Council of Small and Medium Private Enterprises in Romania (CNIPMMR)), alongside civil society organisations.<sup>2</sup>
- In **Spain**, a social dialogue committee for recovery, transformation and resilience was established in November 2020, with a view to monitoring the implementation of policy measures and major reforms adopted as part of the RRP. It comprises the government and national peak-level social partners (the General Union of Workers (UGT), Workers' Commissions (CCOO) and the Spanish Confederation of Business Organizations (CEOE)). Having met twice in 2022, the social partners considered their involvement through this body to have been a process merely to share information. The social partners were also involved through specific social dialogue committees that are normally related to major reforms to be applied by the government (to pensions, for instance). The social partners also reported participating in ad hoc tripartite consultations, depending on the relevant ministry or reform.

<sup>2</sup> In December 2022, Romania, in its RRP, adopted a new social dialogue law to address deficiencies in the social dialogue process, in line with the relevant CSRs adopted by the Council and the related International Labour Organization recommendation. The new law includes some revisions of the definition of economic sectors as a basis for further sector-level collective agreements (European Commission, 2023e).



## Involvement through other settings

The largest group of Member States comprises those in which the social partners were involved through less institutionalised settings, such as formal or informal ad hoc consultation processes, sectoral contexts, and online platforms, which are often shared with other organisations. This group includes Austria, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden. As already mentioned, in some countries these settings are supplementary to other forms of involvement through social dialogue institutions (Czechia and Slovenia) or specific bodies or groups for RRP implementation in the context of the European Semester (Spain).

Significantly, ad hoc or informal bipartite or tripartite consultations were reported as the only setting for the social partners' involvement in the Nordic countries and Germany, where social dialogue is not conducted in formal or institutionalised settings.

- In **Denmark**, the social partners were consulted through different social dialogue forums (committees, councils and boards) in addition to being involved in a European Semester-specific working group (the Contact Committee for European Growth and Employment, which consists of a wide range of civil society organisations, as well as the social partners and governmental agencies). The purpose of this committee is mostly to share information.
- In **Finland**, the social partners were mainly involved in the design of the RRP, but both trade unions and employer organisations agree that there was no social dialogue on its implementation. In the view of one trade union (the Confederation of Unions for Professional and Managerial Staff in Finland (Akava)), there was no further need for involvement once the measures were agreed, but the employer organisation (the Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK)) would like to be more involved in the implementation of the RRP. According to EK, some efforts have been made by groups on a voluntary basis to discuss the opportunities for Finnish businesses provided by the RRP instruments. However, these have not been comprehensive enough. National authorities (such as the Ministry of Finance) also noted that schedules were tight and did not see the need for the further involvement of the social partners.
- In **Germany**, joint meetings with the social partners, welfare organisations and ministries (for employment and social affairs, finance, and the economy and climate protection) took place to discuss RRP implementation, although they were mostly for information sharing.

- In **Sweden**, several tripartite ad hoc meetings were reported, and the social partners have been involved in consultations during the implementation phase of the RRP.

In Austria, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, although social dialogue is generally carried out through well-established tripartite bodies, consultation for the RRP was carried out in alternative settings.

- In **Austria**, the social partners' involvement is grounded in well-established practices of partnership and cooperation between the representatives of employers and employees (and national authorities) at different levels. Thus, social partner consultation is based on permanent but informal cooperation, rather than on legal regulations.
- In **Luxembourg**, the main form of involvement of the social partners has been through a specific ad hoc tripartite working group. This group was established following the social partners' criticism of their lack of proper consultation through the Economic and Social Council. In response, the government agreed to revise the consultation procedure and established a new procedure. This reduced the number of peak-level representatives and established a new calendar of meetings dedicated to taking stock of the implementation of the 2022 NRP and RRP and discussing the CSRs. It included a meeting held in 2023, during which the government presented the 2023 NRP and RRP.
- In **the Netherlands**, institutionalised settings were not used for the involvement of the social partners, and only a meeting with government representatives was reported.

In two countries, Greece and Ireland, the decision by their governments to hold ad hoc bilateral consultations is perceived by the social partners as a way to avoid their further involvement in the implementation of the RRP.

- In **Greece**, the social partners noted the absence of an institutionalised setting for the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the RRP, although they were involved in the design of the plan through the Economic and Social Council. The Greek employer organisation the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises (SEV) was not invited to a consultation or information exchange on the implementation of the RRP. The Greek General Confederation of Labour (GSEE) trade union noted that the individual policies of the RRP were implemented by the ministries. However, the social partners were not provided with a clear picture of or information about which projects of the ministries are integrated into and implemented through the RRP. Therefore, although they participated in some meetings or bodies, the social partners do not know whether they were linked to RRP implementation.

- In **Ireland**, there is a sharp contrast between the social partners' and national authorities' views regarding the involvement of the former in the implementation of the RRP. The national authorities argue that the social partners were given every opportunity to contribute to the RRP through consultation forums such as the Labour Employer Economic Forum and the National Economic Dialogue. However, the trade unions consider that the current forums established for social dialogue are not fit for purpose, particularly with regard to consultations on the RRP. In particular, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) reported that, contrary to the experience in 2022, the Department of the Taoiseach had organised a 90-minute meeting with ICTU, the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) and a range of other civil society organisations on the RRP on 1 February 2023. ICTU said that the plan had been discussed only 'very tangentially' and added that, while the unions had said that they were prepared to discuss the plan further, the 'meeting was the sum total of engagement'.

The picture is somewhat different in the Baltic states, where the use of less institutionalised settings is intended to extend involvement to civil society organisations in addition to the traditional social partners.

- In **Estonia**, the social partners, along with other civil society organisations, were already involved in the consultation process for the development of the Estonia 2035 strategy. The strategy identifies the challenges and priorities on which the national RRP and the related development plans are based. The social partners are also included in the Monitoring Committee on EU Structural Funds, where RRP-funded measures are also discussed. In addition, they participate in the steering groups that meet regularly to monitor the implementation of the Estonia 2035 strategy, which, as noted, is aligned with the RRP.
- In **Lithuania**, the Tripartite Council of the Republic of Lithuania, currently the main social dialogue institution in the country, has not played a role in the implementation of the national RRP. Instead, alternative channels for informal (online) consultation have been established by the government, open to all civil society organisations and mostly information-sharing in nature.

- In **Latvia**, the social partners have not been directly involved in the implementation of policy measures and reforms associated with the RRP. They reported that large infrastructure and digitalisation projects are being implemented in which they have had little capacity to get involved. No new settings have been established, and their main form of involvement has been through ad hoc meetings with large groups of participants of changing composition (involving organisations other than those of the social partners). A supervision committee is also in place, which is a state body based on mandated representatives of selected institutions whose aim is to supervise all processes connected with the use of EU funds.

## Quality of involvement of social partners in institutional settings

This section analyses the quality of the main settings for the involvement of the social partners in RRP implementation. In cases where two settings apply, the predominant setting is selected based on the social partners' views provided and the assessments of the NEC.

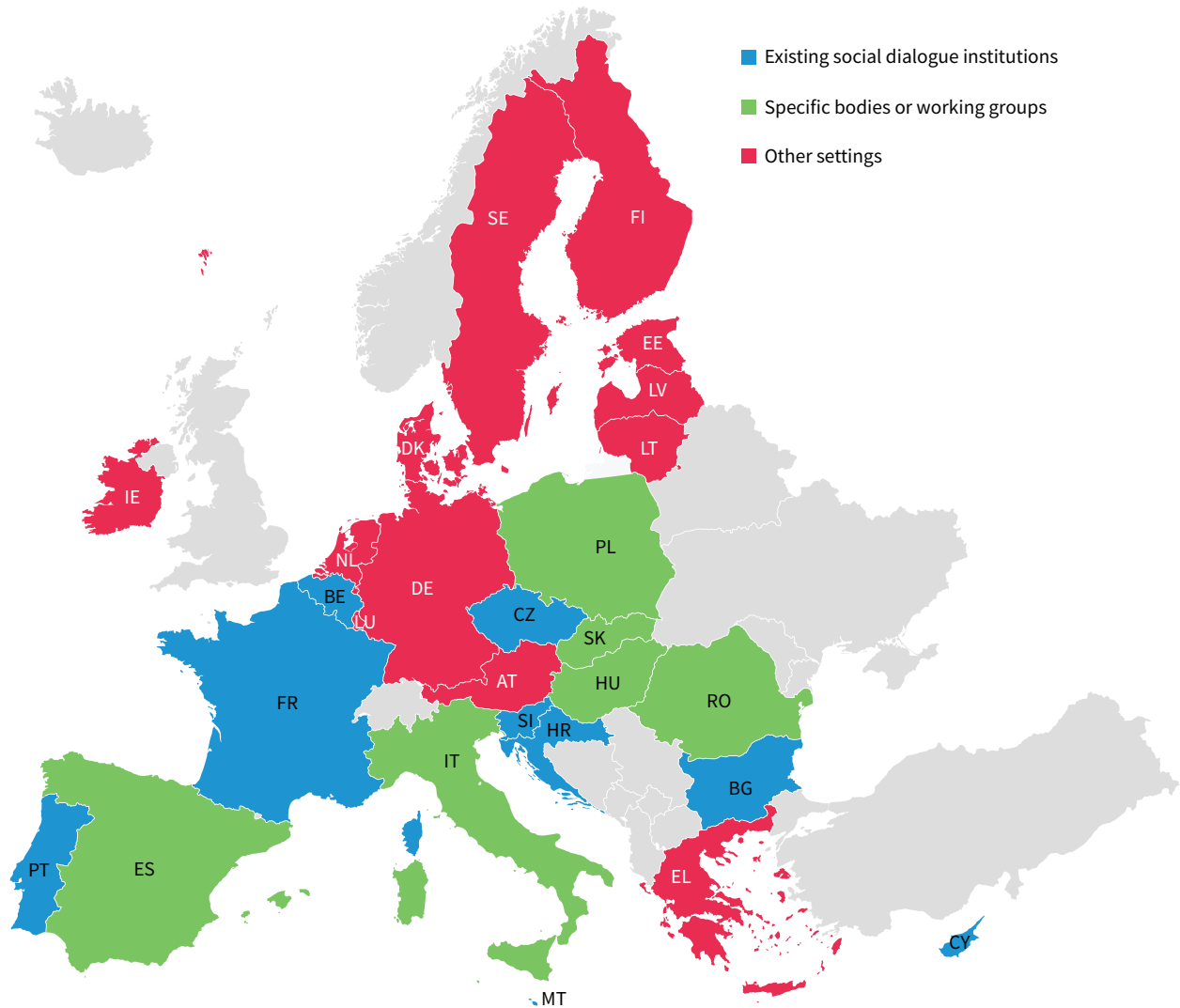
Figure 2 illustrates the main settings for social partner involvement in the 27 EU Member States, based on the following breakdown:

- existing social dialogue institutions: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, France, Malta, Portugal and Slovenia
- specific bodies or working groups created for RRP monitoring and implementation: Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Spain
- other settings (ad hoc consultations and so on): Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Sweden

For those countries where the main setting was either an existing social dialogue institution or a specific body or working group created for RRP monitoring and implementation, the quality of involvement is measured in terms of input, as in previous Eurofound studies (Eurofound, 2022, 2023). To achieve this, three main indicators are analysed that derive from the social partners' and national authorities' assessments:

- adequate time allotted for meaningful consultation
- adequate forms of involvement
- meaningful exchange with national authorities, understood as opportunities for the social partners to contribute to the implementation of the RRP and to receive a response or feedback from the government

Figure 2: Main setting for involving social partners in RRP implementation, EU Member States, 2023



Source: Authors, based on NEC contributions

For those countries where consultation was less institutionalised and was not carried out through any specific body or social dialogue institution, an overall analysis is presented.

### Quality of social partners' involvement through existing social dialogue institutions

#### Adequate time for meaningful exchanges

Of the nine countries where the social partners were mainly involved through institutionalised social dialogue (Table 2), in four (Belgium, Bulgaria, France and Slovenia) both the trade unions and employer organisations reported that the time allotted for

consultation or the meetings held for this purpose had been insufficient or poor. Only in Czechia did both social partner groups report having had sufficient time for consultation.

In the remaining four Member States (Croatia, Cyprus, Malta and Portugal), the social partners disagreed on the assessment of the time allotted. In Croatia, Cyprus and Malta, the employer organisations considered that the time available for consultation had been at least sufficient. In Cyprus, Malta and Portugal, the views of the trade unions diverged. In Portugal, one union was satisfied that the time allotted had been sufficient (the General Confederation of Portuguese Workers (CGTP)), but the employer organisations and one union (UGTP) complained that the time allotted had been insufficient.

**Table 2: Time allotted for institutionalised tripartite or bipartite social dialogue**

	Very good	Good	Sufficient	Insufficient	Poor
Employer organisations and trade unions agree			Czechia	Belgium, Slovenia	
<b>Diverging views</b>					
Employer organisations	Cyprus, Malta (MDA)	Malta (MEA)	Croatia	Bulgaria, France, Portugal	
Trade unions	Cyprus (PASYDY)		Malta (GWU), Portugal (CGTP)	Croatia, Malta (For.U.M.), Portugal (UGTP)	Bulgaria, Cyprus (PEO, SEK, DEOK), France, Malta (UHM Voice of the Workers)

**Note:** For.U.M., Forum of Maltese Unions; GWU, General Workers' Union; MDA, Malta Developers Association; MEA, Malta Employers' Association.

**Source:** Authors, based on NEC contributions

### Adequate forms of involvement

The social partners provided a mixed assessment of the quality of their form of involvement in institutionalised social dialogue settings (Table 3). In Belgium and Czechia, both groups of social partners agreed in assessing their forms of involvement as good and sufficient, respectively. However, it should be noted that in Czechia the social partners' response referred to their involvement in general social dialogue and not to their role in the implementation of the RRP. In contrast, in Bulgaria, Portugal and Slovenia, both groups of social partners shared a negative view, either poor or insufficient, of the forms of their involvement.

In the remaining four Member States (Croatia, Cyprus, France and Malta), the social partners disagreed on the assessment of the form of their involvement. In these countries, employer organisations and one union (in Cyprus) considered that the form of consultation had been at least sufficient. However, in the case of Croatia it is worth mentioning that both social partners stated that they had been shown only the final version of the RRP document and had not been properly involved in the implementation of the RRP.

### Meaningful exchange of views

Regarding the quality of their exchanges with national authorities, both social partner groups in Belgium, Czechia and France agreed in rating these exchanges as either good or sufficient (Table 4). However, in three countries (Bulgaria, Portugal and Slovenia), both employer organisations and trade unions negatively assessed their exchanges with national authorities, rating them as poor or insufficient. In Slovenia, the social partners stressed that they had had little influence on the content of the measures or on their implementation, due to time constraints in meetings and a lack of feedback from the government. In Bulgaria, the social partners considered that consultations had been very formal and unsatisfactory, because most communication took place by email, which is an obstacle to the effective exchange of views.

The views of the social partners diverged in Croatia, Cyprus and Malta. In Croatia, the social partners gave different assessments of their exchanges, although both employer organisations and trade unions stated that they had not had the opportunity to influence the content of the RRP or its implementation.

**Table 3: Adequacy of the form of involvement in institutionalised tripartite or bipartite social dialogue**

	Very good	Good	Sufficient	Insufficient	Poor
Employer organisations and trade unions agree		Belgium	Czechia	Portugal	
<b>Diverging views</b>					
Employer organisations	Cyprus	Malta (MEA)	Croatia, France	Bulgaria, Malta (MDA)	Slovenia
Trade unions	Cyprus (PASYDY)			Croatia, Malta, Slovenia	Bulgaria, Cyprus (PEO, SEK, DEOK), France

**Note:** MDA, Malta Developers Association; MEA, Malta Employers' Association.

**Source:** Authors, based on NEC contributions

**Table 4: Meaningful exchange of views through institutionalised tripartite or bipartite social dialogue**

	Very good	Good	Sufficient	Insufficient	Poor
Employer organisations and trade unions agree		Belgium	Czechia		
<b>Diverging views</b>					
Employer organisations	Cyprus	France, Malta (MEA)	Croatia	Bulgaria, France, Malta (MDA), Portugal (CIP)	Portugal (CCP), Slovenia
Trade unions	Cyprus (PASYDY)		France	Croatia, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia	Bulgaria, Cyprus (PEO, SEK, DEOK)

**Note:** CCP, Portuguese Commerce and Services Confederation; CIP, Confederation of Portuguese Industry; MDA, Malta Developers Association; MEA, Malta Employers' Association.

**Source:** Authors, based on NEC contributions

## Quality of social partners' involvement through specific bodies or working groups

### Adequate time for meaningful exchanges

Among the six countries where specific bodies or working groups have been established for the implementation of the RRP, in Hungary and Spain both groups of social partners agreed in rating the time allotted for discussions as either poor or insufficient (Table 5). In Spain, the social partners stated that only one meeting had been organised in which the government informed them about policy decisions. However, these decisions had already been made public.

In contrast, in Poland and Romania the social partners agreed on the adequacy of the time allotted. However, in Poland they stated that the national monitoring committee was in its early stages, and that it was difficult to provide an assessment of its operation. In Italy, trade unions and employer organisations disagreed on the time allotted for exchanges in the steering committee, with employer organisations more satisfied than unions. In Slovakia, although both social partner groups participate in the government council for the RRP, only the trade unions provided an assessment of their involvement, which they deemed

positive. The trade unions stressed that, as with other reform processes, they lacked time to prepare for the meetings and consultations established by law, and that these were merely formal without meaningful discussions on the implementation of the RRP.

### Adequate forms of involvement

With regard to the quality of the information made available by national authorities, a similar picture emerges from reports by the social partners involved in these settings and reports from those involved through established social dialogue institutions. In Hungary, Romania and Spain, both the trade unions and employer organisations assessed as insufficient or poor the form in which they had been involved in the RRP monitoring committees in their countries. In Hungary, at the time of writing, the new RRP monitoring committee had not started its operation. In Romania, during the most recent exchanges of the RRP monitoring committee, the trade unions criticised the lack of transparency in the negotiation and development of the RRP and issues related to non-compliance with national legislation on social dialogue. In Spain, both groups of social partners agreed that the government had not shared enough information in advance.

**Table 5: Time allotted in specific bodies or working groups for RRP implementation or for the European Semester**

	Very good	Good	Sufficient	Insufficient	Poor
Employer organisations and trade unions agree		Poland	Romania		Hungary
<b>Diverging views</b>					
Employer organisations		Italy (Confindustria)	Italy (Confesercenti)	Spain	
Trade unions			Slovakia	Italy	Spain

**Note:** No information available for employer organisations in Slovakia.

**Source:** Authors, based on NEC contributions

**Table 6: Meaningful exchange of views in working groups for RRP implementation or the European Semester**

	Very good	Good	Sufficient	Insufficient	Poor
Employer organisations and trade unions agree			Poland	Romania	Hungary
<b>Diverging views</b>					
Employer organisations		Italy (Confindustria)	Italy (Confesercenti)	Spain	
Trade unions			Slovakia	Italy	Spain

Source: Authors, based on NEC contributions

In contrast, in Poland both groups of social partners assessed positively the procedural rules adopted and the forms of their involvement. However, work in the national RRP monitoring committee is in its early stages, making it difficult to provide an overall assessment of the quality. The views of the social partners in Italy diverge in regard to the adequacy of the forms their involvement, where the employer organisations made a more positive assessment than trade unions. The representatives of the Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL) stated that the steering committee had convened only once and without clear requests for contributions from the social partners.

### Meaningful exchange of views

Among countries classified in this group, Poland is the only Member State in which employer organisations and trade unions agreed in rating the exchange of views with national authorities as sufficient (Table 6). In Hungary, Romania and Spain, the social partners had an overall negative view of their exchanges in their national RRP monitoring committees. In Hungary, this is explained by the fact that the new committee was not expected to start operating until September 2023. In Romania, however, the social partners raised concerns about their limited representativeness and involvement in the decision-making process related to new investments and reforms adopted in the RRP. The views of the social partners diverged in Italy, where the employer organisations gave a more positive assessment than the trade unions.

### Quality of social partners' involvement in other settings

As mentioned above, in 12 Member States (Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Sweden), the national authorities provided other types of settings for the involvement of the social partners. These range from informal or ad hoc bipartite or tripartite consultations to other types of settings open to the participation of other stakeholders (including at sectoral level and through online platforms). Given the diversity of settings for the involvement of the social partners, this section aims to summarise the main

information and assessments from the national contributions.

Ad hoc tripartite or bipartite consultations are prevalent forms of involvement in countries such as Denmark, Finland, Germany and Sweden, where general social dialogue is not conducted through formal or institutionalised cross-sectoral tripartite bodies such as social and economic councils (Eurofound, 2020). Previous research has consistently shown that these countries perform well in general social dialogue (Eurofound, 2020, 2023). Nevertheless, the data gathered show a rather negative assessment by the social partners of the quality of their involvement in RRP implementation in these countries.

In Germany, both employer organisations and trade unions reported their involvement in regular meetings with federal authorities in charge of the implementation of the RRP. However, they both complained about the limited information available to prepare for the meetings and the limited time allotted for meaningful discussion.

Similar issues were raised by the social partners in Denmark, Finland and Sweden, although more frequently in connection with the timing of the RRP's preparation than its implementation. In Finland, both groups of social partners reported their lack of involvement in the implementation phase of the RRP, but they had different views on the necessity of getting involved. A trade union confederation (Akava) showed an interest in being informed about the progress of RRP implementation but did not see its participation in this phase as important, as long as it was part of the design process. In contrast, the employer organisation EK would like to see more social dialogue even in the implementation phase. In Sweden, the social partners stated that their involvement had been limited to a couple of informal meetings with government representatives. However, they did not see the need for their further involvement in RRP implementation, as they had been involved in the design of the plan, and they are involved in regular policymaking channels through which most of the specific measures are implemented.

Particular attention must be drawn to the cases of Austria, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, where although social dialogue takes place through well-established tripartite bodies, consultation for the RRP was carried out through alternative settings. In Austria, the social partners reported being satisfied with the quality of their involvement. Their involvement in the implementation of measures related to the RRP has been accomplished through well-established sectoral social partnership structures, which provide for the statutory involvement of social partners at different levels. In Luxembourg, the social partners criticised their lack of proper consultation through the Economic and Social Council in previous years. In response to those critics, the government agreed to revise the consultation procedure and established a new procedure involving a more limited number of peak-level representatives. The social partners were satisfied with the new consultation process, although they noted that their views were only partially considered and that the nature of discussions was still limited. In contrast, the social partners in the Netherlands reported that they had not been involved in the implementation of investments and reforms included in the RRP. Trade union organisations were the most concerned by their lack of involvement, and pointed out that most of the investments are implemented through the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy, which is potentially less subject to the influence of trade unions than other ministries.

Finally, different settings for involvement were found in Estonia, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania and Spain. Generally, the social partners in these countries reported being dissatisfied with the quality of their involvement.

In Estonia, their involvement was pursued only through ad hoc tripartite consultations at the drafting phase of the RRP, which was mostly based on the national development plan Estonia 2035. In addition, the online platform Eelnõude infosüsteem was set up by the government, providing access to draft bills and public consultations.

In Greece, in the absence of formal consultations on the implementation of the RRP, the employer organisation the SEV had the opportunity to share its views with government representatives in other consultation processes on related issues.

In Ireland, the trade unions argued that the brief consultations on the RRP were designed only to fulfil the EU's requirements for the involvement of the social partners, and they assessed the consultations as unsatisfactory and too general.

In Lithuania, the social partners reported being involved in various meetings or working groups related to the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the monitoring of EU investment programmes, but their involvement in the RRP had been limited to the development phase and the broader public consultations mentioned previously. In this regard, the national employer organisation Investors' Forum (IF) stated that it did not expect further involvement after its participation in the design of the RRP, while the trade unions stressed that they had limited resources to cover all the issues addressed in the RRP.

In Latvia, ad hoc meetings included supervision committees and specific working groups. The trade unions assessed positively the supervision committees in terms of their organisation and protocols, the information they provided in advance of meetings and the quality of exchanges. Conversely, trade unions rated specific working groups as chaotic in the same dimensions; they had not had enough time to review the information that the working groups had provided before the meetings, and the groups were not organised properly in terms of the types of contributions that would be accepted in meetings. In addition, the trade unions complained that they were disproportionately represented in specific working groups (with two representatives in groups of between 60 and 100 people).

In Spain, both groups of social partners stressed the merely information-sharing nature of ad hoc consultations and working groups established for the monitoring of the RRP.





## 2 Social partners' involvement in RRP implementation in 2023

### Overall satisfaction of national social partners

This chapter analyses the overall satisfaction of the social partners with the implementation of some of the relevant employment, social and economic reforms and investments set out in the national RRP. The analysis focuses on the assessments of the national peak-level organisation representatives who selected the policy measures in each country. It distinguishes between five different policy categories, based on the six pillars of the RRP:<sup>3</sup> (a) the digital transition; (b) economic and social cohesion, productivity and competitiveness; (c) the green transition (environmental sustainability); (d) health, and economic, social and institutional resilience; and (e) policies for the next generation.

The results in this section are complemented with examples of relevant reforms in which the social partners were properly and meaningfully involved in each policy field, along with other cases in which the social partners were insufficiently involved or not involved at all. In this regard, it should be noted that the scopes of most of the measures described overlap categories.

Maps are used to summarise the social partners' views on their involvement in the implementation of RRP measures in different policy fields. When diverging views exist between the social partners, countries are classified depending on the side that shows the most positive assessment. This does not necessarily mean that the other party is dissatisfied, as a neutral assessment category exists; rather, it shows only that there are differences in the degree of satisfaction between the social partners.

For each policy field, countries are classified according to six categories, which are based on information gathered in the questionnaires.

- **Both social partner groups satisfied:** Trade unions and employer organisations report being satisfied with the involvement process.
- **Both social partner groups dissatisfied:** Trade unions and employer organisations report being dissatisfied with the involvement process.

- **Both social partner groups neither satisfied nor dissatisfied:** Trade unions and employer organisations report being neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the involvement process.
- **Employer organisations more satisfied than trade unions:** Employer organisations report higher satisfaction with their involvement than trade unions (for instance, employer organisations report being satisfied or neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, while trade unions are all dissatisfied).
- **Trade unions more satisfied than employer organisations:** Trade unions report higher satisfaction with their involvement than employer organisations (for instance, trade unions report being neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, while employer organisations are all dissatisfied).
- **Mixed assessment:** Assessments between and within social partner groups differ in the same country (for instance, some trade unions report being satisfied while others report being neither satisfied nor dissatisfied).

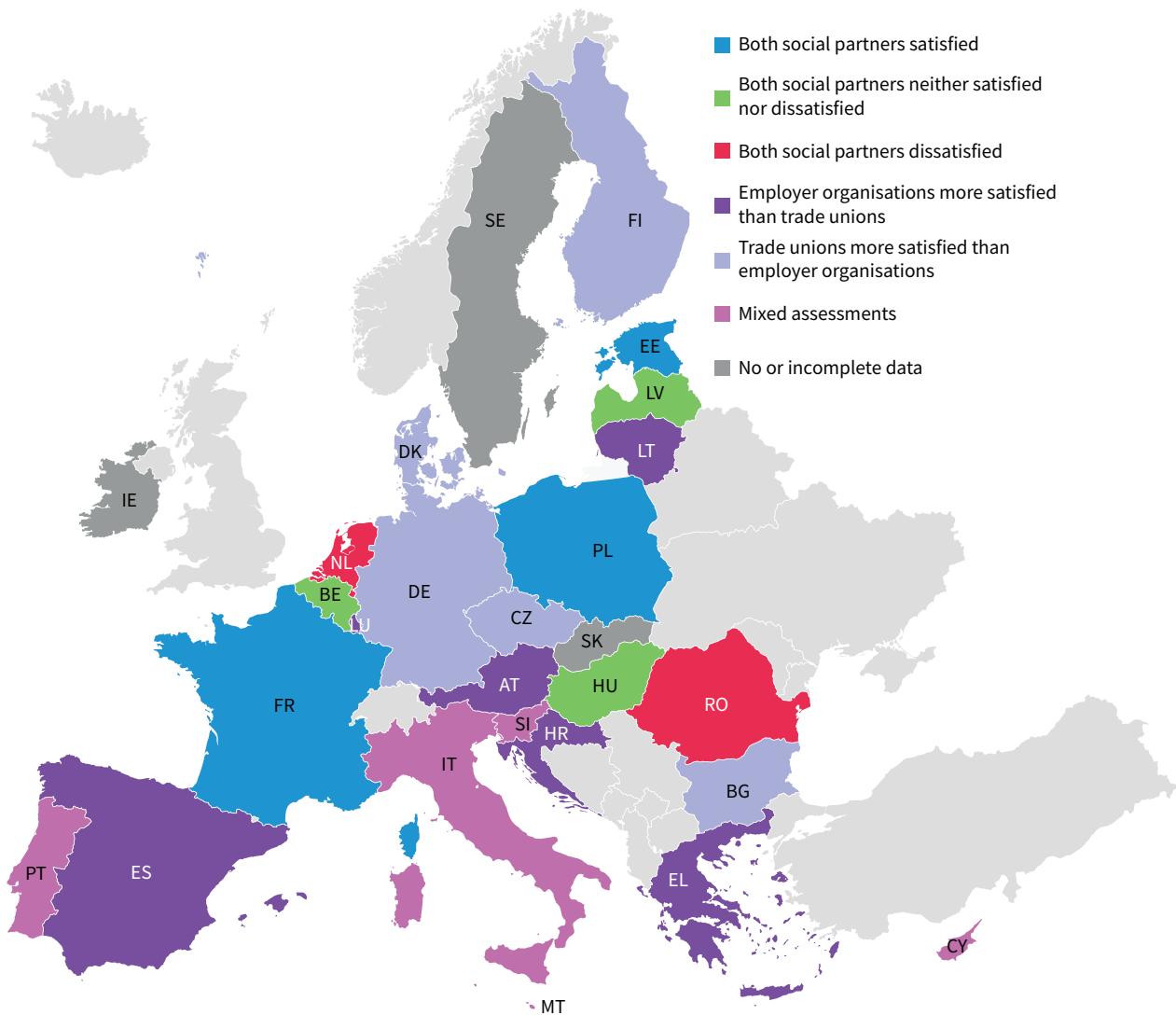
### Digital transition

Regarding the social partners' satisfaction with their involvement in the implementation of policy measures addressing the digital transition, differences between employer organisations and trade unions exist within and between countries (Figure 3). In three countries (Estonia, France and Poland), both employer organisations and trade unions are satisfied with their involvement. In another two, the social partners agree in rating their involvement as unsatisfactory (the Netherlands and Romania). In Belgium, Hungary and Latvia, the social partners did not provide a precise assessment of their involvement.

In most countries, the picture is more complex, and the assessments of employer organisations and trade unions diverge. In six countries (Austria, Croatia, Greece, Lithuania, Luxembourg and Spain), employer organisations give an overall more positive assessment than trade unions, while the opposite is found in five countries (Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Finland and Germany), with trade unions more satisfied than

<sup>3</sup> The six pillars are as follows: (a) the digital transformation; (b) smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, including economic cohesion, jobs, productivity, competitiveness, research, development and innovation, and a well-functioning internal market with strong SMEs; (c) the green transition; (d) health, and economic, social and institutional resilience, with the aim of, inter alia, increasing crisis preparedness and crisis response capacity; (e) policies for the next generation, children and the youth, such as education and skills; and (f) social and territorial cohesion.

**Figure 3: Degree of satisfaction with involvement in implementation of digital transition policies, EU Member States, 2023**



**Notes:** No information available in Sweden; no information available for employer organisations in Ireland and Slovakia.  
**Source:** Authors, based on NEC contributions

employer organisations. However, in other cases the social partners provide a mixed assessment of their involvement, with diverging views within the two groups (Cyprus, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Slovenia).

In Slovenia, the assessments of employer organisations diverge, from neutral (GZS) to negative (Association of Employers in Craft and Small Business of Slovenia (ZDOPS)), while the trade unions agree in rating their involvement as unsatisfactory. Portuguese employer associations are dissatisfied with their involvement; this assessment is shared by the union the CGTP, but differs from the neutral view of the UGTP. Some employer organisations from Cyprus (the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI)), Italy (Confindustria) and Malta (the Malta Employers' Association (MEA)) are satisfied with their involvement in this policy field, although other national employer organisations and trade unions are neutral.

### Examples of meaningful involvement

Examples of meaningful involvement in the field of the digital transition were reported by the social partners in Austria, Germany, Greece and Slovenia.

In Austria, trade unions were involved in the SME Digital programme, which provides individual consulting for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) by certified experts on the topics of business models and digitalisation processes (such as e-commerce and cybersecurity). The implementation of digitalisation projects is also promoted by new investments. The programme is an initiative of the Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, in cooperation with the Austrian Economic Chambers.

In Germany, both groups of social partners were involved in the implementation of the Alliances for Further Qualification project at state (*Land*) level, under

the leadership of the Chamber of Labour. The chamber is a tripartite institution funded by fees paid by all employees on a compulsory basis.

In Greece, the SEV highlighted its positive experience of involvement in an informal technical working group with the Ministry of Labour on the implementation of the Digital Work Card, which is a system for monitoring working time that is currently being implemented in supermarkets, banks, insurance companies and security companies.

### Examples of poor or no involvement

In two countries (Luxembourg and Spain), the social partners identified at least one measure that they should have been involved in but were not.

In Luxembourg, the Independent Luxembourg Trade Union Confederation regretted that the measures to digitalise public administration processes contained in the RRP had not been meaningfully discussed with trade unions. The confederation considers that it could have provided input both as a nationally representative trade union and as a union present in the public administration.

In Spain, the two main trade unions at national level (CCOO and UGT) stated that they had not been involved in relevant measures in the field of the digital transition, which contrasts with the greater involvement of employer organisations on related topics. In particular, they highlighted their exclusion from the drawing up of the national strategy for the development of the chips industry and sustainable industries (Industrial Policy Spain 2030) and legislation on digital connectivity and upskilling (Law 11/2022 on telecommunications and reforms aimed at improving digital skills).

## Economic and social cohesion, productivity and competitiveness

Figure 4 depicts the social partners' satisfaction with their involvement in the implementation of policy measures in the field of economic and social cohesion, productivity and competitiveness. In only two countries (France and Poland) do both employer organisations and trade unions assess their involvement as satisfactory. In three countries, both groups of social partners agree in assessing their involvement as unsatisfactory (Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Romania). In Belgium, Hungary and Latvia, both employer organisations and trade unions state that they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their contribution to the implementation of the RRP in this policy field.

In most countries, diverging assessments were provided by employer organisations and trade unions. In 12 countries, employer organisations are more satisfied than trade unions (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania,

Malta, Slovenia and Spain). In only Denmark and Finland are trade unions more satisfied than employer organisations. In Cyprus and Portugal, the social partners provided a mixed assessment of their involvement, with diverging views within employer organisations and trade unions.

In Cyprus, the employer organisation CCCI and the trade union PASYDY are satisfied with their involvement. Another employer organisation (OEB) gave a neutral assessment and other trade union organisations (PEO, SEK and DEOK) express dissatisfaction.

In Portugal, the neutral assessment of the union UGTP differed from the CGTP's and employer organisations' overall dissatisfaction with their involvement in this policy field.

In Slovenia, divergent assessments were provided by employer organisations, ranging from neutral (GZS) to negative (ZDOPS), while trade unions agreed in assessing their involvement as unsatisfactory.

### Examples of meaningful involvement

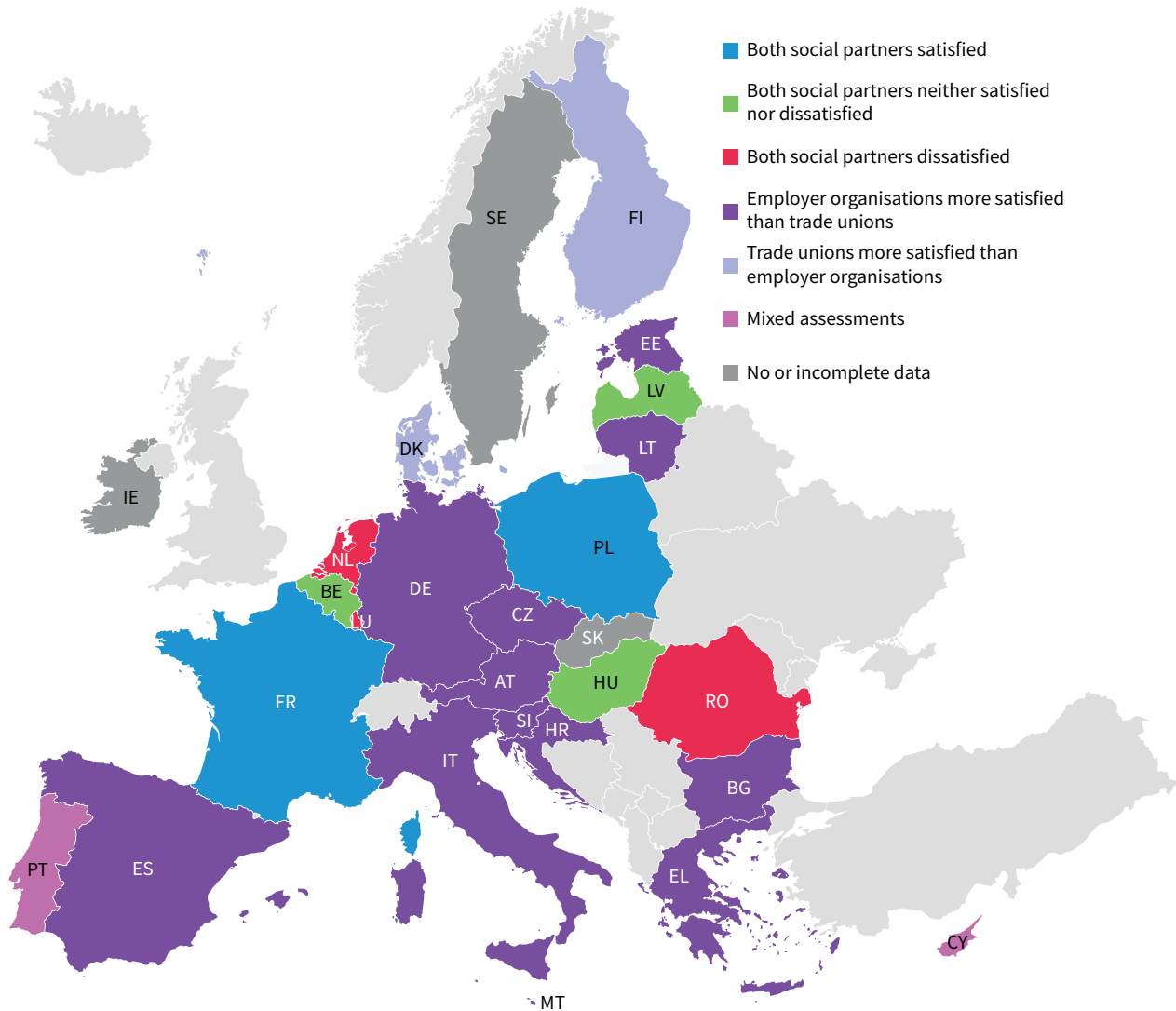
Social partners' involvement in implementing policy measures, particularly in the field of training, learning and skills, was reported in Austria, Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, Poland and Spain.

In Austria, trade unions noted their involvement in the implementation of education and qualification measures aimed at improving employment opportunities for people who had lost their jobs during the pandemic.

In Belgium, both employer organisations and trade unions were involved in negotiating new measures to ensure the right to training for employees as part of the Belgian Jobs Deal, which encompasses various measures, including the option for employees in certain sectors and companies to organise their weekly work schedule. While most competencies related to training are typically managed at the level of the federated entities, the reform of the right to training was handled at federal level due to its connection to labour law. The involvement of the social partners in the implementation of this measure was organised through the Central Economic Council and the National Labour Council. The social partners were engaged in concrete decision-making, such as determining thresholds on the number of training days based on the number of workers in companies, which were to be included in the legal framework.

In Germany, both groups of social partners cooperate in the Securing Training Places programme. The initiative was developed as part of the Alliance for Initial and Further Training, a tripartite initiative with the participation of both groups of social partners and several ministries. Although the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) is not directly involved in the implementation of the initiative, it takes part in the evaluation and monitoring processes.

**Figure 4: Degree of satisfaction with involvement in implementation of policies on economic and social cohesion, productivity and competitiveness, EU Member States, 2023**



**Notes:** No information available in Sweden; no information available for employer organisations in Ireland and Slovakia.  
**Source:** Authors, based on NEC contributions

In Latvia, the social partners reported that although they had not been involved in the operational implementation of the RRP, they were regularly involved in consultations on reforms, either through their representatives on different bodies, such as parliamentary (Saeima) commissions or as members of the supervisory committee in charge of monitoring and evaluating the implementation of EU structural funds and other financing from EU funds. In this policy field, the main employer organisation, the Employers’ Confederation of Latvia (LDDK), and the sector-level trade union the Latvian Trade Union of Education and Science Employees (LIZDA) have been involved in the implementation of various projects aimed at increasing participation in vocational training to attain qualifications.

In Luxembourg, both employer organisations and trade unions were involved in developing a national skills

strategy to promote continuous and vocational training. This decision was taken during a meeting of the Tripartite Coordination Committee, held in July 2020. The RRP contains measures to develop the skills of the workforce, to develop vocational training programmes aimed at jobseekers and to design training programmes for the most promising job profiles.

In Poland, both groups of social partners were consulted in regard to changes in the legal regulation of telework, including new provisions regarding the reimbursement of costs under agreements between employers and worker representatives.

In Spain, both groups of social partners agreed that they had been meaningfully involved in the implementation of two measures in the field of social cohesion and labour market inclusiveness: the agreement on the new Scholarship Holder’s Statute (which sets out public policies to promote a dynamic, resilient and inclusive

labour market) and, notably, the agreement on labour market reform.

**Examples of poor or no involvement**

In Greece, Latvia and Lithuania, some social partners identified at least one relevant measure in this field on which they had not been consulted.

In Greece, the trade union GSEE regretted not being consulted on specific measures addressing employment policies (the planning and development of active employment, policies and interventions in the field of workforce skills, and the transformation of the production model).

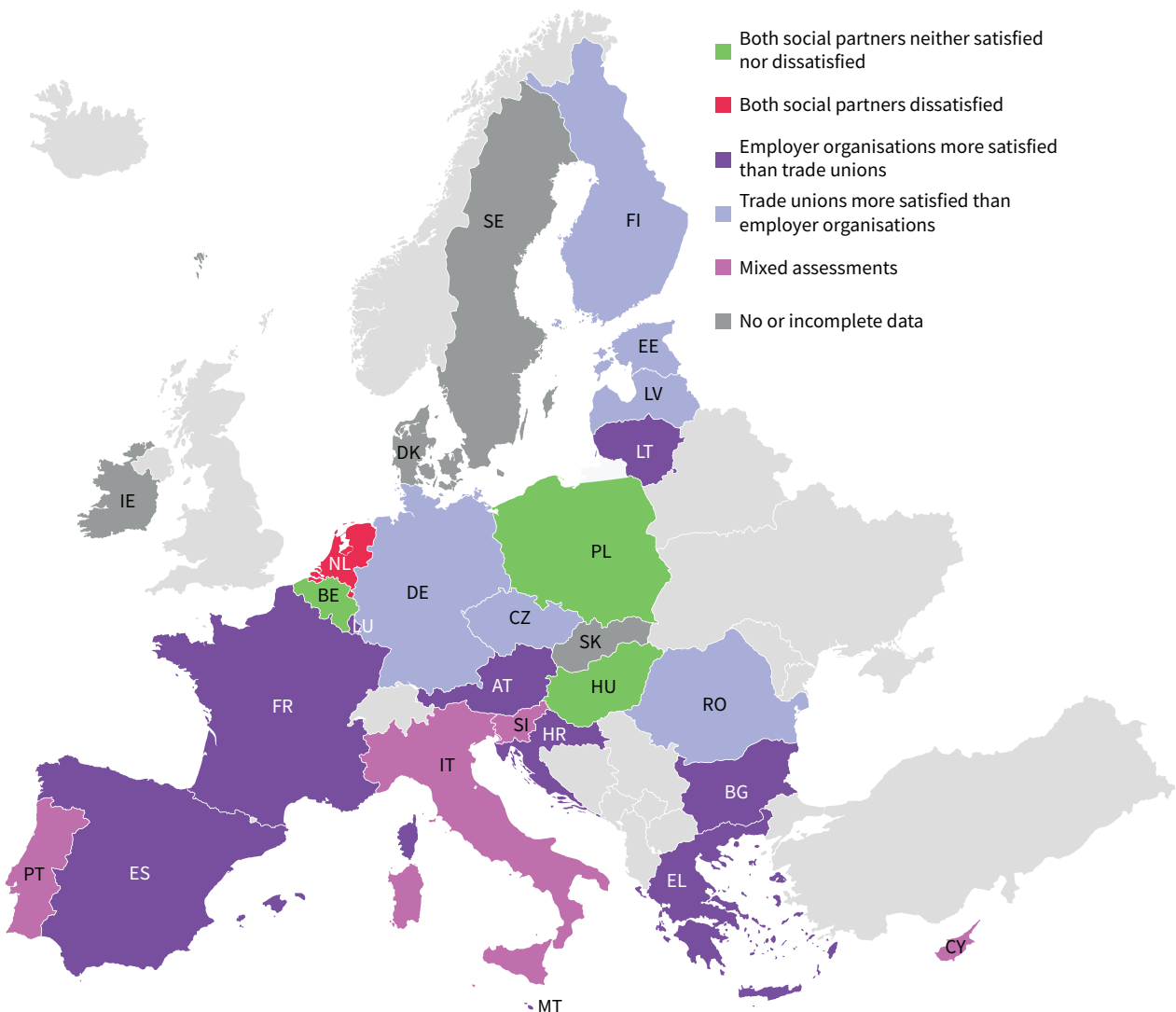
In Lithuania, trade unions and employer organisations reported not having been consulted on a range of reforms and investments related to improving the quality and accessibility of health services and fostering

innovation, delivering long-term care and strengthening the function of the health system in emergencies (to create a healthcare system that is resilient to threats and ready for future challenges). However, the employer organisations noted that, rather than feeling excluded, they felt that their views had not been sufficiently taken into account, particularly when they raised concerns regarding the effectiveness of specific measures.

**Green transition and environmental sustainability**

Figure 5 illustrates the degree of satisfaction of the social partners with their involvement in the implementation of reforms and investments related to the green transition and environmental sustainability. In the Netherlands, both employer organisations and trade unions assess their involvement as unsatisfactory.

**Figure 5: Degree of satisfaction with involvement in implementation of policies on the green transition and environmental sustainability, EU Member States, 2023**



Notes: No information available for Sweden; no information available for employer organisations in Denmark, Ireland and Slovakia. Source: Authors, based on NEC contributions

In Belgium, Hungary and Poland, the social partners are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their involvement.

In the remaining countries, the picture is more complex, and diverging assessments were provided by employer organisations and trade unions. In nine countries, employer organisations give a more positive assessment than trade unions (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Greece, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta and Spain), while in six countries the opposite is the case (Czechia, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia and Romania), with trade unions' assessments being more positive than those of employer organisations. In Cyprus, Italy, Portugal and Slovenia, the social partners give a mixed assessment of their involvement, with diverging views within both groups.

In Cyprus, the employer organisation CCCI and the trade union PASYDY are satisfied with their involvement. Another employer organisation (OEB) give a neutral assessment, and other trade union organisations (PEO, SEK and DEOK) express dissatisfaction.

In Italy, the employer organisations are neutral overall, which aligns with the views of the trade union organisation the Italian Confederation of Workers' Trade Unions (CISL), but differs from the dissatisfaction expressed by other trade union organisations (CGIL and the Italian Labour Union (UIL)).

In Portugal, the UGTP trade union is neutral, in contrast to the CGTP trade union and to the employer organisations, which are dissatisfied with their involvement in this policy field.

In Slovenia, divergent assessments were made by the employer organisations, from positive (GZS) to negative (ZDOPS), while the trade unions agree in rating their involvement as unsatisfactory.

### Examples of meaningful involvement

The social partners in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania and Portugal gave examples of policy measures in this field in which they were meaningfully involved.

In Austria, both employer organisations and trade unions were involved in the implementation of the Renewable Energy Expansion Act and other investments aimed at promoting the transformation of industry towards climate neutrality. The Renewable Energy Expansion Act is a legislative package that was first adopted in parliament in July 2021 (and amended in January 2022) and aims to increase the share of renewable energy in Austria's electricity production to 100% by 2030 and to achieve climate neutrality by 2040. Further laws have been and still are to be passed and ordinances issued. In total, €1 billion annually is provided for investments in renewable energy.

In Germany, both groups of social partners were involved in setting up climate protection contracts for energy-intensive industries. The DGB is involved on behalf of the trade unions to ensure that social criteria (such as construction site locations and job security) are considered. The DGB's contributions are based on the close involvement of its industrial member unions IG Metall (for the metal and manufacturing industries); Industriegewerkschaft Bergbau, Chemie, Energie (for the chemistry, mining and energy industries); Industriegewerkschaft Bauen-Agrar-Umwelt (for the construction industry); and Gewerkschaft Nahrung-Genuss-Gaststätten (for the food industry). Initially, the trade unions were not involved in the consultation process. According to the DGB, this has changed profoundly due to extensive lobbying. The trade unions are now closely involved and were able to negotiate social clauses to be included in climate protection contracts. These have to be implemented by collective agreement at sector or company level.

Similarly, in Denmark both trade unions and employer organisations reported their involvement in various measures related to the green transition through their representatives in bodies and committees at different levels (regional and local). A relevant example is Skilled Workers for the Green Transition, a training programme for unemployed people. In connection with this, the social partners were asked to propose a list of vocational training opportunities in areas with labour shortages, with a focus on training related to the green transition.

In Hungary, the employer organisation VOSZ noted its participation in measures to support energy-intensive SMEs. The proposals submitted by the organisation had been taken into consideration in the final text of the relevant law.

In Lithuania, employer organisations reported that they had cooperated closely with national authorities on the development of the investments made through the investment package More Sustainably Produced Electricity in the Country, to promote renewable energies and self-consumption systems.

In Portugal, the employer organisation the Confederation of Portuguese Industry (CIP) highlighted its involvement in the reform aimed at simplifying public licensing procedures, albeit with a limited impact on environmental sustainability but an indirect impact on the costs borne by companies related to the green transition.

### Examples of poor or no involvement

In Bulgaria, Greece, Lithuania, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, some social partners identified at least one relevant measure in this field on which they were not consulted. In particular, trade unions expressed concerns about their lack of involvement in key measures.

In Bulgaria, both employer organisations and trade unions assessed as unsatisfactory their involvement in reforms under the auspices of the committees of the Green Deal Advisory Council. The measures in question include the establishment of a national decarbonisation fund and climate neutrality roadmap, the decarbonisation of the energy sector 201C, and the promotion of electric mobility.

In Greece, the trade union GSEE was disappointed that it had not been consulted on environmental protection policies.

In Lithuania, unions were excluded from the development and implementation of most energy-related measures.

In Luxembourg, the employer organisation Union des Entreprises Luxembourgeoises (UEL) reported that it had not been consulted on the €24 million project to supply the new residential quarter Néischmelz with heat and electricity produced from renewable energy sources. However, the organisation stated that there was no need for it to be consulted on all measures included in the RRP.

In the Netherlands, both social partner groups were dissatisfied that they had no further involvement in the implementation of measures that have a significant impact on their constituencies. In the view of the employer organisation the Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers (VNO-NCW), this is due to national authorities' decision to avoid additional consultations for measures that were agreed at early stages of the RRP process. However, in the view of the Federation of Dutch Trade Unions (FNV), this is perceived to be in the interest of the employer organisations, as most of the policy-related investments are planned without unions' involvement.

## Health, and economic, social and institutional resilience

Figure 6 illustrates the social partners' degree of satisfaction with their involvement in the implementation of policy measures in the field of health, and economic, social and institutional resilience. In Estonia and France, both employer organisations and trade unions rate their involvement as satisfactory, while the opposite is true in the Netherlands, where both rate it as unsatisfactory. In six countries (Belgium, Czechia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland), both employer organisations and trade unions made a neutral assessment of their contribution to the implementation of the RRP in this policy field.

As for previous policy fields, the picture is more complex in most countries. In eight countries, employer organisations are more satisfied than trade unions (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Greece, Romania, Slovenia and Spain), while only in Finland and Luxembourg are trade unions more satisfied than employer organisations.

In Cyprus, Italy, Malta and Portugal, the social partners give a mixed assessment of their involvement, with diverging views among employer organisations and among trade unions.

In Cyprus, the employer organisation CCCI and the trade union PASYDY are satisfied with their involvement. Another employer organisation (OEB) and trade union (SEK) are neutral, and other trade union organisations (PEO and DEOK) express dissatisfaction.

In Italy, the employer organisation Confindustria and the trade union CISL give a neutral assessment of their involvement in this policy field. Dissatisfaction was expressed by another employer organisation (Confesercenti) and other trade unions (CGIL and UIL).

In Malta, most opposing views relate to the satisfaction of one employer organisation (MEA) and the dissatisfaction of one trade union (UHM Voice of the Workers), while other social partners provided a neutral assessment: The Malta Chamber (TMC), an employer organisation, and the General Workers' Union (GWU), a trade union.

In Portugal, employer organisations and the trade union CGTP are dissatisfied with their involvement, whereas the UGTP is neutral.

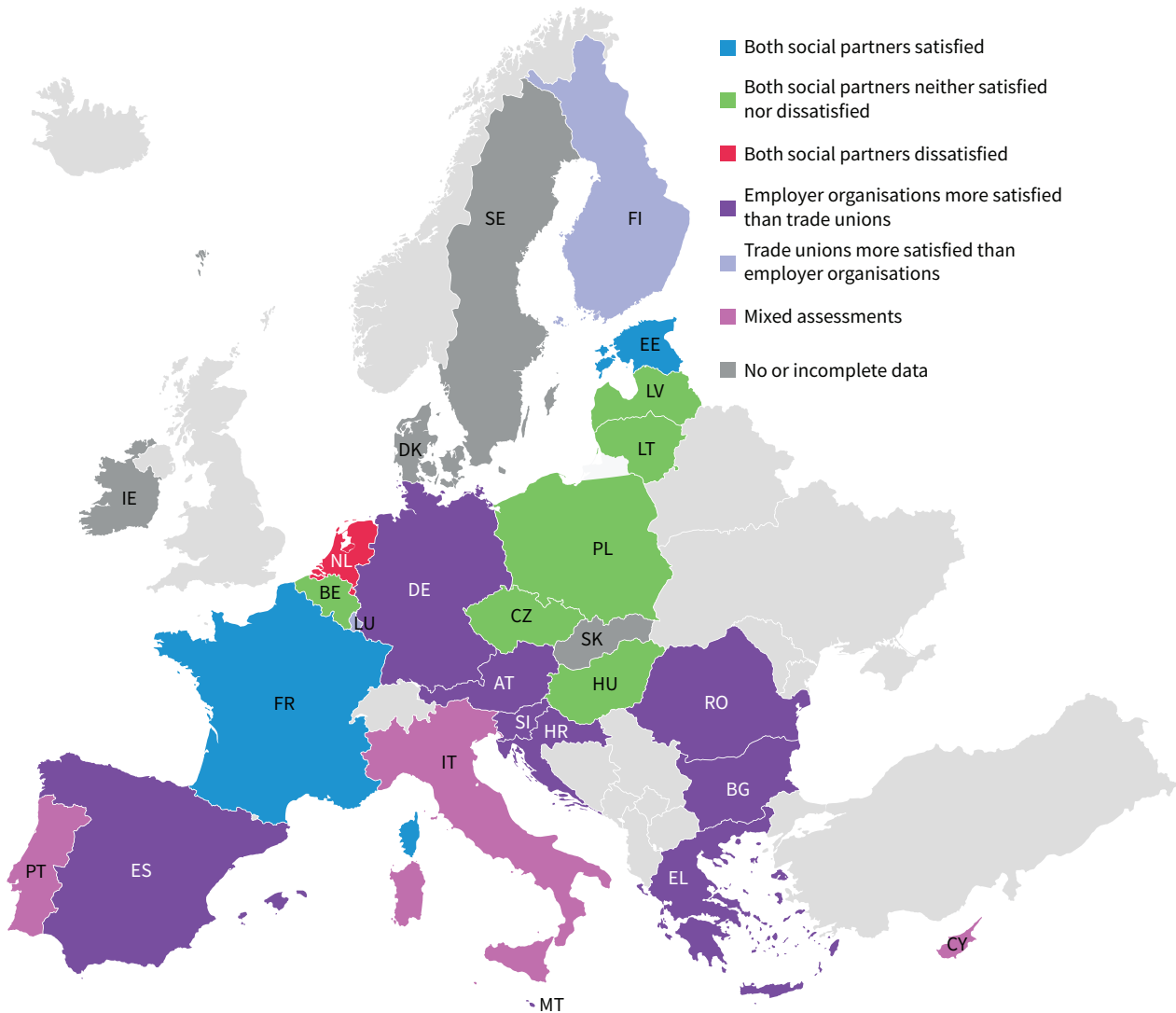
### Examples of meaningful involvement

Examples of policy measures in this field in whose implementation the social partners were involved were reported in Croatia, Estonia, France and Spain.

In Estonia, both trade unions and employer organisations were involved in the implementation of RRP-related measures on healthcare and social protection: a reform to extend the period of unemployment benefits and measures to support the employment of young people through the Unemployment Insurance Fund. Employer and trade union organisations were involved as members of the Unemployment Insurance Fund council. In addition, representatives of the Estonian Nurses Union reported their involvement in specific measures aimed at tackling staffing shortages in the nursing profession.

In France, peak-level representatives from both trade unions and employer organisations reported being involved in the implementation of reforms in social protection and employment policies, although these were not explicitly linked to the RRP. Both groups of social partners were consulted on the reform of the unemployment insurance scheme through bilateral discussions with the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Economic Inclusion. The social partners were also involved in the reform of public employment services with a view to improving the labour market inclusion of minimum income recipients. In addition, both groups of social partners concluded a national cross-sectoral agreement on 15 May 2023 as part of the reform of the national occupational health and safety system.

**Figure 6: Degree of satisfaction with involvement in implementation of policies on health, and economic, social and institutional resilience, EU Member States, 2023**



**Notes:** No information available in Sweden; no information available for employer organisations in Denmark, Ireland and Slovakia.  
**Source:** Authors, based on NEC contributions

The agreement aimed to improve the resources and activities in the areas of risk prevention, compensation and support for victims.

In Croatia, both trade unions and employer organisations were involved in the consultation process for the new Labour Act. However, they were not fully satisfied with the outcomes of their involvement, as the process was marked by the urgency of implementing two new directives and measures from the RRP under the threat of losing EU funds.

In Spain, both groups of social partners reported being meaningfully involved in the development of the shock plan for the care economy and reinforcement of inclusion policies (Royal Decree-Law 675/2023 for the reform of the Dependency Law).

**Examples of poor or no involvement**

In Belgium, Lithuania and Slovenia, some social partners identified at least one relevant measure in this field on which they were not consulted.

In Belgium, the social partners were not involved in the implementation of fiscal reforms through the usual advisory bodies, although it is argued that they had the opportunity to exert some informal influence during the lengthy discussions and public debates.

In Lithuania, a range of reforms and investments concerning the quality and accessibility of health services and long-term care services were implemented without the involvement of the social partners, and particularly trade unions. Employer organisations from the private healthcare sector complained that their views had not been sufficiently taken into account.



In Slovenia, the national trade union confederation Pergam pointed out that the unions were not meaningfully involved in the consultation on reforms to the legal frameworks (financing, provision and employment models) of the healthcare and long-term care systems. Union representatives noted that their involvement in the consultation phase of the reforms had been inadequate, as the deadlines had been unreasonably short, there had been insufficient time for the consideration of their views, and they had been provided with incomplete information.

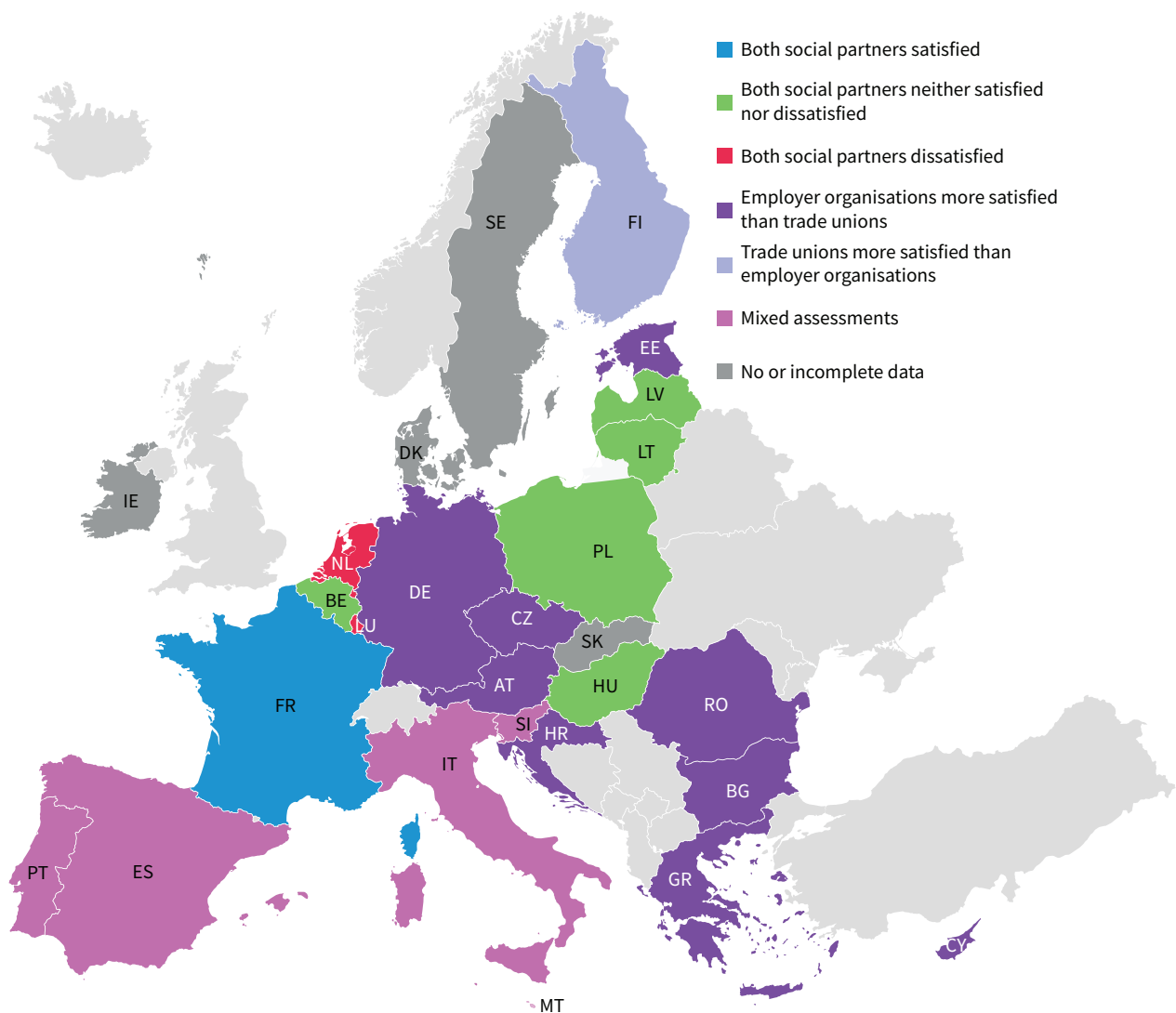
### Policies for the next generation

Figure 7 shows the social partners' assessments of their satisfaction with the implementation of policies for the next generation. Only in France are both employer organisations and trade unions satisfied with their

involvement in this policy area. In Luxembourg and the Netherlands, both groups of social partners expressed dissatisfaction, while in Belgium, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, both social partner groups are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their involvement.

A more complex picture can be found in most countries, with diverging assessments by employer organisations and trade unions. In nine countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Germany, Greece and Romania), employer organisations are more satisfied overall than trade unions with their involvement, while only in Finland are trade unions more satisfied than employer organisations. As in other policy areas, the social partners from Italy, Portugal and Slovenia provided a mixed assessment of their involvement, with diverging views among employer organisations and among trade unions.

**Figure 7: Degree of satisfaction with involvement in implementation of policies for the next generation, EU Member States, 2023**



**Notes:** No information available in Sweden; no information available for employer organisations in Denmark, Ireland and Slovakia.  
**Source:** Authors, based on NEC contributions

In Italy, the assessments of both groups of social partners are mixed, ranging from satisfied (Confindustria) to dissatisfied (Confesercenti) in the case of employer organisations, and from neutral (CISL) to dissatisfied (CGIL and UIL) among trade unions.

In Portugal, the union UGTP gave a neutral assessment, while the CGTP and employer organisations expressed dissatisfaction overall with their involvement in this policy field.

In Slovenia, the assessments of the employer organisations diverge, with GZS giving a neutral rating and ZDOPS giving a negative rating, while the trade unions agree in rating their involvement as unsatisfactory.

In Spain, the trade union CCOO is satisfied with its involvement in this policy area, while the UGT trade union is dissatisfied; employer organisations have neutral views.

### Examples of meaningful involvement

In this policy field, only two countries provided examples of measures in which the social partners had been meaningfully involved: Hungary and Italy.

In Hungary, both employer organisations and trade unions were involved in formal consultations on the modification of the Law on Vocational Training, with the aim of flexibilising the training system to improve its adaptability to economic changes.

In Italy, the employer organisation Confindustria highlighted its active involvement in the implementation of two RRP milestones related to this policy field. One is the reform of advanced technological institutes (ITSS) through the establishment of the National ITS Academy Committee, with advisory functions aimed at identifying training needs and new professional profiles in technological areas. In addition, the employer organisation mentioned its participation in a project managed by the National Institute of Social Security aimed at improving data treatment through an online platform (the OMNIA IS project).

### Examples of poor or no involvement

The national correspondents did not provide any examples of the exclusion of social partners from the implementation of measures under this policy field.

## Box 1: Involvement of sectoral and regional social partner organisations

Most of the information collected at national level does not describe the involvement of social partner organisations at sectoral and regional levels. This may be because only peak-level organisations have responsibilities for the implementation of the RRP or because of difficulties in providing an overall assessment for all organisations that are potentially involved in the implementation of the diversity of policies set out in national RRP.

In this regard, it was reported that in Poland specific ministries are responsible for the implementation of investments and reforms set out in the RRP, which results in some degree of discretion and differences in the involvement of sectoral and regional social partner organisations, and variability in their levels of satisfaction. In the same vein, information gathered in Belgium highlights the difficulty of addressing the diversity of measures implemented in each category, as this process involves multiple social partner organisations and institutional levels. At regional level, the involvement of the social partners in the three Belgian regions was organised in different ways, leading to different assessments from regional social partner organisations. This makes determining their involvement in RRP implementation challenging.

Keeping these caveats in mind, nine countries reported that social partner organisations had been involved at both sectoral and regional or local levels in the implementation of the RRP to various degrees (Czechia, Denmark, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania and Romania). In Slovakia, only sector-level organisations were involved. However, it should be noted that these assessments are often provided by the same peak-level organisations or, in some cases, by a few organisations that may not be representative of all the organisations involved in each category. For instance, the information for Lithuania was based on a single interview with a union representative in the education sector.

Following a public consultation launched by the Commission to collect views to prepare the mid-term review of the RRF, Eurochambres provided information based on the opinions provided by its affiliated chambers in the EU. According to Eurochambres, most chambers involved in the implementation of the RRF observed deficiencies in the absorption of funding at regional and local levels. Excessive red tape and burdensome legislation were mentioned as the main hurdles, together with a lack of information on available funding and a lack of technical assistance in implementing digital or green practices (Eurochambres, 2023).

## Social partners' involvement in discussions of the REPowerEU chapter

The preparation and submission of the REPowerEU chapter in the RRP was one of the main features of the 2023 cycle. In February 2023, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union agreed to make the RRF the main funding tool of the REPowerEU plan, which aims to end the EU's dependence on Russian fossil fuels and accelerate the green transition by increasing the resilience, security and sustainability of the Union's energy system. Consequently, the RRF Regulation was amended, and Member States were encouraged to revise their RRP and submit new or scaled-up energy-related reforms and investments, adding a dedicated REPowerEU chapter. The Commission, in February 2023, published guidance on the revision of the RRP to integrate the REPowerEU chapters (European Commission, 2023f).

Although there was no compulsory deadline for the submission of the REPowerEU chapters, the Commission encouraged Member States to submit them as soon as possible, setting some indicative dates. According to the Commission, 23 REPowerEU chapters have been adopted as part of the RRP submitted by Member States. It means more than 42% (€275 billion) of the total revised RRF allocation will finance investments and reforms supporting the green transition and the REPowerEU plan (European Commission, 2023g). Interestingly, the Commission reminded Member States of their obligation to consult the social partners and other relevant stakeholders when drafting their REPowerEU chapters. It requested that Member States reviewing their RRP provide a summary of the consultation process, including information on the stakeholders consulted and a description of how their input was reflected in the design of REPowerEU measures.

At the time the survey was conducted, fewer than half of Member States had submitted the chapters along with revisions of their RRP, although a few others had announced their willingness to do so. Therefore, the

results presented below are just indicative and have taken account of a limited number of countries. The survey conducted among the national social partners asked them to provide information on the types of consultation organised by governments in drafting the REPowerEU plans as part of the national RRP. Three types of social consultation were reported: formal consultation, provision of information and exchanges of views. The procedures for consultation are not mutually exclusive, and responses from the social partners overlap the three categories.

### Formal consultation

As shown in Table 7, participation in formal consultation procedures was reported by both employer organisations and trade unions in nine countries (Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Romania and Slovakia). Divergent responses came from the social partners in Portugal, Slovenia and Sweden. In Sweden, the employer organisations were involved while trade unions were not. In Slovenia, participation was restricted to the employer organisation the Slovenian Chamber of Commerce (TZS), and in Portugal the UGTP trade union was excluded.

### Provision of information

The social partners were also asked whether or not their government informed them of the REPowerEU initiative (Table 8). In 14 countries (Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland and Portugal), both groups of social partners stated that they were informed. The responses of the social partners diverged in other countries: in four (Greece, Slovakia, Slovenia (TZS) and Sweden), the employer organisations were informed but the trade unions were not, while in three (Italy, Latvia and Romania), the trade unions were informed while the employer organisations were not.

In Italy, the employer organisation Confindustria submitted a proposal for the REPowerEU chapter, as did the trade unions CGIL and CISL. However, at the time of writing, little progress had been made in the dialogue

**Table 7: Involvement in formal consultations on the REPowerEU chapter**

	Yes	No
<b>Employer organisations and trade unions agree</b>	Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Romania, Slovakia	Belgium, Croatia, Czechia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Spain
<b>Diverging views</b>		
<b>Employer organisations</b>	Portugal, Slovenia (TZS), Sweden	Slovenia (ZDOPS)
<b>Trade unions</b>	Portugal (CGTP)	Portugal (UGTP), Slovenia, Sweden

**Notes:** No information available for employer organisations in Ireland and Malta; no information available for trade unions in Bulgaria.

**Table 8: Information provided to the social partners on the REPowerEU chapter**

	Yes	No
<b>Employer organisations and trade unions agree</b>	Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal	Finland, Hungary
<b>Diverging views</b>		
<b>Employer organisations</b>	Greece, Slovakia, Slovenia (TZS), Sweden	Italy, Latvia, Romania, Slovenia (ZDOPS)
<b>Trade unions</b>	Italy, Latvia, Romania	Greece, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden

**Notes:** No information available in Bulgaria and Cyprus; no information available for employer organisations in Ireland and Spain.

with the national authorities, particularly in regard to the projects that should be included in the addendum.

### Exchanges of views

In several countries, the social partners were able to contribute through other or additional formal consultation structures, which enabled them to share their opinions with national authorities. In three countries (Belgium, Czechia and France), exchanges between the social partners and national authorities took place in that way during the preparation of their REPowerEU chapters.

In six countries (Austria, Italy, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia (TZS) and Sweden), these exchanges were limited to employer organisations and did not involve trade unions.

In Belgium, the exchange of views on the REPowerEU chapter took place as part of biannual meetings on the follow-up to the RRP implementation of the Central Council of Economy in May 2023. The decision was taken to include these discussions in these meetings in response to the social partners' unwillingness to take part in a formal consultation process due to time constraints. Furthermore, some of the measures set out in the chapter in the initial version of the RRP were subsequently removed due to a reduction in the EU budget allocation for Belgium. Therefore, the social partners did not see the point of getting involved in additional consultations.

In France, the social partners were consulted through their representatives in the National Council for Ecological Transition as part of the consultations on the draft law on the acceleration of renewable energies. The council is responsible for implementing the REPowerEU programme. In addition, a specific meeting on the issue was organised by the European and International Social Dialogue Committee, although both employer organisations and trade unions criticised the time frame for discussions and the consideration of their proposals.

In Lithuania, national authorities launched a month-long public consultation procedure on the amendment of the New Generation Lithuania plan, concerning the activities to be financed by the REPowerEU funds.

The social partners are also involved through ad hoc consultations at the initiative of the national authorities responsible for the implementation of the plan, which results in the uneven inclusion of trade union organisations.

In Denmark, the Danish Trade Union Confederation (FH) noted that it was informed of the consultation process and was given the opportunity to provide its views both at a meeting and in the form of written documents through formal consultation.

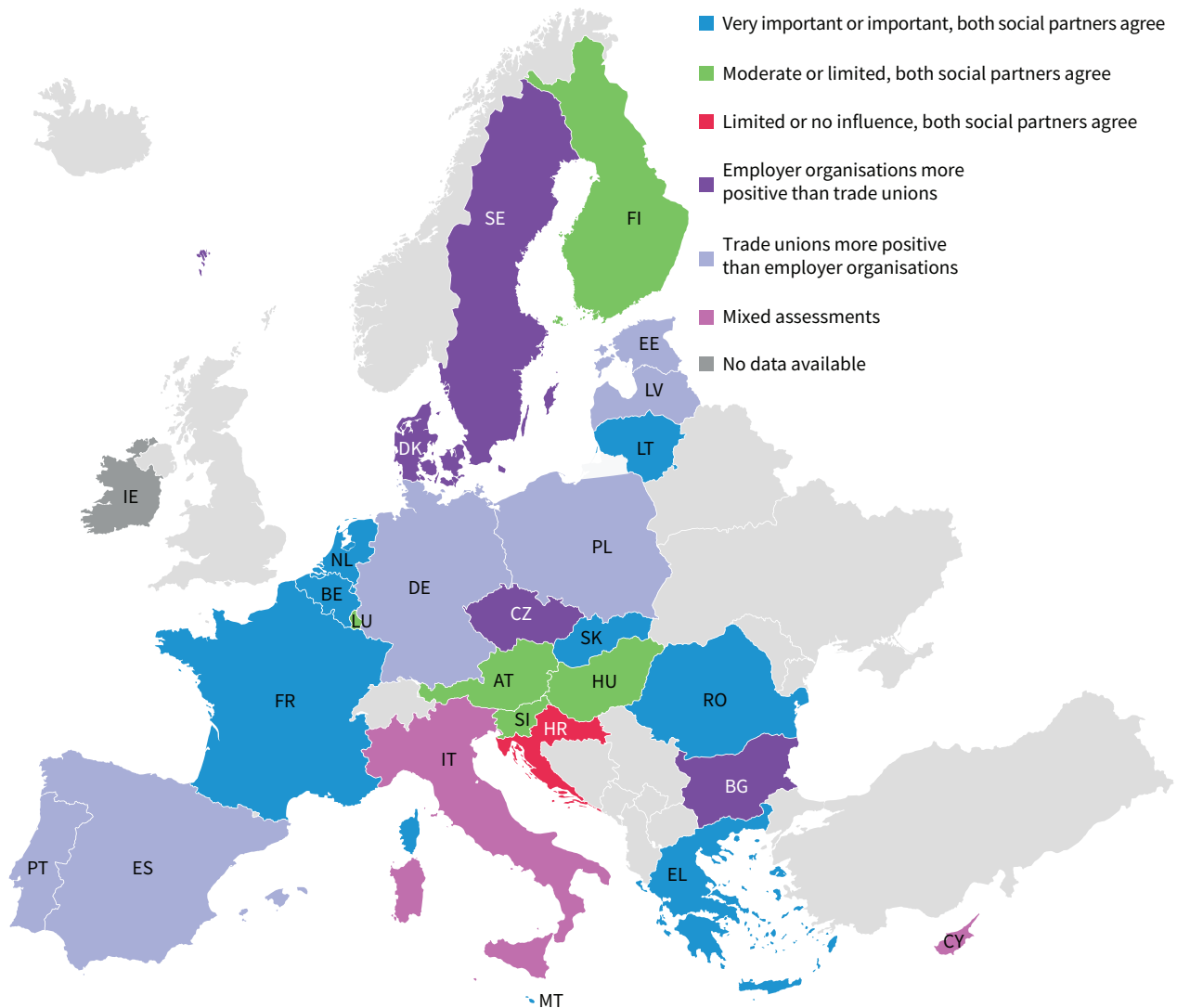
### Overall assessment of the importance and impact of the RRP

The social partners were asked to provide an assessment of the influence and potential impact of measures to be implemented through the RRP (or the RRF or NextGenerationEU) and NRP in certain sectors and economic activities connected to the green and digital transition.

The information gathered shows that assessments differ across countries and between the social partners (Figure 8). In eight countries (Belgium, France, Greece, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Romania and Slovakia), both employer organisations and trade unions agree that the influence of the RRP is very important or important. In another five countries, both trade unions and employer organisations assess the influence of the RRP as moderate or limited (Austria, Finland, Hungary, Luxembourg and Slovenia). In Croatia, both groups of social partners share a negative view of the influence of the RRP, which reflects their dissatisfaction with their limited involvement in the development of the RRP.

Looking at the countries where the views of the social partners diverge, in four (Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark and Sweden), the employer organisations made a more positive assessment of the influence of the RRP than the trade unions. By contrast, the trade unions express slightly more positive views than employer organisations in Estonia, Germany, Latvia, Poland, Portugal and Spain, with trade unions describing the influence of the RRP as important and employer organisations describing it as moderate.

**Figure 8: Assessment of the potential influence of the measures and reforms included in the RRP, EU Member States, 2023**



**Note:** No information available for employer organisations in Ireland.  
**Source:** Authors, based on NEC contributions

From the perspective of the German trade unions (DGB), the RRP includes important measures in some areas, notably the green transition and decarbonisation projects. However, the unions also believe that there should be a stronger emphasis on the social dimension. Indeed, it is argued that most measures were already planned and would have been financed by the national budget in the absence of EU funding. The German employer organisation the Confederation of German Employers' Associations (BDA) assesses the influence of the RRP as moderate, as the funding of these measures through the RRP accounts for a small fraction of the annual gross domestic product.

In Spain, the employer organisations (CEOE) consider that the guidelines set in the NRP are too general and do not reflect the range of interests of sectoral associations. Nevertheless, this issue has been resolved through extensive social dialogue.

In Portugal, the assessment of some union organisations (the General Confederation of Portuguese Workers, (CGTP)) is affected by their negative stance on the role and influence of the EU.

## Evolution of the social partners' involvement since the launch of the RRF

The national social partners were also asked to provide their views on the change in their involvement in the implementation of the RRFs since the inception of the RRF. As can be seen from Figure 9, the social partners in many countries assess the quality of their involvement as stable overall throughout the whole period. In 10 countries (Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Portugal, Romania and Spain), both groups of social partners reported no major changes in the quality of their involvement. In three countries, this statement was supported by relevant national authorities (Austria, Belgium and Romania). In Spain, the social partners provided a nuanced assessment, as both sides noted that the quality of the involvement improved slightly during the implementation phase in spite of a reduction in the number of consultation forums.

In Hungary, both social partner groups are dissatisfied that they still lack relevant information on the development of the RRF, while the national authorities stated that they intend to get the social partners more involved in the future through their inclusion in the new monitoring committee.

In Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, both employer organisations and trade unions agree that the quality of their involvement has worsened since the inception of the RRF. In Luxembourg, the social partners acknowledge some improvements in the consultation procedure through amendments introduced in 2022, but they highlight the merely information-sharing nature of exchanges and their lack of influence in consultations for both the RRF and the NRP. In the Netherlands, concerns were raised by the major trade union federation FNV about the unwillingness of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy to involve the social partners in the implementation of the RRF.

Poland stands out as the only country in which both groups of social partners, along with the national authorities, agree that there have been improvements in the quality of involvement, which can mostly be explained by the establishment of the RRF monitoring committee in 2021.

Nevertheless, the social partners have divergent views in some countries. In five countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, France and Sweden), employer organisations have a more positive assessment of the change in the quality of their involvement than trade unions. In fact,

the trade unions in Croatia, Lithuania and Sweden perceive that the quality of their involvement significantly worsened over the period.

In Lithuania, the social partners agree that they would like to have been more involved in relevant issues, but in the case of the unions their perception of exclusion is exacerbated by the intensity of consultations with other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and professional associations. In Sweden, the trade unions stated that their overall involvement and influence on policymaking worsened significantly with the change in government. In addition, in France the trade unions stressed that their involvement in the implementation of the RRF worsened due to the overall political context (the presidential election in 2022 and the conflict around the 2023 pension reform).

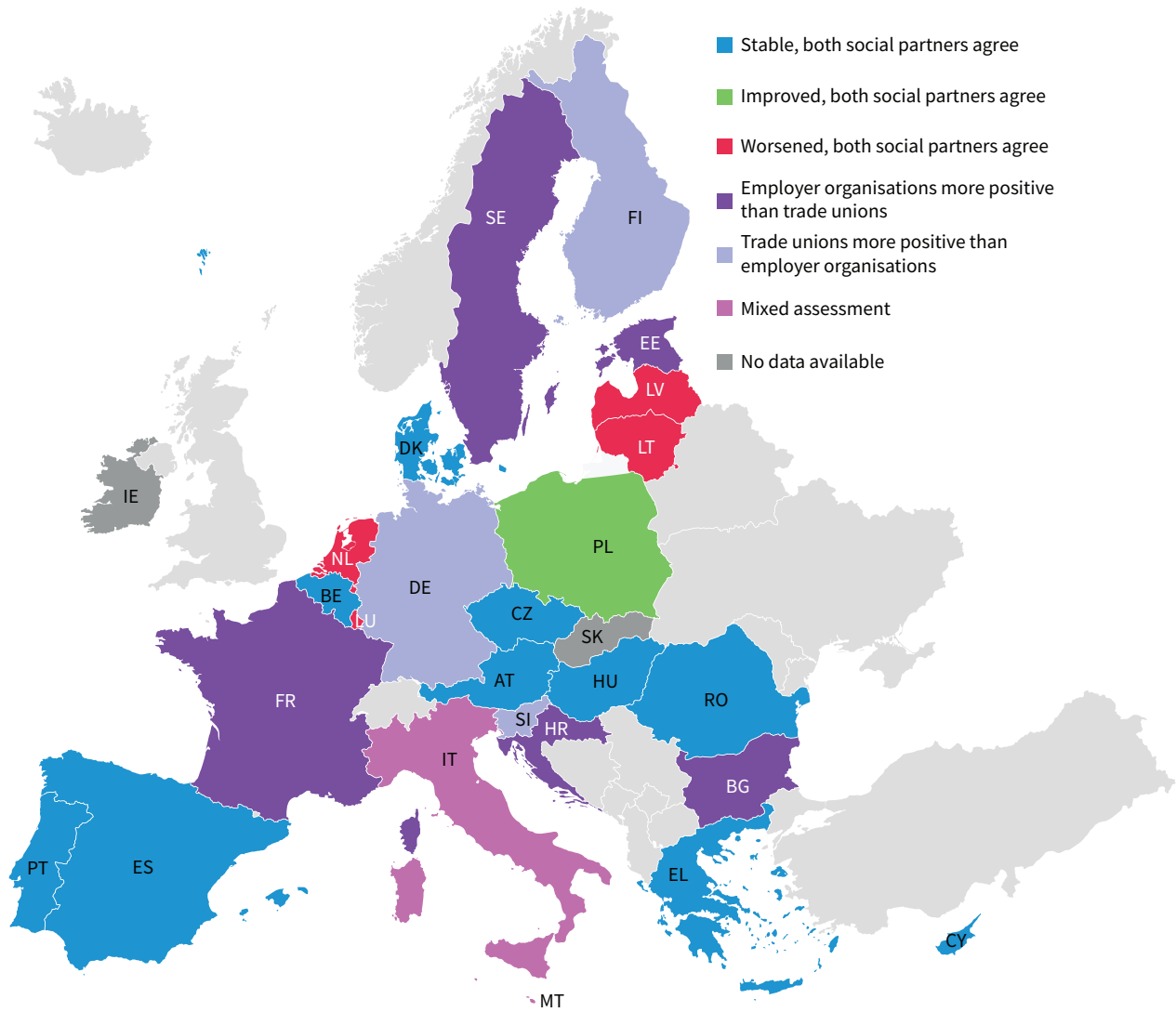
In Bulgaria, the unions urged the government to conclude negotiations with the European Commission in line with the decision of the National Assembly to renegotiate the RRF to remove the requirement for a 40% reduction in emissions by 2026. In the unions' view, this requirement was in clear contradiction of the Supreme Court's decision to retain coal-fired power as an energy source until 2038.

In Finland, Germany and Slovenia, the trade unions have a more positive assessment of the change in the quality of their involvement than the employer organisations. In this regard, the main German trade union DGB reported that its involvement in the ongoing implementation of the RRF has improved but that unions are still not involved in the drafting phase. However, it notes that the trade unions still have no meaningful involvement in implementation, although they are involved in the implementation of other EU policies, such as the European Structural and Cohesion Funds.

In the case of Finland, the trade unions do not expect to increase their involvement in the implementation of the RRF, while employer organisations would prefer to be more involved, either in the implementation or in the monitoring of the development of the RRF. In Slovenia, the trade unions point out that their involvement is still lacking, while employer organisations note that the quality of consultations dropped significantly, as deadlines were unreasonably short, there was insufficient time for the consideration of their views and they were provided with incomplete information.

In Italy and Malta, views diverge both within and between employer organisations and trade unions. In Italy, the trade union UIL notes that successive governments have failed somewhat in meeting their commitments to involve the trade unions.

Figure 9: Assessment of changing involvement in implementation of RRP reforms and investments since the establishment of the RRF, EU Member States, 2023



**Note:** No information available for employer organisations in Ireland and Slovakia.  
**Source:** Authors, based on NEC contributions





# 3 Social partners' involvement in the development of NRPs for 2023

National reform programmes (NRPs) (as well as stability and convergence programmes) are submitted by the Member States setting out their economic and fiscal policy plans in the context of the European Semester. The NRP is one of the two biannual reporting requirements of Member States under the RRF. The involvement of the social partners in the NRPs differs substantially from their involvement in the implementation of the reforms and investments set out in the RRFs. The time frames for the two are different: involvement in the RRFs tends to be a long-term process based on the implementation of the various policy measures included in the plans, while participation in the creation of the NRPs is more focused and usually takes place over a short period, during the months or weeks immediately before the submission of the NRP to the European Commission. This difference in time frames, as well as differences in nature, scope and focus, influences how the social partners are involved and how social dialogue frameworks are established.

The conceptual approach to analysing the quality of the social partners' involvement in the NRPs in 2023 was based on previous Eurofound reports (Eurofound, 2022, 2023). The quality of their involvement was measured in terms of input to processes (that is, their involvement in the design of the NRPs) and output (in terms of their influence on the content of the NRPs).

## Quality of involvement in NRP design

This section analyses the quality of the social partners' involvement in terms of input, which is measured according to four indicators derived from the social partners' and national authorities' assessments:

- adequacy of time allotted for consultation
- degree of the social partners' involvement, understood as the social partners' opportunities to contribute to the development of the NRPs and to receive feedback from national authorities
- balance, or the extent to which trade unions and employer organisations were consulted on an equal footing
- transparency and visibility of the social partners' contributions, or the extent to which the NRPs include a summary of the social partners' views and of the exchanges that took place as part of the consultation

### Time allotted for consultation

Information gathered through questionnaires shows that insufficient time for consultation was an issue in several countries (Table 9). In 10 countries (Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain), both trade unions and employer organisations complained that the time allotted for the consultation process had been insufficient. In another four, this view

**Table 9: Was enough time allotted?**

	Yes	No
<b>Employer organisations and trade unions agree</b>	Sweden	Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain
<b>National authorities</b>	Denmark, France, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain	Estonia
<b>All parties agree</b>	Austria, Czechia, Hungary, Lithuania	Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Romania
<b>Diverging views</b>		
<b>Employer organisations</b>	France, Italy, Malta (TMC, Gozo Business Chamber)	Latvia, Malta (MEA, Malta Chamber of SMEs, MDA)
<b>Trade unions</b>	Latvia, Malta (GWU)	France, Italy, Malta (UHM Voice of the Workers, For.U.M.)

**Notes:** No information available for national authorities in Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy and Sweden; no information available for employer organisations in Estonia, Finland, Ireland and Slovakia; no information available for trade unions in Estonia. For.U.M., Forum of Maltese Unions; MDA, Malta Developers Association.

was shared by the national authorities (Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus and Romania).

In some countries, the social partners complained about the limited number of meetings held (Belgium, Croatia, Luxembourg and Spain), the lack of face-to-face meetings and written exchanges (Romania) or the short time span for providing comments and suggestions (Denmark and Slovenia). Moreover, some countries reported that the time allotted for consultation had been less than in the previous year (for instance, Croatia, Germany and Poland). In Croatia, the social partners reported that the number of meetings had been fewer than in previous years. In Germany and Poland, the social partners highlighted that the time span for submitting comments had been shortened, reducing the number of comments they could make on core aspects of the NRPs.

By contrast, in Sweden the social partners agreed that they had had enough time to participate in the development of the NRPs. In Austria, Czechia, Hungary and Lithuania, there was similar agreement among all three parties consulted: employer organisations, trade unions and national authorities.

In France, Italy, Latvia and Malta, the trade unions and employer organisations disagreed on the adequacy of the time allotted for consultations. In France and Italy, the trade unions were dissatisfied with the time allotted, while the employer organisations were satisfied. In Latvia, the trade unions were satisfied with the time allotted, while the employer organisations were dissatisfied. In Malta, the views among the trade unions and among the employer organisations diverged.

In Estonia, Finland, Ireland and Slovakia, information from the employer organisations was not received. In Finland and Slovakia, the trade unions reported that they were satisfied with the time allotted for consultation. By contrast, the trade unions in Ireland complained that the time allotted for consultation had not been enough.

Generally, national authorities assessed the time allotted more favourably than the social partners. The national authorities from 12 countries agreed that the time allotted for consultation had been sufficient, but these opinions were not shared by the social partner organisations. However, as mentioned previously, the national authorities in Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus and Romania agreed that the time allotted for consultation had been insufficient. In Croatia, the national authorities argued that they had not had enough time to prepare for meetings because the NRP process overlapped with RRP implementation. In Romania, the national authorities recognised that the consultation period had been limited due to technical issues that delayed the drafting of the NRP and the need to meet the deadline for its submission to the European Commission.

## Degree of involvement of the social partners

Information gathered through the questionnaires shows that only in Czechia, Hungary and Sweden did trade unions and employer organisations agree that they had had the opportunity to contribute to the development of the NRP and to receive a response or feedback from the government (Table 10). In Hungary, the NRP was discussed by the Standing Consultative Forum for the Competitive Sector and the Government, and a social dialogue interface was created on the official website of the state employment service. In Czechia, the trade unions reported more acceptance of their suggestions than in previous years, and the employer organisations stressed the well-established involvement of stakeholders and the social partners in the preparation of the NRP. In Sweden, both trade unions and employer organisations reported that they had been able to share their views.

In most countries (14 in total: Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia and Spain), both trade unions and employer organisations noted that they had not received a proper response or feedback from the government. In these countries, the social partners tended to assess their institutionalised involvement mainly as a process for informing them and to a lesser extent as a consultative process. Even when the social partners had been formally requested to submit their assessments and proposals, the consultation was not considered meaningful because the national authorities had not sent them adequate responses.

In many cases, the social partners criticised the failure of the national authorities to give them enough information in advance of consultations or to give it in sufficient time. These include the social partners in Belgium, France, Luxembourg and Spain. In some countries, such as Croatia and Luxembourg, the social partners reported that they had not been consulted before the drafting of the final version of the NRP, with no opportunity to influence the content of the document.

In Belgium, only a table of contents and a list of topics were submitted to the social partners in advance, meaning they did not have a comprehensive overview. They also complained about receiving the information too late. The purpose of the consultation with the social partners in Belgium was to include their views in the annex. In Spain, no draft or information was sent to the social partners before the only consultation meeting was held. The main employer organisation in Spain (CEOE) stated that it had prepared its contribution based on the RRP. It also argued that the consultation was too general for agreement to be reached between trade unions, employer organisations and national authorities. In France, the trade unions were very

**Table 10: Degree of involvement: Was it an actual consultation process?**

Parties	Yes	No
Employer organisations and trade unions agree	Sweden	Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Romania, Slovenia, Spain
National authorities	Austria, Denmark, France, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain	Estonia
All parties agree	Czechia, Hungary	Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Netherlands
<b>Diverging views</b>		
Employer organisations	Austria, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Malta (TMC, Gozo Business Chamber)	Malta (MEA, Malta Chamber of SMEs, MDA), Portugal
Trade unions	Portugal (UGT)	Austria, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal (CGTP)

**Notes:** No information available for national authorities in Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy and Sweden; no information available for employer organisations in Estonia, Finland, Ireland and Slovakia; no information available for trade unions in Estonia, Poland and Slovakia. MDA, Malta Developers Association.

concerned about the lack of time available for revising the documents, but the employer organisations were not as critical in this regard. The trade unions also emphasised that the process had been fragmented and disrupted by the presidential and legislative elections.

Diverging views between the social partners were found in five countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Malta and Portugal), in which either the employer organisations or the trade unions reported not having had the opportunity to properly contribute to the development of the consultation process through exchanges with national authorities.

National authorities were more likely to positively assess the degree of consultation than the social partners. In most countries (14 in total), the national authorities stated that the social partners had had the opportunity to contribute to the NRP and had received feedback on their proposals. However, this view was not shared by the social partners.

### Balance between trade unions and employer organisations

A balance between the consultation of trade unions and the consultation of employer organisations is crucial to the quality of their involvement (Table 11). For meaningful social dialogue to take place, trade unions and employer organisations must be involved on an equal footing. In the case of the NRPs, trade unions and employer organisations reported being involved on an equal footing in 12 countries: Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal and Slovenia. By contrast, in three countries (Croatia, Lithuania and the Netherlands) trade unions and employer organisations agreed that the consultation had been imbalanced. In Lithuania, the influence of trade unions on the NRP is generally considered to be less than that of employer organisations. Nevertheless, in this country the social partners are often replaced by civil society organisations such as NGOs or professional

**Table 11: Balance: Were trade unions and employer organisations consulted on an equal footing?**

	Yes	No
Employer organisations and trade unions agree	Germany	Croatia, Netherlands
National authorities	Croatia, Ireland, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain	Cyprus, Estonia
All parties agree	Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, France, Hungary, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia	Lithuania
<b>Diverging views</b>		
Employer organisations	Bulgaria, Italy (Confindustria), Sweden	Italy (Confesercenti), Romania
Trade unions	Romania	Bulgaria, Italy, Sweden

**Notes:** No information available for national authorities in Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy and Sweden; no information available for employer organisations in Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Slovakia and Spain; no information available for trade unions in Cyprus, Estonia, Ireland and Poland.

associations. In fact, the involvement of the social partners is sometimes considered to undermine competition for financial resources.

In Bulgaria, Italy and Sweden, all trade unions reported not being involved on an equal footing, but employer organisations perceived the consultation as balanced (just Confindustria in Italy). Conversely, the trade unions reported being involved on an equal footing in Romania, while employer organisations stated that the consultation had been imbalanced. In Italy, the opinions of two major employer organisations diverged (Confesercenti reported that the consultation had not been balanced).

In the case of Cyprus, both trade unions and employer organisations were not aware of how the other side had actually been involved because separate bilateral consultation processes had been conducted. In other countries, such as Spain, despite both trade unions and employer organisations being involved in tripartite consultations, the social partners had no knowledge of the comments or suggestions made by their counterparts. In Cyprus, the employer organisations did not assess the balance of the consultation, while trade unions perceived that the consultation had been balanced.

### Transparency and visibility of social partners' views

The results of the analysis of national questionnaires show that in Czechia and Germany both the employer organisations and trade unions agreed that the social partners' views had been explicitly summarised in the

NRP (Table 12). In four countries (Belgium, Czechia, France and Luxembourg), this assessment was also shared by their national authorities. By contrast, in 13 countries the social partners agreed that their views had not been explicitly summarised in the NRP: Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Spain. In Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia and Malta, this assessment was shared by national authorities.

In Poland, the employer organisations reported that the social partners' views had been partially included in the RRP, mostly relating to technical issues such as proposed changes to the date of implementation of reforms but excluding more in-depth insights on the content of policies. Information from the trade unions was not available.

Diverging views among the social partners were found in four countries (Austria, Denmark, Italy and Lithuania). In these countries, the employer organisations stated that their views had been explicitly summarised in the NRP. In Austria and Lithuania, the national authorities agreed with their stances.

As reported previously, the national authorities disagreed with the social partners' assessments in many countries. Only in Croatia, Estonia, Hungary and Slovakia did the national authorities agree with both trade unions and employer organisations on the lack of transparency and inclusion of the social partners' views in the NRPs. In Slovakia, both national authorities and trade unions agreed that there was a lack of inclusion.

**Table 12: Were the social partners' views acknowledged explicitly?**

	Yes	No
<b>Employer organisations and trade unions agree</b>	Germany, Sweden	Bulgaria, Greece, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain
<b>National authorities</b>	Austria, Ireland, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain	Denmark, Slovakia
<b>All parties agree</b>	Belgium, Czechia, France, Luxembourg	Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Malta
<b>Diverging views</b>		
<b>Employer organisations</b>	Austria, Denmark, Italy, Lithuania	
<b>Trade unions</b>		Austria, Denmark, Italy, Lithuania

**Notes:** No information available for national authorities in Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy and Sweden; no information available for employer organisations in Finland, Ireland and Slovakia; no information available for trade unions in Poland.

## Social partners' influence

The social partners' influence on the NRPs was measured based on their own perceptions; they were asked to rank their degree of influence as significant, limited or non-existent. However, these assessments should be interpreted with caution, as they may be influenced by various factors, including the subjectivity of the views provided.

Overall, as can be seen from Table 13, the social partners generally doubted their ability to influence the development of the NRPs. In fact, only two trade unions, in Malta (GWU) and Spain (UGT), stated that their influence had been significant in the development of the NRP.

The findings show that in three countries (Bulgaria, Hungary and Luxembourg) both trade unions and employer organisations stated that they had had a limited or relatively limited influence on the content of the NRPs. In another five countries (Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Finland and Poland), this assessment was shared by their national authorities.

In four countries, both groups of social partners reported that they had had no influence at all (Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia and the Netherlands). This assessment was shared by the national authorities in Croatia and Estonia.

In the remaining countries, divergent views between social partners can be found. Overall, the unions reported less influence than the employer organisations. Trade union organisations from seven countries (Austria, France (Force Ouvrière (FO) and the French Democratic Confederation of Labour (CFDT)), Germany, Greece, Lithuania, Malta (UHM Voice of the Workers) and Sweden) reported having no influence, compared with the relatively limited or limited influence of the employer organisations. Conversely, in Latvia, Malta (Malta Developers Association (MDA)), Portugal (Portuguese Commerce and Services Confederation (CCP)), Romania and Slovenia, employer organisations reported having lower levels of influence than trade unions (no influence compared with limited or relatively limited influence).

Information from national authorities reveals that, as with the other aspects covered in this chapter, they assessed the social partners' influence more favourably than social partners did. The national authorities from five countries (Lithuania, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain) indicated that the social partners had a significant degree of influence, which contradicts the assessment made by the employer organisations and trade unions. The national authorities' views in Austria, Cyprus, France, Ireland, Latvia, Romania and Slovakia were that the social partners had limited or relatively limited influence, which also contradicts the assessment made by either employer organisations or trade unions.

**Table 13: Social partners' assessment of the influence of their views on the content of the 2023 NRPs**

	Significant influence	Limited or relatively limited influence	No influence	No involvement
<b>Employer organisations and trade unions agree</b>		Bulgaria, Hungary, Luxembourg	Cyprus, Netherlands	
<b>National authorities</b>	Lithuania, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain	Austria, Cyprus, France, Ireland, Latvia, Romania, Slovakia		
<b>All parties agree</b>		Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, Poland	Croatia, Estonia	
<b>Diverging views</b>				
<b>Employer organisations</b>		Austria, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Malta (TMC, MEA, Chamber of SMEs, Gozo Business Chamber), Portugal (CIP), Spain, Sweden	Latvia, Malta (MDA), Portugal (CCP), Romania, Slovenia	
<b>Trade unions</b>	Malta (GWU), Spain (UGT)	France (CGT), Latvia, Malta (MUT, For.U.M.), Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain (CCOO)	Austria, France (FO, CFDT), Germany, Greece, Lithuania, Malta (UHM Voice of the Workers), Sweden	Italy

**Notes:** No information available for national authorities in Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands and Sweden; no information available for employer organisations in Ireland and Slovakia. CGT, General Confederation of Labour; CIP, Confederation of Portuguese Industry; FO, Force Ouvrière; For.U.M., Forum of Maltese Unions; MUT, Malta Union of Teachers.

In some countries (Croatia, Luxembourg, Poland and Spain), the national authorities stated that the NRP contained measures that were covered by national social dialogue. In Croatia, the national authorities stated that the NRP had been designed to contain measures that were already contained in the RRP (which should be implemented in the following year) and that were part of other national plans that had already been discussed with the social partners.

In Luxembourg, the national authorities stated that the social partners had an indirect influence on the NRP because it contained draft laws, and professional chambers in Luxembourg are called on to comment on draft laws. In Spain, the main employer organisation (CEOE) stressed that the NRP contained measures agreed through general social dialogue.

## 4 Towards comprehensive involvement in the European Semester cycle

As stated in the Annual Sustainable Growth Survey 2023, the European Commission ‘will make use of the existing forums under the European Semester to inform and involve social partners also on RRF implementation’ (European Commission, 2022b, p. 17). Although there is no formal obligation to involve or to consult national social partners, the Commission has acknowledged that they play a role in the process and should be heard. The social partners’ involvement is often informal and may take various forms: regular exchanges with the Commission’s European Semester officers, meetings with the Recovery and Resilience Task Force or the geographical desk units, or participation in fact-finding missions organised by the Commission.

This chapter looks at the social partners’ involvement in other key stages of the European Semester 2023 cycle through different forms of indirect or informal involvement with Commission representatives.

### Exchanges with European Semester officers

According to the answers provided by the stakeholders contacted, in 13 countries (Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Sweden) both the employer organisations and trade unions stated that they had been engaged in regular or irregular exchanges with European Semester officers (Table 14).

Divergent responses can be found in some countries. In Croatia and Luxembourg, only the employer organisations were involved in regular or irregular exchanges with the Commission officers. Conversely, the trade unions in Finland took part in exchanges with Commission representatives, but the employer organisations did not. In France and Malta, employer organisations and some trade unions reported having been involved, while in Italy the two employer organisations reported opposite views regarding their involvement.

**Table 14: Regular or irregular exchanges with the European Commission’s European Semester officers**

	Yes	No
<b>Employer organisations and trade unions agree</b>	Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, France (Medef, FO, CFTD), Germany, Hungary, Italy (Confindustria, CGIL), Latvia, Malta (MEA, GWU), Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Sweden	Cyprus, Lithuania, Poland, Spain
<b>Diverging views</b>		
<b>Employer organisations</b>	Croatia, Luxembourg	Finland, Italy (Confesercenti), Malta (TMC)
<b>Trade unions</b>	Finland	Croatia, France (CGT), Italy (UIL), Luxembourg, Malta (UHM Voice of the Workers, For.U.M.)

**Notes:** No information available in Greece; no information available for employer organisations in Ireland and Slovakia; no information available for trade unions in Bulgaria. CGT, General Confederation of Labour; For.U.M., Forum of Maltese Unions; Medef, Movement of the Enterprises of France.

## Participation in European Commission missions

According to information gathered, in 11 countries (Austria, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Sweden), both groups of social partners reported having participated in Commission missions (Table 15).

Divergent responses came from the social partners in Croatia, Czechia and Luxembourg, showing that the employer organisations participated in Commission missions while the trade unions did not. By contrast, Finland is the only country in which trade unions (but no employer organisations) participated in Commission missions. Nevertheless, in other countries non-attendance at these Commission mission meetings was reported by specific social partner organisations, namely the Italian employer organisation Confesercenti, the French union organisation the General Confederation of Labour (CGT), the trade union PASYDY in Cyprus, and the employer organisations MEA, Gozo Business Chamber and MDA in Malta.

## Participation in ad hoc meetings

Finally, the social partners were asked about their participation in ad hoc meetings with Commission representatives to discuss national topics, such as labour market regulation (Table 16). In this regard, both the trade unions and the employer organisations from nine countries (Belgium, Czechia, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Portugal, Slovenia and Sweden) reported their participation in such meetings.

Diverging responses from the social partners show that in four countries (Austria, Croatia and Italy) only the employer organisations were involved in ad hoc meetings with Commission representatives, while the trade unions were not (except in Italy, where only CISL representatives joined these meetings). In contrast, in Finland and Romania only trade unions took part in such meetings.

**Table 15: Participation in European Commission missions**

Parties	Yes	No
<b>Employer organisations and trade unions agree</b>	Austria, Cyprus (SEK, PEO, DEOK), Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Italy (Confindustria), Latvia, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Sweden	Belgium, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Spain
<b>Diverging views</b>		
<b>Employer organisations</b>	Croatia, Czechia, Luxembourg, Malta (TMC, Malta Chamber of SMEs)	Finland, Italy (Confesercenti), Malta (MEA, Gozo Business Chamber, MDA)
<b>Trade unions</b>	Finland, France (CFDT), Malta	Croatia, Cyprus (PASYDY), Czechia, France (CGT), Luxembourg

**Notes:** No information available in Greece; no information available for employer organisations in France, Ireland and Slovakia; no information available for trade unions in Bulgaria. CGT, General Confederation of Labour.

**Table 16: Participation in ad hoc meetings**

Parties	Yes	No
<b>Employer organisations and trade unions agree</b>	Belgium, Czechia, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Italy (CISL), Latvia, Malta (TMC, MEA, Gozo Business Chamber), Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden	Cyprus, Denmark, Hungary, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta (Malta Chamber of SMEs, MDA, UHM Voice of the Workers, For.U.M), Netherlands, Poland, Spain
<b>Diverging views</b>		
<b>Employer organisations</b>	Austria, Croatia	Finland, Romania
<b>Trade unions</b>	Finland, Malta (GWU), Romania	Austria, Croatia, Italy (CGIL, UIL)

**Notes:** No information available in Ireland; no information available for employer organisations in France and Slovakia; no information available for trade unions in Bulgaria. For.U.M., Forum of Maltese Unions.



## 5 | Conclusions

The information gathered in this study shows the complexity of the institutional frameworks for the involvement of the social partners in the implementation of the RRP. This is reflected by the fact that in most Member States the social partners reported being involved through a combination of different settings.

The analysis categorised Member States into three groups based on the degree of institutionalisation of the main setting for social partner involvement: existing bipartite and tripartite social dialogue institutions (most institutionalised); bodies or working groups created in the context of the European Semester or to monitor the implementation of the RRP (moderately institutionalised); and ad hoc consultation processes or other forms of open consultation (least institutionalised).

Existing bipartite and tripartite social dialogue institutions are a common setting for involvement in many Member States (Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, France, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia and Slovenia), although in some cases this form of involvement is secondary or supplementary to other settings.

In a smaller number of countries, the social partners have been involved through bodies or working groups created in the context of the European Semester or to monitor the implementation of the RRP. This is the predominant setting for the involvement of the social partners in some central and eastern European countries (Poland, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia) and in southern Europe (Italy, Portugal and Spain).

The largest group of countries comprises those in which the social partners are involved through less institutionalised settings, such as ad hoc consultation processes or other forms of open consultation alongside civil society organisations. This type of setting is prevalent in countries for different reasons, outlined below.

- Ad hoc or informal bipartite or tripartite consultations are the main setting for the social partners' involvement in northern European countries (Denmark, Finland and Sweden) and Germany, where social dialogue is not conducted through formal or institutionalised settings.
- In other countries, ad hoc consultation processes have been established for the involvement of social partners as an alternative to their involvement through well-established social dialogue institutions, as in Austria, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. In some cases, the choice of this form of involvement is perceived by the social partners, especially the trade unions, as a means to prevent their further involvement in the implementation of the RRP (as is the case in Greece and Ireland).
- Informal consultations have been conducted in the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) as part of governments' efforts to extend the scope of involvement beyond the traditional social partners to civil society organisations.

### Quality of involvement

The analysis of the quality of the social partners' involvement in the implementation of the RRP focused on the Member States where institutionalised settings were the main setting, either existing social dialogue institutions or specific bodies created for RRP monitoring and implementation.

Overall, the findings of the analysis did not show significant differences in the quality of the social partners' involvement between the two settings considered.

- In line with previous findings on the implementation of the RRP, insufficient time for consultations was an issue raised by the social partners in most Member States.
- The quality of the involvement of the social partners was assessed as poor or insufficient in most countries, with few differences between the two sides. However, in some cases employer organisations have slightly more positive views than trade unions, as in France and Italy.
- Similarly, the quality of exchanges with national authorities was assessed negatively in most countries, with the social partners dissatisfied with their limited opportunities to influence implementation, either because of time constraints or owing to a lack of appropriate information or feedback from national authorities. The only exceptions were Belgium and Poland.

These assessments should be understood in a nuanced way and their context taken into account, as they can be influenced by several factors, described below.

- At the time of questionnaire completion, the operation of most RRP monitoring committees was in its early stages, and the social partners' assessments may have been affected by discussions related to their composition or the agreement of procedural rules. Recent changes to the composition of the RRP monitoring committee agreed in Poland explain the overall positive assessment of both trade unions and employer organisations of the change in the quality of their involvement. The situation is different in Hungary, where the committee had not yet started work at the time of writing.
- Another factor that can influence the perceptions of the social partners is related to the complexity of the governance structures for the implementation of the wide range of policies in the RRP (including different ministries, administrative and regional departments, and so on). This makes it difficult for the social partners to provide proper and meaningful assessments of the different bodies, institutions and committees that are involved. The social partners' assessments are usually gathered from representatives of peak-level organisations, and their views reflect their involvement at this level of implementation. This is the case in the Netherlands, where the trade unions were concerned about their limited influence on the ministry in charge of the implementation of the RRP. The situation is different in other countries; for example, in Germany the trade unions reported a significant improvement in their involvement in the implementation of the RRP compared with the previous European Semester cycle, as they had more opportunities to take part in different measures through their representatives at different levels.
- In some cases, the social partners' assessments may have been affected by political instability or broader social conflicts, as in France and Sweden. This is also the case in Bulgaria, where the trade unions are demanding the renegotiation of the RRP target for reducing carbon emissions.

- The analysis of the social partners' satisfaction with their involvement in the implementation of reforms and investments in different policy fields shows that employer organisations tend to be more satisfied than trade unions in most policy fields, which may be explained by the very nature of the reforms and investments provided for in national plans.

## Policy pointers

- Since the adoption of the RRF in 2021, during the COVID-19 crisis, it has evolved to adapt to a changing geopolitical environment and challenging economic circumstances. The lessons learned from the first stages of the RRP implementation process by both governments and the social partners should lead now to a more settled second phase during which the social partners should be regularly and comprehensively involved at various levels.
- The more complex and uncertain the economic context is, the better and broader the social partners' involvement in economic, social and sustainability policymaking should be. This engagement will contribute to ensuring the effectiveness of the structural reforms and investments set out in the RRP and will increase their legitimacy.
- In line with the recommendation to strengthen social dialogue in the EU adopted by the Council on 12 June 2023 and with the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, the systematic, meaningful and timely involvement of the social partners should receive greater priority in the development of employment and social policies and any other relevant policies during the second phase of the implementation of the RRF, which will run until the end of 2026.

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# Annexes

## Annex 1: Measures on which national social partners were consulted

### Austria

- SME Digital is a programme that provides individual consulting for Austrian SMEs by certified experts on the topics of business models and processes (including resource optimisation), e-commerce and online marketing, information technology and cybersecurity, and digital administration. Employer organisations reported being involved in consultations about this measure, but trade unions did not. This measure is included in the digital transition policy field.
- The Renewable Energy Expansion Act is a legislative package that was first adopted in parliament in July 2021 (and amended in January 2022). It aims to increase the share of renewable energies in Austria's electricity production to 100% by 2030 and to facilitate the achievement of climate neutrality by 2040. This measure is included in the green transition policy field.
- Measures tackling energy poverty to reduce the energy costs of low-income households, for example by providing comprehensive renovation support, especially for the optimisation and modernisation of heating systems and thermal renovation. This measure is included in the economic and social cohesion, productivity and competitiveness policy field.
- Transformation of industry towards climate neutrality. Trade unions reported being involved in consultations about this measure, but employer organisations did not. This measure is included in the green transition policy field.
- Education and (re)training measures give people, particularly those who lost their jobs during the pandemic, opportunities in new occupational fields. Trade unions reported being involved in consultations about this measure, but employer organisations did not. This measure is included in the fair economic and social cohesion, productivity and competitiveness policy field.

### Belgium

- Pension reform.
- Reform of the right to training, which was handled at federal level and included measures such as the option for employees in certain sectors and companies to either work their weekly schedule over four weeks or follow an alternating weekly schedule. Both trade unions and employer organisations reported being involved in consultations about this measure.

### Croatia

- Improvement of the legal framework regarding working relations through amendments to the Labour Act. This measure is included in the health, and economic, social and institutional resilience policy field.
- Establishment of a voucher system for the education of employed and unemployed people. This measure is included in the green transition and digital transition policy fields.

### Cyprus

- Reform of flexible work arrangements in the form of telework. The aim of the reform is to promote such arrangements to enhance the work-life balance and increase the employment of the target groups.
- Investment in improving the effectiveness of the Department of Labour and Public Employment Services and reinforcing support for young people. This measure is included in the policies for the next generation and the fair economic and social cohesion, productivity and competitiveness policy fields.
- The establishment of multifunctional centres and childcare centres is an investment aimed at enhancing the availability of good-quality care and social development infrastructure for children to address the relevant country-specific recommendation. It will increase women's participation in the labour market, contribute to gender equality, improve employment in general, and contribute to increasing the fertility rate, reducing the risk of poverty and reducing inequalities.
- Investments in skilling, reskilling and upskilling aim to strengthen digital, green and blue skills of employed and unemployed people, improve the digital skills of people over 55 and provide entrepreneurship training for unemployed people, particularly unemployed women.

- A reform of the ‘e-skills Action Plan – Implementation of specific actions’ aims to promote the enhancement of digital skills across the whole of education, public administration and society, and all enterprises. This will enable all citizens to best reap the benefits of digital technologies and facilitate the successful implementation of the digital transformation agenda.

## Denmark

- Upskilling of unskilled people, providing training to unemployed people and employees to combat the lack of skilled labourers (e.g. workers welding district heating pipes, fibre technicians and workers installing digital infrastructure). Note that this is not an RRP-specific measure.
- Initiatives to train workers for the green transition aim to provide unemployed people with vocational training, with a focus on the green transition. Note that this is not an RRP-specific measure, but it is mentioned in the RRP. This measure is included in the green transition policy field.
- A green tax reform, which is a measure included in the green transition policy field.
- Energy efficiency, which is a measure included in the green transition policy field.
- Digitalisation, which is a measure included in the digital transition policy field.

## Estonia

- A policy reform to extend the period of unemployment benefits (*Töötuskindlustushüvitiste pikendamise*), which is included in the health, and economic, social and institutional resilience policy field.
- Measures to support the employment of young people implemented by the Unemployment Insurance Fund (*Noorte tööturumeetmed*), which is included in the health, and economic, social and institutional resilience policy field.
- Green transition of companies (*Ettevõtete rohepööre*).
- Increasing the number of places on nursing courses (*Õdede koolituspakkumise suurendamine*).

## France

- Reform of the public employment service (*Pôle emploi*), whose aim is to change ‘*Pôle emploi*’ to ‘France Travail’, leading to a global ecosystem promoting an inclusive labour market. The reform aims to support people who are furthest from employment, in particular active solidarity income (*revenu de solidarité active*) recipients, who will benefit from 15 to 20 hours a week of (compulsory) support to help them integrate into the labour market in the long term. This measure is included in the ‘other categories’ policy field.
- Reform of the national occupational health and safety system, with the aim of drawing up concrete proposals to prepare for the operational deployment of France Travail.
- Reform of the unemployment insurance scheme. The aim of the reform was to make access to unemployment insurance more universal and fairer and combat job insecurity, by implementing measures such as extending unemployment insurance and providing incentives for companies to offer more permanent contracts.
- A pension reform (proposed in December 2019) aims to ensure the funding of the pay-as-you-go pension scheme by raising the statutory retirement age from 62 to 64, and the insurance period required to qualify for a maximum-rate pension to 43 years – that is, 172 quarters for the generations born from 1965 onwards.

## Germany

- Climate protection contracts for the energy-intensive industries are included in the green transition policy field.
- Alliances for further qualification are implemented at the level of the German states (*Länder*) and/or at sectoral level. This measure is included in the digital transition policy field.
- Efforts to secure training places are included in the fair economic and social cohesion, productivity and competitiveness policy field.

## Greece

- Establishing an informal technical working group (composed of representatives of the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Federation of Hellenic ICT Enterprises and Ergani) on the Digital Work Card and its gradual implementation in supermarkets, banks, insurance companies and security companies.
- A national skills strategy, which is included in the economic and social cohesion, productivity and competitiveness policy field.

- National skills councils, which are included in the fair economic and social cohesion, productivity and competitiveness policy field.
- Reorganisation of the public employment service.
- Reform of the Subsidised Programmes Account for Employment and Vocational Training.

## Hungary

- Establishment of the Integrity Authority. Its purpose is to prevent and identify cases of fraud, conflicts of interest, corruption and other violations related to the use of EU support; members were decided through a public tendering process. This measure is included in the green transition policy field.
- Modification of the law on vocational training (Act LXXX of 2019). The aim of the amendment was to facilitate the adaptation of training to economic changes, creating a more flexible vocational training system. Both trade unions and employer organisations participated in the preparation of the amendment. This measure is included in the policies for the next generation policy field.
- Support of energy-intensive SMEs. This measure is included in the green transition policy field.

## Italy

- A reform of higher technical institutes. This measure is included in the policies for the next generation policy field.
- Special economic zones reform. Note that only Confindustria (an employer organisation) provided input on this. This measure is included in the fair economic and social cohesion, productivity and competitiveness policy field.
- Civil justice reform. Note that only Confindustria (an employer organisation) provided input on this. This measure is included in the health, and economic, social and institutional resilience policy field.
- Public Contracts Code reform. Note that only Confindustria (an employer organisation) provided input on this. This measure is included in the health, and economic, social and institutional resilience policy field.
- The National Social Security Institute implemented the project OMNIA IS. Note that only Confindustria (an employer organisation) provided input on this. This measure is included in the policies for the next generation policy field.
- Tax reform. Note that only Confindustria (an employer organisation) provided input on this. This measure is included in the health, and economic, social and institutional resilience policy field.
- Creation of the Public Procurement Code. This measure is included in the economic and social cohesion, productivity and competitiveness policy field.
- The new Labour Decree. Note that only Confindustria (an employer organisation) provided input on this. This measure is included in the health, and economic, social and institutional resilience policy field.
- Territorial medicine reform. Note that only trade unions (CISL and UIL) provided input on this. This measure is included in the economic and social cohesion, productivity and competitiveness policy field.

## Latvia

- Reform of human resource provision and skills development directions. This measure is included in the following policy fields: the digital transition; fair economic and social cohesion, productivity and competitiveness; the green transition; health, and economic, social and institutional resilience; and policies for the next generation.
- Reform to promote the sustainability and resilience of a people-centred, comprehensive, integrated healthcare system. This measure is included in the health, and economic, social and institutional resilience policy field.
- Reform to promote the sustainability of healthcare, the strengthening of healthcare management, the efficient use of healthcare resources and an increase in the total state budget for the healthcare sector. This measure is included in the health, and economic, social and institutional resilience policy field.
- Reform of the availability of social and employment services to support the minimum income reform. This measure is included in the fair economic and social cohesion, productivity and competitiveness policy field.
- Involvement of unemployed people, jobseekers and people at risk of unemployment in the labour market. This measure is included in the fair economic and social cohesion, productivity and competitiveness policy field.

## Lithuania

- Deregulation and improvement of the business climate, with the aim of providing an attractive migration system and a talent-attraction system to improve the availability of jobs in the labour market. These processes involve corresponding amendments to the Law on the Legal Status of Foreigners and the revision of the list of high-value-added occupations. This measure is included in the health, and economic, social and institutional resilience policy field.

- More sustainably produced electricity in the country as a result of a reform in the RRP component ‘Green transformation of Lithuania’. One of the goals of the component is to increase the number of people producing electricity for their own needs and the amount of national electricity obtained from renewable energy sources. It includes investments in solar and wind power plants and individual accumulation installations. This measure is included in the green transition policy field.

## Luxembourg

- The national skills strategy, which contains measures to develop the skills of jobseekers and vocational training programmes for them, and to design training programmes for the most promising job profiles. This measure is included in the following policy fields: the digital transition; fair economic and social cohesion, productivity and competitiveness; and the green transition.

## Malta

- Renovation of school buildings, with the aim of making them more energy efficient. This measure is included in the green transition policy field.

## Poland

- Remote work, which enables employees to carry out their duties completely or partially (in a hybrid mode) outside the company’s registered office, based on an agreement with their employer. The rules for remote work are set out in agreements concluded with trade unions or statutes. Employers must decide how they will reimburse certain remote work costs and the costs that they will cover. This measure is included in the fair economic and social cohesion, productivity and competitiveness policy field.
- Sobriety checks. Employers are now able to put in place these preventive controls to ensure the protection of the life and health of their employees or other people, or the protection of property. This measure is included in the fair economic and social cohesion, productivity and competitiveness policy field.

## Portugal

- A licensing reform under the RRP component ‘Economic justice and business environment’. It aims to save costs and time spent on bureaucratic procedures, with no impact on environmental protection but a significant impact on the competitiveness of companies and the availability of resources for authorities. Therefore, it is meant not to add new measures to the green transition, but to reduce costs related to the green transition for companies. Note that this reform was only discussed by an employer organisation (the Confederation of Portuguese Industry).

## Romania

- The Social Dialogue Law.
- The green transition (related to environmental sustainability) in mining.
- Public administration reform, unitary pay and social dialogue.

## Slovakia

- Update of the RRP and REPowerEU.
- Transformation of industry and society to address climate change, including through the act on climate change and low-carbon transformation and the law on landscape planning.
- Economic reform, which includes the act amending Act No. 7/2005 Coll. on bankruptcy and restructuring.
- The National Digital Skills Strategy of the Slovak Republic and the Action Plan 2023–2026.

## Slovenia

- Reform of the wage system in the public sector, with the aim of strengthening the use of variable remuneration and performance-based payments in the public sector in order to increase their effectiveness while preserving the public financial sustainability of the wage system in the sector. This measure is included in the following policy fields: economic and social cohesion, productivity and competitiveness; and health, and economic, social and institutional resilience.
- Structural measures to strengthen the labour market and its reform. These measures are included in the economic and social cohesion, productivity and competitiveness policy field.
- Measures related to health and social security implemented (through a health system reform). These measures are included in the following policy fields: economic and social cohesion, productivity and competitiveness; and health, and economic, social and institutional resilience.



## Spain

- Royal Decree-Law 675/2023 for the reform of the Dependency Law (as part of the RRP component ‘Shock plan for the care economy and reinforcement of inclusion policies’). This reform is included in the health, and economic, social and institutional resilience policy field.
- Royal Decree-Law 2/2023 for the public pension system. This reform aims to ensure the long-term sustainability of the public pension system in the context of the Pact of Toledo. It is included in the policies for the next generation policy field.
- The Scholarship Holder’s Statute (not passed yet), which aims to set out new public policies to promote a dynamic, resilient and inclusive labour market. This measure is included in the economic and social cohesion, productivity and competitiveness policy fields.
- Royal Decree-Law 32/2021 on the labour reform. This measure is included in the economic and social cohesion, productivity and competitiveness policy fields.

Information is not available for Bulgaria, Czechia, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands or Sweden.

## Annex 2: List of national organisations included in study

**Table A1: Organisations that participated in the study, by Member State**

Member State	Employer organisations	Trade union organisations	National authorities
<b>Austria</b>	Austrian Economic Chambers (WKO)	Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB) Vienna Chamber of Labour (AK Wien)	Federal Chancellery (BKA)
<b>Belgium</b>	Unisoc Union Wallonne des Entreprises	Confederation of Christian Trade Unions (ACV-CSC) Centrale Générale des Syndicats Libéraux de Belgique (CGSLB) Fédération Générale du Travail de Belgique (FGTB)	Conseil central de l'économie
<b>Bulgaria</b>	Bulgarian Industrial Association (BIA)	Confederation of Labour 'Podkrepa'	
<b>Croatia</b>	Croatian Employers' Association (CEA)	Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia (UATUC) Independent Trade Unions of Croatia (NHS) Matrix of Croatian Trade Unions (Matrix)	Prime Minister's Office, responsible for the implementation of the European Semester European Semester officer and economic advisor
<b>Cyprus</b>	Employers and Industrialists Federation (OEB) Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI)	Cyprus Workers' Confederation (SEK) Pancyprian Civil Servants Trade Union (PASYDY) Pancyprian Federation of Labour (PEO) Democratic Labour Federation of Cyprus (DEOK)	Ministry of Finance Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance
<b>Czechia</b>	Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic (SP ČR)	Czech-Moravian Confederation of Trade Unions (ČMKOS)	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic (MPSV)
<b>Denmark</b>	Confederation of Danish Employers (DA)	Danish Trade Union Confederation (FH)	Ministry of Finance Local Government Denmark (KL) Danish Regions
<b>Estonia</b>	Estonian Employers' Confederation (ETKL)	Estonian Trade Union Confederation (EAKL)	Ministry of Finance
<b>Finland</b>	Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK)	Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions (SAK) Confederation of Unions for Professional and Managerial Staff in Finland (Akava) Finnish Confederation of Professionals (STTK) Industrial Union (Teollisuusliitto)	Ministry of Finance Association of Finnish Municipalities
<b>France</b>	Movement of the Enterprises of France (Medef)	French Democratic Confederation of Labour (CFDT) General Confederation of Labour (CGT) Force Ouvrière (FO)	Ministry of Labour Department of European and International Affairs (DAEI)
<b>Germany</b>	Confederation of German Employers' Associations (BDA)	German Trade Union Confederation (DGB)	Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK) Federal Ministry of Finance (BMF)
<b>Greece</b>	Hellenic Federation of Enterprises (SEV)	Greek General Confederation of Labour (GSEE)	Ministry of Economy and Finance

Member State	Employer organisations	Trade union organisations	National authorities
<b>Hungary</b>	National Association of Entrepreneurs and Employers (VOSZ) Employers' Group of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) Confederation of Hungarian Employers and Industrialists (MGYOSZ)	Hungarian Trade Union Confederation (MASZSZ) Democratic League of Independent Trade Unions (LIGA) Interest Defence Consultancy Service (ÉTOSZ) Independent Healthcare Union (FESZ) Union of Higher Education Workers (FDSZ) Hungarian Trade Union Federation of Workers in the Chemical, Energy and Allied Industries (VDSZ)	Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development (TFM) Ministry of Economic Development (GFM)
<b>Ireland</b>	Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC)	Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)	Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform
<b>Italy</b>	Confindustria Confesercenti	Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL) Italian Confederation of Workers' Trade Unions (CISL) Italian Labour Union (UIL)	
<b>Latvia</b>	Employers' Confederation of Latvia (LDDK)	Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia (LBAS)	Ministry of Finance Ministry of Welfare Ministry of the Economy and Innovation Ministry of Climate and Energy Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development Ministry of Education and Science
<b>Lithuania</b>	Lithuanian Confederation of Industrialists (LPK) Association Investors' Forum	Lithuanian Trade Union 'Solidarumas' (LPSS) Lithuanian Trade Union Confederation	Ministry of Social Security and Labour Ministry of Finance
<b>Luxembourg</b>	Union des Entreprises Luxembourgeoises (UEL)	Independent Luxembourg Trade Union Confederation (OGBL)	Ministry of the Economy Ministry of Finance
<b>Malta</b>	Malta Employers' Association (MEA) The Malta Chamber (TMC) Malta Chamber of SMEs Gozo Business Chamber Gozo Regional Committee Malta Developers Association (MDA)	General Workers' Union (GWU) UHM Voice of the Workers Malta Union of Teachers Forum of Maltese Unions (For.U.M.)	
<b>Netherlands</b>	Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers (VNO-NCW)	Federation of Dutch Trade Unions (FNV)	Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy Ministry of Finance
<b>Poland</b>	Polish Confederation Lewiatan Federation of Polish Entrepreneurs Association of the Employers of the Internet Industry (IAB Polska)	Solidarity (NSZZ 'Solidarność')	Ministry of Economic Development and Technology Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy
<b>Portugal</b>	Confederation of Portuguese Industry (CIP) Portuguese Commerce and Services Confederation (CCP)	General Confederation of Portuguese Workers (CGTP) General Union of Workers (UGT)	
<b>Romania</b>	Concordia Employers' Confederation	National Trade Union Confederation (Cartel ALFA) National Trade Union Confederation Meridian (CSN Meridian)	Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ministry of European Investments and Projects Ministry of Labour and Social Protection

Member State	Employer organisations	Trade union organisations	National authorities
<b>Slovakia</b>	National Union of Employers (RUZ SR) Association of Construction Entrepreneurs of Slovakia (ZSPS) Association of polyclinics and medical facilities (APAZ)	Confederation of Trade Unions of the Slovak Republic (KOZ SR) Joint Trade Unions of Slovakia (SOS) Trade and tourism trade union (OZ PO CR) Slovak Trade Union of Healthcare and Social Services (SOZ ZaSS) Metal workers' trade union (OZ KOVO) Trade Union of Workers in Education and Science (OZ PSaV) Union of railway workers (OZZ)	Government Office of the Slovak Republic Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic (MF SR)
<b>Slovenia</b>	Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia (GZS) Association of Employers in Craft and Small Business of Slovenia (ZDOPS)	Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia (ZSSS) Confederation of Trade Unions of Slovenia (Pergam)	Recovery and Resilience Office
<b>Spain</b>	Spanish Confederation of Business Organizations (CEOE)	Workers' Commissions (CCOO) General Union of Workers (UGT)	Ministry of Economic Affairs and Digital Transformation
<b>Sweden</b>	Svenskt Näringsliv	Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations (Saco)	

**Notes:** The social partners listed provided their views on the topics covered in this report. Other social partners were contacted but declined to participate in the study. In some cases, more than one person per organisation was interviewed. Government representatives, European Semester officers and experts were also interviewed.

## Annex 3: Network of Eurofound Correspondents

**Table A2: National correspondents who contributed to the research**

Member State	National correspondent	Organisation
Austria	Bernadette Allinger	Working Life Research Centre (FORBA)
Belgium	Anne Guisset	HIVA – Research Institute for Work and Society, KU Leuven
Bulgaria	Vassil Kirov	Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (IPS-BAS)
Croatia	Predrag Bejaković and Irena Klemenčić	Faculty of Economics, Business, and Tourism, University of Split, and University of Zagreb
Cyprus	Pavlos Kalosinatos	Cyprus Labour Institute of the Pancyprian Federation of Labour (INEK-PEO)
Czechia	Soňa Veverková	Research Institute for Labour and Social Affairs
Denmark	Carsten Jørgensen and Maria Hansen	Employment Relations Research Centre (FAOS), University of Copenhagen
Estonia	Miriam Lehari and Kirsti Melesk	Praxis Centre for Policy Studies
Finland	Elina Härmä	Oxford Research
France	Frédéric Turlan	IR Share
Germany	Thilo Janssen	Institute of Economic and Social Research, Hans Böckler Foundation
Greece	Penny Georgiadou	Labour Institute of the Greek General Confederation of Labour (INE GSEE)
Hungary	Éva Palócz	Kopint-Tárki Institute for Economic Research
Ireland	Martin Frawley	IRN Publishing
Italy	Michele Faioli and Alessandro Smilari	Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore
Latvia	Raita Karnite	EPC Ltd
Lithuania	Ramunė Guobaitė and Inga Blažienė	Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences
Luxembourg	Adrien Thomas	Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER)
Malta	Krista Bonello Rutter Giappone	University of Malta
Netherlands	Thomas de Winter	Panteia
Poland	Agnieszka Górniak and Ewelina Wołosik	Ecorys Polska
Portugal	Reinhard Naumann	Centre for Studies for Social Intervention (CESIS)
Romania	Nicoleta Voicu	Center for Public Innovation
	Marcel Spatari	Syndx SRL
Slovakia	Rastislav Bednárík and Ludovít Cziria	Institute for Labour and Family Research (IVPR)
Slovenia	Monika Weiss	University of Ljubljana
Spain	Oscar Molina	Institute for Labour Studies, Autonomous University of Barcelona
Sweden	Nils Brandsma	Oxford Research



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The EU Open Data Portal (<https://data.europa.eu>) provides access to datasets from the EU. Data can be downloaded and reused for free, both for commercial and non-commercial purposes.

Three years after the adoption of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), this report reviews the quality of the social partners' involvement in 2023 in the ongoing implementation of reforms and investments funded by that initiative. It also examines the quality of their involvement in the preparation of the 2023 national reform programmes (NRPs) as part of the European Semester.

The RRF Regulation requires the social partners to be consulted in the preparation and implementation of the RRF reform and investment plans. In addition, the European Commission has advocated their involvement in the preparation of the NRPs as part of the European Semester. This report finds that the quality of their involvement in both processes continues to be uneven across countries and depends on several factors.

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