Representativeness of the social partners in the European cross-industry social dialogue

Executive summary

Introduction

The aim of this EIRO representativeness study is to identify the relevant national cross-industry and European actors in the field of cross-industry industrial relations. The impetus for the series of representativeness studies arises from the goal of the European Commission to identify, recognise and assess the representative European associations to be consulted under the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). Hence, this study is devised to provide the basic information needed to support European social dialogue at cross-industry level.

Defining cross-industry activities and associations

Scope of study

The scope of the study in terms of activities is the entire national economy, including both private and public sectors. The scope of the study in terms of actors is all national cross-industry and European associations on the trade union and employers’ organisation sides.

Methodology

Representativeness studies have two main tasks to fulfil. The first is to identify the relevant national associations on both sides of industry. The second is to analyse the relevant European associations from the two sides of industry. For this purpose, the research uses a combined approach to screen the relevant interest associations.

- Top-down screening: this starts by identifying the current relevant cross-industry European interest associations and then examines their affiliated members at national level. In this approach, the analysis focuses only on affiliates in the 28 Member States of the European Union, to the exclusion of all members and affiliated associations in other countries. Only social partner organisations are taken into consideration: member associations with no role in industrial relations and individual enterprises – while they may be important national affiliates of some of the relevant cross-industry EU-level organisations included here – are not covered by the present study. It is also worth noting that the membership figures included in this study should be considered as a minimum for the EU-level social partner organisations, since data on membership of some of their national affiliates were not available at the time of compiling this overview report.

- Bottom-up screening: this starts by identifying the national cross-industry associations involved in cross-industry collective bargaining and/or direct bipartite or tripartite consultations, and then proceeds to collect data on their affiliation to any European associations.

National level of interest representation

Following the analysis of national cross-industry industrial relations (the ‘bottom-up’ screening) and taking into account the members of EU-level organisations (the ‘top-down’ screening), a total of 108 trade union organisations and 134 employers’ associations were identified for inclusion in the present study.

National trade union organisations

Of the 108 trade unions considered in this study, 56% are economy-wide all-encompassing organisations which cover the whole of the private and public
sectors. The remaining 44% have a representational domain which is limited to some subsectors (generally the private or public sectors), certain occupations (blue- or white-collar unions, technicians, and managers), or certain regions.

Although they may not cover the whole economy, it is important to note that the vast majority of unions engage in multi-sectoral collective bargaining (separate collective bargaining in at least two different sectors – 105 unions or 97%) and are effectively integrated in the cross-industry industrial relations systems. Some 55% of unions (59 unions) are involved in cross-industry bargaining and almost 90% (97 unions) in consultations. This is usually carried out in formal tripartite bodies (70 unions or 65%) while a minority participate in bipartite structures (15 or 14%). The remaining 12 organisations (11% of the total 108 trade unions) are involved in consultations in bilateral talks, essentially on an ad hoc basis.

### National employers’ associations

Employers’ associations, even peak organisations, tend to be focused on specific interests, which often encourage relatively narrow representational domains. This is reflected in the prevalence of sectional domains, so that just around 40% of the employers’ associations included in the study have encompassing domains (that is, covering the entire private or public sector). About 60% of the associations concentrate on...
sections of the economic system. Despite this, involvement in multi-sector bargaining, either directly or through members, is almost universal (119 organisations or 89%). Also significant is the participation in cross-industry collective bargaining (45 organisations or 34%). Again, the great majority of organisations are involved in consultations about public policy (120 organisations or 90%), which take place generally within tripartite bodies (76 organisations or 57%), with a direct link to the evidence about trade unions, since by definition the two sides of industry participate together in tripartite consultations and social dialogue.

**European level of interest representation**

According to the European Commission’s list of European social partners’ organisations consulted under Article 154 TFEU, the cross-industry bipartite European social dialogue takes place between the ‘general cross-industry organisations’ (BUSINESSEUROPE, CEEP, ETUC) and the ‘cross-industry organisations representing certain categories of workers or undertakings’ (CEC, EUROCADRES, UEAPME). These six organisations are the relevant EU-level social partners which have been considered in the top-down screening.

**EU-level cross-industry trade unions**

ETUC, EUROCADRES and CEC together represent almost 80% of all listed national trade union organisations.

ETUC is by far the trade union peak level organisation which associates most national organisations (70 out of 108, or 65%) with comprehensive representational domains (48 out of 61, or 79%) and those which are most prominent in national cross-industry industrial relations (38 out of 59 in collective bargaining and 68 out of 97 in consultations, corresponding to 64% and 70% respectively). EUROCADRES’ member associations are a subsection of ETUC’s members and therefore are often all-encompassing unions. CEC, which is independent of ETUC although it participates in cross-industry social dialogue within the ETUC’s delegation, presents only sectional representational domains.

Data on trade union membership are available for three-quarters of the surveyed organisations (83 out of 108). Some 36.2 million active workers are affiliated to the unions included in this study for which membership data were available. According to these data, at least 32.4 million workers are members of ETUC through its national affiliates in the 28 EU countries (data on 59 national trade union organisations out of 70 affiliates). This corresponds to almost 90% of the overall membership included in this study. EUROCADRES has similarly high membership because its members comprise a subsection of the same trade union confederations affiliated to ETUC.

As a general indication of professional and managerial staff membership in EUROCADRES, self-reported data provided for the 2013 Congress by affiliated trade unions indicate a total of some 4.1 million workers. Member organisations of CEC have at least 600,000 affiliated workers (data on nine cases out of 13) or 2% of the overall membership.

**EU-level cross-industry employers’ associations**

The three current EU-level cross-industry employers’ associations, BUSINESSEUROPE, UEAPME and CEEP, represent almost 70% of all national-level organisations.

BUSINESSEUROPE, UEAPME, and CEEP are the EU-level employers’ associations which affiliate most of the national organisations involved in national cross-industry industrial relations. BUSINESSEUROPE tends to have a broader representational domain, whereas the members of UEAPME and CEEP tend to have sectional representation, focused on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and public services respectively.

Data on membership of the employers’ organisations included in this study (134 organisations) are available for 106 organisations in the case of firms (79%) and for 82 organisations in the case of employees (61%). In total, the national organisations included in this study for which data are available group at least 11.9 million affiliated firms, which employ at least 107.8 million workers. At least 3.8 million firms (32%) are affiliated with BUSINESSEUROPE through its national members (data for 26 cases out of 29); such firms employ at least 60.1 million workers (56%, data for 22 cases out of 29). UEAPME affiliates through its national members (data for 27 cases out of 36) at least 6.1 million firms (52%), with at least 16 million employees (15%, data for 16 cases out of 36). CEEP affiliates at least 193,000 firms (2%) – which in this case can actually be public sector administrations in accordance with its representational domain – through its national members (data for 27 cases out of 29); these administrations and enterprises together have at least 19.7 million employees (18%, data for 24 cases out of 29).

These differences reflect the distinct membership bases and notably the focus of UEAPME on small
Conclusions

The data collected for this study show that the European social partners currently involved in cross-industry social dialogue affiliate the great majority of national organisations which have a role in cross-industry industrial relations in the EU28 Member States and cover about 90% of member employees and firms. Specifically, the national members of ETUC, EUROCADRES and CEC organise 91% of all employees and the national affiliated organisations of BUSINESSEUROPE, UEAPME and CEEP organise 85% of firms which employ 89% of workers. It should be noted that ETUC and BUSINESSEUROPE are the only organisations with affiliated members in each of the 28 Member States under scrutiny.

Together, ETUC, EUROCADRES, CEC and BUSINESSEUROPE, UEAPME, CEEP cover three-quarters of the national social partner organisations which participate in cross-industry industrial relations across the EU. They also affiliate through their national members the great majority of unionised workers and firms affiliated to employers’ associations. With their specificities in terms of representation, according to the result of this study, they are to be regarded as the most important EU-wide representatives of labour and management at cross-industry level.

Further information


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