



Evaluation Report on the Building Trade Union Capacities (BTUP4Recovery) Project

Overview

The BTUP4Recovery project, co-financed by the European Union and led by industriAll Europe, aimed to strengthen trade union capacities across Central and Eastern Europe. Targeting five countries—Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, and Serbia—the project sought to enhance organising efforts, collective bargaining, and social dialogue to support industrial recovery post-COVID-19. This report evaluates the impact, assesses progress by partners, and identifies lessons learned to inform future initiatives.

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Quantitative Analysis

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1. Number of new members in companies targeted for organising	3757
2. Collective agreements as a result of organising activities	16
3. Number of directly targeted companies	34
4. Number of trained leaders and activated unionists	2363
5. Number of training activities	52

Qualitative Analysis

Importantly, we saw the emergence of a new, modern organising and bargaining culture. After some difficulties, there was increased self-confidence and acceptance among both the union leadership and key regional and local union representatives of a new membership focus. This will mean a permanent change towards proactive action with strengthened representation. It will have a lasting impact on the way the unions will handle industrial and energy transformation such as the electrification of the automotive sector which is big in all project countries, with ongoing or planned major investments.

As expected, there were different results from country to country. The EU candidate country Serbia was a star performer with more than 3300 newly organised members and almost 2000 trained leaders and activated unionists, shared among five participating unions who developed better cooperation and coordinated action with the help of a non-competition agreement. Slovakia also performed well with with about 140 new members and 130 trained activists, and a committed union leadership to further invest in expanding organising and collective bargaining efforts in a changing industrial landscape. Hungary was the only disappointment, as the union partner proved to have insufficient resources for a cultural change.

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Slovakia

The national workshop in October 2023 brought together trade union leaders and organizers to build understanding and practical skills. Successful initiatives included mapping, small commitment campaigns, and social media engagement. Notably, unions at Gabor and Schaeffler plants made tangible progress by taking credit for their achievements and motivating members through visible actions.

Serbia

Serbian unions demonstrated strong coordination during collective bargaining at Zijin Copper. The final phase involved continued actions focused on strategic organizing at high-impact sites. Notable increases in union membership, such as at Yura Corporation in Serbia, where membership grew from 250 to 950 across multiple sites. The persistent organising efforts with partners from the "Workers Voice" movement significantly expanded membership of SSMS Metal workers Union.

Czech Republic

200 people were trained, resulting in 150 new members, with 100 more recruited indirectly. Aero Vodochody saw a 20% increase in membership, while Eberspächer Rakovník grew by 10%. A new collective agreement was signed at Aero Vodochody. Other companies maintained existing agreements and prepared for upcoming negotiations using newly acquired organising strategies. The project activated 20 leaders, including committee members, shifting from passive to collaborative engagement.

Buhler Motor: A survey prompted executives to engage regularly with employees.

Aero Vodochody: A survey and public meeting led to the preparation of a petition against a proposed 12-hour shift system.

Poland:

In Poland, organising efforts continue with a third leaflet campaign at Mercedes Jawor, though engagement remains low, with only two workers attending a Zoom meeting. Alstom Wrocław has seen 60 new members join, achieving a 65% union density among administrative staff. Limited progress is noted at LG Solution due to layoffs, while former Alstom workers express interest in forming a union at Rewag Rawicz. Challenges include a lack of active leaders and minimal government support for unionisation in foreign-owned companies. Despite these obstacles, ongoing efforts at Mercedes and new hires at Alstom suggest future organising opportunities.

Building Regional Collaboration

In April 2023, a significant regional meeting took place in Kecskemét, Hungary, involving project partners from the metal, mining, energy, and light industries across Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Serbia. Funded by the partners themselves, this meeting underscored the importance of face-to-face interactions for fostering networks and enhancing collaboration, marking a pivotal moment for cross-country cooperation. In a timely and thematically relevant initiative, a leafletting action at the Mercedes plant in Kecskemét involved all project partners and demonstrated the power of transnational solidarity in organising.

Following this successful gathering, organisers initiated monthly meetings to share organising experiences and create synergies in campaigns beyond the project's duration. A notable achievement was the April 2024 binational workshop between Slovak and Czech unions, which included a leafletting campaign at Volkswagen Bratislava, successfully distributing over 3,000 materials and significantly boosting worker engagement.

Networking of Organisers

There were weekly briefings between the project manager and the organisers and monthly briefings with all organisers. Depending on current issues, elected trade union representatives attended the meetings. A key element was regular interaction between the project manager and the lead organisers who learned a strategic and systematic way of working, for which they were accountable. A new international network led to mutual learning and inspiration.

Lead organisers worked systematically with their organisers and there was regular exchange. Partners understood the need to build organising structures in their unions and launched strategic processes to achieve this. Step by step, confidence grew and also the regional and local level union representatives were convinced of the new approach and started acting accordingly.

Lessons Learned for Future Initiatives

- **Strategic Resource Allocation:** Invest systematically in financial and human resources for union growth.
- **Membership Growth Focus:** Trade Unions should prioritise membership growth over resolving individual labour issues.
- **Highlighting Organising Efforts:** Integrate organising dimensions into collective bargaining communications and celebrate victories to enhance engagement.

- **Robust Membership Database:** A strong database is essential for effective communication with members.
- **Team-Based Organising:** Build teams for sustainability instead of relying on individual organisers.
- **Face-to-Face Engagement:** Direct worker interactions, such as factory-gate actions, are more effective in blue-collar environments than digital efforts.
- **Sharing Best Practices:** Cross-border collaboration strengthens national and regional organising through shared experiences.

Conclusions

All in all, the project achieved its goals in almost all project countries and contributed to a cultural change in the participating unions. They now have an understanding and strengthened capacity to continue working on a sustainable industrial transformation with a strong social dimension, with active participation of local level actors.

The BTUP4Recovery project has established a robust foundation for potential trade union growth, showcasing the effectiveness of transnational solidarity in tackling the challenges of industrial recovery.

Strengthening the BTUP Unit is crucial, necessitating the securing of additional resources to provide better support for affiliates and ensure long-term sustainability. Engaging affiliates in discussions about leveraging the European Minimum Wage Directive can also serve as a tool for promoting organising and collective bargaining growth. Ultimately, the success of the BTUP4Recovery project emphasises the need for trade unions to adopt proactive organising strategies, shifting from reactive approaches to long-term, systematic methods that secure worker power and foster positive workplace change.