



Progress Report:

Capacity Building for Unions in Action

‘Building Trade Union Capacities for Better Collective Bargaining and Sustainable Industrial Recovery in Central and Eastern Europe’

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1. Introduction

The Covid crisis, followed by the war in Ukraine and supply chain problems, hit many manufacturing sectors hard, and recovery processes have often been slow and complicated. Digitalisation, decarbonisation and demographic changes have added further challenges. It is clear that a successful recovery and building up to a better level must include a strong social dimension, which requires representative social partners, forward-looking social dialogue, and innovative collective bargaining.

Important parts of supply chains of key industrial sectors are located in Central, Eastern and Southeast European countries, employing hundreds of thousands of workers. But social dialogue structures are weak, and social partners have poor representativeness and capacity.

We concluded that successful implementation of sectoral recovery plans required urgent action to build the capacity of the social partners for strengthening their membership policies and developing their services.

For this project, industriAll Europe identified five countries that are part of international supply chains in key industries and face major changes, accelerated by the Covid crisis. The countries are Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Serbia.

Between 2023 and 2024, the EU-funded project focused on building trade union capacity for organising, social dialogue and collective bargaining, to ensure an inclusive and sustainable industrial recovery and transformation. Participating unions in the five project countries have hired lead organisers, who have been trained by the project and work together with union officials on concrete organising and collective bargaining processes.

This progress report examines the development in the five project countries and especially on two main topics in 2023-2024:

- Improvements in trade union capacity for organising, social dialogue and collective bargaining, and future needs, opportunities and challenges
- Impact of the ongoing industrial restructuring and new forms of working

The report is based on information from the participating unions, interviews with union leadership and organisers, web articles and other documentation.



2. Unionisation and collective bargaining in the project countries

This table summarises the general union density, employer organisation density and collective bargaining coverage in the five project countries. Even though data from different sources varies and is not always up to date, this OECD-ILO data illustrates the low level of union density and CBA coverage.

Country	Union density %	Employer density %	org. CBA coverage %
Czech Republic	11	55	35
Slovakia	11	50	24
Hungary	8	51	22
Poland	13	55	13
Serbia	26	25	30

Sources: OECD, ILOSTAT

Collective bargaining takes place predominantly at company or factory level. There are some sectoral or multi-employer agreements in all project countries, but very few in the industrial sectors. There are also some legal provisions for the mandatory extension of collective agreements to cover all companies and employees (as in France, Belgium, etc.), or functional equivalents (like in Italy and Austria). But they are rarely used, and the lack of sectoral agreements remains a problem.

All this contributes to a low collective bargaining coverage. It is difficult to see how the five project countries could reach the 80% coverage level referred to in the EU Minimum Wage Directive without strengthening sectoral or multi-employer bargaining. However, for the unions to be able to present themselves as credible counterparts for such agreements, they need to organise, grow and increase union density, with the support of industrialAll Europe.

Looking at the labour laws in the five project countries, the thresholds for representativeness to have collective bargaining rights are low or non-existent. A bigger problem is that low union density means less bargaining power.

In the Labour Code of the **Czech Republic**, there are no representativeness thresholds for a trade union to negotiate a collective agreement at plant or sectoral level. A local union can be set up by three workers. If there are several unions present, the employer must negotiate with all of them together, and the unions must be in agreement. The Labour Code is currently being amended so that if the unions do not agree with each other, the employer may negotiate with the largest of them, or with more than one organisation that is in agreement and has more members than the others. A CBA applies to all employees, also non-union workers.

There are 23 sectoral collective agreements, of which 17 are negotiated by the member unions of the CMKOS confederation. Of the industrialAll Europe affiliates, OS KOVO has two sectoral CBAs for the aerospace and electrotechnical industries, OS ECHO, two for the chemical and energy industries, and OS TOK for the TCLF industry.



Industry-level agreements are normally only binding for those employers who are members of the employers' association that signed the agreement. Extension to cover all companies and employees is possible at the joint request of the largest union and the largest employers' association in the industry. At the moment, only five sectoral CBAs have been extended: agriculture, construction, glass and ceramics, textile and garments, and transport.

In **Hungary**, there are seven sectoral agreements in the private sector, including one covering the electricity sector which has both public and private ownership. IndustriAll Europe affiliate VDSz has negotiated multi-employer agreements in the chemical, pharmaceutical and gas industries.

The government is able to extend collective agreements to all employees in an industry under certain circumstances. The request must be made by both parties, and they must be able to show that the agreement already covers a majority of employees in the industry. However, this power has not been widely used and currently only the CBA in the electricity sector has been extended.

The revised Labour Code altered the rules for which unions have a right to bargaining. Trade unions can now conclude collective agreements at company level if their membership exceeds 10% of those employed at the company. When there is no union at the workplace and it is not covered by a collective agreement, a works council can conclude a works council agreement to regulate the terms and conditions of employment, but not wages which can only be negotiated by unions.

The same threshold applies to industry-level agreements, where unions must have 10% of those employed in the industry to be able to reach an agreement. Where there are several unions with at least 10% membership, they must cooperate to reach a single agreement. Employer associations must represent companies which employ at least 10% of workers in the industry.

In **Poland**, multi-employer agreements only cover 200,000 workers, especially in the education sector. At 13%, collective bargaining coverage is clearly the lowest in the five project countries and there has been a declining trend.

A local-level collective agreement should be reached with all the unions in the workplace or at least all the representative unions. These are defined as having at least 15% of the workforce in membership. The threshold is 8%, if the union organisation concerned belongs to one of the three nationally representative union bodies, NSZZ Solidarność, OPZZ and FZZ. If no union represents at least 10% of the workforce, then the agreement should be signed with the largest union in the company.

Sectoral and multi-employer agreements can be negotiated between an employers' association and unions, which have representative status. This means those that belong to one of the three nationally representative union bodies or represent at least 10% of the employees and have at least 10,000 members in the companies to be covered by the agreement, or are the largest union in the companies being covered.

In **Serbia**, the Labour Law stipulates that to be representative with an employer, a trade union's membership must comprise at least 15% of employees with that employer. At national level, representativeness requires a 10% union density. For an employers' association to be representative, it has to organise at least 10% of employers which employ at least 15% of employees in a certain branch. A representative union can engage in collective bargaining and legal disputes. Low thresholds



have enabled the presence of several unions at the same workplace. Therefore, agreeing on anti-competition rules between unions became an element of this project.

In **Slovakia**, collective bargaining takes place mostly at company level. All registered unions in the workplace have in principle the right to participate. If there are several trade unions in the company, they are required to act in agreement if they are negotiating for the whole workforce, unless some other arrangement has been agreed. If they cannot agree, the employer has the right to negotiate with the union with the largest number of members at the workplace, or with a group of unions, if together they have more members than the union with the highest number of members. The collective agreement reached covers the whole workforce.

There are some sectoral and multi-employer (“higher-level”) agreements. OZ KOVO has eight sectoral agreements, including in metallurgy, electrotechnical, machine manufacturing, and glass in the manufacturing industry, and some more in service, public and transport sectors.

To be representative, a collective agreement must be signed on the employer’s side by an employers’ association which employs more people in that industry than any other employers’ association, and on the union side by a union which operates in an industry with more than 30% of the employers belonging to the employers’ association. Only a small number of sectoral or multi-employer CBAs have been extended before March 2021, usually in construction, glass and related products, parts of metalworking, cement and steel, wiring products and bus transport.



3. Industrial change processes underway in the project countries

As the approved project application states, action has focused on building trade union capacity for organising, social dialogue and collective bargaining, especially in the ongoing transformation in the automotive and aerospace industry supply chains. They cover a broad range of industrial sectors, including basic metals, chemicals and plastics, rubber, electronics, glass, and industrial textile and leather.

The following provides a brief overview of recent developments and selected investment decisions in the automotive industry, which has a long tradition in all project countries.

The **Czech Republic** is the biggest automotive sector producer country in Central and Eastern Europe, with an estimated 180,000 direct workers and more than a fifth of Czech exports. Škoda (part of VW) remains by far the largest passenger car manufacturer, followed by Hyundai and Toyota. IVECO dominates bus production and TATRA trucks.

The supply chain encompasses a big number of companies, and the manufacturers seek to better control the chain, address tightening environmental norms, and move into higher value-added products. According to the Automotive Industry Association, emission-free mobility and production, digitalisation and automation, the use of artificial intelligence and the development of technologies for autonomous vehicles are crucial topics for the future of the Czech economy. This applies to other countries as well.

Slovakia has experienced rapid growth in the automotive industry, with Volkswagen, KIA and Stellantis leading the way, followed by Jaguar Land Rover (part of Tata Motors, India). Volvo Cars (owned by Geely, China) recently secured state aid to build a new electric plant near Košice. Also, all the four leading companies plan new electric car production.

The sector accounts for about half of the country's industrial production and exports, having recovered from the pandemic, supply shortages and expensive energy problems. It employs about 170,000 workers directly.

In **Hungary**, after years of decline, investment has increased strongly during the past ten years. The sector now employs 100,000 workers in 600-700 companies, with Germany's Mercedes, BMW and Audi in a leading role.

Electrification will provide new growth. South Korean Samsung and SK are expanding their battery production. In December 2023, China's BYD announced that it plans to build its first European "new energy" (electric or plug-in hybrids) passenger car manufacturing plant in Szeged. China's CATL aims to start production at a new major battery factory in Debrecen, with major government subsidies and despite environmental protests. Production should gradually rise to 100 GWh and employment to 9,000 workers.

Also in **Serbia**, growth has been strong. The number of workers in the automotive industry doubled in a short time since 2016 to over 50,000 direct workers and including the whole supply chain (wire harness, tires, technical textiles, etc.) to over 120,000 jobs. Stellantis (parent company of Fiat, which took over the traditional Zastava factory 16 years ago) announced a transition into electric cars. This is having an impact on other parts of the supply chain which has already received numerous announcements of new foreign investment.



Poland's automotive industry is especially growing, but not only in the supply chain. Mercedes runs a new engine and electric car battery plant in Jawor, chosen as an organising target by the FZZMiH Metalowcy union. Stellantis, which has made Fiats in Tychy, is contemplating a joint venture with China's Leapmotor to produce electric cars.

These snapshots demonstrate that the project countries are attracting a considerable amount of foreign investment in the automotive industry which is experiencing a major transformation. The big picture in Europe some years ago was that 70-85% of turnover in major Western European automotive producing countries was in car manufacturing, while Central and Eastern European production was 50-60% components. This may be slightly changing in light of new investments. Over the longer term, the region remains an attractive investment target thanks to its convenient location near to major markets, its functioning infrastructure, skilled workforce, lower labour costs than in Western Europe, and generous government support.

The aerospace industry is not a major sector in any of the project countries. In the Czech Republic, the OS KOVO union chose Aero Vodochody as one of their three target companies for organising and collective bargaining. Action resulted in the form of a new collective agreement as of April 2024.

During the COVID crisis, it was estimated that new forms of work, including teleworking, would increase. This has however not been the case, especially for blue-collar workers in manufacturing industries. Therefore, participated unions have focused on traditional organising in the workplace, with face-to-face conversations. The use of digital tools has been limited to improved social media presence and WhatsApp and Viber groups, where information and videos can be spread rapidly, with instant feedback and interactive discussions. These tools have supported traditional methods and improved their impact.



4. Goals and action taken in the project countries

Coordination and networking

The main goal of the project has been to build trade union capacity for organising, social dialogue and collective bargaining, to ensure an inclusive and sustainable industrial recovery and transformation. Participating unions have moved from capacity building to organising campaigns in selected pilot companies.

A project **Steering Committee**, consisting of the leadership of the participating unions and their lead organisers, industriAll Europe, IG Metall, the Transnational Partnership Initiative (TPI) and trade union organising experts, met regularly to evaluate progress and discuss the next steps. This inclusive working method has strengthened the sense of ownership and shared objectives among the partner unions.

Promoting **networking of organisers**, both within the participating countries and across national borders, has been one of the goals of the project. The exchange of information and best practices, learning from each other about organising techniques in a changing industrial environment, creating and spreading organising culture, have all been essential.

After some months of training and preparatory action, in April 2023, union leadership and organisers from the five countries gathered for an [international workshop](#) in Kecskemét, Hungary, supported by the FES. This was a good opportunity to exchange experiences and work on the next steps.

Union leaders said there was a cultural change underway in their organisations. Decision-makers now understand the need to invest financial and human resources for membership growth. Unions had prepared work plans for organising action in each country. Higher union density leads to better collective agreements and a louder voice for workers in society as a whole. Union leaders need to agree on non-competition to avoid unnecessary disputes.

Lead organisers had been trained in organising methods and they carried out first mappings and met with union officials in the head office, regions and local organisations. They told the workshop participants about the successes and challenges in their work. Personal contact is key: talking directly to people to hear their concerns and then convincing them that joining forces is the best way to address problems. Training and dynamic communication, including social media groups, are essential elements of an organising strategy, especially for active young workers.

Workshop participants joined local representatives of the Hungarian metalworkers' union VASAS in a leafleting action at the nearby Mercedes plant. The union already has 1300 members at the plant, but wants to grow ahead of works council elections and an announced expansion of production.

In April 2024, the national leadership, union officials and key, local union representatives of OS KOVO and OZ KOVO gathered for a **bi-national Czech-Slovak workshop** in Bratislava, with altogether 30 participants.

Reflecting on the experiences of basic organisations in organising thus far, several common features of successful action emerged. These included the importance of strategic planning, addressing



specific problems, soliciting worker input, prioritising face-to-face communication, and providing regular updates on union activities. Community-building initiatives were recognised as a useful supplement to enhance engagement.

In the concluding session, the participants emphasised the need for ongoing support from federations to sustain local union efforts. They underscored that organising is not merely about recruitment but requires a holistic commitment from the entire union. Success stems from collective efforts, patience, and persistence. Despite the challenges inherent in adopting new approaches, participants affirmed the value of stepping out of comfort zones and embracing innovation.

All in all, the workshop re-confirmed the commitment of Czech and Slovak unions to invest in a growing and active membership base, which will support union efforts to fight for an equitable and sustainable future for workers in the face of an ongoing, profound industrial transformation.

As a concluding act in this project, an **International Conference** will take place in Prague in June 2024 with national and local-level union leaders from the five project countries, partner unions from other European countries, industriALL Europe and IndustriALL Global Union.

At the Conference, participants will:

- Share experiences of building powerful workers' representation through organising and recruitment, report on successes and lessons learned in the project work plan implementation
- Discuss the roles and responsibilities of different actors in strengthening union power
- Establish a transnational network of organising experts
- Draw conclusions and make commitments for future work, including capacity-building for effective union action





Activities in each project country

In the following pages, we summarise the goals set by participating trade unions and action taken in each country, as reported by the lead organisers in the five countries.

Czech Republic

The national partner is the metalworkers' union OS KOVO. They hired Jaromir Valeš as lead organiser as of November 2022.

A [national workshop](#) was organised in March 2023 with 20 participants from the national office and from six companies, of which three were chosen for further work to prepare the ground for organising. The participants recognised that with more workers involved in the union, more could be achieved. By addressing workers in a participation-oriented manner, with systematic mapping and strategic mobilisation, new members can be recruited and existing ones activated. This increases the pressure on employers in collective bargaining and as a result, better pay settlements can be achieved. The participants celebrated a recent OS KOVO victory at Korean-owned [Nexen Tire](#), where a week-long strike brought considerable wage increases and other improvements in the CBA.

The lead organiser held one-day workshops in different regions, with participants mostly from local union organisations but also open to rank-and-file members. The workshops focused on learning the basics of union organising, workplace mapping, one-on-one conversations, collective actions like surveys and petitions, and planning campaigns. Follow-up has included sharing materials, calls, company visits, and ongoing guidance.

Of the three priority companies, Aero Vodochody's local union leadership attended a regional workshop and expressed interest in further organising. An employee satisfaction survey generated 550 responses from workers. Local committee members participated actively and learned the importance of personal contacts. This led to a collective bargaining process and to a [CBA as of April 2024](#). A leafleting action will take place in conjunction with the international conference in June. Initial success has attracted interest in local unions at other aerospace companies as well.

At Valeo, the factory laid off 90 workers, but thanks to active organising, the local union managed to organise a similar number of new members. At Schneider Electric, organising was prepared but has since stalled. Local unions in four other companies finally decided not to participate in organising action, but those in two companies are already preparing surveys.

LESSONS LEARNED IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC:

- *Brownfield organising works best in workplaces with newly elected union chairpersons*
- *Importance of sharing experience and mutual support with Re-set, COZZ and others*
- *Cooperation with regional offices deemed as crucial*
- *Czech unionists generally do not want to get into conflicts, therefore it is more effective to sell organising as a way to make local unions more visible in factories*



As a result of the regional workshops with good attendance, continued connections with regional offices and supportive local unions, a strong network has been set up. Despite challenges, successes like the Aero Vodochody organising drive and Valeo membership recovery showcase the effectiveness of applied strategies. Challenges remain however, as the unfavourable political climate (right-wing government attacking workers' rights) and internal union structures hinder broader progress. Existing local union leadership needs to be convinced.

Expanding initial successes hopefully show the way for the union to progress, which would require modernising union structures and ways of operating. A strengthened network of like-minded people and collaboration with external allies, such as the Union Academy (ČMKOS, FES), COZZ and České priority think-tank, has proved helpful.

Hungary

LESSONS LEARNED IN HUNGARY:

- *Leveraging existing connections is essential for entering target companies*
- *Initial interest from employees does not guarantee successful unionisation*
- *Increasing density in existing factories is easier than greenfield organising*
- *Retention is crucial – new members need to see tangible benefits of membership to ensure their continued engagement and participation*
- *Acknowledge the complexities of organising and focus on effective recruitment and retention strategies*

The national project partner has been the Trade Union of Mine, Energy and Industry Workers (BDSz). Eszter Turai acted as lead organiser until October 2023.

A [national workshop](#) took place in June 2023, where national leaders were joined by local union representatives from eight companies, and regional union representatives. The lead organiser from Slovakia's OZ KOVO shared his experiences, and Türkiye's Öz Iplik-İs and Portugal's Fesete joined online for a conversation on building local union networks to support organising and growth. Such transnational exchange is a valuable part of the project.

During the workshop, participants learned how to create a detailed mapping of the workplace and also identify the issues and key persons and natural leaders. They developed organising plans for their respective companies and regions. The next step was for the participants to implement their plans, find natural workplace leaders and train them. By involving more workplace activists, unions can recognise the concerns that workers are experiencing in their daily lives. That would motivate them to participate in collective action and prepare the ground for organising campaigns.

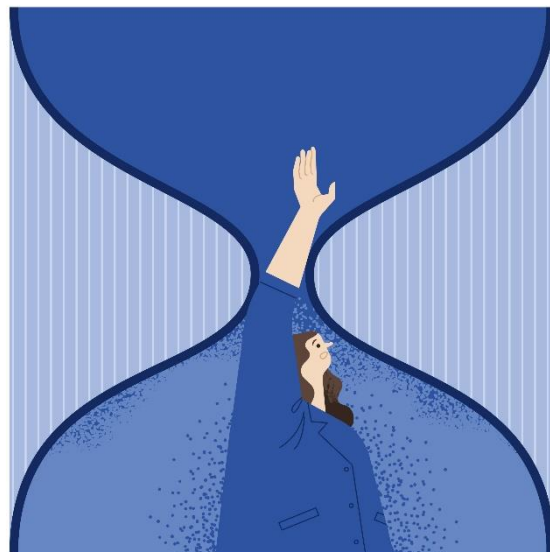
Thorough research using company websites, local and regional media, job advertisements and reviews by former employees was carried out to identify and analyse potential target companies in selected regions. Various setbacks were however experienced in the next phase. Cold calls and online questionnaires provided limited response. Initial contact persons did not show up at agreed meetings, a few contacts left the company, and another enterprise announced its closure. Overcoming trust barriers and management resistance was difficult. Union capacity proved insufficient to maintain a sustained organising and bargaining



effort. Therefore, the project action was put on hold until the end of 2023.

On the positive side, local and regional level union representatives were trained in organising techniques and communications. The lead organiser also met with the union's youth group to discuss industrial transition and recruitment of young workers. Now they know what is needed for success in growing union power. Union organisers also networked with those of the Transnational Partnership Initiative (TPI) of IG Metall and the metalworkers' union VASAS.

BDSz union leadership thinks that the organising method used in the project did not really work for their union. Situations in companies varies, and things that function in one place do not necessarily work in others. The union has managed to increase membership in some companies where they were already present, but more resources and support would be needed for organising new companies. BDSz would have wanted to learn more about greenfield organising, and they would be prepared to invest more resources in growth. They missed the message on how to overcome the fear felt by workers. Too often workers withdrew from the organising effort at a crucial moment. Nobody seems to have found a solution to this problem. After the lead organiser left, the union dropped out the project actions. On a positive note, as a result of the project, union leadership is considering setting up regional centres to be closer to their members.



Poland

The partner union in the project has been the metal and steel workers' union OPZZ FZZMiH Metalowcy i Hutnicy. In February 2023, a team of three, part-time organisers was formed by Marek Jędrzejuk in Wrocław, Justyna Kopa in Ostrów Wielkopolski, and Łukasz Jarczyński in Płock.

LESSONS LEARNED IN POLAND:

- *Find natural leaders in the workplace. Existing, older local union leaders are often complacent and not willing to disturb the status quo.*
- *Educate young workers so that they get to know the union. On the other hand, older workers remember the old days and must be convinced that today's unions are not like the past.*
- *Designate someone in national union leadership who focuses on organising work.*
- *Confront management propaganda where they shift the responsibility of poor wage development to trade unions and blame the EU's environmental legislation for financial difficulties and for the need to cut down workforces, creating an atmosphere of fear.*

Marek started working on a non-union Mercedes-Benz engine and electric car battery plant with about 2,000 workers in Jawor, near Wrocław, building a Facebook contact network of 55 workers. At the beginning, it looked like a tall order because of good working conditions, but later, wage levels proved to be lower than propagated in the media. A leaflet campaign was carried out in October-December 2023, after which a contact person was found, and another round in conjunction with the 1st May celebrations this year. IG Metall is ready to support and may be able to facilitate access to the factory which Marek considers necessary for making progress. Leafleting action took place in conjunction with the 1st May celebrations.

At the same time, union density in Marek's company Alstom has risen to 60%, shared by three unions. There is a CBA which the unions do not seek to renegotiate right now because of the economic situation of the company.

Łukasz has increased union density in his company CNH by 45% to 463 members. However, the enterprise is constantly reducing the workforce. In one identified company, workers were too afraid of dismissal to start talking about unionisation, and in another factory there was already a union present. A new, main target is non-union Solvay in Włocławek. After an initial leafleting campaign, another one is being prepared. Petrochemical production is a complication due to limited access to outsiders.

Justyna chose COM 40 in Nowe Skalmierzyce as the main target, which is one of the biggest companies in the region. A survey generated 250 replies from the workers. Leafleting action took place in December 2023, and another round is needed. Management will be asked to allow access to the workplace for this. Other possible targets include Aju Poland in Poznań and Mahle in Ostrów Wielkopolski.

A [national workshop](#) was held in May 2023. It focused on capacity building for increasing union density in already unionised plants and organising non-union workplaces. OS KOVO from the Czech Republic and IG Metall from Germany contributed expertise for campaign planning and communication.



Efforts to strengthen trade unions have involved robust networking and capacity building activities. Various company cases across regions highlight both progress and challenges in engaging employees and establishing unions. Internal challenges include a shortage of natural leaders and difficulty in convincing both young and older workers to join unions, while external hurdles involve management reluctance and limited government support. Despite these obstacles, the commitment to drive unionisation forward remains steadfast, with ongoing efforts to address challenges and strengthen union structures. Despite scheduling constraints, workshops aimed at empowering unions are planned for 2024. Establishing new unions in various companies poses difficulties, but efforts to address these challenges and drive unionisation forward continue.

Serbia

Five unions participated in the project: SSMS/CATUS, GS Metal Nezavisnost, GS PPI Nezavisnost, GS RIE Nezavisnost, and Industrijski Sindikat Srbije ISS. Dalibor Antanasijević has worked as the lead organiser supporting all participating unions. NGO Workers' Voice has also provided useful help from the beginning.

During the first months, the focus was on research to identify possible target companies for organising and building trust, mutual understanding and collaboration between the participating unions.

Overcoming the challenges of competition required a lot of talks, but in the end, union leaders agreed on the principle of non-competition, solidarity, improved communications and transparency, and close cooperation. The leaders acknowledged the benefits of the project approach aiming at union growth and fighting together against the unjust practices of companies. These principles were confirmed in a Memorandum of Understanding signed by the leaders of the five participating unions.

In March 2023, at a [national workshop](#), 30 national and local union leaders participated from companies that were estimated to be key to the Serbian industry's recovery from the pandemic. They exchanged experiences in organising and identified the reasons for successes and setbacks. The work of trade unions is hindered in many companies. Workers are afraid to join a union and social dialogue is almost non-existent. In addition, global capital, together with the turnover of various governments in the country, have restricted trade union rights.

The participants celebrated a victory by SSMS, ISS and GS RIE Nezavisnost, which achieved a first-ever collective agreement in February 2023 with Chinese-owned company [Serbia Zijin Copper](#) after mobilising the majority of workers in protest, and with the support of industriAll Europe and IndustriALL Global Union. The CBA, signed in the presence of the Minister of Labour, provided for a 15% increase in wages and better working time arrangements.

By September 2023, it was agreed to target the three factories of the Korean-owned Yura Corporation, manufacturer of automotive cables and harnessing.

Union experience was that Korean, as well as Chinese, companies are hard to organise because of the anti-union attitude of the management. However, SSMS had already established a base at the factory in Leskovac, having managed to convince 450 workers out of 3,500 to join the union. The two other plants in Niš (3,500 workers) and Rača (1,500 workers) were completely non-union.



LESSONS LEARNED IN SERBIA:

- *Success requires a well thought out strategy and perseverance to implement it*
- *Organising is hard work and support from the union leadership and other headquarters' officials is essential to have the necessary time and resources to get the job done*
- *Distances are big, so having more organisers in the regions is necessary*
- *Help from the union-minded NGO Workers' Voice was valuable, as they understood the importance of building union power and supported it*
- *Mutual trust and cooperation are necessary to avoid unnecessary clashes between unions*
- *Active engagement, including regular in-person meetings, discussions, and the use of digital communication tools, helped to build momentum and achieve tangible results*

The goal was to reach 15% union density, which is the threshold for representativeness and collective bargaining under Serbian Labour Law. This would mean organising over 1,200 workers of Yura's total workforce, which has recently gone down from 8,500 to 7,500, especially by not renewing temporary contracts. This was a tough challenge, but the unions estimated that success would create self-confidence and inspire further union activism in the region and elsewhere.

The autumn months of 2023 were full of in-person meetings with workers at the three factories. At the beginning, workers were sceptical. This was something new to them. But union representatives were determined and invested a lot of effort and were actively present. After weekly meetings in the factory, with several Viber chat groups having been set up for key people and broader groups of workers, perseverance paid off and workers' attitude became more positive.

By December 2023, new local unions had been formed at Niš, with 40 members, and at Rača with 45 members. By May 2024, membership at Leskovac had risen from 450 to almost 800, and at previously non-union factories at Niš to 141 and at Rača to 82. Growth has been strong in the biggest factory, but below the target at the two others. Organising efforts are continuing and more workers are expected to join the union, so the 15% threshold for representativeness is no longer far off.

ISS has invested in organising at Linglong, Gorenje Hisense, Aptiv, JCHX Kinsey, HBIS and some smaller companies, reporting growth despite difficulties, such as the high fluctuation of workforce. The biggest win was achieved in a greenfield organising activity: With the support of the organiser, a new trade union was established in Domel d.o.o Serbia, a global supplier of electric motors, vacuum motors, blowers and components in 2023. 150 workers out of 400 joined the ISS union and a collective bargaining agreement was signed at the end of 2023.

Some young organisers from Serbia took part in a regional Southeast European [workshop](#) in Romania in October 2023, learning how to use surveys and flyers to improve communication with members and reach out to new potential members, exchanging best practices on communication strategies and campaigns, and developing their own action plans on how to use the new tools in their companies or sectors.



Slovakia

The project partner is the metalworkers' union OZ KOVO. The union hired Gabriel Tóth as the lead organiser, who started with a series of meetings with union leaders in different regions, such as Žilina, Banská Bystrica and others, to introduce the project and the goals of organising. After these meetings and internal discussions, five basic organisations were selected from different regions for the project, mainly from the automotive sector.

A national workshop was organised in October 2023, in the presence of the union's leadership, local representatives from four out of five participating basic organisations, and as a guest, the lead organiser from Czech OS KOVO. Preparatory work had helped the union activists to share a common understanding of the organising concept. Obviously there were some sceptical voices, but discussing past experiences and hearing about best practices and new ideas helped create motivation and even enthusiasm.

In the following months, work continued on the selected target companies KIA in Žilina, Schaeffler in Kysucké Nové Mesto, Gabor in Bánovce nad Bebravou, Continental in Zvolen, and Fortaco in Holíč, where there had been no progress in increasing membership figures. An escalation technique blueprint was shared and discussed with all participating basic organisations. Several workshops were organised in the regions with 30-40 participants each. The content varied depending on the situation in each company, ranging from basic organising tools, such as mapping and small actions, to more advanced organising, such as escalation techniques. Political buy-in was secured at regional OZ KOVO presidium meetings. There will be more one to two-day "Power of Reasoning" workshops for more members in the first half of 2024, building on the positive feedback from the initial meetings. A final two-day event is being prepared for June to evaluate the results of the project and to propose further steps and organising activities.

Facebook postings, a video from local union leaders, a declaration and an overtime boycott action led to 30 new members and a fairer overtime compensation system at Kia in Žilina. After these successes, the basic organisation secured a mandate from the membership conference. The local union will develop a one and a half-year period of active campaigning, which will culminate in collective bargaining in the autumn of 2025. The local unionists are highly ambitious and professionalised. They are now aware that if they are successful in providing better conditions for their members, they will raise the wage benchmark for the whole region. This is their stated goal.

At Schaeffler, the local union strengthened its social media presence, showcasing its efforts and successes, opening problems and sensitive issues. Four new "agitators" were engaged and more will follow. A

LESSONS LEARNED IN SLOVAKIA:

- *Organising workshops have increased the understanding of techniques to improve member engagement, including mobilisation with the help of leaflets, surveys, better communications, social media presence*
- *Introduction of escalation techniques helped to address workplace issues, such as Kia's unfair overtime practices and Schaeffler's unfavourable contracts. This raised the self-confidence of union activists, overcoming initial scepticism*
- *A systematic approach and regular support from local union leaders have increased membership*
- *Limited resources and capacity remain a challenge in some companies with lower union membership*

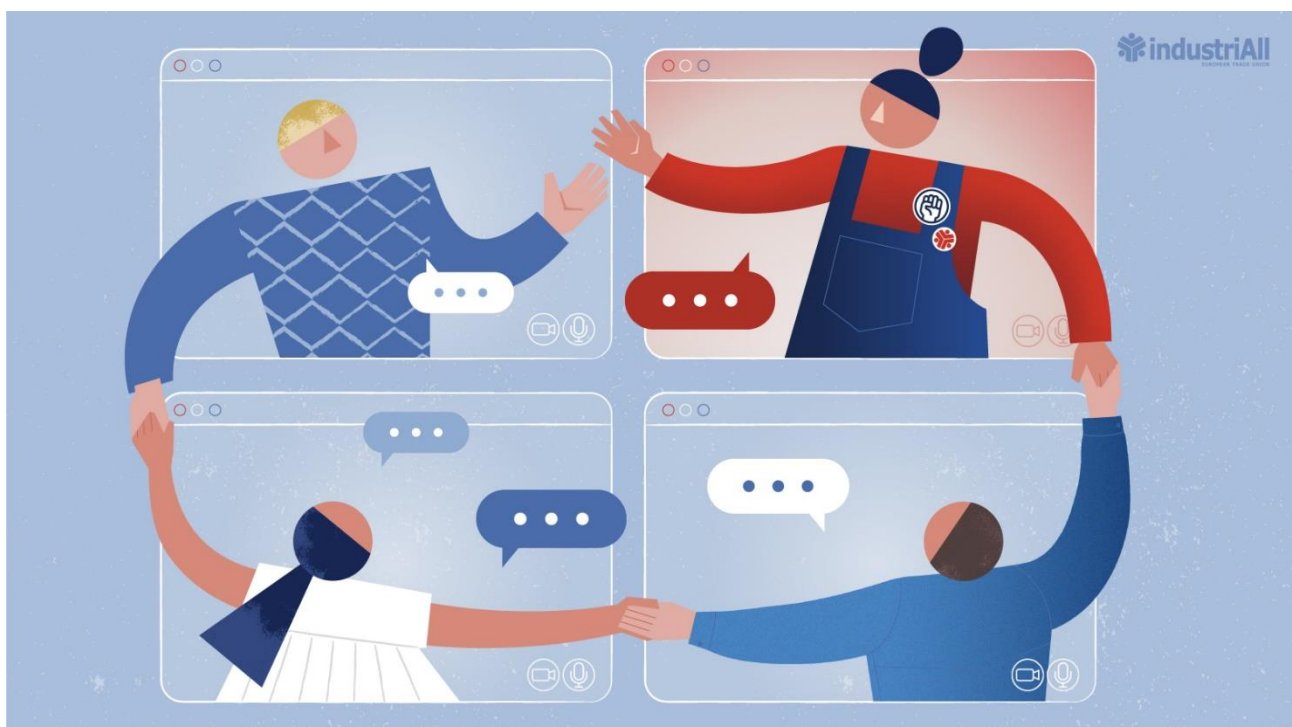


survey of the workforce was carried out, and workers were motivated with “teasing” questions about future challenges. Most workers rejected the less favourable contracts put forward by the management which then abandoned the whole idea. As a result, the local union registered 70 new members and became the winner in the Žilina region of the nation-wide OZ KOVO competition for the most new members. The union reported this success on social media and in the local community. In May, they were already at 105 new members, using organising tools such as campaigns and a survey.

At Gabor, the local union chose the bad quality of food as the issue for mobilisation. A petition gathered 240 signatures, even though there were only 70 union members. After receiving the petition, the management approached the local union and ended up terminating the catering company contract and looked for a new provider. The union then moved to collective bargaining. Communication problems required the intervention of the lead organiser, after which the local union got back on track in its bargaining process. Negotiations are continuing in May, especially focused on wage increases, while union membership has risen to 97.

Continental requires more efforts to overcome the scepticism of the union activists after years of no growth. Members are passive, fearing for their jobs. The leaders agreed on a mapping and finding more active members for agitation and social media work, but the promised action was taken with insufficient effort. The union managed to negotiate a CBA with some positive results, but more work is needed. The management showed interest in improving dialogue with the union and workers. Two more members have recently joined the local organisation committee.

Passivity is also a problem at Fortaco, where the local union was absent from the national workshop. An anti-union employer and the high fluctuation of workers do not make things easier. The lead organiser is helping the local union to produce a leaflet, carry out a survey and set up a Facebook page for improved communications and mobilisation. The search continues for more members interested in organising.





with the financial support of the European Union

2. Summary and conclusions

Ten industriAll Europe affiliates from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Serbia participated in the project. They decided to dedicate staff and financial resources to organise, hire organisers of their own, adopt organising plans, build structures to enable a membership focus, and train regional officers. We trained seven organisers in the project countries and made them operational. A network of organisers has been established and is growing. Another industriAll Europe project has identified youth organisers, trained them and developed a manual. All this positive development will also contribute to a better and more proactive handling of the ongoing industrial transformation.

The first results of a **new membership focus** and **emerging organising culture** can be seen in the **organising and recruitment campaigns** at Yura, Domel (Serbia), Gabor, Fortacco, Continental, Schaeffler, Kia (Slovakia), Aero Vodyhody (Czech Republic), Com40 and Mercedes (Poland). The increase in membership has so far been an average of 5% , and in some factories, this percentage is considerably bigger. There are some new and improved local level collective agreements. Early successes generated self-confidence and laid the ground for further progress.

CONCLUSIONS - LESSONS LEARNED

Building trade union power is a marathon and needs commitment at all levels of the union

- **Prioritisation:** *mainstream membership focus – membership growth is the primary responsibility of shop stewards, solving individual labour issues is secondary*
- **Commitment:** *build consensus and structures – acceptance and support from union leadership is crucial – for all union activities, consider how they contribute to building union power*
- **Capacities:** *membership growth requires capacity building and relocation of resources – build teams instead of organisers working in isolation*
- **Practical experiences:** *go and organise 100%: focus on brownfield organising, increasing union density in factories where unions are already present – face-to-face communication works better than digital organising in blue-collar environments – a good membership database which enables members to be contacted individually is a must – include the organising dimension in news about collective bargaining campaigns and victories*

Further success will require a firm **commitment to building trade union power** - both from industriAll Europe and its affiliates.



IndustriAll Europe is committed to:

- **Continuing to initiate and implement (transnational) organising projects and enlarge the network of organisers**, especially in Central and Eastern Europe. The electric vehicle battery industry organising project is starting in September 2024, with action focusing on four countries, but with participation of unions from other countries as well.
- **Encouraging and supporting the implementation of bilateral projects of affiliates** on capacity building for collective bargaining.
- **Mainstreaming BTUP** across all policy committees, sectoral networks, and working groups, ensuring inclusion in agendas, strategies, policy papers and actions.
- **Providing better support to affiliates by allocating more resources to strengthen the BTUP unit.**

IndustriAll Europe will engage with **affiliates** that have proven that they have made the strategic choices to build trade union power. To be part of BTUP's winning growth path, affiliates must commit to:

- Participate in the industriAll Europe surveys to provide information on strategies, goals, resources and actions taken to organise and grow membership and collective bargaining campaigns.
- Review the membership policies in their decision-making bodies for growth, through the systematic recruitment and retention of members to make organising and building trade union power a key priority in their own organisation.
- Allocate the necessary human and financial resources for membership growth.
- Increase acceptance and support for organising efforts of union leadership, decision-making bodies, officials and activists.
- Train and empower teams of organisers to enhance capacities for growth, stronger collective bargaining, and better working conditions.
- Develop strategies and tools to recruit and organise more members.
- Explore bilateral organising projects for transnational solidarity and collaborate with partner unions.

IndustriAll Europe has embarked on a journey to help affiliates build trade union power for good social dialogue and industrial restructuring that does not leave workers behind. It is a journey to build stronger trade unions at all levels, strong enough to be heard and to bring workers' interests and skills to the negotiating table, with the strength to win good collective agreements and fair distribution of wealth, and also the strength to fight union busting.

IndustriAll Europe has seen the strong commitment of a number of affiliates during the project. More and more affiliates are stepping up their efforts to build trade union power from the bottom up and to start the circle of organising.

Together we are committed to building trade union power to have a strong say in the recovery and restructuring of industry!



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**Every workplace
with a union.
Every worker
in the union.**