White-Collar Workers in Manufacturing

Comparative Analysis of Working Conditions, Attitudes and Trade Union Representation of White-Collar Employees in Selected European Countries

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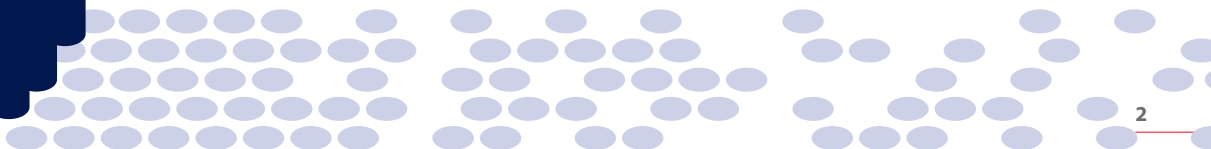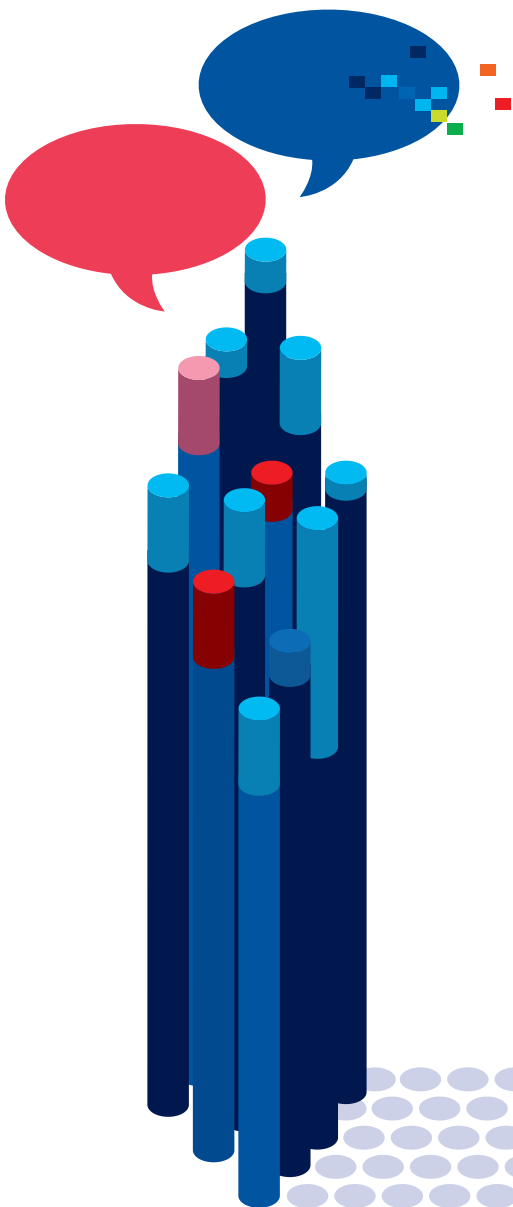* With the support of Alexander Bendel

Contents

Foreword

This research report is an important outcome of the BEREP project 'Better Representation of White-collar Workers for a Sustainable Future of Industrial Relations in Manufacturing', co-financed by the European Commission.
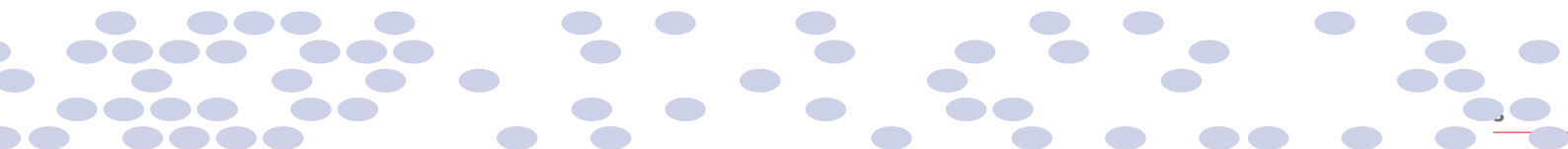
While the manufacturing sector is changing significantly, with a noticeable shift from blue-collar to white-collar workers, the BEREP project is a key contribution to industriAll Europe's ambition to develop targeted strategies to defend the economic and social interests of white-collar workers in the manufacturing industries, underpinned by solidarity, the promotion of quality industrial jobs and pro active social dialogue.

White-collar workers currently make up about 41% of the manufacturing workforce in Europe, though this varies between countries. This change presents a challenge for trade unions, which have traditionally focused on blue-collar workers. Union membership among white-collar workers is much lower, threatening the power of trade unions in collective bargaining and social dialogue.

To address this issue and ensure the representation of all workers, trade unions need to adapt their strategies. Our dedicated Horizontal Working Group on White-Collar Workers, in cooperation with the Building Trade Union Power unit, recognises the urgent need to gather detailed information about white-collar workers to better understand their needs and challenges.

The BEREP project aims at tackling the representation gap of white-collar workers in many European countries and provides practical insights for trade unions. Some countries have a tradition of dedicated trade unions for the representation of white-collar workers. In other countries, trade unions have both white-collar and blue-collar workers but often lack strategies and competencies to equally represent both groups.

Understanding the different national contexts and union structures needed to represent white-collar workers is crucial for the development of successful strategies. Therefore, the research conducted by the Institute for Work, Skills and Training (*Institut für Arbeit und Qualifikation*) at the University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany, looked at eight European countries: Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Poland, Romania, Spain and Sweden, through workshops and secondary data analysis. Additionally, a survey collected primary data from three countries: Finland, France and Germany.

The BEREP project does not only fill a critical research gap, it also offers practical recommendations for trade unions to enhance their outreach and support for white-collar workers.

Finally, our thanks go to the University of Duisburg-Essen, the Institute for Work, Skills and Training, and all our affiliates, for their invaluable contributions.

We trust that this report, together with the Toolbox, will support our affiliates in their efforts to better reach, organise and support white-collar workers. Together, we can ensure that our trade unions in the manufacturing industry are stronger and more inclusive in the future.

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1. Introduction

How can trade unions active in manufacturing industry more effectively represent and, in particular, organise white-collar workers? Can trade unions address and reflect the distinct concerns, attitudes and interests of white-collar workers? And are there currently examples of trade union good practice in this area? These are the core questions analysed in a research project undertaken by researchers from the Institute for Work, Skills and Training at the University of Duisburg-Essen together with IndustriAll Europe, the European umbrella association of trade unions in the manufacturing sector. The project was financed by the European Union through a project dubbed 'BEREP' – an acronym standing for BEtter REPresentation of white-collar employees in manufacturing industry. The research process was coordinated by the two project partners with the involvement of national-level trade unions with the overarching aim of providing both practical support to trade unions as well as enhancing their knowledge about the problems of white-collar organising and approaches that have delivered success.

Why has organising white-collar workers become of such importance for manufacturing trade unions? The main reason is simple: the marked rise in the share of white-collar workers in the manufacturing workforce. As we will show in greater detail below, the share of white-collar workers has grown in most European countries and has overtaken the share of blue-collar workers in several. This trend has also led to a shift in the sources of employee structural power, a key resource underpinning trade union organisational power. Skilled operatives no longer form the core of the manufacturing workforce in terms of numbers and significance. In many fields, these are being supplemented or even replaced by white-collar staff, such as engineers or other formally qualified and highly-skilled employees. In contrast to blue-collar workers, such employees have greater primary power, either because their skills are in short supply or because they are increasingly indispensable for sustaining the scope for innovation in the value creation process. As a result, they have become increasingly important as a source of power for trade unions.

At the same time, in many European countries the unionisation rates of white-collar employees remain significantly below those of blue-collar workers, the traditional backbone of trade union organisational power in manufacturing industry. This situation now poses an existential threat to manufacturing trade unions. The greater the decline in the share of blue-collar workers, the more acute the risk that trade unions will lose organisational power and with this their ability to fulfil their central role in social dialogue and as representatives of the workforce in collective bargaining. This could have ominous consequences for the future of organised industrial relations in EU Member States overall as in many countries it is manufacturing trade unions that continue to be the mainstay of trade union organisational power. Social dialogue and collective bargaining in the manufacturing sector are, therefore, indispensable as anchors of stability for national – and European – systems of industrial relations.

As our analysis will show, current knowledge about how trade unions in Europe have responded to this challenge and taken action to mobilise and organise white-collar employees in manufacturing is very limited. Most research in the field is either dated or confined to an analysis of national developments alone, without European comparison. Given the importance of the problem for manufacturing trade unions across Europe, developing a broader picture of trade union efforts to organise white-collar employees could be beneficial in two respects: firstly, it could contribute to filling the research gap in the field of white-collar organising; and secondly, it would offer manufacturing trade unions information about and useful insights into successful approaches to organising. This report analyses the characteristics and patterns of employment, work and working conditions, together with trade union representation, of white-collar employees in the manufacturing sector in selected European countries. It focuses both on the attitudes and interests of white-collar workers as well as on how trade unions represent and organise these employee groups. The analysis, which will offer a comparison between the countries included, is based on three data sources. Firstly, information on the proportion of white-collar employees in the

manufacturing workforce and their working conditions is obtained using secondary data from the European Labour Force Survey and the European Working Conditions Survey, and for Germany from the German Socio-Economic Panel. Secondly, primary data was obtained by means of an online survey of white-collar employees in manufacturing conducted in three European countries – Finland, France and Germany. This included questions about working conditions, interests, trade union membership and attitudes towards trade unions. Thirdly, half-day online workshops were held with trade union experts from different European countries to discuss and analyse their perceptions of the working conditions and attitudes of white-collar workers as well as the strategies that have been adopted to attract and organise this group.

Secondary data was collected for eight EU Member States: Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Poland, Romania, Spain, and Sweden. Trade union workshops were also held in these countries. Country selection was based on existing typologies of capitalism, industrial relations systems and trade union structures. Based on these typologies, individual countries can be regarded as 'ideal-typical' cases for groups of countries sharing common characteristics. Using such typologies thus opens up scope for drawing conclusions not only about the selected countries but also other countries of their type.

Firstly, the selected countries each represent types identified by the 'Varieties of Capitalism' approach (Hall/Soskice 2001) within the European Union. Finland and Sweden represent the Nordic model, with strong trade unions and a comprehensive welfare state; Ireland falls under the liberal market economy type with weaker social institutions and trade unions as well as strong market penetration, primarily based on foreign direct investment; France and Spain represent the Mediterranean model with an important role for the state (with a more developed welfare state in France); Poland and Romania represent the Central Eastern European model of transition economies with liberal market structures, a strong influence exercised by foreign direct investment, and a weak welfare state; and, finally, Germany comes from the tradition of a coordinated market economy, albeit one in which coordinating institutions, such as industry-level collective bargaining or the role of banks in corporate financing, have noticeably declined in importance (Bosch et al. 2009).

At the same time, the selected countries also exhibit distinctive models of industrial relations and trade union arrangements. These are based on two central criteria:

1. *Levels and actors of employee representation.* This criterion refers to the linkages between employee representation at national or sectoral level and representation at establishment or company level. And specifically, whether trade unions represent employee interests at both levels or whether employee representation at establishment/company level is the responsibility of councils that represent employees independently of trade unions (and irrespective of individual employee union membership) and conduct negotiations with company managements (possibly with some reservation of bargaining topics for trade unions). Examples of the first case of unitary or single-channel systems are Finland and Sweden; an example of the second case, a 'dual system', would be Germany. The sample also includes countries such as France or Spain which have mixed systems with both works councils, with authority to represent employee interests on certain topics, and establishment-level trade unions with the sole right to conclude collective agreements with companies.

2. *The structure of trade unions.* This criterion refers to the differing national trade union organisational logics. Three main organisational logics can be distinguished: firstly, industry trade unions whose organisational domains include all employees in an industry or a sector; secondly, trade unions that organise groups of employees by occupation or qualification, regardless of sectoral boundaries (for example, blue-collar workers, white-collar employees, graduates or managers); and, thirdly, general trade unions that organise across many sectors but have sector-specific organisational structures and compete for members with other unions. Industry unions are dominant in Germany,

occupational unions in Sweden or Finland, and general unions with differing political orientations in France, Poland or Spain. All three types can be observed in Ireland.

With regard to these two criteria, the models of employee representation and trade unionism in the countries included in the BEREP project can be classified as follows:

TABLE 1: Logics of trade union organisation and interest representation

	Organisation by industry	Organisation by employee group	General trade unions
Single channel system	Ireland	Sweden, Finland, Ireland	Poland, Romania, Ireland
Dual system	Germany		
Mixed System			Spain, France

It is no coincidence that some categories are left blank. 'Genuine' dual systems are very rare; apart from Germany, they can only be found in Europe in the Netherlands and Austria. At the same time, mixed systems with trade unions and works councils present at the workplace – but with a trade union prerogative for negotiations with management – are usually associated with pluralistic trade union structures.

The secondary data sets were analysed for the eight selected countries. For budgetary reasons, the survey conducted by the research team to collect primary data only covered three countries (Finland, France and Germany), each of which represents important employee relations models in Europe – unitary systems with trade unions organised by occupational status groups in Finland, mixed systems with pluralist trade unions in France, and dual systems with industry trade unions in Germany. The online workshops were conducted with trade union experts from all the selected countries.

This report is divided into four main sections. It begins with a short introduction on the current state of research on white-collar work and trade unions, continues with an analysis of the working conditions of white-collar employees, drawing on the secondary data sets, and then analyses the interests of white-collar workers and their attitudes towards trade unions using data derived from our survey. Based on the findings of the online workshops, we present data on how trade unions view the working conditions and perspectives of white-collar employees and the organising strategies pursued by trade unions towards this group. In the final section, the results are brought together and a number of conclusions suggested.

2. White-Collar Work and Trade Unions

2.1 The research tradition into white-collar work

The figure of the white-collar worker has been a prominent and persistent feature of sociological research and debates over the past 100 years and has engaged the attention of numerous researchers, particularly from the fields of class analysis and the sociology of work. Studies in this area have focused primarily on the question of the special features of this category of dependent employee when compared with manual employees on issues such as their position in the wider class structure, the nature of their work, and their working conditions (Haipeter 2016a). White-collar employees became a central explanatory factor in understanding the lack of class-based action, or at least class consciousness, on the part of the working class and the emergence of a middle-class society that came to be seen as 'post-capitalist'. This also raised the question as to how trade unions could organise this group of employees, and under which conditions and with what strategies they might be successful in this enterprise. These questions will be addressed in this chapter, which begins by looking at the particular features of white-collar work and employees and then moves onto the issue of white-collar unionism and white-collar organising.

After a phase of intense interest between the 1960s and 1980s, sociological interest in white collar employees has markedly abated since the 1990s. The concept of the white-collar employee has only rarely been used since then, and there appears to have been a rupture in the long tradition of social research into this group. Terms such as 'service', 'knowledge' or 'innovation work' appear to have taken its place. Nonetheless, there are good reasons for persevering with the concept of white-collar work.

Firstly, the concept is still highly relevant in industrial practice. If one visits a workplace today, both HR managers and active trade unionists or works councils will know exactly who in a workforce are white-collar and who are blue-collar. At the same time, this distinction is very important in shaping the expectations of trade unionists about the attitudes and perspectives of white-collar workers, how they organise their working hours, how long they actually work, their career opportunities, their interests as employees, how they pursue these, and the role that interest representation arrangements play in this. This is why, finally, the category of white-collar work is important for trade unions, at least in manufacturing. Given that there is a difference in how blue-collar and white-collar employees can be organised, understanding the bases of these differences as a precondition for attracting white-collar employees to trade unions would be of vital concern.

Looking at white-collar employees and their work, two strands of research can be identified from a current perspective. The first looks at white-collar employees as a social category within a framework of class analysis; the second is focussed on how white-collar work is being transformed.

The approach based on the perspective of *class and social structure* attempts to locate white-collar workers in the class structure of capitalist societies and in particular their place in the contested relationship between capital and labour. It was the German researcher Emil Lederer who as early as in 1912 defined white-collar workers as a 'floating' and highly heterogeneous group of employees that spanned the range between managers in large industrial companies and shop assistants in retail and which, depending on the overall course of economic development, might lean either towards the interests of capital and business or those of wage labour. Lederer himself considered that the former was more dominant in Germany in the period before the First World War but shifted after the global economic crisis of the late-1920s as desperate efforts to avert an abrupt downward shift in class position militated against alignment with the interests of manual workers, ultimately favouring a susceptibility and openness to fascistic ideas.

After the Second World War, and influenced by the material improvements experienced during the subsequent thirty years of sustained economic growth, white-collar workers were seen as proof that

class society had been overcome (according to the prognosis argued by the German sociologist Theodor Geiger in 1949). On this hypothesis, a consumer-oriented middle class had emerged, mainly made up of white-collar workers, which had interposed itself between the antagonistic 'class struggle fronts' of labour and capital.

The end of this phase of rapid growth, and the re-emergence of social conflict, led to a revival of 'class' as an analytical category and an intense debate within sociology in western industrialised countries in which the position of white-collar workers played a central role. While the French sociologist Serge Mallet (1972) argued that a 'new working class' had emerged that brought together highly-skilled employees and technicians who sought democratic direction of production in place of the old system of command and control, Poulantzas (1975) excluded white-collar employees from the working class altogether, labelling them a 'new petty bourgeoisie' on the grounds that, unlike manual workers, they did not perform productive labour and, as employees engaged in supervisory functions and production planning, contributed directly to reproducing the subjugation of productive workers and in that respect exercised tasks on behalf of capital.

In the more recent approaches to class analysis that have emerged since the 1980s and 1990s, white-collar employees have continued to play an important role but no longer figure as a uniform social category in the more differentiated models of class structure that have been proposed. Erikson and Goldthorpe (1993) developed the concept of the 'service class' as one layer within a seven-class schema that distinguished dependent employees based on the nature of their relationship with the employer: that is, whether authority is delegated to them or the nature of their skills. At the top of this class schema, on the two upper levels, is the 'service class', whose members have authority and specialised skills; the third level consists of non-manual routine employees in administration and commerce. Qualified white-collar workers with vocational training can be found at level two, provided they also have supervisory responsibilities and have undergone specialised further training. Where this is not the case, they would be assigned to level three.

Following Erikson and Goldthorpe, Müller (1998) argued in favour of augmenting their schema to include the criterion of employees' 'work logic'. Based on this, he divided the 'service class' into an 'administrative service class', whose main activity is characterised by the exercise of managerial functions in the administrative and operational hierarchy, an 'expert class' with high levels of technical, scientific or business qualification, and a class of 'social services' characterised by a focus on customers, a group that would also include professionally-qualified commercial white-collar workers with scope to advise customers, for example. Based on this approach, Oesch (2006) identified three work logics that serve as a means of horizontal differentiation within this broader group: these are organisational logic, which is formative for employees who have a strong connection to the organisation either through the exercise of authority or their career goals; the technical logic, which focuses on the role of formal qualifications and engagement with the technical challenges of work; and the service logic, which is primarily determined by interpersonal customer contact and an interest in providing a good service. For Oesch, the vertical axis is defined by the possession of marketable skills, with four levels: professional and managerial, associate professional and managerial, skilled vocational and general, and routine and elementary.

Finally, for Wright (1997) the starting point of the analysis is the problem of the middle class in Marxist class theory. In common with the authors noted above, Wright analyses skills and positions of authority as differentiating factors within the group of dependent employees as a whole that shape a distinct class location within the overall class structure and warrant different class categorisations when combined in particular ways. Wright distinguishes between high, medium and low levels of skill and authority, producing a six-field matrix for different class positions of dependent employees, who are labelled respectively as experts, skilled employees, unskilled employees, expert, skilled and non-skilled supervisors, and executives (sub-divided into 'expert', 'skilled' and 'non-skilled'). According to Wright,

exercising skills and authority can establish 'contradictory class locations'. Employees in these positions are therefore in a position to capture some of the surplus value (the 'social surplus') generated by the production system either because they have scarce marketable skills ('skill rent') or because companies want to retain them and pay them a 'loyalty rent'.

Overall, the various refinements in class structure analysis in recent years have led to a more nuanced understanding of white-collar work. The reference to skills and authority or different logics of action and work, which can be found in all the more recent approaches, serves as a means for dealing with the problem of the heterogeneity within the wider group of white-collar employees that is a function of the specific nature of their employment relationships, status positions, and their attitudes to work-related issues. At the same time, however, the category of white-collar work has also become well established as a key component of class analysis.

White-collar work was and is – again – a central subject in the analysis of work organisation and the associated attitudes and perspectives of employees, exemplified in developments in German industrial sociology. Initially, this discipline focused on blue-collar work in large industrial companies. Of necessity, however, attention increasingly shifted to the work white-collar workers performed in offices given that large industrial companies were not only characterised by a complex division of labour and dynamic technical change in the area of direct production, but also by an expanding industrial bureaucracy that performed vital tasks ranging from the administration and management of processes and people, to research and development, and purchasing and sales. White-collar and salaried employees were initially viewed as a common status group in contrast to hourly-paid manual employees, with little regard for the differences in the activities or professional skills of white-collar staff.

While industrial sociology in the first post-war decades focused on different developments in the polarisation and differentiation of white-collar workers' activities, two opposing interpretations of this development have prevailed since the 1970s: on the one hand, the deskilling thesis, grounded in the growing abstraction and standardisation of work due to, among other things, the introduction of IT (Brandt et al. 1978); and on the other, the thesis that work has been upgraded and reskilled, with IT relieving workers of the drudgery of routine and with a focus on the skills deployed in customer service or case management. This second thesis was extended by stressing the structural power resources that white-collar employees can mobilise in individual negotiations with superiors, based on the observation that the work process depends on the willingness of white-collar workers to contribute their specialist knowledge and experience (Littek and Heisig 1987).

This debate has continued to the present. Two attitudinal patterns on the part of white-collar workers have been distinguished in the more recent literature: in one, employees are directed towards making a contribution to organisational success; in the other, the focus is on employee interests. A desire to contribute has been identified mainly among managers and highly-skilled employees and is characterised by a combination of high expectations in terms of work quality and autonomy, and a wish to contribute to the well-being of the company (Kotthoff 1997; Kotthoff and Wagner 2008). In return, employees expect privileges in terms of participation, pay, security and opportunities for individual development. This contrasts with the pattern of employee orientation observed notably in outsourcing and offshoring in the IT industry, leading to a feeling of insecurity and fears of job losses on the part of skilled workers in software and IT services, administration, and research and development (Boes/Kämpf 2010; Kämpf 2008). Loyalty and a desire to make a contribution, so the theory goes, are giving way to a sense of powerlessness among employees as dependent workers. It is this feeling that might lead white-collar employees to consider joining unions.

This analysis is supported by findings on knowledge work, where research suggests that it is no longer appropriate to equate 'white-collar jobs' with good working conditions and 'blue-collar jobs' with poor conditions (Kalleberg 2016). The corporate restructuring of recent decades has also resulted in poorer

working conditions for more knowledge-intensive jobs, reflected in work intensification, increased time pressures, lower pay, the erosion of pension and health benefits, and weakened job security. In some places there is even talk of 'white-collar sweatshops' (Fraser 2001).

Finally, the dynamic changes currently observable in the work of white-collar employees has led to a fresh focus on white-collar work Two trends are at the forefront here: digitalisation and the introduction of new forms of work. With regard to digitalisation, an ambivalent picture has emerged: on the one hand, there are increasing demands to use information and communication software, to work across national borders and to work faster (Hoonakker 2014); on the other, there is a trend towards the elimination of routine activities and greater work autonomy (Seibold/Stieler 2016). These developments might lead to a polarisation of white-collar employees into those conducting routine activities characterised by increasing standardisation (Kämpf 2018) and more highly-skilled employees able to enjoy a degree of job enrichment driven by digitalisation (Waschull et al. 2022). Other digitalisation topics include working with AI (Gmyrek et al 2032), mobile work (Seibold and Stieler 2016), and the bundling of corporate shared services, many of which can be automated (Ahlers 2018).

The more recent research literature has examined new forms of work organisation from two aspects: the 'lean office' and 'agile work'. The underlying strategy of the lean office is to transfer lean production approaches – such as standardisation, value stream mapping, 5S or continuous improvement – to business processes that are only remotely related to production (Boes et al. 2016; Böhm 2015; Bürkardt and Seibold 2015). According to Kämpf (2018), digitalisation is an important prerequisite for the lean office, principally because work on digital objects within digital workflows is more amenable to standardisation and optimisation. As a consequence, administrative functions in industrial companies (such as HR, finance, sales or service, and logistics), characterised by standardisation and process orientation, are highly susceptible to lean office methods (Boes et al. 2018). Agile work, on the other hand, is aimed at the self-organisation of work in teams in which individual members perform specific roles and work in short cycles in the form of *sprints* (Bendel and Latniak 2020). Agile forms of work are found in manufacturing particularly in higher-skilled areas, such as R & D and IT-development. According to Boes et al. (2018), agile methods are introducing new forms of transparency and openness into these areas: activities and progress on projects are not only visible to one's own team, but also the entire organisation. This can be a resource for team members, for example, in that it allows individual workload peaks to be redistributed across the team. On the other hand, it also harbours the potential for conflict due to the disclosure of differences in individual performance. As yet, it is unclear whether and to what extent self-organisation and autonomy in agile forms of work are necessarily accompanied by stress and work overload.

Research findings on current developments in the work and working conditions of white-collar employees, and their attitudes to their work and careers, therefore present a somewhat mixed picture. While autonomous work might offer interesting professional opportunities, intensification and standardisation in the form of the lean office could represent sources of stress. Moreover, these findings are based on developments in a limited number of countries and specific segments of manufacturing and cannot, therefore, be generalised across-the-board. A more general and comparative analysis would be required to obtain a comprehensive overview of the trends and developments in white-collar work and the attitudes of white-collar workers.

At the same time, decisions to join a trade union do not depend solely on economic status, working conditions or even the subjective stance of white-collar workers. Much also depends on trade unions themselves and their activities. While trade unions, of course, ultimately depend on whether employees decide to join them of or not, their activities can do a great deal to influence these decisions – for example, the services they offer, the frames of reference they develop to explain or resolve problems at work, and how they mobilise and organise workers. To explore these, we now turn to the research findings on white-collar unionism and trade union organising.

2.2 White-collar workers and trade unions

How can trade unions in the manufacturing sector attract and organise white-collar workers? Two strands of research offer some insights into this question: the traditional debate about white-collar trade unionism, on the one hand, and the more recent research and discussion of trade union organising on the other.

The debate about *white-collar unionism* peaked in the late-1970s and early-1980s when trade unions in the Anglo-Saxon countries were passing through a phase of rapid expansion driven by rising organisational density in areas of non-manual work in the private and public sectors, organised to a certain degree by trade unions that represented white-collar workers only. This debate centred around the factors that had driven trade union growth and what was specific about white-collar unionism that differentiated it from blue-collar unionism (for an overview, see Price 1983). The most popular models of white-collar trade union growth in this debate were those of Blackburn and Prandy (1965) and Bain (1970).

According to Blackburn and Prandy, trade union growth could be explained by three factors: firstly, the attitude and behaviour of the employer in the sense of employer recognition of trade unionism; secondly, the growth of bureaucracy in which the individual employee is treated as a member of a category or a group with a collectively-determined salary, which favours collective instead of individual action; and, finally, the degree of control that individual employees have over their work, which will be reduced as a consequence of rationalisation. The hypothesis was that the more pronounced these conditions, the greater the inclination of white-collar workers to join trade unions – with white-collar trade unions increasingly developing the characteristics of blue-collar unions in terms of their functioning as a countervailing power to management in a context of divergent interests.

In another approach, Bain (1970), in his study of the growth of white-collar unionism in the UK between 1948 and 1964, noted employer trade union recognition and the bureaucratisation of white-collar work in large administrative units – a process he termed 'employment concentration' – as further important factors, but added a significant third condition: the extent to which government support had helped create a favourable 'climate' for trade unions in terms of public discourse together with steps to strengthen their institutional power through legislation. Bain later introduced economic factors, such as fluctuations in wages and prices or unemployment, as a fourth factor (Price 1983).

A second aspect discussed at that time was the form of white-collar trade unionism – and specifically whether white-collar trade unions had the same character as their blue-collar counterparts and whether they could be regarded as an expression of working-class activity. Blackburn and Prandy (1965) created the term 'unionateness' to characterise the degree of similarity and difference between white- and blue-collar unions and demarcate trade unions from professional associations. This included indicators such as organisations declaring themselves to be and formally registering themselves as a trade union, joining the same umbrella associations, independence from the employer, negotiating collective agreements, and being prepared to take industrial action.

However, there were critical voices against the hypothesis that white-collar trade unions would increasingly resemble 'normal' trade unions once the conditions that favour trade union building became stronger. Kleingartner (1967), for example, stressed the divergent character of the ways in which the collective interests of white-collar workers were organised. From this perspective, unions had made some progress in organising white-collar workers by establishing white-collar sections, hiring graduates as organisers or dealing with the professional problems faced by white-collar staff. Nevertheless, professional – graduate – white-collar workers oriented to professional standards and occupational prestige were held to maintain their distance to trade unions and rely on professional associations to represent their collective interests. For this reason, Kleingartner expected hybrid organisations, combining the characteristics of professional associations and trade unions, to become more important.

Crompton (1968), finally, argued that the ambiguity seen in the representative arrangements of white-collar workers was a result of a class situation characterised by a structural ambiguity between capital and labour, an idea already propounded by Lederer. The less that white-collar occupations exercise functions directly related to the needs of capital or the more their scope for autonomy at work is restricted, the greater the tendency for them to organise in trade unions and vice versa. From this point of view, it is the differences in the intermediate positions occupied by white-collar workers that explain the dynamics of white-collar unionism.

Although the debate on white-collar trade unionism has offered insights into the conditions and character of white-collar trade unions, none has yet provided a real answer to the question as to how white-collar organising by trade unions can succeed given the evident diversity in white-collar employees' working conditions. These explanations were limited by the fact that the debate was anchored in a structural approach to trade unionism. If the political and economic conditions are favourable and if white-collar work loses its distinguishing features, such as autonomy, professionalism and status, then trade unions are likely to thrive – and vice versa. What trade unions actually do to attract white-collar employees played at best a subordinate role. Trade unions are either the victims or beneficiaries of objective circumstances, be these external or internal to the work and workplaces of white-collar workers.

This view on trade unions has been challenged since the 1990s by the debate on union revitalisation and *organising*. The core idea in this is that the activity of organising can help increase organisational density and revitalise trade unions, especially when they are facing an obvious existential crisis. In this respect, it is in fact a debate on the options available to trade unions to defend themselves and increase their strength under unfavourable conditions. It is not by chance, therefore, that organising as a trade union strategy developed in the US from the early-1990s in an environment that was hostile to trade unions as a result of employer anti-union tactics, deregulated labour markets, and a collapse in collective bargaining and union density in the private sector. In this situation, some trade unions developed and tried out new strategies with a clear focus on increasing their organisational power.

Organising has become a catchword for a set of new trade union practices that together form the organising model (for an overview, see Heery 2015). This is based, amongst other activities, on; a) involving activists at the workplace; b) mapping workers with respect to their propensity to join a trade union; c) identifying issues or grievances that might form a basis for joining a trade union; d) framing the case for trade unions within a broader discourse of social justice; e) organising collective actions to mobilise workers; and f) looking for coalitions and joining forces with social movements.

In its pure form, organising is a conflict-based model. Trade unions will regain organisational power by identifying injustices, developing demand with which to confront management, and mobilising for conflict and collective action. Additionally, organising requires a profound strategic and structural reorientation of trade unions. This involves a) training professional organisers, b) implementing plans and budgets for organising, c) developing key areas and targets of activities, and d) establishing organising departments and make organising an ongoing organisational task for trade union officials and workplace ay representatives.

Most organising campaigns analysed in the literature have taken place in the lower segments of fragmented labour markets among a low paid, female or migrant labour force on precarious employment contracts. This has required some deviations from the pure model of organising. For example, workers have had to be recruited outside of workplaces. Because of fragmented employer structures and solo self-employment the level of organisation is that of the labour market rather an individual employer. Coalitions have had to be built with community organisations and activities framed with reference to public goods and the quality of care. And campaigns have been targeted at politicians rather than employers (Heery 2015).

Moreover, the concept of organising is not quite as clear-cut as it might seem. From the outset, there has been debate about the role of leadership in organising campaigns. While activating employees to become activists and participants at the workplace is one of the core steps of any organising campaign, such campaigns also require centralised planning and resources. This has fuelled a debate about union democracy and the centralised or decentralised character of organising (Voss 2010).

Another ambiguity concerns the range and depth of the changes required to initiate organising. In its pure form described above, organising is not just a novel strategy designed to engage employees but a profoundly new way of organising trade unions, including on issues such as resource allocation, departmental organisation, and the tasks expected of trade union officials. At the same time, organising has also been discussed in a weaker sense in terms of single instruments that can be deployed alongside traditional forms of trade union organisation (Brinkmann et al. 2008). This can include organising target groups without bringing professional organisers into the trade union organisation or experimenting with new forms of membership participation in parallel with established representative structures.

Finally, the conflictual approach seen as intrinsic to organising would appear to be incompatible with the consensus-based partnership approaches practiced by more established trade unions engaged in collective bargaining. In the pure form of organising, collective bargaining is a possible, but not necessary, outcome of organising campaigns, as the main goal is to increase organisational power, whatever this might mean for relations with employers. Furthermore, if organising is understood as a grassroots approach with rank-and-file actors at the workplace having the initiative, professionalised collective bargaining by trade union officials, whether at local, regional or industry level, will lose in importance. Additionally, partnership with employers can be regarded as an obstacle to reaching organising targets (Badigannavar/Kelly 2011).

Against this view, other authors have stressed that workers might have a preference for cooperative employment relationships and that collective agreements can produce advantages for labour that are not possible in a purely conflictual approach (Ackers 2015). Trade unions also have to deliver improvements in order to retain members won by organising campaigns, which suggests replacing continuous struggle by strategic and limited conflicts on winnable issues (Cregan 2005).

As a consequence, Heery (2015) has proposed combining organising and partnership. From this point of view, organising would be a suitable strategy directed at low-wage workers and employers hostile to trade unions, whereas partnership would be a strategy for high-wage employers with recognised and established trade unions. At the same time, organising could be used as a first step to increase the organisational power of trade unions, with recognition and a cooperative approach following in its wake. Increasing the organisational power of trade unions and obtaining the potential benefits of cooperation with employers are combined in integrative strategies.

However, this solution highlights the extent to which white-collar employees themselves play only a marginal role at best in the organising debate. None of the two strategies addresses the problem of organising white-collar workers in manufacturing, where many such employees often already work in companies covered by collective bargaining that are not hostile to trade unions in general. Nor are white-collar workers low-waged. The problem for trade unions is rather to organise white-collar workers who might already work in partnership arrangements and be relatively highly paid. In such circumstances, a purely conflictual approach would seem to hold out little prospect of success, given the more cooperative orientations of white-collar workers. At the same time, a purely partnership approach also seems insufficient, given that this has not as yet yielded positive organising effects on its own.

This dilemma might lead trade unions to opt for more selective – or narrow – strategies of organising that are compatible with a partnership approach, as with traditional forms of trade union representation at the workplace. This hypothesis fits with the findings of Haipeter (2016) who analysed a number of

initiatives by trade unions and works councils to organise white-collar workers in German manufacturing about a decade ago (Haipeter 2016b). This revealed a range of different organising strategies both by trade unions and works councils: for example, strategic organising campaigns by the trade union in workplaces characterised by high-skilled white-collar work in IT-services or engineering in which there were neither trade unions nor works councils; initiatives on the part of works councils to offer opportunities for participation to white-collar workers through instruments such as employee surveys, round tables or working groups composed of works councils and employees with responsibilities for specific topics; recruiting white-collar workers for work in works councils; or participation by white-collar workers in local conflicts in the form of meetings and informal balloting during negotiations on payment systems for employees who are outside the scope of collective agreements and whose income is considerably above the highest grade in such agreements.

How these options were used depended on workplace circumstances – whether, for example, there was a works council or the occupational composition of the workforce. In either case, a core focus was the implementation – if it did not exist before – or improvement in the scope for workplace representation by ensuring that white-collar interests were given appropriate priority in order to win their interest in getting involved works councils and trade unions. This can be regarded as confirmation of the hypothesis that workplace representation and how it acts plays a crucial role in organising (Waddington 2015).

Discussion of the positions and attitudes of white-collar employees, changes in work and working conditions and white-collar unionism and organising constitute a useful background to a more targeted research focus on the conditions and practices for organising white-collar employees on the part of manufacturing trade unions. Three particular aspects have emerged from previous research.

The first concerns the *characteristics of white-collar workers* in terms of their numbers, the proportion of the workforce they account for in manufacturing industry, their composition in terms of skills, tasks and gender, and their work and working conditions. What does available data tell us about the work and working conditions of white-collar workers in manufacturing industry across Europe, and what changes can be observed?

The second aspect concerns the *subjective perceptions and attitudes of white-collar workers* with respect both to work problems and working conditions as well as to trade unions. What are the main issues identified by white-collar employees as far as their working conditions are concerned that might be addressed by trade unions? How do white-collar employees perceive trade unions and what makes them attractive or unattractive? How far do attitudes vary between countries, skill levels, age and gender or union membership?

The third aspect, finally, is related to *trade unions and their organising strategies*. What are the main problems posed by white-collar work from their point of view? How are the interests of white-collar employees represented within their organisational structures? What role does organising play, and how do trade union organising practices work. These three aspects will be analysed in the following three chapters based on the findings of the BEREP research project.

3. Numbers, Characteristics and Working Conditions of White-Collar Employees

3.1 The survey evidence

What proportion of the workforce in manufacturing is accounted for by white-collar workers? What are their characteristics in terms of education levels and occupations? And what are their working conditions like? These questions will be analysed in this chapter looking at our eight sample countries – Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Poland, Romania, Spain and Sweden – based on a secondary data analysis of three data sets: the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS), the European Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS), and the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP). These sources were selected because each contains data on the working conditions and attitudes of white-collar workers in manufacturing that can be used for comparative analysis.

· The EWCS is organised by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions and takes place about every five years. It has recently been expanded to include over 70,000 workers in 36 European countries. The analysis is based on the European Working Conditions Telephone Survey (EWCTS) 2021, which was conducted by telephone for the first time in that year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Owing to a change in the interviewing method, it is not possible to make a direct comparison with previous editions. Sample sizes for each country range from 1,000 to 4,200 interviews. The basic population for the analysis is employees aged 18 to 65. Trainees were not included in the analysis.

· The EU-LFS is a rotating random sample survey covering the population in private households in, currently, 35 European countries. The sampling units are dwellings, household or individuals depending on the country-specific sampling frames. In 2016, the EU-LFS sample size was about 4,500,000 individuals. Data is collected by national statistical institutes across Europe and centrally processed by Eurostat.

· The SOEP is a representative repeat survey of private households in Germany based at the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW). The survey has been carried out on the same individuals and families every year since 1984 (with new samples added over time). The individuals and families surveyed were randomly selected to represent the population living in Germany. Around 14,000 households and 30,000 people take part.

Both the EWCS and the EU-LFS allow comparative analyses of the working conditions and orientations of white-collar employees in manufacturing in the selected countries. While the scope of the items surveyed on these topics in the EWCS is significantly broader than in the EU-LFS, as a rotating survey the EU-LFS makes it possible to create time series and monitor trends. By contrast, the EWCS is only conducted every five years and the figures for 2021 cannot be compared with previous waves due to the change in the survey method. The SOEP is a German data source. It cannot be used for comparative analysis, but enables a more in-depth analysis of the German case on a number of points.

In contrast to the other two data sources, the SOEP also asks whether respondents are blue- or white-collar workers. Classification as a white-collar worker is therefore based on respondents' self-assessment. By contrast, white-collar workers are defined analytically in the two other surveys using ISCO codes. The category of white-collar workers thus comprises ISCO codes 10 (managers), 20 (professionals), 30 (technicians and associate professionals), 40 (clerical support workers) and 50 (services and sales workers). Industrial sectors were defined on the basis of groups 10 to 33 of NACE rev. 2 (NACE code C).

In the EWCS and to some extent also in the EU-LFS, differentiated analysis by country, sector and employee group sometimes leads to small case numbers if further subcategories such as gender or age are to be formed. We have therefore decided to only analyse these subgroups if the case numbers would be likely to enable statistically reliable results. At the same time, we have listed the number of respondents in the respective cases. Even if the data quality therefore is limited, it is the only way to analyse the working conditions of white-collar workers comparatively with statistical data. This study is the first to make use of this possibility.

3.2 Shares of white-collar employees in the manufacturing workforce

The proportion of white-collar workers in the manufacturing workforce is a key indicator of the urgency that trade unions are facing in organising this group of employees. The higher their share and the more rapidly it grows, the more pressing a task it is to draw them into trade union membership as a means of sustaining trade union organisational power in industry and with this the leading role of trade unions as a collective actor in social dialogue.

The proportions of white-collar workers in the manufacturing workforce vary both by country and data source (Table 2). According to the EWCS, the proportion of white-collar workers in the overall manufacturing workforce ranges from 18% in Romania to 62% in Ireland. Germany and Sweden have very high shares of 56% and 55% respectively, while Spain and Poland are well below this level with slightly less or more than 40%. According to the EU-LSF figures, the percentages are slightly higher for Finland, Romania, Spain and Sweden, but significantly lower for Ireland, France and Poland; the same applies to a lesser extent for Germany. These differences might be due to low number of cases or to different interpretations of the ISCO and NACE codes by respondents. [1]

Irrespective of this, overall in five of the eight countries analysed – Finland, France, Germany, Ireland and Sweden – around half or more of employees in manufacturing are white-collar workers. In Poland and Spain, this proportion is around 40%; only in Romania is it below 20%.

TABLE 2: Share of employees in manufacturing in selected countries

Country	Share of white-collar workers in manufacturing in % EWCS 2021	Share of white-collar workers in manufacturing in % EU-LFS 2022
Finland	48.5	51.7
France	54.1	46.8
Germany	55.6	51.7
Ireland	62.3	45.4
Poland	44.8	38.5
Romania	18.2	19.6
Spain	37.4	38.5
Sweden	55.3	58.2

Source: EWCS, EU-LFS, authors' calculations. Number of cases (N) for white collar workers: EWCS: Germany (GE) 411, France (FR) 292, Spain (ES) 152, Finland (FI) 128, Sweden (SE) 107, Ireland (IE) 131, Poland (PL) 261, Romania (RO) 121; EU-LFS: Germany 3942, France 1373, Spain 830, Finland 150, Sweden 268, Ireland 127, Poland 1160, Romania 312.

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[1] According to the EWCS, the case numbers of white-collar employees in manufacturing are rather low for Sweden (107), Romania (121), Finland (128) and Ireland (131), and highest in Germany (411). The case numbers in the EU-LFS are much higher in some countries, ranging from 100 in Ireland to 3,500 in Germany.

Long-run trends are also important in determining how urgently trade needs might need to respond. According to data from the EU-LFS (Figure 1), the proportion of white-collar workers in manufacturing has risen significantly over the past ten years in more than half of the sample countries. In Sweden, the increase was around 20 percentage points, in Poland around 10 percentage points, in Finland around seven percentage points, and in Germany and Ireland around five percentage points. In Spain the figures remained more or less constant over the long term. In Romania, on the other hand, the proportion of white-collar workers in manufacturing has stagnated, while in France a slight increase up until 2020 was followed by a sharp drop in 2021 and 2022.
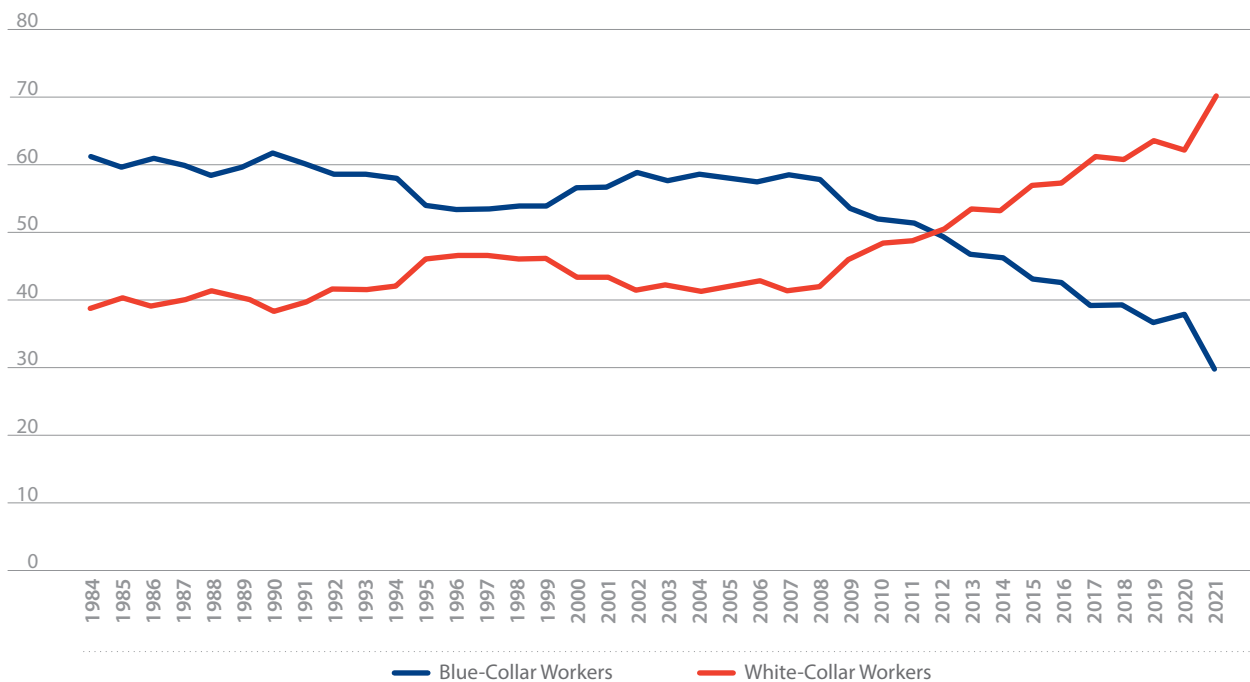
FIGURE 1: Share of white-collar workers in manufacturing in selected countries, 2011-2022 (EU-LFS)
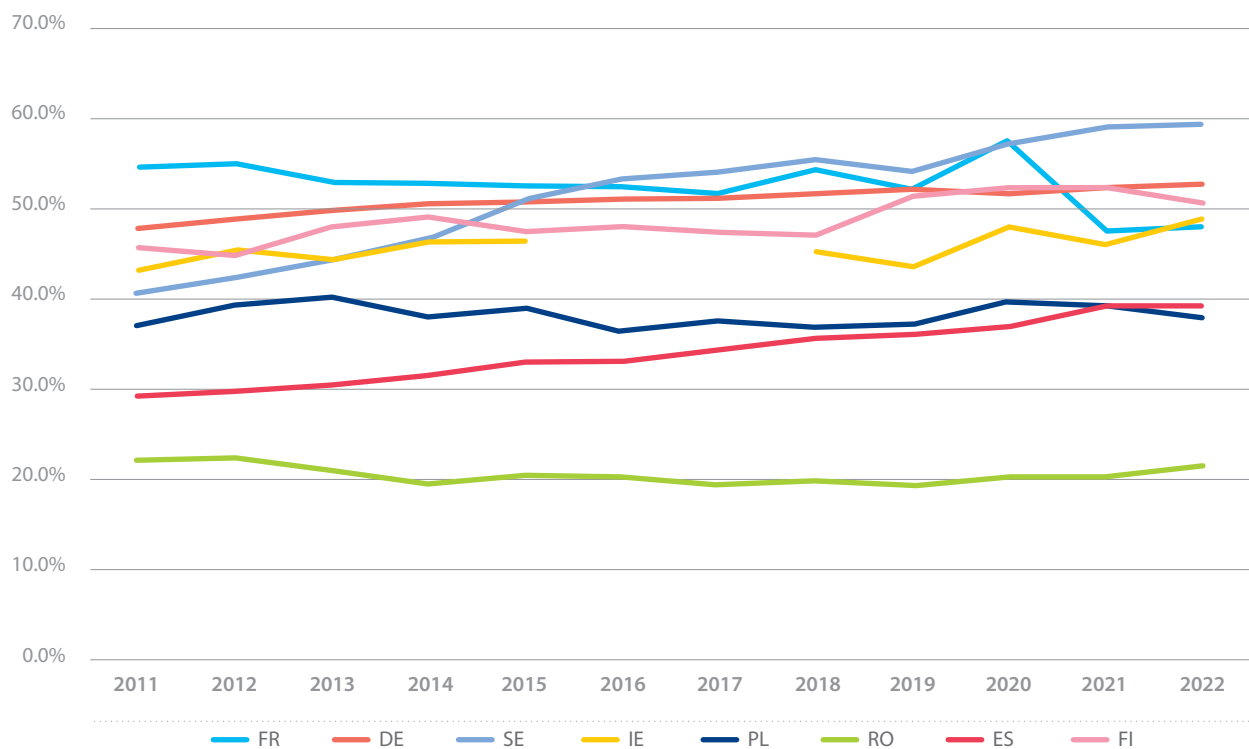
Source: own calculation. N GE varies between 3349 (2011) and 3980 (2021), N ES varies between 701 (2014) and 884 (2020), N FI varies between 137 (2015) and 159 (2021), N FR varies between 1287 (2021) and 1712 (2012), N IE varies between 83 (2011) and 127 (2021), N PL varies between 783 (2011) and 1160 (2022), N RO varies between 292(2021) and 326 (2012), N SE varies between 206 (2011) and 271 (2021).

The growing proportion of white-collar workers in the manufacturing workforce is especially evident for Germany from the SOEP data (Figure 2). According to respondents' self-assessment, a tipping point was reached in 2012, when the proportion of white-collar employees first exceeded that of blue-collar workers. Since then, their respective shares have diverged at some speed with the gap widening sharply in favour of white-collar workers, whose share reached 70% by 2021.

FIGURE 2: Shares of white and blue-collar workers in manufacturing in Germany, 1984-2021 (SOEP)

Source: own calculation. N GE varies between 3349 (2011) and 3980 (2021), N ES varies between 701 (2014) and 884 (2020), N FI varies between 137 (2015) and 159 (2021), N FR varies between 1287 (2021) and 1712 (2012), N IE varies between 83 (2011) and 127 (2021), N PL varies between 783 (2011) and 1160 (2022), N RO varies between 292(2021) and 326 (2012), N SE varies between 206 (2011) and 271 (2021).

According to the EWCS figures, the proportion of women among white-collar workers in manufacturing ranges from 24% in Finland to 42% in Ireland (Table 3). Only in Romania is the proportion of women higher among blue-collar workers (around 52%) than white-collar workers (just under 40%). Overall, this means that organising white-collar employees also means organising women to a much greater extent than previously.

TABLE 3: Women's share in total blue- and white-collar workers in manufacturing, by country 2021

Country	Blue-collar (%)	White-collar (%)	Total (%)
Germany	17.8	34.4	27.1
France	21.6	39.3	31.2
Spain	16.6	38.3	24.7
Finland	20.5	24.2	22.3
Sweden	17.0	36.2	27.6
Ireland	29.1	42.0	37.1
Poland	33.7	41.2	37.0
Romania	52.1	39.9	49.9

Source: EWCS 2021, own calculation.

According to EU-LFS, the proportion of women has remained broadly constant over time, apart from minor fluctuations, with no significant increase or decrease in the country comparison (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3: Share of women in white-collar workers in manufacturing, 2011-2022 (EU-LFS)
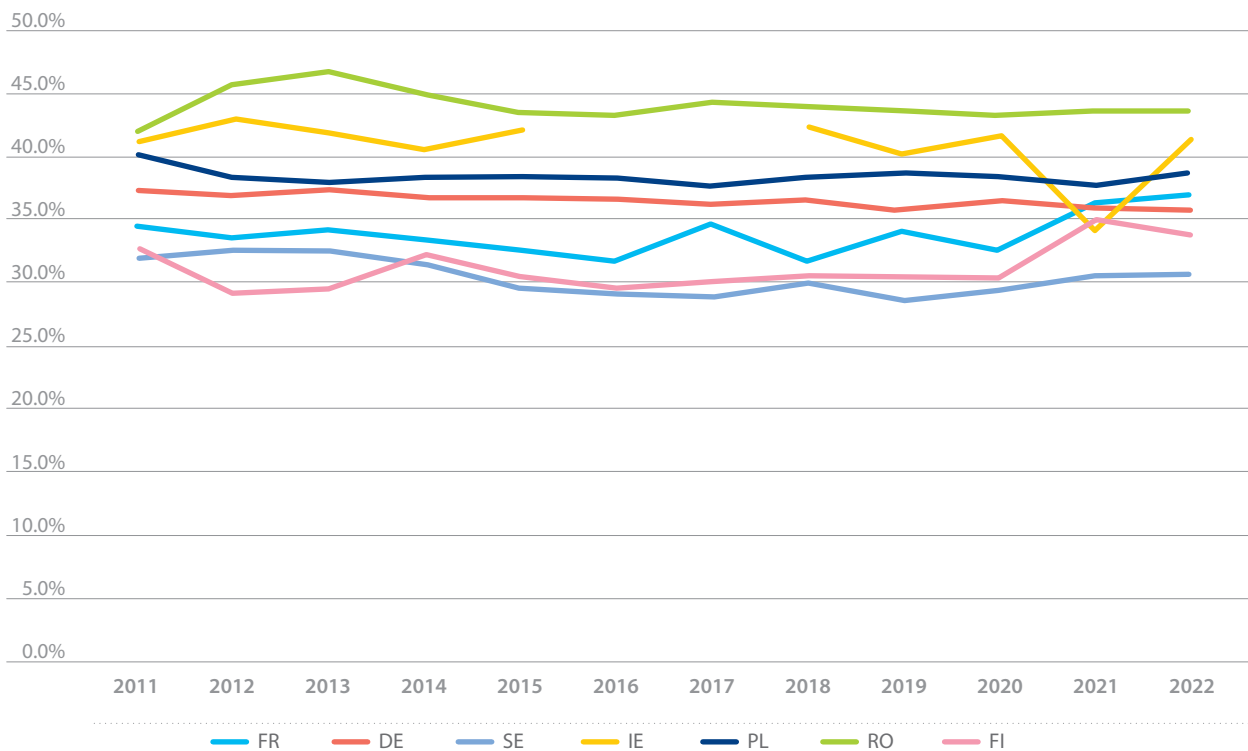
Source: own calculation. N DE varies between 1246 (2011) and 1431 (2021), N ES varies between 258 (2013) and 371 (2020), N FR varies between 467 (2020) and 586 (2012), N PL varies between 304 (2012) and 450 (2022), N RO varies between 127 (2020) and 149 (2012).

3.3 Education levels, occupations and roles

The trend towards an increase in the proportion of white-collar workers in the manufacturing workforce has also been accompanied by a shift in skill structures and the activities and positions of employees in corporate hierarchies.

In the main, a large majority of white-collar employees have attained a tertiary level of education (Table 4). The proportion of employees with tertiary education is particularly high in France (76%) and Ireland (75%), but notably lower in Germany at around 52%. This is probably due to the important role played by the dual vocational training system and further education programmes that build on this which are used by many school leavers as an alternative to attending university.

Compared to white-collar employees, the main highest level of education for blue-collar workers is secondary education. Only in Ireland is the proportion of graduates among blue-collar workers particularly high, at just over 48%, while the proportion with secondary education is significantly lower than in the other countries, at just under 48%.

TABLE 4: Education level of blue and white-collar workers in the manufacturing sector 2021 (in %)

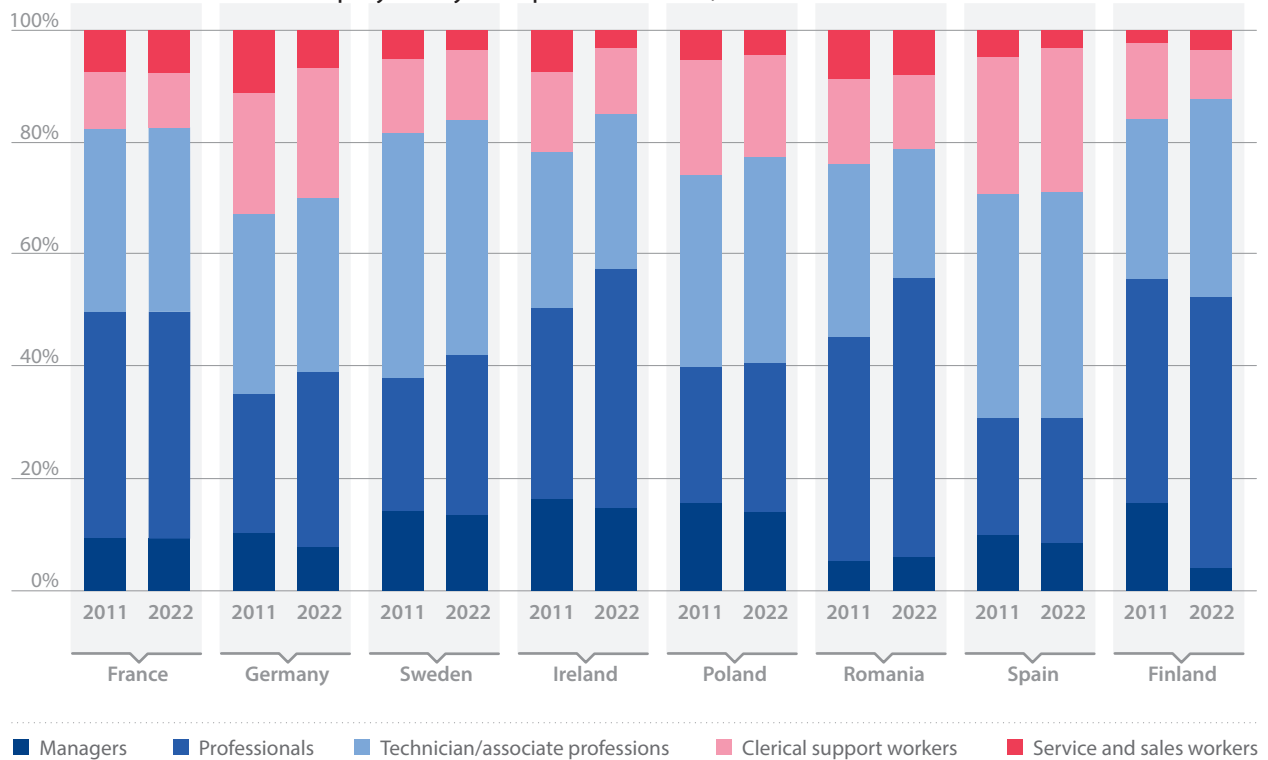| Country	Blue-collar			White-collar		
	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
Germany	1.9	88.0	10.1	0.4	47.8	51.8
France	0.0	82.3	17.7	0.0	24.1	76.0
Spain	4.6	82.5	12.9	1.8	34.7	63.5
Finland	1.4	83.8	14.8	0.9	31.4	67.7
Sweden	0.0	80.3	19.7	0.0	35.1	64.9
Ireland	4.0	47.7	48.3	0.0	24.6	75.4
Poland	0.0	84.4	15.6	0.0	29.0	71.0
Romania	2.3	92.8	4.9	0.0	31.2	68.9

Source: EWCS 2021, authors' calculation.

Looking at the structure of the occupational groups under the five categories of the ISCO codes – service and sales workers, clerical support, technicians and associate professions – several trends can be discerned (Figure 4).

In almost all the countries covered except Finland, the proportion of service and sales workers among white-collar workers had declined slightly over the past decade. The same applies to clerical support workers. Germany is the exception here, with a slight increase in this group of employees, the shares of which are already higher in Germany than in any other country in our sample.

In half the countries analysed – Germany, Sweden, Poland and Spain – the most important group of white-collar workers in quantitative terms are technicians and associate professionals. Their share has remained fairly constant in most countries, even when compared over time, with the exception of a significant decrease in Romania and a sharp increase in Finland. In the other half of the countries in the study sample, professionals form the occupational group with the relatively highest share. Professionals have also increased in importance in all countries except France, with Ireland, Finland and Romania leading the way with an increase of around nine percentage points over the past decade. The increase in Germany and Sweden was also more than five percentage points.

The growing importance of professionals, but also the consistently high proportion of technicians, is likely to be closely linked to trends such as the digitalisation and greening of production or increased product complexity. The need for IT specialists, experts and technicians in product development is therefore increasing. One example of this is the automotive industry, where digitalisation is penetrating both products and processes, centred on vehicle operating systems, autonomous driving, and infotainment (Galgóczi 2023).

FIGURE 4: White-collar employees by occupational status, 2011 and 2022

Legend:
- Managers
- Professionals
- Technician/associate professions
- Clerical support workers
- Service and sales workers

Source: EU-LFS; own calculation. N GE 2011: 3349, 2022: 3942; N ES 2011: 747, 2022: 830; N FI 2011: 151, 2022: 150; N FR 2011: 1697, 2022:1373; N IE 2011: 83, 2022: 127; N PL 2011: 783, 2022: 1160; N RO 2011: 323, 2022: 312; N SE 2011: 206, 2022: 268.

In contrast to this rise in the share of technical experts, the proportion of white-collar staff exercising managerial tasks is falling in most countries with the exception of Romania and France where it has remained constant. However, these trends have been taking place in a context of quite different starting points in terms of the share of managers. While the proportion of managers in Ireland, Poland, Sweden and Spain is around 15% or slightly lower, it is below 10% in France, Germany, Romania and Finland. And in Finland, the proportion has actually fallen by almost 12 percentage points to just 4%.

One reason for this fall might be changes in work organisation towards more project and agile forms of work. Employee self-organisation plays a major role in these approaches, with a consequent decline in hierarchical management and control. Lean office strategies might also have contributed to the fall, given that one argument for adopting this form of rationalisation is to widen the managerial span of control.

However, these trends do not explain the degree of international variation in the shares of different levels of management. Two possible explanations might be adduced for this. The first concerns national organisational traditions and cultures. It might be that countries such as Spain, Poland and Ireland have relatively strong traditions of narrow managerial spans and complex hierarchies. The tasks assigned to managers could also differ; they might, for example, be more involved in production operations – tasks left elsewhere to specialists. A second explanation could be that firms occupy different positions in the global value chain depending on their national location. The greater the proportion of research and development or IT development and services, the lower the likely proportion of managers due to the spread of agile working in these areas; conversely, the more that white-collar work is engaged in administration, the higher the proportion of managers is likely to be.

3.4 Working time

Working hours are a central element of employees' working conditions and, with pay, are therefore at the heart of collective labour disputes. For companies, the issue turns on how long and how flexibly they can utilise employees' work for a given wage; for employees, the issue is if and how they can reconcile their working hours with other life needs and how much time they must or, depending on their attitude to work, can spend at work.

Data from the EWCS suggests two broad country clusters in terms of the contractual hours of white-collar employees in manufacturing. Firstly, countries in which the standard duration of contractual working hours for full-time employees is 40 hours per week; and secondly, countries with a shorter standard week, ranging from 35 to 40 hours (Figure 5). The first group includes Poland, Romania, Sweden and Spain. These countries have a collectively-agreed working week of 40 hours, although bargaining coverage varies in these countries from very high in Sweden and Spain, to low in Romania and very low in Poland. In Romania and Poland, however, the 40-hour week also seems to be the norm for individual contracts. The countries in the second group are Finland, Ireland and France where agreed weekly hours are below 40. In Finland and France, extensive bargaining coverage ensures that this applies to most employees; in Ireland, both collectively and individually agreed working hours are usually 39 hours, and therefore also below the 40-hour mark.

FIGURE 5: Contractual working hours of white-collar employees in manufacturing 2021 (hour brackets in %)
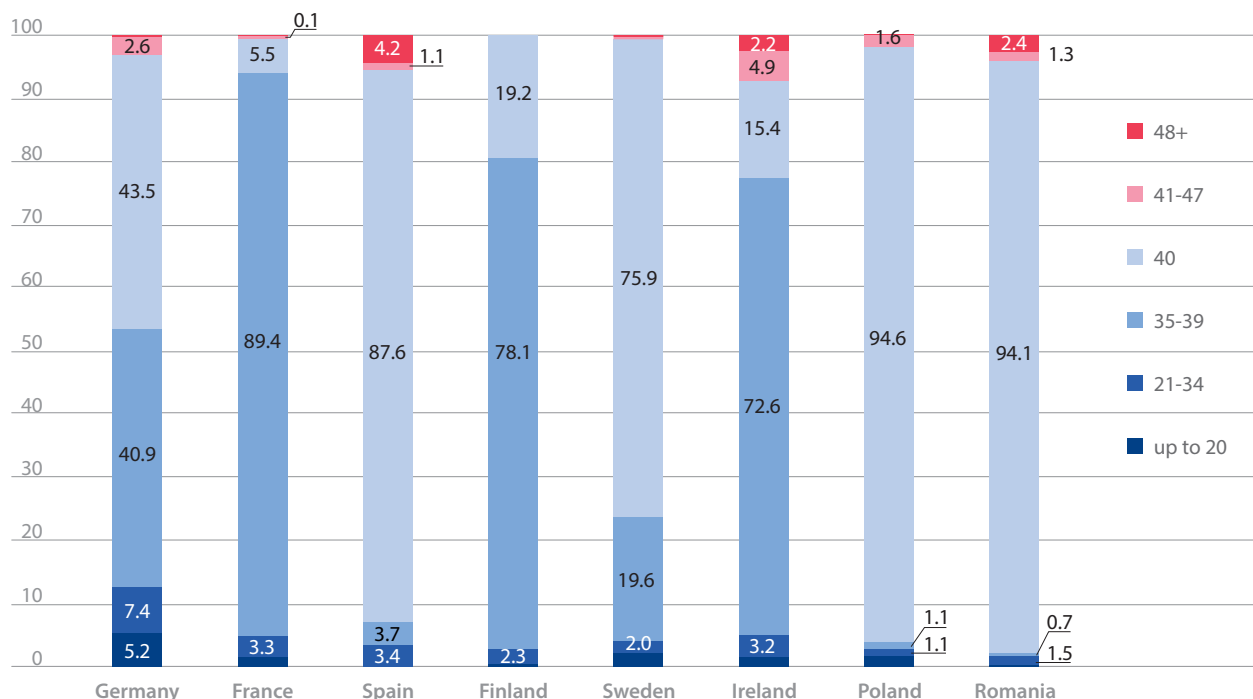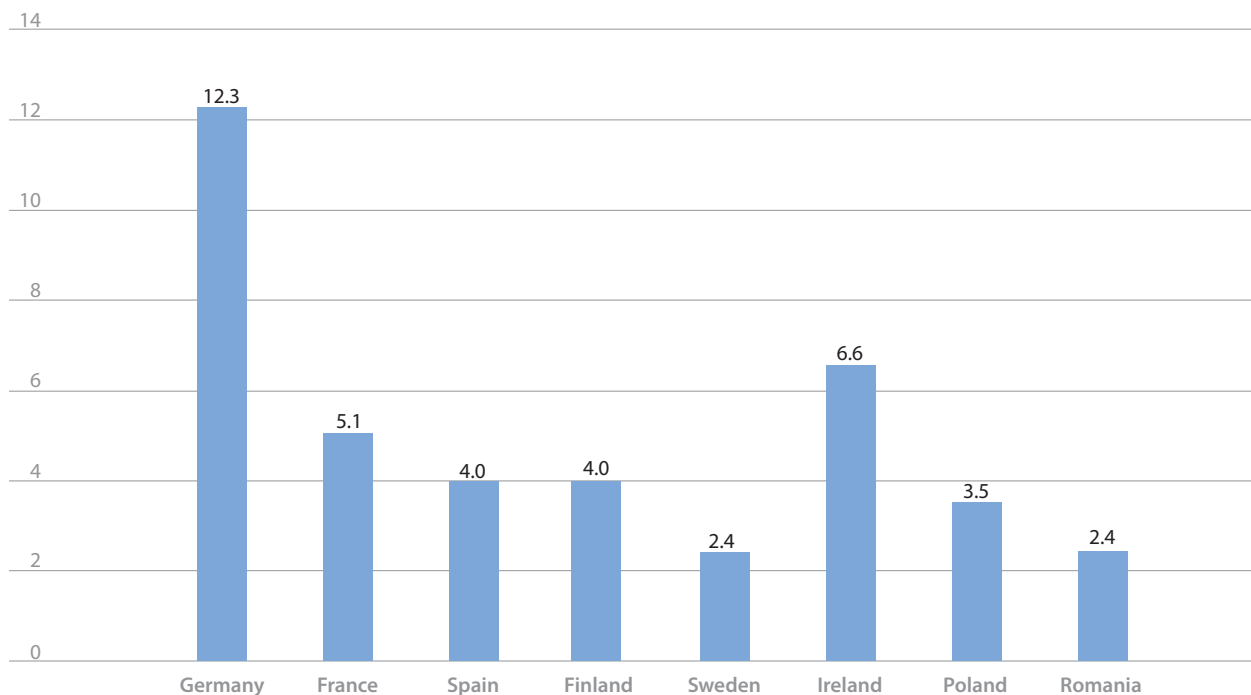

Source: EWCS 2021, authors' calculation. For France the number of valid cases is rather low (144).

Germany is a special case as the two standards for contractual working hours for full-time employees – 40 hours or below 40 hours – co-exist with almost equal weighting, even though collectively-agreed working hours in manufacturing are below 40 hours, ranging from 37.5 in the chemical and pharmaceutical industry and just 35 hours in the metalworking and electrical industry. Given this, the high proportion of contractual working times of 40 hours for white-collar employees in Germany requires some explanation. Four reasons can be cited: firstly, the limited scope of collective bargaining coverage, which is around 50% in the metalworking industry, but higher in the chemical and

pharmaceutical industries; secondly, the 'opening clauses' in industry-level collective agreements that permit company-level derogations from industry norms, the use of which is often also accompanied by extending working hours; thirdly, quotas in collective agreements that permit working hours to be lengthened for agreed percentages of highly-skilled employees; and fourthly, employees who are out of the scope of collective agreements as their salary is higher than the highest wage grade specified in the applicable collective agreement. For these employees, most of whom are professionals and managers, a contractual weekly working time of 40 hours is usually agreed individually.

The proportion of white-collar workers in manufacturing who work part-time is low in all countries (Figure 6). It is by far the highest in Germany at just over 12%. In the other countries, part-time work ranges from 2.4% in Sweden to 6.6% in Ireland. The figures from the EU-LFS cannot be presented in detail here due to the low number of cases in some instances but indicate that women make up the majority of part-time employees.

FIGURE 6: Share of part-time white-collar employees in manufacturing 2021 (in %)

Source: EWCS 2021, authors' calculation.

How long do white-collar employees actually work in relation to their contractual working times? According to the EWCS data, actual working hours for a significant proportion of white-collar employees exceed their contractual working hours (Figure 7). This applies in particular to countries where the standard contractual working time is below 40 hours. In France and Finland, for example, only around half of employees with contractual hours below 40 actually work fewer than 40 hours; the other half work more, and some 30% in Finland and 40% in France work 41 hours or more. This discrepancy is particularly pronounced in Ireland, where around 55% of employees work 41 hours or more, although only around seven per cent of white-collar employees have corresponding contractual working times. In Germany, with its 'dual' standard of contractual working times, the discrepancy is smaller; however, here too, some 34% of employees work 41 hours or more.

There is a somewhat closer fit between contractual and actual working hours in countries with a 40-hour standard, but even here there are clear differences between the countries. Spain and, even more so, Poland and Sweden show the greatest overlap between the two figures. The proportion of employees with longer working hours in Poland is around 22%, followed by Sweden (25%), Spain (around 30%) and Romania (around 36%).

FIGURE 7: Actual working times of white-collar employees in the manufacturing sector 2021 (hour brackets in %)
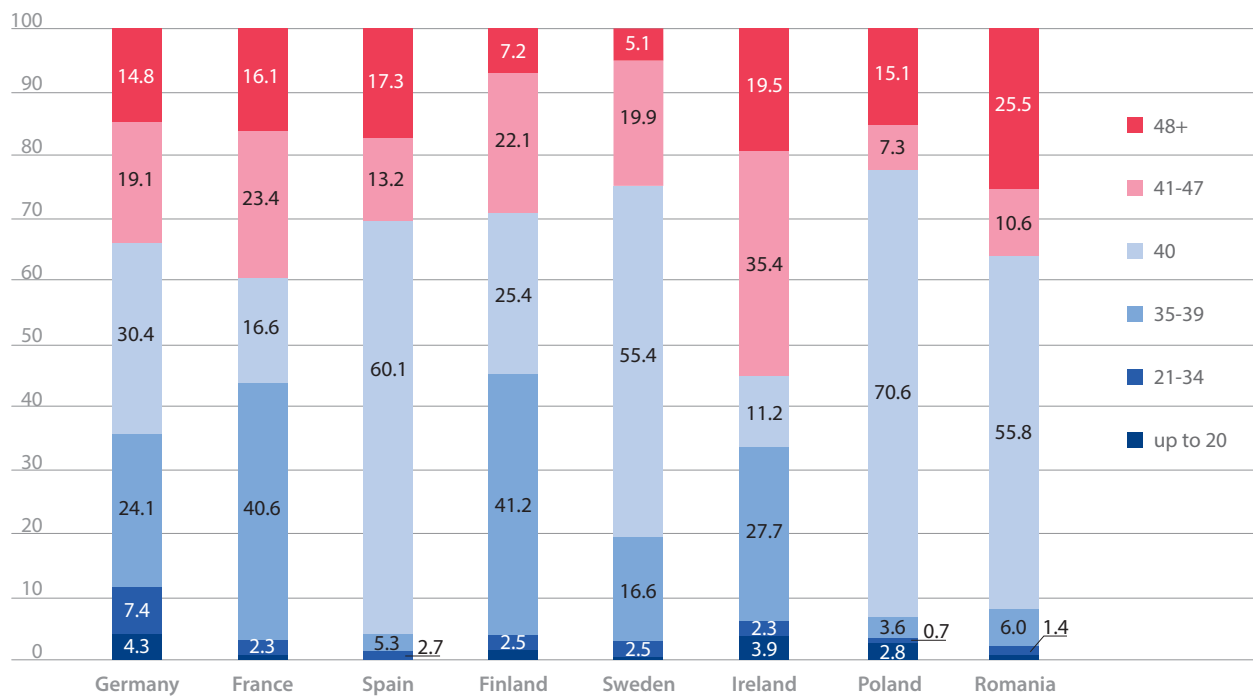
Source: EWCS 2021, authors' calculation.

Usual working hours of full-time white-collar employees in manufacturing, 2011-2022 (EU-LFS)
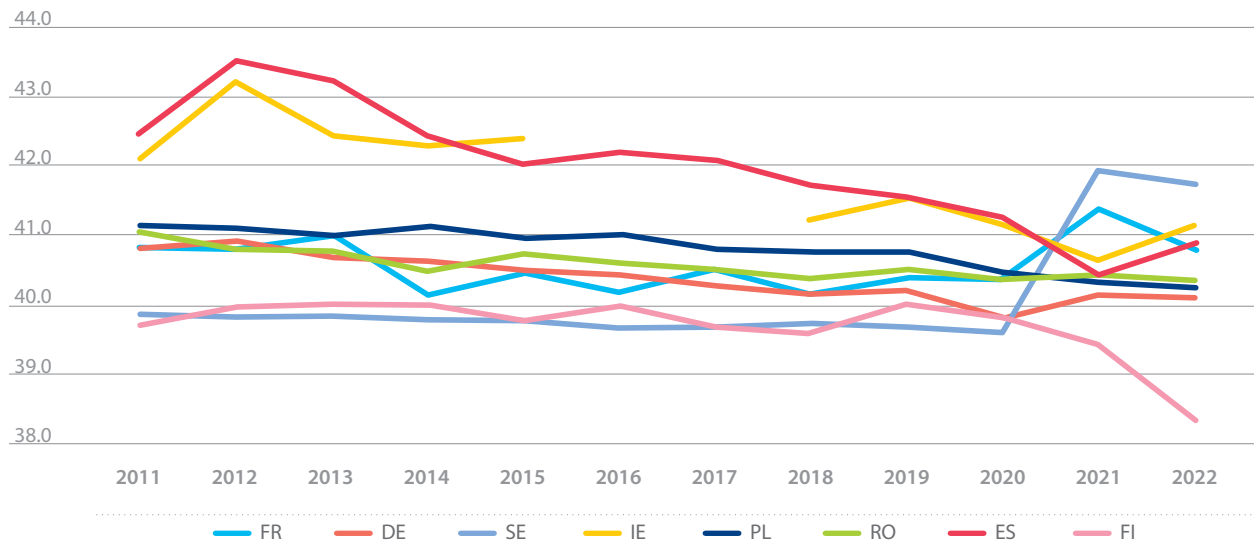
**Source:** own calculation. N GE varies between 2887 (2011) and 3339 (2021), N ES varies between 661 (2014) and 836 (2020), N FI varies between 133 (2017) and 152 (2021); N FR varies between 1199 (2021) and 1601 (2011), N PL varies between 756 (2011) and 1143 (2022), N RO varies between 291 (2021) and 324 (2012), N SE varies between 187 (2011) and 251 (2022).

At the same time, however, the EU-LFS longitudinal data for full-time employees shows that average actual working times have fallen in most countries over the past decade (Figure 8). In Poland, Romania, Ireland and Spain, average weekly working hours fell by around one hour over the observation period, while in Germany they fell by 0.6 hours. In Finland, the decline was even more pronounced at 1.4 hours. Only two countries are exempt from this development: France, where actual weekly working hours decreased over time, but then increased significantly during the Covid-19 pandemic and therefore remained the same overall; and Sweden, where working hours for white-collar workers rose by a total of 1.8 hours due to the increase recorded during the pandemic. A slight increase in working hours can also be seen in other countries during this phase. At present, it is not possible to predict whether this increase will stabilise or whether the long-term trend of declining actual weekly working hours will resume.

Either way, the duration of actual working hours is significantly higher than that preferred by white-collar employees (Figure 9). This is the case for all countries irrespective of the distribution of actual working hours across the hour brackets. The country in which actual and preferred working times are closest to each other is Romania, where almost 60% of employees would like to work 40 hours or more per week and over 90% actually do. Sweden, Spain and Poland also have a similar distribution of actual working hours; however, the desire to reduce working hours is much more marked here, especially in Sweden, where almost 76% of white-collar employees would like to work fewer than 40 hours.

FIGURE 9: Preferred working hours of white-collar employees in manufacturing, 2021 (hour brackets in %)
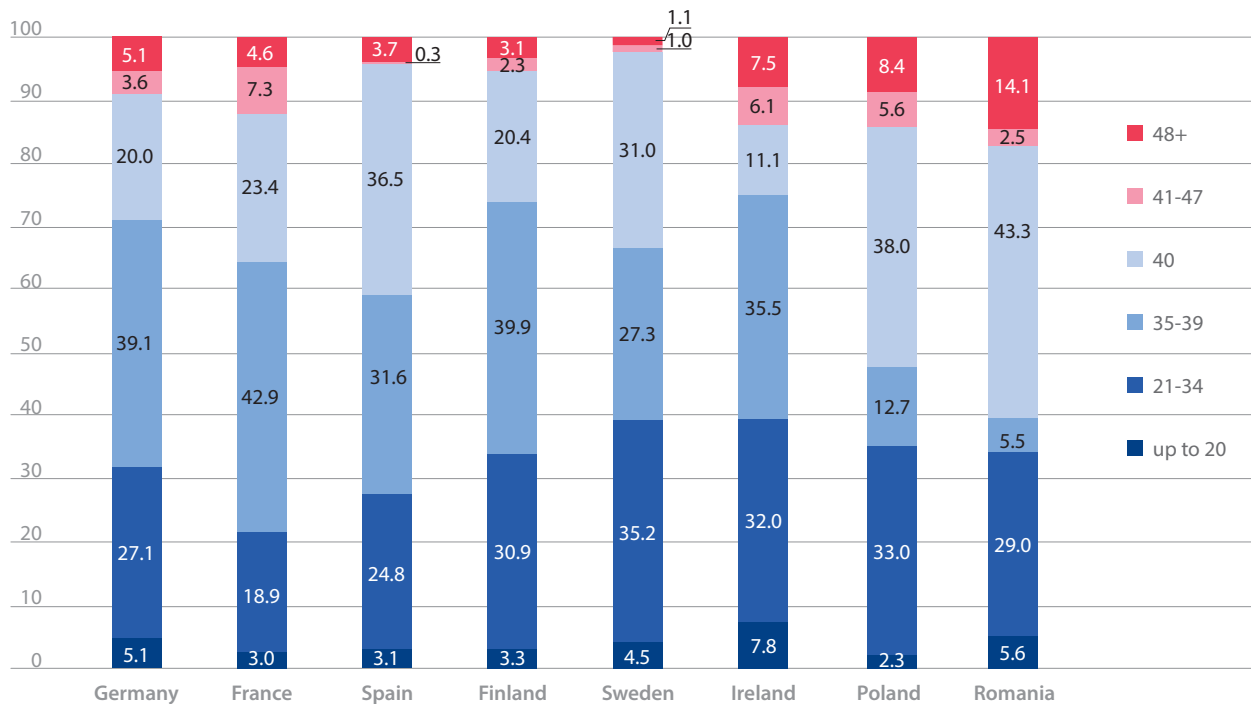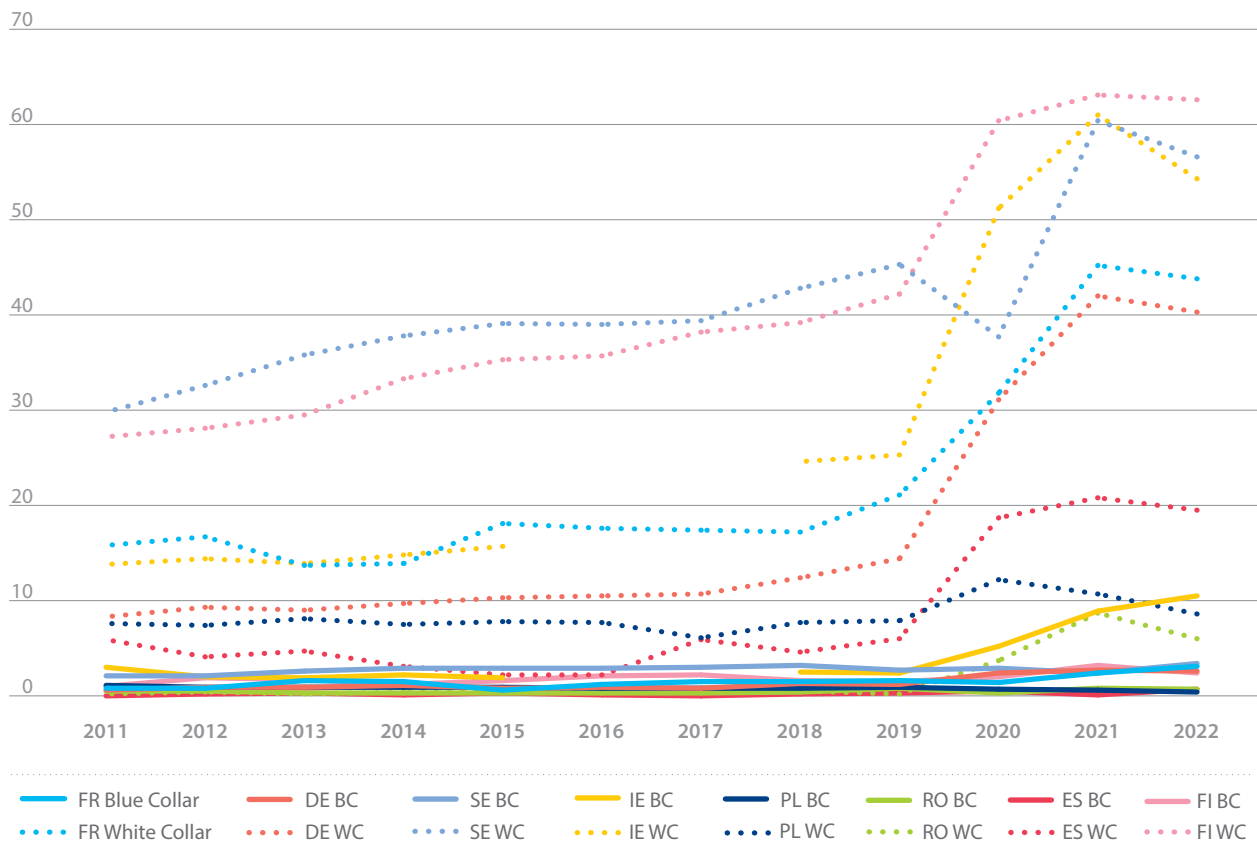

Source: EWCS 2021, authors' calculation

In Germany, France, Finland and Ireland, the most preferred interval is 35 to 39 hours. In other words, employees here would like to work a 35 'plus' hour week. In Sweden, the most popular desired working time is between 21 and 34 hours. However, in all other countries except France working hours in this range are favoured by 25% or more of employees, a figure that is much higher than the values for actual working hours in this range. This might be due to part-time workers wanting to extend their hours. In most countries the part-time rate is so low, however, that the vast majority of employees who would like to work these hours must be full-time. And assuming that most of these employees do not want to work part-time, the figures point to a desire for a short full-time standard below the 35 hours per week.

Another important factor affecting the working hours of white-collar workers is working from home (WFH), information on which is provided by the EU-LSF. Although WFH has no direct effect on working times, it can influence them by saving travelling time or in that employees working at home might be less aware of whether they are strictly adhering to their contractual hours – which means that hours actually worked might increase if they are less attentive. Working from home is also an important factor in work-life balance, as it enables employees to better coordinate their employed hours and personal needs.

Figure 10 shows the major differences in WFH between blue and white-collar workers. The highest rate of WFH by blue-collar workers by far, at over 10% in 2022, was in Ireland; in all other countries, WFH by this group was around 3% or significantly less at this time. In contrast, the lowest rates of WFH by white-collar employees in the countries surveyed at were found in Romania at 6% and in Poland at under 9%. In Spain, it is just under 25%, but in all other countries in 2022 WFH was undertaken by 40% or more. Finland (just under 63%), Sweden (just under 57%), and Ireland (just over 54%) lead the field in terms of WFH.

FIGURE 10: Shares of white and blue-collar employees in manufacturing sometimes or often working from home (in %) (EU LSF)


Legend:
- FR Blue Collar
- DE BC
- SE BC
- IE BC
- PL BC
- RO BC
- ES BC
- FI BC
- FR White Collar
- DE WC
- SE WC
- IE WC
- PL WC
- RO WC
- ES WC
- FI WC

Source: EWCS 2021, authors' calculation

While the proportion of white-collar employees who sometimes or frequently work from home increased slightly in most countries up until 2019, it was the Covid-19 pandemic that triggered a sharp rise in the practice. The incidence fell slightly at the end of the pandemic but at a significantly higher level than previously. This occurred at very different levels in different countries. For example, the incidence of WFH in Sweden and Finland was already much greater than in the other countries at the beginning of the observation period.

The considerable differences in WFH between countries are not easy to explain. One key factor might be the willingness of companies to allow this and accept limits on the degree of hierarchical control. Differences in technical equipment, such as the availability of laptops or suitable software and communication programmes, might also play a role.

WFH is also linked to the question of how white-collar workers perceive the relationship between work and private life. In the countries analysed, most white-collar employees in manufacturing rated their work-life balance as good or very good according to the EWCS. This was seen most frequently in Sweden with 91.5% and least frequently in Spain with just under 77%. Satisfaction with work-life balance therefore goes well beyond the practice of working from home and must be based on other factors. This could include the finding that many white-collar employees consider it easy or very easy to take one or two hours off work for private needs. The percentages are very similar to those for work-life balance, with a high of almost 99% in Sweden and the lowest value in France at just under 77%.

FIGURE 11: Interaction between work and private life, white-collar workers in manufacturing, 2021
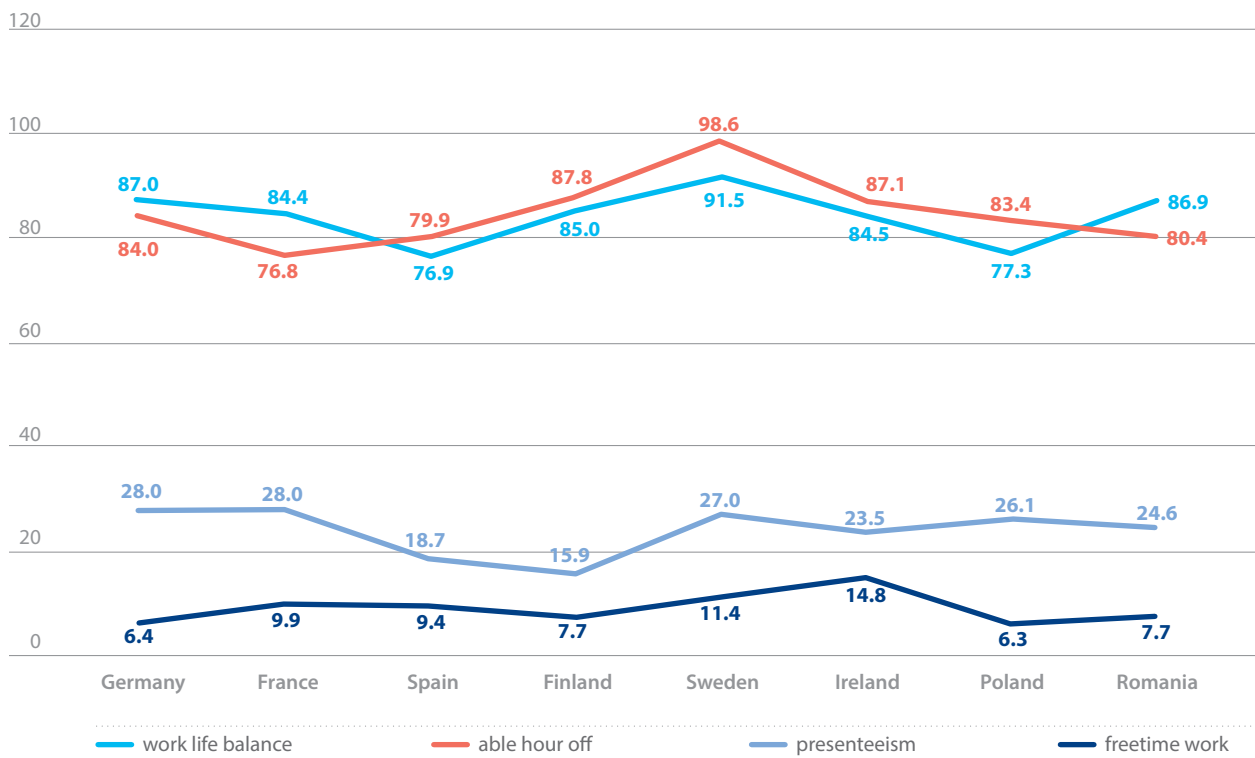
Source: EWCS 2021, authors' calculation. Free-time: proportion of employees who work daily or several times a week in their free time. Presenteeism: proportion of employees who work when they are actually ill; those who were not ill were excluded. Able hour off: proportion of employees for whom it is easy or very easy to take 1-2 hours off work for private matters. Work-life-balance: proportion of employees with a good or very good work-life balance.

3.5 Working conditions

The EWCS contains information on other working conditions and how they are judged by white-collar workers in manufacturing. According to this data, white-collar employees cite points such as 'new learning', dealing with customers, tight deadlines or high speed of work as important factors in their working conditions – indicated as 'always' or 'often' (Figures 12 and 13). Repetitive movements and customer contact are also frequently cited as defining characteristics of working conditions. However, it is not always clear whether these factors are seen as negative or positive; learning new things or customer contact can be interpreted either as a demanding burden or as a motivating or meaningful stimulus.

FIGURE 12: Main dimensions of working conditions: Germany, France, Spain and Ireland (in %)
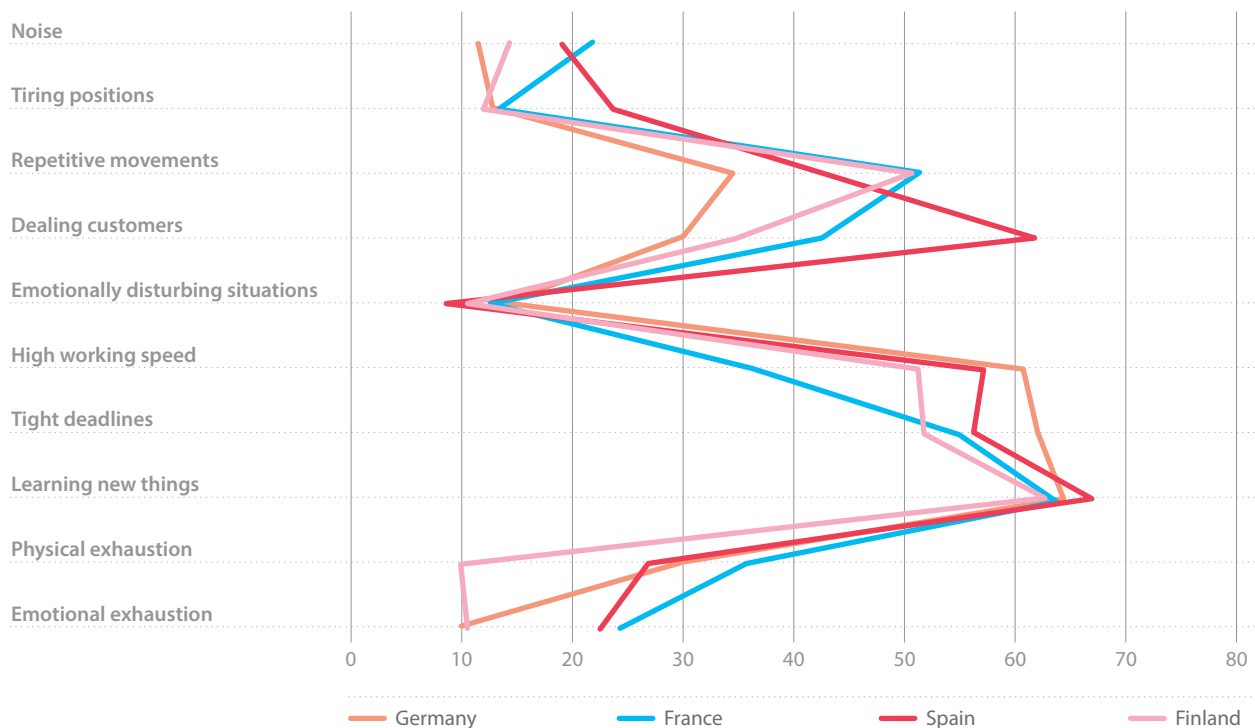
Source: EWCS 2021, authors' calculation

For other factors, however, the interpretation is less ambiguous. Tiring working positions, repetitive movements, emotional disturbances, high working speed, tight deadlines or physical and emotional exhaustion are clear indicators of strain and stress.

A comparison of the countries under scrutiny shows a broadly uniform pattern of working conditions. In all the countries analysed, repetitive movements and, even more so, a high working speed and tight deadlines are clearly negatively connoted and perceived as stressful by a large proportion of employees – and in the case of working speed and deadlines also by a majority in many countries. In addition, learning new things and, to a lesser extent, customer contact is also perceived as a formative working condition that can be perceived negatively and positively. Additionally, in Poland and France the figure for physical exhaustion is over 30%, while in Sweden, Germany and Spain it is only slightly lower. These conditions are found in all countries and largely in the same order.

FIGURE 13: Main dimensions of working conditions: Finland, Sweden, Poland and Romania
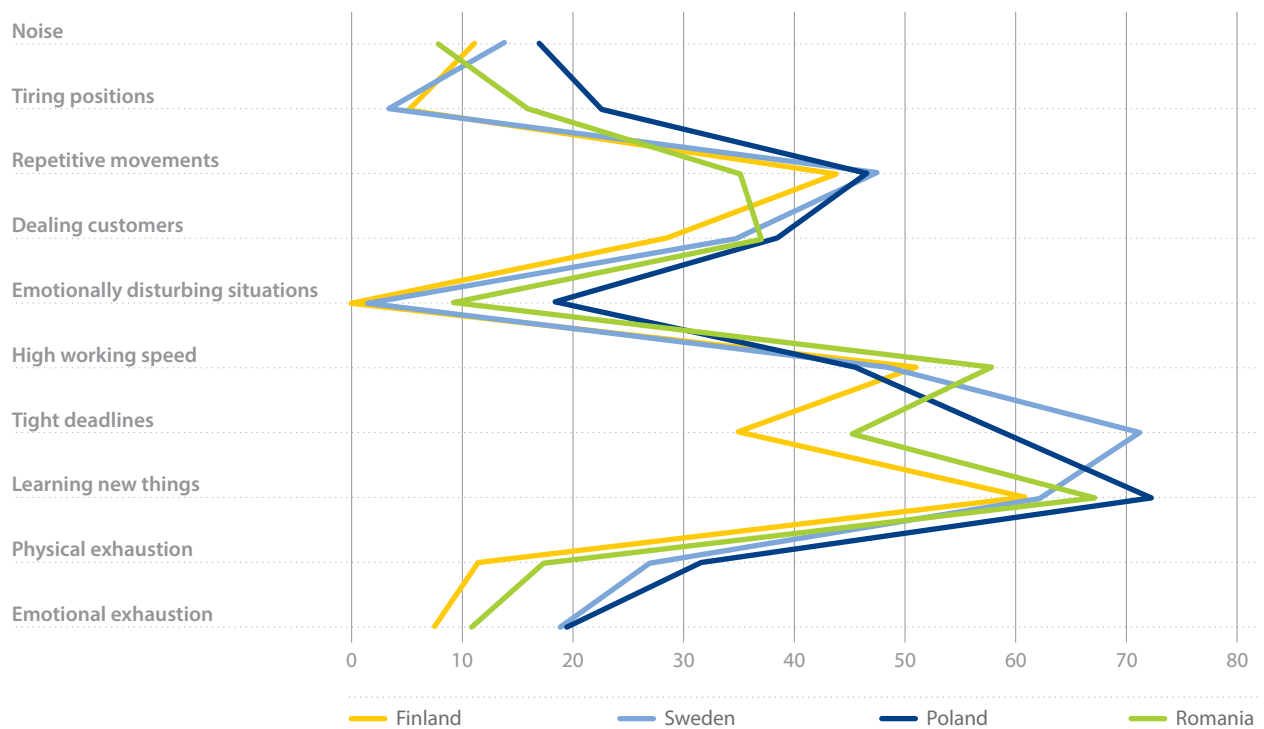
Further information on the working conditions of white-collar employees can be drawn from the SOEP results for Germany where some 60% of respondents fully or somewhat agree with the statement that:

·   they are often under great time pressure due to their workload;

·   they are frequently interrupted during their work;

·   their workload had increased over the previous two years.

At the same time, however, just under 80% of white-collar employees do not expect their work situation to deteriorate, and 90% of employees do not see their job as being jeopardised.

3.6 Autonomy, heteronomy and engagement

The research literature on white-collar employees suggests that autonomy is a key factor shaping how this group perceives their working lives. Autonomous decisions about the nature and methods of how work is performed are therefore likely to be among the central expectations that white-collar employees have of their work – and all the more so, the higher their skill level.

The 2021 EWCS asked three individual questions about employees' autonomy at work, inviting participants to note whether they have scope to select or change any of the following factors: sequencing of tasks, the procedure for completing a task, and the pace or rhythm of work. Each of these questions could be answered on a scale of one to five, with 'one' meaning that the factor can never be changed and 'five' that the employee can always change or choose the factor. The three individual questions are then summarised to form an index, with values from three to fifteen.[2]

A dichotomous index was created from this overall index by the data publisher, with values up to ten in the overall index categorised as low autonomy and higher values as high autonomy. The values of the two indices are shown in for individual countries (Table 5).

All countries analysed have an autonomy index of more than ten; overall, therefore, white-collar workers in manufacturing report a high degree of autonomy. There are major differences, however, between countries on the proportion of white-collar workers working under conditions of high autonomy. While many white-collar workers in manufacturing in Germany enjoy particularly high levels of autonomy, with a score of 75%, far fewer do so in Ireland, with just under 43% of white-collar employees reporting this. At 10.2 points, the average of the autonomy index is also lower in Ireland than elsewhere. In the other countries, between 52% (Finland) and 57% (France) report a high degree of autonomy.

TABLE 5: Autonomy of white-collar workers in manufacturing, 2021

Country	Autonomy index (arithmetic mean)	Share of employees with high autonomy in %
Germany	11.7	75.0
France	11.1	56.8
Spain	10.6	57.0
Finland	10.5	52.3
Sweden	10.8	53.5
Ireland	10.2	42.8
Poland	10.6	57.5
Romania	10.9	56.2

Source: EWCS 2021, authors' calculation.

The counter-model to autonomy is heteronomy of working conditions in which tasks are set or influenced externally to various degrees. In the EWCS, the issue of heteronomy was broken down into three individual questions in the 2021 survey, with a distinction drawn between heteronomy through superiors, through customers or suppliers, or through computer systems. Specifically, the question was asked how these areas influence which tasks have to be completed during work. The possible answers range from 'very extensive external control' to 'no external control' at all. Participants could also answer 'does not apply', which presumably means that the employee in question is not confronted with the

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[2] The values of the individual questions are simply added together here, i.e. three times one is the lowest value and three times five is the highest value. If there is a missing value for a question, the value for the overall index is also a missing value.

external control option mentioned; that is, does not have a supervisor, computer or customer contact. We have interpreted this answer to mean that the respective external control does not apply.

In Germany, for example, 29.5% of white-collar workers in manufacturing industry stated that their work tasks were largely determined by their superiors. A good 40% see this as being at least partly the case. Taken together, therefore, just under 70% of employees feel that their work tasks are partly or significantly determined or externally determined by their superiors. The evaluation in Figure 14 was summarised in this way: that is, the figure shows the proportion of employees whose work tasks were partially or strongly determined by superiors, customers or computers.

FIGURE 14: Heteronomy based on different factors of influence (in %)
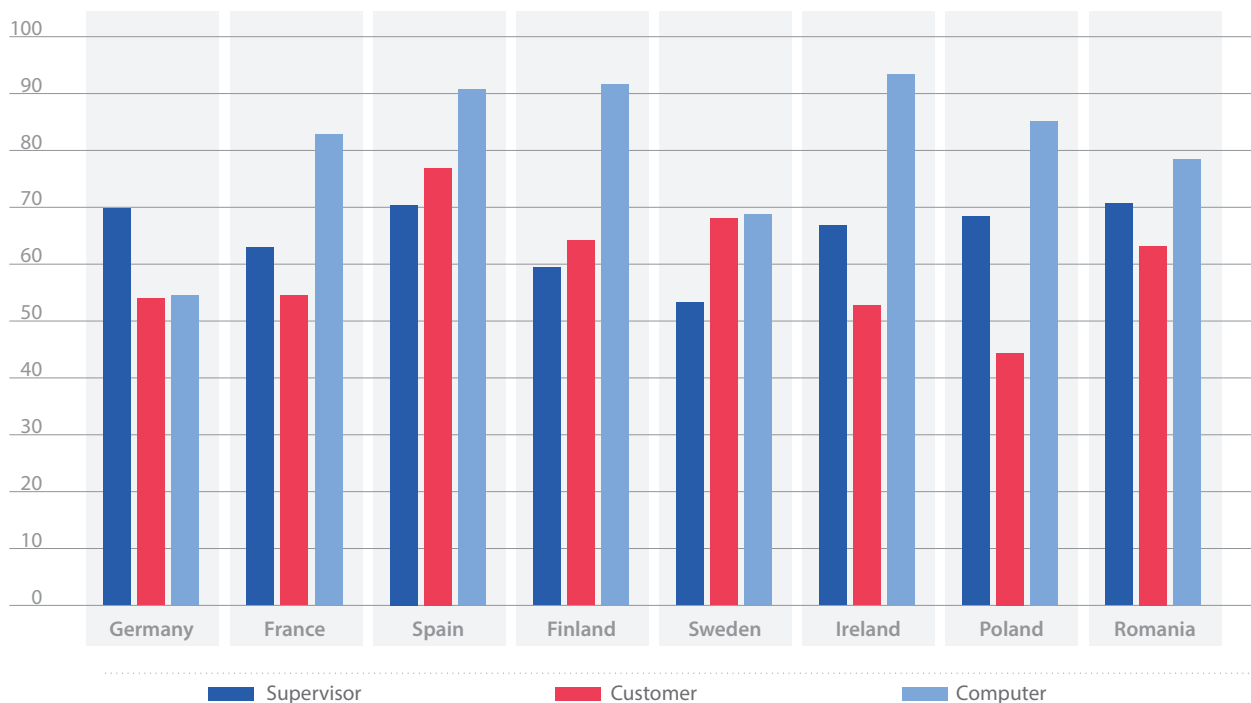
Source: EWCS 2021, authors' calculation.

Most employees felt that their work tasks are most frequently determined by computer systems. At over 90%, this figure was particularly high in Finland, Spain and Ireland. In Germany, the influence of computer systems was significantly lower at just under 55%, below that of influence by superiors. The influence of superiors is similarly high in Romania at just under 71% and Spain at around 70%. In Spain, Sweden, Finland and Romania, more than 60% of employees – and in Spain as much as 77% – felt that their work tasks were often determined by customers or suppliers.

The results suggest that autonomy and heteronomy do not have to be mutually exclusive. Obviously, many white-collar workers have come to the conclusion that they can work autonomously, even though there are heteronomous influences from superiors, customers or computer systems. The respective perceived weight of these influences determines whether the work is considered autonomous or not. Only in very rare cases, is it likely to be *either* autonomous *or* heteronomous. This ambivalence must therefore be taken into account when talking about autonomy.

Other perspectives on work that are important for white-collar workers, according to the literature, relate to issues of recognition, careers and development prospects, and the meaningfulness of their work. In order to perceive one's own work as meaningful or enjoy it, it is important to be able to contribute knowledge and skills, receive sufficient recognition, and be offered development or career opportunities.

According to the EWCS, white-collar workers very often note that they have opportunities to use their knowledge and skills at work (Figure 15).[3] Just under 68% of white-collar workers in Poland and just over 85% in Sweden agreed somewhat or completely with the statement that they can use their knowledge and skills in their work. The values for the other countries surveyed lie between these figures, and exceed 80% for Germany, France, Finland and Romania.

White-collar employees feel slightly less likely than this, but still also very often, that they receive appropriate recognition for their work. This is stated very frequently in Germany (almost 77%) and is least common in Poland (almost 47%). Most other countries have values of around 70% or more.

Judged by the responses of white-collar workers, good career prospects exist for just under half of these employees in most countries. Prospects are rated as particularly good in Romania at just under 55%, but significantly worse in Sweden at around 33%. Overall, career prospects are rated as significantly worse in comparison to the application of knowledge and skills and recognition.

The lowest values among the four items analysed here are for employee commitment to work. Only just over a third of white-collar worker state that they are committed to their work. In France, Spain, Romania and Poland, the proportion of white-collars who have a high level of commitment to their work is quite high at around 40%. The proportion is particularly low in Finland at just under 13%. The level of commitment is therefore not directly dependent on whether employees were positive about recognition or contributing skills. There are obviously other factors that limit the commitment of white-collar workers which cannot be deduced simply from the data.

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[3] The percentage that 'fully' or 'somewhat' agrees that they can contribute their knowledge and skills is shown.

FIGURE 15: Opportunities, recognition, career prospects and engagement of white-collar workers
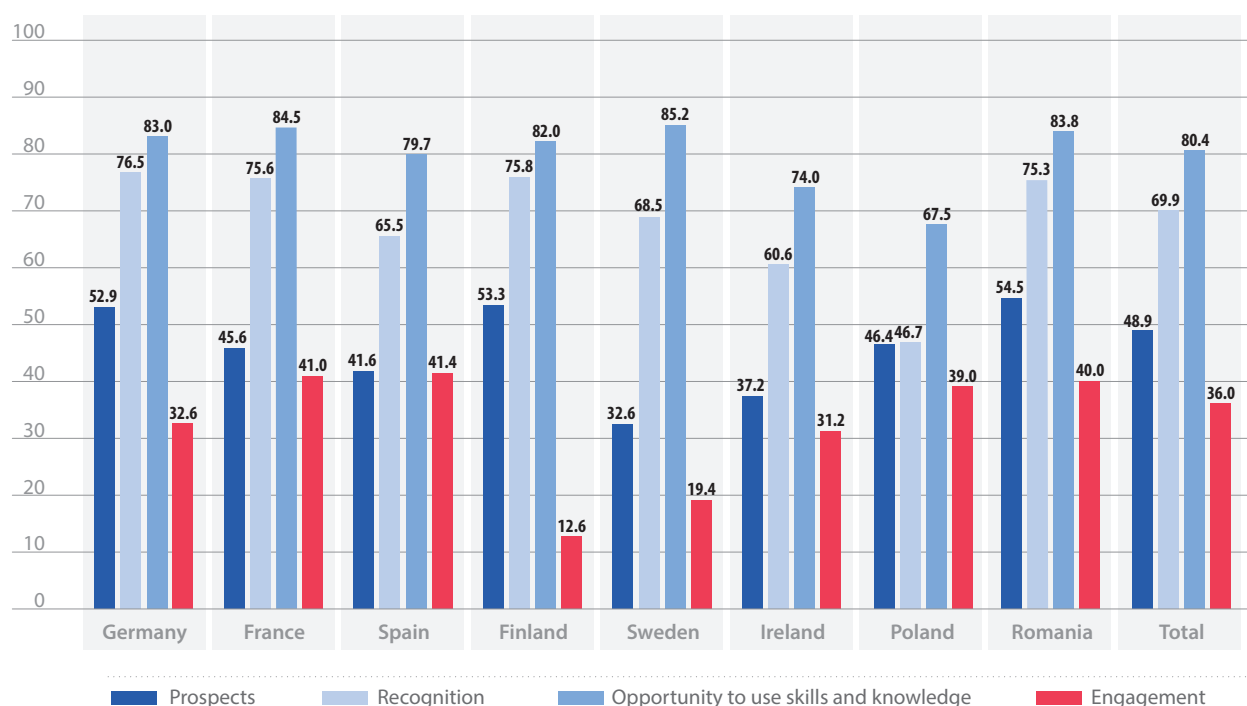
Source: EWCS 2021, authors' calculation. Prospects: career prospects. Recognition: recognition for the job. Opportunities: contributing knowledge and skills to the job. Engagement: proportion of employees with a high level of commitment to the job.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of white-collar workers often or always feel that they have done their job well. In most of the countries analysed, the corresponding proportion is very high, with approval ratings of between 80% and 90% (Table 6). Only in Finland and Ireland are the values between 60 %and 70%. In Ireland, the feeling of doing meaningful work is also the lowest at just under 76%. In Spain, on the other hand, just over 89% of employees see their work as meaningful.

TABLE 6: Self-assessment and meaningful work white-collar employees (in %)

Country	Feeling that work is done well	Feeling that the work is useful
Germany	87.8	85.7
France	85.7	83.7
Spain	82.6	89.4
Finland	62.0	84.1
Sweden	83.8	78.4
Ireland	66.6	75.5
Poland	83.1	84.2
Romania	89.3	86.6

Source: EWCS 2021, authors' calculation; proportion who often or always see the applicable option.

4. Interests and Attitudes of White-Collar Workers

4.1 Our survey

In this chapter we take a closer look at the orientations and interests of white-collar workers and at their attitudes towards trade unions. Data was obtained via on an online access survey conducted in three countries, referred to below as the BEREP survey: France, Finland, and Germany. The online-access panel survey is based on a pool of potential respondents for whom the survey companies had addresses and information about their personal characteristics. This allowed them to draw up random samples of respondents. Online access panel-based samples are a cost-effective alternative to traditional methods, especially when it comes to "difficult" target groups or those that are underrepresented in the population and would be difficult to reach by random selection. Another advantage is that surveys via online access panels are generally characterised by a short field time.

However, these advantages come at the price of limited representativeness, which often cannot be compensated for using weighting methods, especially in surveys of specific subgroups of the population, including our population of white-collar workers. A representative sample can be approximated in online access panels with an appropriate quota system, at least in principle. However, it becomes problematic if there are systematic differences between the panel members and the population. A systematic difference already exists in the fact that panel members have actively agreed to take part in surveys for an incentive. This is why true representativeness cannot be achieved with an online access panel.

The survey was conducted in Germany and France by "UZ Bonn" in cooperation with the panel provider "respondi", which coordinated the survey in both countries and was also responsible for the sampling. Due to the fact that no reliable information was available about the distribution of the target group, white collar employees in the manufacturing industry, it was not possible to draw a representative sample by using quota-based methods. Due to the difficulty of the sample and the feedback in the run-up to the bidding process, it was decided to have the survey of Finnish employees conducted by a Finnish research institute, which combined three online panels – Taloustutkimus panel, Norstat panel, Dynata panel – for the recruitment of the sample.

While the surveys in France and Germany could be carried out simultaneously and faster than the contractor had announced, there were problems with recruiting this very specific target group in Finland, and after consultation with the research institute it was decided to stop the survey at 836 completed questionnaires. The German and French survey took place between 15 February 2024 and 23 February 2024, the survey in Finland between 22 February and 18 March 2024. There were 1,062 respondents in France (36.12% of the total respondents of our survey), 833 in Finland (28.33% of the total), and 1,045 in Germany (35.4% of the total). In all, there were 2,940 respondents. Only white-collar employees in the manufacturing sector were included; respondents who stated that they were blue-collar workers or did not work in manufacturing were not counted. Analogous to the German SOEP, the BEREP survey therefore categorised respondents as white-collar employees based on their subjective assessment.

The survey is based on a questionnaire with a total of 33 questions, developed in consultation with industriAll Europe. The questions focus on a variety of topics: individual employee characteristics, such as age, gender, skills and work tasks; coverage by collective agreements and trade union membership; working hours; work and working conditions; and, finally attitudes towards trade unions, practical experiences with unions, and reasons for any membership decisions they might have taken. The questionnaire took about 20 minutes to complete. The questionnaire was drawn up in German and translated into English and French on the basis of this master questionnaire. The questionnaires are

highly consistent in terms of questionnaire structure, item formulation and response categories, but do not fully fulfil the methodological criteria formulated for international comparative studies (Braun 2014). However, as the focus of this project and the questions posed here was not on country comparisons, but on country-specific analysis, the lack of equivalence is not a deficiency criterion for the study, but should be taken into account in order to avoid misinterpretations.

In the following sections of this chapter we begin by analysing the characteristics of the respondents, whether they work in workplaces covered by a collective agreement, and their trade union status. After dealing with the findings on working hours, we look at respondents' working conditions and, finally, their attitudes to and expectations of trade unions and their criteria for joining or not joining a trade union. The findings on working conditions will be compared with those from the secondary data analysis. The main concern in this chapter, however, is the way in which workplace experiences shape how white-collar workers view trade unions and the incentives for or barriers to union membership.

4.2 Characteristics of white-collar employees

Overall, the respondents were distributed relatively evenly across workplaces by size, as measured by number of employees. These were divided into six classes, ranging from below 10 employees to more 2000 or more. In Finland, however, the proportion of employees working in smaller workplaces with 50-199 employees was far greater than in the other two countries; in France and Germany, on the other hand, the largest proportion of respondents worked in establishments with 2000 or more employees (Figure 16).

FIGURE 16: Distribution of white-collar employees by establishment size, % of respondents (BEREP survey)
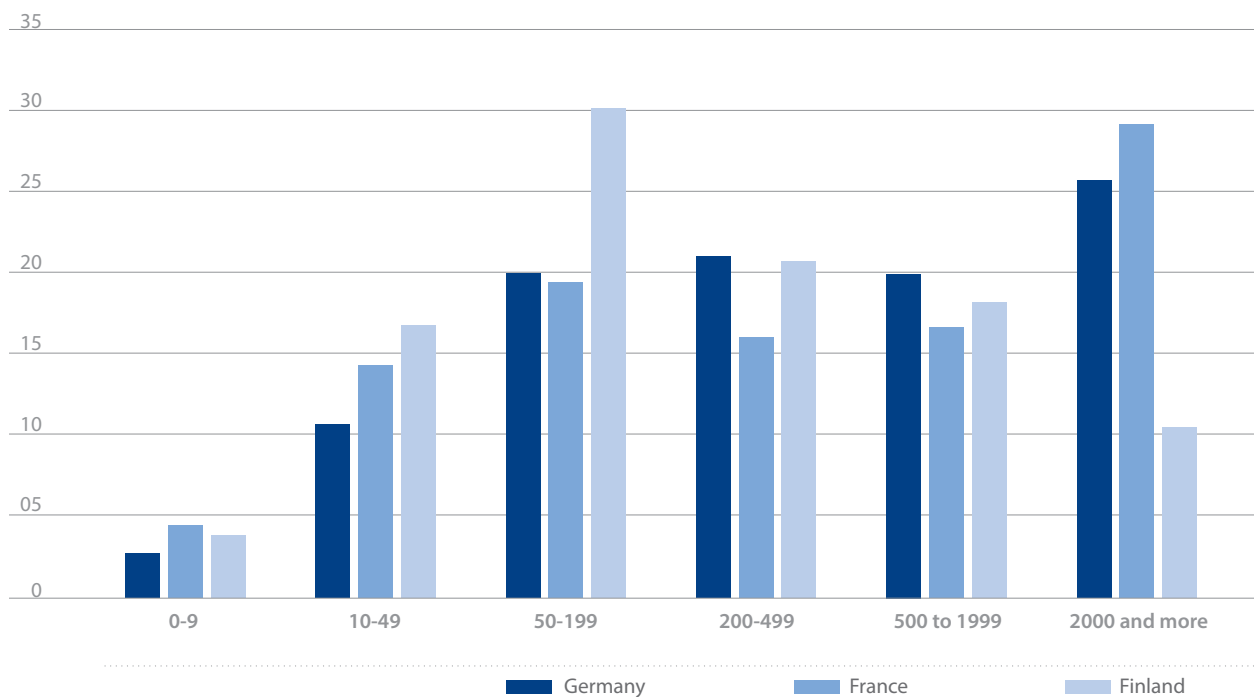
The distribution of respondents by gender shows a slight preponderance of men in Germany and Finland, whereas in France relatively more women took part in the survey (Figure 17).

FIGURE 17: Distribution of white-collar employees by gender (BEREP survey)
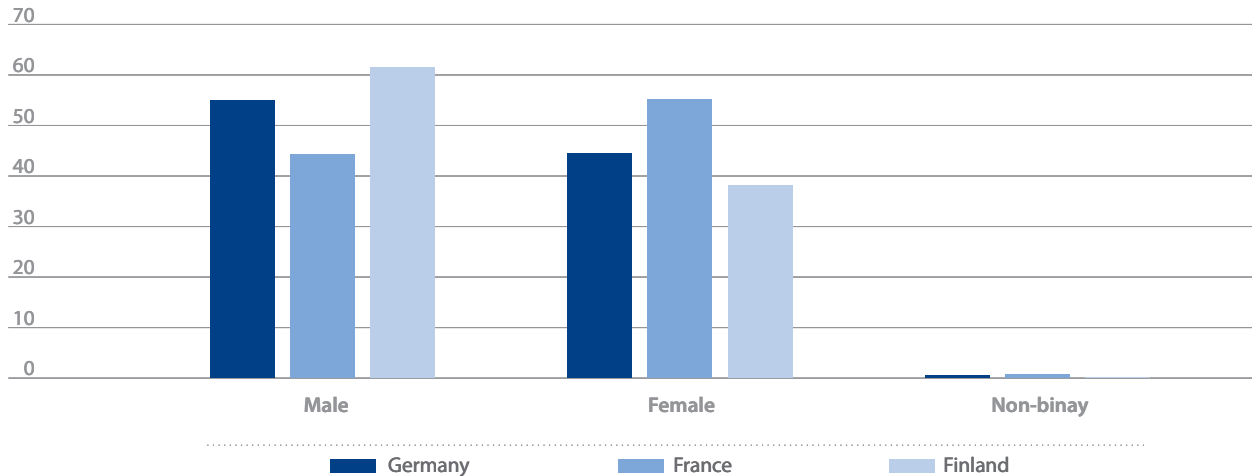
What work activities did respondents perform in the three countries? Figure 18 shows the responses to questions about job requirements, broken down into three broad categories: 'skilled tasks', 'highly-skilled tasks' and 'managerial tasks'. According to this, the proportion of employees exercising managerial tasks was low in all three countries, and lowest in France. The ratio of skilled to highly-skilled jobs, on the other hand, exhibited striking differences. In Finland, the proportion of respondents with highly-skilled jobs was significantly higher than in Germany and France. This parallels the distribution of employees by occupational group which was calculated in Figure 4 using the EU-LFS data. Here, too, Finland had the highest proportion of professionals, while in Germany and France the proportion of skilled occupations was higher overall than in Finland.

FIGURE 18: Levels of tasks of respondents (BEREP survey)
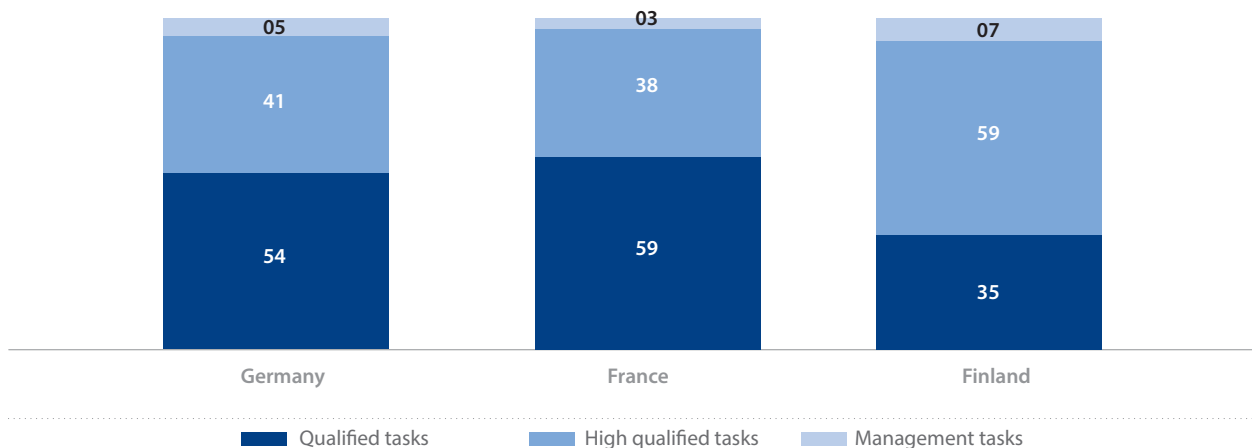
There were major differences between the job requirements cited by male and female respondents. In all three countries, the proportion of men in highly-skilled jobs and jobs with managerial functions was higher than for women who reported a higher proportion of skilled jobs (Figure 19). There were considerable national differences. In Germany, almost 70% of female respondents carried out skilled activities compared with just 40% for men. While France has similar figures, in Finland the proportion of women in skilled jobs was just under 44%, compared with 30% for men. In Finland, therefore, significantly more women are in highly-skilled jobs, with a much smaller gap in relation to men.

FIGURE 19: Task levels by gender and country (BEREP survey)

Legend: Qualified tasks — High qualified tasks — Management tasks
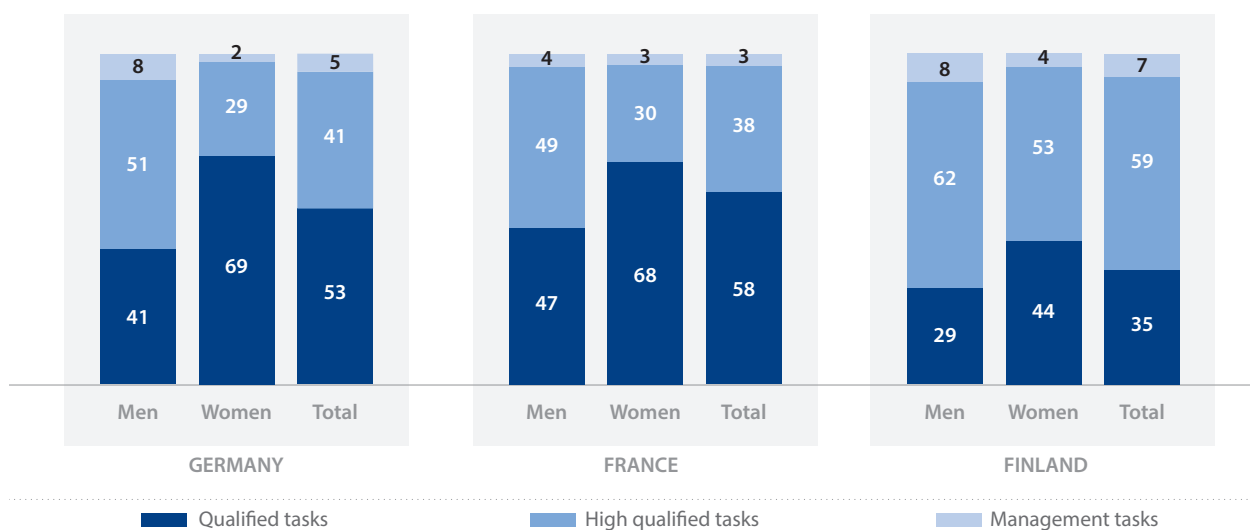
Another important aspect in relation to white-collar workers is coverage by collective agreements (Figure 20). This is relevant in two respects with regard to the overarching question addressed by this study. Firstly, collective bargaining coverage is an important factor in working conditions, in that they determine issues such as pay, grading, working hours and holidays for any employees covered. Secondly, coverage by collective bargaining will also presumably involves a different type of relationship between employees and trade unions, and certainly if employees are aware that they are covered by a collective agreement.

The question of collective bargaining coverage was only asked for Finland and Germany, as, since agreements are made generally binding by the state, coverage by collective agreements accounts for almost 100% of the workforce in France. At 85%, collective bargaining coverage was also very high in Finland both as reported by respondents and somewhat higher based on OECD data. Only a minority of employees stated that they were not covered by a collective agreement or that their company was not subject to such an agreement. In Germany, this proportion is significantly lower at just above 57%; here, the absence of collective bargaining coverage is primarily due to the fact that their employer was not bound by a collective agreement. There are two reasons for this: either a company might not be a member of a signatory employer association or are members of an association that does not require them to comply with any prevailing industry agreement (so-called 'unbound employers' associations', see Haipeter 2011).

FIGURE 20: Collective bargaining coverage (BEREP survey)
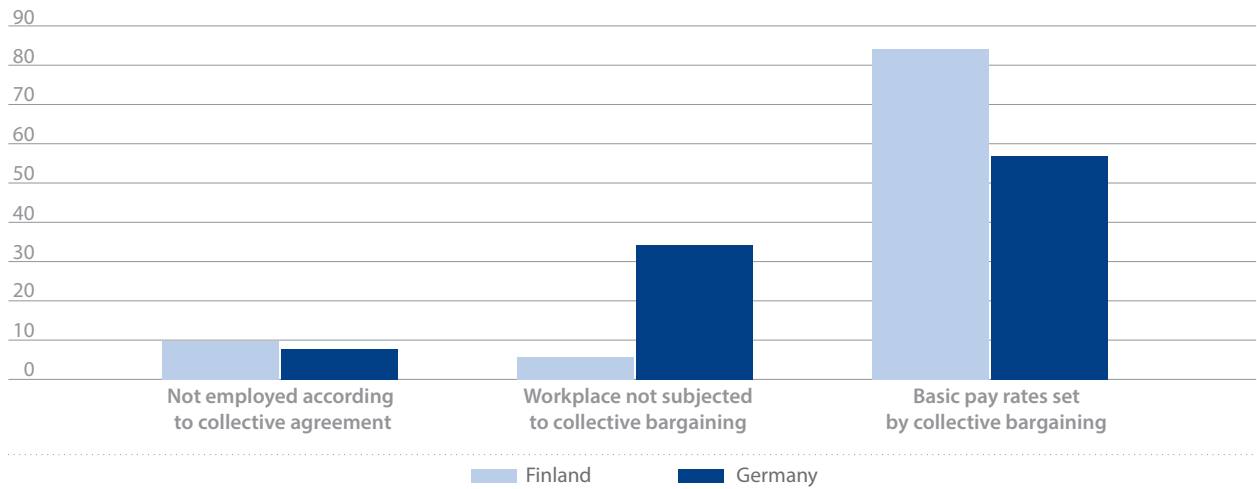
The trade union membership figures for respondents in manufacturing varied greatly as between the countries surveyed (Figure 21). By far the highest level of membership was reported in Finland, at just under 62%. Germany followed a long way behind, with just 30% of respondents saying that they were trade union members. Finally, in France, only under 16% of those surveyed were members of a trade union.

FIGURE 21: Trade union membership (BEREP survey)
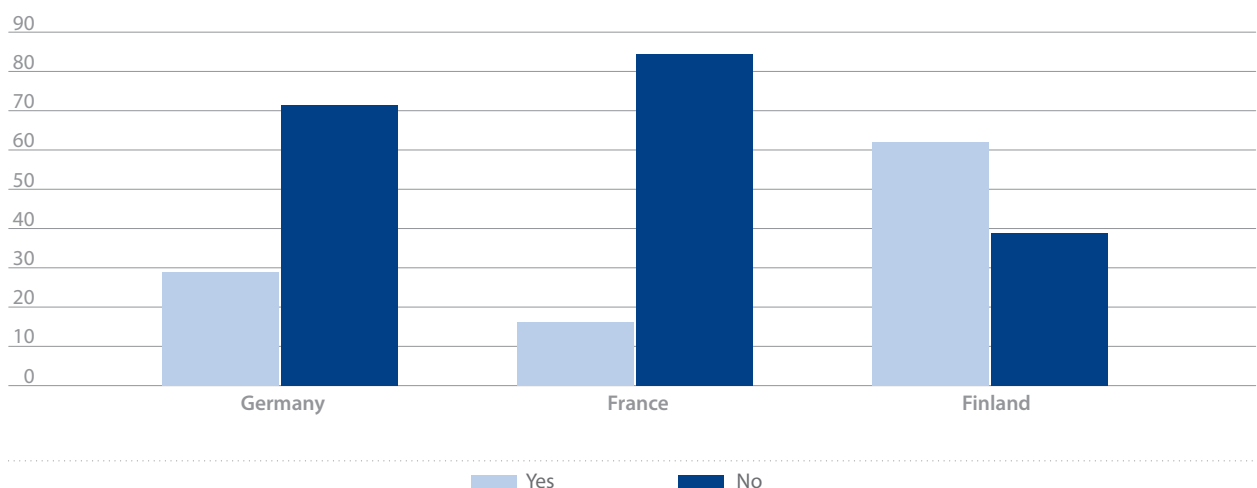
Union membership also varied by respondents' gender and age, with some national variation (Figure 22). In France especially and also Germany, the proportion of men who were trade union members was higher than women; and in Germany, the proportion of men who were trade union members in the under-34 age group was the highest of all age groups. In both countries, the highest proportion of

female trade union members was in the older age group. In Finland, this applied to both genders. Here, however, the average proportion of women trade union members was more than 6 percentage points higher than men.

FIGURE 22: Trade union membership by gender and age, in % of respondents (BEREP-survey)
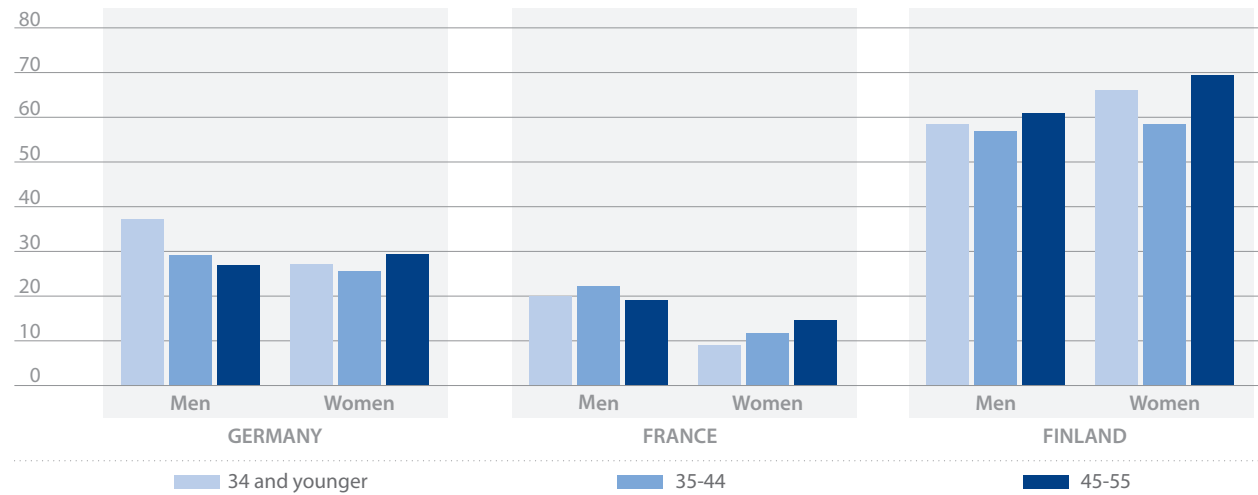
4.3 Working time

The findings on the contractual working hours of white-collar employees largely corresponded to the EWCS data in terms of their distribution across the hour brackets. While employees in France and Finland were mainly contracted to work from 35 to 39 hours, in Germany there was a 'dual' working time norm consisting of a 40-hour week and shorter contractual working hours (Figure 23).

FIGURE 23: Contractual working hours of white-collar workers by hour brackets (BEREP survey)
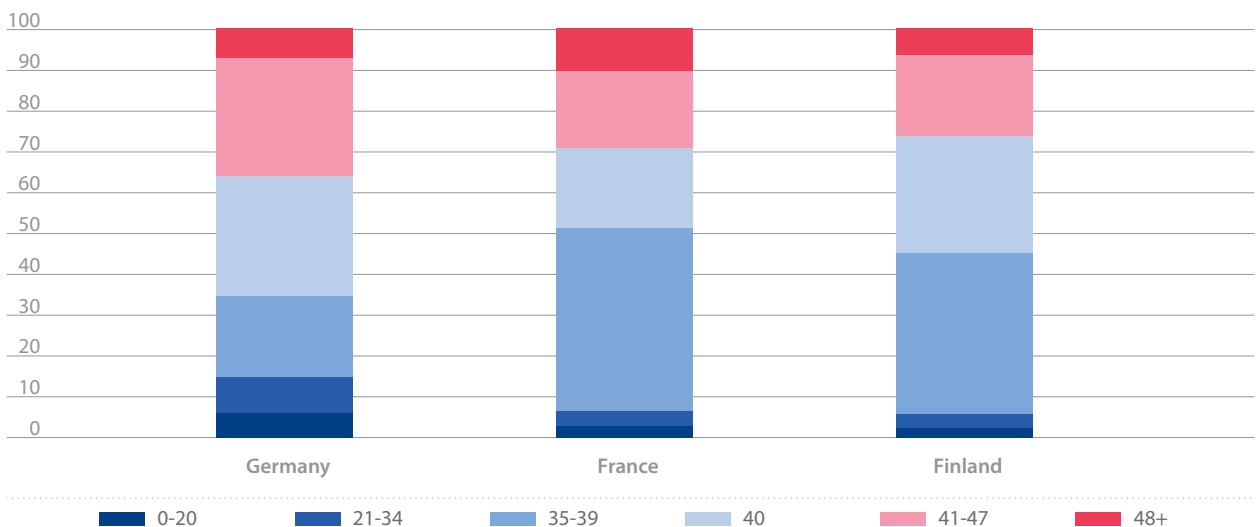
As with the EWCS, our survey also highlighted a gap between contracted and actual hours worked (Figure 24). In all three countries, a large proportion of respondents worked longer than agreed. And in all the countries, between some 25% (France) to 35% (Germany) of respondents worked 41 hours or more. The proportion in the 35-39 and 40 hour brackets was far lower for hours worked than for contractual hours. And as in the EWCS, the higher brackets in Germany had more respondents due to longer contractual hours.

FIGURE 24: Actual hours worked by respondents in hour brackets, % of respondents (BEREP survey)
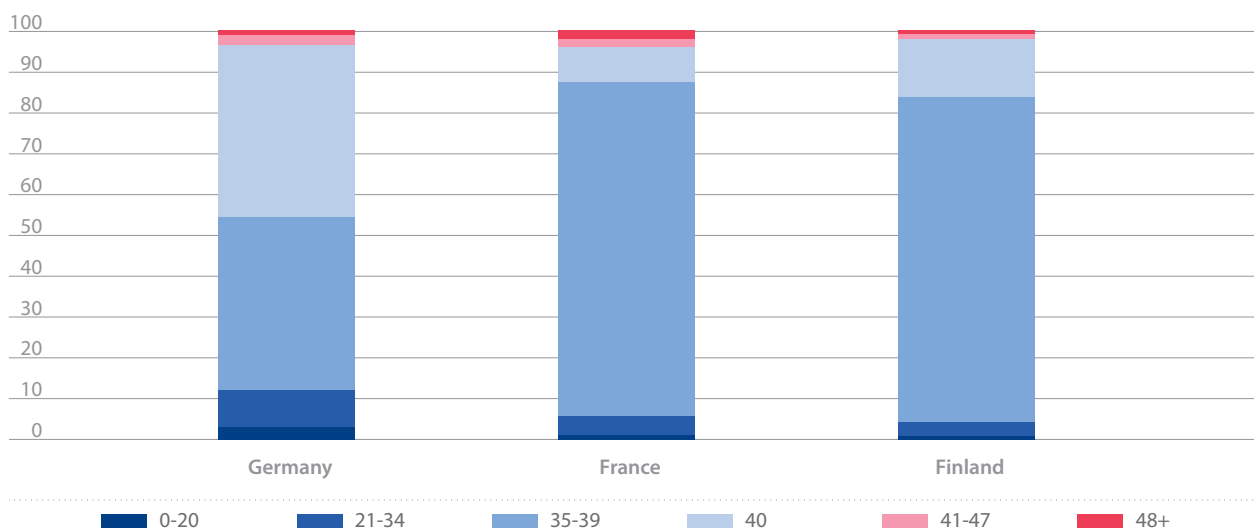
4.4 Work and working conditions

We asked several questions about working conditions and respondents' attitudes towards these. In one of these questions, we clustered several statements with respondents given the option of answering 'strongly agree', 'somewhat agree', 'neither agree nor disagree', 'somewhat disagree' and 'strongly disagree'. The categories 'strongly agree' and 'somewhat agree' (for some questions 'to a very high extent' or 'to a high extent') are combined here as values denoting agreement. The next three figures set out the findings on these questions.

We begin with respondents' assessment of a set of positive statements about their work and working conditions (Figure 25). The statement 'I can influence decisions that are important to my work' was agreed with by around half the respondents in all three countries, with the highest agreement in Finland. Conversely, this also means that the other half were rather sceptical about the statement.

The situation was similar for the question 'To what extent are you consulted before setting work objectives', although the differences between the countries were more pronounced in this case. While only some 38% of respondents in Germany stated that they were frequently or very frequently consulted about their work content, this figure was just under 56% in Finland. The difference between the countries was even greater – and again in the same order – for the statement 'I can organise my working hours to suit my needs'. Here, just under 50% of respondents agreed in Germany, compared with over 83% in Finland.

Responses to the statement 'I am satisfied with the continuous training opportunities offered by my company' were much more consistent. Satisfaction levels with learning and training opportunities were just under 50% in all countries, implying that the majority were not really satisfied or explicitly dissatisfied. The same applies to career opportunities, which were surveyed with the statement 'I am satisfied with my career prospects in my current job'. Only in Finland did the majority of respondents agree with this (61%).

FIGURE 25: Positive statements about work and working conditions, in % (BEREP survey)
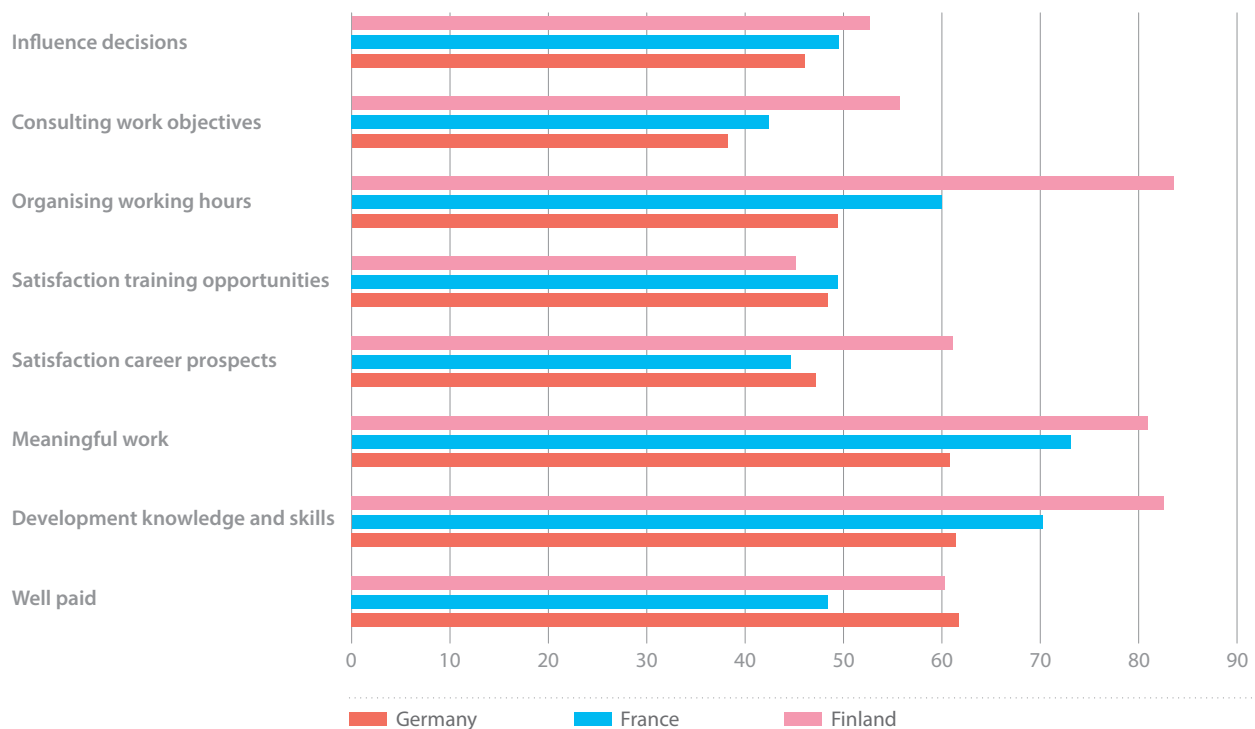
The picture was different for the statement 'I think my work is meaningful'. Agreement on this was significantly higher, unsurprising given the results from the secondary data analysis. However, there was a gap between countries, with Germany at the lower end – with around 60% agreeing – and Finland at the upper, at around 80%. The pattern between countries for the statement 'My work allows me to develop my knowledge and skills' was similar. While some 60% of respondents in Germany agreed, the corresponding value in Finland was almost 83%. Agreement in France was roughly between these two at around 70%.

Finally, agreement was lower with the statement 'I am well paid for my work'. At around 60%, significantly more than half of respondents in Finland and Germany agreed with this statement, while the figure in France was below 50%.

The statements with a more negative connotation began with a question about unpaid work ('Outside your usual working hours, how often do you do unpaid work for your company?') (Figure 26). Between just over 15% (Finland) and around 20% of respondents (Germany) agreed with this question. Agreement with the question 'Do you often have to make concessions regarding the quality of your work to meet deadlines?' was somewhat higher. Around 20% (Finland) to 25% (Germany and France) of respondents

stated that they often had to make such concessions. This can also be viewed as an important indicator of the time pressures under which employees work. We also addressed this issue directly with the question 'How often do you feel overwhelmed by work or under pressure'. Around a third of employees – slightly fewer in Finland, slightly more in France and Germany – stated that this was often or very often the case for them.

Agreement with the question: 'How often are you treated in a condescending or disrespectful way by other people, e.g. clients, colleagues or superiors, in the context of your work?' was significantly lower. Just under 12% (Finland) to just over 19% (France) of respondents said that this happened frequently or very frequently. In contrast, a clear majority of respondents in all countries stated that their work was subdivided into small tasks: that is, that they performed few interrelated or holistic activities. Between 63% (Germany) and 74% (Finland) of respondents agreed with this. However, we do not know the degree to which respondents simply described this as a matter of fact or whether it had a negative connotation.

Agreement with the statement 'I would like more opportunities to reconcile work, free time and family' was somewhat less pronounced, but also quite high overall. This statement was agreed to by 44% of respondents in Finland and just over 60% in France. This is in stark contrast to the overwhelmingly positive assessment of work-life balance found in the secondary analyses. This may also be due to the fact that a significant proportion of employees believed that the volume of their work was increasing. The statement 'Over the last 12 months, I've had to do more work than before within the same timeframe' was agreed with by around 40% of respondents in Germany and Finland, and over 57% in France – significantly more than half of respondents.

Finally, the statement: 'I am generally expected to be available by email or telephone outside my normal working hours' pointed in a similar direction. This accessibility can both reinforce the feeling that work is becoming busier and contribute to a feeling that there should be more opportunities to reconcile work and free time. Respondents' answers on this were also very consistent across countries: around a third of respondents agreed, with slightly fewer in Germany and slightly more in Finland and France.

There were some differences in responses by age and gender, although these were not especially marked. Women and younger workers tended to put more emphasis on issues such as opportunities to reconcile work and leisure and felt that they had to work more than previously. Trade union members in general were more critical of working conditions than non-members, emphasising the negative aspects more strongly and the positive less firmly. However, these were partly differences of degree, and there were still a remarkable proportion of non-members who made negative statements – a potential starting point for trade union organising initiatives perhaps.

We also asked about working with IT and its influence on working conditions (Figure 27). The first statement referred to the general influence of computerised systems. Responses to the question 'To what extent does a computerised system influence the tasks that you have to carry out at work?' varied very considerably across countries. While around 75% of respondents in Finland stated that their work was highly or very highly influenced by computerised systems, this figure was only around 50% in France and 37% in Germany.

Responses to the statement: 'My scope for decision-making is increasingly limited by algorithms' were far more consistent, with agreement ranging from just under 15% in Finland to some 25% in France, a surprising result given that a high proportion of employees in Finland noted that computer systems influenced their work. Finally, the statement: 'The introduction of artificial intelligence allows me to reduce my workload' was agreed with by some 25% of respondents in Germany and France and just over 30% in Finland. The answers show that the influence of computer systems tends to be viewed positively by employees.

FIGURE 26: Negative statements about work and working conditions (BEREP survey)
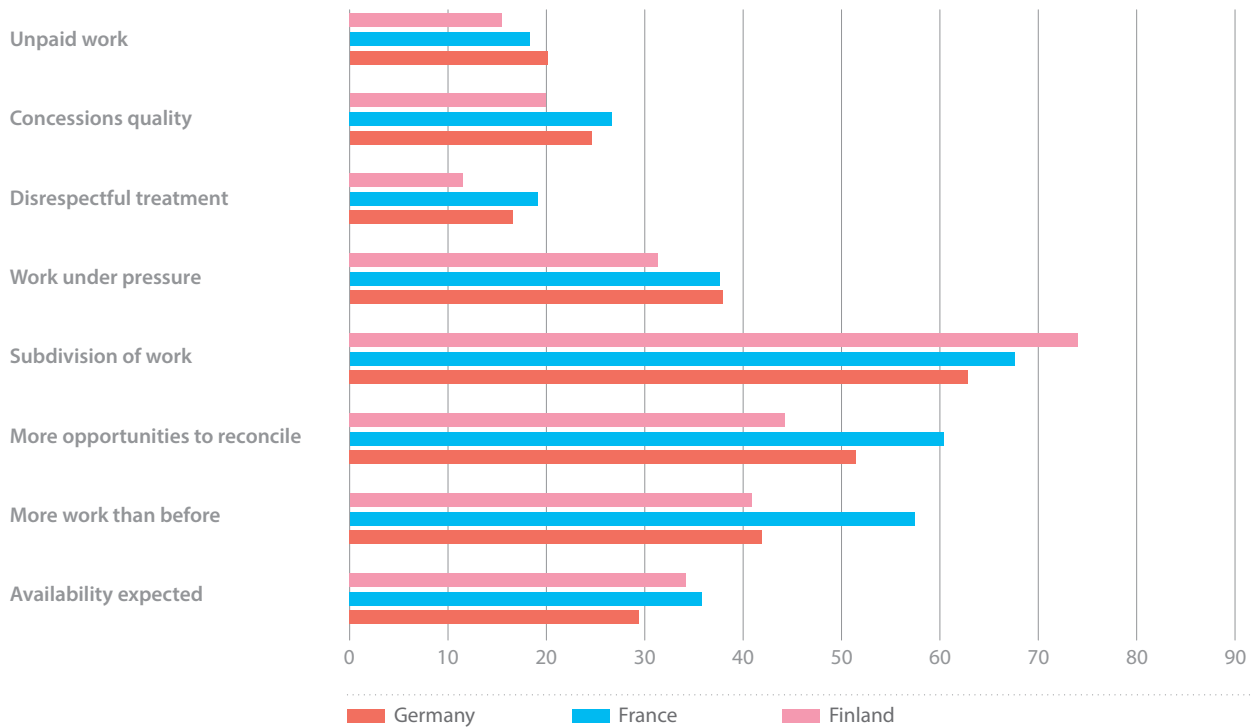
FIGURE 27: Statements about the effects of digitalisation on work (BEREP survey)
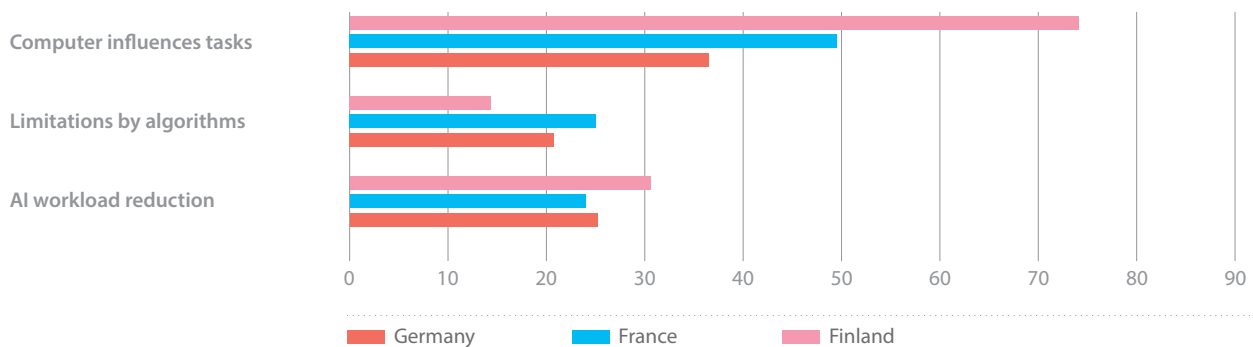
Our survey also went into more detail on issues related to IT hardware and software. Respondents were asked to say how often they had to do engage in a task related to IT. Again, we combined the responses 'often' and 'very often' (Figure 28). Frequent work with a laptop or PC is now part of everyday life for the majority of respondents in all three countries. This applied in particular to Finland, with just under 92%, then to France (88%) and Germany (82%). In this context, respondents in Germany were the most likely to be confronted with frequently having to work with new software (38%). In the other two countries, the corresponding figures were around 10 percentage points lower.

The proportion of respondents who used the cloud or other networks was significantly higher, but with large country differences. While 37% of respondents in Germany agreed, the figure was just under 61% in Finland. There were similarly large differences on the issue of online meetings, with more frequent use in Finland (70% of respondents) than in France and Germany (each 50%). On the frequency of working from home, the figures for Finnish respondents, at 43%, were also well ahead of Germany (31%) and France (27%).

In contrast, frequent work in a shared digital information space was most common in France, accounting for just under 59% of respondents; the figures for Finland (43%) and Germany (40%) were significantly lower. Frequent work with AI was the exception for all respondents, with values from 12% to 13%. It is therefore difficult to understand why around a quarter of respondents thought that AI might help reduce their workload. One answer might be that they have come to believe this, even if they rarely use it themselves.

FIGURE 28: Frequent work with IT (BEREP survey)
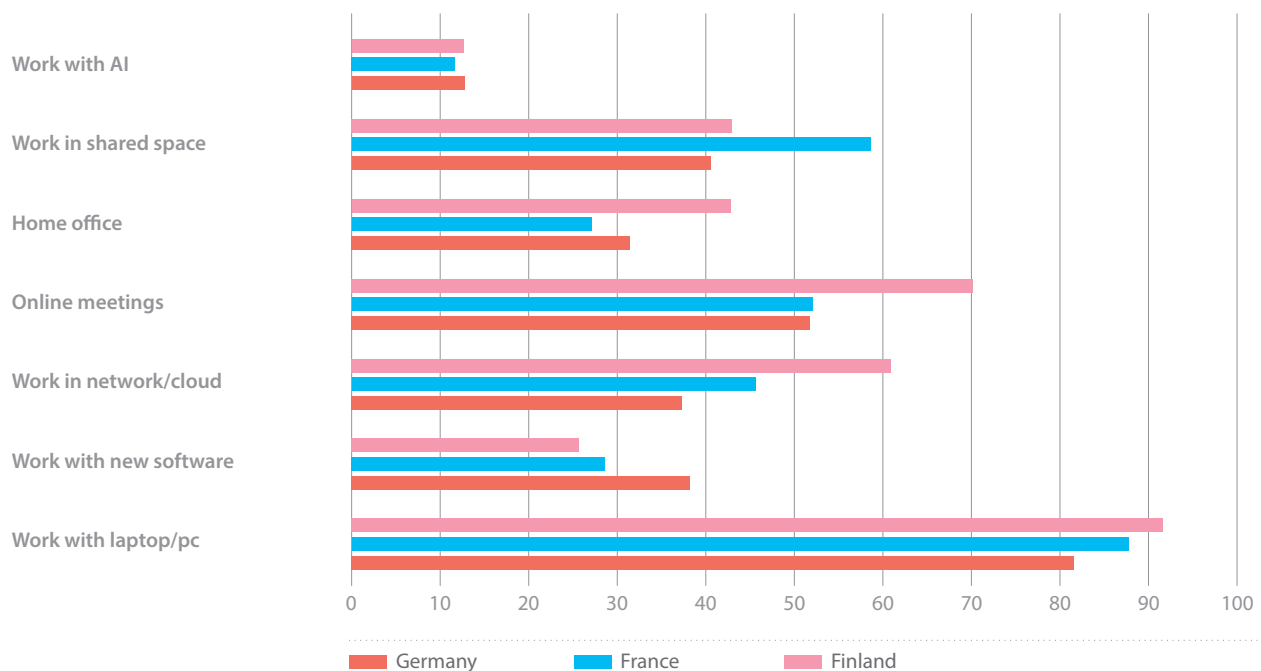
Respondents were also asked to comment on more general statements about work organisation (Figure 29). This applied firstly to 'newer' forms of work organisation, such as project work or flexible and agile structures, characterised by a high degree of employee autonomy and self-organisation. A significant proportion of respondents worked in both variants, which can obviously overlap. There were major differences between countries, however. In Germany, fewer than 50% of employees worked in project or agile work, in France around half, but in Finland some 75-80%.

In all three countries, the majority of respondents (between 60 and 66%) worked in teams with a fixed composition; frequent reorganisation of teams is therefore obviously not an inevitable consequence of project or agile forms of work. In addition, for a significant proportion of respondents, working in a team

was of secondary importance and work tended to be seen as individual in nature. This applied to 37% and 38% of employees in Germany and France and over 50% of respondents in Finland.

A similar picture emerged on the issue of whether employees worked in international contexts; this applied to some 36% of respondents in Germany and over 40% in France, but more than 60% in Finland. This might be related to the fact that the Finnish domestic market is small and being internationally focussed might be especially important for Finnish firms compared with those in France or Germany. At the same time, the proportion of employees for whom everyday work was characterised by routine and repetition was also higher in Finland at around 64%, but lower in France at 56% and in Germany at 47%.

The experience of having to work at a fast pace was widespread in all countries. Over half of respondents said this applied to them in France (62%) and Finland (54%). In Germany, the prevalence was slightly lower at 46%. If we relate this to the – somewhat lower – values for working under time pressure, one conclusion might be that a fast pace of work does not invariably lead to a sense of intense time pressure but is certainly closely related to it.

FIGURE 29: Statements about work organisation (BEREP survey)
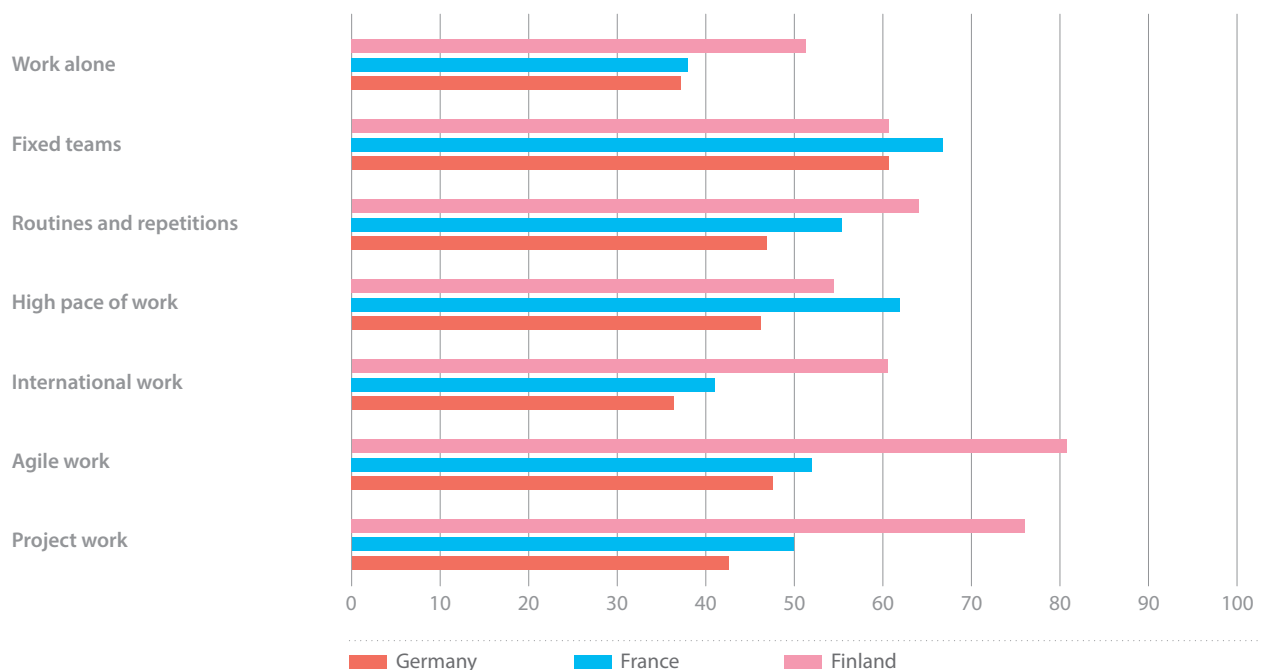
Finally, respondents were asked which aspects of their work were most important to them (Figure 30). Of the ten aspects surveyed, there was none that the majority did not find important. The lowest level of agreement (just under 56% of respondents) was in France for the expectation that the economic performance of their employer should not prevent employees from doing their job well. However, this was rated as important by well over 70% of respondents in Finland and Germany. Also slightly below average in all three countries, with values of less than 75%, was agreement with the expectation that employees could achieve their own training goals.

Agreement with all the other work expectations ran at around 75% or more in all three countries. Accordingly, at least 75% of respondents in each country expected that, a) they can work and take decisions independently, b) can put their skills and experience to good use; c) management listens and appraises them objectively, d) they can organise their working time as freely as possible, e) they are paid properly and proportionately for the work they do, f) their job is stable, g) they have a good balance between personal and professional obligations and balance and h) that their work is remunerated fairly.

FIGURE 30: Important aspects of work, agreement in % (BEREP survey)
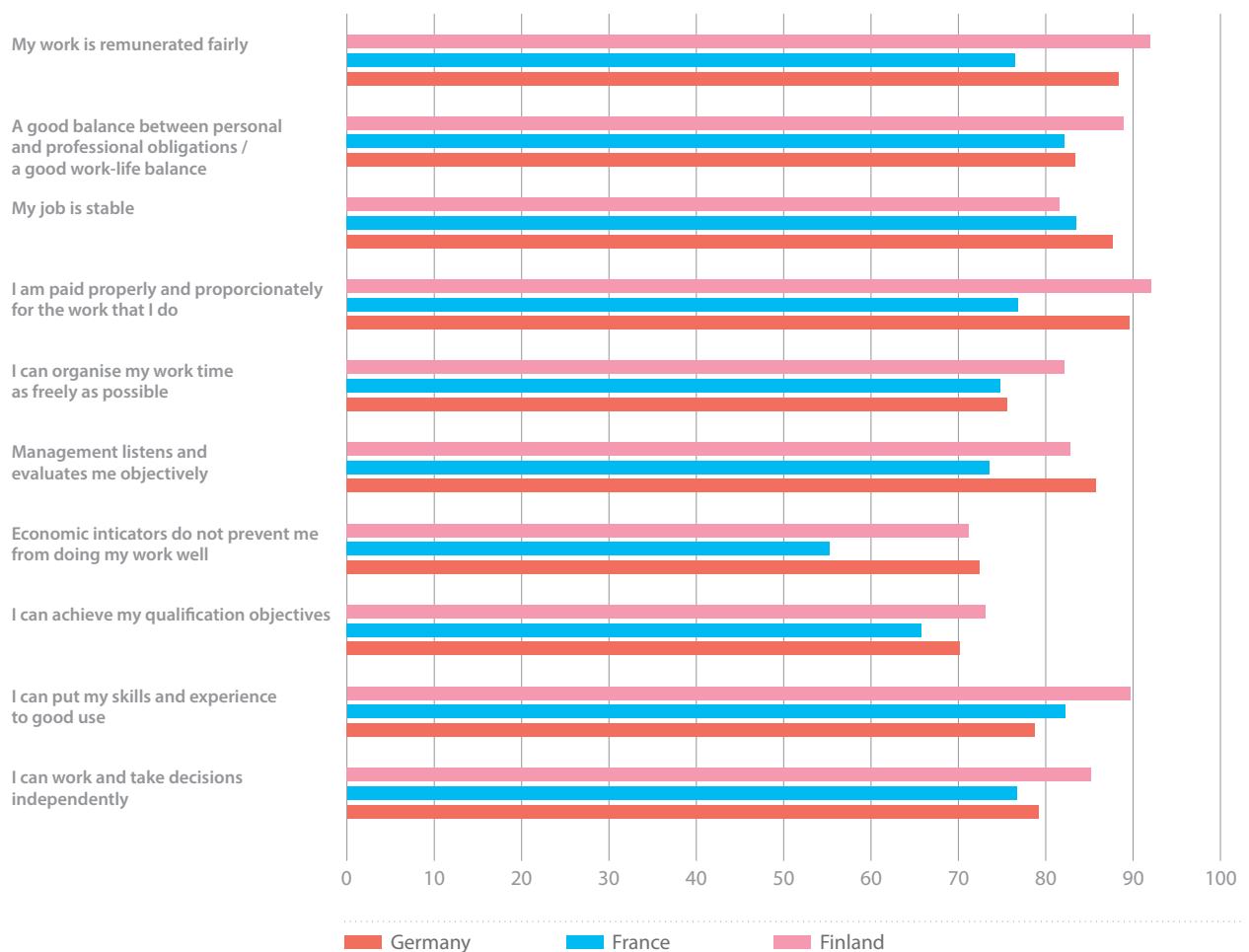
These results confirm and extend the findings from the secondary data analysis that working autonomously, doing qualitatively good work, having a good work-life balance, having working-time autonomy, being treated fairly by management, having a stable job and being paid to fair standards are the most important expectations that white-collar workers have about their working conditions. However, and this is the other side of the coin, for a substantial minority of employees these did not apply.

4.5 Trade unions

In this section we examine the views and expectations of white-collar workers in relation to trade unions. We begin with their general opinions and then turn to their expectations of and experiences with trade union services, what type of contact they have had with trade unions, and what factors have shaped their decisions to join or leave a trade union.

4.5.1 Opinions about trade unions

What do white-collar workers in the three sample countries think about trade unions? To ascertain this, the BEREP survey began by asking respondents about the importance they ascribed to trade unions as representatives of employee interests and as industrial relations organisations in general, and their relevance to themselves personally (Figure 31).

FIGURE 31: General and personal relevance of trade unions (BEREP survey)
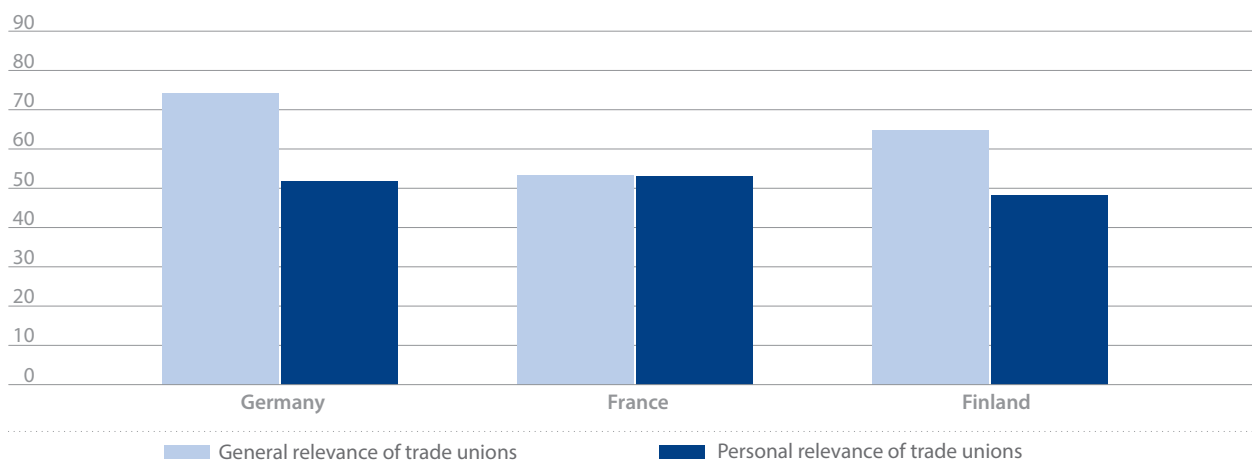
The highest general importance relevance ('very important' or 'important') was attributed to trade unions by respondents in Germany, where almost 75% agreed that trade unions had an important 'general relevance'. This compares with 65% in Finland but just 53% in France. The picture is different on the issue of the relevance of trade unions to respondents personally. On this point, opinions were relatively evenly distributed across the three countries, albeit with weaker agreement in Finland at just under 49%; in Germany and France, by contrast, more than 50% of employees believed that trade unions were important to them personally.

This is surprising given that the proportion of respondents who stated that trade unions were personally important to them in Finland was much lower than the proportion of the r who were trade unions members, whereas in France and Germany this opinion was much more prevalent than the sample's union density rate. One implication from this is that in the latter two countries, organising efforts could build on a pool of potential members – that is, those who feel that trade unions are important but are not members.

We then asked a number of more specific questions designed to explore respondents' opinions based on responses to a number of statements. Respondents were asked what images came to mind when they

thought of trade unions (Figure 32). For simplicity we divided the statements into those with negative and those with positive connotations. Statements with negative connotations were:

- trade unions convey outdated messages;

- they stand out in a negative way during collective conflicts;

- I don't feel affected by their issues;

- they resort to strike action too often;

- they cause trouble at the workplace;

- they tend to represent production workers;

- they endanger economic growth.

The statements on excessive strike activity and a focus on blue-collar workers received the highest overall agreement ('agree' or 'fully agree') at more than 40% of respondents in Germany, over 50% in France, and just under 60% in Finland.

Respondent agreement with the statements on outdated messages, a negative image during collective conflicts, endangering growth and causing problems in companies was also much higher among Finnish respondents at around 50% and above this on some questions. Only the statement that people do not feel affected by trade union issues was met with lower agreement in Finland than in the other two countries. In France and Germany, the negative statements were agreed to by only a minority of respondents, albeit a large minority in some cases. That is, the majority of respondents in these countries did not hold negative views of trade unions.

Participants were also asked to respond to statements with positive connotations about trade unions:

- trade unions are more important than ever today;

- they tackle problems;

- they fight for my salary;

- they are a source of new ideas in my company;

- they give me security and protection;

- they represent values that I share;

- they defend subjects that are relevant to me;

- they are in tune with the times;

- we can make progress with and within the trade unions.

The proportion of respondents agreeing to the statements with positive and negative connotations was broadly similar. The statements on progress with and within trade unions, their role as fighters for employees' pay and as defenders on important issues were agreed to by around half the respondents,

with slightly lower agreement on their general importance in today's world and as guarantors of security and protection. There was weaker agreement with the statement on the active role of unions as sources of new ideas; this was only agreed with by 13% of respondents in Finland compared with some 40% in Germany.

FIGURE 32: Attitudes towards trade unions (BEREP survey)
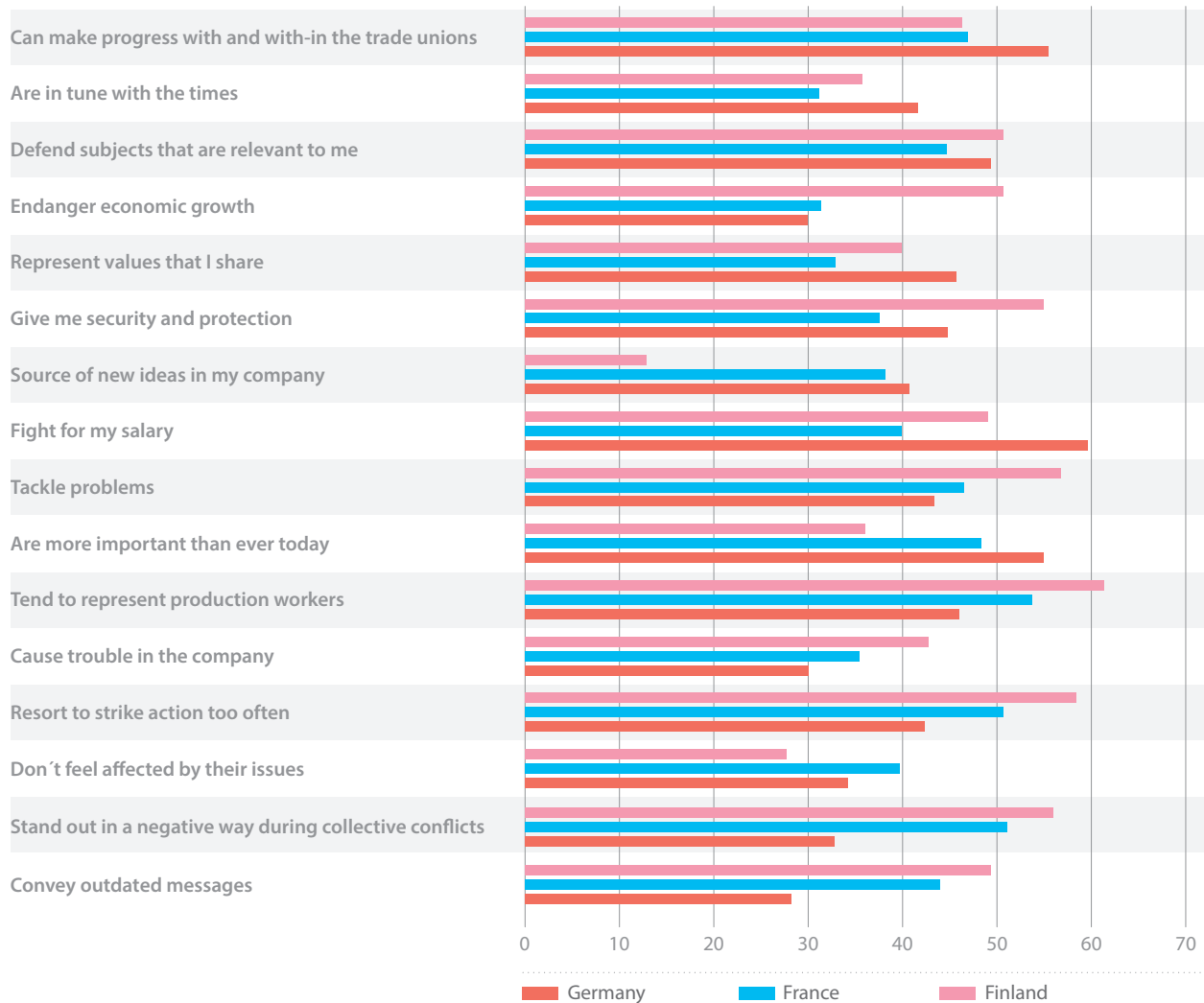
These figures present a mixed picture of how trade unions are perceived, with both negative and positive impressions. At the same time, and looking at France and Germany, the level of agreement with the positive images, and non-agreement with the negatives ones, was much higher than trade union density in these countries, suggests the existence of a potential pool for trade union organising. This potential is diminished somewhat, but not entirely, by the fact that trade union members scored higher on the positive attitudes and lower on the negative ones than non-members. However, agreement with the positive statements and lack of agreement for negative statements was still much higher than the organisational density in either country.

4.5.2 Topics and services of trade unions

What issues should trade unions tackle from the standpoint of white-collar workers? Our survey listed a number of topics and respondents were asked whether they agreed or not with them. In the main, the majority of respondents gave a high priority ('very important' and 'important') to most of the listed topics (Figure 33). This applied in particular to the task of negotiating collective agreements, providing support in disputes with the employer, creating new jobs, campaigning for job security and avoiding offshoring, promoting health and safety at work, guaranteeing pay increases, campaigning against discrimination and for gender equality, and promoting flexible working hours and work-life balance. Agreement on these issues was over 60% and in some cases over 70% in all countries.

FIGURE 33: Issues that should be given greater priority by trade unions (BEREP survey)
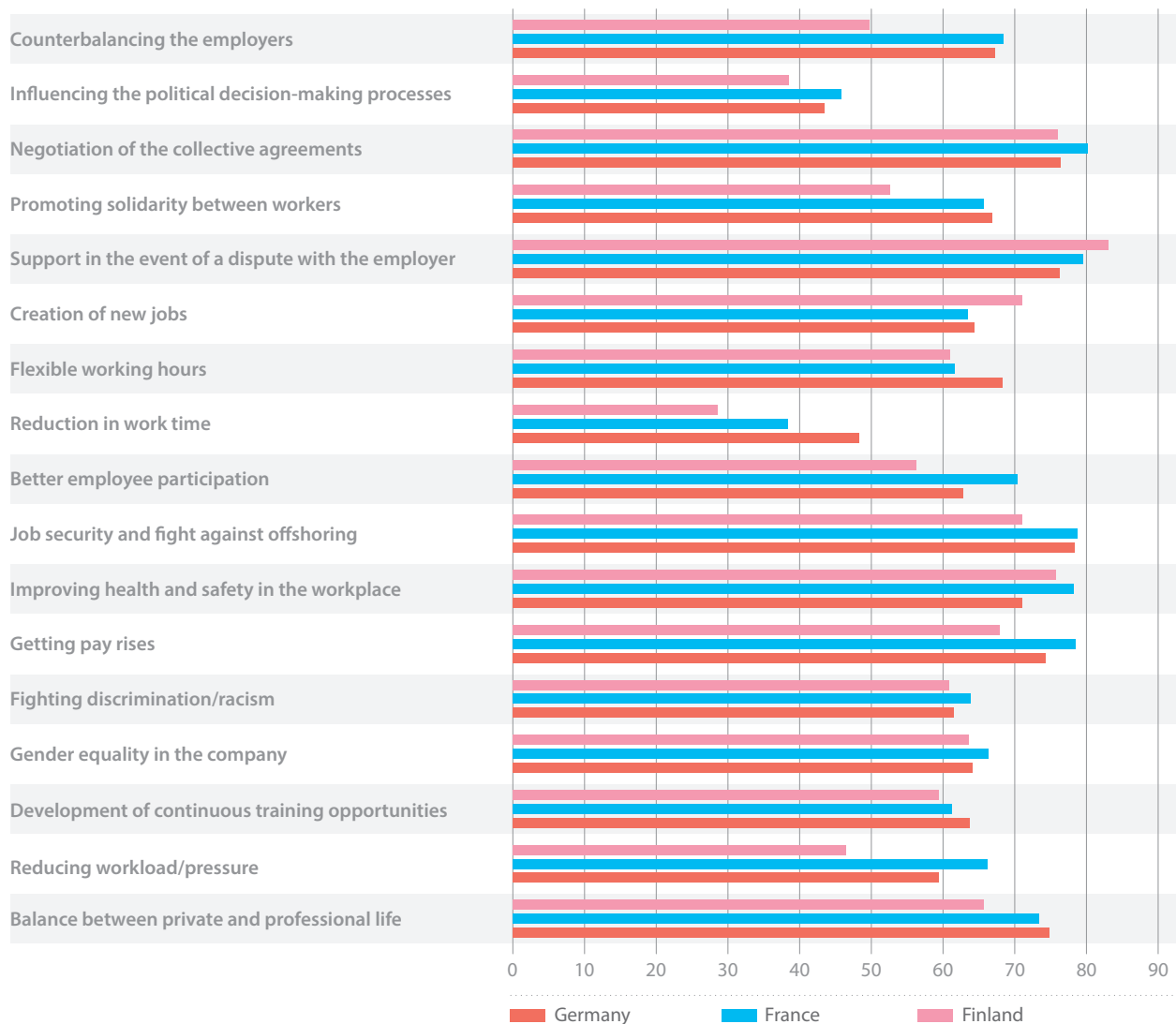
Respondents' responses to the promotion of solidarity, the strengthening of employee participation and the promotion of training opportunities were somewhat more restrained, but still consistently in the

majority, except in Finland where there was a lower level of agreement. The task of limiting workloads was seen as relevant by the majority of respondents in Germany and France, but not in Finland. On the other hand, there were no majorities in favour of trade unions taking on the role of reducing working hours and exercising political influence.

There were some, but minor, differences in responses by age, with younger age groups agreeing more strongly with the statements in favour of trade unions addressing issues such as working time reduction or gender equality. The expectations of trade union members in general were higher than those of non-members and they expected trade unions to deliver on the issues raised. Non-members also had high expectations, given that they had not decided to become members.

4.5.3 Services and contact with trade unions

Are white-collar employees aware of the services offered by trade unions? Figure 34 sets out a list of services that respondents were aware of or had heard about: this is not a list of the services trade unions actually provide or a ranking of their quality. In all three countries surveyed, the most well-known service was the legal advice and support that trade unions provided for their members. There was also high awareness of insurance linked with trade union membership, support during industrial disputes, and other advisory services.

FIGURE 34: Knowledge about services and support offered by trade unions, awareness in % of respondents (BEREP survey)
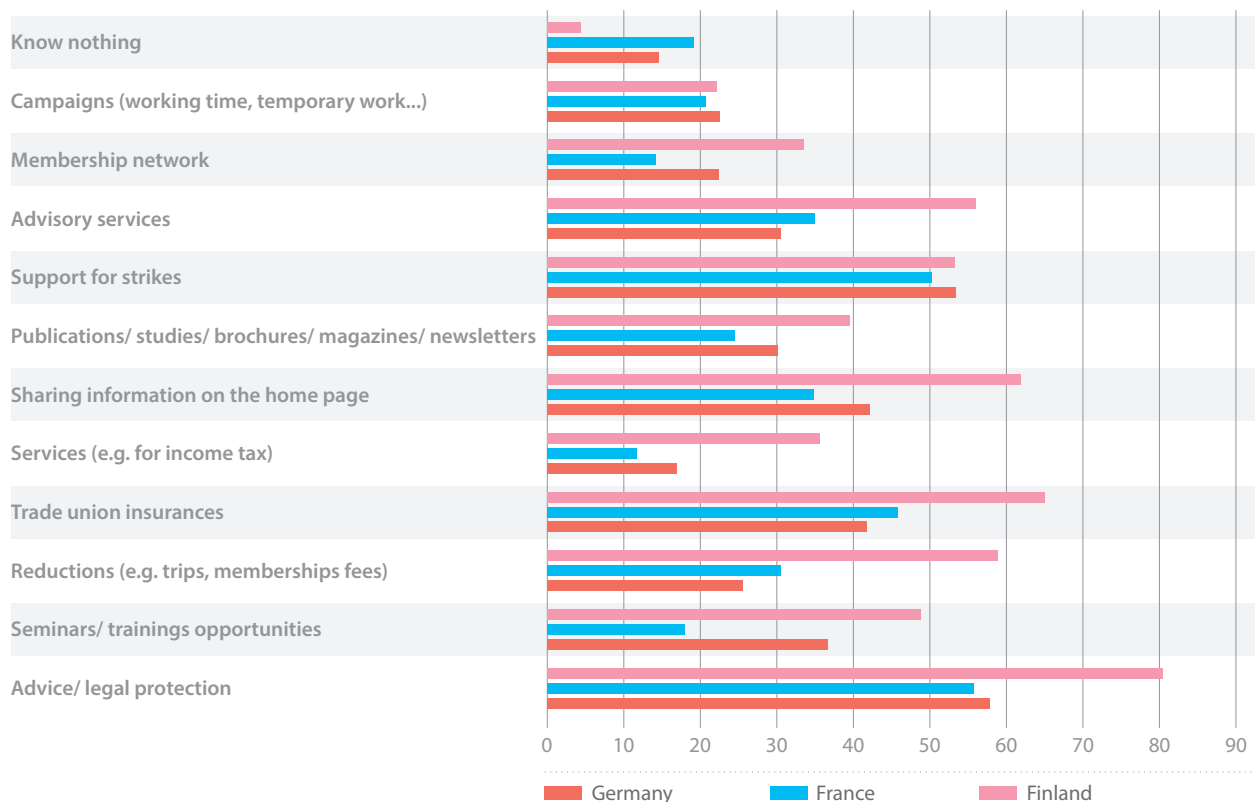
One third (France) to two thirds (Finland) of respondents were also aware that trade unions provided information on their websites, but there was a lower level of awareness about written publications, with values between 15% and just under 40%. It is worth noting that in France, almost 20% of respondents were unaware of the existence of any trade union services. This proportion was also quite high in Germany at just under 15%, whereas in Finland it was below 5%. The level of awareness of trade union services in Finland was significantly higher on almost all issues. This may be due to the higher level of unionisation among white-collar workers in Finland, greater trade union presence at workplaces, or a more active information policy by union head offices.

Which of these services did respondents find attractive for themselves? By far the most cited was legal protection and individual advice on employment contracts, noted by more than 50% of respondents in all three countries (Figure 35). This is followed at some distance by insurance offered by trade unions for accidents at work, occupational disability or unemployment, information on union websites, advice on career issues, health at work or other issues, and finally support for strikes – that is, organisational power as a service.

FIGURE 35: Attractiveness services and support offered by trade unions (BEREP survey)
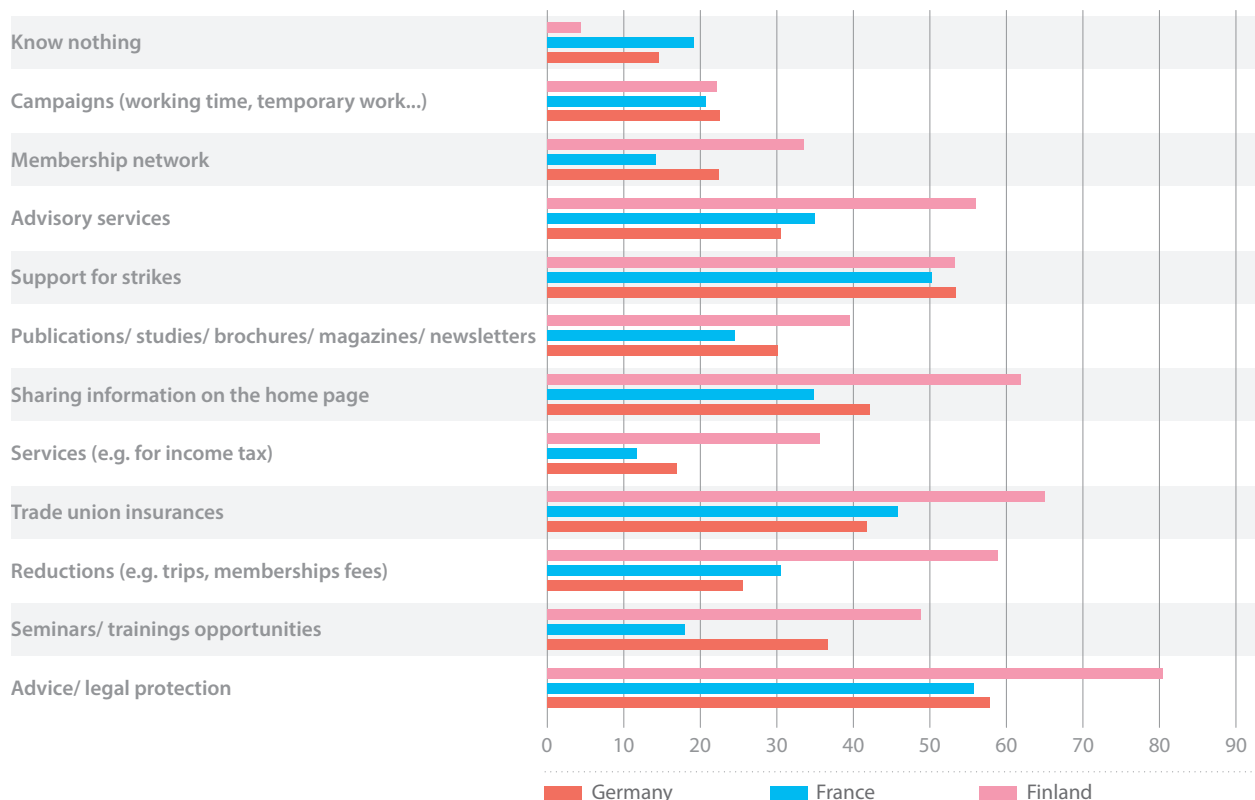
All the other topics mentioned in the questionnaire were generally valued by a smaller minority of respondents. The assessment of respondents in Finland was also more positive in some areas than in the other two countries on the issue of the attractiveness of trade union services. However, this did not apply to all points included, and the differences between countries were less evident than on the issue of general knowledge of their existence. There were greater similarities between responses on the attractiveness of trade union services.

Beyond knowledge of trade union services, the question of whether and how white-collar workers had contact with the trade unions is also important and a factor in whether these services could be accessed. Figure 36 shows that the proportion of employees with contact differs significantly between countries. While well over 50% of respondents in Finland and France had had contact with trade unions, the figure in Germany was just under 41%. This difference could be related to the fact that the first point of contact for problems or issues at the workplace in Germany is not trade unions but works councils who respondents might not necessarily identify with trade unions. In any event, the majority of white-collar workers who had had contact were satisfied with this and with the outcome. Satisfaction levels were highest in Finland, where more than 75% of respondents reported they were satisfied.

FIGURE 36: Contacts with trade unions and satisfaction (BEREP survey)
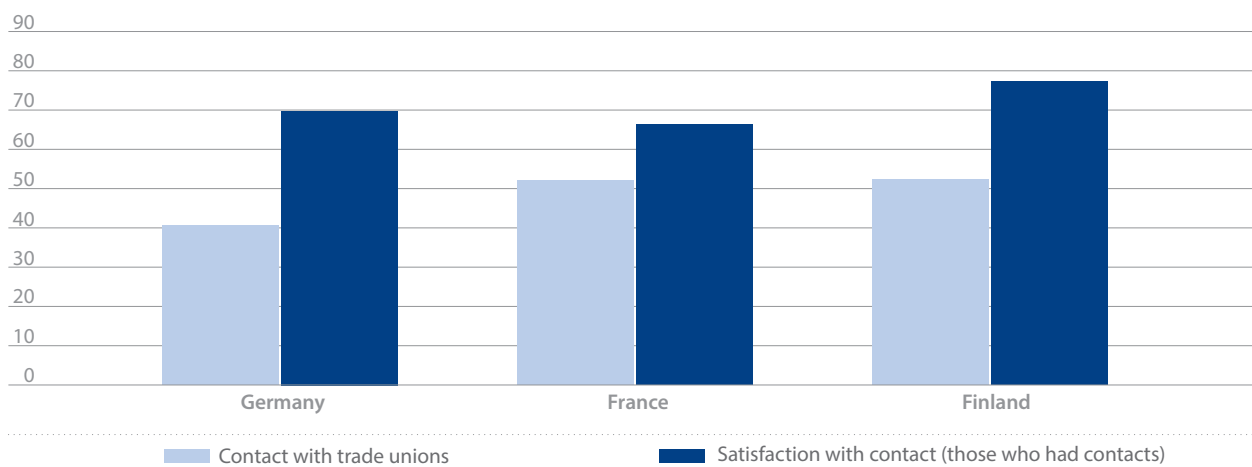
Trade unions are present in companies and workplaces in various forms. Physical presence can mean the presence of trade union representatives or works councils, trade union general meetings, at staff general assemblies or actions by trade union sections. Written and visual presence takes the form of information letters or leaflets and posters. Finally, forms of digital presence include trade union information or communication on social media or company intranets.

As Figure 37 shows, the physical presence of trade union representatives or works councils was the most widespread perceived form of trade union presence, reaching 60% to 70% of respondents in all the countries surveyed. Trade unions were also present via staff general assemblies in the eyes of just under or significantly more (Germany) than half of the respondents. The same applied, with the exception of Finland, to trade union meetings and, with the exception of Germany, to group actions taken by trade unions. The traditional written presence via letters, leaflets and posters remained strong, with some national variations such as differences in the importance of the two forms in Germany and Finland. Trade union digital presence via the internet was known to between 40% and 50% of respondents in all three countries, while presence via social media was far more prevalent in Finland than in France or Germany.

FIGURE 37: Trade union presence in establishments (BEREP-survey)
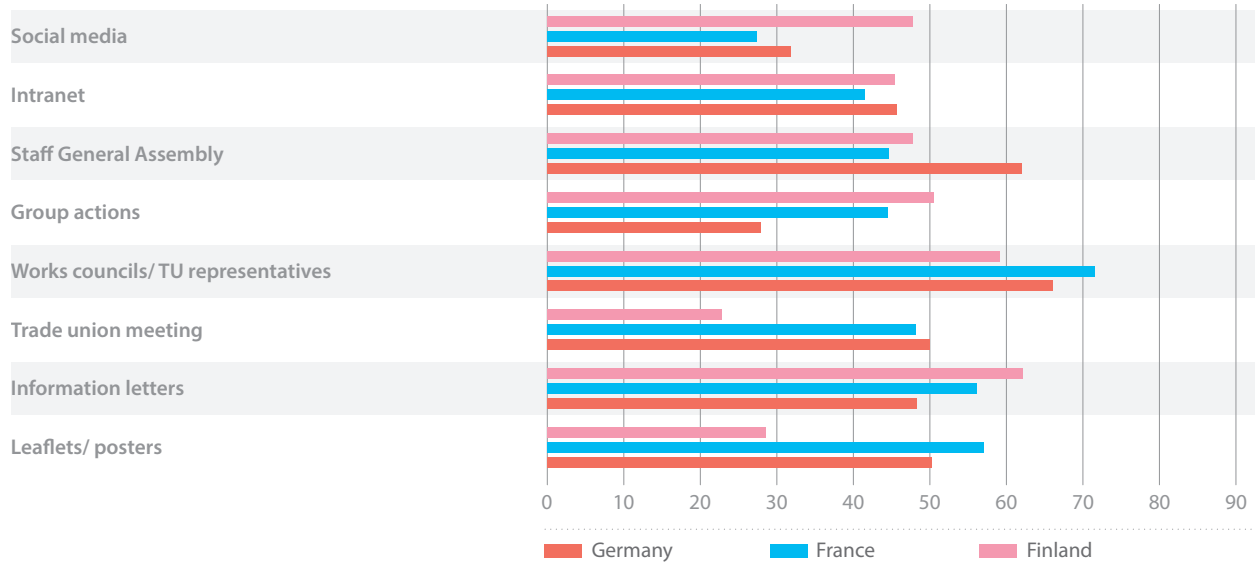
4.5.4 Membership decisions

Why do white-collar workers in manufacturing join a union? What reasons do they give for doing so? According to the findings of our survey, the most widespread motive for joining a union was the general importance of trade unions (Figure 38). In all three countries, well over 50% of employees, with the highest proportion in Germany, stated that this is why they joined. Three further motives were stated by more than 20% of respondents in total and also exceeded this figure in at least two countries: that unions put forward good arguments (in France and especially Germany); a conflict over job security in the company (in Finland and Germany); and a collective bargaining dispute (France and Germany). Other points played a role for respondents in individual countries, with values of around 20%. These included urgent individual problems at the workplace (in France) or family traditions of membership as well as the impossibility of solving a work-related problem individually (in Germany). One intriguing fact was that almost 12% of respondents in Finland could no longer remember why they joined a union.

Among non-members, a large proportion of respondents in each country had not as yet considered trade union membership (Figure 39). While this proportion was well over 60% in Germany and Finland, it was just under 80% in France. However, among those who had given this some consideration, the proportion of those who had decided in favour in principle but yet implemented this decision was far higher when compared with those who had decided against, ranging from just over 14% in France to around 30% in Finland. This suggests some potential for recruitment. Although it might be difficult to organise those who have decided against trade union membership, those who have decided in principle but not yet joined might constitute a core group for an organising initiative as they have already psychologically taken a step towards membership. Additionally, those who have not considered a membership as yet might have positive attitudes towards trade unions and at least be open to considering the question.

FIGURE 38: Reasons for trade union membership (BEREP-survey)
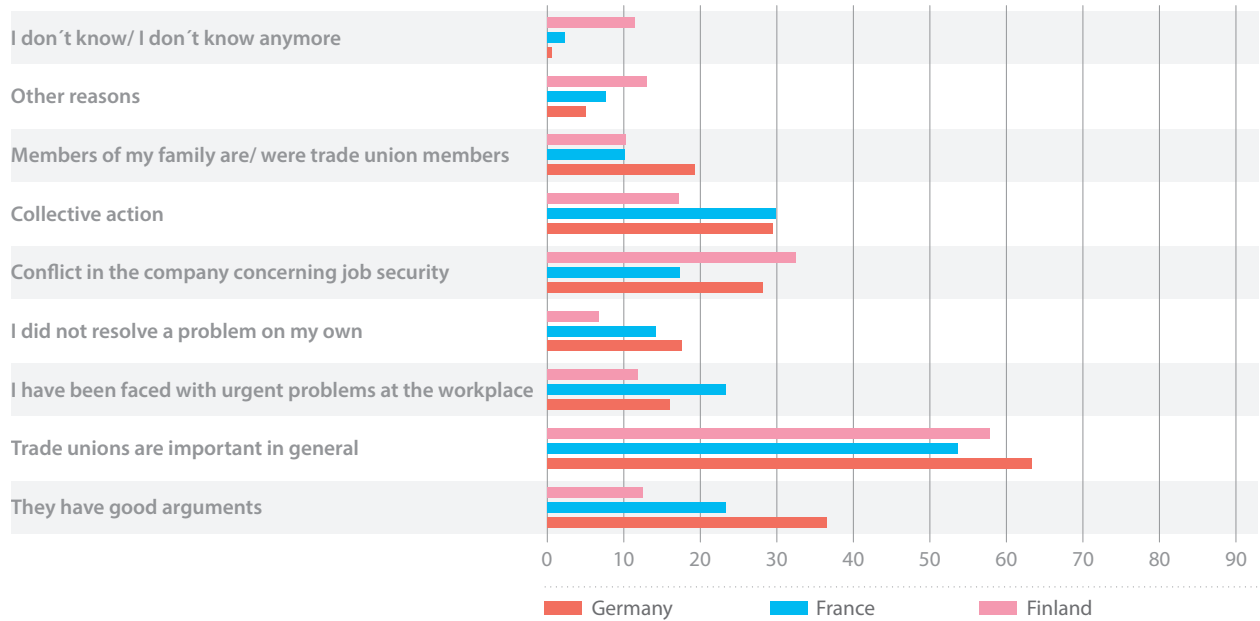
FIGURE 39: Considering membership (non-members only) (BEREP-survey)
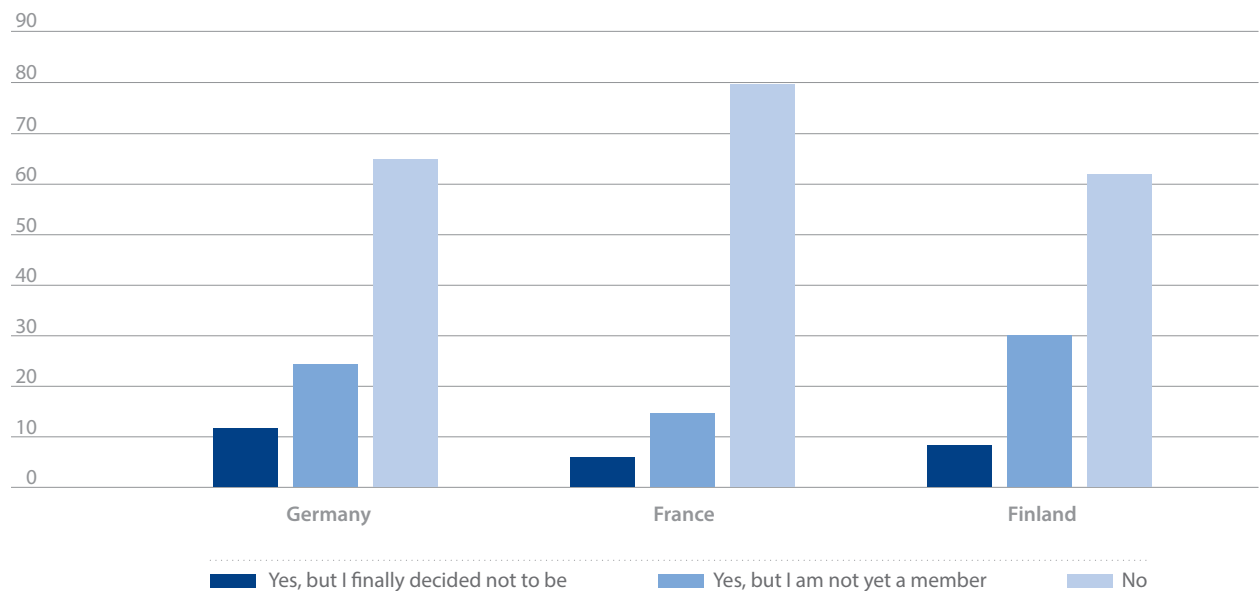
Finally, we look at the reasons that respondents gave for leaving a trade union (Figure 40, based on the items rated 'important' and 'very important'). Four reasons stand out in cross-country comparison, each of which was agreed to by around 40% or more of respondents in all countries. These were:

- that works councils were seen as more important for the representation of one's interests than trade unions;

- that employees benefit as free riders from collective agreements even without membership;

- that their own interests are not represented at all by trade unions;

- that membership fees are too high (an argument that was particularly prevalent in Finland).

Other reasons tend to play a more important role in individual countries. In Germany and France, this applied to the statement that trade union membership at their workplace was not common in the sense of a social custom: this was agreed with by just under 40% in each case. In Germany, one widespread argument was that since their own employer was not subject to any collective agreement, trade unions could not be regarded as having provided this service: this was agreed with by 50% of respondents. In Finland, on the other hand, there was widespread agreement with the argument that trade union support was not necessary to assert one's own interests, a view that was also prevalent in Germany and France. In France, the arguments that trade unions tend to represent the interests of blue-collar workers and that employers or management take a critical view of trade union membership also received some support.

FIGURE 40: Reasons for withdrawal from trade union membership (BEREP-survey)
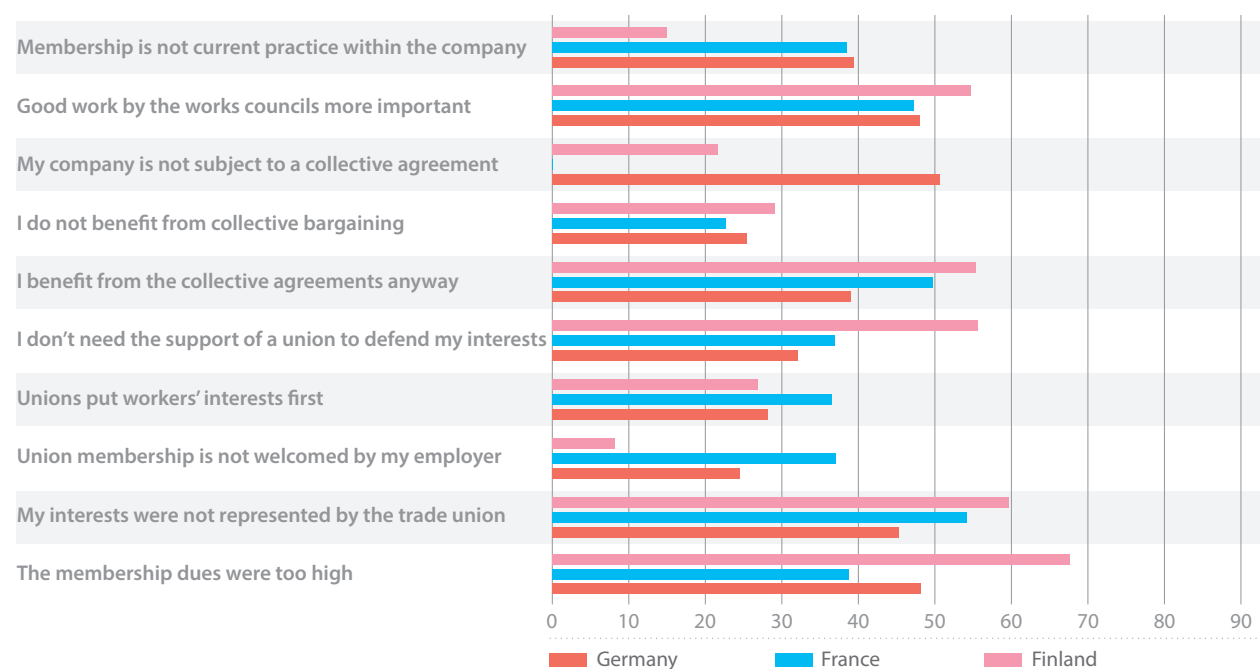
5. Trade Union Practices of Interest Representation and Organising of White-Collar Employees

5.1 Aim and organisation of trade union workshops

In this section we analyse the ways in which trade unions represent white-collar employees and their approaches towards mobilising and organising this group of workers. The analysis is based on a number of online workshops with trade union experts from the white-collar and organising departments of IndustriAll member unions. Although workshops had been held in all eight countries included in this study by the time this report was prepared, finalised data was only available for six of them – Finland, France, Germany, Poland, Romania, and Spain. Because it was only possible to hold the workshops in Sweden and Ireland more recently, transcriptions were not yet available at time of writing and could not therefore be included in the analysis.

One workshop was held in each of the countries covered with experts from either one or more local trade unions, depending on trade union structures and the availability of experts. Workshops were usually attended by between three and seven trade union experts. Each lasted from between three and a half to four hours with one or two short breaks (Table 7).

TABLE 7: Expert workshops – attending trade unions

	Finland	**France**	**Germany**	**Ireland**	**Poland**	**Romania**	**Spain**	**Sweden**
Trade unions	2 STTK (PRO) Akava (TEK)	2 CFE-CGC CGT	2 IG BCE IG Metall	1 SIPTU	1 OPZZ	1 IndustriALL-BNS	1 UGT	1 Unionen (TCO)
Number of experts	4	3	7	6	4	3	3	4

The workshops were structured around four core topics: the structures of trade unions and the importance assigned to representing white-collar workers; white-collar employees' attitudes towards their work and working conditions and the problems that experts considered might have recently emerged; white-collar employees' attitudes and expectations vis-à-vis trade unions and how trade unions respond; and the strategies and practices for organising white-collar workers that trade unions have developed. These topics will be analysed in the following sub-sections of this chapter.

5.2 Trade union structures and goals

Trade union structures in the eight countries can be classified into three types: occupational trade unions covering a broader range of industries in Finland, France and Sweden; general or politically-oriented trade unions with a multi-industry structure in France, Ireland, Poland, Romania and Spain; and industry trade unions in Germany.

In all countries except Germany, trade unions are present at company- and workplace level as *bargaining actors* (Table 8). In Ireland, Poland and Romania, collective bargaining takes place at company level only. In Poland, national or industry collective bargaining never became established after a market economy was introduced in the 1990s, whereas in Ireland and Romania – in both cases at the beginning of the last decade – it was dismantled after the end of tripartism (Ireland) and following state-imposed neoliberal reforms introduced (Romania).

In Spain and France, company-level collective bargaining is usual in large firms. In Finland and Sweden, collective bargaining takes place at sectoral level for blue-collar, white-collar and graduates or managers separately: this sets a framework for additional bargaining at company level over the distribution of agreed overall pay increases and other topics. What is common to all these countries is that if negotiations take place at workplace level, responsibility for bargaining lies with elected workplace trade union sections. Works councils, which exist in Spain and France, are not involved in collective bargaining; they are for information and consultation only (Table 8).

TABLE 8: Trade union structures and the relevance of white-collar workers

	Trade union structures	**Goals and targets for white-collar organising**
Finland	Occupational trade unions: White collar staff – professionals and managerial staff Separate collective agreements Trade union competition Trade union sections	High relevance organising Budget organising
France	Politically-oriented trade unions Trade union competition Trade union sections Ghent system	Overall goals Success in workplace elections - representativity
Germany	Industry trade unions Trade union competition Trade union sections in bigger companies Works councils	High relevance organising Organising department Organising targets
Ireland	General trade union (multi-industry) Trade union competition Trade union sections	High relevance organising Organising Department
Poland	Politically-oriented trade unions Company trade unions Trade union competition	No specific goals
Romania	Politically-oriented trade union Company trade unions Trade union competition	No specific goals
Spain	Politically-oriented trade unions Trade union competition Trade union sections	Success in TU workplace elections – representativity No definite goals – membership development
Sweden	Occupational trade unions: White collar employees – professional & managerial staff Separate collective agreements Trade union sections Trade union competition Ghent system	High relevance organising Retaining and activating membership Marketing department

The position is different in Germany. Here trade unions are responsible for collective bargaining at *industry level*. Company-level collective bargaining can take place in firms that are not registered as members of an employers' association. In these cases, trade unions negotiate as an external actor without formal representation at company level. Shop stewards might be present in larger companies but they have no negotiating responsibilities. The same applies for negotiations over derogations from industry collective agreements where these have been allowed by the 'opening clauses' that have now been agreed in all the industry-level collective agreements of the various industries that make up the manufacturing sector. Bargaining on workplace issues is the prerogative of works councils. In contrast to France and Spain, works councils in Germany are formally independent from trade unions – although around three quarters of works councillors are union members – and are legally entitled to negotiate agreements at workplace level provided these do not impinge on topics reserved for collective agreements 'proper', that is those negotiated between trade unions and employer associations.

In most forms of trade unionism, except occupational trade unions, white-collar workers are represented together with blue-collar workers. Owing to resource constraints, there are no separate organisational arrangements for white-collar employees in enterprise-level trade unions in Poland and Romania, nor are there separate departments in the umbrella associations organised along industry lines. This situation is different in countries with more centralised trade union structures, where arrangements for representing white-collar interests have been established in one or another other way. In Spain, for example, the trade union UGT has established an association of technicians and other white-collar workers.

> *Yes, we have an association of technicians and also, of course, for white-collar employees, who have completely different needs. This is something that was set up back in 198. In fact, the UGT is the only trade union with such a structure. (Workshop Spain)*

In the case of the two German trade unions, white-collar representation is both the responsibility of a member of the Executive Committee as well as of the departments dealing with trade union company-level policy; both are located at the head office. There are also arrangements for white-collar representation at regional or local level in the form of white-collar committees, in which both full-time officials and activists, such as works councillors, can take part voluntarily. These structures are rather old and fragmented, however, and only continue currently in certain regions and with variable levels of activity.

The situation is different in Finland, Sweden and France, albeit in different forms, where trade unions have organisational domains for white-collar workers only. In France the CGC union organises white-collar workers ranging from technicians to senior managers ('cadres').

> *CGC, we are a category union, which means we organise particular categories of workers. And since we are a category union, we don't represent manual workers, only managers in the broadest sense: that's 'colleges' two and three. So one is manual workers, two are the technicians, engineers, three are managerial workers. We represent the employees in colleges two and three, technicians, the engineers, managers, senior managers. We organise everyone except manual workers. We do have members from category one, but they are not allowed to be on the electoral lists or to be elected to an electoral function, but they are allowed to join. (Workshop France)*

However, CGC's approach has brought it into competition from other trade unions that do not have an occupational focus but seek to organise white-collar workers as well as other employee groups. In general, political trade unionism in France, Poland, Romania and Spain tends to be accompanied by strong inter-union competition for influence, resources and members.

There is also some *inter-union competition* around organising white-collar employees in Germany, Finland and Sweden. In Germany this occurs in the chemical and pharmaceutical industry where the Association

of Academics and Managerial Staff (VAA) has engaged in long-standing competition for members with the industry trade union, IG BCE. Many highly-qualified employees in this industry are outside the scope of collective bargaining as their salaries are above the highest grades set by the industry agreement, a phenomenon also seen in the metalworking industry. Such employees are referred to as 'AT employees' (außertarifliche Angestellte), literally employees 'outside' the scope of collective bargaining.

Both in Sweden and Finland, there are three trade union umbrella associations organised along occupational lines, two of two of which have white-collar affiliate unions. Although these associations and their affiliate unions are organised along occupational lines in both countries, with separate organisations for white-collar, graduate and managerial staff, there is some inter-union competition. In Finland it was reported that these occupational demarcations might be blurred because of classifications defined by employers.

> *But there is a grey area. There are certain tasks where I used to say, 'You are a white-collar worker and the other, you are an upper white-collar worker'. This is actually decided by the employer at the workplace, when the shop stewards are negotiating with the employer locally, and says 'Look, this person should be a white-collar worker, not an upper white-collar worker', because there could be situations where there are ten people doing the same job and yet the employer has decided that half of them are upper and half of them are just white-collar workers and there is no justification for that. So we have this grey area and disagreements at local level. (Workshop Finland)*

In Sweden, there is quite marked inter-union competition between the large trade unions organised in the umbrella association TCO (Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees), such as Unionen, which organises white-collar employees across all industries and all grades, and professional trade unions in Saco (Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations) (Kjellberg 2023).

One distinctive feature of trade unionism in Finland and Sweden is the 'Ghent system', under which trade unions play a role in providing unemployment benefits. In both countries, unemployment benefits have a voluntary element in the sense that trade union members pay unemployment insurance contributions that entitle them to earnings-related benefits within the state system above the level of the basic state flat-rate payment. Benefits are co-financed by the state through taxation. More recently in Sweden, the provision of unemployment benefits has evolved into a multi-pillar system with both agreed occupational schemes and private pillars, also operated by trade unions (Lindellee/Berglund 2022). In Finland, on the other hand, non-trade union funds offering access to the system have become more important. The Ghent system in general, with its built-in incentive for trade union membership, has been regarded as the most significant institutional support for trade unionism provided by the state (Western 1997).

Finally, there are differences between the countries covered in this study in terms of the arrangements for *trade union presence at the workplace*. In all unitary systems, trade unions have direct representation at the workplace; in dual systems – only Germany in this study – employees are represented by works councils at the workplace. In both cases, the effective coverage of workplace representation will depend on the system for workplace elections and the willingness of trade union members to get involved as lay activists to promote the union. The resources available to them in these cases will depend on the regulations – set either by statute or collective bargaining – that stipulate what material and personnel resources they are entitled to together with provisions on time-off for union activities.

Where a trade union section exists, it has a right and responsibility to negotiate collective agreements with company management, depending on the prescribed division of labour within the collective bargaining systems between the industry and the local level. The only exception to this rule is Germany. Here, trade union sections exist in many bigger companies in manufacturing but do not have negotiating

rights. All issues related to workplace employee participation, such as information and consultation on a range of legally-stipulated topics, are dealt with by works councils based on their statutory rights. Collective bargaining is the prerogative of, and conducted by, trade unions at industry level. This also applies to company-level collective bargaining, which is formally negotiated by external full-time union officials. Any workplace or company-level derogations from industry agreements will also be negotiated by full-time union officials (usually with the involvement of the relevant works council).

Irrespective of their organisational structure, most of the trade unions in this study have made organising white-collar employees an important goal. However, implementing this has been pursued to varying degrees and with differing organisational underpinnings. Looking at our sample countries, three patterns can be distinguished.

In the first pattern, consisting of Poland and Romania, organising is a general but unspecific goal. In the Polish case, the trade unions did not identify organising white-collar employees as a separate goal. Strategies have been developed mainly at local level and organising is, if at all, a broad goal encompassing all workers without specific consideration for white-collar employees. The situation is similar in Romania; as in Poland, trade unions do not have the resources to engage in separate white-collar strategies.

Trade unions in France and Spain form a second pattern. Organising white-collar employees is an important goal and trade unions have acknowledged the long-term changes in employment structures in manufacturing and regard organising white-collar employees as necessary for their long-term survival.

> *In the meantime, the average ratio in Spain is perhaps 40:60, i.e. 40% white-collar workers and 60% blue-collar workers, but as already mentioned this 40% share is increasing and that is also our starting point, especially in companies where hybrid working is already taking place. There are already companies where there are more delegates, trade union delegates, from white-collar employees. And that's why it's important that we also make it clear that these employees will be in the majority here at some point and we will then also have to take off our overalls, so to speak, in a figurative sense and be more responsive to them. (Workshop Spain)*

However, trade unions in France and Spain have not yet developed more specific goals or organisational structures to deal with such organising activities. The goals remain abstract and not linked with existing recruitment targets. Membership recruitment is important, but there are other even more important goals. This is due to the central role played by elections for works councils in both countries. These determine whether a trade union can be deemed to be officially 'representative', which in turn affects whether it has access to state resources and is entitled to sign collective agreements. To be successful in these elections against competing trade unions can be more important for trade union resources and, therefore their capacity to act, than membership numbers and income from union dues.

> *In the various federations and confederations in the individual trade unions, they try to determine how many members they want to recruit, but actually it's all about seeing how many seats you can win in the election, because the funds also depend on that. You can perhaps win 20% of the seats and the 20% comes with considerable financial resources. If you gain more percentage points than other trade unions, you get more money as a trade union. (Workshop France)*

In the third pattern, consisting of Finland, Ireland, Germany and Sweden, goals are much more concrete in terms of budgets, targets and measures, albeit related to different organisational preconditions and strategies. In this respect, trade unions in Finland and Sweden, on one hand, and in Germany and Ireland on the other, have pursued different organisational approaches. Finnish and Swedish trade unions have developed a marketing approach to organising. In Finland, the trade union Pro has set a budget which can be used for organising and publicity. However, trade unionists have criticised the size of the budget and argued for much more active marketing strategies.

Well, yes, of course, we have budgeted for these issues, which the executive board makes decision about. I think the budgets are too low, to be fair, because we could win a lot more. I think Pro generally markets too little, when it comes to marketing on TV, radio and things like that. During work trips abroad and living abroad for seven years, I could see union advertising on TV all the time, but not here in Finland, so far at least. (Workshop Finland)

In contrast, marketing has become a much more developed core activity at the white-collar union Unionen in Sweden. Around a decade ago, Unionen installed a marketing and sales department with a very large budget and a clearly-defined recruitment target.

It started around 2012. Unionen had the advantage that no other union in Sweden had done marketing in this way, marketing and sales at all, as it was frowned on. So Unionen decided to achieve a target of 600,000 members, and they put a lot of money in, in fact they poured a lot of money into this. (Workshop Sweden)

The goal of 600,000 members – which was eventually reached – was extremely ambitious as Unionen only had some 400,000 members when the strategy was proposed (Kjellberg 2023). Establishing a marketing and sales department was seen as a 'complete paradigm shift' by the trade unionists attending the workshop, as it signalled that membership recruitment had been reframed as a marketing issue, a process accompanied by internal debates and tensions. Work in the marketing department is divided into different teams which focus on different areas, such as recruitment, membership retention, students or local trade union representatives.

In Germany, the two manufacturing trade unions, IG Metall and IG BCE, have stated that organising white-collar employees is a precondition for maintaining their organisational power. In both cases, they have established a structure and invested resources into representing white-collar employees at head office level. At IG BCE, organising white-collar workers has been labelled a 'change topic':

It is absolutely seen as a change topic for us and has been for some years, not just today… About ten or 12 years ago, the issue of white-collar workers was neglected; it was considered a luxury issue. This has changed completely today. It is recognised at all levels that the issue has to be addressed and it is good if union officials devote resources to it. (Workshop Germany)

Both organisations have adopted indicators to guide their activities. At IG Metall, regional budgets (the 'Bezirke' level) and local budgets (the 'Geschäftsstellen') depend on revenues from membership dues and organisational units at both levels are set annual revenue and membership targets. At IG BCE, one of the indicators used is the volume of membership dues, which serves to motivate officials to increase recruitment among high-earning employees, whose dues, since they are based on their salary, will be above average.

At least in our team, we look at the figures every month to see where we stand. Here in the Ruhr area our potential is quite finite, we already have a very high level of union organisation and we know that we can't achieve all the goals set in terms of our structure and we've therefore picked out a few that we want to work on. And this one, having members who pay high levels of dues, is one of them. (Workshop Germany)

One notable feature of organising strategies in Germany and Ireland is the existence of organising departments. IG Metall began implementing organising projects using professional organisers in the late-2000s. These projects were initially centrally planned and run from the union's head office. They were subsequently decentralised by setting a budget that local units could apply for to run organising projects. These projects (known as 'Erschließungsprojekte'), which are staffed by professional organisers, mainly exist at regional level. They have different goals depending on the specific strategies. For

example, they might be aimed at organising at certain type of company, such as automotive suppliers or IT-companies, or target specific groups, such as white-collar workers.

> *For example, in the districts in Lower Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt or Bavaria, there is a focus on white-collar employees in organising projects. (Workshop Germany)*

Organising is also a central goal for the Irish trade union SIPTU, although it is not backed by budgets and targets as in Sweden or Germany. However, the trade union has defined itself as an organising union for some two decades and has an organising unit that uses professional organisers. This is free to define organising campaigns in terms of industries, companies or groups of employees. The department also offers support for any organising activities planned by officials from the industry or sector departments.

> *They can have their own campaigns. And they can run those campaigns separately. But we say, from my point of view, as an industrial organiser, if I go into a workplace where I'm trying to grow the density and also trying to develop the issues, I can actually make a submission through a sector organiser to say 'Well, I need a bit of help from the organising department' and they will give me somebody who'll come in on the ground with me. And when I have to move to another workplace, they can remain in place for several days trying to build the density. I think it's very important that we have those links with the organising department. (Workshop Ireland)*

5.3 White-collar employees and working lives: problems and perceptions

How do trade unions assess recent developments in the working lives of white-collar employees? And conversely, how do white-collar employees perceive their working lives and do they consider trade unions to be vehicles for representing their interests? Trade unionists in our sample countries highlighted remarkably similar attitudes on the part of white-collar employees towards work and working conditions, leading to very convergent demands in terms of the improvements they want. Similar demands were also mentioned in three or more of the workshops (Table 9).

The first of these is the issue of skills. Many of trade unionists in our study reported that updating skills was both an employee demand and an objective necessity that was required to keep pace with the accelerating pace of change at workplace level. The key factors were business restructuring, digitalisation and the ecological transition. One Swedish trade unionist noted.

> *We've been dedicating a lot of attention to transition support, upskilling and reskilling because we can see that the pace of change in skills development is getting faster and faster. So more and more restructuring in workplaces, more and more changes that are directly affecting our members in terms of what kinds of skills they have and what they will need. (Workshop Sweden)*

There was consensus that continuous learning is something white-collar employees are willing to engage in, but also something that employers now expect. This can led to stress and pressure, especially for older employees, as highlighted at the Spanish workshop.

> *All white-collar employees are increasingly required to undergo continuous training. And that does cause stress among older employees, especially in telecoms, IT, etc., where you always have to be at the cutting edge of technology and, above all, react quickly. So, I'd want to highlight the stress that training and continuous training can create (Workshop Spain)*

At the same time, training is often seen as insufficient, as in Poland, where trade unionists complained that a shortage of training opportunities had limited the scope for employee development in contrast to the individual opportunities provided to managers.

And as far as topics for discussion are concerned, employees complain that there is no training for them, that they cannot develop. (Workshop Poland)

In Spain, trade unionists noted the gap between the plentiful training opportunities offered by large firms and the limited options at SMEs, which have fewer resources and less scope to release staff for training during regular working hours.

Large companies provide their employees with a corresponding range of training opportunities. But this is always very much geared to the needs of the company. This situation is much more complicated for small and medium-sized firms. In Spain, there are organisations set up by employers and the government that can provide resources and money. And although there is access to these funds for SMEs, employees are so busy in these firms that they have almost no time to take part in these programmes. (Workshop Spain)

Secondly, there was an emphasis on the demand for *autonomy at work*. This can have two meanings: firstly, it can refer to whether employees have a degree of independence in determining how work is organised, when and how to do it; and secondly, it can refer to participation in decision-making about work organisation and working conditions. One of the main dimensions of autonomy mentioned in the workshops was working time autonomy based on flexible working hours and working from home – that is autonomy in the first sense.

What I tend to find is that people want that bit of flexibility. Maybe the flexi-volume, you know. For example, start a day and perhaps have two hours free in the middle of the day, or whatever the case may be, and that is a big thing for people. (Workshop Ireland)

Autonomy is, of course, usually regarded in a positive sense: but as a French trade unionist noted, it usually goes hand-in-hand with new forms of output-based performance control, irrespective of how these outputs have been achieved.

This is a move away from repetitive tasks towards assignments. More autonomy is encouraged, more decision-making. But there are also two constraints: once a year, a check is carried out to see whether the workload corresponds to an employee's ability to manage their workload, to see whether he or she is at the appropriate level. (Workshop France)

Calls for skill development and autonomy are related to a further employee priority: career development. Building a career can take two basic forms: either ascending the corporate ladder or moving to a bigger firm that pays better and is higher up in the value chain. According to the trade unionists at the German workshop, there is an increasing trend towards the second of these, with employees who start their careers at SMEs trying to move to larger firms. This can lead to work intensification for those left behind as small firms are finding it increasingly hard to find replacements for those who leave.

But we still have a tendency in smaller SMEs in particular that good workers use them as a career springboard. You have people who come in, perform really well for two or three years, and work at high intensity. And that can be problem for these firms. (Workshop Germany)

In Romania, trade unionists stressed another aspect of a focus on careers: that white-collar employee are inclined to keep their distance from trade unions because they fear that such associations might be thought ill of by their superiors and jeopardise their careers. From this point of view, union membership and careers are seen as mutually exclusive

There is this fear that they could jeopardise their career if management were to find out that someone was in the union … This group of employees, the white-collars, feel more vulnerable in terms of their career if they are union members. (Workshop Romania)

The Irish trade unionists from SIPTU made the same observation: that a focus on careers and feelings of social status act to distance white-collar employees from trade unions.

They just don't want to be seen with the trade unions because they feel at limp or emotional opportunities, their careers and I'm way above that. (Workshop Ireland)

The trade unionists from Spain and Romania also emphasised the employment interests of white-collar employees. Whereas in Finland or Germany this group gains from skill shortages on national labour markets, with employment security a lower concern, the situation is very different in Romania and Spain, where graduate unemployment is especially high. And employees who have a job are often confronted with a need to relocate, have to be willing to change employer or move abroad.

Yes, of course there is also the fear that your own job will be lost or change too much. And this might make you more willing to move to another location, either in their own country or even abroad because they know their job could disappear. Or that there is more demand in other countries. (Workshop Spain).

In Sweden, the marketing department at Unionen has used market analysis to cluster the interests of white-collar workers into different groups, depending on their interest in material security, pay, career perspectives or unemployment benefits.

Some want the income-protection insurance, others want help if something happens at the workplace, and the third want pay. These are the main drivers. That's it. (Workshop Sweden)

TABLE 9: Attitudes of white-collar employees

	Stance towards work	Key problems and issues	Stance towards trade unions
Finland	Autonomy Skills Good salary	Work intensification – stress Skills Pay levels	Role of unemployment funds Social customs
France	Meaningful work Autonomy/participation Working on projects Recognition	Work intensification – stress Working hours/WFH	Collective support Little knowledge about unions
Germany	Autonomy at work Skills Career	Work intensification - stress Health and safety Digitalisation, WFH Transformation, agility	Cultural distance ('trade unions are blue-collar workers') Little knowledge about unions Cost-benefit-calculation Structural power Information (economic situation)
Ireland	Individualism Skills Career	Performance based pay Working hours/WFH	Cultural distance Cost-benefit-calculation Trade union recognition

	Stance towards work	Key problems and issues	Stance towards trade unions
Poland	Skills Career Employment Wages	Training opportunities Management by objectives	Little knowledge of unions Collective support Structural power
Romania	Skills Employment Career	Digitalisation: threat employment and autonomy Safeguarding employment WFH	Little knowledge about unions
Spain	Employment security Career Skills	WFH Skills: training and associated stress Performance-based pay	'Trade unions are for blue-collar workers' Cultural distance
Sweden	Security Skills	Work intensification – stress WFH	Role of unemployment funds Three orientations (security, smartness, engagement)

Given these interests, what do trade unions think are the most *important trends and problems* related to working conditions currently facing white-collar employees? The workshops highlighted a number of problems.

One of these was *work intensification* and an associated increase in stress. The Swedish trade unionists argued that psychosocial risks had increased among white-collar employees. In their view, one important element exacerbating or mitigating this was management's leadership behaviour.

> *For white-collar workers it's more about the psychosocial risk, and increasingly about rising work intensity, workplace stress and so on. This is very much linked to work organisation and how managers are performing, either helping you prioritise or piling too much work on you. (Workshop Sweden)*

In Finland, the trade unionists argued problems were caused by the fact that while management constantly expected more, training opportunities during working hours were not sufficient and employees did not have access to the resources they needed to cope. For this reason, the trade union Pro has been trying to negotiate an agreement with the employers' association about increasing training entitlements during working hours.

> *I think, the demands on white-collar workers are getting higher and higher. And of course, there's a lack of training at the workplace. This is the main reason why people are feeling they can't cope. (Workshop Finland)*

Trade unionists in France cited two reasons for rising stress levels: a lack of involvement in decision-making combined with cuts in staffing levels, leading to fewer employees for the same volume of work and hence greater work intensity. The trade union CGT has used regular surveys to gauge employee feeling on these issues.

> *We at the CGT have carried out employee satisfaction surveys, and we've realised that a lot has changed over time… What I mean by that is that employees are simply expected to implement decisions made at a higher level. Many managers also developed burnout as a result. France has introduced a 35-hour week, but managers, of course, work more than this. Their workload has increased and staffing levels have been reduced. (Workshop France)*

Trade unionists in Spain associated rising stress with the new forms of output control mentioned above that typically combine individual performance targets with variable pay. Under these conditions, enhanced autonomy and greater working time flexibility might encourage staff to work harder or to extend their hours.

> *Targets are set and it's difficult for individuals to assess how they stand in terms of realising these. This also makes you much more demanding of yourself. Ultimately, always having your bonus in mind leads to stress. And that often goes hand in hand with flexible working hours. These can be a benefit if you have children or elderly people to care for. But it can also have disadvantages, as you can expect too much of yourself and perhaps stay longer at work. (Workshop Spain)*

The German trade unionists noted two further factors that have increased workloads. Firstly, skill shortages have boosted staff turnover, as employees leave for better or higher paid jobs elsewhere. This puts pressure on those who stay as employers find it difficult to fill vacancies. Bottlenecks in the supply of inputs as a result of Covid-19 and instabilities in value chains also made it almost impossible to anticipate what has been required.

> *What I come across very often is the issue of work intensification, especially where working there is a high level of turnover. Work intensifies immensely for those who stay. This then alternates to some extent with situations where materials are perhaps missing and production is stopped. There is either a intense effort or nothing happening at all. (Workshop Germany)*

Another significant trend in many of the countries in the study is *working from home (WFH)*. The opportunity to use this increased rapidly during the Covid-19 pandemic and WFH has remained at a high level since. During the first phase of the pandemic, WFH developed in a largely unregulated way. Trade unions in many countries were subsequently successful in negotiating agreements on issues such as the permitted extent of WFH, and ways of limiting or recording working hours. The Spanish trade unionists described this as a process of regulating a new form of work, and one which has become popular among employees.

> *First of all, in connection with how WFH is organised issues such as ergonomics, internet connection and, above all, the number of hours per day that you may or must work. All of this had to be sorted out, which is why negotiations began very quickly. Then after the pandemic, WFH practically became the norm. We have now have a model for digital working. You should be at work at least two days a week and can work from home on three. I think we have more or less balanced things out with this approach. And it's a model that's interesting for everyone involved. (Workshop Spain)*

However, in Romania, according to the trade unionists attending the workshop, there had been a reversal of the trend towards working from home, with many companies beginning to require employees to spend more time in the office.

> *WFH was a consequence of Covid-19. Many companies do not favour this type of work, however, and are increasingly demanding that employees come into the office. (Workshop Romania)*

Although WFH is an instrument that might potentially enhance employees' work-life balance, the Irish trade unionists noted that employees do not use it in this way. The reason, they argued, was that employees' desire for career progress led them to want to stay connected and respond to e-mails as soon as they arrive.

> *You know, people have the right to disconnect. But again it's that individualism. It's that 'Oh, I need to be seen to be working for me to get that promotion'. That's why they're not doing it. And it does cause problems then. (Workshop Ireland)*

Working from home also remains a major challenge for trade unions as it restricts the scope for contact with workers. High levels of WFH can reduce opportunities for informal social interaction between unionists and employees at the workplace, simply by virtue of both parties being there, and trade unions have been obliged to look for alternative means of contacting white-collar employees.

> *This has of course become more difficult since the pandemic because people are working from home and you simply can't speak to them directly, there is less contact. The number of problems hasn't fallen but people are no longer as accessible. In this respect, you have to make sure that people are brought back on board (Workshop France)*

Social media has been one route used to try and remedy this. In Germany, trade unions have also tried to organise a campaign on the issue of working from home, a topic we return to in the next section.

A third topic raised in in several workshops was that of *output control*, usually combined with performance-based pay. In Ireland, performance pay was initially introduced by foreign multinational companies and then spread to other fields of white-collar work. From the point of view of the Irish trade unionists, variable pay has been a major driver of individualism as it links reward to individual performance.

> *But I can say, from personal experience, it's individualism within the white-collar sector that's causing the problems because of this idea that if I'm involved in the collective, I won't be seen as a person to go up the managerial staircase. (Workshop Ireland)*

Performance pay was seen as a major challenge for trade unions as they become redundant once pay is negotiated individually. As a consequence, Irish unions have been seeking to negotiate collective provisions on variable and performance-based pay. This has raised two challenges, however: firstly, union density is generally low among employees on performance-based pay; and secondly, should the trade union succeed in negotiating an agreement, employers are likely to extend its provisions to non-unionists, allowing free riding and reducing incentives for membership.

> *You don't need to join the unions. You're going to get the percentage increase anyway, and that can filter down to non-white collar grades as well. And that's where they attack our density. (Workshop Ireland)*

Spanish trade unionists also regarded performance pay as major challenge to which they had not yet developed a response. In Spain too, the practice was driven by the subsidiaries of large multinational companies. In contrast to SIPTU in Ireland, however, the Spanish UGT seems to have had little experiences in collective approaches to this type of reward. However, as performance monitoring is very strict, they noted that employees have to work hard to achieve a sufficiently good performance to warrant a bonus, adding to stress.

> *There is often a very strict policy, especially in multinational companies. It's often said 'You haven't met your targets, so we can't pay the bonus' and so on. Ultimately, you've always got one eye on your bonus, and that leads to stress. And if I work in a target-focused way, it can lead me to put more pressure on myself. (Workshop Spain)*

Given these interests and problems, how do trade unions view the *attitudes and expectations* of white-collar employees towards their organisations? One observation voiced across-the-board, except in Finland and Sweden, was the existence of *cultural distance* between white-collar employees and trade unions; and the higher the level of skill and status in corporate hierarchies, the wider this gap. One of the additional reasons for this was that white-collar employees knew very little about trade unions. Cultural distance and lack of knowledge were especially prevalent among graduates. This group does not pass

through a process of workplace socialisation while acquiring their skills but only once they have finished formal studies and begun what is likely to be a fairly well-paid job. This makes it especially difficult for trade unions to contact this group.

The trade unionists in the Irish workshop argued that white-collar employees with degrees will have developed a mentality that they are white-collar while still at university, with nothing in common with blue-collar workers or trade unions as collective representatives.

> *So I would say that the majority of our school leavers now are leaving with a degree and with a mindset. Even if they don't end up working in a white-collar area, they leave with a mindset that tells them they're white collar. (Workshop Ireland)*

German trade unionists also associated this attitude with white-collar staff who are classified as 'AT-employees' – that is, employees with salaries exceeding that of the highest agreed pay grade. These employees even might view trade unions as organisations that are exclusively for blue-collar workers and not themselves.

> ***A****: My impression is that those who come from university basically know very little about trade unions and the only thing they associate with trade union work is the collective agreement, which they believe has no relevance for them and that they can and must organise everything for themselves. **D***: *I would expand on that. Not just partly the conviction that 'Look, I'm not covered by the collective agreement, so I have to sort things out for myself', but the fundamental conviction that a trade union is by definition not responsible for me at all. That's something I often encounter. In fact, we have a real problem of understanding, which may also be partly due to this lack of professional socialisation. (Workshop Germany)*

These impressions were confirmed by trade unionists from other countries. In Spain, it was argued that trade unions have long been seen as blue-collar organisations that are not willing or able to give white collar employees any support and protection.

> *And they also have the impression that trade unions are not favourably disposed to them. Trade unions are very much for factory workers, not for trained, skilled employees or graduates, quite the opposite. So the message was: as a factory worker you need a union but many others don't. (Workshop Spain)*

One of the main factors explaining this cultural distance was held to be the structural power that white-collar employees enjoy due to skill shortages and their status in workplace hierarchies. Since white-collar workers also have more scope than blue-collar workers to negotiate elements of their working conditions themselves, including pay, they might come to believe that it is more rational for them pursue their interests individually rather than collectively. A trade union might then become an option only where their structural power and prospects for individual negotiations appear limited, as the Polish case illustrated.

> *Interestingly, employees don't turn to trade unions when they want to move up the career ladder but only when they can't because they haven't been promoted. Then they sometimes turn to trade unions for support in resolving a conflict with the employer, as we're able to exert a bit of pressure. But only if they can't resolve matters themselves. (Workshop Poland)*

German trade unionists argued that white-collar employees calculated the costs and benefits that trade union membership might have for them personally to a much greater extent than blue-collar workers. Nevertheless, white-collar employees were not slow to signal their interest in getting more information about the business situation of their employer and their own employment situation, often not adequately provided by management, even on basic issues such as working hours.

I have a small working group with AT-employees from different companies with whom we discuss what we can do. They all say that they simply want to know and understand how their employment relationship works. (Workshop Germany)

White-collar employees also look in great detail at what the trade unions can offer them and what they have to pay for this service.

So it's very much 'What can you do for us?' You know. (Workshop Ireland)

What trade unions can offer is weighed against the structural power employees have, or feel they have, which they can use in individual negotiations. The question is: what is the added value, in terms of collective power, of spending money on union dues?

Yes, so I think what we often hear is, what personal benefit do I get from joining. It's about the money, of course. Is it worth my making this investment, giving up 1% of my salary every month, what do I get out of it? (Workshop Germany)

However, this calculation can only be made in a rational way if employees know what trade unions are, what they do and what they might offer. In several workshops, trade unionists commented that white-collar employees had only limited knowledge of trade unions, and their functions and activities. As a first step, therefore trade unions need to inform white-collar workers about their functions and services.

Trade unions often do not figure especially in the company context, so they don't know what trade unions actually do. They think we're like the Association of German Engineers, that you can become a member and then they'll sort things out for you. (Workshop Germany)

In Ireland, trade unionists stressed the problem of union recognition as an additional concern. In Ireland, there is no clear rule about trade union recognition or rights to collective bargaining. As an informal rule, trade unions will generally be recognised once they are able to establish that 30% or more of a workforce are members. However, the trade unionists from SIPTU highlighted that employee awareness of what trade unions could offer was generally low as employer reluctance to recognise trade unions made it difficult to negotiate collective agreements that might have a positive impact on working conditions.

The biggest issue we have is we can get people to join the union. But the employer does not have to recognise us and people ask, 'What is the benefit of being in the Union, if you can't go in and advocate on behalf of me?' (Workshop Ireland)

The situation is very different in Finland and Sweden, where joining a trade union is a much more usual social custom, given that unionisation levels are already very high and trade unions are much more salient at the workplace. This might also mean that employees are better informed about what a trade union is and what they would gain from membership. There are also fewer issues related to trade union recognition.

Trade unions in both countries also organise unemployment insurance funds (the 'Ghent system') which represent an incentive for white-collar employees as they allow scope for income protection. There are some differences in how the funds operate. Whereas in Finland, unemployment benefit is only available to fund members, in Sweden the state guarantees a flat-rate benefit for all with the fund providing an income-related top-up (Lindellee and Berglund 2022). In both countries this option remains an important factor sustaining the extraordinarily high rates of white-collar union membership.

In Finland, this effect seems to have been put at risk by the fact that some years ago a new fund was created by the employers offering the same unemployment benefits as the trade union scheme but

for a lower fee and without being involved in collective bargaining. This was seen as a major challenge by the trade unionists as it undermines their monopoly on unemployment funds and has triggered competition over the level of fees.

> *Originally it was just an unemployment fund. Then they set up an association as well. You can belong just to the fund or also the association. And the association is trying to look like a union. It has all the same services and benefits as a union. But the monthly dues are just a tenth of TEK membership, without the contribution to the fund. This is very difficult to compete against. And how can they afford all this for half a million people for just €24 a year? (Workshop Finland)*

In Sweden, the trade unions provide additional collective and individual supplementary unemployment benefits above the flat-rate benefit paid by the state, based on collective agreements and subsidised by the state out of tax revenue. Individuals must be trade union members to submit a claim and, in contrast to Finland, there are no competing non-trade union associations. Unemployment insurance is therefore regarded as a strong incentive for trade union membership.

> *We have the state unemployment benefit that only goes up to a certain level, a bit over €2,000 a month. If your salary is above that, and very few of our members are below that, you need something on top. And that is the income-protection insurance we offer. That's a really powerful recruiting argument because you need that money when you're laid off. (Workshop Sweden)*

The white-collar trade union Unionen played a leading role in developing these new benefits as part of its campaign to organise white-collar workers.

> *Since we developed it in 2012, we were the only ones that had this additional income insurance, and this was true up to about 2016, 2017. And then everybody else started to replicate this and offer income insurance. (Workshop Sweden)*

5.4 Trade union organising strategies

Organising white-collar workers is an ongoing process for all the trade unions that participated in the workshops. There is a high degree of awareness among trade unionists that organising white-collar workers is key issue the future of their organisations and for manufacturing trade unionism in general. Most of them situate their activities in the context of the growing proportion of white-collar employees in the workforce.

> *The average ratio in Spain is perhaps now 40:60, i.e. 40% white-collar workers and 60% blue-collar workers. This 40% share is increasing and that is also our jumping off point. And that's why it's important that we also make this clear to our officials so that they are aware that white-collar employees will practically be in the majority here at some point and we will then have to take off our overalls, so to speak, in a figurative sense and be more responsive. (Workshop Spain)*

Trade union activities, and capacities, in this area exhibited both commonalities and differences as between the countries in our sample. Table 10 shows that most trade unions have been pursuing a range of strategies and initiatives, many of which are shared across-the-board. In this respect it is possible to identify *patterns of practices* that have been used across a range of differing forms of trade unionism and institutional conditions and that are regarded as significant and successful in attracting and organising white-collar workers. Together, they form a *list of experience-based good organising practices* that can be applied in different combinations by trade unions, depending on their strategic goals and institutional circumstances.

TABLE 10: Organising: pattern of practices of trade unions

	Organising: patterns of practice
Finland	• Workplace dialogue • Information: events workplace, webinars, social media, websites • Activating shop stewards • Local organising; activating shop stewards • Youth programmes and recruiting students • Reductions in dues • Unemployment benefits
France	• Workplace dialogue • Activating shop stewards • Information events for young employees • Programme for young employees
Germany	• Workplace dialogue • Information: events, social media, websites • Activating works councils and trade union officials • Presence at universities • Thematic campaigns (WFH, New Work) • Strategic organising • Participation (surveys etc.) • New forms of labour regulation • Networks with works councils
Ireland	• Workplace dialogue • Information: social media, websites • Activation shop stewards • Programme for young employees • Strategic organising • Participation (surveys, ballots) • Labour regulation (performance-based pay)
Poland	• Workplace dialogue • Information: social media, websites • Employee surveys
Romania	• Workplace dialogue Information events • Information: social media, websites • Campaign for young employees • Bonuses for TU members
Spain	• Workplace dialogue • Information: social media, videos, online workshops • Activation at local level (works councils and trade union sections) • Networks and coordinators • Presence universities • Communication campaigns
Sweden	• Workplace dialogue • Information: social media, websites • Activating shop stewards and members • Presence on university campuses • Strategic marketing – Campaigns and target groups • Participation (surveys…) • Collective bargaining • Unemployment benefits

5.4.1 Workplace dialogue

The first and most common practice emphasised in all country workshops was *workplace dialogue with white-collar employees* and measures to build this effectively. From the trade unionists' point of view, white-collar employees remain extremely distant from trade unions. They tend not to know a great deal about them, feel able to pursue their interests individually, and are not in an environment where union membership is customary for their peers – except in Finland and Sweden. Rather, white-collar employees need to be convinced that trade union membership could be beneficial for them. A trade unionist from Romania described his approach as follows:

> *Of course, from time to time I go through the different departments and talk to people without knowing that it is written on their face whether they are a union member or not. I speak and ask about their concerns, if they want anything. Of course I introduce myself, who I am and an employee might say 'Yes, you know, I'm not a member of your union', My response is 'It doesn't matter, let's talk, I can help you even if you're not a union member, maybe we can find a solution'. That's one approach. (Workshop Romania)*

For the trade unions at our workshops, communicating and establishing contact with white-collar employees was seen as the first and critical goal in creating a basis for disseminating information, demonstrating activity, and building trust. This requires new ways of engaging with white-collar employees compared to established forms of contact with blue-collar workers, a point stressed in particular by trade unions that organise both groups. This includes both how trade unionists present themselves and the topics they talk about. What is needed, as the Spanish trade unionists termed it, is a 'new narrative'.

> *I tell my colleagues at the UGT that we have to adapt, which means I can't just stand here in my overalls in front of white-collar staff and point out the benefits they offer. We also have to identify with them, which means choosing the right people for dialogue with these employees right from the start. We even almost have to adapt outwardly, and offer a completely different narrative to be able to engage this group at all. We also have to address entirely different topics, such as company car use and so on, whereas with blue-collar workers we tend to talk about issues such as shift work. In short, you have to differentiate. (Workshop Spain)*

Such approaches require a profound break with the recruitment and organising models for blue-collar workers that were not only successful in an immediate sense but also made manufacturing trade unions the power centres of trade unionism in their countries. In this respect, past achievements can be the enemy of new organising models that need to make a radical break from trade unions' traditional styles, cultures and interests. This applies even more where trade unions have to continue with successful strategies for blue-collar workers while at the same time creating new approaches for white-collar employees. How much the weight of tradition still counts was emphasised in the German workshop.

> *Why are we better at organising blue-collar than white-collar workers? It's because our cultural roots are there. We've been addressing their concerns for decades. We are anchored there. We have active shop stewards. And we – that is, full-time officials – are predominantly recruited from this group. (Workshop Germany)*

5.4.2 Information

In doing this, all of our sample trade unions highlighted the fact that a core element of the new approach to white-collar employees is information. White-collar employees also want to be informed and this constituted a second pattern of practice for most trade unions in this study. One important strategy in this area was the *organisation of local information events* at which employees are provided with information either direct by trade unions themselves or by invited experts. In Finland, the trade union Pro organises

an annual campaign in which union activists at regional level go to workplaces and put on 'coffee and cake meetings' for employees at which they provide information about collective agreements and what the trade union does.

> *These take place towards the end of the year between September and October. We have a three-week campaign during which our regional specialists go to different workplaces, take along coffee and cakes and talk about collective bargaining issues (Workshop Finland)*

In Germany, trade unions focus more on more formal presentations, given either by themselves or experts. These can be a first step to contacting white-collar employees at workplaces with little current trade union presence. Events are reported as being popular.

> *We are sometimes surprised by how many people come who we weren't expecting. To take Bayer as an example, we were expecting 40, but over 100 turned up. Another example was at the head office of a company in Hesse where there was no unionisation at all and was dominated by white-collar workers. We simply took the first step there, organised something, didn't expect anyone to come but got 250 attendees. (Workshop Germany)*

Physical communication can also be accompanied by *digital communication* via social media and websites. In Poland, trade unions use these channels to inform employees and present a positive image.

> *We also have Facebook and our website and we post various types of content there. This reaches a lot of people and I hope it will also help establish a positive image of us as an organisation, as a good trade union organisation. (Workshop Poland)*

In Germany, IG BCE recently developed a new campaign and approach for white-collar workers using a digital network known as KAAT.net. This was based on the assumption that digital communication would be an effective means for contacting white-collar employees.

> *This was important for us given the general importance of digital and the fact that it is particularly important for this target group. We started by creating what you might call an infrastructure that we can all build on and work with. And we wanted to create something that we can not only refer people to but also that they can stumble across when they are just Googling work topics because they have a specific question or something similar. And that's why this website and the newsletter were the starting point. (Workshop Germany)*

The only trade union to have made use of public media in a systematic way, includIng large-scale TV advertising, is the Swedish trade union Unionen. Around a decade ago, Unionen backed up a recruitment drive with a media campaign, investing very large sums in TV advertisements. This was maintained for a couple of years but then replaced by advertising on streaming services, based on the assessment that young people, as an important target group, tend to stream rather than watch TV.

> *We were on TV for many years. We've now abandoned it because this target group no longer watches TV. They watch streaming services and that's why we buy space on these. So this is I would say 80 to 85 percent a media buying process. (Workshop Sweden)*

The predominant view among workshop participants, however, was that the most effective way to contact white-collar employees is presence at the workplace. Apart from the events organised by the trade unions mentioned above, this is the job of shop stewards, other union activists or works councils. The task is to make contact and initiate conversations about whatever might be of interest to these employees. In other words: local trade union sections have to become active or be activated to take on this task.

5.4.3 Activation of trade union sections

Widening the spread and level of activity of local trade union sections or works councils is a third pattern of practices closely connected to workplace dialogue and information. Recruitment is much more difficult without a presence at the workplace, as the trade unionists at the Swedish workshop emphasised.

> *Even when we're talking about recruiting members, it's important to have local representatives because you increase workplace visibility. It's much easier to recruit new members, if you have good people at company level. (Workshop Sweden)*

This is one of the reasons – besides the need for shop stewards to negotiate local collective agreements – why the Swedish trade union Unionen has begun a campaign to increase the number and spread of their active shop stewards in company-level 'trade union clubs'. This initiative is intended both to motivate members to become active lay trade unionists and help sustain the position of trade union clubs, coverage of which declined from 51% to 46% of workplaces between 2013 and 2019 (Kjellberg 2023, 1073).

> *Our biggest challenge at the moment, I would say, is getting more union representatives. We currently have a quite aggressive goal of increasing local union representatives from around the 30,000 we have now to 50,000 by 2027. (Workshop Sweden)*

The main means for reaching this target is an 'onboarding process' for trade union members. During the first six months of membership, these are offered digital learning tools to help them to learn about the trade union and its activities. At the same time, usage of these tools is measured and members accrue points depending on the level of their activities. The more points they obtain, the more they will be classified as engaged and 'loyal' and will be addressed by other trade union activists or union regional offices to become active trade unionists themselves.

> *You get points for the level of engagement. The higher the engagement the more points you get, and the more we try to get you to be more engaged. So, this is all about usage data. We can categorise members into one of these segments: the passive segment, which covers pretty well everyone; the active segment; and a loyal segment. (Workshop Sweden)*

The union's eight regional offices also play an important role. In addition to collective bargaining, the regional level is responsible for supporting and activating union clubs. These activities are performed by officials termed 'developers'.

> *We have teams at the regional office and a role known as a 'developer' there. Their job is to activate members to become local union representatives. Sometimes we have what we call leads and they will follow these up. (Workshop Sweden)*

Active trade union clubs are regarded by Unionen as the main element in both recruitment and retention. While the current strategy is focused on recruitment, it also addresses retention, and beyond that how members can be motivated to become active. In this sense, Unionen has been tackling the challenge of what happens once organising has ended, one of the key problems identified in the literature associated with a 'pure' organising model (Markowitz (1998).

This is why the trade union has abandoned its former practice of holding recruitment weeks twice a year in which union officials went to companies and tried to recruit members. This practice was part of the successful recruitment campaign that Unionen launched about a decade ago and has maintained since then. However, closer analysis revealed that it was both very expensive and not especially effective.

We used to mobilise twice a year and everyone at Unionen went out to recruit people. And we had big marketing campaigns. That was good. But when we started to crunch the numbers there wasn't much difference. Recruitment wasn't that much better. And it was much more expensive. (Workshop Sweden)

Recruitment is now regarded as an ongoing task for trade union clubs. For Unionen's marketing department, the critical factor is continuous visibility at the workplace, not short-term campaigns. This is why activating trade union clubs has become a core goal of union activity. The more active they are, the more visible they become, and the more attractive trade union membership becomes for employees.

What the findings showed was that that it's better to be out and doing the groundwork, not recruiting. Just doing their work. Just helping people, being seen, being positive. I think we have something like 15,000 workplace meetings per year, something like that. Could that be 20,000? That would be better for recruitment than doing this twice a year and doing a lot of marketing on it. It's better to be seen and be seen in a positive way a lot all year round rather than twice a year. (Workshop Sweden)

At the same time, addressing white-collar employees calls for shop stewards to be able and willing to take this task on. The more widespread employee interest representation at workplace level is, the more favourable the conditions for active organising; and the more active they are, the more successful they can be at organising. In this sense, training is an important precondition for shop stewards or works councils to be successful, as stressed by the CGC union in the French workshop.

People need to be trained, trained in trade unionism, trade union training that is specific, a basis for trade union delegates for the struggle on the ground. Is it not important just to be there, but to be in real contact with people – to listen, to know the problems on the ground. Information also plays a role. And to suggest to the employees that there are opportunities for events at which they can raise questions and have them answered. (Workshop France)

However, going to workplaces and communicating with employees is a time-consuming activity, especially as elected workplace union representatives or work councillors have many other things to do and often little time to do them in. For this reason, in Finland the trade union Pro has introduced a new structure at workplace level alongside shop stewards. These so called 'club leaders' do not have the duties of shop stewards and can focus on organising. The union also provides some financial benefits to make the role attractive and which represents a form of investment in organising.

We have created a separate department at workplace level with staff who work alongside shop stewards. Existing members at the workplace have the right to choose one person, a Pro 'Club Leader'. Although these individuals do not have the same rights as shop stewards and don't negotiate with employers, they represent a 'right arm' for stewards because these are very busy with their own work as well as dealing with workplace issues. The role of club leaders is to help recruit new members. And we've given them similar benefits to shop stewards so they have something to show for it. (Workshop Finland)

Trade unions that organise both blue- and white-collar employees face the additional challenge of the how to deal with the *representation of white-collar employees in local representative arrangements*. The issue is not just whether such local representative bodies exist, but whether white-collar employees can be found who are willing and able to get involved. The Spanish trade union UGT has been very pro-active in tackling this problem by encouraging its trade union sections to identify members who are willing to take on the role of coordinating this work. At the time the Spanish workshop was held, UGT had some 400 of these workplace coordinators.

If there are no representatives and coordinators for technicians and senior employees we try to encourage them to find someone. Of course, they are the best people to know who are the most suitable and willing people for this. There's a phrase I use a lot: nobody will represent your rights better than you yourself. And if you don't join the UGT, you won't achieve anything. If a company employs only technicians and senior staff, then we have to say to them, 'Yes, why don't you name someone among yourselves to act as coordinator, why don't you choose someone or ask someone to be a contact person for the UGT in your company'. (Workshop Spain)

In Germany, the problem of representation is even more complex as workplace-level representation is the responsibility of works councils which are, at least formally, independent of trade unions. This requires trade unions to maintain good relationships with works councils, as well as secure a high level of union membership on the part of works council members, to make sure that white-collar employees are represented on works councils and encouraged to get engaged in union recruitment.

German unions' experiences in dealing with this set of problems have been mixed at best. In the workshop, IG BCE noted that having senior managers ('AT employees') on works councils and their committees is generally a positive factor. Nonetheless, what role they can play depends on the general stance of the works councils towards the trade union and whether management is welcoming or suspicious towards senior staff being engaged in works council activity.

What can play an important role is whether you have someone or, in the best case, several people, on the works council who are AT-employees themselves, who know the problems at first hand, who are socialised into that culture and so on. That makes communication immediately much easier. Corporate cultures also play a big role; issues such as how easy it is to deal with each other in the company and whether it might be considered dangerous to be seen near the works council office or something similar. (Workshop Germany)

This is why IG Metall has highlighted the need to convince its works councillors that recruiting white-collar employees is an important first step towards successful workplace organising. One of the reasons is that works councils enjoy a higher degree of employee trust than trade union officials, who might come from outside the company and not be known personally. Activity by works councils internally at the workplace is more likely to be successful than interventions by external trade union actors.

In fact, that's almost the main aim, to win over works councils. Because if I have to sign something and pay money, such as membership dues, who do I trust if they tell you it's a good thing, not a union official for certain... The works council actually has a great deal of influence here because if I, as an employee, am approached by the works council, it's clearly very different in terms of a relationship of trust. (Workshop Germany)

White-collar employees continue to be underrepresented on works councils at workplaces with both blue- and white-collar workers. The workshops identified two tasks in such workplaces: the first is encouraging more white-collar employees to get involved on works councils; the second is to remove the cultural barriers between the two groups of employees. This also included encouraging blue-collar works councillors to take an interest in white-collar issues and pluck up the courage to visit white-collar areas and talk with the employees there.

White-collar works council members are clearly still in the minority, even in companies where there is a high proportion of white-collar employees... I think the task is to win colleagues from the white-collar areas, who know the issues, who are, so to speak, the colleagues, the shop stewards, but also at the same time to inspire blue-collar works councillors to get involved in white-collar areas. (Workshop Germany)

5.4.4 Younger employees and students

A fourth pattern of practice which is very common among the trade unions in our sample countries was *focusing on younger employees and students,* either in form of youth programmes or developing a trade unions presence on university campuses.

In Finland, trade unions are doing both things. For example, they have agreements with universities that allow them to be on campus, contact students and inform them about trade unions and the relevance of collective bargaining.

> *We have these universities, that we have contracts with and part of our organisation goes there to talk about labour issues in Finland and collective bargaining. (Workshop Finland)*

The trade union Pro has also developed a programme to attract younger white-collar employees, mainly in the form of a temporary reduction in membership dues. This represents a form of investment for the trade union as these lower dues do not cover the average cost per member. However, Pro argues that the investment is worthwhile as a means of anticipating the expected and imminent fall in income from dues as baby boomers retire.

> *We have a new programme that started this year. We're specifically targeting young employees – that is, under 36 years of age, who can join Pro on reduced dues of 99 euros. . … It's too cheap, our services cost much more than that. But we need new members and have to attract them somehow. And once you're in Pro, you just pay the 99 euro per annum for the first couple of years and you get all the same services and members benefits as a so-called normal member. After that, you start paying the usual 1.25 percent of your income. (Workshop Finland)*

This initiative has been rather successful. According to the Finish trade unionists, more than 5000 young white-collar employees have joined the trade union since the start of the programme.

Trade union presence at universities in Sweden has taken various forms. Until recently, Unionen employed students on part-time contracts as campus recruiters. Although this approach is still practiced by other Swedish trade unions, Unionen has dropped it in favour of two other approaches. The first is based on an alternative strategy in which the union cooperates with a private company that offers discounts on various products for students. This company undertakes an annual campus tour which is promoted as a major event at which Unionen is also present.

> *So, we get to meet all the students and talk to them. We have happening, and have games, and then we try to recruit them. (Workshop Sweden)*

Unionen also organises its own campus events during which organisers from the union's sales department visit universities several times a year.

The second approach is a new service available via Unionen's website. This allows users to specify a job they are looking for, with the associated software then identifying the median salary that can be expected for this job together with information on companies that currently have relevant vacancies. Students who apply via the website need to become a member to gain access to the vacancy.

> *So now you know your salary. And how much demand there is for this job. You could be a conference social media specialist at some company called Qvesarum. You can be project managing, whatever. But if you want to apply for it [through the system], you have to become a member. (Workshop Sweden)*

Establishing a trade union presence at universities is also practised by trade unions in Germany and Spain, with specific strategies for attracting students or young and highly-qualified workers. In France, the trade union CGT organises information events at the workplace for younger white-collar employees within the first two years of their recruitment in order to inform them about the trade union and make contact with them.

> *For young employees, newcomers to the company, we organise these information events for them within two years of their recruitment. (Workshop France)*

In Romania, the BNS trade union has installed a youth council at its highest administrative level in order to give young employees a voice in the organisation. It has also applied for funds to train young trade unionists to enable them to attract and organise young employees on a more systematic basis.

> *We submitted this proposal for European funds to the Ministry of Development and this will hopefully deliver some European aid to train our young people in trade union activities. If we get these funds, the project will run for over two years. We have a group of 28 people who can eventually become trainers and promoters of the union and union activity if they attract more young people into the unions. (Workshop Romania)*

5..4.5 Trade union campaigns

Campaigns, the fifth pattern of practice, are strategic approaches developed at central level to mobilise resources and approaches for attracting white-collar employees. Campaigns can have different foci and draw on a range of resources. In Spain, the UGT's campaigns focus mainly on workplace union elections, during which union officials will step up their presence at the workplace in order to inform and communicate with white-collar employees.

> *We also carry out campaigns during trade union elections, perhaps not so much in a big way, but we've always tried to approach technical staff in the various departments to see what we could do. For example, we've always done everything we can to keep white-collar staff up-to-date with news and show that we can offer a whole range of services. We've gradually made progress and improved our image… And I think it's also important for employees who might think we're somehow off somewhere in our remote tower. Yes, so we have tried to carry out this work of sensitisation step by step. (Workshop Spain)*

A very different type of campaign was developed by the Swedish trade union Unionen. Of all the various approaches reported in the workshops, this was perhaps the most comprehensive in terms of resources and the range of instruments deployed. Unionen launched the campaign in the early-2010s with the aim of boosting recruitment to meet a defined target. It comprised a range of measures – including those noted in the sub-sections of this chapter – such as new organisational structures, additional unemployment benefits, a market analysis of target groups, and a media campaign with TV advertising. This type of all-encompassing campaign required huge investments by the trade union as highlighted above.

The German campaigns lay somewhere between these two extremes in terms of resources committed. For IG Metall, white-collar campaigns are based on specific themes and are developed and organised by the head office departments for white-collar employees. From there, they are passed down to regional ('Bezirke') and local level ('Geschäftsstellen') for use in workplaces. In recent years, IG Metall has initiated two such campaigns, one on working from home, now wound up, and one on 'new work' that began in 2023.

Part of the campaign 'Working from Home must be Fair' consisted of quite basic things that could be used by employees at home or at their workplaces, such as Zoom backgrounds or pencils. The main

instrument, however, was an employee survey that could be adapted to specific workplace circumstances and was to be organised by the works councils. Survey results were analysed by IG Metall and returned to works councils and local trade union offices. They then could be used for communication to employees and in negotiations with management over local agreements on WFH. This also gave IG Metall access to empirical findings about what employees felt about WFH.

> *We prepared an online survey, but made it customisable. In other words, we told the office we had a survey and invited them to take a look if they had a company where it might be useful. We can always adapt it. But there was an issue of scalability. Not everything was adaptable, only a part. We only had one person in the team who worked on the whole thing and it's a lot of work to adapt such surveys. We think we generated almost 30,000 data sets in total, so it went pretty well and the response rates were always high, between 50 and 70 % which is of course fantastic for a survey like this. (Workshop Germany)*

5.4.6 Employee participation

For IG Metall's campaign organisers *employee* or *member participation* is the most important aspect of trade union campaigns. Participation brings the trade union – and works council – closer to employees in two respects. First, employees understand that their opinion is important and that they are taken seriously as experts in their own work and working conditions; at the same time, basing negotiating demands on the expressed views of employees raises the legitimacy of the collective actors. Employee participation in trade union matters is, therefore, seen as a crucial factor in membership retention and activation once organising campaigns are over (Markowitz 1998).

In this sense, employee participation can be regarded as a pattern of organising white-collar employees in its own right. Surveys on employee opinions, experiences or attitudes are an important instrument in a continuum of various forms of participation that can be used to attract employees. Other forms might be round tables and working groups with employees or workplace departmental meetings at which specific problems can be discussed. The wide range of participation opportunities was highlighted in the German workshop:

> *We have many points of contact, from works meetings to the works council to surveys. The most important thing is actually individual dialogue. (Workshop Germany)*

Forms of participation were also reported in other countries, although they do not seem to be as systematic as was the case at IG Metall. In Poland, the OPZZ organised employee surveys in a subsidiary of a multinational company following an initiative by shop stewards.

> *We also have questionnaires that we distribute to employees, where we ask them, for example, about their preferences on pay rises… For example, I drew up something like this, suggested four levels of increase and then the employees responded and we got a result, a result that was good for everyone, both for blue-collar and salaried employees. (Workshop Poland)*

5.4.7 Marketing Department

Most of the patterns of organising analysed so far, with the exception of the broad campaign at Unionen, were run independently from the main organisational structures of the trade unions that undertook them. The only organisational precondition for developing white-collar initiatives seems to be that trade unions recognise that organising white-collar employees is an important goal and that they have a sufficient officials and resources to engage with this issue. Working together in a specific department for white-collar issues might increase efficiency as this enables officials to develop common goals and strategies.

There were two organisational approaches to white-collar organising in our country sample that seemed to be more advanced than this in terms of resource investment: firstly, establishing a marketing department; and, secondly, setting up separate organising departments. Each requires professional skills that are not part of the traditional trade union work.

A marketing department is a unique phenomenon in our research sample and was only found at the Swedish trade union Unionen. This has a staff of eight union officials plus a department head. While the department covers a range of activities, the most important is developing a marketing strategy for organising. The core assumption behind this is that the trade union and union membership are products to sell and that unions need to pay attention to its 'value chain' of awareness, engagement, conversation, onboarding and income protection insurance.

> *We talk about awareness, engagement, conversation, onboarding, how to develop and keep income protection insurance. We have a very systematic structure: how to get a net profit every year. We know we have to recruit about 60,000 to 70,000 members each year, as we lose about 50,000. Half of those we can actually get to stay, and half we can't – they die, change their jobs within their corporate hierarchy, and so on. So, we work in a very, very systematic way over this value chain: how to get new members and how to get them to stay. (Workshop Sweden)*

The trade union is regarded as a brand, and the value of the brand depends on consumer recognition. Unionen's activities are based on a market analysis that classifies employees into different groups; one looking for security, one driven by community and caring for others, and a third group that believes in its own resources and capabilities. Given that this third group would be difficult to organise, or only with disproportionate effort, Unionen concentrates on the first two groups – security and community.

> *So, we know what the drivers are in different segments of the market, and our matching offer is security and community. And that's where we think the biggest potential for new recruitment lies. And this has been proven for some years now. So, we don't even try to target the carefree ones or the dynamic ones, because they are too expensive – and too few. (Workshop Sweden)*

Unionen has also identified three main services it can offer to employees: unemployment insurance, support on pay claims, and support in the event of workplace problems. The task of the union is to sell these products and be more convincing and more timely than potential competitors, be this other trade unions, lawyers or online platforms such as LinkedIn. Unionen conducts regular analyses using a professional market research organisation. This enables problems to be identified and practices questioned and adapted.

> *We have a marketing tracker, so we look at this every month to see what is going on, what we change. What should we do? What are we bad at? What is the gap? And so on. This is done very systematically and we try to know exactly what the barriers are, what the drivers are. How should we talk to them? (Workshop Sweden)*

Activities are measured in terms of key performance indicators (KPI). The union has defined two basic goals: getting more members and getting more local representatives from these members. These goals lead on to more specific measures and objectives, such as advertising and its visibility, the visibility of workplace trade union representatives, and the trade union's profile in the media. The work on KPIs and goals is structured in teams that work on different aspects, such as recruitment, retention or students. The teams are composed of officials from different departments, including a team leader and a member of the marketing department. Identifying problems that might impede meeting objectives is an important aspect of the work, given that these need to be resolved to make progress within the allotted budgets.

If a problem is identified, the person responsible and the marketer try to find people within the organisation that can fix it. It could be marketing. It could be IT. And then they organise a team to fix it and keep within budget. So, there's a budget and there's a goal. And if they find a problem where fixing it won't lead us to the goal, we – as their managers – won't let them do it. Their job is to find things that are goal related and can be met within budget. Then we can allocate resources to it. (Workshop Sweden)

In this respect, the marketing approach includes a rather flexible, cross-functional and team-based organisation that is distinct from unions' traditional departmental structures.

5.4.8 Organising departments

The second organising practice based on organisational innovation is the running of *organising campaigns by trade union organising departments*. The workshops suggested that two organising models can be distinguished. In the first, organising is usually run by the departments responsible for white-collar employees. One example of this is the 'coffee and cake' initiative of the Finish trade union which takes place annually for a couple of weeks and is organised at regional level.

Alongside this rather broad understanding of organising, the second approach is based on professional organising departments or teams. 'Professional 'here means that organising is assigned to organisers who have been trained at union organising academies and who act in line with recognised organising principles, such as targeting goals, mapping cases, talking with employees, identifying grievances, activating employees, escalating conflicts and building trade union structures at the workplace. Although in both of the two cases that adopted this method organising was not confined to white-collar workers – and was not designed to do this – in both instances it served as an important means for supporting white-collar recruitment initiatives.

The Irish trade union SIPTU, which has a long organising tradition, set up an organising department more than 20 years ago. Resources for organising were freed up through organisational reforms but also helped by the establishment of the official Workplace Relations Commission which allows individual employees to submit complaints about alleged contraventions of protective employment legislation and obtain a ruling from an adjudication officer. This option has lifted a considerable and time-consuming burden from union officials, who previously had little time for supporting shop stewards or collective bargaining. Once established, SIPTU's organising department conducted several organising campaigns in different industries. In one of these, focusing on the childcare sector, more than 6,000 workers were recruited and an industry collective agreement negotiated.

These successes have enabled the department to acquire a good reputation among trade unionists. Besides running its own campaigns, the department can also be drawn on for supporting white-collar initiatives in manufacturing. The advantage in this case is that the organiser will be able to stay at a workplace for longer to continue the organising effort.

From my point of view as an industrial organiser, if I go into a workplace where I'm trying to grow the density and also trying to develop the issues, I can actually make a submission through a sector organiser to say 'Well, I need a bit of help from the organizing department', and they then will give me somebody who will come in on the ground with me , and when I have to move, because I have another workplace to go to, they can remain in place for several days trying to build the density. (Workshop Ireland)

The second example is IG Metall in Germany. Here organising as a professional practice started with a campaign in the early-2010s developed by the union's head office in the wind-power sector. Organising was subsequently decentralised in the form of projects that could be applied for by the union's local

and regional units, some of which were aimed at white-collar organising (Haipeter 2016). Organising teams are currently located at regional level and consist of professional organisers who work solely on organising, whether of blue- or white-collar areas. These projects were regarded as rather successful.

> *We can see the results. In general, you can say that wherever there are organising officials, more employees have been organised. In other words, contact helps. And where the focus has been directed at white-collar employees, this is even clearer. Yes, I regularly see the figures and that is very evident. (Workshop Germany)*

However, the trade unionists at the workshop also commented that cooperation and coordination with the organising teams could be better. The problems can be traced back to cultures and patterns of behaviour within the organisation which have held back optimising coordination between departments.

> *Yes, we try to work together as best we can. We currently have an organising department here at head office and we are trying to develop things with them. In general, it has to be said that this cooperation could be much better, also with other departments. (Workshop Germany)*

5.4.9 Collective bargaining

A final trade union practice intended to attract and organise white-collar workers that was mentioned in the workshops is *collective bargaining*. Collective bargaining, as the core purpose of trade unions, has the potential to become a means for white-collar organising provided it is tailored to the interests and working conditions of white-collar workers.

In the case of white-collar trade unions, one might assume that this is their natural business given that they negotiate collective agreements solely for this group. However, according to Unionen in Sweden, collective bargaining can constitute a major incentive to join a trade union for two reasons: first, securing pay increases; and second, and crucially, because it is the trade union that helps achieve these increases. In the Swedish system, agreed industry-level pay increases for white-collar workers are typically defined as a budget, but without any automatic read across to individuals or pay grades. Instead, pay increases depend on how these budgets are distributed between employees at local level, usually via discussion between employees and their superiors. The trade union can support employees in two respects, helping to make membership attractive: first, they negotiate if and how pay increases are implemented at company level; and secondly, they can check whether employers actually pay the agreed increases.

> *You have to break it down to what would it mean at our company? And that would be a task for union representatives to discuss with the employer, and they would also be the ones who make sure the employer actually pays out the whole of the agreed increase, where the collective agreement for that sector says, for example, 3%. (Workshop Sweden)*

Pay increases for white-collar staff are also related to individual performance, with individual rises possibly higher or lower than the average. Performance and pay rises have to be discussed with superiors. Trade union clubs can help employees press their claims in if they disagree with their superior's evaluation.

> *In most of our agreements it says that as a member, you should have a salary discussion with your employer every year where you would discuss your performance. If you disagree with your boss, you can have the union representatives in to help. (Workshop Sweden)*

Performance-based pay is at the core of SIPTU's collective bargaining strategy in Ireland. From a trade union point of view, performance pay is a strategy used particularly by multinational companies to individualise workers. In this respect, SIPTU would simply refuse it if it could. However, given that it exists, the only option seems to be to try and regulate the practice and make it 'accountable'. Negotiating

on performance-based pay might be an organising tool in two respects: first, that the trade union guarantees that everyone will get a pay increase within certain range; and second that the agreement will be negotiated annually so that pay increases take place regularly.

> *So we can then show the white collar workers. There might be a scale of, you know, increases from 2% to 8%, depending on how you perform. We're there shaping that every year we're back in. And making sure that everybody gets an increase. (Workshop Ireland)*

In Germany, the discussion is less about specific components of pay and more about what needs to happen to make collective agreements in general better suited to white-collar employees' needs. A model case for new collective agreements of this kind is a company-level agreement negotiated by IG Metall at the VW IT-subsidiary Cariad. For the first time, this specified flexible pay bands rather than the wage grades that existed previously. Again, the ideas for this model were developed via employee participation.

> *Cariad is a good example of how new collective agreements can be adapted and developed. It's a prime example here because they dared to develop new ideas and work with pay bands with the participation of the people who work there. (Workshop Germany)*

However, collective bargaining innovation of this kind is still rather uncommon. The workshops suggested that trade union negotiating strategies have made only marginal adaptations to the needs and interests of white-collar workers. According to our interviewees, there is a dilemma between the need to develop new forms of regulation but also ensure these do not destabilise existing collective agreements.

> *IG Metall's collective bargaining policy is still very structurally conservative, let's put it that way, so this is really an area where we are very reluctant to experiment, for good reason, because we have our so-called silverware there and we have to make sure that we keep this intact. But we recognise, let me say from the perspective of those responsible for addressing white-collar employees, that it is of course absolutely necessary. (Workshop Germany)*

At one company in Romania, the trade union has negotiated bonuses, an additional monthly salary each year, only for trade union members. This is to attract employees – blue- and white-collar – to become members.

> *Provided there is a high level of union membership and a union representative, they are allowed to negotiate on bonuses. This is provided for by law and is not discriminatory. We have signed an agreement with a company on a pay settlement and a 13th month payment for union members, but to negotiate something like this you need a lot of employees in the union.*

5.5 Trade union resources

The resources available for attracting and organising white-collar employees are both a precondition for and a potential obstacle to union strategies towards this group. While the overall amount of resources is a function of the number of members and the level of union dues – plus any financial support from the state – the critical issue is how much of these resources trade unions are willing to invest in attracting and organising white-collar employees, given their other priorities. Trade unions are complex organisations with a variety of goals, tasks and interests, and white-collar organising has to compete with these for budgets and staff. This problem is, of course, less acute in occupational trade unions, such as Pro in Finland and CGC in France that exclusively represent white-collar employees.

Although all the trade unions that took part in the workshops stated that organising white-collar workers was seen as an urgent and primary goal, they noted that only meagre resources were available for this.

Apart from the headquarters level, already discussed above, the problem of resources was even more pressing at local level, where the resources of regional or local trade union secretaries, who operate outside workplaces, were expected to support company-level trade union sections or works councils and implement campaigns developed at head office; on the other hand, resources can be mobilised at companies and workplaces by trade union sections or works councils (for an overview see Table 11).

TABLE 11: Trade union resources and challenges

	Resources and challenges
Finland	• Strengthening resources of shop stewards
France	• Low level of time-off (State Law from 2019)
Germany	• Lack of resources of trade union
Ireland	• Lack of resources trade union
Poland	• Lack of resources trade union • Low level of time-off
Romania	• Lack of resources trade union • Low level of time-off
Spain	• Lack of resources trade union
Sweden	• Strengthening trade union sections and members

For trade union sections and works councils, resources depend on two main conditions: firstly, the amount of time-off for lay trade unionists; and, secondly, the ways in which local trade union sections or works councils can activate white-collar workers to join representative bodies and take an active part in them, as with the coordinators in Spain.

The only trade union that reported an increase in resources was the Finish trade union Pro. Pro was able to implement its strategy of boosting recruitment by installing 'Pro Club Leaders' as a new department within local trade union sections. The Swedish trade union Unionen has also made increasing the number of active union representatives and trade union clubs a strategic priority in response to the decline in local trade union representation in the late-2010s. The precondition for both activities in Finland and Sweden was access to the resources to develop and conduct these initiatives.

In all the other countries, trade unionists emphasised resource problems. Two main problems were highlighted at the workshops: a lack of time-off for trade union representatives in the trade union sections and a lack of resources for trade union officials whose role is to support trade union activists at workplace level.

In Poland and Romania, trade union lay activists have to do a lot of their trade union work after hours due to the low levels of time-off.

> So it's partly done during my working hours, but also partly after hours because my usual workload is quite high and my supervisor often prevents me from doing a lot of things that I would like to do for the union. (Workshop Poland)

In France too, workshop participants complained about low levels of time-off for active trade unionists in companies. These are lay local union officials and are allowed varying amounts of time-off for trade union matters. In 2019, the already meagre amounts of time-off were further reduced under new legislation.

> *This law has really not helped us because there are now far fewer union reps who are employed full time. That's a problem for union organisation. So we find ourselves with a lower number of union reps and yet we have to try and attract more people and motivate more workers. (Workshop France)*

Scarce time resources also reduce the union's capacity to look after white-collar employees. Our trade union experts also reported that workplace or company-level trade union sections are very hesitant to develop initiatives focusing on white-collar employees on their own; instead, they need support and advice from higher union levels, such as regional units which oversee and support local sections or works councils.

However, union officials are also confronted by the problem of limited resources, given their other responsibilities and the fact that they spend most of their time dealing with problems at company level, as one of the experts in the German workshop outlined.

> *Our day-to-day work is characterised by the fact that we go wherever our support is needed - as a full-time official, as a specialist, as a strategist or as a psychologist. In other words, I might have an issue at Company A and go there, spend a lot of time there, talk to works councils, if we have any, to the shop stewards, if we have any, try to organise the solution, or support the works council in doing so., And once the problem's been solved I can devote myself to other tasks again. In other words, I can't go to each of my workplaces at least three times a week. I can't manage that. (Workshop Germany)*

At the same time, maintaining contacts is regarded as indispensable in interactions with white-collar employees, who are held to be more demanding in terms of expecting ongoing communication and support and who want trade union officials to be responsive to their requests. This puts full-time officials in a dilemma, given their scarce time resources and wide variety of responsibilities.

> *The important thing is that contact is maintained, especially for white-collar areas, because they demand it and say 'If I'm investing in you, I want to see performance, I want you to call me back, I want you to come over to the company and I want you to support me'. And if you've awakened the feeling that IG Metall is accessible and cares, then they also have a positive image of you and will be willing to become members. (Workshop Germany)*

These contradictions are all the more acute in countries with lower levels of trade union resources than those available to a trade union such as IG Metall. In Poland or Romania, the umbrella associations of enterprise-based trade unions do not have any resources at all for initiatives focusing on white-collar employees. In comparison, in Spain or France the level of trade union resources is comparatively high. In the case of the Spanish UGT, there are regional coordinators who can work on the white-collar issue and support company-level trade union sections. However, there is only one coordinator per region, and not all regions have coordinators as yet – as well as having other things to do. Resources are still far from sufficient.

> *So with what we have, that's obviously not enough. The way we are structured in the UGT, we have coordinators for each autonomous region, plus the umbrella organisations. But we still lack coordinators in some regions, and they often lack the time to deal with this task as coordinators because they also have other tasks to fulfil. Yes, if I could choose whether I wanted money or staff, I would want more staff for this work. That would be even more important for me than financial resources.*

6. Summary and conclusions

What are the main findings of the BEREP-project and what practical conclusions can be drawn from them? Both the primary research, in the form of the online survey and workshops, and the secondary data provide a number of important insights into the characteristics, working conditions, and attitudes to work and careers of white-collar employees in manufacturing industry. Significantly, given the rationale for this study and uniquely in terms of comparative research, they also provide information on white-collar employees' views of trade unions, closing a major research gap. The knowledge and practical experience of the trade union experts from the eight sample countries made available in the workshops also provided an overview of trade union structures and resources in manufacturing, their strategies towards white-collar employees, and the organising approaches they have used.

The significance of and increase in the *proportion of white-collar workers* in manufacturing revealed in the analysis is the starting point for understanding how important such trade union strategies are becoming and will become. In five of the eight countries analysed – Finland, France, Germany, Ireland and Sweden – around half or more of employees in manufacturing are already white-collar. With the exception of Romania and France, the proportion of white-collar employees in the workforce has risen significantly over the past ten years in all the countries included the study. In Sweden, this increase was around 20 percentage points, in Spain and Poland around 10 percentage points each, in Finland around seven percentage points and in Germany and Ireland around five percentage points. The SOEP figures for Germany – based on the employee self-assessment – indicate a dramatic shift in ratio of white- to blue-collar employees over time, with the latter accounting for 70% of employees in industry in 2021.

The increase in the proportion of white-collar workers has been accompanied by both an increase in female employment in this originally male-dominated sector and a shift in skill levels towards tertiary qualifications, the precise meaning of which will depend on national education systems. Within the broad group of white-collar employees, the most important occupational group are technicians (with tertiary level vocational training qualifications), associated professionals (an intermediate group) and professionals (holding academic degrees). The growing importance of professionals – but also the consistently high proportion of technicians – is likely to be closely linked to trends such as the digitalisation and greening of production and increased product complexity. In contrast to this increase in technical experts, the proportion of white-collar employees with managerial tasks has been falling in most countries. This a function of the changes in work organisation summed up in terms such as 'the lean office' and 'agile work'.

In terms of the working conditions of white-collar employees, *working hours* are of central concern. Our research indicated two gaps in this area. Firstly, a gap between contractual and actual working hours. In all the countries analysed, actual working hours were significantly higher than contractual hours, albeit against the backdrop of a slight overall decline in hours worked. Nonetheless, certain groups of employees continue to be subject to high or very high actual working hours. And secondly, a discrepancy between actual and desired working hours. Many full-time employees expressed a wish to work between 35 and 40 hours, with a significant proportion wanting to work less than 35 hours.

These ambivalences also applied to other aspects of *working conditions*. Intense and high-speed work and tight deadlines were perceived as stressful by many white-collar employees in all the countries in the study, and in most of them by a majority. In Poland and France, over 30% of the respondents in the EWCS reported physical exhaustion, while in Sweden, Germany and Spain the figure was only slightly lower. At the same time, the vast majority of white-collar employees in this survey rated their working conditions favourably in other respects. This applies in particular to aspects such as autonomy, recognition, the opportunity to contribute their experience and skills, and the meaningfulness of their work. According

to the research literature, these points are at the centre of the demands and expectations that white-collar employees have of their work. The experiences of employees were less positive on two other important requirements, namely career prospects and employee autonomy. According to the EWCS, career prospects were rated as positive by less than half. And instructions from superiors, customer requirements and IT software specifications were seen as external exigencies that restricted autonomy by more than half of employees.

The BEREP survey confirmed the ambivalences of working conditions for the three countries covered (France, Finland, Germany), adding further both depth and widening them to include important additional aspects of attitudes towards trade unions. White-collar employees were relatively satisfied with their pay, opportunities to organise their working hours in line with their needs, the meaningfulness of their work, the recognition they received and their scope for autonomy. However, although this was true of a large proportion of white-collar employees, it did not apply across-the board. Some more detailed findings are also of significance. For example, although white-collar employees expressed high levels of satisfaction with their work-life balance, around half also articulated a need for greater scope to reconcile work and free time. A substantial proportion of employees also complained of time pressures at work and an increase in their tasks and the demands placed on them. There were also divided views on issues such as training opportunities and career prospects, with at least half of respondents critical of the opportunities their employers provided.

In addition, the survey offered new findings on how white-collar work is evolving. Modern forms of work organisation, such as project work or agile work, are now just as widespread as working with IT devices and software, cloud-based working and cross-border networking. It was also in the area of these new working practices that the greatest differences between countries emerged, above all between Finland, as a pioneer of new and digital forms of working, and France and Germany, where such methods are still much less widespread.

In contrast to the secondary data, the BEREP survey aimed to collect data on *collective bargaining coverage* and *trade union membership*. While the proportion of respondents in workplaces covered by collective agreements was very high in France (100%) and Finland (almost 80%), it was only around 50% in Germany. By contrast, the proportion of trade union members among survey respondents in Finland is by far the highest, followed by Germany and France. These data reflect the overall differences in collective bargaining coverage and trade union membership between the countries. It is interesting to note that in Germany the proportion of younger white-collar employees among union members is relatively high, whereas in Finland the proportion of women members was significantly higher than that of men.

The survey also indicated that white-collar employees generally had a positive view of trade unions; in all three countries surveyed, well over half of respondents agreed that trade unions were of high general relevance and, with slightly lower proportions, of high relevance to them personally. A closer look at how trade unions are seen suggested that white-collar employees have both positive and negative images of unions, however. While trade unions were seen by a majority of respondents as collective actors who strike too often or who are too focussed on the interests of blue-collar workers, a majority also saw them as progressive forces, as fighters for workers' pay, and as defenders of important concerns and interests.

White-collar workers also expected trade unions to place more emphasis on these latter tasks and in particular the negotiation of collective agreements and support for employees in disputes with employers, as a force for creating new jobs, as campaigners for job security and resisting offshoring, as promoters of workplace health and safety, as guarantors of pay rises, as campaigners against discrimination and for gender equality, and finally as promoters of flexible working hours and a good work-life balance. Trade unions are already addressing these issues, but it would certainly be worthwhile communicating these achievements and priorities more intensively.

Given how much white-collar employees were seen to value certain services offered by trade unions, such as legal advice and insurance provisions, there is a strong case for foregrounding these schemes in recruitment materials in a more direct and comprehensive way than previously. At the same time, workplace trade union presence is also extremely important, given that employees are much less likely to join a trade union where union membership is not a social norm and no contact has been made by trade unions. In this context, it should be noted that only around half of the respondents in each of the three countries stated that they had had contact with a trade union, implying this was not the case for the other half. The presence of trade unions in workplaces is based on three pillars: physical presence, written and visible presence through posters or leaflets, and digital presence, with digital presence still lagging somewhat behind the other two.

Among the reasons for deciding to join a trade union, the most salient appears to be the general importance attributed to trade unions. However, two other important factors cited were trade unions' ability to deal with conflicts, and specifically their role in collective bargaining disputes, and conflicts over job security. Help with individual problems was regarded as less important. The reasons mentioned for ceasing membership included employees not feeling that their interests were being represented, being able to benefit from collective agreements as free riders, their employers not being subject to collective bargaining, or that they considered other forms of interest representation, such as works councils, as more important. Differences between different categories of white-collar employee do not alter the results substantially. Differences of age and gender were relevant on issues such as work-life balance. Union members were also both more critical of their working conditions and more positive about trade unions. However, positive attitudes about trade unions are still much more prevalent than trade union membership itself, suggesting that trade union organising can build on a positive foundation on the part of a large proportion of white-collar employees. Given these findings, what can be said about trade unions' efforts to attract and organise white-collar employees in Europe? Four findings from the workshops stand out.

Firstly, trade unions operate in very *different institutional environments* with diverse arrangements for employee representation and trade union organisation. These institutional conditions can both restrict and enable their capacities to represent, attract and organise white-collar workers. Under a single channel or mixed system, trade unions are present at the workplace, at least at those workplaces where they have trade union sections. This makes it easier for them to implement strategies at workplace level as they have a direct contact to their local activists and representatives. The position is different in dual systems with formally independent works councils that might need more persuasion to see the relevance of union recruitment in general and new ways of engaging with white-collar employees at the workplace in particular.

Additionally, workplace trade union sections can contact white-collar employees directly as trade unionists, whereas works councillors first have to be elected and then communicate with employees in a second role as lay trade union activists. At the same time, works councils have codetermination rights that allow them to represent white-collar interests very effectively provided they have decided to engage actively with this group.

Trade unions in pluralist systems usually have fewer resources in terms of finance or personnel than their counterparts in systems with no or little inter-union competition; while the former have to compete for members, the latter can organise all employees in an industry or occupational group. Occupational trade unions for white-collar employees also have the advantage that they can devote all their resources to representing white-collar staff. And in contrast to trade unions organised along industry lines, they do not have to overcome cultural differences between blue- and white-collar workers and their respective styles of representation.

This does not mean that occupational trade unions have necessarily been more successful in organising white-collar workers, however, although the high union density in Finland and Sweden and the success

of organising campaigns in these countries do point in this direction. By contrast, the French CGC, as an occupational trade union, has been much less successful in terms of building membership, suggesting that high union density is not a natural feature of occupational trade unions. The Swedish and Finnish trade unions have also been able to make use of the scope for supplementary unemployment benefit that exists in these countries' welfare systems. These funds are a key incentive to join trade unions that unions in other countries in our sample do not have at their disposal.

Secondly, the countries covered in this study share many common features in terms of the trends and problems in white-collar *working conditions*. These are centred on skills, autonomy at work, career perspectives, employment, and pay. Although skills development in the sense of continuous training is highly appreciated, trade unionists noted the problems than can arise when this is made compulsory. Combined with a demanding workload, this can cause pressure and stress especially for older workers. At the same time, there was a feeling that employers did not offer enough training opportunities. A similar situation applies to autonomy at work. Although autonomy has been identified as one of the main factors contributing to a good working environment, it can become a burden if it is coupled with output-related forms of performance control which may fuel self-exploitation by workers who extend their working hours or step up work intensity to meet targets. A strong focus on career development and promotion can have the same effects where it leads employees to intensify their work efforts to climb the corporate hierarchy or get a better job at a bigger company.

The incidence of employment problems for white-collar employees varied considerably by country and in particular depended on the labour market situation and where employing companies were located in value chains. Employment security was a much more salient concern in countries where companies were not faced with skill shortages and occupied lower positions in global value chains, with associated dependence on investment decisions by foreign multinational companies. White-collar employees might also consider that their pay differential to blue-collar workers was too small, or that pay growth was excessively constrained by collective bargaining systems that tied pay increases to corporate competitiveness.

Trade unionists in most of the countries in our sample also highlighted the cultural distance between white-collar employees and trade unions, which was at its widest for employees with the highest skill levels. This was attributed to the fact that many highly-skilled employees knew little about trade unions, felt able to look after themselves, and viewed trade unions, if at all, in terms of a calculus of the costs and benefits of membership. To some extent, trade unions were seen as organisations for blue-collar workers only.

Thirdly, trade unions have developed diverse approaches to *attracting and organising* white-collar employees. The most common and important of these is establishing direct contact with white-collar employees *at the workplace* and demonstrating the relevance of trade unions as representatives of their interests. This might prove to be a long-term process and calls for what the Spanish trade unionists termed a 'new narrative' about what trade unions are and what their mission is. This approach both requires *activating* trade union sections at the workplace to get into contact with white-collar employees and a *re-composition* of these sections – or works councils – to include white-collar employees as members who, in turn, can build contacts with the wider white-collar workforce and help bridge the cultural divide between trade unions and white-collar staff. This will require, and has required in many cases, mobilising local trade union bodies to adopt a new stance towards white-collar workers and take a more strategic approach to how these bodies are organised. This approach, therefore, is not only about organising white-collar workers but also about ensuring they can be retained, and activated, to work for the union.

Trade unions in all the countries covered had developed *digital forms of communication* via websites and social media, and many of them had organised workplace information events for white-collar employees,

intended to address this group's desire for information about business developments and their own employment. Some trade unions had also developed *thematic campaigns* to attract white-collar workers which had been rolled out from head office to workplace level. One key criterion for success in these campaigns is the scale of *employee participation* in surveys or workshops, given the presumption that white-collar employees want to be involved and have a voice.

Strategic organising by organising departments is more the exception than the rule in our sample of trade unions and was practiced only by SIPTU in Ireland and IG Metall in Germany. However, strategic organising can be especially important where trade union representation is weak and workplace union density low. Strategic organising is a promising instrument, especially in workplaces where trade unions are absent and where they need to be anchored in the first place. There seems to be scope here for improving cooperation between trade union organising and white-collar departments.

However, strategic organising needs trade unions to invest in skilled organisers and the organisational structures that allow them to run campaigns based on mapping, local groundwork to activate workers, organising conflict, and building frames and alliances. The Swedish trade union Unionen demonstrated an even higher level of investment in its development of a *strategic marketing approach*, accompanied by shifting very substantial resources to marketing campaigns and improving its products (in this case unemployment insurance). Success has proved the rightness of this approach. In no other case, have such massive membership gains been achieved.

Trade unionists at the workshops mentioned two further initiatives for attracting white-collar employees: first, a presence on campuses to inform students about their existence and their services; and second, the development of new forms of collective agreement that either offer extra payments for trade union members or contain new regulations that are better adapted to white-collar workplaces and employment conditions.

Fourthly, and finally, most trade unions are facing serious *resource problems*. In all except occupational unions, white-collar initiatives are one activity alongside others and compete with other strategies and goals. This problem is evident at all levels – workplace, regional and central. At workplace level, trade union sections or works councils have to include attracting white-collar employees into their frames and activities. At the same time, trade union officials at higher levels have to develop initiatives and strategies and support workplace actors in implementing them. At all levels, the actors have many other things to do, and establishing white-collar organising as a core activity is still a long way from being realised. Although all the trade unions in our sample recognised the priority of white-collar organising, implementing this goal, in terms of freeing up appropriate resources, remains a formidable practical challenge.

Given this lack of resources, it is perhaps fortunate that that many of the organising approaches practised by trade unions do not require big investments. Attracting white-collar employees by giving them a voice through encouraging participation in surveys is fairly low-cost and might be reciprocated by drawing in employee expertise or raising the legitimacy of employee representatives. Becoming active and talking to white-collar employees using 'new narratives' or trying to convince them to become active in local trade union sections is something that lay union activists or full-time officials can engage in without requiring too much in the way of monetary investment. The same is true for ensuring that white-collar employees are appropriately represented in trade union organisations, either by forming a department or bringing together active union officials who have expressed an interest in developing strategies and campaigns that might support workplace activities from above. All in all, the workshops illustrated the huge range of different approaches that trade unions can try, either alone or in combination, to attract and organise white-collar employees in ways that are tailored to their needs, institutional conditions and resources.
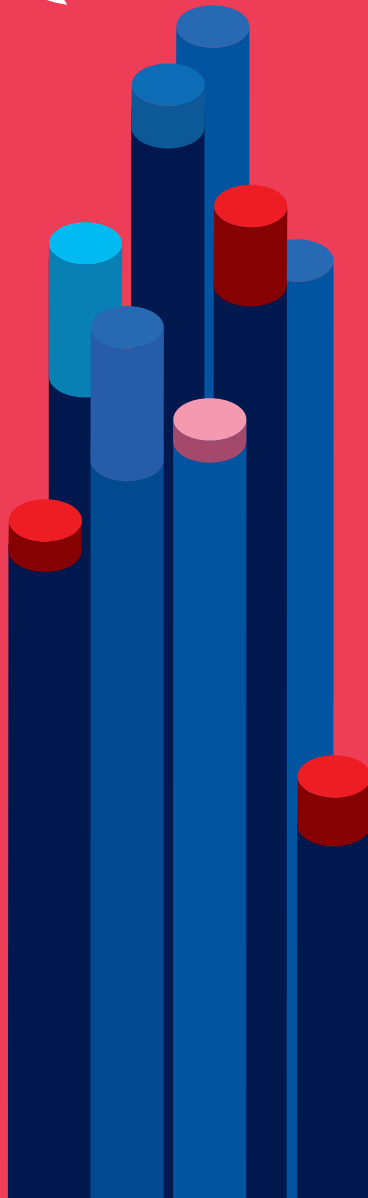
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