BARSERVICE

Comparative Report: Commerce sector

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1. Introduction

This report summarises the key characteristics and trends in collective bargaining in the commerce sector in nine countries: Croatia, Czechia, France, Italy, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Türkiye. In all the studied countries, the commerce sector is relevant for the national economy (for employment and turnover), yet its structure and dynamics differ by country. The comparative analysis below examines the sector's major trends in collective bargaining and potential strategies to seek improvements to strengthen bargaining.

The sectoral identification is limited to the following NACE categories:

- **NACE 45:** activities related to the wholesale and retail trade of motor vehicles and motorcycles, as well as their maintenance and repair.
- **NACE 46:** wholesale trade activities, excluding those involving motor vehicles and motorcycles.
- **NACE 47:** retail trade activities, excluding motor vehicles and motorcycles, and includes the sale of goods in stores, online, or through other means directly to consumers.

2. Sector characteristics

Many countries face overlapping challenges, such as inflationary pressures and the need to adapt to technological advances. Digitalization and the rise of e-commerce have disrupted traditional retail models, compelling both large multinationals and local businesses to invest in online platforms, automation, and modern supply chain management. Furthermore, labour issues such as low wages, high turnover, and skills shortages are recurrent themes across the sector in all 9 studied countries. Despite these commonalities, each country's experience is shaped by local market structure, historical development, and varying degrees of integration into global supply chains.

In several countries, the digital shift is redefining the commerce landscape:

- **Croatia** and **Romania** report an increased adoption of digital channels—with Croatian businesses expanding multichannel sales and Romanian firms investing in self-service and automation—even as consumer habits differ by product category.

- In **Czechia** and **Slovakia**, robust digital platforms and technological innovations such as self-checkout systems and inventory management tools have enhanced operational efficiency, even as foreign retail chains push for higher wages and more competitive digital infrastructures.
- **North Macedonia** is witnessing rapid e-commerce growth, with digital platforms playing a central role in bridging traditional retail with modern logistics.
- **Türkiye** also reflects a diversification in commerce services, though the digital transformation is uneven across sub-sectors, with call centres and retail sales requiring extensive training to navigate new technologies.

Workforce dynamics and the employment structure are also changing and showing notable differences across the studied countries:

- **Croatia** suffers from chronic labour shortages, with estimates indicating a 20% deficit in the workforce needed for daily operations. High turnover and absenteeism—stemming from low wages and poor working conditions—are compounded by difficulties in managing logistics for major retailers.
- **Czechia, France,** and **Italy** show stability in employment in the commerce sector. Yet some disparities occur; for example, in Czechia, wage disparities persist in various segments of the retail sector. France shows a pronounced gender dynamic. 72% of retail workers are women, and part-time contracts are prevalent among female employees.
- In **Serbia**, despite significant employment growth in retail sub-sectors, smaller local businesses struggle with recruitment due to lower salaries and less attractive working conditions.
- In **Slovakia**, the interplay between domestic firms and multinational chains creates a competitive labour market, with foreign operators generally offering higher wages. The divide between the two types of commerce employers occurs also in perceptions of collective bargaining.
- **Türkiye** exhibits a complex employment scenario across the sector with significant informal employment and marked challenges in worker protection. Persistent issues such as long working hours, low wages, and informal employment remain central challenges.

The structure of the commerce sector also varies significantly. **Czechia** and **France** are notable for their early and extensive integration of international retail chains. In Czechia, foreign players dominate the market, a legacy of post-communist restructuring, while France's sector is characterized by a dual structure of vibrant SMEs and dominant corporate groups. In **Italy**, the sector is fragmented, with many small enterprises averaging only a few employees. **Romania, Serbia and Slovakia** exemplify a dual market between large chains and more traditional domestic retail markets or domestic retail chains (e.g. COOP Jednota in Slovakia). This dynamic is reflected in rapid turnover growth and rising productivity despite challenges in labour supply and differences between large foreign chains and domestic retailers on a number of issues, e.g., working time and collective bargaining. Large chains tend to benefit from economies of scale. Finally, **Türkiye** stands out for its sheer scale, with the commerce sector contributing significantly to the country's GDP and jobs.

Across all studied countries, technological innovation is reshaping work processes and competitive dynamics. Investment in digital inventory systems, e-commerce platforms, and automated scheduling is common—from Croatia's attempts to streamline logistics for major department stores to North Macedonia's rapid e-commerce expansion and Slovakia's increasing automation in retail operations. These technologies often bring dual effects: while they reduce the physical burden of work and enhance efficiency, they also heighten job-related stress due to the need for continuous training and the pressure to adapt to new systems. In **Czechia** and **France,** digital transformation is linked with a broader shift towards data analytics and artificial intelligence, which are employed to optimize sales strategies and customer engagement. Nevertheless, the pace of technological adoption varies, particularly among smaller businesses that lack the resources to invest heavily in new technologies.

In summary, the commerce sectors across the studied countries share common challenges—including adapting to digital transformation, managing labour shortages, and contending with large multinational commerce chains—while reflecting distinct national characteristics. Countries like Czechia, Romania, and Slovakia lead in the integration of international retail giants, whereas Italy, Serbia, and Türkiye underscore a more traditional, fragmented market model with significant local participation. The next sections provide an insight into bargaining structures, acknowledging the similarities and differences across these countries – not only in their commerce sectors but also in their national and sectoral bargaining structures and traditions.

3. Current state of collective bargaining

Collective bargaining in the commerce sector varies widely across these nine countries, reflecting differences in institutional frameworks, extension mechanisms, and employer–union relations. While France and Italy demonstrate relatively high sector-wide coverage supported by legal extension, many others—such as Romania, Serbia, and North Macedonia—rely on decentralized bargaining, resulting in patchy coverage and uneven working standards. Recent developments, such as Croatia's new extended sectoral agreement and Slovakia's two multi-employer collective agreements, signal potential for broadening bargaining coverage. However, persistent challenges to bargaining coverage include low union density and fragmented social partner representation. Table 1 summarises the key characteristics of collective bargaining in the commerce sector by country, drawing on country reports within the BARSERVICE project.

The **bargaining landscape presented in the table above differs**, the main difference being the co-existence, or a lack of, company-level bargaining with multi-employer bargaining. Countries with decentralized bargaining include Czechia, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Turkiye. In Croatia, France, Italy and Slovakia company-level bargaining co-exists with coordinated bargaining at the multi-employer or the sectoral level.

In **Czechia**, collective bargaining in the commerce sector is largely decentralized, taking place predominantly at the company level. Multinational retail chains, such as Penny, Albert, and Billa, have granted wage increases through these company-level negotiations, although sectoral agreements continue to be weak. The main trade union, UZO, leads negotiations but lacks comprehensive coverage across the sector. Collective bargaining in **North Macedonia**'s commerce sector takes place mainly at the firm level, resulting in fragmented coverage due to the absence of a robust sectoral agreement. Large retailers hold considerable bargaining power, and smaller or informal enterprises are often left out. Additionally, the rapid growth of e-commerce is evolving faster than current collective bargaining frameworks can accommodate. In **Romania**, collective bargaining is focused at the company level, with no active sectoral agreement in the commerce sector. Major multinationals, such as Carrefour and Metro, do negotiate in-house CBAs, but an imbalance of power is evident: the Employers' Federation of Trade Networks (FPRC) represents about 44% of retail employees, while union membership stands at approximately 5% at the sector level. As a result, the majority of smaller retailers and their employees remain outside the scope of collective bargaining.

Collective bargaining in **Serbia**'s commerce sector is entirely decentralized, with company-level CBAs established in large retail chains like Delhaize, Mercator, and Metro. No sectoral agreement exists, and coverage is estimated at around 10%. Over the past decade, no notable changes have occurred in the actors involved or the bargaining mechanisms employed. Finally, in **Türkiye**, the commerce sector shows mixed activity in collective bargaining, ranking second in the number of CBAs yet covering only about 5% of the workforce. Union density stands at roughly 7%, and strikes are uncommon, indicating limited worker bargaining power. Most CBAs operate at the enterprise level, which restricts broader labour standards for most employees in the sector.

Table 1 Key characteristics on collective bargaining in the commerce sector

Country	Bargaining levels	Bargaining coverage and extension	Main social partners	Recent trends
Croatia	**Sectoral + company**	Coverage ~9.6% (2021) in commerce. Sectoral CA extended by law.	- **Union**: Commercial Trade Union (STH), affiliated to SSSH - **Employers**: HUP (and its branch association in commerce)	A new sectoral agreement entered into force in Oct. 2024, the first one since 2013. Company-level agreements exist but remain limited in number. The first company agreement was signed in 2021 at IKEA-Croatia.
Czechia	**Primarily company-level** (Limited sectoral)	No mandatory extension. Coverage varies, dominated by large MNEs.	- **Union**: UZO (affiliated with ČMKOS) - **Employers**: Confederation of Trade & Tourism, MNEs	Company-level agreements (e.g., Penny, Albert, Billa, Tesco) often yield wage increases. Sectoral agreements have limited reach.
France	**Sectoral + enterprise** (Multi-level system)	High overall coverage (~90%+). Sectoral CBAs extended by decree.	- **Unions**: CGT, CFDT, FO, CFE-CGC - **Employers**: FCD, CDF, UPA	Strong legal extension mechanism ensures wide coverage. Digital transformation and non-standard contracts pose new challenges.
Italy	**National sector + second level** (company/territorial)	~93% coverage nationally. Sectoral CBAs widely applied; partial "dumping."	- **Unions**: CGIL, CISL, UIL - **Employers**: Confcommercio, others	242 national CBAs in commerce, but only ~22 with significant coverage. Bilateral bodies and welfare provisions are well-developed.
North Macedonia	**Decentralized, mainly company-level**	Limited data on coverage. No sectoral extension.	- **Employers**: Large MNEs (Miniso, Soloprom) + small firms - **Unions**: Fragmented, low presence	E-commerce expansion drives new work arrangements. Fragmented bargaining hinders standardized practices.
Romania	**Mostly company-level** (No sectoral CBA)	No sector-wide agreement. Coverage varies, mostly large MNEs.	- **Union**: Federation of Unions of Trade (FSC) - **Employers**: FPRC (covers 44% of retail employees)	High employer resistance to sectoral bargaining. Decentralized CBAs in multinationals (e.g., Carrefour, Metro). Low unionization in smaller firms.
Serbia	**Fully decentralized** (company-level only)	~10% coverage in commerce. No extension mechanism.	- **Union**: Autonomous Trade Union in Commerce - **Employers**: Major retail chains, MNEs	No sector-level agreement. Large MNEs (Delhaize, Merkator, Metro) have in-house CBAs. Little change over the last decade.
Slovakia	**Multi-employer + company**	Some sectoral CBAs (e.g., COOP Jednota), but no universal extension.	- **Union**: OZPOCR, plus multiple federations - **Employers**: COOP Jednota group, ZO, SAMO	Union fragmentation: some chains belong to SAMO (not in multi-employer deals). Company-level CBAs exist (Tesco, Billa, Lidl).
Türkiye	**Primarily enterprise-level** (Limited industry-wide scope)	About 5% coverage in commerce. CBAs often limited to unionized workplaces.	- **Unions**: Multiple - **Employers**: Multiple	Second-most active sector for CBAs, 257 CBAs signed in the sector in 2023; but overall unionization (~7%) remains low. Strikes are rare, limiting bargaining power.

Source: the author's compilation based on country reports within the BARSERVICE project

In the countries with a mixed bargaining system (company, multi-employer, and/or sectoral), Croatia saw the conclusion of a new sectoral agreement in late 2024, which was extended across the entire sector. Despite this extension, the actual coverage rate remained at around 9.6% in 2021, largely due to the void created by the cancellation of the previous sectoral agreement in 2013. Only a limited number of large employers engage in collective bargaining at the company level. **France** maintains a robust multi-level collective bargaining system, characterized by high coverage resulting from sectoral agreements that are extended through government decree, complemented by enterprise-level negotiations. Smaller enterprises often encounter difficulties implementing these agreements, and ongoing digitalization and the rise of non-standard contracts necessitate revised bargaining approaches. **Italy** employs a dual-level bargaining structure, in which strong national CBAs cover most workers, and a second level of bargaining (company or territorial) addresses more specific needs. Although more than 240 commerce CBAs exist, only a relatively small number achieve significant coverage. At the same time, there has been a trend toward contractual dumping, with some minor agreements offering inferior terms. Finally, in **Slovakia**, the commerce sector features both multi-employer and company-level bargaining. Two higher-level agreements exist (*COOP Jednota* and *Zväz obchodu*), but major foreign retail chains often opt out. Union representation is fragmented, with multiple unions sometimes organizing workers within the same retail chain, making coverage more complex. *SAMO*, a key association of large retailers, does not participate in multi-employer negotiations.

4. Challenges to collective bargaining

The challenges to collective bargaining across the studied countries are rooted in structural, legal, and market-specific dynamics. A common issue is employer resistance to unionization and collective bargaining or low union density due to complex legal thresholds or fragmented labour markets. Further, decentralization and fragmentation of bargaining systems limit the scope and effectiveness of bargaining, often leaving out especially small and medium-sized enterprises. Legal and institutional barriers further exacerbate challenges to collective bargaining. In Türkiye, high thresholds for union recognition, restricted strike rights, and lengthy authorization processes hinder union effectiveness. Similarly, the lack of legal support for sectoral bargaining in Serbia and fragmented bargaining structures in Romania and Slovakia limit the reach of collective agreements. Gender segregation, while not universally highlighted, remains a significant concern in countries like Croatia and Romania, affecting the inclusivity and equity of bargaining outcomes.

The above summary of challenges in the commerce sector can be summarised in the following points, highlighting also the countries where the challenge has been detected in the respective country reports:

- **Employer resistance to bargaining** in Croatia, Czechia, Serbia, North Macedonia, Slovakia and Türkiye, where (part of) employers actively avoid or undermine collective bargaining.
- **Low union density:** North Macedonia, Czechia, Italy, and Türkiye struggle with low union membership, which weakens the unions' bargaining power.
- **Fragmented bargaining systems:** France, Romania, Slovakia, and Italy face decentralized or fragmented bargaining frameworks, leading to unequal bargaining practices or complications in sectoral affiliation of social partners and bargaining coverage.
- **Legal and institutional barriers:** Türkiye and Romania face systemic legal challenges to bargaining, while Serbia and North Macedonia deal with weak enforcement and deregulation in bargaining.
- **Vulnerable workers excluded from bargaining coverage:** Digital workers, part-time, and temporary employees often fall outside bargaining frameworks in France, North Macedonia, and Romania.
- **Gender inequality:** Croatia, Romania, and North Macedonia highlight gender segregation in the workforce as a challenge to inclusive bargaining.

5. Smart bargaining and development opportunities

After identifying several challenges to collective bargaining in the commerce sector, the report now addresses the idea of "smart bargaining," or a set of ideas that could help address the challenges identified and thereby strengthen and improve collective bargaining. The idea of smart bargaining is not prescriptive of the same strategies in each country. Rather, smart bargaining seeks improvements to bargaining while acknowledging the locally specific structural and institutional conditions. The analysis identified several common principles across the studied countries. These are presented below, while Table 2 provides a country-specific overview of smart bargaining strategies.

- **Trust:** Building mutual trust between employers and trade unions is important on the journey towards smart bargaining. Countries like Croatia, Serbia, Romania and Slovakia emphasize fostering a culture of dialogue to make bargaining more effective.
- **Leveraging technology:** Czechia and North Macedonia exemplify how digital tools can reach fragmented or remote workforces.
- **Flexibility and adaptability:** Italy and Türkiye highlight the need for flexible bargaining processes that adapt to economic, legal, and social changes.
- **Sectoral vs. company-level bargaining:** Balancing sectoral and company-level agreements is a shared concern. While countries like Slovakia and Serbia promote sectoral bargaining for broad coverage, others like Croatia and Czechia focus on company-level flexibility.
- **Adapting legal and regulatory frameworks:** Legal environments significantly influence bargaining strategies. Italy and North Macedonia discuss the importance of balancing legal mandates with bargaining autonomy, while countries like Slovakia are adapting laws (e.g. the changing status of employers' associations) to facilitate multi-employer agreements. The EC Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages serves as an important resource for this step in Slovakia.
- **Inclusivity and coverage:** Expanding bargaining coverage, particularly to non-unionized or precarious workers, is a central theme. Macedonia, Czechia, and Türkiye emphasize reaching fragmented workforces and atypical employees through innovative methods.
- **Innovative bargaining topics:** Reports from Türkiye, North Macedonia, and France emphasize the inclusion of innovative topics, such as flexible work, sustainability, and digital upskilling in collective bargaining and collective agreements.
- **Cross-national cooperation:** Czechia highlights the importance of international solidarity across trade unions, especially when dealing with multinational

corporations that are broadly present in the commerce sector across the studied countries.

Table 2: Key strategies for smart bargaining

Country	Key Smart Bargaining Strategies
Croatia	Build trust between social partners, focus on systematic and focused bargaining, reject mandatory bargaining.
Czechia	Utilize digital outreach, community-building, legal leverage, public accountability, and international collaboration.
France	Integrate demographic, ecological, and technological considerations; focus on inclusivity and sustainability.
Italy	Ensure timely negotiations, balance legal constraints with union autonomy, reform union representation.
North Macedonia	Use technology to engage non-traditional workers, legal reforms for broader coverage, balance regulation and autonomy, introduce new topics to collective agreement to make them more encompassive and regulate a broader range of issues.
Romania	Adopt data-driven approaches, promote transparency and adaptability, focus on long-term partnerships.
Serbia	Promote sectoral-level bargaining, break resistance to unionization, strategic pre-negotiation efforts.
Slovakia	Strengthen union presence at commerce workplaces, improve inter-union coordination and overcome union fragmentation, expand multi-employer bargaining coverage, legislative reforms to recognise professional associations as employers associations able to engage in multi-employer bargaining.
Türkiye	Emphasize data-driven, long-term strategic bargaining, include innovative topics, foster social dialogue.

Source: the author based on the BARSERVICE country reports in the commerce sector.

6. European perspectives

The EU Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages has driven significant changes in a number of the studied countries. For example, Romania and North Macedonia have boosted minimum wages and encouraged broader collective bargaining coverage. In countries like Croatia and Slovakia, while the Directive aims to expand bargaining coverage, employers' resistance and fragmented union landscapes pose challenges to increasing bargaining coverage, which remains extremely distant from the 80% expected by the Directive. Strong European-level collaborations among trade unions, particularly through organizations like UNI Europa and ETUC, can play a crucial role in exchanging practices and finding common strategies vis-à-vis multinational corporations, as highlighted by the Czech and French reports. Candidate countries like Serbia and Türkiye use EU guidelines as frameworks to improve working standards and strengthen unions’ bargaining power. Overall, EU initiatives help as a resource to promote not only higher wages and improvements in working conditions, but also to stabilise the process of collective bargaining and institutions regulating this process.

A country-specific overview of main European perspectives in the commerce sector is provided below.

Croatia

The EU Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages led employers to refuse further wage bargaining due to increased legal minimum wages. Trade unions see potential in EU-level coordination (e.g., through UNI Commerce) to connect workers across borders. Salary transparency is highlighted as a crucial directive, though discrepancies in wage practices remain. European Works Councils are seen as tools for union development.

Czechia

Strong participation in UNI Global Union and ETUC allows Czech trade unions to collaborate on global framework agreements, like efforts targeting Schwarz Group (Lidl/Kaufland) to improve working standards. European-level cooperation strengthens solidarity and collective power, especially in multinational corporations.

France

EuroCommerce and UNI Europa drive social dialogue, focusing on digital and green transitions, lifelong learning, and health/safety. EU-level campaigns like "Make Amazon Pay" highlight labour rights violations. Joint CSR initiatives emphasize sustainability. EU legislation like CSRD guides ethical practices, while the European Pillar of Social Rights frames social protections.

Italy

The EU Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages has a limited impact due to Italy's lack of a statutory minimum wage. Some unions support introducing a legal minimum wage, while others advocate for collective bargaining dominance. European trade unions are seen as vital for promoting informational campaigns on collective bargaining benefits, considering Italy's strong collective bargaining coverage.

North Macedonia

EU directives like Adequate Minimum Wages are aligning Macedonian policies with EU standards, fostering wage equity and collective bargaining. Collaboration with EU social partners helps address challenges like digital workforce fragmentation. Macedonia benefits from cross-border learning, adapting EU best practices for inclusive regulations, especially in e-commerce and retail sectors.

Romania

The Adequate Minimum Wage Directive has boosted minimum wages and encouraged broader collective bargaining coverage. EU-level social partners (e.g., ETUC) play a key role in promoting EU standards and pressuring multinationals for fair practices. Transnational cooperation helps unions develop negotiation skills, with EU initiatives enhancing transparency and accountability in collective bargaining.

Serbia

Though not an EU member, Serbia aligns with EU practices through social dialogue in wage setting. Trade unions face challenges with employers bypassing legal minimum wage limits. EU collaboration aids unions in knowledge sharing and improving bargaining strategies, though wage levels remain below living wage standards promoted by the EU.

Slovakia

The EU Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages influences Slovak law, mandating broader collective bargaining coverage. Trade unions struggle with fragmented representation and employer resistance. EU-level affiliations (e.g., UNI Europa) and European Works Councils offer tools for cross-border labour coordination, but concerns remain over the quality and transparency of collective agreements.

Türkiye

As a non-EU country, Türkiye uses the EU Adequate Minimum Wage Directive as a reference for improvements in working conditions. Turkish unions advocate for collective bargaining enhancements by aligning with EU practices and leveraging global agreements. Sectors like commerce and education can benefit from EU-influenced wage-setting standards, promoting fairness and social protection despite Türkiye’s outsider status.

7. Conclusions

The commerce sector across Central Europe faces **common challenges but diverse responses** to strengthening collective bargaining. While some countries, like Croatia and Slovakia, benefit from recent legislative changes, others, like Romania and Serbia, still struggle with employer engagement and union fragmentation. Smart bargaining strategies encompassing digitalization, EU-level cooperation, and sectoral bargaining and collective agreements are seen as the most effective paths forward in addressing these challenges. The following conclusions can be drawn on behalf of all the countries studied:

- Expansion of Collective Bargaining Coverage

A key trend across multiple countries is the effort to **expand collective bargaining coverage** in the commerce sector. Croatia saw a significant breakthrough in 2024, with its first sectoral agreement in over a decade raising coverage from 10% to 100%. In contrast, countries like Romania and Serbia still struggle with fragmented bargaining structures, where most agreements remain limited to company-level negotiations. In Slovakia, employer withdrawal from sectoral agreements has reduced coverage, whereas legislative changes aim to bring more businesses into collective bargaining.

- Role of Legislation and Institutional Frameworks

The impact of national labour laws and EU directives is a recurring theme. Croatia and Slovakia highlight the tension between **detailed labour laws and bargaining flexibility**, with employers arguing that excessive regulation limits negotiation space. Italy and France maintain strong collective bargaining frameworks but face challenges from **yellow unions** (non-representative unions signing agreements that undermine working standards). Romania and North Macedonia see EU directives, such as the Adequate Minimum Wage Directive, as opportunities to align national regulations with European working standards**.**

- Employer Resistance and Union Fragmentation

Employer reluctance to engage in bargaining is a common challenge. In Czechia, multinational corporations dominate the commerce sector, making it difficult to establish unified working conditions. Serbia and Romania report that **employer associations lack engagement**, leaving unions with limited bargaining power. Slovakia's experience with multi-employer agreements shows that **without employer commitment, sectoral agreements struggle to be effective**. Another issue is **union fragmentation**, particularly in Slovakia, Romania, and North Macedonia, where competing unions weaken bargaining efforts.

- Smart Bargaining as a Strategy for Modernization

The concept of **smart bargaining** emerges as a strategy to overcome systemic weaknesses. Czechia, North Macedonia, and Serbia advocate for **digitalization of union outreach** and leveraging **cross-border collaboration** (e.g., participation in UNI Europa). France integrates **ecological sustainability and digitalization** into agreements to future-proof the workforce. Italy and Türkiye highlight the importance of **sector-specific solutions**, such as contractual welfare provisions, supplementary pensions, and health care.

- European and International Cooperation

Countries with stronger union networks, like Czechia, France, and Italy, emphasize the role of **EU-level collaboration** in strengthening bargaining power. Czechia's involvement in UNI Europa has allowed for coordinated action against multinational corporations, while France's joint initiatives between EuroCommerce and UNI Europa focus on **digital transitions and worker upskilling**. Türkiye and Serbia, although outside the EU, look to European labour standards as **a model for improving social dialogue**.

- Addressing Precarious Employment and Wage Policies

Several countries report concerns about precarious employment and wage stagnation**.** Czechia, Romania, and North Macedonia identify high turnover and informal work as major challenges to stable working conditions. Croatia's new sectoral agreement lacks strong wage determination mechanisms, and unions criticize employers for avoiding wage negotiations. Italy and France seek to ensure that wage structures reflect inflation and productivity growth**,** while Romania calls for greater transparency in wage-setting mechanisms**.**

- Future Directions: Strengthening Collective Bargaining

Across all countries, strengthening collective bargaining mechanisms, employer participation, and legislative support are key priorities. Countries like Croatia and Slovakia highlight the need for **greater employer engagement in bargaining**, while Romania and Serbia seek to develop more representative and unified union structures**.** France and Italy advocate for contractual welfare expansion, and Türkiye focuses on broadening social dialogue to include gender equality, work-life balance, and digitalization**.**