

## Preface

This publication comprises four volumes that chart the development of collective bargaining since the year 2000 in the 28 Member States of the European Union. Collective bargaining is an integral institution of the European social model and underpins systems of workplace democracy and representation. Although collective bargaining is a key institution in the process of European integration and the development of a European single market that offers benefits to labour and capital, systems of collective bargaining cannot rest easy given the terms of the dominant political and economic discourse. This publication documents numerous examples of the institution of collective bargaining being removed, fundamentally altered or markedly narrowed in scope.

The argument that resonates throughout the publication is that collective bargaining systems are under pressure. In particular, advocates of the neoliberal policy agenda view collective bargaining and trade unions as ‘rigidities’ in the labour market that restrict economic growth and impair entrepreneurship. With the stated intention of achieving greater labour market flexibility, increasing rates of productivity growth and improving competitiveness neoliberal policymakers have attempted to limit the coverage and scope of collective bargaining.

The outcomes of the pressure from the political pursuit of the neoliberal policy agenda vary between and within Member States. Throughout western Europe, for example, industrial bargaining systems are being fragmented, albeit to different extents in different Member States. Nowhere is this clearer than in the private sector in the United Kingdom, where industrial bargaining has all but disappeared, and in the Member States subject to intervention from the Troika, where the coverage and scope of bargaining has been much restricted. Elsewhere in western Europe marked differences have emerged between sectors and industries within Member States as employers, trade unions and the state have not reacted uniformly. Although in post-1990 central and eastern Europe attempts were made by the International Labour Organization and the European Union to establish industrial bargaining arrangements, most of these initiatives foundered. The variation in the impact of the neoliberal policy agenda between and within Member States looms large throughout the publication.

As beneficiaries of the neoliberal policy agenda, employers have striven for and, in many cases, secured decentralised bargaining arrangements with limited scope. Employer-led decentralisation has been supported by governments committed to neoliberal economic policies, by Troika interventions and by the reluctance of the European Union and European Commission to support institutions that underpin the different variants of the European social model. For trade unions the decentralisation of bargaining

challenges their capacity to articulate and coordinate settlements. Decentralisation also ensures that wages become an element of competition with the consequence that labour is subject to recommodification. In short, the position of labour within the national variants of the European social model is now increasingly open to question.

The first three volumes of this publication are structured around 28 country chapters, each of which assess the unique trajectory of collective bargaining in a Member State. An 'Introduction' elaborates the themes mentioned above, while the 'Conclusion' assesses the impact of developments since the year 2000, the redistribution of power inherent in the neoliberal project and the capacity of labour to influence future change. Volume IV contains the index and three appendices presenting national data on issues associated with collective bargaining, a glossary of terms utilised throughout the first three volumes and a review of the different extension mechanisms employed to broaden the coverage of collective agreements. The country chapters analyse the six dimensions of collective bargaining identified by Clegg (1976: 8–11): extent of bargaining, level of bargaining, depth of bargaining, security of bargaining, scope of agreements and the degree of control of collective agreements. This framework accentuates the analytical similarities between chapters, while also facilitating the identification of different developments in the various Member States.

The scale of this publication has necessitated the involvement of a wide range of people in addition to the authors of the country chapters. The editors express their heartfelt thanks to these contributors. The editors reviewed all country chapters. In addition, authors presented their chapters for peer review by their fellow authors at workshops convened specifically for this purpose during the course of the project. The European Trade Union Institute acted as the hub of the research and funded the numerous meetings of authors and editors over the three years of production. Kristel Vergeylen organised the workshops and administered the project with her quiet efficiency. Specific responsibilities were distributed throughout the networks operated by the European Trade Union Institute. In particular, James Patterson was responsible for the English editing of the country chapters, the layout of the chapters and the compilation of the Index. With good humour Birgit Buggel-Asmus efficiently organised the layout and production of the publication. Giovanna Corda, Pascale Daubioul, Fabienne Depas and Jacqueline Rotty of the Documentation Centre of the European Trade Union Institute cheerfully worked through the bibliography of each chapter. Needless to say, responsibility for the final manuscript rests with the editors.

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Brussels, May 2019

## Reference

Clegg H. (1976) *Trade unionism under collective bargaining*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell.