

European employers’ sectoral coordination – 2024 EU level survey on sectoral social dialogue and capacity building

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Acronyms used

- AI Artificial Intelligence
- ESF European Social Fund
- ESSDC European sectoral social dialogue committee

EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
MET	Metal, engineering, technology based industries
OiRA	Online interactive risk assessment tool
SME	Small medium enterprises
STEM	Science, technology, engineering, mathematics

Key findings¹

This report summarises the results of the survey undertaken in the period May-June 2024 amongst the European sectoral employers' organisations. In this survey, the most recent information was collected from 9 Secretariats about the latest sectoral social dialogue processes and their capacity building needs. The survey was undertaken in the context of the EU funded project on sectoral employers' coordination, implemented by BusinessEurope, SGI Europe and SMEunited. The key findings from the survey are summarised below.

The developments in the sectoral European social dialogue structures

The period since August 2023 was a busy time in the European Sectoral Social Dialogue Committees (ESSDCs). The survey results showed active participation and collaboration with social partners, with 27 different types of outcomes identified, averaging 3 outcomes per Secretariat.

Common trends across sectors included joint opinions, positions, statements, and declarations, joint contributions to EU policies, joint events, and joint projects with social partners.

Thematic priorities in the work of ESSDCs included capacity building, joint social partner responses to skills, digitalization, and EU regulatory initiatives.

Examples of joint projects on capacity building were provided in the construction, temporary agency work, and live performance sectors. Joint declarations and projects on skills were developed in sectors like hospitality, temporary agency work, and live performance.

Initiatives related to addressing STEM, digitalization, and AI were reported in sectors like banking and through joint events and statements. Developing joint responses and inputs into EU regulatory initiatives and institutions was a common thread in the work of ESSDCs.

Key EU skills policy initiatives such the EU Pact for Skills, Action Plan on Labour and Skills Shortages, and the European Year of Skills led to new actions and initiatives by social partners in various sectors.

Policy priorities in the ESSDCs

Secretariats reported on policy priorities in their ESSDCs, showing core priorities shared across sectors. Common policy priorities include addressing labour shortages, responding to EU regulatory changes, digitalization, and upskilling workers. Challenges include attracting and retaining skilled workforce, upskilling and reskilling, and supporting digital and green transitions.

Tensions with social partners reported over working conditions, subcontracting, and regulation.

New policy priorities are emerging, such as tackling skills and labour shortages. Further future priorities include improving industrial relations, increasing social dialogue capacity, and shaping EU regulatory framework to support sector growth.

¹ The report was written in June 2024 by the independent researcher Inga Pavlovaite. When quoting, please use Pavlovaite, I. (2024). European employers' sectoral coordination – 2024 EU level survey on sectoral social dialogue and capacity building, Report.

Joint activities with the respective social partners

Secretariats described the key joint activities with their social partner counterparts in various sectors. Many Secretariats are planning future joint activities with their social partners. Common topics for future planned activities include skills and health and safety. Specific activities planned in different sectors include projects related to skills transformation in the chemical industry, skills collaboration in the mobility-transport-automotive ecosystems, and addressing labour and skills shortages in the security sector.

Future joint activities related to health and safety challenges include developing cross-sectoral guidelines on third-party violence with input from the hospitality sector and updating OiRA tools in the live performance sector.

Priorities for the capacity building of sectoral employers' organisations

Secretariats provided views on capacity building needs of national sectoral members, focusing on organization-oriented capacities and participation in social dialogue.

Top priorities for capacity building included providing support, training, and communication to members, strengthening membership base, adapting internal structures, and expanding services.

Key needs for social dialogue participation included developing dialogue structures, ensuring resources for collective bargaining, advocating for supportive frameworks, and engaging in policymaking. The main capacity building needs were identified in Eastern Member States where collective bargaining traditions are less developed.

Avenues of support for capacity building included internal budgets, EC social dialogue budget line, and other sources.

Challenges with using ESF+ funding included lack of awareness, administrative burden, and difficulties in accessing funds. Recommendations included better communication about funding possibilities, simplifying access to funds, and providing guidance on applying for funding. Types of support suggested for capacity building included workshops, financial support for exchanges and training, information exchange, guidance, and logistical support for travel and accommodation.

Introduction

This report summarises the results of the survey undertaken during the period of May-June 2024 amongst the European sectoral employer organisations. In this survey, the most recent information was collected from the EU sectoral employers' organisations Secretariats about the latest sectoral social dialogue developments and their capacity building needs. The survey was undertaken in the context of the EU funded project on sectoral employers' coordination, by BusinessEurope, SGI Europe and SMEunited.

All information provided in the survey was treated as in principle non-confidential so that it can be used for the report. The timeframe covered in the information collection was from August 2023 to April 2024 (as we started collecting data in May 2023). The information covers EU-27 Member States, including Norway and Iceland (the report does not cover non-EU/EEA countries). The survey was completed by 9 Secretariats, from the following organisations covering a range of sectors.

Table 1 Overview of 2024 European survey respondents

Sector	Secretariats of European sectoral employer organisations
Banking	European Banking Federation EBF
Chemical ²	European Chemical Employers Group (ECEG)
Construction	FIEC (European Construction Industry Federation)
Construction	European Builders Confederation EBC
Hospitality	HOTREC
Live performance	Pearle*-Live Performance Europe
Metal, Engineering and Technology based industries (MET)	Ceemet
Security services	CoESS
Temporary Agency Work	World Employment Confederation-Europe

The main survey results are analysed below, structured as follows:

- Section 1.1: outcomes of the European sectoral social dialogue since August 2023 in the sectors represented by the Secretariats;
- Section 1.2: current policy priorities in the ESSDCs;
- Section 1.3: joint activities with the social partners;
- Section 1.4: priorities in the capacity building of the national members.

The focus of the analysis is to identify common trends and differences between the sectors and views of the Secretariats, rather than to summarise the information for each individual sector and Secretariat. Hence, the analysis does not show the situation in each sector, rather aims to portray general trends and overall views, to support the exchange of information, coordination and joint working amongst the different Secretariats.

1.1. Latest outcomes of the ESSDCs since August 2023

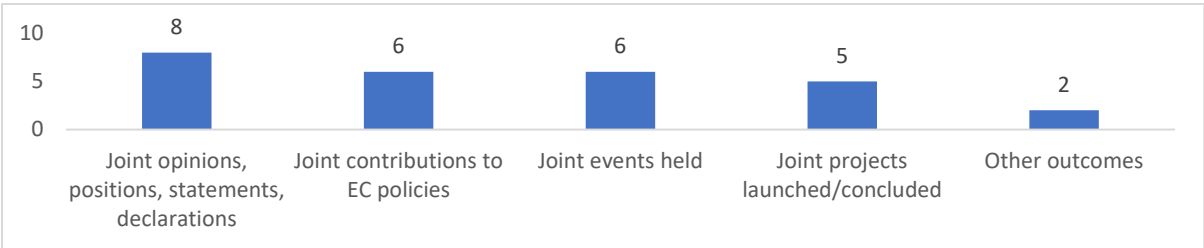
In this section, the survey gathered views and experiences with implementing the European sectoral social dialogue in the respective sectors represented by different Secretariats.

² For convenience, hereafter the report refers to the chemical sector in general, while covering also the pharmaceutical, plastic and rubber industry. The 4 sectors are all represented by the ECEG and covered by the same European sectoral social dialogue committee.

The survey results show a rich landscape of outcomes reported by the Secretariats in their respective ESSDCs, demonstrating an active participation and collaboration with their social partners. As shown in Figure 1, a total of 27 different types of ESSDC outcomes were identified in the period August 2023-May 2024, averaging 3 outcomes per Secretariat.

Looking at the different possible types of ESSDC outcomes, the common trend across the sectors is the prevalence of the joint opinions, positions, statements, and declarations, reported by the majority of the Secretariats (reported by 8 Secretariats, see Figure 1). This is followed by joint contributions to the EU policies with their respective social partners, reported by 6 Secretariats, indicating an important joint work towards the EU institutions and similarly 6 Secretariats reporting joint events held. Important work in the context of the respective ESSDCs related to 5 Secretariats launching or concluding joint projects with their social partners.

Figure 1 The latest outcomes of the ESSDCs since August 2023, by type



Source: Project survey, 2024, n=9, multiple answers allowed.

A number of common thematic priorities can be identified in the work of ESSDCs. To start with, three Secretariats reported activities in relation to the capacity building of their member organisations. This relates to joint projects on capacity building undertaken in the construction, live performance and temporary work agency sectors.

Box 1: ESSDC joint projects on capacity building

In **construction sector**, social partners organised 2 meetings in the framework of their DESOCO 2 project, “Follow up of Decentralized Thematic Social Dialogue for the Construction Industry” (DESOCO 2).³ The main aim of the project is to discuss the social and economic challenges which will determine the future construction labour market (i.e., in the fields of employment, health and safety and vocational education and training). During two years of the project, FIEC and EFBWW will organise 4 thematic meetings in the different Central and Eastern European countries with the sectoral social partners to discuss the main thematic challenges.

In **the temporary agency work sector**, WEC-Europe and UNI-Europa are currently engaging in the capacity building project, starting in September 2024⁴. The project is aimed to develop practical guidance for employers and trade unions, including approaches, tools and methods for strengthening the capacity of the sectoral social partners. Seminars will be organised to enable the exchange and discussion of good practices, focusing on Southern Europe and Central and Eastern Europe. There are planned regional workshops and a closing event to be carried out over two years. The regional workshops are expected to lead to practical guidance for social partners to put in place innovative practices focused on training and social protection for agency workers. They would facilitate the discussions between the

³ [DESOCO2 :: FIEC](#)

⁴ [Agency Work - World Employment Confederation Europe \(wecglobal.org\)](#)

national sectoral social partners on how to support further training and social protection for workers in the sector, exchange practices and lessons learnt from members' experiences.

In the **live performance sector**, the social partners have launched a joint project in 2023-2025 to provide capacity building to their memberships across Europe.⁵ The project is addressed to members in all countries and is not focussing on specific regions or groups of members. Capacity building has been a long-standing agenda item on the work programme of social partners in this sector, starting with the accession of new Member States in 2004. Since then, capacity building has been expanded to include representatives from across Europe.

The thematic analysis of the different ESSDC outcomes also highlights further **common horizontal priorities** namely joint social partner responses to skills, digitalisation, and the EU regulatory initiatives.

In relation to the common topic of **skills under the ESSDCs**, one Secretariat has developed joint declarations with their social partners and one Secretariat launched a joint project on skills. Here, important connection was made in the ESSDCs with the 2023 European Year of Skills. In particular:

- In the hospitality sector, on 18 March 2024 a joint HOTREC-EFFAT declaration was adopted on labour and skills shortages.⁶ It is most relevant as social partners put forward some common views on how to tackle the challenge of labour and skills shortages.
- In the temporary agency sector, WEC-Europe and UNI-Europa adopted joint recommendations on skills.⁷
- In the live performance sector a joint project on skills was launched.⁸ The new project will promote and disseminate the Framework of Actions on skills in the audiovisual and live performance sectors. It will also undertake a campaign to support skills and labour shortages and promote the sector as a whole

In relation to the common topic of **addressing STEM, digitalisation and AI**, joint ESSDC-based initiatives were reported by 3 Secretariats, as follows:

- In the banking sector, the European social partners have signed a Joint Declaration on Employment Aspects of Artificial intelligence based on the findings of the joint project.⁹
- On 19 March 2024 Ceemet organised a joint event together with industriAll Europe and ECEG on STEM related issues.¹⁰ At the joint event they presented the joint paper "Europe needs to make its STEM strategy a reality now". The joint event gathered representatives from the Parliament, Commission, Council as well as stakeholders working in the area of skills, STEM etc.

⁵ [LP capacity building project: Strengthening capacities in the live performance sector \(Sept. 2023-Aug. 2025\) \(pearle.eu\)](https://pearle.eu)

⁶ [EFFAT-HOTREC Joint Declaration on Labour and Skills Shortages | HOTREC – European Hospitality](#)

⁷ [European Year of Skills: Social Dialogue as a Driving Force Forward - World Employment Confederation \(weceurope.org\)](https://weceurope.org)

⁸ [LP capacity building project: Strengthening capacities in the live performance sector \(Sept. 2023-Aug. 2025\) \(pearle.eu\)](https://pearle.eu)

⁹ <https://www.ebf.eu/ebf-media-centre/european-social-partners-for-the-banking-sector-sign-new-joint-declaration-on-employment-aspects-of-artificial-intelligence/>

¹⁰ https://www.eceg.org/_files/ugd/977a5c_fec2a71ade4f4dbf9e7f970c99ab2c60.pdf

- On 15 May 2024, Ceemet, industriAll Europe and other social partners (such as ECEG) and industry associations (such as ACEA, CLEPA) adopted their joint statement “ an industrial deal focus on ensuring quality jobs in Europe”.¹¹

A final common thread in the work of ESSDCs was developing joint responses and inputs into the **EU regulatory initiatives and work of institutions, reported by 3 Secretariats, as follows:**

- On 15 May 2024, Ceemet, industriAll Europe and other social partners (such as ECEG) and industry associations (such as ACEA, CLEPA) adopted their joint statement “An industrial deal focus on ensuring quality jobs in Europe”.¹²
- In the live performance sector, the social partners issued a joint contribution in March 2024 on consultation on passengers rights package.

Most Secretariats also reported that a number of EU policy initiatives have generated new actions and initiatives by the social partners in their sectors. This was particularly the case for the EU Pact for Skills, Action Plan on Labour and Skills Shortages and the European Year of Skills, which all led to a number of new actions, as demonstrated below.

Table 2 EU initiatives which have generated new actions in the sectors

EU initiatives	Number of Secretariats reporting	Examples
EU Pact for Skills	5	Live performance sector: joint project on skills was inspired by the EU Pact for Skills
Action Plan on Labour and Skills Shortages	4	No specific examples provided (reflecting the recent publication of the Plan in March 2024, see also joint activities on skills described in section 1.3)
European Year of Skills	4	Ceemet, EBF, ECEG, ECSA, Eurocommerce, FIEC, Geopa, Hotrec, and IRUA organised a joint session on skills shortages during the Closing Event on 29 April 2024. ¹³ Discussions took place on how to enhance the attractiveness of training, STEM related studies, effective recruitment tools in order to attract talent from outside the EU and linking training to labour market requirements.
Alliance for Apprenticeships	2	Metal industries: The MET social partners are part of the European Alliance for apprenticeships- They have pledged in 2018 and 2021 and report annually as regards their activities in this area.
EU funding opportunities (EC social dialogue line, EU funds such as Erasmus+)	2	Metal industries: TRIREME EU funded project (ERASMUS +) – Ceemet and industriAll Europe are full partners of the project launched on 1 March 2024 and that focuses on “”Digital and Green Skills: Towards the Future of the Mobility Ecosystem is a blueprint for sectoral skills collaboration in the Mobility-Transport-Automotive ecosystem”. ¹⁴ The MET social partners co-lead the work package that will tackle the social impact of the continuous transformation in the ecosystem with a specific focus on the role of social dialogue to mitigate the effect of the green transition on employment and skills in the sector.

¹¹ https://www.eceg.org/files/ugd/977a5c_e13ec59a7be948478079e8931f8af5da.pdf

¹² https://www.eceg.org/files/ugd/977a5c_e13ec59a7be948478079e8931f8af5da.pdf

¹³ [Closing event of the European Year of Skills: Sectoral employers join forces to address skills shortages - Ceemet](#)

¹⁴ [industriAll Europe | NEWS | European Project TRIREME Kicks-Off to boost skills in the automotive sector with social partners' involvement \(industriall-europe.eu\)](#)

EU Talent Pool	1	No specific examples provided (reflecting that the proposal to establish the Pool was published in November 2023)
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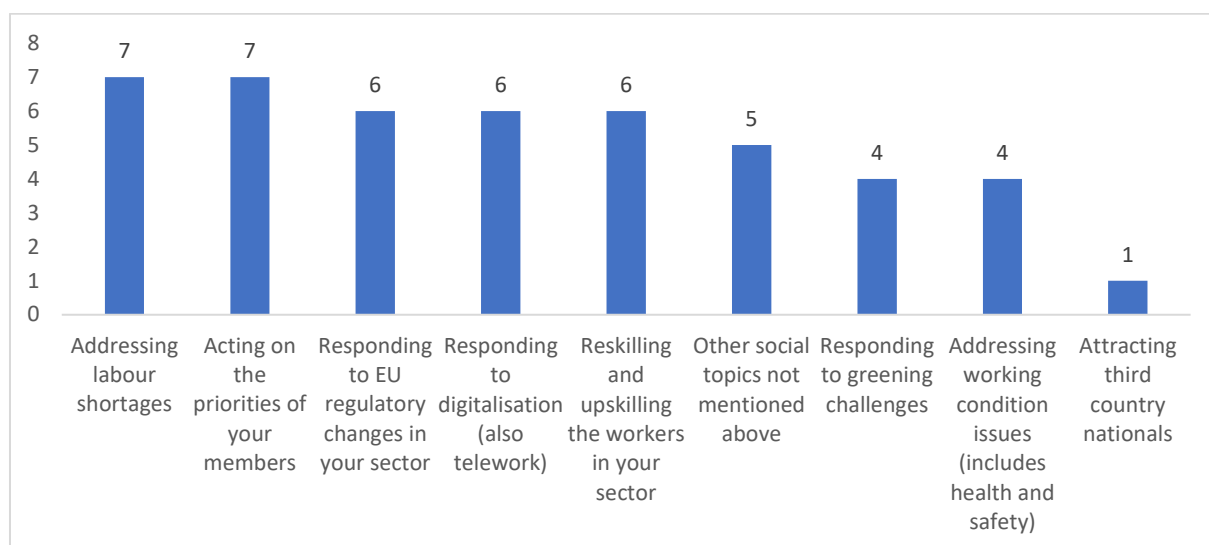
Source: Project survey, 2024, n=9, multiple answers allowed.

1.2. Policy priorities in the ESSDCs

In this section of the survey, the Secretariats reported on the policy priorities in their respective ESSDCs. Overall, the findings show **core policy priorities shared across many sectors**.

Figure 2 shows identified policy priorities which are common between the sectors. Unsurprisingly, almost all Secretariats see the need to act on priorities of their members when shaping their ESSDCs. Acute is also the need to address the labour shortages, reported by almost all Secretariats. Furthermore, also on several thematic priorities, sectors tend to see common issues, such as responding to the EU regulatory changes, responding to digitalisation and reskilling and upskilling the workers in the sectors. Five Secretariats indicated other priorities not captured in the previous categories. This included responding to the changes in the EU regulatory framework (such as the EU Public Procurement Directive, regulations on equal pay, proposal relating to the Directive on decent working conditions), labour mobility (such as posting of workers, social security), the impact of AI on the sector.

Figure 2 What are your most important policy priorities currently for your sector ESSDC?



Source: Project survey, 2024, n=9, multiple answers allowed. The numbers indicate the number of “yes” responses in each answer category.

Additional information from the Secretariats on their key policy priorities in the respective ESSDCs is helpful to further understand **the nature of such priorities, their commonalities and differences**.

The primary common policy priority is addressing labour shortages. Insights from Secretariats in the following sectors shed light on the nature of this policy challenge:

- In the chemicals sector, according to ECEG, industry will face skilled workforce shortage up to 11% by 2030 if no rapid measures are undertaken.

- The hospitality sector suffers from lack of skills for many years, and lack of labour since COVID-19 pandemic. Addressing skills shortages is a priority, as well as upskilling and reskilling.
- In the security sector, structural labour shortages, increasing demand for security services, and the impact of digitalisation on demand for innovative services leading to future skills shortages is a substantial challenge to the sector.

Further challenges relate to attracting and retaining a skilled workforce, ensuring adequate upskilling and reskilling, and providing employees with the necessary skills to support digital and green transitions in the sectors. The challenge is exemplified by CEEMET in the metal industries where the skills gap impacts very negatively on companies and job creation. Moreover, the up-and re-skilling of the workforce (linked to the skills gap) highlights the importance of continuous training to successfully manage the twin transitions.

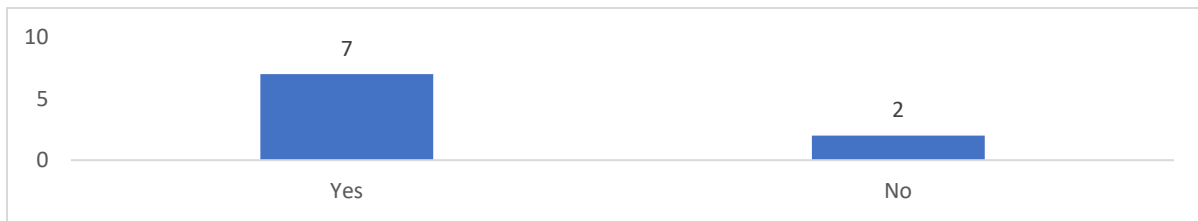
For several sectors, another key policy priority in the ESSDC is to respond to the EU regulatory changes, as shown by the experiences. In the construction sector, the focus on construction and buildings has been major in the current EU landscape, with many pieces of primary and secondary legislation aiming at radically changing operational work in the sector. In temporary agency sector, the EU level regulation is very essential to the agency work industry, including regulation on equal pay. In the security sector, an important topic that affecting the sector in gaining competitiveness and attractiveness is the EU Public Procurement Directive, which features as a key focus of the joint work with UNI Europa. In the live performance sector, due to an own-initiative legislative initiative of the EP calling for a directive on decent working conditions, including a determination of the employment status, the topic has taken a high importance on our agenda since last year. In the Commission reply to the EP a large number of measures have been proposed, which are now in phase of implementation.

A common thematic priority for several Secretariats is the need to respond to digitalisation and digital transition. In the construction sector, this is driven by digitalisation with AI and the impact of new technologies on companies, skills and workers. The rapid transformation of the MET industries impacts heavily in the world of work. For this reason, the social partners are discussing how digitalisation/automation/AI impacts on jobs and work organisation and skills needs in the MET industries. The Banking ESSDC work programme¹⁵ includes topics such as the New Workplace (since Covid-19 where telework is much more common than before), impact of AI on employment, and the banking sector hopes to harness AI for good whilst protecting workers from unintended problems, as well as skills, competences and lifelong learning.

Next, the Secretariats were asked whether on any important policy priorities they experience tensions or conflicts with their social partner counterpart. Amongst 9 Secretariats, **almost all (7) did report experiencing such tensions with their social partners** (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 Are there important policy priorities where you are experiencing tensions and conflicts with your social partner (trade union)?

¹⁵ [Cross-industry and sectoral social dialogue - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/economic-affairs/sectors/industry/cross-industry-social-dialogue)



Source: Project survey, 2024, n=9, Single responses only.

When asked to elaborate on these tensions, a number of Secretariats noted disagreements over the issue of the working conditions with their social partners. This relates to opposing views and perceptions of precarious working conditions, the use of subcontracting and employing third country nationals in the sectors, the interpretation of the causes of labour shortages and the call for more regulation from the union side.

Importantly, four Secretariats also reported that new policy priorities have emerged recently which would require them adding to the next ESSDC work programme. **A notable recent priority that has emerged across several sectors is how to tackle skills and labour shortages.** Secretariats in the construction, chemicals and live performance sectors have reported this trend. In the MET industries, fostering the industrial basis of Europe is a very important topic linked to the green and digital transition of the industry and how to continue to develop a robust industrial strategy in Europe that leads to quality industrial jobs and enhances industrial competitiveness, promotes robust value chains, and fosters a stable investment environment for companies, SMEs, to the benefit of both workers and companies.

Finally, with respect to the future ESSDC, the Secretariats were asked to reflect on **their key strategic priorities going forward and expectations/strategies for the sectoral social dialogue in the (near) future.** Several common threads emerge in the Secretariats' responses. To start with, a common priority is to ensure that improving the industrial relations landscape, increasing social dialogue capacity at the national level in the sectors, maintaining good communication with trade union counterparts at the European level. In terms of more concrete strategic priorities, a number of common themes were identified as follows:

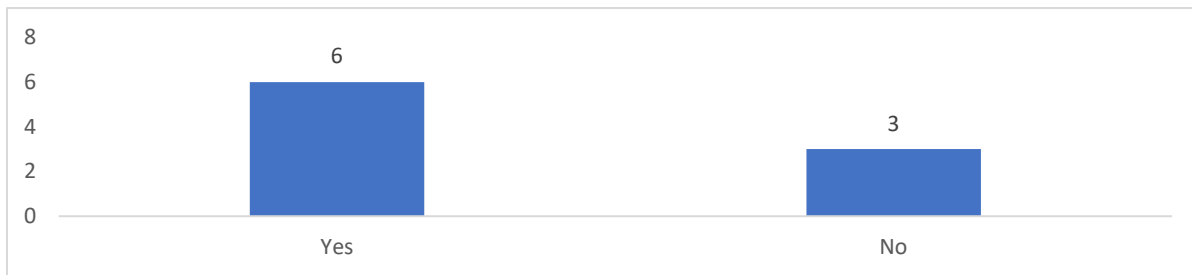
- Maintaining the strategic competitiveness of the respective sectors
- Shaping EU regulatory framework so that it supports the positive growth in the sectors.

1.3. Joint activities with the social partners planned

In this section, the Secretariats were asked to describe joint activities with their social partner counterparts in their respective sectors.

Looking ahead, a number of Secretariats also reported planning future joint activities with their social partners (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 Are you currently planning future joint projects or other activities with your social partner?



Source: Project survey, 2024, n=9, Single responses.

The key **common topics for such future planned activities relate to skills and health and safety topics.**

In the area of skills, the following activities are planned:

- In the chemicals sector, since 1 September 2023, ECEG is coordinating the project "ChemSkills: enabling the green and digital skills transformation of the chemical industry". The project financed by the Erasmus+ Blueprint budget line for sectoral cooperation. Alongside ECEG and other 32 consortium members, industriAll Europe is involved as an associate partner.¹⁶
- In the construction sector, further activities and projects on skills are planned.
- In the MET sector, Ceemet are full partners of the TRIREME EU funded project (ERASMUS +) launched on 1 March 2024 that focuses on "Digital and Green Skills: Towards the Future of the Mobility Ecosystem is a blueprint for sectoral skills collaboration in the Mobility-Transport-Automotive ecosystems". The MET social partners co-lead the work package that will tackle the social impact of the continuous transformation in the ecosystem with a specific focus on the role of social dialogue to mitigate the effect of the green transition on employment and skills in the sector. The project runs for 4 years. The MET social partners are also associated partners of the ongoing project Bridges 5.0 (HorizonEurope) that focuses on making the transformation to industry 5.0 faster and better.
- In the security sector, a new EU-funding project on Labour and Skills Shortages (INTEL: Next Generation) is planned to analyse whether current training frameworks are future-proof and how the industry can be more attractive to new workers.¹⁷

A number of Secretariats are also **planning future joint activities on the various aspects of health and safety challenges facing their sectors**, as follows. In the hospitality sector, this relates to the inputs into the cross sectoral guidelines on third party violence at the workplace. In the live performance sector, these include updating the OiRA tools, including new modules in the area of health & safety at work.

1.4. Priorities in the capacity building for the sectoral social partners at the European and national levels

In this section, the Secretariats provided their views on the capacity building needs of their national sectoral members. The different aspects of the capacity building were defined using

¹⁶ [EU Projects | ECEG](#)

¹⁷ [CoESS - News - EU Social Partners launch INTEL Next Generation, a new EU-funded project to tackle labour and skills shortages in private security](#)

the Eurofound’s definition of capacity building and its objectives in the context of social dialogue and social partners.¹⁸

Firstly, in relation to their organisation-oriented capacities, there is a consensus between the Secretariats on the top priorities (see Table 3). The majority identified that the two key needs relate to provide / diversify / expand support, training, counselling, information and communication to the members, as well as strengthen the membership base of their employer organisations. Also important is the priority adapt their internal organisational structures and work practices to respond to the needs of their members / new sector policy priorities and the priority to continue to provide / diversify / expand services for their members. The need was also identified to hire new staff and develop further the skills of their staff members – such as analytical skills, negotiation skills, other skills.

Table 3 What do you see as the most important capacity building needs for your national sectoral members in their countries?

The needs of your members in relation to their organisation-oriented capacities such as the membership, internal structures:

	1 least important	2 less important	3 neutral	4 important	5 very important
To continue to provide / diversify / expand support, training, counselling, information and communication to their members		1		6	2
To strengthen the membership base of their employer organisations			1	4	4
To adapt their internal organisational structures and work practices to respond to the needs of their members / new sector policy priorities			1	7	1
To continue to provide / diversify / expand services for their members			2	6	1
To hire new staff and develop further the skills of their staff members – such as analytical skills, negotiation skills, other skills		1	4	3	1
Other			2	1	

Source: Project survey, 2024, n=9.

In relation to the capacity building needs in relation to the national members’ capacities to participate in the social dialogue process, (see Table 4), **the majority of the Secretariats agreed on the key priorities being to develop the social dialogue structures and to ensure sufficient human and financial capacity** of the members to participate in the social dialogue in their countries and at the EU level. Secretariats also agreed on the externally facing priorities being to get their voice heard in the policymaking process in their countries and to advocate for more conducive legislative and political framework supporting more space for collective bargaining in their sector.

¹⁸ Eurofound (2020), Capacity building for effective social dialogue in the European Union, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

This echoes the key policy pointers on sectoral capacity building of social partners identified in the recent Eurofound study on the European collective bargaining processes¹⁹, which concluded that:

“ The weakness or absence of collective bargaining in some Member States makes a strong case for building the capacity of the social partners in those Member States and for the establishment of frameworks and incentives to support sectoral collective bargaining”.

Table 4 What do you see as the most important capacity building needs in relation to your national members’ capacities to participate in the social dialogue process?

	1 least important	2 less important	3 neutral	4 important	5 very important
To maintain or set up structures for social dialogue with their social partners in their countries				6	3
To ensure sufficient human and financial resources in their organisations to engage in collective bargaining, social dialogue in their countries			1	6	2
To get their voice heard in the policymaking process in their countries				4	5
To have sufficient human and financial capacity to participate in the European level activities for your sector - – such as advocacy, inputs into the policymaking at the EU level, projects, events, activities			3	4	2
To advocate for more conducive legislative and political framework supporting more space for collective bargaining in their sector			1	5	3
Other			2	1	

Source: Project survey, 2024, n=9.

In relation to further supporting the social dialogue structures at the national level, two Secretariats in the construction and hospitality sectors further commented that there is a need to support their members especially where they do not have collective bargaining at the national level. Furthermore, seven Secretariats further commented in which countries they see the main capacity building needs of their members. **All seven Secretariats concurred that the main capacity building needs are in eastern Member States**, including the Baltic states and Bulgaria and Romania, where the traditions of collective bargaining and social dialogue are less developed. Also, the sectoral social partners in these countries often lack the capacity to engage in the social dialogue (including the human resources with the necessary skills, financial resources and others). This is also due to historical reasons as in these countries it is the cross sectoral social partners who are mainly involved in social dialogue. At the same time, a number of recent experiences highlight how using the EU funds the national social partners are building capacity to engage better their members in different regions in the social dialogue structures (see Box below).

¹⁹ Eurofound (2022), Moving with the times: Emerging practices and provisions in collective bargaining, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Box 1: Initiatives in the central and eastern Europe to improve the capacity of social partners

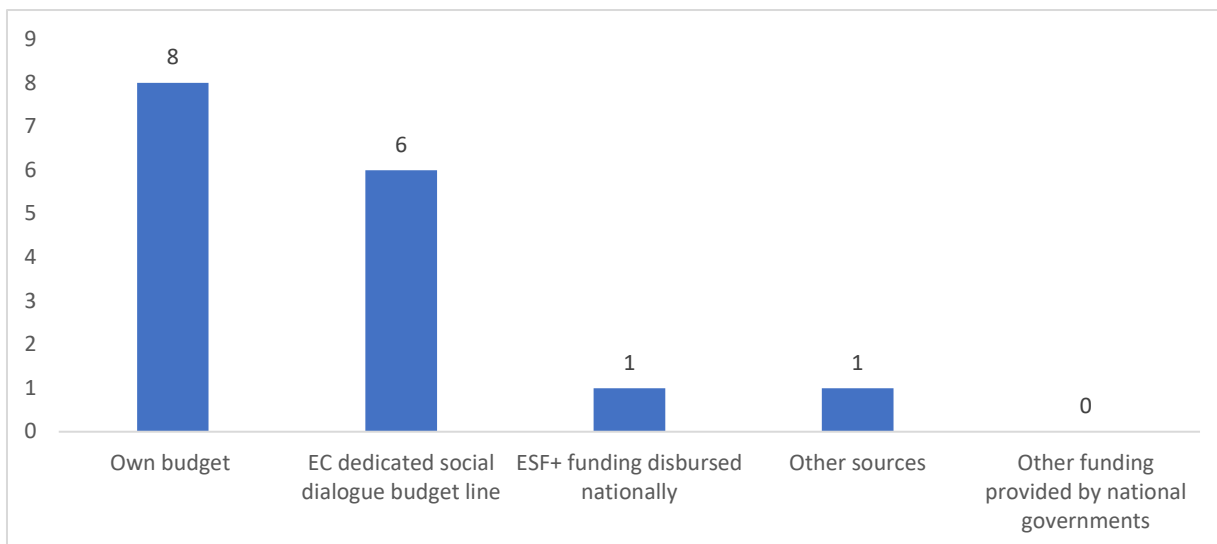
Business Hungary is starting in 2024 a new EU funded project through the research on industrial relations budget line about the interest of sectoral social partners to engage in social dialogue.²⁰ This is being conducted in cooperation with BusinessEurope members in Slovakia, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro.

This builds on the previous experience of Business Hungary using the EU funded projects through a special top-up facility that the Commission created to support the capacity building of social partners as a result of the impact of COVID. To strengthen Business Hungary's organisational capacities, the project included the improved communication services and the outreach into the different regions of Hungary to gather more input into the work of the federation and to attract new members to the organisation, thereby increasing its representativeness. A survey was launched, and discussions took place to better understand the trends and challenges influencing the different regional labour markets in Hungary. Among the outcomes of the project was the development of a communications strategy that will aim to foster continued dialogue with regional level employers. This will help to provide additional input to Business Hungary's social dialogue related activities.

As shown in Figure 5, the majority of Secretariats use a range of avenues of support to address the capacity building needs in the organisations. For the majority, the two most important sources are internal own budget in the organisations and EC dedicated social dialogue budget line. Only two Secretariats use other sources, including ESF+ funding nationally (in the chemicals sector) and other sources. The latter includes the own memberships' network in the chemicals sector. A key issue noted in the Banking sector is the inadequacy of EC social dialogue budget line to cover travel costs. For example, the Commission travel allowances for the projects for social partners to travel for project meetings/workshops/conferences are (at times significantly) lower than the actual costs of the travel. This budget deficit is made up from the employer or employee associations, where possible but in some cases, the deficit comes from an employee's own salary where the union does not cover the costs. This does not encourage participation from all member states, or a good balance between employers and employees. It is a big issue for the social partners in the banking sector.

Figure 5 What avenues of support do you currently use to address the capacity building needs in your organisation?

²⁰ [MGYOSZ - Projects](#)



Source: Project survey, 2024, n=9. Multiple choices possible.

The views on whether the current avenues of support are sufficient for the capacity building in the organisations diverge between the Secretariats (see Table 5). Also noteworthy is a comparatively smaller number of Secretariats responding to this question, with one respondent indicating that they do not think it is appropriate to comment on the adequacy of funding, especially the internal funding. Points raised by three Secretariats referred to their experiences of not having the necessary human resources to undertake all the activities and projects in the context of building capacity and participating in the social dialogue. One Secretariat also raised the point that they work on a wider range of issues apart from social policy issues. In contrast, their trade union counterparts concentrate on social policy issues, and hence comparatively the resources allocated are smaller.

Table 5 To what extent are the current avenues of support sufficient for your capacity building?

	1 not sufficient at all	2 insufficient	3 neutral	4 sufficient	5 very sufficient
Own budget		2	4	2	
EC dedicated social dialogue budget line	1	1	2	2	1
ESF + funding disbursed nationally	1	1	3		
Other funding provided by the national governments		1	3		
Other sources		1	2	2	

Source: Project survey, 2024, n=9.

The Secretariats were asked specifically about their experiences with using the ESF+ funding for the capacity building needs of their organisations and their national members. Secretariats identified a number of challenges with using the ESF+ funding. The first issue is that the funds are **not sufficiently known and not accessible to sectoral employer organisations at national level**. Most HOTREC members do not know how to use ESF+. Another experience reported in the chemicals sector relates to the situations where funding is allocated to the cross-sectoral business representations for the further disbursement on the ground.

Thus, more awareness raising is needed of the ESF+, including the knowledge of how to apply more efficiently to these funds amongst the trade unions and employer representatives.

The second issue identified relates to the **difficulties to apply to and run such projects due to the necessary human resources and the ESF+ administrative burden**. In the MET industries, members in Eastern European countries also highlight that the funding is not easily accessible and that the access to the different budget lines should be simplified and made user friendly. In the live performance sector, our members find it difficult and hard to apply for funding with ESF and it is therefore not yet used to its full extent and potential. There seems to be difficulty in accessing information on funding possibilities and advice or guidance of the public authorities managing the ESF in their respective country.

As a result of these challenges, the **interest and the use of ESF+ funding for sectoral employers' organisations remains limited**. These findings echo similar findings on the limited use of ESF for the capacity building of social partners in the previous 2014-2020 period, where a study on this aspect found that²¹:

“ESF resources allocated in the 2014-2020 period appear insufficient to meet social partners' capacity building requirements and are not made available in a suitable way (i.e. in a way which reflects different countries' needs) at the EU and Member State level.”

The key recommendation from the Secretariats related to the **better communication from the ESF+ authorities to the sectoral employer organisations** to get in touch with members and raise awareness about the funding possibilities. Better information provision is crucial and access to contacts within the ESF that can provide guidance on possible calls and how to apply. In the words of one Secretariat: *“it has to be simpler and easier to understand. Access to the fund should be easy.”*

Moreover, an issue to be further worked on jointly between the cross-industry and sectoral employers' organisations is how to improve the flow of information about the possibility to apply for and implement activities using ESF+ resources and to do so in a way that is coherent in supporting the development of employers' organisations and in addressing their priorities. Further consideration could be given to improving the dialogue between the cross-industry and sectoral social partners in the national context when it comes to access the ESF+ support for the capacity building of social partners. In particular there could be a role for the cross-industry employer organisations to provide information to the sectoral employer organisations, particularly when the latter are their members.

In terms of type of support the national sectoral members would most benefit to build their capacity, the Secretariats put forward the following ideas:

- Organising workshops, and other formats gathering the relevant stakeholders,
- Financial support to undertake exchanges, study visits, mentorship programmes. Support to join trainings such as with the ILO-ITC centre in Turin,
- Information exchange and sharing of best practices,
- Providing guidance for members,
- Providing financial and logistical support to members, including full reimbursement (based on receipts and evidence) of the real cost of travel and accommodation for social

²¹ Weber, T. and Pavlovaite, I. (2018), EU Social Partners' project on 'The European Social Fund: Supporting Social Dialogue at National, Regional and Local Levels': Final report, Brussels.

dialogue meetings/project activities/liaison forums. This also could include interpretation into all required EU languages for European level events, conferences, meetings to allow all participants to be a part of the conversation.

- More contact with the European Commission for their support to the social partners (especially for the liaison forums and project events).

Conclusions

The survey collected the most recent information from 9 Secretariats of European sectoral employer organisations about the latest sectoral social dialogue processes and the capacity building needs for their organisations and their national members. This EU level survey links with the national survey issued in the project which was answered by the national members of the European sectoral employer organisations. Taken together, both surveys provide valuable information on the current landscape of the social dialogue, collective bargaining and capacity building needs at the European and national sectoral levels. A key common theme across both surveys is the continuing needs for further capacity building for both European and national sectoral employer organisations. The survey findings are used by BusinessEurope, SMEunited, SGI Europe and the sectoral European employer organisations for a further follow up and information to support their work as employers organisations at the European level.