



BARCOM

With innovative tools for bargaining support in the commerce sector

EVALUATION REPORT OF THE BARCOM PROJECT March 2016 – March 2018

Dr. Ernest Tingum, Cape Town

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Table of Contents

1.	Introduction	3
2.	Why collecting and coding Collective Agreements?	4
	Social partner's need for insight in collective agreements	4
	Aims of BARCOM	4
3.	Contributing to the expertise of social partners commerce	6
4.	Coding Collective Agreements and sectoral bargaining systems	7
	Introduction	7
	Gathering agreements	7
	Annotating and coding agreements.....	8
	Sectoral bargaining systems and one-pagers	9
5.	Analysing coded collective agreements and sectoral bargaining systems.....	10
6.	Stimulating debates: the final conference	11
7.	Reporting	13
8.	Conclusion	14
	References	15

1. Introduction

This report contains an evaluation of the BARCOM project. BARCOM is an abbreviation of With innovative tools for bargaining support in the commerce sector. BARCOM is a Social Dialogue project, that received funding from the European Commission as part of its Industrial Relations and Social Dialogue Program (VS/2016/0106). This report aims to evaluate BARCOM's core activities, notably collecting and coding of Collective Bargaining Agreements and industrial relations systems in the commerce sector, as well as its dissemination activities. The BARCOM consortium consisted of three research institutes, notably University of Amsterdam/AIAS (coordinator) in Amsterdam, Central European Labour Studies Institute (CELSI) in Bratislava, and University of Economics in Bratislava (EUBA) in Bratislava, two social partners, notably EuroCommerce – The Retail, Wholesale and International Trade Representation to the EU, and UNI Europa – Uni Global Union – Europe. BARCOM had one associate partner, notably WageIndicator Foundation (WIF) in Amsterdam, which is running websites about Wages, Labour Law and Career in 92 countries.

The report is the result of the monitoring of the project by an external evaluator. The evaluator is Dr. Ernest Ngeh Tingum, who is a well-trained economist and currently a post doc research fellow in the School of Economics, University of Cape Town, South Africa. He is also a database expert and a coordinator of WageIndicator's Collective Bargaining Agreements Database outside the EU.¹ During the BARCOM project from March 2016 to March 2018, he has monitored the BARCOM activities and its progress. This was specifically the case during the first months of the project, when he was still a visiting research fellow in the School of Public Policy at the Central European University (CEU), Hungary from September 2015 to June 2016. His CEU supervisor, prof Martin Kahanec, is also a director of the BARCOM partner CELSI and is Head of Department of Labour and Social Development and project coordinator at the BARCOM partner EUBA (University of Economics in Bratislava). Before BARCOM started, he knew already some of the team members. Moreover, he had largely contributed to the CBA Database for non-European countries. In the first months of the BARCOM project, he has had a few face-to-face meetings with BARCOM team members. From mid 2016 onwards, he maintained regular contacts by skype, email or chat with the team members who were responsible for collecting and coding the collective agreements, as well as with the project manager. He also monitored online the progress regarding the posting of collective agreements.

¹ Dr Tingum is a well-trained economist and he currently is a post doc research fellow in the School of Economics, University of Cape Town, South Africa. His current research interest is on tobacco taxation and illicit trade of tobacco products. He is also a database expert and coordinator of WageIndicator's collective bargaining database outside the EU. Between September 2015 and June 2016, he was a research fellow in the School of Public Policy at the Central European University, Hungary where he studied labor market issues with a focus on Sub Saharan African countries. Dr. Tingum was a researcher in a team member on Tobacco Control Analysis and Intervention Evaluation in China and Tanzania, a lecturer in the Dar es Salaam Business School, a part-time lecturer at the Open University of Tanzania, and a lecturer at the National Polytechnic, Bambui, Cameroon. He holds a doctorate degree in Economics (PhD) from University of Dar es Salaam (2015), a master's degree and bachelor's degree in Economics from the University of Dschang, Cameroon. He has authored and co-authored numerous international peer reviewed articles.

2. Why collecting and coding Collective Agreements?

Social partner's need for insight in collective agreements

Collective bargaining is an important instrument in wage-setting processes, but lacks underpinning with empirical data. Little is known about what exactly is agreed upon in collective bargaining. Few countries maintain databases with coded collective agreements and if so, these agreements are coded for different topics and levels of detail across countries. Attempts to discuss bargaining results at EU level are hampered by the lack of systematic data-collection of collective agreements. Collecting and coding agreements allows for statistical analyses that focus on a comparison of bargaining topics across countries and a reflection on the cross-country variation in sectoral bargaining systems in order to properly understand cross-country differences in provisions stipulated by collective agreements. There is an increasing need for cross-country comparisons of agreements, among others because of the growing importance of foreign direct investment in EU member states. Therefore EU-level social partners in commerce, UNI Europa and EuroCommerce, expressed an interest in a study of the content of collective agreements negotiated by their members across the EU, and to relate these to the sectoral industrial relations systems in the respective countries.

Since 2013 associate partner WageIndicator Foundation (WIF) maintains an online coding form that allows to upload, annotate and code collective agreements in any language, and to post them full text on the respective national WageIndicator websites. The database of coded agreements allows for statistical analyses in order to compare bargaining topics within and across countries. BARCOM aimed to collect, code and analyse 140 collective agreements in commerce across 28 EU countries, i.e., approx. five per country. To do so, the research institutes AIAS, CELSI and EUBA joined forces with WIF. The European level social partners in commerce have actively supported this research by asking their members to send their collective agreements.

BARCOM covered all 28 EU member states: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. The teams in the three research institutes were able to cover all languages needed to read these agreements.

Aims of BARCOM

As outlined in the project proposal, the overall objective of BARCOM was to improve expertise in industrial relations in the commerce sector by an innovative approach to analyse the content of collective agreements and relating this to the sectoral bargaining systems. This overall objective was divided in five specific objectives:

- 1) Contributing to the expertise of social partners in the commerce sector in 28 EU member states concerning their collective bargaining, by cross-country comparisons of bargaining results.
- 2) Underpinning these analyses by collecting 140 collective agreements in the commerce sector (on average 5 agreements per country, totaling to $5 \times 28 = 140$) and by coding the content of these agreements for over 200 variables, using the WageIndicator online coding tool and by collecting characteristics of the sectoral bargaining systems in each country.

3) Analysing the coded collective agreements and the sectoral bargaining systems with a focus on (a) the topics are typically negotiated, including the wage and other remuneration-related clauses; (b) whether a wider bargaining agenda is agreed upon; (c) whether bargaining topics cluster within agreements; (d) whether bargaining topics are related to the sectoral bargaining systems.

4) Stimulating debates in the project's main conference in employers' associations and trade unions in the commerce sector about the outcomes of the research.

5) Reporting the outcomes of the research and the debates by means of three reports on the content of the 140 agreements, on sector-level bargaining settings, and on the relationship between the content of the agreements and the sector-level characteristics, all in English, as well as 28 one-page-one-country reports highlighting the content of collective agreements in each of the 28 countries, the latter in English and in the relevant national language(s).

The next chapters will evaluate to what extent and how these five aims have been reached.

3. Contributing to the expertise of social partners commerce

The first aim of BARCOM related to contributing to the expertise of social partners in the commerce sector in 28 EU member states concerning their collective bargaining, by cross-country comparisons of bargaining results. In two ways BARCOM has contributed to the expertise of social partners in the commerce sector, by means of face-to-face meetings and by means of 121 coded agreements, 3 research reports and 28 so-called one-pagers. The meetings will be discussed in this section, the output will be so in section 7.

BARCOM has contributed to the expertise of social partners by means of meetings. The two social partners in BARCOM, UNI Europa and EUROCOMMERCE, have been involved from the very beginning of the project. Six meetings have been reported:

15/06/2016	Amsterdam	Kick-off meeting with social partners
06/06/2016	Brussels	Presentation BARCOM for Social Dialogue meeting ²
28/10/2016	Brussels	Presentation BARCOM for Social Dialogue meeting
11/10/2017	Brussels	Presentation BARCOM for Social Dialogue meeting
27/02/2018	Brussels	Presentation BARCOM for Social Dialogue meeting
28/02/2018	Brussels	BARCOM final conference

The BARCOM presentations for the Social Dialogue meetings were on request of the social partners. In each meeting lively discussions took place about the importance of knowledge about collective agreements. Specific requests concerned the coding of pay schemes in the agreements, including a check whether the pay schemes aligned with the national Minimum Wage levels, and the coding of agreements of companies that are part of a multinational company. At the final conference the results of the research have been presented, in particular focusing on the opportunities to deepen insights in collective bargaining results. For details about the conference, see section 6 of this report.

² See the PP presentation: The BARCOM project on innovative tools for bargaining support in the Commerce sector. Powerpoint presentation by Daniela Ceccon – Database manager in WageIndicator Foundation / researcher at the University of Amsterdam. BRUSSELS, 6th April 2016

4. Coding Collective Agreements and sectoral bargaining systems

Introduction

BARCOM's second goal aimed at (a) gathering 140 collective agreements in the commerce sector (on average 5 agreements per country, totaling to $5 \times 28 = 140$), (b) coding the content of these agreements for over 200 variables using the WageIndicator online coding tool, and (c) collecting characteristics of the sectoral bargaining systems in each country.

Gathering agreements

Gathering agreements started directly after the start of the project. On 06/06/2016 BARCOM team member Daniela Ceccon went to Brussels to present the BARCOM project at a Social Dialogue meeting of the social partners. On 15/06/2016 the official Kick-off meeting with social partners took place in Amsterdam. In both meetings the collection of agreements was extensively discussed. Preferred agreements were sectoral agreements whenever existent, which were in force, which were complete, and which had a readable format. On 28/10/2016 started directly after the start of the project. On 28/10/2016 Daniela Ceccon attended another Social Dialogue meeting of the social partners in Brussels to discuss the agreement collection.

Gathering agreements requires substantial efforts, even though over time it has become easier with collective agreements posted online more often. The BARCOM team maintained a list of links where they found them. In some countries almost all agreements are posted on the Internet (Austria, Netherlands, Portugal). Italy aims to follow an open data policy.³ Finland publishes many agreements online.⁴ In BARCOM 59 agreements were found on the Internet. The BARCOM team approached the national social partners as well as personal contacts in countries that had not posted agreements online asking for their collective agreements. The gathering of agreements ended November 2017, because data analyses had to start.

In total 121 collective agreements from 22 EU member states have been gathered, which is 88% of the target. 116 of these 121 agreements could be included in the research, because some did only to a minor extent cover the commerce sector, whereas for a few others it was not clear which sector was covered.

According to the reporting of the BARCOM team, the main reasons for not reaching the target were difficulties to find any agreements in commerce in Latvia and Malta, and only one or two were found in Bulgaria, Hungary, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. The BARCOM team and the social partners undertook several attempts to gather agreements in the countries at stake. Countries with the lowest coverage happen to be the countries who post their agreements the least online. Moreover, the negotiating partners in these countries apparently are loosely connected to their confederations, resulting in local awareness only of the existence of agreements. Another reason is that collecting agreements for countries with sector level bargaining is relatively easy, because the agreement is supposed to cover everyone and create a level playing field – all of which works well with transparency. The countries with only firm level agreements are more difficult, because it's

³ See <https://www.cnel.it/Contratti-Collettivi/Contratti-in-Open-Data>

⁴ See <https://www.pam.fi/tyo/tyoehtosopimukset.html>, and <http://teknologiateollisuus.fi/en/labour-market/collective-agreements>

considered sensitive information for companies and TUs may fear a race to the bottom. A final reason related to the fact that these countries do conclude more collective agreements in the manufacturing than they do in the commerce sector.

Some countries were not willing or not able to share their agreements, because they are collected by publishers or commercial research institutions, such as the UK, and therefore behind a pay wall and copyright protected.⁵ In other countries the negotiators restrict the dissemination of the full text to those who are covered by the agreement or to their membership, such as Germany, or because the negotiators do not want the text to be public for competitiveness reasons.⁶ In Italy the sectoral agreements are freely available, but not so the underlying company agreements. In the Czech Republic, agreements are archived centrally, but in many other CEE countries this is not the case and therefore they had to be gathered via individual negotiators.

The team reported to the evaluator that more efforts to gather agreements from the countries with none or few agreements would not have resulted in reaching the target. To analyse collective bargaining in these countries the sectoral scope of the project needs to be broadened. Finally, experiences of the BARCOM team show that a collective agreement is mostly a well-understood concept throughout EU28. However, some agreements have wage supplements, which are negotiated more frequently than the agreement itself. Collective agreements are typically renewed after an agreed duration. In most countries, renewed agreements are published full text, but in some countries, Belgium for example, only a registration of the changes in the agreement is published, making it difficult to reconstruct the current agreement from the initial full text agreement.

Table 1 in report 1 shows the breakdown of the 116 agreements by country and by subsector (retail, wholesale, other subsectors in commerce).

Annotating and coding agreements

For the conversion of full texts into machine-readable format, called ‘cracking’, the BARCOM project used the OCR software available through WageIndicator Foundation. Cracking PDF documents goes quick, but if the full texts include tables (and many do so) extra controls are needed, because the software cannot convert tables with sufficient quality. This particularly applies to tables with pay schemes. The gathered collective agreements were mostly in Word or PDF format, but some were in GIF format, requiring extra checks.

For coding the converted texts, the BARCOM team used a coding scheme of the WageIndicator web-based tool, allowing to perform coding activities from more than one location.⁷ After uploading the full texts, the tool allows to annotate clauses, based on the coding scheme. The coding scheme includes the topics assumed to be most common for collective agreements in Europe. Apart from meta data concerning the signatories, the start and end date, the coding scheme covers ten topics, as

⁵ See <http://www.lrd.org.uk/>, LRD in the UK maintains a database of collective agreements, but is a commercial undertaking.

⁶ See https://www.boeckler.de/index_wsi_tarifarchiv.htm

⁷ The Collective Bargaining Agreements Database (CBA Database) was started by the WageIndicator Foundation and the Amsterdam Institute for Advanced Labour Studies (AIAS) in 2013, with the aim of increasing access to and knowledge of the contents of collective bargaining for both researchers and stakeholders. The CBA database contains a large number of collective bargaining agreements that are made available online in the original language and coded in a comprehensive and uniform way using the custom-made COBRA system, as described extensively in the CBA Database Manual (Ceccon et al 2016). By early September 2017 more than 800 agreements from more than 50 countries in the world have been uploaded and coded.

explained in Report 1.⁸ Each topic has detailed questions, provided the topic is mentioned in the agreement. In total more than a hundred variables are coded. The actual clauses (excerpts of text) allow to compare texts across agreements. After the uploading and annotation of the agreements, the tool provides for a huge excel file with more than 500 variables, which can be compared, analysed and shown through graphs and tables. The BARCOM project was also the first project to extensively code and use the pay scale data from the CBA database. The coding of pay scales across countries was a challenging topic, since the structures of pay scales differ significantly across countries. Through a concerted effort of the WageIndicator and AIAS teams, however, comparable coding was developed to analyse the earnings levels and inequality indicators of pay scales in collective bargaining agreements in the commerce sector.

The team reported that the coding of gathered collective agreements went well. Team members were able to read most of the languages of the agreements. If they could not do so, Google translate provided translations of sufficient quality for the coding of the agreements.

Sectoral bargaining systems and one-pagers

The third topic in BARCOM's second goal aimed at (c) collecting characteristics of the sectoral bargaining systems in each country. This task was predominantly performed by the CELSI team, with help from Eurofound, and with help from Maarten van Klaveren of AIAS/UVA who had been involved in a previous Social Dialogue project of AIAS. Eurofound was willing to share information from its most recent representativeness study in EU28. This study focussed on the commerce sector. In 2012-2015 Maarten van Klaveren had collected information about trade union density, employers organisations and Collective Bargaining coverage for the commerce.

The data collected in this phase was used for the so-called one-pagers. These are one-page information leaflets for each of the EU28 member states. These colourful, well-designed one-pagers are in the national language(s) and have information about trade union membership, employer's organisations, largest companies, and alike.

The team reported that the coding of sectoral bargaining systems had been time-consuming and that the development of a constructive industrial relations index was challenging, but that in the end all worked well.

⁸ General CBA data, Job titles, Social security and pensions, Training, Employment contracts, Sickness & disability, Health & medical assistance, Work/family balance arrangements, Gender equality issues, Wages, Working hours

5. Analysing coded collective agreements and sectoral bargaining systems

BARCOM's third objective related to the analyses of the coded agreements and the sectoral bargaining systems in such a way that EU-level as well as sector-level social partners gain insights into the patterns existing in collective bargaining provisions in the commerce sector, so that these provisions can inform their future policy decisions. According to the project proposal, the research objectives were fourfold. First, which topics are typically negotiated and to what extent do collective agreements include wage and other remuneration-related clauses, are indexation clauses included, are wages tied to skills and if so how are skills typically defined? Second, to what extent is a wider bargaining agenda with working hours, schedules, leaves and holidays, employment contracts, work-family arrangements, arrangements concerning health and medical assistance, sickness and disability arrangements, social security and pensions and training agreed upon? Third, to what extent do bargaining topics cluster within agreements? Fourth, how are the bargaining topics related to the sectoral bargaining systems in the 28 countries? As promised in the proposal, BARCOM has delivered three reports, hereafter called Report 1, Report 2, and Report 3. See the Reference section for details.

The first objective was reported in Report 1. BARCOM team members reported that the social partners expressed a great interest in the pay clauses, and that they therefore undertook extra efforts to code the pay scales in such a way that they became comparable across agreements.

The second and third objective were reported in great detail in Report 1 and Report 3.

The fourth objective was reported in Report 2 as far as the sectoral bargaining systems were concerned and in Report 3 for the relationship between bargaining outcomes and systems.

6. Stimulating debates: the final conference

BARCOM's fourth objective related to contributing to the expertise of social partners by means of a final conference. According to the BARCOM team members, recruitment for the conference started early November. A conference announcement and a registration form were posted online at the websites of the project partners. In addition, the social partners distributed invitations through their channels, and so did the BARCOM team. One team member maintained regular contacts with the persons who submitted the collective agreements or promised to do so, and of course all these people were invited. The project manager reported that in total 77 persons had subscribed to attend the conference and that 75 persons attended, of which 72 signed the attendance list. The persons who did not sign were not entitled for reimbursement of their travel costs. It turned out that all of them were based in Brussels or in the cities near Brussels. Attendants came from 20 countries, of which 18 EU28 member states and 2 associate countries, namely Albania and Turkey. The table shows the breakdown of attendants by country. Most participants came from Belgium (20), followed by Italy (10), the Netherlands (9), and Slovakia and Sweden (both 6).

Table Country of origin of the attendants of the BARCOM final conference, 28 February 2018

	Frequency	Percent
ALB	1	1.3
BEL	20	26.7
CYP	1	1.3
CZE	1	1.3
DEU	1	1.3
ESP	2	2.7
EST	2	2.7
FIN	1	1.3
FRA	1	1.3
GBR	4	5.3
HUN	3	4.0
IRL	1	1.3
ITA	10	13.3
MLT	1	1.3
NLD	9	12.0
POL	2	2.7
PRT	1	1.3
SVK	6	8.0
SWE	6	8.0
TUR	2	2.7
Total	75	100.0

During the conference, twelve presentations have been given, including two speeches from UNI Europa and EUROCOMMERCE representatives, one introductory speech by the project manager and a concluding speech by the project coordinator. Four presentations were based on the three reports, prepared for the conference. Another four presentations highlighted country specific issues regarding collective bargaining, notably from Italy, Poland, Spain and UK.

All conference information is posted on the project website <https://wageindicator.org/main/Wageindicatorfoundation/events/the-barcom-conference-brussels-february-28-2018> .

For a complete overview of the project, use this link

<https://wageindicator.org/main/Wageindicatorfoundation/projects/barcom/barcom>

The conference folder included prints of all PP presentations, so that attendants could follow the speakers more easily. In addition, the team prepared two leaflets for the conference folder. One about the CBA database, and one about the WageIndicator activities, both in the national languages.

For the evaluation of the conference, the evaluator spoke to the BARCOM project manager and he saw the Powerpoint presentations and the pictures of the conference. This resulted in the conclusion that the conference was well perceived by the attendants, and that the collective agreements database and its results were highly appreciated.

7. Reporting

BARCOM's fifth and last objective related to reporting. BARCOM has concluded its reporting exactly as promised in the proposal. All BARCOM's coded agreements and all its research output are posted online. The agreements can be accessed through the country links in the [CBA database webpage](#). The research output, specifically the three reports in English and 28 one-page-one-country reports highlighting the content of collective agreements and the sectoral bargaining systems, can be accessed from the [project webpage](#) in WageIndicator.org. Associate partner WageIndicator Foundation has promised to keep the webpage alive after the project.

Towards the end of March 2018, the evaluator has assessed the relevant webpages in WageIndicator.org, the website of associate partner WageIndicator Foundation. All was found in good shape. Web pages pop up properly, the CBA database allows for a good insight in the coded agreements, and according to the projet manager, the reports are to be finalised and posted online on March 28, 2018.

8. Conclusion

The final conclusion of this evaluation is as follows. Overall, the BARCOM project has performed according to the project proposal. The results have been evaluated very positive. The arguments for not achieving the collection of 140 agreements but 121 agreements, make sense. In case the partners consider submitting a follow-up of the BARCOM project, it is advised not strictly define the number of agreements to be collected per country, but propose a minimum and a maximum number of agreements per country. It is also advised to enlarge the sectoral scope from commerce only to all sectors, to allow for cross country and cross sector analyses. Following the requests from the social partners it is advised to put extra efforts in collecting wage data related to the agreements and to make them comparable across countries, because these are of specific interest for social partners in Europe. In addition, national social partners expressed a great interest in collective agreements in multinational companies, because they aim for a comparison across national boundaries. Note finally that machine-reading techniques are available for coding texts. The WageIndicator CBA database currently does not apply these techniques, but these could be developed on a country-by-country approach. Once the techniques are implemented, the costs related to coding agreements will hardly be related to the number of agreements to be coded in a country. Whenever possible, the development of such techniques could possibly be part of a follow-up study.

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