

EXPLAINING THE GLOBAL WAGEINDICATOR COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS DATABASE

DANIELA CECCON, GABRIELE MEDAS

WageIndicator Foundation
gabrielemedas@wageindicator.org

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Abstract

As comprehensive databases documenting the provisions of collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) are limited, and existing databases are not standardized or comparable across countries, the WageIndicator Foundation established its Collective Agreements Database in 2012, which collects and categorizes collective agreements on a global scale. The WageIndicator Foundation operates national websites in 206 countries, providing labour-related content to the public and collaborates with social partners to collect and publish the full texts of CBAs, aiming to increase their use in negotiations. Over the years, the CBA Database team has collected and analysed 2210 CBAs from 67 countries, available in 27 different languages. The coding process involves answering a series of questions related to different aspects of the agreements, resulting in a dataset that includes coded data and selected clauses. The coding scheme consists of over 1,000 variables categorized into fourteen macro topics, covering various aspects such as wages, working hours, and gender equality. The WageIndicator Collective Agreements Database enables statistical analysis and comparative studies on different aspects of the CBAs and has been used in social dialogue projects and research reports in various regions, contributing to the understanding and improvement of labour conditions globally.

Keywords: CBA data, collective agreement database, collective bargaining, collective bargaining agreements, social dialogue

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1. What is a collective bargaining agreement?

When independent labour unions and employers (or employers' organizations) engage in negotiations to establish terms and conditions of employment and regulate their relationship, this process is known as "collective bargaining" (as defined by ILO Convention 154). The resulting written document from these negotiations is called a collective bargaining agreement (CBA). These agreements can be established either at the company level (involving one or multiple companies), at the sector level, or even at an inter-professional level, encompassing all workers within a country. A CBA sets the terms and conditions of employment, it is effective for a specified duration which is stated in the agreement itself but, unlike regular contracts, the parties' obligations do not end on the expiration date, unless a new CBA is negotiated by the social partners.

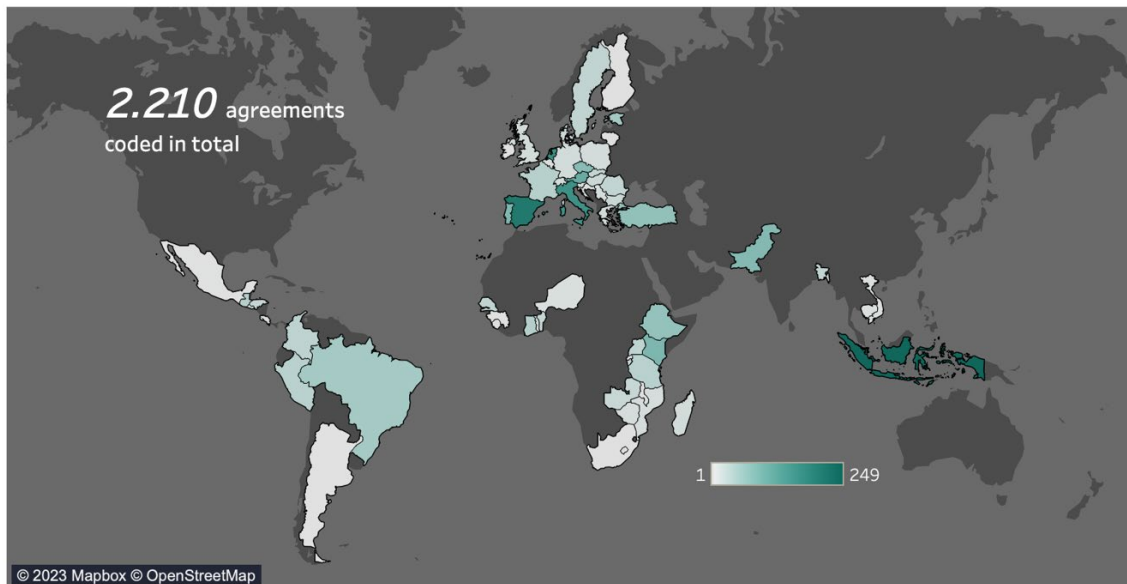
The significance of collective bargaining agreements is recognized worldwide; however, only a few countries maintain comprehensive databases documenting the provisions agreed upon in these agreements. Moreover, even in cases where such databases exist, such as in the UK, New Zealand, and Brazil, they are not standardized or comparable across different countries. Since 2012, the WageIndicator Foundation has been actively collecting and categorizing CBAs on a global scale within the WageIndicator Collective Agreements Database.

2. The WageIndicator Collective Agreements Database

The Collective Agreements Database was established by the WageIndicator Foundation in 2012. The foundation operates national websites in 206 countries (including territories and overseas areas) across all continents, catering to the general public with labour-related content. In 2021, these websites received a total of over 40 million visitors. Each website is presented in the respective national language(s) and aims to gather and provide information on wages, labour laws, collective agreements, career opportunities, and training. Established in the year 2000, the WageIndicator Foundation includes the University of Amsterdam and the Dutch Confederation of Trade Unions (FNV) in its Board of Overseers. As part of Development Aid projects in collaboration with social partners in the global south, WageIndicator began collecting collective agreements in December 2012 with the intention of publishing their complete texts on its websites. The primary goal was to enhance working conditions and attain decent wages by promoting the use and circulation of collective agreements in actual negotiations.

In all participating countries, social partners expressed great interest in publishing their CBAs, recognizing it as an effective and cost-efficient method of communicating the outcomes of their bargaining efforts to their constituents and a broader audience. These partners submit the texts of

their agreements to WageIndicator. Over the past eleven years, the team has collected, analysed and published 2210 collective agreements from 67 countries worldwide (see Figure 1 and Table 1 below). These agreements were available in 27 different languages.



Country	Number of CBAs
Argentina	1
Austria	111
Bangladesh	27
Belgium	8
Benin	23
Brazil	50
Bulgaria	20
Burundi	19
Cambodia	6
Colombia	30
Costa Rica	9
Croatia	7
Czech Republic	77
Denmark	17
El Salvador	13
Estonia	51
Ethiopia	66
Finland	3
France	36
Germany	14
Ghana	38
Greece	13
Guatemala	36
Guinea	1
Honduras	23
Hungary	19
Indonesia	249
Ireland	1
Italy	164
Kenya	90
Lesotho	5
Lithuania	3
Madagascar	13
Malawi	3
Malta	4
Mexico	2
Mozambique	11
Netherlands	170
Niger	7
Pakistan	82
Peru	34
Poland	12
Portugal	86
Romania	27
Rwanda	4
Senegal	28
Serbia	10
Sierra Leone	2
Slovakia	24
Slovenia	8
South Africa	3
Spain	211
Sweden	28
Switzerland	12
Tanzania	34
Togo	16
Turkey	68
Uganda	29
United Kingdom	13
Vietnam	5
Zambia	22
Zimbabwe	10

Figure 1 and Table 1 - Collective agreements included in the WageIndicator Collective Agreements Database in June 2023, per country (excluding transnational agreements). Source: [WageIndicator Collective Agreements Database](#) (2023).

For each collective bargaining agreement, the team addresses a questionnaire, which has been conceived as a comprehensive coding scheme in constant evolution, updated according to the most relevant topics emerging from the public debate at a global level. The annotated CBAs texts are published on the national websites, in national languages, where users can browse CBAs online, view CBAs visualizations and annotations, and use the CBAs comparison tool, which provides a unique opportunity to closely examine and compare the agreements across countries.

3. The collection process

The WageIndicator CBA Database applies three main approaches for gathering the collective agreements:

- a. Downloading from national registries (official national archives);
- b. Through smart Google searches;
- c. Directly asking the bargaining social partners (trade unions and employers' organizations) for full-text agreements.

In some cases, the latter turned out to be quite problematic when signatories are reluctant to share their CBAs. This happens for competitive reasons, or because CBAs are claimed to be available and accessible only for the signatories' parties. Overall, as in recent years CBAs have been published online more frequently, gathering CBAs has become easier, while for certain countries the collection process keeps being quite problematic and challenging.

4. Option of anonymity for the signatories and the CBAs collectors

The WageIndicator CBA Database is able to guarantee total anonymity - if explicitly requested - to both the signatories of the agreements as well as the people who would like to share them with the database team. In order to ensure anonymity to the correspondents, two options are provided:

- a. The CBA can be fully hidden to the public. This means that the text will not be published at all and it will only be coded and analysed internally, for research purposes;
- b. The CBA can be published but without showing any sensitive data regarding the signatories. All the referring data regarding the signatories are deleted by the team prior to publishing the text of the agreement on the WageIndicator website.

5. The coding process

Gathered CBAs can have various formats: Word, PDF, JPEG, or even a printed booklet. These formats need to be converted, or 'cracked', through an OCR (Optical Character Recognition) software. In a next

step, an HTML editor software is used to assign headings for titles, chapters, and articles. Then, the text can be uploaded in HTML format in the WageIndicator CBA Database.

The whole “conversion” process is a time-consuming effort, specifically in case of long full texts, in case of numerous tables and graphs, or in case the original text is in JPEG format. Once texts are uploaded on the database platform, they are ready to be coded.

The coding process consists of answering a series of questions and finding, for each question, the appropriate paragraph, the so-called ‘clause’, that answers that specific question. The collective agreements are annotated according to a coding scheme with more than 1000 variables and relate to fourteen macro topics (and related sub-questions): General CBA data, Job titles, Social security and pensions, Training, Employment contracts, Sickness and disability, Health and medical assistance, Work/family balance arrangements, Gender equality issues, Wages, Working hours, Workers’ Representation & Conflicts, New Technologies & Green clauses, and Coverage.

This process produces two datasets: one includes the data resulting from the coding, the other collects the clauses selected for each variable. The full list of questions is available in the WageIndicator Collective Agreements Database Codebook (Ceccon and Medas, 2022). The full collective agreements’ texts are stored in a separate dataset.

6. The team

The annotators working on the CBA Database are skilled and experienced professionals who are able to manage multiple languages. Figure 2 shows the countries potentially covered by all the languages spoken in the group of annotators. If it is necessary, the team can be expanded to include more languages.

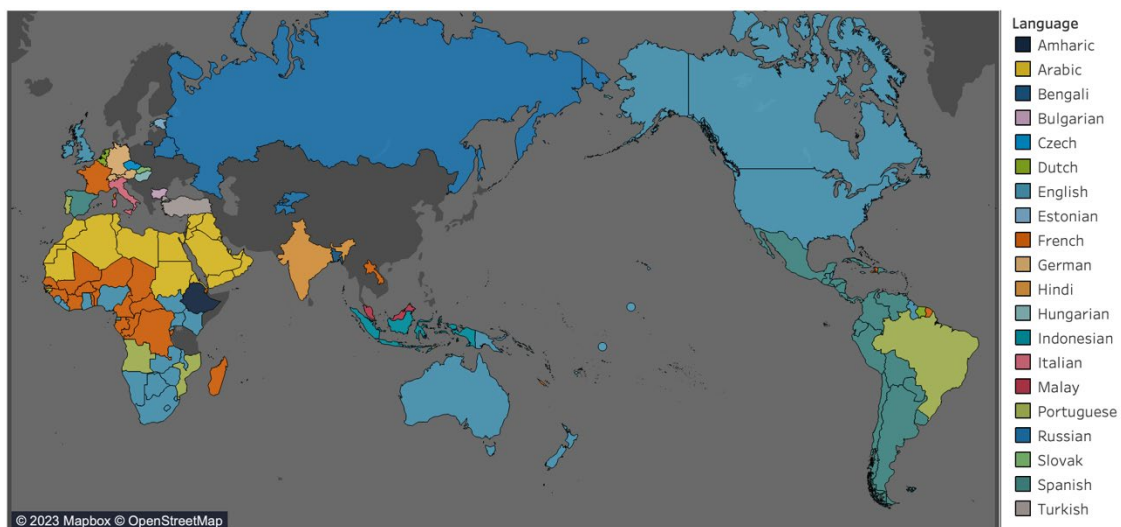


Figure 2 – Countries covered by the languages spoken in the group of annotators.

On top of the linguistic skills, all of the team members have a deep knowledge and understanding in the field of the industrial relations and collective bargaining. All the WageIndicator CBA Database coders can work remotely from different parts of the world, having the chance to instantly connect with other team members any time, online, by using an internal communication channel. This is a precious opportunity for sharing knowledge, new ideas or doubts regarding the annotation.

7. Output and outcomes of the database work

The WageIndicator CBAs database and its related coding scheme have been conceived as an international and comprehensive tool, in order to collect, host, analyse and compare collective agreements from all over the world, at all bargaining levels (national, sectoral, company, etc.). CBAs sampling is, each time, customized according to specific projects' requirements, in terms of countries, industries (based on NACE codes), coverage, bargaining level and time range.

The database allows to conduct reliable and customized statistical analysis, because it is accessible using statistical software. Comparative analysis, in particular, can be performed at many levels, such as cross-country comparison on some topics/provisions, changes over time in one country/sector/CBA, variations between different CBA types and qualitative analysis on specific clauses.

The database has been used in several Social Dialogue projects in EU, Asia, Africa and Latin America (<https://wageindicator.org/about/projects>), as well as in a number of reports and publications (for the most recent ones, see chapter 9. Bibliographical references).

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