

Collective Bargaining in Italy during the Covid-19 pandemic. Evidence from CBAs database

Country Report

June 2023

BARCOVID

The BARCOVID project aims to improve knowledge about the content of collective agreements in Europe and to undertake research activities to enhance the collection of comparative information on collective bargaining outcomes. The project takes in account the Covid-19 impact on industrial relations in Europe, which is approached from different angles, such as government measures and occupational health and safety. Lead partner is the University of Amsterdam/AIAS. The Central European Labour Studies Institute (CELSI), Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies and WageIndicator Foundation are the project's key actors.

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Bibliographical information

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Introduction

The database of Italian national sectoral collective agreements built to perform the analysis presented in this report is based on 34 expired agreements and their successive renewal signed during the Covid-19 pandemic. Official texts were collected exploiting the national archive of sectoral collective agreements together with the updated list of metadata made publicly available by CNEL.¹

The goal of collecting and annotating national collective agreements signed by social actors in the last two years turned to be more difficult than expected for two main reasons. First, because of the relatively long span of time that can pass from the signature of the renewed text and the time when the new and official document is released. In some cases, in fact, it was not possible to retrieve the official document, since only the hypothesis of agreement renewal (“Ipotesi di accordo”) was available. Moreover, in some cases even the expired agreement was still available in its “draft” version so that a backward strategy based on the collection and analysis of previous agreements was required to get a comprehensive and more adequate picture of all the clauses and changes contained in the new agreements.

¹ Official NCBAAs can be found here <https://www.cnel.it/Archivio-Contratti>

Database on Italian CBAs

Before entering the core of our analysis, we briefly describe the features of the Italian database of sectoral collective agreements. The sectoral coverage, as shown in **Table 1**, is quite diverse. The most represented sectors are Manufacturing, Agriculture, forestry and fishing, Healthcare and social work, Transport, logistic and Public administration.

Table 1 Italian CBAs by sector

Sector	Number of CBAs
Agriculture, forestry, fishing	4
Manufacturing	9
Waste treatment, sanitation, supply of electricity, gas and water	2
Transport, logistics, communication	3
Financial services, banking, insurance	2
Public administration, police, interest groups	3
Education, research	2
Healthcare, caring services, social work, personal services	3
Security, cleaning, homework	2
Publishing, printing, media	1
ICT services	1
Other professional, scientific and technical activities	1
Activities of religious organisations	1

Concerning the distinction in terms of the types of organizations covered (if private, public or cooperative), we observe that the bulk of the database is made by private companies, with few public, non-profit and cooperative organizations.

Table 2 Italian CBAs by type of organization

Type of organization	Number of CBAs
Private	26
Public	5
In the not-for-profit sector	1
In a government funded organisation, go	1
In a co-operative organisation	1

Turning to signatories (**Table 3**), we observe that almost half of the agreements were signed by multiple employers' organizations, while 19 were signed by a single employers' organization. All NCBAAs are signed by trade unions and no difference emerges in the post-Covid scenario.

Table 3 Italian CBAs by type of signatories (Pre/Post Covid comparison)

Type of signatories	Pre-covid		Post-covid	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Single employer/company	19	15	19	15
Trade unions	34	0	34	0

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on clauses

In the following section, we will illustrate the observed changes in the number of clauses included in Italian sectoral collective agreements, comparing pairs of agreements renewed after the explosion of the pandemic. Consistently with the structure defined by the Wage Indicator codebook (Ceccon and Medas, 2022), we distinguish the following main domains of interest: 1) Job titles; 2) Training and apprenticeships; 3) Employment contract and non-standard work; 4) Social security and pensions; 5) Sickness and disability; 6) Health and medical assistance; 7) Work/family balance arrangements; 8) Gender equality issues; 9) Working hours and 10) Wages.

Job title, training and apprenticeships

The description of a classification system of occupations is usually included in collective agreements since the definition of pay-scales is normally linked to different job levels. Job descriptions are quite rich and provide information on skills, tasks and responsibilities for each occupation identified by the agreement. As expected, no difference is observed in the renewed documents, since all agreements refer at least to a job classification system, even if the degree of details in distinguishing the different job levels is quite heterogeneous and goes from the simple definition of the typologies covered by the agreement to a longer description of job profiles. The same stability is recorded with respect to the provision of training courses for employees, included in all the agreements analysed in both periods (Table 4). However, in more recent agreements the content of the training courses is specified with more details, for what concerns, in particular, the use of digital technologies.

Table 4 Clauses on job titles, training and apprenticeship contract (Pre/Post Covid comparison)

Type of signatories	Pre-covid		Post-covid	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Job description/job classifications system	34	0	34	0
Training programs	34	0	34	0
Apprenticeships	28	6	28	6
Training Fund	30	4	30	6

Employment contract and non-standard work

Table 5 Clauses on employment contract (Pre/Post Covid comparison)

Type of signatories	Pre-covid		Post-covid	
	Yes	No/n.a.	Yes	No/n.a.
Employment contract	34	0	34	0
Trial period	33	1	33	1
Severance pay	34	0	34	0
Free legal assistance	23	11	25	9
Specific provision on temporary workers	28	6	29	5

All agreements contain clauses on the definition of the employment contract with, for instance, information about the length of the trial period, apprenticeship, severance pay, free legal assistance and so on. Moreover, as shown in **Table 5**, the vast majority of NCBAAs contains clauses on non-standard workers that, given the process of deregulation of the labour market, are increasingly hired within companies through temporary agencies. Many of these clauses fix the maximum threshold of temporary agency workers that can be employed in firms covered by the national sectoral agreement, with a share that goes from 5% to 30% of the total workforce employed in the company. The imposition of this constraint represents an important tool to reduce the use of precarious employment, especially in those sectors where non-standard job contracts are more diffused. No relevant change is observed once we compare Pre-Covid agreements with Post-Covid ones (**Figure 1**), apart from a small increase in the clauses on free legal assistance and temporary workers (respectively + 2 and +1).

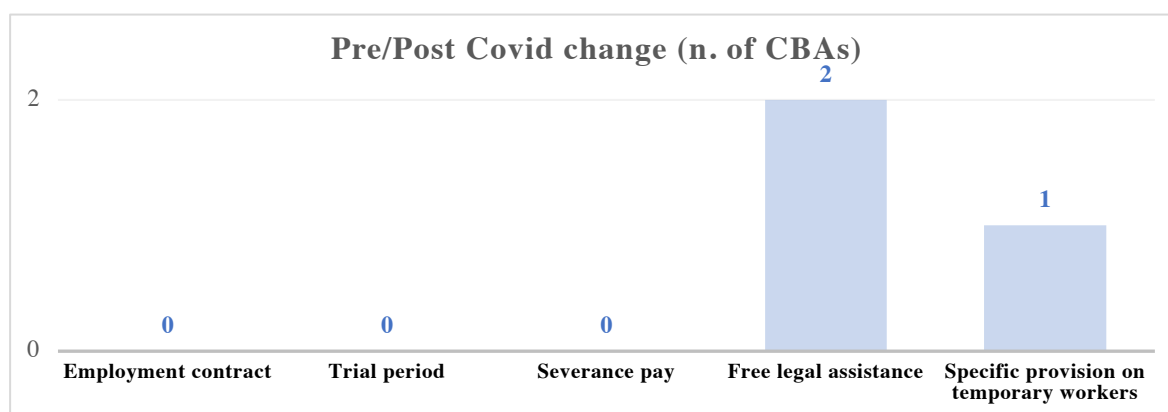


Figure 1 Pre/Post Covid change in the inclusion of clauses related to employment contract (n. of CBAs)

Sickness and disability, health, medical assistance and social security

Clauses on sickness leave, pay in case of work accident and return to work after serious illness are usually included in national collective agreements, as confirmed by **Table 6**. The same holds for those provisions concerning health and safety, such as the adoption of national protocols defined by the law and the organization of training courses devoted to new workers. What is more, an increasing number of NCBAAs shows specific clauses on the so-called “corporate welfare”, namely the provision of pension funds, private health insurance and other benefits linked to social services usually supplied by the public sector, but progressively dismantled by privatizations and public funding cuts. This trend is partially confirmed by Italian CBAs, since we observe an already high and stable number of agreements with clauses on funds, and even an increasing number of provisions on health private insurances and subsidized medical assistance for workers (**Figure 2**).

Table 6 Clauses on sickness, disability, health and medical assistance (Pre/Post Covid comparison)

Type of signatories	Pre-covid		Post-covid	
	Yes	No/n.a.	Yes	No/n.a.
Sickness leave	34	0	34	0
Return to work after serious illness	31	3	31	3
Pay in case of disability because of work accident	33	1	33	1
Free or subsidized medical assistance for sick employees	26	8	29	6
Health insurance	26	8	28	6
Pension funds for employees	28	6	28	6
Health and safety workplace policy	34	0	34	0
Health and safety training	32	2	32	2
Financial support for employees funeral	27	7	27	7

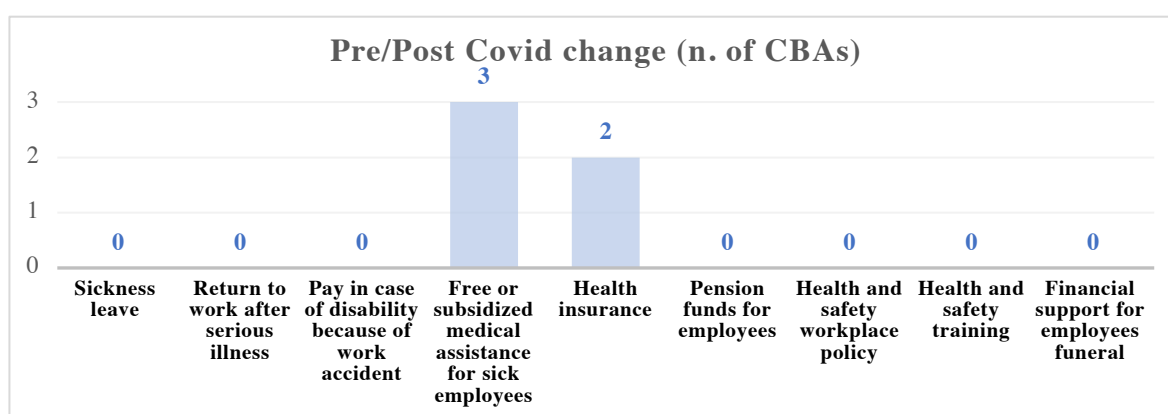


Figure 2 Pre/Post Covid change in the inclusion of clauses related to sickness, health and social security (n. of CBAs)

Work/family balance arrangements

Table 7 Clauses on work/family balance arrangements (Pre/Post Covid comparison)

Type of signatories	Pre-covid		Post-covid	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Paid maternity leave	33	1	33	1
Paid paternity leave	27	7	29	5
Paid leave to care for dependent relatives	31	3	32	2
Paid leave in case of death of relatives	27	7	29	5
Paid leave in case of the worker's marriage	29	5	34	0
Time-off breastfeeding	10	24	11	23
Job security for women after maternity	28	6	28	6

The right of paid leave for maternity is ensured by the law, and indeed almost all agreements (with the exclusion of an agreement for fishing cooperative vessels), contain at least one clause on maternity leave, as illustrated in **Table 7**. These clauses usually define the duration and amount of pay during the maternity leave. On the contrary, not all agreements contain a specific clause on paternity leave, even if their number is increasing over time. Clauses on job security for women after maternity are included in two tiers of the NCBAAs analysed, and they consist in very specific provisions underlining the prohibition of dismissal or discrimination against pregnant women, already defined by the law. If compared to the pre-Covid set of agreements, the post-Covid texts seem to reveal a higher attention to clauses related to care, since both paternity leave and other paid leaves linked to family and care duties increased during the pandemic (**Figure 3**).

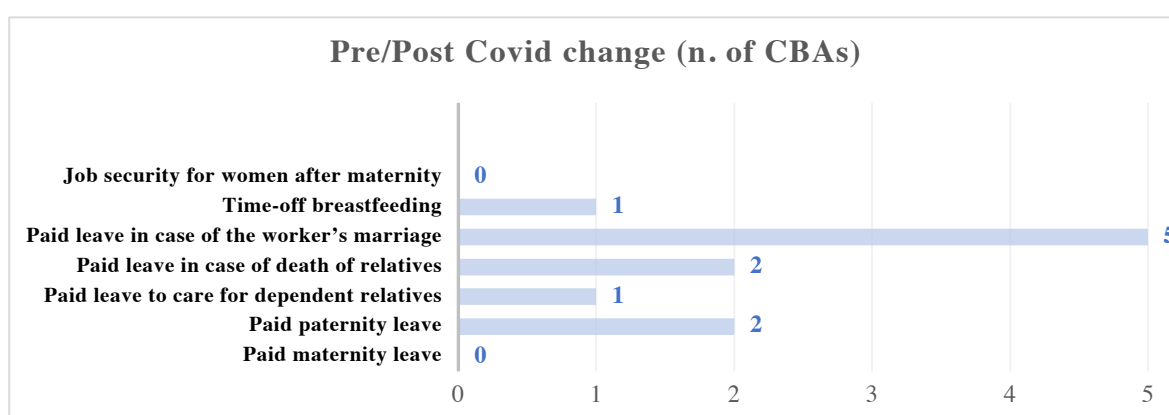


Figure 3 Pre/Post Covid change in the inclusion of clauses related to work and family balance arrangements (n. of CBAs)

Gender equality

Clauses that explicitly address the issue of gender equality (i.e., promoting equal opportunities for female workers, ensuring protection against sexual violence, monitoring gender equality in terms of occupations, career, training and pay) are increasingly present in collective agreements, as shown in our database of Italian CBAs, where almost the totality of agreements contain at least one clause on gender equality. One of the most relevant topics that are currently gaining attention not only among social actors, but also among institutions and policy makers is how to put in place an effective mechanism of prevention in the workplace against violent behaviours and sexual harassments targeting women.²

Indeed, within the agreements displaying clauses on gender equality, most of them contain specific clauses that address violence and sexual harassment at work with the aim of preventing and prohibiting mobbing or offensive behaviours. Moreover, a significant number of agreements recognize workers' right to have periods of paid leave for those (mainly women, according to national statistics) that are victims of domestic violence. As shown in **Table 8**, the number of agreements is increasing over time (especially in the case of domestic violence) suggesting a more dedicated attention of social actors on these issues (**Figure 4**).

Table 8 Clauses on gender equality (Pre/Post Covid comparison)

Type of signatories	Pre-covid		Post-covid	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Addressing discrimination at work	26	8	32	2
Equal opportunities for promotion of women workers	21	13	26	8
Equal opportunities for training of women workers	18	16	23	11
Addressing sexual harassment at work	23	11	29	5
Special leave for workers subjected to domestic violence	14	20	25	9
Monitoring gender equality	28	6	28	6

² See ILO, Violence and harassment in the world of work: A guide on Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206 International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO, 202.

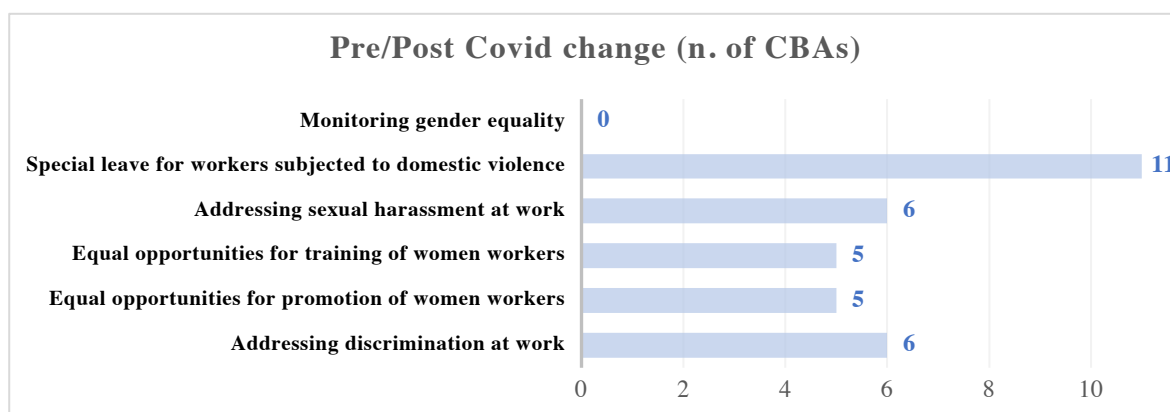


Figure 4 Pre/Post Covid change in the inclusion of clauses related to gender equality (n. of CBAs)

Working hours

Clauses on working hours, paid annual leaves and rest periods are usually present in collective agreements, also because different sectors have different models of work organization (i.e., with night shift, etc.). Among different and flexible work practices, remote working is considered one of the most prominent, despite other flexible work arrangements are usually regulated within NCBAs (i.e., extended leave, conversion from full time to part time work, flexible hours and models of job share). These clauses are usually included in collective agreements, in particular the right of workers to move from a full-time job contract to a part-time job contract. As shown in **Table 9** and **Figure 5**, their overall presence is increasing over time.

For what concerns remote working, we also observe an increase (+3 agreements) in the number of NCBAs providing specific clauses on this topic. According to **Figure 6**, the sectors that record this increase are respectively Manufacturing (+ 2 agreements over a total of 9 CBAs) and Public Administration, Police and interest groups (+ 1 agreement over a total of 3 CBAs analysed).

Table 9 Clauses on working hours (Pre/Post Covid comparison)

Clause	Pre-covid		Post-covid	
	Yes	No/n.a.	Yes	No
Working hours (per week, month or year)	34	0	34	0
Paid annual leave	34	0	34	0
Rest period	34	0	34	0
Paid leave for trade union activities	33	3	33	1
Flexible work arrangements	30	4	31	3
Remote work	16	18	18	16

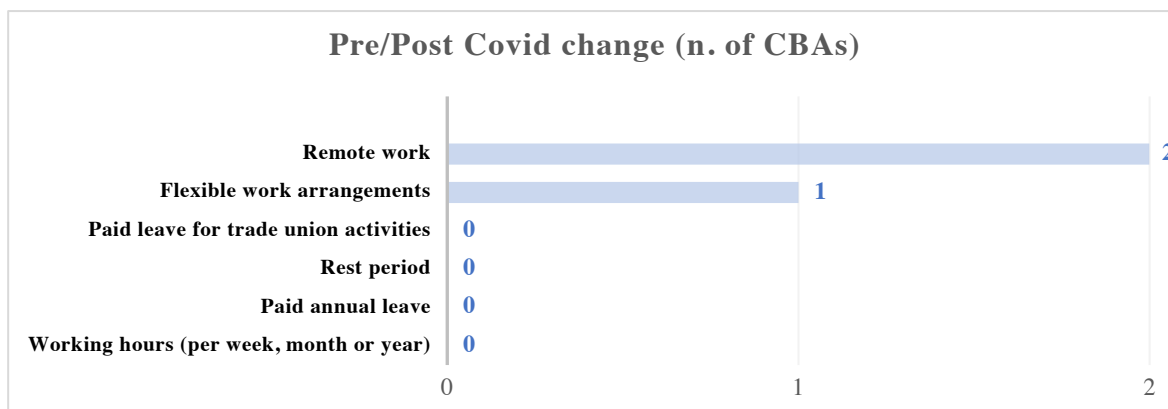


Figure 5 Pre/Post Covid change in the inclusion of clauses related to working hours (n. of CBAs)

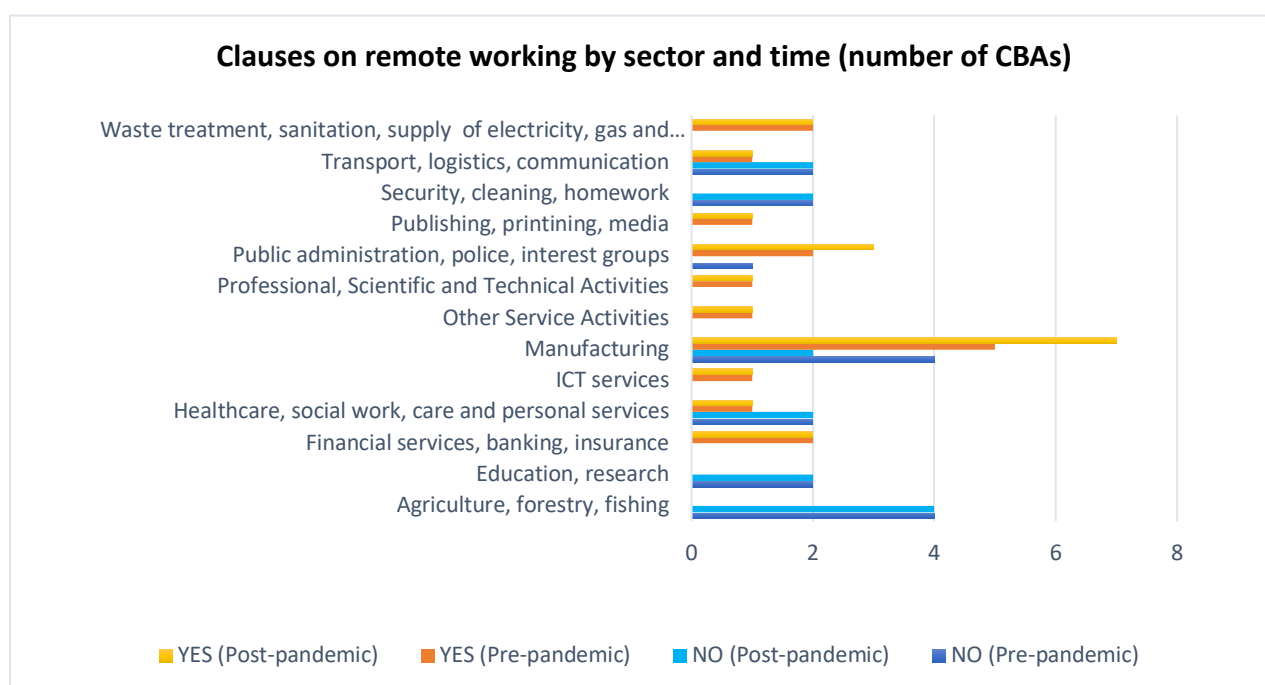


Figure 6 Clauses on remote working by sector and time

Wages

Clauses on wages are present in all CBAs, together with clauses on overtime allowances, once only extra payment. The only change observed comparing Pre- and Post-Covid periods is an increase in the number of agreements with specific clauses on the structural wage increase (**Figure 7**).

Table 10 Clause on wages (Pre/Post Covid comparison)

Type of signatories	Pre-covid		Post-covid	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Wages	34	0	34	0
Structural wage increase	32	2	34	0

Once only extra payment	34	0	34	0
Seniority allowance	29	5	29	5
Overtime work allowance	34	0	34	0

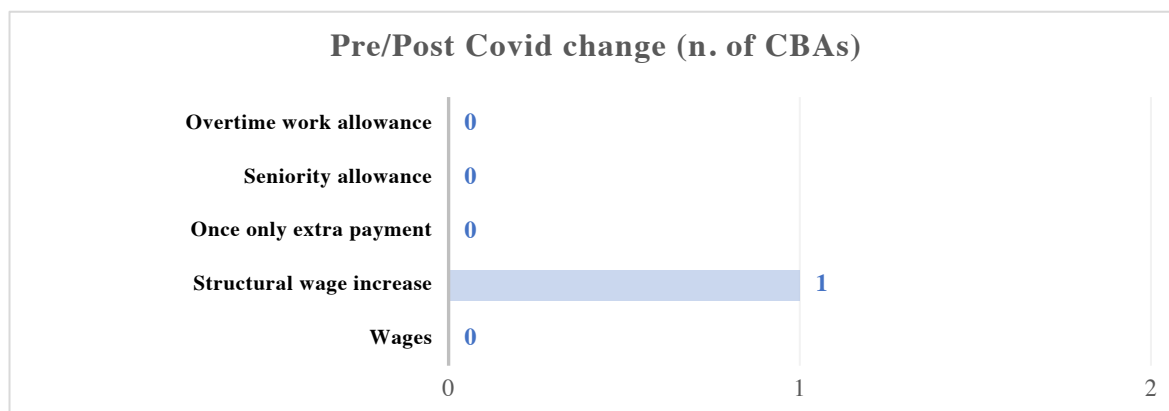


Figure 7 Pre/Post Covid change in the inclusion of clauses related to wages (n. of CBAs)

Clauses on Covid

Do the agreements signed during the pandemic contain clauses specifically related to Covid-19? Given the unexpected and radical impact that the pandemic had on society and economic activities, we should expect agreements displaying specific clauses or referring to it. However, according to our analysis based on the renewal of 34 sectoral agreements, only the 29,4% of the CBAs contains specific clauses that refer to the pandemic. Different interpretations could be provided. On the one hand, the lack of any reference to the global pandemic might highlight the willingness of social actors to leave this topic out of the bargaining because conceived as temporary and not so relevant to be reported in agreements that normally last for at least three years. On the other hand, it might suggest that this specific topic represented a source of conflicts and tensions among social actors as potentially opening new margins of bargaining on topics never discussed before. Further investigation through direct interviews could better highlight the reasons behind this finding.

Table 11 Clauses on the Covid-19 pandemic

Clause	Number of CBAS
Specific clause on Covid	10
Exercise of trade unions rights during the pandemic	6
Training related to Covid	1

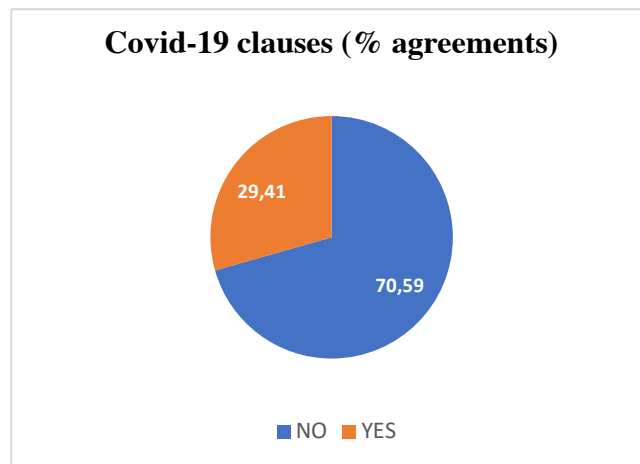


Figure 8 Clauses on Covid-19 (% of NCBAAs)

Where present, the reference to the pandemic remains in most cases quite general, usually cited at the beginning of the document when the overall socio-economic context is widely described. More precisely, the explosion of the pandemic is cited when:

- i) discussing the process of renewal, that in some cases took place online, as it is also confirmed by the survey on the bargaining process (Cetrulo, 2023),
- ii) the necessity of reorganizing the production or the provision of services,
- iii) the socio-economic context (risk of low revenues, low profits and destruction of employment)
- iv) health and security measures (i.e., provisions of mask and tests)
- v) the regulation of remote working.

Moreover, in 6 CBAs (2 belonging to the Manufacturing sector, 2 to the Waste, electricity and supply sector, 1 to Transport and logistic and 1 to the Financial and insurance sector) explicit reference is made about ensuring trade union rights during the pandemic. On the contrary, despite the attention devoted to vaccines in the national debate, no reference is found on the obligation of vaccination or green pass in the texts.

CBAs coverage

In terms of collective bargaining coverage (number of employees that are estimated to be covered by the agreements), we retrieve this information from the INPCS-CNEL database that allows to match the identifier of Italian NCBAAs with the number of firms (and workers) covered by them. No relevant change is observed before and after Covid, since more than 4 million workers result to be covered by the agreements under analysis.

New clauses under analysis

The last version of the Wage Indicator codebook used to study the content of collective agreements and translate it into quantitative and qualitative variables, has introduced new items of analysis related to the current political and academic discussion on the role of industrial relations. These new items aim to track the degree and quality of discussion – within collective agreements – around the use of new technologies, the adoption of green policies and participatory mechanisms. Given their novelty, it is not possible to make a comparative analysis with pre-Covid agreements, but it is nevertheless interesting to see their current degree of diffusion among NCBAAs signed after the explosion of the pandemic. As shown in **Table 12** and **Figure 9**, these clauses are already very common in the agreements under analysis.

Table 12 New clauses on emerging topics

Clause	Number of CBAs
Workers' direct participation	34
Reference to conflicts or strike	26
Green clauses	22
Training programs related to the introduction of green provisions at work ³	6
New technologies	30
Training programs for the use of new technologies	28

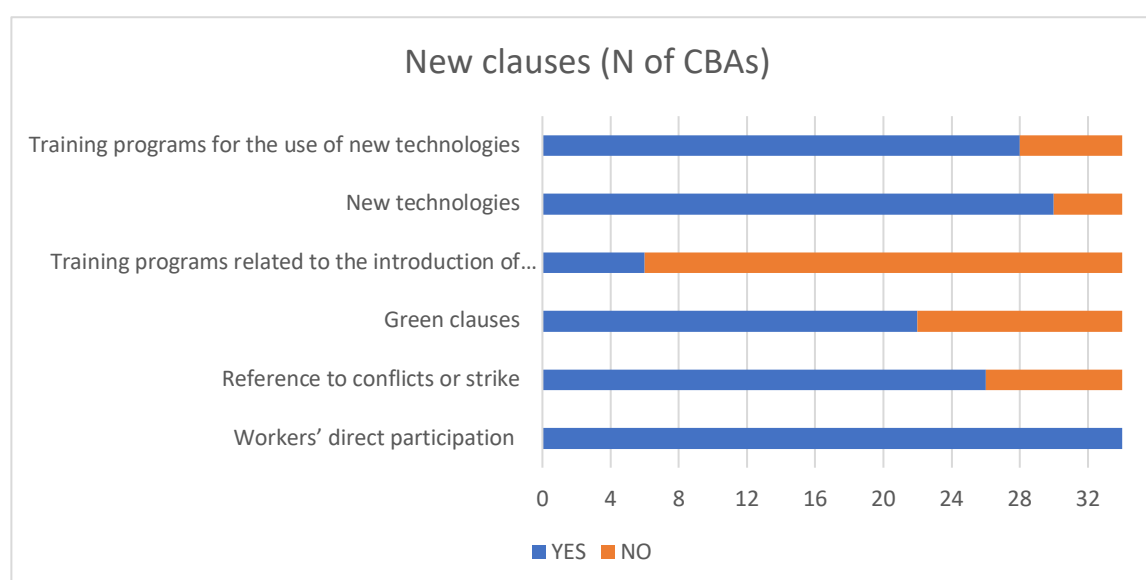


Figure 9 New clauses on participation, technology and green provisions (n. of CBAs)

³ As specified in the codebook, "green provisions are provisions related to environmental issues, climate change and/or anything that aims at improving the working conditions by providing a greener workspace".

Conclusions

As widely illustrated in this report, most of the NCBAAs show a certain stability in terms of clauses and general content. This cautiously suggests the solidity of social actors' bargaining agenda, that seems to have been only slightly affected by the pandemic. Indeed, the main changes observed concern clauses on remote working and flexible work arrangements, paid leaves for care duties and gender equality issues. While in the case of remote working, the relation with the pandemic seems to be self-evident, drawing general conclusions on the other two topics is more challenging. Another element of interest is represented by the growing attention towards new technologies and green policies which seem to emerge from agreements signed after the pandemic. A further expansion of the database under analysis could allow a better understanding of these findings in the national context of industrial relations.

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