

# Continuity and Change in Collective Agreements in Europe Before and After the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Comparative 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.

## *University of Amsterdam/AIAS-HSI*

AIAS-HSI is an institute for multidisciplinary research and teaching at the University of Amsterdam (UvA), the largest university in the Netherlands. AIAS-HSI has as its objective the coordination, implementation and stimulation of interdisciplinary research into the practice of labour law and social security law. Therefore, it combines insights from the social sciences, legal dogmas and legal theories in its research.

## *Central European Labour Studies Institute (CELSI)*

Central European Labour Studies Institute (CELSI) is a non-profit research institute based in Bratislava, Slovakia. It fosters multidisciplinary research about the functioning of labour markets and institutions, work and organizations, business and society, and ethnicity and migration in the economic, social, and political life of modern societies. CELSI strives to make a contribution to the cutting-edge international scientific discourse.

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## *WageIndicator Foundation*

WageIndicator Foundation collects, compares and shares labour market information through online and offline surveys and research. Its national websites serve as always up-to-date online libraries featuring (living) wage information, labour law and career advice, for employees, employers and social partners. In this way, WageIndicator is a life changer for millions of people around the world.



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## *Bibliographical information*

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## Introduction

One of the main goals of the European BARCOVID project is to assess whether the “bargaining agenda”, namely the content of collective agreements, has been affected by the pandemic, at a which extent and on which specific topics. Thanks to the collection of national collective agreements and considering the institutional specificities of each country under analysis, several national reports have been published with a focus on Austria, France, Italy, Spain, The Netherlands, Turkey, Estonia and East European countries. All country reports have shown patterns of stability in CBAs with respect to the main provisions of collective bargaining, reporting nevertheless some relevant changes on the number of clauses devoted to structural wage increase, flexible work arrangements, health provisions, and gender equality.

However, advancing any generalization from these findings might be risky given the limits of the data under analysis. National databases on collective agreements, as provided by Wage Indicator, despite being a unique and original source of information on industrial relations at national, sectoral and firm level, do not cover a sufficient spectrum of CBAs to be considered statistically representative. Moreover, the identification and collection strategy of agreements often could not follow a specific sampling strategy, given the scarce availability of official documents, the different models of collection and storage, and the necessity to resort to those sources more easily available. What is more, the findings presented in the reports are mainly descriptive, leaving aside clear-cut interpretations on the relation between the observed changes and the explosion of the pandemic. Indeed, this type of analysis would need further investigation through a more in-depth qualitative analysis of the texts and direct interviews with social actors.

The report presented here summarizes the main results of the comparative analysis on national collective agreements expired before the explosion of the pandemic and renewed during the Covid-19 pandemic, focusing on three countries: Austria, Italy and the Netherlands. For each of these countries was indeed possible to retrieve a sufficiently high number of CBAs. Moreover, data

presented here can be easily enriched by the analysis provided in Jansen et al. (2023), where the main results of the BARCOVID Negotiator Survey are presented with respect to the same set of countries.<sup>1</sup>

## Wage Indicator CBAs database

Before entering the details of the comparative analysis on the content of collective agreements, let us illustrate the sectoral composition of our database, that represents only a subset of CBAs database built during the BARCOVID project (see the Methodological section in the Appendix).

As shown in **Table 1** and **Figure 1**, a certain heterogeneity in terms of sectors can be observed. The most represented sector is Manufacturing, followed by Healthcare, care services, social work and Transport, logistics and communication. On the contrary, the least represented ones are Activities of religious organisations, Real estate, renting, call center and Other professional, scientific and technical activities.

*Table 1 CBAs by sector*

<b>Sector of the CBA</b>	<b>Austria</b>	<b>Italy</b>	<b>The Netherlands</b>
Agriculture, forestry, fishing	6	4	2
Construction, technical consultancy	1	0	8
Education, research	0	2	1
Entertainment culture and sport	5	0	0
Financial services, banking, insurance	2	2	2
Healthcare, caring services, social work	7	3	5
Hospitality, catering, tourism	2	0	3
ICT services	1	1	2
Legal and market consultancy	0	0	2
Manufacturing	1	9	11
Public administration, police, interest groups	0	3	2
Publishing, printing, media	4	1	1
Retail Trade	1	0	6
Real estate, renting, call center	1	0	0
Security, cleaning, homework	0	2	1
Trade, fueling and repair of motor	0	0	3
Transport, logistics, communication	7	3	4
Waste treatment, sanitation, supply	1	2	2
Wholesale	1	0	2

<sup>1</sup> Country reports on collective bargaining can be found at the BARCOVID page.

Other professional, scientific and technical activities	0	1	0
Activities of religious organisations	0	1	0
Other	0	0	1
Total	40	34	58

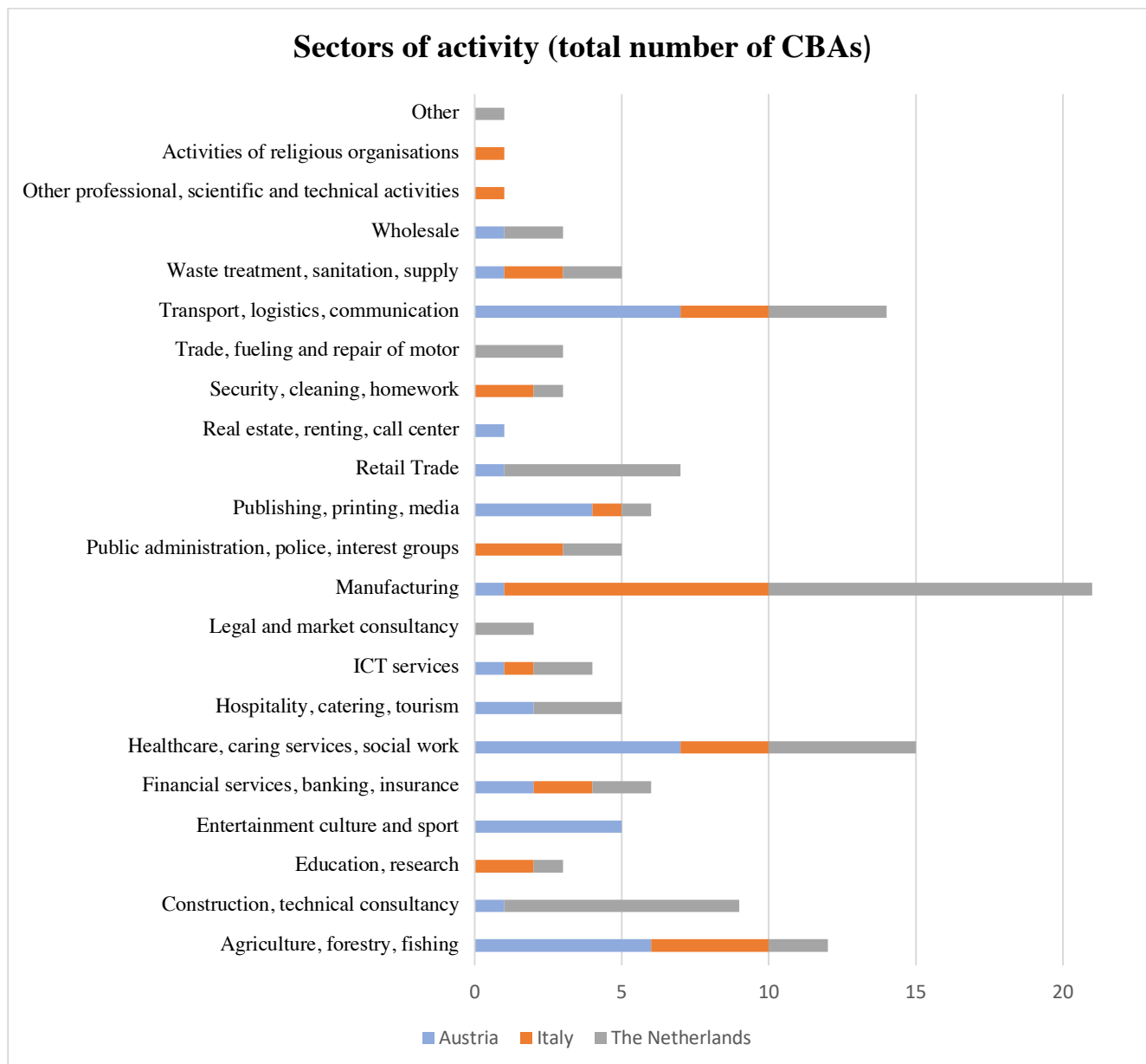


Figure 1 Sectoral composition of the CBAs database (total number of CBAs)

For what concerns the type of organizations, most of the CBAs cover the private sector, with a nevertheless significant number of public and non-for-profit organizations, in the case of Austria and Italy (Table 2 and Figure 2).

Table 2 CBAs by type of organization

Type of organization of the CBA	Austria	Italy	The Netherlands
Private	30	26	50
Public	3	5	0
In the non for profit sector	4	1	3
Semi-public	2	0	5
Government funded organisation	0	1	0
Co-operative organisation	0	1	0
n.a.	1	0	0
N. of CBAs	40	34	58

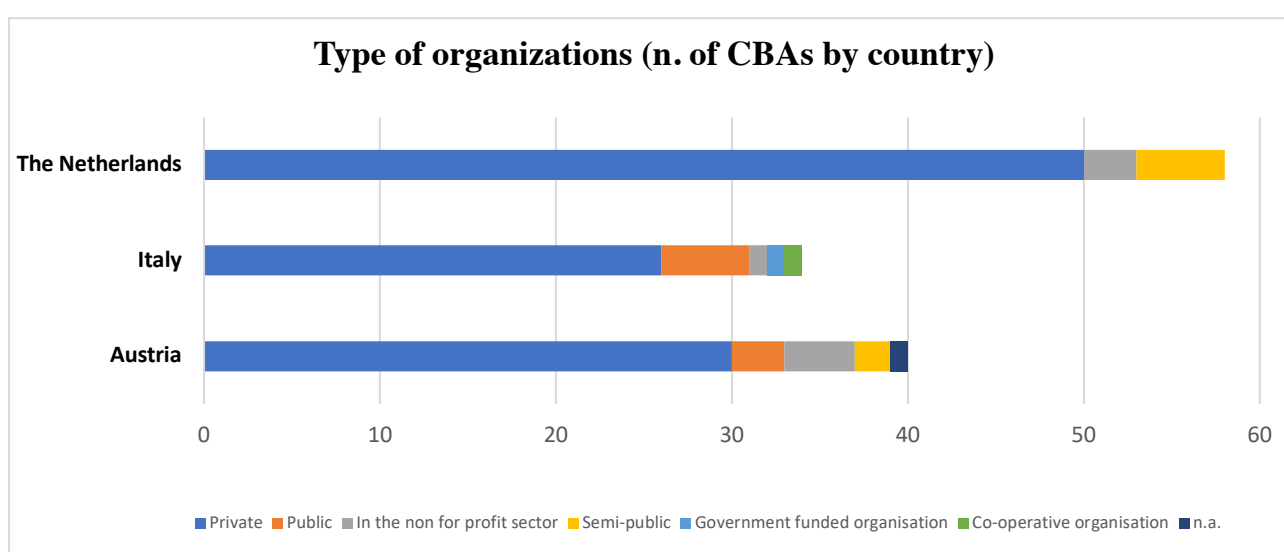


Figure 2 Type of organizations by country (n. of CBAs)

Trade unions always result as signatories of the collective agreements in the three countries. From the employer side, both single employers' association and multiple employers show as signatories of the agreements (Table 3), with a bigger presence of single associations in the case of Italy (Figure 3).

Table 3 Signatories per country

Signatories	Austria	Italy	The Netherlands
Single employer / employers' association	5	19	11
Trade unions	40	34	58
N. of CBAs	40	34	58

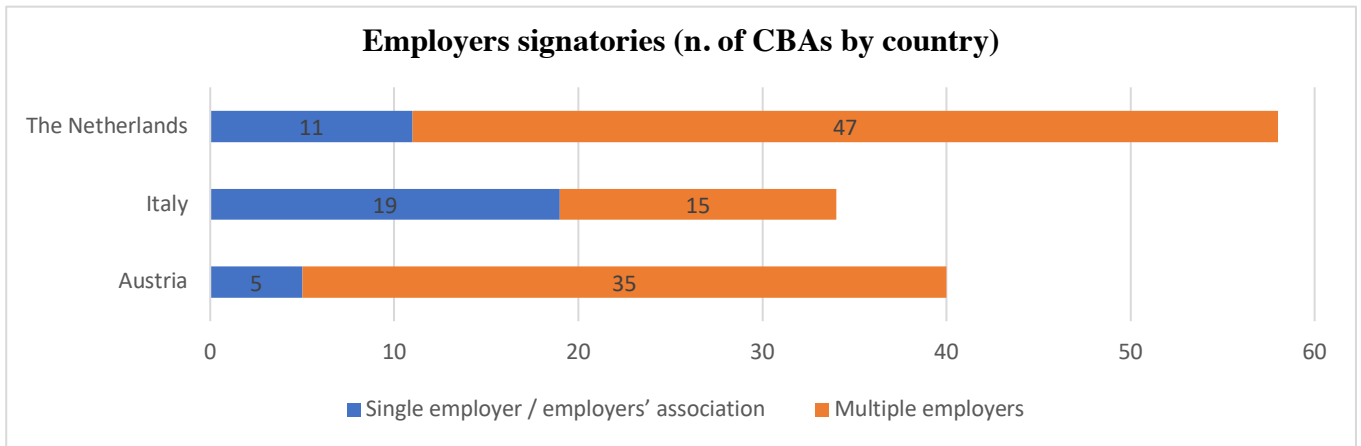


Figure 3 Single and multiple employers (N of CBAs by country)

## The impact of the Covid19 pandemic on clauses

In the following section, we will illustrate the observed changes in the number of clauses included in collective agreements, comparing pre and post Covid agreements. In line with Jansen et al. (2023), also in this case the analysis will focus on Austria, The Netherlands and Italy. Consistently with the structure defined by the Wage Indicator codebook, we mainly distinguish ten main domains of interest: 1) Job titles; 2) Training; 3) Social security and pensions; 4) Employment contracts; 5) Sickness and disability; 6) Health and medical assistance; 7) Work/family balance arrangements; 8) Gender equality issues; 9) Working hours and 10) Wages.

Notice, however, that the descriptive analysis presented in this report strongly depends on the type of data made available once the process of CBAs annotation was completed by the coders. Some inaccuracies might be due to the different understanding and interpretations of the texts provided by the coders.

Differently from country reports, where attention was devoted to the description of the relative frequency of each clause in the national dataset of collective agreements, in this case the focus will rather be on different patterns of change observed in the three countries once we compare pre- and



post-Covid documents. Moreover, given the different size of national CBAs databases, the observed change in the frequency of each clause will be also computed in terms of percentage change.<sup>2</sup>

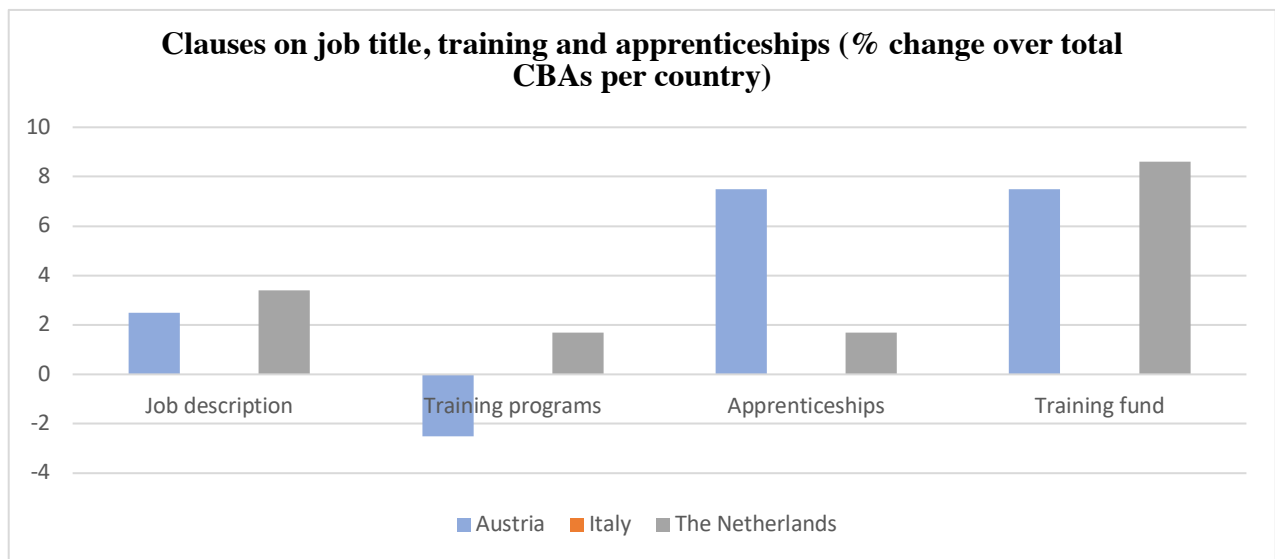
## Job title, training and apprenticeships

For what concerns provisions on the job description, classification systems, training programs and apprenticeships, we observe few changes in the case of Austria and The Netherlands, as reported in **Table 5** and illustrated in **Figure 4**. All changes are positive, apart for clauses on training programs in the case of Austria. In the case of Italy, where already most of the CBAs displayed clauses on these topics before the pandemic, no change is observed.

Table 4 Clauses on job title, training and apprenticeships (Pre and Post-Covid comparison by country)

Clause	Austria			Italy			The Netherlands		
	Pre-Covid	Post-Covid	Change (unit)	Pre-Covid	Post-Covid	Change (unit)	Pre-Covid	Post-Covid	Change (unit)
Job description	32	33	1	34	34	0	56	58	2
Training programs	39	38	-1	34	34	0	55	56	1
Apprenticeships	31	34	3	28	28	0	24	25	1
Training Fund	2	5	3	30	30	0	27	32	5
N. of CBAs	40			34			58		

Figure 4 Relative change in the number of clauses on job title, training and apprenticeship (Pre and Post Covid comparison, by country)



<sup>2</sup> This measure might be biased by the different degree of diffusion of a specific clause before the Covid. For this reason, the tables provide all relevant information to compute the absolute change.

## Employment contract and non-standard jobs

Almost all CBAs usually contain clauses on employment contract, with information about the trial period, severance pay and so on. In the case of Austria, we observe a slight increase in the number of CBAs with these clauses (+1 for the three issues), while in the case of The Netherlands, the main increase is observed on trial periods that result to be included in 11 CBAs with respect to the pre-pandemic period. A completely different scenario is the one of Italy, where provisions on less frequent issues such as the entitlement of free legal assistance and the regulation of the use of temporary workers are increasing in the post-pandemic period (**Table 6**).

Table 5 Clauses on employment contract and non-standard jobs (Pre and Post-Covid comparison by country)

Clause	Austria			Italy			The Netherlands		
	Pre-Covid	Post-Covid	Change (unit)	Pre-Covid	Post-Covid	Change (unit)	Pre-Covid	Post-Covid	Change (unit)
Employment contract	39	40	-1	34	34	0	57	57	0
Trial period	26	27	1	33	33	0	31	42	11
Severance pay	36	37	-1	34	34	0	4	4	0
Free legal assistance	0	0	0	23	25	2	0	0	0
Provision on temporary workers	4	4	0	28	29	1	43	43	0
N. of CBAs	40			34			58		

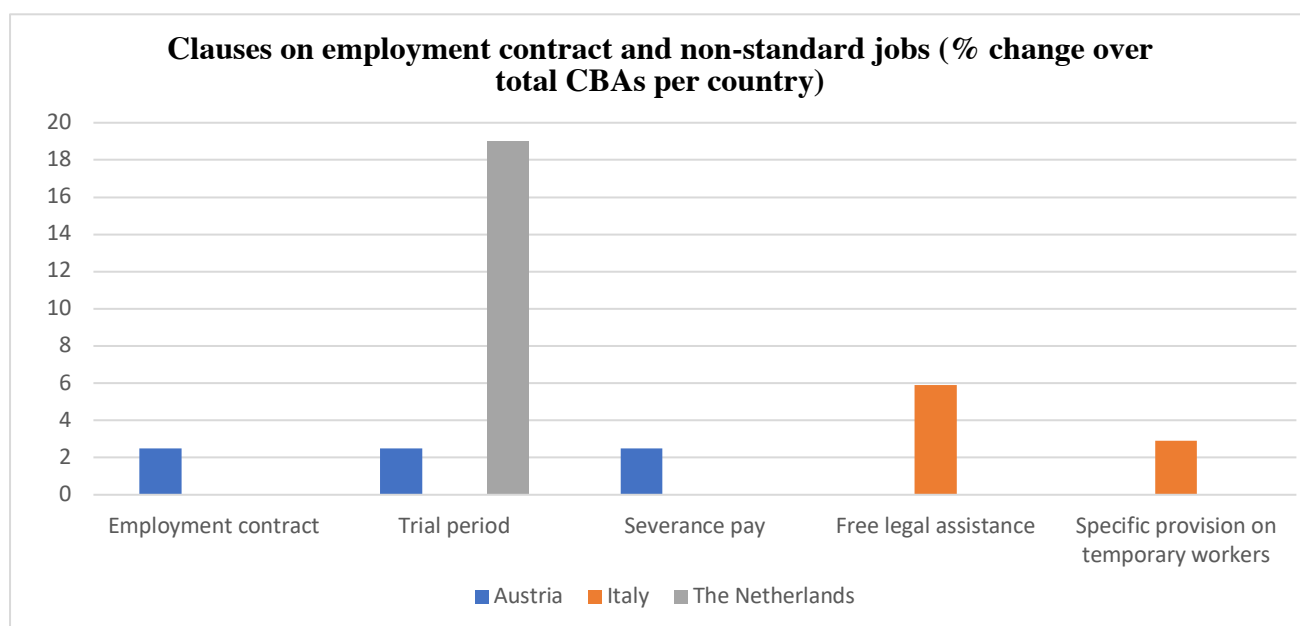


Figure 5 Relative change in the number of clauses on employment contract and non-standard jobs (Pre and Post Covid comparison, by country)

## Sickness and disability, health and medical assistance

Paid leave for sickness, health provisions and medical assistance have certainly represented topics of discussion during the Covid-19 pandemic. Apart from Italy, where these topics seemed to be frequently discussed in CBAs already before the pandemic, we observe an increase in the number of clauses in collective agreements after the pandemic both in Austria and The Netherlands with respect to sickness leave, return after a long illness, pay in case of work accidents (**Table 7**). Moreover, in

Table 6 Clauses on sickness, health and social security (Pre and Post-Covid comparison by country)

Clause	Austria			Italy			The Netherlands		
	Pre-Covid	Post-Covid	Change (unit)	Pre-Covid	Post-Covid	Change (unit)	Pre-Covid	Post-Covid	Change (unit)
Sickness leave	37	38	1	34	34	0	57	57	0
Return to work after serious illness	2	2	0	31	31	0	10	9	-1
Pay in case of disability because of work accident	21	22	1	33	33	0	21	22	-1
Health and safety workplace policy	18	18	0	34	34	0	40	41	1
Health and safety training	1	1	0	32	32	0	9	9	0
N. of CBAs	40			34			58		

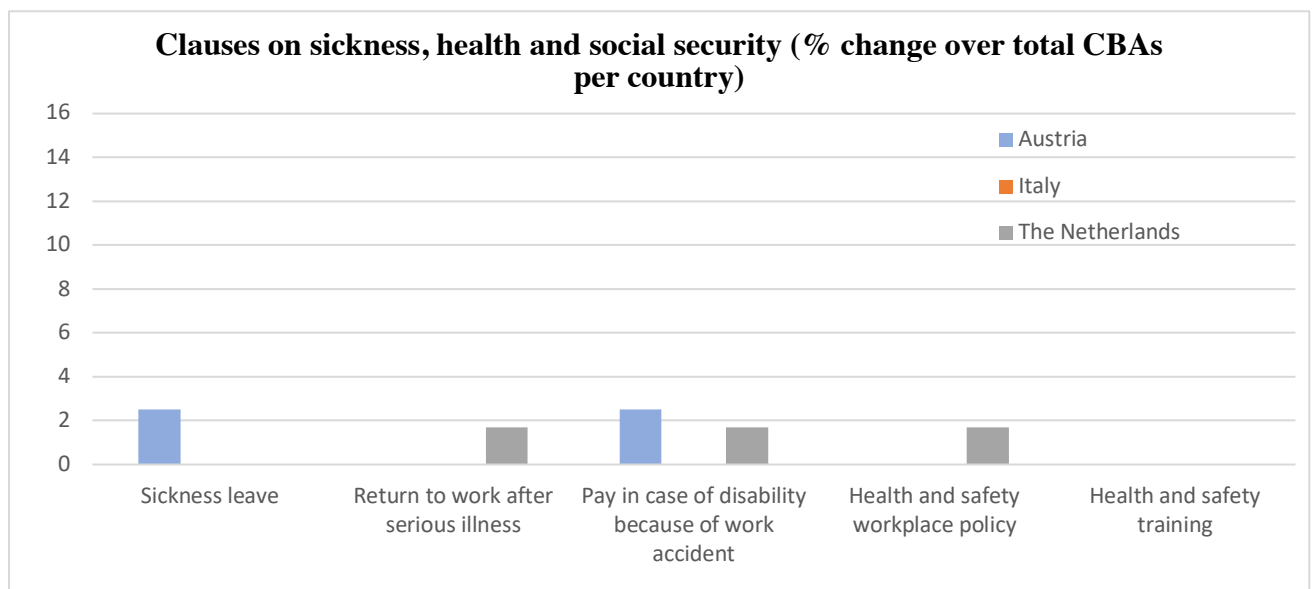


Figure 6 Relative change in the number of clauses on sickness leave, health and social (Pre and Post Covid comparison, by country)

## Work/family balance arrangements

Work and family balance arrangements include clauses on paid maternity and paternity leave, paid leave to take care of dependent relatives and special paid leaves (i.e., for marriage or death of relatives). These clauses usually refer to the national regulation, but in some cases, they also introduce additional provisions such as the extension of the period of paid leave or the increase of the allowance. Almost all the clauses considered increase during the post-pandemic period (**Table 7** and **Figure 7**).

Table 7 Clauses on work/family balance arrangements (Pre and Post-Covid comparison by country)

Clause	Austria			Italy			The Netherlands		
	Pre-Covid	Post-Covid	Change (unit)	Pre-Covid	Post-Covid	Change (unit)	Pre-Covid	Post-Covid	Change (unit)
Paid leave to care for dependent relatives	12	11	-1	31	32	1	28	33	5
Paid leave in case of death of relatives	39	39	0	27	29	2	54	54	0
Paid leave in case of the worker's marriage	36	39	3	29	34	5	40	49	9
N of CBAs	40			34			58		

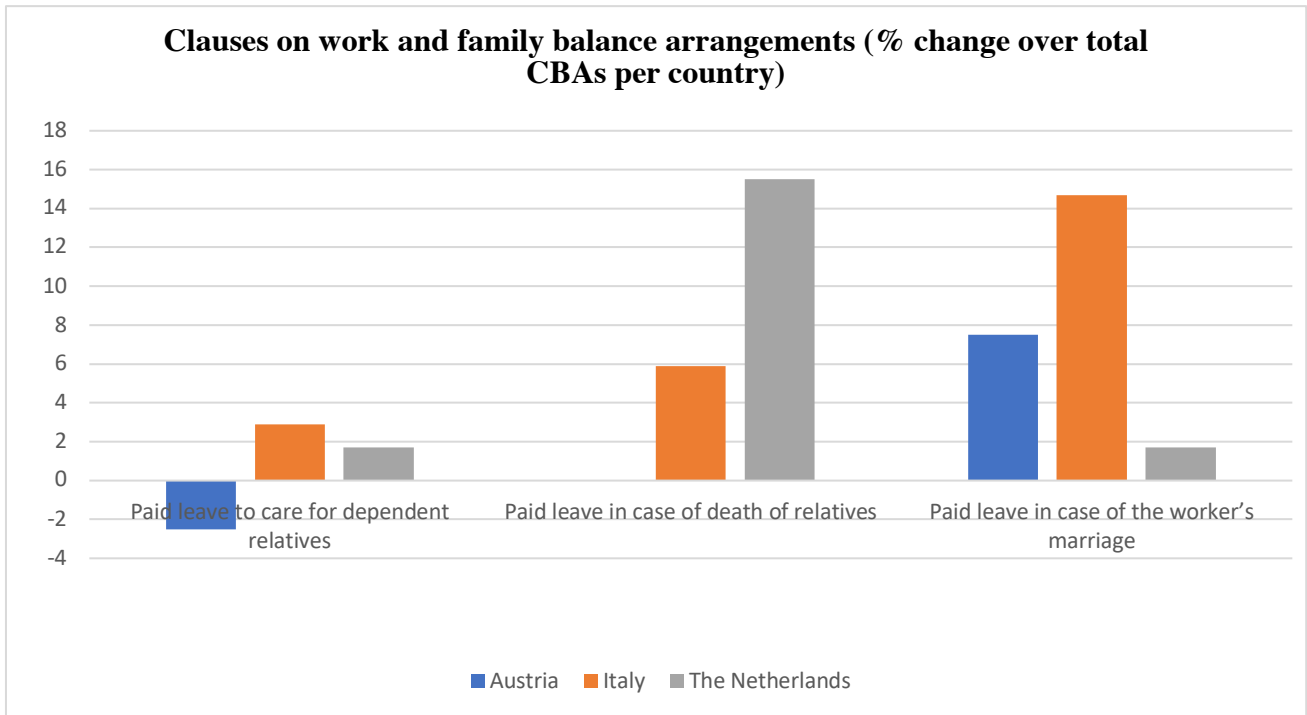


Figure 7 Relative change in the number of clauses on work and family balance arrangements (Pre and Post Covid comparison, by country)

## Gender equality

Gender equality issues include a broad set of provisions whose aim is to reduce and prevent discriminatory practices against women. Moreover, given the social relevance of violence against women, social actors are devoting increasing attention to the necessity of ensuring a safe and respectful workplace environment. This seems to be particularly the case of Italian CBAs, since we observe a significant increase in clauses addressing sexual harassment at work and recognizing special leave for workers subjected to domestic violence (**Table 8, Figure 8**).

Table 8 Clauses on gender equality issues (Pre and Post-Covid comparison by country)

Clause	Austria			Italy			The Netherlands		
	Pre-Covid	Post-Covid	Change (unit)	Pre-Covid	Post-Covid	Change (unit)	Pre-Covid	Post-Covid	Change (unit)
Equal opportunities for promotion of women workers	1	2	1	21	26	5	6	6	0
Equal opportunities for training of women workers	2	3	1	18	23	5	5	3	-2
Addressing sexual harassment at work	0	0	0	23	29	6	15	15	0
Special leave for workers subjected to domestic violence	0	0	0	14	25	11	0	0	0
Monitoring gender equality	1	1	0	28	28	0	3	5	2
N of CBAs	40			34			58		

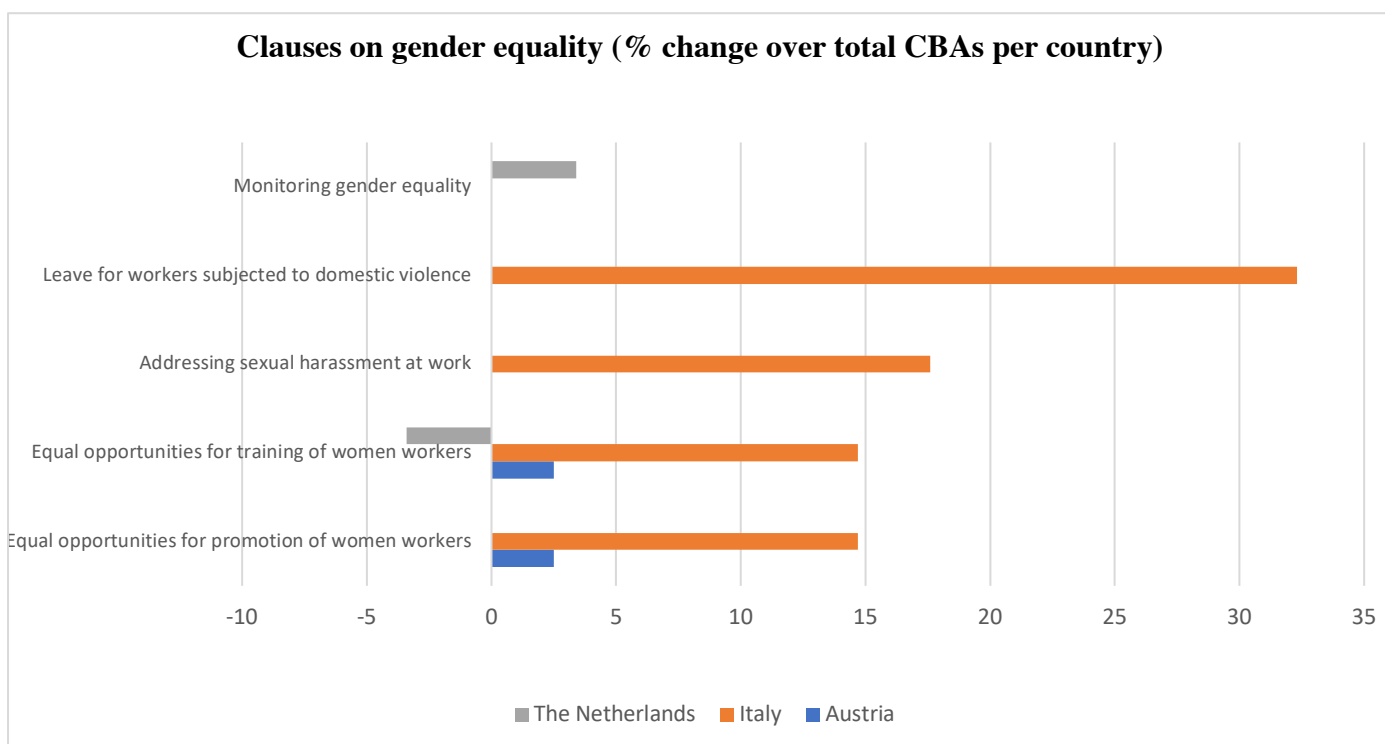


Figure 8 Relative change in the number of clauses on gender equality (Pre and Post Covid comparison, by country)

## Working hours

Clauses on working hours are widely diffused in CBAs, as they regulate the work organization model of specific sectors of activity. Indeed, almost all the three national CBAs datasets exhibit clauses on working hours and rest period (**Table 9**). On the contrary, clauses on flexible work arrangements are less frequent in collective bargaining, despite they have been increasing after the explosion of the pandemic (**Figure 9**).

Table 9 Clauses on working hours (Pre and Post-Covid comparison by country)

Clause	Austria			Italy			The Netherlands		
	Pre-Covid	Post-Covid	Change (unit)	Pre-Covid	Post-Covid	Change (unit)	Pre-Covid	Post-Covid	Change (unit)
Working hours	40	40	<b>0</b>	34	34	<b>0</b>	58	56	<b>-2</b>
Paid annual leave	38	39	<b>1</b>	34	34	<b>0</b>	56	55	<b>-1</b>
Rest period	36	37	<b>1</b>	34	34	<b>0</b>	41	45	<b>4</b>
Paid leave for trade union activities	0	0	<b>0</b>	33	33	<b>0</b>	39	44	<b>5</b>
Flexible work arrangements	22	31	<b>9</b>	30	31	<b>1</b>	34	39	<b>5</b>
Remote work	4	4	<b>0</b>	16	18	<b>2</b>	2	2	<b>0</b>
N of CBAs	40			34			58		

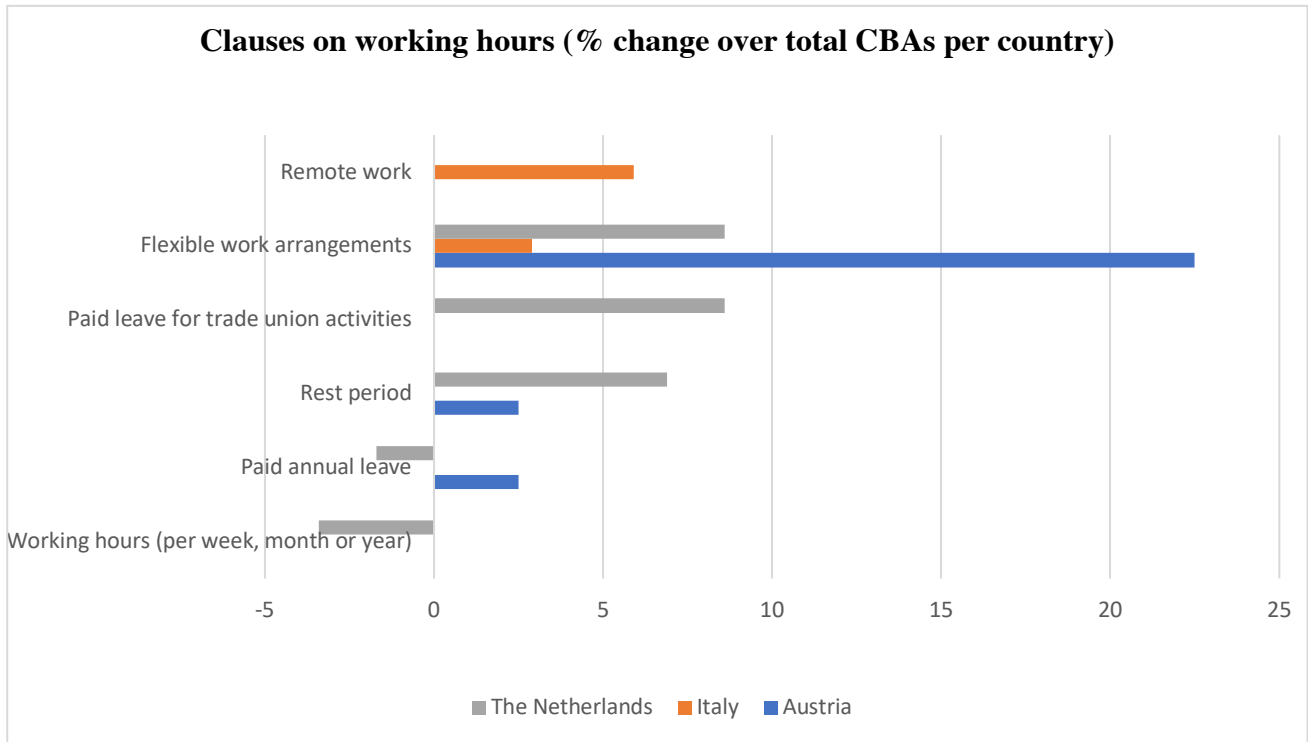


Figure 9 Relative change in the number of clauses on working hours (Pre and Post Covid comparison, by country)

## Wages

The most interesting result concerning provisions on wages is the higher number of clauses on structural wage increase in the three countries (Table 10). Other clauses on wages, seniority allowance and overtime remain quite stable for Austria and Italy, but seem to decrease in the case of Dutch CBAs.

Table 10 Clauses on wages (Pre and Post-Covid comparison by country)

Clause	Austria			Italy			The Netherlands		
	Pre-Covid	Post-Covid	Change (unit)	Pre-Covid	Post-Covid	Change (unit)	Pre-Covid	Post-Covid	Change (unit)
Wages	40	40	0	34	34	0	58	57	-1
Structural wage increase	18	29	11	32	34	2	35	48	13
Once only extra payment	39	39	0	34	34	0	29	21	-8
Seniority allowance	23	25	2	29	29	0	12	6	-6
Overtime work allowance	37	37	0	34	34	0	53	51	-2
N of CBAs	40			34			58		



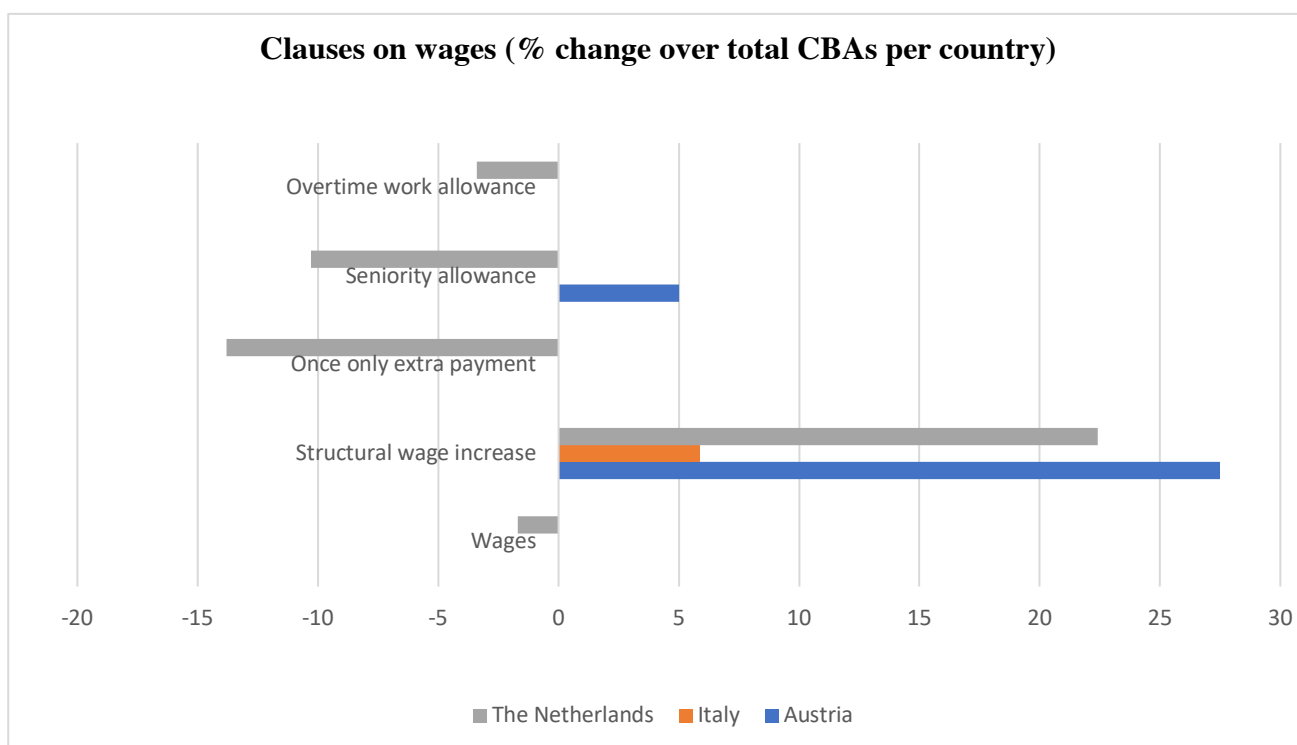


Figure 10 Relative change in the number of clauses on wages (Pre and Post Covid comparison, by country)

## Clauses on Covid

Not all CBAs renewed after the explosion of the pandemic contain clauses on Covid-19 or make at least a quick reference to it. On the contrary, only a minority of them specifically discuss the explosion of the pandemic. Italy is the country where a higher incidence of Covid-19 related clauses is observed, since almost the 30% of the NCBA's under analysis discuss about Covid-19 against the 12 and 13% in the case of Austria and The Netherlands (**Figure 11**). Moreover, it is worth to notice that only Italian CBAs under analysis, despite only in few agreements, stress the necessity of ensuring trade unions rights during the pandemic (**Table 11**).

Table 11 Clauses on Covid-19 (number of CBAs by country)

Clause	Austria	Italy	The Netherlands
Specific clause on Covid	5	10	8
Exercise of trade unions rights during the pandemic	0	6	0
Training related to Covid	0	1	0
N. of CBAs	40	34	58

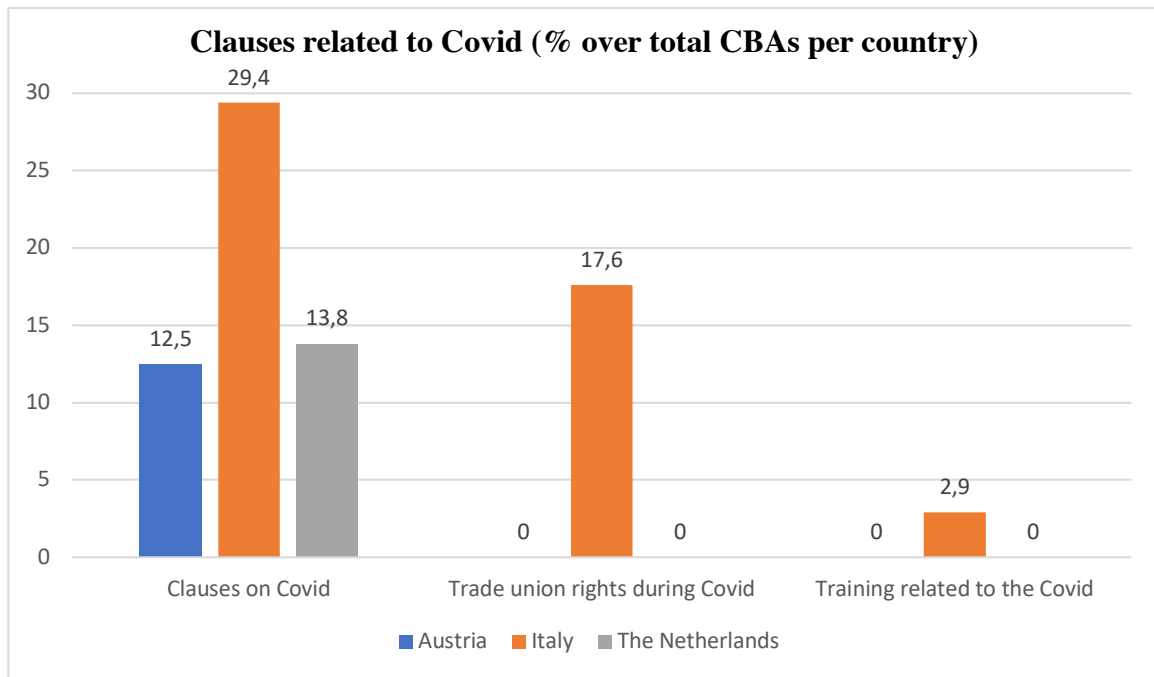


Figure 11 Clauses on Covid-19 (% of CBAs over total CBAs by country)

## Conclusions

The main changes in the content of Austrian, Dutch and Italian CBAs have been illustrated in this report, looking comparatively at the same collective agreement signed before and after the Covid-19 pandemic. A relative stability emerges in terms of frequency of the main provisions usually included in collective agreements such as wages, working hour and so on. However, few differences can be identified once we look more in depth at those clauses related to structural wage increase, health provisions and flexible work arrangements. Indeed, these topics seem to have been more frequently the object of bargaining in collective agreements after the explosion of the pandemic, consistently with the evidence presented by Eurofound (2021) and ILO (2022). However, no further interpretation of these results can be provided, given the different size and representativeness of national CBAs under analysis. At the same time, these findings could represent an interesting starting point for a deeper analysis on the evolution of collective bargaining, through a more qualitative analysis on texts and the collection of additional evidence on social actors' perspective (Cetrulo and Kováčová, 2023).

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## Appendix on methodology

The collection strategy of collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) adopted within the BARCOVID project has been conceived by Wage Indicator and the entire team of research to meet the official targets of the project, mainly expressed in terms of number of CBAs and targeted countries (**Table 12**).

*Table 12 Initial targets of the BARCOVID project (number of CBAs by country)*

<b>TARGETS OF THE PROJECT: CBAs Nr/Country</b>
50 Dutch CBAs renewals (of the pre Covid-19 CBAs already contained in the WIF Database)
50 Spanish CBAs renewals (of the pre Covid-19 CBAs already contained in the WIF Database)
50 Italian CBAs renewals (of the pre Covid-19 CBAs already contained in the WIF Database)
A total of 100 Austrian CBAs: before COVID and after COVID
A total of 100 French CBAs: before COVID and after COVID
A total of 50 CBAs renewals for the rest of all the other countries (EU 27 plus 5 candidate countries), excluding the already mentioned CBAs from Spain, Italy, Netherlands, Austria, France

The main criteria adopted to collect CBAs consisted in looking for the post Covid-19 renewals of all the EU 27 plus 5 candidate countries' CBAs already contained in the Wage Indicator database (called "Cobra"). This would allow an original and up to date comparison of pairs of collective agreements, expired and renewed after the explosion of the pandemic. Unfortunately, in some countries, this goal turned out very difficult to be pursued. As documented in national reports, Covid-19 pandemic has affected social bargaining negotiations activities, probably favouring a certain delay in negotiating, signing, and publishing the agreements' renewals.

To face this challenge and meet the project's requirements, a parallel collection strategy was conceived and applied, consisting in the collection of 'pairs' of both pre and post Covid-19 agreements that were not already included in the database. Thanks to this strategy, it was possible to overachieve the target of CBAs and, at the same time, compensate for the number of expected CBAs renewals in the most problematic cases, where available CBAs were not sufficient. Overall, around 400 new collective agreements have been collected, uploaded in the WageIndicator Collective Agreements Database and coded according to the annotation process defined in Ceccon and Medas (2023). To be more precise, collective agreements and related renewals - pre and post Covid-19 - have been collected for several countries: Spain, Netherlands, Italy, Austria, Turkey, Germany, France, Portugal, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Estonia (**Table 13 and Table 14**).

Nonetheless, the whole number of CBAs used in this analysis is higher, since it also involves the pre Covid-19 CBAs already contained in the WIF Database.

As already explained above, the whole collection strategy has been conceived and carried out in the framework of "pairs" of agreements to allow a comparison of type of bargaining in their Pre and Post Covid-19 documents. National, regional, public, private, sectoral and company level agreements have been collected, to cover the widest spectrum of collective agreements typologies and levels of bargaining. Several sources have been identified to ensure the collection of collective agreements, following the criteria of institutional relevance, reliability, and documents' availability. The main source is represented by national collective agreements registries built by national institutional offices

that store collective agreements together with additional information on sectors, number of employees covered and so on. The second most important source is represented by the direct contact with the bargaining social partners, namely trade unions and employers' organizations, asking for full-text and official documents of collective agreements. Alternatively, official documents have been collected through a careful desk research.

*Table 13 CBAs renewals of previous CBAs present in the database*

<b>Country EU 27+5</b>	<b>CBAs already in the Database</b>	<b>Uploaded in COBRA</b>
Spain	114	29
Italy	102	20
Czech Rep	10	6
Austria	26	15
Portugal	33	7
Turkey	55	13
The Netherlands	101	69
Hungary	10	2
Poland	10	2
Slovakia	10	7
France	31	4
TOT	502	174

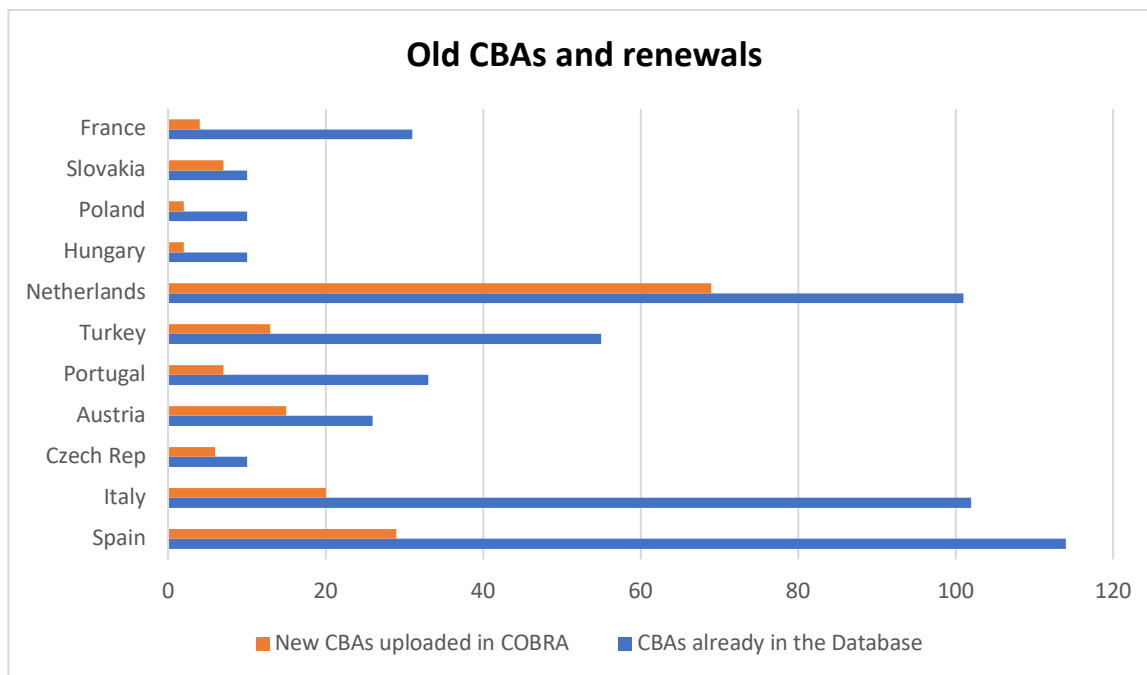


Figure 12 Collection of new CBAs (strategy 1)

Table 14 New CBAs collected (renewals of CBAs already present in the database)

Country	Renewals uploaded in COBRA	Predecessors uploaded in COBRA
Austria	35	35
Germany	4	4
Italy	16	15
Spain	36	36
Portugal	4	4
<b>TOT</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>94</b>

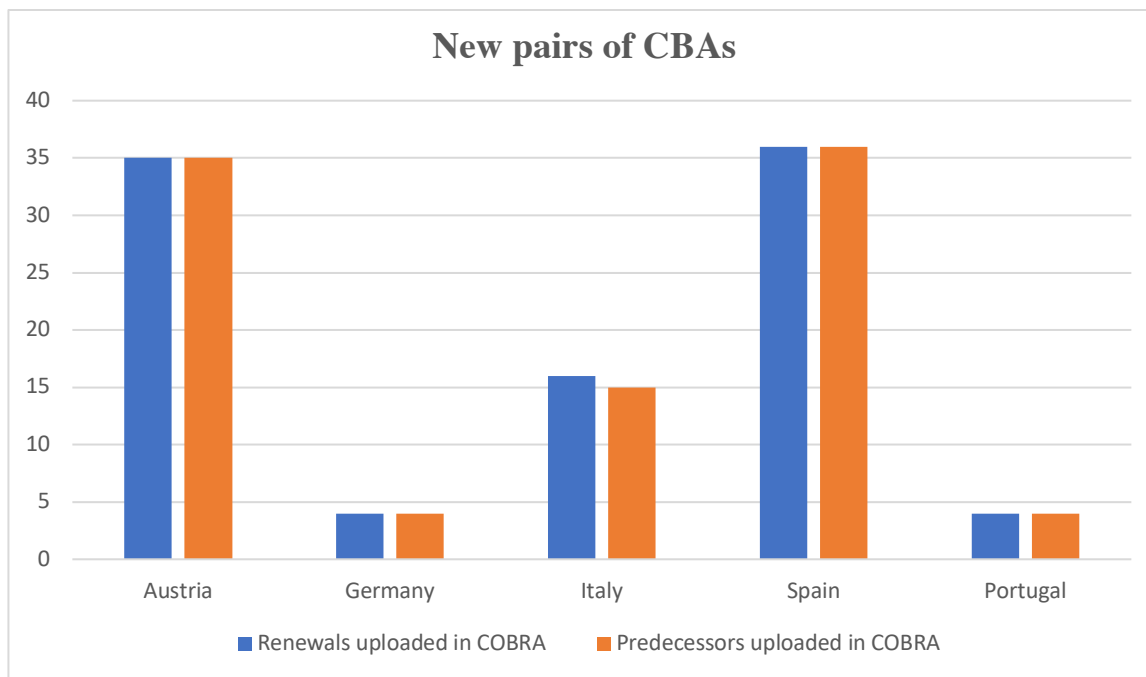


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