

Collective Bargaining in France 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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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.

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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.



Funding

BARCOVID (VS/2021/0190) is funded by the European Commission through its Social Dialogue Program.

Bibliographical information

Cetrulo, A., and Medas, G. (2023). *Collective Bargaining in France during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Evidence from CBAs database*. University of Amsterdam, Central European Labour Studies Institute, Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies, WageIndicator Foundation.

Contact

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Table of contents

INTRODUCTION	3
FRENCH CBAS DATABASE.....	3
THE IMPACT OF THE COVID19 PANDEMIC ON CLAUSES	4
JOB TITLE, TRAINING AND APPRENTICESHIPS.....	4
SOCIAL SECURITY AND EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT.....	5
SICKNESS AND DISABILITY, HEALTH AND MEDICAL ASSISTANCE	5
WORK/FAMILY BALANCE ARRANGEMENTS	6
GENDER EQUALITY	6
WORKING HOURS	7
WAGES	7
CLAUSES ON COVID	7
CONCLUSIONS.....	8
REFERENCES	8
LIST OF TABLES.....	8

Introduction

The database of French sectoral collective agreements is made of four national collective agreements signed before the explosion of the Covid-19 pandemic and their correspondent renewal signed during the pandemic. The limited number of French agreements is due to the unexpected difficulties encountered in the collection of complete French agreements. More precisely, it depends on the fact that French CBAs are officially published online only as partial documents, instead of the whole entire document, meaning with amendments and renewals of single articles of the agreement itself. The lack of availability of entire agreements renewals is incompatible with the main objective of the BARCOVID project, which is to compare full versions of the same agreement signed before and after the explosion of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹

Therefore, given the very limited number of documents available to perform the pre/post Covid analysis, the report on French CBAs will essentially present the main results of the comparative analysis without advancing any further generalization.

French CBAs Database

All the agreements belong to the private sector, and they are signed by multiple employers. Three out of the four agreement cover the retail trade sector, while one covers the wholesale sector (**Table 1**).

¹ Nevertheless, the original amount of French collective agreements that was supposed to be used in the project has been compensated through the collection of other national collective agreements from other EU countries.

Table 1 Characteristics of French CBAs

Characteristic of the CBA	Number of CBAs
Wholesale sector	1
Retail trade sector	3
Private type of organization	4
Multiple employers	4

All agreements are signed by multiple employers and trade unions, as shown in **Table 2**.

Table 2 French CBAs by type of signatories (Pre/Post Covid comparison)

Type of French signatories	Pre-covid		Post-covid	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Multiple employers	4	0	4	0
Trade unions	4	0	4	0

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 the French agreements, comparing pre and post Covid agreements. Consistently with the structure defined by the Wage Indicator codebook (Ceccon and Medas, 2022), we 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.

Job title, training and apprenticeships

All agreements contain clauses on the job classification system, training programs devoted to workers and apprenticeships. In most of the agreements under analysis, a specific clause on training funds is included. No change is observed when comparing clauses before and after Covid (**Table 3**).

Table 3 Clauses on job titles, training and apprenticeship contract (Pre/Post Covid comparison)

Clause	Pre-covid	Post-covid
Job description/job classifications system	4	4
Training programs	4	4
Apprenticeships	4	4
Training Fund	3	3

Social security and employment contract

All agreements contain clauses on pension fund for employees and employment job contract. Other provisions related to unemployment fund, trial periods and severance pay are also included in most of the agreements. No change is observed when comparing clauses before and after Covid (**Table 4**).

Table 4 Clauses on social security and employment contract (Pre/Post Covid comparison)

Clause	Pre-covid	Post-covid
Pension fund for employees	4	4
Disability fund for employees	3	3
Unemployment fund for employees	3	3
Employment contract	4	4
Trial period	3	3
Severance pay	3	3
Free legal assistance	0	0
Specific provision on temporary workers	0	0

Sickness and disability, health and medical assistance

All agreements contain clauses on sickness leave and pay in case of work accidents. Other clauses related to health and medical assistance are relatively less diffused in the four agreements under analysis. No change is observed when comparing clauses before and after Covid (**Table 5**).

Table 5 Clauses on sickness, disability, health and medical assistance (Pre/Post Covid comparison)

Clause	Pre-covid	Post-covid
Sickness leave	4	4
Return to work after serious illness	2	2
Pay in case of disability because of work accident	4	4
Free or subsidized medical assistance for sick employees	2	2
Health insurance	3	3
Health and safety workplace policy	3	3

Health and safety training	2	2
Financial support for employees funeral	0	0

Work/family balance arrangements

Clauses on work/family balance are included in the collective agreements. Maternity leave and paid leave to take care of relatives are included in all the texts, such as the paid leave for marriage. Clauses on job security after pregnancy, time off breastfeeding and paternity leave seem to be less diffused in the 4 agreements under analysis. No change is observed when comparing clauses before and after Covid (**Table 6**).

Table 6 Clauses on work/family balance arrangements (Pre/Post Covid comparison)

Clause	Pre-covid	Post-covid
Paid maternity leave	4	4
Paid paternity leave	2	2
Paid leave to care for dependent relatives	4	4
Paid leave in case of death of relatives	4	4
Paid leave in case of the worker's marriage	4	4
Time-off breastfeeding	1	1
Job security for women after maternity	2	2

Gender equality

For what concerns gender equality, all the four agreements have specific clauses concerning the promotion of equal opportunity, career development and training programs for female workers. Clauses on sexual harassment at work are less diffused. No change is observed when comparing clauses before and after Covid (**Table 7**).

Table 7 Clauses on gender equality (Pre/Post Covid comparison)

Clause	Pre-covid	Post-covid
Addressing discrimination at work	3	3
Equal opportunities for promotion of women workers	4	4
Equal opportunities for training of women workers	4	4
Addressing sexual harassment at work	1	1
Special leave for workers subjected to domestic violence	0	0
Monitoring gender equality	1	1

Working hours

All the agreements analysed have clauses on working hours, paid annual leaves and rest period. On the contrary, no agreement includes specific clauses on flexible work arrangements and remote work. No change is observed when comparing clauses before and after Covid (**Table 8**).

Table 8 Clauses on working hours (Pre/Post Covid comparison)

Clause	Pre-covid	Post-covid
Working hours (per week, month or year)	4	4
Paid annual leave	4	4
Rest period	4	4
Flexible work arrangements	0	0
Remote work	0	0

Wages

All agreements have clauses on wages. Slight changes are observed with respect to seniority allowance and overt time work allowance, requiring further investigation.

Table 9 Clause on wages (Pre/Post Covid comparison)

Clause	Pre-covid	Post-covid
Wages	4	4
Structural wage increase	2	2
Once only extra payment	1	1
Seniority allowance	3	4
Overtime work allowance	3	4

Clauses on covid

Three agreements out of four renewed after the explosion of the pandemic have at least a specific clause related to Covid-19. Usually discussed as a preamble to the agreements, the French social actors acknowledge the strong economic impact on the sector and the need of working towards the common interest.

Table 10 Clauses on the Covid-19 pandemic

Clause	Number of CBAS
Specific clause on covid	3

Conclusions

According to the analysis of the French agreements provided by Wage Indicator within the BARCOVID project, no significant change emerges in French CBAs signed before and after the explosion of the Covid-19 pandemic. These results suggest a relative stability in the main provisions included in the national collective agreements under study.

References

Ceccon, D., Medas, G. (2022). Codebook WageIndicator Collective Agreements Database – Version 5 – February 2022. WageIndicator Foundation, Amsterdam.

List of tables

<i>Table 1 Characteristics of French CBAs</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Table 2 French CBAs by type of signatories (Pre/Post Covid comparison)</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Table 3 Clauses on job titles, training and apprenticeship contract (Pre/Post Covid comparison)</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Table 4 Clauses on social security and employment contract (Pre/Post Covid comparison)</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Table 5 Clauses on sickness, disability, health and medical assistance (Pre/Post Covid comparison)</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Table 6 Clauses on work/family balance arrangements (Pre/Post Covid comparison)</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Table 7 Clauses on gender equality (Pre/Post Covid comparison)</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Table 8 Clauses on working hours (Pre/Post Covid comparison)</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Table 9 Clause on wages (Pre/Post Covid comparison)</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Table 10 Clauses on the Covid-19 pandemic</i>	<i>7</i>