



Collective Bargaining in Spain during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Observations from a Negotiator Survey

Country Report

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Central European
Labour Studies
Institute



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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.

Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies

Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies is a public university institute - with special autonomy - working in the field of applied sciences: Economics and Management, Law, Political Sciences, Agricultural Sciences and Plant Biotechnology, Medicine, and Industrial and Information Engineering. The School promotes the internationalization of didactics and research with innovative paths in the fields of university education, scientific research and advanced training.

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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Contact

Giedo Jansen, g.jansen@uva.nl

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Collective Bargaining and Industrial Relations during the Pandemic: Limited Evidence from the Barcovid Negotiator Survey

2.1 Data Collection: Negotiator Survey

We collected the data for this study through the *Barcovid Negotiator Survey*, which is an international survey conducted among negotiators and signatories of collective bargaining agreements in five European countries. The survey was conducted to investigate the impact of the Covid19 pandemic on industrial relations. We used an online questionnaire created using Qualtrics, and fieldwork was conducted between January 16 and March 10 2023. The survey questions were designed to understand the renewal process of CBAs during the pandemic and the wider implications of the pandemic on relations between social partners.

To recruit respondents, we identified signatory parties (employee and employer organizations) for all collective agreements in the CBA Database for Austria, France, Italy, The Netherlands, and Spain, and collected their email addresses via web search. If possible, information on individual negotiators (name and professional email address) was retrieved. We sent invitations to these organizations/individuals between in January 2023, and we also sent two reminders in February and March. Invitations were sent to only the first five signatory parties involved with a CBA, and only one negotiator was contacted in case multiple signatories/negotiators were listed for one organization.

For Spain, we sent invitations to 170 signatories (or other negotiators or officials involved with the collective agreement). The invitation emails and questionnaires were presented to respondents in their own language, in this case Spanish. Yet, in total, we only received 6 fully completed responses (response rate 3.5%). This is notably lower than the average response rate across the 5 countries under study (13%) and much lower than the highest response rate in the Netherlands (response rate 29.8%). Several efforts were made to increase the response rate for Spain (additional email invitations were sent out and targeted telephone calls were made). Unfortunately, these efforts did not result in a substantially higher response. More details about the data collection and the questionnaire can be found in the overarching report and the questionnaire appendix (cf. Jansen, Cetrulo and Szüdi 2023).

Because of the low number of responses, the data will not be analysed statistically. Statistical analysis on such a low number of responses is not meaningful. Nevertheless, for some key questions included in the questionnaire, we will report the answer of the 6 Spanish respondents since they still represent an original and very specific source of information. These responses, indeed, should only serve as an illustration, and should not be generalized beyond the participants of this study. For this reason, the responses are only listed, without any further interpretation. For general patterns about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the negotiation process, we refer to the comparative report by Jansen et al. (2023).

2.2 Some observation regarding the impact of the Covid19 pandemic on collective negotiations in Spain (N=6).

To what extent did the covid19 pandemic make it more difficult to reach an agreement?

Much more difficult	2
More difficult	2
Neither more difficult, nor easier	2

The Covid19 pandemic made it easier for negotiators to accept each other's terms

Strongly disagree	1
Disagree	1
Neither agree, nor disagree	1
Agree	2
Don't know / Not applicable	1

How important was the covid19 pandemic compared to other factors that affected the negotiation process?

Very important (most important reason)	1
Important, but other reasons are more important	3
Neither important, nor unimportant	2

Have negotiations during the covid19 pandemic mainly taken place online or offline?

Fully offline (in person negotiations)	2
Mostly offline, but sometimes online	1
Mostly online, but sometimes offline	2
Fully online	1

How would you describe the relations between social partners at the time of negotiations?

Bad	1
Neither good, nor bad	3
Good	2

How have the relations between social partners changed since the beginning of the Covid pandemic (in 2020)?

Worsened	1
Stayed about the same	5

2.2 Responses to open questions regarding the impact of the Covid19 pandemic on collective negotiations in Spain.

Why did the pandemic make it more difficult to reach an agreement?

“The pandemic has worsened the economic situation of [sector], which was already bad, and the employers are using this as an excuse to make their unacceptable proposal, worse than that of the [related sector].”

- Trade union representative, Spain

“It was very complicated due to the uncertainty of the economic and legal frameworks. It was unknown what the continuity of the companies or the workers would be.”

- Employer representative, Spain

“The company blames COVID for the fact that any proposed improvement cannot be accepted.”

- Trade union representative, Spain

Is there anything else you would like to share regarding the CBA renewal process in general and regarding the Covid pandemic specifically?

“In the negotiation of [sector], the pandemic has worsened the economic situation of the companies, making the negotiation more difficult. However, it has not affected the negotiating meetings, which have been in-person because they began in January 2022 when the worst moment of the pandemic had already passed in Spain and there were no movement or meeting restrictions.”

- Trade union representative, Spain

References

Jansen, G. & Cetrulo, A. and Szüdi, G (2023). *Collective Bargaining during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Evidence from an International Negotiator Survey*. Comparative Report. University of Amsterdam, Central European Labour Studies Institute, Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies, WageIndicator Foundation