















The BreakBack Newsletter is a tool for the dissemination of the results of the European Project "VS/2019/0079 -Break up to get back together (BreakBack). The impact of unionisation through innovative service provision on union membership and industrial relations"

The newsletter is edited by the Project lead-applicant CISL Nazionale with the contribution of the project partners:

Lsrc - Lithuanian Social Research Center (Lithuania):

OUIT-Sociological Research Centre on Everyday Life and Work of the Uab - Universitat AutòNoma De Barcelona (Spain);

Dsps-Unifi - University of Florence (Italv):

Faos - Employment Relations Research Center, Department of Sociology, University of Copenhagen (Denmark):

Diesis Coop Scrl-Fs (Belgium): Ezio Tarantelli Foundation -

Research and Training Center (Italy)- as an affiliated entity;

ETUC -European Confederation of Trade Unions, as an Associate Organisation.

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In this issue

- 1. BreakBack Policy Labs: an Overview
- 2. Italian Policy Lab
- 3. Belgian Policy Lab
- 4. Danish Policy Lab
- 5. Lithuanian Policy Lab
- 6. Spanish Policy Lab
- 7. The BreakBack Final Conference





BreakBack Policy Labs: an Overview

he underlying idea of the project is that it is necessary to "break up" some rigidities in labour representation and create new personalized protection tools to "get back" to collective solidarity. The project aims to reflect on how trade unions respond to the growing individualism in contemporary society, concentrating "servicing" activities – that is, the supply of services as a strategy to strengthen union membership - specifically those targeted on the "unorganised" workers - namely, people excluded from union protection (precarious workers, freelancers, digital workers, and so on). Indeed, national policy labs, held since May 2021 in all countries involved in the implementation of the Project, had the purpose to discuss the above issues together with trade unionists, academics, and experts, to understand the changing reality and improve knowledge of industrial relations.

Servicing versus organising?

In the context of rapid and profound changes in the labour market, the problem of "free-riding", connected with the perceived necessity of maintaining the traditional social base of trade unions, is compounded by the problem of "organising the unorganised". In this prospect, the effectiveness of trade union action depends on "strategic choices" that bring significant organisational implications. Among the "critical" choices – such as to explain the differences in terms of trade union performance –, one concerns the action model, whose main forms correspond to "organising" and "servicing".

The "organising" approach, inspired by a model of participatory trade unionism, is embodied in activities carried out at the local level and aimed at recruiting unorganised workers to create consensus around traditional union activities, such as collective bargaining and mobilisation. This model has developed in Anglo-Saxon countries, starting from the United States, as part of the broader debate on revitalizing trade union action.

The "servicing" approach, inspired by a model of trade union as a supplier of individual goods, is instead oriented towards the provision of services aimed at supporting workers outside the workplace. To this end, trade union organisations have dedicated bureaucratic structures made up of full-time employees with specialist skills who operate through a network of offices. As such, they compete with market services provided by external professionals, such as lawyers, accountants, and labour consultants.



In the case of "organising", those who decide to join a trade union do so in the light of a collective identity and a sense of belonging. In this sense, the union asconfiguration the "community". In the case of "servicing". the act of joining a union is primarily aimed at enjoying the advantages deriving from "selective incentives" (e.g., to have free or discounted services). Still, the link with the organisation often remains weak and rarely translates into participation. Here, the union is configured as a "service company", and the workers play the role of "consumers".

On closer inspection, these are two ideal -typical models, which tend to present themselves in different combinations.

Between "servicing" and "organising", in fact, we have intermediate approches, which we could define as "strategic servicing" since they rely on supplying individual and "collectivising" services.

These services are aimed at social groups often characterised by a low sense of collective identity and legitima-

cy (both outside and inside trade union organisations). "Collectivising" services therefore respond to specific individual needs, but have an explicit or latent collective function. In other words, they aim to "build" a collective, paving the way for possible future actions and dimensions of shared representation.

In the infographic below, a visual representation of how the services studied as good practices within the BreakBack Project take place into the ideal line connecting the three models ("organising", "strategic and collectivising servicing" and "servicing").



The Italian Policy Lab

n May 26th, a policy lab was held to disseminate the key findings of the BreakBack Project, focusing on the Italian case.

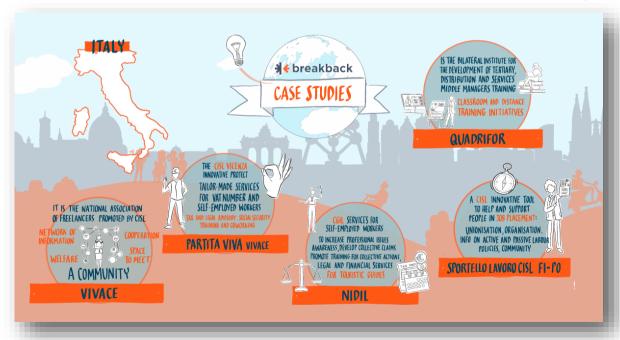
The reflection has started from the perception of a delay in the process of innovation of trade union action in relation to the changes in the world of work. However, Italian trade unions are dealing with these changes and extending their range of action to new occupational profiles, outside the traditional workunconventional places, developing practices. A growing awareness of the not-subsidiary role of service supply in the broader framework of union activities has been registered. An explicit and organic revitalization strategy based on servicing is nevertheless still missing.

The analysis of five case studies gave the base for this reflection:

- Vivace, a national association of freelancers affiliated to CISL.
- Sportello Lavoro CISL Firenze-Prato, an office set up to provide services to support people in finding a job.
- Partita Viva CISL Vicenza, a project aimed at providing tailor-made services for self-employed and freelance workers.
- Sportello lavoratori autonomi di Nidil CGIL Firenze, an office set up to provide basic services for self-employed workers.
- Quadrifor, a bilateral body providing training for middle managers in trade and services.

Some key figures:

• The supply of innovative services, based on different logics of action, is emerging along with the supply of traditional union services.





- These experiences are local or sectoral experiments, which nevertheless tend to institutionalize (not without problems, primarily due to organizational fragility, or resistance, basically cultural resistance to change).
- Traditional services (i.e., fiscal and social insurance assistance) still are a strategic driver for the financial stability of trade unions but are a weak driver for workers' involvement and mobilization.
- A problem arises concerning how to evaluate the effectiveness of servicing in revitalising union action: based on new registrations or mobilization capacity? and how to deal with job-to-job mobility across sectors?
- Service supply could, however, be a way for trade unions to social legitimization, as it also exerts a collectivizing function. That is, it identifies new collectivities that can be mobilized in the future.

Critical points in the discussion

1) On the decline of trade unionism.

• Italian trade unionism is one of the strongest trade union movement in Europe after the Nordic ones; its resilience is primarily due to its widespread service supply system (traditional services bring two million members a year).

2) Selective incentives.

 The perspective of services as "selective incentives" could be wrong: what can be done once indivisible collective goods are created? Is there room for individual action?

3) Participation.

- Servicing is a strategic tool to develop a sense of belonging to a community.
- The social division between dependent and independent workers has blurred; hence, it is crucial to understand what the workers need today.
- If people are involved in the design of services, union membership is likely to grow; for this purpose, it is necessary to develop new communication tools and participation systems.

4) Risks.

- One of the most significant risk is developing diverging logics of representation and servicing (as business associations did): it is crucial to systematically link service supply to the representation of interests.
- Creating collectivities is not enough; an effective organizational and financial management (which implies developing managerial skills within trade union organizations) is needed.





The Belgian Policy Lab

he Belgian Policy Lab took place, online, on Tuesday 22th of June 2021.

The meeting started with an introduction to the BreakBack project Melinda Kelemen and this introduction was followed by a presentation on the Belgian case by Karolien Lenaerts (KU Leuven - HIVA).

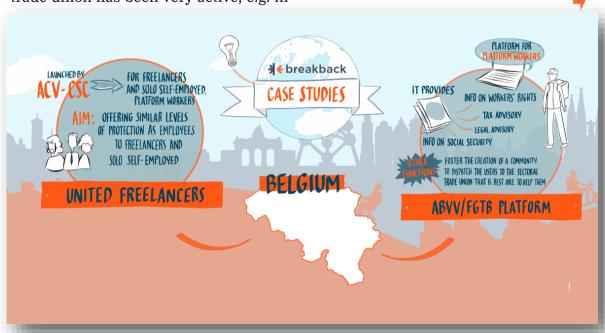
Then a discussion on the two case studies in focus followed.

Case 1: ABVV-FGTB platform for platform workers (presentation by Tom Peeters)

• Broad overview of all activities ABVV-FGTB (BTB in particular) does in relation to platform work, which includes all activities around the 'platform for platform workers'. Especially in the transport sector, the trade union has been very active, e.g. in

relation to Uber, Deliveroo, etc. but also in relation to other (parcel) transportation companies (e.g. GLS-POSTNL). Platform work is seen a way to organise labour as cheaply and flexibly as possible (cf. social dumping), which is an issue the union is familiar with in the transport sector. Platform work leads to more precarity in the labour market.

- Discussion on the current legal framework 'Law De Croo' and the need to have a third status in between self-employed and employee. The union is against a third status, as this creates a higher level of complexity and more grey areas.
- BTB focuses on three areas: 1) increasing awareness among the general public (including the young); 2) addressing issues in court / juridically (e.g. court cases against Uber and Deliveroo; influencing policy); 3) launching campaigns (representing





all those who work in the transport sector, regardless of their status – not necessarily to get more members but to unite workers and to give them a voice). The union is also very active in the field, goes out to meet workers.

Case 2: United Freelancers (presentation by Joep Vanderbeke)

- ACV-CSC aims to be a union for everyone on the shop floor, irrespective of their status, and is reflecting on how to defend these workers' interests as best as possible. United Freelancers targets platform workers and the self-employed. These groups are brought together as they generally have no access to collective bargaining and worse conditions and social protection than employees.
- United Freelancers provides both individual and collective support. The aim is to offer similar and equivalent services to what is offered to employees with employment contracts, but with some tailoring to reflect the particular situation of the self-employed and platform workers.
- •United Freelancers has an extensive Support Centre (e.g. FAQ sent out, checks for false self-employment clauses in contracts) and is currently developing a web tool for platform workers.
- •United Freelancers emphasises a collective answer to the issues these workers face: false self-employment, wellbeing legislation (application, extension),

concluding collective agreements.

Reflections from the experts and the audience

- Belgium performs well in comparison to other countries in terms of the trade union density, but the latest data suggest that it is in decline and has fallen below 50% in 2019 (with some exceptions). Overall, the number of trade unions members seems to go down.
- Case examples: good illustration of the service-oriented approach that is typical for Belgium; in the country the organising model is relatively unknown (except e.g. work council elections).
- Why are trade unions trying to organise platform workers, do the benefits outweigh the costs? A number of reasons were suggested: positive media attention, getting experience in dealing with such issues to apply to other sectors, profile of the workers involved, positive experiences with the unions, etc.
- Upcoming European Commission initiative on platform work: first consultation round of social partners was concluded, second round recently launched (giving more detailed inputs now). The issue of atypical work and regulating it to ensure that all have access to social protection, good working conditions and the right to collective bargaining is key. This matters for the long run sustainability of public expenditure for social protection.





• Unions agreed that the target groups in focus are growing and at the centre of the policy and societal debates in Belgium.

Concluding remarks

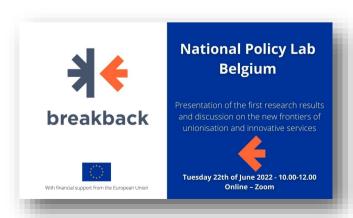
The provision of collective as well as individual services by unions to their members is a core activity of Belgian trade unions, which dates back to their early days and is linked to the Ghent system that is currently in place. The Belgian trade unions provide a wide array of individual services, and serve members who are active as well as inactive in the labour market.

In recent years, trade unions have undertaken several initiatives to offer new types of services to their existing members - with a view to retaining members – but also to offer traditional or new services to groups that were typically outside of their scope. the self-employed Especially platform workers, who are typically classified as self-employed by default or have a more ambiguous employment status, have received much attention. From that perspective, service provision can also serve as a lever to retain or attract new members.

The case studies under investigation provide interesting examples on this point. Interviews with service users have uncovered examples of individuals who were already union members and are satisfied to also receive support on their new endeavours, but also of individuals who were never union members or only for a short period of time and have now become members again. In both cases, the low thresholds to get support from the trade union and then become a union member appear relevant.

Interviewees also pointed to the fast help and the clear communication from the unions as key strengths. With these initiatives, trade unions have succeeded in reaching groups of workers that are difficult to reach, and this is coupled with their growing online presence and the digitalisation of the service provision.

However, as both initiatives are still in the early stages and targets are difficult to set and measure, it proved difficult to conduct an assessment of the effectiveness in terms of membership consolidation and renewal, or in terms of the legitimisation of unions among social groups that traditionally are not familiar with trade unions or hold negative opinions about trade unions.



Lithuanian Policy Lab

n June 29th, a policy lab was held to disseminate the key findings of the BreakBack project, focusing on the Lithuanian case. Participants of the Lab included representatives of the both main national trade union confederations – Lithuanian Trade Union Confederation (LPSK) and Lithuanian Trade Union 'Solidarumas' (LPS 'Solidarumas'), coming from all – national, industry and company – levels.

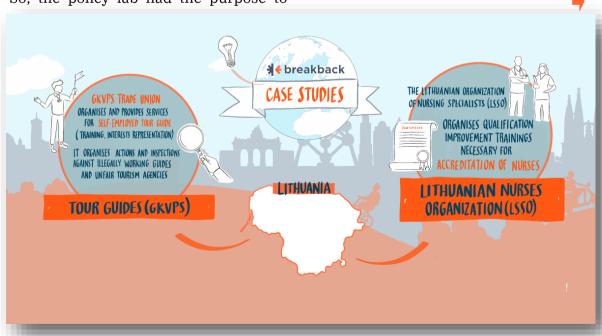
The main idea of the Lithuanian policy lab has been experience sharing and insights for the future developments of trade union strategies. As it became obvious during implementation of the BreakBack project, Lithuanian trade unions are the ones, who the least use "servicing" activities in their daily life. So, the policy lab had the purpose to

discuss this issue with trade unionists, academics, and experts, to improve knowledge in servicing activities, to decide whether Lithuanian trade unions have to develop services for their members (and non-members) more actively, which services proved to be the most efficient as well as to discuss organisational aspects of service activities, i.e. which (human, financial, other) capacities and resources are necessary in order to develop the net of trade union services.

In order to better achieve the aforementioned goals of the Policy lab, Italian colleague Andrea Bellini made a presentation on trade union services – what they are and how they can help raise union membership.

During the presentation the following topics were discussed by the Lab's participants:

 Types of trade union "representation systems";





- Logics of trade union actions;
- Reasons for trade unions to supply services;
- "Servicing" versus "organising";
- Reasons of different spread of union services in different countries;
- Traditional and innovative union services:
- Practical aspects of union services organisation;
- Some examples of "innovative" services from the Italian case.

In general, representatives of Lithuanian trade unions were very much satisfied with the information provided and discussed during the Policy lab.

Their main concerns were related to the funding of trade union services, legal environment including possibility to delegate some state functions for trade unions in service provision, efficiency of union services in terms of attracting new members.

Participants of Policy lab agreed, that despite some union service examples (including Lithuanian Nurses' Trade Organisation and Union 'Solidarumas' of Guides and tour guides cases as well as few other examples) available in Lithuania, union services in general are poorly developed. Bearing in mind that Lithuanian trade unions do not have a well-developed structures participants agreed that it would be wise at the beginning to think about possibility to initiate some easily managed, efficient union services for some particular groups of workers, e.g. migrants (third-country nationals were mentioned during the Lab as one of the most urgent examples). Another option discussed by the participants of the Lab – possibility to use some EU funds for piloting some union services.

In the conclusions, Policy lab's participants expressed their willingness to learn more about some servicing activities and possibilities to use them in their daily life.



Presentation of the first research results
on the new frontiers of unionisation and innovative services

Tuesday 29th June 2021 - 10.30-12.00

On line -Zoom

The Danish Policy Lab

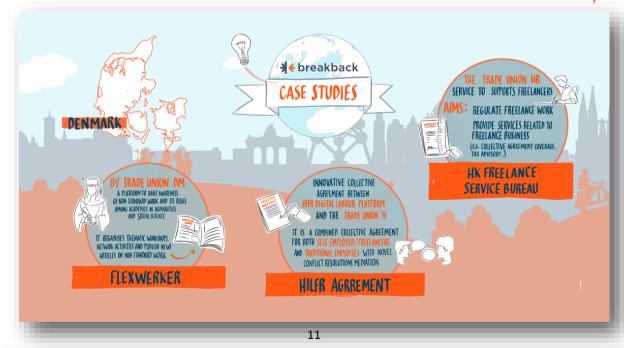
n the 1st July, Associate Professor, Dr. Trine P. Larsen and Associate Professor, Dr. Anna Ilsøe, FAOS, University of Copenhagen, organised an online policy lab in order to discuss, with representative of Danish unions, employers' associations, Ministry of Employment, workers cooperatives and with researchers and academics, the BreakBack preliminary research results.

Trine P. Larsen started to present the Breakback project, the project aim, research design and used methods as well as briefly present the countries analysed in the project. She then moved on to briefly present the agenda for the webinar before briefly presenting empirical findings on the recent development in non-standard and emerging forms of non-standard work in Den-

mark including the marked sector variations. Here it was mentioned that one in three of all employed on the Danish labour markets are non-standard workers and this development has been fairly stable the last two decades, but with marked sector variations as to the scope and type of non-standard work characterizing distinct sectors.

Anna Ilsøe then outlined the main features of the Danish IR system along with empirical findings as to the strength of the Danish collective bargaining across distinct sectors, where there are marked variations in union density, collective agreement coverage and density of workplace presentation across distinct sectors.

Then, she went on to define what we understand as innovative policy responses, emphasizing that the different innovative policy responses may be union-led, worker led or even employer led and involve a wide range of actors, not least in the case of Denmark.





Anna Ilsøe then went on to introduce the three cases examined:

- 1. the company based platform agreement Hilfr between the Danish trade union 3F for low skilled workers and the cleaning platform Hilfr;
- 2. the union-led Freelance bureau by the Danish Union HK
- 3. the bottom-up initiative Flexwerker, which is a workers collective initiated and developed by a group of academics with non-standard employment contracts that have been financially supported by the trade union DM.

The individual presentations raised a series of interesting discussions among the participants. Some of the key debates concerned the following themes.

- Definition of non-standard employment: There was a brief discussion on the concept of non-standard work and how some types of non-standard work such as marginal part-time work may be more widespread among some employee groups than others such as students. It was also debated where non-standard work is most widespread i.e. in private services such as retail, hotel and restaurants etc...
- Registration of migrant workers on digital labour platforms: This was also an issue debated notably the methodological challenges associat-

- ed with analysing these groups and their working conditions. These groups of workers are not systematically registered in the Danish register data nor do they form part of the labour force survey if they are not having their residency in Denmark, reflecting blind spots in Danish data sources.
- Union led workplace representation on digital labour platforms covered by collective agreements. This question raised some discussions and it was revealed that this question will be dealt with in the renewal of some of collective agreements covering the digital platform economy. In this context, there are also ongoing union debates as to how to offer workplace representative and union services in the cloud in order to organize platform workers by offering online chat functions, debates etc...and some digital labour platforms also seem positive towards such solutions.
- labour platforms having signed collective agreements. Here there are different practices, but typically only some platform workers are covered by these agreements. Questions were also raised if there were some elements in the platform agreements that only cover members of the signatory social partner and in this context, the collective agreements follow similar practices than on other



large parts of the labour market, where all workers are covered if having employee status. However, there are also examples where the bargaining social benefits listed in collective agreements only cover union members. This had also been raised within other Danish unions.

- HK freelance-bureau and its business model: This raised also questions from the participants where the freelance bureau in some instances have turned down users due to their prices were too low and thus resembled social dumping. It was also debated whether there have been any problems associated with the fact that has signed the collective agreement both as employee and employer representative. Here it was noted that there may be some juridical challenges, but de facto this has not raised any concerns thus far. Most work only few hours through the freelance bureau and have fairly short -term contracts.
- Collective agreements for freelancers:
 This issue was also debated and it was raised the potential conflicts with the EU's competition laws and for these reasons remained limited. In the past, such agreements had often had a positive knock-on effect on the freelance market in terms of wages and prices for distinct freelance services.



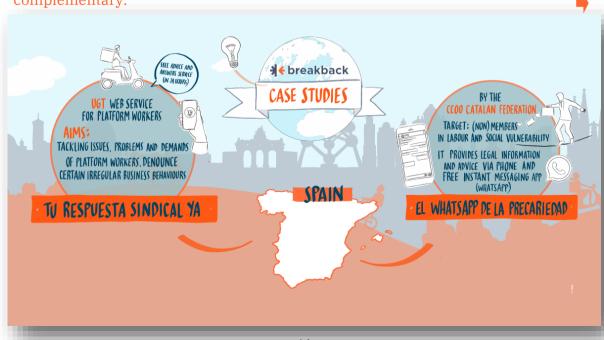


The Spanish Policy Lab

he Spanish National Policy Lab on new frontiers of unionisation and innovative services took place on September 9th.

Oscar Molina (QUIT-UAB Professor) opened the session presenting the general approach, the objectives, the partners, the countries studied, and the services analysed of the Break Back project. In doing so, he emphasised the hypothesis of the possible effectiveness of innovative services in tackling trade union membership problems. The infographics produced by the project coordination have been very useful to facilitate this dissemination. Finally, Molina provided an overview of the literature on trade union models and the role of services in each model, concluding that "organising" and "servicing" are complementary.

Alejandro Godino (OUIT-UAB Researcher) presented data on the problems and explanatory factors of low union membership in Spain and Europe, paying particular attention to recent developments during the great recession, but also during the recent pandemic crisis. He also paid attention to the disincentive effect on membership of two factors above all: the institutional framework that guarantees a high coverage of collective agreements and the utilitarian use of trade union services. Considering all this, Godino briefly outlined the obstacles and general characteristics of innovative trade union services in Spain and then explained the two cases analysed in Spain: "Tu Respuesta Sindical Ya!" (UGT) and "El Whatsapp de la precariedad" (CCOO Catalunya). Godino explained their objectives, organisation, users supported and some data on their effectiveness.



Labour representation in dispersed and networked companies has been provided by Helena Ysàs (Associate Professor of Law UAB - DRELATES Researcher) She explained some of the legal difficulties of trade union representation in dispersed and networked companies. Employees in these companies often face problems of isolation and lack of access to union representatives. which is why larger unions have designed innovative services in recent years to provide them union support (e.g., the Whatsapp of precariousness) and also alternative strategies to extend collective bargaining coverage.

After this session has been realized, a Round table discussion "The unionization challenges" with Maribel González (Responsible of Organizational development – CCOO Catalunya) and Ramón Alòs (Collaborator researcher of QUIT-UAB). Oscar Molina moderated a panel discussion around three key questions:

- •To what extent do individual services offered by trade unions to their members play an important role in promoting membership?
- •What kind of services (collective and individual) could help to improve membership?
- •Are services offered to workers who are not members of the union effective in increasing membership?

González explained the context and trajectory of CCOO Catalunya, the union's membership trends in recent years, the role of services in attracting and retaining members, and some data on the number and profiles of workers supported, paying particular attention to the importance of this support during the pandemic crisis. González concluded her presentation highlighting the complementary role of trade union services and collective mobilisation.

For the contrary, Alós was critical of the role of services in membership increasing, pointing out that services contribute little and only temporarily to membership. In any case, services offered in proximity can be more effective. Alòs also claimed that several studies show that the effect of services dedicated to non-members is very low in increasing membership.

Final remarks

The presentations and debate of the policy lab have provided evidence on the complementarity of the 'Organising' and the 'Servicing' models of union action towards strategies enhancing union membership. Since a union with an exclusive focus on service provision for its members does not constitute a 'threat' to employers in collective bargaining processes, the two strategies must complement each other for more effective unions.

Therefore, innovative services focused on supporting non-member workers can be understood in this complementarity.



The cases studied in Spain and presented in the Spanish Policy Lab ("TRSY!" and "The precariousness's WhatsApp") are good examples of these initiatives and the challenges they face in order to bridge the gap between the union and non-unionized workers, as Maribel González well argued summarising the effectiveness services of CCOO Catalonia union aimed at non-unionized workers.

However, as the two cases show, these services may not be sufficient to solve the problems of membership in Spain. Innovative services promoted in Spain not only face difficulties in reaching groups of workers who are difficult to mobilize, but also and above all, in turning this extension of trade union service provision into an effective strategy to increase membership. As Ramón Alòs highlighted during the debate of the Policy Lab, despite the rise in the utilitarian use of these services, the trade unions budget in Spain are still mainly based on membership, i.e., those workers who are affiliated through trade union action in workplaces and who see the trade union as a tool of collective organization rather than as an individual service.

Therefore, we can conclude several causes on the lack of effectiveness of innovative services in Spain aimed at enhancing membership: union representativeness mostly based on union elections, legal extension of

collective agreements, fluctuation of membership linked to utilitarian use of services and productive fragmentation that complicate mobilisation.

Taking all this in consideration, union strategies to increase and retain membership should be mostly based on union activity at the local/work centre level. That is, to build bottom-up union action and provision of services near to both union and non-union members daily labour reality.





On the next issue: The BreakBack Final Conference

he Final Conference of the project that will take place, in hybrid form, on 18th and 19th November 2021, in presence at the CISL Studies Centre in Florence and online on the Zoom platform, with interpretation available in four languages: Italian, English, French and Spanish. It will begin at 2 p.m. CET on 18th November and end at 2 p.m. on 19th November.

During the event, the research hypotheses developed in almost three years of activity - the last two marked by the pandemic - will be presented, along with the good practices analysed, starting with the "collectivising" function of certain services and the associative potential of experiences dedicated mainly to groups of workers who are difficult to unionise.

In addition to the research team and trade union leaders from different European countries, the conference will be attended by some of the main industrial relations experts and by the General Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation, Luca Visentini.

The in-person activities will be carried out in compliance with the security protocols provided for by current legislation on combating and containing Covid -19.



Download the Agenda → https://bit.ly/2ZJVazI

To register, please fill in the forms at the following links:

In-person → https://forms.gleiGS7kM74wYQQSFSG9

Online →
https://us06web.zoom.us/
meetingregister/tZAlc-
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