

Social Dialogue mapping

Description scheme for country overviews

BELGIUM

Sources:

- 1/ Eurofound Working Life Profiles <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/country/belgium#actors-and-institutions>
- 2/ OSH WIKI https://oshwiki.eu/wiki/OSH_system_at_national_level_-_Belgium
- 3/ ESENER-3 <https://visualisation.osha.europa.eu/esener#!/en/survey/overview/2019>

Introduction on Social Dialogue in MS (1)

The Collective Agreements Act of 1968 (modified by the Law of 30 December 2009) lays down the criteria for representativeness. To be representative, a trade union organisation or an employer organisation must have at least 125,000 members; be an inter-occupational organisation (or forming part of an inter-occupational organisation) of workers or employers; and represent an absolute majority of sectors and activities in the private and public sector.

These criteria determine the external representativeness of trade unions. When a trade union meets these criteria, it can conclude collective agreements, apply for representation in a joint committee and be represented on the Central Economic Council (CCE/CRB) and the National Labour Council (CNT/ NAR)

At present, three trade union organisations have representative status: FGTB/ABVV, ACV/CSC and CGSLB/ACLVB, as well as their member federations.

Trade Unions (1)

- **About trade union representation**

All Belgian citizens have the right to be affiliated to a union no matter what their professional status (employees, blue-collar workers, white-collar workers, civil servants, unemployed, retired). Belgian unions cover all workers through many branches organised by sectors, occupations or professional status.

In comparison with most other European countries, Belgium has one of the highest trade union density rates, comparable to rates in the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark. Over the last 10 years, this rate remained quite stable (between 53% and 56%) with a slight growth trend.

- **Main trade union confederations and federations**

The three main trade union organisations are: the Confederation of Christian Trade Unions (*Confédération des Syndicats Chrétiens/Algemeen Christelijk Vakverbond*, CSC/ACV) (1.7 million members); the Belgian General Federation of Labour (*Fédération Générale du Travail de Belgique/Algemeen Belgisch Vakverbond*, FGTB/ABVV) (1.5 million members); and the Federation of Liberal Trade Unions of Belgium (*Centrale Générale des Syndicats Libéraux de Belgique/Algemene Centrale der Liberale Vakbonden van België*, CGSLB/ACLVB) (290,000 members).

Long name	Abbreviation	Members	Year	Involved in collective bargaining (*)
Confederation of Christian Trade Unions (Confédération des Syndicats Chrétiens/Algemeen Christelijk Vakverbond, CSC/ACV)	ACV/CSC	1,605,820	2015	Yes
Belgian General Federation of Labour (Fédération Générale du Travail de Belgique/Algemeen Belgisch Vakverbond, FGTV/ABVV)	FGTV/ABVV	1,544,916	2015	Yes
Federation of Liberal Trade Unions of Belgium (Centrale Générale des Syndicats Libéraux de Belgique/Algemene Centrale der Liberale Vakbonden van België, CGSLB/ACLVB)	ACLVB/CGSLB	29,3952	2014	Yes

Employers' organisations (1)

• About Employers' organisations

Every company located in Belgium and self-employed people have the right to join employers' associations. Like trade unions, employers' associations have both national and/or sectoral branches. Companies and/or self-employed people are free to join one (or more) of these. According to the main national employer organisation in Belgium (Fédération des Entreprises de Belgique/Verbond van Belgische Ondernemingen, FEB/VBO), they represent 75% of all Belgian companies. However, there is no accurate data on the density of all employers' associations.

Employers' associations involved in collective bargaining at both national and sectoral levels negotiate for the country or the sector. Consequently, all companies in the country or the sector are covered by the collective agreement regardless of affiliation to an employers' association or none.

• Main Employers' organisations

The Belgian Federation of Employers (Fédération des Entreprises de Belgique/Verbond van Belgische Ondernemingen, FEB/VBO) is the main national employer organization in Belgium. FEB/VBO represents 33 sectoral employer federations. In total, it represents 50,000 companies including 25,000 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Other employer organisations are the Federation of Belgian Farmers (Fédération des Agriculteurs Belges/Belgische Boerenbond, BB), and the Confederation of Social Profit Enterprises (UNISOC), the Flemish *Unie van Zelfstandige Ondernemers* (UNIZO) and the French-speaking *Union des Classes Moyennes* (UCM).

At regional level, the most important employer organisations are, the *Vlaams Netwerk van Ondernemingen* (VOKA), the *Union wallonne des Entreprises* (UWE) and the *Brussels Enterprises Commerce and Industry* (Beci), besides UNIZO and UCM. Not-for-profit sectors are represented

by: VERSO : Vereniging voor social profit ondernemingen; UNIPSO; BCSP0 : Brusselse Confederatie van Social-Profit Ondernemingen.

Long name	Abbreviation	Members	Year	Involved in collective bargaining (*)
Unie van Zelfstandige Ondernemers (UNIZO)	UNIZO	87,500	2011	Yes
Union des Classes Moyennes (UCM)	UCM	70,000	2013	Yes
Belgian Federation of Employers (Fédération des Entreprises de Belgique/Verbond van Belgische Ondernemingen, FEB/VBO)	FEB/VBO	50,000	2014	Yes
Federation of Belgian Farmers (Fédération des Agriculteurs Belges/Belgische Boerenbond, BB)	BB	30,000	2013	Yes
Confederation of Social Profit Enterprises (UNISOC).	UNISOC	27,428	2013	Yes

Social Dialogue on OSH (2)

• General remarks on social dialogue on OSH

Belgium has an elaborated system of social dialogue ^[17] at all levels (national, sectoral and company) and in the different socio-economic fields such as economic policy, social policy and occupational safety and health.

According to a Eurofound study on the Working Conditions and Social Dialogue in Belgium ^[18], national and sectoral social dialogue has made in Belgium important contributions to the improvement of working conditions. On the one hand, the national and sectoral social dialogue plays an important and positive role in the preparation of new OSH legislation in Belgium. This legislation is still the main regulative instrument of working conditions in Belgium. On the other hand, this national and sector social dialogue plays a complementary role to existing legal regulations. Bi-partite negotiated agreements exist on a range of OSH matters. Specific sectoral bodies are involved in campaigning for better working conditions and coaching companies to obtain better working conditions results and comply to a higher degree with the existing rules and regulations.

The social dialogue in the public sector is regulated by the Law of 19 December 1974 ^[19]. Social dialogue takes place in the negotiation and joint consultation committees, which are composed of government representatives and the representative trade union organizations.

- **National level**

Two consultative bodies play a key role in the social dialogue on OSH related aspects.

- The social consultative body on an interprofessional level is the High Council for Prevention and Protection at Work (Conseil supérieur pour la prévention et la protection au travail/Hoge Raad voor preventie en bescherming op 't het werk)' [20]. The social partners are represented equally in this Council. The Council advises the Minister of Work in the policy-forming process (with particular regard to working out all the relevant regulations).
- In addition, there is the *National Labour Council (Conseil National du Travail/Nationale Arbeidsraad* ^[21], which is composed of the highest members of trade union and employers' confederations. They negotiate national intersectoral collective agreements for the whole private economy.
- The social partners include:
 - The *Federation of Enterprises in Belgium (Verbond van Belgische Ondernemingen/Fédération des Entreprises de Belgique, VBO-FEB)* ^[22] is the multi-sector employers' organisation representing companies in all three regions of Belgium. Its members, Belgium's leading sectoral federations, represent companies in key industrial and service sectors.
 - The *intersectoral trade association UNIZO (Unie voor Zelfstandige Ondernemers)* ^[23] is the largest Union for Independent Entrepreneurs. UNIZO organises within the Flemish region or the Dutch-speaking community self-employed and SMEs. The counterpart of UNIZO in the Walloon region or French-speaking community is the "National Federation of Middle Classes' Unions (Fédération Nationale des Unions des Classes Moyennes, UCM)" ^[24].
- Belgium has *three trade union confederations* recognised as representative organisations: the ACV-CSC ^[25] (Christian), the ABVV-FGTB ^[26] (Socialist), and the ACLVB-CGSLB ^[27] (Liberal). The trade unions are involved in the design of operational programmes and projects aimed at strengthening the rights of individual workers such as industrial strategies and educational/training programmes.

- **Sectoral level**

There are the *joint committees* ^[28] at sectoral level. These are set up for all sectors with the intention of grouping together businesses undertaking similar activities and working out rules adapted to the working conditions.

There are sector-based OSH Committees in the construction, metal and chemical industries which comment and formulate recommendations on legislation.

- **Enterprise level**

At corporate level, the *Committee for Prevention and Protection at Work* ^[29] is the advisory body. This body is compulsory in enterprises with more than 50 employees. The Committee is set up on a joint basis. The employer appoints its representatives; the employees elect their delegates every four years. The prevention advisor attends the meetings of this committee. The powers of the Committee were established in the law on the well-being of employees and the implementing decision of 3 May 1999 ^[30].

The Committee mainly has an advisory and supervisory role. In the public services, the tasks of the Committee are performed by the Basic Consultation Committees.

There is also the trade union representative in the companies representing the employees who are members of a union. In the absence of a committee and union representation, the employer must directly consult workers about matters that concern the well-being at work.