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ALTOGETHER
Employers and employees developing effective consultation and participation system to address the COVID19 impact

"COMPARATIVE REPORT ANALYSIS

FOR WORKERS' INFORMATION, CONSULTATION AND PARTICIPATION RIGHTS

AND THE COVID19 CRISIS (MANAGING OF THE CRISIS, IMPACT, RECOVER)"

Comparative analyses report for 7 countries:
Germany, Poland, Romania, Montenegro,
Serbia, Portugal and Spain

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CONTENT

1. Introduction 1

2. Data collection and profile of the persons surveyed.....1

3. Analysis of the research phase.....3

4. Mapping of the current state 3

5. Assessment of other possible effective mechanisms.....4

6. New drivers identified to improve employee representation and consultation.....6

7. Participatory workplace arrangements.....8

8. Survey analysis.....11

9. New identified drivers for improved worker representation and consultation.....15

10. In-depth Interviews 16

11. Case Studies 17

12. Conclusions from the research phase 18

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 health crisis has turned into a global economic crisis, putting at risk the health, jobs and incomes of millions of people around the world. This research is focused on comparative analyses on the COVID19 impact and recover from damages effect on company level and workers right to information, consultation and participation and to analyze the country-specific situation in seven EU Member States and Candidate Countries, the best practices, as well as the external factors influencing the issue.

Organizations are faced with increasing uncertainty as they navigate today's "grand challenges", or highly significant problems not typically confined to national, economic, or societal borders (Eisenhardt et al., 2016, Ferraro et al., 2015)[1]. But with the recent outbreak of COVID-19 ("Coronavirus (COVID-19)"[2], 2020), organizations face a grand challenge of unparalleled proportions, one that forces them to dive into and directly manage unprecedented territory as they alter their workforce in technical, physical and socio-psychological ways not seen before.

The aim of this research was to give a clear indication of problematic issues and review the situation on how to set up an effective and functioning information, consultation, and participation mechanisms at the company level applicable for different sectors and country context related to finding solutions, promote cooperation and increase workers participation in decision making processes related to COVID 19 impact and recovery strategies at company level through good and bad practices in all partnering country. The research was carried out in Spain, Poland, Serbia, Germany, Montenegro, Romania and Portugal, assessing cross-sectorial trade unions and employers' organizations from 7 EU old and new member states candidate countries with recommendations applicable in old member state, new member state and candidate state context.

This Comparative Report is based on the information included in the National Reports presented by the experts of each participating country, where their assessments, the analysis of the interviews carried out with employers and trade unions and the collection of data through a desktop analysis are collected, as well as on the analysis of the online surveys carried out during the first phase of this research. In addition, we have used the template prepared for the country reports to standardize as far as possible all the information contained in them, including the nuances and justifications of some of the results that we have taken from the studies mentioned above.

DATA COLLECTION AND PROFILE OF THE PERSONS SURVEYED

During the research phase, 443 surveys were collected, of which the highest number of respondents were in Montenegro with 106 participants who represents 24% out of the total, following Spain with 87 respondents which represents 20% of the total number and Germany, Romania, Poland, Portugal and Serbia received 50 responses per country which represents a percentage of 11 % per country.

[1] Ferraro F., Etzion D., Gehman J. Tackling grand challenges pragmatically: Robust action revisited. Organization Studies. 2015;36(3):363–390. [Google Scholar]

[2] Coronavirus (COVID-19). (2020, April 27). Retrieved April 28, 2020, from https://www.nih.gov/health-information/coronavirus.

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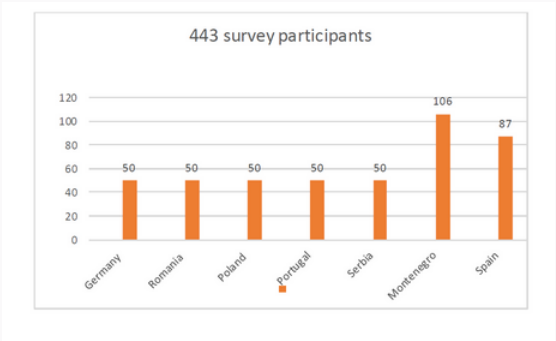
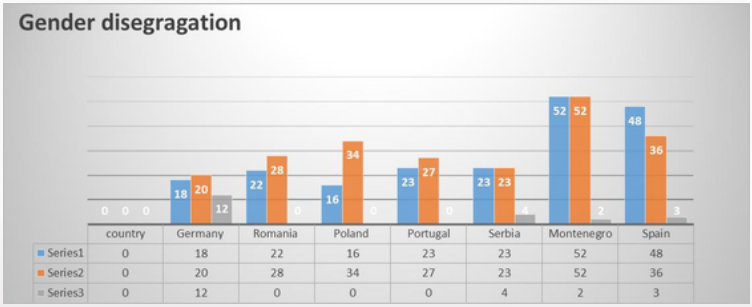


The profile of respondents in this research encompasses a diverse range of characteristics. Among the participants, 46% identified as female, 54% of respondents identified as male, and 5% did not specify their gender. The age groups are diverse and vary from country to country. Most respondents is in the age gap between 18-25 are present Spain with 14% following Romania with 3,5% and Portugal 3%. Predominant respondents in the age gap 25-35 were in Spain with 14% following with Portugal (12%). In the age group 35-45 highest percentage of the respondents were in Spain with 17% and predominant group of respondents in the age gap between 45-55 with a higher percentage of 50% in Montenegro, following Spain with 16% and the highest percentage of respondents over 55 were in Montenegro with 27%. The analyses from the surveys in Germany and Serbia did not provide age desegregation data which is why the age division of the total number of respondents is not relevant. The majority of the respondents are employees with highest percentage in Montenegro with 98% of the participants, and employers coming from a wide range of sectors: commerce, industry, services, aviation, health and care, agriculture, security, public administration, security, IT, restaurants and education. The highest number of respondents coming from SMEs are from Spain with 62%, highest number of respondents coming from companies with 50-100 employees are in Poland with 8%, and the highest number of representatives from companies with employees between 100-1000 are in Montenegro with 63%.



country	Germany	Romania	Poland	Portugal	Serbia	Montenegro	Spain
Series1	0	18	22	16	23	23	52	48
Series2	0	20	28	34	27	23	52	36
Series3	0	12	0	0	0	4	2	3

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ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH PHASE:

MAPPING OF THE CURRENT STATE

As the COVID-19 pandemic gripped the globe, its multifaceted impact on workers' rights necessitated an urgent focus on their information and consultation privileges. It became imperative for workers' representatives to be well-informed about the safety measures being deployed to protect their health. This knowledge covered protection against the COVID-19 related threats, adaptations to work arrangements, social distancing and teleworking norms, and job security considerations within various sectors.

Amidst the crisis, Germany, Portugal, and Poland adopted a proactive stance to fortify their employees' rights to information, consultation, and participation. A variety of measures were implemented, from laws mandating companies to safeguard their workers against the virus, to involving workers' councils in decision-making processes. In addition, new legal stipulations were introduced to permit flexible work arrangements. The governments in these countries initiated financial assistance programs for businesses grappling with the impact of the pandemic and established supervisory boards within companies to represent the workforce.

Regrettably, the scenario in Serbia, Montenegro, and Romania didn't mirror this proactive approach. Serbia was marked by a deficient social dialogue, resulting in inadequate provisions for workers to exercise their rights in full capacity. This shortcoming manifested in the handling of the COVID-19 crisis and the recovery phase. Similarly, despite having entrusted rights related to information and consultation to trade unions, Montenegro did not make significant strides in strengthening its social dialogue during the crisis. In Romania, worker representation mechanisms were notably absent, and legislative impediments curtailed employee involvement in company management bodies.

Various reports at the national level indicated that the most robust measures to bolster workers' information and consultation rights in the context of the pandemic were introduced in Germany, Portugal, and Poland. The German government passed the Occupational Health and Safety Control Act in December 2020, which required companies to shield their employees from COVID-19. Occupational health and safety committees within these companies were mandated to participate in enforcing this protection. Moreover, an initiative led by works councils, trade unions, and employees in the meat industry led to another law to enhance occupational health and safety enforcement in June 2020. This law insisted on the formation of works councils within slaughterhouses.

In Poland, additional legal stipulations were introduced to safeguard employees and maintain business continuity amid the COVID-19 crisis. The regulations, among other things, allowed temporary suspension of employment contracts, reduction in working hours, the possibility of remote working, and alterations in the rules governing temporary workers' employment. To maintain business continuity and protect employees, employers were required to engage with employee representatives when instituting such changes. Additionally, Poland has a so-called Code of Commercial Companies, mandating select companies to establish a supervisory board. This board, with employee representatives elected from among the candidates nominated by the workforce, plays a critical role in the company's management and is required to consult with employees on decisions related to personnel and organizational policies.

Portugal implemented measures like simplifying the layoff regime, which allowed companies to suspend employment contracts temporarily or reduce working hours while still guaranteeing workers a portion of their wages. The Portuguese government also introduced financial assistance and tax relief measures to support businesses affected by the pandemic. One of the most significant measures was the "COVID-19: Apoio à Economia" program, offering financial aid to companies and self-employed workers directly impacted by the pandemic.

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The national level reports from Spain, Serbia, Montenegro, and Romania painted a contrasting picture. In Spain, the non-recognition of trade unions and other forms of worker representation by businesses and the government presented a significant barrier to social dialogue. In Serbia, the 2022 EC report highlighted the weak social dialogue and partial harmonization of the Labor Law with the EU acquis. Despite the Labor Law containing certain provisions resembling standards for informing and consulting employees, the union concluded that these provisions were too general, thereby failing to provide the necessary level of detail critical for their application and interpretation.

In Montenegro, all rights related to workers' information and consultation were entrusted to trade unions, nearly harmonized with European legislation regarding the rights of workers' councils, excluding the possibility of workers, i.e., trade unions, having their representatives in supervisory and/or management structures of companies. However, the general weaknesses of social dialogue in Montenegro were not significantly improved during the crisis.

Unlike other member states, Romania lacked mechanisms for representing workers in the employer's decision-making body. There were no works councils in Romania, barring the exception of Community-scale undertakings where their establishment was mandated by European standards. Moreover, the Companies Law in Romania expressly stated the incompatibility between the status of a member of the Board of Directors or the Supervisory Board and the status of a company employee.

In conclusion, countries displayed varied responses to the pandemic concerning worker rights. They ranged from proactive measures strengthening employee participation and consultation to significant weaknesses and limitations in social dialogue and worker participation in decision-making. As the world continues to grapple with the pandemic, the protection and prioritization of workers' rights remain a critical global challenge.

ASSESSMENT OF OTHER POSSIBLE EFFECTIVE MECHANISMS

The COVID-19 pandemic tested the efficacy of consultation mechanisms across countries as they navigated the crisis and embarked on recovery strategies. Employee participation and social dialogue emerged as key components in this process, playing a significant role in countries such as Germany, Portugal, Romania, Poland, Serbia, Montenegro, and Spain.

Germany successfully used a combination of measures such as regular meetings, joint working groups, transparent communication, and feedback systems for inclusive decision-making. Adaptation to company-specific factors ensured a tailored approach, which proved successful during the recovery phase. A similar approach was seen in Poland, where briefing meetings, online platforms, and working groups facilitated dialogue and influenced critical operational decisions.

Portugal initially faced challenges due to the exclusion of social partners. However, trade unions played a crucial role in executing government measures and preserving jobs. Notably, Portugal's experience led to significant legislative changes in social dialogue, highlighting the impact of unions in crisis response and recovery.

Serbia and Montenegro suggested mechanisms to bolster worker participation, highlighting the role of representation in management boards, collective bargaining, suggestion schemes, and joint councils. Montenegro focused on the "employee representative for protection and health at work" and a national body for workplace safety and health, providing a unique mechanism for improving dialogue and addressing workplace issues.

In Spain, the importance of social dialogue and employee participation was clear but faced challenges due to weak social dialogue and legal barriers. The pandemic exacerbated these issues, necessitating increased documentation and awareness of social dialogue and reliance on trade union strength.

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Across these countries, the importance of social dialogue and employee participation in managing the crisis and recovery phase is clear. Each country's unique context and challenges influenced the mechanisms employed, ranging from joint working groups and transparent communication to legislative changes and increased trade union rights. While there are considerable similarities in the recommended measures, the implementation and outcomes vary. The experiences of these countries underscore the need for adaptable strategies that consider company-specific factors, cultural nuances, and legislative context to ensure successful management and recovery from crises. It also highlights the need for governments to support social dialogue and worker participation rights, thereby ensuring resilient and sustainable recovery strategies.

Assessing potential effective mechanisms in the context of different partnering countries can provide a roadmap to enhance social dialogue and improve employee participation. Each nation's individual context, historical experiences, and legislative frameworks can significantly influence the relevance and applicability of these mechanisms.

In Germany, one potential mechanism could be the expansion of employee training programs focused on developing leadership skills and enhancing workers' understanding of the business environment. This could empower workers to contribute more effectively to dialogues and decision-making processes. Moreover, further enhancing digital platforms for dialogue, especially for remote workers, could be beneficial considering the increasing prevalence of remote work.

In Portugal, the rejuvenation of trade union rights through Law 367/2022 offers a new platform for effective dialogue. Building upon this, unions could be encouraged to engage more actively with workers, seeking their input and representation more consistently, and advocating for their concerns more vigorously.

Poland could further benefit from expanding the roles of Workers' Councils and trade unions in decision-making processes. Their inclusion in more strategic aspects of the company, beyond working conditions and wages, could offer more holistic solutions for recovery.

For Serbia, a potential mechanism could involve enhancing the legal framework that supports collective bargaining agreements. Ensuring these agreements provide a comprehensive protection for workers' rights and are flexible enough to adapt to changing business environments could enhance their effectiveness.

In Montenegro, the establishment of a national body for protection and health at work could serve as an effective mechanism for engaging workers and promoting their rights. Greater participation from the government and social partners in this body could amplify its impact.

Spain could potentially benefit from the removal of legal barriers hindering the formation and activity of trade unions. Strengthening unions' legal power and enhancing their capacity to mobilize public support could drive effective dialogue, ensure workers' representation, and ultimately contribute to socially responsible business practices.

Each of these mechanisms, while tailored to the specific contexts of the partnering countries, share a common goal: to strengthen social dialogue, enhance worker participation, and ensure an inclusive, sustainable recovery from crises like the COVID-19 pandemic.

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NEW DRIVERS IDENTIFIED TO IMPROVE EMPLOYEE REPRESENTATION AND CONSULTATION

In recent years, various new forms of employee representation and consultation have developed that can help improve employee participation in decision-making processes. The initiatives for Collectively influence through workers representatives undertaken in Germany, Romania, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Spain and Montenegro provide distinct models of enhancing collective influence through worker representatives. They highlight a commitment towards evolving labour relations, marked by enhanced communication, democratic participation, and a shift from a purely hierarchical model to a more collaborative one. These initiatives recognize that employees are not mere components of the production process but vital stakeholders with unique insights and perspectives. The diverse strategies, whether through legislative reforms, digital platforms, incentive programs, or consultative bodies, illustrate the collective effort towards fostering a more equitable work environment. By empowering employees to participate in decision-making, these initiatives not only contribute to better workplace outcomes but also significantly influence the very nature of work and industrial relations. Upon examining the initiatives undertaken by Germany, Romania, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Spain, and Montenegro to improve employee representation and consultation, it is apparent that they share both unique characteristics and commonalities. Out of the examples of the initiatives presented in the National Level reports it can be concluded that Germany's approach involves the collective influence of employee representatives to actively participate in decision-making. Romania, conversely, has sought legislative amendments, strengthening association rights and collective bargaining. Poland's strategy revolves around incentive programmes, underlining group performance over individual contributions, fostering collective influence. Portugal has adopted digital mediums such as social media and online platforms to provide employees with a voice, facilitating real-time communication. Serbia's initiative promotes participation through joint bodies and committees, while Montenegro has encouraged dialogue during crisis situations, valuing the collective insight provided by employees and trade unions in crisis management.

Common strengths across these nations lie in the active efforts to promote employees' role in decision-making, enhance communication, and collectively address workplace issues. These strategies not only encourage transparency but also inspire collective responsibility. For instance, Germany's, Poland's, and Serbia's initiatives share the strength of collective participation in decision-making processes, enhancing the overall effectiveness of decisions and fostering a sense of ownership among employees. Similarly, Portugal's use of online platforms for information exchange encourages wider participation, offering cost-effective, efficient, and real-time communication.

Despite these strengths, these initiatives are not without their limitations. One common weakness is the gap in access or competence. Germany faces challenges with the competence of employee representatives, whereas Portugal's reliance on digital platforms might exclude workers who lack digital literacy or access to technology. Similarly, Romania's legislative changes require time for effective implementation. For Poland, its incentive programme may unintentionally spur rivalry among employees. Serbia's approach, while inclusive, has a limited scope due to its consultative nature. The specifics of Montenegro's initiative's weaknesses are not stated, but potential drawbacks could relate to maintaining consistent, effective dialogue in crisis situations.

On a comparative note, Romania's and Portugal's strategies stand out for their future-oriented approach. Romania's change of law to improve the right to collective bargaining is a more structural and comprehensive approach, impacting the nation's overall labour landscape. Portugal's harnessing of digital platforms, on the other hand, aligns with the increasing digitisation trend, offering a more contemporary and flexible solution. However, the ultimate efficacy of these initiatives is contingent on the specific socio-economic and cultural contexts of each country. It would be erroneous to assert that a strategy effective in one country would yield the same results in another. The cultural receptiveness, the degree of digitisation, the state of labour laws, the historical background of labour

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movements - all these factors profoundly impact how these initiatives are embraced and how successful they are. In Spain, collective influence through worker representation plays a crucial role in the labor market. This representation is primarily manifested through their participation in decision-making processes and management of their respective companies. Major trade unions, such as CCOO and UGT, reinforce the collective voice of employees, with their membership numbers and the extent of collective agreements enhancing their publicly expressed positions. They leverage the power of media to influence public opinion, initiate crucial debates, and present their positions and expertise. This influence extends beyond the workplace, with public support often garnered by addressing societal issues. Additionally, a myriad of neighborhood associations, social associations, and NGOs often collaborate with trade unions to exert greater pressure on companies or administrations. In the digital age, the use of social media has become a pivotal element in improving worker representation and consultation, enabling real-time engagement on a global scale. However, there are challenges. For instance, the right to information, an essential form of worker participation, was notably weak during pandemics, underscoring the need for more robust communication mechanisms.

In conclusion, while these initiatives demonstrate a growing recognition of the importance of worker participation and consultation across Europe, their effectiveness is nuanced and heavily reliant on national context. Nevertheless, the shared strengths and weaknesses of these strategies underscore the universality of certain principles such as collective decision-making, effective communication, access to representation, and competence of representatives. These findings should guide future initiatives, promoting more inclusive, transparent, and effective worker participation across the continent.

The second part of the analyses focuses on the individual influence, strength, and positioning of workers in the labour market and labour process in seven different countries: Germany, Romania, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Montenegro, and Spain. The analysis is structured around a comparison of different initiatives designed to empower workers and their strengths and weaknesses.

In Germany, the "Employee Interview" initiative empowers workers to express their perspectives openly, outline personal strengths and weaknesses, demand wage increases, and share their concerns. It is a powerful tool for personal communication and potential wage improvement. Nevertheless, the individualistic nature of this process can also be its downfall. Its outcomes rely heavily on a manager's discretion, and the private nature of the discussion might limit its broader impact.

Romania adopted the "Assistance for Employers in Applying Employee Protection Measures" during the Covid-19 crisis. This initiative fosters trust and establishes effective communication channels between employees and employers. However, its main drawback is the significant strain it puts on union resources due to the extensive time and expertise required to supplement the existing lack of knowledge.

In Poland, the initiative of "Meetings with Managers" creates opportunities for workers to express their opinions and suggestions directly to decision-makers. This strategy heightens worker commitment, trust, and understanding of the company's strategy. Despite these strengths, the initiative's effectiveness can be compromised due to its time limitations, inability to account for all employees' views, and potential discomfort for some workers in expressing their opinions in front of management.

Portugal's "Co-determination" model is designed to give workers a say in decision-making processes at the company level, either through representation on company boards or the establishment of worker councils. Despite fostering more meaningful engagement with decision-making processes, the success of this initiative is often hindered by challenges in implementation, particularly in contexts where workers are not organised or where labour laws do not provide for such participation.

Serbia has adopted a "Suggestion Scheme and Participation through Job Enrichment". This initiative allows for worker engagement, the utilisation of knowledge and talents, and provides additional motivation and job

enrichment. Nevertheless, the non-obligatory nature of the scheme can make some workers feel excluded, creating a potential divide between those who innovate and those who implement the innovations.

In Montenegro, unions commonly represent workers when solving problems with employers. However, many employees refrain from approaching the employer individually due to the fear of potential retaliation. Thus, the effectiveness of this initiative can be hampered by the prevalent culture of fear.

In Spain, employee participation takes multiple forms, from dialogue with employers to participation in management and social dialogue institutions. Spanish trade unions, CCOO and UGT, effectively influence public opinion by initiating debates and presenting positions and expertise. Furthermore, social support created by addressing societal issues reinforces the power of publicly expressed positions. However, the right to information, an essential aspect of worker participation, was found to be weak during pandemics.

In summary, all seven countries demonstrate a varied range of initiatives aimed at strengthening workers' influence, their position in the labour market, and their involvement in the labour process. These initiatives range from personal interviews to wider representation in management decisions. However, all face their own unique challenges, whether in implementation, sustainability, or cultural acceptance. These analyses suggest that a balanced, comprehensive approach that incorporates both individual and collective strategies may be optimal for strengthening workers' influence and position in the labour market. It is essential to foster a culture of trust and open dialogue, provide adequate resources, and use inclusive and structured mechanisms to ensure fair representation in decision-making processes. The digital age's advent also calls for a more robust focus on digital literacy and the use of social media to improve worker representation and consultation.

The research assessed possible new forms of worker participation and in Germany these forms are emerging with the rise of digital platforms. One such platform is Coworker.org, which empowers employees to initiate online petitions and campaigns, providing them with a mechanism to express their opinions and influence their workplaces. These digital platforms can yield significant changes, but it's noteworthy that the success rate of petitions can vary and may not always affect immediate change in practice.

Furthermore, Germany has seen the advent of "Der Schnellcheck Digitaler Betriebsrat," a tool that aids the process of digital transformation within companies. This platform uses questionnaires to guide and accompany the digital transformation process, enhancing employee participation and engagement in shaping the digital future of their workplaces. It's essential to acknowledge that despite the opportunities provided by this platform, some works or staff councils may resist digitising their processes.

Overall, these new forms of worker participation illustrate the evolving dynamics of employee engagement in Germany, showcasing the potential of digital platforms to democratize the workplace and pose challenges in balancing traditional practices with new digital methodologies.

PARTICIPATORY WORKPLACE ARRANGEMENTS

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, participatory workplace arrangements have emerged as an essential mechanism in ensuring business continuity and employee well-being across various countries. Our analysis covers seven countries—Germany, Romania, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Montenegro, and Spain—all diverse in their socio-economic landscapes yet unified in their efforts to navigate the unprecedented challenges of the pandemic. Through surveys and interviews, we explored the unique and shared strategies these countries employed, focusing on the critical role of trained worker representatives, their skills and their contributions to decision-making processes during this global crisis.

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SKILL BREAK OUT NEEDS BASED ON THE RESEARCH PER COUNTRY:

GERMANY:

- Effective communication
- Crisis management
- Problem-solving
- Collaboration
- Understanding of business strategies
- Negotiation skills
- Social skills
- Strategic thinking

ROMANIA:

- Information dissemination
- Awareness-raising
- Understanding of workplace realities and production processes
- Collaboration
- Implementation of measures

POLAND:

- Organization of remote work
- Implementation of safety rules
- Planning skills
- Providing emotional support
- Effective communication

PORTUGAL:

- Effective communication
- Negotiation
- Conflict resolution
- Collaboration
- Awareness of issues related to the COVID-19 crisis

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SERBIA:

Effective communication

- Curiosity
- Desire to acquire new knowledge and information
- Knowledge of specific issues for which consultation is required
- Digital skills
- Teamwork
- Tolerance and openness to new ideas

MONTENEGRO:

- Persistence
- Willingness to impose oneself
- Understanding between workers and employers
- Crisis management strategy creation
- Risk management and supervision
- Clear and transparent information flow

SPAIN:

- Influencing management decisions
- Understanding of corporate governance
- Responsibility for the success of the company
- Social responsibility
- Implementation of social transformation
- Training to improve professional skills
- Knowledge sharing

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

From the skills identified across these seven countries, a few common and critical ones for effective worker participation emerge. They can be summarized into five broad areas:
Communication and Negotiation Skills: Ability to effectively convey ideas, listen to others, resolve conflicts, and negotiate mutually beneficial outcomes. It is important to foster openness and tolerance for diverse ideas and perspectives

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Knowledge and Understanding: Familiarity with specific business strategies, production processes, corporate governance, and awareness of current issues (like the COVID-19 crisis). Encourage curiosity and a desire for continuous learning.

Digital Skills: With remote work becoming more prevalent, digital competency is crucial. This includes managing remote work, understanding digital communication tools, and utilizing technology for effective information dissemination.

Collaboration and Teamwork: Working well with others, sharing knowledge, and contributing to a collective goal. Build environments that promote collaboration between management and workers.

Strategic and Crisis Management Skills: Ability to plan and organize work, manage risks, and adapt to changing situations. It's important to provide training in these areas and encourage workers to take an active role in crisis management.

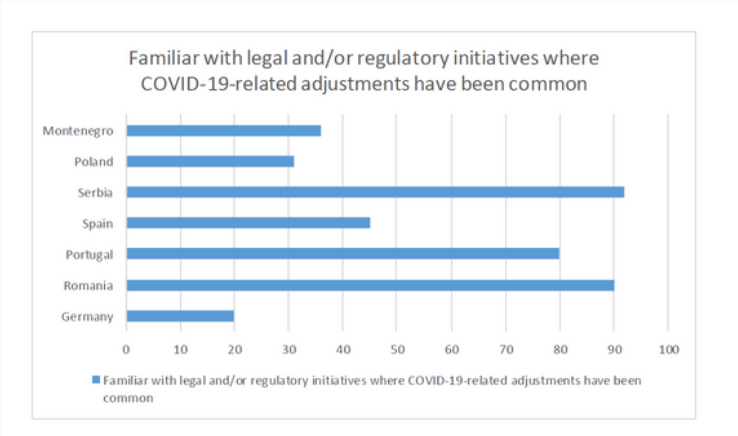
These skills foster an effective participatory workplace environment, thereby enabling businesses to better navigate crises and ensure the well-being of their employees. Organizations should consider incorporating these skills into their training and development programs for worker representatives

SURVEY ANALYSIS

The survey encompasses a broad range of themes, focusing on the comprehension of country-specific legislation regarding worker participation during the COVID-19 crisis, representation of employees at the company or board level, the involvement and effectiveness of workers' board representatives during the crisis and recovery period, as well as the individual and collective consultation processes within companies.

The survey additionally explores alternative methods of representation, the presence and impact of trained representatives in the workplace during the COVID-19 crisis, and the skills deemed critical for greater engagement with management structures and for resolving recovery issues. Collecting responses from employees, employers, and trade union representatives, this survey provides a valuable reference for research hypotheses and contributes to the development of supportive training materials and comparative national reports. By promoting this comprehensive analysis, the project seeks to stimulate dialogue, improve work conditions, and influence strategic decisions in the aftermath of the pandemic.

The start series of survey were focused on assessment of effective representation of workers in managing the COVID19 crisis can contribute to identifying what needs to be done to ensure that workers may exercise their rights to representation on structuring recovery measures on company level to contribute to effective corporate governance. Respondents were asked if they were familiar with any country legal and/or regulatory initiatives where COVID-19-related adjustments have been common. The most informed respondents are in Serbia where 92%, following Romania where 90% were familiar with national adjustments to legislation and 85 % on European level and Portugal with 80%, the moderate informed respondents were in Spain 45%, Poland 31 %, Montenegro 36%, and the least informed respondents were in Germany where 80% of the respondents are not familiar with any initiatives or are unsure.



The survey also explored respondents' awareness regarding specific regulations or agreements on worker participation in the public sector, distinct from the general labour code or extant laws in their home countries. It was noteworthy that a majority of respondents from all participating countries confessed to a substantial knowledge gap on this topic, often responding with "I don't know."

In terms of respondent awareness, Poland led the way with half of its respondents manifesting familiarity with such sector-specific worker participation regulations or agreements. At the other end of the spectrum, Germany showcased the least awareness, where a 97% of respondents disclosed their unfamiliarity by selecting the “No” or "I do not know" response. Montenegro followed suit with 62% of respondents admitting a lack of knowledge. In Romania, Serbia, Spain, and Portugal, around half of the respondents also conveyed a lack of awareness regarding such initiatives. These findings point to significant disparities in knowledge across countries regarding public sector-specific regulations and agreements on worker participation.

When asked to assess the level of satisfaction of the principle of collective workers’ rights of advancing a co-operative dialogue between workers and managers majority of the respondents responded with moderate satisfaction level 3 on the scale of 1 to 5 (1 being disappointing, and 5 being exceptional).

In order to assess the effective mechanisms for exchanges of views between the management and the workers representatives can lead to better corporate governance in the environment influenced by recovery COVID 19 crisis, series of questions have been asked to all respondents. On the question “Does your company have employee representation at company or board level” the highest respondents that responded that they have the employee representation at company or board level were in Romania 66% following Montenegro 58%, Poland 50% , Portugal 38%, Spain 35%, lowest level of employee representation of in Serbia 19% and Germany 8%.

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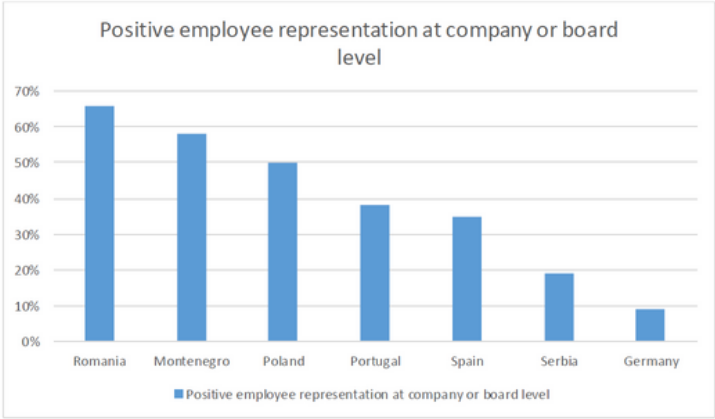

The survey responses revealed interesting patterns about the role of employee representatives at the board level in managing the COVID-19 crisis and the subsequent recovery phase across several countries. The data suggests that employee representation and satisfaction with their role can vary widely from country to country.

In Germany, a mere 12% of respondents indicated the presence of employee representation at their company or board level, with a staggering 88% suggesting the absence of this right. Furthermore, a majority (66%) expressed dissatisfaction with the role of their representatives. This may hint at why some German companies lack employee representatives or a board of directors.

Contrastingly, in Montenegro and Serbia, 75% and 53% of respondents respectively confirmed the right to appoint employee representatives. However, the satisfaction level with their representatives' role during the COVID-19 crisis stood at a middling 2.6 grade in both countries, suggesting a need for improvement.

Meanwhile, 66% of Romanian respondents affirmed their right to appoint a representative, but their satisfaction level was disappointingly low at 1.7. Poland, with less than half (48%) of respondents acknowledging the right to appoint employee representatives, also reported a notably low satisfaction level at 1.6.

Portugal displayed the lowest proportion of respondents (38%) with the right to appoint representatives, and the majority did not provide an assessment of their level of satisfaction. In Spain, only 27% of respondents confirmed the right to employee representation, but they expressed a slightly higher satisfaction level of 2.7. These varied responses underline the disparity in worker participation rights and satisfaction levels across these countries.

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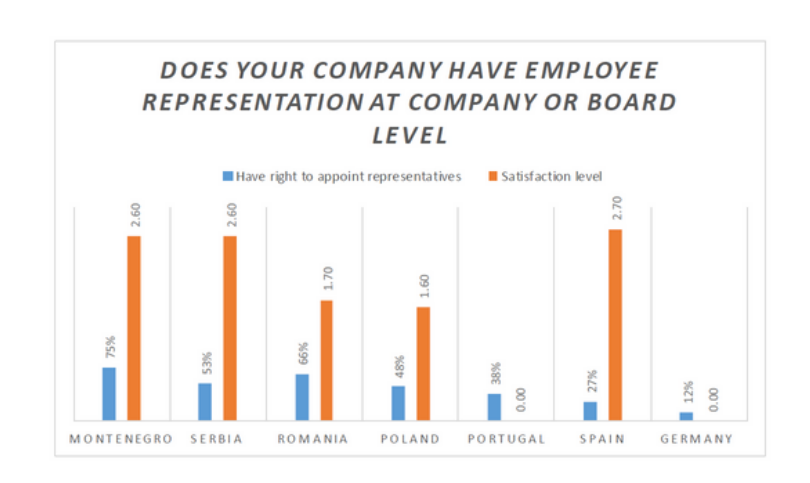

The role of workers' board-level representatives in managing the COVID-19 crisis and subsequent recovery period varied considerably across the surveyed countries, as did the level of satisfaction with their involvement. In Germany, 94% of respondents stated their representatives did not play a role in handling the COVID-19 crisis, with an average satisfaction score of just 1.72, indicating a notable disappointment.

In stark contrast, in Poland, a significant majority (66%) acknowledged the pivotal role of their representatives in managing the crisis. Nevertheless, the satisfaction grade was relatively moderate at 3.4. In Portugal, only 19% reported their representatives as having a significant role, yielding a satisfaction grade of 2.8. Similar to Portugal, Spain also had a satisfaction grade of 2.8, albeit with a higher percentage (57%) of respondents confirming their representatives' involvement.

Montenegro mirrored Spain with half of the respondents stating their representatives had a role in the crisis and yielding a satisfaction grade of 2.8. Interestingly, only 25% of Serbian respondents noted the involvement of their representatives, and the satisfaction level is currently unknown.

In conclusion, the data illustrates a diverse landscape regarding the participation and perceived effectiveness of workers' representatives during the COVID-19 crisis, the absolute majority believes that employees are passive recipients of information. It means that the management only communicated the news in the company and did not ask for opinions or discuss new measures. However, what seems surprising is that the same respondents were more positive about the "processes of consultation". This means that employees are more or less satisfied with the way of communication. The variance in both the involvement level and the satisfaction grades across these countries underscores the necessity for improved communication and active participation of worker representatives in crisis management at the company level.

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NEW IDENTIFIED DRIVERS FOR IMPROVED WORKER REPRESENTATION AND CONSULTATION, AND WAYS IN WHICH THEY CAN BE USED TO INFLUENCE BUSINESS AND COMPANIES STRATEGIES CAN CONTRIBUTE TO GREATER WORKERS PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING PROCESSES

The survey also assessed the prevalence and effectiveness of individual communication between workers and managers as a driver for improved worker representation and consultation. The data across the countries shows diverse trends and satisfaction levels regarding individual worker-manager interaction.

In Germany, there was an equal distribution, with exactly 50% of respondents stating that managers do engage individually with workers, with a satisfaction level of 3.38. In Romania, a little more than half (57%) indicated that managers communicate with workers on an individual basis, and the satisfaction level was reasonably favorable at 3.

Meanwhile, in Poland, a substantial majority of respondents (97%) affirmed individual communication between workers and managers, with an average satisfaction grade of 3.45, indicating moderate contentment with this approach. In contrast, Spain's percentage was comparatively lower at 56%, with an average satisfaction grade of 2.89.

Portugal followed closely behind Poland with 66% of respondents acknowledging individual worker-manager relations, but with a slightly lower satisfaction level of 3.2. In Serbia, 60% of respondents affirmed that managers relate individually to workers, but the average satisfaction grade was only 2.5, indicating room for improvement. Montenegro showed a similar pattern with 51% of respondents stating individual worker-manager interaction, with an average satisfaction grade of 2.73.

In conclusion, the individual communication between managers and workers appears to be a vital factor in effective worker representation and consultation across all surveyed countries. The degree of its implementation and corresponding satisfaction levels show a mixed picture, suggesting that the method and quality of individual communication are crucial and need further enhancement for better worker participation in decision-making processes.

The survey also evaluated whether managers engage with workers collectively through their representatives and the associated satisfaction levels amid the COVID-19 crisis and the ensuing recovery period.

In Germany, a majority (62%) indicated that collective consultation through representatives took place, with a satisfactory level of 3.3. Romania stood out with 80% of respondents affirming this approach, which, however, had a slightly lower satisfaction rating of 2.9.

Portugal showed an even distribution, with exactly 50% of respondents confirming collective worker-manager relations, but the overall satisfaction level was relatively decent at 3. In Spain, the proportion of affirmative respondents was slightly lower at 39%, and the satisfaction level was comparable to Romania's at 2.9.

Poland had the lowest percentage of respondents (34%) confirming collective engagement, yet the satisfaction level was surprisingly high at 3.3, tying with Germany. Serbia presented a balance, with 49% of respondents stating that managers relate collectively to workers, and a moderate satisfaction level of 3.

Montenegro demonstrated a high level of collective consultation (74%), but the satisfaction level was the lowest among the surveyed countries at 2.74.

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In conclusion, while the practice of managers engaging with workers collectively through their representatives was prevalent to varying degrees across the surveyed countries, satisfaction levels showed a different trend. Some countries with higher collective consultation did not necessarily record higher satisfaction levels, suggesting that the quality and effectiveness of collective consultation methods need further improvement.

The survey explored the presence of trained representatives in companies who actively partake and inspire the workforce during the COVID-19 crisis and recovery period. The responses varied significantly among the different countries when asked if such representatives exist in their companies.

In Germany, a striking majority of 95% of respondents indicated the absence of such representatives. Similarly, in Serbia, 90% of the respondents stated there were no trained representatives participating and stimulating the workforce during the crisis and recovery.

In Portugal, Spain, and Montenegro, 75% of the respondents also reported the lack of such representatives. This result suggests a substantial absence of trained personnel engaging with the workforce in these countries during these critical periods.

In contrast, Poland and Romania presented a somewhat better situation. In Poland, 58% of respondents indicated the absence of these representatives, implying that nearly half of the respondents may have such a system in place. Romania showed the most positive scenario among all countries surveyed, with 50% reporting the absence of trained representatives, suggesting the potential existence of such roles in half of the respondents' companies.

In conclusion, the majority of respondents across the surveyed countries reported a lack of trained representatives at the company level who could actively participate and stimulate the workforce during the COVID-19 crisis and the recovery period. This result underscores the need for companies to invest in training and preparing their representatives to better support their workforce during such crises.

The respondents were asked to provide an opinion on “What skills according to you contribute to greater engagement with management structures and influencing procedures, tackling new COVID19 crisis issues and “getting things done” to help resolve recovery problems at company level” the the responces varied between countries and the presented data in the national level reports indicate that the most common mentioned skills need are detected in re-think the way of working, training existing skills and more responsibility allowed to frontline workers are also considered important skills that contribute to resolving recovery problems at company level, cultivating collaboration between employees and management, Initiatives for hybrid working.

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

In-depth interviews were conducted with ten participants per country to complement the survey results, bringing an added layer of nuance and personal perspective to the data collected. The outcomes of these interviews solidified and corroborated the survey findings, enhancing the credibility of the results and offering valuable insights into the perceptions of the workforce during the COVID-19 crisis and recovery period.

In review, the survey found substantial variability in workers' representation and participation across different countries. Notably, the most informed respondents about COVID-19-related legislative adjustments were in Serbia and Romania, while German respondents were the least aware. In terms of worker participation in the public sector, Polish respondents emerged as the most informed, whereas the majority of the German respondents expressed unfamiliarity.

Interestingly, despite the high percentage of respondents in Montenegro and Serbia having the right to appoint employee representatives at the company or board level, their satisfaction was quite low. Similarly, while the

majority of respondents in Germany did not have the right to appoint employee representation, there was significant dissatisfaction with their representatives.
On a positive note, the survey revealed a strong tendency towards managers relating to workers individually, particularly in Poland and Portugal, which was correlated with a higher level of satisfaction. However, there was a significant lack of trained representatives participating and stimulating the workforce during the crisis and recovery period, especially in Germany and Serbia.
These findings underscore the need for countries to invest in workers' representation, communication, and participation as a critical step towards improving corporate governance and effectively managing crises. The interview results further strengthened these conclusions, emphasizing the importance of involving workers in decision-making processes.

CASE STUDIES

The case studies from Germany, Romania, Poland, Serbia, Montenegro, Spain and Portugal provide valuable insights into the management of employee rights and consultations during the COVID-19 crisis.

Good practices are seen in the German context, where transparent communication and active employee participation contributed significantly to managing the crisis. EDP in Portugal demonstrated similar effective strategies, establishing a COVID-19 monitoring committee and support team, ensuring open communication and supporting directly affected employees. In Romania, the successful negotiation of a collective labour agreement, despite obstacles, showcases the power of internal solidarity and strategic union leadership. In Poland, building effective communication channels and offering appropriate training were among the recommended practices.

On the contrary, bad practices highlighted areas of improvement. In Germany, the lack of information dissemination led to mistrust and uncertainty among employees, as did the inadequate involvement of employee representatives in decision-making. In Romania, limitations of collective agreements were exposed, with issues around exercising full collective bargaining rights. Portugal's COVIPOR case emphasized the repercussions of inadequate safety measures and lack of communication, leading to a COVID-19 outbreak, Montenegro, on the other hand, precisely because of the lack of real dialogue and the involvement of trade unions in the decision-making process, it happened that during the epidemic, even basic means of protection, such as protective masks, were not provided in a timely manner, nor in sufficient numbers compared to the total number of employees, so it often happened that an employee used one mask during full-time work and In Spain, the health sector, as in the rest of Europe, suffered a lot; not knowing what we were facing conditioned each and every one of the measures adopted at work for health professionals; we had no prevention measures, and our health professionals had a very high rate of contagion.

These case studies underline the necessity for transparent and open communication, active employee participation, and adherence to safety measures. Furthermore, the importance of effective and strategic leadership, particularly in unions, is vital to navigating crises. While shortcomings are context-specific, they all converge towards a lack of employee engagement and communication, emphasizing that companies must ensure their employees are informed, involved, and safe to effectively manage crises.

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CONCLUSIONS FROM THE RESEARCH PHASE

1. Active and transparent communication significantly improves crisis management within companies. Recommendation: Implement regular updates, open forums, and clear channels for employee feedback to maintain trust and morale during crises.

2. Employee involvement in decision-making fosters greater acceptance and support for measures implemented. Recommendation: Involve employee representatives in critical decision-making processes to ensure measures address employees' concerns and needs.

3. Effective leadership, particularly within unions, can significantly influence negotiation outcomes. Recommendation: Invest in leadership development programs to equip leaders with necessary skills for strategic decision-making.

4. Digital platforms for communication and consultation, as suggested in Poland, can enhance employee participation. Recommendation: Invest in digital infrastructure to facilitate efficient, open communication and consultation among employees.

5. Training in digital skills is lacking but necessary for employees to actively participate in online consultations and decision-making. Recommendation: Provide employees with training programs focusing on digital literacy and skills to fully engage in digital communication platforms.

6. Modern training approaches are needed to equip employees with the necessary skills to navigate crises effectively. Recommendation: Develop and implement comprehensive training programs that utilize modern learning methods, such as e-learning, simulations, and gamified learning modules.

7. The rapid adoption of digital technology during the pandemic has exposed a gap in digital skills among the workforce. Recommendation: Invest in continuous digital skills training to ensure that employees can adapt to technological changes and innovations in the workplace.

8. The crisis has underlined the need for a flexible approach to managing employee rights and consultations. Recommendation: Develop policies that allow for flexibility and adaptability in response to changing circumstances, ensuring the protection and representation of employee rights.

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