

# Working together

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This is one of a series of training modules produced as part of an ambitious European project, *Civil Society Dialogue: Bringing together workers from Turkey and the EU through a shared culture of work*, which aims to ensure better knowledge and understanding of one another and an awareness of the challenges and opportunities of future EU enlargement.

## HOW TO USE THIS PUBLICATION

The training modules are intended to offer a short, clear introduction to the subject for a trade union audience, and each will have an educational activity that can be used in the classroom or with groups of members. A list of all the publications in this series can be found below, and copies can be downloaded from the ETUC website [www.etuc.org/r/557](http://www.etuc.org/r/557)

## PUBLICATIONS IN THIS SERIES

1. Trade unions at the European level
2. Industrial relations at the European level
3. Turkish trade unions and industrial relations
4. Trade unions and industrial relations in EU countries
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6. Trade unions and civil society
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## ETUC MANIFESTO

At its 11th Congress in Seville, Spain, in May 2007, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) adopted a Manifesto for Action for the next four years. This manifesto highlights five main areas where the ETUC is committed to going 'on the offensive' on behalf of European workers:

- the European labour market
- social dialogue, collective bargaining and worker participation
- better European economic, social and environmental governance
- a stronger European Union
- stronger trade unions and a stronger ETUC.

# FOREWORD

The European Trade Union Confederation at its Congress in 2007 voted in favour of the accession of Turkey to the European Union, 'provided that it meets, in reality and not on paper, the requirements of membership and the provisions of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. A transformation of Turkish society with full rights and freedoms should be sought and completed during the challenging process of negotiations'.

It was on this basis that the ETUC, and its affiliated organisations in Turkey and in the European Union, agreed to step up their cooperation and launch this ambitious project *Civil Society Dialogue: Bringing together workers from Turkey and the EU through a shared culture of work*, which aims to ensure better knowledge and understanding of one another and an awareness of the challenges and opportunities of future EU enlargement.

The central elements of the project are:

- 12 exchange and mutual understanding seminars for trade unionists coming from different regions of Turkey on the one hand and from different Members States of the European Union on the other
- 9 training seminars, in cooperation with European Industry Federations.

The project has also produced this series of training modules which will provide an important tool for building capacity within the ETUC, by enabling other workers and trade unionists from both the EU and Turkey to understand the challenges ahead and to accept cultural, social and political differences more readily.



Thanks are due to:

- ETUC affiliated organisations – European Industry Federations and the national trade union confederations from the EU and Turkey that have carried this project forward
- workers and trade unionists from the national unions in Turkey and the EU who have taken part in the different training activities
- trainers from the national unions in Turkey and the EU, and Marcus Strohmeier (ÖGB) who coordinated the training activities and contributed to these booklets
- Nigel Rees (Trade Union European Information Project) who was responsible for editing the original texts for these educational booklets, and also Kazim Ates who was responsible for revising them
- Laura Fallavollita, Yücel Top and the other members of the project coordination committee (Osman Yıldız, Uğraş Gök and Kıvanç Eli Açıık), who, under the guidance of Joël Decaillon and Jeff Bridgford, have brought the project to a successful conclusion.

I commend these training modules to trade unionists from the affiliated organisations of the ETUC. I encourage you to use them, so that we are all in a better position to defend workers' interests throughout Turkey and the European Union.

**John Monks**  
**General Secretary**  
**European Trade Union Confederation**

## CONTEXT

Within the global economy decisions which have a direct or indirect impact on the quality of trade union members' working lives are taken on a daily basis. State enterprises are privatised, companies are merged, plants are closed and activities are relocated at an ever accelerating pace. Faced with the challenge of globalisation, trade unions need to play an active role in accompanying and influencing these decisions, and in fighting for workers' rights, both at the national level and increasingly at the international level. It is no longer sufficient to be able to work only at the national level, as so many decisions are increasingly being taken at a distance from where trade unionists work. Trade union officers and representatives need the tools to be able to work together across national borders.

This training module has been designed to enable trade union officers and representatives from throughout the European Union and Turkey to identify their counterparts in other countries and to improve ways of communicating with each other. This can be done through email, letter, fax and telephone. Methods of communication will vary according to the country and sector, and the training module's activities can be used across the range of different technologies.

It consists of a series of activities that can be used with one or more of trade union colleagues from other countries. Each activity will have aims and some tasks to do.

When you are ready to begin with the activities, first read through the aims so that you are clear about why you are doing this activity and then complete the tasks to the best of your ability.

You may find some of the tasks difficult to do easily or immediately. The important point is starting to communicate effectively with your colleagues from other trade unions and to share difficulties as well as successes.

## LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER

Important initiatives are being taken by trade unions to influence decisions taken by employers and to fight for workers' rights; to prevent accidents and ill health; to promote equality and to fight racism, sexism and homophobia; to bargain for skills and educational opportunities; to target climate change and to build workplace organisation to defend jobs and services. It is important that trade unionists learn from each other, take on the most useful lessons and apply what they have learnt to their own particular circumstances.

Many trade unions have already started to establish international links to:

- find out how unions in other countries are tackling common problems
- develop union solidarity amongst workers
- provide help and support to unions that need it
- coordinate information and ideas to help tackle multinational companies
- link workplace union organisation in different countries
- promote ethical trading within companies and their supply chains
- campaign on individual rights issues
- influence international bodies

Finding your colleagues from other countries may be both easier and harder than you might at first imagine:

- Easier, because there are a lot of sources of information available on the internet and through your union.
- Harder, because multinational companies are constantly buying and selling operations and because our international trade union structures will inevitably take time to catch up on the companies.

## WORKING TOGETHER

There are many examples of trade unions working together across borders, but here are some recent examples provided by Turkish trade unions that have

been working together with the European Industry Federations and Global Union Federations.

### **Novamed Case and Global Solidarity**

The TÜRK-İŞ affiliated union Petrol-İs organised the majority of workers in Novamed, which is a subsidiary of *Fresenius Medical Care*, located in Germany. At every stage of the organizing work and bargaining process, the local management in Antalya practised systematic anti-union repression to urge the Petrol-İs members

to leave the union, and it threatened them with moving the plant to another country. Despite these challenges, collective bargaining between Novamed management and Petrol-İs started on 19 April 2006. However, an agreement could not be reached due to the management's persistent and obstinate attitude. Meanwhile, the Novamed management hired 50-60 new workers in order to break any future strike activity. As a result, the union made the decision to strike on 11 August 2006. The Novamed strike started on 26 September 2006. These challenges were overcome, particularly as a result of active global solidarity.

The strike drew worldwide interest, particularly following concerted action taken by the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions. (ICEM) on 8 March 2007, International Women's Day, when hundreds of trade unions and individuals rallied to the defense of Turkish workers. Following a meeting in Germany between ICEM, its European sister organisation EMCEF and the German chemical workers' union IG BCE on the one hand and corporate officials on the other in late September 2007, negotiations were re-launched and concluded with an agreement, and the 447-day long Novamed strike ended on 18 December 2007. The settlement brought the 84 strikers, 82 of whom were women, back to work, and granted all workers a wage increase and also a social package. All the striking workers returned to work on the 2 January 2008.

In addition to NGOs and women's groups from all over the world, many national unions gave their support to the strike, including unions from Greece, USA, France, Romania, Russia, Azerbaijan, Serbia, Brazil, Canada, Belgium, Palestine, South Africa, Nigeria, Ireland, Spain, Bulgaria and India.

### **EFFAT and the Oltanlar Nut Factory workers in Trabzon**

Another example is to be found in the food sector. EFFAT supported the struggle of the Oltanlar Nut Factory workers in Trabzon in May 2002. They were

## Things to find out

- **Contact your own union and find out whether it has an international department or already has links with your colleagues' unions (your own union website may have links to other union organisations)**
- **Check whether there is a European or global works council for your company and go through your union to establish a contact.**
- **Contact European and international union organisations such as European Industry Federations and the Global Union Federations for your industrial sector and see what information they may have**
- **Look up the website for your multinational company. There is likely to be a map or listing of the company's operations in the world. You will need to keep checking this information as purchases and sales of operations occur frequently**
- **Use a search engine such as Google to track down other union, company and industrial relations web sites. It is surprising how many sites have information in different languages.**

members of Özgıda-İş. This support increased the capacity of the workers and it had a considerable impact on the success of this struggle.

### **EMF and IMF launch solidarity campaign for financial support to Turkish Sinter Metal workers**

Metalworkers across Europe and globally were called on to donate funds in support of 350 struggling Turkish Sinter Metal workers, fighting for their reinstatement since December 2008.

Workers of Sinter Metal had been fighting for their jobs and their rights since December 2008 after being fired for joining the union, Birleşik Metal-İş, an affiliate of the European Metalworkers' Federation and the International Metalworkers' Federation.

Workers had been demonstrating in front of the company gates for almost a year. The unemployment insurance and healthcare benefits ran out as of June, and many families had been forced to sell handicrafts and small goods to survive.

Their fight was symbolic of many trade union struggles in Turkey, where workers attempting to organise a union are often faced with retaliation through unjust dismissals, abuse and violence. Birleşik Metal-İş had made the Sinter Metal case a priority, as it is the largest industrial dispute in Turkey's massive Dudullu Organised Industrial Zone. A victory at Sinter Metal would have been a victory for all workers in Turkey.

The EMF and IMF both made donations to this important and strategic fight. The financial assistance helped keep the struggle alive and provide some relief for basic living costs to the 350 Birleşik Metal-İş members out of work.

Since launching a joint solidarity campaign in March 2009, the EMF and IMF repeatedly called on Sinter Metal to immediately reinstate unjustly dismissed

workers, stop violations of basic labour rights, and start negotiations with the union.

The affiliates were asked to help Sinter Metal workers by donating financial support directly to Birleşik Metal-İş.

### **COMMUNICATING WITH EACH OTHER**

Letters, telephone, emails or faxes may be used. You may even get the opportunity to meet face to face. Use whatever methods are best for you. More and more trade unionists have access to email, either at work or at home, or indeed in the different Internet cafés that are to be found in large and small towns and cities. Moreover email has the added advantage of being visible after the sending of the message, which is clearly not the case for telephone conversations. It is also the fastest and most efficient way of communicating with each other right now and in the foreseeable future, and this training module will concentrate on providing a few tips on how to use email for trade union purposes.

When emailing you need to be direct, use simple language and focus on one issue, not many. You may need to email back and forth a few times with your colleagues in order to clarify the parts of their answers that you do not understand. For example, it will help you to keep a list of words or concepts that you do not understand and ask your colleagues for explanation.

Email can be used very informally and misunderstandings may occur. You should be careful about being too casual or personal and always remember that emails can be stored, forwarded to other people or printed and copied. And if someone sees four emails from the same person about the same thing there is a danger that none of them will be read!

### **Languages**

You are likely to be emailing back and forth in different languages. This provides a real challenge,

but help is at hand. There are a number of resources to assist you with translation.

- union members and their families – we are all more mobile than ever before, and you will have a rich linguistic store to call on at your workplace
- resources within your union – some unions and confederations may have access to translation facilities
- free internet translation sites, such as **www.babelfish.altavista.com** or **www.freetranslation.com**, offer a range of different language combinations and others, such as **http://translate.google.com/#** or **http://traduction.babylon.com/**, opportunities for translation in and out of Turkish. These should be used with care though, as they can be inaccurate and at best provide rough translation
- your local community resources – such as universities, libraries, local schoolteachers, bilingual activists, community organisations
- professional translators familiar with trade unions
- language learning resources such as tapes, books and classes from your local library and college.

Remember that translation takes place within a cultural and national context. For example, even when you speak the same language with colleagues from another country, you may attach different meanings to the same words and phrases. This is particularly true in the context of trade union activity since there is so much variation in what a union looks like and does in your different countries. For instance, you can translate the words 'collective bargaining' but, as we see from training module 4 *Trade unions and industrial relations in EU countries*, collective bargaining systems are different in different countries.

## Formal and informal communication channels

As we have seen in training module 1 *Trade unions at the European level*, there are various formal possibilities for international communication and cooperation within the structures of the European Trade Union Confederation, with 82 national confederations affiliated to the ETUC, ranging from two Icelandic confederations (ASI and BSRB) in the west to four Turkish confederations (DISK, HAK-IŞ, KESK and TÜRK-IŞ) in the east, from two Norwegian confederations (LO-N and YS) in the north to two Maltese confederations (CMTU and GWU) in the south.

There are twelve European Industry Federations, with affiliated organisations covering the same wide geographical spectrum and representing workers in individual sectors, ranging from journalism and entertainment to the chemical and metal industries. They are responsible on the trade union side for European social dialogue at sectoral level: the 35 different sectoral committees discuss issues specific to the industries they cover and can agree a wide range of initiatives.

There are 45 Interregional Trade Union Councils, ranging from the northern tip of Sweden to southern Spain, from Ireland in the west to Hungary in the east.

Around 10 million workers across the EU have the right to information and consultation on company decisions at European level through their European Works Councils. The 'recast' of the Works Council Directive (2009/38/EC) applies to companies with 1,000 or more employees, including at least 150 in two or more Member States.

However the vast majority of communication about day-to-day trade union matters will be between trade union representatives on an informal basis, obtaining and sharing information, tackling common problems, developing union solidarity, providing help and support, campaigning on individual rights issues and influencing international bodies.

# Activity 1

## Issues to Share

### AIMS

To enable you to:

- identify specific workplace problems which could be shared with colleagues from another country
- work out what you would like to achieve

### TASK

Discuss with union representatives and colleagues at your workplace or in your union problems that you feel could benefit from shared activity with your colleagues from another country. Look for a problem that is widely felt in your workplace and could be of interest to other trade unionists. You will want to choose a problem where you have some possibility of making a difference.

Examples could include:

- job losses
- introduction of new technology
- health and safety issues
- issues of equality
- access to training opportunities

Restate your problem as a positive aim. For example, the problem of the loss of jobs could be restated as a goal of either stopping the loss of jobs or as a goal of protesting against the loss of jobs; a health and safety problem could be about the goal of finding out how this is handled in your colleague's workplace.

Write an email or letter, sharing the problem and any additional background information. Being clear and specific about the problem and what you want to achieve will help them understand your situation.

# Activity 2

## Next Steps

### AIMS

To enable you to:

- formulate a plan of action
- make progress with the problem you identified
- develop communication and links with your colleagues from other countries.

### TASK

Draw up a rough plan for taking forward the problem which you raised with your colleagues from another country. Share your plan and ask and answer questions back and forth with your colleagues until you understand their thoughts and have arrived at a way forward. You may find that you need to think about involving unions in other countries.

You may want to put specific dates against your short-, medium- and long-term goals.

## Activity 3

### Identifying and overcoming barriers

#### AIMS

To enable you to:

- identify potential barriers or difficulties
- look at ways to overcome them

#### TASK

List the barriers that you will face when you begin implementing your plan.

Prioritise the three most significant, and for each of them:

- identify three simple steps that you can realistically take to overcome the barrier.
- share your ideas with your colleagues.

## Activity 4

### Keeping in touch

#### AIMS

To enable you to:

- set up a schedule to keep in touch with your colleagues from another country.

#### TASK

Make a list of the things that you would like to discuss with your colleagues on a regular basis. Decide how often you would like to schedule communications. It will be important to schedule the communications so that you do not end up only communicating with each other when there is a problem.

Discuss this information with your colleagues and agree on a regular schedule of communications and the list of key topics you would like to cover on an on-going basis.




# FURTHER INFORMATION

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) was set up in 1973 to promote the interests of working people at European level and to represent them in the EU institutions. The ETUC's objective is an EU with a strong social dimension that safeguards the wellbeing of all its citizens. At present, the ETUC has in membership 82 national trade union confederations from 36 European countries, as well as 12 European Industry Federations, plus observer organisations in Macedonia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Other trade union structures such as EUROCADRES (the Council of European Professional and Managerial Staff) and EFREP/FERPA (European Federation of Retired and Elderly Persons) operate under the auspices of the ETUC. In addition, the ETUC coordinates the activities of the 45 IRTUCs (Interregional Trade Union Councils), which organise trade union cooperation at a cross-border level.

The ETUC is one of the European social partners and is recognised by the European Union, by the Council of Europe and by EFTA as the only representative cross-sectoral trade union organisation at European level.

**[www.etuc.org](http://www.etuc.org)**

# PROJECT PARTNERS

	Algemeen Belgisch Vakverbond – Fédération Générale du Travail de Belgique – ABVV-FGTB	<a href="http://www.fgtb.be/">www.fgtb.be/</a>
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	Landsorganisationen i Sverige – LO-S	<a href="http://www.lo.se/">www.lo.se/</a>
	Türkiye Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu – DİSK	<a href="http://www.disk.org.tr/">www.disk.org.tr/</a>
	Türkiye Hak İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu – HAK-İŞ	<a href="http://www.hakis.org.tr/">www.hakis.org.tr/</a>
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	Trades Union Congress – TUC	<a href="http://www.tuc.org.uk/">www.tuc.org.uk/</a>
	European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions – EFFAT	<a href="http://www.effat.org/">www.effat.org/</a>
	European Metalworkers' Federation – EMF	<a href="http://www.emf-fem.org/">www.emf-fem.org/</a>
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Civil Society Dialogue – Bringing together workers from Turkey and the EU through a shared culture of work

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