

EMPOWERING TRADE UNIONS

to tackle

INTERSECTIONAL DISCRIMINATION

**Good practices, lessons, tools, paths
towards an intersectional approach**



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TOWARDS INTERSECTIONAL JUSTICE FOR A FAIR AND INCLUSIVE EUROPE

Despite regulatory progress, discrimination persists in Europe, particularly affecting women, people with a migrant background, individuals with disabilities, and ethnic minorities. According to Eurostat, in 2021, 7.7 per cent of men and 10.4 per cent of women born in the reference country but with both parents born abroad reported feeling discriminated against at work, mainly due to their foreign origin. Furthermore, nearly 8% of men and 9% of women born outside the EU reported experiencing discrimination at work, with the primary cause identified as foreign origin.

A survey conducted by the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) found that 47% of residents of the Islamic faith surveyed in 13 member states have experienced discrimination in the last five years, with higher rates among women wearing religious clothing. This data demonstrates the widespread nature of discrimination, which particularly affects individuals possessing multiple identity characteristics subject to prejudice.

In a Europe that should be inclusive and multi-ethnic, due to the evolution of its own history as well as economic and demographic necessity, diversity is still, instead of being unanimously recognised as an asset for social and cultural development, a pretext for discrimination.

Among these, secularly rooted, gender-based discrimination remains widespread, and all European trade unions have always fought against it, not only because it is inhumane and anti-historical, but also because it is absurd and harmful in the contemporary economic and social context.

The study of intersectional discrimination focuses on an even more complex, articulated, and at the same time, pervasive and dangerous dimension of inequality.

In fact, the analytical approach to the effects produced by the interaction of different forms of discrimination allows us to observe how they, overlapping or alternating to the detriment of the same subject, generate new forms of marginalisation and exploitation that are original and personalised.

While studies on discrimination traditionally arose from the need to counter those based on ethnic grounds and, more recently, those linked to discrimination against women, we can now recognise that the reasons for discrimination are much broader and more complex.

Age, disability, gender identity, and sexual orientation are subjects of discrimination, both old and new, alongside the racism and misogyny that continue to be profoundly and widely present in our communities.

The awareness of a society that is increasingly complex and inhomogeneous, and is simultaneously composed of people who are increasingly aware of their conditions, identities, rights, and aspirations, serves as the foundation upon which new studies on the intersectional effects of different forms of discrimination have made progress.

Adopting an intersectional perspective means recognising that penalisations are not based on factors in their own right; rather, they are the result of prejudice and hostility exacerbated by the combination of multiple interconnected aspects that represent people's individualities, identities, and complexities, as well as by political and cultural conjunctures that shift the attention of the masses to different factors, instigating, time after time, the growth of popular sentiments adverse to the bearers of true or presumed diversity.

We need only think of the anti-immigration political campaigns that criminalise immigrants, rather than the recent U-turn taking place in America and some areas of Europe regarding respect for different sexual orientations and identities.

Women with a migrant background, for example, may encounter discrimination based on both gender and ethnic origin. Factors such as age, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, and certain disabilities can severely impact their present and future, creating cumulative effects that heighten barriers to employment and social participation.

Ignoring these intersections risks making the experiences of those at the intersection of multiple forms of oppression invisible, which, upon closer inspection, could potentially describe the majority of people.

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) has assumed a central role in promoting inclusion and implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights. Fully realising its fundamental principles requires ensuring fair labour markets and effective social protection systems, with the condition that equality and equal opportunities are genuinely guaranteed for all.

The ETUC has supported numerous initiatives to strengthen workers' rights, promote gender equality, improve occupational health and safety, and combat undeclared work—devoid of safeguards and protections—more than any

other organisation. For this reason, it often becomes the only way to survive for those who suffer discrimination.

Implementing the Social Pillar requires a collective commitment from European institutions, national authorities, and social partners, including trade unions.

In theory, all institutional and social actors should join together to support the horizontal anti-discrimination directive proposed as early as 2008 and remain faithful to the mandate of a Europe of welfare, progress, and justice.

A Europe in which the idea of equality and brotherhood, which underpin both the Christian and Enlightenment cultures on which Europe is founded, is also necessary for the competitiveness of an economic-social model that is an alternative, now more than ever, to those of other continents.

However, even in the EU, the adoption of legislation to protect all people in the variety of their identities, both within and outside of the workplace, remains a battleground due to economic reasons - as if exclusion did not come at a high price for everyone - and even ideological ones. After a long wait for approval, the proposal for a horizontal directive was ingloriously withdrawn.

Currently, protection against discrimination in the EU is fragmented and does not sufficiently cover all areas of social life.

The areas of inequality, injustice, and intolerance still present on our continent pose not only an ethical problem but also an exacerbating limitation to the ability of the entire community to develop, integrate, and progress.

Therefore, adopting a clear strategic line to combat discrimination, along with an intersectional perspective, is not only a matter of social justice but also of economic effectiveness.

Structural discrimination limits the sense of community and, in turn, restricts the access of many often-excellent individuals to the labour market, thereby reducing the productive potential of the European economy. In many EU countries, racial tensions and xenophobia are leading to the loss of skilled foreign workers, which contributes to the anticipated shortage of skilled labour by 2035. This also affects women, those with diverse gender identities, individuals with varying abilities, young people, and the elderly.

Promoting inclusion and combating discrimination in all its forms, no matter how complex, is not just a matter of conscience but also a necessity.

Pope Francis, who sadly passed away recently, had said: 'Any discriminating relationship that does not respect the fundamental conviction that the other is like myself constitutes a crime, and many times an aberrant one.'

To this, one can only add that the crime is not only committed against the human beings who are discriminated against, but against the entire community and therefore even against oneself: discrimination deprives a community of the spiritual progress that provides meaning, strength, and perspective to economic progress.



CHAPTER 1 – CONTEXT AND PURPOSE

The Trade Unions Against Discrimination (TUAD) project builds on the tradition of union action, integrating human rights, social rights, and workers' rights. Trade unions have consistently viewed discrimination as linked to socio-economic inequalities that are entrenched in the economic system and exacerbated by ineffective policies intended to address these issues. Policymakers at all levels are solemnly committed to the European Pillar of Social Rights, which emphasises equal treatment as its first chapter, not as a mere coincidence: the full realisation of equality rights is a prerequisite for entering the labour market (to which Chapter II is dedicated) and for enjoying the social protection rights outlined in Chapter III. Simultaneously, the rights to equality, equal opportunities, and non-discrimination serve as crucial factors for evaluating any form of indirect mistreatment of workers in every context.

Moreover, focusing on intersectional discrimination helps detect social practices outside the workplace (i.e., within social, community, and institutional relations) that reinforce inequality, impact the world of work, and ultimately influence the quality of life in our societies.

1.1 The TUAD Project

TUAD aims to provide practical and conceptual tools for detecting, addressing, and combating intersectional discrimination within and outside the workplace. To achieve this, the project engaged and mobilised trade unionists, inviting them to share their experiences and provide insights on innovating collective bargaining, trade union organisation, and other practices in more inclusive ways.

The main objectives that have guided the implementation of the project are:

- 1) Raise awareness of intersectional discrimination and help shift the understanding of discrimination from a largely individual level to a more structural one. Instead of relying solely on single-axis frameworks that focus on one dimension of discrimination at a time (e.g., gender, ethnicity, or disability), an intersectional approach recognises the multidimensionality of people's experiences and identities. For instance, Muslim women who wear the hijab, women with disabilities, and LGBTQI+ refugees may experience discrimination in qualitatively different ways than their male, white, and non-disabled counterparts. Such variations in how discrimination manifests for different individuals based on the combination of various identities are not only mostly absent from available statistical data but also rarely addressed by anti-discrimination legislation in EU member states.
- 2) Enhance trade unions' capacity to detect, combat, and prevent discrimination both in and outside the workplace. Trade unions are crucial non-discrimination actors that make significant contributions across society. They typically have well-organised structures, and union representatives in the workplace can utilise the expertise of their sectoral and national instances, providing them with the potential for broader societal change through their non-discrimination initiatives. However, various approaches across Europe depend heavily on resources. Through this project, ETUC aims to promote the sharing of best practices and strengthen the capacity to develop concrete strategies at the workplace or company level.
- 3) Building synergies among trade unions and civil society organisations (CSOs) to promote equality both within and outside the workplace, while enhancing the workers' perspective in national and EU policymaking. Trade union membership, social dialogue, and workers' rights to information, consultation, and participation are vital tools for democracy in the workplace, playing a crucial role in fostering democratic and inclusive societies beyond it. Meanwhile, as civil society and academia advocate for an intersectional approach to discrimination, a concerning trend of restrictive measures in several EU Member States is adversely impacting civic space and the ability of civil society actors to carry out their legitimate tasks. The project addressed the necessity for trade unions to reinforce strategic collaborations to design and implement non-discrimination practices. These partnerships strengthen unions' lobbying power and provide a platform for discussion and the sharing of best practices.

These objectives are rooted in the ETUC agenda, as indicated in its most recent policy documents, which also acknowledge the limits of the actions taken thus far. Regarding equality and non-discrimination, the Action Programme 2023-2027¹ affirms that trade unions are sometimes not fully equipped to tackle the issues facing workers, citizens, and residents who suffer from direct and indirect discrimination in its varied forms.

1 *ETUC Action Programme 2023-2027, Together for a Fair deal for Workers*, adopted by the ETUC 15th Statutory Congress (Berlin, 23-26 May 2023), <https://www.etuc.org/en/document/etuc-action-programme-2023-2027>

Unions' actions encompass collective bargaining and social dialogue, which can strengthen inclusiveness and fair regulations. Collective bargaining and collective agreements must be utilised to actively promote diversity, tolerance, and inclusion at all levels while opposing all forms of discrimination and work-related violence. They serve as tools to combat discrimination directly. The ETUC will also continue its efforts to identify collective agreements and negotiated clauses aimed at combating racism, discrimination, and the influence of the far-right within the workplace.

The fight against gender-based discrimination and the fight against racism have been pioneering themes in union programmes. The ETUC considers Gender Equality as a cross-cutting and intersectional dimension of trade union intervention, in particular in the current context of economic and social crisis: "the weakening of women's working and living conditions is likely to continue and even escalate with the cost-of-living crisis. Single mothers, migrant women, women with a low level of education, young women and older women will be the most affected.

The issue of age discrimination and ageism is not new to the union agenda. The claim for a "social protection system that safeguards peoples' right to ageing in dignity" is laid out in ETUC Action Programme 2023-2027. The emphasis is placed on rights, access to care services, intergenerational relationships: "Reinforce the narrative of Dignity of Ageing based on a comprehensive approach to welfare rights, including minimum dignifying safety nets, amongst other measures adequate minimum income, and long term care for all ages and on the intergenerational solidarity principle".

The union approach is inherently open to recognising new rights. In June 2021, the ETUC adopted the resolution "LGBTIQ Rights are Trade Union Rights." This document expresses the ETUC's position on the EU Strategy for equality of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, non-binary, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) individuals from 2020 to 2025. LGBTIQ rights are a vital aspect of the unions' actions to combat discrimination in the workplace.

Trade unions raise also the question of the non-recognition of some forms of discrimination, especially related to social origins, status, education and wealth.

1.2 The Compendium

The Compendium aims to suggest new instruments for union action.

Chapter 2 examines the significance of intersectionality, starting with academic definitions of the concept and exploring its various applications at both social and institutional levels. The chapter highlights the importance of intersectionality for trade union efforts, particularly in identifying and addressing discrimination, as well as in promoting social and trade union renewal through increased worker participation and inclusivity.

Chapter 3 examines international and European anti-discrimination legislation, highlighting several pertinent legal cases in European courts that reference intersectionality. While not exhaustive, it offers a snapshot of a regulatory framework where intersectionality is beginning to gain traction.

Chapters 4 and 5 form the core of the Compendium. They provide a collection and analysis of effective practices for combating discrimination based on the research and training activities of the TUAD project. These practices are highlighted by emphasising the contributions each can make to building a toolbox against discrimination, enhancing the intersectional potential of trade union action. Chapter 4 focuses on trade union practices categorised by the involved actors: collective bargaining, tripartite social dialogue, relationships with legislation and public institutions, as well as connections with civil society organisations, social movements, and local communities. Chapter 5 outlines practices that benefit the internal and organisational development of the union itself: training for trade unionists, methods for listening to and engaging with workers, communication strategies, public campaigns, and initiatives for innovating forms of worker representation and union decision-making.

Chapter 6 summarises the main policy recommendations developed by the TUAD project. These recommendations were drafted during group work sessions at the learning seminars, incorporating contributions from representatives of participating unions, institutional speakers, and CSOs invited to the discussions. In this context, the recommendations represent a work in progress and reflect the evolution of union action toward an intersectional approach.

Chapter 7 provides a glossary of essential terms related to discrimination and intersectionality, based on definitions already accepted by international bodies and civil society organisations fighting against discrimination.

Chapter 2 - INTERSECTIONALITY AND TRADE UNION ACTION AGAINST DISCRIMINATION

An intersectional approach to discrimination has become increasingly relevant in order to combat it effectively, in light of several factors. The evolution and integration of European societies, first and foremost, and the changes in the world of work call for trade union responses to be up to such degree of complexity.

2.1 Intersectionality: a concept moving among the spheres of academia, activism and institutions

The innovative value of TUAD lies in its adoption of the concept of intersectionality. This approach to the study of privilege and oppression was developed by African-American scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, in her groundbreaking 1989 paper², argued that social and legal systems cannot adequately address the different dimensions of oppression if they fail to consider how these dimensions interrelate and overlap, and if they do not focus on the experiences of those who suffer from oppression.

Over time, the concept of intersectionality has been extensively employed in academic studies, beginning with an analysis of the dimensions of “intersection” (race, sex, gender, age, disability, class, and social status, etc.) that create specific layers of oppression and privilege. Intersectionality has also permeated the lexicon and regulatory norms of various international institutions (UN Conventions, UN agencies, ILO) and has recently been acknowledged within the framework of EU legislative processes³.

This is a significant development with great potential, particularly for recognizing the rights of underrepresented groups and individuals. However, there remains a lack of institutional action that can effectively address the root causes of intersectional discrimination. Intersectional discrimination stems from the systemic aspects of exploitation and social inequality, whereas the neoliberal discourse and its practices are not free from ideological bias⁴ and predominantly provide relief from discrimination on an individual level instead of systemically.

Civil society organisations and social movements have also built on the concept of intersectionality. The important contribution of activism lies in its effort to avoid conceiving the struggles for social justice as separate silos or solely related to identitarian aspects (identity politics). This has prompted a reflection on the existing inequalities within social organisations, as well as on the transformative potential of intersectionality as a tool to question hierarchies, stimulate participation, and enrich the social action agenda.

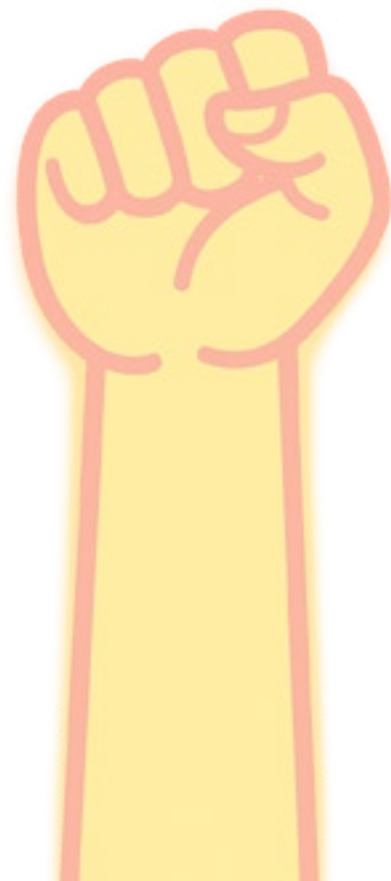
2.2 Definitions of intersectionality: from theory to trade union practice

In line with the union approach, TUAD aimed to develop a definition of intersectionality that considers its cognitive value (acknowledging and analysing discrimination) as well as its significance in terms of action (at the social and institutional levels, as well as within trade unions themselves) and providing space and voice for the subjectivity of workers experiencing discrimination.

² Crenshaw, Kimberlé (1989), Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics, «University of Chicago Legal forum», Vol. 1989, Issue 1, Article 8.

³ Capesciotti, Marta (2021), Labour policies at the intersection of gender and race, GRASE project (Gender and Race Stereotypes Eradication in Labor Market Access).

⁴ De Vita, Luisa (2022), The importance of Intersectionality for Gender Equality in the Labor Market Analysis, «AG About Gender - International Journal of Gender Studies», Vol. 11, No. 22: Doing Intersectionality in Explored and Unexplored Places, Genoa University Press.



Intersectionality has been defined in many ways, both by academia and at international and institutional levels. From academic theory to social and institutional practices, this variety reflects the state and evolution of forms of oppression, privilege, inequality, and discrimination. The lesson of intersectionality is that these forms of oppression are systemic and ever-changing and cross the boundaries between the world of work and social life. Intersectionality in the UN glossary focuses on the identity dimensions at play in discrimination and on their intersections, which produce specific forms of oppression. This definition can be supplemented by that provided by the UN-Women glossary, which recalls the centrality of persons who experience discrimination within power structures while also emphasising their agency and, more generally, the transformative potential of intersectionality.

«[Intersectionality:] The theory that various forms of discrimination centred on race, gender, class, disability, sexuality, and other forms of identity, do not work independently but interact to produce particularized forms of social oppression» (UNTerm⁵); «Intersectionality recognises that people's lives are shaped by their identities, relationships and social factors. These combine to create intersecting forms of privilege and oppression depending on a person's context and existing power structures such as patriarchy, ableism, colonialism, imperialism, homophobia and racism. It is important to remember the transformative potential of intersectionality, which extends beyond merely a focus on the impact of intersecting identities» (UNWomen-UNPRPD⁶)

Intersectional discrimination does not simply coincide with multiple discrimination based on individual stand-alone factors, no matter how "cumulative" they may be (such as being a woman, a migrant, a low-income worker, disabled, elderly, etc.). Intersectional discrimination defines a particular experience that intertwines rather than merely 'adds up' the various factors of discrimination affecting the same person simultaneously, shaped by the specific context. The workplace is one of these contexts; it is also connected to the other social dimensions of people's lives. Trade unions need to be better equipped to recognise and combat intersectional discrimination.

As will be discussed in Chapter 3, a recent European directive (the Pay Transparency Directive, paragraph 25 preamble) refers to intersectionality in contexts involving the intersection of various axes of discrimination or inequality, where the worker belongs to one or more groups protected against discrimination based on sex, as well as racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, or sexual orientation, as protected under Council Directive 2000/43/EC (7) or 2000/78/EC (8).

2.3 Why intersectionality matters in trade union action against discrimination

Intersectionality can provide a new perspective for union action on issues of equality and non-discrimination. The intersectional approach focuses not just on the mere sum of different social claims and subjectivities, but on revealing their interconnections. Trade union action centres around negotiating rights and improving working conditions for workers, especially in areas such as fair wages and equal pay, protection against discrimination and harassment, access to training and professional development, work-life balance, social security and benefits, among others. Negotiating rules and actions against discrimination is not a new aspect of trade unions' and workers' representatives' interventions in workplaces. Changes in society have consistently influenced how labour and modes of production evolve, prompting the trade union agenda to adapt and expand. The fight to uphold the rights of women and minorities has long been integral to the labour movement's tradition, as has the inclusion of the most vulnerable workers.

In the background is the shift in the production and industrial relations model following World War II, marking the end of "The Glorious Thirty." This crucial factor necessitates that trade unions strike a careful balance between universal efforts to defend labour rights and a focused approach to the specific conditions of workers. The topic

5 <https://unterm.un.org/unterm2/en/>

6 <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/01/intersectionality-resource-guide-and-toolkit>

of “union revitalisation” remains central to trade union discussions at both national and European levels. Over the past two decades, studies of industrial relations and trade unionism have emphasised the concept of revitalisation in various ways- for instance, by introducing terms like community unionism, social justice unionism, and coalition unionism. Numerous experiments in trade union renewal exist, yet the challenges ultimately stem from structural changes in the world of work, with new demands and needs for representation that require fresh forms and mindsets for trade union action⁷.

But what effects could an intersectional approach have on workers’ rights and industrial relations⁸? Firstly, intersectionality can help to avoid an overly general consideration of workers’ characteristics, needs, and demands⁹. Frequently, the economic sectors with the most differentiated worker profiles are also those where inequalities are greatest and hierarchies are particularly organised around the intersections of race¹⁰ and gender¹¹, as well as age¹², social status, and more (such as in domestic and care work, the platform economy, construction, logistics and transport, and agriculture). The concepts used in recent decades to analyse the labour market and employment in Europe (precarity, dualism, working poor, etc.) become more concrete when examined through the lens of intersectionality¹³.

A crucial dimension of a union action inspired by intersectionality addresses the issues of internal organisation, workers’ representation, and the development of more “inclusive” trade unions. The principles of inclusiveness and equality are essential components of the programmes and guidelines of European unions aimed at renewing trade unionism. This is significant in itself, as it enables trade unions to recognise the diversity of the workforce and its members, and it can also positively influence the practices and agendas of collective bargaining. Trade unions have consistently reflected on the democratic forms of labour representation, and intersectionality can help explore the relationship between forms of union democracy and the matter of substantive justice in representation¹⁴.

A further effect of trade unions adopting an intersectional approach is their relationship with civil society organisations, social movements, and local communities, especially concerning the most vulnerable sectors of the labour market¹⁵. In a complex, fragmented and diversified society, it is essential for unions to be capable of cooperating with other social actors and be open to different practices and languages. An action of general representation of workers needs to include all dimensions of identity and social experience, and the agendas of collective bargaining and social dialogue can be enriched by such an approach. This crosses the boundaries of social life and work, and therefore requires an understanding of the workers’ concrete This approach facilitates action and union organising beyond the workplace.



7 Regalia, Ida (2024), Labour Movement: Old and New Problems of representation, in «Stato e Mercato», Vol. 1: Labour power in contemporary capitalism. Class conflict in the old and new world of work.

8 McBride A., Rodriguez J.K. (2024), Intersectionality and Industrial Relations, in Hodder A., Mustchin S. (eds), The Value of Industrial Relations, Bristol University Press.

9 McBride A., Hebson G., & Holgate J. (2015), Intersectionality: Are we taking enough notice in the field of work and employment relations?, «Work, Employment and Society», 29 (2).

10 Tapia, M., Alberti, G. (2019), Unpacking the Category of Migrant Workers in Trade Union Research: A Multi-Level Approach to Migrant Intersectionalities, «Work, Employment and Society», 33 (2); Alberti, G., Holgate, J., & Tapia, M. (2013). Organising migrants as workers or as migrant workers? Intersectionality, trade unions and precarious work, «The International Journal of Human Resource Management», 24 (22).

11 Holgate J., Hebson G., McBride A. (2006), Why gender and ‘difference’ matters: a critical appraisal of industrial relations research, «Industrial relation Journal», Vol. 37, Issue 4; Ortensi L.E., Tosi F. (2021), Gender and migration background at their intersection. An analysis of labour market data in Europe, project GRASE (Gender and Race Stereotypes Eradication in Labor Market Access).

12 Stypińska J., Gordo L.R. (2018), Gender, age and migration: an intersectional approach to inequalities in the labour market, in «European Journal of Ageing», Vol. 15.

13 Policy Department for Citizens’ Rights and Constitutional Affairs Directorate-General for Internal Policies (November 2020), Precarious work from a gender and intersectionality perspective, and ways to combat it, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/662491/IPOL_STU\(2020\)662491_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/662491/IPOL_STU(2020)662491_EN.pdf)

14 Briskin, Linda (2014), Strategies to support equality bargaining inside unions: Representational democracy and representational justice, in «Journal of Industrial Relations», Vol. 56 (2).

15 Cherubini D., Garofalo Geymonat G., Marchetti S. (2022), Intersectionality as a political practice in the domestic workers’ rights movements, in «AG About Gender - International Journal of Gender Studies», Vol. 11 No. 22: Doing Intersectionality in Explored and Unexplored Places, Genoa University Press.

Chapter 3 – THE EMERGING RELEVANCE OF INTERSECTIONALITY IN THE LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

3.1 International framework

At both the international and European levels, the legislative framework for combating discrimination has a long history and is fundamentally based on various instruments that address different areas of discrimination separately and distinctly. While no provision explicitly covers intersectional discrimination, some tools offer a foundation for recognising and addressing discrimination based on multiple intertwined identity factors, including gender, race, sexual orientation, disability, and age, among others.

In the international sphere, references to combating intersectional discrimination can already be found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)¹⁶. Article 2 establishes the principle of equality and non-discrimination, stating that all human beings must enjoy rights without distinction of race, sex, language, religion, political opinion, or other conditions. Although intersectionality is not explicitly mentioned in the declaration, its implementation can benefit from a broader interpretation.

A central role in combating discrimination has been played over the years by the UN through the development of a series of conventions indirectly addressing intersectionality. It is the case, for example, of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of racial discrimination (ICERD, 1965), which focuses on racial discrimination but can be used to tackle combined forms of discrimination when they include race. Later on, the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (2001)¹⁷ emphasised the need to address intersectional discrimination by recognising that race, gender and other identities can combine and create further and new forms of discrimination. The Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities (CRPD, 2006) includes an explicit recognition of multiple and intersectional discrimination (Article 6), notably with reference to women and girls with disabilities.

In 2015 the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted. The Agenda sets out to empower people who are at risk of vulnerability and promotes an intersectional perspective that addresses the risks of multiple disadvantages faced by women, children, older persons, refugees with disabilities, and those experiencing socioeconomic difficulties considers the intersections among various forms of inequality.

The fight against discrimination is also addressed by several ILO conventions¹⁸. Of particular importance with regard to the themes of intersectionality is ILO Convention No. 190. The Convention's preamble takes on an intersectional angle when it states that "an inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive approach, which tackles [...] multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, and unequal gender-based power relations, is essential to ending violence and harassment in the world of work".

While the adoption of an intersectional vocabulary and approach by the international regulatory framework faces delays and shortcomings, the situation appears more promising from an operational perspective. For example, several UN agencies implement an intersectional approach in various areas when planning their interventions and issuing handbooks, toolkits, or guidelines. Significant examples include the World Health Organization's toolkit and the UN-WOMEN toolkit¹⁹, which advocate for the importance of including an intersectional approach in policies regarding the inclusion of persons with disabilities. Finally, the guidance note on intersectionality issued by the OHCHR²⁰ provides practical guidance on how institutions and organisations can work to recognise and combat discrimination against minorities, thereby promoting a more inclusive approach.

16 <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

17 https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/Durban_text_en.pdf

18 The Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEX-PUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312245; The Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEX-PUB:12100:0::NO::12100:P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312256:NO; The Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156) https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEX-PUB:12100:0::NO::12100:P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312301:NO; The Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183) https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEX-PUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C183. The first two are fundamental conventions and they emphasise, among other things, the link between individual and structural discrimination affecting women on the labour market and in business.

19 <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/Intersectionality-resource-guide-and-toolkit-en.pdf>

20 <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/minorities/30th-anniversary/2022-09-22/GuidanceNoteonIntersectionality.pdf>

3.2 European framework

The European legislative framework also recognises discrimination on specific grounds related to race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and age. However, there is rarely, if ever, explicit reference to intersectional discrimination, which is often confused with multiple discrimination. As indicated below, the EU's institutional action on equality and non-discrimination issues has a rich and detailed history, although it has long been shaped by legislative initiatives and action programmes organised according to different grounds of discrimination, with gender-based discrimination emerging as a significant focus and almost exclusively addressing the workplace dimension.

Council of Europe

Since its foundation in 1949, the Council of Europe as an intergovernmental organisation has created a common legal space, centred on the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) across its 46 member states²¹. In the context of these efforts, the Istanbul Convention (2011)²² has crucial importance as a human rights convention. This importance already emerges in the wide formulation of the different discrimination grounds (article 4, paragraph 3²³). This is explicitly mentioned in the Explanatory Report to the convention²⁴, which clarifies that “the reasoning behind the selection of these grounds of discrimination followed from several regional studies indicating that women often lack access to support services due to discrimination based on their migrant or refugee status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or face discrimination at the hands of enforcement agents”. Moreover, the Convention introduces an intersectional approach, that reflects attention to the potential impact of a combination of grounds of discrimination in different provisions. Looking at discrimination and inequality exclusively in connection to only one of the possible discrimination grounds at a time is clearly considered as insufficient for several reasons: “Firstly, such an approach can overlook some forms of discrimination, and fails to capture the complexity of inequality”. Secondly, a single-ground approach to discrimination disregards the complexity of human experience (that cannot be reduced to one's gender, age, race, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, state of health, or any other status), since our experiences are affected by the combination of all these and more. Moreover, a single-ground approaches can even be detrimental to embracing human beings in all their entirety, producing the effect to delineate groups rigidly and stereotypically (women, migrants, persons with disabilities, children, older persons, etc.), and failing to notice the diversity within them. By contrast, a comprehensive and in-depth view of discrimination calls for a consideration of the relation between different grounds of discrimination.

Over the years, the Council of Europe has gradually introduced an intersectional approach in different areas of intervention (Recommendations to Member States, Studies, Guidelines) on a variety of topics: combating hate speech, on political participation of minority youth (including Roma), on combating antisemitism and islamophobia, on combating discrimination against LGBTQI+ people, on protecting the rights of people with migrant background, refugees and asylum-seeking women and girls, etc. In its mandate for the years 2024-2027, the Steering Committee on Anti-discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion (CDADI) has been instructed to prepare a Feasibility study and possible draft recommendation on preventing and combating intersectional discrimination²⁵.

The European Social Charter, adopted by the Council of Europe in 1961, covers and revised in 1996, is an international treaty that protects social rights in Europe and promotes a fairer and more inclusive society. Even if the word “intersectionality” is not explicitly mentioned, the Charter should be read as “embracing the intersectional” dimension: among the rights enshrined, it explicitly covers the right to non-discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, age, colour, language, religion, opinions, national extraction or social origin, health, and association with a national minority, as well as their interconnection.

21 The Convention secures the right to life, to a fair hearing, to respect for private and family life, freedom of expression, freedom of thought, conscience and religion and the protection of property, while explicitly prohibits, discrimination in the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set out in the Convention.

22 Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, <https://rm.coe.int/168008482e>

23 “The implementation of the provisions of this convention by the parties, in particular measures to protect the rights of victims, shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, gender, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, state of health, disability, marital status, migrant or refugee status, or other status”.

24 Council of Europe, Ensuring the non-discriminatory implementation of measures against violence against women and domestic violence: Article 4, Paragraph 3, of the Istanbul Convention, <https://rm.coe.int/paper-on-article-4-paragraph-3-of-the-istanbul-convention/1680a5d92e>

25 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/committee-antidiscrimination-diversity-inclusion/intersectional-discrimination>

EU legislation

Recent EU directives emphasise the importance of addressing intersectional discrimination in order to recognise and combat discrimination in the world of work. These directives seem to be more attentive of social complexity than past provisions, as they related of various grounds of discrimination on the basis of sex, of racial or ethnic origin, of religion or belief, of disability, of age or sexual orientation. Council Directive 2000/43/EC²⁶ to combating racial or ethnic discrimination, whether direct or indirect, across employment, training, access to goods and services, and other sectors. This approach indicates a greater degree of intersectionality compared to previous directives by encompassing a broader range of sectors that necessitate anti-discrimination action.

Council Directive 2000/78/EC²⁷ defines a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation, and also adopts a potential intersectional approach by prohibiting all employment and occupation discrimination based on religion or belief, disability, age and sexual orientation. The principle of equal treatment with regard to employment, training and working conditions has important precedents in EU legislation, particularly for what concerns equal treatment between men and women²⁸. The Directive, in addition to equal treatment at work between men and women, focuses in Articles 10, 11 and 12 on the prohibition of direct and indirect discrimination at work based on religion or belief, racial and ethnic origin, disability, age or sexual orientation. The greater degree of intersectionality of the 2000 Directive therefore lies in the expansion of protected groups and in its consideration of both direct and indirect discrimination.

A more recent directive, Council Directive 2023/970/EC²⁹ to strengthen the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value between men and women through pay transparency and enforcement mechanisms - the so-called Pay Transparency Directive -, offers a more recent definition of intersectionality. Art. 3(e) defines intersectional discrimination as “discrimination based on a combination of sex and any other ground or grounds of discrimination protected under Directive 2000/43/EC or 2000/78/EC”. In paragraph 25 of its preamble, it further clarifies the definition. In referring to gender-based pay discrimination as a situation where a victim’s sex plays a crucial role that can take many different forms in practice, the Directive specifies that “it (the gender-based pay discrimination) may involve an intersection of various axes of discrimination or inequality where the worker is a member of one or several groups protected against discrimination on the basis of sex, on the one hand, and racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, as protected under Council Directive 2000/43/EC (7) or 2000/78/EC (8), on the other”.

In paragraph 25 of the preamble, the legislator clarifies and better discloses the potential of the intersectional approach in gender pay discrimination: “Women with disabilities, women of diverse racial and ethnic origin, including Roma women, and young or elderly women are among groups which may face intersectional discrimination.”

The paragraph further strengthens this approach by considering the intersection of various identity factors as aggravating in cases of discrimination. It imposes a positive duty on public authorities to address such issues: “This Directive should therefore clarify that, in the context of gender-based pay discrimination, it should be possible to take such combinations into account, thus removing any doubt that may exist in this regard under the existing legal framework. This enables national courts, equality bodies, and other competent authorities to take due account of any situation of disadvantage arising from intersectional discrimination, particularly for substantive and procedural purposes. This includes recognising the existence of discrimination, deciding on the appropriate comparator, assessing proportionality, and determining, where relevant, the level of compensation awarded or penalties imposed.”

Hence, in this context, the directive expressly mentions the importance of the intersectional approach as pivotal “for understanding and addressing the gender pay gap”. It, in fact, declares, in Article 16, the relevance of intersectional discrimination with respect to the right to compensation: “Member States shall ensure that the compensation or reparation includes full recovery of back pay and related bonuses or payments in kind, compensation for lost opportunities, non-material damage, any damage caused by other relevant factors which may include intersectional

26 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2000/43/oj/eng>

27 Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32000L0078>

28 Council Directive 76/ 207/EEC of 9 February 1976 on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/1976/207/oj/eng>

29 Directive (EU) 2023/970 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 May 2023 to strengthen the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value between men and women through pay transparency and enforcement mechanisms, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2023/970/oj>

discrimination, as well as interest on arrears”.

Further in the text, in article 23.3 on penalties, intersectional discrimination is listed among potentially aggravating factors for effective, proportionate and dissuasive penalties applicable to infringements of the rights and obligations relating to the principle of equal pay: “The penalties (...) shall take into account any relevant aggravating or mitigating factor applicable to the circumstances of the infringement, which may include intersectional discrimination”.

Within this European landscape of anti-discrimination, where the intersectional approach is still maturing, the proposal for a ‘Horizontal Directive’³⁰ has put forward the need to extend the fight against discrimination to areas such as education, health, social security and access to goods and services. The long and difficult discussion around this measure is emblematic of the political and conceptual difficulties that emerge when the intersection of different areas of discrimination requires consideration. The European Parliament itself³¹ has condemned the European Commission’s failure to comply, stressing the importance of the Horizontal Directive and emphasising that “any update of the proposal for a horizontal anti-discrimination directive by the Commission must build on Parliament’s position, address intersectional discrimination and explicitly prohibit discrimination on any combination of grounds listed in the Charter for Fundamental Rights of the EU”.

If the EU legislation advances slowly, the European Parliament’s political debate is very dynamic on intersectional discrimination. In 2022, the European parliament adopted a Resolution entitled Intersectional discrimination in the EU: socio-economic situation of women of African, Middle-Eastern, Latin American and Asian descent³² that includes a definition of what intersectional discrimination means and why using this as a lens through which to consider all policy helps to address inequalities from a comprehensive, systemic and structural perspective: “whereas many women face intersecting inequalities and discrimination in the EU; whereas intersectional discrimination refers to a situation in which several grounds of discrimination operate and interact with each other, for example gender with other grounds of discrimination, such as race, colour, ethnic or socio-economic status, age, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, sex characteristics, genetic features, religion or belief, nationality, residence status, migrant background, or disability, among others, in a way that is inseparable and produces specific types of discrimination”. The Resolution is quite innovative. It embraces the risks that new technologies, including artificial intelligence, can exacerbate and compound existing inequalities and discrimination for women in all their diversity facing intersectional discrimination. It makes the case for intersectional discrimination to prevent that women attain positions in public institutions, including in the EU institutions, and for the need to ensure a fair representation of the diversity of society in decision-making – it also notes that quotas alone are ineffective against intersectional and structural discrimination in a holistic way. The Report finally calls for a series of policy measures embedding intersectional discrimination as a permanent and transversal trait.

The approach to equality and inclusion is gaining traction as an internal practice in European organizations and institutions. This applies to the Council of the European Union, which, in its Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2030³³, embraces a broader and intersectional view of diversity and pursues an integrated method of inclusion. It aims to be more data-driven through targeted data collection and analysis, both in the implementation of interventions and in impact assessment.

Jurisprudence and legal cases

The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) has been instrumental in ensuring the interpretation and enforcement of anti-discrimination laws within the EU.

While the Court of Justice has not yet officially recognised intersectional discrimination as an autonomous legal category, treating discriminatory factors separately, it has nonetheless interpreted the European anti-discrimination directives more broadly in some judgments. It states that a person who suffers multiple discrimination based on various identity factors may appeal to the rules covering different forms of discrimination, albeit in a distinct manner.

30 <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-a-new-push-for-european-democracy/file-anti-discrimination-directive?sid=8801>

31 European Parliament resolution of 19 April 2023 on combating discrimination in the EU – the long-awaited horizontal anti-discrimination directive (2023/2582(RSP), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0111_EN.html). See also <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-area-of-justice-and-fundamental-rights/file-anti-discrimination-directive>

32 https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0289_EN.html

33 Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2030, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/general-secretariat/jobs/diversity-and-inclusion/>

Some illustrative cases are those in which the CJEU has extended the interpretation of Directive 2000/43/EC, opening up to the possibility of considering multiple factors³⁴: 1) In 2016, in the Parris case (C-443/15) on discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and age, the CJEU rejected the explicit recognition of intersectional discrimination but called for the various factors of discrimination to be assessed separately. 2) In 2015, the CHEZ case (C-83/14) addressed indirect discrimination based on ethnic origin and socio-economic conditions. Other Court judgments dealt with cases of multiple discrimination on sexual orientation/gender dimensions³⁵, ageism/disability intersectional dimension³⁶; female pensioners with male pensioners and the intersection of gender and age³⁷

However, case law has since evolved, taking intersectional discrimination into consideration more and more.

The Council of Europe's case law has evolved differently than the EU dimension, placing greater emphasis on an intersectional legal interpretation and vocabulary when dealing with cases of discrimination.

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) oversees the implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights³⁸, which adopts a broad wording of the grounds of discrimination, including "sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status". In *FM & Others v Russia*³⁹ the ECHR determined that the exploitation of irregular female migrant workers amounted to discrimination under Article 14 in conjunction with Article 4 (forced labour) of the Convention. The Court referenced a variety of UN documents on intersectional discrimination and supported the claimants' argument that "they were victims of intersectional discrimination based on their gender, ethnicity, and social position, arising from the authorities' biases related to gender, ethnicity, and anti-immigrant sentiment."

The European Committee of Social Rights, which monitors the European Social Charter, has identified intersectional discrimination in *International Planned Parenthood Federation European Network (IPPF EN) v Italy*⁴⁰. The claim addressed an Italian law regulating the conscientious objection of medical practitioners concerning termination of pregnancy. The claimants argued that the law discriminated against women based on both territorial and/or socio-economic status, as well as gender and/or health status. The Committee determined that the various alleged grounds of discrimination were closely intertwined and represented a case of "overlapping," "intersectional," or "multiple" discrimination.

European strategies and action plans

At the European level, action plans and strategies are complex tools for implementing regulations and policies that have relevance also beyond the legislative dimension. Since 2020, the European Commission has published a set of coordinated strategies and action plans to promote diversity and equal opportunities, combat discrimination and address the structural conditions of inequality. A Union of Equality summarises the centrality of this principle within the policies and institutions of the EU, based on the principles laid down in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), namely in Articles 8, 9 and 10. Although some strategies should be revised by the new commission (UVDL political guidelines 2024/2029⁴¹), the strategy A Union of Equality, amongst others, makes specific references to the fight against intersectional discrimination in particular:

The Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 (GES)⁴², pursues a dual approach that, on the one hand, aims at mainstreaming general and specific actions on equality and combating discrimination and, on the other hand, posits "intersectionality [as the] horizontal principle for its implementation" in every field of action: raising awareness against gender stereotypes; including women in the labour market, especially in terms of the intersection with their ethnic or religious affiliation and migratory background; making sure that national and European public authorities collect and examine relevant data; and funding research in the field of gender and intersectional studies.

34 https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3196036

35 P. v S. and Cornwall County Council from the CJUE : C-13/94, [showPdf.jsf](#)

36 Case C-312/17Bedi, [CURIA - Documents](#)

37 Case C-123/10 Brachner, [CURIA - Documents](#)

38 https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/convention_ENG

39 *FM & Others v Russia* [https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{%22itemid%22:\[%22001-238319%22\]}](https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{%22itemid%22:[%22001-238319%22]})

40 https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-social-charter/processed-complaints/-/asset_publisher/5GEfKJmH2bYG/content/no-87-2012-international-planned-parenthood-federation-european-network-ippf-en-v-italy

41 https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63ffb2cf648_en?filename=Political%20Guidelines%202024-2029_EN.pdf

42 European Commission, Gender equality strategy. Achievements and key areas for action. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy_en

On 19 September 2020, the European Commission released the EU Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025,⁴³ partly to address the underlying issues of structural racism through legislative measures. Recognising that racism can intersect with other forms of discrimination and hatred based on religion or belief, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, or against migrants, the Action Plan adopts an intersectional perspective to provide a deeper understanding of structural racism and effective responses to it.

The Youth Strategy (2019-2027)⁴⁴ adopts an intersectional approach and includes measures to combat discrimination linked to: gender, employment; and social rights.

The LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025⁴⁵ promotes an intersectional perspective: discrimination affects LGBTIQ individuals at every stage of life, including employment, job searching, career development, and retirement, despite European laws protecting their rights. Many face challenges in securing stable and equitable employment, which increases the risk of poverty, social exclusion, and homelessness. Discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, and sexual characteristics also impacts the physical, mental, and sexual health, as well as the overall well-being of LGBTIQ individuals.

In conclusion, along with guiding the legislative framework and inspiring operational plans and strategies, the intersectional approach must also inform the tools used to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of policies.



43 European Commission, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/racism-and-xenophobia/eu-anti-racism-action-plan-2020-2025_en

44 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=oj:JOC_2018_456_R_0001

45 European Commission, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/lesbian-gay-bi-trans-and-intersex-equality/lgbtiq-equality-strategy-2020-2025_en

Chapter 4 – INTERSECTIONALITY: BUILDING ON GOOD PRACTICES FOR TRADE UNION ACTION AGAINST INTERSECTIONAL DISCRIMINATION

The Compendium aims to provide tools to strengthen the union's anti-discrimination efforts from an intersectional perspective. From this standpoint, the challenge is to adopt an intersectional approach capable of identifying and preventing discrimination while also giving voice to workers who may face discrimination based on multiple and intertwined aspects of their life experiences and subjectivities.

To develop and consolidate an intersectional approach through tailored trade union actions, Chapters 4 and 5 provide insights and suggestions by showcasing examples of effective union actions against discrimination⁴⁶ as a foundation for further progress. The TUAD aims to disseminate examples of existing anti-discrimination practices while suggesting their extension and adaptation for trade union use in an intersectional context.

In different national contexts, the practices presented already have a track record in actions conducted over time against discrimination, while in others, they may represent an inspiration for union innovation in an intersectional sense. The starting point is not the same for everyone, but TUAD's challenge is to raise the level of response against discrimination to achieve an intersectional approach.

The practices reported below have been selected based on their "intersectional contribution" even if not yet in full and complete intersectional perspective but also based on the importance of the action they can inspire and propose to trade unions.

As for the first aspect, it is important to highlight the rarity of expressly intersectional practices. However, those reported here all contain potential elements of intersectionality that make them useful for developing

As for the second aspect, it will be noted that some practices may seem predominantly focused on single grounds of discrimination, or may only contain a hint of intersectionality. However, they have been included for methodological and educational purposes and to ensure completeness, as they provide significant examples of actions necessary to promote an intersectional approach. For practical reasons stated at the chapter's beginning, concrete examples that demonstrate, for instance, the importance of effective training for negotiating against discrimination, or the role of tools such as the collection of intersectional data – always to be applied specifically with an intersectional approach – have not been omitted.

The practices that emerged as relevant - albeit embryonic and implicit – from an intersectional perspective have been grouped primarily based on the areas and levels of union action in which they were generated and the actors involved as initiators or partners of the action itself: trade unions, employers, public institutions, and civil society.

The reported practices are then presented within brief thematic paragraphs which propose indications on how to upgrade them in an intersectional perspective. All together, these "lessons" represent a possible toolkit to guide and enrich trade union action in an intersectional dimension. The indications provided are addressed to union representatives in workplaces, union leaders, union officials responsible for anti-discrimination policies, workers. The reported practices highlight the variety and multidirectional potential of trade union action towards equality and equal treatment – a precious basis to upgrade in the intersectional approach.

Collective bargaining is the main dimension for trade unions to express their role. Collective agreements define negotiated rules and rights for workers, sometimes emphasising the needs of specific groups.

Universal and solidarity-based trade unions' action aim at building awareness on and developing a cultural approach to a common basis of rights for all people and workers. In order to promote an inclusive action capable of detecting, combating and eradicating discrimination in the workplace, the intersectional approach is crucial to reinforce both solidarity among all workers and the acknowledgement of diversity by:

46 The best practices were collected with the involvement of the members of Tuad's Steering Committee and of ETUC affiliated unions, and were analysed through various activities: 1) presentation, direct experience sharing, and discussion of the practices during the 5 learning seminars (practices shared by participants and affiliated TU); 2) conduction of 6 (online) qualitative interviews with experts and trade unionists at national and European level (EPSU, EFBWW, LBAS Latvia, UGT Spain, GEW Germany, AKAVA Finland); 3) conduction of a survey among ETUC affiliated unions (25 responses from 11 countries: Italy, Portugal, Spain, France, Estonia, Sweden, Finland, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Montenegro, Cyprus). TU websites and online resources were also consulted.

Providing an analytical perspective on the different intertwined dimensions of discrimination at play in actual work contexts, on the one hand, and on the day-to-day experience and subjectivity of workers on the other.

Emphasising the importance of dialogue, empowerment and workers' participation, in order to grasp the diversity of their needs and demands and enhance the contribution they can make to other workers, communities and trade unions' inclusiveness.

Union action has the resources to respond to this challenge by:

Acting on a multi-level basis, from the European social dialogue dimension to company-level bargaining.

Keeping together the protection of workers and the creation of an organising environment (an "inclusive trade union") where anti-discrimination stances can become part and parcel of the trade union culture and of union practices at all levels.

Considering the importance of engaging with civil society organisations and the general public through awareness-raising actions and the promotion of cultural progress.

4.1 Collective bargaining and social dialogue: inspiring joint practices towards intersectionality

Every European country has its own model of industrial relations. Collective bargaining is the core instrument for trade unions to give rights concreteness and address issues providing tangible guarantees. The issue of discrimination is no exception, and the approaches of collective bargaining can be adapted to combat discrimination from an intersectional perspective at all levels, in different sectoral contexts, and in transversal ways.

European Framework Agreements: an ideal reference for intersectional collective bargaining



Collective bargaining at national, territorial, company sectoral level guarantees rights for workers of a given country, productive sector or territory. Collective agreements contain anti-discrimination clauses which frequently refer to European legislation and international conventions, (e.g. the Istanbul Convention, ILO Convention No 190) although not all EU countries ratify them (as it is unfortunately the case for the Istanbul Convention)

The intervention of social dialogue and agreements between social partners at the European level can lead to a strengthening of collective bargaining at the national level on anti-discrimination issues. It is the case of the [Framework agreement on harassment and violence at work of 26 April 2007](#) (ETUC/CES, BUSINESSEUROPE, UEAPME, CEEP).

The condemnation of ageism as a discriminatory ground - as well as the demographic trends of an increasingly ageing of working population in the EU - also inspired social partners for the [European Social Partners Framework Agreement on Active Ageing and an Inter-generational approach](#), signed in 2017 by the European Social partners. It aims at embracing a life-cycle approach to work and implies also to adapt work organisation as well as workplaces to guarantee they are healthy and age-friendly.

These agreements have been implemented via their transposition in national/territorial/company agreements by all the organisations affiliated to the EU level representative signatories parties.

#Ageism #Gender

#EU

The European trade union and transnational company agreements: against intersectional discriminations



European trade unions play a fundamental role in representing and coordinating the interests of workers employed in specific sectors. Regarding the issue of discrimination, European trade unions intervene in guiding the union agenda, in training and raising awareness, in developing social dialogue, and in sharing information and practices among affiliates. EPSU has conducted surveys and studies on public service workers, a crucial area for the emergence of potential discrimination, particularly gender discrimination regarding women's rights to [equal pay](#). EPSU supports anti-discrimination, diversity and inclusion issues in the collective agreements of various multinational companies (Suez, Engie). The transnational framework agreement between EPSU and the multinational [Veolia](#) enhances workplace protections for over 120,000 workers in 17 countries, securing enforceable rights on diversity and inclusion, highlighting also the need to pay attention to the "risks of intersectional discrimination". The agreement introduces several critical rights, including "fully paid leave for victims of workplace and domestic violence, the right to refuse relocation to a country where LGBTQ+ rights are restricted, a zero-tolerance policy on discrimination, a dedicated budget to address gender pay gaps, measures to improve workplace accessibility and career support for disabled workers, recruitment initiatives to promote diversity, including for Roma workers, an oversight committee to ensure commitments are upheld and enforced". A key element of the agreement is the non-regression clause, which ensures that workers in countries with stronger protections do not see their rights weakened.

**#EU #Gender, #LGBTQI+,
#Racism, #Disability**

Inclusivity of collective bargaining for the integration of socially vulnerable groups into work: an intersectionality lesson



The integration of people from socially vulnerable groups into work requires specific interventions; in several countries this includes offering sheltered employment conditions - primarily aimed at workers with disabilities - who must fully benefit from all entitlements that can be granted by collective agreements ([FNV](#), Netherlands). Some countries have specific economic operators in the area of employment for disabled people. It is the case of the "type-B social cooperatives" in Italy, legal entities that promote the employment of people with disabilities, minorities, refugees and asylum seekers, former inmates, etc. Social cooperatives, regulated by Law 381 of 1991, operate in sectors such as cleaning, catering, gardening, crafts and commerce, contributing to active employment policies through training and guidance projects. Active in different economic sectors, social cooperatives are regulated in Italy by law and working conditions are set via national [Collective Bargaining Agreement](#) (CBA) signed by Social Cooperative Employer Organisations and representatives of trade unions since 1992. The CBA was recently renewed for the 2023-2025 triennium.

**#Italy,
#Netherlands
#Disability, #Migrants**

Intersectionality for labour market and social inclusion: the case of workers with a migrant background



An intersectional approach can integrate both labour rights and social inclusion of people with migrant background. The protection of refugees and asylum seekers from discrimination requires diversified initiatives, involving both the labour market and the social sphere. Social dialogue is an essential factor, as proven by the [Agreement for the support of persons subject to international and temporary protection](#) signed in Italy by the trade unions of temporary and precarious workers (Nidil Cgil, Felsa Cisl, Uiltemp) and the employers' associations of employment agencies. The Agreement considers the multiple needs of workers benefiting from international protection from different points of view pertaining to both employment and the social sphere: vocational training and language learning, income support, financial allowances for workers with minor children and for family reunification, as well as psychological support.

#Italy

#Migrants

Giving voice to discriminated workers in the workplace



At company level too, similar services can be activated, through collective agreements between trade unions and company management. This is the case of several large corporations that have included in their company-level agreements services for anonymous complaints and measures to tackle discrimination, inappropriate behaviour, harassment and violence in the workplace. Agreements provide for the activation of the Ethics Help-line, an anonymous reporting system operated by a third party that allows for the reporting of potentially unlawful conducts within workplaces. The "whistleblower" model can be strengthened in workplaces also on discrimination issues, following the widespread adoption in EU countries of the "Whistleblower Protection Directive". (Directive EU 2019/1937 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2019).

#EU

#Gender

Developing intersectionality thanks due diligence: lessons from large companies



Collective bargaining at company level always takes certain specificities into account, starting with the company size. The European legislative framework has been strengthened by the recent Corporate sustainability due diligence directive ([Directive 2024/1760](#)), which among other aspects, reiterates the link between human rights and labour rights. Large businesses are the ones where bargaining at company-level is most likely to take place; they have a recognised brand, an image they must defend before the general public, and they sometimes independently promote actions of Corporate Social Responsibility which also tackle discrimination and inclusion. The business dimension could thus enhance a shared culture – among workers, trade unions, and companies – on the protection of workers' rights also through collective bargaining. It is important for trade unions to monitor such initiatives, as they can become the subject of shared efforts at industrial relations and bargaining level. In the field of gender equality, large companies have acquired certifications (certification for gender equality UNI PDR 125/22) or promoted business practices with the aim of achieving a zero gender pay gap; in the Italian case of [Barilla](#), collective bargaining has included this achievement in the company agreement, integrating it into a broader strategy of interventions for equal opportunities, diversity, and inclusion, for example by establishing a 12-week parental leave for parents "regardless of gender, marital status, sexual orientation".

#Italy

#Gender #LGBTQI+

Equipping for anti-discrimination: joint committees, works councils and working groups at company level for intersectionality



At company level, collective agreements provide for the setting up of committees on equality and equal opportunities, often from a gender perspective, to analyse the actual disparities in the conditions experienced by workers (e.g. Gender pay gap, gender based violence, mobbing, harassment). Italy's experience with company-level bargaining (which can be found in the CGIL FDV Archive, and is available to union members) sees a widespread presence of "joint committees", composed by trade union and employer representatives to cover various issues, including "equal opportunities" (Leonardo, Eni, Enel, Mediaset) and the fight against gender violence – with a recent tendency to explicitly include the issues of equality and inclusion from an intersectional perspective (Kohler Group). The national CBAs for the various sectors provide for such committees to be set up, but their actual creation falls within the remit of company-level bargaining.

#Italy

#Gender

Intersectional non-discrimination in hiring and recruitment in an intersectional perspective



Discrimination can be silent and implicit, especially when it is not covered by legislation, as when it comes to the selection and management of personnel. Employment contracts and corporate rules must therefore be based on principles of non-discrimination, and adopt several concrete solutions (blind recruitment, respect for non-core personal data, use of neutral terms, control of AI etc.). The adoption of principles of non-discrimination in collective agreements should guide the administrative and organisational activities of undertakings: selection and recruitment procedures adopted must ensure gender equality; recruitment process should be gender balanced; profiles sought and the work tasks described in a gender-neutral way; resources selected fairly on the basis of gender and no questions asked during interviews on matters pertaining to sexual identity, marriage, pregnancy or care responsibilities (ENAI Foundation, Italy, Archives CGIL FDV).

#Italy #Gender #LGBTQI+

#Racism #Disability #Ageism

Actions for professional recognition and competencies in an intersectional perspective



Among workers' rights, the right to professional recognition, professional development and training, the valorisation of competencies and career advancement are crucial. Discrimination can also occur in these areas, especially in unfavourable working environments, when management fails to pay attention to these matters and unions lack awareness. In this respect, several collective agreements focus on the importance of an anti-discrimination corporate culture ensuring that for all aspects of the employment relationship (starting with recruitment, and covering also the right to training, remuneration, promotions, transfers and termination of the employment relation itself), that employees are treated fairly and in accordance with their ability to meet their job requirements, without any discrimination on grounds of race, gender, sexual orientation, social and personal position, physical and health condition, disability, age, nationality, religion or belief (Italy, Archive CGIL FDV: Comer Industries, Ferrero, Barilla).

#Italy #Gender #LGBTQI+

#Racism #Disability #Ageism

Lessons learnt to develop intersectionality through collective bargaining practices:



- ▶ European Framework Agreements are essential for fostering intersectional collective bargaining at the transnational level. Enhancing the role of European trade union federations and transnational company agreements, also as an opportunity to disseminate good practices at the national level.
- ▶ A multi-stakeholder approach, involving trade unions, employers, and policymakers, enhances effectiveness.
- ▶ Stronger collaboration between national and European trade unions can reinforce bargaining power.
- ▶ Building on existing equality approach to make collective bargaining evolve towards intersectionality.
- ▶ Promoting collective bargaining for the integration of socially vulnerable groups into work and social inclusion.
- ▶ Giving voice to discriminated workers in the workplace also through anonymous reporting and complaints channels.
- ▶ Corporate due diligence must integrate intersectionality to ensure fair labour practices.
- ▶ Accountability mechanisms should be in place to monitor compliance at company level.
- ▶ Equipping for anti-discrimination: joint committees, works councils and working groups at company level.
- ▶ Challenging companies in bargaining aspects of the employment relationship where there may be risks of intersectional discrimination: hiring and recruitment, professional recognition and competencies.

4.2 Institutions, trade unions, and employers: synergies and practices towards an upgraded intersectionality perspective

At various levels, legislators, institutions, trade unions and employers often interact through tripartite social dialogue. This important dimension highlights the potential of social partners to pursue equality, via synergies that can influence legislation, guarantee its effective implementation, and trigger actions on the ground and in the workplace efficiently. Practices also show evidence that these interactions in the tripartite context often lead to practices, guarantees, and rights for workers beyond the minimum regulatory requirements prescribed by European directives and national legislation. There is no limit to the possibilities of building towards better treatment for workers and ambitions of intersectional equality. Synergies, therefore, are strengthened, emphasising the crucial role of social partners for institutional and regulatory objectives. This often translates into legislation that mandates collective bargaining or social dialogue between unions and employers to give concrete form to the regulatory mandate in various ways; conversely, collective bargaining inspires improvements in laws and institutional practices on anti-discrimination issues treated within it because they are considered relevant by social partners – jointly or otherwise.

From legislation to work-place: social partners in institutional fora – an opportunity for implementing an intersectional approach



In the area of combating discrimination, legislation plays an essential role from several perspectives: EU directives impact national legislation, and trade unions can contribute in making sure that greater attention is paid to workers. Legislation sometimes provides for actions that have to be carried out in the workplace and that require dialogue between trade unions and companies. National, sectoral and company-level CBAs may refer to anti-discrimination legislation and define clauses for the expansion of rights.

European legislation has prompted national legislation to adopt anti-discrimination rules, with the involvement of relevant social actors such as trade unions. For example, [Council Directive 2000/43/EC](#) (29 June 2000) on the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin. In Spain, the Consejo para la eliminacion de la discriminacion racial o étnica ([CEDRE](#)) was created. By transposition law, trade union and business organisations are part of the Council. The victim assistance service, in its annual report, records the cases of discrimination detected and attended to. In its 2023 report, it pays special attention to the impact of intersectional discrimination towards women, since they are the ones who suffer racial discrimination most frequently. Specifically, 768 cases were detected in which intersectional discrimination was identified, and the most frequent reasons were gender, place of birth, religion and age.

[Spanish legislation](#) requires all companies with more than 50 employees to draw up an equality plan which must be negotiated between management and trade unions, to address gender inequalities and discrimination. The obligation to introduce equality plans is met with a resistance that may prove difficult to overcome. This is why it is important to train trade unions and disseminate practices that can inspire and encourage bargaining at workplace level. The UGT trade union has produced several bargaining guides and collections of good practices to support the introduction of equality plans ([Guia de buenas practicas en la negociacion de planes de igualdad](#), UGT, Spain).

**#Spain #Gender #LGBTQI+
#Racism #Disability #Ageism**



From workplace experience to legislation and institutional actions: the proactive role of trade unions in improving law within social dialogue – lesson for intersectionality



In several European countries, social dialogue is the basis for equality legislation. [Legislation in Finland](#) was recently renewed with the contribution of social dialogue, with the introduction of several innovations: the role of the anti-discrimination Ombudsman was expanded, and is now entrusted to enforce the anti-discrimination Act on individual complaints of discrimination. “Harassment” was redefined and broadened. Companies must create Equality plans and have two years to implement them.

In Spain the [Comprehensive Law on Equal Treatment and Non-Discrimination](#), the implementation of which is supported by the trade unions, contemplates intersectional discrimination (article 6.3) and the adoption of positive actions which, in the case of this type of discrimination, must take into account all the causes of discrimination. It also considers acts or omissions that constitute multiple discrimination as a very serious offence (article 47.4). The areas of application of the law include employment, collective bargaining, self-employment, trade unions and employers’ organisations, education, healthcare, social services, the provision of goods and services, public safety, justice, housing, public establishments and shows, artificial intelligence and cultural and sporting activities.

Trade unions are at the forefront in demanding fairer and more inclusive immigration laws and combating new restrictive and discriminatory laws. The intersectional approach is particularly fruitful in this sense, as it highlights the negative and at times disproportionate impact of legislation on certain groups of migrants (for example, women and children and their access to rights and social services). A [recent campaign by the CGT](#) (France) against proposals to reform the French immigration law focuses on these aspects.

#Finland #Spain #France

#Gender #Racism #Migrants #Disability #LGBTQI+

Taking into account principles but also vocabulary/ terminology which fosters intersectionality and inclusiveness



European legislation can make the vocabulary of collective bargaining evolve. . An important example concerns the pay-transparency directive that expressly foresees an intersectional approach to erase any possible factor of gender pay-discrimination. This strengthens the awareness of intersectional anti-discrimination at all levels.

The terminology evolves with respect to intersectionality, also regarding the inclusive potential of the subjects to be protected. From an intersectional perspective, it is useful to update the terminology used (for example in collective bargaining) not only thanks to legislation but also through the use of appropriate and inclusive terminology/language: for example, the use of the acronym SOGIESC (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, Sexual Characteristics) or considering, in addition to nationality, the broader condition of migration background.

#EU

#Migrants #Gender

Tripartite tools to join forces and ensure law implementation: tripartite observatories and working groups for intersectionality



Institutions and trade unions may promote initiatives for the application of employment integration measures such as the establishment of tripartite observatories or working groups for the most vulnerable persons, such as disabled persons. In Italy, the [National Observatory on the Condition of Persons with Disabilities](#), in collaboration with Trade Unions, has developed guidelines for targeted employment, proposing a pilot project to create a Company Observatory for Workers with Disabilities in large companies. This unit, coordinated with company union representatives, supports workers with disabilities throughout their entire employment journey, not only at the hiring stage. The Disability Manager, a central figure, coordinates the Observatory's policies, monitors socio-occupational integration, and facilitates access to resources and information for workers.

#Italy

#Disability

Equality bodies and social partners cooperating against intersectional discrimination



The role of equality bodies has been recognized at European level since the early 2000s and has been updated by the most recent directives ([Council Directive EU 2024/1499](#)). The role of social partners is not specifically stated, but would be essential for monitoring, identifying and combating discrimination, especially in the workplace. The action and profile of equality bodies at national level varies from country to country. A broader, potentially intersectional and collaborative approach with trade unions too would be essential. A 2016 study by [Equinet](#) found that 18 equality bodies in 17 countries already work on intersectional discrimination. Examples include the Belgian body [Unia](#), which has developed a diversity barometer and conducted a documentary on older migrant workers. Other examples include the [Swedish Equality Ombudsman](#) and [Fada](#) (Germany), which have also worked on intersectionality for many years. In Italy, the UNAR ([National Office Against Racial Discrimination](#)) has expanded its prerogatives to cover different forms of discrimination (on grounds of age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, etc.). Among other initiatives, UNAR renewed a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) with Italian trade unions CGIL, CISL and UIL against discrimination in the workplace. In France, "Defender of Rights" ([Défenseur des Droits](#)) is an independent administrative authority of the Government of France, enshrined in the French Constitution. One of its missions is to fight discrimination and promote equal rights. The main cause of the complaints received by the authority is the violation of the rights of persons with disabilities, workers in particular.

#Belgium #France #Italy #Sweden #Germany

#Gender #Disability #Racism #LGBTQI+



Lessons learnt to empower key actors in the fight against intersectional discrimination:



- ▶ European and national anti-discrimination legislation is a tool for trade unions and employers' associations useful for innovating collective bargaining also in intersectional terms
- ▶ Key stakeholders must continue to push together for adaptable and forward-thinking laws that account for complex and evolving forms of discrimination
- ▶ Bringing together multi-stakeholders to foster safe spaces for advocacy and policy development.
- ▶ From workplace experience to legislation and institutional actions: the proactive role of trade unions in improving law through social dialogue and developing collective bargaining solutions that can, in turn, inspire legislative innovations.
- ▶ Taking into account the evolution of the terminology used in the European anti-discrimination legislation into collective bargaining mechanisms
- ▶ Joining forces through tripartite cooperation to ensure proper and adequate law implementation considering the intersectional dimension
- ▶ Fostering the cooperation of civil society organisations, institutional organisations (such as equality bodies) together with social partners against intersectional discrimination
- ▶ Actioning the bottom-up approach to empower marginalized and vulnerable groups directly affected by intersectional discrimination
- ▶ Ensuring active participation by these marginalised and vulnerable groups in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies and initiatives

4.3 Inside and outside of the workplace: trade unions, civil society organisations social movements, local communities working together to develop and equality approach

Trade unions interact with civil society and build synergies for effective equality, as equality rights are both workers' rights and human rights. The power and strength of trade unions depend on the participation of workers, as well as on the extent of societal support for their demands and agenda. Regarding issues related to discrimination, social support for inclusiveness and the protection of rights is growing, but we must continue striving to engage with the public and raise awareness. An intersectional approach requires trade unions to reach out to groups and identities not represented by institutions or within trade unions. To achieve good results on discrimination matters, trade unions must effectively interact with the general public and engage with different stakeholders, particularly Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), NGOs, social movements, and local communities. This represents fertile ground for developing intersectional equality in multiple dimensions: trade unions must continue to engage with civil society and communities as social actors, drawing inspiration from other social experiences for both contractual and non-contractual action.

Resourceful synergies to develop and consolidate intersectionality



At European level, the presence of civil society umbrella organisations with a focus on combating discrimination facilitates the dissemination of studies and research works. These resources are essential to enrich the analysis of unions on discrimination and inequality, also through the consolidation of the intersectional approach proposed in their analyses: [ENAR](#), [European disability forum](#), [Equinet](#), [ILGA Europe](#), [European Youth forum](#).

#EU

#Gender, #Disability, #Racism, #Migrants, #Youth, #LGBTQI+

Intersectionality developed via networking with the civil society and local communities



The intersectionality of the approach to anti-discrimination action requires networking with all stakeholders and, especially, engaging with local and community organisations. One example is the [Fighting racism starts at school](#) project, organized by the FENPROF trade union (Portugal), promoting reflection and debate with unionized professors in FENPROF and community organizations that work on anti-racism.

Workplaces are not separated from the general context and the places of personal and social life of individuals. Trade unions intervene to defend the social rights of citizens, especially in relation to the welfare system. Community organising can go hand in hand with union organising and strengthen the demands of workers by mobilising local communities, at the intersection of social status, gender, migration, and age. The FNV union (Netherlands) has promoted experiences of community organising to tackle racism, through a [campaign for a minimum wage and against wealth inequality](#), which was taken up by various parties. The union decided not to work to support the campaign in workplaces but in ten cities, in socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods with a large migrant population.

#Portugal, #Netherlands

#Migrants, #Racism, #Gender, #Youth

Advocacy actions to combat intersectional discrimination



In Italy, a coalition of civil society organisations, political parties and trade unions has campaigned for the expansion of citizenship rights. The campaign [Ero straniero](#) ("I was a foreigner", promoted by a network of organizations, both secular and religious, including trade unions, committed to bringing the issue of managing migration flows and the need for reform into the public debate) has submitted a proposal for a citizens' initiative bill reforming the Italian law on citizenship and works to spread a different narrative of migration processes.

#Italy

#Migrants

*Trade union
engaging actions
with civil society
social movements:
enormous potential
for intersectionality*



The relationship between trade union organisations and social movements is not a novelty, but its forms vary over time. In recent years, the issues of social justice and combating discrimination have been at its centre. In Spain, the new law on equality was supported by a broad coalition of social movements, reinforced by demonstrations and strikes on the occasion of [International Women's Day](#). In Swiss, [trade union involvement in feminist movements](#) has enriched their languages and practices, enhancing the analysis on gender inequality from an intersectional perspective. The worldwide wave of the #MeToo movement has been the backdrop for multiple initiatives by national trade unions and the [ETUC](#) to combat gender-based violence through union action in workplaces and society. Among the various initiatives, the ground-breaking study [Safe at home, safe at work, safe online](#) showcases trade union practices and recommendations aimed at combating gender-based violence in an integrated manner across different social, work, and online dimensions.. In the UK, the mobilisations that followed the murder in 2020 of black American citizen George Floyd by the police in Minneapolis (USA), and the Black Lives Matter movement, have inspired the [TUC](#) and its affiliates to set up working groups, collectives of workers and union members, and anti-racist programmes. Seemingly, in other European countries, acts of police violence ignited antiracist protests (see for example the events in France after the murder of young Nahel Merzouk in 2023). The current conflict in the Middle East and the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Palestine and Israel have led to widespread acts and sentiments of islamophobia, anti Palestinian racism and antisemitism in Europe. The British union UNISON (UK) has produced a booklet for trade union activists with talking points to counter discriminatory, explicit and implicit stereotypes ([Understanding Antisemitism and Islamophobia in the context of Israel and Palestine](#)).

In many European countries, the rise of the electoral and social consensus of the far right has prompted [ETUC](#) to place anti-racism and relations with democratic, political and social organisations at the centre of their action. In Italy, following the overwhelming international solidarity received after the squad attack on 9th October 2021, the CGIL decided to promote the establishment of an "[International Network of Antifascist Trade Unions](#)". A year later, in front of a large audience of international trade unionists in celebration of the struggle against all forms of violence, discrimination and oppression, the "Manifesto" proposal was launched as a synthesis of this Network commitment.

#EU, #Swiss, #UK, #Italy, #France

#Gender, #Racism, #Antifascism

*Attention to
and support for
good civil society
practices*



In addition to the direct involvement of trade unions in social and community initiatives, giving visibility to the activities of civil society is also important. This is the case with the [Queer and Here](#) course (a free course for LGBTQ+ People Seeking Protection and Refugees) aimed at LGBTQI+ asylum seekers, especially young ones, which suffer intersectional discrimination. The course is promoted by IRIN (Irish refugees Integration Network), a collective of Dublin City University academics, students and members of civil society. The aim of the course was to empower the participants by providing them with support and knowledge of the context and queer relations in the host society. The trade union supported the initiative, but was not involved in the activities.

#Ireland

#Migrants, #LGBTQI+, #Youth

*Combating
discrimination
through social life:
sport activities*



Discrimination is widespread in every social area, not just in the workplace. Social gatherings and leisure activities can be the place where discriminatory bias, offensive labelling and even violence thrive. Workplaces are not isolated from their context, so trade unions also work in collaboration with civil society organisations to address social discrimination, for example in the world of sport: the CGT trade union (France) promotes an [open dialogue with associations](#) on the theme of sport as a vector of emancipation and a safe space of expression for persons with a migrant background, for the disabled, and for LGBTQI+ persons.

#France

#Migrants, #Disability, #LGBTQI+

Lessons learnt to develop an anti-discrimination action at the intersection between workplaces and society:



- ▶ Networking with civil society at European and national levels can strengthen the union's ability to address intersectional discrimination, rooting actions in communities and territories.
- ▶ Social movements, as expressions of new needs and demands for change, provide a stimulating environment for unions, both for renewing their agenda and expanding their relationships.
- ▶ Advocacy actions to combat intersectional discrimination, particularly when addressing public institutions and requesting legislative changes, are more effective if they can create coalitions between unions and other social organizations.
- ▶ Even when the union is not the promoter or directly involved, attention to and support for good civil society practices can strengthen and build trust among a broader audience.
- ▶ Discrimination is widespread in every social area, not just in the workplace; for example, combating discrimination can also take place in contexts such as sports.

Chapter 5 - TRADE UNIONS TOWARDS AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH

Considering the “transformative potential of intersectionality” is not merely a call to bargaining; to make it functional, a profound change within the trade union organisation itself is necessary. Being an “inclusive” trade union is one of the key points of the ETUC Programme. This concept applies at all levels, from the European to the company level, and it serves as a strategic objective for all affiliated trade unions. This presents a major challenge, as it is a crucial condition for renewing and strengthening trade unions.

Chapter 5 outlines suggestions and lessons that emphasise the need for internal development of the union before its external impact, inspired by the intersectional approach. Beginning with the diversities characterising unions throughout Europe, intersectionality must serve as a resource to promote organisational changes, inclusive relationships with workers and members, innovations in union culture, and approaches to worker representation. Adopting an intersectional approach necessitates an evolutionary effort rooted in the understanding that this impacts all levels of union action: from the training of trade unionists to the adoption of comprehensive plans and strategies inspired by an intersectional approach, culminating in a shift in how the bargaining agenda is perceived in workplaces.

In other words, trade unions should focus on their internal aspects by developing guidelines, training programmes and creating listening and welcoming spaces for workers. Their transition toward intersectionality is already in progress. Workers’ representation is central to union action and also relates to social needs expressed outside the workplace.

The practices we group in this session have in common the trade union as initiator and trade union affiliates and members as first recipients.

5.1 Enhancing intersectional awareness within trade unions and the world of work

The preparatory actions for trade unions to adopt an intersectional approach are numerous and necessitate an integrated strategy, primarily through awareness-raising and cultural change that should be encouraged from the European level (ETUC, European federations) down to the national level. The complexities of the work environment and the diverse experiences of workers serve as the main sources of inspiration for a renewed union agenda against intersectional discrimination.

Awareness-raising and orientation of a culture against discrimination: the role of European Federations



IndustriAll, the European trade union federation that brings together many industrial sectors, develops anti-discrimination interventions through integrated work (Horizontal Working Groups) that adopts an intersectional approach: through position statements and guidelines for affiliated trade unions ([Rainbow Workplaces: Our commitment to equality for LGBTIQ workers](#)), up to providing an award for unions (at national or local level) that have developed projects and services for workers who suffer discrimination ([Diversity at the Workplace Award](#)).

#EU

#LGBTQI+

Developing intersectionality on the basis of existing practices proved effective on specific discrimination grounds



An intersectional perspective should represent the evolution of cross-cutting approaches of trade union action, such as on gender equality. The Belgian trade union confederation, CGSLB, has promoted an initiative against discrimination and to promote the participation of women: [WO=MEN](#) is an effort to support women through professionalization help, legal advocacy against discrimination, job training (taking into consideration the specific needs of young people, mature workers, unemployed), and promotes social dialogue on gender issues.

#Belgium

#Women

From awareness-raising to revisiting trade union agenda and positioning in an intersectional perspective



Also on the basis of trade union practices as those sketched above, internal trade union anti-discrimination actions evolve in strategies that represent a peak moment of trade union agenda development. High degrees of internal knowledge and awareness-raising with respect to equality and non-discrimination results, in some cases, in trade unions formulating clear principles and strategies that define their priority agendas. It is the case, in Slovenia of the [Programme Guidelines of Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia 2022-2027](#); in the UK, of the [TUC EQUALITIES CAMPAIGN PLAN 2024 – 2026](#), a document to guide and support the work of the TUC General Council and to provide vital equalities information as needed. It also aimed at leading a 3-year campaign on equality across the country. It is based on the work of TUC affiliates and TUC officials on Black workers, women, disabled workers, young workers and LGBT+ workers – already a good basis for an intersectional approach. It also provides affiliates with details of the overarching narrative for the work of TUC to challenge inequality in the workplace and In other cases, such a practices both disseminate the position of the trade union and try to orient the political debate and the arena-setting - for civil, legislative and industrial relation progress. For example, with the aim of disseminating these programmes in the form of easily accessible documents for workers, the Dutch trade Union FNV amongst others disseminated its vision on diversity, inclusion and anti-discrimination in a paper entitled [A fair labour market for everyone](#), which summarises the main trade union demands in this area and emphasises the importance of taking action at workplace and societal level.

#UK, #Slovenia, #Netherlands

#Racism, #Disability, #Gender, #LGBTQI+

Orienting trade union action from an intersectional perspective – the more detailed the considered dimensions, the more effective it will be



It is evident that trade union action must be oriented from an intersectional perspective, implying a more overarching, universal approach, to respond to needs-based demands of (possibly) all specific groups of workers. Very pragmatic tools can be conceived to pursue this objective, as in the case of the [Rainbow checklist for collective labour agreements](#) by the Dutch union FNV. The guide is conceived as a true list of objectives to achieve and verify, addressing various aspects of work performance and the relationship of LGBTQI+ workers with companies and other colleagues: recruitment and selection, parental care, pension, undesirable behaviour (bullying, harassment, etc.), including monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

#Netherlands

#LGBTQI+

Intersectional approach: sectors' specificities and relations between workers and beneficiaries matter



Coherently with the considerations above, sector specificities must be taken into account in the view of having detailed and effective intersectional approach in trade union action against discrimination. The characteristics of the work context matters, along with those of the end-receivers of services or being impacted by them. For example, in public service provision, the relationship between the worker/service provider and citizens is delicate, and biases or implicit discrimination can rise in these situations. From this point of view, all the more in the areas of education, schooling, health care and personal services, the challenge is on both protecting workers and defining anti-discrimination practices when engaging with communities, families, students, users of public services beneficiaries. The [EIS Anti-racist Strategy \(Educational Institute of Scotland\)](#) combines a set of activities such as "raise awareness on racism and knowledge of how to respond to it, mobilize membership for anti-racism, integrate anti-racism in the curriculum, increase black, Asian and minority ethnic representation within education, and the Trade Union."

#UK

#Racism

Lessons learnt from effective intersectional practices in trade unions actions and structures



- ▶ Fostering a culture against discrimination within trade unions orienting trade union actions from an intersectional perspective and focusing on specific dimensions (such as race, gender, or disability) makes the interventions more impactful and meaningful
- ▶ Effectively revisiting the union agenda and positioning it from an intersectional perspective ensures that diverse forms of discrimination are acknowledged and addressed
- ▶ An intersectional approach should not only address discrimination within the workplace but also consider the broader socio-economic context and how external factors influence workers' experiences

5.2 Training and Capacity-building on intersectionality for Trade Unionists: different levels, instruments and methods

Trade unionists and workers' representatives need adequate training on anti-discrimination and an intersectional approach. Building on experience and training can greatly benefit from collective bargaining, which provides concrete examples of national, sectoral, and company-level clauses and agreements on anti-discrimination. The tools trade unions offer for bargaining have started to incorporate theoretical considerations related to intersectionality, as well as collections of good practices on specific topics and recommendations for items to include in the bargaining agendas.

Trade union training and tools in an intersectional perspective

In both the social and working environment, there are systemic conditions of intersectional discrimination, which is why it is important that workers' representatives and trade unionists are trained to ensure that nothing is overlooked, from recruitment to harassment in the workplace.

The [Reasonable Adjustments Disability Passport](#) (NEU, UK) is a tool for agreeing with employers on the best conditions for workers with disabilities to reach their potential. Different forms of disability or impediments to work performance are considered, with attention both to the physical and more visible forms of work but also to the psychological forms, taking the gender condition and its specificities also into account.

The [Disability equality toolkit](#) (NEU, UK) is a tool to recognise and address discrimination against people with disability in the workplace in several respects: "Disability access, Workplace disability audits, Reasonable adjustments, Disability harassment, Disability leave and flexible working, Mental health and stress at work, Health and safety and disability equality".

These examples demonstrate how anti-discrimination issues such as equal treatment for people with disabilities, already widely spread in legislation and union agendas, can be enriched by an intersectional approach. In Italy, a national law ([D.lgs. 62/2024](#)) has modified existing regulations on disability, introducing numerous references to the world of work and the rights of persons with disabilities through the new notion of reasonable adjustment. This happens in many other European countries.

Training and developing tools on intersectionality is crucial because it is on the workplace and in the day-to-day work that the legislation must be implemented as it there that workers with disabilities may encounter the greatest difficulties, which often remain unacknowledged. This can be addressed by adapting the workplace: workstation, working tools, operating modes. Of course, workplace adaptation is not a technical aspect isolated from other potential sources of discrimination. The overall condition of disabled workers must also be considered based on gender, age, migration background, and other aspects.

#Italy, #UK #Disability

From collective bargaining practice to trade union guides and digital tools



At European level, various European trade union federations create tools and guides to disseminate good practices useful for union action against discrimination. The EFBWW [strategic guidance](#) and the [resolutions](#) adopted well prove its commitment against harassment and gender-based violence, for gender equality, and for defending the role of trade unions against the far right, taking into account the specificities of the sector. The EFBWW also plays a role in training trade unionists to innovate collective bargaining, as in the case of [Women in construction, wood and forestry- A Resource Toolkit for Gender Equality at Work](#).

IndustriAll has drawn up a report [Bargaining for Equality](#) consisting in a guidance for preparing and conducting negotiations, examples of equality-related issues and potential demands, recommendations for implementation, follow-up, and impact assessment. The intersectional potential is asserted, supplementing “the need to go beyond the traditional notions of gender equality and address forms of discrimination, harassment, or prejudice, with the aim of guaranteeing equal opportunities and equal treatment for all”.

At national level, the document drafted by the Spanish trade union CC.OO. on [Igualdad y diversidad en los convenios colectivos](#), provides examples of general clauses concerning LGBTQI+ workers’ rights on equal treatment and non-discrimination, but also specific clauses on health and safety, training, access to employment, professional promotion, use of inclusive language, access to permits and social benefits. A recent document ([La LGTBI-fobia desde la prevención de riesgos laborales](#)) offers new examples of collective bargaining in favour of LGBTQI+ workers, particularly in combating harassment and violence in the workplace and on the recognition of permits (paid and unpaid) for the needs of workers involved in gender-affirmation pathways.

The approach adopted by guides and handbooks can vary. The trade union guides produced by the CFDT (France) provide legal definitions and legislative references on discrimination in the workplace, and focus on the issues of language and of daily practices at work that may conceal discrimination, offering suggestions and examples of concrete cases of discrimination with the aim of detecting, preventing and addressing discrimination ([Prévention des violences sexistes et sexuelles au travail](#), [Agir contre les discriminations lgbt dans le monde du travail](#), [Prévenir et combattre le racisme et les discriminations raciales au travail](#)).

The German trade union Ver.di has published a guide for workers on the actions they can take to address discrimination at work ([Für Solidarität und Gute Arbeit. Was tun bei Diskriminierung und rassistischem Mobbing?](#)). The guide draws on real situations and provides practical recommendations and assistance on how to deal with this important topic in an appropriate and respectful manner.

The French union FO has created a guide [dedicated to the rights of workers with disabilities](#), considering the multiplicity of their needs and opportunities: from the definitions of the regulations to the reporting of associations defending the rights of disabled people, to concrete examples that can inspire bargaining in workplaces and models of agreements personalized and adapted to the needs of workers with disabilities.

#France, #Germany, #Spain, #UK, #EU
#Gender, #Racism/Migrants, #LGBTQI+, #Disability

*Joint trainings
for bridging so-
cial partners for
intersectional
equality in the
workplace*



#Montenegro

#Gender

*Workshops and
lectures on anti-
discrimination at
the workplace*



The association [Hands off my mate!](#) ("Mach' meinen Kumpel nicht an!") promoted by DGB in Germany, is active to promote equal rights for all. The initiative fosters equality and equal opportunities, especially in the world of work. They offer, among other things, workshops and lectures at company level on prejudice, discrimination, racism, right-wing populism, right-wing extremism and equality in the world of work. The association, promoted by the DGB, organizes workshops in workplaces, which is why it is placed here among those related to training.

#Germany

#Racism

*Research and ex-
pertise empow-
ering capacity
building of trade
unionists*



The connection between collective bargaining and other areas of union intervention is crucial. Research activities, projects, exchanges between trade unions and experts, scholars and civil society organisations may also help 'trade union action' in the strict sense. The [FEELING project](#) (CGIL, Fondazione di Vittorio, Italy), has been promoted from a network universities, social workers associations and trade unions to strengthen the capacity building of professionals who, in their different capacities, work with LGBTQI+ foreign minors. Dozens of professional educators, lawyers and psychologists participated to its training programme. In the final phase, the network of project partners promoted territorial agreements between institutions, trade unions and civil society organisations on the dissemination of an inclusive culture and inclusive practices.

#Italy

#Migrants, #Youth, #LGBTQI+

*Integrated an-
ti-discrimination
projects*



Unions may also work on specific projects, especially when supported by European funds or in the framework of an institutional initiative. The practices with the greatest potential to contrast discrimination are those well focused on their beneficiaries, objectives, sector of intervention and include different types of integrated and interconnected activities. [Yo soy servicios publicos](#) is an EU co-financed FeSP-UGT (Spain) website that enhances the role of public services and workers in social transformation against racism and discrimination, through information campaigns, guides for workers, training courses.

The trade union FNV (Netherlands) has implemented the project [Working towards a generation without discrimination](#), which, with an explicitly intersectional approach, uses a multi-level strategy to combat discrimination in the workplace: through public communication actions, empowerment of active members and involved workers, training, and recognition of the union as an enforcer of civil and social rights laws in the workplace.

#Netherland, #Spain

#Ageism, #Youth, #Racism

Lessons learnt to develop intersectionality through training and capacity building



- ▶ Training is an essential element to strengthen the fight against discrimination, primarily by revising programs and tools from an intersectional perspective.
- ▶ Training tools (training courses, guides, and digital tools) must combine an intersectional approach, taking into account the specificities of sectors and the characteristics of workers.
- ▶ Training against discrimination can lead to broader cultural change if it involves joint actions among different social partners.
- ▶ Training projects can develop at different levels: from workshops and courses in workplaces to broader and integrated projects at national or sectoral level (information campaigns, guides for workers, training courses).

5.3 Innovating internal Trade Union structures through an intersectional approach

Efforts to combat discrimination in the workplace should be reflected in the internal organisational models adopted by trade unions and in the opportunities provided to workers to express their needs within union organisations. Trade unions are structured differently across various European countries. Still, there is a universal need to provide opportunities for participation and visibility for groups that are under-represented or most affected by discrimination.

Empowering Future Leaders: Strengthening Youth, Gender and minorities' Representation in Trade Unions



The membership base of the affiliates of trade unions is very diverse and reflects the social base. Some groups, such as migrants and workers with migrant backgrounds, are particularly represented in certain sectors; the same applies to women. Young workers are less numerous, not only because of demographic trends: their presence within trade union organisations does not reflect the importance that generational diversity should hold. The project [Promotion of Young Talent and Parity in Focus](#) of the VBE trade union (Germany) explored these themes. The analysis of the current state of representation at governing bodies level follows several recommended measures: at structural level (Integration into the Work of the Executive Board, Harnessing the Power of Online Meetings, Adapting Meeting Structures, Rotating the Chairing of Meetings, Including Childcare in Meeting Allowances), at personal level (Being a role model/Self-promoting - Encouraging Discussion, Building Networks for Specific Groups), at the level of content (Targeting the Group Orientation of Content on Offer, Getting to Know the Association's Structures, Acquiring Know-How).

The traditional under-representation of women and disadvantaged groups in trade union bodies, especially at leadership and senior positions level, can be addressed in several ways. One of these is internal training on strengthening leadership and mentoring and enhancing the skills of women within trade unions. The examples are mainly concentrated in the sectors with a higher presence of women workers: care, health, public services and education. The CTU, the Croatian Teachers' Union, organises [training seminars for members](#), during which they can acquire legal and communication skills as well as how to perform decision-making roles in education bodies. Due to the high representation of women in the union, the seminars are largely taken up by female members.

**#Germany, #Croatia,
#Gender, #Women, #Youth**

The intersectionality potential of inclusive TU organizational models



The union responds to the request for participation from underrepresented groups of members through diverse organizational methods, spaces, and opportunities for discussion.

The [Black Teachers' Consultation Conference](#) is promoted by the British trade union NASUWT (UK) to provide an open forum for discussion on the professional experience of Black teachers (who self-identify as African, Caribbean and Asian identities). These spaces also inter-connect, so as to be in a position to tackle both the specificity of discrimination and be able to strengthen the intersectional response, as with the [Equalities weekends for Black, LGBTI, women and young members](#).

Other trade unions have adopted similar initiatives, as in the case of the [TUC Anti-Racism Task Force](#) (UK), which has an emphasis on supporting workers but also changing the unions themselves as much as the social context: "the Taskforce is leading the trade union movement's renewed campaign against racism at work. It will engage with Black workers across the UK to hear about their experiences. And it will produce recommendations on tackling structural racism in the UK, in workplaces and in unions themselves". For the degree of achievement of goals set by the initiative to be measurable, the [anti-racism tracker](#) was introduced, establishing measurable goals on several levels: collective bargaining, organising, campaigning, tackling racism in Unions.

[Ver.di queer](#) is the LGBTIQ subgroup within the German trade union Ver.di, dedicated to advocating for the rights of queer employees. Ver.di queer is not just a cross-sectional working group of union members, but it is recognized within the union as an affiliated group. This entails official participation in the union decision-making processes; improved resources and financial support for LGBTIQ projects; strengthened influence on CBAs and workplace regulations benefiting LGBTIQ employees.

Similar experiences are widespread in other German unions, such as the GEW (German Education Union) active in the education sector: in 2021, the Federal Lesbian and Gay Caucus of the GEW became the [Federal Committee Queer](#) recognised in the union's statute.

The German trade union confederation DGB has promoted the [LGBTIQ* Conference](#), to promote the rights and opportunities of LGBTIQ+ workers in the workplace. In addition to lectures and practice-oriented workshops, the conference offered space for exchange and networking between company-based experts, interest groups and other actors. The topics addressed took into account the specificity of the German industrial relations system and, in particular, the role of Works Councils in representing the diversity expressed by workers in workplaces.

**#UK, #Germany
#Racism, #Sexism, #LGBTQI+, #Youth**

Lessons learnt to innovate the organization of the union through an intersectional approach:



- Intersectionality has the potential to bring about change within the union organization itself: spaces for discussion and representation of specific groups of members can strengthen workers' participation opportunities and enrich the diversity of the unions themselves.
- Recognizing the diversity expressed by the membership base must be reflected in the diversity of the union organization at all levels, including leadership: promoting the roles and responsibilities of young people, women, and minorities within trade unions.

5.4 An intersectional approach in the relationship with workers: welcoming them, informing them, and listening to them

Cultural, programmatic, and organisational change must be reflected in a new approach to the relationship between unions and workers: thinking of safe and welcoming spaces that respect diversity and express workers' needs, both in the workplace and outside.

Welcoming spaces and relations with workers in the workplace



It is essential to be aware of condition of workers and listen to their demands and to their experience of discrimination. Receiving workers adequately is essential to establish a relationship and can be done in different ways (at union premises or via social media), but the direct relationship between workers and union representatives in the workplace remains essential. Some experiences introduce face-to-face reception and listening spaces at the workplace level for migrant workers or refugees ([Fluchtpunkt Laden](#), IGMetall, Germany).

#Germany

#Migrants

Listening to workers, outside the workplace too



A worker who is discriminated, harassed or bullied at work may find it difficult to report it and, especially, to find a safe place to do so. Several trade unions offer services that make this possible, while fully protecting the privacy of the worker, such as with the [Confidential phone](#) activated by the FNV (Netherlands) for workers experiencing harassment, bullying, discrimination. The presentation of the service clarifies that no one is excluded (age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, race, religion, nationality); intersectional definitions of acts against workers are provided; effects at physical, mental and personal dignity level are taken into account. Similar services are promoted by other trade unions, both on a general basis ([SAK employee rights hotline](#), Finland) and covering specific issues such as violence and gender-based harassment in the workplace.

#Netherlands, #Finland



#Racism, #Gender, #LGBTQI+, #Disability, #Ageism

Targeted information and awareness campaigns



Information campaigns on workers' rights are an essential part of the work of trade unions. Communication and information must, of course, be targeted and take the specificities of their recipients into account. The guide [Your Rights as a Worker](#) by SIPTU (Ireland) was specifically conceived for refugees and asylum seekers to provide guidance on labour laws, social inclusion opportunities and how to protect their rights, and takes the special condition of women and younger workers into account.

There are countless awareness campaigns promoted by trade unions on issues of discrimination, namely on racism, migrants, and gender-based violence. One example is the initiative by IG Metall (Germany) entitled [Respect! No place for racism](#). Across the country, it advocates for a respectful and solidarity-based cooperation. This commitment continues to support IG Metall in times of growing violence from the far right.

#Ireland, #Germany



#Migrants, #Racism, #Youth, #Gender

A friendly communication to involve workers who suffer discrimination



Information material and guides on how to combat discrimination and access labour rights can be an important instrument of union action. Interactive online services and helplines are also becoming increasingly popular, as part of broader digital unionism strategies. Digital services and devices allow for greater interactivity and targeted communication for specific target groups, but it remains essential to also provide general information that can involve workers and direct them to more specific services. This approach is reflected in many websites of national and sectoral unions featuring landing pages on labour rights, Q&A, guided routes to legal assistance through telephone services and on-site services at union premises. Even simple games on basic knowledge of labour rights can offer a welcoming and inclusive way to bring workers closer together, as is the case with the multilingual web pages ([Do you know your rights at work?](#)) of the central organisation of Finnish trade unions (SAK).

#Finland

Lessons learnt to strengthen the relationship between workers and the union through an intersectional approach



- ▶ An intersectional approach is based on the relationship with workers, starting from welcoming, listening, and discussion spaces in workplaces that recognize and respect diversity.
- ▶ The relationship with workers must use all available channels, even outside the workplace, through both traditional contact methods (union offices) and technologically innovative tools (social media, helpline).
- ▶ Communication plays an essential role in a relationship with workers that is not taken for granted and not limited to workplaces. A targeted approach (specific groups and workers' needs) must be integrated with friendly and open communication to involve workers, particularly those who suffer intersectional discrimination.

5.5 The tools to develop intersectional knowledge: archives, data, expertise for continuous learning

The intersectional approach must also guide the organisation of informational resources upon which the union relies to analyse inequalities and act accordingly. On the one hand, it is necessary to systematise the legacy of collective agreements made by unions through archives and observatories; on the other hand, the collection of data and information regarding discrimination, equality, diversity, and inclusion at all levels from institutional to company level, must be encouraged.

Building and making accessible archives and data-bases of intersectional good bargaining practices



In this perspective, the systematic collection of good collective bargaining practices can certainly serve the purpose of enhancing trade union training on the basis of existing good practices that can always be improved in an intersectional dimension. This action is at the heart of the TUAD project, but it is also an effort that trade unions have already been carrying out at both European and national level. Gathering and analysing good bargaining practices is a way to incentivise and encourage expansion and innovation of trade union action. Collections of collective agreements are not uncommon, sorted according to specific themes and possible grounds for action against discrimination. In addition to the more widespread gender-based and anti-racist bargaining practices, LGBTQI+ rights are also the object of bargaining efforts. All this must be strengthened and innovated in intersectional terms.

The European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) hosts on its website a [database of good practices](#) in collective bargaining, social dialogue, training and a lot more, aimed at strengthening unions in being more inclusive and more active in combating discrimination in different areas (migration, disability, gender, LGBTI, persons from disadvantaged social backgrounds). The database has collected 142 files from 31 countries.

At national level, several specific projects for the training of trade unionists against discrimination present collections of good practices and examples of clauses for collective bargaining agreements, in particular on gender, racism/migration, LGBTQI+ ([Igualdad y diversidad en los convenios colectivos](#), CC.OO, Spain).

In Italy, the trade union confederation CGIL and the Fondazione Giuseppe Di Vittorio have created observatories and archives on [collective bargaining at company level](#) (available for trade union members) and on [negotiations on social and local welfare issues](#) (available to the public); several thousand agreements were collected and archived as per the topics covered by each agreement (including discrimination, equal opportunities, equality and inclusion) as well as per its beneficiaries (women, elderly, migrants, LGBTQI+ people, workers, precarious, etc.).

#EU, #Spain, #Italy

#Migrants, #Gender, #LGBTQI+, #Disability, #Ageism

Systematised collection of intersectional data to negotiate in the workplace



Collecting data and information on the condition of workers or vulnerable population groups can help in analysing needs and identifying situations of widespread and silent discrimination, beyond the specific cases affecting individuals. In this regard, there are various experiences devoted to strengthening the trade union initiative through a solid database of data and documentation. The challenge lies in using data through an intersectional approach, capable of considering the dimensions that can exacerbate discrimination in a specific sector, type of work, or workplace.

Collecting, analyse and using data to support collective bargaining is not an easy task, and trade unions have drafted guides that help in this regard: [Gender Pay Gap Reporting: Guidance for unions on closing the gender pay gap and bringing the issue into collective bargaining](#) (ICTU, Ireland).

In Italy, the CGIL trade union has carried out several surveys at the territorial level on the needs of workers, local communities, social services end-users, both in collaboration with universities and autonomously. At the national level, in 2021 and 2022 the CGIL promoted an [Investigation on labour](#) conducted by the Fondazione Di Vittorio with a working group of researchers and with the participation of all CGIL's sectoral federations. The respondents were more than 30,000, employed in all sectors and covering almost any profession and type of employment contract. Chapters of the study also focused on the specific situation of women, young people and migrant workers.

#Ireland, #Italy

#Gender, #Youth, #Migrants

Reports and research on discrimination

Several trade unions support the research programmes of trade union research institutes, whereas in other contexts it is more common to cooperate with universities and private research organisations. The participation of trade unions in the conduction of studies and researches may also be an opportunity for new relations with research organisations and academic scholars, experts and researchers. It can also indirectly help unions build a wider connection with civil society organisations.

Lessons learnt to redesign the approach to data, informational resources, and knowledge from an intersectional perspective



- ▶ The intersectional approach must be the core of the organization of informational resources, starting with those of the unions themselves: accessible archives and databases of intersectional good bargaining practices.
- ▶ In the analysis of national and local statistics, as well as in the analysis of the workforce at the company level, a systematized collection of intersectional data is necessary to negotiate in the workplace.
- ▶ The analysis of relevant data to recognize inequalities and discrimination in the world of work can be an opportunity to consolidate shared knowledge throughout the union organization. Additionally, promoting reports and research on discrimination can develop profitable relationships with experts, scholars, and civil society organizations that conduct research practices.



Chapter 6 - RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS INTERSECTIONAL DISCRIMINATION

Due to its complexity, addressing intersectional discrimination requires multidimensional, multi-layered strategies and actions. In this fight, trade unions are key actors, as they can advocate for inclusive policies, represent diverse workers' voices, and promote structural changes within workplaces and beyond.

This chapter outlines concrete policy recommendations to address the root causes of discrimination, but also to support unions in tackling intersectional discrimination, particularly related to racism, ageism, gender inequality, LGBTIQ+ rights, and disability inclusion. By incorporating an intersectional approach into their internal practices, collective bargaining strategies, and advocacy efforts, trade unions can become powerful agents of legal and societal change. Their actions raise awareness, promote inclusive work environments, and help shape fairer, more equitable societies.

Additionally, the role of institutions, governments, and employers' organisations as social partners is critical in advancing intersectional equality through comprehensive and inclusive policy frameworks. This chapter also offers targeted recommendations to guide their actions in addressing overlapping forms of discrimination and driving systemic change in the world of work.

Trade unions in Europe engage in social dialogue. Union programmes and guidelines often define objectives for internal changes at both organisational and political levels. Developing autonomous perspectives on change is essential for trade unions to be equipped for these processes, both in relation to social partners and institutions, as well as within the unions themselves. There are platforms for dialogue with institutions, employers, and within the labour movement. The following recommendations are based on the work of the TUAD project and specifically focus on adopting an intersectional approach to anti-discrimination in institutional and trade union actions.

6.1 Recommendations for EU and National Institutions

Addressing intersectional discrimination in EU labour markets and societies requires coordinated efforts at all institutional levels, integrating intersectionality into EU and national labour policies, regulatory frameworks, and social protections.

EU and national institutions play a pivotal role in setting the legal and policy frameworks supporting inclusive workplaces and equitable labour markets. Through legislative action, public policy, and the enforcement of anti-discrimination laws, they can provide the foundation for a more inclusive workplace and society. Additionally, institutions such as national equality bodies, labour ministries, and regulatory agencies are essential in monitoring compliance, facilitating dialogue between social partners, and driving reforms that ensure intersectional discrimination is systematically addressed.

In a nutshell, European institutions should:

- ▶ Introduce and foster recognition of 'intersectional discrimination' in European legislation on anti-discrimination, diversity, equality, and inclusion. A broad interpretation should also be adopted when defining the dimensions of intersectionality, which also considers the relevance of socio-economic status.
- ▶ Adopt and implement the 'Horizontal directive' against discrimination, adopting an intersectional approach, to harmonise protection within and outside the workplace.
- ▶ Define clear and enforceable sanctions in case of breach and non-compliance with anti-discrimination and equality principles.
- ▶ Recognise the intersectional dimension in applying case law in cases of multiple discrimination brought before the European courts.
- ▶ Recognise intersectional discrimination in the programmatic and operational instruments of the EU (strategies, action plans, funds, etc.).
- ▶ Enhance monitoring and accountability mechanisms to track progress on intersectional discrimination policies. This includes defining and developing intersectional criteria and indicators for the effectiveness and impact assessments of EU anti-discrimination programmes.

- ▶ Involve social partners in all possible steps to define equality objectives, monitoring and evaluation.
- ▶ Empower societal actors and especially social partners for addressing intersectionality by allocating adequate capacity-building resources.
- ▶ Formalise an intersectional approach in selecting, collecting and processing statistical data at the European level (Eurostat) and surveys conducted (Eurobarometer).
- ▶ Encourage national governments to implement intersectional policies within all dimensions, including labour and social protection systems.

In a nutshell, national institutions should:

- ▶ Strengthen legal frameworks by integrating intersectional discrimination and incorporating its recognition in national labour laws and the mandate for action of all national bodies and agencies responsible for enforcement (inspectorates, verification bodies, sanctionary frameworks, etc.).
- ▶ Enhance the development of legal instruments to protect workers facing multiple forms of discrimination.
- ▶ Introduce an intersectional approach to evaluating the effectiveness and impact of public policies, with particular regard to social policies for inclusion and integration (school, health, care, housing).
- ▶ Introduce specific sanctions and incentives for public or private companies that adopt anti-discrimination measures and instruments into national legislation.
- ▶ Provide for non-discriminatory clauses in company support and financing programmes, based on verifying compliance with objective criteria and joint assessments between trade unions and companies.

6.2 Recommendations for Trade Unions

Specific education and awareness-raising actions can have a profound internal impact on trade unions and an effective multiplier effect. The good practices show the relevance of equipping trade unions at all levels to identify and address discrimination affecting workers across intersectional dimensions, including gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, and age. Unions have active steps to make, to ensure that leadership bodies reflect the diversity of the workforce, particularly by promoting the participation of members from underrepresented and marginalised communities and building and maintaining partnerships with organisations focused on human rights, social justice, and anti-discrimination to broaden their impact and benefit from shared expertise. To this end, it is crucial that intersectionality remains a priority on trade unions' agendas to drive internal transformation and influence external change. This can develop a deep and capillary intersectional awareness among all trade unionists and promote necessary actions for empowering trade unionists in the workplace, particularly by enforcing intersectional protection and inclusiveness. On another dimension, trade unions must remain involved in society and stay in touch with civil society organisations to increase their advocacy power and keep intersectional equality high on the institutional and civil agenda.

In a nutshell, trade unions should:

- ▶ Build an inclusive trade union agenda by nurturing relations with local communities, social movements, and civil society organisations and by involving democratic and progressive parties in the fight against the far right.
- ▶ Develop organisational models, both at the national and sectoral level, that connect the issues of intersectional non-discrimination, diversity, equality, and inclusion. This can also be done through constant comparisons between trade unionists responsible for focused grounds of discrimination (gender, youth, disability, migrants/racism, LGBTQI, etc.).
- ▶ Adopt formal strategies and actions for trade union empowerment to strengthen the participation and role of underrepresented groups, including those in poor socio-economic conditions.
- ▶ Support grassroots initiatives advocating for the rights of workers facing multiple discrimination factors

by offering financial resources, staffing support, and greater public visibility and providing them with tools and platforms to advocate for their rights and interests.

- ▶ Create spaces and occasions for workers and groups affected by intersectional discrimination to meet, exchange views, and share experiences (e.g., at Annual Conferences, dedicated sessions during Congresses).
- ▶ Increase representation of marginalised communities within trade union leadership and decision-making structures. This may also include formal recognition and affiliation of such groups to the union itself, thus appropriate involvement in decision-making.
- ▶ Develop and implement training programs on recognising and tackling intersectional discrimination for trade union representatives at all levels of the TU structure and in the workplace.
- ▶ Incorporate intersectionality into trade union policies and strategies to ensure inclusive representation and advocacy. Strengthen alliances with civil society organisations working on intersectional issues to amplify efforts against intersectional discrimination.
- ▶ Encourage the development of educational materials and toolkits on intersectionality for trade union members.
- ▶ Promote, through the means of negotiation, a system of inclusive welfare services at the national and local levels. Adopt an intersectional approach when negotiating with institutions on major social issues (e.g. informal care, long-term care, precarious work, migrant inclusion, gender inequality, housing problems, work-life balance, etc)
- ▶ Raise awareness on intersectionality topics when engaging in social dialogue with social partners, including joint training moments, seminars, and communication campaigns.

6.3 Recommendations for Trade Unions and Social Partners during Social Dialogue

Effectively addressing intersectional discrimination in the workplace requires a comprehensive and institutionalised response, rooted in the mechanisms of social dialogue. Intersectionality highlights how various forms of discrimination interact to produce unique and compounded disadvantages for certain groups of workers. Traditional one-dimensional approaches are insufficient to dismantle these layered inequalities.

Social dialogue—including collective bargaining, consultation, and cooperation between employers, trade unions, and, where appropriate, public authorities—serves as a cornerstone for embedding intersectional perspectives into labour market policies, workplace practices and all societal environments. Through inclusive and sustained dialogue, social partners can co-create equitable employment frameworks, promote inclusive organisational cultures, and ensure that intersectional anti-discrimination measures are tailored, enforced, and reflect the diverse lived experiences. Strengthening the role of social dialogue in this context is essential for advancing systemic change and fostering a fair, inclusive, and resilient societal and working environment.

In a nutshell, social partners should:

Promote collaboration between employers and trade unions to create inclusive workplace practices.

- ▶ Be equipped to engage in and promote horizontal “anti-discrimination agreements” at the company/ sectoral level, including the intersectional dimension.
- ▶ Develop the intersectional approach expressively for bargaining purposes; ensure intersectional discrimination is explicitly addressed in collective bargaining negotiations and agreements; embed intersectionality in all themes related to work organisation (working hours, organisation of work, health and safety, career opportunities, training, work-life balance, etc.);
- ▶ Adoption of an inclusive and non-discriminatory language in collective bargaining, countering any bias and implicit discrimination
- ▶ Ensure that equality clauses are included in collective agreements
- ▶ Within the information and consultation rights framework at the company level, information systems for data collection and sharing practices should be implemented to combat intersectional discrimination.

- ▶ Extend the role and activity of joint committees at the workplace level on equal opportunities, diversity, equality and inclusion in an intersectional sense.
- ▶ Provide joint training courses on intersectionality (anti-discrimination and approach to bargaining).
- ▶ Define policies inspired by diversity, equality and inclusion for personnel management, recruitment and professional advancement; set procedures and tools to protect workers and management representatives from intersectional discrimination.
- ▶ Improve, through bargaining, policies unilaterally adopted by companies to combat discrimination (Ethical guidelines, Codes of conduct, etc.)
- ▶ Provide services to support and protect workers who are victims of discrimination at the workplace and/or community level.
- ▶ Promote monitoring and verification mechanisms (surveys, working groups, 'inclusion tests', intersectional impact assessments, etc.) to detect and address discrimination.
- ▶ Develop guidelines for transparent and fair recruitment, promotion, and retention policies.
- ▶ Advocate for cross-sector dialogue to ensure a holistic approach to addressing intersectional discrimination.
- ▶ Through collective bargaining and tripartite social dialogue, a figure of worker representation at the company level is provided, and they are responsible for combating discrimination.



Chapter 7 - INTERSECTIONALITY GLOSSARY

Adopting an inclusive language and learning the correct terms to name and challenge discrimination are now important themes on the union agenda. The following glossary proposes definitions adopted by the main civil society organisations at the European level and international institutions.

Accessibility is the creation of access for people with disabilities, whether physical or mental, to their surrounding environment; this includes access to transportation, information, and communication technologies [citation](#)

Ageism refers to stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) towards people on the basis of their age. [citation](#)

Bias, is the inclination or prejudice for or against one person or group; it especially regards the results of unfair treatment across people or groups [citation](#)

Biphobia: the fear, unreasonable anger, intolerance or/and hatred toward bisexuality and bisexual people [citation](#)

Collective bargaining, a series of negotiations by employers and employees, acting in their respective capacities via representatives or themselves, with the goal of jointly agreeing on labour conditions, terms of employment, and wages. [citation](#) Collective bargaining is key to inclusive and effective governance of work. Collective bargaining is a fundamental principle and right at work. The effective recognition of this right enables voluntary negotiations between employers (or employers' organisations) and workers' organisations, which can result in a collective agreement [citation](#).

De facto equality, the equality of outcome by way of a redistribution of resources and power; it considers the effects of discrimination and differences in access to resources and participation of marginalised people or groups [citation](#)

Direct discrimination a situation in which one person receives less favourable treatment than another based on their background or certain personal characteristics [citation](#)

Disability Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others [citation](#)

Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Any distinction, exclusion or preference made on the basis of race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin, which has the effect of nullifying or impairing equality of opportunity or treatment in employment or occupation (...) [citation](#)

Diversity, the practice or quality of valuing positively, and thus involving, people from a range of different social and ethnic backgrounds and of different genders, sexual orientations, etc.; beyond appearance and status, it includes varying ideas, perspectives, and values [citation](#)

Equity, an equality in outcomes through cognisance of structural differences that lead some individuals to sustain greater disadvantages than others. [Citation](#)

Gender-based violence, an afflictive action taken against a person on the basis of their gender; violence can be described as either physical, sexual, or psychological, and it can also refer to violence that disproportionately affects individuals of a certain gender [citation](#)

Gender expression, the manner in which one expresses their gender identity through actions and appearance [citation](#)

Gender identity, an individual's deeply perceived and experienced sense of gender; it may or may not assign with the sex assigned to them at birth [citation](#)

Gender roles, typically dictated by gender and social norms, these roles are the responsibilities expected to be fulfilled in a given society; for example these include relations/roles of reproduction (caregiving and household) and of production (breadwinning) [citation](#)

Homophobia: fear, unreasonable anger, intolerance or/and hatred directed towards homosexuality [citation](#)

Inclusion, processes and policies that embrace people or groups that may embody marginalised identities, thus offering dignity and the opportunities to take part in society. [citation](#) Active Inclusion means enabling every citizen, notably the most disadvantaged, to fully participate in society, including having a job [citation](#)

Inclusive Trade Unions, Trade unions have to represent society and organise and be a safe place for women, people of colour, the LGBTI community and workers with disabilities (and of all ages) [citation](#)

Indirect discrimination, refers to the institutionalised norms (laws and practices) that may seem neutral since they are applied equally, but have poorer effects on some people over others [citation](#)

Intersectionality, the theory that various forms of discrimination centred on race, gender, class, disability, sexuality, and other forms of identity, do not work independently but interact to produce particularised forms of social oppression [citation](#); Intersectionality recognises that people's lives are shaped by their identities, relationships and social factors. These combine to create intersecting forms of privilege and oppression depending on a person's context and existing power structures such as patriarchy, ableism, colonialism, imperialism, homophobia and racism. It is important to remember the transformative potential of intersectionality, which extends beyond merely a focus on the impact of intersecting identities. [citation](#)

Intersectional discrimination, acknowledges the multi-faceted dimensions of discrimination, based on personal characteristics or intersecting social/group categories [citation](#) Intersectional takes place on the basis of several personal grounds or characteristics/identities, which operate and interact with each other at the same time in such a way as to be inseparable. [citation](#)

LGBTQI+, the acronym refers to people that identify to non-heteronormative sexual orientations or gender identities, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex people; as a result of their identity, which can be openly stated or private, face specific obstacles when it comes to accessing their social rights [citation](#)

Multiple discrimination, a concept that recognises that individuals have multi-layered identities and recognises as such that discrimination can occur on the basis of one, or multiple, perceived characteristics. Such discrimination can, and often does, create cumulative disadvantages (Sequential multiple discrimination, Additive multiple discrimination, Intersectional discrimination). [citation](#)

Racial Discrimination Any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life [citation](#)

Structural racism is a product of a system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various ways to perpetuate racial inequity, and has been a feature of the social, economic, and political systems in which we all exist. Structural racism refers to the systematic discrimination and disadvantage faced by racial and ethnic minority groups within social, economic, and political structures. [citation](#)

Sexism, belief in the ranking of gender based on ideas of the nature of gender and the social roles derived from them [citation](#)

Sexual orientation, a person's emotional, affectional and/or sexual attraction toward other people of the same gender, a different gender or multiple genders; it is separate from a person's gender identity [citation](#)

Social norms, general and unwritten rules about manners in which people are expected to behave in certain environments and situations or within certain social groups [citation](#)

Stereotypes, a generalised view or preconception about attributes or characteristics of a person or group of people [citation](#)

Transphobia: Refers to negative cultural and personal beliefs, opinions, attitudes and behaviours based on prejudice, disgust, fear and/or hatred of trans people or against variations of gender identity and gender expression [citation](#)

Unconscious bias, social stereotypes about groups of people that individuals form outside their own conscious awareness [citation](#)

Xenophobia, attitudes, prejudices and behaviour that reject, exclude and often vilify persons, based on the perception that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society or national identity [citation](#)

TRADE UNIONS AGAINST DISCRIMINATION



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