



*- Why do workers and trade unions need the Horizontal Directive to make equality a reality in an intersectional dimension? And what do you see as the obstacles to its adoption?*

Hello everyone. Thank you, Reentje, for giving me the floor, and thank you again for the warm welcome to the DGB in Berlin today for this final conference. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the European Trade Union Confederation and in particular Giulio and his entire team, Marina, Sarrah and Esyllt. Thank you for the invitation to take part in this session, but also for the close collaboration we have had, with the other affiliates and the Di Vittorio Foundation, throughout the project.

This conference must not be the end of the story, and I am convinced that we will continue to work together with the ETUC on the trade union fight against discrimination, which is more vital today than ever. It's an observation that I think is shared, having heard Esther this morning and the discussions throughout the day.

Whether in France or elsewhere in Europe, we realise that the fight against discrimination is not far enough advanced and is not moving fast enough, despite the relentless work carried out by trade unions in the world of work or by civil society in a more societal context. Every victory counts, but still too many lives are destroyed today as a result of discrimination. Figures fluctuate in the fight against discrimination, but the persistent phenomenon of under-reporting distorts the picture and puts into perspective the self-congratulatory exercises of our national and European authorities in the fight against discrimination!

To come back to your question, Reentje, Force Ouvrière is convinced that workers and trade unions do indeed need the horizontal directive today. The first recognition of the intersectional dimension that we obtained in

the European Union directive on pay transparency is now under threat through the "omnibus" packages in favour of a deregulation at European level. It is also threatened by the employers' agenda, at least in France, against the so-called "over-transposition" of EU directives, which is preventing us from seizing this opportunity to make progress in our respective Member States to combat discrimination more effectively.

This is why FO spoke out strongly and openly against the withdrawal of the horizontal directive from the European Commission's action programme last February. This is all the more incomprehensible given that the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the EU in the second half of 2024 had opened the way to a breakthrough on the issue of reasonable accommodation, which was being agitated by certain conservative governments, led by Hungary, under pressure from employers refusing to accept their responsibility for ensuring inclusive workplaces for workers with disabilities. Today, the European Commission is talking about a lack of consensus and will certainly hide behind its major competitiveness project to refuse to put it back on the table. At FO, we believe that this is a disgrace!

As I reminded Mrs Minzatu a few days ago during her visit to Paris, it is by respecting and strengthening the European Union's social model that we will improve our competitiveness. And that means first and foremost achieving equal treatment throughout Europe, and above all, for the organisation and the workers I represent, in the workplace and the world of work in general! This is all the more necessary when our social model, our attachment to fundamental rights and equal treatment are under frontal attack from foreign powers such as the United States and China. For FO, making progress on the Horizontal Directive and reiterating our values are also a duty of solidarity towards workers around the world who are fighting for their rights and for equality on a daily basis, under much more difficult conditions and often at the risk of their lives!

Faced with the erosion of the rule of law and the undermining of fundamental rights in certain parts of Europe, including France, Force Ouvrière is convinced that the horizontal directive will be able to reaffirm in uncertain times the commitment of European integration to equal treatment. This commitment can be found in the Treaty of Rome, in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and in the European Pillar of Social Rights. This commitment is necessary to inject energy, as well as human, material and financial resources, into the daily battles against discrimination that our respective organisations are waging today! This is all the more important in the run-up to the opening of negotiations on the next European Union budget, when the European Social Fund is under threat!

On the other hand, Force Ouvrière is convinced that the horizontal directive will make it possible to support our respective struggles in our Member States throughout Europe and to put the fight against discrimination back at the centre of attention in an intersectional dimension. For FO, this intersectional approach is also a vector for the convergence of struggles within the trade union movement, as we saw during the protest against the pension reform in 2023, which exacerbated discrimination in the exercise of the right to a decent pension, whether for young people, women, racialised people, LGBTQ+ people or people with disabilities! So this intersectional approach is not only vital if we are to combat existing discrimination more effectively, but also to vitalise our own actions!

This is why the horizontal directive is necessary for FO, but it is only the umpteenth step in our trade union fight against discrimination, requiring us to take action and mobilise even more at national level, in our professional branches and in companies!

To finish on this point, I think we also need to look at what lies ahead, which some people still regard as science fiction. We organised an FO day in conjunction with the international summit on Artificial Intelligence last February. We came away from that day with the observation that we are still far from being ready, in Europe and in France, to face up to the risks of further deepening discrimination, including intersectional discrimination, through AI. That's why we think the horizontal directive is more important than ever! It allows me to extend my solidarity to the LGBTQ+ workers mobilised in Hungary to defend Pride and who are facing the risks of mass surveillance by the authorities through AI!

*-How can trade unions fill the significant legislative vacuum at the moment in the face of employers' pressure for deregulation in your country and across Europe? How can trade unions get involved and make a concrete contribution to a national and European dynamic to win this battle between now and the end of the EU mandate?*

Thank you Reentje for this wide-ranging question! As I was saying, this horizontal directive is very necessary, but we're not waiting for it to arrive before taking action. Let's be clear! It's not the umpteenth communication, strategy or recommendation from the EU that will be able to fill the legislative void caused by the withdrawal of the horizontal directive. But let's be optimistic! We are only at the beginning of the European Union's 2024-2029 mandate!

Force Ouvrière is committed, as I am sure are other ETUC affiliates, to the day-to-day framework of collective bargaining and social dialogue, whether at cross-industry level, in the occupational sectors or even within companies! I am sure that the compendium of good practices resulting from the project will bear witness to this. FO mentioned many of its actions during the various working seminars organised as part of the project, not to mention the seminar we organised on disability at the very beginning of the project!

Despite the difficulties sometimes encountered in engaging with employers in the context of social dialogue, whether at European or national level, FO is convinced that progress is possible. This is one of the aims of another project shared by the ETUC with European employers, in which we are participating and which is also led by Giulio, the LABOUR INT 3 project on the inclusion of refugees and migrants.

At national level, we are also trying to engage with employers, even though it is sometimes difficult to get them to understand that this is not just a social issue and that it fully concerns the world of work, with repercussions on work organisation, working conditions and even workers' employment conditions!

To come back to the question, FO is convinced that it should be included in the next European social dialogue programme currently being negotiated! Not only will this help to step up the pressure on European co-legislators to get the horizontal directive back on track, but it could give additional tools to trade union organisations across Europe to take more effective action against discrimination in the meantime! It's also vital if we are to maintain a cross-fertilisation dynamic at national and European level and avoid the Horizontal Directive being shelved for decades to come!

Without lapsing into demoralising pragmatism, we must nevertheless be aware of the slim chances of making progress on European legislation during this term of office. We must therefore seize every opportunity open to our respective organisations to create momentum. The renewal of the action plan on the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights in the second half of 2025 is one such opportunity. FO is convinced that this is a good basis for obtaining a result by the end of the mandate in 2028-2029 by acting in our respective forums, and if the need arises in a joint manner between trade unions and civil society while respecting our respective roles.

Other opportunities will present themselves in the meantime to progressively advance the intersectional dimension, and I welcome, for example, the mobilisation of the ETUC once again, and of Tea JARC and her team in particular to lead the working group on disability!

But there is always room for manoeuvre and FO is convinced that the fight against discrimination from an intersectional approach could be integrated more transversally into the actions of the European trade union movement, for example within the framework of the European Semester, i.e. the coordination of budgetary, economic and social policies in Europe. This is one of the few positive signs of EU economic governance in France, where we can at least applaud the European Commission for frequently calling the French authorities to order to take action against discrimination against migrants and the Roma.

As we have also seen in the project, FO is convinced that we must also support and rely more on the work carried out by the Council of Europe and the institutional players involved in the fight against discrimination. Once again, the time and resources of our organisations are not unlimited and we still have a long way to go on the issue of strengthening our capacities, including through better appropriation of European funds. Here again, I welcome the work of the ETUC, which has produced a very useful guide on the subject, which we have adapted within our organisation, including to support the action of our trade unions throughout the country in the fight against discrimination.

However, in order for the trade unions to become involved and make a concrete contribution to a national and European dynamic, FO is convinced that greater awareness is needed within our own organisations! I really welcome the work that civil society is doing within its own framework and in its own role, as we have heard during this session.

But our organisations need to become fully aware of the role they have to play in combating discrimination in the world of work, and we can no longer relegate this issue to the heart of our organisations and hope that others will do it for us. It's easier said than done, and it requires a substantial effort to create dynamics that go beyond the goodwill of some of the individuals concerned, who play a fundamental role but who cannot replace a more collective awareness in the name of social justice within our organisations. This is the eternal task of giving a voice to the people concerned while building a more sustainable movement with allies, without whom our struggles would be lost in advance! This is the day-to-day reality of trade unions and the reality of the trade union mandate that we build, that we defend and that we give back, as I am doing before you today!

This is why, for Force Ouvrière, our priority is to convince our structures to get involved, to equip them with the knowledge and tools to take sustainable action at their level against discrimination, a *sine qua non* condition to ensure the success of our mobilisations over the long term, including alongside civil society in our respective roles. That's why we're here with you today!

So I'll conclude with a touch of optimism: our new space for young people, FO Jeunes, has made the fight against discrimination one of their priorities for action! We must not hesitate to draw on the younger and future generations to build our actions for today and tomorrow! Who knows, it could also ensure the renewal - if not the survival - of the trade union movement!

Thanks again to Giulio and the ETUC for bringing this project to fruition, and we hope to be able to continue building the trade union fight against discrimination together tomorrow!