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breakback

COMPARATIVE REPORT

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Francesco Lauria, Vincenzo Marasco

Break up to get back together

The impact of unionisation through innovative service provision on union membership and industrial relations

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BreakBack – Break up to get back together. The impact of unionisation through innovative service provision on union membership and industrial relations

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BREAK UP TO GET BACK TOGETHER

GUIDE

CV

WE REFER TO:

EMPLOYEES IDENTIFIED AS "VULNERABLE"

FOCUS

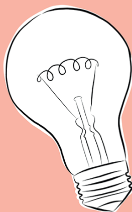
breakback

A UNION STRATEGY THROUGH SERVICES PROVISION TO:

ENHANCE MEMBERSHIP

REVITALIZE ACTION

THE PURPOSE:



- HOW UNIONS RESPOND TO INDIVIDUALISATION
- EVALUATING IMPACT OF SERVICES ON MEMBERSHIP

BREAK BACK HAS 3 MAIN AIMS

RELAUNCH AN INCLUSIVE SOCIAL DIALOGUE

THE HYPOTHESIS:

TRADE UNIONS ARE EXPERIMENTING A "CUSTOMISATION" OF THEIR ACTIVITIES

1. TO ASSESS WHICH STRATEGIES TRADE UNIONS ADOPT TO OVERCOME WORKERS DISAFFECTION

2. TO COLLECT AND DESCRIBE THE VARIETY OF SERVICES PROVIDED IN 5 E.U. MEMBER STATES

3. TO EVALUATE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THESE MEMBERSHIP REVITALIZATION STRATEGIES

EVALUATE WHETHER THE PROVISION OF SERVICES LEADS TO A UNION MEMBERSHIP INCREASE!

First part
Introduction

The theme of the revitalisation of union action has been at the centre of the debate for many years (e.g., see Moore, 2010; Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman, 2013; Schnabel, 2013; Baccaro and Howell, 2017; Vandaele, 2018). In truth, it is still a current topic. For instance, in its latest report, the International Labour Organization (ILO) has highlighted the risks for the future of trade unions (Visser 2019c; see also Visser 2019a)1. Indeed, the continuing decline of employment in trade union stronghold sectors, the rise of atypical and informal work, and the impact of the digital economy on labour relations are threatening the ability of trade unions to fulfil their historical functions and roles. In this context, the dualisation between unionised and non-unionised sectors and the marginalisation of trade unions are plausible scenarios.

Trade union revitalisation depends on developing strategies to expand union representation beyond the current membership base. Among these strategies (see Frege and Kelly, 2003; 2004), the literature has mainly focused on **organising** (see Clawson, 2003; Hurd, 2004; Simms et al., 2013). Less attention has been paid to **servicing** (see Jarley and Fiorito, 1990; Boxall and Haynes, 1997; Williams, 1997). The latter goes beyond the supply of individual goods for union members. Instead, it is a strategic approach to bring unorganised workers, particularly those excluded from any protection, identified as "vulnerable" (i.e., self-employed workers without personnel, platform workers, atypical workers, and unemployed persons), closer to trade unions. Unlike organising, in which the strengthening of union membership is pursued by creating communities of worker-activists, the rationale of servicing is to increase the perceived usefulness of joining a union.

Indeed, the **BreakBack Project** focused on servicing as a set of conscious and deliberate strategies through which trade unions aim to increase their members by reaching groups and individuals out of their influence. This research project had a twofold objective. Firstly, it aimed to detect the presence of concrete practices of service supply as translations of strategic choices aimed at renovating union action. For this purpose, it gathered, analysed, and classified "repertoires of practices" – namely, union services – in five countries (i.e., Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Lithuania, and Spain). Secondly, it intended to understand the effects of these practices in strengthening union membership. In other words, the project was meant to evaluate whether the supply of services leads to an increase in union membership and/or to the growth of workers' involvement in union activities.

Since March 2019, the project partners have

1. A useful website produced by the ILO: https://www.ilo.org/infostories/en-GB/Stories/Labour-Relations/trade-unions.

undertaken a two-stage research agenda. In the first phase, they conducted semi-structured interviews with 4-5 key informants per country to investigate whether peak-level trade union organisations have developed a "revitalisation" strategy and whether this strategy includes innovative services. In the second phase, the research teams adopted a case-study approach. In detail, the researchers carried out 14 case studies (at least two cases were covered per country) by interviewing the persons in charge of service provision and collecting opinions of service users. In the latter case, they conducted focus groups, one-to-one interviews, and a web survey.
This report offers a comparative reading of the research findings. To this end, it draws on the five country reports prepared by the BreakBack national teams (see Bellini et al., 2022; BlažienĐ et al., 2022; Larsen et al., 2022; Kelemen and Lenaerts, 2022; Molina and Godino, 2022). ◆

Second part
Industrial relations systems: an overview

2.1 Background information

Despite some convergence at the European level, industrial relations systems retain national specificity. The history of the five countries has led to different institutional settings and organisational models, resulting in different relationships between trade unions and their members and trade unions and society. This section provides an overview of industrial relations in the five countries: the national contexts, trade union organisations, collective bargaining, and membership trends.

Denmark represents the Nordic model of industrial relations with its typical features. The first one is the presence of long-standing union organisations, combined with a strong employers' association. This strength is reflected in exceptionally high levels of union membership and union density, even after the recent decades of decline. Moreover, there was a virtuous circle between high union density and the welfare regime until recent liberalisation reforms. In fact, trade unions still administer the Danish unemployment insurance system (an example of the "Ghent system"). Traditionally, there were institutionalised links between the main trade union (LO, at that time) and social democratic parties, which dominated national politics for several decades in the 20th century.

The very foundation of the Danish industrial relations model is the September Compromise of 1899. The confederal trade union LO (now, FH) and the employers' association DA signed an agreement outlining the fundamental principles for collective bargaining regulating wage and working conditions. These principles, which have remained more or less intact, outline the framework for regulating wage and working conditions (Due et al., 1993; Larsen and Ilsøe, 2016). Therefore, Danish collective bargaining is not anchored in law but collective agreements. As such, it is a voluntarist system in which trade unions and employers' associations hold a strong position in the labour market.

In Denmark, collective bargaining occurs at two levels: multi-employer industry-wide agreements outline the framework for collective bargaining, while company agreements interpret and implement them. Following a recent trend, collective bargaining has increasingly been decentralised towards the company level. This process started in the early 1980s. Companies not participating in multi-employer bargaining can join industry-wide agreements or negotiate specific agreements with local union branches. Such agreements often include tailor-made solutions. In this context, new types of company agreements covering freelancers, platform workers, and solo self-employed have emerged (Ilsøe and Madsen, 2017; Larsen et al., 2018).

Institutionalised "social partnership", which dates back to the second post-war period, characterises the case of **Belgium**. The outcome

of re-shaping industrial relations resulted in "one of the most formalised participation structures in Europe" (Vilrokx and Van Leemput, 1992: 362). Belgian society's "pillarisation" implies competing ideological identities embodied in a network of institutions, such as trade unions, civil society organisations, and political parties. Thus, competition between identity-based trade unions (i.e., Christian, Socialist, and Liberal unions) is higher in Belgium than in Denmark.

The national level of collective bargaining encompasses two institutions: the National Labour Council (NL, *Nationale Arbeidsraad - NAR;* FR, *Conseil National du Travail - CNT*) and the Central Economic Council (NL, *Centrale Raad voor het Bedrijfsleven - CRB*; FR, *Conseil Central de l'Économie - CCE*). The governing bodies of trade unions and employers' associations meet regularly at the cross-industry level in the Group of Ten, bringing together five representatives each. The agreements reached by the Group of Ten constitute political and moral commitments. However, although the government may enforce them by transposing them in law, they are not legally binding. For that reason, these agreements are considered highly influential. At the industry level, collective agreements are signed within joint committees and sub-committees (taking decisions on pay levels, classification schemes, working time arrangements, and training). The industry-wide agreements apply to all employers and employees covered by the joint committees or sub-committees. Legal extension of an industry-wide agreement by royal decree is relatively easy and nearly always applied. As soon as an agreement binds an employer, it applies to all employees. Lower levels of collective bargaining (i.e., local or company bargaining) can only improve what has been negotiated at the level above. The state potentially plays a significant role in collective bargaining: since 1996, a law has allowed the government to link pay increases to the forecasted pay trends in Belgium's main trading partners (namely, Germany, France, and the Netherlands).

Italy and Spain share some basic features. They have a history with relatively late industrialisation, a broad agricultural sector, and union pluralism. Moreover, significant differences can be identified.

In **Italy**, industrial relations are regulated by law and collective bargaining. The latter prevails over the former, which means industrial relations are clearly "voluntaristic". Collective bargaining is based on a coordinated two-tier system. National industry-wide agreements (*Contratti Collettivi Nazionali di Lavoro*, CCNLs) represent the primary level; then, second-level agreements are negotiated at the company or territorial level. CCNLs regulate a wide range of issues related to employment relations, including working hours and paid holidays, training, health and safety at work, fixed-term contracts, social insurance, and wages. Then, company agreements introduce mechanisms to increase productivity and regulate how their benefits are distributed among employees through "performance-related pay". In general, second-level agreements may also be signed at the local level. In some sectors, such as agriculture and construction, there is an optional third level: the regional level. Despite the lack of *erga omnes* extension mechanisms, broad coverage is ensured by the *de facto* application of industry-wide agreements also to non-members, due to the propensity of the judiciary to use the minimum wages set by the CCNLs as reference points to implement the principle of "fair pay" stated in Article 36 of the Constitution.

The Unitary Workplace Union Structures (Rappresentanze Sindacali Unitarie, RSUs), established by the Giugni Protocol, are the fulcrum of the representation system. They have the right to be informed and consulted on relevant company issues and bargain collectively in the workplace concerning issues indicated by the applicable industry-wide agreement. These are "unitary" bodies in the sense that all workers participate in the elections, regardless of their being union members or not. Besides

the new workplace representation rules, new agreements formalised the criteria for measuring and certifying representativeness and specified collective bargaining procedures. In some sectors, such as banking, the RSAs (*Rappresentanze Sindacali Aziendali*) system prevails. This latter is an instrument of representation in the workplace that expresses the associative dimension of each trade union.

Spain presents a more fragmented picture of interest representation. It is also characterised by state intervention in industrial relations, with a bargaining system that benefits from relatively high levels of coverage due to the automatic extension of collective agreements (Molina, 2014). During the democratic transition, after the end of Franco's regime, industrial relations had to be rebuilt. The late consolidation of employers' associations and the weak organisational structure of trade unions made the regulatory support indispensable to develop collective bargaining in the early years of democracy.

In return for cooperation, the state provided institutional compensations to social partners, especially trade unions – for instance, involving them in policymaking and providing extension mechanisms for collective bargaining. Social partners achieved institutional and political power, which by far exceeded their influence capacity based on membership or company-level representation.

Spain is characterised by multi-level collective bargaining, with weak coordination between the levels. The sectoral and territorial (provincial) levels are the most important ones in terms of workers covered (Martín Artiles and Alós Moner, 2003). Since the mid-1990s, cross-industry agreements have contributed to governing and coordinating collective bargaining in Spain and maintaining a formally high level of centralisation. The tendency towards decentralisation, already in place at that time, accelerated in the context of the Great Recession. This process has eroded the regulatory capacity of industry-wide agreements. However, the recent labour market reform, approved in February 2022, provided significant corrections to deregulation.

The representation bodies in the workplace are workers' delegates and workers' committees (plus the *Juntas de Personal* in the public sector). According to Spanish law, workers' committees can be established in companies with 50 or more workers, have information and consultation rights and the power to sign company agreements.

Like most post-Communist countries, **Lithuania** experienced a radical change in the role of trade unions (Masso et al., 2021). The restructuring of the economy, along with fragmentation and inter-union competition, led to a dramatic loss of members until the 2000s. The low level of union density, the absence of traditions in industrial relations, especially at the company level, and the related lack of unions' resources makes collective bargaining more difficult than in the other countries. According to the Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania (LC), collective agreements could be concluded at five different levels, either at the cross-sectoral, sectoral, territorial, company or workplace level. Whether collective bargaining formally relies on a multi-level system, company-level agreements are dominant in practice. In fact, there is only one national collective agreement signed in 2018 (and renewed in 2019) covering some wage-related issues for public-sector employees. In the public sector, employment and working conditions, including salary issues, are indeed regulated by law; thus, there is little room for manoeuvre for sectoral collective bargaining. In the private sector, there is a discordance between the structures of trade unions and employers' associations, which prevents the social partners from engaging in collective bargaining at the sectoral level. Moreover, employers have been reluctant to assume the role of sectoral social partners and sign collective agreements, claiming the absence of a mandate from their members (Blažienė and Gruževskis, 2017). Under the new Labour Code, collective agreements apply only to

the members of signatory trade unions. However, trade union representatives and employers can extend their coverage to all employees.
Social partners also have a significant role in policymaking on social and working life issues through participation in the Tripartite Council of the Republic of Lithuania. The Council is the central scene of interaction between public authorities and social partners, together with specialised tripartite commissions and councils under local municipalities (Blažienė et al., 2019). This institution has played a crucial role in developing the country's industrial relations system.
From a comparative perspective, the five industrial relations systems are highly different in terms of centralisation of collective bargaining, bargaining coverage, and the presence or absence of mandatory extension mechanisms of collective agreements to unorganised workers (see Table 1).

Despite the absence of mandatory extension mechanisms to unorganised workers, Italy and Denmark have high bargaining coverage rates (about 80%). In Spain, instead, bargaining coverage is 68%, although an extension clause exists. Since the 1990s, collective bargaining has been increasingly decentralised towards the company level in all three countries. This development reflects the need for flexibility at the workplace level and anchors pay increases to productivity growth. However, decentralisation has produced different outcomes in these countries. Denmark and Italy developed a "coordinated" two-tier collective bargaining system. Instead, collective bargaining assumed a "disorganised" character in Spain, especially after the Great Recession. At the end of the spectrum, Lithuanian collective bargaining has a very low coverage rate, more or less 7%, and is highly decentralised.

2.2 Trade unions

Differences between the trade union systems in the five countries depend on historical and idiosyncratic factors. Here, we focus on three aspects: the major cleavages that have given rise to such differences; the existence or absence of inter-union competition; and the unions' organisational structure.
Denmark has a longstanding tradition of multi-unionism, with the first trade unions emerging in the 1870s. Today, there are three main trade union confederations. They are organised in a threefold structure, including the confederation, sectoral federations, and local unions. The confederations represent their members' interests vis-à-vis the political system and employers while engaging in collective bargaining to different degrees depending on their delegated mandate. Sectoral federations are engaged in collective bargaining at the industry level, while local branch unions are involved in company bargaining, although their primary task is offering services to workplace

Table 1: Main features of collective bargaining systems (2018)

Country	Level	BargCent	Adjcov	Ext
Belgium	5	4,6	92,9	3
Denmark	3	2,3	82,0	0
Italy	3	2,4	80,0	0
Lithuania	1	1	7,1	1
Spain	3	2,1	68,0	2

Level: The predominant level at which wage bargaining occurs, in terms of coverage of employees (it takes value 5 when bargaining predominantly occurs at the central or cross-industry level and value 1 when bargaining predominantly occurs at the local or company level).
BargCent: Centralisation of wage bargaining.
AdjCov: Adjusted bargaining (or union) coverage rate.
Ext: Mandatory extension of collective agreements to unorganised workers (it takes value 3 when the extension is virtually automatic and more or less general and value 0 when there is neither a legal provision for a mandatory extension).
Source: Visser (2019b).

representatives. Usually, Danish unions are organised by occupation. However, their structure is complex: the confederation keeps together a combination of different representation criteria: professional (mostly for skilled workers), general (including skilled, non-skilled, white-collar workers, and highly skilled/academics), and industry-based. Indeed, this is the traditional organisational and representative structure of Scandinavian trade unions, organised by professional status, distinguishing between "blue-collar" and "white-collar" unions.

The largest Danish union is, by far, the Danish Trade Union Confederation (FH), with 79 affiliated unions representing 1,064,465 blue-collar and white-collar workers in the private and public sector in 2020 (Statistics Denmark, 2021). FH came into force in January 2019 following a union merger between the oldest and largest trade union, LO, and the second-largest one, FTF, mainly representing white-collar workers.

The second-largest confederation is the Danish Confederation of Professional Associations (AC). It is an umbrella organisation for 25 affiliated trade unions, representing professional and managerial staff who graduated from universities and higher education institutions. Recent figures indicate AC organises around 292,000 employees, including medical doctors, dentists, biologists, lawyers, engineers, architects, economists, and academic staff at Danish universities (Statistics Denmark, 2021).

The third one is the Association of Managers and Executives (LH), founded in 1991 to represent managerial staff in the public and private sector. LH does not negotiate collective agreements in the traditional sense (its members negotiate with the employers individually) but negotiates collaboration agreements supporting the terms and conditions outlined in employment contracts.

Alongside traditional trade unions, alternative unions also exist in Denmark, and they have become more widespread in recent years. In 1995, they organised less than 3% of all employed on the Danish labour market compared to more than 10% in 2015 (Ibsen et al., 2015). Such unions differ from traditional ones as they typically do not engage in collective bargaining (there are a few examples of alternative unions negotiating collective agreements).

In **Belgium**, there are three main trade union confederations, whose history is rooted in longstanding political and philosophical traditions: the Confederation of Christian Trade Unions (ACV-CSC), linked to the Christian worker movement, the General Federation of Belgian Labour (ABVV-FGTB), close to the socialist movement, and the Confederation of Liberal Trade Unions of Belgium (ACLVB-CGSLB), inspired by liberal ideals. ACV-CSC and ABVV-FGTB are the largest unions in the country, with over 1.3 million members each; ACLVB-CGSLB has almost 300,000 members. Belgium is one of the most unionised European countries, with a membership rate of around 50% of active workers. Although the unions compete for members, they cooperate closely to manage the complex Belgian institutional framework.

The three confederations are organised by sector, with separate union structures for manual and non-manual workers in the private sector. The confederations are in charge of coordinating the federations (administration and support), signing country-level collective agreements for all workers, and negotiating with the employers and the government in national institutional bodies.

Similarly, in **Italy**, the main cleavage between trade union confederations is rooted in ideological divisions and the pluralism of trade union cultures. At the beginning of the Cold War, divisions among political parties and cultures led to the split of the existing union, the unitary CGIL. The Italian Confederation of Workers' Unions (CISL) was created from this break-up, giving rise to a non-confessional union bonded to Catholic values and a trade union concept close to Anglo-Saxon trade unionism starting with the "Wisconsin School". Likewise, people from other

non-communist cultures formed the Union of Italian Workers (UIL), a secular trade union close to social-democratic and republican positions. The remaining part, the Italian General Confederation of Work (CGIL), continued to be linked to the Communist and Socialist parties. The three Italian confederations had alternate periods of "unity of action", from the 1970s to 1984, to build a "unitary federation", which never reached the declared objective of organic unity between CGIL CISL, and UIL. Over time, though, with the transformation of the Italian party system, these ideological divisions have lost political relevance. However, they are still important when trying to understand union cultures.

CGIL, CISL, and UIL are still the main trade union confederations in the country. They represent 11,188,535 members altogether. However, almost half of them (4,842,054, 43.3%) are retired workers, a specific feature of Italian trade unionism.

Historically, there have been highs and lows in inter-union relations. For decades, periods of coldness, if not hostility, followed periods of close cooperation. When the centre-right governments led by Silvio Berlusconi were in charge, relations were characterised by sharp differences and fierce competition. In recent years, the inter-confederal agreements signed from 2011 onwards can be interpreted as signs of a general improvement in the quality of relations. The three main confederations have a dual organisation, based on "vertical" and "horizontal" structures. Vertically, federations organise workers on a sectoral basis. Indeed, their primary function is to carry out collective bargaining at the sectoral level. Horizontally, the local inter-sectoral branches (*Camere del Lavoro*, for CGIL; *Unioni Sindacali Territoriali*, for CISL; *Camere Sindacali Territoriali*, for UIL) organise all workers in a given territory on a cross-sectoral basis. Historically, the CISL is characterised by a stronger role of sectoral federations. They perform bargaining activities locally on cross-sectoral issues and support workplace representation bodies in negotiations at the company level. They also offer services to workers, citizens, and migrants. The pluralism of Italian trade unionism is also characterised by several autonomous confederations, such as the UGL, CISAL, and Confsal. Moreover, "rank-and-file" unions, such as the Cobas, CUB, SGB, SLAI, and USB, are strong in specific sectors – e.g., transport, logistics, and public administration, particularly education.

In **Spain**, the trade union movement that emerged during the post-fascist transition was an attenuated duopoly of two major national confederations (UGT and CCOO) and some small professional and/or regional confederations. The General Union of Workers (UGT) was historically the dominant union confederation and managed to reorganise abroad during the Franco dictatorship with the support of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. During the 1960s, some groups of workers created the Workers' Committees, acting at the margins of the Franco regime. This strategy, which faced strong opposition from the Franco government, would crystallise after Franco's death into Workers' Commissions (CCOO). The different ideological orientations persisted during the early years of democracy. The communist CCOO endorsed a class ideology of industrial unionism and political confrontation; in contrast, the socialist UGT followed a cooperative strategy of political action based on social dialogue (Molina, 2005).

The relations between the two main confederations are generally of good quality, although subject to certain strains. They have reached a series of agreements with the employers, providing a framework for annual pay increases and the structure of industrial relations in Spain. They also signed a tripartite agreement with the government and employers on remote working arrangements in September 2020.

All confederations are structured on an industry basis with separate federations for different

Table 2: Main national social partners

Country	Trade unions	Employers' associations
Belgium	• Confederation of Christian Trade Unions (ACV-CSC) • General Federation of Belgian Labour (ABVV-FGTB) • Confederation of Liberal Trade Unions of Belgium (ACLVB-CGSLB)	• Federation of Belgian Enterprises (VBO-FEB) • Union of Self-Employed Entrepreneurs (UNIZO) • Union des Classes Moyennes (UCM)
Denmark	• Danish Trade Union Confederation (FH) • Danish Confederation of Professional Associations (AC) • The Association of Managers and Executives (LH)	• Confederation of Danish Employers (DA) • Financial Sector Employer Associations (FA) • Local Government Denmark (KL) • Danish Regions (Danske Regioner) • Ministry of Finance
Italy	• Italian General Confederation of Work (CGIL) • Italian Confederation of Workers' Unions (CISL) • Union of Italian Workers (UIL)	• General Confederation of Italian Industry (Confindustria) • National Confederation of Craftsmanship and SMEs (CNA) • Confartigianato Imprese • Italian Confederation of Businesses in the Trade, Tourism, and Service Sectors (Confesercenti) • Italian General Confederation of Companies, Professional Activities, and Self-employment (Confcommercio) • Italian Confederation of SMEs (Confapi) • National League of Cooperatives and Mutuals (Legacoop) • Confederation of Italian Cooperatives (Confcooperative)
Lithuania	• Lithuanian Trade Union Confederation (LPSK) • Lithuanian Trade Union "Solidarumas" (LPSF) • Lithuanian Trade Union "Sandrauga" (LPS)	• Lithuanian Confederation of Industrialists (LPK) • Confederation of Lithuanian Employers (LDK) • Association of Lithuanian Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Crafts (LPPARA) • Chamber of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania (LRŽŪR) • Investors' Forum (IF) • Lithuanian Business Confederation (LVK)
Spain	• Workers' Commissions (CCOO) • General Workers' Confederation (UGT)	• Spanish Confederation of Employers' Organisations (CEOE)

industries. As happened in Italy, Belgium, and Denmark, both CCOO and the UGT were reorganised by merging sectoral federations. In both CCOO and the UGT, federations are sections of the main confederations rather than autonomous bodies. Moreover, Spanish trade unionists are more likely to see themselves primarily as members of the UGT or CCOO than their sectoral federation. Both confederations also have regional structures, which correspond to the country's regional divisions, and play an essential role. In Spain, too, the plurality of the trade union system is high: alongside UGT e CCOO there are three other national confederations (USO, CGT, and CNT, the historic anarchist confederation) and several regional unions, echoing the region's demands for greater autonomy. In consequence of the economic crisis and the decline in union membership, Spanish trade unions have implemented profound organisational changes. In particular, the UGT has reduced the number of sectoral federations to three.

In **Lithuania**, the trade union movement is divided into three main confederations, all represented in the national tripartite social dialogue committee. The Lithuanian Trade Union Confederation (LPSK) is the largest one, with around 50,000 members, followed by the Lithuanian Trade Union "Solidarumas" (LPSF), with some 14,000 members, and the Lithuanian Trade Union "Sandrauga" (LPS), with around 10,000. There are also two smaller confederations, RJPS and LDF, and unions not affiliated to any confederation (e.g., the NPPSS, bringing together specialist unions representing parts of the public sector, such as the police and

firefighters). The LPSK emerged in 2002 from a merger of two trade union confederations that existed when Lithuania was part of the Soviet Union. Instead, Solidarumas developed from the movement for Lithuanian independence, Sajudis, although it took its current name only in 2002. The confederations are organised along sectoral lines, although they also have regional structures. The LPSK has 25 sectoral federations, Solidarumas has 15, and Sandrauga states it operates in 18 areas. The largest federations are in the public sector, particularly health and education. The LPSK's largest affiliate with 10,000 members, the education union LŠMPS, was created by merging two unions in May 2019. The LPSK is closer to the Social Democratic Party, while Solidarumas, historically closer to the conservatives, now takes a more neutral stance. Despite these political differences, the confederations have cooperated in the past, as opposed to important changes to the government's labour code.

2.3 Union membership trends

The BreakBack countries present similarities in some labour market trends – namely, the decline of trade union stronghold sectors and the rise of atypical work – which exacerbate the unions' difficulties reaching vulnerable workers, composed chiefly of young people (but also migrants and service workers). How this affected trade union density in each county depends on other contextual factors.

In **Denmark**, union density has declined since the mid-1990, from 73% in 1995 to 63% in 2018 (Ibsen et al. 2015; Larsen et al., 2022). The last decades experienced significant changes in the occupational structure on the Danish labour market as the shrinking of sectors representing the strongholds of the Danish collective bargaining model with solid traditions for high union densities (i.e., manufacturing and construction), and, conversely, the expansion of less densely regulated sectors in terms of collective bargaining, union densities and workplace representation such as private services (Ilsøe and Madsen, 2017b). Similarly, Denmark faced the rising of atypical workers, especially in companies without collective agreements coverage (Scheur, 2011; 2017; Larsen, 2011; Ilsøe and Madsen, 2017; Larsen et al., 2019). Danish trade unions increasingly struggle to attract young people aged less than 25 years, atypical workers, and non-ethnic Danes. The decrease in union density is also due to legal and political factors. Labour market reforms have liberalised the traditional Danish Ghent system and tightened employees' rights to tax exemptions regarding their trade union fees. Consequently, historically strong unions such as those affiliated with LO have lost members since the mid-1990s. In contrast, the academic unions, the alternative unions, and some white-collar unions under the trade union confederation FTF have experienced rapid growth. Indeed, their membership base has expanded substantially, especially throughout the first decade of the new Millennium. However, these unions have not been able to attract and organise all the members that LO and its affiliated unions have lost.

Belgium is among the countries with the highest trade union density and collective bargaining coverage in the EU. According to Vandaele (2019), in Belgium, the average union density equals 55% between 2000 and 2009 and 54% between 2010 and 2016. Moreover, union membership is fragmented: workers from all sectors, occupations, and ages can be found among union members (Eurofound, 2010). The high union density rate has been attributed to institutional embeddedness and the existence of the Ghent system. In this system, trade unions are closely involved in paying unemployment benefits, incentivising workers to join a trade union. Although this system has recently come under pressure, Belgian trade unions did retain an important role in paying unemployment benefits. Union membership has then declined less than in the other EU Member States. However, the

main challenge for Belgian trade unions appears linked to the demographic changes in the labour market. Ageing of the workforce and difficulties in recruiting new union members suggest that union membership is likely to decline in the future.

In **Italy**, trade unions have a high membership compared to the European average. Since the early 1990s, it has been permanently above 10 million (Carrieri and Feltrin, 2016). In the long term, the three main trade unions increased their members from less than 9 million in 1981 to almost 12 million in 2011. Then, they faced a moderate decline. In 2018, nevertheless, membership started rising once again, a sign of fluctuating but not collapsing membership. To fully understand Italy's membership trends, we must consider a national anomaly: the considerable weight of retired workers among union members (taken alone, 43.3% of the total). At the same time, it is also worth noting the low union density (8.0%) among persons aged 15-24. The low propensity of young people to join the unions is connected with structural features of the Italian labour market, making them likely to find temporary jobs, mainly in small and service firms with low unionisation. In this context, migrants represent 15% of the unionised labour force (Visser, 2019b; last available data, 2016), although, from the early 1990s, the unionisation of foreign workers has grown faster than that of native ones. This group represents an essential driver of membership growth. Looking at sectoral dynamics, associative data confirms a well-known phenomenon: the diminished weight of the primary and, above all, the secondary sector – that is, the historical bases of union membership – which represent less than one-fourth of all members. Then, a remarkable phenomenon is the continuous growth of union membership among self-employed, atypical workers and unemployed persons. On closer inspection, industrial sectors showed very different labour-market performances in the reference period, which do not always explain union membership trends. The textile, chemical and energy industries, for instance, had a massive contraction in employment. In these sectors, membership dynamics can be traced back to the labour market's structural changes (Bordogna 2021). On the other hand, the metalworking industry benefited from employment growth, not followed by increased union members (Carrieri and Feltrin, 2016). In construction, a drastic fall in employment levels was accompanied by a relative weakening of sectoral trade unions; thus, this sector recorded an increase in union density.

Spain has historically had relatively low union membership. The evolution of membership figures in Spain has not followed the same downward pattern as in other EU countries. From the 1980s, there has been sustained growth in the number of members, although at a slower pace than the active population. Union membership reached a peak in 2010 and then started a decline until 2016, when membership started to increase again. The manufacturing sector has been a traditional stronghold of trade unions, with higher union density levels than other sectors. However, with the decline of the manufacturing sector, the service sector, and in particular public services, accounts for most of the members of trade unions. The low membership levels of trade unions are a combination of several factors: *institutional* (automatic extension of collective agreements and the use of electoral criteria in order to determine the representativeness of trade unions); *organisational* (complex multi-level organisations with regional and sectoral federations, but with a moderate level of centralisation making it challenging to develop effective organising strategies (Martínez Lucio, 2003); *structural* (a production system where small and micro companies are predominant and there is a vital seasonal component in crucial sectors of the economy); *sociocultural* (historically low levels of civic engagement in Spain). There are no up-to-date official figures on union density in Spain. That means that union membership

and density data are self-reported by trade unions and should be handled with care. Union density is estimated at around 21%. Looking into the differences by type of contract, we find how being in a temporary contract constitutes an important factor for non-affiliation to the trade union. At the same time, the union density of those under 35 is half that of those older than 35. The high levels of precariousness and unemployment among young people provide minimal incentives to join trade unions (Molina 2021).

The number of trade union members has been permanently decreasing in **Lithuania** since 2000, with union density fluctuating around 7-8% during the last decade. However, Lithuanian law entitles Lithuanians who possess working capacity with employment rights and promote trade union membership (Masso et al., 2021). Moreover, there are no retired persons, students, or unemployed persons among the union members, nor are there migrants. Furthermore, the public sector has always dominated the membership structure; this trend will likely develop in the near future. Considering that women have dominated employment in the public sector, membership rates have been higher than for men. ◆

Third part
Strategies to strengthen union membership

3.1 Comparing union strategies

This section focuses on trade union renewal strategies (Behrens et al., 2004; Drahokoupil, 2015; ETUI, 2017; Vandaele, 2019). Generally, these strategies aim to increase the number of union members, which implies reshaping membership to cope with critical changes in the labour market, such as high unemployment rates, the decreasing weight of manual work, and the growth of atypical work.

However, it should be pointed out from the very beginning that, although these challenges concern all the BreakBack countries to some extent, it presents itself in very different ways in the various national contexts: not only, as we have seen, membership trends are very different from one country to another, but, furthermore, a decline in membership has different meanings in different national systems (Frege and Kelly, 2003). That is, the role of what is called associative power can be more or less relevant to the capacity for trade union action: although the decline in membership is inevitably a problem for trade unions (membership being the primary source of revenue), its specific significance depends on its combination with other union power resources in the various contexts (to give but one example, in Spain, trade unions representativeness depends mainly on the electoral mandate in workplace councils, rather than on the number of members). In different contexts and for different reasons, union renewal strategies often tackle the issue of membership trends as a secondary outcome.

Among the countries examined in this report, **Belgium** faces the least complex challenges. As discussed, membership density is stable and higher than in the other countries, reflecting a long history of politically and institutionally embedded trade unions with close links to civil society. In this context, trade union renewal strategies to extend union representation to new occupational groups have been based mainly on extending existing measures to excluded workers. The unions, however, took initiatives to improve their effectiveness, expanding the services provided, raising the quality of service provision, and modernising communication tools.

Denmark still maintains a high rate of trade union density, even though trade unions experienced a significant membership loss. To attract atypical workers, Danish unions under FH reconsidered their approach shifting from trying to eliminate atypical work to acknowledging, organising, and regulating it through collective bargaining (Mailand and Larsen, 2011; Larsen and Mailand, 2018; Ilsøe and Madsen, 2017a). Moreover, many professional unions developed specific organising strategies targeting specific groups of hard-to-unionise workers.

In **Italy**, too, the primary strategy to reach non-unionised workers is to extend collective bargaining. In this regard, the aim is to introduce collective bargaining where it does not exist (e.g.,

"new jobs", especially in logistics and transport). There are also efforts to provide innovative bargaining practices, like the promotion of "inclusive bargaining" (aiming to go beyond the boundaries of sectoral federations and negotiate working conditions in environments that connect different groups of workers, such as airports or hospitals) and "social negotiation" (with local authorities, regarding the benefits and services they provide). Finally, a great deal of emphasis is placed on the range of tools that the union uses to meet workers and their representation needs. This means increasing the ways of bridging with workers through innovative methods (e.g., street-level unions, open assemblies to involve new types of workers at "unusual" times and places, opening up union's offices to civil society associations, new attention to freelance workers). However, at the central level, little attention is still paid to providing services as a strategic tool to attract new members.

In **Spain**, the institutional setting hinders union membership by limiting the selective incentives for union members, and the unions rely more on institutional than associative power. Here, a predominance of passive approaches to recruitment (i.e., reduced fees for specific groups) has emerged. Two main strategies have been identified in union leaders' discourse regarding organisational change and the need to reach hard-to-unionise groups. The former aims to strengthen the link between the unions and civil society, promoting the modernisation of structures, communication strategies, and services offered to specific groups of workers, also paying attention to young people and developing proximity services (e.g., welcome protocols and permanent contact with local-level officials). The second strategy faces the worries about the loss of influence and negative attitudes towards unions. It aims to reinforce the union's working-class identity while increasing its influence on policymaking.

As in the Spanish case, the **Lithuanian** confederations consider improving the public perception of the union a priority. In order to increase their visibility and authority in the general public, union leaders have started active work towards more active participation in television and radio programmes, attendance at the meetings in Parliament and the Government, organisation of various campaigns for the urban and regional population to inform them about the activities of trade unions. These activities are not aimed directly at increasing the number of trade union members but at making the general public aware of trade union activities and opportunities and legitimising their role as a public actor.

3.2 The role of servicing

Among the strategic options that can be employed to increase union membership and revitalise union action is **servicing**. Servicing is rooted in trade unions' original "service ethos", derived from mutualistic traditions. In its modern version, it pursues multiple aims. Indeed, it goes beyond the supply of individual goods aimed at strengthening the worker's position in the labour market. It is a strategy that relies on supplying services as "selective incentives" to join the union and, in so doing, increase the number of members and raise funds. Furthermore, it is a way of extending the range of action of trade unions to include unprotected workers and persons excluded from the labour market. As such, it can be a response to the growing individualisation of employment relations. As already noticed, its rationale is to increase the perceived usefulness of union membership. Union services are widespread in the BreakBack countries, although to different extents. In some cases, they are institutionalised (e.g., in Belgium and Denmark) or have long-standing traditions (e.g., in Italy); in others, they fall outside the core union activities (e.g., in Spain) or are a relatively new feature of the trade union system (e.g., in Lithuania). The strategic approach that lies behind them also differs significantly from one country to another, depending on State traditions in industrial relations, the degree of development

of the trade union movement, the prevailing model of trade unionism, the geographical spreading of local union headquarters, the degree and extension of employment protection.

Belgian trade unions have a long history of service supply, which they consider a core activity next to typical trade unions activities, including the organisation and representation of workers and collective bargaining. Unions typically offer an extensive service package to their members, taking a life-cycle approach that aims to support workers at all stages of their lives. Belgian trade unions provide services on a broad spectrum of issues: social security, labour law and rights, leave systems, purchasing power, well-being at work, health and safety, diversity (ethnicity, gender, disability), temporary work and other types of contracts, taxation, education, and training, as well as the payment of unemployment benefits (Ghent system).

Similarly, in **Italy**, the enlargement of service provisions is a preponderant strategy among the three main confederations. However, the emphasis on these activities and their role in influencing membership trends are perceived differently. The general orientation is to expand individual servicing using three techniques: strengthening existing tools through more differentiation, meeting categories of people excluded from services; developing bilateral tools; providing innovative answers for specific sections of the labour market through special initiatives. In particular, there is a widespread tendency to equip the powerful tax assistance system (CAAF) with skills that can assist specific categories of workers, such as the self-employed, who have different tax regimes from employees, which are more complicated. The same can be said for specific forms of legal protection: for example, lawyers who are experts in private law and not only in labour law or who can also provide advice on disputes with the public administration.

Danish trade unions offer a broad package of services to their members who have specific characteristics, depending on the occupational status targeted by the individual union. Services include insurance, renting summer houses, and shopping discounts to social and psychological counselling, as well as novel, more business-like services to support start-ups.

Although service supply is not the primary strategic concern of **Spanish trade unions,** the two biggest confederations offer free legal advice on labour and other issues (e.g., mortgages). Moreover, they promote discounts on a wide range of goods and services or reduced prices for hotels and resorts.

On the contrary, in the **Lithuanian case**, the provision of services for workers does not appear to be a common phenomenon among trade unions. However, union members can benefit from legal consultations, legal representation in labour disputes, and many leisure centres.

Usually, the studies on trade union renewal deal mainly with **traditional servicing**, namely the offer of "selective incentives" through services as a way to retain or increase traditional membership. However, the analysis of servicing approaches in the BreakBack countries revealed a new approach, with servicing being a way of bridging with hard-to-unionise workers (e.g., immigrants, precarious or peripheral workers) or addressing existing problems with new tools. In these cases, innovative services are developed alongside traditional ones. This means that "old-style" individual services are increasingly conceived as leverage to attract new members and build new workers' communities. In other words, traditional servicing is becoming **strategic**. That is why we coined the term **collectivising services**. The latter can be defined as "individual services for collective purposes"; they target groups lacking identity and legitimisation to respond to individual needs and "construct" a collective.

The development of the aforementioned new forms of service provision indicates that services can contribute to innovating union action as part of the strategic action of trade unions in many countries. ◆

Fourth part
The case studies

4.1 Types of servicing

The BreakBack project has selected a number of cases that represent innovative services in one of the two dimensions presented above. They are all cases in which the service – or the trade union initiative of which the service is an indispensable part – can be read as an "instrument" of renewal for the *membership* dimension.

The "target" of the service activity can classify the 14 case studies conducted by the BreakBack researchers (see Table 3). We can then look at the services dedicated to self-employed workers, platform workers, and precarious workers or unemployed people.

Servicing towards the self-employed is the most frequent type of servicing. Italy has three examples. **Vivace CISL** is a national association for freelancers and self-employed workers affiliated with Felsa, the CISL Federation for self-employed and atypical workers. Vivace was born an online community, but territorial offices will be opened. Vivace aims to offer services (Tax/ Legal Advisory), develop a collective culture and identity, and represent the self-employed workers in national discussions. **Partita Viva Vicenza - CISL** represents VAT holders and provides them with services. Furthermore, it has opened a co-working space in the heart of the trade union headquarters. While maintaining its specific characteristics, recently, Partita Viva Vicenza joined Vivace. **Nidil-CGIL Firenze** provides services to self-employed and atypical workers, turning individual issues into collective ones.

It promotes territorial agreements outside the perimeter of traditional union protection – for example, in the case of tour guides.

In Denmark, one example of services dedicated to self-employed professionals is the **HK Freelance Bureau**. The latter aims to regulate freelance work and assist freelancers with various services related to the freelance business, such as collective agreement coverage, assistance with invoicing, tax returns, insurance, and work contracts. The Freelance Bureau is open to union and non-union members – but with some service restrictions.

The Belgian **United Freelancers** was launched by ACV-CSC. It targets three groups of workers: freelancers (the self-employed without personnel), self-employed in their secondary occupation, and platform workers. Even though these workers perform similar tasks and in similar conditions as regular employees, their employment status does not give them the same rights or level of protection. ACV-CSC aspires to represent all workers active in the Belgian labour market and solve their problems regardless of employment status.

Both the Lithuanian cases are related to professional workers. The **Lithuanian Nurses' Organisation (LSSO)** is a branch of LPSK, organising and providing services for nurses. LSSO organises professional development services. In particular, it provides training and

issues certificates necessary for accreditation of nurses in Lithuania. It was established to meet the need for reformation of the profession due to poor working conditions, heavy workloads, and the need to represent the profession's interest at the national and international levels. The main aims of LSSO were the improvement of nursing-related legislation, the establishment of decent professional standards, and the improvement of the education of nurses. **GKVPS**, a trade union representing guides and tour guides, is a branch of the Lithuanian Trade Union "Solidarumas" that organise and provide services for self-employed guides. GKVPS provides some training, represents the interests of tour guides in state institutions, organises various actions and inspections against illegally working guides and unfair tourism agencies. The reasons for its establishment were the extremely poor working conditions of tour guides, such as fewer social guarantees and possibilities to negotiate, a high share of illegally working guides, unfair competition, low income, and an inappropriate and unclear legal regulation.
Among the BreakBack cases, there is room for two services tailored to platform workers. The **Platform for Platform Workers** is an initiative of the Belgian ABVV-FGTB. The platform is for all workers who have questions about their rights. Through the platform, workers are dispatched to the department that is best able to help them. Its main objective is to get more grip on platform work. Attracting new members is only a secondary goal. The Spanish **TuRespuestaSindicalYa.com (TRSY!)** is a top-down initiative for platform workers created with the inter-sectoral coordination of the UGT. The service aims to tackle issues, problems and demands of platform workers. This service also functions as a digital union section. Within the service, a mailbox is provided to answer questions on (bogus) self-employed rights. The TRSY! service also provides legal coverage for platform workers, especially in legal claims against platform companies to denounce their bogus self-employment situation. Even though the service was intended for platform workers, many people from Spain's rural areas use it as their only way to contact the trade union. The Danish **3F-Hilfr agreement** is an innovative collective agreement negotiated between the cleaning platform Hilfr and the United Federation of Danish Workers (3F). It is a combined collective agreement for both self-employed/freelancers and traditional employees (i.e., on zero-hour contracts), along with novel conflict resolutions mediation. 3F aimed to lift workers with different employment status' wages and working conditions as well as attract new members within a digital labour market they rarely organise.
Three service activities regard precarious or unemployed workers. **Flexwerker DM** is a Danish grassroots initiative to create a platform and raise awareness of non-standard work and its associated risks among humanities and social science academics. In the beginning, there were no ties to the trade union; later, the Danish Association of Masters and PhDs (DM) supported it financially and integrated it into their service offer. Flexwerker organises thematic workshops and network activities, publishes news articles on non-standard work, and is open to union and non-union members. The aims of the **CCOO Catalunya - El WhatsApp de la Precariedad** are to bridge the gap between the organisation and non-unionised members, influence collective bargaining at the company level, and become a tool of participation and interaction between people suffering the same precarious conditions. The service provides legal information and advice via phone and a free instant messaging app. Doing this focuses not only on labour-related issues but also on social vulnerability issues. Moreover, it is a response to the fragmentation of labour realities. Finally, the Italian **Sportello Lavoro - CISL Firenze-Prato** is a frontline service for unemployed workers, providing information, skills analysis, job search support, and training. During the pandemic, the front-office service has

Table 3: Main target groups of servicing practices

	Belgium	Denmark	Italy	Lithuania	Spain
Self-employed workers	• United Freelancers	• Freelance bureau	• Vivace • Partita Viva • Nidil	• LSSO • GKVPS	
Platform workers	• Platform for platform workers	• 3F-Hilfr agreement			• TRSY!
Precarious workers or unemployed persons		• Flexwerker	• Sportello Lavoro		• El WhatsApp de la Precariedad
Other			• Quadrifor		

become a virtual service in synergy with trade union federations.

The last case can hardly be homologated to others presented so far. It is **Quadrifor**, the Italian national joint body administered by a committee of employers and trade union representatives. It aims to train "middle managers" in the service sector. This is an example of direct engagement of social actors in the empowerment of managers and professionals (for which some sectoral trade union organisations have promoted ad hoc associations).

4.2 Varieties of servicing

As previously noted, the role of servicing varies considerably in different countries. It differs according to the trade union traditions, their organisational capacity, and the institutionalisation of industrial relations. Moreover, the servicing may also respond to different objectives, depending on the different industrial relations context and the different «power resources» available to trade unions. This variety also emerges in the BreakBack case studies on servicing. In order to understand this interconnection, we can refer to at least five relevant aspects.

1. The **centrality of the service** for the trade union body providing it – i.e., whether the service offered represents the "core business" of trade union action or represents only part of it, either large or small.
2. The **type of service provided** by the trade union, whether individual or strategic, according to the definition mentioned above.
3. The **level of engagement of the overall organisation** in the singular service – i.e., whether the service provided is part of a strategy at the national level (sectoral or confederal) or is the product of a bottom-up strategy by a local initiative.
4. **How the organisation provides services** – i.e., directly or indirectly as a gateway to other union branches that will supply the service.
5. Finally, the union's **organisational strength** in service provision is intended as the resources deployed to provide the service.

Concerning the first issue – **service centrality** – some initiatives are the direct outcome of a strategic choice to meet the emerging needs of a group of workers through servicing. This is the case for trade unions offering training to their members (*Quadrifor*, IT). It is also the case for *United Freelancers - ACV-CSC* (BE), *Platform for Platform Workers - ABVV-FGTB* (BE), *TRSY! - UGT* (ES), and *Vivace CISL* (IT), in which the services provided respond to confederal strategies that target a relevant labour market niche, that of platform and freelance work, otherwise difficult to reach. On the other hand, some grassroots initiatives are the outcomes of local entrepreneurship, on which sectoral unions have not a specific mandate of representation within the Confederation. This is the case for *Flexwerker DM* (DK), *GKVPS - Solidarumas* (LT), *Nidil-CGIL Firenze* (IT), *Sportello Lavoro - CISL Firenze-Prato* (IT), *Partita Viva Vicenza - CISL* (IT).

A second core difference between the cases rests on the **type of service**. In traditional servicing, the ratio is to supply individual incentives to

retain or increase members (*Quadrifor*, IT, or *LSSO-LPSK*, LT). In other words, the service is tailored to specific individual needs while not aiming to build a community. On the contrary, strategic servicing responds to specific individual needs with either an explicit or latent collectivising function (e.g., *Partita Viva Vicenza - CISL*, IT; *Vivace CISL*, IT; *Nidil-CGIL Firenze*, IT; *Platform for Platform Workers - ABVV-FGTB*, BE; *TRSY! - UGT*, ES; *Flexwerker DM*, DK; *3F-Hilfr agreement*, DK; *United Freelancers - ACV-CSC*, BE; and *GKVPS - Solidarumas*, LT). In these cases, services perform at least two other functions besides offering individual protection. The main one is related to the "legitimisation" of the union organisation towards certain workers, which can serve in terms of membership and effective representation. The second aim regards bringing out, through the services, a collective dimension and encouraging unionisation. However, this does not mean that the union necessarily uses the services instrumentally to attract members.
In strategic servicing, services represent short-term individual outcomes, but here it also lies a collectivising function. That is why we can define strategic servicing as providing a set of individual and collectivising servicing towards satisfying individual needs and community-building.
For example, in the case of *TRSY! - UGT* (ES), the service has a latent purpose of collectively organising hard-to-unionise workers – namely, bogus self-employed workers. *Partita Viva Vicenza - CISL* (IT) provided services for the self-employed and a coworking community. *Vivace CISL* (IT) offers services that meet collective criteria (i.e., risk insurance at an average rate calculated on the whole community). Through the *Platform for Platform Workers, ABVV-FGTB* (BE) aims to get more grip on platform work. As a matter of fact, platform workers reached via the website sometimes joined the union and became trade union delegates themselves.
On the other hand, in some cases, services have been instrumentally used to contact specific categories of workers. In these cases, the instrumental dimension appears more pronounced, where the service is often the beginning of more traditional organising. *Nidil-CGIL Firenze* (IT) and *CCOO Catalunya - El WhatsApp de la Precariedad* (ES) represent this third logic. In the first case, through the services, the union succeeded in organising Florentine tour guides and then bargained for a first trade labour agreement with Tour Operators. In the Spanish case, service is (also) a way to try to influence collective bargaining at the company level. Once users contact the service to explain particular situations of precariousness, the union activates field research to organise workers collectively in similar situations.
Regarding the third issue – the level of **engagement in servicing** – a distinction must be made between the unions in which service supply is a core activity and those in which it is not. Among the former are the unions that offer services for professional development, such as *LSSO-LPSK* (LT) – providing training and certification for nurses – and *Quadrifor* (IT) – providing training for middle managers. In both cases, significant financial and human resources are assured to provide services because those organisations are born service providers. Other cases share an experimental nature. In the latter, servicing is just one of the many activities of a trade union. In the cases of *Nidil-CGIL Firenze* (IT) and *CCOO Catalunya - El WhatsApp de la Precariedad* (ES), the main goal is to reinforce legitimacy towards specific professional groups with the services being just the means to achieve this goal.
The fourth issue is related to **organisational features of service provision.** Servicing can be indirectly by a "gateway" organisation or directly through a service-oriented one. In the former case, those who promote services are no more than a "contact point" (e.g., *Platform for Platform Workers - ABVV-FGTB*, BE; *CCOO Catalunya - El WhatsApp de la Precariedad*, ES). In the latter, trade

Table 4: Synopsis of the case studies

	Centrality			Type		Engagement		Provision		Resources	
	Yes	No	Other	Individual	Strategic	Top-down	Bottom-up	Directly	Indirectly	Internal	External
Platform for PWs (BE)	x				x				x		
United freelancers (BE)	x				x					x	x
Flexwerker (DK)		x			x						
Hilfr agreement (DK)					x						
HK Freelance Bureau (DK)			x					x			
CCOO					x		x		x		
TRSY! (ES)	x				x			x			
Nidil (IT)		x	x		x		x				
Partita Viva (IT)		x	x		x						
Quadrifor (IT)	x			x		x					
Sportello Lavoro (IT)		x	x					x			
Vivace (IT)	x				x					x	x
GKVPS (LT)		x	x		x						
LSSO (LT)				x		x					

union operators take care of the incoming issues providing legal and tax assistance, guidance, and information to workers (e.g., *Sportello Lavoro - CISL Firenze-Prato, IT; TRSY! - UGT, ES; HK Freelance Bureau,* DK). Moreover, they aim to establish a solid relationship with the workers and build a cohesive community.

Finally, central to **organisational strength** is the internal or external organisational assets. The number of trade unionists involved, the diffusion of the points of contacts, the access to organisational resources of the national or local confederations can influence servicing effectiveness. Grassroots initiatives are fragile: union action depends primarily on a tight circle of people – in some cases, a trade unionist – rather than on the overall organisation itself. In this case, the lack of institutionalisation leads to the risk of personalisation. Networks, relationships, and information risk becoming the property of the trade unionist who started the initiative and being dispersed if he/she has a professional discontinuity. However, when grassroots initiatives can access their organisation's human and logistical resources, they can increase the scope of their activities. The most striking case is that of *United Freelancers - ACV-CSC* (BE), which has no more than four people employed but, through external experts and "traditional" service networks, has taken on over 1,000 dossiers. The same could be said of *Vivace CISL* (IT), which was managed by very few people in the beginning.

4.2.1 Differences in the access to services

Among the strategic choices of these innovative services, there is the issue of access: are they member-only services, or are they open to everyone? Is the service to be paid or not?

The first relevant differentiation is due to the national context. The well-established relationship between union membership and access to services, typical of Belgian trade unions, influences the cases of the *Platform for Platform Workers - ABVV-FGTB* (BE) and *United Freelancers - ACV-CSC* (BE). Indeed, for them, membership is compulsory.

In other contexts, where membership is not required to access the services, what matters is both the type of service offered and the strategic aim planned for the service. Where services are different from those traditionally offered

by trade unions, there is a tendency to ask for a fee, but this is often removed or significantly reduced if a membership is taken up. In this case, the responses to individual needs are part of a course that incentivises membership; therefore, services play a strategic role in the unionising strategy (as in the cases of *LSSO-LPSK,* LT, *Nidil-CGIL Firenze*, IT, and *Partita Viva Vicenza - CISL,* IT). A particular case is that of the *HK Freelance Bureau* (DK). Indeed, the latter acts as a not-for-profit organisation offering services and collective bargaining coverage in exchange for a fee based on the value of individual contracts. Thus, fees are not related to union membership. On the other hand, there are service restrictions for non-union members, which function as an indirect incentive to join the union.

Then, there are services not aimed at promoting membership directly. Services designed to facilitate contact with workers who are dispersed throughout the territory or difficult to reach are often free of charge and do not require registration, as is the case of *Sportello Lavoro - CISL Firenze-Prato* (IT) or *CCOO Catalunya - El WhatsApp de la Precariedad* (ES) and *TRSY! - UGT* (ES). The same can be said of the *3F-Hilfr agreement* (DK), which allows individual workers to choose their employment status after 100 hours on the platform, regardless they are members or not. Finally, services such as those provided by *Quadrifor* (IT) are addressed to both members and non-members and subject to payment.

4.3 Servicing from the workers' point of view

4.3.1 Services, identity, representation

Most service users approached the unions mainly to get a specific issue resolved. A first group can be identified with workers who ask for professional or business services. This is truer for high-skilled sectors, both in the case of workers with an established professional identity (i.e., nurses for *LSSO-LPSK*, LT; middle-managers for *Quadrifor*, IT) and that of freelancers (i.e., *United Freelancers - ACV-CSC,* BE; *HK Freelance Bureau*, DK; *Vivace CISL,* IT; *Partita Viva Vicenza - CISL,* IT). In these cases, trade unions compete with other providers in institutionalised markets of private services. Their ability to respond to individual needs and a community-oriented approach can make a difference. Generally, low-skilled or precarious workers seem more interested in demands for individual protection about their working conditions. Workers *CCOO Catalunya - El WhatsApp de la Precariedad* (ES) and *TRSY! - UGT* (ES), for example, address trade unions demanding aid in their relationship with the employers (e.g., legal advice or protection concerning employment terms and working conditions). Furthermore, the safer working conditions obtained from the agreement with 3F are the main reason for choosing *Hilfr* (DK) as their working platform. Similarly, the requests addressed to *Sportello Lavoro - CISL Firenze-Prato* (IT) concern a form of protection that reduces the risks of uncertainty and increases employment chances.

From the workers' point of view, a request of more than individual or practical outcomes is not to be excluded. First of all, most typically, the demand for **representation**. This demand mainly concerns the unions organised around a specific profession (i.e., *LSSO-LPSK,* LT, for nurses; *GKVPS - Solidarumas*, LT, for tour guides), but also involves services addressed to platform workers (*TRSY! - UGT,* ES; *Platform for Platform Workers - ABVV-FGTB,* BE). Freelancers show a more complicated relationship with representation. If in some ways they seem to express resentment for the lack of representation of independent workers by trade unions, they also seem to look for unions mainly with individual purposes: in those cases where the union participated in national bargaining tables on the condition of independent workers, as happened to *Vivace CISL* (IT), for example, this engagement does not seem to be wholly recognised by workers or at any rate does not particularly affect the relationship between workers and trade unions.

Workers' demands may also involve some kind of enhancement of **communal belonging**. This is sometimes expressed in a direct request to the trade unions for recognition and strengthening of the identity of one's occupational group (in our cases, this concerns above all platform workers), or, more indirectly, in need for a "professional community", expressed by freelancers: the need to confront one another with similar professionals, to expand their network, to build new professional relationships. The services for freelancers and atypical workers explicitly address this question. This is the case for the coworking space set up by *Partita Viva Vicenza -CISL* (IT), *Flexwerker DM* (DK), and *HK Freelance Bureau* (DK).

These more "community-oriented" requests do not imply a predisposition of our professional groups to be mobilised by the trade unions. A militant attitude is rarely sought, even in sectors interested in what we have called "collectivising" services. In cases involving platform workers, unions often claim to have recruited some of them as union delegates, although there is no evidence that this is a common occurrence. The situation for freelancers is even more nuanced. In some contexts, such as Belgium, the demand for a highly professionalised service seems to exhaust the workers' requests to the union. In Italy, instead, there seems to be a demand for community engagement or forms of activism, although limited to cases of people closer to the unions for ideological reasons or politically active. Even in the successful cases of mobilisation of freelancers (i.e., *Nidil-CGIL Firenze*, IT, and *GKVPS - Solidarumas,* LT), the latter did not show reliance on collective action.

As regards membership, usually, as we have seen, the unions' aim in service provision was not to increase membership per se but build legitimacy for the union in specific groups. Other factors, such as the general perception of trade unions in different national contexts, influence the attitude of workers towards trade union membership. The Belgian cases, where membership is compulsory for using the service, show stable growth of members over time.

In the Italian cases dealing with hard-to-unionise workers (i.e., *Partita Viva Vicenza - CISL, Vivace CISL,* and *Nidil-CGIL Firenze* for freelancers, and *Sportello Lavoro - CISL Firenze-Prato* for the unemployed), the results in terms of membership increases are different due to the organisational scale, whether national or local. However, the trade unionists interviewed claim that the service channel is virtually the only way these workers join the union in all cases. The consequences in terms of new members from the Lithuanian and Spanish cases are more difficult to assess.

Even where the services have significantly increased union membership, this has meant a volatile membership. This is often the case for members caught through union services. In this sense, the main challenge is how to turn this "associative" success into an "organisational" one.

4.4 What the unions do

4.4.1 Servicing, legitimisation, identity

The case studies show that trade unions are trying to pursue at least three different goals: extend union membership to unorganised workers; legitimise the emerging demands for representation within the trade unions; paving the way for collective action.

Specifically designed to bridge the gap between some occupational groups and the trade union, servicing works as a strategy for legitimising the relationship between trade unions and hard-to-unionise workers. The legitimacy issue is multifaceted: on the one hand, it is about how specific groups of workers perceive trade unions; on the other hand, it concerns whether trade unions pay attention to these groups and recognise them as union categories.

LSSO-LPSK (LT), *GKVPS - Solidarumas,* LT and *Nidil-CGIL Firenze* target established professions, operating in a regulated market, with a stable professional identity, such as tour guides and

nurses. Thus, have the opportunity to leverage on an already existing professional identity to increase legitimacy on trade union. However, this is not the case for most BreakBack case studies, which target groups lacking collective identity and legitimisation, both outside and inside trade union organisations.
Some services address groups with a certain degree of legitimacy within the unions – witnessed, for example, by the existence of union sections representing them – but still find it hard to create a stable relationship with the targeted sectors. This is the case for *TRSY! - UGT* (ES), with *UGT* that already had an associate union representing the self-employed *(UPTA)* and bogus self-employment being in a "grey area" between different union federations. The *TRSY!* service, working within the union to establish a clear strategy towards the representation and coverage of these platform workers, was meant to address this problem and legitimise these workers' demands in front of the union.
In the same way, *Flexwerker DM* (DK) has been working to legitimise the demands of precarious workers in academia, changing the perception of these workers within the union. The *Danish Association of Masters and PhDs* and the *3F-Hilfr agreement* (DK) paved the way to various attempts to bargain new agreements with other platforms, legitimising the unions' representation of platform workers. The *HK Freelance Bureau* (DK), too, attempted to represent these groups by signing a collective agreement, where it represented both sides of the industry.
The legitimacy of any occupational categories varies according to the national context and the specific organisation: in the case of *CGIL*, in Italy, there was not a union federation for self-employed workers, so it has been a local strategic choice of *Nidil Firenze* (the trade union federation dedicated to precarious and non-standard work) to provide services as a tool to address the new forms of self-employment. Generally speaking, the cases related to self-employment are those in which a "weak" legitimacy emerges the most from both points of view. From this point of view, in the cases of *HK Freelance Bureau* (DK), *Vivace CISL* (IT), *Partita Viva Vicenza - CISL* (IT), and *United Freelancers - ACV-CSC* (BE), servicing has enlarged the traditional scope of trade unions.
It is more difficult to assess to what extent these initiatives have successfully legitimised trade unions in the face of these hard-to-unionise workers. While influenced by the service provision, the perception of the legitimacy of one's occupational group within trade unions is primarily related to the general perception of the unions in the public arena at the national level. For example, in the Italian and Lithuanian cases, freelancers still feel marginal in union strategies and consider their experience with union services an exception. On the other hand, the Belgian cases appear different, even if many freelancers were surprised that trade unions supported the self-employed and felt this was a favourable development. The same goes for precarious workers in the Danish and Spanish cases.
The legitimisation issue is exacerbated by the services' target groups representing undefined identities (e.g., freelancers and precarious workers). In some cases, the strategy was to convey a sense of shared identity and legitimise it within the union through the services. Then, we can note several ploys to enhance this commonality. *3F* (DK) invests considerable resources to reach platform workers via social media, especially by organising or tapping into existing online groups via Facebook or WhatsApp. *Partita Viva Vicenza - CISL* (IT) has launched a coworking space to encourage freelancers to meet and share experiences. *HK Freelance Bureau* (DK) has attempted to improve service users' working conditions and create shared services. *Vivace CISL* (IT) has focused on community-building, providing professional services at shared rates, and has opened local branches to facilitate meeting and sharing opportunities. In all these cases, there is already a defined occupational

group with specific needs but without a collective identity and recognition by the union. Unions try to create this "collective feeling" with an innovative concoction of service provision and participation tools. The shared purpose is to take part in the build-up process of the community that they intend to represent, offering, via servicing, some kind of collective goods. Sometimes the final aim is to arrive at a legislative intervention, sometimes collective or workplace bargaining.
In the two cases involving tour guides, *GKVPS - Solidarumas* (LT) and *Nidil-CGIL Firenze* (IT), services have been organised around a specific professional identity and used to channel service users into collective mobilisation. This brings us to the next section, devoted to collective action.

4.4.2 Servicing and mobilisation

Servicing activities, therefore, are suitable for providing not only individual goods but also collective goods, either by offering services designed to build or strengthen a community or through other service-related activities (for example, offering communication and participation tools). This is the case for groups of workers that are marginal to union action, whose demands focus on services.
However, the research also reveals cases in which the use of services is used strategically in a practical way to create a collective and mobilise it. In these cases, we are faced with the "instrumental" use of services meant to address specific groups of workers, identify their problems, and deal with them using "traditional" union tools. In such cases, service has significance and is worth attracting members or legitimising their presence within the unions. However, it acquires its strategic value for the organisation in its ability to intercept problems that would otherwise remain out of the union's sight.
As we have seen, trade unions are confronted with audiences that are not readily receptive to collective mobilisation. The types of collective action that may be attained vary considerably, depending on the unions' objectives, the group to which these services are addressed, and the power resources available in the different contexts.
A first form of connecting servicing and collective action can be found in cases where the services have focused on social networks and other communication tools to provide channels for workers to self-organise. In the case of *TRSY! - UGT* (ES) – given the lack of a central workplace for these workers – the method of dissemination through social media and other digital means has allowed users to access and meet at specific points arranged by themselves to organise collectively.
Generally speaking, the services proved to be essential tools for understanding the specific dynamics of certain areas of work that are not easily traced by trade unions. Sometimes, this served to uncover some borderline situations, from the point of view of contracts and working conditions, a frequent occurrence in cases of platform work. In these situations, legal instruments were often used. This was the case for *United Freelancers - ACV-CSC* (BE), which supported those members willing to join the class action in a court case against Deliveroo. In dealing with tour guides' unfair working conditions, *GKVPS - Solidarumas* (LT) organised a picket in front of a tour operator's building, putting pressure on public authorities for sending labour inspectors and block unlicensed guides.
Especially in cases addressing platform workers, the services aimed to reach and actively involve workers and develop worker representation at the company level, appointing union delegates in unfavourable contexts *(Platform for Platform Workers - ABVV-FGTB,* BE; *TRSY! - UGT,* ES; *3F,* DK). In this way, *TRSY!* introduced the first union delegate in a food delivery platform in Spain. This worker became a union delegate once a court ruling recognised his status, forcing the company to accept him as an employee.
On other occasions, once users have contacted the service to explain particular situations of precariousness, the union activates field research

to organise workers collectively in similar situations. From there, they arrived to mobilise workers to create bargaining opportunities. For example, through the legal services offered, Nidil-CGIL Firenze (IT) became aware that most local tour guides were working without a contract. Gathering workers around this issue, they addressed the local administration to set up a quality standard for tour operators. Moreover, they successfully negotiated a collective agreement on working conditions for tour guides with a tour operator.

Following this path, trade unions have sometimes reached a significant level of mobilisation. This was the case for riders working for the Glovo delivery platform company, who requested the union's support through the service CCOO Catalunya - El WhatsApp de la Precariedad (ES). Then, CCOO Catalunya carried out collective organising actions with these riders that led to a three-week strike during the summer of 2021, blocking the activity of the company's supermarket delivery branch. The aim was to reclaim the employment relationship of their workers, who currently work through a chain of outsourced temporary work agencies. Currently, CCOO Catalunya and the company's management have opened a negotiation process.

To sum up, servicing was the way to deal with issues that would otherwise be difficult to chart and initiate other union activities, whether legal, bargaining or mobilising. In some cases, servicing has proved functional for actions that bring the union strategy very close to the organising model.

4.4.3 Servicing and membership

Research results show that targeted workers appeared to be satisfied with the services provided. Moreover, union officials often reported sustained growth in users over time. This growth was, in some cases, further enhanced by the pandemic, which posed a new set of concerns – especially on social security or health protection – for many of the targeted occupational groups.

However, it is complicated to assess how this has directly increased membership. In general, there is not much data available on members attracted through individual services, as unions rarely keep track of them. For some services, membership is a prerequisite for access; in contrast, other services are designed to reach mainly non-union members. Besides, some services address a large audience or are country-wide services, while others are directed at small groups or are supported by local initiatives, thus making a comparison in terms of numbers hard.

Among the common aspects worth mentioning is membership volatility. Indeed, the membership resulting from services tends to be utilitarian, with a tendency to disaffiliate once the problem is solved. Another issue pertains to the difficulty of moving from membership to active participation. In some cases targeting platform work, for instance, union delegates were established at the company level; on the other hand, there is little evidence that these practices are extended to the platform workers supported by the services. This is even more so for freelancers who lack faith in a collective strategy, even with mobilisations and collective successes.

However, the effectiveness of these initiatives should be assessed by looking at the multiple dimensions of the worker-union relationship. The experiences addressing self-employed workers, platform workers, or middle managers have an additional function complementary to membership renewal: starting a legitimisation process among groups of workers that are not familiar with the unions or have an unfavourable opinion of them. The same can be said of those services addressing unemployed persons, such as *Sportello Lavoro - CISL Firenze-Prato* (IT): their primary function is to perpetuate the union's relationships with the workers close to CISL that are transitioning from one job to another. Therefore, the impact of these innovative services on trade unions would be more appropriately assessed if they were considered an (initial

or advanced) step in a long-term strategy of relationship building with defined occupational groups.

4.4.4 Servicing and organisation

Finally, success in bridging the gap between trade unions and unorganised workers also depends on the role of services within organisations. The case studies show different levels of organisational strength.

On the one hand, we have services, such as *LSSO-LPSK* (LT) and *Quadrifor* (IT), which derive part of their strength from the institutional context, ensuring financial and human resources for the provision of services. Many others, however, are more experimental, moving between organisational and legislative uncertainties. Some of these are projects that implement strategies promoted at the confederal level and can thus benefit from greater stability and continuity (e.g., *TRSY! - UGT,* ES; *Platform for Platform Workers - ABVV-FGTB, BE; United Freelancers - ACV-CSC,* BE).

Others, as is often the case with experimental initiatives, tend to depend on the "institutional entrepreneur" promoting them – usually an individual actor, less often a coalition of actors (e.g., *Flexwerker DM,* DK; *Sportello Lavoro - CISL Firenze-Prato,* IT; *Nidil-CGIL Firenze*, IT; *GKVPS-Solidarumas,* LT). The lack of institutionalisation of initiatives leads to an over-concentration of resources, e.g., in terms of relationships with community members or mastery of the language of a professional community. These resources run the risk of becoming the property of the community organiser and being dispersed if this person has a career discontinuity.

Precisely for this reason, it is important to stress that the most part of case studies are moving towards a path of organisational strengthening if not of actual institutionalisation. In many cases, organisational strengthening was limited to rationalising tools and know-how (e.g., through the centralisation of know-how scattered among the various federations). Sometimes, following the initiative's success, it has led to an increase in the number of trade union federations involved in the provision of the service, each with its resources and sectoral expertise, turning a sector-specific initiative into an asset of the whole organisation. In the two Italian CISL cases related to self-employment, it led to changes in the organisational structure. Indeed, in the case of Vivace (IT), the original associative model was virtual; then, it took root in Felsa - the CISL federation dedicated to self-employed and atypical workers - relying on its resources and territorial coverage. As part of a general reorganisation of initiatives targeting self-employment, Partita Viva Vicenza (IT) also found its place within Felsa.

Another valuable aspect concerns the forms of financing of these services. As we have seen, many innovative services had not the immediate objective of attracting members, nor did they ask users for a fee, revealing their strategic character with respect to legitimising and enhancing the union's public image among specific workers. In such cases, the support of the organisation as a whole is a prerequisite for the continuity of the activity.

Finally, again at the organisational level, the relationship with the "traditional" services the confederations offer is worth mentioning. The existence of a network of services provides the organisational framework through which services promoting new approaches and targeting alternative groups can be conveyed, especially in cases where the aim is to bring traditional trade union services to previously excluded occupational groups.

In some cases, innovative services functioned mainly as gateways by directing target workers to existing agencies (e.g., tax and legal assistance departments). More often, the process required innovative solutions to complement the existing offer: attracting external resources to deal with the required know-how (e.g., acquiring expertise in corporate or labour law to meet the needs of self-employed workers); asking those who provided the services to do it in the organiser's headquarters to identify the services with the union. ◆

Conclusions

Research findings can be summarised in three main points.

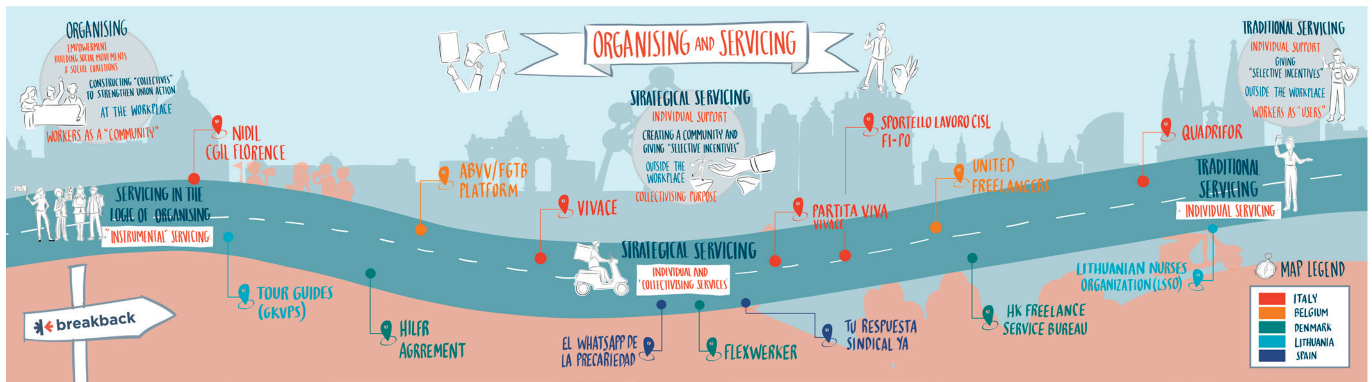
The first point regards national industrial relations systems and trade union strategies. Where servicing is traditionally a core trade union activity, we found that national strategies on membership renewal were also oriented to adopt a servicing approach. Even if, in some cases, such as Italy, a national framework is still missing, and servicing is much more a matter of local experimentation than a confederal design. In other countries, such as Lithuania, rather than on servicing, trade unions have focused much more on enhancing their representation and institutional capacity in a more conventional manner. In Spain, instead, the low rate of union membership poses the problem of raising financial resources to provide innovative services.

The second point is related to the ratio behind servicing. Case studies help us to find two main types of servicing. On the one hand, "traditional servicing" follows the logic of supplying individual incentives to retain or increase members (e.g., through legal or tax assistance). That is, the service is tailored to specific individual needs, but its organisation lacks an orientation towards community-building or collective action. On the other hand, we found a new type of servicing, what we called "strategic servicing". In this case, services are still provided individually but have a "collectivising" function. In strategic servicing, trade unions pursue multiple, either latent or explicit, aims.

- To promote a collective identity, for instance, among platform workers, as in the case of the Belgian *Platform for Platform Workers - ABVV-FGTB.*
- To build a new community, such as self-employed workers (e.g., Partita Viva Vicenza - CISL, IT; Vivace CISL, IT; HK Freelance Bureau, DK, and Flexwerker DM, DK).
- Or even to promote collective actions to increase their working conditions, as happens in the cases of Italian and Lithuanian tour guides.

So, there is a significant difference between collectivising services and the traditional services related to legal, tax, or occupational matters. Like the organising approach, strategic servicing tries to create a new community of workers as the first step to identity creation and collective action.

Figure 1, representing the positioning of all case studies in an ideal "continuum" between organising and servicing, also accounts for the varieties of servicing approaches. All of them rely on supplying services as "selective incentives" to join the union. However, on the top left, close to the organising model, is what we call **servicing in the logic of organising**. This strategic approach implies supplying services that are **instrumental** to collective action. In the middle, different forms of **strategic servicing** can be identified that are oriented to supplying services for **collectivising** purposes. Here, collectivisation is first and foremost an internal process by which trade



unions create a collective as a union category. This result is subordinate to creating a community of "service users" as a necessary but insufficient condition for developing collective identity and mobilisation. On the top right, **traditional servicing** entails supplying services **individually** to understand the needs of people included in a target group, with no explicit intention to construct a collective.

The third point concerns the servicing outcomes. In most cases, research results point to a positive impact of servicing on membership. However, we realised that counting members attracted through union services is difficult.
In general, data on the new members from the studied services is hardly available, as unions rarely keep track of them.
Second, we found that, especially for traditional servicing, membership coming from service provision tends to be utilitarian and therefore fluctuating, with a high number of disaffiliations once people have solved the problem for which they contacted the union.
In the case of strategic servicing, with the services understood as collectivising services, an issue pertains to the adequate capacity of moving from "simple" to "active" participation of union members. Although many cases targeting, for example, platform workers, have succeeded in establishing union delegates in some companies, there is little evidence that these practices affect the platform workers supported by the services (see also Drahokoupil and Vandaele, 2021). Even freelance workers see themselves as a professional community more oriented to solving business problems or increasing business opportunities rather than collective action.
It must be stressed that the effectiveness of servicing should not be measured merely in terms of increased union membership but by looking at the multiple dimensions of the worker-union relationship.
We realised that servicing has an additional function complementary to membership renewal: promoting the "identification" – understood as the development of a union identity – of groups of workers that are not familiar with them or have an unfavourable opinion of them.
Therefore, the impact of innovative services on trade unions would be more appropriately assessed if they were considered an initial step in a long-term strategy of relationship-building with hard-to-unionise workers.
In the context of rapid and profound changes in the labour market, the problem of "free-riding", connected with the perceived necessity of maintaining the traditional social base of trade unions, is compounded by the problem of "organising the unorganised" (Alinsky, 1946; Heery and Adler, 2004; Lani, 2014, Lauria 2022). Traditionally, this issue is addressed by adopting the "organising" approach, inspired by a model of participatory trade unionism embodied in activities carried out at the local level, aimed at recruiting unorganised workers and creating consensus around traditional union activities, such as collective bargaining and mobilisation (on the

recent developments on organising, see Mundlak, 2020). This model has developed in the Anglo-Saxon countries, starting from the United States, as part of the broader debate on the revitalisation of union action. The servicing approach differs significantly from organising, especially in its traditional version. Inspired by the model of a trade union as a supplier of individual goods, it is instead oriented towards providing services aimed at supporting workers outside the workplace. To this end, trade unions have dedicated bureaucratic structures of full-time employees with specialist skills who operate through a network of offices. They compete with market services provided by external professionals, such as lawyers, accountants, and labour consultants. In the case of organising, those who decide to join a trade union do so in the light of collective identity and a sense of belonging. In this sense, the union assumes the configuration of a "community". In the case of traditional servicing, the act of joining a union primarily aims to enjoy the advantages deriving from "selective incentives" (e.g., to have free or discounted services). Still, the link with the organisation often remains weak and rarely translates into participation. Here, the union is configured as a "service company", and the workers play the role of "consumers". On closer inspection, these are two ideal-typical models, presenting themselves in different combinations. BreakBack shows that we have intermediate approaches between traditional servicing and organising. We could define them as strategic servicing since they rely on supplying both individual and "collectivising" services. These services address social groups often characterised by a poor collective identity and legitimacy (outside and inside trade union organisations). Collectivising services, therefore, respond to specific individual needs but have an explicit or latent collective function. In other words, they aim to build a collective, paving the way for possible future actions and dimensions of shared representation.

In conclusion, the case-study research identified new areas of trade union representation created, not without difficulty, in new kinds of jobs (e.g., platform workers), traditionally fragmented professions (e.g., freelancers) or long-abandoned targets such as the unemployed. These areas can hardly be reached without the strategic use of services which, by their very nature, are bridges towards an enlarged and individualised conception of the world of work and its representation. However, BreakBack shows that, across Europe, new forms of trade unionism are emerging. They are addressed to hard-to-unionise workers and are commonly based on service provision. This new kind of activity is far from traditional servicing. It tries to create a new community of workers as the first stem to identity creation and collective action. Results in terms of new membership, although positive, are not the primary outcome of this new approach. The main result is the creation of new trust in trade unions among non-standard workers, who now represent a growing and strategic core of workers. In other words, trade unions are now experimenting with new languages, strategies, and practices to adapt to the changing world of work, recently affected by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. ◆

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