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**Break up to Get Back Together: The Impact of Unionisation Through Innovative Service Provision on Union Membership and Industrial Relations. Country Report: Italy**

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# COUNTRY REPORT



# ITALY

Andrea Bellini, Marco Betti, Stefano Dal Pra Caputo,  
Alberto Gherardini, Francesco Lauria, Vincenzo Marasco

**ITALY**

**breakback**

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## Break up to get back together

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

# COUNTRY REPORT ITALY

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**BreakBack – Break up to get back together.**  
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A UNION STRATEGY THROUGH SERVICES PROVISION TO:

ENHANCE MEMBERSHIP

REVITALIZE ACTION

THE PURPOSE:

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



FOCUS

 breakback

RELAUNCH AN INCLUSIVE SOCIAL DIALOGUE

BREAK BACK HAS  
**3** MAIN AIMS



GOALS

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

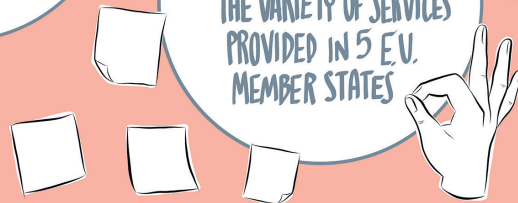
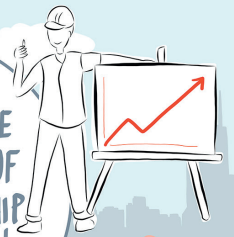
2. TO COLLECT AND DESCRIBE THE VARIETY OF SERVICES PROVIDED IN 5 EU MEMBER STATES

3. TO EVALUATE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THESE MEMBERSHIP REVITALIZATION STRATEGIES

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



THE HYPOTHESIS:  
TRADE UNIONS ARE EXPERIMENTING A "CUSTOMISATION" OF THEIR ACTIVITIES





# Part 1

## The national system of industrial relations

### 1. Baseline information


#### 1.1. Main economic and labour market trends

**A**fter the economic crisis of 2008, the Italian economy has started growing again, albeit to a lesser extent than the European average. In fact, from 2012 to 2017, the GDP increased by 1.2% compared to 7.4% in the European Union (EU). In 2018, the Italian economy slowed down further. This economic downturn was determined by both net external demand and consumption (Eurofound 2019; Istat 2019).

Concerning labour market performance, Italy is still trying to return to the pre-crisis levels. In 2020, the unemployment rate decreased for the sixth year but remained distant from 2008 (9.2% compared to 6.7%). Simultaneously, the employment rate increased for six years in a row until 2019 and then decreased again in 2020. However, these trends were accompanied by a rise in inequalities. Salaried employment grew, and self-employment declined, while their weak components expanded significantly. Among employees, the number of fixed-term contracts rose – especially those with a duration of less than six months. Among the self-employed, the number of own-account workers – a heterogeneous group with marked traits of vulnerability – further increased. Furthermore, full-time permanent jobs diminished, while involuntary part-time grew substantially, for women in particular.

#### 1.2. Labour market regulation

The primary source of labour market regulation in the country is Law 300/1970, known as the Workers' Statute (*Statuto dei Lavoratori*). The Statute aims to safeguard workers' freedom and dignity, as well as their rights to organise and conduct union activities on the workplace. Among other things, it foresees rules (Article 18) to protect workers against dismissal.

Since the 1990s, however, state interventionism has grown considerably. Parliament passed a series of laws to promote employment by making the labour market more flexible. Law 196/1997, also known as the Treu Package, liberalised temporary agency work and, in so doing, marked a trail for others to follow. Law 30/2003 and Legislative Decree 276/2003 introduced different types of flexible contracts. Law 92/2012, then, partly deregulated dismissals. Finally, Law 183/2014 and enforcement decrees, the so-called Jobs Act, further loosened the constraints against dismissals while, at the same time, introducing an open-ended contract with increasing protections, together with tax incentives to encourage hiring. Recently, two interventions aimed to enhance protection for self-employed workers. Law 81/2017 launched the Freelance Workers' Statute (*Statuto del Lavoro Autonomo*), a wide-ranging package of measures, including a more favourable regulation of maternity leave and sickness benefits. This initiative was complemented by Law 172/2017, which introduced the principle of “fair 



pay” (*equo compenso*), implying that freelancers’ pay must be proportional to the quantity, quality, contents, and characteristics of their professional performance.

### 1.3. Regulation of industrial relations

Italian industrial relations are regulated by law and collective bargaining, with the latter prevailing over the former, which means they are clearly “voluntarist”.

The Workers’ Statute represents the primary source – a “legislative” source – used to regulate all aspects inherent to trade union representation. It entrusts the implementation of the principles established regarding the negotiations between the social partners, assigning the latter a prominent role.

The tripartite agreement of July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1993, between the government and social partners, known as the Giugni Protocol, re-designed the structure of collective bargaining and, among other things, established the Unitary Workplace Union Structures (*Rappresentanze Sindacali Unitarie*, RSUs). These are “unitary” bodies in the sense that all workers participate in the elections, regardless of their being union members or not. Furthermore, they are the fulcrum of the representation system, as they have the right to bargain at the workplace level. Nevertheless, the inter-confederal agreements of 2011, 2013, and 2014 changed their composition, opting for an open system. Indeed, they removed the reserve of one-third of delegates appointed by the trade unions that had signed the relevant industry-wide agreement.

The 2014 agreement – signed by the leading employers’ association, Confindustria, and the three most representative trade unions, the CGIL, CISL, and UIL – renewed the regulatory framework. Besides the new workplace representation rules, it formalised the criteria for the measurement and certification of representativeness and specified collective

bargaining procedures. This agreement marked convergence between the private and public sectors – the latter being regulated by Legislative Decree 165/2001.

In broad terms, Italian industrial relations seem to be searching for a new identity that better suits the needs of companies and territories, which implies a tendency towards the decentralisation of collective bargaining. At the time of writing, however, the industry-wide agreements still represent the barycentre of the system.

### 1.4. Background information on the trade union system

In Italy, there are three main trade union organisations: i) the General Confederation of Italian Workers (*Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro*, CGIL), politically on the left and historically close to the former Communist and Socialist Parties; ii) the Italian Confederation of Workers’ Trade Unions (*Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori*, CISL), politically independent and essentially non-confessional, although with Social Christian influences; iii) the Union of Italian Workers (*Unione Italiana del Lavoro*, UIL), historically close to Republican and Social-democrat political positions. These have homologous organisational structures based on separate sectoral federations operating under the umbrellas of national confederations.

The pluralism of Italian trade unionism is also characterised by several autonomous confederations, such as the UGL, CISAL, and Confsal. Moreover, relevant sectoral and occupational trade unions are not attached to any confederation: a notable example is the FABI, the most representative union in the banking industry; others are the CIDA and CIU-Unionquadri, which represent managers and professionals. There are also “rank-and-file” unions, such as the Cobas, CUB, SGB, SLAI, and USB, which are strong in specific sectors – e.g., transport, logistics, and public administration, particularly education.

## 1.5. Collective bargaining

Collective bargaining is based on a coordinated two-tier system. National industry-wide agreements (*Contratti Collettivi Nazionali di Lavoro*, CCNLs) represent its primary level, while “second-level” agreements are negotiated either at the company and/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, the use of fixed-term contracts, some aspects of social insurance and, of course, pay determination. Company agreements then 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 stipulated at the local level. In some sectors, such as agriculture and construction, there is an optional third level: the regional level. After the 2009 reform of the collective bargaining structure, CCNLs have a duration of three years, with a unified deadline for regulatory and pay issues.

Formally, in the Italian legal system, collective agreements are classified as acts between private actors. As such, they apply only to the members of the signatory parties, and their validity cannot be extended by law. Despite the lack of *erga omnes* extension mechanisms, extensive coverage is ensured by the *de facto* application also to non-members, due to the propensity of the jurisprudence 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. For this reason, bargaining coverage – that is, the percentage of employees covered by collective agreements – is estimated to be 80% (Visser 2019). At the workplace level, a new instrument was gradually implemented in medium-sized and large Italian enterprises – i.e., works councils (*Consigli di Fabbrica*) – starting from the 1960s. These were organisations of direct and unitary worker representation set up

in all the main companies. In 1970, employee representation was regulated by the Workers’ Statute, which introduced the RSAs (*Rappresentanze Sindacali Aziendali*), elective bodies that represent the employees who are members of a specific trade union within a company. Then, the inter-confederal agreement of 1993 added a “single-channel” form of representation: the RSUs (*Rappresentanze Sindacali Unitarie*), which represent all employees, regardless of their being union members or not. As already underlined, RSUs have the right to be informed and consulted on relevant company issues and bargain collectively on the workplace concerning issues indicated by the applicable industry-wide agreement.

## 2. Trade unions

After the Fascist period, the dominant anti-fascist political cultures gave rise to a unitary confederation: the CGIL. However, this unity lasted only four years. At the beginning of the Cold War, divisions among political parties and cultures led to the split of the CGIL. From this break-up, the CISL was created, giving rise to a non-confessional union bonded to Catholic values. Likewise, people from other non-communist cultures formed the UIL, a secular trade union close to social-democratic and republican positions. The majority of the CGIL remained linked with the Communist Party. Over time, however, with the transformation of the Italian party system, these ideological divisions have lost political relevance, although they are still important when trying to understand union cultures.

The CGIL, CISL, and UIL are still the main trade union confederations in the country. They boast 11,188,535 million members altogether (see Table 1, Annex). However, almost half of them (4,842,054, that is, 43.3%) are retired workers. This is a specific feature of Italian trade unions. The CGIL is the largest one, with 5,295,616 members (47.3% of the total). The CISL and UIL have 3,908,463 (34.9%) and 1,984,456 (17.8%)



members, respectively (see Table 2, Annex). Historically, there have been highs and lows in inter-union relations. For decades, periods of coldness, if not hostility, have 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 2009 onwards can be interpreted as signs of a general improvement in the quality of relations.

### 2.1. The CGIL

As mentioned above, the CGIL originated from a socialist-communist background. However, it never presented the dogmatic traits that are typical of the Marxist trade unionism belonging to the FSM, the World Trade Union Federation, dominated by the Soviets. In those years, the idea of the primacy of the political party and the idea of the trade union as a “transmission belt” from party to society were deeply rooted in its culture. Despite this, the CGIL tried to find its own identity as a trade union, pursuing autonomous aims.

The CGIL was born as a “class” union and, over time, has maintained a generalist character. These cultural roots are at the origin of the differences between the CGIL and other unions. Among the three main confederations, in fact, the CGIL more explicitly plays the role of an antagonistic union. Furthermore, it has maintained a more direct relationship with the political domain.

The CGIL has a dual structure concerning its organisational logic, based on “vertical” and “horizontal” structures. Vertically, federations organise workers on a sectoral basis. Their primary function, indeed, is to carry out collective bargaining independently, at the sectoral level. Horizontally, the Chambers of Labour (*Camere del Lavoro*) organise all workers in a given territory on a cross-sectoral basis and have a prominent role. 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 CGIL has 12 sectoral federations: the FLAI (agriculture and food); the FILCTEM (chemical-pharmaceutical industry; energy; oil, gas and water; mining; rubber and plastic; glass; ceramics and tiles; textiles and clothing; tanning, leather and footwear; industrial laundries); the FILLEA (construction); the FIOM (metalworking); the FILCAMS (trade, tourism, services); the FILT (transport); the FISAC (banking and insurance companies); the SLC (communication); the FLC (school, university and research); the FP (public administration); Nidil (temporary agency work and atypical work); and the SPI (retired workers).

This list results from a restructuring process, which, in different ways, involved many confederal trade unions throughout Europe. In general, trade unions are in the process of merging sectoral federations. The logic behind this operation is to adapt the organisation to the changing labour market structure (i.e., the contraction of industry and the parallel expansion of services) and, at the same time, reduce costs. As already highlighted, the CGIL is the largest trade union in the country, with 5,295,616 members, of whom 2,702,002 (51.0%) are persons in the active population (see Table 3.1, Annex). Among the latter, 731,641 (14.4%) are in industry, 959,882 (17.8%) in services, and 599,351 (11.1%) in the public sector, while 112,980 (only 2.3%) are self-employed or atypical workers. Therefore, the CGIL remains strong in its traditional social base: the industrial working class, although now it has a higher membership in the tertiary sector, in which low-skilled jobs are concentrated. Regarding territorial coverage, the CGIL is stronger in central Italy, with a peak in Emilia-Romagna.

Typically, Italian trade unions’ financial resources depend on membership fees (see Table 11, Annex). That said, over the last twenty years, there has been a steady increase in revenues from servicing. The most significant contribution

of union services derives from tax assistance, provided through the CAAFs (*Centri Autorizzati di Assistenza Fiscale*), established in 1991. It is essential to point out that trade unions play this role in a non-monopolistic market. Another important form of servicing is ascribable to the patronages (*Patronati*), union bodies that assist Italian workers, including those who are not union members. The CGIL's patronage, INCA (*Istituto Nazionale Confederale di Assistenza*), offers advice and assistance to guarantee access to social security and social and health services. For some of these services, trade unions receive a financial contribution from the Public Administration. Other individual services are provided through the Labour Disputes Offices (*Uffici Vertenze e Legali*) and Career Guidance Services (*Servizi di Orientamento al Lavoro*).

Moreover, the CGIL's protection network involves several affiliated associations, such as the Auser (*Associazione per l'Invecchiamento Attivo*), the SUNIA (*Sindacato Unitario Nazionale Inquilini e Assegnatari*), the APU (*Associazione Proprietari Utenti*), and the Federconsumatori (*Federazione Nazionale Consumatori e Utenti*), supplying services for the elderly, tenants, customers.

In this framework, the CGIL is more conflict-oriented than other trade unions. Therefore, the new emphasis on individual protection through servicing is not its home ground. Despite this, the CGIL has, in any case, sought to expand its service supply system.

Like other trade unions, the CGIL is facing new challenges related to the changing character of the labour market, with the rise of self-employed and atypical work. For this purpose, the CGIL has created Nidil (*Nuove Identità di Lavoro*), a specific body that aims to represent the interests of self-employed and atypical workers. Its organisational model, in effect, is a specific feature of Italian trade unionism. Archetypal organisations of such a kind were born in the late 1990s and took the shape of “subsidiary” union bodies belonging to the confederal level but which were isolated

from sectoral federations, which remained those entitled to sign industry-wide agreements.

## 2.2. The CISL

As already stated, between 1947 and 1948, the conflicts within the unitary CGIL became irreversible. Such conflicts concerned three major issues: the international position, wage policy, and the political use of strikes. In October 1948, the Christian component realised that the common experience was over and established the Free General Confederation of Italian Workers (*Libera Confederazione Generale Italiana dei Lavoratori*, LCGIL). Nevertheless, after only two years, LCGIL merged with other independent unions giving rise to the CISL (Baglioni 2011). Not all the CISL's unionists were linked to the Christian movement since both Socialist and Republican activists joined the confederation.

The challenge was, therefore, to imagine a different conception of a trade union. This difference was based on three main points, which are still the distinguishing traits of the CISL's culture (Coppola, Lauria, 2021). First, the idea of the trade union as an association, that is, an organisation relying on membership. Compared to the CGIL, which aims to represent the world of work, the CISL puts great emphasis on its associative nature: it may represent non-members as well, although they have no right to influence the political line and the associative life of the union. Second, it focuses on contractual issues, leaving general issues and political affairs in the background. Third, it has a weaker link with politics, associated with a claim to autonomy from political parties.

Just like the CGIL, the CISL has a dual organisational architecture. On the one hand, sectoral federations – vertical structures – organise workers employed in the same or contiguous production sectors. On the other hand, cross-sectoral – horizontal – structures, belonging directly to the confederal level, are organised on a territorial basis, at the regional (*Unioni Sindacali*)

*Regionali*, USR) and local (*Unioni Sindacali Territoriali*, UST) levels. Over the last ten years, the CISL territorial trade union confederations have realized a significant merger process.

In this context, sectoral federations could be seen as the fulcrum of the system and, as such, enjoy substantial autonomy. Traditionally, the CISL also pays special attention to the company level, aiming to strengthen company bargaining. This is another distinctive feature and a cause of conflict with the CGIL, which is, instead, committed to safeguarding the role of country-wide industry-wide agreements.

The CISL, in turn, has 18 sectoral federations: the FAI (agriculture and food); the UGC (agricultural enterprises); the FEMCA (chemical-pharmaceutical industry; oil, gas and water; mines; rubber and plastic; ceramics and tiles; glass; textiles and clothing; tanning, leather and footwear); the FILCA (construction); the FIM (metalworking); the FLAEI (energy); the FIRST (banking and insurance companies); the FIST (trade, tourism and services; self-employment, temporary agency work and atypical work); the Fistel (entertainment, information and telecommunications); the FIT (transport and logistics); the SLP (postal services); the CISL Medici (doctors and veterinarians); the FNS (firefighters; penitentiary police; forest service; civil protection); the FP (public administration); the CISL Scuola (teaching and non-teaching school staff); the CISL Università (teaching and non-teaching university staff); the FIR (innovation and research); the FNP (retired workers). In 2020, the Fistel and FLAEI started merging into a new federation called the CISL Reti.

The CISL also has a complex system of services and service associations. The most important ones are: the CAAF (tax assistance), the INAS (patronage); the Adiconsum (consumer association); the Anolf (migrant workers); the Anteas (volunteering), the Iscos (international cooperation and solidarity), the SICET (tenants), the SINDACARE (coordination of individual dispute offices).

According to the CISL, among its 3,908,463

members, 2,217,831 (56.7%, a little higher than the CGIL, and far less than the UIL) are persons in the active population (see, again, Table 3.1, Annex). Historically, the CISL is strong in the public sector (especially in education), where it is close to the CGIL in terms of the number of members (542,298). As far as the territorial composition is concerned, the CISL is stronger in the North-East, where Catholic traditions are deeply rooted.

Concerning financing, the CISL's primary source of revenue is provided by membership fees (see, once again, Table 11, Appendix), yet service revenues are increasing.

The CISL, too, is faced with the necessity to give original responses to substantial changes in the Italian labour market structure, exploring non-conventional forms of unionism. In this sense, the Felsa (*Federazione Lavoratori Somministrati Autonomi e Atipici*) – now, operating synergistically with the FISASCAT, under the umbrella of the FIST – aims to organise self-employed and atypical workers. Unlike the Nidil-CGIL, the Felsa is the outcome of the strategic choice to adopt the organisational model of a sectoral federation to reinforce its potential actions and activities. There is also Vivace, which is an association of freelancers affiliated with the CISL. This organisation is now part of the Felsa and aims to organise workers. This association started as an online community.

### 2.3. The UIL

The UIL was created in 1950 to give the workers an alternative option to the CGIL and CISL, namely a trade union out of the range of the two main political parties: the Communist Party and the Christian Democrats. In this sense, the UIL was conceived as an independent, Socialist-oriented trade union, although its ideological background, in the post-war period, was enriched by the Action Party.

Thanks to its almost 1,984,456 members, the UIL is the third largest Italian trade union. If compared to the CGIL and CISL, however, it is different

in several ways. Its social base, in fact, is mainly composed of persons in the active population, who are 1,426,648, that is, 71.9% of its members (see Table 3.1, Annex). Also, its territorial structures, called Local Union Chambers (*Camere Sindacali Territoriali*), cover the whole country, although they are concentrated in the historical enclaves of the Republican Party, namely Emilia-Romagna, Marche, and Sicilia.

At the sectoral level, the UIL has 15 federations: the UILA (agriculture and food); the Uiltec (textiles, energy and chemical industry); the Feneal (construction); the UILM (metalworking); the UILCA (banking and insurance companies); the Uilcom (entertainment, information and telecommunications); the UIL Poste (postal services); the Uiltucs (trade, tourism and services); the UIL Trasporti (transport and logistics); the UIL FPL (local authorities); the UIL OCCC (Constitutional bodies); the UILPA (public administration); the UIL Scuola RUA (school, university and research); the Uiltemp (self-employment, temporary agency work and atypical work); the UIL Pensionati (retired workers).

In addition to its primary mission, which is focused on labour issues, the UIL provides its members and citizens with support and services in several fields, such as social insurance, tax assistance, consumer protection and anti-gender-based violence, through its network of union bodies, associations, and service companies – e.g., ITAL, CAF, ADOC, UNIAT, and the anti-mobbing and anti-stalking helpdesks. Comparatively, the UIL is less committed than the CGIL and CISL to supplying services, although these activities contribute considerably to its economic stability.

### 3. Membership trends

#### 3.1. Changes in membership composition

Italian 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 decline (see Table 1, Annex). In 2018, nevertheless, membership started rising once again.

As mentioned, a fierce inter-union competition characterised the 2000s and, partly, the 2010s. This led to an increase in the number of members. However, this growth was not uniform across the three confederations. In the ten years from 2011 to 2020, the UIL had relatively slow but continuous growth. Instead, the CGIL and CISL grew until 2012; then, they started to decline, although the CGIL recorded increases in 2018 and 2019 (see Table 2, Annex). Of the three, the CISL is the one that grew most in the first part of the period, but also the one that fell most rapidly in the second. At the end of the period, the CGIL and CISL showed negative balances (-401,585 and -432,423 members, respectively), while the UIL recorded an increase (+80,607).

To fully understand Italy's membership trends, we must consider a national anomaly, that is, the considerable weight of retired workers among union members: taken alone, in fact, the latter represent 43.3% of the total (see Tables 1 and 4.1, Annex). To have an idea of the extensive change in union membership, it is essential to consider that far less than 20% of members were retirees in 1980. Demographic and labour-market changes explain this phenomenon only in part. Paradoxically, this may also be seen as a direct consequence of Italian trade unions' past successes, which allowed the latter to create strong ties with the workers who joined the union movement during the 1970s when trade unions were more dynamic. In recent years, however, this tendency has reversed. The number of active members grew until 2012, then declined for a few years, and started to increase once again in 2016, with a balance of +102,620 at the end of the period; on the other hand, retired members decreased continuously since 2009, but registering a slight increase in 2018 and 2019, with a balance

of 856,021 (see Table 1, Annex). In any case, the strength of Italian pensioners' unions is also explained by the fact that retired workers do not remain members of their sectoral federations but are automatically directed to confederal pensioners' organisations.

Trade unions differ from each other also on this point. Retired workers carry a heavier weight in the CGIL (49.0%) than in the CISL (43.3%) and, above all, in the UIL (28.1%) (see Table 3.1, Annex). This indicates that the three confederations have different social bases. Moreover, the lower incidence of retirees on UIL's membership may explain its better performances in the period since the number of inactive members has been falling.

The analysis of *union density* – namely net union membership (i.e., total membership minus the people outside salaried employment) as a proportion of total salaried employment (Visser 2019) – gives further indications. After a long period of continuous decline, union density showed signs of recovery during the years of the crisis and reached its peak (36.2%) in 2013; afterwards, it started falling again (see Table 5, Annex). The workers' involvement in the negotiated management of company crises, indeed, led by trade unions, gives a significant contribution to explaining this trend. Moreover, the comparison with the *unionisation rate of the labour force* – i.e., the number of active union members as a proportion of the labour force – give interesting indications. Compared to union density, the latter introduces self-employed and atypical workers and unemployed persons – that is, people traditionally outside the range of action of the trade unions – into the analysis. The two curves have specular trends: diverging until 2013 and converging until 2019, with the unionisation of the labour force decreasing between 2011 and 2016 and growing between 2017 and 2020. These “bimodal” trends require composite explanations: in the first phase, the number of *salaried* union members decreased by almost double that of *active*

members, but the denominator of the ratio for the latter increased three times more than for the former; in the second phase, *salaried* members increased by less than half compared to *active* members, with the denominator significantly increasing for the former, while decreasing for the latter. In the first case, therefore, the trend of the denominator produced a net effect, which explains the different trends of the two curves; in the second case, it produced an amplifier effect, which favoured but not determined the convergence process. This suggests that the investment made by the main trade unions in new forms of organisation and action, targeting the most vulnerable groups in the labour market and most reticent to join the trade unions, such as self-employed and atypical workers and unemployed persons, has had appreciable effects in the last years.

Here, it is also worth noting the low union density (8.0%) among persons aged 15-24 (see Table 7, Annex). The low propensity of young people to join trade unions is connected with some structural features of the Italian labour market, which make them likely to find a job under employment contracts (temporary) and in firms (small) or sectors (services) characterised by low unionisation (see Tables 8-10, Annex). This is a further concern that is associated with the heavy weight of retired workers among union members. In the long term, in fact, the combined effect of these phenomena may result in progressive erosion of the active component of union membership.

In this context, migrants represent approximately 15% of the unionised labour force (Visser 2019; last available data, 2016), although, from the early 1990s, the unionisation of foreign workers has grown faster than that of native ones. This is particularly the case in sectors where the presence of migrants is high, including care, construction, transport and, of course, agriculture. This group is an essential driver of membership growth. Furthermore, it is probably the only force that, in

the long term, could somehow counterbalance the dynamics of inactive members.

In general, it can be said that profound changes lie behind membership trends. The growth of union membership followed a threefold path of development. In the first period, from 1980 to 1998, union membership increased considerably, fuelled by the growth in the number of members among retired workers. In those years, a process of *substitution* took place between active and retired members. In the second period, from 1999 to 2010, there followed a phase of *stabilisation*. In that phase, total and net union membership grew in parallel. In the third period, from 2011 onwards, there are signs of a *trend reversal*. The number of union members has started to decline, primarily because of the fall in the number of inactive members.

That said, trade unions have lost ground in their traditional domain, the working population, while the number of retirees has increased. This anomaly explains the high union membership. Still, recent changes show that this trend is not irreversible.

### 3.2. Sectoral dynamics

The changes in the social base of Italian trade unions become evident if we focus on 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 (see Table 3.2, Annex). The erosion of the industrial core has continued in recent years. From 2011 to 2020, the CGIL and CISL lost 220,101 and 109,401 members, respectively, in industry; on the other hand, they gained 217,854 and 159,049 members in trade and services (see Table 4, Annex). On the other hand, the UIL followed a different trend, registering slight increases in both sectors. In this regard, nevertheless, Italy is in line with other European countries.

Then, a notable phenomenon is the continuous growth of union membership among self-employed and atypical workers and the people included in the “miscellaneous” category, primarily unemployed persons (see Table 4.2, Annex). This fact supports the hypothesis in the previous sub-paragraph regarding the effects of the investment in new forms of organisation and action targeting vulnerable groups. Concerning self-employed and atypical workers, the net positive balance is almost entirely attributable to the CGIL, which has doubled the number of members in this labour-market segment during the last ten years (see Table 3.2, Annex).

Once again, the analysis of union density reveals further details. Despite the continuous increase in members, private services still have a far lower union density than industry (31.1% against 45.5%) (see Table 10, Annex). If we look more deeply into the sectors, however, we find that Italian trade unions are strong in transport (52.0%) and construction (51.9%), while being relatively weak in trade (23.5%), with manufacturing being closer to the national average (35.2% compared to 36.4%).

### 3.3. Interpreting contemporary changes

Most of the changes so far described are due to the long-term transformation of production and the labour market. The decline of industry and related restructuring processes has deeply affected union membership and action. However, 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 easily traced back to the labour market’s structural changes. 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 was one of a few sectors to record an increase in union density.

Controversial indications also come from other macro-sectors, such as the public sector. In public administration, in fact, participation is still low despite employment growth. In education, instead, it grew significantly despite a contraction of the sector. Another trend regards the increase in the number of unemployed union members. This could be a significant aspect over the next few years because of the effects of the pandemic on the labour market.

Specialist literature suggests that at least two other factors should be considered: *organisational arrangements* and *service supply*. The former aspect implies understanding new forms of representation and “bottom-up” organising practices (Gumbrell-McCormick, Hyman 2013; for Italy, Lani 2014). The latter takes the shape of a strategic orientation – i.e., *servicing* – that may also have an impact on membership. In this regard, we need to assess to what extent users, who come into contact with trade unions to take advantage of the services offered, represent an opportunity for strengthening union membership (Carrieri and Feltrin 2016). ♦

# Part 2

## Strategies to strengthen union membership

### 1. Factors that influence membership trends

**T**he second part of the report reconstructs the interpretations provided by the three main Italian trade unions regarding union membership trends together with how they are used to build action strategies. The aim is to understand specific approaches and actions that can strengthen membership in sectors that are less permeable to union action, such as low-skilled jobs (e.g., trade, transport, and platform services) and high-skilled jobs (e.g., *high-skilled services* and *independent professionals*). The analysis is based on five semi-structured interviews, conducted in the last months of 2019, with the national secretaries responsible for the organisation of the CGIL, CISL, and UIL, the UIL official in charge of membership, and the general secretary of the Italian Transport Federation (FIT) of the CISL. As we have seen, over the last fifteen years, the Italian trade union system has been subject to a profound transformation of its social base. This transformation, however, has not altered the numbers in absolute terms, which the leaders of the three main confederations, on the threshold of 2020, consider indicating relative stability, without forgetting the situations of the individual unions. The UIL, for example, experienced low but constant growth in membership, while the CISL went through a decrease, which stopped in the last three years.

In this regard, all the interviewees underline two specific aspects. Firstly, the effects of the 2008 economic crisis: where there was a fall in membership, the decrease was less pronounced than the loss of jobs, which has led paradoxically, at least in the strongest sectors, to an increase in union density, albeit minimal. Secondly, the effects induced by ‘organisational adjustments’: since the law regarding union representation came into force, the system of counting members has changed. Previously, membership was calculated based on “union proxies” signed, in a system where – in some cases – the same individual can sign more than one proxy (for example, a worker who is entitled to a pension from two different pension funds may sign a proxy for each of the two funds). Using the sum of proxies as a system to count members has now been abandoned in favour of the number of tax codes. As a result, the national secretary of the CGIL declared during the interview that, in the case of his trade union, with this calculation mechanism, the number of members has dropped by 200,000.

In line with the data presented in the first part of the report, the change that union leaders refer to does not regard numbers in absolute terms but the internal equilibrium between the different categories. As we have seen, pensioners play a critical role in the Italian trade union. In the last decades of the Twentieth century, this category, which had been the driving force behind the CGIL and CISL, has suffered a drastic drop of



about 600,000 since 2008. This decrease is because of the new legislation, Law 201/2011, the so-called Fornero Law, which gradually raised the retirement age.

The situation regarding active members is more complex, although relatively homogeneous in the three confederations. In all cases, there has been a further shift of focus from the traditional base of union membership, private manufacturing labour, to the service sector:

**But, overall, there has been a shift, which I believe should be considered normal, towards members in the services area. Basically, more members in the services area and fewer pensioners [...]. This is linked to productive factors or internal changes.**

*[National Secretary of the UIL]*

Together with those designed to represent new forms of work, these categories have benefited from the expansion of services and the approach of trade unions to parts of the labour market that had previously been unionised very little or not at all. In addition to these changes, there has been an increase in part-time contracts (mentioned by the CGIL secretary as an effect of the crisis) and strong growth in the number of workers that were not born in Italy, mainly present in low-skilled labour market sectors such as construction and personal care.

If we exclude the Italian peculiarity linked to the incoming flow of pensioners, all the unions agree that the profound transformations of the labour market explain this movement in the composition of the union base:

**The labour market has changed. In recent years, it has been characterised by precarious work and job instability. In the past, it was one thing to be a trade unionist when the majority of members joined a company at 14, 15 or 16 years of age, and left, perhaps with tears in their eyes, after having worked 35 or 40 years.**

**In other words, they were employed with open-ended contracts for an indefinite period in the same company, which meant there was an emotional relationship between worker and company. However, that is no longer the case. Recent years have seen constant mobility from one job to another and periods of work interspersed with periods of unemployment.**

*[National Secretary of the CGIL]*

The effects of this shift do not only regard the relative importance of the categories, but rather they concern the entire union as an organisation. The first consequence, which regards the relationship between the union and its grassroots, could be summed up with “de-ideologisation”. It is a change that means a different type of participation and commitment, but – even more relevant for our discussion – it also changes how contact is made with the worker. What is important is territorial presence, commitment towards a specific issue or problem, as well as obviously the activity of the union delegate in the workplace, rather than the political message and sense of belonging.

**In other words, the times are long gone when I joined the CGIL, if I was a communist. If I was a socialist, depending on what kind of socialist I was, I joined the CGIL or the UIL; while, if I was a good Catholic, I had to join the CISL.**

*[National Secretary of the CGIL]*

The interviewees also stated that this trend – already challenged by union unity and “contamination”, in the 1960s, and the changes in the country’s production system – indicates the need for “a new way of being a union”, which accepts the challenge of “meeting” work outside the usual places, not to mention the problem of “gaining the loyalty” of the base using different approaches and tools.

There is also a second tendency – which the

CGIL leader explicitly refers to, but which all the interviewees allude to in one way or another – that is also linked to the union’s organisational possibilities and actions: the shift of the base means a “poorer” membership. If workers who decide to join the union have a part-time or intermittent job or poorly paid work, the trade union card must be cheaper, which will significantly impact the organisation’s economic capacity.

This is even more relevant for a trade union, such as in Italy, which depends mainly on the income generated through membership fees. The processes of change in membership structure, described here, have primarily created organisational problems, including the economic sustainability of the confederations, which is why the first response has been organisational.

## 2. Strategies and actions to strengthen membership

Despite giving an overall positive interpretation of the current trends, the three most representative Italian trade union confederations paint a picture that profoundly changes union action, the relationship between trade unions and their members and, consequently, what steps trade unions must introduce to maintain their representative role. In the words of the interviewees, this change often takes the form of a “delay” in the innovation of union action compared to a rapidly evolving labour market, an evolution which, as we have seen, does not only regard the equilibrium between categories and between production sectors but the very relationship between trade unions and workers. Faced with this challenge, the trade union leaders interviewed referred to an “open” approach, which, rather than being a clearly defined strategic plan, was more an orientation that stimulates the creativity of the various bodies: the territorial structures, the sectoral federations, the bargaining tools, and “bilateral” systems. It is an opening where the unions involve *new professional figures*,

which foresees an opening from *the workplace to the territory* and introduces *a range of union practices* alongside the more traditional forms of bargaining.

**We are trying to multiply the number of keys on that keyboard, which must be played in all its entirety.**

*[National Secretary of the CGIL].*

This approach can be seen in various initiatives, which are often common to all trade union organisations. However, there are some differences regarding organisational structures, bargaining practices and the entire range of tools that can be adopted to meet workers’ needs. Regarding the first aspect, it should be emphasised that in recent years, the unions have undergone an organisational rationalisation, which also aimed at coping with the economic difficulties mentioned above and regards their presence on the territory and the management of the sectoral federations. Faced with the pulverisation of production activities and work that has, so to speak, been “dispersed”, the common indication is that the trade unions:

**[should] carry out their work in the workplace and consider the local communities as they need answers.**

*[National Secretary of the ICFTU]*

While common to all the conversations we had, this answer is particularly important in the arguments of the CISL and, even more, UIL leaders. These confederations seem to be involved in upgrading the role of their offices, transforming them from trade union locations into places that can carry out the functions performed by other intermediate institutions (such as parties, parishes, and the world of associations in general), making room for other actors or relocating them in places with specific problems, where the need for union presence is strongest.



**The first is in some way to encourage the participation of young people within our organisation, without making it official. In the sense that we have given the political guidelines to our territories to open our offices and to the middle management the possibility to listen and to let young people in. [...] Naturally, there is also a relationship with structured associations – for example, Libera – and all those associations that deal with the environment, legality... Therefore, opening much more to these social forces.**

*[National Secretary of the UIL]*

**These are important organisational challenges because maybe you have organised your structure with ten branches in one area and then you decide to open one more in a particular area, such as on a mountain top or in the most difficult neighbourhood of a big city, to try and broaden our territorial cover. [...] We would like our offices to become “squares”: places where people can come, exchange ideas, reason and feel part of a community [...]. It is anything but simple, because first, to do it, you must change some practices and rebuild the group, also through training.**

*[National Secretary of the CISL]*

Regarding the reorganisation of the sectoral federations, it is important to underline the role played by the organisations that represent atypical workers. The three organisations dedicated to non-traditional forms of work – the Nidil, Felsa, Uiltemp – which have been operating for about 20 years, are growing, not only due to the increasing use of new forms of contract but also because of the strategic decision to provide these organisations with a mandate to deal with increasingly broader sectors of the labour market by incorporating pre-existing organisational elements or forms of association. Nidil, for example, has absorbed the *Consulta delle*

*Professionisti*, while Vivace is becoming the “leader” of the previous associations dedicated to the liberal professions, although it has itself merged with the Felsa. Moreover, the latter was also set up in 2009 by merging the ALAI and CLACS. These organisations represent the primary tools with which trade unions are trying to respond to the diversification of forms of work and open their traditional base.

**We have strengthened the representation of atypical workers – which we have extended to include independent professionals, also thanks to the Vivace association – to the point that we are now starting to do a little more business. Naturally, we are at the beginning, but we already have more than 40,000 members.**

*[National Secretary of the CISL]*

**Our organisation of atypical workers, the Nidil, which was at the bottom of the list of our 12 sectoral federations in the CGIL, has expanded to the point that today, it is the tenth and continuing to grow.**

*[National Secretary of the CGIL]*

In particular, the organisation of atypical workers seems destined to dominate the whole area of new jobs: with a more complicated scenario in the case of low-skilled work, as it is disputed by the relevant sectoral federations, while simpler in the case of independent professionals, where ambiguity between organisations, although present, is less marked.

Nonetheless, the three confederations agree that the first tool that must be used to relaunch union action is collective bargaining. In this regard, the strategy is to introduce bargaining, with reference to the CCNL, to areas where it exists. Many so-called “new jobs”, especially in logistics and transport (starting with riders and platform work, in general), have no collective protection at the national level. The first effort of all the trade unions is to bring them within

the field of “traditional” bargaining. However, there is no shortage of other activities that are not traditionally organised by trade unions, such as dialogue with the government to build a network of protection for self-employed workers and independent professionals or the promotion of a system of “inclusive bargaining”. This term refers to a form of bargaining that aims to go beyond the rigid boundaries of sectoral federations to negotiate aspects of employment and working conditions in environments that structurally connect different groups of workers (such as, for example, airports, large hospitals, large industrial centres, and shopping centres):

**We are trying to say: in that area, let’s try “inclusive bargaining”, so we no longer have a federation that finds solutions for those in that sector and then, the day after, another sectoral federation comes along and acts only in the interests of its members. [...] Keeping together those of one agreement [CCNL] with those of another agreement, keeping together the “Serie A” worker, who gets a good salary, with the “Serie Z” worker. [...] Trying to put these sectors and workers together is far from simple. Convincing the railway worker to talk to the cleaner, the cleaner to the person who has the shops in the gallery of Milan Central Station and try to suggest that we go to those who run the show and together make demands and start bargaining.**

*[National Secretary of the CGIL]*

Among the inclusive forms of bargaining for those parts of the labour market that are at the margins of union action, we have the so-called “social negotiation” – i.e., bargaining with local authorities regarding the benefits they provide and the services they offer.

Finally, a great deal of emphasis is placed on the range of tools that the union organise to meet workers and their representation needs. This means, above all, increasing the ways of meeting

workers through innovative methods (street unions, open assemblies that manage to involve new types of workers at “unusual” times and places). In this regard, particular attention is paid to the offer of services and strengthening the bilateral system, which is an open system for the innovation of services for certain categories of workers or production sectors.

**However, in the meantime, greater emphasis on bilateral tools. [...] I have followed the craft sector closely. The CGIL, CISL, and UIL are equipping themselves with branches of the bilateral body in each territorial structure: supplementary healthcare; in some cases, complementary social security; income support; solidarity fund for those who lose their jobs or go through periods of non-contribution... So, this is another piece that has been added and which comes from contracts, so from the traditional union roles, but the final use is in any case innovative [...]. Continuous training and the numerous interprofessional funds help maintain a high level of training and retraining. [An official of the UIL]**

### **3. Perceptions regarding the role of servicing**

Among the strategies which aim to broaden the union base and, at the same time, respond to the challenges posed by changes in membership, of particular importance is the offer of a wide range of services. This is the “third pole” of the strategy regarding openness that emerged during the interviews.

**Given the importance of services, it is natural that they have increased both quantitatively and qualitatively. Obviously, also in terms of financial resources. For example, [supplementary] healthcare is, today, becoming a substitute for public health care [...]**

*[General Secretary of the FIT-CISL]*



The enlargement of services is a strategic aspect common to the three confederations, although the emphasis on these activities and their role in relation to membership trends are perceived differently. The general orientation is to expand the offer using three techniques: i) strengthening existing tools and branches through more differentiation, which can meet categories of people excluded from services; ii) developing bilateral tools; iii) providing innovative answers for specific sections of the labour market through special initiatives.

Regarding the first aspect, there is a widespread tendency to equip the 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.

**This... well knowing that traditional union services are not services that have been set up for the self-employed. We now have – not all – but we have an important part of our CAAF offices where those with a VAT number can receive assistance. This was not the case a few years ago; they [the self-employed] did not even come to our offices... and even if they had entered, we would have had to tell them: you have got the wrong address, go, and see an accountant.**

*[National Secretary of the CGIL]*

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. In addition to these examples, there are some structures on the territory, such as the Women's Desk and the Foreign Workers' Centre, and relations with other associations (such as pensioners' and elderly people's associations, consumers, tenants, etc.) that provide specific services.

Collective bargaining continues to represent

the focus of trade union action in low-skilled sectors. The declared intention is to bring new professions under the aegis of industry-wide agreements. In this perspective, the most targeted services are the ones that can be obtained directly through bargaining, from which the bilateral system originates. However, there are also several innovative initiatives. For example, there is the Sportello Lavoro CISL, which deals with active labour market policies. Although it is part of the traditional package of services offered by Italian trade unions, it has recently been reorganised and is now a helpful tool to manage mobility procedures in case of a company crisis.

In the case of high-skilled labour sectors, however, there are specific services for individual categories of workers. Training is one area open to trade union action that the leaders of all confederations mentioned. Trade unions organise vocational courses that offer training credits or preparatory courses for job selections in the public administration. In these cases, training is also the way categories of workers that have traditionally been far from the trade union environment can make contact and move towards unionisation. An interesting case here regards the tour guides working in Florence, who, starting from a training initiative, have built their demands with Nidil-CGIL. The category of *independent professionals* is probably the one where the offer of services is the most innovative. For these workers, the trade union question is only linked to the need for services in the traditional sense, but rather it regards their isolation and, in general, their working conditions, which do not facilitate forms of association. In this regard, trade unions' attempts to set up co-working spaces and offer integrated services are essential. Examples of this can be seen in the P@sswork Network (CGIL) in Bergamo and Veneto's Partita Viva experience (CISL). Vivace (CISL) represents an attempt to build a more structured associative network of independent professionals linked to the confederal trade union environment). This organisation started as an online community but

is now evolving into an organisational structure representing the advanced tertiary sector. The provision of services, therefore, is a fertile area for potential innovation in union action. That said, what is the role of union services in attracting new members? And what is the relationship between services and the collective protection role of trade unions?

**[...] we now have a solid majority of new members that come from the sector... from individual protection: patronage, tax assistance centres, labour dispute offices, work guidance desks. In other words, from services. And this is growing significantly.**

*[National Secretary of the CGIL]*

**A trade union offers protection and services. And, therefore, there is no doubt that if the rates are different, it is worth becoming a member. The same applies if you want to access services such as the labour office and the labour disputes office. Through these services, people come into contact with the organisation, which also becomes a way of joining.**

*[National Secretary of the CISL]*

**However, services are not the channel to follow for union membership. The main channel for members regards requests and claims, the renewal of collective agreements, presence on the territory, personal contacts, all of which are lacking today in many instruments of representation.**

*[National Secretary of the UIL]*

The views of the leaders are not unanimous. The opinion of the UIL manager probably reflects the different situation of the confederation, whose presence on the territory is decidedly less structured than the other two organisations. Regarding the CGIL and CISL, however, the role of services in attracting new members is a central theme, which has led to a reorganisation within

the trade union organisations.

In the CGIL, the role of services as an essential element of union action has followed a more problematic path. However, from the interviews, it was clear that the decision to consider individual protection no longer a subsidiary element but rather a characterising element of union action is accepted as “a path is taken that is not reversible” [National secretary of the CGIL] and which the organisation is slowly coming to terms with. While recognising the importance of services, the interviewees also underline a series of problems. First of all, at the organisational level, it is necessary to coordinate the work of individual services, with their “individual” logic, with the federations and their sectoral logic, increasing synergy between the two types of activity, as the CISL secretary interviewed says:

**[...] We follow a logic of functional integration, in the sense that all the components of the organisation must be visible to its members, non-members, and those in need, giving a complete response rather than as separated units in watertight compartments. For those who have always worked by sector, this approach is a complex issue...**

*[National Secretary of the CISL]*

A second problem, emphasised in the interviews in a transversal manner, directly regards the relationship between the union and its members who approach the organisation through the services:

**In the current situation, permanently, [...] of the average million or so new members that we have, at least 60% come from the services, and the number is increasing. [...] What does that mean? It means that we have a problem, which I think my colleagues in the CISL and UIL also have, and they are saying the same thing: there is an overall problem for the union regarding loyalty. Because the membership that derives from the services is often motivated by**





necessity, this means that, very often, once the necessity finishes, the membership finishes. Therefore, you join because you need an intervention, and I, as an organisation, must then work to convince you that it is worth remaining a member after the intervention. This is the problem.

*[National Secretary of the CGIL]*

The logic of services foresees a lighter form of participation and less an idea of belonging. The issues raised do not regard a workplace and its community but are confined to the individual sphere. In this sense, the fragmentation of workplaces and the diversification of forms of work pose challenges to the changing trade union base and the very relationship created with its members. Therefore, the confederations are wondering how they can move forward along this path, working on increasing the loyalty of their service users: the idea is to look for ways of transforming the supply of a service into continuous forms of participation.

**In this case, in addition to these offers of services, we are working a lot on the idea that there must also be an offer of spaces for participation. This means that if I ask you to join, you, as an independent professional, cannot be considered simply a commodity that I sign up for. Instead, I must put you in a position whereby you can become part [of the organisation], become a delegate, an RSA, or work in the union. [...] And I have to say, although a little patchy, the results are coming, but...** *[National Secretary of the CGIL]*

From this point of view, there is a substantial difference between types of services, based on the ability to establish a different relationship with workers:

**Whoever requests a service that does not immediately feel part of a community that**

**protects their interests perhaps does so out of convenience. Naturally, if you come to the Sportello Lavoro or the Anolf for the right to citizenship, it is to be considered protection and not just a service: it is a diversified form of conventional trade union action. [...] During the tax campaign, for example, if someone signs up because they want to reduce their spending by half, they don't have the time to get involved because there's always a queue at the office. In the service offered to tenants, on the other hand, there is room for dialogue, and they can tell you some stories... there is room for dialogue and reasoning, and there is the possibility to offer a broader view of union activity. One of the great challenges regards the ability to welcome a person who asks for a service as if they were at home: if we can develop a service of this kind, in my opinion, it will further help to prevent diversification between those who join and those who don't.**

*[National Secretary of the CISL]*

For this reason, it is initiatives aimed at combining the provision of services with paths that provide for more lasting forms of relationship (such as professionalisation courses or integrated offers for migrants in particular contexts) or with the provision of spaces for participation (such as providing co-working spaces) that are most enthusiastically mentioned in the interviews. In this sense, the most advanced initiatives considered those that aim to transport the union beyond its traditional audience by creating forms of participation that become more than the simple use of the service.

However, there are objective difficulties in pursuing these paths, both internal and external to an organisation that remains, in its structure, designed for different forms of participation and action. In fact, large sections of the labour market have difficulty in regarding the trade union as a credible and reliable actor:

**In other words, it's not as if the "glorious CGIL", at a certain point, announces that it can meet the needs of all those workers. There will be a wild celebration with flag waving and accolades. There is still a lot of mistrust towards the union, especially for certain sectors for which the union... the whole union has been an enemy for years. I mean, we have companies where the contrast between high and low professionalism, in some people, is still there...**

*[National Secretary of the CGIL]*

#### **4. A general overview**

The picture painted by the union leaders interviewed describes unions engaged in reviewing their tools and practices. This review does not call into question their traditional functions or actions but rather seeks to add solutions and tools to include the workers that are not traditionally linked to their social bases, whose relative weight is decreasing.

However, the assessment of this path is different regarding the prevailing feeling concerning the work still to be carried out and the delay to be made up for in relation to the transformations taking place:

**I am never satisfied. We still have a lot of work to do. The membership figures indeed tell us that we are working in a difficult situation regarding the consolidation and strengthening of our organisation. However, there remain pockets and areas where we can improve, such as those we have just talked about in which, both through extensive bargaining mechanisms and through our ability to offer and diversify services, we can broaden the range of services offered. It is a positive assessment, but it can be improved. We are on the right track.**

*[National Secretary of the CISL]*

The interviewees believe the path to be "the right one", but assessments of the paths taken and their

effects remain unclear. Above all, they complain of a delay with the youth component. In this area, there are problems linked to their large size and a certain resistance to change in organisations with a confederal structure. In addition, the initiatives implemented are often the result of a local or sectoral initiative and rarely appear to be supported by an overall strategy for the organisation. For this reason, successful initiatives in one territorial context may prove less effective in others, with the organisation struggling to activate systems to monitor and disseminate initiatives. The three confederations also agree on the need to focus the debate on the expansion of trade union services or the opening of branches, and they recognise the central problem of transforming the results of this expansion into forms of active participation in union life. However, the ideal tools required to achieve this goal remain open to debate, and, in this sense, the interviewees reserved judgment concerning the initiatives put in place.

Despite the problems detected, the assessment expressed by the interviewees regarding the health of their organisations is positive, not so much for the results achieved, which are considered as provisional results of a path that is well underway, but rather for the awareness of changes within the union. For the union managers, the very fact that the idea of the union as a bureaucratic, monolithic, and unchanging organisation has been challenged represents a major success of recent years.

**Often, in our executive bodies... and I say this to paint a clearer picture... do you realise that fifteen or twenty years ago, if someone in the same role as mine came here to tell you that the CGIL wants to give the same rights and opportunities to employees and self-employed... in this regard, he would have been... kicked out! Kicked out, yes, that's the right verb.**

*[National Secretary of the CGIL] ♦*

# Part 3

## Union services and their links to unionisation strategies

### 1. Old and new union services in the country

**T**he three main Italian trade union confederations are looking for possible strategies that can revitalise collective action to respond to transformations in the labour market and the changing composition of the union base. This operation is connected to a concept of openness that involves the innovative use of existing tools and structures and the development of new organisational methods. It regards openness towards new professional figures, shifting the focus from the workplace to the territory, and promoting a wide range of union practices. Of these practices, the renewal of service supply is fundamental. As we have already seen, services have long been an essential component of the trade union offer. However, their importance has been growing for at least twenty years, not only from a financial point of view. The interviews with the leading figures of the three main trade unions highlighted that they also represent a tool through which Italian unions cope with membership turnover. This has led to a reappraisal of the role of services in trade union action, which has also affected organisations that are culturally more reluctant to change, such as the CGIL. The provision of individual protection – ranging from CAAFs and centres assisting in accessing social security, social and health services (patronages), to legal

advice provided by labour disputes offices and career guidance services – is therefore now an integral and official part of the trade union offer. Also at the local level, individual categories or territorial branches organise initiatives that aim to set up innovative forms of services, which are more than just a simple offer of individual goods as a form of selective incentive to join the unions. It is a strategy based on an offer designed to approach both workers who are more distant from the union and those in a marginal position or outside the labour market. The supply of services has thus been one of the main tools to aggregate categories of workers and professional communities that have been historically excluded from trade union representation.

This approach of the confederal trade unions to broaden and innovate their services has resulted in a variety of organisational formulas, including, for example, focusing on CAAF desks to offer tax assistance to categories of workers, such as the self-employed, who have different tax regimes from employees; expanding forms of legal protection in issues not strictly related to labour law; experimenting activities to match labour supply and demand, with particular reference to vulnerable workers; organising (also through bilaterality) training activities for highly qualified workers; and setting up professional networks of independent professionals, both through online and local communities.

## 2. Selection of case studies

### 2.1. Research methods

Regarding the research methods, the general outline of the national context and the analysis of the case studies were carried out using qualitative techniques, while the evaluation of the users' individual experiences was based on a mixed-method approach.

More specifically, the first part of the research reconstructed the strategies of the main Italian trade unions regarding the role of service supply to increase membership and participation in the life of the union. Here, together with the analysis of official documentation, five semi-structured interviews were carried out (see Table 1).

The second part of the work consists of five case studies, selected through strategic sampling

according to the type of service, based on which a conscious selection of cases mediates the transition from the demand to the empirical context according to their relevance regarding what is to be observed. In fact, the contexts that were selected cover a wide range of targets (low and high-skilled workers, self-employed, unemployed), organisational environments (associations, services, bilateral institutes), and territorial contexts (national experiences and local experiences that were then reabsorbed at the national and/or sectoral level). To reconstruct the paths, strategies and critical areas encountered by the associations/services were studied, together with the documents on the websites and the material provided by union managers. Two subjects were interviewed for each case, so there were ten interviews in total (see Table 2).

**Table 1.** List of semi-structured interviews used in the first two parts of the report

Role of the interviewees	Organisation
National organisational secretary	CGIL
National organisational secretary	CISL
National organisational secretary	UIL
National sectoral secretary	FIT CISL
National manager in charge of membership	UIL

**Table 2.** List of the semi-structured interviews referred to in the third part of the report

Case study	Role of the interviewees	Organisation
Sportello Lavoro	Member of confederal secretariat	CISL Firenze Prato
Sportello Lavoro	Project manager	CISL Firenze Prato
Vivace	Founder	
Vivace	National secretary of the FELSA	CISL Nazionale
Partita Viva	General provincial secretary	CISL Vicenza
Partita Viva	Project manager	CISL Vicenza
Nidil	Project manager	CGIL Firenze
Nidil	Manager responsible for legal protection	Professionista
Quadrifor	Director	Professionista
Quadrifor	President	CISL Nazionale

**Table 3.** List of focus groups contacted in the third part of the study

Case study	Information source	N. interviewed/participants
Sportello Lavoro	Focus group	8
Vivace	Focus group	4
Partita Viva	Semi-structured interviews	5
Nidil	Participant observation	5
Quadrifor	*	*

\* Due to the bilateral nature of Quadrifor and the type of people who participate, it was not possible to contact individual participants through the use of surveys nor through in-depth interviews or focus groups.

Finally, various methods were used for user evaluation. First of all, a web survey was carried out. Following this, several in-depth qualitative studies were performed, through semi-structured interviews, focus groups and the observation of an assembly with the workers (see Table 3), which made it possible to assess the experience and understand the needs and expectations of the participants regarding the relationship between services, membership, and participation.

## 2.2. Synopsis: basic outline of the selected case studies

The analysis of the Italian case is based on five case studies that allow us to examine a wide range of subjects, territories, and structures (see Table 4, below).

In describing the different experiences, the first dimension used calls into question the organisational characteristics of the organisations offering services. The cases range from sectoral organisations, such as the Nidil Firenze, to affiliated associations of trade union structures, local services, and bilateral bodies. In the case of affiliated associations and local services, there has also been a transformation over time so that these structures – which initially started as local

experiments – are now connected with national levels. In this regard, as far as the territorial dimension is concerned, we have mainly local organisations, structures which, as we have anticipated, follow a bottom-up approach, but also with national coordination, as in the case of Partita Viva, and national level actors, as is the case with Quadrifor. Considering the services offered, we can distinguish between associations that mainly cater for freelance workers and independent professionals, structures exclusively engaged in training activities for the so-called middle management and cases, such as the Sportello Lavoro that try to involve a wider audience of subjects through information, guidance, and training activities. Consequently, the fourth dimension, which regards the characteristics and competences of the users involved, is strictly connected to the type of service offered. On the one hand, there will be organisations dedicated to skilled workers; on the other hand, there will be structures for less skilled workers or with a transversal approach.

The richness of these experiences, thus, makes it possible to shed light on the services offered by trade union actors as a means of increasing membership, and on the transformations taking

**Table 4.** Description of the case studies

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Sportelli per le partite IVA	Quadrifor
<b>Type of case</b>	Services	Association	Association	Services	Bilateral institution
<b>Structure of reference</b>	CISL Firenze-Prato	CISL (Recently, joined Felsa)	CISL Vicenza (Recently joined Vivace)	Nidil-CGIL Firenze	(Set up and run by FILCAMS-CGIL, FISA-SCAT-CISL, Uiltucs-UIL, and Confcommercio)
<b>Organisational level</b>	Local (Later, becoming part of the national system of CISL services)	National	Local	Local	National
<b>Services offered</b>	Orientation, training and meeting the supply and demand of work	Community building, networking, and training (Now, tax assistance, patronage, and other services)	Tax assistance, patronage, legal protection, training, and co-working spaces	Tax assistance, patronage, legal protection, training	Training
<b>Groups targeted</b>	Workers and people outside the labour market	Professionals and freelancers	Professionals and freelancers	Self-employed workers (E.g., tour guides)	Middle managers
<b>Professional level of users</b>	Low	High	High	Transversal	High

place in the Italian labour market and the emerging forms of representation.

### 3. The case studies

#### 3.1. Case study 1: Sportello Lavoro CISL Firenze-Prato

##### 3.1.1. History and objectives

In 2018, it was decided to set up a help desk (the Sportello Lavoro) at the CISL in Florence-Prato, two cities in central Italy, to listen to those who – for different reasons – frequented the office. In fact, many users often went to the CISL to fill in an unemployment application form or deliver a CV, but their relationship with the union was limited to these single activities.

One of the aspects of the experience regards its “physical nature”, in the form of concrete space and recognition, which is linked to the more general question of the union’s identity. As the interviewees report:

**We decided to set up a physical place that is recognisable from the outside.**

*[Secretary of the CISL Firenze-Prato]*

Furthermore, the Sportello Lavoro is to be considered as an active instrument that promotes unionisation, but starting from the labour supply: the main approach is to contribute to improving employability:

**We don’t consider skills profiles, but rather, for new graduates, those expelled from work, or workers in transition, we organise all the functions that could be useful for finding a new job.**

*[Secretary of the CISL Firenze-Prato]*

In this case, a key role was played by the provincial secretariat of the CISL, which came up with the general concept, which was later supplemented by ideas coming from the national organisational assembly, which then set up a form of coordination with other initiatives:

**Following this project, we compared other national CISL initiatives, in Vicenza, in Lombardy [...] [with] the organisational and services assembly, the Sportello Lavoro was born. A national desk with a national logo, which could coordinate with other associations.**

*[Secretary of the CISL Firenze-Prato]*

This bottom-up push, which started from the activities of individual trade unionists at the local level, was then legitimised and organised at the confederal level.

However, the story of the Firenze Sportello Lavoro goes back decades to the birth of the federation of atypical workers – the Felsa - which, in its initial phase, shared the costs of the desk and the staff involved in the regional organisation. Later, the first agreements were set up, such as the one with the local Chamber of Commerce, which provides the desk with information concerning the needs of companies and the profiles most in demand on the labour market. The Sportello Lavoro, therefore, functions as an intermediary.

This confirms the central nature of the local level. In fact, national strategies are developed at this level, interacting with the political-institutional system and with the various actors in the field, thus maintaining the specific local characteristics.

**With the experience and management of different cases, the Sportello Lavoro created a position for itself**

*[Secretary of the Felsa-CISL]*

##### 3.1.2. The organisation

There is a mismatch between strategic choices, objectives, structure, and available resources regarding the organisational dimension. The idea was to create a service that would complement traditional passive policies, such as social security benefits, which were patronage services and the main channel used to contact users.

One of the possible solutions was to set



up a database to facilitate the matching of supply and demand. To do this, two initial steps were necessary: firstly, systematically gather information concerning the people who frequented the organisation; secondly, strengthen and build the channel with local institutions and businesses.

Therefore, it was a question of putting the union into a position where it could become directly involved in intermediation processes, as it had done historically at the beginning of trade unions, an ambitious project that nevertheless, in some areas, suffered from an organisational point of view. Thus, although the objectives remain the same today, the interviewees expressed some doubts concerning the precise nature and investments needed to strengthen the structure:

**The fundamental question is to understand precisely how we want to organise the activity. We can specialise more in supply-demand intermediation, maintaining contacts, or the entire activity of competence assessment, such as preparing people for the labour market. These are the two paths we can take.**

*[Secretary of the Felsa-CISL]*

A possible route is linked to national strategies. The Sportello Lavoro is a confederal service, and, in this context, some agreements with employment agencies – such as Umana and Gi Group – have been set up, which have led to specific protocols. The activity of the desk is thus part of a more comprehensive network. Over time the function of the Sportello Lavoro has been extended. From the simple creation of “training opportunities” for those who turned to the patronage in order to benefit from passive policies to the supply of a service for all workers concerned. Therefore, the network can be extended to other areas of interest, such as job fairs or relations with high schools. Although these activities are not directly related to the

desk’s mission, they seem to confirm the will to move towards a new form of representation and trade unionism.

Another aspect of interest concerns the identity and cultural dimensions of the trade union. As we have seen, many people turn to the trade union only in cases of apparent difficulties, such as when they lose their jobs following company crises. This creates a special relationship between the different actors involved, which goes beyond the mere instrumental function. The trade union becomes a safe space where one can express anxieties and fears:

**When people come to the Sportello Lavoro, they speak sincerely; they open up much more than the agency. [...] Many people feel suspicious in general. But if they come to us, they feel more at their ease.**

*[Secretary of the Felsa-CISL]*

From the interviews, it is clear that union protection can come in different forms, not only through bargaining at the workplace but also through promoting active policies or supporting individuals who feel lost due to a temporary weakness and need to re-find a sense of direction. Earlier, we mentioned the difficulties arising from pursuing medium- to long-term strategic objectives. The organisational weaknesses present are, in fact, only temporarily balanced by the subjects in the agency, and this means it is possible to reduce the adverse effects concerning the lack of dedicated human resources. There are in fact three full-time staff members together with three subjects on trainee or apprenticeship contracts. Furthermore, some of the investments needed to improve the desk, which regard not only personnel but also space management and the purchase of PCs, were made possible thanks to the financial contribution of the pensioners’ federation. This creates a patchwork of resources and tools, which reduces the desk’s consolidation potential.

### 3.1.3. User profile and trends

The Sportello Lavoro is a space for people searching for support to enter or re-enter the labour market through four types of activities. The first one concerns *career guidance* and provides contractual and trade union advice and help to fill in forms and obligations and compile a CV. The second regards *information management* on a dedicated platform. The third aims to *enhance the role of training* with accredited organisations. The fourth is based more on aspects of *income support*. According to the data provided directly by the Sportello Lavoro, about 85% of those who contacted the operators did not have a job, and almost all of these had been employees (95%), while the remaining 15% contacted the desk for information or in search of new opportunities. Overall, there are 820 subjects, divided almost equally according to gender: 440 women and 380 men. The position of the Sportello Lavoro within a broad and heterogeneous network makes it possible to identify several trends that sectoral federations find more challenging to pick up. For this reason, it was possible to come into contact with two segments that hardly ever have anything to do with the trade union: the self-employed and creative workers. Regarding the first point, through Vivace, it was possible to start a process to involve independent professionals. In particular, the Felsa, the CISL federation dedicated to self-employed and atypical workers, collaborates with the Sportello Lavoro to improve recruitment, while Vivace plays a role in raising awareness. However, the possibility of representing these subjects requires an overall reorganisation of the structure, which, as we have seen, cannot be based only on the individual investments of individual operators. In fact, unlike job seekers, professionals require specific channels and methods of access:

**Since it started, about ten freelancers have been involved. For them, interaction best takes place via the web: Facebook and Twitter.**

*[Secretary of the Felsa-CISL]*

Regarding creative workers, the aim is to create a dedicated co-working space. Also in this case, the regional structure was strategically involved and will physically host the space. However, unlike the other initiatives, in this case, there appears to be no defined strategy.

### 3.1.4. Assessment of the services

#### a) From the trade union's point of view

The interviewees, overall, expressed their satisfaction: the opinions of the confederation and those reported by those who contacted the desk are positive. Over time, the relationship with institutional actors, agencies, enterprises, and other organisations – such as schools or job fairs – has also been strengthened, making it possible to reduce the distance between labour supply and demand. Also within the sectoral federations, the work of intermediation and networking is recognised. However, some difficulties remain in communication and exchange of information because the federations often act autonomously and with strategies that do not always meet the needs of the Sportello.

**The agreements have been signed with all the confederations. We have established some good protocols, but no [confederation] analyses or [updates] them. The convention states that we commit ourselves to manage the phases of company crises, extraordinary wage guarantee funding, etc., and that in these cases [the confederations] will be able to refer the staff to the Sportello Lavoro. [The confederations] must inform us when [the companies] start their selection of personnel and which professional profiles are needed.**

*[Secretary of the CISL Firenze-Prato]*

However, despite the good intentions, the implementation of signed agreements often remain incomplete, and this indicates the absence of a structured link between the Sportello Lavoro and the sectoral federations:





**The signed agreement on paper must be followed up by concrete action, which is a lot of work. [...] In some cases, [the agreements] work, in others less so and others not at all.**

*[Secretary of the CISL Firenze-Prato]*

Thus, on the one hand, relations are created through agreements, and, in some cases, the work of the Sportello Lavoro is presented in company board meetings and assemblies. On the other hand, the management and maintenance of these agreements require an effort that is not always possible, even though the sectoral federations themselves benefit from each potential new registration. This becomes even more relevant if one considers that one of the important aspects of the Sportello Lavoro regards the role played by the trade union. In this sense, what seems like service for people that cannot be reached through traditional channels – such as temporary workers, but not only – is considered by the operators as a new and complementary – way of being a trade union:

**The Sportello Lavoro, for me, is more a trade union activity than a service. It is a way of unionising, working with temporary workers, who by their nature are very discontinuous.**

*[Secretary of the Felsa-CISL]*

In this regard, the interviewees report two significant experiences. The first one concerns a company that produces injectors and employs many temporary workers (more than 200 out of about 1,100 employees). The union is present with its federation – the Felsa – and has grown consistently. With some workers, the Sportello Lavoro acted as an intermediary with other companies in the metalworking industry, facilitating hiring an employee. Although limited in numbers due to the limited negotiating power of temporary workers, the experience has had a significant impact:

**There was a substantial impact on the company. For a whole day, nobody talked about anything else.**

**I wanted to underline that because it is important to use this service to carry out trade union work.**

*[Secretary of the Felsa-CISL]*

A second positive example is linked to a more traditional form of intermediation involving a recent graduate who could not find a job. In this case, the activity of the Sportello was to improve the worker's profile, involving a specialised agency that managed to find a job.

In the interviewees' words, the Sportello Lavoro can be considered a positive experience, which has succeeded in enhancing the role and opportunities of active policies.

As we have seen, besides being a service, the Sportello Lavoro can be considered a channel of access to the union, a different form of social contact with union activities. Membership is not necessary:

**When people find a job, 95% of them join and see the union differently. Not only in a confrontational way but also positively.**

*[Secretary of the Felsa-CISL]*

From a numerical point of view, the data provided by the Felsa secretary shows that, out of 820 users, about 85 have found a job, and 79 of these have become union members. This underlines the growth potential, as in the case when representing the unemployed. At the same time, it highlights the structural limits of the organisation, which, in the medium term, may negatively affect the evaluation of activities:

**The activity ends with us, and this is a limit. [...] through the database, we contact many people, but we cannot organise them. [...] We, those 800 people we have in the portal, cannot organise them. This poses another**

## **problem because it could become a potential boomerang.**

*[Secretary of the CISL Firenze-Prato]*

In the case of the Sportello Lavoro, we can provide an initial assessment. Regarding strengths, there is undoubtedly the ability, also thanks to the direction of the confederation at the regional level, to make good use of the sectoral federations and internal resources of the organisation. Furthermore, the emphasis on the emotional aspect and trust, which binds some contractually weak subjects to the activities of the Sportello, can help improve the desk's performance. Finally, the decision to focus on two other groups – freelancers and creative workers – can potentially widen union participation while also favouring contamination between different approaches and visions.

There is, however, a certain organisational weakness, which is often compensated for by the commitment of individual workers. Therefore, concrete interventions at the regional level, together with a more active role for the sectoral federations, are needed to balance the limited number of resources involved in such an ambitious project. The risk, in fact, is that a new model of unionisation will not be implemented, with the Sportello Lavoro playing the role of a pivot within a broader and more structured network. At the same time, the interviewees highlight the need for differentiated channels and approaches among the different groups. It is one thing to organise a group of individuals with non-standard contracts, which require efficient management of the database and constant ways of relating and involving them; it is quite another to involve – even using different spaces such as co-working and/or virtual communication channels – a group of self-employed and creative workers. Each group may represent a new pool of members, but they both require specific medium-term investments.

In this sense, considering trade union activity as

a process of continuous training through active policies and mobilisation of different actors is undoubtedly a potential winner.

In brief, there are two main challenges. Firstly, it is important to improve the intermediation service, increasing the chances of finding a new job for those who decide to turn to associations other than the public services of job centres or private agencies.

Secondly, it is essential to transform the supply of services into a supply of representation, distinguishing between those who find a new job and can therefore join sectoral federations and the broader and more heterogeneous group of unemployed people, who have no organisation that can meet their demands.

### *b) From the user's point of view*

A total of 52 people responded to the online questionnaire, and 40 of these had used the Sportello Lavoro services. In general, the overall evaluation can be considered positive, with only one respondent stating they would not advise a colleague to take advantage of the services on offer. In contrast, 11 respondents underlined the usefulness of the activities, even though they had not been able to sort out all their reported problems.

Regarding those who used the services, about half of those who filled in the questionnaire (21) are currently members of the union and show a willingness to continue to remain so in the future. The remaining respondents are not (and have never been) members (12), while 5 respondents are currently not members but have been in the past.

However, the Sportello Lavoro is a gateway to the trade union: 30 people came into contact with the service without going through the union or only afterwards. In general, 3 users of the services decided to join, 16 continued to use the services but did not participate in other activities, 16 became interested in activities related to their profession, and 4 in other union initiatives.



Finally, 22 people stated that their opinion of the trade union had improved, while, for the others, it has remained substantially unchanged.

The service also seems to have made it possible to provide a new form of representation for these subjects, although polarised positions have emerged. Regarding the view that “trade unions represent workers like me”, the group of respondents was divided: 22 wholly or partly agreed; 12 did not express a clear position; the remaining 6 said they wholly or partly disagreed. As far as socio-demographic characteristics are concerned, the sample is evenly split in terms of gender (18 women and 22 men). The age range is medium-high (33 people are between 31 and 60 years of age); while there is a lower level of education in men (16 have a secondary school diploma or a professional diploma). When the questionnaire was filled in, most of the subjects were not employed (32), and most of these had been so for less than a year (23).

As mentioned, 8 people, mainly women, took part in the focus group. Of the participants, we can see that 3 subjects had an educational qualification equal or superior to a degree, while 3 had a high school diploma. Of the remaining two, one had a professional qualification and the other a middle school diploma. As far as age is concerned, two participants were under 35 years of age, while the eldest was 54 years old. Finally, they were predominantly unemployed, with only one respondent having a job, whom all lived in the city of Florence or the surrounding area.

The first part of the meeting investigated the ways people can come into contact with the Sportello Lavoro. The panorama that emerged was differentiated: most focus group participants were already members of the trade union, which facilitated their contact with the Sportello Lavoro, while others came across the structure almost “by chance” or by word-of-mouth.

This is in line with what emerged in the first part, in which it was pointed out that, before setting up the Sportello Lavoro, many users only contacted

the union for activities, such as the management of some operations or the drafting of a CV. In this sense, as we shall see, the Sportello Lavoro makes it possible to generate a more structured relationship.

Subsequently, we focused on the services used. The main activities of the desk are linked to the assessment of workers’ skills, the reorganisation of their CV, the proposal of training activities and, subsequently, the setting up of contacts with a series of employment agencies in the territory.

**We reviewed my CV, and they showed me how to use some funds for training and unemployment. I joined the Sportello Lavoro and was contacted by a temporary work agency.**

*[Focus group]*

**I have been working since 1987. [When I lost my job], I joined the Sportello Lavoro, I was contacted, and I had an introductory interview [...] [Still] I have had no direct experience, but we will have to meet for the communications to INPS and some job selections.**

*[Focus group]*

Direct intermediation seems to play a less critical role. In other words, despite the intent to act as an intermediary body that can direct workers towards the needs of companies where the union is present, this ability to connect companies and workers in order to reduce the distance between supply and demand remains relatively marginal:

**The Sportello Lavoro heard I was willing to do the job, and they organised my candidature. Nothing came of it, but at least... [they tried].**

*[Focus group]*

In this sense, the role of employment agencies is central. The activity of the Sportello Lavoro is therefore propaedeutic and aims to prepare candidates for selection by the agencies. As we

shall see, this aspect represents one of the main areas of intervention for developing new services. In addition, the capacity of intermediation in the labour market has been dramatically reduced by the consequences of the pandemic. With redundancies being frozen and the reduction in employment opportunities, it is difficult to make a real assessment of the capacity to connect companies and workers, also acting through training. A further element strongly linked to the considerations that emerged in the first part of the report concerns the “trade union” function of the Sportello Lavoro and involves the relationship with the public job centres (*Centri per l’Impiego*, CPIs) and the employment agencies. We had, in fact, highlighted how the relationship created between workers and operators is not only instrumental. For people having lost a job, the trade union becomes an area that is perceived as a safe place, differently from the CPIs:

**The CPI almost becomes a helpful office for bureaucratic matters. Regarding active proposals, it is absent. Maybe you can find a helpful person, but it just feels like a pain in the neck in some cases.**

*[Focus group]*

In this regard, the excerpts capture the feeling of disorientation and fragility that characterises these subjects:

**I see that the CPIs have lost the central position they had before, while the Sportello Lavoro, maybe due to its trade union background, pays more attention to people.**

*[Focus group]*

**For me, going to the CPI was a trauma. Superficially, they are nice to you, but then, in practice, you are faced with a person who doesn’t really care about you [...] they put me in some improbable ranking list, where there were dozens of people in front of me with**

**better ranking. [Instead] they should help me to look for something where I can work. [It would be necessary] to be more attentive to those sitting in front of them, instead of just having people fill in a form.**

*[Focus group]*

In other words, the CPIs seem to lack the relational aspects needed to deal with the transition phases of working life. What emerges, in fact, is a sort of functional division of activities: on the one hand, the CPIs have a predominantly bureaucratic-administrative value; on the other hand, the agencies deal with concrete job placement. In the middle, there is the Sportello Lavoro, which performs the functions of guidance and filtering.

The next step concerns the aspects related to the level of satisfaction with the services received and membership. In general, there is a highly favourable judgement. Nevertheless, considering the labour market situation during the pandemic, it is difficult to assess how much the answers are conditioned by the respondents’ fragile emotional and occupational conditions.

As far as membership is concerned, many of the participants were already members of the trade union. In contrast, for others, the Sportello Lavoro represented an opportunity to get to know the trade union organisation better, to review some positions regarding previous experiences or join for the first time.

**I signed up after coming into contact with the Sportello Lavoro.**

*[Focus group]*

A final element to be highlighted concerns the relationship with the employment agencies. As we have seen, the Sportello Lavoro seems to act as a filter between workers and agencies, overseeing the “upstream” aspects, such as the skills assessment or the CV. Subsequently, the operators put the subjects in contact with the agencies,



without, however, establishing a close relationship of information exchange – on outcomes and assessments – with the latter.

**My suggestion is to insist on more feedback concerning the results (of the assessment).**

*[Focus group]*

Another critical element concerns the real ability of recruiters to assess the different profiles, skills and potential of workers carefully. In fact, in a highly flexible labour market such as can often be found in the agencies, supply far exceeds demand meaning there is a risk of marginalising profiles.

**The general impression is that the agencies have young people working who do not really understand what you have done and what you could do. I had this impression. I understand that it is also difficult for them to deal with the large amount of work.**

*[Focus group]*

Therefore, there should be a more structured collaboration between the Sportello Lavoro and the agencies to enhance the value of workers, promote funded training courses, and give potentially weak subjects a new form of representation in the labour market.

We can try and summarise some of the elements that emerged from the joint reading of the results of the survey and the focus group. The first aspect of note regards the fact that, despite the existence of public job centres, a form of union-based intermediation service is in any case useful. Therefore, although the number of intermediaries is limited, the relationship between operators and workers fosters a climate of trust, which means periods of job instability can be approached less “formally and bureaucratically”. In our opinion, this is a crucial factor, especially for people who must reorganise their position in the labour market. In this sense, a trade union structure that is more inclined to focus on aspects related to

representation, associative culture, and solidarity can reduce uncertainty and increase potential employment chances.

In this sense, we can also interpret workers’ requests to be better protected from employment agencies to improve the exchange and timing of information received concerning assessments, vacancies, and opportunities for reimbursement or training.

In fact, this is by no means a new issue. Over the years, the federations dedicated to representing self-employed, temporary, and atypical workers have, in fact, signed numerous agreements to improve the protection of these individuals. What can be considered as new is the fact that, rather than traditional types of representation, what is needed now is a more operational representation that is part of the assessment process.

In this context, there are several possible ways forward. For example, one way could be to formalise the preferential channels between the Sportello Lavoro and the agencies, reinforcing the definition of competences and training paths from the beginning. Naturally, this approach has some problems because it requires substantial organisational investments by the trade unions, and it may also generate adverse effects by discouraging companies from using agencies that offer a workforce that is too “unionised”. An alternative softer approach could be to strengthen the “guarantee” role regarding guidance and training activities. Also in this case, however, investments of an organisational nature and a more comprehensive network of relations are required as the opportunity of a more structured relationship would also be appealing for agencies. The final element involves the representation of the unemployed. In this context, the most relevant issue probably regards the heterogeneity of the category, a fact that emerges from the focus group. Furthermore, rather than collaborating, these subjects are more in competition with each other, which reduces the potential for collective action and information exchange. However,

common demands are still possible concerning both CPIs and agencies, which means the union is an important counterpart for promoting new demands.

## 3.2. Case study 2: Vivace

### 3.2.1. History and objectives

Ever since it was founded, the CISL has paid attention to some sectors of self-employed work, particularly self-employed agricultural workers and certain “trades”, such as carousel workers. However, the growth in self-employment coming from independent professionals, creative work sectors, and professions linked to new technologies represents a relatively new scenario for trade unions. Due to its legal nature and how the work is carried out, this labour-market segment has had difficulty in guaranteeing representation by the trade unions and, at the same time, it has generated problems for the organisations, linked to the characteristics of different professional identities and the development of different types of protection. Vivace was set up to enable the CISL to approach this world. On the initiative of a Felsa official, in 2016, work began on a project aimed at representing this segment of self-employment. From the outset, the project has followed a line that aims to highlight and preserve the character of these jobs. To organise innovative forms of representation, it was decided not to proceed directly through one of the existing sectoral federations but through the founding of an autonomous association pursuing two objectives: providing users with a clear identity and encouraging the development of a specific work culture.

The association was initially set up as an online community to meet the needs of mobile professionals whose work is not tied to a specific place or sector. Similarly, the choice of an agile channel such as the web was helpful to overcome mutual distrust, which, in recent decades, has separated trade unions from the self-employed.

As an association, Vivace aims to represent freelance workers regardless of the type of employment relationship. Vivace’s idea of representation is based on three interconnected principles: firstly, providing valuable tools for community members through the offer of services and special agreements; secondly, building an aggregative entity, which transforms the association into a place where discussions can be held, and certain values and work cultures can be shared; thirdly, acting, by virtue of the membership, as a political interlocutor in decisions concerning the conditions of self-employed workers, in particular in the negotiations held with the public institutions at various institutional levels.

Precisely to strengthen these three forms of representation, as we shall see, Vivace’s path has led the association to evolve into a more structured organisational form, both by overcoming the association’s exclusively virtual dimension and trying to establish itself in the various territorial areas. This online community first set up a series of agreements and services that members could access.

The first step regarded constructing a wide network of specific services for this type of professionals, starting from the system of services that the confederation already supplied and then integrating it with ad hoc interventions. An attempt was then made to ensure that these services became a means of identifying the association, for example, by trying to supply services directly as Vivace. Therefore, some CAAF services or services linked to the patronages (e.g., sickness and parental leaves) could be provided directly by the territorial coordinators of Vivace rather than by the confederation’s service supply system.

Furthermore, by registering on the portal, it is possible to access the agreements: legal advice and protection, also online, from a group of lawyers; insurance benefits for motorists, in collaboration with Tiassisto24; an agreement with a broker



regarding supplementary pensions; health care, through contacts with the FISASCAT; the extension of the coverage of Ebipro, the bilateral body for employees of professional firms, to the members of Vivace.

The trade unionists interviewed underlined the objective that the services can be used to build a sense of community, that is, they can be organised collectively: for example, by offering insurance plans in which the risk profile does not correspond to that of the individual worker, but rather to that of the members of Vivace as a whole. These initiatives are thus presented as a value that the community offers, which is also “educational” and “political” with regard to individualistic work culture. Therefore, the service also provides an opportunity to “send a message” concerning how important it is for a self-employed worker to have, for example, his or her professional insurance, which can be helpful in difficult times.

### 3.2.2. *The organisation*

From an organisational point of view, the association started with a lean structure. The central staff consists of three people. All the participants, although relatively young, have considerable trade union experience, particularly in the federation of atypical workers (the Felsa, of which the current president of Vivace is also national secretary). However, it is important to underline that, from the very beginning, despite its small organisational set-up, Vivace has been able to count on the confederation’s extensive network of services and Felsa staff throughout the country to provide services and advice.

Although it is a young association, the steps taken in recent years have led to significant organisational changes. These interventions were carried out both top-down (i.e., in the relationship between the association and the grassroots) and bottom-up (i.e., in the relationship between the association and the confederation).

Regarding the first perspective, the first years of experience clearly indicated that a more

articulated structure was required, widening the participation methods and becoming more widespread in the territory:

**[...] an evolution, if you like, also to give a certain capillarity to our initial experience.**

*[Coordinator of Vivace].*

The idea was to provide this community with a “concrete” structure to seek greater continuity in membership and more active participation. With this idea in mind, a training programme was launched for territorial operators, who were given the task of opening and managing local offices in their areas. A further nine operators were also trained, expanding the staff available to the association. However, there followed a sudden halt: the planned training finished in February 2020, shortly before the restrictive measures were introduced to contain the Covid-19 pandemic in Italy, which meant that, at the time of the interviews, the opening of these local branches had yet to come.

In addition to these changes, which were predominantly due to the internal evolution of the association, there are other aspects concerning the relationship with the confederation and the sectoral federations. In recent years, after the Organisational Assembly and the Services Programme Assembly, the CISL decided to invest more in the association. The association realised that a structured organisation was needed to respond effectively to the needs of the territories. It, therefore, became affiliated with the Felsa. Consequently, joining Vivace means automatically becoming a member of the Felsa.

### 3.2.3. *User profile and trends*

Vivace caters to a specific type of worker: all the self-employed who have high or medium-high qualifications and carry out intellectual work. Within this varied group, it is difficult to identify a typical profession characterised by a specific type of work performance (linked to fiscal and

social security conditions). The professions involved change geographically in relation to the distribution of professional specialisations on the territories and a membership that is very much based on word-of-mouth relying on small local professional communities.

To provide a correct membership overview of the association, it is important to bear in mind that, until 2020, Vivace's membership was remarkably "fluid" in the sense that there was no actual membership, but you could subscribe – completely free of charge – to the website. If you signed up for the site, you also became a member of the association. In 2020, however, in conjunction with the organisational changes described above, a membership campaign was launched that involved the payment of a fee. Although this new membership system has just started – which makes it difficult to analyse diachronically – in absolute terms, the number of members does not seem to have changed significantly. Indeed, the objective is to "retain" members. The two interviewees reported that – once Vivace had started to become well known within the freelance community – online membership reached a peak in membership of over 1,500, which, over time, began to decline:

**At that point, we realised that by only operating online, loyalty is not possible, so these 400 signed up, but it was difficult to generate any form of lasting relationship [...]. Then, the peak was followed by a decline, because being online makes it difficult to create a relationship and convince people to join Vivace...**

*[National coordinator of Vivace]*

Since January 1st, 2020, with the start of the "official" enrolment, Vivace has arrived at almost 400 members, of which, according to the president, 50% came from CISL services, and the remaining were workers who already knew Vivace, thus showing continuity of membership.

Proof of this lies in the fact that most of these enrolments took place through the online portal and not through a CISL service desk.

The local branches were the other point of access to the association that the management was counting on, but they played a minor role in enrolment because, due to the lockdown, they were prevented from opening.

#### *3.2.4. Assessment of the services*

##### *a) From the trade union's point of view*

According to the trade unionists in charge of the management of Vivace, the project has been a success while remaining a work in progress. In their view, it was a success in the sense that they created an organisation that, at the national level, manages to bring self-employed workers and trade unions together, making clear progress in overcoming mutual distrust. In particular, the organisation of an offer of specific, highly elaborated services and its reception by the target group of workers seem to have been the most important contributing factors. Finally, as an association representing the self-employed, Vivace has actively participated in important negotiations concerning the development of the Freelance Workers' Statute and the more recent ones regarding income support during the pandemic. From this point of view, maintaining a certain autonomy was an added value so that Vivace could act as a competitor and, at the same time, a partner of associations such as Acta and Confprofessioni.

However, if we take the triple declination of the idea of representation that Vivace has set as its objective, it is essential to focus on the second point in the future: namely, being a place of collective aggregation and participation. First, this means improving the community as an online site where freelancers can interact, access services, and talk to the association. Therefore, the services must be improved in their "collective" function, and the portal must become a place of interaction. Secondly, the issue regards the





development of associative democracy. As we have seen, this problem is at the roots of recent organisational choices, particularly the decision to set up territorial structures. In fact, these structures do not replicate the role of the “central” service supply system on a local basis and are not organised like counters but as meeting places where it is possible to develop an associative life. These areas of development and the logic behind them are at the heart of the problem that associations such as Vivace must face:

**The transformation of service – with random participation based exclusively on a specific request – into membership, thus constructing associative democracy.**

*[President of Vivace]*

This is all the truer for a group such as Vivace’s target group, which is involved in individual work activities and has a working culture that is not particularly inclined towards collective action. From this point of view, the work carried out in recent years should be viewed positively, as it has made it possible to weigh up and develop a series of organisational and political solutions. However, the central issue has yet to be resolved. In this regard, 2020 should have represented the concrete test, starting with the innovations that should have been developed at the territorial level. However, the extended lockdown has put off the moment of truth concerning online reality and territorial participation.

If we look beyond this unavoidable setback for the development of the association, the story of Vivace highlights that following their contacts with these categories of workers, the forms of participation in trade union life must be reviewed, in particular regarding the approach towards forms of participation that can be defined as “lighter”. For example, during the lockdown, several professionals who were members of the association offered their professional know-how: this led to a project of “video pills” which

contained “professional instructions” regarding how to cope during the lockdown. According to their skills, each professional prepared a short video of just a few minutes, which contained suggestions and advice. In situations of this kind, one can reveal forms of participation that differ from those of traditional trade unions but are nevertheless significant in terms of their relationship with the membership:

**[It’s] the way one says: I’m part of Vivace, I have this wealth of knowledge, and through Vivace, I can provide you with this bit of information.**

*[President of Vivace]*

To sum up, the key message is that an active structure has been set up that is now known to both the labour market and other social and political actors. However, the most critical element highlighted regards the relationship between services and membership – i.e., the development of organisational tools and forms of relationship that guarantee continuity and participation after the usefulness of the individual service has expired. In this sense, the reorganisation of Vivace, especially at the territorial level, goes to the heart of the problem, attempting to hold together the two souls that characterise its evolutionary path, from its beginnings as an online community – with undoubted advantages in terms of ease of access and recognisability – to the search for greater organisational “solidity”. This solidity is a necessary step, not so much concerning the growth of membership in absolute terms, but rather to improve the quality of associative life.

*b) From the user’s point of view*

To collect the opinion of the users of Vivace’s services, a web survey was implemented and distributed by email through the organisation and, secondly, a focus group was set up. Both were designed to collect an evaluation of the services

offered and their role in shaping the relationship between citizens and trade unions.

The survey collected 14 responses, mainly from self-employed or temporary workers (10), two unemployed, and two trade unionists directly involved in Vivace. This limited number of responses, which was collateral to the main activity, but which came from the organisation, can be interpreted as an initial symptom of the difficulties of trade union activities when coming into contact with the world of the self-employed. The focus group involved four Vivace members, all of whom were self-employed.

Regarding the first access, the data shows that most respondents learned about Vivace through the union itself, although web communication played a role: the union as a whole is the forerunner of more specific and less known services. This statement, however, requires further clarification. As some respondents added, and as emerged from the focus group, it is above all through the trade union's services that this information is conveyed. During the focus group, a particular combination of factors emerged: the participants stressed the importance of word-of-mouth – the advice of a friend, a colleague, or an acquaintance within the trade union environment – to gain initial access to the world of union services (CAAFs and patronages). Through these, Vivace could become known, which could then be followed by a formal approach.

Word-of-mouth seems to be how independent professionals receive the “unexpected” information to find answers to problems related to their working conditions within the trade union environment. In this sense, gaining knowledge through the communication of trade unionists should not be interpreted as an effect of previous contacts with the organisation concerning Vivace's services or activities.

The participants in the focus group reported that they started relations with Vivace mainly by searching for specific information – that is,

services. However, the survey shows that half of the respondents (7) belong to Vivace even though they have not used any services. Among those who have used the services, different levels of relationship emerge.

The answers regarding the perceived quality of services show a high level of satisfaction (the lowest average value is 7.8 on a scale of 1 to 10). The focus group provided further confirmation of this satisfaction and offered some possible interpretations. Participants say that they turned to Vivace almost by chance, in search of help in times of difficulty (access to the “reliefs” linked to the pandemic, confusion over contributions linked to the disappearance of ENPALS, etc.) after having been unable to find solutions through traditional professional channels; and that, in that situation, they did not expect the trade union – which they regard as something distant – to help them with their problems and questions.

From this point of view, the focus group confirmed that the trade union's main competitors in approaching independent professionals are accountants. Participants compare their experience of Vivace's services with the services offered by accountants. Their comparison regards the cost, professionalism, and care of the people they met in the association.

**[...] Given that I don't think they are people on incredible pay, in fact, I don't think they are paid very much. What hit me [is that] – in a world where there is a general and extreme disinterest, having, for 30 years, paid accountants, agents, lawyers, etc. – I had received such a good treatment. I mean, the guy who assists me [...] thought of solutions: he called me one day to tell me “I was thinking...”, and asked me... I was stunned because I was used to paying professionals a lot of money, and they never considered [laughter] doing anything more than they had to. It really hit me.**

*[Focus group]*



Although hinged on a positive experience regarding individual relationships, the relationship between the focus group participants and Vivace, mediated through the services, is more articulated than first appears. Almost no one claims to have used many services (in fact, often only the one they originally made enquiries about) or even to know about Vivace's range of services. Apart from pure communication, this data reflects the particular way in which independent professionals come into contact with trade unions: as an opportunity to look for a specific solution, rather than as a place that could offer a range of tools that can help in the growth, management, and development of professional life – all of which are managed individually (for example, no one mentioned the whole package of services, which comprises insurance and health measures, mentioned by Vivace managers). At the same time, an issue that emerges from the focus group regards the question of greater involvement, even if it may vary in intensity and interest. There was a request for training courses (on how to keep a VAT number, for example); there was a complaint about the lack of activities that can put people in contact with other professionals who are also part of the association (for some, the focus group was their first opportunity to meet other members); there was no communication network that keeps them informed, by e-mail or other means, about both personal aspects (e.g., tax deadlines) and Vivace itself (e.g., events and meetings). In the words of a participant,

**[...] there is a lack of communication: the relationship is still “I need something, and so I will ask you” rather than “being part of”. One does not feel like a member but rather a user. And this is a pity [...]. [For example,] I saw that they have a department dedicated to women, but I didn't understand how it works... In short, in my opinion, there is a little confusion concerning the association itself.**

*[Focus group]*

As far as services are concerned, the main challenge for the trade union in its relationship with independent professionals is precisely how to offer forms of “service” to consider participants both as users and members, to overcome the dichotomy that emerges between a request for an association that arises and develops from the demand for individual services and the expressed desire to “feel part” of a group.

During the discussion, participants requested other things from the trade unions (e.g., training for “independent professionals” and negotiating with companies and the government). However, all of them perceive the trade unions as distant entities.

The condition of independent professionals emerging from the focus group is ambivalent. There is a strong collective identity, based on the tax system and working relationship: not “doing” or “having” a VAT number, but “being a VAT number”, as one participant underlined. It is a clear identity, built – at least in our discussion regarding their relationship with the trade union – in opposition to “others” with whom they feel different, less protected, and even stigmatised. At the same time, a perception emerges of very different situations that are difficult to assimilate within that shared identity:

**The problem with independent professionals is that we do very different jobs, and the companies we work for have very different rules. It is a “rough stormy sea”.**

*[Focus group]*

In the best-case scenario, the trade unions seem like distant entities, while, in the worst, they seem hostile, precisely because they are the official representatives of “the others”. Among the focus group participants, the only one who had already had contact with the union – and indeed had been a trade unionist – was the only one with a past as an employee. This feeling of detachment between the trade union world and

the world of independent professionals seems to regard the trade union as a whole rather than individual organisations: greater distance is tangible in the CGIL than in the CISL but with no significant difference in the assessment. The survey data also evidences that the prevailing feeling is “remoteness”, as something that has nothing to do with them (and sometimes appears as “obsolete”). Therefore, in this context, the “discovery” of Vivace represents a surprise, in which the encounter with the union produces a different image of those who work there: not the “grey employees” that one expected, but “professionals” who put “passion” into their work.

**For me, an independent professional, the word “trade union” has always seemed to have little to do with me. Not only does it not concern me, but I also find it a bit old-fashioned. The fact that this perception is wrong seems very important to me.**

*[Focus group]*

This ambivalence in the representation of trade unions was often mentioned: two distinct positions mark the difference between the “experienced” trade union (which offers services and is professional and dedicated) and the “public-actor” trade union (the one in the public sphere) that continues to address other subjects, from which they feel little compatibility or even conflict:

**The feeling I have, through the media, [...] is that they only talk about those who offer them [more members].**

*[Focus group]*

Here, the participants refer to the limited valorisation of initiatives such as Vivace: the fact that the union “knows” how to meet the needs of the independent professionals but do nothing to promote it, does not make it visible in its public communication, and fails in building a campaign,

is seen as a sign of the remoteness of the union as a whole.

From this point of view, the participation and experience of Vivace have not changed the perception of the union as a whole. The previous year’s events seem to have worsened this opinion, with the union not being perceived as a defender of specific sectors that have been particularly affected by the pandemic – such as live shows or sports activities – where many self-employed workers operate.

What emerges is a dualistic conception of the trade union, which is perceived as an organisation that is not doing enough to be regarded as a valid interlocutor in the world of the self-employed and where projects such as Vivace are considered isolated cases.

The trade union must improve the dissemination of information and build networks between people who share a common professional condition. In short, it must work on producing tools that can encourage greater participation. However, the general feeling is that the main requirement does not concern organisational structures but rather the political identity and consequent proposals of the union in its role as a collective actor.

### **3.3. Case study 3: Partita Viva (now, part of Vivace) - CISL Vicenza**

#### *3.3.1. History and objectives*

Partita Viva was founded in 2015 in the industrial city of Vicenza, in the northeast of Italy, by a group of self-employed professionals with a registered VAT number (the so-called *Partite IVA*) and is promoted and supported by the CISL. The original goal was to start negotiations between these workers and the local administration. The project has evolved following an increase in the number of self-employed workers in the province of Vicenza, thanks to the negotiations led by the current coordinator and former provincial secretary for Vicenza. A new secretary has since taken over this role.



Over time, the negotiations have developed into a well-structured project. Through a dedicated helpdesk, Partita Viva now provides a range of integrated services for those who want to become self-employed professionals, as well as for those who already are. The services range from tax advice to legal advice, from social welfare to training courses, including a physical meeting and workplace: the co-working space.

Partita Viva has also set the long-term objective of representing and safeguarding the self-employed emerging at the national level. It acknowledges that the most significant changes can be achieved by joining forces and gathering the voices of an increasingly large group of people.

It is for this reason that Partita Viva has recently joined Vivace, a community of self-employed workers promoted by the CISL as a meeting and discussion point and as a platform for the development of a representative process for a segment of the labour market that is increasingly important in the country, yet still poorly protected.

While, until a few years ago, the relationship between the self-employed and Partita Viva was direct, since 2020, it is through a subscription to Vivace, on its website, that one can become a member of Partita Viva and gain access to its services. In this way, however, one can access the services and concessions offered by Partita Viva and those offered by Vivace at the national level. Partita Viva's objectives are twofold: to provide valuable services, on the one hand, and represent the self-employed, on the other. The provision of services is the easiest way to approach the self-employed and engage with them immediately. Representation gives voice to those who lack one. Partita Viva's uniqueness resided in the fact that it also became an integrated service for CISL sectoral federations, which was made possible thanks to the promotion of Partita Viva's work in Vicenza's UST. The promoters presented their business's mission directly to the boards of the territorial structures. It was emphasised that "a poorly

managed self-employed worker can compare to an employee" and "a *Partita IVA* is not a job, but a way of working, and can therefore fall under any of the federations" [Coordinator of Partita Viva]. Over time, Partita Viva has also formed partnerships with other organisations, such as *Solidarietà Veneto*, an association that deals with supplementary pensions, and *PerMicro*, a fund for unbanked individuals providing microfinance training courses and participation in local trade fairs (e.g., *Job Orienta*).

### 3.3.2. *The organisation*

In terms of the organisation of the body, Partita Viva serves as a helpdesk and as a link between the various services provided by the CISL in Vicenza, as a sort of "glue" between internal services and the external user. It is currently staffed by a single person, the coordinator, who handles all enquiries daily, part-time. In broader terms, the CISL services (from tax services to assistance requests) were mapped out, which ended up finding potentially useful resources for the self-employed.

As a result of an "awareness-raising" exercise undertaken by some CISL employees, it became clear that some of them had the expertise to help the self-employed practically but were not used to dealing with this type of worker.

**In the legal office, there was a young guy who created video games. He found a client with a Canadian company and wanted to check that his contract, which was written in English, was correct. The legal office provided him with this service. If someone needs credit recovery, there is an internal contact.**

*[Coordinator of Partita Viva; Provincial Secretary of the CISL Vicenza]*

The internal staff was bolstered after a few hours of ad hoc training:

**We began providing the tax service and the welfare office, thereby helping all the self-**

**employed to gain access to services. Let's use maternity as an example: when you start as an employee, you go to HR, and you say what you are entitled to; but many self-employed workers didn't know that there was a mother's bonus, a birth bonus, and so on... they didn't know it existed since they were on their own.**

*[Coordinator of Partita Viva; Provincial Secretary of the CISL Vicenza]*

A fundamental part of Partita Viva is the co-working space, a physical space that has become the project's identity over the years. At least before the Covid-19 pandemic, the co-working space was where professionals met, where people could socially interact, talk to fellow workers, and trade tips. This social interaction was later kept alive thanks to the creation of an internal WhatsApp group where self-employed professionals exchanged views on new freelance-related laws to this day. The coordinator has often used the group to receive quick answers on issues of representation.

On top of the ability to work in a physical place that provides different services (from Wi-Fi to printers and a work desk), these interactions sometimes ended up becoming the start of actual lucrative collaborations between freelancers.

**I do, in fact, wonder whether to categorise co-working under services or representation since it started as a service but then became a real group. It is like the board of Partita Viva, in particular for those who attend regularly. Whenever I need to present a project, I pass it by them first. About fifty of us subscribed to Partita Viva today, and about a dozen use the co-working space. These 12-15 people are the point of referral when something needs to be done. I sometimes like to involve them in the simpler things, such as writing up the website to feel that it belongs to them.**

*[Coordinator of Partita Viva; Provincial Secretary of the CISL Vicenza]*

It is also the “physical nature” of this place that has helped raise awareness about the needs of these workers. From the beginning of the pandemic, the co-working has had a restricted opening schedule. Online meetings have replaced in-person ones. The new partnership between Partita Viva and Vivace brings organisational improvement as it has made it possible to offer online meetings.

### 3.3.3. User profile and trends

Partita Viva's growing presence at events, meetings, seminars, and so on, within its sector has helped membership numbers rise over the years. In 2019, approximately 200 workers were provided with tax services. Their accounts are kept, tax returns filed, and services such as e-invoicing are provided. Last year (2019), the total number of members was about 300, of which 50 were members of Partita Viva, and 10-12 attended the co-working space actively and consistently. Subscribing to Partita Viva was free until 2018. However, from 2019 an optional contribution of 30 euros was introduced (which provided some INAS services that would otherwise have been at a charge, access to the co-working space, orientation, and legal advice). The introduction of the membership fee, which ensured that only interested people would sign up, was positively received.

From 2020, the membership cost rose to 60 euros yearly, made by going through Vivace directly (there is then a contribution to Partita Viva). This payment has created a convenient system: the 60 euros are deducted from the tax return or both the tax return and accounting. In this way, with 200 euros, you can have your tax return done and be subscribed to Vivace and Partita Viva, and with an additional 200 euros (400 euros in total), you can have the complete package with accounting for the whole year.

**The most challenging thing is taking the time to explain all the services we offer. Now that**



**I'm no longer in the SAPI office [the CAAF's service for self-employed workers], it's not easy. They have business goals, as well as accounting ones. They cannot pass all the contacts on to me; not everyone makes another appointment. That's the most complicated aspect.**

*[Coordinator of Partita Viva; Provincial Secretary of the CISL Vicenza]*

The average Partita Viva member and those who attend the co-working space have obtained high educational qualifications. Their ages range between 25 and 40. Many of them work in communication, design, and graphic design. These all tend to be “new” jobs. As well as freelancers, some people are registered with professional associations. There are no significant gender imbalances.

Despite the difficulty of creating transversal activities that could be of interest to all members, as a heterogeneous group, users showed interest in other types of activities. For example, some freelancers attended the Job Orienta event in 2019 (school, training, and work orientation fair) and could talk about their experiences as *Partite IVA* to whoever stopped at the CISL stand. The same goes for another event that was organised by CISL on November 25th of the same year.

#### 3.3.4. Assessment of the services

##### a) From the trade union's point of view

The assessment of the services must be put into the context of an increasingly rapidly changing labour market nationally and, consequently, in the province of Vicenza, an area dominated by small and very small businesses. Moreover, Partita Viva is highly innovative in that it offers its services to a young segment of the population, freelancers under 40, which is generally poorly represented and, at the same time, highly diverse due to the type of jobs and workers covered by the term *Partite IVA*.

In terms of internal assessment, there has never

been a review on satisfaction levels, due partly to the low participation numbers. However, the project coordinator points out the following:

**There are always areas to improve on.**

**Generally, there are two types of members: those who fall in love with Partita Viva because their need to be helped in every aspect (building a network, and so on) is met; then, there are those who are uninterested. The latter type of member still pays for the services but has no interest. These tend to be older people or people already accustomed to the job and subscribe only for practical reasons.**

*[Coordinator of Partita Viva; Provincial Secretary of the CISL Vicenza]*

Considering the trend in subscriptions over the last years, an evaluation would result in a positive outcome.

The ability of the project to adapt to different situations (see, for example, the free advice that Partita Viva gave to all freelancers during lockdown) is undoubtedly an aspect that the members appreciate, as shown by the feedback received by the coordinator. Although much of Partita Viva's activity revolves around the co-working space, the online sessions also generated a positive reaction. The same goes for the informative webinars about the financial support provided by the Italian government to assist the self-employed workers during the first few months of the Covid-19 pandemic.

One of Partita Viva's key assets is its ability to adapt to the member's needs. The fact that the coordinator is a *Partite IVA* herself drives this. The downside is that the project relies almost entirely on a single person. From this point of view, the collaboration with Vivace strengthens the organisational aspect of the project. Partita Viva continues to be independent in its communication (on the website and the Facebook page) and in local arrangements relating to training courses and events. It

collaborates with Vivace in sharing information (articles and reports on new requirements, laws, and support for the union).

Finally, tax services that can be adapted to the situation represent one of the benefits, as with the government's financial support to self-employed workers, whereby Partita Viva managed the individual requests. Another benefit, as previously mentioned, is the ability to be represented, particularly in the medium to long term.

One of Partita Viva's challenges is that participation numbers may drop due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, the Partita Viva model has remained a local one as it has not been reproduced at the regional level.

**We have tried many times. Half of our time has been dedicated to this. In the beginning, we were a model that was “antagonistic” to Vivace – I’m exaggerating but making it clear – because our model consisted of being present in the area, which was not always possible, and without a direct return on investment. On the other hand, Vivace was based on the idea of an online community. We were like a fish out of water, and we tried explaining to all the other provinces the importance of promoting this in the other areas to create a regional network. It failed because it was not understood, in my opinion, because you had to invest in it. There was an immediate requirement for economic investment. There are costs to Partita Viva, but if I don’t consider that there is a spin-off...**

*[Coordinator of Partita Viva; Provincial secretary of the CISL Vicenza].*

Even though Partita Viva is a “local” project with “in-person” participation and, on the other hand, Vivace was founded as an exclusively online community, it is worth noting that the two have, over time, “integrated” to some extent, taking some aspects from one another. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, for example, there were

plans to open a co-working space in the CISL headquarters in Florence specifically for self-employed professionals, in a move to support the “physical character of a place”. Conversely, for Partita Viva, the Vivace project allows it to respond to more of the enquiries coming from its members at a time of great change, such as during the pandemic (enquiries about financial support for freelancers, for example).

*b) From the user’s point of view*

11 people responded to the online survey, of which 10 had used the services. Due to the small number of participants, we focused on the qualitative aspects addressed through 5 semi-structured interviews. The survey participants were primarily males (9); 5 were union members (the other 5 were not and never have been); and for 3 of them, Partita Viva was a means of getting to know the union. Half of the participants’ opinion of the trade union improved after using the service, while their opinions stayed the same for the other half. There was no clear stance on the ability to represent self-employed workers.

The Partita Viva project was strongly affected by two unforeseen circumstances: the pregnancy of the manager of the association and the Covid-19 pandemic. As we will see further on, these two factors revealed the precarious nature of the organisational structure and the network of connections built at the time.

The starting point stems from the type of member. A diverse sector comes to light, both in professional profiles, career backgrounds, attitudes, and the relationship between the professional and private spheres. There is also a certain “unpreparedness” when it comes to the start of their work. In some cases, workers are young and with little work experience and/or no experience of self-employed work.

**When I registered as a Partita IVA, I didn’t know how to manage myself properly; I didn’t know about all the bureaucratic formalities,**





**how to invoice someone, accounting when to pay my taxes [...]. So, when I leapt into the world of the Partite IVA, I needed support.**

*[Interviewee 5]*

Coming across Partita Viva happened by chance for many people. Sometimes, it was thanks to events organised with the Informagiovani (Info point for young people) in Vicenza and published on various media outlets; other times, members knew about or were already members of the union. The study also revealed that the CISL had already put an advisory service for self-employed workers in place, upon which Partita Viva was then developed. In any case, the coordinator played a crucial role as a facilitator, as she engaged directly with the individuals and guided them in the counselling process.

**It was by chance [...]. A year after I had registered as a Partita IVA, which was also the first year I had to file my tax return, I didn't know whom to go to, nor how to do it. I saw that at the Informagiovani in Vicenza you could arrange a meeting and then use the accounting service at a favourable price. I met with her [the coordinator], and I understood what this organisation does [...]. I signed up, and I began to use the co-working space as well.**

*[Interviewee 1]*

**I found Partita Viva thanks to a Facebook advert I came across regarding counselling at the Informagiovani in Vicenza. I decided to arrange a meeting where I explained a bit about my projects, and, from there, I signed up.**

*[Interviewee 2]*

Generally, members are very satisfied with the service they receive, both for practical reasons, such as those concerning legal and tax obligations and the networking aspect. The interviews highlight young self-employed workers can suffer from a sense of isolation and loneliness

on their journey. Therefore, through Partita Viva, they become aware of their obligations and opportunities, enhancing their sense of security, giving them the feeling that they are being guided and that others are going through the same journey.

**For me, it was massively helpful, because as a Partita IVA, you tend to be a bit isolated (and) when you find yourself in front of the tax and regulatory side of things [e.g., the ISEE, Equivalent Economic Situation Indicator], you feel a bit lost [...] alone and abandoned. In this system, however, you begin to understand your rights a lot better, how many other Partite Iva there are [...]. It has given me confidence because I am not alone, and I know that I can count on this support.**

*[Interviewee 1]*

Thus, if tax services and CAAF consultancy can be considered the privileged means of entry, the co-working space strengthens relationships. In addition, Partita Viva organises events and workshops, such as in-depth courses on economic management, microcredit, access to benefits, or other specific issues. In any case, the interviews have demonstrated that Partita Viva is a point of reference, regardless of what the actual queries are. As we have seen, the regulation of the sector is, in fact, very complex. Self-employed workers are often unable to consider the different opportunities regarding tax incentives in advance. Consequently, the danger is that one may decide not to apply for these benefits, or, on the contrary, to fill in all the bureaucratic paperwork, in this way wasting much time and then risking not being eligible for them. In both cases, this can lead to frustration.

**I attended a couple of training courses [...]. One was on economic management as a freelancer, another on microcredit, and then other similar small courses [...] There**

**are often doubts, especially in the past year. [Partita Viva] is a reference point, an “official” one, so to speak, that helps you clarify things.**

*[Interviewee 1]*

**Lately, I’ve been taking part; I listened to a live broadcast which talked about the latest bonus [...]. It was useful because I didn’t waste my time doing the practical side of things [...] a lot of time is wasted. However, Partita Viva has been very useful in helping me understand how the world of self-employed workers and professionals works.**

*[Interviewee 2]*

The generally favourable ratings result in the project being spoken about in different places, in this way spreading the word to friends and colleagues that could be interested.

**I always recommend arranging a consultation, especially at the beginning, so that you immediately understand what it means to be a Partita IVA. That way, you aren’t just leaping into the unknown. You know the services are available to you, there are people there, and there are colleagues following the same path and in the same situation as you. So, in my opinion, a service like this is fundamental.**

*[Interviewee 4]*

As previously mentioned, along with the tax services, the co-working space is one of the distinctive features of the association. In fact, members can develop a sense of community through the co-working space (found inside the headquarters in Vicenza). In other words, the tax services and the networking dimension represent two strategies that complement each other, both of which are necessary to boost participation and a sense of belonging. Co-working was, therefore, instrumental in creating new networks of professionals that, although they may not have ended up in actual new business opportunities,

still contributed to building up trust and to the circulation of information. During their “coffee break chats”, people could share their opinions on matters and their concerns and strategies on how to deal with certain problems (such as late payments) and lay the foundations for creating a “bottom-up” professional community.

**It has been fundamental for me: both due to the space available, since working from home all the time becomes a bit... and because it is essential for the relationships that I have formed. It is also a way of trading tips and sometimes a way of “consoling oneself” with regard to the “not so happy” aspects of being a Partita IVA. At least we can meet up, and, in some cases, business opportunities have arisen.**

*[Interviewee 1]*

**I was interested because there was the possibility of getting in touch with other people from different professional backgrounds [...]. By joining Partita Viva, I was also able to make use of the co-working space, which I don’t need (but) I still use it for networking, to meet people. I might stay there for half an hour, have a coffee with someone and have a chat because a lot of opportunities come about just like that, during a coffee break or at the café. [Covid stopped everything] but if we had met a few times during this period, I believe that something quite interesting could have happened. If anything, we could have built up our trust.**

*[Interviewee 3]*

**Above all else, there are similarities between members, and we share the journey within Partita Viva. People often believe that “an opportunity to collaborate is possible”. But the opportunity never came for me. In any case, I’m sure that if I had been able to go there more often, I would have been able to start to collaborate on some projects because**



**the idea of the place was not just for sharing a workspace but also to use it for networking purposes and business collaborations.**

*[Interviewee 4]*

**I used the co-working space often, and there were many ventures that I liked to participate in since the idea behind it was to form a community as well. As self-employed, we are only small, but with a desire to build a network of different professionals [...]. One would go there, have a coffee, have a chat, and maybe ask someone else: “how did you pay that invoice?” or “how does X work?”. This represents a sense of community that is more often than not lacking in the world of the Partite IVA, who are often cooped up at home, working ten hours a day and losing the perception of reality.**

*[Interviewee 5]*

The interaction with other union workers on the premises is different. Although the co-working space can be found on the ground floor of the provincial headquarters, it is sometimes seen as being isolated from the rest of the building. In fact, while, on the one hand, there is a continuous flow of people who are often rushing from one office to another (the trade union sectors, on the contrary, are located on the upper floor of the building) thanks to the location itself, on the other hand, there is minimal contact with the trade union representatives. Nevertheless, the interviewees understand the potential positive outcomes from interacting with other workers and representatives since they can act as a gateway to a vast business world.

**Actually, there weren't [any interactions]. However, I am sure that Covid stopped a lot of things before they even started [...]. In this sense, no collaborations were started except, maybe, for some chats mediated by her [the coordinator], who acted as a bridge between the two parties. [...] It was my first**

**experience engaging [with the union], I didn't know anything... To be honest, I haven't [approached the union] yet. I mean, I've always been focused on myself, my freelance work, and my issues. [...] The only thing is that you might work there; it's a space that is divided up, but it isn't isolated [...]. I've never looked into it.**

*[Interviewee 1]*

The issue of participation is often the cause of critical issues. Thus, even though the Covid-19 restrictions closed down the co-working space (and damaged the economy to the point where many self-employed workers are seriously struggling), which has slowed the project down considerably, the fact that the person in charge of managing the organisation has been occupied with the birth of a baby has further exposed the organisational problems.

Moreover, in keeping with a predominantly practical approach, it seems to be that people will participate in the various activities based on whether there is a concrete return for it. In other words, people prefer to attend workshops focused on professional aspects, whereas events that are dedicated to broader or union-related issues seem to be less pertinent.

**I mostly got involved with what pertained to being a Partita IVA. There had also been some sessions on remote working; so, they weren't specifically aimed at the Partite IVA, but it was interesting because it was a way of bringing self-employed workers and employees together. Remote working does open up many issues. [...] I did engage a bit [but] I was quite focused on my affairs, on issues related to being a Partita IVA.**

*[Interviewee 4]*

This allows us to introduce the topic of representation and the trade union's role in this sphere.

The topic of representation, in its true meaning, can be controversial. Those who come across the trade union for the first time through Partita Viva are not clear on the means and strategies to pursue common demands. In fact, as mentioned above, the fact that the survey participants are young and lack professional experience diminishes their attitude towards joint struggles. On the other hand, they are aware of the need to protect themselves by taking out health insurance. In this way, Partita Viva can act as a facilitator and mediator of questions that often remain unanswered.

However, some of them, particularly those who have had relations with the union (more or less directly), are also aware that promoting a common cause could result in a positive outcome, both for the professionals and the workers' representatives.

**I never thought about it. Every so often, I get the Partita Viva newsletter that might have some updates on health insurance, which means that I know that there's somebody out there taking care of things that I will benefit from without me. I've never really gotten into it much, though.**

*[Interviewee 1]*

**Not at the moment. There is a course to follow while acknowledging that [this was] one of the first organisations to look after self-employed workers. In my opinion, the union has not yet adequately addressed this phenomenon, in the sense that there are still significant preconceptions about the old type of Partita IVA, the traditional one. It is perhaps difficult to understand a relatively new phenomenon whereby the Partite IVA are hiding economic frailty behind them, particularly in the beginning and, in some cases, even after several years of business. I reckon a cultural leap is necessary.**

*[Interviewee 4]*

**From this point of view, it helps to know that the union is there, that there is someone who can give you a hand, especially since we are almost all very young. So, you know, it is also a different way for the union to consider young people because, as we mustn't forget, the world of work is changing, and I think that this is an opportunity to rethink and envision a new form of safeguarding for all the new jobs that will be invented soon. [...] It will no longer be just those permanently employed within a company that are safeguarded. Therefore, if they want to continue to attract young people, I think it would be a winning move to try to take on our professional profiles, even though there may not be that many. It would also be a good political move to say: "we're here on this front too".**

*[Interviewee 5]*

This introduces a strategic dilemma: many participants showed a practical engagement, which is useful for their career and economically feasible thanks to the low cost of the services provided. Participation is therefore conditioned by market dynamics and seems to occur mainly in the start-up phase of a business. It is, however, also clear that the *Partite IVA*, with their peculiar features, represent an increasingly large part of the labour market. This, therefore, represents a challenge for the unions but can also bring with it fragile and uncertain returns.

**Later on, some might reach a point where, having developed as a Partita IVA, they are earning a good and stable enough amount that they may not feel the need for these services as much.** *[Interviewee 4]*

The interviewees did not highlight any specific problems. However, what is evident is the relationship between the costs of the services provided and the changes that the organisation will go through in the future with its transition to Vivace. Since the quality of services is deemed to



be good, increasing the registration fee does not cause a problem. On the one hand, Partita Viva acts as a point of reference and, on the other, by comparing its services to those in the surrounding area, we can appreciate the cost-effectiveness of the proposed offer.

**The fee raise did not make me jump for joy. I understand the reasoning behind it and therefore accept it. I can see the good work being done. I can't think of any critical issues. Also, because it's been a year since... Maybe, one suggestion on the co-working space: it could be more inviting.**

*[Interviewee 2]*

**For me, [the fee for the services] is cheaper. [...] I've heard of accountants charging much higher rates. It also brings me a bit of peace of mind. I prefer to pay this amount and know that I have that support, for legal advice, for example, if I need anything. If not, I would be a bit lost.**

*[Interviewee 5]*

The relationship with Vivace seems to be more controversial, especially for those involved in the building of the project, as there is a risk that the project loses touch with the local needs of the members. This is not a criticism, rather a concern linked to a potentially beneficial process of consolidation and structuring at the national level.

**I am slightly more confused by the national Vivace project. Partita Viva works well because it is a very local service. It is also a very practical service, with real networking opportunities, in the sense that these people you know from the local area live there. There are also moments when you meet them and talk to them in person. But when the matter is passed onto the higher echelons, that touch is lost. That feeling of care and attention... That representation is lost. [...] It is logical that there is a national**

**direction. I'm just saying that during this transition, we are missing that care and attention.**

*[Interviewee 4]*

The final point addresses the existing tension towards collective action. The interviews reveal awareness and a willingness to participate and achieve collective improvements and greater representation actively. In this case, the trade union could play a strategic role by helping the professionals to organise themselves. However, this idea clashes with what we have defined as the organisational limits and strategic dilemmas of union action and clashes with professionals whose approach is sometimes more practical and closely linked to the different stages of their careers. The relationship between services, representation, and participation, therefore, remains an ongoing issue.

**Covid interrupted many of the plans that were taking shape. We got lost after that [...] we would bring up different issues with the idea of asking about them or arranging a meeting about them. Health insurance comes to mind since sometimes you have to use private insurance. So, we talked about these things, perhaps without intending to fight these battles ourselves... I still feel like a "novice" in my job; so, I don't have a very broad vision of things yet.**

*[Interviewee 1]*

**I strongly believe in the political value of an association like Partita Viva, in the truest sense of the word. And it is for this very reason that I have certain expectations. I don't think it can solely provide services. [...] We talked about [working] conditions a few times, and there was some excitement. Then, of course, when Covid hit, everything was shut down, and I have to say that I was shocked at how, and how quickly, everything stopped because we couldn't see each other in person. Because**

**without being able to see each other, we lose the uniting element [...] The problem also lies in the fact that we are a very disjointed group since the idea of professional orders means that a united front is lost.**

*[Interviewee 4]*

### **3.4. Case study 4: Nidil CGIL Firenze - Sportello per le Partite IVA**

#### *3.4.1. History and objectives*

Nidil is the CGIL trade union body, founded in 1998, representing and safeguarding atypical workers. In the years following its creation, its commitment to self-employed workers has mainly consisted of fighting against the misuse of non-standard employment contracts (e.g., collaborations, VAT registration, joint ventures, copywriting). The increase in the number of workers who are self-employed and without a fixed salary in the production sectors, where there is a notable power imbalance with the client, has reinforced the view that trade unions should be responsible for representing and safeguarding the most vulnerable aspects of self-employment. The implementation of innovative ways and methods of organising the unorganised is mainly left to the local administration of the different unions. That is, how Nidil Firenze works.

The legislative change (law 190/2014 and then 208/2015) that enacted a facilitated tax scheme for lower-income self-employed workers left the trade union service system in a dual predicament with these workers as they lacked specialist legal and tax expertise (which relates to private law rather than labour law). Nidil Firenze chose to create an integrated package of services aimed at the self-employed and provided directly by the union and the confederation's offices working in collaboration. Everything that is offered by the CGIL to employees, Nidil tries to reproduce in its system by adapting it to the needs of the self-employed.

An integrated service desk was considered as the first solution to the "isolation" of self-

employed workers facing working conditions which, to work, require not certain professional competences, but also "a variety of skills" related to tax governance, credit recovery, and improving one's position on the market.

The helpdesk has also been used as a means of systemically collecting data on self-employment in the city. The provision of services acted as a telescope into the situation, in this way going beyond the scope of individual safeguarding. For the trade union, these services catalysed a process of learning about the world of self-employment, whose demands for representation and protection were, all in all, little known.

The dual functionality of the service package for the self-employed meant that Nidil indicated it as the first step towards becoming a functional organisation for a more genuine trade union representation. In a nutshell, the aim is to transition from individual safeguarding to a collective one.

A typical example of this approach was how Nidil dealt with tour guides. From the information gathered through the services provided, particularly those concerned with legal protection, it became clear that there was a general struggle when it came to the contractual conditions of tour guides – a small but important practice in a city like Florence. As people came looking for protection, it became apparent that no tour operator (the employer's counterpart to the tour guide) signed a letter of engagement with their workers, which not only resulted in a general reduction in fees but also the inability to collect debts in cases of dispute, of which there were many. After becoming aware of these issues, they decided to offer a training course for tour guides, designed to make them more knowledgeable of their contractual rights. The promoters' idea was to complement this initiative with negotiations with tour operators, which, in fact, took place with the help of the political mediation of the Municipality of Florence. In this way, Nidil sought to use the knowledge gained through individual

services to create a collective training course and develop a common effort. Accounting was the first service that was provided. It was geared towards the self-employed, particularly those who come under the flat-rate tax regime (Law 190/2014 introduced a flat-rate tax of 5% for the first five years for the *Partite IVA* who have an income of fewer than 30,000 euros). The service is relatively affordable and straightforward. The second service was that of legal protection. While the standard dispute resolution offices specialise in labour law, freelancers need an expert in civil law: for disputes related to the non-payment of salaries, for example, or the protection of intellectual property, or issues concerning the individual contract when there are clauses that stipulate the exclusive nature of the relationship. Finally, there is a connection to the welfare office for matters relating to the INPS.

#### 3.4.2. *The organisation*

Alongside the participatory courses that the trade union intends to add to the offer, these services are managed by Nidil Firenze and its operators, who, after assessing the individual problem, organise the meeting between the worker and the specialist. For this reason, the Nidil organisation had to equip itself with the necessary skills to cope with the specific needs of the workers.

In order to set this system up, Nidil has, on the one hand, made use of CGIL's range of services, with regard to tax assistance (CAAF) and access to INPS benefits (the INCA-CGIL welfare office). On the other hand, it has used its resources by drawing on the freelancers that campaigned with the organisation. In this context, Nidil Firenze has formed a partnership with a civil lawyer who, within CGIL, had been fighting for the recognition of the *Partite IVA* for years and is now on the board of directors of Nidil. This partnership, which began informally, later developed into a real service.

Within Nidil Firenze, both the provision of

services and some form of protection aim to establish initial contact and lay the foundations for mutual recognition between workers and the union. Through so-called "little plays", the services were used in an attempt to promote the union. For example, it is in the Nidil premises that services are provided, which helps to establish a relationship between the specialist (the CAAF employee or the lawyer) and the worker, as well as the relationship between the worker and the union. These organisational features are important insofar as they enable the union to be identified as a place where the self-employed can understand and protect their needs while avoiding conveying the idea of the union as a mere provider of consulting services. Over time, these instances of interaction (legal assistance, in particular) have enabled certain issues within specific types of workers, such as tour guides, to be addressed. Even though the interview with Nidil Firenze's General Secretary reveals a clear shift in the union's attitude towards the self-employed, nationally, the organisation still lacks strategies to represent the self-employed and any means of coordination between these different types of services (unlike in dispute resolution, for example). Therefore, it is evident that there are regional discrepancies both in the variety of services provided and in the relations with the self-employed and a poor correlation between strategies and results. The work of the local branches – the Nidil ones, in particular – is often cutting-edge, which the union, in its entirety, does not always recognise.

#### 3.4.3. *User profile and trends*

In terms of membership, before launching this course, Nidil Firenze could only count on a small number of members that were self-employed, which mainly consisted of small groups of campaigners. In recent years, however, there has been a steady increase in membership and, today, the number of *Partite Iva* is thought to be about 100 (source: an interview with the General

Secretary of Nidil Firenze). The accounting service seems to be the preferred reason for joining, owing to the significant number of cases handled (more than 200 in 2019). Regarding legal counselling, however, it is predominantly the issue of credit recovery that leads to membership.

The pool of potential members is mainly composed of highly qualified professionals working in communication, technology, photography, and cinema. However, there are also some in more traditional fields, such as white-collar workers (architects, therapists, and lawyers in particular) and certain healthcare professions (such as nurses and midwives). Finally, people belonging to certain sectors have specific critical issues, like sales representatives or sectors based on specific features of the local economy, such as tour guides or teachers in American schools.

It is, by contrast, less likely for artisans and merchants to be self-employed since the tax system presents them with various problems. Occasionally, defining the term “professionals” can be problematic, as is the case when considering whether the work of domestic helpers and carers counts as self-employed. However, most of the time, this approach succeeds in attracting the self-employed, not just formally.

In terms of nationality, it is worth highlighting the presence of some foreign workers, owing to the existence of specific sectors, such as tour guides and teachers in American schools, again. For almost all self-employed workers, the services provided represent the gateway to the trade union. The membership rate among those who use the services is high (80% according to the estimations of the Secretary) since membership offers a considerable discount on the prices of the services. Guaranteeing longer-term membership, however, proves to be more of a problem. While employees buy and keep renewing their memberships, freelancers often

have a single problem and are therefore unlikely to renew their subscription once that problem is resolved.

#### 3.4.4. Assessment of the services

##### a) From the trade union’s point of view

Regarding the trade union in general and its relationship with the self-employed in particular, Nidil considers itself a pioneering body. In this context, Nidil Firenze’s work regarding the self-employed features some major points of innovation.

The way in which they designed the relationship between their services and the respective unions (which is the primary point of interest, as well as the biggest challenge) consists of the transition from access to the service provided to collective action, so that the workers involved can help Nidil envisage feasible union battles in new sectors. Nidil Firenze was promoting the idea of becoming a credible representative for the self-employed through its relations with professional associations and by identifying political and/or negotiating battles. Creating a set of specialised services was the first step towards making themselves known and getting in touch with the specific issues that self-employment presents. They paid attention to those issues that can be addressed through creative campaigns:

**The more you provide services, the more you can match the demand for services with the demand for trade union representation.**

*[General Secretary of Nidil-CGIL Firenze]*

So far, the most successful process has been that of the tour guides. Having collected information through the provision of services initially, followed by a training course, it was possible to set out some demands that were agreed jointly. Two initial outcomes emerged from this process. The first is a project run by the Municipality of Florence, which involves a kind of “quality control” for tour operators, certifying that the





company meets certain standards, not least those concerning the quality of the working relationship. The second outcome was signing a trade union agreement – “I would consider it the first trade union agreement for real professionals” [General Secretary of Nidil -CGIL Firenze] – between Nidil and one of Florence’s tour operators. The agreement regulates how guides perform their job, the form and content of the employment contract, the assignment of tasks, minimum pay, the payment method and its timing, and union activity. Though, beyond its innovative value, it is still an uphill climb: the challenge is to reinforce the use of a *written* contract while also working towards an agreement on fair payment with the employers’ association of tour operators.

The route that Nidil Firenze has taken with the self-employed has proven to be rugged and narrow. This is firstly due to how hard it is to reproduce this dynamic: when there is an adverse power imbalance, particularly in the sectors that do not have a natural counterpart, it is more challenging to adopt such strategies. Where possible, such as in healthcare professions, Nidil tries to use negotiation. It also runs specific campaigns for the self-employed, although these strategies are not always feasible.

It is nevertheless difficult to achieve results that are perceived solely positively by the workers. What may be seen as a long-term achievement from a trade union perspective is not always perceived as an achievement in the eyes of the workers in question.

**This is because they [the workers] don’t have an overview of the situation and probably don’t see that perspective; we are trying to make them understand it, but they don’t trust collective action.**

*[General Secretary of Nidil-CGIL Firenze].*

Some of the results that are significant for the group are therefore often not perceived as

relevant or are even looked at with suspicion due to the underlying individualistic nature of self-employment. Such is the case with pay agreements, as they are often feared to be agreements that may decrease the income of those higher up in the market.

This brings us back to the relationship between the services provided and participation. For tour guides, for example, actual involvement in the campaign and union action was very low relative to the number of guides who approached or joined Nidil.

In recognising the critical issues that come with this development, the adopted strategy seems to point in two directions. Firstly, it aims to “diversify” participation. In the interview with the Secretary, it was raised that the trade union should try to come up with something different from the traditional forms of participation where people would “make use of their tax service and then immediately become fully engaged in union activity”. It is emphasised that strategies to improve participation should be varied. Initiatives such as informative surveys, questionnaires, and training courses like the one previously mentioned for tour guides (although it should be noted that the model appears to be more one of *organising* rather than *servicing*) are proposed as measures to keep the dialogue between the professional world and the union alive. There is, therefore, a demand for more “flexible” forms of participation.

The other suggestion that arises from the interviews is that, to improve participation in future union action, the approach to this field needs to be divided into sectors. According to Nidil’s employees, general campaigns (e.g., on fair pay) fail to involve different professional fields, whereas approaches based on a sector tend to produce more concrete and longer-lasting relations, as shown by the tour guides’ case.

*b) From the user’s point of view*

The problems of engaging the relevant target

group played a decisive role in shaping the investigation process. The web survey, distributed via an announcement from the organisation, received 12 responses, predominantly made up of self-employed workers (8), along with 2 currently unemployed people and 2 employees. It was later decided that a Nidil assembly that only addressed self-employed members would be observed.

Despite its limitations since it cannot directly question the participants on their relationship with the union and the role of its services, this research project has highlighted some critical elements of the relationship between the organisation and the *Partite IVA*, as well as some of the features of the programme that Nidil Firenze is undertaking.


Both amongst the survey respondents and those who attended the assembly (in this case, a direct effect of the chosen research method), the self-employed workers that had engaged with Nidil Firenze showed a better relationship with the union and a greater political affinity to the CGIL than in the other initiatives aimed at the same types of work.

This greater “willingness” to participate and engage in trade union militancy, as the Secretary of Nidil Firenze mentioned and as could be seen in the assembly, does not seem to be enough to overcome the problem of sporadic and short-lived participation, which makes it difficult to organise joint projects, even though the relationship with Nidil is good and the services provided are efficient.

There are over 100 *Partite IVA* registered with Nidil Firenze, but only a dozen participates in the joint events, such as sessions directed mainly at the self-employed, and even these people are not always present. Four workers attended the assembly that we observed. The meeting consisted of: a debate on Nidil’s proposals for fair pay and social safety nets for the self-employed; an update on the news regarding ISCRO (Extraordinary Income and Business Continuity Allowance); the drafting, following a debate, of Nidil Firenze’s

proposals to the regional government of Tuscany on training and other support mechanisms; and the opening of a service desk specifically for women professionals.

One of the main issues that came back was the idea of belonging to a type of employment relationship (“the *Partita Iva*, by choice or by fate”) that is felt to be far removed from the legislator’s interests and that is heavily criticised in public discourse. The “tax evading freelancer” stereotype is repeatedly used at the start of almost every public speech. In the current climate, what appear to be historic innovations in the relationship between the State and the self-employed, particularly with regard to the drastic situation that Covid-19 has caused, are, in fact, not perceived as a reversal of the trend in that relationship, which remains to be looked upon suspiciously. The handling of the measures for *Partite Iva* during the pandemic has been perceived as the result of a rationale that is “based entirely on an emergency”, and it has been strongly perceived as a sector without voice and rights. Also, campaigns aimed at political negotiation no longer appeal to people as much: the route that Nidil Firenze has taken on calling for the regional government of Tuscany for an advance on non-payments (according to the CIG model used by the Region) appears to be a challenging battle, while Nidil’s proposals for fair pay are considered to be a “lost battle”.

Somewhat paradoxically, the meeting revealed that the most important demands did not concern collective rights or welfare rights so much; instead, they concerned rights traditionally linked to contractual procedures: holidays, paid leaves, and trade union rights. From this perspective, Nidil Firenze’s course for tour guides, for example, can play an innovative role, even if it is restricted to certain professional sectors. It is also important to note the constant mention of the lack of trade union rights. As stated by the participants, this testifies the search for the means to respond to a desire for participation through one’s professional 

status in a situation where any form of joint action seems complicated and out of reach for individuals.

To conclude, compared to the other cases that involve self-employment, Nidil Firenze's one seems to have its unique features due to the process undertaken by the organisation and the research tools chosen. On the one hand, it confirms the specific nature of its relationship with the trade union of this vast segment of the labour market: a relationship that presents challenges in the creation of types of "active membership" in union life, together with a growing demand for initiatives and ways of participating.

This challenge, however, is part of a less "distrustful" relationship between self-employed workers and the union to which they belong, as they do not see the union, on the whole, as an "old tool" or a distant entity. The path which Nidil Firenze has chosen to exploit the willingness to campaign of this small minority, which ended up being examined through the lens of research, is that of experimenting with innovative ways to encourage involvement (from the provision of services to the design of models of activity by sector). This way aims to transform that willingness into joint action shared by various workers hitherto far from trade union activity.

### 3.5. Case study 5: Quadrifor

#### 3.5.1. History and objectives

The history of Quadrifor, Institute for the Development of Tertiary Sector Management Training (*Istituto per lo Sviluppo della Formazione dei Quadri del Terziario*) is linked to the specific nature of the individuals it targets: qualified workers who are in an intermediate position between employers, managers, and workers (the so-called "middle management").

Quadrifor was founded in 1995, as a result of the contractual agreement set out in Article 13 of the CCNL for trade and services, signed by Confcommercio, Filcams-CGIL, Fisascat-CISL, and

Uiltucs-UIL. The involved parties committed to the creation of a body dedicated to the training and development of the professional skills of middle managers in the sector. It is, therefore, a bilateral institute.

The following year, the headquarters and statutory purposes were designated, the governing bodies were established (President, Management Committee, Board of Auditors), and the procedures for the administration and management of assets were set. Regarding the latter, given the importance of the matter, two agreements were signed: the first one at the confederal level, the second with the different unions. The two agreements were designed to "demonstrate, with transparency, how the resources are distributed" [Director of Quadrifor].

In 1996, Quadrifor began its activities: the first institutional conference on professional training and the development of middle managers, held at the CNEL (National Council for Economy and Labour) took place, and the first national survey on the training needs of middle managers and companies was launched. As we shall see, the research and analysis of training needs are features of this project.

Middle managers hold an intermediate position in a company's structural hierarchy and are crucial for company development. The training of middle managers can therefore transform them into "agents of change".

Quadrifor's uniqueness also resides in the proactive role played by trade unions – "a leading role", according to the President (appointed by the unions themselves). This has led to training becoming the common ground for trade union and employer demands. Moreover, the quality of the training is guaranteed by an internal certification of quality, which is based on monitoring and evaluating the specialised companies providing the training courses, as well as the satisfaction levels of the training course participants.

### 3.5.2. The organisation

Quadrifor is a structured organisation, not only from a managerial and organisational point of view. One of the unique features of Quadrifor is tied to the importance of its research activity, which allows it to collect and independently process different data, such as participant satisfaction levels, the analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the courses, a comparison to other training companies and businesses, detecting training needs and identifying strategic skills. This allows for greater autonomy in the design and management of courses.

As we shall see, this is an element of Quadrifor that sets it apart from the other case studies.

**Over the years, Quadrifor has researched the middle manager's role and what the most suitable candidate for that role looks like, focusing on what skills, knowledge, and training needs are required. The research consisted of interviews and surveys, and all the information gathered proved useful for the range of training activities.**

*[Training manager of Quadrifor]*

In terms of staff, there are 12 employees, including the director, the vice-director, the managers of three different divisions, and a training researcher. Having a designated figure has made it possible to carry out ad hoc research on aspects that are considered strategic. For example, those related to the training needs of women middle managers, women working with technology, and changes in the labour market. It is in this way that the organisation is

**[...] unique. Only among managers in the service sector can you find something similar. [...] because workers and entrepreneurs aren't thinking about training just yet.**

*[President of Quadrifor]*

This becomes more relevant in the less structured and/or family-run businesses, such as those

**with fewer than ten employees, [where] middle managers, being directly under the direction of their bosses, are not inclined to take part in the training.**

*[President, Quadrifor]*

By starting with middle managers and their needs, the organisational culture of entrepreneurs can be improved. Moreover, a diverse range of training courses can support the development of non-redundant skills.

As previously mentioned, Quadrifor's training courses are delivered by specialised training companies with expertise in the relevant fields. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, which shifted everything online and to remote learning, opening a new path for development, the sites where the courses were delivered were based on where the participants came from.

Having already mentioned remote learning, it is important to highlight a specific point: the organisation had already begun to make increasing use of webinars. In fact, in addition to training in the classroom, there were 60 courses called "Quadri for E-learning", both in Italian and English.

Focusing on the "traditional" courses, there are three distinct groups: courses from the catalogue, for which middle managers can sign up directly; inter-company courses, characterised by the fact that the middle managers are varied as they come from different companies and have different skills; and company courses, which are requested directly by companies.

The classroom training courses are split into five topic areas: 1) technical/managerial training, a two-day classroom across-the-board course; 2) self-management, consisting of activities aimed at empowering the participant; 3) team management, through initiatives pertaining to tools and techniques for developing and leading teams; 4) managing processes, through courses on project management, organisational improvement, quality and HRM processes; 5)



business management, addressing the more prominent topic of developing technical and specialist competencies in purchasing, administration, finance and management control, internationalising markets, marketing and sales. Overall, the training programme for 2020 consists of 229 classroom training courses, a total of 346 editions, delivered in ten Italian cities, as well as around 60 e-learning courses.

It is worth paying particular attention to the inter-company courses. By bringing together different abilities, these courses enable the circulation of non-redundant information and therefore encourage innovative learning processes:

**We had 25 middle managers innovating. Basically, they socialise, and, in that socialising, they share knowledge that would otherwise have never come out**

*[President of Quadrifor].*

More precisely, the inter-company courses consist of classes made up of a maximum of 15 people from a variety of companies, different in terms of sector and size, so that they can share their experiences:

**We examine the registrations and create groups where the middle managers are not from the same company. It is a complicated task. We want to create a team that stays in touch.**

*[Director of Quadrifor]*

Therefore, we can see how this is primarily a process that impacts organisational-managerial aspects, whereas issues related more to trade union matters, such as labour regulation or supplementary welfare, remain in the background.

### 3.5.3. User profile and trends

As of 2019, Quadrifor had approximately 66,700 members and almost 14,000 companies in the

service sector. These figures continue to grow; in 2015, there were only 53,637 members. In terms of gender, there are 41,383 men (69%) and 18,759 women (31%). In terms of age distribution, there are no noticeable gender disparities (around 40% for both genders) in the two core age bands (36-45 and 46-54), which consist of the most numerous and typical age bands of this sector. Meanwhile, female middle managers over 55 show a 6.3% increase compared to their male colleagues (12.2% to 5.9%) (Source: Report on participation in training courses, 2020).

Moving onto trade union matters, the proportion of middle managers who are union members and engage in training programmes is low. The interviews also highlighted that the choice of whom to enrol on training courses, and the choice of the course, is often decided by managers or employers rather than middle managers. Therefore, if a middle manager joins a trade union, it could have adverse effects and be interpreted negatively by the top management, reducing the middle manager's chances of participating in training courses.

There is rarely a direct relationship between the trade union representatives involved in the governance of Quadrifor and the member companies. This does not mean that there are no trade union representatives in those companies but no established relations between the companies and the bilateral institute. It is, in fact, precisely because of its nature that it cannot promote strategies aimed at increasing union membership but can only aim to improve labour relations by acting as a tool for understanding the union's role and activities:

**A unionised middle manager makes more responsible decisions with regards to the workers he manages as well. The fact that they are familiar with the trade union environment is important [...]. Knowing about the management of the restructuring stages, representation, and labour law contributes**

**to a good atmosphere in the company. An improved relationship between the middle manager and the employees contributes to and improves the harmony and productivity of a company.**

*[President of Quadrifor]*

However, as previously mentioned, improved relations within the work environment seem to be tied to aspects of employer interests, connected more to the management of human resources than to the issue of labour relations.

Given this context, the interviewees' words indicate that training contributes to the formation of good labour relations because the organisation plays a synergic role between companies and trade unions and because of the type of people involved. However, when we consider how staff are selected to participate and the fundamental lack of trade union involvement in selecting the courses at the company level, the connection between participation and good labour relations is not so obvious.

This, therefore, leads to a contradiction. On the one hand, the experience provided by the bilateral institute and the awareness of the opportunities for growth deriving from training, both for the company and the individual, bring the positions of the employer and the union closer together. On the other hand, the delay in understanding the importance of what has been called the "training culture in companies" [Director of Quadrifor] and the continuing anti-union attitude towards the involvement of union representatives in the companies' strategic choices may reduce the innovative significance of the initiative. Consequently, the choices of both the activities and the participants results from unilateral decisions made by the companies based on a cost-benefit analysis of the service.

#### 3.5.4. Assessment of the services

##### a) From the trade union's point of view

The assessment of the services provided can only

be interpreted in the context of a gradual change in the labour market, leading to an informal reorganisation of company hierarchies and responsibilities. As a result, due to the high costs of the top management, there is less room for executives and more emphasis on middle managers. Moreover, middle managers are closer to the employees and more suited to acting as a "liaison" between them and the top management.

**This is a phenomenon that has already been written about extensively. In the last ten years, the definition of a quadro in the Italian Civil Code has changed: it is now, to all intents and purposes, a middle manager. The role of the quadro is changing even more quickly due to the crisis.**

*[Director of Quadrifor]*

In other words, the middle manager's role in the company seems to be more flexible and less defined than in the past. This may also be the reason why the importance of active policies is recalled, especially during times of crisis:

**When they open, many companies will find that conditions are different to before. Organising in good time is crucial. Middle managers, if they are competent, can make a difference.**

*[President of Quadrifor]*

The role of technology and remote learning will thus be crucial, with courses that will transform teaching methods:

**[...] from in-person classroom teaching to online. Webinars are shorter and record a higher attendance. Shorter, more incisive courses, where you don't have to travel [...] and where middle managers can manage themselves as they wish to.**

*[President of Quadrifor]*



The interviews highlight another factor: the high satisfaction levels expressed by the participants appears to contribute to an understanding, albeit indirectly, of the trade union and its role within the organisation. In other words, even when, as in most cases, there are no modules on labour law, the middle manager understands that behind Quadrifor's governance and course provision lies the role of the trade union as well:

**The middle manager begins to understand how the trade union side of things work. It becomes clear to the participants that the union is also behind these operations.**

*[President of Quadrifor]*

Thanks to the training, they become aware of the trade unions and the services they provide, even though this is always indirectly and without the mediation of the organisation:

**We went on a tour visiting companies in the service sector [...]. With Quadrifor, the middle managers are “in touch” with the union. But the cost of unionisation... goes through the three unions.**

*[President of Quadrifor]*

In broader terms, participant satisfaction with the courses is surveyed mainly through questionnaires. The participants rated the teacher, teaching materials, content, adequacy of the teaching space, duration and left an overall opinion on the course. The largely positive opinions represent:

**[...] the definite proof. It shows us that both middle managers and companies are asking for training, so they see the benefits from this point of view.**

*[Director of Quadrifor]*

Further evidence of a positive response to the training is that some middle managers requested

to carry on with the courses independently, paying the subscription fee themselves. Furthermore, some formed “communities of practice” with the course teachers to keep the training up. As we have seen, online communities can be created through group chats, where information is shared and sometimes remains active even after the training course is over.

This is an important aspect, which confirms the dynamic nature of people who have, for some time, obtained a new position in the company hierarchy:

**The middle manager is laden with additional tasks. He is more and more a senior figure. Some companies only have middle managers instead of executives.**

*[Director of Quadrifor]*

We can therefore form an initial assessment of the course using a SWOT analysis method.

Among its *assets*, we can highlight the structural solidity of the organisation, as well as the type of participants. This enables Quadrifor to be a credible representative for both companies and trade unions, creating a favourable platform for collaboration. Furthermore, the nature of the courses and the role that middle managers occupy more and more in a company open room for innovation with regards to organisation and knowledge, which are considered in this case as “soft skills”.

As far as the link between services and unionisation is concerned. On the one hand, the bilateral approach avoids any conflict and provides a foundation for good labour relations; on the other hand, there appears to be a theory emerging that knowledge of the functions and opportunities associated with the role of trade unions makes it possible to “narrow the gap”, even though there is no direct impact on membership. However, this point remains unclear and needs further investigation on the receiving end of the services.

Among its *weaknesses* is the very nature of the relations between the trade unions. In fact, even though they are involved in the organisation's governance, they maintain the competitive dynamic when it comes to the association of middle managers to individual trade unions. In the medium term, this may create two problems. The first is to do with the risk of legitimising the status quo and, consequently, promoting adaptive strategies in the face of structural change. In other words, the competition between unions may reduce the ability to influence the organisation's policies, relegating the union's role to that of a passive spectator during times of change.

The second critical issue involves the risk of continuing to insist on policies that are designed solely to develop the aspects of training that are related to the management of human resources and productivity without succeeding in triggering new paths of development as far as the role of the trade union in the company is concerned. The central role of the corporate aspect in training courses is also made evident by the fact that there is only one course on labour law.

The risks, therefore, come from the possible failure to seize the opportunities for reform during the Covid-19 pandemic and the changes to the world of work it brought with it. This is also linked to that contradiction mentioned above regarding the union's position in the organisation's governance, where it plays a crucial role, and what we have called an "adverse" choice, whereby the middle manager's affiliation to the

union could be seen negatively by the company. By contrast, the opportunities are tied to the potential for growth in the number of participants and the exposure of the services provided by the union. In terms of the former:

**Many middle managers don't know about Quadrifor. Even though we have 70,000 people from the trade and services sectors registered, we only have a small portion of employees. There are no middle managers in tourism who are members, for example.**

*[President of Quadrifor]*

The provision of more services can be a supplementary means of increasing membership. If people get to know the union through training, the promotion of ad hoc services could encourage membership. Finally, the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the process of moving training online. In this context, both the organisation and the training companies have continued to invest in online teaching tools and less formal in-person training. This has opened new possibilities that can broaden the range of courses and participants if put into practice.

*b) From the user's point of view*

Due to the bilateral nature of Quadrifor and the type of people who participate, it was not possible to contact individual participants through the use of surveys nor through in-depth interviews or focus groups. ♦



# Conclusions

## Sevicing a strategy to strengthen union membership?

**I**n Italy, the offer of individual services is an activity with ancient roots, which characterises the organisational action of trade unions. Individual assistance and protection services, tax compliance, intermediation between job supply and demand, in fact, are regularly offered by trade unions in their maturity phase and generate a large share of their budget. These are mainly traditional services, created for the dual need to offer “selective incentives” for membership (Olson 1965) and find new funding sources in the face of a tendency to decline in membership. Recently, alongside these activities, the experimentation of a new offer of services, characterised by a different ratio, is being added. From the case studies, a plurality of experiments emerges, united by the idea of “strategic” use of services (Kochan et al. 1986; Boxall and Haynes 1997), primarily aimed at intercepting workers – but not only – reluctant to traditional trade union action: self-employed and unemployed for the lower part, middle managers for the upper part of the labour market. On closer inspection, these are different cases. Sometimes, these are initiatives that arise from below, resulting from strategic choices of territorial offices or provincial-level sectoral federations. Other cases involve initiatives from above of a confederal or contractual matrix. Over the years, however, these experiences

have not remained isolated. The maturation of the experiments has produced contamination of the organisational logic and progressive institutionalisation of the initiatives. In the case of Vivace, for example, the “virtual” associative model is now rooted in the “physical” territorial structures of Felsa. In the case of Partita Viva, instead, the bottom-up experience is now part of the same national project. Even the case of Sportello Lavoro seems to have found a framework within national coordination of similar initiatives, the same coordination that Nidil guarantees to the initiatives of Nidil Firenze. A dialectic, therefore, emerges between the territorial and national levels, which lends itself to a double reading: on the one hand, this can reduce autonomy and local specificities; on the other hand, it can allow the consolidation and systematisation of the experiences in place. However, more than the differences, it is helpful to point out the similarities between the case studies. The first transversal aspect of almost all the initiatives – except for Quadrifor, which is a case in itself – is exploiting the services provided by the CAAFs and patronages as the main asset to bring people who are difficult to reach through traditional channels, be they self-employed or unemployed. What emerges describes how some peripheral union initiatives are beginning to perceive the strategic value of individual services,


thus extending – sometimes, unconsciously – the principles of servicing. These initiatives are appreciated by the workers and contribute to the consolidation and renewal of union membership.

It should be noted that the effectiveness of this type of initiative should not be measured only in the harsh terms of new union members but rather take as a reference the many nuances that characterise the relationship between worker and trade union. From this point of view, Sportello Lavoro has the function of perpetuating the union's relations with the workers who are transitioning from one job to another. The other experiences aimed at self-employed workers and middle managers have an additional and ancillary function to promoting membership renewal, that is, the initiation of a process of legitimising trade unions among social groups that traditionally do not know or have a negative opinion of them.

A second element that these experiences have in common is organisational fragility. Like all experimental initiatives, they tend to depend on the institutional entrepreneur who promotes them – usually an individual actor, less often a coalition of actors (Bellini and Gherardini 2015). The poor institutionalisation of the initiatives produces a concentration of resources – be they relations with the members of the community or the mastery of the “provinces of meaning” of each professional community – which risks becoming the property of the community organiser or, worse still, dispersing in the community in the case the reference person has a professional discontinuity. Therefore, structuring some local initiatives in consolidated experiences, such as in the case of Felsa, which is not characterised by a bureaucratic organisational style, is a good omen, which could theoretically reduce the innovative scope of bottom-up experiences.

Finally, within the framework of what is written in the initial part of this report, the case studies allow us to reflect on the relationship between

the membership activated by these services and participation in trade union action. As we know, the organising paradigm has the direct objective of activating a community of people to promote collective action (Alinsky 1946; Clawson 2003; Hurd et al. 2003, Simms et al. 2018). On the contrary, servicing appears more inspired by the model of a trade union as a supplier of individual goods. In this sense, membership would be more linked to enjoying the advantages deriving from selective incentives, and the link with the organisation would rarely translate into participation (Boxall and Haynes 1997).

In the Italian case, servicing seems to move away from this definition. Instead, indications emerge regarding a range of strategic choices, which translate into a variety of “hybrid” models, which can be placed along a continuum that allows us to grasp different “nuances” of servicing (see Figure 1). At one extreme, that of traditional servicing, the offer of services is an end in itself, as in the case of Quadrifor. In this case, those who offer services do not have the problem of organising actual users. At the other extreme, we find a type of servicing that follows the logic of organising, with the offer of services instrumental to collective action, typical of the Nidil Firenze experience. In between, we have the other experiences, which configure cases of strategic servicing to the extent that they offer individual and “collectivising” services simultaneously. In the experiences of Vivace, Partita Viva and, to a lesser extent, Sportello Lavoro, the provision of services represents an end in itself, a short-term product that facilitates workers' lives, and makes it possible to connect with them. These experiences, however, have a second, longer-term objective, which varies from one to another, although having collectivising purposes, namely: a) to build a community of workers to represent (such as in the case of Vivace and, on a local scale, Partita Viva); b) updating an old method of union action, that of unilateral regulation, to give representation to those who do not have a job (Sportello Lavoro). 

**Figure 1.** The servicing: a typology

Servicing following the logic of organising (instrumental services)	Strategic servicing (“collectivising” services)		Traditional servicing (individual services)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training course for tour guides (agreement with a tour operator)</li> <li>• <b>Nidil Firenze</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online community - <b>Vivace</b></li> <li>• Co-working - <b>Partita Viva</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Micro-consultancies - <b>Vivace</b></li> <li>• Integrated services : - <b>Vivace, Partita Viva, Nidil Firenze</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guidance, training, job matching - <b>Sportello Lavoro</b></li> <li>• Training needs analysis, continuing training - <b>Quadrifor</b></li> </ul>

In conclusion, the cases analysed have identified new spaces for trade union representation, which are created, not without difficulty, in little-travelled areas – such as self-employment – or long abandoned – such as unemployment.

These spaces can hardly be reached without strategic use of services, which by their nature are bridges towards an enlarged and “personalised” conception of the world of work and its representation (Buonerba 2020). ♦

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# Annex

## 1. Associative data

**Table 1.** Trends in union membership by type of members (number and percentage of members, 2011-2020)

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Active members*	6.243.861	6.311.393	6.292.143	6.260.462	6.136.729	6.166.696	6.241.210	6.303.119	6.344.536	6.346.481
%	52,3	52,9	53,0	53,5	53,1	54,2	56,4	56,1	56,4	56,7
Pensioners	5.698.075	5.625.949	5.576.860	5.449.518	5.410.934	5.202.605	4.829.829	4.934.532	4.912.252	4.842.054
%	47,7	47,1	47,0	46,5	46,9	45,8	43,6	43,9	43,6	43,3
<b>Total</b>	<b>11.941.936</b>	<b>11.937.342</b>	<b>11.869.003</b>	<b>11.709.980</b>	<b>11.547.663</b>	<b>11.369.301</b>	<b>11.071.039</b>	<b>11.237.651</b>	<b>11.256.788</b>	<b>11.188.535</b>
%	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>

\* It includes salaried, self-employed, and atypical workers, plus unemployed persons.

Source: Authors' processing of data provided by trade unions.

**Table 2.** Trends in union membership by trade union (number and percentage of members, 2011-2020)

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
CGIL	5.697.201	5.723.493	5.695.210	5.624.913	5.547.792	5.470.392	5.208.128	5.363.301	5.354.721	5.295.616
%	47,7	47,9	48,0	48,0	48,0	48,1	47,1	47,7	47,6	47,3
CISL	4.340.886	4.296.900	4.246.323	4.168.077	4.075.306	3.953.642	3.911.857	3.908.049	3.927.455	3.908.463
%	36,4	36,0	35,8	35,6	35,3	34,8	35,3	34,8	34,9	34,9
UIL	1.903.849	1.916.949	1.927.470	1.916.990	1.924.565	1.945.267	1.951.054	1.966.301	1.974.612	1.984.456
%	15,9	16,1	16,2	16,4	16,7	17,1	17,6	17,5	17,5	17,8
<b>Total</b>	<b>11.941.936</b>	<b>11.937.342</b>	<b>11.869.003</b>	<b>11.709.980</b>	<b>11.547.663</b>	<b>11.369.301</b>	<b>11.071.039</b>	<b>11.237.651</b>	<b>11.256.788</b>	<b>11.188.535</b>
%	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: Authors' processing of data provided by trade unions.

**Table 3.1** Union membership by trade union, macro-sector/type of members and related sectoral federations (number and percentage of members, 2020)

Trade union	Macro-sector/ type of members	Sectoral federations	No.	%
<b>CGIL</b>	Agriculture and food	FLAI	261.259	4,9
	Industry, including construction	FILCTEM, FILLEA, FIOM	731.641	14,4
	Trade and services	FILCAMS, FILT, FISAC, SLC	959.882	17,8
	Public sector	FLC, FP	599.351	11,1
	Self-employed and atypical workers	Nidil	112.980	2,3
	Miscellaneous	Unemployed persons, SILP, others	36.889	0,5
	<b>Sub-total: Active members</b>		<b>2.702.002</b>	<b>51,0</b>
	<b>Pensioners</b>	<b>SPI</b>	<b>2.593.614</b>	<b>49,0</b>
	<b>TOTAL MEMBERS</b>		<b>5.295.616</b>	<b>100,0</b>
	<b>OTHER</b>		<b>533.833</b>	
<b>CISL</b>	Agriculture and food	FAI, UGC	218.467	5,6
	Industry, including construction	FEMCA, FILCA, FIM, FLAEI	546.858	14,0
	Trade and services	FIBA (now, FIRST), FIST (excluding Felsa), FISTEL, FIT, SLP	742.392	19,0
	Public sector	CISL Medici, FNS, FP, FSUR	542.298	13,9
	Self-employed and atypical workers	Felsa	44.062	1,1
	Miscellaneous	Border workers, special members (unemployed persons)	123.754	3,1
	<b>Sub-total: Active members</b>		<b>2.217.831</b>	<b>56,7</b>
	<b>Pensioners</b>	<b>FNP</b>	<b>1.690.632</b>	<b>43,3</b>
	<b>TOTAL MEMBERS</b>		<b>3.908.463</b>	<b>100,0</b>
	<b>OTHER</b>		<b>160.648</b>	
<b>UIL</b>	Agriculture and food	UILA	232.040	11,7
	Industry, including construction	Uiltec, Feneal, UILM	376.239	19,0
	Trade and services	UILCA, Uilcom, UIL Poste, Uiltucs, UIL Trasporti	391.960	19,7
	Public sector	FPL, UIL OOCC, UILPA, UILRUA, UIL Scuola	358.259	18,1
	Self-employed and atypical workers	Uiltemp	68.150	3,4
	<b>Sub-total: Active members</b>		<b>1.426.648</b>	<b>71,9</b>
	<b>Pensioners</b>	<b>Uil Pensionati</b>	<b>557.808</b>	<b>28,1</b>
	<b>TOTAL MEMBERS</b>		<b>1.984.456</b>	<b>100,0</b>
	<b>OTHER</b>		<b>302.900</b>	

*Note: the data released by the trade unions have some particularities and non-homogeneities: for example, in the cases of CGIL and CISL, some categories such as immigrants, tenants, and unemployed persons become members of the confederations through the so-called "direct membership cards", expressions of associations and services; in the case of UIL, instead, the share of second-affiliated members partially compensates for the historical weakness compared to the other two confederations in the direct unionisation of pensioners; among the second-affiliated members, there are those who are reached through agreements with independent associations and unions, including both active and retired workers.*

*Source: Authors' processing of data provided by trade unions.*

**Table 3.2** Trends in union membership by trade union and macro-sector/type of members (number of members, 2011-2020)

Trade union	Macro-sector/ type of members	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<b>CGIL</b>	Agriculture and food	281.912	281.780	277.346	272.085	265.769	260.713	250.090	258.331	259.643	261.259
	Industry, including construction	951.742	943.593	917.409	883.249	849.089	829.804	823.995	790.016	763.636	731.641
	Trade and services	742.028	774.414	801.236	791.872	793.540	803.286	865.535	923.989	942.202	959.882
	Public sector	613.842	610.300	601.962	598.973	584.820	574.285	582.631	587.666	587.119	599.351
	Self-employed and atypical workers	61.004	70.952	67.632	73.413	75.811	93.841	104.368	120.079	122.993	112.980
	Miscellaneous	49.269	46.331	41.427	39.967	39.807	45.145	36.509	31.330	26.856	36.889
	Sub-total: Active members	2.699.797	2.727.370	2.707.012	2.659.559	2.608.836	2.607.074	2.663.128	2.711.411	2.702.449	2.702.002
	Pensioners	2.997.404	2.996.123	2.988.198	2.965.354	2.938.956	2.863.318	2.545.000	2.651.890	2.652.272	2.593.614
	<b>TOTAL MEMBERS</b>	<b>5.697.201</b>	<b>5.723.493</b>	<b>5.695.210</b>	<b>5.624.913</b>	<b>5.547.792</b>	<b>5.470.392</b>	<b>5.208.128</b>	<b>5.363.301</b>	<b>5.354.721</b>	<b>5.295.616</b>
	OTHER	700.374	669.073	659.388	664.910	655.210	581.482	563.752	565.052	578.845	533.833
<b>CISL</b>	Agriculture and food	268.016	269.475	256.580	252.180	253.234	261.662	255.029	243.851	230.087	218.467
	Industry, including construction	656.259	662.440	654.829	644.730	627.111	614.865	584.558	565.580	555.042	546.858
	Trade and services	583.343	603.808	630.909	652.674	673.892	685.949	694.874	706.958	729.675	742.392
	Public sector	592.793	589.951	585.174	600.701	516.000	513.051	529.594	527.298	534.632	542.298
	Self-employed and atypical workers	44.334	44.687	43.796	41.054	42.003	41.601	41.522	42.486	43.945	44.062
	Miscellaneous	70.736	70.784	66.507	63.511	68.755	80.626	92.525	108.282	134.455	123.754
	Sub-total: Active members	2.215.481	2.241.145	2.239.808	2.256.864	2.180.995	2.197.754	2.200.119	2.196.473	2.227.836	2.217.831
	Pensioners	2.125.405	2.055.755	2.006.515	1.911.213	1.894.311	1.755.888	1.711.738	1.711.576	1.699.619	1.690.632
	<b>TOTAL MEMBERS</b>	<b>4.340.886</b>	<b>4.296.900</b>	<b>4.246.323</b>	<b>4.168.077</b>	<b>4.075.306</b>	<b>3.953.642</b>	<b>3.911.857</b>	<b>3.908.049</b>	<b>3.927.455</b>	<b>3.908.463</b>
	OTHER	144.497	145.850	134.319	136.289	137.884	137.039	130.983	144.649	152.035	160.648
<b>UIL</b>	Agriculture and food	224.747	225.616	225.940	221.588	223.996	225.472	226.551	227.013	229.508	232.040
	Industry, including construction	373.334	368.325	350.928	352.354	353.188	358.116	362.084	370.429	375.723	376.239
	Trade and services	337.372	340.552	352.384	352.558	357.089	359.733	368.382	375.919	383.546	391.960
	Public sector	339.551	341.177	345.543	346.751	347.767	349.179	350.011	352.180	355.763	358.259
	Self-employed and atypical workers	53.579	67.208	70.528	70.788	64.858	69.368	70.935	69.694	69.711	68.150
	Sub-total: Active members	1.328.583	1.342.878	1.345.323	1.344.039	1.346.898	1.361.868	1.377.963	1.395.235	1.414.251	1.426.648
	Pensioners	575.266	574.071	582.147	572.951	577.667	583.399	573.091	571.066	560.361	557.808
	<b>TOTAL MEMBERS</b>	<b>1.903.849</b>	<b>1.916.949</b>	<b>1.927.470</b>	<b>1.916.990</b>	<b>1.924.565</b>	<b>1.945.267</b>	<b>1.951.054</b>	<b>1.966.301</b>	<b>1.974.612</b>	<b>1.984.456</b>
	OTHER	292.593	289.232	288.973	305.675	305.831	304.460	305.020	307.020	306.743	302.900

*Note: the data released by the trade unions have some particularities and non-homogeneities: for example, in the cases of CGIL and CISL, some categories such as immigrants, tenants, and unemployed persons become members of the confederations through the so-called "direct membership cards", expressions of associations and services; in the case of UIL, instead, the share of second-affiliated members partially compensates for the historical weakness compared to the other two confederations in the direct unionisation of pensioners; among the second-affiliated members, there are those who are reached through agreements with independent associations and unions, including both active and retired workers.*

Source: Authors' processing of data provided by trade unions.

**Table 4.1** Union membership by macro-sector/type of members (number and percentage of members, 2020)

Macrosettore/tipo di iscritti	No.	%
Agriculture and food	711.766	6,4
Industry, including construction	1.654.738	14,8
Trade and services	2.094.234	18,7
Public sector	1.499.908	13,4
Self-employed and atypical workers	225.192	2,0
Miscellaneous	160.643	1,4
<b>Sub-total: Active members</b>	<b>6.346.481</b>	<b>56,7</b>
<b>Pensioners</b>	<b>4.842.054</b>	<b>43,3</b>
<b>TOTAL MEMBERS</b>	<b>11.188.535</b>	<b>100,0</b>
<b>OTHER</b>	<b>997.381</b>	

Source: Authors' processing of data provided by trade unions.

**Table 4.2** Trends in union membership by macro-sector/type of members (number of members, 2011-2020)

Macro-sector/ type of members	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Agriculture and food	774.675	776.871	759.866	745.853	742.999	747.847	731.670	729.195	719.238	711.766
Industry, including construction	1.981.335	1.974.358	1.923.166	1.880.333	1.829.388	1.802.785	1.770.637	1.726.025	1.694.401	1.654.738
Trade and services	1.662.743	1.718.774	1.784.529	1.797.104	1.824.521	1.848.968	1.928.791	2.006.866	2.055.423	2.094.234
Public sector	1.546.186	1.541.428	1.532.679	1.546.425	1.448.587	1.436.515	1.462.236	1.467.144	1.477.514	1.499.908
Self-employed and atypical workers	158.917	182.847	181.956	185.255	182.672	204.810	216.825	232.259	236.649	225.192
Miscellaneous	120.005	117.115	107.934	103.478	108.562	125.771	129.034	139.612	161.311	160.643
<b>Sub-total: Active members</b>	<b>6.243.861</b>	<b>6.311.393</b>	<b>6.292.143</b>	<b>6.260.462</b>	<b>6.136.729</b>	<b>6.166.696</b>	<b>6.241.210</b>	<b>6.303.119</b>	<b>6.344.536</b>	<b>6.346.481</b>
<b>Pensioners</b>	<b>5.698.075</b>	<b>5.625.949</b>	<b>5.576.860</b>	<b>5.449.518</b>	<b>5.410.934</b>	<b>5.202.605</b>	<b>4.829.829</b>	<b>4.934.532</b>	<b>4.912.252</b>	<b>4.842.054</b>
<b>TOTAL MEMBERS</b>	<b>11.941.936</b>	<b>11.937.342</b>	<b>11.869.003</b>	<b>11.709.980</b>	<b>11.547.663</b>	<b>11.369.301</b>	<b>11.071.039</b>	<b>11.237.651</b>	<b>11.256.788</b>	<b>11.188.535</b>
<b>OTHER</b>	<b>1.137.464</b>	<b>1.104.155</b>	<b>1.082.680</b>	<b>1.106.874</b>	<b>1.098.925</b>	<b>1.022.981</b>	<b>999.755</b>	<b>1.016.721</b>	<b>1.037.623</b>	<b>997.381</b>

Source: Authors' processing of data provided by trade unions.

**Table 5.** Trend in union density compared to the unionisation rate of the labour force (percentage, 2011-2020)

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Union density*	35,5	35,7	36,2	35,8	34,6	33,9	33,6	33,3	33,2	33,9
Unionisation rate of the labour force**	25,7	25,4	25,4	25,0	24,5	24,4	24,6	24,9	25,1	25,9

\* Salaried union members (compared to active union members, atypical workers and unemployed persons are excluded) in proportion to employees.

\*\* RActive union members in proportion to the labour forces aged 15-64.

Source: Authors' processing of data provided by trade unions.

**Table 6.** Union density by gender (percentage, 2017)

	%
Males	37,3
Females	28,1

Source: Visser (2019).



**Table 7. Union density by age (percentage, 2014)**

	%
Elderly people (55-64 years)	35,5
Adults (25-54 years)	40,0
Young people (15-24 years)	8,0

Source: Visser (2019).

**Table 8. Union density by employment contract (percentage, 2012)**

	%
Permanent contracts	39,3
Temporary contracts	31,8

Source: Visser (2019).

**Table 9. Union density by firm size (percentage, 2014)**

	%
Large firms (100 employees or more)	56,8
Medium firms (11-99 employees)	40,0
Small firms (10 employees or less)	10,0

Source: Visser (2019).

**Table 10. Union density by sector and macro-sector (percentage, 2014)**

	%
Manufacturing	35,2
Construction	51,9
<b>Sub-total: Industry</b>	<b>45,5</b>
Trade	23,5
Transports	52,0
Social services	41,5
<b>Sub-total: Services</b>	<b>31,1</b>

Source: Visser (2019).

**Table 11. Estimated revenues by source of revenue and trade union (million euro and percentage, average 2013-2014)**

Sources of revenue	CGIL	%	CISL	%	UIL	%
Active members	320-370	45,6-46,0	260-310	48,6-49,1	150-180	58,4-58,6
Retired workers	150-180	21,4-22,4	90-120	16,8-19,0	30-40	11,7-13,0
<b>Sub-total: Membership fees</b>	<b>470-550</b>	<b>67,0-68,4</b>	<b>350-430</b>	<b>65,4-68,0</b>	<b>180-220</b>	<b>70,0-71,7</b>
<b>CAAF</b>	131-144	18,7-17,9	115-127	21,5-20,1	47-52	18,3-16,9
• Ministry of Finance	38-41	5,4-5,1	33-37	6,2-5,9	13-15	5,1-4,9
• National Institute for Social Security (INPS)	19-22	2,7-2,7	17-18	3,2-2,8	7-8	2,7-2,6
• Customers	74-81	10,6-10,1	65-72	12,1-11,4	26-29	10,19,4
Patronati (Ministry of Labour)	100-110	14,3-13,7	70-75	13,1-11,9	30-35	11,7-11,4
<b>Sub-total: Services</b>	<b>231-254</b>	<b>33,0-31,6</b>	<b>185-202</b>	<b>34,6-32,0</b>	<b>77-87</b>	<b>30,0-28,3</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>701-804</b>	<b>100,0-100,0</b>	<b>535-632</b>	<b>100,0-100,0</b>	<b>257-307</b>	<b>100,0-100,0</b>

Source: Authors' processing of data provided by Carriero and Feltrin (2016: 83, authors' translation).

## 2. Survey data

### Section 0: Case selection

**Table 01.** Please, select the case you would like to evaluate

	No.
Sportello Lavoro - CISL Firenze-Prato	54
Vivace (CISL)	14
<b>Partita Viva - CISL Vicenza</b>	<b>11</b>
Nidil CGIL Firenze - Sportelli per le partite IVA	12
Quadrifor	
None of the above	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>

*Note: it was not possible to contact the individual users to distribute the survey questionnaire, due to Quadrifor's bipartite nature.*

**Table 02.** In your experience with the selected case, did you use any services?

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
YES	41	7	10	10	<b>68</b>
NO	13	7	1	2	<b>23</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>91</b>

*Note: only those who selected one of the five cases listed in Table 01, "Please, select the case you would like to evaluate", answered this question and had access to the full questionnaire.*

## Section A: Socio-demographic profile

**Table A1.** Age group

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
55 years or more	8	5	3	1	17
45-54 years	15	1	1	4	21
35-44 years	10	2	5	2	19
25-34 years	15	5	1	5	26
Less than 25 years	3				3
Don't answer	3	1	1		5
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>91</b>

**Table A2.** Gender

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
Woman	28	5	2	6	41
Man	23	8	8	5	44
Don't answer	3	1	1	1	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>91</b>

**Table A3.** Highest level of educational attainment

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
Doctoral degree		1			1
University education (graduate or postgraduate degree)	12	8	6	9	35
Upper secondary education	23	4	4	3	34
Vocational training qualification/Professional diploma	5				5
Lower secondary education	10				10
Primary education	1				1
No qualification					
Don't answer	3	1	1		5
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>91</b>

## Section B: Occupational profile

### All respondents

**Table B1.** Current main activity status

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
Employed (even if on a paid leave)	12	10	9	9	40
Employed, but on temporary lay-offs or reduced hours	1	1		1	3
Not employed	38	2	1	2	43
No answer	3	1	1		5
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>91</b>

## Employed persons

**Table B1.1** Professional status

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
Employee	12	2	3	2	19
Employer-coordinated freelance worker or occasional worker	1	2			3
Self-employed*		7	6	8	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>43</b>

\* Employer, professional, own-account worker, freelancer, solo-self-employed, family worker, member of producers' cooperative.  
 Note: only those who answered "Employed ..." to the question in Table B1, "Current main activity status", answered this question

**Table B1.1.1** Employment contract

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
Open-ended contract		2	3	2	7
Fixed-term contract (including temporary agency work, school supplies, vouchers, etc.)	7				7
Apprenticeship	2				2
Zero-hour contract					
Internship or traineeship	1				1
No contract	1				1
Other	1				1
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>19</b>

Note: only those who answered "Employee" to the question in Table B1.1, "Professional status", answered this question.

**Table B2. Economic activity**

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
Agriculture, forestry, and fishing	1				1
Manufacturing, mining and quarrying, and other industry (including construction)	1				1
Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles			1		1
Transportation and storage (including postal and courier activities)	4		1		5
Accommodation and food service activities	1	1		1	3
Information and communication		2	3	1	6
Financial, insurance, and real estate activities				1	1
Professional, scientific, and technical service activities	1	2	1	4	8
Administrative and support service activities	2				2
Public administration and defence, compulsory social security, education, and health services	1	3	2	1	7
Residential care and social work activities	1				1
Other (trade union)		2			2
No answer	1	1	1	2	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>43</b>

Note: only those who answered "Employed ..." to the question in Table B1, "Current main activity status", answered this question.

**Table B3. Hours worked during the previous week**

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
More than 40 hours	1	1			2
36-40 hours	2	1	3	5	11
21-35 hours	3	4	2	3	12
11-20 hours	1	1	1	1	4
1-10 hours	3	1		1	5
0 hours	3	2	1		6
No answer		1	2		3
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>43</b>

Note: only those who answered "Employed ..." to the question in Table B1, "Current main activity status", answered this question.

## Not employed persons

**Table B1bis.** Please, specify your current status

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
Unemployed (seeking new job)	34			1	35
Unemployed (seeking first job)					
Not active (e.g., student, fulfilling domestic tasks, disabled for work)					
Retired			1		1
Other	4	2		1	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>43</b>

Note: only those who answered "Not employed" to the question in Table B1, "Current main activity status", answered this question.

**Table B1bis (other).** Other: please, specify

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
Freelancer		1			1
Independent consultant		1			1
On an unpaid maternity leave	1				1
Professional				1	1
Temporary agency worker	1				1
No answer	2				2
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>

## Unemployed persons seeking new job

**Table B1.1bis .** What was your professional status in your previous job?

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
Employee	24				24
Employer-coordinated freelance worker or occasional worker	4				4
Self-employed*	3				3
No answer	3			1	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>			<b>1</b>	<b>35</b>

\* \* Employer, professional, own-account worker, freelancer, solo-self-employed, family worker, member of producers' cooperative.

Note: only those who answered "Unemployed (seeking new job)" to the question in Table B1bis, "Please, specify your current status"; answered this question.

**Table B1.1.1bis .** What kind of contract did you have in your previous job?

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
Open-ended contract	6				6
Fixed-term contract (including temporary agency work, school supplies, vouchers etc.)	16				16
Apprenticeship					
Zero-hour contract	2				2
Internship or traineeship					
No contract					
Other					
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>				<b>24</b>

Note: only those who answered "Employee" to the question in Table B1.1bis, "What was your professional status in your previous job?"; answered this question.

**Table B2bis. Economic activity**

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
Agriculture, forestry, and fishing	1				1
Manufacturing, mining and quarrying, and other industry (including construction)	5				5
Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	1				1
Transportation and storage (including postal and courier activities)	5				5
Accommodation and food service activities	2				2
Information and communication	1				1
Financial, insurance, and real estate activities					
Professional, scientific, and technical service activities	2				2
Administrative and support service activities	4				4
Public administration and defence, compulsory social security, education, and health services	2				2
Residential care and social work activities	1				1
Other (not specified)	7				7
No answer	3			1	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>			<b>1</b>	<b>35</b>

Note: only those who answered "Unemployed (seeking new job)" to the question in Table B1bis, "Please, specify your current status", answered this question.

**Table B3bis. How long have you been not working?**

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
More than 12 months	6				6
9-12 months	3				3
6-9 months	3				3
3-6 months	2				2
1-3 months	9				9
Less than 1 month	8				8
No answer	3			1	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>			<b>1</b>	<b>35</b>

Note: only those who answered "Unemployed (seeking new job)" to the question in Table B1bis, "Please, specify your current status", answered this question.

## Section C: Assessment of union services or activities

**Table C1.** How long have you been in contact with the union or the services?

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
More than 3 years	7			1	8
2-3 years	23	5	7	9	44
Less than 2 years	24	9	4	2	39
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>91</b>

**Table C2.** How did you learn about it?

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
From the union's website or social media	4	1	2	5	12
From other websites or social media	3	2		1	6
Through word-of-mouth between colleagues or friends	16	1	5	4	26
At the workplace	4	1	1		6
Through communication from trade unionists	13	5		1	19
Through union documents (flyers, posters, newspapers)	2		1		3
Through public/institutional communication (e.g., the regional government or job centres)	2				2
Other	10	4	2	1	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>91</b>

**Table C2 (other).** Other: please, specify

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
Asked about my situation	1				1
CAF (tax assistance)		2	1		3
Digital Career Days	1				1
E-mail		1			1
Formatemp (vocational training for temporary agency workers)	1				1
Informagiovani (info point for young people)			1		1
ISEE (certification of the economic situation)				1	1
Patronato (social insurance assistance)	2				2
Proximity to my house	2				2
SAPI (assistance for self-employed and freelance workers)		1			1
No answer	3				3
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>17</b>

**Table C3.** How many times have you used the services

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
Regularly	3	2	3	4	12
Often	5		2		7
Sometimes	22	2	4	4	32
Rarely	4	1	1	2	8
Only once	7	2			9
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>68</b>

Note: only those who answered "Yes" to the question in Table 02, "In your experience with the selected case, did you use any services", answered this question.



**Table C3bis.** How many times have you participated in the activities of the union?

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
Regularly	1	1			2
Often	1				1
Sometimes	2	1			3
Rarely	2			2	4
Only once	7	5	1		13
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>23</b>

Note: only those who answered "No" to the question in Table 02, "In your experience with the selected case, did you use any services", answered this question.

**Table C4.** Please, indicate your satisfaction on the following dimensions (mean values on a scale from 1 to 10, in which 10 is the highest level of satisfaction)

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
Ease in finding the information needed to access the services	8,6	8,0	9,3	8,6	8,6
Ease in making an appointment	8,8	9,3	8,2	8,6	8,7
Quick response	8,8	9,2	9,2	8,4	8,7
Operators' professionalism	9,1	8,7	9,4	9,4	9,1
Clarity of the information received	9,1	9,0	9,1	8,9	9,1
Effectiveness in solving my problems	8,1	8,7	9,2	8,5	8,4
Costs incurred	8,6	7,9	8,4	7,6	8,3
(N)	(41)	(7)	(10)	(10)	(68)

Note: only those who answered "Yes" to the question in Table 02, "In your experience with the selected case, did you use any services", answered this question.

**Table C5.** Would you recommend a colleague to use the services?

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
Yes, they were helpful to me	29	4	9	9	51
Yes, even if they did not solve the problem completely, they were helpful	11	2		1	14
No, the services offered by other organisations are more efficient					
No, they didn't help me	1				1
Don't know		1	1		2
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>68</b>

Note: only those who answered "Yes" to the question in Table 02, "In your experience with the selected case, did you use any services", answered this question.

**Table C5bis.** Would you recommend a colleague to contact the union?

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
Yes, it was helpful to me	7	1			8
Yes, even if it did not solve the problem completely, it was helpful	3	1			4
No, other organisations are more supportive					
No, it didn't help me	1		1	1	3
Don't know	2	5		1	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>23</b>

Note: only those who answered "No" to the question in Table 02, "In your experience with the selected case, did you use any services", answered this question.

**Table C6 . What should be done to improve the services, in your opinion? (Open question)**

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
Answering the phone and reducing waiting times	1				1
A serious check on the professionalism and work of some employees	1				1
By making an appointment for a particular service, often, you are not aware of the documents to be presented, and you risk having to return to complete the operations. It would be advisable to connect the user with the operator before the appointment				1	1
Creating an app for reservations, invoice uploads, payments, and other services				1	1
Developing an interview methodology to bring out the user's characteristics and, based on market demand, helping him build a strategy for profitable job search	1				1
Expanding the number of people who can use the services by creating union offices throughout the territory and not just in local headquarters / Spreading job offers geographically, based on the location of the subjects in charge	2				2
Extending opening hours			2		2
Extending the territorial coverage		1			1
Giving more information aimed at those who have a VAT number. Building networks among those who have a VAT number and often work in isolation and promoting collective action		1			1
I'm happy with this, costs of services, response times, and the availability of operators / I don't know what to ask for more / I'm satisfied, there's nothing to improve / I have always had the answers to my needs / The service is already great / For now, nothing / They are already very efficient / Everything's ok	5	2	1		8
Increasing the number of operators to reduce waiting times	1				1
It should be easier to get in touch with them	1				1
Making themselves known				1	1
Offering appointments via videoconference	1				1
Offering job opportunities even to over 55s	1				1
Offering more extensive free courses for the unemployed	1				1
Offering more job opportunities / Getting more people on the labour market / Improving job search	3				3
Offering targeted advice since each worker is an individual entity	1				1
Protecting low-income families		1			1
Reactivating the coworking space, despite Covid, would be very nice			1		1
Sending newsletters with job offers	1				1
Strengthening the switchboard, especially in this period, to sort requests faster	1				1
There is no initial reception	1				1
<b>No answer</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>68</b>

## Section D: The relationship between services, membership, and participation

**Table D1.** What is your relationship with the union?

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
I am a trade unionist		2			2
I am a member, and I have been a trade unionist in the past	3				3
I am a member, and I will continue to be	22	6	4	8	40
I am a member, but I will not renew my membership		1		1	2
I am not a member, but I have been in the past	7		1	1	9
I am not a member, and I have never been	15	4	5		24
Don't know/Don't answer	4			2	6
No answer	3	1	1		5
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>91</b>

**Table D1.1.** Could you please tell us the reasons why you decided not to renew your membership? (Open question)

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
Because of the high costs of membership fees	1				1
I don't need anything			1		1
I did not say that I would not renew my membership	1				1
I found no difference from when I was not				1	1
I left the world of work		1			1
I will renew it once I meet again for the appointment regarding the tax return				1	1
No reason; personal difficulties and long periods of unemployment	1				1
The state should protect workers' rights	1				1
No answer	3				3
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>11</b>

Note: only those who answered "I am not a member, but I have been in the past" or "I am a member, but I will not renew my membership" to the question in Table D1, "What is your relationship with the union?", answered this question.

**Table D1.2 .** How long have you been a member?

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
More than 10 years	3	1		1	5
6-10 years	1	2			3
3-5 years	5	1	2	4	12
1-2 years	9	3	1	4	17
Less than 1 year	7	2	1		10
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>47</b>

Note: only those who answered "I am a trade unionist" or "I am a member ..." to the question in Table D1, "What is your relationship with the union?", answered this question.

**Table D2.** Please, clarify how you got in touch with the union

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
I used the services and, subsequently, I got in touch with the union	13		2	4	19
I used the services without having got in touch with the union	17	2	3	3	25
I got in touch with the union and, subsequently, I used the services	17	6	3	5	31
I got in touch with the union without having, to date, used the services	4	5	2		11
No answer	3	1	1		5
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>91</b>

**Table D3.** After the experience you had with the union or the services...

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
I started to carry out activities promoted by the union	2	2	1	1	6
I joined the union	3	1	1	2	7
I started to participate in initiatives not related to my profession promoted by the union	4	1		1	6
I became interested in other initiatives related to my profession promoted by the union	16	5	2	1	24
I continued to use the services without participating in the initiatives promoted by the union	23	4	5	6	38
I didn't want to know about it anymore	3		1	1	5
No answer	3	1	1		5
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>91</b>

## Section E: Opinions on trade unions

**Table E1.** What was your opinion on trade unions before attending the union or using the services?

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
Positive, I had already used services or received assistance from trade unions	21	3	4	3	31
Positive, but I had never used services or received assistance from trade unions before	10	2	1	4	17
Neither positive nor negative	16	7	4	4	31
Negative, I had come into contact with trade unions, but I was not satisfied					
Negative, but I had never been in contact with trade unions	4	1	1	1	7
No answer	3	1	1		5
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>91</b>

**Table E2.** Has your opinion changed after attending the union or using the services?

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
Yes, it has improved	23	5	4	6	38
Yes, it has improved, even if I am not satisfied with the services or the assistance received	3				3
It's the same	25	8	6	5	44
It has worsened				1	1
No answer	3	1	1		5
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>91</b>

**Table E3.** "Trade unions represent workers like me". How much do you agree with this statement?

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
Strongly agree	7	1	1		9
Agree	19	6	3	6	34
Neither agree nor disagree	18	4	4	4	30
Disagree	5	1	1	2	9
Strongly disagree	2	1	1		4
No answer	3	1	1		5
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>91</b>

**Table E3.1.** What should the trade unions do to improve their ability to represent workers like you, in your opinion? (Multiple responses)

	Sportello Lavoro	Vivace	Partita Viva	Nidil	Total
Increasing dedicated staff	18	3	3	4	28
Improving the website and developing online services	16	4	3	6	29
Changing/increasing the opening hours of the offices	5		3	1	9
Helping us workers to build networks, creating specific places within union structures	25	8	5	6	44
Enhancing communication	13	7	3	5	28
Reducing membership fees	8			2	10
Reducing service costs	5		1	3	9
Other (not specified)	5	2	1		8
(N)	(54)	(14)	(11)	(12)	(91)

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