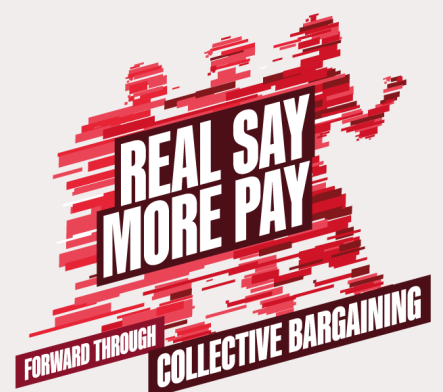


ORGANISING FOR COLLECTIVE BARGAINING, AND WINNING!

A snapshot report for the 6th UNI Europa Conference
Belfast, 25-27 March 2025



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In recent years, UNI Europa has established itself as the leading European trade union federation for organising and union renewal. This has been achieved through a strong track record of direct intervention, working with affiliates to help them refine their strategies and work plans. This is done directly on a bilateral basis through EPOC (the European Power and Organising Centre) or through the organising centres that have been set up in those parts of Europe where trade union capacity to influence collective bargaining has previously been limited. The latter are:

- COZZ – Central Europe Organising Centre;
- SEEOC – South-East Europe Organising Centre.

The various strands of our organising work are brought together by our UNI Europa Organising Strategy, which articulates in a concise way three priority areas for building trade union power with service sector unions in Europe.

1 How we approach organising: supporting union renewal with EPOC & the organising centres

Organising is the renewal of the trade union power and of the capacity to bargain collectively and effectively.

As the definition above makes clear, the concept of union renewal is central to any worthwhile approach to organising. Organising is not just about winning individual and low-level campaigns in workplaces with little trade union tradition, but a broad and diverse set of approaches to strengthening unions, whatever their starting point. This means working with affiliated unions in a way that promotes mutual support, as each project/campaign adds to the collective experience that then benefits all subsequent unions.

This definition also emphasises the importance of collective power. The focus of organising is not on developing individual workers' rights, member services or legal support (although such strategies can be part of leverage work), but on the power of a broad membership and the ability to mobilise that membership. Both density (i.e. the number of members) *and* the willingness of those members to take action are essential building blocks for building union power. Finally, organising has a concrete goal: effective collective bargaining.

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The aim of organising is to increase the capacity of workers to change the balance of power in collective bargaining and ultimately to achieve better working and living conditions for (and by) workers. This is a particular challenge at the sectoral or multi-employer level because the institutional power that unions have won through historical struggle can often lead to passivity among members once this status is taken for granted. The challenge is therefore not to reinvent the wheel, but to rediscover and reinvigorate the collective power within our unions to win better agreements that deliver the pay and conditions, as well as the say, our members deserve.

The organising work also focuses on sustainability, with plans to ensure that organising lives on in the workplace and the union after an initial organising drive and bargaining round. For this to happen, it is essential that the culture of union work changes, that an organising approach becomes standard practice, and that workplace leaders are the linchpin of any successful and sustainable union.

For unions in Central and Eastern Europe, where union organising capacity is much lower, UNI has set up two organising centres: COZZ works with unions in the Visegrád countries (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary) and Ukraine, while SEOCC works with unions in south-eastern Europe, including Romania, Croatia and Slovenia.

The centres have been successful in organising workers, particularly as part of UNI's global campaigns, by centralising the organising function into teams of organisers with unparalleled expertise in building unions in their specific countries and sectors.

2 EPOC & EPOC network

Launched in 2019, EPOC provides strategic support to well-established unions, particularly in Northern and Western Europe, to defend, expand and (re)build sectoral collective bargaining. EPOC does not employ organisers on the ground, but works with the existing staff of affiliated unions, providing training, advice and campaign support. EPOC focuses on renewing affiliates' organising and bargaining strategies through increased activism and membership engagement.

All of EPOC's work is underpinned by the principle that organising is a professional activity that requires clear development pathways. The long-term renewal of the trade union movement cannot be based on simply hoping that officers pick it up on the job.

The renewal of any union's organising and bargaining strategy is developed through a series of structured sessions developed over many years of experience with unions across Europe. There is no silver bullet that will solve the organising challenges facing all unions. However, by systematically developing lead organisers we can test specific

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approaches that have worked with other similar unions facing similar challenges. An organising approach to union power involves structured dialogue with workers, mapping the bargaining unit, identifying strong organising issues, identifying natural workplace leaders, and recruiting new members through the gradual escalation of collective action.

All of EPOC's work begins with an intensive 'buy-in' process in which we systematically engage with each level of decision-making in the union (starting at the top) before setting up a pilot programme. Traditionally, this involves meetings with union leaders, union officers and local representatives, local union leaders, workplace representatives and workers. These meetings range from strategic discussions about union development and the importance of sectoral bargaining, to providing effective tools for local organising campaigns.

Once agreement has been reached on a pilot programme, a series of structured workshops are held with union leaders, organisers and other union officials as appropriate. At its core, EPOC is guided by a clear vision of effective union organising rooted in participatory collective bargaining. This model has been developed specifically together with UNI Europa affiliates.

The aim is not just to win victories for members in individual workplaces, but to build organisation at every level, empowering workers to take forward union demands and understand the power dynamics that affect their success. Historically, this level of activism has been a particular problem in environments where we have institutionalised sectoral bargaining.

More than 35 unions have now gone through EPOC programmes, with more to come through 2025. The geographical spread of unions involved in EPOC has been a source of great satisfaction. Nordic unions have been among the most active, but we now span right across Europe, from Ireland in the west to Spain in the south and Turkey in the east. In total, affiliates from 15 different countries have benefited from the support provided by EPOC. The range of UNI sectors is also encouraging, with affiliates from virtually all sectors represented.

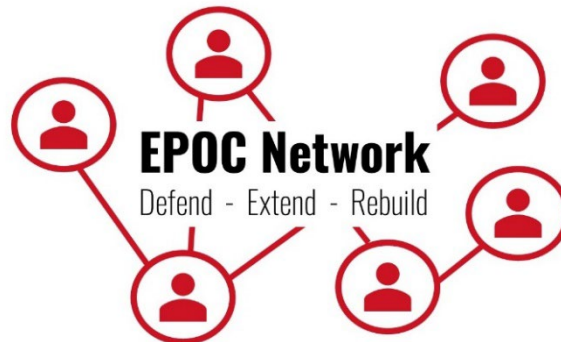
Some of the successful campaigns that affiliates have run directly through EPOC programmes include:

- [IG BAU's success in their cleaning sectoral campaign](#)
- [GMB's success in winning collective bargaining and fighting against fire and rehire](#)
- [GPA's big wins in sectoral pay negotiations](#)
- [PAM's fight to defend sectoral bargaining and win pay rises](#)

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- [TGS's series of collective bargaining wins](#)

Next to EPOC as an organising centre, UNI Europa has also set up the EPOC Network. This network provides a platform for unions to come together and share campaign experiences and challenges. While the EPOC programme offers a bilateral relationship between the union and UNI Europa, the EPOC



network offers a multilateral relationship among unions that speak the same language around organising and union renewal. Initially focused on celebrating success stories and best practice, the network also hosts closed sessions to discuss strategic issues, organisational challenges and areas for improvement in a confidential environment.

In June 2024, UNI Europa's EPOC network held an introductory workshop on Union Renewal in Belgium. It brought together trade union representatives from across Europe to explore ways of growing and modernising trade unions. Representatives from national and European trade unions were introduced to EPOC's "whole union approach" to organising. Guest speakers and facilitators shared how they had organised campaigns in countries such as Türkiye, Finland, Austria, Norway and Ireland.

In September 2024, EPOC Network gathered in Timișoara for a two-day retreat. The host centre, SEEOC, shared its experience of organising workers at Auchan supermarkets, the challenges it faced and the next steps.

The future for organising and union renewal in UNI Europa means consolidating the EPOC Network. The network will be flexible in how it responds to the needs of affiliates.

3 COZZ (Central Europe Organising Centre)

Founded in Poland in 2016, COZZ works in the Visegrad countries and Ukraine, initiating and managing trade union campaigns on a project basis. This means that COZZ applies for different types of projects (UNI organising funds, EU projects) that allow them to engage organisers and build structures from the ground up. It currently employs 8 lead organisers and 12 organisers working directly on the ground organising

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workers on behalf of affiliates. From the start, it has supported other European trade union federations (ETUFs) and their affiliates, too.

Work in Central European countries is doubly challenging. First, much of the economy is dominated by multinational companies that have moved there in search of the higher profit margins offered by cheaper and mostly unorganised labour. Second, the trade union landscape is fragmented and focused on workplace-level union organisations. The trade union movement lacks resources, both in terms of money (which is mostly kept at the workplace level) and capacity. This lack of resources makes it difficult for unions to carry out strategic organising and planned recruitment.

COZZ has filled this gap by creating and leading partnerships that have proven successful in holding multinational companies to account. In this way, COZZ contributes to UNI's global union campaigns and union-building in difficult circumstances (e.g. Orpea, now emeis, Teleperformance). Building on almost 10 years of experience, COZZ is now a well-established resource within the trade union movement in the region.

One of the key long-term efforts that has shaped COZZ and its partners is the organising work in the care sector, which began at the start of the pandemic in Poland and the Czech Republic and has since continued in Hungary. Despite hardship, precarious working conditions and high levels of fear, a total of 62 new unions were formed with over 2,200 members and over 250 new activists and leaders recruited. These unions have negotiated 32 new collective bargaining agreements that have significantly improved the working lives of thousands of workers.

All these efforts followed a similar model: COZZ mobilises workers through collective action, holds thousands of talks and organises individual and group meetings outside the workplace to set up union committees and start (and finish) collective bargaining. During these campaigns, a number of regional innovations were introduced, such as online recruitment and sectoral union structures.

Another important factor in the recent development of the COZZ methodology and approach is related to the changes that are taking place in many workplaces, where remote work is commonplace and work is often organised in international teams. Since the 5th UNI Europa Conference, COZZ has been able to organise in key multinational companies that are market leaders in this form of work organisation, namely Teleperformance Poland, Google Poland, Microsoft Czech Republic and DHL IT Czech Republic.

This greenfield organising of remote workers (and/or workplaces with high turnover) can be successful using a similar organising model as described above, if attention is also paid to a wider (community) mapping of existing networks. In this way, workers are

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engaged online where they spend most of their working time. A consistent and well-resourced organising effort is used to facilitate community-building between workers. This kind of online approach is necessary because community-building does not happen 'naturally' if workers are not meeting physically and outside of the work-related activities.

4 SEEOC (South-East Europe Organising Centre)

In 2021, UNI Global Union, UNI Europa and SITT Romania established a third organising centre called "SEEOC: South-East Europe Organising Centre". The organising centre is part of UNI Global Union's wider organising and collective bargaining apparatus and has as its main objectives organising, capacity-building, bargaining support and the digital transformation of unions.

The Centre aims to be UNI Global Union's arm in the region, providing both support to affiliates in the South East Europe region and organising capacity for projects or campaigns in line with UNI Global Union's strategy. The work of the Centre is coordinated by UNI SCORE and closely linked to sectoral and regional priorities.

SEEOC is based in Timisoara and Bucharest, but much of its reporting and internal affairs are managed online. Since its launch in 2021, the centre has been involved in organising projects in the ICTS, contact centre, road transport (ETF) and commerce sectors.

The team currently consists of field organisers who are directly involved in organising projects, lead organisers responsible for overseeing organising projects and a director who oversees the entire operation, ensuring that the team works cohesively and that the project's objectives are in line with UNI's goals.

Some examples of SEEOC's recent work and achievements include the work undertaken in the **Romanian ICTS sector**. In partnership with UNI Global – ICTS Sector and SCORE, the team aimed to build on company-level organising to push for legal recognition at sector level and to build an ICT union federation. The ultimate goal was a sectoral agreement covering all workers in the Romanian ICTS sector. So far, there have been union campaigns in companies such as Nokia, Atos, Honeywell, DXC, Tech Mahindra, Infosys Consulting and, from 2024, Amazon Web Services. In 2024, the team successfully pushed for legal recognition at sector level and built an ICT union federation. During the campaign, partner union SITTRO won two UNI Global Breakthrough Awards.

SEEOC then worked with UNI Global Union's commerce sector to organise in the **Romanian commerce** sector. The team formed a new union of 2,500 members in Auchan Romania, which has around 7,000 commercial workers, and signed the first

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collective agreement with a union since it became active in Romania. The campaign won UNI Global's Breakthrough Award in 2024.

Next, SEEOC partnered up with UNI ICTS to build a union and sign a collective agreement at **Teleperformance Romania**. The team formed a new union with almost 600 members in Teleperformance Romania, which has around 1,300 employees. In 2024, the team continued to push for legal recognition at company level and signed the first collective bargaining agreement since it became active in Romania.

Finally, SEEOC also worked with ETF Europe and the ITF in the Romanian transport sector. For example, SEEOC pushed to support their local affiliate in an organisational and cultural shift towards local organising to gain new members and financial stability, resulting in almost 1,000 new members in two years and legal recognition in four new transport companies.

5 Organising in multinationals

Another important focus of UNI Europa, in collaboration with UNI's sectors and UNI Score, is the organising work on multinational companies in Europe. This includes campaigns linked to Global Agreements (GAs) as well as campaigns conducted without such agreements, or in pursuit of them. While detailing all activities related to the 50 Global Agreements – most of which involve European companies – would exceed the scope of this report, these agreements remain a core component of UNI Europa's work.

UNI's biggest campaign on multinational companies focuses on Amazon, which is notorious for its union-busting practices. Amazon operates across multiple UNI sectors, including Commerce, Post and Logistics, ICTS, and MEI. More than ten years ago, following the first wave of strikes organised by Ver.di, UNI launched the Amazon Alliance with the goal of holding the company accountable. Over the past four years, various organising campaigns have been conducted in Germany, Poland and Italy in collaboration with UNI's Commerce and Logistics affiliates. These efforts have led to hundreds of new members in these countries and resulted in an access agreement in Poland.

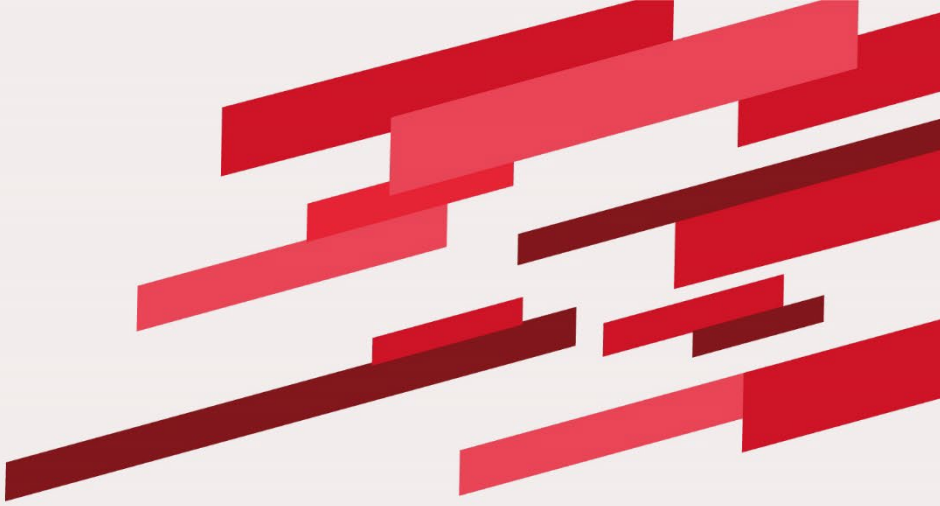
The Commerce sector has been at the forefront of leveraging Global Agreements to facilitate union organising in various European countries, among them H&M in Bosnia and Switzerland, and IKEA in Slovenia and Portugal. The ICTS sector has utilised its new Teleperformance agreement to expand organising efforts beyond Romania and Poland. In Ireland, the company agreed to union access and collective bargaining trigger points in February, and it has committed to rolling out the agreement in multiple

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Southeastern European countries, as well as Portugal. In the care sector, the Emis Agreement has enabled unions in Switzerland, Poland, Czechia and Croatia to gain access to workers. This agreement has led to significant achievements, such as the first collective bargaining agreement (CBA) in Croatia's private nursing home sector and the conversion of all interested caregivers in Poland to regular employment contracts.

UNI has continued its organising and affiliate support efforts even in companies without a Global Agreement. In Georgia, UNI backed the organising and campaign of workers at the online gaming company Evolution. In Slovenia, UNI helped organise all Fresenius clinics, resulting in a company-wide CBA. In Turkey, UNI helped its affiliates secure victories at multiple companies, including Deichmann and Nike.

Training worker representatives from multinational companies remains a key priority for UNI Europa and its sectors. In the past year, for instance, training sessions were conducted for shop stewards at Spotify and in the video gaming industry in Sweden, as well as for Google workers in Switzerland, to name a few.



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