

Challenges for Organising and Collective Bargaining
in Care, Administration and Waste collection sectors
in Central Eastern European Countries

Challenges for Organising and Collective Bargaining in Care, Administration and Waste Management sectors in Central Eastern European Countries

NEWSLETTER

No. 3



The CEECAW project is firmly committed to strengthening collective bargaining across the sectors of care, public administration and waste management in Central and Eastern Europe. While previous editions focused on research findings and capacity-building workshops, this issue highlights the structural and political obstacles hindering the effective implementation of Article 4 of Directive (EU) 2022/2041.

We are now at a critical juncture: the Court of Justice of the European Union is expected to deliver its ruling on the Directive following the Advocate General's opinion, issued on 14 January 2025, which recommended annulment in its entirety. There is no exact deadline for the Court's decision.

Against this backdrop, this newsletter asks:

- What structural barriers continue to block the expansion of sectoral collective bargaining?
- What risks are unique to the care, waste, and public administration sectors in the CEE region?
- And perhaps most pressing: what conditions must be met for the Directive to serve as a genuine engine of social change and not a missed opportunity?

This issue does not promise easy answers. Instead, it invites reflection on lessons learned so far and on the need for bold, collaborative action among European institutions, national governments, and trade unions in order to bridge the gap between legal obligation and real-world impact.

In addition, Newsletter 3 provides an update on key developments within the CEECAW Project, including:

- (A)** The publication of four policy papers with practical recommendations for implementing Article 4 of the Directive.
- (B)** The Scientific seminars held in 2025;
- (C)** The release of four video recordings

The previous CEECAW newsletters (the first and the second) may be found [here](#)

Policy Spotlight: The Risk of Losing Momentum

Unfortunately, there is little reason for optimism. This may only serve to emphasise the necessity of projects like CEECAW. In many Central and Eastern European countries, governments are using the pending CJEU judgment as an excuse for inaction Lithuania being a possible exception.

Article 4 of the Minimum Wage Directive was hailed as a turning point a long-overdue recognition of the need to strengthen collective bargaining across the EU. Yet, nearly two years after its adoption, the initial enthusiasm is already waning. Several Member States have not even begun drafting national action plans, despite being legally obliged to do so. In Central and Eastern Europe, these delays are often accompanied by minimal consultation, a lack of transparency or even open resistance. Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland, for example, have taken no meaningful steps towards implementing Article 4 in a way that would genuinely empower workers or trade unions.

Even where action plans exist, concerns are growing about ‘fake compliance’: meeting legal requirements while ignoring structural issues such as the erosion of sectoral bargaining, weak union rights and falling coverage.

To ensure the process is effective and genuinely increases the number of workers covered by collective agreements, the Commission should develop clear criteria for assessing national action plans enabling it, in line with the Directive, to deliver a meaningful report to the European Parliament and the Council every two years.



Looking Ahead: What Would Real Change Require?

What would it actually take to revitalise collective bargaining in Central and Eastern Europe beyond conferences, consultations, and compliance forms?

One thing is clear: no technical fix will succeed without political will. But political will doesn't emerge spontaneously. It must be built, claimed, and demanded, both at the national and EU level. That, in turn, requires reframing collective bargaining: not as a relic of the past, but as a strategic tool for managing transitions, ensuring fairness, and rebuilding democratic trust.

Real change would mean treating trade unions as partners rather than obstacles in public sector reform and green transitions. It would require establishing mechanisms to extend collective agreements, particularly in fragmented or outsourced sectors. It would also involve investing not just in legal frameworks, but in data, enforcement, and organising capacity. Most importantly, it would mean embedding collective bargaining into the EU's broader objectives from climate resilience to digital justice to gender equality.



Policy Papers

One of the main outcomes of the CEECAW project is an attempt to identify courses of action to strengthen collective bargaining in the European Union, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. Experts from the Institute of Public Affairs, in consultation with EPSU, have developed four policy papers on the sectors studied: care, central public administration and waste management, as well as cross-sectoral recommendations.

Title: *A Ray of Hope or a Monument to an Expected Collapse? How the EU Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages Can Help Revive Collective Bargaining in Central and Eastern Europe*

Author: Sławomir Adamczyk

Summary:

This policy paper explores whether Article 4 of Directive (EU) 2022/2041 can become a genuine turning point for rebuilding collective bargaining systems in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), or whether it will remain a symbolic gesture. The paper highlights how, despite formal legal frameworks, collective bargaining in the region remains fragmented, marginal, and often limited to the company level. Trade unions face multiple challenges: organisational fragmentation, lack of state support, the dominance of transnational corporations, and disconnection from young and precarious workers.

The document offers a comprehensive set of recommendations for trade unions to enhance internal coordination, build negotiation capacity, engage younger generations, and include non-standard workers in bargaining structures. It also proposes strategies to overcome employer resistance through the development of sectoral agreements, incentive systems (e.g., public procurement preferences), and joint promotional campaigns to reframe collective bargaining as a modern, future-oriented tool.

On the institutional side, the paper calls for stronger engagement with public authorities, including monitoring and co-drafting of Article 4 action plans, legal safeguards for social partners, better enforcement of labour law, and expanding collective bargaining within the public sector. The paper is notable for its absence of direct recommendations for EU-level trade unions, instead urging a return to the strategic vision set out in the 1999 ETUC Congress resolution in Helsinki, and a renewed roadmap for building a European system of industrial relations.

→ [Link](#)

Title: *Time to Care for Care: Towards Better Working Conditions and Effective Social Dialogue in Central and Eastern Europe*

Author: Maciej Pańków

Summary:

This policy paper focuses on the urgent need to strengthen social dialogue and collective bargaining in the care sector across Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), with particular attention to long-term care (LTC), early childhood education and care (ECEC), and social assistance centres (SAC). Based on interviews and secondary analysis in 12 countries, the paper identifies structural underfunding, low wages, staff shortages, and deteriorating working conditions as widespread and deeply entrenched issues. These problems are compounded by the lack of union presence, weak bargaining coverage, and low public recognition for care workers.

The document outlines concrete recommendations for national and European trade unions. At the national level, priorities include strengthening sectoral structures, increasing union density, investing in local leadership, and promoting public advocacy for better funding and recognition of care work. Trade unions are also urged to respond strategically to policy shifts such as deinstitutionalisation and migration, while actively engaging in the implementation of Article 4 of Directive 2022/2041 in a meaningful way.

At the European level, federations are encouraged to continue fostering regional networking, advocate for a robust legal and financial framework for the care sector, and support the EPSU–Social Employers Framework of Action on retention and recruitment. European-level social partners are also called upon to collaborate in improving the sector's image as a quality employer, particularly in the public services context. The paper underscores that improving pay and working conditions in care is essential not only for workers but for ensuring accessible and high-quality services in ageing and transforming societies.

 [Link](#)

Title: *Negotiating the Future of Public Administration: Union Strategies for Central and Eastern Europe*

Author: Jan Czarzasty

Summary:

This policy paper addresses the challenges faced by workers in Central Public Administration (CPA) across Central and Eastern Europe and proposes strategies for revitalising collective bargaining and improving working conditions. Based on in-depth research and interviews in 12 countries, the study identifies underfunding, understaffing, workforce ageing, politicisation, and restrictions on collective action as key problems. Despite a relatively strong potential veto power of CPA workers (who provide essential services), their ability to organise and bargain remains constrained by legal and institutional barriers.

The paper recommends that national trade unions engage in revitalisation strategies, push for implementation of Directive 2022/2041 (or national alternatives if annulled), advocate for lifting restrictions on the right to strike and bargain, and utilise mechanisms like complaints to the European Committee of Social Rights. In countries where extension of collective agreements is possible, these tools should be actively explored.

At the European level, the EPSU is encouraged to expand support for unions in the CPA sector, strengthen their role in the European Social Dialogue Committee for Central Governments, and promote broader participation of employers via EUPAE. Both national and European-level actors are urged to help reposition public administration as an attractive employer, setting a positive benchmark for the wider economy. The paper stresses that improvements in CPA industrial relations are not only essential for workers but for the functioning and legitimacy of public institutions in CEE.

 [Link](#)

Title: *Green Work, Missing Voice: Why Collective Bargaining Must Anchor the EU Circular Economy*

Author: Barbara Surdykowska

Summary:

This policy paper highlights the critical need to strengthen collective bargaining and worker representation in the waste management sector, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Despite being essential to the EU's circular economy goals, waste workers remain largely invisible in policy debates, underpaid, under protected, and excluded from sectoral social dialogue. The sector suffers from fragmented employer structures, low union density, precarious working conditions, and a near-total absence of collective bargaining coverage especially in CEE countries.

The paper offers concrete policy recommendations at EU, national, and trade union levels. At the EU level, key priorities include integrating labour quality indicators into circular economy monitoring, improving coordination between environmental and employment policies, and promoting collective labour standards in funding and regulation. National governments are urged to prioritise the waste sector in their National Action Plans under Article 4(2) of Directive 2022/2041, strengthen sectoral social dialogue structures, and introduce incentives for collective agreements.

For trade unions, the paper calls for targeted organising strategies, stronger representation structures, and closer collaboration with civil society actors and environmental NGOs. The EPSU is encouraged to establish a dedicated platform for waste workers and support model action plans at the sectoral level. The paper argues that building a just and effective circular economy requires recognising waste workers not as externalities but as central agents of the green transition deserving decent work, visibility, and the right to negotiate collectively.

 [Link](#)

Scientific seminars

As part of the CEECAW project, four Scientific seminars (online) were organized by the leader and project partners.

4 April 2025 *An Uncertain Future of Collective Bargaining in Central and Eastern Europe* → Poland /FUNDACJA INSTYTUT SPRAW PUBLICZNYCH/

The poster features a purple background. At the top left is the CEECAW logo and the text 'Challenges for Organising and Collective Bargaining in Care, Administration and Waste collection sectors in Central Eastern European Countries'. Below this, a dark purple box contains 'CEECAW SCIENTIFIC SEMINARS'. To its right, two white circles contain '04' and 'APRIL'. Further right, a white box lists the times '2:00 PM CET' and '4:30 PM CET'. The main title 'An Uncertain Future of Collective Bargaining in Central and Eastern European Countries' is in large white font. At the bottom left is the European Union flag and 'Funded by the European Union'. Next to it is the 'INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS' logo. On the right is a large white question mark with a silhouette of a person's head inside it. A white 'webinarium' button is at the bottom right.

CEECAW SCIENTIFIC SEMINARS

04 APRIL

2:00 PM CET
4:30 PM CET

An Uncertain Future of Collective Bargaining in Central and Eastern European Countries

Funded by the European Union

INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

webinarium

19 May 2025 *Collective Bargaining in Central Public Administration sector of CEE Countries under the shadow of polycrisis* → Lithuania /LIETUVOS SOCIALINIŲ MOKSLŲ CENTRAS – LSMC/

The poster has an orange background. At the top left is the CEECAW logo and the text 'Challenges for Organising and Collective Bargaining in Care, Administration and Waste collection sectors in Central Eastern European Countries'. Below this, a dark orange box contains 'CEECAW SCIENTIFIC SEMINARS'. To its right, two white circles contain '19' and 'MAY'. Further right, a white box lists the times '2:00 PM CET' and '4:00 PM CET'. The main title 'Collective Bargaining in Central Public Administration sector of CEE countries under the shadow of polycrisis' is in large white font. At the bottom left is the European Union flag and 'Funded by the European Union'. Next to it is the 'INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS' logo. To the right of that is the 'Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences' logo. On the right side is an illustration of a person in a dark suit struggling to carry several large, dark orange spheres labeled 'DIGITALISATION', 'UNDERSTAFFING', 'POLITICISATION', and 'WORKFORCE AGEING'. A white 'webinarium' button is at the bottom right.

CEECAW SCIENTIFIC SEMINARS

19 MAY

2:00 PM CET
4:00 PM CET

Collective Bargaining in Central Public Administration sector of CEE countries under the shadow of polycrisis

Funded by the European Union

INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences

webinarium

11 June 2025 *Unionised Green jobs and collective bargaining in the waste management sector in the CEE* → Bulgaria /INSTITUTE OF PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIOLOGY – IPS/

 Challenges for Organising and Collective Bargaining in Care, Administration and Waste collection sectors in Central Eastern European Countries

CEECAW SCIENTIFIC SEMINARS

11 JUNE

**10:00 AM CET
12:15 PM CET**

Unionised green jobs and collective bargaining in the waste management sector in the CEE



 Funded by the European Union

 INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

 INSTITUTE OF PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIOLOGY

 BULGARIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

webinarium

23 June 2025 *A care sector crisis as a turning point: Advancing Collective bargaining* → Słowacja /STREDOEUROPSKY INSTITUTE PRE VYSKUM PRACE - CENTRAL EUROPEAN LABOR STUDIES INSTITUTE (CELSI)/

 Challenges for Organising and Collective Bargaining in Care, Administration and Waste collection sectors in Central Eastern European Countries

CEECAW SCIENTIFIC SEMINARS

23 JUNE

**2:00 PM CET
4:00 PM CET**

The Care Sector Crisis as a Turning Point: Advancing Collective Bargaining



 Funded by the European Union

 CELSI Central European Labour Studies Institute

 INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

webinarium

Sectoral Focus: What Risks Are Workers Facing Today?

While the political debate remains stuck, workers in key public sectors continue to face mounting pressures from underfunding and staffing shortages to long-standing structural neglect. Here is a snapshot of the sector-specific risks that emerged most clearly across our workshops and research.

Care

- Chronic understaffing and an ageing workforce threaten both service quality and workers' health.
- The feminisation of the workforce often coincides with low pay, weak union representation, and high exposure to third-party violence.
- Outsourcing and privatisation are accelerating, often without adequate protection of employment conditions or trade union rights.
- Despite facing major challenges, care workers remain underrepresented in national strategies and union structures.

Central Public Administration

- Governments continue to delegate responsibility to front-line workers without adequate resources, training, or legal clarity.
- Pay stagnation and rigid hierarchies are driving young professionals away from careers in public service.
- Many public administrations remain entirely outside the scope of collective bargaining coverage.
- Structural reforms - such as digitalisation - often proceed without sufficient dialogue or anticipation of their effects on working conditions.

Waste Management

- Green transitions are generating pressure to modernise, but often without involving workers or unions in the planning process.
- Health and safety risks remain high, particularly due to underinvestment in protective equipment and irregular subcontracting chains.
- As 'brown' jobs disappear, trade unions must make every effort to organise 'green' workers especially in new or hybrid roles linked to circular economy systems.
- In many CEE countries, union presence in the sector is alarmingly weak, leaving a growing number of workers without protection, voice, or bargaining structures.
- This is also the only one of the three sectors without a dedicated EU-level social dialogue committee.

Thematic video recordings

As part of the project, four video recordings were prepared (with subtitles in all project languages) focusing on the challenges related to the development of collective bargaining and the specific challenges faced in each of the three sectors.

The videos feature representatives of the Institute of Public Affairs (ISP), organizations participating in the CEECAW project, and EPSU.

Strengthening Collective Bargaining in CEE Countries

Main challenges in the care sector

Main challenges in the waste management

Main Challenges in Central Public Administration



Studies on collective bargaining in Europe

It's been a productive season for new research on collective bargaining in Europe. From working time reduction strategies to the complex interplay between public procurement and labour standards, several recent publications shed light on both the potential and the pitfalls of current frameworks. Below, we highlight a few must-reads that provide valuable ideas, case studies, and uncomfortable questions for unions, public authorities, and policy makers alike.

Spotlight: New ETUC Study on Working Time Reduction

Is working time reduction becoming a real shift or just a slogan?

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) has published a [comprehensive study](#) on reducing working time through collective agreements across Europe (ETUC, 2025). Based on 119 agreements that all include **reduced hours with no loss of pay**, the report reveals a landscape that is **fragmented, cautious, and often limited in scope**.

"The idea of working time reduction is gaining momentum but in practice, most agreements remain confined to specific groups or workplaces, rather than driving systemic change."

Key findings:

- All analysed collective agreements involve a **reduction in working time with no reduction in pay** but the scale and coverage vary significantly.
- **83% of agreements** focus on weekly hour reductions (typically 1–3 hours), often introduced gradually.
- Most agreements **target specific groups**: shift workers, older employees, or those in high-risk jobs rarely entire sectors or occupational categories.
- **Care, waste, transport, and manufacturing sectors** remain underrepresented, despite high workloads and workforce shortages.
- In many cases, working time reduction is part of a **broader package** that includes pay increases, extra days off, or improved well-being provisions.
- Employers increasingly see shorter working weeks as a **tool for recruitment and retention**, with benefits for staff health and motivation.
- The report includes practical **negotiation strategies**, stressing the importance of preparation, long-term planning, and impact assessments.

What else does the report offer?

- A typology of working time reduction strategies across Europe from symbolic to substantial.
- In-depth case studies from Belgium, Scotland, Sweden, Germany, and Italy (e.g., Lamborghini, IG Metall, PCS).
- Insight into how working time reduction intersects with gender equality, occupational health, productivity, and the green and digital transition.
- Reflections on **legal and political barriers**, including limited EU competences and national legislative obstacles.

Questions worth asking:

- Can working time reduction become a universal right without deepening class or sectoral inequalities?
- Are we truly reclaiming time or just compressing work into fewer hours?
- Why are the sectors most in need of time justice such as care, education, and waste – so absent from these negotiations?

● Spotlight: Collective Bargaining and Public Procurement in France

This 2025 [ETUC case study](#) explores how public procurement practices in France affect collective bargaining. France stands out in the European landscape as a country with **strong sectoral collective bargaining** and **active use of public procurement for social objectives**. However, the study reveals key **tensions between market-driven procurement logic and labour rights**.

“France has a well-developed collective bargaining system – but public procurement practices often fail to align with it, creating risks of social dumping and fragmentation.”

Key findings:

- **Public procurement accounts for around 10% of France’s GDP**, making it a significant potential tool for promoting decent work.
- Although French legislation allows for **social clauses** in public contracts (e.g., requiring respect for collective agreements), their actual use is **inconsistent and often weak**.
- There is a growing gap between **contracting authorities and the industrial relations system**. Many public buyers are unaware of or uncomfortable with enforcing labour provisions.
- **Collective agreements are not automatically binding** in public tenders, unless explicitly included or required by national rules.
- The **decentralisation of procurement** (to municipalities, regions, agencies) leads to **wide variation in practices**, and often weakens coordinated enforcement of labour standards.
- Procurement is still primarily driven by **cost and efficiency**, especially under pressure from austerity, despite legal tools enabling social ambition.

What else does the report highlight?

- **Examples of good practice:** e.g., local authorities including collective agreement clauses; collaboration between trade unions and public buyers.
- Analysis of how procurement can either support or bypass existing sectoral agreements.
- Discussion of **regulatory gaps** and contradictions between EU-level market rules and national social objectives.
- Reflections on the risk of **social fragmentation**: competition between providers leading to downward pressure on working conditions.

Questions worth asking:

- Can public procurement truly support decent work or does it reward the lowest bidder at the cost of labour rights?
- How can public authorities be supported to enforce collective agreements more effectively?
- Should EU procurement rules be reformed to better protect sectoral bargaining systems?

● Spotlight: Collective Bargaining and Public Procurement in Germany

Is Germany's federal structure strengthening or undermining collective bargaining through public procurement?

This 2025 [ETUC case study](#) examines how public procurement interacts with collective bargaining in Germany. The German industrial relations system is grounded in **sectoral bargaining** and a **dual structure of co-determination**, yet its **fragmented federal system** creates major challenges for using procurement as a tool to support decent work.

"Germany has legal mechanisms to link public contracts with collective agreements but their fragmented, optional nature limits their effectiveness."

Key findings:

- **Germany spends 500 billion EUR annually** on public procurement over 13% of GDP – but there is **no unified national framework** mandating respect for collective agreements.
- Since the **2000s, procurement laws have been decentralised**, with each of the 16 Länder (states) developing their own rules.
- Some states have introduced "**Tariftreuegesetze**" (laws requiring contractors to follow sectoral collective agreements), but others have **no such requirements**.
- The federal government itself does **not systematically require compliance** with collective agreements in federal-level tenders.
- This fragmented legal landscape leads to **unequal treatment**, regulatory gaps, and weak enforcement, especially in cross-regional contracts.
- German trade unions are **not systematically involved** in public procurement processes in contrast to their strong role in bargaining and co-determination.

What else does the report highlight?

- Examples of **good practices at state level** (e.g., Berlin, Bremen, North Rhine-Westphalia), where public contracts promote fair pay and collective agreement coverage.
- Analysis of legal and institutional fragmentation – and the risk that **procurement competition undermines collectively agreed standards**.
- Reflections on the limits of voluntary and decentralised models in protecting labour rights across a federal system.

Questions worth asking:

- Can a fragmented federal system deliver coherent support for collective bargaining through procurement?
- Should Germany move toward a unified national procurement law to enforce sectoral standards?
- How can unions gain a stronger role in shaping procurement decisions that affect working conditions?

Final step

The culminating event of the CEECAW project will be the Roundtable of social partners organised by EPSU in Brussels on 15 October 2025. During this event, we will present the main findings of our comparative study covering 12 Central and Eastern European countries and, above all, discuss recommendations and an action plan for the future to revitalise collective bargaining in Europe.

It will be an excellent opportunity to celebrate the project's successes!

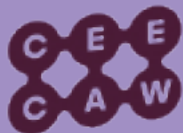
Details of the programme will be published on the project partners' websites and social media.

Venue: [European Transport Workers' Federation, Galerie AGORA](#)

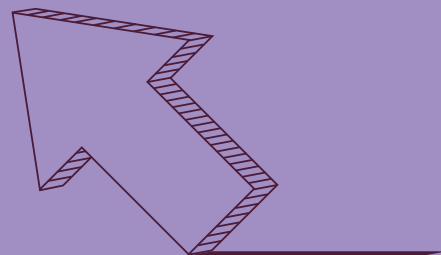
Duration: 9.30-17.00 (CET)

The event will be streamed in social media.

Don't miss it!



Challenges for Organising and Collective Bargaining in Care, Administration and Waste collection sectors in Central Eastern European Countries



CEECAW partnership:

FOUNDATION INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS
EUROPEAN FEDERATION OF PUBLIC SERVICE UNIONS - EPSU
FONDACIJA CENTAR ZA DEMOKRATIJU - FOUNDATION OF THE CENTRE OF DEMOCRACY
LIETUVOS SOCIALINIŲ MOKSLŲ CENTRAS - LSMC
STREDOEUIROPSKY INSTITUT PRE VYSKUM PRACE - CENTRAL EUROPEAN INSTITUTE FOR
LABOUR STUDIES - CELSI
INSTITUTE OF PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIOLOGY - IPS

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