

GREEN TRANSITION AND PARTICIPATION



**A European comparative analysis
in the metal sector**

MEET project final report



Co-funded by
the European Union

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Executive Summary

The European project MEET. *Towards a Green and Just Transition of the Metal Sector* is part of the European Union's actions to strengthen workers' participation in the decision-making processes of multinational companies, in particular in the ecological and circular transition paths of the metal sector.

The green and digital transition represents a crucial challenge for European production systems, with a direct impact on work organisation, employment, skills and industrial governance. In this context, European Works Councils (EWCs) and employee representatives play a strategic role in ensuring that industrial change is socially just and negotiated.

One of the main objectives of the MEET project was to: i) strengthen the role of EWCs and workers' representatives in managing the green transition; ii) promote transnational cooperation between trade unions and workers' representatives in four countries: Italy, Spain, Hungary and Turkey; iii) build skills and practical tools to deal with sustainability at company level.

Among the activities implemented are: i) national workshops and discussions with unions in the metalworking sector; ii) the design of a training course for EWC delegates and workers' representatives; iii) the development of the *10 Green Rules* as a practical guide for

union action; iv) the innovative proposal to establish *Green Labs* within EWCs, i.e. permanent spaces for consultation on corporate sustainability.

The project also made it possible to map and compare regulatory frameworks, union practices and the level of involvement of workers' representatives in the ecological transition. In Italy, there is progress on the sectoral contractual and training level, the development of negotiation tools and the increasing attention to the ESG dimension within and outside the scope of trade union action. In Spain, there is strong integration between industrial policies and social dialogue, particularly in the steel sector. In Hungary, social dialogue is rather fragile, with the trade union role to be strengthened, but public investments in batteries and hydrogen are important. In Turkey, the regulatory framework is evolving and industrial incentives ambitious, but union protection is weak.

To support the action of EWCs, the project promoted the elaboration and implementation of innovative tools such as the *10 Green Rules*, guidelines for integrating sustainability in the work of representatives, through the creation of ESG databases, indicators, training, participation in EU projects and green welfare, in addition to the proposal to set up *Green Labs* within the EWC, i.e. permanent units able to monitor environmental and social performance, support dialogue with companies, and anticipate employment impacts.

In conclusion, the MEET project has contributed significantly to strengthening the negotiating capacity of workers' representatives on sustainability policies, while consolidating transnational social dialogue and the exchange of good practices between trade union organisations from different countries. It has also fostered a shared European vision of just transition, understood as an inclusive process in which ecological innovation is accompanied by participatory forms of governance. Among the main recommendations emerging from the project experience is the importance of integrating the *10 Green Rules* into EWC agreements, in order to make the treatment of environmental and social issues systematic within the company. It is also proposed that *Green Labs* be institutionalised as structured spaces for continuous discussion between workers' representatives and companies on sustainable transition paths. At the same time, we stress the need to strengthen the European legal framework, guaranteeing effective rights of information and consultation on ESG issues, and to finance transnational and sectoral training courses aimed at strengthening skills on sustainability, the circular economy and just transition, thus contributing to a real democratisation of industrial innovation processes in Europe.

1. Introduction

The ecological transition promoted by the European Green Deal and reinforced by the European Union's new industrial strategy is a process of systemic reconfiguration of the economy, production and work organisation. It is not just an environmental change, but a structural transformation that directly affects the quality of employment, the distribution of skills, occupational health and the balance of value chains. In this context, sustainability cannot be understood as an abstract objective or a strategic framework, but rather as a concrete field of social confrontation, in which it becomes essential to recognise an active, conscious and structured role for workers.

European regulatory instruments - from the CSRD Directive on sustainability reporting to the Regulation on the taxonomy of sustainable economic activities, up to the Border Carbon Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) and the reinforcement of the ETS - are imposing new responsibilities and requirements on companies, not only in terms of environmental performance, but also of transparency and reporting. However, the effectiveness of these provisions depends on anchoring them in corporate decision-making and management processes. It is in this space that social dialogue can play a decisive role, provided that it is conceived no longer as a tool for mere

compensation, but as a lever for co-designing transformation.

From the experience gained in some more advanced European contexts - such as Germany, the Netherlands and France - a vision of participation emerges that goes beyond the defensive function and is configured as an anticipatory practice, oriented towards the joint definition of industrial strategies. In this perspective, sustainability is not just a matter for technical experts or company advisors, but becomes a legitimate area of trade union action, which can and must also be exercised through collective bargaining. This entails a redefinition of the bargaining culture, which must integrate the languages of green transition, digitalisation and social innovation, and equip itself with adequate tools to influence the real content of industrial policies.

In recent years, the idea of an 'ecological and proactive' trade unionism has been gaining ground, capable of contributing to sustainable business planning, the assessment of environmental and employment impacts and the protection of rights in the context of new energy and technological challenges. It is not simply a matter of adapting to change, but of governing it democratically. The experience of numerous delegates and workers' representatives shows how, where there are skills, access to information and concrete negotiating spaces, participation can become an enabling factor for the success of the transition itself.

EWCs, in this scenario, represent a fundamental junction for consolidating multi-level governance that holds together the economic, environmental and social dimensions of transformation. Their action, however, needs to be strengthened both at the regulatory level, through a revision of Directive 2009/38/EC that explicitly provides for consultation on ESG issues, and at the operational level, through shared tools, training courses and autonomous resources. The experiences gained within the MEET project show that building a trade union culture of sustainability is possible. However, it must be recognised, supported and integrated into the heart of European strategies.

2. Country Analyses

2.1 Italy

Analysis of the national context: transition to the circular economy and the role of workers' representatives

Italy stands out on the European scene for having early developed an articulated regulatory and strategic framework to support the ecological transition and the circular economy. The adoption of the National Strategy for the Circular Economy in 2022 marked a crucial moment, serving as the foundation for the revision of the national production model and fully integrating with the National Recovery and Resilience Plan. This strategy envisages significant interventions, both in the sustainable management of material and energy resources, and in the reconversion of high-intensity industrial processes, such as in the engineering sector.

This transformation is supported by several regulatory and institutional instruments that have strengthened the country's regulatory framework. These include the National Waste Management Programme with the introduction of the national electronic register (RENTri), extended producer responsibility and criteria for the termination of waste status, together with the consolidation of environmental taxation and the

promotion of green public procurement. At the constitutional level, the reform of Articles 9 and 41 introduced fundamental principles to protect the environment, biodiversity and ecosystems, making the concern for future generations explicit. These changes are intertwined with the increasing focus on the implementation of ESG criteria, which are also taking centre stage in the dialogue between companies and trade unions.

In this scenario, the Italian engineering sector is among the most involved in the ecological transition. Its economic importance, territorial capillarity and connection with European manufacturing make it a strategic but also particularly exposed sector. Companies are having to respond to new EU regulations, such as the ETS system, the CSRD (Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive) and the CBAM mechanism, which impose a rethinking of production processes with a view to sustainability. However, there are strong differences in approach: large companies, especially multinationals, show greater maturity in ESG practices and reporting systems, while SMEs still show difficulties related to structural and information deficiencies.

On the trade union side, workers' organisations have taken an increasingly active role in accompanying companies along this path of transformation. The FIM-CISL, in particular, has distinguished itself by drawing up the *FIM Green Book*, a policy document that articulates

ten trade union rules in favour of sustainability in bargaining and in metalworking companies. These guidelines have already been translated into concrete bargaining practices, promoting the introduction of company protocols on sustainability, the development of shared ESG indicators, the enhancement of environmental welfare, professional training for green and digital transitions, and the direct involvement of trade union representatives in decarbonisation industrial plans.

A tangible testimony of this commitment is the Green Days organised by FIM-CISL in 2023 and 2024. These events fostered inter-regional discussions and initiated training courses for union representatives, with a focus on environmental sustainability and social responsibility. In parallel, tools such as the *FIM Green* newsletter and the *Industrial Sustainability Observatory* contributed to the dissemination and systematisation of trade union good practices in the environmental field.

In the context of multinational companies, EWCs represent a fundamental platform for transnational participation. In Italy, the trade union presence in EWCs is particularly active and has often proved decisive in the introduction of environmental issues into company agendas. It is precisely in this context that the MEET project's proposal to set up *Green Labs* fits in: real permanent laboratories of confrontation between company management and workers' representatives. The objective is twofold: to monitor the evolution of ESG

indicators and to promote local sustainability initiatives, while ensuring early involvement in industrial transformation processes.

Despite significant progress, some critical challenges remain. The uneven spread of 'green' contractual instruments across the country, the limited availability of ESG data on the company scale and the still partial involvement of representatives in long-term decision-making processes represent obstacles to be overcome. In order to effectively tackle these difficulties, a synergic action between the social partners is desirable, including, among other things, the systematic integration of the ten green rules in EWC agreements, the institutionalization of *Green Labs* in large companies, the strengthening of training courses dedicated to the double transition, and the shared elaboration of national guidelines for environmental bargaining.

2.2 Spain

Industry and regulatory context on decarbonisation

The Spanish context is characterized by a significant strengthening of its national commitment to the ecological transition, launching a series of regulatory and strategic interventions aimed at reconverting the national production model in a sustainable way, within the framework of the European Green Deal and the internal requirements of industrial modernization. The National

Integrated Energy and Climate Plan (NIPEC) and Law 7/2021 on Climate Change and Energy Transition define the fundamental trajectories of decarbonisation of the economic system and outline an energy model based on renewable, accessible and inclusive sources.

In parallel, the adoption of Royal Decree 1055/2022 on extended producer responsibility, the Law 7/2022, of 8 April, on waste and contaminated soil for a circular economy and the launch of the strategic plan *España Circular 2030* represent three cornerstones of Spanish policy for a less linear and more resilient economy. The objective is ambitious: to significantly reduce waste production, encourage reuse and foster sustainable reindustrialization processes, through operational and regulatory instruments that integrate environmental, social and territorial dimensions.

Particularly relevant is the attention the Spanish government has paid to the social and employment impact of the ecological transition, endowing itself with specific devices such as the Institute for a Just Transition, The Just Transition Strategy and participatory systems for evaluating regional decarbonisation plans, especially in areas most vulnerable to industrial desertification.

In this context, the steel sector emerges as one of the industrial sectors most involved in transition processes. Characterized by high energy and emissions intensity, the sector has undergone profound transformations, especially following the progressive closure of coal-fired

thermal power plants, which has had significant repercussions on workers, local communities and value chains. In many regions, these processes have required a radical restructuring of industrial policies, with the launch of reconversion plans in which, however, the involvement of workers' representatives has not always been systematically guaranteed.

A significant experience in this area is the work of CCOO Industria, which has adopted an integrated approach to transition, combining union analysis, negotiation and training activities (for example in the INDITEX group). Particular attention has been paid to monitoring the environmental policies of large multinational companies and to protecting the rights of workers involved in industrial relocation or transformation processes.

The role of trade unions in managing the green transition is based on a well-established tradition of social dialogue and institutional recognition. However, evolving environmental challenges have introduced new complexities, requiring workers' representatives to equip themselves with specific technical skills, innovative contractual tools and the ability to anticipate change. In response, the CCOO Industry has developed training programs and participatory research initiatives to build a trade union narrative on sustainability, promote the active presence of representatives at companies' ESG tables, strengthen the critical reading of non-financial balance

sheets, and experiment with forms of shared governance in industrial reconversion processes.

Among the most emblematic initiatives is the *Just Transition Agreements*, which has given impetus to the definition of regional protocols concerted between the government, companies and trade unions, aimed at managing the exit from coal and fostering retraining paths towards emerging sectors of the green economy.

Also at transnational level, Spain is progressively expanding the participation of its representatives in EWCs, especially in large industrial groups operating on national territory. However, despite increasing involvement, sustainability still does not figure as a transversal priority in EWC activities, often remaining subordinate to employment or reorganization issues.

The institutional maturity of the Spanish system and trade union leadership make the country a particularly favourable terrain for experimenting with new models of participatory governance that can also be replicated in other European contexts. The challenges remain considerable and the participation of workers' representatives in industrial transformation processes is still uneven and fragmented. There is still a need for training in circular economy and ESG reporting, and formalized tools for involvement in corporate decarbonization processes are lacking in many cases. The MEET project offers a concrete response to these critical issues, proposing an integrated and transnational

approach to the right transition, in which workers' representatives are put in a position to anticipate changes, actively contribute to strategic decisions and propose solutions that combine environmental sustainability, social equity and industrial competitiveness.

2.3 Hungary

State of social dialogue and limits of representation

In recent years, Hungary has outlined a series of national strategies with the aim of aligning with the European commitments of the Green Deal and promoting a gradual transformation of its production model in the direction of sustainability. The central strategic reference in this path is the National Strategy for the Circular Economy, adopted in 2021, which defines an action plan extended until 2040. This strategy is structured around four key pillars - bio-economy, construction, plastics and industry - and aims to promote resource efficiency, eco-innovation and advanced waste management.

In addition to this policy document, the government has introduced further instruments geared towards green transition. Among them, the National Programme for Environmental Sustainability aims at reducing the carbon intensity of production processes and spreading circular models. Of particular note is also the Green Hydrogen Strategy, presented in 2021, which identifies hydrogen as a strategic energy carrier, especially in the transport and

heavy industry sectors. This is flanked by an active policy of attracting foreign investment in areas of high environmental value, with a special focus on the electric mobility sector, particularly in battery production. However, the concrete translation of these strategies remains uneven. According to data provided by the European Commission through the Circular Economy Scoreboard, Hungary still performs poorly on several key indicators, including industrial waste production, recycling rates, and the adoption of circular models by small and medium-sized enterprises.

Hungary's strongly export-oriented industrial system focuses significantly on the automotive sector, which accounts for a large share of manufacturing GDP. In this sector, the government has promoted a rapid expansion of battery production for electric vehicles, supported by major investments by large international groups such as CATL, SK On, Samsung SDI and BYD. Although this strategy represents an important step in the technological transition, it has provoked public debate and environmental tensions, especially in relation to the potential impact on health, natural resources and environmental quality. Projects have often been implemented quickly and in a non-transparent manner, without adequate involvement of local communities and workers' representatives.

Even in the more traditional engineering sector - where companies such as BMW and Mercedes operate -

modernisation efforts are underway to integrate environmental sustainability practices and industrial digitisation. However, the process still appears to be characterised by a predominantly top-down approach, which limits the effective participation of trade union representatives in decision-making processes and in defining strategic priorities.

Social dialogue in Hungary is overall weak and poorly institutionalised. Trade unions, in particular VASAS, which is active in the metalworking sector, operate in a complex environment marked by a low level of unionisation, marginal political influence and legislation that is not always conducive to structured dialogue between social partners. Nonetheless, VASAS has shown a growing awareness of the challenges related to the ecological transition, investing in training activities, international collaborations and capacity-building.

Among the most significant initiatives are the monitoring of working conditions in battery production, the reflection on professional transformations induced by electric mobility and Industry 4.0, as well as the active participation in European projects such as MEET, which focus on strengthening trade union capacity in the ESG field. However, the lack of regulated instruments of participation in companies and the absence of an organic national strategy on the right transition severely limit the possibility of trade unions to pre-emptively influence industrial and environmental choices.

A further critical issue concerns the vocational training system, which still appears weak and fragmented in Hungary. Training courses for workers and trade union representatives are scarce, rarely updated on sustainability issues and poorly integrated with the production fabric. This training deficit results in insufficient technical preparation on crucial aspects such as emission reduction, efficient waste management or ESG data analysis, hindering the active contribution of workers' representatives to the definition of industrial reconversion and upskilling strategies. Training, if properly designed and supported, could instead represent a fundamental empowerment tool for trade union representatives, especially in a historical phase in which technological evolution requires new skills and a systemic reading of the changes underway.

Overall, the Hungarian experience shows a production system in transition, driven by ambitious public strategies but still lacking in social dialogue and structured worker involvement. Among the main critical issues are the insufficient participation of trade unions in environmental innovation processes, the persistent information asymmetry between companies and workers on ESG issues and the difficulty in negotiating proactive agreements on sustainability and the environment.

In this scenario, initiatives such as the MEET project take on a strategic value, as they promote transnational cooperation between European trade union organisations,

facilitate the dissemination of operational tools - from training to participation models - and help to build the conditions for truly integrating the principle of just transition also in less mature industrial contexts.

2.4 Turkey

Green policies and the emerging regulatory framework

Although not a member state of the European Union, Turkey has in recent years embarked on a path of progressive alignment with European environmental and climate legislation. This orientation responds both to the political goal of future EU membership and to increasing economic integration with the single market. The ratification of the Paris Agreement in October 2021 represented a turning point in Turkish environmental policies, marking a strategic shift towards a more structured vision of energy transition and decarbonisation.

In the same year, the Ministry of Environment, Urbanisation and Climate Change adopted the Declaration on the Climate Change Strategy to 2053, with the ambitious goal of achieving climate neutrality by mid-century. This vision is reinforced by the Green Deal Action Plan, also launched in 2021 and inspired by the European model, with the intention of harmonising Turkish legislation on circular economy, emission reduction, green taxonomy and industrial sustainability.

On the regulatory side, Turkey has initiated the enhancement of its National Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS), which is currently in a pilot phase but is set to become binding in several industries, including the metal sector. In parallel, the Ministry of Energy promoted the National Energy Efficiency Strategy and launched initiatives related to electric mobility and the decarbonisation of so-called *hard-to-abate* industries. However, in spite of the programmatic commitment, there is a lack of specific legislation on the just transition, capable of guaranteeing a systemic inclusion of workers in ecological and industrial transformation processes.

As part of an increasingly sustainability-oriented industrial policy, Turkey has activated incentive mechanisms in key sectors such as automotive, electronics and metallurgy. In particular, the government strategy promotes the production of electric vehicles and batteries through programmes such as HIT-30, which provide tax breaks, investment support and the development of regional industrial clusters. Emblematic projects such as TOGG - the country's first producer of electric cars - symbolically represent the country's desire to position itself as a technological and industrial hub in the field of sustainable mobility, with a strong vocation for integration into European markets.

In parallel, many engineering companies, especially export-oriented companies or part of multinational groups, are starting to integrate sustainable production

practices into their business models. However, the adoption of ESG criteria and alignment with European standards still remains limited, especially among small and medium-sized enterprises.

In the Turkish trade union landscape, Türk Metal Sendikası - the main organisation in the metal sector - has started to develop its own strategic agenda on sustainability issues. Awareness of the impact of the ecological transition on work organisation, employment and the protection of rights prompted the union to take action in various areas: from training its union delegates on green industry, digitalisation and environmental regulations, to promoting campaigns for environmental safety in the workplace, and initiating dialogue with company and institutional representatives to foster greater corporate social responsibility.

Despite these developments, the conditions for social dialogue in Turkey remain fragile. Trade unions operate in a legal and political environment characterised by restrictions on trade union freedom, low levels of effective collective bargaining and still limited participation in decision-making processes affecting the country's industrial transformation.

At the transnational level, the presence of Turkish representatives in EWCs is still limited, but gradually growing, especially in multinational companies with a significant production base in Turkey. Although their actual involvement in sustainability-related

decision-making processes is still limited, there is a growing interest, also thanks to participation in European projects such as MEET. For Turkish delegates, EWCs represent a valuable opportunity to access information on ESG practices adopted at European level, strengthen their consultation and participation skills, and export more advanced approaches to the national context, thus contributing to an evolution of the internal social dialogue.

However, the challenges Turkey faces on this path are manifold. First, there is a lack of a clear legal framework that recognises the right of workers to participate in environmental governance. This is compounded by a poor uptake of ESG culture in companies, particularly SMEs, and structural difficulties in effectively representing workers in a heterogeneous and rapidly changing industrial system.

Despite these obstacles, there are positive signs of change. The increasing internationalisation of Turkish companies, coupled with regulatory pressure from the EU - in particular with the introduction of the CBAM and ESG reporting obligations - could stimulate an evolution of the system. Furthermore, the strengthening of transnational trade union networks and the growing interest of new trade union generations in environmental and social issues offer concrete scope for a participatory transformation.

In this context, capacity building and European cooperation initiatives, such as the MEET project, are crucial to foster the emergence of a more inclusive model of ecological transition, in which Turkish workers can also

Country	CAE participation	Social Dialogue	Environmental trade union initiatives
Italy	Consolidated	Structured	Green Book, ESG training, Green Days
Spain	Expanding	Institutionalised	Transición Justa, shared platforms
Hungary	Weak	Fragmented	Initial Training, EU Projects
Turkey	Limited	Fragile	Emerging assets, first ESG approach

actively contribute to the transformation of industry and the construction of a more sustainable and just economy.

Table 1 - Involvement of workers' representatives in the ecological transition

3. Comparative analysis

3.1 Convergences, divergences and common trajectories

The transition towards a sustainable and circular economy is a structural and transversal challenge affecting all European industrial systems, imposing a profound reorganisation of production, labour and governance models. Although declining in different forms, conditioned by the respective economic, institutional and trade union set-ups, the green transition shows a series of recurring dynamics in the four national contexts analysed - Italy, Spain, Hungary and Turkey - providing an articulated but significant representation of the opportunities and tensions that are crossing the metalworking sector in this historical phase.

In all cases examined, there is a growing awareness of the urgency to reconfigure production processes according to sustainability criteria, a development stimulated by converging factors. European regulations - including the Green Deal, the Carbon Boundary Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), the Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) and the ETS - exert increasing pressure on companies and institutions. Added to this is the impact of technological innovations, such as electric mobility, advanced digitisation and the introduction of green hydrogen, which are redefining value chains and the demand for skills in energy-intensive industries. Last but

not least, there are new social demands related to environmental justice, transparency and corporate social responsibility, which impose fairer and more inclusive production models.

Despite the diversity of national reference contexts, some common trajectories emerge that testify to an underlying convergence. All four countries are progressively integrating sustainability into national and sectoral industrial plans, albeit with different degrees of maturity and speed. The idea of a just transition - understood as a balance between economic competitiveness and social cohesion - emerges as an increasingly present mediation point in the debate between institutions, companies and social partners. Alongside this, there is a shared need to invest in the development of new skills, both for workers directly involved in transformation processes and for trade union representatives called upon to negotiate and oversee transitions in the workplace.

The ecological transition, therefore, is not only an environmental or technological issue, but increasingly a political and social terrain in which the future of industrial work in Europe and its partner countries is at stake. The data that have emerged suggest that, despite even marked differences in levels of progress, there is common ground on which to build shared paths, strengthen transnational trade union cooperation and promote participatory

governance models that hold together sustainability, innovation and rights.

3.2 Structural divergences: institutions, participation and governance

The comparison between the countries shows significant institutional, trade union and legal divergences, which affect the ability to address the ecological transition in a participatory and inclusive manner:

Scope	Italy	Spain	Hungary	Turkey
Regulatory framework	Mature and multi-level, with strong integration in the NRP and constitutional reform	Advanced, with specific laws on climate transition and circular economy	Under construction, with focus on investment attraction and strategic plans	Selective alignment to the EU; Green Deal 2021 Action Plan
Social Dialogue	Structured, with a recognised trade union role at sectoral and company level	Institutionalised, with trade unions active in the legislative and territorial process	Weak, with little involvement of workers in decision-making processes	Fragile, hampered by political and legal constraints

Trade union capacity	High proactivity (e.g. FIM Green Book), advanced contractual tools	Strong planning (e.g. CCOO Industria, Transición Justa)	Growing awareness, but limited tools	Recent activation on environmental issues, but still marginal
Participation in EWCs	Active and established	Growing, with structured thematic contributions	Still limited, but active presence in EU projects	Marginal, but expanding through transnational networks

These structural differences affect the real possibility of negotiating a fair transition, particularly in the most vulnerable segments of the labour force (low-skilled workers, peripheral sectors, companies in difficulty).

3.3 Workers' representatives: a changing actor

In all the contexts analysed, we are witnessing a profound transformation in the role of workers' representatives, who are called upon to confront unprecedented challenges posed by the ecological and digital transition. The adaptation of production models in a sustainable direction entails an evolution of the trade union profile, which requires new skills, tools and methods of intervention. Emerging first of all is the need, shared across the board, to update the technical knowledge of trade union delegates on complex topics such as emission

reduction, energy efficiency, sustainability reporting and green finance. These areas, traditionally unrelated to trade union action, are becoming central to collective bargaining and corporate governance processes.

At the same time, there is a growing demand for operational tools to monitor and assess the environmental policies adopted by companies in an autonomous and conscious manner, so as to play a proactive role in decision-making processes. In this context, the interest in the inclusion of environmental clauses in collective agreements, where the regulatory framework allows it, is an important sign of the reorientation of trade union action towards a constructive and anticipatory approach.

The real challenge today is to make this new role structural, overcoming the defensive approach that has often characterised trade union reaction to technological and environmental change. Instead, it is necessary to affirm a participatory model of representation, capable of contributing to the definition of industrial transformation trajectories from the initial stages, and not only managing their downstream impacts. This implies the formal recognition of environmental prerogatives for workers' representatives and the strengthening of their capacity to act as legitimate interlocutors in the governance of sustainability.

3.4 Existing instruments and regulatory gaps

The comparison between the four countries shows a significant asymmetry in the availability of regulatory and contractual instruments to address the ecological transition in a participatory manner. In Italy and Spain there are already well-established experiences of 'green' bargaining, thanks to a favourable regulatory environment, greater institutionalisation of social dialogue and the presence of evolved trade union competences. Practices of involvement in ESG processes, the shared definition of environmental indicators and the introduction of corporate protocols for sustainability are concrete examples of an integrated and mature approach.

On the contrary, in Hungary and Turkey, the structural weakness of social dialogue and the absence of an appropriate regulatory framework severely limit the possibility of adopting similar instruments. In these contexts, workers' representatives have little room for intervention, and the inclusion of the environmental dimension in collective bargaining remains episodic and strongly conditioned by the company context.

A transversal limitation, common to all countries, is the absence at European level of uniform legislation explicitly recognising a structured role for employee representatives in environmental issues. Although EWCs represent a potential space for transnational participation, they are often confined to merely informative functions and are

rarely substantially involved in sustainability decision-making processes.

To this is added a further critical element: the lack of public policies specifically oriented to support environmental training for workers and trade union delegates. In the absence of an integrated strategy for professional qualification on sustainability issues, the risk is that of an unequal transition, which excludes precisely those subjects that could contribute decisively to its fair and inclusive management.

4. Recommendations and operational proposals: towards a participatory and just transition

The experience of the MEET project, developed through training courses, national workshops and transnational comparisons, has clearly highlighted a fundamental principle: the transition towards a circular and low-emission economy cannot disregard a structured and conscious involvement of workers' representatives. In a context marked by climate urgency and the profound reconfiguration of industrial systems, the trade union role is called upon to evolve from a predominantly reactive function to a proactive one, oriented towards the co-governance of change processes.

The recommendations that follow are structured on two complementary levels: on the one hand, immediately adoptable operational tools, on the other hand, policy proposals at European level. Both dimensions are based on the practices and reflections that have emerged in the course of the project and converge on a strategic objective: to strengthen the role of EWCs as key players in the just ecological transition.

Scope	Propositional action
Knowledge	Access to ESG data, analysis of impacts
Participation	Early consultation in environmental plans
Training	Courses on sustainability, shared digital tools
Proposals	Environmental clauses in contracts, EU projects

4.1 The *10 Green Rules*: an operational guide for union action

One of the most concrete results of the MEET project is the definition of the *10 Green Rules*, a set of guiding principles and practical actions designed to accompany employee representatives in EWCs and transnational negotiation contexts. The *Green Rules* are a streamlined and effective tool for integrating environmental, climate and social sustainability into the daily agenda of trade union action.

The structure of the ten rules is structured around three fundamental axes: - Know and Monitor, i.e. ensuring access to ESG data, assessing environmental impacts and mapping business risks; - Participate and negotiate,

promoting the inclusion of environmental issues in EWC regulations, formulating proposals for contractual clauses and activating early consultation mechanisms; - Train and transform, through continuous training, the creation of shared digital tools and the exchange of good practices between EWCs operating in different countries and sectors.

Green Rules are designed to be formally adopted within the internal regulations of EWCs, thus becoming an integral part of their functioning. Their strength lies in their simplicity, adaptability and replicability, making them applicable in even very different industrial and cultural contexts.

	Green Rule	Brief description
1	Integrating sustainability into EWC agreements	Formally include ESG issues among the subjects of information and consultation in EWC regulations and agreements.
2	Creating a shared ESG database	Build an internal database with regulations, reports, agreements and good practices to ensure continuity and expertise over time.

3	Initiate ESG training programmes for delegates	Offer regular training on circular economy, health, environmental governance and just transition.
4	Defining common ESG indicators	Identify and use environmental, social and governance indicators to analyse corporate strategies.
5	Monitoring corporate ESG performance	Set up systems for ongoing assessment of ESG commitments through audits, questionnaires and analysis of company reports.
6	Providing operational tools for EWC delegates	Prepare summary sheets, model agreements and facilitated reading tools for trade union action.
7	Promoting sustainable corporate welfare	Integrating green measures into corporate welfare systems (sustainable mobility, environmental training, flexibility).

8	Participating in European sustainability projects	Activate transnational collaborations to strengthen negotiating capacities and exchange good practices between EWCs.
9	Supporting the right transition for workers	Ensure that company plans include retraining, training and social protections during reconversion processes.
10	Involving territories and local stakeholders	Promoting dialogue between EWCs, businesses and local communities for a shared sustainable transition.

4.2 Green Labs: a permanent space for sustainability in EWCs

Alongside the *Green Rules*, the MEET project proposes the establishment of *Green Labs*: permanent committees within the EWCs, entirely dedicated to sustainability, just transition and the circular economy. These are mixed and thematic functional units, composed of EWC members, experts, company representatives and, where appropriate,

external stakeholders such as public bodies or research centres.

Green Labs are configured as spaces of elaboration and comparison with well-defined tasks: analysing corporate ESG indicators, assessing the social impact of transition in terms of employment, health and mobility, formulating recommendations addressed to corporate management and European governance bodies. Furthermore, they can act as hubs of cooperation between EWCs and between territories, facilitating knowledge sharing and the coordination of joint initiatives.

Looking ahead, *Green Labs* can become real laboratories of social innovation, capable of experimenting with tools such as environmental compensation, participatory budgeting or joint assessment of business plans. To be fully effective, however, *Green Labs* must have three essential conditions

- formal recognition within the regulations of EWCs;
- autonomous resources dedicated to consultancy, training and analysis tools;
- access to standardised ESG data (e.g. EU taxonomy, CSRD) and the possibility of direct dialogue with corporate sustainability managers.

5. Conclusions

The results of the MEET project clearly show how the ecological transition cannot be fully realised without a structured and conscious involvement of workers' representatives. The experience gained through workshops, training activities and comparison of national experiences has shown the centrality of European Works Councils in promoting participatory and multilevel governance of sustainability. In this perspective, tools such as the 10 Green Rules and the Green Labs proposal are configured not only as project outcomes, but as fundamental elements of a renewed trade union paradigm in environmental matters.

The 10 Green Rules provide operational guidance for integrating ESG issues into daily trade union action and EWC regulations. At the same time, the Green Labs are proposed as permanent spaces for dialogue, analysis and proposals, in which employee representatives can contribute on an ongoing basis to the definition of corporate transition strategies. To make this step change effective, however, a strengthening of the European legal framework is required, starting with the revision of Directive 2009/38/EC, which should explicitly include the obligation to consult on ESG issues and the possibility of establishing thematic bodies within EWCs. Alongside this, it is strategic to invest in transnational training programmes that strengthen the negotiation,

environmental and digital skills of delegates and promote a shared culture of sustainability.

Ultimately, the MEET project has highlighted a profound conviction: green transition, to be even just, must be built together with workers. Only by recognising their active and structured role will it be possible to transform decarbonisation and innovation processes into opportunities for democratic growth and social cohesion. The actions tested within the project represent a replicable model at European level, capable of combining industrial competitiveness, environmental protection and social inclusion. In this sense, MEET does not end with a set of recommendations, but with the opening of a concrete perspective to strengthen trade union participation at the heart of European industrial transformation.

