

Industrial relations and social dialogue

Involvement of social partners in the national recovery and resilience plans



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Abbreviations used in the report

NRP	national reform programme
RRF	Recovery and Resilience Facility
RRP	recovery and resilience plan

Note: See Annex 1 for abbreviations of the social partner organisations and national authorities discussed in this report.

Executive summary

Introduction

To address the significant risks and challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent economic and social crisis, the EU institutions have adopted NextGenerationEU, an €806.9 billion temporary financial instrument aimed at boosting recovery through the issuance of a common European debt. The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), designed to finance reforms and investments in Member States from the start of the pandemic in February 2020 until 31 December 2026, forms the cornerstone of this EU programme. The European Semester has been adapted to integrate the RRF within its iterative governance process. To benefit from the RRF, Member States were invited to submit recovery and resilience plans (RRPs) outlining their national investment and reform agendas, in line with the EU policy criteria. In 2021, Eurofound analysed the involvement of the social partners in the preparation of the RRPs, as such involvement is provided for under the RRF Regulation adopted on 12 February 2021.

Policy context

Member States began preparing their RRPs from October 2020, with the aim of making European economies and societies more sustainable, resilient and prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the green and digital transitions. Article 18(4)(q) of the RRF Regulation requires RRPs to set out a summary of the consultation process undertaken with social partners and other relevant stakeholders as part of the preparation and implementation of the RRP, to show how their inputs are reflected in the plan.

Key findings

Overall, the social partners considered that the consultation process could have been better planned and organised. National social partners were involved in the preparation of the RRPs through a greater variety of settings and procedures than were used in previous European Semester cycles. However, the quality and intensity of the involvement was uneven and rather weak in a relatively high number of countries.

Compared with previous European Semester cycles, governments increased the range of mechanisms for involvement. Such mechanisms ranged from ad hoc settings to specific websites for public consultation aimed at covering actors and groups representing wider society. Social partners contributed to the preparation

of the RRPs through these involvement platforms, but were critical of the fact that the use of online consultation and e-platforms was mainly of an informative nature, not conducive to a meaningful consultation process. Social partners noted that their organisations should have a privileged role with regard to employment and social policies and should be consulted in a more meaningful way than other stakeholders.

Not having enough time allotted to consultation remained the most common issue among social partners, and this issue was even raised by a few national authorities. The restrictions brought about by the COVID-19 crisis seemed to have little effect on the process of involvement.

Social partners reported having received feedback on their contributions to the RRPs in only a few countries, and, in most countries, both employer organisations and trade unions reported that they did not receive an adequate response from national authorities. Similarly, while the RRF Regulation requires Member States to reflect the views of the social partners in the RRPs, most RRPs describe the milestones of the consultation process only briefly and just list the stakeholders involved, without making explicit the social partners' views or which of these views have been taken on board.

Overall, national social partners were dubious about their ability to have an impact on RRPs. Trade unions tended to be less confident of their influence than employer organisations. By contrast, national authorities considered that social partners' views had more influence than trade unions and employer organisations themselves believed.

National employer organisations and trade unions mostly had broadly similar perceptions regarding the quality of their involvement in the preparation of the RRPs, although there were disagreements and diverging views between them – even in the same country in cases of multiple organisations – about their participation in specific policy measures.

These findings concerning social partners' rather weak involvement should be contextualised against the backdrop of the uniqueness of the preparation of the RRPs and the overall framework and effectiveness of national social dialogue. Interestingly, social partners are eager to engage in further consultation processes aimed at implementing the policy measures and reforms and also some investments approved in the RRPs.

Policy pointers

- The 2022 European Semester cycle represents a key milestone for implementing the policy reforms and investments to which Member States committed to in the RRP. The meaningful involvement of social partners in the implementation of the RRP is essential for fostering domestic ownership and for improving the effectiveness of the policy actions and reforms envisaged.
- As stated in the Employment Guidelines, good-quality and effective involvement of the social partners should include timely and meaningful consultation, with governments providing feedback on the contributions made and improving the visibility of the exchanges.
- The recent developments in Ukraine are having, and will have, a severe economic and social impact in the EU, in addition to the detrimental effects on society and human rights. While it is expected that the conflict will further complicate the EU's economic recovery from the pandemic, integrating the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) into the European Semester process represents a key instrument to face the multidimensional negative effects of the emerging crisis.
- Social partners' involvement in the implementation of the RRP increases the effectiveness of the structural reforms needed to achieve fair and inclusive sustainable economic growth and to ensure social recovery, particularly vis à vis the expected lowering of growth and rising inflation resulting from the Ukrainian war conflict.
- Social partners' engagement in the policy actions and reforms embedded in the RRP is crucial for boosting the implementation of the twin transition goals, green and digital, and also to ensure social resilience – when Europe is faced with the biggest refugee crisis since World War II – while supporting the deployment of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan. To achieve this engagement, social dialogue should be used as the key tool for building partnerships to deal with the challenges ahead stemming from the war crisis.
- Closely monitoring the implementation of the RRP and being required to carry out more detailed reporting on the quality of the involvement of national social partners in the implementation of the reforms and investments approved will ensure a more effective EU and Member State response to the challenges brought about by the Ukrainian conflict.

Introduction

Context of research

Since 2016, Eurofound has been monitoring the involvement of national social partners in the European Semester and has produced a series of annual reports on the results of this exercise (Eurofound, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019a, 2020, 2021).

Based on the guidelines for Member States' employment policies (the 'Employment Guidelines'), adopted by the Council of the European Union in July 2018 and updated on 19 October 2020,¹ and the European Pillar of Social Rights, the scope of the analysis was widened to cover involvement in overall policymaking within the framework of national tripartite social dialogue. Both key policy documents acknowledge and promote the involvement and consultation of social partners in the 'design and implementation of economic, employment and social policies according to national practices' (principle 8 of the European Pillar of Social Rights).

To address the significant risks and challenges raised by the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent economic and social crisis, the EU institutions have adopted NextGenerationEU, an €806.9 billion temporary financial instrument designed to boost recovery through the issuance of common European debt. The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) serves as the cornerstone of this EU programme by providing EU countries with a total of €672.5 billion to support investment and reforms. This figure is made up of €312.5 billion in grants and €360 billion in loans. Within NextGenerationEU, supplementary financial instruments have also been made available, such as the Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe (REACT-EU) and the Just Transition Fund.²

The European Semester has been adapted to integrate the RRF into its iterative governance process. To benefit from the RRF, Member States have submitted recovery and resilience plans (RRPs) outlining their national investment and reform agendas, in line with the EU policy criteria.

National recovery and resilience plans

To access this extraordinary funding, since October 2020, Member States have been designing and preparing RRFs that will form the basis of their spending. These plans must have a comprehensive and forward-looking policy nature aimed at making European economies and societies more sustainable, resilient and prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the green and digital transitions. To ensure a smooth approval process, the European Commission held discussions with Member States to fully align the preliminary draft plans with the RRF eligibility requirements before they were formally submitted. Following the assessment of the national plans by the European Commission, financial support was approved and grants began to be handed out in the second half of 2021.

The 2021 Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy stated that the European Semester and the new RRF were intrinsically linked. The implementation of the RRFs should address the four dimensions identified in the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy: environmental sustainability, the digital transition and productivity, fairness, and macroeconomic stability.³ The principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights should also form part of the RRFs⁴ to ensure a fair and inclusive recovery. Furthermore, the assessment of the RRFs is checked against the 2019 and 2020 country-specific recommendations.⁵

1 Council Decision (EU) 2020/1512 of 13 October 2020 on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States. Guideline 7 establishes the following: 'Building on existing national practices, and in order to achieve more effective social dialogue and better socioeconomic outcomes, Member States should ensure the timely and meaningful involvement of the social partners in the design and implementation of employment, social and, where relevant, economic reforms and policies, including by supporting increased capacity of the social partners. Member States should foster social dialogue and collective bargaining. The social partners should be encouraged to negotiate and conclude collective agreements in matters relevant to them, fully respecting their autonomy and the right to collective action.'

2 Existing funds such as the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived may also contribute with additional money.

3 According to the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy, 'These dimensions, which are closely interrelated and should be mutually reinforcing, have guided the Member States' reform and investment agendas over the past years and **feature prominently among the objectives** of the Recovery and Resilience Facility.'

4 Article 4 of the RRF Regulation (and the relevant recitals) refers to 'contributing to the implementation' of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

5 According to Part 4, 'Overall impact', of the Commission staff working document *Guidance to Member States: Recovery and resilience plans – Part 2* (European Commission, 2021), 'To comply with the specific reporting requirements under the European Semester that are normally fulfilled by the National Reform Programme, Member States should report on the implementation of 2019 and 2020 country-specific recommendations under this section, to the extent this is not already covered in Part I Section 2 of this Guidance'.

As the European Semester and the RRF overlap, it was necessary to temporarily adapt the European Semester. To this end, Member States were required to submit their national reform programmes (NRPs) and their RRFs in a single integrated document, providing an overview of the reforms and investments that the Member States planned to undertake in the coming years, in line with the objectives of the RRF. Thus, the RRFs have become the main reference document for the Member States' forward-looking policy initiatives. In 2021, the European Semester country reports were not produced, being replaced by analytical documents drafted by the European Commission to assess the substance of the RRFs.

Involvement of social partners in the preparation of the RRFs and NRPs

Article 18(4)(q) of the RRF Regulation of 12 February 2021 requires RRFs to set out:

*a summary of the consultation process, conducted in accordance with the national legal framework, of local and regional authorities, **social partners**, civil society organisations, and other relevant stakeholders, for the **preparation and, where available, the implementation of the plan and how the inputs of the stakeholders are reflected in the plan.***⁶

(European Parliament and Council of the EU, 2021)

This provision has been developed by the Commission in *Guidance to Member States: Recovery and resilience plans – Part 2*, in Part 3 ('Complementarity and implementation of the plan'), Section 5 ('Consultation process'):

*Member States should also provide a summary of the **consultation process** of local and regional authorities, **social partners**, civil society organisations, youth organisations, and other relevant stakeholders, as implemented in accordance with the national legal framework, for the preparation and, where available, the implementation of the plan. The summary should cover the **scope, type, and timing of consultation activities, as well as how the views of the stakeholders are reflected in the plan.***

(European Commission, 2021)

Therefore, when submitting the RRFs and NRPs, Member States should describe any consultation and/or contribution of social partners in the drafting and implementation of the RRF. The strictness of these clauses and the need to consider and include the proposals of stakeholders in the RRFs were publicly

advocated by the Commission's Executive Vice-President, Valdis Dombrovskis, who is responsible for the social dialogue portfolio. Dombrovskis has underlined that this approach is not only about holding public consultations but also involves integrating effectively the contributions made by the stakeholders.

This report addresses the quality of the involvement of national social partners in the creation of RRFs. Therefore, it is mainly focused on tripartite social dialogue, in whatever form it takes at national level. As has been reported many times, there is a wide variety of national types of and mechanisms for the consultation and participation of social partners in policymaking. In this regard, the findings constitute an indicator of the quality of tripartite social dialogue at national level.

The scope of the study covers EU Member States. At the time of writing, the Netherlands had not yet submitted its RRF, and therefore it is the only country not covered by the report.

Methodology and analysis of information

The findings of this report are based on information collected by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents on the views of social partners and government representatives in the Member States. Most of the views gathered were from national peak-level organisations, such as confederations, although some sectoral organisations also provided comments.

Social partners and government representatives were asked to provide their views on their involvement in the creation of the RRFs during 2020–2021. Additionally, the social partners contacted were asked to discuss a maximum of 10 relevant employment, social and economic policy measures included in the RRF aiming to foster the digital transition and productivity, fairness, and environmental sustainability. A total of 217 measures were gathered to assess the quality of the involvement of the social partners in policymaking.

This report uses the working definition of 'involvement' applied in Eurofound's previous reports: for consultation to be viewed as involvement, it should be genuine, timely and meaningful. The analysis of involvement in the development of the RRFs was based on the social partners' assessments using quality standards that Eurofound had defined previously. Therefore, there exists a normative framework designed to assess the quality of involvement, which allows the production of evidence-based results.

⁶ The full text of the RRF Regulation is available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R0241&from=EN>

The data and information collection undertaken to inform this report took place from April to July 2021. A total of 143 responses were gathered, offering an overall picture of the degree of involvement of social partners. These responses came from the following types of stakeholders:

- 60 from trade union representatives
- 48 from employer organisation representatives
- 35 from government representatives

As a rule, the analysis gives greatest weight to views that employer organisations and trade unions share, and the assessments shared by all stakeholders interviewed (from employer organisations and trade unions, backed by national authorities) are deemed worthy of attention. The results of this triangular exercise are shown in Tables 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 of this report, under the labels ‘Employer organisations and trade unions agree’ (agree with the assessment) and ‘Overall agreement’ (employer organisations, trade unions and national authorities all agree with the assessment). Divergent views between employer organisations and trade unions are also mentioned when they represent strongly opposed views. In any case, caution is required when interpreting the results, as they are based on subjective views that individual respondents provided on behalf of one organisation each.

Although not all the social partners were contacted in each country, the organisations that provided replies are considered to be highly representative at national level. However, not all of the social partners and government authorities that were contacted responded. The views collected in this study should not be considered as exhaustive and comprehensive, nor should the results be deemed representative of all national stakeholders. However, the opinions and assessments gathered do offer an overall picture of developments in social partner involvement at EU level. It should be noted that the report uses the concept of stakeholders to refer to a rather broad range of social players that may include social partners. However, the main focus of this report is the involvement of social partners solely composed of employer organisations and trade unions. The social partner organisations and national authorities that provided responses as part of the research are listed in Annex 1 of this report.

This report comprises five chapters following the introduction. Chapter 1 analyses the quality of the involvement based on the methodology applied. Chapter 2 describes the degree of satisfaction of the social partners with their involvement as regards some specific measures grouped into wide policy categories. Chapter 3 presents contextualised and more granular information useful for a better understanding of the process of involvement in Member States. Chapter 4 looks at social partners’ involvement in overall policymaking within the framework of national tripartite social dialogue. Chapter 5 discusses the key findings from the analysis and presents policy pointers based on the findings.

Features of the institutional governance framework

The 2021 Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy sets out the need to involve social partners in the implementation and, consequently, the preparation of the RRP. However, it leaves Member States with the autonomy to set up involvement procedures in accordance with national social dialogue frameworks and practices, as is also true of the NRPs.

Unlike in recent years, RRP were mostly available only in the native language on the Commission’s website during the period before the submission deadline.⁷ As a rule, the deadline for the submission of the RRP was 30 April 2021, although such a deadline was stated publicly to be indicative, as quality should prevail over speed. In fact, several Member States delayed their submission (for example, Czechia to 1 June, Estonia to 18 June, Malta to 13 July and Bulgaria to 15 October), for different reasons. At the time of writing, the Netherlands had not yet submitted its RRP.

Social partners’ involvement in the RRP took place through well-established institutional settings and/or ad hoc meetings (Table 1). However, as noted by Eurofound in previous reports, it is not unusual for the social partners to be involved through both mechanisms (for example, in the case of the RPP, in Czechia). Moreover, in some countries, involvement took place through existing tripartite bodies (such as economic and social councils and the like) in addition to ad hoc meetings or specific working groups created to discuss the NRP (for example, in Poland and Portugal).

⁷ Later, more detailed information and related documents were added to the Commission’s web page dedicated to the national RRP: https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/recovery-coronavirus/recovery-and-resilience-facility_es#national-recovery-and-resilience-plans

Table 1: Institutional settings for involving social partners in the creation of RRP and NRP

Ad hoc tripartite/bipartite consultation/specific working groups	Institutionalised tripartite/bipartite bodies
Austria, Cyprus, Czechia,* Denmark,** Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Romania, Spain, Sweden	Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Greece,*** Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia

Notes: *Social partners in Czechia were involved through meetings of the economic and social council and external inter-ministerial consultation. **National confederations in Denmark were not directly involved in consultation, but sectoral organisations were. ***In Greece, only trade unions reported that they were involved through the institutionalised tripartite/bipartite council. According to the employer organisation SEV, ad hoc tripartite and bipartite consultation took place.

Source: Unless otherwise indicated, all tables in the report are the authors' own compilation, based on information provided by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents and interviews with national social partners.

In **Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia**, social partners were involved in RRP creation through well-established institutional settings, at least during some phases of the consultation process. The social partners in **Luxembourg** were involved through the national social and economic council. In **Belgium**, consultations most notably took place at the federal level within the Central Economic Council and the Federal Council for Sustainable Development, while regional governments also interacted within regional socioeconomic councils. In **Greece**, part of the consultation process was carried out through the Economic and Social Committee (the national branch of the European Economic and Social Committee), a body representing a wide range of social partners in the country. In **France**, consultation was carried out through two separate bodies: the Social Dialogue Committee for European and International Issues (a consultative body under the Minister for Social Relations) and the Economic, Social and Environmental Council, whose powers stem directly from the national constitution.

In **Portugal**, the first phase of the consultation phase of the RRP was carried out through the Economic and Social Committee. However, the second phase involved

an extended consultation process for the RRP, with the Economic and Social Committee discussing the RRP with various social partners and civil society organisations through ad hoc bilateral meetings. For the consultation process on the RRP, a specific institutional setting was also created: a National Monitoring Committee with a broad membership that will be in charge of monitoring the RRP's implementation. In **Poland**, consultation on the RRP began in the summer of 2020. The draft plan was submitted to the Social Dialogue Committee and other established working teams ('working groups') involving social partner representatives (after some pressure from their side). Additionally, there was a further consultation process that was also open to civil society organisations.

In the remaining countries, specific procedures or ad hoc tripartite/bipartite consultation procedures were developed. For example, in **Denmark**, social partners were involved in specific settings to discuss the RRP as the 'climate partnerships' and 'restart teams'. In **Ireland**, consultation with the Labour Employer Economic Forum was a new development in 2021. In **Slovenia**, a special RRF expert committee was established within the Economic and Social Council to contribute to the RRP.

Box 1: Online e-consultation platforms

The creation of RRP introduced a new development in 2021 not seen during the creation of NRP in previous years. Some governments (in Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Ireland and Poland) broadened the scope of involvement by holding public consultations aimed at reaching a wider range and larger number of stakeholders, and these consultations were carried out through e-platforms run by governments, on which all interested parties and stakeholders – including the social partners – could express their opinions and make suggestions.

While this procedural change involved enlarging the target audience and creating more transparency, the social partners have criticised the management of these online processes, essentially because the content that governments uploaded to these platforms was insufficient and did not allow meaningful contributions to be made. As these platforms do not allow feedback to be given on suggestions, most social partners consider this form of involvement an information-sharing tool, rather than a proper social dialogue process.

Interestingly, in **Croatia**, the work on the RRP took place in parallel with the work on programming for (other) EU funds, which included the social partners. Based on the same intervention logic, the work on the RRP should be viewed in complementarity with the work on programming, the latter involving extensive stakeholder consultations on how to allocate RRP and EU funding.

Although the social partners' views were not directly provided in **Italy**, unlike the situation over the past few years consultations occurred mostly through ad hoc meetings with the government and at formal hearings in parliament.

Procedures for developing RRP and NRPs

The European Commission required each Member State to submit its NRP and RRP in a single integrated document. It has been reported that the discussions regarding the NRP and the RRP overlapped in some countries and, as a result, the content of the NRP mostly reflected that of the RRP.

According to the information gathered, governments developed different processes for involving the social partners in the NRP and the RRP in Austria, Czechia, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy,⁸ Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Romania and Sweden (Table 2).

In most of these countries, the consultation on the NRP followed the same procedure as in previous years, while a different consultation process was developed to discuss the RRP. In Latvia, the method applied involved large working groups with wide representativeness. In Sweden, a specific tripartite working group was established for consultation on the NRP, in line with previous years, with social partners' contributions included separately in the report. In contrast, the consultation process for the RRP was carried out on an ad hoc basis, only through verbal consultation.

Additionally, social partners have reported some changes in the procedures to discuss the NRP compared with previous years in Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal and Spain.

It is also worth mentioning the cases of Cyprus and Estonia. In **Cyprus**, the NRP was submitted to the European Commission on 26 November 2021 and the plan refers to extensive consultations taking place prior to sending the NRP for the RRP and the cohesion funds, implying the alignment of the two exercises. In Estonia, social partners' inputs into the NRP were gathered during the development of the Estonia 2035 national strategy plan.

Trade unions reported changes in Hungary, Ireland and Slovakia, while employer organisations reported changes in every country.

When comparing the 2021 involvement in the RRP to that in the NRP in previous years, the social partners have stressed some new institutional features concerning the procedure.

- There are new national authorities leading the process of involvement, such as ministries of finance and the like. For example, in Estonia, the national authorities in charge of the RRP are the Ministry of Finance and the State Shared Service Centre.⁹ Similarly, in Poland, the Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy now leads the process, while involvement in the NRP used to be managed by the Ministry of Labour. In Greece, a high-level political steering committee and a dedicated agency under the Ministry of Finance were set up for the purpose of designing and implementing the national plan.
- There is a greater number of meetings. Formally, the time span allowed for creating and submitting the RRP is longer than the time frame for consultation on the NRP. This longer window should have theoretically provided more opportunities for meetings (even though they were online). In some countries, social partners highlighted that participation in the creation of the RRP was time-consuming and demanding (Cyprus and Spain).

Table 2: Procedures for developing RRP and NRPs in 2021

Changes in the procedures to discuss the NRP compared with previous years	Countries developing different processes to involve social partners in the NRP and the RRP
Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Spain	Austria, Czechia, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Romania, Sweden

Note: Information was not available or not sufficiently clear-cut for some countries.

⁸ In Italy, previous Eurofound studies have reported a lack of social partner involvement in NRP creation. Accordingly, a lack of change in this process should be interpreted as continuity in terms of unilateral NRP design by the government.

⁹ In Estonia, the Government Office is co-responsible for the RRP with the Ministry of Finance for the strategic side of the plan, while the State Shared Service Centre will implement the plan.

- There is a greater variety of mechanisms for involving the social partners. For example, in Estonia, consultation entailed public hearings, information days and working groups; in Spain, regular meetings at peak level, aimed at setting up general guidelines, were accompanied by more ‘operational’ meetings, at which specific policies

were discussed; in Poland, the government created a website to gather contributions from civil society organisations and individuals; and in Greece consultation included written contributions and meetings with representatives of industry, key social partners and stakeholders, including at local level.

1 Quality and effectiveness of the process

The conceptual approach to analysing the quality of the social partners' involvement in the RRP was based on previous Eurofound approaches (Eurofound, 2021). Thus, the quality of the involvement was measured in terms of input or processes (that is, involving the social partners in the design of RRP) and output (that is, the degree of social partners' influence on the policy content of RRP).

This section analyses the quality of the involvement in terms of input, which was measured according to four main indicators derived from social partners' and national authorities' assessments:

- the time allotted for consultation
- the degree of consultation, understood as social partners' opportunities to contribute to the development of the RRP and to receive a response or feedback from the government
- balance – the extent to which trade unions and employer organisations have been consulted on an equal footing
- transparency and visibility of the social partners' contributions – the extent to which RRP included a summary of the consultation process, providing details on the scope, type and timing of consultation activities

Time allotted for consultation

As mentioned above, Member States were asked to submit the RRP to the European Commission before 30 April 2021. This was a guideline date, not a fixed deadline, and Member States have until mid-2022 to submit the RRP. The time span set for submitting the RRP began on the date of publication of the RRF Regulation proposal in summer 2020. It has been reported that some governments started to collect

suggestions and to involve social partners in September 2020, although most of them did not involve social partners until the end of 2020 or early 2021.

According to the information gathered on the time frame for involvement in the RRP (Table 3), in Croatia, Luxembourg, Poland, Slovakia and Sweden, social partners were involved at the very end of the RRP development process (March–April 2021). In Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Romania and Slovenia, the involvement process started in January 2021. In the remaining countries considered – Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal and Spain – social partners reported that they were involved from the very beginning of the RRP development process.

National authorities in some countries reported a different time frame from the social partners, namely in Hungary – where a selected group of stakeholders was requested to share their views on the objectives of the RRP in December 2020 – and Slovakia – where a number of informal meetings and discussions took place from early 2021 or even towards the end of 2020 – which may suggest that the social partners count only the more formal consultation in March–April and not additional activities/meeting.

Although the quality and effectiveness of involvement are the most definitive criteria, the number of joint or separate meetings held between national authorities and social partners is an indicator of the intensity of the exchanges and consultations. There were also some differences between countries in terms of the number of tripartite and bipartite meetings held to consult the social partners on the RRP creation or assessment (Table 4). The countries with the highest number of meetings (that is, with more than three meetings) were Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Spain.

Table 3: Time frame for involvement in the RRP

Period	Member States
From the beginning (2020)	Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, Spain, Sweden*
Since January 2021	Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Hungary,** Ireland, Lithuania, Romania, Slovenia
Mostly in March–April 2021	Croatia, Luxembourg, Poland,*** Slovakia, Sweden

Notes: *For Sweden, this time frame refers only to the NRP. **For Hungary, the time frame started earlier, in December 2020. ***For Poland, social partners were asked to participate in preliminary meetings earlier, but they were not able to effectively contribute to the RRP until the very end of the submission date. Information was not available from national authorities in Germany or employer organisations in Denmark.

Table 4: Number of meetings reported to be held during the process of involvement

Party	More than three meetings	Three meetings	Two meetings	One meeting
Employer organisations	Cyprus		France, Ireland	
Trade union organisations			Denmark	Cyprus
Employer organisations and trade unions agree			Hungary	Slovakia
National authorities	Denmark, France, Hungary, Ireland, Slovakia			
Overall agreement	Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain	Czechia, Latvia, Luxembourg	Croatia, Estonia	Austria, Lithuania*

Notes: *For Lithuania, in addition to the Tripartite Council meeting, more meetings took place online. Information was not available for Germany, Malta or Sweden; for employer organisations in Denmark; for trade union organisations in France or Ireland; or for national authorities in Cyprus, although in the latter the RRP mentions that consultations took place within government services/ministries. 'Employer organisations and trade unions agree' = agree with the assessment; and 'Overall agreement' = employer organisations, trade unions and national authorities agree with the assessment.

In terms of meetings to discuss the RRP content, in three countries (Czechia, Latvia and Luxembourg) three meetings were organised, while in two countries (Croatia and Estonia) two meetings were held, although in the latter it is more accurate to refer to two rounds of meetings.

In the case of **Austria**, social partners were given the opportunity to contribute to the development of the NRP only at the kick-off meeting on 26 January 2021, and to the development of the RRP only via comments sent to the designated email address provided by the government at a later point. With regard to **Lithuania**, social partners reported that, although different virtual meetings were conducted, a real consultation did not take place because the draft of the RRP was presented at the Tripartite Council only once and only following a request from social partners. Thus, social partners argued that only one meaningful meeting was held, although more than one online meeting took place. National authorities stressed that consultations with social partners started in December 2020 and continued in January 2021 as part of the new government programme, which also covered RRF issues. These exchanges continued through public consultations in February, including accepting written comments in April.

In some countries, there were differences in the number of meetings reported by each party (trade unions, employer organisations and national authorities). National authorities reported a higher number of

meetings than social partners in **Denmark, France, Hungary, Ireland and Slovakia**. In **Cyprus**, employer organisations reported attending more than three meetings, while unions reported attending just one.¹⁰

It is, however, worth noting that a high number of meetings also entails more work for the social partners, which, in some cases, can be difficult to handle. In some cases, too many meetings made it difficult for social partners to adequately prepare the work sessions, particularly when the documents were provided with very little time in advance or even at the beginning of each meeting. This was, for instance, reported in **Spain**, where social partners noted that the intensity of the meetings and the scant amount of time given for analysing the documentation made it hard to prepare properly, even though social partners were highly satisfied with the overall consultation process. In addition, in **Belgium**, some social partners stated that there was not enough time allocated to preparing for the meetings because the time frame was too short. In the end, the advisory committee (made up of the Central Economic Council and the Federal Council for Sustainable Development) informally declined the request to submit recommendations on the latest version of the RRP (at the beginning of April 2021).

All in all, it appears that, regardless of when the involvement phase started and of the number of meetings held, a lack of sufficient time for consultation was an issue in several countries. Information gathered through the national questionnaires shows that, in eight

¹⁰ It should be noted that when it comes to reporting the number of consultations, some confusion could have arisen, since there were meetings to discuss different topics (for example, consultations on long-term economic strategy, taxation strategy, RRP, and so on). Additionally, there are five main social partners involved in social dialogue in Cyprus: two employer organisations and three trade unions. Due to this diversity, different social partners could have held different numbers of meetings for different consultation processes.

countries, social partners complained that the time allotted for consultation was not enough: Austria, Croatia, Czechia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Slovakia and Slovenia. By contrast, in Belgium,¹¹ Finland, France, Poland¹² and Spain,¹³ all of the parties agreed that the social partners had enough time in 2021 to participate in the assessment or development of the RRP.

In several countries, trade unions and employer organisations disagreed on the time allotted (Table 5). In eight countries, employer organisations or trade unions reported being dissatisfied with the time allotted for consultation. In Bulgaria, Denmark, Hungary, Portugal and Sweden, at least some of the trade unions were satisfied with the time allotted, while employer organisations were not. By contrast, in Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Hungary and Romania, at least some of the employer organisations were satisfied with the time they were allotted, but trade unions were not.

In some of these countries, however, divergent opinions also existed within trade unions and employer organisations. Such differences among trade union organisations were reported in **Portugal** (between the union confederations CGTP and UGT¹⁴) and **Hungary**,

where LIGA, MOSZ and MASZSZ believed that there was not enough time for consultation while PSZ believed there was. Similarly, in **Cyprus, Greece, Hungary and Romania**, there were differences within national employer organisations. In **Sweden**, there were also differences within the national employer association contacted (the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR)), related to the type of programming document that was the subject of the consultation: social partners were satisfied with the time allotted for consultation only for the NRP.

Generally, national authorities assessed the time allotted more favourably than the social partners. National authorities from a total of 21 countries (15 countries in which only the national authorities agreed and 6 countries in which all parties agreed) agreed that the time allotted for consultation was sufficient, but these opinions were not shared by social partner organisations in most cases. However, in three countries (Germany, Hungary and Romania), national authorities and social partners agreed that the time allotted for consultation was not enough. In Hungary, this assessment was limited to the consultation on the RRP, not the NRP.

Table 5: Time allotted for consultation

Party	Enough time allotted	Not enough time allotted
Employer organisations and trade unions agree		Austria, Croatia, Czechia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Slovakia, Slovenia
National authorities	Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary,* Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia	Germany, Hungary,** Romania
Overall agreement	Belgium, France, Hungary (VOSZ, PSZ), Poland, Spain, Sweden	Hungary (MGYOSZ, LIGA, MOSZ, MASZSZ), Romania (UGIR)
Diverging views		
Employer organisations	Cyprus (OEB), Estonia, Greece (SEV, ESEE), Hungary (VOSZ), Romania (Concordia)	Bulgaria, Cyprus (CCCI), Denmark, Greece (GSEVEE), Hungary (MGYOSZ), Latvia, Portugal, Romania (UGIR), Sweden**
Trade unions	Bulgaria, Denmark, Hungary (PSZ), Portugal (CGTP)	Cyprus, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary (LIGA, MOSZ, MASZSZ), Ireland, Portugal (UGT), Romania

Notes: *For the NRP; **For the RRP. Information was not available for national authorities in Denmark, Finland and Malta; for employer organisations in Germany and Ireland; or for trade unions in Latvia.

'Employer organisations and trade unions agree' = agree with the assessment; and 'Overall agreement' = employer organisations, trade unions and national authorities agree with the assessment. Acronyms of national organisations presenting specific views are shown in parentheses (see Annex 1 for a list of social partner organisations and national authorities and their abbreviations).

11 Reports from Belgium in this regard are more nuanced depending on the level of consultation (federal and from the three regions). According to some social partner representatives (not specified in the report), the pace of the consultation was quicker and more intense than in other consultation processes but managed to achieve satisfactory outcomes. Others (not specified) stressed that there was not enough time allotted for consultation because the time frame was too short.

12 In Poland, according to the social partners, the involvement process started early enough, but in the end the time devoted to analysing the final version of the RRP was not sufficient.

13 In Spain, despite the large number of meetings, the government provided the documents with very little notice.

14 See Annex 1 for a list of social partner organisations and national authorities and their abbreviations.

Degree of consultation

Information gathered through the questionnaires shows that, in most countries, social partners contributed to the RRP through both verbal and written contributions, which were in most cases provided separately by trade unions and employer organisations. In **Austria** and **Germany**, social partners contributed to the creation of the RRP only through written contributions.

Nevertheless, according to the questionnaires, trade unions and employer organisations in only six countries agreed that they had the opportunity to contribute to the development of the RRP and to receive a response or feedback from the government, namely Belgium, Czechia, Spain and Sweden (for the consultation process of the RRP), Finland, and Hungary (VOSZ and PSZ) (Table 6). In the case of Hungary, according to the authorities, sufficient time had been given for consultation on the measures in the RRP within the available time frame for elaboration, while the time available for planning the RRP was very short.

In most countries (15 in total), both trade unions and employer organisations noted that they did not receive a proper response or feedback from the government: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. In these countries, social partners tended to assess their institutionalised involvement mainly as an informative process and to a lesser extent as a consultative process. Even if social partners were formally requested to submit their assessments and proposals, the consultation was considered not meaningful because the national authorities did not send them adequate responses. In some cases, social partners criticised the fact that they were involved only once the political decisions had been made and thus complained that there was actually no real involvement. In other countries, such as **Romania**, social partners regretted that they were not addressed as ‘real partners’ and considered that the involvement of civil society agents hindered actual consultation and a meaningful exchange of views between social partners and government. It is also

worth considering the case of **Italy**, where social partners were not directly involved in the development of the RRP but reported that they had an ‘indirect influence’ on the measures adopted through significant participation in the parliamentary committees during the pandemic. Their efforts are focused on ensuring their involvement in the implementation and monitoring of the measures through an institutional body called Tavolo permanente per il partenariato economico, sociale, e territoriale.

In addition, in nine countries, either employer organisations or trade unions reported not having had the opportunity to properly contribute to the development of the consultation process through exchanges with national authorities: Cyprus, Denmark, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Malta and Romania. Some of the statements gathered from the questionnaires are nuanced and must be duly contextualised (see more detailed information in the next section).

Opposite views between social partners

Diverging views were found in **Latvia**, where the employer organisation (LDDK) reported not having had the opportunity to contribute or to receive feedback from the government, while trade unions appeared to be satisfied. By contrast, in **Cyprus, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Ireland** and **Sweden**, employer organisations assessed the scope of the consultation process positively, while trade unions disagreed.

It is also worth highlighting that different assessments within social partner organisations (on both the employers’ and the unions’ sides) are notable in the cases of Hungary, Portugal and Romania. Differences between trade union organisations were identified in Hungary (between PSZ, which reported participating in an actual consultation process, and LIGA, MOSZ and MASZSZ, which did not) and in **Portugal** (between the CGTP and the UGT). On the employers’ side, differences were identified in **Romania** (between Concordia and UGIR) and in **Hungary** (between VOSZ and MGYOSZ).

In most of these countries, national authorities disagree with the social partners’ assessments.

Table 6: Opportunity to contribute to the RRP and NRP and receive feedback

Party	Yes	No
Employer organisations and trade unions agree	Finland	Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece (GSEVEE, ESEE), Hungary (MGYOSZ, LIGA, MOSZ, MASZSZ) Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal (UGT), Romania (Concordia), Slovakia, Slovenia
National authorities	Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia	
Overall agreement	Belgium, Czechia, Hungary (VOSZ, PSZ), Spain, Sweden*	Sweden**
Diverging views		
Employer organisations	Cyprus (OEB), Hungary (VOSZ), Ireland, Romania (UGIR)	Cyprus (CCCI), Denmark, Latvia, Malta, Romania (UGIR)
Trade unions	Denmark, Latvia, Malta, Portugal (CGTP)	Cyprus, Greece, Ireland

Notes: *For the RRP; **For the NRP (although, in Sweden, consultation for the NRP was not expected by the social partners and instead they submitted their own stand-alone contributions). Information was not available for national authorities in Denmark, Finland, Malta or Portugal. 'Employer organisations and trade unions agree' = agree with the assessment; and 'Overall agreement' = employer organisations, trade unions and national authorities agree with the assessment. Acronyms of national organisations presenting specific views are shown in parentheses (see Annex 1 for a list of social partner organisations and national authorities and their abbreviations).

Balance

The balance of the consultation between trade unions and employer organisations is crucial for the quality of the involvement. Meaningful social dialogue presupposes that trade unions and employer organisations are involved on an equal footing. In 12 countries, trade unions and employer organisations reported being involved on an equal footing: Belgium, Czechia, Estonia, France, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden.

In addition, in **Malta** and **Portugal**, at least one trade union (GWU and CGTP, respectively) agreed with employer organisations on the balanced character of the consultation process. In **Finland**, where trade unions considered that the consultation was balanced, information was not available for employer organisations.

By contrast, in Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Hungary and Romania, at least some employer and trade union organisations perceived that the consultation process was unbalanced. It is worth noting the case of **Cyprus**, where most trade union and employer organisations perceived that consultation was unbalanced (PEO, DEOK and CCCI). In most of these cases, however, divergent opinions were seen between and within social partners. Differences emerged between trade union organisations in **Portugal** (between CGTP and UGT) and in **Hungary** (between MASZSZ and PSZ), while, in **Romania**, differences emerged on the employer side (between Concordia and UGIR).

Transparency and visibility

As mentioned in the 'Introduction' section, the RRF Regulation and Part 2 of the European Commission guidance (European Commission, 2021) require Member States to include in the RRP a summary of the consultation process with social partners and other stakeholders (for example, regional authorities and civil society organisations) for the preparation and implementation of the plan. The summary should cover the scope, type and timing of consultation activities, as well as how the views of the stakeholders are reflected in the plan.

However, this study found that only in **Spain** did employer organisations, trade unions and national authorities agree that the social partners' views were explicitly summarised in the RRP (Table 7). Trade unions from Estonia, Hungary (PSZ), Latvia and Malta also agreed on this. A closer look at the section of the RRP where this information should have been included shows that, in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Hungary, Ireland, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia and Sweden, the social partners' views were not made explicit, while in the case of Greece the plan cites only some examples of stakeholders' views that were taken into consideration.

In Sweden, national authorities reported that social partners' views were included only in the NRP and not in the RRP.

Table 7: Social partners' views explicitly summarised in the RRP

Party	Yes	No
Employer organisations and trade unions agree		Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus (PEO, DEOK), Denmark, Finland*, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia
National authorities	Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia	
Overall agreement	Spain, Sweden**	Belgium, Czechia, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Sweden*
Diverging views		
Employer organisations		Latvia
Trade unions	Estonia, Hungary (PSZ), Latvia, Malta	Hungary (MASZSZ)

Notes: *For the RRP; **For the NRP. Information was not available for national authorities in Denmark, Finland, Greece, Hungary or Malta; or for employer organisations in Estonia or Malta.

'Employer organisations and trade unions agree' = agree with the assessment; and 'Overall agreement' = employer organisations, trade unions and national authorities agree with the assessment. Acronyms of national organisations presenting specific views are shown in parentheses (see Annex 1 for a list of social partner organisations and national authorities and their abbreviations).

Summary of main findings

The analysis drawn from replies to questionnaires sent to the national social partners reveals widespread dissatisfaction among the social partners with the mechanisms deployed to involve them in the drafting of the RRP. With a few exceptions (Belgium, Finland and Spain), trade unions and employer organisations in most Member States considered that:

- the time allotted for involving the social partners was insufficient
- a genuine process of consultation and discussion on the content of the RRP had not taken place
- the RRP submitted did not reflect their proposals and contributions in a transparent manner, despite the European Commission's requests

However, this assessment should be contextualised (see Chapter 3). It is worth highlighting the exceptional nature of the development of the RRP and, consequently, of the consultation process. The design of the RRP was a top-down process led by the European Commission in a complicated time, namely a period framed by the COVID-19 crisis. National governments conducted this huge reform and investment exercise in a relatively tight time frame. The development of the RRP was a complex task that required the participation of more government departments and stakeholders than the preparation of the NRP. The scope, intertwined structure (for example, strategies, components, policy areas and pillars), investments and financial commitments of the RRP require a thorough analysis and the concurrence of a wide range of public and private stakeholders and players.

All these factors and particularly the technical complexity of the process may have constrained or distorted the consultation and social dialogue,

particularly in relation to the 'design' of the RRP and also in the time available for reaching a consensus.

Furthermore, it is likely that the social partners have assessed their participation against the general framework of national social dialogue. On the one hand, this factor could explain the particularly negative results of their evaluation of their involvement, which, in some countries, contrasted with other more positive indicators (for example, the number of meetings). On the other hand, it could explain the limited cross-country variations in the results for countries having the same national industrial relations model (with different models having different levels of quality of social dialogue) (Eurofound, 2018; Sanz et al, 2020).

Nevertheless, the results deserve critical reflection. The importance of the structural changes, reforms and investments that are to be developed in future years required a meaningful social dialogue process allowing social partners to contribute to the development of the RRP. Furthermore, attention should be drawn to those countries that have mainly relied on online forms of consultation – opened up to alternative civil society actors too – where social partners complain they barely had the opportunity to receive feedback.

Social partners' influence

Social partners' influence on the RRP was measured based on social partners' own perceptions; they were asked to rank the degree of influence as significant, limited or non-existent. However, these assessments should be interpreted with caution, as they may be influenced by different factors.

Overall, as can be seen from Table 8, social partners reported a general mistrust in their ability to influence the development of the RRP.

Table 8: Social partners' influence on the development of the RRP

	Significant	Limited or relative	No influence
Employer organisations and trade unions agree		Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, Spain	
National authorities	Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, France, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Slovakia, Spain	Croatia, Germany, Romania, Slovenia	
Overall agreement		Czechia, Estonia, Poland, Sweden	
Diverging views			
Employer organisations	Austria, Cyprus (OEB)	Croatia, Cyprus (CCCI), Greece (GSEVEE), Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia	
Trade unions	Denmark, Finland, Malta	Hungary (MOSZ, PSZ)	Austria, Croatia, Germany, Hungary (LIGA), Ireland, Luxembourg, Romania, Slovakia

Notes: Information was not available for Italy, for national authorities in Finland, Greece, Malta and Portugal; for employer organisations in Finland, Germany and Malta; or for trade unions in Slovenia. Information on employer organisations' views in Denmark could not be double-checked. The employer organisation ESEE in Greece and the trade union MASZSZ in Hungary claimed not to have been involved. 'Employer organisations and trade unions agree' = agree with the assessment; and 'Overall agreement' = employer organisations, trade unions and national authorities agree with the assessment. Acronyms of national organisations presenting specific views are shown in parentheses (see Annex 1 for a list of social partner organisations and national authorities and their abbreviations).

The findings show that, in 12 countries, social partners, and in some cases also national authorities, agree that social partners had a limited/relative influence: Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, France, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Spain and Sweden.

In the remaining countries, differences between trade unions' and employer organisations' perceptions were reported. Overall, unions reported lower levels of influence than employer organisations. Union organisations from Austria, Croatia, Hungary (LIGA), Ireland, Luxembourg, Romania and Slovakia reported having no influence, while German unions reported not having been involved in the process. By contrast, employer organisations reported having had a significant influence (Austria, Cyprus (OEB)) or limited/relative influence in several cases: Croatia, Cyprus (CCCI), Greece (GSEVEE), Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

In Denmark, Finland and Malta, trade union organisations reported having had a significant influence on the development of the RRP, while information was not available for the employer organisations in these countries.

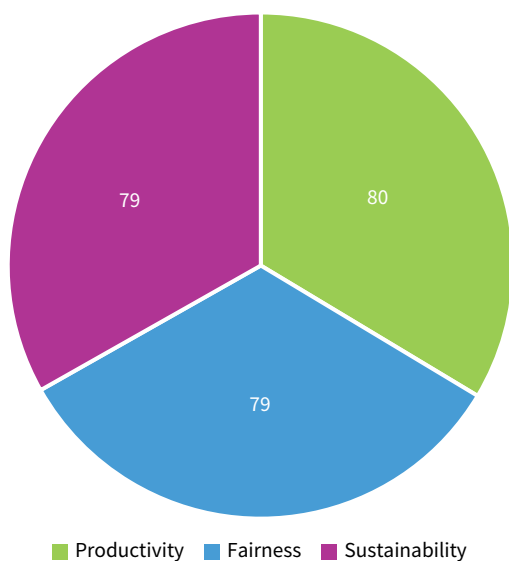
Finally, information from national authorities reveals, as for the other aspects covered in this chapter, that these authorities assessed involvement more favourably than social partner organisations did. National authorities from a total of 12 countries indicated a significant degree of influence of social partners (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, France, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Slovakia and Spain), which contradicts the assessment made by either employer or trade union organisations. National authorities' views in Croatia, Germany, Romania and Slovenia indicated a limited or relative influence by social partner organisations.

2 Involvement by categories of measures

This chapter analyses the involvement of social partners in the most relevant employment, social and economic policy measures included in the national RRP. The analysis covers employer organisations' and trade unions' participation in the consultation process, focusing on two main areas: (1) methods of involvement in the consultation process (information, consultation or agreement); and (2) social partners' satisfaction with the outcome of the consultation process.

A total of 217 measures (that is, reforms and policy actions) included in the national RRP of 26 Member States were selected by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents and, as much as possible, agreement was reached with the social partner representatives contacted. Based on their potential economic and social impact, a maximum of 10 measures were initially selected from each country and were grouped according to the three main policy dimensions of the RRP: fostering the digital transition and productivity; fairness; and environmental sustainability. As can be seen from Figure 1, the overall distribution of the measures is fairly balanced across these three dimensions. It is also worth mentioning that a small number of measures (21 in total) overlapped across different categories, so these measures are counted twice.

Figure 1: Proportion of total measures addressed by each policy dimension, %



Note: Some measures (21 in total) fell under more than one policy dimension, bringing the total to 238 measures.

Source: Authors' own compilation based on replies to questionnaires submitted by the Eurofound Network of Correspondents

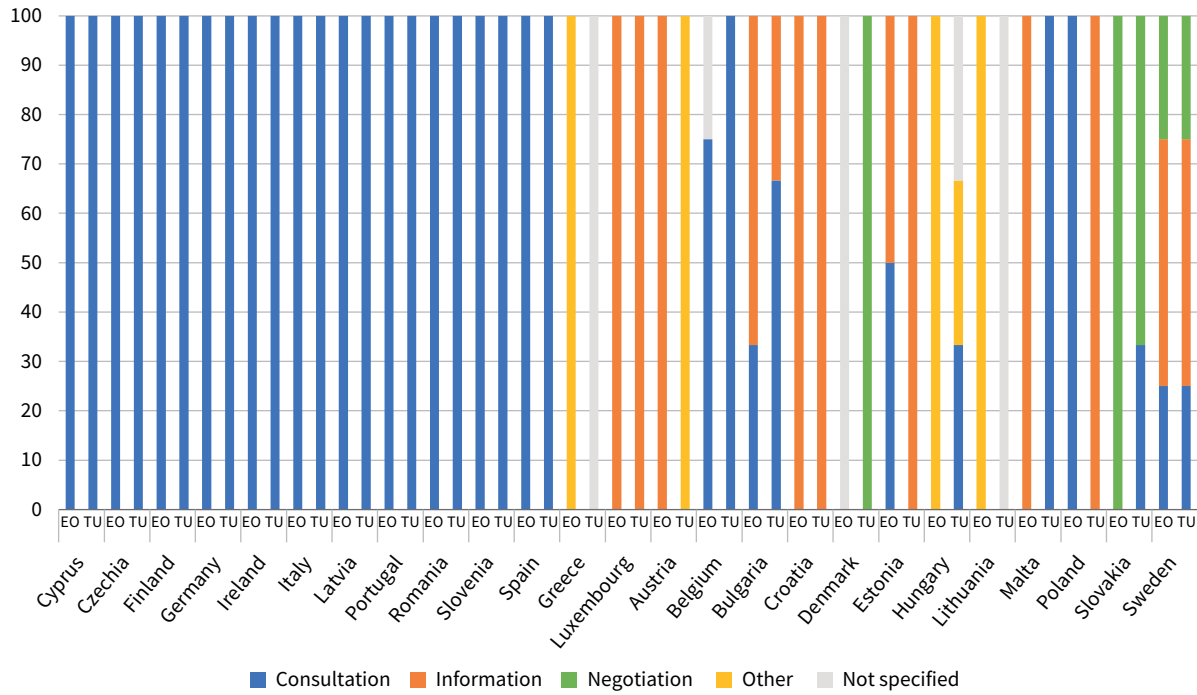
The results of the analysis presented below must be interpreted with caution, as a large part of the information provided in the social partners' replies to the questionnaires does not distinguish between different measures. In most cases, social partners' assessments were applied to all measures in the RRP and, consequently, a deeper analysis of the differences in social partners' involvement in the three policy areas was not possible.

Digital transition and productivity

Regarding social partners' methods of involvement in the consultation process on policy measures in the field of the digital transition and productivity, Figure 2 shows that consultation was the prevalent one for both employer organisations and trade unions. In 12 countries (Belgium, Cyprus, Czechia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Spain), consultation was reported as the main form of involvement by both social partners. Information was the main method of involvement in Croatia and Luxembourg, while negotiation was limited to Denmark, Slovakia and (partially, that is, only for some measures) Sweden. Other forms of involvement that were not specified were reported in Austria, Greece, Hungary and Lithuania.

Differences in the methods of involvement between employer organisations and trade unions were identified in several countries. In Poland, consultation was the prevalent form of involvement according to employer organisations, while trade unions reported information as the main form. Similarly, in Austria, employer organisations were involved through information, while unions reported not having been involved in this group of digitalisation measures. In Denmark, national employer confederations were not directly involved in the negotiations, but sectoral employer federations took part in the process along with union organisations. In Malta, it was reported that employer organisations were involved through information only, while trade unions were consulted. In Estonia, employer organisations were partially involved in consultation on measures, while the involvement of trade unions was limited to receiving information. In contrast, trade union organisations in Bulgaria were more involved through consultation than employer organisations. Sweden stands out as the only case in which social partners were involved to some extent via information, consultation and negotiation on the measures.

Figure 2: Methods of involvement in digital transition and productivity policy measures, %

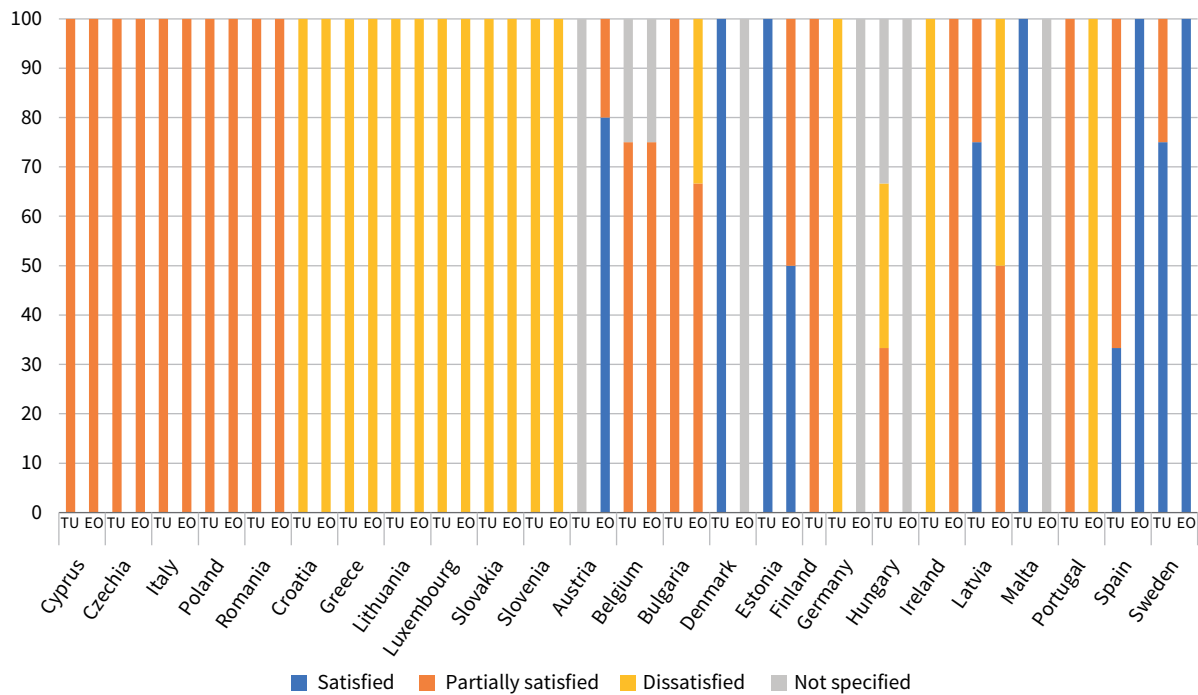


Notes: EO, employer organisations; TU, trade unions. Data were not available for the Netherlands, as it had not yet submitted its RRP at the time the study was carried out. In France, no measures were reported by the social partners in this policy field.

When considering the degree of social partners' satisfaction with the outcomes of their involvement in the productivity policy field (Figure 3), differences between employer organisations and trade unions exist within and between countries. Seven countries were identified in which both employer organisations and trade unions stated that they were partially satisfied with the outcome of the consultation (Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czechia, Italy, Poland and Romania). In another five countries, social partners agreed that the results of the consultation process were unsatisfactory (Croatia Lithuania, Luxembourg, Slovakia and Slovenia).

In the remaining countries, however, the picture is more complex, and diverging assessments were provided by employer organisations and trade unions. Social partners held opposite views in Ireland (employer organisations were partially satisfied while unions were dissatisfied) and in Portugal (unions were partially satisfied and employers were dissatisfied). In other cases, however, social partners provided a mixed assessment of their involvement, although there was a higher level of agreement when one of the social partners was fully satisfied with the outcome of the consultation, as in the cases of Estonia and Spain.

Figure 3: Satisfaction with the outcomes of involvement in digital transition and productivity policy measures, %



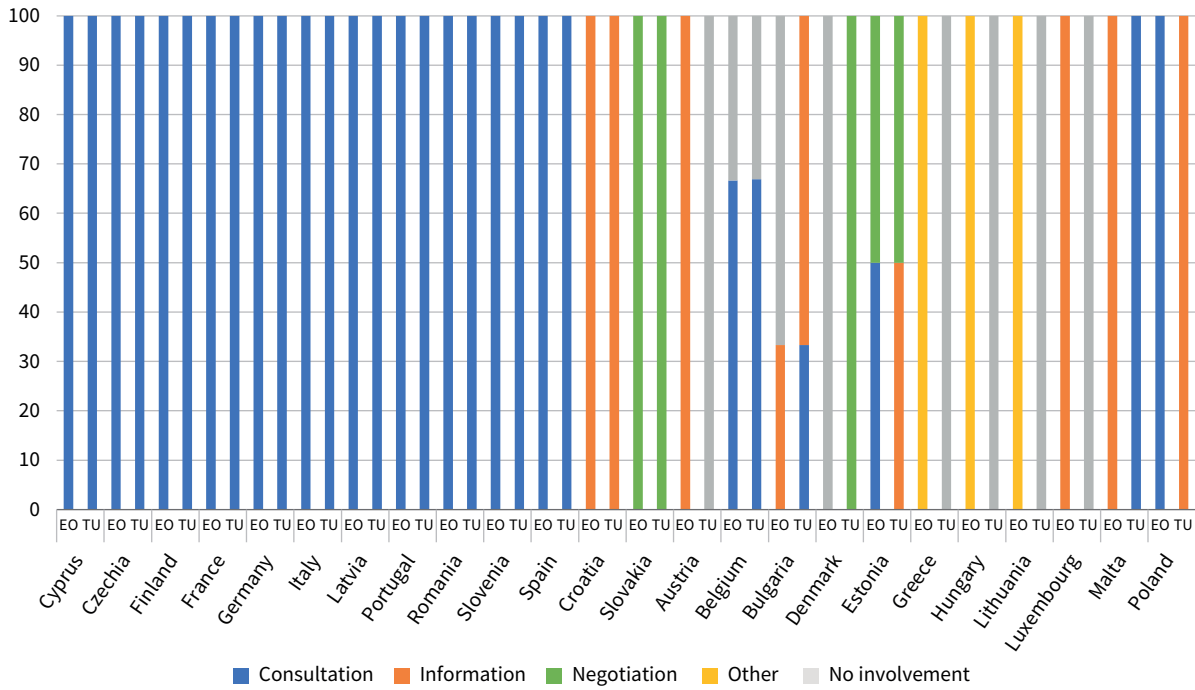
Notes: EO, employer organisations; TU, trade unions. Data were not available for the Netherlands, as it had not yet submitted its RRP at the time the study was carried out. In France, no measures were reported by the social partners in this policy field. For Finland, there was no information for employer organisations.

Fairness

Regarding social partners' methods of involvement in the consultation process on policy measures related to the fairness dimension of the RRP, Figure 4 shows that consultation was the prevalent form of involvement in most of the countries. In 12 countries (Belgium, Cyprus, Czechia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Spain), consultation was the main method of involvement of both social partners. Information was the only form of involvement for both social partners in Croatia and for employer organisations in Luxembourg, while negotiations on this type of measure were reported by both social partners in Slovakia and partially in Estonia. Other forms of involvement were reported in Greece, Hungary and Lithuania.

Differences in the methods of involvement of employer organisations and trade unions were identified in several countries. In Poland, the involvement of employer organisations was through consultation, while unions were involved only through information procedures. Similarly, in Austria, employer organisations were involved through information, while trade unions reported no form of involvement. In Malta, employer organisations were only provided with information, while trade unions reported having been consulted.

Figure 4: Methods of involvement in fairness policy measures, %

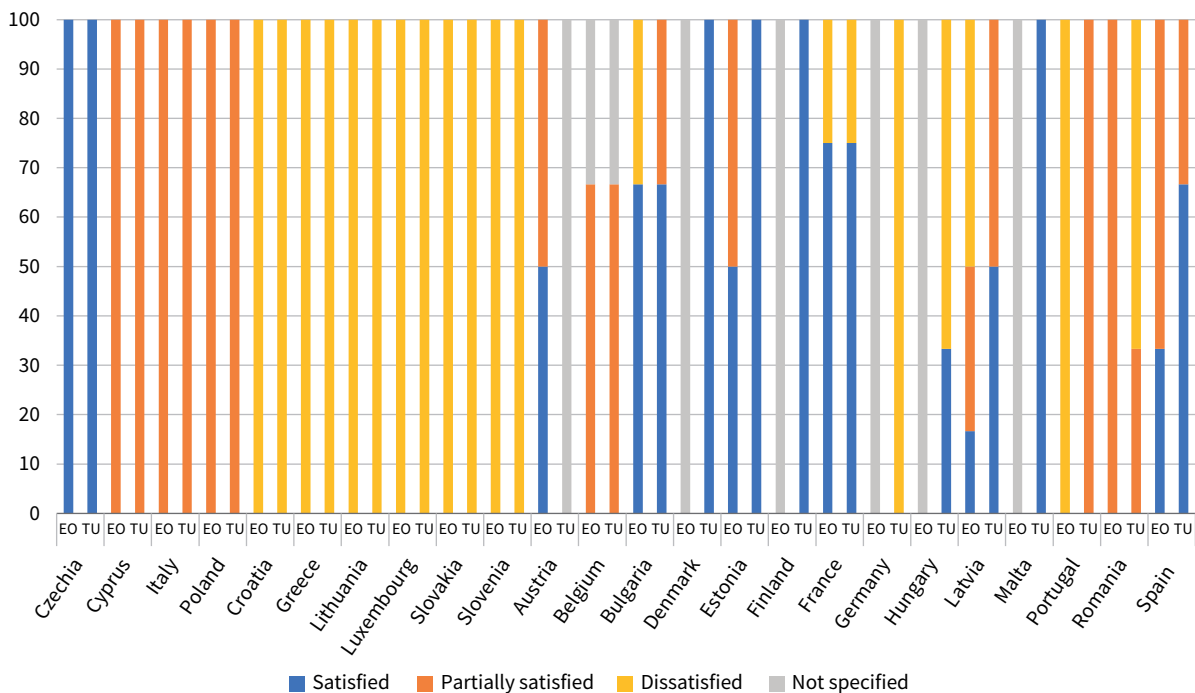


Notes: EO, employer organisations; TU, trade unions. Data were not available for the Netherlands, as it had not yet submitted its RRP at the time the study was carried out. In Ireland and Sweden, no measures were reported by the social partners in this policy field.

Regarding the degree of social partners' satisfaction with the outcomes of their involvement in the field of fairness (Figure 5), there are relevant differences across countries and between social partners. Only in Czechia

did both social partners report as satisfactory the outcome of the consultation. In Cyprus, Italy and Poland, both employer organisations and trade unions stated that they were partially satisfied with the

Figure 5: Satisfaction with the outcomes of involvement in fairness policy measures, %



Notes: EO, employer organisations; TU, trade unions. Data were not available for the Netherlands, as it had not yet submitted its RRP at the time the study was carried out. In Ireland and Sweden, no measures were reported by the social partners in this policy field.

outcome of the consultation. In six countries, social partners agreed that the outcome of the consultation was completely unsatisfactory (Croatia, Greece, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Slovakia and Slovenia). Despite the different views of social partners at national level, in Bulgaria, Estonia, France, Romania and Spain, both employer and trade union organisations agreed that they were satisfied or partially satisfied with the majority of the measures subject to consultation. Some levels of dissatisfaction were also reported in Bulgaria, France and Romania.

Sustainability

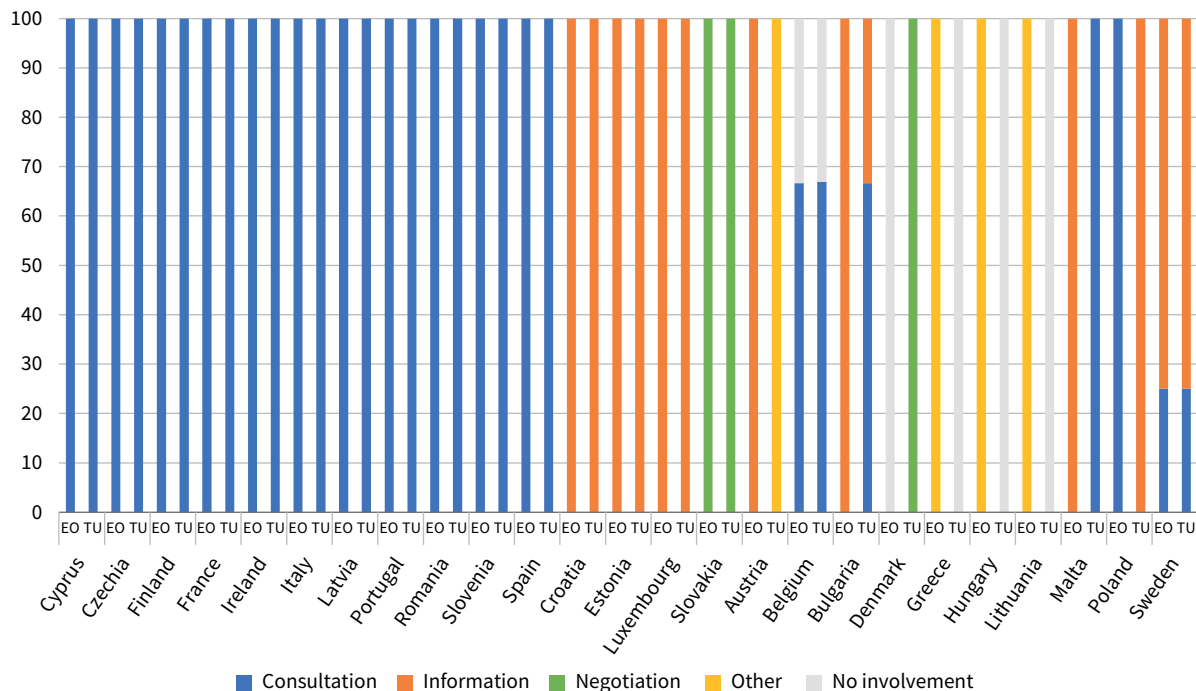
As in the two previous policy fields, the most prevalent method for the involvement of social partners in the development of measures related to environmental sustainability was consultation procedures. Figure 6 shows that, in 12 countries (Belgium, Cyprus, Czechia, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Spain), consultation was the main form of involvement for both employer

organisations and trade unions. Information was the only form of involvement for both social partners in Croatia, Estonia and Luxembourg, and it was also the main practice in Sweden, followed by consultation. Only in Slovakia did both social partners hold negotiations on the measures subject to consultation. Other forms of involvement were reported in Austria, Greece, Hungary and Lithuania.

Differences in the methods and the degree of involvement of employer organisations and trade unions were identified in various countries. In Poland, the involvement of employer organisations was through consultation, while unions were involved only in information procedures. Similarly, in Austria, employer organisations were involved through information procedures, while unions reported other forms of involvement.

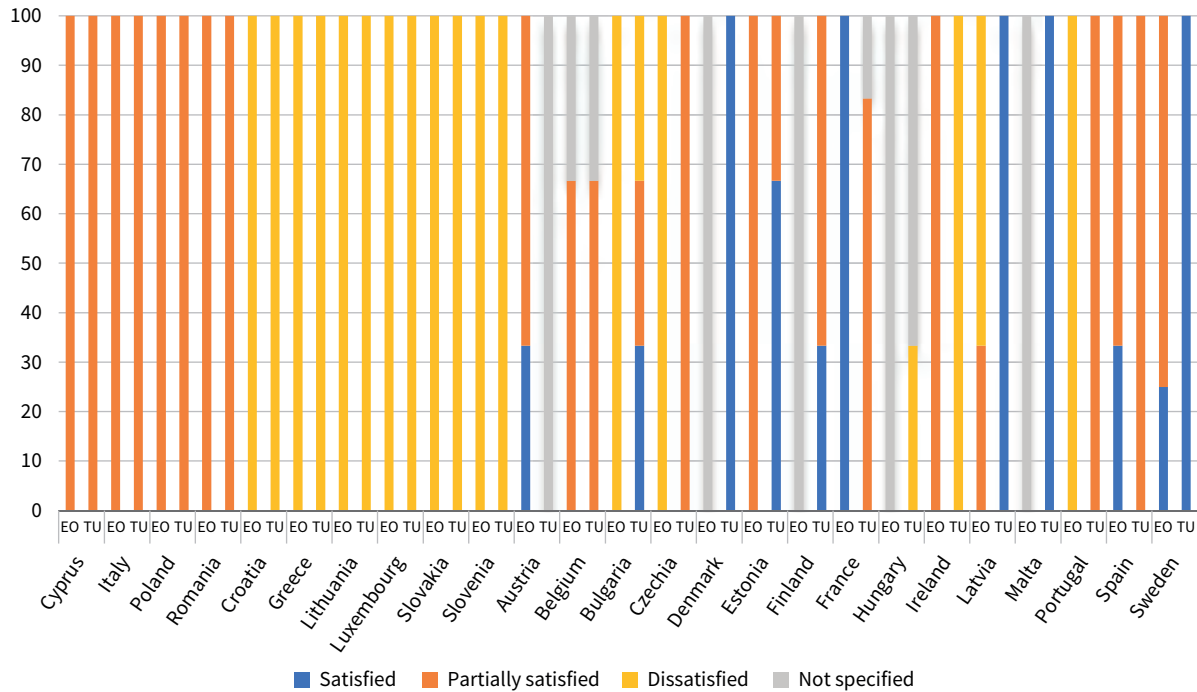
Differences between social partners were also found in the case of Bulgaria, where trade unions reported taking part in consultation on certain measures, while the involvement of employer organisations was restricted to receiving information.

Figure 6: Methods of involvement in sustainability policy measures, %



Notes: EO, employer organisations; TU, trade unions. Data were not available for the Netherlands, as it had not yet submitted its RRP at the time the study was carried out. In Germany, no measures were reported by the social partners in this policy field.

Figure 7: Satisfaction with the outcomes of involvement in sustainability policy measures, %



Notes: EO, employer organisations; TU, trade unions. Data were not available for the Netherlands, as it had not yet submitted its RRP at the time the study was carried out. In Germany, no measures were reported by the social partners in this policy field.

Figure 7 represents the degree of social partners' satisfaction with the outcomes of their involvement in the development of policy measures related to environmental sustainability. As already seen in the two previous policy areas, social partners' assessments differed across countries and between social partners. In four countries (Cyprus, Italy, Poland and Romania), both employer organisations and trade unions stated that they were partially satisfied with the outcome. By contrast, in six countries (Croatia, Greece, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Slovakia and Slovenia), both social partners agreed that the outcome of the process was unsatisfactory. Among countries in which social

partners' views differed, four countries were identified in which both social partners stated that they were satisfied or partially satisfied, to varying degrees, with the outcome of their involvement in the development of the measures (Estonia, France, Spain and Sweden). The countries in which social partners held opposite views on the outcomes of their involvement included Bulgaria and Latvia, where employer organisations reported that they were dissatisfied but trade unions did not, and Ireland, where employer organisations were partially satisfied with the outcomes but trade unions were dissatisfied.

3 Contextualised and more detailed assessment

The findings drawn from the methodology applied in this chapter raise questions about the overall quality of social partners' involvement in the design of the RRP. Overall, the results show that involvement is weak in many countries, as reported mainly by the social partners, although this finding is uneven across the EU and across the different types of consultation processes carried out.

These overall findings should be contextualised within the framework of national social dialogue practices and the impact that an unprecedented procedure such as the development of the RRP has had on national policymaking. A first caveat should be made concerning the term 'involvement in the design' of the RRP. While in some countries social partners understand this to mean close involvement from the very beginning, others consider the design of policy documents a government responsibility and feel that, while social consultation plays an essential role, it does not necessarily require participation in the drafting of policies.

This is particularly relevant in the case of preparing and consulting on such a comprehensive document as the RRP, which integrates a wide range of policies and investments, often far beyond the usual labour market and employment policies. In this regard, a lack on the part of the organisations themselves of the skills or capacity required for developing an effective consultation may be a handicap. Furthermore, in response to the questionnaires, the social partners stressed that there was no time or opportunity for consultation on each measure proposed in the RRP; therefore, the views expressed have a more general nature. In addition, the use of online public consultation platforms did not facilitate the role usually played by the social partners and potentially led to a situation in which trade unions and employer organisations were not distinguished from other organisations representing civil society and operating in various domains. Finally, even though it has not been specifically highlighted, the dimensions of work prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic – no in-person meetings, with only virtual meetings taking place – may also have influenced involvement.

In light of the above, it is therefore worthwhile to provide a more granular assessment, including details on social partners' involvement in the design of the RRP as provided by the actors themselves and bearing in mind that subjective expectations are mixed up with other factors that impact the effectiveness of national tripartite social dialogue.

Countries with positive assessment of involvement

Social partners in the Nordic countries generally felt that they had been meaningfully involved in the RRP. It should be noted that they considered their participation in the development of specific policy documents – such as the NRP in previous years – to have been rather limited, given their considerable experience of being closely involved in the design and implementation of labour market, employment and social reform policies. Hence, in **Finland**, in addition to attending official hearings and following a 'bottom-up' approach, the social partners organised meetings and proactively contacted the ministries. As they were aware of the highly political nature of the RRP and the funding involved, their engagement was extensive. Two of the peak-level trade unions (SAK and Akava) pointed out that employer organisations were involved to a greater degree than trade unions. However, this may have been related to the types of measures that the RRP involved, as many measures have stronger ties to businesses than to employees.

Similarly, in **Sweden**, social partners confirmed that they had been involved in the design and implementation of those parts of the plan that concerned their activities, particularly those related to the labour market. In **Denmark**, social partners were involved in specific settings, such as the climate partnerships and restart teams to discuss the RRP. Neither the trade union (FH) nor the employer organisation (DA) was directly involved in these meetings, but some sectoral organisations were, as were chief executive officers from large or notable Danish companies.¹⁵

¹⁵ Pages 230–232 of the RRP for Denmark include two sections on implementation and the consultation process, covering the involvement of the social partners. In addition, 'social partners' are mentioned on pages 8, 26, 40 and 172. In addition, individual unions are cited and the restart teams and climate partnerships are mentioned.

Social partners in other Member States also showed overall satisfaction with the quality of their involvement in the development of the RRP. This was the case in **Spain**, where participation in the RRP was assessed very positively by all actors involved, and in **Belgium**, at least at federal level (different – and apparently less satisfactory – consultation processes were held at regional level). The tight time frame of the process was highlighted as the main constraint, along with the relatively limited influence on the final version of the RRP. In **Czechia**, the overall quality of the involvement was satisfactory, as in previous years for the NRP. The only exception was in the environment field (the green transition), in which social partners, especially employer associations, were not satisfied with the level of their participation.

In **France**, the relatively weak score from the questionnaire may stem from the formally institutionalised procedure existing in that country. Nevertheless, the social partners that were consulted highlighted that they were heard on many of the measures discussed. Moreover, they were informed and consulted slightly sooner than in the previous exercises, and they were able to have exchanges with representatives of the various ministries involved in the measures contained in the RRP. In addition, the French Prime Minister organised three ‘social conferences’, in July and October 2020 and March 2021, to discuss the measures related to the labour market.

In **Bulgaria**, the social partners reported partial successes in respect of opportunities to influence the RRP after its official presentation on 30 October 2020, particularly in terms of the timely reaction and the work done by the Economic and Social Council, through which the representative employer organisations and trade unions made active contributions. It has been reported that, for the first time, a large number of the social partners’ proposals to improve the RRP were taken into account in the final version. This finding is consistent with previous results showing an

improvement in the quality of the social partners’ involvement in the European Semester.

In **Cyprus**, the consultation process was initiated in a timely manner, although the RRP development process did not provide for consultation on, a review of or feedback on the individual proposals of social partners. Nevertheless, owing to the timely process, there was time to review the draft RRP, at least for those social partners that requested a review and were able to submit additional comments and opinions.

Countries expressing dissatisfaction with involvement

In **Slovenia**, a special RRF expert committee to contribute to the RRP was established within the Economic and Social Council. However, both employer and trade union organisations were dissatisfied with the development process of the RRP. Social partners were involved only through information that the government provided to them about the priority areas and the measures planned in the RRP; they were not given the opportunity to influence the setting of priorities or the content of the measures. All three employer organisations (GZS, OZS and ZDOPS) noted that they mainly just received information about the measures and that there was no meaningful dialogue.

According to the social partners in **Hungary**, involvement was very limited and genuine consultation, including concrete feedback on any of the specific proposals provided, was lacking (Box 2). The largest cross-sectoral employer organisation (MGYOSZ) and the cross-sectoral trade union federations (LIGA, MOSZ, MASZSZ and SZEF) were not involved in a face-to-face consultation. They were able to express their opinions through a government e-consultation website or by sending an email, and were invited to take part in a National Economic and Social Council briefing in February 2021.¹⁶

¹⁶ The National Economic and Social Council is a macro-level social consultation body with contributions from employee and employer organisations, chambers of industry, civil organisations, and representatives of the sciences, the arts and official churches. The government takes part as an ‘invited party’.

Box 2: Social partners in Hungary unhappy with limited involvement

Although stakeholders were invited to provide comments initially on the brief outlines of draft components (these draft components were published one by one at different times), the draft RRP for Hungary was published on the government e-consulting 'partnership' website in mid-April 2021. Under the so-called RRP partnership (a wide-ranging partnership representing different areas of life, including culture, health, science and churches), six direct in-house consultations and one conference were held, mostly between the end of February and the end of April 2021. Prior to these events, a 13-page summary, a frequently-asked-questions page and a PowerPoint presentation on the topic were made available. The trade unions' and employer organisations' opinions and comments, which were publicly accessible on the e-consultation website, were based on the documentation available at the time. Therefore, even though it was possible to submit an opinion from December 2020, at that time a full draft or complete RRP was not yet available to comment on.

The social partners received information (verbally) in an online information session at the National Economic and Social Council briefing on 26 February 2021. In addition to the e-consultation organised by the government in the same month, this session provided an insight into EU resources in the National Economic and Social Council. In March 2021, at the Permanent Consultation Forum of the Private Sector and the Government (a tripartite cross-sectoral consultation body), social partners urged the government to speed up the real consultation on the RRP.

The full, 432-page draft of the RRP was available on the government's online consultation platform from 16 to 30 April 2021. Social partners could also send their opinions via email, but these emails were not publicly available.

The general public could access the final version of the RRP from 16 May 2021. According to the government, 467 stakeholders had been asked for their opinion in the consultation process and 88 organisations had made a comment; 36 organisations had expressed their opinion through the website and 52 organisations had done so by email. Interestingly, suggestions submitted by chambers, civil organisations, churches and even companies were incorporated into the final version, but no suggestions from the social partners themselves were included.

In **Slovakia**, a series of six thematic online consultations with a broad range of stakeholders, including the social partners, took place in March 2021. The social partners were invited to a formal discussion in April 2021, just before the deadline for submitting the RRP. However, according to the social partners, while all comments were taken into account, none were incorporated into the wording of the draft. An extraordinary meeting of the Economic and Social Council took place only two days before the government meeting at which the RRP was approved.

In **Greece**, social partners' involvement was limited to a public consultation on the RRP's strategic guidelines before its finalisation. In the context of the public consultation (held from 25 November to 20 December 2020), the national social partners (GSEE, GSEVEE, ESEE and SEV) and the Economic and Social Council submitted written opinions on and proposals for the RRP, to which the government replied in writing. Social partners' involvement in the RRP's formation was not significantly different from previous processes implemented in the development of the NRP in the European Semester.

In **Lithuania**, the government organised a public consultation process. The social partners referred to this as a public distribution of information and felt that their opportunities to exercise any influence on the content of the planned reforms and investments were minimal. Social partners agreed that, even if they had had the opportunity to express their views verbally in the public consultation, there was not enough time for the measures suggested to be analysed. All in all, they concluded that their involvement was weak and was less than in 2020 and 2019 for the development of the NRP in the context of the European Semester.

In **Romania**, following a debate organised by the new government with social actors, the social partners complained that they were less involved than civil society actors. According to the social partners, debates always took place together with civil society organisations and the time allotted for consultations was short, without in-depth discussions. The trade unions were the most dissatisfied with the process, and they sent an open letter complaining about the lack of social dialogue in the adoption of the RRP.

Box 3: Effect of change of government on preparation of the RRP

A change of government in a country may be a determining factor when it comes to social partners' involvement in the development of the RRP. For example, in **Italy**, two RRP proposals were prepared and presented to the parliament (one by the outgoing government on 15 January 2021 and another by the incoming government on 25 April 2021). The opinions and suggestions of the social partners were heard by the relevant parliamentary committees. Moreover, the social partners actively participated in the public debate about the measures to be included in the RRP. A legal act adopted by the government at the end of May 2021 (Law-Decree 77/2021) has defined a governance model for the implementation phase of the RRP, envisaging a consulting body with the participation of economic and social partners and other relevant stakeholders.

The October 2020 elections to the Seimas in **Lithuania** brought a fundamentally new government composition. The new government came into office that December and had to prepare a plan for the implementation of its programme along with the design of RRP measures. Similarly, legislative elections were held in **Romania** on 6 December 2020 and a new centre-right government came into office in January 2021.

In **Slovakia**, the RRP was prepared by a government elected in 2020. While social partners were not satisfied with their involvement in the development of the RRP, it is expected that the tripartite model will be implemented in the future, and that therefore their participation will be more in demand. This is evidenced by an increase in the frequency of the Economic and Social Council meetings (there were only two meetings in 2020, while in the first half of 2021 there had already been six meetings). In addition, in **Slovenia**, a new government came into office in March 2020. Since then, the institutionalised social dialogue through the Economic and Social Council has not evolved positively.¹⁷

Mixed views but overall social partner dissatisfaction

In **Germany**, the process of the development of the NRP has not changed in comparison with previous years – social partners were asked to comment on the draft NRP at the beginning of February 2021. However, the development of the RRP followed a different approach, and here diverging views emerge: while the German employer organisation (BDA) stated that it had been involved in an extensive exchange, the trade union DGB stated that the process had not been a 'true consultation process' and that its views had not been taken up by the Federal Ministry of Finance, which, in turn, stressed that DGB's views were taken on board in the final version of April 2021.

The government and the social partners were also found to have opposing views in **Austria**, where the latter stated that they had been only marginally involved in the process of the creation of the RRP. In turn, the federal government argued that the social partners' stances were taken into consideration and real involvement was enabled but that the timetable was too tight to launch a broader review process. Similarly, opinions fundamentally differed between the social partners and the national authorities in **Luxembourg**, where the former were unhappy with the

way in which they were involved in both the RRP and the NRP. The social partners stated that the quality of social dialogue was declining and that they had not been listened to, while government officials stated that social dialogue was still working well, even though the pandemic had brought about changes in negotiating methods.

In **Estonia**, the social partners felt that there had not been a meaningful consultation process and that instead their involvement had been in an information-sharing process in which the political decisions had already been made and the stakeholders were simply informed. However, there were measures included in both the NRP and the RRP that had been thoroughly negotiated with the social partners.

In **Poland**, social partners were involved in the working groups at an early stage through the development of preliminary fiches. However, those organisations that considered themselves strongly involved in this work (the trade union OPZZ and the employer confederation Lewiatan) stated that the outcomes of that work were not reflected in the draft RRP that was presented to the social partners for consultation in February 2021. The government did not refer to this early stage of activities in its description of the RRP consultation. Further phases of the consultation consisted of the draft being available on the government's website along with a

¹⁷ In May 2021, the Slovenian trade unions completely withdrew from the Economic and Social Council as a result of conflict on the tax reform prepared by the government without social dialogue. The unions noted that tripartite social dialogue had been at an all-time low since May 2020.

dedicated interactive form that enabled the submission of comments on specific parts of the document. The final version of the NRP contained information about the changes made to the RRP as a result of the public consultations. However, the changes were not attributed to particular groups; in other words, the proposals put forward by the social partners were not clearly identified. Therefore, social partners remained critical of their involvement in the RRP, particularly because they were consulted only a few days before the definitive version was submitted to the European Commission.

Different views between the social partners are not uncommon. For example, in **Ireland**, the employer organisation IBEC was partially satisfied with its involvement (although it had had limited influence on the RRP), while the trade union ICTU was dissatisfied, noting that it did not have access to the details of the RRP. Tellingly, the trade union stressed that it had been consulted and involved even less than in 2020 for the NRP – when it was given only 24 hours to comment on the draft – and significantly less than in previous years as well. Nevertheless, the government gave a positive assessment of the consultation process.

Opposite views were also highlighted in **Portugal**. The employer organisations CCP and CIP were dissatisfied with their involvement, while the trade unions CGTP and UGT were partially satisfied. However, none of the social partners felt that they had participated in the design at an early stage, and all of them stressed that they had had a limited influence on the outcome.

In **Latvia**, both social partners considered that the quality of their involvement in the development of the RRP was not satisfactory at the beginning of the process but improved after the first draft was submitted, as a result of their continuing insistence on being heard. They stressed that they received documents very late and did not have sufficient time to read drafts and to prepare comments. However, the social partners' opinions slightly differed: trade unions were more satisfied with their involvement than employer organisations, and they acknowledged that some of their views were implemented in the final version.

In **Malta**, both social partners stated that there had not been enough time allotted during the consultation process and that more meetings should have been held. According to the Malta employer organisation (MEA), it was only after social partners expressed their dissatisfaction that further meetings were held to take on board social partners' views on how budgets for the measures were to be allocated (rather than on the content of the measures per se). However, these meetings were held after the RRP was submitted to the European Commission on 13 July 2021. Social partners also hold relatively divergent views on their degrees of involvement, with the MEA stating that the process had leaned more towards information sharing, while the trade union (GWU) representative stated that the involvement process included both information sharing and consultation.

4 Social dialogue and social partner involvement in 2021

The 2020 COVID-19 outbreak did not allow social dialogue to unfold as usual, although it is widely agreed that social dialogue worked very well, particularly during the second half of the year. This cooperative environment made possible fruitful agreements among employer organisations, trade unions and worker representatives on implementing anti-crisis social and economic measures at company and workplace levels, usually with institutional and financial support from governments. In contrast to the weak participation of social partners in the preparation of the RRP, this constructive spirit of dialogue mostly continued during 2021, even though diverging views emerged in some countries concerning the focus and approach of the recovery measures put in place or the duration of measures supporting the income and social protection of workers. Since, at the time of writing, the pandemic is not yet over and uncertainty exists regarding the implications of further waves and the effectiveness of the vaccination programmes, the full potential of recovery policies cannot yet be seen. This is also reflected in social partner debates at national level.

According to information from the COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch database,¹⁸ social dialogue processes continued to go smoothly in most EU Member States in 2021, in the aftermath of the 2020 pandemic period. In half of the new recorded cases of governments passing legislation or implementing other (non-binding) texts between January and November 2021, social partners were involved in the design phase of these measures in

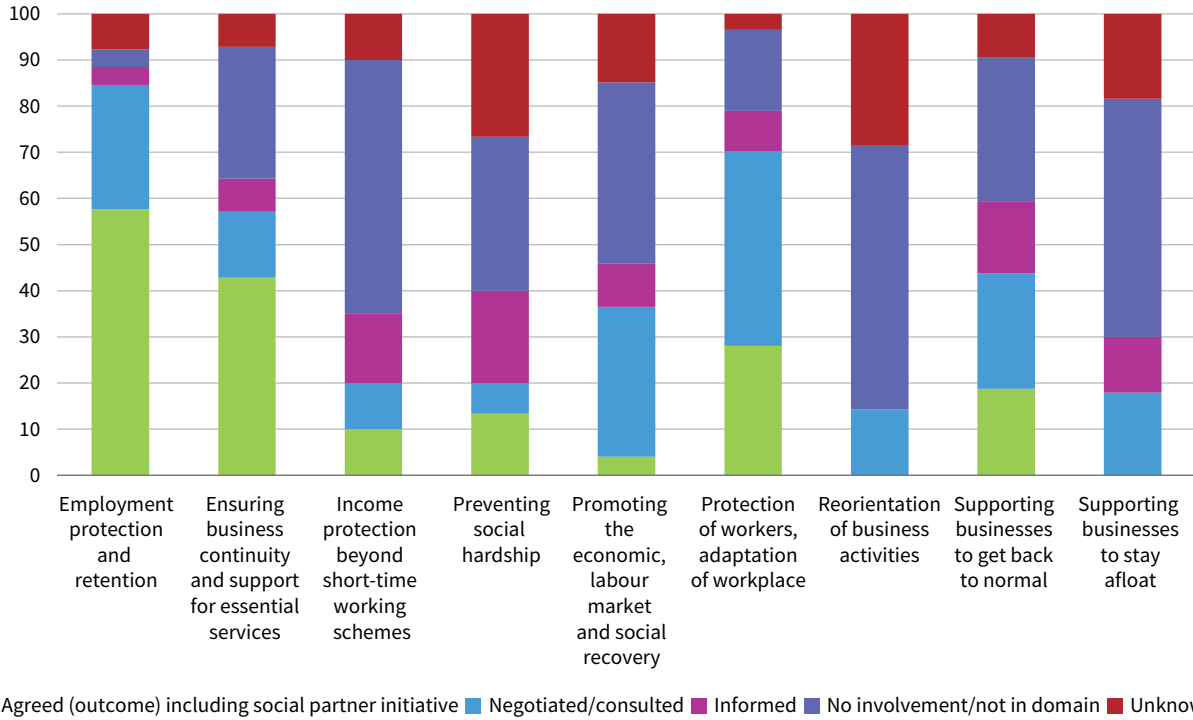
some way beyond simply being informed.¹⁹ This means that they were consulted, negotiated with governments or ultimately even approved the measure. The quality and intensity of these various types of involvement differ between countries and even within the same country, depending on each specific measure.

Figure 8 shows how this involvement varies by thematic area. The highest degree of social partner involvement was found in the area of employment protection and retention, which includes to a high degree income protection schemes for employees (for example, short-time working schemes). Interestingly, the category of measures aimed at ensuring business continuity and support for essential services also saw a high degree of social partner involvement, most likely as a result of the economic recovery in 2021. The lowest degree of involvement was found in measures aimed at promoting economic and social recovery, the reorientation of business activities and supporting businesses to stay afloat, although in these cases employer organisations reported having been more involved than worker representatives owing to the nature of the policies applied (most of them financial). The types of measures undertaken throughout 2021 were relatively different from those in 2020, as some of them were continuations of measures that already existed, while others were more recovery oriented. This reflects the different approaches and priorities of social partners and governments in the social dialogue arena.

¹⁸ Eurofound's COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch database maps policy measures, collective agreements and company practices by governments, social partners and others to cushion the socioeconomic effects of the COVID-19 crisis. It contains more than 1,200 measures adopted and includes information on how trade unions and employer organisations have been involved in the design of these policy measures. As the situation evolves, measures are newly implemented, changed or cancelled and replaced at rapid speed. For this reason, the database is regularly updated, and quality control checks are in place.

¹⁹ Only those cases for which information was available and that were considered in the social partners' domain in principle were included.

Figure 8: Forms of involvement of social partners in the design of policy measures to cushion the socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, %



Note: Figure represents 229 cases of legislation/recommendations and tripartite agreements collected between January 2021 and 19 November 2021.

Source: Eurofound, COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch database

5 | Conclusions and policy pointers

Conclusions

Overall limited and partial involvement

- Based on the methodology applied and the answers provided, the analysis shows that national social partners were involved in some way in the preparation of the RRP, through a variety of settings and a greater range of procedures than in previous years. However, the quality of the involvement was uneven and fairly weak in a relatively high number of countries.
- Overall, the social partners believed that the consultation process could have been better planned and organised. Shortcomings and deficiencies regarding timeliness and meaningfulness were widely reported across Member States.
- These results, based on views gathered from the social partners, should be contextualised against the backdrop of the uniqueness of the preparation of the RRP and the overall framework and effectiveness of national social dialogue. The design and preparation of the RRP was a complex and demanding task for governments that may have lowered the quality standards of consultation in some Member States and particularly may not have met social partners' expectations of involvement in the design of the document.
- The complex nature and structure of the RRP – with a high number of headline categories and subcategories – may have limited the understanding of and involvement in the process. The investments discussed could cover a variety of the diverse policy measures addressed – for example, digitalisation and the green transition – as one measure could support several goals. This could partially explain the social partners' negative assessments, which, in some countries, contrasted with other, more positive indicators and the overall positive performance of tripartite social dialogue.

Developments in settings for involvement

- In most cases, involvement was based on formal consultation, either on an institutional basis (existing tripartite bodies and ad hoc settings and meetings) or via bilateral direct contacts and working meetings with government representatives. When comparing involvement in the RRP with that in the NRP in previous years, some new institutional features concerning the procedure were reported.
- The national authorities that led involvement in the RRP, namely ministries of finance, were different from those for the NRP, with a rather secondary role for labour authorities (ministries of labour). These changes brought about new arenas in which social partners needed to operate, different procedures and new contact persons for social partners to become familiar with.
- There was a greater number of meetings for the RRP than for the NRP. Formally, the time span for the preparation and submission of the RRP was longer than that allotted for consultation on the NRP in previous years. This longer window should have theoretically provided more opportunities for further contacts and meetings, even though they were online.
- There was a greater variety of mechanisms for involving the social partners in the RRP than for the NRP. Governments set up a wider range of mechanisms for involvement in the RRP, from ad hoc settings to specific websites aimed at covering actors and groups representing wider society.
- Social partners submitted contributions to the drafting of the RRP on dedicated online platforms for public consultation put in place by governments. However, social partners criticised the fact that these open forms of collecting and sharing information did not allow for a meaningful consultation process, arguing that their organisations, unlike other stakeholders in the policymaking process, should play a privileged role with regard to employment and social policies.

- Most social partners reported that they had been involved on an equal footing. The involvement process in the RRP was more open than that of the NRP in previous years. Given the ample range of policy reforms affected by the RRP, sectoral organisations were also involved, depending on the measures discussed during the policymaking for the RRP. Contact and consultations took place with business representatives, as a variety of the types of measures set out in the RRP (for example, investments in green energy) require cooperation and partnership with private businesses.

Uneven and overall weak involvement

- The policymaking method of the RRP was fairly different from the methodology for preparing the NRP in previous years. However, this did not provide for better involvement of the social partners and in some cases there was a rather lower level of satisfaction among the social partners. In some countries, the consultations related to the RRP and to the NRP overlapped, which raises questions on the need to better coordinate the policymaking of both key documents.
- A lack of sufficient time allotted to consultation remained the most widely shared issue among social partners and was an issue even shared by a few national authorities. This is somewhat paradoxical, as the time span for the preparation of the RRP was longer than that for the NRP. The restrictions brought about by the COVID-19 crisis seemed to have had little effect on the process of involvement.
- The quality and intensity of the exchange during the consultation process left much to be desired. In only a few countries did the social partners report having received feedback on their contribution to the RRP, while in most countries (15 in total) both employer organisations and trade unions said that they had not received an adequate response from national authorities.
- While the RRF Regulation and guidelines issued by the European Commission asked Member States to reflect the views of the social partners in the RRP – that is, to provide more than just a summary of the consultation activities – this study found that this requirement was met in only a few plans. Most of the RRP that were submitted only briefly described the milestones in the consultation process and listed all of the stakeholders involved, without making explicit the social partners' views. Given the complex structure and the length of the RRP, this shortcoming should be interpreted with caution, as social partners' views may have been partially scattered through other sections of the RRP.

- Overall, national social partners were dubious about their ability to have an impact on the RRP. Findings show 12 countries in which social partners agreed that they had a limited or relative influence on the RRP. Overall, trade unions were less confident in their influence than employer organisations. By contrast, national authorities were much more positive and believed that social partners' views had more influence than trade unions and employer organisations themselves believed. This assessment applies to all categories of the quality dimensions analysed.
- Both types of social partners tended to have broadly similar perceptions of the quality of their involvement in the preparation of the RRP, although there were disagreements between employer organisations and trade unions about their participation in discussions with the government regarding specific policies measures. In addition, it should be noted that diverging views or at least nuanced differences of opinion often arise among employer organisations or trade unions in the same country in those industrial relations systems with a plurality of organisations.

Forward-looking insights

- Depending on the financial allocation and impact of the RRP in relation to national budgets, the approach to the preparation of the RRP and, consequently, the involvement of the social partners varies significantly. For example, some social partners considered that the RRP could be viewed as a sort of summary of pre-existing initiatives, rather than a list of new measures, while others saw the RRP as a real opportunity to mobilise resources through a set of investments affecting the national economic model and providing new policies for the next generation.
- Although the social partners showed overall dissatisfaction with their involvement in the design of the RRP, they claimed that they maintained a willingness to engage in further consultation processes during the implementation of the policy measures and reforms approved. In this regard, social partners stressed that the country reports issued by the European Commission in the context of the European Semester framed the discussion on the implementation of national reforms and investments, allowing social partners to exchange ideas and contribute to the RRP using a sound baseline.

Policy pointers

- The 2022 European Semester cycle represents a key milestone for implementing the policy reforms and investments to which Member States committed to in the RRP. The meaningful involvement of social partners in the implementation of the RRP is essential for fostering domestic ownership and for improving the effectiveness of the policy actions and reforms envisaged.
- As stated in the Employment Guidelines, good-quality and effective involvement of the social partners should include timely and meaningful consultation, with governments providing feedback on the contributions made and improving the visibility of the exchanges.
- The recent developments in Ukraine are having, and will have, a severe economic and social impact in the EU, in addition to the detrimental effects on society and human rights. While it is expected that the conflict will further complicate the EU's economic recovery from the pandemic, integrating the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) into the European Semester process represents a key instrument to face the multidimensional negative effects of the emerging crisis.
- Social partners' involvement in the implementation of the RRP increases the effectiveness of the structural reforms needed to achieve fair and inclusive sustainable economic growth and to ensure social recovery, particularly vis à vis the expected lowering of growth and rising inflation resulting from the Ukrainian war conflict.
- Social partners' engagement in the policy actions and reforms embedded in the RRP is crucial for boosting the implementation of the twin transition goals, green and digital, and also to ensure social resilience – when Europe is faced with the biggest refugee crisis since World War II – while supporting the deployment of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan. To achieve this engagement, social dialogue should be used as the key tool for building partnerships to deal with the challenges ahead stemming from the war crisis.
- Closely monitoring the implementation of the RRP and being required to carry out more detailed reporting on the quality of the involvement of national social partners in the implementation of the reforms and investments approved will ensure a more effective EU and Member State response to the challenges brought about by the Ukrainian conflict.

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Annexes

Annex 1: List of organisations contacted

Member State	Employer organisations	Trade union organisations	National authorities
Austria	Federal Economic Chamber (WKO)	Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB) Chamber of Labour Vienna (AK Wien)	Federal Chancellery (BKA)
Belgium	Federation of Enterprises in Belgium (VBO/FEB) Walloon Federation of Agriculture (FWA) Union of the Middle Classes (UCM) Belgian Federation for the Chemicals Industry and Life Sciences Sector (essenscia)	Confederation of Christian Trade Unions (ACV/CSC) General Confederation of Liberal Trade Unions of Belgium (ACLVB/CGSLB) General Labour Federation of Belgium (FGTB)	Cabinet of the State Secretary for Scientific Policy, Recovery Programme and Strategic Investments
Bulgaria	Bulgarian Industrial Capital Association (BICA) Bulgarian Industrial Association (BIA)	Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria (CITUB)	Ministry of Finance (MF) Council of Ministers Administration (CMA) Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP)
Croatia	Croatian Employers' Association (CEA)	Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia (UATUC) Independent Trade Unions of Croatia (ITUC) Matrix of Croatian Trade Unions (Matrix)	Prime Minister's Office responsible for the implementation of the European Semester
Cyprus	Employers and Industrialists Federation (OEB) Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI)	Cyprus Workers' Confederation (SEK) Pancyprian Civil Servants, Trade Union (PASYDY) Pancyprian Federation of Labour (PEO) Democratic Labour Federation of Cyprus (DEOK)	Ministry of Welfare and Social Insurance (MLWSI) Directorate-General for European Programmes, Coordination and Development (DGEPD)
Czechia	Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic (SP ČR)	Czech-Moravian Confederation of Trade Unions (ČMKOS)	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic (MPSV ČR)
Denmark	Confederation of Danish Employers (DA)	Danish Trade Union Confederation (FH)	Ministry of Employment
Estonia	Estonian Employers' Confederation (ETKL)	Estonian Trade Union Confederation (EAKL)	Ministry of Finance Government Office
Finland	Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK)	Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions (SAK) Confederation of Unions for Professional and Managerial Staff in Finland (Akava) Finnish Confederation of Professionals (STTK)	Ministry of Finance
France	Movement of the Enterprises of France (MEDEF)	French Democratic Confederation of Labour (CFDT) General Confederation of Labour (CGT)	Prime Minister's Office
Germany	German Employers' Association (BDA)	German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) German Civil Service Federation (Dbb)	Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi) Federal Ministry of Finance (BMF)
Greece	Hellenic Federation of Enterprises (SEV) Hellenic Confederation of Professionals, Craftsmen & Merchants (GSEVEE) Hellenic Confederation of Commerce & Entrepreneurship (ESEE)	Greek General Confederation of Labour (GSEE)	Ministry of Finance

Member State	Employer organisations	Trade union organisations	National authorities
Hungary	National Association of Employers and Entrepreneurs (VOSZ) Employers' group of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) Confederation of Hungarian Employers and Industrialists (MGYOSZ)	Hungarian Trade Union Confederation (MASZSZ) Forum for the Co-operation of Trade Unions (SZEF) Democratic Trade Union of Crèche Employees (BDDSZ) Democratic Confederation of Free Trade Unions (LIGA) Teachers' Union (PSZ) Independent Trade Union of Health Workers (FESZ) National Federation of Workers' Councils (MOSZ) Hungarian Civil Servants and Public Employees (MKSZ)	Ministry of Innovation and Technology (ITM)
Ireland	Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC)	Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)	Department of An Taoiseach/Prime Minister
Italy	n/a	n/a	n/a
Latvia	Employers' Confederation of Latvia (LDDK)	Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia (LBAS)	Ministry of Finance
Lithuania	Lithuanian Confederation of Industrialists (LPK)	Lithuanian Trade Union Solidarumas (LPSS) Lithuanian Trade Union Confederation (LPSK)	Ministry of Social Security and Labour Ministry of Finance
Luxembourg	Business Federation Luxembourg (FEDIL) Union of Luxembourg Enterprises (UEL)	Luxembourg Christian Trade Unions Federation (LCGB)	Ministry of the Economy
Malta	Malta Employers' Association (MEA)	General Workers' Union (GWU)	n/a
Netherlands	n/a	n/a	n/a
Poland	Polish Confederation Lewiatan (Lewiatan) Polish Craft Association (ZRP) Employers of Poland (Pracodawcy RP)	All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions (OPZZ) Independent Self-governing Trade Union Solidarity (Solidarity)	Ministry of Development and Technology
Portugal	Confederation of Portuguese Industry (CIP) Portuguese Trade and Services Confederation (CCP)	General Confederation of Portuguese Workers (CGTP) General Union of Workers (UGT)	Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security (MTSSS) Office for Strategy and Planning (GEP)
Romania	General Union of Romanian Industrialists (UGIR) Concordia Employers' Confederation (Concordia)	National Trade Union Confederation (Cartel ALFA) National Trade Union Confederation Meridian (CSN Meridian)	Ministry of External Affairs Ministry of European Investments and Projects
Slovakia	Federation of Employer Associations (AZZZ SR) National Union of Employers (RUZSR)	Confederation of Trade Unions of the Slovak Republic (KOZZ SR) Association of Industrial Unions (APZ)	Ministry of Finance
Slovenia	Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia (GZS) Chamber of Craft and Small Business of Slovenia (OZS) Association of Employers in Craft and Small Business of Slovenia (ZDOPS)	Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia (ZSSS) Confederation of Trade Unions of Slovenia (PERGAM)	Ministry of Finance (SVRK) Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (MDDSZ)
Spain	Spanish Confederation of Employers' Organisations (CEOE)	Workers' Commissions (CCOO) General Union of Workers (UGT)	Ministry of Economic Affairs and Digital Transformation
Sweden	Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR)	Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations (Saco)	n/a

Note: The social partners listed provided their views on the topic as part of the preparation of the report. Other social partners were contacted but declined to participate in the study. In some cases, more than one person per organisation was interviewed. In addition, other government representatives, European Semester officers and experts were also interviewed.

Annex 2: Network of Eurofound Correspondents

Correspondents who contributed to the study

Country	Contributor	Organisation
Austria	Bernadette Allinger	Working Life Research Centre (FORBA)
Belgium	Dries van Herreweghe	HIVA – Research Institute for Work and Society, KU Leuven
Bulgaria	Lyuben Nenchev Tomev	Institute of Social and Trade Union Research (ISTUR)
Croatia	Predrag Bejaković	Institute of Public Finance
Cyprus	Pavlos Kalosinatos	Cyprus Labour Institute (INEK-PEO)
Czechia	Soňa Veverková	Research Institute for Labour and Social Affairs
Denmark	Mikkel Mailand and Maria Hansen	Employment Relations Research Centre (FAOS), University of Copenhagen
Estonia	Ingel Kadarik	Praxis Centre for Policy Studies
Finland	Amanda Kinnunen	Oxford Research AB
France	Frédéric Turlan	IR Share
Germany	Sandra Vogel and Axel Hauser-Ditz	Institute for Economic and Social Research, Hans Boeckler Foundation
Greece	Elena Kousta	Labour Institute of the Greek General Confederation of Labour (INE-GSEE)
Hungary	Nóra Krokovay	Kopint-Tárki Institute for Economic Research
Ireland	Andy Pendergast	IRN Publishing
Italy	Roberto Pedersini	Department of Social and Political Science, University of Milan
Latvia	Krišs Karnītis	EPC Ltd
Lithuania	Inga Blažienė	Lithuanian Social Research Centre
Luxembourg	Franz Clément	Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research
Malta	Christine Garzia	University of Malta
Poland	Barbara Surdykowska	Foundation Institute of Public Affairs
Portugal	Maria da Paz Lima	Friedrich Ebert Foundation (Lisbon)
Romania	Raluca Dimitriu	European Institute of Romania (IER)
Slovakia	Ludovit Cziria	Institute for Labour and Family Research
Slovenia	Barbara Lužar	Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana
Spain	Oscar Molina	Institute for Labour Studies, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
Sweden	Anna-Karin Gustafsson	Oxford Research AB

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This report examines the quality of the national social partners' involvement in designing and implementing reforms and policies in the context of the European Semester cycle and in the preparation of the national reform programmes. Within the framework of NextGenerationEU, Member States in 2021 prepared and submitted recovery and resilience plans (RRPs) aimed at making European economies and societies more sustainable and resilient, as well as better prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the green and digital transitions. Social partners reported that, despite their obligatory involvement in the preparation and implementation of the RRPs, the consultation process could have been better planned and organised, as the quality and intensity of involvement in a number of countries were quite low. This situation could be improved by ensuring more timely and meaningful involvement of social partners in the implementation of the RRPs. This would not only boost ownership in the process but also enhance the effectiveness of the policy actions and reforms envisaged.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) is a tripartite European Union Agency established in 1975. Its role is to provide knowledge in the area of social, employment and work-related policies according to Regulation (EU) 2019/127.

