SOCIAL GREEN DEAL – Role and prospects for industrial relations and social dialogue in green transition management of local economic systems

National baseline report: Belgium

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Contents

1.Introduction

This report is a baseline overview of the particularities of Belgium as a participant country in the Social Green Deal project. Our focus here is on labour relations and social dialogue as an integral part of the transition to a greener future. Nevertheless, we begin with some general introductory facts about Belgium in section 2, and the Belgian population in section 3, before delving into the economy in section 4. Available documentation on the green transition and social sustainability is presented in section 5. Section 6 is a quick overview of relevant sustainable development indicators, while section 7 contains a more thorough discussion of social dialogue and industrial relations in Belgium, where we discuss some practical applications.

2.General information about the country

The Kingdom of Belgium is situated in north-western Europe, surrounded by the Netherlands to the north, Germany to the east, Luxembourg to the southeast, France to the southwest and the North Sea to the northwest. The port of Antwerp with access to the North Sea plays a crucial function as a gateway to Europe. As a European port it is only second to the nearby port of Rotterdam in terms of total freight shipped. The Brussels Capital Region in particular is highly internationalised. The capital city of Brussels is ranked among the top twenty global cities by the Kearney 2022 Global Cities Report. Brussels is host to many of the key institutions of the European Union as well as the headquarters of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Belgium is part of a region known as the Low Countries, which

includes the current Benelux countries (Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg), but historically also included small parts of the bordering regions of France and Germany. The climate is maritime temperate; and there is significant precipitation year-round.

3.Population

3.1. General information about the population

Belgium (population 11.6 million) has a complex institutional structure dominated along regional and linguistic dimensions with the three highly autonomous regions of Flanders (population 6.7 million), Wallonia (population 3.6 million) and the Brussels Capital Region (population 1.2 million). While Flanders is the main Dutch-speaking region, Wallonia the French-speaking region and the Brussels Capital Region officially bi-lingual in Dutch and French, there is also a small German-speaking area in the eastern cantons along the border with Germany.

3.2. Education of the population

Just over half of 25-34 year-olds in Belgium have a tertiary education, which places Belgium in the top half of the OECD countries in this regard (OECD, 2022). While compulsory education begins at age 6 and ends at age 17, more than 90% of the population is in school between the ages of 3 and 17 (ibid.).

3.3. Qualitative and quantitative data of employment

To be completed

4.Economy of the country

4.1. Main characteristics of the economy

4.2. Application of the green economy

Table 1. General indicators Belgium

Population, 2021 (Eurostat)	11 554 767

Workforce, "active population", (aged 20-64), 2020 (Eurostat)	4 954 900
Employment, 2020 (Eurostat)	70%
Real GDP aggregates per capita, 2020 (Eurostat [SDG_08_10])	€ 33 880
Collective bargaining coverage, 2019 (OECD.Stat)	96%
Union density, 2019 (OECD.Stat)	49,1%

Figure 1: Trade union density Belgium

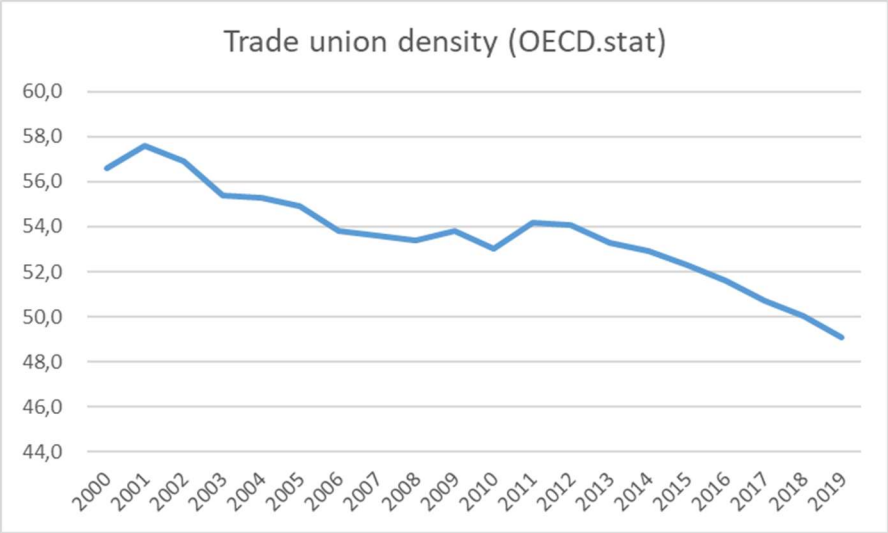


Figure 2: Employment rate Belgium

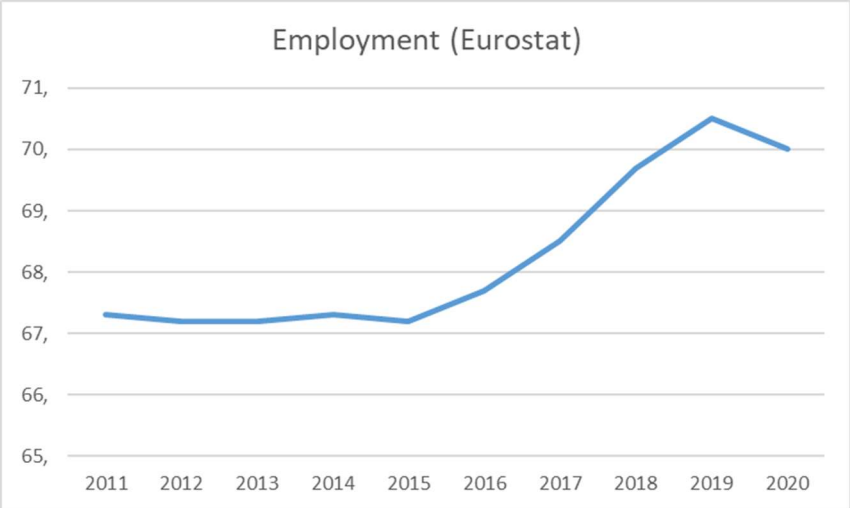
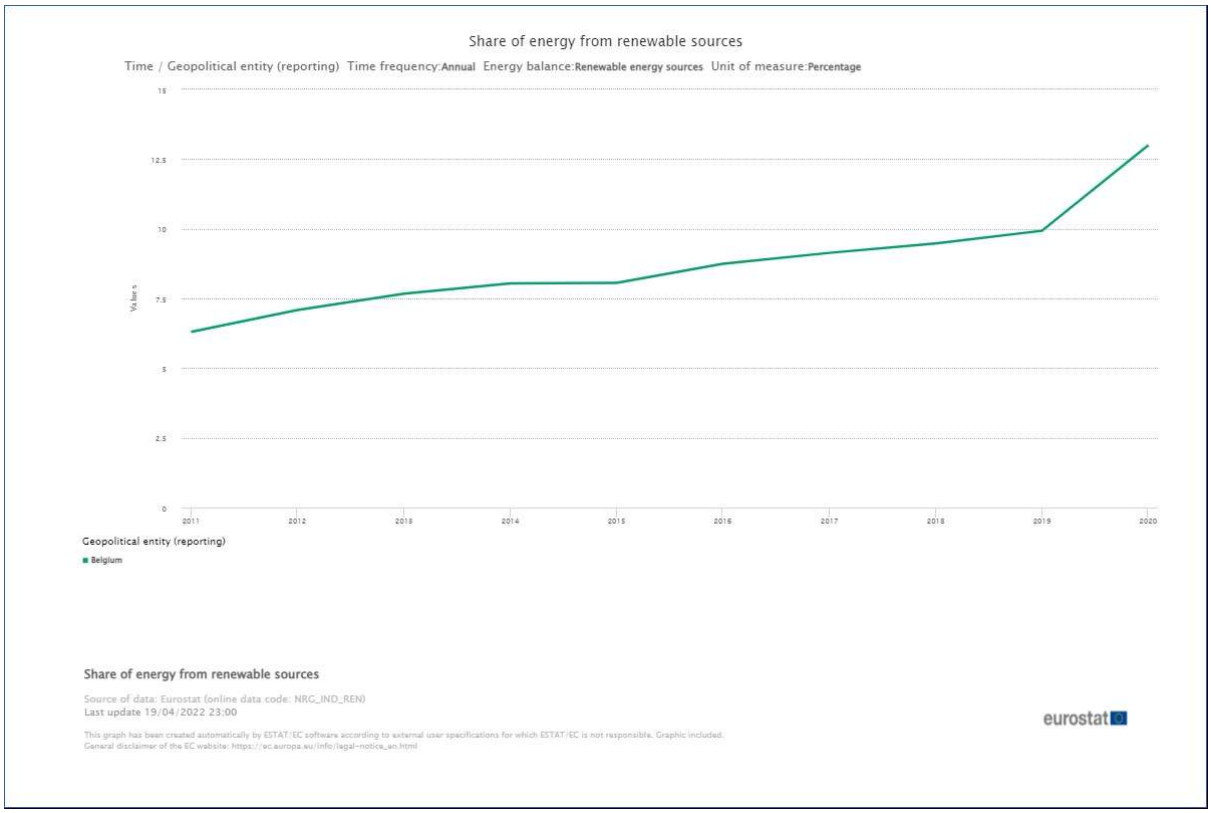


Table 2. Green indicators Belgium

Share of renewable energy, 2020 (Share of energy from renewable sources Eurostat [nrg_ind_ren])	13%
Net greenhouse gas emissions, 2020 (Eurostat [SDG_13_10])	75,2
Total emissions excluding LULUCF, 2019 (Tonnes of CO2 equivalent, Thousands) (Dataset OECD Greenhouse gas emissions)	116 651,49

Total emissions including LULUCF, 2019 (Tonnes of CO2 equivalent, Thousands) (Dataset OECD Greenhouse gas emissions)	115 551,56
Net greenhouse gas emissions of the Land use, Land use change and Forestry (LULUCF) sector, 2020 (in 1000 tonnes) (Eurostat [DEMO_GIND , ENV_AIR_GGE])	-335,9

Figure 3: Share of renewable energy Belgium



5.Documents on green transition and sustainable development

Climate change strategy, strategy for green economy, just transition plan, energy transition and industrial strategy, National Recovery and Resilience facility Plan…

https://commission.europa.eu/business-economy-euro/economic-recovery/recovery-and-resilience-facility/belgiums-recovery-and-resilience-plan_en

NL:

https://dermine.belgium.be/sites/default/files/articles/NL%20-%20Nationaal%20plan%20voor%20herstel%20een%20veerkracht_1.pdf

FR:
https://dermine.belgium.be/sites/default/files/articles/FR%20-%20Plan%20national%20pour%20la%20reprise%20et%20la%20re%CC%81silience.pdf

Belgian website:
https://nextgenbelgium.be/

6.Sustainable development Indicators

(https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/sdi/database) – country level

7.Social dialogue and industrial relations

Belgium is categorized as a 'coordinated' market economy with collective bargaining of actors on centralized levels (Hall and Soskice 2001; OECD 2018). There are strong protective and high participative standards. Workers are backed up by substantial rights and economic and social institutions that reduce power imbalances and enhance the possibilities to reach compromises. Trade unions have extensive information and consultation rights at establishment level and regulate unemployment insurance schemes (Ghent system). In addition, the bargaining power of trade unions is strengthened by protective standards, i.e. statutory minimum wage and ('erga omnes') extension procedures of collective agreements (Bosch and Lehndorff 2017). Although it has become increasingly difficult to reach social agreements, most reforms have been put in place after social dialogue. The influence of the social partners has always remained important in Belgium.
Belgium has a three-tier system of bargaining with a strict hierarchy. At the central level, there is a national labour council that can make national agreements and every two years the main employer representatives and union confederations negotiate agreements that are legally binding for all employers and employees. These biannual economy-wide agreements are also known as interprofessional agreements (IPA). The national level then provides a framework for the sectoral Collective Labour Agreements 'CLA' or 'Collectieve ArbeidsOvereenkomst (CAO)' signed further in the Joint Committees 'JC' or 'Paritaire Comités (PC)'. These sectoral agreements are legally binding for all employers and employees who are covered by the Joint Committee concerned (because sectoral agreements are almost always extended by royal decree). Company agreements can make further elaborations (Hemerijck and Marx 2010; Vandekerckhove and Van Gyes 2012). The hierarchy between bargaining levels is ensured by the so-called favourability principle, which states that lower level agreements can only improve higher-level standards in favour of employees (OECD 2019).

Overall, the Belgian collective bargaining system has not been seriously challenged by the social partners as derogation possibilities are rarely taken. The company can also only undercut sectoral defined standards when this possibility is explicitly foreseen in the sectoral agreement. However, these so-called opening clauses are very rare and seldom applied. The possibility for employers to opt-out of collective agreements is also almost never used in Belgium. Such derogation possibilities are usually introduced to help companies that suffer from serious economic difficulties (by allowing them to deviate from higher standards). In this case, social partners usually find a solution within the existing framework and there are a number of mechanisms that allow companies to adjust such as state-sponsored programmes allowing for temporary reduction of working time or partial unemployment and early retirement (Keune 2010).

The highly centralized and coordinated industrial relations system thus offers a high degree of 'inclusiveness' which means that there are "formal mechanisms that extend the wages, benefits and working conditions negotiated by workers in industries and occupations with strong bargaining power to workers in industries and occupations with less bargaining power" (Appelbaum et al. 2010:7). This has resulted in high collective bargaining coverage rates and strong trade unions in Belgium. The proportion of employees covered by collective bargaining has a coverage rate of 96 per cent and union membership is 49.1 per cent (OECD.stat, 2019). Unlike other European welfare states, trade unions had been able to preserve this relative strong position in the industrial relations landscape. This exceptional position can be ascribed to the fact that they are firmly institutionalized in Belgium. Besides a strong anchoring in different levels of social dialogue from workplace to national level, trade unions regulate some social insurance provisions (unemployment benefits and some – mostly sector specific – social provisions). This so-called Ghent system had arguably contributed to their strong position within the field.

Although this has put unions overall in a decent bargaining position to enforce sector-wide agreements and mitigate labour market segmentation by making it difficult for employers to exit agreements or to employ workers on non-standard employment contracts on lower terms and conditions (Bosch et al. 2010; Doellgast et al. 2009; Pulignano and Doerflinger 2018), they have experienced increased difficulties in obtaining this. Despite the high degree of formal institutional stability, significant changes had occurred that have been gradually undermining traditional arrangements. Belgium's strong inclusive industrial relation system had exhibited some signs of cracks, notably on account of further labour market deregulatory measures and increasing international pressures resulting from the growth of non-unionized low wage economies. This has given more flexibility to employers while weakening trade unions. Moreover, the growing criticism by politicians and media had put pressure on social dialogue and in particular challenged the trade unions, who had started political strikes and protests against some of these policies (Pulignano 2017; Van Gyes et al. 2018). The pressure on trade unions seems to have affected their membership as well, where unionization rate reached a peak of 55.1 per cent in 2011 this had declined to 49.1 per cent in 2019. This slow attrition in unionization rate may be a reflection of a weakening union power.

It has become increasingly difficult for social partners to reach inter-sectoral agreements, most notably since the financial and economic crisis in 2008, where the state has had to intervene. Even though the Belgian state may have adopted a more neo-liberal discourse of a 'free market' to decrease state dependency and increase labour market flexibility, this did not seem to coincide with less state involvement. On the contrary, the state seems to have been

rather more than less involved in industrial relations. This created unrest among trade unions as well as employers. The state had imposed cutbacks and reforms such as the implementation of an indexation leap, alongside with a series of other measures prolonging retirement age from 65 to 67, greater flexible working times, and a change in wage compensation based on experience rather than seniority. These state interventions were met with a lot of protest and resistance, especially from the trade unions (Pulignano 2017). Additionally, trade unions developed a more antagonistic relationship with ruling political parties. Unions started political strikes against the government, while the (role of the) trade union movements have increasingly been questioned by politicians and media (Van Gyes et al., 2018).

The state has also enforced a stricter wage centralization affecting industrial relations and social dialogue on different levels. The Belgian social partners have witnessed an increasing trend of centralisation from sectoral to intersectoral level due to the 'wage norm', which was set in 1996 when the government introduced the 'employment and competitiveness' law. This so-called 'wage norm' law or 'Loonnormwet' was used as an indicative maximum margin of wage increases in the private sector that is based on the expected average wage development in the neighbouring countries, and also main competitors, Germany, France and the Netherlands. It sets the pay costs on top of the automatic pay indexation that is linked to prices, thereby framing the wage negotiations in the inter-sectoral bargaining and subsequently lower bargaining levels. By placing an upper limit for wage negotiations that runs through all levels, the wage norm limits the bargaining room of social partners. Particularly when this norm that was once more indicative, has become imperative in 2017 (Eurofound 2018).

This higher state involvement could be understood in the Belgian context of strong trade unions as 'an attack on the traditionally highly-valued autonomy of the social partners to organise and set wages and working conditions. Stricter control, overruling or ignoring of collective bargaining and social dialogue have been on the increase since Belgian governments – perhaps under European surveillance – opted for a programme of austerity.' (Van Gyes et al. 2018:99). Within this context, where the Belgian government started imposing wage moderation by enforcing the statutory wage norm, it became increasingly difficult for social partners to reach agreements, particularly since the financial crisis in 2008, as the wage norm had become very low leaving virtually no room for further negotiations. The state had intervened on several occasions (in 2011/12, 2013/14 and 2019/20) since no consensus was reached by the social partner on inter-sectoral level. Reforms in wage-setting system in 2007 reduced social partners' autonomy even further and increased governments influence. Meanwhile, the wage norm had been reduced to decimal digits after the financial crisis in 2008 and had become more strictly monitored with sanctions for companies that exceed the wage norm (Eurofound 2018). The wage norm varied from 5 or 6 per cent before the crisis in 2008 to 0 per cent in 2013/14 and 1.1 per cent in 2017/18 and in 2019/20. The national agreement is tightly constrained by legislation, but also limits pay increases for lower levels.

There had been an opposing trend of decentralisation on non-wage issues within the highly centralised wage bargaining system giving employers more power and flexibility at the company level. The sector-level remains the dominant bargaining level, but company-level agreements have increased. However, the delegation of more issues to the company level is still to be framed within the higher-level agreements, which means that lower level

agreements can only provide equal or more favourable conditions than what is stipulated on sector level. Although the higher-level agreements had given more room for company level bargaining, derogation or opening clauses had not been part of the decentralization trend. Since the wage norm left little room for bargaining at sector level, trade unions have enhanced their role in decentralized negotiations while fighting to keep the decentralization organized and protected by the favourability principle (Van Gyes et al. 2018).

1. Initiatives carried out in travel and tourism /industrial areas in crisis /agriculture and aimed a low carbon and circular economy and their impact on macroeconomic indicators at a local level
    a. The role of industrial relations and tripartite social dialogue in managing such initiatives (phase of involvement, key actors, level of negotiation, main topics, results achieved; evaluation & lessons learnt)

Organisational changes, innovations, and implementation of new technologies in the workplaces are usually considered the prerogative of the company and are mainly managed by trade unions at the company level. Also in Belgium that is known for its highly centralised structured industrial relations system where social partners can make (inter)sectoral Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs) that cover all companies within the sector. Beside CBA39 on union involvement in the implementation of new technologies in companies and on job security during the process that was negotiated in the 1980s, there are no specific sectoral agreements on the green and the digital transformation within the automotive sector for example. Belgian trade unions deal with the issues arising from new technologies by negotiating informal or formal agreements at company level to mitigate negative effects for workers with threats of strikes as a last resort. Trade unions thus monitor the impact of these changes on employment and working conditions and intervene when this is evaluated negatively. However, this may hamper the anticipation of change and adopting a long-term perspective to look for solutions beforehand. Thus far, they lack an overarching or more centralized strategy to manage the potential impact of a more radical transition on employment. There is a growing sense of awareness of the potential impact of green and digital transition but the discussion has only just started (Pulignano et al., forthcoming).

Workers representation structures at the workplaces are realized through a double-system of works councils and trade unions. The trade union delegation is entitled of negotiation rights with management. The works councils, which are all unionised, are involved in social, economic, and financial policy related to the organization of work in the company. The works councils have extensive rights to receive economic and financial information (EFI) of the company they work for (Doerflinger et al., 2018). The works councils can issue advice, make suggestions or objections about or against collective measures that may change the work organisation in terms of employment (CBA 9, art.10). Aside the works councils, there is also a committee for prevention and protection at work (CPBW) that mainly plays an advisory role on all proposals and measures, such as the planning and introduction of new technologies and the effect on the safety and well-being of employees in the performance of their work.
In Belgium, worker representation rights exist on the company level, but they have a greater emphasis on consultation and information provision with more limited possibility to influence management-decisions and to advance independent reform proposals. A further

union channel for influencing management is sectoral collective bargaining, which however has a narrower focus on wages and working conditions (Pulignano et al., forthcoming).

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REGIONAL REPORT FLANDERS

On the role of trade unions in the decarbonization of the Flemish industry

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Summary 2

Summary

This report focuses on the northern and Dutch-speaking region of Belgium, Flanders, with a particular emphasis on its industrial sector. Despite being predominantly a tertiary economy, Flanders possesses a well-established secondary sector, which includes energy-intensive industries like refining, chemicals, and iron and steel activities. In 2018, these industrial sectors were responsible for 36.6% of the region's total greenhouse gas emissions, with energy-intensive industries operating under the EU Emissions Trading System accounting for 80% of this sector's emissions. It should be noted that while the significance of the secondary sector has decreased over time, direct employment in Flemish industry still constituted 13% of total employment in Flanders, highlighting the sector's socio-economic importance, with its gross added value amounting to 21%.

However, Flanders faces several challenges in reducing its greenhouse gas emissions. The energy-intensive nature of its industries, coupled with heavy reliance on fossil fuels, poses a considerable obstacle. Additionally, the region's high population density, substantial exports, relatively high energy consumption, and limited space for renewable energy systems further contribute to this challenging position. The intrinsic role of carbon in consumer and energy products also makes the straightforward reduction of carbon usage nearly impossible. Therefore, a more strategic approach is required, focusing on increasing the value derived from each ton of carbon, extending the useful lifespan of carbon in products, and minimizing carbon losses in the form of CO2 emissions.

Given the complex context of the digital and green transition for the Flemish energy-intensive industry, as well as the region's/countries' well-established practices of social dialogue, it is worthwhile to investigate the role played by trade unions in facilitating ongoing changes. Specifically, this study aims to examine the involvement of trade unions in Climate Leap (Klimaatsprong), a government initiative with the goal of developing an industrial policy that can facilitate and support the decarbonization of the Flemish industry. Furthermore, two case studies of chemical companies have been selected to explore the participation of trade unions in climate policies.

By conducting this investigation, we aim to shed light on the engagement of trade unions in shaping sustainable industrial practices within the Flemish energy-intensive industry. This knowledge will contribute to a deeper understanding of the social dynamics involved in the

transition towards a greener economy and provide valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders (e.g. trade unions) involved in climate change mitigation efforts. Overall we found that social dialogue on climate change and decarbonization is still limited and certainly not a priority for management nor trade unions, especially at company and sectoral level. Nevertheless, we found three interesting cases where trade unions were effectively engaged, successfully or not, in discussions on the impact of climate change and decarbonization.

In our first regional case, Climate Leap, trade unions' involvement in a strategic policy preparation initiative provided them a unique position within the Permanent Consultative Body, legitimizing their role in decarbonizing Flemish industry and granting access to critical information at regional level. However, their actual influence was considered limited, and many of their social concerns were pushed to a later stage in the process. Despite the limited scope and depth of participation, interests of the employers' organization and trade unions were mostly aligned, both arguing for solutions that increased competitivity of Flemish industrial plants. To strengthen their expertise, trade unions allied with the environmental organization to further push their social agenda in the otherwise techno-economic discussion on decarbonization.

Our first company case demonstrated that securing a seat at the table was only the first step; trade unions needed to actively maintain their presence and advocate for climate change in social dialogue all the while developing an own strategic agenda on the topic. Engaged individual members played a pivotal role in initiating and sustaining these discussions within trade unions and company-level structures. The trade unions strategy, faced with limited technical expertise, focused on developing concrete indicators and monitoring mechanisms to evaluate management's plans for climate-related goals.

Conversely, our second company case highlighted the challenges trade unions faced when climate change was not a priority for management and was kept far away from social dialogue channels. Despite the efforts of an engaged trade union representative, trade unions lacked a seat at the table for climate change discussions. This case underscored the significance of finding allies and constructing internal networks to foster climate change conversations. Traditional channels of social dialogue might be less effective to initiate social dialogue on climate change, as trade unions are lacking expertise and institutional leverage on the topic. Looking at our first, more successful case, alternative approaches might be useful to break through existing barriers and bring climate change on the agenda of social dialogue.

In conclusion, the case studies offer valuable insights for trade unions engaging in climate change discussions. Engaged individual members seem yet to be crucial in driving climate change discussions within trade unions and companies in Flanders, as climate change and decarbonization are seldom a priority at company level nor sectoral level. Finding suitable allies and developing strategic agendas are key to strengthening trade unions' positions at all levels of social dialogue. Gaining a seat at the table is not enough, it is equally necessary to hold on to that seat and, of crucial importance, to develop a strategy on what to do with oit. When traditional channels prove ineffective, exploring unorthodox methods and building internal networks might be instrumental in promoting meaningful climate change policies and initiate social dialogue.

Flanders: socio-economic profile

Flanders, the northern region of Belgium, is characterized by its autonomous governance and Dutch as the official language. With its own powers through the Flemish Parliament and Government, Flanders operates within the framework of the federal state of Belgium. As of January 2022, Flanders has a population of approximately 6.7 million, accounting for about 58% of Belgium's total population, while covering 44% of the country's surface area (Vlaams department Economie, 2022).

Flanders boasts a strong economy, representing about 59% of the Belgian economy as measured by GDP. In 2020, Flanders recorded a gross value added of EUR 238.9 billion, reflecting its significant economic contribution (Roland Berger, 2021). Moreover, Flanders' GDP per capita reached EUR 38,200 in 2021, positioning it among the top half of the European Union countries in terms of economic prosperity. Flanders not only boasts a high proportion of highly qualified workers as well as an elevated labor productivity ratio; the region also has a relatively low employment rate by European standards (Vlaams department Economie, 2022).

Nowadays, Flanders' economic strength lies in its central position within a global economy, facilitated by its proximity to Brussels, the capital of the European Union. Brussels serves as a sought-after location for multinational corporations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to establish their European or regional headquarters (Roland Berger, 2021).

Historically, Flanders witnessed significant growth in industrial sectors such as steel, textiles, automotive, and pharmaceuticals during the second half of the 20th century. While the textile industry suffered setbacks due to the shift of mass production to low-wage countries, it has gradually revived since the 1990s, focusing on high-tech applications and high-quality textiles. The automotive industry remains an essential source of employment, although it faced challenges with plant closures and restructuring. Also in the 20th century, Flanders developed a strong chemical industry mainly clustered in the port of Antwerp. Alongside its industrial sectors, Flanders has developed an extensive service economy, particularly in logistics and transport, although it is susceptible to economic fluctuations (Wyns & Khandekar, 2020).

The region's economy is still characterized by a robust secondary sector, comprising industries such as oil and chemical products, metallurgy, plastics, and food processing. This sector accounts for 26% of Flanders' gross value added and 21.4% of employment (direct and indirect)

(Roland Berger, 2021). Its relatively greater importance in gross value added compared to employment signifies higher labor productivity, driven by international competition and greater capital investment. Key branches within the secondary sector include "food & beverages," "chemicals" (primarily in terms of gross value added), and pharmaceuticals.

Flanders also boasts a rapidly developing tertiary sector, encompassing various services. The region has successfully cultivated an extensive service economy, particularly in logistics and transportation. However, the service sector's dependency on economic cycles poses a potential challenge for the region (Bassilière et al., 2023).

In 2022, the real economic growth of Flanders' GDP was estimated at 2.8% (Bassilière et al., 2023; Vlaams department Economie, 2022). Industries such as transport and communications, health and social services, business services, and equipment manufacturing played a pivotal role in driving this growth. Private consumption experienced a rebound starting in 2021; however, complications surrounding the war in Ukraine and inflation hindered further recovery. As a result, the projected real GDP growth for the Flemish Region in 2023 is +1.3%, primarily due to a slowdown in consumption and less promising exports.

Flanders faced economic challenges in the past, including a recession in 2009 followed by a partial recovery in subsequent years (Bassilière et al., 2023). The region also felt the impact of the debt and euro crises, which created tensions within the euro area. However, from 2014 to 2019, Flanders consistently achieved a growth rate close to 2%, with 2015 seeing slightly higher growth. The COVID-19 crisis caused a significant contraction in 2020, with a negative growth rate of -5.5%. Nonetheless, Flanders experienced a strong rebound in 2021, with a growth rate of +7.0% following the COVID-19 slump (Bassilière et al., 2023).

Trends in labour regulation and social dialogue

In 1970, the Belgian State adopted a Federal Structure including regions and communities. This federalisation process strengthened along six major institutional reforms that took place in 1970, 1980, 1988–89, 1993, 2001 and a last reform in 2013 (Van Herreweghe et al., 2018). The last institutional reform affected the organisation of the labour market by granting larger power to regions (Flanders, Wallonie and Brussels) in fields where social partners usually play a major role, such as health and safety or employment policies.

Nevertheless, most labour regulations are still being determined at intersectoral level by the social partners themselves or at federal level. In recent years and partly due to austerity measures since the crisis, a series of labour regulation reforms have been implemented in the country/regions. These relate to working time flexibilisation (2012, 2016 and 2017), temporary agency work (2013), flexi-jobs in horeca and small retail (2015, 2017), night work for e-commerce (2015, additional changes in 2017), reforms of early retirement and pensions (2012-2015); career leave system (2015) and a change in the probation period (2017). Another major change concerns the introduction of more unified employment status for blue and white-collar workers (Law of 26 December 2013) (Van Herreweghe et al., 2018).

Recent changes in working life have been influenced by the Labour Deal Act signed in September 2022 (at federal level) (Van Herreweghe et al., 2023). The primary objective of this act is to increase employability to 80% by 2030. The act encompasses various approaches, including improved monitoring, reduced discrimination in the labor market, labor market activation, and training. The involvement of social partners through collective bargaining and sectoral funds is a key aspect of many of these measures.

Efforts have also been made to improve workability and work-life balance for employees. One notable provision is the option for employees to complete their full-time work week in four days. However, despite the involvement of social partners, there have been disagreements on certain aspects of the Labour Deal. The National Labor Council, responsible for providing advice on the law, failed to reach a unanimous agreement, preventing the formulation of formal advice.

One major point of contention between employers and trade unions is the balance between flexibility and worker protection. Employer organizations view the right to disconnect law, implemented in February 2023, as a vote of no confidence against employers. In addition, they are critical of mandatory additional training days, while in turn, unions argue that platform workers are still insufficiently protected and believe that flexibility in e-commerce is becoming excessive (Van Herreweghe et al., 2023).

Wage increases have also been a source of conflict between trade unions and employer associations. The automatic indexation system, which adjusts wages according to inflation, has raised concerns about the competitiveness of Belgian companies due to rising wage costs. Trade unions argue that many people suffer the consequences of inflation and price increases,

leaving them financially vulnerable. Demonstrations have taken place, calling for the government to take action, including abolishing the wage norm law that restricts significant wage increases during national negotiations.

Regarding the green transition, the Belgian government and social partners recognize Belgium's important role in this area. The country's knowledge-intensive economy and focus on innovation present opportunities, but also challenges due to, for example labor market shortages. Finding workers with specialized technical profiles has been a persistent issue. The government aims to address this through initiatives such as the Labour Deal, which emphasizes increasing employment rates and providing training opportunities. Social partners support this vision in theory. However, it remains to be seen how this commitment translates in practices such contributing advice, establishing collective agreements, and utilizing existing sectoral training funds. It should be stressed that Belgium's complex institutional structure, where competences around climate policy are spread across the different regions and even policy levels, complicates a unified strategy which adds up on the already significant challenges Belgium and its region face vis à vis clime change (Van Herreweghe et al., 2023).

The secondary sector in Flanders

The Flemish energy-intensive industry sector comprises several industries, including the production of chemicals, refining and cokes, basic metals (including steel and non-ferrous metals), food and beverages, paper and paper products, non-metallic minerals (including ceramics and glass), textiles, and products of wood. These industries produce 9.1% of total added value of Flanders but also accounted for approximately 36% of total Flemish emissions in 2016, amounting to 27.9 Mt CO2-eq (Deloitte, 2020; Wyns & Khandekar, 2020).

Within the Flemish industrial sector, the energy-intensive industries falling under the scope of the European Union Emissions Trading Scheme (EU ETS) represented 80% (22.4 Mt CO2-eq) of the industrial greenhouse gas emissions in 2016 (Deloitte, 2020). However, it's worth noting that around 20% of industrial emissions fell outside the EU ETS scope in Flanders.

Between 2005 and 2019, the emissions of Flemish industrial EU ETS sectors decreased by 16% (from 26.7 to 22.4 Mt CO2-eq). The most significant emission reductions occurred in the chemicals sector (a reduction of 29%) and a combination of ceramics, non-ferrous, food, and textiles industries (a fall of 18%). Some of these reductions can be attributed to industrial

closures during the period, particularly affecting smaller industries like ceramics and textiles (Wyns & Khandekar, 2020).

Flanders exhibits a concentration of large industrial greenhouse gases (GHG) emitters within the EU ETS. In 2019, the refining, chemicals, and iron and steel sectors accounted for nearly 80% of Flemish industrial emissions covered by the EU ETS. The top 40 largest industrial emitters represented around 90% of industrial EU ETS emissions, with the top 10 emitters contributing approximately 70% of Flemish industrial EU ETS emissions. The top 40 list consists primarily of refineries, steel producers, and chemicals producers, along with a few companies from the food and beverages, paper, non-ferrous, ceramics, textile, and glass industries (Deloitte Belgium VUB-IES, 2020).

In terms of employment, the industrial sectors experienced a 15% decline in direct employment between 2005 and 2018, decreasing from 207,600 to 176,300 persons. This decline was observed across most of the covered industries. Additionally, the share of direct employment in these industries compared to total Flemish employment dropped from 8.5% to 6.2% during the same period. Meanwhile, the total employment in Flanders as a whole increased by 15% from 2.45 million persons to 2.82 million persons between 2005 and 2018 (Vlaams department Economie, 2022).

Challenges related to climate change for Flemish energy intensive industries

The transition to a climate-neutral economy and society poses significant challenges for Flemish industry (Sana & Vael, 2022). The European Union Emissions Trading System (EU ETS) sets a joint emission cap that applies to the industry falling under its scope, including Flemish ETS companies. The Flemish Climate Strategy 2050 does not establish a specific quantitative target for Flemish ETS companies but emphasizes their need to comply with the annual tightening of the EU-level emission cap, projected to reach approximately -85% by 2050 compared to 2005 levels. However, the European Commission has proposed even more ambitious scenarios, including a reduction of -95% by 2050.

Flemish industry faces several hurdles in transitioning to a climate-neutral economy (See table 1). The region's high population density, significant exports, relatively high energy consumption, and limited space for alternative systems installation contribute to its challenging

position regarding greenhouse gas emissions. Moreover, Flemish industry is energy-intensive and heavily reliant on fossil fuels (Wyns & Khandekar, 2020).

Efforts to increase energy efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Flemish energy-intensive industries as part of the European climate goals pose a substantial challenge. Simply reducing carbon usage is nearly impossible due to the essential role of carbon in consumer and energy products. Instead, a 'smarter' approach involving increased value per ton of carbon, extending the useful lifespan of carbon in products, and minimizing carbon losses in the form of CO2 emissions is necessary. Achieving these goals will require a major transformation in how carbon is used in industry (and society) (Deloitte Belgium VUB-IES, 2020; Wyns & Khandekar, 2020).

Incremental improvements in emissions and energy consumption are insufficient to achieve a complete transition, highlighting the need for a significant industrial transformation in the coming decades. However, for all actors involved, it is crucial to ensure that this transition does not undermine the competitiveness of Flemish energy-intensive industries, as it could lead to production capacity shifting to regions outside Europe, exacerbating the global problem (Deloitte, 2020).

Despite the challenges, it is believed that Flanders can remain an attractive location for future sustainable industries in Europe. The region can build upon its strengths, such as its central location, highly educated workforce, excellent infrastructure, and global reputation for innovation (see also table 1) (Wyns & Khandekar, 2020).

All stakeholders, including the government, businesses, and research organizations, acknowledge the pivotal moment and the importance of taking action now. Given the long development times and investment cycles associated with the transition, proactive measures are crucial to achieving the 2050 targets (Vlaamse overheid, 2021a).

Table 1 SWOT analysis of Flemish industry (Wyns & Khandekar, 2020)

Strengths	Weaknesses

• Central geographical location • Excellent connectivity (logistics) • At the core of European value (& supply) chains • Clustering of production plants/processes and process optimisation (esp. Chemicals & Refining) • Strong presence of large multinationals creates positive spill-overs for smaller (local) companies in industrial clusters • Refining has due to Integration of world-class stream cracking installations and availability of surplus coking a 'Must Run' status • Highly skilled labour force • Strong reputation for research and business expenditure on R&D (BERD)	• High energy cost related to EU policy (exposure to prices) • Most (large) investment decisions are taken by multinational companies with decision making centres outside of Flanders. • Relatively high labour costs • Regulatory complexity especially for multinationals • Open economy and location vulnerable to international trade disruptions • Need for more and updated infrastructure given status as a major logistics hub
Threats	Opportunities
• Global sectoral developments (US shale gas & shale oil, new investments in Middle East, overproduction in emerging economies like China) • EU & global trade disruptive events (e.g. Brexit, US mercantilism, COVID19) • Disruptions during the transport and power sector low-carbon transition. The first might weaken the position of refined oil production and hence the link with petrochemicals • Industrial low-carbon technologies deployment (significantly) higher electricity demand demand for investments in low-carbon power production	• Energy/power-sector transition industrial demand response/storage opportunities • Well placed industrial clusters offer opportunities for industrial symbiosis and better economic resilience in a low-carbon economy • Circularity new business models and higher value-added products and services • Instrumentalise Know-how and public supported R&D (e.g. moonshots) via demonstration of low-CO2 technologies in Flanders • Create lead markets for low-CO2 products and technologies in Flanders via a mission oriented industrial policy

• Circularity lowered demand of basic products/materials • EU ETS (future) higher CO2 prices more carbon exposure uneven global playing field	

Flemish industrial policies on climate change

Flanders has endorsed the Paris Climate Accord commitments, with the objective of limiting climate change to well below 2°C (with a target of 1.5°C) compared to the pre-industrial era (VARIO-raad, 2023; Vlaamse overheid, 2021a). As part of the Paris Climate Agreement, the European Union has set the ambition of achieving climate neutrality by 2050, an objective stakeholders in Flanders fully support. To this end, greenhouse gases will have to be reduced by at least 90% compared to 1990 in terms of gross emissions by 2050. The EU has set as an interim milestone to already reduce emissions by at least 40% by 2030 (base year 1990). Sectors covered by EU ETS must reduce 43% CO2 emissions by 2030 (base year 2005). Non-ETS sectors must reduce 30% CO2 emissions by 2030 (base year 2005). The European Commission is currently examining whether this ambition can be increased to 50-55% by 2030. On 11 December 2019, the Von der Leyen Commission published the Green Deal with various policy plans to achieve these climate targets and also addresses the transition of European industry necessary for this.

In response to the ambitious EU objectives, the Flemish government took several initiatives to develop a policy framework to facilitate climate transition in general and for industry in specific. For reaching the intermediate objectives of 2030, the Flemish government agreed upon the Flemish Energy and Climate Plan (VEKP) (Vlaamse overheid, 2021b). The VEKP, approved by the Flemish Government in December 2019, sets objectives for greenhouse gas reduction in non-ETS sectors, objectives for the Land Use, Land-Use Change, and Forestry (LULUCF) sector, energy efficiency, and renewable energy. While no national emission reduction targets were imposed for ETS sectors (heavy industry, energy production, and aviation) by the EU, the VEKP includes action points for the transition to a low-carbon industry in these sectors.

In addition, the Flemish climate strategy for 2050 is supposed to be a long-term strategy integrated with the strategies of other regions in Belgium to comply with the European Regulation on the governance of the energy union and climate action (Vlaamse overheid,

2020). Each member state is required to submit a long-term strategy to the European Commission by January 1, 2020, and every ten years thereafter. The strategy provides a perspective of at least thirty years. Within the framework of those two initiatives (VEKP and Flemish climate strategy), stakeholders and policy makers should develop industrial policies specifically to facilitate climate change in Flemish industry. Two initiatives are of specific interest here, the Moonshot initiative and Klimaatsprong.

In 2019, The Moonshot initiative, Flemish industry carbon circular and low in CO2 by 2050, (Vlaamse industrie koolstofcirculair en CO2-arm tegen 2050) was launched as a strategic innovation project in Flemish energy and climate policy(VARIO-raad, 2023). The goal of this initiative is to achieve technological breakthroughs by 2040 in products, processes, and materials that can contribute to making the Flemish industry carbon circular and low in CO2 by 2050. The means of the Moonshot initiative are extensive financial support instruments for the selected innovations.

Also in 2019, a context analysis and roadmap study called Flemish industry carbon circular and low in CO2 by 2050 through the development of market-ready innovative technologies by 2040 (Vlaamse industrie koolstofcirculair en CO2-arm in 2050 door de ontwikkeling van marktrijpe innovatieve technologieën tegen 2040), was commissioned by the Flemish government (Deloitte, 2020). The study aimed to develop a roadmap until 2050 and a policy framework for industrial transition based on an analysis of the Flemish industrial landscape, research on potential technologies, and exploration scenarios through modeling. The study focused on the chemical, refining, and steel sectors, which are responsible for approximately 90% of industrial greenhouse gas emissions in Flanders. The study identified 5 transition paths:

- Use of biomass instead of fossil feedstock (e.g. by chemical conversion of wood);
- Circular use of plastics (e.g. by chemically recycling waste plastics);
- Increased use of (green) electricity for heating and using hydrogen instead of natural gas;
- Capture of emitted CO2 and conversion to new base molecules (e.g. methanol) or underground storage in old gas fields (CCS).

Based on the conclusions and recommendations of the above-mentioned study, a plan of action has been agreed within the Flemish government to promote industrial transition on a broader scale than the Moonshot innovation policy. To this end, a broad industrial transition program

is being set up, Climate Leap, with participation of a broad range of stakeholders, including the trade unions (SERV Raad, 2023). Since Climate Leap is expected to outline the eventual industrial policy that will support the decarbonization of Flemish industry, it provided an excellent case for this study.

Industrial relations in Belgium/Flanders

(Inter)sectoral level

Belgium has a highly structured industrial relations system, in which the regions play a mostly advisory role. The traditional system of collective bargaining in Belgium is entirely regulated by the act of 5 December 1968 on collective bargaining agreements and sectoral joint committees in which the right to organise and bargain collectively is recognised and protected (Van Herreweghe et al., 2018). Wage bargaining is highly structured through three interlinked levels: the highest level with centralised cross-sectoral agreements covering the entire economy; an important intermediate level covering specific sectors; and company-level negotiations as a complement or substitute for the sector-level bargaining. In principle, lower-level agreements can only improve (from the employees' perspective) what has been negotiated at a higher level.

At sectoral level, there are 100 joint committees and 65 joint subcommittees deciding on pay levels, classification schemes, working time arrangements, training, etc. The sectoral collective agreement applies to all employers and employees covered by the joint committees or subcommittees concerned (Van Herreweghe et al., 2018). As negotiations on this level give legal content following the agreements at the national cross-sector level, it is argued that the sector is still the most important bargaining level. Another reason is that for many non-wage items, this is the highest level of negotiation. Every company and employee is assigned to a sectoral joint committee. This is almost automatically done when the company applies for a social security number and the employee is registered within the company for the social security system.

Since the financial crisis of 2010, this system has been under pressure by on the one hand imposition through state intervention and on the other hand certain innovations and particular decentralisation tendencies. The institutional framework has, however, remained intact, although in 2017 a stricter wage norm legislation (law of 29 March 2017) was introduced (Van Herreweghe et al., 2018).

In the period 2010–2015, no new full intersectoral agreement was reached. The state intervened twice with a wage freeze (above indexation) for the period 2013–014 and a temporary suspension of the wage indexation (2015-2016). The wage norm was implemented by law and

thus had a much more binding impact. At the start of 2017, the social partners nevertheless reached for the first time since 2010 a new intersectoral agreement (IPA 2017-2018) which foresees among others a (bi-annual) wage increase of maximum 1.1% (above indexation). In 2020 social partners concluded the last intersectoral agreement (IPA 2020-2021), with wage increase of 0,4%, but also with an increase of the minimal wage.

Company level

Workers representation structures at the workplaces are realized through a double-system of works councils and trade unions (ETUI, 2016). A trade union delegation exists aside the works council (Ondernemingsraad). The trade union delegation is entitled of negotiation rights with management. The works councils, which are unionised as all members are elected every two-years (social elections) on the basis of a list of the trade unions, are involved in social, economic and financial policy related to the organization of work in the company. The works councils can issue advice, make suggestions or objections about or against collective measures that may change the work organisation in terms of employment (CBA 9, art.10). For example, works councils have extensive rights to receive economic and financial information (EFI) of the company they work for. Aside the works councils, there is also a committee for prevention and protection at work (CPBW) that mainly plays an advisory role on all proposals and measures, such as the planning and introduction of new technologies and the effect on the safety and well-being of employees in the performance of their work.

Industrial relations and climate change

Organisational changes, innovations, and implementation of new technologies in the workplaces – expected responses to climate change and decarbonisation – are considered the prerogative of the company (Vereycken et al., 2022). Social dialogue on those topics mainly takes place at company level. In Belgium, trade unions have a traditional a strategy towards technological change, meaning that trade unions deal with the issues arising from new technologies by negotiating informal or formal agreements to mitigate negative effects for workers once these outcomes already materialize. So, trade unions react to new technology by monitoring the impact of these changes on employment and working conditions and intervening when this impact is evaluated negatively (Frans & Pulignano, 2022; Vereycken et al., 2022). However, this may hamper the anticipation of change and adopting a long-term perspective to look for solutions beforehand, a so-called proactive strategy. For example, the

CEO from VW Group recently announced that 30.000 less jobs would be needed due to electrification of cars and according to the trade union officer (Frans & Pulignano, 2022):

> *"This creates some insecurity…maybe the top trade union representatives and trade union officers are aware of this shift, but at this moment it is not that urgent. But maybe, tomorrow, Audi says we will reschedule and digitalize the production line and we do not need all those people. But now they are looking for a lot of people to hire." (Trade union officer, METEA ACV)*

Thus far, there is no social dialogue on the green and the digital transformation within the automotive industry. This means that there are no specific collective agreements dealing with the challenges that are related to the green or digital transition such as qualifications, reskilling of workers, preparing workers for the transition in a timely manner. The same holds true for the other industrial sectors. According to a trade union officer, there are other more urgent priorities, following the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russian-Ukrainian war, such as inflation and wage negotiations. Also from employers' side, there is no need for collective solutions; they would rather develop company plans without too much interference. The absence of sectoral plans to deal with the future employment leaves important issues such as training or preparing workers for the new skills required to be decided at the company level, creating much room for employers' discretion at the company level to manage the transition as they see fit (Frans & Pulignano, 2022).

> *From the trade union part, there is a lack of framework, collective agreement, or legislation to play its role and employers do not push for collective agreements or legislation, they want to handle it themselves. (Trade union officer, METEA ACV)*

There is nevertheless a growing sense of awareness of the potential impact of green and digital transition but the discussion has only just started (Frans & Pulignano, 2022).

> *"Digitalisation only becomes important when it is already implemented and when the effects become visible for the blue-or white-collar workers in the production lines. So now we ask ourselves, how can we be more pro-active, how can we foresee the discussion that can appear after the introduction of new technologies and make a win-win out of it, for example at some point the low-skilled will be processed out and there will not be a job anymore or they will need to make a shift, be reskilled or upskilled. Can we already make a training plan? We need to be more pro-active instead of re-*

active. This is the most urgent strategy for the trade union." (Trade union officer, METEA ACV)

In sum, trade unions have started raising awareness in their trade union organization, but there seems no overarching strategy to manage the impact of a more radical digital and green transition. This leaves much room for employers to manage the transition in a way that they see fit at the company level where trade unions reach for the traditional tools to try to mitigate negative effects of the industrial policies. However, little research exists in Flanders on the role of trade unions and social dialogue in dealing with climate change (Frans & Pulignano, 2022). In our two company cases, we will exactly try to further elaborate on the dynamics stirring social dialogue on climate change at company level.

Casestudies

In this section we will present our three casestudies, the first case being situated at Flemish, regional level, while the two other cases are situated at the level of company.

Case 1: Climate Leap "Klimaatsprong"

Methodology

We conducted interviews with all main partners of Climate Leap. We interviewed a civil servant from the administration (Vlaio) involved in Climate Leap, two trade unionists with a seat in the Permanent consultative body, a representative of the employers association Essencia and an employee from the environmental organization Bond Beter Leefmilieu (BBL). In addition, we contacted a member of the national ACV and the sectoral trade union ACV Metea to capture their views on the work of their colleagues in Climate Leap. Finally, we joined twice the industrial policy working group of ACV to be able to observe the internal knowledge sharing and coordination efforts regarding Climate Leap.

All respondents were informed of the purpose of their interview and gave their willing consent to use their input for this study.

Climate Leap is the name of the policy initiative that started in 2020 with the goal of preparing a strategic industrial policy framework that should facilitate and guide the decarbonization of the Flemish heavy industry. Climate Leap is an example of and first attempt in Flanders of a quadruple helix collaboration between the Flemish government, employers' organization Essencia, environmental organizations and, of special interest to our case study trade unions. Initiated by two government departments, the focus of Climate Leap lies on the big emitter companies, mostly in the chemical sector. The intended strategic policy framework should consist of a series of policy instruments. It is the first time that trade unions are involved in policy preparation at the Flemish level – making it an excellent case to study their potential role in influencing climate change/decarbonisation policies.

Timeline and governance of Climate Leap

In 2020 the Flemish industry employers organisation, in collaboration with the Flemish government, ordered a roadmap study mapping the current situation and the possible (technological) solutions to decarbonize they Flemish industry considering the targets the EU has set. Recommendations of this study included (1) the need for a strategic policy agenda and framework to facilitate the future changes and (2) the acknowledgment that for the envisioned

changes a broad societal support and discussion is required. With these findings in mind, Flemish government decided to initiate Climate Leap. In 2021 Climate Leap was provided a legal foundation which ensures its long term character and (likely) persistence across several legislatures. Although legally binding, the actual legal text is brief and does not stipulate Climate Leaps' governance or composition. As such, the governance of Climate Leap was decided upon ad hoc during 2022. A combination of administrative, political, consultants and representatives of employers ended up with a governance structure consisting of a Permanent consultative body, several working groups and a broader feedback group.

- Firstly, the Permanent consultative body makes decisions and writes the advices that go to the government. Each 5 year the Permanent consultative body is to present a program note a detailed progress of the finished work and a planning for the next five years. With the necessary delay, the first program note was approved in 2023. The Permanent consultative body composes of different representatives of the government administration, employer organization Essencia, and two members (one for trade unions, one for employers) of the Social Economic Counsel of Flanders, a bipartite organization,. Finally, the Permanent consultative body is lead by two consultants from Deloitte, responsible for the process and coordination.
- Secondly, several working groups were being composed, each dedicated to specific aspects of a future policy framework (Innovation instruments, financing, infrastructure and permits, and energy). The composition of the working groups differs on the topic and was in principle also open to the trade unions. However, they decided that they did not have any relevant expertise on those topics. The environmental organization (Bond Beter Leefmilieu (BBL)) is represented in each working group, but was not allowed to have a seat in the Permanent consultative body.
- Thirdly, a broader feedback group of stakeholders exists that gathers once or twice a year with representatives from civic society organizations and universities to give feedback and input on the work of the working groups and the Permanent consultative body.
- Finally, the advices Climate Leap provides the Flemish government are forwarded to three consultative bodies for feedback and advice. In two of the three consultative bodies the trade unions are involved as well (SERV and MINA-counsel).

Perspectives of the different actors

In our interviews we asked the specific perspectives of the different participants of Climate Leap.

Employers organization

The employers association of the Chemical industry Essencia is mainly concerned about the impact of decarbonization on the competitivity of the Belgian/Flemish chemical plants. As many of those companies are multinationals with multiple production sites, the threat of outsourcing is always present. They agree with the objective of decarbonization, but look to the government for setting the right conditions for the transformation in terms of infrastructure, easy access to licenses and permits and especially financial support. They consider it important that Climate Leap formulates clear and consensus-based advices in a timely manner.

The employers emphasize that the people who will carry out the transformation of the industry must be the same people that make the decisions, meaning that the employers should decide. The government can set targets and has to establish the right conditions, but the actual decisions on how and what should be done, is to be made by the employers, with support from the trade unions. The latter have a clear role in the eyes of the employer: stimulating acceptance among the employees and citizens on the upcoming changes. Their expertise on training and skills will be useful in a later phase, once the more important technological and technical decisions have been made. Trade unions have little expertise in that regard and that is also not their role, according to Essencia. Put differently, the employers define the role of trade unions in Climate Leap rather narrow, as pacesetters for the employees and experts on the upcoming changes.

In practice, there has been little disagreement between employers and trade unions in the Permanent consultative body. Essencia is able to determine the pace and direction of actions and the trade unions mainly limit themselves to emphasizing the need for social acceptance of the instruments and the need to retrain and reskill employees. The latter is a clear common interest between employers and trade unions – especially considering the currently tight labour market in Flanders. This alignment of interests between employers association and trade union is rather far-reaching, as they both advocate strong Flemish industrial companies that generate employment for highly skilled and paid employees. With regard to climate change and decarbonization, regionally based trade unions and employer organizations seem to be natural allies.

Trade unions

For the trade unions their participation in Climate Leap is unique. It was a specific minister in the Flemish government that insisted that trade unions (and environmental organizations) should be involved in the governance of Climate Leap. The two biggest Belgian trade unions (ACV and ABVV) share a seat in the Permanent consultative body (ACV as permanent seat, ABVV as back-up). Both trade unions are reasonably satisfied with they way Climate Leap functions, emphasizing the uniqueness of their involvement in setting a policy framework. It should be noted that the highly unionized and well paid jobs in the (chemical) industry in Flanders are of huge importance to the trade unions. Safeguarding those employment is absolute key to the trade unions. At the same time, they emphasize that their role up till now has been limited and that the actual hand writing the advices to government is still the employers'. The latter is also immediately their main criticism of Climate Leap, whose governance is the result of a political and opaque process in which they were not involved, with the result, admittedly, that their influence extends further than ever, but at the same time is still limited.

Regarding the content of the discussions, the trade unions admit that they have limited expertise and they mainly limit themselves to emphasizing the need for a socially fair and just transition and the necessity to incorporate a working group on retraining and skills. Interestingly is that the trade unions work in close collaboration with BBL, the environmental organization represented in the different working groups. In this collaboration, BBL provides the technical expertise the trade unions are missing. Through regular follow up meetings, BBL in the working groups preparing input and trade unions in the Permanent consultative body taking decisions, they are better able to influence the discussion and get their objectives in the final advices. Because of this collaboration, the first Program note of Climate Leap actually references to a socially just and fair transition – something trade unions and BBl actually had to fight for. Despite some potential differences in interest between the environmental organisations and trade unions, for example regarding the future of employment in some of the big emitter companies, they currently find each other in a concern over the social and workforce related impact of the decarbonization of the Flemish industry.

Considering the broader challenges of climate change and decarbonisation, ACV has some clear objectives they want to advance through their participation in Climate Leap. First of all, they want to create sectoral transition funds, bipartite governed, to finance the transition tailored to the sectoral needs. Secondly, they aim to reinforce social dialogue on climate change at company level, however, they are not quiet clear in how they want to realize that objective.

Thirdly, they strive for specific sectoral transition plans with a clear set of social indicators, for example around training. Finally, they are against any further fragmentation of the already wide array of different innovation and financial support systems at the Flemish level. Although these are some tangible objectives, it is still unclear how Climate Leap will precisely advance these. Trade unions do see other channels as well. They have seats in other (innovation) funds (for example the Hermesfund), and counsils (for example MINA and Serv) and are trying to advance their objectives by including them in Flemish collective agreements, so called Vesoc agremeents. Furthermore they see a lot of potential in the translation of EU regulations in national legislation or company practices, such as the ETS 2 regulation or the directive on corporate social responsibility (CS3D). However, trade union actions in all those different initiatives at different levels should be coordinated (see further).

Internally, ACV and ABVV are struggling to coordinate their actions around the topic of climate change. They face three major internal challenges.

- The first challenge is their obvious lack of expertise on the topic, as can be observed by their absence in the working groups. Specifically in the case of Climate Leap, the trade union tries to compensate for their lack of expertise by allying with BBL, which seems to be a promising strategy as both trade union and BBL are satisfied with their current collaboration and are exploring how they can cooperate at other topics. It should immediately be noted that some trade unionist find their lack of expertise no problem, as they do not consider it their role to provide input on what they consider a managerial prerogative.
- A second challenge is trade unions' coordination of, and knowledge transfer between their actions and efforts on climate change in the dispersed Belgian policy context. For example, there are separate and several innovation funds trade unions have a seat in, but also multiple industrial working groups and funds where climate change is being discussed, and this both at federal, Flemish and regional level. In response, ACV organizes an industrial working group on a regular basis, inviting national and sectoral level trade unionists working on that topic through different channels. In addition, other civic societies or academia are also often invited to give input or feedback. These meetings are organized by the national ACV and aim to facilitate knowledge sharing through the organization and raise further awareness on the topic of climate. ABVV tries a similar approach. It should be noted that the interviewed trade unionists admit that the topic of climate change is currently mostly top down driven, from the national

level to the sectoral trade unions – where, in most cases, climate change is still not a priority. Although initiatives such as the Industrial working group aim to improve this, a broader, third challenge is situated here.

- A third, double, challenge for trade unions is (1) to promote the importance of climate change and decarbonization among the own members and sectors, and, (2) as an extension of that, getting them on the same line in terms of viewpoints and objectives. On company level, the EU objectives of 2030 and 2050 still look very abstract to most trade unionists, especially compared to their traditional concerns, namely employment conditions such as wages or working time issues. Moreover, most don't see climate change as a responsibility of the trade union, nor are they involved in relevant decision making or get the necessary information at company level. Trade unions also represent a broad spectrum of employees, often with very different interests and opinions when it comes down to how decarbonization should be achieved. Trade unions are faced with a democratic challenge when dealing with climate change, as they both represent the supposed winners and losers of climate change. This complexity might also explain the difficulties trade unions face in formulating concrete, tangible objectives on climate change measures.

Administration

The Flemish government aims to get as much of the advice produced by Climate Leap into the next coalition agreement.. They are satisfied with how things are going now but agree that the composition of the Permanent consultative body and the working groups was a political process. They insisted on the participation of trade unions and even BBL as environmental organization because of past experiences with major projects getting stuck or delayed because of a lack of social acceptance. Trade unions, following the administration, should understand why specific decisions are being made so they can defend and explain them to their members. Information sharing thus seems the main administrations' goal of participation of trade unions. However, they also emphasize that they pushed the governance of Climate Leap in such a way that employers are partially obliged to take the feedback of trade unions into account in the advices they provide the government. The administration insisted that all advices should be based on consensus, implying that if the governments' money is the carrot, the requirement for consensus building is the stick. The administration admits that it's a small stick, but insists that there exists an implicit pressure, especially for employers, to take into account the views of trade unions and BBL if they want to acquire government funds.

The administration confirms our finding that employers organization Essencia and trade unions seem to have similar interests in many respects. The trade union up till now mostly stressed a social justice and fairness argument and the administration believes that their role will grow once the technological and technical choices have been made and discussion moves on towards implementation and boundary conditions such as retraining.

Conclusion

The involvement of trade unions in a strategic policy preparation initiative is unique in Flanders. The position of trade unions in the Permanent consultative body legitimizes their position as a partner in the decarbonization of Flemish industry and provides them information that would otherwise be not accessible. Through their participation, trade unions gain expertise on the topic, are developing a strategic agenda of their own and learn to know the actors in the field. That said, the actual influence of trade unions in Climate Leap is considered limited for now. This influence is said to grow once the more softer, social concerns will be discussed in the future, but this is still uncertain and one might ask himself whether the technical and technological choices that are currently being made do not already set important (social) parameters, for instance regarding future employment prospects.

Lessons learned from Climate Leap useful for other trade unions in Europe are:

- The process of setting the governance and defining the different participants and partners should be transparent. Trade unions and BBL suggested that similar future initiatives should start with a mapping of the stakeholders and the governance should be legally defined beforehand. Interestingly, the role of the consultants as process facilitators was unquestioned by all partners. On the obligation of consensual advices the opinions differed. While the administration stressed the implicit pressure consensus puts on the employers to take into account the other opinions, BBL and trade unions were more critical, pointing at the risk of becoming co-responsible for advices they do not fully support.
- The scope of Climate Leap should have been broadened to enable a real strategic agenda for the Flemish industry. For example, Climate Leap does not advice on budget choices, nor does it include a discussion on the possible integration of the different channels of funding and subsidies.
- The social factors, including fairness, workforce impact and social acceptance should be included from the start in discussions. Although this is the case in Climate Leap in

theory, in practice employers and administration keep on delaying discussing on the topic to a later stage while giving priority to more technical, technological and economic discussions.

- The depth of participation of trade unions should not be confined to information sharing alone, but should also include more substantial participation in decision making. Otherwise there is a risk that trade unions themselves subscribe, that they become co-responsible for choices they do not fully support. In turn, such a lack of influence could push trade unions towards a more reactive stance towards decarbonization and climate change.
- Trade unions should search for suitable allies in the discussion on climate change and decarbonization. The example of Climate Leap illustrates that environmental organizations are a suitable ally which can also provide technical expertise the trade unions do not possess.
- Trade unions do not only require a seat at the table, but also need to develop a strategic agenda of their own. The case of Climate Leap shows how trade unions are slowly piecing together such an agenda, but face internal challenges to coordinate their actions on different fronts, facilitate knowledge sharing throughout the organization and build internal legitimacy on the topic.
- The discussion in Climate Leap show the challenge of decarbonization in a globalized economy where outsourcing is a significant and every-present risk. Keeping or even strengthening competitivity of the Flemmish industrial plants becomes a key concern and the touchstone for much of the proposed ideas and measures. In that context employer organisations at sectoral level and trade unions find themselves rooting for the same thing, namely a government that facilitates the transition and especially provides the funding for all this. We observe this alignment of interests also in topics such as (re)training and skills. The example of Climate Leap shows us that employer organisations and trade unions can be natural allies in the decarbonization debate.

Case 2: Chemea Ghent

Methodology

We conducted an in depth interview of 1,5 hour with trade unionist working for this interview.

Description

Our first company case, nicknamed Chemea, is a US based globally operating company in the chemical sector. The company produces a broad range of products for everyday purposes. Founded in the first half of the 20th century, the company now has over 30 manufacturing sites worldwide and employs about15,000 people. In Belgium, Chemea 's presence includes a plant that also produces pesticides. The plant employs several hundred employees.. Climate change related challenges are (1) the intensive production process using fossil fuels and (2) the oil-based production of pesticides. This reliance on fossil fuels both as a raw material and an energy source is challenging in the light of the EU climate targets for 2030 and 2050. Given Chemea 's global presence, it has the possibility of moving its production to other parts of the world . With the energy crisis in Europe during the winter of 2022, parts of production at Chemea already moved to the USA because of the more favorable energy costs. The recent opening of a production plant in the USA using coal illustrates the political- and environmental differences between the EU and the USA.

The three major trade unions (ACV, ABVV, ACLVB) of Flanders are active at Chemea and the social climate is good. For this case study we focus on the story of an ACV trade union representative with a long career at Chemea having a seat in the works council currently. Because of his efforts and approach, he was able to increase awareness for the need of a company policy on climate change related challenges, and even more important for our research, he established social dialogue on those company policies.

For the first time in 2019 our respondent tried to raise awareness for the challenges climate change could pose to Chemea. He succeeded to put it on the agenda of the works council, where he prepared a presentation of the changing policy context and how this could impact the production and workforce at Chemea. Our respondent acts out of a genuine concern for the climate in the first place, but he also believes that the company should proactively prepare for the upcoming changes to safeguard employment in the region. When he raised these concerns with the works council for the first time, he received little reaction from site leadership and his colleagues of the trade unions, nor did his presentation lead to any follow-up actions.

According to our respondent, the way he presented the challenges of climate change was too abstract for the works council to actually create a sense of urgency or undertake action.

In 2020 national ACV appointed the respondent for a training program matching with his aspirations. Under the banner "The New Conspirators," Reset. Flanders – a civic society organization, organized training programs for employees (mostly trade unionists or prevention advisors) for several years. The goal of the six day training program is to support employees to turn their ideas around sustainability, circular economy or climate change into action at the workplace. In a period of six months, our respondent followed individual- and group sessions on the topic, giving him inspiration to approach the topic of climate change at Chemea from a completely different angle.

In 2021 our respondent decided to organize individual talks/interviews with the works council members. He asked site leadership for a central and accessible room which he could use for these interviews. He redesigned and decorated that room to make it more welcoming and he added a lot of information on climate change, open for consultation to all. All works council members accepted his invitation and had an individual conversation with our respondent on the topic of climate change. For each he had the same two questions: what does climate change mean to you personally, and what does it mean to you professionally? These interviews were a big success, according to our respondent, for several reasons. First of all, our respondents' two questions enabled works council members to connect their personal opinions and beliefs on climate change with their professional interests and opinions. This made the discussion on the impact of climate change less abstract and gave it even some emotional depth to the members of the works council. Secondly, by speaking to the works council members individually, our respondent was able to identify and build an informal network of people who were personally in favor towards more proactive policies on climate change, but, because of their function in the organization and the works council found themself impeded, or at least not encouraged to support him. This way, our respondent knew who's support he could count on.

After the individual interviews, our respondent returned to the works council with a new presentation. This time he had more success and he found most members willing to engage in actual action, leading to some actual and tangible results:

- They decided to discuss the climate change related initiatives or company policies every three months at the works council as a fixed agenda item. Climate change thus became a topic of discussion between site leadership and trade unions on a quarterly basis.

- Site leadership created a new function, the climate change coordinator, responsible for coordination of climate initiatives at Chemea in Europe.
- The Chemea site launched several working groups on climate change related challenges and how to proactively counter them, for example on alternative energy sources or how to make the pesticides more sustainable.
- The Chemea site started with company excursions visiting examples of climate friendly initiatives at other companies or locations.

Our respondent himself emphasizes that the most important change was that climate and decarbonization became a routinely discussed, self-evident topic in the works council and at site level, just as other topics such as health and safety are. In addition, site leadership started to see climate change as an actual driver of shifting business models and consequently understood the need to proactively engage in the upcoming changes in products and production processes.

Although our respondent is happy with how Chemea is currently approaching climate change and sees this partly as the result of his actions as a trade unionist in the works council, he also emphasizes the continued difficulty to keep climate change included as a structural topic of social dialogue on the one side and to find a suitable role for trade unions to play in the ongoing changes on the other side. Discussions on the way production processes and products will change at Chemea and how to prepare or anticipate those changes are highly technical in nature. Such technical expertise is not available among trade union members. Even though they are invited to the different working groups, they experience difficulties to find trade union members who could at least understand, leave alone contribute to those working groups. The technicity of the discussions and unclear role of trade unions also causes site leadership to easily bypass trade unions in discussions or information updates. Our respondent noticed that they get all the information at the works council if requested, but it's not something site leadership is doing automatically. It's because of our respondent's informal network at the company that the trade union gets access to information and initiatives. Climate change as a topic of social dialogue should be constantly stressed and actively reinforced, as it is something new both site leadership and trade unions are not familiar with. In that respect, the agreement to discuss climate change quarterly at the works council, means a structural improvement.

Regarding the role of trade unions, our respondent's vision and current efforts focus on a (quantitative) control over the outcomes and objectives of the plans site leadership presents

them. He therefore tries to standardize information, identify useful indicators and increase the comparativeness of the received information of site leadership. Just as trade unions learned to interpret and use the social indicators site leadership is obliged to provide to the trade unions every year, trade unions have to invest in a set of indicators on climate change they can use to understand what site leadership is doing on that topic and act accordingly. This focus on the outcomes rather than the actual process of transformation means that trade unions should not invest in the pure technical expertise on climate change and its implications for production processes, but rather focus on getting grip on structural indicators of the transformation and try to use those to stir the process towards the intended objectives.

Finally, our respondent also emphasized the difficulties of engaging trade union members, both on a company and at sectoral level, of the importance and relevance of climate change. At company level, he experienced a lot of uncertainty and anxiety among the members when dealing with climate change. The topic is mostly too abstract for them and they don't see the immediate relevance for their work at Chemea. In response, our respondent emphasized the importance to make the topic very concrete and tangible for them, using real life changes caused by climate change everyone recognizes. At sectoral level, our respondent experienced a general lack of interest for his efforts. The focus of the sectoral trade union, ACV Bie, lies with traditional union topics mostly related to employment conditions. They tackle those topics mostly top down and offer little room for individual members to bring up new topics such as climate change.

Conclusion

The case of Chemea shows us that it is not only important to get a seat at the table, it is equally necessary to hold on to that seat and, of crucial importance, to know what to do with that seat. Trade unions at Chemea gained a seat at the table following an unorthodox approach of an individual trade unionist and even acquired a structural arrangement to discuss the topic at the level of the works council. However, the trade union has to constantly remind site leadership and their own members of their seat at the table, showing us the precarity of climate change as a topic of social dialogue. Simultaneously, the trade union is looking for working solutions that provide content and meaning to this seat. Their strategy focuses on setting and standardizing the specific indicators by which they can monitor and evaluate the plans of site leadership. Hence, their focus lies on information sharing and monitoring of those information. Finally, this case illustrates the importance of engaged individual trade union members in bringing climate change to the agenda of social dialogue (and keeping it there). As the institutional set

up of trade unions internally nor externally support or include climate change as topic of social dialogue, it is up to individuals such as our respondent to introduce and structurally anchor the topic both within the trade unions and within the structures of social dialogue at site leadership level.

Case 3: Chemco Antwerp

Methodology
We conducted an in depth interview of 1,5 hour with a trade unionist working for this company.

Description

Our second company case, nicknamed Chemco is a German chemical company that was spun off from Bayer. The company produces plastics for use in mattresses, cars and medical devices, among other things. At Chemco worldwide 16.000 people are employed. We focus on their plant in the port of Antwerp where they produce all kinds of advanced polymers and high-performance plastics, employing 950 employees. Climate change is a challenge for Chemco as (1) their main raw material is oil, a fossil fuel, and (2) their production process is energy intensive. At central level, in Germany, the company is developing a strategy based on the goal *to embed circular economic principles into the fabric of [their] operations and be a trailblazer for the entire plastics industry*. This strategy is put forward very strongly and visually on the Chemco website. However, as we will see in the case study, the goal of becoming a circular company is not accompanied by clear guidelines of how to get there, nor did there any consultation take place with management of the subsidiaries, nor with the trade unions at any level.

All three major trade unions (ACV, ABVV, ACLVB) of Belgium are represented at Chemco in Antwerp. We spoke with Patrik Collier, an ACV representative with a long career both at Chemco and in ACV. He has a seat in in the Antwerp work council and in the European work council of Chemco. In addition, he will soon take over a seat at the European ethical committee of the company. At Belgian level, Patrik is also engaged at sectoral level, where he is presiding the working group in preparation of the 4-yearly congress of ACV Bie – the sectoral trade union federation of construction and chemical companies. In addition, it should be noted that

an old Chemco colleague is one of the six national secretaries in charge of the day-to-day management of ACV National. This gives Patrik a direct, informal line with ACV at national level. Patrik combines several functions at several levels both within the company and the trade union, giving him an extended formal and informal network. The social climate at Chemco is stable, but in general not very cooperative.

Just as in the case of Chemea, Patrik has been trying for several years to include climate change and its related company challenges as a topic on the agenda of social dialogue. However, in contrast to the case of Chemea Ghent, Patrik has not been successful in engaging management to discuss climate change in the context of social dialogue. Moreover, he also experiences difficulties to convince his colleagues and even his own trade union, ACV Bie, of the importance of climate change. Patrik did not find allies in the German trade unions at the European level. Despite his limited success with management, Patrik keeps on trying to advance the topic at multiple levels and forums, as we will see in the following paragraphs.

Patrik's motivation to forward to topic of climate change is less inspired by a personal belief in the importance or rightness of the topic, but all the more by a belief that climate change will fundamentally alter production processes at Chemco and forms a threat to employment in the plant of Antwerp. His first priority is thus with the employment related consequences of climate change for Chemco. Patrik, just as our respondent from Chemea, followed the Reset. Flanders training "The New Conspirators", on how to promote social dialogue on climate change. However, this training focused more on innovative methods and approaches and less on the traditional work, channels and levels of social dialogue. Patrik acknowledged that a more innovative approach might work, for example at Chemea, but that he preferred the more institutional approach – as we will see in the next paragraphs.

At company level, Patriks first priority is to get answers from management on how the company is planning to tackle the challenges of climate change (new products, processes, technologies…) and what the impact (retraining, new skills required, …) will be for the employees he represents. Trade unions at Chemco Antwerp have regular meetings with management, and it was there that he first started asking questions on this topic. Management was interested but also reluctant and it was only after 9 months that Patrik got a written reaction saying that the climate challenges and the plans on dealing with them are being determined at the corporate headquarters in Germany. They advised him to raise his concerns at the European work councils or his German trade union colleagues. After insisting, management added that

they had no appropriate spokesperson to discuss this topic at the level of the Antwerp plant. Next, Patrik talked to the German trade unions and was able to raise his questions directly to the top management at the European work council. The reaction of management was similar, they found it interesting and admired his engagement with the topic, but didn't want to give him any concrete information or insights on how the company was planning to overcome the climate related challenges. Instead they repeated their goal to become fully circular, but without going into detail how they were going to do that. Consequently, Patrik considers those plans of management at least partly as greenwashing attempts. The German trade unions supported him, but had (more traditional) priorities amidst the recent energy crisis, and didn't put any actual effort in supporting him.

When not receiving any information from higher management in Germany, Patrik put climate change on the agenda of the Antwerp's' work council. He built the argument that if they do not develop any plans for the company centrally, management in Antwerp should take initiative and start thinking and preparing for the future of the plant. He proposed to organize a working group on the topic, including the trade unions. However, local management plainly rejected the idea, arguing that climate change is not a topic of social dialogue and that no working group will discuss the topic. After this clear statement of management, he tried to indirectly raise awareness on the topic by regularly pointing and asking about the regulatory framework on decarbonization and how the company will be responding to every more strict norms. For example, he asked questions on the ECTS position of the company, or their approach toward the Scope 1, 2, 3 emission system. Management tended to sideline those questions because they often lacked expertise on the topic, or they redirected his questions to the environmental working group. The latter is, in the opinion of Patrik, more a discussion forum where no actual decisions are being made as there are also no important members of management seating in that working group. However, as much of his questions referred to actual legislative obligations, local management was often forced to react and develop actual policies around those topics.

At sectoral level the topic of climate change is not a priority despite the major challenges facing the Belgian chemical industry. However, Patrik was able to structurally raise awareness on climate change at sectoral level as member of the union delegation involved in the negotiations on a new sectoral collective agreement. The latter includes a paragraph on the risks of climate change and the increasingly strict regulation of carbon emissions and the consequent need to incorporate those risks into social dialogue at sectoral but certainly also at company level. This

collective agreement was signed last year by both trade unions and employers' organization Essencia. This paragraph, Patrik hopes, can be used to foster social dialogue on the topic. However, he adds immediately, that requires trade unionists or managers willing to prioritize climate change– something which seems unlikely based on his current experiences.

At the level of trade union, he could use his position as president of the working group in preparation of the four yearly congress to include climate change risks as a topic of discussion. In the preparatory survey they distributed among their members including a list of possible priorities for ACV Bie, Patrik included two statements related to climate change, but those two ended at the bottom of the list. Because of his formal position though, Patrik was able to include those topics to the program of the congress. Patrik acknowledges that trade unionists and representatives have too little expertise on the topic of climate change and the challenges and risks it entails. To tackle this, Patrik already had several discussions with the team of trainers and coaches of ACV Bie, trying to convince them to include climate change to their trainings. Finally, Patrik is convinced that if you want to change something, you have to go for the important positions in the trade union and the social dialogue channels at company level. In that regard he will replace a retiring colleague at the European ethical committee soon. The latter meets more regularly than the European work councils, enabling Patrik to better network with the German trade unions in the hope to convince them to take initiatives on climate change and start asking questions of their own.

After a decade of trying to get management to join the conversation about climate change, Patrik can cite several obstacles, but also some small successes. Regarding the position of the trade unions, we already mentioned that both at company and at sectoral level, they do not see climate change as a priority, nor do they posses any expertise on the challenges it entails or how to handle those as a trade union. Patrik mostly adds that climate change is too abstract of a topic for most trade union representatives, it's consequences lying too far in the future for them to feel the urgency to act now. In addition, employees and trade union representatives alike are more focused on the current employment conditions and do not look at the challenges to those conditions facing ahead. At national level, ACV tries to create some sense of urgency, but at sectoral or company level, their message still sounds weak. Regarding the position of management, Patrik points out two important challenges. First of all, local management at plants such as Antwerp change every four year, determining their scope of action and especially limit the timespan in which they think and act. This prevents long term thinking of an active engagement with trade unions on the topic. In addition, top management at Chemco does not

provide local management with clear targets or plans, instead choosing for a long term target without stipulating how to get there. It should be noted that local management at Chemco was not involved or consulted at setting this goal of becoming a circular company. Consequently, local management does not feel responsible for attaining those goals, or at least not stimulated to take individual action. Patrik stresses that local management in Antwerp undertakes actions in the context of climate change. There is a major research center in Antwerp where they experiment with new products based on bio fuel or with recycling finished products. However, the first big batch of bio polymers had to be sold with a loss as nobody was found willing to pay for the bio stamp. Recycling is possible, but Patrik never saw any plans to get the old material back to the plants for actual recycling. So there are sporadic initiatives, but Patrik doubts whether there is an integrated plan or, alternatively was never able to see it.

Among his achievements, Patrick is happy that the new sectoral agreement finally acknowledges climate change as a topic of social dialogue. At company level, he noticed that the local management is learning from this continued questions and remarks and are now better able to situate and respond to his questions. For example, local management recently presented a plan regarding the Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions. The legal obligation was probably the most important driver of this policy, but Patrik's initiative was certainly also an instigator.

Conclusion

Despite the continued efforts of an engaged trade union representative, trade unions at Chemco have no seat at the table when it comes to climate change related topics. Nor management, nor Belgian/German trade unions see climate change as a priority for social dialogue and although the vision of the company towards the future (circularity) is more or less clear, the path towards the goal does not seem to be crystallizing yet, or is at least hidden from the eyes of the trade unions. We can still learn some important lessons from this case. Firstly, this case illustrates the importance of finding allies and constructing an internal network of like minded colleagues to forward and foster discussions on climate change at company level. Despite efforts at national and European level, Patrik did not succeed at creating such an alliance/network. In fact, he never had a proper discussion with a representative of management on climate change. Secondly and relatedly, the limited impact despite continued effort might point us to the limitations of following the traditional and institutionalized channels of social dialogue for fostering climate change discussions. Although we should not minimize Patrik's impact, we should definitely not overestimate it. Especially compared to the successful, although unorthodox approach of our respondent at Chemea, the case of Chemco seems to point out that

the traditional positions of trade unions and management in the institutionalized channels of social dialogue at Chemco are just not tailored to the specificities of climate change. To tackle climate change, organizational actors require a proactive attitude, strategic thinking about the economic future of the company and specific technical expertise to probe for the possible solutions – all characteristics rarely found in Belgian social dialogue channels. Put differently, with a traditional approach it seems very difficult to overcome the existing and vested positions and interests of management and trade unions. Although any real control of labour over climate change related policies and impact will undoubtedly follow from its incorporation within the traditional structures of social dialogue, the road to get there might lead through less conventional ways. Finally, the case of Chemco illustrates the complexities of social dialogue in a multinational company where management frequently changes position at the subsidiaries and firm policies are set at a central level. Especially under conditions of uncertainty, such as with climate change related topics, the responsibilities of who should do what might not be entirely clear and in dealing with trade unions, responsibilities are easily passed between local and central level. If trade unions do not coordinate their efforts at national and international level, the case of Chemco illustrates, it becomes difficult to obtain the necessary information or to puncture all too abstract managerial visions/greenwashing attempts.

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