

*Survey on Covid-19' effects on TUs inside ESCB*



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# Survey's framework

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic brought many challenges to all of society including national central banks who have been obliged to re-adapt their traditional work model in order to protect staff from the coronavirus. Teleworking has become the main functional tool for the vast majority of the employees of the national central banks and has been vital for the NCB's to maintain their business operations.

The WGs of the Standing Committee (Social Benefits, IT, SSM and MTF) have carried out different surveys in order to understand how this transition to teleworking occurred and which measures were undertaken in our respective central banks that have influenced staff well-being and working conditions.

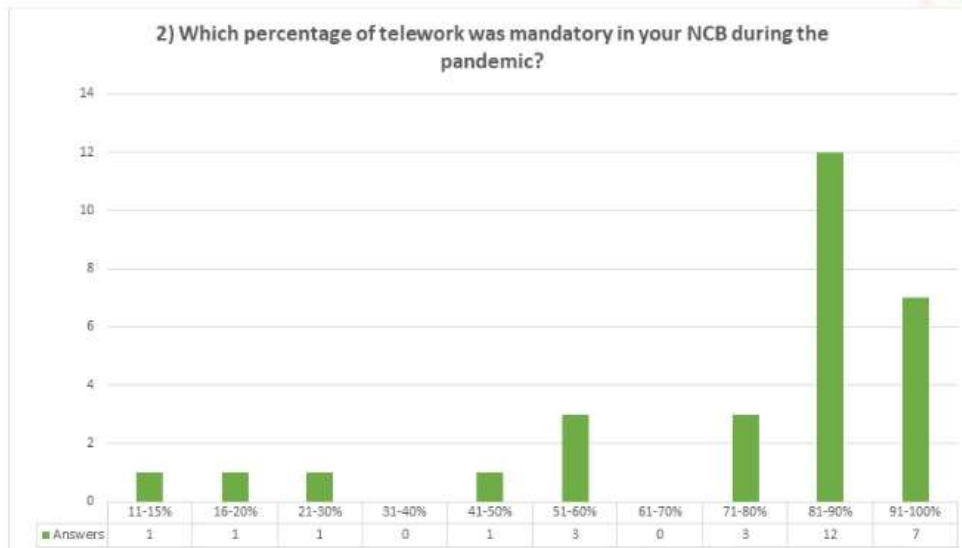
After more than 3 months since the lockdown began, the SCECBU Communication WG also proposed to analyse (through a very short survey) how this transition to teleworking occurred in terms of trade union involvement on the measures taken by the NCBs, because we are of the opinion that trade unions must take part in the decisions taken to fight this dramatic situation. Therefore, the focus of this survey has been to understand how much the TUs have influenced the decisions taken and how staff representatives have continued to do their job under such special circumstances. And also, which effects Covid-19 brought to ESCB trade union organisations and how did they communicate with staff during this pandemic crisis.

Four sample questions were asked that have helped us outline a scenario of the trade unions' current and future role. We hope that the conclusions will also support our position during the social dialogue discussions with the ECB.

**Number of respondents: 25 TUs from 18 countries and the ECB**  
**Response Rate: 72%**



## Adoption of Teleworking



**Findings:** from the above graph we can conclude that the majority of CBs have provided between 71% to almost 100% teleworking to staff. Those CBs providing a higher percentage of teleworking did not reach 100% considering that the branches haven't had the possibility to use this tool, due to their job specificities. Nevertheless, in these cases, staff have been allowed to work in split teams. In some CBs 95 % of some sectors, e.g. cash handling and payment systems, teleworking is not possible, so shift systems have been introduced.

We can also add that, unfortunately, some CBs have provided a very low percentage of teleworking to their staff.

**OUR CLAIMS:** Teleworking was the main "solution" found to guarantee the safety of staff in the context of Covid-19. It might become one of the important tools to be used in the future within all NCBs and CB Boards should allow staff to use it. Anyhow, teleworking cannot, in any circumstances, imply less rights for workers and it should be subject to regulation in the context of collective bargaining. We must also not forget that this kind of model may bring a great loss of social contacts and, consequently, TU membership.

## Trade Union's role and influence during the pandemic



Did your central bank consult with trade union representatives before taking action to combat the coronavirus epidemic?

YES

44%

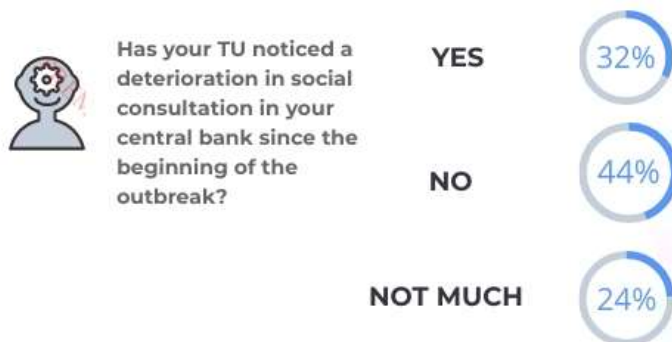
NO

56%

**Findings:** Most of NCBs have not previously consulted with their trade unions concerning the measures taken to combat the pandemic. We have also noticed a major difference among the northern countries (where decisions were discussed with TUs before taking any action) and southern and eastern countries (where most of the CB's, with few exceptions, did not consult with the TU's). One TU declared that during the pandemic consultation and co-operation had actually been better than before and that they would like to keep it at this level. Some TUs have also stated that HR asked for their approval before implementing the rules of behaviour and organisation of work. But it has also happened that in some CBs other staff representative structures had been consulted instead. We must stress that a few TUs stated that consultation does not usually take place with the respective boards.

**OUR CLAIMS:** Job precariousness is growing all around and, indeed, central banks have contributed to this through the increasing recurrence to outsourcing. These are situations and facts that threaten the future of trade unions. Therefore, TUs must be more involved in the decisions to be taken within the ESCB. As they are more aware of the real needs and complaints of staff, TUs can be of great support to central bank boards for finding common solutions and contribute to a common corporate culture, which was so important in the past and that risks being lost in the new context of work.

## Trade Union's role and influence during the pandemic (cont.)

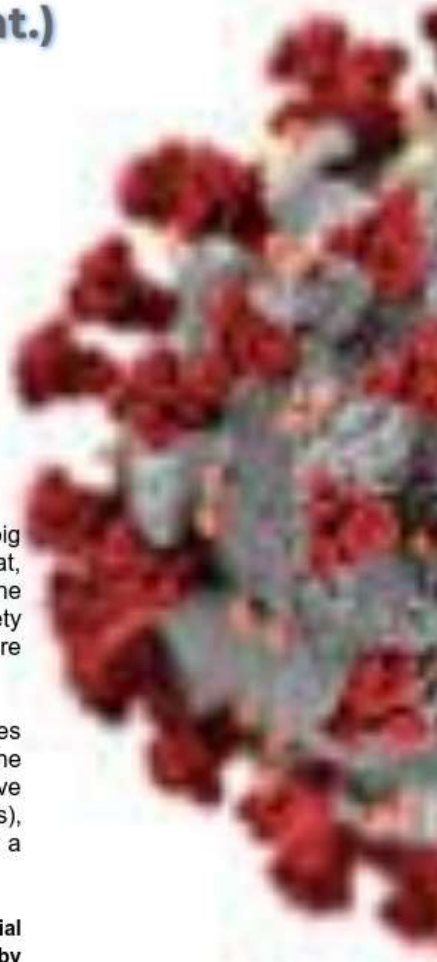


**Findings:** Many of the trade union respondents have reported big difficulties, for quite sometime now, to discuss with the boards and that, unfortunately, this situation did not improve during the pandemic. One TU has even stated that the right to be consulted on health and safety matters was ignored and that the Bank set up an ad hoc structure instead from which staff representation was excluded.

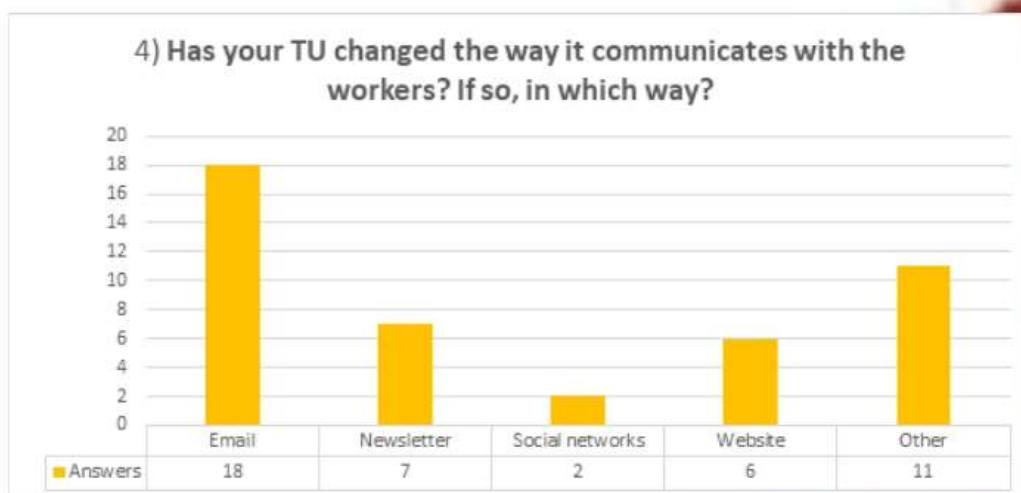
Here, as in other contexts, we continue to observe evident differences between the south and the north (where social consultation with the boards has not suffered a great deterioration and even some have been positively surprised about the behaviour of the respective boards), and most especially Eastern countries (where we can take note of a growing deterioration in social dialogue).

**OUR CLAIMS:** At ESCB level, consultation and negotiation are essential for finding the correct way to prevent staff from being seriously hit by Covid-19 consequences in the working environment.

The SCECBU demands to open a true social dialogue in order to find some common answers by CB boards and staff representatives.



## Communication with members



**Findings:** due to the percentage of staff teleworking, the TUs were obliged to use more electronic means to reach their members.

E-mail was the preferred tool used and teleconference calls were also reported to have contributed to keep TUs' activity alive during the pandemic crisis.

**OUR CLAIMS:** traditional trade union practice has been built around the fact that members work together in a centralized workplace. And now, with the increasing usage of new models of work, TUs will have to strengthen their networks in order to keep in contact with their members but also with employees, in general.

The SCECBU demands that the ESCB leaders create the necessary conditions for trade unions to be able to use the respective CB Intranet in order to be in touch with employees and members.



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## **Final Working Group's conclusions**

As the previous reports by the Social benefits, IT, SSM and MTF WGs have highlighted, and we quote, "the Covid-19 pandemic, starting in China in December 2019, has brought unprecedented disruption and disorder to the world economy and has affected the lives and health of millions of its citizens".

The effects of Covid-19 on the economy of Europe has been severe even in countries with robust economies.

NCBs have been fast to react to the pandemic in order to protect their staff that have continued to fulfil their duties in a very professional way.

As the present survey points out, the short time available to NCBs to respond to the pandemic might have been one of the reasons that have prevented the respective Boards to consult with TUs regarding the decisions to take (at least we want to believe in this). On the other hand, this has also been an occasion for some boards and TUs to rethink the social dialogue, which might be helpful in the future. We will see.





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## **Final Working Group's conclusions (contin.)**

The following outlines the most relevant answers received from the respondents about new plans:

- NCBs and TUs will have to think about new ways of keeping the social dialogue;
- New regulations concerning working time and extension of teleworking must be negotiated with TUs in the future within those NCBs where it is not usually done;
- some CBs have been very proactive with constant messages to staff and also most of the TUs have improved their communication with their members through different channels and therefore, the SCECBU requires the continuity of these efforts;
- on the other hand, most of the NCBs have chosen to engage in dialogue with internal committees (e.g. ad hoc structures especially created for this context), rather than with TUs that were completely excluded from the dialogue).







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### **Final Thoughts**

Trade Unions' role within the Central Banks has changed significantly over the past 10 years. A growing trend in outsourcing, employer sponsored forms of employee participation and other constraints have combined to precipitating a significant drop in union membership, therefore weakening TUs active role. The coming years, especially now, with the new digitalisation context and Covid-19, will be, for sure, very challenging for the trade union movement inside central banks, as in everywhere. The way TUs respond to the future challenges and opportunities will be crucial in determining their level of influence at work and beyond in the future.

