**ILERA European Conference**

**10-12 September 2025**

**Special Session submission**

**Title** Comparative Industrial Relations Research: Towards Social Europe? An ETUI and *Transfer* research round-up

**Name of organiser** Jane Parker;1 Kalina Arabadjieva;2 Béla Galgóczi;2 Agnieszka Piasna;2 Wouter Zwysen;2 and Bart Vanhercke2

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**Five key words** industrial relations, comparative, social Europe, research, ETUI

**Summary** The European Union (EU) continues to face critical challenges affecting the economy, welfare systems, jobs and workplaces, and social life. The European Commission (EC) (2024) asserts that ‘(a) strong Social Europe is the foundation of prosperity and well-being, and a competitive and fair economy’ and that ‘(s)killed workers, capable of leveraging innovation and adapting to the clean and digital transitions, are key to this.’ But, in the context of current EU industrial policy and the recent Draghi (2024) report, what does a ‘strong Social Europe’ mean and what is its relationship to existing and potential industrial relations systems, institutions and actors?

In this Special Session, we would adopt a panel discussion involving short panellist presentations (5-6 minutes each) by ETUI researchers on key industrial relations features within and across the EU Member States as they relate to progress on Social Europe, including:

* challenges of broad transformations in contemporary economic and employment systems for workers, workplaces and society – key findings from Piasna, A., Theodoropoulou, S. and Vanhercke, B. (eds) *Benchmarking Working Europe 2025*, ETUI and ETUC (**Agnieszka Piasna and Bart Vanhercke**);
* EU green industrial policy: what role for labour law? (**Kalina Arabadjieva**);
* ETUC’s assessment of recent EU industrial policy and union sectoral responses to EU industrial policy and implications for worker participation and representation (**Jane Parker**);
* new mechanisms in Europe (e.g. Industrial Alliances, an Industrial Forum, the European Trade Union Confederation’s (ETUC) (2024) Trade Union Renewal Centre) in relation to Social Europe (**tbd**);
* managing the green transition: What tools exist in the ‘industrial relations’ repertoire (**Bela Galgóczi**);
* worker’s bargaining power in light of economic transformations and institutional change – trend analysis of labour market and wage inequalities from a perspective of workers’ bargaining position, with a focus on how economic trends – globalisation, digitalisation, but also growing labour market concentration and monopsony - widen differences between workers and lead to greater inequality. On the other hand, stronger collective representation on the one hand and growing labour shortages on the other can and do offer some rebalance (**Wouter Zwysen**); and
* withering Social Europe in the new EU economic governance context? (**Bart Vanhercke**).

These presentations would be followed by Q&A involving the panellists and audience.

*Substantively*, the session’s significance concerns the imperative for industrial relations in Europe to play a key role in informing industrial policy aimed at supporting quality jobs and the social conditionality of public funds to in turn help ensure the respect and ongoing protection of union rights, worker interests and participation, and wider societal inclusion and well-being.

*Processually*, the session is important as a key forum in which academics, policymakers, and practitioners can discuss empirical research of relevance from the ETUI, including recent studies published in its house journal, *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research.* The session would also be supported by an ETUI book stall at the conference, and publicity by the Institute’s Communications and Publications department.

**References**

Draghi, M. (2024). The future of European competitiveness: Part A – A competitiveness strategy for Europe. September. Brussels: EC.

EC. (2024). Delivering a strong Social Europe. <https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/delivering-strong-social-europe_en>

ETUC. (2024). Adopted Resolution - Roadmap to establish a Trade Union Renewal Centre. Adopted 26 March, Brussels: ETUC, <https://www.etuc.org/en/document/en-adopted-resolution-roadmap-establish-trade-union-renewal-centre>

Piasna, A., Theodoropoulou, S. and Vanhercke, B. (eds) (2025). *Benchmarking Working Europe 2025: Quality jobs for sustainable competitiveness*. Brussels: ETUI and ETUC, forthcoming.

*Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research.* <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/TRS>

**Participants (tentative)** Kalina Arabadjieva Presenter

Béla Galgóczi Presenter

Jane Parker Chair and/or presenter

Agnieszka Piasna Presenter

Bart Vanhercke Presenter

Wouter Zwysen Presenter