



MSU - WP7-Europe

DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLACE OF WOMEN IN COMMERCE SECTOR UNIONS

1. General information on the commerce sector and appraisal of gender inequalities in this sector

1.1. Summary presentation of the area of economic activity, enterprises and technical and economic development of the sector

Unlike the metal industry, commerce is an expanding area of economic activity, which offsets the difficult employment situation in industry. There have been changes in terms of concentration and mergers recently, but it is one of the sectors, that has grown most rapidly over the past 20 years in Europe. Another difference is that there are many more women in this sector - almost half of the jobs are occupied by women, especially in retailing (more than 60% of employees are women). More recently, in **Belgium** and **Austria**, growth of the retail sector has slowed down, because of stagnating or even declining household expenditure. Thus, in Belgium, the volume of sales in the distribution sector dropped by 1%. Despite disappointing sales, overall employment is increasing. Between 1996 and 2000, the number of employees increased by 10%. Stagnating sales seem to have affected, above all, the number of self-employed, of whom there were 2,238 fewer. In the **Netherlands**, employment in the retail sector has grown substantially in the past ten years. In **Italy**, the service sector is growing, especially regarding women's employment (10.9% growth rate of women's employment compared with 2.5% for men) – more than a million women's jobs were created between 1993 and 2001 (+ 36,000 in industry and – 178,000 in agriculture).

The commerce sector covers a wide range of activities: wholesale, retail, food, non-food, etc. – in which types of jobs vary. In retailing, which our study focuses on, there are both tiny groceries and huge hypermarkets. The sector is undergoing major restructuring. Changes include increased internationalisation and concentration, continuing development of franchises and new price wars. Thus, for example, some Italian companies have disappeared and been taken over by German and French ones.

In **Denmark**, the overall feature of the commerce sector is the high proportion of small companies both in wholesale and retail parts of the sector. In wholesale, 78% of all companies have 1-10 employees and in retail 84% of the companies have between 1-10 employees. In the retail sector in recent years there has been an increase in larger companies, especially in the food sector, with the development of discount shops and coops. At the same time, shopping centres have increased in numbers, emptying the centres of smaller towns of small shops of different kinds, even if legislation has prevented the creation of an unlimited numbers of shopping malls.

Table 1. Data on companies and employment in the commerce sector

Country	Number of companies	Proportion of employees in very small companies (under 10 employees)	Employment	
			Total employment	% of women
Austria	35,040 (retail)	32% (retail)	493,231 (incl. 47% retail)	51% (68% retail)
Belgium	69,259 (incl. 37,650 retail)	42% (retail)	434,172 (incl. 46% retail)	46,9% (67,8% retail)
Denmark	49,806 (incl. 31,446 retail)	40,843 (retail 26,476 – 64.8%)	347,163 (retail 185,519)	44.8% (retail 56.6%)
France	515,830 (incl. 309,396 retail)	1/3	2,958,120 (incl. 51,65% retail)	45% (62% retail)
Italy	720,000	2/3	3,456,000 (3 millions full-time equivalents)	45,2%
Netherlands	89,000 (retail)	28% (retail)	629,000 (retail 380,000 full-time equivalents)	64% (retail)

Sources: national reports

1.2. Appraisal of gender inequality in the commerce sector

Employment flexibility

Employment flexibility is one of the major features of this sector. Each country uses various ways of managing non-permanent employment: part-time jobs are used in all countries; there are also fixed-term contracts, temporary work, para-subordinate contracts (Italy), “minimal employment” (Austria), sub-contracting (Belgium) and a variety of flexible contracts (the Netherlands), etc.

- **Part-time jobs** are very certainly the form of employment, that is most widespread in the commerce sector: in **Austria**, almost 40% of all commerce employees work part-time (1999). The proportion is particularly high in supermarkets and discount stores, with a view to reducing labour costs by using as big a number of flexible employees as possible. The disadvantages of part-time work include inferior working conditions, unsocial hours and unskilled work. Processes of deskilling – which are typically the result of technical and organisational measures (in supermarkets and discount stores) – principally affect women.

* In **Denmark**, the number of part-time employed women dropped from approximately 341,000 in 1990 to approx. 217,000 in 2001. At the same time, the employment rate for women increased from 75.6% to 81.4% of all women in the labour force between 16-66 years of age. During the same period, the part-time employment of men increased slightly from approximately 148,000 in 1990 to approx. 165,000 in 2001, as the employment rate dropped from 84.6% in 1990 to 77.8% in 2001. Over the same period of time, changes in working time agreements concern flexibility.

* In **Belgium**, part-time work is very widespread in the commerce sector and especially in retailing, where almost half of all employees and 45% of women have part-time contracts. 87% of part-timers in retailing are women. But the increase in the use of part-time employment is related to changing work organisation - following on from legislation¹, that aims at promoting work-life balance, new forms of reduced working hours are being introduced.

* Part-time work is also a very common trait of jobs in retail in the **Netherlands**. Nearly two-thirds of all jobs in retail are part-time. Not only women, but also young employees, are frequently involved in (small) part-time jobs. As in other countries, the percentage of part-timers is higher in supermarkets than in small shops (nearly 50% in general, but more than 60% in supermarkets). Part of the increase of employment is clearly a result of the growth of part-time jobs.

* In **France**, 37% of employees work part-time (fewer than in 2000, when 39% did so). The average length of part-time hours is 26.5 per week. For women, part-time employment predominates in super- and hyper-markets: 54% of women employees work part-time (compared with only 11% of men). Part-time employment is most widespread in “maxi-discount stores”, where 76% of women work part-time. 21% of part-timers are subjected to variable working times – this is greatest in the maxi-discount stores, affecting almost half (46%) of part-timers. Maximum breaks are stable: 3 hours if shops close for

¹ The 10 August 2001 law on work-life balance concerns the system of time credits, shorter careers and reduced allowances for half-time work.

lunch and 2.5 hours if they do not. According to a survey carried out by FCD², cashiers are greatly affected by part-time work. The study identifies two reasons: “*The predominance of part-time work today is, of course, a result of the fact that it makes it possible to manage queues more flexibly, but there is also a widespread feeling that it is a job with a high degree of stress and a rapid pace of work - and that it is hardly possible to keep this up during full-time work on the till*”.

* In **Italy**, the growth of employment is explained by the increase in part-time jobs in the commerce sector and catering between 1997 and 2001, although in general this form of employment is less developed in this country. The proportion of women part-timers is significantly greater than that of men and part-time work is mainly non-chosen, but is the only way of being recruited, especially in big stores.

- Besides part-time work, **other forms of flexible jobs** have developed in different ways in each country:

* In **Austria**, in 2000, every 15th women working in the retail sector was “minimally employed” (i.e., earning less than 301.54 Euros in 2003 and not contained in the Chamber of Business’ employment statistics). In 2000, 76% of all the minimally employed were women. The number of minimally employed staff increased greatly between 1996 and 2002 – from 17,501 to 27,050. Commerce is the sector with the highest proportion of minimally employed staff. They are protected by all occupational rules governing normal employees (with the exception of the discharge regulation in the Salaried Workers Act). They have, e.g., the right to take paid holidays and family care leave and they may voluntarily sign up for the regular social insurance scheme. According to the trade unions, the minimally employed should, therefore, not be seen as atypical employees. Atypical forms of employment include categories such as the “new self-employed” and “new contractors” – forms of employment that have also greatly increased in the commerce sector.

* In **Belgium**, the sector seems to be using more and more fixed-term contracts. There are few such contracts in wholesale companies, but 9% of employees in retailing have fixed-term contracts. In 2001, 65% of new recruits to big retail companies (more than 20 employees) were given fixed-term contracts. Moreover, merchandising and sub-contracting are not just limited to demonstrating promotions, but also used for restocking and drawing up stocks for departments. These methods threaten permanent jobs, given that working conditions and pay of those employed by external companies – including temporary agencies who provide specialised suppliers with staff – are significantly worse than those set by commerce sector joint negotiating commissions.

* In **France**, although the majority (77% in 2002) of contracts are permanent, fixed-term contracts have been increasingly used over the past ten years (+ 74%, while “normal” employment only increased by 23%). Fixed-term contracts mainly concern women (62%), whereas only 44.8% of all employees in the sector are women. Another type of employment, that is increasing greatly, is that of sales demonstrators, 90% of whom are women. They have permanent contracts, but their hours are not fixed – both in terms of number of hours and when they work – they often have long periods without work and are subjected to changes in timing. Given the small number of hours they work (less than 20

² FCD (Fédération des entreprises du Commerce et de la Distribution), *Evolution d'encaissement dans la grande distribution alimentaire*, December 2001.

days per month), they are not entitled to paid holidays, nor unemployment benefits and pensions. As they are employed by industrial service providers, they are not covered by the commerce sector collective agreement. 10 cases that were taken to the employment tribunal (*prud'hommes*) by *CFDT* – denouncing their situation - were won.

* In **Italy**, “para-subordinate” work is widespread in large retail stores. This kind of contract escapes any precise legislative regulation as it cannot be classified as freelance, nor subordinate. Its use is often unjustified, apart from the fact that it costs less and those concerned have fewer rights. Companies use “continuous and co-ordinated collaborators”, who enjoy organisational independence, even though their activity is functionally and structurally linked to the contractor company, and “share associates contracts”, which is essentially a masked form of subordinate contracts, but includes accountability for losses. Even though there is very little reliable data available, these forms are increasingly used.

* The retail sector in the **Netherlands** contains a great variety of flexible contracts. In the larger department stores and supermarkets, nearly 17 % of all men have some kind of flexible contract. For women this percentage is nearly the same. The majority (87%) of employees with flexible contracts are under 25 years old. This picture is somewhat different in the segment of retail with small shops (food retail, excluding supermarkets). Here, in 2000, only 11 % of all those working in this sector are working on a flexible basis: 9 % of all men, 12 % of all women. A big difference is that the flexible workforce does not consist of young workers (only 18%), but largely of (older) women.

Occupational segregation

There are no overall statistics regarding the distribution of jobs within companies, but it is clear that in all the countries covered by this study, women predominate amongst sales staff, office employees and cashiers in the retail sector. However, heads of subsidiaries, regional directors and shop directors are in the hands of men.

* In recent years in **Austria**, there is a tendency for women to become subsidiary managers of drugstore chains. According to a *GPA* union officer: “*This trend does exist and the reason is most likely not because employers have discovered equal opportunities in this field, but rather that women are willing to tolerate more; they are more able to suffer under the conditions that prevail in these chain stores; they are easier to manipulate and work for less money*”.

* In **France**, there are no gendered data for all functions, but *CFDT's TEQ* survey³ refers to the distribution of men and women in some occupations: with 62% of the sample being women, which is representative of the whole sector, 96% of cashiers, 76% of sales staff, 59% of those in self-service and 91% of office employees are women.

* In the **Netherlands** no detailed specific gendered data are available for functions in the sector. However statistics from the national Central Bureau of Statistics make clear that, whilst only 15% of all women working in supermarkets work at a higher level, this is the

³ The *TEQ* survey concerned 3,000 employees in super- and hyper-markets and was carried out between 1997 and 1999. The sample is composed of 67% non union members, 62% women, 75% working in hypermarkets (Carrefour, Casino, Continent and Leclerc, etc.); 26% are cashiers, 25% in self-service, 10% sales staff, 7% office employees and 32% “others”.

case for nearly 34% of the men. Due to the fact that most shop owners in the smaller shops are men, here the difference is even larger: no figures can be given for women working on a higher level in food retail, for instance. This means the numbers are too small to count.

* In **Denmark**, there are also no data on segregation in the commerce sector. In wholesale, women account for approximately 40% of employees and a third of these women (a quarter of men employees) have little or no occupational training. In retail, 57% of the employed are women, over 50% of whom are in the 16-29 years age group. About 40% of both men and women employees have no or little occupational training.

* In **Italy**, 21% of women employees in all sectors are executives, but only 15% in the commerce sector. 37% of women perform managerial functions (but in the commerce sector, there are only 32% of women middle managers). 52.5% of women in the sector are in white collar positions (compared with 33% of men) and the proportion of blue collar women is less (43%, compared with 59% of the men).

1.3. Industrial relations

Unionisation and women

* In **Austria**, *GPA* is the union, which organises all employees in services, including commerce. The rate of unionisation in the commerce sector – 10% - is relatively low. In some very large enterprises, it can, exceptionally, reach 80%. According to a *GPA* officer: “*Other sectors are easier to organise. The retail sector is dominated by small enterprises. If there is a shop steward, then he is rarely a full-time union officer and has to travel long distances*”. According to a woman shop steward: “*The reason for lack of willingness (to join) is that everybody complains that union dues are too high... the law enforces the collective bargaining agreement for all employees – so they say why should I join the union, if I get the pay raise anyway?*”

* In **France**, *CGT* and *CFDT* share most union members in the sector (about 25,000 members each), but each have their own specific features and strong points. While *FO* and *CFTC* just have a few strongholds in certain big department stores. The proportion of women members is respectively 48% and 47% in *CGT* and *CFDT*, i.e., less than the proportion of women employees in the commerce sector. Even though it is still difficult for women to be in national sector union leadership bodies, they are better represented at grass roots: according to a survey carried out by the woman officer responsible for equality within the *CFDT* services union concerning 104 branches (covering all services), with a 72% response rate: amongst the 46% of members who are women, 35% are union delegates, 47% are on branch executives, of whom, 29% are branch secretaries and 49% are branch treasurers (here we find the role of accountant that is attributed to women...). 38% are involved at the inter-sector level (in *département* and regional committees, etc.). Only 6 out of 78 branches have a gender balance clause in their internal rules.

* In **Belgium**, the commerce sector is made up of various sector unions. *Landelijke Bediendencentrale en Nationaal verbond voor Kaderpersoneel (LBC-NVK)* is a *CSC* sector union, that organises office employees and executives in Flanders and Brussels, while *Centrale Nationale pour Employés (CNE)* is the Walloon sister organisation of *NVK* is also affiliated to *CSC*. *LBC* has 276,000 members and women are in the majority

(57%). The sector union affiliated to *FGTB* is called *Bond voor Bedienden, Technici en Kaders- Syndicat des employés, techniciens et cadres de Belgique (BBTK-SETCa)*. It has 250,000 members, of whom 60% are women.

* As in the national setting in **the Netherlands**, so in the commerce / retail, sector unions of three trade union confederations define the picture: *FNV Bondgenoten*, *CNV Dienstenbond* (services) and – to a lesser degree – *MHP*. *FNV Bondgenoten* has a little more than 32,000 members in the retail sector, i.e., a little more than 5% of all those working in the retail sector are members of this union. *CNV Dienstenbond* has even fewer members and *MHP* several hundred. This means that total unionisation is some 10%.

* In **Italy**, as in the metal industry, all 3 trade union confederations have a sector union in services (including commerce, tourism, personal services and service companies): *Filcams (CGIL)*, *Fisascat (CISL)* and *Uiltucs (UIL)*. *Filcams* is the biggest services sector union and, according to 31.12.2002 data, has 284,608 members (57% of whom are women, i.e., more than their proportion amongst employees – 47%). Union membership is increasing (+5.4% between 2001 and 2002). But turnover is very high (more than 25%), because of seasonal and atypical work. The proportion of women union members is higher in the North (70% in Turin and Bologna). *Fisascat* has 154,068 members with an annual growth of 4.25% and 47.6% of women (2001). *Uiltucs* is smaller with 83,769 members.

* In **Denmark**, the biggest union for commerce, wholesale and retail - unionising approximately 100,000 employees in the commerce sector is one of the 4 sectors of *HK/DK*, named *HK/commerce*. There are approximately 345,000 employees in the commerce sector. Unionisation depends on the agreements made by the employers' organisation and trade unions, and the functions filled in the companies. Other unions involved are *KAD* and *SID*, (approximately 125,000 members in commerce), as well as *IDA* and other technical and commercial trade unions organising managers and other specialists. 70% of the members of *HK/commerce* are women (in the wholesale sector 31.4% of employees are women and in the retail sector 56,8% of employees are women).

Collective bargaining and industrial climate

* In **Austria**, a key element – that is different from other European countries – is the corporatist system of interest groups: employers must (according to legislation) join the Chamber of Business and employees the Chamber of Labour, both of which have the right to represent their members during collective bargaining. Since 1947, salaried non manual employees in the commerce and retail sector are represented by *GPA* and wage manual workers by *HTV* during collective bargaining. Collective agreements apply to the whole of the country. Agreements cover working hours, overtime, additional work⁴, leave, annual bonuses, redundancies and pay. In the retail sector, there are two agreements: one for salaried non manual employees and apprentices and another for wage manual workers. About 70% of all salaried non manual employees in large and small enterprises are covered by income system A. The regulations of the collective bargaining agreement are minimum standards – improvements are always possible. Each collective agreement contains a point related to equal opportunities, explicitly reflecting the Austrian Equal Opportunities Act.

⁴ Additional work = overtime worked by part-timers, which is not paid on overtime rates, because one has to work more than 40 hours for overtime to be paid as such (1.5 times).

* Many different collective bargaining agreements exist in the retail sector in the **Netherlands**. Some of them are solely for a large company, others cover whole branches. One can see the developments in retail (previously many smaller privately owned shops, few larger companies, now changing towards a sector with more larger companies and many franchise-chains) reflected in the evolution of labour relations: slowly growing union-membership amongst employees and the evolution and maturing of employers organisations into more full-fledged lobby- and service-institutions.

In food retail, two large collective bargaining agreements exist: one for workers in many different smaller and medium-sized shops – covering some 82,000 employees – and one for supermarkets – covering some 120,000 employees. There are also some smaller ones for specific groups of employees (for instance for employees in distribution centres of large supermarkets). Apart from these agreements a general law exists in the sector for all those food retail shops which are not covered by the collective bargaining agreements. In this law basic rights of employees are fixed (mainly on pay and working time). Also other basic rights, such as sick pay, trade union rights and special rights for older workers are included. For some years already employers organisations and unions have started a process to replace this law by a fully-fledged collective bargaining agreement, but until now this has not succeeded.

* In **France**, the sector is marked by a whole series of agreements (more than 40 nationally) and by the existence of various employers' chambers based on very different situations (small companies and huge groups). Since 2002, a new national agreement for “predominantly food wholesale and retail companies” brings together agreements for food warehouses and shops, that mainly sell food. This agreement was signed by *CFTC*, *CFDT*, *FGTA-FO*, *CGC*, the Federation of shop and distributive companies and the national union of specialist food wholesalers. The *CGT* did not sign the agreement. The industrial climate has deteriorated and there is tension around recent closures of big department stores (such as Marks and Spencer). According to the *CGT*, “*Employers are scattered – there are as many employer structures as kinds of activity. Some come together within a particular sector, such as FCD in food, but Intermarché and Leclerc are not members and there is no national spokesperson for either of these hypermarkets...*”

* In **Belgium**, as in France, several joint commissions have been created in this sector: Joint commission N° 201 – independent retail; N° 202 – food retail; N° 311 – department stores, etc. Joint commissions are composed of an equal number of union and employer representatives. They are chaired by an independent person, who is an expert in industrial relations. They have been created (by royal decree) for all sectors of economic activity. Their objective is to group together companies with similar activities, in order to subject them to rules that are adapted to the particular working conditions. The role of the commissions is to draw up collective agreements and forestall or settle industrial conflicts. Women are significantly under-represented in the commissions and are mainly substitute members.

* In **Italy**, the industrial climate has significantly deteriorated in recent years, given the political context and reforms (2003) of the centre-right government aimed at increasing flexibility. These reforms are intended to render the labour market extremely flexible, notably by increasing the number of insecure contracts, extending part-time work without being required to have employees' consent when increasing their hours (unless specified in the contract), introducing a series of new atypical contracts – some of which are unique

in European legislation, such as “standby (on-call) workers” – as well as job-sharing, discontinuous work and seasonal work. According to *CGIL*, the situation is serious and the government imposes its policy without negotiations, thus making the industrial climate very tense. The national collective agreement for the commerce sector, that covers 1.5 million employees was signed by *Filcams*, *Fisascat* and *Confcomercio* in 1994 and renewed in 1999. New negotiations began in 2003. Some elements concerning equality have been included in the joint union platform, such as the introduction of a permanent equality commission; data on pay should be submitted to unions and a specific national bilateral body in order to monitor pay inequality; a code of conduct on sexual harassment should be introduced in the new national agreement and to be improved in second level bargaining (companies); the new 53/2000 law on flexibility regarding parental leave should be implemented by company-level bargaining. Unions also demand that the part-time minimum threshold should be raised (16 hours in the previous agreement) and that the percentage of those entitled increased and extended to all companies, including those with less than 30 employees. Another demand is to increase payment of Sunday and bank holiday working to 35% and also to consider as overtime any hours worked in “vertical” part-time work. Level 2 collective bargaining is less widespread in this sector than in the metal industry (22% of employees concerned, compared with 51.7%). This level of collective bargaining takes place mainly in big companies. In small shops – as for the whole of the country – no collective bargaining takes place without union representatives.

* In **Denmark** the rate of unionisation is very high, even if there is a tendency among younger employees not to join a union. This has led to intense efforts towards young employees by several unions - among them *HK/DK*. Generally speaking, the collective bargaining system sets up frame-agreements with possibilities for local negotiations. The last round of collective bargaining in the sector covered by the Union of Commercial and Clerical Employees in Denmark *HK/DK* was in 2001 and the next round will take place in spring 2004. Over the last 2 decades some of the most heated negotiations have been around the application of the legislation on opening hours. Through a political decision the legislation on opening hours was regulated and opening up for longer opening hours, opening hours during week-ends etc. In this year’s bargaining some of the central issues will be: working hours and flexibility; training and education on full pay; improvement of pensions. Central bargaining takes place between *HK/DK* and *DH&S* – the employers federation - on the basis of demands for the negotiations, discussed in regional committees. In individual companies, the results of the framework agreement can be transposed. Individual negotiations on pay also take place.

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2. Position of sector union leaderships regarding the place of women and equality

Table 2. Representation of women in commerce sector unions

	Number of union members	% of women members	% of women employees in the commerce sector	Proportion of women in elected day-to-day leadership bodies	Proportion of women in executive committees (bigger elected bodies that meet periodically)	Other indicators
Austria <i>GPA</i> (Sector 12, Commerce)	20,934	64 %	67 %	10%	66 %	33% (2001) small negotiating committees (agreement: to be raised to 66%)

Belgium <i>LBC</i>	276,000	57%		1/8 “daily bureau”	25% “manage- ment board”	18/62 industrial officers
<i>SETCa</i>	250,000	60%		1/9 “federal bureau”	11/33 “federal executive committee”	154/232 industrial committees; 21/74 (28%) regional secretaries
Denmark			Wholesale: 31,4% retail : 56,8%			Chairwomen of regional committees: 16/35; members of regional committees: 136/184; shop stewards: 315/461; members of collaboration committees (works councils): 207/295; members of company boards:16/34
<i>HK/Commerce</i>	Approx. 100,000	Approx. 70%		2 /3	15/21	
<i>KAD</i>)	100%				
<i>SID</i>) approx.) 30,000					
<i>IDA</i>))					
France			45% (62%retail)			
<i>CGT</i>	25,000	48%		50% “federal bureau”	47% “executive commission”	
<i>CFDT</i>	25,000	47%		1/8 “executive commission”	11/27 (40%) “federal bureau”	
Italy			45,2%			
<i>Filcams</i>	284,608	57%		3/8 (37%)	61/163 (37%)	45% of works council members; 41% local secretaries; 4 regional secretaries
<i>Fisascat</i>	154,068	47,6%		0 /5	40/151 (26.5%)	3 regional secretaries

<i>Uiltucs</i>	83,769			1/5	13/88	
Netherlands <i>FNV Bondgenoten</i>	49,938 (wholesale and retail)	60% (retail)	64% (retail)	2/4 (50%) “executive committee” (whole of <i>FNV Bondgenoten</i>)	19% “national board” (whole of <i>FNV Bondgenoten</i>)	63% of union management staff (whole of <i>FNV Bondgenoten</i>); 42% of trade union negotiators in wholesale + retail. In food retail 39 % of the members in negotiating committee are women (2002).

Sources: National reports

* In **Austria**, *GPA* organises the great majority of employees in the sector. *GPA* and *HTV* have respectively a national women’s secretary and a federal women’s affairs secretary. Contact with members in individual companies is not primarily the responsibility of these national secretaries, but of the regional women’s affairs secretaries. Since the introduction of a gender quota in *GPA* in 1995, this has at least guaranteed that gender is considered a topic of discussion. The restructuring of *GPA* (previously the retail sector was in a much larger sector, that included tourism and social workers) into individual economic sectors has led to members having more influence, thus women are also better represented now. Since 2000, the gender quota in *GPA* is taken very seriously and has been fulfilled in the federal committee of the retail section of the union, but in the negotiating committee it has only been half fulfilled. But in the smaller negotiating committees, the directors of each economic sector in the respective Austrian states is nominated and, therefore, these positions are still under the control of men.

* In **Italy**, there are many women union representatives in *Filcams (CGIL)*, but proportionately less than the number of women employees and union members. According to a woman *Filcams* officer, “Women have greater difficulties being unionists, because of life and work times. But it is also true that women are not even asked if they would like to be active in the union and they are almost always subjected to more assessment than men”. Women’s representation is in theory guaranteed by the quota system, that is laid down in the union’s charter (adopted in 1998) – for the formation of all organisational bodies, from membership committees to the executive board, it was established that neither men nor women could have less than 40% or more than 60% representation. “It is true that there is a risk of putting any woman in the secretariat. But in some situations, the culture is so male-dominated that if there are no impositions, then women will never get in - it is a risk worth taking”. (Woman *Filcams* officer). In recent years, women in positions of authority have increased in *Filcams* and it is one of the sectors with a relatively high number of women representatives and leaders. In *Fisascat*

(*CISL*), there is a women's co-ordination group, but almost exclusively at national level. Only two regions have elected regional women's co-ordinators. *"There isn't a strong tradition of such groups in the sector, especially as women are naturally part of the structure, given the high presence of women"*. (Woman *Fisascat* officer). There is no specific indication of quotas, except for nationally for the confederation (at least 30% on electoral lists), which is higher in the sector. There is a fairly large presence of women locally, less regionally (only three women general secretaries), while the national secretariat is exclusively male! There are not even membership campaigns targeted exclusively at women, although in this sector there have been many training courses especially for new women works council representatives. In *Uiltucs (UIL)*, there is no specific structure on women's issues, nor targeted membership campaigns, nor measures to safeguard representation in leadership structures. **The perception is that the sector has such a high presence of women that gender issues are a general - not specific - problem and do not need to be dealt with separately from daily union practice.**

* In **the Netherlands** a comparatively large percentage of *FNV* members in retail, and especially in food retail, are women: 60%. The percentage is nearly the same as the percentage of women employees in this part of the retail sector. This has been an active policy of the union, engaging itself in issues which are especially important for women, and thus trying to interest women in union membership. Issues involved were: part-time work, flexible contracts, childcare and leave provisions. Also the issue of working time and the possibilities of influencing one's own working schedule has been an important issue and, as the trade union negotiator states: *"this is an issue which is seen as especially important to women, whereas pay is a typical issue, which appeals more to men"*.

Also in recruiting people for trade union work, the union actively involves women. The central trade union negotiator sees this as a permanent goal, which however is not always easy to reach: *"For many women, paid work is not their primary focus. They work for extra money and their major concern is the family. They are, therefore, not very interested in becoming active in the union. But if they do - and we have quite a lot of women who are very active - they are very valuable."* There is also another reason why it is hard to build up trade union work in the sector: many employees switch jobs frequently, especially young employees, but also women, who 'use' the part-time employment possibilities in this sector to adapt their working hours according to the needs of their family situation. Still steadily building up trade union work to a reasonable level, however, the *FNV* negotiator is in the process of forming central committees (across companies in the food sector), which will be more permanently involved in the process of collective bargaining. The aim is to have equal representation of men and women, in line with membership figures in the union. Nationally *FNV Bondgenoten* is rather 'feminised', as a result of years of positive action within its own internal workforce. Half of the day-to-day leadership body ("executive committee") are women. Also two-thirds of union management staff are women. No women's committees exist, neither in retail, nor any other sector in the union. The national committee was abolished two years ago, and, also due to great internal problems and discussions, no follow-up has been made yet. The co-ordinator for the whole collective bargaining process is in the process of finding new answers to the issue of 'special groups' in the organisation.

* In **Belgium**, *LBC* is confronted with under-representation of women in its structures. This imbalance is partly due to the structure of its leadership bodies. Bureau members are delegated by sectors and regions, which often only have one representative. It is almost impossible to have quotas for women, without doubling the number of representatives.

Agreements to ensure representation of certain groups, such as warehouse staff, renders the situation complicated, even though there is a will to ensure parity. The general secretary says that the independent retail sector - 70% of whom are women - is hardly represented in the union, because it is composed of tiny companies, where there are no agreements concerning union representation and therefore there is no structured union movement in it. *LBC* does not have women's commissions. According to the general secretary, **it would be an aberration to have a specific structure for women in a union, where the majority of members are women.** In *SETCa*, women's commissions at regional and national levels are provided for in the union's rules. They meet regularly and lead to issues of equal opportunities being taken up by congresses. Attention is paid to new needs arising from the feminisation of the labour market, such as childcare and after school hours provision. But, internally, the women's commission has not really managed to launch a debate on equal opportunities.

* In **France**, in both unions that were studied - *CGT* and *CFDT* - similarities on the issue of equality emerge: neither have - or no longer have - women's commissions. Previously, the issue was dealt with specifically, but this is no longer the case and is now considered to be transversal. In both cases, there is a person who is responsible for equality, but they do not have an official status at national level. Both officers emphasise that it is difficult to mobilise continually on this issue, especially as union members and employees are often in insecure jobs.

* In **Denmark**, with 70% of women among union members in commerce, there seems according to the sector secretariat not to be any problems in attracting women to take part in the national, sector, regional and company-based committees and other political representations. And with no problems - no strategy! But at the same time, the retail sector does have an image problem and, therefore, also problems in attracting and retaining staff. The image problem is due to rather low pay and also working times - not especially the length of the weekly hours, which are 37 hours. On the other hand *HK* has for many years been one of the most active Danish trade unions concerning gender equality. From the beginning of the 1990s, the woman Vice-president of *HK/DK* was responsible for gender equality policy in *HK*. Among *HK*'s objectives, it is stated that "*HK will have to work to secure real equality for all groups, including equality between men and women, both regarding pay, working conditions and representation in committees and boards, etc. inside and outside the trade union movement*". Since beginning of the 1990s, *HK* also had staff to stimulate work for equality. They were very active and made a lot of initiatives regarding family/work reconciliation, sexual harassment, equal pay, women's representation in the political system of trade unions, etc. As a general tendency in society, specific staff and specific targeting of equality and the position of women stopped after about 5-6 years of intensive work. Now *HK/DK* has its general political objective, that is formulated and integrated in all sector work, etc, but it also has special issues, that are translated into special strategies: on equal pay and family policies.

Table 3. Internal sector union structures responsible for equality

Austria <i>GPA</i>	Women's affairs secretary
<i>HTV</i>	Women's affairs secretary (both federal and national)
Belgium <i>LBC (CSC)</i>	No women's commission
<i>SETCa (FGTB)</i>	Women's commission
Denmark	No formal structure, but a general objective and obligation to achieve gender equality. Special strategies for equal pay and family/work reconciliation.
France <i>CFDT</i>	Equality officer
<i>CGT</i>	Equality officer
Italy <i>Filcams (CGIL)</i>	No official structure, but an informal coordination
<i>Fisascat (CISL)</i>	A women's coordinating group at national level
<i>Uiltucs (UIL)</i>	No specific structure
The Netherlands	No women's commission; no equality officer

Source: National reports

3. Analysis of trade union action and collective agreements (if any) from a gender perspective at sector level

The commerce sector is marked by weak mobilisation and few specifically women's demands. The reason given in all the countries covered by the study is that the big presence of women and job insecurity both mean that such demands are not useful. This illustrated very well by the following remarks of the *CGT (France)* woman commerce national sector union officer: *"We are, in fact, victims of the feminisation of the sector – we are mainly women and therefore we think it is obvious that such issues will be dealt with and there is no need for a specific approach. The issue is raised regularly – as is the case for young people... The idea is that when we campaign on working time and pay, the women's question is automatically included. There have been periods when we have done a lot, e.g., we published a bulletin and organised action around the 8 March, but we are doing less now. The main demand in our sector concerns job insecurity, especially related to the widespread use of part-time work and low pay. CGT has launched two campaigns on these issues: "Real jobs with dignity" and "Job insecurity takes over our lives".*

Unequal pay

* In **Belgium**, equal pay is obvious for trade unionists, but both commerce sector unions observe that inequalities persist. Collective agreements on pay in general and job evaluation were a very effective way of ensuring legal security of workers and limiting gender inequality: *“Without exaggerating, we can say that whatever pay inequality persists is very moderate, thanks to collective bargaining. If this regulatory interface was removed, unequal pay would increase hugely”*⁵. According to Erwin De Deyn, SETCa national officer, union branches have not succeeded in generalising a job evaluation approach in the retail sector: *“The sector is far too differentiated and we do not manage to convince employers of the importance of removing inequality”*. Another union approach for combating segregation is to ensure that there is more vocational training.

* In **France**, there is no action or collective bargaining on unequal pay in the commerce sector, however, the issues of low pay and job insecurity are crucial. A major problem in the sector is very low pay on recruitment and throughout careers. Despite staff shortages and including in higher skilled positions, pay is not attractive. Some collective agreements still have starting pay that is below the national minimum wage (SMIC), thus holding up careers, as in the lower grades, advancement does not lead to pay increases. According to the CGT woman national secretary: *“Pay must be increased – everyone’s pay, not only women’s pay. There isn’t direct discrimination, therefore there isn’t specific action... We haven’t found a way of embarking on the issue of gender equality, because there are so many other forms of inequality... The law on equality has not been implemented yet in our sector. It is difficult to get it accepted... moreover, there are very few prospects for women, in career terms – promotions are very limited – we do not campaign for women cashiers to become shop managers – that’s not our priority. Our only priority is pay increases, not promotion...”*. According to the CFDT national secretary: *“There are major changes being introduced in grading – before there were the Parodi criteria and cashiers started on coefficient 130 and then after 4 months they were on 140 and after 6 months on 150, but after 20 years, they were still on 150. It was the same for self-service staff. We were against that. Five years ago, there was an agreement that changed the system a bit, but there still isn’t a career. There are attempts at versatility, but that is difficult, for example, cashiers work on the till for 20 hours and on filling shelves for 12 hours, thus enabling them to have a change and also to increase the hours of part-timers. But, stocking shelves has to be done early in the morning and therefore versatility introduces problems of working hours being spread out throughout the day”*.

* Also in **the Netherlands** it is acknowledged that unequal pay for women in the service sector – and therefore in retail – exists. Figures are clear about this. Especially retail is one of the sectors where women and young workers are more frequently underpaid than in other sectors. Trade union action by FNV to tackle this problem has focused on issues, relating to the insecure position of especially women and young workers: improving pay conditions for part-time workers and those working on flexible contracts and fighting for extra pay for work at inconvenient times. Also work stability (‘stable’ flexible contracts with, for instance, a minimum number of hours, enabling women to work by incorporating childcare in the collective bargaining agreement) has been a major issue. FNV considers improving the situation for the more vulnerable part-time and flexible employees to be a vital part of trade union strategy (even though these groups are relatively poorly unionised), not only to interest these groups in trade union membership, but - more important - to reduce employers’ appetite

⁵ Ferre Wyckmans, *Verslagboek LBC-NVK-Congres*, ‘inkomens herverdelen’, November 2001, p. 29

to employ more or only flex-workers, with all the negative side-effects also for those on steady contracts.

Especially as a result of the discussion on changes to the law on shop closing times, hefty debates and negotiations have taken place on extra payment in relation to inconvenient working times. One issue was whether or not evening hours were inconvenient for part-time employees, who 'choose to work during these hours' (of course affecting mostly women). Extra payment still exists. However, in some collective bargaining agreements, the level of extra payment was somewhat lowered, in exchange for greater job security and a bigger say in working time. As these issues also affect women greatly, the exchange has often to women's benefit.

No explicit action has been undertaken on the issue of unequal pay as such, apart from several legal actions, which have helped trade union action concerning, for instance, flexible contracts. Several cases before the Commission for Equal Treatment and even before the Courts have helped unions to guarantee equality in many ways between workers with steady contracts and people with flexible contracts.

Efforts have also been made to come to an objective job classification system, which could give men and women in the sector more levers to make the employer base their pay on objective grounds.

* In **Austria**, there are also no gendered statistical data in this sector, but pay agreements are significantly lower than in sector where men predominate. For many years, collective agreements were negotiated by men: equal pay issues and the reduction of the pay gap led only to demands for abolishing the lowest paid grades or longer leave and better work/life balance. But really effective measures for guaranteeing gender equality have not been introduced into collective agreements. Moreover, in sectors where there are many women employees, few of them are union members.

* In **Italy**, equal pay is guaranteed in the collective agreement, but that does not stop there being considerable unequal pay in the commerce sector, because of bonus systems at company level. For example, "*supermini*" bonuses (bonus on top of minimum pay) are sometimes high, but rarely given to women. The main source of inequality is linked to the fact that most women have low levels of qualifications and rarely accept atypical working hours and therefore their career possibilities are limited. The fact that women are also more absent, because of maternity leave, long holidays and sick leave, does not play in their favour. However, some company agreements take this kind of absence into account when awarding bonuses e.g. at *Rinascente*, where such absences are considered as worked time and are, therefore, included when calculating bonuses. But, above all, there is very little data on the pay gap, thus rendering action difficult. In the platform discussion, all three sector unions demand more information.

* In **Denmark**, *HK/Commerce* has started to build up its own statistical information on equal pay, as the information based on gender is no longer part of official statistics or statistics published by the Employer's Federation. Equal Pay is guaranteed through legislation, but it does not prevent inequality. The Danish Employer's Federation and the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions (*LO*) published in September 2003 a study on 'Women's and Men's Pay', where it is stated, among other conclusions, that the general pay gap of 20% is due to segregation of the labour market, education, working hours, etc.

At the congress of *HK/Commerce* in 2000, a decision was made to focus on equal pay and full pay during parental leave.

Strategies for equal pay:

- Give openness to individual pay – through reporting to trade union company discussions. The retail sector has low pay and openness might change it also in relation to gender distribution.
- Working groups inside trade unions concentrating on the private sector, elaborating statistics on the basis of information from members, also statistics on factors, such as education, experience, seniority etc., to identify differences, that exist after all and which are not explainable by concrete factors.
- Training for shop stewards on agreements and legislation, statistics and negotiations on pay, personal strategies for negotiations, etc.
- Legal cases on equal pay, started by the union.

Pay increases in the retail sector between 2001 and 2002 were 2,3%, compared to the general rise in pay in the private sector of 4%. *HK/Commerce* has especially low pay compared to pay levels among *HK* members in general. Every fourth employee earned less than 15,800 DKr. (2,100 Euros) per month in 2002.

IKEA management in Denmark took the initiative in summer 2003 to raise minimum pay in the company to 20,000 DKr, which led to a lot of discussions in other retail companies.

Working time and work-life balance

As in the other sectors – but especially in the commerce sector, where problems of flexible working hours and longer opening hours affect women in particular – two situations can be identified: in some countries, the demand for shorter working hours, in order to improve the situation of part-timers, is primordial (France, Belgium and partly Italy); elsewhere, this issue does not seem to really be on the union agenda.

Table 4 Data on working time in the commerce sector

Austria	38,5 hours
Belgium	
Denmark	37 hours
France	35 hours (according to sector-level agreements), annualisation
Italy	38-40 hours
The Netherlands	40 hours with the right to 156 extra hours off work per annum, which brings the average number of hours actually worked per week down to 37 hours.

Sources: National reports

* In **Belgium**, shorter working hours without loss of pay and with compensatory job creation remain the main demand of both unions in the commerce sector. According to *SETCa*, this measure would be of benefit to everyone, especially women. Indeed, more women are unemployed and for longer. Moreover, some of the hours that are released by general shorter working hours could be used to increase the hours of part-timers, who are predominantly women⁶. Much union attention is paid to working conditions of part-timers. Unions are in favour of reorganising working hours by giving more to part-timers and fixing in sector-level collective agreements minimum working hours that are equivalent to at least half-time hours⁷.

⁶ Gender equality : from principles to reality, *SETCa* : Our proposals.

⁷ *SETCa* statutory congress, 11-12 October 2001.

The survey carried out by *LBC* on demands shows that women are in favour of longer part-time hours. Access to full-time employment, by adapting their contract, should be proposed to part-timers who so wish, before using insecure contracts. A first step has been made towards a four-day week for part-timers with a contract of a maximum of 24 hours per week.

* In the **Netherlands**, very clearly one can see the close link between the issue of working time and pay. Working time is, of course, itself also an important issue for women and has been a prominent issue on the negotiating agenda. Especially the issue of introducing greater say for all workers regarding their working times has been a permanent issue of negotiation. Collective bargaining agreements have many articles limiting the possibilities for employers to decide freely on rosters and working hours, some of which are especially important for women. Employers are, for instance, obliged to take into account employees' childcare arrangements⁸. Also, employers cannot force employees to work more than two evenings, and the collective agreement lays down limitations on working at weekends and on nightshifts. Of course, due to the low level of unionisation, probably many employees do not dare to make use of these rights. On the other hand, it is important that they are inscribed in general agreements.

* In **France**, *CGT* and *CFDT* had different views on the introduction of the 35 hour week in the sector. According to *CGT*, *"The 35 hour week was not welcomed as it was seen as involving more flexibility and job insecurity. It didn't really improve employees' quality of life – especially for women – except in a few cases. Moreover, we did not obtain more jobs. We are not against the 35 hour week itself, but the way it was introduced in our sector... Some agreements cover 60,000 employees and others only 80 (for a Leclerc supermarket), but each agreement counts as one... We haven't signed many agreements"*. According to *CFDT*, the demand for the 35 hour week was strong: *"Most of the agreements we signed were good ones, but less so recently. However, the issue of equality comes into very few agreements... just empty references to it in the preamble. We decided not to sign agreements, where part-time work was imposed. The aim is that employees have a minimum of 200 hours per quarter in order that they count for pensions. For us, it is really important to distinguish between chosen and imposed part-time work"*. However, some criticisms have been formulated: *"We really failed on job creation – after the initial Aubry agreements, we could have demanded proportional recruitment of women into new jobs, but we didn't even think about it... We have always ensured in agreements that some of the extra hours should be devoted to job creation and some to enabling part-timers, who want to, to increase their hours, but it is not always requested, as some of them have several jobs..."*.

According to the *TEQ* survey, that has already been referred to, flexible working hours are widespread, especially for those working on tills: 44% of cashiers have hours that change all the time. And, generally speaking, women are subjected to more flexibility than men: 23% of women (compared with 7% of men) say that their hours change all the time. However, 24% of women and 30% of men have split shifts. Unpredictable hours are a real problem for women, especially as most of them have children to look after and are responsible for organising family life. The issue of part-time work has also featured greatly in demands. As in Belgium, the emphasis has been on enabling those with short part-time hours to work longer hours if they so wish. But, according to *CGT*, some part-timers do not want to work more. Some women have calculated that the extra childcare expenses and fatigue means that it isn't worth their while working longer.

⁸ Most collective bargaining agreement in the Netherlands contain fully fledged childcare provisions for men and women.

* In **Italy**, some issues have been formulated in collective bargaining demands, long before legislation was adopted. Thus part-time measures were negotiated in the commerce sector ten years before a law was adopted. However, it cannot be said that the issue of working hours has been really pursued in connection with equality: it is very difficult for mothers in this sector, because of continuing male-dominated work organisation, that promotes availability and atypical extra hours. *“A woman, who works part-time, has no career prospects. The organisation of a supermarket is schizophrenic and hectic; managers, who are mainly men, want those with positions of authority to be available all day every day. Women just cannot make this kind of commitment, not even those who work full-time”*. (Marinella Meschieri, *Filcams CGIL*).

* In **Austria**, as we already mentioned in relation to the metal industry, shorter working hours are not a major demand. In the commerce sector, debates however concern shop opening hours. Opening hours have been significantly deregulated over the past 10 years (e.g., the latest proposal extends morning opening from 6 to 5a.m. and the “Black and White Regulation” ensuring employees have every other Saturday off was removed from the final draft of the working hours act) and have met with intensive union and Chamber of Labour protest, in vain. Part-timers’ hours in relation to shop opening hours, as well as family leave, are also discussed. Moreover, the union is involved in a “FlexPower” project regarding disparate groups affected by atypical employment, differentiating between more highly qualified employees who consciously choose atypical employment for a certain phase of their lives and the many employees – many of whom are women - who are forced to work atypical hours and for whom the union recognises they have not done enough to help. Demands with a view to getting the same rights are developing.

* In **Denmark**, shorter working hours are not a discussion point for men and women in the commerce sector, as stated in a study ‘Good life – family policies’ carried out among *HK* members in 2001. Members answered that they did not want a general reduction of working hours, but more flexibility in planning working hours related to flexible parental leave schemes, possibilities for part-time work at certain periods and for saving hours to be used for various leave purposes. Members also put different demands on childcare and more flexible opening hours, etc. as well as more demands on company human resources policies.

4. Obstacles and factors that foster gender mainstreaming

In the metal industry, the primary factor referred to by all union actors concerned the predominance of men in employment, however, research shows that the presence of women in the commerce sector is not in itself sufficient to reverse the situation: just as in the metal industry, although there are more women union members, women are not more involved in decision-making bodies and they maintain a certain distance from union activity. Job insecurity (part-time work and high turnover) are undoubtedly factors.

* In **France**, according to the *CGT* woman national sector union officer: *“Real progress has been made, but very slowly. Moreover, depending on the period, there is a great increase in women’s participation, but then when there are closures, it declines, as was the case for Marks and Spencer. Also, it is difficult, because of the profile of union members: young women, who accept a term of office and then leave – they do not want to stay for long, they have children and sometimes leave their job... Each time, we have to begin again and mobilise, in order to convince women to participate... and then they leave”*.

According to the *CFDT* commerce sector national officer: “It is very difficult for the union full-timers, because in the commerce sector there are only three of us for 2.3 million employees!!! **Our union rights are limited** – in terms of time off for union activity amongst others – so it is hard. We don’t have a 35 hour week, especially in a sector, where there is a rapid increase in membership (+12-13% per annum). The problem is, therefore, one of work organisation. We have to work on enabling women to enter our union and leave work before 7 p.m. There is also the problem of travelling – I travel one and a half months per year for the union – it’s difficult... All full-timers are not in Paris and there is also the problem of work for union officers’ partners in Paris. Also, bargaining topics are on the increase what with mergers and restructuring. It’s becoming increasingly complex”.

The issue of **required availability** for taking on such responsibilities is posed again.

* In **Austria**, women shop stewards refer to well known obstacles: women’s lack of time for union activism; lack of awareness that women have the right to be treated like male colleagues; fear of losing one’s job, children and husband are waiting for dinner in the evening; care of the elderly and disabled. According to a *GPA* woman union full-time officer: “This is a field where we have to take a top-down approach. The leadership and the key negotiating team decide upon a demand... but they aren’t credible... There are people on the negotiating committee who haven’t really dealt with this issue before... they only want to achieve an across-the-board percentage improvement in pay and come home to a hero’s welcome”.

* In the **Netherlands**, the composition of the workforce in the retail sector is seen as the most important obstacle to trade union work – including improving the specific position of women in the sector. Unionisation is low, and this means that - even with some quite reasonable arrangements in the collective bargaining agreements (especially important for women) - it is hard to ensure that employers really fulfil their obligations. Also the ‘fleeting’ labour force is a major obstacle: it means a permanent process of building up the trade union position. Also the sector is in permanent movement and change, with sharp competition within it. This influences the agenda greatly.

* In **Belgium**, as far as *SETCa* is concerned, the biggest obstacle to gender mainstreaming in the union is related to the way union work is organised. The union culture is male-dominated – meetings are held late in the evening and collective bargaining lasts a long time, etc. Women view this kind of flexibility as being incompatible with family life, where although there has been a certain degree of redistribution of chores between men and women, women still have the greater burden.

LBC considers that recruitment policy, which was often influenced by male-dominated culture in the past, plays a major role in gender mainstreaming in the union. *LBC-NVK* therefore decided that their internal recruitment policy should lead to employing more women. Another obstacle is that the number of union elected positions is limited and are often occupied by longest-serving activists, whereas women are often younger and have less union experience. *LBC-NVK* general secretary thinks that by bringing more young people into the various bodies, that will automatically lead to more women being involved.

* In **Italy**, as in the metal industry, one of the most important instruments for exercising mainstreaming is second-level (company) bargaining, which is considered to be the only instrument capable of implementing positive action for women's employment. A factor that could help gender mainstreaming in the commerce sector is that there are so many women, that gender issues are considered general problems. Nevertheless, even in this sector, one of the most important problems for women is that they are still less represented in union committees, despite their large numbers amongst employees and union members.

5. Tools envisaged by each sector union to improve this theme.

Each union's assessment of gender mainstreaming.

* In **Austria**, in November 2002, *GPA* ratified the implementation of a gender mainstreaming programme – *GPA* is the first union to have formally introduced the concept of gender mainstreaming. *GPA* leadership established a project group, which is responsible for making suggestions for concretely implementing a "Gender Mainstreaming Plan of Action" within *GPA*. There have been several pilot projects on federal reform, competence and collective bargaining. The definition of mainstreaming used on *GPA*'s website is: "*We understand by this, the inclusion of a gendered approach to political processes, decision-making and measures, as well as a gendered understanding of the effects of these steps, with the goal of achieving equality for women and men in all areas of society*" (www.gpa.at/gender).

The following activities are either planned for the very near future or are being currently carried out:

- Survey of income data in the retail sector and analysis thereof from a gender perspective;
- Development of concepts towards the implementation of equal pay ;
- Development of concrete gendered guidelines for the collective bargaining process;
- Development of guidelines for work at plant level;
- Presentation and discussion of a programme and demands of the *GPA* women's affairs department to retail workers shop stewards;
- Training for members of collective bargaining teams, dealing with the topic of implementation of equal pay for work of equal value for women and men in the spring of 2003;
- "Gender-Training" with the goal of preparing for upcoming collective bargaining rounds, in order to integrate "Gender Mainstreaming Aspects".
- Further development of the interest group associations of "[Flex@Work](#)" in cooperation with the "FlexPower" project.

In **Belgium**, in spite of difficulties of implementing a quota, the secretariat are making initiatives to increase the number of women in *LBC*'s decision-making structures.

Some proposals are up for discussion:

- increase the number of positions in leadership bodies, in order to facilitate women's entry;
- envisage a person who will be responsible for promoting initiatives regarding equal opportunities.

* In **France**, amongst tools developed by *CFDT* at the level of the confederation, are gender balance charters, which are internal union agreements on monitoring and fostering the place of women in the union concerned. A revealing sign is that the woman officer responsible for women in the commerce sector union could not find the gender balance charter, which had been signed many years previously. This pinpoints the difficulty of ensuring that equality is a transversal and permanent reference in union activity. *"The charter was very old and not used... It should be said that no one held the position, so it was even worse. The charter recalled principles of equality and envisaged taking on board childcare expenses if necessary. We do do that and they are not an obstacle. When a women comes to a meeting or training course, the union pays if she has childcare problems"*. In the *CFDT* services sector union's rules (May 2000 version), it is written that **"union branches foster gender balance"** and, when there are two candidates to the federal bureau, **"parity between men and women should be respected"**. Internal rules indicate that the union's national council is composed of one delegate for up to 300 paid up members and 2 delegates (**of whom at least one is a woman**), for 301 or more paid up members. Finally, for the sector council, the union can present 2 candidates per sector and **"should ensure the gender balance of their candidates"**.

* In **Italy**, according to *Filcams (CGIL)*, in the negotiating platform, there is the will to introduce a general code that fosters equality at company level. *"We demand that the employers-employees commission has a different role and that data on pay gaps be provided..."* There has been positive experience in some companies, such as Ikea, which is an example of good practice, notably concerning equality, perhaps because managers are women – for instance, they grant a period of training after maternity leave. There is also the example of Coop: 2/3 of employees are women: there is one of the first codes in Italy against sexual harassment. In one of the shops, the 53/2000 law has been implemented to promote working hour arrangements and flexibility, that correspond with employees' family needs. But the second level (enterprise) of collective bargaining concerns few companies, besides some major department stores and thus covers only a small part of the sector. In the commerce sector, there are two few company agreements for there to be real results.

* In the **Netherlands**, in the 1990s, many tools were actively used to involve women in union activity – before four unions merged into *FNV Bondgenoten*.

Several examples are:

- the 'cash desk' project (research into the working conditions of women working frequently and for a long time at cash desks (tills), not only interesting women in trade union action, but also improving these conditions – promoting new cash desks and task rotation);
- the shopping centre project (going into shopping centres with small, special task groups, talking to people working in smaller and larger shops);

- actively involving women in discussions on working time (with discussion projects for women) and new legislation on flex-work and security and shop closure;
- involving women in activities of the union on career guidance;
- actively recruiting women in all educational courses of the union.

The last activities are still taking place. Apart from this, amongst trade union officials there is an awareness, that women are a majority within the sector, and that this means that trade union work should involve issues, which are important for women.

* In **Denmark**, as pointed out earlier, *HK/DK* has been very active in discussing and securing gender equality among members and in the society in general. The union itself points out that 'mainstreaming was an issue, long before it become modern' and was also pushed by its 70% women members. So in *HK/DK*, and therefore also *HK/Commerce*, mainstreaming means that gender equality is part of all strategies and equal pay strategy is a good example of this way of thinking. Another is the ongoing attention paid to women in political positions and in management both inside and outside the union.

In the coming collective bargaining process, there are demands for full pay during the parental leave and a contribution to a central birth leave foundation - where all companies regardless sector and distribution of men and women contribute - to secure full pay. The industrial birth leave foundation was a result of collective bargaining in 1995 exclusively for the industrial sector. At that time *HK* was very active in bringing together all forces to create a general foundation, but *Dansk Metal* took their own road.

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Analysing union practices regarding equality in the commerce sector might seem paradoxical: although it is a sector with many women, it seems that, relatively speaking, union strategies have not been greatly developed on this issue. This can be explained by the nature of jobs in the sector, which are marked by a high degree of insecurity (as well as low pay and short hours) and a high turnover rate. The attitude that is often observed by union actors is that priority is not given to equality as such, but to the more general struggle against low pay and great job insecurity.