



A Union Toolbox for Organising White-Collar Workers in Industry

By industriAll European Trade Union

Acknowledgements

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Foreword

The manufacturing sector in Europe is experiencing a significant transformation. The proportion of white-collar workers has risen substantially, even surpassing the number of blue-collar workers in some countries. Currently, white-collar workers make up about 41% of the manufacturing workforce in Europe, though this varies by country.

This shift presents both challenges and opportunities for trade unions in the manufacturing industry, which have traditionally focused on unionising blue-collar workers. Historically, blue-collar workers have been the backbone of union power in manufacturing. However, their numbers are decreasing while the number of white-collar workers rises. If unions want to maintain a strong voice in the industry, we need to recruit and organise more white-collar workers. This is challenging because many white-collar workers still believe they can negotiate individually and do not need a collective approach. Some, like industrial engineers and quality assurance staff, might have individual power resources due to their positions in organisational hierarchies and their specialised qualifications, but they are a minority. Many must deal with little work autonomy, high levels of overtime, no right to disconnect and bogus self-employment contracts. By effectively organising these workers, trade unions can build organisational power. This will ensure we continue to play a vital role in advocating for workers' rights, negotiating strong collective agreements and contributing to a sustainable and social future for the manufacturing sector in Europe, based on social dialogue.

We trust that this toolbox will assist affiliates in better reaching, organising, and supporting white-collar workers, thereby ensuring that trade unions remain a strong voice advocating for the manufacturing industries in Europe.



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Using the Toolbox

Who Are White-Collar Workers?

The manufacturing sector in Europe is undergoing massive changes. More and more people in the sector are performing tasks from behind a desk or in front of a laptop. We call these people white-collar workers. They might be administrators, designers, project managers, technical writers, IT specialists, customer relations staff, or any number of other roles: in short, **anyone who works mostly in an office, and not on the shop floor.**

What Is This Toolbox?

This toolbox offers a guide for trade unions aiming to organise and recruit white-collar workers within manufacturing.

- It provides practical strategies and tools adaptable to various organisational needs.
- It addresses existing challenges and offers specific solutions and approaches for organising white-collar workers.
- It includes useful templates and checklists for organising and recruitment which are relevant to each stage of a campaign.

While not all tools will be useful for every initiative, organisation, culture, or labour relations system, this booklet serves as a resource for building trade union power with a focus on white-collar workers.



How To Use This Toolbox

The toolbox is organised chronologically, starting with information and ideas about how to build support within your union for organising white-collar workers. It then explains how to start an organising campaign aimed at white-collar workers, including advice on where to reach them and how to communicate. Finally, it covers how to get white-collar workers more involved in the union and what steps to take to keep them in the union after they have joined, sometimes known as retention. Checklists and templates you can use to build and run your campaign are included in most sections. At the end of the toolbox, you will find links to more resources.



Make White-Collar Workers a Priority for Your Union

White-collar workers make up a larger proportion of employment in the manufacturing sector than ever before. Industrial unions have traditionally drawn much of their strength from organising blue-collar workers, but as industry changes, unions must adapt to maintain and grow our power. If we don't bring more white-collar workers into industrial unions, we risk losing density in workplaces and, with it, our ability to win good collective agreements for all workers. That is why industrial unions must put more emphasis on finding, talking to and recruiting white-collar workers.

Our research has found that white-collar workers are not as dismissive of unions as is sometimes assumed: our survey found over half think trade unions are relevant to them. This indicates that there are many white-collar workers who are open to union membership but have not yet been approached to join. But before you can get into workplaces and have those conversations, you need to make sure your union is assigning time, resources and importance to organising white-collar workers. This will ensure that your efforts will not be in vain and that new members find a union which is welcoming and responsive to their needs.

How Unions Are Making Organising a Priority

Here are some real-world examples of how unions in different parts of Europe are making organising a priority for their union.

Marketing Department

The **Swedish trade union Unionen** has set up a marketing and sales department, which covers a range of activities; the most important is developing a marketing strategy for organising based on a clearly defined recruitment target. Unionen's activities are based on a market analysis that classifies employees into different groups; one looking for security, one driven by community and caring for others,

See sections 3.1 and 3.2 of the full report for more details.

and a third group that believes in its own resources and capabilities. Given that this third group would be difficult to organise, or only with disproportionate effort, Unionen concentrates on the first two groups. Unionen conducts regular analyses using a professional market research organisation. This enables problems to be identified and practices adapted.

Unionen launched the campaign in the early 2010s, with the aim of boosting recruitment to meet a defined target. It included a range of measures, such as new organisational structures, additional unemployment benefits, a market analysis of target groups, and a media campaign with TV advertising. Such an all-encompassing campaign required huge investment from the trade union.

Set Up White-Collar Departments or Committees in Your Organisation

In most forms of trade unionism, except occupational trade unions, white-collar workers are represented together with blue-collar workers. In many, but not all, trade union structures for representing white-collar interests have been established. In **Spain**, for example, the trade union **UGT** has established an association of technicians and other white-collar workers. One union organiser said: “Yes, we have an association of technicians and also, of course, for white-collar employees, who have completely different needs. This is something that was set up back in 1987. In fact, the UGT is the only trade union in Spain with such a structure.”

Set Up an Organising Department or Committee in Your Organisation

The **Irish trade union SIPTU**, which has a long tradition of organising, set up an organising department more than 20 years ago. Resources for organising have been freed up by organisational reforms, but also by the establishment of the official Workplace Relations Commission, which allows individual employees to lodge complaints about alleged contraventions of protective employment legislation and obtain a ruling from an adjudication officer. This option has lifted a considerable and time-consuming burden from union officials, who previously had little time to support shop stewards or collective bargaining. Once established, SIPTU’s organising department carried out several organising

campaigns in different industries. These successes have allowed the department to build a good reputation among trade unionists. Besides running its own campaigns, the department can also be used to support white-collar initiatives in manufacturing. The advantage in this case is that the organiser can stay in a workplace for a longer period, which benefits organising efforts.

Regional Organising Teams

The **German trade union IG Metall** has implemented organising as a practice since the early 2010s, when it launched a strategic campaign in the wind power sector. Organising was subsequently decentralised in the form of projects that could be applied for by the union's local and regional units, some of which were aimed at organising white-collar workers. Organising teams are now based at regional level and consist of professional organisers who work solely on organising workers, whether blue or white-collar workers. These projects are considered quite successful.



Top Arguments for Focussing on White-Collar Workers

Before starting to organise white-collar workers, you need to come to a common understanding in your union that it is worth focussing on this group. Here are some top arguments aimed at members and leadership on the need to prioritise white-collar workers:

1. The number and proportion of white-collar workers in industry is increasing. If we don't bring them into the union, our strength in companies and the sector will be weakened. Use data from the main report to show how the proportion of white-collar workers is developing in your country and comparable economies.
2. As industries digitalise, more jobs will be white collar. In countries with the most digitalised industries, the proportion of white-collar jobs is higher, like Germany, France, Sweden and Finland. If the industries of the future are to be unionised, then we must organise white-collar workers now.
3. White-collar workers are much more open to union membership than is often assumed. Evidence shows they are more likely to join when they see unions in their workplaces, so the union needs to be present and visible if we are to grow our membership among this group.
4. Because many white-collar workers in industry have never joined a union, they may not have negative past experiences or perceptions. Their departments and workplaces are often "greenfield" sites, i.e. places that have not been organised before. This allows the union to set the narrative and create a sense of novelty, urgency and importance around joining.

See section 3.2 of the main report.

See section 4.5 of the main report.

See sections 5.1 – 5.3 of the main report for detailed information about how unions have built buy-in and started their campaigns.

Take a Step-by-Step Approach

Start with pilot projects: Begin by implementing smaller, manageable projects that are less risky and easier to oversee. These serve as an opportunity to assess the feasibility of new approaches or ideas. However, they require staff and resources in order to test organising white-collar workers in a defined and measurable way. Positive results will create internal support for a greater focus on the group.

Evaluate and learn: Once these smaller projects are completed, thoroughly evaluate the outcomes and measure results (new members, agreements, changed attitude towards the union in the workplace). This stage is critical for learning what works and what doesn't, enabling adjustments and refinements to be made based on real-world feedback.

Scale to flagship projects: With the lessons and successful strategies from the pilot projects, scale up to larger, more impactful projects. These flagship initiatives are more visible and have greater potential to demonstrate the effectiveness and benefits of the new approach across the union.

Convince the majority in the democratic decision-making bodies of your union: Use the success of these projects as case studies to win over the wider leadership and membership of the union. Present clear evidence of success from these projects to persuade the majority of members that the new approach is beneficial to all workers and should be adopted throughout your union.





Doing Research

Who Are the White-Collar Workers in the Target?

The present toolbox offers a starting point in your efforts to organise white-collar workers. You will need to do your own research when designing your pilot projects and subsequent campaigns to reach white-collar workers.

As a first step, you may want to identify one firm, or even a workplace, that will be your target. Alternatively, you could collect information on several targets to make a final decision. In either case, you will need to systematically collect information on:

- Demographics and job roles of white-collar workers
- Key industries and emerging sectors in the target region
- Employment patterns, work environments, and workers' relationship with the union, including their membership status and communication preferences
- Workers' perceptions of unions and the appeal of non-union alternatives; these can help identify potential barriers and opportunities for union recruitment and support

How to get information on white-collar workers where you already have a presence

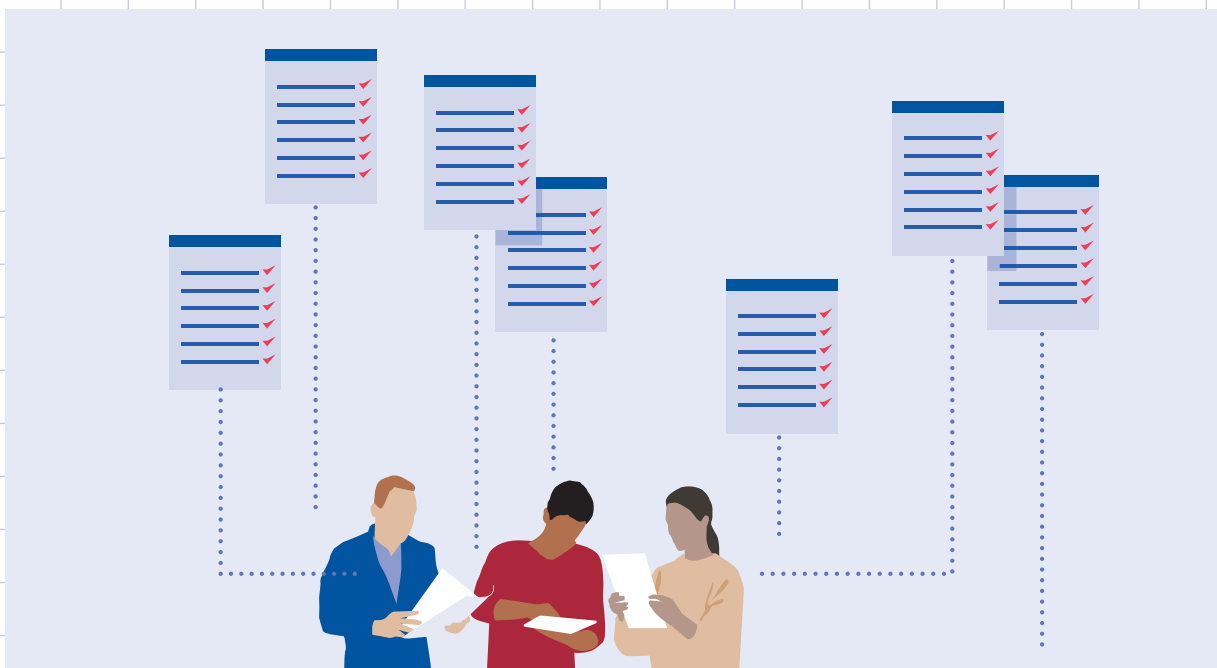
Doing your research is key, not only in places where the union doesn't have a presence (known as greenfield sites) but also where the union has one (brownfield sites). In the latter, you should make use of the knowledge and resources already present in the workplace to expand your organising to white-collar workers.

Engage with your blue-collar membership in the target workplace or company. They will have insights into the size and structure of the white-collar workforce. Be sure to explain the importance of organising white-collar workers, as well, as a means to strengthen the union for all.

Use your membership data. Get hold of the relevant membership database, if you don't already have it, and identify the white-collar workers who are already members. If you don't have up-to-date information about each member, including profession, employment status, education and skill level, level of union activity and contact data, contact the member to get it.

Run a survey of your existing membership to gain detailed information about their attitudes towards the union, the level of existing union activity, if any, the attitude of their non-union colleagues and the issues that affect them. There is more information about surveys, including templates, later in this toolbox.

Speak to members (and then to non-members!). Do not rely exclusively on the survey. You need to have conversations with members to understand in-depth what motivates them to be in the union, what they want to change in their workplace and how they can help organise new members. Ask members to set up conversations with non-members so you can get their perspectives too.



Find Out Information About Your Target Employer

As well as finding out as much as you can about the workers you are seeking to organise, you need to collect information about the company in which they work. This is known as strategic corporate research. You need to map the company's corporate structure, as well as how the workforce is organised, who their clients and suppliers are, and their relationships with the local community, politicians and regulators.

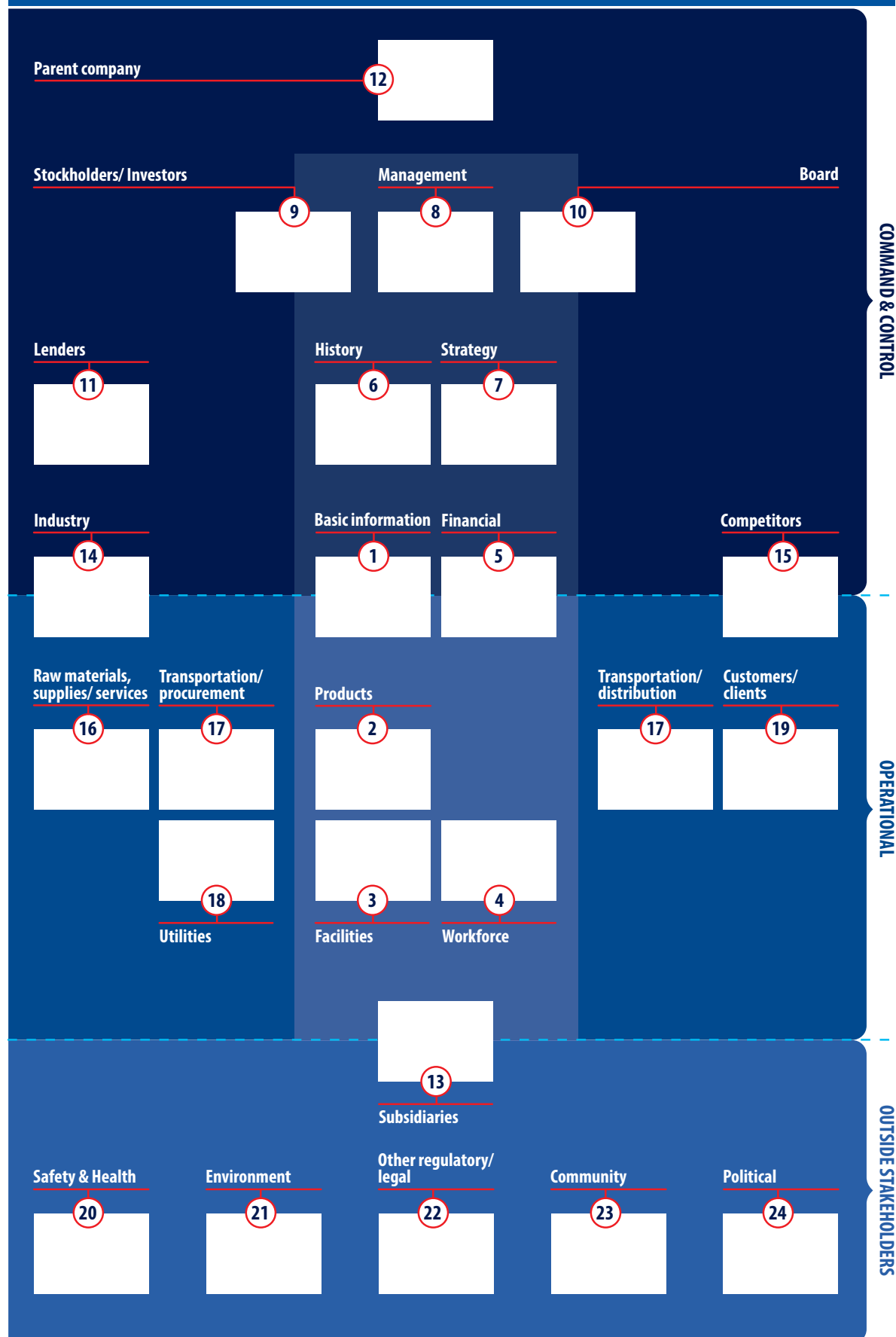
Where to Find Information About Companies?

The websites of the local subsidiary (where appropriate) and the parent company are a good place to start. Most big companies will have a section or a separate site aimed at investors. Here you will find key information about the company's strategy, performance and structure. You can also check documents that the company's files (e.g. company accounts, business registration, communications to investors or shareholders) with your local authorities. Supplement this information with a web search. Sites aimed at investors can be a good source, as can media reports. Get in touch with industriAll Europe if you need help decoding the data. Combine these findings with what you are being told by workers in the company. Do they match up? Is the company meeting its legal obligations and any voluntary commitments they may have made to investors or government?

This graphic visualises the information you need to collect about both the target employer and the surrounding ecosystem of clients and vendors, ownership structures, subsidiaries, community, political and market pressures. It is adapted from work by Tom Juravich at www.strategiccorporateresearch.org.

STRATEGIC CORPORATE RESEARCH

(private sector firms)



Identifying an Issue

Now that you have the information that you need about the workers and the employer, you need to identify an issue to campaign around. Your research can help you here, but the most important thing is to talk to the workers you are trying to organise. Use the skills and methods in the section 'Communicating with White-Collar Workers'.

Communication will be a continuous process. When you have your issue, you can move on to planning your campaign, which is the next section of this toolbox. However, campaigns must be open to change as you learn more and workers become more involved. As such, you should be open to changing your issue as time goes on. Use the checklist in this section to constantly ask if your issue is the right issue and whether there is another one that better meets the criteria.

What Issues Are of Most Concern to White-Collar Workers?

It is the workers themselves who should choose the issue that the campaign is built around. However, it is important that you understand what issues tend to be of greatest concern to white-collar workers so that you can ask about them in your conversations and understand how problems may be impacting workers' lives.

Research conducted by industriAll Europe has identified several issues that are important to white-collar workers, across countries and sectors:



Work and Time Pressure: Many white-collar workers experience significant work and time pressure, leading to stress and increased workloads.



Gap Between Contractual and Actual Working Hours: A substantial number of workers work longer hours than those contractually agreed upon, contributing to work-life balance issues.

**Training and Qualification Pressures:**

Continuous learning is highly valued and has become an essential requirement, but mandatory qualifications combined with high workloads cause pressure and stress, especially for older workers. Additionally, companies often do not provide sufficient training opportunities, which workers perceive as detrimental to their career prospects.

**Autonomy as a Double-Edged Sword:**

Although autonomy is a key factor for good working conditions, it can become harmful when combined with impossible targets and a high-pressure or unsupportive work environment, leading to self-exploitation, stress and burnout.



Employment Insecurity: The level of employment insecurity varies by country and is influenced by legislation, labour market conditions and the positions of companies in the global value chain. Employment is more secure where there is a scarcity of qualified white-collar workers.

**New Technologies and Changing Requirements:**

The use of new technologies underlines the need for the up-skilling and re-skilling of white-collar workers. Arrangements are needed to enable white-collar workers to keep up with new demands and to help them adapt to the changing requirements of their jobs.

Remember: For any campaign, you need to find out from workers what issues most affect them!

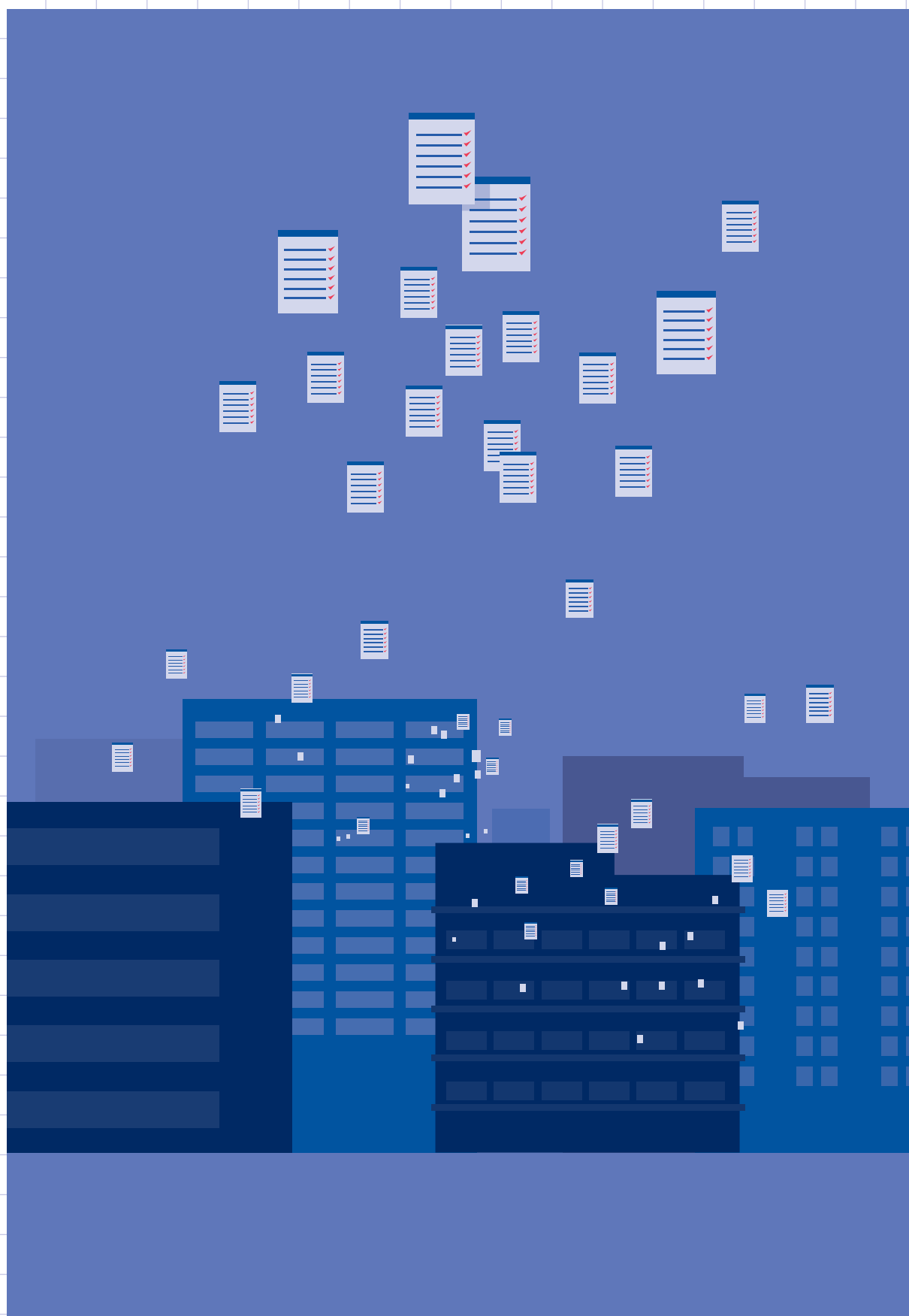
The issue could be anything from stagnant wages and limited benefits to poor working conditions, heavy workloads, unclear instructions and a lack of respect. Keep in mind not every problem is an “issue”, i.e. the right topic for an organising campaign. Use this checklist to evaluate your issue. Do not discount the issue if it does not meet all the requirements. Instead, use the checklist to identify where your issue is weaker and think about what you can do and how you can frame it to meet the requirements. Do not be afraid to try this exercise with several issues to find the right one.

More about issues that affect white-collar workers in sections 4.4 and 4.5 of the main report.

Checklist for Choosing an Issue

This checklist helps you pick the right issue to build a strong organising campaign. Here's what makes a good issue:

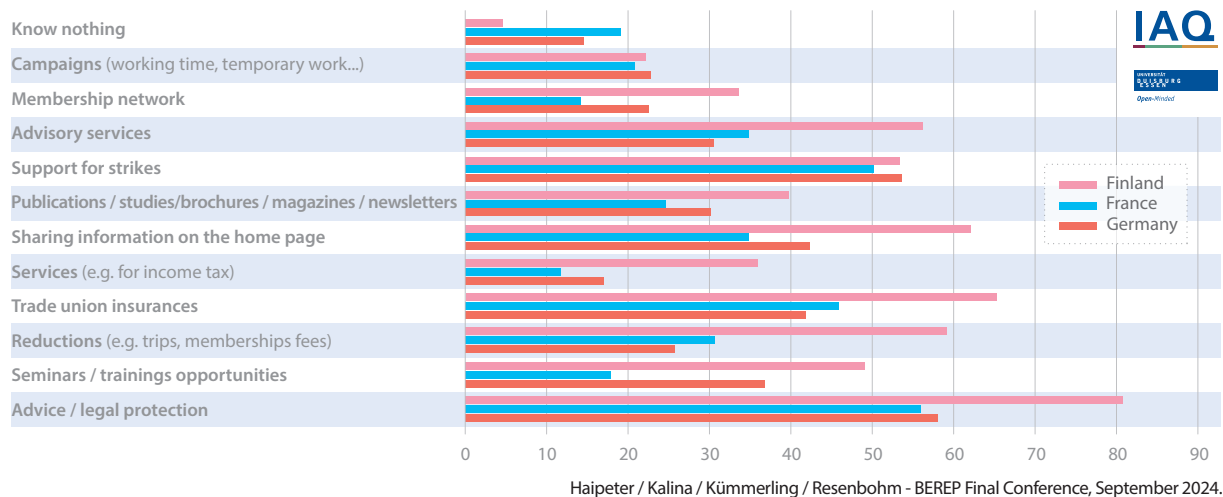
- ☒ **Widely Felt:** Affects a significant portion of the workforce, not just a small group.
- ☐ **Deeply Felt:** Something workers really care about and are motivated to address.
- ☐ **Winnable:** There's a realistic chance of achieving progress.
- ☐ **Worth the Effort:** The potential gains justify the time and energy invested in the campaign.
- ☐ **Real Improvement:** Results in a significant positive change for workers.
- ☐ **Inspiring:** Motivates members and keeps them engaged throughout the campaign.
- ☐ **Worker Power:** Focusses on issues where collective action is the key to winning, not just legal strategies.
- ☐ **Easy to Understand:** Clear and simple demands that everyone can rally behind.
- ☐ **Message to Management:** Sends a strong message about workers' willingness to fight for their rights.
- ☐ **Clear Timeline:** Realistic timeframe that allows for preparation and action without losing momentum.
- ☐ **Non-divisive:** Avoids creating privileges for certain groups of workers or taking from some to give to others.
- ☐ **Leadership Development:** Provides opportunities for members to take on active roles and develop leadership skills.
- ☐ **Next Steps:** Sets the stage for future union campaigns with a stronger foundation.
- ☐ **Community Support:** Appeals to the community and aligns with its interests.
- ☐ **Union Solidarity:** Connects with struggles of other unions for broader impact.



Attracting White-Collar Workers to the Union

According to our research, white-collar workers are often looking for services from unions that help them manage their working lives and ensure their rights are respected. These can include individual advice services on issues like tax and legal protection as well as support in individual disputes with the employer. The graph below shows the types of services most sought by white-collar workers in some European countries.

BEREP Survey. Attractiveness of services and support offered by trade unions



GPA Austria and IGBCE Germany: meeting the needs and expectations of white-collar workers

GPA, the union in Austria representing white-collar workers in a broad range of sectors, has launched various tools and resources specifically aimed at white-collar workers. These include a [dedicated webpage for those on 'all-in' employment contracts](#), common among white-collar workers. The website includes an accessible Q and A and a free online calculator that workers can use to ensure they are being remunerated correctly for the time they work. GPA also provides information about calculating travel time and allowances, a stress index and news and information of interest to white-collar workers.

Similarly, IGBCE, a German union representing both white- and blue-collar workers in the chemical sector, provides a dedicated reader on labour law for white-collar workers, so they can easily find information directly relevant to their situation.

How to Plan a Campaign

What Is a Campaign?

A campaign is a planned and coordinated effort by the union to achieve a specific objective and, in doing so, strengthen the union by recruiting and activating more members. When workers win, it demonstrates the power of the union to other workers. This leads to a virtuous cycle where a victory builds momentum towards the next campaign, more growth and another win. But in order to achieve a win that is clear to workers, you need to start by identifying what the objective is. This is why we use so-called SMART objectives.

What Are SMART Objectives?

Use the insights you have gained from learning about your target group to build a campaign that focuses on organising and activating white-collar workers. It should be informed by your research but set by the workers themselves, through organisers' discussions with them. More information about this process is provided in the section 'Communicating with White-Collar Workers'.

To ensure a goal is both achievable and specific, check your objective against the SMART criteria. Ask if your goal is:



Specific: e.g. Negotiate for the inclusion of remote work options for at least 30% of the workweek for all office and R&D staff by the end of next year.



Measurable: e.g. Increase membership among product designers and engineers by 200 individuals in the major manufacturing hub of a specific company by the third quarter of this year.



Achievable: e.g. Secure commitment from the targeted manufacturing company or in a specific region/sector to establish a career development programme, including up-skilling and re-skilling opportunities for technical staff within the next two years.



Relevant: e.g. Advocate for enhanced intellectual property protection measures in employment contracts for research and development staff across the manufacturing sector, aiming for legislative backing by the end of the legislative session.



Time-bound: e.g. Conduct a satisfaction survey among white-collar members by the end of the first quarter to assess current workplace conditions. Use findings to guide bargaining priorities by the second quarter.

How to Write a Campaign Plan

Now that you have done your research and identified your campaign objective, you should develop a campaign plan. A campaign plan:

- Names a team of people working on the campaign (union officials, shop stewards, union activists).
- Breaks the campaign down into a series of smaller tasks.
- Organises tasks on a clear timeline, taking account of public holidays and internal and external events.
- Defines who is responsible for each task, taking into account workloads and timing.
- Sets qualitative and/or quantitative criteria to evaluate the outcome of the tasks.
- Evolves over time as the campaign develops and adapts in response to evaluation.

Don't forget: None of the team members will likely be able to work fulltime for the campaign. The role of shop stewards and union members is key. Don't burn them out by putting too much pressure on them.

Training Your Core Team: shops stewards, organisers and activists

Unions often offer a range of training to shop stewards on how they can better service members and successfully represent workers. However, training on organising and recruitment is just as important, but less common. IndustriAll Europe's [Organising Programme](#) offers support and materials that unions can use to start training their shop stewards. Organising training covers all steps of an organising campaign, starting with identifying core team leaders and targets, research, campaign planning, mapping the work place, charting activities of workers in the campaign, one-on-one communication with workers to find out their issues and to engage them in actions, escalating from small to larger actions, and communicating wins and storytelling.

You may encounter reticence from shop stewards who already have a lot on their plate with existing union business. They may say they don't have time to do more. This can be countered by explaining that organising is about growing the union: more members means more resources. Moreover, the organising approach is about building up members to do more for themselves and enabling them to rely less on shop stewards and staff and more on their own power. By focussing on peer-to-peer organising, where members take charge in having recruitment conversations, an organising approach need not mean a hugely increased workload for shop stewards.

Lead organisers are professional organisers who work for the union. They can provide invaluable support and coordination for organising in workplaces, particularly where shop stewards do not have the capacity. Their role is to:

- Lead and facilitate a number of single organising projects.
- Contribute to the implementation and development of the union's organising strategy.
- Implement and develop organising plans.
- Encourage all union staff to be involved in organising.
- Deliver training in organising, develop skills and tactics for organising.
- Report to leadership and elected representatives on organising campaigns.

It is vital to have someone in this role to drive the organising agenda in your union, bring the necessary expertise to campaigns and create coherency between projects.



Using Surveys

Surveys are a useful instrument to find out what issues impact on the working lives of white-collar workers and what they want from the union. They also serve as a signal to members that the union is driven by their views and interests. For non-members, surveys act as an initial point of contact with the union. As well as getting non-members' thoughts on the workplace, you will gain contact details and information about workers that you can use to map the workplace and reach out to potential recruits. Sometimes, the results can also bolster your case with the employer, showing the strength of feeling on a certain topic.

Online vs. Paper Surveys

Both formats have their advantages. Which one you choose will depend on the size and type of workplace you are organising. **Online surveys** are less expensive to produce and distribute. The data is also easier to collect and analyse. In the case of white-collar workers, who are more familiar with digital communication, it may be the more appropriate option, particularly if the workforce works remotely some or all of the time. However, there are drawbacks: workers are often more reluctant to fill in online surveys as it is less clear who is collecting the data and for what purpose. Many will simply not see the email. This is why it is important that the survey is shared with workers through direct contact, be that a face-to-face meeting, a personal message or following a telephone call. Never rely on mass email drops. Online surveys are also more open to fake responses and interference from the boss.

Paper surveys may seem old-fashioned, but they still hold real advantages, despite the time and money involved in printing, distributing and collecting the papers and then recording the results. Distributing paper surveys requires face-to-face contact. The most important thing about a survey is not what format it takes, but how you use it. Whether digital or on paper, a survey is a tool for making in-person contact with workers, having organising conversations and gauging their interest in the campaign (more details in the next section). Using a paper survey can encourage your members and activists to have these interactions when circulating the survey, as opposed to relying on a digital format distributed

For how trade unions use surveys, see sections 5.4.5 and 5.4.6 of the main report.

by the union office. A survey is a tool to organise workers, not a research exercise.

Worried about data protection? Don't be. Consult [industriAll Europe's guide to GDPR](#). By following a few simple steps, you will protect the union and workers' data.

This is an example of a good survey: it's short and easy to fill-in. It makes the union's demands clear. It collects key data about the worker.

How Unions Use Surveys and Questionnaires

In **Poland**, at the initiative of shop stewards, the industrial workers' union **FZZMiH**, affiliated to OPZZ, organised employee surveys in a subsidiary of a multinational company. In this survey, employees were asked about their preferences for pay rises.

The **French union CGT** also uses surveys to learn more about working conditions and for identifying issues of concern. The use of such surveys has helped the union to recognise that working conditions for white-collar workers have changed significantly. For example, they became aware that staffing levels had been reduced, resulting in increased workloads and higher levels of stress.

SINGLE-ANSWER QUESTIONS

MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS

GET PEOPLE MORE INVOLVED

Our Union at Company X PAY SURVEY 2024

Unite is our union at Company X. We are running a pay survey and want to know what your main concerns are for our 2024 pay claim. Please take the time to give us your views. This will be treated in strict confidence and not seen by management.

- My pay is (please tick one): Fantastic ☐ Good ☐ Could be better ☐ Bad ☐
 - Have you ever found it hard to make ends meet? Yes ☐ No ☐
 - Please rank the following issues from one to five (1 being most important, 5 being least important):
 - Inflation + pay rise ☐
 - More holiday ☐
 - Better night shift payment ☐
 - Improvement to sick pay ☐
 - Improved canteen facilities ☐
 - Do you think our union reps should have more time granted by the company to campaign for you? Yes ☐ No ☐
 - Is it important for you to see more temps made permanent? Yes ☐ No ☐
 - Is there anything else you would like to see included in this year's pay claim?
.....
 - I am a member of Unite? Yes ☐ No ☐
 - I want to get more involved with my union at Company X? Yes ☐ No ☐
- Name Shift
- Mobile Email
- Please keep me in touch about Unite the Union & this campaign by phone ☐ email ☐

This survey and your personal details will be kept confidential by Unite the Union. The results will be submitted to [company] only and will be retained by Unite for the duration of the [name of campaign] campaign and associated issues. Unite the Union's full up-to-date privacy policy can be found at www.uniteunion.org/privacypolicy

Communicating With White-Collar Workers

The most effective way to contact white-collar workers is to be present in the workplace. According to our research, white-collar workers notice and appreciate the physical presence of the union in workplaces. The cornerstone of your campaign is the one-on-one conversation. This is a structured conversation between the organiser (either union staff, a shop steward or workplace activist) and the worker. The purpose of these conversations is to:

- Find out what concerns and issues the worker has.
- Gauge their interest in joining the union and what issues will get them active.
- Get information about the workplace, like who works there, how the workplace is structured and the attitudes and feelings of the workers towards the boss and the union.
- Ask the worker to do a small task, like speaking to one or two other workers, bringing them to the next assembly, finding out specific information, or distributing leaflets to other colleagues. This tests their commitment and builds a sense of involvement.

The 70:30 Approach

The 70:30 approach means union organisers and shop stewards spend 70% of their time listening and 30% talking in a strategic conversation with a worker. Use active listening and strategic questioning to understand workers' concerns. It's important to respect the worker's opinion and avoid arguing. The goal is to reach an agreement at the end of the conversation. Active listening involves fully concentrating, understanding, responding, and remembering what the other person is saying.

Example of Active Listening:

Worker: "I've been really stressed because the workload has increased, but our team hasn't grown. It feels like management doesn't care about our well-being."

Union Organiser: "It sounds like you're feeling overwhelmed by the increased workload and that you feel management isn't addressing your team's needs. Can you tell me more about how this is affecting you and your colleagues?"

In this example, the union organiser uses active listening by:

1. Paraphrasing the worker's concerns to show understanding.
2. Asking an open-ended question to encourage the worker to share more details.
3. Demonstrating empathy and validation of the worker's feelings.

Using Social Media

Social media can be a useful tool for increasing visibility and reaching out to specific groups of workers. Keep in mind that each social media platform serves different purposes and audiences, and that not every platform is equally suited to reaching white-collar workers. While TikTok and Instagram may be useful for reaching out to students and younger workers, LinkedIn may be more appropriate for providing professional information on specific topics. You may want to consider asking your membership what they think is the best way and platform to reach out to white-collar colleagues.

On LinkedIn, you can create a dedicated page for your campaign where you should post regular updates, with a focus on the successes of the union in the campaign and more widely. Engage directly with individuals who express interest through personalised messages, offering more detailed information and invitations to join the union. Consistent interaction, combined with valuable, persuasive content, will help build a strong recruitment presence on LinkedIn. And remember: always follow up communication.

Campaigns which never leave the digital space will never have the same positive effect on improving working conditions and wages as campaigns in the workplace. Physical presence and direct interactions – also possible remotely – build trust and community, effectively mobilise workers, and apply pressure on employers.

How Unions Use Social Media

One example of a successful digital campaign comes from the Finnish Industrial Workers' Union **Teollisuusliitto in Finland**. It aimed to enforce the media and printing sector's collective agreement. Conducted entirely remotely due to social distancing during the Covid crisis, the campaign used digital tools and platforms for communication and organisation. Engagement tactics included online surveys and petitions, and delegations to the employer to build collective power.

By May 2020, the team had identified and tested 53 workplace leaders, secured 85% worker commitment to the petition for collective bargaining, established organising committees ready for action, and elected the first shop stewards. Significant outcomes by autumn 2020 included 70% union density, 60 new members, 90% worker engagement in actions, and the employer signing the sectoral collective bargaining agreement and recognising elected shop stewards. The campaign's success highlights the effectiveness of digital organising, achieving substantial worker engagement and significant victories in collective bargaining despite the challenges of remote communication. See: <https://news.industriall-europe.eu/p/btup-best-practices>

The **Sindicatul IT Timișoara (SITT)** has used social media to mobilise and raise awareness among IT workers in **Romania**. Their campaigns focus on highlighting workplace issues, promoting union benefits, and organising events. For instance, during their successful recruitment drives, they utilised platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to share testimonials from members, updates on negotiations, and calls to action. This approach has helped them reach a wider audience quickly and engage with potential members more effectively. The union's activities resulted in a sectoral collective agreement for IT workers in Romania. By blending online and offline efforts, SITT successfully mobilises workers, negotiates better terms, and ensures lasting improvements in working conditions. More information: <https://sitt.ro/pages/de-ce-sitt/>



One-On-One Conversations

The one-on-one conversation is a structured, directed dialogue between the organiser and the worker. The aim is to understand the worker's views on their working life and the union and encourage them to become involved in the campaign and join the union. The organiser may be a union official, a shop steward or rank-and-file activist, but it's important that they have been trained and had the opportunity to practise such conversations in advance. Use this model to structure your one-on-one conversations:

The 7-Step Approach to One-On-One Conversations

Remember! The key is 70% listening and 30% talking!

1. Introduction

- Introduce yourself and explain your union role briefly.
- Explain your reason for the approach.
- Develop a rapport and build a working relationship.
- Be friendly and have an open manner.

"I'm here to introduce myself so that you know who I am and what my union role is."

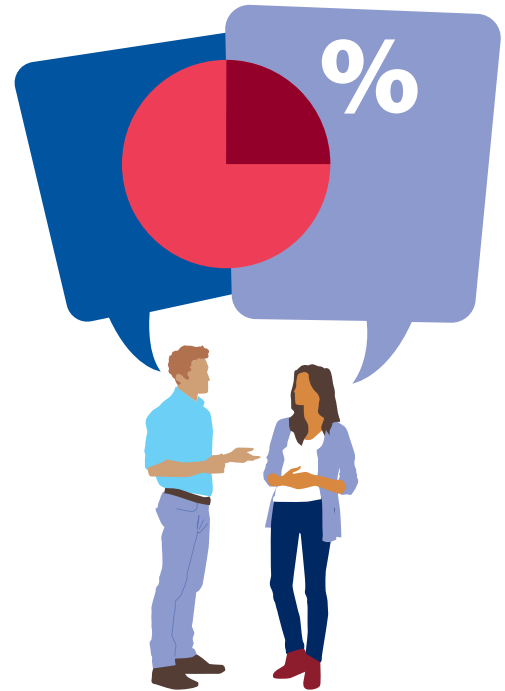
2. Gather basic information about the worker

- Show an interest in the worker by asking about their job and interests.
- Use open questions and listen actively.

"How are you finding the job?" or "What has been happening?"

3. Find issues of concern

- Find out what the issues are for the worker.
- Ask open questions to get the worker to talk about their issues.
-



"How are you finding things here at work?"

"What do you think about the change of hours?"

4. Educate about being in a union

- Talk about some of the successes union members have had acting collectively, such as winning issues or increasing employment conditions.
- Use the Anger-Hope-Action approach (see below).
- Suggest how their issue could be solved with a collective action approach.
- Listen actively and answer their questions.

5. Get agreement to do something

- Get them to do something 'union' or join up.
- This action could include agreeing to attend a meeting, sign a petition, give out some union materials or join the union.
- Have your closure statements ready.
- Be prepared for objections and answer these in a way that moves the worker.

6. Inoculate

- How do you think the boss will react?
- Why?
- This could be a tough campaign, we have to stick together to make it work.

7. Wrap up

- Conclude the approach in a friendly way that leaves an opening for further contact.

"It's great you've decided to join the union. I'll see you next week."

How Unions Create Opportunities from Conversations

In **Finland**, the **trade union Pro** organises an annual campaign in which union activists at regional level go to workplaces and put on 'coffee and cake meetings' for employees at which they provide information about collective agreements and the trade union's work.

In **Romania**, **trade unionists of industriALL BNS** regularly go through different departments and talk to people without knowing whether they are union members or not. The trade unionists ask about their concerns and try to find out if they have any problems. If there are problems, they try to help find a solution.

The **German IGBCE** regularly holds events to provide information to white-collar workers. In their experience, such events are a useful way of reaching out to white-collar workers who are usually out of the union's reach. They have found that more people attend such events than they initially expected. To take Bayer as an example, they organised an event at the headquarters and were expecting around 40 employees, but over 100 turned up. "Another example," said one organiser, "was at the head office of a company in Hesse where there was no unionisation at all and was dominated by white-collar workers. An information event was the first step there and we didn't expect anyone to come, but then we got 250 attendees."

Sveriges Ingenjörer in Sweden focuses on supporting engineers throughout their careers with services like salary negotiation advice, career coaching, and access to extensive salary statistics. Legal support includes assistance with employment conditions, disputes, and contract reviews. They also offer well-being services such as seminars on stress management and resources for maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

The Anger-Hope-Action Approach

The "anger-hope-action" approach is a strategy to engage and mobilise workers effectively by leveraging their emotions and directing them towards collective action. Anger is generated by highlighting challenges like high workload, stress, unclear work orders, and the missing right to disconnect, provoking a strong emotional response. This anger mobilises workers by making them aware of the urgent need for change. Hope is then instilled by presenting a clear vision of what they can achieve through collective action. This combination of anger and hope should then be directed towards the action the worker can take (join the union, sign a petition, join the strike, etc.) to change the situation.

There are three phases in the communication of a union organiser with a worker:

1. ANGER:

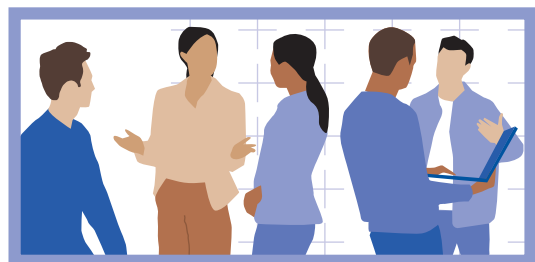
Ask about issues like unfair wages or poor working conditions to evoke a sense of injustice and anger.



2. HOPE:

Offer Solutions: Present potential solutions and share success stories to inspire hope.

Positive Vision: Communicate a clear vision of a better future if workers unite.



3. ACTION:

Call to Action: Provide specific steps the workers can take together, such as attending meetings or joining the union.



Planning Conversations That Engage White-Collar Workers

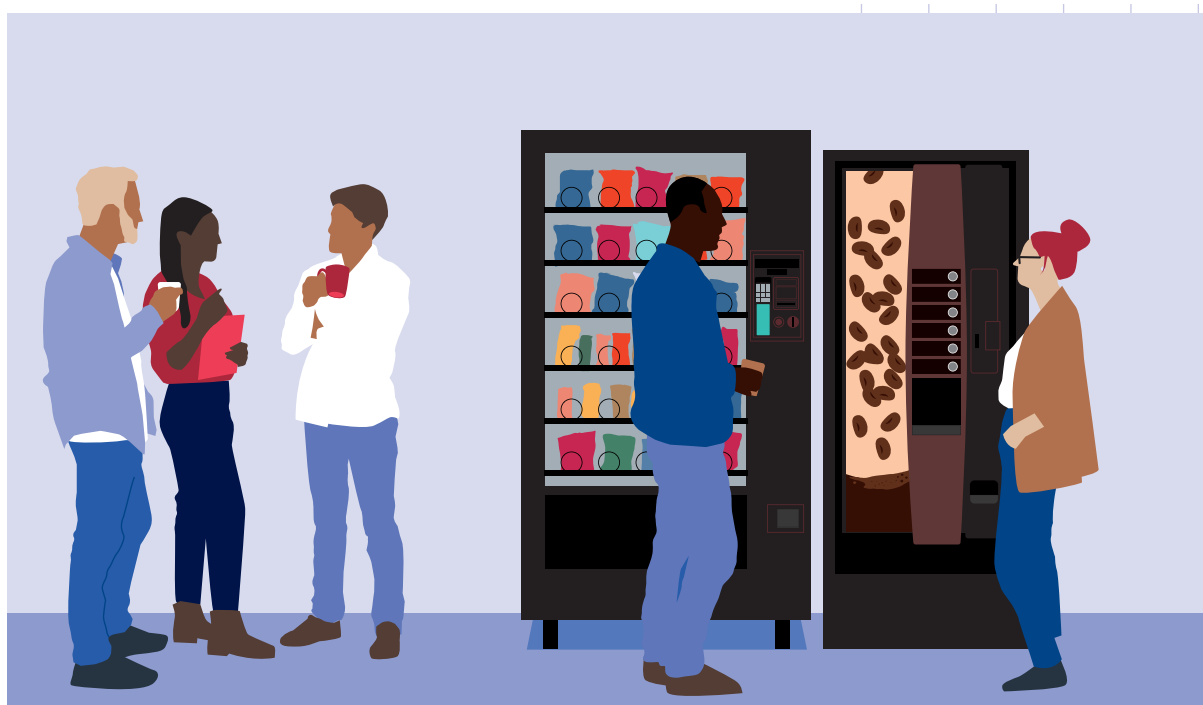
According to our research, many white-collar workers are looking for reliable background data and information. This makes it important to prepare for conversations with relevant facts and figures. These should be coupled with stories about wins that centre white-collar workers as the protagonists in their own success.

Arguments for Joining the Union

In your one-on-one conversations with workers, you will encounter arguments against joining the union or getting involved in the campaign. It's important to be ready to counter these arguments.

Workers may be anxious or scared. You can overcome their reluctance by making clear and convincing arguments that refocus their fears or anxieties towards the union as a solution to their concerns. The point is always that workers will be stronger and better able to protect each other if they join together. For that to happen, the reluctant worker also needs to join. Make sure activists and shop stewards who are also having these conversations are aware of the types of arguments they may face. Practise using these counter-arguments with them so they can use them in their own one-on-one conversations.

This table sets out the most common arguments for not getting involved and how you can counter them. Use them to practise your responses with others in the campaign.



Arguments

Counter argument

”

*I do not want to pay a fee/
the fee is too high*

Explain what the contributions are used for: lawyers, education, supporting activities.

Membership of any association costs something; give examples from daily life about paying for something to get something.

”

*I have a good relationship with
my supervisor*

Having a good relationship with your supervisor is great, but union membership offers crucial protections and benefits that go beyond any individual relationship. Supervisors can change, and there's no guarantee the next one will be as supportive.

”

*I can solve my issues alone
vis-a-vis the management*

Solving issues alone might work sometimes, but union membership provides collective power, better wages, job security, and consistent support. If management changes, union backing stays strong. With a union, you're never alone in facing challenges—your rights and benefits are always protected by a unified voice.

”

*Unions are for blue-collar
workers*

Unions are not just for blue-collar workers; they provide vital support and benefits for white-collar workers too. Unions negotiate better salaries, secure job protections, remote work and offer legal assistance.

”

I do not have time

You can decide for yourself how much time you want to spend on it.

There are tasks that do not take much time.

Winning improvements in your life (like better pay and conditions) often require a little time, but it's worth it in the long run.

”

What do I get out of it?

Explain what the union is doing/has done.

The more we are, the stronger we become.

Promotion is never guaranteed, the trade union can negotiate a collective agreement for promotion/career steps.

”

*I am afraid/
do not want to endanger
myself*

The union is a strong force and it will be even stronger with you.

"What doesn't kill you makes you stronger".

If many join, it is less dangerous and the fear disappears.

If you get a few of your colleagues to join up as well, the boss can't single you out.

Explain what the union will do if there is repression.

Arguments

Counter argument



The trade union cannot help me because I am a temporary / contracted/ freelance worker.

We will support you, explain how, and what protections exist.

The union stands up for regular employment contracts (no guarantee of success - do not make empty promises).

Labour code applies to all workers. We can help, if you have problems. Give examples of what unions can do.



I do not want any problems with promotion/in my career

Possibility of anonymous membership.

The apprehension shows that the situation is not ok, and something needs done: if you don't do it, how can you expect others to improve it for you?

Promotion is never guaranteed, the trade union can negotiate a collective agreement for promotion/career steps.



*I'll think about it...
(is an indication of other fears/
doubts!)*

The sooner we become more numerous, the sooner we can achieve something- What do you want to think about?

How much time do you need? - When can we talk about it again?

Maybe you can help us in other ways in the meantime.

Examples of what we can do.



That changes nothing after all

You can suggest what changes we are working on.

Examples from other companies, countries.

We are as strong as our members are united.

Join us and be part of the negotiation /action.



What can you achieve after all?

The union gives the opportunity to negotiate at a higher level.

As a group we have more power.

Our problems are not individual.

What can you achieve alone? Alone nobody hears you.

Arguments

Counter argument



I will have the benefits without being a member

As a member you would be part of our successes

Are you also free-riding in public transport?

The cake we share becomes bigger when there are more of us.

What do you think you can reach alone vis-à-vis management?



The Labour Code does not give me any protection after all

Right, so we must do it together and secure in agreements with the employers all the protection that the law does not give us. But no one is preventing us from agreeing on protection bilaterally.



It is not at all transparent what the union is doing do/ the Chair is never available

If you join us, you will be part of the decisions. You will not only get an insight, but also the opportunity to help shape them.

I'll explain what we do, how we work and bring you materials next time.

The union is not the Chair; we are all together the union. Members support members.

Why not come to the next meeting of the workers' committee?



I am too young

Make use of the time. It's fun. Build a community. We need you to achieve a better education and training.



I am too old

Negotiate together severance payments, pensions, protection for older workers.

Identifying Workplace Leaders

Trade union organising is more than recruitment. Trade union organising is about building workplace leaders who can reach other workers and get them to take action. Through this process, the workers build their own power and confidence and learn to rely on their own strength and commitment.

White-collar workers themselves are more likely to recruit and organise other white-collar workers. That's why it is important to identify and develop natural leaders within a workplace to grow the campaign. An organiser will start to identify leaders through one-on-one conversations and then by assessing their commitment based on a series of "small asks" made to them during one-on-one conversations.

The "Small Ask" Approach

Assign a small, specific task related to the organising effort. This could be speaking to one or two colleagues, or passing around a petition or leaflet. This helps gauge activists and potential leaders' commitment and provides a chance for further interaction. Watch if they complete the task reliably and with enthusiasm. This will give you an insight into their work ethic and dedication to the cause.

By using this approach, you can identify individuals who are vocal, respected, engaged, and action-oriented. The "small ask" approach not only identifies potential leaders but also helps assess their commitment, laying the foundation for a strong organising team.

For example, GPA Austria uses groups on social media to attract non-members to make a first contact with the union. These groups are based around particular professions, such as engineers, architects, project managers, directors, etc. The non-members who join can then be approached with a small ask based on a topic they have shown interest in (e.g. transparent employment contracts, equal pay, educational offerings).

Checklist for Identifying Workplace Leaders

Here's an approach to recognising potential workplace leaders for your union's organising campaign. These are often informal leaders who can influence others.

Formal and Informal Recognition:

- ☒ **Recommended by workmates:** Look for consistent recommendations across different social circles within the company.
- ☐ **Community involvement:** Individuals active in community causes often demonstrate leadership and a commitment to social justice, translating well to union organising.

Communication and Influence:

- ☐ **Vocal advocates:** Identify those who readily voice concerns about workplace issues and inspire others to speak up.
- ☐ **Respect and trust:** Seek out individuals who command respect from their peers due to their integrity and work ethic.

Engagement and initiative:

- ☐ **Question askers:** Those who probe management decisions and company policies often possess a critical mindset valuable for organising.
- ☐ **Social event organisers:** Individuals who take the initiative to bring people together informally are adept at building relationships and fostering a sense of community.

Action and Union Affinity:

- ☐ **Previous union contact:** Those who have already contacted the union about workplace issues demonstrate a willingness to take action and a potential understanding of union benefits.
- ☐ **Natural Leaders:** Look for individuals who take charge in situations, solve problems, and inspire others to follow.

Recruiting and Retaining White-Collar Workers

Organising is not just about getting more members. It is a prerequisite for successful negotiations, because white-collar workers know best the needs and interests of other white-collar workers. They are also the most able to develop the new narrative needed to attract others to the union. Additionally, white-collar workers with their skills and competencies in business administration or project management are also a source of expertise for trade unions to use in negotiations with management.

As set out in this toolkit, white-collar workers will have their own interests and issues, sometimes distinct from their blue-collar colleagues. To continue to attract and retain white-collar members, special attention should be paid to activating white-collar members in your existing structures and creating space for white-collar members to participate in the life of the union. When unions seek to recruit white-collar workers, we need to be ready to negotiate for them! This may mean adapting or altering your union's structures and procedures to better represent their views. Below you will find several examples of how other unions have achieved this.

Creating a Retention Policy Using Organising Methods

The Fellesforbundet retention project in Norway targeted members at risk of leaving, especially those who had not paid their dues for three months. Local departments were tasked with contacting these members using phone calls and digital channels. Full-time employees were given the necessary time and resources for this task. As a result, 47.7% of contacted members stayed, 11.8% were transferred to another local or union, since their reason for leaving was a change of workplace, and 3.7% of those intentionally wanting to resign were convinced to remain. The key lessons learned from the Fellesforbundet retention project are:

1. Retention efforts were most effective when managed locally, as this allowed a better understanding of specific challenges and contexts.
2. Proper preparation and special communication training for employees were crucial for effectively contacting members.
3. Maintaining a comprehensive and accurate member database was essential for successful retention efforts.
4. Recognition of the importance of retention efforts of leadership at all levels which shows commitment through action was crucial.

Personal conversations (phone, face-to-face) were significantly more effective in retaining members compared to email communication.

White-Collar Departments or Committees

In countries where white-collar workers are represented by the same union as blue-collar workers, some unions have set up separate white-collar departments or committees to follow the work. This can keep the focus on organising efforts in this group, share wins and help to upscale successful campaigns.

Young Workers and Students

Others have placed a focus on young workers and students. A greater proportion of new starts in industry are entering white-collar jobs, often after time in tertiary education. Unions which are present on campuses, or make themselves visible to new workers at induction meetings or in starter packs, find it easier to bring young workers into the union when they join the workplace.

Reaching Young Workers Early in Their Careers

The youth group of the **Hungarian Federation of Chemical Workers (VDSZ)** focuses on increasing youth membership and interest in trade unions by actively participating in job fairs and university expos in Hungary. The initiative informs young people about the benefits of union membership. They set up stands at events at the job fair of the Budapest University of Engineering, and Veszprém Pannon University. Young union representatives engage with students, explain union goals, and highlight the transparency and vitality of union operations.

In **France**, the trade union **CGT** organises information events at workplaces specifically for younger white-collar employees within their first two years of work. This helps to inform new employees about the union and establish early contact.

White-Collar Workers and Works Councils

In countries where works councils exist, these can be key to your campaign. Members of works councils are often trusted natural leaders who need to be activated to bring in more white-collar members. These workers also tend to be underrepresented in works councils, which can increase perceptions among white-collar workers that trade unions are not for them. Use your campaign to bring white-collar workers into the works council and show how it can be used to meet their demands.

Using Works Councils as an Organising Opportunity

The **French union CGT** stresses that it is not just important to be present at the workplace, but to be in real contact with people: to listen, to know the problems on the ground for which specific training is needed and helpful.

The **Spanish trade union UGT** has been very proactive in tackling this issue by encouraging its trade union sections to identify members who are willing to take on the role of representatives and coordinators for technicians and senior employees. Technicians and senior employees are seen as the most appropriate people to take on this role, as they know themselves best and share similar experiences and perspectives with other white-collar workers. In 2024, UGT had some 400 of these workplace coordinators.

Women White-Collar Workers

A significantly larger proportion of women work in white-collar jobs than in blue-collar roles. Organising white-collar workers therefore also means organising women to a much greater extent. Your campaign needs to be sensitive and open to those issues that particularly impact women. You must not discount the gender dimension of how workers experience their jobs. For example, women workers may highlight disparities in career prospects and work autonomy between roles traditionally seen as female and those traditionally seen as male.

Ensure that women are involved at every stage in your campaign, that their opinions are reflected in surveys and conversations and their views acted upon. Increasing the membership rate of women workers enhances the union's representation, demonstrating a commitment to a diverse workforce and boosting the union's legitimacy and appeal.

Focussing Effort on Recruiting Women

IG Metall in Germany has made significant efforts to recruit and retain female members. They conduct targeted campaigns that address the gender pay gap and work towards creating more inclusive workplaces. IG Metall provides training and upskilling opportunities which are especially beneficial for female workers looking to advance in the manufacturing sector.



Conclusion and More Resources

Organising is a marathon, not a sprint! This toolbox represents a starting point for planning and running an organising campaign for white-collar workers. The ideas and tools that it contains are not exhaustive. As you expand your union's organising of white-collar workers, you will likely encounter the need for more support and information. IndustriAll European Trade Union offers a wealth of training, resources and support for organising and for union work directed at white-collar workers.

Data and Research

- This toolbox has been developed as part of a wider project on white-collar workers in industry. The full report, which is referenced throughout this toolbox, offers in-depth data about white-collar workers, the issues of concern to them and what unions are doing to engage and organise them.
- IndustriAll Europe's Collective Bargaining Database contains information about collective bargaining across the continent and is searchable by issue. It is an invaluable resource for understanding how other unions are tackling problems you may be facing in negotiation. It is available here: <https://news.industriall-europe.eu/p/collective-bargaining-database>.
- 'Beating Global Capital' a paper by Tom Juravich offers an excellent introduction to corporate research.
- The *Dirt Diggers Digest Guide to Strategic Corporate Research* offers in-depth guides to conducting research, as well as a wealth of materials: [Dirt Diggers Digest Guide to Strategic Corporate Research | Corporate Research Project \(corp-research.org\)](#)
- The [European Trade Union Institute](#) offers publications on corporate research and other issues of relevance.
- European Works Councils (EWCs) can play a useful role in supporting organising. Though they have not been conceived as trade union bodies, but rather as vehicles for information and consultation on a wide range of transnational matters, it is clear that trade unions play a crucial role in the establishment and functioning of EWCs. This makes them the tool for building cross-border trade union networks and developing strategic cooperation, including organising. IndustriAll Europe's Company Policy Database is a tool to support political cross-border trade union work within multinational companies in the sectors covered by industriAll Europe. It is available here: <https://agenda.industriall-europe.eu/ewc-landing-page>.

Organising Resources

- IndustriAll Europe offers a range of organising manuals, both on organising in general and in specific sectors and circumstances. They can be found here: <https://news.industrial-europe.eu/p/btup-documents>.
- Specific information and advice on organising white-collar workers can be found here: <https://www.industrial-all-union.org/organizing-white-collar-workers>.
- The Organising for Power programme provides a range of invaluable resources on the practicalities of running a campaign, available here: <https://www.rosalux.de/en/o4p>.
- Excellent resources about organising and unions in the context of digital transformation are available from here: <https://www.fes.de/en/themenportal-gewerkschaften-und-gute-arbeit/international-trade-union-policy/trade-unions-in-transformation-40>.



Training

IndustriAll Europe offers support to develop your organising plan and training for your officials to implement it in workplaces. Once you have decided to become an organising union, please contact industriAll Europe.

IndustriAll European Trade Union offers bespoke training and support for unions that want to focus on organising and strengthening trade union power through our Building Trade Union Growth Path. Being successful in organising requires time, commitment and resources from the union, whilst industriAll Europe can offer expertise, training, advice and other support. In order for your union to benefit from the programme, we will work with you to:

1. Review the membership policies in your decision-making bodies for growth through the systematic recruitment and retention of members to make organising and building trade union power a key priority in your organisation.
2. Allocate the necessary human and financial resources for membership growth.
3. Increase acceptance and support for organising efforts of union leadership, decision-making bodies, officials and activists.
4. Recruit and empower teams of organisers to enhance capacities for growth, stronger collective bargaining, and better working conditions.
5. Develop strategies and tools to recruit and organise more members.

Contact

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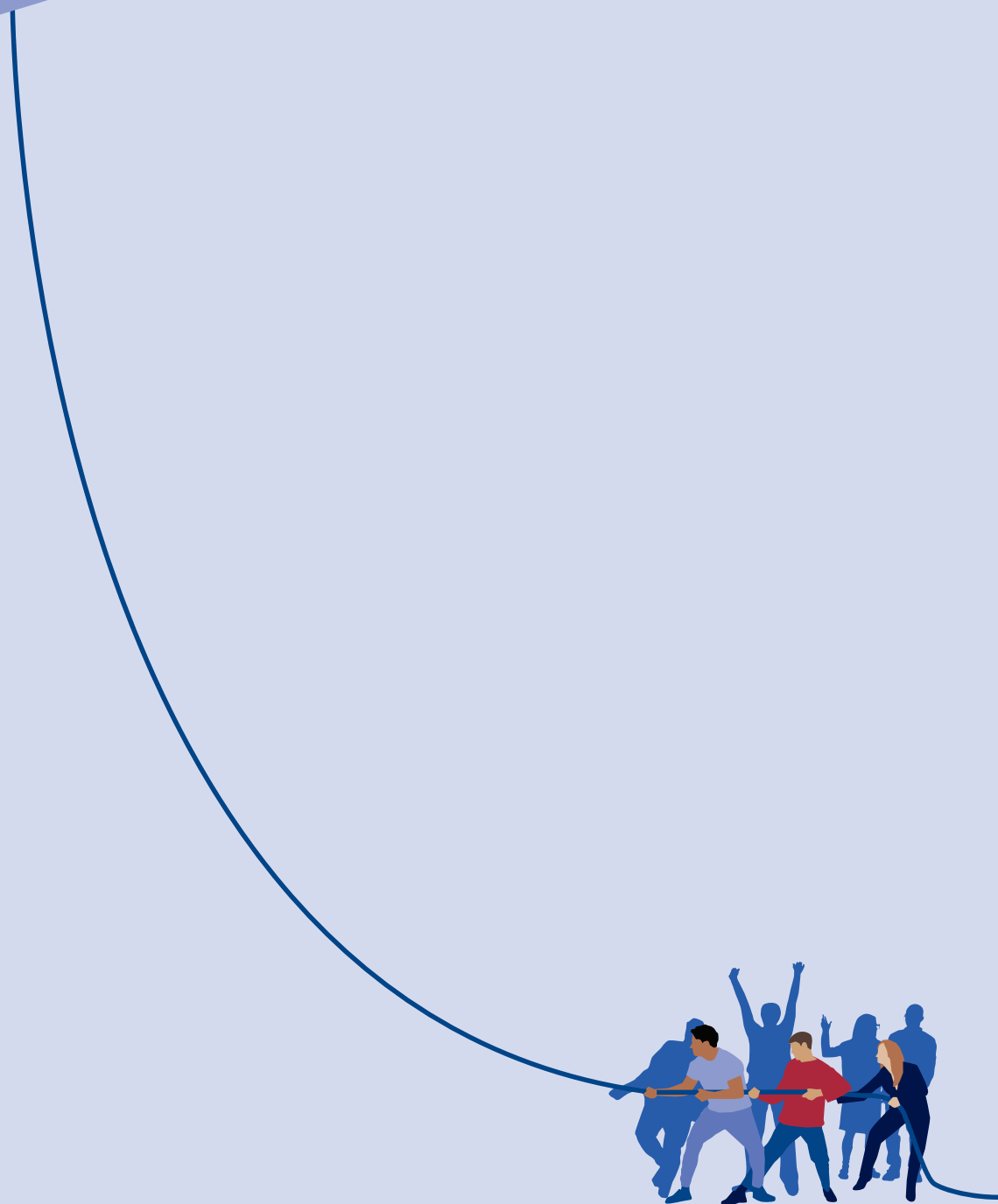
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