

# RETAIN Project – Best Practice Report



**UAI**  
global  
union



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# Intro- duction

01

UNI Europa's RETAIN PROJECT sought to identify and develop union strategies and cutting-edge practices at the company, sector, national and European level to address high levels of staff turnover and the labour shortage in the long-term care sector, private security and industrial cleaning.

The Covid-19 pandemic has also changed the way that governments and society at large regard these jobs. They have been labelled

'essential workers', or 'key workers', giving workers a special legal status in situations of lockdowns but also offering a chance for higher recognition of the sector and to address long-term issues within the sector. Throughout the first months of the pandemic, people stood on their balconies and at their windows and clapped for nurses and doctors – medical specialists. However, they didn't clap for the domestic care worker, private security guard at



the supermarket door, let alone for the cleaner who was cleaning and sanitizing the hospital, often without Personal Protective Equipment.

High levels of staff turnover persist in these sectors, and are associated with understaffing, increased work stress and decreased quality in service provision, ultimately undermining the attractiveness of the sector. Moreover, this weakens trade union membership and worker representatives' capacity to represent workers and employees adequately.

At the sectoral level, wages in the three investigated services sectors (industrial cleaning, private security and long-term care) remain low; sectoral collective bargaining is under attack; and health and safety issues abound. Trade unions in low-wage services sector (Industrial Cleaning, Private Security and long-term care) face multiple challenges: an ageing membership; membership decline and more aggressive behaviour on behalf of companies, as well as short-term or part-time work contracts. Moreover, individual's ability to switch between work in different sectors adds to a high level of fluctuation. Another problem remains the lack of professionalism and training of supervisors and managers in low-wage industries. Often these supervisors and managers are workers' first point of contact if problems arise but are not able to assist or remedy a situation.

Building on the EU-funded projects 'Securing Best Value', 'Best value in

the cleaning sector', 'Anticipation of Change in Private Security Services', and 'Watch the gap! Workers' influence on transfer of employment contracts', RETAIN has been designed in cooperation and enjoyed the support from worker participants of the Social Dialogue Committees in Industrial Cleaning, Private Security, the European Works Councils of ISS, G4S and Securitas, and trade unions from Hungary, Germany, Sweden, Finland, Belgium, Denmark, Spain.

Through bringing together unions from across these three sectors, RETAIN aimed to establish company, sectoral and national practices by trade unions, employers and clients to retain and recruit staff for these occupations, with a view toward the gendered dimension of the problem. The project established in-depth sectoral knowledge as well as created forums for cross-sectoral exchange on union strategies, the strengthening of trade union alliances, collective bargaining and organising.

Three sectoral workshops were organised with the goal of training worker representatives to tackle these questions at said levels, promote equal participation of women and men in the decision-making bodies of workers' organisations and further UNI Europa's work in creating quality jobs and services.

Historically, trade unions have been able to make wage gains and improve terms and conditions in situations of labour shortage. This project has achieved, amongst other things:



➤ RETAIN has already contributed to unions being able to provide workers with an occupational identity, which can contribute to the attractiveness of the industry and can help to recruit new staff and retain other workers.

➤ RETAIN will further help to strengthen sectoral agreements and social dialogue, as wherever these exist and contract lengths are longer, and workers are more likely to remain with the same employer and in the same industry.

➤ Through our affiliates' collective bargaining agreements and recurring collective negotiations, UNI Europa will be able to use RETAIN's results to strengthen social partners' ability to collectively bargain on these issues.

➤ By co-operating with European Works Councils that have specific information and consultation rights, RETAIN will be able to implement the project results at a transnational level and help companies to identify where and why recruitment and retention remain issues, and strengthen social dialogue and worker organisations within these multinational companies.

➤ In the private security sector, RETAIN has also been able to address the issue of labour turnover and staff retention in the context of the takeover of G4S, and through the management-led 'Project North Star' at Securitas.

➤ Moreover, RETAIN has contributed to the recently established Global Agreement with Orpea, which also foresees a working group on staff shortages and labour turnover as part of the further development of this project.

For EWC representatives, it has also become apparent that information and consultation rights run up against limitations as some information could affect the share price and management often refer to the fact that certain decisions lie with the owners. This particularly affects workers in Central and Eastern Europe and Southeast Europe. This created the necessity of a strategic shift to also orient activities of the project on labour shortages, high labour turnover to the investor community. This work will be followed up in the coming years.

The following pages will provide some information on best practices from the three investigated sectors. The best practices documented throughout the project implementation are described in more detail throughout the sectoral reports, while the cross-sectoral reports offer a digested list of these practices.

**Best  
practices  
in the  
industrial  
cleaning  
sector**

**02**

# Wages, working conditions and collective bargaining



The German employers' association in cleaning BIV and their social partner IG BAU agreed on raising minimum wages during Covid-19 because they considered long-term planning and steady wage increases important for the security of companies and clients, especially due to the uncertain future caused

by the covid-19. BIV also launched a national campaign *#Rückendeckung* on social media. The campaign kicked off with videos and banners to promote the sectors' attractiveness and relevance in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, which featured testimonials of essential workers.



- As a response to increased workloads, the interviewees in Norway reported that they stipulated in their collective agreement a possibility to conduct test cleaning in order to estimate the necessary time needed for surface cleaning, and thus prevent excessive workloads
- Even though early morning and evening shifts are still the predominant working time arrangement in the cleaning industry, there are some exceptions: in Finland daytime cleaning is the dominant mode of cleaning, while night time cleaning is also made more expensive by the collective bargaining agreement.
- Due to the fact that cleaners often commute between several different clients, the Belgian interviewees reported that the cleaners' time spent commuting is compensated by their CBA when the travel time from one place to another does not exceed more than 3 hours.
- In Belgium, the sectoral collective agreement for industrial cleaning includes a clause transposing the TUPE directive: in addition to the automatic one-year job protection linked to the transfer of employment contracts to a new employer, the CBA provides for 6 months job protection against economic dismissal
- Different examples of good practice to promote retention through the promotion of living wages were mentioned by our affiliates, such as the well-known campaign 'Justice for cleaners' in the UK which resulted in getting the London mayor to set the living wage standards for cleaners. Similarly, in Finland, the union calculated that while there is a shortage of cleaners in the Helsinki region, almost half of the cleaners' gross wage is spent on rent, indicating a need to increase the salaries. An interesting anecdotal example was cited by our interviewee from Finland who noted that the problem of labour shortages disappears with higher wages: a company in Finland that offered higher wages than their competitors received more than a thousand job applications in one year. Our respondent in Belgium pointed to the benefits of sectoral collective agreements as they served to at least level the wages across the sector and contributed to the stabilization of the workforce. During the project, participants mentioned some follow-up ideas regarding the promotion of living wages such as establishing a living wage observatories to monitor wage levels across the sector.

# Training



The ISS Academy, especially in the Nordic countries, is providing different types of training in facility management, whereby the workers are able to receive training and switch around the facilities in the company (for example from catering to cleaning), which is followed by salary increases.



Some union-led training programmes are also documented, for example Unite the Union provides migrant workers with free English classes, IT classes, training on union rights etc. These programmes are also used to reach and unionize workers.

# Health and Safety



During the RETAIN advisory board meetings, the employers have stressed the importance of health and safety in increasing retention. For example, the ISS mentioned the importance of creating a safety culture which includes many elements: the ISS Safety Rules enabling uniform health and safety standards across countries, training not only in physical but also psychological risks, Health Alerts which provide guidance and training to employees and communicate latest policies and protocols through their

HSE app, the use of the app to report incidents (including the Near Miss incidents) and carry out corrective actions to amend the root causes, regular campaigns around HSE (for example posters, Toolbox talks, appointing safety ambassadors in charge of promoting HSE), creating different personal health and safety profiles depending on the customers' activities etc. In this way, the company claims to have reduced the lost time injury frequency by 80 % in the past decade.

# Public procurement

➤ Uni Europa has been campaigning to change public procurement rules at the EU level with a simple demand: no public procurement without a collective agreement. The demand has so far been supported by more than 100 MEPS, and is a direct response to the fact that a strong competition for contracts for service provision based on price is putting a downward pressure on wages and working conditions across the industries. Different good practices regarding public procurement can be found on municipal levels. For example, the City of Ghent signed a charter guaranteeing that it will procure cleaning services with the contractors who respect labour laws and agreements in the cleaning sector and organize vocational training for their employees. In 2017, the City of

Barcelona published a mayoral decree on City Council's sustainable public procurement that includes social and gender criteria. Similarly, as was documented in the "Making Socially Responsible Public Procurement work" guide published by the European Commission, the City of Helsingborg invited potential cleaning companies a market consultation to discuss potential social requirements that the City intended to use in a procurement of cleaning services, while the Catalan government launched a tender in 2018 for cleaning services of its administrative facilities in 6 territories that included social award criteria (covering occupational health and safety aspects, gender equality measures, measures to promote work-life balance, training for workers and others).



**Best  
practices in  
the private  
security  
sector**

**03**

Similar to the industrial cleaning sector, the project participants in the private security sector presented different practices to increase retention by improving wages, working conditions, collective bargaining developments, training, health and safety, or public procurement criteria. Below are some of the documented examples.

# Wages, working conditions and collective bargaining



In Denmark a new sectoral collective agreement for the security workers was secured amidst the Covid-19 crisis in 2020 and included wage increase, special savings that can be used for senior days, care days, holidays or pension, and also a surcharge for nights and weekends calculated above the minimum wage.



In Norway, the unions' long-term policy of securing higher wages in the industry led to decreased labour turnover, as the union secured wages in the industry to be no less than 95 % of industrial workers' wages



As a response to increased workloads resulting from tasks sometimes not pertaining to

job description of security workers, our interviewees from Ireland said that they have clearly stipulated a list of task of security workers in their CBA



Securitas in the UK, for example, enrolled young people on the so-called Kickstart scheme financed

by the UK government. At the same time, the company has also started an inclusion and diversity group in which employees from Black and Minority Ethnic background or LGTBQI workers 1) build and share knowledge 2) identify diversity and inclusion in recruitment and retention.

# Training



The OGB-L trade union in Luxembourg negotiated in their collective bargaining agreement a sectoral training centre funded by employers which is designed to raise overall standards of the profession and achieve a higher share of skilled workforce. The training center is opened by employers and trade unions in March 2020. The SITC provided 2,400 hours of training in 2020 (the activity was limited by COVID), and for 2021, the balance was supposed to reach approximately 30,000 hours.



The BYA training center in Sweden is owned by the employers' organization

Säkerhetsföretagen and the Swedish Transport Workers' Union and is a leader in providing a broad range of basic, specialized and continuing education for security companies. The basic training is cost-free and is funded by the collective agreement (the unions and the companies have a clause to finance the BYA training through salary contributions). The BYA provides training for around 300 security companies, which own about 95 % of the market share, meaning that the BYA training significantly influences the training standards in the sector.

**Best  
practices  
in the long-  
term care  
sector**

**04**



In addition to focusing on wages, training and health and safety, the project participants in the long-term care sector have focused on sector-specific issues, such as the burning issues of understaffing in the sector or the need to work with the investor communities to raise the standards in the private provision of care. Some of their documented examples of good practices are listed in the text below.

# Wages, working conditions and collective bargaining



The Austrian trade union initiative from GPA and Vida “More of us. Better for all” have built a large-scale campaign demand better staffing levels and have among other things called for 20 % more staff in hospitals and for a uniform calculation

of personnel requirement for all hospital and care facilities, which should be defined with employees’ involvement and take into account absences such as holidays, sick leave, training, pregnancy and maternity leave. To achieve their goals, the unions have

used innovative strategies, combining concrete policy proposals (undertaking surveys to point to alarming working conditions, using academic studies determining staff requirements and staff calculation models), promotional and outreach activities (a wide range of promotional materials, using petitions, mobilizations and effective actions such as using cardboard figures to symbolically point to staff shortages), as well as coalition-building and legislative actions (joining forces with the Chamber of Labour and the Medical


Association to undertake a parliamentary citizens' initiative for more staffing).




UNI Europa managed to secure a binding global agreement with the largest private care provider Orpea that covers 70,000 employees in 23 countries, a first global agreement of its kind in the healthcare and private retirement facilities sector. The global agreement brings many positive commitments, including on the exercise of freedom of association (for example, ORPEA committed to training managers and supervisors on their obligation



to remain neutral on the question of unionisation), union access (ensuring free access without the presence of the local management and extending it to induction meetings, the training of employees, digital access etc.), and employment standards (ORPEA committed to avoid precarious employment by systematically favouring full-time employment). Additionally, the company agreed to establish a joint working group “to raise staff-resident ratio, tackle high levels of labour turnover in the company, promote quality care and address labour shortages in the care sector”, that will jointly develop and monitor a five-year plan on the issues of retention and career development.



UNI Global Union coordinated with more than 100 investors with US\$3.35 trillion in assets under management—and launched a set of expectations for for the nursing home sector which included uplifting wages to living wage levels, ensuring sufficient staffing levels, shifting away from using precarious contracts, respecting workers’ right to freedom of association and engaging in constructive social dialogue. The number of investors signing the statement continues to grow.



Our affiliates all over Europe have in the past two years expanded collective bargaining and improved working conditions, and have especially increased their activity in Central, SouthEast and East Europe, the regions which usually have lower levels of collective bargaining. For example, successful organizing efforts have been undertaken in the Czech Republic, Poland, Croatia and Slovenia, among others. In Slovenia, after more than 18 months of organizing during a global pandemic, dialysis workers at six Fresenius Medical Care’s Nefrodial clinics in Slovenia improved conditions and pay through their first company-specific agreement: the employees received on average between 20 and 30 percent higher salaries and negotiated an annual 1.33 per cent pay rise for each year of employment in the company for all employees in the Nefrodial clinics.

# Training



Different good practices related to investing in training have been noted. Our affiliates from Belgium described their federal training programme that offers employees in the care sector (hospitals as well as retirement homes) to complete nursing studies while keeping their salaries (known as the 'project 600' and the 'project 360'). The employees are given free hours to study for a nursing degree during a period of 3 to 4 years. At the same time, the replacement staff is covered by the state through the system of the so-called Social Maribel. The Social Maribel is a federal employment measure to create new employment in certain parts of the public and not-for-profit sector through reductions in employer contributions to social security. The goal of the system is to reduce workloads for the existing staff and meet the increased demand in several sectors, including the care sector. The system is the outcome of many years of negotiations between trade unions, employers in the non-profit sector and federal

government and is constantly being re-negotiated and improved.



There are positive examples of cross-border organizing of migrant workers by unions such as the cooperation between the Croatian Union of Migrant Workers and the Austrian Vida Union that covers self-employed live-in carers. Vida provides the migrant self-employed care workers (estimated around 60 000) with legal information and counselling, offers insurance against accidents, co-funds the German language courses as well as training courses for home care, while the Croatian counterpart assists with tax counselling.



# Health and Safety



In order to contribute to health and safety in the workplace, UNI Europa has published a “Shield against Covid”, a set of guidelines for unions to use their bargaining power and improve health and safety in the workplace during the Covid-19 pandemics and beyond, from recommendations on infectious disease protocol to recognizing Covid19 as an occupational disease. During the RETAIN project,

some service providers have reported various good practices such as providing counselling and psychological aid as the job has become even more physically and emotionally demanding and has a major impact on the mental health of carers. Such initiatives need to be expanded in the future to include a comprehensive set of policies for health and safety in the workplace.



# Conclu- sion

05

**Based on these good practices,  
the RETAIN Project achieved  
following objectives:**

- Enhanced our understanding of retention and recruitment problems in sectors that are key areas of employment growth in the European Union
- Identified and developed cutting-edge practices to recruit and retain staff and minimise labour turnover at the company, sectoral and national level in private security, cleaning activities and residential care services
- Provided policy advice and expertise to affiliate trade unions and employers that can be used in collective bargaining and social dialogue
- Advanced the existing work programmes in the EU sectoral social dialogues in Industrial Cleaning and Private Security
- Strengthened UNI Europa's and affiliate trade unions' activities in the European Works Councils
- Disseminated the project result to multinational companies with the aim of establishing roundtables with these in order discuss recruitment and retention practices and develop joint activities.
- Widened unions' scope of strategic action at the company-level, among clients, at the sectoral level, country and most important European-level.