



Final report from the Hungarian Trade Union Confederation (MASZSZ)-OxYGen Foundation partnership in the Hungary-Armenian Open Governance Partnership Knowledge Transfer

Following the request of the OxYGen Foundation and based on previous successful cooperation, the Hungarian Trade Union Confederation (MASZSZ) became partner to the “Knowledge Transfer for Enhanced Government's Accountability and Citizens Participation in Armenia” project funded by the International Visegrad Fund. The participation of MASZSZ aimed at know-how transfer and sharing experiences on issues of:

- Evolution and development of the labour rights, corresponding legislation, and the role of trade unions in advocating workers' interest
- Evolution of social dialogue at various levels, relations, and cooperation of trade unions with state, employer and local government actors – showing possible win-win cases
- Trade union and NGO / civil society cooperation - sharing eventual win-win cases
- Workers-Trade Union direct cooperation examples
- Sharing any positive cooperation cases with private sector and CSOs

The original project plan was to organise for Armenian participants in person visits to Hungary and introduce our experiences on the spot by facilitating seminars, workshops, and visits in Budapest and in some Hungarian regions. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic lock-downs and restrictions, there was a need several times to rearrange the whole structure and programme/ timetable. Consequently, the project had to go online entirely, which made it more complicated and less interactive. Even the very much hoped final visit of Armenian participants to Hungary (August 2021), with trade union experts, state and local government officials and key stakeholders concerning open governance issues had to be cancelled.

MASZSZ has organised and facilitated two half day online workshops for Armenian counterparts, with Hungarian representatives of trade unions, local governments, NGOs dealing with women's issues, labour rights, youth issues, and open governance in general. Respectively, the workshops addressed gender equality, youth participation in governance, labour rights issues and country experience in public governance partnership.

The online workshop on July 1, 2021 was attended by 53 participants on the Armenian side. The workshop was linked to the Labour rights multi-stakeholder open Platform - Civic Voice and Action (CVA) which is a newly formed Armenian network for protecting and defending labour rights. This aims at facilitating national level consultations for policy reforms and legislative changes to address the discrimination and violation of labour rights. The aim is to act with the involvement of grassroots organisations, experts, social partners - private sector, trade unions, CSOs, activists' nonformal groups and government officials.

As announced to the participants, the aim of the workshop was to

- share the key learning and best practices on labour rights protection systems in Eastern European countries, based on the example of Hungary and to find replicable models for Armenia. Presentation of various cooperation modules on tripartite social partnership, and partnership among trade unions, CSOs, and LSG.
- present the key learnings from the advocacy and campaign work towards smooth cooperation, gender-sensitive approaches, and youth involvement.

To meet these aims, the agenda has been structured:

- The Hungarian industrial relation system: the role of social partners to ensure social dialogue and social partnership in labour rights – human rights sphere. (presented by Károly GYÖRGY, *International secretary, Hungarian Trade Union Confederation (MASZSZ)* and Adrienn BÁLINT, *Director for Social Affairs, BusinessHungary*)
- Effective cooperation of trade unions and civil society organisations for promoting labour rights – presentation of the “Slave Law” campaign. (presented by Balázs BÁBEL, *Vice president, Hungarian Metalworkers’ Federation*)
- Transposition of international standards to national law, human rights, equality, gender sensitivity in legislation / tripartite cooperation (presented by Dr. Judit IVÁNY CZUGLER, *Workers’ Vicechair, National ILO Council*)
- Tripartite Interest Reconciliation Council of the Capital City Budapest (FŐÉT) / functioning of tripartite negotiations, presentation of the evolution of the three years Wage Agreement (presented by Annamária KUNERT, *Advisor to the Budapest capital City Municipality (president, Trade Union Youth)*)
- Budapest municipality and the CSO cooperation best practices and learning (presented by Marietta Le, *senior advisor to the Mayor of Budapest*)
- Empowering women in the society: Changing roles – changing attitudes. Unpaid work, a case study – widescale public campaign for parliamentary action. (presented by Kata JUHOS, *“Step by step” Association (Lépjünk, hogy léphessenek Egyesület)*)

The presentations (see attached) and the following discussions oriented to map and understand the situation in Hungary and Armenia which have led to some very important findings. It is worth to state that the experiences over the past three decades in Hungary, Poland seem to be

rather similar. It was also recommended to the attention of our Armenian partners, that on the Hungarian side we can't tell what to do – but can tell what's not worth to do and where the Hungarian trade unions and civil sector failed in constructing and managing democracy.

1. Importance of sound and just legal framework -words and practice:

- an issue all stakeholders have to work together in a meaningful way, both in principle and in practice
- A significant role and imminent importance of and adherence to international standards, as the basis (UN Human Rights Declaration / ILO Core Labour Standards / EU Acquis Communautaire)
- For the world of labour, the ILO labour standards aim at creating a balance between capital and labour, however there is still a gap between words and practice
- The role of the executive (the state/ government): should be the guardian of the implementation of the law/ regulations
- While the legislators and the government /authorities should meet their obligations, there is a significant role of social partners, NGOs, civil society actors to play – the latter functioning as watchdogs of democracy

2. In the world of labour we talk about social partnership

-
- Social partnership needs genuine, reliable actors: trade unions, employers, government / local government
- Partnership must aim at meaningful dialogue arriving to compromises that are fruitful for all group interests
- Social dialogue and partnership must be made understood among people – it is about and for the benefit of the society, of people – this necessitates cooperation with civil society
- There is a need to go beyond company frames: fighting for and defending labour right is the task of trade unions, and the role of the entire society

3. Democracy

- Labour rights are human rights: without labour rights (individual and collective rights!) there is no human rights and without human rights, there are no labour rights
- What matters is the practice – pure words, written texts are not enough. This is a common experience of all socialist countries.
- Our CEE experience shows how wrong we have been: attaching and leaving roles to trade unions, to civil society, to government. These roles must be coherently linked.
- Effective practice of labour rights are prerequisite for economic and social progress and for meaningful policy making
- Imminent role of the media – without real media freedom and without the media being available to everyone, there is much vague chance for success

4. The way to act

- There is a need to present your objectives and put pressure on legislators
- To do so, there is a primary need to get the objectives recognised by the society
- The objectives should be transparent, together with transparent presentation of how legislators, authorities go along with the issues concerned
- There is a need for broad coalitions – every actor on the NGO, civil society side need to look beyond their own goals, placing them always in a societal framework – that enables people to understand
- Broad coalitions are needed – Hungarian examples prove how it can work (e.g. “slave law” movement developing to a broadest possible coalition on purpose)
- Need to find catch-words – that are easily understood and communicated and make people active
- Direct contacts and dialogue with people
- Capacity building: know-how transfers, trainings, learning from best practices (like this project)

Due to the organisational difficulties the issue of “Women in the labour market, gender-sensitive labour legislation: challenges and successes cases, effective mechanism of cooperation” was subject to a workshop at a later stage, where the originally planned Hungarian presentation (by Mária HERCEGH, Chair of MASZSZ Women’s Section) could not attend.

Károly György

17. 09. 2021.

Attached presentations:

1. Hungary – labour market and industrial relations
2. Cooperation of trade unions and NGOs
3. Interest Reconciliation Council of Budapest and the three-year wage agreement
4. Campaign to increase the amount of care allowance