Transatlantic Networking Guide

This guide was produced with the financial support of the European Commission
Introduction

The overall aim of this guide is to provide a resource that will enable USA and European worker representatives to initiate and improve their working relationships.

The guide is to be used together by worker representatives in European countries and the United States in direct communication with each other. This can be done through email, letter, fax and telephone.

This practical guide will give you a series of activities that you can use with one or more of your counterparts. Each activity will have the aims, some tasks for you to do and some ideas about additional resources that may be helpful to you.

As you move through the activities you will find that they require increasing levels of communication and action to be taken in order to build strong relationships of solidarity.

Before you begin, read through the entire sequence of activities so that you have an idea of how the programme will develop.

When you are ready to begin with the activities, first read through the aims so that you are clear about why you are doing this activity and then complete the tasks to the best of your ability.

If there are some things that you are not able to answer easily or do not know, do not worry. It is better to complete most of the task and send it rather than wait too long to find the “right answer”. Once the tasks are completed, send the information to your counterparts.
Before You Begin - Identifying Your Counterparts

Building solidarity means building links with the workers and the unions that are a part of your multinational company. Building effective links and successful cross-national relationships requires us to know as much as we can about each other.

The first thing you will need to do is find your counterparts.

In order to get started identifying your counterparts try these options:

- Contact your own union and find out whether it has an international department or already has links with your counterpart unions (your own union website may have links to other union organisations).

- Check whether there is a European or global works council for your company and go through your union to establish a contact.

- Contact European and international union organisations such as the European Industry Federation and the Global Union Federation for your industrial sector and see what information they have.

- Look up the website for your multinational company. There is likely to be a map or listing of the company’s operations in the world. You will need to keep checking this information as purchases and sales of operations occur frequently.

- Use the Google search engine on the Internet to track down other union, company and industrial relations web sites. It’s surprising how many European sites have information in different languages.

Once you get started you may want to learn about the language, culture and history and comparative industrial relations for the other countries. Information is available on ETUCO (language training programmes for trade unionists) and also, e.g. on the ETUI website (Benchmarking Working Europe 2003).

Finding your counterparts may be both easier and harder than you might at first imagine. Easier because there are a lot of sources of information available on the Internet and through your union. Harder because multinational companies are constantly buying and selling operations and because our international trade union structures will inevitably take time to catch up on the companies.

Once you have made the initial contact with your counterparts, you will need to refer them to the ETUCO Internet site so that they can obtain their copy of this guide: http://www.etuc.org/etuco/en/projects/transatlantic.cfm
How to Communicate With Each Other

To save repetition we refer throughout to “email communication” but you may, of course, use letters, emails or faxes or even get the opportunity to meet face to face. Use whatever methods are best for you.

You may need to email back and forth a few times with your counterparts in order to clarify the parts of their answers that you do not understand. For example, it will help you to keep a list of words or concepts that you do not understand and ask your counterparts for explanation.

Remember when emailing you need to be direct, use simple language and focus on one issue, not many. You will find a great deal of useful information on ETUCO website in Dialog-on – Transnational Communication online.

You are likely to be emailing back and forth in different languages. There are a number of resources to assist you with translation.

- Union members and their families
- Resources within your union
- The European Trade Union College website has information about emailing between trade unionists who speak different languages.
- The Internet “gist” translation resources.
- Your local community resources – such as the universities, libraries, local schoolteachers, bilingual activists, community organisations.
- Resources from your company that you trust.
- Professional translators familiar with trade unions.
- Language learning resources such as tapes, books and classes from your local community library and college.

You will need to be aware that translation takes place within a cultural and national context. For example, even when you both speak the same language, you may attach completely different meanings to the same words and phrases. This is particularly true in the context of trade union activity since there is so much variation in what a union looks like and does in your different countries. For instance, you can translate the words ‘collective bargaining’ but collective bargaining systems are different in different countries. To help you with this it is particularly important that you keep referring to Appendix 1: Finding Out About Industrial Relations Systems in Europe and the USA.
Avoiding the stereotypes

• In the USA union members may be working with local communities and others to challenge management decisions. USA trade unions sometimes have a reputation for militant action but 98% of union agreements are settled without industrial action.

• Unions from the Nordic countries are known for their internationalist outlook but their workers’ representatives are equally concerned to look after the workers in their own workplaces.

• Trade unionists from the UK are often accused of rarely looking beyond their national border but many are active in their company European Works Council.

• In Germany a workers’ representative might be a member of the top decision-making Board of their company and participate in decisions about the appointment of senior company managers.

• Many European countries such as Austria and Germany are known for their co-operative industrial relations but there are still strikes covering whole sectors of the economy.
SECTION 1: UNIONS AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS IN EUROPE AND THE USA

Introduction

In this part of the programme you will find out about the different systems of trade union organisation and industrial relations in your respective countries. Looking at a mass dismissal as an example will help you see the similarities and differences in the ways that the same issue is dealt with in different countries.
**Activity One - Finding Out About Our Trade Union Work**

**Aims**

This activity will help you to find out about what workers’ representatives do in the different countries in your company.

**Tasks**

You need to share some information about your workplace union activities with your counterparts. Read through and answer the questions below and add in any other information that you think is important.

**Email Discussion Questions**

- What union or workplace representation job do you do at your workplace and what does it involve?

- What workers do you represent?

- Are there any groups of workers that are under represented groups in your union? (For example, nightshift workers, women, racial and/or cultural groupings)

- Do you have any union jobs beyond your workplace?

- How do you represent union members? For example, are there works councils? Shop stewards committees?

Once you have exchanged the answers to these questions, you may want to email back and forth questions about terms which need clarification or additional questions that occur to you.

Once you understand the information that has been sent to you, email back with the most unexpected or interesting thing that you found out.

**Resources**

- ETUCO/Infopoint-ETUC publication – [Worker Representation Systems in the European Union and the Accession Countries](#)
Activity Two - Different Systems of Workers’ Representation – Case Study of a Mass Dismissal

Aims

This activity will help you to think about the different ways in which workers are represented in the different countries in your company.

Tasks

In a company employing a staff of 1500 the management plans to subcontract part of the production in two countries. One of the consequences of such a decision would be the closure of a plant, which would involve a permanent mass dismissal of the workers. This company has a European Works Council.

You need to share information in this activity about how this would be dealt with in your own country. If you are a European worker representative, describe how the European Works Council would be involved in this process.

Email Discussion Questions

• Who would be involved in the discussions from the workers’ side?
• How would the workers’ representatives be informed and consulted?
• Would you have the right to negotiate with management over the mass dismissal?
• Would you have the right to negotiate with management over the effects of the mass dismissal on the workforce?

Resources

• The ETUCO/Infopoint-ETUC publication - Worker Representation Systems in the European Union and the Accession Countries (which includes an activity sheet on mass redundancies and trade union responses)
• Other ETUCO resources on European Works Councils
• Mass Dismissal Procedures in the United States
Activity Three - Comparing Labour Relations

Aims

This activity you will help you to compare and contrast the key aspects of labour relations systems in the USA and Europe

Tasks

In this activity you will be comparing industrial relations between your countries. You may want to refer to “Finding out about industrial relations in Europe and the USA” as you answer these questions.

Email Discussion Questions

• **Union Density**
  o What is the percentage of union membership at your workplace and in your company? How does that compare with the national level of membership?

• **Union Workplace Representation**
  o Do unions have the opportunity to represent all workers at your company?
  o Is there more than one union and, if so, whom do they each represent?
  o What union rights do you have under your law or collective agreement?

• **Works Councils**
  o Do you have works councils in your company?
  o At what levels of the company do they operate?
  o How do they work?

• **Representation on Employer’s Board**
  o Do workers have a legal right to representation on the top decision making body of a company?
  o Do unions have a legal right to representation on the top decision making body of the company?

• **Collective Bargaining**
  o How is collective bargaining organised in your company?
  o Are there some things negotiated at company level and others subject to collective agreements negotiated outside the company?
  o Are any things, such as working time or minimum pay, fixed in the law?

Resources

• ETUCO/Infopoint-ETUC publication (folder and PowerPoint presentation) – [Worker Representation Systems in the European Union and the Accession Countries](#)
• AFL-CIO PowerPoint presentation on [Union Membership in the US](#)
SECTION 2:
WORKING WITH OUR COMPANIES

Introduction

This part of the programme will help you to gather information about your company. It will not make you an expert in management or finance but it will provide you with ideas about the sort of information that you might collect and the places you can find that information. The activity is a starting point for collecting information and will give you some idea of what might be useful but it is for you to adapt to your own company circumstances and your own information needs. You should also use the expertise available through your union, national or international confederation or other resource agencies to help you understand the information you collect. Bear in mind that the best source of information is often the workers themselves, who can see the changes going on in a company, as well as looking at annual reports or financial accounts.
Activity Four - Finding out about our companies

**Aims**

In this activity you will share information about your company operations and strategies.

**Tasks**

*Email Discussion Questions*

Keep your answers brief and to the point.

- Where do most of the company profits and debt come from in your country? Globally?
- What are the most important challenges to the company in your country? Globally?
- What is the company’s business strategy for the next 1-3 years in your country? Globally?
- What are the important changes taking place in this industry in your country? Globally?
- What problems are workers facing at your workplace? /in other workplaces in your country?

Share your answers with your counterparts.

**Sources of Information**

- **Information that workers know from direct experience of the company’s operations.**
  For example, you can tell about investment by whether new machinery is coming into the plant.

- **Information the company provides**
  For example, you might receive information at meetings or in a company newsletter.

- **Information given to shareholders**
  For example, the company annual report and other information can be found on the company web site.

- **Independent Information**
  The financial press, industry organisations, your own unions and various community organisations (NGOs) and educational institutions provide independent information about companies. See Appendix 2: Useful Websites for other examples.
Activity Five – Identifying Your Company’s Relationships

Aims

In this activity you will share information with your counterpart about the key relationships your company has.

Tasks

- Make a list of your company’s important relationships. Include specific examples of entities or organisations from each of the following categories:
  - Other Employers in the Same Industry or Market
  - Workers and Unions
  - Customers / Service Users
  - Suppliers and Vendors
  - Executives, Owners, Shareholders, or Directors
  - Management
  - Parents, Subsidiaries, Siblings and Other Operations
  - Financial Institutions
  - Media
  - Government and Regulators
  - Politicians
  - Public and Community groups

- Identify the three most important and influential relationships that your company has.

- Share the information with your counterpart and discuss the similarities and differences between you.

- Discuss whether either of your unions has used any of these company relationships to influence the company.
SECTION 3:
COMMUNICATING WITH EACH OTHER

Introduction

In this part of the programme you will find information, examples and activities that will help you develop and strengthen your own workplace communication systems. You will also share information with your counterparts so that you both understand how your union communicates at the workplace level.

Effective communications are a key way of involving everyone in union activity. They build solidarity at the workplace by getting information and opinions from the workers to the representatives and the representatives to the workers.

These activities focus on building a solid foundation of worker involvement, integrating international communication into existing structures or building new ones where they are needed.
Activity Six – Sharing Workplace Communication Strategies

**Aims**

In this activity you will have the opportunity to review your own workplace communication systems and share information with your counterparts.

**Tasks**

Write brief comments in answer to the questions below. A couple of sentences for each question will do. When you have finished, share your answers with your counterpart.

**Email Discussion Questions**

- Identify one problem or workers’ concern in your company. The problem you identify does not have to be shared by your counterparts and should be very specific to your workplace.

- Briefly identify the key communications systems that your union uses to communicate about that problem at your workplace with members and management.

- Tell your counterpart the strengths and weaknesses of your workplace communication systems.

- Briefly discuss how you would communicate the problem to other workplaces in your country (if you have a list of the other workplaces in your country send that as well).
Activity Seven – International Communication Strategies

**Aims**

This activity will help you develop an international communications network.

**Tasks**

- Build your international communications network by filling in the following form with the names of people you already know.
- Discuss what type of communications you will use, how often you will maintain communications and how you will handle the language differences.
- Decide what the first thing you will email each other will be and when you will do it.
- List any barriers that might occur as you begin to implement this communications network. Make a plan to include additional people.
- Identify at least one realistic thing that can be done to overcome each barrier.
International Communications Network

Each person listed below will be responsible for communicating with others in the network regarding problems that need global activity or support, sharing information and reporting activities that have taken place.

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SECTION 4: PREPARING FOR ACTION

Introduction

In this section you will be deciding on problems and goals for transatlantic activity. You will then begin the planning process with your counterparts by first deciding who the decision makers and allies are that can help resolve these problems.
Activity Eight - Identifying and Sharing Problems and Goals

**Aims**

This activity will help you to identify and share specific workplace problems that can benefit from transatlantic communication and activity.

**Tasks**

Identify one specific workers’ problem that you feel could benefit from shared activity with your international counterparts. Look for a problem that is widely felt in your workplace and that your union members feel strongly about. You will want to choose a problem where you have some possibility of making a difference.

*N.B.: The problem you identify will be used in the rest of the activities that follow.*

The problem you decide on does not need to be the same or similar to those in your counterpart’s country or union. The more specific and localised your problems are, the easier it will be to address.

In order to be clear about what your goal is, restate your problem as a positive aim. For example, the problem of the loss of jobs could be restated as a goal of either stopping the loss of jobs or as a goal of protesting against the loss of jobs.

Share with your counterparts any additional background information relating to the problem and goal that will help them understand your situation. Make sure that the information you share is clear and specific.
Activity Nine - Decision makers and Allies

Aims

This activity will help you to identify both the decision makers in the company and any allies who might be helpful to you.

Tasks

- For the problems that you identified in Activity Eight, list the decision makers in the company.

- List the allies (organisations or individuals) who might be able to assist you. For example, in a plant closure, your allies might include local community organisations, politicians, universities, union affiliated research organisations, other national and international unions and small local businesses as your allies.

- Share your work with your counterparts. Ask and answer any questions that can help simplify and clarify the information you have given to each other.
SECTION 5:
TAKING ACTION

Introduction

In this section you will make a transatlantic action plan to resolve the problem you have identified and share your plans with your counterpart. You will also examine and discuss the barriers you may encounter and ways you can keep in touch in the future.
Activity Ten - Planning the next steps

Aims

This activity will help you to plan action steps that will address the problem that you have identified for transatlantic activity.

Tasks

- Complete the following list for the problem that you prioritised in Activity Eight (Identifying and Sharing Problems and Goals).

- Exchange your plan with your counterparts. Ask and answer questions back and forth with your counterparts until you understand their plan.

- You may find that you need to think about involving unions in other countries.

- You may want to put specific dates against your short-, medium- and long-term goals.
Activity Eleven – Identifying and Overcoming barriers

**Aims**

In this activity you will identify potential barriers or difficulties with reaching your goals and look at ways to overcome barriers.

**Tasks**

- Make a list of all the barriers that you will face when you begin implementing your plans.
- Prioritise the three most important barriers you will face.
- For each of these prioritised barriers, identify at least three simple steps that you can realistically take to overcome the barrier. Make sure your ideas are realistic.
- Share your barriers and your ideas on how you will overcome them with your counterparts.
Activity Twelve - Keeping in Touch

**Aims**

In this activity you will set up a schedule to keep in regular communication with your counterparts.

**Tasks**

- Make a list of the things that you would like to discuss with your counterparts on a regular basis.

- Decide how often you would like to schedule regular communications. It will be important to schedule the communications so that you do not end up only communicating with each other when there is a problem.

- Share this information with your counterparts and agree on a regular schedule of communications and the list of key topics you would like to cover.
Appendix 1:
Finding out about industrial relations systems in Europe and the USA

Below you will find background information on some key topics. This will help you to gain a working understanding of different industrial systems in Europe and the USA.

Union Density

There is considerable variation in union density between countries. For example, in the Nordic countries membership levels can be as high as 70-80% whereas in the United States density levels have been approximately 10% for a number of years. However, the overall density figures alone do not tell us everything. For example, in both the UK and the USA public sector membership is much higher than in the private sector. France has the lowest membership density in Europe, but non-members will take part in industrial action.

National Works Councils

Who’s on them

Works councils are made up of employee representatives regularly elected by the whole workforce. In some countries the representatives are elected from a list provided by the trade unions. In other countries employee representatives are not necessarily union members and may even be middle or lower level managers. In some countries such as Germany works councils are employee only bodies that meet with management. In other countries such as France the chair of the works council may be a manager.

Legal Status

Most European countries have legislation that gives different powers to works councils. Countries have different laws before a works council can be formed and different requirements covering the number of representatives. Legislation from the European Union means that even countries like the UK without a history of works councils systems will have to introduce them.

What can they do

There are three areas that works councils are most commonly involved in. Firstly, works councils are information and consultation bodies. In some
countries the company is required to disclose financial information to the
works council. Secondly, works councils may become involved in
collective issues. For example, in countries like the Netherlands, works
councils negotiate over many issues such as the company’s outsourcing
decisions and the introduction of new technology. Thirdly, works councils
may be involved in individual worker rights. In Germany, the individual
termination of a worker’s employment could be negotiated in the works
council.

**How are they organised**

Some companies have works councils just at the workplace level but they
may also have them at national levels such as the business group or the
whole company.

The USA has no equivalent works council system although a few European
multinationals have begun to set up North America works councils.

**European Works Councils (EWCs)**

A European Works Council can be established under European law in
multinational companies with a total of over 1,000 workers and more than
150 workers in each of two countries in the European Economic Area.

Worker representatives on the European Works Council are elected under
the system of their home countries. As with national works councils, they
may or may not be union representatives.

European legislation gives them a legal right to information and
consultation over a range of strategic company decisions.

The company provides translation and travel funds for the European
Works Council representatives.

The EWC normally meets once a year with management and in most cases
workers have their own pre-meetings.

**Collective Bargaining**

In most European countries the right to bargain collectively is supported
by the law or even the constitution. In the USA obtaining the union’s right
to bargain from the employer is mostly a very lengthy, adversarial and
difficult procedure for the workers involved.

Collective bargaining may take place at a number of different levels. In
Europe, many countries have sector-wide agreements covering industries
like engineering or chemicals. Enterprise (company-wide) bargaining is
also common particularly in large companies. In some countries like the
UK collective agreements may be signed in individual workplaces. In the
USA the law emphasises and encourages workplace level agreements and
these predominate, but multi-employer and company-wide agreements can exist and are more common in some sectors.

In Europe there are extensive legal provisions for worker benefits such as pensions, paid sick leave, paid parental leave, paid vacation, paid training and subsidised childcare as well as national health care systems. In the USA these are negotiated with the company usually at the workplace level.

**Representation on Company Boards**

In Europe, unlike the USA, a number of countries provide a statutory right for workers to sit on the company’s board of management or top decision-making body in the company. Examples of this can be found in Germany, Austria, Sweden and Denmark.

**Workplace Representation**

In the USA, there are no legal or statutory provisions for the election of shop stewards or union delegates. Time off for shop stewards in the USA must be negotiated as part of the collective agreement. In Europe some countries have legal rights for elections and time off for worker representatives. These rights may be supported and extended through collective agreements. Trade unionists who are also works council representatives will receive extra rights.
Appendix 2: Useful Websites for information and communication

A. International and European trade union organisations

• **International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU)**
The ICFTU is the major global union confederation to which national union federations (such as the AFL-CIO in the USA and the DGB in Germany) are affiliated.

• **Global Union Federations (GUFs)**
Unions throughout the world are organised by industrial sectors into Global Union Federations.
For a full list see: [http://www.icftu.org/addresslist.asp?OrgType=ITS&Language=EN](http://www.icftu.org/addresslist.asp?OrgType=ITS&Language=EN)

• **European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)**
National confederations in Europe are affiliated to the ETUC. The ETUC has a research centre called the **ETUI** (European Trade Union Institute), a trade union training college called **ETUCO** (European Trade Union College) and a further institute specialising in health and safety of workers (**TUTB**) (European Technical Trade Union Bureau for Health and Safety).
[http://www.etuc.org](http://www.etuc.org)

• **National confederations**
Unions in most countries around the world will be affiliated into national confederations.

In the USA the main confederation is AFL-CIO: [http://www.aflcio.org/](http://www.aflcio.org/)

• **European Industry Federations (EIFs)**
European unions are organised by industrial sectors into European Industry Federations (these are the European equivalent of the GUFs).

B. Additional Information on US Labor

• Human Rights Watch Report on Workers' Freedom of Association in the United States under International Human Rights Standards
• Mass Dismissal Procedures in the United States
  http://www.workingforamerica.org/documents/docmenu.htm

  http://www.bls.gov/

• Solidarity Center of the AFL-CIO International Affairs Office
  http://www.solidaritycenter.org/

C. Additional Information on Labour in Europe

• ETUCO/Infopoint-ETUC
  Worker Representation Systems in the European Union and the Accession Countries

• European Foundation, Dublin
  The online database EIRONLINE is an excellent source of information on industrial relations in Europe:
  http://www.eiro.eurofound.ie

D. Additional Information on International Labour

• International Labour Organisation
  http://www.ilo.org/public/english/

• Labourstart - International Labour News
  http://www.labourstart.org/

• Cyber picket line
  http://www.cf.ac.uk/socsi/union/

• Union Network International
  http://www.union-network.org/

• Globalisation and Labor Standards
  http://www.laborstandards.org/

E. Company Research

• University of California Labor Center
  This website identifies major Internet locations for doing company research.
  http://laborcenter.berkeley.edu/strategiccampaigns/resources.shtml

• Corporate Watch
  http://www.corpwatch.org/
F. On line Conferencing and Communication

- FirstClass conferencing system
  For more information and downloading of this particularly useful conferencing software, please see:
  http://www.firstclass.com/
  or http://www.firstclass.com/clientdownloads/

G. Internet Translation

- http://www.systransoft.com/
- http://www.freetranslation.com/
- http://world.altavista.com/

Please note that Internet translation should always be used carefully, as it can be inaccurate and at best provides rough translations.
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