



SOCIAL DIALOGUE IN THE AIR TRANSPORT SECTOR IN BULGARIA

Research Findings



TRANSFER

Turning the Atm sector into a Successful
Example of Replicable social dialogue practices



БЪЛГАРСКА ТЪРГОВСКО-ПРОМИШЛЕНА ПАЛАТА
BULGARIAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY

AIR TRANSPORT SECTOR IN BULGARIA – OVERVIEW



- Five international airports
(Sofia, Varna, Burgas, Plovdiv and Gorna Oryahovitsa)
- Growing passenger traffic after the COVID-19 recovery
- Presence of national and international airlines, airport operators and ground handling companies
- Increasing importance of digitalisation, automation and environmental sustainability
- Labour shortages in several occupations due to migration and demographic trends

WORKING CONDITIONS AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

Main challenges

- Labour shortages and difficulties in attracting qualified personnel
- Ageing workforce in several occupational groups
- Pressure to improve wages and working conditions
- Increasing digitalisation and automation of airport services
- Need for continuous training and upskilling
- Growing health and safety requirements
- Balancing operational flexibility with workers' rights



Main industrial relations actors

- Trade unions representing aviation employees
- Employers' organisations and airport operators
- Airlines and service providers
- Ministry of Transport and Communications
- Civil Aviation Administration
- Labour Inspectorate
- National Tripartite Council and sectoral dialogue bodies

SOCIAL DIALOGUE IN THE AIR TRANSPORT SECTOR

Legal framework

- Social dialogue is regulated through:
- Labour Code
- Collective Labour Agreements
- Information and consultation procedures
- Occupational health and safety legislation
- EU labour and aviation legislation

Main mechanisms

- Bipartite negotiations
- Collective bargaining
- Information and consultation procedures
- Joint committees
- Tripartite consultations on national policies



Participation in Social Dialogue

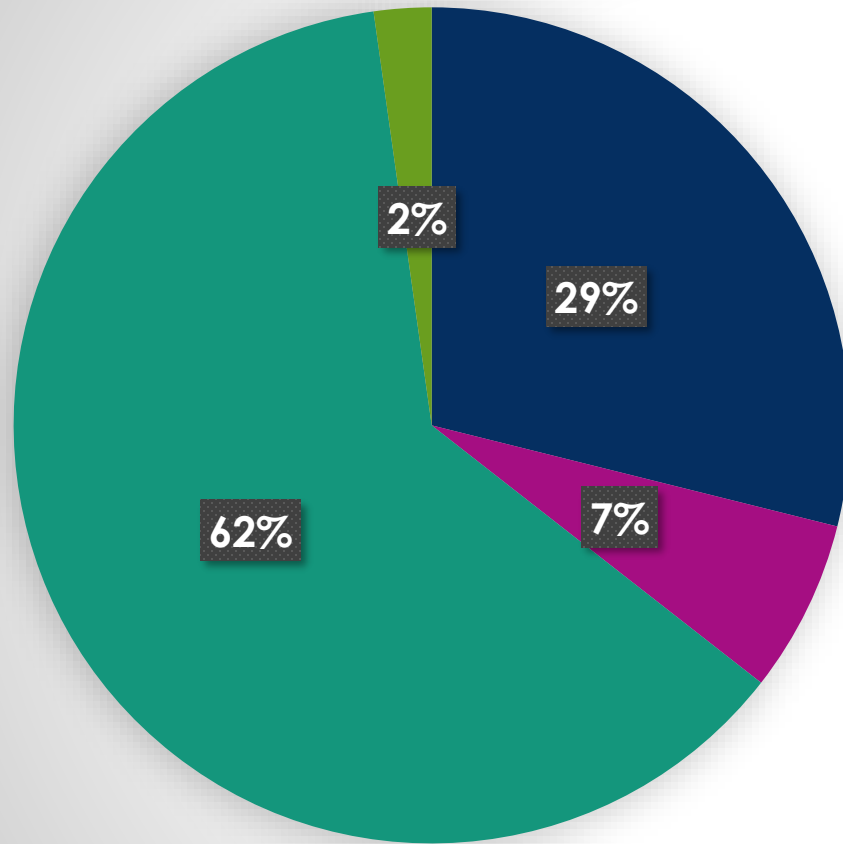
Current situation

- Social dialogue is generally well established in larger enterprises.
- Trade unions actively participate in collective bargaining.
- Regular consultations take place on working conditions, health and safety, restructuring and organisational changes.
- Cooperation between employers and trade unions has contributed to resolving sectoral challenges.

Good practices

- Company-level collective agreements
- Joint working groups
- Employee consultation during organisational restructuring
- Cooperation on vocational training and skills development





- Guaranteed by Constitution/Legislation
- Primarily delegated to Collective Bargaining
- coexistence of legal guarantees and contractual regulation
- I don't know

GUARANTEED TRADE UNION RIGHTS

► Employers

95% - positive for existence of a formal, written document (an agreement or charter) that formalizes the relationship between the company and the social partners

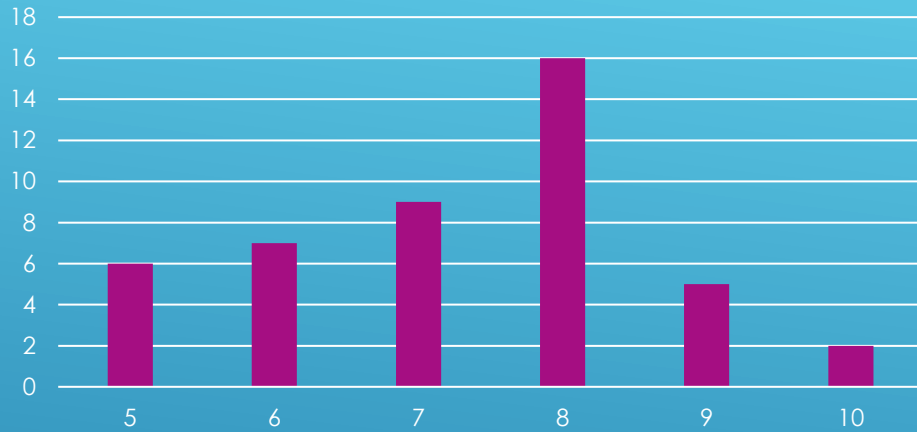
95% - recommend the adoption of this type of formal written relationship with unions to your members

► Trade Unions

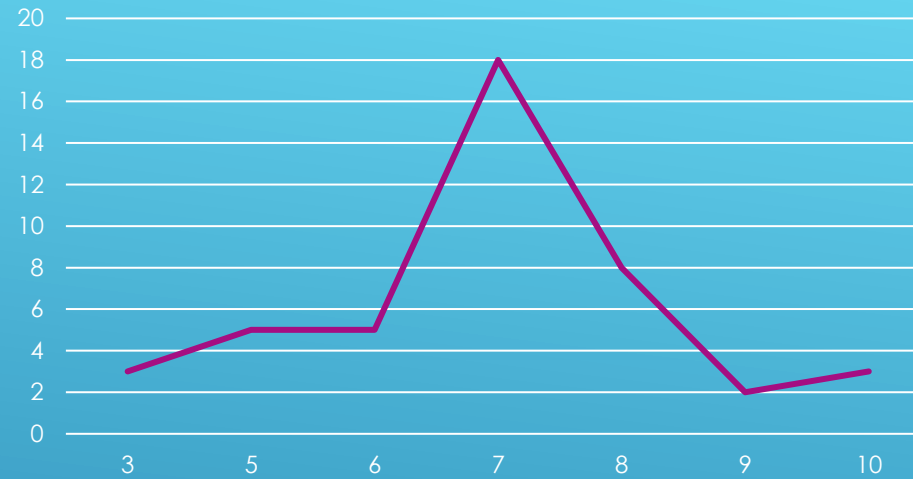
71% - consider that establishing a formal written relationship with the employer can be a point of demand for the next round of collective bargaining



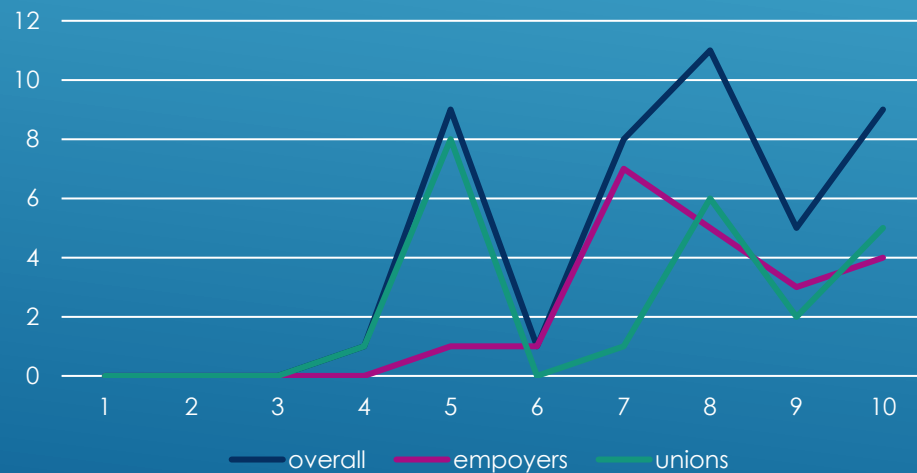
Evaluation of the Key principles of behaviour



Assessment of joint contribution



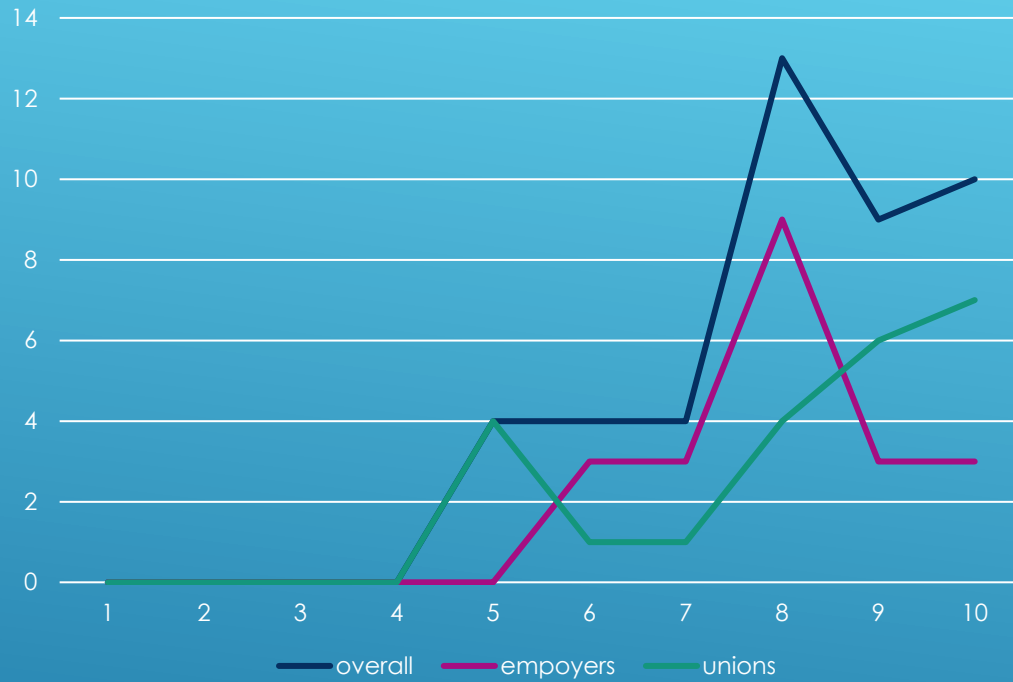
Striving to deliver consistent messages



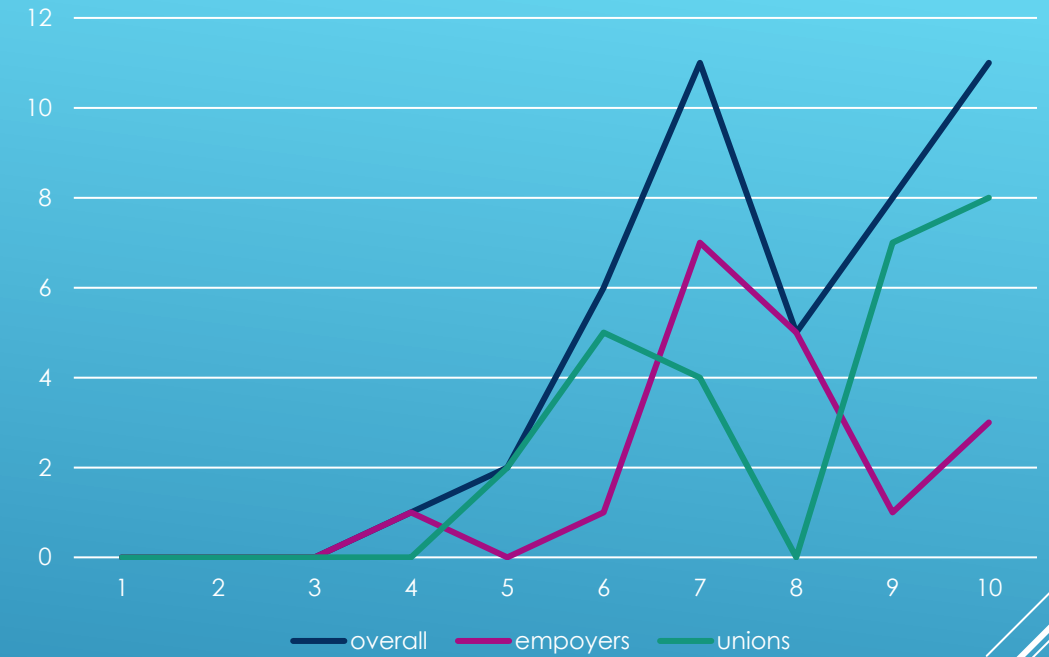
- Joint contribution - representatives of unions give more extreme answers 5; 10
- Employers are more moderate 7; 8
- 67,5% is the positive recognition of the legitimacy and value of trade union/worker representatives' input by the employer /7-10/

BEHAVIOR OF SOCIAL PARTNERS - 1

Recognition of nominated delegates



Accepting disagreements

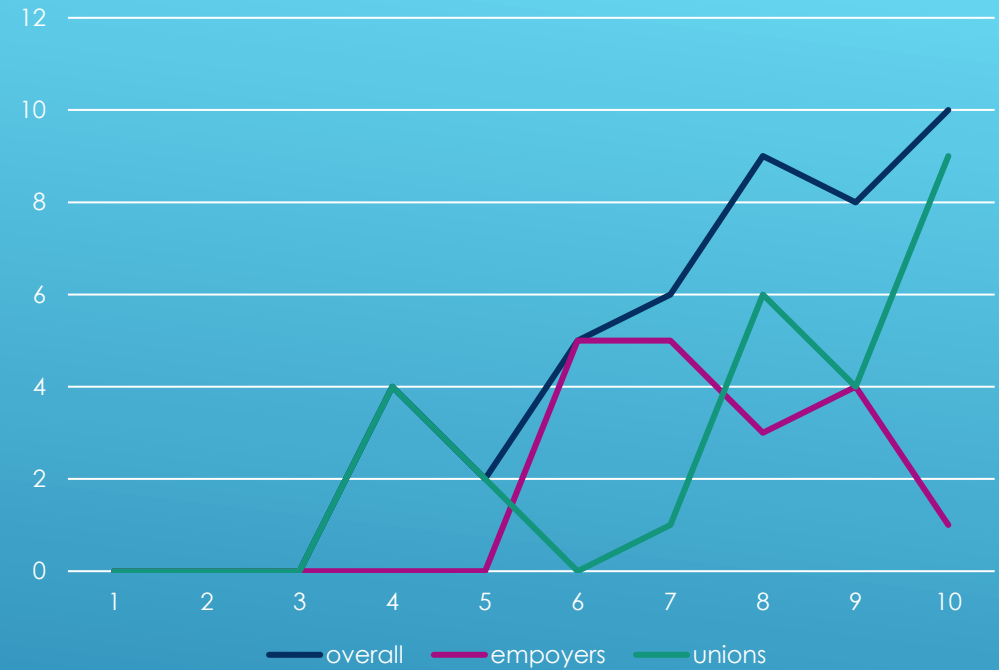


BEHAVIOR OF SOCIAL PARTNERS - 2

Time – long-term investment /
Ownership of agreements

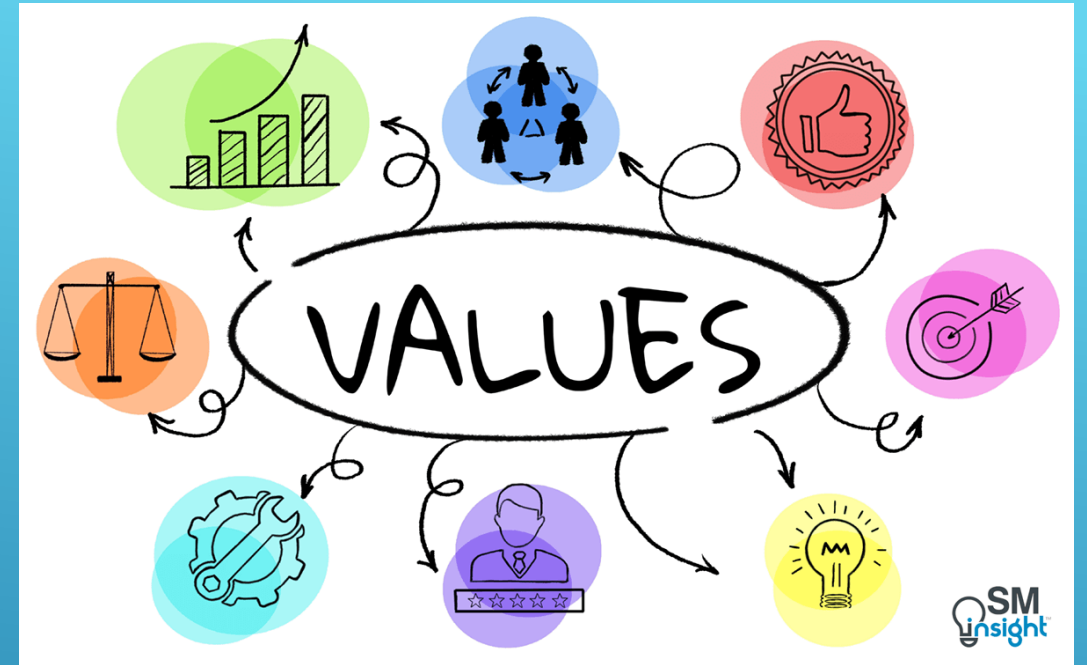
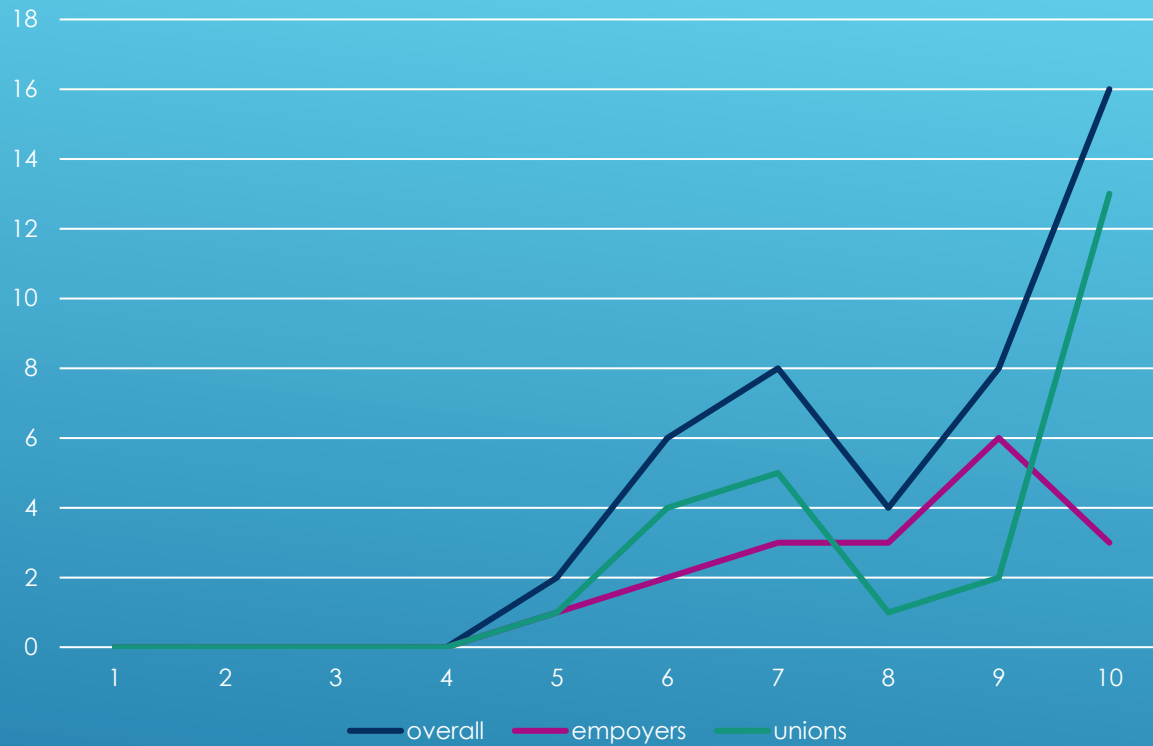


Availability for informal discussions



BEHAVIOR OF SOCIAL PARTNERS - 3

Importance of values



BEHAVIOR OF SOCIAL PARTNERS - 3

Assessing communication



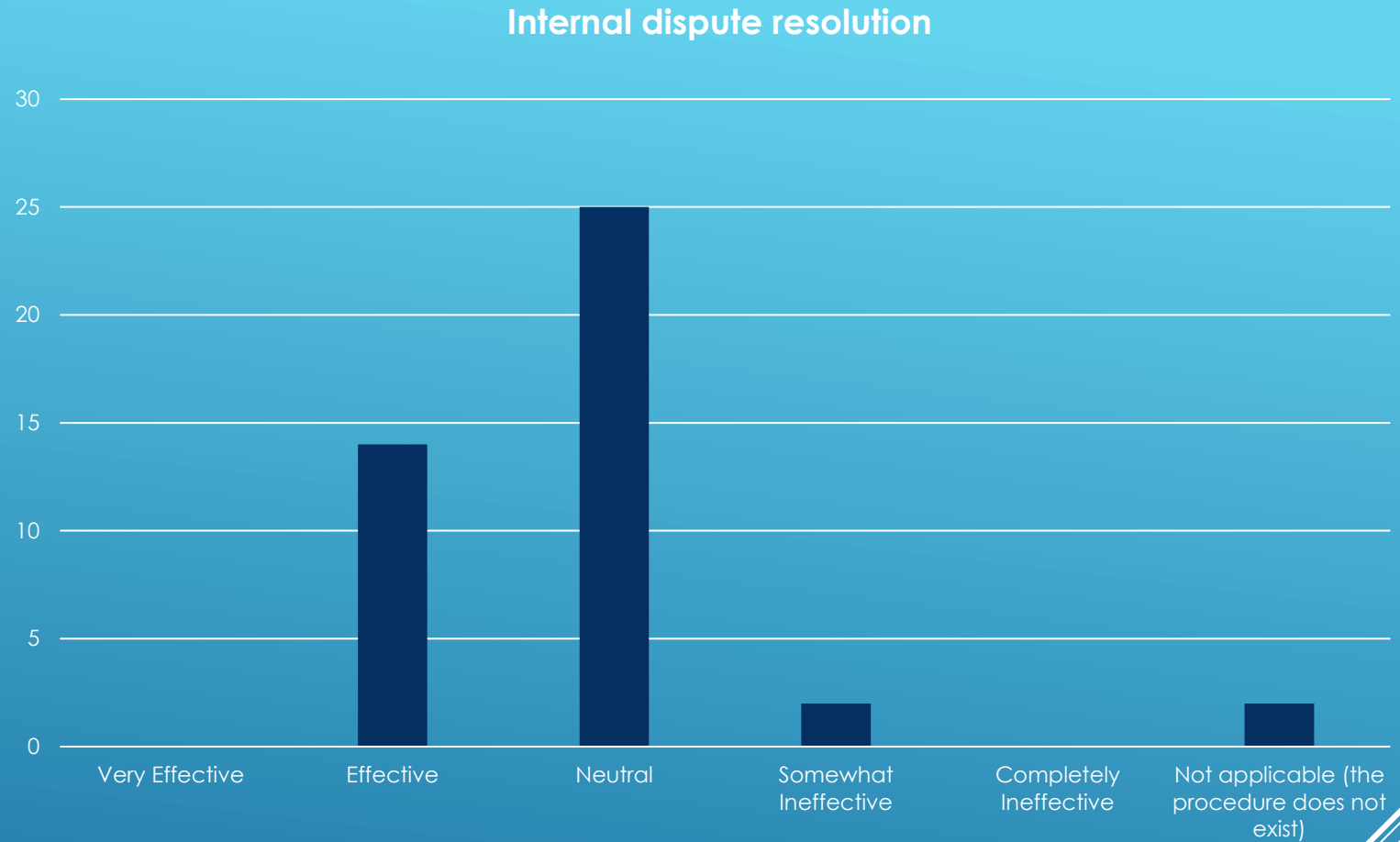
► 93% consider communication can be improved

COMMUNICATION

- At the national level the agreed consultation arrangements formalized and regulated mainly by combination of law and agreements – 82%
- Explicit procedures - formal provisions (law, agreement, procedure) are in place in the event that one party considers the agreement not respected by the other – 78%
- 67% have experienced disputes due to agreements not being respected in the last 3 years.
- 73% of them faced up to 3 cases, the rest – more than 3 cases.

RESPECT OF AGREEMENTS

- ▶ 95 % respond that there is a formal dispute resolution/mediation procedure (law, agreement, code) regulating the conduct of industrial relations (the relationship between the Social Partners).



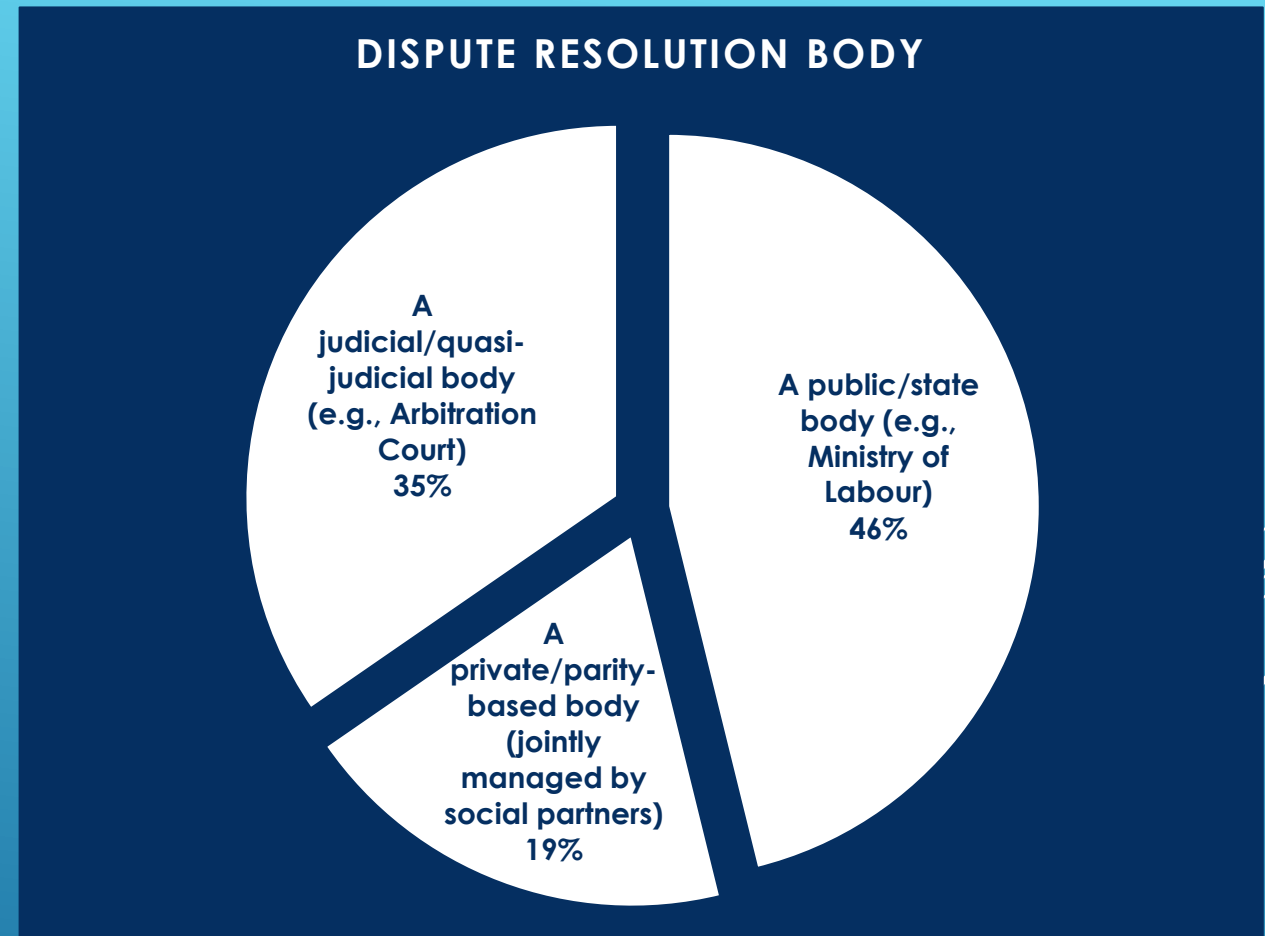
BREAKDOWN IN SOCIAL DIALOGUE

- ▶ In half of the companies there is an internal committee for dispute resolution.
- ▶ Its composition is parity-based - equal number of management and worker/union representatives in all companies.
- ▶ The scope of this committee is clearly defined and limited to certain issues (e.g., technical, organizational, social issues)
- ▶ A formalized protocol (timeline, document submission rules, etc.) for the production of committee papers/documents has been established.



INTERNAL DISPUTE RESOLUTION

- ▶ 57 % - there are current legal provisions and established mechanisms for external dispute resolution in Bulgaria
- ▶ 1/3 of the respondents skipped this question.
- ▶ 53 % consider the resolutions/decisions issued by the external mediator/body are immediately binding for the parties.
- ▶ For 40 % they are only binding if previously agreed upon by the parties
- ▶ According to 72 % there is a right to appeal in case of disagreement with the outcome of the resolution



EXTERNAL MEDIATION

- ▶ Uneven social dialogue across companies
- ▶ Limited participation in smaller enterprises
- ▶ Labour shortages increasing operational pressures
- ▶ Rapid technological changes requiring new skills
- ▶ Limited financial resources for training
- ▶ Need for stronger employee involvement in digital transformation
- ▶ Difficulty attracting younger workers
- ▶ Insufficient sectoral coordination on long-term workforce planning



MAIN OBSTACLES AND CHALLENGES



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SOCIAL DIALOGUE IN THE AIR TRANSPORT SECTOR IN BULGARIA

FINDINGS FROM THE TRANSFER PROJECT



RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends:



1. STRENGTHEN SECTORAL SOCIAL DIALOGUE STRUCTURES.

Build stable, inclusive and effective mechanisms at sectoral level.



2. PROMOTE EARLIER INVOLVEMENT OF SOCIAL PARTNERS IN DECISION-MAKING.

Ensure timely consultation and meaningful participation in all stages of decisions.



3. IMPROVE COLLECTIVE BARGAINING COVERAGE.

Encourage more companies and workers to benefit from collective agreements.



4. INVEST IN LIFELONG LEARNING AND RESKILLING.

Strengthen skills, support career development and adapt to future needs.



5. ENHANCE COOPERATION BETWEEN EMPLOYERS, TRADE UNIONS AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS.

Work together on training, skills development and labour market needs.



6. DEVELOP STRATEGIES TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN QUALIFIED STAFF.

Make the sector more attractive, inclusive and sustainable for current and future employees.



7. SUPPORT DIGITAL AND GREEN TRANSITION THROUGH SOCIAL DIALOGUE.

Anticipate change, manage impacts and create quality jobs.



8. EXCHANGE GOOD PRACTICES AT EUROPEAN LEVEL.

Learn from others, share experience and build a stronger aviation sector together.



Effective social dialogue remains a key instrument for:

- ▶ improving working conditions;
- ▶ supporting competitiveness;
- ▶ managing organisational change;
- ▶ strengthening workforce resilience; and
- ▶ ensuring a fair and sustainable transition for both employers and employees.
- ▶ The TRANSFER project provides practical recommendations and tools to further reinforce social dialogue and contribute to a more resilient and competitive European air transport sector.



CONCLUSIONS



THANK YOU!

