



THE ABC OF THE ACV-CSC



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Foreword

With its 1.5 million members and 70,000 activists, ACV-CSC is the largest trade union in Belgium and the 12th largest trade union globally. ACV-CSC defends the rights of employees and people no longer in capacity to work because of illness, unemployment or age.

ACV-CSC considers international solidarity an essential part of its trade union action. In the globalised economy, the interests of workers in our country cannot be isolated from those of workers in other countries. ACV-CSC supports representative, autonomous and free trade unions in their struggle for social justice and decent work across the world.

To this end, ACV-CSC works closely with other trade unions in the European Trade Union Confederation and the International Trade Union Confederation. ACV-CSC has also developed its own international trade union development programme with trade union partners from the Global South. Furthermore, it works in close cooperation with other social movements through WSM, the Belgian NGO of the Christian workers' movement for North-South cooperation. ACV-CSC is a driving force in the drafting of new international conventions in the International Labour Organisation. In the Commission for the Application of Standards, which monitors compliance with the concluded conventions, ACV-CSC has a key role as spokesperson for the workers' group.

In this 'ABC of ACV-CSC', in addition to our international commitments, we present the internal functioning of the organisation and its extensive system of social dialogue in Belgium in a nutshell. In this brochure we discuss the high rate of unionisation in Belgium, the near 100% coverage of all employees in the private sector by collective labour agreements, the automatic indexation of wages to which (almost) all employees are entitled, the role of ACV-CSC as payment agency for unemployment benefits, the central strike fund that provides income for all ACV-CSC members who strike or take action, etc.

We hope it will give you more insight into (the inner workings of) ACV-CSC. For more information, you can always get in touch with the colleagues of ACV-CSC International. Their contact details can be found at the back of this magazine. ■■

**Editorial Team:**

Patrick Van Looveren
and Bram Van Vaerenbergh

Cover Photos: Jan Agten, Stefaan Beel,
Tim Dirven, Michael De Lausnay,
Violaine Martin/ILO, Guy Puttemans,
Kristof Vadino

Design: Gevaert Graphics

Responsible Publisher: Dominique Leyon

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Ann Vermorgen

President ACV-CSC

**Marie-Hélène Ska**

General Secretary ACV-CSC



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BELGIUM: STRENGTH LIES IN UNITY

A small but complicated country. Three official languages – Dutch, French and German, 11.7 million inhabitants on 30,689 square kilometres, six governments at the centre of Europe with the headquarters of the European Union and NATO in Brussels.

Belgium declared its independence in 1830 and a year later the monarchy was officially proclaimed. This is still in place, with King Philippe as the seventh king of the Belgians since 21 July 2013. Nevertheless, the unitary Belgium did undergo some transformations. Ever since the Belgian state reforms in the 1970's, the country is composed of three Communities (Flemish, French-speaking and German-speaking), each with its own government. In addition, there are also three Regions (Flemish, Walloon and Brussels), again with their own government. The single Flemish government governs on both regional and community competences. Alongside, there is also a federal government. Hence, Belgium counts no less than six (!) governments. Communities in Belgium are responsible for personal matters (culture, welfare and education), while the Regions are responsible for economic matters.

For a long time, the country had three traditional political parties: the Christian Democrats, the Socialists and the Liberals. Initially, these were national parties, but today the three major political families have separate entities in both parts of the country. Since the 1980s, new parties have entered the political scene, with Greens, nationalists and communists, among others, running for election. Especially in recent years, there has been a shift to the (extreme) right in Flanders, with the Flemish nationalist N-VA being the largest political party since 2010, while the far-right Vlaams Belang was the second largest party in Flanders in the last two elections in 2019 and 2024.

Belgium has always known an open economy. According to economic, social and political criteria, Belgium is in the top



WITH ITS CENTRAL LOCATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND ITS HIGH DEGREE OF ECONOMIC OPENNESS, BELGIUM CAN MAKE THE MOST OF ITS STRENGTHS AND MAINTAIN ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE.

The Belgian labour force can be divided into three categories: 54.4% work as white-collar workers, 32.5% as blue-collar workers and 13.1% as civil servants. 63.8% are working full-time, with the remaining worker population working part-time. II

three most globalised countries in the world. With less than 0.16% of the world's population, Belgium is the 15th biggest exporter in the international trade in goods (WTO – World Trade Organization). In 2023, exports of goods and services accounted for about 86,68% of the GDP. In 2023, 63.8% of Belgian exports went to the European Union, 10% to America and 4.3%

to Africa. Our country is the largest global hub for diamond trade and is one of the most important exporters of pharmaceuticals, polyethylene and floor coverings. With its central location in the European Union and its high degree of economic openness, Belgium can make the most of its strengths and maintain its significance in international trade.



... only four countries in the world produce **MORE BEER** than Belgium?

... Belgium is the country with the **MOST CASTLES** per square kilometre?

Did you know that...

... **WATERLOO**, the famous battlefield where French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte was defeated, is located just south of Brussels?



... **BRUSSELS**, along with Washington, is home to the largest diplomatic community and the largest number of foreign press correspondents in the world?



Trade unions in Belgium

Belgium currently has 3 representative trade union organisations: **ACV-CSC (Christian)**, **ABVV-FGTB (socialist)** and the **ACLVB-CGSLB (liberal)**. The rate of unionization in our country is between **55% and 65%** (depending on the calculation method), out of an active labour force of 7 million people. Social elections are organised every four years.

Together, ACV-CSC, ABVV-FGTB and ACLVB-CGSLB form a common union front during important collective actions or negotiations. Hence, during demonstrations in Brussels or elsewhere, there will be red, green, and blue trade union representatives marching alongside each other at the front.

Social elections are organised every four years in Belgium. Employees in the private sector elect their trade union representatives in their company for both its works council and its committee for prevention and protection at the workplace. These elections determine the trade unions' representation within the social dialogue instances. Since the 1970s, ACV-CSC has consistently been confirmed as the largest trade union at national level.

These election results are in line with the evolution of ACV-CSC's member count. This has risen sharply since 1925, with the strongest growth during the period 1929-

1932, as well as during the post-war years (1945-1949) and the early 1970s. At that time, the mark of 1 million members was exceeded for the first time. The number of members increased further to 1.6 million and is currently declining slightly towards 1.5 million members. This decrease is mainly due to changes in the social and economic fabric in our country.

During the most recent social elections of 2024 – in 7,407 companies – ACV-CSC won the majority of seats in both the committees for prevention and protection (55.38%) and the works councils (53.32%). In 4,152 companies, elections were held for a works council, since a works council is only required as of 100 employees, while a committee for prevention and protection must be installed in companies with at least fifty employees. Though voting in social elections is not compulsory, as many as 776,000 employees voted for their works council and about 829,000 for their committee for prevention and protection at the workplace.

Women

In 2024, ACV-CSC counted no less than 57,655 running candidates, of which 17,264 were first-time candidates. ACV-CSC was the only trade union that succeeded in getting more female representatives elected for committees for prevention and protection as well as for works councils. For the welfare committees this amounts to 43.26%, with 41.88% in works councils. This not only makes us the sole union increasing its representation in both social dialogue bodies, but also the union with the most elected women on the lists in terms of percentage.

1886: the first Christian trade unions

The first trade unions in our country were founded in Ghent in the mid-19th century. In 1886, Leo Bruggeman and Gustaaf Eylenbosch founded the Anti-Socialist Cotton Workers' Union.

1886

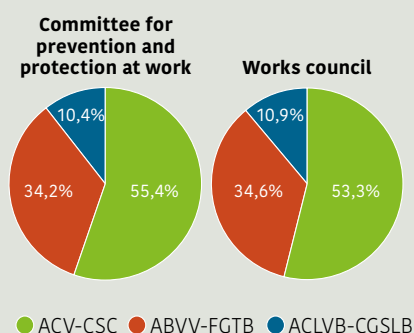


1955

ACV-CSC obtains five-day work week

In 1951, during its congress, ACV-CSC approved a guideline for a generalization of the five-day work week with full pay. In 1955 ACV-CSC decided to organise strikes on Saturdays until that demand was met. In the end, an agreement was reached at the Labour Conference, with a gradual introduction of the five-day work week and a reduction in the weekly working hours from 48 to 45 hours, with full pay.

Seat distribution results of the 2024 social elections





1912

The confederation **ACV-CSC**

In order to promote cooperation, the General Secretariat of Christian Professional Associations ('Algemeen Secretariaat der Christelijke Beroepsverenigingen') was established in 1904. Eight years later, a single national confederation was formed: the General Christian Trade Union Confederation ('Algemeen Christelijk Vakverbond' or 'ACV' in Dutch, 'Confédération des syndicats chrétiens' or 'CSC' in French).



1920

Index

In 1920 the retail price index was published and at the instigation of the trade unions, this was linked to the wages.



1924

Pensions Act

In 1924, the law was passed on compulsory pensions at 65 years for workers and 60 years for female workers.

expansion of social security provision

During World War II, leaders of employers' and employees' organizations and former senior civil servants prepared for the reconstruction of the country. They produced a 'draft agreement on social solidarity', which provided for a system of compulsory social insurance for all workers.

1944

first National Labor Conference

In 1936, the crisis of the 1930s led to the largest wave of strikes our country has ever known. The government and employers had to bow down and held the first National Labor Conference, which led to an increase in the minimum wage, a week of paid leave, and the gradual introduction of the 40-hour work week.

1936

2014

largest trade union demonstration ever in Brussels

On 6 November 2014, 120,000 people took to the streets against a whole series of anti-social measures introduced by right-wing Michel I government. That demonstration was followed by provincial strikes and other demonstrations.



1973-1989

job creation as priority

The oil crisis of 1973 sparked an economic crisis, resulting in spikes in unemployment. Job creation became the number one priority of ACV-CSC, and in 1975 early retirement at the age of 60 with compulsory replacement was introduced in order to provide better chances of a job for young people. Subsequently, the minimum age and career conditions were further eased.



1990-2007

dealing with austerity policies

Due to an ongoing economic crisis, successive governments have continuously pursued a policy of austerity. As such, a wage norm law was introduced, which the trade unions have fought and still do to this day. But there has also been social progress: a system of time credit leave, a 38-hour work week and social benefits, with indexation in keeping with wage increases.

2024

25 days of paid leave?

Currently, ACV-CSC is campaigning, among other things, to guarantee 25 days of yearly paid leave for every employee instead of the current 20 days.

Internal organisation of ACV-CSC

Developing an efficient trade union action with and for our members requires good organisation and solid structures. These have evolved over time and will continue to adapt to the development of the multiple ACV-CSC organisations and the social, economic, and political context.

The organisation and structures of ACV-CSC are based on two pillars: a professional pillar (work) and an interprofessional pillar (place of residence).

ACV-CSC's decision-making bodies operate on the basis of a 'tiered democracy': each decision-making level elects its representatives for a higher level. The interprofessional decision-making bodies strive for equal representation of men and women and a proportional representation of all ACV-CSC members, regardless of age, status or origin.

The two pillars of union action

A person's membership is based on two criteria: the place of work and the place of residence. A member is attached to both a trade federation (depending on the sector in which he or she works) and a (regional) association (depending on the place of residence and/or place of work).

Union work within the company falls is covered by the professional pillar and union work at a regional level depends on the interprofessional pillar. A person can be a unionist within their place of work and/or on the regional level.

The work of the trade federations and (regional) associations is supported by the confederation, which brings together and coordinates the general action of the trade union movement. It organises various services in support of the work of the trade federations and associations, as well as the general actions of ACV-CSC.

The interprofessional pillar: regional federations

In 2024 ACV-CSC has regional federations : 5 in Flanders, 1 in Brussels and 7 in Wallonia. Each regional federation organises and provides services to the members for its region and is responsible for the development of union activities.

The regional federations coordinate and stimulate union activities for projects that go beyond the framework of a single sector or company. They represent employees in the region where they live and organise around certain themes and/or for specific target groups), sometimes in collaboration with other organisations (for example with OKRA for seniors on the Dutch-speaking side). They also provide legal assistance to all members, provide training for delegates and activists, and collect and manage membership fees.

13 federations

Flanders / Brussels / Wallonia

Bewegingsverbond ACV	CSC Brabant wallon
Brussel / Fédération	CSC Mons - La Louvière
Mouvement CSC Bruxelles	
Bewegingsverbond ACV Vlaams-Brabant	CSC Charleroi - Sambre et Meuse
ACV Provincie Antwerpen	CSC Hainaut Occidental
ACV Limburg	CSC Liège - Verviers - Ostbelgien
ACV Oost-Vlaanderen	CSC Luxembourg
ACV West-Vlaanderen	CSC Namur - Dinant

In Belgium, the government engages the trade unions as payment agencies for unemployment benefits. The organisation of this aspect by ACV-CSC differs between regions.

The professional pillar: the sector unions

In companies with trade union representation, the basic trade union work takes place within the company. Each member has a say in his or her trade union section (activist or shop steward section). The trade union section brings together the elected unionists of the works council (OR/CE), the committee for prevention and protection at work (CPBW/CPPT) and the trade union delegation (VA/SD) as well as the other unionists in the company. The trade union section organises actions and provides union services within the company and works closely with the trade union official of the sector union monitoring the company.

The ten sector unions organise according to their economic sector (metals, food, education, public services, etc.) They coordinate and encourage union action with regards to company and sectoral issues. They represent workers in the collective bargaining committees, responding to the challenges and issues that arise in the sector such as working conditions, the economic situation of companies and employment. They take the necessary action in cooperation with the trade union sections within the companies.



Governing Board ACV-CSC (June 2024) with from left to right):
Koen Meesters, Ann Van Laer, Marc Becker,
Ann Vermorgen (President), Stijn Gryp,
Marie-Hélène Ska (General Secretary), Bart Vannetelbosch,
Anne Léonard and Annemie Plessers

Photo: Michael De Lausnay

10 ACV-CSC sector unions	Represent and defend the interests of employees from the following sectors
ACV Voeding en Diensten / CSC Alimentation et Services	Cleaning, food industry, hospitality, security services, United Athletes, ...
ACVBIE / CSCBIE	Construction, manufacturing, energy, chemical industry, social enterprises
ACV-CSC METEA	Technology, metal, textile
CNE	White-collar workers and executives (and in some cases also blue-collar workers) from all private sectors, universities
ACV PULS	
ACV openbare diensten / CSC services publics	Public sector
ACV-CSC Transcom	Shipping, aviation, railways, telecoms, culture, diamonds, postal services, road transport and logistics
COC (Christelijke Onderwijscentrale)	All levels of education and education networks in Flanders (except subsidised primary education and universities)
COV (Christelijk Onderwijzersverbond)	Subsidised Dutch-language primary education
CSC-Enseignement	Education in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation and the German-speaking Community, with the exception of universities

Confederation

The confederation serves as umbrella organisation for all ACV-CSC’s trade federations and interprofessional associations. It ensures solidarity between all members of ACV-CSC.

The confederation:

- coordinates ACV-CSC’s trade union activities;
- concludes national collective agreements for all workers;
- negotiates with employers and the government at the interprofessional level;
- represents all workers on a regional, national, and international level;
- manages the common finances;
- provides supporting services for the activities of the federations and associations;
- is responsible for the overall functioning of ACV-CSC as well as its political stance.

The confederation is led by the governing board consisting of a President, General Secretary and seven National Secretaries. (Photo above) **II**

ACV-CSC in campaign mode

ACV-CSC uses specific campaigns to draw attention to topics that matter to employees. In addition, ACV-CSC also has a number of sub-activities for specific target groups. Below you will find an overview of some of these campaigns and sub-activities.

Interim United

Interim United focuses specifically on temporary workers. For example, they run campaigns around the end-of-year bonus and developed an app which temporary workers can use to keep track of their number of days worked. ||



Jong ACV – Jeunes CSC

'Jong ACV' on the Dutch-speaking side and 'Jeunes CSC' on the French-speaking side focus on the rights of younger workers in the workplace. They campaign for wages, affordable public transport, interns, student workers, ... ||



United Freelancers

United Freelancers acts as a trade union for the rights of the self-employed and freelancers. They defend their interests on an individual and collective level, including individual services and assistance. They also organise webinars that are widely watched. ||





Index We Trust

'Index We Trust' was a campaign launched by ACV-CSC to defend the automatic wage indexation, a system currently under threat from all sides. We produced a special edition of the activist magazine 'Vakbeweging' and distributed a million bread bags to a thousand bakeries in the country.



SUPER MARIA

ACV Gender Femmes CSC

'ACV Gender' on the Dutch-speaking side and 'Femmes CSC' on the French-speaking side defend the rights of women in the workplace. They strive for a better work-life balance and run yearly campaigns. II

social elections 2024

Every four years, ACV-CSC runs its campaign for the social elections. In 2024, we called on people to stand for election and not just keep their ideas about a better workplace to themselves. II

**DON'T JUST
SHARE YOUR
IDEAS
ABOUT
WORK
AT HOME**



ACV-CSC in Belgium's social dialogue

Belgium has an extensive system of social dialogue between employers and workers, both in the private and public sectors, in companies and public institutions as well as at sectoral, regional, and national level.

IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR

SOCIAL DIALOGUE IN COMPANIES

At company level, there are three structured forms of social dialogue with the employer: the trade union delegation (determined by sectoral provisions), the committee for prevention and protection at work (from 50 employees) and the works council (from 100 employees). Small businesses are not required to set up such bodies for social dialogue. If there is a trade union delegation present in such small businesses, it is granted some of the powers otherwise assigned to the committee for prevention and protection at work and the works council.

The **trade union delegation** consists only of trade union representatives. The number of workers from which a trade union delegation must be set up, how the members are appointed and the facilities provided to conduct their trade union work, is determined by the collective bargaining committees for each sector.

The trade union delegation is authorised to negotiate with the employer with a view to concluding collective bargaining agreements. It also monitors the correct application of social legislation, collective agreements, work regulations and employment contracts, intervenes in individual and collective issues and organises trade union actions.

The works council and the committee for prevention and protection at the workplace are jointly composed of an employers' delegation and an workers' delegation. Workers' representatives are elected every four years in social elections (see, p. 6). Both in the works council and in the committee for prevention and protection at work, there are generally separate representations for blue-collar and white-collar workers, as well as a separate representation for young people if more than 25 young people are employed. If there are more than 15 executive staff members, there may also be a separate representation of executive staff in the works council.

The **works council** has social and economic-financial powers. The works council must be informed annually, quarterly, and occasionally (following certain events) about the economic and financial state of affairs in the company and the evolution of the employment. The works council is also authorised to advise on the organisation of work and working conditions, the introduction of new technologies, personnel policy, the induction of new employees, education and training, teleworking, etc. A works council has decision-making power concerning the planning of annual leave, the replacement of public holidays, changes to the work regulations and the appointment of auditors. In recent years, the works council has also been given new powers with regards to sustainability reporting, environmental investments, etc.

The mission of the **committee for prevention and protection at work** is to

ensure the well-being of workers at work (safety, health, ergonomics, stress, dangerous substances, etc.) in order to prevent accidents at work and occupational diseases and to monitor the quality of the environment, both inside and outside the company. The committee for prevention and protection at work is assisted in its mission by both an internal and external service for prevention and protection at work.

SECTORAL SOCIAL DIALOGUE

The social dialogue on sectoral level takes place in the collective bargaining councils. These are composed of an equal number of representatives of the workers' and employers' organizations. They can conclude collective bargaining agreements that apply to all companies and all employees of a (sub)sector.

NATIONAL AND INTERPROFESSIONAL SOCIAL DIALOGUE

'Group of 10'

The leaders of the trade unions and employers' organisations at national level make up the 'Group of 10'. Every two years, they hold discussions with a view to concluding an interprofessional agreement. This contains minimum agreements that apply to all employees in the private sector.

National Labour Council

The National Labour Council (CNR-NAR) has an equal number of representatives of the trade unions and employers' organisations. The CNR-NAR is empowered to conclude collective bargaining agreements

that apply to all employees and employers in the private sector. It can also conclude sectoral agreements for sectors without a working collective bargaining council. In addition, the CNR-NAR has the statutory task of delivering advisory opinions or making proposals on the implementation of individual and collective labour law and social security law.

Central Economic Council

The Central Economic Council (CRB-CCE) – also composed of an equal number of representatives from trade unions and employers' organisations respectively, and supplemented by academics – issues opinions or formulates proposals to ministries or parliament on issues related to the economy and business. For example, the CRB-CCE is responsible for annually reporting on the available margins for wage increases based on a comparison with the development of labour costs in the three neighbouring countries since 1996.

Other bodies

As a social partner, ACV-CSC is also represented in many other bodies for consultation, dialogue and management, such as the High Council for Prevention and Protection at Work, various social security institutions, the National Bank of Belgium (NBB), the Index Commission and the Federal Council for Sustainable Development (FRDO-CFDD).

Regional dialogue

Just as at the national level, there are regional consultative and advisory bodies in which ACV-CSC is represented and helps to define the guidelines.

IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

NEGOTIATION AND CONSULTATION COMMITTEES

Social dialogue in the public sector takes place in various bargaining and consultative committees, with an equal number of representatives from the public authorities and the representative trade union organisations (including ACV-CSC and its trade federations).

AUTONOMOUS PUBLIC ENTERPRISES

The autonomous public enterprises each have their own collective bargaining council. An umbrella Committee on Public Enterprises is responsible for shared matters.

DIALOGUE IN SUBSIDISED PRIVATE EDUCATION

For the subsidised private schools and the private pupil guidance centres, local negotiating committees have been set up – unlike in public schools. Its powers are similar to those of the works councils in the private sector and the negotiation and consultation committees in the public sector. ■

ACV-CSC's commitment in Europe...



Marc Leemans speaking at the
International Labour Conference
of the ILO in Geneva.

ACV-CSC is committed to the internationalisation of workers' rights and global rules for social justice and decent work. To this end, it cooperates on a European and worldwide level with pluralistic, representative, democratic and independent trade unions affiliated to the European Trade Union Confederation and the International Trade Union Confederation.

Member of the International Trade Union Confederation

ACV-CSC is a member of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), founded in 1973 with the aim of defending the interests of workers at the European level. The ETUC brings together 94 trade union confederations from 42 countries and 10 European (sectoral) trade union confederations. The ETUC is headquartered in Brussels. www.etuc.org

Active in interregional trade union councils

The ETUC set up a number of structures to represent the interests of specific workers' groups. For example, there are interregional trade union councils (IRTUCs) that bring together trade unions from neighbouring member states and defend the interests of workers from a border region. ACV-CSC's regional federations participate in various IRTUCs and work together with French, Dutch, German and Luxembourg trade unions depending on the region.

Collaborating with trade union partners from Eastern and Central Europe

ACV-CSC is strongly committed to cooperation and exchange with trade unions from Eastern and Central Europe, in order to promote the development of strong social models and a strong social dialogue in these regions. The aim is to reduce the gap in wages and social protections between Western and Eastern Europe in order to prevent social dumping. Together with the ETUC, ACV-CSC organises seminars with Eastern European trade unions on the role of unions in a just (climate) transition, on social dialogue and social models in Europe, etc. as well as with trade unions from EU candidate countries on their role in the EU accession process

and to facilitate their access to the EU institutions.

Monitoring of EU trade agreements

ACV-CSC is committed to a fair and sustainable trade policy that protects labour rights, human rights and environmental standards. In 2022-2024, the focus was on the follow-up of the EU's trade agreements with other countries and/or trading blocs.

**ACV-CSC IS COMMITTED
TO A FAIR AND
SUSTAINABLE TRADE
POLICY THAT PROTECTS
LABOUR RIGHTS,
HUMAN RIGHTS AND
ENVIRONMENTAL
STANDARDS.**

For example, ACV-CSC denounces the EU's agreement with Mercosur (free trade area that includes major South American countries) since it lacks binding and sanctionable clauses for compliance with labour rights, human rights and environmental standards.

Serving in European works councils of multinational companies

Multinational companies with a minimum of 1,000 employees in EU Member States or the European Economic Area and with at least 150 employees each in at least 2 Member States are obliged to set up a European Works Council or another procedure for consulting or informing employees. Currently, there are about 1,300 Euro-

pean Works Councils in Europe. These include workers' representatives from the companies in the countries concerned, including many workers' representatives on behalf of ACV-CSC.

Making its mark in the European sectoral consultations

At a sectoral level, some 40 European sectoral committees have already been set up to organise social dialogue within their sector. There, workers are represented through the European (sectoral) trade union federations, in which many ACV-CSC representatives also have their say.

Actively participating in European interprofessional consultations

Since the Protocol on Social Policy of the Treaty of Maastricht, the European Commission is obliged to consult the representative European workers' and employers' organisations on any preliminary draft of European legislation and initiatives concerning social policy. The European social dialogue with employers' organisations has led to framework agreements on parental leave, part-time work, fixed-term contracts, teleworking, work-related stress, harassment and violence at work, inclusive labour markets, active ageing, and digitalisation. ACV-CSC is actively involved in this European social dialogue through the bodies of the European Trade Union Confederation.

Advising the European Economic and Social Committee

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is a consultative body of the European Union with representatives of employers' organisations, trade unions and other civil society organisations from all EU Member States. ACV-CSC exerts influence through its 2 mandates in the EESC. ■

... and worldwide

ACV-CSC also makes its mark in the world. ACV-CSC is a driving force in the International Labour Organisation and International Trade Union Confederation. ACV-CSC's trade federations are actively involved with the international union federations for their respective sectors. Through ACV-CSC International and in cooperation with WSM, ACV-CSC supports trade union partners and social movements from the Global South.

Member of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)

ACV-CSC is a member of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) founded in 2006. It is the largest social movement on a global scale with 340 organizations from 169 countries, for a total 207 million members. The ITUC is represented in the different continents through its regional organisations and works closely with the Global Unions Federations which are responsible for sectoral trade union activities. The general secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation is the Belgian Luc Triangle, who started his union career with ACV-CSC. The ITUC is headquartered in Brussels. www.ituc-csi.org

Strongly involved in international sectoral union federations

ACV-CSC's trade federations are highly active in the international union federations for their respective sectors. For example, ACV-CSC META is a member of IndustriALL Global Union and ACV-Transcom is attached to the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF).

Supporting union partners from the Global South through ACV-CSC International

ACV-CSC and its international foundation ACV-CSC International have developed an international trade union development programme with union partners from the Global South. With this programme, ACV-CSC is active in building the capacity of trade unions in the Global South so they

can be better equipped for collective bargaining and social dialogue with employers and governments. The efforts also go towards the development of their internal organisational and services provided to members, as well as organising employees at their workplaces. Further efforts take place on a political level with the authorities to improve the legal protections of workers' rights. The programme also aims to contribute to strengthening income security, reducing gender-based violence

**"ALL OVER THE WORLD,
WE ARE SEEING ATTACKS
ON WORKERS' RIGHTS
AND TRADE UNIONS. WE
MUST CAMPAIGN AGAINST
THIS."**

**LUC TRIANGLE, GENERAL
SECRETARY OF THE
INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION
CONFEDERATION**

and discrimination at work, and reducing companies' environmental footprint.

Through its 5-year programme 2022-2026, ACV-CSC collaborates with trade union partners from three continents:

- in Asia with KSBSI in Indonesia, CLC in Cambodia and KMU in the Philippines;

- in Africa with CSC Congo in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Dignité in Côte d'Ivoire, and CNT in Niger; and
- in Latin America with UGT in Brazil, CASC in the Dominican Republic and CSP and CTH in Haiti.

In close collaboration with WSM

ACV-CSC, together with ABVV-FGTB and ACLVB-CGSLB and the Belgian North-South Movement and its umbrella organisations 11.11.11 and CNCD, strives for social justice in the world and solidarity with the workers and peoples of the global South. In the cooperation with civil society and NGOs, a key role is reserved for the cooperation with WSM (We Social Movements), the NGO of the Christian workers' movement for North-South cooperation. WSM collaborates with 100 organisations in 20 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, comprising not only trade unions but also health insurance funds, microcredit institutions, women's organisations, youth organisations and organisations supporting older people to promote decent work and social protection. WSM is also strongly committed to supporting a thematic network for social protection rights at a national, continental, and international level through IN-SP!R. www.wsm.be

Key player in the International Labour Organization

Ever since Gust Cool, ACV-CSC's president has been the spokesperson for the workers' representation in the International Labour Organisation's Committee on the Application of Standards, which monitors compliance with the current conventions. ACV-CSC is a driving force in the development of new international conventions, including on more rights for domestic workers. In the past decade, Luc Cortebeeck, honorary president of ACV-CSC, presided over the workers' representation on the ILO Governing Body, later becoming chair of the governing body.

Advising OECD through the TUAC

The trade unions provide opinions to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) – an alliance of 38 countries – through the Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC). Marc Lee-mans, former president of ACV-CSC, is vice-president of the TUAC.

Attending United Nations Climate Change Conferences

Representatives of ACV-CSC are part of the Belgian delegation as observers and promote a just transition to a low-carbon economy. II





FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT UNIONS

Trade unions, they exist practically everywhere and have done so for a very long time. Yet there are still differences between trade unions in various countries. What makes the rate of unionisation in Belgium so high? Or do ACV-CSC as well as the other trade unions in Belgium have no legal personality? Below you will find the answers to these questions and many others.

How come the rate of unionization is so high?

The union membership rate in Belgium is on the high side. Similar to the Scandinavian countries of Finland, Iceland, Sweden and Denmark, trade unions are responsible for the payment of unemployment benefits in Belgium. This system is called the 'Ghent system', because it is said to have been used for the first time in this city. Although our country applies more of a 'quasi-Ghent system': there is also the Auxiliary Unemployment Benefits Fund, a public institution responsible for the payment of unemployment benefits for the unemployed who choose not to receive their benefits through a trade union.

establishing individual and collective relationships between employers and employees in companies or entire industries. In Belgium, there are intersectoral collective agreements, concluded in the National Labour Council, as well as sectoral collective agreements and company-level collective agreements. Although throughout Europe, fewer and fewer workers are covered by collective bargaining agreements, this aspect remains stable, even high, in Belgium. For example, collective bargaining agreements are concluded by the trade unions, but they also apply to non-members. This is not always the case in other countries.

How come we haven't suffered from inflation?

In Belgium, the system of automatic indexation is widespread. Opponents often say that 'this system only exists in Belgium', but there is also a form of wage indexation in countries such as Luxembourg, Cyprus and Malta. In some sectors in a number of other European countries, there are also mechanisms in place to adjust

Are all workers covered by collective bargaining agreements?

In Belgium, almost all workers in the private sector are covered by collective agreements. A collective bargaining agreement is an agreement concluded between one or more workers' organisations and one or more employers' organisations



Foto: Jan Agten

cording to a member's profile. In addition, there are subsidies from the government – albeit very limited – and ACV-CSC deliberately wants to keep it that way since we want to be as independent as possible towards the government. The attendance fees that ACV-CSC's staff receive for their presence on various administrative boards and joint consultative bodies also go towards the organisation. Furthermore, ACV-CSC also receives an administrative fee for its recognition as a payment agency for unemployment benefits. That fee has decreased in recent years, however, and it no longer covers the full costs. Nevertheless, ACV-CSC continues to include this loss-making activity, since it believes that it should not only represent workers with a job, but also those without one. The membership fee is used to pay ACV-CSC's staff, but also serves to support trade unions for those same members. In addition, all members receive a members' magazine. A part of each member's contribution goes towards the 'Centrale Weerstandskas' (CWK), also known as the strike fund. This is an important form of solidarity between all members and spanning all sector unions of ACV-CSC. The strike fund provides an income in the event of strikes and lock-outs and compensates the expenses for actions set up as an alternative to strikes. The strike fund is managed by the ACV-CSC's National Board. **II**

wages to inflation. The unique feature of the Belgian system is that (nearly) all employees are entitled to an automatic wage indexation. Furthermore, and no less important, social benefits and minimum wages are also tied to the index. Although almost all employees are entitled to it, there are still differences: 40% of private sector employees receive an annual index adjustment in January, while there are also employees who receive an index adjustment each time the trigger index number is exceeded by 2%. According to a conservative estimate, only about 1.7% of employees in the private sector are covered by a joint committee where there is no mechanism of automatic indexation at all.

Why no legal personality?

Unlike companies, trade unions do not have legal personality. As a result, it is impossible, for example, take a trade union to court or claim damages. But more importantly, it protects the right to strike. In the Netherlands, trade unions do have legal personality, and as a result judges

can, for example, halt a strike. Since it a trade union cannot be taken to court in Belgium, no liability claims can be filed. It would not be desirable for a trade union to have to pay for the millions of euros in economic damage caused by a strike. In addition, as a legal personality trade unions in Belgium would be compelled to disclose their financial data. As a result, companies and/or the government would quickly determine how much the strike fund amounts to, making them able to estimate how long a union could financially support a strike. Nevertheless, (mainly) right-wing parties have been calling for trade unions to be required to have legal personality for some time – a position held by many parties in their election program for 2024.

Where does ACV-CSC get its money from?

ACV-CSC's main source of income are the membership fees of its 1.5 million members. All members – with the exception of students and jobseekers under the age of 25 – pay a contribution, which varies ac-

THE TEAM OF ACV-CSC INTERNATIONAL

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Karin Debroey
Coordinator
ACV-CSC International
karin.debroey@acv-csc.be



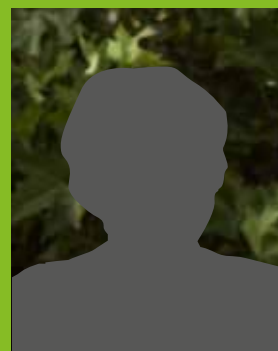
**Esther Quist –
Therson Danquah**
Management assistant
esther.quist-thersondanquah@acv-csc.be



Frederic Triest
Programme coordinator
frederic.triest@acv-csc.be



Joris Van De Voorde
Financial management
joris.vandevoorde@acv-csc.be



Veerle Lens
Quality management
veerle.lens@acv-csc.be



Jeroen Roskams
Desk Asia
jeroen.roskams@acv-csc.be



Annick De Ruyver
Desk Latin America
annick.deruyver@acv-csc.be



Amélie Chevalier
Desk Africa
amelie.chevalier@acv-csc.be



Thomas Miessen
Desk Europe
thomas.miesen@acv-csc.be



Laura Eliaerts
Desk DRC
laura.eliaerts@acv-csc.be