

1.1 Objectives

The empirical evidence available for the banking sector suggests that since the early 1990s, on the basis of a broad deregulation, internationalisation and wide adoption of rapidly evolving information and communication technologies, profound restructuring processes have been under way. The restructuring process, which largely developed through mergers and acquisitions, and which affected all aspects of industrial relations poses a large number of questions to the social partners. The major ones that are discussed in this report refer to the degree of restructuring regulation through social dialogue practices between the employees representatives and their interest organisations, the trade-unions, at company or sectoral level and the employers respective representation. In this context, with the aim for analysis of best practice of social dialogue in the banking sector, the report examines the following issues:

1. What is the trend in banking sector employment and work organisation?
2. Do developments in banking sector leaders highlight the prospects for work organisation restructuring?
3. Are any North-South differences caused by a possible phase difference in the restructuring process and the degree of introduction of ICT in the banking sector?
4. What is the social dialogue agenda set for the sectoral or company level as a result of the banking sector restructuring across Europe and work organisation?
5. Have the issues arising from the restructuring process been already dealt by employers / management and trade-unions through varying types and practices of social dialogue?
6. What are the positive and negative experiences and how we can identify the components of best practices?

In our search for the components of best practices in social dialogue in the banking sector the analysis focuses on three aspects:

Who are the partners in the social dialogue process ?

- a) employees organisation with (and through) institutional representation at the national, sectoral, company, branch, business unit level.
- b) groups of employees that may be underrepresented in the existing institutional representation (eg. women, disable persons etc)
- c) groups of employees that encounter specific conditions in the process of introduction of ICT as they move to a new work organisation (older, less educated etc.)
- d) employees that may form ad hoc interest groups with regard to specific aspects of work organisation and restructuring (e.g. these affected by merges of branch, business units, functions etc.)

This part of analysis aims to identify best practices that incorporate the view and the interests of all the parties (groups) affected by the restructuring process.

1. What is the process of social dialogue practices? Formal collective bargaining is considered as one type of social dialogue practice. Other types of social dialogue, varying from the minimum of information and consultation to the maximum of joint activities (e.g. for retraining or outplacement of employees) are also considered. The issue of the centralized or decentralised dialogue between the social partners is also examined. More developed modes of participation with regard to changes in work organization are also explored.
2. What are the topics of the Social Dialogue? The agenda of social dialogue practices is evolving, depending on the level at which bargaining takes place. Next to the "traditional" topics such as the question of redundancies and employment adjustment because of the introduction of information technology and the changes to the work organisation, which appear the most important for the examination of best practices, new issues are set in the agenda and, in this context, human resource policies with regard to training and the work - family aspects with a view to a family friendly work organisation, are also examined.
3. If it is possible to identify best practice policies that are based on social dialogue and cope with these problems, is there room for transferability of best practices between countries and banking sector organisations? What is the possible role of the banking sector social partners in this process?

Our research project has been rather complex. We started out by examining a large set of reports available in the industrial relations literature with regard to developments in the banking

sector in Europe. These reports gave a broad overview of major developments in the field, but were used as a starting point for our analysis. In the majority of European countries the social partners of the banking sector have dealt with the issues arising from the restructuring process of the banking sector. Broadly speaking, despite national differences the banking sector is characterised by highly unionised employees and developed practices of collective bargaining. However, the degree of restructuring has created major pressure on industrial relations to the degree that may have caused tendencies towards both adversarial and consensual relations between the social partners in banking sector organisations. On the other hand, our research project realised that there is a large body of anecdotal evidence that shows the existence of several social dialogue based approaches to the restructuring process of the banking sector at the sectoral and firm level, where trade-unions have developed their activities in an innovative direction, in the sense that they were reluctant to oppose the need for restructuring and attempted to safeguard the interests of their members by securing jointly agreed, or even jointly managed, processes of employment adjustments (mainly early retirements schemes, training programmes) with in most cases seeking new ways of sharing the burden of restructuring between employees and the employer. These schemes have been devised with the evolving role of the social partners in the banking sector. Unfortunately, this evidence is not yet publicly available in a comparative context, especially for the majority of the countries participating in the project. The detailed research we conducted aims to highlight this evidence arising from mostly Southern European countries and their national banks that undergo restructuring in the European context.

After discussions with the Working Group, it was decided that apart from the survey questionnaire that is addressed to bank employees in various countries- in order to gather more structured evidence - it would have been preferable to assist our field research, on the basis of a key questionnaire to be distributed to representatives of banking sector trade-unions of the participating to the project countries. This key people questionnaire, which is attached in the Appendix II, was also used as a basis for in depth interviews with trade-unions key persons and has allowed some interesting results to be achieved. In this paper we report the results of our literature analysis, and of the key persons questionnaires as well as of the in depth interviews. Both results and conclusions presented here remain the sole responsibility of the Authors, and cannot be attributed – as it is the case with any independent research - in any way to the members and partners of the project, the social partners, nor the European Commission. The partners to the project are the INE OTOE from Greece, the SINDIGATO DOS BANKARIOS DO NORTE from Portugal, the FNV BONDGENOTEN from the Netherlands, the UIL CREDITO E ASSICURAZIONI from Italy, the COMFIA CC.OO from Spain, the ETYK from Cyprus and the MUBE from Malta. The partners responsibility lies partially with their participation in the process to identify what may be considered as best practice and with their assistance in the provision of input to the researcher during the running of the project.

1.2 Structure of the Report

The report is developed in five chapters. The Chapter 2 that follows examines employment developments in the European banking sectors throughout the 1990s, identifies the trends and discusses the factors that shape employment developments. In other words outlines the employment relation's background, within which trade-unions and employers develop their collective behaviour. Then Chapter 3 focuses on the restructuring and the social dialogue in the European banking sector. After assessing the state of social dialogue at the international level, through the ILO coordinated activities, and the progress of sectoral social dialogue at the European Union level, then the analysis deals with the national experiences of restructuring and social dialogue in selected national cases for the banking sector that include countries such as Spain, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Malta, Greece and Cyprus. The next Chapter, Chapter 4, examines the work and life aspects that arise from the restructuring of employment relations and the degree to which these issues are dealt through social dialogue practices in the banking sectors. After elaborating the factors that influence the work and life balance in the new environment, and presenting the experience the countries after consideration, the report examines the requirements and the restrictions for developing effective measures for work life balance through social dialogue by drawing on the Greek development. The final Chapter 5 summarises the findings of the study with regard to the best practices of social dialogue in the banking sector in each country and paves the way to the further analysis and evaluation of these practices based on the survey findings of the employees views for social dialogue practices in the banking sector in each country under examination.

