FAIRFORWARD
SHAPING INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES ACROSS EUROPE

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# Capstone Wrap-Up Conference Report

**Kraków, Poland | 29 October 2026**

## Conference overview

The All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions (OPZZ) hosted the closing conference with the General Workers' Union of Malta (GWU), the project coordinator. 19 people attended in person and four (two participants and two experts) joined online. The conference reviewed what unions had learned about negotiating inclusive workplace policies and which project tools they could continue to use.

The project brought together unions from Malta, Poland, Italy, Lithuania, Montenegro, Spain and Serbia, with the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) as associated partner. Bartosz Rydliński and Dominika Pyzowska moderated the opening and the exchange of national experiences.

## Conference parts

**FAIRFORWARD in practice.** Using the project timeline as a guide, participants from each partner country described how the successive stages of FAIRFORWARD unfolded in their national context. They shared what they had learned from the focus groups, how they had contributed to the comparative review of national legal frameworks, and how they had used the CIAT and SIAT playbook to deliver national training. They also discussed what they had taken away from the Inclusivity Forum and how their national experiences had informed the manual on negotiating inclusive workplace policies.

**Country Learning Carousel.** Delegations compared training results, implementation difficulties and tools worth retaining. Jovita Pretzsch, vice-chair of Lithuania's LPS Solidarumas, presented online. At the Kaunas seminar on 8–9 May, 15 union representatives and four representatives of municipalities and employers' organisations drew on experience from sectors including healthcare, education and transport. The resulting union action plan of their workshop is a basis for future bargaining.

Malta's delegation identified the composition of its focus group as its most important result. Bringing together people who faced different forms of discrimination helped reveal barriers that can overlap. The Maltese presentation illustrated this with family-friendly working hours: a policy may appear to cover the workforce while its eligibility rules exclude part-time or shift workers.

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**European-level reflection.** Marina Monaco (ETUC) encouraged unions to document what they had achieved with employers and use that evidence when arguing for stronger European standards. She cautioned that reopening equality legislation could put existing protections at risk. Ahead of the 2027 ETUC Congress, she proposed study visits and small exchanges between affiliates to find out which practices could travel across countries and what prevented others from doing so.

## Workplace representation and follow-up

**Trade unions and DEI in Europe.** The workplace discussion asked what representatives can do when an employer endorses diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) publicly, but workers still encounter barriers. Pretzsch's account identifies three elements of implementation: workers participate in decisions, employers commit to action, and unions monitor progress. Montenegro's media union, represented by its president Marijana Camović Veličković on behalf of USSCG, highlighted the relevance of inclusive bargaining to employees in media organisations.

**Fishbowl discussion.** In the discussion, the Montenegrin delegation described employers who preferred to pay a fine rather than hire a worker with a disability. Katarzyna Pietrzak from OPZZ called for stronger enforcement. Solidarumas proposed that each union choose one issue raised by its members and name a representative to pursue it. Equal access to training across shifts was its example. The union suggested tracking whether the employer discussed the proposal, the parties reached agreement and whether workers experienced a change.

**Closing round and ETUC contribution.** In the closing discussion, Giulio Romani, ETUC Confederal Secretary, described practical support for migrant workers, including interpretation and help with administrative procedures. He called for unions and employers to tackle exploitation in subcontracting chains. In response to a question about platform workers, he identified a gap between adopting European rules and enforcing them nationally. He also urged unions to explain their work through examples workers recognise, such as negotiations over protective gloves for hairdressers in Italy.

## Key findings and recommendations

In Lithuania, representatives of municipalities and employers pointed out that small businesses and employers in smaller municipalities had fewer resources to implement recommendations. Asking the people responsible for a workplace change to assess its feasibility helped the group refine its proposals. A useful bargaining practice is to ask affected workers what would resolve the problem, then agree with the employer how and when implementation will be reviewed.

Italian representatives described bringing workers who had experienced different kinds of discrimination into the same focus group. Listening to those accounts helped negotiators identify demands they might otherwise overlook.

Polish OPZZ raised a related difficulty: workers who feel unsafe disclosing their sexual orientation may never tell a representative what is happening.

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Both later contributions point to the need to hear directly from workers before drawing up bargaining demands.

The Maltese participants recommend regular surveys of groups facing disadvantage to compare formal protections with workers' experience. Their plan also proposes multilingual information and an accessible route for workers to report grievances. For a union reviewing a workplace policy, a first step would be to ask which workers can use it in practice and how those excluded can raise the issue.

## Future cooperation and conclusions

Solidarumas proposed incorporating FAIRFORWARD materials into regular representative training and selecting at least one issue for pilot negotiations within three months. It suggested that partners nominate contacts and meet online after six months. Each partner would bring one measure it had tried and one obstacle it had encountered.

In her sustainability presentation, Mary Grace Vella from GWU proposed negotiating clauses on recruitment, career progression and pay, training union representatives to handle grievances involving several forms of discrimination and giving worker-led committees a role in reviewing policy. The framework also calls on unions to examine representation in their own leadership.

The conference linked the manual to decisions that representatives can take locally. Lithuania's proposed pilot would test whether a concern raised by workers reaches the bargaining table. Malta's proposed surveys would help unions check whether the resulting measures reach the workers who raised it. Both offer practical ways to assess what continues beyond the project.

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