

BARSERVICE

Towards smart bargaining in the publishing sector in Turkey

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2024



The project is funded by the European union, project No. 101126532

Table of contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Executive summary | 1 |
| I. Sector identification and trends | 2 |
| II. Current state of collective bargaining | 3 |
| III. Challenges to collective bargaining | 6 |
| IV. Towards Smart Bargaining | 8 |
| V. European Perspectives | 10 |
| VI. Conclusions | 13 |
| References | 14 |

List of tables

| | |
|--|---|
| Table 1. Number of Collective Agreements Signed | 5 |
| Table 2. Workers and Members of Trade Unions | 5 |

Executive summary

The publishing sector in Türkiye is undergoing a significant transformation due to digitalization, economic pressures, and flexible working models. Although collective bargaining processes are critical for protecting workers' rights and ensuring sectoral stability, low unionization rates and legal obstacles limit the effectiveness of these mechanisms. As of 2023, the unionization rate in the sector is only 10,77%, and the proportion of workers covered by collective labor agreements is 2,22%. This demonstrates the limited inclusiveness of collective bargaining processes.

The European Commission's Adequate Minimum Wage Directive provides an important reference for the sector in terms of expanding the scope of collective bargaining and reducing wage inequalities. Provisions supporting gender equality for women employees and social security regulations for freelance workers could be incorporated into collective bargaining processes.

The spread of digitalization and freelance working models has made organizing efforts in the sector more complex. It is necessary to include freelance journalists in unionization processes and develop specific collective bargaining models tailored to this group. Moreover, establishing stronger social dialogue mechanisms with employers could contribute to improving working conditions in the sector.

In conclusion, increasing the scope of collective bargaining, revising legal regulations, raising unionization rates, and promoting sectoral-level agreements are essential steps. These measures could help create a fairer and more sustainable working environment in the publishing sector.

I. Sector identification and trends

The publishing sector in Türkiye has long been situated at the intersection of economic, technological, and political dynamics. Recently, key trends such as digitalization, economic pressures, and changing consumer habits have come to the forefront. The sector is undergoing a transformation, particularly with the acceleration of digitalization. A significant decline in the circulation of traditional print media has been observed, with newspapers and magazines increasingly giving way to digital platforms. Advertising revenues have largely shifted to digital channels, challenging the sustainability of print media outlets. Additionally, economic crises and exchange rate fluctuations have increased paper costs, raising production expenses for print media. Given the heavy dependence of the media sector in Türkiye on advertising revenues, this contraction has placed considerable pressure on the industry.

According to the 2022 report published by TURKSTAT (Turkish Statistical Institute), the publishing sector in Türkiye is undergoing significant changes. The number of newspapers and magazines decreased by 9,2% compared to the previous year, falling to 4.048. Of these publications, 53,9% were magazines. During the same period, the total annual circulation of newspapers and magazines decreased by 8,3%, dropping to 848.365.241 copies. Newspapers accounted for 95,4% of the total circulation, with daily newspapers making up 88,2% of this figure. Meanwhile, 64,8% of the annual circulation of magazines was attributed to monthly publications. This reflects the ongoing transformation of print media.

Another significant shift in the publishing sector has occurred in book production and sales. In 2022, the number of published materials decreased by 4,1% compared to the previous year, totaling 83.653. Of these, 69.211 were books, and 13.246 were web-based electronic books. Additionally, book band sales dropped by 13,3%, declining to 380.296.402 units. This decline highlights the decreasing demand in the print book market and the increasing influence of digitalization (TURKSTAT, 2023).

Overall, 2022 was a year of considerable change for the publishing sector in Türkiye. While digitalization continues to drive the transformation of the sector, economic conditions have intensified the pressures on print media. The observed declines in newspaper and magazine circulations, as well as in book production and sales, underscore the need for structural changes in the publishing industry. Strengthening digital publishing and fostering sectoral collaborations are particularly critical for the sustainability of the sector.

The trends shaping the industry are primarily influenced by technological changes, globalization, and economic and political factors.

Technological Changes: The widespread accessibility of the internet and the increasing use of smart devices have accelerated digital media consumption. The dissemination of news content via social media platforms has altered the business model of traditional journalism. Furthermore, content production and distribution powered by artificial intelligence have enhanced efficiency while posing a threat to traditional workforce roles.

Globalization: The dominance of global media platforms (e.g., Google, Facebook) in the advertising market has put local media organizations under pressure. At the same time, the greater accessibility of international news has increased the importance of producing local content.

Economic and Political Factors: The sector faces economic pressures due to economic instability and rising costs. Moreover, media freedom and political pressures in Türkiye impact journalistic activities, negatively affecting independent journalism.

Globally, digitalization and advancing technological capabilities have diversified the ways people access news and their information consumption habits. In Türkiye, traditional communication tools such as newspapers, radio, magazines, and television have been supplemented by new platforms like social media, news websites, and podcasts. Each emerging communication medium transforms but does not entirely replace its predecessors, creating a culture of convergence (Kürtünlü, 2024). Workers in the publishing sector are striving to keep up with the pace and flow of digital evolution.

In conclusion, the publishing sector in Türkiye is in the midst of a transformation shaped by digitalization, economic pressures, and political dynamics. These changes present both opportunities and challenges, redefining the future of the sector.

II. Current state of collective bargaining

The publishing sector stands out as a critical field where collective labor agreements play a significant role in regulating workers' rights and ensuring stability within the industry. According to 2023 data, a total of 42 collective labor agreements were concluded in the sector, covering 36 workplaces. The total number of workers employed in these workplaces was 2.208. Among the workers covered by collective labor agreements, 451 were public sector employees, while

1.757 worked in the private sector. Of these workers, 1.697 were union members, indicating that approximately 77% of employees in workplaces covered by collective agreements were unionized. Around 13% of workers risked being excluded from the benefits of collective agreements but generally paid solidarity fees to benefit from these agreements (CSGB, 2024).

The majority of workers in the sector are not unionized, and collective labor agreements cover only a small fraction of employees. According to 2023 data, the total number of workers in the sector was 99.384, with only 2,22% covered by collective labor agreements. This reflects the unfavorable conditions for the functioning of collective bargaining processes. The number of unionized workers in 2023 was 10.701, resulting in a unionization rate of merely 10,77%. When comparing the number of unionized workers with those covered by collective labor agreements, the latter accounted for approximately 20,6% of unionized workers in the sector.

In 2023, there were three workplaces in the publishing sector where strikes were carried out, involving 68 employees. Out of these 68 employees, only 10 participated in the strikes, yielding a strike participation rate of approximately 14,71%. The number of workplaces where strikes occurred and the low participation rate indicate that the right to strike is a rarely utilized tool for struggle. This situation highlights the weak bargaining power of workers against employers (CSGB, 2024).

Looking at 2013 data, the number of workers in the publishing sector in Türkiye was 104.141. Of these, 3.714 were unionized, resulting in a unionization rate of 3,57%. In 2013, a total of 10 collective labor agreements were concluded, covering 14 workplaces. The total number of workers employed in workplaces covered by these agreements was 707. Of these workers, 553 were public sector employees, and 154 were private sector employees. A total of 649 workers were union members, indicating that approximately 92% of employees in workplaces covered by collective labor agreements were unionized. However, only 0,68% of the total workforce in the sector was covered by collective labor agreements. When comparing the number of unionized workers with those covered by collective labor agreements, the latter accounted for approximately 19,3% of unionized workers in the sector (CSGB, 2014).

To illustrate the changes in the publishing sector, data from 2013 and 2023 are presented in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1. Number of Collective Agreements Signed

| Year | Number of Collective Agreements | | | Numbe of Workplaces | | | Number of Workers | | | Number of Members | | |
|------|---------------------------------|---------|-------|---------------------|---------|-------|-------------------|---------|-------|-------------------|---------|-------|
| | Public | Private | Total | Public | Private | Total | Public | Private | Total | Public | Private | Total |
| 2013 | 9 | 1 | 10 | 12 | 2 | 14 | 553 | 154 | 707 | 534 | 115 | 649 |
| 2023 | 5 | 15 | 20 | 6 | 36 | 42 | 451 | 1757 | 2208 | 451 | 1246 | 1697 |

Table 2. Workers and Members of Trade Unions

| Year | Number of Workers | Number of Unionized Workers | Unionization Rate (%) |
|------|-------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 2013 | 104.141 | 3.714 | 3,57 |
| 2023 | 99.384 | 10.701 | 10,77 |

Between 2013 and 2023, the publishing sector in Türkiye underwent significant changes. While the total number of workers in the sector decreased from 104.141 in 2013 to 99.384 in 2023, marking a 4,57% decline, the number of workers covered by collective labor agreements increased from just 707 in 2013 to 2.208 in 2023, representing a remarkable 212% rise. The number of workplaces with collective labor agreements also rose from 14 to 36 during the same period, a 157% increase. Nevertheless, the share of workers covered by collective labor agreements, which accounted for only 0,68% of the workforce in 2013, increased to 2,22% in 2023. Despite this progress, the scope of collective bargaining remains limited. The unionization rate showed notable growth, rising from 3,57% in 2013 to 10,77% in 2023. However, the majority of workers in the sector remain non-unionized, highlighting the inadequacy of collective bargaining mechanisms in addressing the broader workforce.

Collective labor agreements are critical tools for regulating working conditions in the sector. They provide important frameworks for wage increases, social benefits, and job security. However, the accelerating pace of digitalization and the proliferation of freelance work models have constrained the scope of collective labor agreements and diminished the effectiveness of unions. This is particularly evident in small-scale media organizations, where the implementation of collective labor agreements is minimal.

Most collective labor agreements in the sector are concluded at the workplace level. While this ensures standards are maintained across different workplaces, major media organizations often prefer single-employer agreements tailored to specific workplace needs. While such agreements can address localized requirements more effectively, sector-wide agreements offer broader coverage

and better regulation of worker rights.

Over the past decade, notable shifts have occurred in the dynamics of collective labor agreements within the sector. With the rise of digital media organizations and the growing prevalence of freelance work models, employers have gained more bargaining power in negotiation processes. Conversely, unionization rates among traditional media workers have remained high. Large unions in the sector play a crucial role in safeguarding sectoral standards through their involvement in collective bargaining processes.

Strengths of the current collective labor agreement mechanisms include the presence of unions and their effectiveness in protecting worker rights. However, the growing adoption of flexible working models and digitalization are among the factors narrowing the scope of collective labor agreements and limiting the efficacy of bargaining mechanisms. Therefore, new strategies must be adopted to expand the reach of collective labor agreements within the sector.

Increasing unionization rates is a crucial step toward expanding the coverage of collective labor agreements. It is particularly important to incorporate digital media workers into unions and encourage the implementation of collective labor agreements in small-scale media organizations. Additionally, developing a specialized collective bargaining model for freelance journalists could broaden the scope of collective labor agreements within the sector. Such innovative approaches are vital for overcoming current challenges and ensuring more effective protection of workers' rights.

In conclusion, collective labor agreements remain an essential tool for protecting workers' rights and ensuring stability within the publishing sector. However, the digital transformation of the sector and the widespread adoption of flexible working models necessitate the development of new approaches to expand the coverage of collective labor agreements. In this context, increasing awareness among unions and strengthening collaboration with employers will contribute to making collective labor agreement practices more effective in the sector.

III. Challenges to collective bargaining

The publishing sector faces distinct dynamics and significant challenges in collective bargaining processes compared to other industries. Collective bargaining mechanisms in this sector have limited influence due to both structural and sector-specific conditions. Legal regulations and low unionization rates, in particular, pose substantial barriers to safeguarding workers' rights.

In Türkiye, Act No. 6356 on Trade Unions and Collective Labor Agreements complicates unions' ability to gain bargaining authority through sectoral and workplace thresholds. This dual threshold system significantly restricts worker organization efforts in workplaces and threatens a democratic working environment. For instance, even if a high level of unionization is achieved in a workplace, the union must surpass legal thresholds to negotiate a collective labor agreement, rendering the process nearly ineffective. This situation not only restricts workers' rights but also diminishes the influence of unions.

Another significant challenge in collective bargaining processes is the prolonged legal disputes caused by employers contesting official authorization determinations. These disputes can last for years, during which many workers are dismissed or lose their union membership. Combined with the already low unionization rates in the sector, this further limits the number of workers covered by collective bargaining. As of 2023, only 10,77% of the sector's workforce is unionized. Additionally, workers covered by collective labor agreements represent merely 2,22% of all employees in the sector. These figures highlight the limited functionality of collective bargaining mechanisms.

A critical issue is that collective labor agreements in the sector are predominantly concluded at the enterprise or workplace level. The absence of sectoral and national-level agreements hinders broader protection of workers' rights. Enterprise-level agreements cover only specific workplaces, failing to establish standardized working conditions across the sector. Furthermore, important issues such as gender equality and anti-discrimination are often inadequately addressed in collective labor agreements. Even in areas where female employees are prevalent, inequalities in wages and promotion processes are rarely included in collective bargaining processes. This omission perpetuates low levels of gender sensitivity in workplaces.

The rise of digitalization and freelance work models has further complicated organization and collective bargaining in the sector. The increasing number of freelance workers has made it nearly impossible for these groups to benefit from unionization rights. Consequently, integrating digital media workers into collective bargaining frameworks becomes challenging, hindering the creation of a broader mechanism for protecting rights in the sector.

Despite these challenges, there are tools and strategies that can be developed to improve collective bargaining processes in the sector. First, revising the sectoral and enterprise threshold requirements could facilitate unions' ability to gain bargaining authority. Additionally, developing specific collective bargaining models for digital media workers and freelance employees could ensure that

these groups are also protected. Regulations addressing gender equality should be included in collective labor agreements to address wage and promotion inequalities faced by female employees. In conclusion, making collective bargaining processes more effective and inclusive in the publishing sector is critical for both protecting workers' rights and improving working conditions within the industry. Legal reforms to enhance union effectiveness, the establishment of stronger social dialogue mechanisms with employers, and the promotion of sectoral collective labor agreements are essential steps toward achieving this goal. These measures will contribute to creating a fairer and more sustainable working environment in the sector.

IV. Towards Smart Bargaining

The publishing sector in Türkiye faces significant challenges in collective bargaining processes due to both structural and sector-specific difficulties. Digitalization, flexible working models, low unionization rates, and gender inequalities are among the most critical issues in the sector. The smart bargaining approach provides a roadmap for addressing these challenges by modernizing collective bargaining processes and adapting them to sectoral needs.

In the publishing sector, digital transformation and freelance work models are straining the limits of traditional collective bargaining mechanisms. Smart bargaining aims to develop flexible arrangements to include groups like freelance journalists, who are often excluded from collective bargaining processes. For example, ensuring social security rights and guaranteeing income stability for freelance workers is a key component of this approach. Smart bargaining integrates changes brought about by digitalization into collective labor agreements by addressing workers' needs such as remote work arrangements, the use of digital tools, and data security. Furthermore, new mechanisms are required to protect the rights of journalists earning income through digital platforms.

The publishing sector is characterized by intense working conditions and creative processes. Smart bargaining aims to balance employees' workloads and support creative efforts with tailored solutions. For instance, it offers solutions such as organizing flexible working hours and ensuring fair overtime payments to suit the sector's high-paced work environment. Women in the sector often face discrimination due to wage disparities and challenges in promotion processes. Smart bargaining seeks to incorporate provisions into collective labor agreements to address these issues, such as reducing wage gaps, ensuring transparency in promotion processes, and introducing measures to combat workplace gender discrimination.

Smart bargaining aims to balance the needs of both employers and employees. In the publishing sector, this approach considers employers' needs to adapt to digitalization and economic fluctuations while developing solutions to protect employees' job security and social rights. It contributes to creating a sustainable working environment within the sector.

Expanding the scope of collective bargaining in the publishing sector requires strategies tailored to the sector's structural dynamics and existing challenges. Considering characteristics such as digitalization, flexible working models, and low unionization rates, achieving this goal depends on implementing various actions and fostering cooperation among stakeholders.

Low unionization rates are one of the primary issues limiting collective bargaining processes in the sector. Including freelance workers and digital media employees in unionization efforts is a critical step toward expanding the scope of collective bargaining. Unions can organize campaigns on digital platforms to raise awareness and reach next-generation media workers.

Revising the sectoral and enterprise thresholds outlined in Türkiye's Act No. 6356 on Trade Unions and Collective Labor Agreements is an essential step to increasing the scope of collective bargaining. High thresholds limit unions' ability to negotiate collective labor agreements and hinder workers from accessing union rights. Lowering these thresholds and incorporating groups like freelance workers into collective bargaining processes are necessary reforms.

Including female journalists in collective bargaining agreements and introducing regulations to promote gender equality can broaden the scope of collective bargaining in the sector. Issues such as wage inequality, challenges in promotion processes, and combating workplace discrimination must be integrated into collective labor agreements.

Journalists working in the digital media sector often operate under short-term contracts or as freelancers. These groups must be included in collective bargaining agreements for social security, retirement benefits, and working hours. Additionally, national and sectoral-level regulations should be implemented to protect the rights of journalists working on digital platforms.

Moving beyond enterprise-level bargaining to sectoral and national-level collective labor agreements would significantly expand the scope of collective bargaining. Such agreements would ensure the protection of fundamental rights for all employees in the sector and establish equitable standards across workplaces.

The publishing sector faces significant challenges in collective bargaining processes due to legal regulations. The current legal framework in Türkiye contains obstacles that limit the effectiveness of collective bargaining mechanisms. Provisions in Act No. 6356 narrow the scope of unionization and collective bargaining processes. Sectoral and enterprise thresholds restrict unions' ability to gain bargaining authority. For example, a union must organize 1% of the sector's workers and more than half of a workplace's employees to obtain bargaining rights. Given the low unionization rates in the publishing sector, these thresholds make it nearly impossible for unions to negotiate collective labor agreements, leaving the scope of collective bargaining severely limited.

Employers' objections to official authorization determinations significantly delay collective bargaining processes. Such disputes can last for years, during which many workers are dismissed or forced to resign from unions. This contributes to persistently low unionization rates in the sector and weakens collective bargaining processes.

Current legal regulations exclude freelance journalists and other flexible work model employees from collective bargaining. Freelance journalism, which has become a widespread working model due to digitalization, is not adequately addressed in current legislation. This exclusion prevents these workers from exercising union rights or participating in collective bargaining processes.

Existing legal provisions also fail to adequately address gender equality. Women in the sector face disadvantages due to wage disparities and obstacles in promotion processes. The lack of legal support for incorporating gender equality measures into collective labor agreements leads to these issues being insufficiently addressed in bargaining processes.

The effectiveness of collective bargaining processes in the publishing sector is limited by deficiencies in the current legal framework. Factors such as sectoral and enterprise thresholds, the exclusion of freelance workers, and prolonged authorization disputes hinder unionization and collective bargaining processes. Addressing these challenges requires revising legal regulations, developing models suited to digitalization, and introducing provisions to promote gender equality. These measures will help establish more inclusive and effective collective bargaining processes in the sector.

V. European Perspectives

The European Commission's Adequate Minimum Wage Directive plays a significant role in protecting workers' rights, reducing wage inequality, and

expanding the scope of collective bargaining. Although Türkiye is not a member of the European Union, this directive serves as an important reference point for labor reforms and collective bargaining practices in the publishing sector. The principles of this directive could be adapted to address key issues in the sector, such as low wage levels, the lack of social security for freelance workers, and wage disparities affecting female employees.

EU-level social partners such as the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) provide sectoral guidance to expand collective bargaining and protect journalists' rights. These organizations support collective bargaining processes related to emerging work models such as digitalization and freelance work, offering examples of best practices to guide local unions. Unions like the Turkey's Journalists' Union (TGS) can benefit from the experiences of these international social partners to strengthen organization and expand collective bargaining processes in the sector.

Collaboration and mutual learning among social partners in the publishing sector are critical tools for making collective bargaining processes more inclusive. Innovative collective labor agreement models implemented by EU-level social partners can serve as examples for unions in Türkiye. Particularly in areas such as digitalization and gender equality, examining European best practices could inform sectoral reforms. Additionally, establishing stronger dialogue mechanisms between employers' organizations and unions could enhance collective bargaining processes.

In the publishing sector, collective labor agreements often focus on basic job security, wage increases, and social benefits. However, their scope must be expanded to adapt to sectoral changes. For instance, the use of digital tools and remote work rights should be integrated into agreements, and issues such as wage inequality, promotion processes, and maternity leave should be included to promote gender equality. Furthermore, the social security, retirement rights, and wage standards of freelance journalists must be addressed in collective labor agreements.

The European Commission's Adequate Minimum Wage Directive and the support of EU-level social partners provide a strategic framework for expanding the scope of collective bargaining in Türkiye's publishing sector. Collaboration and mutual learning among social partners are essential tools for addressing structural issues in the sector and improving the content of collective labor agreements. Including topics such as digitalization and gender equality in collective bargaining processes will contribute to creating a fairer and more sustainable working environment in the sector.

VI. Conclusions

The publishing sector, facing significant transformations and challenges such as digitalization, freelance working models, and gender inequality, has reached a critical juncture where innovative approaches in collective bargaining processes are essential. Smart bargaining emerges as a promising method to address these challenges within the sector. The increasing prevalence of freelance and remote working models driven by digitalization necessitates new regulations to expand the scope of collective bargaining.

Smart bargaining aims to address sector-specific challenges by making collective bargaining processes more flexible and inclusive. Currently, low unionization rates and the limited scope of collective labor agreements pose significant barriers to protecting workers' rights. Including freelance and digital media workers in collective bargaining processes represents a key opportunity to ensure equity in the sector. Provisions for social security, fair wages, and retirement benefits for these groups must be incorporated into collective labor agreements.

Gender inequality is another pressing issue in the sector. Addressing the wage disparities and promotion challenges faced by women journalists will play a crucial role in establishing an inclusive collective bargaining mechanism. Adding gender equality clauses to collective labor agreements can contribute to creating a fairer working environment for women journalists.

International guidance and cooperation offer significant opportunities for the sector. International social partners, such as the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), provide examples of best practices to guide local unions in the publishing sector. Moreover, establishing stronger mechanisms for social dialogue between employers' organizations and unions could serve as an effective strategy to expand the scope of collective bargaining.

In conclusion, adopting smart bargaining methods in the publishing sector will play an important role in addressing its challenges while protecting workers' rights and fostering an inclusive working environment. Improving legal frameworks, promoting unionization, and developing collective bargaining models that accommodate digitalization are critical steps in this process.

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