

Case Study: Federació d'Ensenyament de CCOO de Catalunya - FECCOO (Spain)

Context:

FECCOO is the education sector branch of CCOO Catalunya (Comisiones Obreras), one of the largest and most influential trade unions in Spain. The union represents workers in all levels of education, from early childhood to university, including vocational training and adult education. FECCOO also represents both public and private institutions and all education workers. The union represents a wide diversity of workers.

The current political context is framed by a socialist party-led government, although there is increasing pressure from far-right politicians. Within the country there are deep ideological tensions, affecting values such as fairness, democracy, and equity.

The union is committed to defending public services – this includes a demand for improved wages as wages have not grown as the union had hoped. The union is also campaigning for increased investment in education. It has asked for 6% of GDP because current levels are only at 3.8%. Another priority for the union has been to demand job stability for teachers. This was a requirement of the European Union. Last year, it was possible to win job stability for an additional 36,000 teachers (between 2022 to 2024), which is described as a merit competition. The union organises predominantly in the public sector, but it represents workers in both sectors and each sector has its own problems. The existence of job insecurity favours the expansion of private and subsidiary schools, and in these places, working conditions are obviously harsher.

In the years since the Covid-19 pandemic the stability of teachers is the most pressing issue. The psychological impact on teachers and students, and the deterioration of mental health, also, has also been a great challenge. And at the organisational level, the Union had to manage internal reorganisation and the recovery of mobility after the pandemic, following the lockdowns. Despite the challenges the union was successful in achieving 100% sick pay for workers, and an improved salary supplement. The supplement has been paid every nine years, but the union secured the payment every six years, combined with equal pay. The union is also campaigning for teachers who are involved in providing professional training programmes (FP teachers) to receive a salary equal to secondary school teachers.

Another achievement of the union has been the submission of the 21st Century Council administration, which promotes job stability, merit-based career progression, continuous training,

a better work-life balance, regulated telecommuting, and occupational health and safety. The agreement also guarantees the union's participation in modernisation processes, policies on reducing temporary work, and ensures technological adaptation without loss of rights. All this is happening in a working and social context that has been profoundly transformed.

What does 'local leadership' look like?

The union has a traditional hierarchical structure based on developing organisational capacity at the national, regional, City, and school level. However, in each province or municipality (in the case of the major cities), the union has a leader who works with a team for different sectors; then, in different schools and education centres, there are union members who pass on information, try to resolve any doubts people may have, or pass on the questions and problems they have. This leader maintains direct and continuous contact with members and workers through visits, meetings, and various communication channels, such as specialised consultations and personalised mailing lists. They, and their team, work as a 'proximity delegation'. Their role is to ensure that members' voices are heard, and that the unions responds to members' immediate needs. The goal is to ensure the union maintains a close and trusting relationship between the organisation and the workplace.

These local leaders also act as a link between the schools, the members, and the administration, since they sometimes are involved in meetings with the government. These leaders are in contact with the school councils with the aim of collecting information and helping in responding to all the problems that arise in the school. Information on key issues is continuously disseminated to members in schools. For example, one union official described how she has the contacts of all the members in her local area and every week she distributes information about the agreements being reached between the union and the administration, about local union training as well as events like assemblies and organisations. Local leaders are also those who work in the workplace, representing the union, informally or not. They are responsible for the team or the group of members/affiliates in each institution, but mostly they pass information and help maintain a continuous contact with local leaders. In the private sector, the union struggles to have committees in schools, but despite this there is normally someone, a representative of the committee, representing the union. This is also the case in bigger institutions in the public sector.

How are local leaders identified and developed?

Both at the institutional level and at the municipal or local level, the union develops and supports local leaders through union training and mentoring, and coaching activities. Local leaders who are heads of a provincial team are selected through assemblies or by higher-level union structures

that are organised at all the various levels: local, regional, and national. In specific sectors and institutions institution leaders are also elected or selected locally, as in the case of universities, the public sector, and the disability sector. Local leaders are members of the union, but primarily workers. In most cases, they are elected, but when they are directly selected by the unions, there is usually an interview to evaluate their experience and profile. When a local leader starts their mandate, there is always training. The training can be distributed by people from within the union or by external experts who come in for specialised questions. The priority is to ensure that there is comprehensive and stable preparation of activist leaders. FECCOO also has advisory councils for members, that, when a question from a member arises, have the function to advise the local leader on how to respond. This is referred to as counselling. In addition, local leaders receive information from the union staff that is distributed to members via local leaders about political agreements or about relevant aspects of education policy. Therefore, if a member has a question, the local leader can access the information they need to provide an authoritative response. In addition, in the case of institution 'leaders', no formal procedure is in place to select them, since this is very much based on personal commitment and motivation

How do local leaders link to the formal democracy of the union?

Local leaders are nominated by the union; therefore, they must commit to the union's democratic rules and are accountable for them. Every four years, the union congresses in which elected delegates participate. In these elections, those members who are candidates and get the most votes are delegated to participate in the congresses. Another procedure may also apply, in specific cases, in which the union chooses delegates among teachers or workers who are already members of the union.

Are there dedicated programmes to support particular groups in the union?

In FECCOO, there is a system that has been tested by institutions to ensure that political minorities, with minimal representation, can participate in decision-making. Other minority groups are also represented, for example, in the current executive committee, there must be a representative for the LGBTQ+ community. The LGBTQ+ community also has representatives in each region, and at the local level, there are working groups within, so the union can hear the voices of all these representatives, and it is acknowledged they have an important role in the organisation. FECCOO aims to ensure that all policy officers reflect the interest of these groups, issues, situations, and special circumstances. These policies of inclusion are monitored and assessed periodically through assemblies and leadership committees at different levels. The executive committee and the council committee also monitor the progress. These rules are reviewed several times a year, and the union analyses the rules that emerge for each sector. The analyses them periodically, to look at the results, the difficulties, and the successes being experienced. A formal evaluation is

conducted every four years, and the union congress, across all these sectors, analyses and evaluates the issues.