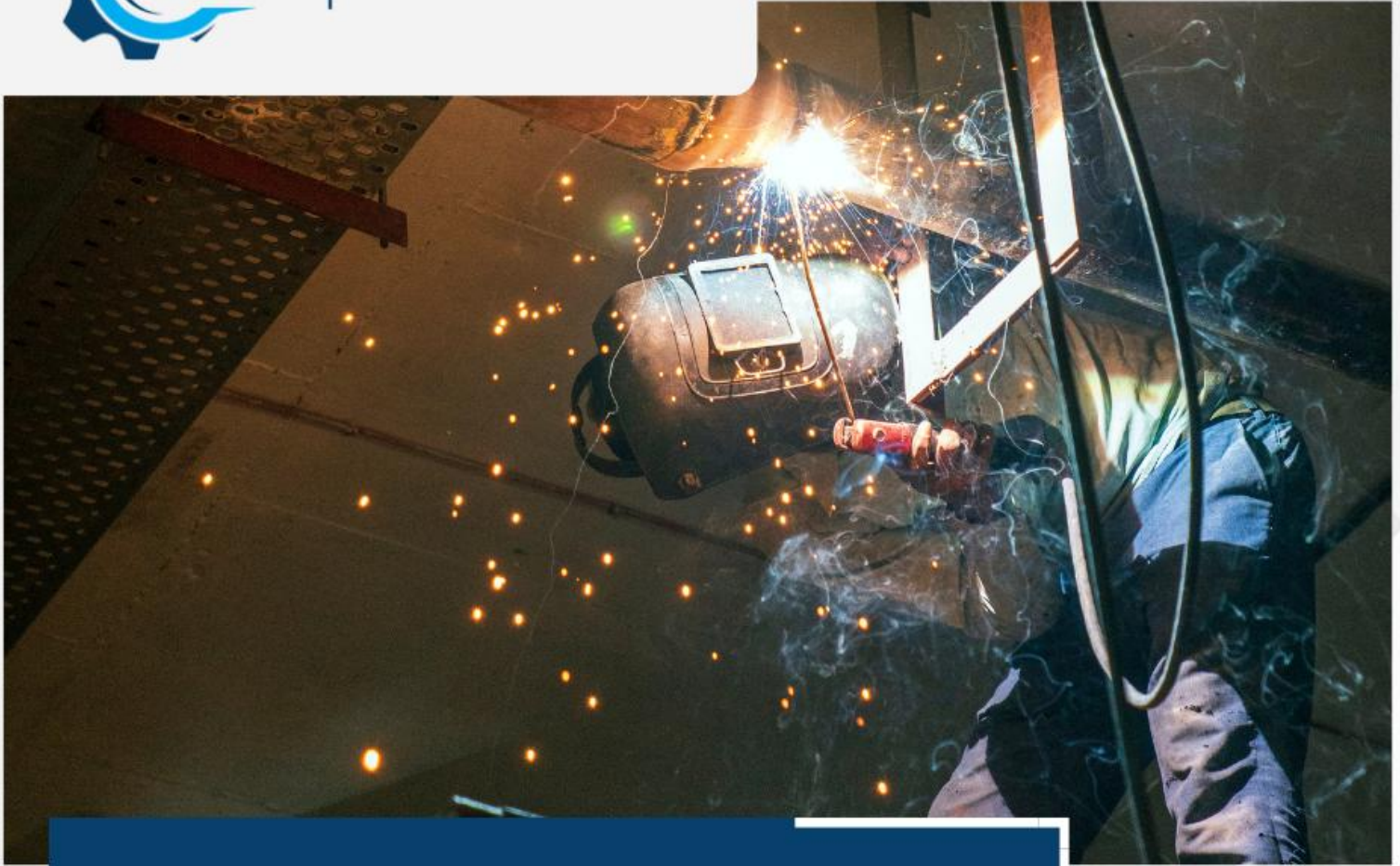




Supporting the Implementation of the
European Industrial Deal with Strengthened
Social Dialogue in European Metal Sector.



FRANCE

NATIONAL REPORT



Co-funded by
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Introduction

Context of the SoDi Project and the Industry

The European metallurgical sector is undergoing a dual structural transformation: the green transition, dictated by the objectives of the European Industrial Pact, and the digital transition. While these changes offer opportunities, they also pose major challenges in terms of skills, work organization, and preserving industrial jobs.

It is in this context that the SoDi project (Supporting the implementation of the European Industrial Pact through enhanced social dialogue), co-financed by the European Commission, has been developed. The project brings together an alliance of trade union partners from France (FTM-CGT), Poland (FZZMIH), Bulgaria, Serbia, and North Macedonia, in collaboration with European actors such as the CEEM. The project brings together an alliance of trade union partners from France (FTM-CGT), Poland (FZZMIH), Bulgaria, Serbia, and North Macedonia, in collaboration with European actors such as CEEMET and IndustriAll Europe.

In France, this global context is marked by an acute paradox: the situation of the industry remains very worrying, as illustrated by the restructuring announcements at ArcelorMittal and tensions in subcontracting, and coexists with “record profits” for CAC 40 companies.

This disconnect between the financial health of large corporations and the social situation of employees places social dialogue in a position of critical tension.

Objectives of the study

This French national report has three main objectives:

1. To map the current state and perceived effectiveness of social dialogue mechanisms in the French metalworking sector.
2. To identify concrete capacity-building needs for union representatives and employees.
3. To formulate strategic recommendations to make social dialogue an effective lever in the management of a socially just industrial transition.

Overview of the methodology

To meet these objectives, the analysis is based on a mixed methodology, both quantitative and qualitative:

A **quantitative survey** was distributed online to union representatives and employees in the sector to identify key trends, obstacles, and needs, from which the “4 Findings” were identified.

1. A **qualitative focus group** was organized on October 30, 2025, bringing together experts from the federation (lawyers, economists) and representatives from the field to explore and analyze the “why” behind the survey findings, i.e., the “3 Hypotheses.”
2. A **Documentary research**, based on analyses by the FTM-CGT Federal Office and external strategic sources, provided political and economic context for the results.

Scope and limitations

The scope of this study is national and sectoral (metalworking). Its main limitation, which is also its analytical strength, is the nature of its sources: the quantitative data comes mainly from union respondents, and the discussion group was composed of experts and representatives of the FTM-CGT.

This report therefore presents an in-depth and critical analysis of the situation, as seen from the field and from the trade union perspective.

1. Political and sectorial context

The French metallurgy sector is evolving in a context of paradoxical tensions. On the one hand, large industrial groups are posting record profits (CAC 40). On the other hand, the situation in the industry remains very worrying and is resulting in growing precariousness for workers. This precariousness is fueled by a cyclical decline in demand, particularly in the steel industry, strong competition from imports, and restructuring plans.

This profound disconnect between the financial prosperity of large corporations and the social reality of employees places social dialogue in a position of critical tension.

1.1 Overview of the metalworking sector: trends, challenges, and transformation

Metalworking remains a strategic but fragile sector, concentrated in vulnerable employment areas (the North, Lorraine, port areas). It faces multiple challenges:

- **Economic and competitive challenges:** The sector is experiencing a cyclical decline in demand, particularly in steelmaking, and international competition that is considered unfair. This takes the form of heavily subsidized imports (particularly of steel and metallurgical products) from non-EU countries that do not apply the same social standards or environmental constraints, such as carbon pricing. This dumping weakens domestic production and results in announcements of massive job cuts, such as at ArcelorMittal in April 2025, which serve as a lever for the FTM-CGT union.
- **Transition Challenges:** The energy (decarbonization) and digital transitions create

technological opportunities, but also major risks of job losses “without adequate social plans” due to a lack of anticipation and dialogue.

- **Health and Social Challenges:** Working conditions remain a key issue. The FTM-CGT union warns of major health risks, such as PFAS and asbestos, posing a "double challenge: protecting health without sacrificing jobs." Added to this are growing job insecurity, arduous working conditions, intensification of work, and the widespread use of short-term contracts and subcontracting.
- **Strategic Challenges (FTM Position):** Faced with these issues, the FTM-CGT is articulating strategic responses. In the steel industry, it supports a day of action (Nov. 27) and an act for the nationalization of ArcelorMittal. Faced with the €16 billion “defense loan” and simultaneous “social setbacks,” the Federation is relaunching its “public defense hub” project to demand social control. Finally, the issue of the “relationship between contractors and subcontractors” is being addressed through the so-called “GM&S” act.

1.2 Social dialogue in the context of employment policy

The framework for social dialogue has become structurally more rigid. The new national collective agreement for the metalworking industry, in force since 2024, marks a historic step backwards. It promotes a “fragmentation of collective standards” and “top-down negotiation,” where company agreements (often less favorable) can take precedence over industry protections, thereby diluting collective guarantees.

In this context of unbalanced power relations, employers have been able to impose their positions, as illustrated by the refusal to increase AGIRC ARRCO pensions despite inflation.

Faced with institutional dialogue that is often blocked or formal, the FTM-CGT is stepping up its action in the courts to defend trade union freedoms and whistleblowers.

The decisions to take legal action in the cases of Naval Group for union discrimination and Thales for the dismissal of whistleblowers are proof of this.

1.3 Key elements of the European industrial pact relevant to the sector

The French government's stated policy of “reindustrialization” is perceived as a partial failure. The FTM-CGT notes that “public efforts are unevenly distributed”: they often benefit large groups for technological projects, but “leave SMEs/subcontractors in difficulty in the regions.” The SODI project must therefore address the issue of social and environmental conditionality of public aid.

1.4 Existing capacity-building initiatives

The FTM-CGT's capacity-building strategy is based on two pillars:

1. **At the national level:** Grassroots actions, such as the “two-week unionization drive” and “regional initiatives,” to strengthen the activist base.
2. **At the European and international level:** Strategic coordination with Industrial Global and Industrial Europe. The aim is to “coordinate transnational solidarity” and put pressure on the headquarters of multinational companies. The SODI project must be part of this dynamic and serve as a platform to amplify these mobilizations, for example in the ArcelorMittal case.

2. Methodology

To meet the study's objectives of mapping challenges and identifying needs, a mixed methodological approach (quantitative and qualitative) was deployed in three phases.

Description of the data collection methods

- **Quantitative survey (Phase 1):** A structured questionnaire was distributed online to union representatives and employees in the metalworking sector. A total of 58 responses were collected and analyzed. The majority of respondents were union representatives (42) from large companies (50). This survey identified four key statistical findings.
- **Qualitative focus group (Phase 2):** An online focus group was organized on October 30, 2025. It was composed of a targeted panel including union representatives from companies such as Tokheim and John Deere, and experts from the federation (a legal expert and an economist). The semi-structured discussion aimed to explore the four findings of the survey in greater depth by testing three working hypotheses on the causes of the blockages.
- **Documentary research (Phase 3):** The primary data from the survey and focus group were supplemented and contextualized by documentary research. This was based on internal strategic analyses by the FTM-CGT, in particular the minutes of the Federal Bureau's October 2025 meeting, and external analyses (ArcelorMittal, Thales, PFAS, etc.) to define the political and sectoral context.

Data analysis approach

The analysis followed a sequential approach. The quantitative data from the survey enabled us to formulate hypotheses about the “why.” These hypotheses were then tested, validated, and refined during the focus group, which provided concrete examples, field analyses, and recommendations. This report is therefore a synthesis of these three data sources.

3. Main Conclusions

The cross-analysis of the quantitative survey and the qualitative focus group not only validated the four initial findings of the survey, but also identified the root causes. The three working hypotheses (on the absence of decision-makers, top-down dialogue, and HR training) were confirmed and significantly refined by the participants.

3.1 Social dialogue mechanisms: a legal facade

The survey (Finding 1) revealed a highly polarized perception of the effectiveness of social dialogue, with 23 respondents rating it as “very poor” and 17 as “good.” The discussion group explained this paradox: the few positive ratings assess compliance with the form, while the negative ratings assess the substance, which is considered non-existent.

- **Validation of Hypothesis 2 (Top-down dialogue):** The federation's legal expert defined the situation as “dialogue solely on form.” Legal obligations (meetings, consultations) are respected, but the goal “is to avoid having to make commitments as much as possible.” A representative from the industrial equipment sector (Tokheim) confirmed this point, noting that management “lacks loyalty” and comes to meetings with “projects already set.” Information flows downwards, and there is no negotiation.
- **Validation of Hypothesis 1 (Absence of decision-makers):** The group identified the mechanism that enables this “dialogue in form”: the absence of real decision-makers. Hypothesis 1 is fully validated. “No, we are not dealing with the real decision-makers,” reported the Tokheim representative, but with HR departments acting by “delegation of authority” with “limited decision-making capacity.”

• A flawed legal and institutional framework:

1. **The decline of the Collective Agreement:** This superficial dialogue is encouraged by the new legal framework, in particular the new national collective agreement for the metalworking industry (in force since 2024). This represents a step backwards by promoting the “fragmentation of standards” and the primacy of company agreements (often less favorable) over industry agreements.
2. **Ineffective sanctions (BDESE case):** The example of the Economic, Social and Environmental Database (BDESE) is symptomatic. The federation's legal expert

cited the case of Thales, which did not set up a compliant BDSE, and pointed out that the maximum penalty for such an “obstruction offense” is a derisory fine of €7,500.

3. **The failure of preventive dialogue:** The ineffectiveness of these mechanisms is forcing the FTM-CGT to shift the balance of power to the courts, as evidenced by the decisions to take legal action against Naval Group for union discrimination and Thales for dismissing whistleblowers.

3.2 Capacity-building needs: a strategic asymmetry

- **Validation of Hypothesis 3 (HR competence):** The survey identified a massive need for training (negotiation, law). Hypothesis 3 (on HR training) was validated, but with a crucial nuance that redefines the problem. The problem is not that HR is incompetent. On the contrary, according to one field representative, they are “very well trained but manipulate information and do not have the same objectives as us.” The capacity need is therefore not a simple technical gap, but a fundamental asymmetry of objectives; union representatives seek to negotiate, while HR is trained in legal optimization and avoidance.
- **Internal obstacle (union coordination):** The group also identified a need for internal reinforcement: the “lack of coordination among union organizations.” The Tokheim representative gave a concrete example where the CGT, despite being in the majority, was blocked by an alliance of signatories (CFDT/CGC) who, together, reached 50% to validate an agreement unfavorable to employees.

3.3 Impact of the green and digital transitions: the strategic “blind spot”

- **Validation of Finding 4 (The “Blind Spot”):** The group unanimously confirmed the total absence of dialogue on the transitions. One representative summarized: “No dialogue on the digital/green transition, information only through the CSE.”
- **Transition as a top-down management tool:** This absence can be explained by Hypothesis 2. Management considers these issues to be “technical” rather than “social” and therefore imposes them top-down.
- **John Deere case (Green Transition):** A representative from the agricultural machinery sector illustrated the contradiction of the green transition (production of “clean engines” vs massive imports of parts from China/India). The group's conclusion was twofold: 1. Social dialogue must be extended to strategic supply chain issues. 2. If the transition is managed in this way (without dialogue on strategy), it will destroy local jobs.

- **PFAS case (Health Transition):** Health alerts, such as those on PFAS and asbestos, raise the same issue. They place workers in a “double bind: protecting health without sacrificing jobs.” These strategic issues are also managed unilaterally by management, without social dialogue.

3.4 Job quality: the direct consequence of deadlocks

The failure of social dialogue mechanisms has a direct and measurable impact on job quality.

- **Precariousness and wages:** In a context of “growing precariousness” and “work intensification,” the balance of power is unfavorable. The employers' refusal to increase AGIRC ARRCO pensions is symbolic of this.
- **The impact of weak sanctions:** The federation economist's analysis of the €7,500 fine demonstrates the direct link. This derisory fine is “included in the calculation of gains and losses” and can be used by employers as an argument to “justify losses” and, consequently, “not to increase wages”
- **Job security:** The federation's economist also pointed out that any attempt to tighten sanctions immediately encounters “job blackmail.” Cases of restructuring, such as that of ArcelorMittal, illustrate that job security is the first adjustment variable in the absence of strategic social dialogue upstream.

4. Cross-cutting themes

Analysis of the survey and focus group data revealed several cross-cutting themes that underpin all of the issues identified. These themes explain the underlying dynamics that structure the failures and blockages of social dialogue in the sector.

4.1 Trust and cooperation between stakeholders: the collapse of a paradigm

The most significant cross-cutting theme is the total collapse of trust between employee representatives and management. Analysis of the findings shows that social dialogue is no longer perceived as a space for cooperation or co-construction, but as a purely asymmetrical power relationship.

The terms used during the focus group, such as “lack of loyalty” on the part of management (who arrive with “projects already decided”) and “manipulation of information” by HR departments, are not mere opinions: they describe the actual experience of dialogue.

This collapse of trust is a direct consequence of Hypothesis 1 (the absence of decision-makers) and Hypothesis 3 (the competence of HR). It proves that local dialogue is a sham, because the interlocutors have no power and are trained not in negotiation, but in legal avoidance.

This fundamental mistrust explains why the recommendations instinctively reject cooperation-based tools, such as “joint training,” in favor of coercion-based tools, such as legal leverage or tax penalties.

4.2 Regional variations and variations according to company size/sector

The analysis confirms that the challenges of social dialogue are not monolithic.

- **Variation according to size:** Hypothesis 1 (the absence of decision-makers) has been identified as a structural problem specific to large groups. In these organizations, the distance between the place of negotiation (the local establishment) and the place of decision-making (the head office, often abroad) is such that social dialogue is structurally emptied of its substance. Local representatives negotiate with HR departments that have no power, rendering dialogue on the ground ineffective on strategic issues.
- **Variation across sectors:** The challenges of transition (Green and Digital Deals) manifest themselves differently across sectors, requiring tailored union responses. **Agricultural machinery** (John Deere case) faces the challenge of strategic consistency, where transition (“clean engines”) masks import strategies. The **steel industry** (ArcelorMittal case) is facing massive restructuring and “employment blackmail,” requiring a political response. **The defense/aeronautics** sector (Thales case) is grappling with legal and ethical issues, with the protection of “whistleblowers” versus trade secrets.

4.3 Trade union coordination (the internal cross-cutting challenge) A major cross-cutting challenge, identified by the group as an internal obstacle to the effectiveness of collective action, is the “lack of coordination between trade unions.”

This problem is not abstract; it has direct legal and practical consequences. One representative provided a concrete example where the CGT, despite having a majority of votes at the site, was defeated by an alliance of signatures (CFDT/CGC). These two organizations, although individually in the minority, were able to reach the legal threshold of 50% by joining forces to validate an agreement deemed unfavorable to employees, against the opinion of the majority union.

This cross-cutting theme demonstrates that the weakening of social dialogue is not only the result of employer actions, but also an exploitable internal vulnerability.

5. Recommendations

The recommendations from the survey and focus group are targeted and reflect the structural obstacles identified: the absence of decision-makers, top-down dialogue, and asymmetry of skills. They are structured around three main areas.

5.1 Capacity building

The survey revealed a massive need for training. However, the focus group analysis showed that simple technical training is insufficient when dealing with HR representatives who are “highly trained” in avoidance.

- **Recommendation 1 (Rejection of joint training): The discussion group**

firmly rejected the proposal for joint training (HR and unions). One representative explained that these training courses are “run by firms paid for by employers” and that, as a result, “they speak the language of the employers.”

- **Recommendation 2 (Making training conditional):** The group recommends prioritizing independent union training. Any “joint” training would only be considered useful on the condition that the real decision-makers (site managers, business unit managers) are present, and not just HR departments.
- **Recommendation 3 (Internal coordination):** Faced with the challenge of inter-union coordination, an internal recommendation is to strengthen training for teams on the rules of representativeness and alliance strategies, to prevent unfavorable agreements from being validated by minority alliances.

5.2 Strengthening social dialogue

Faced with the failure of institutional dialogue, participants recommended shifting the balance of power by activating three levers of pressure.

- **Recommendation 4 (Trade union and judicial leverage):** Noting the ineffectiveness of current sanctions, the group recommends increasing the number of legal proceedings to “create case law.” The example of the “right to alert,” which has been gradually strengthened and regulated by legal action, was cited as a model to follow.

- **Recommendation 5 (Legislative leverage and sanctions):**
This is the

group's central recommendation. In view of the derisory fines, such as the €7,500 for the BDESE, and the delegation of criminal responsibility (which protects decision-makers), the most effective proposal is to introduce dissuasive administrative sanctions. These, identified by the federation's legal expert, would take the form of “loss of social or tax benefits” in the event of proven non-compliance.

- **Recommendation 6 (Political and image leverage):** The federation's legal expert proposed “targeting the company's image,” one of their weak points, by creating a state “social rights label” that would reward good practices, similar to environmental labels.
 - **Limitation identified:** One representative immediately tempered this idea, pointing out that CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) labels already exist and are “already being misused” by companies for their image, in a logic of “social washing.” He cited his own company, which has a “very good CSR score” despite the realities on the ground.
 - **Qualified recommendation:** Such a label could only be effective if it were managed by an independent state or trade union body and if it were based on verifiable results criteria rather than simple declarations.

5.3 Political and financial support

- **Recommendation 7 (Calibration of sanctions):** If financial sanctions are maintained, the federation's economist insisted that they should be proportionate to the size of the company, for example a percentage of turnover, in order to be truly dissuasive.

- **Recommendation 8 (Management of employment blackmail):** The federation's economist also emphasized that any sanction must be calibrated so as not to pose a “threat to employment.” This reinforces Recommendation 5 (loss of tax benefits), which penalizes shareholders and management rather than the means of production itself.
- **Recommendation 9 (Aid conditionality):** In line with the analyses in Section 2 (on the Defense Cluster and Reindustrialization), a key policy recommendation is to require strict social and environmental conditionality for public aid paid to large groups.

6. Conclusion

Summary of the current situation and identified needs

This national study, based on a quantitative survey (of 58 respondents) and a qualitative focus group, makes a clear observation: social dialogue in the French metalworking sector is in crisis. It is perceived by representatives in the field not as a tool for negotiation, but as a “dialogue in name only,” a legal facade devoid of substance.

The analysis validated the three working hypotheses explaining this failure:

1. **The absence of decision-makers:** Representatives negotiate with HR departments that have “no power,” acting simply by “delegation.”
2. **A top-down dialogue:** Management “manipulates information” and arrives with “projects already decided.”
3. **An asymmetry of skills:** HR is “highly trained” in legal avoidance creating a strategic imbalance.

The most serious symptom of this failure is the total absence of dialogue on the green and digital transitions. These issues, considered “technical” by management, are imposed without any negotiation, threatening local jobs and workers' health.

Final thoughts on the alignment of social dialogue

The aim of the SoDi project is to align social dialogue with the green and digital transformation. This study shows that such alignment is impossible in the current state of affairs. The level of mistrust is such that tools based on “cooperation” are rejected by representatives on the ground because they are perceived as “management talk.”

Consequently, the recommendations in this report move away from a cooperation paradigm to focus on a constraint paradigm. For social dialogue to (re)become a lever for managing transitions, it must first regain the power it has lost. This means finding ways to force the real decision-makers back to

the negotiating table and ensuring that negotiations focus on strategic issues, not just formal compliance with the law.

Next steps and possibilities for action

This national report is not an end in itself, but rather a diagnostic tool for the next phases of the SoDi project. The conclusions of this French report, combined with those of our Polish (FZZMIH), Bulgarian, Serbian, and Macedonian partners, will serve as the basis for the creation of the European summary report.

In concrete terms, the next steps will be based on this diagnosis in order to:

1. **Develop training tools that meet the identified needs:** not basic legal training, but strategic modules on (a) detecting manipulation, (b) inter-union alliance strategies, and (c) putting together legal and economic cases to activate leverage.
2. **Organize dialogue sessions** that take this balance of power into account, targeting the right interlocutors.
3. **Strengthen transnational coordination** via IndustrialEurope, using concrete cases, such as those of ArcelorMittal or Thales, to exert pressure at the level of European headquarters, where decisions are actually made.

Annex 2: Focus Group Agenda

The qualitative session was held online on October 30, 2025 (2:00-4:00 p.m.). The detailed analysis of the discussions held during this session forms the basis of Sections 4, 5, and 6 of this report.

Participants :

- Moderator: Khalil Coulibaly (FTM-CGT)
- Rapporteur: Hugo
- Guest expert: Frédéric Touboul (FTM-CGT Coordinator)
- Guest expert: Frédéric Sanchez (Former FTM-CGT Secretary General)
- Participants: A panel of experts and field representatives including:
 - The federation's legal expert
 - The federation's economist
 - A representative from the industrial equipment sector (Tokheim)
 - A representative from the agricultural machinery sector (John Deere)
 - (Other participants)

Agenda :

1. **Welcome and introduction (10 min):** Presentation of the SoDi project (WP2) and rules (confidentiality and GDPR registration).
2. **Introduction of participants (10 min):** Round table discussion (roles and issues).
3. **Presentation of survey findings (20 min):** Presentation of the four quantitative findings and introduction of the three qualitative working hypotheses.

4. Interactive thematic discussion (60 min)

- Theme 1: Current state of social dialogue (Test Hypotheses 1 & 2)
 - Theme 2: Capacity building gaps (Test Hypothesis 3)
 - Theme 3: Impact of the green and digital transitions (Test Finding 4)
 - Theme 4: Recommendations (concrete solutions)
5. **Summary of key messages (15 min):** Summary by the facilitator and validation by the tutor.

6. Next steps and closing (5 min).

Annex 3: Sources used (Documentary Research)

In addition to the survey and focus group data, the contextual analysis (Section 2) was based on the following strategic documents and situation reports:

- Relevé de décisions du Bureau Fédéral de la FTM-CGT (22 octobre 2025).
- Sources de presse externes concernant les cas ArcelorMittal et les alertes PFAS.
- Decision report from the Federal Bureau of the FTM-CGT (October 22, 2025).
- External press sources concerning the ArcelorMittal cases and PFAS alerts.



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