



Employment relations in micro and small enterprises - literature review

Country profile: Finland

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Collective representation

The overall unionisation rate of employees in Finland is very high (96,5%). Thus there are 2,064 million members in the unions. This is, however, an exaggerated picture as the percentage of members that are represented by the unions is only 81,3% after cleaning out e.g. students, retired persons, entrepreneurs, free members and resting members. There are differences in unionisation between different sectors; the public sector is the most unionised (91,2%) sector. In other sectors the rate of unionisation is as follows: industry (81,6%), agriculture (81,5%) and private services (60,5%), which is the sector with the lowest unionisation rate. (Sandqvist 1996).

There are about 220.000 companies in Finland out of which 120.000 act as employers. Two labour market organisations represent the companies in the private¹ sector. (Työelämäsuhteet Suomessa 1999) The Confederation of Finnish Industry and Employers ("TT - Teollisuus ja työnantajat") has nearly 5700 members. These companies employ 550.000 persons. 2427 of the members have less than 10 employees (42,7%), and 1930 members have 11-50 employees (34 %). The Employers' Confederation of Service Industries in Finland ("PT - Palvelutyönantajat ry.") has 8300 members that have 340 000 employees. The majority (75%) of the members has less than 20 employees.

In addition, there is the Federation of Finnish Enterprises, FFE (Suomen Yrittäjät ry.) that is not a labour market organisation, i.e. it does not participate in the Collective Bargaining Act negotiation². The FFE has about 87.500 members out of which 41,8% are sole entrepreneurs, 48,8% have 1-9 employees and 8,2% have 10-49 employees. Thus, the membership represents quite well the overall population of companies in Finland. The micro and small companies are underrepresented in the traditional labour market organisations (TT and PT) as opposed to their share of the business population. However, they are quite well represented in the Federation of Finnish Enterprises that also offers services in the field of labour market issues; e.g. counselling.

The minimum security of wage and salary earners in Finland is assured in two ways. It is regulated by 1) Labour Laws that are prepared jointly by government and labour organisations (employees, employers) and by 2) (sectoral) Collective Bargaining Acts (See chapter 2. Collective Bargaining) on salaries, working hours and other benefits.

The nature and quality of the professional relationship between employees and employers and/or managers at company level is regulated by Co-operation within Undertakings Act ("laki yhteistoiminnasta yrityksissä 725/85"). The purpose of the law is to develop the activities and working conditions of a company by increasing the opportunities of employees to influence their own work and working place and by reinforcing mutual interaction of employers and employees. The law is applied in companies with at least 30 employees. The law needs to be followed also by companies with at least 20 employees if the company intends to dismiss at least 10 employees. The issues that are regulated by the law include e.g.

- important changes in work, in work procedures and arrangements, work transfers that affect employees;

¹ Excluding agriculture

² In the recent years, the FFE has aimed to gain such a position, but so far it has been unsuccessful. Given the overall membership structure of the organisation this type of development might improve the participation possibilities of the smallest companies in the labour market issues.

- important acquisitions of new machines or equipment, arrangements in working place or changes in product lines and services that affect employees;
- the closure of the company or of its part, or its transfer to another locality or important increases or decreases in production;
- selling or merger of the company that affect employment, etc.

The selection of the shop steward³ is voluntary in both large and small companies. However, it seems that in many small companies it is commonly thought that a shop steward is obligatory in companies that have more than 10 employees (Timonen 1998). Based on information given by SAK (Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions) most companies with over 30 employees seem to have a shop steward, and surprisingly many micro companies do have a shop steward.

Table 1: *Shop stewards in companies in different size classes* (based on a survey conducted by the SAK; Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions)

Number of employment	< 9 employees	10-29 employees	30-100 employees
Shop steward in a company	30-40%	50%	90%

There is also some evidence that based on external measures (such as existence of health and safety committees, regular internal inspections or written policies) the safety and health at work is not taken care of in small companies. However, in practice, the quality of small firm health and safety work could be of high quality if health and safety work and production are tightly linked together. (Kupi 1994)

Collective bargaining

The Finnish system of Bargaining covers all three possible levels: central union, sectoral and firm -level. Traditionally the negotiations on the central union level have been very important. (Holm 2000) There is a long tradition of General Incomes Policy Settlements, the GIPS ("tulopoliittinen kokonaisratkaisu", TUPO) that are negotiated centrally. The GIPS is a mutual agreement made between the three parties: government, labour organisations on the employer and employee side. The GIPS deals with salaries, but also other work-related issues, such as training. In GIPS, the general trends for the sectoral Collective Bargaining Acts are formulated, e.g. all sectors agree to salary increases of a certain %-unit and hence, all the sectoral Collective Bargaining Acts apply the %-unit increases in the respective sectors. However, the current trend can be translated as a shift away from a centrally organised system towards sectoral and firm-level bargaining systems (Holm 2000).

The Finnish Labour Agreement Act ("työsopimuslaki") and to some degree also the Collective Bargaining Act ("työehtosopimuslaki") have currently been renewed and they have come to force as of 1st of January 2001.

³ A general term for different types of shop stewards. The shop steward system is regulated by various laws and orders. The system is based on agreements between the labour market organisations. The system will ensure the adoption of labour market agreements, the resolution of possible disagreements between the employer and employee, and dealing with other issues.

In the renewal process the so-called general validity ("yleissitovuus") of the Acts was under strong discussion. Until the end of 2000 the Collective Bargaining Act was binding if more than 50% of the employees in a particular sector worked for unionised companies. The Federation of Finnish Enterprises (the FFE) took the stand that the non-unionised companies could avoid the general validity of the Act (the FFE is not a labour organisation and it represents a lot of non-unionised companies). However, the law renewal implies that the 50% limit is not a peremptory demand, if the Collective Bargaining Acts are otherwise established. Also the unionisation of the employees is considered when defining whether the Act is generally valid in a given sector. Until the end of the year 2000 the potential disputes were solved in labour tribunals. As of 1.1.2001 the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is the responsible authority whether a Collective Bargaining Act is generally binding or not in a given sector. The generally binding Acts will be applied also for non-unionised employees and also for non-unionised employers alike.

In 1997, the private employment in Finland was appr. 1,3 million of which 900 000 worked for unionised companies. The companies that followed the generally binding Collective Bargaining Acts employed 325 000 employees. The companies not following the Collective Bargaining Acts employed 75 000 employees. The latter companies pay appr. 5% lower salaries than the companies that are within the generally binding acts. However, as the companies within the generally binding acts pay 20% higher salaries than the lowest listed salaries, the basic needs of employees are not at risk even in the companies outside the Collective Bargaining Acts. (Holm, 2000)

Based on the view of the SAK (Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions) most micro and small companies do seem to follow the Collective Bargaining Acts, but a small group of the smallest companies is openly against all Collective Bargaining Acts. Small companies especially in certain sectors, such restaurants, retail companies, construction and transportation companies, have had problems with the regulations. It is the view of the SAK that this may be a result of the lack of understanding and knowledge of the Collective Bargaining Acts and their regulations in small companies. (SAK/Vainio)

The general validity of Collective Bargaining Acts does not have influence on employment under conditions of economic growth. However, during recession employment reduced mostly in sectors with a generally binding Collective Bargaining Act. (Holm 2000) Thus, there is some evidence that local bargaining could be useful in maintaining employment in companies during periods of recession.

The local bargaining of job contracts has increased since 1993. It seems also that a clear turn in local bargaining has taken place in the end of the 1990's. The general direction in local bargaining is the "market-oriented forced agreements". This means that the agreements made are in fact regulated by the market conditions, not by the two parties (employees / employers) in the bargaining. Therefore, the terms in the local bargaining are not dictated by employers, but by the customers. Another turn in local bargaining are the important changes in employee attitudes in the end of 1990's. Instead of emphasising the importance of labour unions in making lucrative employment deals, the wage earners identify the meeting of the customers' needs as the best insurance for earning a good salary. In addition, employees do no longer accept that one person, shop steward, makes deals on their behalf without carefully listening to them. Therefore, the emphasis in local

bargaining is shifting towards team- or individually negotiated bargaining. (Timonen 2000⁴) There seems to be an increasing "understanding of entrepreneurship" of the employees in the companies. The need for local bargaining is reinforced in small companies because they have more and more quite long-term contracts with large companies. There is some evidence that larger companies are actually transferring some of their needs of flexible employment to smaller companies. (Tuominen 1998).

The Finnish Working Life Barometer monitors changes in the quality of working life by interviewing wage and salary earners. From the results we can clearly see the decreasing trend of the influencing possibilities of the trade unions in all work places of different size classes. (Ylöstalo 1999)

Table 2: *The influencing possibilities of trade unions in working places of different sizes in 1992-1999* (balance; growing-decreasing)

%	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	No. of replies 1999
< 10 employees	-14	-11	-16	-11	-16	-10	--	-10	274 (25%)
10-49 employees	-10	-25	-13	-14	-9	-11	--	-10	440 (40%)
50-199 employees	-7	-25	-25	-22	-18	-12	--	-7	198 (18%)
> 200 employees	-17	-20	-35	-23	-11	-11	--	-17	196 (18%)
									Missing inf. 7 (1%)

On the other hand, there is also some evidence that local bargaining is not exploited to the fullest in small companies as the interests of management and employees do not match. Therefore, the companies continue e.g. to use over-time although in theory it could be possible to replace overtime by reorganising working hours. Employees' inclination to transfer overtime hours to regular hours seems to depend on the impact of different arrangements on their income and job security. (Repo 1996)

Based on Timonen's study (1998) it seems to be quite difficult especially in smaller companies to find persons willing to act as shop stewards in a company. One reason for this is the dismissal negotiations where the shop steward is expected to participate, and that were rather common during the recession in the early 1990's. On the other hand, a shop steward currently needs to be aware of the different labour regulations as well as opportunities, which is quite a demanding task. In addition, there is a growing tendency that employees want to agree on matters individually without a shop steward This naturally diminishes the authority and importance of shop stewards. (Timonen 1998) Curiously, this development is not altogether welcomed by the employers, as they fear that this trend may decrease the effectiveness of local bargaining during the long run. (Timonen 2000)

The local bargaining in small and large companies seems to be of different nature. The (communication) culture of the company is the most important influencing factor on local bargaining, and there are natural differences in it between the small and the large companies. Briefly, local bargaining in smaller companies is less official and often verbal. Consequently, the persons in small companies do not always recollect what

⁴ The particular study deals with mostly large companies. However, the earlier studies are applied in the study as pre-studies.

issues had actually been locally bargained. Secondly, in small companies there are not so many hierarchical levels - in fact, the level of supervision of work was abolished from most small companies during the past few years. Thus, the information is exchanged directly between the workers and management. The divisions between different tasks - or between management work and other work - are much more flexible in small companies. Although the nature of local bargaining differs in different size classes of companies, the contents of local bargaining are much the same in companies of different sizes. The most common issue is the flexible hours, e.g. the maximum duration of working day. Other common issues are also the local arrangements for bonus salaries, application of new payment systems and changes in job descriptions. There are, however, important differences among the small companies themselves with reference to company culture and style of local bargaining. Some are model examples of good negotiation relationships and easiness of bargaining, whilst some are questionable flexibility laboratories. Similarly, the role of the shop steward differs from a strong developer of the company to a supervisor of human rights in the company. (Timonen 1998) This view is reinforced also by the representatives of the SAK (Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions) as they confirm that based on their studies both the "heavens and hells" of employment relations can be found in the small companies (SAK, Vainio). Based on these results, it seems that no overall conclusions could be drawn regarding employment relations in small companies, but there seems to a diversity of both good and bad cases.

The selection of the shop steward⁵ is voluntary in large and small companies. In small companies it was surprisingly commonly thought that a shop steward is obligatory in companies that have more (e.g. more than 10) employees. This misunderstanding may result from the fact that in companies with more than 10 employees it is necessary to appoint work safety delegate among the employees. (Timonen 1998)

Working and employment conditions

There are no laws on minimum salaries, but the levels of salaries are normally settled in the Sectoral Collective Bargaining Acts. There is also a salary security system ('palkkaturvajärjestelmä') to ensure that employees will receive their salaries in case of a bankruptcy or insolvency of the employer.

The forms of employment relationships in the service enterprises differ structurally from the corresponding structure of business population of the whole country. Permanent full-time work was done by 57% of the employees in the service sector, whereas 76% of the employees in the whole country were engaged in permanent full-time relationships (Sep 1997). 28% of the employees in the service sector had permanent part-time work, the corresponding figure for the whole country being 6%. During the recent years, the service sector has generated mostly so-called atypical employment relationships, which means other than permanent full-time work. Permanent full-time relationships are favoured by medium-sized retail or wholesale companies and expert organisations of all sizes. Large companies within the retail industry, hotels and restaurants and cleaning companies (dominated by female employment) favour permanent part-time relationships. Fixed-term full-time employment relationships are favoured by small companies and by public sector (in social and health care sectors). Fixed-term part-time employment is favoured by small enterprises in the hotel and restaurant sector, retail chains and in medium-sized cleaning companies. (Laaksonen 1998)

⁵ A general term for different types of trustees. The shop steward system is regulated by various laws and orders. The system is based on agreements between the labour market organisations. The system will ensure the adoption of labour market agreements, the resolution of possible disagreements between the employer and employee, and dealing with other issues.

It seems that in general bigger companies pay bigger salaries (see the following table). However, based on an expert view, the generally binding Collective Bargaining Acts have the strongest influence on wages especially in the industry, where both parties (employees and employers) are unionised. Thus, in general wage dispersion in Finland may be explained by education, task or experience, and the firm size is not a relevant factor (Vartiainen 2001⁶).

Table 3: *Sum of salaries paid FIM in different size classes, and average salary per employee (FIM) by company size*

Year	Data	Size class					Grand Total
		< 1 employee	1 employee	2-9 employees	10-49 employees	50-249 employees	
1994	Sum of salaries paid	1,232,611	2,395,182	15,294,040	18,846,999	18,395,956	56,164,788
	Sum of employees	31,531	38,353	158,987	153,059	145,451	527,381
	Salary/employee	39,092	62,451	96,197	123,136	126,476	106,498
1995	Sum of salaries paid	1,130,553	2,472,068	16,512,011	20,664,153	20,309,566	61,088,351
	Sum of employees	30,842	42,998	169,961	163,796	153,229	560,826
	Salary/employee	36,657	57,493	97,152	126,158	132,544	108,926
1996	Sum of salaries paid	983,063	2,653,432	17,664,946	22,485,081	21,382,660	65,169,182
	Sum of employees	35,280	46,868	182,024	170,428	153,995	588,595
	Salary/employee	27,864	56,615	97,047	131,933	138,853	110,720
1997	Sum of salaries paid	1,268,066	2,914,130	18,750,888	24,212,560	22,478,034	69,623,678
	Sum of employees	36,058	47,304	188,836	183,829	159,473	615,500
	Salary/employee	35,167	61,605	99,297	131,712	140,952	113,117

Source: *Small Business Institute Database and Statistics Finland*

According to a Finnish study, small companies create and destroy jobs relatively more than large ones. However, there is no clear relationship between firm size and net employment change. Furthermore, after studying various aspects of job quality, the study concludes that job quality in small companies is not significantly worse than in large ones. The aspects of job quality studied were productivity, turnover of employees, stability of jobs, working conditions and working hours. (Hohti 2000)

The risk for unemployment is higher in small companies than in the larger companies. However, for the employees over 55 years the relative risk for unemployment is higher in larger companies than in smaller companies. (Romppanen 2000)

It seems also that the amendments and policy improvements aimed at facilitating employment of the special groups of unemployed (such as long-term unemployed and young adults) have been ignored by the smallest companies as they are not aware of these possibilities (Saari 1996). There are also many possibilities in the framework of local bargaining to reorganise work in the companies to remove the company-specific causes

⁶ Dr. Juhana Vartiainen, Labour Institute for Economic Research, 10.1.2001

of overtime. However, companies do not use these possibilities. Business management's inclination to transfer overtime to regular hours depended on the possibility to transfer the costs of overtime to selling prices, the value of machinery and equipment and the value of in-house training given to employees. The implementation of suitable models had been hindered by difficulties in matching the interests of management in local bargaining and inconsistencies of employment policy and regulations that impede the availability of suitable workforce, training and local bargaining. (Repo 1996).

Conflicts

Labour market organisations are responsible for negotiating the Collective Bargaining Acts. In case of a disagreement the government has set in place conciliation system. Until the end of 2000, conflicts regarding for example the general validity of the Collective Bargaining Act were settled in the labour tribunals, but now it is the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

Based on SAK's (Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions) view conflicts in the workplaces in micro and small companies are more common than in the large companies as all of them do not follow / are aware of the labour market regulations, such as the Collective Bargaining Acts. The sectors with most of the problems are: restaurants, retail, construction and transports. The larger companies (chains) seem to have fewer problems in these respects, so it is especially the small companies in these sectors with some problems. However, strikes are less common in micro and small companies, but they are not very common even in the larger companies in Finland. (Vainio/SAK). A Finnish study regarding conflicts at workplaces seem to offer a slightly different picture.

Table 4: *Competition and conflicts at work places, by size of company in 1990 (%)*⁷ (Hohti 2000)

Size of the company	1-9	10-19	20-99	100+	N =
Competition at work place	45	62	66	66	2129
Conflicts between employees and superiors	48	66	73	75	2304
Conflicts among employees	43	67	72	73	2238
Conflicts between different employee groups/ teams	28	52	59	66	1820

However, the conflicting picture given by the research results and by the view of the labour market union could be explained by sectoral factors. It may be that small companies in certain sectors have more conflicts and problems than companies in general, but overall micro and small companies have fewer conflicts than larger companies.

Size and sector considerations

The bigger the company, the larger part of the staff who takes part in employer sponsored training. In companies with less than 50 employees 33 per cent of the staff takes part in training, companies with 50-99 51 per cent, and companies with 100-199 people 59 per cent of the staff takes part of the training. In

⁷ Borrowed from Kolu, Timo (1991) Työelämän laatu 1977-1990. Hyvinvoinnin koettuja muutoksia työssä. Komiteanmietintö 1991:38, Tilastokeskuksen tutkimuksia 188, Helsinki.

companies with 500 or more employees, staff members attended training almost twice as often as people in companies with less than 50 people. (Blomqvist etc. 1998, 23-24.) In another study conducted by SAK (Central organisation of Finnish Trade Unions) the results are similar with a slightly different size classes applied. Only 11 % of the companies with less than 30 employees provide internal training for the employees, 46% of the companies with 30-200 employees and 50% of the companies with over 200 employees.

Table 5: *The percentage of internal training in the company by size of company* (Laukkanen 1998)

	with external financial support	without external financial support	does not know if support was received
ene-30	3	5	3
31-200	11	25	10
>200	14	29	17
Average	10	21	10

Thus it seems that the availability of internal training is especially poor in the smallest companies. Based on the view of the SAK (Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions) the larger the company the more it seems to provide different kind of benefits for its employees, such as a better salary, more bonuses and other forms of rewards. In addition, training and personnel development and health care are better organised as well as safety and health at work issues, and the better the company is aware of the different labour regulations (such as Collective Bargaining Acts).

There are some differences in the risk for unemployment in companies of different size classes (Romppanen 2000).

Table 6: *Risk for unemployment in different companies by size of company in 1993, 1995 and 1997 (%)*

	1993	1995	1997
Small companies (<49)	12.9	8.0	5.5
Middle-sized companies (50-499)	8.8	5.1	3.3
Large companies (> 500)	6.5	3.7	2.6
Total	9.4	5.8	3.9

Source: *Romppanen 2000*

The average risk for unemployment is greatest in small companies and smallest in large companies. In companies with less than 50 employees the average risk for unemployment is nearly twice as in large companies during 1990's. This reflects naturally also the problems of new start-up companies. The risk for unemployment for the young, however, is independent of the size class. In dismissals it is normally the last recruits that are the first to go. For the wage earners in the age bracket 30-50 years the risk for unemployment is reduced. For the persons that could be subject to unemployment pensions (for the persons over 55 years), the risk for unemployment reaches again the same level in all the size classes. However, the growth of the risk is modest in the small companies. In large companies the risk for unemployment for the persons over 55 years is twice or three times as important compared to persons of 30-50 years of age. (Romppanen 2000)

Policy implications

The growing number of SMEs is of interest to policies related to employment relations as it will mean that the number of enterprises and respectively the number of employees will be outside Collective Bargaining Acts. How will this trend change the labour market relations in general is an issue of great interest in the future. (Holm 2000)

The concept and definition of local bargaining seemed to be somewhat unclear, especially to representatives of employees. For example, in about half of the smaller companies the respondents said that local bargaining had resulted in agreements that were not legal according to the general agreement. These were, however, accepted by both sides (employees and employer) with the explanation that it was the only possible alternative "to keep the company up and running". Yet, when the researcher checked these agreements he found out that most of them were in fact legal. It seems that the complexity and difficulty of the collective agreements act is an obstacle to the awareness and exploitation of the flexibility it could offer. (Timonen 1998) It seems that the labour regulations are too difficult for the smallest companies to understand them and follow the regulations in the first place.

Similar conclusion is drawn in another case, also. There are measures aimed at facilitating employment of certain special groups, such as young adults and long-term unemployed persons, but the companies do not make use of these measures. The main reason is that the employers are not aware of these possibilities. This may e.g. result from the fact that information and promotion of the measures is not sufficient. There are some studies that question the reliance on the effectiveness of the employment measures, which were intended to make employment easier. There is a danger that the advantage does not go to the benefit of the job applicants whom they were aimed at. Either the beneficiaries are other job applicants that displace the applicants who were aimed at, or employers whose improved employment possibilities do not show as increased employment. Therefore, there should be very clear conditions according to which it is possible to use the measures aimed at promoting employment. In addition, these measures place also new demands on employers, as they have to actively seek out information on such flexible solutions. (Saari 1996)

One of the main results in a Finnish study dealing with local bargaining in small companies was that the labour market organisations are not aware of the practices of local bargaining within the small companies. (Timonen 1998) The lack of information was also identified by one of the labour market organisations themselves. This means that employment relations in small companies have not been a focal issue for labour market organisations. This is reflected also by the lack of specific studies in the field in Finland.

There is some evidence that the larger companies take benefit of the relaxed regulations for the smaller companies. Workers have been transferred to small companies within the same group of companies to avoid the own liabilities that are set for the larger companies in the case of pension costs. In general the risk for unemployment for the persons over 55 years in large companies is twice or three times as important compared to persons of 30-50 years of age. In the smallest companies the risk for unemployment was not significantly more important. (Romppanen 2000)

The opinions of shop stewards concerning the hypotheses of the EU Green Paper on the new organisation of work seem to be contradictory. The supported hypotheses included broader job descriptions, an increase in reorganisational activities, an increase in team and group work, and an increase in payment of wage supplements based on skills and competence. On the other hand, the shop stewards were highly skeptical about the narrowing of wage differentials, the reduction of use of sub-contractors and outside labour and an

increased responsibility of the employer in terms of personnel development policies, i.e. flexibility is believed to increase at the expense of job security. (Laukkanen 1998)

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