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# Participation in investment policy: when dialogue has influence

What ILO case research shows about institutional mandates, informal access, resources and the evidence needed to distinguish consultation from influence.

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## Participation and policy influence

The ILO working paper examines how national social dialogue institutions and social partners engage with sustainable foreign direct investment and multinational enterprise policy. It reports growing tripartite engagement, while interviewees also described preferences for government-business discussions. Its account concerns institutional and policy settings as of 2023, not a finding about how those institutions currently operate. The paper is one source, and the selected passages do not independently corroborate its findings.

**Salient One analysis**

A place in a dialogue can provide an opportunity to raise employment and social concerns, but it does not by itself show that those concerns changed a decision. Influence depends on what participants can discuss, when their views enter the process and whether decision-makers respond. The paper's account of both active advisory bodies and parallel bilateral channels illustrates why formal participation and practical authority should be examined separately.

## What the research can establish

The paper uses desk research and expert interviews to examine eight ILO Member States and the West African Economic and Monetary Union. Cases were chosen partly for geographic diversity and partly because their tripartite constituents had already received ILO awareness-raising or capacity support concerning the MNE Declaration. Interviews from August to October 2023 included officials, employer and worker representatives, ILO partners and specialists.

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This purposive selection can illuminate how particular institutions work, but it is not a representative survey of national dialogue systems. Prior ILO support also matters when interpreting examples of engagement: the cases were not selected independently of that experience. The paper can identify reported practices and plausible routes to influence; its design does not, on its own, establish that support caused policy changes or improved livelihoods.

## Advisory status and practical authority

The ILO paper describes several studied institutions as advisory or consultative bodies that offer comments, opinions or recommendations to government. It also reports that most institutions documented as actively driving socioeconomic policy development and implementation have advisory or consultative status. In many of those cases, their objectives and functions are elaborated across a broad set of activities, rather than being confined to a narrow label.

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Advisory status therefore need not mean inactivity, but neither does an active role prove that government adopted a particular recommendation. Clear functions can give participants a basis for entering policy discussions and following implementation; narrow competence or referral to one ministry can constrain the issues they reach. Examining the route from a recommendation to a government response is more informative than treating institutional status as a measure of influence.

## When bilateral channels bypass dialogue

Interviews reported in the paper point to continuing preferences for bilateral engagement on foreign investment and multinational enterprise issues, especially between government and businesses. The paper identifies economic ministries in Peru, Slovenia and South Africa as examples from those interviews. It describes such channels as sometimes operating alongside labour and social ministries and often sidestepping processes for social partner and wider stakeholder consultation.

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Bilateral discussions may give government and businesses a direct way to consider investment issues, but they can also determine which concerns reach decision-makers first. If worker organizations enter only a separate or later discussion, their opportunity to shape the same policy choices may be weaker. The reported pattern is a reason to investigate how channels interact in each case, not proof that every bilateral discussion excluded workers or produced an adverse outcome.

## Discretion and continuity

The paper reports that many studied institutions have founding instruments defining their competence over economic and social policy, and that some also have internal procedural guidance for social partner involvement. Nevertheless, expert interviewees indicated that government consultation is often more discretionary than procedural in practice. The paper also notes that, in some cases, institutional involvement depends on government decisions.

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Discretion can allow government to choose an appropriate forum for a particular issue, but it can also make access uneven across policy topics and decision cycles. Written functions alone do not establish whether an institution is invited early enough to affect a proposal. Continuity would be better understood by tracing invitations, submissions and responses across decisions, rather than assuming either dependable consultation or its absence from the existence of formal procedures.

## Resources and representation

Several institutional officials told the researchers that insufficient human and financial resources hindered their work. Officials from the Philippines' Department of Labour and Employment and the WAEMU Social Dialogue Commission explicitly raised financial constraints. Separately, the paper recommends broadening the representation of diverse worker and employer groups; that recommendation is not itself evidence that a particular group was excluded from a particular decision.

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Resources shape more than attendance: participants may need time and expertise to assess investment proposals, consult their constituencies and formulate alternatives. Where those capacities differ, formally equal seats can carry unequal practical weight. Broader representation can make more perspectives available, but its value also depends on whether representatives can communicate with those they speak for and explain how their positions were developed. These are questions to investigate, not outcomes established by the recommendation.

## Assessing influence and outcomes

The paper recommends the ILO Self-Assessment Method for Social Dialogue Institutions as a way for institutions to evaluate and improve effectiveness and inclusiveness. That is a proposed assessment approach, distinct from an independently verified finding that a particular institution changed policy or delivered social benefits. The selected passages describe the recommendation, but do not establish what assessments or other evaluations were subsequently conducted.

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A stronger test of influence could trace a proposal from consultation records through government decisions, including reasons given for accepting or rejecting submissions. Interviews across participating and non-participating groups could test competing accounts of access. To examine social effects, researchers could also compare relevant outcomes over time and consider other explanations or a suitable comparison group. The selected extracts do not establish whether such evidence was collected or whether a comparison group existed.

## Implications and limits

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Salient One’s conditional interpretation is that social partners’ influence on investment policy may depend on whether consultation occurs in practice: the ILO report finds that inclusion is often discretionary, while government–business discussions can bypass broader participation. These channels may give different groups unequal opportunities to shape policy, but the selected evidence does not establish their effects on a particular policy or livelihood.

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National tripartite participation is also not evidence of consent by communities affected by an individual project. A separate inquiry would be needed to understand who is affected, how they can participate and whether decisions respond to their concerns. The ILO paper’s focus on institutional policy dialogue supports examining that connection, but cannot establish local conditions or project outcomes. Any intended benefits would not offset adverse human-rights harm.

## Sources and attribution

1. The role of national social dialogue institutions in shaping investment policies
   May 2026 · Retrieved 10 November 2026

   Used throughout this analysis.

   Masocha, Vongai. 2026. The role of national social dialogue institutions in shaping investment policies. ILO Working Paper 171. Geneva: International Labour Office. © ILO. https://doi.org/10.54394/00033984. Licensed under CC BY 4.0. CC BY 4.0

   Selected ILO-author-owned narrative and recommendations from this specific working paper only. Excludes third-party quotations, boxes, figures, tables, references, personal case narratives, logos and other third-party material. The purposively selected cases describe institutional settings as of 2023.

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