## Identified Barrier: Conflictual climate of industrial relations

For employers, an ageing workforce should remain productive and efficient (efficiency); for trade unions, firms should create the conditions under which older workers can actively contribute to create value by filling their skills gap and responding to their growing healthcare and working-life-balance needs (equity). This requires a positive attitude and the active participation of both employers and workers that should be based on mutual adaptation in order to reconcile their respective needs. Labour-management and cross-workers solidarity and participation is therefore a central concept associated with sustainability in mitigating the effects of an ageing workplace (voice).

As a result, cooperation and integrative bargaining emerges as an enabling factor to shape active ageing through industrial relations and social partnerships at national or local level. Conversely, whereas the distributive approach to labour relations and collective bargaining prevails over the integrative one and effects on sustainability are more likely to be negative or controversial. Voice, in this respect, is expressed in terms of conflict: labour relations are polarised rather than balanced between efficiency and equity.

Yet confrontational industrial relations, which reflect more power-based rather than trust-based employment relationships, still prevail in Italy, and it results in less integrative bargaining outcomes. Efficiency pressures on the employers’ side tend to exacerbate this conflictual attitude: in most cases, labour relations at the shop floor are polarised rather than balanced between efficiency and equity, and this hamper sustainable management of an ageing workforce. In contexts where the climate of industrial relations is confrontational, efficiency pressures tend to prevail over sustainability, and the life course perspective in shaping employment policies remains unpractised. It comes with no surprise that national or sector-wide regulations based on a sustainable compromise between efficiency and equity do not necessarily translate into sustainable HRM or industrial relations practices at a firm-level, or that high and low roads to productivity coexist across sectors and companies.