

LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENT

Workers' representatives	European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU) (1974) http://www.epsu.org
Employers' representatives	Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) (1951) http://www.ccre.org

Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee (SSDC)

Informal working group:	1996
SSDC:	13 January 2004
Rules of procedure:	13 January 2004
Work programme:	2004-2005; 2006-2007; 2008-2010

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GENERAL OVERVIEW OF SECTOR

The main purpose of local and regional government is to manage and deliver public services to the communities they serve. These local services include for example transport, refuse collection, water distribution and street lighting, but also education, leisure services, social welfare, healthcare, policing, fire-fighting, etc. Although these authorities differ considerably from one country to another, they are all confronted by the same challenges: globalisation, the opening-up of public procurement and enhanced competition, budgetary constraints, demographic change, growing mobility, and so on.

Local and regional government makes up around 10% of total employment within the EU. Given the variety of the services provided, jobs are extremely diverse: e.g. teachers, social workers, drivers, maintenance staff, administrators, police officers and fire-fighters. There is a very high level of female employment, especially in the fields of education, healthcare and social work.

Almost 100,000 local, regional and federal bodies across the EU-27 were [surveyed](#) in 2007, including 91,252 municipalities, 935 intermediate-level authorities and 319 regional or federal entities. Some countries (such as Estonia, Iceland and Luxembourg) have only one level of local authorities (town councils or municipalities). Others have two: the municipality and the region (Hungary, Latvia, Czech Republic, etc.). Still others have three: municipality, region and county (France, Poland, etc.).

These authorities differ considerably from country to country (size, number, resources, etc.). A policy of merging town councils has been pursued in several European countries (Austria, Denmark, Germany, Belgium, Greece). Conversely, in the former communist bloc countries, where town councils had been absorbed into larger entities as part of the “rationalisation” and planning process, some countries (Slovenia, Czech Republic, Romania) disbanded these combined authorities during the 1990s and re-established the former town councils. [Generally speaking](#), when it comes to their public service mission, Europe’s local and regional authorities are all confronted by the same challenges: globalisation, market opening and enhanced competition, budgetary constraints, demographic change, growing mobility, and so on. The EU has a growing impact on this sector owing to its moves towards liberalisation and its rules on public procurement.

PARTICIPANTS AND CHALLENGES

Social dialogue in this sector began in 1996, and the Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee (SSDC) was formally constituted in 2004. It brings together the European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU) for the workers, and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) for the employers. Two concerns were uppermost at the outset: modernising public services, and the role of local development in combating unemployment. The issue of developing a European approach to promoting services of general interest came to the fore later on.

Social dialogue in this sector began in 1996, and the Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee (SSDC) was formally constituted in 2004. Two concerns were uppermost in 1996: modernising public services, and the role of local development in combating unemployment. During the 1990s the EU Member States began to accept that promoting employment was a “matter of common concern”. In 1996 the Commission unveiled its European Pact of Confidence for Employment, which prefigured the subsequent European Employment Strategy (EES). This Pact placed special emphasis on local development.

It was in this context that the social partners in the sector adopted their first joint text, in which they pointed out that local and regional authorities “have considerable expertise to offer for local development and employment initiatives” (Joint Statement of the European Federation of Public Service Unions and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions – Local & Regional Government Employers Platform on Employment in the European Union, 29 November 1996). This marked the starting point for social dialogue, which gradually spread to other topics: modernising public services, services of general interest, equal opportunities, telework, European labour law, active inclusion, and so on.

Institutionalisation of the social dialogue through the setting up of an SSDC coincided, in 2004, with the European Commission’s White Paper on services of general interest ([COM 2004\(374\) final](#)). This document, setting out the Commission’s approach to promoting services of general interest, appears to have marked a turning-point in the sectoral social dialogue.

As concerns the nature of the texts adopted, the bulk of them are what the [European Social Observatory](#) calls “joint opinions”, in other words documents addressed to the European institutions in order to express the views of those in the sector about specific Community initiatives. These texts relate to the European Employment Strategy (EES), services of general interest, modernising labour law, active inclusion and development of social dialogue. Then there are “recommendations” addressed to national organisations: these are more akin to reciprocal commitments. They cover equal opportunities, gender equality and telework (implementation of the cross-industry framework agreement). Lastly there are two “declarations”, the first on modernising public services, and the second on developing social dialogue in local and regional authorities (especially in the new Member States).

Thus an analysis of the texts adopted reveals a social dialogue that initially focused on lobbying (to influence European policy-making by means of joint opinions), thereafter turning to reciprocal commitments in respect of industrial relations, quality of work, etc. The work programme for the period 2008–2010 provides for an investigation of the phenomenon of third-party violence (particularly in public transport, hospitals and schools). The intention is to join with other sectors (commerce, private security and hospitals) in supplementing the framework agreement concluded by the social partners in the cross-industry social dialogue (Framework agreement on harassment and violence at work, 26 April 2007). It is also worth noting that in February 2009, owing to the international economic and financial crisis, the sector forwarded to the Spring European Council a list of recommendations aimed at highlighting the role that local and regional authorities can play in helping the most vulnerable individuals affected by the crisis.

OUTCOMES

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The joint texts adopted in this sector reflect a shared desire to defend the specific nature of the **public** services delivered by local and regional authorities. In this respect, 2004 seems to have marked a turning-point in the social dialogue: whereas those in the sector had hoped to contribute their know-how in aid of local development and employment, the publication of the [White Paper on services of general interest](#) seems to have put them on the defensive.

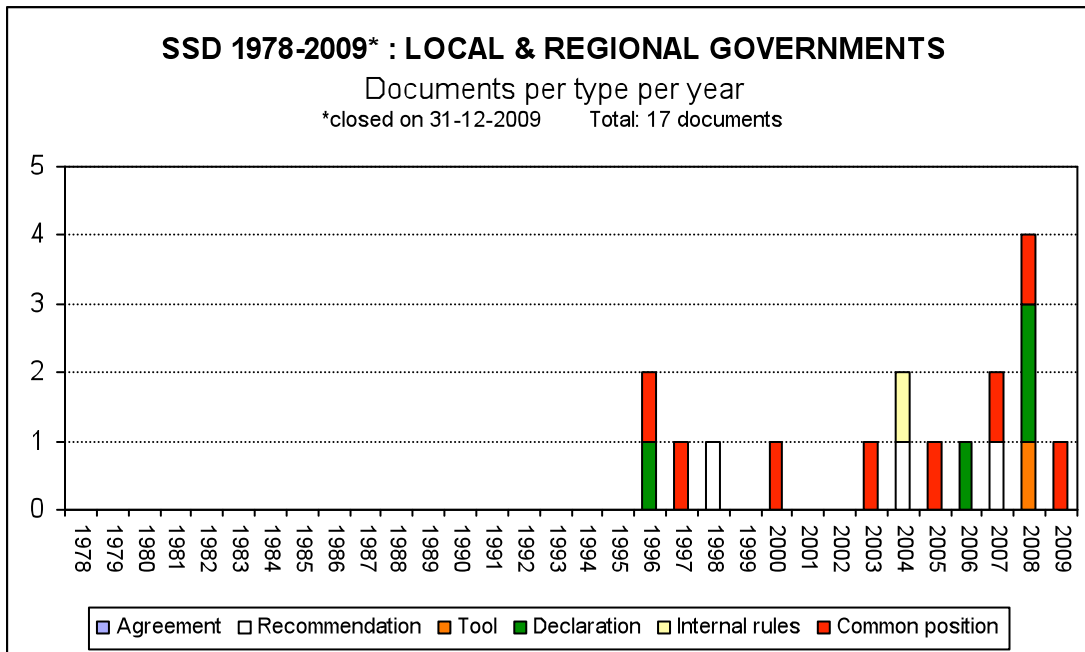
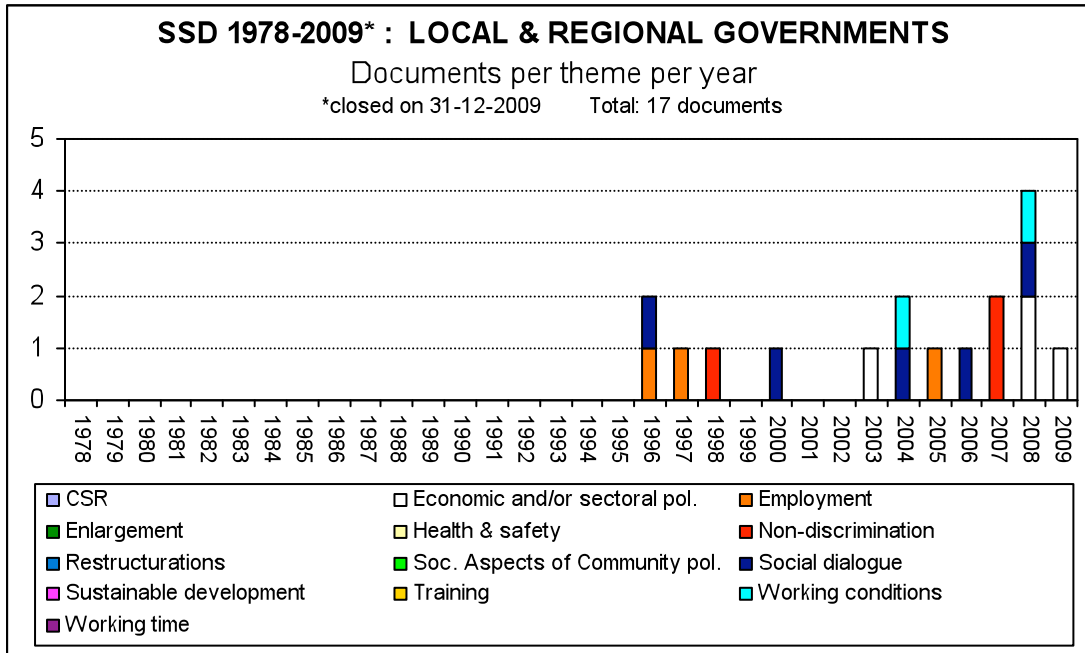
While this White Paper was in its preparatory stages, the social partners adopted a joint opinion which reads like a warning to the Commission: “we believe that, in accordance with the principles of subsidiarity, proportionality, local self-government and proximity, decisions as to the organisation of public services and services of general interest of a local or regional nature should remain in the hands of local and regional authorities, where democratically elected representatives are in the best position to judge the merits of different options (...) on behalf of their citizens and electors. Democratic control and accountability, responsible use of scarce resources, the prevention of abuses of market power, long-term service delivery and security of supply of many services require public intervention and cannot be left to market forces only” (Joint statement on the role of local and regional public services and the Green Paper on services of general interest, [COM\(2003\) 270](#) final).

This defensive stance on market forces was equally apparent in 2005 with regard to the development of the EES. The social partners expressed regret that the guidelines took a narrow view of the role of local public services/services of general interest. They asserted that “this demands a positive discussion on public services rather than an ideologically based ‘*private good, public bad*’ approach” (CEMR-EP / EPSU joint statement on EU employment policy, 15 May 2005).

In 2007, in their joint statement on the modernisation of labour law (Joint CEMR/EPSU response to the European Commission’s Green Paper COM (2006) 708, Modernising Labour Law to Meet the Challenges of the 21st Century, 3 April 2007), the social partners point out that the Commission’s focus is mainly on “the personal scope of labour law rather than an issue of collective labour law. We see this as a general weakness in the overall analysis.” They believe that the Commission should above all “concentrate on preventing unfair competition and social dumping between Member States (...)”. Thus this sectoral social dialogue seems, since 2004, to have been adopting a rather defensive stance in respect of the EU’s “intrusions” in the area of public services, liberalisation and labour law.

JOINT TEXTS

The “local and regional government” sectoral social dialogue has resulted, since 1996, in the adoption of 17 joint texts.



Date	Title	Theme	Type	Addressee
27/02/2009	CEMR-EP/EPSU Joint Message to the Spring European Council 2009	Economic and/or sectoral policies	Joint opinion	European institutions
18/12/2008	CEMR/EPSU joint response to the Consultation of the European social partners for a review of the implementations of the Commission Communication and decision of 20 May 1998	Social dialogue	Declaration	European institutions
01/07/2008	Reform of public services: What role for social dialogue?	Economic and/or sectoral policies	Tool	National organisations
03/06/2008	Supporting the reform process in local and regional government: Joint evaluation of the experience in different forms of service provision Joint conclusions, June 2008	Economic and/or sectoral policies	Declaration	European social partners
19/03/2008	CEMR-EP/EPSU Joint Statement on the Active Inclusion of Those Furthest from the Labour Market	Working conditions	Joint opinion	European institutions
14/12/2007	Guidelines to drawing up gender equality action plans in local and regional government	Non-discrimination	Recommendation	National organisations
03/04/2007	Joint CEMR/EPSU response to the European Commission's Green Paper COM (2006) 708 Modernising Labour Law to Meet the Challenges of the 21st Century	Working conditions	Joint opinion	European institutions
29/11/2006	CEMR – EPSU joint statement on the development of social dialogue in local and regional government	Social dialogue	Declaration	National organisations
19/05/2005	CEMR – EPSU joint statement on EU employment policy	Employment	Joint opinion	European institutions
13/01/2004	CEMR-EP / EPSU joint statement on telework	Working conditions	Recommendation	National organisations
13/01/2004	Internal rules of procedure for the European sectoral social dialogue committee for the local and regional government sector	Social dialogue	Rules of procedure	European social partners
16/09/2003	Joint statement on the role of local and regional public services and the Green Paper on services of general interest	Economic and/or sectoral policies	Joint opinion	European institutions
15/11/2000	CEMR Employers' Platform and EPSU joint statement on the EU employment policy	Social dialogue	Joint opinion	European institutions
7/10/1998	Joint declaration of the CEMR Employers' Platform and EPSU on equal opportunities	Non-discrimination	Recommendation	National organisations
24/10/1997	Joint declaration of the	Employment	Joint opinion	European institutions

	CEMR Employers' Platform and EPSU on employment			
29/11/1996	Joint Statement of the CEMR Employers' Platform and the European Federation of Public Service Unions on Employment in the European Union	Employment	Joint opinion	European institutions
29/11/1996	Joint Declaration on Modernisation of Public Services	Social dialogue	Declaration	National organisations