

**Observatoire Social Européen (2010) *European Sectoral Social Dialogue Factsheets*. Project coordinated by Christophe Degryse**

[www.worker-participation.eu/EU-Social-Dialogue/Sectoral-ESD](http://www.worker-participation.eu/EU-Social-Dialogue/Sectoral-ESD)

## **FOOTWEAR**

<b>Workers' representatives</b>	<b>European Trade Union Federation: Textiles, Clothing and Leather (ETUF:TCL) (1975)</b>  <a href="http://www.etuf-tcl.org/?lg=en">http://www.etuf-tcl.org/?lg=en</a>
<b>Employers' representatives</b>	<b>European Confederation of the Footwear Industry (CEC) (1959)</b> <a href="http://www.cecshoe.be">www.cecshoe.be</a>

### **Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee (SSDC)**

<b>Informal working group:</b>	1991 (Joint Committee established in 1982)
<b>SSDC:</b>	1999
<b>Rules of procedure:</b>	
<b>Work programme:</b>	2005 - 2006

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## GENERAL OVERVIEW OF SECTOR

**The footwear sector, a highly labour-intensive sector consisting of numerous SMEs, is faced with a series of challenges connected with the [liberalisation](#) of world trade. For several years now, these challenges have taken the form of restructuring operations, falling employment and transfers of production, but also the need to improve Europe's competitive edge.**

A typical feature of the [footwear sector](#) is its large number of small firms and micro-enterprises. It is one of three sectors comprising what is globally referred to as the "fashion industry": footwear, textile and clothing, tanning and leather. For a general overview of the fashion industry, see the "textile and clothing" factsheet.

The footwear sector is notable for its company size – mostly small firms or SMEs –, high labour intensity and the extent of relatively poorly skilled female labour. In 2006, according to the [European Commission](#), the sector employed approximately 388,000 people in 26,000 enterprises (mostly located in Italy, Spain and Portugal, but also in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia).

Like the textile and clothing sector, this sector is faced with a series of challenges connected with the liberalisation of world trade. The last remaining restrictions on footwear imports from China were lifted on 1 January 2005, since when China and Vietnam have become the principal external suppliers of footwear to the EU. These two countries alone account for more than 60% of imports into the EU (by value).

For Europe, therefore, the challenges arising from liberalisation take the form of heightened competition from countries with low labour costs, company restructuring operations and a decline in the number of firms trading, falling employment and the vital need to improve Europe's competitive edge (technical product quality, fashion and design, brand image, etc.).

It would nevertheless be mistaken to believe that the sector's structural difficulties date back only to 2005; they existed long before then. The sector has been losing jobs at a rate faster than average for European manufacturing industry ever since the early 1990s. These job losses are partly attributable to investment in modernisation, but above all to the transfer of production sites to non-EU countries.

## **PARTICIPANTS AND CHALLENGES**

**Since the footwear sector is heavily exposed to international competition, one recurring topic of its sectoral social dialogue – which brings together the European Trade Union Federation: Textiles, Clothing and Leather (ETUF:TCL) for the workers, and the European Confederation of the Footwear Industry (CEC) for the employers – is combating “unfair” competition from third countries, particularly those where practices such as forced labour by prisoners and the employment of children still exist, and where trade union rights are not recognised.**

The establishment of European social dialogue in this sector can formally be divided into three phases:

- a) the setting up of a joint committee, in existence from 1977 to 1984, tasked with helping the European Commission to study the sector’s socio-economic problems;
- b) after a seven-year break, the establishment of an informal working group in December 1991, which is when joint texts began to be issued (the first one was adopted in 1993);
- c) the transformation of this working group into a Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee (SSDC) in 1999.

From 1993 onwards, the social partners’ prime concern was global trade and in particular the generalised system of preferences (GSP) established by the EEC in favour of developing countries. (The general objectives of the GSP, achieved by granting tariff reductions or exemptions for products imported from developing countries, are to boost those countries’ export revenues, promote their industrialisation and accelerate their economic growth.)

The social partners sought to insert a social clause in the GSP so as to preclude unfair competition from third countries (forced labour by prisoners, child labour, lack of trade union rights, etc.). This concern to ensure fair competition has existed ever since the inception of social dialogue in the sector: it is for example reflected in the 2006 Joint Opinion calling for EU origin marking of footwear imported from third countries.

In their first Joint Opinion on employment (3 November 1993), the social partners drew attention to the structural difficulties confronting their sector and called on the EU to take these into account in its trade, industrial, regional and social policies. In 1995 they adopted a Charter on the employment of children, which was supplemented in 1996, then updated in 1997 and expanded in 2000. This text constitutes the social partners’ main reciprocal commitment, in which they indicate their desire to work in favour of a European leather and footwear industry that is internationally competitive and based on respect for the interests of both employers and workers. The Charter (a “recommendation” according to the [European Social Observatory](#) criteria) forms part of a strategy aimed at endowing the European footwear industry with a “socially responsible” brand image.

This strategy ties in with an ongoing demand for the EU to take account of the specific nature of employment in the sector, as reflected in several joint opinions: the 1995 Joint Statement on employment, the 1999 Joint Opinion on reducing social and fiscal pressure on low-skilled, low-paid work, the 1999 Joint Opinion on the social impact of the Asian and Russian financial crises on the fashion industry (in association with the tanning and leather sector; see that factsheet), the social partners' contribution to the Lisbon Summit of 2000 and, lastly, their contribution to the social action programme of 2000.

## **OUTCOMES**

**The main focus of social dialogue in the footwear sector is to shape a socially responsible European brand image, especially via the Charter on the employment of children. In addition, the sectoral social partners take every available opportunity to remind the EU institutions of the structural difficulties confronting their industry.**

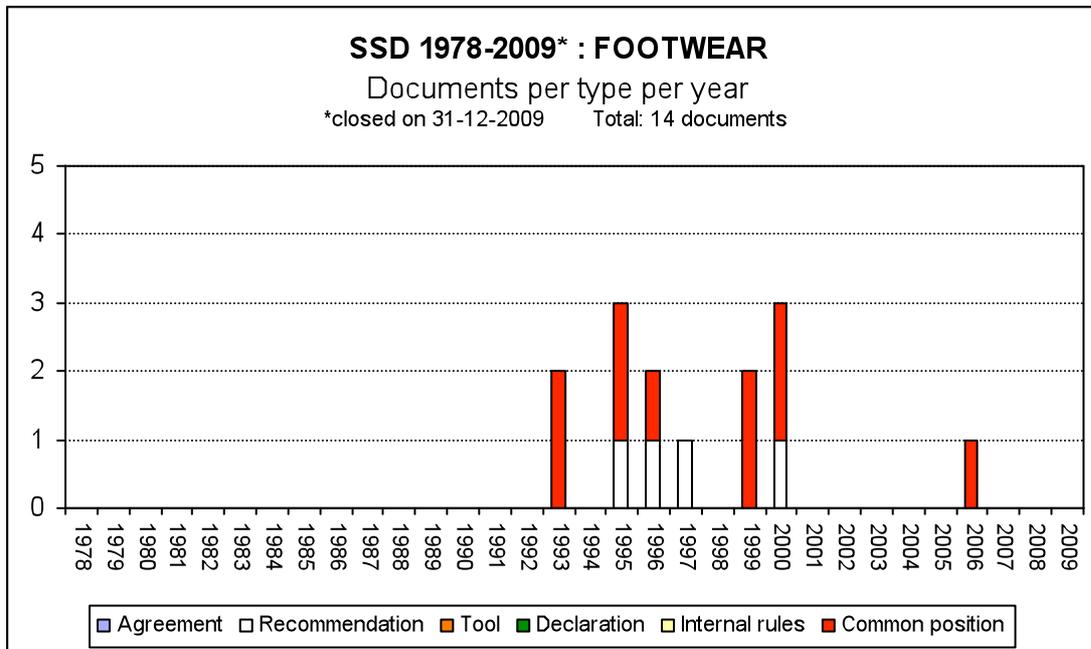
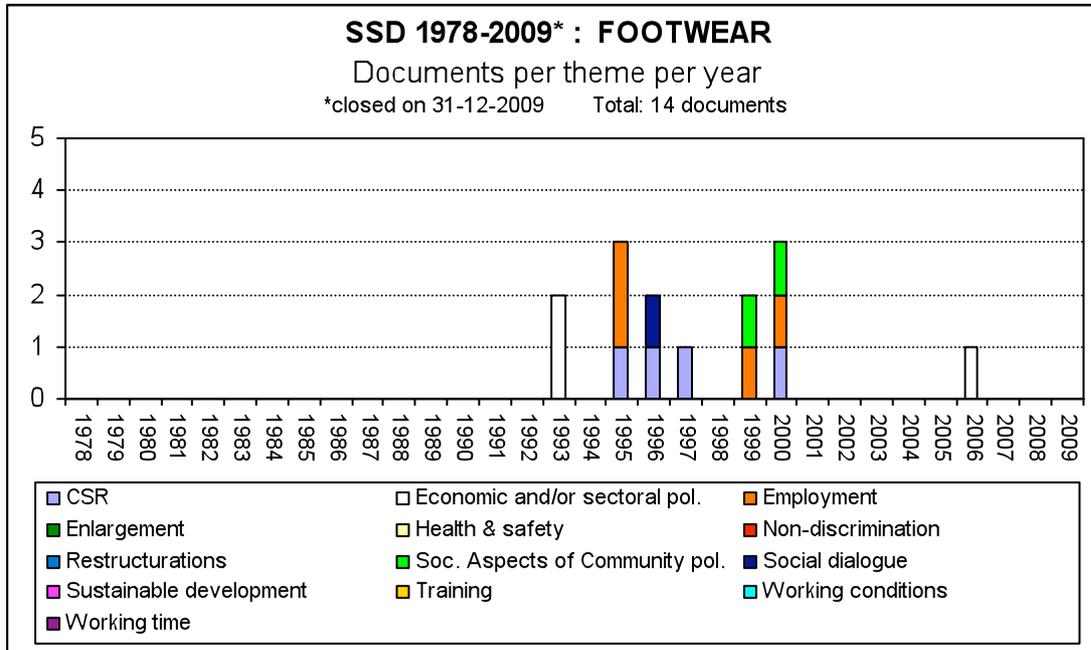
All the joint texts adopted by the footwear sector take the form of either joint opinions (“lobbying”) or recommendations (“reciprocal commitments”).

It is however worth noting that all the recommendations relate to the Charter on the employment of children: the initial charter has in fact been amended and supplemented on various occasions. Apart from the charter, social dialogue in the sector mainly revolves around topics chosen for targeted lobbying of the Community institutions: employment, the social effects of Community policies, and corporate social responsibility.

The sector’s strategy is fairly straightforward: shaping a socially responsible European brand image, calling for fairness in global trade and urging the EU to take account of the sector’s structural difficulties.

# JOINT TEXTS

The “footwear” sectoral social dialogue has resulted, since 1993, in the adoption of 14 joint texts.



Date	Title	Theme	Type	Addressee
26/01/2006	The EU must adopt the origin marking of footwear imported from third countries	Economic and/or sectoral policies	Joint opinion	European institutions
17/11/2000	Code of conduct . A charter of the social partners in the footwear sector	Corporate social responsibility	Recommendation	National organisations
02/06/2000	Programme d'action sociale: contribution des partenaires sociaux du secteur de la chaussure (letter) <i>(in French only)</i>	Social aspects of Community policies	Joint opinion	European institutions
07/03/2000	Sommet de Lisbonne: contribution des partenaires sociaux du secteur de la chaussure <i>(in French only)</i>	Employment	Joint opinion	European institutions
08/06/1999	Impact des crises financières asiatique et russe sur la filière "mode" <i>(in French only)</i>	Social aspects of Community policies	Joint opinion	European institutions
21/05/1999	Suivi du dialogue social sectoriel textile-habillement et chaussures <i>(in French only)</i>	Employment	Joint opinion	European institutions
21/10/1997	Charter on the employment of children – update	Corporate social responsibility	Recommendation	National organisations
13/12/1996	Avis conjoint des partenaires sociaux sectoriels chaussure au niveau européen au sujet de la communication de la Commission sur le dialogue social <i>(in French only)</i>	Social dialogue	Joint opinion	European institutions
13/12/1996	Child labour. A charter by European social partners in the footwear sector	Corporate social responsibility	Recommendation	Enterprises
16/11/1995	Statement on the Essen priorities concerning employment	Employment	Joint opinion	European institutions
07/03/1995	Charter on the employment of children	Corporate social responsibility	Recommendation	Enterprises
07/03/1995	Avis commun de la CEC et du CSE:THC <i>(in French only)</i>	Employment	Joint opinion	European institutions
03/11/1993	Joint opinion on employment	Economic and/or sectoral policies	Joint opinion	European institutions
16/01/1993	Insertion d'une clause sociale dans le prochain SPG communautaire (letter) <i>(in French only)</i>	Economic and/or sectoral policies	Joint opinion	European institutions