

WOODWORKING

Workers' representatives	European Federation of Building and Woodworkers (EFBWW) (1958) http://www.efbww.org
Employers' representatives	European Confederation of Woodworking Industries (CEI-Bois) (1952) http://www.cei-bois.org/

Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee (SSDC)

Informal working group:	1994
SSDC:	2000
Rules of procedure:	17 June 1994 and 12 March 2001
Work programme:	2006 - 2007 - 2008

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GENERAL OVERVIEW OF SECTOR

The woodworking industry has become increasingly prominent in the European Union with successive EU enlargements (Sweden, Finland, etc.). Having experienced a lengthy crisis period and then been faced with growing international competition, the European woodworking industry adopted a strategy of specialisation, diversification and sustainable management of Europe's forests.

The [woodworking sector](#) currently consists mainly of small and medium-sized enterprises. Over 3 million [workers](#) are employed by the 340,000 or so SMEs operating in the EU.

The forestry sector and the woodworking industry in the EU came to prominence with the 1995 enlargement (Sweden, Austria and Finland). The extent of forest cover in the EU-12 was in fact modest (around 25%), whereas Austria, Finland and Sweden all have a high proportion of afforested land (more than 60% of the total). In quantitative terms, the enlargement of Europe from 12 to 15 countries [doubled](#) the surface area of the EU covered by forest. Self-sufficiency in timber supplies rose from 55% in 1994 to 91% in 1996 (Agence Europe, 29 June 1998).

Today, according to [Eurostat](#), forests and other woodland areas make up 177 million hectares, or 42% of the surface area of the EU-27. 73% of this afforested land (i.e. 129 million hectares) was available for timber production in 2005.

The woodworking sector comprises activities ranging from furniture-making to carpentry/joinery and door manufacturing; it encompasses mechanical woodworking, sawmills, packaging, commerce and the importing of timber and its derivatives. The sector is distinctive for its large proportion of SMEs (owing to the family structure of most craft industries in the past).

Having experienced a severe crisis throughout the 1970s and in the early 1980s, and having then faced growing international competition, the woodworking industry deliberately invested in the introduction of new products and new manufacturing technology in the 1990s. Many SMEs have adopted a strategy of specialisation and diversification.

Today, over and above the issues of enlargement and trade globalisation, the woodworking sector is confronting two major economic challenges: the trade in illegally logged timber and its derivatives, and sustainable forestry management in Europe. An International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA) was concluded in 2006. On 17 October 2008 the European Commission put forward a ["forestry package"](#) aimed at preventing the sale of illegal timber in Europe. On 17 February 2009 the European Parliament's Committee on the Environment called for stringent regulation, on the grounds that between 20 and 40% of industrial timber production worldwide comes from illegal sources, almost 20% of which enters the European market.

Finally, it is worth noting that wood consists of 50% carbon; on account of the biomass and the humus that forms in the ground beneath them, forests are in fact a means of combating greenhouse gases.

PARTICIPANTS AND CHALLENGES

Health and safety, working conditions and sustainable forestry are the three principal strands of social dialogue in the woodworking sector. This social dialogue struggled to find its feet at first, but seems to have reached cruising speed in the early 2000s. The Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee brings together the European Federation of Building and Woodworkers (EFBWW) for the workers, and the European Confederation of Woodworking Industries (CEI-Bois) for the employers.

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Although European-level employers' and workers' organisations were formed in this sector back in the 1950s (in 1952 and 1958 respectively), it was not until 1991 that social dialogue - then still unofficial - began in two sectors: woodworking and furniture. This development came about when the European Commission consulted the social partners on the issue of wood dust (protection of workers against risks arising from exposure to carcinogens at work). The embryonic social dialogue was broken off, however, owing to differences of opinion on this matter. Only in 1994 was the social dialogue put on a formal footing, through the mutual recognition of the EFBWW and CEI-Bois as social dialogue counterparts.

An initial joint opinion, on sustainable forestry, was adopted in 1997. The social partners note in this text that the main cause of deforestation in tropical countries is the spiral of poverty, social inequality, demographic pressure, extreme debt and economic underdevelopment, all of which leads to uncontrolled exploitation of forests through the felling of trees for agricultural, industrial and infrastructure purposes, and through increased use of wood for fuel. They therefore call on the European Commission and the Member States to do their utmost to break this spiral, in particular by making available the necessary resources for development in these countries.

The adoption of this first joint text, which coincided with the European Commission's 1998 communication on sectoral social dialogue, led the woodworking social partners to set up a Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee (SSDC) in 2000. According to the rules of procedure of the SSDC, social dialogue was to be geared towards joint lobbying of the Commission and promoting social dialogue throughout the sector. So-called 'horizontal' (general) topics were excluded from its scope and were to be handled by the relevant umbrella organisations. The same applies to all remuneration matters.

Very soon after the establishment of the SSDC, a code of conduct was negotiated and then adopted in 2002. It relates to compliance with ILO Conventions Nos. 29 and 105 (forced labour), 87 and 98 (freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining), 138 (ban on child labour) and 111 (non-discrimination in employment). To this day, the code of conduct remains the only reciprocal commitment entered into by the social partners in this sector.

There followed some joint opinions and joint declarations on biomass combustion (2003), the sector's contribution to combating climate change (2006), illegal logging

and certification of wood (2007) and the use of energy from renewable sources (2008).

OUTCOMES

So far, social dialogue in the woodworking sector has developed mainly thanks to joint opinions on sustainable forestry, joint tools and exchanges of information on more specifically “social” issues (vocational training, health and safety, etc.), and its code of conduct on working conditions.

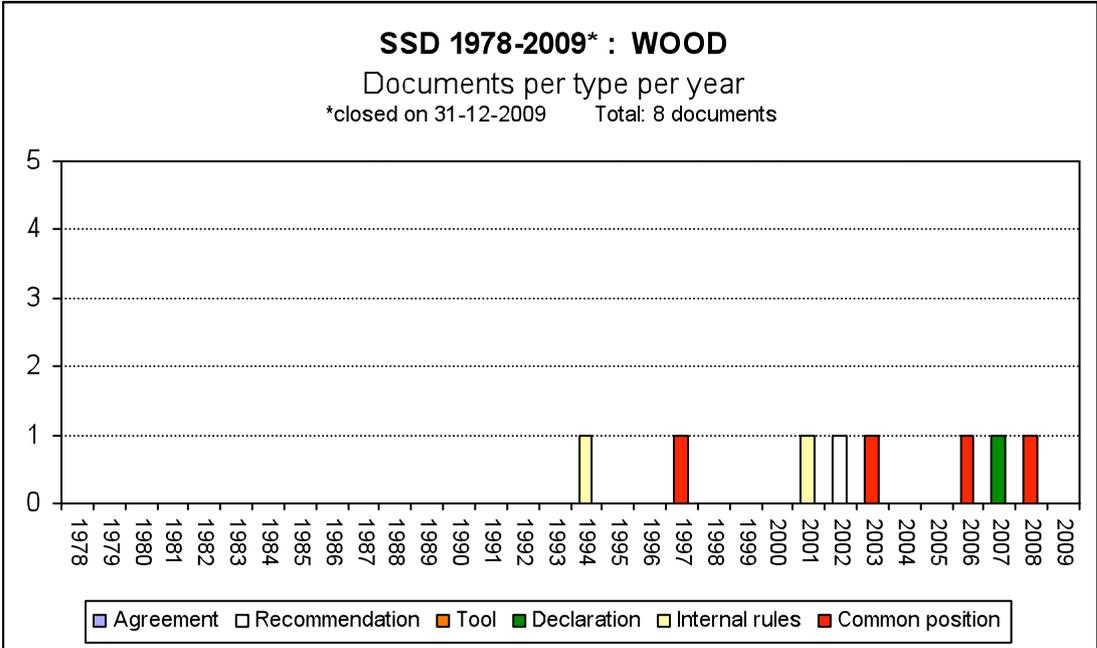
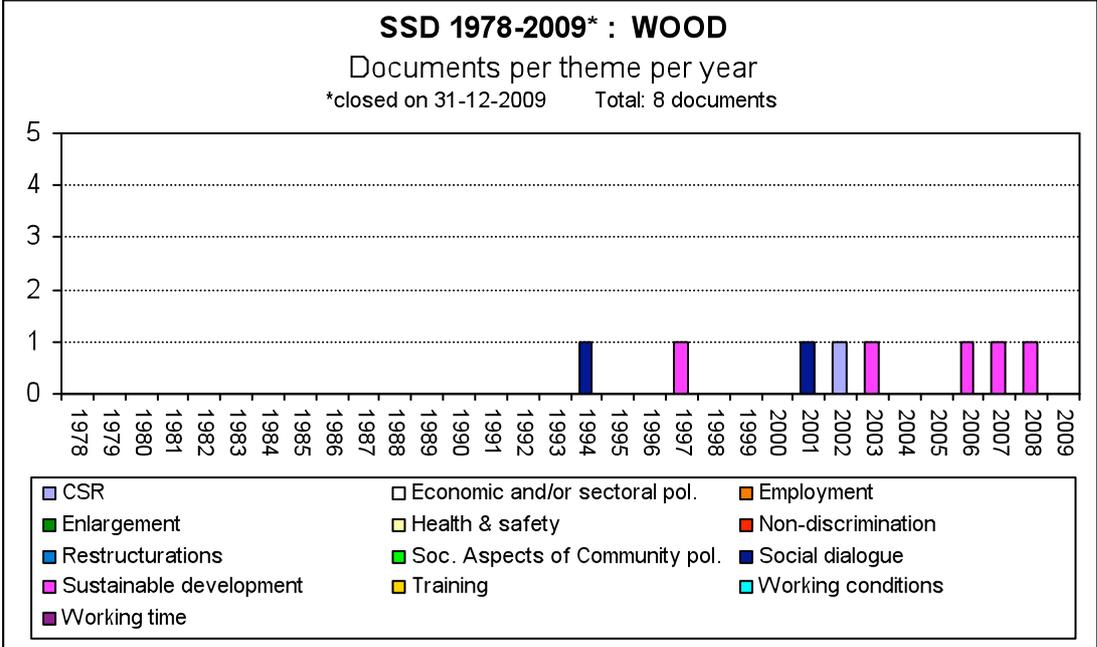
Both the woodworking and furniture sectors belong to the category of “sectors managing change in a context of globalisation”, according to the typology of the [European Social Observatory](#). Although at the outset this sector was little affected by European legislation, the impact of international competition has been severe.

The issue of climate change, a more recent development now being tackled head-on by the EU, is of considerable concern. Whereas the joint texts adopted in the woodworking sector relate mainly to the topics of sustainable development and combating global warming (i.e. topics which strictly speaking are not social ones), it is noticeable that a number of social issues are beginning to crop up in talks at the SSDC and in its work programme, especially those of vocational training (in particular via the [Valiwood](#) and E-Wood projects funded under the EU’s *Leonardo* programme: these are internet-based tools for identifying personal skills for workers in this sector) and health and safety (with the creation of working groups).

These topics are not subjects of collective bargaining as such; it is more a matter of designing joint tools and exchanging information. Thus the issue of workers' health and safety, which was a source of discord between the social partners in the early 1990s (with respect to wood dust), is still on the table but not with a view to joint opinions.

JOINT TEXTS

The “woodworking” sectoral social dialogue has resulted, since 1994, in the adoption of 8 joint texts.



<u>Date</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Theme</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Addressee</u>
10/06/2008	CEI-BOIS and EFBWW Position Paper on the European Commission's proposal for a directive on Renewable Energy Sources	Sustainable development	Joint opinion	European institutions
01/10/2007	Joint declaration of CEI-Bois and EFBWW on illegal logging and certification of wood	Sustainable development	Declaration	European institutions
24/10/2006	Social partners demand the recognition of wood-based products as carbon stores with a positive contribution to climate change	Sustainable development	Joint opinion	European institutions
13/06/2003	Biomass combustion beyond reasonable limits!	Sustainable development	Joint opinion	European institutions
20/03/2002	Code of conduct. A charter for the social partners in the European woodworking industry	Corporate social responsibility	Recommendation	National organisations
12/03/2001	Rules of procedure of dialogue committee in the woodworking industry (draft proposal)	Social dialogue	Rules of procedure	European social partners
05/09/1997	Sustainable forestry (joint declaration)	Sustainable development	Joint opinion	European institutions
17/06/1994	Memorandum of understanding on engagement in a social dialogue	Social dialogue	Rules of procedure	European social partners

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