

**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)

## **AGRICULTURE**

<b>Workers' representatives</b>	<b>European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions (EFFAT) (2000)</b>  <a href="http://www.effat.org">http://www.effat.org</a>
<b>Employers' representatives</b>	<b>Employers' Group of Agricultural Organisations in the EC (COPA-COGECA) (1958)</b>  <a href="http://www.copa-cogeca.be">http://www.copa-cogeca.be</a>

Representativity study: Traxler, F. (2007), *Representativeness of the social partners: Agricultural sector*, EIRO, Dublin, October 2007

<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/studies/tn0608017s/tn0608017s.htm>

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

<b>Informal working group:</b>	1974
<b>SSDC:</b>	1999
<b>Rules of procedure:</b>	26 April 1999
<b>Work programme:</b>	2007 – 2008 - 2009

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## GENERAL OVERVIEW OF SECTOR

**Agriculture is one of the sectors most heavily affected by EU policy developments: establishment of the common agricultural policy (CAP) in the 1960s; surplus production crises in the 1970s and 1980s; protracted reforms of the CAP in the 1990s and 2000s, etc. This is the backdrop to social dialogue in the sector.**

Around [9 million](#) European people currently work in agriculture (EU-25). The majority of them are self-employed or work on family farms. But the sector also includes a large number of seasonal workers, many of them low-skilled migrants. Undeclared labour is also very widespread, especially among seasonal workers.

The political events determining the history of the European Community have affected the agricultural sector more than others. The establishment of a common agricultural policy (CAP) as early as 1962 is obviously a case in point. This led to a determination to boost output in the sector throughout the 1960s, as well as the introduction of tariff protection from world markets (where prices were lower) and export incentives.

Production surpluses began to appear from the 1970s onwards and, in particular, the 1980s. The CAP, a victim of its own success, started to come in for criticism: it was too expensive, led to overproduction and distorted international trade. The various phases of EU enlargement (especially during the 1980s – Greece, Spain and Portugal – but also in the 2000s – central and eastern Europe) likewise had a major impact on this sector.

During the 1990s the CAP embarked on a lengthy period of structural reform (in 1992 and then 2003), and was the subject of intense negotiations and conflict at the World Trade Organisation.

Social dialogue in the sector has followed these developments and takes place against this political and economic backdrop. What is more, owing to the considerable degree of European integration in respect of agricultural policy, this SSD probably constitutes a paradigm for the setting up of a European system of industrial relations. Indeed, the [European Social Observatory](#) classifies agriculture as one of those sectors with a tendency towards European-scale industrial relations (Pochet *et al.*, “European sectoral social dialogue 1997-2004”, European Social Observatory). It is worth noting, for example, that protest action is almost always organised at European level.

## **PARTICIPANTS AND CHALLENGES**

**Historically, the European agricultural sector is the one that has been keenest on harmonising working conditions with a view to improving them. Social dialogue in the sector brings together the European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions (EFFAT) for the workers, and the Employers' Group of Agricultural Organisations in the EC (COPA-COGECA) for the employers. Agreements on working time were concluded back in the 1960s. The next topics to be addressed were training, working conditions, social protection, the combating of undeclared labour, early retirement, etc.**

We shall divide the history of sectoral social dialogue (SSD) in agriculture into four phases for the sake of convenience.

A “joint advisory committee on social problems of agricultural employees” was established as early as 1963. This committee was crucial to the implementation of social dialogue in the sector. It oversaw the conclusion of two major agreements: one in 1968 setting weekly working time in arable farming at 45 hours; the other in 1971 extending the first agreement to the animal husbandry sector. The joint advisory committee was institutionalised in 1974 in the form of a Joint Committee on Social Problems of Agricultural Workers (this joint committee, set up by virtue of [Commission Decision 74/442/EEC](#), was replaced in 1998 by the current SSDC). In 1978 it updated the two agreements on working time, in the form of an agreement serving as a recommendation. This was the “Agreement on the harmonization of working hours of permanent agricultural workers in the EC arable farming sector”. Although according to the European Social Observatory’s classification this is a “recommendation”, it is very close to what would nowadays be described as an agreement based on Article 139 of the Treaty (no such legal basis existed at that time). The text is in fact both very specific – “The normal number of working hours, excluding overtime, shall not exceed 2,088 hours per year (40 hours x 52 + 8 hours)” – and binding: “the social objectives set out in this Agreement shall be wholly achieved within four years and shall be implemented by means of such national or regional measures as are appropriate” (our emphasis). This document, which was subsequently amended on several occasions, demonstrates just how keen the social partners were to harmonise, and thereby improve, working conditions in their sector. Moreover, in their joint opinions of 1979 and 1981 they emphasised the social aspects of the European Commission’s structural policies (with reference to the Rome Conference of 1961) and called on the Commission to prioritise the human rather than the economic aspects of the CAP.

An initial turning-point came in the 1980s, on the one hand owing to the enlargement of the EEC to take in Greece (1981), then Spain and Portugal (1986), but also on the other because of the crisis caused by agricultural surpluses. As concerns enlargement, the social partners adopted two joint opinions concerning surveys and studies on agricultural workers’ earnings and employment. Given the large numbers of seasonal workers employed in the newly acceding Mediterranean countries, the social partners called for this new situation to be taken into account so as to obtain

more reliable data on employment in the sector (until then such surveys had covered only full-time permanent employees). We should not forget that seasonal work can often mask a growth in undeclared labour. As regards the crisis over agricultural surpluses, ancillary social measures were the main focus of attention from the social partners. Thus the 1986 Opinion concerning ancillary socio-structural measures under the common agricultural policy tackled head-on such issues as the setting up of an early retirement scheme, the development of measures in favour of young farmers, vocational training, etc. The 1980s likewise saw the introduction of a strong “health and safety” dimension into the SSD, through the adoption of joint texts on accident prevention (1981), safety requirements for the construction of agricultural buildings and installations (1982) and safety criteria for agricultural trailers (1984). A joint opinion on the social protection of agricultural relief service workers was also adopted in 1982.

Another turning-point in the SSD came during the 1990s, a decade marked by both a jobs crisis, the first major reform of the CAP and the effects of the GATT trade agreements. A succession of joint opinions ensued, relating to the social repercussions of the CAP reform, early retirement for agricultural workers, and the adaptation of workers’ skills to developments in agriculture. Throughout this period, and after the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty (1992) which put European social dialogue on a formal footing, the social partners sought to use the provisions of this new treaty for “the consolidation in Europe of a system of industrial relations that lends itself to a strong and effective social dialogue can constitute a fundamental contribution to a policy of renewal for agriculture” (Joint Declaration of 30 March 1995). The declaration put forward their priorities: training, a review of working time, working conditions and social protection, the combating of undeclared labour, early retirement, unemployment benefit for workers temporarily laid off, women’s work, etc. Following on from this declaration, they signed an important “Recommendation framework agreement on the improvement of paid employment in agriculture in the member states of the European Union” on 24 July 1997. This agreement contains provisions on paid employment in agriculture, the adaptation of working time, and working conditions (income, overtime, rest periods, night work and paid leave). With regard to working time, however, it is worth noting that the recommendation is less binding than the 1978 text, which laid down a deadline for implementation (see above). That is why the [European Social Observatory](#) classifies this text as a recommendation and not as an agreement, even though it is similar to one.

The fourth phase of this social dialogue began in 1998-1999, with the formal establishment of the SSDC and the adoption of its rules of procedure. Then came the adoption of a joint tool on vocational training and a statement on the employment of agricultural workers (2000) in the difficult circumstances of the “application of the Agenda 2000 measures, WTO trade negotiations, enlargement of the EU, technological upheavals, consumers’ new demands, etc.”. Another important document was adopted on 5 December 2002: the European agreement on vocational training. This agreement is classified by the [European Social Observatory](#) as a recommendation, even though it refers to the provisions of Article 139(2) of the Treaty, which makes it very much akin to an agreement. Like the 1997 recommendation, however, it does not set a deadline for implementation. Subsequent to this agreement, a joint tool on vocational training was adopted in 2007 (the Agripass CV).

Alongside vocational training, the topic of health and safety returned to prominence with the adoption of a Safety Manual for forestry work, as well as Instructions for spray operators (2001), a Declaration on best practices in health and safety (2004), a joint opinion on protecting workers' health and safety from musculo-skeletal disorders (2005), and a European Agreement (classified as a recommendation) on the reduction of workers' exposure to the risk of work-related musculo-skeletal disorders in agriculture (2005).

## OUTCOMES

**Social dialogue in this sector originally centred around the development of a fully-fledged European system of industrial relations, by means of reciprocal commitments. However, the many protracted reforms of the common agricultural policy also led to a new dimension in this SSD, namely lobbying of the European institutions.**

As we have seen, this SSDC has been much affected by political developments within the EU: CAP reform, WTO negotiations, Agenda 2000 and the succession of enlargements. The topics addressed by the social partners relate mainly to working time, employment, social measures accompanying the reforms, vocational training and health and safety (apparently with little attention to sustainable development).

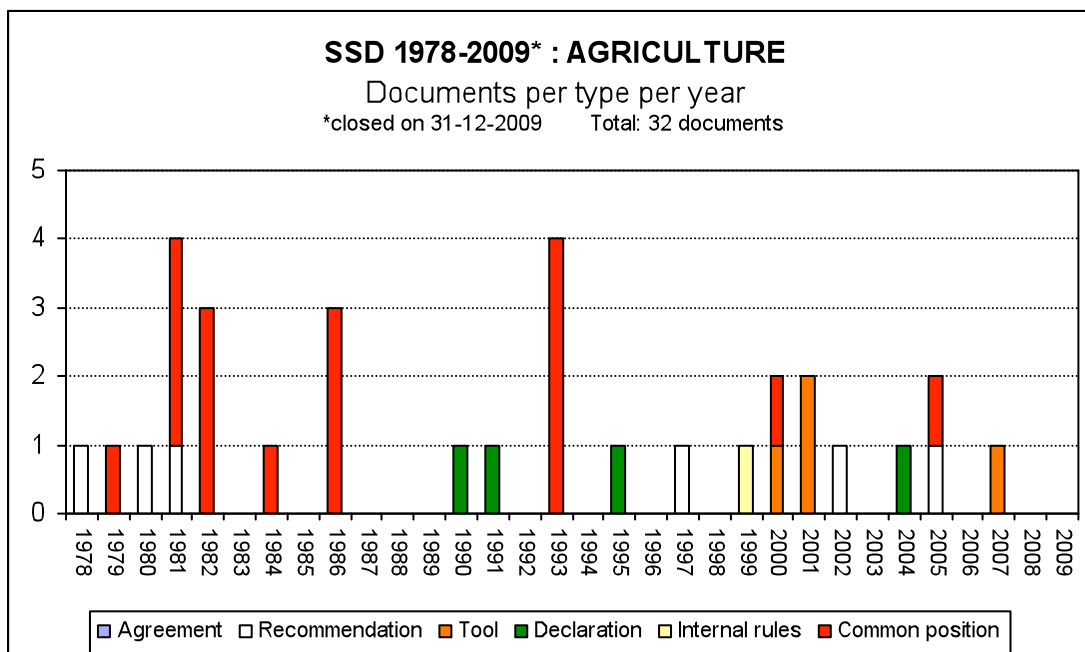
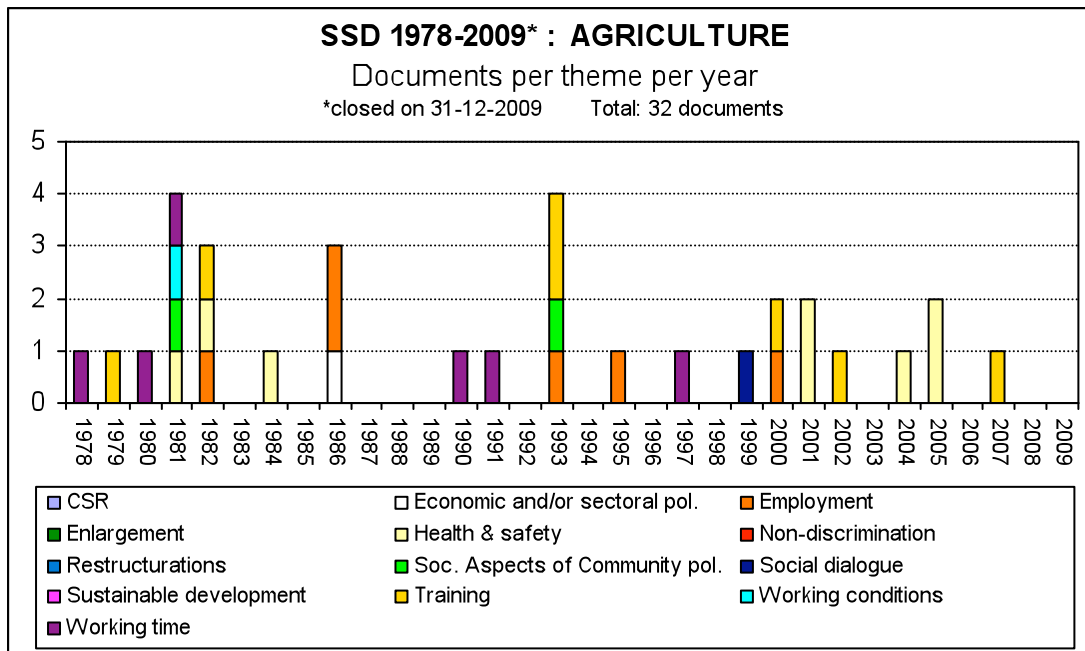
We have divided the history of this social dialogue into four phases for the sake of convenience. It would appear that the “development of a European system of industrial relations” was especially significant during the first phase (and to a lesser extent the third).

Paradoxically, and with the notable exception of the 2002 Recommendation on vocational training, there seem to have been fewer “reciprocal commitments” than tools, declarations and joint opinions since the formal creation of the SSDC.

We should not however underestimate the training tools, which have a real impact in countries not possessing such toolkits. One crucial outstanding issue is the monitoring and implementation of these joint texts at national level.

## JOINT TEXTS

The “agriculture” sectoral social dialogue has resulted, since 1978, in the adoption of 32 joint texts.



Date	Title	Theme	Type	Addressee
10/05/2007	Resolution adopted by GEOPA-COPA and EFFAT	Training	Tool	European social partners
21/11/2005	European agreement on the reduction of workers' exposure to the risk of work-related musculo-skeletal disorders in agriculture	Health and safety	Recommendation	National organisations
25/01/2005	Avis commun concernant la protection de la santé et de la sécurité des travailleurs contre les troubles musculo-squelettiques <i>(in French only)</i>	Health and safety	Joint opinion	European institutions
24/10/2004	Health and safety in agriculture - best practices and proposals for action	Health and safety	Declaration	National organisations
05/12/2002	European agreement on vocational training in agriculture	Training	Recommendation	National organisations
01/04/2001	Instructions for spray operators. Spraying technique, environment and safety	Health and safety	Tool	Enterprises
01/04/2001	Safety manual for forestry work	Health and safety	Tool	National organisations
13/04/2000	Final statement of the EFA-GEOPA/COPA conference on "Employment of agricultural workers in the European Union"	Employment	Joint opinion	European institutions
01/01/2000	White paper: Securing employment through vocational and continuing training in European agriculture	Training	Tool	National organisations
26/04/1999	Rules of procedure for the sectoral dialogue committee on social dialogue in agriculture	Social dialogue	Rules of procedure	European social partners
24/07/1997	Recommendation framework agreement on the improvement of paid employment in agriculture in the member states of the European Union	Working time	Recommendation	National organisations
30/03/1995	Joint declaration by EFA/CES-GEOPA/COPA on employment in agriculture	Employment	Declaration	European social partners
18/11/1993	Opinion concerning forestry	Training	Joint opinion	European institutions
18/11/1993	Opinion concerning training in agriculture	Training	Joint opinion	European institutions
27/01/1993	Opinion concerning social	Social	Joint opinion	European



	consequences of CAP reform	aspects of Community policies		institutions
27/01/1993	Opinion concerning early retirement for agricultural workers	Employment	Joint opinion	European institutions
29/11/1991	Additional clause to the Agreement on the harmonization of working hours (persons engaged in crop and livestock farming in Portugal)	Working time	Declaration	National organisations
19/01/1990	Additional clause to the Agreement on the harmonization of working hours of permanent agricultural workers in the EC arable farming sector (application in Spain since 1983)	Working time	Declaration	European social partners
24/11/1986	Opinion concerning ancillary sociostructural measures under the common agricultural policy	Employment	Joint opinion	European institutions
24/11/1986	Opinion concerning Community action in the forestry sector	Economic and/or sectoral pol.	Joint opinion	European institutions
15/02/1986	Opinion concerning the agricultural statistics	Employment	Joint opinion	European institutions
21/12/1984	Opinion concerning safety requirements for attaching, detaching, coupling and uncoupling operations with agricultural tractors	Health and safety	Joint opinion	European institutions
26/11/1982	Opinion on the promotion of relief services in agriculture and the social protection of relief service workers	Employment	Joint opinion	European institutions
26/11/1982	Opinion with regard to training for agricultural workers	Training	Joint opinion	European institutions
01/01/1982	Opinion on safety requirements for the construction of agricultural buildings and improvements to installations	Health and safety	Joint opinion	European institutions
27/11/1981	Opinion on the prevention of accidents in agriculture and the relationship between the elimination of technical barriers to trade in agricultural tractors and safety	Health and safety	Joint opinion	European institutions
27/11/1981	Amendment to the Agreement on the harmonization of working hours of permanent agricultural workers in the	Working time	Recommendation	European social partners

	EC arable farming sector			
06/05/1981	Opinion concerning surveys of agricultural workers' earnings in the EC	Working conditions	Joint opinion	European institutions
01/01/1981	Opinion on the social aspects of the common agricultural policy	Social aspects of Community policies	Joint opinion	European institutions
10/06/1980	Agreement on the harmonization of working hours of permanent agricultural workers in the EC livestock farming sector	Working time	Recommendation	European social partners
23/05/1979	Opinion concerning the vocational training of and cessation of farming by agricultural workers in the context of the sociostructural measures proposed by the Commission	Training	Joint opinion	European institutions
22/03/1978	Agreement on the harmonization of working hours of permanent agricultural workers in the EC arable farming sector	Working time	Recommendation	European social partners