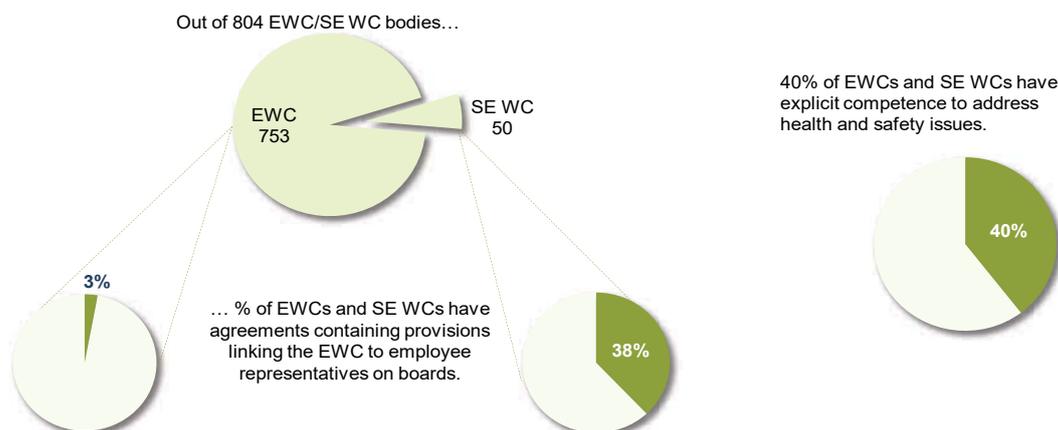


Articulation with other forms of workers' participation

Figure 4.6. EWCs and SE WCs with health and safety competence (% of total)



Source: ETUI, European Works Councils database (www.ecwdb.eu).

Joining forces with other employee representatives

Alongside the vertical dimension of articulation, which refers to the links between national-level and European-level information and consultation, articulation can also have a horizontal dimension: how can and do European Works Councils (EWCs) and SE-Works Councils (SE-WC) cooperate with other forms of worker representation, such as employee representatives sitting on company boards or health and safety representatives?

With regard to links with board-level employee representatives (BLER), some EWC and SE-WCs agreements in force contain provisions linking the EWC to worker representatives on boards. These provisions range from regular exchanges of information between EWCs or Select Committees and employee representatives on the supervisory boards, the participation of board-level employee representatives in EWC/SE-WC meetings, the EWC/SE-WC receiving the agenda and documents provided to supervisory board members, and, in the case of many SEs, to the right of SE-WCs to nominate the employee representatives on the board.

An openness to seeking links between board-level representation and the EWCs is more prevalent in SE-WCs (38% compared to 3% of EWCs), clearly because both forms of representation were the subject of SE negotiations.

On the other hand, a still relatively poorly exploited potential for EWCs is links to the networks of health and safety representatives operating in individual companies.

As will be seen in the next section, occupational health and safety representations (OHS representatives) are actually quite widespread in European workplaces.

Health and safety is also a well-established issue for workers' participation at the European level. At least 44% of the currently active EWCs and SE-WCs whose founding agreements have been analysed by the ETUI specifically include health and safety matters within the remit of the EWC. Whether or not companies launch explicit company-wide policies in this area, the existence of a legal corpus of common European standards (see next section) underscores the feasibility of cross-border cooperation on these issues across the company. Furthermore, whether or not OHS is listed as a topic for which the EWC or SE-WC has the right to information and consultation, the Recast EWC Directive strengthens the basis on which they can demand such involvement in any company policies

which have their origin at the European management level.

EWCs and SE-WCs can thus serve as a potentially useful and productive nexus between European-level participation and coordination and local action. EWCs can draw upon an additional, independent and institutionalised source of information about local H&S conditions by seeking contacts with statutory health and safety representatives. In this way, real problems, threats to workers' health, as well as ideas for solutions and initiatives can be brought directly to the attention of central management. On the other hand, national health and safety representatives could benefit greatly from information from EWCs/SE-WCs on the transnational dimension of the challenges facing them in their workplaces. These dynamics are just as important in manufacturing or industry, where workers are exposed to serious health and safety challenges, as in retail and services, where psychosocial risks are on the rise.

By seeking information exchange and collaboration with other employee representatives in the company, such as BLER and OHS representatives, EWCs and SE-WCs can strengthen the capacity of all workers' representatives' to build upon the European dimension of their work.