



For a better food future: Social Dialogue in the food and drink sector

In the food and drink industry, workers and employers have been working together at the European level for over 10 years, through the Sectoral Social Dialogue for Food and Drink (SSDC).

With EFFAT representing the workers in the sector and FoodDrinkEurope representing the employers, the Social Dialogue allows both sides of the food and drink industry to jointly give direction on issues affecting employers and workers.

The dialogue seeks specific answers by jointly identifying challenges, exchanging experiences, and proposing solutions through joint actions, statements, positions and agreements as a means to influence European policies and legislators.

Today's social dialogue is the key to shaping a more sustainable food and drink sector on issues such as climate change, digitalisation, sustainable growth of the industry, upskilling and reskilling of the sector, the impact of the Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine, and the Covid-19 pandemic.

We recall that European social dialogue is entirely interdependent with the social dialogue in the Member States and cannot be treated separately.

In light of the European Commission's review of the EU sectoral social dialogue the social partners of the food and drink sector provide our joint opinion on the suggestions.

Joint input into the SSD review

New funding tool (Objective 5 D of the proposition)

The SSDC Food and Drink is against the proposal of this new funding tool as stated in the current proposition.

For the social partners of the SSDC Food and Drink it is essential to recall the institutional role of social dialogue as set out in the Treaty (Article 152 - 155 TFEU). The EU shall promote social dialogue, while fully respecting the autonomy of the social partners and the diversity of national industrial relations systems.

Changing from the current system of organising the social dialogue to a new funding tool is therefore not only an organisational decision but also a political decision.

It is not appropriate that in order to hold statutory Social Dialogue meetings the social partners have to apply for project financing, which could be refused. Furthermore it would substantially increase the bureaucratic burden for the social partners.



Strengthening the link between the European Commission and SSDCs

EFFAT and FoodDrinkEurope firmly believe that if SSDCs had higher weight on European policy making, this would raise the commitment of social partners in the committees. Therefore, social partners should be systematically involved in the design of European policies, actions, and legislative proposals.

More regular exchanges between the European Commission staff and the social partners would help raise awareness of the sectorial-related issues inside the Directorates-General.

Therefore:

Coordinators network (Objective 5.3 E of the proposition)

It is essential that the link between the SSDCs and the Directorates-General are reinforced, that the outcomes of the SSDCs are known by the Commission staff, and that the need and added value of informing and consulting with the social partners is better understood.

Therefore, we support the proposal for a coordinators network, as it would allow social dialogue to be considered in all Directorates-Generals.

It is important that the Commission sets out how it sees the concrete functioning of this network.

Consultation (Objective 5.3 F of the proposition)

We support the targeted consultation of social partners to ensure impact but it is essential that such consultations are held in a timely manner before decisions are taken.

Clusters (Objective 5.1 A of the proposition)

We can see added value in the concept of establishing clusters on a needs-basis, in order to better reflect horizontal issues of concern for several SSDCs. It must however in no way replace the current existing structure of SSDCs.

New platform (Objective 5.4 H of the proposition)

A new platform could be relevant, especially if it will serve to update the database of social dialogue outcomes.

We will thrive to jointly evaluate, after a certain time, the results of the SSDC in the Member States. Concrete projects on the implementation of the negotiated results at national level could improve the interlink.

A joint reporting mechanism by social partners from the Member States on their sectoral experiences to the SSDCs could promote national cooperation and involvement in EU work.