

European Works Councils

A European works council (EWC) is a multinational body representing employees' interests in companies operating across Europe. It has the right to information and consultation. There are currently over 900 such bodies in existence in the European Union.

Legal basis

The legal basis for the European works councils was provided by the EWC Directive 94/45 EC of 22 September 1994, and Directive 2009/38 EC of 6 May, 2009. It applies in 30 countries, which are the 27 Member States of the European Union and Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

Role of the EWC

Pursuant to the European Directive, an EWC must consist of at least three members, up to a maximum of 30. It is legally required to hold at least one meeting with the central corporate management, at which the latter must report on the expected development of the company's business, its production, sales and employment situation, changes to its organisation, the introduction of new working practices, relocations, mergers and closures.

Rights to information and consultation

The EWC only has a right to information and consultation. Yet its scope of influence depends very much on the individual bodies involved. Some EWCs have developed into negotiating bodies. For example, the European Employee Forum, the name given to the EWC at General Motors, has concluded several framework agreements guaranteeing the future of particular plants.

Successful communication

Once an EWC has been established, it has to be able to perform its functions. The fact that the delegates speak different languages and come from different cultures has to be taken into consideration. First of all the language barrier has to be overcome so that participants can communicate at meetings. Communication is made possible with the aid of simultaneous interpreters who translate what is being said immediately into the various other languages required. This means that all the delegates can express themselves in their native language and can also understand what the other participants are saying. Professional interpretation provides the basis for an intensive exchange and ensures that the EWC can perform its functions.