

# Social Dialogue:

## What is it, and why is it important for you?

### What is social dialogue?

Social dialogue is defined by the International Labour Organisation as 'all types of negotiation, consultation or simply exchange of information between, or among, representatives of governments, employers and workers on issues of common interest relating to economic and social policy'. At a European level, numerous sectoral social dialogue committees already exist that cover a wide range of different industries such as hospital/healthcare, education, insurance, civil aviation and telecommunications. By looking at the impact of social dialogue in these areas, we will be able to build an understanding as to why it must be structured within the active leisure sector (which is a combination of fitness and outdoor sectors).

This action is now required because the EU Commission have decided that sport and active leisure should build its own structures in social dialogue and this work has started. The DIAL project is an initiative to build the participation of employers and national associations and European organisations from fitness and the outdoor sectors in social dialogue.

Social dialogue is important in terms of developing a strong relationship between employers and employees. It potentially covers all employment issues and can include areas such as the establishment of salary pay scales and employment conditions, cooperation regarding the management of health and safety issues, qualifications, further training and career progression, and social security concerns. In addition to this, it allows employer and employee representatives to engage in consultation with public authorities, policy-makers and governments in order to help to influence and shape future policies across a wide-range of policy areas – particularly employment policies.<sup>1</sup>

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1 'Social Dialogue', (2012), *Social Europe Guide*, Vol: 2.

## Who is involved?

Those most frequently involved in social dialogue are generally known as 'social partners'. This term covers organisations which represent both employers' and employees' including employer federations and employee associations and/or trade unions. Where social dialogue takes place between only those representing employers and those representing employees, this is known as bipartite dialogue, whereas, when government representatives are involved, it is called tripartite dialogue. In some countries such as France social dialogue is already well established as a procedure and in other European countries it is still at a basic level of development.

Depending on the level at which dialogue takes place, the number of partners involved can vary significantly. Within the European Union two main forms of social dialogue exist. The first is for cross-industry actions which focus on all sectors that are active in social dialogue, and will cover aspects such as macro EU/national economy issues, and major labour market concerns. The second, and which is the DIAL project focus, is based on sectoral social dialogue and examines the issues facing one particular sector alone. For the purposes of developing a strong and cohesive sense of dialogue among social partners in active leisure in the EU, it would be most appropriate for relevant stakeholders to place the majority of their emphasis only at a sectoral level. This development is the main objective of the DIAL (Social Dialogue on Active Leisure) project currently being undertaken by EHFA and EC-OE.

EHFA has taken the initiative to form EHFA-Employers to act as a European level representative for employers in the health and fitness sector. EHFA and EC-OE have already been identified as being European organisations that are representative of employers, business associations and individual companies in the active leisure sector. The basis for this is that the majority of EHFA's affiliated members are not themselves directly involved in collective bargaining in the fitness sector. Therefore, EHFA, and the other organisations examined by the Eurofound study, 'each within its own domain – largely remain unchallenged in their position as EU-wide representatives of the sector's employees and employers.'<sup>2</sup> EHFA-Employers will act as a Sectoral Employers' Organisation to represent employers in sectoral social dialogue.

## Why is social dialogue important?

Social dialogue is seen as a fundamental part of the European social model. In fact, Article 152 of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union states that 'The Union recognises and promotes the role of the social partners at its level, taking into account the diversity of national systems. It shall facilitate dialogue between the social partners, respecting their autonomy.'<sup>3</sup> The European Commission promotes social dialogue as an instrument for better governance and the promotion of economic and social reforms. In total, over 40 sectoral social dialogue committees have already been established at EU level and combined, they represent over 75% of all employees in the EU's labour market. It is now time for the active leisure sector to become organised and to determine its social partners.

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2 *'Representativeness of the European social partner organisations: Sport and active leisure industry'*  
<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/docs/eiro/tn1105058s/tn1105058s.pdf>

3 <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/areas/industrialrelations/dictionary/definitions/europeansocialdialogue.htm>

The Commission-recognised European employer's organisations sit on these social dialogue committees as representatives of their particular industry and they are consulted by the European Commission on policy issues which may have a social or employment-related impact on their industry.<sup>4</sup> The DIAL project will work to establish the employer organisations that will be recognised by the Commission for the active leisure sector.

The establishment of effective social dialogue in the active leisure sector is going to happen and the DIAL project test and develop the necessary structures. It has been found that the collective bargaining coverage of the sport and active leisure sectors at national levels is lower than the national average in 15 out of the 19 European countries studied by the Eurofound Study. On this basis, working to promote and to generate greater involvement of sectoral employers' organisation in social dialogue at both national and European levels, the DIAL project will provide the active leisure sector with strengthened collective bargaining coverage.<sup>5</sup> Through building strong social dialogue in the active leisure sector we can show European stakeholders that the active leisure industry has a great amount to contribute through its work in the EU across a wide range of areas including health, education, job creation and employment and further afield.

## How does social dialogue benefit employers?

The existing structures of social dialogue is proving to be highly beneficial to employers, employees, national associations and stakeholders throughout the European Union. As the focus for active leisure will be on the sectoral rather than cross-industry side of social dialogue, let's briefly look at one example of the work undertaken by in sectoral social dialogue at EU level.

### Example: Education

Social dialogue in the education sector covers the following issues: early childhood education, primary and secondary education, vocational education and training, higher education and research, and teaching, management and administrative staff.

The current work of the sectoral social dialogue committee on education is focusing on lobbying efforts in order to obtain a modernisation of the Professional Qualifications Directive (2005/36/EC), the launching of a feasibility study in relation to a European Skill Council for the education sector, a joint project aimed at recruitment and retention in education, promoting quality in education, strengthening higher education and research in the EU, and examining issues relating to work-related stress, harassment and violence in the workplace among others.

The achievements of this sectoral social dialogue include the following: Investing in the future. A joint declaration on education, training and research (2011), Joint guidelines on trans-regional cooperation in lifelong learning among education stakeholders (2011), and European Federation of Education Employers (the employers' representative) and the European Trade Union Committee for Education (the employees' representative) are signatories of the Multi-sectoral guidelines to tackle third-party violence and harassment related to work (2010)

4 'Social Dialogue', (2012), *Social Europe Guide*, Vol: 2.

5 *Representativeness of the European social partner organisations: Sport and active leisure industry'* <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/docs/eiro/tn1105058s/tn1105058s.pdf>

This example highlights the valuable work undertaken in the area of social dialogue and provides a brief insight into the work that can be undertaken on behalf of all actors involved in the area of active leisure whether it be at a national level or at European level. Given that up to four-fifths of national legislation can be influenced by the EU, surely it is of the utmost importance for the active leisure sector to have a strong voice at the table when it comes to its representation in the European Union and its dealings with the European institutions.

Some topics that are being prepared for consideration by employers for social dialogue in the active leisure sector include:

- Contracts of employment for its workers
- The effect of the working time directive
- Recognition of relevant qualifications and certifications
- Agreement of the main occupations in active leisure
- Improving mobility of workers for employment and education (Carte Professional)
- Health and safety at work (employees and customers)
- Anti-doping actions
- VAT and tax "benefits"
- European standards for quality assurance of facilities (CEN)
- Representative structures at national and European levels

The DIAL project will be producing its findings and recommendations at the end of 2014.

<http://www.ehfa-programmes.eu/node/12>



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