



“Future of the Workplace” project

Providing high quality, modern and sustainable jobs within local and regional government

Theme n°6

Well-being and Sustainable Workplaces

The Sustainable Development Strategy

The importance of local and regional government in achieving sustainable development was recognised at the Rio earth summit in 1992, which laid the basis for much of what has followed in the field of sustainable development. The Agenda 21 document, which the summit adopted as its plan of action to promote sustainable development, noted that “because so many of the problems and solutions being addressed by Agenda 21 have their roots in local activities, the participation and cooperation of local authorities will be a determining factor in fulfilling its objectives”.ⁱ

The EU adopted its first Sustainable Development Strategy at the Göteborg European Council in 2001. This was followed by the renewed Sustainable Development Strategy for the enlarged EU in June 2006. This defines sustainable development in the following terms: “Sustainable development means that the needs of the present generation should be met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

The strategy’s key objectives cover environmental protection, social equity and cohesion, prosperity and the EU’s international obligations. It sets out seven key challenges, with targets and policies to meet them. These are:

- to limit **climate change** and its costs and negative effects to society and the environment;
- to ensure that our **transport** systems meet society’s economic, social and environmental needs whilst minimising their undesirable impacts on the economy, society and the environment;
- to promote **sustainable consumption and production** patterns;
- to improve **management** and avoid overexploitation of **natural resources**, recognising the value of ecosystem services;
- to promote good **public health** on equal conditions and improve protection against health threats;
- to create a **socially inclusive** society by taking into account solidarity between and within generations and to secure and increase the quality of life of citizens as a precondition for lasting individual well-being; and
- to actively promote **sustainable development worldwide** and ensure that the European Union’s internal and external policies are consistent with global sustainable development and its international commitments.

The strategy’s policy guiding principles include the “involvement of businesses and social partners” stating that it should “enhance the social dialogue”.

The 2006 Sustainable Development Strategy foresaw National Sustainable Development Strategies to make progress at national level. It also committed the European Commission to producing a progress report on implementation every two years drawing on a report produced by the EU’s statistical agency EUROSTAT.

The most recent EUROSTAT report ⁱⁱ relates to 2011 and contains more than 100 indicators of progress. Of the 11 identified as headline indicators, three, those on the risk of poverty or social exclusion, on greenhouse gas emissions and on the consumption of renewables, are seen as moving in a **clearly favourable** direction. A further three, on real GDP per capita, on life expectancy and healthy life years and on

the abundance of common birds, are seen as subject to **moderately favourable** changes, and five, on resource productivity, on the employment rate of older workers, on energy consumption of transport relative to GDP, on the conservation fish stocks and on official [foreign] development assistance are seen as changing in a **moderately unfavourable** way.

Sustainable development in the local and regional government workplace

Not all of the issues covered by the EU Sustainable Development Strategy fall within the competence of local and regional government – examples of those that do not include the conservation of fish stocks or the amount of national development assistance.

In addition, some issues linked to the Sustainable Development Strategy, particularly in the areas of socioeconomic development, social inclusion and demographic changes, are covered in other sections. These include the employment prospects of women, the integration of migrants, the employment rates of older workers and the extent of life long learning. However, as well as issues linked to the environment and climate change there are some employment issues linked to sustainability, which have not been covered so far. This includes issues linked to employee wellbeing such as dealing with stress and working time.

It is also clear that, as in the rest of the economy, sustainable development poses challenges to local and regional government. In particular it is important to ensure that the change to more sustainable development is not at the expense of the employees within the sector, or of those who use its services.

More sustainable development offers the prospect of new employment –a recent ILO report estimates that between 15 and 60 million new jobs could be created in the “green economy”, of which many could be in Europe.ⁱⁱⁱ At the same time some jobs will be lost and others will change fundamentally. This will require a major effort to ensure that employees are trained in the new skills they will need. A change to more sustainable development may also require changes in working time patterns with a new balance of part-time and full-time working.

To achieve a “just transition” to the new model – one that does not come at the cost of employees, it will be vital that their representatives should be informed and consulted (see below). The ILO report, referred to above, finds “many such cases where social dialogue is making a vital contribution to greening the economy, ranging from individual enterprises to large-scale national programmes”.

Action in local and regional government in member states

Local and regional authorities in the EU have generally been keen to take up issues of sustainable development, often under the banner of Agenda 21, the document agreed in Rio. Many have joined the ICLEI (International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives), which was founded in 1990. It played an active role at the Rio earth summit and it continues to promote sustainability at local authority level.

There are 147 local authorities or associations of local authorities in the EU which are members of the ICLEI including 21 in Germany, 18 in Spain, 16 in France, 16 in Finland, 13 in Sweden, 12 in Italy, 12 in Norway, 10 in the UK, 6 in Denmark, 6 in Portugal, 5 in the Netherlands and 5 in Romania. Norway, which is outside the EU, has 11 ICLEI affiliated cities and KS, the association of local and regional authorities, is also affiliated.

However, this is by no means the full extent of local authority involvement in sustainable development.

In **Germany**, several regions (Bundesländer) have drawn up Agenda 21 plans for action and this is also the case at the municipal level where large numbers of local Agenda 21 plans have been agreed. There are no national statistics on the number of local and regional authorities in Germany, involved in sustainable development activities but a study on Rheinland-Pfalz in 2007 found that eight out of 12 of the regions larger cities had formally passed Agenda 21 resolution and three had developed detailed plans. In total 116 out of 236 larger and medium sized authorities had taken some sort of action.^{iv} The association of German cities, the Deutscher Städtetag, has also produced material for its members setting out how to implement a local sustainable development plan.

In **France**, although they remain voluntary, local Agenda 21 plans have legal support through legislation passed in 2010. By June 2012, 304 municipal bodies and other local authorities had been officially recognised by the ministry of sustainable development as local Agenda 21 organisations, making it easier for them to gain financial support. In total almost 850 local bodies were involved in local Agenda 21 activities by June 2012. In addition, local authorities with more than 50,000 inhabitants are obliged to present a report on the situation with regard to sustainable development before debating their budget plans.

In the **UK**, many councils have developed sustainability policies and in 2007 legislation was introduced which required all larger local authorities in England to draw up Local Area Agreements with central government, which among other things, covered environmental and climate change targets. However, following the change of government in May 2010, Local Area Agreements were scrapped in October 2010 and current policy emphasises local accountability.

In **Italy**, a body to promote local Agenda 21 activities was set up in 2000 and its latest report, for 2011, shows that 490 local and regional authorities were members, including 55.5% of the cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants. However, the report also points out that the number of members had fallen by 6.3% as compared to the year before, something it explains as a consequence of both internal weaknesses and external factors such as local authorities' reduced resources.^v

In **Sweden**, a report published by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKL) in 2007 found that 84% of local authorities were working with environmental targets in 2006.^{vi} In **Norway**, nearly 300 out of 430 municipalities are certified as so-called "Eco-Lighthouse" municipalities, which means that they have made a political and practical commitment on environmental issues. In **Estonia**, all

local government strategies and development plans must be based on the principles of sustainable development.

This high level of activity at the level of local and regional authorities is not surprising given the central role that they and their associations have played from the start. CEMR, together with the international body ICLEI and the Danish City of Aalborg, staged the Aalborg +10 conference in 2004 when 110 local governments (now more than 650) signed the Aalborg Commitments, intended to allow cities and towns to achieve sustainability.

However, the experience of Italy and the UK suggests that in local and regional government in some countries the concern with sustainable development may have declined as other problems – particularly financial – have become more pressing, or as political priorities have altered.

The range of actions undertaken

The range of actions that local and regional authorities have taken to implement their commitment to sustainable development is extensive, as the following examples indicate.

Birmingham City Council (UK): the city council has taken measures to eliminate work related stress and where this is not possible to reduce it. This has been accomplished through designating specific staff as Stress Advisers, through the introduction of a corporate welfare working group led by a stress champion at senior level, the introduction of focus groups, the development of stress risk assessments and resultant action plans and the delivery of stress awareness training for managers and staff. The council has also worked closely with the Health and Safety Executive (the official UK body dealing with health and safety at work).

Bristol (UK): the city council has encouraged cycling among its staff, providing changing rooms and showers, wherever possible and introducing a payment for those using their own bicycles for council business analogous to that provided for those using private cars (a “mileage allowance”).

Croydon Council (UK): the local authority has worked in partnership with a network of well-trained and independently operating groups to improve bio-diversity in its parks and woodlands. The groups include ‘friends of park’ groups, local nature conservation groups and charities. Although the council only invested limited resources, it was able to use the enthusiasm and commitment of volunteers to achieve more than it could have done alone.

Dobříš (Czech Republic): the authority has installed new red containers across the town, where small electric appliances that have been discarded can be dumped for later collection.

Erfurt (Germany): the city has set up an internet platform “Forum Erfurt” to enable the concerns of citizens to be aired and addressed in an effective way.

Hertfordshire County Council (UK): the council has worked to understand how public services might be at risk from climate change. After identifying gaps in this understanding, the council started to employ a risk-based approach. It now has a corporate Climate Change Risk Register and an emerging awareness of climate change risk across the whole organisation.

Hosnětín (Czech Republic): although small, with only 240 inhabitants, this local authority has established a biomass heating plant and uses solar panels.

Mainz (Germany): the authority has undertaken an eco-audit in the city administration.

Munich (Germany): the city is working to produce a development perspective for the city (Perspektive München – PM) which examines what the city will look like in 20 or 30 years time. The two guiding principles are sustainability, in other words preserving the quality of the city for the future, and city living, which is about the qualities of social and cultural variety, tolerance, economic opportunity and creativity, that emerge from a range of different people living closely together.

Orleans (France): the city council has introduced a new service which allows the citizens to recharge mobile devices (such as telephones, games consoles, computers and cameras) free of charge using solar power.

Rimini (Italy): the council has undertaken a campaign to raise awareness about the risks of asbestos and the manner of its disposal and to encourage the disposal of asbestos.

Seine-Saint Denis (France): the council's Agenda 21 programme of 136 separate initiatives includes several intended to reduce inequality, including a programme to combat substandard housing.

Stockholm (Sweden): the city's municipal vehicle fleet is now (2012) entirely comprised of clean vehicles. These are vehicles powered by methane gas (natural gas, biogas), ethanol, electric and electric hybrid vehicles.

Toulouse (France): the authority is increasingly encouraging its employees to use public transport rather than their own cars. There is a policy of using less paper, as well as effort to use less water and electricity. One way that has been adopted to use less electricity in the summer is that hours have been changed. For those departments where this is possible, employees now start and finish earlier (with working hours from 5.00 to 12.00 in some cases). This reduces the use of air conditioning and therefore energy.

Vitoria-Gasteiz (Spain): in 2010 the authority agreed a (second) plan of action for Agenda 21, covering the period 2010 to 2014. It includes 228 actions and 304 subordinate activities of which more than one third deal with social inclusion and one quarter with environmental issues. There are also initiatives to improve the governance of the city and the involvement of its citizens. Among the actions is the introduction of environmental good practice into all the buildings of the city's

administration. This is to go in parallel with a programme of environmental sensibilisation for employees and technical managers.

The role of the unions and employee representatives

Unions and other bodies representing employees have a crucial role to play in ensuring that local and regional authorities achieve their sustainability goals. They can come forward with their own suggestions; they can win employee acceptance of management schemes; and in some cases changes need to be negotiated with them.

In the area of the environment, a survey carried out by the union confederation the TUC and the Labour Research Department in the UK in 2012 found numerous examples of union activity in local government.

Union representatives in the public services union UNISON in a Lancashire council helped bring about a week long closure at Christmas. “We previously opened between Xmas and New Year but convinced them that closing for a full week would give big financial savings in heating and lighting,” they explained. In a centre in Liverpool, unions ensured that sensor lighting was installed. Unions have also been involved in working from home arrangements (Rhondda Cynon Taf, Wales) and schemes to promote cycling and walking to work (Hackney, London). A UNISON representative at another local authority explained that they are working on the production of a flood risk management strategy, the adoption of sustainable drainage systems, as well as making efforts to reduce dependency on fossil fuels to reduce the council's carbon footprint.^{vii}

A recent guide from the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) contains examples of trade union involvement in environmental improvements at the workplace in countries other than the UK. It also indicates how trade unionists can raise awareness and build support for environmental initiatives.^{viii}

In the area of public health, in as far as it relates to the employees of local and regional government, European legislation^{ix} requires local and regional authorities to inform and consult with employees or their representatives. Unions have developed policies in a range of areas related to the well-being of employees in local and regional government, covering, among other topics, working time, stress, bullying, harassment, third party violence, back pain, muscular-skeletal disorders and danger substances.

Conclusions

Sustainable development covers a wide range of topics in local and regional government, some of which are covered in other sections. However, in the two main areas covered in this document, those linked to the environment and public health, it is clear that many local and regional authorities have made progress across an enormous range of issues. It is also clear that the issues raised affect those working in local and regional government and that the involvement of employees and their

representatives can be crucial to the successful implementation of sustainable development policies.

Recommendations for social partners

1. Continue to ensure that environmental concerns retain their importance: with local and regional authorities facing severe financial problems, there is a danger that less priority may be given to environmental issues. However, this would be a mistake, particularly as a better use of resources could bring its own savings in the longer term. A longer-term perspective on sustainability in all its dimensions needs to be explored for local and regional governments as employers' and their employee representatives.
2. Ensure that employee representatives can play a full role in sustainable development at the workplace: without the active support of the workforce sustainable development policies are unlikely to be implemented effectively. CEMR and EPSU should explore issuing guidance to their members suggesting how employee representatives could be involved and giving examples of good practice which could be further explored and adopted at local level.

WORKSHOP CASE STUDIES

Norway: Changing working patterns in a sustainable way

In 2011, the Norwegian government produced a government white paper called "Joint responsibility for a good and decent working life".^x This established that working conditions were good for the majority of Norwegian employees, that there were high levels of union density and collective bargaining coverage and that the situation had improved in recent years. However, it identified a number of challenges: extensive part-time working; a high level of sickness absence; and some sectors suffering from social dumping – the use of non-Norwegian workers on poor pay and conditions. With the number of elderly people expected to more than double between 2000 and 2050, the report concluded that Norway needed more people working more hours.

This is particularly an issue in the area of health and social care, where only 31% of employees are employed full time. The figures for the municipal sector overall are full-time 49%, part-time 51%. As a result both employers and unions agreed that there was a need to increase the proportion of people working full-time, as this would help individuals develop their own competence, make health and social care a more attractive prospect for young people (who want full-time jobs) and offer a better service to users. As the majority of part-time workers are women this move might also result in a

more even distribution of childcare and household responsibilities.

In 2011, employers and unions in the municipal sector signed agreement on inclusion in working life, which has as its priorities: reducing the amount of sick leave taken; improving the inclusion of the disabled at work; and allowing older employees to work longer.

In the area of sick leave, one of the key concerns has been to reduce the level of sickness absence among women, which is more than twice as high as men's. Although it is clear that this higher absence rate is linked to the fact that women take primary responsibility for child care, the precise linkage is unclear and one reason may be that women generally have a much wider range of responsibilities beyond children, including in the home, at work and in wider society. More research is needed to understand the reasons better.

Measuring environmental impacts in the Czech Republic

The Liberec region, which has 440,000 inhabitants, has taken a particularly precise approach to its impact on the environment. It has started to measure its ecological footprint (the amount of natural resources that the region consumes in a given year). The calculation uses official statistics on consumption, which is converted to the area of biologically productive land and water required to produce the resources used and assimilate the waste produced. Resources and waste can be converted to a corresponding area of biologically productive land. The calculation also includes the area for the assimilation of carbon dioxide that results from burning fossil fuels, built-up areas and areas for protection of biodiversity. Provided they are sorted according to biomass production, these varying areas can be expressed in the same units, which measure the overall demand for natural resources in the region. This total demand is then compared with the region's available bio-capacity.

ⁱ Agenda 21, The United Nations Programme of Action from Rio, 1992

ⁱⁱ Sustainable development in the European Union: 2011 monitoring report of the EU sustainable development strategy, EUROSTAT, 2011

ⁱⁱⁱ Working towards sustainable development: Opportunities for decent work and social inclusion in a green economy, ILO, 2012

^{iv} Lokale Agenda 21 in Rheinland-Pfalz: Ergebnisse der Umfrage der Landeszentrale für Umweltaufklärung, www.umdenken.de/script/udb_anon/print/la21.pdf
Rheinland-Pfalz

^v BILANCIO SOCIALE 2011 –IX rapporto sulle attività dell'Associazione Coordinamento Agende 21 Locali Italiane, 2011

^{vi} Nationella miljömål en lokal utmaning, SKL, 2007

^{vii} Green Unions at Work 2012, Trades Union Congress, Labour Research Department, 2012

^{viii} Green workplaces: a guide for union representatives, ETUC, 2012 (available in Dutch, English, French, German, Polish and Spanish) <http://www.etuc.org/a/10376>

^{ix} Council Directive 89/391/EEC of 12 June 1989 on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers at work

^x Meld. St. 29 (2010–2011) Felles ansvar for eit godt og anstendig arbeidsliv