

Corporate Social Responsibility

CSR - more than a public relations exercise?

There is no commonly agreed definition of CSR but the European Commission has defined it as "a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis."

The "voluntary" aspect of CSR causes trade unions concern. The ETUC and EPSU believe that social dialogue and legislation are also a part of CSR. As the ETUC says, CSR "must be developed in the framework of the European social model and the common values of the EU Member States, including in the context of enlargement and globalisation" (see ETUC Executive Committee Resolution of October 2001 <http://www.etuc.org/en/>). Voluntarism is not part of the EU social model and there is little evidence to date to show that CSR as defined by the Commission has had much of an impact on companies' social and environmental performance.

In order to promote CSR, the Commission last year set up a EU Multi-Stakeholder Forum (CSR EMS Forum) bringing together employers, business groups, trade unions and NGOs, with the aim of promoting innovation, transparency and convergence of CSR practices and instruments, through:

- Exchange of experience and good practice between actors at EU level;
- Bringing together existing initiatives within the EU, and seeking to establish a common EU approach and guiding principles, including as a basis for dialogue in international fora and with third countries;
- Identifying and exploring areas where additional action is needed at European level.

The ETUC coordinates trade union representation in the Forum. A report is expected by mid-2004 on the results of the Forum's work.

Particular areas of interest to EPSU in the Forum are the CSR practices of public utilities and the measures adopted by central or local authorities to support CSR (e.g., through social and environmental criteria in public procurement).

EPSU encourages unions and EWCs to put CSR on the agenda of meetings with companies. Key issues to raise are: respect for EU and international standards; discussion on social indicators to monitor company policy; and agreements involving trade unions from all parts of the company in Europe and beyond are core issues.

The ETUC and EPSU want the Forum to make concrete proposals to improve the EU framework for CSR, such as requiring companies to report on social and environmental performance and ensuring the participation of workers and their representatives in CSR.

Links:

ETUC executive Committee Resolution October 2001

<http://www.etuc.org/en/>

European Commission CSR websites (which contains links to other sites):

DE Employment

[http://forum.europa.eu.int/irc/empl/csr_eu_multi_stakeholder_forum/info/data/en/csr%20ems%](http://forum.europa.eu.int/irc/empl/csr_eu_multi_stakeholder_forum/info/data/en/csr%20ems%20forum/)

DG Enterprise

<http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/csr/forum.htm>

DG Trade

http://europa.eu.int/comm/trade/issues/global/csr/index_en.htm

EuoActiv's section on CSR

<http://www.euractiv.com/cgi-bin/cgint.exe/1?204&OIDN=1505952>

Copenhagen Centre : www.copenhagencentre.com

ILO Business and Social Initiatives Database: www.ilo.org

- [Log in](#) to post comments
- [Printer-friendly version](#)

Policies

[Company policy and EWCs](#)

Document types

[Report](#)

[Statement](#)

[Papers and publications](#)