

WS26 – Protecting employees

Session 1

The Chinese vision

- Migratory / peasant workers who moved to the cities to work have few rights. As they are not registered they are easily exploited, especially women.
- NGOs have been active since mid 90s, especially in Shenzhen, with notable effects. The voice of the worker needs to be heard.
- The development and safeguarding of migratory workers' rights is critical in changing from a planned to a market economy. This includes minimum legal rights and independent alliances.
- China is interested in how Europe deals with problems of employment rights and globalisation. Europe appears to be loosening labour law whilst China is tightening theirs.
- Decentralisation is a possible answer to improving implementation of rights.
- There is an imbalance between economic growth and labour rights protection and foreign experience could be useful.

The European questions addressed to Chinese

- How are Chinese workers being affected by handling dangerous substances in production?
- Why has China not ratified ILO Conventions 87 and 98?
- Why are there no independent employers' and employees' organisations in China?
- Why are there no effective, decentralised civil society organisations or NGOs in China?
- What is being done to help women with migration and consequent family reunification, wage levels and other social issues?
- Does China see EU health and safety issues and employment initiatives (eg. CSR) as helpful or interference?
- What level of protection for accidents and illnesses at work is there in China and who provides it?
- Are the rights of migrants dependent on their prior registration in the household registration system?
- How far does Chinese culture influence the position of women in society, or is socialism/capitalism stronger?
- Is China a traditional society with a planned economy or is it more a socialist society?
- How far are the Chinese trade unions linked with political parties?
- How far are trade unions evaluated in their historical Chinese context?

Session 2

The European vision

- Social protection in Europe goes beyond wage protection to cover the legal protection of workers and other socio-legal issues.
- Europe works at 3 levels – national, intergovernmental and European – backed by a well established social partners network.
- The interplay between national and international is very important: different countries have differing legal and taxation systems and traditions, which makes a “social Europe” harder to achieve.
- Europe faces 4 major challenges – globalisation (which includes environment), an ageing society, increasing technological change and the need to modernise the social model as lifestyles change with the need for ever greater flexibility.
- The fear of globalisation, which includes the growth of other powerful countries, in immigration and in fixed term contracts, has led to the Lisbon Strategy aimed to guarantee better jobs, research and innovation.
- Migrants in the EU come from other countries, both from inside and outside Europe – the key issue for them is equality with national workers.

The Chinese questions addressed to Europeans

- With the new challenges posed by globalisation, what does Europe suggest as to how social conditions and labour policies be best developed?
- How best can we resolve the problem of the widening of the gap between rich and poor arising from increased capital flows around the world?
- In cases of conflict in social justice, what specific social model does the EU use to protect workers' rights?
- To what extent could religion and religious influence take over from trade unions?
- What plans does the EU have to review the comparison between the European Social Model and that of the UK/US, given the attractiveness of the lower costs of the latter?
- Does the EU have any joint proposals to protect the rights of migrant workers, both with the immigration process and with local workers?
- What plans do the unions have to attract more young people and to counteract the indifference felt by many?
- How can trade unions in Europe become more integrated across borders?
- How can we promote CSR to benefit both European and Chinese workers?
- Can the EU provide more information about how Europe developed political, social and economic rights?
- What lessons can we learn from the EU in bridging gaps in the protection against discrimination?

Session 3

The convergences between the European and Chinese society

- Increasing convergence in worker and staff consultation as the Chinese have been following European practices.
- Increasing convergence in strict health and safety legislation.
- Trans-national company standards have been adopted in many areas.
- Common interest in CSR.

The divergences between the European and Chinese society

- Implementation of health and safety legislation is weak and varies widely across China due to lack of sufficient enforcement authorities.
- Backlog of major health and safety problems affecting Chinese workers resulting from previous lack of adequate workers' protection.
- Independence of EU workers' and employers' organisations is not mirrored in China.
- Europe's effective civil society system is not mirrored in China.
- Lack of implementation of ILO Conventions in China.
- Setting up trade unions within trans-national companies in China is difficult; handling health and safety issues in such companies is an even bigger problem.



- In China migrant workers are treated totally separately from urban workers; in Europe, equality with local workers is the issue.
- CSR is becoming too commercially oriented as handled by trans-national companies in China, challenging its effectiveness, whilst the exercise by Chinese workers of their rights under CSR is also a major problem.



Session 4