

EBC position against the definition of safety-related requirements in Eurocodes to be provided by European execution standards

About EBC

Established in 1990, the European Builders Confederation - EBC - is a European professional organisation representing national associations of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises working in the construction sector.

The construction sector is of vital importance to the European economy. With 3 million enterprises, an annual turnover of around € 1,600 billion and a total direct workforce of 13 million, the construction sector contributes at around 10% to the GDP of the European Union.

99.9% of the European construction sector is composed of small and medium-sized companies, which produce 80% of the construction industry's output. Small enterprises (less than 50 employees) are responsible for 60% of the production and employ 70% of the sector's working population.

Background

Within the CEN system, CEN Technical Committee (TC) 250 "Structural Eurocodes" has the overall responsibility for "structural design rules" in the building and civil engineering field. If a CEN TC (for products, execution, etc.) has a need to use structural design rules, it is asked to refer to the relevant EN Eurocodes whenever it is possible. For the complete design and construction of buildings and other civil engineering works, the Eurocodes are intended to be used in combination with execution standards that cover, for example, concrete, steel and aluminium structures, special geotechnical works as well as field testing of soil.



<http://eurocodes.jrc.ec.europa.eu>

Execution standards have come to cover a wide range of topics, depending on the particular subject matter. A new requirement has arisen in CEN TC 250 for an “execution standard” to support EN 1995 “Design of timber structures”. As a result, AFNOR has expressed concern to CEN Technical Board about the need for execution standards more generally. EBC has been consulted through the CEN Construction Sector Network Core Group and is currently following up this topic.

Construction SMEs’ opposition to European execution standards

Different construction techniques and execution methods have been developed over time in different European Member States: such techniques are the result of historical practices determined by morphological, hydrographical and climatic conditions of sites, geological structure and exposure to natural hazards (including seismic risk). These variables have shaped the construction economy at local level and influenced cultural practices that vary from country to country. This explains why there are specific national and even highly localised practices - sometimes already standardized at the national level, with the satisfaction of the different stakeholders - within the same country in terms of generic safety-related requirements, but also concerning the choice of materials to be used in construction works.

Producing generic safety-related requirements in Eurocodes through execution standards would be a seemingly impossible task, since execution standards would most likely fail in covering every possible scenario and construction standardisation is not meant to only provide a list of national requirements based on local practices and characteristics.

Considering the fact that many regulatory matters concerning safety are currently dealt at national level and significantly differ from country to country, execution standards to be adopted at European level may cause additional costs to construction SMEs, without reflecting their needs. Indeed, the construction sector (and SMEs in particular) have not yet expressed any request concerning the development of European execution standards that, for the time being, are solely discussed in the framework of CEN TC 250.

The need for European execution standards could be driven by the desire to open up to an "international" dimension of construction market. However, while in the construction sector international contracts usually feature fairly exceptional types of buildings, the same cannot be said concerning more "conventional" buildings, individual houses and renovation works, which constitute the main business segment of micro and small enterprises in construction.

Therefore, proceeding with the development of execution standards without limiting their scopes to specific structural components seems neither viable nor advisable. In this respect, any initiative aimed at defining generic safety-related requirements in Eurocodes through European execution standards should not garner the support of any existing technical committee whose members are not comprehensively representing all the relevant stakeholders, with particular reference to SMEs.

Conclusions

Construction SMEs oppose European-wide execution standards for building works, whose need has not been widely identified or justified by all the relevant stakeholders in the field of construction. Moreover, construction SMEs object to the current tendency of integrating execution rules for structural works into standards that are not designed to provide such requirements.

CEN/TC 250, with respect to its scope, does not have the authority to investigate on the development of European execution standards. This matter should be discussed in the framework of the CEN Technical Board, aiming at duly justifying the need for European execution standards from a technical and economic perspective while addressing end user requirements.

Any decision related to the development of European execution standards has to be the result of wide and transparent consultations with all the economic actors concerned, with particular reference to micro, small and medium-sized enterprises.