



## Direct democracy in a medium-sized firm



**BELGIUM**  
LIEGE



### BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Based in Liège, Group Terre recycles paper, clothing and metals, as a way of carrying out work integration and financing development projects in the third world. It has also developed activity in logistics, construction, housing and social support. It operates 2,500 collection points and 20 shops across the Walloon region.

Terre started life in 1949 as a voluntary activity, but transformed itself into a work integration enterprise in 1980. The group now comprises 12 operating units, 4 of which are constituted as associations and 8 as limited companies. Group Terre ASBL is the majority shareholder of all of these subsidiaries.

The group currently has 434 salaried workers (400 fte) of more than 30 different nationalities. 409 of them have permanent contracts and 212 benefit from some form of public wage support. There are also approximately 50 volunteers. Annual turnover is €25 million.



### GOVERNANCE MODEL

Group Terre operates a system of direct worker democracy. All workers in any of the group's 12 operating companies are invited to join the general assembly.

The general assembly is the guarantor of the group's charter, agrees the strategic plan, appoints the boards of the operating companies, and agrees transversal policies such as those on personnel management and participatory management. Nowadays the company boards are mostly made up of employees, who supervise the work of the directors. The hierarchical structure of each company is organised according to its circumstances.

The general assembly currently has 108 members.

As regards participation, the general assembly has adopted a model comprising:

- The annual general assembly of workers (strategic decisions).
- Annual company meetings (company management and plans).
- Bimonthly thematic meetings (debate on societal issues).
- Monthly sector meetings (operational decisions)
- Monthly newsletters (information).

Meetings take place during paid time. The protection of individual workers, as regards respect for the employment contract and appropriate hierarchical supervision, is guaranteed by:

- free expression in all meetings;
- the presence of a third person during recruitments, evaluations etc.;
- the presence of a team member during the recruitment of managers;
- workers can take part in the general assembly;
- the collective evaluation of the manager by workers;
- the collective definition of annual objectives;
- trade union officials are brought in in case of litigation.

The participation model is assessed every four years in parallel with the social elections. The process identifies areas for improvement and concludes with a secret ballot of all workers in whether to continue with it or not.

Two trade unions are active within Terre. They represent certain categories of workers in the works council and the safety committee.



START DATE:  
**1949**



LEGAL FORM: **Association  
with subsidiary associations  
and companies**



N° EMPLOYEES:  
**434**



## SOCIAL IMPACT

- Pioneer of new approaches to social enterprise.
- Provision of 434 empowered, participatory and high-quality jobs in a context of lifelong learning.
- Work integration of disadvantaged people.
- Recycling of waste.
- Sale of clothes to poor people at affordable prices.
- Finance for social projects in Third World.



## STRENGTHS

- Empowerment of workers.
- Transparent flow of information.
- Sustainable combination of different income streams.



## WEAKNESSES

- Difficulty in raising capital.

**GROUPE TERRE ASBL**  
Rue de Milmort, 690  
4040 Herstal  
Belgium  
<https://www.groupeterre.org>

**R2G** RIGHTS TO GROW  
information consultation  
participation rights  
help social enterprises grow



The R2G project is co-funded by the European Union (agreement reference VS/2018/0009)

This document reflects the views only of the authors, and the European Union cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

