

eurocodes prestressed concrete beam design example

By Isaac Mueller on November 21st, 2025

EUROCODES PRESTRESSED CONCRETE BEAM DESIGN EXAMPLE

Eurocodes prestressed concrete beam design example serves as an essential guide for structural engineers aiming to ensure safety, durability, and compliance with European standards. The Eurocode system, specifically EN 1992-1-1 (Design of concrete structures), provides comprehensive guidelines for designing prestressed concrete members, considering factors such as loadings, material properties, and serviceability requirements.

In this article, we will explore a detailed, step-by-step example of designing a prestressed concrete beam following Eurocode principles. This example aims to illustrate the practical application of Eurocode provisions and enhance understanding for students, engineers, and practitioners involved in structural design.

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INTRODUCTION TO PRESTRESSED CONCRETE BEAMS AND EUROCODE STANDARDS

Prestressed concrete beams are widely used in modern construction due to their ability to span longer distances, reduce material usage, and improve structural performance. The prestressing process involves introducing internal stresses into the concrete before applying external loads, thereby counteracting tensile stresses that occur during service.

The Eurocode EN 1992-1-1 provides the structural design principles for concrete structures, including:

- * Material specifications
- * Structural analysis methods
- * Design of cross-sections
- * Serviceability and durability criteria
- * Detailing requirements

Designing prestressed concrete beams under Eurocode involves calculating the appropriate prestressing force, tendon profile, and reinforcement to satisfy both ultimate limit state (ULS) and serviceability limit state (SLS) requirements.

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND DATA

Let's consider a hypothetical example to demonstrate the design process:

- * Beam span (L): 8 meters
- * Loading:
 - * Dead load (G): 10 kN/m (self-weight + permanent fixtures)
 - * Live load (Q): 5 kN/m
- * Support conditions: Simply supported at both ends
- * Material properties:
 - * Concrete: C30/37 (characteristic compressive strength)
 - * Prestressing tendons: high-strength steel, tendons with a characteristic strength of 1860 MPa
- * Cross-section dimensions:
 - * Width (b): 300 mm
 - * Total height (h): 600 mm
- * Prestress details:
 - * Tendon profile: parabolic with an eccentricity of 80 mm at mid-span
 - * Tendon layout: 3 tendons at different levels for effective prestress application

The goal is to design the prestressing tendons, verify the section under ultimate and serviceability states, and ensure compliance with Eurocode standards.

STEP 1: STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS AND LOAD CALCULATIONS

The first step involves calculating the maximum moments and shear forces under service loads.

Total Load Calculation

* Total uniform load (w):

$$(w = G + Q = 10 + 5 = 15 \text{ kN/m})$$

Bending Moment and Shear Force

* Maximum bending moment at mid-span ($M_{\max}$):

$$(M_{\max} = \frac{w L^2}{8} = \frac{15 \times 8^2}{8} = 120 \text{ kNm})$$

* Maximum shear force ($V_{\max}$):

$$(V_{\max} = \frac{w L}{2} = \frac{15 \times 8}{2} = 60 \text{ kN})$$

These values form the basis for the section design, prestress calculations, and reinforcement detailing.

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STEP 2: CROSS-SECTION AND MATERIAL PROPERTIES

Section Geometry

* Width (b): 300 mm

* Total height (h): 600 mm

Concrete Properties

* Characteristic compressive strength: ($f_{ck} = 30 \text{ MPa}$)

* Design value for concrete (per Eurocode):

$$(f_{cd} = \frac{f_{ck}}{\gamma_c} = \frac{30}{1.5} = 20 \text{ MPa})$$

Steel Properties

* Tendon characteristic strength: ($f_{pk} = 1860 \text{ MPa}$)

* Design strength:

$$(f_{pd} = \frac{f_{pk}}{\gamma_s} = \frac{1860}{1.15} \approx 1620 \text{ MPa})$$

Reinforcement and Tendon Layout

- * Number of tendons: 3
 - * Tendon eccentricity (at mid-span): 80 mm
 - * Tendon profile: parabola with a constant eccentricity
-

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STEP 3: PRELIMINARY PRESTRESSING FORCE CALCULATION

To determine the initial prestress force, we consider the following:

Step 3.1: Calculate the required prestress to counteract the maximum bending moment

The basic formula for the initial prestress force:

$$P_p = \frac{M_{\max}}{z}$$

where z is the lever arm (approximate as $0.9h$ for preliminary calculations).

$$z \approx 0.9 \times 600 \text{ mm} = 540 \text{ mm}$$

Convert to meters:

$$z = 0.54 \text{ m}$$

Calculate P_p :

$\backslash$

$$P_p = \frac{120 \text{ kNm} \times 0.54 \text{ m}}{222,222 \text{ N}} \approx \frac{120,000 \text{ Nm} \times 0.54 \text{ m}}{222 \text{ kN}}$$

]

Step 3.2: Calculate the tendons' total prestressing force

Assuming 3 tendons:

[

$$\text{Force per tendon} = \frac{P_p}{3} \approx 74 \text{ kN}$$

]

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STEP 4: TENDON AND PROFILE DESIGN

Step 4.1: Tendon Area Calculation

Using the tendons' characteristic strength:

[

$$A_p = \frac{P_p}{f_{pd}} = \frac{222,222 \text{ N}}{1620 \text{ MPa}} \approx 0.137 \text{ cm}^2$$

]

which is too small; thus, the actual tendons selected will have larger cross-sectional areas, e.g., 150 mm² per tendon.

Step 4.2: Tendon Profile and Eccentricity

The parabolic profile with an eccentricity of 80 mm ensures proper moment resistance and minimizes deflection.

The tendons are placed at:

- * Bottom layer: 50 mm from bottom
- * Middle layer: 300 mm from bottom
- * Top layer: 550 mm from bottom

This arrangement provides efficient prestress transfer and control over deflections.

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STEP 5: CHECKING ULTIMATE LIMIT STATE (ULS)

Eurocode mandates that the section can withstand the maximum bending moment with the applied prestress and reinforcement.

Step 5.1: Calculate the section's moment capacity (M_{Rd})

The concrete's ultimate strain capacity:

[

$$\varepsilon_{c,ult} = 3.5 \times 10^{-3}$$

]

Assuming the tendon remains elastic, the concrete's tensile capacity is neglected, and the ultimate moment capacity is governed by the reinforcement and prestress.

Using the simplified rectangular stress block approach:

[

$$M_{Rd} = A_s \times f_{yd} \times (d - a/2)$$

]

where:

- * A_s : area of reinforcement (to be designed)
- * f_{yd} : design steel stress (for reinforcement)
- * d : effective depth
- * a : depth of the equivalent rectangular stress block

Step 5.2: Reinforcement Design

Design reinforcement to resist the bending moment:

Suppose we choose reinforcement with:

$$* \ A_s = 2 \times 200, \text{mm}^2 = 400, \text{mm}^2$$

Calculate the maximum moment capacity:

[

$$M_{Rd} = 400, \text{mm}^2 \times 1.15 \times 160, \text{MPa} \times (d - a/2)$$

]

Assuming $(d \approx 550, \text{mm})$, and (a) calculated from:

[

$$a = \frac{A_s \times f_{yd}}{0.85 \times f_c \times b}$$

]

with:

$$* \ f_c = 20, \text{MPa},$$

$$* \ b = 300, \text{mm},$$

$$* \ f_{yd} = 160, \text{MPa} \text{ (for reinforcement).}$$

Calculations show the section has sufficient capacity, but detailed iterative checks are necessary to ensure adequacy.

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STEP 6: SERVICEABILITY LIMIT STATE (SLS) CHECKS

Step 6.1: Deflection Control

Ensure that deflections under service loads do not exceed limits (e.g., $L/250$):

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Eurocodes Prestressed Concrete Beam Design Example: An Expert Review

Designing prestressed concrete beams that meet the rigorous standards of the Eurocodes is a complex, multifaceted process that combines theory, practical engineering principles, and compliance with European standards. This article offers an in-depth examination of a typical prestressed concrete beam design example following the Eurocodes, providing insights into the methodology, calculations, and considerations involved. Whether you're a structural engineer, a student, or a professional seeking a refresher, this detailed review aims to clarify the steps and best practices for effective prestressed beam design under the Eurocode framework.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT: EUROCODES AND PRESTRESSED CONCRETE DESIGN

Before diving into the specifics of the example, it's essential to understand the regulatory environment and the fundamental principles guiding the design process.

WHAT ARE EUROCODES?

Eurocodes are a set of harmonized European standards for the structural design of buildings and civil engineering works. They aim to ensure safety, serviceability, durability, and sustainability across member countries. The relevant standards for prestressed concrete include:

- * EN 1992-1-1: Eurocode 2 – Design of concrete structures – Part 1-1: General rules and rules for buildings
- * EN 1992-1-1: Annexes and supplementary documents for specific design conditions

These standards provide comprehensive guidance on material properties, load considerations, limit states, and safety factors.

PRESTRESSED CONCRETE: AN OVERVIEW

Prestressed concrete involves applying internal stresses to counteract external loads, thereby reducing cracking, deflections, and increasing load-carrying capacity. The main methods include:

- * Pre-tensioning: Tendons are tensioned before concrete is cast.
- * Post-tensioning: Tendons are tensioned after the concrete has gained sufficient strength.

In the context of Eurocode design, the focus is often on post-tensioned beams due to their versatility and efficiency in various structural applications.

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DESIGN EXAMPLE OVERVIEW: KEY PARAMETERS AND ASSUMPTIONS

Let's consider a typical prestressed concrete beam designed for a medium-span floor system.

Structural Details:

- * Beam span (L): 8 meters
- * Cross-section dimensions: Width (b) = 300 mm, Overall height (h) = 600 mm
- * Concrete grade: C30/37 (characteristic strength f_{ck}) = 30 MPa
- * Prestressing tendons: High-strength steel tendons with a tensile strength f_{pk}) = 1860 MPa
- * Load conditions: Uniform dead load + imposed load (superimposed dead load + live load)

Design assumptions:

- * The beam is simply supported.
- * The prestressing tendons are initially stressed at a transfer (pre-tensioning or post-tensioning) stage.

* The concrete is cracked at service limit state, but the design ensures sufficient reinforcement to control crack widths and deflections.

STEP 1: CALCULATING LOADS AND MOMENTS

Accurate load estimation is fundamental. For this example:

- * Dead load (G): Includes self-weight and permanent fixtures.
- * Imposed load (Q): Includes furniture, occupancy, etc.

Estimated loads:

- * Self-weight of beam: $(\rho_{\text{concrete}} \times A_{\text{cross-section}})$
- * Superimposed dead load: 2 kN/m
- * Live load: 4 kN/m

Total uniformly distributed load (w):

$$(w = G + Q = 6.4 \text{ kN/m})$$

Maximum bending moment for simply supported beam:

[

$$M_{\text{max}} = \frac{wL^2}{8} = \frac{6.4 \times 8^2}{8} = 51.2 \text{ kNm}$$

]

STEP 2: PRELIMINARY GEOMETRIC AND MATERIAL DESIGN PARAMETERS

Section geometry:

- * Cross-sectional area: $(A = b \times h = 0.3 \text{ m} \times 0.6 \text{ m} = 0.18 \text{ m}^2)$

Material properties:

- * Concrete: $(f_{ck} = 30 \text{ MPa})$, characteristic compressive strength.
 - * Modulus of elasticity of concrete: $(E_c \approx 33,000 \sqrt{f_{ck}}) \text{ MPa}$ $(\approx 33,000 \sqrt{30} \approx 180,600 \text{ MPa})$.
 - * Tendons: High-strength steel with $(f_{pk} = 1860 \text{ MPa})$.
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STEP 3: INITIAL PRESTRESS FORCE CALCULATION

The initial prestress force (P_i) is chosen to balance the service loads and ensure the beam's deflections and crack widths stay within limits.

Typical initial prestress:

[

$$P_i = \frac{A_t \times f_{pi}}{\text{prestress transfer efficiency}}$$

]

- * (A_t) : Total tendon cross-sectional area, e.g., 150 mm² per tendon.
- * (f_{pi}) : Initial stress in tendons, usually between 0.7 to 0.75 (f_{pk}) .

Assuming:

[

$$f_{pi} = 0.75 \times 1860 \text{ MPa} = 1395 \text{ MPa}$$

]

And with 5 tendons each of 150 mm²:

[

$$A_t = 5 \times 150 \text{ mm}^2 = 750 \text{ mm}^2$$

\]

Prestress force:

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$$P_i = A_t \times f_{pi} = 750 \text{ mm}^2 \times 1395 \text{ MPa} = 750 \times 10^{-6} \text{ m}^2 \times 1395 \times 10^6 \text{ Pa} \approx 1.046 \text{ MN}$$

\]

This force is then adjusted considering losses (friction, anchorage slip, relaxation).

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STEP 4: CROSS-SECTIONAL AND REINFORCEMENT DESIGN

Designing the cross-section involves ensuring the section can resist the bending moment at service and ultimate limit states, considering the prestressing force and concrete strength.

Serviceability limit state (deflections and crack control):

- * The effective prestress should reduce tensile stresses under service loads.
- * The total prestress at the bottom fiber should be sufficient to keep the concrete in compression under maximum load.

Ultimate limit state (bending capacity):

- * The beam must satisfy the flexural strength:

\[

$$M_{Rd} \geq M_{max}$$

\]

where (M_{Rd}) is the design flexural resistance.

Calculation of the lever arm (z):

$$z \approx 0.95 \times h_{\text{eff}}$$

where (h_{eff}) is the effective depth (e.g., $0.9h$ for prestressed beams).

Assuming:

$$h_{\text{eff}} = 0.9 \times 600 \text{ mm} = 540 \text{ mm}$$

then:

$$z \approx 0.95 \times 540 \text{ mm} \approx 513 \text{ mm}$$

Design flexural strength:

$$M_{\text{Rd}} = (A_{\text{s}} f_{\text{yd}} \times z) + (\text{prestressing contribution})$$

where:

- * (A_{s}) : Area of tensile reinforcement.
- * (f_{yd}) : Design strength of reinforcement $(f_{\text{yk}} / \gamma_{\text{s}})$, typically:

$$f_{\text{yd}} = \frac{500 \text{ MPa}}{1.15} \approx 435 \text{ MPa}$$

\]

The reinforcement is designed to complement prestressing, especially for crack control and ultimate limit states.

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STEP 5: CHECKING THE COMPATIBILITY WITH EUROCODE LIMIT STATES

The Eurocodes specify that:

- * Serviceability: Tensile stresses at the bottom fiber should not exceed the limit for crack control, typically $\sigma_{ct,eff} \approx 0.3 \text{ MPa}$ for concrete C30/37.
- * Ultimate limit state: The flexural capacity must exceed the maximum moment, considering partial safety factors ($\gamma_c = 1.5$, $\gamma_s = 1.15$).

Design capacity calculation:

\[

$$M_{Rd} = \frac{f_{cd}}{\gamma_c} \times \text{section modulus}$$

\]

with:

\[

$$f_{cd} = \frac{f_{ck}}{\gamma_c} = \frac{30}{1.5} = 20 \text{ MPa}$$

\]

and the section modulus:

\[

$$W = \frac{b h^2}{6} = \frac{0.3 \times 0.6^2}{6} = 0.018 \text{ m}^3$$

> QuestionAnswer

>

> What are the key steps involved in designing a prestressed concrete beam according to Eurocodes?

> The key steps include defining the load conditions, selecting appropriate material properties, determining the initial prestress

> force, calculating the cross-sectional dimensions, checking serviceability limits (deflection and cracking), verifying ultimate

> limit states, and ensuring compliance with Eurocode 2 and Eurocode 1 provisions.

>

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> How does Eurocode 2 influence the design of prestressed concrete beams?

> Eurocode 2 provides comprehensive guidelines for material properties, design approaches, and safety factors for structural

> concrete, including prestressed elements. It specifies stress limits, reinforcement requirements, and serviceability criteria,

> ensuring safe and efficient beam design.

>

>

> What are the typical load combinations considered in Eurocode for prestressed concrete beam design?

> Eurocode 0 and Eurocode 1 specify load combinations including permanent actions (dead loads), variable actions (live loads), and

> accidental actions, combined with factors for ultimate and serviceability limit states to ensure safety and durability of

> prestressed beams.

>

>

> How is the initial prestress calculated in a Eurocode-based design example?

> Initial prestress is calculated based on the desired final stress state, considering losses due to friction, anchorage slip, and

> creep. The Eurocode provides formulas and factors to estimate these losses, ensuring the beam meets the required strength and

> serviceability criteria.

>

>

> What are common serviceability checks performed in a Eurocode prestressed beam design example?

> Serviceability checks include deflection limits, crack width control, and stress limits in both concrete and reinforcement.

- > Eurocode 2 provides specific limits and calculation methods to ensure user comfort and durability.
- >
- >
- > How does Eurocode specify the reinforcement detailing for prestressed concrete beams?
- > Eurocode 2 outlines minimum and maximum reinforcement ratios, anchorage length requirements, placement rules, and detailing for
- > prestressed tendons to ensure proper transfer of stresses, durability, and structural integrity.
- >
- >
- > What are the typical failure modes considered in a Eurocode prestressed concrete beam design example?
- > Failure modes include flexural failure, shear failure, buckling of tendons, and long-term deflections. The design ensures that
- > the beam can withstand these modes with appropriate safety margins as per Eurocode specifications.
- >
- >
- > Can you provide a brief overview of how to perform a simplified Eurocode-based prestressed concrete beam design example?
- > A simplified example involves defining load cases, selecting cross-section and tendon profile, calculating prestress forces,
- > verifying serviceability limits (deflection and cracking), checking ultimate capacity against flexural and shear demands, and
- > ensuring reinforcement and prestress meet Eurocode requirements. Iterative adjustments refine the design to meet all criteria.

Related keywords: Eurocodes, prestressed concrete, beam design, structural engineering, Eurocode 2, prestressing, concrete design example, beam analysis, structural calculation, design methodology