

SOCIAL AGENDA

Making our workplaces safer

How the EU helps improving
health and safety standards



Health and safety at work, particularly issues relating to accidents at work are one of the most important areas of action of the European Union's social policy. The long-standing commitment to improve working conditions for European workers dates from over half a century ago, and has been instrumental in reducing the number of accidents at work and making our workplaces healthier and safer over the years. Statistics show that the number of accidents at work in the EU decreased by more than 17% between 1995 and 2005. Fatal accidents decreased even more markedly over the same period, by over 35%. Good news? Undoubtedly. However, the same statistics also tell us that every year 5 720 people still die in the European Union as a consequence of work-related accidents. Besides that, the International Labour Organisation estimates that an additional 159,500 workers in the EU die every year from occupational diseases. Taking both figures into consideration, it is estimated that every three-and-a-half minutes somebody in the EU dies from work-related causes.

“Every year in the European Union 5 720 people still die as a consequence of work-related accidents”

That is why a sustainable and durable reduction in the number of accidents at work and occupational diseases is the prime objective of EU policies in the field of health and safety at work. In its communication entitled “Improving quality and productivity at work: Community strategy 2007–2012 on health and safety at work” the Commission has proposed the ambitious goal of achieving, by 2012, a 25 % reduction in the total incidence rate of accidents at work in the EU-27. This is to

be achieved through the creation of national strategies targeting the most common risks and the most vulnerable sectors of activity, enterprises and workers.

In this edition's "Special feature", which begins on page 15, we take a closer look at the ways in which the EU is working to make our workplaces safer and healthier. One article looks at the overall strategy, while others focus on aspects such as the prevention of specific injuries (for instance needles) and initiatives helping to ensure that health and safety legislation is properly understood and implemented in the workplace.

Elsewhere in the magazine we examine the issue of so-called professional gender segregation.

The tendency for women – and men – to end up in certain jobs or sectors is a powerful factor influencing the gender pay-gap as well as perpetuating and reinforcing gender stereotypes. Meanwhile, in this issue's feature we report on the attitudes of European citizens to the current crisis, their expectations and concerns for their professional and personal circumstances as well as their perceptions of the EU's role in the area of employment and social affairs.

Finally, in the Other Voices section on page 26 you will find the views of social partners' organizations ETUC and Businesseurope on how best to ensure occupational health and safety in the EU.

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Special feature



How the EU is helping improve workers' health and safety

Wide-ranging measures aim at achieving the objectives set out in the EU strategy on occupational health and safety, namely a 25% reduction in work accidents by 2012.

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Hard times ahead: Europeans and the crisis



The crisis may be bottoming out, but employment prospects remain bleak, and European citizens are well aware of it.

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New improved rules for social security co-ordination



EU regime for co-ordination of social security systems to be made more modern and efficient thanks to new rules.

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A magazine providing information on European employment and social policies, Social Agenda is published in English, French and German by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. • Editor in chief: Robert Verrue, Director-General, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities European Commission, B-1049 Brussels
 65,000 copies of this issue were published. Subscription is free on request – please contact: European Commission, Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities DG – InfoCentre, B-1049 Brussels, Fax.: (32-2) 296 23 93; <http://ec.europa.eu/social/contact>

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GENERAL

- 2 October

Irish voters endorsed the Lisbon Treaty in a referendum. The "yes" vote came 16 months after the treaty was rejected in a first referendum. The Irish government agreed to hold a second vote after EU leaders offered guarantees on national sovereignty and agreed that each EU country would continue to have a commissioner. All 27 member countries must ratify the treaty for it to take effect. With Ireland now on board, only the Czech Republic and Poland need to complete the ratification process. The treaty aims to enhance the EU's role on the world stage and streamline its decision-making.

- 16 September

The European parliament endorsed José Manuel Barroso for a second term as president of the European commission. Mr Barroso will now be charged with putting together a new Commission. A total of 718 MEPs took part in the secret ballot, with 382 voting for and 219 against. There were 117 abstentions. EU leaders nominated Mr Barroso for another five-year term after European parliament elections in June.

- 7 September

The average real wage increase for European workers fell from 3.6% in 2007 to 1.3% in 2008, according to new data published by Eurofound's European Industrial Relations Observatory (EIRO). The annual update on pay developments in Europe 2008 recorded sizeable differences between EU Member States, with the rate of real increase falling sharply, and the nominal rate dropping only slightly. Wide differences emerge, however, between the various groups of countries within the EU, in terms of the level of real wage increases, with a broad east-west split. In terms of trends in real pay rises, the rate of

increase, following the average trend, fell between 2007 and 2008 in all but four countries: Germany, Greece, Hungary and the Netherlands. The rate of increase declined most sharply in Estonia, Latvia and Romania. The report also examines collectively-agreed pay increases in three selected sectors (metalworking, banking and local government), current wage rates and minimum wage increases, increases in average earnings, and the extent of the gender pay gap across all countries.

EMPLOYMENT AND EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND

- 3 October

The flagship event for the European Job Days took place at the European Commission headquarters in Brussels, attracting around 12 000 jobseekers and 80 employers. During September and October similar events took place all over Europe, giving jobseekers and employers the possibility to visit over 500 diverse events, ranging from recruitment fairs to seminars and lectures on job mobility.

- 18 September

Latest data covering the period up to July-August 2009 indicate that the labour market is deteriorating at a slower pace than in previous months; still young people and migrants continue to be hit particularly hard. The general improvement is supported by a rise in confidence among businesses and consumers, including their employment and unemployment expectations. The moderation in the economic recession results among others from increases in retail trade turnover.

WORK ORGANISATION, WORKING CONDITIONS AND SOCIAL DIALOGUE

- 2 October

The Commission has issued opinions accepting that Hungary, the Netherlands and the UK will slightly extend working time of doctors in training on a temporary basis. The Commission has consulted the social partners, and the opinions underline that the average weekly



Commissioner Špidla and President Barroso at the Brussels Job Day

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working time for doctors in training still cannot exceed 52 hours, including on-call at the work place, and that the temporary extension will last till 31 July 2011. The Working Time Directive contains, special rules for doctors in training, whose average weekly working hours are to gradually reduce from 2004 to not more than 48 hours, in principle by 31 July 2009.

- 9 September

The European Commission has accepted two applications from Belgium for assistance under the European Globalisation adjustment Fund (EGF) – the first to benefit under revised EGF rules. The funding will help 2 168 workers in the textiles sector back into employment. The applications – for a total of almost €9.2 million – concern workers made redundant in mainly small businesses in three Belgian provinces: Limburg, East Flanders and West Flanders. The package will include competence screening, interview skills training, individual job search support and career assistance, training and outplacement. The total estimated cost is over €14 million, of which the European Globalisation adjustment Fund has been asked to fund €9.2 million.

- 31 July

10,000 workers were helped by the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF) last year and of these, more than two-thirds found a new job, according to a report adopted by the European Commission on 31 July 2009. The second annual report on the EGF shows an increasing uptake of the funds by EU countries for measures to support workers dismissed as a result of globalisation. It also reports on the outcome of the first EGF contributions in terms of helping the redundant workers into new jobs.

- 28 July

In 2008, the average collectively agreed weekly working time in the European Union remained unchanged at 38.6 hours, according to the annual update on working time developments from Eurofound, the Dublin-based EU Agency. The report also found that the average paid annual leave entitlement for workers in Europe was 25.2 days across the EU in 2008; however, some countries had up to three weeks' more holidays than others. Across the European Union, the longest working weeks, worked by full-time employees in their main jobs,

are found in Romania (41.8 hours), the Czech Republic (41.7 hours) and Latvia (41.7 hours). The shortest are in France (38.4 hours), Belgium (38.6 hours) and Ireland (38.9 hours).

- 17 July

Employers and trade unions in the healthcare sector have signed an EU-wide agreement on 17 July 2009, to prevent injuries from needle sticks and other sharp objects (see article on page 18). More than 1 million such injuries occur every year, forming one of the most common health and safety threats in the European workplace. The agreement aims to achieve the safest possible working environment for employees in the sector and protect workers at risk; to prevent injuries to workers caused by all types of sharp medical objects (including needle sticks), and to set up an integrated approach to assessing and preventing risks as well as to training and informing workers.

PROMOTING AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

- October – November

Diversity Days to celebrate diversity in Europe are being held in 4 Member States (Cyprus, Luxembourg, Portugal and Sweden) this autumn and they promise to interest and entertain the public while bringing the message of the benefits of diversity to as many as possible. Diversity Days are an initiative of the EU-wide "For Diversity. Against Discrimination" information campaign, which aims to raise awareness of discrimination and to give advice on how combat it. Each Diversity Day will feature a key event where local and national organisations come together to challenge people to think about and take responsibility for their own attitudes and behaviour and to recognise the positive contribution diversity makes to the workplace and to society as a whole.



European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee.

- 30 July

The European Commission has adopted a proposal to increase the existing right to parental leave from three to four months per parent, and to apply it to all employees, regardless of their type of contract. If adopted by Member States in the Council, the proposal would give legal effect to a recent agreement negotiated by European trades unions and employers' organizations and signed on 18 June 2009. The proposal complements the Commission's recent package of measures to improve work-life balance for Europeans.

- 28 September

The second meeting of the integrated platform on Roma inclusion, launched in April 2009 in Prague, took place in Brussels on 28 September. The aim of the Platform for Roma inclusion is to provide an arena for exchanging knowledge, experience and good practice, making commitments for initiatives and possibly monitoring progress achieved for the inclusion of Roma in Europe. The second Platform meeting, co-organised by the European Commission and the Swedish presidency, focused on the education of Roma in Europe. Invited participants included representatives from the Roma civil society, governmental officials from EU Member States, EU civil servants, representatives from the main international organisations and NGOs as well as academics and experts in this field.

- 3 August

On 1 January 2009, the population of the EU27 was estimated at 499.8 million, compared with 497.7 million on 1 January 2008. The population of the EU27 grew by 2.1 million in 2008, an annual rate of +0.4%, due to a natural increase of 0.6 million and net migration of 1.5 million. The demographic situation in 2008 in the EU27 shows continuation of the upward

trend in the natural increase which began in 2004, explained by a moderate increase in the birth rate and a relatively constant death rate, while net migration has remained over the same period at an annual level of between 1.5 and 2 million. These figures come from a report published by Eurostat, the Statistical Office of the European Communities, on demography in the EU27 Member States, EU Candidate, EFTA and other European countries.

GENDER EQUALITY

- 31 July

The Commission adopted the third work programme of the Roadmap for equality between women and men 2009-2010. The programme presents the actions carried out in 2008 and the forecasts for 2009 and 2010 in view of achieving the Commission's commitments towards equality between women and men in six priority areas: equal economic independence for women and men; reconciliation of private and professional life; equal representation in decision-making; eradication of all forms of gender-based violence; elimination of gender stereotypes; promotion of gender equality in external and development policies. The document has been transmitted to the Council, the

- 29 July

EU legislation has benefited workers through broader protection against discrimination based on gender and clearer definitions of discrimination, says a European Commission report adopted on 29 July. The report looks at how Member States have implemented the key provisions of Directive 2002/73/EC on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women, with a view to identifying the main problems and good practices. It notes progress in implementing the Directive and describes it as satisfactory, but draws also attention to the fact that the Commission has had to take action against some national governments that have not yet brought their laws and procedures into line with the Directive. National equality bodies have a key role in furthering equality, says the report, particularly in assisting victims of discrimination, who are more likely to turn to an equality body than make use of traditional litigation.





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Hard times ahead: Europeans and the crisis

A new survey provides a snapshot of EU citizens' perceptions and concerns about their current situation and future prospects

According to the latest data from the EU Monthly employment monitor, in the EU as a whole the labour market continues to weaken in reaction to the economic downturn, albeit at a slower pace than in previous months. Employment continues to decline and unemployment to rise, job vacancies remain significantly lower than a year ago and companies continue to announce more job reductions than creation.

On the other hand, there are signs of a stabilisation in the economic and labour market situation in certain Member States. The deterioration in economic activity is starting to ease, supported by stabilisation in industrial production, while unemployment has recently levelled off or even declined in some Member States such as Austria, Denmark and Portugal. Moreover,

survey data continue to show a relative improvement in confidence among businesses and consumers. Nevertheless, the labour market outlook for the coming months remains bleak, indicating that the full impact of the economic crisis on labour markets is, at least partly, still to be felt. So while fears of a deep and prolonged recession may be starting to fade, there is little doubt that the recovery will be slow and fragile. And jobless, at least for some time.

But what do European citizens make of the situation? How do they feel about their personal circumstances, what do they think the future has in store in terms of job opportunities for themselves and those closer to them? And can the European Union help to ease unemployment and promote job creation?

Last summer, the European Commission carried out an extensive Eurobarometer survey in order to try and find the answers to these questions.

The resulting study, published in July, shows that more than six out of 10 of Europeans think further impacts of the economic crisis on jobs are to be expected. A third of those in work are 'very concerned' that they may lose their jobs in the crisis, however over 70% feel the EU has a positive impact in creating new job opportunities and fighting unemployment, and a third are aware of the European Social Fund – the EU's main tool for investing in workers and keeping them in work.

According to the survey results, around 3.5% of working Europeans have personally experienced job losses



Youth unemployment has reached an historic high

six out of 10 did not worry at all about such a possibility.

The concern about job losses is explained and compounded by the fact that at least 6 in 10 Europeans feel that the worst of the economic crisis is yet to come and only 28% think it has reached its peak, with the highest levels in the Baltic countries: 82% in Latvia, 76% in Estonia and 74% in Lithuania think the worst impact is still to be felt. In countries which have implemented comprehensive flexicurity approaches, the outlook is more confident. 45% of Swedes and 36% of Danes feel more optimistically that the peak of the crisis is now in the past.

due to the economic crisis. Almost a quarter know a colleague who has lost their job and 36% know someone from among their friends or family who has been affected. Hardest hit are Latvia, Lithuania, Spain and Ireland, while people in Luxembourg, Greece and the Netherlands have experienced comparatively fewer job losses.

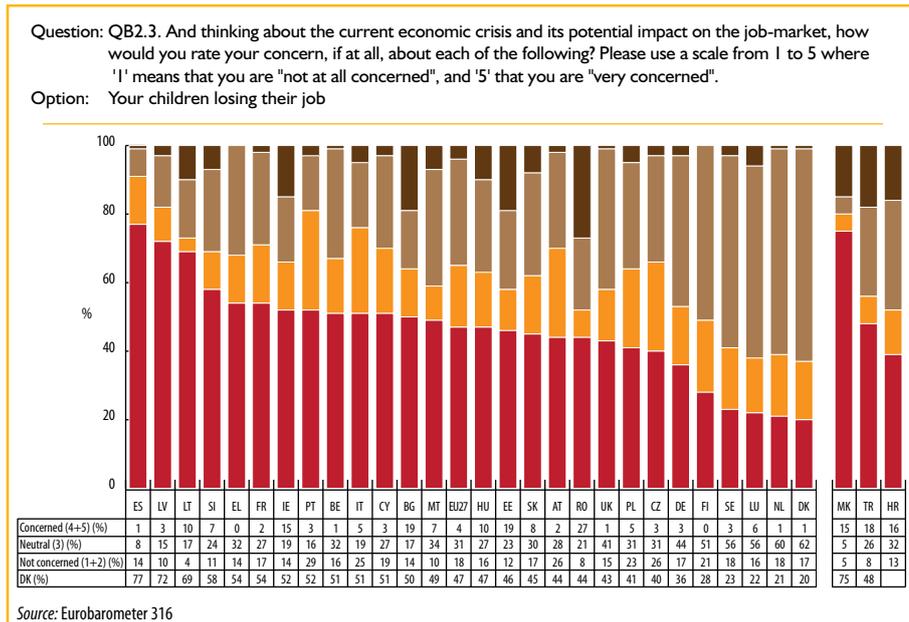
A third of Europeans in work are 'very concerned' that they may lose their jobs in the future, with more people worried about their partner (38%), but especially about their children (47%) losing their jobs. The Europeans' concern for their children's future employment situation

is particularly striking, and while it probably stems at least partly from a parent's natural tendency to worry about their offspring's future, it also reflects a widespread feeling that things are not about to improve anytime soon. Unsurprisingly, the level of concern is strongly linked to how badly individual EU countries are being affected by the crisis and by job losses: in Spain, where youth unemployment has reached almost 40%, almost eight people in 10 worry about their children losing their jobs, a concern shared to a much lesser extent in countries such as Denmark or the Netherlands, where only 20% of respondents expressed such fears, and

When it comes to future expectations about the chances of staying employed, the survey results show great disparities in confidence among EU countries, reflecting once again the different impact the economic downturn is having across the EU. So for instance, less than four in 10 Lithuanians said they were confident that they will have a job in two years' time, in stark contrast to Finland, where a whopping 90% of those interviewed declared themselves very or fairly confident. For the record, the EU average was 66%, pretty much unchanged since 2008.

Should they need to find a new job, most of those interviewed would opt for the same type of job in the same location, or alternatively widen their search to a different location, showing more openness to moving to a new area than moving to a new type of job. About one in four of those Europeans not working say they will take up any job; a result that has not changed significantly since 2006. The majority of Europeans believe that, in these times, professional experience and qualifications are the two most important aspects in finding a new job easily, followed by adaptability.

In terms of the EU's role in employment, more than half of those interviewed consider it to be positive, and this figure rises considerably when addressing specific issues. Almost 80% think the EU has a positive role in improving

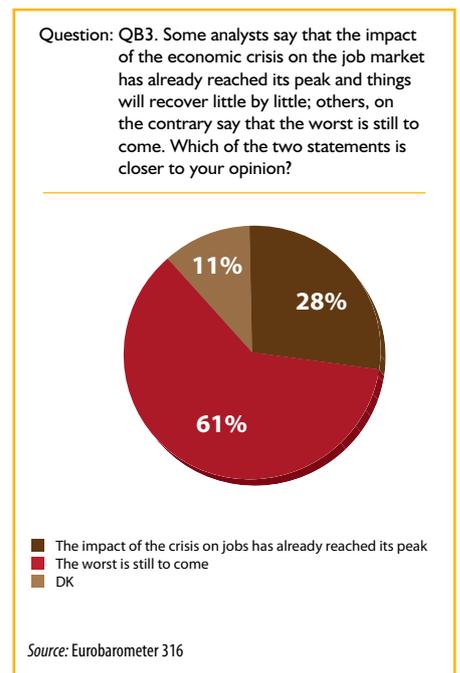
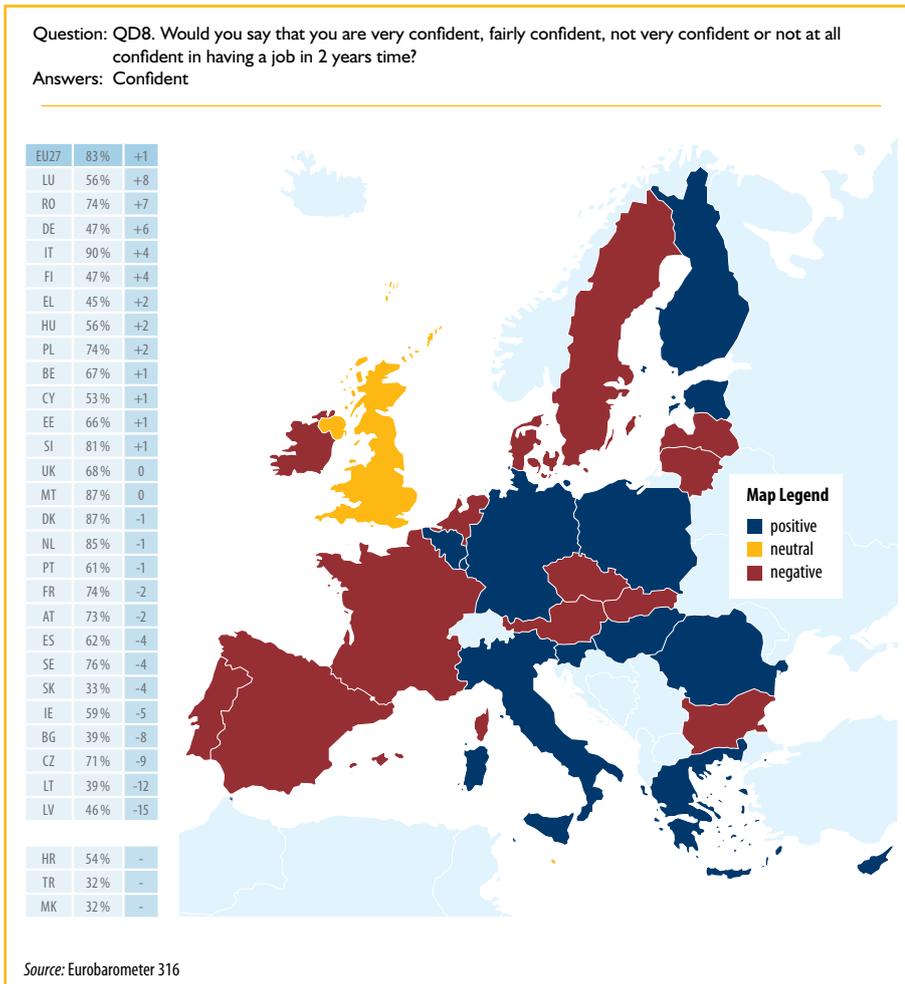




access to education and training, 76% on promoting gender equality, 73% on combating other forms of discrimination and 72% on creating job opportunities and fighting unemployment. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it is in the "new" member States that the EU is perceived as having had a much greater positive impact across all employment and social policies, while the "old" EU15 countries appear to take a somewhat more jaded view of its benefits.

Overall, a third of Europeans are aware of the European Social Fund (ESF), the EU's main tool to support those who may lose their jobs as a result of the crisis. The Fund is best known in Slovakia (59%), Portugal (58%) and Spain (53%) and least known in Denmark (17%). A third of those asked felt the ESF's budget allocation of around 10% of the EU budget is too little and only 5% said it was too much.

"I am not surprised by the outcome of this survey. Understandably Europeans are concerned about the impact of the crisis on their jobs and families. ", said Vladimír Špidla, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, commenting the results of the survey. He added: "That's why action has been taken at a European level since the very beginning of the crisis to limit its impact on jobs. We have recently introduced microcredits for people who want to start their own business, proposed 100% funding of ESF for the next two years to allow for continuous training of workers, and urged Member States to make 5 million apprenticeships available for young people who leave school. These measures will help keep Europeans in jobs and help them back into jobs if they lose theirs."





The potential of microcredits to fight poverty and exclusion is not limited to the developing world

© Belga Picture

Commission launches microfinance initiative for employment and inclusion

Microloans will be made available to the unemployed and other vulnerable groups to set up their own business

The proposal

The European Commission is proposing to set up a microfinance facility to increase the supply and accessibility of microloans for vulnerable groups and unemployed wanting to set up their own business. Starting in 2010, and with an initial budget of €100 million, the new facility will target three main groups of beneficiaries: those who lost their job or are at risk of losing it, disadvantaged persons who usually have difficulties in accessing banking lending and/or the labour market; and micro-enterprises in the social economy.

The global crisis which originated as a financial turmoil prompted by severe liquidity problems in the US, the EU and other developed economies, had a freezing effect on the main function of the banking sector: financial intermediaries stopped lending to consumers and enterprises because of an increased fear of default. The inter-banking market came to a stall calling for an intervention of the central banks to provide liquidity. Recent data from the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) shows the depth of the fall in outstanding loans that accounted for more than €1.98 billion.

This is the most significant reduction ever recorded in a single quarter by BIS. The slowdown in lending continues even now in many European economies threatening the emerging recovery.

The economic downturn resulting from the turmoil that hit the financial and capital markets led to a significant increase in unemployment in all members of the EU offsetting and reversing the positive employment growth of 6 million achieved during 2007-2008. The combination of credit scarcity and rising unemployment means that people with strong entrepreneurial spirit who would like to either become self-employed or start a micro enterprise cannot do so because of the fragmented access to credits and the high aversion to investment risk of the banks. In this unfavourable context, the inclusion of vulnerable groups in the employment market becomes even more uneven.

Microfinance in the EU

Microfinance is an area that needs little introduction. It emerged in the late 1970 and it was mainly used as a tool to fight poverty in the developing countries. The notion that access to microcredit and other ordinary banking services help poor households build business, increase their earnings and find their way out of poverty in countries where welfare arrangements are lacking quickly became so appealing and widely used by international donors that its founding father Muhammad Yunus won a Nobel Peace Prize in 2006. As the microfinance became an important activity for the development community, microfinance professionals became more and more aware of its build-in poverty reduction potential and of its limitations.

In Europe, microfinance is used primarily with a view of creating employment and supporting entrepreneurship. It means extending loans under €2500 tailored to meet the funding needs of micro-enterprises employing less than 10 people. At European Union level, the European Commission identified in 2007 the need to further develop microfi-

nance intermediaries, to increase the capital of these providers and improve the regulatory environment to unlock the potential of microcredit in the EU. For this purpose, the Commission launched the JASMINE initiative to support the development of the microfinance providers. Providers of microfinance in Europe are grouped in the European microfinance network based in Paris.

As a way of illustration of the potential of microcredit, Eurostat points to a figure of 700 000 new loans of potential demand for microcredit. More recently, the European Parliament called upon the Commission, in its resolution of 24 March 2009, to reinforce its efforts in support of growth and employment.

Design of the new microfinance instrument 'Progress'

As outlined in the Commission Communication "Shared Commitment to Employment", the new proposal of The Facility will mitigate the overall investment and counter-party risk inherent to the target beneficiaries in a context of reduced credit supply and high aversion to risk by banks.

The new facility, called the Progress microfinance facility, will have a budget of €100mn to be channelled by an international financial institution to banks and non bank providers of microfinance services in the Member States of the European Union. This will be achieved through an offer of three main products: guarantees, equity and debt financing. The facility will be implemented under joint management with an international financial institution like the European Investment Fund. The latter will extend these three products to providers of microfinance in the European Union.

Risk-sharing and guarantees are designed to share the risk among several participants. They can be funded and unfunded. The former are used to provide liquidity (in the form of a loan) to a financial intermediary in order to support



Muhammad Yunus' pioneer work on microcredits won him the Nobel peace prize in 2006

funding for a new portfolio and share the risk for the same portfolio of microloans. Unfunded risk sharing is usually used to provide cover for the risk of a portfolio of microloans in order to free the capital capacity of the receiving intermediary to extend additional new microloans to final beneficiaries. Risk sharing instruments generally produce the biggest financial leverage. Equity investments are primarily used to strengthen the equity/capital base of micro-finance provider as well as to support investment vehicles/funds. Equity participations allow the microfinance provider (or vehicle) to increase its own funds/capital base available at long term. Debt instruments may take the form of loans to microfinance institutions/investment vehicles/funds (either senior or subordinated) or bond subscriptions. These instruments are designed to provide liquidity to the micro-finance provider(s)/ investment vehicles/funds that will in turn use the funding to extend loans to final beneficiaries (micro-borrowers).

One of the particular features of the new facility is its openness to banks and non bank providers of microfinance. People willing to establish their own business to escape from unemployment need quick and easy access to funding. In many circumstances, non bank providers of microfinance do not have a large network of local offices and access to them for people living in areas where there is no such type of provider could become a geographical barrier. On the other side, for traditional banks microfinance is an

activity associated with high transaction costs and risks which limit the supply of this service by banks. By extending the facility to the two types of financial intermediaries, the Commission wants to channel the funds in the most quick and linear way.

The new facility will not just provide funding. It will create an interface with the European Social Fund (ESF) which is the only structural fund that can grant interest rate rebates to people. This possibility, if used by the managing authorities of the Fund, has the potential to significantly improve the access to funds for micro-entrepreneurs. In addition, with its traditional activities for entrepreneurship promotion, coaching, training and consultancy for job seekers, the ESF will sustain the final beneficiaries of the facility. A specially created network of experts will support the design and setting up of concrete microfinance schemes by national authorities.

The new Progress microfinance facility relies on the lessons learned from the global experience in microfinance. The build-in combination of lending and non lending services will certainly allow achieving a rapid deployment of the funds after the initial start of the facility and avoiding the drawbacks in implementing microfinance schemes. The planned evaluations will help in further developing the know-how in designing appropriate answers to policy challenges such as the current economic crisis.



ESF in Latvia – 'Bee' is for business

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Before he participated in an ESF-funded training course for budding business owners, Normunds Zeps was an unemployed mechanic with an interest in bees and a taste for honey.

Normunds lives in a small flat in Kalupe in rural Latvia with his wife and two sons, but the farm is 76 km away in a place called Grugules. "My mother lives in that area now," he says. "It's where my family got some land when the old collective farms were privatised."

Normunds graduated from Viski agricultural college as a machinery mechanic. "But life down here is a day-to-day struggle," he says, "and it can be very difficult to find a decent job, even when you have qualifications. Most of the time, I just stayed home and took care of the boys while my wife went to work. But I was also passionate about my beekeeping. I would have called it a hobby, really, but then I thought maybe I could develop it into a business."

Showing real initiative, Normunds decided to take part in a project co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund. "I wanted to change my situation," he says. "I knew I

had to learn more about business. This programme was offering a free training course on how to run a small enterprise, so I decided to go for it."

The ESF supports families with children who want to start businesses. In the Latvian Daugavpils district where Normunds lives, an area still struggling to overcome decades of Soviet rule, a project was launched to develop know-how in business and self-employment start-up. Course topics included developing and implementing a solid business plan.

Normunds looks after 28 bee 'families', following a routine that involves tending a wide swath of territory around the hives. "I cut the grass while the bees are sleeping, and I generally look after the territory. I come here three days a week. The other two days I stay at home with my boys."

Apart from the honey-makers, the Zeps farm is a one-man beehive of activity. Normunds starts early and stays late. He is working to restore some historic buildings on the property, cutting timber for a new roof for a stone barn. He also raises vegetables for family and friends in temporary hothouses he built himself.

His wife and kids drop by to lend a hand when possible, but he still works largely on his own.

"We use no chemicals here," he boasts. "The bees exploit several species of flowers in this area, moving from one to another across the day and across the seasons. We are delivering a very natural and healthy product."

Normunds now considers himself a fully fledged beekeeper, producing a tonne of high-grade honey per year, and he's working hard to expand his business. "I've got a long way to go before calling myself a successful businessman," he admits. "Providing for my family is still a struggle, but the EU has given me a good start.

"There is no question about it – when I started getting down to business I realised how useful the training course really was. Quite frankly, my life wasn't going anywhere, and this experience helped me to think in practical terms. Today we are still struggling, life remains hard, but we are making a real go of it. As far as I'm concerned, you have to keep moving forward. Has the training I received made a difference in my life? Yes, it's made a difference in all of our lives."



"Atypical" career choices should be encouraged from early on

Gender equality and the segregation of EU labour markets

The tendency for women to end up in certain jobs helps perpetuating gender stereotypes

The tendency for women (and men) to end up in certain jobs or sectors, known as "employment segregation by gender", is one of the root causes of the gender pay gap. It also reflects the extent of gender stereotypes and whether in a given country, some occupations are still restricted or not to one of the two sexes. Recently, the Network of experts on gender and employment issues issued a report aimed at analysing gender segregation in EU labour markets by sector and occupation. It provides a comparative analysis of trends in segregation, examines the root causes of the phenomenon, the consequences and the policy responses.

The index used to monitor gender segregation within the European employment strategy shows no sign of reduction,

at least for the EU as a whole. Segregation is still relatively high, reaching a 25.3% level for occupational segregation and an 18.3% for sectoral segregation. However, differences among countries remain wide, with a gap of about 10 percentage points between the most and the least segregated countries.

Research and policy attention on the implications of segregation has traditionally focused on wage inequality, including undervaluation of female work and discrimination. Recent figures confirm that undervaluation of female jobs is still widespread, but it is low-pay occupations that are especially exposed to this risk. Moreover, gender segregation also impacts on job quality. Analysis of selective indicators for the different

dimensions of job quality indicates that, in addition to pay, important gender asymmetries still concern long working hours, career prospects, and access to managerial and supervisory positions.

Finally, segregation does not facilitate efficient reallocation of labour supplies, male and female. Skill and labour shortages are likely to affect mixed occupations less than male- or female-dominated occupations in the medium term. Instances of (broad) male-dominated occupational groups for which shortages are anticipated include plant and machine operators and assemblers, senior officials, managers and legislators, and craft and related workers. Female-dominated occupational groups where shortages are expected feature service workers and sales workers, clerical workers and elementary occupations - including care workers with low levels of qualification - and professionals or associate professionals - including qualified care workers such as nurses. This adds cogency to a policy of desegregation, because the latter can favour the redistribution of labour supply flows while also redistributing opportunities for the development of higher skills.

Policies to tackle segregation have a long-standing tradition in relatively few Member States, primarily the Scandinavian countries, the UK, France, the Netherlands and Germany. Such policies operate at two levels: societal (awareness raising, educational programmes to counter stereotypes in school and in the media) and labour market (training, countering of skill and labour shortages, job evaluation procedures and pay systems, etc).

Desegregation policies often imply tackling the 'early in life' roots of segregation by investing in 'motivational events' or in educational programmes designed to positively encourage 'atypical' choices among young boys and girls, and to promote new role models. These policies should be pursued in both directions, attracting men into feminised areas such as care work or teaching, and further promoting women's advancement in male-dominated areas.



ESF in Denmark – helping women into the driving seat

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Whether behind the wheel of her yellow, single-decker bus, or chatting with her workmates at City Trafik, one of the two main bus companies in Aalborg (Denmark), Jane Grøne seems completely at ease. Yet in early 2007, already in her mid-fifties, she was unemployed and had no formal qualifications to help her into work. When she spotted an advertisement for trainee bus drivers in her local paper, she was tempted to respond – she enjoyed driving and it sounded interesting. But she hesitated. Would she be able to handle a large vehicle? And could she cope with the responsibility of her passengers' safety?

A week later, Jane noticed the same advert. "It seemed like fate," she recalls. "I thought to myself: If other people can do it, why can't I? I might as well try and see how it works out. I can always back out later if necessary."

So she went ahead and, in November 2007, got a place on the Job Competence programme run by the local vocational training centre AMU Nordjylland (ArbejdsMarkedsUddannelser – LabourMarketEducation), an educational project co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund. The bus drivers' course

included both theory and practice, with several different modules covering health and safety, first aid, handling money, ergonomics, and how to assist disabled passengers.

In the meantime she started looking for a vacancy, and City Trafik offered her a place starting in February 2008. But there was a problem, because although she was due to complete the training by that date, she felt she did not have enough practical experience. "I was nervous, because the company had promised me a job, and all the other new drivers were ready to start." She was afraid she would lose her opportunity, but the company kept its word. "As we say in Denmark, maybe it was because of my blue eyes," laughs Jane mischievously. She spent two months taking extra driving lessons, and by April was ready to take up her post.

"I'm really happy I got my bus driver's licence," she adds. "It gives you a lot of confidence when you take the diploma and get a good job with good colleagues. You feel better about yourself."

Jane comes from Hjørring in the north of Denmark. When she was 15 she moved to Aalborg, where her

parents opened a café. But a short time later her mother died, and as the oldest of six children, she was soon busy looking after her three brothers and two sisters, and helping with her father's business. She had little time to study and pass exams, so she left school without qualifications.

She works 37 hours a week, normally spread over six days, with shifts that start as early as 4am and end as late as 1.30 am. Every morning she arrives at the depot to be told which route she will be covering that day. There are 170 drivers working out of the City Trafik depot, 22 of them women.

"I am very happy in my work," concludes Jane. "I am happy with my colleagues, and with my boss. Everybody is treated well, and we help each other. It's like one big family, and nobody is left out. I am going to stay here until I die!" she jokes. She has good reason to expect a lengthy and satisfying career: as long as the drivers renew their medical certificates every five years, retirement age is flexible. City Trafik's oldest bus driver is 72 years of age.

"I really enjoy coming to work, even at 4am," she says. "I am never sorry to be working."



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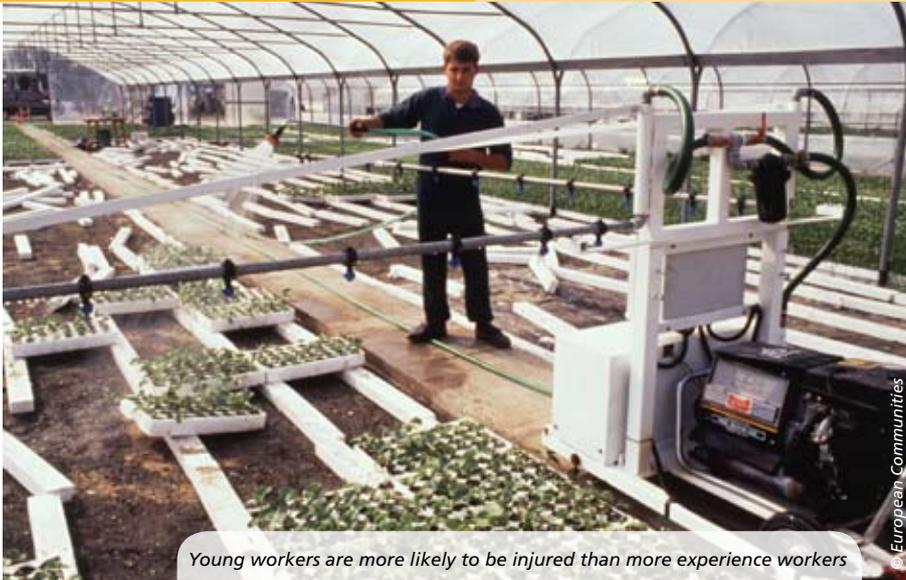
How the EU is helping improve workers' health and safety

It is exactly 20 years since the adoption of the EU framework directive on occupational health and safety, which sets out the key principles underpinning the prevention of risks and the protection of the health and safety of workers, and constitutes the basis for all subsequent individual directives.

In the two intervening decades, a significant body of legislation has emerged, as well as a common culture of risk prevention which has become the hallmark of EU occupational health and safety policy. But while this has undoubtedly contributed to a substantial improvement in the health and

safety of European workers, the number of work-related accidents remains unacceptably high. According to recent statistics, almost 5500 people in the European Union lose their lives at work each year, and a far greater number are injured. As well as the human suffering involved, there is the economic impact. Every year, the direct insurance costs alone of workplace accidents are estimated to be €20 billion and 149 million working days are lost. Individuals, businesses and society all pay the price. The development of new technologies and new professions brings with it new occupational hazards until recently unheard of.

That is why the EU continues to put a lot of effort in improving occupational health and safety. The Community strategy covering the period 2007-2012 sets an ambitious goal for EU member States: an overall 25 % reduction in the total incidence rate of accidents at work by 2012. It also provides the framework for governments and stakeholders to achieve this objective, both through legislation and by promoting the improvement, simplification and better implementation of the EU regulatory framework. The articles that follow take a closer look at recent legislative developments as well as at current initiatives helping to implement existing legislation in an accessible and user-friendly way.



Young workers are more likely to be injured than more experience workers

Making work safer: the Community strategy 2007-2012 on health and safety

In spite of the progress achieved the EU still faces a number of challenges as regards occupational safety and health

The indisputable success of the European policy on safety and health at work in the last two decades is largely due to the adoption, transposition and application in the Member States of a large body of Community legislation in this. This has resulted in a considerable reduction of the incidence of work-related accidents and diseases.

However, in spite of the progress achieved, the EU still faces a number of challenges as regards occupational safety and health.

First of all, the burden of accidents and work-related ill-health is still high both in human, social and economic terms. According to the most recent data available from Eurostat, every year more than 5,700 people die in the European Union as a consequence of work-related accidents (EU-27), and

about 500 million days at work are lost because of accidents and work-related diseases (EU-15).

The overall cost of the accidents at work to the EU economy in the most recent year for which detailed information is available (2000) is estimated to be around 55 billion EUR. The estimate corresponds to 0.64 % of the GDP for EU-15 in 2000. But this estimate only concerns accidents at work; non-accidental work-related health problems are not covered. From the macroeconomic perspective the total cost of accidents at work and occupational diseases in the EU-15 may range from 2.6 to 3.8 % of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Also, occupational hazards are still high for certain categories of workers (young, older, migrant

workers, workers with insecure job), for certain types of companies (small and medium-sized enterprises are particularly exposed, accounting for 82% of all occupational injuries and 90% of all fatal accidents), and for certain sectors (construction, agriculture, transport and health care all present higher than average risks of accidents at work).

But on the other hand, it is also crucial to observe how changes in society and economy, which are linked to the acceleration of innovation, the demographic change and the transformation of work patterns, are affecting the nature of occupational hazards. As a result, certain types of occupational illnesses such as musculoskeletal disorders, infections and illnesses associated with psychosocial factors are becoming more and more common.

For these reasons, the Commission considers that actions to improve standards of health and safety at work still have a large potential for gains to workers and employers, as well as to individuals and society as a whole in the EU.

To support EU efforts towards a more effective prevention of occupational accidents and diseases, the European Commission has defined and adopted, in 2007, a new Community strategy on health and safety at work, covering the period until 2012. This strategy, which continues the efforts deployed in the framework of the previous 2002-2006 Community strategy, intends to provide an integrated framework for Member States to deliver on their national policies and for stakeholders to promote common initiatives in this area of the European social policy, which is today among the most developed ones.

The Strategy intends to consolidate the common culture of risk prevention, which is the major achievement of the more than 40 year old history of OSH in the European Union. This culture is

the fundamental basis for improving OSH performance in the long term, because only the development and maintaining of this culture can make sure that all actors in the field are fully involved and ready to cooperate.

In this regard, it is clear that legislation, while being the back stone and driving force for further improvement, is not sufficient on its own to produce changes in attitudes and behavioural patterns. It needs to be complemented by other policy tools and interventions designed to reinforce the impact of regulatory provisions and provide the suitable context for practical application and enforcement.

To this end, the new Community strategy on health and safety at work identifies a number of specific actions and tools, which include the improvement, simplification and better implementation of the EU regulatory framework the development of coherent national strategies adjusted to the specific context of each Member State, a better identification and assessment of potential new risks through more research, exchange of knowledge and best practice, the development of new synergies between OSH policy and other national and European policy areas (education, public health, research), and the further development of international cooperation on OSH.

The strategy also sets an ambitious goal for all Member States to achieve: an overall 25 % reduction in the total incidence rate of accidents at work by 2012. In this context, the incitation to generalise the strategic approach to the management of OSH policies at European and national levels represents another main objective of the new Community strategy.

The main emphasis is put here on the need to develop (national) OSH systems, i.e. infrastructures in the area of OSH that provide the main framework for the implementation of

(national) OSH programmes. Adopting a strategic approach entails designing a consistent process, which involves identifying objectives and priorities, defining actions to improve the state of occupational safety and health, and developing monitoring tools to evaluate the impacts of the actions carried out.

In this context, the new Community strategy intends to act as an interface between the European and the national levels of governance, by providing a framework to guide the Member States in their efforts to re-design their national prevention systems in a more consistent and integrated way. The aim is to share experience and discover factors which may help the Member States and the social partners to create solutions adapted to their specific national situations, and which could be of benefit to everyone.



Key health and safety statistics

Agriculture

The fatal accident rate for the old EU 15 member States is 12.6 per 100 000 workers; for accidents with more than three days' absence, the rate is more than 6000 per 100 000 workers. These are some of the highest rates for any industry. In the old Member States just 4% of the working population work in agriculture, but in the new Member States it is 13.4%.

Construction

Around 1,300 workers are killed each year, equivalent to 13 employees out of every 100,000 — more than twice the average of other sectors.

Education

Some 15% of employees in Europe's education sector, from teachers and cooks to administrative staff, have suffered physical or verbal abuse at work.

Health care

The accident rate in the health care sector is 34% higher than the EU average.

MSDs

Lower back disorders affect 60-90% of people at some point in their life; at any one time, 15- 42% are affected.

Small and medium-sized enterprises

There are 19 million small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the EU, employing nearly 75 million people. However, SMEs record an over-proportional 82% of all occupational injuries, rising to about 90% for fatal accidents.

Stress

More than one in four workers are affected by work-related stress in the European Union.

Young workers

Across Europe, 18 to 24-year-olds are at least 50% more likely to be injured in the workplace than more experienced workers.



EU steps up protection against sharp injuries

The European social partners of the hospital and healthcare sector agree provisions to be implemented through EU law

Employers and trade unions in the healthcare sector have signed an EU-wide agreement to prevent injuries from needle sticks and other sharp objects.

Injuries caused by sharp instruments including needles are one of the most common and serious risks threatening hospital and healthcare workers in the European Union, and represent a high cost for national health systems and society in general. The agreement negotiated by the social partners in the healthcare sector constitutes a substantial breakthrough in the effective prevention and protection of hospital and healthcare workers against sharp injuries.

More than 1 million such injuries happen every year, forming one of the most common health and safety threats in the European workplace. Hospital and healthcare workers (nurses, doctors,

surgeons, midwives etc.), are frequently exposed to the risk of infection due to injuries caused by the sharp instruments they handle daily, for instance needles, scalpels, suture equipment, and catheters. This is particularly true of certain departments and activities such as emergency rooms, intensive care or surgery. The consequences may be very serious, with a risk of contracting diseases such as viral hepatitis or AIDS.

The new framework agreement was signed by the European Public Services Union (EPSU) and the European Hospital and Healthcare Employers' Association (HOSPEEM), who established a social dialogue committee in the hospital and healthcare sector in 2006. The sector employs around 3.5 million people.

In the Community strategy 2007-2012 on health and safety at work the Commis-

sion already announced its intention to continue working to improve the prevention of a number of occupational risks, including those arising from needle-stick injuries. This work was to be carried out in co-operation with the Social Partners, as provided in the EU Treaty.

After being consulted by the Commission on the proposed initiatives, the social partners decided to start negotiating on the subject. The negotiations lasted five months, and the resulting Framework Agreement on Prevention from Sharp Injuries in the Hospital and Healthcare Sector was signed on 17 July 2009. The agreement now needs to be converted into EU law, and the Commission has already started the internal procedure which will translate it into a Council directive.

The Framework Agreement contains the main principles to be respected for the prevention of sharp injuries, as well as a detailed description of several key aspects, such as risk assessment, elimination, prevention and protection, information and awareness-raising, training, reporting, follow-up and implementation.

The adoption of this new directive will certainly strengthen the level of protection of hospital and healthcare workers against this kind of risks, improving therefore the wellbeing at work as well as the quality of healthcare provided to patients, thus benefiting the whole society.

The aims of the agreement:

achieve the safest possible working environment for employees in the sector and protect workers at risk;

prevent injuries to workers caused by all types of sharp medical objects (including needle sticks);

set up an integrated approach to assessing and preventing risks as well as to training and informing workers.



Better health and safety at work regulation through good practice guides

A series of good practice guides is available to help implement EU health and safety provisions and social cohesion through volunteer work

How do I minimize the risks connected to working at height? What if in my job I am exposed to noise, vibration or harmful substances? What protective equipment should I use when risk prevention is not an option? Proper implementation of European legislation in the field of occupational health and safety requires the answer to these and many more questions. Not always an easy task, particularly in small and medium-sized enterprises. Over the years, EU action to make European workplaces healthier and safer for its workers has resulted in a solid corpus of legislation covering the maximum number of risks with the minimum number of regulations.

However, if legislation is to contribute to improving working conditions,

reducing the number of work accidents and occupational diseases, it needs to be properly and effectively implemented at national level. This, as we have seen, can often represent a challenge, for employers and workers alike. The Commission therefore puts a lot of effort into developing initiatives aimed at providing information and guidance for the promotion of a safer, healthy working environment, especially in small and medium-sized enterprises.

Experience has shown that tools aimed at facilitating the understanding and implementation of the directives can constitute a valuable and powerful help to consolidating these aims. With this in mind, a series of "Good Practice Guides" has been developed to define state of

the art practices to prevent harm arising from different hazards. The guides are developed by the Commission in cooperation with the Advisory Committee on Safety and Health in the guise of Expert Working Groups.

The guides are focused on the end user, that is the person physically at risk. As it is clearly impossible to cover each and every situation cannot be covered in the guide, a new way of thinking is encouraged, one of "dynamic risk assessment" where the employer (and worker) is expected to apply the good practice ideas described in the guide to their actual situation in order to protect the individual at risk. The suggestions and recommendations in the guide do not relieve the employer from the obligation to undertake a thorough risk assessment before opting for a specific working method. This worker-oriented approach of the guide is crucial to better regulation as it raises the profile of health and safety legislation down to the level of the individual at risk and facilitates understanding and application of the legislation. To ensure the widest possible dissemination of information the guides are available in all official EU languages.

On a practical level each guide relating to a specific Directive concentrates on a particular industry or activity which has shown the highest risk of harm*/. Over the last five years, guides have been issued on the following subjects: Explosive Atmospheres, Chemical Agents, Vibrations at Work, Work at a height, and Noise at Work. New guides are being prepared covering Construction, Agriculture and Forestry, Small Fishing Vessels, Artificial Optical Radiation, Electromagnetic Fields and Muscular-Skeletal Disorders.

By helping all concerned to better implement EU provisions, it is hoped that the guides will contribute to the overall objective of adequately protecting the health and safety of workers and ensuring that at the end of the working day, they return to their families in good health.



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China's coal miners to benefit from EU expertise

EU experience can help improve workers' safety beyond the Union's borders

In an increasingly globalised economy, it is in the EU's interest to contribute to raising labour standards throughout the world. The G8 Summit which took place last July 2009 in L'Aquila, Italy, called for social and employment policies to become a crucial pillar in the new global framework for balanced and sustainable growth. This move, the G8 said, should notably take forward the ILO Decent Work Agenda, of which occupational safety and health is an integral part. This is just an example of the emerging global consensus to give employment and social objectives a greater place in global governance. As Europe's future employment challenges – exploiting the job potential of a greener economy; increasing competitiveness and competing for talent in a globalised knowledge-based economy; and the response to demographic ageing, including migration – are essentially driven by global developments.

Health and safety at work is one particular area where Europe needs to share its experience at global scale. This is fully reflected in the Community Strategy 2007 2012 on health and safety at work, which identifies the promotion of health and safety at the international level as one of its major objectives.

China is a key partner of the EU on the global scene. China and the EU have engaged in a long-term dialogue that covers all aspects of employment and social affairs. Three Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with China have been signed so far. The most recent, signed in January 2009 with the State Administration for Work Safety (SAWS) initiates a formal dialogue aimed at promoting and enhancing mutual understanding of

health and safety at work through regular exchanges of information on policy approaches, legislation, experiences and best practice, and policy review. This will be done for example through joint studies on topics of common interest, workshops and seminars, staff secondments, fact-finding and technical visits, training, internships and exchange programmes and the promotion of networking activities. Annual review meetings will bring together senior officials from both sides. In addition, China and the EU are currently exploring the possibility of cooperating with SAWS to support it in its commitment to improve Chinese workers' health and safety.

Although the MoU covers all aspects of health & safety at work, in a first step a focus will be dedicated to coal mine safety. This is an area of particular concern in China. China produces around 40% of the world's coal and it still represents the vast majority of all coal mine accidents in the world. Accidents in the industry are considered to be the second highest cause of accidental death in China, after road traffic accidents, with close to 6,000 deaths per year on average. Coal mine safety is also an area when the EU has a long standing experience which can benefit China's miners. The exchange of expertise under this new agreement will therefore help to cut workplace accidents and save lives.

The international dimension of the EU strategy on health and safety at work

The EU should promote the preventive principles set out in its policy on safety and health at work by:

- working together with other nations to promote implementation of the Global Strategy on Occupational Safety and Health, adopted by ILO in 2003, and ratification of the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention adopted in 2006,
- working with third countries and international organisations to obtain a global ban on the production, marketing and use of asbestos or products containing asbestos, and promoting health and safety at work in general,
- enhancing the collection of data on accidents through reporting requirements of serious accidents, thus improving the comparability of such data,
- strengthening cooperation with developed economies such as the United States, Canada, Australia and Japan and with emerging economies such as China and India"



New improved rules for social security co-ordination

EU adopts long-awaited new rules to make co-ordination of social security systems more modern and efficient

On 29 July 2009, after over a decade of discussion, EU leaders finally reached an agreement on a new modernised regime of EU social security coordination. The new rules will come into force in Spring 2010. In the 11 years it took to reach this agreement, the EU has seen two enlargements, 22 presidencies and three mandates of the European Parliament. As one might expect, ideas on how to simplify and modernise the rules have evolved over this period of time.

Making the Coordination System work more efficiently

The new rules – contained in Regulation 883/2004, its Implementing Regulation and in addition a Regulation that amends Regulation 883/2004 – continue to be based on the same fundamental coordination principles: equal treatment regardless of nationality; legislation of only one state applies; aggregation of periods

of insurance; and the export of benefits.. The main focus of the modernisation has been on making the coordination system work more efficiently and providing better protection for citizens' rights. The European Parliament insisted that the provision of information to citizens was central to this. There are, therefore, new and enhanced provisions in the regulations requiring the 31 countries that belong to the coordination system to provide user-friendly services to citizens and to provide them with information to enable them to assert their rights.

The Commission is currently working to improve its provision of information about the rules: a video about how coordination works is almost complete; the guide for citizens is being rewritten; the website is to be changed; and a series of training seminars on the new rules for experts from the Member States and their institutions are being hosted.

The drive to make the rules more efficient is also intended to benefit the over 50 000 social security institutions that are part of the system. This is demonstrated by, for example, tighter deadlines for reimbursement of costs between Member States, by new improved procedures for recovery of benefits paid but not due, and by a range of new provisions reinforcing cooperation between institutions and improving information flows. There is also a new procedure to deal with disagreements between institutions.

Electronic Data Exchange

Central to the modernisation project and to improving information flow is the introduction of compulsory electronic data exchange between Member States. Exchange of data between states on the social insurance records of individuals is of course a vital element of social

security coordination. Until now, this exchange has been done principally by means of paper E-forms. The modernised coordination regime introduces a new electronic EU system for these exchanges known as EESSI (Electronic Exchange of Social Security Information). The Commission has designed and is putting into operation an IT infrastructure that offers a secure technological environment and the necessary technical means for this exchange. This system acts as a bridge between the national systems of social security. It consists of a central coordination node to be hosted in the Commission's Data Centre, and an application connected to the central node via specified access points deployed in the national administrations.

The EESSI project has been identified as a "project of common interest" under the EP and Council Decision 2004/387/EC that promotes the Interoperable Delivery of Pan-European e-Government services to Public Administrations, Businesses and Citizens. In addition, EESSI has been identified as a project with wider potential and is to be studied as part of a Commission interoperability study. In terms of putting EESSI into operation, the Commission is working to ensure that the legal requirements of the Regulations can be transposed into

IT processes within the EESSI system. This involves the design of Structured Electronic Documents ("SEDs"), by means of which information for every circumstance envisaged by the Regulations can be exchanged. This detailed work is being carried out in close cooperation with the Administrative Commission (for the Coordination of Social Security Systems), through which the necessary input from the Member States can be obtained.

The transition from the old paper system to the new electronic one poses particular challenges, particularly as not every country will be ready to start exchanging via EESSI at the same time. It is envisaged that EESSI will start functioning in December 2010 and the complete switchover should be completed by the end of April 2012.

It should be noted that paper forms will not in fact completely disappear under this new electronic regime as citizens who move will still need to carry something with them that demonstrates their social security entitlements (similar, for example, to the European health insurance card in the healthcare field) To this end, new so-called "portable documents" with a distinctive EU logo are currently being designed.

Other Aspects of Modernisation

The coordination Regulations have been modernised in other ways too. For example, paternity benefits that are equivalent to maternity benefits are now included and there is a new provision dealing with the allocation of responsibility for recognising "child-raising periods". There is also a new provision for those Member States who have started to provide a defined contribution state pension (as opposed to the more traditional schemes based on years of contributions).

Simplification?

What about simplification? The impetus to reform the social security coordination rules came after all from the 1992 SLIM project, the aim of which was to simplify single market legislation.

Unfortunately, it cannot be claimed that the new modernised regulations have become instruments that are instantly comprehensible for the non-specialist! The nature of the coordination system means that necessary layers of complexity still remain. Nonetheless, a range of important simplifications have taken place. Perhaps the most important is the removal of the list of categories of persons who can enjoy rights under the Regulations. This has been replaced with a single definition of a person subject to the legislation of a Member State. This simplification significantly broadens citizens' rights as it means that all EU citizens residing in a state – whether economically active or not – are now included within the scope of the coordination rules.

In conclusion, the new social security coordination regime pursues the same aim as it did when established over 50 years ago: it allows EU citizens to exercise their right to free movement whilst maintaining their social protection. The focus of the new Regulations is to improve procedures in order to make citizens' rights even more effective.



New rules aim to provide more user-friendly services to citizens

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ESF in Romania – fostering researchers' mobility



Sibiu in Transylvania is a historic town. The waves of Romans, Turks, Huns and Saxons that swept through the area over the centuries have left a legacy that attracts culture-seekers from far and wide. But one person with a professional interest in the region is anthropologist Monica Stroe. “I’m studying the Saxon heritage of Southern Transylvania,” says the 24-year-old. “I started my PhD six months ago.”

Her work focuses on how the cultural and tourist industries tap into the area’s rich and diverse history and traditions. “I chose the Saxon areas for personal reasons,” she says. “I was born and grew up in a town founded by the Saxons where many medieval aspects remain. But I have always thought that Sibiu has made more of its heritage.”

A meticulously restored medieval city centre is one of Sibiu’s traditional showpieces. The city was the European Capital of Culture in 2007 and hosts many internationally renowned events. For Monica, this was an ideal time to develop a case study. “I was interested to see how Sibiu developed its ‘brand’ and how this has affected surrounding areas.”

Her research covers a wider area in the Southern Transylvanian region. “I’m really interested in the rural areas – how they are now promoting themselves as cultural destinations,” she says. “Another important aspect is that there is an ethnic paradox here,” she continues. “The mayor is German, yet only around 1.6% of the population are German origin – it’s a phenomenon happening throughout the region.”

Monica’s PhD studies followed on from her Master’s degree in nationalism studies and ethnic relations at the Central European University in Budapest. After qualifying, she knew she wanted to continue studying related topics. “My Master’s looked at the dynamics of ethnic groups, regional identities and conflicts,” she says. “It made me more aware of the difference between ethnic groups. I’m interested as to how identities are constructed.”

However, when she returned to Bucharest where she had originally studied, opportunities for academic research were scarce and underpaid. She was considering a change of direction: “I was thinking of going into market research work. It would have been a compromise, but continuing to study was looking financially unviable.”

Help came through a scholarship, co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund. “The grant really mattered to me. It gave me the chance to stay in my chosen field. I wouldn’t have been able to start a PhD without it.”

She receives a monthly stipend to cover her living expenses during the three years of her studies. And it also enables her to spend eight months in foreign universities across the EU and gives access the libraries and materials essential to her work. “Having that mobility is vital for my research,” she says. “It gives me the opportunity to travel. I can get access to important archives and get a wider perspective.”

As part of the programme, she will write articles for academic journals and work with professors. “It gives me good experience and the support that I need to focus on long-term field research.” Looking to the future, she says: “I’m hoping that the PhD will open up doors. I want to improve my research skills and consolidate my theoretical background. Ideally, I’d eventually like to work in community development. But it is early days, I’m concentrating on my research,” she concludes.



Renewed rules for European works councils

European works councils strengthened to better inform and consult workers, especially during restructuring

Effective social dialogue is essential, especially at a time of economic crisis. With a renewed legal framework, the European works councils will now be able to fully assume their role of looking ahead and providing support to socially responsible management in Community-scale companies.

The proposal to improve the legislation on European works councils was a priority for the Commission over the last year. A rapid agreement was reached by the Council and the European Parliament to adopt it, with the support of the European social partners. The provisions of recast Directive 2009/38/EC have now to be

transposed into law by the Member states for European works councils to be established and operate within this renewed framework.

European works councils are bodies representing the European employees of a company. Through them, workers are informed and consulted at transnational level by management on the progress of the business and any significant decision that could affect them. The right to establish European works councils has been introduced in 1994 in businesses employing at least 1000 employees in Europe with at least 150 employees in each of two Member States. The composition and

functioning of each European works council is adapted to the specific situation of the company by an agreement between management and workers' representatives.

Currently, European works councils exist in around 900 companies. There are approximately 20 000 members representing over 15 million European workers, favouring social dialogue and anticipation of change in transnational companies.

Key company decisions are increasingly being taken at European or transnational level. Rapid changes in the economic and social context and

the significant increase in multinational businesses over recent years mean workers need to be appropriately informed of, and consulted on, transnational matters. Building on the results of the existing legal framework, the new directive aims particularly at ensuring the effectiveness of employees' transnational information and consultation rights, at favouring the creation of new European works councils and at ensuring legal certainty in their setting up and operation.

First, establishing new European works councils will become easier. Employees must be provided with all the information they need in order to be able to request the establishing of a new body. The composition of the employees' group which negotiates with the central management is clarified, as well as the way in which negotiations for the purpose of establishing the European works council should take place. The competent European trade union and employers' organisations are to be informed of the start of negotiations, to enable them to monitor the establishment of new European works councils and promote best practice. Trade unions are also among the experts on whom the employees may call for assistance in the negotiations with management.

Secondly, European works councils will be operating more effectively. The new directive clarifies what is meant by 'informing' and 'consulting' employee representatives and states that these actions must take place at such time, in such fashion and with such content as are appropriate. It defines the transnational competence of European works councils and links the national and European levels of information and consultation. The fall-back rules, which are used as benchmark in defining negotiated and adapted rules at company level, are adapted, stating that there should be regular coordination with the European works council, which also has the right to receive a reasoned response to any opinion expressed.

Thirdly, continuity and adaptation of European works councils will be ensured. The new directive stipulates that in the event of a merger or significant acquisition, European works councils must be adapted either by applying what is contained in the relevant agreements or by further negotiation. Apart from these cases, the agreements in force remain valid.

Finally, the role and capacity of employee representatives will be reinforced. The members of European

works councils will have the means required to apply the rights arising from the directive to represent collectively the interests of the employees and must inform employees of the content and outcome of the information and consultation procedure carried out within the European works council. Employees' representatives will also be provided with training without loss of wages.

The new rules have advantages both for employees and for employers. Workers will benefit from a better dialogue with management and with workers of other countries. They will be a position to anticipate companies' evolution, and to have a voice in defining accompanying measures, particularly in case of corporate restructuring. Companies will benefit from legal certainty, better dialogue with their employees, better understanding and acceptance of their decisions as well as increased capacity to adapt to changes. With the timely recast of the directive, European works councils will be able to play a more important role in anticipating corporate restructuring and involving employees in decision making. This is especially welcome in these times of economic crisis with a large impact on employment.



Social dialogue is essential, particularly in times of crisis

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Prevention is better than cure

Why legislation must not place undue administrative burdens and implementation costs on companies

European workers benefit from the highest health and safety standards – an achievement to be proud of. For example, Commission figures indicate that between 1995 and 2005, the incidence rate of non-fatal accidents at work in the EU-15 dropped by 27.4%, against 42.4% for fatal accidents. But we can always improve our track record. That is why European employers pay great attention to improving the working environment for their staff.

Prevention instead of cure is the basis for the European approach to health and safety. The cornerstone of this approach is risk assessment. The legislative framework at European level is well developed and provides a high level of protection for European workers – through the Framework Directive on health and safety, 89/391 and the more specific directives stemming from it.

Without reducing the level of health and safety protection, it is important to ensure that legislation does not place undue administrative burdens and implementation costs on companies, particularly for small and medium-sized ones. BUSINESSEUROPE

supports the Commission's efforts in improving regulation and reducing administrative burdens. This includes simplification of existing legislation where necessary.

In the field of health and safety the Commission has, for instance, stated its intention to simplify two existing and outdated directives: Directive on manual handling of loads and Directive on work with display screen equipment. Care should be taken to ensure that this leads to real simplification for companies.

For instance, we do not want the introduction of a more general legislative measure to deal with musculoskeletal disorders. Although this would incorporate an updating of the two previously mentioned directives, it would go beyond simplification. Legislation is not the appropriate solution. There is no evidence suggesting that non-binding preventative measures would not be effective.

The occurrence of musculoskeletal disorders has a negative impact on the workers who suffer from such problems. The impact on companies is a reduction in efficiency in the workplace and loss of productivity.

There is also the cost of sickness absence for companies and national social security systems. Employers do not underestimate the seriousness of this issue. However, this problem not only occurs at work. There can be a direct link between work activities and musculoskeletal disorders. There is also clearly a direct link with activities outside the workplace. It is often very difficult and in many cases impossible to assess the root of the problem. Improvements can be made without introducing legislation, through education and lifestyle changes, as well as company-led practices such as health promotion activities and ergonomic organisation of the workplace.

European employers continually strive to improve health and safety protection at the workplace. Measures at European level must be designed to provide effective protection without undue burdens being placed on companies. In many cases measures devised by companies themselves, at the level of the workplace, are an effective and efficient means to improving health and safety provisions.

*Contribution by Philippe de Buck,
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European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)
Confédération européenne des syndicats (CES)

Occupational health: a social issue

Trade union expectations are equal to the unacceptable human and social cost of work-related illnesses

Twenty years ago, the European Union (EU) adopted the framework directive on health and safety at the workplace, which in turn inspired a renewal of national laws. Positive results have been achieved with respect to a reduction in occupational accidents. On the other hand, the overall impact of work on health continues to produce tremendous social inequalities. It is generally estimated that at least 8% of cancers are related to occupational exposure. This represents about 80 000 avoidable deaths, primarily among blue collar workers, every year in the EU. Similar inequalities occur for mortality from cardiovascular disease and suicides and for the quality of life of the elderly.

Prevention policies are simply not enough in these areas. The contrast with the excessive deployment of resources to cope with H1N1 flu is striking! The trade unions expect the new Commission to give new impetus to a Community strategy on health at the workplace. Three questions will constitute important credibility tests.

Dangers from chemicals are responsible for a high number of illnesses,

with consequences that generally take a long time to surface. Carcinogenic substances can cause cancers more than 20 years after exposure. A primary prevention policy is crucial and must be based first on replacing dangerous products with safer alternatives and second on organising collective protection when substitution is not possible. The definition of binding limit values is indispensable to this effort. The revision of the existing directive on carcinogenic substances is therefore a priority and should be extended to substances toxic for reproduction and the definition of appropriate limit values for the most commonly used substances, for example, crystalline silica and formaldehyde.

Musculoskeletal disorders represent the number-one complaint of workers in Europe. They can be the source of a whole range of disabilities. In some sectors, they can even prevent workers from pursuing their activity to the end of their working lives (construction, health care, repetitive work in industry). The new Commission will be judged on its ability to promote appropriate legislation that gives fresh momentum to prevention practices and addresses the organisation of work.

These endeavours require political courage. Under the banner of "Better Regulation", some would like to backslide. An opinion on working environment was issued by the Stoiber High level group on administrative burden reduction on 28 May 2009. It states that 89 % of the time spent by companies managing information on health and safety is an administrative burden that should be reduced. It challenges the obligation for small enterprises to write down a risk assessments. Yet risk assessments are the cornerstone of systematic addressing of health issues at the workplace. Without prior assessment, there cannot be real prevention. In the best of cases, a reactive policy is put into place.

The trade unions reject the development of a two-tier system where workers in small enterprises would cease to benefit from a preventive approach. They will be mobilising to ensure that health at the workplace is returned to a central place in different European Union policies.

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Making a difference in life - the EU investing in people

What does the EU really do for citizens? The European Social Fund (ESF) is one answer to the question, investing in some 10 million people every year throughout the 27 Member States. This book tells the stories of 54 individuals – two per Member State – who have taken up the opportunities offered by ESF-funded initiatives. The interviews focus on women and men, on every age group from teenagers to pensioners, in urban and rural communities, in every country of the EU. It is available in all EU official languages.

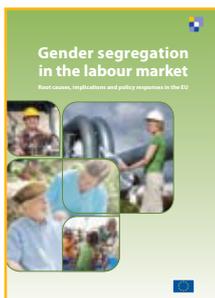
Catalogue No.: KE-78-09-859-EN-C



New rules for European works councils

European works councils have a renewed legal framework, aimed at favouring their creation and at better informing and consulting employees, especially in times of restructuring. This leaflet provides an insight into the changes introduced by the new legislation for the establishment and operation of European works councils. It is available in English, French and German.

Catalogue No.: KE-31-09-123-EN-D



Gender segregation in the labour market: root causes, implications and policy responses in the EU

This report on gender segregation in the labour market examines employment segregation for men and women in Europe through comparative analyses of trends across all 27 Member States plus Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. Specifically, the report looks at the root causes of gender segregation, its consequences and the current and desirable policy responses. This report is available in printed format in English with French and German summaries.

Catalogue No.: KE-78-09-682-EN-C

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