

Community strategy 2007-2012 on health and safety at work

2007/2146(INI) - 15/01/2008 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report by Glenis WILLMOTT (PES, UK) in response to the Commission's communication on the Community strategy 2007-2012 on health and safety at work. The resolution was adopted by 598 votes for, 20 against and 23 abstentions. It recalls that around 167 000 people died in 2006 as a result of work accidents or a work-related disease and that each year some 300 000 workers suffer permanent disability. Parliament welcomes the Commission's target for an average reduction of 25% in workplace accidents across the EU. Whilst that the figure may vary from country to country due to differing points of departure, it is still important to have clear and well-targeted measures together with a timetable and financial commitments which can then be evaluated and assessed. In the absence of such measures, timetable and commitment, Parliament calls on the Commission to report to Parliament on progress at the half-way stage of its 2007-2012 strategy.

Parliament calls on the Commission to do the following :

- to give priority in its strategy to those activities and/or industries which involve particular risks, such as metal-working, construction, electricity or forestry;
- to involve the European Agency for Health and Safety at Work (OSHA) more closely in this process, and, in particular, to ask it to submit an assessment of which industries have the highest risk of industrial accidents and occupational diseases and how such a risk can be effectively counteracted;
- to assess the availability of gender-disaggregated statistics at Community level on work-related fatal and non-fatal diseases;
- to collect more figures and data on workers with chronic diseases and to analyse their working conditions and to draw up a charter for the protection of the rights of cancer patients and people with other chronic diseases in the workplace and, with a view to requiring companies to make it possible for patients to continue in employment during their treatment and to return to the employment market after it has finished;
- fully to take account of the implications of demographic change on OHS, and to reinforce preventive measures and to adopt measures intended to compensate physical decline, notably through ergonomics and workplace design, and through measures and incentives designed to maintain the motivation, capacities and health of ageing workers;

Parliament regrets that the Commission's communication is silent on targets for the reduction of occupational diseases but understands the difficulty in measuring occupational diseases. It therefore calls on the Commission to review the use of existing statistical procedures in order correctly to identify and measure occupational diseases, and, in particular, occupational cancers with a view to setting targets for their reduction. Parliament suggests that the Commission consider the option of replacing Commission recommendation 2003/670/EC concerning the European schedule of occupational diseases with a directive.

Parliament also regrets that, despite Parliament's repeated and specific requests, the Commission has yet to propose amending Directive 2000/54/EC with a view to addressing the serious risks to health care workers arising from working with needles and medical sharps. It calls for an appropriate amendment to be adopted well before the end of the legislature in mid-2009 in line with its resolution on protecting European healthcare workers from blood-borne infections due to needlestick injuries. The Commission must implement appropriate prevention and screening measures to reduce the risk of contracting blood-borne diseases such as hepatitis C.

Members consider that the health problems related to exposure to asbestos are well known and that the European regulation on asbestos is adequate. They underline the fact that asbestos-initiated diseases in Europe are forecasted to be very high for many years ahead, and they call on the Commission to organise a hearing on how to tackle the huge OHS problems related to existing asbestos in buildings and other constructions. Parliament also calls on Member States to draw up national action plans on phasing out asbestos, including obligations to map asbestos in buildings and provide for the safe removal of asbestos.

Parliament also considers that it is vital to identify and monitor new and emerging risks ? e.g. psychosocial risks. It congratulates the OSHA's risk observatory for its work and calls on the Commission to act on its findings and come forward with the necessary proposals when new risks are identified.

Members await the outcome of the second phase of consultation of the social partners on musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) and ask the Commission to assess the option of proposing a directive given the increasing occurrence of MSDs and that the current legislation appears to be inadequate as it does not address all work situations or cover all risks concerning work-related MSDs. Scientific principles must be fully taken into account;

To ensure better application of the existing legal instruments on occupational health and safety, MEPs call on the Commission and Member States to strengthen surveillance mechanisms and to apply minimum requirements for the quality of preventive services and work inspection. They also call for tougher sanctions in the event of standards being ignored. It is also necessary to better assess implementation of legislation, exchange best practices, and strengthen the culture of prevention and early warning systems as well as social dialogue and the involvement of employees in the workplace. Noting the recurring lack of resources needed to verify the effective implementation of legislation in Member States, MEPs call for extra measures to strengthen this part of the strategy as well as a series of technical measures to evaluate the performance of national inspection systems. In particular, Member States should ensure that there is, at the very least, a ratio of 1 labour inspector to every 10000 workers and to focus inspections on priority sectors with high risks of accidents.

Lastly, and convinced that prevention is the best way to avoid work accidents, Parliament calls on the Commission to take measures to ensure that employers fulfil their responsibilities in providing appropriate preventive services and in constantly evaluating occupational risks. Member States must also regularly adapt the planned measures to keep in line with technological advances.