

# Mid-term review of the European strategy 2007-2012 on health and safety at work

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The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs Karima Delli (Greens/EFA, FR) on the mid-term review of the European strategy 2007-2012 on health and safety at work.

Mid-term review of the strategy: Members point out that the European reference framework on occupational health and safety (OHS) does not in itself provide for automatic improvement of working conditions. The major factors for improvement are proper implementation on the ground, notably via employee participation, tripartite dialogue arrangements, gathering and disseminating data, awareness-raising campaigns and networking of training and information services, and supervision of the application of the legislation in Member States. The Commission is asked to take swift action when infringements are detected and to reinforce sanctions when necessary.

The report deplores the fact that in 2009 several Member States did not focus their national strategies on the three priorities of the EU strategy: stress and burn-out at work, RSI, and research into and regular gathering of data on new risks.

It takes the view that OHS policies at European and national level should be made consistent and be reflected in other public policies: health, employment, industry, research, environment, transport, road safety, education, energy, regional development, public procurement and the internal market. It criticises the fact that the Commission has failed to pay sufficient attention to the gender mainstreaming approach when dealing with issues concerning health and safety at work, either in the Community strategy on health and safety at work or in its mid-term assessment. Gender mainstreaming should be implemented across the policies in order to better reflect the specific risks faced by female workers.

The report stresses the following:

- with respect to the award of public contracts, safety levels and accident prevention practices should be taken more fully into account;
- the importance of fully implementing REACH and the need for greater synergy between REACH and OHS policies, both at European level and in the Member States;
- the next European strategy should set more measurable goals, together with binding timetables and a periodic evaluation, and Members hope to see the objective of one labour inspector per 10 000 workers, as recommended by the ILO, become binding;
- austerity budgets and cuts in social spending should not harm action to improve health and safety at work;
- Member States should invest more in risk-prevention policies since such investment would be repaid in the form of improved labour productivity, improved business competitiveness and a reduction in social security expenses;
- work-related stress is recognised as a major obstacle to productivity in Europe and Members deplore the accelerating growth of conditions and accidents caused by psychosocial problems among workers, calling on the Commission to ensure that the EU of the Framework Agreement on Work-related Stress of 8 October 2004 is implemented in every Member State.

Collection of statistical data: Members want the Commission to develop gender and age-specific statistical means to evaluate prevention not solely in terms of accidents but also in terms of pathologies and the percentage of workers exposed to chemical, physical or biological agents and to dangerous situations from the point of view of the organisation of work. They also call for the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) to compile national indicators on exposure to cancers and to review the knowledge on exposure of particularly vulnerable workers.

The committee calls, in addition, for a European programme for the monitoring of occupational hazards (in particular musculoskeletal and psychosocial problems). It criticises the fact that not all Member States set measurable targets related to their national OHS strategies and that the vast majority of them have not set targets on occupational diseases, work-related health problems and illnesses, occupational risk factors or high risk sectors. Neither the mid-term review nor the 2009 scoreboard on the Community Strategy on Health and Safety at Work provide any substantial information on where Member States stand with regard to the EU strategy's only quantified target of a 25 % reduction in occupational accidents by 2012.

Fostering a prevention culture: the report calls on Member States and Commission to make guidelines on the protection of workers easier to apply in practice, without undermining the rules on health and safety at work. It points out that about 50% of workers in the EU still have no access to preventive services, especially as regards SMEs and subcontracting chains. All workers, those in the public and also in the private sector, should be covered by risk-prevention arrangements as well as effective prevention policies. New forms of employment should be taken into account so as to ensure that prevention and monitoring measures cover all workers, in particular vulnerable workers, regardless of the type of work that they do and their employment arrangements. The committee hopes that the target will be one safety advisor for every 3 000 employees.

Member States are asked to:

- increase the staffing levels of, and the resources available to, their labour inspectorates in order to meet the target of one inspector for every 10 000 workers, as recommended by the ILO;
- assess the quality of the training of their workplace risk prevention managers and supports their exchanges of best practices.

The report calls on the Commission to propose a directive protecting individuals who legitimately warn of OHS unacknowledged risks, notably by notifying the appropriate labour inspectorate, to ensure that such individuals are protected against threats of dismissal, and to put an end to blacklisting of such workers.

Vulnerable workers and specific risks: in addition to workers who do strenuous work, migrants, young people, old people, women of

child-bearing age, the disabled, members of ethnic minorities, low-skilled workers, casual workers, those with insecure working conditions and the long-term unemployed returning to the labour market are particularly at-risk categories. The committee believes that prior to the employment of these workers special preliminary training should be offered where appropriate.

The Commission and Member States are asked to consider protecting young workers over the age of 18 under Directive 94/33/EC, and to facilitate the process of demographic change by better adapting health and safety measures at the workplace to the needs of older workers.

Lastly, Members ask the Commission to submit a proposal to Parliament and the Council in 2012 seeking to ban smoking everywhere at the workplace, including indoor catering establishments, on all public transport and in all enclosed public buildings within the EU.