

# Promoting health and safety in the workplace

2004/2205(INI) - 24/02/2005 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted the report by Jiří MAŠTÁLKA (GUE/NGL, CZ) on promoting health and safety at the workplace.

To help the Member States, especially the new ones, to enact in their national legislation the EU's directives on health and safety at work, Parliament is asking the Commission to consider using the "open coordination method" in this area. This method requires the Member States to swap experience and good practice - but without introducing binding European legislation. Parliament believes the EU's future strategy on health and safety should include the liberal professions but should focus above all on the construction, fisheries, agriculture and health sectors.

Parliament's resolution highlights the importance of preventive measures in reducing the risk of workplace accidents and long-term health problems. Around 50% of workers in the EU do not have access to prevention services, so the report calls on the Commission "to examine the state of Member States' preventive systems in greater detail and to come forward with proposals for framing coherent national prevention policies based on an overall EU strategy". This would include, for example, guides on how to apply existing directives, taking into account the sex and age of workers as well as the nature of the risks.

Parliament notes that a high level of worker protection will lead to a competitive disadvantage for the old Member States within the Community unless it is ensured that, in the new Member States, the *acquis communautaire* is fully implemented and the health protection directives are applied in practice.

Moreover, Parliament considers that EU funding of programmes to improve worker protection, information, participation, cooperation in a social dialogue on health and safety at the workplace, etc. in general, and especially in or for SMEs, should be organised on the basis of simpler procedures, and that the adequate financing foreseen in budget plans for such programmes and projects should be allocated in time.

Member States are urged to increase the number, quality and power of labour inspectorates and to amplify and extend the training and qualifications of labour inspectors.

There is a need, according to the Parliament, to step up research into and the prevention of work-related illnesses, giving illnesses of a psycho-social nature the importance they deserve but without confining such efforts to them exclusively.

As regards medical staff, Parliament calls on the Commission to ensure that Member States implement the specific preventive measures necessary to protect healthcare workers from injuries caused by needles and other medical sharps in view of the risk of infection from potentially fatal bloodborne pathogens (group 3 biological agents).

The Commission is called upon to reduce, by means of appropriate measures, the health risks posed by "atypical" employment contracts.

Parliament expresses its concern over the proposed working time and services directives as regards in particular the intensification of work and the possibilities of control, the risk of extreme flexibility of working time and the danger of individual opt-outs. It equally expresses its opposition to any re-regulation in the field of health and safety which does not guarantee an equivalent level of protection for all workers in the EU.

Lastly, Parliament considers that corporate social responsibility applies both to society and companies themselves and calls on employers and trade unions to ensure that the legislation protecting female workers is duly implemented and, in particular, to help them reconcile family and working life. Favourable conditions and a suitable working environment for pregnant women and nursing mothers are urged.