

New legislation to reduce injuries for 3.5 million healthcare workers in Europe

EU Employment and Social Affairs Ministers have today adopted a Directive to prevent injuries and infections to healthcare workers from sharp objects such as needle sticks – one of the most serious health and safety threats in European workplaces and estimated to cause 1 million injuries each year. The Directive translates into Community law an agreement negotiated by the European social partner organisations in the sector, which employs around 3.5 million people.

Speaking at the Council of Ministers meeting, László Andor, EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion said: "*The healthcare sector is one of the biggest employers in Europe and needles represent a real risk to workers, both in terms of injuries and increased rates of life-threatening infections like HIV or hepatitis*". He added "*This new Directive will better protect workers and their families while reducing the burden of injuries on European health services.*"

The new Directive implements in law a framework agreement on prevention from sharp injuries in the hospital and healthcare sector signed in July 2009 by the European Public Services Union (EPSU) and the European Hospital and Healthcare Employers' Association (HOSPEEM) – European Social partner organisations (see [IP/09/1157](#)).

It aims to:

- achieve the safest possible working environment for employees in the sector and protect workers at risk, as well as patients;
- 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.

The legislation specifically addresses one of the priority objectives of the EU's current strategy for health and safety at work, which aims to cut workplace accidents by 25% by 2012.

Background

In 2006, the European Parliament adopted a resolution requesting the Commission to submit a legislative proposal on protecting healthcare workers from blood-borne infections due to needle stick injuries. After the two-stage consultations on this issue, in 2006 and 2007, the EU social partners decided to organise a technical seminar with all stakeholders (nurses, doctors, surgeons and so on), which highlighted the many causes of injuries in hospitals and healthcare services. In December 2008, they informed the Commission of their intention to negotiate on a wider basis covering all types of sharp injuries (including needle sticks) and on 17 July 2009 they signed a framework agreement following five months of negotiations. On 26 October, the Commission adopted a proposal for a directive to implement the agreement. On 27 January 2010, the Parliament's Employment and Social Affairs Committee adopted a draft Motion for a Resolution (by 44 votes to 1 with no abstentions), supporting the adoption by the Council of the proposal for a directive implementing the Framework Agreement.

Further information

Proposal for a Directive implementing the Framework Agreement on prevention from sharp injuries in the hospital and healthcare sector concluded by HOSPEEM and EPSU

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/dsw/public/displayRecord.do?id=5136

Agreement of the social partners

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=558&furtherNews=yes>

European social dialogue website

<http://ec.europa.eu/socialdialogue>