



European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)
Confédération européenne des syndicats (CES)



ETUC – On the offensive against MSDs

"More than one in three European workers across all sectors suffers from musculoskeletal disorders. We want to launch a mass trade union offensive focused on work organisation to stem these rapidly-spreading work-related illnesses", proclaimed John Monks, ETUC General Secretary, opening the joint conference hosted by the ETUC and its research and training institute, ETUI-REHS, on 9 and 10 October in Brussels. Entitled "ETUC – On the offensive against MSDs", the conference attracted 80-odd mainly trade union attendees.

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), are medical conditions that affect the muscles, tendons and nerves. It is Europe's most widespread occupational disease, and European workers' main health complaint.

"Current European legislation is not enough to tackle this problem. We need to get a draft MSD Directive back on the European agenda", urged Marc Sapir, Director of the ETUI-REHS. "It is very much in the in-tray", agreed Antonio Cammarotta, the European Commission official in charge of MSDs.

The social partner consultations on possible new European legislation which started in 2004 hit the doldrums before being given momentum last March with the launching of the second phase of consultations.

The unions and employers' representatives are at loggerheads. The unions want a general directive on MSDs that would give weight to the impact of work organisation and psychosocial factors. The European employers' organisation, BusinessEurope, is dead set against that, as its representative, Bob Koning, made clear. Arguing that "there is no scientific evidence that the rise in MSD is work-related", he called for a sectoral approach and the development of non-binding schemes like awareness-building and exchanges of "good practice".

The Commission seems to differ. "The Commission favours an overall approach that combines regulatory and non-regulatory measures. There is a case for a new initiative that could take the form of a directive based on the 1989 framework directive on the health and safety of European workers", said Antonio Cammarotta.

The two-day discussions also showcased various national trade union initiatives that will foster the development of a Europe-wide trade union strategy on MSDs.

Contact person: dgregoire@etui-rehs.org

