

quality of life in the 15 Member States and 13 acceding and candidate countries.

Levels of collective bargaining high in Europe

According to the recent annual overview industrial relations released by the European Industrial Relations Observatory (EIRO), the levels of collective bargaining coverage is on average almost four times higher in the European Union than in the USA and three times higher than in Japan. "It's the single most marked difference between the EU and its two competitors" says Willy Buschak. "The recently published annual overview *Industrial relations in the EU, Japan and USA* shows that, on average, 67% of the workforce in the new enlarged European Union is covered by collective bargaining, i.e. agreements in which workers - partially or fully - have their pay and conditions set."

Collective bargaining levels are lower in the new than in the current EU Member States. Still, taking into account the differences between union and non-union sectors, workers' pay and conditions across Europe of 25 are agreed collectively to a much greater extent than in Japan and the USA, reflecting a difference in the nature and extent of employment and labour law between three competitors.

A road map to labour peace

By combining social dialogue and tripartite concertation with the foresight model of establishing scenarios for the future, the Foundation-led project *Social dialogue and conflict resolution mechanisms* has produced national development plans outlining effective industrial relations systems in all 10 candidate countries. The project, which is based on previous European Foundation projects on social dialogue and EMU in the current and new EU Member States, will come to an end on 31 March 2004 with a conference in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

"The workshops on conflict resolution have led to real dialogue between participants," says **Frank Pullicino**, Director of the Department of Industrial and Employment Relations in Malta. "For us in Malta, the project will contribute to a wider use of tripartite concertation, leading peaceful industrial relations."

More information is available at <http://www.eurofound.eu.int>.



European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

BUILDING OSH KNOWLEDGE

The European Agency's work with Acceding and Candidate Countries

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The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work is based in Bilbao, and its main role is to "provide the Community bodies, the Member States and those involved in the field with the technical, scientific and economic information of use in the field of safety and health at work"¹. This article aims to explain briefly how the Agency has been working with the Acceding and Candidate Countries to achieve a smooth transition into their full membership of the Agency network and also to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and good practice across the EU25.

Preparing for EU enlargement : sharing knowledge and good practice

Over the last five years, the Agency has been preparing to ensure that the Acceding and Candidate Countries (ACCs) would be able to participate as full members of its network from May 2004. The Agency has a "Focal Point" in each Member State and EFTA

country to act as its reference centre. The relevant national OSH authorities in all the ACCs appointed a Focal Point during 2000.

They have been involved in Agency activities and developed their own websites with support from the Agency's PHARE programmes.

¹ Article 2 of the Agency's Founding Regulations : <http://agency.osha.eu.int/agency>.

The Agency has also expanded its network of "Topic Centres": these are consortia of OSH-expert institutions that provide the Agency with reports and other products to fulfil its Work Programme. A "Topic Centre Good Practice - Candidate Countries", funded by the PHARE II programme, was launched in 2003 and has been working to collect, analyse and disseminate examples of good practice in the four areas identified by the ACCs as priorities for action: construction, agriculture, dangerous substances and psychosocial issues². This consortium will be replaced in May 2004 by a new "Topic Centre New Member States", which will continue to cover the same four key topics, and also prepare a report on the impact of socio-economic changes on OSH issues in the workplace. A new generation of Topic Centres will be in place by the end of 2005, with a mixture of members drawn from the EU25.

The Agency has also participated in the "Work Life and EU Enlargement" project, which aims to build and exchange knowledge within the field of working life in order to facilitate the enlargement of the European Union. All Candidate Countries have participated in this project run by the Swedish National Labour Market Board³.

Raising awareness : European Weeks on Safety and Health at Work

One of the Agency's main tasks is to raise awareness about OSH problems and to identify practical solutions to address them. The *New Community strategy on health and safety at work 2002-2006*⁴ has emphasised this role: "The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work should act as a driving force in matters concerning awareness-building and risk anticipation." To fulfil this obligation, each year the Agency organises EU-wide campaigns known as "European Weeks". Many of the ACCs have already taken part in these campaigns, whose previous themes include musculoskeletal disorders (2000), accident prevention (2001), psychosocial issues (2002) and dangerous substances (2003).

The European Week 2004 focuses on construction, with the slogan "Building in Safety". Statistics from the EU15 illustrate why it is important to focus on this topic: construction activities take place beyond the construction sector itself, and some estimates suggest that the industry may employ more than 12 million workers – possibly up to 16 million if undeclared workers are taken into account. There are around 1,300 fatal accidents each year. Construction workers are almost twice as likely to have accidents as employees in other sectors: every year, nearly one million construction workers have accidents resulting in the loss of more than three working days. There are also many other problems, such as musculoskeletal disorders, with upper limb problems reported by 28% of construction workers (twice the EU average).

The European Week 2004 will be the biggest ever OSH campaign, with more than 30 countries taking part and information available in 20 languages. It is backed by the Irish and Dutch EU Presidencies, with a launch in Dublin on 30 April 2004 under the auspices of the Irish EU Presidency and the European Parliament.

As in previous European Weeks, the 2004 campaign wants to emphasise prevention, by 'designing out' risk even before workers arrive on the building site: studies have shown that many accidents are due to decisions taken before any building work has started. The European Week's publications and activities will identify the major hazards in construction work and disseminate tried and tested practical solutions.

To maximise the impact of the campaign, this year's European Week will not only address its message to intermediaries, but also target workplaces directly. To this end, the Agency will be working with the social partners and co-ordinating activities with the Senior Labour Inspectors Committee's (SLIC) construction campaign⁵.

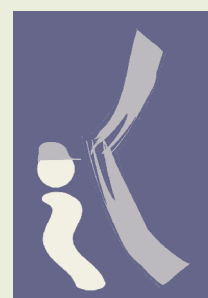
Everyone can get involved in the European Week 2004: construction companies, trade unions, clients, architects, suppliers, etc. You will find more information (in 20 languages) on the website launched on 30 April 2004: <http://ew2004.osha.eu.int>, where you can also sign up to our European Week Campaign Charter.

Future developments

The Community Strategy clearly indicates that "to ensure that the *acquis communautaire* is being properly applied, there must be an effective transfer of experience and knowledge". One of the Agency's main goals over the coming years will be to facilitate this exchange of expertise among the EU25. This will be reflected in the rolling Work Programme 2005-2008 to be agreed in November 2004, at the first meeting of the Agency's Board where all 25 countries will be present as full members.

The main challenge for the Agency is to continue to provide information that is relevant and practical in all 25 Member States. In the case of good practice materials such as our factsheets⁶, the Agency has already started to publish them in the 20 official languages so that they can reach their intended target audience at the workplace.

The Agency takes full advantage of the Internet as a cost-effective means to disseminate information, and all our publications are available freely for download from <http://agency.osha.eu.int>. We encourage you to visit our website and send us your feedback. ■



**BUILDING
IN SAFETY**

² See the Agency's good practice pages : http://europe.osha.eu.int/good_practice.

³ WLE website at <http://www.ams.se/wle>.

⁴ http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/news/2002/mar/new_strategy_en.html.

⁵ See http://europe.osha.eu.int/good_practice/sector/construction/slic.

⁶ Available from <http://agency.osha.eu.int/publications/factsheets>.