

## ETUC Demands EU Action on MSDs

The European survey of 2010 on working conditions once again underlined the importance of musculoskeletal disorders. This is the most frequent complaint by workers regarding the negative impact of work on their health. Musculoskeletal disorders affect all industries, and are the source of a significant proportion of absences due to illness and, in the most severe cases, can prevent workers from keeping their jobs. In many European countries, musculoskeletal disorders are causing the highest number of recognised and compensated occupational diseases. The worsening situation is related to the intensification of work, to the still very strong prevalence of repetitive work and to the interaction of physical factors (such as inadequate equipment) and psycho-mental factors.

Current EU legislation still does not adopt a comprehensive approach with regard to this important occupational health problem. Particular directives have been adopted based on the 1989 Framework Directive, focusing on specific elements which can be the origin of musculoskeletal disorders. The main elements of this legislation are the 90/269 EC Directive that deals with the manual handling of loads, the 90/270 Directive on work on Video Display Units and Directive 2002/44 on vibrations.

In the different Member States, musculoskeletal disorders are rightly regarded as a major occupational health problem but prevention measures have so far failed to provide them with an effective response. Indeed, one of the reasons for this is the piecemeal approach based on the risk factors. A more comprehensive approach, which would generally address all the causes of musculoskeletal disorders would be likely to improve prevention practices. Provisions must be followed in all companies, independent of their respective size.

The European Commission has been working for almost ten years now to prepare a comprehensive directive on musculoskeletal disorders. On several occasions the European Parliament has expressed its wish for a rapid conclusion to this exercise.

The European Trade Union Confederation wishes to stress that the Commission must assume political responsibility and submit without delay a draft directive to allow the Parliament and the Council of Ministers to fulfill their role. A global Community legislation on musculoskeletal risks would represent added value for the Member States and boost prevention policies in a more effective manner.

For the ETUC, the proposed directive should be linked to the preparation of the Community strategy on occupational health and safety for 2013-2020. It is an essential element of a new strategy that grants priority to health problems at work and in particular to the long-term effects of working conditions.