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# What do Europeans think about their working conditions?

**The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) has just released the results of a Europe-wide opinion poll on safety and health at work. According to the findings, there is widespread concern among European citizens that the current economic crisis could adversely affect health and safety at work, putting at risk the improvements that they report having seen over the last five years. Many Europeans also feel well informed about occupational safety and health and consider it an important factor when choosing a new job.**

## **The economic downturn puts pressure on European workers**

According to the opinion poll, 6 out of 10 Europeans expect the global economic downturn to deteriorate working conditions, especially regarding health and safety. And a significant majority of respondents (75%) across Member States believe that ill health is caused at least to some extent by the job that people have.

Jukka Takala, Director of EU-OSHA, recognises the challenges that businesses face today and reminds them of investing in their workers health: "The financial crisis may lead organisations to ignore or minimise the importance of workplace safety and health. And even there is a risk that companies will consider cutting back on their investment in occupational safety and health (OSH). The challenge to us, as the Agency, is to convince them that there is no point in making short-term gains at the cost of long-term problems. All of our work shows that the more healthy workplaces are, the more productive they also tend to be".

## **Salary and job security most important**

As unemployment increases, people may be more concerned with their immediate job security than with the safety and health of their working conditions. When asked about the deciding factors for choosing a new job, European Union citizens believe that job security and salary level are more important than safe and healthy working conditions, which ranked third in the poll before working hours.

## **Better information – improved health and safety conditions**

The encouraging news is that people within many of the Member States (particularly EU-15) regard themselves as well informed about risks in the workplace and 57% of respondents believe that health and safety at work has improved over the last five years.

## **Gender differences**

The opinion poll also reflects gender variations in attitudes towards OSH. Male participants regarded salary (61%) and job security (55%) as the most important factor when taking a new job, in comparison to lower percentages among female respondents (53% and 51%, respectively). On the contrary, women seem to give more importance to working hours (26%) than men (19%).

In addition, more male respondents believe that health and safety conditions have improved over recent years (62%) than their female counterparts (only 52%) and men feel better informed on safety and health matters (71%) than women (61%).

Jukka Takala said: "In fact, safety and health risks of women at work tend to be underestimated and

neglected. The incompatibility of working time with family life, the 'double shift' which still affects women disproportionately and the fact that there is more emphasis on accidents at work than on occupational health (which leads to attention being turned towards male-dominated sectors and occupations) are some of the new challenges which must be faced. It is essential to take a 'gender sensitive' approach to safety and health at work, an issue which EU-OSHA will continue in its contribution to ensure greater understanding within businesses across the European Union".

EU-OSHA has played an essential role in promoting safety and health at work within Europe for more than a decade and will continue to contribute in its pro-active approach to the improvement of working conditions. The Agency's Healthy Workplaces campaign, including the European Week for Safety and Health at Work from 19 to 23 October, is the world's biggest information campaign on OSH, involving thousands of organisations and workers across Europe.

For more information on the results of the **Pan-European opinion poll on occupational safety and health**, please visit our website at: <http://osha.europa.eu/en/statistics/eu-poll>

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### Notes to editors:

1. The "**Pan-European opinion poll on occupational safety and health**" was conducted by TNS Infratest, global leader in opinion polling, political and social research and responsible for the Eurobarometer. The representative survey involved 1000 people from each EU Member State with participants selected from a wide range of age, educational and occupational backgrounds. Field work was carried out in April and May 2009.

The questions were designed to assess the opinions of European citizens on the importance of safety and health in the workplace, levels of awareness among workers, current standards of safety and health practice and their views on how these may change due to the economic crisis.

See the complete results by Member State at: <http://osha.europa.eu/en/statistics/eu-poll>

2. The mission of the **European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA)** is to make Europe a safer, healthier and more productive place to work. EU-OSHA was set up by the European Union to help meet the information needs in the field of occupational safety and health. Based in Bilbao, Spain, EU-OSHA aims to improve the lives of people at work by stimulating the flow of technical, scientific and economic information between all those involved in occupational safety and health issues. <http://osha.europa.eu>

3. **Healthy Workplaces. Good for you. Good for business. A European campaign on risk assessment** is the Europe-wide information campaign organised by EU-OSHA. The current campaign (2008/2009) aims at reducing work-related accidents and illness through better risk assessment. It targets, in particular, SMEs and high risk sectors, such as construction, agriculture and transport. <http://hw.osha.europa.eu>

During the **European Week for Safety and Health at Work from 19-23 October 2009** hundreds of campaign events and activities will take place all over Europe. These include conferences and exhibitions, training sessions and activities where both large and small companies work together. The common theme linking all these events is promoting the importance of carrying out risk assessment in every workplace. The campaign concludes with the Closing Event on 17 November 2009. <http://osha.europa.eu/en/campaigns/hw2008/events/view>

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