



European Work Hazards Network Health and Safety Charter

The European Work Hazards Network

The European Work Hazards Network (EWHB) is an information and exchange network for workers, trade unions, safety representatives, safety activists, health professionals and academics involved in promoting and improving safety, health and welfare in the working environment.

The EWHN is made up of national networks and workers organisations, from any European country. It is a voluntary and informal organisation. Each national network is autonomous. A Steering Committee consisting of representatives of national networks meets two or three times a year. European-wide Conferences are organised every two or three years. Smaller conferences and meetings on specific topics are occasionally organised.

The EWHN sees workers' organisations (trade unions) as the main force for improving health and safety at work, and seeks to work in co-operation with them.

The aims of the EWHN are:

- To provide a forum for the exchange of safety, health and welfare information and experiences;
- To initiate and support campaigns aimed at improving safety, health and welfare in the working environment;
- To facilitate exchange visits between workers and those involved in health and safety across Europe and the world;
- To develop and promote the European health and safety charter for workers.

The EWHN's main focus is on workplace organisation to bring about improvements in health and safety. One of the original concerns of the EWHN was to consider the impact of European Union Directives on health and safety and how they were implemented in each individual EU country. This EU legislative approach is now only a very small part of our work. The EWHN also covers national networks in Europe outside of the European Union, and we are concerned about fellow workers throughout the world – we do not want to reduce risks to workers in Europe by exporting those risks elsewhere in the world.

European Health and Safety Charter

The European Health and Safety Charter is intended as a tool to help all those who are trying to improve health and safety in the working environment. It is a means to discuss, to organise, to educate and to politicise. The original demands were agreed in 1992. Changes in working practices, the impact of globalisation and the power of multi-national companies, mean that the Charter needs to be continually revised and up-dated. It is a working document to respond to threats and attacks from companies and governments, and to set a positive agenda of what we want. It includes some suggestions for strategies to try and win our demands.

Neo-liberalism, Globalisation and the Brutalisation of Work

Globalisation is a characteristic tendency of capitalism, with constant expansion and search for new markets. Regulation by nation states can, however, influence the form it takes. Since the 1980s, after a period of stable and long term development in Europe, the neo-liberal political agenda has been to support competition, 'liberalisation', deregulation and the removal of so-called barriers to the free movement of capital, goods, services and labour. There has also been widespread attack on the 'welfare state' and public sector by funding cuts and privatisation.

The global economy is increasingly dominated by a decreasing number of multi-national companies. Their competitive power has led to their virtual monopoly control of many sectors of the economy, and consequent driving down of wages and working conditions. Deregulation of the labour market helps companies to turn permanent jobs into temporary ones, to force low paid workers to seek two or three jobs to earn enough money to survive, to create a mass of unemployed workers. The abolition of capital controls allows multi-national companies to move or threaten to move production and investment to countries where labour is cheaper and governments will provide inducements (grants, lower taxes, free trades zones, etc). The weakening of workers' rights and of the role and power of trade unions, competition and deregulation of markets in goods and services, privatisation of public sector jobs – these have all contributed to an increase in the 'brutalisation' of work. The pressure on workers to work longer hours and to work harder, and the lack of enforcement of health and safety laws, mean more ill health and disability caused by work.

So, it is not just a matter of campaigning against a poor working environment, we must also challenge the underlying forces which put such pressures on workers:

- We must resist attempts to weaken laws and agreements which protect workers.
- We must promote and organise for more regulation of markets as part of the global movement against neo-liberalism.
- We must develop solidarity with working people throughout the world to resist the transfer of risk from one country to another.

The principles of equality and unity underpin all aspects of the Charter, and must apply within workplaces, within countries, and across international borders. We must consider how each of the sections affects vulnerable workers and groups who are often disadvantaged, such as women, ethnic minority, migrant, young, old, disabled workers. It is also essential to include the fight against racism – which can be used to divide workers and weaken their organisation – in campaigns for better working conditions.

In summary, all working people must have the right to

- work which does not cause physical or mental injury or illness
- meaningful work that makes it possible to maintain and develop skills and competencies
- a limit to working hours and flexible working to suit the worker
- a balance of work with home life to ensure good quality of life
- work which differentiates but does not discriminate – this means recognising the differences between people and the impact work has on them, and the measures we need to ensure they are equally protected, but not treating any group (whether according to ethnicity, age, gender, disability, sexuality) more favourably
- access to occupational health services, health and safety advisers and other experts

Legislation

The EWHN will work to ensure that:

- Legislation at European and national level to protect the life, health, safety and well being of all workers is defended and strengthened;
- Legislation continues to hold the employer responsible for this protection, and that attempts to shift responsibility to workers themselves is resisted;
- The health and safety of workers is the paramount consideration in legislation and enforcement, and that any moves to deregulate in order to reduce requirements on employers or promote 'free trade' are resisted;
- No employer will be able to evade the health and safety controls of one country by moving production to another country. All European employers are required to provide equal levels of health and safety protection to all direct and subcontracted workers throughout the world.
- Employers are forced to ensure equal pay and working conditions between directly employed and sub contracted workers;
- Organisations providing agency workers are responsible for providing agency workers with pay and working conditions equal to those directly employed by the contracting company;
- Legislation is introduced to protect workers from hazards known to cause work-related stress;
- Legislation on working time is strengthened;

Enforcement

The EWHN will work to ensure that:

- Enforcement of health and safety law is strengthened, with criminal prosecution and penalties for companies and individual managers who break the law or cause harm to workers;
- All workplaces are inspected regularly by health, safety and environmental enforcement agencies, with worker representatives present, and without prior notice to the employer;
- Worker representatives and workers themselves have a right to call for an inspection without being identified;
- Partnerships between workers and employers are seen as a possible addition to good law and effective enforcement, not a replacement for them.

Trade unions, health and safety representatives and worker rights

EWHN will work to ensure that:

- All workers have a real opportunity to join an independent trade union, to elect their own health and safety representatives, and to take part in collective bargaining;
- Trade unions have an automatic right to be recognised and to appoint health and safety representatives;
- All workers and worker representatives have the right to speak out about hazards at work, and to be protected from any victimisation for doing so;
- Workers' representatives and workers themselves have the right to stop the job where there is a risk to life, safety or health;
- Trade unions have rights to international collective bargaining in multinational companies and to controlling and enforcing standards;

- Health and safety representatives have the right to the time and resources needed to be fully involved in all health and safety activities without loss of pay or victimisation, including the right to meet and exchange information with other health and safety representatives;
- Health and safety representatives have the right to access and represent all of their members, no matter where they work or by whom they are employed;
- Trade unions prioritise health and safety, the election of adequate numbers of health and safety representatives, and support for them.

(We define ‘health and safety representative’ as workers elected by their fellow workers, preferably through a trade union, to represent them on health and safety matters. This does not include people appointed by companies or government.)

Research, information, education and consultation

The EWHN will work to ensure that:

- Workers have a right to information on all activities, processes, chemicals, systems of work and health and safety investigations in the workplace, including information on the potential impact of their workplace on the environment;
- Workers are informed, consulted and have co-determination regarding any changes in the workplace that may affect health and safety;
- Experts, researchers, advisors who are acting on behalf of workers have a right of access to the workplace;
- Employers are obliged to set aside a budget to ensure adequate health and safety education and training for both managers and worker health and safety representatives;
- Mechanisms, such as a work environment fund, are put in place to fund independent, worker-centred health and safety research.

Occupational health and safety services

EWHN will work to ensure that:

- The occupational health and safety conventions of the ILO are incorporated into European and national legislation, and that this legislation is properly enforced.
- No such occupational health and safety service are provided for profit;
- Workers have a right to full compensation and costs for all work-related diseases or injuries.

The overall demand of the EWHN Health and Safety Charter is for a safe and healthy working environment for all working people, so that they are able to work without fear for their lives, health and well-being.