Europe for safety and health at work

Opinions of Europeans following the European Year of Safety, Hygiene and Health Protection at Work

COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES
The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect either the position or views of the Commission of the European Communities.

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KEY

EC 12 European Community (all twelve Member States)

COUNTRIES

B Belgium
DK Denmark
D (w) former West Germany
D Federal Republic of Germany (including the five new Länder)
D (o) five new Länder (former East Germany)
G Greece
E Spain
F France
Irl Ireland
I Italy
L Luxembourg
NL Netherlands
P Portugal
UK United Kingdom

SECTORS OF ACTIVITY

The sectors of activity referred to in this report are as defined in the NACE nomenclature
Agriculture Nace 0: agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing
Chemicals, energy Nace 1 and 2: energy, water, extraction and processing of
minerals, chemical industry
Metal manufacture Nace 3: metal manufacture, mechanical, electrical and
instrument engineering
Manufacturing industries Nace 4: other manufacturing industries
Construction Nace 5: building and civil engineering
Distributive trades Nace 6: distributive trades, hotels, catering, repairs
Transport Nace 7: transport and communication
Finance Nace 8: banking and finance, insurance, business
services, renting
Other services Nace 9: other services
SUMMARY

The Health and Safety Directorate V/F of the Commission of the European Communities conducted two opinion polls in order to prepare for and then assess the impact of the 1992 European Year of Safety, Hygiene and Health Protection at Work, and to find out more about what people in Europe think about health and safety at work. The first was held in spring 1991 among a sample of 12 500 workers and the second in spring 1993 among a total sample of 25 000 people, including 12 500 workers. The polls were carried out as part of the "Eurobarometer" series conducted periodically by the Commission.

AWARENESS OF ACTIVITIES

• Almost one in four workers knew that 1992 was dedicated to safety, hygiene and health protection at work.

• More than one in five Europeans said that they recognised the logo used during the Year. Extrapolated to the total population, this represents almost 60 million Europeans aged over 15.

• Almost one third of the workers questioned (29%) knew about the Community’s activities in the field of occupational health and safety.

• These overall figures include considerable variations between countries or sectors of activity.

• The media and firms were the main information channels.
PARTICIPATION AND INFORMATION

Without specific reference to the European Year itself, in 1992:

- One in four workers received information or gave his opinion about health and safety at work.

- One in ten was involved in a specific health and safety measure, while 16% took some sort of action themselves.

- Of those workers who knew about the Year, one in three noted an improvement in their working environment. 58% received information about occupational health and safety.

- There were major differences between sectors of activity: the best informed and most active were workers in the chemical and energy industries, while agricultural workers had the poorest results.

IN FAVOUR OF CONTINUING COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

- 59% of workers in 1991 and 61% in 1993 felt that Community legislation would improve their health and safety conditions. A growing percentage (19% in 1991 and 28% in 1993) expressed no opinion.

- Almost two thirds of these fully agreed or agreed to some extent that "the EC should take all necessary action to guarantee safety, hygiene and health at work", rather than that "no action at all concerning these matters should be taken at European Community level".

- The workers considered the Community's priorities to be stimulating research (71%), providing information on health and safety (69%), monitoring the application of Community legislation (65%) and encouraging discussions between employers and workers (64%).

FIRMS MUST TAKE ACTION

- In 1991 two thirds of the workers felt that firms should take the main responsibility for preventing occupational illnesses and accidents.

- In 1993, among people responsible for safety in firms, the main expectations lay with employers (46%), internal safety services (45%) and government inspectors (43%).
INTRODUCTION

This brochure gives a summary of the main conclusions of two opinion polls conducted for the Commission of the European Communities.

The first, carried out in spring 1991, was designed to find out what Europeans think about occupational health and safety, and to provide a basis for the information campaign launched for the European Year of Safety, Hygiene and Health Protection at Work. The second survey was in two phases (April and June 1993) and was designed to measure developments in opinions and behaviour regarding occupational health and safety and to provide information for a partial assessment of the impact of the European Year on people in Europe. It was also intended to provide supplementary information in fields not specifically covered during the earlier survey.

This report gives a highly condensed account of the results of the two surveys and concentrates on the second in particular.

CONTEXT OF THE SURVEYS

Political and economic situations in Europe at the time of the two surveys

In 1991, when the first survey was conducted, the economic and political climate in Europe was fairly favourable. Opinions in favour of European integration and the Community in general, measured by four questions repeated in Eurobarometer surveys over a number of years, had reached a peak, as we can see from the following graph.

European integration and support for the Community In general (1985-1993)

Note

These figures refer to the following four questions, which have been asked in the same form in Eurobarometer surveys for some time:

- In general, are you for or against efforts being made to unify Western Europe ("Unification")?
- Generally speaking, do you think that our country's membership of the European Community is a good thing, neither good nor bad, or a bad thing ("Membership")?
- Taking everything into consideration, would you say that our country has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the European Community ("Benefit")?
- If you were told tomorrow that the European Community had been scrapped, would you be very sorry about it, indifferent or very relieved ("Regret scrapping")?
In 1993, however, public opinion in Europe changed in the face of economic recession and uncertainty following the delays in the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty. The results of the last Eurobarometer survey (March-April 1993) reflect a rather gloomy mood, ranging from dissatisfaction at how democracy works at national level to waning support for the European Community and some of its policies. Support for the unification of western Europe had stabilised (73% "very much in favour" or "in favour") after three sizeable drops since spring 1991. Opinions on membership of the European Community had also consolidated, with 60% thinking that it was a "good thing" for their country to be a member. The downward trend (-2%) continued, however, in opinions on whether countries benefited from membership of the European Community; a positive view is now held by 47%. The number who would feel sorry if the European Community was scrapped has fallen to 42% (-2%), with 38% indifferent and 11% very relieved. Finally, it should be noted that it seems from a number of questions that the drop in the percentage supporting European developments does not automatically increase the percentage opposed, but the don't-knows or don't-cares.

This marked and rapid change in opinion over the period between the two surveys on health and safety in Europe must be taken into account when analysing the results. Any drop in interest in the Community's occupational health and safety activities could be an extension of the drop in support for the Community in general, or more specifically the effect of doubts or questions about Community measures in the health and safety sector.

**Objectives of the European Year of Safety, Hygiene and Health Protection at Work**

The aim of the Year was "to conduct a number of activities designed to promote and enhance the value of the substantial body of Community measures in the field of safety, hygiene and health at work". In the course of one year the Commission and the tripartite National Liaison Committees organised or funded over 500 projects, not including all the activities carried out in firms or by workers', employers' or government organisations. Over 2 500 initiatives were recorded in all the Member States, and this was certainly not the full total.

Priorities and specific target groups were selected for the Year: the working population in general, workers in high-risk sectors, small- and medium-sized firms and young vocational trainees.

A total budget of ECU 12 million was allocated for the Year. An estimated 50% of this went on information and awareness campaigns and measures to mobilise the general public or specific target groups.

**SURVEY METHOD**

The first survey was conducted for the Commission through Eurobarometer in March and April 1991 among a sample of 12 500 workers (1 000 in each country, including the new Lander, and 500 in Luxembourg). The sample was representative of the workforce in the Community countries, adjustments being made for the various sectors of activity. Respondents were interviewed personally.

To enable comparisons to be made and to obtain a sufficiently wide sample of the working population, the second survey was conducted in two phases, March and April 1993, then June 1993. Each phase involved some 12 800 people (workers and unemployed, 1 000 for each country including the new Lander, 500 for Luxembourg and 300 for Northern Ireland). Questions 1 to 4 were put to all respondents. Questions 5 to 23 were put only to workers. In order to produce more representative results for the various sectors of activity and to enable the two surveys to be compared, two adjustments were made to the sample. The first
applied to questions 1 to 4 when the target group was the whole population. Clearly, the worker’s sector of activity was not taken into account, since some of the respondents did not work. The second adjustment applied when questions 1 to 4 were analysed by sector of activity and when the replies to questions 5 to 25 were analysed. Account was taken of the distribution of Europeans in the sector of activity in which they worked. With these weightings the results of the two surveys can be compared.

Both surveys were coordinated and processed by INRA (Europe), Brussels.

**TABLE OF QUESTIONS**

1. Did you know that 1992 was dedicated to safety, hygiene and health at places of work by the European Commission or not?
2. Have you ever seen this symbol (European flag)? And this symbol (European Year logo)?
3. Have you read, seen or heard anything about the activities of the European Community in the field of safety, hygiene and health at places of work?
4. How did you get to know about this?

With regard to this matter, have you in 1992:
5. taken any initiatives?
6. given your opinion?
7. made suggestions?
8. asked for information?
9. participated in any action?
10. received information?
11. noticed any improvement at work?
12. Here is a statement that some people have made about this subject. Could you tell me whether you agree strongly with this statement, agree slightly, disagree slightly or disagree strongly?
   Community legislation will improve my own health and safety conditions at the place where I work.
13. Which of the following comes closest to you personal opinion?
   The European Community should take all necessary action to guarantee health, safety and hygiene at work.
   No action at all concerning these matters should be taken at European Community level.
14-17 For each of the following, do you think that the European Community should do more, about the same or less?
   - checking the application of Community legislation on health, safety and hygiene at work
   - providing information on health, safety and hygiene at work
   - stimulating discussions between workers’ and employers’ organisations
   - stimulating research to improve health, safety and hygiene at work.
18-23 For each of the following categories, could you tell me if they should do much more, somewhat more, somewhat less or much less to reduce accidents at work and work-related illnesses?
   - employer
   - government inspectors
   - each worker individually
   - workers’ representatives
   - company committees on which workers and managers are equally represented
   - people in the company responsible for health and safety at work.
Opinions of European on the European Year of Safety, Hygiene and Health Protection at Work

WERE EUROPEANS AWARE OF THE EUROPEAN YEAR?

European Year

The whole sample was asked the following question:

Question 1:

"Did you know that 1992 was dedicated to safety, hygiene and health at places of work by the European Commission or not?"

19% of all Europeans and 23% of workers said yes to this question. The figures varied between sectors and sub-populations from 15% for the unemployed to 31% for the chemicals and energy sector. Generally speaking, the industrial sectors were most aware of the existence of the Year.

These results can be linked to the limited amount of funding spent on information and mobilisation campaigns during the Year: the investment needed to make one person aware of the existence of the Year - the first stage in making people aware of its objectives - was limited to around to one tenth of an ecu.
Recognition of the logo

To minimise confusion respondents were shown the European flag. Both workers and non-workers were then asked whether they recognised the logo chosen to illustrate the Year (question 2). 21.2% said yes. Extrapolated to the total population, this represents almost 60 million Europeans aged over 15.

The percentage varied between the different sub-populations: workers were more likely to identify the logo, particularly those in the chemicals and energy sector and managers.

The logo for the Year is now recognised by one fifth of all Europeans, even if they do not always automatically associate it with the European Year.
Community activities in the field of occupational health and safety

23% of Europeans said yes to question 3:

"Have you read, seen, or heard anything about the activities of the European Community in the field of safety, hygiene and health at work?"

The main target group of the Year, the working population, was better informed: 29% were aware of the Community's activities, although there were major differences between sectors. For example, only 18% of agricultural workers knew about the Community's activities, compared with 39% of workers in the chemical and energy industries.

This table is in line with the previous results and confirms the impression gained from the 1991 survey. Some sectors appear generally better informed than others, the extremes being chemicals/energy (39%) and agriculture (18%).

Many sectors which proved to be the most hazardous in 1991 - industrial and transport sectors - were better informed about the Community's activities than the average worker. However, the agricultural sector, which is also a high-risk sector, still remains difficult to reach.
Sources of Information

The following question (question 4) was put to those who said either that they knew that 1992 was the European Year of Safety, Hygiene and Health Protection at Work, or that they knew about the Community's activities in the field:

"How did you get to know about this?"

Well in the lead were the media (television, radio, newspapers, etc.) with 49.6%. However, this figure should be interpreted cautiously, since anyone asked this question might automatically think of the media as a source of information. 15% of replies from both workers and non-workers also mentioned firms as helping to provide information.

What is particularly interesting here is to analyse the replies of the various sub-populations, whose lists of information sources differed. The company was naturally the most important source for workers, which probably explains the reduced impact of the media on this group.

Generally speaking, "companies", "trade unions" and "employers' organisations" appear to be growing in importance in the industrial sectors, to the detriment of the three other sources. The sectors which were best informed about the Community's activities were those where companies played an active part in providing information. The results of the 1991 survey indicated that firms in these sectors already played an active part in health and safety in general.
Opinions of European on the European Year of Safety, Hygiene and Health Protection at Work

The media played a consistent role in all sectors of activity and types of employment: some 12% of Europeans received information from this source. Where particular groups were better informed, it was mainly thanks to their companies, trade unions or employers’ organisations.

Situation in the Member States

The differences observed between the Member States largely resulted from the fact that the organisation of the Year was very much guided by the twelve National Liaison Committees, which decided on national priorities according to each country’s particular situation and requirements. The target groups and the methods used to reach them in particular varied from one country to another. Some countries focused on the general public, others on SMEs or high-risk sectors. The extent to which the media were used varied widely: some committees planned campaigns involving employers and trade unions, others established direct contact with firms. These variations should be borne in mind when interpreting the following graphs.
ARE EUROPEAN WORKERS WELL-INFORMED ABOUT HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK AND ACTIVE IN THE FIELD?

In the 1991 survey 55% of workers in Europe said that they had had the possibility to give their opinion or make suggestions about how to develop better safety, hygiene or health protection at the place where they worked, so it was interesting to see how these possibilities were put into practice during the European Year.

The following questions (questions 5-11) were put in the spring 1993 survey:

"In 1992 have you taken any initiatives with regard to this matter?"
"In 1992 have you given your opinion with regard to this matter?"
"In 1992 have you made suggestions with regard to this matter?"
"In 1992 have you asked for information with regard to this matter?"
"In 1992 have you participated in any action with regard to this matter?"
"In 1992 have you received information with regard to this matter?"
"In 1992 have you noticed any improvement at work with regard to this matter?"

These questions, which are broader, more detailed and more practical than those in the earlier survey, cannot be used to measure participation in the European Year. When analysing the replies, it must be remembered that they are influenced by at least two major groups of factors: the habits of workers in Europe regarding participation and information and the specific impact of the European Year.

One in four workers in Europe received information or gave an opinion on this subject. The percentage of positive replies drops depending on the level of active involvement required: for example, 11% participated in a specific action. The question about noticing any improvement at work is particularly interesting: in 1992, 17% of workers noticed improvements in safety and health protection. Extrapolated to the working population, this figure is the equivalent of 25 million people.

In order to identify the behaviour of individual sub-populations and differences between the Member States, we have concentrated on only three questions which are an accurate reflection of the replies received.
Those who knew that 1992 was the European Year of Safety, Hygiene and Health Protection at work appeared to be a particularly well-informed and active sub-group. The results for young people and blue-collar workers were only a few percent different from the average for the working population. However, there were major variations between countries which, here again, should be interpreted as reflecting national habits and possibilities as much as the impact of the European Year.

For the various sectors of activity the picture is the same as before, with major variations between the chemical and energy industries at one end and agriculture at the other. However, it seems that some progress has been made since the 1991 survey, when there was a serious shortage of information, dissatisfaction with the measures taken and lack of scope for participation in the construction sector compared with the European average.

In 1992 17% of workers in Europe noted improvements in safety and health protection at work. A considerable number (around a quarter) had received information or given their opinion on the subject, although the scope for participating in specific activities remained limited.
WHAT DO EUROPEANS THINK ABOUT THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY?

Question 12:
"Here is a statement that some people have made about this subject. Could you tell me whether you agree strongly with this statement, agree slightly, disagree slightly or disagree strongly?

Community legislation will improve my own health and safety conditions at the place where I work"

This question was also asked in the spring 1991 survey, when 18% replied "don't know". The results of the spring 1993 survey show that this figure has now reached 28%, confirming the impression of uncertainty recorded in other Eurobarometer surveys over the last two years.

If we subtract the "don't knows" and calculate the results of the two surveys on the basis of the positive and negative replies only, the percentage of positive replies was fairly stable, increasing from 59% to 61%. However, there was a slight reduction in the most extreme positive and negative views, particularly in those countries which had been most strongly in agreement or disagreement in the first survey.

The swing in opinion was more marked in two sub-groups: the agricultural sector was less positive, whereas the financial sector was more positive than before.
The majority of those expressing an opinion remained convinced that Community legislation would have a beneficial effect on their health and safety. However, here again, a sizeable percentage of workers showed the same uncertainty about Europe which we have seen repeatedly over the last two years.

To find out whether workers in Europe consider that the Community has a role to play in protecting their health and safety at work, they were given the following two opinions placed at opposite ends of a ten-point scale:

**Question 13:**
"The European Community should take all necessary action to guarantee health, safety and hygiene at work"

and

"No actions at all concerning these matters should be taken at European Community level"

They were asked to give a mark out of ten according to whether they agreed with the first opinion (1) or the second (10).

The results were divided into four categories:

1-4: those more in favour of Community action,
5 and 6: indifferent,
7-10: those fairly strongly opposed to Community action in the field,
don't know.
Those in favour of Community action on health and safety were in the majority with 62%. 9% did not express any opinion on the subject.

Opinions strongly in favour or somewhat in favour of Community action in the field of occupational health and safety clearly predominated in the five new Lander (69%), Greece (80%), Spain (68%), Italy (69%) and Portugal (71%).

Denmark (50%), France (54%), Luxembourg (49%) and the United Kingdom (53%) were less enthusiastic, although around half of the workers were still in favour of action at Community level.

Although the "don't know" rate was similar to the 9% Community average in most countries, Luxembourg proved the most hesitant with 17%, and Denmark the most decided with 4%.
The comparative results for other sub-groups (sectors of activity or type of job) do not show any significant differences.

Two-thirds of workers would encourage Community health and safety initiatives. Only one-tenth are opposed.

On the subject of support for Community action in the health and safety field, in order to identify what type of action most people wanted to see, the following questions suggested various possibilities (questions 14-17):

"For each of the following, do you think that the European Community should do more, about the same or less?

- checking the application of Community legislation on health, safety and hygiene at work
- providing information on health, safety and hygiene at work
- stimulating discussions between workers’ organisations and employers' organisations
- stimulating research to improve health, safety and hygiene at work"

When interpreting the results, attention should be focused not on the absolute values of the replies, but rather on the relative priorities which emerge, given that the level of support for Community action was already established by the previous question.

The wishes expressed by the workers were fairly evenly balanced between the four types of Community action in question. However, encouraging research and providing information were the two fields in which more intensive Community action was hoped for. The percentage of "don't knows" was again relatively high (12-15%).
Opinions of European on the European Year of Safety, Hygiene and Health Protection at Work

In favour of checking the application of directives

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In favour of information on health and safety

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In favour of stimulating discussions between employers and workers

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Note for interpreting the graphs on pages 22 and 23.

In each graph the bar beside the name of each country indicates the level of support for the type of action in question.

A comparison of the results for the different Member States shows that:

- overall, the order of priority between the types of action remains fairly constant from one country to another;
- Spain, Greece, Italy and Portugal, which had a clear majority in favour of Community action in the health and safety field in the previous question, made little distinction between priorities in this question. In other countries, on the other hand, particularly Denmark, the priorities were much more clearly defined;
- the importance of stimulating discussions between employers and workers showed the widest variations: Greece, Spain, Ireland, Italy and Portugal gave it the highest priority.

A comparison of the results for these questions between the various sectors of activity and types of job shows that they were fairly similar to the average results for all workers.

Although workers' expectations focus mainly on stimulating research and providing information, they are also in favour of checks on the application of Community legislation and stimulating discussions between workers and employers. There are considerable differences between countries, however.
WHAT DO WORKERS IN EUROPE EXPECT OF THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR SAFETY IN THEIR FIRMS?

In the 1991 survey, in response to the question

“In your opinion, who should be primarily responsible for reducing occupational accidents and illnesses?”

workers put firms at the top of the list (64.5%).

In the 1993 survey attempts were made to pinpoint who, in firms, workers expected to improve prevention

The following questions were asked (questions 18-23).

“For each of the following categories, could you tell me if they should do much more, somewhat more, somewhat less or much less to reduce accidents at work and work-related illnesses?

- employer
- government inspectors
- each worker individually
- workers’ representatives
- company committees on which workers and managers are equally represented
- people in the company responsible for health and safety at work.”

Two remarks are called for here:

most people showed a natural tendency to give a positive reply to this question, only 1.3% of those interviewed replied in the negative. The question is therefore mainly useful for comparing the various people involved in prevention and the various sub-populations of the sample. Comparisons were based on the proportion of very positive replies (“should do much more”),

there are differences in prevention management structures between countries, sectors and sizes of firms, particularly when it comes to workers’ representatives, joint company committees and people in the company responsible for health and safety, so great care should be taken when analysing the results.
In the Community as a whole, the workers' expectations focus on the employer, those in the company responsible for health and safety and government inspectors.

An analysis of the results for each country leads to the following conclusions.

expectations are generally higher in Greece, Spain, Italy and Portugal, and are lowest in Luxembourg, in Germany employers head the list of those expected to do much more; Greece, Ireland and Portugal have the highest hopes that the role of those in the company responsible for health and safety at work will be expanded; in the Netherlands and France it is the government inspectors who are expected to do more about prevention.

Out of the various possibilities within the firm, workers look mainly to the employer, company health and safety services and government inspectors to improve accident prevention. However, not all the possibilities proposed exist in all firms or every country.
Publications on 'Europe for safety and health at work'

- Working with dangerous products
- Training in safety and health at work
- Health and safety training in the fishing industry
- General practitioners and occupational diseases
- Safety and health in the construction sector.
  "Training: temporary or mobile construction sites'
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