

Technical conclusions

1. De definition of MSD

In the agreement the following definition of MSD is used:

The signatories to this agreement call upon the Community authorities to establish a definition of musculoskeletal disorders which will be valid for all Member States. For their part they consider that MSDs are a number of troubles affecting the main articulations of the human body which might be caused by:

- repeated gestures;
- loading and unloading heavy weights; whole body vibrations;
- bad postures.

During the meeting in Maastricht we noticed that the definition of MSD is not a uniform used definition. A suggestion for a follow-up definition could be:

The members consider that MSDs in relation to professional activities and lifestyle are a number of troubles affecting the main articulations, nerves, muscles and connective tissues of the human body which might be caused by: - repeated gestures, - loading and unloading heavy weights; body vibrations; - bad postures.

2. National observatory: Have National Observatories of Agricultural workers' health and safety been created

In the agreement the following definition of observatory is used:

The signatories to this agreement call on the social partners in each Member State to create a "national observatory of agricultural workers' health and safety", with the support of the appropriate national bodies, or to designate an existing authority or body to perform this role. This observatory should be in charge of centralising statistics relating to MSD in conformity with the European statistical framework, and of compiling a register of good practices for preventing the risk of MSD

The members consider that in many countries of the EU a well functioning observatory has been created. Some of them are recognized for the reason that social partners are deeply involved in its activities. In other well functioning observatories the social partners should be more involved in the future. In few countries an observatory has not yet been started.

3. Improvement of knowledge about the risk:

In the agreement the following is set about knowledge:

statistics relating to MSD in conformity with the European statistical framework, and of compiling a register of good practices for preventing the risk of MSD

The members recognized that in many countries different forms of statistics relating to MSDs are produced and that a register of good practices for preventing the risk of MSD is not yet executed. Better data on MSDs are needed. Both the European Commission and national governments need to collect and analyse better quality and consistent data on the prevalence, incidence and (especially early) costs of MSDs in agriculture.

Geopa-copa could ask a committee of experts to come with a concrete practical way of producing uniform statistics.

4. Have authorities or bodies been made responsible for coordinating policies for the prevention of MSD's

In most countries authorities or bodies are made responsible for coordinating preventive activities in agriculture. Some more extensive than others, some private others public.

5. Awareness and training programmes

Some countries organize training programmes which can be considered as a good and interesting practice. In most countries unions and employer organizations offer trainings about prevention of MSD, however not specially for agricultural workers and employers.

6. Good practices

Good practices are not hard to find in EU member countries. However the exchange of good practices hardly happened. Many studies to reduce MSDs are executed and sometimes repeated in other countries.

Final conclusions of the meeting by the President Chris Botterman

1. Agricultural social partners are prepared to take responsibility for safety and health at work

Health and safety at work is an important topic. All players – employers, employees and authorities- are needed in promoting health and safety. EU agriculture social partners have shown to take the European agreement on reduction of MSD's seriously and are prepared to take responsibility for safety and health at work. Those who carry out the daily work; employers and employees, have the final responsibility in introducing and following health and safety instructions.

2. Public health should be involved to pay attention to the relationship between MSD and lifestyle. Social partners should promote this.

MSD is not only depending on working conditions but also on person's whole life style. The known risk factors for MSDs include not only physical load and manual work but also repetitive strain, accidents in the past, obesity and smoking. Social partners in each country could take appropriate actions on that.

3. Progress in prevention of MSD in agriculture and forestry can only be made by exchange of good practices and practical solutions amongst member organisations within Europe.

In Europe there already exist legal provisions and regulations and many research studies have been carried out. Next step should be to get all this information into practice, organise a system based on the collection of good examples. Geopa Copa will not stimulate new regulations but is thinking to create a working group with country experts, ILO-expert, the European Commission representatives, workers and employers in order to exchange information and create a follow-up system.

4. The combination of Agricultural Health Insurance and prevention of MSD may bring benefits to agricultural workers and employers.

The fee of insurance can be built in a way that in occupations or workplaces where the defined risks for accidents and MSDs are higher also the fee is higher. On the other hand if an employer takes effective actions to reduce the risk of accidents and MSD the fee should be lower. It is of importance that employers and workers are member of the board of the health insurance.