



## Conference

RESPECT: Effective approaches to  
tackling third party violence in the  
workplace

**22 October 2009, Brussels**



## **FOREWORD**

The aim of this document is to provide the European Social Partners involved in the RESPECT project as well as various stakeholders in EU Member States with a brief summary of the information and recommendations circulated during the one-day conference on “Multi-sectoral initiative on 3<sup>rd</sup> party violence project”. The event was held on the 22 October 2009 in Brussels with the support of the European Commission. The conference had three main objectives: to present the results of the studies undertaken by GHK Consulting (for the employer side) and Provoke it (for the trade union side) on “Effective approaches to tackle third party violence in the workplace”; to present a number of selected good practice examples identified as part of the project; most importantly, to provide the opportunity for all project partners to decide on any next steps in this area, following up on the 2007 cross-sectoral framework agreement adopted by ETUC, Businesseurope, CEEP and UEAPME. A number of multi-sectoral meetings and events have already taken place to assess the need for and possibility to agree a joint action on the issue of third party violence. Therefore, this conference was part of the decision-making process to assess whether further discussions should take place on a multi-sectoral European instrument or framework to be used to prevent, identify and manage problems of third-party violence in the workplace.

As stressed in the conference documents package circulated amongst participants, a multi-sectoral Action Plan would bring the following benefits:

1. Attempt to reduce the overall level of third-party violence and mitigate its negative affects;
2. Complement the 2007cross-sectoral framework agreement adopted by ETUC, Businesseurope, CEEP and UEAPME;
3. Take account of health and safety regulations and existing frameworks;
4. Provide an instrument to raise awareness across Europe of the different issues concerning third-party violence;
5. Confirm the responsibility of employers, in cooperation with trade unions and workers, to ensure and promote a working environment free from third-party violence.
6. Identify the different measures and processes introduced by social partners to prevent and manage problems of third-party violence at work;
7. Draw up principles and guidelines that can support joint actions by social partners at the different levels to tackle third-party violence;
8. Give examples of practical measures that can be taken;
9. Commit trade unions and employers to working together on this issue;
10. Provide a framework for monitoring, evaluation and review.

## **Summary of the conference proceedings**

The workshop was attended by over 100 participants from more than 20 EU Member States. The summary of the conference proceedings will be structured following the organisation of the conference per distinct sessions: introduction to the project from the European Commission’s perspective; prevention and risk assessment; awareness raising and training; reporting and follow up; panel discussion; and conclusions.

In her welcome address, Valeria Ronzitti, Director of HOSPEEM, emphasised that the 2007 agreement on violence and harassment at work concluded by the European Social Partners made a significant contribution to dealing with violence at work. However, of immediate concern are the two main shortcomings of the agreement: first, the agreement does not deal specifically with the problems caused by third-party violence; second, the agreement leaves at the discretion of national member organisations to include third-party violence as part of the agreement implementation. These issues are stringent for the sectors represented in this project (i.e., hospital and health care sector, local and regional government, commerce and private security sectors) as they are most affected by the increasing trend in third-party violence. She reiterated that the aim of the conference was to deepen the discussion on key features of successful policies and to – if possible – agree to jointly design and launch a multi-sectoral instrument to tackle third-party violence.

Echoing these statements, Penny Clarke from EPSU highlighted in her introductory note that the conference followed a thematic and holistic approach to third-party violence, bringing together both the employee and the employer perspective.

## **A. INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

On behalf of the European Commission, Jean-Paul Tricart, set out the context for the conference by presenting an overview of the following key issues: 1) the contribution of the consultation of the European Commission to the social dialogue on violence at work, and in particular on tackling third party violence; 2) the significant progress made between social partners in this area; 3) the character of complementarity between multi-sectoral, cross-sectoral and sectoral initiatives and instruments to tackle third-party violence; 4) the potential of a multi-sectoral approach to deal better with the growing phenomenon of violence at work.

It was also during this stage that the EC representative it would continue supporting this dialogue and initiative.

## **B. PRESENTATION OF THE PROJECT EXPERTS AND EUROPEAN AGENCY FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK ON VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT**

During this phase of the conference, Tina Weber and Per Nyström – the project experts from GHK Consulting and Provoke it respectively – outlined the findings of two separate research projects on third-party violence from the employee and employer sides. The studies present several commonalities. First, third-party violence was found to be a pervasive and troubling issue across the EU for both employers and employees working in different sectors. However, this being the second point, there are noticeable differences between countries in terms of the magnitude and frequency of this phenomenon. For instance UK, France and Finland can be placed at the top end of the spectrum whilst HU, CY and BG report low levels of third-party violence at work.

Thirdly, there are also significant differences between sectors in relation to third-party violence. Important is the fact that the sectors represented at the conference are amongst the most affected. Furthermore, the project experts emphasised that third-party violence is a multi-faceted concept covering a wide range of behaviours and employers often lack the know-how to tackle these behaviours. In addition, there is evidence that few sectoral agreements targeting third-party violence are in place at work.

The conference continued with a presentation of Malgorzata Milczarek from the European Agency for Health and Safety at Work who provided an overview of the problems of violence and harassment at work drawing upon a recent pan-European survey. The study describes the main risk factors of third-party violence (e.g., handling valuables) as well as the detrimental consequences of it for both the individual and organisations. Key message conveyed was the general low level of acknowledgement of third party violence across the EU, particularly in the New Member States. In addition, the study found that NMS have fewer initiatives tackling this problem due to the perceived lack of tools, awareness and general concern about it. The presenter also provided examples of solutions to the problem of violence, namely efficient risk assessment (RA). It was emphasised that RA methods must be flexible, user-friendly and to involve both employees and employers in the design and implementation processes. More details about this extensive survey and available toolkits can be found on the website of the Agency ([www.osha.eu](http://www.osha.eu)).

## C. PREVENTION AND RISK ASSESSMENT

Prevention and risk assessment constituted one of the three key themes of the conference. This part started with a succinct presentation from the project experts who highlighted the importance of involving social partners in the prevention and risk assessment of third-party violence. Furthermore, measures arising from RA can cover several aspects such as provision of accurate information to clients regarding the nature and expected quality of a service, provision of tools, workplace and process design.

In line with these conveyed messages, two representatives of the Health and Safety Division at the Hertfordshire County Council provided useful tips regarding the prevention of violence through planning the environment (room layout, control of noise levels, CCTV etc.), delivery of personal safety training and planning the job design (ID safe devices, panic button, clear work procedures and information sharing etc.). It was highlighted that the prevention of violence should take a customised risk-based approach because of new emerging risks at work. Furthermore, the speakers suggested that social services associated with lower risk of violence can also benefit from simple preventive measures such as electronic diaries, training and constant interaction with the supervisor via mobile or other devices. Sharing common ground, the Training and Working Environment Council of the Swedish Guarding Industry (BYA), established by the Swedish social partners, provided an example of RA checklist based on three types of risks (low, increased and high risk), probability and consequences of a risky event.

## D. AWARENESS RAISING AND TRAINING

Under this section, the following case studies were presented by employers:

- Carrefour Europe
- Royal College of Nursing
- Stockholm County Mental Health Hospital

As the titles suggest, each case had its specificities although the cases share many common ideas.

Carrefour delegates presented their specific programme tackling third-party violence implemented in France (and across the Group in different customised versions) between 2007 and 2008. More than 8,000 employees in hypermarkets and supermarkets attended this programme. The training is based on a train-the-trainer system involving both professional trainers and trained shop managers.

Innovative elements of this initiative include the partnership with NGOs and the principles of understanding violence and manage the negative emotions associated with violent situations.

Kim Sunley from Royal College of Nursing provided an overview of the impact of third-party violence on lone social workers drawing upon the results of the RCN lone worker survey in the UK. Results show a high number of unreported verbal assaults, e.g., out of 1893 verbal assault incidents, only 883 were reported. Furthermore, 60% of the surveyed lone workers reported that their employer did not know their whereabouts and 72% never or rarely received the necessary information before a visit to a patient. Most importantly, results indicate that the mobile phone is by far the most common personal safety device. Only 3.5% of lone workers had an Identicom device despite the fact that this was recommended by the UK Government. The RCN has also developed a 5-point action plan to tackle third-party violence which has gained public attention and support. The UK government already committed £29million for employers to invest in technology and training for lone workers.

The example from Sweden highlighted the importance of training by individuals close to the needs of the workplace, which are aware of the types of situations which can arise in this environment and how these can best be diffused. The training provided in the Stockholm mental health trust was found to have reduced certain types of interventions (such as restraint of patients) significantly.

## E. Reporting and follow-up

Steve Phillips of the Department of Health in the UK provided an overview of the good practices of reporting and follow-up in NHS. Since 2003, the newly-established body NHS Security Management Service has been collected quality data on reported physical assaults and criminal sanctions. Collated NHS-wide reports are currently available some seven months after the end of each year but there are plans to develop reporting in real time. Legal action following assaults involves joint work with the Police and the Crown Prosecution Service. Comparing figures between 2003/2004 and 2007/2008, the improved system of reporting resulted in an increase of 5% in the number of reported incidents whilst the number of assaults decreased from over 60,000 to under 56,000 in the period 2004/05 to 2007/08. The follow-up work has also brought about positive results as the number of criminal sanctions following assaults per year have increased from 51 to 992 during the reference period (2003-2008).

This conference session continued with a presentation from Doug Russell of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW) which described the robust outcomes of the Freedom from Fear Campaign. With the aim to reduce commercial robberies and repeated assaults, the campaign encouraged employer and employees

store-specific RA tools. The USDAW campaign is an excellent example of efficient collaboration between social partners and local authorities, including police and environmental health officers.

During discussion, various participants raised the issue of the use of reported information which is still considered a contentious matter in terms of confidentiality as well as rights of current and prospective victims of assault.

## F. Panel discussions

The conference concluded with a panel debate with high level representatives of all project partners to discuss lessons learnt and next steps.

On behalf of EPSU, the General Secretary Carola Fischbach-Pyttel welcomed a multisectoral initiative emphasising at the same time the importance of bottom-up approach to tackling third-party violence through the use of good RA, reporting, support to victims and design of safe working environment.

HOSPEEM, represented by its Secretary General Godfrey Perera, welcomed the multisectoral approach whilst reiterating that a reactive approach to third-party violence is more expensive and detrimental in the long-run than a pro-active/preventive approach. As previous speakers, HOSPEEM representative stressed that paramount importance of RA in the first place.

Echoing these messages, Bernadette Segol, Regional Secretary of UniEuropa, embraced the idea of a multi-sectoral approach that could cover all organisations, particularly SMEs, which are more vulnerable to third-party violence. She emphasised that good practices and enforced laws are necessary but not sufficient to tackle this business and societal problem across all EU countries and sectors.

EuroCommerce, as a dialogue partner with UniEuropa, showed support for this initiative which could potentially be better placed to tackle new emerging risks to businesses (such as the growing number of isolated shops in capital cities). Xavier Durieu, Secretary General, drew attention to the toolkit on “Preventing third party violence in Commerce” launched by EuroCommerce on 21 October 2009.

In line with these positions, Hilde de Clerck, General Secretary of CoESS, welcomed the multi-sectoral initiative whilst highlighting the importance of taking into account sectoral specificities when designing a common tool for tackling third-party violence.

Kelvin Scorer, Vice-Chair of CEMR-EP, stated that the issue was common yet dependant on sectoral circumstances and workplace settings. The European law was clear in this area based on risk assessment and appropriate actions. However, it remains important to learn from each other and value could be added by a broad multi-sectoral agreement which emphasized the need to develop a policy and presented good practice examples. Any approach may need to be differentiated for the special needs of the sectors as, for instance, in the context of local government and hospitals when providing public services.

The EC delegate reiterated the Commission’s support of a multi-sectoral agreement referring to the fact that such as an agreement would not hinder in any way other cross-sectoral or sectoral initiatives.

## G. Conclusions and next steps

The conference concluded with the brief presentation and circulation of the draft commitment document on third-party violence at work produced by the social partners

on the 22 October 2009. The draft is subject to ratification by their respective decision-making bodies. The draft reiterated that HOSPEEM, CEMR, EPSU, CoESS, Eurocommerce and UniEuropa take the issue of third-party violence in the workplace very seriously. Regarding the 2007 agreement, the draft document mentions that “the yearly joint tables on the implementation of the cross-sectoral agreement show to date that third-party violence is not systematically addressed in the implementation of the agreement.”

In light of this fact, the involved social partners “will aim to develop a jointly agreed instrument that will set out the steps that need to be taken to prevent, identify and manage problems of third-party violence.” The mentioned policy instrument would support various approaches by employers and trade unions to tackling the problem as well as provide a framework for all sectors covered by the initiative. The policy instrument would provide the following elements:

- A clear definition of third-party violence
- Preventive measures such as managing the expectations of clients through the provision of accurate information about services in advance;
- Designing safe workplaces through RA including the provision of tools, workplace and process design;
- Training and awareness raising;
- Monitoring and follow-up;
- Support to victims;
- Procedures for policy evaluation and review.

The multisectoral instrument would complement clauses 4 and 5 of the cross-sectoral agreement concluded by the ETUC, CEEP, BusinessEurope and UEAPME. The draft document emphasises that each sector would be responsible for implementing the tool in line with national practices under a common framework and timetable for reporting and evaluation.