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European organisations agree on measures to counter work-place violence

Eight European organisations of social partners have today adopted joint Guidelines¹ setting out the practical steps that can be taken by employers, workers and trade unions to tackle problems of third-party violence in a range of different service sectors. The guidelines have been agreed by CEMR, CoESS, EFEE, EPSU, ETUCE, EuroCommerce, HOSPEEM and UNI Europa², all sectors which face the challenge of violence originating from members of the public.

The European Working Conditions Survey shows that almost one in ten workers in the EU report having suffered violence, bullying or harassment at work in the previous year (results 2005 survey). According to the survey, carried out by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, third party violence at the hands of clients, customers or patients is more common than violence from work colleagues. Threats of violence and actual violence from third parties are most common in a variety of sectors.

The eight sectors are increasingly concerned about the impact of such violence since it not only undermines the health and dignity of individual workers, but also has a very real economic impact in terms of absences from the workplace, morale and staff turnover.

The Guidelines are the outcome of a two-year process supported by the European Commission to assess the issues through research, workshops and the exchange of best practices³. The Guidelines aim to:

- Increase awareness and understanding of employers, workers, their representatives and other public authorities (e.g. health and safety agencies, police, etc) of the issue of third party violence
- Demonstrate the commitment of social partners to working together and sharing experiences and good practice to help prevent and manage problems of harassment and/or violence instigated by third parties and reduce the impact on employees' health and well-being, sickness absence and productivity.
- Provide employers, workers and their representatives at all levels with Guidelines to identify, prevent manage and tackle problems of work related harassment and violence instigated by third parties.

The Guidelines complement the cross-sectoral agreement on violence and harassment at work, adopted in 2007⁴.

CEMR, CoESS, EFEE, EPSU, ETUCE, EuroCommerce, HOSPEEM and UNI Europa will work together to implement the Guidelines in all member states.

¹ The Guidelines are available in English, French, German, Spanish, Swedish and Russian on <http://www.epsu.org/a/6782>

² CEMR (Council of the European Municipalities and Regions), CoESS (Confederation of European Security Services), EFEE (European Federation of Education Employers), EuroCommerce (The Retail, Wholesale and International Trade Representation to the EU), EPSU (European Public Service Unions), , ETUCE (European Trade Union Committee of education) , HOSPEEM (European hospital and healthcare employers' association) and UNI Europa

³ EPSU/UNI Europa report on third-party violence <http://www.epsu.org/a/5866>

⁴ In April 2007, the European cross-sectoral social partners BusinessEurope, ETUC, CEEP and UEAPME reached an autonomous framework agreement on dealing with violence and harassment in the workplace. The agreement refers to third party violence but does not suggest any specific measures; leaving the issue to the discretion of Member States in their national implementation.