



# HEALTH AND SAFETY OF EU POLICE OFFICERS

## *EuroCOP Position Paper*

The very nature of policing and the varied duties performed by police forces to ensure public safety, means police officers are exposed to health and safety risks on a daily basis. The EuroCOP 2014 Members Survey has found that EU police forces are observing very specific work-related illness amongst their officers as a result of their work environment, and exposure to physically and mentally extreme situations. Common examples of work-related diseases include depression, burnouts, cardiovascular

diseases, PTSD and stress. In Belgium, the Netherlands and the UK, health and safety concerns relate primarily to sick leave caused by workload and understaffing. Elsewhere in Europe health and safety concerns are tied to the lack of proper equipment and training. Whereas exposure to extreme situations is often considered “part of the job”, EuroCOP is particularly concerned about the underlying reasons for these work-related illnesses identified in the 2014 survey.



Reasons for work-related **physical illness**, identified by the national police forces, include:

- Exposure to dangerous situations
- Poor equipment
- Lack of physical training
- Stress



Reasons for work-related **mental illness**, identified by the national police forces, include:

- Stress
- Personnel cuts
- Job insecurity
- Extreme incidents
- Work environment (work shifts, workload etc.)

The 2014 EuroCOP Members Survey also raised concerns about inequalities between the police health and safety facilities on offer across European Member States, as well as the quality of equipment. It is important to emphasize that these differences

between Member States hamper enhanced police cooperation within the EU and its ambition to create a common culture of European policing.

## DID YOU KNOW?

- Workload and understaffing have a significant impact on sick leave, which is for instance relatively high for police officers in The Netherlands compared to other organizations.
- Some Spanish police officers are not allocated personal bulletproof vests.
- Up until 2012 the Irish government did not recognize the EU Working Time Directive as applicable to the police. Since then, rosters have changed and are currently undergoing a pilot phase.
- The Belgian police force has a 30% shortfall of police officers.

## DUTCH CASE STUDY

In 2014, Dutch police chief Gerard Bouman drew attention to the fact that more police officers suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than was previously understood. The Dutch National Police expects to refer 1,500 to 2,500 police

officers suspected of suffering from PTSD, for treatment every year. Emeritus Professor of Psychiatry Berthold Gersons, at the Academic Medical Centre (AMC) of the University of Amsterdam, also concluded that 7% of the police officers suffer from PTSD.

## EU POLICY FRAMEWORK

**Acknowledging that specific working conditions may have detrimental effects on the safety and health of workers, the Working Time Directive 2003/88/EC further regulates the working time and working conditions.**

The Directive provides for instance that Member States “shall take the measures necessary to ensure that every worker is entitled to a minimum daily rest period of 11 consecutive hours per 24-hour period”.

However, according to Article 17 (3), derogations may be made from several provisions of the Directive for civil protection services that would include police officers.

The 2015 EuroCOP members’ survey, which focuses specifically on implementation of the Directives across Europe, highlights major discrepancies between Member States. For instance in Denmark and The Netherlands the Health and Safety and Working Time Directives are reportedly well implemented whereas various issues of concern were raised in Spain.

**The health and safety of workers is currently regulated at the EU level by the Safety and Health of Workers Directive-Council Directive 89/391/ EEC.**

This Directive provides that Member States “shall pay particular attention to encouraging improvements, especially in the working environment, as regards the health and safety of workers, and shall set as their objective the harmonisation of conditions in this area, while maintaining the improvements made”.

However, pursuant to Article 2 of the Directive, certain specific public service activities, including police officers, can be interpreted as exempt from the requirements of this Directive.

## EUROCOP RECOMMENDATIONS

- EuroCOP strongly encourages further discussion of sector specific legislative initiatives on the health and safety rights of police officers at the EU level. It is crucial that the appropriate working conditions are in place to reduce work-related illnesses as much as possible.
- Working conditions can be varied and imbalanced across the EU. Increasingly, police officers are not provided with the same health and safety rights as other European workers. EuroCOP believes that the main driver to redress this imbalance needs to be political will and the proper implementation of current EU health and safety legislation.
- EuroCOP stresses the need for the health and safety of police officers to be addressed at the political level to enable information-sharing and best practices on the prevention of violence against law enforcement officers and the reduction of their exposure to extreme

situations, allowing them to perform their duties safely. The capabilities of European police forces depend to a large extent on the appropriate working conditions.

- EuroCOP calls on EU policymakers to recognize the particularities of police work and to ensure that police officers are provided with the appropriate working conditions (including equipment and training) to carry out their duties and to keep citizens and themselves safe and healthy.
- EuroCOP believes that it is of utmost importance for injured police officers have equal access to the necessary medical and psychological support across the EU Member States.

## ABOUT EUROCOP



*The European Confederation of Police, EuroCOP, is the umbrella organisation for 35 police unions and staff organisations in Europe based in Luxembourg. It represents the interests of almost half a million police officers in 27 European countries, dealing with issues which range from police cooperation across borders to a safer working environment for police officers on the street. EuroCOP was established in November 2002. It is an independent, non-profit and secular organisation and has no affiliation with any government or political party. It is self-financed through contributions of its members. EuroCOP is open to any organisation representing police officers in member countries of the European Union or the Council of Europe.*