

Press release by the European League Against Rheumatism (EULAR)

## **EULAR calls for ambitious EU health and safety legislation by the end of 2016**

**Brussels, 12/10/2016: The European League Against Rheumatism (EULAR) today called on the European Commission to present ambitious legislative proposals by the end of 2016 that improve working conditions and include obligations to adapt the workplace for people with rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases (RMDs) and other chronic diseases. A key concern voiced at a conference organised by EULAR on the occasion of World Arthritis Day in Brussels was that lower working standards in order to cut 'red tape' could be counterproductive and further increase the already huge burden of rheumatic and musculoskeletal conditions in the workplace.**

Across Europe, a number of inadequate and unsafe working conditions regrettably still exist in many work places, which are particularly problematic for people suffering from rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases (RMDs). Evidence from the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) shows that RMDs are the main occupational diseases in Europe, making up a staggering 38% of all occupational diseases. Consequently, RMDs are the main cause of absenteeism, work loss, work limitation and retirement.

In anticipation of the publication of the European Commission's evaluation of existing Directives on health and safety at work, EULAR organised its conference on "Reducing the burden of chronic diseases in the workplace. New policies for better working conditions and the retention of ill people at work" on 12<sup>th</sup> October in Brussels. The discussions clearly showed the need for the European Commission to present legislative proposals by the end of the year that do not water down, but strengthen EU health and safety legislation.

As EULAR president Prof. Gerd Burmester commented "*There is sometimes a false assumption that identifies health and safety legislation as a burden on businesses or as red tape. We call on the European Commission to avoid such an assumption. It is crucial that new legislative proposals improve, not reduce working conditions*". Indeed, there is clear evidence showing that better health and safety legislation would in fact improve the prospects of businesses and economies as a whole. In Germany alone the total productivity loss as a result of RMDs stood at 8,5 billion €, which is about 0.4% of Germany's gross national product (GNP). Better health and safety legislation would also lift the huge burden of RMDs and other chronic conditions on health and social systems.

European Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs Marianne Thyssen affirmed: "*Rights related to health and safety at work have always been a cornerstone of European social policy.*" She stressed as vital the Commission's contribution to improving the lives of patients with RMDs.

For the RMD community, the conference once again made it clear that current legislation and policies on health and safety at work do not sufficiently cover a number of areas. Prevention of work-related RMDs is included in existing Directives, but needs to be extended and strengthened for issues such as work postures, repetitiveness and pace of work, and duration of standing. Most importantly however, legislation and policies need to improve working conditions and enshrine the obligation to adapt the workplace for people with RMDs into legislation. Such measures would allow people with RMDs and other chronic conditions to stay in work and return to work after treatment or sick leave. According

to Member of the European Parliament Roberta Metsola, European policy makers should not be deterred by the primacy of health policy by Member States, but called on them to take an active role: *“Much more can be done, and much more needs to be done. We can encourage Member States to coordinate health policy, we can discuss innovative ways to assist the elderly, we can create awareness and shape agenda-setting in related areas.”*

## **About rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases (RMDs)**

RMDs are one of the most burdensome chronic conditions affecting European societies, including more than 200 different diseases (all painful conditions of the musculoskeletal system). More than 120 million people in the EU are affected by RMDs (1 in 4). Furthermore, RMDs are the most prevalent occupational diseases at the European level (38.1 % of all occupational diseases and according to the Global Burden of Disease Study, RMDs are the greatest cause of disability in Europe (responsible for 29,07 % of years lived with disability).

## **About EULAR**

The European League against Rheumatism (EULAR) is the European umbrella organisation representing scientific societies, health professional associations and organisations for people with RMDs. EULAR aims to reduce the burden of RMDs on individuals and society and to improve the treatment, prevention and rehabilitation of RMDs.

To this end, EULAR fosters excellence in education and research in the field of rheumatology. It promotes the translation of research advances into daily care and fights for the recognition of the needs of people with RMDs by the EU institutions through advocacy action.

EULAR is also an official campaign partner of the 2016/17 “Healthy Workplaces for All Ages” campaign of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA).

To find out more about EULAR visit: [www.eular.org](http://www.eular.org)

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