

Page 3: What will happen to the Green Deal following the European elections?

DGUV Kompakt spoke to Ilka Wölfle, Director of the European Representation of German Social Insurance in Brussels.

European elections: every vote counts

Diversity lies firmly at the heart of the European Union (EU), which unites 27 states with their different histories, cultures and interests. However, it also poses the greatest challenge. Ahead of the elections, German social insurance is calling for a democratic and social Europe. Existing challenges can, after all, only be overcome together on the basis of democratic values, stable social protection and mutual respect.

The European elections are an important date on the calendar for German social insurance with results having a say in determining future European legislation, and therefore also national laws. The two are closely linked – a point which is often overlooked. Potential shifts in the majorities in the European Parliament may change the course of initiatives already under way. This applies to measures for dealing with demographic change, to the digital and green transition in Europe, to the EU's canon of social values and to the European Pillar of Social Rights. For the German social insurance, this therefore raises the question of what status will be given to health and social policy over the next legislative period?

EU in people's everyday lives

“The world is currently posing major challenges,” says Dr Stefan Hussy, Director General of the German Social Accident Insurance, “which makes it all the more important that Europe continues to ensure stability and security”. Decades of pro-



Ilka Wölfle, Director of the European Representation of German Social Insurance, is promoting the European elections.

gress could be compromised in the face of increasingly Euro-sceptic rhetoric. The EU has made many things easier and some things possible in the area of social security in particular – whether it's the coordination of pension systems or the protection of mobile workers against accidents at work or illness. “Living, working or studying permanently or on a temporary basis in another EU country is taken for granted today. Europe has become part of people's everyday lives,” underlines Hussy.

We can only move the EU forward together

In a globalized world of work, the mobility of European citizens will increase and new types of work will often no longer be based around national borders. A joint European response is needed. This also concerns, for example, protecting workers from carcinogenic substances, regulations for platform work and research. It's about enabling people in Europe to work in a healthy and a safe way. In order to encourage as many people as possible to participate in the European elections in June and vote for a social Europe, the European Representation of German Social Insurance (DSV) has launched a social media campaign.

“A strong European economy is only possible with a Europe focussed on social affairs and health,” emphasises Ilka Wölfle, Director of the DSV. Ahead of the campaign, the German Association for Social Security Policy and Research (Gesellschaft für Versicherungswissenschaft und gestaltung e.V., GVG) and the DSV hosted a discussion at the DGUV's headquarters in Berlin. Under the motto ‘Between hope and fear - the European elections, the shift to the right and the social policy of tomorrow’, Ilka Wölfle discussed the opportunities and challenges of this election together with Ralph Brinkhaus (CDU), Angelika Glöckner (SPD), Dr Anton Hofreiter (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen) and Dr Ann-Veruschka Jurisch (FDP). Ilka Wölfle concluded: “At EU level, we must work closely together to find ways to create a Europe that is close to its citizens, based on solidarity and social responsibility. Every vote counts.”

Between hope and fear:

the European elections, the shift to the right and the social policy of tomorrow

→ www.dsv-europa.de/en > Events



We are running out of time

World Day for Safety and Health at Work draws attention to the dangers of climate change

The very hot days in April served as a timely warning – summer is coming and with it, the heat. Extended periods of temperatures in excess of 30 degrees place significant stress on employees – especially if they are working outdoors, are engaged in hard physical work or are in buildings that cannot be cooled. Concentration drops and there is a greater risk of accidents at work or heatstroke. Climate change also brings the increased risk of non-melanoma skin cancer, dehydration and new allergies.

I therefore very much welcome the fact that, on its World Day for Safety and Health at Work on 28 April, the International Labor Organization (ILO) drew attention to the dangers of climate change.

The task of social accident insurance is to develop appropriate measures to protect employees. For this, we rely on application-oriented research from our research institutes, which are investigating the following questions: How can we better protect outdoor workers from strong sunlight? Do cooling jackets provide relief on hot days? What new infectious diseases and allergens are emerging? We use the answers to help identify appropriate measures for protecting employees. However, companies also have a role to play. They should prepare for periods of hot weather and draw up or update heat protection plans. These plans regulate how companies adapt their organisation to periods of heat and what measures to take to protect the workforce. The German social accident insurance institutions help with the preparation.


Yours Dr Stefan Hussy
Director General of the DGUV

Lowest number of fatal accidents at work

In 2023, the number of fatal accidents at work and commuting accidents fell to its lowest level ever in the history of social accident insurance. A total of 610 fatal accidents occurred in 2023, compared to 671 in the previous year, according to the preliminary annual figures of the German social accident insurance institutions. In 2023, the number of reports of suspected occupational diseases fell by more than 60 percent with a corresponding fall in the number of officially diagnosed occupational diseases to 72,747 (-63.5 percent). This decline is almost solely due to coronavirus and follows the general trend in the infection process. Last year, 785,164 reportable accidents at work occurred, which is equivalent to a slight fall of 0.3

percent. There was a rise however in commuting accidents to 184,189. This means 6.3 percent more accidents occurred on the commute to work than in the previous year.

In school accident insurance the figures for 2023 are also more in line with the pre-coronavirus period. The level of over one million school accidents, last achieved in 2019, was reached again, for the first time, in 2023. The number of accidents on the school commute rose to just over 90,000. The number of fatal accidents at school and on the way to school rose from 25 in 2022 to 31 over the past year.



Working together to combat heat: nationwide action day in June

On 5 June 2024, the annual Heat Action Day will take place and numerous organisations at federal and regional state level are set to participate. The impact of heat is often underestimated. It may not only limit employees' performance but in individual cases it can even be life-threatening – especially when doing hard physical work. The DGUV therefore calls on companies to conduct risk assessments and, based on these, to develop heat protection concepts and protective measures. German social accident insurance institutions provide advice to companies on this issue. The aim of the national campaign is to raise awareness of health risks among the population. The central kick-off event and press conference will take place at the BG Hospital Berlin (Unfallkranken-



Source: Jan-Peter Schulz/BG BAU

Appropriate preventive measures can protect employees from health risks resulting from heat

haus Berlin). The particular focus of this year's campaign is on the health and social services sector.

...> www.hitzeaktionstag.de (German only)

Good to know!

The German Social Insurance European Representation (DSV) is based in Brussels and plays an active role in shaping developments in Europe by representing the interests of German social insurance in the EU, advising European bodies on issues of German social legislation and monitoring developments in relevant areas of law. It is represented by the umbrella organisations of the German social insurance system consisting of statutory pension insurance, statutory accident insurance, and statutory health and long-term care insurance.

...> www.dsv-europa.de/en



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We need effective social systems to combat climate change



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Ms Wölfle, what is the Green Deal?

When taking up office, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen made climate protection and sustainability central themes in all policy areas. On 11 December 2019, she presented the European Green Deal as the new environmental growth strategy for the European Union (EU). The Green Deal is a package of political initiatives aimed at systematically modernising the entire economy, society and industry. The main aims are more efficient use of resources, climate neutrality in the EU by 2050, and also maintaining the competitiveness of the economy. It is ultimately intended to improve the lives of all EU citizens.

Why is the Green Deal also relevant to German social insurance?

The inherent nature of the Green Deal makes it relevant for us. We are already feeling the effects of climate change today – in healthcare due to exotic infections, in emergency care following extreme weather events, and in the workplace, where we are affected by heat and UV radiation. We have to respond to these effects in healthcare, but also in occupational safety. Occupational safety measures need to be checked and adapted to ensure safe and healthy working, and this includes consideration of new, “green” tech-

nologies and previously unknown workplace risks. We need efficient social systems for all of this.

Are you able to point to an initiative as an example?

Of course. Let’s take, for example, the EU’s Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability as this is something we deal with a lot. It is a key component of the Green Deal and is intended to better protect people and the environment from harmful chemicals and to boost innovation using safe and sustainable chemicals. There are many initiatives here – not all of which we are in favour of. For example, we have been very critical of the risk assessment of substances. Not every hazardous substance needs to be banned if care is taken to handle it safely. And every now and then EU policy also needs a bit of a reality check. We have therefore repeatedly pointed out, when revising exposure values for asbestos, that stricter limit values must be technically feasible in practice. And that doesn’t always happen overnight.

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Not every hazardous substance needs to be banned if care is taken to handle it safely.

to her State of the Union in 2023 reveals that the narrative has changed. In 2019, the Green Deal’s climate goals were still very much the focus, whereas now von der Leyen is advocating an economic agenda, shifting the focus on to innovation and investment. For us, climate policy and social policy are closely linked. It therefore remains important that social and health policy issues are given a high priority in the next European legislative period, regardless of the further development of the Green Deal.

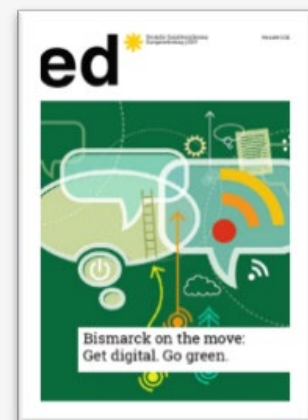
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The goals of the Green Deal must not ignore the interests of German social insurance.

European elections 2024

From 6 to 9 June 2024, around 373 million EU citizens will elect the 720 members of the next European Parliament. It is the only European institution that is directly elected by EU citizens. Together with the Council, it can approve and amend legislative proposals – including in the area of social and health policy. Elections take place every five years.



***ed Bismarck on the move:**
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2/23



Could the Green Deal lose momentum as a result of the European elections?

If populist and anti-European groups increasingly find their way into the European Parliament – and unfortunately that cannot be ruled out – this could indeed have an impact on the further implementation of the Green Deal. However, regardless of this, we are already seeing a change in stance within the Commission. Comparing Ursula von der Leyen’s statements during the presentation of the Green Deal in 2019



Listen up! Too much noise makes you ill

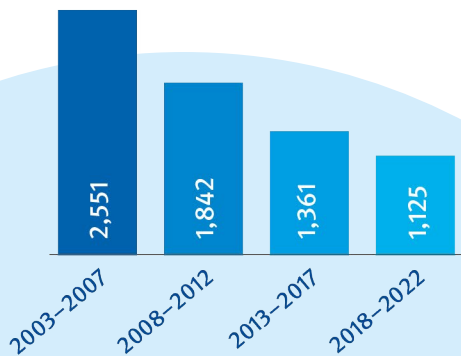
Noise in the workplace can cause health problems and pose an accident risk. Despite significant success in prevention, noise-induced hearing loss is the second most frequently officially diagnosed occupational

disease. The damage is caused very gradually, over many years – and is irreversible. In 2022, the occupational disease of noise-induced hearing loss was officially diagnosed on 6,637 occasions. Employees working in

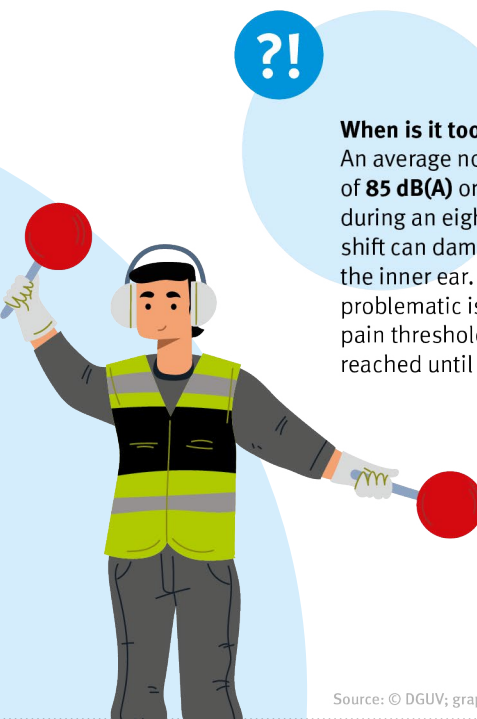
economic sectors involving heavy machinery, such as construction or in metal and woodworking, were particularly affected.

NOISE-INDUCED HEARING LOSS: NEW PENSIONS

2003–2022 (5-year periods)

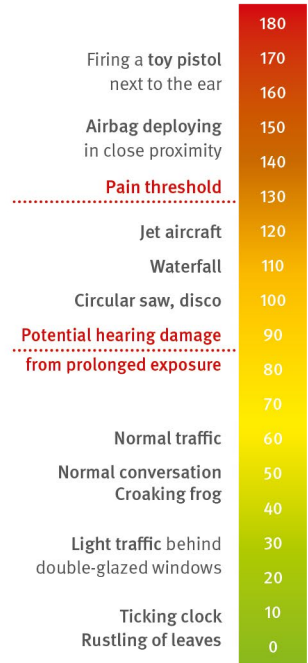


PREVENTION HELPS! While the number of officially diagnosed occupational illnesses remains stable, the number of new pensions is falling. There is no contradiction here, instead it illustrates the effectiveness of prevention. Cases of severe hearing damage are becoming less frequent. Illnesses involving minor hearing loss are now more prevalent.



When is it too much? An average noise dose of **85 dB(A)** or above during an eight-hour shift can damage the inner ear. What's problematic is that the pain threshold is not reached until **130 dB**.

Sound-pressure level of familiar movement noises in decibels/dB(A)



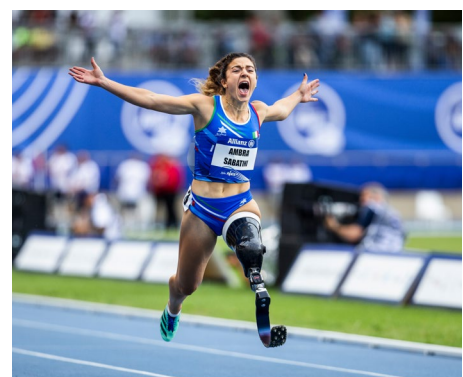
Source: © DGUV; graphic elements: shutterstock.com

Disability sport – DGUV recognises reporting

The German Paralympic Media Award recognises outstanding reporting on sport for people with disabilities. The prize was awarded on 24 April by German Social Accident Insurance. The record number of entries shows that parasport is becoming more visible and reporting on it increasingly accepted as normal. “However,” says Manfred Wirsch, Chair of the DGUV Governing Committee, “inclusion cannot be taken for granted. There are still lots of barriers”. The award ceremony was attended by State Secretary Dr Rolf Schmachtenberg from the Federal Ministry

of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS), Jürgen Dusel, Federal Government Commissioner for Matters relating to Persons with Disabilities, Rita Schwarzelühr-Sutter, Parliamentary State Secretary for the Interior, and Franziska Becker, State Secretary for Sport in the Berlin Senate Department for the Interior and Sport. Numerous members of the Bundestag and representatives from sport, business and associations were also in attendance.

Award Ceremony 2024: → www.dguv.de/gpma (German only)



The winning photo “A scream, a victory”.

Source: Milka Volkmann

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