28 April - World Day for Safety and Health at Work

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28 of April is the World Day for Safety and Health at Work, a very important day in all UNDP infrastructure and urban upgrading sites in Cyprus. To mark this day we accompanied Fatma Terlik, UNDP-PFF Health and Safety focal point for the UNDP Partnership for the Future Programme in Cyprus, on her site visits to different on-going construction sites.

With more than 55 civil works contracts awarded in the past five years – ranging from 10,000 to 25mln Euros each – and approximately 800 workers employed, health and safety quickly became a priority issue on UNDP agenda in Cyprus. Fatma’s site inspections are all-encompassing and every personal protection equipment (PPE), scaffoldings, emergency situation plan, first aid, manual handling and tools are inspected to make sure they are up to standard.

“At first, people did not respond very well to our efforts here, but after series of on-site training about the advantages of these policies, they have come to understand and highly appreciate that it is for their benefit” –says Fatma as we drove to the first site visit of the day.

According to local statistics, in 2010, in the northern part of Cyprus, the manufacturing industry was the occupation with the highest number of registered accidents (70 recorded accidents), followed by construction sector with 56 accidents registered. Despite these numbers, the northern part of Cyprus has made tremendous efforts to minimize the risks and reduce the number of accidents and injuries on the workplace.

“Lately, there has been a huge increase in awareness of the Health and Safety practice at work in the northern part of Cyprus. As of 1st of January 2012 all enterprises operating in the northern part of Cyprus, need to have an health and safety risk assessment report in place, and a certification exam, and the completion of a 4 months training program is requested to all health and safety inspectors. This has encouraged a better understanding and implementation of health and safety policies that are essential for a healthy working environment” – says Fatma. {youtube}-ePYyFJhMY8{/youtube}

Worldwide, according to ILO statistics, a worker dies from a work-related accident or disease every 15 seconds, and every 15 seconds, 160 workers have a work-related accident.

UNDP Partnership for the Future in Cyprus has been working on health and safety in the work place since 2005 through its Private Sector Development project for the Turkish Cypriot community. When the first training session and workshops were organized on EU regulations and standards, early in 2004, almost no information was available to Turkish Cypriot enterprises on the requirements and advantages of complying with these regulations. The “Occupational Health and Safety” standard (OHSAS 8001) was one of the first EU standard to be covered by UNDP-PFF awareness seminars.

“We had a lot of difficulties convincing our employees that they had to follow these new rules. They didn’t want to wear helmets or other safety equipment. We tried to convince them that this was for them and not for the company. We did training sessions and in the end we had to set up penalties. But now it has been four years, and the employees that have been through this process with us don’t want to leave the company. They understand the importance of this!” – told us one of the first beneficiary of the private sector development programme who, thanks to UNDP and EUsupport, got his OHSAS certificate in 2005.

From the coffee shop restoration site in small villages, the almost completed Municipal Market site in old Nicosia, improvement and rehabilitation of minor and major town centres, the construction site of the new Nicosia waste water treatment plant, to the renewal of water distribution networks, UNDP Partnership for the Future in Cyprus regularly checks that health and safety regulations are observed thoroughly on-sites inspections and this is done by constant liaison with the sites’ supervisors and contractors as well. On each site visit we spoke to workers, engineers and constructors about the health and safety measures put in place in their work place. Did they feel safe working? Were the conditions right? Did they feel like the UNDP-PFF went an extra-mile to provide a suitably safe and healthy environment to work?

‘I get messages regularly thanking the UNDP-PFF for bringing this policy to light. The basic idea of protecting yourself and others at work has slowly but surely become a part of everyday living not just for workers but the employer as well, and knowing that with my job I am contributing to create a safer working environment for my colleagues and workers makes me feel proud to be working at UNDP”.
The celebration of the World Day for Safety and Health at Work is an integral part of the Global Strategy on Occupational Safety and Health of the ILO and promotes the creation of a global preventative safety and health culture involving all stakeholders.

The UNDP-PFF in Cyprus will be joining the rest of the world to celebrate the prevention of occupational accidents and diseases. The 2012 World Day for Safety and Health at Work focuses on the promotion of occupational safety and health (OSH) in a green economy.

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