



SafeHabitus

PRESS RELEASE | World Day for Safety and Health at Work

## Climate change poses serious challenges for the safety and health of farmers and farm workers

Brussels, 26 April 2024 - Agriculture and forestry are amongst the most dangerous sectors in which to work. The impact of climate change on the work environment will further increase a number of already serious risks to farmers, foresters and workers. For this reason, [SafeHabitus](#), the EU's largest project on health, safety and working conditions in agriculture, is commemorating this year's **World Day for Safety and Health at Work on 28th April**, under the ILO Slogan "**We are running out of time - ensuring safety and health at work now in a changing climate.**"

In December 2023, two of the SafeHabitus partners, **GEOPA, representing farmers/employers, and EFFAT, representing agricultural workers, adopted a [joint statement](#)** on the effects of severe meteorological conditions on agriculture. They also committed to continue their policy work on mitigating the effects of severe meteorological conditions on agriculture, farmers and farm workers. This will involve a series of knowledge exchange and foresight workshops exploring how working conditions in European agriculture will change over the coming years in response to key drivers of change, including climate change, and what steps are necessary to protect the health, safety and wellbeing.

An [EU-OSHA Policy Brief](#) co-authored by **SafeHabitus members Alun Jones - CIHEAM Zaragoza and John McNamara - TEAGASC, along with Martina Jakob - Leibniz Institute for Agricultural Engineering and Bioeconomy**, outlines key climate change risks to agriculture workers and offers recommendations. Heat poses health risks for all farmers but especially for those working in enclosed spaces or prolonged periods of high heat. This challenge can be made worse where the need for personal protective equipment, e.g. when handling pesticides or forestry, adds stress. From a health perspective, farmers and farm workers face heightened skin cancer risks due to daily sun exposure and mild winters in the EU increase exposure to animal and insect-borne diseases. Extreme weather events exacerbate unsafe working conditions and increase stress among farmers and farm workers. Recommendations in this report include workplace adaptations, smart monitoring, and health promotion programs. As climate impacts intensify, development of appropriate OSH resources are crucial for worker safety.

Speaking on the World Day for Safety and Health, **the leader of the SafeHabitus project Dr David Meredith** stated that the project will focus on vulnerable populations most exposed to the impacts of climate change, including farmers, their family members, and migrant and seasonal workers. This work will develop both EU and National level policy recommendations and design place based/bottom-up solutions that take account of the structural adjustment challenge and support local scale adaption to changing climate and recovery from extreme weather events.

**EFFAT General Secretary Kristijan Bragason** highlighted the link between working conditions and climate change: "28th of April is an important day for unions as on this date we commemorate workers who lost their lives, were disabled or injured by their work. We would like to dedicate this year's commemoration to the risks to the health and safety of workers associated with extreme heat. As the summer is approaching and agricultural harvest campaigns

are starting already in some countries, we need to consolidate our efforts, also within projects as SafeHabitus, to prevent any further deaths on the fields due to heat strokes and cardiac arrest. We need a European binding initiative on maximum working temperature to protect the health and life of outdoor workers.”

**More information:**

- [EFFAT and GEOPA Joint Statement | The effects of severe meteorological conditions on Agriculture](#)
- [EU-OSHA Policy Brief | Impact of climate change on occupational safety and health](#)

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