

**Question for oral answer O-000036/2023  
to the Commission**

Rule 136

**Dragoş Pişlaru**

on behalf of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

Subject: Improving firefighters' working conditions

Firefighters play an indispensable role in protecting lives, the environment and infrastructure in the EU, particularly with climate change causing increasingly frequent and larger fires and other natural disasters. Firefighters operate under extremely difficult working conditions and are exposed daily to highly carcinogenic combustible and chemical substances and intensely stressful situations. This has serious impacts on their physical/mental health and safety and on that of their families. Firefighters have up to a 300 %<sup>1</sup> higher chance of getting cancer than the general population. European and national occupational health and safety legislation aims to protect workers regularly exposed to carcinogenic substances but is not suitable to protect workers facing ad hoc high levels of exposure.

The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs would like to ask the Commission:

1. How will the Commission, jointly with Member States and social partners, ensure the protection of firefighters and their working conditions, including compensation for overtime? Will the Commission take further action following WHO's<sup>2</sup> recognition of firefighting as a carcinogenic occupation?
2. Will the Commission undertake to consider, following a consultation with social partners, putting forward an EU proposal on minimum standards for firefighters' personal protective equipment, training, awareness-raising and operating procedures e.g. medical surveillance and decontamination?
3. Will the Commission consider more investments in new research and technology in the sector and how does it plan to ensure victims' protection from secondary exposure?
4. Following the Matzak judgement<sup>3</sup>, in view of the large number of volunteer firefighters (3.2 million) in the EU and the need to increase firefighter numbers in the future, how does the Commission intend to safeguard this voluntary commitment in Europe without calling Directive 2003/88/EC<sup>4</sup> into question?
5. Will the Commission consider setting up a European register to collect data on occupational diseases disaggregated by sector?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36627291/>.

<sup>2</sup> [https://monographs.iarc.who.int/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Classifications\\_by\\_cancer\\_site.pdf](https://monographs.iarc.who.int/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Classifications_by_cancer_site.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Judgment of the Court of Justice of 21 February 2018, *Ville de Nivelles v Rudy Matzak*, C-518/15, ECLI:EU:C:2018:82.

<sup>4</sup> OJ L 299, 18.11.2003, p. 9.