

Creating Cardiac AWAREness at Work Breathing new life into the EU Safety at Work Directive *Event Report*

On January 13, 2025, [MEP Dr. András Kulja](#) hosted the event **"Creating Cardiac Awareness at Work: Breathing New Life into the EU Safety at Work Directive"** at the European Parliament in Brussels. Organised with the Alliance for Workplace Awareness and Response to Emergencies ([AWARE](#)), the event sought to address gaps in workplace preparedness for sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) and advocate for updates to the outdated 1989 European Directive on workplace safety [89/654/EEC](#).

This event marked a significant milestone in advancing effective responses to sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) and improving survival rates in out-of-hospital settings. The discussions emphasised the need to improve workplace safety through first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) training while ensuring the availability of automated external defibrillators (AEDs) to achieve this goal.

The discussions brought together experts dedicated to cardiovascular and emergency care, patient organisations, national and European policymakers, and industry leaders. Together they emphasised the importance of harmonised measures across Europe to tackle cardiac emergencies in the workplace.

“Updating our workplace safety rules to include CPR training and accessible defibrillators will not only save lives at work but also have a wider impact.”

- Dr. András Kulja, Member of the European Parliament and Event Host



Event Creating Cardiac AWAREness in the Workplace

Overview of Discussions

MEP Dr. András Kulja (Hungary, EPP), shared his deep commitment to cardiovascular health, his experience as a surgeon before joining the European Parliament, and his hope of improving European's access to healthcare in this new role. He underscored the critical need of updating workplace safety standards to improve survival rates and quality of life of SCA survivors. Given that SCA is the third leading cause of death in Europe, he emphasised the urgency of harmonising CPR and AED training policies. Dr. Kulja also reaffirmed the European Parliament's commitment to addressing cardiovascular health through legislative updates, setting the tone for actionable discussions for the years to come.

Federico Semeraro, the Chair of the European Resuscitation Council (ERC), introduced AWARE. The Alliance is dedicated to enhancing workplace preparedness for health emergencies, especially SCA, by bringing together physicians, CPR trainers and industry to pave the way forward. He highlighted the fact that the Alliance advocates for improved first aid and CPR training requirements, as well as ensuring the availability of essential emergency equipment, such as AEDs, in workplaces across Europe.

Davide Patron, a sudden cardiac arrest survivor, shared his story of being saved at a French train station by his girlfriend, an obstetrician, along with a bystander and a firefighter who brought the AED. His testimonial highlighted the importance of bystander resuscitation, demonstrating that anyone can save lives if properly trained. He also stressed the need for increased public awareness through social media and systemic change to ensure emergency preparedness. Finally, he highlighted a significant awareness gap for recognising SCA — SCAs are frequently mistaken for heart attacks, yet they require a vastly different response. Davide Patron's intervention at the event [can be watched here](#).

Sarah-Taïssir Bencharif, a healthcare journalist and emergency doctor, skilfully guided the panel discussions. Drawing from her personal experience in the emergency room (ER) and helped underline the importance of quick and correct CPR and AED use. She noted that she had witnessed the consequences of when bystanders could not assist during a sudden cardiac arrest and expressed strong support for AWARE's mission to address this issue.



MEP András Kulja, Event Host



Davide Patron, SCA Survivor

Panel Discussions

1. Towards a Safer Workplace: Flaws in the Current Directive

Dr. Robert Leach, President of the European Society for Emergency Medicine (**EUSEM**) highlighted significant gaps in the European Directive on workplace requirements ([89/654/EEC](#)), particularly its lack of detailed provisions for workplace training and AED accessibility. As the President of an organisation aiming to ensure patients receive high quality emergency care, he noted the importance of harmonising emergency preparedness across the EU. Currently, member states' workplace health and safety provisions differ greatly, and survival rates vary as a result. While the current Directive leaves many key policies up for interpretation by the member states, a new version should provide clear evidence-based guidelines on mitigating workplace emergencies. Furthermore, the healthcare system has changed substantially since 1989, and as a result Dr Leach argued that the Directive should be updated.

During his intervention, **Jacques Delchef**, member & GOAL coordinator of the Belgian Resuscitation Council (**BRC**) advocated for practical and tailored CPR and AED training to effectively teach this skill to a variety of people and in different contexts. As a member of the BRC and an emergency nurse, Mr Delchef trains people daily on the lifesaving abilities of CPR. In Belgium, it takes the emergency services an average of 8 minutes to arrive on site, when brain damage can appear as early as 6 minutes. This data shows that it is imperative to enable people to start resuscitation earlier. Jacques Delchef emphasises that people are more inclined to learn CPR when they see its direct impact on their personal lives, such as the potential to save a loved one like a partner, parent, or grandparent. This highlights the importance of tailoring awareness campaigns to emphasise these personal connections, making the life-saving skill feel more relevant and urgent. Furthermore, he stressed the importance of making AEDs more visible and increasing their availability, as when combined with resuscitation, AEDs are effective at saving lives.

“People are more inclined to learn CPR when they see its direct impact on their personal lives, such as the potential to save a loved one.”

- Jacques Delchef, Belgian Resuscitation Council

2. Protecting Europe's Workers: Key Asks for the Revised Directive

Prof. Dr. Carolina Malta Hansen, a cardiologist and researcher in resuscitation science, sudden cardiac death and inherited cardiovascular disease at the **University of Copenhagen**, highlighted Denmark's success in promoting workplace CPR training without requiring legislation. She emphasised the cultural and structural changes that enabled this achievement. She recalled that in 1989, sudden cardiac arrest survival rates were much lower, and laypeople were not permitted to use AEDs. Today, 80% of the Danish population are ready to perform bystander CPR, and over 25,000 AEDs are registered and accessible throughout the country. Additionally, more than 50% of adults in Denmark have received CPR training through their workplaces. Professor Hansen believes that although the shift occurred in Denmark without legislation, implementing legal measures could significantly enhance the situation by making training more accessible and ensuring that no one is left behind, fostering a societal change embraced by everyone.

Anaëlle Toutounji, Workplace First Aid Coordinator at the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC) highlighted the urgent need to improve workplace safety by strengthening legal frameworks, enhancing training, and leveraging evidence-based research. She emphasised the importance of mandatory first aid and AED training for all employees, as well as appointing one or two first aiders responsible for safety. These individuals should be more skilled, willing to intervene in the event of an emergency, and receive annual refresher training. Additionally, clear legal standards should be established across sectors depending on the specific occupational risks and accident rates. Ms Toutounji also showcased the European Red Cross and Red Crescent’s role and expertise in promoting quality training globally and advancing research to tailor first aid strategies to workplace needs, with the aim of reducing accidents and saving lives both on-site and in the wider community.

Helge Myklebust, Director Strategic Research of [Laerdal](#), discussed the potential of leveraging technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual reality (VR), to modernise and scale workplace CPR training. He emphasised how these innovations could make training more effective and widespread. To make the training effective and save lives, Mr Myklebust highlighted the importance of the 112-emergency operator who will assist the caller, either CPR trained or not, to identify cardiac arrest, begin CPR and mobilise the nearest AED. In addition, he strongly advocated for a Cardiac Arrest Registry to track progress as well as an AED registry that describes location of available and functional AED devices.

“More than 50% of adults in Denmark have received CPR training through their workplaces”

- Prof. Dr. Carolina Malta Hansen, University of Copenhagen



Event Speakers

3. Ensuring Long-Term Protection Through an Adaptable Directive

Dr. Susanne Schunder-Tatzber, Chair of the Emergency Preparedness and Response in Occupational Health organisation ([EPROH](#)), highlighted the role of the EU in acting as a global role model in the field of workplace health and safety. She highlighted the need for occupational health & safety regulations that evolve with continuous health risk assessment to adapt to changing risks, stressing the importance of long-term occupational health and continuous skills maintenance.

Joachim Maurer, Director Business Development Connected Care at [Philips](#), emphasised the importance of AED maintenance, accountability, and centralised registries. In an emergency situation, registries can help bystanders locate and use an AED, which when used in conjunction with CPR raises survival rates to 70 per cent. However, he also shared an incident where an AED, assumed to be functional, had a depleted battery, rendering it unusable in an emergency. This highlighted the critical need not only to install AEDs and document their location, but also to regularly check and maintain them. Ideally this is done with an AED remote monitoring program, automating the review of AED self-test status, health of electrodes and batteries. He advocated greater investment and local support to raise awareness and improve accessibility.

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Joachim Maurer, Philips

Sophie Meiser, Director European Government Affairs at [Stryker](#), called for better awareness, accessibility, and investment in AEDs and workplace safety, highlighting challenges in maintenance, location visibility, and the need for unified AED registration systems. She pointed to the need to take a more strategic approach to AEDs placement in Europe, so that their value can be maximised. Too often AEDs are either nearby but cannot be located or are simply not in reach. A fresh look at the European Union's legislative framework for safety at work can help to change that, while also contributing to long-term reductions in healthcare costs, a factor that health authorities should take into account.

Dr. Kulja closed the event by summarising the discussions and reiterating the urgency of updating the 1989 Directive. He also highlighted the broader societal benefits of this approach, emphasising how improving workplace safety and emergency preparedness can save lives, reduce healthcare costs, and enhance overall public well-being. He issued a call to action for policymakers to collaborate with stakeholders, ensuring workplaces are equipped to respond to health emergencies and prevent avoidable deaths.

Next Steps

AWARE and its partners will continue to engage with policymakers, Occupational Safety and Health Agency (OSHA) representatives, and national and EU policymakers to seize the momentum generated by this event by spreading best practices and translating them into concrete legislative updates. The Alliance will also work on crafting detailed policy recommendations to bolster workplace safety across Europe.

To know more about AWARE's objectives and activities, follow AWARE on [LinkedIn](#) or write to the Secretariat at aware@erc.edu