EU strategic framework on health and safety at work 2014-2020

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PURPOSE: to propose an EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2014-2020.

BACKGROUND: ensuring a safe and healthy work environment for over 217 million workers in the EU is a strategic goal for the European Commission, working closely with Member States, social partners, and the other EU institutions and bodies.

As risks to workers' health and safety are broadly similar across the EU. EU action on occupational safety and health (OSH) has been pursued over the years within a strategic policy framework that includes two key components:

1. a comprehensive body of EU legislation covering the most significant occupational risks and providing common definitions, structures and rules that are adapted by Member States to their different national circumstances;
2. a series of multiannual action programmes between 1978 and 2002, followed by European strategies (covering 2002-06 and 2007-12), to identify priorities and common objectives, provide a framework for coordinating national policies and promote a holistic culture of prevention.

As a result of the 2007-12 strategy, 27 Member States have put in place national strategies.

The results of the evaluation of the 2007-2012 OSH strategy confirm the value of an EU strategic framework for policy action in the field of OSH and show strong stakeholder support for a continuing EU-level strategic approach. The evaluation highlights the need to review objectives, priorities and working methods to adapt the EU policy framework to changing patterns of work, and new and emerging risks.

In 2013, the Commission launched an online public consultation to seek stakeholder views on the implementation of the previous OSH strategy. A large majority of respondents considered that more should be done to **reduce administrative burden and compliance costs for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)**. The majority of respondents also indicated that these objectives should be pursued while maintaining a high level of compliance with OSH principles, regardless of the size of the company.

In proposing a **strategic framework on health and safety at work for 2014-2020**, the Commission took due account of several contributions, all in favour of launching a strategic policy initiative, in particular those received from the European Parliament.

This framework strategy takes account of these contributions.

CONTENT: this communication sets out key strategic objectives and a range of actions for promoting workers' health and safety, based on an identification of the outstanding problems and major challenges.

Outstanding problems: despite the significant reduction in accidents and better prevention, health and safety at work in the EU still needs further improvement:

- every year more than 4 000 workers die due to accidents at work and more than three million workers are victims of a serious accident at work leading to an absence from work of more than three days;
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the costs due to work-related sick leave are unacceptably high (e.g. in Germany, 460 million days' sick-leave per year resulted in an estimated loss of productivity of 3.1% of GDP;
- costs for social security attributable to sickness or accidents are also unacceptably high (in the 2010 /2011 fiscal year, the net cost to government in the UK alone was estimated at £ 2 381 million).

Main challenges: the Commission notes in particular three main challenges:

1. **improving the implementation record of Member States**, in particular by enhancing the capacity of micro and small enterprises to put in place effective and efficient risk prevention measures. Simpler, more efficient solutions need to be put in place to take into account the situation of micro and small enterprises, and therefore ensure effective protection of workers' health and safety in all workplaces regardless of size. This requires simplifying legislation where appropriate, and providing tailored guidance and support to micro and small enterprises to facilitate risk assessment;
2. improving the prevention of work-related diseases by tackling existing, **new and emerging risks.** Specific attention should be given to addressing the impact of changes in work organisation in terms of physical and mental health (notably, women can face specific risks, such as musculoskeletal disorders or specific types of cancer);
3. tackling **demographic change** given that the working population aged between 55 and 64 in the EU-27 is expected to increase by about 16 % between 2010 and 2030. In addition, reintegration and rehabilitation measures allowing for early return to work after an accident or disease are needed to avoid the permanent exclusion of workers from the labour market.

Framework strategy 2014-2020: in order to respond to these three challenges, the Commission proposes a range of actions to be implemented or developed in close collaboration with Member States, social partners and other stakeholders, grouped under seven key strategic objectives:

- **further consolidate national strategies** in light of the new EU strategic framework and in consultation with relevant stakeholders, including social partners and specialised Agencies such as the EU-OSHA;
- **facilitate compliance with OSH legislation**, particularly by micro and small enterprises by promoting the exchange of best practices;
- **better enforcement of OSH legislation** by Member States by mapping the resources of labour inspectorates and evaluate their capacity to carry out their main duties on enforcing OSH legislation;
- **simplify existing legislation** and eliminate unnecessary administrative burden;
- **address the ageing of the workforce**, emerging new risks, prevention of work-related and occupational diseases by disseminating good practice;
- **improve statistical data collection** and develop the information;
- **better coordinate EU and international efforts** to address OSH and engage with international organisations such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

The instruments used to implement this framework are EU legislation, EU funds (the European Social Fund (ESF) and other European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) to finance actions relating to OS, social dialogue, communication and information, synergies with other policy areas (research, education, etc).

Next steps: the Commission will therefore hold an open debate with key stakeholders in relevant fora about the views and proposals contained in this communication and will involve them in implementing actions where appropriate.

This strategic framework will be reviewed in 2016 in light of the results of the ex post evaluation of the EU OSH acquis and progress on its implementation.