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

2015/2107(INI) - 26/10/2015 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Ole CHRISTENSEN (S&D, DK) on the EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2014-2020.

Members recalled that occupational health and safety (OHS) is a basic interest for society that has a positive effect on companies' productivity and competitiveness and allows people to work in good health until the statutory retirement age.

They considered that workplace accidents and occupational diseases are a major societal burden and improvements in occupational health and safety across Europe can contribute to the economic recovery and to reaching the Europe 2020 objective.

The EU-OSH strategic framework: Members stressed that all employees, including in the public sector, have a right to the highest level of protection regarding health and safety in the workplace. In this regard, they called on the Commission to work out labour specific strategies covering all forms of employment under the EU-OSH regulatory framework. They also called on the Commission and the Member States to **draw up indicative reduction targets for occupational diseases and accidents at work following the 2016 review of the EUOSH strategic framework** and to rely on the latest peer-reviewed research findings when reviewing the framework.

National strategies: Members considered it essential to continue to initiate and coordinate policies at EU level while applying a stronger focus on **implementation and enforcement of the existing OSH legislation** with a view to ensuring a high level of occupational health and safety for all workers. They called on the Member States and the Commission to ensure that national OSH strategies reflect the EU-OSH strategic framework.

Implementation and compliance: Members called on the Commission to continue taking into account the specific nature and situation of SMEs and micro-enterprises when revising the strategic framework in order to help these companies **meet the objectives set as regards health and safety in the workplace**. They recalled that the SME concept covers approximately 99% of all companies in its current form. They urged the Member States to use the European funding for OSH actions in general and the development of e-tools in particular with the aim of supporting SMEs.

In parallel, they called on the Member States to support the active involvement of employees in implementing **preventive OSH measures** and on the Commission to take all necessary steps to **monitor the implementation and enforcement of OSH legislation in the Member States**.

Enforcement of the legislation: Members encouraged the Member States to follow the ILO standards and guidelines on labour inspection, to ensure that **adequate staffing and resources are available to labour inspectorates** and to improve training for labour inspectors. They also called on the Member States to **carry out stringent inspections and impose appropriate penalties on employers** using undeclared workers.

They urged the Commission and the Member States to take all necessary measures to combat undeclared work and highlighted that a majority of fatal accidents at work occurs in labour intensive sectors, in which undeclared work is more prevalent than in other sectors.

Prevention of work-related diseases and new and emerging risks: Members firmly reiterated their call on the Commission to present a proposal for a revision of Directive 2004/37/EC on the basis of scientific evidence adding more binding occupational exposure limit values where necessary and to develop an assessment system in cooperation with the Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work that is based on **clear and explicit criteria**. They believe that possible regulatory overlaps resulting in unintended non-compliance should be addressed in this context.

Moreover, Members stressed the need to introduce more stringent protection of workers, taking into account not only exposure periods but also the mix of chemical and/or toxic substances to which they are exposed.

Asbestos: the report pointed out that many workers are still being exposed to asbestos in their workplaces. It called on the Commission to work closely with social partners and the Member States to promote and coordinate Member States' efforts to develop national action plans, provide adequate funding and take appropriate action for the management and safe removal of asbestos. Members reiterated their call on the Commission to **design and implement a model for asbestos screening and registration** in accordance with Article 11 of Directive 2009/148/EC. They also called for a European campaign on asbestos, and **urged the Member States to compensate workers exposed to asbestos**.

Other important measures: Members also called for the following:

- developing and implementating a programme for systematic monitoring, managing and support for workers affected by psychosocial risks, including stress, depression and burnout;
- combatting harassment and violence at work, through a **Commission proposal for a legal act based on the framework agreement on harassment and violence at work**;
- promoting awareness raising and giving greater prominence to prevention and occupational health and safety in school curricula at all levels, including during apprenticeships;
- improving the collection of reliable and comparable data on occupational diseases, exposures and hazards across all sectors, including the public sector;
- strengthening cooperation on OSH with international organisations, including ILO, OECD, G20 and WHO.