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

2015/2107(INI) - 25/11/2015 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 536 votes to 95 with 28 abstentions, a resolution on the EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2014-2020. Parliament recalled that occupational health and safety is a basic interest for society as well as an investment that has a positive effect on companies' productivity and competitiveness and allows people to work in good health.

It 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: Parliament 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, it called on the Commission to work out labour specific strategies covering all forms of employment under the EU-OSH regulatory framework. It welcomed the fact that many important fields of action are identified in the EU-OSH strategic framework; regrets, nevertheless, that the Commission has not set out specific targets in the framework.

Members regretted nevertheless:

- that the Commission has not set out specific targets in the framework;
- the delay in drawing up the current EU-OSH strategic framework. Members believed that the many challenges facing European workers, businesses and labour markets, including those identified by the Commission, call for measures to be applied in a timely and effective manner.

As a result, Parliament stressed that **more concrete legislative and/or non-legislative measures as well as implementation and enforcement tools** should be included in the framework, following the 2016 review.

National strategies: Parliament 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. It called on the Member States and the Commission to ensure that national OSH strategies reflect the EU-OSH strategic framework.

Implementation and compliance: Parliament 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.** It recalled that the SME concept covers approximately 99% of all companies in its current form. It 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 **Member States**.

Enforcement of the legislation: Parliament 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**. It also called on the Member States to carry out **stringent inspections and impose appropriate penal**ties on employers using undeclared workers. It 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.

Members stressed that the participation of workers and social partners at all levels is a prerequisite for the effective implementation of OSH legislation.

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: Parliament 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.**

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs): Parliament called on the Commission to take action on one of the most prevalent work-related health problems in Europe and submit without delay a proposal for a comprehensive legal instrument on musculoskeletal disorders to improve effective prevention and address the causes of MSDs, taking into account the problem of multicausality and the specific risks faced by women.

Other important measures: Parliament also called for the following:

- a comprehensive strategy on **endocrine disruptors** which could, where necessary, include the implementation of EU legislation on the marketing of pesticides and biocides and tighten up the rules on preventing occupational risks;
- further research on the potential OSH risks associated with new technologies such as potential risks to the health and safety of workers handling **nanotechnology;**
- developing and implementing 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.