



**European Committee
of the Regions**

SEDEC-VII/024

WORKING DOCUMENT

**Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and
Culture**

EU strategic framework on Health and Safety at work 2021-2027

Rapporteur: **Sergio Caci (IT/EPP)**

**Working document of the Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment,
Research and Culture -- The EU strategic framework on Health and Safety at work
2021-2027**

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1. Considers that the EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2021-2027 (the new EU Strategic Framework) is a strategy that includes a sufficiently ambitious approach by the European Commission to reduce work-related deaths by 2030 (so-called Vision Zero target), while ensuring a safer working environment and in line with the new needs arising in particular as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, but not only;
2. is convinced that the policy framework provided by the European Union on health and safety at work (OSH) has so far led to major improvements in raising OSH standards across the EU. Together with the Vision Zero objective, the Framework underlines that the EU's ambitions are moving in the right direction, while requiring greater inclusion of all categories of workers, which has not yet occurred in this proposal;
3. stresses the need for the EU's role in providing a unified strategic direction in this area. This need has been clearly demonstrated by both the studies and the practical results of the last decades. The highlights of OSH legislation show that EU and Member State actions with other actors (e.g. social partners and different stakeholders at different levels of governance) can have a positive and direct impact on working life in both dimensions of health and safety;
4. unquestionably endorses the three cross-cutting objectives for the strategic framework set by the European Commission in drawing up the EU strategy for the next five years, namely anticipating and managing changes in the post-pandemic world of work during digital, green and demographic transitions, improving the prevention of accidents and occupational diseases and improving preparedness for potential future health crises;
5. welcomes the idea that the Commission intends, in order to achieve its objectives, to revise the terms of the Workplaces Directive and the Directive on display screen equipment, as well as to update EU rules on hazardous chemicals to combat cancer, reproductive and respiratory diseases, as well as updating the protection limits for asbestos and lead;
6. recommends, furthermore, that the Commission proceed with the fastest possible preparation and implementation of an EU-wide initiative on mental health at work to assess emerging issues relating to this issue, and to propose guidelines for resolving situations that render the worker's stay in the workplace unhealthy or unsuitable;
7. with regard to the two points above, strongly believes that these should apply to all categories

of workers, including those currently excluded from the policy framework;

8. welcomes the fact that, drawing lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, the European Commission intends to draw up emergency procedures and guidelines for the rapid dissemination, implementation and monitoring of measures in potential future health crises, in close cooperation with public health professionals;
9. regrets that, although all Member States have so far at least partially integrated the letter and spirit of the EU policy framework into their national systems, none of them actually follows it in its completeness. This is due to the fact that some countries have not reviewed and updated their national OSH strategies to fully align them with the EU Strategic Framework for 2014-2020 due to poor timing or low achievement of key objectives, as highlighted by EU-OSHA, such as ageing of the population employed, simplification of procedures, and more effective and timely implementation of legislation;

OSH AND CULTURE OF PREVENTION

10. points out that the number of accidents at work has decreased over the last forty years thanks to three segments: Scientific and technological improvements, OSH legislation and OSH management systems. Considers it necessary, therefore, for the European and national legislator — throughout the drafting, adoption and implementation of the strategy — to refer to a solid culture of prevention, as the primary method for achieving the Vision Zero objective, but not only in the common interest of workers and businesses;
11. Points to the publication *by the International Social Security Association (ISSA)*, which shows that an investment in a good OSH strategy can lead to a double return for every euro spent on occupational safety and health for employers. Without neglecting, then the incommensurable loss of working hours, the decrease in the moral place of work and the consequent impact on productivity;
12. agrees with the European Commission that poor adherence to the principles of prevention also leads to bad publicity for companies affected by accidents at work, with serious consequences for their reputation and employees' job prospects;

13. OSH AND GREEN AND DIGITAL TRANSITION

14. considers that technological progress is constantly changing the landscape of a workplace. It is therefore positive that the EU speaks with proposals up to date with technology in the workplace, as set out in the Commission's first objective of the new EU policy framework;
15. stresses the success of the proposal to establish harmonised rules on Artificial Intelligence (AI). These, together with the recently published strategy for the best development and governance of *blockchain* technology, including in conjunction with other technological solutions, show that the Commission is really anticipating the changes in the new world of work brought about by the digital transition. With these and other technological innovations, it is necessary to anticipate the problems that may arise in connection with healthy and safe living in the

workplace;

16. agrees with the comments on the ‘White Paper on AI’, according to which workers and employers will be directly affected by the design and use of AI systems in the workplace, and that the involvement of the social partners will be a crucial factor in ensuring a human-centric approach to AI in the workplace;
17. Reiterates in this regard the relevance to OSH of what has already been expressed in the CoR opinion “*White Paper on Artificial Intelligence — A European Approach to Excellence and Trust*”¹, according to which “the use of AI technologies is also of great importance with regard to working conditions and workers’ well-being. To this end, endorses the European social partners’ call for data minimisation and transparency, together with clear rules on the processing of personal data to limit the risk of intrusive control and misuse of such personal data, in order to ensure respect for human dignity;
18. reiterates also that it is crucial to ‘enable workers’ representatives to address data, consent, privacy and surveillance issues, establishing a link between data collection and a concrete and transparent purpose and ensuring transparency in cases where AI systems are used in human resources procedures’;²

REGIONAL AND LOCAL RELEVANCE OF THE STRATEGY

19. Stresses that the EU Strategic Framework 2021-2027 — with its *Vision Zero* approach — will require local and regional authorities to address the problems and implement the objectives of the framework directly “*on the ground*”, and that the way they should do so is through supervision, training, building a culture of prevention and protection of workers, working together through the exchange of experience and good practices, further identifying problems and evaluating — followed by feedback — the solutions best suited to resolving them;
20. considers that overseeing the implementation of OSH legislation on the management of OSH objectives entails a key role that regions and cities can play in achieving the ambitious objectives of the Strategy;
21. believes that regions and cities should continue to encourage and provide training and education to labour inspectors, employers and workers to adapt to advanced employment changes influenced by the green and digital transition, but also by the new conditions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic;
22. believes that cooperation — as soon as possible — between regional and local authorities with the EU and the relevant national authorities, but also with other cities and regions, and the exchange of experience and good practices, will promote progress on OSH and help build a culture of prevention;

¹ COR 2014/2020

² IDEM

23. stresses that proper involvement of regions and cities is necessary to further define the OSH strategy. It therefore considers it essential that they be involved in the assessment of the workplace in the field of OSH. They must also be able to send feedback to the EU in order to help the EU create a clear picture of the situation *on the ground* to correct the current situation in the course of work, and to help shape the next post-2030 strategy.
24. To this end, calls on the Commission to create a dedicated digital tool (e.g. a portal) to which regions and cities can refer when they consider it appropriate or necessary to provide guidance to the European legislator on health and safety at work.

FINAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

25. welcomes the creation of ‘Vision Zero’ and its target of zero work-related deaths by 2030; Maintains that ‘Vision Zero’ should not be limited to deaths only, but should extend to occupational accidents and diseases;
26. expresses its endorsement of the Strategic Reference Framework on Violence, Harassment and Discrimination in the Workplace, but would prefer the Framework to be in line with ILO Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work;
27. reiterates its approval of the continued progress and three successive updates of the Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive; Maintains, however, that the directive should be extended to establish binding occupational exposure limits covering all 50 priority carcinogens (compared to the current 27) and that its scope should extend to substances toxic to reproduction and to hazardous medicinal products;
28. supports the inclusion of combined exposure to hazardous chemicals, endocrine disruptors and the revision of the BOEL for respirable crystalline silica in the chemical exposure section of the OSH policy framework;
29. supports the need to provide guidance in the Framework on Psychosocial Risks that goes beyond an individualistic approach and calls on the Commission to present a directive on psychosocial risks;
30. welcomes the adoption of the ILO recommendation of 1 labour inspectors per 10,000 workers; However, it could support the need to further strengthen the sanctioning mechanisms and the collection by labour inspectorates and the dissemination of the data collected;
31. calls for the inclusion of OSH in the Artificial Intelligence Act;
32. expresses its regret that the range of application of the OSH policy framework excludes self-employed workers (including atypical workers and platform workers) and calls for the EU initiative to improve the working conditions of platform workers to include a strong OSH reference;
33. stresses, therefore, the need for a thorough revision of this framework, and calls on the European

legislator to increase ambition and a longer term vision in this context;

34. Welcomes the European Commission's firm recommendation to Member States to recognise COVID-19 as an occupational disease and reiterates the importance of employers' obligations to ensure decent living and working conditions for mobile and migrant workers, including seasonal workers;
35. Welcomes the fact that, through its proposal, the Commission is anticipating changes in the new world of work due to the green transition, in addition to the digital transition, but also, more generally, the prevention of work-related diseases.