

## Health and safety at work in the EU

### FOCUS

### European Commission strategic framework 2021-2027

On 28 June 2021, the European Commission adopted a new strategic framework for the EU highlighting the challenges and the key measures to be implemented with regard to health and safety at work for the period 2021-2027.

This text aims to rally the institutions of the EU, the Member States, the social partners and other relevant stakeholders around three cross-cutting objectives: anticipating and managing the transformation taking place in the new world of work, improving the prevention of occupational injuries and diseases, and strengthening preparedness for potential future health crises.

This FOCUS reviews this new strategic framework, and in particular the measures that the European Commission plans to implement and those in which it invites the Member States and social partners to become involved.



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**Abbreviations used**

- OIs/ODs:** Occupational injuries/occupational diseases  
**ACSH:** Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work  
**SLIC:** Senior Labour Inspectors' Committee  
**PSRs:** PsychoSocial Risks  
**OSH:** Occupational safety and health  
**MSDs:** Musculoskeletal disorders  
**EU:** European Union
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## Introduction

In order to work out this new Strategic Framework, the Commission based its work mainly on the findings of a vast consultation with the stakeholders concerned by occupational safety and health in Europe.

It accordingly published a roadmap, submitted notably for open public consultation, and collected the advice and positions of the Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work (ACSH), the Senior Labour Inspectors' Committee (SLIC), the representatives of EU employers and workers, and the European Council and Parliament. It also had regular discussions with the stakeholders and received specific contributions.

All in all, citizens, authorities, associations and other organizations stated their opinions both on the Strategic Framework which covered the period 2014-2020 and on their expectations for the coming six years.

Most of the 355 respondents to the public consultation felt that the 2014-2020 framework had contributed either "to a large extent" (15%) or "to some extent" (54%) to improving safety and health at work on the European Union level. The percentages were lower on the workplace level: 8% and 43% respectively.

In general, the stakeholders mentioned the following points as deserving special attention over the coming years:

- Rapid population ageing;
- Ergonomic and psychosocial risks;
- Atypical work forms;
- Risks related to teleworking;
- The application of OSH rules, especially in very small enterprises and SMEs;
- Monitoring of compliance with OSH rules;
- Prevention of OIs/ODs (cancers in particular);
- Updating of the legislation relating to ODs;

### A few figures:

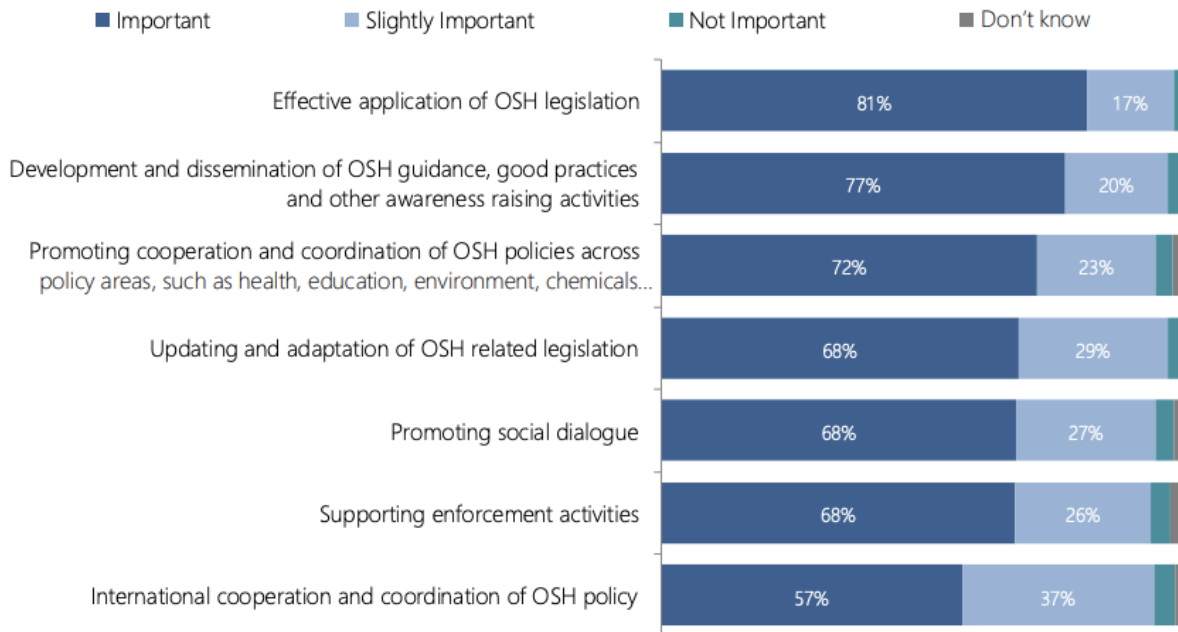
- Workers in the EU: around 170 million
- Fatal OIs: 3,300 per year  
They decreased by about 70% between 1994 and 2018
- Fatal ODs: more than 200,000 per year
- Cancer is the leading cause of work-related mortality in the EU
- Cost of OIs/ODs: more than 3.3% of the EU's GDP (€460 billion in 2019)
- Already before the health crisis, 84 million people in the EU experienced mental health problems
- As a consequence of the pandemic, around 40% of workers have adopted teleworking.

(Source: EU Strategic Framework 2021-2027)

- Lessons to be drawn from the health crisis;
- Updating of restrictive occupational exposure limit values;
- Supplements to the Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive;
- Combating violence and sexual and psychological harassment in the workplace;
- Vulnerable groups: young people, women, seasonal workers, migrants, disabled persons, front-line workers (healthcare personnel, etc.);
- The importance of social dialogue, awareness raising and enhancement of synergies with other fields of action (health, education, environment, etc.);
- Improvement of OSH-related statistics, etc.

To the question on the importance of certain points to be included in the future strategic framework, the effective application of OSH legislation tops the list of answers, followed by the working out and dissemination of good practice rules and other awareness raising activities (see diagram on p. 4).

**Thinking ahead to the next 7 years (2021-2027), how important do you think the following will be in terms of OSH policy and action at EU level to be included in a Strategic Framework?**



(Source:: COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION - SYNOPSIS REPORT)

## The three objectives to be achieved by 2027

The strategic framework applies to all the stakeholders concerned by safety and health at work: national authorities, including labour inspectors, employers, workers and other players concerned. It has no binding force and is intended to create a framework for action, cooperation and discussion.

The three objectives set by the Commission for 2027 are as follows:

### 1. Anticipate and manage CHANGE in the new working world

In order to ensure safe and healthy workplaces during the digital, ecological and demographic transitions, the Commission:

- will revise the directives on workplaces and on display screen equipment;

- will update the protection limits for asbestos and lead;
- will prepare a Community initiative regarding mental health in the workplace, which will assess emerging problems related to workers' mental health and will propose guidelines for action.

### 2. Improve the PREVENTION of injuries and diseases in the workplace based on a "vision zero" approach

This "vision zero" approach aims to eliminate work-related deaths in the EU. The Commission will, in particular, update the EU rules related to dangerous chemical products in order to combat cancer, disorders of the reproductive system and respiratory diseases.

### 3. Improve PREPAREDNESS to cope with potential future health threats

Drawing lessons from the current pandemic, the Commission:

- will establish emergency procedures and guidelines for the rapid roll-out,

implementation and monitoring of measures in potential future health crises; and

- will act in close cooperation with public health players.

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## Commission, Member States and social partners: measures to be taken to achieve the objectives set

By means of this new strategic framework, the Commission plans in particular to:

- modernize and simplify EU rules on OSH matters in the context of the ecological and digital transitions;
- place emphasis on psychosocial risks;
- combat the causes of work-related deaths;
- address risks related to dangerous substances;
- promote health at work;
- offer workplaces for all.

It indicates the measures that it will take and invites the Member States and social partners to perform certain actions. In particular, the Commission invites the Member States to update and develop their national strategies regarding occupational safety and health in accordance with this strategic framework - in cooperation with the social partners - to ensure that the new measures are applied in the workplace.

For certain actions, the Commission indicates a deadline for implementation. These indications mainly concern the first years covered by the Strategy, because a review is planned in 2023 and new guidelines could be stipulated at that time.

The following tables summarize the various measures to be taken for each major cross-cutting objective and each major theme:

Objective 1:

- Ecological and digital transition
- Psychosocial and ergonomic risks
- Exposure limit values

Objective 2:

- Vision Zero
- Dangerous substances
- Healthy workplaces
- Priority targets

Objective 3:

- Health crises
- Labour inspectors
- Covid-19.

## Objective 1: Anticipate and manage CHANGE - Action to be taken by...

Theme	The European Commission	The Member States	The social partners
<b>Ecological and digital transition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Modernize the OSH legislative framework relating to digitalization by a <b>revision of the “workplaces” and “display screen equipment” directives by 2023.</b></li> <li>▶ Launch an <b>EU-OSHA campaign</b> in <b>2023-2025</b> on the creation of a <b>safe and healthy digital future</b>, and in particular on psychosocial and ergonomic risks.</li> <li>▶ Ensure appropriate follow-up of the resolution of the European Parliament on the <b>right to disconnect.</b></li> <li>▶ Develop the analysis database, the electronic tools and the guidelines to assess the risks related to <b>green and digital jobs and processes</b>, especially the <b>psychosocial and ergonomic risks.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Update <b>the national legal frameworks</b> in order to:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deal with the OSH risks and opportunities arising from the ecological and digital transitions;</li> <li>• Focus on the use of digital tools to make <b>labour inspection more effective</b> both by prevention and by the detection of infringements of the legislation.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;">➔ In consultation with the social partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Take measures and update existing agreements at the interprofessional and sector level in order to cover new OSH issues related to the market for digital work, and in particular <b>psychosocial and ergonomic risks, by 2023.</b></li> <li>▶ Together find solutions to take on the challenges posed by <b>teleworking, digitalization</b> and the <b>right to disconnect</b>, based on the framework agreement of the European social partners on digitalization.</li> </ul>

(Objective 1, cont'd)			
Theme	The European Commission	The Member States	The social partners
Psychosocial and ergonomic risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ On the EU level prepare a <b>non-legislative initiative relating to mental health in the workplace</b>, which will assess emerging problems related to workers' mental health and will propose guidelines for action <b>before the end of 2022</b>.</li> <li>▶ Ask the “expert group on effective means for investing in health” to give an opinion on <b>mental health support for healthcare personnel and other essential workers</b> <b>by the end of 2021</b>.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;">→</p> <p>in cooperation with the Member States</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Step up <b>the monitoring and collection of data</b> on the situation relating to mental and psychosocial risks in all sectors.</li> <li>▶ Organize <b>peer evaluations</b> concerning the psychosocial and ergonomic aspects of work.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;">→</p> <p>and the social partners</p>
Exposure limit values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Propose protective limit values concerning:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>asbestos</b> (directive on asbestos in the workplace) <b>in 2022</b>;</li> <li>• <b>lead</b> and <b>diisocyanates</b> (Chemical Substances Directive) <b>in 2022</b>;</li> <li>• <b>cobalt</b> (Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive) <b>in the first quarter of 2024</b>.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		

## Objective 2: Improve the PREVENTION of OIs/ODs - Action to be taken by...

Theme	The European Commission	The Member States	The social partners
Vision Zero	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Promote the “Vision Zero” approach regarding <b>work-related deaths</b>:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve the collection and analysis of <b>data</b> on OIs/ODs</li> <li>• Create a “Vision Zero” <b>tripartite working group</b> in the ACSH</li> <li>• Design targeted measures and information tools to <b>raise awareness</b></li> <li>• Strengthen <b>enforcement of the legislation</b> by support to the SLIC: develop greater awareness in enterprises, exchange good practices and promote in-depth training for labour inspectors.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Work on implementation of the “Vision Zero” approach regarding work-related deaths in the EU.</li> </ul>	
Dangerous substances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Update the EU rules for combating <b>cancer, reproductive disorders and respiratory diseases</b>.</li> <li>▶ Create a priority list of <b>reprotoxic substances</b> to be dealt with in the relevant directives <a href="#">by the end of 2021</a>.</li> <li>▶ <a href="#">By 2022</a>, provide up-to-date guidelines, including on training, protocols, monitoring and follow-up, in order to protect workers against exposure to <b>dangerous drugs</b>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Provide training for <b>farmers</b> by means of agricultural advisory services in order to enhance their skills and their awareness of OSH rules on farms, including with regard to the safe use of chemical substances.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Consultation on the lowering of ELVs for <b>welding fumes, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, isoprene and 1,4-dioxane</b> (Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive) <a href="#">in 2023</a></li> <li>▶ Establish, for the <b>healthcare sector</b>, guidelines aiming among other things at protecting workers against exposure to dangerous drugs.</li> </ul>



(Objective 2, cont'd)			
Theme	The European Commission	The Member States	The social partners
Healthy workplaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Support awareness raising concerning <b>MSDs, cancer and mental health</b>, and concerning <b>harassment</b> in the workplace and sexist prejudices.</li> <li>▶ Propose a legislative initiative aimed at preventing and combating <b>sexist violence</b> against women and <b>domestic violence</b> before the end of 2021.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Combat occupational risks related to <b>diseases of the cardiovascular system</b>.</li> <li>▶ Promote the <b>European Code Against Cancer</b> among workers to improve their knowledge of health matters and reduce the risks of cancer.</li> <li>▶ Actively support reintegration, non-discrimination and the adaptation of working conditions for <b>workers suffering from a cancer or having survived a cancer</b>.</li> <li>▶ Promote the consideration of <b>gender issues</b> in the design, implementation and reporting phases.</li> </ul>	
Priority targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Provide <b>sector information</b> for SMEs in cooperation with EU-OSHA.</li> <li>▶ Produce an OSH overview concerning the <b>health and healthcare sector</b>, in cooperation with EU-OSHA, by the first quarter of 2024.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Provide <b>improved guidelines and training</b> for risk assessment and prevention, especially in very small enterprises and SMEs.</li> <li>▶ Actively combat hazards in the <b>healthcare sector</b> by the establishment and application of occupational safety procedures and by providing appropriate training.</li> <li>▶ Assess and combat risks particularly for the <b>groups most affected by the pandemic</b>, such as disabled persons.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Develop the online interactive risk assessment tool (<b>OiRA</b>) designed specifically for the <b>healthcare sector</b>, in cooperation with EU-OSHA.</li> </ul>

### Objective 3: Improve READINESS to respond rapidly to threats - Action to be taken by...

Theme	The European Commission	The Member States	The social partners
Health crises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Immediately start an in-depth assessment of the effects of the pandemic and of the effectiveness of the national and Community OSH frameworks.</li> <li>▶ Establish emergency procedures and guidelines for the rapid roll-out, implementation and monitoring of measures in <b>potential future health crises</b>, in close cooperation with public health players.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Produce:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>plans to prepare for future crises</b> providing for the implementation of the EU guidelines and tools within the framework of national OSH strategies;</li> <li>• mechanisms for coordination between the authorities in charge of <b>public health and OSH by 2023</b>.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
Labour inspection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Produce, <b>by 2022</b>, guidelines for <b>labour inspectors</b></li> <li>▶ Determine the quality of the risk assessments and risk management measures under the <b>directive on biological agents</b>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Strengthen <b>follow-up</b> and <b>effective checks on compliance with OSH obligations</b> regarding seasonal workers performing high-risk jobs.</li> <li>▶ Strengthen <b>cooperation</b> and the exchange of information between labour inspectors and the other competent national authorities in order to improve OSH standards in all sectors of employment.</li> </ul>	
Covid-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Update the Commission's recommendation on occupational diseases in order to include Covid-19 <b>by 2022</b>.</li> </ul>		

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## Conclusion

The Commission specifies that the application of this strategic framework will be based on:

- a more robust factual database, thanks to research on and collection of data, at both the EU and national levels;
- strong social dialogue;
- the mobilization of funding, including EU funds;
- an improvement in compliance with and supervision of the existing legislation;
- awareness raising and enhancement of capabilities.

In 2023, an OSH summit, bringing together EU institutions, the Member States, the social partners, EU-OSHA and other stakeholders, will be held to review the progress achieved in the establishment of this ambitious framework and to assess the suitability of this framework in light of the rapidly changing context.

### **According to Nicolas Schmit, European Commissioner for Employment and Social Rights...**

“The tenth principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights gives workers the right to a high level of protection of their health and safety at work. At a time when we are endeavouring to build back better after the crisis, this principle ought to be a focal point of our action. We should commit ourselves to a “Vision Zero” approach regarding work-related deaths in the EU. Good health at work concerns not only our physical condition, but also our mental health and our well-being”.

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## References - Find out more

- [EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2021-2027](#)
- [Staff Working Document accompanying the Strategic Framework](#)
- [Synopsis report accompanying the Strategic Framework](#)
- [Q&A: the new EU strategic framework on health and safety at work](#)
- [Factsheet: Occupational safety and health in a changing world of work](#)

See the EU Strategic Framework for all the references concerning directives and relevant documents.



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