



Occupational safety and health in a changing world of work

Brussels, 28 June 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how crucial occupational health and safety (OSH) is for protecting workers' health, for the functioning of our society, and for the continuity of critical economic and social activities. In this context, today the Commission is renewing its commitment to update occupational safety and health rules by adopting the **EU strategic framework on health and safety at work 2021-2027**. It sets out the key actions needed to improve workers' health and safety over the coming years.

This new strategy focuses on three cross-cutting objectives, namely managing **change** brought by green, digital and demographic transitions as well as changes to the traditional work environment, improving **prevention** of accidents and illnesses, and increasing **preparedness** for any potential future crises.

Over the past decades, progress has been made – for example, fatal accidents at work in the EU have decreased by about 70% since between 1994 and 2018 – but more remains to be done. Despite this progress, there were still more than 3,300 fatal accidents and 3.1 million non-fatal accidents in the EU-27 in 2018. More than 200,000 workers die each year from work-related illnesses. The updated framework will help to mobilise EU institutions, Member States and social partners around common priorities on workers' protection. Its actions will also help to reduce healthcare costs and support businesses, including SMEs, to become more productive, competitive and sustainable.

Executive Vice President for an Economy that Works for People, Valdis **Dombrovskis**, said: *"The EU's legislation on occupational safety and health is essential for protecting almost 170 million workers, peoples' lives and the functioning of our societies. The world of work is changing, driven by green, digital and demographic transitions. Healthy and safe work environments also reduce costs for people, businesses and society as whole. That is why maintaining and improving protection standards for workers remains a priority for an economy that works for people. We need more EU action to make our workplaces fit for the future."*

Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, Nicolas **Schmit**, said: *"Principle 10 of the European Pillar of Social Rights gives workers the right to a high level of protection of their health and safety at work. As we build back better from the crisis, this principle should be at the centre of our action. We must commit to a 'vision zero' approach when it comes to work-related deaths in the EU. Being healthy at work is not only about our physical state, it is also about our mental health and well-being."*

Three key objectives: change, prevention and preparedness

The strategic framework focuses on three key objectives for the coming years:

- 1. Anticipating and managing change in the new world of work:** To ensure safe and healthy workplaces during the digital, green and demographic transitions, the Commission will review the Workplaces Directive and the Display Screen Equipment Directive and update protective limits on asbestos and lead. It will prepare an EU-level initiative related to mental health at work that assesses emerging issues related to workers' mental health and puts forward guidance for action.
- 2. Improving prevention of work-related diseases and accidents:** This strategic framework will promote a 'vision zero' approach to eliminate work-related deaths in the EU. The Commission will also update EU rules on hazardous chemicals to combat cancer, reproductive, and respiratory diseases.
- 3. Increasing preparedness for possible future health threats:** Drawing lessons from the current pandemic, the Commission will develop emergency procedures and guidance for the rapid deployment, implementation and monitoring of measures in potential future health crises, in close cooperation with public-health actors.

The actions in the strategic framework will be implemented through (i) strong social dialogue, (ii) a

strengthened evidence based policy-making, (iii) improved enforcement and monitoring of existing EU legislation, (iv) awareness-raising, and (v) mobilising funding to invest into occupational safety and health, including from EU funds like the Recovery and Resilience Facility and Cohesion policy funds.

The Commission also calls on Member States to update their national occupational safety and health strategies to ensure that the new measures reach the workplace. Beyond EU borders, the Commission will also continue playing a leading role in promoting high occupational safety and health standards globally.

Background

The update of the EU strategic framework on health and safety at work for 2021-2027 in light of the COVID-19 pandemic is part of the [Commission Work Programme for 2021](#). The [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) underlines in its principle 10 that “Workers have the right to a high level of protection of their health and safety at work.”

At the [Porto Social Summit](#) on 7 May 2021, all partners renewed their commitment to implementing the Pillar and a strong social Europe in the Porto Social Commitment. They committed to “support fair and sustainable competition in the Internal Market”, including through “healthy working places and environments.”

The previous [EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2014-2020](#) focused among others on prevention of work-related diseases, addressing demographic change and implementation of legislation. Key achievements include three successive updates of the [Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive](#) and the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work ([EU-OSHA](#)) guidelines and online tools for employers, including on COVID-19.

The new framework draws on input from a broad range of stakeholders. This includes an EU-OSHA report on national occupational safety and health strategies, reports, recommendations and hearings with the European Parliament, several Council conclusions, exchanges with social partners and independent experts, a [public consultation](#), and the opinion of the Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work (ACSH) and the Senior Labour Inspectors Committee (SLIC).

For More Information

[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](#)

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