



## **PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE NEW EU OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH POLICY FRAMEWORK**

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### **Position of CEC European Managers**

**AUGUST 2013**

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## **1. Necessity and nature of a new EU OSH policy framework**

*Do you agree with the assessment of the EU OSH Strategy? Did it lead to tangible results?*

CEC European Managers mainly agrees on the assessment of the EU OSH strategy. The main goal of the strategy was to reduce by 25% the total incidence of accidents at work by 2012 in all Member States. We acknowledge that due to the lack of data in 2012 the Commission cannot certify that the objectives have been met. The latest Eurostat forecasts showed that between 2007 and 2010 the incidence of non-fatal accidents at work in the EU-15 decreased by 26.8%. For the EU-27, the study gave data only between 2008 and 2010 but the figure is also around 25%. There is nothing that could lead us to think that the number of accidents increased by 2012, so we agree to say that the objective set has been reached. However, what we find regrettable is the fact that no objectives have been set concerning the occupational illnesses for the period 2007-2012. Moreover, according to the Labour Force Survey ad hoc module 2007 on work-related accidents and health problems 8.6 % of people employed in the EU-27 reported work-related health problems in the past 12 months. Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), stress, depression and anxiety were the two most common problems. In fact, we can say that MSDs and stress are the both new and increasing phenomena in the working world. Even if there are few data on the issue a survey shows that "the three-year trend in the rate of work-related stress has decreased in one Member State, was stable in two of the Member States, while in two Member States the trend did not change significantly. In nine of the Member States the rate is increasing. Data is unavailable for the remaining Member States" Another study explains that nearly one in four workers is affected by stress, and suggests that between 50% and 60% of all lost working days are related to it. These figures become even more meaningful if we consider the condition of managers, who by definition are more subject to this problem than other categories of workers.

*In order to improve workplace safety and health, do you consider it necessary to continue coordinating policies at EU level or is action at national level sufficient?*

At CEC European Managers, we realize it is important to continue coordinating policies at EU level because the objectives set have been reached, so the strategy has been efficient. The European Health and Safety strategy at work is fundamental because it gives a common action framework for all the member states. Indeed, we must recognize that not all countries in the EU have the same legislation concerning health and safety at work, nor do they offer the same standards of protection. And this applies to all workers, regardless of their occupation, professional profile or hierarchical level. That is why the European strategy must coordinate all the national policies in this area.

So, Europe should also encourage a deeper commitment in the area of health and safety at work, and Member States should realize that important efforts must be made in order to have correct results in this matter. The questions about work, its quality and the quality of working life for the workers are in direct link with the efficiency, performance and competitiveness for the companies. The lack of effective protection of health and security at work has a major negative impact on the economy (absenteeism, work accident, occupational illnesses and disablement). The important economic cost of health problems and security at work can hinder economic growth and affect the European companies' competitiveness.

*If you deem such a framework at EU level is necessary, explain why. Which aspects should be covered?*

Based on the best practices applied at national level, the proposed framework should focus on prevention measures, the improvement of the advisory role of social partners in the adoption of those legislative measures by Member States and, finally, on the need to improve the anticipation and adaptation capacities of health and safety bodies to the new needs and occupational needs that arise.

## **2. Level of commitment**

*With respect to your answer to the above questions, is there a need for a new EU OSH Strategy or should alternative measure be considered? Please explain*

There is a need for a new EU OSH strategy, which would come as a follow-up of the previous one while emphasizing the increasing health-related problems at work. The other work-related health problems will be more and more managed at a national level by the member states and with the

help of social partners (employers' organisations and trade unions). As far as the structure of this strategy is concerned, we believe that it should follow the format of a multiannual European strategy (6 years) which would define the general work programme in the field of Health and Safety at work. This multiannual strategy should be completed by annual European strategies more precise more supervised with clear objectives and control criteria. Provisions ensuring a periodic review of the results achieved and a monitoring of the functioning of the strategy should be adopted, too.

*If EU level action is necessary in order to improve workplace safety and health, do you consider it necessary to set broad goals and priorities and to coordinate national policies at EU level?*

CEC European Managers is in favour of defining broad goals and priorities to coordinate national policies at EU level. It would allow intensifying the commitment of all the Member States at European level but also at a national level. Coordination seems indispensable in order to prevent too heterogeneous interpretation of the European strategy that would cause negative consequences for the EU.

*What would be the added-value of including specific targets into a possible new EU OSH policy framework to measure progress in improving workplace safety and health in the EU?*

Including specific targets into a new EU OSH policy framework will encourage the Member States to respect their commitment in the implementation of this new strategy, and would allow for an easier verification (through factual references) of the actual accomplishments of the framework's indicators. Periodic monitoring of results achieved is required in order to improve the safety's levels and if needed the measures taken should be modify if they are not adapted.

*Should a new policy framework include a list of objectives, actions, calendars and actors involved in the implementation of actions or should it be limited to setting a vision for the future, and a definition of goals and priorities?*

The new policy framework should of course include common objectives and involve actors interested in their achievement, with a special consideration of social partners. In spite of progresses on the issue of health and safety at work, many Member States still lag behind. Europe has to create a common frame for health and safety at work with specific objectives and precise deadlines, in order to incite member states to act. Europe must assist and control the EU countries about this subject.

## **Content of a new EU OSH policy framework**

*What are the key challenges in the OSH area? How would you prioritise them?*

- Improving prevention and intervention measures in case of occupational risks. There is a necessity today develop a system based on economic incentives that can really make prevention an attractive priority for companies. We are also in favour of a bonus-penalty system at national and European level to induce companies to increase the prevention amongst the employees.
- The recognition of illnesses caused by psychological conditions linked to work as occupational illnesses (Depression, anxiety and burn out). Managers traditionally undergo high levels of stress ; now that the crisis is hitting our economies, the level of responsibility put on managers has increased sensibly, as performance goals have become higher and harder to achieve. At the same time, new technologies make it possible for people to be reachable and ready to interact 24/7. This translates for managers into a virtually permanent condition of professional readiness, with heavy consequences on the work-life balance and additional psychic strain. This recognition must be put in force quickly at all levels in order to avoid serious consequences on managers caused by the evolution of working conditions in companies and the fixation of unreachable objectives for the employees. For this reason we believe that such psychological conditions should be taken into account when assessing the "hardness" of a job.
- OSH in micro and SMES -The strategy must include the different needs of the micro enterprises and SMEs. Policymakers must find simpler solutions so as to make it easier for the micro enterprises and SMEs to comply with health and safety requirements.
- Effects of the population ageing on the workforce: as a consequence of the on-going demographic changes, individuals are working longer, and will be increasingly asked to do so in the coming years. This shift will bring great changes in the current working patterns but will also entail the need to "update" accordingly the list of OSH issues.

*What practical solutions do you suggest to address all or some of these challenges?*

CEC European Managers is particularly concerned about the consequences of high psychological pressure on managers, and focused on way to tackle stress on the workplace. In 2012 it participated in a Leonardo project, aimed at developing an innovative training program to help managers acquire non-professional competences so as to better face work-related

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stress. Through an online training program based on four pillars (health; sport; nutrition and attitudes) managers are coached to identify what affects them in their working environment and how they can become proactive in addressing these factors of stress.

This is an example of how social partners (and other non-policymaking stakeholders) can contribute to the debate, and shows to what extent stress is a central issue for managers. We also think it can be good thing to set up guides about new work-related health problems. Information and awareness campaigns must be launched at national and European level on stress, carcinogenic substances or psychosocial risk factors. All workers (including managers) must receive specific training allowing them to react properly and adopt the appropriate measures to help their colleagues deeply affected by phenomena such as stress, anxiety. Additionally, more information should be made available - we can take the example of the website: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/MSD/>, created by the British government, dedicated to OSH. Similar initiatives should be adopted in each European country, and further information should be given concerning other occupational risks and health concerns, such as advices about how to manage stress at work or how to recognize occupational illnesses. Finally, we favour the creation of a *curriculum laboris* which will follow all the working career of the employees. This instrument would register all the risks that the employee has faced during his entire working career (following all changes) and would be designed so as to ensure confidentiality.

*Do you consider that such a framework should develop initiatives to provide further protection for vulnerable groups of workers and/or for workers in specific high risk sectors?*

This framework should of course develop a special framework for vulnerable groups of workers and for workers in specific high risk sectors. Indeed, these groups are more likely to have an accident or health problems. If we take the case of vulnerable workers, we can give the example of the employees with subcontracting contracts, they are vulnerable because they have to adapt every time to new work environment and new tasks to do. They are not always aware of the risks and what to do to prevent accidents.

In addition, within these groups stress and anxiety are also present because of unknown situations plus high rate of accidents for high risks sectors. They know that the sector is risky so it may increase the level of stress of the employees and the level of accident is high. Measures and initiatives should be made for these groups, they should beneficiate of better protection in order to secure them and also decrease the level of stress they are facing.

*Do you consider that measures for the simplification of the existing body of EU OSH legislation should be included in such a political instrument? If so, which ones would you suggest?*

CEC European Managers reckons that measures for the simplification of the existing body of EU OSH for CEC Managers do not need to be included in a political instrument. Solely, the EU OSH has to be supported by directives in order to make the Member States implement the strategy at a national level. In addition to that, a diffusion of the best practices adopted by Member States at national level would prove extremely effective, as it would at the same time increase the cooperation between States.

*Do you think that such a framework should specifically identify and address the challenges posed by the ageing of the working population? If so, which measures would you suggest?*

CEC European Managers considers population ageing (and its effects on the European workforce and work-related issues) an issue of great concern: a study on the future availability of managers and professionals on the European labour market has been commissioned in 2012 as a part of a European project CEC was involved (in the framework of the initiatives for the 2012 European year). As we underlined above, an increasingly older working population will pose new questions and problems that both policy makers and concerned stakeholders will have to deal with. And needless to say, an ageing working population is of course more exposed to risks at work. Nevertheless, we believe that this framework would not represent the best tool to identify and address the challenges posed by the ageing of the working population, as its core function is to find ways to decrease the number of accidents and illnesses due to work. The problem of ageing population should be dealt with at the EU level but not in this framework. The EU should launch a study to know what people can do and until what age and in which sectors.

*What measures would you suggest to reduce the regulatory burden on SMEs and micro-enterprises, including reducing compliance costs and administrative burden, while ensuring a high level of compliance with OSH legislation by SMEs and micro-enterprises?\**

CEC European Managers acknowledges that the implementation of the OSH strategy for the SMEs is a real challenge because of the relative lack of means they possess. However, some measures could be adopted in order to help them to comply with the EU OSH strategy at relatively low cost. That is the reason why we think it would be appropriate to create "an identity card for the enterprise" which will bring together all the basic information such as the activity, legal denomination and so on. The company could deliver this card and then add the information more



specific that is needed to the setting up of a file. Some countries have already found some other ideas to help the SMEs and micro-enterprises comply more easily with health and safety regulations. In fact, in the evaluation of the European strategy on safety and health at work 2007-2012 some examples of such simplification are given: The application of the Standard Cost Model to assess the costs of administrative burdens from OSH legislation and to revise legislation accordingly (e.g. DK, FI, BE); The provision of example risk assessments and online templates for SMEs (e.g. UK); The creation of a call-center for the labour inspectorate or Q&A services by the national authorities (e.g. EL, SE). Among the other measures not specifically relating to OSH issues, the French example of the pact for competitiveness foresees to experiment measures to help SMEs and this before the promulgation of the law. These measures are considered as a test, they allow the government to see if the law is adapted and feasible for SMEs. Simplification here is understood in a broader sense includes the reduction of administrative costs, provision of support to SMEs to carry out risk assessments or innovative solutions to provide support to employers for the implementation of legislation. In this will to reduce compliance costs and administrative burden, the EU should promote the use of Internet.

*Do you have any views on the role of social dialogue at EU and national level to the identification, preparation and implementation of any new initiatives to improve health and safety at work?*

Social dialogue at EU and national level is really important in this field. Indeed, Social Partners (employers' organisations and trade unions) know what the dangers are in the sector they represent. That is why it is fundamental to consult them before taking any initiative. SP organizations are in direct contact with both employers and employees and can identify what is dangerous, what is not, how to do to avoid accidents and how to improve the current situation. So far, Social Partners have played an important role in designing and implementing occupational safety and health policy. At a European level, one cannot forget the big contribution of sectorial social dialogue, and the number of joint declarations and other documents covering health and safety issues on the workplace that sectorial committees deliver on a regular basis. Social partners have the goal to come up with innovative solutions to solve traditional and emerging problems. The EU Social Partners are key actors of this on-going process to adapt European legislation to actual changes on the ground. Every MS should be equipped with specialized bodies, competent in the matter of OSH as it is the case for example in France, where two such bodies are active: the Committee on Safety, Hygiene and Health Protection at Work or the National agency for the improvement of work conditions. For CEC, the stake of a negotiation on the quality of working life at the European level is considerable because it should include all

activities at work. Negotiate on the quality of working life is fundamental. It can enable a win-win situation for the employees' wellbeing and for the company's competitiveness. The quality of working life is not only a social matter, but has profound economic implications too, as it is linked with the overall performance of the companies and it is a factor of progress.

*Add any further aspects that in your view were not sufficiently taken into account by the above questions*

From our point of view, the problems encountered by the managers are not enough taken into account in the study and in these questions. For many years, occupational health and safety issues were almost entirely associated with physical problems (accidents, injuries, diseases). Nevertheless, more and more often we can see that managers are facing many health problems due to work; with stress as the most important and frequent. Stress and anxiety do influence the health of managers, but also their professional efficiency, with negative consequences on the overall productivity of the companies they work for. Employers have the duty to protect the well-being of all employees at work, not only workers but also managers, and also to ensure that managers have sufficient knowledge of how to intervene in case of similar problems occurring to lower-rank employees. Because of the very nature of their role and profile within the companies they work for, managers are ultimately responsible for ensuring the wellbeing of workers and employees, and need to receive an appropriate training to fulfil this task. Furthermore, considering the condition of vulnerable groups and workers in high risk sectors, managers should benefit from a specific framework. That is why it is also important to increase the number of scientific researches in order to anticipate, identify and deal with the risks in the area of health and safety at work especially in the field of mental health. Data collected would allow gathering information on the subject and so developing national and European strategies. Moreover, we also think that in a world where the economy is globalized, Europe should collaborate more with international bodies such as the International Labour Organisation in order to set up common or coordinated policies.



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