



EU strategic framework on health and safety at work 2021-2027

Joint declaration by EFBWW & FIEC

FINAL

5/10/2022

A) Introduction

1. With the Communication COM(2021)323 final, the European Commission presented its new Strategic Framework on health and safety at work for the period 2021 to 2027 (here below the “Strategic Framework”). With reference to the subsidiarity principle and reflecting on the fact that Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) is always specific, depending on the type of activity, environment, material and technology used, and other factors, the European Commission is repeatedly pointing on the important role of Social Dialogue in all planning, evaluation and execution of OSH measures. With this joint declaration, EFBWW and FIEC, the European Sectoral Social Partner for the construction industry, provide their views on this Strategic Framework, bearing in mind the specificities of the construction sector.

B) Background

2. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the vulnerability of our societies. Companies and workers were hit twice, as human being by the pandemic itself and as economic actors by the effects of long shut down periods. As a response to this crisis, in many EU countries, sanitary protocols have been put in place and enabled the reopening of construction sites – which had been closed because of COVID restrictions – under good conditions. Often, these sanitary protocols have been negotiated between social partners and in cooperation with public authorities. Prevention strategies for possible future pandemics should have the same focus on guaranteeing the necessary sanitary conditions.

3. The new Strategic Framework states that the last three decades have brought significant progress in OSH. For instance, fatal accidents at work in the EU decreased by about 70% between 1994 and 2018¹. For the construction sector alone, fatal accidents have decreased from 1049 in 2010 to 716 in 2018; and non-fatal accidents have decreased from 504 532 in 2010 to 385 249 in 2018². In spite of this significant improvement, we believe that more needs to be done. In particular, the new Strategic Framework also stresses that over 200 000 workers (all sectors) die each year from work-related illnesses³. We believe that more should be done in this area.

¹ See EU Strategic Framework (p. 2)

² Figures from EUROSTAT: see the tables in annex

³ See EU Strategic Framework (p. 2). **No data available for the construction sector.**

C) General comments to the proposed Strategic Framework

4. Against this background, we welcome the Vision Zero approach to work-related deaths in the EU, as proposed in the new Strategic Framework. However, there is a certain lack of clarity in the Strategic Framework regarding EU actions and the expectations towards/from the Member States. The Commission should describe realistic targets and specific actions regarding single work-related accidents/diseases. Furthermore, the Strategic Framework is missing a systematic analysis of the status, recent developments and future challenges in the world of work.

5. We believe that a satisfied workforce is a key parameter of competition in a globalised world. Therefore, creating a strong health and safety culture at work, job satisfaction, skills development and career opportunities are positive factors, not only for an individual's working life but also for contributing to the competitiveness of European enterprises.

6. We consider that a sound legislative framework – always based on reliable scientific data – and its correct application and enforcement is a sound basis for any improvement of the working conditions. This basis also provides a level playing field for all actors in the respective economic areas. Based on this legislative framework, non-binding instruments should be further developed to support companies with the implementation (i.e. exchange of best practices, awareness raising campaigns, better information tools, etc.). Moreover, we believe that our social dialogue for the construction sector is always the right place to exchange views on any Commission's sectoral legislative proposal/revision and – besides the opinions of the Advisory Committee for Health and Safety (ACHS) – the established social partners' consultations are a key element of such initiatives. In this respect, we insist that EU sectoral social partners should be stronger involved in the European Commission's regular evaluation and fitness-check of the EU legislative framework. Indeed, they are first confronted with changes in the world of work and need a structured pathway to announce those changes if they are relevant in connection with the legislative framework.

7. We recognise the efforts that the European Union has done over the past decades in the field of OSH. The EU Strategic Frameworks on OSH have provided a legal and political framework which has given impetus to many improvements in working conditions. Important standards like the obligatory risk assessment, the hierarchy of preventative measures or the cooperation between companies and workers in OSH activities are cornerstones of the progresses achieved. The EU Strategic Frameworks were based on the conviction that the right to health is a fundamental right; all workers deserve working conditions which respect their health, safety and dignity, as recognised by employers and trade unions. We are convinced that the strategies' overall impact was and still is absolutely positive for Europe's workplaces.

8. As in other economic sectors, OSH in construction is very much influenced by a significant number of factors. Therefore, we would like to recall that today's OSH policies are necessarily multidisciplinary, as they draw on occupational medicine, safety, ergonomics, epidemiology, toxicology, industrial hygiene, as well as on proper standardisation and design. In this respect, we also insist that issues related to chemical substances should be regulated under OSH legislation, rather than under the REACH framework.

D) Specific comments to the proposed Strategic Framework

9. The Strategic Framework mentions that the Commission will improve data collection on OSH. This is a very important point which should be more precise in terms of planned implementation. Considering that each type of accident has its specific conditions (work environment, machinery, material, substance or other aspects), we propose a sector-oriented initiative of the European Commission, next to the work on better and comparable data collection. Such initiative should aim to detect jointly, with the social partners, the specificities of various types of accidents (e.g. falls from heights), work on better definitions and harmonisation of the classification criteria, and start risk reduction campaigns.

10. We are convinced of the importance of investing in health and safety at work as a contribution to the ongoing digitalisation and greening of our industry.

11. We believe that the aging of the society will also have an impact on the greening and the digitalisation of our sector. In this respect, we need strategies for older workers, as well as throughout the whole working career, starting with the apprenticeship. Ergonomics also play an important role in this regard. Particular attention should be given to occupational Musculo-skeletal disorders (MSDs) and the prevention thereof. We are currently involved in MSDs prevention in the framework of the EU-OSHA “Healthy Workplaces” campaign. Psychosocial strain is one of the factors connected to MSDs, a growing risk at workplaces. Equally in connection with a related EU-OSHA campaign, the European Social Partners developed a guide for construction companies to minimize these risks.

12. Climate change also needs to be mentioned as it will have enormous effects on the planet and our daily life. Working conditions will be strongly affected mainly, not only for outdoor workers. For some of the related phenomena – e.g. sun, heat, cold – we already have experiences and practices on how to protect workers better. Such best practices for adapted protective measures come out of employers’ risk assessments and need to be promoted as widely as possible. Furthermore, the EU-OSHA should undertake research on this topic.

13. Technological developments and changes, such as new materials, machinery or tools, are constantly changing workplaces and practices. OSH standards at the workplace must adequately take this into account. Therefore, rapid political, administrative and technical responses are essential in order to take these changes on board and to guarantee a high level of health and safety at work. Ideally, the social impact of these developments should be anticipated, with clear ergonomic and safety standards for these newly designed materials/machineries/tools. This is the purpose of the Machinery Directive⁴ currently under revision.

⁴ Directive 2006/42/EC of 17/05/2006 on machinery⁵ E.g. social dialogue project on information modules on asbestos: <https://www.fiec.eu/our-projects/completed-projects/information-modules-asbestos>

14. Asbestos is still among the most significant occupational health challenges. We repeatedly worked jointly on asbestos-related issues.⁵ With the launch of the Renovation Wave⁶ initiative by the European Commission, as well as the revision of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive⁷, we expect that the amount of renovation works will increase significantly. Therefore, the proper management of this substance is extremely important. Against this background, we acknowledge the European Parliament resolution of 20 October 2021 with recommendations to the Commission on protecting workers from asbestos (2019/2182/INL). Even though we have different positions regarding the exposure limit value of asbestos at the workplace, we consider that some of these recommendations are a basis for complementary reflection and discussion within our social dialogue. We are convinced that the implementation of any additional measure, action and programme related to asbestos' removal should be based on the strong involvement of stakeholders, especially the sectoral social partners and prevention institutes within the construction sector. We believe that further improvement may be necessary and possible in the fields of workers' training, exchange of best practices for specific asbestos related occupations, the overall handling of asbestos (i.e. from detection to waste management) and risk assessments/risk reduction measures. Moreover, it is very important that companies and households can benefit from accompanying measures, in particular financial support.

15. We underline that labour inspectorates, in cooperation with employers, play a key role in verifying the correct application of the legislation in force and, thereby, in prevention in general. Therefore, we welcome that the EU Strategic Framework calls on Member States to strengthen field inspections. To help those Member States who need it the most, further concrete measures should be put forward. Member States must provide adequate support to labour inspection services – and live up to the ILO call for 1 labour inspector per 10.000 workers⁸ for industrialised countries.

16. In order to avoid that the fundamental right of health, as laid down in Article 31 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, be affected by introducing different levels of protection for companies of different size, we share the view that an equal level of protection for all workers is required. To achieve this, it is crucial to ensure that any legislation can effectively be implemented and applied by all companies, independently of their size. To this end, we see a need to help Micro and Small enterprises better to comply with the health and safety regulations, including with necessary financial support.

17. We underline that the positive impact of this new Strategic Framework will very much depend on some preconditions. It needs clear goals, backed by specific actions, as well as a periodic evaluation of the respective activities. As pointed out by the EU-OSHA⁹, the external support from bodies like labour inspections, prevention bodies, social partners or insurances is insufficient. In general, much more funding is needed. In particular, the social dialogue budget line is quite limited and there is no funding linked to our activities in the framework of the EU-OSHA campaigns. Better funding and staffing of the responsible unit of DG EMPL is also needed for the Commission's internal structures dealing with OSH.

⁵ E.g. social dialogue project on information modules on asbestos: <https://www.fiec.eu/our-projects/completed-projets/information-modules-asbestos>

⁶ COM(2020)662 final, dated 14/10/2020

⁷ Directive 2010/31/EU of 19/05/2010 on the energy performance of buildings

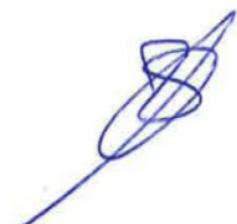
⁸ ILO Labour Inspection Convention 1947 (No. 81) / Report from 2006 International Labour Conference (footnote p. 66): <https://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/relm/ilc/ilc95/pdf/rep-iii-1b.pdf>

⁹ See EU-OSHA 2021: Improving compliance with occupational safety and health regulations: an overarching review. Executive Summary - <https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/summary-improving-compliance-occupational-safety-and-health-regulations-overarching-review>

18. Finally, social partners should be properly involved in designing and implementing sound health and safety measures at all levels, in accordance with the rules and principles of the EU Framework Directive. In this respect, we would like to draw the attention to the FIEC-EFBWW social dialogue work programme, covering the period 2020 to 2023. In this programme, we have committed ourselves to:

- Improve the overall EU OSH framework
- Participate in the implementation of a stronger prevention culture
- Assess the EU OSH legislative framework
- Focus on some specific hazards (e.g. silica, asbestos, ergonomics...)
- Cooperate with all relevant stakeholders and institutions
- Call for the harmonisation of statistics on OSH

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EUROPEAN CONSTRUCTION
INDUSTRY FEDERATION

Fatal Accidents at work by NACE Rev. 2 activity [hsw_n2_02]

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 Source of data Eurostat
 UNIT Number
 NACE_R2 Construction



GEO/TIME	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
European Union - 27 countries (from 2020)	:	:	999	905	826	733	740	767	672	679	682	755
European Union - 28 countries (2013-2020)	:	:	1.049	958	869	784	791	815	717	733	716	:
Belgium	24	21	22	19	14	20	12	14	16	12	17	10
Bulgaria	52	29	27	19	16	20	22	16	20	26	21	20
Czechia	57	19	27	29	22	21	28	29	19	19	18	18
Denmark	11	8	8	8	5	3	4	6	3	5	3	2
Germany (until 1990 former territory of the FRG)	125	95	85	112	97	80	99	89	73	89	90	70
Estonia	6	5	4	4	3	6	5	3	8	1	3	8
Ireland	13	9	5	5	7	10	6	10	9	4	5	12
Greece	26	18	13	16	11	8	7	10	9	7	8	13
Spain	180	123	100	106	68	58	59	68	49	73	67	100
France	74	133	113	130	124	133	128	119	111	105	101	160
Croatia	:	:	14	15	18	8	6	7	11	11	12	12
Italy	184	184	183	143	110	101	105	133	115	89	123	92
Cyprus	5	2	9	1	2	4	1	2	0	0	2	3
Latvia	12	7	5	10	11	3	5	2	5	5	4	10
Lithuania	21	11	6	13	16	17	12	14	8	4	6	7
Luxembourg	0	4	2	2	2	1	2	2	6	1	5	2
Hungary	41	30	26	18	18	18	19	24	16	22	22	29
Malta	1	2	2	0	6	1	1	2	4	1	4	3
Netherlands	39	24	15	8	7	7	5	5	4	4	5	3
Austria	28	39	21	10	31	24	15	12	16	23	21	19
Poland	125	118	114	99	82	71	55	69	52	58	48	44
Portugal	78	76	67	57	55	42	43	48	37	42	26	28
Romania	136	115	95	59	65	56	67	57	57	56	39	61
Slovenia	9	12	12	5	7	5	7	7	0	4	6	4
Slovakia	18	14	3	3	13	7	7	11	5	9	9	8
Finland	6	8	7	4	9	4	9	3	9	2	5	7
Sweden	17	9	14	10	7	5	11	5	9	7	12	10
Iceland	:	:	:	0	0	0	:	:	:	:	:	:
Norway	8	11	9	11	10	10	11	6	8	7	4	9
Switzerland	27	20	19	11	22	18	21	12	28	14	20	14
United Kingdom	48	41	50	53	43	51	51	48	45	54	34	:

Non-fatal accidents at work by NACE Rev. 2 activity and sex [hsw_n2_01]

Last update
Extracted on
Source of data

20.01.22
21.02.22
Eurostat



UNIT
NACE_R2
SEX

Number
Construction
Total

GEO/TIME	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
European Union - 27 countries (from 2020)	:	:	476.159	454.799	395.661	353.950	351.663	347.293	347.467	352.575	362.630	371.800
European Union - 28 countries (2013-2020)	:	:	504.532	479.869	418.414	378.018	376.551	372.284	371.737	376.088	385.249	:
Belgium	12.716	11.465	10.974	11.174	9.971	9.165	8.543	8.122	8.106	7.813	7.694	7.337
Bulgaria	371	308	231	256	229	200	222	200	185	181	205	185
Czechia	7.664	6.015	5.566	3.357	3.034	2.882	2.756	2.658	2.688	2.577	2.468	2.440
Denmark	8.897	7.080	6.833	6.783	7.053	6.637	6.467	6.231	6.514	6.452	7.126	6.862
Germany (until 1990 former territory of the FRG)	125.756	127.649	112.210	125.306	116.909	105.052	114.496	112.802	116.267	117.609	118.465	116.854
Estonia	2.088	930	1.029	1.070	1.071	872	842	820	1.146	1.239	647	642
Ireland	3.167	727	2.475	2.403	1.401	932	1.276	1.755	1.488	1.877	2.388	1.602
Greece	5.975	4.314	3.394	2.439	1.654	1.344	416	374	411	387	382	450
Spain	162.152	104.199	85.513	68.947	44.892	37.565	38.263	42.889	46.165	52.818	59.322	70.843
France	109.405	102.320	98.042	98.758	92.144	86.078	82.934	78.675	75.334	73.987	75.507	75.349
Croatia	:	:	1.281	1.357	701	1.008	945	1.019	1.053	1.231	1.115	874
Italy	78.155	67.288	59.620	50.364	39.865	37.762	33.005	30.811	29.935	29.616	28.105	27.229
Cyprus	644	560	530	417	326	246	184	154	172	252	308	330
Latvia	214	112	97	127	163	154	146	146	120	147	188	198
Lithuania	580	255	279	358	347	340	354	398	343	384	368	454
Luxembourg	2.650	2.183	2.233	2.362	2.430	2.237	2.340	2.342	2.207	2.034	2.364	2.257
Hungary	1.297	1.102	1.040	852	968	795	765	776	912	870	883	982
Malta	561	502	537	466	438	393	460	364	231	263	284	277
Netherlands	17.984	10.567	16.782	11.150	18.367	10.470	7.140	6.409	5.877	4.484	5.768	6.715
Austria	14.592	12.718	12.841	12.637	12.399	11.965	11.827	11.608	11.811	11.312	11.753	11.625
Poland	10.006	8.215	8.585	8.755	7.879	6.244	5.863	5.557	5.290	5.195	5.047	4.633
Portugal	33.189	33.236	31.418	27.551	19.691	18.384	19.252	20.239	18.097	18.551	18.800	20.384
Romania	756	556	458	442	397	401	422	471	487	480	441	481
Slovenia	3.176	2.697	2.303	1.864	1.659	1.406	1.450	1.365	1.256	1.413	1.464	1.463
Slovakia	918	732	656	538	498	461	439	476	429	425	446	426
Finland	9.684	7.669	7.987	8.044	7.823	7.488	6.753	6.313	6.500	6.527	6.681	6.274
Sweden	3.075	2.899	3.245	3.343	3.352	3.469	4.102	4.318	4.444	4.451	4.410	4.634
Iceland	:	:	:	39	80	101	:	:	:	:	:	:
Norway	6.868	6.053	4.665	3.265	5.565	2.754	1.367	1.460	1.396	1.398	1.370	1.309
Switzerland	17.323	17.739	18.573	19.820	19.717	20.768	21.055	20.876	21.282	21.329	21.714	22.776
United Kingdom	43.830	32.359	28.372	28.751	22.753	24.068	24.887	24.991	24.270	23.514	22.619	: