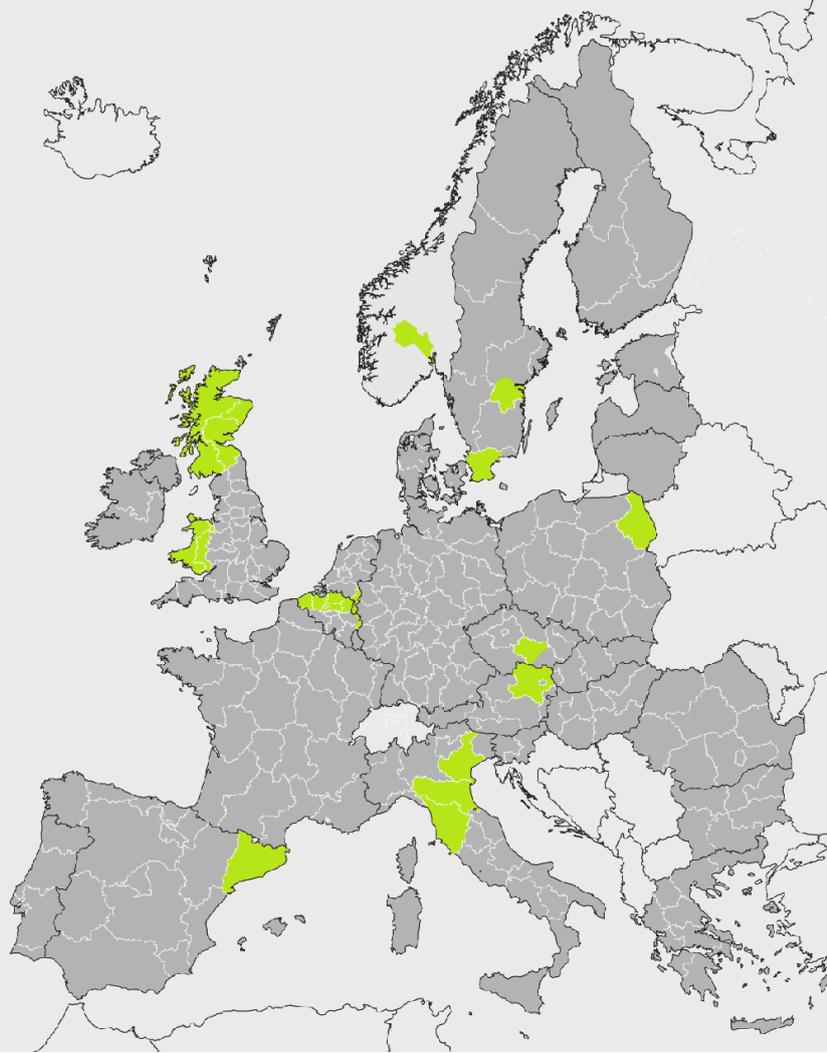


# EUREGHA'S RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION ON THE NEW EU OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH POLICY FRAMEWORK

2013



The main purpose of the consultation is to gather insights and contributions from all interested parties on the possible directions of future EU policy in the occupational safety and health area by identifying current and future challenges, as well as solutions to address these challenges. It takes into account the results of the evaluation of the European Strategy on Safety and Health at Work 2007-2012.

# RESPONSE

## NECESSITY AND NATURE OF A NEW EU OSH POLICY FRAMEWORK

### 1. DO YOU AGREE WITH THE ASSESSMENT OF THE EU OSH STRATEGY? DID IT LEAD TO TANGIBLE RESULTS?

Yes, EUREGHA agrees with the assessment and believes that it will lead to tangible results.

### 2. 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?

Yes, EU level action is necessary but such action should not extend to coordination of national strategies by the European Commission. Rather, there is need for an OSH framework set for authorities/companies/employers which they can benefit from to further improve health and safety at European workplaces.

As a network of regional and local health authorities, EUREGHA also believes that an OSH framework should encourage Member States to include cooperation with different levels of governance. Regional and local authorities represent the natural interface between citizens, national and European institutions and therefore, they need to be better included in implementing a new framework.

### 3. IF YOU DEEM SUCH A FRAMEWORK AT EU LEVEL IS NECESSARY, EXPLAIN WHY. WHICH ASPECTS SHOULD BE COVERED?

It is important to have an EU framework for workplace safety and health which reflects the new and emerging risks that the European workforce faces. A new OSH strategy should maintain the same level of work related risks but increase the evaluation and monitoring system at EU level in order to create a better understanding of new risks and ways to avoid or mitigate them. Another great added value with an EU level framework is that it fosters an exchange of experiences and of best practices between countries.

A number of new challenges and risks have emerged and these aspects need to be covered in a new framework. A special focus should be given to; the mental health of the workforce, demographic changes and a more vulnerable and ageing workforce, inactive lifestyles and its effects such as obesity, diabetes and coronary heart diseases. In addition, the economic crisis and psychosocial issues that lead to these new and emerging risks, such as job insecurity, precarious contracts and work intensification, also need to be taken into account.

## LEVEL OF COMMITMENT

1. 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.

Yes.

2. 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?

Yes, EU level action is necessary but it is better to have an EU level framework than EU level coordination of national policies. An OSH framework should set broad goals and priorities and monitoring of the framework should be coordinated at the European level.

3. 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?

The added value is that the new framework would become clearer which might facilitate and further improve its implementation. Specified action points would further make it easier to measure progress which can hopefully improve the gathering of harmonized European data.

4. 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?

Yes, but EUREGHA also believes that a new OSH framework should include priorities and a set of clear action points to facilitate its implementation.

## CONTENT OF A NEW EU OSH POLICY FRAMEWORK

### 1. WHAT ARE THE KEY CHALLENGES IN THE OSH AREA? HOW WOULD YOU PRIORITISE THEM?

The main challenge and key priority is to better include mental health at the workplace. The mental health of the workforce is crucial and linked to several other health related problems, one related area that needs to be included is for instance suicide prevention. Other important challenges to include are inactive lifestyles, obesity and the health related challenges that come with an ageing workforce.

Another important priority should be to improve the evaluation of the new framework (and to evaluate it faster). Mid-term evaluations are very important so that the response to new and emerging risks will improve. Further, health is not only a national problem, it is also a regional and local problem, so the multi-governance of the new framework needs to be improved and authorities on both national, regional and the local level need to be included in the framework.

### 2. WHAT PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS DO YOU SUGGEST TO ADDRESS ALL OR SOME OF THESE CHALLENGES?

A new OSH framework should include more action points targeted at tackling issues related to mental health. One practical suggestion would be to include a broader definition of OSH. Inspiration could for instance be taken from the definition of the ILO which already includes mental and social wellbeing of workers.

Special attention should also be given to suicide prevention and encouraging the creation of suicide prevention plans could be one solution. One inspiration could be EUREGENAS (European Regions Enforcing Actions Against Suicide) which is a three year project, funded by the Health Programme, with the aim of contributing to the prevention of suicidality by developing and implementing strategies for suicide prevention at the regional level.

Research on the causes of mental health, new and emerging risks and on work related diseases also needs to increase. It is also very important that a new OSH framework is aligned and integrated with other EU initiatives to avoid duplication, such as the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing, the Joint Action on Mental Health and Wellbeing and the Europe 2020 strategy.

Another action could be to mainstream peer activities to improve the exchange of experiences and learning from initiatives at different levels of governance and between different stakeholders from both public and private sectors. Lastly, the links and cooperation with other areas and agencies of the European Commission could also be strengthened, especially with DG SANCO on mental health and wellbeing.

3. 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?

Yes. A special focus should be given to people with mental illness and to the ageing workforce. Another important focus group is groups that are facing health risk due to their socio-economic situation. This focus is important in order for a new OSH framework to also take into account the health inequalities that exist within Europe. A new framework should also include subnational stakeholders, such as regional and local authorities as well as NGO: s, in the strategic planning so that the new framework becomes as comprehensive as possible.

4. 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?

Yes, demographic changes need to be addressed, especially since it is important that a new OSH framework is aligned with the Europe 2020-strategy. With an ageing population it is important that the workforce remains happy and motivated to work longer and an OSH framework needs to take this into account. A new framework should address issues such as MSD: s, stress and promoting better and longer professional activity (for instance vocational training). Such a framework also needs to reflect the need for working conditions that are in favour of an ageing workforce such as flexible working hours etc.

**EUREGHA is the reference network for European Regional and Local Health Authorities.** We bring together a critical mass of knowledge and expertise and encourage diversity with the purpose of helping our members to improve the efficiency and quality of health systems and services in Europe.

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Website [www.euregha.net](http://www.euregha.net)

   EUREGHA

EUREGHA Secretariat  
Rond-point Robert Schuman, 11  
1040 – Etterbeek  
Brussels, Belgium

#### CONTACT US

E-mail [secretariat@euregha.net](mailto:secretariat@euregha.net)

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