

From policy to practice: Safety and Health in Micro and Small Enterprises in the EU

European Risk Observatory

National Report: Estonia

Authors: Marina Järvis, Karin Reinhold, Charles Woolfson, the Tallinn School of Economics and Business Administration, Tallinn University of Technology (TTU)

Project management: Malgorzata Milczarek, Marine Cavet, EU-OSHA.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Description of the national context

The report describes the national context and occupational safety and health (OSH) situation of the current Estonian OSH system and examines its challenges and national policies for micro- and small enterprises (MSEs) with impact on OSH.

Estonia is a small Baltic state close to the Russian Federation and Finland, with a population of approximately 1.3 million persons and a workforce of 625,000. As a former Soviet Republic that experienced significant inward migration from other parts of the Soviet Union in the years between 1945 and 1990, it contains a large number of non-ethnic Estonians. Altogether about 420,000 inhabitants (31.4 %) belong to various ethnic groups other than Estonian. The great majority of these (25.5 % of the total population) are Russian by origin and comprise a significant Russian-speaking minority (Estonia.eu, n.d.).

An extensive process of privatisation has created an economy that is overwhelmingly reliant on the economic activity of micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises. The scale and structure of the Estonian economy identifies a high share of micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, which now comprise 99.8 % of companies. These enterprises account for about 74.4 % of value added in the Estonian economy (as against an average of 58.1 % for the EU28). The enterprises are concentrated in the service sectors, followed by the retail and wholesale trade and construction, with manufacturing accounting for a quarter of MSE value-added and employment (European Commission, 2014; see Table 1).

Table 1: MSE sector profile, Estonia

Size (number of employees)	Number of enterprises			Number of employees			Value added		
	Estonia		EU-28	Estonia		EU-28	Estonia		EU-28
	Number	%	%	Number	%	%	Billion EUR	%	%
Micro (0-9)	57,572	90.2	92.4	123,809	30.6	29.1	2	24.2	21.6
Small (10-49)	4,824	8	6.4	97,786	24.1	20.6	2	23.7	18.2
Medium-sized (50-249)	982	1.6	1	95,077	23.5	17.2	3	26.5	18.3
Large (≥250)	151	0.2	0.2	88,576	21.9	33.1	3	25.6	41.9
Total	63,529	100	100	405,248	100	100	10	100	100

Source: European Commission, 2014

Table 1 reveals the scale and structure of the Estonian economy and the predominant share of micro- and small enterprises. Of over 60,000 enterprises in the MSE sector in 2014, over 57,500 (90.2 %) were micro-enterprises, and fewer than 5,000 (8 %) were small enterprises. By contrast, fewer than 100 (1.6 %) were medium-sized enterprises, while only just over 150 (0.2 %) were large enterprises. MSEs comprised 98.8 % of the total number of Estonian companies. MSEs accounted for 47.9 % of value added in the Estonian economy (as against an average of 39.8 % for the EU-28) (European Commission, 2014: 2). MSEs provided over half the total employment (54.7 %); about a third of employees (30.6 %) were engaged in micro-enterprises and a further quarter in small enterprises (24.1 %) (European Commission, 2014).

Thus, in total the MSE sector comprised the overwhelming majority of Estonian enterprises. The total number of active enterprises has significantly increased since 2010, that is after the financial crisis. While in 2010 the Labour Inspectorate database contained slightly more than 43,000 active enterprises, by 2016 the number had increased by around 11,000 (Labour Inspectorate, 2016: 4). Micro-enterprises in particular saw their share in employment increasing, suggesting that this sector has been an important driver of economic recovery (Labour Inspectorate, 2016: 4).

1.1.1 Occupational injuries in MSEs

According to the Estonian Act on Occupational Health and Safety, occupational accidents are divided into minor occupational accidents, serious occupational accidents and fatal occupational accidents. Occupational accidents which result in serious bodily injury to an employee or by which an employee's life is endangered are classified as serious occupational accidents. In 2014, approximately 900 reported serious accidents occurred in Estonia. Compared with the previous year, the number of serious accidents at work increased by 15 % (Labour Inspectorate of Estonia, 2015: 14). Accidents occurred most often in manufacturing and in public administration and defence. Almost two-thirds of accidents involved males, most often in the age group 25-34.

The estimated number of accidents at work, calculated by Statistics Estonia based on the Labour Force Survey 2013, is almost three times more than the number of accidents reported to the Labour Inspectorate. In particular, data on less serious accidents are underestimated because of underreporting, while also the administrative system encourages the practice of staying at work or a quick return to work after a work accident has occurred (Eurofound, 2015: 19). Since the recovery from the global financial and economic crisis, the gross number and rate of occupational accidents have increased. This is in line with established research findings that suggest that accident rates rise after a period of economic downturn as the pace of economic activity increases, together with an increase in the numbers of those employed, especially in higher risk sectors such as manufacturing and construction.

Accident data reveal an almost doubling in the percentage of enterprises (both public and private) reporting an accident in the previous 12 months, and an overall increase from 5.4 % in 2009 to 9.4 % in 2015 (Statistics Estonia, 2015).

1.1.2 Role of authorities and social partners

The field of OSH is regulated through relevant legislation. The main regulatory authority is the Labour Inspectorate, which conducts inspections and monitoring for compliance with OSH requirements, and carries out targeted OSH improvement campaigns in sectors of particular concern, such as construction. In general, the Labour Inspectorate adopts a business-friendly and 'light' regulatory touch with regard to violations of regulation, commented upon by international institutions such as the OECD (2010: 64). The formal nature and lack of practical risk assessment procedures and reports, and the fact that risk assessment is performed inadequately, suggest that the authorities have some way to go in securing a modern and safe working environment in Estonia, in particular, the steps of implementing safety measures and then follow-up controls, are often overlooked or forgotten.

Several years ago, the Labour Inspectorate set itself the aim of helping employers and employees and, in addition to being a supervising authority, also being a counselling institution, providing more information and guidance, and using penalties as a last resort. In addition, the national programme 'Face-to-face consultancy' or 'Corporate working environment counselling service' was established in 2014; it includes consultancy services on site in the field of OSH, implemented by the Labour Inspectorate, in order to help employers to fulfil legal requirements as well as to improve the safety culture in Estonian establishments. This programme has a special focus on MSEs and start-up companies (for example new employers). The programme has been developed to suit all Estonian companies from different sectors.

Social partners play only a minimal role in OSH prevention and education, because of the significant weakness of trade unions, with the lowest union representation in the EU (around 5 % of the workforce; Ministry of Social Affairs, 2014: 32) and the generally weak structure of participatory arrangements in

general. This applies especially to OSH matters, where compliance with regulation is at best rather formal. Estonia has had a 'dual system' of workers' representation since 2007, whereby, in the absence of a workplace trade union, the workforce can elect a 'trustee' to represent their interests. However, in practice, these representatives are very rare; they can be seen particularly in the food industry and in mining.

Other agencies, such as fire regulation authorities, and stakeholders may have some indirect but unmeasurable positive effects on OSH.

1.1.3 National policies for MSE's with impact on OHS

General OSH regulations also apply to MSEs, with some exceptions. Based on Estonian OSH legislation, the mandatory workers' representative is not required in micro-enterprises (fewer than 10 employees). In addition, micro-enterprises are exempted from establishing an OSH organisation (a working environment council comprising representatives of employer and employees). As required by law, a working environment council is mandatory only in enterprises of over 50 employees, or if a labour inspector requires the establishment of a working environment council based on working conditions in the enterprises. However, the employer is obligated to cooperate with the employees regarding OSH issues no matter the size of the company.

National policies aimed separately at MSEs barely exist, although, as said above, the predominance of micro-enterprises does ensure that, where initiatives are undertaken, such policies will include these enterprises by default. Available evidence points to the persistence of 'old' risks in the workplace. However, with regard to new and emerging risks of a psychosocial nature, the case studies and all available evidence suggest that Estonia ranks very low among its EU counterparts with regard to identifiable initiatives in this area.

1.1.4 Available expertise and important intermediaries for MSEs regarding OSH issues

Occupational health service check-ups are available and compulsory for employees, as is a compulsory 24-hour training module for safety representatives and safety managers (working environment specialists) delivered by private education providers.

Among external OSH service providers are entrepreneurs or private medical companies and agricultural advisors (the main external OSH expertise in the agricultural sector). The services provided by occupational health physicians, occupational health nurses, hygienists, psychologists and ergonomists are considered to be OSH services, which are available on a free market basis in Estonia. According to the Estonian Occupational Health and Safety Act, the statutory requirements are met if the employer acquires the services from any of the individual specialists. This means that the multidisciplinary provision of OHS is not required (Martimo, 2005). The market-driven system has led to a situation where the employer can choose the contents of the OSH service. Relatively good information is obtainable on the number of licensed occupational health professionals and OSH service units. Much less information is available on the process of acquisition and customers of OSH services, particular among MSEs. The only indications of the coverage and contents of OSH are obtained indirectly from the information labour inspectors gather annually from employers, and from data about health examinations conducted by the occupational health physicians from the Health Statistics and Health Research Database, collected by the National Institute for Health Development.

The Labour Inspectorate provides extensive web-based information services on its website www.ti.ee as well as on the working life portal 'Tööelu portaal' www.tooelu.ee (administered by the Labour Inspectorate, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Health Board and the National Institute for Health Development). In addition, the consultancy service ('Face-to-face consultancy') in OSH provided by the Labour Inspectorate can be ordered on site by MSEs. The project started in 2014, and is funded from 2015 to 2020 by the European Social Fund.

It is interesting that the main priorities and problems in current OSH practice in Estonia have remained the same for the last 15 years (Reinhold et al., 2009; Järvis, 2014): a lack of political commitment on the parts of the government and of the social partners to draw up policies for the further development of OSH, due to the weak social dialogue in Estonia and the slight impact of the social partners, in particular in the field of OSH; insufficient legislation — the continuing absence of an insurance act for occupational accidents and diseases, which effectively places the burden of compensation, support and rehabilitation as a result of workplace injury or ill-health on the individual worker and his or her family; the low quality of risk assessment; absence of an agreement between the occupational health doctors/physicians and the Estonian Sickness Fund to reimburse costs for the analysis and rehabilitation of workers; and the lack of cooperation between employers, employees and occupational health doctors.

1.1.5 General national OSH strategies that attempt to engage with MSEs

All Estonian micro-enterprises are also covered by the OSH legislation and activities of the Labour Inspectorate, although the likelihood of inspection for most is very small. However, there is no specific national strategy that attempts to engage particularly with MSEs.

Recently, various national programmes were established in Estonia that are directed towards all establishments, not only MSEs. It was emphasised by the OSH authorities and stakeholders that MSEs in particular can benefit from evaluated national programmes/good examples and can receive support for OSH management. The general strategies aimed at improving OSH in Estonian MSEs seem to be included and reflected in the national programmes/good examples. The objectives of these are particularly to help MSEs minimise paperwork/bureaucracy, to make it easier to fulfil OSH legal requirements and to maintain health and safety in the establishment as well as increase and promote the exchange of OSH information and good practice, for example OSH training, consultancy, online interactive tool for risk assessment (for descriptions of selected national programmes see EU-OSHA, 2017a).

2 Research methods

2.1 Design of data collection

The Estonian research followed the original research design proposed for this work package (see also EU-OSHA, 2017b) with three sector dialogue workshops (in manufacturing, construction and the private service industry, with a focus on the hotel, restaurant and catering, HORECA, sector). Quality was secured by personal contacts with and invitations to stakeholders, with active involvement of the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Labour Inspectorate, which is also the EU-OSHA focal point. EU-OSHA's 'OSH ambassador'¹ in Estonia was also involved. The aim of the workshops was to bring different actors and intermediaries together and share their experiences about key success factors and major pitfalls in promoting effective OSH management and prevention actions in the field of OHS in MSEs. The researchers together with participants tried to identify areas of consensus and diverging opinion in the field of OHS in the three sectors in order to further develop successful sector-specific OHS arrangements (regulatory, supportive, informational and so on) that could have significant impacts on health and safety in MSEs.

After the initial meeting with representatives from the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Labour Inspectorate and the focal point, the dates and the content of the national dialogue workshops were discussed. At the beginning, the Estonian research team was sure that the organisation of the workshops would be particularly difficult because of the weak social dialogue in Estonia. The main concerns of the research group and possible constraints were to get sufficient representatives from all four groups (OSH regulators, OSH advisors, employers' representatives and workers' representatives), but especially from employers' representatives. However, the representatives from the Ministry of Social Affairs and the

¹ Since 2009, EU-OSHA has been cooperating with the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) to raise awareness of OSH among SMEs and micro-enterprises. To carry out this task, the EEN nominates OSH ambassadors at country level. Their role comprises coordinating activities and promoting OSH to SMEs at national level (<https://osha.europa.eu/en/about-eu-osha/what-we-do/corporate-strategy-and-work-programmes/cooperation-with-other-agencies/european-enterprise-network>)

Labour Inspectorate were very positive, optimistic, confident and willing to assist in preparation of all three national dialogue workshops, because there is a perceived urgent need to facilitate social dialogue between actors in the field of occupational health and safety.

The selection of participants took a long time. It included searching for relevant information on the internet, and several discussions among OSH researchers during the initial meeting at the Tallinn University of Technology and, later, with representatives from the Labour Inspectorate, focal point and the Ministry of Social Affairs. The latter were very helpful, recommended OSH advisors and appointed labour inspectors with experience of inspecting MSEs in the relevant sectors to attend the national dialogue workshops. Besides that, the selection criteria took into account results from careful analysis of the possible role and function of sector-specific intermediaries on OSH improvement in MSEs. For each of the sector workshops, the research group tried to involve various actors and intermediaries in order to collect relevant information and experiences in the field of OSH in MSEs as well as facilitate dialogue between the various actors.

The following stakeholders were invited to participate in the workshops: representatives from the sector in question, social partners, labour inspectors, OSH professionals (members of the Occupational Health Physicians Association and occupational health service providers, as they also provide OHS services to micro- and small companies), representatives from the Estonian Trade Union Confederation and Estonian Employers' Confederation, and participants from sector-specific associations. For instance, intermediaries in the manufacturing sector were also invited from the Federation of Estonian Engineering Industry, the Estonian Furniture Industry Association, the Estonian Electronics Industries Association and the Estonian Machine Industry Federation; in construction, from the Association of Construction Material Producers of Estonia and the Estonian Association of Construction Entrepreneurs; and in HORECA, from the Estonian Hotel and restaurant Association, the Estonian Food Industry Association and so on. In addition, the case companies that were interviewed as part of research carried out in the previous phase of the project (EU-OSHA, 2018) were also invited to participate in the workshops, and a representative from one small hotel participated in the workshop for the HORECA sector. All participants were informed about the project and the aim of the workshop and asked to participate in order to share and to discuss relevant information about their experience in promoting effective OSH management and prevention action in the field of OSH in MSEs.

Although the cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Labour Inspectorate and the focal point was fruitful during the preparation of the workshops, the Estonian research group put much effort into securing sufficient participation in all groups and sectors through personal contacts/networks. As a result, three national dialogue workshops were planned carefully and conducted successfully with sufficient participation in all groups and sectors, especially OSH professionals and advisors with a high level of expertise in MSEs, who together provided a broad and extensive representation of various viewpoints and inputs.

2.2 Strategy for the analysis

The numbers of participants in each workshops ranged from 18 (in the workshops for HORECA and for the construction sector) to 26 (in the manufacturing sector). All participants were divided into four groups: OSH advisors, OSH regulators, employers from MSEs or employers' representatives, and workers or their representatives. The Estonian research group acted as facilitator during the discussions. For each national dialogue workshop, notes were taken by the researchers from each group discussion and from the plenary discussions. In addition, all plenary discussions were recorded.

Based on these workshops, the final summary was produced. Furthermore, five additional interviews were conducted, recorded and carefully analysed. A summary was written of each interview. These five additional interviews included relevant actors and intermediaries, from groups which were not (or insufficiently) covered in the first phase (national dialogue workshops), and, in turn, complemented and substantiated the findings from the national dialogue workshops.

3 Results

3.1 Role and function of intermediaries in OSH improvements in MSE

The three national dialogue workshops demonstrated the role and function of different intermediaries and relevant actors in OSH management in MSEs, challenges and possibilities related to situations both where MSEs are reached by the intermediaries and where it is hard to do.

In some sectors, the associations are active and able to reach MSEs, but not particularly in the field of OSH. Participants in all three workshops indicated that MSEs were hardly motivated when it comes to OSH issues. Generally, micro- and small enterprises are not members of employers' associations/organisations and therefore, cannot receive any support from employers' organisations and can be difficult to reach.

Members of the Estonian Machine Industry Federation claimed to recognise the importance of OSH as a topic of concern; however, representatives from associations in the HORECA and manufacturing sectors declared that they do not deal with OSH issues, and do not offer any support in the field of OSH for their members.

3.1.1 Employers' associations

The only employer organisation recognised as a national-level social partner is the Estonian Employers' Association (ETTK), which represents around 25 % of all employers in Estonia. The members of this association are mainly medium-sized and large companies; therefore, small and micro-enterprises are barely represented by the association.

Representatives from the Estonian Employers' Association did not respond to the invitation to participate in the workshops. However, it was represented indirectly by a member of the Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, who participated in the manufacturing sector workshop and found the discussion fruitful and useful, but confessed that the Chamber of Commerce and Industry has not dealt with OSH issues systematically and, therefore, the representative did not contribute ideas during the discussions.

3.1.2 Trade unions

Estonia has two major trade union confederations. The Estonian Trade Union Confederation (EAKL) comprises 19 branch unions that represent state and municipal government officials, education workers, healthcare workers, transport workers (including road, rail, sea and air transport), industrial workers (including energy, light industry, food, timber and metal) and employees in the service sector (postal, communication, trade, hotel and cleaning, and so on.) The second largest trade union organisation is the Estonian Employees' Unions' Confederation (TALO), which mostly represents cultural workers and public sector employees.

The failure of trade unions in Estonia to reverse their declining bargaining strength and representational coverage is in part due to the historical legacies of the previous era, added to which is the hostile climate towards independent worker representation in Estonia on the part of many employers, especially among MSEs, where trade unions are not seen as relevant. In contrast to the situation in Nordic countries and in other EU Member States, trade unions in Estonia have played only a marginal role in OHS arrangements and dialogue on OHS at the workplace level, reflecting the general absence of social dialogue at the enterprise level. Nevertheless, a representative from the Estonian Trade Union Confederation actively participated in all workshops and contributed to the discussions.

Thus, trade unions can be said to play only a minimal (if any) role in OSH prevention and education, because of the significant weakness of trade unions, as was confirmed by the results of the three workshops and additional interviews.

It was concluded during the workshop in the construction sector that trade unions have no sector-wide organisation or agreements. The typical establishment in the construction sector relies on non-unionised low-wage and low-skill labour.

In the HORECA sector, a trade union was established in 1990 and has an active executive director with good knowledge of OSH, who also participated in the workshop. He stated that the trade union could contribute to improvement of OSH awareness much more; however, the low coverage of trade unions may affect the success of the campaigns. So far, the trade union primarily deals with labour agreement issues.

Some trade unions exist in the manufacturing sector, such as in power engineering and in the metal industry. However, the representational coverage of workers here too is low and there is no strong push from the trade unions for involvement in improving working conditions or OSH activities.

3.1.3 OSH regulators

The Estonian workshops have demonstrated the crucial role of the Labour Inspectorate in influencing working conditions and OSH management in MSEs. After inspections, MSEs tend to be more willing to discuss OSH issues and cooperate with OSH advisors, as well as start to look for relevant OSH information and available simple and cheap solutions that might help compliance with OSH regulations. Positive impact can be achieved when the MSE has a long-lasting cooperation with the labour inspector and OSH advisor. In addition, the OSH situation is generally better in those MSEs which have participated in the national programme called 'Face-to-face consultancy' or 'Corporate working environment counselling service'. This comprises free-of-charge consultancy services that can be ordered/invited on site, and was initiated by the Labour Inspectorate.

The working environment council (generally to be found only in larger enterprises and not in MSEs) may cover all issues relevant to the whole working environment or just a specific area, for instance OSH documentation, employees' training, or protective and control measures. The main task of the working environment council is to find, in cooperation with the employer's representative(s), any workplaces and activities that should be improved, and to provide recommendations for possible solutions. The programme 'Corporate working environment counselling service' has been developed to suit all Estonian companies from different sectors. However, the main focus on MSEs and start-up companies who have just initiated their activity has not yet been achieved, although it might be suggested that good practice from larger companies could, in principle, be cascaded downwards to MSEs if there were appropriate structures in place and sufficient policy momentum among governmental and sectoral actors.

During the manufacturing sector workshop, the OSH regulators claimed that companies in the manufacturing sector are monitored by labour inspectors over many years probably more regularly and consistently than in any other sector, with specific nationally targeted inspections performed to ensure that there is wide coverage of the companies (each receives an informative letter about the national target inspection, but only a certain proportion are actually visited; afterwards, the summary of the overall exercise is sent to all who received the informative letter). For example, in 2014, the specific national target inspection focused on the wood and furniture industry.

In addition, the Labour Inspectorate manages the web portal called www.tooelu.ee, where OSH guidelines are available. Information is available in Estonian, Russian and English.

Employers claim that sometimes they feel that there is too much information and it is difficult to distinguish the important OSH information from less important information, which they can ignore. Employers complain about the high administrative burden of regulatory compliance, which they argue should be less for small establishments.

OSH regulators find those brochures useful for the employers to raise awareness of OSH problems; however, OSH regulators are aware that not all MSEs know of their existence. Some of the employers in the workshop noted that they prefer to get the material in hard copy in both Estonian and Russian in order to distribute the information to the employees, who often do not have access to a computer from which to access information.

One of the issues discussed in the workshop was the easy and quick process of registration of a new company in Estonia — one can do it within minutes without having any knowledge about OSH requirements for the workers. OSH experts suggested that, after the registration of the company, the Labour Inspectorate should send a sector-specific OSH guideline to the owner of the newly established company. Until now, Labour Inspectorate automatically sends the general OSH regulations and guidelines to the contact email of the owner of the registered company.

In the hotel and restaurant business sector, enterprises often function without any inspection by authorities, except occasional check-ups by the Rescue Board concerning fire safety, the Health Board concerning food safety and the Labour Inspectorate, which is directly responsible for supervising if laws and rules in the field of OSH are obeyed. In the workshop, one representative from the Health Board and three representatives from the Labour Inspectorate participated in the discussion. In addition, the focal point of EU-OSHA in Estonia and a representative from the Ministry of Social Affairs were present.

OSH regulators believe that in the HORECA sector the occupational hazards are less obvious than in some other sectors. The representatives of the Labour Inspectorate state that usually the awareness of safety representatives is low concerning occupational hazards, hence the systematic thinking about workplace risks is even lower among employees. They also mentioned that OSH knowledge depends on seasonality in the sector: in summer, which is the busy period, the quality of service is more important than safety of workers. In addition, many extra workers are hired from among students, who may have little experience and little knowledge about safe routines while working in the HORECA sector.

Representatives of the Labour Inspectorate believe that they face a challenge to reach employers and employees of SMEs. The information is available on the Labour Inspectorate's special website called 'Tööelu portaal' ('Working life portal'), and information days are organised. However, since there are few legal and economic incentives to deal with OSH, only a certain proportion of MSEs in the HORECA sector are reached. The Labour Inspectorate confesses that it has not been able to inspect all small restaurants and cafeterias because of the high workload. However, the Labour Inspectorate devotes a lot of effort to reaching MSEs at least once per 3 years. MSEs are a priority for the Labour Inspectorate, based on the Labour Inspectorate's Development Plan 2016-2020, which emphasises the importance of MSEs, reducing administrative burdens for MSEs, providing e-services and contact-free monitoring. The Labour Inspectorate attempts to reach MSEs through a variety of channels, such as inspections and monitoring, campaigns, consultation or counselling. In addition, targeted sector-specific controls are organised regularly in accordance with the national strategy based on EU campaigns.

Some new plans have been made by the Labour Inspectorate in order to improve the situation in the HORECA sector: (a) encourage more active involvement of trade unions; (b) produce a sector-specific brochure about occupational hazards; (c) negotiate changes to the legislation, towards a practical approach and less bureaucracy for MSEs.

3.1.4 OSH advisors and professionals

There are two groups of OSH professionals: providers of occupational health services (mainly entrepreneurs or private medical companies) and OSH experts working at the Labour Inspectorate and providing OSH consultancy on work sites within the programme 'Corporate working environment counselling service'.

During the workshop in manufacturing, OSH professionals, such as service providers, mentioned that they have good cooperation with the manufacturing sector. It is likely that manufacturing is the sector that most actively utilises the OSH services and sends workers for health check-ups. However, some employers find that the service availability is poor in rural areas and there is no possibility of choosing between different service providers. They also complain that the quality of different service providers varies substantially and government support is needed to harmonise the service quality, a view with which the researchers concur.

Risk assessment providers (private companies that offer OSH services) emphasised during the workshop that cooperation with employees is crucial in order to compile a high-quality risk assessment document.

During the workshop in the construction sector, OSH professionals emphasised that construction is a specific sector where, for instance, the risk assessment procedure may need a different approach and on-site experience, so some providers are more specialised in risk assessments in the construction sector than others. However, MSEs hardly ever approach providers; they find the service expensive. Better cooperation occurs with larger construction companies. However, one MSE owner who participated in the workshop stated that he uses a private OSH expert regularly; a lot of safety matters, especially the documentation, but also extensive safety training every 2 years, have been carried out by the external expert. In addition, free consultancy from the Labour Inspectorate has been ordered, which the company found useful.

Occupational health physicians claimed similarly that the employees of MSEs may not be covered by health check-ups because the employers may have no knowledge, or do not emphasise the need, possible benefits and importance, of health check-ups. Based on Estonian regulation, occupational health physicians provide OSH services (mainly health check-ups) for employees, and employers are obligated to pay for this service. In Estonia, OSH providers are only entrepreneurs or private medical companies, and the provision of OSH services for employees is compulsory for all companies.

One MSE which participated in the workshop took part in a programme on 'Health Inspection, Risk Assessment and Working Environment Measurements' offered by Foundation Innove. Funding was offered for micro- and small enterprises to get better opportunities to conduct health check-ups of employees, order working environment measurements and, based on those, conduct risk assessment. Risk assessment was conducted by an external service provider with financial support from Foundation Innove. The feedback was positive, but MSEs found this programme quite expensive. The current programme was not successful in Estonia because sponsorship was given to projects worth EUR 1,000 to EUR 10,000 and participants were required to pay 30 % of the cost. Foundation Innove reports that 97 micro- and small enterprises were funded. The Labour Inspectorate estimates that the number was not very high because of the lack of a media campaign, and the potential could have been much better.

OSH professionals also note that many essential OSH requirements (such as risk assessment, internal control, safety training) are regulated too softly, which means that it is hard to decide what are the minimum limits. They criticised that no unequivocal agreed principles exist among labour inspectors about what counts as a violation and when sanctions are possible and needed. In some companies, it is therefore possible to manage with more superficial documents and activities than in others.

In the Estonian workshop for the HORECA sector, professionals and occupational health physicians mentioned that they have good cooperation only with larger companies, but smaller ones often do not approach the private professionals themselves. Occupational health physicians claimed that they do not have time and resources to try to reach MSEs and, therefore, the employees of MSEs may not be covered with health check-ups.

3.1.5 Other intermediaries

Some employers' associations exist, such as the Federation of Estonian Engineering Industry, the Estonian Furniture Industry Association, the Estonian Electronics Industries Association and the Estonian Machine Industry Federation. All of them received invitations to participate in the sector workshops but showed no interest. These associations are different from the Estonian Employers' Confederation, because they deal with sector-specific questions. However, not all associations have an interest or expertise in OSH.

During the workshop for the manufacturing sector, the employers present gave their opinion that associations do not emphasise OSH, but sometimes during association training meetings the main requirements of OSH are included in the programme.

A strong impact was seen from vocational and engineering schools as well as higher educational institutions, all of which teach OSH in manufacturing and technical study syllabuses. The participants,

especially employers' and employees' representatives, claimed that young workers are more aware about their rights, are more courageous in asking about hazards and requesting adequate safety equipment, and usually have an open, receptive attitude to safety routines. In addition, since young workers are more mobile and ready to move from one company to another, they may have a broader view and knowledge of OSH requirements.

One of the five additional interviews was conducted with the executive director of the Estonian Association of Construction Entrepreneurs (EACE), which unites around 100 construction companies. However, there are about 7,000 construction companies registered in the Economic Activities Registry (about 90 % of them are companies with one to nine workers). This shows that MSEs in the construction sector are not eager to organise and unite, and, therefore, the influence of EACE on MSEs is weak. Since the number of member companies is low, a lot of EACE activities are organised on a small budget. The main role of EACE is to promote good practices and initiate the debate about necessary guidelines and standards for entrepreneurship and for the environment (including working environment). In cooperation with member establishments and representatives of the Labour Inspectorate, EACE has developed several guidelines about the working environment. In addition, EACE was a leader in compiling the General Requirements for Construction Contracts (ETÜ 2013), in which the obligations, rights and responsibilities of general contractors and subcontractors are regulated. A large part of the activities of EACE involves developing qualification standards for different levels of workers and managers. All those standards incorporate occupational health and safety requirements as well. In addition, EACE participates in the work of an industrial tribunal which recommends appropriate workplace standards and guidelines. In order to raise awareness and knowledge of OSH in the construction sector, EACE organises various follow-up programmes, which usually also involve the main requirements of OSH.

According to EACE, the main problem that MSEs in the construction sector have in ensuring good working conditions is their low administrative capacity to access and apply available OSH expertise and guidance offered by the association.

Another association which influences OSH in MSEs in construction sector is the Association of Construction Material Producers of Estonia (with 61 members). Like EACE, it promotes good practices, participates in various Estonian standardisation committees and develops guidelines mainly in cooperation with the Labour Inspectorate.

One of the five additional interviews was conducted with the representative of the Estonian Hotel and Restaurant Association (EHRL). He stated that, during the planning stage of its activities, the association does not differentiate between the sizes of companies and does not target MSEs specifically. It is important to support the development of the environment of all establishments that are members of the EHRL. However, there is no special strategy or regular activities to promote OSH in the sector; mainly the input is through participation as a social partner when new state regulations are applied in the HORECA sector. One of the main activities which the EHRL declares on its website (<http://www.ehrl.ee/en/>) is ascertaining the need for in-service training and organising training, but OSH training is not seen as a priority. Since the association is passive about OSH, its practice and strategy add no special value for MSEs.

3.2 Barriers and enablers for intermediaries for preventive activities in the MSEs

3.2.1 Barriers

A range of barriers for intermediaries for preventive activities in the MSEs were identified during the national dialogue workshops and follow-up interviews. The general conclusion is that there is a need to increase owner-employers' knowledge and OSH competence in small and micro-enterprises.

In addition, there is a need for more evidence-based research in order to understand better the needs and capabilities of the MSEs in different sectors. The OSH infrastructure in Estonian MSEs is still very weak.

It was also concluded during the workshops that the main reason not dealing with OSH is the lack of resources in MSEs. There is also a need for various incentives, both regulatory and non-regulatory, plus more practical activities aimed at owner-employers to improve their OSH knowledge and their motivation to deal with OSH.

3.2.2 Suggested enablers

The workshops pointed to the following suggestions for and enablers of improving OSH among MSEs:

- more guidelines in Russian for OSH knowledge to reach all sections of the workforce;
- raising awareness about the importance of OSH among employers in MSEs, and Integration of OSH talks in regular company meetings, even when no special new information has to be distributed, which would help workers think about and discuss OSH more systematically and openly — but a good model that encourages such dialogue is also needed for employers;
- new cheap solutions in order to deal with OSH effectively — especially the main requirements and sector-specific issues so that OSH is not seen as a burden on business;
- government support for harmonisation of the quality of work of OSH service providers, including both risk assessment providers and occupational physicians — currently, the quality of inspections and risk assessments seems to be variable and superficial;
- support in facilitating more active communication with occupational physicians in order to motivate workers to take better care of their health and safety;
- changes in attitude — OSH should be seen as an investment to improve quality of work;
- transmission of sector-specific information about OSH requirements to all new establishments (the vast majority of companies in Estonia are MSEs) in the first week after registration of the company;
- stronger trade union engagement in OSH activities in terms of offering training and support to workplace safety representatives, and also the creation of an environment where strong business organisations are established as well, which could initiate continuous and effective social dialogue and also help to develop regulations and guidelines as well as social agreements about the working environment and OSH;
- financial incentives readily available for improving OSH in MSEs;
- improvement of collaboration between MSEs and occupational health services;
- connecting the requirements of workplace risk assessment reporting with the annual financial report, to ensure that MSEs are aware of OSH legislation and the main obligations;
- an act for compulsory insurance against occupational accidents and diseases, which would effectively motivate employers to deal with OSH proactively, familiarise MSEs with OSH and lead them to prioritise it more.

In the construction workshop, some sector-specific suggestions were proposed:

- Through legislative instruments, minimum requirements about the structure, competence and financial capability of construction companies should be established in order to ensure sufficient administrative capacity to create a safe working environment exists. If the construction company does not meet these criteria, it should have a right to operate only as a subcontractor under a general contractor that ensures the required working conditions and sets a good example.
- Templates of documents (such as risk assessment template, safety guidelines and safe work plan templates) should be created for MSEs and distributed to them. At present, the portal www.tooelu.ee makes some guidelines available to the construction sector, but more guidelines specific to the sector are needed.
- A work safety plan should be created with a checklist of basic requirements and systems, which makes it easier to carry out safe working efficiently, especially when time pressure is a factor. If the work safety plan needs extensive writing, it may not be used at all, so it has to be easily completed.
- Weekly internal checks could use a mobile app to communicate results. The app could automatically send the results to the head office of the company as well as to the Labour Inspectorate.

3.3 Sector-specific experiences of the intermediaries

MSEs in different sectors encounter some similar problems — during all workshops, comprehensive legislation, bureaucracy, and lack of time, human and financial resources were mentioned as key constraints. There were several socioeconomic challenges as well; however, lack of resources, comprehensive legislation and bureaucracy were named by the participants in the workshops as the main constraints. In addition, participants in all the workshops appreciated the work of the Labour Inspectorate — especially free OSH training for employers in MSEs (2010-2014), national targeted inspections and the new service called ‘on-site consulting’. However, there are substantial differences between sectors as well. During workshops, it was possible to observe that each sector has a few specific problems which may not be relevant to other sectors. These are discussed in the following subsections.

3.3.1 Manufacturing

The manufacturing sector is important, as it has a wide variety of hazards, depending on the type of manufacturing. The main occupational hazards in enterprises arise from unsafe machinery and equipment, fixed and static postures (standing or sitting work), physical hazards (noise, vibration, indoor ambient climate problems), chemicals, and psychosocial risks such as time pressure during busy periods and also long working hours depending on the season.

In the workshops, the participants agreed that OSH issues are appreciated and systematically dealt with more than in many other sectors. Usually, the companies manage OSH because of regard for workers' health, regular checks by the Labour Inspectorate and the employers' overall formal responsibilities for OSH. However, the smaller the company, the fewer resources it finds to deal with concerns about OSH, mainly because of lack of resources and low awareness among employers and employees. The main motivation to deal with OSH issues comes from the managers of enterprises. If the manager has a positive attitude, then it is more likely that the workers will encounter better conditions and a variety of programmes to develop OSH. Secondly, pressure from workers and their awareness affect the application of systematic practices of OSH. However, the low levels of trade union membership, their overall organisational weakness and a lack of initiative in OSH matters offer little potential for strong social dialogue on OSH to develop. A third factor may be if the employer sees a practical benefit to productivity and profitability from good OSH practices, but the connections between these factors are not always immediately transparent. Fourthly, the legal requirements can be named as a motivator but must be seen against the rather patchy level of monitoring and generally limited enforcement and verification actions by the responsible authorities. Finally, clients and owners of the company may force managers in MSEs to deal with OSH, especially in order to ensure the good image of the client company, as well as enhancing its reputation for social responsibility. For the individual MSE in manufacturing, however, social responsibility issues are not an overwhelming priority.

The chief constraint in dealing with OSH was the perceived lack of financial resources available to allocate to OSH.

3.3.2 Construction

The construction sector is known as one of the most hazardous sectors, with numerous occupational hazards such as working at heights and risk of falling (lack of proper safety barriers and safety harnesses), problems with sharp tools/equipment as well as outdated equipment, extreme temperatures (outdoor work, fieldwork), hazards in work involving fire, and chemical hazards, with intensifying factors such as time pressure, high levels of competition in the sector, and pressure of work, time pressure and unrealistic deadlines. In addition, budget issues, safety versus deadlines, superficial work safety plans and oversight, and insufficient safety training add to hazards in this sector. Many occupational accidents occur but, since the majority of them are minor (often underreported), employers routinely neglect OSH in favour of fulfilling tight deadlines. During the workshop, the employers stated that current OSH

legislation for the construction sector is comprehensive but ambiguous, and employers in MSEs may not understand all requirements. OSH regulators agreed that some of the requirements may be too time-consuming and bureaucratic to fulfil; often OSH requirements are seen as a cost which MSEs may seek to avoid by ignoring them. Employers of MSEs confessed that there is usually no annual budget allocated to OSH, but resources are found when needed. The majority of the finances go to obvious and immediate expenditures on personal protective equipment and working clothes, but other proactive measures could be employed as well, such as organising safety training, especially when the MSE is in a contractual relationship with a larger enterprise.

Thus, OSH activities in construction sites are often dependent on the safety culture of the general construction company. MSEs state that working under different general construction companies usually affects OSH activities on site. General contractors with a high safety culture give good examples and motivate the workers of subcontractors to follow all safety rules precisely. Sometimes, clients may affect the safety activities, too — when the building work is conducted on the client's land then clients prefer to supervise builders in visible OSH matters (such as wearing helmets or working at heights using proper safety equipment).

Because of tight deadlines, both compulsory overtime hours and working during weekends are common and exhausting for the workforce, which may affect the probability of occupational accidents occurring.

3.3.3 Hotels and restaurants

In general, representatives from the HORECA sector were of the opinion that occupational health and safety deserves more attention than it generally received. The potential is still good for the future compared with many other sectors, since less financial expenditure on specific OSH requirements is needed than in other sectors (such as manufacturing and construction). However, MSEs still find that the costs incurred in order to meet all the requirements set in legislation are quite large — especially because of the high staff turnover experienced in the HORECA sector. The representatives of MSEs also noted that often the employer emphasises good OSH practices in daily routines more than workers, who very often have low regard for the importance of OSH. Employees in this sector can be described as having low levels of education, mainly young or senior workers. Young workers usually see working in hotels and restaurants as only a transition period in their career — working part-time to support their studies or waiting for a better opportunity to appear. Senior workers usually enter the HORECA sector after losing their jobs in another sector. Since the HORECA sector does not require specific skills, it is easy to find employment; however, the wages are low and, therefore, the staff complement is not stable. There is a challenge in this sector to find new workers with good skills, and with responsible and positive attitudes. Employees are also 'wage-sensitive' — even a small amount of pay-rise would be a good enough reason to move to another hotel or restaurant.

In addition, the sector provides employment for the Russian-speaking workforce, who may have no knowledge of Estonian and, therefore, may not understand OSH rules set by the company, as well as having a different working culture from Estonian-speaking employees. Participants asserted that Estonian-speaking workers were more likely to follow existing OSH rules, but that cannot be said about Russian-speaking workers. While such opinions may be based on stereotypical views, it did appear to the researchers that one factor underlying a lack of OSH awareness among Russian-speaking workers was because relevant documents and OSH training are provided in Estonian only.

Employers from MSEs in this sector confessed that there is usually no budget for OSH activities, and any problems are dealt with reactively. They also emphasised that the clients' wellbeing and safety is very important for the management and, indirectly, this also influences the safety of employees to some extent. However, often workers take risks as part of a job and do not pay too much attention to mitigating such risks. If minor accidents occur, the work is continued afterwards with no analysis conducted. The main hazards in the sector involve slips/trips/falls, heavy lifting (kitchen and housekeeping staff), burns/cuts in the kitchen, prolonged working in a standing position and static postures, time pressure, shift work and night shifts, and use of chemicals (dishwashing products, household cleaning products). Often, as in other sectors, no special attention is given to psychosocial risks.

It was agreed by participants that the general level of service culture (especially client-friendly attitudes) in Estonia is low — the employer, besides introducing health and safety requirements, has to teach the employees basic serving practices as well. This makes in-service training longer and more complicated, and was seen by MSE employers as a factor which often ‘squeezes out’ time that could be devoted to OSH awareness training. While this may be a rationale for lack of engagement with OSH issues, it was the view of the researchers that as a justification it had some basis in reality. However, we have also previously suggested various ways in which OSH training might be more easily incorporated at establishment level with the right structure of support and encouragement.

3.4 Intermediaries

3.4.1 Company-specific experiences of the intermediaries

Company size is one of the main factors that affect capability to deal with OSH effectively. In the workshops, it was mentioned several times that in micro-companies there is always a lack of human resources to fulfil all OSH requirements according to the legislative regulations. In most cases, OSH matters lie on the shoulders of the owner-manager. If she or he is motivated to deal with it by her or his own life philosophy or wishes to create a ‘family feeling’ inside the company with care and respect for workers’ health, OSH activities are regular and systematic, even if, in some cases, not documented. When the owner-manager has no motivation to deal with OSH, she or he prioritises other activities in the company and OSH is neglected. In some cases, the owner may have good intentions but, since survival is more crucial, OSH will not be able to compete with production, service and quality demands. When the company has more than 10 people (small companies), then it is more likely to have a managerial level where additional people besides the executive manager can contribute to ensure good working conditions.

3.4.2 Intermediaries’ experiences

Different intermediaries may deal with different OSH matters and therefore can contribute to specific OSH problems, but cannot affect some others. For example, associations may offer additional training where the main requirements of OSH are included in the programme, but afterwards the associations will not observe if anything improves in OSH matters in the company. However, usually dealing with one problem may create a situation wherein the owner-manager is stimulated to solve some other issues as well. For example, MSEs may ask an occupational health service provider to offer only health check-ups for the workers, but, if the occupational physician notes that there is no risk assessment conducted, the owner-manager may be motivated to assess occupational risks systematically and compile a risk assessment document. The occupational physician may also point out hazards which may affect workers’ health and are managed poorly, which again may create a circumstance where the owner-manager needs to find additional solutions in order to make the working environment safer and healthier. This is, however, a contingent and indirect effect and is a beneficial but not a systematic route to improved OSH in MSEs.

3.4.3 Contextual factors

During workshops, the issue was discussed that companies which barely survive are more likely to have poor working conditions and no motivation, time or finances to target OSH matters. Often, OSH is neglected as a whole in such companies. On the other hand, small companies which belong to a larger (sometimes foreign) corporation usually get positive influence from the parent company on OSH matters — OSH activities are usually more active and systematic. Sometimes the corporation’s requirements are too difficult to handle because of differences in national OSH systems, which may cause misunderstandings and lower the motivation to prioritise OSH.

3.4.4 Target groups: those that can be reached and those that cannot

As discussed above in various chapters, it is difficult to reach MSEs, especially the ones that have no manager with a motivation to ensure good working conditions for her or his workforce. It remains a challenge for the future, and some possible solutions are offered in section 3.2, 'Barriers and housekeeping and enablers for intermediaries for preventive activities in the MSE', such as transmission of sector-specific information about OSH requirements to all new establishments in the first week after registration of the company, and 'preferred contractor' certification as outlined in the conclusion below. It is also clear that the Labour Inspectorate should make efforts to reach MSEs regularly. The Labour Inspectorate has admitted that larger companies are visited more regularly than smaller ones and, because of the large number of companies per labour inspector, there is no possibility of conducting visits to or even telephone check-ups of many MSEs.

3.4.5 Identified shared understandings as well as divergences among the stakeholder groups

In the national dialogue workshops, the participants agreed in general on the current functions of intermediaries as well as on the most of the barriers and enablers identified for intermediaries that approach MSEs.

There was a consensus between OSH regulators, trade unions, employers' representatives and OSH advisors about the low level of motivation of MSEs to deal with OSH, and of interest in dealing with it, because of the owner-employers' lack of OSH knowledge and available resources within the highly competitive market, particularly in the construction and HORECA sectors.

In discussions it was agreed that, generally, MSEs have a positive perception of OSH and want to comply with relevant regulation, but need more knowledge of what to do and how, and they favour practical and technological solutions. However, the main reason for ignoring OSH is lack of resources (economic, human, managerial, time), which leads to low levels of awareness and of OSH knowledge.

OSH advisors and OSH regulators agreed that it is a challenge to reach MSEs and to convince them to pay attention to health and safety in the working environment. In addition, all participants agreed that MSEs require special attention, and intermediaries need to understand the sector-specific needs of MSEs in order to reach them and to offer OSH prevention measures and OSH activities, because MSEs search for simple and cheap solutions to manage OSH in MSEs. All participants understand that MSEs are generally suspicious of authorities because the work environment is a peripheral issue with a potential for additional economic costs should checks be implemented and remedial measures be required in the establishment. However, after a visit by the Labour Inspectorate, the working environment is usually improved and the employers are encouraged and more motivated to deal with OSH. From this, it can be concluded that the work performed by the Labour Inspectorate is valued and appreciated.

The main divergences concern understanding of OSH requirements, which seemed to MSEs sometimes unclear, time-consuming and expensive, in particular in the construction sector. At the same time, participants share the understanding that OSH in MSEs in the construction sector depends on the general contractor of the construction site, and in the manufacturing sector it depends on large companies, which are the main clients of MSEs, and perform visits and audits that pay attention also to OSH issues.

Employers favoured the Labour Inspectorate adopting more information-based and consultative approaches, while OSH advisors and workers' representatives emphasised the essential role of the inspections, legislation, clear sector-specific manuals/factsheets and guidance. In addition, there were some conflicting viewpoints reported during the workshop between trade unions (and worker's representatives) and employers' representatives and the Labour Inspectorate about the effectiveness of workers' involvement in health and safety activities, poor working conditions (for example underestimation of occupational risks by the employers and workers), as well as the attribution of responsibility for OSH performance on the part of employers to workers in the event of accidents. Representatives from trade unions and the Labour Inspectorate emphasised that, generally, occupational risks are downgraded in MSEs and many owners consider OSH to be the 'personal' responsibility of the employees

There was also active discussion between stakeholders about the quality of OSH advisors (especially occupational health physicians) and risk assessment procedures. It was agreed that it is difficult to find occupational health services providers, especially non-medical specialists (for example occupational hygienists, occupational psychologists and ergonomists), and that national authorities should perform the quality control over OSH services provided.

Employers complained about high prices of the occupational health services, and about the low quality and formality of the health check-ups performed by the occupational health physicians. It was also agreed among participants that there is a need to increase new employers' awareness of OSH requirements in small and micro-enterprises, by informing them automatically about the law and OSH requirements shortly after the registration of the company.

The intermediaries agreed that the current OSH system does not sufficiently support sector-based approaches currently taken towards the MSEs, and special attention with careful planning is needed.

The findings from all workshops were similar and consistent across the three sectors and demonstrated commonalities in the field of OSH in MSEs. The cooperation between intermediaries and establishments was more effective in the manufacturing and construction sectors than in hotels and restaurants. These findings were also confirmed by the additional interviews.

3.5 What works for whom — and why?

Based on conclusions from the national dialogue workshops and additional interviews, it is possible to present a list of good OSH examples and activities/OSH arrangements (regulatory, supportive, informative and so on) that could ensure effective OSH management and prevention action in the field of OSH in MSEs; for instance the availability and accessibility of OSH advisors/experts for MSEs. However, there is a need to understand sector-specific needs, specification of the MSE requirements, and capabilities of the owner-managers and employees in MSEs to try to tailor supportive methods and programmes.

The intermediaries' current approach to improving OSH in MSEs includes consulting services, preparation of the relevant information (on paper and electronically), communication channels (social media, web portals, sector-specific networking), national programmes and various tools, particularly ones that are intended to help MSEs minimise paper work/bureaucracy in order to make it easier and cheaper to achieve the fulfilment of OSH legal requirements. In all workshops, participants reported effective and supportive cooperation with regulatory authorities (the Labour Inspectorate and the Ministry of Social Affairs), which are accessible state authorities and disseminate information via campaigns and electronic media. We assess the other initiatives mentioned above as weak and not oriented to the target group (MSEs), because of intermediaries' low awareness of the actual sector-specific needs of MSEs as well as weak infrastructure which does not support activities in the field of OSH.

Based on discussions from all dialogue workshops, it is possible to conclude that different intermediaries have the potential to interact and cooperate with MSEs and each other, by providing a multidisciplinary integrated approach to MSEs that could complement each other's contributions. One successful instance of this is in the construction sector, where the Estonian Association of Construction Entrepreneurs has developed qualification standards for construction workers and during the process of development there has been effective cooperation and dialogue with the Labour Inspectorate in order to incorporate appropriate OSH requirements into the standards.

Many of the participants in the national dialogue workshops suggested that the intermediaries could have an important role in helping employers to manage OSH in small and micro-enterprises; however, they have to carefully plan and design their programmes and initiatives in order to ensure that these will achieve their outcomes and aims. For instance, OSH information is still needed on paper as well as electronically, and in sector-specific forms of presentation, in both Estonian and Russian. Participants from the workshop in manufacturing sector reported several shortages in national programmes that have been developed; for instance, the online interactive tool for risk assessment 'Tööbik' is a good idea but needs to be changed and substantially improved in order to reach its target groups and achieve its objective and to be a practical management tool for managing occupational risks in enterprises.

As a result of the workshop discussions, it became clear that the Labour Inspectorate has a vital role in the improvement of working conditions in MSEs. It was reported that MSEs do not have motivation and resources to deal with OSH, but the fear of being inspected and possible sanctions by the Labour Inspectorate motivates MSEs to deal with health and safety in order to comply with relevant legislation. This is also used as a motivator or benchmark, for example by OSH advisors, to convince employers to start dealing with OSH and to pay attention to the improvement of working conditions, especially for reluctant owner-employers. This was also a shared understanding among employers' and employees' representatives, OSH advisors and regulators. The Labour Inspectorate's role was highly valued especially in the construction sector, because of the fear of being closed down or work being suspended at a construction site. This could be very costly for the employers and, therefore, the general contractor sets OSH demands and requirements for the subcontractors, which are generally small and micro-enterprises.

3.5.1 Incentives

At present, Estonia does not have strong incentives for employers to deal with OSH. However, possible incentives for employers to be willing to invest in OSH were discussed during the workshops and interviews, and are presented in sector-specific chapters. In addition, the business-friendly approach, enforcement philosophy and light regulatory touch with regard to violations of regulation adopted by the Labour Inspectorate during the recent years remains an issue. Employers' representatives preferred this Labour Inspectorate approach and the possibility of receiving consultancy on site. At the same time, this approach received some criticism from OSH advisors and workers' representatives, who emphasised the importance of the inspections and the role of sanctions against violations as legal incentives to deal with health and safety. Legal incentives depend on the likelihood of the employer's being punished for not complying with the law. Because of the overall regulatory philosophy and the limited resources of labour inspectors, this likelihood is rather small.

In addition, the economic incentives at the moment are modest, because the Health Insurance Fund reimburses the costs arising from work-related diseases and accidents. Estonia still does not have a compulsory Insurance Act for occupational accidents and diseases, and compensation for occupational disability is integrated into the Public Health Insurance Scheme. Consequently, improvement of the health and safety of the working environment is not encouraged. Estonian employers do not have any economic responsibility in cases of sick leave, because the Health Insurance Fund compensates the patient for loss of income. So there is little motivation from the legislation for employers to invest in OSH.

What also is clear from Estonian data is that the OSH situation has improved during the last 20 years, at least in terms of employers' awareness, perception and attitudes. Intrinsic incentives relate to the health and safety image the employer wants to maintain in order to attract customers and skilled potential employees. Such incentives were underlined by the employers' representatives. In contrast, OSH advisors and OSH regulators stressed that this incentive has not yet emerged in the majority of Estonian small and micro-enterprises, partly because of the abundant workforce, as well as employers' limited OSH knowledge. During the workshops and the interviews with MSEs carried out within the previous phase of the project, the research group identified relatively positive attitudes towards OSH among employers and employees in small and micro-enterprises. However, OSH has a low priority in MSEs, and employers tend to be more cautious and negative towards paperwork/meetings and regulatory requirements that distract attention from the core business.

It is possible to conclude, based on the results of the workshops, that more practical activities directed at employers in MSEs (for example designing a prevention approach suitable for small and micro-enterprises) are needed in order to improve their knowledge of OSH issues and to demonstrate to MSEs the benefits of prevention measures and OSH management systems. Much of their present reluctance may arise from their ignorance of the benefits and risks related to OSH, low awareness of the national programmes (OSH consultancy, online interactive tool for risk assessment 'Töökik' and so on) and inability to deal with other issues than core business activities.

3.5.2 Information

The main challenge for the intermediaries is to provide OSH information in such a form that each MSEs can use it and utilise it for its own purposes in a cost-effective manner. This means that the competent

authorities and other relevant actors need to produce information in a form that is user-friendly, clear and simple, as well as providing sufficient guidance for implementing OSH measures at the workplaces. Participants from the dialogue workshops agreed that the information from campaigns is relevant and necessary; however, sometimes the information materials are long, unclear and too complicated to apply in practice, particularly for MSEs. For practical purposes, the informative materials and good practice guidelines should be continuously updated and disseminated.

Participants from the construction workshop emphasised that the current OSH regulations are too comprehensive and some requirements are unclear for employers and therefore can be interpreted in various ways. In addition, employers from the construction sector complained that there is a lack of sector-specific OSH guidelines and manuals as well as OSH advisors.

The provision of OSH information requires a well-developed channel of information and a group of experts to take care of the flow of information. It should use a range of communication channels in order to ensure that OSH information is easily available and accessible for all users of that information. Estonian authorities seem to rely on web services as an appropriate channel for information dissemination. However, participants from workshops insist that information in printed form (on paper/hard copy) is still important even though internet services are well developed in Estonia. It is essential to know who the users of the Internet-based information are and what the reasons for using or not using the information are. One problem with internet-based information is its abundance, end users' varying computer literacy and unclear sources of the information.

Participants positively evaluated the newsletter *Working Life*, published by the Labour Inspectorate (available on the Internet and in print), the working life portal (www.tooelu.ee) and the website of Labour Inspectorate as the main sources of OSH information and the main channels for regular dissemination of OSH information.

A competition for the best workplace practices in OSH, called 'Best Workplace Practices Award', initiated by the Labour Inspectorate, received positive feedback during workshops. Best experiences and best practices are collected from different sectors (private and public) in order to solve specific problems in the field of OSH, to ensure OSH management and employees' wellbeing. The main aim of the programme is to disseminate best practices in the field of health and safety and to exchange them between different sectors and sizes of establishments. The collection of the best practices has a broader scope and wider applicability in improving working conditions across all sectors. The best workplace practices are published on paper as well as online (on the Labour Inspectorate website and the 'Tööelu' portal).

4. Conclusion

The national dialogue workshops and additional interviews have revealed a number of shortcomings in Estonian OSH systems and practices as well as different intermediaries' approaches to promoting effective OSH management and prevention actions in the field of OSH in MSEs from different sectors.

The main differences between sectors were related to the work performed, specific hazards, specific legal requirements (such as construction) and the variations in the activity of sector-specific associations.

The discussion at the workshops and additional interviews revealed that generally the influence of different intermediaries is low due to passive and weak social dialogue in Estonia. The greatest impact on OSH management in MSEs comes from the Labour Inspectorate, because it can reach MSEs more effectively thanks to the legal basis on which it conducts its activities. Qualified OSH experts are accessible and available to all sectors; however, there are differences between geographical regions (poor accessibility of OSH experts in rural regions) and little demand and interest can be observed, in particular among MSEs. This can be explained by the lack of interest in OSH in general and the limited resources provided to the field of OSH.

As a conclusion from three workshops and additional interviews, it is possible to say that MSEs are searching for easy, cheap, practical and simple solutions in order to comply with OSH regulations. Intermediaries need to carefully analyse proposed supportive tools and measures for MSEs in order to

achieve their objectives and reach the target group. A good start can be, for instance, the online interactive tool for risk assessment 'Tööbik', also developed for MSEs, but this needs to be further developed and substantially improved in order to be a practical management tool in the enterprises. Another good example can be the extensive OSH training of owner-employers and safety managers in MSEs that was provided by the Labour Inspectorate during 2010-2014.

It is evident that employers, especially in MSEs, need incentives to become interested in health and safety issues in order to be willing to deal with and to invest more in OSH. One example of economic incentive for MSEs was programme on 'Health Inspection, Risk Assessment and Working Environment Measurements' offered by Foundation Innove. The financial fund was meant for micro- and small enterprises in order to establish better opportunities to conduct health check-ups of employees, to order working environment measurements and to conduct risk assessment.

These innovative measures above are important in assessing what can or might be done in the area of OSH interventions. Having said this, the resocialisation of risk remains an outstanding challenge in achieving better overall OSH performance in Estonia. After several decades of building a market economy, competitive pressures have resulted in risk being reallocated to the individual societal actor to carry the burden and, in the event of harm, to bear the costs. Against this, however, the burden of compliance is also borne by individual actors: in the case of OSH in MSEs, by the companies themselves in different sectors operating in a strongly competitive economic environment.

It appears that efforts towards improvement in OSH adopted in larger enterprises are currently not successfully 'cascading' best practice to dependent subcontractors in any systematic manner, even in construction, where some attempts at achieving such an effect have been made. A system of 'safety mentoring' might be considered for the future, which could identify and encourage 'preferred contractors' among SMEs with certified good OSH performance on a sectoral basis, whereby larger companies would be able to identify MSEs that have sustainable procedures in place to assure good OSH standards. This would provide a direct commercial incentive to MSEs to pay more attention to implementing effective OSH measures. However, as it stands today, the dense substratum of small and particularly micro-enterprises, subsisting on the margin of economic viability, may be exerting a downward gravitational pull on overall safety and health standards. Lacking vigorous support from OSH intermediaries in generating momentum towards improved safety and health performance, the role of the Labour Inspectorate becomes crucial in the maintenance of overall standards in OSH.

OSH intermediaries play a restricted role in the promotion of good OSH in the context of Estonia, where the general level of safety culture and practices is low, especially in the MSE-dominated sectors reviewed here. Sector-specific intermediaries hardly exist in any meaningful or proactive sense in manufacturing, construction and HORECA. Therefore, there is little in the nature of MSE company-level experience in promoting best practice that can be reliably generalised, as reported from the workshops. This means that there is no accumulation of best practices that would create sustainable and measurable OSH performance improvements over time. Enterprises in all of these sectors operate under severe financial constraints, being generally economically vulnerable and without the resources to develop effective OSH systems. The key actor in terms of stimulating safety compliance and attempting to generate safety improvements is the Labour Inspectorate of Estonia. However, even here the overall capacity of the agency and its ability to conduct comprehensive targeting of risky sectors are restricted, even though periodic campaigns are mounted.

Nevertheless, in addition to the efforts of regulatory agencies, there have been some attempts to disseminate OSH knowledge more widely in contractual compliance requirements, although the 'trickle down' effect of such measures has not been scientifically evaluated to date. Professional associations of safety managers do not yet exist; OSH physicians, risk assessment providers and OSH advisors appear not to be responsive to the needs of overall sectoral or national OSH advice dissemination, other than as contingently determined by market demands for their individual services. Meanwhile, key social actors such as employers and trade unions are not able to adequately regulate OSH activities at a sectoral level in any meaningful sense because of their low membership coverage. Addressing these contextual challenges will be a continuing theme in the improvement of OSH for Estonia in the foreseeable future.

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Appendix 1

▪ Organisations represented in the workshops and interviews

OSH professionals/experts

Tallinn University of Technology; Estonian University of Life Sciences; Baltic Euromedical OÜ; Ohutu Töö Garant OÜ; Ohutusallikas OÜ; Töökeskkonna Haldus OÜ; OSH advisors; Qvalitas AS; Mediserv OÜ; PERH (The North Estonia Medical Centre); Risk Management OÜ; Qvalitas Medical Centre.

OSH regulators

Labour Inspectorate; EU-OSHA focal point; Ministry of Social Affairs; The Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (representative of EU-OSHA OSH Ambassador); Health Board.

Employer representatives

Adven Eesti AS; Saku Metall AS; Favor AS; Komerk AS; Elme Metall; Pet City OÜ; Firesolutions OÜ; AS Favor; AS Eesti AGA; Tafrix AS; Storaenso AS; Teenusetare OÜ; Laig Estonia OÜ; Greenclean OÜ.

Worker representatives

The Confederation of Estonian Trade Unions; Ensto Eesti AS; Hyrles OÜ; Greenclean OÜ; ABB AS; Graanul Invest AS; Eesti Ohutus OÜ; Eesti metsatöötajate MTÜ; Baltic Restaurants Estonia; Nordic Hotel Forum; Park Inn by Radisson Meriton Conference & Spa Hotel Tallinn; Eesti Teenindus- ja Kaubandustöötajate Ametiühing (Estonian Service and Trade Workers' Trade Union)

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) contributes to making Europe a safer, healthier and more productive place to work. The Agency researches, develops, and distributes reliable, balanced, and impartial safety and health information and organises pan-European awareness raising campaigns. Set up by the European Union in 1994 and based in Bilbao, Spain, the Agency brings together representatives from the European Commission, Member State governments, employers' and workers' organisations, as well as leading experts in each of the EU Member States and beyond.

European Agency for Safety and Health at Work

Santiago de Compostela 12, 5th floor
48003 Bilbao, Spain
Tel. +34 944358400
Fax +34 944358401
E-mail: information@osha.europa.eu

<http://osha.europa.eu>



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