

European Agency for Safety and Health at Work

# Safety and health in micro and small enterprises in the EU: from policy to practice

European Risk Observatory  
Report



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## Foreword

Micro and small enterprises (MSEs) form the backbone of the European Union economy and are seen as a key driver for economic growth, innovation, employment and social integration. About half of the European workforce is employed in MSEs and effective occupational safety and health (OSH) management in MSEs is essential to ensure both the well-being of workers and long-term economic survival of these enterprises. Statistics and studies show, however, that the safety and health of many workers employed in MSEs is poorly protected and that ensuring good OSH management in MSEs remains a significant challenge. This problem is acknowledged in the Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2014–2020, adopted by the European Commission, which identifies the enhanced capacity of MSEs to put in place effective and efficient risk prevention measures as one of the key strategic objectives for safety and health at work.

Responding to the existing gap in OSH requirements and workplace practice, EU-OSHA launched a wide-ranging, three-year project (2014–2017) with an overall aim to identify key success factors in terms of policies, strategies and practical solutions to improve OSH in MSEs in Europe. The project, commissioned to a group of researchers constituting the 'SESAME' (Safe Small and Micro Enterprises) consortium, has three main objectives. It will provide evidence-based support for policy recommendations, contributing to the current discussions on the regulation on OSH in Europe with regards to small enterprises. Moreover, it will identify workplace-level good practices in assuring good OSH management, and will facilitate further development of the existing or new practical tools, including the Online interactive Risk Assessment (OiRA) tool. Finally, the findings will inform future research aiming to expand knowledge on the determinants of good OSH in MSEs operating in dynamically changing economies.

This report presents findings from the third phase of the project, which identified good practice examples. The research involved OSH authorities, social partners and OSH experts to identify key elements of successful policies, strategies and workplace interventions. Building on the previous phases of the project, which reviewed up-to-date knowledge on OSH in MSEs and looked deeper into MSEs to understand, from the perspective of employers and workers, the problems and concerns associated with OSH at workplace level, this report points to efficient solutions, but also identifies important gaps in the existing support offered to MSEs. These challenges will be further addressed in the final phase of the project which aims to support policy recommendations and describe good practice in facilitating better OSH in the most vulnerable MSEs. Those results will be published and disseminated by EU-OSHA in 2018.



Christa Sedlatschek

Director

# 1 Executive summary

This executive summary presents the findings from a research project investigating the policies, strategies, methods and tools used by intermediaries, authorities and occupational safety and health (OSH) institutions to reach out to and support micro and small enterprises (MSEs) in managing OSH, constituting part of the wider Safe Small and Micro Enterprises (SESAME) project.

As found in the previous phases of the SESAME project, the institutional, socio-economic and regulatory context is found to have a strong impact on OSH in MSEs. Many MSEs face severe contextual challenges, such as competitive pressure, price competition and increasing fragmentation of production, although there is a huge variation among MSEs with regard to these factors. In addition, many MSEs often find themselves under pressure stemming from their weak position in the supply chain. These pressures translate into a vulnerable business model for many MSEs, with limited decision latitude and few economic and managerial resources that could be devoted to issues other than the survival of the business. Often these business vulnerabilities also put the workers in vulnerable positions, with non-standard employment, low levels of workplace training and precarious working conditions.

The contextual factors, combined with few resources being devoted to topics such as OSH in MSEs, results in a large proportion of MSEs having a reactive approach to OSH, where they only rarely engage in proactive OSH initiatives and mainly react to incidents such as inspections, accidents or near accidents, or demands from employees or customers. Those external calls for action may lead to preventive actions to improve selected OSH factors, although they tend to focus mainly on safety and rarely on health issues. MSEs are often businesses struggling to survive, with little interest in OSH and often not reached by the more general OSH policies or by intermediaries. Even the more avid MSEs seem, in general, to be hard to reach, especially with general OSH information.

## Research findings

The study consisted of two separate research tasks. Task 1 identified good examples of OSH measures aimed at MSEs. Based on the available literature, interviews with stakeholders and information about dissemination, and through the usage of the good examples and information obtained from MSEs, 44 examples were selected, described in detail and analysed in order to identify key success factors. Task 2 consisted of dialogue workshops (in six of the participating countries) and focus groups and/or interviews (in three countries). In the dialogue workshops and interviews, national intermediaries with relevance to the OSH setting in MSEs discussed approaches to OSH and identified barriers to and enablers for developing OSH in MSEs, sharing views and experiences based on their daily interaction with MSEs. The workshops engaged four different types of intermediaries including employer representatives, worker representatives, regulators and OSH advisors. The findings in this report are based on the descriptions of good examples and on the data collected in the workshops and interviews. The report also draws on the relevant research literature.

The project highlights a wide range of good examples which show that OSH can be addressed and improved in MSEs. This can be achieved through direct interaction with intermediaries, but also through other means such as economic incentives and supply chain requirements. The intermediaries can have different roles in relation to OSH such as dissemination of OSH information, translating OSH regulation, counselling MSEs on OSH topics and supporting OSH developments in MSEs. The MSEs constitute a very heterogeneous and diverse group even within the individual sectors, and even more so across sectors, regions and countries. Hence, there are no simple fit-all solutions to the OSH challenges faced by this group, and there is a vital yet difficult-to-achieve need to adapt policies, programmes, tools and initiatives to the specific needs of MSEs. This tailoring of policies and initiatives applies all the way from the national level to the sector or subsector level and in many cases even to the level of specific work processes in a company. Sector-level social partners play a key role in the design of sector-specific adaptations.

The good examples presented in the report use different mechanisms in order to support OSH improvements in MSEs. These include actions to increase awareness of OSH risks and motivation to improve OSH in the workplace; support provided by both OSH and non-OSH intermediaries; providing

practical tools to facilitate risk identification and control; training to increase OSH knowledge; and providing economic support to facilitate implementation of selected OSH improvements in the workplace. Some good examples take the form of orchestrated programmes that combine and coordinate the efforts of different intermediaries and use a combination of regulatory pressure, information and incentives in order to initiate OSH improvements in MSEs. Most of the good examples are based on voluntary participation. The voluntary examples and initiatives have positive impacts on OSH in the involved MSEs; however, a severe limitation of these voluntary schemes is that they do not reach the large proportion of MSEs that are reactive and try to avoid active involvement with OSH institutions.

Following the reactive approach, MSEs often seek easy and directly applicable solutions to the OSH issues at hand. They, furthermore, prefer personalised face-to-face contact when discussing potential solutions to OSH issues, so intermediaries that are accessible to the MSEs and able to help upfront with the encountered issues are highly valued by MSEs. The intermediaries can also help MSEs to translate more technical regulatory demands into daily practices. OSH solutions are more easily integrated if they are aligned with the daily work practices of MSEs and are therefore more likely to have positive impacts for the MSEs. Intermediaries can thus contribute to important improvements in OSH in MSEs on several dimensions.

All four types of intermediaries, that is, employer and worker representatives, regulators and OSH advisors — along with other intermediaries such as suppliers and, in particular, the insurance companies that hold a prominent position in the OSH system in several countries — can have a positive impact on OSH developments in MSEs by influencing, controlling and supporting the enterprises via their personal, direct and often frequent contact with them, especially when offering tangible advice to the MSEs. The impact of the various intermediaries varies across national contexts, sectors and types of intermediary. The labour inspectorates play an important role in all the countries investigated. While the compliance inspection remains the main focus, labour inspectorates also advise and support MSEs, with the balance between inspection and support found to be somewhat ambivalent. The social partners have a strong impact in countries with long-standing traditions for national and sectoral social dialogue, and the influence of organised labour and employer associations is often profoundly extended to OSH matters at local and workplace levels. In many cases, MSEs have good and trusting relationships with their employers' associations and other industry associations. OSH advisors do still play a significant role in many countries, but the quality and outreach differs considerably, and there are also significant differences between free-of-cost and market-based provisions of OSH advisors. Since most MSEs have restricted resources, it can be difficult for OSH advisors to access MSEs if the MSEs have to pay for the service.

Regulatory requirements and their enforcement have proven to be vital for reaching MSEs. This is the case in particular for MSEs that have a reactive approach and face substantial challenges with regard to the socio-economic context. The regulatory requirements and the labour inspections ensure a minimum degree of attention from the MSEs and set OSH benchmarks not only for owner-managers but also for other actors such as employers' associations, unions and OSH advisors. Including inspections and regulatory requirements in different OSH initiatives also increases the outreach of these, particularly towards the large proportion of MSEs that are not susceptible to voluntary measures.

MSEs are strongly embedded in their socio-economic context and they have limited resources, and improving OSH in MSEs is hence a complex process requiring organisational, procedural and technical changes in companies. Reaching out with effective support is difficult and expensive; comprehensive solutions for OSH in MSEs should therefore be addressed from different perspectives and implemented with the involvement of different intermediaries and actors. Often, there is a synergy effect of combining various policies, activities and schemes in order to bring about a strong impact. The coordination or orchestration of policies among actors can help to achieve the best possible outcome. Coordinating the efforts can also overcome some of the limitations of the particularistic approach in many of the good examples, and move the policies and programmes towards a more holistic approach to improving OSH in MSEs.

There are several initiatives that, at a low cost, are efficient at reaching a large proportion of MSEs. However, public budgets for OSH authorities and other OSH programmes have been cut in recent years



in many countries, and it appears unrealistic to expect the majority of MSEs to be reached by such programmes, especially the MSEs operating below the regulatory radar, without assigning more resources. Since regulatory requirements and inspection-backed initiatives are found to have a strong impact on OSH standards and awareness in MSEs, an increase in the effort to enforce such requirements and initiatives in MSEs would have a positive impact. In addition, there is a strong requirement to adapt inspections and other regulatory activities to the needs of MSEs, otherwise owner-managers in MSEs may become alienated with regard to OSH.

### Policy pointers

- Because of the identified challenges faced by the majority of MSEs, the policy-makers and stakeholders responsible for improving OSH in MSEs need to give higher priority to MSEs and their special needs, in particular by taking into consideration the limited resources provided for both inspections and voluntary programmes.
- MSEs are in general reactive in relation to OSH, and policies based on regulatory requirements are therefore found to have the broadest reach, since many MSEs do not take part in voluntary schemes or policies.
- Well-designed programmes, tools and other initiatives can have a positive impact on OSH in MSEs; in particular, support, tools and initiatives that can be integrated into the daily work practices and management of MSEs can be prolific. The impact can be considerably strengthened by support from broader policies targeting MSEs and by resources for inspectors and other intermediaries reaching out to MSEs.
- It is necessary to adapt the policies specifically to the needs, business setting and context of MSEs. This must be done at the sector level, but often actions targeting even more detailed levels, such as subsectors and work processes, are needed. Tripartite organisations and sector associations can facilitate such tailoring to the needs and demands of MSEs. This can be further facilitated by closer collaboration (orchestration) among different government regulatory bodies including non-OSH agencies.
- Various intermediaries that meet MSEs face to face are often preferred by MSEs. In this way, intermediaries can increase the reach, efficiency and legitimacy of OSH policies directed at MSEs. However, face-to-face meetings are also expensive, and it is therefore crucial to find cost-efficient solutions ensuring the coordination between intermediaries and exploiting the possibilities to include various non-OSH intermediaries, who often have broad contact with MSEs.
- Most MSEs have, as confirmed by this study and by the previous phase of the SESAME project, limited resources, economically and managerially, and it is therefore necessary to provide low-cost or free OSH programmes in order to reach a larger proportion of MSEs.



## 2 Introduction

It is well established that micro and small enterprises (MSEs) are particularly challenged when it comes to ensuring a good and sound occupational safety and health (OSH) setting (EU-OSHA, 2016) and that they therefore have special needs when it comes to improving OSH. It is the overall aim of the SESAME (Safe Small and Micro Enterprises) research project to provide new data and insights on this topic and investigate cross-European experience of improvement in OSH in MSEs. This is done by collecting and analysing comprehensive new knowledge on OSH in MSEs, as well as on experiences with OSH policies and support programmes.

The report builds on two separate studies (referred to as tasks). Task 1 collected and analysed good examples of policies and strategies, tools and resources, and other initiatives aimed at helping MSEs improve their OSH from the nine involved European Union (EU) countries <sup>(1)</sup> (listed in Appendix 1). As the list shows, a broad range of tools, strategies and policies were found in the involved Member States. The good examples are interesting and inspiring and provide a good basis for analysing what works, for whom and under what circumstances (Pawson, 2006; Pawson and Tilley, 1997). Many examples are sustainable, in the sense that they are continuously funded, evaluated and improved, which gives insights into what is required to increase the impact in terms of improved OSH in MSEs. Task 2 investigated how various stakeholders and intermediaries in their institutional setting engage and interact with MSEs on the topic of OSH. This report analyses and discusses the findings of both these tasks. The methodology of both tasks is presented in Chapter 3. In order to understand how MSEs react towards these various initiatives and intermediaries, the report also draws on the findings from SESAME case study research on ‘the view from the workplace’ (EU-OSHA, forthcoming), which provides a comprehensive MSE viewpoint, including owner-managers’ and workers’ perspectives, as well as research on the findings from the first part of the SESAME project (EU-OSHA, 2016), where the existing knowledge was synthesised to provide a framework for the further analyses in the project.

There are marked differences between countries included in the research project, and, in this report, we examine the more generic tendencies, approaches and mechanisms that are shared across countries, while also taking the specific national contexts and contributions into consideration. Economic sectors and subsectors often share many characteristics and dynamics across national settings, which may make it more relevant to compare sectors across national borders rather than with other sectors in the same national setting. Therefore, we are including the sector perspective throughout the report where it is deemed relevant.

Governments and their institutions, social partners, research institutions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are all, to various degrees, involved in activities aimed at improving OSH in MSEs, including legislation, agreements and programmes, as well as building institutions. These activities sometimes explicitly acknowledge the special needs of MSEs, and MSEs are also affected through the indirect consequences of the general arrangements and settings in OSH and labour market regulation in the national contexts. In the report on views from the workplace (EU-OSHA, forthcoming), the micro level, that is, the view from owner-managers and workers in MSEs, is presented. In the present report, we analyse the relations between MSEs and the arrangements, policies, strategies and tools aimed at supporting MSEs, as well as the impacts and roles of intermediary actors, who directly interact with the process of improving OSH in MSEs. In Chapter 4, after explaining the methodology used (in Chapter 3), we define and discuss the socio-economic and regulatory context for MSE support, which is used as a frame for the analysis in Chapter 5 of the institutional and legislative setting, in order to highlight the conditions, terms and infrastructure of support for MSEs. One thing that is vital to MSEs is the direct interaction between intermediaries engaging in OSH issues (as well as other stakeholders) — this is the focus of our analysis in Chapter 6. The objective is to highlight how intermediaries in their various contexts work with MSEs, which approaches are successful in introducing improvements and which could hamper such positive outcomes. This is followed in Chapter 7 by an analysis of the programmes and strategies aimed at reaching out to MSEs. Here we demonstrate that there is a very wide variety of programmes and strategies aimed at MSEs, which can vary in efficiency. The focus is, in particular, on

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<sup>1</sup> Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, France, Italy, Romania, Sweden and the United Kingdom, with the addition of three examples from other countries.

good examples that have proved to be effective, particularly over the long term, but we are also interested in barriers to the efficient implementation of programmes and strategies. In the final part of the report, the overall results of the research project are discussed in Chapter 8, before Chapter 9 summarises the conclusions on effective approaches, as well as enablers and barriers, which can be used to develop more effective policies and programmes for improving OSH in European MSEs.

## 3 Methodology

The objective of this report is to present the results from the study of policies and programmes supporting MSEs, as well as the role of intermediaries in relation to OSH for MSEs. The report therefore scrutinises programmes, strategies, tools, policies and other actions with significance for OSH in MSEs. It furthermore analyses the role and impact of various stakeholders and intermediaries, as well as the national context in relation to the identified good examples and the independent impacts of intermediaries and the interactions they have with MSEs. These insights help foster knowledge on key success factors and on good practices for improving OSH and developing preventive actions at workplace level.

### 3.1 Background

The characteristics of MSEs and the external context — not least the socio-economic context — in which they operate affect how MSEs are best supported when trying to make OSH improvements. Outcomes are also affected by the particulars of the support, the interaction between MSEs and intermediaries providing the support, and how well the content and intervention strategies fit the needs and context of the targeted MSEs. It is therefore necessary to reach beyond the descriptive surface of policies and programmes. This can be done using evaluation theory to establish the links between policies, strategies, programmes and actions or initiatives, their socio-economic and regulatory contexts, and the expected outcome in MSEs. It is, in that respect, crucial to build on the ‘view from the workplace’ report, which highlights the attitudes and experiences of owner-managers and workers (EU-OSHA, forthcoming). It is similarly important to include the practical experience of interactions of MSEs with practitioners (intermediaries) such as regulatory inspectors, OSH advisors and social partner (generally understood as national labour market organisations) officials.

The theoretical point of departure is programme theory (Bickman, 1987; Hansen and Vedung, 2010; Legg et al., 2010), which expresses the underlying assumptions that policy and programme developers build on. There is always explicitly or implicitly a theory about why a particular policy, programme, tools or interaction should achieve the desired outcome. The description of the programme logic is a good basis for evaluation of the good practice examples. It allows an analysis of which parts of the programme logic might have been especially innovative and successful or problematic, and it will thereby increase our understanding of the mechanisms in action. In addition, it provides a better qualitative and detailed understanding of what works and what might be problematic. For instance, a programme might be very innovative and effective, but still have poor results because of a failing link in the programme logic, causing a break in the intervention chain (logic) and resulting in a poor outcome despite the high quality of the entire programme — with the exception of the weak link in the intervention chain. By understanding the programme logic, it is possible to uncover the generic mechanisms that can make policies and programmes work. The mechanisms can be termed semi-regularities (Pawson and Tilley, 1997), as they will always depend on the context related to the specific firm, sector and country, meaning that they will not always lead to the same outcome in different settings and contexts. Identifying these mechanisms is also relevant in relation to the intermediaries’ interaction with MSEs, scrutinising why some intermediaries are more successful than others in addressing OSH issues in MSEs.

The report uses the realistic evaluation approach to understand ‘what works, for whom and in what circumstances’ (Pawson, 2006; Pawson and Tilley, 1997) for MSEs. This approach has recently been applied within OSH research by researchers heading this work package (Hasle et al., 2012a, 2014; Pedersen et al., 2012) and it provides opportunities to extract generic knowledge, which can be used to develop more successful policies and programmes. One important contribution is to identify generic mechanisms that make companies in general, and therefore also MSEs, react to external pressure (Hasle et al., 2014). The key driver is the need for companies to be legitimate (maintain a licence to operate) and the mechanisms can be coercive, normative or imitative (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). An interesting finding (Hasle et al., 2014) is that the mechanisms often supplement each other and that policy-makers can use a combination of mechanisms to design more efficient programmes.

## 3.2 The design

The data collection has been carried out in two interlinked tasks building on the findings from the preceding work in the SESAME project involving the literature review on OSH in MSEs (EU-OSHA, 2016) and the case study research emphasising inputs from the workplace level (EU-OSHA, forthcoming). The two tasks included in this report were carried out successively in such a way that the national good examples from task 1 have been discussed in many of the dialogue workshops in task 2. Overall, both tasks were designed in order to better understand the underlying mechanisms and dynamics that the initiatives and interactions are based upon. The aim of task 1 was to identify and analyse good examples of programmes and strategies, and the aim of task 2 was to collect information on experiences from intermediaries of both direct interactions with MSEs and the institutional settings for support for MSEs. In both task 1 and task 2, barriers and success factors in programmes aimed at supporting OSH improvements in MSEs have been in focus, as well as identifying the more general socio-economic challenges faced by MSEs.

In order to ensure coherent application of the research design across the nine partner countries, the methods were described in detail in separate guidelines that were developed in dialogue with the national partners. These guidelines were then implemented in each national context by the nine national partners. Furthermore, the practical application of the research design was discussed with partners during two workshops. During the initial discussions among the partners and in the workshops, it became evident that there would need to be room for national adaptations of the original research design in task 2. In particular, the dialogue workshop design (see section 3.2.2.) proved to be difficult to put into practice in some of the partner countries. We will discuss this further below and describe in detail the methodology applied for each of the two parts of the research.

### 3.2.1 Task 1 — The good examples

The first step of task 1 was to map policies and programmes relevant to OSH in MSEs in each of the nine countries. The partners in the nine countries used their knowledge of the OSH systems in their countries as points of departure for the identification of good examples. The good examples were identified through literature searches and interviews with key actors in the national settings. To identify the good examples, the focus was not solely on ‘micro and small companies’, but also on national OSH strategies with implications for MSEs. There are several examples of good initiatives that are not specifically designed to target MSEs, but rather are aimed at sectors dominated by MSEs and specifically adapted to the MSEs in the sector. Therefore, good examples within sectors that are dominated by MSEs, such as agriculture, cleaning, carpentry and restaurants, have also been included.

The initial mapping resulted in 88 examples. Three additional examples (Ireland, the Netherlands and Poland) from countries other than the nine partner countries were identified and included. Therefore, the examples originate from 12 countries representing different regulatory and societal systems, and different approaches to OSH in MSEs.

The second step was to select 45 of the 88 examples to describe in more detail. This description aimed to elaborate and verify the initial findings through interviews with key experts from research institutes, relevant authorities and the social partners and, when possible, with MSEs supported by the good examples. The descriptions of the good examples included information about the following characteristics:

- type of action;
- aim and content;
- target group (micro and small companies, sector, managers/safety representatives/employees);
- level (EU, national, sector, regional, local);
- actors and intermediaries;
- policy instruments;
- cost and funding;
- evidence about impact;
- key mechanisms for achieving the impact.

The third step was to select 24 of the 45 examples to be analysed in further detail. The selection aimed to include examples with the most solid information possible, to allow the largest potential for impact and learning across borders in the EU, and to select different types of examples, as well as examples from a variety of sectors, in order to provide a broad basis for the analysis of what works, for whom and under what circumstances. All descriptions of the good examples have been peer reviewed and aligned in order to provide comprehensive descriptions of similar information about the examples. The aim has been to present the good examples in a clear way in order to provide readers from different regulatory or national contexts with sufficient information to understand the good examples and their context, and also provide a basis for further comparing and analysing the good examples.

The good examples have been compiled in a separate technical annex (EU-OSHA, 2017). The examples have been grouped according to the type of action and the typology summarised below for supporting MSEs has been used.

Infrastructure:

- methods for authorities' supervision adapted to MSEs;
- structures for provision of personal OSH support;
- non-OSH intermediaries engaging in OSH.

Programmes and strategies:

- get MSEs aware of, interested in and working with OSH;
- provision of OSH tools and methods adapted to MSEs;
- OSH training for MSEs and their employees;
- economic support for OSH investments;
- using requirements from the value chain as a lever for OSH;
- orchestrated examples.

### **3.2.2 Task 2 — Intermediaries and OSH**

The overall aim of task 2 was to learn how various intermediary actors interact with MSEs in terms of OSH and to learn from their experiences in order to identify the key factors for explaining various successes for and barriers to promoting effective OSH improvements and OSH management among MSEs. Furthermore, the research design aimed to identify areas of consensual and diverging opinions among the different actors and intermediaries in the national contexts.

The main method of attaining this knowledge was through the dialogue workshops that were conducted as discussion groups, where the various intermediaries gathered and exchanged viewpoints and experiences from their work on improving OSH in MSEs. The design of the dialogue workshops drew on previous traditions of participatory action research mainly developed in the Scandinavian countries (Greenwood and Levin, 2006; Gustavsen and Engelstad, 1986; Svensson and Nielsen, 2006). The dialogue workshops were designed both to facilitate an explicit expression of the intermediary actors' prior experiences of working with OSH in MSEs and, equally importantly, to initiate a constructive dialogue among the actors about which efforts are successful in improving the work environment in MSEs. Likewise, the dialogue workshops should have enabled the participants to identify their shared understanding of the approach to MSEs, as well as highlight their potential disagreements and the implications of these for OSH in MSEs. The workshops lasted approximately half a day with necessary national adaptations of the concrete setting and the specific time schedule in order to ensure consideration of the national context and thereby be effective in achieving the overall objectives of this task.

A sector approach was chosen in order for the dialogue workshop participants to be able to relate to each others' experiences on a more tangible level. The priority sectors were construction, manufacturing and the service sector, with a particular emphasis on the hotel and restaurant subsector. The sectors are important economic sectors with significant proportions of MSEs, particularly in construction and private services. This was, in general, achieved in all partner countries with some national adaptation to

the sectors because of specific national circumstances; for example, cleaning was emphasised in the Swedish dialogue workshop on service industries and, in France, the road transport sector was included instead of manufacturing.

The intermediaries participating in the dialogue workshop were divided into four broad groups consisting of (1) workers and workers' representatives; (2) employers and employers' representatives; (3) OSH advisors; and (4) OSH regulators and inspectors — each group was represented by three to six persons. If there were fewer representatives from a specific group, follow-up interviews were conducted in order to gain sufficient insights from these specific groups. There was also room for national adaptation of these groups, so that intermediaries not traditionally included, such as suppliers and insurance companies, could be invited. In several countries, OSH insurance companies are key intermediaries and such companies were invited to take part. Therefore, many dialogue workshops included representatives of these institutions. The OSH insurance companies were typically grouped with the 'regulator' group. Furthermore, a number of additional interviews were conducted in each country; these included various intermediaries with different perspectives that were not captured in the dialogue workshops. While it could be relevant to include representatives from MSEs (owner-managers and workers), it proved in general somewhat difficult to get these representatives to attend the dialogue workshops. In most countries, owner-managers and workers were invited — in particular, persons who had been involved in earlier SESAME research (case studies) — but only very few of these invitees participated. The specific groupings may have some implications for the further analysis, since the intermediaries participating obviously have a specific starting point in their own experiences. However, the intermediaries were selected to reflect the national setting, and the additional and follow-up interviews were intended to help ensure coherent coverage of each national context.

Early on in the process of designing the guidelines and implementing the workshops at the national level, it became clear that this would be difficult in some national settings. In a few countries, it would be close to impossible for the various actors to participate in a dialogue workshop, especially the social partners. This was typically due to the adverse relations between the various actors, a lack of relevant actors or the formal character of meetings involving different OSH actors. Therefore, an alternate solution of either focus groups (Carey and Asbury, 2016) with the relevant actors or semi-structured interviews (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009) was included in the design. The focus group approach in this study includes only one of the groups of intermediaries rather than the four groups in the dialogue workshops. The focus group approach was also supplemented with interviews, as explained above, which were carried out, for example, in Romania. Table 3.1 provides a short overview of the methods applied in each partner country. Appendix 2 provides a more detailed list of interviews.

**Table 3.1:** Overview of methods applied in task 2 by each partner

Country	Main data collection	Sectors	Supplementary interviews
<b>Belgium</b>	Three dialogue workshops	Construction	Four supplementary interviews
		Manufacturing	
		Horeca <sup>(2)</sup>	
<b>Denmark</b>	Three dialogue workshops	Construction	Two additional interviews for workshops
		Manufacturing	Five supplementing interviews
		Horeca	
<b>Germany</b>	Focus groups and individual interviews with 31 OSH stakeholders	Construction	Four additional interviews
		Manufacturing	
		Horeca	

<sup>2</sup> Horeca (hotels, restaurants and cafes) covers NACE code I: Accommodation and Food Service Activities.



Country	Main data collection	Sectors	Supplementary interviews
<b>Estonia</b>	Three dialogue workshops	Construction Manufacturing Horeca	Five supplementary interviews
<b>France</b>	Three dialogue workshops	Construction Transport Horeca	Seven additional interviews
<b>Italy</b>	One dialogue workshop covering all three sectors	Construction Manufacturing Horeca	Ten follow-up interviews and eight additional interviews
<b>Romania</b>	Eight focus groups (with 22 participants) and 19 interviews	Construction Manufacturing Horeca	Five additional interviews Questionnaire with external services
<b>Sweden</b>	Three dialogue workshops	Construction Manufacturing Cleaning	Four additional interviews
<b>United Kingdom</b>	Interviews with a total of 32 individuals representing 18 bodies	Construction Manufacturing Private services	Six additional interviews

Findings from task 2 were reported in a national report from each partner based on a common template. These national reports are the main empirical input for this analytical report, together with the good examples from task 1. In addition to a national report, each partner provided the task 2 coordination team with substantial notes from each workshop.

### 3.2.3 Overall analysis

The analysis is based on the dialogue workshops and interviews with intermediaries as well as written sources for task 2. For task 1, we drew mainly on the results of the analysis of the good examples, which are also based on interviews and written material, as described above. Furthermore, the overall findings and results were discussed with all the national partners in an analytical seminar, where some preliminary conclusions and general findings were also put forward and discussed in detail by the partners. We also draw on the research literature on MSEs in general, not least the first findings from the SESAME project (EU-OSHA, 2016), and, in particular, the literature about intermediaries (see examples in Cunningham and Sinclair, 2015; Olsen and Hasle, 2015; Walters, 2001), and also included other relevant literature, for example when discussing the socio-economic context and the impact on OSH.

All the national task 2 reports have been scrutinised and coded using NVivo 11 software. The coding of the data in the reports was based on a range of predefined labels (nodes) reflecting the design of the work package and the data were also scrutinised for novel inputs and findings not captured fully by the original labels. Therefore, we have combined a hypothetical-deductive approach to the data with an inductive approach, which has allowed us to capture the richness of the data.



## Safety and health in micro and small enterprises in the EU: From policy to practice

All information about the nine participating countries is from the national reports unless stated otherwise with specific references. The good examples used in the analysis are listed in Appendix 1. All national reports and descriptions of the good examples will be available in the technical annexes to this report.

## 4 The socio-economic and regulatory setting

The review of the literature on micro and small firms that preceded the present study (EU-OSHA, 2016) revealed numerous paradoxes in the position of MSEs and their arrangements for OSH in relation to their wider social, economic and regulatory settings. These paradoxes and settings have important implications for OSH outcomes in MSEs and form a backdrop of the findings in this report. The review of the literature demonstrated, for example, that while MSEs constitute a significant element of the EU economy and account for by far the largest proportion of enterprises, other measures of their share of the economy, such as the number of workers employed by them or their relative profitability, indicate a more complex picture. Numerous factors contribute significantly to limitations to their growth, their economic viability and the vulnerabilities of those who work in them. It showed further paradoxes, for example, in the way that some MSEs and the organisations representing them appear to regard regulation as a serious burden on their business. Other research, on the other hand, showed that regulatory inspection — or the threat of it — was one of the most powerful determinants of the willingness of MSEs to act on OSH matters, and additional research showed that face-to-face relations with regulatory inspectors were a powerful means of ensuring compliance with the requirements of good OSH practice.

Other studies included in the analysis (EU-OSHA, 2016) show further paradoxes, such as that while the social relations in some MSEs are often highly prized by both workers and their employers, in others they are responsible for the serious exploitation of workers' vulnerabilities. In addition, the role that MSEs play in supporting the performance of larger organisations in value chains, in which they tend to occupy weak and dependent positions, contributes to the precarious situation of many such MSEs and those who work in them (see Doellgast and Greer, 2007). Such precariousness may be further understood, at least in part, as a consequence of current business practices in which (usually) larger and more powerful organisations outsource cost and risk burdens to smaller and economically weaker ones that have proportionately fewer resources available to address them, which, arguably, contributes to poorer working conditions and OSH outcomes in such enterprises. The value chain may not only limit the possibilities for MSEs to organise their own work processes, but also hamper their influence and control of OSH, which, for example, is often seen in construction. However, some research findings demonstrate that the same supply chain relations can, under different circumstances, be used to promote the leverage of good practices in OSH in small and micro firms involved in these economic and business relations.

A final paradox, related to the increasing trend for outsourcing, is the fact that the strategies of organised employers and unions, and the collaboration between them in established social dialogue bodies and institutions, may even drive small companies further down the low road of vulnerability. Employers' organisations typically represent larger companies, while trade unions typically have more members in these companies. Therefore, in defending the interests of their members in these larger companies, unions may also find themselves (albeit inadvertently) in alliances to combat unfair competition by small companies operating at the edge of legality, as has been illustrated for the cleaning industry in several EU countries (Kirov and Ramioul, 2014). Such small companies are precisely those that offer low wages, precarious contracts and unsafe workplaces, since they can only survive by using competition strategies based on low labour costs, which was the key driver of the externalisation of their activities by the larger companies in the first place.

One of the many reasons for these paradoxes can be found in the heterogeneity of MSEs, which is reflected in both task 1 and 2 of this work package. The so-called 'structures of vulnerability' that previous authors have suggested to be inhabited by workers and employers in many smaller enterprises (see, for example, Nichols, 1996) may limit the capacity of these enterprises to respond effectively to the challenges with which they are thus presented, although they are not necessarily always present or present in the same ways in all MSEs. It was argued in the previous report (EU-OSHA, 2016) that the upshot of this was that, while some MSEs were clearly able to deliver the economic success stories predicted for them by many EU economic policy-makers, a substantial proportion of the total EU population of MSEs could be characterised as pursuing 'low-road strategies' in their approach to economic survival and that, for a host of related reasons, achieving best practice in relation to OSH was unlikely to be a business priority. While the same heterogeneity as that referred to above makes generalisations concerning positive or negative OSH outcomes in relation to *all* MSEs and the socio-

economic contexts in which they are situated somewhat perilous, it does not seem unreasonable to deduce from the wealth of evidence available that, for the substantial proportion of MSEs that could be said to be pursuing 'low-road economic survival strategies', good OSH practice and outcomes might be problematic. This is also a general finding from the dialogue workshops in task 2, where many intermediaries talked about MSEs that do not have the resources or the interest to improve their OSH setting.

Moreover, this situation of MSEs is not a static condition, but one that is dynamic and subject to change. In this respect, the structural features of the economies of most EU Member States and their past and present economic policies can act as supports and drivers of the processes helping to shape the delivery of strategies employed by the owner-managers of these firms to try to ensure their economic survival. They therefore contribute to those factors that help determine the extent to which a small or micro firm follows a low or high road to its economic survival and development and, as the present report makes clear, the structural features and economic policies also relate to the extent to which it is able to factor OSH arrangements into this process.

It is often argued by many OSH policy proponents that there may be a positive relationship between an enterprise's pursuit of best practice arrangements for OSH and its business success. This also has some support from research (see, for example, Haslam et al., 2016; Veltri et al., 2013). Although this relationship is poorly documented for MSEs and is obviously not always the case, there are numerous examples of this in this research project and it also opens up possibilities. One is the suggestion that, if policy and infrastructures are dynamic and subject to change, perhaps this change could be tailored to embrace better conditions to promote good practice in OSH. However, this may be an option that is not available for the substantial proportion of MSEs forced to pursue low-road strategies to their economic survival, where problems of poor OSH dominate and contribute to the disproportionately poor outcomes among MSEs.

These low-road firms generally have features that make them hard for intermediaries, as well as various programmes, to reach. Moreover, there seems little doubt that a substantial proportion of them would fall into the categories that previous research on the role of regulation in relation to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) has labelled 'avoiders and outsiders', while others would be seen, at best, as 'reactors' (Vickers et al., 2005). Therefore, they exist largely beyond the reach of voluntary support to 'better themselves and their business' in terms of OSH and largely beyond the ambit of regulatory agencies — until, that is, something happens, such as a serious injury, and this serves to draw the enterprise to their attention, which can be described as a reactive approach. There is therefore a need to pose questions concerning the support for OSH in MSEs that take some account of the contexts in which the harm experienced by workers in these firms occurs to evaluate its effectiveness. It is one of the challenges for the analysis of intermediaries and programmes aimed at MSEs presented in this report that these firms in general are poorly covered by most of the examples as well as by most of the intermediaries.

## 4.1 Labour market changes

Changes in the structures of the economy and the labour markets in advanced market economies, such as those of the EU, are clearly important. Significant in this respect are trends that have already become well established over the past 30 years, such as patterns of increasing fragmentation, outsourcing and subcontracting, as well as growth in non-standard forms of employment, a greater role for migrant labour and an increase in informal undeclared and irregular work (Baccaro and Howell, 2011; Doellgast and Greer, 2007; Gautié and Schmitt, 2010; Grimshaw et al., 2016; Weil, 2014). Migrant workers in general may be both less aware of OSH rights and demands and often in a more vulnerable labour market position to address them, which is likely to lead them to be accepting inferior working conditions and a less safe and healthy work environment.

Not only have these developments had effects on safety, health and well-being, which are now well documented, but their continuation over quite a long period has given rise to a level of societal acceptance of such change that has formed the basis for further patterns of insecurity and non-standard forms of employment (Nichols and Walters, 2013). One of the important problems to mention is the fact that workers are increasingly hired as independent contractors or as self-employed workers, forming

part of a large and growing independent workforce, which recent estimates suggest may form as much as 20 to 30 % of the working-age population in some EU countries and which often lacks the protection afforded to full-time employees of larger corporate enterprises (the ‘Uberisation’ of work) (Manyika et al., 2016). While this issue is not covered by the research in this report, it nevertheless constitutes an important challenge for the most vulnerable firms in the affected sectors, as these forms of employment either become part of the survival strategy by the vulnerable firms or compete with these and other firms on the same markets. It is therefore a type of employment that is deserving of more attention as was pointed out, among other things, in the last communication from the European Commission (European Commission, 2017a).

These patterns in the organisation of work and their concomitant degradation of the protection previously afforded to workers have occurred at the same time as other changes, such as those evident in the way work is managed in which individualisation and responsabilisation are increasingly promoted. Across Europe, another trend is the movement of OSH interest from the workplace and the prevention of accidents and ill health towards individual responsibility for a healthy lifestyle. The focus on health promotion also transfers the responsibility for injuries to the employee, who should keep fit in order to avoid health problems. Arguably, these developments have added further to the increased vulnerability of some workers, since they also contribute to the assumption of risk and the consequences of risk becoming increasingly individualised — while being assumed (often disproportionately so) by vulnerable individuals. Much of this has taken place within the ambit of the economic environment populated by MSEs. One example is described for Swedish occupational health service providers whose main service to MSEs is health check-ups, usually with no connection to working conditions (Schmidt et al., 2016).

## 4.2 Regulatory changes

In parallel, a widespread reduction in the resourcing of regulatory inspectorates has taken place and, at the same time, politically driven changes to the nature of inspection have occurred. Most regulatory inspectorates in the EU have experienced significant reductions in their budgets during the past two decades (EU-OSHA, 2016; Walters, 2016). In some cases where budgetary requirements for inspection have been maintained, this has been because the labour inspectorate has a wider function, which is seen as important for revenue collection (such as the remit for the inspection of numbers of persons employed at the establishment, which is one of the responsibilities of some labour inspectorates) (EU-OSHA, 2011; Walters, 2016). In other countries, inspectorates have been subject to changing political priorities causing fluctuations with both ups and downs in budgets, such as those experienced in Denmark and Sweden.

There has also, both at the EU level and in some countries, such as in the United Kingdom, been a discussion about reducing the regulatory burden on business; the OSH regulation has been one of the targets for this discussion and suggestions to remove legal requirements for MSEs have been aired. There have been discussions in some countries, most notably in the United Kingdom, where the regulatory inspectorate for OSH has been required to adopt a more ‘business friendly’ approach to inspection and to ensure that their requirements do not excessively impede production. However, the last communication from the European Commission (2017a) regarding the modernisation of OSH legislation clearly stated that the removing of obligations from MSEs is not the way forward. The Commission recognises that MSEs have both a higher risk and special needs for support compared with larger firms and therefore suggests that there should be more support for MSEs and that compliance should be made simpler and less costly, rather than removing of legislative demands (European Commission, 2017a). The inspectorates in the EU have in the same period been attempting to make their regulatory practices more appropriate to reach the very large number of smaller and micro workplaces, which are generally acknowledged to be beyond the reach of conventional inspection. They have adopted these approaches, not only with MSEs in mind, but also as a response to the wider influences of the changing world of work, and through their EU-level organisation, the Senior Labour Inspectors’ Committee (SLIC) (see SLIC, 2015). As a result, at least at the inspection-policy level, a set of strategies are now discernible that address the ‘hard to reach’ and are intended to supplement conventional approaches to inspection (see Walters (2016) for an outline).

There may be further societal impacts on OSH in MSEs in relation to how consensual and participatory work organisation is experienced in different EU Member States. For example, significant differences

have been noted by previous researchers concerning discretion in job tasks and worker participation across European countries (Gallie, 2007, 2009; Holman and Rafferty, 2017). The Nordic countries often come out with higher workers' discretion and influence. Active worker participation and cooperation is often found to be a self-perpetuating norm (Sørensen et al., 2015). This may have implications for OSH in MSEs in terms of workers' participation in work organisation and workers' well-being, and therefore workers' ability to affect their own physical, as well as psychosocial, working conditions. All in all, this highlights how numerous aspects of the surrounding society and institutions have implications for how MSEs handle OSH in the first place. It also has strong implications for the intermediaries and initiatives at firm and sector level through the contexts in which these are set with the aim of improving OSH in MSEs.

This section therefore concludes that it is of great importance to give proper regard to the institutional and the socio-economic setting of strategies and instruments designed to aid OSH in MSEs when attempting to evaluate their effectiveness.

## 5 The institutional set-up for OSH support for MSEs

The nine countries in this study share important features of their institutional set-ups. These are first and foremost related to OSH regulation, where the EU Framework Directive on OSH from 1989 and subsequent directives provide a common framework for all EU Member States and have, according to a recent evaluation, had a significant impact (European Commission, 2017b). However, the EU regulations have also been implemented with great variation and varied efficiency, and history, economy and policy all determine some very significant and profound differences across the EU in the way that work, industrial relations and therefore also OSH are regulated and governed. This chapter discusses the role of rules, regulations and institutional structures in relation to OSH in MSEs. This discussion is based on insights and discussions from the dialogue workshop in task 2 and further informed by input from the SESAME project, as well as the existing literature on institutions and OSH in national contexts.

These pan-European variations obviously have significant implications for the way that OSH in MSEs is regulated, controlled and perceived in the individual partner countries. OSH in MSEs is highly embedded in the surrounding society and institutions, and the cross-national differences reflect industrial relations, state traditions, the position and power of social partners, business structures, political systems and traditions for corporatism at the societal and firm levels, among other examples (see also EU-OSHA, 2013).

The most important categories for institutional OSH support for MSEs are:

- state regulation;
- corporatist social partner institutions;
- insurance.

All nine countries feature, to a larger or smaller extent, institutions covering these categories and they are often intermingled. For example, legislation may cover how insurance and corporatist institutions operate and the other way around, with corporatist institutions influencing the way the state regulates OSH. At the same time, it is useful to distinguish institutions and we use these three categories for the institutional analysis in this chapter. The balance between the various institutions, as well as other structural and institutional inputs, including the socio-economic and regulatory settings discussed in the previous chapter, is obviously dynamic and institutional change can occur in various ways (Hacker et al., 2015; Streeck and Thelen, 2005).

### 5.1 Government policies and institutions

Public policies and government institutions also have an important impact on MSE activity in relation to OSH and this has been highlighted in this research project in both tasks and, in particular, in the dialogue workshops. All the participating countries have general legislation on OSH, which is based on the 1989 European Framework Directive on OSH establishing the general duty of the employer to ensure a safe and healthy work environment and subsequently ensure that all identified risks are controlled (see also Walters, 2002). MSEs are generally covered by all relevant requirements for a safe and healthy work environment, which is in accordance with the general EU regulation of the Framework Directive. The Framework Directive also includes the requirement to carry out risk assessments, but MSEs, especially micro enterprises, are, in most countries, exempt from some parts of OSH management, for example certain written documentation and worker representation requirements. Most often, micro firms (< 10 employees) are exempt from the requirement for an OSH representative and for small enterprises (< 50 employees) for the requirement to set up an OSH committee, but this also depends on how the legislation on OSH is related to collective agreements on worker representation in the national contexts.

The requirements for risk assessment also vary to some extent for MSEs. All firms are required to carry out risk assessment, but there is national variation in terms of certain rules, depending on firm size, for whether or not special education is required or whether or not external qualified advisors have to be involved.



The regulations in most countries acknowledge in various ways the special needs of MSEs in the general policy documents on OSH. It is thus generally nationally recognised that MSEs have a higher risk profile than larger enterprises and a limited capacity to control OSH risks, and workers in MSEs are exposed to higher OSH risks. At the same time, it is difficult and expensive to reach out to a large number of micro and small firms. However, we have found a few examples of extensive policy strategies that can ensure that the special needs of MSEs are addressed in an efficient manner.

All Member States have established labour inspectorates for the enforcement of OSH legislation, which inspect workplaces in order to ensure compliance with the legislation. However, the inspectorates' history typically originates from a long time before the initial EU regulation. The first legislation and inspectorates can be traced back to the 19th century in several countries. There is therefore a good reason for considerable differences between the countries (Walters, 2016). Some of the major differences include:

- **Focus:** in some countries, inspections include only OSH (for example Denmark and the United Kingdom) and in others inspections have a wider focus on both OSH and, to a lesser extent, other working conditions such as working hours (Germany and Sweden) as well as minimum salary (for example France and Italy). It depends, among other things, on the strength of corporatist systems where the social partners, to a larger extent, control working conditions. There is a tendency to include some wider issues through collaboration with other authorities in the countries with a narrower OSH focus. This is the case, for instance, regarding the control of identity and tax payment (Belgium, Denmark and Sweden).
- **Central government:** most countries have local structures of OSH regulation even where they are strictly controlled by the government; however, in some countries, such as Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom, there is a local structure controlled by municipal or regional authorities. These mainly cover MSEs and what are considered the lower risk sectors. The inspections often cover other social and health issues, for instance related to food safety. In the United Kingdom, however, although there are actually more workplaces that are covered by local authorities than by the labour inspection authority, they remain under the primary authority of the labour inspection authority.
- **Specialised inspections:** several countries have specialised inspections, for instance related to fire safety, and specialised sector inspections, typically in infrastructure sectors such as railways and energy production.

The main obstacle preventing government policies from reaching MSEs is the resources made available primarily in terms of inspectors to reach out to MSEs. This was highlighted in most of the national dialogue workshops, in particular with regard to reaching MSEs with little interest in improving OSH. As already mentioned in Chapter 4, most countries have seen budget cuts in their inspectorates resulting in fewer inspectors and fewer inspections. Statistics on this question are, however, not generally available and difficult to compare between the countries, and it is therefore difficult to compare the level of labour inspections in the national contexts. Nevertheless, we have attempted to give an overview of how the resources have developed during the last decade based on data on the evolution of staff and resource levels collected by the SESAME partners (see the extended discussion of labour inspectorates in section 6.1).

The consequence of a reduction in resources is that the general outreach of OSH inspectorates to MSEs is reduced. In Sweden, for example, the number of inspections has been halved and, in addition, the proportion of all inspections that target MSEs has also been reduced. This is probably because of the expense of reaching out to MSEs: labour inspectorates realise that they can reach more workers by a few inspections in larger firms than they will reach with many inspections in MSEs.



**Example 5.1:** The case of the United Kingdom — deregulation and downgrading of inspections

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has experienced a decline of more than 50 % in their inspections since 2004 (Tombs, 2016) and has in the same period removed or improved 84 % of the legislation (HSE, 2016). The HSE has tried to compensate for this decline by streamlining inspections to make them risk based (Black and Baldwin, 2010), giving priority to firms with higher risks. In addition, the HSE has put more focus on the dissemination of information, in particular to MSEs, on the internet and by the development of collaborations with other non-OSH partners, such as the tax authority, but it is inevitable that such a large reduction will have an impact on reaching MSEs, which is especially expensive and difficult.

Example 5.1 from the United Kingdom illustrates how most national authorities facing budget cuts have tried to develop new strategies that are both more focused (the risk-based approach) while meanwhile also diversifying activities in terms of dissemination, training and information. In Estonia, for example, the labour inspectorate has been involved in training activities. We return to the question of how inspectors in practice relate to MSEs in section 6.1.

Some countries, such as Denmark, Germany, France and Romania, have national research institutions working on OSH, which are at least partially funded by the government. These institutions carry out research and often have an advisory role for the OSH authorities. They also typically carry out activities regarding the dissemination of information and training on OSH. In other countries, for example Estonia and Sweden, there are no centralised OSH research institutes and relevant research is commissioned by the authorities on a contractual basis.

While most national strategies on OSH acknowledge the challenges and limitations faced by MSEs and several have national initiatives aimed at MSEs, none provides a coherent and comprehensive policy approach to dealing with the substantial issues this research project has highlighted. However, the Danish and French OSH strategies, for instance, acknowledge the specific needs of MSEs, although these general strategies are typically not transformed into any specific programmes or initiatives with any sort of wider reach among MSEs. There is therefore generally a need for national OSH policies to address the topic of OSH in MSEs at a more ambitious level.

## 5.2 The role of corporatist institutions

All countries have some degree of systematised corporatist collaboration between governments, employers' associations and unions, and here we discuss, based on the national dialogue workshops, the role of these corporatist institutions, while in section 6.3 we discuss what the social partners do separately for their members. Variations are common in the tripartite advisory committees at the national level that have an advisory role to the government on national strategies and the development of regulation. The strengths and influence of these committees vary considerably across countries, and few of them have independent resources to undertake activities by themselves, while others have a very modest impact on OSH policies and company-level OSH.

The variation of corporatist structures at sector level is also very marked, with several examples from Belgium, Germany, France and others, with strong corporatist sector institutions with extensive activities. Some are established in collective agreements, some in insurance systems and some in government structures or in various combinations. In some countries, for example Denmark and Sweden, this collaboration is built on a mutual interest in supporting regulatory compliance, including compliance with OSH regulations. This mutual interest serves as a way of blocking companies' dumping prices by not complying with regulations. We discuss the insurance-based systems in section 5.3, and here we give two examples to illustrate how these sector institutions may work.

**Example 5.2: Joint sector federations in Belgium**

The social partners have a strong tradition for sector collaboration in the private sector in Belgium. It has developed into sector and subsector federations, which negotiate collective agreements and take care of vocational training and various social benefits. Part of the collaboration also involves activities on OSH. The social partners have, for natural reasons, different interests in many matters, but they meet regularly and take care of many different policy fields. They have also developed collaborative competences in the way that each of them recognises the legitimacy of the other and they know how to search for and develop solutions for mutual benefit. The broad spectrum of activities of the sector federations also opens the possibility of integrating OSH into other fields such as vocational training. However, there is not necessarily a particular focus on MSEs and the tendency may be that the larger organisations dominate, since this is also where both employers' associations and unions have the highest representation. The joint sector federations are funded partly by the collective agreements and partly by government.

**Example 5.3: The bipartite sector council for construction in Denmark**

Since 1980, Denmark has had a system with sectorial bipartite OSH councils. An example of an active sector council reaching out to MSEs is found in construction. The council was, until the turn of the millennium, characterised by conflicts and few shared activities. It has since changed, and the council is now very active and increasingly works in close collaboration with the Working Environment Authority. As construction is dominated by MSEs, the council has during recent years changed its priorities and is now, to a large extent, targeting MSEs. This is done by, among other things, focusing on the dissemination of information about new and safer equipment, materials and tools. The council is also involved in the development of equipment and providing information about recommended equipment in collaboration with suppliers, as well as testing equipment at construction sites (see an example for bricklaying in Hasle et al., 2014) and also working in collaboration with an advisory service (known as BAMBUS) organised by the social partners (see Good example 12: Denmark).

### **5.2.1 Bipartite and tripartite institutions**

In addition to participation in formalised corporatist institutions as outlined above, the social partners (employers' federations/associations and unions) also establish institutions themselves. We discuss in greater detail their direct contact with MSEs in section 6.3, whereas here we discuss their role in the national context. The social partners are actively trying to affect and lobby the relevant national policies and negotiate regulation and fiscal agreements in order to ensure the best possible conditions for their members. This also includes OSH settings where the traditional position for the employers' associations is to emphasise limits to regulation or even deregulation of OSH, since it is perceived too burdensome and too restrictive, whereas the unions' position typically would be to require stronger regulation and enforcement. However, in some cases, such as the examples mentioned above, the partners find ways to collaborate beyond these traditional positions.

The importance of the social partners in terms of OSH is to a high degree reflected in the influence and strength of the social partners in the national industrial relations systems and labour markets. This is still highly diversified across European countries and to a large degree still reflects state and labour market traditions in the individual countries (Bohle and Greskovits, 2012; Crouch, 1993, 2012; Hay and Wincott, 2012). The social partners take on more prominent roles in countries with high member density and long-standing traditions and institutionalisation of corporatism and strong social partners, such as Belgium, Denmark, Germany and Sweden. However, the social partners can play a significant role also in cases of relatively low membership rates. This is particularly the case in France where the social partners, both at the general level and the sector level, have a strong influence, despite more limited membership rates. In some countries, such as Italy and the United Kingdom, the influence of social partners is more limited. Finally, the social partners in central and eastern Europe have for historical reasons a relatively low degree of legitimacy and low membership density.

A general finding reported in earlier research (including EU-OSHA, 2016), which was confirmed in task 2, is that social partners in all countries have a lower coverage rate among MSEs than large companies. Therefore, even in countries with a strong impact from the social partners on OSH, it was agreed in the workshops that the social partners tended to neglect the needs and demands of MSEs and rather took the larger companies' needs and demands into consideration when it comes to OSH. The lower integration of MSEs in the labour market systems through lower social partner engagement also leads to a higher occurrence of precarious working conditions among small companies compared with larger firms. The social partners are quite obviously also more attentive to their members, which applies to both employers' associations and unions alike, and they tend to neglect the companies that are not members of an employers' association, do not have employees' representative bodies or do not have employees that are union members. This can have quite large implications, in particular in countries where the social partners have a prominent role, for example in sector-based OSH regulation and support for MSEs for them to comply with the OSH regulation, as in Belgium Denmark and Sweden as well as in Italy, where the employers' association have a strong voice with regard to the regulatory development. Here the unorganised companies tend to fall outside the scope of the campaigns and other initiatives targeted at improving OSH. In some countries, collective agreements can be declared to cover all companies in a sector, through legal extension mechanisms of collective agreements, such as in Belgium. Thereby, MSEs can also be covered, although the extension mechanisms can make some specific exceptions for MSEs.

Furthermore, the scope and scale of national social dialogues have implications for the extent to which intermediaries such as external prevention services or insurance providers are included in targeting and improving OSH in MSEs, for example through sector level social dialogue. It was, for instance, highlighted in the Estonian dialogue workshops that the passive and weak social dialogue at the national level is reducing the influence and impact of intermediaries. However, the sector level social dialogue is very influential in Belgium, Denmark, Germany, France and Sweden and further information and coordinated actions were planned in the sector level social dialogue forums on OSH. The institutionalisation of the social dialogue also has the consequence that the actors from the social partners have developed long-standing relations, which make it easier for them to reach a consensus, since they often meet and discuss OSH, which was also reflected in the national dialogue workshop. In several national settings, the social partners are also involved in the regulation of OSH by advising on new regulation and legislation. The embedding of OSH discussions in the broader industrial relations system can also have drawbacks, for example if OSH discussions reach stalemate as a result of other discussions in the industrial relations system. An example was given from the Swedish manufacturing sector, where disagreements on a collective agreement had hampered the cooperation on OSH between the social partners at sector level for an extended period.

In western and northern Europe, numerous initiatives and programmes aimed at MSEs have been initiated by social partners, who are taking long-term responsibility for these initiatives. The stakeholders often include (or are dominated by) sector or employers' organisations that seem to consider OSH a rather important responsibility for them. The stakeholders are important, as they both provide sector knowledge and contribute to the adaptation of the OSH support to the sector and sometimes even the funding (completely or partly) of the activities. Networks, as well as corporatist institutions, on OSH strategy are more commonly found in the examples from western and especially northern Europe, and these also facilitate the dissemination of OSH information. Such stakeholders are not that common in central and eastern Europe.

### 5.3 Insurance-based institutions

All countries have compulsory systems for the insurance of workers against accidents and occupational diseases, although with very different designs.

**Table 5.1:** Insurance-based systems

Country	Funding for OSH activities	Insurance institutions active as OSH actors	Controlled by social partners
Belgium	Limited	Yes	No
Denmark	Very limited	No	Yes
Germany	Yes	Yes	Yes
Estonia	No	No	No
France	Yes	Yes	Yes
Italy	Yes	Yes	No
Romania	Limited	Very limited	No
Sweden	Yes	No	Yes
United Kingdom	No	No	No

However, there are remarkable differences in the insurance-based systems between the countries, as illustrated in Table 5.1. Three countries (Germany, France and Italy) have strong insurance-based systems. These insurance systems are largely controlled by social partners and the insurance systems fund rather extensive preventive activities and provide tools and support to companies including MSEs. In Germany, the insurance companies (or, rather, 'institutions', which is more accurate here, since they are not companies in a traditional sense) even carry out inspections in parallel to government inspections. In Belgium, insurance companies also play an important role in OSH, as all employers have to contract one to compensate for cost if an OSH accident occurs. While they inform MSEs about OSH legislation and prevention, insurance systems' actions are more general and standardised in the smaller companies than in the larger companies, where the insurance companies provide customised support. Still, they play an important role in the case of companies with aggravated risks (95 % of the 200 per year are MSEs) to which insurance companies offer personal support to set up an action plan in order to sustainably improve their OSH.

In France and Italy, rather extensive preventive activities are funded through the insurance system, and in Denmark and Sweden funds are provided for OSH research. In Denmark, funds for social partner collaboration are also sourced through insurance, although within a very limited economic frame. In Italy, for instance, the insurance body provides economic support for OSH training (Good examples 24 and 25: Italy) and OSH investments (Good example 30: Italy) in a way that favours MSEs. In addition, Belgium and Germany have stable funding for MSEs through insurance companies of relevant outreach activities, especially the supplementary inspections that are a unique feature of these national systems.

#### Example 5.4: Berufsgenossenschaften in Germany — insurance governed by the social partners

Germany has a long tradition of sector-based insurance systems, which are jointly controlled by the social partners (Berlioz, 2016). This is well established and has a long tradition dating back to the 19th century. The Berufsgenossenschaften carry out rather extensive preventive activities both in terms of information and training activities and as a full parallel system to the government-based labour inspection. It also has more inspectors on a stable basis than the government, which, as in many other countries, has seen budget cuts over the last decade. By sharing governance it also provides a basis for continuous collaboration among the social partners and a need to find mutual agreement, otherwise the system would not work. As it is a compulsory insurance system, MSEs are

also affiliated to the Berufsgenossenschaften and thereby receive services in the form of information and inspections.

#### Example 5.5: INAIL in Italy — support for OSH investments

The Italian National Institute for Insurance against Accidents at Work (INAIL) carries out extensive support activities for the prevention of accidents and occupational diseases. The activities include research, information and training. Perhaps the most noteworthy activity is financial support for OSH interventions, which directly targets all sizes of companies, but especially favours MSEs; in fact, 93 % of the enterprises receiving funding in 2014 were MSEs (see also Good example 30: Italy).

Most of the insurance-based OSH systems have developed into a particular financial and organisational form through long historical development, as in the German system, which can be traced back almost 150 years. They are therefore well established and have the possibility of securing stable funding for preventive activities, which seems in other countries to be subject to fluctuating political priorities. However, the OSH insurance systems have in most countries been subject to budget cuts during the last decade.

## 5.4 Discussion of institutional set-up

In each country, there has been a specific historical development of the institutional setting and these have evolved into many different unique forms, but there are also institutional similarities across the partner countries. Some of these similarities derive from the past, as all countries during their development realised that it was necessary to regulate OSH because employers (and workers) were not capable of ensuring that safety and health was at an acceptable level themselves. All countries therefore have OSH legislation and an OSH authority with labour inspectors enforcing the legal requirements. The governmental labour inspectors share some characteristics, but large differences are still evident. Another less-positive development, which is also by and large shared, is the general trend to reduce the resources for OSH enforcement and inspections, which is seriously hampering the outreach to MSEs. We analyse the importance of inspections in section 6.1 below.

Some countries, but not all, have forms of institutionalised collaboration between the state and the social partners. Most common is a tripartite advisory council at the national level; many countries also have various forms of sector-based tripartite and bipartite collaborations. The importance of these varies considerably, with the largest influence in the countries with strong corporatist traditions, such as the Scandinavian countries and Belgium, although Germany and France also have long traditions of insurance-based systems with important collaborative institutions, with the insurance system having ensured stable funding for preventive activities.

The institutional set-up is often based on historical development but is dynamic, with a mixture of institutions and programmes typically co-existing and supplementing each other in an ongoing development in each national context, although this diversity may also result in a lack of a general policy and institutional coherence in the approach to OSH in MSEs. Sometimes temporary programmes have been turned into permanent institutions, and sometimes institutions in other fields have expanded their activities to include OSH, or at least to coordinate their efforts, as has happened with tax authorities in Sweden.

This plethora of institutions and actors also has different outcomes, with many leading to efficient programmes (further analysed in Chapters 6 and 7), although this has also created problems in many countries. The limited resources are sometimes spent on the duplication of the same type of activities, institutions are competing for attention and resources, and they may even end up in disseminating more or less conflicting messages. This problem was especially highlighted in the French and Belgian dialogue workshops, but is also present in several other countries, especially since a lack of overall coordination among OSH actors and institutions was present in almost all settings. This is supplemented

by a general lack of coherent and efficient OSH policies targeting MSEs in all the partner countries. The result may be detrimental for MSEs. They have limited resources, including managerial resources, and owner-managers have difficulties distinguishing between the different actors. Some countries have started coordination processes with a focus on a stronger coordination between the various institutions and stakeholders. At best, the coordination among actors can be developed to a form of orchestration of OSH initiatives and programmes (Hasle et al., 2014) where the different actors take active roles while coordinating their efforts and messages to MSEs (see section 7.6 for a further analysis of this approach).



## 6 The role of direct interaction with MSEs in OSH

MSEs in general have few financial or management resources and it is generally agreed that they rarely have sufficient time, resources or knowledge to prioritise working systematically with OSH in their enterprises (EU-OSHA, 2016). Intermediaries with a direct personal contact with MSEs can therefore have an important role in influencing, controlling and supporting MSEs in relation to OSH, and they have, therefore, been a key part of this research project. The crucial role of intermediaries has been a focus for the discussion of support for MSEs since the turn of the millennium (Haslam et al., 1998; Olsen and Hasle, 2015; Walters, 2001). Intermediaries have, in some of the literature, been defined as actors who are not included in the formalised OSH regulatory system consisting of mainly labour inspectors and in some countries the mandatory OSH advisors. However, studies have indicated that MSEs prefer face-to-face contact with resource persons (Hasle and Limborg, 2006) and that labour inspectors are often the most important sources of information (James et al., 2004). We therefore include all actors who have direct and personal contact with MSEs as intermediaries in the analysis in this chapter.

In all the involved countries, intermediaries play an important role and have an impact, although this also varies greatly across countries, sectors and type of intermediaries. This variation in intermediaries partly reflects the more general labour market settings of the national systems, including industrial relations, skill formation and state intervention in labour markets, as discussed above, and also how OSH as such is regulated at the national level.

All countries have systems with labour inspectors but, in some countries, the labour inspectors provide most of the OSH control and support, for example in Estonia and Romania, while in other countries there are various important complementary actors, including OSH advisors and social partners. As previously discussed, insurance companies also feature prominently in several national OSH settings, may have direct contact with MSEs, carry out inspections and give advice. We discuss each of these intermediaries' roles and also include some less-traditional intermediaries in our analysis, which may also have an important impact in the next section of this chapter.

We discuss each type of intermediary as outlined above and end by discussing patterns and findings across different types of intermediaries. In this chapter, we also give good examples of new or innovative approaches, which may increase the impact of the intermediaries and stakeholders.

### 6.1 Labour inspectors

In all countries studied, the labour inspections were setting benchmarks and providing a frame of reference for other actors' contact with MSEs. As already discussed, all countries have systems for workplace inspection of OSH, which also includes MSEs. Inspectors have different roles in various countries and different names. Some inspectors and inspectorates focus on only OSH, while others have a broader approach to working conditions (minimum salary, working time, etc.) (EU-OSHA, 2011). We use the term 'labour inspector' here as a general term and point out where differences in roles and context have consequences.

The main goal of all the national inspection systems is to enforce compliance with OSH legislation. The intermediaries in all countries emphasised the importance of these inspections with regard to safeguarding good OSH in MSEs, in particular among MSEs that have little incentive to take on OSH improvements on their own (see the discussion in Chapter 4). This includes particular companies trying to survive through a low-road strategy typically by building on price competition, low wages, a precarious workforce and a minimal compliance strategy (EU-OSHA, 2016). The inspections send a signal to MSEs from society about the need to ensure at least minimum OSH standards (Hasle et al., 2012b). While MSEs are often not inspected very often, some may never be inspected; the labour inspectors will always visit when a serious accident or fatality has occurred, which again further endorses the reactive approach of most MSE. The inspectors' visit to a workplace represents, in principle, enforcement backed by a risk of legal action in case of non-compliance. Both the owner-managers interviewed in the earlier SESAME study of MSEs (EU-OSHA, forthcoming) and the intermediaries in the workshops and interviews referred to this enforcement as the most important pillar for ensuring a certain level of attention from MSEs to OSH.



Nevertheless, there are significant variations in the reach, quality and effectiveness of national labour inspectorates, which in some countries are described by the intermediaries as having a business-friendly and 'light regulatory' approach, while the inspections were seen as a far more efficient tool for enforcing compliance with OSH regulation in other countries. Nonetheless, all countries face difficulties in reaching out to a larger proportion of MSEs.

The eastern European countries represented in the SESAME project, namely Estonia and Romania, are part of a region where the OSH infrastructure is less comprehensive and established than is, for instance, the case in the western European countries. This also means that the labour inspectorate is in general the main body, together with the relevant ministry (typically the labour ministry) and OSH institutes, of national inspection systems in the eastern European countries, since there are few other actors, in particular in Estonia. In these countries, the European Social Fund funds some initiatives carried out by the labour inspectorate. For instance, in Estonia the labour inspectorate provides OSH information and support to MSEs without the threat of inspection, since the amount of information is low from other sources (Good example 15: Estonia). This is made possible through economic support from the European Social Fund.

In most countries, the labour inspectorates are constrained by a limited capacity to reach out to MSEs (see Table 6.1 and section 5.1). The reason is a limited budget, with cutbacks in budgets in many countries, combined with the high cost of reaching a large number of MSEs. In many countries, this leads the labour inspectorates to concentrate on larger companies (see, for example, such a development in Sweden, described in section 5.1, where the inspections in MSEs have decreased, although from a high level), since they are, in some cases, benchmarked by the number of workers covered rather than by the number of companies. The length of time between inspections of MSEs can therefore be substantial in many countries and MSEs in some sectors are hardly inspected at all. Therefore, in some countries the chance of MSEs being inspected is very low, which obviously strongly reduces the impact of inspections. In Belgium, for instance, interviewed experts estimate that the best case is once every 20 years, which is likely to exceed the life span of many MSEs. This has been the case particularly since the introduction of risk-based inspections in many countries, which implies that sectors often referred to as low-risk sectors, such as retail and other parts of the service sector, would rarely or never meet an inspector. This combination of fewer resources and weaker information concerning risk, especially in firms that are 'hard to reach', is likely to further reduce the possibility of MSE inspection. At the same time, this approach also ensures more frequent inspections in high-risk sectors, especially in construction, which seems to be a priority sector in all countries and at the same time is characterised by a large proportion of MSEs.

Table 6.1 provides an embryonic overview of the development in labour inspections directed towards MSEs in the countries participating in the study. However, the data provided have to be read with great caution, since it is very difficult to compare inspection activities across national contexts, and there may be significant variation in how national figures are reached. The figures were collected by SESAME researchers, but they had to rely on various types of sources for the data. For some countries, the figures include all interactions (for example in relation to accidents, follow-up, etc.), while for other countries the figures include only inspections. Furthermore, for some countries, these are estimates rather than exact numbers, for instance the number of inspections in France is underestimated, since some local departments did not report the number. Therefore, the figures are not meant to be comparable, but only to provide some indications of the developments in labour inspections in the countries.

Table 6.1: Developments in national labour inspections of MSEs

Country	Estimated probability of MSE inspection	Development over the last 10 years in budget and/or inspections for the labour inspectorate
Belgium <sup>(3)</sup>	Once every 20 years in MSEs (according to expert interview).	Number of inspectors decreased since 2011.
Denmark	Political agreement from 2012 that all MSEs (<102 employees) will be inspected at least once during the period from 2012 to 2019 by the labour inspectorate. Furthermore, half of all companies with 1-1.9 FTE (full-time equivalent) will be visited as part of risk-based inspections. This was, however, a specific agreement, so the likelihood of being inspected is likely to decrease later.	< 10 employees Decreased budget in recent years, but fluctuating budgets before that.
Germany	Labour inspectorates manage their resources with the help of algorithms that take account of the size of the establishment and the sector. The larger an establishment and the more injury prone its activities, the more likely it is to be inspected <sup>(4)</sup> . In 2015, the preventive services of the statutory accident insurance organisations visited 165,107 MSEs (private companies only; BMAS/BAuA, 2016), which is approximately 7 % of the insured companies of the size class.	The number of small establishments (1-19 employees) visited by labour inspectorates has dropped by 50 % since 2005. The number of inspections from preventive services of the statutory accident insurance organisations has also dropped markedly since 2005.
Estonia <sup>(5)</sup>	Since the economic structure of Estonia is almost entirely dominated by MSEs, the majority (c.80 %) of annually inspected enterprises are MSEs. The probability of a micro or small enterprise being inspected is estimated to be roughly once every 5 years for the manufacturing sector and every 10 years for other sectors.	The budget for personnel expenses has been slightly increased every year since 2010. In additional, there is the possibility of using the European Social Fund to increase the capability of the labour inspectorate.
France	Difficult to estimate, but limited (especially when compared with the large number of MSEs).	Stable with an increasing trend, but with large organisational changes and increased workload for the inspectors.
Italy	Very limited (when compared with the number of MSEs).	The number of inspections have been stable within the last 3 years (*).

<sup>3</sup> Data from Algemeen Toezicht Directie Welzijn Op Het Werk (2017).

<sup>4</sup> The labour inspectorates report visits by establishments in three size classes: 1-19; 20-499; 500+ employees. One company may have various establishments. There are regional disparities between the inspectorates of the 16 *Länder*. For example, in Hamburg, almost 50 % of the annual inspections are done in establishments with 1-19 employees. However, in 2015, they covered only 792 of 25,633 establishments of the size class (3 %; BGV, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Data from the Estonian Labour Inspectorate.

Country	Estimated probability of MSE inspection	Development over the last 10 years in budget and/or inspections for the labour inspectorate
Romania	Frequency varies significantly by sector, location and even inspector.	Budget slightly increasing; personnel slightly decreasing.
Sweden	Micro companies (< 10 employees): 20 % of all inspections. Small companies: (10-49 employees): 29 % of all inspections.	Inspections halved since 2007. Number of inspectors decreased, budget fluctuations, but budget increased in recent years.
United Kingdom	Very limited — the overall trend in the United Kingdom is for reduced inspection and stronger emphasis on risk-based prioritisation.	Severe cutbacks in recent decade.

Source: Data from national partners.

\*Data are available from only the last 3 years for Italy.

The inspections provide the basic frame of reference for other actors' and intermediaries' contacts with MSEs in all countries. However, outreach as well as focus varies significantly, as shown in Tables 6.1 and 6.2. Despite the limitations in coverage and focus of OSH inspections among MSEs, there was largely a general agreement among the intermediaries that the inspections serve an important purpose of signalling minimum compliance and thereby ensuring that OSH is something that companies take into consideration to some extent in their operations. In several workshops and interviews, other stakeholders including OSH advisors, employers' associations (often highlighting a level playing field for companies) and unions were pleading for increased inspection activity among MSEs. The inspections were, in particular, highlighted as the most important instrument (and in some cases as the only one) in relation to MSEs that would not otherwise consider their work environment important. This finding corroborates earlier findings reported in the literature (EU-OSHA, 2016; James et al., 2004; Walters, 2001). The inspections also provide a possibility of reaching companies that are not part of the organised labour market such as those not covered by collective agreements or not members of an employers' association, which in some countries constitute the major proportion of MSEs. This is typically more pronounced in the service industries and agriculture than in manufacturing, where collective agreement coverage often is higher. The inspections furthermore create an important platform for other intermediaries to discuss OSH with MSEs. Many social partners reported mainly being contacted by their members once the companies would be or had been inspected, received improvement notices or when an accident occurred and the labour inspectors had become involved. In addition, OSH advisors and other actors involved in improving OSH can gain access to MSEs through inspections. In some countries, MSEs can be instructed to seek help from an OSH advisor (an occupational health service or OSH consultant) by the labour inspectors, and, in general, OSH advisors used the standards set by the labour inspectors as a benchmark for their work with MSEs.

**Table 6.2: Labour inspection approach to MSEs in the nine countries**

Country	Outreach to MSEs	Focus	Sector-specialised inspections/inspectors
Belgium	Limited	Control, sometimes referring to OSH intermediaries or tools (for example OiRA)	Inspectors with expertise in some fields such as Horeca and construction

Country	Outreach to MSEs	Focus	Sector-specialised inspections/inspectors
Denmark	Relatively extensive in high-risk sectors	Control with advisory elements, especially for micro firms	For construction and partly for other sectors
Germany	Limited, regional and sector disparities	Control (labour inspectorates), control and advice (statutory accident insurance)	Sector specialisation
Estonia	Very limited	Control, advise on how to organise work and OSH	There are four sector-specialised inspections/inspectors: (1) construction; (2) production and industry; (3) service and public sector; and (4) transport
France	Limited	Control, advise on how to work with OSH and provide external information sources and partnership with some prevention stakeholders	For public administration and agriculture, civil servants in specific sectors (mines, hydroelectric installations, national defence establishments)
Italy	Essentially limited to cases where there has been a warning (reactive approach)	Enforcement; to a much lesser extent, advisory	For construction, otherwise not
Romania	Varies with sector (for example more in construction), location (large cities) and contracts (for example large state-run contracts in construction)	Mainly control and enforcement; minor elements of consultancy and education	For most hazardous sectors (construction, mining, transport, chemicals, agriculture), otherwise not (for example Horeca)
Sweden	Relatively extensive in high-risk sectors, very low in non-prioritised sectors	Control, some advice on how to work with OSH and external information sources	A continuing transition from the previous sector-organised inspectors to inspectors working with all sectors
United Kingdom	In the past nearly 20 years in the United Kingdom, the regulatory authority has promulgated a highly developed policy and strategic approach to adopting outreach strategies to reach MSEs other than through inspection	The overall trend in the United Kingdom is for reduced inspection and stronger emphasis on risk-based prioritisation	In some sectors, such as the nuclear industry, off shore oil, etc., but other sectors are covered by generalised inspectors

### 6.1.1 Development of new methods for labour inspection

Most national inspectorates have overcome the difficulties in reaching out to MSEs in an efficient manner. One major constraint is the limited resources, but the approach methodology is also a challenge. MSEs may tend to react with suspicion and hostility towards legal authorities (Hasle and Limborg, 2006) and inspectorates have therefore tried to find both the most cost-effective way to reach out to MSEs and new ways of actually carrying out the inspection. Among the collected good examples, we have identified in task 1 a number of approaches to find new ways to make personal contact with MSEs.

There is a widespread trend in seeking to find efficient combinations of control and advice. One example is found in Denmark (Good example 43) where the labour inspectorate has developed specially targeted inspection methods for micro firms with less than five employees. The idea is to put more emphasis on the dialogue on OSH, including both control and advice. The plan is to visit all MSEs with at least two full-time employees during a period of 8 years, which is a very high inspection rate for MSEs compared with other European countries. It is a significant change from the traditional inspection methods in Denmark, which did not include advice. We discuss this issue in section 6.1.2. The initiative is rather new and has not yet been systematically evaluated.

There seems to be growing agreement among many European inspectors and regulators that inspections should aim to be more dialogue-based and consultative (SLIC, 2015). This seems to be appreciated by MSEs, as they get more support on how to work with OSH and solve OSH problems, which was highlighted in several national reports. However, whether or not this has an impact on OSH conditions and OSH management has not yet been evaluated. One of the most extensive examples is from Estonia, where the labour inspectorate provides full consultancy services.

#### Example 6.1: Labour inspectorate offering face-to-face consultancy service in Estonia

The Estonian labour inspectorate has since 2016 offered consultancy services primarily to MSEs. The services consist of a call centre for telephone advice and a number of consultants visiting MSEs and giving advice. The visits are, in principle, based on invitations from the employer, but can also be initiated by traditional OSH inspectors. The firms are only eligible if they have no outstanding issues with the labour inspectorate. This approach is still new and has not been evaluated, but interviews with stakeholders indicated a positive impact on the visited firms, which, among other things, emphasised that the advice is free of charge for MSEs. Among the constraints are resource limitations and the tendency of the firms to confuse traditional inspectors and the consultants and their assignment in relation to MSEs.

(Good example 15: Estonia)

The most relevant success factors for the development of new inspection methods as identified in the good examples and those often discussed in the workshops are:

- All MSEs (or almost all) can be reached by labour inspections if sufficient resources are devoted to this (as the Danish experience in recent years shows).
- Through a more advisory approach, MSEs are expected to get a better understanding of OSH.
- The advisory approach increases dialogue and attention to OSH issues.
- The labour inspectorates' new role in relation to MSEs makes it possible to provide guidance on how to make risk assessments, which is expected to help MSEs to comply with regulations.
- Advisors have the relevant OSH competence, which gives legitimacy among employers. The advice and recommendations are relevant and of good quality.
- The qualitative and reliable advisory service is free of charge for the owner-manager.
- Advisory services on site are practically oriented and easy to make use of. Owner-managers can get advice on how to solve specific problems and receive relevant advice in the field of OSH.
- Workers get involved and are satisfied, as the advisors talk to them during the visit(s).



The impact of labour inspectors giving advice can be discussed. If the effect is that the inspectors are reluctant to make demands on MSEs, the effect may be contrary to what is expected. In addition, if MSEs do not want to or cannot make use of the advice, the effect obviously becomes questionable. However, it is also possible to combine giving advice with requiring improvements.

### **6.1.2 Schisms of inspections: balance between control and support**

In countries and sectors where inspections actually reach MSEs, the intermediaries reported tension between the roles of OSH inspectors, inspecting and regulating compliance with existing legal frameworks on the one hand and taking on a more advisory role on the other hand (as in the good examples from Denmark and Estonia mentioned above (Good examples 15 and 43)). MSEs are trying to figure out how to do things in an acceptable manner (Hasle et al., 2012b) and they therefore typically request easy and applicable solutions to the problems they encounter, but the OSH inspectors are normally not in a position to provide such specific solutions. The MSEs want inspection outcomes to be as tangible as possible. This applies to the identification of violations of legislation, where MSEs want to know what is wrong and what is acceptable, and they also want concrete suggestions for improvements. The last point is a dilemma for most inspection approaches and was reported by many intermediaries as problematic (stating that this also reflects the MSEs' understanding of the problem), since the inspections may therefore, in some incidents, leave MSEs more confused and not knowing how to handle an improvement notice. The principal standpoint of most labour inspectorates, despite the turn towards a better dialogue with MSEs suggested above, is that their core task is to control violations and not to order specific solutions. A large number of inspectors also share this viewpoint.

The question of the enforcement approach of labour inspections was one example of diverging opinions among stakeholders participating in the dialogue workshops. Some intermediaries considered the OSH inspections to be too formal (and some intermediaries even considered them repressive, for example as discussed in a Belgian workshop). The point is that the enforcement approach may unnecessarily distance MSEs, thereby constraining their potential impact. However, other intermediaries stressed the need for strict enforcement in order to ensure the deterrence effect of inspections. In Germany, the role of the labour inspectorates is limited to control and enforcement, while the preventive services of the statutory accident insurance organisations cover both control and advice to member companies. However, figures show that the outreach to MSEs by both of these is relatively limited; interview partners also noted this.

The option of a more advisory-style approach could create problems, including legal ones. Firstly, because the inspectors have thereby approved a solution, which they cannot always be certain will work in practice and MSEs may not have implemented the solution correctly. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, because the inspectors are not authorised advisors with advisors' insurance, they may therefore encounter a liability problem if the suggested solution does not work and MSEs lose money. As MSEs ask for solutions from the inspectors, they may tend to meet the request, but court cases about the liability of this advice have been experienced in some countries, for example in Sweden, as discussed in the dialogue workshop. In several countries, there have been discussions about the balance between the control and the advisory-based approach. The balance has varied over time, but most often the advisory element has been limited to OSH management, risk assessment and other OSH activities, which are not very well fitted to MSEs' wish for tangible advice about how to solve concrete problems. The Estonian case above is an example where the labour inspectors had provided free OSH training for employers from MSEs for a period, and the labour inspectors were also providing 'on-site consulting', which was perceived very positively among the intermediaries; however, in this case, traditional enforcement and advice have been clearly separated.

The inspectors participating in the dialogue workshops and interviews recounted their personal experience with modifying their practice to meet what they consider to be the needs of MSEs. They are, as such, working as what have been called 'street level bureaucrats' by Lipsky (1980). Public employees conducting first-line public services (what Lipsky terms street level bureaucrats) need, as does everybody else, to make sense of their work. They therefore tend to adjust the execution of their authority (in this case inspection) to their own lived experience, even though it may be opposing the official policy. The labour inspectors reported using their experience to fulfil the goals of the inspections in the most efficient way to ensure compliance and thereby improvement of the work environment. They are often

met by suspicion from owner-managers (Hasle and Limborg, 2006) and it therefore becomes important for them to develop a personal style and to create sufficient confidence and trust in order to develop a useful dialogue with owner-managers. They will therefore in many cases try to give owner-managers concrete solutions by, for instance, telling them about good examples in other MSEs (often used by Danish inspectors) or by emphasising that they just transfer information about possible solutions. Another important experience from inspectors is an attempt to meet MSEs 'where they are', as it is often expressed. This can be done by showing respect and interest in the business as a starting point rather than directly focusing on violations of the legislation, which can be taken as a personal criticism, as owner-managers have their identity tied to the company (Hasle et al., 2012b). It is often easier for inspectors to get in a dialogue with MSEs when they have a specialised knowledge of the particular sector and can thereby address the specific needs and conditions of the relevant sector. Another option, as pointed out in the German interviews, is to have inspections tied to a local area, where inspectors use the knowledge of the local neighbourhood to open contact with MSEs.

### 6.1.3 Integrating OSH into other types of inspection

MSEs are hard to reach because of their high number and high turnover, combined with limited resources for OSH inspectors. Other types of inspections and regulatory bodies already meeting or in contact with MSEs have therefore been used in several countries as an alternative way of reaching MSEs. These other inspections often include elements of traditional inspections; food hygiene inspections were typically mentioned in most countries, together with other types of inspections including inspections of chemicals and heavy machinery, and inspections from environmental agencies and fire safety authorities (see Table 6.3). Some of these inspection authorities have also been recognised by MSEs themselves (see EU-OSHA, forthcoming) as having an impact on OSH. Such a possibility is obviously targeted at only the specific industries and sectors where this is relevant. It was suggested by several participants in the workshops that this approach could have a strong potential impact, for example on increasing cooperation across these authorities by exchanging information on poorly performing companies and carrying out joint inspections.

**Table 6.3:** Examples of other types of OSH-relevant inspections reaching MSEs

Country	Type of inspection
Belgium	Organisational audits by insurance companies in MSEs with an aggravated risk
Denmark	Pilot project with integrated food, tax and OSH inspection in newly started food companies Fire safety inspections
Germany	Inspections by sector accident insurance companies and bodies
Estonia	Fire safety inspections
France	Fire safety inspections Safety inspections and regulatory controls on machines, vehicles, bridge cranes, etc. by accredited organisations Inspections by the regional health insurance fund (Prevention Services of Regional Insurances (CARSAT))
Italy	Inspections by local authorities, for example food hygiene, environmental protection, chemicals, hoisting systems and heavy machinery Fire safety inspections
Romania	Fire safety inspections



Country	Type of inspection
	Sector-specific (sanitary, veterinary and food safety inspections, consumer protection, construction inspections) and environmental protection
Sweden	Tax authority inspections in selected sectors, for example construction
United Kingdom	Inspections by local authorities (for example food and hygiene authorities) Health-care quality inspection Pharmaceutical control

Source: Data from national partners.

#### ▪ Integrating inspections

The idea of combining OSH inspections with food hygiene inspections for newly started restaurants was one of the identified good examples collected in the frame of task 1. The Danish Veterinary and Food Authorities cooperated with Danish Working Environment Authority (WEA) and tax authorities. The food authorities inspected all newly started companies in the 2 months after their start-up, and the inspectors provided advice on this occasion on both OSH and tax compliance.

Another way of using other authorities' inspections for OSH-related issues has been introduced in Sweden. In the construction sector, there are new demands with regard to the identity cards of people working at construction sites. These demands are intended to prevent economic crime and ensure compliance with tax regulations. The Swedish Work Environment Authority cooperates with tax authorities, assuming that this will also block the companies with the worst OSH conditions and performance from the market, if they have severe tax issues. Another example is the joint inspections in the United Kingdom in the high-risk waste sector where the labour inspectorate and the environmental agency share information about poor performers and carry out joint inspections targeting both OSH and environmental issues.

#### ▪ Inspections by insurance companies

Belgium and Germany have a particular type of inspection, where insurance companies can also carry out inspections (see also section 5.3). Belgian insurance companies have a more active approach in which organisational audits of the companies' OSH management are included. These organisational audits are based on an assessment of whether or not the company has 'aggravated' risks compared with the industry average. If this is the case, the company must pay a fine (EUR 3,500 for MSEs) and, in return, the company receives support for improving OSH from the insurance company. This includes the abovementioned audit by an engineer from the insurance company in which risks are assessed and an action plan is developed for the company.

In Germany, insurance-based inspections carried out by the preventive services of the Berufsgenossenschaften, which can not only issue fines but also give advice to the member companies. Since 2008, Berufsgenossenschaften coordinates its activities with the labour inspectorates of the *Länder* as a part of the Joint German OSH Strategy (GDA).

#### ▪ Inspections by non-OSH bodies

Especially in the United Kingdom, and to a lesser extent also in other countries, local authorities and some sector organisations carry out inspections in relation to, for example, food safety (the former), health-care quality and pharmaceutical inspection (the latter). These inspections do not cover OSH, but they were nevertheless described as a main source of OSH advice by employers and workers in MSEs concerned.

**Example 6.2: Pharmaceutical inspections in the United Kingdom**

An example illustrating inspections by non-OSH bodies is the United Kingdom example (Good example 18) of the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC), which has been mentioned as a source of OSH information and support by small pharmacies. The principal purpose of the GPhC is to protect, promote and maintain the health, safety and well-being of members of the public by upholding standards and public trust in pharmacy. The GPhC provides support and advice to pharmacists and pharmacies in areas such as governance and risk management; staff (including support, training, numbers and recruitment); premises; services; and equipment and facilities. Although the explicit focus is on the safety of the service for its users, there are obvious corollaries with OSH and these inspections provide an important contribution to the control of OSH in small pharmacies.

There are several advantages of these inspections, but there are also weaknesses. One advantage is that other authorities may visit MSEs in their sector more regularly, sometimes once every year or few years, with food safety inspections made more often, depending on the national context. They have face-to-face contact with owner-managers in the sector and often also with at least some employees. Often, the same inspector meets the same owner-manager over a period of several years, and many of them develop good relations. Many studies have pointed towards personal contact as a success factor for improvement of OSH in MSEs (see a review in Hasle and Limborg, 2006).

The regulatory bodies have, inside their restricted fields, the power to stipulate required improvements and, if requirements are not fulfilled, they can close businesses down. They often visit MSEs much more regularly than traditional OSH inspections would be carried out. They therefore have a good, practical knowledge of the sector and often personal knowledge from earlier visits. They are thus in a good position to provide advice and support to the MSEs inspected. This sector knowledge, power and supportive role, in addition to the controlling role of these intermediaries, give them legitimacy in the sector, which is a good platform for having an impact on the MSEs visited. In several interviews with representatives of restaurants in MSEs as part of work package 2, it was mentioned that food safety inspectors had an impact on OSH, although OSH was not their responsibility (EU-OSHA, forthcoming).

There are, however, also severe limitations to this approach. The non-OSH regulatory bodies, including the food safety inspectors, have no obligation to provide OSH support to the visited and inspected MSEs. The lack of assignment implies a limitation to what these bodies can do and achieve. They can mainly deal with OSH when there is a clear connection between their main subject (for example patient safety or food safety) and OSH. There are several OSH aspects that cannot be dealt with because they are too distant from their assignments. Another limitation is that, although the inspectors and advisors usually have a good knowledge about the sector and their specified field (pharmaceutical, food and health care), their OSH knowledge may however be limited and therefore their OSH advice and the support may be limited as well. Another problematic issue can be the confusion of regulatory roles for MSEs, in particular if they have contradicting information. Several intermediaries reported in the workshops and interviews that owner-managers can have difficulties in making distinctions between the different authorities and the demands they make on MSEs.

Learning from the success of this type of non-OSH authority, the following conclusions can be reached:

- Utilising other authorities and inspectors in specific sectors to OSH topics can increase the number of MSEs reached with the same resources, as these authorities are already visiting these MSEs.
- MSEs appreciate not having contact with many different authorities and it is easier for MSEs to handle regulatory demands if they can talk to one inspector rather than many. This also reduces the risk that requirements are perceived as contradictory.

- Typically, non-OSH authorities have a high level of sector knowledge and often knowledge about the individual MSEs, making it easier to understand MSEs they are in touch with and provide good and relevant support.
- A few OSH topics considered especially important for the sector could be selected and assigned to the non-OSH authority to include advice on these in their contact with MSEs.

One of the great challenges in improving OSH in MSEs is to reach out to all MSEs. The existence of an authority with a good coverage in the target group/target sector that is in personal contact with and making visits to MSEs and has a high degree of legitimacy provides a potential platform for outreaching activities regarding OSH. The good examples show that these bodies, such as United Kingdom regulatory bodies in pharmacy and health care, and food safety inspectors, already have an impact on OSH. This impact may however be random as long as there is no clear assignment regarding OSH. The impact will probably also be limited to OSH topics that relate closely to the assignment of the body.

Such strategies or approaches emphasising non-OSH inspection in some settings, such as the United Kingdom, are perhaps less a 'strategy' but are rather just filling the regulatory gap left by the reduced inspectorate 'presence' for MSEs in some sectors in particular, as discussed in Chapter 4. However, if these inspections are to be developed further in order to improve OSH in MSEs, the OSH assignments for other authorities should be defined clearly and basic OSH training for the inspectors regularly visiting MSEs should be provided. With clear assignments and good OSH knowledge, the impact on OSH conditions and OSH management from this strategy can increase substantially. While it cannot replace traditional OSH inspections, it could be a relevant supplement, in particular in MSEs, because of the resource restrictions. There may however be some difficulties that need to be overcome in order to clarify the assignments regarding OSH. If an authority is expanding its responsibility to include OSH, it is important to align the responsibilities with the national work environment authority, as it is not possible to assign two different authorities the same responsibility. In addition, assigning new responsibilities to an organisation usually requires resources to fulfil the requirements, as assigning OSH tasks to an authority would require either more resources or a reallocation of working hours from the original assignment to OSH, and experience shows that sharing responsibilities across organisational silos can be very difficult. A possible compromise is to select a few OSH topics considered especially important for the sector and assign the authority to include advice on those topics in their contact with the workplaces.

## 6.2 OSH advisors

Most countries also have some kind of OSH advisory systems, although the outreach to MSEs and the quality of the services and the requirements to use the advisory system varies significantly across countries, from compulsory use of (external) OSH advice in Belgium and France to purely voluntary market-based systems for OSH consultants in, for instance, the United Kingdom. OSH advisors are, in several countries, the most important intermediaries with direct personal contact with MSEs, but there are also countries where they play a less important role in relation to MSEs, mainly in the countries with voluntary take-up, where MSEs often do not prioritise the use of OSH advisory services. We have collected experiences from all nine partner countries where various OSH advisors were included in task 2 as participants in the dialogue workshops and as interviewees. In this section, we analyse the external service providers, whereas the direct advice from employers' associations and unions will be analysed in the section 6.3, which explicitly considers the role of the social partners.

It is required in the EU OSH Framework Directive from 1989 that employers must ensure that either they have the necessary OSH competence in-house or they acquire it from outside. However, in spite of this common requirement, there are wide differences in the national requirements for OSH advisors. Some countries have extensive compulsory systems often based on medical services, which have been developed during a long historical period and others have very limited requirements (see Table 6.4).

Table 6.4: Overview of advisor roles in the nine EU countries

Country	OSH advisors	Reach among MSEs <sup>(6)</sup>
Belgium	Obligatory for all companies	High
Denmark	Not mandatory; can be demanded by labour inspectors if there are issues, but rarely used Special advisory system for construction	Low
Germany	Obligatory, but employers can take OSH training and do the job themselves, private suppliers In some sectors, free advice is supported by insurance companies	High (for OSH generalists), medium (for occupational physicians)
Estonia	No legal requirements, but limited advisory service from the labour inspectorate	Low
France	Compulsory occupational health services (health surveillance, workplace risk assessment, etc.)	High
Italy	Voluntary, but companies can avoid other mandatory written documentation if they use an OSH service provider	High
Romania	Compulsory (but only if the company does not have an employee trained in OSH) Medical surveillance service (internal or external) is compulsory and authorised separately (generally, it operates separately from OSH external services)	High
Sweden	Voluntary, but compulsory if the company does not have sufficient OSH knowledge	High
United Kingdom	No legal requirements but requirement for competence in OSH, which may imply use of advisors	Low, but possibly increasing

Source: Data from national partners.

One can make a basic distinction between OSH advisors offering their services on a market basis and OSH advisors offering their services without cost (free or indirectly paid) to MSEs. The free services are typically financed by various organisations offering advice or they are financed in other ways, for example through insurance companies or collective agreements. There is generally good experience with free advisory services for MSEs, since they are quite reluctant to pay for OSH services, and they rarely do so in countries where there is no legal requirement for OSH advisory services, as in Denmark and the United Kingdom. In some countries, such as Estonia and Romania, the labour inspectorates

<sup>6</sup> The different levels of 'reach' are defined as follows: high uptake, more than 50 %; medium uptake, 10-49 %; and low uptake, less 10 %. The figures were estimated by the national research teams.

offer some free services, although to a limited extent. In Denmark, there is a free service within the construction sector based on the collective agreements.

A key distinction is whether the use of advisory services is compulsory or voluntary. Some countries have systems with elements of both. For instance, in Italy its use is voluntary, but if the companies are engaged with an external OSH advisor, the owner-managers can avoid filling in some legal documentation on safety assessment, which increases the uptake of external advisors significantly. In a similar vein, Germany has a system where it is compulsory unless the owner-manager is trained in OSH management. The legal requirement obviously makes a great difference, both for the OSH advisors and for MSEs. Denmark previously had a mandatory system, but, when it was abolished for a voluntary market-based system, most MSEs dropped the service and the OSH advisors reported having difficulties accessing MSEs (Hasle et al., 2016). In other countries without the obligatory use of OSH advisors, MSEs, according to participants in the workshops, rarely use OSH advisors, as they are considered too expensive. In the mandatory systems, MSEs are typically paying only for the minimum services required to ensure that they are still operating in accordance with the law. Even in some countries where the use of OSH advisors is compulsory, there are MSEs that are not covered, as compliance with the requirement is not controlled by the authorities.

Even in countries with a mandatory system, the external advisory services mostly operate on a market. This creates a challenge for providing services to MSEs, as payment is usually based on the number of employees, and MSEs therefore pay only a very small fee. As a result, they get access to only a very limited service. The MSEs are thus not very interested in the external service providers, as the income they get from them is limited. There was therefore criticism of the advisory services offered to MSEs in several national workshops. In some of the systems with a mandatory OSH advisor system, it was questioned whether or not the OSH advisors were paying sufficient attention to the needs of MSEs. Often, they would only set aside few resources and limited time for MSEs. In the Belgian case, for instance, it was stated by several participants that the external services were mostly for medical check-ups or much less, or only gave advice in a very standardised way on more substantial risk assessment or risk control. The qualifications of the OSH advisors in terms of their knowledge of OSH, the sectors they operate in and, in particular, the conditions of MSEs were criticised and raised in several other workshops, for example in Estonia, Italy and Sweden.

Among the most important tasks that many OSH advisors perform for MSEs is conducting the compulsory risk assessments and subsequently preparing the required documentation. In addition, they provide general OSH information for owner-managers and workers. For example, in Romania the OSH advisors play a substantial role in helping MSEs in particular with risk assessment, as the use of external OSH advisors is compulsory if the companies do not have their own OSH-trained employee(s), so the OSH advisors ensure that a minimum degree of attention is devoted to OSH in MSEs. In the United Kingdom it was also found that the OSH service providers can create a 'safe space' where MSEs can ask all their questions relating to OSH without fearing any retaliation or reprimands from regulatory authorities. However, there are no figures on the coverage of OSH advisors in MSEs in the United Kingdom, and it is estimated to be very low.

While external OSH advisory services can most definitely make a difference to safety and health in MSEs, the use of them was often also discussed in connection with a minimal compliance approach. Here the main aim for MSEs is to ensure minimal compliance with existing requirements or, at least, with the requirements they are aware of. As the owner-manager has limited resources, there is a tendency to push the responsibility on to the external service provider, at least if the cost for that service is perceived as affordable or it is a legal requirement. This can also potentially lead to behaviour where the external advisor is not treating MSEs as individual clients with specific needs, but rather reproduces standard documents and recommendations without paying much attention to the specific needs and context of the MSEs. This could be, for example, filling out the written risk assessment in order to meet only the minimum criteria. This was also reported in the SESAME case study research (EU-OSHA, forthcoming). Some companies had an external OSH service provider filling out the written risk assessment only in order to meet the requirements and thus avoid sanctions from the labour inspectors, while not using the risk assessment as a basis for measures to control the risks, and hence, in reality, not complying with the intentions of the regulations.



The focus of the advisory services varies considerably as well. It is dependent on legislation, national institutions and on traditions. The OSH service providers in some countries have a traditional OSH approach of identifying risks, developing solutions, etc., while others are more focused on occupational health physicians providing medical health check-ups and individual advice to employees. The latter is a tradition in several countries including Belgium and France. In Sweden, there are demands for medical check-ups for employees exposed to certain risks, which ensures that this service is also available to MSEs. The German system is a hybrid whereby an OSH generalist and a physician are involved in prevention. The occupational physician also performs medical check-ups for some employees (depending on activities). The workshop participants in several countries reported that these services rarely include real preventive advice on how to control risk at the workplace. There is therefore also criticism of these systems, which are rather costly. In Belgium, for instance, interviews with experts showed that there is a continuing debate on the sense of this practice. The medical check-ups are still quite widespread and a considerable proportion of the resources (budget and time) of external prevention services, in which many of the staff are traditionally medically trained staff and occupational doctors, are devoted to them. Therefore, it is not very easy to change this tradition. Some practitioners conclude that the medical check-ups use too many resources that could otherwise be spent on other services, such as on the prevention of psychosocial risks. In Belgium, this debate is also pertinent because of the mandatory role of the external prevention services; companies have to pay for services such as medical check-ups, which are perhaps not what they need most.

On the other hand, over the years, the requirement for medical check-ups has been gradually adapted and the requirements now differ more between sectors and occupations with specific risks (such as construction or chemical industries) and sectors and occupations with fewer risks (such as office work) for which there is less of a need for medical check-ups.

In Germany, it appeared in the interviews that the cooperation between good practice providers of the public OSH institutions and private prevention services is difficult at times. Some interview partners said that the private prevention services use their own instruments for their services that use publicly available instruments. Others gave the impression that service providers are not always wanted in good practice OSH networks, as they might use them for acquisition or profit from publicly funded action.

In some cases there is also a strong focus on medical services, although they are not required by legislation. That is the case in Sweden where the majority of MSEs have a contract with a private advisory service. This service focuses most often on medically related services such as check-ups, health promotion and rehabilitation, although rehabilitation may include both individual actions as well as workplace-related actions. In other countries, such as Romania, priority is given rather to safety, and the advisory services therefore have a focus on accident risks and less focus on other OSH aspects.

It was agreed by many of the intermediaries in the workshops that the advisory services do not cover new and emerging risks such as those relating to the psychosocial work environment and stress. In some countries, however, there are emerging activities regarding the psychosocial work environment. In Belgium, the external service providers are obliged by law to cover these risks and in Sweden most occupational health services employ behaviourists, although they often work with individuals, and focus on therapy and leadership rather than on the workplace and the organisation of work. In some cases, elements in the form of assistance for the rehabilitation of workers hit by severe stress were included.

### **6.2.1 Non-traditional OSH advisors**

Even if OSH advisors are mainly market based, there are also other types of advisory services, and in some countries there are examples of more non-traditional organised advisory services, most notably in Denmark and the United Kingdom. In the United Kingdom, there are NGOs offering advice to workers in the larger cities, which are described in the example below.



**Example 6.3: Hazards centres in the United Kingdom**

In the United Kingdom, where unionisation is very low among MSEs, an example of a non-state-funded initiative aimed at providing support and information for workers on health and safety issues, outside the traditional unions and organised labour settings, is the network of hazards centres established in different parts of the country, of which those in London and Manchester are probably the largest and longest standing. The Manchester Hazards Centre, for example, is an independent organisation, which gives information and advice on any health, safety and welfare problems at work and hazards arising from workplaces. The service is financed by fundraising and voluntary work, and it is free to all workers, as well as to the families of workers killed at work and to community groups facing hazards in the Greater Manchester area. It also campaigns in the area for better workplace health and safety. It is part of a national network of hazards centres and other health and safety groups that include the Sheffield Occupational Health Advisory Service, the Leeds Occupational Health Advisory Service, the Bradford Workers Health Advice Team and the Keighley Work Safe Project, among others, and are affiliated to the national Hazards Campaign, which campaigns nationally for safer workplaces. Many of the workers who use these advisory services work in MSEs that are somewhat removed from more traditional trade union influence.

In Denmark the employers' associations and unions in construction have established an OSH advisory service for the construction sector called BAMBUS (Good example 12), where companies that are members of employers' associations (or have union members on their staff) can use the OSH advisory service for free. The full-time staff working for BAMBUS offer a rather extensive service.

**Example 6.4: BAMBUS — OSH advisory service based on collective agreements in Denmark**

The employers' associations and the unions in construction agreed, as part of the collective agreement in 2007, to establish a shared OSH advisory service. It is funded by contributions from the companies regulated in the collective agreements. The main focus is tangible advice to companies and construction sites. Each advisory team is therefore equipped with a van, so they can deliver direct advisory services at the actual construction sites. The van is, at the same time, used to bring new and improved OSH solutions (materials, tools and equipment) to construction sites in order to demonstrate their use *in situ* to workers and owner-managers. Most of the resources for the services are directed towards MSEs, and the service is generally very well accepted and appreciated by all stakeholders in the sector. The service is highly adapted to the specific needs of MSEs, and the companies typically contact the service when they have a co

ncrete OSH issue. This could be a problem they have identified themselves, but it could also be in relation to an improvement notice from the labour inspectors.

**An example of interaction between a company and a BAMBUS consultant**

A carpentry company was to set up Fermacell plates in connection with the construction of some housing for young people. These plates had to be cut with a circular saw, causing problems with dust. The company had connected a vacuum cleaner to the saw, but the vacuum cleaner often had to be emptied and cleaned, and did not work when it was nearly full.

The consultant from BAMBUS had an idea for a filter that could be attached in order to catch the dust. The consultant agreed to meet with the person responsible for OSH matters in the company at the construction site concerned.

'Everything was quite unproblematic, because the consultant knows everybody in the company. He just brought it [the filter] to the carpenter, since we had just talked about it in the phone.'

At the construction site, the consultant approached the foreman. The consultant instructed them in using the filter.

'He showed us at the spot how we should assemble it and how it worked. So you could not make any mistakes. He was very good at explaining how it worked. You know, that it would save the vacuum cleaner for a lot of dust and that we did have to change the filter bag then.'

The instruction was very much concerned with the practical use of the filter and not so much with the work environment. Because the solution got rid of the problem at the source, there was no need for other OSH preventive initiatives.

The company borrowed the filter for 1 month. Afterwards, they invested in their own.

Adapted from Team Arbejdsliv (2014).

Another example of providing OSH support to MSEs in the construction industry is the Swedish OSH advisor initiative, where six full-time regional OSH advisors provide OSH support to construction companies with a focus on MSEs, adapted to the conditions in each region. These advisors have very good and concrete knowledge about OSH in construction and can give free advice when meeting construction workers, foremen and owner-managers at construction sites or the offices of the construction companies.

The OSH advisors described above are financed by the sector itself, either jointly through contributions made from the collective agreement via the bipartite work council, as in Denmark, or by the employers' organisation, as in Sweden. Without this financing, the services could not exist. Both in Denmark and in Sweden there are market-based actors offering similar services. However, at least in Sweden, there has been a debate about the lack of knowledge about the construction sector among these other actors and the fact that they have a strong focus on the provision of medical services and a lack of preventive services targeting workplaces in the construction sector. Taking responsibility for the preventive and workplace-oriented advisory services is a way of ensuring that this kind of advice is available to the members of the social partners. In addition, it shows that OSH is prioritised in the sector and that the organisation takes responsibility and supports their members regarding OSH.

### **6.2.2 Learning from experience with OSH advisors**

Research points at personal support as an effective strategy for reaching out to and supporting MSEs in improving OSH (Hasle and Limborg, 2006), and this study confirms these earlier results. We can point out several factors drawn from both workshops and the good examples, which are important for the success of this kind of personal support:

- Advice free of charge is important for the positive attitude and use of the service.
- Personal meetings or contact with the advisor is appreciated by many MSEs, which are as a rule not very keen to use written material about OSH.
- The OSH advisors are active in sectors where OSH is recognised as an important topic and actions to reduce occupational injuries are prioritised.
- The advisors have good knowledge of the sector and are perceived as peers by MSEs, which give them a high degree of legitimacy among MSEs.
- The advisors are able to adapt the information and advice given to the needs and conditions in MSEs.
- The advisors often return to the same companies on a regular basis, which supports the development of trust.
- The advice is often concrete and helps MSEs to solve problems.
- The advisor is usually available and can give advice if a need for advice arises. In this way, the advisors provide good support for reactive OSH management, which is common in MSEs.

## **6.3 The role of employers' organisations and unions as intermediaries**

The social partners play important roles at the institutional level, as outlined in section 5.2, but some of them also take on active roles as intermediaries by providing direct assistance to individual MSEs, as do more non-traditional intermediaries such as professional associations. However, such active interventionist roles are mostly confined to some countries from Scandinavia and western Europe and

are considerably less common in countries with other than corporatist regimes where these interested organisations are, in general, much less developed. Nevertheless, since they may act to the benefit of MSEs, we focus on the roles they can play in improving OSH in these companies.

A main contribution from the social partners as intermediaries with regard to OSH in MSEs is their roles as translators of the legal requirements for MSEs. The social partners can step in and complete this task both from the companies' side (mainly employers' associations) and from the workers' side (unions). However, this assistance is almost always based on membership and, as membership of organised labour and employers' associations in MSEs in most countries is quite low, the reach is generally limited.

Another role for the social partners is to get in touch with their members when there is conflict between the employers and the workers in MSEs. If this is the only occasion for these organisations to get involved, this can make OSH at the enterprise level an area of conflict for the social partners rather than an area of cooperation and progression. It was highlighted, for example in the Danish workshops, that this can be problematic for the social partners as intermediaries, since the effort becomes reactive, and owner-managers and workers mainly associate the social partners' engagement with conflicts.

### **6.3.1 Unions and organised labour**

MSEs and, in particular, small service companies are typically less well integrated into national industrial relations systems, and the workforces in MSEs tend to be less well organised, which in turn often leads to more precarious working conditions in MSEs (Ebbinghaus, 2006; Grimshaw et al., 2016). In general, it can be stated that a lack of worker representation is an obstacle for the efficient support of workers in MSEs. Nonetheless, there are still countries — mainly Denmark and Sweden — in which unions are relatively well represented in MSEs, and unions still play a role in the workplace representation of workers and in the counselling of members in MSEs, including on OSH issues. Nevertheless, we found only a few MSEs in the SESAME case study research (EU-OSHA, forthcoming) that had a formal OSH representative among the workers. In Sweden, the number of OSH representatives is decreasing, although from a high level, especially in the private sector. In some countries, such as France and Italy, the support for members in MSEs is also hampered by competition among unions, which has the consequence that the chance of unions having several members in MSEs is even smaller.

Overall, as an intermediary, the main contributions of the unions (besides workplace representation) are offering counselling to their members, disseminating OSH information and, in several countries, providing OSH training. While the impact of the social partners varies a lot with the national context, this is more pronounced for unions than for employers' associations. However, a general finding is that there is no worker representation in MSEs, except for in Denmark and Sweden, which are atypical when considering the EU as a whole. Danish and Swedish unions have a very active role, while in countries with low union penetration (especially in MSEs), such as Belgium, Estonia and the United Kingdom (where the low union penetration is very pronounced for MSEs), unions play a much more modest role in terms of workplace OSH.

In Denmark and Sweden, the unions have personnel assigned solely to dealing with OSH issues. These union officials also get involved in workplace issues of OSH. It tends to be mainly when conflicts arise at the local level over OSH issues that the union personnel are contacted by their members in MSEs or their representatives. This is often in relation to compensation for accidents or occupational diseases, but can also be about disputes regarding the interpretation of existing regulations. It was also highlighted in the data from several of the partner countries that unions emphasise wages, employment and general working conditions, rather than safety and health issues at the workplace level, which in some instance can result in less-efficient OSH settings, as well as less attention being devoted to OSH, not only by the workers but also by unions. A classic example is the use of piece-rate work, which is still widespread in construction and manufacturing (but also, for example, in call centres in more modern forms), which often has negative consequences for the work environment. However, the piece-rate system rarely seems to be problematised from an OSH perspective by the unions.

Unions are engaged in providing OSH training in several countries, including Denmark, France, Sweden and the United Kingdom. In Denmark and Sweden this training can also include the mandatory training of elected OSH representatives; therefore, the OSH representatives can receive this training from the

unions, typically at the unions' own training centres. However, as there are very few elected OSH representatives in MSEs, for instance in Belgium, since this is only required for firms with more than 50 employees, the consequence is that the outreach to MSEs is limited or does not exist at all in practice.

#### ▪ **Regional safety representatives — a good example of union support for MSEs**

An intermediary that is rooted in organised labour is the network of regional safety representatives (RSRs) in Sweden, which includes safety representatives covering multiple companies within a region and has previously received academic attention (Frick, 2009; Frick and Walters, 1998). There is a somewhat similar system in Italy of territorial workers' representatives (RSLTs) <sup>(7)</sup>; however, according to the interviewed Italian RSLTs and workers, the system does not function in full accordance with its intentions and is less comprehensive and integrated than the Swedish system.

These union representatives (RSRs) cover MSEs that do not have an OSH worker representative at the workplace, but where there are unionised workers. The RSRs are often the unions' main contact with their members in MSEs. This has proved to be sustainable over a long period and it has the highest coverage of OSH support (compared with other intermediaries) among Swedish MSEs, helping to increase OSH awareness by establishing a dialogue with the owner-managers in MSEs, and some owner-managers are even using an RSR as an advisor on OSH. The RSR typically visits these companies every year or every second year, which is a much higher frequency than under most other intermediary systems found in the involved countries.

The key success factors based on the insights from the workshops for the RSRs are, in several regards, similar to those for OSH advisors, described in section 6.2.2. However, there are also differences, as traditional OSH advisors do not represent the workers in the same way as RSRs:

- RSRs' work is based on dialogue, which is an important part of the Swedish industrial relations model, based on strong trade unions and well-organised employers.
- The RSRs' personal visits to the workplaces are essential for this dialogue and the personal contact with RSRs is appreciated by many MSEs that are not very keen to read material on OSH.
- The RSRs often return to the same companies on a regular basis, which supports development of trust.
- The RSRs usually have good knowledge of the sector and are perceived as peers by MSEs, which gives them a high degree of legitimacy among MSEs.
- RSRs have the competence to make judgments and achieve an insider dialogue.
- The RSRs are usually able to adapt the information and advice given to the needs and conditions in MSEs. The advice is free of charge and often concrete and helps MSEs to solve problems.
- RSRs have the knowledge needed not only to identify problems but also to suggest simple and cheap measures to address identified OSH problems.
- The RSR can be contacted and can give advice if a need for advice arises. In this way, the RSR provides good support for reactive OSH management, which is the most common approach in MSEs.

### **6.3.2 Employers' associations**

The employers' associations and similar organisations, such as sector or business organisations in the form of trade associations and chambers of commerce (who do not negotiate collective agreements or otherwise become involved in regulating working conditions, in contrast to employers' associations), are mainly involved indirectly with MSEs. But they are still an important intermediary with support also for individual MSE members, although again with significant variation across the partner countries. The

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<sup>7</sup> There are also similar systems in Norway and in regions of Spain.

membership is generally low among MSEs and it is a major constraint for the outreach of employers' associations.

The employers' association in some cases has a specific section or more often specific staff devoted to OSH matters, which guide MSEs if they have had an improvement notice from labour inspectors or have to deal with cases of compensation for occupational injuries or other relevant queries. Here the employers' associations have an important role in translating and interpreting the demands from improvement notices and the OSH legislation into concrete actions and solutions in MSEs. This is an important task, since it is often difficult for MSEs to fully comprehend what they are required to do. This task in general has a reactive starting point, with MSEs facing a problem, and they then turn to their employers' associations for an answer or solution to the problem encountered. It was rarely reported in the workshops that MSEs turn to the employers' associations with a more proactive request of developing the work environment in general or improving OSH management. This finding supports the literature showing that MSEs are found chiefly to have a reactive approach to OSH in general (Hasle et al., 2012b; Walters, 2001; EU-OSHA, forthcoming) and that they seek applicable and immediate solutions to their problems. The employers' associations, in general, have the role of advising and supporting MSEs (who are members of their association) on OSH issues, in particular the role of 'translating' legislation and formal demands from other actors, mainly labour inspectors. Furthermore, the companies generally have a high level of trust in the employers' associations, since they are organisations working in their own interests, which can also further enhance the role of employers' associations as OSH intermediaries in relation to MSEs.

However, employers' associations in several countries have very few members among MSEs and the outreach for this important role is therefore very limited. There are exceptions in some countries where there are employers' associations with a broader membership among MSEs. This is, for instance, the case of *Confartigianato* in Italy, which organises craftsmen and artisans and has the capacity to offer direct and personal advice to its members. In Germany, the chambers, which are self-governed public bodies with mandatory membership, fulfil legally defined tasks, such as general representation of interest, advice and support for the member companies, and the regulation of training and examination of the workers. Some of the chambers actively cooperate with OSH stakeholders and provide contact to member companies. In some other countries, there are also specific subsector associations with historical traces to the former guilds, which have maintained a stronger membership base and have the capacity to offer more extensive advice to their members. In Belgium, there are separate employers' organisations for small and medium-sized companies, both at the national level and for some specific sectors (such as construction and agriculture). The national employers' organisations for MSEs (up to 50 employees) are even represented separately in the tripartite consultative bodies negotiating on collective agreements. Their main topics of interest, however, are to lower the administrative and regulatory burden for their members and to control wage costs.

As part of their informative function, the employers' associations also facilitate seminars on topics related to OSH; this could be on construction management and OSH or on more concrete topics such as asbestos, nanomaterials or diesel fumes (as in examples from France), in which an expert provides information for the member companies. Some employers' associations also provide OSH training of managers; for example, in France, and in Denmark, some employers' associations also offer the 3-day mandatory training course for the OSH workers' representative. Some employers' associations are also facilitating networks that occasionally include OSH issues in their agenda, although the agenda in general mainly covers topics related to running a business. Some are mainly for MSEs or are in industries dominated by MSEs such as auto repair shops. A United Kingdom trade association had a 'showcasing' approach, where the member companies could visit other, mainly smaller, companies in order to see first hand their good solutions, thereby providing inspiration.

## 6.4 Non-OSH intermediaries

The constraints for reaching out to MSEs in an efficient manner have spurred an interest in involving non-OSH intermediaries as a way to convey OSH support to MSEs. We have discussed the possibility



for inspections for food hygiene, chemicals, heavy machinery, fire safety and environment in section 6.1.3. Non-OSH actors or intermediaries have also received some attention in the literature. Studies have, for instance, investigated the role of accountants (Hasle et al., 2010), agricultural advisors (Olsen and Hasle, 2015) and the management of chemical use by hairdressers and apple growers (Olsen et al., 2010). The role of non-OSH intermediaries was highlighted in several dialogue workshops as a way to reach a higher number of MSEs than in the current settings. We also found empirical examples of unconventional intermediaries engaging in improving OSH in MSEs (for example agricultural advisors in Estonia; Good example 16). However, it was also often highlighted in the dialogue workshops and interviews that potential solutions have not yet been implemented in practice. Therefore, this seems to be an emerging strategy attracting both interest and high expectations. There are some good experiences, but with much work remaining to develop this strategy into an efficient tool for improving OSH in MSEs.

Nonetheless, some interesting examples did materialise in this study. One country where the inclusion of other intermediaries has been given specific attention is the United Kingdom. It is an explicit strategy by the HSE spelled out in the 2009 strategy document *The Health and Safety of Great Britain* (HSE, 2009), which called for a broader perspective with greater involvement of a wide range of public and private sector stakeholders. One element was to develop cooperation with banks, insurance companies and other financial institutions in order to reach out to MSEs. One reason for this strategy is the severe reduction of resources for the HSE, which limits the organisation's ability to reach especially MSEs and subsequently creates a need to find other more cost-effective ways of reaching out to the target group. One initiative has been a joint webinar with the United Kingdom tax authorities aimed at MSEs, where there had been comparative progress in terms of continuing and sustainable collaboration. Otherwise, the progress has been limited. One of the problems is that these types of potential intermediaries have little direct interest in using their own resources on OSH (Cunningham and Sinclair, 2015).

Another United Kingdom example with a stronger impact is the United Kingdom Estates Excellence also initiated by the HSE (Good example 17: United Kingdom). The initiative brings together business owners, commercial property owners, local authorities and expert partners to improve health and safety on their premises, for example within industrial estates, high streets and commercial premises with multiple businesses. The initiative targets specific geographical areas with a higher than average risk identified by either the HSE or the local authorities. It provides a free service in the form of seminars and advice to companies in the particular area. Either HSE experts or local stakeholders trained by HSE provide the service. The outcome for the included sites has, so far, been quite positive but the outreach at the national level is still rather limited and continued funding, which has so far been provided by HSE, seems uncertain.

The idea of using agricultural advisors (Olsen and Hasle, 2015) is also highlighted in our study. Estonia has a national OSH advisory programme in agriculture (Good example 16: Estonia). Agriculture advisors have been trained in OSH (a total of 184 hours lecturing and own work) and subsequently provide OSH support to farmers together with other types of advisory services when visiting companies in the agriculture sector. In interviews with Estonian MSEs in the sector, the advisory OSH service was mentioned as useful and appreciated by MSEs. This is a cost-effective scheme combining a restrained, but high-quality training activity for OSH advisors with low cost for the advisors to include OSH in their daily work as agricultural advisors. This example shows how cooperation with non-OSH intermediaries can be used to disseminate OSH knowledge and support MSEs in improving OSH, in particular if the provision of OSH advice adds a dimension to the non-OSH actors service or business model, as in this case.

Another group of actors that could be given more prominence, where some good experience already exists, is suppliers. These include suppliers of tools and aids for the companies, suppliers of materials (at construction sites, kitchens, etc.), as well as designers, architects, construction managers and others with an impact on OSH. For companies in the SESAME study regarding 'the views from the workplace' (EU-OSHA, forthcoming), there were several examples of suppliers, for example, changing the weight and/or design of materials such as flour bags, detergent containers and bricks pallets. The suppliers also suggested and delivered, for example, less-toxic ingredients. In the Danish dialogue workshop on construction, several suppliers were present and they expressed a clear interest in helping



improve OSH for example by replacing the unsafe equipment such as old, unsafe ladders with newer and safer equipment. A similar case appeared in the manufacturing workshop in Belgium regarding unsafe equipment. Some of the suppliers present in the Danish workshop on construction had also worked with upgrading the OSH knowledge level of their salespersons in relation to their equipment, so they could advise MSEs on how to use the equipment in a safe manner. They perceived this as an extra value that they could add to their service to the craft companies. If the suppliers are able to provide the correct OSH information, it could prove valuable for gaining improvements in the work environment.

Obviously, the suppliers have an interest in increasing their sales, but there are nonetheless some very significant gains to be made if there are overlaps between the interests of the suppliers and OSH improvements. However, all new products and services that suppliers offer do not, per se, improve OSH. There are also many examples of the opposite, illustrating why it cannot be taken for granted that this is a safe and sound strategy without ensuring that the services and products provided truly improve OSH. The suppliers were also engaged in discussions on these issues with the Danish bipartite OSH council on construction, who also saw some clear benefits from the cooperation and realised the risk of suppliers recommending equipment having no additional benefit or even poorer OSH performance. The council have therefore developed a list of recommended equipment, and new equipment could only be added to the list after recommendation by practitioners from the construction sector, which is one way to integrate the suppliers into OSH improvements in a supportable way, ensuring that the equipment recommendations actually lead to improvements in OSH.

The possibilities for a more active role for suppliers can be from the point of view of better integrating OSH in the supply or production chain. In this approach, which is particularly relevant in construction, suppliers are, together with OSH considerations, already involved in the planning phase. Certification of suppliers in, for instance, manufacturing in Belgium, is also a possibility. We will return to these issues related to the supply chain in section 7.5.

As the policy statement from the United Kingdom illustrates, it is quite a novel approach to launch a comprehensive strategy in this field. There are, however, both strengths and limitations to such a strategy. The non-OSH intermediaries usually have no assignment or specified resources to provide OSH support to the MSEs they are working with. The lack of assignment implies a limitation to what these intermediaries can do and achieve. They can mainly deal with OSH when there is a connection between their core aims and OSH. The examples above illustrate that this can be the case. However, there are most often several OSH aspects that cannot be dealt with, as the link to the assignments of the intermediaries is not clear and, although the intermediaries usually have good knowledge of the sector they are working in, their OSH knowledge may be limited.

#### ▪ **Learning from non-OSH intermediaries**

The key success factors for non-OSH intermediaries are:

- Making use of an existing network and a stakeholder with high legitimacy in the target group provides a good basis for reaching out to many MSEs.
- MSEs appreciate a 'one-stop-shop'. For MSEs, it is easier to deal with intermediaries if they can talk to one advisor about everything.
- The non-OSH intermediaries have a good knowledge about the sector, which makes the advice more applicable to MSEs.
- As the Estonian example illustrates, OSH training is a good way of enabling the advisors to combine their ordinary work with OSH advice.
- As the advisors visit or are in touch with many companies in the sector, they can also transfer experiences and solutions to problems between companies.
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## **6.5 Discussion of intermediaries**

There is broad consensus in the literature and it also emerges from our data that intermediaries have an important role in relation to OSH in MSEs. They often provide personal face-to-face contact and can

give tangible advice, which is much appreciated by MSEs. However, not all kinds of intermediaries or all national settings are equally effective in this respect.

Inspections play a key role, as they ensure the basic attention to OSH in MSEs. The MSEs are, in some countries, critical of inspections and may believe that requirements are too strict or constitute too much red tape, which may result in a low-profile strategy of staying under the radar of the inspections, but the general impression from this study is that MSEs by and large recognise the role played by labour inspections. Other intermediaries have, in this context, emphasised that the inspections constitute a basic framework and often also a starting point for their work, as the inspections ensure that basic attention is paid to OSH. However, the inspections are hampered by a general lack of, and in some countries clearly decreasing, resources to reach a sufficiently large number of MSEs with inspections to generate an effective impact, and most national inspectorates have experienced budget cuts during the last decade.

An important function of the intermediaries is the interpretation of OSH regulation and legislation for MSEs, thereby helping MSEs decode the demands they receive from authorities. This role was, in some countries, enhanced by scepticism towards regulation and the authorities from MSEs. There is perhaps a tendency that MSEs using the intermediaries for interpretation of regulation and legislation are mainly the MSEs with most resources that are actively seeking help when facing OSH challenges. This includes, for instance, MSEs that are organised in employers' associations and are seeking help from their organisation compared with non-organised MSEs, which may work out their own solutions and are hoping to stay under the radar as discussed in Chapter 4.

It is important that the intermediaries adjust their services and offers to the needs and prerequisites of MSEs. Results from the dialogue workshops and interviews have clearly concluded that MSEs prefer OSH advice and solutions that are personalised and adapted to their specific business. This personalised contact, which also allows the owner-managers to develop a trust-based relationship with the intermediaries, does however not happen very often, since it is time and resource demanding for the intermediaries. The opposite is generally the case. Legislation is not adapted and is too complicated, the advice of the external advisory services is too standardised and too expensive for its practical use, and the social partners and insurance organisations focus on large companies. Furthermore, several participants reported that MSEs often felt that there were not sufficient resources set aside for visiting and/or supporting MSEs.

There are examples of advisors reaching out with personal and tangible advice to MSEs such as the Berufsgenossenschaft (Germany), BAMBUS (Denmark) and RSRs (Sweden), but these are related to very specific national contexts and structures. In most cases, the outreach is limited because of scarce resources and a lack of business interest from MSEs, often based on scarce economic and management resources, which means they prioritise other topics that are more urgent from their perspective. In addition, the qualifications of advisors seem to be an issue. There are, furthermore, differences in the type of OSH advice, which, in some countries, focuses on individual health-related issues with limited relevance for preventive activities in the workplaces, and emerging risks such as stress have hitherto rarely been touched upon by any intermediaries, even though the interest in and activities concerning these risks seem to have increased during recent years. The MSEs also prefer free or low-cost advice or support, since in general they have restricted budgets and often do not have a specific budget set aside for OSH. The social partners play an important role at the programme and institutional levels, but they have more limited direct contact with MSEs; in many countries they have almost no contact, in a few countries they give advice to members on particular problems and in only two countries — Italy for employers' associations and Sweden for unions with RSRs — have we found important examples of broader coverage of outreach activities in relation to MSEs.

Resources are generally a restriction, especially for labour inspectorates, making it very difficult for the traditional OSH inspections to cover all or even a substantial number of MSEs in a coherent manner. Many attempts have therefore been made to combine the regulatory efforts of inspectors with several other types of intermediaries. They cover both the traditional external advisory services and potential intermediaries from non-OSH fields. The examples show interesting experience from this approach, and it can probably be expanded much further, but it is nonetheless not without the risk of other trade-offs; there is obviously a risk that the non-OSH intermediaries have limited or low levels of OSH knowledge

or do not emphasise OSH issues sufficiently to contribute to improving OSH in MSEs. Another risk is creating confusion with regard to the various regulatory agencies among MSEs, which could undermine the impact of OSH inspections. In some institutional settings there are multiple intermediaries interacting with MSEs with weak or no coordination among them, for example in Belgium where MSEs can be visited by inspectors, external service providers and insurance companies. This can obviously be confusing for MSEs, especially when the messages of the intermediaries are contradictory or conflicting, and it is also often reported that owner-managers have difficulties in making distinctions between the various intermediaries. There can also be competing interests between various intermediaries, for example OSH advisors may very well have a different agenda from social partners or authorities, and there may also be social partners competing over the membership of MSEs. This could be due to different unions competing over members in MSEs, or trade associations and employers' associations competing over MSEs as members of their association. In France, for instance, the social partners compete over membership.

A particularly important observation is the fact that we have found no examples that are effective in reaching out to the most vulnerable MSEs, applying a low-road strategy and generally not covered by any kind of intermediaries. However, the RSR schemes do this to some extent, as do other trade-union-based initiatives such as those attempting to organise migrant workers. These low-road companies are typically not covered by the formalised systems and institutions related to legislation or the voluntary private advisory services. Even if there are attempts to limit effects of the grey or black economy with informal and precarious work practices, there are no or few examples of reaching out to the workers in these sectors. The only exceptions, although the outreach is difficult to judge, are the hazards centres in the United Kingdom. They offer free advice to individual workers and do have some contact with the grey labour market of precarious workers. In contrast, in several countries the strategy seems instead to be to try to block out the grey and black sectors in order to avoid undeclared work, which is often associated with poor working and OSH conditions. This results from the requirement for identity cards at construction sites and the use of inspections to look for compliance with not only OSH regulation but also, for instance, tax registration. Sometimes the employers' associations support their members regarding OSH and this support is sometimes complemented by different types of demands aiming to exclude companies that do not fulfil basic requirements, for example to avoid companies working on a black market. Therefore, this may lead to the paradoxical situation that the chief interest of social partners, as interested organisations of employers and workers, or of joint social dialogue bodies, as discussed under Chapter 5, is either focused on the large companies or is focusing on combatting unfair competition by small companies operating on the grey or black markets. These efforts by the alliances of the established employers' organisations and unions may in some instances have a negative impact on the workers of these small companies who work in often extremely bad conditions, with low wages, flexible working times, limited work security and unsafe working environments. These companies, often operating at the edge of legality, may, as a result of these strategies of established social partners and coalitions, be pushed even more towards working under the radar, with more vulnerability of their business and their workers as a result. There may also be a positive effect, whereby, rather than being pushed further down the precarious segment of the labour market, workers and companies may be included in the established labour market, leading to improvements in OSH and general working conditions. Since this segment of small, vulnerable firms is growing as a result of the tendencies of organisations to try to reduce their costs by externalising non-core business activities to companies that operate with low labour costs, it is feared that the vulnerability in these companies in terms of OSH and their workers will increase even further.

## 7 Programmes and methods aimed at MSEs

MSEs are a heterogeneous group consisting of enterprises with very different conditions and values. The arrangements, policies, strategies and tools aimed at supporting MSEs in improving OSH need to reflect these differences. This chapter discusses the variation in programmes, methods and strategies identified during the study aimed at improving OSH in MSEs in different target groups. The chapter also discusses whether or not these are effective in reaching out to MSEs and improving their OSH conditions, as well as their OSH management. We build on the previous analysis of institutions and intermediaries, and focus here on the specific programmes aimed at MSEs. There are, of course, overlaps, and several programmes have already been touched upon in the previous chapters. This chapter mainly analyses the good examples collected during the research, but it also draws on material from the national dialogue workshops and from the interviews carried out in the frame of task 2.

The good examples selected are intended to be neither an exhaustive list of all good examples nor the best examples. The examples mainly originate from the nine partner countries and the descriptions are based on information available from existing written sources in combination with interviews. They are however all good and interesting examples and provide a good basis for analysing and discussing how to reach out to MSEs and support implementation of improvements in their OSH conditions.

A diversity of examples of programmes, strategies, policies and other measures aimed at improving OSH in MSEs has been strived for in the selection of good examples, and this research has uncovered a very broad range and variety of such examples. Table 7.1 gives an overview of the good examples selected to be described and analysed on their main mechanisms or the programme logic of the examples and the countries from which the good examples originate.

**Table 7.1:** An overview of the good examples according to the main mechanisms.

Main mechanism	BE	DK	EE	FR	DE	IT	RO	SE	UK	PL	IR	NL
Get MSEs aware of and working with OSH			8, 9				10, 11			7		
Strengthening OSH infrastructure through structures for providing OSH support (*)		12	15					13, 14				
Authorities' supervision adapted to MSEs (*)		43, 44										
Non-OSH intermediaries engaging in OSH (*)			16						17, 18, 19			
Provision of tools and methods	33, 35, 38, 40			42	31, 32, 39	41	37	34				36
OSH training			23	28, (6)		24, 25	26, 29	27, (4)				

Main mechanism	BE	DK	EE	FR	DE	IT	RO	SE	UK	PL	IR	NL
Economic support for OSH improvement		(1)				30						
The value chain as a lever for OSH	20							22	21			20
Orchestrated examples		1		2, 6	5			3, 4				

Note: The numbers refer to the good example number. The numbers in brackets are good examples that are also classified under another mechanism.

(\*) These examples are discussed in Chapter 6.

The good examples cover many sectors, and several examples include not only one but several sectors; for example, the tools for risk assessment (the Belgian SOBANE, Irish BeSmart and Swedish checklists) cover up to several hundred subsectors.

The strategies and tools are mainly directed towards target groups with partially similar characteristics. Not surprisingly, most of the target groups have well-known OSH problems related to manual work and many of them are targeted at high-risk sectors such as construction, manufacturing, forestry and agriculture and service sectors such as transport, Horeca and retail trade.

Among the good examples described, it is obvious that there are very few examples from sectors with mainly salaried and clerical employees, for example those working in office settings. There are only a few good examples that can be used by MSEs in office settings to support their work with what is often considered their main OSH issue — the psychosocial work environment.

## 7.1 Get MSEs aware of and working with OSH

Awareness raising was a frequently raised topic during workshops and interviews. Intermediaries and stakeholders generally agreed that MSEs, for obvious reasons, most often have a low awareness of the need to be proactive on OSH (EU-OSHA, forthcoming). Their limited financial and management resources compel especially owner-managers to focus on core business activities. Inspections provide an important point of departure for OSH awareness in MSEs, as already pointed out in the preceding chapter, but the inspectors have difficulties in reaching a reasonably large proportion of MSEs and many MSEs therefore, in reality, may never be inspected. The most common approach to providing information in order to raise awareness is on the internet. This is, for instance, a key element in the United Kingdom labour inspectorate's strategy.

However, MSEs rarely take the initiative in searching for information on OSH (EU-OSHA, 2016; Hasle and Limborg, 2006). Activities that raise awareness, which systematically target MSEs, especially in their start-up phase, are therefore important. We included five such good examples with a focus on getting MSEs to start working with OSH. All these examples originate from eastern Europe (two from Estonia, two from Romania and one from Poland).

The Romanian examples (Good examples 10 and 11) are campaigns inviting MSEs to seminars where OSH information is given and support is offered in order to make it easier for MSEs to comply with legislative requirements. One of the campaigns was directed towards all small and medium-sized companies in Romania, reaching as many as 21,000 participants in 2012. The other Romanian good example concerned the revised EU regulation on the classification and packaging of chemicals and reached over 1,000 companies working with chemicals.



Two of the examples include a type of contest resulting in a diploma or an award. In Good example 7 (Poland), the labour inspectorate offers MSEs support to comply with the regulations and, when complying, a Labour Inspection Diploma is issued. In Good example 8 (Estonia), companies taking part in a contest with a good solution to an OSH problem can be awarded a 'Best Workplace Practice Award'.

The fifth of these good examples (Good example 9: Estonia), called the Health Calendar, focuses on engaging companies in topics that are relevant to and suitable for them, some of which concern the workplace and OSH. Different topics are offered each month relating to workplace health. Companies enrol free of charge to a web-based platform, which provides monthly material and has some possibilities for discussions and feedback from participants.

Often the information needed for implementing solutions to risks is available, for example through online tools or from online information. It was debated in several workshops whether or not the information is sufficient, while it was often emphasised that MSEs do not look up this information themselves, but rather tend to seek advice from various intermediaries, for example advisors. Therefore, the information would need to be delivered more directly to MSEs, as in the good examples discussed above. The high load of available information on OSH can, in some instances, lead to information overload; as stated by a participant in the Belgium workshop: 'employers can find the information everywhere and nowhere'. Other participants described the information available as too long and complicated for MSEs to grasp.

The five examples described have all succeeded in reaching out to MSEs and providing information on how to improve OSH and, at the same time, have succeeded in increasing MSE awareness of and interest in OSH. The extent to which the information has led to actual OSH improvements in MSEs is, however, difficult to evaluate. None of the examples reached all MSEs. The Romanian campaign has, however, reached out to a significant proportion of all SMEs in Romania (about two-thirds last year). Several of the other good examples reach out to and engage several hundreds of MSEs, which is good, but is still only a small proportion of all MSEs in the countries concerned. Furthermore, the companies reached are mainly companies that self enrol and therefore may already have a higher OSH awareness than average. Other examples combining awareness raising with regulatory OSH demands and provision of support are, for example, the Irish BeSmart (Good example 36) and the Swedish checklists (Good example 34), which are recommended by both labour inspectors and RSRs.

Some examples illustrate how information and communications technology (ICT) can be used to provide OSH information in novel ways. The Swedish example on welding (Good example 4) exemplifies this. The information includes short films illustrating how to weld safely, which are well adapted to both the message (which is difficult to describe in words) and the target group (whose work practice has a focus on working technique and equipment). The Swedish web course on OSH in retail trade (Good example 27) includes an interactive test. Other ICT-based examples include web tools such as Online interactive Risk Assessment (OiRA) (Good example 2: France) and the BeSmart example from Ireland (Good example 36: Ireland). These examples are well suited to the target groups, which may seek information on OSH in new ways, typically relying much more on ICT. However, the initiatives are based on voluntary participation and there is a high risk of not reaching out to the MSEs in greatest need of support, for example MSEs with a low-road strategy.

The key success factors in these examples are:

- the legitimacy of the programmes provided by labour inspectorates;
- they are easy to participate in;
- low cost/no cost apart from the working time;
- the support provided is relevant, and it is often possible to get practical, reliable and relevant advice on OSH to improve the conditions at work;
- for some of the good examples, such as the awards, participation also provides positive exposure for the company in media.

There are also limitations to these good examples. The campaigns are built on occasional participation in seminars. Even if support is offered, there is no information on to what extent this support is used.



The Polish Labour Inspector Diploma includes personal support and follow-up, which increases the effect of this good example. Another limitation is the sustainability of the examples. Campaigns are usually conducted during a limited time and then stop. Campaigns may raise awareness and get MSEs started, but need to be followed up in order to support continuous improvements in the long-term operation of MSEs.

For many of the 44 good examples, the dissemination and uptake of the support provided could be increased by including more activities aimed at increasing awareness. The challenge is to reach out to those MSEs that do not know or feel the need to be aware of OSH. In addition, the good examples demonstrate the importance of combining actions to increase awareness with support in dealing with risks.

## 7.2 Provision of OSH tools and methods

Provision of specific tools has been a long-standing strategy for supporting MSEs. The general experience is that many tools, for example those related to OSH management, have been too complicated, which make them difficult to use for MSEs. It is also common that the tools have not been designed for and adapted to MSEs and they lack a dissemination strategy to reach out to and motivate MSEs to use the tool (Hasle and Limborg, 2006). It is, at the same time, also clear that MSEs need some more specific tools if they are to develop their own OSH control. In this study, we have included 13 examples of tools adapted to MSEs. Several of these include more than one specific tool. These tools have been included as, unlike the general experience, they are in fact being used by MSEs. We have classified these tools in Table 7.2 according to the aim and content of the tool.

**Table 7.2** An overview of the different types of tools provided and described as good examples

Provision of OSH tools and methods	BE	FR	GE	IT	RO	SE	IR	NL
OSH management	38		31, 32, 39					(20)
Risk identification and control	33, 35				37	34	36	
The psychosocial work environment	40			41				
Design of workplaces in some sectors		42						

Note: The numbers refer to the good example number. The numbers in brackets are good examples that are classified under another mechanism but also provide a tool.

### ▪ Tools supporting OSH management

Three examples that focus mainly on support to improve OSH management along with development of formal and documented routines have been included and all three are from construction, although one of the examples is also directed towards other high-risk sectors. The three examples reflect both the need to manage and the difficulties in managing the construction processes. Many MSEs, especially micro companies, have difficulties with management systems and these normally do not work in MSEs. Nonetheless, within construction, the dependence between the main contractor and the clients and the need for coordination of the production make such systems more relevant for MSEs (Jensen et al., 2010). However, there is a lack of evaluation of the impact of these management systems on OSH in MSEs.

Two German tools focus on the development of OSH management systems and routines in construction. An occupational safety management system in the construction industry (AMS (Arbeitsschutz mit System) BAU (Safety Management System in Construction); see Good example 31: Germany) has a focus on providing support to construction companies in their development of an OSH management system. Good example 39 (Germany) on networking to support the construction industry in different ways also includes support in the development of an OSH management system. Another good example, the VCA (Veiligheid Gezondheid en Milieu Checklist Aannemers (Safety Health and the Environment Checklist Contractors); see Good example 20: Belgium and the Netherlands), involves a certificate where management routines are very practically described and the certificate includes detailed control safety measures that are applied according to what is required by the certificate (see also section 7.5 on the value chain).

The reoccurring difficulties with formal OSH management are important to consider when designing OSH management systems for MSEs, and there is a need to develop support for OSH management that is better suited to the work practice in different sectors. Based on our findings, it seems evident that the construction industry has a need for OSH management systems more adapted to their work practice. One way to deal with this could be integrating OSH management systems with other management systems adapted to the businesses of the MSEs.

The key success factors for the OSH management systems to work in MSEs are:

- The management systems are simple and practice oriented.
- Routines are very concrete; for example, they describe what good practice should be applied, and when and what kind of personal protective equipment should be used.
- The systems are adapted to the sectors and therefore make sense for MSEs. The systems are preferably integrated with other management systems.
- The implementation of the systems is supported by personal advice, often free of charge for MSEs.
- The implementation of the OSH management systems improves the competitiveness of the company.
- For the certified VCA system, the certification is a requirement to get access to certain markets.
- For the certified management systems, audits are made and contribute to the follow-up of the systems and ensuring that required routines are followed.

A general problem encountered by MSEs with the management systems is the requirement for documentation. Even if there is an ambition to reduce the paperwork, many MSEs and especially micro companies perceive the paperwork as too burdensome. In addition, there are experiences with the VCA system in which some MSEs adapt to the requirements for documentation, but do not implement the documentation into daily practice, which poses demands on external audits in order to identify deviations.

### ▪ **Tools supporting risk identification and control**

The most common and probably most widely used tools support risk identification and risk control tailored for different sectors or subsectors. The most common approach is the use of checklists, with lists of risks and sometimes the most likely control measures as well.

The Belgian SOBANE strategy in combination with the Deparis guide (Good example 33: Belgium) gives advice on how to organise risk assessment and involve workers in the risk assessment. It has proved a good basis for risk identification and control and has been developed to cover about 30 different sectors. The Swedish checklists (Good example 34) have been developed in a similar vein for more than 60 sectors and subsectors. The OiRA tools developed based on a framework provided by EU-OSHA focuses on common risks in sectors and how to assess and control the risks. OiRA tools are available in several countries<sup>(8)</sup> and there is good experience with the OiRA tools from France and Belgium (Good examples 2 and 35, respectively). The Irish BeSmart tool (Good example 36) aims to identify and

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<sup>8</sup> As of 2017, 128 sector-specific OiRA tools have been published (20 are under development) in EU countries and at EU level.

control risks and was developed to cover several hundred subsectors. The Romanian initiative Health and Safety at Work (Good example 37) includes tools aimed at supporting MSEs in risk assessment and control, but has a different approach, since it is divided into different OSH topics rather than sectors, although there is a sector approach for the construction industry.

Many of the other good examples, as well as methods used by inspectors, advisors and other intermediaries, also include some type of tool, and the tools are usually adapted to the conditions in the target sector. However, there are differences between the tools when it comes to the level of detail in controlling the risks. The Swedish checklists are adapted to the existing knowledge and understanding of OSH in MSEs, with the production process as the backbone and detailed questions about topics that the employer and employees can easily recognise. Many other tools are organised according to OSH factor, such as chemicals, noise and accidents.

In several of the examples, there is a focus on how to carry out risk assessments. When the target group is in a certain sector, the risks mentioned are usually the most common risks in the sector and several of these good examples focus on the good practice applied in the sector in order to control the most common risks, for example the OiRA tools, the Belgian SOBANE risk assessment and the Swedish sector checklists. However, some of the good examples focus on the risk assessment process rather than on good practice in controlling risks. In several countries, there seems to be a limitation to what kind of support the work environment authority can provide, resulting in support mainly focusing on the risk assessment process and meaning that the information mainly focuses on how to do a risk assessment and not on giving advice on how to control the specific risks prevalent in the sector.

#### Example 7.1: The impact of promotion and dissemination strategies for risk assessment tools

Four examples illustrate different dissemination approaches for risk assessment tools. All these tools are based on some kind of checklist adapted to the sector, making the content of the tools somewhat similar.

- The Belgian SOBANE strategy (6,000-7,000 participants in half-day seminars annually) is actively promoted by the Ministry of Labour (Good example 33).
- The Irish BeSmart tool (38,000 users since 2011) is disseminated through the labour inspectorate and presented as a tool that helps MSEs comply with legal requirements (Good example 36).
- The Swedish checklists, with more than 140,000 users in 2016 for all checklists, are actively promoted by the labour inspectorate. In addition, the checklists are also promoted by the social partners involved in the development of the checklists and by RSRs (Good example 34).
- MSEs in France were mainly informed by partners representing sector organisations, insurance bodies and public organisations about the OiRA tools for road transport and restaurants through letters, advertisements and social networks. The tools have been used by 12,000 users since January 2014, with the best outreach among MSEs in the road transport sector (Good example 2).

Active promotion by these particular actors — that is, inspectorates and the Belgian Ministry of Labour — gives legitimacy to the tools, and the ability of the tools to provide compliance with OSH regulations is probably essential for the impact of these tools.

As is seen from the description of the tools (EU-OSHA, 2017), there are similarities but also differences between them, for example to what extent they include detailed advice on how to solve OSH problems. Even if the tools are concrete and provide solutions, some of them focus mainly on *how* to work with OSH, for example how to conduct a risk assessment, while others may focus more on *what* to do to improve OSH, for example what control measures to take. From the descriptions of the good examples, it is not possible to evaluate the impact in relation to what kind of support the tools provide.

The key success factors that encourage MSEs to make use of tools contributing to the improvement of OSH are:

- They are recommended by authorities as a way of complying with regulatory demands.

- They support a reactive strategy, which is common among MSEs. When there is some kind of requirement to deal with OSH issues, MSEs can use the tools to do what is required. Although the tools support a reactive strategy, the effect may be prevention of identified and selected risks.
  - They are very simple to use and a lot of reading is not required to understand how to use them.
  - They are adapted to sectors, which make them relevant and easily understandable by MSEs in the sector.
  - The tools can be adapted to the specific needs of the individual MSEs, for example selecting what OSH factors to work with in the Irish BeSmart tools or omitting or adding questions in the Swedish checklists.
  - They are easily available without charge on a website.
  - Even if the tools are used on a website, the information submitted is treated with confidentiality, meaning that MSEs do not run the risk of being inspected on the basis of the information about their OSH that is provided on the website when using the tool.
  - Using tools that provide advice on good practice on how to control risks is much faster and easier than trying to make a risk assessment and decide on control measures without any support.
  - The tools are usually backed up and promoted by the social partners and insurance companies, as well as the labour inspectors, which gives the tools legitimacy among MSEs.
  - They include solutions to the OSH problems encountered, not only to the identification of OSH problems. The best tools provide alternative solutions for MSEs to choose from.
  - There is openness towards the users of the tools, and the tools are continuously updated and revised based on input from stakeholders, as well as MSEs.
- **Tools for the psychosocial work environment**

The psychosocial work environment belongs to the field of emerging risks, particularly in relation to the organisation and management of work but also involves topics such as the economic crisis, globalisation, organisational change and the growing service sector (EU-OSHA, 2014; Jespersen et al., 2016). However, it is rarely a priority in the discussions of OSH in MSEs, and the issue as such was not often mentioned at the workshops and in the interviews. Although the problems mentioned above constitute major challenges, there are also indications that close social relations can be supportive in many MSEs (Sørensen et al., 2007), while, at the same time, close social relations may also hamper the identification and handling of various risks, not least psychosocial risks. In several sectors, in particular agriculture and Horeca, certain risks would be perceived as inherent to the industry (EU-OSHA, forthcoming).

This constrained interest is also reflected in the good examples and only few of the good examples address or even acknowledge psychosocial OSH risks. We have only been able to identify two tools focusing on the psychosocial work environment that can be useful for MSEs. However, some of the other tools, especially the tools on risk identification and control may include selected aspects of psychosocial risks, for example the OiRA tools (Good examples 2 and 35) and the Belgian SOBANE strategy, which includes a module dedicated specifically to psychosocial issues (Good example 33).

The Belgian Knipperlichten (Flashing Light in English) (Good example 40) is based on a two-step procedure, starting with a group consisting of a manager and employees (or representatives) answering 12 questions based on actual data that may indicate a deterioration of the psychosocial climate at work, for instance absenteeism and incidents of undesired behaviour. Depending on the answers, it is decided whether or not it is necessary to continue with a deeper analysis. In addition, the Italian tool (Good example 41) starts with a checklist for a preliminary assessment, continues with a questionnaire for in-depth assessment and ends with the making of an action plan.

The key success factors for these types of tools aimed at the psychosocial work environment are to some extent similar to those mentioned above:

- They provide an easy way for MSEs to make a (relatively rapid) diagnosis of the psychosocial climate.

- The questions are easily recognisable by everyone.
- They can be used by MSEs without any external support.
- They are easily available on a website and can be used free of charge.
- They are based on data that are normally easily accessible in all companies.
- The second step, the questionnaire, adds a qualitative and deeper dimension to the analysis.
- The tools are promoted by different stakeholders. In combination with the scientific evaluation of the tools, this gives the tools legitimacy.

These tools have been scientifically evaluated, and the results show that, if applied as intended, they have a positive effect on the psychosocial work environment. However, the use of the tools is voluntary, and the measure for utilisation has until now been based on downloads from the internet; therefore, there is still little systematic experience from MSEs actually using them. There is therefore not any systematic evidence on their practical application and whether or not, for instance, most of MSEs are able to accomplish the full process. Overall, we can conclude, with few exceptions, that there is a general failure to address psychosocial work environment factors in MSEs and a lack of evaluation of the uptake and use of the tools developed for MSEs.

#### ▪ **Tools supporting design of workplaces**

The French Mavimplant (Good example 42) is an interesting example of a tool that is very different from the other tools analysed. It is a web-based interactive tool, which can be used by owner-managers in bakeries and garages for the redesign of their workplace. Redesign of a workplace is something seldom done, and it also requires good competence in planning for both a safe and healthy workplace and effective production. Involvement of a sustainable partner, that is, a sector organisation with good knowledge about the conditions in the sector, was essential in the development of the tool. The dissemination of the tool is dependent on support from several partners working together in a network on Mavimplant. The plan is to develop Mavimplant for other sectors.

The key success factors are:

- It is easily accessed through the web without any charge.
- It is adapted to the sector, with different tools for bakeries and garages.
- It is enjoyable to use the tool, as it is based on new technology with an attractive feeling for the user (good informatics support, user friendliness of the software, gaming and playful aspect of 3D mock-up).
- It provides an opportunity to make plans and discuss alternative designs. The interactive tool gives feedback and comments on important considerations and risks with different designs.
- It is difficult to reach out to garages and bakeries 'just in time' when they are in the process of initiating redesign of their workplaces. Cooperation with equipment installers and manufacturers is essential in order to provide information about Mavimplant 'just in time' when that information is needed.
- It can be and is used in vocational training, at least in the bakery sector.

The Mavimplant tool is still quite new and it will be further developed and evaluated. A challenge is to reach out to MSEs and make them use the tool when they are planning to design a new workplace.

### **7.3 OSH training for MSEs and their employees**

OSH knowledge is required to be able to identify and control risks, and there are, in some countries, legal requirements for basic training of, for instance, the owner-managers. In Germany, such training can partly release MSEs from using and paying for external advisors. There are normally also requirements for provision of training for elected OSH worker representatives and for members of OSH committees. However, there is always a minimum number of workers required before these rules are applicable (EU-OSHA, 2016). However, even when there is a legal requirement, fewer MSEs comply with these rules than larger companies (EU-OSHA, 2012).



Next to these legal requirements, OSH training is also integrated more or less in many of the programmes already mentioned, for example in the examples of awareness raising. We have, in addition to these examples, identified good examples with a special focus on training, both for companies and integrated in vocational training systems (see Table 7.3).

**Table 7.3: An overview of different types of training provided and described by the good examples. The numbers refer to the number of the good examples.**

Provision of training	EE	FR	IT	RO	SE
OSH training for MSEs	23		24, 25	26	27
OSH training in vocational training		28		29	(4)

#### OSH training for MSEs

In Estonia, a national programme was developed in order to offer training to senior managers and safety managers in SMEs (Good example 23). Representatives of more than 3,000 companies took part in this OSH training. As Estonia is heavily dominated by MSEs, most participants were from this group of companies. In Italy, there is a system of vouchers for OSH training courses for staff in charge of safety in MSEs (Good example 24). A similar approach with subsidies for OSH training courses is used in the Italian construction industry (Good example 25). These training courses are combined with the possibility of getting personal follow-up support at the workplace. In Romania, there is also training for MSEs in the hotels and restaurant and the construction sectors (Good example 26), and these seminars have reached more than 1,200 participants from each sector. Sweden provides free OSH training for the retail trade online (Good example 27).

#### Example 7.2: The Swedish example of web training with a certificate

This is a training course designed to prevent robberies and violence in retail shops. It is designed in collaboration between the social partners and is funded by an insurance company. It is part of a larger programme aimed at the prevention of robberies and violence in shops. It takes 45 minutes to complete the basic part on the internet and an additional 15 minutes for the follow-up. The manager/employee completing the course can print a certificate as proof of the completion of the course. Since 2003, 131,000 people have undertaken the training course and completed the final test to get a certificate. The course has a high degree of legitimacy, as it is developed and promoted by all the stakeholders in the sector. The idea has now spread to hotels and restaurants, where the stakeholders have developed a similar course (Good example 27: Sweden).

#### OSH training in vocational training

Many intermediaries across the partner countries emphasised in the workshops that integrating OSH in the vocational training systems would increase OSH awareness. Training students and apprentices in safe and healthy work organisation and work processes in the vocational system would be highly beneficial from an OSH perspective, especially in MSEs with a low OSH knowledge level.

Three good examples involve vocational training. French Synergy provides an OSH introduction for both schools for vocational training and for newly employed workers (Good example 28). The Romanian Access initiative (Good example 29) has developed OSH training for cleaners. The OSH training was developed in a project and subsequently integrated in vocational training for cleaners, thus becoming a durable strategy to ensure OSH competence among cleaners. In addition, the Swedish website Weld Right (Good example 4) includes support for including OSH in vocational training, and new funding has recently been granted to improve that support further. In Belgium, the social partners have, through their sector collaborative councils, established joint training centres (for example in the wood sector) where



workers can be trained for working in the industry and have their skills upgraded, but these training centres have a broader focus than just OSH.

**Example 7.3: Access — OSH training of cleaning workers**

Most cleaning workers in Romania work in MSEs and have limited or no professional education. The public labour market training authority, an NGO, a labour union and a consultancy firm developed a 3-month comprehensive training course in 2010 for cleaning workers. It was funded by the EU social funds. About one-third of the programme directly targeted OSH issues. 1,300 workers completed the training programme and were, according to the evaluation, very satisfied with the content. The EU funding ran out after 3 years and, even though several different organisers now run the course, it has not been possible to continue with the free training without a source of financial support (Good example 29). However, the course is running now for payment and still includes information about OSH and why OSH training for cleaning workers is sustainable.

The key success factors of the good examples of OSH training projects, regardless of whether directed towards MSEs or vocational training were:

- legitimacy of the stakeholder providing the training, often the labour inspectorate, an insurance body or sector organisations in cooperation with the trade unions;
- availability of the training, for example it was available locally or regionally, or was easily available through the web;
- it was easy to participate;
- low cost/no cost apart from the working time;
- the support provided is relevant and easy to implement; the training often includes applying the OSH knowledge provided at the workplace and this was often followed up in subsequent training sessions;
- the support provided is of good quality and adapted to the needs of the sector and the target groups, meaning it is concrete and useful and can be used to improve the conditions at work including reducing risks.

The training is, in several of the examples, sustainable, for example through integration in vocational training, for example the Romanian Access programme for cleaners or the stakeholders' long-term commitment in their support of the training. For example, the Swedish web-based course 'Safe in the store' was evaluated, updated and complemented several times after being launched in 2003.

## 7.4 Economic support for OSH investments

MSEs have limited financial resources and therefore have difficulties in securing money for investments in OSH. This requires investment in human resources (training) and external advice, as well as direct investment from the firm in forms of equipment, reorganisation of workplaces or other OSH improvements. We have, earlier in this chapter, presented several examples of providing free or subsidised training and advice, whereas direct investments and economic support for OSH improvements in MSEs are sparser. Only in a few cases is the actual implementation of OSH improvements directly financially supported.

In Italy economic incentives have been used by INAIL (the National Institute for Insurance against Accidents at Work), which is a public, compulsory OSH insurance organisation (Good example 30). INAIL has two programmes using economic incentives for improving company-level OSH. Part of the companies' insurance premium is returned to fund preventive action at a workplace level through support for projects aiming at improving health and safety. Furthermore, companies that have implemented OSH improvements may receive a reduction in their annual premium. Although there are significant drawbacks, including the preparatory cost for applying for economic support for the companies, and an element of randomness due to the application procedure, the two Italian programmes are considered positive. The programmes result in concrete improvements in MSEs and, on top of this, they may also increase OSH awareness, in particular among MSEs. The economic incentives from INAIL are directed to a few high-risk sectors, such as transport, agriculture, fisheries

and aquaculture. Since the programmes are redirecting funds paid by companies into OSH improvements, the programmes can be perceived as economic sustainable. This model for financing OSH improvements may be relevant in other institutional contexts, and it has similarities with the Danish OSH consultancy services in construction, which are financed by the companies own contributions and regulated through the collective agreements.

Another example that includes economic incentives is the Danish prevention packages (Good example 1). This example included substantial economic support for the involved MSEs. After a successful application, the companies could get compensation for lost working hours due to the project activities, as well as support for certain other investments. These economic incentives were, in many incidences, vital for MSEs to implement the proposed improvements in OSH, for instance the application of lifting aids in construction and a safe reorganisation of the workshop in auto repair. Evaluations have indicated a positive and sustainable impact of the programme in the participating companies (Kvorning et al., 2015). Despite the success of the Danish prevention packages, they were due to financial constraints being removed from the government budget in 2016. This highlights the economic vulnerability of OSH improvements in MSEs, depending on government funds, which may fluctuate over time and with changes in the political preferences of current governments.

The key success factors that contribute to improve OSH from these subsidies are:

- It is easy to apply for the subsidies.
- The information about the subsidies was communicated to MSEs, either through the insurance company (Italy) or through information from legitimate actors, such as sector organisations or social partners and labour inspectors (Denmark).
- The terms for the subsidies were specified in order to ensure that the subsidies were directed towards investments in the most important OSH improvements.
- The subsidies supported MSEs in a way that was also beneficial for their businesses, including productivity and quality.
- The subsidies are open towards a process of continuous OSH improvements beyond the subsidised OSH investments.
- For sustainable economic incentives, funding based on using a proportion of, for example, insurance fees may be a sustainable solution, since it redirects funds from contributors to OSH improvements, which also potentially increases attention on OSH issues.

The agencies working with both cases gave priority to developing simple application procedures fulfilling a minimum of requirements for justifiable use of the money. However, the Italian case shows that it still was more difficult for micro companies than for larger MSEs to apply, and in the Danish case many MSEs experienced problems with the administration of the application and the financial reporting procedures.

While no qualitative assessment of INAIL exists, the research-based evaluation of the Danish prevention packages shows that economic incentives and support can be an efficient tool in creating lasting improvements and changes in MSEs. While government have to prioritise the sparse resources, which the wealth of initiatives aiming for low or no cost confirms, this also suggest that if government are serious in their attempt to create lasting OSH improvements among MSEs, it is necessary to find sustainable solutions on how to finance the improvements. This can partly (or fully) be done by contributions-based fund such as the Italian insurance companies or the Danish collective agreements. While more funding and economic support in itself cannot solve all the OSH issues faced by MSEs, it can be an important contribution along with other initiatives such as those discussed in this chapter.

## 7.5 Using the value chain as a lever for OSH

MSEs are increasingly getting involved in longer and more complicated value chains, which can make the possibility of controlling OSH even more difficult (James et al., 2015; Lloyd and James, 2008; Quinlan and Bohle, 2008). MSEs often from the weaker part of the value chain and may be forced on a low-road strategy in order to maintain their position in the market or in the value chain (EU-OSHA, 2016; James et al., 2015). Value chains have therefore also been subject to discussion about how to regulate

OSH (James et al., 2015; Walters and James, 2011). At the same time as the value chain can be a general challenge for MSEs, the value chain can also be used as a lever for improvement of not only OSH by also of wages and working conditions, for example by the state or local governments in public procurement (Jaehrling, 2015). The most common use of value chain strategies is found in the construction industry, where we present a number of examples including the construction of the Olympic Park in London. However, it has also been used in other cases, such as certification of suppliers in manufacturing in Belgium and the Netherlands (VCA) and procurement demands in the cleaning sector, which in Sweden is disseminated through a website.

Three examples from construction, one of them also aiming at other high-risk industries, indicate quite different strategies to approach OSH in the value chain. In Belgium and the Netherlands, the VCA system (Good example 20) is a third-party certification system required by most clients in high-risk industry to ensure the safety of subcontracting companies that carry out work on their premises. The VCA system is an example of the contracting companies putting certain OSH demands on their sub-suppliers, which can also be applied in public procurement in construction, as the Olympic Park legacy shows. The targeted companies work on a business to business (B2B) market. Other MSEs in the same sector working on a business to consumer (B2C) market are not required to have this kind of certification, which can help to illustrate how the position in the value chains can have significant impact on how companies are affected by value chain demands. Another example from the United Kingdom (Good example 21) illustrates how the value chain can be used to support MSEs regarding OSH.

#### Example 7.4: The Olympic Park legacy

During the construction of the Olympic Park in London, OSH was given a high priority by the authorities in charge of the construction process. The main authority put OSH high on the agenda early on in the planning of project, which also had an impact on OSH among subcontractors, many of which were MSEs. The requirement for the construction of the Olympic Park included routines and standards for procuring of designs, the appointment of contractors and the building of the new venues and infrastructure work in relation to health, safety and the environment. This further included self-assessment of OSH performance among the contractors, as well as external auditing on the constructing companies and the subcontractors, which led to a good and safe work environment in the construction project. The result was the first construction of an Olympic park without a fatality and a lower than average rate of OSH accidents. In the United Kingdom, interviews with MSEs in the construction sector indicated that there was a perception of improvement over time because of the cascading of OSH standards and requirements through the supply chain as a result the Olympic Park legacy. It also seems that the legacy from the construction of the Olympic Park still has an impact in the United Kingdom construction sector as a result of lessons learned during that construction.

In Sweden (Good example 22), a new initiative focuses on OSH competence and certificates of OSH training. It is integrated with a special system of ID cards, which has been developed for the construction sector. It includes a newly established database, which connects the ID cards with certificates of different OSH training courses. It is thereby possible for procurers to ensure OSH competence among subcontractors and can therefore be an active tool for procurement of subcontractors in construction.

The three examples are all inside B2B in construction or high-risk industry and, in these cases, important success factors include:

- The cooperation between stakeholders, such as the work environment authority, the contractors (at large construction sites), trade unions and sector organisations, gives legitimacy to the certification/scheme.
- The requirements are aligned with regulatory requirements, which is an additional incentive.
- The main building clients and/or the main contractors define the OSH standards, which they adhere to and are subsequently transferred to the smaller subcontractors.
- Clearly defined minimum requirements, in combination with training of all workers and management, give companies the necessary means to fulfil the criteria.

- At construction sites with many subcontractors working in parallel, effective communication and coordination is ensured.
- The implementation of the requirements is audited and the outcome in terms of accidents and deviations is followed up.
- The certification is, in practice, a licence to operate within a specialised market, giving MSEs access to business opportunities, which are restricted to companies with a certificate.

These examples show how B2B clients can affect OSH in MSEs in the construction industry. Similar examples may exist in other high-risk sectors with demands for smaller subcontractors, in particular in niche markets with highly specialised OSH demands as seen in the VCA system. It is most often large companies that are the clients. This can include public clients, who are often engaged in large-scale infrastructure construction projects such as the Olympic Park, where the public procurers or main contractors can use these projects to set an OSH standard at least requiring compliance with OSH regulations, or in some examples a more elaborated OSH effort than required in the legislation, thereby acting as a 'socially responsible customer' (Jaehrling, 2015). Other investors, for example institutional investors such as public or semi-public pension funds, can also enforce OSH demands in the tendering material. This is increasingly seen from the Danish pension funds investing in construction projects. These large public customers and investors can be expected to be more attentive to OSH requirements. It is therefore a strategy that is mainly viable when working in a B2B market with clients concerned about OSH, not only low cost, and we can see a trend that professional building developers are including OSH in their tenders (Jensen et al., 2010).

MSEs working in sectors with high competition and cost pressure are seldom met with OSH demands from their clients, especially small-scale customers including private customers (B2C). For these MSEs, the value chain more often has a negative impact on OSH, which was mentioned in the interviews with MSEs, for example in the transport sector (EU-OSHA, forthcoming). However, in the cleaning workshop with Swedish participants, it was discussed that some MSEs in the cleaning sector manage to get the resources to consider OSH, mainly as they operate in a business niche with clients prepared to pay for good quality, rather than solely focusing on the price. In addition, in Sweden, ready-made procurement demands focusing on OSH has been developed for the cleaning sector.

## 7.6 Orchestration of policies and programmes examples

The data from the workshops, interviews and from many of the good examples show how policies and programmes in many cases include several actors, each with their own input, activities and approaches and with some kind of coordination among the actors. Such explicitly coordinated programmes can be termed orchestration, where each actor plays with their available instrument in order to reach a shared goal. Orchestration can be quite complex and usually involves a combination of the three main drivers: regulation, information and incentives (Hasle et al., 2014; Vedung, 1998; Hasle et al., 2017). Absence of coordination can, on the other hand, lead to less-positive outcomes for otherwise well-designed initiative. Some form of regulation is usually included and the Labour Inspectorate may, for instance, recommend programmes as means to fulfil regulatory requirements. In addition, these orchestrated examples often include systematic information about risks and control possibilities, making it clear that there are several advantages for MSEs and their employees to make use of the programme. In addition, there may be other incentives, such as getting free advice, free access to tools and even subsidies for investments, as in the Danish prevention packages (Good example 1). Several of the coordinated or orchestrated examples also highlight different kinds of business benefits from making use of the support and improving OSH conditions. One example is the Swedish website Weld Right (Good example 4), which highlights the positive impact on both quality and productivity when providing a good work environment, using skilled welders who know how to work safely and making ergonomic adjustments to the workplace.

In addition to the general coordination between actors, we have identified six examples, listed in Table 7.4, that are specifically characterised by orchestration marked by the explicit designs of the examples, where the different actors play different roles, all of them contributing to achieve the end goal.

Table 7.4: Overview of the orchestrated good examples

Good example number	Country	Title	Involved stakeholders
1	Denmark	Prevention packages — economic support to improve OSH for MSEs	The Prevention Fund The Labour Inspectorate The National Research Centre for the Working Environment The social partners from the targeted sectors
2	France	A programme in road transport and restaurants using OIRA (interactive risk assessment tool)	The French Insurance Fund for Employees (CNAMTS), The National Institute for Research and Safety (INRS) and CARSAT, as well as several sector specific organisations in road transport and in restaurants
3	Sweden	Safe Forestry, a combination of activities to improve safety in forestry	The Federation of Swedish Farmers together with four regional associations for forest owners, representatives of the Swedish Work Environment Authority and the Swedish Forest Agency, representatives of businesses buying wood and organisations for vocational training within forestry and land management
4	Sweden	Weld Right (SvetsaRätt) — a web platform for improving OSH and OSH management in welding, providing elements of motivation and incentives, support for OSH training, including OSH in vocational training, good OSH practice and support for OSH management	The social partners for the welding sector, the Swedish Welding Commission, the Swedish Work Environment Authority, welding companies and a research institute
5	Germany	Network activities and instruments in the construction sector — INQA (Initiative for a New Quality of Work) advance good construction/and instruments (Check-Bauen, BauWertInWest)	The network includes more than 150 partners from social partners, professional associations, service providers for prevention, consumer protection associations for building owners, ministries and other relevant institutions.
6	France	A broad programme aiming at improving safety and health in small construction companies	Confederation of Crafts and Small Building Companies (CAPEB), Institute for Research and Innovation in Health and Safety at Work (IRIS-ST), the National Union of Artisans of Public Works and



Good example number	Country	Title	Involved stakeholders
			Landscape (CNATP) of prevention in construction, public building (OPPBTP), equipment manufacturers, insurance of craftsmen and the INRS

The orchestrated good examples build on cooperation — and not least coordination — between several stakeholders with complementary competences and roles. The Prevention packages from Denmark, for instance, combines labour inspection of legal requirements with information about possible support and subsidies making it easier to fulfil the requirements. In addition, the joint OSH sector councils, the employers' associations and the unions have informed their members about the possibility of support and subsidies. The support provided was developed in collaboration between the Labour Inspectorate, the National Research Centre for the Working Environment, the OSH sector council and the social partners. Priority has been given to build on evidence from research and on tailoring to the needs and conditions in the specific sectors (Hasle et al., 2012a; Kvorning et al., 2015). In some national contexts, there is competition among the various stakeholders over input and also over the attention of MSEs, which suggest that a coordinated effort towards MSEs could be helpful. This could reduce the risk of confusion among MSEs and avoid less-efficient or even malfunctioning initiatives or programmes due to conflicting messages and interests.

The Swedish Safe Forestry programme (Good example 3) uses cooperation between OSH advisors and OSH trainers and the work environment authority and there is a new regulatory demand for chainsaw licences. This kind of cooperation seems to be very effective and has resulted in a huge increase in the number of Swedish chainsaw licences after introducing regulatory requirements for training for those working professionally with a chain saw.

All orchestrated examples provide tools adapted to MSEs and intended for use by MSEs. The tools vary, for example from checklists, short films illustrating good work practice and information on different types of control measures (Swedish website Weld Right) to manuals describing how to address a selected set of OSH problems in the sector in combination with personal support (the Danish prevention packages).

Several other good examples also include cooperation and networking among stakeholders, although this also varies a lot across examples, sectors and contexts. In countries with strong social partners and strong sector organisations, the cooperation usually involves sector organisations, employers' organisations and trade unions, depending on the country and the availability and strength of trade unions. Other stakeholders and intermediaries can be involved as well, as, for example, the development of the Swedish Weld Right (Good example 4) website includes involvement of teachers in vocational training together with other stakeholders.

One important advantage of the orchestrated actions is that MSEs are getting the same messages from different stakeholders, which is increasing legitimacy and credibility. Another important factor is that the labour inspectorates are involved in providing the legal requirements, which is important both for MSEs and for the social partners' commitment. It is also important that the support offered is flexible and can easily be adapted to each micro or small enterprise, sometimes providing advice on how to solve a concrete problem and sometimes increasing awareness. The flexibility of the orchestrated examples is essential in order to tailor the support to the needs of the companies. The coordination among various stakeholders can also increase the potential gain from the limited resources by concentrating the effort where it is deemed most relevant and through finding the most effective intermediary for different tasks. However, a coordinated effort also requires balance and cooperation among the involved actors, in which they prove themselves capable of arriving at coherent solutions that all partners can support. This may be highly challenging in some settings, in particular if there are socio-political topics involved where,



for example, the social partners have difficulties in arriving at a joint position, and the result may be the lowest possible common denominator.

Therefore, the orchestrated examples include actions, which can be used to:

- provide some kind of incentive or motivation for MSEs to participate. In the orchestrated examples, motivation often includes a complex mix of regulation, incentives and information (stick, carrot and sermon);
- provide guidance, which can be used by MSEs on how to identify risks and needs and how to go about reducing or eliminating risks;
- provide OSH training to the owner-manager, safety representatives or employees. There are also orchestrated examples providing support for the inclusion of OSH in vocational training for the professions employed in the sector;
- provide support through a network with different actors working together in providing information and supporting MSEs;
- enhance future coordination and cooperation between norm-setting stakeholders with high legitimacy including authorities, the social partners, sector organisations or insurance bodies;
- the same message from all stakeholders involved and without any stakeholders objecting increases the legitimacy of the advice given;
- the complexity of the orchestrated examples provides a multitude of opportunities for support for MSEs and makes it easy to adapt the support provided to the conditions and needs of each MSEs.

## 8 From policy to practice: discussion

The SESAME project has so far confirmed earlier findings showing that MSEs in general are hard to reach with regulation and information, as well as other forms for support for improvement of OSH. It is hard to get owner-managers and workers engaged in proactive improvement of health and safety in these micro and small companies. However, we have in this study found a wide range of examples of diverging strategies, programmes and institutions aimed at this target group of firms. Several different intermediaries are using the opportunities described in these examples to engage, enlighten and support the improvement of safety and health in MSEs. For some of the examples of programmes and intermediaries there is evidence of a positive impact on OSH, and these findings indicate that substantial improvements in MSEs can be achieved through intermediaries and through programmes using a wide variety of methods such as inspections, tools, campaigns, training and the other methods. If the support from intermediaries and these programmes (or good examples, as they have been termed in the research project) is designed to reach out to the target groups, fit their specific needs and prerequisites and motivate and support OSH improvements, there is a great potential for reaching a large part of MSEs. In this chapter, we discuss how to get from the policy level to actual practices in MSEs, and what challenges, dynamics and mechanisms we have found the most important in this research project. In line with our methodological approach described in Chapter 3, our aim was to identify the programme logic in order to answer the question ‘what works for whom, and why?’.

Intermediaries as a broadly defined group play a key role in reaching out to MSEs in several sectors and institutional settings. There is striking variation across the partner countries, as well as across intermediaries, and, furthermore, across the different sectors on how intermediaries engage with MSEs. This highlights how the institutional set-up has a significant impact and determines the possibilities for the intermediaries. Despite the positive examples, there also seems to be a vast unused potential for intermediaries to interact with MSEs, including more non-traditional intermediaries not normally engaged with OSH. The discussions in the dialogue workshops and the interviews showed that the participants had many relevant reflections on how the role of intermediaries could be further developed into more effective support for MSEs.

There are many examples of targeted efforts that have a positive impact on OSH in MSEs, as shown in this report, but there is a need for policy-makers and intermediaries to create more holistic and comprehensive approaches and solutions. We have not identified (as predicted) any stand-alone solution that is able to overcome the identified obstacles in relation to OSH in MSEs. It may very well be more costly and demanding to design more holistic initiatives, but there can be substantial gains and synergies in coordinating different programmes, tools and efforts towards MSEs. This is already the case in several programmes and initiatives working with different intermediaries, as has been shown, for example, with the coordinated or orchestrated initiatives. Nevertheless, future solutions and policies should pay even more attention to the need for comprehensive and holistic solutions when addressing OSH challenges in MSEs. It was, for instance, pointed out at the workshops that the lack of coordination between different intermediaries, as well as confusion between roles, rules, requirements, etc., constitute an important problem for support for MSEs.

### 8.1 The results of reaching out to MSEs

Looking at the evidence of the impact of the policies and programmes, it is striking that many of the good examples reach out to only a limited number of MSEs in the target groups. A significant proportion of MSEs is not aware of the OSH regulation and do not experience a need to care about OSH. Considering the large number of MSEs, outreach to the target group is probably the most important challenge when aiming at the improvement of OSH in MSEs, especially when addressing MSEs working under the regulatory radar. One important aspect is the large cost to reach out to all or almost all MSEs, highlighting the issue of financial support for potential OSH improvements in MSEs. Most examples simply do not have sufficient resources to reach the major part of the targeted MSEs. The specific OSH support provided to MSEs in the good examples is usually subsidised in one way or another. MSEs rarely pay for the tools and methods provided for them because they do not have the resources or have other financial priorities. Some of the good examples go beyond the provision of free support and offer subsidies for OSH investments and support direct OSH investments. These types of investment are effective in terms of making substantial improvements in OSH, as they usually subsidise only selected

investments with an impact on OSH. The subsidies of OSH investments, however, are usually time limited. However, in Italy, a scheme with subsidies for investments funded through the OSH insurance contributions has been running for several years.

This issue is closely related to the capacity and resources devoted at the political level to improving OSH in MSEs. Although there are many improvements to be made within the existing structures, raising the overall level of OSH in European MSEs will also require policy-makers to devote more attention to the area, not only financially, but also politically and regulatory. This is not to say that investing more funds and resources will solve the identified OSH problems, but there is a connection between the amount of funds invested in the good examples and in the intermediaries and the actual OSH outcome in the affected MSEs. One potential way to overcome the financial limitations is making the MSEs themselves contribute, for example through their OSH insurance premium or collective agreements, from where MSEs can get access to free or low-cost support. In countries with a strong insurance system with direct support for MSEs, more companies may be reached this way, although reaching out to MSEs is not the same as MSEs making effective use of the OSH support.

The MSEs and their work environment are highly influenced by socio-economic developments in the surrounding society (see Chapter 4 and EU-OSHA, 2016). Deregulation, fragmentation, increasing precariousness and de-collectivisation of labour markets and work in general have profound impacts on MSEs and on OSH in MSEs. The MSEs may be particularly hit by these developments, for example in terms of fragmentation, because many small firms are engaged to solve tasks for larger corporations that are not carried out by the main company in order to create cost savings (Doellgast and Greer, 2007). The socio-economic context is therefore important to understand, both in terms of barriers and enablers, how the analysis of how good examples and intermediaries can help MSEs with improving OSH. Important aspects in terms of the surrounding society are that MSEs are also positively affected by developments in society and MSE employees (and owner-managers for that sake) are not restricted to working in MSEs throughout their entire working lives. Therefore, there may be spill-over effects from different types of organisations and firms, for example from increased OSH awareness and OSH knowledge in larger corporations, sectors and society at large. An example can be the increased emphasis on working in a safe and healthy manner when teaching the apprentices and students in the vocational training system, which can have a positive impact on OSH in MSEs (see also EU-OSHA, forthcoming).

The approach in the vast majority of examples of policies and programmes is based on MSEs voluntarily participating and making use of the support provided. The voluntary approach is usually combined with references to regulatory requirements and reaches out mainly to those MSEs that are aware of and interested in OSH, but also to those that have become aware of OSH, for example, after an inspection, accident or demand from a safety representative or employee. Many of the voluntary approaches, especially in countries with a strong social dialogue, tend to be directed towards companies organised in employers' associations or with workers organised in labour unions. Sectors that are well organised in sector organisations or employers' organisations are usually more easily reached. As a consequence, non-organised companies and workers are excluded in some instances, as the social partners evidently tend to focus on their members. It also leaves out sectors where the organisational density is low.

The voluntary approach has the advantage that it creates strong engagement of the involved firms. However, the main problem of the voluntary approach is that it mainly reaches MSEs that already have some interest in OSH and, most likely, already have higher than average OSH knowledge and resources for investment in OSH improvements. The initiatives and programmes are, nevertheless, also required in this type of enterprise, which already has an interest in OSH, as most MSEs face the problem of scarce management resources and, for understandable reasons, mainly prioritise the survival of their business. Overall, the conclusion is that the programmes based on voluntary participation are most likely to reach only a fraction of the companies in greatest need of OSH support. Many MSEs are therefore not reached, and, if they are eventually reached, may not feel the need or have the resources to make efficient use of the support offered. This was also noted by some of the interviewees and dialogue workshop participants who consequently asked for strengthened inspection and advice from by governmental organisations (such as the labour inspectorates) in order to better approach non-complying companies and 'avoiders'.

All in all, this points to important questions about MSEs operating out of the reach of the examples and intermediaries analysed in this study. There are programmes and incentives based on inspection and regulation that, in principle, should cover all companies. However, as discussed in section 6.1, many labour inspectorates have experienced substantial budget cuts and strategy changes, so the chance of MSEs being inspected is, in general, very low and has, in many cases, decreased. It is in particular the unorganised MSEs, as well as MSEs operating in the grey zone of the economy, often with workers in precarious job market positions such as part-time workers, young workers, low-paid and migrant workers, which neither have access to support nor face the possibility of being inspected. These companies also operate under the radar of the established industrial relations systems, and it would require new inspections strategies to reach these types of establishments. There are, however, exemptions, for example in the United Kingdom, where workers in the informal sector have access to the NGO-based hazards information centres.

Start-up companies represent both a challenge and an opportunity. These are most often under the radar of the organised institutions and therefore difficult to reach out to, but starting a new business may also provide an opportunity where good OSH practices can be established. In fact, it has been found from research that start-up companies have a better chance of survival if they take care of OSH (Holizki et al., 2006, 2015). There are good examples with this particular target group, such as the Danish coordination between the labour inspectorate and the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration focusing on start-up companies in the restaurants and food businesses (Good example 44).

In summary, much of the efficiency and outcomes of the OSH measures taken are dependent on the resources and capacity, not only of MSEs, but also of the resources and capacity invested in the programmes, tools and actors. Important factors, next to resources and regulatory power, are the legitimacy of the organiser or intermediaries engaged and how well the programme is designed to fit the needs and interests of MSEs.

### **8.1.1 Psychosocial work environment**

When discussing the overall efficiency of securing OSH improvements in MSEs, an important additional topic is the psychosocial work environment. There is an increasing interest in and concern for the psychosocial work environment in European countries, and most countries are developing policies and programmes to control psychosocial risks, although with marked national variation (Eurofound and EU-OSHA, 2014). However, this interest is not reflected in our findings. The ambiguous nature of the psychosocial work environment and the close linkages with work organisation generally makes it difficult to handle for policy-makers and authorities (Jespersen et al., 2016) and for employers' organisations and unions. This may be an explanation for the very few examples of programmes on this issue identified in this study (the two good examples include the Belgian Knipperlichten (Good example 40) and the Italian tool addressing work-related stress (Good example 41)). An explanation could be that the institutional stakeholders, including the employers' associations and the unions, are generally emphasising physical risks rather than psychosocial risks. The fact that in task 2 we emphasised sectors with physical risks at the core of their production may also have affected the absence of psychosocial work environment programmes. The physical risks tend to be more prominent in MSEs than in larger companies, while close social relations, at least in the well-functioning MSEs, may be a positive lever for the psychosocial work environment (Sørensen et al., 2007).

Another aspect may be that the policies and programmes, as well as most initiatives from intermediaries, target sectors with mainly manual work and employees with vocational training. This is problematic, since there is also a large proportion of MSEs in sectors dominated by clerical work, and therefore other OSH problems, but these sectors have not been included in this study. Furthermore, issues such as stress, bullying and other psychosocial OSH issues may be equally important in the sectors that are devoted most attention, for example construction, but the good examples (with the few exceptions highlighted) only deal with physical OSH risks. This is a shortcoming that future initiatives should be more attentive towards.

## 8.2 Mechanisms for improving OSH in MSEs

Following Vedung (1998), we make a distinction between three core mechanisms in the examples of the policies and programmes and the action from the intermediaries; these include regulation, information and incentives (also called 'stick, sermon and carrot' by Vedung), which we discuss in more details below. The three mechanisms are also closely related to the programme theory explained in Chapter 3, since these mechanisms typically form the foundation for the anticipated outcome of the programme. While several programmes draw on a mixture of these mechanisms, many emphasise one specific mechanism to form the programme logic that generates the changes in MSEs.

This report highlights how many voluntary initiatives, despite good results, tend to have a limited reach and uptake due to the voluntarist approach, which does not engage or reach the large proportion of the MSEs that have a more reactive approach. Therefore, while this study has uncovered several examples and intermediaries relying mainly on information and incentives, the regulatory dimension comes out as vital and is often an a priori factor in improving OSH in MSEs. Often the most influential solutions include two or all three policy mechanisms and often relate directly or indirectly to the regulatory demands. Along previous findings in this research project and following the typology of Vickers et al. (2005), a large proportion of MSEs can be described as 'reactors' who chiefly respond to stimuli rather than actively seeking out the information themselves, or fall into a much smaller group, which Vickers and colleagues term 'proactive learners'.

### 8.2.1 Regulation

Several of the identified policies and programmes are based on the active interest and participation of MSEs. While the analysis in this study has shown many positive implications of this approach, the overall scale and reach of these voluntary programmes are limited, since a large proportion of MSEs can be described as avoiders or outsiders (EU-OSHA, 2016; Vickers et al., 2005). They are hard to reach with information, campaigns and incentive-based programmes due to their reactive approach to OSH based on a lack of knowledge and a low-road survival strategy (see EU-OSHA, 2016). The regulatory dimension (what Vedung (1998) terms the stick) therefore becomes very important for reaching MSEs in general and the group of reactive MSEs in particular. The current socio-economic context with increasing integration of markets and fragmentation of production processes also leaves regulation with a more important role, since many MSEs do not have sufficient resources or do not find themselves in a position to prioritise OSH (EU-OSHA, 2016).

The coverage and implications of regulatory initiatives for MSEs varies, depending on the applied approaches. Lack of resources is, as already mentioned, a decisive factor, but the regulatory actors involved, as well as their strategy, also play a role. Including the regulatory authorities in broader initiatives targeting MSEs involving other actors and/or incentives and information can have a positive impact. The Romanian campaigns, for example, where the labour inspectorate (Good example 10) offers seminars and supportive tools to MSEs have been very successful in reaching out to a large number of MSEs. This is probably linked to the fact that MSEs want to learn about the legal requirement they are obliged to follow and, at the same time, they can meet labour inspectors at seminars without risking enforcement actions. Many OSH activities in MSEs have a strong element of striving for compliance with OSH regulation, which illustrates the key role of regulation in relation to OSH in MSEs. The focus in most of the good examples is to support MSEs and make them comply with regulatory demands, such as in the examples initiated by labour inspectorates, where compliance with regulation is the main aim (see the Polish example about the Labour Inspection Diploma (Good example 7) and the Estonian example about Best Workplace Practices Award (Good example 8)).

Many of the other good examples refer to regulatory requirements and have been adjusted to provide support in order for MSEs to comply with regulatory requirements, although not always as explicitly as in the labour inspectorate examples. These examples tend to offer support on a voluntary basis in order to convince the owner-managers that it is advantageous for MSEs to improve OSH. The applied strategy seems to depend more on the particular stakeholder responsible, rather than other factors, such as sector and OSH topic. This illustrates how the regulatory demands serve as a benchmark for many policies and initiatives other than regulation. In the same way, regulatory demands are benchmarking many intermediaries' efforts towards MSEs, for example OSH advisors and employers' association



representatives often help MSEs with meeting the regulatory demands. Cooperation between regulatory authorities and other organisations, making use of the regulatory requirements and pressure from inspections, in combination with provision of support, can thus be an effective approach.

As with the discussion of funding of the various initiatives, policies and programmes, it is important to emphasise that regulation alone cannot solve the entire range of OSH issues in MSEs. In particular, this is not the case in the current regulatory setting, where inspections and regulatory enforcement have a comparatively low outreach among MSEs and there are insufficient funds dedicated to ensuring a comprehensive inspection regime of MSEs in most European countries. In order to safeguard a safe and healthy work environment in MSEs, the three mechanisms should be combined and the regulatory demands should be applied in a manner that ensures the best possible OSH outcome in MSEs. One possibility is to adjust inspection regimes in order to better meet the reality of MSEs and increase the OSH efficiency of the inspection, as in Good example 43.

#### Example 8.1: Good examples from regulation

The Danish labour inspectorate has adapted and adjusted their inspections of micro firms (less than five employees) in order to better meet the specific needs of these companies, but without compromising the intent of the inspections. This means that the labour inspectors are increasingly obliged to provide OSH guidance to micro enterprises, when compared with larger companies, rather than simply inspect them, since it is acknowledged that the micro companies have difficulties in providing solutions to issues pointed out during inspections (Good example 43: Denmark).

Although regulatory demands towards MSEs is an effective way to make them address OSH issues, the research evaluating the Danish prevention packages (Good example 1) pointed out that forcing entry of some MSEs into a Prevention package could reduce motivation and limit the chance for a successful implementation (Kvorning et al., 2015). This result implies that the way the regulatory demands are tailored is essential and will have an impact on the outcome. This result could be interpreted as a need not only for regulatory requirements but also for boosting the owner-managers' internal motivation in order to improve OSH, which is needed, as OSH requires continuous attention. Regulatory demands may be effective in solving limited problems. Continuous improvement of OSH, however, requires commitment and understanding of OSH that goes beyond solutions to limited problems.

### 8.2.2 Information

The second key mechanism that is highlighted from Vedung's (1998) typology is what he calls 'sermon'. In our study, this roughly equates to providing OSH information and campaigns, which is closely related to the examples of awareness raising discussed in section 7.1. One key reason for many MSEs having a reactive approach to OSH is (at least partly) their poor knowledge on OSH and OSH requirements, as the findings from workplace interviews have shown (EU-OSHA, forthcoming). Increasing MSEs' awareness of OSH is therefore an important measure to improve OSH in MSEs.

If they do not have any awareness, MSEs do not put effort into improving OSH. However, having knowledge of how to improve OSH is no guarantee that MSEs will actually do so. Ensuring the dissemination of OSH information to MSEs was, in many workshops, discussed as a crucial factor. Some strategies mentioned in the workshops were to motivate the employer to take an introductory course on OSH or to apply a few limited OSH questions to get started, for example, a simple checklist or talking about order and tidiness. Achieving concrete improvements in OSH was seen as a good way of increasing awareness and getting started in working with OSH.

However, providing MSEs with OSH information should not be seen as an end in itself, but rather as a means to increase awareness, which may subsequently increase motivation for making OSH improvements. Relying solely on providing information is therefore a weak strategy for making long-term OSH improvements in MSEs, in particular in relation to MSEs with a low-road strategy, and it cannot be seen as a stand-alone strategy. Simply providing OSH information on a website will reach few MSEs. It should therefore be combined and complemented with other strategies for reaching out to MSEs and ensuring OSH improvement. One critique of the information-based approach is that MSEs in general



rarely search for OSH information and, if they do, it is typically from a reactive approach in order to solve a concrete problem or relevant issue (EU-OSHA, forthcoming).

Nonetheless, there was a tendency among many actors and intermediaries to perceive the problems of reaching MSEs as mainly a matter of dissemination of the OSH information. Dissemination is, in many settings, perceived as putting information at the internet. As an example, OSH information is often offered through websites, but these are probably visited mainly by the more proactive MSEs, where owner-managers or others (for example OSH representatives) are already aware of and interested in OSH. Even though some websites have many hits, it is far from certain that visiting an OSH homepage results in any tangible OSH improvements. On the other hand, it appears important that OSH information is easy accessible and targets the concrete issues and sectors or relevant work process, and therefore is easy for MSEs to apply, once MSEs are motivated or encouraged to search for it. This is important especially for those MSEs that are to find the information themselves. Here, intermediaries can help with providing the right information and guiding MSEs to the relevant sources of information, in particular in situations where there is a lot of OSH information available. It was suggested in several workshops that the problem was not whether or not the correct information is available, but rather how MSEs can navigate the very large amount of information available and select what suits their needs best. MSEs also favour information delivered by personal contact, for example at the workplace or at meetings targeted the specific group, which may be a fruitful, but resource-demanding approach. As a participant in the Horeca dialogue workshop in Belgium expressed it, 'it is not a sector of written words'.

For inspiration, a New Zealand initiative, the FarmSafe programme, aiming at increasing farmers' awareness of OSH using a series of local meetings and succeeded in reaching out to many farmers (Morgaine et al., 2006; Olsen and Hasle, 2015). The FarmSafe programme was highly appreciated by the participants. However, this programme required a lot of work in order to arrange meetings and reach out. The evaluation of the FarmSafe programme and another awareness-raising initiative (Stave et al., 2008) shows that raising awareness is not sufficient. Awareness needs to be complemented by support that will facilitate the identification of concrete risks, as well as tools to implement the changes needed (Morgaine et al., 2006; Olsen and Hasle, 2015; Stave et al., 2008).

### **8.2.3 Incentives**

The final and third mechanism referred to is what Vedung terms the 'carrot', which creates various incentives for MSEs to engage in OSH improvements. In the data we have collected, there are various forms of incentives used, but they are most often through the provision of free support and less often through direct economic or business incentives, although there are also examples of the latter. These programmes are often referring to explicitly a programme logic based on incentives aiming to raise the owner-managers' own motivation. Besides the few that result in a direct economic gain, some include more indirect business benefits, such as reduction in administrative work or lowering of the risk of being inspected.

In order for the 'carrots' to have an effect on owner-managers in MSEs, the potential gains should be clear and perceived by the owner-managers as rewarding. Economic incentives obviously have great potential, since many MSEs face economic restrictions that makes it difficult for them to invest time and money in OSH improvements. Therefore, programmes or initiatives with economic incentives can be effective 'carrots' when they are designed to improve OSH in MSEs. However, the economic incentives are in general burdened by important questions concerning their long-term economic sustainability, as it is up to policy-makers and intermediaries to make decisions regarding funding-sustained support for such programmes. The economic incentives may be of particular interest in settings where funding can be ensured through contributions from the companies themselves. This could, for instance, be in insurance-based OSH systems, where parts of the premium are returned to the companies through economic support for investments in OSH improvements (as in Italy); this can be in various forms, for example improvements in equipment or changes in work organisation etc.

The administrative incentive of being relieved of various administrative burdens can be promising, but there are also potential drawbacks. For instance, if the implementation or action that led to the exemption from administrative measures in the first place is not controlled or audited, this leaves room for MSEs that are mainly avoiders to steer clear of regulatory control. Some tendencies of firms to behave in this

way were observed in in the workplace study (EU-OSHA, forthcoming) and further discussed in this work package, for instance in relation to MSEs using OSH advisors to avoid doing risk assessments themselves, which would often result in a minimum compliance approach by the companies. It can be a problem particularly if the legal requirements are deregulated, leaving it up to the MSEs themselves to ensure compliance.

### **8.3 Tailoring to the needs and work practice of target groups**

A key finding in this report is that the policies and programmes must be adapted to the specific needs and work practice of MSEs and the owner-managers' understanding of the actual context in which they operate. This is one of the key challenges in reaching out to and supporting MSEs in order to improve OSH (Hasle et al., 2012b; Hasle and Limborg, 2006). Because MSEs form such a heterogeneous group, there are numerous characteristics of MSEs that need to be taken into consideration when tailoring policies, programmes and tools. In this section, tailoring of OSH initiatives with regard to sector, work practices and personalised support is discussed.

One of the main findings in this study has been that OSH support for MSEs tends to predominantly have a reactive character (see EU-OSHA, forthcoming). The MSEs are open towards support when a particular problem is manifests itself; this can be in the form of inspection notices, employee concerns or client inquiries, accidents, or other occurrences that involve attention to OSH. MSEs are, in this case, asking for help, for instance in translating regulatory and legislative demands into concrete and easily applicable on-site solutions. This emphasises how the timing of the support, the role of the intermediaries and other OSH measures, such as inspections, legislation and information must be adapted to the specific needs and demands that MSEs have if the incentives are to reach them.

#### **8.3.1 Adaptation to the sector**

One obvious way to adapt the more generic solutions is to provide sector-specific solutions. The good examples illustrate the need to tailor support and many of the good examples are sector-specific. The discussion in the workshops further supported the conclusion that sectors, and in particular specific subsectors, provide a good basis for provision of OSH support, since there is great variation in OSH conditions and needs when working on such an aggregated level as the manufacturing or food industry. Therefore, adapting a tool or approach to a broad sector is often not sufficient and it typically (obviously depending on the character of the issues at stake) has to be specialised for subsectors or even work tasks (the adaption to concrete work practices is discussed below). The good examples are often tailored to subsectors: for example, bakeries rather than the food industry and welding companies or working at height in construction rather than the manufacturing industry. The important point is that MSEs can easily recognise these issues themselves and that MSEs are given as much specific knowledge as possible.

It is also important to adapt the initiatives to the competencies and resources available; therefore involving OSH experts, as well as regulatory authorities and people with good knowledge about the sector and their processes, can be a very useful method in this respect. Sector experts also have knowledge on business conditions including vulnerabilities, market and competition and impact from clients and the value chain, which makes it possible to develop support of good OSH quality, which at the same time is adapted to the needs and the conditions of the target group, as well as the regulatory requirements. In particular, the guidance on how to remediate OSH problems can be difficult for regulatory authorities to provide, as discussed in section 6.1.2. This kind of support may be easier for other intermediaries or actors to provide.

It is also obvious that there are sector differences regarding how easy it is to increase OSH awareness among MSEs. Sectors that are well organised, for example with strong employers' and sector organisations or have a compulsory membership/affiliation to insurance companies or other sector organisations, are usually easier to get in touch with. Less well-organised sectors, such as private services, may be more difficult to reach. The organisational structure of sectors also varies across countries. This level defines what intermediaries are relevant, since it is also sector dependent.

Most MSEs in the sectors covered by the good examples generally have a poor level of documentation and written routines and, for this target group, concrete advice on good practice, including how to control the most common risks is therefore appreciated. In the workshops, it was highlighted that regulatory bodies or bi- and tripartite councils, in countries where these are active, design much of such sector-based OSH information (see previous sections). These stakeholders and intermediaries typically have a good understanding of the targeted sectors and their work practice. There was a general agreement in many workshops that the sector information developed for MSEs was satisfactory to meet their needs. This led to discussions on new methods of dissemination of OSH information to MSEs and employees in MSEs, for example using new social media and developing new apps better targeted at MSEs, rather than just putting all this information in a website. In addition, pictograms, comic strips and other types of simple information on OSH were discussed as new tools for OSH information, which are particularly suitable for migrant workers that do not speak the native language.

The analysis shows that most of the sectors covered by the good examples are characterised by manual work and usually well-recognised physical risks. This is what could be expected, as the programmes and strategies developed are selected to deal with the most severe OSH risks and target groups with high incidences of work injuries. There are only a few examples reaching out to many other sectors (for example BeSmart in Ireland, Good example 36). However, these tools with a broader reach have also been adapted to subsectors, although the BeSmart adaptation has been made using modules that are combined and adapted to fit every subsector, for example barber shops, computer repair, undertakers, etc. Several new OIRA tools also focus on sectors with less-prominent physical risks, for example educational establishments, offices and shops.

It is noticeable that as many as 24 of the good examples include the construction sector as a target group and in 13 of these construction is the only target group. This can be interpreted as an acknowledgement of the great need to improve OSH in this sector and of how much attention is devoted to this sector compared with other sectors. Construction is known to have a high proportion of MSEs, as well as high rates of OSH injuries, and it is a large sector. These factors, in combination with the difficulties in controlling OSH conditions at temporary workplaces with many subcontractors, are probably the reason for the priority of this sector. It could also be possible that the sector coverage reflects the prioritisation of physical over psychosocial risks, which results in the abundance of good practice approaches for the construction industry, while sectors that are less dominated by physical risks, such as Horeca or retail, remain relatively uncovered.

### **8.3.2 Adaptation to the work practices**

The tacit knowledge of workers or their 'work practices' (to use terms from Gherardi and Nicolini, 2000) in the targeted firms may not be compatible with a dissemination strategy based on bureaucracy, formalities and written texts. A more efficient dissemination method is integrating safety knowledge with 'practice', that is, with working techniques and equipment maintenance. Therefore, besides adapting the OSH initiatives to the sector, they can and should in many cases be further tailored to the specific work practice in the sector or subsector. Through integrating potential solutions and tools with daily work practices, the chances of successful adaptations are increased and also, the chances of improving and altering the daily work practices towards more sustainable OSH solutions. The MSEs targeted usually have a concrete work practice based on manual work, using machines, specific working techniques and solving problems when they arise, which the concrete advice is adapted to.

The most explicit use of adapting an OSH initiative to a specific work process is the Swedish example Safe Forestry (Good example 3), where the skills of safe forestry, which are sometimes very advanced, are developed and taught in a way that is relevant for both workers and employers. In contrast, dissemination of OSH knowledge in sectors with another type of work practice, which includes more development and use of written formal routines, could be done in another way, for example by implementing management systems, detailed routines and more documentation.

This difference in work practices is highlighted in Good example 1, the Danish prevention packages. It was decided that the limited resources should not be used for external OSH advisors. The programme instead relied on written guidelines, which worked for the auto repair sector, which has extensive experience of handling written manuals. The same approach of written manuals was, however,

considered to be difficult for the construction sector, since it did not align with the traditional work practices, and therefore it was decided that MSEs would get complementary personal support from labour inspectors.

The good work practice provided may be concrete technical advice on how to solve OSH problems, but it may also be advice on improving routines such as risk assessment or how to organise OSH management. It could also be integrating risk assessment and safety routines into daily work or integrating OSH into existing routines and systems. An example of an adaptation of the OSH advisor to both sector and work processes is the Danish BAMBUS service (see the description of the example in section 6.2.1). Provision of good practice is, however, not always simple and straightforward. As has already been discussed in section 6.1.2, there may be a schism between the regulatory and advisory approach. In addition, providing very concrete and detailed advice is mainly possible for problems that are common and for which solutions are already known and evaluated. For problems that are more complex, such as psychosocial or organisational OSH issues, that kind of support is much more difficult to provide. This particular approach of adapting to the daily work practices should therefore be supplemented by other initiatives, but in general improving specific work practices, and preferably the most risky and dangerous work processes, can create substantial improvements.

### **8.3.3 Personal and direct support: The role of intermediaries**

Both the previous findings in SESAME (EU-OSHA, forthcoming) and the findings in this part of the research show that MSEs prefer direct and personalised information on OSH. This reflects the demand for easy and applicable solutions to the OSH issues faced by MSEs. The intermediaries work with personal support and many of the good examples rely on an element of personal contact to MSEs. The personal support is often combined with other initiatives, such as tools and information on websites.

The MSEs also value a dialogue-based approach during a personal visit by an external resource person. In such a case, OSH can be discussed and the advisor can tailor the information and suggestions to the specific micro or small enterprise. Raising awareness is seen as part of the aim of personal meetings between advisors, owner-managers and workers in MSEs. The intermediaries that already have contact with specific MSEs tend to have a high degree of legitimacy in the target group. The personalised contact is nonetheless also cost and time consuming, and therefore expensive, if all MSEs are to have personal contact with an intermediary.

As should be clear by now, we state in this report that intermediaries have an important role (although as yet often underdeveloped in many regards) in supporting MSEs with making OSH improvements. This also applies to personal support, where intermediaries play a key role. Personal support is a good way to increase awareness about OSH and initiate OSH improvements, especially in combination with information about regulatory demands and offering support to help MSEs to comply with their demands. This approach has been used in several of the good examples, for example the Estonian agriculture advisors and labour inspectors providing face-to-face consultancy to MSEs (Good examples 15 and 16), the Danish prevention packages and BAMBUS (Good examples 1 and 12), the Swedish OSH advisors appointed by the employers' federation, as well as the RSRs (Good examples 13 and 14) and the Irish BeSmart initiative (Good example 36). In addition, in Germany, the INQA initiatives are typically supported by advisors providing personal advice to MSEs (Good example 5). These examples rely on intermediaries directly informing and guiding MSEs about OSH and OSH requirements. Many of the examples of personal support on OSH for MSEs focus on compliance with regulatory (minimum) requirements and thereby support a reactive approach among MSEs. This study has identified examples relying on cooperation with non-OSH intermediaries who have well-established and sustainable contacts with MSEs in the target groups, and there seem to be good possibilities for the development of such an approach.

In some countries, there are examples of programmes focusing on individual health-related issues, which are of limited relevance for prevention at the workplace level. This mainly concerns regulatory demands for medical check-ups, which are required in several countries, although in some countries individual advice on healthy lifestyles is the focus (for example nutrition, smoking, drinking and stress). While this may be relevant for the individual worker, it is often separated from workplace practices and its impact on health and the need to reduce workplace risks, thereby potentially removing attention from



what may cause health problems towards treating the symptoms and ignoring the causes originating in the workplace. This illustrates a development towards individualisation of OSH, which may not in itself lead to any direct improvements in the work environment in the specific MSEs; in contrast, this may move the responsibility from the employer and the workplace to the individual worker.

## 8.4 The impact of market position and the value chain

MSEs are often in a subordinate economic position compared with larger firms, as discussed in Chapter 4, and the buyer/supplier relation can therefore be subject to power relations (Doellgast and Greer, 2007; Flecker, 2009; Gereffi et al., 2005). This may have negative implications for the less-dominant firms in the value chains in terms of working conditions and OSH, for instance when smaller suppliers are working for large retailers (Lloyd and James, 2008). The value chain can thus have significant implications for OSH in MSEs because of competitive pressures to reduce cost and production time, which often result in fewer resources for OSH in the subcontracting firms (see also EU-OSHA, 2016). The good examples, as well as the discussions in the workshops, indicate B2C relationships as especially troublesome, often putting a competitive pressure on MSEs, for example emphasising prices and not considering OSH, but there are also substantial pressures in B2B settings. In addition, limitations in the decision latitude of MSEs due to restrictions by their clients or buyers may have a negative impact on OSH in MSEs. In these cases, the value chain is perceived to have a negative impact on OSH, as competition reduces the resources available for OSH. Based on findings in the literature mentioned above, we would assume that the more generic and replaceable products and services MSEs are producing in the value chain, the higher the negative impact and pressure on OSH will be. This vulnerability can result in OSH having less prominence in daily management of the companies and fewer resources available to deal with OSH issues. In contrast, MSEs in niche markets or producing for niche markets would often be in a less-vulnerable position in the value chain.

The decision latitude of companies is highly influenced by sector setting. Owner-managers in MSEs in the manufacturing industry often can have a high degree of decision latitude on their own premises; their production process, including machines, and the daily work is typically well planned. Their clients normally put demands on the products, which can then affect production methods, but are therefore only indirectly. In construction, MSEs usually work on temporary work sites often shared with several other companies. The owner-managers' decision latitude is in these cases more limited, especially for MSEs working as temporary subcontractors. Another example of a sector with even more limited decision latitude for the owner-manager is cleaning, as the work takes place in other companies' premises and the OSH conditions are, to quite a large extent, decided by the clients' demands and by the premises. It is obvious that limitations in the decision latitude of the owner-managers in MSEs limit their ability to control the OSH conditions for their employees, and it can therefore be more difficult for the owner-manager to improve OSH. The workers may also feel this pressure directly, for example workers will typically face time pressure, for example in cleaning. However, the good examples from construction, cleaning and other sectors illustrate that it is possible to develop programmes that can help the companies to control OSH and thereby reduce the negative impact from limited decision latitude.

The value chain can also be used to create positive impacts on OSH in MSEs. A few of the good examples (discussed in section 7.5, such as the Olympic Park construction in London and the Dutch and Belgian VCA certification scheme) used the value chain in different ways to facilitate OSH requirements or provide OSH support to MSEs. The inclusion of the value chain in these good examples is a way of ensuring that subcontracting MSEs are reached by the OSH support and advice provided through the value chain. The value chain approach can also help reduce the impact of poor decision latitude in MSEs. However, in most of the good examples, the value chain or any value chain effects are not taken into consideration.

A final example of an approach to the value chain and regulatory demands with implications for OSH in MSEs is from Sweden, where the tax authorities require construction sites to have identity cards and a register of the people working at construction sites. The employers' organisation in the construction industry has established a system in which the identity card is connected to an OSH competence database, making it possible, for example, for building proprietors to check that the people at construction sites have the required OSH training. This provides a tool for upstream actors in the value chain to check subcontractors OSH competence in combination with blocking out companies that do not pay taxes, etc.

## 8.5 Coordination, networking and orchestration

Network of actors, including sector and employers' organisations, trade unions, labour inspectorates and insurance bodies, working together can have positive implications for OSH in MSEs, by both coordinating and orchestrating the programmes and initiatives, and spreading knowledge and information in the networks. The type of network involved in and supporting the good examples gives legitimacy to the OSH advice provided, which contributes to establishing a standard for the sectors, and improves the potential development of OSH in MSEs.

Some of the most valued good examples and incentives from intermediaries could be described as orchestrated efforts (see also the orchestrated good examples in section 7.5), where several actors and/or intermediaries are coordinating their actions and efforts towards MSEs. In some partner countries, there were explicit queries in the dialogue workshops regarding forums or institutions where the OSH effort towards MSEs could be coordinated. These forums were partly in place in some countries as sector-based bi- and tripartite councils in, for example, Belgium, Denmark, France and Sweden. Some of the OSH insurance organisations also had bipartite representation. The most developed coordination and networks were in Denmark, where the WEA is coordinating their inspections and campaigns with the sector OSH councils in order to target specific issues or policy areas. Here, the councils are also involved in developing the specific issues and policies related to OSH, as well as implementing the overall national policy on OSH.

The results from the good examples featuring coordination (see section 7.5) can be compared with the experiences discussed in the workshops. The discussions reported potential confusion over OSH information, as well as a general lack of coordination among the intermediaries in many countries and sectors. In all the national workshops, there were recommendations for a higher degree of coordination among the various intermediaries in the national context. The participants highlighted that more coordination and cooperation among intermediaries would be beneficial for MSEs and would also lead to a better use of the resources available to the intermediaries. Several examples of the lack of coordination leading to confusing or contradicting messages to MSEs, intermediaries working from very different perspectives and even obvious competition among intermediaries were given. While some of the lack of coordination is due to different starting points of the actors and partly inherent tensions, for example between inspectors and firms and between employers and workers, although much could be attributed to mere lack of coordination. An example from Belgium is that the OSH advisors mainly highlight their own tools for OSH improvements in MSEs, therefore neglecting the range of public solutions already available. Nevertheless, the various stakeholders also operate on very different conditions; some purely on a market basis, as external OSH service do in most countries, while others have a purely public regulatory approach. The actors competing on a commercial basis often have very different approaches to MSEs, as discussed in Chapter 8. This may create suboptimal structures or incentives, where external actors merely ensure minimal compliance in MSEs, but not any substantial improvements in OSH. Yet another dimension to the lack of coordination is the competition among social partners over members, for example trade or employers' associations competing for MSEs as members, or trade unions competing over members, as was the case in France.

To sum up, coordination of the often-scarce resources for OSH support for MSEs among intermediaries is a way of making better use of the resources by allocating tasks to the organisations with the competence and resources needed, which can result in effective improvement of OSH at affordable costs. The coordination and networks may also lead to more coherent OSH policies and a better dialogue among the intermediaries and stakeholders involved. However, there are many obstacles to such coordination and, in practice, coordination does not always work. The consequences of poor coordination may even hamper OSH improvements, as MSEs have difficulties dealing with mixed and contradictory messages from different stakeholders.

## 8.6 Sustainability

A challenge when developing policies and programmes aimed to improve OSH in MSEs is to achieve sustainable changes. The crucial questions are how to ensure lasting impact in MSEs and how to ensure that the changes and improvements are achieved in a sustainable manner, as seen from a societal perspective. This latter aspect includes economic and social viability, in particular safeguarding the



European goal of inclusive growth and reaching the large number of workers in MSEs, who potentially in a risky work environment on a daily basis (EU-OSHA, 2016). Reaching sustainable solutions among MSEs themselves is further complicated by the high turnover of MSEs, which makes the improvement of OSH in segments a continuing and dynamic endeavour.

The policies and programmes provide different examples of how to address the sustainability, but there are, in general, only few programmes that can be deemed economically sustainable in the long run. The economic sustainability of policies and programmes is a critical issue in relation to initiatives and solutions aimed at improving OSH in MSEs. The most sustainable economic funding of support for MSEs is the insurance-based systems, since these ensure stable contributions that can be redirected back to OSH improvements in MSEs. Nevertheless, even in this case it can be very difficult to gain significant further improvements in the current context without setting aside specific and additional economic funding for the policies and programmes. However, examples of low-cost solutions can be found. One example of cost-effective support is from Estonia, through integrating OSH activities in the non-OSH agriculture advisors. Through a limited investment in OSH training of advisors, they now can provide OSH support to farmers at a very low (if any) cost. Development of this kind of cost-effective support is an interesting strategy. In summary, most of the interventions discussed in this project are targeting 'low-hanging fruit'. These are important inputs from which substantial gains can be made, but there are important limitations, as highlighted by this research project. In order to move beyond the easier targets and get to the deeper roots of the problems, more political attention needs to be devoted to the topic, especially since many of the OSH issues are related to the structural development in MSEs and the socio-economic context in which these are situated.

Yet another dimension of sustainability is the legitimacy of actors, as well as the interactions between MSEs and intermediaries. Most of the sustainable good examples rely on a long-term commitment and cooperation between stakeholders and intermediaries. A long-term commitment is advantageous, as it allows for continuous development of tools, updating them, for example, when legislation or technology changes, but this is best suited to countries with a strong OSH infrastructure. Cooperation and networking is a good basis for cost-effective programmes, as each stakeholder can contribute, building on their existing resources. For example, sector organisations often have regular contacts with the target group. Insurance organisations in countries with compulsory insurance, for example Germany, have very good records of the companies in the target group. They usually develop tools and support jointly and based on their complementary competencies and they also disseminate the support jointly. They follow up and evaluate how the support works and evaluate what MSEs think about the support provided. Whenever needed, the support provided is revised and improved in order to better meet the needs and requirements from the target group. However, this kind of long-term commitment is possible mainly in countries with strong organisations and a strong OSH infrastructure such as Scandinavia and western Europe and in countries with strong insurance bodies taking responsibility for OSH, as in Germany and Italy. In eastern Europe, this strategy is more difficult to apply. It should be noted that in several countries, especially in western Europe and Scandinavia, special organisations or institutions have been founded by the stakeholders and intermediaries to provide OSH support to MSEs and often also to larger companies. Germany, for instance, has the Berufsgenossenschaft and the insurance system, which provide a stable base for the development of OSH support for companies.

## 9 Conclusions

Intermediaries and programmes aimed at improving OSH in MSEs can have positive impacts on OSH outcomes. We have in this research project identified numerous examples of policies and programmes with a positive bearing on various dimensions of OSH in European MSEs. Likewise, we found that a broad range of intermediaries (regulators, advisors, social partners and others) may have a considerable impact, although this impact is, to a large extent, dependent on the institutional context, which varies considerably between the different EU Member States. The discussions in this report have highlighted how institutional, socio-economic and regulatory contexts and tendencies at the macro level have a strong influence on OSH in MSEs. Nevertheless, it seems that the potential for improving OSH in MSEs is still far from fully utilised in most settings and sectors.

When interpreting the effects of the good examples, what achievements we can realistically expect regarding OSH in MSEs from isolated programmes or interactions with intermediaries needs to be discussed. It is necessary to analyse these initiatives not as 'entities', of which the exact effect can be measured, or as initiatives that can radically improve all OSH dimensions in individual MSEs or entire sectors. Rather, OSH in MSEs has to be understood as part of complex societal processes that are highly affected by the socio-economic context in which they are situated. Because of the complexity of the issues involved, there is a need for more complex and coherent solutions based on complementary incentives, strategies, tools and measures that can be of very different character. This by no means excludes simpler approaches, such as the use of checklists, which can also help improve OSH significantly in MSEs. However, the effect of simple tools supporting OSH improvements can be markedly increased if they are integrated into broader outreach strategies.

As MSEs constitute a very heterogeneous group, there is no solution that fits them all, so the programmes, strategies and tools need to be adapted to the specific context and settings of each enterprise. Few of the initiatives and interactions with intermediaries are in themselves sufficient to raise the OSH standard, so, in general, there is a need to combine various efforts, programmes and policies, taking into account the advantages and assets of the three core mechanisms of change: the stick, the carrot and the sermon. This effort can be promoted and substantiated by a range of different intermediaries and actors with different focal points and different access to MSEs, as well as different competences and motivations for helping and supporting MSEs and their owner-managers, as well as their workers. This therefore calls for further coordination or orchestration of the OSH effort towards MSEs in particular.

Many MSEs face strong competitive pressures and struggle with the survival of the business on several levels, and this results in a large proportion of MSEs being forced into in low-road business survival strategies, where OSH is handled with a minimum compliance approach, if handled at all. Many of these companies can be described as reactive or even as avoiders, mainly trying to work under the radar of any public or intermediary influence on their company-level OSH. Therefore, for many MSEs the socio-economic conditions have a strong impact on OSH and these socio-economic factors are typically beyond the realm of the OSH regulations and the OSH incentives discussed in this report. Therefore, OSH regulation, programmes, policies and initiatives aiming to include this large group of MSEs have to take this socio-economic reality into consideration.

In some settings, regulatory enforcement and inspections are the main policy instruments, but many of the examples analysed in this report are based on voluntary approaches, providing information on regulation rather than using regulation to inflict OSH demands on MSEs. While there are many good voluntary examples with a real reach and impact, a severe limitation to the voluntary interventions is that they do not reach the large proportion of MSEs that can be described as avoiders or that are seeking to remain under the radar. These companies simply do not partake in purely voluntary programmes.

Many MSEs are found to have a reactive strategy towards OSH, initiating improvement only when an incident has occurred or if someone (typically a labour inspector, but potentially a safety representative, an employee or an OSH advisor of any kind) requires improvements. In general, the good examples and many of the intermediaries support MSEs' reactive approach to OSH by offering help when MSEs face demands to improve OSH. Some intermediaries and programmes, however, are trying to stimulate

a more proactive approach among MSEs, for example through the provision of OSH training or OSH management. However, from the descriptions of these examples, it is not possible to evaluate to what extent such an approach actually contributes to more proactive OSH among the participants. Only in one programme, the Danish prevention packages (Good example 1), is it explicitly stated that the outcome was continued and proactive work with improvements of OSH among many of the participating MSEs.

Considering the reactive approach of many MSEs, as well as the large proportion of MSEs strongly affected by the socio-economic context, it is obvious that enforcement and compliance with regulatory requirements need to play a vital role when designing programmes and policies aimed at improving OSH in MSEs. Indeed, the influence of the regulatory benchmark, combined with the risk of actually being inspected, is the most important contribution of the labour inspectorates to improving OSH in MSEs, and regulatory requirements are a crucial point of initiation for most other activities undertaken by intermediaries and the various policies and programmes, and, in particular, for reaching MSEs that are hard to reach. While labour inspections are found to have a positive impact in all countries, they still only reach out to small proportions of MSEs, even in the countries with the most comprehensive coverage. This is reinforced by the restricted resources of labour inspectorates and cutbacks in funding in several countries. Therefore, while inspections are crucial, we must conclude that they cannot be the sole policy measure. The overall policy solutions should, therefore, build on as many dimensions and actors as possible, including the three policy mechanisms: regulation, information and incentives.

## 9.1 Learning from the positive experiences and good examples

As stated above, we found numerous positive impacts from various programmes, policies and initiatives directed at MSEs, some of which were facilitated by intermediaries. There are innovative and well-designed initiatives that reach an important proportion of MSEs, thus helping to increase OSH standards and procedures and hopefully also OSH outcomes in these enterprises. In addition, simpler tools offering direct support are found to be supportive of and contribute to improving OSH standards. The central aspects that tend to make these initiatives successful are that they offer direct and applicable support to MSEs and the suggested solutions can be easily implemented. As explained above, MSEs are often faced with acute issues that they need to react to. They need and appreciate solutions adapted to the specific settings in their sector and often even to the specific work process. Intermediaries may also have a role in disseminating the solutions or guiding MSEs, such as translating regulatory demands into concrete actions. The involvement of sector-based intermediaries helps to build legitimacy for the support provided. One conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that, in some contexts, it is not necessarily the lack of initiatives that is the problem, but rather the coordination of these into a clear strategy and a straightforward message to MSEs. This requires that the different stakeholders cooperate and disseminate the same message in order to avoid fragmentation, confusion and an overload of messages. The strategies and programmes that help secure substantial OSH improvements are usually complex, using different tools and actions supporting each other, as discussed in the section on orchestrated efforts. Long-lasting and far-reaching OSH improvements typically require changes in processes and organisation, as well as technical changes. The good examples describe different strategies and programmes and different ways of dealing with this process, and one way of achieving improvements is through combining several tools and initiatives.

Compulsory advisory services and insurance-based systems have the widest coverage among MSEs, but these systems often lack sufficient tailoring to the needs of MSEs. Furthermore, many resources are used for medical check-ups and support for preventive actions may be limited as a result. In MSEs there is an over-representation of workers who, in different respects, are vulnerable, for example migrant workers, workers with a weak position in the labour market and workers without professional training or education. These vulnerable groups are usually the most difficult to reach and no country has a clear strategy of how to reach out to them.

The intermediaries can have a positive role with regard to MSEs, for example by disseminating OSH knowledge, providing support and guidance for MSEs, and facilitating various types of action. A group of intermediaries of particular interest here is the non-traditional intermediaries that do not usually or exclusively deal with OSH issues as, for instance, the agricultural advisors in the Estonian example or

other regulatory entities. If these can provide OSH input, support or information to MSEs, there would be a much larger scope for reaching MSEs, since these intermediaries are, in general, more frequently in contact with MSEs.

Another important result from the research is the emphasis on adapting and tailoring the support to the needs of the MSEs in the target group. This is not a new finding as such, but the research here has further strengthened the evidence for the need for this. If the initiatives are to reach MSEs and lead to real OSH changes, it is important that these are adapted to the work practices in the targeted MSEs, the sector and business context, and the available OSH infrastructure.

From the findings, it is obvious that even the most effective strategies are not currently reaching all MSEs, for example in a sector. The strategies based on voluntary and other approaches based on regulation usually do not reach out to all MSEs because of limited resources. In particular, MSEs with little incentive to participate in voluntary schemes, as well as newly established companies, can be difficult to reach. The resources required to reach out to all MSEs are considerable, but more comprehensive efforts could, for instance, be financed partly through insurance contributions, collective agreement or other contribution-based policy schemes. However, this is only possible if collective agreements cover all or most companies, which is a rarity in Europe, even in those countries with institutionalised social dialogue and a strong role for the social partners in regulating OSH.

Even with limited resources it is possible to make a sustainable impact, as several of the examples illustrate. There may also be significant spin-off effects from one enterprise to others; for example, an enterprise may implement changes that have an impact on OSH in other MSEs, such as in the case of subcontractor certificates, or if there is an explicit learning outcome where other MSEs may watch and learn from the enterprise introducing the good examples. When considering that the most vulnerable MSEs, which also are in most need of OSH support, are more difficult to reach, this gives rise to questions about priorities. Therefore, in the discussion of how OSH in MSEs can be improved, there is also a need to evaluate the cost effectiveness of different strategies and, in the long run, make better use of the limited resources available for OSH to ensure the long-term sustainability of the programmes and initiatives. However, evaluation of cost effectiveness is not easy and straightforward, as the impact is seldom evaluated, is often difficult to assess and there are often no data available on cost effectiveness. However, the good examples we include in our analysis have all been implemented in real-life settings and, in general, with realistic cost levels, so these initiatives can be replicated. Increasing the attention given to OSH in society in general will also have a positive impact, since MSEs are embedded in the wider society and there is an exchange of workers, as well as owner-managers, between MSEs and between MSEs and larger companies. Therefore, increasing OSH education in vocational training, for instance, can be an efficient approach to increasing OSH awareness in multiple companies and settings.

All in all, the findings show that it is possible to reach out to MSEs and improve the work environment. The issue is to ensure sufficient resources and use learning outcomes from the good examples and well-functioning institutions to tailor efficient programmes and strategies. However, the research also shows that there are severe limitations and deficiencies, in particular in the socio-economic context, which needs to be addressed, as well as potential solutions.

### **9.1.1 Suggestions for future policies**

Finally, we highlight some policy implications of the research findings. These are not policy recommendations, but rather suggestions and considerations for aspects to be included and given attention when designing future policies on OSH in MSEs and the subsequent transformation into programmes, tools and other activities. The suggestions are based on the general lines of the research findings in this study. These policies can include institutional set-up and intermediaries and various types of policies and regulations aimed directly at MSEs, without the intervention of other actors. What needs to be taken into consideration can be summarised at three levels: micro (typically company) level, meso (institutional and sector) level and macro (societal) level. As discussed throughout the report, many of the socio-economic and structural settings and conditions have a significant impact on the OSH outcome in MSEs. These include increasing fragmentation of production, changing power relations between

buyers and suppliers, internationalisation of production, rapid technological development, deregulation of labour markets and ever-increasing competition. It is difficult to change this socio-economic context in the short or medium term, if at all. Therefore, when designing potential programmes and policies aimed at improving OSH and working conditions in MSEs, the aim should be to try to overcome the negative consequences of these macro-trends for MSEs and their workers and in particular those who are the most vulnerable.

### At the micro level, the policies should:

- have inspections and regulation as foundations, since many MSEs are not reached through voluntary initiatives and policies, and the regulatory policies can create opportunities for other actors to engage with MSEs;
- use a communication style, both in written and direct communication, that creates confidence and trust, and therefore avoids unnecessary administrative and OSH technical lingua; it should be tailored to the specific target group, recognise the business needs, be simple and action oriented and avoid general information, for instance by suggesting risk assessment of general OSH hazards, as MSEs prefer solution-oriented tools tailored to sector and subsectors;
- be cost free or low cost, since MSEs very rarely prioritise financial resources for OSH issues, in order to achieve a wide coverage;
- develop inspection methods tailored to MSEs, without compromising the impact of the inspections, for example by providing information on where to find solutions to the problems encountered; inspectors should as far as possible seek to engage in a dialogue with owner-managers in which they should recognise the business needs of MSEs at the same time as maintaining the focus on OSH;
- apply direct contact with the target group through stakeholders that already have contact and a high degree of legitimacy in the target group, since this would increase the number of MSEs reached; this could, for instance, be by using membership organisations (employers' associations, unions, others) as intermediaries, as they have the initial trust of their members among MSEs;
- integrate non-OSH inspectors and other non-OSH intermediaries in OSH support for MSEs, which also could increase the reach significantly; these non-OSH intermediaries often have good insights into the sectors, have legitimacy as sector relevant actors and can, for example, be food inspectors or agricultural advisors.

### At the meso level, the policies should:

- facilitate the orchestration and coordination of programmes (combining elements of regulation, incentives and information) involving the relevant authorities, social partners and other organisations in order to gain synergy effects and to avoid using unnecessary resources because of lack of coordination; at the same time, confusion among MSEs about the different actors will be avoided;
- ensure policy continuity in relation to pilot programmes, for example through agreements between social partners and by sustained economic funding; several of the good examples found in this research project were conducted as only pilot projects despite successful outcomes and were subsequently terminated;
- design and integrate OSH into vocational and other professional training, and use combinations of regulation and training, such as OSH training; a minimum of OSH training could be a legal requirement to gain a licence to operate in certain industries;
- provide financial support for the implementation of OSH initiatives, since MSEs rarely prioritise this;
- utilise supply chain possibilities, for example secure responsibility in the supply chain but tailor to possibilities for MSEs in order not to push them out of market; this could include OSH demands in public procurement and one possibility could be to include systems for chain



responsibility where the clients — typically the larger companies — are charged with responsibility for the upstream suppliers — typically MSEs;

At the macro level, the policies should:

- pay more attention to psychosocial and organisational issues, which are often neglected in current policies and are also of great relevance to MSEs;
- ensure funding for the continuation of programmes and activities (insurance-based and other contribution-based finance models can be the most stable strategies, since they ensure a steady inflow of funds and the funds are returned as OSH investments);
- enable coordination between stakeholders and the development of one-string systems in order to avoid contradictions between actors and systems;
- facilitate tripartite coordination and policy development in order to make sure all actors support the developed policies;
- ensure quality of OSH advisory services and develop tailored advisory services for MSEs; this can be in the form of legal requirements for quality assurance of the OSH advisory services;
- give MSEs higher priority in national OSH systems compared with larger companies, since MSEs have not been covered in a coherent manner so far in most national policies, and most policies have a bias towards the larger companies.
- facilitate closer collaboration between different government regulatory bodies, since there can be significant gains from increased collaboration and MSEs prefer contact with fewer authorities; this can be done by integrating labour inspection with sector-specific inspections in cases where they exist, such as food industry;
- develop initiatives aimed at OSH in the black/grey market that has a large proportion of MSEs and subsequently follow up with inspection or other types of regulation, since these companies are difficult to reach by other means.



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## Appendix 1 - The good examples included in the project<sup>9</sup>

### Orchestrated examples

<b>Good example 1: Denmark</b>
Prevention packages: economic support to improve OSH for MSEs
<b>Good example 2: France</b>
A programme for road transport and restaurants using the OIRA interactive risk assessment tool
<b>Good example 3: Sweden</b>
Safe Forestry: a combination of activities to improve safety in forestry
<b>Good example 4: Sweden</b>
Weld Right (SvetsaRätt): a web platform for improving OSH and OSH management in welding
<b>Good example 5: Germany</b>
Network activities and instruments in the construction sector: INQA advance good construction/and instruments (Check-Bauen, BauWertInWest)
<b>Good example 6: France</b>
A broad programme aiming at improving safety and health in small construction companies
<b>Get MSEs aware of, interested in and working with OSH</b>
<b>Good example 7: Poland</b>
Labour Inspection Diploma as an incentive for micro companies work with OSH
<b>Good example 8: Estonia</b>
Best Workplace Practices award for interest in OSH and providing solutions to specific problems
<b>Good example 9: Estonia</b>
Health Calendar (Tervisekalender) to help employers develop healthy lifestyles, a positive safety culture and well-being at work
<b>Good example 10: Romania</b>
'Safety and Health in SMEs' campaign aiming at increasing OSH awareness and initiating OSH improvements
<b>Good example 11: Romania</b>
Information and awareness campaign on changes entailed by the provisions of the EU CLP Regulation No 1272/2008 on classification, labelling and packaging of chemicals
<b>Strengthening OSH infrastructure through structures for providing personal OSH support</b>
<b>Good example 12: Denmark</b>
BAMBUS: The Safety and Health Preventive Service Bus for the Construction Sector

<sup>9</sup> Descriptions of the good examples are available at: <https://osha.europa.eu/en/tools-and-publications/publications/safety-and-health-micro-and-small-enterprises-eu-policy-practice/view>

<b>Good example 13: Sweden</b>
RSRs: OSH actors supporting workers and employers in Swedish MSEs
<b>Good example 14: Sweden</b>
OSH advisors in the construction sector disseminating OSH knowledge and supporting construction companies
<b>Good example 15: Estonia</b>
Consultancy service in OSH and face-to-face consultancy on site in order to increase employers' OSH knowledge and to support OSH management
<b>Non-OSH intermediaries engaging in OSH</b>
<b>Intermediaries without regulatory power</b>
<b>Good example 16: Estonia</b>
National programme: OSH training for agriculture advisors: OSH information days for agriculture in different regions of Estonia
<b>Good example 17: The United Kingdom</b>
The HSE's Estates Excellence Initiative
<b>Other authorities and regulatory bodies</b>
<b>Good example 18: The United Kingdom</b>
The GPhC as an OSH support for pharmacies
<b>Good example 19: The United Kingdom</b>
The Care Quality Commission: impact on OSH in small companies in the care sector
<b>Using requirements from the value chain as a lever for OSH</b>
<b>Good example 20: Belgium and the Netherlands</b>
VCA: securing safety for subcontracting companies carrying out work in a high-risk industries
<b>Good example 21: The United Kingdom</b>
The Olympic Park legacy
<b>Good example 22: Sweden</b>
Compulsory OSH courses and identity cards to provide and control basic OSH knowledge in the construction sector
<b>OSH training</b>
<b>OSH training for MSEs</b>
<b>Good example 23: Estonia</b>
National programme: a comprehensive OSH training programme for safety managers and senior managers of SMEs

<b>Good example 24: Italy</b>
Subsidies for Companies: free training courses for the staff in charge of safety in SMEs
<b>Good example 25: Italy</b>
OSH training for the construction industry in combination with OSH support for workplaces
<b>Good example 26: Romania</b>
Safety and health at work: a prerequisite for competitiveness; regional seminars in the Horeca and construction sectors
<b>Good example 27: Sweden</b>
Safe in the store, a widely used web course about OSH in retail, including OSH training for the newly employed and vocational training
<b>OSH training for newly employed and vocational training</b>
<b>Good example 28: France</b>
'Synergy': OSH introduction for the newly employed
<b>Good example 29: Romania</b>
Access: a project for free professional and OSH training of cleaning workers
See also:
Good example 4: Sweden
Weld Right (SvetsaRätt): a web platform for improving OSH and OSH management in welding
Good example 6: France
A broad programme aiming at improving safety and health in small construction companies
<b>Economic support for OSH improvement</b>
<b>Good example 30: Italy</b>
ISI-INAIL: Incentives to companies for the implementation of interventions relating to health and safety at work
See also:
Good example 1: Denmark
Prevention packages: economic support to improve OSH for MSEs
<b>Provision of tools and methods suited to support of OSH and OSH management in MSEs</b>
<b>Tools supporting OSH management</b>
<b>Good example 31: Germany</b>
Occupational safety management system in the construction industry (AMS BAU)

<b>Good example 32: Germany</b>
GDA Orga Check and INQA tools: self-evaluation checklists for small companies
<b>Tools supporting risk identification and good practice for sectors</b>
<b>Good example 33: Belgium</b>
SOBANE and the Déparis guide: tools to support participatory risk management
<b>Good example 34: Sweden</b>
Checklists for sectors: support for risk identification, selection of control measures and making an action plan
<b>Good example 35: Belgium</b>
OiRA: Sector-specific Online interactive Risk Assessment for small and micro enterprises
<b>Good example 36: Ireland</b>
BeSmart.ie initiative: OSH tools for MSEs in many sectors
<b>Good example 37: Romania</b>
'Health and safety at work': guidance for understanding OSH legislation
<b>Good example 38: Belgium</b>
A framework for cooperation within sectors to stimulate, facilitate and share OSH management practices
<b>Good example 39: Germany</b>
INQA network 'Offensive Mittelstand': a network that brings together experts in order to support small companies in Germany
<b>Tools for the psychosocial work environment</b>
<b>Good example 40: Belgium</b>
Knipperlichten: a tool for indicators for psychosocial risks at work
<b>Good example 41: Italy</b>
A tool for risk assessment and risk management of work-related stress
<b>Tools supporting design of workplaces in some sectors</b>
<b>Good example 42: France</b>
Mavimplant: a tool supporting good design of workplaces
<b>Methods for authorities' supervision adapted to MSEs</b>
<b>Good example 43: Denmark</b>
OSH labour inspections adjusted for MSEs
<b>Good example 44: Denmark</b>
Coordination between Danish public authorities when inspecting MSEs



## Appendix 2 - Overview of interviews in partner countries

	Main data collection	Sectors	Supplementary interviews
Belgium	Three dialogue workshops with representatives of key stakeholders <sup>(10)</sup>	Construction Manufacturing Horeca	<p>Head of the prevention department of large insurance company</p> <p>Person responsible for collective prevention in MSEs at IDEWE (large external prevention service) and the General Director of IDEWE</p> <p>Member of the publishing committee of the periodical magazine about safety <i>Veiligheidsnieuws (Prebes)</i>, former director of the risk management division of an external prevention service and former health and safety manager of several large companies (retired)</p> <p>First advisor of the competence centre work and social security of the Federation of Enterprises in Belgium, responsible for OSH-related topics</p>
Denmark	Three dialogue workshops with representatives of key stakeholders	Construction Manufacturing Horeca	<p>Two additional interviews (one OSH advisor in private services and one union representative in the Metalworkers' Union)</p> <p><u>Five supplementary interviews:</u></p> <p>OSH staff at the Metalworkers' Union (previously a labour inspector for more than 10 years)</p> <p>Employer representative from the employers' association for hairdressing and cosmetics</p> <p>Food safety inspector, Danish Veterinary and Food Administration</p> <p>Two representatives from the employers' association for the car repair industry</p>
Germany	Focus group interviews and individual interviews with 31 OSH stakeholders representing key stakeholders	Construction Manufacturing Horeca	<p><u>Four supplementary interviews:</u></p> <p>Independent OSH consultant from the health-care and education sectors</p> <p>Representative of a chamber of trades and a specialist in occupational health promotion in the health-care sector</p> <p>Representative of a chamber of trades, hygiene expert</p> <p>Representative of the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB), political advisor</p>
Estonia	Three dialogue workshops with	Construction	<u>Five supplementary interviews:</u>

<sup>10</sup> Employers' representatives, workers' representatives, regulators and OSH advisors.

	Main data collection	Sectors	Supplementary interviews
	representatives of key stakeholders	Manufacturing Horeca	<p>Construction sector: head of the Estonian Association of Construction Entrepreneurs</p> <p>OSH advisor: occupational health physician with extensive work experience in OSH</p> <p>OSH advisors/professional: OSH professional with work experience at the National Labour Inspectorate, in the field of OSH</p> <p>Horeca sector: head of the Estonian Hotel and Restaurant Association, as well as the board chairman of Nordic Hotels AS</p> <p>Manufacturing sector: senior manager (production and safety manager) in medium-sized enterprise who has extensive experience with MSEs</p>
France	Three dialogue workshops with representatives of key stakeholders	Construction Transport Horeca	<p><u>Five additional and five supplementing interviews:</u></p> <p>A national labour inspector (DGT)</p> <p>Two regional labour inspectors (DIRRECTE)</p> <p>An OSH expert at regional labour inspection (agriculture)</p> <p>Two joint non-profit private insurance</p> <p>An expert in OSH among MSEs of a national research institute (INRS)</p> <p>A representative from a trade union</p> <p>A technical engineer, supporting labour inspectors in practice</p> <p>Representative from Malakoff Médéric, which is a non-profit French social protection organisation that offers pension, health and retirement benefits</p>
Italy	One dialogue workshop covering all three sectors with representatives of key stakeholders	Construction Manufacturing Horeca	<p><u>Follow-up interviews:</u></p> <p>Six interviews with workers in manufacturing, construction and service companies</p> <p>Worker's health and safety representative (RSL in Italy) in a metal-mechanic company</p> <p>Trade union representative with institutional function with priority to orientation, training and qualification of workers</p> <p>Two interviews with ASL inspector (Labour Inspectorate) for the manufacturing sector and the construction and service sector</p> <p><u>Additional interviews:</u></p>

	Main data collection	Sectors	Supplementary interviews
			<p>Workers' health and safety territorial representative (an RSLT in Italy), part of the system of the bilateral body ELBA (Craft Bilateral Body of Lombardia)</p> <p>Two interviews with worker's health and safety territorial representatives</p> <p>Engineer in INAIL with institutional function in the assessment of risk prevention</p> <p>Auditors for a body of worldwide certification of safety management systems</p> <p>Consultant and trainer in the field of safety in the workplace in a service company</p> <p>Responsible person in Confartigianato Pavia, with 'confident' function for companies</p> <p>OSH advisor in Compagnia delle Opere (employers' association)</p>
Romania	Focus groups and interviews with representatives of key stakeholders	Construction Manufacturing Horeca	<p>Questionnaire with external OSH services</p> <p><u>Five additional interviews:</u></p> <p>Two staff from distributors of cosmetics (employee) and textiles (owner-manager)</p> <p>One chemical formulator (owner-manager)</p> <p>One OSH consultancy/advisor (owner-manager)</p> <p>One editor from an OSH magazine</p>
Sweden	Three dialogue workshops with representatives of key stakeholders	Construction Manufacturing Cleaning	<p><u>Four additional interviews:</u></p> <p>Sector expert (cleaning) from an employers' organisation</p> <p>Two OSH advisors employed by employers' organisations in construction</p> <p>Representative from a trade union (cleaning)</p> <p>Former OSH expert from an employers' organisation (cleaning)</p>
United Kingdom	Interviews with a total of 32 individuals representing 18 bodies	Construction Manufacturing Private services	<p><u>Additional interviews:</u></p> <p>Representative of the OSH inspectorate responsible for health strategy</p> <p>Two representatives of (non-OSH) private services sector regulators responsible for the regulatory bodies' overall strategies</p> <p>OSH expert working in a consultancy capacity with substantial experience in the construction sector</p>

Main data collection	Sectors	Supplementary interviews
		Representative of an OSH advisory organisation responsible for the regulatory bodies' overall strategies
		Representative of both an information and advice provider, and of a trade union responsible for OSH strategy (one person with several roles)

**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.

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