

*17-18 September 2014, Amsterdam, Invitational Conference
'Investing in Occupational Safety and Health - how benefits beat the costs'*

Closing and preliminary conclusions

By Esther de Kleuver, Director OSH, Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, the Netherlands

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Of course the proceedings of the conference are not yet available. Nevertheless, we were able to extract some preliminary conclusions from the discussions I'd like to share with you.

1. Firstly, there's increasing consensus among policy-makers that economic incentives provide a trigger for OSH-improvement. We have seen the creation of new incentive schemes in several countries (e.g. Germany, Italy, the Netherlands). Policy-makers in countries without a scheme might profit from the experiences of these countries and take inspiration to develop their own. Therefore EU-OSHA could contribute by disseminating the schemes. It is of the utmost importance that the benefits from the improvement of OSH are visible, first and foremost at company-level, since this constitutes a concrete and powerful trigger for implementation. If companies do not perceive what's in it for them, they will be less motivated to invest.

2. Secondly, there is an abundance of data from research which shows that investing in OSH is inherently good and pays off. Yet it will take more than cost-benefit analysis alone to motivate companies. We also have to take into account the cultural, emotional and social aspects related to OSH in the company. Economic investment in OSH is not a replacement for the creation of proper occupational safety and health. However, it may help convince companies to keep a steady focus on prevention. And maybe we can think further about incorporating OSH in the concept of sustainable employability in a certain way.

3. Finally the European Commission has adopted a new strategic framework on OSH, therefore actions on the issue of investing in OSH, parallel to the realisation of intrinsically safe work and good working conditions, are very timely. The moment is here!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You have put a lot of effort in the conference over the last two days. On behalf of the organizers of the conference and my ministry, I thank you very much for your presence and input. Without your contributions the conference could not succeed. Once again thanks.

Our gratitude goes out especially to our speakers mr. Tompa, mr. De Greef, mr. Kohstall, mr. Andrew Smith, mr. Stoel, mr. Dietmar Elsler, Xabier Irastorza, Angelica Schneider, Henning Kruger, and to our chair mrs. Brenda O'Brien.

Allow me to express my special thanks to the co-organizers of the conference: EU-OSHA and its director Christa Sedlatschek, the Focal Points of the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg, and last but not least TNO. This conference is the result of our combined efforts and our conviction of the need to take this theme further. Thank you very much for your cooperation. I am looking forward to opportunities to renew and strengthen our relationship in the future.

And finally.

Over the last two days we have discussed investing in OSH and, how the benefits of doing so beat the costs. The discussion never ends. Since we do not live in a perfect world, there will always be room for improvement in OSH. I hope you all will continue to contribute to the discussion and that the results may apply to your own occupational safety and health as well. For, whether we are employers or employees, in the end we are all working people.

I wish you all a safe and sound trip home. And thank you.

18.09.2014