

European Agency for Safety and Health at Work

# European Agency for Safety and Health at Work

Consolidated Annual Activity Report 2020

**Executive Summary**



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## Management Board's analysis and assessment

The Management Board of EU-OSHA,

Having regard to:

- Regulation (EU) 2019/126 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 January 2019 establishing the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA), and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 2062/94,
- Financial Regulation of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work of 27 September 2019, and in particular article 48 therein,
- EU-OSHA's 2020-2022 Programming Document adopted by the Governing Board on 16 December 2019, and, in particular, the work programme for 2020,
- EU-OSHA's Consolidated Annual Activity Report of the Authorising Officer for the year 2020:

Acknowledges the results achieved by EU-OSHA and notes the following analysis and assessment:

1. Considers that the Consolidated Annual Activity Report 2020 represents a comprehensive and transparent account of the Agency's activities and results of the year; takes note that the Executive Director, in her capacity as Authorising officer, had no reservation to report;
2. Congratulates the Agency on the important and timely contribution, through several actions carried out alone or in collaboration with others, to safer and healthier workplaces in Europe further to the global health crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic;
3. Notes with satisfaction that the role played by EU-OSHA in the implementation of the EU-OSH Strategic Framework coming to an end in 2020 has been broadly acknowledged, including by an independent external evaluation and wishes for an equally successful contribution to EU policy priorities on OSH as reflected in the next Strategic Framework and in other EU policy documents;
4. Appreciates the Agency's progress in achieving its strategic objectives as outlined in EU-OSHA's Multi-annual Strategic Programme and welcomes that these are aligned to and considerably contribute to wider EU policy objectives on OSH and beyond; acknowledges in particular the Agency's contribution to:
  - Reducing the OSH burden resulting from MSDs by improving the understanding on the topic and promoting discussion among policy-makers, researchers and intermediaries via the OSH overview on Musculoskeletal disorders and the HWC "Lighten the Load", launched in October 2020;
  - Gathering comparable and reliable OSH data across Member States via its monitoring activities such as ESENER, the Workers' exposure survey to cancer risk factors and the OSH barometer that will enable evidence-based policy making and actions.
  - Providing support to medium, small and micro enterprises for a better implementation of OSH legislation through more and better risk assessments via OiRA, and the OSH overview on supporting compliance;
  - Providing insights into the consequences of digitalisation on workers' safety and health and the

challenges it poses to prevention, policy and practice as well as the opportunities it offers via a dedicated OSH overview that will constitute the knowledge base for the next HWC starting in 2022.

5. Notes with satisfaction that the key performance indicators results are positive across all activities and that the ambitious targets were achieved or almost achieved in all cases;
6. Welcomes the very high implementation of the annual work programme resulting in an almost full implementation rate of the budget;
7. Appreciates the cooperation established with other EU Agencies aimed at expertise and methodology exchange as well as joint delivery; welcomes the good progress made during 2020 with regard to the implementation of the action plan adopted in response to the evaluation of EU-OSHA, Eurofound, ETF and Cedefop;
8. Welcomes that the positive results have been confirmed in ex-post evaluations concluding that the Agency's work is of high-quality and important for its stakeholders.
9. Stresses the importance of tripartism at the EU and national level to ensure the effective functioning of the Agency and its Focal Points and encourages EU-OSHA to keep up its efforts to disseminate its activities and engage with the relevant stakeholders;
10. Considers that the main risks that threaten the achievement of the strategic and operational objectives have been properly identified and that the necessary measures have been adopted to mitigate their impact or likelihood; and that the internal control systems put in place by the Agency are adequate as confirmed by various audits;
11. Observes that the Executive Director's declaration of assurance is based on a robust control system build around the Internal Control Framework which is also confirmed by the absence of significant findings from the Internal AuditService and the Court of Auditors;
12. Considers that the information provided in the Consolidated Annual Activity Report gives the Management Board reasonable assurance that the resources available to EU-OSHA in 2020 were used for their intended purpose and in accordance with the principles of sound financial management. Furthermore, the control procedures in place give the necessary guarantees concerning the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions

In light of the above, the Management Board requests the Consolidated Annual Activity Report 2020 be forwarded, together with this analysis and assessment, to the European Parliament, the European Council, the European Commission and the Court of Auditors.

3 June 2021

(signed)

Renārs Lūsis  
Chairperson of the Management Board

## The Agency in brief

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) is an Agency of the European Union. Established in 1994, the Agency works on the basis of a new founding regulation, which entered into force in early 2019.<sup>1</sup> The regulation defines EU-OSHA's mandate and governance arrangements.

EU-OSHA's mission and vision are enshrined in the Agency's [Multi-annual Strategic Programme](#) (MSP), which the Management Board extended up to 2023 in 2018. The Agency's mission is to develop, gather and provide reliable and relevant information, analysis and tools to advance knowledge, raise awareness and exchange occupational safety and health information and good practice which will serve the needs of those involved in OSH.

The Agency's vision is to be a recognised leader promoting healthy and safe workplaces in Europe based on tripartism, participation and the development of an OSH risk prevention culture, to ensure a smart, sustainable, productive and inclusive economy. The Agency's long-term strategic objectives are also established in the MSP. The MSP identifies six priority areas that correspond to related strategic objectives based on EU policy objectives on OSH. Such priority areas are: Anticipating change, Facts and figures, Tools for OSH management. Awareness raising and communication, Networking knowledge, and Strategic and operational networking.

The Agency is based on a tripartite structure as is the standard in the employment and social affairs field. Key actors in OSH in Europe are represented in the Agency's Management Board: representatives of governments, employers and workers of the EU 27 and the European Commission. An expert appointed by the EP EMPL Committee also participates in the work of the Management Board, and EEA/EFTA countries and Eurofound have an observer status in the Management Board. Whereas the Management Board takes the key strategic decisions, the Executive Board oversees effective preparation and follow-up of the Management Board decisions.<sup>2</sup>

As a tripartite organisation, the Agency works closely with governments', employers' and workers' representatives – in addition to the European Institutions - in order to share good practices and reach workers and workplaces across Europe.

The tripartite dialogue is an essential element not only at the decision-making stage but also at the implementation stage of EU-OSHA's mandate - both at European level and at Member State level via the national, tripartite focal point networks. The Focal Points are the Agency's main operational network. Whereas they are not directly involved in the governance of the Agency, they play a key role by providing input to the Agency's planning and implementation of the work programme at the national level. They are key actors for the development and co-ordination of the tripartite network in Member States. It is only by engaging Focal Points and their networks that the Agency can achieve its objectives and it is therefore decisive that the network partners perceive the Agency's work as adding value to their work. Thanks to their work, EU-OSHA can rely on high-quality information and data from the national level that feeds into the implementation of the Agency's activities and through their networking and dissemination actions involving social partners EU-OSHA manages to reach out to the intended target audiences in the Member States.

While preparing decisions for the Management Board, the Agency regularly consults its three Advisory Groups, the "Tools and Awareness Raising Advisory Group" (TARAG), the "OSH Knowledge Advisory Group" (OKAG), and the Workers' Exposure Survey Advisory Group (WESAG) and has regular coordination meetings with Directorate B, Unit 3 of the Directorate General for Employment and Social Affairs, which serves as the Agency's primary partner at the Commission.

Internally, the Agency is organised in four Units, three of which are operational (Prevention and Research Unit, Communication and Promotion Unit and Network Secretariat) and one administrative (Resource and Service Centre). The Executive Director also serves as the Head of Unit of one of the

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<sup>1</sup> Regulation (EU) 2019/126 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 January 2019 establishing the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA), and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 2062/94, cf. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32019R0126>

<sup>2</sup> With the 2018 Regulation, the "Governing Board" and "Bureau" have become "Management Board" and "Executive Board", and the "Director" became the "Executive Director". In this report, the terminology from the new Regulation is used unless reference is made to actions and decisions taken before its entry into force on 20 February 2019.

operational Units (Network Secretariat). The Executive Director has delegated appointing authority powers by the Management Board whereas all Heads of Unit as well as one Temporary agent/Administrator staff member in the Network Secretariat have delegated authorising officer powers.

The Executive Director is assisted in her management responsibilities by the Heads of Unit. There are regular meetings at the management level to monitor the Agency's performance, the implementation of the annual work programme and the budget, audit recommendations, the internal control and risk register action plans, human resources matters as well as any other issue that is relevant for the smooth running of the Agency.

The Agency's activities are implemented under direct decentralised management.

## The year in brief

### Key conclusions in relation to operational activities

In 2020, the global COVID-19 pandemic has made occupational safety and health an even more relevant topic on the EU agenda. EU-OSHA has been strongly involved in the EU response to the crisis. Early on, EU-OSHA provided COVID-19 guidance for the workplace, an OIRA COVID-19 risk assessment tool along with other resources to facilitate the return to workplaces in safe and healthy conditions<sup>3</sup>. As regards the operations of EU-OSHA, the Agency was able to deliver its planned work programme almost in its entirety and at the same time to assume and deliver unplanned COVID-19 related tasks and meet its stakeholders' needs in uncertain and challenging times. This is in no small part due to the flexibility and commitment shown by the Agency's national focal points and the national tripartite networks which they operate.

Besides that, EU-OSHA continued progressing towards its strategic objectives across its six priority areas. This resulted in a budget implementation of 97% and a work programme implementation of 96% (target: 90%).

During 2020, important results from the OSH overview on "musculoskeletal disorders" have been made available. This activity started in 2018 with the aim of contributing to reduce the OSH burden resulting from MSDs by improving the understanding on the topic and promoting discussion among policy-makers, researchers and intermediaries. This OSH overview has established the knowledge base for the Healthy Workplaces Campaign "Lighten the Load" which was launched in October 2020 and will feature an extended cycle of 24 months. The campaign is expected to provide an opportunity to improve the awareness and understanding of MSDs and its multifactorial causes. This means: improving awareness about work-related MSDs risk factors and how to prevent and manage them (importance of risk assessment / management); improving awareness about health outcomes related to MSDs, along with the impact of MSDs for enterprises and society as a whole. As a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the increased demand towards teleworking practices, the Agency integrated a new focus on 'good practice examples on teleworking in times of crisis' into the campaign.

The fieldwork for the third edition of the enterprises' survey ESENER finalised in 2019 and during 2020 the dataset was made available. The data visualisation of ESENER 2019 data, as well as the comparisons of ESENER 2014 and 2019 data, were all launched beginning of June. EU-OSHA initiated an activity aimed at delivering a workers' survey to determine their exposure to cancer risks factors and analyse the resulting data. The survey draws on the conclusions of the feasibility study from 2017 and the input from experts. Building on the experience of the Australian Worker Exposure Survey (AWES), this activity sets out to fill an important information gap that has been widely identified, most recently in the context of the revision of the Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive but also in the January 2017 European Commission Communication on modernisation of EU OSH legislation and policy.

Since 2019, EU-OSHA has fully taken over the development of an EU OSH information system (comprising a dashboard, the aka 'OSH barometer' and an analytical report, the 'State of OSH in the EU') to further the support provided to the Commission for its establishment. The OSH Barometer is

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<sup>3</sup> See here for more of the resources provided by EU-OSHA:  
[https://osha.europa.eu/en/themes/covid-19-resources-workplace#pk\\_campaign=ban\\_homecw](https://osha.europa.eu/en/themes/covid-19-resources-workplace#pk_campaign=ban_homecw)

online since May 2020 and functions as the EU's official comprehensive source of OSH information, That will also be the opportunity for the Executive Director to thank the OSH community for the smooth and valuable cooperation during her mandate and to pass on her legacy.

EU-OSHA initiated two new OSH overviews: one on OSH and digitalisation; and another one on supporting compliance. The former will provide insights into the consequences of digitalisation on workers' safety and health and the challenges it poses to prevention, policy and practice as well as the opportunities it offers. The latter will provide an insight on the environment or 'context' that incentivises and assists enterprises – including small and micro – to fulfil their obligations under OSH regulations.

Furthermore, EU-OSHA has been serving as an information-based resource and platform for debate, facilitating the exchange of information on OSH research, policy and practice. In particular, it has provided support to the Commission, other Institutions and key stakeholders when requested, to strengthen the evidence base for their decision-making and to provide them with the input necessary for their policy work. Particularly relevant will be EU-OSHA's assistance to the Commission in its follow-up on the ex-post evaluation of EU legislation on OSH, by providing relevant technical, scientific and economic information necessary for the preparation of possible legislative initiatives and follow-up actions.

Finally, EU-OSHA continued to effectively communicate and promote OSH, either directly or through its network. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, communication and promotion actions were moved almost in their entirety on-line. Notwithstanding, EU-OSHA managed to actively present its work at over 300 events and adapted its FAST support scheme to enable focal points to reorient FAST awareness raising actions (for example media actions) in the member states to address the COVID-19 pandemic, providing guidance to workers and employers as they return to the workplace.

## **Key conclusions related to management, internal control and assurance**

The Agency's internal control systems and management of resources is based on a systematic analysis of the evidence available.

EU-OSHA can rely on a variety of sources to carry out such assessment and of processes and procedures to ensure completeness and reliability of the information.

Overall, the Executive Director received reasonable assurance that the Agency's internal control systems had been adequate and had provided reasonable assurance and that the compliance and the implementation of the Internal Control Framework are satisfactory; risks are being appropriately monitored and mitigated; and necessary improvements and reinforcements are being implemented.

The Executive Director issued her judgment on the basis of the control processes in place and the outcomes of such controls; the resources spent to raise awareness with respect to ethics and integrity and fraud prevention; the annual risk assessment and Internal Control Framework assessment exercises; the quantitative and qualitative nature of the non-conformities included in the register for 2020; the assurance received by the Internal Control Coordinator; and, last but not least, on the overall favourable opinions expressed in the final reports by internal and external auditors and their recommendations in the past few years.

In her declaration of assurance, the Executive Director has not deemed it necessary to include any reservation.