

European Agency for Safety and Health at Work

# European Agency for Safety and Health at Work

Consolidated Annual Activity Report 2021

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 2021-2023 Programming Document adopted by the Management Board on 14 December 2020, and, in particular, the work programme for 2021,
- EU-OSHA's Consolidated Annual Activity Report of the Authorising Officer for the year 2021:

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

1. Considers that the Consolidated Annual Activity Report 2021 represents a comprehensive and transparent account of the Agency's activities and results of the year; takes note that the interim Executive Director, in his capacity as Authorising officer, had no reservation to report.
2. Congratulates the Agency on the continued significant 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; congratulates the Agency on the good results achieved despite the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, which hit particularly hard on EU-OSHA as a network-based organisation.
3. Notes with satisfaction the important role assigned to EU-OSHA in the new EU-OSH Strategic Framework for Safety and Health at Work 2021-2027.
4. Commends the Agency for having ensured business continuity through a prompt reorganisation, reprioritisation and reallocation of resources in response to the delay in the appointment of a new Executive Director.
5. 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 contribute substantially to wider EU policy objectives on occupational safety and health (OSH) and beyond; acknowledges in particular the Agency's contribution to:
  - Reducing the OSH burden resulting from musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) by improving the understanding on the topic and promoting discussion among policy-makers, researchers and intermediaries via the OSH overview on MSDs and the Healthy Workplaces Campaign 'Lighten the Load'.
  - Knowledge on the impact of digitalisation on safety and health through an OSH Overview. This overview directly addresses one of the key EU policy priorities identifying OSH challenges and possibilities linked to digitalisation.

- The development of foresight studies which set an example for other organisations. The current foresight study on the circular economy is directly relevant to the green transition by identifying new and emerging risks related to this development.
  - The availability of official EU OSH information via the OSH barometer. The barometer provides qualitative and quantitative data which constitutes an evidence base for policy-making.
6. Notes with satisfaction that the results for key performance indicators are positive across all activities and that the ambitious targets were to a large extent achieved.
  7. Welcomes the very high implementation rate of the annual work programme resulting in an almost full implementation of the budget.
  8. Appreciates the cooperation established with other EU agencies aimed at expertise and methodology exchange as well as joint delivery; welcomes that the Agency has fully implemented the action plan adopted in response to the evaluation of EU-OSHA, Eurofound, ETF and Cedefop.
  9. Stresses the importance of tripartism at the EU and national levels 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. Acknowledges the key role played by Focal points and their networks in contributing to the achievement of EU-OSHA's objectives, through the provision of high-quality information and data from the national level feeding into the planning and implementation of the Agency's work programme, and their effort in disseminating the Agency's work in the Member States.
  11. 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.
  12. Observes that the interim Executive Director's declaration of assurance is based on a robust control system built around the Internal Control Framework. The robustness of the control system is confirmed by the absence of significant findings from the Internal Audit Service and the Court of Auditors.
  13. 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 2021 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 2021 be forwarded, together with this analysis and assessment, to the European Parliament, the European Council, the European Commission and the Court of Auditors.

10 June 2022

*(signed)*

Michael Gillen  
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 (OSH) information and good practice that 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 European Parliament (EP) Employment and Social Affairs Committee also participates in the work of the Management Board, and, together with European Economic Area and European Free Trade Association countries representatives and European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound), European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) and European Labour Authority (ELA) representatives, he has 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 coordination 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

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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.

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 C, Unit 2 of the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL), 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<sup>3</sup> also serves as the Head of Unit of one of the 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 their 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, and human resource 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, an important framework condition arose that has been having a significant impact on the work of the Agency ever since. The global COVID-19 pandemic has made OSH an even more relevant topic in the EU agenda. EU-OSHA has been strongly involved in the EU response to the crisis. As a result, all ongoing and planned activities were reviewed in order to adapt to the new priorities and needs. OSH-related topics from the pandemic have been integrated across the activities where relevant – for example, via a specific focus on teleworking in the Overview on musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) and the linked Healthy Workplaces Campaign 2020-22. The importance of EU-OSHA's contribution to the management of the pandemic, both in terms of identification of risks and ways to prevent and manage these, was recently evidenced by a study on OSH and COVID-19 carried out at the request of the European Parliament Employment and Social Affairs Committee Committee.<sup>4</sup>

The Agency's long-term strategic objectives are established in a [Multi-annual Strategic Programme 2018-2023 \(MSP\)](#) adopted by the Management Board and formulated within the framework of the Founding Regulation. The MSP addresses the main challenges in OSH in the EU as identified in the main EU policy documents. During 2021, EU-OSHA continued to make progress towards its strategic objectives across its

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<sup>3</sup> Please note that as from 16 September 2021, the Management Board has appointed an interim Executive Director until a new Executive Director is in post. In the present report, reference will be made to 'Executive Director' when referring to tasks that are in general ascribed to the function as per the policies and procedures in place; to 'interim Executive Director' when referring to specific actions carried out as from 16 September 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Maxime Moulac, Panagiota Pavlou and Laura Vone, 'Occupational Safety and Health: Adjusting provisions in the light of COVID-19', March, 2022.

six priority areas. This resulted in a budget implementation of 97% and a work programme implementation of 96% (target: 90%).

In June 2021, the Commission adopted a new [EU OSH Strategic Framework](#) covering a seven-year timespan, from 2021 to 2027. The Agency's own analysis and the dialogue with its stakeholders confirmed that its long-term strategic objectives are a good basis for contributing to the implementation of the EU OSH Strategic Framework. Other key documents are the [European Commission Communication 'A Strong Social Europe for Just Transitions'](#) and the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#).

One of the main challenges identified is the digital transition and its impact on the workplace. Whereas digitalisation brings a number of opportunities, there are also risks and it is stressed that high safety and health standards must be maintained. EU-OSHA is contributing directly to the management of this transition via its major OSH Overview activity on digitalisation and the Healthy Workplaces Campaign on digitalisation that will begin in 2023. The OSH Overview on Digitalisation followed a foresight study on the same topic.

Another key challenge is the green transition. This transition will also have an important impact on work and it is necessary to anticipate this impact. Anticipation of change in the world of work is one of the cornerstones of the new strategic framework and EU-OSHA's well-established foresight work will contribute to this. Currently, a foresight activity on the circular economy is being implemented that will help identify risks and opportunities related to this aspect of the green transition.

For EU-OSHA, it is very important to be able to contribute significantly to these new areas, without, however, ignoring other key OSH challenges as identified in the main policy documents thus far.

Other key challenges are linked to psychosocial risks and MSDs. EU-OSHA has implemented a major OSH Overview on MSDs and the research results are now being promoted through a Healthy Workplaces Campaign running from 2020 to 2022. Over the next programming period, a new OSH Overview on psychosocial risks will be implemented. It will address current challenges relating to the protection of mental health at work, expanding knowledge on the prevalence and effective prevention of mental health problems to inform current policy debate and workplace interventions.

EU-OSHA is developing a Workers' Exposure Survey on carcinogens that will help estimate the amount of workplace exposure to carcinogens in Europe. This will directly support the objective of reducing cancer as a cause of work-related deaths.

Through the Online interactive Risk Assessment (OiRA) activity, EU-OSHA, together with its partners, provides a tool for employers to carry out a good quality risk assessment, thereby facilitating compliance with the legal requirements without compromising the quality of the risk assessment, especially among SMEs. OiRA is explicitly mentioned in different policy documents and is an activity that will be continued throughout the programming period.

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.

EU-OSHA has 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 entirely online. Notwithstanding, EU-OSHA managed to actively present its work at over 350 events and



adapted its Focal Point Assistance Tool (FAST) support scheme to enable Focal Points to reorient FAST awareness-raising actions (for example, seminars and media actions) in the Member States to address the COVID-19 pandemic.

The EU OSH Strategic Framework promotes a Vision Zero approach to work-related deaths in the EU. EU-OSHA's vision and programmed activities to promote an OSH risk prevention culture are fully supportive of this approach.

Evaluations have several times confirmed the performance and the relevance to EU policy priorities of EU-OSHA. This is both the case for activity evaluations commissioned by the Agency and for the evaluation of EU-OSHA and three other agencies under DG EMPL's remit commissioned by the European Commission. The [Staff Working Document of the Commission following up to the four agencies' evaluation](#) highlights that: EU-OSHA contributes to and sometimes is the only source of high-quality information on OSH; supports EU policies and legislation through awareness raising and implementation, making knowledge and good practices available to stakeholders; and complements work and knowledge developed by others such as the Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work. By the end of 2021, the Agency had implemented all the actions agreed upon by the Management Board to meet the recommendations from the four agencies' evaluation.

EU-OSHA has continued collaborating closely with other EU agencies in 2021 – both those within the employment and social affairs policy field and beyond. In addition to continuing the established cooperation with Eurofound, the European Training Foundation (ETF) and Cedefop, EU-OSHA has already engaged with the newly established ELA to formalise collaboration.

In September 2021, Dr Christa Sedlatschek, who had served as EU-OSHA's Executive Director for 10 years, retired: her work and commitment to the mission of the Agency having been very much acknowledged and appreciated by all stakeholders. The recruitment of a new Executive Director was delayed and the Management Board took timely decisions to ensure business continuity. Most importantly, the Management Board agreed on interim arrangements and asked the Head of the Prevention and Research Unit, Mr William Cockburn, to temporarily take up duties as interim Executive Director. Mr Cockburn took up the duties on 16 September, the day after Dr Sedlatschek retired. In parallel, the Management Board made sure that all requirements for the implementation of the appointment procedure for the new Executive Director were respected so that the protection of personal data and the integrity of the procedure were ensured.

As the 2021 results demonstrate, the arrangements put in place swiftly to mitigate the impact of the delay in the recruitment of a new Executive Director resulted in minimal disruption to planned work and have not affected EU-OSHA's overall performance.

## 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 this assessment and of processes and procedures to ensure completeness and reliability of the information.

Overall, the interim 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 interim Executive Director issued his 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 2021; 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 his declaration of assurance, the interim Executive Director has not deemed it necessary to include any reservation.