

IMPROVING OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH IN MICRO AND SMALL ENTERPRISES IN EUROPE — CONSTRUCTION AND AGRICULTURE SECTORS

16 October 2019, Brussels

Introduction

Background

Micro and small enterprises (MSEs) account for nearly 99 % of businesses in the European Union (EU) and employ around half of the workforce, making them the backbone of the EU economy, driving growth, innovation and social integration.

However, occupational safety and health (OSH) is often poorly managed in MSEs, so workers are at greater risk of workplace accidents and work-related ill health. MSEs are heterogeneous and they lack cohesive representation, which poses challenges for monitoring working conditions, raising awareness and enforcement. The issue has been prioritised in national strategies on OSH, in the [European Commission's strategic framework](#), in its [communication on the modernisation of OSH legislation](#) and, most recently, in the context of the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#).

In 2014, the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) launched a 3-year project to help improve OSH outcomes in MSEs across Europe. The project, called Safe Small and Micro Enterprises (SESAME), was commissioned from a consortium of experienced researchers from nine Member States of the EU. Its overall aim was to provide support for evidence-based policy recommendations and facilitate the development of new or existing practical tools by identifying key success factors in terms of policies, strategies and practical solutions for improving OSH in MSEs in Europe. A [final conference](#) on the SESAME project took place on 19 June 2018 to present the outcomes of the [SESAME project's research](#) and to set up an active dialogue among EU-OSHA's stakeholders on the way forward.

Both construction and agriculture are sectors dominated by MSEs. Eurostat figures show that approximately 18 million people across the EU work in the construction sector, with 98 % of enterprises in the sector being micro and small (1 to 49 workers). Labour in the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector accounts for the equivalent of around 10 million people working full-time across the EU, with the vast majority of European farms being small, family-run holdings.

A [high-level conference](#) took place in Brussels on 16 October 2019. Its purpose was to engage EU and national stakeholders in a dialogue on how European MSEs in the construction and agriculture sectors can be supported to manage OSH effectively. To this end, it comprised both interactive components, including two panel discussions and parallel sessions, and presentations of the project's findings.

Conference proceedings

Christa Sedlatschek, Executive Director of EU-OSHA, opened the conference. Members of the research team then presented the project's findings on effective OSH policies and interventions for MSEs. David Walters (Cardiff University) focused on what works well and what can be improved in securing improved OSH in MSEs. Ann-Beth Antonsson (Swedish Environmental Research Institute) elaborated on the good examples on the construction and agriculture sectors identified in the SESAME project.

Next, a first session of parallel group discussions was held, at which employers, advisors and representatives of authorities, trade unions and international organisations in the agriculture and construction sectors discussed the project's findings and its potential impact in their respective sectors.

This was followed by a first panel discussion involving representatives of the European Federation of Building and Woodworkers (EFBWW), the European Builders Confederation (EBC), the European Construction Industry Federation (FIEC) and the European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions (EFFAT).

The morning session closed with a presentation by Hans Jørgen Limborg of the Bam-bus project in Denmark, an example of good practice in the construction field.

The afternoon opened with two examples of good practice in agriculture: a presentation by Piret Kaljula on the agriculture advisors initiative in Estonia, followed by a presentation by Tomas Gullberg on the Safe Forestry initiative in Sweden. This was followed by the second session of parallel group discussions and by the second panel discussion.

William Cockburn, Head of the Prevention and Research Unit at EU-OSHA, acted as moderator.

Opening statement

Christa Sedlatschek, Executive Director of EU-OSHA, opened the conference. She welcomed all participants and emphasised the key role that MSEs play in the European economy. She mentioned that half of all workers in the EU are employed by MSEs. However, the accident rate remains high in SMEs and therefore there is significant room for improvement in working conditions. She added that the SESAME project launched by the Agency has provided answers to some fundamental policy questions concerning what works and what does not, and under what circumstances, taking account of issues such as forms of governance and regulation, enforcement, advisory services, information and education, financial support, collective agreements and the involvement of social partners. As construction and agriculture are sectors dominated by MSEs and are also among the sectors with the highest levels of OSH risks, she stressed the importance of improving OSH practices and strategies in both sectors.

Good practice examples

Construction sector

Hans Jørgen Limborg, from Roskilde University in Denmark, introduced the Bam-bus project. The employers' associations and the unions in Denmark's construction sector 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 it 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, generally, all stakeholders in the sector accept the service very well and appreciate it. The service is highly adapted to the specific needs of MSEs, and the companies typically contact the service when they have a concrete OSH issue.

Agriculture sector

Piret Kaljula, from the Estonian Labour Inspectorate, presented the agriculture advisors project. It was launched in 2012, and for 1 year, trained 13 agriculture advisors with funding from the Rural Development Foundation. Agriculture advisors have been trained in OSH (a total of 184 hours' lecturing and independent work) by the Tallinn University of Technology, and subsequently provide OSH support to farmers together with other types of advisory services when visiting companies in the agriculture sector. On average, each advisor reached 5 to 10 farms per month across the country, mostly MSEs, including in remote areas. Farmers welcomed the initiative, and negotiations are ongoing to arrange new training for more advisors.

Tomas Gullberg, from the Swedish Safe Forest Association, presented the Safe Forestry project. Safe Forestry uses cooperation between OSH advisors and trainers and the work environment authority, which has resulted in a huge increase in the number of Swedish chainsaw licences after regulations introduced requirements for training for those working professionally with a chainsaw. It was launched initially as a 4-year project in 2001, with financial support from an insurance company, and it is still ongoing, with 350 certified instructors and approximately 150 000 licences issued to date.

Group discussions

During the conference, representatives took part in two sector-specific group discussions, each exploring in more detail sector experiences of safety and health in MSEs. The discussions were loosely organised around a set of issues that emerged from the SESAME study, but they were quite wide ranging and reflected the diverse but rich experience of members in addressing the challenges of OSH in MSEs in the sector. The following is a summary of these discussions. Although they were organised in two different sessions, the nature of the subject and the experiences of participants meant that many common issues were identified.

Construction sector

The group was composed of experienced stakeholders with interests in safety and health in the construction sector in Europe. They included over 20 representatives of the social partners, regulators, peak sector organisations, OSH practitioners and others from a representative range of EU Member States as well as representatives of European organisations such as the European Commission.

As a starting point, the group acknowledged that the focus on MSEs is better than a focus on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). In the latter case, micro companies tend to be less visible and the focus is often more on quite large medium-sized companies, which tend to dedicate greater resources to OSH and have more formalised approaches to OSH management.

What are we aiming at?

There was some discussion concerning the visibility of target groups in construction. Contributors noted, for example, that micro companies tend to be less visible and therefore strategies designed to take this into account are important. Participants then discussed 'invisible companies' in construction: they were described as often self-employed people and micro enterprises that are not organised and tend to work on private housing jobs, for example, rather than on large construction sites. 'Invisible companies' are especially hard to reach, and strategies to reach out to these companies were discussed. Participants also indicated that self-employed builders are a major challenge in the sector.

Some of the participants noted that there was no fixed pattern and not all micro firms were necessarily hard to reach; others acknowledged the possibility of reaching out to MSEs through the organisations or federations they are affiliated. Overall, there was consensus that, as a rule, smaller size implied greater challenges for reaching out to. Existing differences between Member States in OSH coverage in MSEs were also mentioned, with relatively good coverage in some and quite poor coverage in others. Again, it was acknowledged that small construction companies are often less organised than the larger ones, making them difficult to engage with.

The three categories of MSE identified in the research — 'learners', 'reactors' and 'avoiders' — were used in this discussion. Participants recognised that construction companies interested in OSH, the 'learners', are the easiest to reach. Reaching out to 'reactors' and 'avoiders' was acknowledged to be a particular challenge in the construction sector.

A variety of factors affecting OSH practice and outcomes in micro and small firms in construction were also discussed, including questions of cost. One participant stressed that a complicating factor is that MSEs get paid for the job, and taking time to implement preventive measures is often not included in the planning or the budget for the work.

How can we organise sustainable interventions on OSH?

The role of organisations and business relations were discussed. The participants acknowledged that pooling resources and organisations working together to reach out to MSEs and provide OSH support is a good strategy. It was also acknowledged that legislation and related inspections are a strong basis for this.

Participants also discussed the potential of working together with local authorities, other than OSH authorities, as a way of reaching out to MSEs in construction. Contributors discussed the fact that, in countries requiring building permits, the local authority that grants such permits is a potential partner to work with. The authority could, for example, provide information to private homeowners about their responsibility for OSH when they obtain building permits. It was also acknowledged that there are limitations to this strategy, for example that it is not possible for the homeowner to supervise the construction site daily. It was concluded that ways to integrate OSH into this process could be further discussed.

What works? For whom and in what contexts?

OSH knowledge in MSEs and the importance of providing good OSH training as part of vocational training for construction workers were discussed. However, here again it was pointed out that not all construction workers receive vocational training.

Examples of good approaches were presented by participants and discussed. It was acknowledged that hands-on information is very useful for MSEs in construction, rather than bureaucratic routines, which MSEs probably avoid if they can. Participants also stressed that there are information and tools available, for example the Online interactive Risk Assessment Tool (OiRA), but MSEs have little time to dedicate to OSH and to OSH education.

The participants mentioned several examples of different kinds of information aimed at construction workers, such as brochures in different languages, posters and videos focusing on important topics, for example [a Spanish campaign on preventing falls from roofs](#) (available only in Spanish). The information can use different ways of motivating prevention, including information about both the physical and emotional consequences of accidents. This kind of material is available and has been for a long time.

A strategy used in Estonia is to provide OSH information (from the OSH authority) to all newly registered construction companies. It was also acknowledged that it was often difficult for newly started companies to prioritise OSH, and information about OSH can easily be forgotten among all the other information that these companies receive.

In the Netherlands, a simple sign language ([Bouwspraak](#)) has been developed, which everybody working on the construction site is required to know. This is one way of overcoming some of the language issues. Bouwspraak comprises body signs and pictograms and warns people of dangerous situations. However, not all issues are covered; for example, silica does not have a pictogram.

In the discussions, it was also acknowledged that providing information does not result in the immediate use of the information. The information needs to be available just in time and is best when received from a trusted source, such as a supplier. Campaigns may create emotions that can have a long-lasting positive impact. The group identified them as an effective awareness-raising tool.

In the end, it was concluded that the impact of this information is limited to only the construction companies that are actually reached and are interested in the message, which are usually the 'learners' and those 'reactors' for which the topic is relevant at the moment they receive the information. The participants discussed strategies for reaching out to 'avoiders' and 'reactors', including raising awareness in schools, among suppliers and shops that sell construction materials, and at town halls where they request building permits. It was acknowledged that the presence of OSH information in these contexts could be a way of reaching out to MSEs and self-employed people in construction, even though this would require more resources.

Agriculture sector

What are we aiming at and how can we organise sustainable interventions on OSH in MSEs in agriculture?

Members of the discussion group first introduced themselves, revealing that they were an experienced group of stakeholders with interests in safety and health in the agriculture sector in Europe. They included over 20 representatives of the social partners, regulators, sector organisations, OSH practitioners and others from a representative range of EU Member States as well as representatives of international organisations such as the European Commission and the International Labour Organization (ILO). Several of them were already familiar with the SESAME outputs and indicated that they had found them valuable; others expressed a keen interest in learning more about them.

The group discussion started with a general acknowledgement of the high risks of the sector and its comparatively poor OSH outcomes, as well as of the preponderance in it of micro, family and single-person enterprises, which are often geographically remote. These considerations help to explain some of the challenges for both managing and regulating OSH in the sector. It was agreed that such disparity and divergence also suggested reasons why cross-sector learning was not highly developed in the sector. The strong vocation of many of those who work in the sector was also discussed and note taken of their preference for practical, just-in-time solutions and their distaste for both bureaucracy and what they perceive as administrative interference with their work.

It was pointed out that the sector was already equipped with many tools and checklists for OSH, but putting them to effective and widespread use remained a significant problem. It was agreed that, to be successful, OSH intervention needed to take into account such features of the MSEs that dominated the sector.

It was also pointed out that specific needs must be considered when contemplating OSH strategies and interventions, including those of the large proportion of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, such as migrant and itinerant workers in temporary and insecure employment, often receiving very low wages.

The group agreed that despite the high risks in the sector there was a considerable challenge for awareness raising to support farmers to take preventive measures at their workplaces. The important role of intermediaries and organisations in achieving, conveying and transferring this awareness and changing traditional behaviour and practices sufficiently to encourage prevention was confirmed. In addition, however, it was pointed out that approaches to OSH were likely to be most successful if they saw it not as an add-on but rather as something embedded in the nature of the tasks undertaken in the sector.

As one participant put it, 'it is important to achieve awareness of risk as part of practice — and not as something separate'. It was acknowledged that this was a major challenge and it required a combination of education and training to raise awareness and to change practice at all levels. Change in practice could occur in many forms, from the inclusion of the building blocks of good OSH practice in basic education from an early age to the specific training of those living and working in agriculture. Alongside such awareness, it was agreed that the incorporation of OSH into the safety design of machines would help to further embed it in everyday good practice. Therefore, both design and training needed to focus on how to use a machine safely and not only on how to use it from a technical point of view.

It was acknowledged that there was a role for regulation in changing the culture of the sector, and it was agreed that regulation was a necessary basis for improving OSH. In addition, however, participants discussed how those in the sector might have more incentives on OSH, not only in terms of regulatory compliance. To this end, economic incentives were discussed, as was making the sector more aware of the good business reasons for preventive OSH. It was agreed that motivation was important and that incentives needed to be taken into account when finding ways to motivate MSEs in the sector more effectively. Effort was required to present OSH strategies as understandable means by which farmers, for example, could make their work lives somewhat easier by adopting safer working practices, and could also encourage workers to seek employment in the sector.

At the same time, the role of other actors, institutions, organisations and processes in the sector was acknowledged as important in supporting improved OSH practice. In particular, the possibility of positive influence in supply chain relations was discussed, and examples of the influence of suppliers in this respect were considered. There was also a discussion of the role of risk assessment as an awareness-raising process rather than a bureaucratic exercise and an end in itself.

Eventually, it was concluded that, although these challenges were significant and needed to be addressed, a greater focus on preventive OSH was an achievable aim for the sector. With the variety of strategies, tools and interested actors already in the sector, improvements were possible. Although this was the clear aim of the participants in the discussion, they acknowledged the considerable difficulties in achieving sustainable improvements and agreed that concerted and coordinated actions of a multiplicity of stakeholders were likely to be a positive way forward.

What works? For whom and in what contexts?

David Walters opened the session with a brief explanation of the approach of the SESAME research to evaluation of intervention on MSEs, and the techniques of realist evaluation that had been adopted by the research. This was followed by a lively and open discussion among participants concerning the features of successful intervention. It explored the need for interventions to have a specific focus, to be sure that they appropriately addressed their targets in this broad and diverse sector, and for them to be accessible and transferable, to ensure they reached the large numbers of workplaces that could potentially benefit from them. It was agreed that the most useful way to pursue these joint aims was through the coordinated actions of a multiplicity of stakeholders.

It was also acknowledged that in this complex sector it was unrealistic to expect that interventions would be likely to produce universally applicable solutions. This is not only because the sector is large and complex but because the issues on which interventions focus are also large and complex. There was therefore a need to prioritise actions according to both the severity of risk and the practicability of effective solutions. There were a number of specific suggestions for identifying those at risk as well as examples of effective campaigns —

such as the change of attitudes observed among male agricultural workers following campaigns targeting skin protection. It was widely agreed that diversity in intervention was needed to match the diversity of work situations found in the sector. At the same time, it was also pointed out that sometimes both the effectiveness and the sustainability of OSH interventions could be aided by their inclusion as part of wider interventions. Examples of such practices that were mentioned included the role of substitution in pesticide use, where, primarily for environmental reasons, changes from chemical to biological control had taken place in some situations and resulted in reduced exposures to hazardous substances. David Walters linked these developments to examples of incorporating OSH into other interventions that had been seen in the SESAME study to take place in other sectors.

The need for better data on risk exposure and its health effects was also discussed, with examples given of the importance of national observatories on specific issues such as musculoskeletal disorders and skin cancer.

The question of knowledge transfer through the development of existing networks was discussed. It was pointed out that many national and cross-border networks of various stakeholders in the sector already existed, as well as strong and long-standing relations between farmers and their suppliers. Several examples of their positive actions were reported during the group discussion. It was also suggested that they might be enhanced by facilitating greater involvement in them of farmers themselves, who, it was suggested, perceived great benefit from being able to relate more directly to the experiences of other farmers. Despite the diversity in the sector, therefore, it was also agreed that the many examples of long-standing networks and relations were a positive asset that could be further utilised to cascade OSH messages.

While coordinated actions and engagement of multiple stakeholders in OSH intervention and improvement were seen as likely to be effective ways forward, questions concerning the resourcing of OSH were also discussed. This discussion was wide ranging and embraced means and examples of economic incentives for preventive measures in MSEs in the sector, the role of national insurance systems and other forms of resourcing. The need for a broader conceptualisation of costs and benefits of resourcing OSH was pointed out. It was noted that costs are more obvious than benefits and this needs to be addressed.

Many separate examples of good practices and successful interventions on OSH could be found in agriculture. In conclusion, it was acknowledged that there was a need for coordinated and concerted actions to take forward improvements addressing the multiplicity of situations in the sector in ways that worked for workers and their employers across the range of diverse contexts in which the sector was situated.

Stakeholders' views and panel discussions

To introduce the first panel discussion, the researchers summarised the group discussions.

Ann-Beth Antonsson (Swedish Environmental Research Institute) opened the discussion by mentioning that the group had stressed the necessity for employers in the construction sector to increase their OSH knowledge and to take OSH risks seriously. She added that a need for coordination had been identified and new ways of performing risk assessment had been discussed, with a view to finding possible solutions to emerging challenges in the workplace and to the existing difficulties in performing risk assessment in the construction sector.

David Walters (Cardiff University) mentioned that the group had acknowledged a tendency to identify target groups with business units, whereas OSH strategies for MSEs must target not only the employers but also the workers. Given the practical nature of agricultural work, the group discussed how to develop strategies addressing strengths and weaknesses of this practical knowledge, concluding that there is a need to incentivise employers towards innovation and good practice. The group identified a need for coordination, given the multiplicity of the existing challenges in the sector, which require a multiplicity of solutions.

What do you see as the most significant challenges to improving OSH arrangements and outcomes in MSEs in your sector?

Eugenio Quintieri (EBC) referred to the multiplicity of the challenges at stake and stressed the need to change the existing culture in the construction sector to make it more OSH sensitive, in response to the high-risk nature of the sector and of the new and emerging challenges it is facing. An additional challenge is to tailor OSH information to micro enterprises and to provide them with concrete measures that are essential to support them in carrying out their daily work.

Rolf Gehring (EFBWW) stated that, although the construction sector is not a technology driver, technology plays a big role in the sector and poses new OSH risks. Another challenge is undeclared work, mostly by single workers and micro enterprises. He stressed the importance of training to increase knowledge and participation, as well as to provide an explanation of technological changes in the sector. He concluded that orchestration is important at all levels, and for each single level there is a need to identify who needs to be involved and who can help.

Domenico Campogrande (FIEC) mentioned that in the construction sector several actors operate on the worksite at the same time, often without understanding each other. He recognised that mobility is an issue, and that, in spite of the existence of relevant legislation, self-employment is also still a challenge for OSH, especially for micro and small companies. With limited resources available for labour inspectorates, there is a need to invest in training to change the existing culture. He mentioned the important role of social partners and concluded that it is crucial to transform risk assessment into something easy to use, recognising that incentives and tools can be very beneficial to micro and small companies, whose main obstacle is the lack of resources.

Arnd Spahn (EFFAT) maintained that agriculture is the most dangerous sector in the EU economy and stressed the importance of campaigning, of raising OSH awareness and of focusing on people. He added that farmers' organisations are not very interested in developing concrete activities to improve OSH, and resources for labour inspectorates specific to the agricultural sector are almost non-existent. The specificities of the agricultural sector must be taken into account, and it is crucial to identify what can be done by different stakeholders, in an effort to achieve common results. He expressed his concern that only a few EU Member States have signed the [Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention](#) (International Labour Organization, 2001). Lastly, he identified the need for a specific risk assessment tool on agriculture.

Research shows that one of the most difficult challenges is to reach out to those MSEs that are not aware of OSH and have little interest and knowledge of OSH; what are your experiences and thoughts about it?

Rolf Gehring (EFBWW) argued that a solution to this challenge might be difficult to find, because, from a business federation's perspective, it is not often easy to detect what goes on inside each company. Raising awareness and producing material that is easy for all companies to use do help. Companies are nowadays required to prove that they are responding to OSH requirements, for example including time for training in working hours, especially targeting new workers. He added that those who are hardest to reach can be reached indirectly: another channel is through those who are experienced in OSH at company level or at local level, who can raise awareness of OSH in different companies in the sector.

Eugenio Quintieri (EBC) stressed that OSH culture is fundamental. He added that competition could be a problem because, if we keep competing on only the lowest price, it is inevitable that OSH becomes a cost that makes a company less competitive. He identified the need of including social criteria in public tenders and showing employers the added value of OSH measures from an economic point of view, which will increase their interest in OSH. Lastly, he added that it is necessary to speak the same pragmatic language as the enterprises in the construction sector and to communicate effectively with the target audience.

Arnd Spahn (EFFAT) stated that migrant workers in agriculture are not fully aware of OSH, and that training these workers in local OSH requirements is not likely to be very successful because of the specific context of migrant workers. He maintained that it is important to channel OSH information according to the specifics of each group. He stressed the necessity of providing migrant workers with the information they need to foster better social standards in agriculture, concluding that, if we do not give migrant workers the chance to be more integrated, they will be used to oppose developments in OSH.

Domenico Campogrande (FIEC) stated that FIEC has developed, together with EFBWW, a 12-step guide to measures to implement OSH at company level¹, which has been disseminated among national partners. He mentioned, nonetheless, the difficulty of tracking how far the information is disseminated. He concluded that risk assessment could be implemented in a very easy and pragmatic manner by micro enterprises.

EU-OSHA's Executive Director, **Christa Sedlatschek**, hoped that orchestrating would increase OSH awareness in micro and small enterprises. The newly established [European Labour Authority](#) will probably also play an important role in this regard.

¹ *Guide for developing a H&S Management System*, available at: www.fiec.eu

David Walters argued that when designing OSH policies and practices we often fail to fully grasp the new and unstructured path that work is taking, which also leads to the creation of more MSEs. He added that an increasing number of workers are no longer employees in a traditional sense, and this holds especially for micro companies. He concluded that the strategies we try to adopt are context dependent; therefore, it is essential to be aware of the changes that are taking place in the workplace.

Ann-Beth Antonsson stated that dissemination of OSH is still a huge challenge. She welcomed Arnd Spahn's examples of alternative dissemination channels in the context of migrant workers, which reflect an important point highlighted in the SESAME project, namely collaboration with non-OSH intermediaries. She explained that the challenge comes from the fact that strategies are context dependent, so there is a need to identify the specificities of each sector. She identified another challenge in the limited resources available, which must be prioritised. She concluded by stating that it is difficult to reach undeclared workers, they might not be very interested and this is a great problem, as their work is usually not very safe. The SESAME project did not cover undeclared workers.

To introduce the second panel discussion, the researchers summarised the group discussions.

David Walters stated that, recognising the complexity of OSH in agriculture, the group had acknowledged the need for prioritisation in addressing the issue. The availability of data and the need for them in order to make informed decisions had been discussed, with the examples of practices and national observatories. The importance of participation of farmers and farmers' employees had also been talked through. He also reported that the group had discussed the role of existing networks within the sector, as well as the use of parallel actions and stakeholders in the sector. Finally, the group had agreed on the need to remind employers that the benefits will outweigh the costs.

Ann-Beth Antonsson stated that one of the topics in the group discussion had been how to communicate with workers who do not speak the local language. She added that the group had discussed the effectiveness of using traditional awareness-raising channels, such as campaigns, as well as more innovative approaches. She mentioned an OSH awareness-raising initiative taking place in Ireland, whereby shops that sell equipment also disseminate OSH material, and a similar initiative in Sweden with shops that sell chainsaws, and she stressed the importance of reaching out to schools. She added that the group had engaged in a discussion on the example of large companies requiring OSH standards from smaller companies working for them, and stressed that, nonetheless, insufficient resources can be an obstacle. Lastly, she mentioned that the discussion had also touched on other topics, such as the ISO standards and the role of medical doctors in prevention.

What kind of support do you think is most effective in improving OSH arrangements and outcomes in MSEs in your sector? And what is the role of clients?

Domenico Campogrande (FIEC) argued that it is common practice in construction to have subcontractors and, as a rule, the bigger the company, the higher the number of subcontractors. He added that long chains of subcontracting are often associated with undeclared work and poorer working conditions. He mentioned the case of Spain, where a measure is in place limiting the number of subcontractors in public procurement. He clarified that price pressure inhibits the implementation of OSH measures, adding that public procurement guarantees certain OSH standards on the part of the contractors, while this is often not the case in private procurement. He concluded by mentioning the example of the United Kingdom and Ireland, where an identification card corresponding to a specific level of OSH knowledge is needed to enter the worksite, adding that it is an additional cost for the companies yet still a bearable one.

Arnd Spahn (EFFAT) stated that the supply chain is a serious issue in agriculture. He stressed that the existing structure is very poor and only a change to larger-scale agriculture can strengthen it, but agriculture in Europe comprises MSEs and family businesses and this must be accepted. Although the standards of OSH in agriculture in Europe are overall not bad, compared with other world regions, the sector is facing new and more complex issues. He mentioned that agriculture is a trendsetter in technology, for instance in the use of drones, but this raises questions. He concluded that the situation of OSH in the supply chain in agriculture is very weak at the moment.

Ann-Beth Antonsson argued that the identification-card-based system to enter the workplace is also very useful to limit undeclared work. She added that, for supply chains, it is common to use formal requirements for subcontractors to provide written evidence that they have adopted some OSH routines, but this is hardly indicative of concrete action being taken.

David Walters stated that the supply chain plays a key role in the construction sector. Although it has some positive elements, one of the limitations of the supply chain is that OSH standards tend to lower as you go down the links in the chain. He maintained that, when one moves from well-regulated environments to less well-regulated environments, not only vertical effects (linear relationship) but also horizontal effects are visible, affecting each of the tiers, and these effects are context specific. Lastly, he argued that social partners have a role to play and that, among them, trade unions can have an impact as well, and in many cases trade unions have used supply chain relations successfully.

Closing remarks

William Cockburn recalled that the aim of the conference was to promote the SESAME project and to get feedback on it, and acknowledged that the level of engagement that characterised the event was a success. He then provided a quick overview of the most relevant work currently carried out by EU-OSHA. The Agency is going to start research on supporting compliance by MSEs, which will encompass many of the issues that were discussed in the conference. He added that the easy-to-use [OiRA](#), guiding MSEs through the risk assessment process, also has specific tools for construction² and a few tools in national languages on agriculture³, and an EU-wide tool on agriculture is coming up. He also mentioned that the European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER), the latest Healthy Workplaces Campaign on Managing Dangerous Substances and the one starting in 2020 on musculoskeletal disorders are also particularly relevant to both the construction and agriculture sectors. He added that EU-OSHA is currently running a review on OSH risks and the future of agriculture.

² There are currently [11 OiRA tools](#) available for the construction sector.

³ There are currently [7 OiRA tools](#) available for the agriculture and forestry sector.