



Healthy Workplaces Summit 2017 — experts celebrate the Healthy Workplaces for All Ages campaign as it reaches its final milestone

Bilbao, 21-22 November 2017

The European workforce is ageing and retirement ages are going up. But how can we make sure that workers remain healthy into old age and that economic growth is sustained? Ensuring safe, healthy and well-adapted workplaces throughout the working life is key. Promoting sustainable working lives and how to achieve this were among the main goals of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work's (EU-OSHA's) Healthy Workplaces for All Ages campaign. These issues were also top of the agenda for leading occupational safety and health (OSH) experts as they united at the 2017 Healthy Workplaces Summit, held in Bilbao, Spain.

The summit — which is a key event in any Healthy Workplaces Campaign calendar — marked the end of EU-OSHA's latest 2-year campaign and was attended by more than 350 participants, including the network of national focal points, official campaign and media partners, policy-makers and social partners. The summit was also streamed live online to a global audience, and [recordings of the sessions](#), [presentations and speakers' CVs](#) are available. The commitment and enthusiasm of all in attendance was evident, with inspirational and insightful debates during the 2-day programme of plenary and parallel sessions, panel discussion and networking. Delegates also embraced the use of interactive audience polls and Q&A sessions, which greatly enhanced the level of audience engagement. There was a real sense of achievement as participants reflected on the success of the campaign, and they clearly valued the opportunity to interact with like-minded people, exchange good practice and discuss innovative ideas for bringing about change.



1.1 Opening session

Delegates received a warm welcome from EU-OSHA's Brussels Liaison Office Manager, Brenda O'Brien, who was the summit's main moderator. Ms O'Brien highlighted the importance of bringing people together to build relationships and share experiences, and, with the help of [Napo](#), set an informal and relaxed tone for the meeting.

Károly György, Chair of the EU-OSHA Governing Board, on behalf of EU-OSHA's Director Dr Christa Sedlatschek, also welcomed participants and offered his thanks to the social partners, national focal points, and official

campaign and media partners for their commitment to the campaign, which he believes has *'contributed significantly to creating greater awareness'* of workforce ageing and the associated challenges. He also remarked on the importance of such collaboration — *'enterprises and social partners working together have been able to implement better practices in this area'* — a sentiment that was echoed by many participants during the 2-day summit. Mr György also urged participants to use the



opportunity to explore ways of addressing the challenges that remain and to continue their invaluable efforts to promote sustainable working throughout Europe.

Thought-provoking and inspirational opening statements were also delivered by some other valued supporters of the campaign, including [Marianne Thyssen](#), Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility (via video message). Commissioner Thyssen emphasised the timely nature of the Healthy Workplaces for All Ages campaign given Europe's *'ageing workforce, growing skills gap and the ever-increasing pressure at work'*. She also reiterated the European Commission's commitment to ensuring safe and healthy workplaces — *'one of the cornerstones of the European Pillar of Social Rights'* — and recognised the contribution of the campaign to not only improving *'individual well-being, but also the competitiveness of the economy'*.



Other speakers also marked the start of the summit by expressing their support for the campaign and congratulating EU-OSHA on its achievements:

- Janar Holm, Deputy Secretary General of the Ministry of Social Affairs of Estonia, representing the Estonian Presidency of the Council of the EU
- Pedro Llorente, Deputy Secretary of Employment and Social Security, Spanish Government
- María Jesús San José, Minister of Employment and Justice, Basque Government
- Kris De Meester, Chair of the Health and Safety Group, BusinessEurope
- Marian Schaapman, Head of the Working Conditions, Health and Safety Unit, European Trade Union Institute (ETUI).

Although each of these speakers provided different insights, from national or social partner perspectives, into the issues and the approaches for tackling them, all agreed that everyone — workers, employers and policy-makers — must work together to *'share information and best practice'*, *'reinforce the culture of prevention and occupational safety'* and achieve sustainable working conditions for all in the context of an ageing European workforce.

1.2 Keynote speech — Health inequalities and the ageing workforce

An in-depth analysis of issues related to demographic change in Europe, their impact, the main challenges for the workforce and policy-makers, and some possible solutions were provided by Maria Albin, Professor of Occupational and Environmental Medicine from the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, in her keynote speech. Professor Albin presented comprehensive facts and figures to highlight the complexities of the challenges, including the widening health inequalities in Europe related to differences in national welfare systems, educational level and gender. She emphasised the importance of understanding the interactions between these factors to decision making and policy, and encouraged all stakeholders to use the evidence available and learn from examples of good practice to ensure the efficient use of resources and the development of *'cohesive OSH policies'*.



1.3 Plenary panel discussion — Successful strategies and policies to promote sustainable work and healthy ageing

Practical solutions and successful policies in the context of workforce ageing, how they can be implemented and the related obstacles were further explored in a plenary panel discussion session. Moderator Ruben Maes, Strategic Communication Advisor, engaged the audience and panel members in an interactive debate of a range of issues, which marked a fitting end to an afternoon of fruitful and intensive debate.

Members of the first panel discussed their own experiences of promoting sustainable working at company and national levels, and were invited to consider how good practice could be transferred to other organisations or countries and what might prevent the implementation of such strategies.



Victor Santos, Medical Coordinator for Spain and Portugal of the Good Practice Award-winning [PSA Group](#), demonstrated that achieving the ambitious goal of zero accidents in the manufacturing sector can be a reality. With an inspirational example of an approach to sustainable working that put *'respect for workers at its heart'*, he emphasised the importance of worker, manager and social partner involvement from the very start of any OSH initiative, and highlighted that, particularly in the context of an ageing workforce, *'personalised solutions'* that account for *'physical and psychosocial characteristics'* are key. The other panel members — Wiking Husberg, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health in Finland, and Sander van Leeuwen, Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment in the Netherlands — reiterated the need to engage all stakeholders and raise awareness of the importance of sustainable workplace practices that target not just older workers, but workers at all stages of their careers. This sparked much discussion about the difficulties in ensuring that the right information is collected and communicated effectively to those who need it most, particularly small businesses that lack resources or motivation.

This challenge and potential approaches for tackling it were also covered in depth in the second panel discussion on related policy needs and the impact of policy. Members of the panel, comprising representatives of EU-OSHA's social partners and the European Commission, agreed that positive approaches to supporting the sustainability of individual businesses should be an integral part of OSH policy, and that awareness raising and providing practical tools are

critical. F. Jesús Alvarez Hidalgo, Policy Officer of the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, outlined that *'taking care of people'*, by promoting active ageing both in and outside the workplace, is at the heart of such policies. However, again, communicating the importance of sustainable working to businesses was identified as a key challenge. To ensure continued *'productivity and economic sustainability'*, Rebekah Smith, Senior Advisor of BusinessEurope, suggested that businesses should be encouraged to look at the *'composition of their workforce'* and identify any skills gaps that are likely to emerge as a consequence of workforce ageing, and, with the help of practical tools and good practice examples, take steps now to prevent a *'cliff-edge scenario'* in the future. Marian Schaapman, Head of the Working Conditions, Health and Safety Unit of the ETUI, also emphasised the continued requirement for a structural approach to OSH policy, to complement awareness-raising activities and practical tools.

1.4 Networking event

Discussions continued into the evening at Athletic Bilbao's famous San Mamés stadium, the venue for the Healthy Workplaces Summit networking event. Andrew Smith, Head of EU-OSHA's Communication and Promotion Unit, paid tribute to national focal points, campaign partners, media partners, good practice award winners and EU institutions for *'getting the campaign's messages, its practical tools and good practices into workplaces in more than 30 different countries and 25 languages'*. He also pointed out why the stadium was such an apt venue for this final celebration of the campaign: with one of Athletic Bilbao's top goal scorers being aged 35 (an old age for a football player) and still going strong, and the club priding itself on its principles of fairness and respect, it truly does *'lead by example'*. The evening also included a special celebration of much-loved OSH hero [Napo's 20th anniversary](#).



1.5 Parallel sessions

To provoke further discussion, networking and good practice exchange on a range of relevant topics, delegates were given the opportunity to take part in one of four interactive parallel sessions on day 2: 'Good practices for promoting sustainable workplaces', 'Rehabilitation and back to work', '20 years of Napo — our versatile partner in promoting OSH' and 'Good practice exchange in OSH — the best 10 years of EU-OSHA campaign partnership'. In each of these sessions, representatives from companies, EU institutions, social partners and other experts presented examples of good practice or shared other relevant experiences, and engaged with participants in active discussions of the issues.

Professor Stephen Bevan, Institute for Employment Studies, led the session ['Good practices for promoting sustainable workplaces'](#) and shared some of the *'innovative and exciting'* examples of good practice identified in his role as chair of the 2016-17 Healthy Workplaces Good Practice Awards jury, including those adopting *'a life-course perspective'* and *'holistic approach'* to risk prevention and OSH management, involving a *'consideration of age diversity'* and appropriate *'workplace adaptation'*. These attributes were reflected by the various companies that presented their examples of good practice throughout the session, ranging from participative approaches to risk assessment, adaptations to workplaces and work organisation, and the implementation of tools to promote healthy, sustainable working lives. Representatives from the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic and the Slovenian Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities reinforced the message that *'collaboration is a great way to expand knowledge'* by showcasing their *'fantastic example of an international collaboration across the security services'* geared towards the specific needs of an ageing workforce, and their plans to *'initiate a systematic collaboration in the area of workplace health promotion across EU Member States'*.

In the session ['Rehabilitation and back to work'](#), chair Antonella Cardone, Executive Director of the Fit to Work Global Alliance, led a thought-provoking discussion on specific challenges related to vocational rehabilitation, including the costs of early exit from the labour market, the burden of chronic disease and the need for a *'joined-up policy approach'* to tackle the issues. To demonstrate the extent of the problem and why action to encourage people to return to work and vocational rehabilitation are essential from an economic point of view, Wiking Husberg of the Ministry of Social Affairs in Finland presented some findings from research, carried out in collaboration with social partners, on the costs of sickness absence and early exit from the workforce to tax payers in Finland, which run into billions of euros each year. National examples of good practice were also presented from Norway, Sweden and Austria, with strategies to promote lifelong working by targeting all stages of the career, not just older workers, based on *'qualifications and education'*, *'early intervention and well-coordinated services'* and *'close cooperation'* between social partners and businesses being among the approaches discussed, along with systematic approaches to integrating return-to-work policies into management plans. Ms Cardone highlighted the need to learn from such examples and take action, to *'gather data and make it available to policy-makers and employers'* and to ensure *'concerted actions between the main stakeholders'*.

Good practice exchange is fundamental to EU-OSHA's Healthy Workplaces Campaigns, and EU-OSHA's campaign partners are the driving force behind this, allowing EU-OSHA to reach out to those at 'shop-floor level'. In turn, as Dietmar Elsler of EU-OSHA explained, partners report benefiting from opportunities to network and collaborate with other campaign partners, optimise company performance and increase their visibility through 'websites, blogs, social media and publications'. In the session '[Good practice exchange in OSH — the best 10 years of EU-OSHA campaign partnership](#)', this 'win-win relationship' between EU-OSHA and its partners was evident as Natalie Lotzmann, Head of Global Health Management at SAP, invited some representatives from these campaign partners to share their experiences of being part of the good practice exchange initiative. In addition to providing inspirational and motivational examples of good practice in the session, speakers and the audience also engaged in an interactive discussion on how to make good practice exchange even more effective and get the campaigns' messages across to even more businesses throughout Europe. For instance, increasing efforts to understand the needs and motivations of individual companies and tailoring materials specifically for hard-to-reach businesses and sectors were highlighted as important.



As was clear from all sessions during the course of the 2-day summit, the power of effective communication cannot be underestimated and EU-OSHA uses a range of media to get its campaign messages across to a wide audience. In the session '[20 years of Napo — our versatile partner in promoting OSH](#)', training expert Toby Caldwell demonstrated the power of non-verbal communication. The Napo films, with their combination of humour, emotion, and short and simple scenes, are a perfect example of this, reaching people of all ages and cutting across language and cultural barriers, as demonstrated by the examples from Slovenia and Italy using the 'Napo for teachers' material in education and workers training and in Labour Inspection in Estonia.

1.6 Closing session and outlook

As the summit — and indeed the campaign — drew to a close, Andrew Smith took the opportunity to look ahead to EU-OSHA's next campaign: Healthy Workplaces Manage Dangerous Substances. In keeping with the morning's parallel session on the value of humour in communicating key campaign messages, the audience was entertained by a very light-hearted and well-received take on how flour dust can be dangerous if not managed effectively in the short video '[The asthma of Antoine the Baker](#)', which was one of the winners of the 2017 International Media Festival for Prevention. On a more serious note, Mr Smith appealed to the audience for their continued support, to ensure that 'Europe's workers are protected from dangerous substances and hazardous workplace practices', and highlighted some of the key messages that this forthcoming campaign intends to convey:

- dangerous substances are more common than most people think and risk assessment in all sectors is crucial
- there is guidance available on identifying and reducing or eliminating risks
- carcinogens are a particular concern in Europe's workplaces and special measures must be taken to protect workers.

In his closing remarks, Stefan Olsson, Director of Employment and Social Legislation, reiterated the importance of the tripartite approach to OSH acknowledged by the [European Commission's Social Pillar](#), which has been clearly demonstrated by the success of this campaign. He emphasised that investing in OSH campaigns such as this is 'money well spent' and the pivotal role that EU-OSHA must continue to play in promoting OSH and ensuring the sustainability of Europe's workforce. He reinforced the message that, faced with rapid demographic change, 'intergenerational exchanges in the workplace' are essential and conveyed a real sense that the campaign and the dialogue between EU-

OSHA and its partners and other stakeholders are key to fostering new ways of thinking and innovative solutions to workplace safety and health, to ensure that societies, economies, businesses and individuals *'stay competitive, stay happy and stay productive'*.

