

## FOCAL POINT MEETING - REVIEW ARTICLES ON THE FUTURE OF WORK

(Bilbao, 12 Feb 2020 - EU-OSHA premises)

In the 2020 Focal Point seminar on Foresight expert articles, two new expert articles have been presented and discussed. The first article on 'Supply Chains and their present and future implications on OSH' (David Walters, Phil James), and the second on 'Smart Personal Protective equipment: intelligent protection for the future' (Michael Thierbach) have been resented by the authors. Moreover, an introduction has been given to the new futures relation project on 'the future of Agriculture and OSH'. The PPT's of the presentations have been included.

Group discussions were organised to discuss the two expert articles.

### **Results of the group discussions.**

"It is all about context" was one of the main messages of the article on the *present and future implications of supply chains for OSH*. In the discussion it was agreed that addressing such context specific situations requires tailored approaches and the evidence suggests that interventions are more effective when this is understood at both corporate and regulatory levels. This is already seen in some approaches at sector levels, such as in construction and food, where corporate and regulatory interests have been combined to produce more effective ways of using supply chain relations to improve OSH. While recognising the potential of the use of supply chain initiatives effectively in this way, discussion acknowledged that progress has been slow and that the general experience with supply chain initiatives to improve OSH in the member states was relatively limited. National initiatives are for example targeted at large enterprises, stimulating the private sector to elevate safety standards, focus on sharing of OSH information between suppliers and workers, within or beyond regulatory frameworks that are available, and often a role for inspections is included in a sector-based way.

A further relevant issue explored in the discussion concerned the nature of change in the structure, organisation and control of work and employment. Current patterns in the relations between employers, their workers and the businesses and customers with which they interact for example, suggest a shift in the locus of control of work activities and employment relations. This to an extent results from a greater presence, for example of independent workers, flexi-workers, platform-workers and of more 'fragmented work situations', often facilitated by rapid changes in the use of information technology.

Together, these developments present serious challenges for conventional approaches to the management and regulation of safety and health. It was agreed that supply chain relations can have positive uses in supporting compliance in these emergent scenarios, but greater focus on such matters as the business logistics and pricing mechanisms within them is required in order to identify effective drivers of change. At the same time, this has implications for the adaptation of current regulation, and regulatory policies, much of which were developed to meet challenges of more than 50 years ago. Regulatory policy makers need to be more aware of the changed scenarios in the structure and organisation of work that are rapidly emerging at the present time and ensure that 'adaptive legislation' is in place to meet their challenges. Exploring the use of supply chain initiatives may be one way to effectively address some of these challenges. But the wider development of 'smart governance' is required to increase capacity to meet the diversity of needs and challenges presented by current work organisation, size, location and sector.

Discussion further recognised that there are likely to be a multiplicity of solutions required to meet such demands. It was suggested that perhaps a key to their effectiveness might be found in the extent to which 'smart governance' can effectively co-ordinate solutions across the diverse situations in which prevention strategies were needed.

Smart PPE is upcoming, as we can read in the second article on *Smart Personal Protective equipment as intelligent protection for the future*. Although developed for the purpose of safety and health, specific features of the smart PPE could also create risks. For example, to power electronic smart PPE only safe batteries should be used that are not getting too hot or even may explode, moreover there are security as well as privacy issues. It is important to take care not to create extra risks. The smart PPE is more than its parts alone; it is a new device from which its combination of parts could led to new risks. For the users training is important and feedback for further optimization. User acceptance can be created by smart feedback and simplicity of use, "less is more". For certification and standardisation there are challenges related to the fast developments and the combinations of parts. Also notified bodies need to learn, for example on electronics.

What could be target groups for the Smart PPE? The Smart PPE could be very helpful for Lone workers. Is has already been promising within the group of fire fighters. In forestall areas where there is no wifi, short communication can be created sender-to-sender via the persons in the group via smart wearables. They become 'intelligent users'. The better the PPE is developed the 'deeper' the forest fighters can enter into the forest. It is important that the wearable is used as intended. On the other hand, it should be avoided that a 'false feeling of safety' leads to people taking more risk (risk equal state). Human behaviour is important. It must be understood that technical solutions cannot be replaced by smart PPE (STOP principle). At last, the monitoring of the status of the PPE is very important for health and safety reasons.