

PREVENTION SERVICES' ROLE IN SUPPORTING OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH COMPLIANCE IN IRELAND

Promoting effective occupational safety and health (OSH) practices is key to safer and healthier workplaces. Improving arrangements and practices for managing OSH across a whole range of industry sectors and firm sizes — large, medium and small — is stimulated, supported and sustained by a range of institutional actors and internal and external processes to firms. Scientific research¹ highlights, among other things, the critical role that state regulators for OSH, such as Labour Inspectorates and prevention services, can play. This policy brief is part of a research project conducted in Ireland to provide further insight into this topic.² The methodology for this research involved interviews with 22 participants, twelve of which were from the Health and Safety Authority (HSA). The remaining ten were from prevention services providers and workers. In addition, a literature review was conducted. The findings from this research form the basis for this policy brief.

This research as presented in the main report, found evidence for the beneficial OSH compliance effects from internal and external prevention services providers that can form the basis for policy pointers to support further OSH compliance. Case Study IE4 from Ibec,³ Ireland's largest lobby and business representative group, details the benefits of facilitating an online community of practice. In particular, this has to do with the motivating effect on members to improve their own OSH compliance when they become aware of how their peers have implemented improvements through this community of practice. In Case Study IE5,⁴ the National Irish Safety Organisation (NISO), which is a member-led regionally devolved prevention services provider, exemplifies the benefits of providing a social networking community of practice for its members. Both Case Studies IE4 and IE5 provide policy pointers for encouraging the additional formation of OSH compliance-related communities of practice, and enhancing the scope of those that already exist.

Case Study IE6⁵ details the work of the State Claims Agency that has achieved OSH compliance improvements in the Irish health and social care sector by using OSH-related incident data, which is mandatorily required under national legislation. This reliable and valid incident database forms the basis for this agency to prioritise its prevention services interventions. There are additional organisations nationally and in other Member States that also collect OSH-related incident data, including insurance companies and organisations with large numbers of workers. The policy pointer here is that such organisations could benefit from standardising the collection and reporting of such data, as exemplified by the State Claims Agency. On analysis of such data, organisations could then prioritise their own interventions and evidence OSH compliance improvements.

Case Studies IE4 to IE6 detail how these selected prevention services providers supported OSH compliance without use of any sanction powers, thereby relying on persuasion alone. Still the case studies show that more research is needed to investigate further examples of existing prevention services providers using their persuasive abilities to achieve better OSH compliance. As is the case with the State Claims Agency (see Case Study IE6), how prevention services providers engage with their clients to achieve OSH compliance improvements does not have the large literature base its importance deserves. As prevention services providers are reliant on their persuasive abilities, further

¹ EU-OSHA – European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, *Improving compliance with occupational safety and health regulations: an overarching review*, 2021. Available at: <https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/improving-occupational-safety-and-health-changing-world-work-what-works-and-how>

² EU-OSHA, 2025. The main report is available at: <https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/irelands-approach-supporting-occupational-safety-and-health-compliance-role-labour-inspectorate-and-prevention-services>

³ Case Study 4 is available at: <https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/ibec-and-its-online-community-good-practice-supporting-occupational-safety-and-health-compliance-case-ie4>

⁴ Case Study 5 is available at: Case IE5 is available at: <https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/irelands-niso-community-practice-supporting-occupational-safety-and-health-compliance-case-ie5>

⁵ Case Study 6 is available at: <https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/irish-state-claims-agencys-risk-management-supporting-occupational-safety-and-health-compliance-case-ie6>

research as to any additional innovative or collaborative practices that can motivate their clients to achieve better OSH compliance outcomes appears beneficial.

As detailed in EU-OSHA (2023), and in the main report (EU-OSHA, 2025), there are further policy pointers that could be investigated in order to benefit OSH compliance, as follows:

- a better procedural standardisation for the conduction of visual inspections used for OSH compliance-related risk assessments and audits; and
- the provision of more standardised templates for high-risk scenarios as used by fire safety professionals (see for example, LGA, 2024; NDFEM, 2022; PAS 79-1:2020).

Prevention services are changing considering the large amount of good-quality online OSH compliance guidance, the emergence of online OSH compliance communities of practice (as exemplified by Ibec and NISO in Case Studies IE4 and IE5); and the increasing number of workers who have an OSH-related qualification or have attended OSH educational presentations. As a policy pointer, the promotion of engagement of workers to be more involved in assessing OSH compliance in their own companies rather than overly relying on external prevention services providers could have benefits for the OSH compliance in general.

The recently published report regarding the Grenfell Tower tragedy investigated those prevention services providers who were previously involved with fire safety regarding the building (Grenfell Tower Inquiry, 2024). Fire safety is an integral part and very important component of OSH compliance. Therefore, this inquiry's findings provide valuable lessons for all prevention services providers. Given that these findings were made under strict judicial conditions, they are also relevant for this prevention services policy brief. A concise summary of the recommendations from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry relevant to national prevention services providers are as follows:

- The creation and maintenance of a publicly available register of prevention services providers that details their training experience and qualifications.
- The consultation process for new OSH compliance-related legislation and guidance to include both the academic community as well as those professionals with practical experience. This will allow prevention services providers to have access to the latest OSH compliance-based research as well as relevant OSH developments.
- A practically based definition of high-risk workplaces in order to allow the appointment of appropriate prevention services providers. In particular, there is now in Ireland a sharp divide between those prevention services providers who can competently advise of fire safety due to recently issued codes of practice (NDFEM, 2022, 2023).

Further the Case Study IE4 on Ibec's development and use of an online OSH compliance community of practice can also serve as inspiration and be replicated to more sectors and scenarios. Workplaces' use of online meetings and tools are now widespread and prevention services providers as well as multi-site companies are well placed to replicate Ibec's community of practice.

As exemplified by the State Claims Agency in Case Study IE6, there appears to be an OSH compliance advantage in legislatively extending mandatory reporting of OSH incidents. Currently, only accidents resulting in more than three days absence or certain dangerous occurrences are reportable to the HSA.⁶ It could possibly be a beneficial statutory initiative and facilitate comparative analysis if incident reporting were to be legislatively introduced on a far greater scale. It is suggested that this initiative could begin with the larger companies in Ireland. This is because they would be far more likely to have the OSH compliance-related personnel to implement this initiative.

There is also a policy pointer opportunity to extend OSH compliance reporting using the recent Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive.⁷ This directive requires OSH compliance-related information to be published in annual reports from large companies, including the following:

- Companies must report on how they manage worker-related matters, including health and safety at work.

⁶ Guidance on the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Reporting of Accidents and Dangerous Occurrences) Regulations 2016.

⁷ See: https://finance.ec.europa.eu/capital-markets-union-and-financial-markets/company-reporting-and-auditing/company-reporting/corporate-sustainability-reporting_en

- The directive mandates disclosure of information regarding policies, outcomes, risks and targets related to the health and safety of employees.
- Companies are encouraged to provide quantitative indicators, such as workplace accident rates, injury statistics, and information on any health and safety initiatives.
- The reporting should consider how OSH contributes to a company's overall sustainability performance.

Finally, the subject matter expert in Case Study IE3 commented on the lack of reporting relevant to the occurrence of psychosocial risks in companies. Looking at the reporting of certain psychosocial risks could provide with advantages for promoting OSH compliance.

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