

The external evaluation of the European Agency for Safety & Health at Work (the 'Agency') was carried out by the Centre for Strategy & Evaluation Services (CSES) in 2006/07. This document contains a summary of the key conclusions and recommendations from the final report.

## 1. Study Aims

The objectives of this evaluation were, in summary, to evaluate the focal points (FOPs) and their network's contribution to the performance of the Agency in achieving its mission. The more specific aims were to:

- Assess the extent to which the activities of each focal point and its network, in particular the social partners, have met the objectives in the document, **'Preparing for Enlargement. Proposal for a Second Generation Agency Network'**;
- Assess the **Agency's role** in supporting the focal points' and their networks' activities;
- Assess the contribution of the focal points and their networks taken as one to the **efficiency and effectiveness** of the Agency's activities.
- Assess the **overall impact** of Agency activities.
- Provide **conclusions and recommendations** to help develop and optimise future Agency activities.

It should be stressed that the primary purpose of the assignment was to evaluate the contribution of the FOPs and their national networks to helping the Agency to achieve its mission, rather than undertaking an overall evaluation of the Agency itself.

As with any evaluation, this exercise fulfils two basic purposes – examining past experience and achievements, and, secondly, helping to define future priorities. The results of the evaluation are intended to help the Agency and its Board/Bureau to decide on the future organisation of the FOP network – including the Agency's role in supporting their work – so as to maximise results and impacts, efficiency and effectiveness.

The evaluation, which was carried out during the second half of 2006 and early 2007, involved wide-ranging research. This included face-to-face interviews with Governing Board Members, Commission officials, all EU25 National Focal Points (FOPs) and many network partners, and Agency staff. In addition, a number of surveys were undertaken covering Board Members, FOPs, network partners and end users of the Agency's products and services. The survey of end users elicited a response from 771 organisations and individuals. Last but not least, other EU-supported agencies were interviewed to enable some aspects of EU-OSHA's activities and organisation to be compared.

## 2. Overall Conclusions

1. **It is clear from the evaluation that the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work is very highly regarded as a source of information in Europe on OSH issues.** Since its establishment, it has done much to ensure that the profile of OSH is

prominent in both EU and national policies and in helping to promote better practices 'on the ground'. The research feedback is generally positive with regard to the types of activities promoted by the Agency and their relevance to target groups, the way in which activities are delivered and the impacts achieved.

**2. The FOPs and their networks have played a very important role in helping the Agency to achieve positive outcomes.** FOPs are an essential mechanism through which the Agency can promote its mission. However, the research suggests that following EU enlargement it has become more difficult in many respects to maintain a close relationship with the FOP network. But there are a number of practical steps that could be taken to ensure that the relationship with FOPs is strengthened.

**3. The objectives set out in 'Preparing for Enlargement - Proposal for a Second Generation Agency Network' have either been or are being achieved.** In summary, it can be said that whilst good progress has been made, there is still some way to go before the objectives set out in this strategy are fully met. Capacity building in the EU10 countries remains a key priority.

**4. Looking ahead, consideration needs to be given to the appropriate mix of delivery methods – decentralized via the FOP network/more centralized with an emphasis on EU level activities.** With available resources being spread more thinly across EU Member States, there is a need to develop ways of delivering OSH support actions – in both EU10+2 and EU15 countries - that ensures that the more limited resources do not jeopardize the achievement of strategic aims. Whilst the adoption of more centralized delivery mechanisms may provide part of the solution, the research suggests that there is also a need, at a national level, to strengthen the FOP network and their supporting networks. The potential contribution of national networks to the promotion of the Agency's objectives is not at present being fully exploited.

**5. Overall, the Agency demonstrates high European added value and the evaluation does not point to the need for fundamental changes to the Agency's objectives or how promotes its mission.** European added value lies in reinforcing and adding credibility to national OSH promotion, economies of scale, capacity building and strengthening tripartitism, and improving an understanding of OSH issues by adding a European dimension to the picture at a national level. Fundamental changes are not needed and it is more a question of fine-tuning certain aspects of the Agency's operations.

### **3. Role of National Focal Points**

**6. The role of FOPs and their capacity to promote the Agency's mission needs to be seen against the backdrop of national OSH structures and traditions.** As Section 3 of this report has shown, in some countries responsibility for OSH is centralised in national administrations or in specialized agencies/institutes but elsewhere responsibility for OSH is often shared at a national level by different government departments or has been devolved to regional authorities. A further factor influencing the FOP function is changing host structures. In a number of countries, responsibility for OSH (and the FOP host structures) has been transferred from one government department to another, often following elections. Several examples are given in the report of where a lack of continuity in OSH structures and resourcing has had a negative impact on the FOP function. Equally, in some countries, FOP structures have provided an important element of continuity in a constantly changing institutional environment.

**7. In general, the support provided by national authorities and host organisations to FOPs is seen as adequate.** Almost half (48%) of FOPs surveyed indicated that their relationship with national authorities is ‘excellent’ with the remainder being broadly satisfied. As highlighted in Section 3, there are not surprisingly circumstances on a day-to-day basis in which it is difficult for FOPs to combine commitments to the Agency with those to their host organisations, but this situation is inevitable and there is probably very little that can be done to avoid it beyond improving time management. More fundamental is the question of whether FOPs have sufficient financial and human resources to perform their function effectively. The evaluation suggests a very mixed picture in this respect.

**8. On average, the individuals responsible for the FOP function spend around half their time on Agency-related tasks but this varies considerably from one country to another.** Overall, European Week campaigns are the most time-consuming activity for the FOPs, taking up on average just over a third of the time available. Other activities which take up a considerable amount of time are networking, website management and especially the checking of translations.

**9. FOPs have a key role in providing the information required by the Agency to define its work programme and strategy, and in ensuring that the Agency’s aims are aligned with national priorities.** In most cases, FOPs are part of the national administrations and therefore relatively well-placed to fulfill this role. However, some challenges can arise for the FOPs if national plans diverge from the Agency plans. The Agency undertakes consultations with the FOPs to minimize these situations as much as possible, but striking a balance between the national priorities of the EU’s 25 (and now, 27) Member States has not always been possible. Indeed, since the enlargement of the network, it has become increasingly difficult to ensure that the Agency’s priorities always coincide with national ones. Closer consultation between FOPs and the Board/Bureau would improve communication but, equally, the support of host organisations and national networks generally is critical to help identify priorities in the first place.

#### **4. Role of National Networks**

**10. Network partners also have an important function in enabling FOPs to understand the needs of workplaces and other end users.** FOPs are not usually in direct contact with the workplaces, and the feedback of social partners who are more directly engaged with workplaces, is invaluable in designing and targeting relevant outputs in an appropriate way. Often employers’ organisations, and trade unions, are relied upon to provide this sort of information. However, the commitment of these kinds of organisations is often weak. The potential contribution of the FOPs and network partners to defining Agency priorities and target groups is currently not being fully exploited. In the survey, 72% of FOPs said that there was sufficient opportunities to make an input to defining the Agency’s strategy but a significant minority (20%) argued this was not the case (the rest did not offer an opinion).

**11. The extent to which FOPs are supported by network partners is also critical to successful delivery of the Agency’s objectives.** Whilst 76% of FOPs stated they had an ‘excellent’ relationship with national authorities, and likewise with social partners (62%), the proportion saying this was so with OSH professionals and universities was much lower (50% and 56% respectively). The role of network partners is important in providing a ‘multiplier’ mechanism through which OSH promotional efforts can be channeled to reach target groups. FOPs generally had a more positive view of the relationship than network partners.

The situation in different EU Member States varies considerably in this respect. In some countries, there is a long tradition of joint working between social partners and strong networks generally through which OSH can be promoted. Elsewhere, including most of the EU10 Member States, these structures are still very much in the process of being developed. Indeed, in many of these countries (and several 'old' Member States), our research suggests that it is the FOP function itself that is acting as a catalyst and driver for the development of networks. Another factor influencing the capacity of national networks to deliver Agency priorities is the extent of centralization/decentralization in governmental structures generally.

#### **Recommendations - National Networks**

- Board members should be encouraged to participate in network meetings. This is already the case in some countries but not in others. Participation in these meetings would help to improve communication between the Agency and network partners, and visa-versa, and would underline the commitment to strengthening national networks. At the same time, more emphasis should be placed by FOPs on communicating more proactively with Board members (perhaps supported by an electronic newsletter).
- Ways of encouraging the further engagement of network partners should also be investigated. To this end, the Agency should consider organising or participating in national events attended by network partners. There should also be more emphasis on identifying and sharing good practices with regard to developing national networks.
- The Agency and FOPs should extend networking beyond social partners and others already engaged to include collaboration with other national and EU-supported bodies (Euro-Info-Centres, Innovation Relay Centres and other networks that have contact with SMEs).
- Consideration should be given to doing more to secure the involvement of private sector organisations (e.g. workplace health promotion bodies) in national activities, particularly in the organisation of European Week campaigns. This could provide the companies concerned with useful publicity as well as additional resource for FOPs.

### **5. Key Agency Initiatives**

**12. A key FOP function is to help organise and promote the European Week (EW) campaigns. An important question is whether the campaigns should be essentially sector-focused or thematically orientated.** The EWs are a key method of reaching high risk sectors which the new Community Strategy for 2007-2012 emphasises should be the Agency's primary target group. With a sector-based approach, key social/network partners whose support is needed to run an effective campaign can be more easily identified. Similarly, the limited scope of a sector-based campaign means that it should be possible to focus efforts more and thereby achieve greater impacts. On the other hand, a thematically-orientated EW campaign has wider relevance, is more inclusive in terms of network partners and does not preclude sector-specific actions.

**13. At present, the annual cycle of European Week campaigns makes it difficult to maximise impacts.** Running the campaign on a yearly basis has benefits in that, for example, it encourages a certain momentum in the organisation of campaigns which helps to raise their profile. However, difficulties have been encountered with the annual campaign cycle in terms of organisation, as well as the lack of time available for

preparation and follow-up of campaign results, and the overlap between the end of one European Week and the beginning of the next one.

**14. The Healthy Workplace Initiative (HWI) exemplifies a more centralized approach and is one possible model for campaigning activities generally.** Organising activities in a centralised manner should be more cost-effective with scope to maximize economies of scale and to streamline administrative tasks.

#### **Recommendations – European Week Campaigns and HWI**

- Future European Weeks should be primarily a theme-based but include a sectoral focus. How precisely this is done should be left to FOPs so as to take account of situations in different countries but the Agency should provide overall guidelines.
- Consideration should be given to running the EW campaign over a two-year period. This could help to overcome difficulties currently faced with the campaign organisation as well as ensuring that a particular theme is sufficiently followed up. The first year could be devoted to promoting of the overall campaign theme with the second year then focusing on particular sectors and high risk target groups.
- Closer collaboration with SLIC campaigns should be encouraged, so as to ensure that there are no overlaps, and that possible synergies can be exploited.
- The approach being adopted to European Week 2007, offering FOPs the option of centralized support along the lines of the HWI or the FOP subsidy for decentralized national activities, is to be welcomed. It will be important to evaluate the advantages (and any disadvantages) of the differing approaches as a basis for deciding on the most appropriate campaigning approach in the future.

**15. The amount of time spent by FOPs on translation tasks is disproportionate with the service being provided by the Translation Centre being heavily criticised.** There are considerable differences between the amounts of time spent by different FOPs on translation tasks. Some spend no time on this at all whereas in other cases this can take up 50% of their time. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, there seem to be differences in the quality of the translated materials received by FOPs in different countries, which means that some have more work to do in checking documents than others. Secondly, differences exist in how some FOPs tackle translation tasks (in particular, some FOPs are able to share this work with other FOPs where there is a common language). Last but not least, some host institutions have translation services to carry out the work so that the FOP does not spend as much time on this him/herself. Overall, the quality of work undertaken by the Translation Centre is now improving although it is still seen by most FOPs to be unsatisfactory.

#### **Recommendations – Translation of Agency Materials**

- The possibility of using local translation services should be explored, although it is recognised that the Agency's Regulation states that the Translation Centre should be used.
- Closer contacts between the Translation Centre and the FOPs should be encouraged so as to ensure that FOPs views and advice on terminology in national languages can be taken into account at the earliest stage possible. There are several examples of where this is already happening and the outcome has improved the quality of translations.
- There should be increased discretion at a national level to decide which Agency materials to translate. This function could be undertaken by Board Members, or by FOPs in consultation with network members, or jointly by all three parties.

However, there is a strong argument for some core materials, such as Fact Sheets to always be translated by the Agency.

## 6. Networking Between National Focal Points

**16. The extent of networking between FOPs is difficult to gauge, partly due to the many forms that it takes.** Cooperation between FOPs can be broadly divided into two types: joint working on particular tasks (e.g. translation of European Week campaign materials) and, secondly, and more informal and less focused networking. The extent of this latter type of networking between FOPs is particularly difficult to gauge. Overall, there is a very mixed picture - networking between FOPs is quite well developed in some cases, especially where it focuses on practical tasks, but not systematic or well developed in other cases. Differing OSH frameworks and practices are an important factor that influences the extent of networking. In particular, where these practices are relatively strong, there is less incentive to develop cross-border links although most FOPs recognize that they have a role to play in transferring know-how

**17. The sharing of good practices, joint working on translation tasks and the strengthening of the FOP function are particularly important benefits of this cooperation.** Where cooperation does take place it is mostly in connection with translation tasks. There are many examples of collaboration on the translation of Agency materials (e.g. between Austria/Germany, Belgium/France, and brochures produced in Poland and Sweden have been translated and reprinted in Lithuania and Estonia respectively). Other FOPs recognise that potential for this kind of collaboration exists, but is not fully taken advantage of it. The sharing of good practices is also an important feature of FOP networking.

### Recommendations – Networking Between FOPs

- It would help to reintroduce the practice whereby FOPs hold a meeting on their own to discuss issues of common concern. This would make it easier for FOPs to agree on the issues to be discussed with the Agency and to communicate messages more clearly.
- Consideration should be given to holding FOP meetings at different locations around Europe, perhaps on an alternating basis so that Bilbao continues to be the main venue but every other meeting is held somewhere else. One possibility would be for FOPs whose country holds the EU Presidency to host these sessions. The advantage of this approach would be twofold: firstly, it would strengthen networking between FOPs and enable them to learn more about each others' ways of operating; and, secondly, it would be a symbolic gesture suggesting a more equal partnership with the Agency.
- Campaigning actions taking place across countries, for example within the context of the European Week, collaboration between FOPs on joint initiatives and sharing good practices, should be encouraged and supported.
- The Agency should facilitate regional meetings and 'study visits' between countries. The results should be presented or discussed at FOP meetings and disseminated more widely. Details of joint initiatives, collaboration to produce materials, or in the organisation of campaigns, could be disseminated through the Extranet, for example.
- Greater use should be made of ICT to strengthen the relationship with and between FOPs. In particular, the Extranet could be developed so that there is increased

scope for 'virtual' networking.

## 7. Relationship between the Agency and FOPs

*Terms of reference: Assess the Agency's role in supporting the focal points' and their networks' activities.*

**18. Feedback on the Cooperation Agreement as a framework for joint working between the Agency and FOPs is generally favourable.** According to the survey feedback, most FOPs (84%) see the Cooperation Agreement as an appropriate framework and almost two thirds (64%) also argued that sufficient opportunities existed to discuss the agreement and specific tasks with the Agency. There is similar feedback on the Work Programme. However, in terms of on-going communication, while the Extranet is generally perceived to be an effective communications mechanism, the main difficulty from the point of view of the FOPs is that it is not kept up to date. Thus, FOPs frequently receive reminders of work being late that has not yet even been set. Similarly, the Agency's possibilities to follow-up effectively on FOP work are limited as not all FOPs update the status information on tasks once they are completed.

**19. At an operational level, the working relationship between the staff from the Bilbao office and FOPs is good.** However, there is a widespread feeling that the relationship between the Agency and FOPs is not as strong as it used to be. One reason for this is that with EU enlargement, which has not been matched by significantly increased financial allocations to the Agency, it is more difficult to maintain a close relationship with all FOPs. A related concern is that there is not enough face-to-face contact with Agency staff and that it has become more difficult to find out who is responsible for particular matters. At present, direct contact is limited almost entirely to the three FOP meetings in Bilbao and the scope for detailed discussions with particular members of the Agency's staff are very limited. As pointed out in the report, at present there are only three Agency staff from the Network Secretariat helping to coordinate the FOP network. Because they have other responsibilities, this is equivalent to about one full-time person.

**20. The FOP meetings in Bilbao are an important part of the consultation process but more could be done to maximize the benefits.** FOP network meetings are held three times a year in Bilbao and there are also other consultations – generally informal – in addition to these events between the Agency and FOPs. However, many FOPs see the meetings in Bilbao as no more than a formality, arguing that there is not enough real discussion and that the results are in any case not taken into account by the Agency in reaching decisions. Some FOPs from EU10 Member States have voiced a concern that these countries are still less ready to put forth their ideas in FOP meetings. However, it is important to note that this is not simply a difference between new and old Member States (some FOPs also felt that a divide exists between FOPs within the EU15, particularly between those who have acted in the FOP role for a long period of time and those who are new to the work).

**21. At a more strategic level, feedback from the evaluation suggests that whilst there is adequate scope for FOPs to make an input to preparing events and campaigns, this is less so with more strategic issues – e.g. identifying target group needs and in ensuring that Agency priorities take into account national priorities.** In the survey, a significant proportion of FOPs (20%) argued that there was not sufficient scope to influence the Agency's strategy. The area where the FOPs feel that they make the smallest contribution is over decisions on the allocation of financial resources to different projects or priorities. Not all FOPs want a say in more strategic

issues of this kind. However, others feel that there should at least be an opportunity for FOPs to make an input if they feel that they have an important contribution to make.

**22. There is a perception that the Agency's strategic planning procedures are not flexible enough to allow changes to work plans to be easily made.** According to the survey, whilst 32% of FOPs stated that these procedures were flexible enough, a higher proportion (44%) indicated this was no the case (the remainder did not offer an opinion). From a FOP perspective, the key question is how flexible the Agency's strategic planning procedures are and, in particular, whether there is sufficient scope to adjust tasks/objectives during the course of implementing actions if changing circumstances suggest that changes are needed. Most FOPs do not consider that there is enough flexibility. But Work Programmes, contracts with the Topic Centres, and the financial commitments and contracting procedures that underpin these and other activities, need to be decided well in advance. Similarly, the Agency is bound by the constraints of the European Commission's financial regulations. That said, circumstances can change and at times adjustments need to be accommodated. The Cooperation Agreement does allow for changes to be made during the course of implementation and FOPs are asked to contact the Agency if this is the case. Thus while certain procedures could be improved by the Agency, FOPs need to make full use of the flexibilities the current arrangements already have built into them.

#### **Recommendations – Relationship Between Agency and FOPs**

- There is a need for more flexibility in the way in which FOP work plans are implemented with, in particular, the opportunity to adjust objectives, resource allocations, etc, in a timely and non-bureaucratic way if circumstances change.
- There is also room for improved planning with regard to the implementation of the work plans, in terms of clearer timetables etc, as well as more effective use of the Extranet function. Both the Agency and FOPs need to ensure that their inputs to the Extranet are kept up-to-date.
- Agency staff should be given geographical responsibilities and carry out more visits to EU Member States to strengthen the relationship with FOPs and their network partners. This would be mutually beneficial: Agency staff would get to know individual FOPs better and obtain a more in-depth appreciation of priorities in different countries while FOPs would gain a better understanding of Agency's priorities and have more scope for discussing issues of concern to them in depth.
- Consideration should be given to increasing the Agency resources available for network coordination, either by assigning additional staff specifically to this role in the Network Secretariat and/or giving staff geographical responsibilities from other units. If the previous recommendation is adopted, and if each EU Member State is visited at least once a year, this would require around 230 staff days of time (100-150 for preparing, carrying out and following up visits and a further 3-4 days per country for on-going contacts throughout the year).
- Given EU enlargement, consideration should be given to establishing a FOP Steering Group as a way of helping to coordinate the FOPs' position on issues and ensuring that their voice is heard.
- Where not already the case, the working relationship between FOPs and Governing Board members at a national level should be strengthened so that EU-OSHA Board meetings can be used by FOPs as a way of raising issues. Consideration might be given to FOPs making an input (perhaps via a nominated representative or a steering group – see earlier recommendation) to Bureau

meetings which generally take place in Bilbao the day after the FOPs meet.

**23. Resourcing issues are in many cases a key factor determining the ability of FOPs to carry out Agency tasks.** With respect to human resources, some FOPs simply do not have the time themselves, or the support staff, needed - half the FOPs consider that they do not have sufficient time for the carrying out all Agency-related tasks. However, despite this, in many cases the problems are not caused by a shortage of human resources, or time, but more by the difficulties in obtaining the necessary financial resources. Although the FOP subsidy is relevant in this respect, this assistance from the Agency is modest in scale and demonstrates only partial additionality. More important is the capacity of FOPs to raise funds from host organisations and network partners. More generally, in all countries, the role of national networks of OSH specialists, social partners, etc, is also critical from a non-financial perspective to successful implementation of FOP work plans. The research feedback suggests that far more needs to be done in most countries to strengthen the contribution of network partners.

#### **Recommendations – FOP Subsidy**

- The FOP subsidy, in its current form, only demonstrates partial additionality and should be discontinued.
- However, if the current FOP subsidy scheme is discontinued, this should be on the basis that (a) it is not discontinued before an alternative is introduced that continues to provide assistance to support national EW campaigns; (b) the Agency consults with FOPs closely over the introduction of an alternative system; and (c) some provision is made, at least for a transitional period, to provide support directly to FOPs who genuinely need it (our research suggests that in the case of EW2005, six FOPs, mainly from EU10 countries, would not have been able to organise any form of EW campaign without the subsidy. On the basis of an average grant allocation of €30-40,000, this would mean a provision of around €200,000 for EW activities).
- As a way of testing the best approach, the arrangements for European Week 2007, i.e. offering a ‘European Week Assistance Package’ or the FOP subsidy, is helpful and the results should be evaluated to determine which option is preferable for and produces the best results in terms of the effectiveness of campaigns.
- The Agency, with the support of the European Commission, should encourage national authorities to provide additional resources to supplement the FOP subsidy. For example, national funding might be used to help customize Agency materials more closely to national circumstances and target groups.

**24. The integration of FOPs from the EU10 Member States has been successfully achieved.** Most FOPs from the EU10 Member States have developed the capacity to make an input to the preparation of work programmes, specifically with regard to identifying the needs of intended beneficiaries. In many of the EU10 countries, however, FOP networks are still relatively weak – reflecting institutional weaknesses generally – and this means that it is difficult to obtain the inputs at a national level that are needed for the FOPs to play a proactive and positive role at a European level.

## **8. Target Groups, Products and Services and Impacts**

**25. The Agency’s target groups are quite well defined but cover a very broad field and the question is how key targets should be prioritized and most effectively**

**reached.** The overall target group for the Agency's activities and products is defined in its 2002 Communication Strategy as being policy makers responsible for the development of OSH-related legislation; OSH policy 'shapers' (including trade unions and employers' representatives); the OSH professional community; information providers and intermediaries; and end user (employers and those with a direct influence on workers' OSH). This is a very broad definition and our research suggests that there is sometimes uncertainty over whether products and services should be designed specifically for end users (workplaces) or for intermediaries (social partners, OSH specialists, etc). Whilst almost two-thirds of FOPs (64%) indicated in the survey that target groups were 'well-defined', a significant proportion (24%) stated this was not the case (the rest did not offer an opinion). Compared with some other EU agencies, EU-OSHA's target groups (in particular, smaller businesses) are very large and prioritization is therefore needed.

**26. A key issue is the extent to which the Agency's products and services are tailored to the needs of different target groups.** Here there was varied feedback from the survey work – whilst a high proportion of FOPs (84%) stated that the Agency's products and services were sufficiently customized, this was less so with network partners (70%) and more especially with end users (62%).

At present, the Agency (through the Topic Centres) is responsible for producing most of the material used by FOPs carrying out Agency-related tasks. As a result, there is some degree of trade-off between benefits of scale obtained, and the lack of local relevance and effectiveness of the materials. There is certainly a view amongst FOPs and network partners that materials produced by the Agency are often rather too 'European' in nature and fail to address issues from a national perspective, thereby reducing their relevance. Thus, some information on OSH issues is not detailed or analytical enough to be of interest to specialists but at the same time is not practical enough for workplaces. This task of tailoring information produced by the Agency to particular target groups is not a function that can be entirely undertaken centrally and the question is therefore whether FOPs and their network partners should be doing more in this respect.

**27. European Week campaigns and the dissemination of information via the Agency and national websites are generally seen as the most effective ways of reaching target audiences.** There are, however, differing views on the effectiveness of different methods. For example, FOPs consider European Week campaigns as being more effective than network partners. However, there is broad agreement on the increasing importance of electronic dissemination of information. The Agency's website is an important source of information and, to varying degrees, the network websites make heavy use of the content. The importance, and quality, of the national websites vary, however. In some countries, the Agency website provides a main gateway to information on OSH issues. Elsewhere, other websites, particularly the websites of national OSH institutes, are more used.

**28. In addition to the existing methods the Agency and FOPs use to directly reach target groups, other ways of disseminating information and raising awareness of OSH issues are being developed and this should be continued.** Apart from the role of network partners, closer joint working with other EU-supported networks, in particular the Euro Info Centres, is being developed and this should considerably enhance the effectiveness of dissemination efforts. The new Community Strategy highlights the need to mainstream OSH issues in other EU policies and feedback from this evaluation suggests that more should be done by the Agency to

exploit possibilities in this respect. Ensuring that OSH priorities are addressed through the implementation of Structural Fund programmes, especially measures aimed at SMEs, is an obvious priority in this respect.

**29. Overall, feedback from the evaluation suggests that the activities of the Agency and FOP networks are achieving positive impacts and demonstrating a high degree of European added value.** When end users were asked for their views on the overall effectiveness of the work of the Agency and FOPs, over two-thirds (69%) stated in the survey that the Agency carries out its activities ‘quite’ or ‘very’ effectively. There are, however, differing views regarding the impact of different Agency activities. But, overall and on an aggregated basis, survey feedback from FOPs, network partners and end users points strongly to an appreciation that the European dimension is adding value to purely national and regional initiatives to promote OSH: 30% of end users participating in the survey stated that the European dimension is ‘vital’ while less than 5% said this was not so (the rest argued it was ‘very important’).

**30. Apart from the benefits associated with gaining access to wider EU expertise and good practices in the OSH field, the technical and other support provided by the Agency, and networking between FOPs, are also important manifestations of European added value.** Although the FOP subsidy only demonstrates partial additionality overall, the financial support provided by the Agency is very important in some countries because of the limited resources available from purely national sources to promote OSH policies. There are also economies of scale to be gained from certain activities being undertaken at a European level, for example the preparation of European Week campaign materials, and benefits from the European branding of OSH products and services. These aspects of European added value are more pronounced in some countries than others, often depending on perceptions generally regarding EU membership but also on how well developed OSH practices and policies are. The European dimension is important in many countries in enhancing the credibility of activities to promote OSH, capacity building, sharing good practices and more efficient ways of working generally. However, perceptions regarding European added value vary considerably and in some EU Member States, generally those with relatively highly developed OSH practices and systems, the benefits of Agency activities are not seen as favourably.

**31. The Agency has developed tools to assess the impact of some initiatives on target groups but performance measurement methods should be developed to embrace the full range of its activities.** European Week campaigns are subject to external evaluation while other initiatives such as the Healthy Workplace Initiative have been assessed internally. However, there is a need to develop a performance measurement system for the full range of Agency activities so that the impact on target audiences, and relative effectiveness of different activities, can be monitored on a more comprehensive and on-going basis. The survey work undertaken as part of this evaluation, in particular the survey of end users via *OSHmail*, provides an example of how this might be tackled. Likewise if Agency staff were to undertake field trips to visit FOPs (see earlier recommendation), this could be used an opportunity to assess activities and to facilitate a sharing of good practices.

#### **Recommendations – Agency Products and Services**

- Target groups should be more clearly prioritized. Because the Agency has a broad range of target groups, and a potentially very large number of SME ‘end users’, prioritization of targets is essential if outputs are to be relevant and impacts

maximized. A greater emphasis on providing information that is practical, and that focuses on good practices is needed.

- In addition to existing methods of reaching target audiences, new methods should be developed including joint working with other EU-supported networks (in particular, the Euro Info Centres) and mainstreaming OSH priorities in other EU programmes such as the Structural Funds.
- More could be done to make the Agency's website user-friendly, particularly by making it easier for end users to identify relevant information and to navigate generally. The fact that much of information available from the Agency's website is mainly in English is also widely regarded as a constraint on it being used, especially by end users.
- Performance measurement tools should be developed so that the impact on target audiences, and relative effectiveness of different Agency activities, can be monitored on a more comprehensive and on-going basis. Apart from periodic end user surveys, Agency staff could be asked to undertake an assessment of FOP and network activities as part of their field trips (see earlier recommendation), using this as an opportunity to highlight good and less good practices based on experience in other countries.