

Moving towards 2020 - Priorities for occupational safety and health (OSH) research in Europe for the years 2013-2020

Seminar Online Summary (SOS)

In 2012, the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) prepared a report to define priorities for occupational safety and health (OSH) research for the years 2013-20 with the aim of providing input into the preparation of a possible EU OSH strategy and into Horizon 2020, as well as to promote OSH research coordination and funding in the EU.

The seminar 'Moving towards 2020 - priorities for OSH research for the years 2013-20' was a follow-up to the EU-OSHA report and it aimed to validate the findings of the report and to discuss the priorities for OSH research for 2013-20 in view of the broader challenges Europe is facing. The aim was also to provide a platform for discussing the ways in which to foster OSH research coordination and funding and promote mainstreaming OSH research in other policy areas. The participants of the seminar included research directors and representatives of funding bodies (PEROSH, former NEW OSH ERA Members), representatives from Member States, representatives of the European Commission (DG EMPL, DG SANCO, DG Research, DG Enterprise), and European social partners.

The first day of the seminar was chaired by Ms Maria Teresa MOITINHO, Head of Unit, B3 (Health, Safety and Hygiene at Work) DG EMPL, and was mainly dedicated to providing feedback on the report. Directors and research directors of major European OSH research institutes and funding bodies commented on the report and the session was followed by a discussion. The first day of the seminar also included a round table discussion moderated by Ms MOITINHO.

The second day was chaired by Dr Christa SEDLATSCHKEK, Director EU-OSHA and it focussed on the ways in which to foster OSH research and promote research coordination and mainstreaming OSH research in other research and policy areas. The programme included presentations by representatives of the European Commission, DG RTD, DG SANCO and DG ENTR. The international perspective was provided by Jukka TAKALA, the Executive Director of Workplace Safety and Health Institute. MOMSC, Singapore. Examples of OSH research cooperation were presented as well. The seminar was concluded by Dr Christa SEDLATSCHKEK.

The general feedback on the report was positive, it was pointed out that it is an important document and that the priorities for OSH research listed in the report reflect the challenges identified in the EU2020 Strategy. While discussing the impact of the report, it was suggested that by establishing a shorter list of priorities and focussing on fewer issues the impact could be greater.

9 October 2013

Introduction to the seminar

Teresa MOITINHO, EC DG EMPL, Head of Unit B3 (Health, Safety and Hygiene at Work)

Ms. Teresa Moitinho introduced the seminar with a brief overview of the work of the Health, Safety and Hygiene at Work Unit, DG EMPL, after which she presented the purpose of the seminar and outlined the main issues to be discussed.

In her speech Ms. Moitinho emphasised that only a healthy population can achieve its full economic potential and it is essential that absenteeism from work and early retirement due to incapacity are addressed at European level if we are to meet the demographic challenge ahead. Central to this is improving the working conditions and protection of workers. And to achieve this, policy-makers and practitioners alike must be provided with sound, targeted and useful research, designed with our future needs in mind. With cuts to research funding evident in many countries, now more than ever we need to join forces, pool our knowledge, act together and maximize our impact. EU-OSHA has a major role to play in identifying priorities for future research and promoting research coordination.

OSH research priorities – presentation of the report

Christa SEDLATSCHKEK, EU-OSHA Director

Dr Christa SEDLATSCHKEK started her presentation by pointing out how defining priorities for OSH research is linked to EU-OSHA and European Risk Observatory objectives and summarising the antecedents of the EU-OSHA report “Priorities for occupational safety and health research in Europe: 2013-2020” published in June 2013. After presenting the historical background she recalled the aim of the report, which was to identify priorities for OSH research in the coming years in accordance with the objectives of the EUROPE 2020 strategy and the Horizon 2020 programme. Therefore, the structure of the report reflects the challenges identified in EUROPE 2020 Strategy, comprising four major thematic areas:

- Demographic change – Sustainable work for healthier and longer working lives
- Globalisation and changing world of work
- OSH research for safe new technologies
- New or increasing occupational exposure to chemical and biological agents

Finally, Dr Sedlatschkek recalled the purpose of the seminar to validate and discuss the priorities identified in the report, to discuss the ways to foster research funding and coordination, and to promote mainstreaming OSH in other policy and research areas and invited the participants to actively participate in the discussions.

Research directors’ feedback on the report

- **General feedback**

Didier BAPTISTE, Scientific Director INRS, PEROSH Chairman

Prof. Didier BAPTISTE presented PEROSH network’s role in OSH research development and coordination and explained how the network’s priorities related to those identified in the EU-OSHA report. Prof. Baptiste also indicated that PEROSH member institutes contributed to EU-OSHA report and the PEROSH publication on “Sustainable workplaces of the future” was consulted when drafting the report. He stated that the PEROSH network believed that OSH research and policy intervention carried important economic benefits and had the potential to support and strengthen the implementation of EU2020. He underlined that OSH plays a vital role in increasing the competitiveness and productivity of enterprises. He pointed out that it was important to strengthen research on the economic dimension of OSH to support evidence-based policies and decision making at society and enterprise levels.

Prof. BAPTISTE underlined Agency's key role in mainstreaming health and safety at work in other policy areas. He assured EU-OSHA of the PEROSH network's further cooperation in order to enhance European research on OSH issues. As PEROSH chairman, he invited EU decision makers to take into account OSH issues when setting the priorities for calls or proposals. The seminar would be an opportunity to raise awareness on the necessity of developing and coordinating research to improve workers' health and safety in Europe.

- **Demographic change – Sustainable work for healthier and longer working lives**
Nils FALLENTIN, Research Director, NRCWE, Götz RICHTER, BAuA

Dr. Nils FALLENTIN considered the research priorities presented in the report highly relevant but pointed out that new employment and work patterns should be taken into account in this context as well. He found the emphasis on the link between productivity and OSH too strong: performance and wellbeing are two related but different outcomes. He also pointed out the fact that MSDs, stress and mental health were too tightly bound to demographic changes and aging workforce. He welcomed the fact that sustainability was a key term in the report and stressed that the OSH aspect should be emphasised in this context. He underlined also the importance of translational research.

In his feedback on the thematic area *Demographic change – Sustainable work for healthier and longer working lives*, **Dr. Götz RICHTER** concluded that the identified priorities address the most relevant questions that arise from the current challenges of demographic change. He also stated that OSH research on demographic change should be based on a multidisciplinary approach. Further, the whole life course should be considered, including interaction between private and professional life. The research should address issues of adapting working conditions to age/ageing and of preventive work design.

- **Globalisation and the changing world of work**
Paulien BONGERS, Director Innovation, Work and Employment, TNO, Sergio IAVICOLI, Director, Department of Occupational Health, INAIL

Prof. Paulien BONGERS highlighted the most important trends and societal challenges in relation to OSH included ageing of the population, global competition, increase in flexible work arrangements, life-long learning, and increasing lifestyle-related health problems. In the context of the financial crisis, growth needs to come from innovation. Technology is the major force of innovation, but the agents of change will be healthy and innovative workers. Good and capacitating working conditions are a necessity in order to ensure inclusive growth. Prof. BONGERS highlighted the main challenges for OSH research related to globalisation and changing world of work, such as measuring the exposome, support for SMEs, and development of integrated OSH intervention, including individual, organisational and societal level, supported by new design and technology.

Dr. Sergio IAVICOLI observed that the impact of the current changes in the world of work were comparable to that of the industrial revolution. A complicating fact was that the governance system was changing in the same time. A number of issues are related to globalisation, which all have an impact on OSH, in particular job insecurity, restructuring and downsizing, and flexible work arrangements. New technologies are an opportunity, but both new and already identified risks were present. He emphasised the contribution of OSH to sustainability and noted that closing the health gap also depends on a successful prevention of occupational risks at the workplace during the life course.

- **OSH research for safe new technologies**
Gérard LASFARGUES, Deputy Director General, ANSES

Prof. Gérard LASFARGUES from ANSES commented the third main area "OSH research for safe new technologies" of the report. He stated that a great number of important issues were addressed in the report such as green and more sustainable economy, renewable energy technologies, waste management and recycling, new work forms, virtualisation of the working environment. He reflected on the relevancy of the identified priorities in terms of the challenges identified in the EUROPE 2020 strategy and their relation to research priorities for OSH in France and ANSES in particular.

- **New or increasing occupational exposure to chemical and biological agents**
Harri VAINIO, Director General, FIOH, Gérard LASFARGUES, Deputy Director General, ANSES

Prof. Harri VAINIO started his presentation by showing some figures related to the burden of disease in and causes of death concluding that disease prevention is a good investment. He acknowledged that the EU-OSHA report was a valuable document to conclude the recent trends in the field of OSH, that the priorities identified are in line with the priorities of the EUROPE 2020 Strategy and they cover a wide range of issues. The question was how to report could be used to achieve an impact. Analysing how future oriented the report is Prof. Vainio pointed out some issues that didn't receive the due attention in the report, such as occupational asthma, health inequalities. He highlighted some challenges related to risk management of chemical and biological agents, such as lack of exposure data, and pointed out some research needs in this context, e.g. development of a European job-exposure matrix, research on risk communication and risk perception, etc. Finally, he indicated some parallels with OSH research priorities in Finland.

Prof. Gérard LASFARGUES pointed out some important aspects relating emerging OSH risks: complexity (chemical mixtures), ambiguity (nanotechnologies and nanomaterials) and uncertainty (endocrine disruptors, low doses). Research on new methods for risk assessment is needed taking into account those aspects. He also emphasized the need for research on exposure assessment. Prof. Lasfargues described the French approach towards nanosafety and the French strategy for research on endocrine disruptors. Finally, he stressed the need for documentation of workers' exposure to bioaerosols and different biological agents and for determining the impacts of emissions from processes of recovery of waste and by-products

The Importance of Science in a Goal-Setting Regulatory Regime: OSH Research in GB

Mary TRAINOR, Head of Science, HSL

After the research directors' feedback, **Dr Mary TRAINOR** gave an overview of the research work at HSL and explained how research fed into and supported regulations in the British system. Types of research conducted at HSL include: translational research, strategic research, investigation and research related to incidents & ill-health, research to support interventions, research to inform policy, investment research, and comprised a foresight centre. Dr. TRAINOR presented a number of examples for each research area. She concluded her presentation by highlighting the process of knowledge generation leading to practical solutions.

OSH communication, risk communication

Sture BYE, Director of Communication and International Relations, STAMI

Mr. Sture BYE from presented the communication at STAMI which he described both inbound and outbound, and based both on old and new media. He shared the view that there was a need for strengthening research on risk communication. In addition to the needs identified in the report, he also highlighted issues such as the need for assessing new technologies; identifying underlying mechanisms and influences and investigating how these determine behaviour; the need for further development of methodologies of evaluation and risk communication strategies suitable for uncertainty. Further, he and described the new trends in the world of communication and science and the challenges it poses for OSH communication. He concluded that risk and OSH communication is all about strategic leadership and strategic communication.

The role of OSH research and its links to the EU 2020 Strategy – Round table

- Christa SEDLATSCHKEK, Director EU-OSHA
- Erika MEZGER, Deputy Director, EUROFOUND
- Jukka Takala, Executive Director, Workplace Safety and Health Institute, MOMSC, Singapore
- Dietmar REINERT, Director IFA, Vice Chairman, PEROSH
- Viktor KEMPA, ETUI
- Rebekah SMITH, Business Europe

Dr. Christa Sedlatschek, Director of EU-OSHA, introduced the round table.

Ms Erika Metzger, Deputy Director of EUROFOUND, acknowledged in her statement that the report *Priorities for occupational safety and health research in Europe: 2013 – 2020* makes the link between OSH research and the Europe 2020 strategy quite clear. She also noted that the European Commission was very explicit about the role that “quality of work” played for competitiveness by declaring the working environment as a leading competitiveness factor and presented EUROFOUND work to measure job quality. With the help of the European Working Conditions Survey, EUROFOUND was able to identify trends over time, highlighting areas of progress but also problematic areas. It could analyse quality of work for specific groups, like older workers or women and compare sectors and occupations. As regards research, Ms Metzger stressed three issues: research on quality of work needs to be based on life stages analysis, more research is needed on the link between quality of work and company performance, and the trends in collective bargaining need to be monitored. She pointed out that due to the economic crisis more than before, a joined-up approach is required to be able to translate the results of research into action faster and it is important that that research is coordinated at all levels. Ms Metzger concluded that the transfer of research results into practice and concrete policy action remains a challenge.

Mr. Dietmar Reinert, Vice Chairman of the Partnership for European Research in Occupational Safety and Health Network (Perosh network) and Director of the Institute for Occupational Safety and Health of the German Statutory Accident Insurance Fund (IFA/DGUV), stated that OSH research should be proactive instead of reactive, international instead of national, interventionist instead of analytical. He gave explanatory examples for each statement. The Risks Observatory in Germany was a good example of proactive research. DGUV worked together with EU-OSHA on this issue. For international research, he quoted the 8 joint projects run by the PEROSH network and partners. Then OSH research should be interventionist. We needed more intervention research: not all our knowledge is transferred to practice.

Mr Viktor Kempa, senior researcher at the European trade Union Institute (ETUI) was concerned about the deteriorating of OSH due to the lack of EU strategy. He underlined that the EU 2020 strategy didn't explicitly mention OSH. He recalled that the EU 2020 strategy's priorities were a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy and it focuses on five ambitious goals in employment, innovation, education, poverty reduction, and climate/energy. It is necessary to establish and emphasise the links between OSH and the EU 2020 strategy. Further, he deplored the legislative deregulation trend that could have negative effects on OSH. Regarding research, he pointed out that OSH research should be participative, and meet the needs of the workplaces. Mainstreaming OSH issues in the research programmes should be used to put resources together for OSH research. He emphasised that the OSH risks have to be assessed for each new technology introduced at the workplace. With respect to the priorities identified in the EU-OSHA report Mr Kempa stressed that the number of OSH research priorities needed to be reduced. Finally, he stressed EU-OSHA role as a facilitator, a motivator and a focal point for discussion.

Ms Rebekah Smith, senior advisor at Business Europe, stressed the importance of setting the corporate point of view and identifying the links to the EU 2020 strategy. As regards the topics on demographic change, she highlighted that in addition to supporting adaptation of the workplaces to the needs of older workers, taking a life course approach in OSH research is also important. She emphasised that in addition to the role played by employers, public health services had also a role to play. Concerning the changing world of work, she highlighted the increasing competition and restructuring. She pointed out that governments should facilitate adaptation instead of blocking restructuring. As regards new technologies, Ms Smith emphasised that research should also look at benefits, not only risks. In her opinion, looking at the business case in OSH was needed, taking into

account business performance. Finally, she concluded that we needed to avoid research for research's sake but OSH research must be translated into practical tools at workplace level.

Mr. Jukka Takala, Executive Director of the Singapore Workplace Safety and Health Institute (WSH), observed that a number of challenges related to OSH research had been identified by the seminar participants. First, he underlined that better evidence was needed. In his opinion, the issue wasn't to reduce the number of priorities but to determine what kind of research brings clear evidence. Second, he observed that presently there was no EU OSH strategy and that the EU 2020 strategy wasn't that much concerned with OSH. Communication was becoming a high priority, and he highlighted that the presence of the EU-OSHA was important to provide this communication. Third, he underlined that OSH research should be practical with concrete outputs and that it should provide solutions for particular needs (e.g. control banding). Fourth, he noted that not much had been done to reduce exposure. One failure he mentioned is that we have not been able to globalise OSH research. He also noted that we should aim high, and mentioned the MOMSC Singapore vision of zero harm as a long-term goal.

Discussion

In the round table discussion it was pointed out that a high level of political commitment were needed to improve health and safety at work in Europe and that at the moment, this commitment was missing at the European level. It was generally acknowledged, that there is a need for an EU OSH strategy especially in the time of economic crisis. It was argued that issues related to health and safety at work need to be put high on the political agenda. Research showing that investing in OSH was important and beneficial is needed more than ever. Proofs were also needed on the fact that OSH research was being translated to the workplaces and contributed to achieve a sustainable working life. The report on "Priorities for occupational safety and health research in Europe: 2013-2020" was considered excellent.

Another issue discussed was the need of scientific and practical evidence. Scientific and practical evidence were separate although interlinked approaches: both were useful. It was observed that scientific evidence was brought through a scientific process only but this process was not always possible to implement in the context of OSH. Hence, it was pointed out that practical evidence should be used. In this context it was noted that high quality case studies and intervention studies were needed. Besides, it was added that intervention research was difficult to publish. Discussions took place on how to identify pathways to promote the publication of good practices and case studies.

The European Commission programme on Regulatory Fitness and Performance (REFIT) was discussed too and concerns were expressed that these deregulation trends can have a negative impact on health and safety at work, especially in SMEs. On the other hand, it was also pointed out that legislation is only useful if it is adapted to companies' and workers' needs and is implemented. Generally, it was agreed that that there was no evidence from industry that EU OSH legislation was a burden.

The importance of the EU-OSHA report was generally acknowledged. While discussing the potential impact of the report, it was pointed out that the list of priorities in the report is too long, and by establishing a shorter list of priorities and focussing on fewer issues the impact could be greater, both at national and European level, e.g. in terms of increasing the share of OSH research within the HORIZON 2020 programme. As the funding for OSH research in national budgets was decreasing, efficient use of resources through better coordination of research becomes central. The division between research priorities and general priorities for OSH has to be clear and a greater emphasis should be put on the transfer of research results into practice in order to increase impact at the workplace.

10 October 2013

Mainstreaming OSH research in other policy areas

- **Horizon 2020 and OSH research**

Tuomo KARJALAINEN, Research Programme Policy Officer, DG RTD
After briefly presenting the development of Community research, **Dr. Tuomo KARJALAINEN** introduced the HORIZON 2020 Framework Programme for Research and indicated the areas that are relevant for OSH. He pointed out that OSH-relevant issues are embedded in many topics proposed for the first call of Horizon2020, and listed some examples. Regarding OSH research priorities presented in the EU-OSHA report, Dr. Karjalainen observed that they were similar or identical to those identified by the Commission services during the preparation of Horizon 2020.

- **OSH research and public health issues**

Isabel DE LA MATA, Principal advisor for Health, DG Health and consumers

Ms Isabel DE LA MATA presented the scope and the objectives of the European Commission's proposal for Health programme within the Multiannual financial framework (MFF) 2014-2020. The major challenges include among others the ageing of the population, the increase of health inequalities and increase in chronic diseases prevalence. She addressed the issue of chronic diseases and indicated that chronic diseases are responsible for 78% of health care expenditure in Europe and this number is expected to increase in the coming years. Further she presented EU work on chronic diseases, addressing risk factors and health determinants. EU actions include the Nutrition and physical activity strategy, Alcohol related harm strategy, Tobacco legislation and campaigns, EU strategy on health inequalities, disease specific initiatives, and support through financial mechanisms. Some issues to be considered in the context of chronic diseases are the imbalance between prevention (3%) and treatment (97%), demographic change, and innovation. Throughout her presentation Ms de la Mata was drawing parallels between public health and workplace health and safety, emphasising the role of workplaces in promoting health. Finally, she outlined future health challenges including more effective health promotion, a better linking between health promotion, prevention and screening, health integrated services and healthy ageing.

- **Workplace in the context of the innovation and industrial policy**

Grzegorz DROZD, Policy Officer, Innovation Policy for Growth, DG Enterprise and Industry

Mr Grzegorz DROZD presented the EU reinforced industrial policy published in 2012 which recognises the role of new working practices and transformation of workplaces in promoting labour productivity and explained why there is a need for workplace innovation. Further, he highlighted the components of workplace innovation and its contribution to achieving sustainable organisations, good work and high performance. He presented the European Workplace Innovation Network (EUWIN) network aimed at developing workplace innovation in companies. Mr Drozd highlighted the programmes of the Enterprise and Industry Directorate General related to social innovation. In conclusion, he pointed out that according to the 5th European Working Conditions Survey, innovative workplace practices are associated with higher commitment and learning and better working conditions.

The international perspective

Jukka Takala, Executive Director, Workplace Safety and Health Institute, MOMSC, Singapore

Dr. Jukka TAKALA started his presentation with a brief overview of the Workplace Safety and Health Institute in Singapore (MOMSC) and how the National Research Agenda 2011-16 was developed and how it is structured. Research priorities are grouped around two main themes: (1) Business and organisational aspects of WSH (2) WSH risks and solutions. Further, he presented figures related to the global and European burden of diseases and injuries and the global work-related fatalities and

work-related annual deaths. He stated that cancers and circulatory diseases should be priorities for future research. The leading causes of death could be often linked to work-related components. Dr. Jukka Takala also addressed the issue of the economic cost of work-related injuries and ill-health. Concerning competitiveness, the issue was to determine if a high degree of competitiveness had an impact on the working conditions. The challenge was to achieve a sustainable working life. A comprehensive and integrated approach to managing workplace safety and health should be adopted. Better communication was necessary and global collaboration was needed to improve OSH.

Research and funding – coordination of actions

- **The Sustainable Workplace in Horizon 2020: A Swedish platform**

Maria ALBIN, Department of Epidemiology and Environmental Medicine, Lund University

Prof. Maria Albin presented the state of the art of OSH research in Sweden. In Sweden, OSH administration is run at a tripartite level with strong support from social partners. The main challenges for Swedish OSH research are health, demographic change and workers' well-being. Research scope needed to be widened, including work environment and sustainable jobs. Prof. Albin presented five major areas to be developed at both national and European levels: better interaction between researchers on topics of common interest, improved dialogue with social partners and users, identification of new fields for joint research on sustainable and innovative workplaces, development of research on sustainable and innovative workplaces, and greater priority given to the development of European cooperation in this field.

- **Joint Programming Initiative 'More years, better lives'**

Mikko HÄRMÄ, Vice Chairman of the Workgroup "Work and Productivity", Scientific Advisory Board of JPI

Prof. Mikko Härmä introduced the Joint Programming Initiative "More Years, Better Lives: the potential and challenges of demographic change" aiming at identification of research gaps, definition of joint activities, recommendations to political stakeholders and better coordination of national/regional and EU activities relevant for demographic change. The objective of the Strategic Research Agenda (SRA) was to have an impact on national and EU agenda setting, including Horizon 2020. A consultation process was to be organised to define the priorities among the proposed research topics. Prof. Härmä presented also the JPI fast-track data-project the results of which would be used as an input to the SRA.

- **EUWIN "European Learning Network for Workplace Innovation"**

Frank POT, Emeritus Professor of Social Innovation of Work and Employment, Nijmegen School of Management, Radboud University

Prof. Frank Pot gave a presentation on the European Learning Network for Workplace Innovation (EUWIN) commissioned by DG Enterprise and Industry. He defined the concept of workplace innovations as new and combined interventions in work organisation, human resource management and supportive technologies. Workplace innovations are related to several policy fields. In order to achieve mutual reinforcement, different policies should be combined. The EUWIN network aims at improving work organisation, learning and reflection, advanced structures and systems and promoting workplace partnership. OSH and workplace innovation are overlapping concepts. Their combination allows promoting well-being at work. Workplace innovations could contribute to a simultaneous improvement of performance and quality of working life, but it is only possible to achieve that on two conditions: commitment of management and participation of workers. According to Prof. Pot, research had been largely focused on performance: further research was needed on how to improve the quality of working life.

Conclusions

Summarising the main points of the discussions, EU-OSHA Director **Dr. Christa Sedlatschek** concluded that EU-OSHA would try to take on board the feedback and the proposals made during the seminar to achieve impact. The EU-OSHA was aware that many OSH organisations and bodies were suffering both from the lack of resources and from budget and staff cuts due to the crisis and that at the moment, occupational safety and health isn't a priority on the political agenda. The link between OSH, competitiveness, and business performance should be emphasised when discussing the advantages of good health and safety management at the workplaces. Social stability and sustainability should go hand in hand with economic growth, Dr. Sedlatschek concluded.