

European safety and health experts meet with EU Commissioner to confront challenges for micro and small enterprises

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) welcomes Commissioner Marianne Thyssen and other stakeholders to a seminar on how to ensure workers' safety and health in micro and small enterprises (MSEs). The seminar takes place on 25 January in Bilbao and coincides with the publication of two new reports that explore the latest findings of EU-OSHA's project on MSEs. The reports, as well as the seminar, focus on good practice examples from throughout the EU, identifying key success factors and challenges, and the important role of intermediaries when it comes to improving occupational safety and health (OSH) in MSEs.

Protection of health and safety at work is one of the key principles of our European Pillar of Social Rights. It is imperative that employer and worker representatives, national authorities and OSH advisors work together to ensure that workers in micro and small enterprises can enjoy safe and healthy working conditions.

Many MSEs find managing OSH challenging, and workers are more likely to be at risk of safety or health issues in these enterprises than in other, larger enterprises. In fact, more than 80% of all occupational injuries in the EU occur in micro, small or medium-sized businesses – and the smaller the business, the higher the risk. The findings of the latest reports shed light on MSE-specific problems and concerns, OSH attitudes and behaviours, and the drivers of and barriers to the implementation of OSH measures in such enterprises. The good practice examples from MSEs, analysed in depth during the course of the project, provide experts with a view of what works, for whom and under what circumstances. Successful approaches to supporting OSH include those involving awareness-raising activities, training, the provision of practical tools, and economic incentives. The instrumental role played by intermediaries in supporting OSH in MSEs is also clear from the reports, and is a key topic of discussion at the seminar.

Marianne Thyssen, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, emphasises that: *'Protection of health and safety at work is one of the key principles of our [European Pillar of Social Rights](#), as well as social dialogue and involvement of workers. As part of this and as the good examples demonstrate, it is imperative that employer representatives and worker representatives as well as national authorities and occupational safety and health advisors work together to support safety and health in micro and small enterprises and to ensure that workers in these enterprises can enjoy safe and healthy working conditions.'*

Good practice examples

The value of cooperation among different stakeholders and the incorporation of OSH into the supply chain is particularly well illustrated by the British Olympic Park project. During the construction of the Olympic Park, all relevant stakeholders – including the national OSH regulator, the contractors and the unions – were consulted before the project began and at all stages throughout. Safety and health was a top priority and – through supply chain management – all subcontracted MSEs were required to adhere to strict OSH standards which led to an outstandingly low rate of accidents during construction. Motivating MSEs to take action and raising awareness of relevant tools and legislation are key to improving OSH. In Denmark, under a nationwide labour inspection initiative, inspectors systematically visit MSEs and provide OSH-related guidance and resources, with the aim of reaching and opening up dialogue with all MSEs.

EU-OSHA Director, Christa Sedlatschek, highlights another example of how the actions of intermediaries at the national level can help MSEs deal with OSH: *'In France, Online interactive Risk Assessment (OiRA) tools have been integrated into the preventive approach to OSH. Using the framework developed by EU-OSHA, [the National Research and Safety Institute has tailored OiRA tools](#) to the needs of two MSE-dominated and vulnerable sectors – the road transport and restaurant sectors – enabling businesses to assess their own risks and implement measures to improve safety and health. What is particularly impressive about this example is how the concerted actions of several regional and national OSH institutes, professional organisations and other relevant sectoral partners have enabled the development and dissemination of these tools to MSEs.'*

Although all of the examples provide evidence that effective tools and well-designed interventions can successfully support OSH in MSEs, many of the initiatives are voluntary and therefore will not reach MSEs that take a reactive approach to OSH and do not actively engage with OSH institutions.

So how can policies and programmes be shaped to meet the needs of the hardest-to-reach MSEs? The project's final analysis report, to be published later in the year, will discuss this in detail, by focusing on the transferability of good practices and exploring the role of policies and programmes in a regulatory and socio-economic context.

Links: