

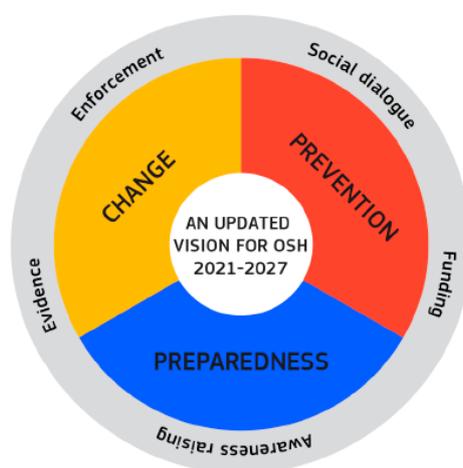
## EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2021-2027 (Occupational Safety and Health in a Changing World of Work)

Occupational safety and health (OSH) legislation is essential to protect the health and safety of the EU's workers as well as to enhance the sustainability and competitiveness of the EU's economy. The protection of worker's health and safety is enshrined in the EU Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

The OSH Framework was announced in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, published in March 2021. The strategic framework focuses on three cross-cutting objectives for the coming years:

1. anticipating and managing **change** in the new world of work brought about by the green, digital, and demographic transitions
2. improving **prevention** of workplace accidents and illnesses
3. increasing **preparedness** for any potential future health crises

This document provides a background to the motivations outlining these objectives and the action needed at EU, national, sectoral, and company level. It presents the implementation of these objectives which will be underpinned by social dialogue, strengthened by evidence base, enforcement, awareness-raising, and funding.



### Anticipating and managing change

With the green and digital transition, the nature of the workplace and the pattern of work is changing. In the context of digitalisation, the European Commission aims to modernise the new OSH legislative framework by reviewing the **Workplaces Directive and the Display Screen Equipment Directive by 2023. Changing forms of work and remote working will also require new and updated OSH solutions such as the right to disconnect.** Simultaneously, Europe's ageing workforce requires continuous reflection and response. A more inclusive OSH is necessary in supporting the participation of older workers in the labour market by adapting the working environment and tasks to their specific needs.

Advances in technology not only offer new opportunities for all workers but also improve work-life balance and support OSH implementation. **Whilst the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and remote working reduce work-related risks, challenges arise by such new technologies. The Commission is thus proposing the first legal framework on AI systems.**

Climate change also affects workers' safety and health, including through increased ambient temperature, air pollution, and extreme weather. This highlights the importance of enhancing green transitions. Related to this is the current limit values of certain hazardous substances used at the workplace. Whilst not only key to the green transition, further limiting the values of such substances prevents the risk of work-related diseases. That said, **the Commission aims to propose new protective limit values on asbestos, lead, and cobalt.**

The EU has a role in improving not only the physical health, but also the mental health of its workers. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, almost half of the EU's workers started working from home - the permanent connectivity, the lack of social interaction, and the increased use of ICT, has given a rise to psychosocial and ergonomic risks. The Commission is funding projects that address these mental health challenges and that aim to promote good mental health. **The Commission will launch an 'EU-OSHA healthy workplaces campaign' 2023-2025 on creating a safe digital future covering psychosocial and ergonomic risks** in particular. In cooperation with Member States and social partners, it also looks to prepare a non-legislative EU-level initiative related to mental health at work before the end of 2022, and to ask experts on effective ways of supporting the mental health of healthcare workers and other essential workers by the end of 2021.

### Improving prevention of work-related diseases and accidents

The strategic framework strengthens prevention culture to reduce work-related diseases and accidents in the EU. A Vision Zero approach to work-related deaths is essential for investigating accidents and deaths at the place of work, identifying and addressing causes of such accidents and deaths, increasing awareness of the work-related risks, and strengthening enforcement of existing rules and guidelines.

A healthy workforce is the fundamental basis of a strong and resilient economy and society. Encouraging overall healthy lifestyle choices in the workplace can significantly reduce absenteeism, illness, and non-communicable diseases. Cancer is the leading cause of work-related deaths in the EU and circulatory diseases are the second-largest cause. **Actions to fight cancer at the workplace are key components of the Europe's Beating Cancer Plan. Along with these diseases, preventing hazardous substances is also a priority for the Commission by updating the EU rules on such substances to combat the above-mentioned diseases.** Under this proposed strategic framework, the methodology for addressing hazardous substances will continue to be updated to identify further efficiencies in establishing OSH limit values in the decision-making process.

Workplace violence, harassment, or discrimination based on sex, age, disability, religion or belief, racial or ethnic origin, and sexual orientation, may affect the safety and health of workers, and therefore have negative consequences for those affected, their families, their co-workers, their organisations, and society at large. It can also lead to situations of labour exploitation. **The Commission will assess how to strengthen the effectiveness of the Employers Sanctions Directive (2009/52/EC). It will also propose a legislative initiative on preventing and combatting gender-based violence against women.**

#### Increasing preparedness – responding rapidly to threats

During Covid-19, OSH policy and legislation had a crucial role in helping workers, businesses, and governments to protect lives and manage well-being risks, business continuity, and sustainability. It is thus essential to draw the lessons of the pandemic and increase preparedness for future health crises and also post-pandemic resumption of work. Epidemiological measures should be given priority by improving the timeliness and effectiveness of the response to such crises, and by enhancing synergies between OSH and public health. This framework contributes to health policies and helps in increasing the preparedness for the future, in parallel with this Communication on the early lessons learnt from the Covid-19 pandemic.

***The full text of the Commission Communication can be found in the link below:***

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0323#PP1Contents>

**For questions or more detailed information please contact EU Affairs Manager Daniel Debono and Senior Advisor Mark Seychell from the Malta Business Bureau's Brussels Representative Office on [infobrussels@mbb.org.mt](mailto:infobrussels@mbb.org.mt)**

