



Council of the
European Union

Brussels, 2 December 2014

16237/14

SOC 839
EMPL 185

NOTE

from:	Presidency
to :	Council (EPSCO)
Subject:	Ageing European workforce: challenges and opportunities for health and safety throughout the working life

Delegations will find attached a background note prepared by the Presidency in view of the lunch discussion at the EPSCO Council on 11 December 2014.

Ageing European workforce: challenges and opportunities for health and safety throughout working life

The Commission's Communication on a EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2014-2020 (EU-OSH Strategic Framework)¹ identified three key challenges that are common across the Union:

- improving the implementation in Member States, in particular by enhancing SMEs' capacity in OSH risk prevention;
- tackling existing, new and emerging OSH risks; and
- tackling demographic change, as the EU population and work force is becoming older.

The Italian Presidency devoted particular attention to this Communication and decided to focus on the third challenge. An in-depth discussion took place at Social Questions Working Party level in preparation of the ministerial debate².

In Europe, older workers will make up almost a quarter of the total working-age population by 2030. While the EU's total workforce will decline, there will be an increasing supply of older workers. However, this potential will be insufficiently tapped if large numbers of older workers continue to leave the labour market before the age at which they qualify for a pension, often because of health problems and especially those which are work-related.

¹ COM(2014) 332 final - 10949/14

² The first challenge was the subject of a Presidency seminar on “*How to combine enterprises’ growth and competitiveness in times of crisis while promoting health and safety at work*” (Rome, 4-5 December); the second one was addressed by the Hellenic Presidency (EPSCO Council 19 June 2014, doc. 10960/14).

Healthy and safe workplaces for all, taking into account the diversity of the workforce, will also contribute to achieve the Europe 2020 targets. Ageing workforce has been a recurrent concern addressed by EU OSH strategies. The previous EU Strategy for Health and Safety at Work 2007-2012³ urged the importance of taking into account demographic changes and the needs of an ageing working population by adapting working environments and creating occupational health services. The aim is to enable workers to play a full part in working life from entering to workforce until they reach old age.

The evaluation of the EU OSH Strategy 2007-2012⁴ concluded that demographic trends imply that the needs of older workers will be a priority in the immediate future. This evolution should also be assessed from a gender perspective. It was indicated that there is a need to link occupational health more closely with wider health issues. Such integration could mean bringing health promotion to the workplace and developing better procedures to accommodate older workers' particular health needs and natural limitations. Several occupational and safety issues are age-related and it was therefore considered important that population ageing in the EU be duly taken into account in the future EU OSH policy framework.

The EU OSH Strategic Framework 2014-2020 proposes concrete action to address the issue of demographic change. Actions include identification and exchange of good practice on ways to improve OSH conditions for older workers, the promotion of rehabilitation and reintegration measures, and raising awareness and sharing information.

In the discussions held during the Italian Presidency delegations have shared useful information on measures taken in their Member States in order to improve health and safety at work for the ageing work force. Several of them have highlighted the inter-linkages between national OSH strategies and other strategies dealing with the ageing workforce: pension, skills, employment and health strategies, among others. Some also referred to research already undertaken or to research gaps still to be filled.⁵

³ COM(2007) 62

⁴ SWD(2013) 202

⁵ 14568/14. See also Annex to this note.

A representative from EU-OSHA presented the preliminary findings of a 2013-2015 pilot project designated by the EP⁶, stressing that the key question was to find an OSH system for *all* workers. Later retirement age and longer careers mean longer exposure to work-related risks. But later retirement age also means that the workers can be expected to develop more non-work related health problems. On the whole, a life-long approach to OSH is needed.

In order to further deepen the issue on the ageing European workforce and OSH-related issues, Ministers are invited to express their views on the following:

1. In different Member States, various policies and measures have been identified and implemented in order to improve older workers' health and safety at work. According to your opinion and experience, which measures have contributed most to the occupational health and safety of older workers?
 2. While all age groups of workers are entitled to adequate health and safety at work, would there be scope for specific attention to older workers e.g. in certain sectors or certain groups of older workers? In particular, the labour market participation of older workers has increased substantially over the last decades and is expected to continue to increase. This evolution should be assessed also under a gender perspective.
 3. What (further) EU level OSH-related actions could support the Member States' actions in making the ageing workforce healthier? Could EU research programmes be of particular interest?
-

⁶ OJ 29.2.2012 ("*Safer and healthier work at any age, OSH in the context of an ageing workforce*")

SUMMARY of the debate of the Social Questions Working Party (8 October 2014)

The discussion focused on the topic "Health and Safety of EU Ageing Workforce" (doc. 13440/14), with five questions⁷. The work force on the whole is ageing for several reasons:

- increased pensionable age;
- increased female participation in the work force (women now remain or return to work despite having children);
- training and retraining opportunities that are available to older workers.

Despite the increased number of older workers within the work force, health and safety at work (OSH) was important throughout the whole working career and that it would be a mistake to start paying attention to OSH only when workers get older.

OSH was considered only one aspect that was important for longer careers and improved job satisfaction. Other important components included life-long learning (LLL), fighting age discrimination, flexible working arrangements, and adequate tax and benefit systems to retain and attract older workers. General public health measures and screenings addressing the entire population can help to retain older workers in the labour force.

The Commission stressed that spending in OSH brings economic benefits, an investment of one euro returning between 1.8 and 2.4 euro⁸ or 2.2 euro⁹. Some delegations also stated that it is important to involve the social partners in matters related to the ageing workforce, and that it is also necessary to pay attention to the sectors and work places that are not covered by the social partners.

⁷ Following the debate, ten delegations sent their responses to the Presidency questionnaire (doc. 14568/14).

⁸ The Commission study (published end 2011) "*Socio-economic costs of accidents at work and work-related ill health*" can be found on the link below under "Socio economic aspects"
<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=716&langId=en>

⁹ The study "*Calculating the International Return on Prevention for Companies: Costs and Benefits of Investments in Occupational Safety and Health*", A project of the International Social Security Association (ISSA), German Social Accident Insurance (DGUV), German Social Accident Insurance Institution for the Energy, Textile, Electrical and Media Products Sector (BG ETEM), Final report, Version 2, February 2013

1. Are Member States assessing the potential benefits of greater investment in prevention, rehabilitation and accommodation (adaptation of workplaces to the health status of workers) and planning to strengthen their policies aimed at keeping older workers longer in employment?

In several MSs, policies have been developed as part of an overall *strategy* that focuses on prevention and keeping people healthier longer, or as part of a campaign for sustainable employment that focuses on preventing unemployment, absenteeism and disability and on improving well-being at work and productivity. In this latter case, the government's role is to disseminate scientific knowledge and good practices, and support organisations and companies (including SMEs) in adopting the right approach at their level. Other MSs have taken account of demographic changes in their policies on the ageing workforce. One MS has had a comprehensive national strategy for ageing since the 1990s, in which attention is paid to the whole working career.

Some delegations consider it important to take action in order to reduce negative attitudes towards older workers and to improve the health and skills of older workers. Attention has been paid to improving the health status of the whole working population, and especially of disadvantaged groups such as those aged 50+.

It is desirable to invest in funding OSH research to assess the best ways in which to approach OSH and employment issues. Particular attention should be devoted to women's working environments.

2. Are Member States considering to use the structural funds of the new programming period 2014-2020, as suggested in the Communication on "an EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2014-2020", in order to improve efforts on health and safety for ageing workers?

The delegations have a range of different positions. In some MSs the use of Structural Funds is encouraged, among other things, for "the improvement of quality at work". One MS has chosen "sustainable employment" as one of its priorities for the use of its ESF resources. In other MSs, there are plans to use the funds under a specific programme. One MS has allocated funds to "adapting to change of workers, enterprises and entrepreneurs".

Several delegations consider using Structural Funds for OSH as a possibility, while other MS are not planning to use their Structural Funds for OSH activities.

**3. What are the most important measures used to keep an ageing workforce in employment?
What experience have Member States had with such measures?**

Measures taken (or, in some cases, planned) by MSs are:

- setting OSH responsibilities for all relevant players (government, social partners, work place, different sectors)
- the development of a national strategy on the elderly and active aging
- the introduction of incentives to the employers of older workers; reduced costs, including social security contributions, of older workers
- delayed transition from work to retirement, e.g. by tightening the eligibility requirements for partial or gradual retirement and by having no mandatory retirement age, or by allowing the combination of pension and salaried work
- reduced age discrimination , awareness-raising among employers and employees
- the penalisation of companies which discriminate older workers when implementing collective redundancies
- the dissemination of good practices on return to work
- incentives to companies that develop effective OSH prevention measures, and stressing prevention in general
- access to training/life-long learning for older employees, access to active labour market measures for older workers
- health and safety promotion in the work place
- adaptation made to work places and to the way in which work is organised, especially as regards workers doing very hard work and providing care services for dependents
- linking the older and younger workers through the so-called "Generation Pact", thereby using the experience of older workers
- focus on rehabilitation
- focus on work-related stress/psychosocial hazards
- focus on public health for all
- focus on gender-related issues
- research and surveys on OHS issues.

Measures can take different forms: strategies or frameworks, legislation, campaigns, research funding, etc. Some measures can be "classified" under several headings. Several delegations also stressed that in many cases measures covered the whole working age population and not only older workers. In addition, it was stressed that the economic aspect is an important factor to be taken into account when discussing the employment situation of older workers.

4. How can MS develop better policies for an ageing workforce? In particular, how can national strategies contribute to addressing the OSH aspects of the ageing of the workforce in the light of the EU OSH Strategic Framework?

Social dialogue in this context is important for some delegations. Others consider that OSH aspects could be improved through relevant strategies (health, pension, employment, skills etc.) or consider that employers should be given incentives to invest in better working conditions for all workers, including the older ones. One delegation highlighted the role of academic research in identifying the needs of older persons and one stressed the importance of having reliable and comparable statistical data. The importance of information sharing at EU level has also been noted.

5. Should work-related health issues receive more attention in the context of the Europe 2020 strategy and the European Semester with a view to contributing to longer working lives?

Several delegations stressed that reaching the employment rate target of the Europe 2020 strategy would require a higher participation rate of older workers. Therefore OSH issues should be considered an important element in reaching the targets of the Strategy. For some delegations, health and safety at work should have more attention in the context of the revised Europe 2020 Strategy, while others considered that work-related health issues should not be specifically addressed by the Strategy.
