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**NOTE**

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From: General Secretariat of the Council  
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council  
Subject: Safety and health at the heart of the future of work  
- Policy debate

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Delegations will find attached the Presidency steering note on the above subject, with a view to the EPSCO Council on 15 October 2021.

## **Safety and health at the heart of the future of work - *Policy debate***

### **Steering note**

The world of work is changing as a result of technological progress, digitalisation, demographic trends, climate change, and transformations in work organisation. The demographic changes are leading to the shrinking of the working-age population, which poses a huge challenge for labour market resilience, economic growth, sustainability of social protection systems and our societies as a whole. To tackle these challenges, a human-centred approach to the future of work is needed more than ever. We need to create conditions for sustainable work for everybody, supporting people to engage and remain in work throughout the working life and thus contribute to their wellbeing at all ages and to the productivity and sustainability of our economies.

Occupational safety and health (OSH) is a precondition for sustainable work over the life course. It is also a fundamental right of all workers protected by the Charter, regardless of their contractual status. Investment in safety and health at work pays off and is of benefit to: 1) individuals by keeping them healthy and safe and by enabling and stimulating them to engage in work over the course of life; 2) to business by setting the grounds for long-term competitiveness through recruiting and retaining a healthy, highly-skilled and engaged workforce as well as by reducing the costs related to i.a. work accidents and absenteeism; and 3) to society by improving people's health, safety and wellbeing in general and by reducing the costs associated with accidents at work and work-related diseases.

Occupational safety and health has consequences that extend beyond work. Its effects and outcomes have a clear spill-over into people's health and wellbeing in general, and that of society as a whole. An enhanced positive spill-over effect can be achieved by making occupational safety and health more visible and by mainstreaming it in other public policies at all levels, in particular in the area of public health, education, public procurement, agriculture, environment and climate change.

The continuous improvements of people's living and working conditions is an objective of the European Union, enshrined in Article 151 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. The protection of workers' health and safety, enshrined in the Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights, is one of the key elements of an EU economy that works for people. The right to a healthy and safe workplace is reflected in principle 10 of the European Pillar of Social Rights, and is fundamental for achieving the United Nations' sustainable development goals.

The EU strategic framework on health and safety at work 2021-2027 sets out the key priorities and actions necessary for improving workers' health and safety over the coming years. The strategic framework focuses on three crosscutting key 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; and 3) increasing preparedness for any potential future health crises.

Ensuring a high level of occupational safety and health is one of the essential means of enabling sustainable work for all, which is in turn indispensable to address population ageing. The institutions, the Member States and European and national social partners have an important role in ensuring sustainable work. Efforts at all levels are required to deliver on the objectives of the new EU strategic framework on health and safety at work in order to make sure OSH standards meet the requirements of the changing world of work and contribute to enabling sustainable work over the life course for everybody.

Against this background, Ministers are invited to focus on the following questions in their contributions:

1. *Based on the lessons learned from the implementation of the Strategic Framework on health and safety at work 2014-2020, what are the main challenges you expect in implementing the new EU Strategic framework on health and safety at work 2021-2027? Which activities at the EU level do you consider necessary to deliver on the three main objectives of the new framework?*
  2. *To what extent do health and safety policies in your country actively contribute to work becoming more sustainable over the life-course? How are they integrated into other relevant policies, for example public health? What more are you planning to do in that regard?*
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