

## SYMPOSIUM: Social Europe's new framework for safer and healthier work (Bilbao, 5 July 2021)

# Questions and Answers

Questions by: **The Audience**

Answers by: **William Cockburn**

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- Q.1** *Very many healthcare workers are considering or want to quit their current jobs because of poor working conditions, bad management, destructive culture i.e. several countries are also facing a current and coming huge deficit of specialist doctors and nurses. Will EU-OSHA help to address this threatening public health crisis on an EU level?*
- A.1** EU-OSHA recognises these challenges and will start a three-year research-led OSH Overview activity on health and care sectors in 2023. Recent publications include [exposure to biological agents in healthcare](#) and [MSD in the healthcare sector](#). Ongoing research includes a sectoral secondary analysis of data from the [ESENER 2019](#) survey, the results of which will be published in 2022. The agency has also collected examples of practical tools and guidance relating to [dangerous substances](#) and to [MSDs](#) in the healthcare sector.
- Q.2** *Le télétravail risque de créer des inégalités (espace de travail à la maison, équipement, dépenses additionnelles). Comment anticiper les solutions? Au niveau des partenaires sociaux? Au niveau des législations?*
- A.2** The Agency has recently published a report on [telework in the context of the pandemic](#), and a short report on [regulation of post-COVID telework](#), and collected over a hundred examples of [practical tools and guidance on telework and MSD](#). A report on telework and MSDs will be published after the summer. Ongoing research includes the three-year [OSH Overview activity on digitalisation](#), with a specific project addressing telework that is due for publication in 2022. A new OSHwiki article with practical solutions for prevention of OSH risks related to telework will be published in the coming weeks as well.

**Q.3** *In terms of assistance to employers, wouldn't it help, in such a framework, to also undertake to better promote and explain various methods and measurement techniques for risk assessment and prevention?*

**A.3** The Agency's Online interactive Risk Assessment tool project, [OiRA](#) provides easy-to-use tools that guide employers, especially those in small businesses, through the risk assessment process. In terms of research, a major OSH Overview on Supporting Compliance is looking at the external factors that influence how businesses address their OSH obligations. The first report, an '[overarching review](#)', was recently published and a research on 'market influences' has just commenced.

**Q.4** *Why not introduce/update/improve the guidance for work inspectors on psychosocial risk/threat?*

**A.4** In 2022, EU-OSHA starts a three-year research activity on psychosocial risks. The important role played by labour inspectors will be among the aspects addressed in this OSH Overview.

**Q.5** *Concerning sanctions, should there be a compulsory attendance by health and safety personal for companies not respecting the rules? These companies should pay the attendance and be forced in terms of implementation.*

**A.5** The Agency's OSH Overview on Supporting Compliance that is looking at external factors that influence how businesses address their OSH obligations has addressed the use of sanctions in its '[overarching review](#)', and it will next year focus on 'state influencing factors', that will address the use of sanctions more in-depth.

**Q.6** *La prévention ne doit elle pas être d'abords effective pour tous notamment pour les travailleurs les plus fragiles et particulièrement les migrants et les femmes?*

**A.6** EU-OSHA addresses the needs of vulnerable groups of workers across its activities. Recent examples include a report on [MSDs and a diverse workforce](#), a discussion paper on [COVID-19 and MSD risks for migrant workers](#) and a [review of biological agents and prevention of work-related diseases](#).

**Q.7** *If prevention is necessary now more than ever, rehabilitation is even more important to consider due to the ageing of European population, as well as the increasing numbers of handicapped people, be it with light or hard impairments, physical or mental. Until the concept of health is addressed mainly by those who have the competencies to deal with it, namely HCW (Health Care Workers), and in particular occupational physicians, there will always be a major gap to be fulfilled in this domain.*

**A.7** The Agency recognises the importance of rehabilitation and return to work and the crucial role played by healthcare workers.

Recent outputs on these issues include a literature review on [Rehabilitation and return to work after cancer](#); a guide for [managers on 'long-COVID'](#) and one for [workers](#), and a host of resources from the [OSH Overview on MSDs](#), such as on working with chronic MSD and [Return to work after MSD-related sick leave in the context of psychosocial risks at work](#). A secondary analysis of data from the workplace survey ESENER is underway, looking OSH practices in the healthcare sector, and in 2023 a new OSH Overview on OSH in the health and care sectors will start.

- Q.8** *The question to all participants to comment on my following statement: In relation to the topic of improving prevention, protection carcinogenic and hazardous substances, I miss in the framework the support of different (new) measurement techniques. There are so many ways to better protect workers, be it with real-time exposure measurements or fit testing of respirators. Also in this area, employers should be shown more possibilities to know the exposure of workers.*
- A.8** EU-OSHA's 2018-2019 Campaign '[Healthy Workplaces Manage Dangerous Substances](#)' promoted a wide range of resources to support employers, including an [e-tool](#) available in EU and eight national versions and a [database](#) with nearly 1,000 examples of practical tools and guidance.
- Q.9** *The picture painted by Sir Michael Marmot is recognised in many Member States. In what way do you think EU-OSHA's tools and work can help in decreasing the gap/inequality for workers across Europe, especially for blue-collar workers in the frontline during the pandemic? Do you think that the present tools are appropriate to address this issue?*
- A.9** The keynote speech highlighted, among other aspects, the importance of an evidence base for good policy-making. In this regard, EU-OSHA continues to work together with DG EMPL and the Agency's Focal Points on the EU OSH Information System. Under this activity, the [OSH Barometer](#), which presents key data and trends on OSH in the EU Member States, has been available since May 2020. This will be complemented next year with the first analytical report 'The State of OSH in Europe.'
- Q.10** *Good to see that strengthening enforcement will underpin the three crosscutting key objectives. In Ireland, in addition to improving awareness, the imposition of court imposed sanctions and fines sent a clear message to all and contributed to significant reductions in deaths and serious accidents at work. While respecting the sovereign rights of Member States, is it timely, in implementing the new Strategic Framework, to compare and contrast sanction and penalty practices to aim for common approaches to 'Vision Zero.'*
- A.10** The Agency's OSH Overview on Supporting Compliance that is looking at external factors that influence how businesses, address their OSH obligations has addressed the use of sanctions in its '[overarching review](#)' and will next year focus on 'state influencing factors', which will address the use of sanctions more in-depth.