



## **Joint Statement of HOSPEEM and EPSU on the new EU Occupational Safety and Health Policy Framework**

[adopted on 11 December 2013/finalised on 12 February 2014]

### **Background and framework for joint statement**

On 31 May 2013, the European Commission launched a public consultation further to results of the evaluation of the European Strategy on Safety and Health at Work 2007-2012. This was aimed at gathering contributions from the public for the new EU policy framework in order to identify current and future challenges in the area of occupational safety and health (OSH), and solutions to address them.

Welcoming this initiative, HOSPEEM and EPSU responded to the consultation. Their respective responses<sup>1</sup> can be found on the [HOSPEEM](#) and [EPSU](#) websites.

With this joint statement, discussed at the Working Group Meeting of 23 October 2013, HOSPEEM and EPSU, the sectoral Social Partners in the hospital sector, aim to highlight common priorities and views for the new EU policy framework on occupational safety and health at work.

### **Benefits and objectives of an EU-level policy framework/strategy on OSH**

Taking into account the evaluation and the results achieved under the EU OSH Strategy 2007-2012, HOSPEEM and EPSU believe that it is necessary to continue developing, coordinating and monitoring workplace safety and health policies at European level in the future where this adds value. This gives more visibility to this policy area and encourages Member States to give appropriate weight to measures to reduce the number of work accidents, occupational diseases and psycho-social risks, and social partners to keep health and safety at the workplace high on their agendas. The evaluation of the EU OSH Strategy 2007-2012 showed the key role it played in various Member States to help adopting or further elaborating national OSH strategies.

However, setting of concrete targets for the reduction of workplace related risks, accidents and diseases and implementation are a responsibility of the relevant actors at national and local levels, with a particular role the social partners. Adequate resources should be allocated for the effective implementation and coordination of national and local strategies for the health and safety at the workplace.

An improved coordinated strategic framework at EU level is indeed needed to contribute to tackle key challenges faced by the healthcare sector, made more difficult by the pressure on healthcare budgets resulting from the economic crisis. Another element here is the increase in the number of older health workers in combination with the increasing demand for healthcare services.

EPSU and HOSPEEM share the opinion that OSH measures and safer work places will support workers to have more healthy and productive years of their professional careers or careers with reduced risk of suffering impairment to their health and well-being. The health workers' good health is a guarantee for the safety of patients.

A new EU occupational safety and health policy framework would also give a positive signal to all stakeholders, by setting the overall direction and common priorities up to 2020.

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<sup>1</sup> HOSPEEM there uses the term “new EU OSH policy framework”, whereas EPSU wishes to see a “new EU OSH strategy 2014-2020”.

With respect to the design, HOSPEEM and EPSU support an approach which defines common strategic objectives. The goals and priorities of the new EU policy framework should be broad, as OSH actions/measures have to be tailored to the national situation, legislation, organisation and practice. This takes into account that there are different starting points and specificities of Member States in the OSH field. Broad goals will support national governments and social partners in dealing with long term challenges and objectives and encourage them to determine appropriate targets and indicators. It is essential that in this process Member States put a strong focus on the identification of the relevant stakeholders and their responsibilities in contributing to both the formulation and implementation of national occupational health and safety policies, with social partners in first line for all these tasks.

A new EU OSH strategy should be shaped as a framework aimed at helping to coordinate the actions of the different EU Member States in the occupational health and safety field. This will allow having a full picture of the measures in place and of the results achieved in all the EU Member States. As part of this strategy a strong focus should be put on having a framework to underpin cooperation, coordination and exchange of good practice examples between governments and relevant stakeholders and to produce practical tools to help employers and trade unions in the setting up and in the assessment of OSH actions/measures.

A new EU OSH strategy should inspire Member States and support them towards continuous improvements in processes, outcomes and monitoring of national OSH strategies.

There is a body of evidence – from different countries and sectors – for a positive link between productivity and OSH measures and for a return on investment resulting from OSH initiatives, at least in a mid-term and long-term perspective.

The focus in the field of OSH should primarily be on ensuring the health and safety of workers and patients, and all actions must be implemented in a way to best promote these objectives, including the implementation of existing provisions and measures. The new EU policy framework can also include measures for the simplification of the existing body of EU OSH legislation, even though simplification does not in itself lead to increased quality and should therefore not be pursued as an independent objective. The need for new EU OSH regulation should be preliminary assessed through an impact study, and should it prove to be necessary, it should ideally outline overarching principles. Finally, existing EU OSH legislation might also need adaptation and/or improvements.

To be effective, HOSPEEM and EPSU are convinced that it is essential for a possible new policy framework/strategy to be accompanied by procedures and mechanisms to clearly assess the outcomes achieved as a result. This will also allow assessing in due time and in a structured manner the added value of having such a strategy.

### **The role of social dialogue and social partners in OSH**

With respect to the contents, the creation of ownership amongst the relevant stakeholders at national and local level should be given priority. The new policy framework should underpin their consultation and involvement, in particular the one of social partners, by the national governments in both the formulation and implementation of national OSH actions. This is because the sense of ownership by the different actors who have to implement and take forward the actions is fundamental to achieve the objectives set in the OSH area.

Social dialogue at EU level and within the Member States should have a primary role in the identification, preparation and implementation of any new initiative to improve health and safety at work. In this light HOSPEEM and EPSU believe that the lack of involvement of public sector employers in EU consultative bodies on OSH policies is not acceptable and should be urgently addressed. In particular, the inclusion of public sector employers' in the Advisory committee on safety and health at work of the European Commission and in the Advisory Groups of the EU Agency for Safety and

Health at Work would certainly contribute added value to the work of these bodies, reflecting at the same time the role played by public sector in the social dialogue process.

European and national social partners' initiatives and agreements are concrete and tailored instruments to address OSH issues, as employers and workers' representatives are in the best position to understand and identify the real issues affecting the health and safety at the workplace. They are therefore in a strong position to decide which principles and standards should be applied and to know what solutions will have a positive effect for the health and safety of the workforce in practice.

HOSPEEM and EPSU are firmly convinced that a model involving social partners – at European level, in every Member State and at workplace level – in the formulation and implementation of OSH policies and supporting the actions and agreements in the health and safety field arisen from their own initiative is a winning model.

Whilst assuring the compliance with European legislation, standards and requirements, this model respects the principle of subsidiarity in social, health and employment policies as well as the capacity of social partners to take joint initiatives in the occupational health and safety area. EPSU and HOSPEEM would welcome the new EU OSH policy framework to give visibility to their work as sectoral social partners.

### **Common past priorities of HOSPEEM and EPSU**

In this respect, the work done so far in the OSH field by the social partners within the EU social dialogue is enlightening and helpful; it also allows building upon follow-up actions, where and if considered appropriate.

- Regarding the ageing of the workforce, the future EU OSH policy framework should be aimed at promoting health and safety measures to tackle the various challenges in order to promote actions to provide safe workplaces, to support staff to work to their maximum abilities and to keep staff healthy and in work until retirement. At the same time HOSPEEM and EPSU do not believe that the EU new policy framework should specifically address this challenge, as this is an important issue that needs to be addressed within the existing legislative and risk assessment framework provisions. The sectoral social partners for the hospital and health sector included a number of possible measures to support these aims in the "[EPSU-HOSPEEM](#) Guidelines on addressing challenges related to an ageing workforce and good practice examples" endorsed in October 2013. The European Commission should support further efforts in this regard and help to disseminate the results and to foster the exchange of existing practice and good examples.
- In the hospital and healthcare sector, the Agreement on the Prevention from Sharp Injuries signed by HOSPEEM and EPSU in 2009, transposed into Council Directive 2010/32/EU in 2010, is a very good example of the results that social partners can achieve together to identify risks and to improve safety and health at workplace. We witness this both with regard to the contents of the Framework Agreement/Directive and with regard to the procedures set up to work towards and guarantee improvements for the safety of the workforce and of the patients at the level of health care institutions. These improvements will only be achieved by conferring a key role to the social partners at the different levels. The sense of ownership of this agreement by the social partners and their strong commitment boosted the transposition of the Directive into national legislation. What is even more important, thanks to the bottom-up approach characterising this kind of process, the provisions negotiated by HOSPEEM and EPSU have been already implemented at the workplace level in several Members States. There is also a strong commitment of social partners towards continuous improvements and monitoring, as highlighted in the framework of the joint [HOSPEEM-EPSU](#) project "Promotion and support of the implementation of Directive 2010/32/EU" run in 2012/2013. In the context of their own activities on this OSH topic, HOSPEEM and EPSU have also witnessed the supportive and helpful role of EU-OSHA.
- HOSPEEM and EPSU were amongst the eight EU-level sectoral social partners having endorsed the multi-sectoral guidelines to tackle third-party violence and harassment related

to work. They participated in a joint [project](#) (in 2010 and 2011) to promote awareness raising and the use of the guidelines as well as in the drafting of an implementation report (in summer and autumn 2013).

HOSPEEM and EPSU welcome the possibility for the European Social Fund to support national and sectoral initiatives to develop a culture of prevention in the field of health and safety at work and to improve occupational health and safety in the context of training measures to benefit both hospitals/health structures and workers concerned.

It is in this spirit that HOSPEEM and EPSU will put particular emphasis and attention to selected issues of health and safety at the workplace in the context of their joint work programme 2014-2016.