

# VISION ZERO

The Link to Vision Zero – EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2021–2027

VISION ZERO  
PRACTICE



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## Author

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## Introduction

The EU strategic framework on health and safety at work 2021-2027 promotes a 'VISION ZERO' approach to work-related deaths by improving data collection on accidents at work and occupational diseases, by strengthening enforcement and increasing awareness on reducing work-related deaths at company level, sharing good practices, and supporting increased training for labour inspectorates. Based on the EU strategic framework on OSH, the EU Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work encourages EU-OSHA to:

- Disseminate information on Vision Zero approaches, include Vision Zero in its campaigns and spread related tools and guidelines,
- Continue to improve EU data collections on occupational accidents and diseases, considering existing legislation and practices, high risk sectors,
- Raise awareness about the return on investments into OSH measures at all levels, and offer related guidelines and good,
- Encourage the Senior Labour Inspectors Committee (SLIC) as well as national labour inspections, to include Vision Zero approaches in their campaigns,
- Arrange fora for sharing best practices on Vision Zero approaches, in and between Member States as well as in a tripartite framework,
- Develop and promote EU guidelines on including occupational safety and health specifications in procurement procedures.

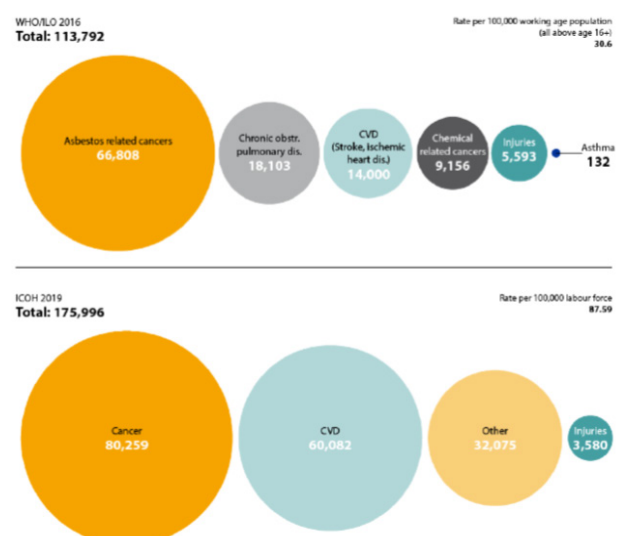
Following on the recommendations of the Advisory Committee, below two activities with close relations to the Vision Zero approach at EU-OSHA are described more in detail, first the OSH-Barometer Data Visualization Tool and second the Lift-OSH project on OSH in supply chains of the European construction and agri-food sector.

## The OSH-Barometer Data Visualization Tool

To achieve the goal of zero occupational accidents and illnesses, reliable, timely and comparable data on occupational accidents and work-related health problems is a key requirement to assess OSH performance across EU Member States and draw evidence-based policy conclusions from such comparisons. EU-OSHA will continue to improve EU data collections on occupational accidents and diseases in its OSH Barometer data visualization tool.

Please see below in figure 1 as a recent example of statistics presented in a user-friendly way in the OSH Barometer the newest estimations of work-related fatalities by different causes. The estimation from ICOH includes generally more risk factors WHO/ILO statistics, therefore the ICOH numbers are considerably higher. However, regarding the impact of single cause, both studies deliver similar results, with occupational cancer being by far the highest risk factor in both studies.

**Figure 1.** WHO/ILO and ICOH estimation on work-related fatalities



“ In today's economy, where all countries have global business relations, a Vision Zero approach can be a key element to improve OSH throughout the global supply chains. ”

## The influence of supply chains

Nowadays, companies are increasingly dependent on national and international supply chains, as the public is becoming more and more aware of, not least due to the COVID-19 pandemic and most recently the Russian war against Ukraine. The relationships between customers and suppliers largely determine the framework conditions and decision-making scope of companies, including health and safety at work. The strong competitive and price pressure often leads to poorer working conditions in the supply chain, the further away the suppliers are from the end customer. In recent years, many examples from developing countries have been reported in the media, such as the Rana Plaza accident (Bird et al., 2019) in the textile industry of Bangladesh. To address OSH concerns resulting from global supply chains the ILO established its Vision Zero Fund, launched by G7 and endorsed by G20.

This aligns well with the Vision Zero approach of the 'EU strategic framework on health and safety at work 2021-2027 - Occupational safety and health in a changing world of work'. We are also increasingly seeing examples from European countries, such as harvest workers in Spain and Italy, bogus self-employment in the German meat industry or many workers on construction sites across Europe who must work in precarious conditions. In response to this, various measures have been developed that either have a direct impact on the relationship between customers and suppliers, or increasingly measures that are based on national or international regulations.

**EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) planned for 2024 – What are the benefits of these new rules?**

**For citizens**  
 Better protection of human rights, including labour rights.  
 Healthier environment for present and future generations.  
 More transparency enabling informed choices.  
 Better access to justice for victims.

**For companies**  
 Harmonised legal framework in the EU, creating legal certainty and level playing field.  
 Greater customer trust and employees' commitment.  
 Better risk management and adaptability.  
 Increased attractiveness for talent, sustainability-oriented investors and public procurers.

**For developing countries**  
 Better protection of human rights and the environment.  
 Increased stakeholder awareness on key sustainability issues.  
 Sustainable investment.  
 Improved sustainability-related practices.

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## The Lift-OSH Project of EU-OSHA

The EU-OSHA LIFT-OSH project (Leverage Instruments for Occupational Safety and Health) investigates the influence of supply chains on working conditions in construction and agriculture. It is carried out by an international research consortium led by Prof. Peter Hasle (University of Southern Denmark). In a first step, a comprehensive literature review of the empirical state of research on market-related factors influencing occupational safety in both sectors will be carried out (Walters et al, 2021).

In the further course of the LIFT-OSH project, more than 40 case studies from at least 7 different European countries have been created, which used 132 structured interviews and workplace analyzes to assess the concrete framework conditions of every customer-supplier relationship and their effects on prevention. A series of accompanying workshops with the most important European stakeholders (e.g. social partners, companies, supervisory authorities) ensures the practical feasibility of the results and identify best practices where the European countries involved can benefit from each other. The results of this study can be relevant both for internal occupational health and safety management with suppliers and for the development of overarching multi-stakeholder approaches.

Based on the supply chain management literature (Hasle et al. 2014), we distinguish between the following two direct influencing factors in customer-supplier relationships:

- Contractual influences: Various forms of contracting and formal reviews and pre-qualifications of suppliers and service providers, including an actual review of work processes.
- Relationship influences: Various forms of informal relationships between customers and suppliers aimed at increasing occupational health and safety qualifications and improving working conditions.
- Hybrid forms: Both influencing factors often appear in a hybrid form, with elements from both factors.

Going beyond this, there are indirect factors influencing supply chain governance that are exercised by external stakeholders, such as:

- National legislation and regulation on supply chains (e.g. in Germany "Act on Corporate Due Diligence to Avoid Human Rights Violations in Supply Chains");
- International legislation and regulation (e.g. EU directives, international standards, sustainability index);
- Labor and collective bargaining law (e.g. regulations against precarious working conditions)
- Public pressure (e.g. from the media, NGOs).

#### *OSH in supply chains of the agri-food sector*

In the EU, the supply chains in the agricultural and food sectors (agri-food) account for 5.5% of the gross domestic product and employ 23 million workers. The sector is dominated by a few large retail and food companies, but most businesses are relatively small, with an average of 16 employees.

Supermarket chains and major grocery brands face high reputational risk, which is a key motivation for their occupational health and safety activities. However, the focus for reputation is more on food safety, environmental and animal welfare aspects.



In this project, the literature study is supplemented by stakeholder interviews to identify further case studies and to use the assessments and experiences of the experts on the supply chains. Representatives from the trade union sector stated that it was difficult to get employee representatives interested in the issue of occupational safety in supply chains. Unions represent the interests of their members and verification of working conditions in the supply chain would

mostly be left to the "CSR departments". Furthermore, the workers in the agri-food sector are often poorly organized and work under precarious conditions, the competitive and price pressure is enormous. However, new certificates could help in the food industry, which values good working conditions and could in this way persuade large retail chains to prefer to buy from such certified companies.

#### *OSH in supply chains of the construction sector*



The construction industry is one of the largest economic sectors in the EU, generating around 9% of the gross domestic product and employing 16 million people. As in the agri-food sector, a few multinational corporations dominate the sector, carrying out international infrastructure projects and other large contracts. However, most companies are very small and have an average of just 4 employees.

Construction companies must comply with a number of standards and regulations in the areas of quality, environment, climate and product safety, which led to the development of a new professional field in medium-sized and larger construction companies (Uhrenholdt-Madsen et al., 2019). This also includes the safety and health coordinators, who are responsible for safety and health protection on construction sites. The appointment of the Safety and Health Construction Coordinators (SHCC) according to the

COUNCIL DIRECTIVE 92/57/EEC has been regulated since 1998 They are playing an increasingly important role in larger construction projects, but the European qualification profiles have not yet been harmonized with one another, which is a particular problem in large international projects.

## Conclusions

In today's economy, where all countries have global business relations, a Vision Zero approach can be a key element to improve OSH throughout the global supply chains, thus contributing to achieve the SDGs on 'Decent work and economic growth (8)' and 'Good Health and Wellbeing (3)'.

The construction and agri-food sectors are characterized by two different supply chains. On the one hand, similar tools are used in both industries, such as economic incentives, corporate social responsibility reporting and auditing, to manage the functionally fragmented and geographically distributed supply chains. On the other hand, there are sector-specific instruments such as safety passes on construction sites and quality labels in the food sector. Both sectors have in common a high level of employee mobility and many employees who work under precarious working conditions and, for the most part, have a migration background. In addition to the influence of state regulation and control in occupational safety, the focus is increasingly on the influence of the supply chains, which in turn are regulated by laws in some countries.

Further, EU-OSHA responds with the OSH Barometer Data Visualization Tool to the requests of the European Commission and the EU members states for more accurate OSH data. A sound European Vision Zero approach must be evidence-based on reliable data for appropriate policy decision making.

## Acknowledgements

The Lift-OSH project is carried out by an international research consortium led by Prof. Peter Hasle (University of Southern Denmark), funded by the European Agency for Safety and Health, Bilbao. Further publications are planned in 2024.

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