

Healthy workplaces lighten the load

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Christa Sedlatschek reflects on 25 years of making Europe's workplaces safer, healthier and more productive.



Christa Sedlatschek Executive Director of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) - Photo credit: EU-OSHA

As Europeans, we pride ourselves on our commitment to social rights, including the right to safe and healthy working conditions.

We have long recognised this as being fundamental to building an inclusive and prosperous society.

In 1989, the European Union's first comprehensive piece of occupational safety and health legislation was published: The Framework Directive.

This was a major milestone, setting out minimum workplace safety and health requirements and common principles across the EU.

Such legislation has been instrumental in improving conditions for workers across Europe.

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But it was clear that more needed to be done to address the shocking reality that more than four million workplace accidents were still occurring each year.

The European Commission responded by declaring 1992 the European Year of Safety and Health at Work.

This was followed in 1994, by the founding of an agency dedicated to raising awareness of and advancing knowledge on occupational safety and health — the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA).

At EU-OSHA, we are marking our 25th anniversary by looking back at our contributions to workplace safety and health and drawing inspiration from our achievements.

Through awareness-raising campaigns and the online interactive risk assessment tools (OiRA), and by providing high-quality information and practical guidance, we have built an agency that we are immensely proud of.

Our success is largely thanks to our strong partnerships - with the European Commission, national focal points, social partners, campaign partners and our stakeholders.

This network - which we have worked tirelessly to strengthen over the years - enables us to connect with workplaces and make a real difference.

The future is uncertain, but we are sure that new safety and health challenges will arise in workplaces as a result of developments in technology, political and societal pressures, and changes in the economy, demographics and the European Union itself.

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We strive to keep ahead of these changes, to ensure that resources are used effectively and efficiently.

Several of our initiatives are aimed at anticipating new and emerging risks.

Our latest European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER-3), for example, has a focus on the effects of digitalisation and demographic change.

We are also running a foresight project on the impact of digitalisation on workplace safety and health.

Our findings are intended to guide decision-making and help determine how to prioritise resources at the policy, research and company levels.

One of the most pressing issues facing Europe's workplaces is the high prevalence of musculoskeletal disorders.

They can be prevented and effectively managed, and our upcoming 'Healthy Workplaces Lighten the Load' campaign aims to provide the information, tools and resources needed to do just that.

Whatever the future brings, with the ongoing commitment of our partners, we are confident that we will continue to make a difference as a world-renowned leader in promoting occupational safety and health.

About the author

Christa Sedlatschek is European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) Executive Director

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