

## **Legislative program needed to implement the EU's occupational Safety and Health Strategy**

Effective occupational safety measures and prioritization of workers' health and safety are resource factors that also support productivity and the economy in a socially sustainable manner. The COVID-19 crisis made the interaction between the economy, health, and safety increasingly visible and highlighted the need to strengthen internal cooperation within the European Union. A common Occupational Safety and Health Strategy supports cooperation and brings the union's activities closer to people's everyday lives. As the changes in the world of work are continuous and rapid, and challenges such as the climate crisis bring new risk factors, the Occupational Safety and Health Strategy must also evolve, and its objectives should be able to be updated during the strategy's validity period. Finland also benefits from these EU occupational safety measures.

### **A Directive to prevent psychosocial risks**

The EU's Strategic Framework for Occupational Health and Safety recognizes psychosocial risks and increased mental health problems. This is a phenomenon that significantly threatens the health of workers, leading to considerable negative consequences such as workplace stress. There are economic costs involved in workers' absences; sick leaves and early disability pensions. Over half of workers in EU countries report that work-related stress is common in their workplace, and four out of five managers are concerned about work-related stress. According to a survey conducted by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, the majority of employers state that compliance with the law is the main reason for addressing occupational health and safety issues in the workplace.



However, the actions proposed in the EU strategy are limited to projects, campaigns, and recommendations. In addition to these, a legislative program is needed to support the implementation of the strategy. The need for legislation to prevent psychosocial risks and work-related mental health problems is evident. We need a directive for the prevention of work-related psychosocial risks, overload, and mental health problems, and the Commission must act promptly. EU-level legislation is needed because, so far, only a few member states have clear legislation on managing psychosocial stress factors.

### **Key legislative initiatives to ensure Occupational Health and Safety**

Another significant cause of incapacity to work is work-related musculoskeletal disorders. Legislation regarding this issue also needs to be reviewed, updated, and developed.

In the next legislative term, efforts to develop occupational chemical safety at the EU level should continue. Setting and updating exposure limits is necessary to reduce the risk of work-related cancer and reproductive health risks.

Regulations benefit workplaces only when they translate into practical actions in everyday workplace operations. EU legislation on occupational health and safety should take into account recent research findings and the current challenges posed by factors such as the changing world of work, the climate crisis, technostress, ethical stress, and global infectious diseases.

In addition to preparing new directives, the effective implementation, application, monitoring, and updating of existing regulations must also be prioritized in the EU. The European Parliament and the



Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work, operating under the Commission, play a significant role in the preparation and monitoring process. Alongside new challenges, traditional occupational health and safety work and risk prevention must also be well managed.

### **Impact of Digitalization**

Remote and hybrid work, digitalization of the workplace, and multi-location mobile work are becoming more common across various sectors. The specific features of Occupational Health and Safety related to remote work must be considered in all activities. The right to disconnect for workers must be strengthened. Regulation of digitalization and AI (Artificial Intelligence) systems must also establish fair frameworks for future development.

### **Additional information:**

Susanna Salovaara, Head of Office, FinUnions, +32 488 47 95 08, [susanna.salovaara@finunions.org](mailto:susanna.salovaara@finunions.org)

Pekka Ristelä, Head of International Affairs, SAK, +358 40 5468781, [pekka.ristela@sak.fi](mailto:pekka.ristela@sak.fi)

Maria Häggman, Head of International Affairs, STTK, +358 40 148 9091, [maria.haggman@sttk.fi](mailto:maria.haggman@sttk.fi)

