

An international conference on 'Labour Inspection and the Challenges of the Future', organised by the State Labour Inspection, was held at the SLI Training Centre in Wrocław on 27 and 28 October 2022. The event was attended by labour inspection staff from EU Member States, as well as representatives from the International Association of Labour Inspection (IALI), the International Social Security Association (ISSA), the International Labour Organisation, the Senior Labour Inspectors' Committee (SLIC) and the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA). In a special series, we present the most interesting excerpts from the conference participants' speeches.

Implementing a preventive mindset in industry by Vision Zero. An offer for labour inspectors to increase sustainable compliance

Helmut Ehnes, Chair of VISION ZERO Steering Committee of the International Social Security Association (ISSA), Secretary General of ISSA Mining, Technical Secretary of ISSA Trade

The International Social Security Association is the author of the Global Initiative Vision Zero and 7 Golden Rules which were presented in 2017 at the World Congress on Safety and Health in Singapore. The premise of Vision Zero is to create a new mindset for the culture of prevention at workplaces and beyond.

Prevention pays off

Presenting the history of Vision Zero, Ehnes displayed a slide showing changes in the occurrence of serious accidents in Germany over the course of 100 years (1910-2010) in the context of new pensions per 1000 workers. The chart shows a downward trend from 9.6 to 0.3. While these results can be a source of satisfaction, as he pointed out, it must be remembered that behind every accident at work there is a tragedy of the injured person and their families. Ehnes stressed

the social dimension of such incidents. He also cited global data, referring to 340 million such accidents, 2.4 million people affected by occupational diseases and 400 fatalities. He then touched upon the economic aspect of such incidents and mentioned their most frequent effects: first aid cost, transport to hospital, treatment cost, rehabilitation, payment of salary, compensation, insurance cost, fine, decreased motivation of workers, standstill, material damage, replacement labour, cost resulting from quality problems, contractual penalty, loss of image. ISSA conducted a study, according to which the return on prevention is 2.2, i.e. each euro invested in safety, health and wellbeing generates a potential for increased commercial success of 2.20 euros.

New quality

The first global initiative for prevention is Vision Zero, which is based on the

following premises:

- every accident is preventable,
- every work-related disease is preventable,
- nobody should get killed at work,
- no serious occupational diseases, work accidents and traffic accidents

Over the years, preventive efforts concentrated on safety and health issues, whereas Vision Zero adds to these two pillars of prevention the underestimated concept of well-being which also has an impact on workplace accident statistics:

1. Safety – refers to the active promotion, maintenance and sustainability of safe working conditions and safe workplace behaviour. It includes prevention of unsafe working conditions and sudden and unexpected events such as accidents, incidents and near misses.
2. Health – refers to the active promotion, maintenance and sustainability of healthy working conditions and healthy behaviour in the workplace. Health can

be affected by exposures to dust, noise, hazardous substances, vibration; it is also connected to heavy lifting, ergonomics, etc.

3. Well-being refers to the active promotion, maintenance and sustainability of healthy psychosocial working conditions so that workers' mental health and ability to work productively and creatively are maintained. Well-being is affected by workplace design, work organisation and human factors.

Lucky 7

The strategy relies on 7 Golden Rules which, when applied, help reduce the risk of adverse events. These guidelines for action can be applied in every workplace, company or economic sector around the world.

1. Take leadership – demonstrate commitment
2. Identify hazards – control risks
3. Define targets – develop programmes
4. Ensure a safe and healthy system – be well-organized
5. Ensure safety and health in machines, equipment and workplaces
6. Improve qualifications – develop competence
7. Invest in people – motivate by participation

Implementation and application of these seven rules enable entering the path that leads to the goal of zero accidents at work. Ehnes invited the participants to visit the website <https://visionzero.global/> offering free publications and guides on Vision Zero. He also discussed the role of labour inspectors as promoters of the prevention culture, using the strategy to increase the impact. It is worth pointing out that the initiative has gained significant popularity and has become the backbone of national and sectoral strategies in countries such as Germany, Singapore, Pakistan and Finland.

Vision Zero – the Polish experience

Artur Sobota, Director of the Prevention and Promotion Department at the Chief Labour Inspectorate

Vision Zero is a very ambitious endeavour. Striving to eliminate accident and health risks is a continuous and never-ending process. The number zero can and should be the target, even though at the current stage of the development of mankind, technique and technology of work processes, this sounds like utopia. It seems that only the complete elimination of the weakest link in the work process, which is the human being, or full automation of work will allow the target to be achieved. However, every accident, every occupational disease which entails the suffering of the victim, as well as financial and social cost, forces us to search for the right way to avoid undesired effects.

The State Labour Inspection, which already some time ago recognised the need for accident and disease prevention, conducts preventive programmes with the participation of employees, employers, farmers and members of rural communities. The programme objectives may well have been developed over twenty years ago, but they have remained valid until the present day. Even unmodified, they fit the Vision Zero strategy perfectly. Three of them deserve particular attention.

The 'Effective occupational risk management' programme seeks to change attitudes of the target group towards the occupational risk assessment. The

objective is to make them aware of the fact that it is a tool to assess the work process which allows to professionally detect health risks and take relevant corrective measures, and that the occupational risk assessment is not an unnecessary formality but an obligation that makes sense. It helps show employers what the negative effects and consequences are if an occupational risk assessment is carried out incorrectly or not carried out at all.

The 'Obtain the SLI diploma' programme supports employers in their efforts to ensure labour law compliance in their companies and to achieve a sustainable improvement of working conditions. It also helps increase the level of work safety, especially as regards works involving particular life and health hazards.

The 'Respect life! Safe work on a farm' programme aims at disseminating information about the rules of health and life protection in individual farming, among others by means of enhancing the knowledge of farmers and exerting a direct impact on the improvement of safety and working conditions of farmers.

Additionally, all participants of the preventive initiatives implemented by the SLI obtain free of charge professional support in their joint effort to eliminate accident and health risks, which is consistent with the Vision Zero objectives.

Psychosocial workload factors survey and the use of it in enforcement

Arto Teronen, Director of Field Operations, Department of Work and Gender Equality, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (Finland)



A survey on psychosocial workload factors was developed by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health in 2018-2019 for occupational health and safety authorities. Entities at central level were involved in its development. In 2021, the questionnaire was integrated into the inspection data system of occupational health and safety authorities, extending its use in the enforcement area.

The price of stress

It is the legal duty of the employer to ensure that working conditions are such that they do not endanger the physical

or mental health of the employee (negligence in this area entails certain consequences). Why is this so important? Work-related stress is associated with poor health, lower productivity or an increased number of accidents. It affects an individual's fitness and functional capacity. Mental health problems are the leading cause of sickness absence and disability pension in Finland. This shows that reducing work-related stress brings tangible business benefits.

Pre-inspection survey

The psychosocial working environment

is difficult to observe during workplace inspections, so a decision was made to systematically monitor workload factors and analyse harmful psychosocial stress factors. Originally paper-based questionnaires were used, but nowadays the health and safety representative or manager provides the workers with an electronic questionnaire. The survey is usually used as a pre-inspection questionnaire in the workplace and the results of the survey are used during inspections as:

- assistance in the selection of legal remedies focused on the issues that are the most common cause of tensions;

- guidance for analysing the employer's actions;
- assistance in assessing the extent to which the employer is likely to have failed to comply with the law.

The results of the survey are analysed and discussed during the inspection. The employer receives the survey information as part of the inspection report. The survey allows for a structured collection of information on the working conditions of employees for enforcement purposes.

What to ask?

The questions focus on three areas:

1. Workload factors related to the scope of the job, resulting from the way the job is organised, e.g. excessive workload relative to working hours, unclear job

description or responsibilities, unrealistic or unreasonable goals, factors interfering with concentration at work;

2. Workload factors related to the content of the work, e.g. challenging or difficult work tasks, high responsibility, performing several tasks simultaneously;

3. Workload factors related to the social functionality in the work community, e.g. problems related to mutual cooperation and interaction between colleagues or supervisor, harassment, discrimination, lack of support from the supervisor in performing the work.

Responses are rated on a scale of 1 to 5, indicating the degree of workload caused by work-related factors. There is also the possibility to speak freely in the survey. If the employee feels that it is for some reason impossible to estimate the

burden, he or she can choose the point "Not applicable to my work".

Reading the survey

The survey does not indicate in what ways harmful load factors occur in the workplace in different positions. The questionnaire does not allow conclusions to be drawn about the health of workers. On the basis of the survey alone, the inspector cannot draw conclusions as to whether the employer has complied with the legislation. But the survey does allow for a systematic collection of information on psychosocial working conditions and can be used to identify problems specific to each workplace. The survey helps to assess the impact of psychosocial working conditions on health and to prioritise risks, and on the basis of the survey, specific measures can be taken to manage psychosocial workloads.

Counteracting the negative effects of stress in the workplace

Joanna Bartoszek, psychologist, Chief Specialist at the Prevention and Promotion Department at the Chief Labour Inspectorate

The State Labour Inspection has for many years been making efforts to reduce exposure to psychosocial factors in the working environment. Activities in this area include the prevention programme 'Counteracting the negative effects of stress in the workplace', aimed at employers and employees. The programme is implemented comprehensively in all district labour inspectorates and consists of several pathways to support employers who express an interest in the topic of psychosocial risks and, above all, in taking corrective measures in their

workplaces. The procedure consists of educational and awareness-raising tasks aimed at disseminating knowledge about occupational stress and other psychosocial risks (including bullying, discrimination, unequal treatment, psychological and sexual harassment, violence and aggression). Training events, webinars, conferences are conducted, stands and consultation points distributing SLI publications are organised. Coordinators cooperate with the media and post articles on the web. The thematic website www.streswpracy.pl informs about the programme. In addition, professional

support is provided by making available a tool for assessing the stressfulness of work characteristics – the Psychosocial Risk Scale (prepared by the Institute of Occupational Medicine in Łódź). The completed questionnaires are forwarded to the Chief Labour Inspectorate. After analysing the results, the coordinator at the SLI prepares proposals for corrective measures. Participants in the programme very much appreciate the fact that, thanks to the support of SLI staff, they have the opportunity to raise awareness among employers and employees regarding the identification of negative phenomena in workplaces.