

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.

# Work of international organisations for occupational safety and health

**Charlotte Grevfors-Ernoult**, Chair of the Senior Labour Inspectors' Committee (SLIC), Head of Unit C.2 – Health and Safety at Work, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (European Commission)

**Ho Siong Hin**, President of the International Association of Labour Inspection (IALI)

The European Commission's Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2021-2027 sets forth key priorities and measures aimed at improving workers' health and safety. Charlotte Grevfors-Ernoult in her presentation entitled 'Addressing occupational safety and health (OSH) challenges when enforcing EU OSH legislation' discussed the most important strategic aspects of this document from the enforcement perspective. Outlining the background of developing the Framework, the SLIC Chair pointed out that during the COVID-19 pandemic ensuring safe working conditions has grown even more important. Indeed, workers' protection in the EU has visibly improved, which can be seen in the decreased number of fatal accidents at work – reduction by 70% between 1994 and 2018. However, 3300 workers still die every year in accidents at work and 200 000 die of work-related diseases. At the same time, annual cost related to accidents

at work and occupational diseases in EU amounts to over 3.3% of GDP, which is 460 billion euro. She stressed that during the work on amending the Framework, there was a broad consensus among the stakeholders, i.e. the European Parliament, the European Council, national authorities and social partners.

## Focus on objectives

Based on consultations, reports and feedback from many institutions, a strategic framework was created, with emphasis on three objectives:

- anticipating and managing change in the new world of work in the context of green, digital and demographic transition;
- improving prevention of accidents at work and occupational diseases;
- increasing preparedness to respond to potential future health crises.

Equally important are supporting activities which will enable the

implementation of these objectives, that is enforcement, social dialogue, raising awareness, funding and collecting evidence. Analysing the first objective, Charlotte Grevfors-Ernoult highlighted that change emerges in the context of the green and digital transitions in the field of OSH and entails modernisation of OSH regulations in the European Union, such as, among others, the Workplaces Directive and Display Screen Equipment Directive, or new protective limits for hazardous chemicals linked to the green transition, such as asbestos. It is also important to pay attention to psychosocial and ergonomic risks, especially those related to digitalisation. Another objective is comprehensive prevention. The Vision Zero approach aims at eliminating work-related fatal accidents. It involves updating EU rules on hazardous chemicals to combat cancer, reproductive and respiratory diseases, as well as

addressing occupational circulatory diseases. This objective puts emphasis on measures ensuring workplaces for all, including gender mainstreaming, better workplaces for persons with disabilities, tackling workplace violence and harassment.

labour inspections. SLIC is composed of representatives of the labour inspectorates' services of the 27 Member States. It consists of one full member per Member State and one alternate member. Representatives of EEA/EFTA, EU-OSHA and ILO are observers. Organisation of SLIC activities is the

The organisation provides support for its members in building capacity and tackling challenges. In 1978 IALI was granted the status of a 'Non-Governmental International Consultative Organisation' by the International Labour Office. Everyday operation of the Association is entrusted upon the Executive Committee, which is elected by the General Assembly held once every three years. The Executive Committee consists of one President and eight Vice-Presidents – one of them performs the function of the General Secretary, and another one – of the Association Treasurer. IALI priorities are as follows: to provide professional foundation for building strong, modernised and effective labour inspection worldwide; to inform about the importance and role of labour inspection; to build partnerships and alliances with related organisations and in specific projects to promote decent work around the world; to provide resources for accessing technical expertise; to promote and support the development of regional cooperation initiatives; or to provide professional assistance through the publication of guidelines.

### Causes of work-related deaths in EU (%)



As regards the last objective – increased preparedness and quick response to threats – there has been a need to set up an EU guidance for potential future health threats, to ensure OSH standards for seasonal and migrant workers and to update the Commission Recommendation on occupational diseases to include COVID-19.

### Improved effectiveness

Charlotte Grevfors-Ernoult stressed that implementing EU OSH vision requires updating national legal frameworks. Member States should focus on the use of digital tools in order to improve the efficiency of labour inspection by preventing and detecting breaches of legislation. It is the hope of the SLIC Chair that the strategic framework will contribute, among others, to better application and enforcement of the law.

### SLIC – elite group of inspectors in the European Union

The second part of the presentation was focused on the institution of SLIC, i.e. the Senior Labour Inspectors' Committee, formally set up by a Commission Decision in 1995. SLIC gives opinions on the enforcement of EU OSH legislation and promotes knowledge sharing between

responsibility of the Bureau, consisting of representatives of the Member States which hold the current Presidency of the Council of the EU, the former and the upcoming ones. Working Groups are set up with specific mandates, and its members must have the appropriate expertise. The SLIC work plan 2021-2027 includes priority areas that relevant working groups work on, specialising in, among others, emerging risks in a workplace (e.g. WG Emex), traditional risks (e.g. WG Chemex, WG Machex), new forms of work (e.g. WG Machex subgroups on robotics and digitalisation, WG OSH for mobile workers), knowledge development, exchange and communication.

### IALI – international representation of inspections

Ho Siong Hin, President of the International Association of Labour Inspection, started his presentation entitled 'Measuring Performance of the Occupational Safety and Health Function' by reminding what the International Association of Labour Inspection was. The organisation was established in 1972 and gathers 130 members in 109 countries worldwide. Its work is focused on promoting professional, ethical labour inspection and its effective activities.

### Step by step

The organisation issues numerous publications, including those concerning measures of performance of labour inspectorates' work. This is a set of guidelines designed to help IALI members to meet the challenges of their day to day work. An example may be a six-step methodology for measuring the achievement of improved health and safety in workplaces.

**Step 1:** Analyse the OSH situation – identify the problem and establish a baseline:

- defining the issue that the labour inspectorate needs to address. A question arises as to what has to change so that OSH can improve. (Example: Increase in certain types of injuries, such as musculoskeletal

injuries, or a rise of injuries in certain sectors, such as construction).

- collecting data which will serve as a starting point for measurements and comparisons.

**Step II:** Establish goal(s) – define the goal and how it supports the larger vision, e.g. that of the government. The goal should be relevant, credible, measurable, sustainable and timely.

**Step III:** Allocate resources (inputs) – staff, budget and equipment.

**Step IV:** Undertake activities – fulfilling the labour inspectorate’s statutory obligations and delivering

collected, partnerships developed or events organised.

**Step VI:** Measure outcomes – the degree of change in relation to a defined problem that is made visible as a result of a labour inspectorate’s activities, e.g. outcomes for workers, companies and the society.

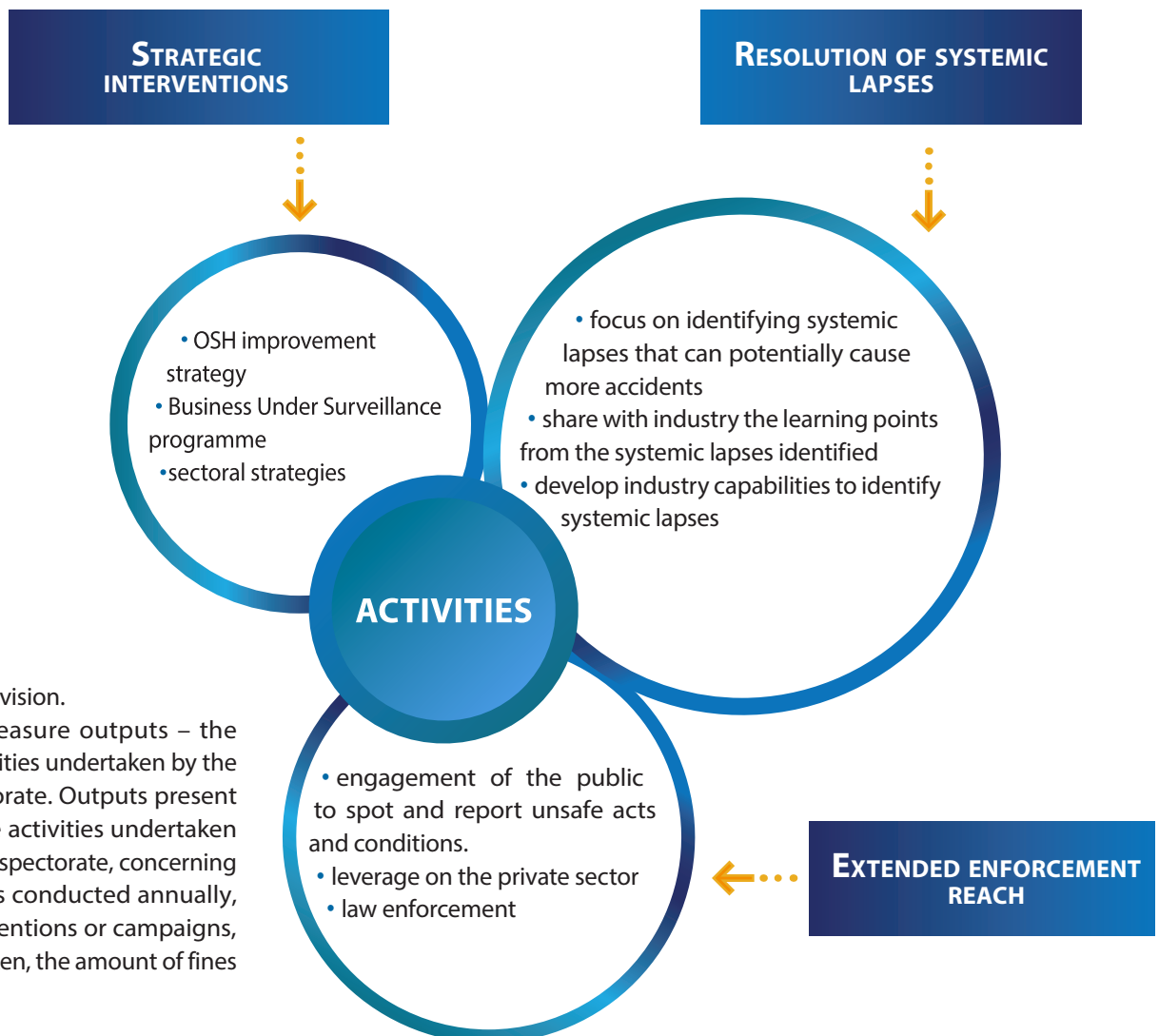
**Singapore’s example**

In 2004 in Singapore, the workplace fatality rate in 2004 was 4.9 per 100,000 employees, which was higher than the EU’s average rate of 2.5. The impetus for change came in the aftermath of

three serious accidents that occurred in 2004 – the collapse of a part of the Nicoll Highway, an accident at work on Fusionpolis construction site, and the fire onboard the oil tanker Al mudaina. Through these accidents it became clear that the society expected higher safety standards. A vision-goal was conceived, whereby Singapore is a safe and healthy workplace for all, renowned for best OSH practices.

At the onset of the establishment of the new framework, the Singapore Ministry of Manpower (MOM)’s target was, by 2015, to reduce the worker

**Measures taken in Singapore**



related goals or vision.

**Step V:** Measure outputs – the number of activities undertaken by the labour inspectorate. Outputs present in numbers the activities undertaken by the labour inspectorate, concerning e.g. inspections conducted annually, targeted interventions or campaigns, legal actions taken, the amount of fines

fatality rate by half, in order to attain the standards of the current top ten developed countries with good safety records. In 2008, this target was reviewed – to reduce workplace fatalities to less than 1.8 per 100,000 workers and reduce the number of accident injuries to 280 per 100,000 workers by 2018. The number of employees in the OSH Division increased gradually from about 200 in 2005 to around 370 in 2011. The organisation's budget also increased; the Division operates on a budget of \$40 M annually (Singapore currency). Partnerships and alliances for increased workplace health and safety we also managed to be established. The measures undertaken were comprehensive in nature.

The outputs of direct activities, such as the number of inspections, fines imposed and notices of non-compliance, were regularly measured. The last stage was the measurements of outcomes, which showed that Singapore has made significant improvements in its workplace fatality rate since the establishment of the new OSH framework. A decrease in accident at work fatality rate was observed, from 4.9 in 2004 to 2.2 in 2010 (per 100,000 workers).

### Exchange of experience

The publication referred to by Ho Siong Hin in his presentation also analyses cases from countries such as Australia, Denmark, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Slovenia, United Kingdom or Norway. The IALI President also recommended the "International Benchmarking on OSH Regulation" (IBOR), which enables a thorough review of the whole OSH system, starting from legal issues, through inspectors' powers, and ending with prevention, inspection outcomes, or communication mechanisms. IBOR

was published in 2019 and steadily gained popularity. It allows to organise capability building of labour inspectors and to enhance their professionalism.

Additionally, IALI supports countries in the implementation of the IALI Code of Integrity and Common Principles, and works with Regional Alliances of Labour Inspectors (RALIs). As Ho Siong

Hin said: "We want to be close to other international organisations operating in the OSH area and that is why we get involved in other programmes". Hence the cooperation takes place on many forums, from the Vision Zero campaign of the International Social Security Association (ISSA) to initiatives of the International Labour Organisation.

## Multiple dimensions of cooperation

**Dr Michał Wyszowski**, PhD, Deputy District Labour Inspector in Poznań

The activity of the State Labour Inspection in the framework of the Senior Labour Inspectors' Committee (SLIC) and its Working Groups is mainly geared towards the development and coordination of work of the authorities inspecting working conditions in the EU Member States. Currently SLIC focuses on the implementation of the Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2021-2027, which defines three basic cross-cutting objectives. The first objective is to anticipate and manage change in the new world of work brought about by the green, digital and demographic transitions; the second one concerns prevention of work-related diseases and accidents, and the third one focuses on increasing preparedness for possible future health threats.

In 2021, SLIC reorganised in order to prepare for the implementation of the work plan 2021-2027. The following Working Groups were then established:

- CHEMEX (chemical risks), sub-group for long-latency diseases – with the involvement of a State Labour Inspection expert;
- BIOLEX (biological risks) – with the involvement of a permanent SLI expert;
- EMEX (emerging risks in the workplace) – with the involvement of SLI experts;
- MACHEx (safety of machinery and technical equipment) – with the

involvement of a permanent SLI expert;

- GEA (law enforcement) – with the involvement of a permanent SLI expert as the Working Group Chair;
- STRATEGY (SLIC operational strategy) – with the involvement of a permanent SLI expert;
- OSH for Mobile Workers – with the involvement of a permanent SLI expert as the Working Group Co-chair;

On a global scale, the State Labour Inspection cooperates with foreign authorities supervising working conditions, among others in the framework of the International Association of Labour Inspection (IALI), which brings together representatives of labour inspections from more than one hundred countries around the world. IALI's activity concentrates on promoting standards, developed by the Association, concerning the effective operation of labour inspection. In the informational materials for, 2022 IALI will include information on inspection programmes implemented by the State Labour Inspection on the national level (work safety during servicing of electric cars) and a regional one (work safety on wind farms – District Labour Inspectorate in Gdańsk, reprotoxic risks in the work environment – District Labour Inspectorate in Poznań).