European Agency for Safety and Health at Work

The view from the workplace: Safety and Health in Micro and Small Enterprises in the EU

European Risk Observatory

National Report: Estonia

European Agency for Safety and Health at Work

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Introduction

Estonia is an example of a relatively new EU Member State from the former Soviet bloc that has made significant strides in working environment since the early 1990s, both in terms of improvements in reported health and safety outcomes and in the development of comprehensive worker protection, especially since accession to the European Union in 2004. Nevertheless, some significant gaps remain as a common inheritance of the legacy of communism across central and eastern European countries and continue to negatively influence general issues of occupational safety and health (OSH) performance. In particular, Estonia, in following a 'liberal' path of economic development, has generally not favoured regulation in the sphere of occupational health and safety and, for example, even today no compulsory system of occupational accident insurance exists, which means that those injured at work have to seek redress in the courts for any compensation. Another important legacy of the Soviet era is the overall weakness of employee representation and participation in working environment issues.

Estonia is a small northern Baltic state in close proximity to the Russian Federation and Finland, with a population of approximately 1.3 million persons and a workforce of 625,000. As a former Soviet Republic that experienced significant inward migration from other parts of the Soviet Union (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, USSR) in the years between 1945 and 1990, it contains a large number of non-ethnic Estonians. Altogether about 420,000 inhabitants (31.4 %) belong to various ethnic groups other than Estonian. The great majority of these (25.5 % of the total population) are Russian by origin and comprise a significant Russian-speaking minority (Estonia.eu, n.d.). This historical background is essential for understanding much of the contemporary social and economic background in Estonia, not least with respect to regulation and enforcement philosophies in OSH and other areas, as well as the impacts of cultural diversity in the field of working environment and occupational health and safety. With immigration from other parts of the Soviet Union, less than half the industrial workforce was composed of ethnic Estonians (Pettai and Hallik, 2002). This produced patterns of occupational differentiation in Estonian society, the inheritance of which remains today, with the Russian-speaking minority generally occupying the less skilled positions in the labour market. While enforcement of OSH regulation in Soviet times was often subordinated to needs of production, there are almost no detailed studies of this topic about Estonia apart from one case study of the mining industry (Kesküla, 2013). The legacy of Soviet-era OSH regulations based on the centralised all-Union organisation of industrial ministries inhibited the development of effective systems of OSH management in the Soviet republics (Woolfson and Vanadzins, 2014). Since independence from the USSR, the state-planned economy has been superseded by the introduction of a free 'neoliberal' market system with a deregulationary emphasis in policy-making and governance (Kattel and Raudla, 2013). In short, the achievement of independence from the USSR was marked by a profound reactive shift away from and against previous prescriptive systems of controls and penalties towards a much more 'business-friendly' regulatory and enforcement regime.

During the 1990s and early 2000s, Estonia was making good progress towards catching up with the gross domestic product (GDP) levels of its European Union counterparts, reaching three-quarters of the EU average before the economic crisis of 2008. When the crisis struck, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were the three worst hit economies in the EU, with GDP dropping by 1.7 % in 2008 and a dramatic 13.4% in 2009 (Eurofound, 2015: 2). While the effects of the crisis in terms of GDP decline were dramatic, so also was the economic recovery which followed, although most recent data point to a new slowdown occurring. In particular, the close economic interlinkages with the Finnish economy, currently undergoing recession, as well as the wider economic environment are likely to affect the medium- to longer term economic prospects for Estonia.

While economic recovery in Estonia since the crisis has been remarkable, the social impacts of the crisis in terms of sharply rising unemployment, the growth of inequality and increasing outward migration of the working population have also been significant (Masso et al., 2012; OECD, 2014a). Inequality of income distribution, as measured by the income quintile ratio, is thus high in Estonia today. It ranks fourth highest in the EU, on a par with two other crisis-hit countries, Greece and Latvia, and behind only Romania, Bulgaria and Spain. Expenditure on social services, for example health care, has been a low priority and, at 5.9 % of GDP, places Estonia at second bottom of the OECD league, ahead only of Turkey, and well below the OECD average of 9.2 % of GDP (OECD, 2015). Life expectancy is comparatively low at 76.5 years, as against the OECD average of 80.2 years (OECD, 2014b). Thus,

Estonia today has inherited a legacy of issues of social exclusion, particularly since the financial and economic crisis. Its mixed economic outlook directly affects the future of working life and the working environment, especially since the crisis. This also has an impact on OSH compliance and work environment, especially in the micro- and small enterprise (MSE) sector, with its heightened economic vulnerability.

1 National OSH infrastructure and regulatory context

1.1 Regulatory context — OSH specific

The main document underlying the field of occupational health and safety in Estonia is the Occupational Health and Safety Act. It was adopted by the Estonian Parliament — the *Riigikogu* — and is the relevant document based on which several relevant regulations of the Government of the Republic and the Ministry of Social Affairs have been developed and enacted (the Act came into force on 26 July 1999). It covers occupational health and safety requirements for the work of employees, and rights and responsibilities of employers concerning employees' health in establishing and ensuring a safe work environment and organising occupational health and safety at enterprise and national levels. The OSH Act is binding on all sizes of enterprises, including MSEs.

In the occupational health and safety system of Estonia, the Ministry of Social Affairs constitutes the executive authority that regulates the entire area, whereas two of its structural units (the Working Life Development Department and the Health Care Department) are directly involved in OSH-related policy-making. The Working Environment Council operates on the national level under the authority of the Ministry of Social Affairs. The Council is a tripartite advisory body comprising 15 members and its main task is to make suggestions and express opinions on the development and implementation of the working environment policy. Following the discontinuance of the Occupational Health Centre in 2004, the Centre's executive role in the area of occupational health was assumed by the Health Board (Working Environment Department). Altogether, there are three government agencies operating within the area of the Ministry of Social Affairs which deal with the field of OSH, as follows: the Health Board, Labour Inspectorate and the National Institute for Health Development. The National Institute for Health Development is a government-established research and development body collecting, connecting and providing reliable national information related to the health of Estonia’s population. In addition, the web portal www.tooelu.ee (administered by the Labour Inspectorate, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Health Board and the National Institute for Health Development) is deemed an important source of information regarding OSH for employers and employees.

1.2 Main actors and institutions

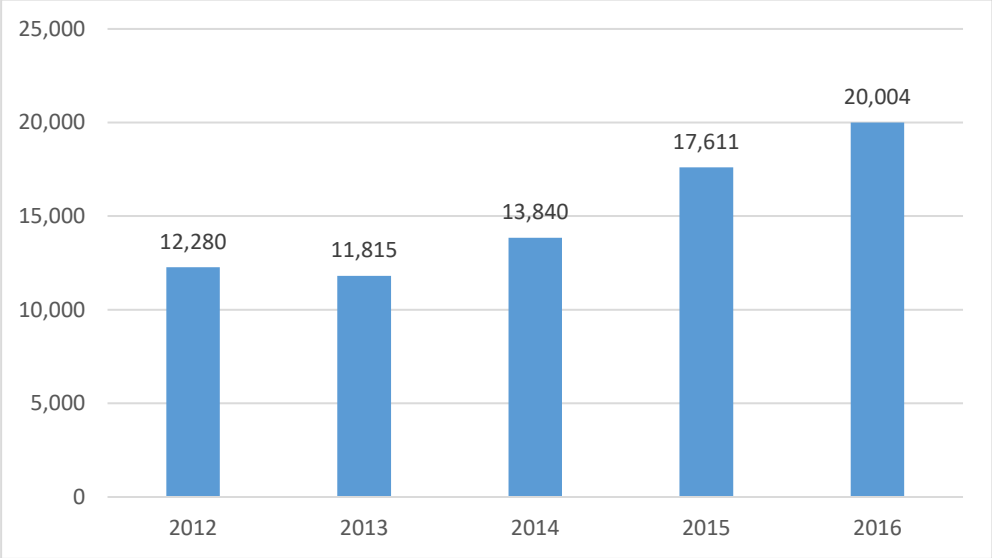
a) Labour Inspectorate

Compliance with occupational health and safety requirements is monitored by the Labour Inspectorate (*Tööinspektsioon*). The Labour Inspectorate informs employees and employers, investigates serious occupational accidents and analyses their causes, exercises powers of enforcement and conducts prevention campaigns aimed at specific sectors in order to improve their OSH outcomes (Eurofound, 2015: 3). Regarding inspection and enforcement, the Labour Inspectorate notes for the year 2016: ‘Violations were detected in 85 % of enterprises during supervision. Every third inspected enterprise had problems with preparing a risk assessment of the work environment or training and instructing the employees. Every fourth enterprise lacked safety instructions and every fifth had not appointed a work environment specialist’ (Labour Inspectorate, 2016: 23).

For the year 2016, the Labour Inspectorate reported: ‘The number of identified violations has significantly increased compared to 2015; however, also the number of enterprises, which had never been inspected before, has also gone up’, by approximately 16 % (Labour Inspectorate, 2016: 27; Figure 1). A detailed analysis of violations by legal acts ‘shows that problems with organising the risk analysis of work environment still rank first. The number of such violations has soared in the last two years. Risk

assessment is either completely lacking, is not properly organised or needs to be updated, as it no longer corresponds to the changed work environment' (Labour Inspectorate, 2016: 28). In summary, the overall picture emerging from Labour Inspectorate supervision activity suggests: 'a significant number of employers fail to contribute to their work environment before the labour inspector's visit. On the positive side, it can be noted that the work environment in most enterprises has significantly improved after the inspector's visit' (Labour Inspectorate, 2016: 23).

Figure 1 Number of identified OSH violations 2012-2016



Source: Labour Inspectorate, 2016: 27

At a strategic level, the role of the Labour Inspectorate has changed and its focus has shifted to activities aimed at awareness-raising of employers and employees, rather than on prosecutions and punishment (Labour Inspectorate, 2015). The Labour Inspectorate is thus active in dissemination activities, communication and information activities, organising information days on work environment and labour relations, and training of work environment specialists and managers of MSEs all over Estonia. The electronic newsletter of the Labour Inspectorate is issued every 2 months and OSH information is published in the local press and on city websites. Dissemination of best practices is an ongoing activity available on the Labour Inspectorate's website (http://www.ti.ee/en/), in which the MSEs are the main target group. Targeted inspection campaigns based on previous evidence of non-compliance have started in the last year in the MSE-dominated construction sector, and in the sectors of commerce, metallurgy, wood processing, catering and transport. Based on work-related illness data, targeted campaigns are also to be aimed at the metallurgical industry, the wood-processing industry, and agriculture and food production (Labour Inspectorate, 2015).

Inspections of the working environment are generally conducted in firms with over five employees, which in Estonia thus exclude the great majority of all registered enterprises (OECD, 2010: 63). With regard to micro-enterprises with fewer than five employees, while inspections have increased in this sector the most, the inspectorate notes that it has not been 'able to visit all small enterprises with adequate frequency' and that this will be an area for future interventions (Labour Inspectorate, 2016: 24). There is roughly one inspector per 9,400 employed persons, which is in line with International Labour Organization recommendations. In 2014, inspection activity covered 10 % of the total number of enterprises with more than five employees (14,769) in the whole country, a stable percentage for each year since 2010. There are some areas identified as still problems by the labour inspectors, such as handling of hazardous chemicals, whereas manual handling of loads has improved in some areas, while other traditional risk factors, stemming from moving parts of machinery and so forth, still exist in the

agriculture and food industry (Labour Inspectorate, 2015). However, based on assessments by the inspectorate, some 80 % of enterprises were judged to be 'good' or 'rather good' and 20 % 'rather bad' or 'bad', a relatively constant situation over recent years, notwithstanding the uptick in recorded violations in the most recent years (2015-2016).

The view of the Labour Inspectorate on the Estonian working environment in general is that the most common problems the Estonian companies face are training and instruction of workers, organisation of health examinations, and selection and appointment of workers' representatives involved in occupational health and safety (Labour Inspectorate, 2015: 4). The major area of concern for the Labour Inspectorate is risk assessment ('internal control'), which 'either was not conducted at all or insufficiently performed or it needed to be improved' (Labour Inspectorate, 2015: 12). In every third enterprise visited, this problem was identified, although the number and percentage of such enterprises where risk assessment has not been conducted at all is declining year by year. At the same time, there appeared to be 'more problems at those enterprises where risk assessment has once been conducted', but 'it is not up-to date and no longer in line with the changed work environment', suggesting that much risk assessment activity is of a formal or superficial nature (Labour Inspectorate, 2015: 12).

The frequency and level of penalties imposed seems to reflect a generally 'light regulatory touch' adopted by the inspectorate. While the sums for fines appear small by international standards (up to EUR 2,600 for violations of OSH requirements and up to EUR 2,000 for concealing occupational accidents and diseases), they reflect the level of penalties that exist in Estonia for general violations of labour law in the context of a generally pro-business environment. These penalties are judged by OECD to be 'very low' and in need of 'some increase' (OECD, 2010: 64). However, as the inspectorate has put it: 'The need to enforce penalty payment has significantly decreased, as compliance of requirements of notices issued by labour inspectors has improved' (Labour Inspectorate, 2015: 14).

b) Technical Regulatory Authority and Rescue Board

The Technical Regulatory Authority (also known as the Estonian Technical Surveillance Authority) monitors compliance with legal requirements in the field of industrial safety, which includes building and construction safety, electricity, mining, explosive materials and pyrotechnics, chemical handling, mining, devices for lifting people, heating equipment and pressure equipment. In addition, fire safety and chemical safety in companies are also controlled by the Rescue Board.

c) Occupational health services

Occupational health services (OSH services) constitute an important infrastructure that provides expert advice to the employers and the workers, carries out health and safety training and counselling, and initiates preventive and safeguarding actions in the field of health and safety at work. In Estonia, these services are available on a market basis and provided by an occupational health physician, an occupational health nurse, a hygienist, a psychologist or an ergonomist. According to the Estonian Act on Occupational Health and Safety, only private companies or private medical companies may provide OSH services. According to law, the statutory requirements are met if the employer acquires the services from any of the individual specialists. This means that the multidisciplinary provision of OSH is not required (Martimo, 2005). The tasks of occupational health professionals are listed in the Act. Relatively good information is obtainable on the number of licensed occupational health professionals and OSH service units. Much less information is available on the process of acquisition and on customers of OSH services, particularly among MSEs.

A review of the involvement of enterprises in ensuring that employees undergo periodic health check-ups, as required by Estonian law, shows some reported improvement over the years between 2009 and 2015. However, companies in which nobody received health check-ups amounted to a quarter (25.7 %) in 2015 (Statistics Estonia, 2015a). Size of enterprise was significant in terms of deviation from Estonian percentages. Micro-enterprises with five to nine employees recorded 30 % of the total number of enterprises where nobody received health check-ups in 2015. Enterprises with 10 to 49 employees

where nobody received health check-ups comprised 24.3 % of the total in 2015. The overall picture which emerges with regard to employee health check-ups suggests a rather mixed performance, especially of micro- and small enterprises, although some improvement in larger enterprises. Among enterprises with 50 to 249 employees, only 10 % failed to provide health check-ups in 2015, compared with 20.1 % in 2009 (Statistics Estonia, 2015a).

1.3 National OSH programmes aimed at MSEs

Special action programmes have been launched by the Ministry of Social Affairs in order to support OSH management in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); however, all other Estonian enterprises and organisations can also participate in them.

Comprehensive OSH-training programme (Labour Inspectorate)

A comprehensive OSH-training programme for safety managers and senior managers of MSEs was launched in 2009 with aid from the EU (funded by the European Social Fund) and lasted for 5 years. The target group was owners and managers of MSEs, as well as working environment specialists (safety managers) from different sectors. There was no follow-up system of programme evaluation after its completion. However, altogether 3,656 senior managers, owners of MSEs and safety managers were trained in the field of OSH. The OSH training programme was extremely popular among MSEs. Some companies that were interviewed as part of the current study also participated in this training programme, and researchers received a positive feedback from them.

Online interactive tool 'Tööbik' (Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour Inspectorate)

An online interactive tool called Tööbik (www.tööbik.ee) helps employers (especially MSEs) to conduct risk assessment, and to organise and administer data about employees and the workplace. Employers can also grant access to the Labour Inspectorate ahead of the inspection. This tool was launched in January 2015 and has been used by more than 3,200 enterprises since then. The Ministry of Social Affairs provides a helpdesk accessible by phone or by email, and the Labour Inspectorate has local advisors who attend workplaces to give consultations and to motivate employers to use this facility. There is no follow-up system of programme evaluation.

Programme 'Health inspection, Risk Assessment and Working Environment Measurements' (Foundation Innove)

The project was launched over the period 2011-2014 by Foundation Innove. The target group was micro- and small enterprises. The project aimed to provide financial support for micro- and small enterprises in order to facilitate better opportunities to conduct health check-ups of employees and to conduct risk assessment. Sponsorship was given to the individual participants in the project in the range of EUR 1,000 to EUR 10,000 (participants were required to pay 30 % of the cost). There was no follow-up system of programme evaluation after its completion.

National programme — Collection of 'Best Workplace Practices' award (Labour Inspectorate)

Since 2009, the Labour Inspectorate has been collecting best workplace practices in OSH implemented by the employers from different sectors (private and public) in order to solve specific problems in the field of OSH. This includes topics such as ergonomics, good practices in OSH management systems, innovative solutions to safety and health risks in different sectors (construction, health care, manufacturing and so on) to improve working conditions, and measures to reduce health and safety risks.

National programme — OSH training tailored for agriculture advisors (Ministry of Rural Affairs, Rural Development Foundation)

The programme was directed to employers and employees in the agriculture sector. In 2012-2013, the Rural Development Foundation funded a 1-year academic training course in OSH for 13 agriculture advisors (from different regions in Estonia) in order to increase their skills in providing advice to farmers in OSH matters, preparing relevant documents in accordance with the legislative OSH requirements,

and providing advice on risk assessment procedures and so on. There was, as above, no follow-up organised for programme evaluation after its completion.

Consultancy service in OSH — face-to-face consultancy (Labour Inspectorate)

The consultancy service was established in cooperation with local authorities in 2015 (funded by the European Social Fund). Sixteen offices and nine consultancy agencies providing free OSH advice once a week were opened in different parts of Estonia, including small towns and remote communities in rural areas. In addition, consultants could be requested to visit on site. The project has funds for 5 years. The service provided by offices was ceased in 2017 due to lack of local interest, however, the project with free OSH consultations on site continues. The start has been promising as many employers have requested this service during the first year, but it is too early to say if this project will be successful.

1.4 Industrial relations and worker representation

In mid-2009, Estonia reformed its labour market institutions and labour protection laws, following a decade of discussion between the social partners. The intention of the reforms was to encourage 'flexicurity' along the lines of the Danish model. A new Employment Contract Act was duly introduced in mid-2009 that produced a more flexible labour market in Estonia in terms of reduced employment protection (Eamets, 2013). This Act had the effect of making permanent contracts more flexible, reducing notice periods for dismissal and severance pay, facilitating the introduction of fixed-term contracts for up to 5 years (a type of employment contract not generally common in Estonia prior to this), extending payment for standard working hours until 22.00, and easing the administrative burden on employers by abolishing work books and personnel files and removing the need to have the approval of the Labour Inspectorate for temporary part-time work or collective dismissals. In short, greater employment insecurity became an embedded feature of the Estonian labour market both in formal legal terms and in practice.

Trade union density (percentage of employees who are union members) in Estonia is the lowest in the EU, at just over 5 %. The Estonian Trade Union Confederation (EAKL) represents industrial workers and people employed in the service sector (Estonian Trade Union Confederation, n.d.). The second largest trade union organisation is the Estonian Employees' Unions' Confederation (TALO), which mostly represents cultural workers and public sector employees. The only employer organisation recognised as a national-level social partner is the Estonian Employers' Association (ETTK), which represents around 25 % of all employers in Estonia.

In Estonia, collective bargaining has typically been decentralised, as collective bargaining mostly takes place at company level. Therefore, coverage of collective bargaining is very restricted; 90 % of collective bargaining agreements are in the public sector. Collective bargaining in the private sector, especially in MSEs, is almost non-existent. No collective bargaining worth mentioning occurs at the MSE level, while at the sectoral level there are only two agreements: in transport and in health care (Eurofound, 2015: 3). Levels of industrial disputes and strikes are low in Estonia, although there have been notable industrial disputes in recent years.

Estonia has had a 'dual system' of employee representation since 2007, whereby in the absence of a workplace trade union the general workforce can elect a 'trustee' to represent their interests with management and conduct collective bargaining on their behalf. The trustee can also address OSH issues and freely examine the working conditions, including the work organisation. By contrast, where there is a union present in the establishment, it can represent only its own members unless a general assembly of workers gives it wider powers. In parallel with the overall decline in trade union representation, there has been a growth in the number of non-union trustees, from a presence in 13 % of companies in 2009 to approximately 18 % of enterprises in 2015 (ETUI, 2015). The latest available data from the Estonian *Work Life Survey* suggest that only 6 % of enterprises have a trade union presence, a figure in the range of that suggested above for trade union density (Statistics Estonia, 2015b). This is the lowest figure for the EU-28, a ranking matched by data from OECD countries (OECD, 2013). Data for Estonia from the Second European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER-2) suggested over a third of Estonian enterprises (36.2 %) have no representation

arrangements at all, either through trade unions or trustees, or through working environment representatives or councils (EU-OSHA, 2016a). This figure may be an underestimate, given the overwhelming predominance of micro- and small enterprises in Estonia.

Opportunities for employee 'voice' are thus poor in the Estonian context, even though legislative arrangements (dual channel representation) would appear to facilitate such processes. The decline in trade union density appears to be continuing. In contrast to the decline in unionisation, the coverage of 'trustees' as an alternative form of workforce (non-union) representation is increasing, although it still covers only about one out of five workers (ETUI, 2015).

Table 1: Coverage by worker's representatives in Estonian enterprises (%)

Size of the enterprise (number of employees)	2009	2015
5-9	29.5	33.6
10-49	55.4	62.4
50-249	81.5	91.7
≥250	96.0	98.7

Source: Statistics Estonia, 2015c,d

According to law, companies with more than nine workers are required to elect workers' representatives. However, not all companies have implemented this requirement — as seen in Table 1. Enterprises with five to nine employees recorded the lowest proportional coverage by workers' representatives, at a third (33.6 %) in 2015. Enterprises with 10 to 49 employees had better coverage, with nearly two-thirds (62.4 %) claiming the presence of a working environment representative in 2015 (compared with 55.4 % in 2009). Medium-sized enterprises, with 50 to 249 employees, appeared to have higher proportions of workers' representatives, with 91.7 % coverage in 2015 (compared with 81.5 % in 2009). Enterprises with 250 or more employees reported coverage of 98.7 % in 2015 (compared with 96.0 % in 2009) (Statistics Estonia, 2015c,d).

While overall coverage by workers' representatives such as trustees is increasing in Estonia, it should be kept in mind that a workers' representative in the form of a trustee is not required in micro- enterprises (fewer than 10 employees). As required by law, a working environment council comprising working environment representatives and employers is mandatory only in enterprises with more than 50 employees, or if a labour inspector requires the establishment of a working environment council based on working conditions in the enterprises. Therefore, as most enterprises have fewer than 50 employees, the majority of enterprises in Estonia do not have a functioning working environment council. In private companies, working environment councils exist in only 9.1 % of enterprises (up from 5.7 % in 2009) (Statistics Estonia, 2015a). In state and local government agencies, these councils were present in 21.3 % of establishments (up from 18.4 % in 2009) (Statistics Estonia, 2015a). Trade unions, within an overall context of weak worker representation mechanisms, appeared to play almost no role in OSH in the interviewed MSEs, confirming the previous Baltic Working Environment and Labour (BWEL) survey of Estonian establishments (Woolfson et al., 2008).

1.5 Characterisation of the MSEs in Estonia

In terms of the economy of Estonia, the Soviet period saw the establishment of several larger (1,000+ employees) enterprises, the activities and outputs of which were directly linked to the all-Union centrally

planned economy. Since independence from the USSR and transition to a market economy in the early 1990s, such larger enterprises have mostly been dismantled. An extensive process of privatisation has created an economy that is overwhelmingly reliant on the economic activity of micro- and small enterprises.

Table 2: MSEs sector profile, Estonia

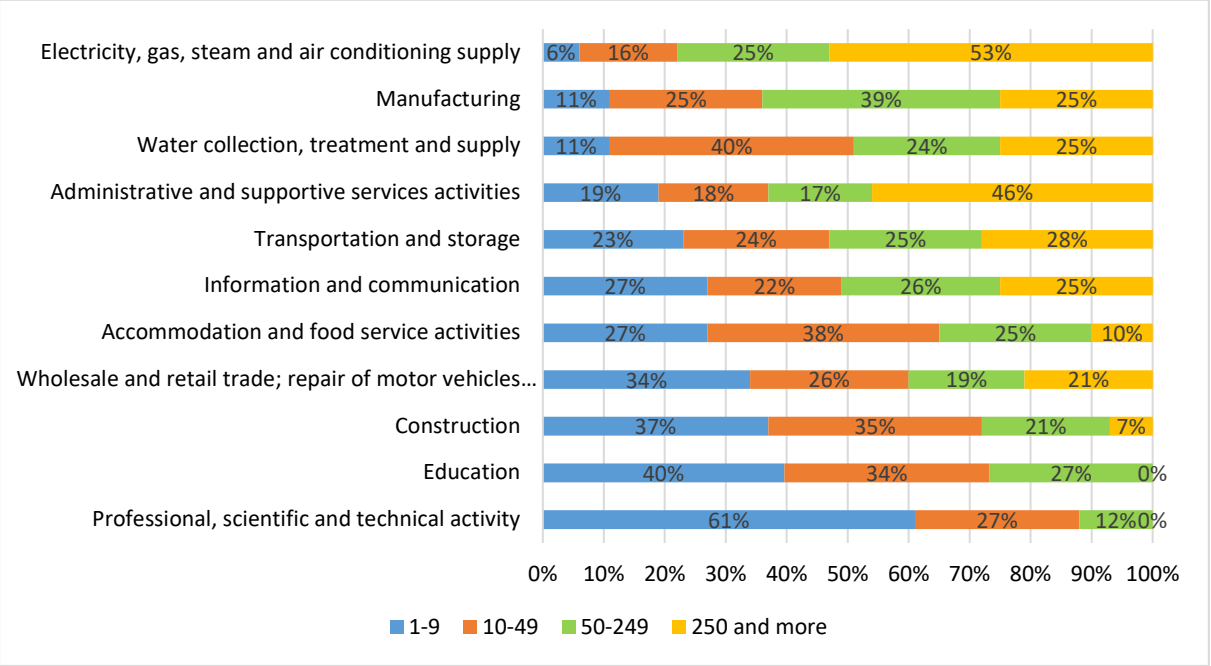
Size (number of employees)	Number of enterprises			Number of employees			Value added		
	Estonia		EU-28	Estonia		EU-28	Estonia		EU-28
	Number	%	%	Number	%	%	Billion EUR	%	%
Micro (0-9)	**57,572**	**90.2**	**92.4**	**123,809**	**30.6**	**29.1**	**2**	**24.2**	**21.6**
Small (10-49)	**4,824**	**8**	**6.4**	**97,786**	**24.1**	**20.6**	**2**	**23.7**	**18.2**
Medium (50-249)	982	1.6	1	95,077	23.5	17.2	3	26.5	18.3
Large (≥250)	151	0.2	0.2	88,576	21.9	33.1	3	25.6	41.9
Total	**63,529**	100	100	405,248	100	100	10	100	100

Source: European Commission, 2014

Table 2 reveals the scale and structure of the Estonian economy and the predominant share of micro- and small enterprises. Of over 60,000 enterprises in the MSE sector in 2014, over 57,500 (90.2 %) were micro-enterprises, and fewer than 5,000 (8 %) were small enterprises. By contrast, fewer than 1,000 (1.6 %) were medium-sized enterprises, while only just over 150 (0.2 %) were large enterprises. MSEs comprised 98.2 % of the total number of Estonian companies. MSEs accounted for 47.9 % of value added in the Estonian economy (as against an average of 39.8 % for the EU-28) (European Commission, 2014: 2). MSEs provided over half the total employment (54.7 %); about a third of employees (30.6 %) were engaged in micro-enterprises and a further quarter in small enterprises (24.1 %) (European Commission, 2014).

Thus, in total the MSE sector comprised the overwhelming majority of Estonian enterprises. The total number of active enterprises has significantly increased since 2010, that is after the financial crisis. Whereas in 2010 the Labour Inspectorate database contained slightly more than 43,000 active enterprises, by 2016 the number had increased by around 11,000 (Labour Inspectorate, 2016: 4). Micro-enterprises in particular saw their share in employment increasing, suggesting that this sector has been an important driver of economic recovery (Labour Inspectorate, 2016: 4).

Figure 2: Share of Estonian total employment by Sector



Source: Eurofound, 2013: 2

The breakdown of employment by sector in Estonia in Figure 2 shows that in specific areas of employment, such as professional, scientific and technical activity, education, construction, wholesale and retail trade, and accommodation and food service activities, employment in MSEs accounted for more than 50 % of the total employment. A third of persons employed are engaged in the service sector, where the growth of employment is the most consistent. When looking at the fields of activity by the number of employees, approximately 20 % are engaged in the processing industry sectors. The main fields are the manufacturing of metal products, the timber industry and the textile industry. A total of 13 % of employed persons work in retail trade and 9 % in construction (Labour Inspectorate, 2016). A Eurofound report (2013: 1) notes: 'Although entrepreneurship in Estonia has developed relatively quickly and its competitiveness has improved significantly, the Estonian economy continues to be dominated by enterprises that operate in traditional (low technology) sectors and whose productivity and profitability per employee lag behind businesses in the developed industrial countries', while there is a 'low share of high-tech employment and exports, [and] a very low business expenditure on research and development'. Wage growth, however, is high in information and communications technology sectors, where there are labour shortages and high numbers of vacancies, but overall Estonian average wages are among the lowest in the EU-28. In addition, the available labour pool is declining because of emigration of young employed workers, and an ageing working population. These factors represent significant challenges to improving the smooth functioning of the Estonian labour market and to achieving significant improvements in the working environment.

1.6 OSH profile of MSEs

The overall picture regarding work-related accidents and diseases provided by the latest available data sets the scene for inspection and enforcement. In 2016, 5,081 work accidents were reported, of which 4,036 were related to minor bodily injuries, 1,019 were related to serious injuries and 26 proved fatal to the employee. Compared with 2015, the number of registered work accidents increased by 282 at all severity levels. When looking at the numbers by the size of the enterprise (Table 3), 494 (9.7 %) of

occupational accidents occurred in companies with up to 9 employees and 1,102 (21.7 %) in companies with 10-49 employees. However, there figures must be treated with extreme caution, as it is recognised that underreporting of incidents in MSEs is likely to be considerable.

Table 3: Distribution of occupational accidents by size of company

Size (number of employees)	2015	2016
Up to 9 persons employed	475 (9.9 %)	494 (9.7 %)
10 to 49 persons employed	1,108 (23.1 %)	1,102 (21.7 %)
50 to 249 persons employed	1,491 (31.1 %)	1,514 (29.8 %)
More than 250 persons employed	1,725 (35.9 %)	1,971 (38.8 %)
Total	**4,799 (100 %)**	**5,081 (100 %)**

Source: Labour Inspectorate, 2016

In 2016, 39 new cases of occupational disease were registered (Table 4). The youngest person having an occupational disease in 2016 was aged 37, the oldest, aged 64. The main cause of occupational disease was the physiological risk factor (overly excessive physical exertion). Five cases were caused by a chemical risk factor and four cases by a physical risk factor. When looking at the numbers of occupational diseases by the size of the enterprise, 39 % of the total number of occupational diseases diagnosed were in enterprises with up to 49 employed persons (Labour Inspectorate, 2016). It would appear that occupational diseases are more difficult to address in MSEs because of a complex of factors that lead to problems in adequate detection and recording of true incidence rates such as: the lack of health check-ups, and due to a variety of economic, institutional and regulatory problems enumerated elsewhere in this report including: the challenging social-economic situation in Estonia (employees may face the risk of losing their job); employers face the risk of economic losses; occupational health physicians face possible court cases and open conflict with the employer; absence of an Insurance Act of Occupational Accidents and Diseases; lack of agreement between occupational health physicians and the Estonian Health Insurance Fund in order to provide the financial support for the rehabilitation services; shortage of occupational health and safety specialists.

Table 4: Number of enterprises where an occupational disease was registered

Size (number of employees)	2015	2016
Up to 9 persons employed	13 (11.7 %)	15 (19.5 %)
10 to 49 persons employed	18 (16.2 %)	15 (19.5 %)
50 to 249 persons employed	56 (50.5 %)	39 (50.6 %)
More than 250 persons employed	24 (21.6 %)	8 (10.4 %)
Total	**111 (100 %)**	**77 (100 %)**

Source: Labour Inspectorate, 2016

2 Description of fieldwork and the sample

2.1 General remarks on the fieldwork and the methods

The main data reported on here arise from qualitative interviews in a sample of Estonian MSEs derived both from the ESENER-2 database of companies that agreed to participate in a follow-up study, and from the researchers' own database of contacts in suitable companies that were in line with the overall sample selection criteria of the study and thus helped to ensure the target number of case studies for each sector.

The researchers conducted an interview with the employer and a worker in each enterprise. Before the interviews, a tour visit (on-site observation) was conducted in order to allow a general overview of working conditions and work organisation in the enterprise. Observations revealed supplementary data about attitudes, tangible factors (for example safety policies, norms, general views) and behavioural dimensions (for example safety norms in action) as well as salient features of health and safety in each enterprise. In combination, the face-to-face interviews and observations provided an important basis for inferring the basic assumptions and attitudes of the organisation and its OSH management system.

The case studies aimed to explore managerial methods and practical OSH procedures in order to identify general OSH drivers behind current OSH management practices in micro- and small establishments. The objective of the qualitative case studies was to address 'what', 'how' and 'why' questions in order to understand what makes micro- and small establishments manage OSH issues well or less well in terms of effective OSH management practice in the context of Estonia. The case studies were intended to promote better understanding of the rationale, organisation and implementation of current OSH management practices and routines for ensuring safety and health (the development of needs, identifying obstacles, and the changes that have occurred in this area). In addition, the case studies aimed to provide deeper knowledge about managers' and workers' perceptions regarding issues that influence the effectiveness of OSH management, as well as the overall OSH performance in the enterprises.

The empirical case studies were conducted in 20 micro- and small establishments from five sectors: manufacturing, agriculture, transport and storage, construction, and accommodation, restaurant and food services. Contact data for 63 establishments were received from TNS in November 2015. The initial approach was a first contact by telephone, followed up by email with an attached official information sheet to introduce the project. Fourteen of the cases were establishments that had participated in the ESENER-2 survey, based on the following criteria: sector, number of employees (size of the enterprise) and location. Six enterprises which also met the selection criteria were selected from the researchers' personal contact list from previous national projects, contacts from OSH advisors and the Labour Inspectorate. All selected enterprises represented average enterprises in each of the five sectors, which facilitated comparison of the results within each sector. The refusal rate was around 20 %. However, almost none of the studied enterprises remembered their participation in the ESENER-2 study, perhaps because of the high turnover of personnel in MSEs. In some cases, the establishment was no longer eligible for the study (the number of employees had decreased or some had ceased trading). The interviews were conducted by two experienced researchers, in Estonian and Russian. Each interview with the employer representative lasted for more than 1 hour on average and with the worker about 40-50 minutes on average. All face-to face interviews with employer representatives in establishments were completed before the worker interviews. Every effort was made to protect the privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of individuals and organisations participating in this study.

2.2 Description of the sample

This section describes general characteristics of the case study establishments and enterprises and the participants in the interviews. As shown in Table 5, the participating establishments in each sector were both micro and small.

The field visits took place during the period from November 2015 to July 2016 and involved 40 interviews and observations in the total of 20 enterprises, which are located in different parts of Estonia (Table 5).

Table 5: enterprises and establishments in the qualitative case studies

Case number	Number of employees	Type of enterprise, ownership	Main business functions
		Manufacturing	
EE1	Micro (5-9)	Independent (B2B & B2C), local	Printing
EE2	Small (10-19)	Independent (B2B & B2C), local	Jam manufacturing
EE3	Small (20-49)	Subsidiary (B2B), local	Log cabin manufacturing
EE4	Small (20-49)	Subsidiary (B2B) foreign	Energy company
		Construction	
EE5	Micro (5-9)	Independent (B2B), local	Concrete elements installation
EE6*	Micro (5-9)	Independent (B2B), local	General building and construction project management
EE7	Small (10-19)	Independent (B2B), local	Building construction and finishing
EE8*	Small (20-49)	Independent (B2B), local	General construction
		Agriculture	
EE9*	Micro (5-9)	Independent (B2B), local	Dairy farm 1
EE10*	Small (10-19)	Independent (B2B), local	Corn cultivation
EE11	Small (10-19)	Subsidiary (B2B & B2C), local	Tree/plant nursery
EE12	Small (20-49)	Independent (B2B & B2C), local	Dairy farm 2
		Accommodation, restaurant and food services (hotel, restaurant and catering, HORECA)	
EE13	Micro (5-9)	Independent (B2C), local	Restaurant

Case number	Number of employees	Type of enterprise, ownership	Main business functions
EE14*	Small (10-19)	Independent (B2C), local	Hotel 1
EE16	Small (20-49)	Independent (B2C), local	Hotel 2
Transport and storage			
EE17	Micro (5-9)	Subsidiary (B2C), local	Storage of household machine sales
EE18	Small (10-19)	Independent (B2B), local	Wagon transport 1
EE19	Small (10-19)	Independent (B2B), local	Wagon transport 2
EE20*	Small (20-49)	Subsidiary (B2B), foreign	Storage and transport

* Case establishments **not** recruited via ESENER-2. B2B, business to business; B2C, business to consumer.

Almost half (nine) of the enterprises were established over 20 years ago. None of the companies was established less than 2 years ago. Two enterprises (one from the hotel, restaurant and catering, Horeca, sector and another from the construction sector) had been established 6 years previously and the remaining enterprises between 7 and 20 years previously.

In total, the researchers interviewed 43 people during 40 interviews. Of these participants, 21 were managers (some were owner-managers of establishments). The majority (14) of the managers were middle-aged (41 to 60 years old). Of these managers, eight were female. The majority (14) of the managers had higher education and the remainder had vocational secondary education.

A total of 22 interviewees were employees. It is important to mention that employees who were interviewed in most of the establishments were selected by the managers.

Almost all employer representatives and employees had received OSH training (usually 24-hour training) outside the workplace. The fact that almost all of the interviewed employer representatives and employees had OSH training, or even in one case a degree in the field of OSH, indicates a selection bias. Interviewees in all establishments that participated in the case studies reported better OSH conditions than the actual situation would appear to be in Estonia from the reports of the regulatory agency (Labour Inspectorate, 2015, 2016a,b).

3 Analysis

3.1 Risk awareness

Risk awareness may be affected by the education received and skills developed by the employer and workers, the commitment of the manager, the abilities of experienced workers to transfer good and safe work routines to younger workers, and the level of control and supervision performed by the external authorities (for example the Labour Inspectorate). Based on results of interviews and workplace visits, it is possible to say that employers and workers are aware of the main occupational risks, and that workers have received basic OSH training and, sometimes, first aid training. However, the researchers

found that many employers and employees were not aware of the procedures of risk assessment and health check-ups, particularly in the agricultural and construction sectors. In addition, according to results from interviews, owner-managers and workers generally underestimated health risks, and had an incomplete overview of existing risks, as well as perceiving risks differently.

It is essential to mention that generally there was a lack of a shared understanding about the most significant occupational hazards (mainly physical risks) and a divergence between the perceptions of managers and workers, as well as a more general lack of common understanding in terms of OSH matters. When asked in detail about specific common occupational hazards in the workplace, employers and employees mentioned broadly the same issues, but they perceived occupational risks differently. Employers listed more occupational risks existing in their organisation, such as physical risks (slips, trips, falls and risks in the use of machinery and electrical devices), ergonomic risks related to work with visual display units (VDUs) and manual handling of heavy loads. Workers reported repetitive movements, inappropriate microclimate (extremes of temperature) and excessive noise, followed by poor lighting, as the most important risks in their working environment.

Based on researchers' observations and interviews, it is possible to say workers were not always familiar with the results of risk assessment or the safety measures aimed at reducing or eliminating occupational risks.

The main occupational risks identified in the establishments surveyed were as follows:

- **Physical risks** were stated as the main type of occupational risks by both employees and employers and include slips, trips, falls, burns, cuts (sharp implements), contact with machinery, inappropriate microclimate, extreme temperature (outdoor work, working in fields), noise, radiation and vibration (vibratory power tools and ground working equipment in the construction sector), electricity and working at heights (construction).
- **Ergonomic risks** include heavy lifting (manual handling), working in awkward positions or in confined and uncomfortable spaces, prolonged working in a standing positions/awkward postures, standing work for long periods, VDU work, repetitive tasks and moving objects.
- **Exposure to dangerous substances** (airborne fibres and materials — asbestos, lead, silica dust, organic solvents, sewer gases, welding fumes) and **biological risks** received little attention from both employers and workers and were superficially assessed and presented in the risk assessment documents.
- **Psychosocial risks** include stress, work intensity, fatigue, tight deadlines and time pressure, working late at night (especially in the Horeca, agriculture, transport and construction sectors), extended work days, time pressure, violence and aggression from clients (in the Horeca and transport sectors), conflicts between workers, poor communication and perceived discrimination.

Regarding psychosocial risks, one owner-manager reported:

Enormous time pressure is the worst thing in our work. It starts at once: when I read the contract after winning the procurement, I sometimes get angry. […] It causes a lot of stress and also conflicts. In Estonia, the deadlines are just way too tight. We are supposed to work even during weekends, which is unacceptable. I wish the client's representative who has made the contract would once work in a real construction site and then would understand better what kind of deadlines should be humane. (Employer, EE8)

However, in many micro- and small establishments it seemed that neither management nor workers appeared to have any interest or competence in addressing psychosocial risks in the working environment. Busy periods, tight deadlines, time pressure and long working days appeared to be accepted by the workers and to be taken as an inevitable feature of working life. As one truck driver said, it was 'a part of the truck drivers' work and in the nature of the work of schedulers' (EE19). Again, another worker when asked 'how did you get the scar on your arm?' explained that it was a result of her own carelessness (personal failure) rather than pressures of production: 'Oh, this is from pouring hot jam to my arm. It happens from time to time. It's my own fault, I didn't check how hot the jam was and

acted too carelessly. This is normal, nothing to worry about. It will heal eventually. During quieter times I am more careful' (worker, EE2).

This above can be also explained by the lack of interest in OSH issues shown among both employers and workers, as production (and economic survival) often comes first in MSEs. However, in a few case studies, there were positive examples of commitment to OSH at all levels within the establishment, but that was more of the exception than the rule. On the whole, managers tended to underestimate the risks faced in their establishment and both managers and workers generally perceived their workplaces as 'safe'. In the case studies, the researchers particularly addressed **psychosocial risks** and how these were managed within the organisation. Many managers of the companies were able to describe such risks when asked by the interviewers; however, no systematic specific actions were taken in order to minimise or eliminate psychosocial risks and, in general, it was a low-priority concern for most enterprises. Nevertheless, the researchers found a couple of examples of 'good practice' in this area — companies that organised workshops and seminars for workers in order to learn how to deal with work-related stress and conflicts at work, although these appeared to have been exceptions within our sample: 'We have had several training courses about work-related stress and conflict management. Lecturers from Tartu and Tallinn gave us some tips how to survive during the intense time at work and how to solve work-related conflicts between workers' (worker, EE11).

The case study data suggest that Estonian employers may not emphasise or provide professional help to deal with work-related psychosocial problems although the Occupational Health and Safety Act (1999) stipulates that the requirement rests on employers to guarantee the psychological and social wellbeing of employees. Thus, while the formal legislative requirements would seem to correspond to furthering the achievement of 'best practice' goals, in reality the systematic implementation measures that would permit these goals to be realised are absent in the majority of workplaces (Reinhold et al., 2015; Järvis et al., 2013). Our case studies suggest that employers in Estonian MSEs may be poorly equipped to deal with psychosocial issues. This corresponds to results from the ESENER-2 survey, which located Estonia among the lower third of those countries 'having sufficient information on how to include psychosocial risks in risk assessments' and second last among 36 countries which 'use […] a psychologist, in-house or contracted externally' (EU-OSHA, 2016a: 49-50). Estonia also ranks in the lower third with respect to enterprises 'having an action plan to prevent stress and procedures for bullying/harassment and threats, abuse or assaults' or prevention training in these areas (EU-OSHA, 2016a: 53). New data from the Sixth European Working Conditions Survey contain information on the rather poor 'social environment' in Estonian workplaces, ranking Estonia fourth top in the EU-28 with regard to the level of reported adverse social behaviour at work (Eurofound, 2016: 65).

3.1.1 Perceived responsibility for OSH in the company

Overall, risk awareness and general knowledge about occupational hazards in the majority of the MSEs in the sample were based on the experience of the workers and/or education they had received at the vocational/technical schools. As one owner-manager summed the matter up, senior (older) workers tended to ignore safety precautions more often, a reflection perhaps that their attitudes to OSH were formed in a different (Soviet) era, when such matters were not treated as seriously as today. Moreover, the majority of employers of the investigated MSEs relied on senior workers' experience and awareness about OSH, workers whose approach to OSH may sometimes lack more up-to-date awareness.

Moreover, in some of the investigated MSEs (EE2, EE9, EE13, EE14, EE16, EE17), many occupational hazards and risks were automatically accepted by workers as a 'part of the job' and, therefore, no complaints were made when a near-miss or minor accident occurred. During interviews, researchers encouraged workers and senior managers to share their experiences concerning near-misses, occupational incidents and accidents, as well as procedures for reporting and registration of near-misses. The researchers found that near-misses were not recognised and not reported by workers in many sectors, for example in construction, Horeca (restaurants), and transport and storage. In some companies, the employer representatives confessed that they did not register near-misses because of lack of time or little interest of workers in doing so. The tendency to minimise the significance of near-misses as a path to improving OSH performance was exemplified by the dismissive view of one manager

that to report every supposedly minor incident would be ridiculous, a view that seemed to be shared by the workers themselves, suggesting that to report every such event was seen to be excessive and unnecessary.

Incidents and accidents were generally seen by employers, as well as workers themselves, as a 'part of the job' (manufacturing, Horeca, transport and storage, construction), the inevitable result of human error or a lack of attention. Often such responsibility for accidents was linked to the carelessness of workers: 'workers need to be careful and responsible for using it [equipment] in a proper and safe way' (Horeca). Time pressures, stress, working at high speed and long working days, that is, circumstances in which accidents are more likely to occur, were also seen as 'the nature of their work in the kitchen' (Horeca) or 'a normal part of truck drivers' work' (transport company). Nevertheless, workers often took personal responsibility for safety seriously and claimed that they felt sometimes 'guilty' when accidents occurred ('need to be careful and pay more attention to work, particularly to use gloves' (EE2), 'my own carelessness' (EE2, EE13), as if they personally were blameworthy or the 'troublemaker', by creating disruption due to injury.

Most of the workers interviewed and all employers were more likely to assume that the employer has primary responsibility for controlling workplace risks. The common perception of responsibility for managing OSH routines in a day-to-day sense was that this was 'everyone's responsibility' (EE2, EE6, EE12, EE13, EE20).

3.2 Company OSH organisation and risk management practice

3.2.1 Practices of acquiring OSH knowledge and risk assessment practices

The main sources of information as well as external support in the sample of MSEs can be specified as various OSH courses, the Labour Inspectorate (free of charge OSH consultations), agriculture advisors and external OSH consultants. In addition, occupational health service providers (occupational health physicians and so on), the National Institute for Health Development and the web portal www.tooelu.ee administered by the Labour Inspectorate were deemed important sources of information regarding OSH.

Many employers and workers found the Labour Inspectorate a supportive organisation in OSH matters. They used the Labour Inspectorate website as well as published guidelines (online and on paper) to find relevant information. Employers emphasised the benefits of phone consultancy by lawyers and the recently established free of charge OSH consultations by the Labour Inspectorate (see previous description of national OSH programmes). In addition, employers and workers' representatives obtained information from OSH training sessions provided by independent OSH training companies. According to the law governing this matter, every workers' representative has to pass a 24-hour training course in order to represent employees in OSH matters. The course covers the following topics: the main legislation requirements in OSH, OSH practical activities in the enterprise and OSH training of employees; an overview of occupational hazards and risk assessment procedures; systematic work environment management; personal protective equipment; occupational accidents and occupational illnesses; and occupational health services, health inspection and organising first aid.

Good working conditions were generally facilitated by investment in new and safe vehicles/tools, as well as by hiring more trained and experienced workers (in transport, Horeca, manufacturing and construction in particular). At the same time, it is important not to overestimate the sustainability and generalisability of this OSH knowledge in terms of its **organisational embeddedness**. It is possible to conclude that workers were generally aware about the main hazards in their workplaces, but often this knowledge had come with on-the-job experience rather than through systematic risk prevention activities offered by the management or training. In several MSEs, the researchers also identified the owner-managers' experience-based knowledge about occupational hazards, learning from previous incidents that facilitated safer working conditions (but sometimes this was unsystematised and undocumented). It appeared that owner-managers had developed some kind of awareness of the need for safer conditions and accompanying practices while establishing their own companies and learning from their

previous experiences. Such tacit understandings performed an important anchoring of basic predispositions towards good OSH practices, but, because of their implicit rather than explicit nature, they were not necessarily generalisable and hence not effectively 'cascaded' throughout the organisation.

Across all the case studies, it is possible to conclude, based on results from interviews with owner-managers, that traditional occupational hazards (in particular, physical and ergonomic risks) were investigated by the employers and assessed in risk assessment procedures, followed by action plans to prevent these risks. However, in our limited sample of four companies per sector, working conditions and the quality of risk assessment varied from sector to sector. The researchers assessed the quality of risk assessment in the majority of establishments as low. Across all sectors, there was an absence of risk exposure assessments (measurements of all occupational hazards), unsystematic evaluation and assessment of health risks (unclear risk assessment methods) and insufficient assessment of chemical and biological risks, as well as an absence of assessment of psychosocial risks. In those establishments where external OSH providers were involved, together with a working environment specialist and workers' representatives, the quality of the risk assessment and working environment was slightly better than in establishments where the owner-managers dealt with OSH matters by themselves.

However, in many of the investigated establishments, weak worker participation and involvement in the process of risk assessment was identified as a common factor. Based on the results of the case studies, it can be said that there was some involvement in risk assessment procedures, for example in filling a questionnaire about possible hazards and health complaints, particularly in the manufacturing, HORECA and construction sectors, especially where the enterprise performed risk assessment by itself. However, those risk assessments were conducted unsystematically. In many establishments, informal discussions between employers and workers about potential occupational risks took place without any systematic analysis of risks.

3.2.2 Risk communication practice

The main channels for OSH communication identified by the researchers were as follows: email, intranet, phone, posters, educational films, informative stands/wall notices, reporting boxes, personal talks with workers and feedback, and reporting systems. Less frequently identified were special rooms on the site for weekly meetings between the workers' representative and foremen in order to discuss the weaknesses of the OSH system, dangerous situations, near-misses and accidents, as well as to provide help needed to ensure effective and high-quality job performance.

The relevant Estonian OSH legislation and the EU Framework Directive on OSH require that all employees and their representatives have to be informed of the risks to their safety and health and of the preventive measures required and taken. However, in most of the investigated companies, no formal systematic risk communication system was established. Generally, in smaller enterprises safety representatives have taken a formal role only and provided limited information and feedback on safety and health issues to management. However, such safety representatives were often appointed or chosen by management and, in many cases, were part of management rather than being elected by the workforce as 'independent' representatives and spokespersons. In addition, in small and micro-establishments, the need for an employee representative was not acknowledged. The employer was present on site every day and, if there was a need to disseminate OSH information, employers simply talked to workers. Therefore, workers and employers stated that communication was direct and effective.

However, in the main, based on the descriptions presented by the interviewed managers and workers, the researchers had the strong impression that, even where direct communication and discussion of OSH matters did take place, it was often of a perfunctory and superficial nature, covering a limited range of topics or issues. In addition, such discussions as did take place on OSH matters appeared to have been rather unstructured and unsystematic. During the interviews with workers, researchers encouraged them to share experiences about their **involvement in health and safety activities**. Workers reported that they generally did not discuss health and safety at work with colleagues and were

not always willing to talk about safety issues, nor did they participate much in OSH activities. These observations reinforce the earlier conclusion discussed in section 3.1 that generally there was lack of a shared understanding about the most significant occupational hazards (mainly physical risks), and a gap in perceptions between managers and workers, as well as a more general lack of common understanding in terms of OSH matters. Based on the results from interviews with owner-managers, it is possible to surmise that the effectiveness of risk communication, which is generally informal, can be positively affected through regular meetings with workers. Such regular meetings, if made mandatory, could facilitate communication on OSH matters and enable the content and amount of information for the target group to be tailored more appropriately. At the same time, there can be a danger of **excessive information** from external sources (such as a foreign-based company head office) drowning out the OSH message appropriate to the local subsidiary organisation through an information overload. This can create confusion and even misunderstanding about obligations, duties and tasks. This was asserted by one employee responsible on behalf of management for OSH:

I am responsible for OSH training and instructions of all workers. Sometimes, I am confused because I do not know what kind of method for learning should we apply for some workers — they do not remember anything about previous training ... We have the rule to leave our workplace after the second bell of the fire alarm. I do not know why, many workers are confused and misunderstand what they have to do, especially in an emergency situation. (Employer representative, EE20)

To sum up, the necessary preconditions for effective worker participation and risk communication were often related to the personal characteristics of the employer as much as to any formal training in OSH that may have been acquired. Such characteristics as empathy and good interpersonal skills, good communication skills and the willingness to discuss details of the working day with workers were seen as important in ensuring good OSH. However, in some MSEs, there was only weak risk communication because of a lack of channels for communication (for example, no worker representative was elected, or the structure of the organisation and the work tasks did not allow workers to communicate with each other to share safety concerns, for instance in the transport company, where truck drivers did not meet each other often).

Safety knowledge transfer barriers were found by researchers in all investigated establishments, such as lack of time and workers' willingness to share OSH information and expertise with their colleagues, a general lack of interest in OSH matters and a low importance attached to safety concerns among both workers and employers. In addition, the interviews suggested that there was a tendency towards a culture of blaming workers for incidents and accidents rather than acceptance of employers' primary duty to ensure the management of OSH was conducted effectively.

3.2.3 Routines ensuring safe and healthy work

Routines ensuring safe and healthy work differ from sector to sector. One of the positive, but uncommon, examples of different routines ensuring safety and health at work came from a construction micro-company where a well-educated owner-manager put a lot of effort into raising the awareness of safety issues among his workers and changing unsafe behaviours. The owner-manager was on the construction site every day, walking around and giving reminders about safety precautions, creating a common understanding and perception towards safe workplace behaviour among the workforce, and giving feedback if safety rules were neglected and/or personal protective equipment was not used. The owner-manager stated: 'effective OSH management in construction sector requires constant supervision, OSH training for all workers and personal example (pattern of safe behaviour) and effective communication' (owner-manager, EE6).

However, there were generally no clearly formulated routines in terms of safe behaviour in the various OSH documents analysed from the case companies. In those few case studies that did have the Occupational Health and Safety Assessment Series (OHSAS) 18001 standard implemented, safety was a management priority and systematic proactive activities had been implemented. One example was an energy company where regular safety-oriented rounds were required by all employees:

Yes, we need to do to safety-oriented rounds. We need to fill out the check-list and see if anything is wrong on-site: fire-extinguishers, electric safety, ground maintenance, and so on. Actually, we like it quite a lot because it gives us something different to do and get out of the routine. And sometimes, we even notice something dangerous which later will be fixed. (Worker representative, EE4)

The interviews also demonstrated other activities aimed at ensuring safe work, such as regular maintenance and repair of work tools and machines, cleaning and 'good housekeeping' to ensure accident and fire prevention. Employers mentioned during the interviews that good housekeeping included not only cleanliness, but also maintaining floors free of slip and trip hazards, keeping work areas neat and removing waste materials from work areas, as well as creating carefully thought-out storage facilities and maintaining attention to the layout of the whole workplace. One employer representative stated that much attention was paid to 'good housekeeping' and to fire safety within the company to minimise the health risks:

Fire safety is essential for us and we train our workers in good housekeeping in order to minimise the risks. It is not allowed to smoke near the warehouse. Instead of a smoking room, we created a rest and stretching room for all workers. (Employer representative, EE20)

This positive example of established routines aimed at ensuring safe and healthy work came from a storage and transport company that had specific financial resources dedicated to OSH and provided training for those who dealt with OSH. There was extensive internal OSH training organised for different stakeholders (for example workers, foremen, heads of departments, top management, clients, visitors and partners) as well as active worker involvement in health and safety activities. In addition, the employer invested in new and modern vehicles and tools, as well as modern methods/systems that influenced work organisation in the company and, thus, indirectly also affected health and safety positively.

The above examples, however, were the exception rather than the rule. In most of the case studies, such attention to OSH matters was not prioritised on the list of day-to-day management concerns. It was clear that routines in terms of safe behaviour need to be clearly formulated in different OSH documents as well as in practice. In addition, good work routines ensuring safety and health at work require regular safety supervision, internal and external audits conducted by a working environment specialist and external OSH experts, 'shop-floor' walks and meetings between top management and workers. Providing OSH training for representatives and the involvement of workers in health and safety activities constitute additional routines that may have beneficial OSH outcomes. In the main, however, this was not the general pattern of safety management routines in the case studies and, in the majority of cases, these activities were not emphasised and practised.

However, more typically the researchers observed a widespread lack of interest in the field of OSH, and a lack of understanding of the vital role of OSH management routines for the sustainable development of MSEs.

3.2.4 Use of external OSH expertise

MSE management representatives asserted that the main sources of external OSH expertise were the Labour Inspectorate, certified external service providers (occupational health services, OSH services) and, in the unique case of agriculture, a number of sector-specific agriculture advisors.

The researchers identified the main services provided by the OSH services as risk assessments of the work environment, including measurement of risk factors, medical examinations and assessments of workers' health. Both the employers and workers valued the feedback and recommendations received after health check-ups provided by occupational health physicians. An example can be given from an energy company:

We pay a little bit more and get much better overview of our working conditions and what can harm health. It's a high-risk sector and it's good that the workers go through an extensive health check-up (Employer representative, EE4)

According to ESENER-2 data, 48.6 % of Estonian micro and 77.1 % of small establishments report the use of OSH services, particularly an occupational health doctor. The current research, however, revealed that in many investigated establishments, particularly in the construction sector, and in accommodation and food services, little or almost no attention was paid to occupational health and its promotion. In addition, in several micro- and small establishments from the manufacturing, Horeca and construction sectors, it appeared that senior managers (employers) did not understand the importance of occupational health services and, in particular, the preventative role of occupational health doctors.

In the agricultural sector, the main external OSH expertise came from cooperation with OSH consultants in agriculture, so-called agriculture advisors. Owner-managers and employers valued the professional assistance and relevant help received from these agriculture advisors, which included OSH matters such as conducting risk assessments, preparation of relevant documents in order to adhere to the legislative OSH requirements, and advice on compilation of action plans based on results from risk assessments.

3.2.5 Motivation of company OSH practice

Six of the 20 investigated companies mainly practised management-driven OSH, in the sense that management took its responsibilities in this area seriously and was proactive in ensuring that adequate safety management systems were in place. In the case studies, a few companies stood out in terms of high management commitment to health and safety. The motivation in those companies came mainly from the employer's personal characteristics, such as empathy, good interpersonal and communications skills, willingness to discuss with workers different issues (restaurant, construction companies) and understanding of the importance of taking good care of employees' wellbeing by protecting them and keeping them healthy and productive for as long as possible (manufacturing and storage companies).

An example of motivation to deal with OSH was given by an employer representative from the transport and storage sector. Difficulties in recruiting a core workforce to an out-of-town location with high workplace demands required him to address the issue of ensuring a decent working environment:

We are forced to use a contract workforce because it is so hard to find good workers in this area, especially for the last 2 years. Everybody wants to work in Tallinn, close to their family and home. Additionally, the nature of work and work organisation in the warehouse is not suitable for everybody — shift work, many workers do not feel comfortable to work between high storage platforms/shelves, intensive work and too much work. Additionally, ageing is also a big problem in the area. We need to take good care of our workers to keep them healthy as long as possible. (Employer representative, EE20)

Some interviewed managers (mainly in the construction and manufacturing sectors) claimed that they deal with OSH because they are afraid of inspections and sanctions from the Labour Inspectorate. Based on ESENER-2 results, avoiding fines and sanctions from the regulatory authority is one of the major reasons advanced in MSEs for addressing OSH (micro-establishments 88.7 % and small establishments 91.5 %).

Two of the 20 investigated companies, being subsidiaries owned by foreign companies (one in manufacturing and the other in transport and storage), emphasised that their main motivation for dealing with OSH comes from the corporate/holding company's high demands on the local management for good OSH performance. However, there was one example of commitment from the local management to good OSH practice, although, as the interviewed employee representative points out, the company was not 'typical':

I feel that our company is not a typical Estonian enterprise where the employer tries to do as little as possible for health and safety, or even evades some legislative rules. Our employer has taken the responsibility for safety and shows it in every way. One of the board members works as a manufacturing manager. He's dedicated to safety 100 %. (Employer representative, EE4)

In our sample, admittedly based on only two foreign-based companies in Estonia, it did not appear that there were beneficial 'spill-over' or 'cascade' effects in terms of raising OSH standards. It appeared that

OSH matters were devolved to local management to deal with, rather than dealt with or monitored through the foreign head office of the company. More common than transnational 'cascading' of good practice in OSH, therefore, was the role of regulatory authorities in ensuring that main contractors take responsibility for ensuring that subcontractors in the supply chain have appropriate OSH measures in place. These demands were motivated, in part, by the prospect of penalties for non-compliance. From the point of view of the subcontractor, penalties, if imposed, might endanger their future cooperation with the client. However, even with these considerations taken into account, it appeared that, while recognising the risks involved, for example, in the construction industry, compliance was of a rather 'basic' nature. An owner-manager provided the following view:

Construction involves high risks — tools, mechanisms, electricity, and working at heights — all the time workers need to be careful, otherwise serious accidents happen easily. What I can say as a construction project manager on the site is that OSH does not seem a vital factor related to quality and work performance. Micro- and small companies try just to fulfil basic safety requirements mentioned in the agreement with the general contractor. (Owner-manager, EE6).

The research, even though based on a limited number of cases, is largely in line with the previously known situation regarding OSH. Despite some fear of sanctions from the regulator that might jeopardise contractual relations with clients, there is a general lack of employer motivation to deal with OSH issues in Estonia stemming from legislative requirements. After over two decades of public debate on the question, employers remain implacably opposed to any compulsory insurance system which is seen as an additional 'burden' on business and an unacceptable business cost. It would seem that, in this regard, Estonia's 'business-friendly' environment and open economy, referred to in the introduction, has potentially negative effects when it comes to securing good OSH practices of a sustainable nature. That said, it is important to recognise that there were some good individual OSH practice examples; these are explored further in section 3.2.7.

3.2.6 Workers' participation in the practice of OSH risk prevention

In Estonia, a working environment council has to be established by law only in enterprises with more than 50 employees (that is medium-sized or large enterprises), which means that micro- and small companies do not usually elect such a council. However, where more than 10 employees are present in the workplace, a working environment representative should be elected by the employees. According to current legislation, working environment representatives must be elected by the workers themselves. The real situation can often be quite different, with the manager informally selecting who would be 'best' to perform this function. In addition, workers are sometimes reluctant to take on this extra role, which is seen as an additional responsibility to their main work, as the researchers found in several interviews. However, there was also one positive example of an MSE where a working environment council was elected voluntarily and appeared to work effectively.

The case studies suggested an overall trend that, in small companies (with 10 or more workers), elected working environment representatives were not involved much in OSH activities. This was also the case in micro-enterprises, where sometimes there were no representatives elected at all. The main reason was described by a manager of a transport company:

Since our company is pretty small and all documents are prepared by the manager, we do not see that representatives [elected by workers] can contribute a lot to the health and safety. (Employer representative, EE13)

In many small and micro-companies, OSH duties were often fulfilled by the employer her- or himself, who was usually on site every day, and could thus communicate with the workforce directly. An example can be given of a manager of a small manufacturing company where, even though a designated working environment representative existed, the role was only passive and strictly formal. The manager himself undertook OSH duties in the course of his daily shop-floor presence:

Since our company is small, I do the job myself, and some duties are on the shoulders of the quality manager. Safety is important for me, but I don't see that the representative can contribute a lot to the

OSH issue, he's just a regular office worker. I talk to people myself — I'm on-site every day, so it's not a problem for me. I get all information from them [the workers]. (Owner-manager, EE2)

Another possible reason for weak work environment participation in Estonian establishments is a lack of time and interest on the part of the management in dealing with OSH issues and a reluctance to be open-minded towards the concerns of elected representatives. In one case, a member of the junior management acting as a safety representative stated:

I do not have enough time to deal with OSH issues as a representative. I have my obligations as a manager of the sales department. There is a lot of work and I feel like I need to deal with 'fire-fighting' every day. I feel that the senior manager does not understand and does not value OSH, as well as the whole importance of workers' safety environment. I was elected as a representative because it was required by the legislation, but practically I do not fulfil these duties as a representative, and I am not supported by top management. (Worker representative, EE16)

It is possible, however, to describe recognition by employers of the advantage of the presence of working environment representatives where they do exist, although they are often not genuine workers' (shop-floor) representatives. As one employer noted:

[I receive] feedback from workers, being on the actual spot, drawing attention to special requirements and problems on site as well as identifying means of overcoming them, seeing/hearing what's going on in order to improve communication between the two sides. (Owner-manager, EE15)

It was summed up by the employer in another establishment:

Workers' representatives are doing a good job. I don't manage to go everywhere. But when [work environment] representatives are helping me, the effect is better. (Employer representative, EE4)

The picture which emerges is one where employee working environment representatives appear to be involved in improvement of the working environment, but not on a regular basis (for example in Horeca, manufacturing and construction). Interviewed workers and employer representatives reported that employees were generally involved in the process of risk assessment, if only by filling in the questionnaires about possible occupational risks and health complaints. Several good practices of worker involvement in OSH were also found. One such example of workers' participation in prevention activity was involvement in the process of risk assessment in a small establishment (warehouse). All the employees in the enterprise were involved in the process of risk assessment, as well as constantly engaged in reporting near-misses and dangerous situations. The company drew up its own programme for employees' motivation, recognition of incidents and reporting of near-misses and dangerous situations at work. Personal feedback to each worker was given by the working environment specialist (employers' representative) after the analyses of the near-misses and regarding safety measures proposed by workers.

3.2.7 Effectiveness of OSH management and good OSH practices

Several good OSH practices were observed in various establishments. The origins of the good practices were mainly national OSH programmes described in section 1.3, with aid from external OSH providers (storage company, energy company, corn cultivation company), owner-managers' commitment to OSH and good knowledge of OSH issues (coffee shop, building construction and finishing company), and parent companies with high OSH standards/norms that actively promote exchange of OSH knowledge and good OSH practices, as well as enhancing existing safety cultures in Estonian companies (storage company, log cabin manufacturing). Regarding systematic OSH management, good practices (free of charge consultancy and positive cooperation with external OSH service providers) were found, to a greater or lesser degree, in establishments EE20 (transport and storage), EE4 (manufacturing), EE10 (agriculture) and EE20 (transport and storage).

Some of the investigated MSEs were engaged in ancillary or preventive activities in the field of OSH, such as conducting health check-ups for workers and engagement with workplace health promotion

activities (organising massages for workers or providing financial support for physical exercise and other healthy lifestyle activities (for example support for subscriptions to sports clubs) (EE4, EE15, EE20).

However, from observations and interviews, the researchers estimated the level of risk control in most of the investigated establishments as being medium or rather low (manufacturing, transport and storage sectors). Even though employers and workers have demonstrated good awareness of possible occupational risks in their working environment, they noted that resources were often limited for investment in advanced risk control (that is, beyond the minimum requirements of OSH legislation). A few companies, however, did demonstrate good OSH practices; for example, an employer representative from an energy company stated: 'Looking at the job satisfaction survey which we conducted last year, safety is at the highest satisfaction level of 5.0. This tells us we have done a good job establishing the adequate requirements for health and safety' (employer representative, EE4). Of course, high employee satisfaction, against a background of generally low expectations in this sphere in Estonia, may not signal that good OSH practices are actually in place and recognised as such.

Activities indicating at least some orientation towards good OSH practices (EE2, EE4, EE15, EE20) included the use of technical measures (mechanical aids and technology — lifting devices during the loading of goods, a conveyor system used to reduce manual handling of materials and a forklift truck used for most manual handling); ergonomic workplace design and use of personal protective equipment (appropriate clothes, safety boots, gloves and earmuffs); and organisational measures such as regular OSH training, workers' health check-ups, risk assessment, written and oral risk communication, rotation of workers in order to minimise risks of muscular-skeletal disorders (in manufacturing and warehousing), good housekeeping, and regular checking and maintenance of tools and machinery.

3.2.8 Classification of company OSH practice

The case study results suggest that the most common OSH strategy in MSEs was **reactive** rather than **proactive**. For example, a small dairy farm implemented safety measures (or held OSH discussions with workers) only after the occurrence of accidents or serious near-misses. The employer related his point of view, which was typical: 'Accidents are stupid coincidences which are very difficult to foresee' (employer, EE12).

Overall, the researchers took the view that risk management practice was, with some exceptions (EE3, EE4, EE6, EE7, EE15, EE20), mainly reactive. Thus, only a few of the investigated companies demonstrated proactive and innovative management approaches to risk management.

Measured against the benchmark criteria in the established literature for a proactive approach to risk management (Didla et al., 2009; Santos-Reyes and Beard, 2008; Robson et al., 2007), the Estonian research suggests that, with the few discussed exceptions, the majority of the case study enterprises fell below (EE2, EE5, EE8, EE10, EE11, EE12, EE13, EE17) or far below (EE1, EE9, EE14, EE16, EE18, EE19) the threshold for fulfilling such criteria, detailed below:

- safety was a clearly recognised value and understood as a complex and systemic phenomenon, and safety was integrated into all daily activities;
- OSH was seen as a part of a general (strategic) management system;
- the organisation was mindful in its practices and activities were organised in a manageable way;
- occupational hazards and core task requirements were clearly understood and responsibility was taken for the safe functioning of the whole system;
- safety was learning-driven, valued and enhanced.
- In addition, some other benchmarking factors can be mentioned as conducive to good OSH outcomes:
- owner-managers' good awareness about OSH as well as their willingness to discuss OSH issues and demonstrate their own commitment by personal example;
- owner-managers' demonstration to workers of the extent to which safety is valued by the company.

Fulfilling the above benchmark criteria means that resources (persons, time, money) were allocated to OSH, adequate OSH information was available for the workers in the right place at the right time, occupational health services were provided for all workers (for example regular workers' health examinations), and regular internal monitoring and audits were conducted in OSH. Effective risk management also involves workers' active involvement and participation in OSH activities, personal feedback provided to each worker who reports near-misses and/or dangerous situation(s), and proposed safety measures creating a safety learning organisation in which overall risk assessment is organisationally embedded in daily practices.

In summary, it is clear from the case study material that few if any of the sampled companies met all these established criteria in full, although a few MSEs (EE2, EE8, EE10, EE12, EE13) did possess the potential to move towards these objectives, and demonstrated some measures of proactive engagement with OSH, if additional resources and technical guidance from the authorities or external providers were consistently available at an affordable price for MSEs and in formats which could be readily accessed. Such interventions, however, require the effective monitoring of those initiatives which have previously been undertaken to allow systematic and targeted support in the future. Further comments in this regard are made in the following section.

3.3 Mechanisms

- **The role of legislation and sector-level regulation**

Legislative requirements regarding OSH are in place in all the investigated sectors, and the Labour Inspectorate routinely maintains supervision over compliance with legal requirements, although, as pointed out previously, there is an increasing level of non-compliance measured in terms of recorded OSH violations, while the inspection coverage of MSEs by the regulatory authority remains incomplete. Again, previous observations about the style and philosophy of enforcement, specifically 'light touch' regulation and low levels of penalties, are important in any assessment of impacts of legislation and regulation.

With regard to specific sectors, it is illustrative to examine the traditionally high-risk construction sector. Here, an essential aspect was compliance with regulatory requirements, if only to avoid problems with authorities that were performing state supervision (Labour Inspectorate, Technical Regulatory Authority and Rescue Board). That said, however, in the two investigated construction companies, one of the main motivators was a desire to run the business in an honest way, to keep their good reputation and image among partners, and to fulfil the high standards of the general contractor. Otherwise, as previously mentioned, there might be penalties imposed by both the general contractor and, not least, the authorities, which could endanger their future relationship both with the client companies for which they acted as subcontractors and with the regulatory bodies.

Results from ESENER-2 (EU-OSHA, 2016a) revealed that for Estonian MSEs one of the major reasons for addressing OSH is fulfilling their legal obligations (for micro-establishments 89.9 % and for small establishments 95.6 %). However, the fear of penalties rather than a more positive engagement that recognises the economic and social benefits for businesses from good OSH practice is an indication of the attitudinal barriers that may still exist in many MSEs.

In the other sectors from which the case studies were drawn, little motivation from the legislation for employers to deal proactively with OSH was also observed. Generally, employers do not analyse the possible costs related to occupational accidents and diseases, because the coverage of such costs is 'externalised' to employees and their families and falls as a burden on the Estonian health insurance (temporary loss of work ability) and pension insurance (permanent loss of work ability) schemes, rather than on individual businesses.

Legislation by itself, however, will not address the issues that confront OSH in Estonian MSEs. In order to achieve more positive results in OSH management, one possible new avenue of action might be to strengthen the national OSH system in Estonia as well as public awareness, through tripartite collaboration. Previous survey results in Estonia have shown significant employee support for a

cooperative approach with employers towards workplace health and safety issues (Woolfson et al., 2009). However, the trade unions, which are key players in OSH in other EU Member States, lack any sustained commitment to this field in Estonia, and have neither the expertise nor the capacities to engage constructively with other social partners on matters such as OSH training or representational issues at either national or sectoral level. Moreover, since the economic crisis, trade unions have seen an overall erosion of their national-level tripartite engagement, and a further weakening of their representational voice in the workplace, which in any event was already absent at the level of MSEs (Kallaste and Woolfson, 2013).

Individual elected safety representatives, and working environment councils in a few larger companies, may have experience in providing employee voice in on OSH matters, but that experience is not generalised to other establishments in any systematic manner. The development of good OSH requires that representatives of the workforce be empowered to become health and safety advocates, acting in a more proactive manner than currently. A step towards this might be greater legal protection from managerial discrimination, as is provided for in legislation in other Member States, such as the UK. The appointment of representatives who are more independent of management than would appear to be the case in Estonia, and more extended training of these workforce representatives beyond the current mandated number of hours, would also be steps towards this goal.

Regarding the institutional capacities of the regulatory authority, further enhancement could include greater powers of enforcement, the ability to apply stronger incentives towards stimulating compliance and additional labour inspection human resource capacities, as well as increased funding for OSH information exchange, research and support services. Sectoral initiatives in order to disseminate good practice and generate greater momentum towards good OSH policy and practice are necessary to 'reach down' into MSEs, but, apart from in agriculture, these do not exist. So far, the educational initiatives undertaken completely lack objective auditing that would enable their effectiveness to be gauged objectively as a basis for further follow-up interventions at sectoral level. For example, the Rural Development Foundation prioritised OSH through the already mentioned OSH-training programme tailored for selected agriculture advisors and information days for farmers. The effectiveness of the programme was not assessed and the initiative has ceased. In the construction sector, three educational films about OSH in construction ('Work on Scaffolding', 'Work on a Ladder' and 'Work on the Roof') were prepared by the industry association and trade unions. Again, the effectiveness of the films as an informational medium was not assessed and the web link to the films is not currently operative (Tööinspektsioon, 2013).

- **The role of support from authorities and from external service providers**

The case study results highlight the vital role of improvement of OSH management that belongs to the Labour Inspectorate and external service providers (OSH providers), acting as the main sources of information and practical expertise.

Various national OSH programmes were drawn up at the national level in Estonia, as previously described in section 1.3. However, there were only three establishments in our sample where national programmes were used in the field of OSH. First, building construction and finishing company (EE7) took part in a programme on 'Health Inspection, Risk Assessment and Working Environment Measurements' offered by Foundation Innove. The financial fund was meant for micro- and small enterprises in order to secure better opportunities to conduct health inspections of employees, to order working environment measurements and, based on these, to conduct risk assessment. Sponsorship was given to projects worth between EUR 1,000 and EUR 10,000 (participants were required to pay 30 % of the cost). The case study company applied for it and successfully conducted measurements of occupational hazards, risk assessment and health inspection. The second company (EE3, log cabin manufacturing company) and the third company (EE20, storage and transport company) used the free OSH consultancy service from the Labour Inspectorate (new since 2015) and found it useful. In addition, an extensive state programme to educate safety managers was used (EE3) — the former safety manager of the company had participated in this course.

The task of the external OSH services providers is clearly defined in the OSH legislation. For instance, the duties of an occupational health physician are as follows: identifying work environment hazards during the risk analysis and assessing their potential impact on the employee's health, taking into account age and gender characteristics; conducting health examination and assessment of the state of health of employees; counselling the employer to adapt the work to the employee's state of health and in improving working conditions, choosing work equipment and their safe use, and selecting and using personal protective equipment, as well as organisation of rehabilitation of employees. Owner-managers from two establishments in the agriculture sector (EE9 and EE10) used the free services from agriculture advisors and found them effective and useful (consultancy in OSH, cooperation to conduct risk assessment and so on). However, in other sectors, the market-driven system has led to a situation where the employer chooses the content of the OSH services and has to bear the costs occurred. In this situation, where the employer pays for the services and is not interested in incurring further costs, service providers have no choice but to perform the workers' health examination according to the employers' demands. Sometimes, it means that selected content of OSH services may be insufficient and without the required consistency; for example, workers' health examinations may be performed without the necessary relationship to risk assessment and exposure assessment of the workplace. When the researchers asked more precisely about the cooperation with occupational health physicians and possible benefits of conducting health check-ups for workers, employer representatives could not name any benefit or expected specific outcome.

- **The role of management style and social relations**

The overall management style seems to influence the way OSH is organised in the establishment. In all establishments, the management was experienced in running businesses in their sector. Based on the interviews and observations, the researchers estimated that in the investigated companies the most common leadership style was 'managerially-determined' (Titov et al., 2013). This managerial style was identified as a potential detriment, because workers were not involved in decision-making and OSH activities, and there was no feedback provided to workers. It is possible to say that in those companies the managers were demanding and strict managers, who believed and expected that their instructions had to be followed by all workers (Horeca, agriculture and manufacturing sectors). However, in some establishments, where managers applied a managerially determined style, they also facilitated some degree of communication with workers in order to share their ideas in the field of OSH. In one establishment (EE6), the researchers estimated that the owner-manager employed both a directive and a supportive style, offering workers guidance and directions for job completion (clear job tasks and demands) that helped in creating a positive work environment of psychological support and friendliness. This appeared to have an indirect but positive effect on the conduct of OSH.

Researchers also identified several establishments where safety was a clear value for the company and was described in the OSH strategy and safety policy of the company. In addition, it was seen as an essential part of job quality and performance. This situation was found in a small storage company, a small energy company, a log cabin manufacturing company and two small building construction companies. The energy company employer representative stated: 'We have heard from the new employees that they want to come to work in the establishment because the image is good. In our sector, it automatically means also that the safety culture has to be high, too — we work in a pretty high-risk area' (employer representative, EE4).

The researchers identified that good social relations were valued in the majority of the investigated establishments and again may have indirect but positive benefits for OSH practice in contrast to more conflictual workplaces. Interviewed workers and employers claimed that this is due to the small size of the companies — that they feel 'like a family' (EE6, EE7, EE15) or work as a family company (EE9 and EE10). In Horeca (EE13, EE14, EE16), it is possible to say that senior managers have adopted a managerially determined style. Employees tended to do only as they were told, rather than stepping up and taking personal initiative and responsibility. The owner-managers were mainly focused on clients' satisfaction and on providing services to clients.

The influence on OSH of management style and commitment can also be assessed from the allocation of the resources to the field of OSH. In the majority of the investigated establishments (15 of 20), the owner-manager did not directly invest in health and safety, workplace health promotion and training for employees. Two reasons for this were the high rate of personnel turnover (Horeca and agriculture sectors) and lack of employers' awareness and interest in this field. In addition, OSH costs were seen as purely a cost for the employer, and not an investment in sustaining human capital.

Supportive social relationships at work were less likely to create interpersonal pressures and conflicts. Nevertheless, one investigated hotel (EE16) could be characterised as conflict-ridden, causing dysfunctions in communication — there were divisions between Estonians and Russians, experienced and new workers, older and younger workers, and temporary and permanent workers. Organisational segmentation was detected along all these lines. Conflicts occurred as a result of poor communication, scarcity of common resources, competition and lack of conflict management. The researchers found that both the manager (especially) and the workers interviewed lacked the willingness and expertise to resolve conflicts, and an understanding of the usefulness of harmonious industrial relationships in creating a motivating work climate, effective communication and employees' involvement in OSH activities and processes.

- **Value chain effects on company OSH management**

The case studies also revealed that in most investigated establishments the **value chain** does not typically affect OSH management. Thus, for example, subsidiaries or subcontracting establishments did not appear to be under any pressure to enhance practices that would encourage employee participation in OSH matters.

In the construction sector, however, OSH could be affected by the general contractor in larger projects, as illustrated by a construction company that operated in the Estonian and Finnish markets. Large construction companies in Finland have similar safety perspectives and rules in place wherever they operate, and the requirements may vary minimally. Thus, the owner-manager in one construction company claimed that, for Estonian firms, requirements placed on subcontractors with regard to OSH compliance may vary, depending on the country in which the general contractor originates. This implies that there is no automatic transfer or incentive for good practice further down the value chain, but, in the case in question, the Nordic company appeared to place obligations to observe good OSH practice on the Estonian subsidiary.

Without further detailed research, given the limitations of the case studies, it is not possible to put forward any generalisation of substance on this matter. However, evidence from existing research suggests the limited nature of transfer of good practice in industrial relations (which in the Nordic context normally includes safety and health issues). Rather, it appeared that local managements were offered a wide degree of discretion in accordance with prevailing local standards and practices (Sippola, 2011).

4 Summary and key findings

The case studies revealed a variety of OSH management practices in the Estonian context including some good examples of MSEs with commitment to OSH, but also an overall tendency towards following a 'low road' in OSH (EU-OSHA, 2016b). The amount of resources (human, time, finance) allocated for OSH activities was generally rather restricted. The researchers identified the following as persistent barriers to effective OSH management in the studied Estonian MSEs:

- lack of employers' commitment to OSH, with no focus on responsibilities and accountability;
- poor worker participation in health and safety activities;
- low level of knowledge of OSH responsibilities;
- absence of regular workplace audits/inspections and risk management;
- inadequate provision of OSH training and health check-ups;
- ineffective communication on OSH matters between management and workers;

- absence of elected worker representatives, or formalism in appointing safety representatives who have other managerial roles;
- passive safety management with little interest in OSH programmes/practice and lack of time and willingness to deal with OSH issues;
- low level of awareness and knowledge on the part of management of psychosocial risks.

The key issue, however, was a perceived lack of resources (human, time, finance) available to be dedicated to OSH.
Compounding these barriers is the fact that many risks are automatically accepted or discounted by both employers and employees as a 'part of the job'. Both employers and workers appeared to have the attitude that workers should deal with hazardous situations themselves. With responsibility allocated to individual workers themselves, attention was deflected from organisational issues in the management of the work process. Overall, however, the researchers found a lack of initiative and interest in the field of OSH on the part of employers (and to some extent also workers), compounded by poor communication between management and workers on OSH issues.

In addition, there was a lack of business-related and sector-specific activities, campaigns and guidelines tailored particularly for MSEs that would promote good OSH. Nevertheless, based on the results from interviews and workplace visits, it is possible to present provisional examples and activities that could enhance OSH in MSEs. These may be specified for management and for employees.

Management aspects:

- owner-manager commitment to workplace safety integrated into the general management system within the company;
- management demonstration of the importance of safety on a daily basis in different ways (for example personal example of wearing personal protective equipment, walking and talking about safety, regular replacement of unsafe tools and machinery);
- owner-manager's willingness to invest resources in OSH;
- safety inspections performed by the owner-manager as well as external competent authorities, with regular checks, feedback and verbal notes about safety violations during the work day that improve workers' safe behaviours;
- regular discussion of issues of safety in meetings and open/direct communication with owner-manager;
- presence of OSH instructions, risk assessments, special site safety plans (construction sector);
- demonstration by management to workers of the extent to which safety is valued by the company;
- supportive and resourced regulatory authorities which are accessible and disseminate information (via different communication channels) and thus can enhance effective worker representation;
- competent supervision of daily tasks, performed by employers in collaboration with worker representatives in order to make sure that employees are working in a way that will ensure health and safety.

Worker representation and involvement:

- workers' involvement in OSH activities, including representation and participation in OSH management beyond formal compliance;
- acquisition of OSH knowledge and information;
- regular OSH training (owner-manager involved in staff OSH training).

Considerable improvement has been made in the field of OSH in Estonia in recent years (through national OSH programmes as discussed previously). However, there are still challenges ahead. It is interesting that the main priorities and problems identified in the current research into current OSH practice in Estonian MSEs have remained the same for the last 15 years (Reinhold et al., 2009; Järvis et al., 2013). These challenges include lack of political commitment on the part of the government and

social partners to further development of OSH policies; legislative gaps, especially the continuing absence of an Insurance Act for Occupational Accidents and Diseases, which would remove the burden of compensation, support and rehabilitation as a result of workplace injury or ill-health on the individual worker and his or her family; low quality of, and lack of awareness of the need for, risk assessments; no agreement between occupational physicians and the Estonian Sickness Fund to reimburse costs for rehabilitation of workers, as well as a lack of cooperation between employers, employees and occupational physicians. In our view, the above would be the most salient issues to address in order to enhance OSH in MSEs in Estonia for the future.

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