

Poland's approach to supporting occupational safety and health compliance: the role of labour inspectorate and prevention services

Summary

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This report¹ centres on two main categories of occupational safety and health (OSH) actors: the State Labour Inspection (Państwowa Inspekcja Pracy – PIP) and prevention services, which include OSH services and occupational health services (OHS).

The findings are based on a detailed study utilising qualitative and quantitative data, including reviews of available documents, reports, media and interviews with relevant stakeholders.

As this report underlines, there is a lack of data, information and knowledge about the role of the Labour Inspectorates and prevention services in supporting OSH compliance at the EU level. Therefore, it was decided to conduct country case studies in Germany, Ireland, Norway, Poland and Portugal, followed by a comparative analysis of the five countries.

The present report delineates the outcomes and findings of the research project in Poland. In addition, six case studies and two policy briefs were developed on the role of the Labour Inspectorate and prevention services in supporting compliance.²

The report presents the approach to labour inspection in Poland, which could be characterised as a co-enforcement model. The co-enforcement model involves a collaborative approach to ensuring OSH compliance with the cooperation of different institutions and organisations. This approach combines inspection and prevention activities. The enforcement model focuses on ensuring compliance with labour laws through inspections, penalties and corrective measures, often organised around a single/central organisation responsible for the labour inspection.

PIP consist of a centralised State Labour Inspection and 16 District Labour Inspectorates, alongside a training and educational centre. In general, PIP core responsibilities are centred around three thematic areas: (1) workplace health and safety, (2) compliance with legal protection of labour, and (3) ensuring the legality of employment. This mission is executed through traditional enforcement activities: targeted inspections and proactive measures designed to mitigate the risk of accidents and ensure compliance with labour regulations. However, the scope of PIP's activities extends beyond enforcement, leaning towards a co-enforcement model. A significant aspect of its mandate involves prevention, combined inspection–prevention activities, activities targeting specific sectors or topics, promotion, and educational initiatives geared towards fostering a safety culture and cultivating healthy work environments within Polish enterprises. Further, the co-enforcement model is manifested via a broad network of cooperation and stakeholders involved in PIP activities, such as a broad scope of other

¹ The full report is available at <https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/polands-approach-supporting-occupational-safety-and-health-compliance-role-labour-inspectorate-and-prevention-services>

² The six case studies are referred to continuously throughout the report. The cases are numbered as 'Case PL1', 'Case PL2', etc., PL referring to Poland. This is further explained in the chapter on methodology.

See EU-OSHA - European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, *Addressing workplace stress in Poland: supporting occupational safety and health compliance (Case PL1)*, 2025. <https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/addressing-workplace-stress-poland-supporting-occupational-safety-and-health-compliance-case-pl1>

See EU-OSHA - European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, *Polish State Labour Inspection agreements: supporting occupational safety and health compliance (Case PL2)*, 2025. <https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/polish-state-labour-inspection-agreements-supporting-occupational-safety-and-health-compliance-case-pl2>

See EU-OSHA - European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, *Ukrainian refugee and migrant workers: supporting occupational safety and health compliance (Case PL3)*, 2025. <https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/ukrainian-refugee-and-migrant-workers-supporting-occupational-safety-and-health-compliance-case-pl3>

See EU-OSHA - European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, *Polish 'Agreement for Safety in Construction': supporting occupational safety and health compliance (Case PL4)*, 2025. <https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/polish-agreement-safety-construction-supporting-occupational-safety-and-health-compliance-case-pl4>

See EU-OSHA - European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, *Polish sector prevention and inspection programmes: supporting occupational safety and health compliance (Case PL5)*, 2025. <https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/polish-sector-prevention-and-inspection-programmes-supporting-occupational-safety-and-health-compliance-case-pl5>

See EU-OSHA - European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, *Polish initiatives to support OSH experts: supporting occupational safety and health compliance (Case PL6)*, 2025. <https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/polish-initiatives-support-osh-experts-supporting-occupational-safety-and-health-compliance-case-pl6>

The policy briefs are as follows:

See EU-OSHA - European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, *Polish Labour Inspectorate supporting occupational safety and health compliance*, 2025. <https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/polish-labour-inspectorate-supporting-occupational-safety-and-health-compliance>

See EU-OSHA - European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, *Prevention services role in supporting occupational safety and health compliance in Poland*, 2025. <https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/prevention-services-role-supporting-occupational-safety-and-health-compliance-poland>

governmental institutions, OSH organisations, social partners, sectoral organisations and universities, among other organisations.

Considering OSH prevention, the report covers two key dimensions: OSH services and OHS. The OSH prevention service can be a separate unit/position within the company whose tasks are to organise preventive activities to protect the workers from occupational hazards, improve OSH conditions and advise the employer on OSH-related matters. OSH experts can work as internal staff (dedicated to OSH or in other positions, yet appointed to handle OSH) or external experts contracted for specific tasks. OSH experts play a key role in ensuring safe and healthy working conditions. However, in Polish, the name of this service is Occupational Safety and Hygiene (Bezpieczeństwo i higiena pracy – BHP), which to some extent reflects its limited engagement in health issues.

OHS specialists are occupational doctors responsible for the delivery of occupational medical examinations. Occupational medical examinations apply to every worker regardless of position or type of work, provided they benefit from a regular employment relationship³. Therefore, they exclude workers on civil law contracts and other atypical employment forms. Notably, companies must issue a referral to the examinations. Most commonly, these tasks are handled by OSH experts (internal or external) or, in smaller companies, other competent staff assigned to this task. These referrals should be based on the occupational risk assessment for selected employees, indicating OSH risks present in the workplace. Based on the referrals, OHS doctors conduct the medical examinations. Therefore, the quality of the risk assessment in the company is closely linked to the quality of the occupational medical examination.

Overall, this report provides an overview of the activities of and key challenges faced by labour inspection and OSH and OHS prevention services and their role in supporting OSH compliance in Poland. Chapter 2, *OSH landscape in Poland*, examines the legal and operational environments in which these bodies function, providing insights into Poland's regulatory structures governing OSH practices. Chapter 3, *The activity of the State Labour Inspection*, focuses on the core activities of the State Labour Inspection, including complaint handling and labour inspections, and its co-enforcement model for OSH risk prevention. Chapter 3 discusses the dynamics of complaint handling, showing a recent decrease in complaints in 2023 and indicating that **complaints mainly fall under primary remuneration and employment relationship issues**.

Furthermore, Chapter 3 provides insights into the inspections, covering inspections delivered as a follow-up to the complaints and planned inspection activities. This section discusses a **solid data-driven approach while choosing the sectors for the inspection focus. PIP set up its inspection and prevention activities based on analysing the number of fatal and severe accidents, focusing on the construction sector in recent years, which has had the highest share of these accidents**.

Chapter 3 also elaborates on the PIP approach to penalties, which is affected by the structure of the Polish economy, composed of SMEs. **Given SMEs' dominance, labour inspection focuses on positive re-enforcement and education, adjusting penalties to the financial capacities of each enterprise. At the same time, labour inspectors stress that the current financial penalty level is insufficient, especially considering recurring and severe violations. Therefore, the section discusses proposals in the 2023 Annual Activity Report, including the non-financial approach to enforcement.** Finally, the section draws on horizontal activities, such as: sector-specific programmes covering selected sectors like the campaign 'Budowa. STOP Wypadkom' (Construction. STOP Accidents); programmes targeting specific types of companies (see *Box 9: Example of PIP initiative targeting SMEs*); activities supporting targeted vulnerable groups, such as young people entering the workforce; and a broad spectrum of training, workshops and promotional activities supporting OSH prevention.

Chapter 4, *The activity of OSH and OHS prevention services*, discusses the roles and responsibilities of OSH experts and occupational health professionals in safeguarding workers' wellbeing through proactive health and safety measures. The section on OSH experts provides information on the characteristics of OSH experts, primarily based on the findings from the Central Institute for Labour Protection – National Research Institute (CIOP-PIB) in 2020 (Dobrzynska, 2020), providing insights on

³ Information about the different forms of employment in the Polish Labour code and their related aspects to OSH and labour inspection is available in Box 7 below. More information is also available from the PIP webpage section "Employees": <https://www.pip.gov.pl/en/for-employees/forms-of-employment>

the numbers of OSH specialists or their scope of work and the type of tasks internal and external OSH experts tend to carry out. Further, it presents debates on the qualifications of OSH experts and the discussion on OSH experts with specific expertise versus OSH experts with generalist profiles (and on-ground experiences working with companies). The section on OSH experts concludes with the personal motivations and the barriers to the OSH professions. Further, the second part of Chapter 4 focuses on the OHS and occupational doctors, discussing the scope and procedure of occupational medical examinations. Next, Chapter 4 focuses on the OHS challenges, including the uneven distribution of occupational doctors and occupational health centres across Poland. Finally, Chapter 4 discusses the **prevention potential of occupational medicine, which is underutilised, as well as the barriers to access to occupational medical examinations as in the case of agriculture, where farmers, due to their form of employment, are not covered by mandatory occupational medical examinations.**

Chapter 5, *Cooperations and synergies*, further discusses the synergies established within Poland's OSH system, examining PIP's collaborations, focusing on four main types: cooperation in inspections, cooperation in expertise exchange, cooperation in promotion and collaboration in knowledge/data sharing. Further, PIP cooperates with prevention services institutions, social partners and business entities. It provides an overview of how these synergies are created, their legal basis and scale, and what they comprise in terms of both promotion and enforcement. **In the labour inspection section, the chapter discusses the practicalities and examples of cooperation contributing to the co-enforcement model. When it comes to OSH and OHS prevention services, providing overarching insight on collaborations and synergies was more challenging, considering the diversified landscape of actors involved in OSH prevention.**

Chapter 6, *Challenges in labour inspection and OSH and OHS prevention services*, identifies the challenges within Poland's OSH system commonly faced by labour inspection, OSH and OHS prevention services. They both face the challenge of designing and carrying out their activities in an economy dominated by SMEs, issues related to human resources (demanding workload, limited human resources, needs in terms of expertise), and the need to develop approaches addressing challenges of the new world of work, such as the rise of remote and gig/platform work. These are summarised in Chapter 7, *Conclusions and key findings*. Indeed, the last chapter underlines the data-driven and collaborative approach in labour inspection, which supports response to challenges in the dynamic world of work. It emphasises the discussions about changes in penalties and presents the idea that includes non-financial measures and debates on human resources and the scope of PIP responsibilities. This last chapter also underlines the significance of the latest research in providing information about OSH experts. This indicates that these studies support discussions on topics such as OSH experts' qualifications and the demand for OSH expertise (either general OSH experts or specialists in a specific field). Considering OHS, the final chapter stresses the prevention potential of OHS as well as regional disparities in access to occupational medical examinations.

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