

Joint Response to the new Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2021-2027

On 28 June 2021, the European Commission published its new [Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2021 – 2027](#) with the overarching aims to anticipate and manage change, prevent work-related accidents and illnesses, and increase preparedness against future crises.

Although concrete details on the proposed actions are yet to be seen and the Strategy mainly proposed non-binding initiatives, the [European Alliance for Mental Health – Employment & Work](#) (EU MH Alliance) welcomes the Strategy as a first step and commitment from the European Commission to further improve occupation health and address new challenges concerning digitalisation and teleworking, mental health of workers, inequalities and discrimination, as well as better prepare the world of work for future crises. While it is encouraging to see important progress in bringing down occupational illnesses, accidents and injuries, new changing realities of work mean related psychosocial risk factors will more than ever need to be addressed in an adequate and timely manner.

Psychosocial risks in the spotlight

The EU MH Alliance [took part in both rounds of the public consultations](#) to feed with its expertise into the new Strategy. The Alliance welcomes its general objectives on change management, illness prevention and increased preparedness. After a preliminary analysis, the EU MH Alliance is particularly pleased to see that many of its recommendations have been integrated in the new Strategy. We particularly appreciate the focus on psychosocial risks under the first objective on anticipating and managing change, which was already a concern pre-pandemic and became even more pressing following the impact that COVID-19 had both on mental health and workplaces.

More inclusive workplaces, but missed opportunities to tackle the needs of younger workers

The EU MH Alliance also welcomes the focus on more inclusive workplaces under the second objective on prevention of accidents and illnesses. This section makes a specific link to [EU Disability Rights Strategy 2021-2030](#) and commits the European Commission to present a package to improve the labour market outcomes of persons with disabilities. While the EU MH Alliance welcomes the objectives of fighting workplace discrimination against persons with disabilities and older workers, as well as gender discrimination, the Framework misses the opportunity to explicitly focus on the specific needs and challenges faced by younger people. That group remains indeed at a particular disadvantage in the labour market and is only briefly mentioned in the research and data collection section of the Strategy instead of forming a central part of the target population.

Learning from COVID-19

On a final note, we welcome the section on increasing preparedness as a lesson learned from COVID-19. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of ensuring proper working conditions and high levels of health protection for professions at risk in times of crisis. In this respect, the announced “overview of the occupation safety and health in the health and care sector as well as an in-depth

assessment of the EU and national OSH frameworks to develop emergency procedures and guidance for the rapid deployment, implementation and monitoring of measures in potential future health crises” can bring considerable improvements.

While some of our recommendations are not present in the final text of the Strategy (most notably the need for an EU Directive addressing psychosocial risks in the workplace), the EU MH Alliance will continue its work contributing to the multi-governance implementation of the mentioned measures, ensuring that the commitments taken are upheld and that the missing aspects of a comprehensive OSH policies and practice are nonetheless taken into account in the following years.

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About the European Alliance for Mental Health – Employment & Work

The EUMH Alliance is an informal coalition of European organisations, the main aims of which are to promote mental health and well-being in the workplace, to advocate for equal access to the labour market for all people experiencing mental ill health and to stimulate policy developments at EU level in these domains. The EUMH Alliance was originally initiated to mainstream mental health in all policies, including health, social, education and employment policies. More information can be found at www.eumhalliance.com.