

NATIONAL OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH POLICY

2016-2022

I. BASIS

The Fundamental Law of Hungary, Act XCIII of 1993 on Labour Safety and Act LXXV of 2000¹ all impose obligations on Hungary to define long-term tasks related to occupational safety and health, and, in consultation with groups representing the interests of employees and employers, to establish national policies for the preservation of capacity to work, to ensure occupational safety and regulate the working environment. The Communication of the European Commission² and the WHO³ Global Action Plan provides guidance on this process.

II. TERM

The National Occupational Safety and Health Policy (hereinafter referred to as NOSHP) sets out Hungary's occupational safety and health priorities for the period of 2016-2022. This occurs in line with the EU's current 2014-2020 strategy for health and safety at work, which is to be followed by all Member States.

III. OBJECTIVE

The priorities of NOSHP are defined in accordance with the explicit objective of developing practices to protect workers by preserving their ability to work, maintaining safety and health standards and increasing the number of healthy years in a worker's lifetime. Providing appropriate working conditions is indispensable in order to maintain the maximum productivity of the workforce. Recognition and effective management of risks arising from conventional (usual) hazards, as well as new and emerging risks, is also an important factor to be taken into account. The nature of occupational diseases is changing constantly. Scientific and technical development and social changes relating to globalisation may exacerbate existing risks and result in the appearance of new ones.

¹ ILO Convention 155 concerning Occupational Safety and Health and the Working Environment (1981) - promulgated in Act LXXV of 2000

² Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions *on an EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2014-2020 (Official Journal C230, 2015.07.14., pp. 82-90.)*

³ The WHO Global Action Plan on Workers Health (2008-2017) programme defines the main principles and objectives that are required for maintaining physical and mental health at a workplace. <https://www.mindbank.info/item/1489>

The objective is to reduce risks that represent a threat to safety and health of employees as absence from work and the costs of medical treatment and rehabilitation are much greater than any investment in development of occupational safety and health. Prevention is the only option for avoiding accidents at work and occupational diseases.

A further objective is to ensure that occupational safety and health development contributes – through the improvement of working conditions – to greater productivity, competitiveness and carrying capacity of society, as well as to the preservation of a high-quality workforce through the implementation of the following measures:

- introduction of an explicit set of values relating to safety and health of employers and employees
- long-term preservation of physical, mental and psychosocial well-being
- continuous development of professional knowledge
- focus on primary prevention
- improvement of the general health of the workforce
- promotion of voluntary compliance by employers and employees in line with legal requirements
- introduction of new preventive methods beyond existing official measures

IV. ANALYSIS AND ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION

The increase in the risks affecting employees is the consequence of the expansion in employment, the appearance of new business models and forms of employment, and a lack of experience on the part of individuals returning to the labour market. The growth in the economy and production, and the impact of increased burdens on workers, has led to an increase in the number of accidents at the workplace, including fatal accidents at work and occupational diseases.

In total, 20,088 accidents at work with more than three calendar days' absence from work were reported in Hungary in 2015, 84 of which were fatal. These figures are relatively high compared to the improving tendency of recent decades. In 2015, a further 77 mining accidents occurred at work, 2 of which were fatal. Therefore the total number of work-related accidents is 21,165 registered by the relevant occupational safety and health authorities, 86 of which were fatal.

Over the recent period, an upturn in the economy has primarily been seen in the industry. Risks of accidents are high in this sector, which, unfortunately, is also reflected in the number of accidents at work. Most accidents at work occur in the processing industry, transportation, warehousing and retail sectors. The lack or inoperability of safety equipment used to prevent mechanical hazards, the lack of or failure to wear personal protective equipment and a deficiency in occupational safety and health knowledge are the most frequent causes of accidents.

Keeping objective statistics on work-related accidents can be difficult as employers do not always report accidents resulting in more than three days of absence from work. The main reasons are the attempted avoidance of sanctions, administrative negligence, a lack of knowledge of legal regulations and unclear employment conditions.

Following the year 2012 when the number of work accidents was the least in recent years, the number of fatal accidents at work has begun to rise. Since its expansion, the construction industry, the most risky sector, requires more attention in this period. Behind the accidents, there are a lack of protective equipment and occupational safety and health knowledge, as well as a lack of discipline.

Activities involving elevated psychological stress represent an increasing proportion of accidents at work, and absence from work due to psychosocial factors is also occurring more frequently. According to international research data, the ratio has reached 50-60%⁴.

In 2015, 277 cases of occupational diseases and poisoning were recorded in total. This figure is also higher than the previous year rate and 68.2% of the cases lead to work incapacity. The number of registered increased exposure cases⁵ also increased the previous year. There are still few reported occupational diseases caused by physical and ergonomic factors. The numbers of reported cases of work-related musculoskeletal disorders and health damage caused by increased psychological exposure at the workplace are also significantly under-represented. One of the possible reasons for this low occurrence is that occupational diseases resulting from the application of modern technologies (e.g. rapid increases in the number of jobs involving the use of a computer monitor) or caused by psychosocial factors that attract more and more attention are not recognised and therefore not reported. Development of diagnostics of diseases arising from these new risks is of key importance.

Most increased exposure cases occur due to lack of awareness of the risk factors, or the inadequacies in engineering control or personal protection. During work involving the use of hazardous materials, mandatory biological monitoring is often neglected. Recognition of increased exposure cases on time and introduction of adequate measures by the employer will reduce or eliminate the exposure.

Numerous measures have been introduced in recent years to reduce the administrative burden of occupational safety and health (e.g. reduction and simplification of occupational safety and health documentation, removal of requirements to supply data). These measures do not result in any positive effects on their own.

The prevention of accidents at work and occupational diseases is important for the entire national economy as adequate conditions in the workplace are not expected to carry negative consequences or additional costs. It is a natural and fundamental common social and individual interest to ensure that employees are able to work under safe and healthy conditions.

⁴ **European Agency for Safety and Health at Work**, 2000. Research on work-related stress (p. 29.)
<http://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/reports/203/view>

⁵ **Act XCIII of 1993 on Labour Safety, Section 87. 1/E** *Increased exposure: any concentration in the body of an employee above the biological limit values in the case of biological exposure at work provided for in the Decree on the Chemical Safety of Workplaces relating to expected biological exposure indices during the performance of work or while engaged in an occupation, and in connection with noise, a 30 dB hearing impairment in both ears at 4000 Hz.*

On average, 4,000 people receive accident allowance from the Health Insurance Fund each day. The State spends approximately HUF 10 billion a year on accident-related services, which also includes in-kind benefits.⁶

Any investment in an appropriate occupational safety and health strategy and practices, primarily by the State and employers, will generate multiple returns, so the only acceptable approach is an investment in prevention. Investments in safety and health at work have been shown to generate return of 2.2.⁷

According to statistical data, Hungary performs well in occupational safety in an EU comparison. While there are on average 1,500 accidents for 100,000 employees involving at least four days of absence from work in Europe, the respective figure in Hungary is only 511. Although the number of accidents in Hungary is only one third of the figure calculated against the number of employees when compared across the EU, the ratio of fatal accidents is worse: while 1.44 cases are fatal per 100,000 employees across Europe, the respective figure in Hungary is 1.6, which puts us in the middle band for the EU.

On the basis of experiences of the authorities⁸, irregularities in occupational safety and health were found at more than 80% of inspected employers. The ratio of employers inspected annually is barely reaches 2% due to the large number of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises operating in Hungary.

In order to increase the level of safety at work, reduce the number of accidents, prevent the occurrence of occupational diseases, and to preserve and increase Hungary's competitiveness, the following tasks have to be enforced with the purpose of fostering the improvement of working conditions.

V. TASKS

1. Developing the competitiveness of enterprises

1.1. Supporting introduction of free online tools to be used to carry out occupational safety and health tasks

Assistance for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises in the development of working conditions with a view to increasing competitiveness.

The ability of small and medium-sized enterprises to apply effective and efficient risk prevention measures is a key objective in the current strategy of the European Union.

⁶ <http://www.asz.hu/jelentes/1111/jelentes-a-munkaugyi-es-munkavedelmi-ellenorzes-rendszerenek-ertekeleserol/1111j000.pdf>

⁷ https://osha.europa.eu/hu/topics/good-osh-is-good-for-business/index_html

⁸ <http://www.ommf.gov.hu>

1.2. Encouraging the development of an effective occupational safety and health management system

The management system covers the organisational structure, planning activities and responsibilities, established practices, and procedures, processes and resources required for the development, implementation, execution, review and maintenance of the employer's (organisation's) safety and health policy.

1.3. Communication of good practices and promotion of adoption

Enterprises often share their occupational safety and health development results with one another. The spread of information on such practices through conferences, publications and in the press or online help smaller, less experienced or start-up enterprises to develop their own working conditions.

1.4. Developing a concept for accident insurance within the scope of social security

In line with certain components of social security, a detailed proposal for the introduction of a separate accident insurance branch can form the basis of an effective employer incentive system for the development of working conditions to reduce the occurrence of work-related accidents and occupational diseases.

2. Maintaining the working capacity of employees

2.1. Reducing absence from work as a result of psychosocial risks

The incidence of accidents at work and occupational diseases can be reduced by encouraging research focusing on the recognition, prevention and reduction (resolving) of psycho-social risks, and by publishing results and elaborating methods that are useful for employers, as well as by sharing good practices.

2.2. Encouraging research to determine work-related musculoskeletal disorders and work-related cancer, and promoting research results

Any research aimed at identifying exposure caused by carcinogenic agents (hazardous materials and mixtures, as well as physical factors) and by work-related musculoskeletal disorders, as well as causes of death due to cancer, must be encouraged and the results must be shared more broadly.

2.3. Encouraging and supporting the elaboration of new methods of ergonomics

In order to maintain working capacity, because of the increasing number of working years and the new types of exposures emerging as a result of technological advancement it is indispensable to reduce the harmful effect on health. In addition, existing known and elaborated methods must be published and disseminated.

3. Occupational safety and health training and education

3.1. Elaborating a mandatory further training system for occupational safety and health professionals

Effective prevention depends on the timeliness and quality of knowledge of professionals, and so information must be maintained and developed continuously. Professional occupational safety and health tasks must be performed to high-quality standards in line with changes in legal regulations and technological development.

In view of all this, a mandatory regular further training system must be put in place for (already qualified) occupational safety and health professionals by ensuring that successful participation in the further training is a requirement for the continuation of their employment.

This relates to further development and the establishment of the service providers' database, envisaged according to Paragraph 5.4 of "Research, development".

3.2. Expanding knowledge on safety and health and chemical safety at work in education

The objective is to develop a prevention-aware approach. Support materials for occupational safety and health training and education must be developed for every sector, including every professions.

In addition to professional materials, the teachers and experts delivering the training must be supported with methodologies, guidelines and supplementary materials to enable them to perform their work on the basis of sufficient knowledge ("Train the trainer!").

3.3. Reducing occupational risks affecting employees of vulnerable groups and employees working in atypical types of employment

Preparation of information on safe and healthy working conditions for young and aging employees, women, employees of altered working capacity, occasional workers, public workers, and teleworkers, and distribution of these materials to the respective workers. It relates to Paragraph 5.3. of Research and development.

4. Information, communication

4.1. Preparing information and publications promoting safe and healthy employment

The State's role as a service provider must be enhanced through the preparation of guidelines for improving working conditions and publications aimed at raising awareness. These educational materials must be formulated using easily comprehensible language and effectively distributed to entrepreneurs (e.g. online, through the press or conferences) to help them ensure the work they provide does not endanger safety and health, and to acquire the knowledge necessary to become an employer and prevent the occurrence of accidents at work or occupational diseases as a result of insufficient knowledge or information (i.e. preparation of guidelines and publications to raise awareness).

4.2. Regular distribution of timely and professional information targeted at micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, with the involvement of the public information system of occupational safety and health

Monitoring of changes in legal regulations and safety rules and disseminate this information as broadly as possible. Frequently asked questions must be published regularly and guidelines also need to be distributed (e.g. online, through the press and via conferences). The information delivery and educational activities of the occupational safety and health authority must be developed to suit the specific needs of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises.

4.3. Supporting the publication of research results relating to occupational safety and health

Knowledge and information must be shared at conferences, through the press or publications and electronically in order to distribute the latest research results to entrepreneurs.

5. Occupational safety and health research and development

5.1. Statistical data collection and development of the information base

In order to facilitate evidence-based policy decisions, it is important to collect reliable, timely and comparable statistical data on accidents at work, occupational diseases and exposure to risks at the workplace, as well as to analyse costs and benefits relating to occupational safety and health.

National and EU statistical experts must cooperate more closely. The objective is to clarify the process of data collection for the European Statistics on Accidents at Work (ESAW): to improve coverage, reliability, comparability and timeliness. In addition, a solution must be found to improve the ratio of occupational diseases that are reported.

5.2. Encouraging research on the impacts of climate change on employees

Definition and analysis of future potential health damage (diseases) affecting employees directly or indirectly as a consequence of climate change.

5.3. Coping with the increasing average age of employees and analysis of the impact of newly emerging risks

Due to demographic changes, a solution must be found to the challenge of preserving the physical and mental health of older employees. The use of new chemicals, dissemination of new technological solutions, and the risks affecting employees of altered working ability and other vulnerable groups require special attention and a targeted approach.

5.4. Establishing a database of occupational safety and health service providers

A reliable database can help employers achieve more effective and easier decision-making. The data content may be enhanced by also taking into account aspects that indicate the quality of the service.

5.5. Establishing a database of occupational health service providers

A database of occupational health service providers can also help employers make better choices. The content may also be enhanced by also incorporating indicators of service quality.

5.6. Improving the professional and operational conditions of the integrated occupational safety and health authority

Effective performance of public tasks needs to be supported in order to allow the authority to effectively contribute to the elaboration of a legal framework that is in line with developments in employment and to monitor the results achieved. The authority should provide information and advice to employers and employees, occupational safety and health representatives and interest groups to enable them to exercise their rights and perform their obligations in relation to occupational safety and health, and in order to take the most appropriate measures to correct any inadequacies experienced.

5.7. Developing cooperation among organisations interested in maintaining safe and healthy working conditions and lawful employment

Cooperation between the occupational safety and health authority and other **partner authorities** should be enhanced to develop consistent interpretation procedures and achieve effective prevention.

Cooperation between the occupational safety and health authority and **local representative bodies** must be developed. There is an increasing need in society to expand the activities of authorities to the provision of occupational safety and health advice and information, whereby collaboration with bodies representing local interest groups can improve efficiency.

Collaboration between the occupational safety and health authority and **international occupational safety and health organisations** must be improved. There is international demand across the EU as well as in Hungary for the more effective coordination of efforts to manage safety and health issues at work and for participation in international organisations (ILO, WHO, OECD).

5.8. Introduction and development of a risk-based inspection strategy

Inspections by the occupational safety and health authority reach relatively few enterprises, so employers often gain from continued failure to comply with regulations. During inspections conducted in the key sectors, occupational safety and health authority often finds that the occupational safety and health situation of enterprises pursuing similar activities within the same sector is very different. The elaboration and introduction of a risk-based inspection strategy similar to that already applied by a number of authorities and economic operators would contribute to more effective utilisation of existing resources and more efficient operation of the occupational safety and health authority.

The authority's database of employers must be developed as the basis for a classification system of risks at work for use in the potential future creation of an accident insurance branch.

5.9. Complex evaluation of all 24 directives comprising Hungarian legislation on occupational safety and health and simplification of existing laws and regulations

The objective is to reduce the administrative burden of entrepreneurs, to identify potential simplification options and to establish consistent occupational safety and health regulations through public consultations held with interested parties.

Summary

Future economic development depends a great deal on economic potential, comprising of key factors such as safe and healthy working conditions, and the health and qualifications of the employees performing the work.

With the successful implementation of the tasks defined in the NOSHP and the increased role of the State, working conditions can be improved, work-related accidents and occupational diseases can be prevented, and Hungary can also become more competitive.