

Safety and health in micro and small enterprises in the EU: the view from the workplace

European Risk Observatory

Report

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Foreword

Micro and small enterprises (MSEs) form the backbone of the European Union economy and are seen as a key driver of economic growth, innovation, employment and social integration. About half of the European workforce is employed in MSEs, and effective occupational safety and health (OSH) management in MSEs is essential to ensure both the wellbeing of workers and the long-term economic survival of these enterprises. Statistics and studies show, however, that the safety and health of many workers employed in MSEs is poorly protected and that ensuring good OSH management in MSEs remains a significant challenge. This problem is acknowledged in the Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2014-2020, adopted by the European Commission, which identifies enhancing the capacity of MSEs to put in place effective and efficient risk prevention measures as one of the key strategic objectives for safety and health at work.

Responding to the existing gap in OSH requirements and workplace practice, EU-OSHA launched a wide-ranging, three-year project (2014-2017) with the overall aim of identifying key success factors in terms of policies, strategies and practical solutions to improve OSH in MSEs in Europe. The project, commissioned from a group of researchers constituting the Safe Small and Micro Enterprises (SESAME) consortium, has three main objectives. It will provide evidence-based support for policy recommendations, contributing to the current discussions on the regulation of OSH in Europe with regard to small enterprises. Moreover, it will identify workplace-level good practices in ensuring good OSH management, and will facilitate further development of existing or new practical tools, including the Online interactive Risk Assessment (OiRA) tool. Finally, the findings will inform future research aiming to expand knowledge on the determinants of good OSH in MSEs operating in dynamically changing economies.

This report presents findings from the second phase of the project, which explored OSH attitudes and practices in MSEs through 362 in-depth interviews with both workers and owner-managers of small companies across nine EU Member States, with a special focus on sectors such as construction, manufacturing, agriculture, hotels, restaurants and catering, retail/wholesale, transport, and health care. The implications of those attitudes will be further addressed in the final phase of the project, which aims to support policy recommendations and describe good practice in facilitating better OSH in the most vulnerable MSEs. Those results will be published and disseminated by EU-OSHA in 2018.



Christa Sedlatschek

Director

Executive summary

This report presents the findings of a qualitative study of understandings and experiences of occupational safety and health (OSH) in 162 cases of micro and small firms selected from a range of economic sectors in nine EU Member States. Its aim was to present a 'view from the workplace' by exploring experiences and understandings of OSH within micro and small enterprises (MSEs) and the influence of contexts in which they are situated. The previous review of the literature in the Safe Small and Micro Enterprises (SESAME) project indicated that this work environment contains a set of particular risks that are largely the product of socio-economic features of these workplaces and determined by a constellation of factors within and around them that create their risk profile (EU-OSHA 2016). Building on these findings, the present study was designed to investigate and capture perspectives of both owner-managers and their workers in MSEs in ways that would allow comparison of important and influential contexts within which their enterprises were situated.

In relation to national contexts, Member States were grouped according to a number of features that previous work has indicated they have in common and which act as determinants of the ways in which OSH arrangements are made and organised at the workplace level (EU-OSHA 2013). These include, for example:

- the regulatory character and administration of OSH provisions and institutional arrangements for the surveillance of compliance;
- the labour relations systems, their historical development and the power of the actors within them;
- the nature of the economy, the spread of productive activities and services, the relative size of the public and private sectors, and economic policies; and
- the systems and policies for social welfare.

At least one country was chosen from each of the resulting clusters from which to select our cases, as shown below, where the countries chosen are indicated in bold:

1. *Western EU*: **Belgium, Germany**, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Austria;
2. *Northern EU*: **Denmark**, Finland and **Sweden**;
3. **United Kingdom (UK)** and Ireland;
4. *Southern/Latin EU*: Greece, Spain, **France, Italy**, Cyprus, Malta and Portugal;
5. *Central and Eastern EU*: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, **Estonia**, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, **Romania**, Slovenia and Slovakia.

The cases were also chosen from within seven broad sectors of economic activity in which MSEs are particularly prevalent: agriculture; manufacturing; construction; wholesale and retail trade; transport; accommodation and food services; and human health and social work. These are, of course, all large and varied areas of activity and the qualitative sample was not intended to be representative of their full diversity. The areas in which the case study establishments were operating within these broad sectors included:

- agriculture: crop and animal production, forestry;
- manufacturing: manufacture of metal, food, wood, chemical, paper and textile products;
- construction: construction of buildings and specialised activities;
- wholesale and retail trade: wholesale trade; maintenance and repair of motor vehicles; retail sale of pharmaceutical and medical goods, and of new goods in specialised stores;
- transport: haulage and freight;
- accommodation and food service activities;
- human health and social work: care provision for adults and children, dental and other clinical provision, and provision of training and activities.

Selection of examples of MSEs of different sizes from within these areas nevertheless allowed some sector-level comparative analyses.

Each case study involved visits to the participating company and interviews with the owner-manager and a worker, as well as observations of the activities of the enterprise. In this way, a rich body of qualitative empirical data was gathered concerning the awareness, practice and experience of arrangements for OSH in MSEs and the contexts in which they occur, and what acts to determine them, across the range of different sectors, size bands, business practices and national regulatory and economic settings in the EU. Analysis was undertaken

comparatively, to draw out understandings of the relations of OSH at the workplace level and the influence upon them of key features of business practice, size, sector, and national regulatory and socio-economic contexts.

Findings

The findings drew attention to features of the style and character of national regulatory regimes for OSH management and the extent of their focus on MSEs in the countries studied, along with the role, availability and competence of OSH services, information and training provision for owner-managers and workers in MSEs, and the labour relations contexts in which OSH is managed in MSEs, both in the narrow sense of provisions for workplace representation and consultation of workers on OSH, and more generally in terms of the wider labour relations structures, procedures and practices in the wider contexts inhabited by MSEs. They also considered the influence of features of national systems for social protection, health and welfare in relation to workers in MSEs, as well as those of the wider national political and economic structure and climate and the effects on OSH of the position of MSEs within the structure and organisation of work and labour markets in the country.

It was clear that national regulatory regimes, OSH systems and the institutions and processes of labour relations, although broadly similar in EU Member States, differ sufficiently to be an important influence on the way things were done on OSH in MSEs. Despite the differences, however, testimonies from owner-managers and workers indicate that a common refrain among MSEs in all Member States was the extent to which owner-managers especially felt themselves, in one way or another, not particularly well served by many of the arrangements made for the governance and support of OSH in their countries.

The cases from the seven sectors studied were a diverse and heterogeneous group. This, of course, was expected given the findings of the literature review (EU-OSHA 2016). However, issues of access meant it included a greater proportion of MSEs that were well-established businesses, with growing or stable, mostly permanently employed, workforces, than might be expected in the population as a whole. A significant proportion of them had also been able to mitigate the competition they faced by offering high-quality goods and services in niche markets and attracting business on the basis of their reputation, as opposed to having to compete solely on price. This kind of profile was not unexpected, given the well-recognised difficulties of reaching and including 'low road'¹ MSEs in research of this nature. Nevertheless, some MSEs taking a low road approach were included in the sample.

The analysis suggested many cross-sectoral similarities, with findings common to MSEs in more than one, and often all, sectors, as well as some differences between sectors. For the most part, there was some risk awareness among the respondents in the participating MSEs. However, longer latency and less visible risks, in particular psychosocial risks, were much less well recognised than more acute and visible physical risks. Psychosocial risks were much more widely recognised in Member States where their regulatory inclusion and enforcement had a higher profile. In addition, the management and workforce respondents from the MSEs in the human health and social work sector, in particular, were more likely than those in other sectors to recognise the psychosocial risks associated with their work. Despite this recognition, however, there was little evidence of any systematic attempt to assess or mitigate these risks. Rather, they were seen by many as inherent to the job, and so as something to be accepted and borne. This tendency, to see what were often the most common risks to which workers were exposed as inherent in the job, was one that was apparent, to a greater or lesser extent, in all of the sectors studied, and applied to acute, physical risks and sometimes also to those related to workload, work intensity and working hours. Wherever this was the case, owner-managers and workers generally considered such risks to be unavoidable and best approached with 'common sense'. This was a term that the respondents frequently used in relation to their approach to workplace hazards more generally, reflecting the widespread informality and individualisation around OSH in our sample. Recognition of complex causation in relation to accidents was rare among our respondents. More commonly, there was a tendency towards individualisation and responsabilisation, both in relation to incidents and in terms of OSH more widely, and this was common across all sectors.

Levels of formalised OSH routines (written risk assessments, OSH policy documents and so on), therefore, were generally low among the sample. In addition, there were many MSEs in which written risk assessments did exist but were rarely used in practice. Rather, they were produced in order to comply with a legislative requirement and were not seen as an OSH management tool. Relatedly, therefore, examples of systematic

¹ Low road MSEs are those MSEs that adopt well-recognised bundles of organisational and business strategies that increase pressure on wages, working conditions and so on in the fight for the survival of their business.

OSH management were rare. In addition, however, there was a size effect, with levels of formalisation and systematicity decreasing with enterprise size. This also reflected the fact that the smaller firms in the sample had fewer resources (managerial, temporal, financial, expertise and so on) at their disposal than the larger firms, and as a result were on the whole more vulnerable both in a business sense and in terms of OSH. While this was common across sectors, it was also apparent that more formal and systematic approaches were more frequently found, across all MSE sizes, in higher risk sectors (such as construction and transport). This was the case, in particular, in sectors (such as construction) in which Member States also imposed sector-specific regulation which explicitly required elements of such approaches, often through the supply chain. These findings are, of course, consistent with widely recognised effects of size and sector on OSH-related practices and approaches in MSEs.

A number of the participating MSEs used external service providers for support with OSH. The level at which this occurred varied by Member State, and reflected national requirements. However, there were also clear differences in the ways these services approached their task and/or were used by the owner-managers of MSEs, both of which were important for the extent to which they influenced OSH. In some instances, in particular those where the use of such services was mandatory and the regulatory context was perceived as being more punitive than supportive, there was a tendency for services to be perceived as offering a 'minimum necessary for compliance' approach. In these circumstances, it was also common for owner-managers to regard OSH as the responsibility of the external service and so have little direct involvement with it — having, in effect, contracted this responsibility out — with the result that compliance was often limited to completion of paperwork. At the same time, there were instances where external services provided much more extensive support, with OSH improved above the minimum level necessary for compliance. For the most part, this was dependent on the owner-manager taking an interest and becoming actively involved in OSH.

Similarly, there were few instances of formal arrangements for worker participation in OSH within the participating MSEs. In some cases, workforce size thresholds at which these were applicable were defined by regulation. In addition, it was clear that national industrial relations traditions, arrangements and contexts (such as union density and collective bargaining) were influential, with arrangements much more common in countries with a long and strong participative tradition combined with comparatively high union density. Here again there was some sector variation, with levels of formal arrangements particularly low in sectors, such as agriculture, in which industrial relations traditions were least well developed and trade union density lower, in comparison with, for example, manufacturing. However, in a number of instances across the sectors, both management and worker respondents suggested that workers were reluctant to get involved in OSH in this way. This was clearly related to enterprise size, with many indicating that formal arrangements were unnecessary given the good social relations and open and informal communication within their workplace. And good social relations and informal communication were widely reported among the participating MSEs in all sectors. As a result, meetings were generally rare, and those with OSH on the agenda even more so. However, here again, there was some variation by sector, with OSH more regularly included in team meetings in high-risk sectors such as manufacturing and construction (for the latter, there was again a link with sector-specific legislation here).

In terms of drivers for OSH, regulatory context was clearly important. Inevitably, this varied by country and sector. At a national level, inspection frequency and the extent to which inspections were seen as a source of support and/or a potential source of punitive sanctions varied with the traditions of the Member State. Seeing inspections as supportive, therefore, was much more common in countries such as Denmark and Sweden, while they were more likely to be seen as punitive in Member States such as Romania. In addition, though, there were some important sector-level differences. The likelihood of a visit from the labour inspectorate varied, at least in some countries, depending on the inspectorates' current risk prioritisation inspection strategy. As a general rule, businesses in higher risk sectors were more commonly visited than those in lower risk sectors.

In addition, however, inspection by sector-specific bodies, which often determined companies' continued licence to operate, was often indirectly influential over OSH. For example, measures required of businesses in the food services and human health and social work sectors that are designed to protect clients are often also, in practice, protective of workers. Furthermore, these inspections (which some of the respondents struggled to distinguish from those related to OSH) may also have the effect of raising owner-managers' awareness of the need for compliance more generally.

Some of the participating companies were part of wider organisational groups and, where this was the case, their OSH arrangements were often influenced by their parent companies. In these instances, parent companies sometimes 'rolled out' OSH management systems and procedures to their subsidiaries and inspected their compliance with them, as well as providing OSH knowledge, expertise and support. However, there were also

examples of a negative impact, such as when parent organisations or trustees (in the case of human health and social work) refused to allow MSEs' managers to invest in OSH.

Similarly, supply chain influences on OSH could be both positive (for example where clients required certain OSH standards or suppliers provided OSH information) and negative (such as when clients' demands led to tight deadlines). Here sector differences were also apparent, with influences seemingly relatively limited in, for example, agriculture, but rather stronger in areas such as transport and construction (for construction, this was sometimes related to sector-specific legislation, as indicated above). Relatedly, OSH certification was an important driver in some sectors (again, sectors such as construction and transport), particularly those where supply chain influences were strong and MSE owner-managers felt obliged to invest in such schemes simply to allow their firm to compete for business. Individual characteristics and the attitude of the owner-manager more generally, of course, were of particular importance as an OSH driver — something that was consistent across countries and sectors and reflects the findings of many other studies (EU-OSHA 2016).

Many of the interviewed owner-managers expressed the strong desire to keep their workers safe, often referring to them as 'family' (in some cases this was literally the case, but for many it was figurative). Other owner-managers suggested a rather more pragmatic motivation, explaining that poor OSH outcomes were costly, as workers needed to take time off work and productivity could be reduced. For many, the reality was a mix of both these factors. However, where owner-managers took an interest in OSH and instigated a participative, inclusive and open approach, OSH arrangements, practices, awareness and so on were generally more in evidence and seemed to be more integrated into day-to-day process, practices and procedures. In some cases, this was in part related to the position of owner-manager (for example, those that were involved in production processes were sometimes better able to appreciate their workers' day-to-day experiences and to hear and take on board their concerns and suggestions). However, it was also closely related to their capacity and resources.

It was clear that some owner-managers had ambitions for the growth of their businesses, but many preferred to stay as an MSE, feeling that if their company became too big it could become difficult for them to maintain control of daily operations. Many also actively sought to maintain committed and loyal workers, as well as others with possibilities for development. These approaches can be related to the close spatial and social proximity between owner-manager and workers in MSEs as well as to the identity of the owner-managers. Hence, during the research, often owner-managers of MSEs were found who were trying to embark on one form or another of a 'high road'² strategy for their business. However, while many aimed for this, they were not always successful, as they faced pressure from the market and competitors to adapt to the demands of customers, for example by working longer hours, often for reduced reward. This pressure led them to try to reduce costs not directly related to their core business functions. The consequence of this was that they felt obliged to pass this burden on to their workers in terms of their wages, their employment security or their working hours, as well as choosing not to devote time and resources to topics such as OSH, which they believed to be outside their core business interests. Thus, many owner-managers were caught between these two different positions: the desire to pursue a high road strategy and the mechanisms forcing them towards a low road strategy.

In short then, for most owner-managers in MSEs OSH was a minor issue compared with other issues that occupied their attention. For many, the most important consideration was that it should not interfere with the core business activities necessary to secure the survival of the firm. Accordingly, it was typically not regarded as a key managerial issue or given much attention. In this respect it was similar to other issues that are often perceived to be secondary to core business activities in MSEs, such as training and human resource management in general, and it also helped explain how the process of risk shifting took place in these work situations, with workers increasingly shouldering this burden.

Making sense of the findings

Although the sample of workplaces was inevitably biased towards the 'better' end of the experience of work in MSEs, the data it gathered nevertheless broadly support the conclusions that emerged from the review of previous research. That is, it suggested that work in a significant proportion of MSEs can be understood in terms of the experience of social and economic inequality in the distribution of risks to safety and health in the processes of production and services in the EU economy. The findings confirmed that MSEs are indeed a

² High road implies the opposite of low road and refers to MSEs that enjoy a high growth success, such as the so-called gazelle companies, but also, more generally, small businesses that are able to invest in skills and innovation in ways that act to support their growth and business success.

heterogeneous group, more so than larger companies, but it also suggested some broad commonalities. While generalisations concerning positive or negative OSH outcomes in relation to MSEs and the contexts they inhabit remain somewhat perilous, our study shows that a typology accentuating common features and differences according to size, sector, business practice and nationality is both possible and useful. Individual MSEs seldom feature all characteristics associated with each ideal type in such a classification, but it remains helpful in understanding how to address various common OSH issues in MSEs.

Such typologies were developed to help understand the rich and diverse set of findings revealed in the case studies. They were classified by business practice, size, sector and national context. From their business practices emerged a set of generic types of MSE, which are referred to as 'learners', 'reactors' and 'avoiders'. Our field studies demonstrated a number of obvious reasons why, for example, some MSE owner-managers have a proactive approach to OSH and some even see it as part of their business model. They are strongly influenced by a constellation of factors embraced by the economic and business position of their organisation, the education and skills of the owner-manager and workers, and the risk awareness and capacities of both, as well as the visibility of the firm to regulators and other external influences. As a result, these MSEs are able to deliver the economic success stories predicted for them by many EU economic policy-makers. However, others fell into categories that current and previous researchers have labelled 'avoiders', while others would be seen, at best, as 'reactors'. It was explored how and why these firms often pursued low road strategies in their approach to economic survival, where achieving best practice in relation to OSH is unlikely to be a business priority. Thus, they existed largely beyond the reach not only of voluntary support to better themselves and their business in terms of OSH, but sometimes also beyond the reach of regulatory agencies. From the differences of size in the sample emerge distinctions between the behaviours of micro enterprises, with fewer than 10 employees, smaller small enterprises, with 10-19 employees, and larger small enterprises, with 20-49 employees. These differences were seen to be further overlain in our sample by those that are sector specific; for example, characteristics of some sectors, such as agriculture or construction, were evident as the determinants of particular behaviours among MSEs that distinguished them from those in other sectors, such as accommodation and food services versus transport, that were of similar size or followed similar business practices. All of this was further influenced by features of behaviour clearly determined by the regulatory, economic or labour relations environment inhabited by the cases studied in different Member States. Taken together, therefore, our typologies offer some useful ways to think about the determinants of practice on OSH in MSEs and to pose questions concerning the supports necessary to improve this practice, questions that take some account of the contexts in which the harm experienced by workers in these firms occurs.

Reflections

There are a number of points of reflection that have arisen from the investigation of experiences and perceptions of OSH in the MSEs studied. The comparative findings reveal some remarkable similarities across national and sectoral boundaries. In particular, they demonstrate the pivotal role of the owner-manager's influence in the social and economic relations of OSH in MSEs and relate these to a focus on the business practices they feel obliged to adopt and prioritise in order to compete effectively in the wider economic contexts in which MSEs are embedded. It is clear from the many cases, and from the findings of previous studies, that OSH seldom receives a high priority in owner-managers' strategies to meet these demands. One of the principal ways in which the contradictions of (often only dimly perceived) regulatory requirements on OSH and strategies to prioritise productivity in business practice are reconciled is through the process of responsabilisation for OSH in the social relations that underpin the production of the business. In this way workers take on responsibility for using their 'common sense' in adopting work practices to get things done in ways that meet the demands of business production but are perceived to be 'safe' regardless of what regulatory provisions or professional understandings of OSH management might require.

In such scenarios, it is usually only when things go wrong and injuries or ill-health result that the requirements of regulation or wider good practice are found to have been breached and, in such cases, it is the workers' actions that are often the proximal cause of the breach. While the MSE's setting and its business context help to drive this process of responsabilisation, the process itself is not new and it has been described many times when the social relations of workplace injury have been studied from a sociological perspective in other situations, including those found in larger organisations. However, in MSEs, their business vulnerabilities in modern economic contexts, and the insecurity of employment within them, along with the often low levels of knowledge concerning OSH among both workers and their managers, have helped to promote the adoption of these positions by the owner-managers and workers studied.

Indeed, this might cause us to reflect on whether or not trying to understand 'what works' in supporting OSH in small firms through undertaking research along the lines presented here is entirely successful in addressing the problem of inequality in the distribution of work-related risk, for such inequalities are shared by a host of forms of work in which MSEs often feature prominently and which have in common precariousness, insecurity and general inaccessibility to both regulatory inspection and voluntary forms of support for OSH. Moreover, it is probable that such situations lie outside the reach of mainstream of OSH strategies at both national and EU levels. However, as the present research has found, while large-scale survey data might suggest such scenarios to be increasingly common, in the main they lie beyond approaches such as the ones presented here to researching OSH in MSEs.

While, as has been argued, it is to some extent possible to assess the implications of findings from the more accessible 'better case' scenarios that have been the majority of cases studied, this is not an entirely satisfactory way of understanding what actually occurs in the situations that lie beyond the reach of conventional research methods. Moreover, the growth and continuation of such situations over quite a long period has helped give rise to a level of societal acceptance of them, which in turn has acted to support the 'normalisation' of further patterns of insecurity and non-standard forms of employment, along with their negative effects on the health, safety and welfare of the workers involved with them.

Such patterns in the organisation of work and the protections afforded to workers have occurred at the same time as other changes, noted in sociological studies of work and employment in the current era, such as those of atomisation, individualisation and responsabilisation within workplaces, which serve to place greater responsibility for safety and health not on those whose business activities create risks, but on those who are obliged to work with such risks. Indeed, even among the better case scenarios, which form a large proportion of cases on which this report has been based, the majority often do not perceive OSH as something that has to be addressed specifically through its management in ways defined by statute. As has repeatedly been observed, the effect of this approach means that risks tend to be experienced by those who work with them and responsibility for their avoidance is also assumed by such workers, rather than by those that the regulatory system indicates to be responsible — their employers. Arguably, such forms of 'participation' have further increased the vulnerability of some workers, since they also contribute to the assumption of risk and its consequences becoming increasingly individualised — and assumed (often disproportionately so) by vulnerable individuals.

There are two further points of reflection that arise from this. The first concerns the nature of 'participation' of workers in OSH in MSEs. It is evident that arrangements for formal representative participation in our cases were rare and, in most cases, entirely absent. While this is understandable, in as far as it is well known that representative participation on OSH is unlikely in such informal settings, it means that such participation that did occur was direct and individualised. However, the true nature of this participation, its drivers and what determined its quality were far more difficult to discern. Given this, and the issues of individualism and responsabilisation alluded to in previous paragraphs, and in the absence of autonomy associated with representative participation, the need to really understand what is going on in workplace relations is important if a truly informed understanding of what works, for whom and in what contexts is to be achieved concerning OSH in MSEs.

This leads to the second point of reflection, which concerns the way such participation and the processes and relations that help to determine it were studied. In the discussion of the findings, previous sociological literature that has to some extent explored the issues that surround the assumption of responsibilities for work-related risks by the workers who experience them was pointed to. This work was found to be useful in seeking deeper insights into some of the qualitative experiences that have been related in the interviews with workers and their managers in the cases studied. However, as was also concluded from the review of OSH literature, there is a relative dearth of such study in relation to workers in MSEs. While the approach to qualitative research on OSH in MSEs is thought to have enabled our findings to be somewhat more representative of the workers' standpoint than much of previous research on OSH in MSEs, it is acknowledged that the methods were really not sufficiently sociologically or ethnographically detailed to have explored these issues in the depth required. More focused, sociologically informed, qualitative research would be useful in enhancing better understandings of these processes and contexts that determine the perceptions and practices of OSH in MSEs.

In the report that follows, therefore, endeavours were made to make sense of a very rich set of empirical findings from a large number of cases of OSH practices in MSEs from nine EU countries that were visited during the course of the fieldwork. In so doing, the limitations inherent in applying these aims to such a heterogeneous group should be borne in mind. The challenge of making sense of key elements of comparability in relation to

OSH practices and outcomes across MSEs has been alluded to, while at the same time the heterogeneity of the same enterprises has been acknowledged. It was also attempted to contextualise these elements of comparability in relation to the socio-economic contexts in which they are situated. There are of course dangers of reductionism in all of this. Despite these caveats and qualifications, however, it is thought that the typologies created, as well as the broad understandings presented of the socio-economic and regulatory contexts in which they occur, and of the processes that help determine the actions that are taken by both workers and owner-managers on OSH in MSEs, help to situate the findings in relation to previous studies and generally contribute to improved understandings across all these areas. At the same time, they are thought to offer some useful pointers for policies and strategies to help support MSEs in addressing the weaknesses in OSH arrangements to which they relate. In this respect, the research outlined in this report and the conclusions presented here provide the groundwork for both the analysis of strategies and tools to support MSEs (EU-OSHA 2017a, b), as well as the reflections made in the final report on the whole project (EU-OSHA 2018).

Introduction

In 2014, the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) commissioned an international consortium of researchers to undertake a project on safety and health in micro and small enterprises (MSEs) in the European Union (EU). The project, known as SESAME (Safe Small and Micro Enterprises), was carried out in three separate but inter-related studies:

1. a review of the literature presenting an up-to-date understanding of existing knowledge on the contexts of and arrangements for occupational safety and health (OSH) in MSEs in the EU;
2. an investigation of the understandings and experiences of OSH of both owner-managers and workers working in MSEs;
3. an analysis of good practice and experiences of policies, strategies, instruments and tools to support good OSH practice in MSEs.

The findings of the first and third of these studies are described in detail elsewhere (EU-OSHA 2016, 2017a, b). In addition, the project's final report draws together the main findings of all three studies, reflecting on their implications both for existing knowledge and future research, and for policy on OSH in MSEs (EU-OSHA 2018).

This report presents and discusses the findings of the second study of the SESAME project: the investigation of the understandings and experiences of those working in MSEs. This Introduction serves to provide a brief outline of the background to the study and its place within the wider SESAME project. This is followed by a description of the key aims of the study and the approach taken to meeting them. The chapter closes with an outline of the structure of the report.

Background

Like most national governments of EU Member States, the European Commission (EC) considers small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs — that is, those with fewer than 250 employees) and entrepreneurship to be 'key to ensuring economic growth, innovation, job creation and social integration'³. In recognition of their importance, in 1983 the European Parliament began a series of initiatives, which continue to this day, aimed at encouraging their development in the EU⁴. This is perhaps not surprising when it is considered that SMEs represent about 99 % of all enterprises, employ about two-thirds of those working and contribute over half of gross value added in the EU-28⁵. Within this group, it is micro (those with fewer than 10 employees) and small (those with 10-49 employees) enterprises that make up the largest proportion in terms of both numbers of enterprises and employment (see, for example, the figures for enterprises in the non-financial business sector of the EU-28 in 2015 shown in Table 1).

Table 1 SMEs and large enterprises: number of enterprises, employment and value added in the non-financial business sector of the EU-28 in 2015

| | Micro | Small | Medium | SMEs | Large | Total |
|----------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------------|
| Enterprises (number) | 21,356,252 | 1,378,702 | 224,647 | 22,959,600 | 44,458 | 23,004,059 |
| % | 92.8 | 6.0 | 1.0 | 99.8 | 0.2 | 100 |
| Persons employed (number) | 40,057,408 | 27,503,428 | 23,170,352 | 90,731,192 | 45,168,732 | 135,899,904 |
| % | 29.5 | 20.2 | 17.0 | 66.8 | 33.2 | 100 |
| Value added (EUR billion) | 1,453,926 | 1,233,270 | 1,250,907 | 3,938,103 | 2,923,873 | 6,861,976 |
| % | 21.2 | 18.0 | 18.2 | 57.4 | 42.6 | 100 |

³ ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Statistics_on_small_and_medium-sized_enterprises

⁴ http://www.europarl.europa.eu/facts_2004/4_14_0_en.htm

⁵ ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Statistics_on_small_and_medium-sized_enterprises

Note: The non-financial business sector consists of all sectors of the economies of the EU-28 or Member States, except for financial services, government services, education, health, arts and culture, agriculture, forestry and fishing. Source: European Commission 2016, p. 77.

Numerically, and indeed politically and socially, therefore, smaller enterprises are hugely significant within the EU. However, the economic restructuring that has taken place across the EU (as well as further afield) over recent decades adds further to their present significance. One of the main features of this restructuring has been the increased prominence afforded in business strategies to the role of outsourcing. Processes and activities once carried out by a single organisation are now frequently distributed among multiple, mainly smaller, enterprises. This in turn has led to the increased importance of value chains in business relations. The contribution of MSEs to the economy of the EU, therefore, is much more complex than simply their large number, the proportion of workers they employ or the value they add. Although it is considerably harder to quantify, the contribution of MSEs to supporting the performance of, and therefore also the levels of employment and value added by, larger organisations is hugely significant. In addition, and of particular salience for the whole SESAME project, as well as having implications for the size of enterprises in which people work, economic restructuring of this kind has had profound and well-recognised effects on the ways in which people are employed and their work is organised, as well as on their working conditions and labour relations — all of which have very significant implications for their work-related health, safety and wellbeing (see, for example, Quinlan and Bohle 2008; Quinlan et al. 2001).

It was against this backdrop that the first study of the SESAME project, the review of the existing literature on the nature and experience of safety and health at work in MSEs in the EU, was carried out (EU-OSHA 2016). Its key findings included the following:

- A substantial proportion of MSEs employ 'low road strategies' to their economic and business survival. These are development strategies characterised by increased pressure on wages, working conditions and so on (in contrast to the 'high road' approach, which focuses on investment and innovation). This is the result of the linkage between bundles of organisational and business strategies and the multifaceted limitations on resources available to MSEs. The many workers that are employed in these enterprises are most likely to experience poorer working conditions, lower job quality and proportionally greater risks to their health, safety and wellbeing.
- The occurrence of serious injuries and fatalities is proportionally greater in smaller firms than in larger ones. In addition, there is good reason for concern about the arrangements for safety and health in a substantial proportion of micro and small firms. These concerns apply, to a greater or lesser degree, across all EU Member States.
- There are a set of socio-economic and regulatory factors that act in concert to raise the risks to safety and health experienced by workers in a substantial proportion of smaller firms to levels greater than those experienced in larger enterprises in comparable sectors. Reasons for poor uptake of arrangements for managing OSH in these enterprises include:
 - the weak economic position of many MSEs and the low investment they are able to make in OSH infrastructure;
 - the limited knowledge, awareness and competence of their owner-managers in relation to both OSH and its regulatory requirements;
 - their limited capacity to manage their affairs systematically; and
 - their attitudes and priorities, given the limited resources at their disposal and their concerns for the economic survival of their business, in which OSH has a low profile.
- The general and multifaceted lack of resources for OSH experienced in many MSEs is embedded in wider social, economic, regulatory and labour relations contexts and in the structures and business relations in which MSEs are situated. Further, there is a heterogeneity among MSEs, in terms of their institutional variety, and the varieties of experience within them — in particular, the often very different experience of workers from that of their employers.
- In relation to the regulation of OSH in MSEs, engagement is generally limited and compliance weak, although the heterogeneity of MSEs makes for a mixed picture. However, there is a greater prevalence of non-compliance among the many MSEs that pursue low road survival strategies, and among which exposures that are harmful for workers' safety and health are likely to be disproportionately experienced.

As these main findings suggest, the review also identified a number of gaps in the existing literature and made recommendations about future research to address them. Two of these in particular have informed the approach taken in the study described in this report. First, the review recommended that:

- *more balanced attention should be given to workers and owner-managers in the establishments studied and the economic, business and regulatory environments in which they are situated and which determine the nature of arrangements made for OSH and their outcomes in MSEs.* (EU-OSHA 2016, p. 119)

Second, it suggested that:

- *opportunities to explore differences in the national determinants of OSH practice and outcomes should be explored with comparative studies of selected EU Member States that are representative of different national contexts.* (EU-OSHA 2016, p. 119)

Aims of the study

Taking all of the above as its starting point, the aim of the study presented in this report was therefore to present a view from the workplace by exploring experiences and understandings of OSH within MSEs. Building on the findings of the literature review (EU-OSHA 2016), the study was designed to try to capture the perspectives of *both* owner-managers *and* their workers. In addition, it was carried out in ways that would allow comparison of important and influential contexts within which enterprises operate. Previous work has suggested that these function at a number of levels both nationally and sectorally.

In relation to national contexts, in addition to possessing unique features of their own, the 28 Member States of the EU have a number of features in common. Many of these features can be used to group clusters of Member States that have something in common. This comparative approach has been used in a number of settings, including for research focused on OSH (EU-OSHA 2013). Of course, it needs to be borne in mind that such groupings are necessarily broad and, as such, the 'fit' of individual Member States within them inevitably varies and is never entirely complete. Nevertheless, this kind of clustering has been successfully applied when seeking to identify sets of features that act as determinants of the ways in which OSH arrangements are made and organised at the workplace level (EU-OSHA 2013). These features include, for example:

- the regulatory character and administration of OSH provisions and institutional arrangements for the surveillance of compliance;
- the labour relations systems, their historical development and the power of the actors within them;
- the nature of the economy, the spread of productive activities and services, the relative size of the public and private sectors, and economic policies; and
- the systems and policies for social welfare.

Following the rationale of this earlier work (EU-OSHA 2013), we have again grouped the EU-28 into five clusters:

1. *Western EU:* **Belgium, Germany**, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Austria;
2. *Northern EU:* **Denmark**, Finland and **Sweden**;
3. *United Kingdom (UK) and Ireland*;
4. *Southern/Latin EU:* Greece, Spain, **France, Italy**, Cyprus, Malta and Portugal;
5. *Central and Eastern EU:* Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, **Estonia**, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, **Romania**, Slovenia and Slovakia.

From each of these clusters, we chose to carry out our study in at least one country: these are indicated in bold in the list above. This allowed comparison of workplace OSH experiences and understandings in nine Member States representing the range of national contextual features known to be influential over OSH practice.

In addition to the national context, the sector in which MSEs operate has also been identified as strongly influential not only over the OSH risks and their consequences that workers in them experience, but also over the OSH arrangements made within them in relation to both acute physical and longer latency health and psychosocial risks (see EU-OSHA 2016 for a full discussion). This study, therefore, also focused on seven sectors in which MSEs are particularly prevalent: agriculture; manufacturing; construction; wholesale and retail trade; transport; accommodation and food services; and human health and social work. These are all large and

varied areas of activity and our qualitative sample was not intended to be representative of their full diversity. Rather, as we describe in more detail in Chapter 2, the sample was drawn from within this broad range to allow national- and sector-level comparative analyses. The areas in which the case study establishments were operating included:

- agriculture: crop and animal production, forestry;
- manufacturing: manufacture of metal, food, wood, chemical, paper and textile products;
- construction: construction of buildings and specialised activities;
- wholesale and retail trade: wholesale trade; maintenance and repair of motor vehicles; retail sale of pharmaceutical and medical goods, and of new goods in specialised stores;
- transportation: haulage and freight;
- accommodation and food service activities;
- human health and social work: care provision for adults and children, dental and other clinical provision, and provision of training and activities.

The aim of this study, therefore, was to explore the experience of workers and owner-managers in a number of cases of MSEs operating in these sectors from the nine Member States identified above. In so doing, the intention has been to capture, in a comparative way, experiences of safety and health at work and what determines them at the level of the workplace, in order to help inform the consideration of strategies to support improved arrangements and outcomes for OSH in these settings. As we explain in more detail in Chapter 2, each case study involved researchers visiting the participating company to interview the owner-manager and a worker, with this approach to sampling allowing both national- and sector-level analyses, as well as an overarching analysis of the data. In total, 162 MSEs took part in the study.

The structure of this report

This report is presented in three parts. Following this Introduction, Part 1 comprises two chapters. The first of these provides a brief outline of the relevant regulatory frameworks in place and the various socio-economic circumstances in the Member States that were the focus of the study. This, of course, is intended not to be a comprehensive account of these matters in each Member State, but rather to give sufficient explanatory detail of the contexts within which the MSEs that took part in the study were operating. Chapter 2 summarises the methodological approach taken to the research.

As Chapter 2 describes, the study's analyses were carried out at three levels. First, the data from within each of the nine Member States that were the focus of the study were considered at the national level. These findings are presented in a series of national reports written by the teams of our international consortium of researchers. Second, the data were considered within each of the seven sectors studied (this is presented in Part 2 of the report). Third, a comparative and overarching analysis was carried out based on both these national- and sectoral-level analyses (Part 3 of the present report).

Parts 2 and 3 of this report, therefore, present the analysis of findings from our cases by sector and in a comparative way, to draw out understandings of the relations of OSH at the workplace level that are useful in both explaining the strengths and limits of current preventive actions as well as informing the development of future ones. Part 2 of the report therefore opens with a brief introduction outlining the key features of the sectoral analysis, including its scope and limitations. This is followed by seven chapters focusing on the findings of the study within each of the seven sectors. This part of the report concludes with a chapter that briefly summarises those findings.

Finally, Part 3 draws all of the work together in three concluding chapters. The first of these chapters presents some key comparative understandings from the fieldwork and introduces a set of typologies of MSEs that are explored in more detail in the following chapter. The final chapter draws some conclusions and considers their implications both for future research and for policies and supports for OSH in MSEs.

Part 1: National contexts and research methods

In this first part of the report, we present something of the national contexts from which the cases of MSEs on which the fieldwork focuses were selected, and the methods used to gather and analyse the qualitative data from these enterprises on which the report is based. This is organised into two chapters.

In the first of these, national regulatory regimes for OSH management and the extent of their focus on MSEs are explored, including the role of the regulatory authorities in seeking compliance. This provides part of the picture of support for OSH in MSEs, while the chapter also discusses the different forms of OSH services and the role these play in providing OSH support for MSEs. National support from training and access to information are also explored and some key aspects of the labour relations contexts in which all this takes place are also compared between the Member States in the study. In addition, some comparison is made of features of social protection, health and welfare systems in relation to workers in MSEs in the different countries. The chapter further acknowledges, in a comparative way, the importance of the wider national political and economic structure and climate and the position of MSEs within the structure and organisation of work and labour markets in the country.

In Chapter 2 the methods employed to collect and analyse the qualitative data on the cases are described. The chapter therefore gives an account of sampling strategies used, the fieldwork and the approach to data analysis.

1 Relevant national contexts

1.1 Introduction

As noted in the Introduction, the review of the literature that formed the first study of the SESAME project highlighted the significance of the various contexts in which MSEs are situated to their OSH-related considerations, decisions and arrangements (EU-OSHA 2016). That is, the review indicated that there is a set of socio-economic and regulatory contexts which, together, are powerfully influential over MSEs' OSH arrangements and so over the risks to which those working in them are exposed. These include:

- the style and character of national regulatory regimes for OSH management and the extent of their focus on MSEs;
- the role, availability and competence of OSH services;
- information provision for MSEs;
- national, sector and local arrangements for training and skills qualification for owner-managers and workers in MSEs;
- the labour relations contexts of OSH in MSEs;
- features of social protection, health and welfare systems in relation to workers in MSEs;
- the wider national political and economic structure and climate; and
- the position of MSEs within the structure and organisation of work and labour markets in the country.

The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to outline something of these contexts within the Member States in which our case study establishments were operating. It is important to be clear that what follows is not intended to be a systematic account of the structures and practices that make up these contexts. We have reasoned that there is neither the room nor the need for such detail. Instead, what is presented here is indications of the similarities and differences between countries in the contextual situation of MSEs, which help to provide part of the explanation for different experiences of safety and health in MSEs. Further details of the information on which this chapter is based can be found in the national reports that were prepared for each country included in the study and which are published separately.

The chapter begins by exploring similarities and differences in national regulatory contexts, since, while regulation of OSH is an obvious feature of all EU Member States, there are some important differences between them in the ways in which OSH regulation relates to MSEs. While the regulation of OSH in MSEs is obviously an important influence on the experience of OSH in these establishments, it is by no means the only one. OSH regulation is supported by the national systems for OSH of which it is a part, and these infrastructures are critical to the delivery of its requirements. In this sense, for example, the role of services supporting OSH is important, and there are clear variations in national capacities to provide such services in the different countries studied. These include variations in national policy contexts that help determine the type of service provided and the economics of its operation, as well as in national regulatory requirements in relation to their support for OSH in MSEs specifically. In addition, the provision of information to MSEs to enable them to function effectively in relation to making arrangements for OSH is widely seen as critical, but here too there are substantial variations between countries in the extent and role of information provision within national strategies for OSH in MSEs. Similarly, it is equally widely recognised that the provision of OSH training and skills qualifications on OSH enhances capacities to deliver effective approaches to OSH. It is also the case that, for owner-managers and workers in MSEs, the requirement and incentive to receive training in order to acquire such skills is frequently not perceived as a priority or a sufficient driver in the operation of the wider business of the MSE. However, here too there are significant variations both between countries and between sectors in the nature of the provision offered and in the value attached to it.

Another major influence on OSH in MSEs is the framework of labour relations in which the MSE is situated. The chapter, therefore, goes on to consider something of the institutional features of labour relations in the countries studied. As we noted in the review of the literature that informed the present study (EU-OSHA 2016), the way in which MSEs are positioned in relation to these institutions is an important influence on how policies on OSH affect them. As we also argued in that review, the way in which labour relations within MSEs are constructed and operationalised is equally important. As is already clear from previous accounts, it is evident that there are important differences in these matters between MSEs and larger organisations, but similarities and differences between countries on these matters are also important to recognise, since they too influence the ways in which OSH requirements are operationalised in MSEs.

All these effects are operationalised within even wider contexts, including both those provided by the role and development of national systems for social protection, health and welfare and those of the wider economy in which the MSEs are embedded. There is no space in the present chapter to present a comparative account of either these systems or the influence of the wider economy in which MSEs are situated in the countries studied, but substantial details of these infrastructures and their influences are presented separately in the national reports. However, we do need to make a few observations concerning the role of these wider contexts in determining OSH experience, practice and outcomes.

By social protection, health and welfare systems we mean those structures, institutions and procedures that societies create to protect the liberty and livelihoods of citizens, as well as those put in place to look after their safety, security, health and wellbeing. Most of the countries in our study have passed through similar but by no means identical stages in their post-war development since the Second World War, in which different versions of welfare economies have been introduced and have evolved in parallel with the growing effects of globalisation and the adoption of neo-liberal political and economic policies, especially from the 1970s onwards. Among other things, the decades following the 1970s saw the state withdraw substantially from the delivery of services, and private business increasingly taking on this role on a for-profit basis. Protection of workers' rights, security of employment, access to benefits, health care provision and support for social welfare have all undergone significant and substantial alterations during this period. However, the societies in which these changes have taken place were far from identical in their provisions for social protection even before such changes occurred, and national institutions have responded to change with different degrees of resilience. Here is not the place to debate the literature concerning the effects of the so-called 'varieties of capitalism' (Hall and Soskice 2001) during recent decades. Nevertheless, it is clear that these changes have elements of both convergence and divergence in their impact on institutions of social protection, health and welfare, which anyway vary considerably between countries, according to the patterns of development of their provisions in the history of the countries concerned.

Thus, there are substantial differences in the extent to which these national systems can be said to take account of work-related safety and health matters, and, when they do, the extent to which establishment size influences the support they provide. There are also substantial and often related differences in the extent to which systems for health and welfare act as safety nets for workers who, for reasons determined by the nature of their employment, may not be able to access certain forms of work-related social, health and welfare benefits that in other situations may be accessed through employment. For example, the limited resources of small enterprises and especially of micro enterprises mean that they are often unable to offer much in the way of employment-related benefits of these kinds to their workers. However, for those workers in countries with robust systems for social protection and welfare, this may not be quite so significant as it is for those in countries where such systems are poorly developed.

As far as the influence of the wider economy and labour market is concerned, this is felt in many different ways by both owner-managers and workers in MSEs. In the review of the literature preceding this report (EU-OSHA 2016), several interconnected themes concerning the influence of structural and process-based dimensions of the wider economy and labour market were presented as influences on the ways in which OSH might be handled by MSEs. Such influences included, for example, the extent of the role of MSEs in the economy overall, patterns of employment in relation to MSEs, the role of MSEs in both the formal and the informal economy, business processes and relations between MSEs and purchasers of their products and services and the influence these have on how work is conducted within them, and so on. These themes were further overlain by the phenomenon of change in the ways in which the economy is structured, the ways in which it operates and in the extent to which it is successful or in crisis. Recent years have seen rapid and ongoing change in all these matters, with huge differences between countries in how they have been experienced. But in all countries MSEs have been at the heart of their cause and effect. The nature of their employment and business activities, as well as their success or otherwise, is dependent on and determined by constellations of the wider elements of the economies in which they are embedded and the ways in which these elements are involved in the processes of rapid change that are characteristic of advanced market economies now. These elements also affect the ways in which the regulation and labour relations of OSH are experienced in MSEs, as well as the ability of the wider OSH systems in place in different countries to operate with more or less effect in relation to MSEs. We cannot therefore overestimate the influence and effects of the national economic and labour market contexts in which MSEs operate in the countries studied.

In the following sections, therefore, we provide some comparative descriptive analysis of key elements of national contexts which may influence both the arrangements MSEs make for OSH and the nature of their outcomes. More details of this descriptive analysis for each of the Member States included in the study can be

found in the national reports that accompany this publication. As mentioned above, the intention of this chapter is not to provide a detailed and in-depth systematic description of all aspects of national context. Rather, it is to draw out some of the key similarities and differences between them in order to provide a contextual backdrop to the analyses presented in Parts 2 and 3 of this report.

1.2 National regulatory frameworks

There are two elements to the framework within which OSH in MSEs is regulated. One comprises the instruments of public regulation, while the other concerns their means of enforcement. Both were present in all the countries we studied. However, we need to acknowledge that this is something of an oversimplification because increasingly, these days, scholarship that addresses OSH regulation tends to take a broadened view of the meaning of the term and the contexts in which it is situated. It is usual to talk about ‘governance and regulation’ of OSH, in order to embrace both the policy and instruments of regulation and to take account of the multiplicity of regulatory actors and processes that nowadays all play a role in the ways in which work and its OSH conditions and environments are governed and regulated. This is in part an acknowledgement and reflection of the effects of changes that have occurred in the organisation and operation of national economies in response to the influence of globalisation. These wider conceptualisations are especially relevant in the case of MSEs, since, as we have argued elsewhere in our review of the relevant literature (see EU-OSHA 2016), they are embedded in a network of social and economic relations which have a regulatory effect on their activities and serve to govern what they can and cannot do to ensure their survival and success. It is also the case that regulatory authorities charged with ensuring compliance, which traditionally involves regulatory inspection, have increasingly recognised that the regulatory effects of these networks on the approaches to OSH in MSEs can be utilised by regulators to varying degrees to promote compliance. As a consequence, this often forms part of their own regulatory strategies alongside or in place of inspection.

Despite this somewhat complex scenario, at its core, the state still retains an overall responsibility for regulating OSH and therefore we outline the key elements of that role in the countries studied.

1.2.1 *The position of MSEs in the national plan for regulating and governing OSH*

In line with EU provisions, all of the Member States included in the present study have in place some kind of national plan or strategy for OSH. However, the extent to which explicit provision is made for the needs of MSEs within this strategy varies. For example, in Denmark the national OSH strategy in place to 2020 recognises the special needs of MSEs and mentions them explicitly. The political agreement says there are ‘many small enterprises in Denmark, and they may at times find it difficult to comprehend the vast number of rules and informative materials concerning occupational health and safety’ (Political agreement 2011, p. 3). However direct activities targeted at MSEs are limited in the political agreement, although there are a few, including the possibility of differentiation of fines; coordination of inspection between authorities; and labour inspection adjusted to MSEs (meaning providing them with more guidance than larger companies). Besides these activities, the main national programmes are based in the bipartite work environment councils, which cover specific sectors.

Elsewhere, in Estonia several national programmes have been launched by the Ministry of Social Affairs in order to support OSH management in SMEs. These have included, for example, the provision of training, toolkits for risk assessment, financial support for health surveillance and risk assessment, and a scheme to reward good practice.

In France, a tripartite body decides on the content of a National Occupational Health Plan, the current version of which runs until 2020 and is in its third iteration. It specifically defines a strategy of national OSH programmes concerning risk prevention in MSEs, including:

- the development of services targeted at MSEs to ensure the effectiveness of prevention arrangements;
- the assessment of each action taken by the prevention stakeholders.

The strategy also sets several main objectives, including:

- establishing a coordinated national actors' network of prevention services targeting MSEs;
- promoting prevention by improving the role of labour inspection and actions carried out by occupational health services;
- enhancing employee representation in companies and in the joint inter-professional regional committee; and
- through the constitution of coordinated networks of regional actors, instigating prevention actions in local areas with further partners including sector organisations.

In addition, the strategy involves the identification of priority sectors (road transport, restaurants, car repair, bricklaying), based on statistical evidence of increasing occupational accidents and diseases.

In Germany, there is a well-established national Joint German OSH Strategy (*Gemeinsame Deutsche Arbeitsschutzstrategie*, GDA), which is the responsibility of the National OSH Conference (*Nationale Arbeitsschutz Konferenz*, NAK). There are several OSH programmes directed at MSEs, as well as a number directed at companies of all sizes but popular among MSEs. Many of these courses focus on the improvement of management and risk assessment processes in enterprises. Since 2002, the New Quality of Work Initiative (*Initiative Neue Qualität der Arbeit*, INQA) has been active in promoting good OSH practice especially among MSEs through establishing specific networks and collaborations for, and with, the participation of small enterprises. This initiative has also supported the development and promotion of good practice tools for small enterprises. The current version of the GDA also promotes aids and guidelines for companies, including those on reducing psychosocial risks and integrating psychosocial risks into risk assessment. Again, these are not exclusive to MSEs.

In Italy, national strategies and programmes for prevention of accidents and occupational ill-health are developed by a cross-governmental Steering Committee and the Evaluation Committee for Active Policies, which is supported by the Italian Workers' Compensation Authority (*Istituto Nazionale Assicurazione Infortuni sul Lavoro*, INAIL).

In Romania, there are no OSH programmes solely targeting MSEs. Rather, MSEs are included in various programmes and campaigns with wider coverage, including those on risk assessment and OSH services.

Like Denmark (and other Scandinavian countries), Sweden has a strong tradition of social partnership between the institutions representing workers and their employers, which works in tandem with the government to provide an infrastructure and regulatory context for OSH. National policies on the work environment are agreed at this level and result in a variety of programmes that either are specifically directed towards MSEs or have been shown to be particularly useful for MSEs. For example, at the national level, in 1942, the social partners set up Prevent, a non-profit organisation jointly owned by the social partners with the objective of improving OSH at work. Services include training courses, books, a newsletter, checklists for risk assessments and much more. All material is developed in cooperation with researchers and the social partners. Although the services are directed towards establishments regardless of size, their work is especially valuable for smaller companies with limited resources for acquiring and developing OSH knowledge and practices on their own. Also significant in the Swedish context are the Regional Safety Representatives (RSRs), appointed by the trade unions to represent the workers in OSH matters. RSRs are financed partly publicly and partly by the trade unions. They visit MSEs where there is at least one employee who is a member of a trade union, but where there are no joint company safety arrangements. RSRs may ask for improvements, but cannot act as labour inspectors. The focus is on dialogue, and RSRs can act as local safety representatives if there is not one at the company. According to the Swedish Work Environment Authority (SWEA) (2016), RSRs performed about 56,000 company visits per year. Swedish researchers have pointed out that this is considerably more than those of either the SWEA or the OSH services. Finally, in recent years, the SWEA has performed several inspection and information campaigns aimed at MSEs in various sectors.

In the United Kingdom, a national OSH strategy is produced by the Health and Safety Commission, with the tripartite engagement of unions, employers' organisations and the state. It is largely implemented through the actions of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE, the regulatory inspectorate). One of the six 'strategic themes' of its current iteration is focused specifically on 'supporting small employers'. Interestingly, it focuses particularly on the role of supply chain relations, stating⁶:

⁶ <http://www.hse.gov.uk/strategy/supporting-small-employers.htm>

Reaching micro and small businesses can be difficult, but not impossible. Working together, much has already been done to help small businesses, but there are opportunities to work smarter. Already many large businesses and intermediaries have developed efficient supply chains and productive relationships by working with and supporting small businesses.

1.2.2 Statutory measures

Process-based arrangements in relation to safety and health are central to national regulatory means to improve preventive approaches to OSH both within the EU and further afield. In all the countries in the present study (and indeed, in all Member States of the EU), the regulatory requirements framing responsibilities for OSH are currently of this type. They identify the responsibility for OSH as lying with the employer, and further require employees to cooperate with employers to enable the latter to discharge these responsibilities. They have the systematic identification, assessment and control of risks at their core, and emphasise the importance of ensuring that a participatory approach is taken towards processes involved in undertaking identification, assessment and control of work-related risks to safety and health. Regulatory scholars have long identified the development of these features of OSH regulation as involving a shift from prescriptive to process-based standards — a trend originating in Scandinavian countries and the United Kingdom in the late 1960s and early 1970s, spreading to other north-west European countries and eventually forming the basis of EU regulatory strategies on OSH embraced by EU Framework Directive 89/391/EEC and applying across all the Member States of the EU.

This means, of course, that the framework of law represented by EU Directive 89/391/EEC and its various individual daughter OSH Directives has been transposed into national law by all EU Member States, although in many of them a range of quite different approaches applied previously. This in turn, has meant that the introduction of the regulatory framework set by EU OSH Directives was experienced very differently across EU Member States. More comprehensive adaptation processes were triggered, for example, in those countries, such as Belgium, Germany and Italy, in which a very different tradition of OSH legislation existed from that which framed the development of the EU Directives, while in countries in Scandinavia and in the United Kingdom changes in existing legislation necessary to implement the Directives were less fundamental. Indeed, in the United Kingdom, the provisions of the EU Framework Directive were implemented through delegated legislation (the so-called ‘six-pack regulations’) without even the need to pass primary legislation, while in the Scandinavian countries there was debate concerning whether or not the EU legislation went as far as already existing national process-based standards of internal control. When revised legislation was introduced, it was to further these standards rather than those of EU provisions (Walters 2002a; Vogel 1998). In the eastern EU countries that had experienced political and economic changes following the demise of Soviet influence and their shift from controlled to market economies, entirely new legislative frameworks were required to implement the process-based approaches of the EU provisions (Gagliardi et al. 2012).

The result has varied in different countries too, and, while there is now a higher degree of harmonisation of the basic approach to OSH regulation between Member States than was previously the case, there are still numerous national differences both in legislative provisions and in practices. For example, while the requirement to assess risks is clear in all Member States, the level of its specificity in regulatory requirements varies between countries. In Belgium, all companies must set up a global prevention plan which sets out the results of risk assessments, goals for the next 5 years and the means for achieving these goals. Risk assessments must be carried out for every activity and workstation and must cover occupational safety, protection of workers’ health at work, psychosocial risks, occupational hygiene, ergonomics, improvement of the workplace and improvement of the internal environment related to these domains. In France, risk assessment must be documented in a single written document, identifying risk at every workstation and planning preventive measures. Since 2001, the identified risks have to be listed and prioritised in a written risk assessment document. The aim of this approach is to define a programme of prevention linked with the detected risks within the company in order to reduce accidents and occupational diseases. Its regular updating is also a legal obligation. However, in 2013, only 46 % of employers said that they had this document (DARES 2016). In addition, in some countries there are specific arrangements for MSEs in relation to risk assessment. For example, in Italy, owners of micro enterprises can write their own risk assessment report using a standardised and simplified document (except where there are ‘major risks’) or they can delegate this activity. The person responsible for the prevention and protection service can be either an employee or an external advisor. Similarly, in Romania, micro enterprise employers may take over OSH activities, if they have OSH training (of at least 40 hours’ duration), they work

frequently in the enterprise and the enterprise does not carry out activities specified as dangerous by the law. The same applies to small enterprises if the risks cannot lead to irreversible effects (deaths or invalidity). In Sweden, micro enterprises also have some exemptions from the requirements for systematic work environment management that are the basis of Swedish OSH regulation. For example, although risk analysis, action plans and instructions for hazardous work must be documented, policy documents, routines and the annual audit do not have to be documented.

As the national reports also elaborate, there are size-related differences in the legislation in other areas too. Thus, as we outline below, there are differences in requirements to provide for worker representation, with employers in very small enterprises in some countries not being required to put in place arrangements that apply in larger enterprises for safety committees, or in some cases, for the election of worker safety representatives. There are also size-related differences in the provisions that apply in relation to employers' duties to use prevention services or competent OSH specialists and, as indicated above, there are national differences in the scale of documented risk assessment required, in relation to both size and work activity. In all these cases, in general the smaller the enterprise, the less onerous the requirements of legislation that apply to them. It might be expected that these differences would have the effect of lessening the regulatory burden perceived to be borne by MSEs. However, as will be evident from the cases analysed in Parts 2 and 3 of the present report, it is not entirely clear that they actually made any difference in practice to how the activities to which they related were undertaken within MSEs in the countries where such measures differed. For example, while there are exemptions from arrangements for certain forms of worker representation or from using services for OSH services for MSEs in some countries but not in others, these forms of representation or occupational safety services were rarely found in the MSEs included in the study generally, even where their exemption from such requirements had not been made explicit. Moreover, such differences between countries also did not seem to relate to how the regulatory burden was perceived among the owner-managers in the cases studied. That is, where exemptions existed in national legislation they did not seem to lead to perceptions of a lower regulatory burden than where no such regulatory exemptions were made. As we discuss in Part 3, the evidence from the cases in fact suggested that influences on how owner-managers and workers in MSEs regarded regulation and how they perceived its effects on their own actions were somewhat more complex than explained by the mere content of the regulations.

A further issue with regard to the impact of process-based regulatory provisions on MSEs that is also raised in the literature (see EU-OSHA 2016) concerns the extent to which such an approach is really appropriate in situations in which OSH knowledge and competences may be limited and where the general capacity to manage the affairs of a business is also limited. This is, to a large extent, something that is size related and it is well established that many micro and small firms struggle with the knowledge and competences required to make arrangements to manage OSH in ways seemingly required by process-based regulation. Again, the literature reviewed previously makes it plain that a substantial proportion of owner-managers and workers in MSEs prefer to be told what to do when it comes to regulatory compliance and, as will emerge from the analysis of findings in Parts 2 and 3, this was also a recurring theme in many of the cases in the present study.

1.2.3 Achieving regulatory compliance

Legislation itself is only one part of the national regulatory framework. The influence of regulation is achieved in various ways, but traditionally a central means of ensuring its effects has been through administration of the law and the resourcing of the institutions responsible for doing so. Arguably, this includes the structures and processes with which statutory provisions, policies and institutional strategies are developed, implemented, operationalised and evaluated. Playing the key role in ensuring compliance in every Member State of the EU are regulatory inspectorates that are tasked with enforcing and monitoring compliance with the regulatory requirements on OSH — including in micro and small firms.

Such inspectorates are usually constituted in line with International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions such as Convention 81⁷ on Labour Inspection and Convention 129⁸, which applies to agriculture. These indicate that labour inspection should be organised as a system applying to all workplaces and covering a basic set of matters including the safety, health and welfare of workers. Labour inspectors should be trained and competent public officials in secure employment, under the control of a central state authority, and they should inspect workplaces

⁷ http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C081

⁸ http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C129

as thoroughly and often as necessary to ensure effective application of relevant legal provisions, which should be enforceable by inspectors in the course of their duties. And they should be present in numbers proportionate to the size of the economy and number of workplaces requiring supervision. Adequate penalties for breaching such provisions or obstructing inspection should be part of national regulation. Inspectors should also provide advice and guidance to employers and workers on compliance with the law and alert competent authorities when abuses are identified.

However, in practice, there are many different ways in which these core functions have evolved over the nearly 200 years since the first Factory Inspectors were appointed in the United Kingdom in 1833. As the national reports demonstrate, in many of the EU Member States in our study, the labour inspectorate has regulatory responsibilities not only for OSH but also for elements of the administration of labour law and social protection, including addressing illegal or undocumented work, as is the case in Belgium, Estonia, France and Romania. In others such as the United Kingdom, the regulatory inspectorate is solely concerned with OSH; and in others still, such as those in Scandinavian countries, the regulatory inspectorates are mainly concerned with OSH but also have some wider responsibilities. There are further complications. While in most Member States, in line with Convention 81, there is an inspectorate that is under the control of a central state authority, in others, such as Germany, a dual system operates in which there is both a state inspectorate and one administered by the organisations for employment-related social insurance. Here, public authorities on the one hand and the statutory accident insurance institutions on the other operate in tandem. On the state side, the first pillar of governmental stakeholders and public authorities is further divided between the Federal Government (national level) and the authorities of the 16 Federal States (*Länder*, regional level). The national parliament (Bundestag, Bundesrat) has the legislative competence in relation to OSH, and the Federal Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs (*Bundesministerium für Arbeits und Soziales*, BMAS) prepares laws, prepares and enacts ordinances and supervises authorities. The Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (*Bundesanstalt für Arbeitsschutz und Arbeitsmedizin*, BAuA) is a research and advisory body subordinated to the BMAS. The authorities of the 16 *Länder*, that is, their ministries and labour inspectorates, are responsible for the enforcement of law and labour inspections in their territory. The second pillar is made up of the sector-oriented statutory accident insurance institutions. These are constituted as self-governing bodies under public law (*Unfallversicherungsträger*) and are supervised by public authorities. Their mandate includes the prevention of work-related ill-health, which enables them to decide on their own prevention regulation, to run their own research centres and to inspect their member companies. Every company in Germany with one or more employees is obliged to be a member of an accident insurance scheme. The National OSH Conference (*Nationale Arbeitsschutz Konferenz*, NAK) is the top-level coordination body, which consists of representatives of the different parties and receives advice from the social partners. The NAK is responsible for the strategic steering and agenda setting of the GDA. The joint regional coordination bodies of the *Länder* and accident insurance institutions (*Gemeinsame Landesbezogene Stellen*) are responsible for agreements on joint programmes and inspection strategies.

Elsewhere, such as in Italy and the United Kingdom, there is a central state inspectorate but local or regional public health inspectors also have jurisdiction over many workplaces, the number of which may in fact be greater than those inspected by the central state authority. Moreover, in some countries the extent of regional autonomy complicates what actually constitutes 'the central state'. There is no space in this report to discuss the detail of the differences between the countries in the study on these matters. Nor do all such differences impinge on the practice of inspection in relation to MSEs. However, those that do are the subject of further discussion in the final report of the SESAME project (EU-OSHA 2018). For the purpose of the present report, therefore, we confine ourselves to noting that there were regulatory inspectorates resourced to different levels and administered somewhat differently in all the countries in the study. Although there is clearly considerable variation in the resourcing of inspectorates in the countries studied, there are no reliable published figures with which to make informed comparisons⁹.

Inspectorates in all countries are charged with the task of monitoring and achieving compliance with OSH regulation from *all* duty-holders, including those in MSEs. But it is evident from the national reports and in the findings presented in Part 2 of this report that, most commonly, participants in the cases of MSEs studied reported rarely, if ever, experiencing a visit from a regulatory inspector. Such a finding is not especially surprising. It is widely acknowledged that the ratio of inspectors to worksites is so disproportionate that the logistics of

⁹ Collection of national data in sufficient detail to make meaningful comparisons, while important, was beyond the brief of the present research. Figures available from the ILO contain insufficient detail to be useful in this respect and there would appear to be no other published comparative sources.

inspection are such that it is highly unlikely a micro enterprise would receive a routine proactive visit from an inspector, unless the risks of its activities drew it to the attention of the inspectorate. There were a few exceptions to this general rule among the countries in the study. One of note was found in Denmark, where the ratio of inspectors to workers and workplaces is relatively high, and where between 2005 and 2012 the labour inspectorate aimed to briefly visit all companies in the country as part of its compliance strategy, in order to identify those firms, sectors and risks on which it should concentrate future enforcement activities. Since then, however, regulatory inspection strategy has changed towards the use of risk-based inspections whereby enterprises carrying a higher risk are more likely to be inspected — a practice commonly found in other countries too. The inspections have also increasingly taken on a consultative role in providing guidance on possible solutions, especially for MSEs, on OSH matters (see EU-OSHA 2017a).

From the perspective of the present study, two observations are important in relation to national experiences of inspection and MSEs. The first is the widely acknowledged situation mentioned above where the proportion of inspectorate availability to number of worksites covered means that it is virtually impossible that all worksites could ever be inspected with anything like a meaningful regularity. Since the most diffuse and numerous of these worksites are likely to be MSEs, their numbers alone mean that they constitute a significant challenge to traditional approaches to regulation through inspection. The second important observation is that, for many (but not all) countries, resourcing of public authority regulatory inspection has reduced in recent decades, making the reach of approaches to compliance with regulation through inspection even more challenging.

Generally, an acknowledgement of the impossibility of undertaking regular inspection visits to all MSEs as a meaningful regulatory strategy within existing resource constraints has led regulatory inspectorates in EU Member States to seek to develop additional strategies to achieve a greater impact on so-called 'hard to reach' groups, included among which are many MSEs. These approaches are also discussed in detail in the final report of the SESAME project (EU-OSHA 2018). For our purposes here, it is important to note that inspectorates in the EU Member States we studied have all been to some degree concerned with how to deploy the resources available to them in ways that have the widest impact on achieving compliance. The methods they have adopted to do this are summarised by Walters (2016), and include many that do not use inspection as the first or main means of influencing the compliance behaviour of duty-holders. Rather, they focus on stimulation and promotional activities aimed at increasing the reach of messages about good practice with greater attention to circulation of advice and guidance, cascading messages to hard to reach duty-holders such as MSEs, by making more strategic use of peak organisations or targeting events in which such hard to reach groups or their representatives may be present, as well as going upstream in supply chains to target buyers of goods and services produced by MSEs, encouraging them to demand OSH compliance from their suppliers, and so on. As detailed in the national report on Estonia, for example, 'the role of Labour Inspectorate has changed and its focus has shifted on activities aimed at awareness-raising of employers and employees', rather than on prosecutions and punishment (Labour Inspectorate 2015). The Estonian Labour Inspectorate is thus active in dissemination, communication and information activities, organising information days on work environment and labour relations and training of work environment specialists and managers of MSEs. Dissemination of best practice is an ongoing activity, available on the Labour Inspectorate's website, for which MSEs are the main target group¹⁰. Targeted inspection campaigns based on previous evidence of non-compliance have started in the last year in the MSE-dominated construction sector, commerce, metallurgical industry, wood-processing industry, catering and transport. Based on work-related illness data, targeted campaigns are also to be aimed at the metallurgical industry, wood-processing industry, and agriculture and food production (Labour Inspectorate 2015).

As also noted in the Final Report (EU-OSHA 2018), critics of these practices have pointed out that, while they may be useful means of augmenting inspection practice, unlike the case with inspection itself, there is very little robust evaluation of their effectiveness (see, for example, Walters et al. 2011 and, more recently, Tombs 2017). Such critical analysis further points out that at a time of reduced resourcing for inspection and in a political context in which policies aim to reduce regulatory burdens, especially those on MSEs, there is a substantial risk that inspectorates will resort to these methods as *alternatives* to inspection as they struggle to do more with less. We have been unable to systematically study the extent of these practices in the countries included in the present research. However, as already noted, it is clear from the national reports, along with the analysis of the cases in Part 2 of this report, that participants in the present study did not experience regulatory inspections

¹⁰ <http://www.ti.ee/en/>

very frequently, even though many of them regarded the possibility as a significant influence on their compliance behaviour.

1.3 OSH services

One of the main forms of formal support for OSH compliance in the EU, beyond that of public regulation and its administration, is through prevention services that have skills and competences to assist and advise duty-holders in meeting their legal obligations (and indeed, going beyond them) in managing arrangements for OSH in their enterprises. However, the extent to which owner-managers and their workers in MSEs are either compelled or enabled to take advantage of such services, and how useful they are to them, are moot points, since both the nature of these services and the regulatory requirements to use them are strongly orientated towards the needs of larger enterprises. However, here too, as is presented in some detail in the national reports, there is considerable national variation in virtually all aspects of the nature and function of these services and in regulatory requirements for them, and therefore it is not surprising to also find much variation in their role in relation to the needs of OSH in MSEs.

1.3.1 *The variety of OSH services*

There is variety in the different kinds of OSH services in the EU and this makes for some difficulty in making national comparisons concerning their use by MSEs.

To begin with, a distinction can be made between 'internal' and 'external' services. Historically, the former were associated with large organisations with the resources to establish such a department within their corporate structure. Formerly heavily industrialised Member States also often have long-standing (and often size-related) regulatory measures requiring employers to use the services of occupational physicians, nurses or safety engineers. But even where no such provisions have existed, such as in the United Kingdom, historically large organisations and especially nationalised industries were often well served with OSH departments. There remains such a provision in some larger organisations in most of the countries studied, although for obvious reasons of resourcing they are unlikely to be present in MSEs.

External services have also enjoyed a fairly long history in some countries, where formerly there has been state funding available for such services or where, as is increasingly the case nowadays, regulatory provisions requiring their use help to support the market for these services. In addition, one of the major trends in the restructuring of work that has occurred over the past several decades has involved the downsizing and outsourcing of many of the functions formerly embraced within the corporate structures of large organisations, along with the privatisation of formerly nationalised industries and the shift from manufacturing and primary production to services. It is not surprising that this has led to an increased presence of external services, as they have been among the activities for which many formerly large organisations have sought to divest themselves of direct responsibility. Some such services are themselves quite large operations, while others are much smaller concerns that might even be characterised as MSEs themselves. Moreover, in some countries, such as the United Kingdom for example, where there has been little state regulation of the qualifications of the personnel of such services, there has been a substantial growth in 'consultants' operating in this market. The role these often very small and even self-employed actors play in relation to providing advice and support, especially to MSEs, is quite significant and has led to concerns being expressed concerning their competence. As a result, currently the United Kingdom regulator has a list of such operators who are deemed suitably qualified to provide a service and this is a practice also seen in some other countries — such as Romania for example.

Trade unions play a significant role in a related form of 'OSH service' present in a few of the countries studied. For example, as outlined above, in Sweden regional safety and health representatives are enabled by statutory requirements to visit and offer support on OSH to workers and employers in small firms in their area in which there is at least one trade union member. Researchers who have examined this system have repeatedly pointed out that this gives more access to help on OSH matters than is provided by either the regulator or the OSH services in this country, while evaluations have indicated that such support is more often than not regarded as useful and effective (Frick 2009). A similar provision, although not developed to the same extent, is found in Italy and there are some indications in the literature that this form of support is especially active in parts of northern Italy (Walters 2002a). In some of the other countries in the study there are also advice centres and sector-level organisations that are supported by trade unions or charitable bodies and provide help with OSH

advice to workers, including those in MSEs, but these are generally 'one-off' responses to particular local or sector conditions and so are not widespread.

Finally, as the national reports show, some employer organisations, sector organisations and employment-related insurance associations also provide MSEs with improved access to OSH services, either through their own provision or through links with private providers. One advantage of such arrangements may be that they allow the engagement of OSH prevention specialists, concerted actions involving other players and wider institutions, thus better guaranteeing their transfer and sustainability. Although there were relatively few examples of the experience of these forms of support among the cases studied, those that were identified were generally experienced positively, and this approach is explored further in the report on the design and implementation of OSH policies strategies programmes actions and support for MSEs (EU-OSHA 2017a, b).

Generally, therefore, the variety in the nature and quality of the preventive service support for OSH in MSEs means that care needs to be taken when comparing use between countries, since there are major national differences in what constitute 'prevention services'. As the following sub-section further demonstrates, there are also significant differences in the regulatory requirements addressing both them and their use in the countries studied.

1.3.2 Regulatory requirements for using OSH services and some examples of practice

In Belgium, in establishments with 20 or more employees, employers must appoint internal prevention advisors, while, in those with fewer than 20 employees, the employer can take on this role him- or herself. Among SMEs, unless the establishment is operating in a high-risk sector, prevention advisors are not obliged to undergo any training. In addition, however, all companies, regardless of size, must contract an external prevention service, which provides support in relation to risk management and occupational health.

In Denmark, there is no provision for the use of OSH services — this is completely voluntary. The only exemption is that labour inspectors are empowered to issue orders requiring the employer to use an OSH advisor, but as this provision is rarely used the coverage of such services for MSEs is very limited (Hasle et al. 2016).

In Estonia, OSH services provide advice to employers and workers, as well as safety and health training and counselling, and initiating OSH preventive and control actions. Services are available on a market basis and are 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 may provide OSH services and, according to this law, the statutory requirements are met if the employer acquires the services from any of the individual specialists. This means that multidisciplinary provision of OSH is not required (Martimo 2005). The tasks of occupational health professionals are listed in the Act. Relatively good information is available on the number of licensed occupational health professionals and OSH services active in Estonia, but less systematic information is available on how they are actually used by MSEs. However, a review of the involvement of enterprises in ensuring that employees undergo periodic health surveillance, as required by Estonian law, shows some reported improvement over the years between 2009 and 2015. Companies in which nobody received health surveillance amounted to one quarter (25.7 %) in 2015 (Statistics Estonia 2015a). Size of enterprise was significant, with micro enterprises representing the largest proportion (30 %) of the total number of enterprises where nobody received health surveillance in 2015. By contrast, among enterprises of 50-249 employees, only 10 % failed to provide health surveillance in 2015 (Statistics Estonia 2015a).

In France, as well as regular medical examinations by occupational physicians from occupational health services, all companies, regardless of size, may consult professionals in risk assessment and prevention belonging to occupational health services. However, from the national report it would appear that the experience of MSEs in this respect is somewhat mixed. Occupational health services were described as not being helpful for improving prevention in companies, even if compulsory medical visits were regularly made for individuals. Employers reported difficulties in communicating with them, as this quote from the manager of a residential care home for elderly people (operating in the human health and social work sector) indicates:

There are visits about every 2 years [for employees], he [the occupational doctor] does not come here. I made a request so that he could come here and help me to work on the risk assessment document. But, it is a bit difficult, there is a shortage of occupational doctors, etc. And so, I'm still waiting for an answer. (FR, manager, 5-9 employees)

In all companies in Germany, the employer is obliged to appoint an OSH specialist (*Sicherheitsfachkraft*, often abbreviated to Sifa, §5 of the Work Safety Law, *Arbeitssicherheitsgesetz*, ASiG) and an occupational physician (*Betriebsarzt*, §2 ASiG). In MSEs, they are usually contracted from external prevention service providers. They support the employer in carrying out risk assessment and in every aspect of prevention. Their annual service hours depend on the size and risk profile of the company. Some statutory accident insurance bodies also have medical and technical service departments (*Arbeitsmedizinische und Sicherheitstechnische Dienste*) which have prevention services under contract, helping member companies (including MSEs) to find qualified service providers. Some accident insurance bodies also have prevention service centres. Others have explored possibilities in the extent to which additional specialists, such as medical assistants, physiotherapists, ergonomists and psychologists, can take over single preventive tasks from occupational physicians (Kirsch 2015). Regulation 2 of the German Social Accident Insurance (*Betriebsärzte und Fachkräfte für Arbeitssicherheit*) already establishes additional prevention models for MSEs. In companies with up to 10 employees, the employer can participate in the Sector model (*Branchenbetreuung*). The Sector model includes free consultation provided by the service centres of the different accident insurance bodies. In companies with up to 50 employees, the employer can participate in the Employer model (*Unternehmermodell*). In the Employer model, employers must attend OSH training, which qualifies them to carry out certain OSH measures in the company. The employer may thus reduce the service hours of occupational physicians and safety specialists (whose services can still be requested when required).

In Italy, the use of external OSH expertise was reported to be frequent. As detailed in the national report, regular use of this support was reported in two-thirds of the Italian case study companies, through the provision of either temporary or long-term contractual arrangements. Temporary support typically included technical advice on risk identification and analysis, as well as 'one-off' events (such as an application to a specific OSH programme), while long-term contracts very often include legal responsibility as an external person responsible for the prevention and protection service (*Responsabile Servizio Prevenzione e Protezione*, RSPP).

In Romania, external OSH services are important because they are the main external support for many MSEs, working directly with them on a contractual basis. They have to be authorised by the Advisory Commission organised in central and territorial inspectorates, according to nominations made by the Ministry of Labour. In accordance with legal provisions (Law 319/2006¹¹), when a company does not have the capacity to carry out all OSH activities needed to fulfil its legal duties, (an) external service(s) shall be hired. It or they may take over the entire OSH activity or just those parts that the company cannot cover with internal resources (the responsibility remains with the owner in any case). MSEs do not usually have resources to use both internal and external support and most of them (although not all) transfer their OSH activity entirely to external services. The list of authorised services is published on the Labour Inspection website and is also available at the inspectorates' offices. It is not difficult to enter the market for external OSH services, so there is a lot of supply, but compared with the number of enterprises, there is still work for everyone and competition is minimal. Enterprises, especially MSEs, are often unable to assess the efficiency of the external service they use, or are not interested in doing so because, as the findings described in the national report indicate, some consider this collaboration purely a formality. With only few exceptions, most of the case study companies had contracted external services that were either in charge of all OSH activities or were only hired to do the risk assessment. The owner-managers interviewed said that they were told about the option to use external services when they registered their companies and authorised their activities at the inspectorates.

In Sweden, the use of external OSH expert services is not required by law but is agreed upon in the collective agreements between the social partners in some sectors. There is a comparatively well-developed market-based provision for OSH services, although it is considerably reduced from that which was provided when it received state funding from a work environment fund. The services include information on new rules, training courses for management and workers, and participation in safety rounds or inspections of the work environment together with concrete advice on how to adjust and improve the workplace or equipment. Previous studies have shown that MSEs mainly use medical services, such as health check-ups and services related to rehabilitation, with preventive services used to a much lesser extent. As indicated in the national report, six of the case study companies included in the present study bought in external support from private OSH consultants. This is approximately the same as the average affiliation of MSEs to occupational health services. Of these six, some have an agreement with a 'traditional' (from a Swedish perspective) OSH expert consultancy (occupational health service) that can offer a complete range of services from a safety engineer, physiotherapist or ergonomist, as well as in occupational hygiene and medicine. Others used experts with a narrower scope, and

¹¹ Law No 319/2006 on Safety and Health at Work of 14 July 2006, Romanian Official Journal, Part I No 646 of 26/07/2006.

sometimes several services for different issues, such as one consultant to keep track of changes in legislation and standards, and another to assist with fire safety.

In the United Kingdom, as noted above, historically there were no detailed regulatory provisions governing the use or competences of OSH services, although such services often existed, both within large organisations and independently. Although there have been no detailed studies, there are indications of considerable growth in market-based and fairly small-scale operations in this field, which has led to concerns about the quality of provision. As the national report suggests, one of the reasons for the greater use of external services among the participants of this study than might be expected from previous research may be related to protection against litigation increasingly sought by both public and private actors, since this is perceived (and indeed marketed) as one way in which duty-holders might protect themselves against the threat of such litigation. MSEs are particularly prone to this effect and the previously mentioned register of consultants set up by the regulatory body (HSE) following the recommendations of a public inquiry was intended to moderate the effects of unscrupulous marketing of these services to small enterprises.

1.3.3 OSH services and MSEs

As the material presented in the national reports demonstrates, although there is provision for a variety of preventive services for OSH in all the Member States in the study, there is considerable variation in the form and quality of this support and there are some significant issues with the level of support provided for OSH in MSEs. Some of these issues are structural, reflecting sector differences, differences in funding arrangements, the nature and size of providers and so on. Others concern the orientation of the services, which, although there are some exceptions, are in the main geared towards the needs of large organisations or high-risk concerns. As a consequence, in relation to MSEs, services are often resorted to in order to demonstrate adequate levels of compliance with minimum standards, such as on health checks or risk assessment. In some countries, there have been signs reported of unscrupulous business practices on the part of consultants who exploit MSE owner-managers' ignorance and fears of non-compliance, although this does not seem to be an issue in all countries. More commonly found in the cases reported in detail in the national reports, and in Part 2 of this report, are examples of personnel in OSH services not really understanding the needs of owner-managers in MSEs and therefore not addressing them adequately.

The cases would seem to indicate that there is room for an improved focus on the particular situation of MSEs in the strategies of support provided by prevention services. In this respect, the national reports provide some examples of the positive appreciation by owner-managers in MSEs of the engagement of prevention services. Often this appears to be the case where the prevention service functions as part of a wider network of support, such as where, for example, they are part of a concerted action involving other intermediaries and regulators, or where access to them is provided as an element of the services of employment-related insurance organisations, such as in Germany or France.

1.4 Information and training for OSH in MSEs

It is already well established in the literature on OSH in MSEs that access to information and training on OSH is among the key elements that enable owner-managers and their workers to engage effectively with making arrangements to deliver appropriate OSH performance. There is an extensive range of provision of both information and training in all of the countries studied. They are also often featured as aspects of national policies and programmes for OSH, and particularly to support the needs of MSEs. However, it is equally well established that access to OSH training is often problematic. Sometimes this is because such support is not available in sufficiently tailored a form to be regarded as helpful by its potential beneficiaries, but it is also quite often because owner-managers do not regard such information or training as enough of a priority to enable either themselves or their workers to make use of it. Nevertheless, in all of the countries in the study there were quite extensive and varied arrangements through which training and information could be accessed. Some examples are outlined in the following paragraphs.

1.4.1 National provision and experiences in the cases

While we will provide greater detail in Part 2, there were many examples from the cases we studied where there was experience of preventive services. In Belgium, for example, sources of OSH expertise included sector organisations (Joint Committees), which were mentioned by companies in the construction and food service (hotel, restaurant and catering, or Horeca) sectors. These federations offer sector-related information and training, with OSH receiving much attention. Employers indicated that they find them easily accessible, and directed at their sector-related needs. Even where OSH was not an important focus for training, such as in manufacturing, training provided through employers' federations was said to be useful in improving recipients' understandings of OSH. Managers who undertook such training said the contact with peers that took place during training allowed the informal exchange of experiences on how to deal with some issues, such as OSH. Similarly, when the companies studied belonged to a larger group of companies, sharing experience with the (safety) managers of other subsidiaries, who often work with similar products and in similar conditions, was also reported to be a useful source of information.

In Estonia, the main sources of information identified in the sample of cases of MSEs included a variety of training courses, the Labour Inspectorate (with free OSH consultations), agricultural advisors and external OSH consultants. Also, the National Institute for Health Development and a web portal administered by the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Health Board (www.tooelu.ee) were deemed important sources of information regarding OSH. A comprehensive OSH training programme for safety managers and senior managers at the 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. 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 of those who were interviewed in the current study had participated in this training programme and were positive about their experiences.

In France, several sources of information were mentioned by the owner-managers in the cases studied. These included the internet, trade journals and newsletters, professional networks and trade shows, but none were used frequently. Overall, owner-managers acquired their knowledge by searching on their own, being helped by internal experts or calling external providers. Sources were seen as being there in case support was needed, rather than something actively used to get regular information on OSH. None of the owner-managers reported having received training related to OSH management. They sometimes reported being trained to deal with specific risks while they had been employees themselves, but had not participated in OSH training as managers of their own companies.

In Germany, since 2002 the New Quality of Work Initiative (*Initiative Neue Qualität der Arbeit*, INQA) has been active in promoting good OSH practice among companies, and MSEs have been the focus of its activities. INQA started as a joint initiative of governmental OSH stakeholders, social insurance institutions, social partners and other interested parties, under the presidency of the BMAS and the advice of the BAuA. A specific feature of INQA's activities is that the initiative strives to bring OSH stakeholders and companies together. During the last 15 years, INQA has established specific network collaborations directed at, and with the participation of, small enterprises, such as Offensive Mittelstand, Offensive Gutes Bauen and Offensive Gesund Pflegen (Advance SMEs, Advance good construction, Advance health(y) care work). As noted above, INQA has also supported the development and promotion of good practice tools for small enterprises.

The GDA also promotes aids and guidelines for companies that are sometimes aimed at the owner-managers of MSEs, giving them self-explanatory tools for improving their OSH management. The GDA also promotes the national guideline for management systems and instruments which derive from it. Some of these are also popular among MSEs. Partners for the promotion of the management systems included the statutory accident insurance bodies and OSH authorities of the Federal States, which supported the implementation with different forms of incentives. In terms of our participants, more than half of the owner-managers interviewed in the fieldwork cases claimed to be actively gathering information on OSH. They said they read a lot to learn more about workplace safety and health and how to prevent accidents or work-related diseases. Several information sources were named in the interviews, including OSH specialists, the internet, authorities, the statutory accident insurance bodies, networks, newsletters and trade journals. Several owner-managers stated that they had gathered knowledge on sector-level regulation through their apprenticeships. This was especially so in the construction, wholesale and retail, and transport sectors. Several owner-managers said they participated in OSH training measures under the 'employer model' of which they were part and were therefore allowed to carry out risk assessment on their own. Trade-related vocational training was also perceived as a source of OSH

knowledge, as the following quotes from the owner manager of a road and sewage conduit construction firm (operating in the construction sector) and a worker in a car repair company (from the wholesale and retail trade sector) suggest:

When trained on the profession, you learn how to behave, wear PPE [personal protective equipment], not to stand under heavy loads, to use checklists. (DE, owner-manager, 10-19 employees)

You get instilled already in your vocational training that you should not touch the V-belt. You must not do that, of course, so you don't do it automatically. (DE, worker, 5-9 employees)

In Italy, according to its public pronouncements, INAIL provides information, training and assistance in the field of safety and health at work. This addresses production and occupational systems, risk prevention, prevention interventions and health surveillance. It promotes a participatory model involving the institutions, social partners, and other bodies and organisations operating in the field, and aims to foster, through training, information and funding, a substantial reduction of human and economic cost due to accidents at work and occupational diseases. However, the owner-managers of micro and small companies have difficulty acquiring in-depth knowledge of what they must do and not do for several reasons (for example lack of time, difficulty in understanding the legislation) (Micheli and Cagno 2010). In the cases in the present study, only one owner-manager reported having 'good knowledge' on what is required according to the regulations and two claimed to have 'moderate knowledge'. They had all proactively acquired knowledge from multiple sources, including advisors, employers' associations, sector-specific certificates, training courses, websites and magazines. However, the rest of the interviewed owner-managers perceived the available information as insufficient and, despite widespread use of external services for acquiring OSH knowledge, it seems there was little evidence of actual 'learning' from these advisors.

In Romania, external services provide some of the needed OSH information, most of it during the provision of training. Periodic training at work seemed to be the most common way to get OSH information in the MSEs studied. For workers this was, in general, their only source of OSH knowledge. While there is the usual range of national information providers represented by state agencies, sector organisations and external services, the fieldwork findings suggest acquiring information and OSH knowledge was a real problem in almost all the cases studied. Most of the interviewed owner-managers did very little to obtain OSH information, generally indicating that they had little time to spend on this task. They relied on their external service to provide information or on their own employee in charge of OSH (where there was one). However, many of the owner-managers were not able to describe what they discussed with their OSH services and when, or what training they had recently provided. The internet was mentioned by a minority of the respondents as a potential source of information, but, even among these, most could not provide an example of how they had used it. Further, there are many providers for specific OSH training, but not all MSEs have the money or the intention to attend a certified course.

In Denmark and Sweden, there was substantial provision for information and training by various major actors at state and sector levels as well as from OSH services and employer and trade union organisations, either independently or through bipartite arrangements. Practices of acquiring OSH knowledge varied between and within case study companies. Some respondents were keen to stay informed and actively subscribed to email newsletters, participated in training courses and seminars, and utilised their trade or professional networks. Others had a more reactive approach, either making sure that somebody else was responsible for keeping the MSE up to date, or not bothering at all. As one Swedish owner-manager of a restaurant (in the accommodation and food services activities sector) put it:

SWEA may be good in sending this kind of information but I wouldn't know, because I don't read it. You know, you read the things you are interested in, what feels relevant right now for me. (SE, owner-manager, 5-9 employees)

Overall, the SWEA was seen as having a limited role in the case study companies' pursuit of OSH knowledge. Rather, it was the trade and employers' associations, together with the trade unions, that emerged as important conveyors of OSH knowledge and information. In Denmark, there seemed to be a somewhat more positive appreciation of the Work Environment Authority in this respect. In Sweden, those companies with a contract with an external OSH consultant obtained regular OSH information and received OSH training courses as part of the contract. In both countries, some companies also subscribed to web-based services that notified them when new provisions were issued.

In short, it was clear from the interviews that OSH information and knowledge could be found in abundance in Denmark and Sweden. This seems, however, mainly to be accessed when a perceived need arises. The challenge for these MSEs was to find the time and also the financial resources to participate in information seminars and training courses and invest in tools and assistive equipment.

A similar pattern was found in the United Kingdom. Here there were a plethora of sources of information and training provision for OSH from similar national- and sector-level sources to those already mentioned for other countries. Despite this availability, however, the findings of previous research on OSH in MSEs show that the knowledge of owner-managers concerning OSH requirements is often actually quite limited (Fairman and Yapp 2005; Baldock et al. 2006; Levine et al. 2012). However, among the managers interviewed in the United Kingdom cases, the approach to searching for OSH information, referred to by virtually all of those interviewed, was simply that they would 'Google it'. This, of course, raises some questions about the quality and validity of the information they might come across. All these managers were able to recall and describe occasions when they had sought OSH knowledge. For them, as well as for those who used external expertise to support their OSH activities, sources of information also included:

- sector-specific regulators, publications and trade bodies (which often provided OSH information on their websites, in newsletters and bulletins and, in some cases, through a helpline);
- external human resources experts;
- attending external courses (either in person or online);
- local chambers of commerce (some of which also provide OSH support for an additional subscription);
- forums for small and private businesses;
- the OSH teams of parent organisations (which were often seen as both a resource and an auditor whose standards they had to meet);
- suppliers (such as training in relation to the use of particular machinery);
- the inspection and certification of equipment and/or the working environment (for example fire alarms).

The regulator's (HSE) website was also seen by many as a source of information, although several interviewees found it difficult to access the information they wanted through it and were frustrated by its lack of specificity. As one respondent from an asbestos survey and removal firm (operating in the construction sector) put it, with characteristic understatement:

That's my main gripe in terms of information. It could be just a bit more specific and just a bit more user-friendly. It's not always easy to find out what you want — what ticket, what risk assessment, what method am I supposed to be using? (UK, manager, <10 employees)

1.4.2 Availability, access and application: some conclusions

In summary, then, while there is considerable variety in the form and content of information provision and training on OSH in the countries studied, there would seem to be no shortage of this provision. However, there was a significant gap between the presence and availability of both information and training and its uptake and perceptions of its usefulness by owner-managers and their workers in MSEs in all of the countries studied. This finding confirms previous research in this respect. The testimony of owner-managers in the cases studied also points towards feelings of frustration with the insufficient specificity of information, in as far as a frequent criticism from owner-managers in a number of Member States was that, while it was possible to find both information and training on OSH, it was often not specific enough to the needs of the MSE to be really helpful. A second consideration, especially in relation to training, was its prohibitive cost, not only in relation to the actual cost of training courses but also because of the time lost to production that was involved in enabling either managers or key employees to undertake training on OSH. Finally, there were concerns expressed about paying for training, only to equip employees with qualifications that might enable them to find another job. This in turn also reflects the low priority afforded to OSH among the concerns of owner-managers in running their business. For many of the interviewees in the study, it was not a question of complete lack of knowledge concerning the existence of potentially useful information and training (although, for some, there were issues concerning knowing where to find appropriate information); it was more a question of recognising that it could be useful to them and having sufficient incentive to access this resource.

There also seemed to be a link between firms that accessed external support and the use of information and training. Although it was not possible to study this systematically, it seemed from many examples in the cases that those firms that had some experience of using some form of external service to support a more proactive approach to OSH were also more likely to seek information and training than those that avoided being proactive in this respect. As we explore in the final part of this report, these features of the way owner-managers behaved either reactively or proactively towards OSH characterised a range of their approaches to OSH support more generally, and not just their perceptions and orientations in relation to using information and training. Nevertheless, the findings specifically in relation to use and availability information and training suggest that, in many cases, while information and training may be theoretically available, its more effective dissemination and quality requires an approach from its suppliers that is more sensitive to the specific needs and contexts of its use in MSEs.

1.5 Labour relations contexts

The labour relations contexts in which arrangements for OSH are made in MSEs are often very different from those for workers and managers in larger firms. This has consequences at a variety of levels. It is well established, for example, that, while there are regulatory requirements supporting the role of worker representation on OSH in all Member States of the EU and a participatory approach to OSH management also characterises the provisions of EU Directives, these requirements have developed in relation to the experience of relations in larger organisations and they remain most relevant to them. The arrangements they prescribe are rarely found in MSEs and, as previously noted, in many of the countries in the present study, they are not even required of them. A substantial body of research shows that the representation of workers' interests in the labour relations of OSH in larger firms supports both improved arrangements for and improved outcomes of OSH management (see EU-OSHA 2017c for a detailed review). Therefore, exploring its role in MSEs, where the institutions of formal representation are usually absent, would seem to be an important task for research. Yet the research literature is almost entirely silent on this matter and, as we have pointed out in our review of the literature more generally (EU-OSHA 2016), the 'workers standpoint' (Eakin 2010) is also almost entirely absent from the research literature specifically addressing OSH in MSEs.

Exceptions to this pattern are found in a small number of accounts that examine the effectiveness of arrangements for workers' representation in small firms. Such arrangements are best known in Sweden (see Frick 2009 for a review, and below), but also exist in less developed ways in other countries, such as Italy and Spain (Walters 2002a).

In addition to workplace institutions, however, the institutions, structures and procedures of labour relations that exist outside MSEs, for example at sectoral and national levels, also have a bearing on what happens within small firms, since they form an important part of the wider contexts that serve to govern and regulate many aspects of the ways in which these firms operate. Comparative studies on labour relations in the Member States of the EU make it plain that there are significant differences between these arrangements, their development and their effects in the countries in the present study. In the following paragraphs, therefore, we offer some comparisons of the key features of these contexts in the countries studied.

1.5.1 Arrangements for representing workers' interests in OSH in MSEs

In all the countries in the study, there was a regulatory framework for worker representation on OSH in place, as is the case for all EU Member States. Details of these provisions are provided in the national reports for each country. In outline, they varied somewhat between countries, but were broadly compliant with what might be expected from the transposition of Framework Directive 89/391 and with the relevant provisions of ILO Convention 155. The variation in the national regulatory requirements is important in several respects. To begin with, it demonstrates the influence of broader national patterns in regulation and labour relations on the specific provisions for worker representation on OSH, as well as providing further clues to the important influence of national institutions and procedures of labour relations on these specific measures. This provides indications of the likely kinds of supports and constraints that may follow from them. There are three comparative aspects that are of relevance. One concerns the relationship of the regulatory provisions to institutional labour relations contexts; the second concerns significant inclusions in or exclusions from the regulations; and the third addresses particular enhancements in the regulations. In what follows we consider each of these in turn.

Statutory measures on workers' representation on OSH in each of the Member States of the EU are based around one of essentially three or four approaches, largely reflecting national institutional labour relations practice. Fulton (2013) suggests that most frequently found are arrangements in which employee safety and health representatives, with specific rights defined by regulation, are elected or selected. Their presence is most common in larger workplaces in combination with a joint safety and health committee — of which some representatives are members, along with managers and (sometimes in an *ex officio* capacity) the safety and health professionals in the company. Fulton indicates that arrangements of this sort can be seen in 13 Member States; these are represented in the present study by Denmark, Italy, Sweden and the United Kingdom. He further suggests that this is probably also the case in Romania. A second model that occurs in some countries tends to promote the position of the joint safety and health committee as central, and the employee members of the committee may also act as safety and health representatives. Fulton identifies five countries following this model and, in our study, France would fall into this category, and also to some extent Belgium, although, in the case of the latter, the trade union delegation may also address safety and health functions where there are not enough employees to form a Joint Committee. In some countries (although not in any of those in the present study), a variation occurs where the institutional focus of the regulatory structure is solely on safety and health representatives. However, perhaps the biggest departure from these varieties of institutional representation occurs in countries in which the works council is the primary institutional structure for employee representation on OSH — such as is the case in Germany in our study. Here there are neither safety and health representatives (in the same sense of the term as in other countries) nor joint safety and health committees in the sense in which they are found in other models. These functions are undertaken on the one hand through the works council, and on the other through so-called 'safety representatives' who are in fact workers appointed to this task by managers, rather than worker representatives within the meaning of the term as it applies elsewhere.

A further relevant point concerns the relationship of the representatives and committees to other institutional actors involved in wider labour relations in the countries studied, and notably in this respect to trade unions. Whereas in some countries, such as Sweden and the United Kingdom, this relationship is explicitly stated, in others there is no such specific mention of trade unions and trade union representatives in the regulatory measures on worker representation on OSH. Rather, rights and functions are bestowed upon 'worker representatives', and employers have duties to facilitate their election. However, in many such situations the representatives may include trade union representatives, and are also supported in practice by trade unions. Conversely, where unions are absent or very weakly represented, it may lead to many representatives with no trade union connection being appointed or elected into this role, whatever the legislation says (EU-OSHA 2017c).

Whether these different institutional focuses of regulatory measures contribute to significant differences in practice is hard to say, as comparative research on these matters is largely absent from previous literature. For our purposes, perhaps the most important point to note about the statutory measures is their clear focus on the institutions and contexts of larger workplaces. Most of these institutions and contexts are not found in small enterprises and this raises the important question of how the autonomous representation of workers' interests in OSH in smaller firms is achieved.

In terms of inclusions and exclusions in statutory provisions, workplace size is the most obvious influence on the extent and detail of arrangements for worker representation on OSH. As already noted, in many EU Member States there are size thresholds below which there is no regulatory requirement for any form of employee representation on safety and health. For example, commonly this is where there are nine or fewer employees. In Sweden, it is five or fewer, while in the United Kingdom there are no size limits. In Belgium, the size thresholds that apply are the same as those in relation to other workplace institutions of representation. Thus, only workplaces with more than 50 employees have a Committee for Prevention and Protection at Work, while in smaller workplaces the trade union delegation — if it exists — takes over the function of employee representation for safety and health, and if there is no trade union delegation the employer must consult the employees directly on matters concerning their wellbeing at work.

Attempts to address the problem of representing workers' interests on OSH in small firms are found in the legislative arrangements for worker representation in a few EU Member States. The best known of these is in Sweden, where, since 1974, there have been provisions that govern the appointment by trade unions of the RSRs that were mentioned earlier. These representatives have rights to visit small firms in which they themselves are not employed, but where there is at least one trade union member, to advise on safety and health and support the development of participative approaches to the prevention of injuries and ill-health. As the report on Sweden makes clear, most evaluations have found these provisions to be a success. However, in the main they have not been taken up elsewhere within the EU. As we have already noted, there are provisions for 'territorial health and safety representatives' (or RSPPs) in Italian legislation but it is unclear how

widespread or successful they have been, and there are various voluntary initiatives to create similar arrangements within sectors or regions in some other countries, either by trade unions unilaterally or through bilateral agreement of some kind. Again, the research literature is comparatively silent on the effects of these arrangements (but see Walters 2002b for some exceptions).

1.5.2 *Wider institutional contexts*

While their presence in micro and small workplaces may be limited, it is well recognised in the wider literature on labour relations and labour history that trade unions have been a major determinant of change in the development of improved regulation on OSH that affects all sizes of enterprises in most Member States of the EU (and elsewhere). It is equally recognised that they have done so not only through approaches to workplace representation on OSH but through a variety of other means. These have included pressing for regulatory reforms, making inputs into tripartite and bipartite policies, through national- and sectoral-level collective bargaining arrangements and outcomes on wider issues of pay and working conditions, and of course pressing for improvements and supporting workers' grievances across the whole spectrum of labour relations. In this sense, both their presence and their actions, even when not directly addressing OSH, may serve to contribute to raising standards of OSH as part of their role in raising the standard more generally of what are considered fair and acceptable conditions of work in advanced market economies in the EU — and this includes conditions experienced in MSEs whether or not there are organised workers present in these establishments. Of course, such a contribution is not easy to measure or attribute definitively, but this does not make it any the less real or significant in real terms.

In the national reports on the countries studied, we have noted several examples of these wider influences. For example, in Belgium collective agreements are concluded between employers' and workers' representatives at Joint Committee (sector) level. These collective agreements may concern matters such as working time, flexibility or PPE and are binding for all companies, including MSEs. Similarly, in Denmark, wages and working conditions are mainly regulated through collective agreements, with 84 % of all Danish workers being covered by a collective agreement. In practice, even more are working under terms set in those arrangements, since companies can choose to follow the terms without signing their own agreement. Unionisation rates are high in Denmark, at around 65 % on average. However, there are significant variations between sectors when it comes to unionisation and collective bargaining coverage (Rasmussen et al. 2015) and it is acknowledged that inclusion of smaller companies is especially problematic (Refslund 2016) and worker representation and union presence are both lower and more uneven in smaller enterprises. Nevertheless, as the national report notes, all the Danish case study companies, except two in agriculture, had collective agreements regulating wages and working conditions. Similarly, in Sweden, all the case study companies were covered by collective agreements between employers' associations and the trade unions. Despite the fact that Sweden, like Denmark, has no legislation on the extension of collective agreements to enterprises that do not have their own agreements, the coverage is very high. In 2012, 85 % of workers, and 100 % in the public sector, were covered by collective agreements (Kjellberg 2013). This high coverage and the narratives in our cases of the assistance that employers and workers receive from their respective organisations show that the social partners play an important role — despite a decreasing level of unionisation.

In Romania, trade union density is also relatively high¹², with around 44 %-50 % of employees being unionised, but it is lower among smaller enterprises. The EU-OSHA survey ESENER-2¹³ showed that not many of its respondents in Romanian MSEs had a recognised trade union: 2.2 % of those with 5-9 employees and 13.7 % of those with 10-49 employees. And they are subject to lesser requirements on the presence of institutions of labour relations than those with 20 workers or more.

In France, trade union presence in the workplace is high in large companies, but very low in smaller ones, and union density is low overall. Collective agreements are concluded by sector activity and not by size. At this level, in some sectors there is a collective agreement covering every job, while in others it may be limited to one job in one sector within a geographical department. There are more than 9,772 collective agreements in France, but they are not always used.

¹² <http://www.worker-participation.eu/National-Industrial-Relations/Countries/Romania/Trade-Unions#note6>

¹³ European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER), A recognised trade union representation. Available at: <https://osha.europa.eu/en/surveys-and-statistics-osh/esener> (accessed May 2014).

In German companies, panel data from 2011 show that only 6 % of private MSEs have worker representation (Deutscher Bundestag 2014, data from IAB Betriebspanel). Industrial relations are organised by sector. Collective agreements are concluded between employer associations and trade unions. There are also in-house collective agreements in major companies. Data show that between 35 % (former East Germany) and 52 % (former West Germany) of the workers work in establishments that have a sector collective agreement. Trade unions and employer associations are also represented in the bipartite assemblies and boards of the statutory accident insurance institutions and in the steering committees of the GDA. Trade unions and employer associations further advise the national parliament in the law-making process, as well as the Federal Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs, for example in the committees that enact technical rules.

A distinguishing feature of the United Kingdom's OSH system is the extent to which it has relied on the voluntary development of many of its elements, which as a result lie outside the regulatory frame, in keeping with the British pattern of regulation of economic activity and labour relations more widely. In the case of worker representation on safety and health and safety, while there are statutory provisions covering the involvement of trade union representatives, they operate within a system for general workplace representation and collective bargaining that was historically entirely voluntary and even today has only a rather indirect relationship to regulatory support. These features, in combination with the comparatively weakly developed corporatist institutions of the United Kingdom, have been quite strong influences on the way the 'system' for safety and health operates. Nevertheless, despite this there is a network of tripartite and bipartite structures that provide for policy and strategies on OSH that address both specific risks and sectors. While the membership of these bodies is heavily skewed towards the larger enterprises, the effects of decisions at this level will be felt to some extent in smaller organisations in the same sectors, as was seen in Scandinavian countries. However, in the absence of research on these effects, it is not clear exactly how much this is the case.

In contrast, in Estonia, trade union density is the lowest in the EU, at just over 5 %. In mid-2009, Estonia reformed its labour market institutions and labour protection laws, following a previous decade of discussion between the social partners. In short, greater employment insecurity became an embedded feature of the Estonian labour market both in formal legal terms and in practice. Collective bargaining has typically been decentralised, and mostly takes place at company level. Therefore, coverage 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 a sectoral level there are only two agreements: in transport and in health care (Eurofound 2015a, p. 3). Levels of industrial disputes and strikes are low in Estonia, although there have been notable industrial disputes in recent years. Opportunities for employee 'voice' are thus poor in the Estonian context, especially in MSEs, even though legislative arrangements appear to facilitate such processes. The decline in density of trade union membership appears to be continuing. In contrast to the decline in unionisation, the coverage of non-union worker 'trustees' as an alternative form of workforce (non-union) representation is increasing, although still only covering about one out of five workers (ETUI 2015), but even these are not required in workplaces with nine or fewer workers.

1.5.3 Making sense of the labour relations context

Although it is clear that the institutions for worker representation on OSH seldom feature in MSEs, it is nevertheless important to understand that such institutions exist in workplaces more generally, that they are provided for by statute and that they were one of the essential underpinnings to the development of thinking around the regulated self-regulation that characterises the features of statutory approaches to OSH management and its enforcement in the EU today (Walters and Nichols 2007). The implications of their absence in the majority of MSEs, therefore, raise some important concerns about the relevance of the statutory provisions to the situation experienced by workers in these enterprises. As our review (EU-OSHA 2016) made clear, the wider literature on labour relations, as well as that on the sociology of work in small firms, suggests that relations between owner-managers and their workers in MSEs are quite as complex and heterogeneous as is the profile of MSEs themselves, and differences in these relations may therefore also contribute effects on how arrangements for OSH are implemented and operated. How this actually occurs, however, has not been specifically or extensively studied.

There are of course positive accounts of the role of trade union OSH representatives in special cases, such as in Sweden. However, these accounts are specifically focused on exceptional situations in which statutory interventions have been introduced to support workers' representation in small firms with arrangements that are not typically found in most EU Member States. They have little to say about how workers' interests in OSH are

represented in small firms in which there are no formal institutional arrangements or in countries in which there is no requirement for them. We would suggest that this continues to be a significant gap in the research literature.

Looking beyond the workplace, it is evident that there is variation in the extent to which the institutions of labour relations play an effective role in the implementation of improved standards in MSEs, where union representation is poor or non-existent. One aspect of the variation in the range of countries selected in the present study concerns that of the spectrum of different degrees of corporatism they demonstrate. For example, the incorporation of trade union and employers' organisations into the processes involved in their development and monitoring is more established, long-standing and characteristic of some systems than others, such as is seen for example in the Scandinavian countries. In these countries, social partnership is considered to play an important role in negotiating working conditions. In Denmark, for example, this leads to a situation where the state's role is the adoption of legislation, while at the same time leaving a high degree of autonomy to the social partners who negotiate implementation of policies and regulation of the work environment. In other countries, such as Germany and Belgium, the institutions are also quite pronounced and to a degree supported by the regulatory systems. In others, such as the United Kingdom, while corporatism is generally regarded as a less developed tradition, nevertheless, on matters of OSH, both tripartite and bipartite institutions at sector and national levels are quite prominent. In still other countries, such as those with formerly controlled economies, market-based institutions are of more recent origin, making their effects difficult to compare with those where these traditions are older and more embedded. What effects all these structural and procedural features of labour relations actually have on helping to voice workers' interests on OSH in MSEs and contribute to better solutions to OSH problems is not clear. But it is one of the many contexts in which decisions are taken about OSH practice within enterprises, and therefore it remains relevant to enhancing our understandings of these practices and what limits or supports them, as we explore further in Part 3 of this report.

1.6 Summary and conclusions

This chapter has outlined some of the national contexts that might be important determinants of OSH arrangements and practices in MSEs in the countries covered by this study. More details of them can be found in the accounts that make up the national reports on each of the countries studied. Here, in summary, we have drawn attention to features of the style and character of national regulatory regimes for OSH management and the extent of their focus on MSEs in the countries we studied, along with the role, availability and competence of OSH services, information and training provision for owner-managers and workers in MSE, and the labour relations contexts in which OSH is managed in MSEs, both in the narrow sense of provisions for workplace representation and consultation of workers on OSH, and more generally in terms of the wider labour relations structures and procedures and practices in the wider contexts inhabited by MSEs.

In the introduction to the chapter we also identified the possible important influence of features of national systems for social protection, health and welfare in relation to workers in MSEs, as well as those of the wider national political and economic structure and climate and the effects on OSH of the position of MSEs within the structure and organisation of work and labour markets in the country. We further noted there that, while it was beyond the scope of a chapter of this length to provide details of these features, this did not imply that they were of little importance. Instead, we suggested that the regulatory, labour relations and OSH systems contexts that we have explored here are in fact themselves overlain and influenced by these wider contexts that are determined by the nature of the economy and the arrangements for social protection, health and welfare that support social and economic life in the countries studied and cannot be fully appreciated without reference to these wider settings.

This said, it is clear from the preceding account that national regulatory regimes, although broadly similar in EU Member States, differ sufficiently to be an important influence on the way things are done on OSH in MSEs. Equally clear are the differences and similarities in features of OSH systems between countries, whether these concerns the different roles of prevention services or different levels of training and information provision on OSH. Despite the differences, however, as the testimonies from owner-managers and workers to which we have referred to in this chapter indicate, a common refrain reiterated among MSEs in all Member States is the extent to which owner-managers especially feel themselves, in one way or another, not particularly well served by many of the arrangements made for the governance and support of OSH in their countries. We will have reason to explore these findings in much greater depth in Part 2 of this report and we will reflect on their significance in Part 3.

2 Methods

This was a complex and challenging study. It involved an in-depth qualitative investigation of workplace experiences of OSH in MSEs. As described in the following sections, the fieldwork was carried out by an international consortium of European researchers in nine EU Member States, within MSEs of four size bands, operating within seven sectors.

Qualitative case study research methods are generally used when exploring the processes whereby the events of interest are mediated by relations between the institutional actors involved. They are generally employed in the social sciences when deeper understandings of the quality of the processes and relations being investigated are required. The approach allows the collection and analysis of rich data from several inter-related sources. While it may have some limitations in terms of quantitative representativeness, generalisability, reliability and validity (Flyvbjerg 2006; Starman 2013; Yin 2003), these are commonly moderated by triangulation techniques using multiple data sources or methods and by examining different perspectives on the same process/relations to allow theoretical saturation (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007). However, it is important to be clear that a case study approach is not a quantitative study and therefore neither its aims nor its results can be validated by techniques applied to such studies.

Ideally, multiple perspectives on the same set of processes are obtained from a variety of sources. To do this effectively, multiple approaches to data collection are utilised, including not only interviews but also the collection and analysis of documentary material as well as site observations during field visits, that can support the full development of a nuanced, contextual view of reality which helps uncover the complexities embedded in the multifaceted processes under investigation. The following pages outline the ways in which these methods were employed in the present study.

2.1 Sampling

Previous analyses of the ESENER data (EU-OSHA 2013, 2016) have made comparisons by national regulatory style. These have suggested that arrangements for participative OSH management are more frequently made in *countries with more embedded approaches towards participative OSH management* in their regulatory systems than in countries in which these approaches to regulating OSH management were the result of more recent legislative changes. This pattern has been broadly consistent across establishment size categories within both the ESENER-1 and ESENER-2 datasets (EU-OSHA 2013, 2016). We wanted to focus data collection in countries that would allow such comparisons within our sample of micro and small establishments. As outlined in the Introduction, we therefore used the same set of groups of the EU-28 Member States as a basis for selecting the countries for the study:

1. *Western EU*: **Belgium, Germany**, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Austria;
2. *Northern EU*: **Denmark**, Finland and **Sweden**;
3. **United Kingdom (UK)** and Ireland;
4. *Southern/Latin EU*: Greece, Spain, **France, Italy**, Cyprus, Malta and Portugal;
5. *Central and Eastern EU*: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, **Estonia**, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, **Romania**, Slovenia and Slovakia.

As noted in the Introduction, the reasoning for this division is essentially based around a set of postulates concerning possible differences in *regulatory cultures, character and arrangements for OSH management*. It is worth emphasising that such differences as have been observed in previous studies are not solely the consequences of regulatory style. It is more plausible that they are caused by a combination of factors that include regulation but also embrace something of the organisational cultures and labour relations as well as the wider economic and political features of the countries concerned. The results of a previous analysis (EU-OSHA 2013) were suggestive of these possible differences, as were the findings described in the first study of the SESAME project (EU-OSHA 2016).

In order to make comparisons across the combinations of regulatory and other influential features represented by the five groups of countries, the nine Member States highlighted in bold above were selected. This selection reflected both the capacities of the consortium carrying out the research, and an attempt to ensure that something of the variety within each group was captured. To this end, two countries were selected in all but one of the groups (the other containing only two countries in total). The intention, therefore, was for the data analysis

to provide insights into how the contexts and environments represented by the groups affect OSH arrangements in MSEs.

Data collection further focused on seven sectors, each selected because of the significant role played within it by MSEs. These were agriculture; manufacturing; construction; wholesale and retail trade; transport; accommodation and food services; and human health and social work. However, it is important to be clear at this point that, as it was a qualitative sample, we were not aiming to construct a sample that was 'representative' of the full extent of these large and diverse sectors within the Member States in which the study was carried out. Rather, drawing our sample from within this broad range allowed us to carry out comparative analyses at both the national and sector levels, in addition to our overarching analysis. Data collection, therefore, did not extend to all branches of each of these sectors. For example, the data collected in Statistical classification of economic activities in the European Community (NACE) section G (wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles) came from enterprises involved principally in car repair activities, as well as some wholesale activities. With the exception of two pharmacies and an optician (which are, of course, particularly specialised areas covered by very specific licensing and operating requirements that do not apply elsewhere), it did *not* include retail more generally. This simply reflected the particular enterprises that agreed to take part in our study, as opposed to any selection strategy on our part. Nevertheless, it is important to be clear about the areas that were and were not covered, because of their implications for the risks workers were likely to be exposed to, the specificities of relevant branch-level contexts and requirements, and the consequences of each of these for OSH experiences, understandings and arrangements within the participating MSEs. The areas of activity in which case study establishments were operating were as follows:

- agriculture: crop and animal production, forestry;
- manufacturing: manufacture of metal, food, wood, chemical, paper and textile products;
- construction: construction of buildings and specialised activities;
- wholesale and retail trade: wholesale trade; maintenance and repair of motor vehicles; retail sale of pharmaceutical and medical goods, and of new goods in specialised stores;
- transport: haulage and freight;
- accommodation and food service activities;
- human health and social work: care provision for adults and children, dental and other clinical provision, and provision of training and activities.

Further details are given in Part 2 of this report, but the participating establishments are outlined in Table 2, which also indicates the breakdown of data collection by sector, country and enterprise size.

As this project was a follow-up to ESENER-2, our aim was that all of the participating enterprises were to be ones that had already participated in the main ESENER-2 survey. As part of that survey, all respondents were asked if they would be prepared to be re-contacted about future research. Over three-quarters (78 %) of respondents agreed. Our aim was to complete case studies in 160 enterprises: 10 each in Denmark and Sweden¹⁴; and 20 each in the other seven Member States. For each set of 20 enterprises, we aimed to complete four case studies in each of five sectors¹⁵, and to include smaller micro (<5 employees), larger micro (5-9 employees), smaller small (10-19 employees) and larger small (20-49 employees) enterprises within each sector.

Enterprises that met our eligibility criteria (according to their size, sector and country of operation) were approached by TNS¹⁶ about the current study. For the six of the seven Member States in which 20 case studies were to be carried out, research teams were supplied with details of 150 establishments that agreed to be contacted directly by members of the team about the study. The exception was Estonia, for which there was a lower number of available enterprises from which TNS could sample, resulting in only 63 contacts being supplied. Those carrying out 10 case studies were supplied with 75 sets of contacts.

¹⁴ These two Scandinavian countries were both included in the SESAME project partly because we were aware that they would be a comparatively rich source of strategic interventions on work environment issues in micro and small firms (the focus of the third study of the project) and partly because of the distribution of expertise within the consortium. As such, they were 'counted' as one for this study, and so between them carried out the same number of case studies as each of the other seven countries.

¹⁵ Not all sectors were included in each country covered by the study – see Table 2.

¹⁶ Kantar (formerly TNS) is a global market research company. It carried out the ESENER-2 survey on behalf of EU-OSHA and was also commissioned by EU-OSHA to deliver the sample, according to the criteria agreed by the research consortium, for the current study.

The research teams then contacted the establishments directly with further information about the study and an invitation to participate by allowing researchers to visit and carry out interviews with a manager and a worker. Although this process was sometimes lengthy, for most countries it led to the successful recruitment of sufficient establishments. However, in the instances where this was not the case, research partners within the consortium completed their case study sample through their own contacts, as indicated in the national and sector (in Part 2 of this report) reports, as well as in Table 2 below.

Table 2 The participating establishments

| Sector | Country | Enterprise size (number of employees) | | | | Total |
|---|--------------|---------------------------------------|---|--|--|-----------|
| | | <5 | 5-9 | 10-19 | 20-49 | |
| Agriculture: crop and animal production, forestry | Denmark | | Pig producer | Forestry company Agricultural service supplier | Plant producer in horticulture | 4 |
| | Estonia | | Dairy farm* | Plant nursery Grain cultivator* | Dairy farm | 4 |
| | France | | Forest company Cattle sales | Arboriculture | | 3 |
| | Romania | Arable farm* | Arable farm* | Pig farm* | Arable farm* | 4 |
| | TOTAL | 1 | 5 | 6 | 3 | 15 |
| Manufacturing: manufacture of metal, food, wood, chemical, paper and textile products | Belgium | | Manufacturing of machines | Installation and maintenance of plant and machinery | Supply of specialised spare parts Packaging of rolled steel | 4 |
| | Denmark | | | Manufacturing of industrial cooling and ventilation equipment Manufacturing of dairy robots | | 2 |
| | Germany | Artists' forge | | Manufacturing of crab packaging | Production of paper testing technology Manufacturing of air- conditioning units | 4 |
| | Estonia | | Printing company | Production of jam | Manufacturing of log cabins Heat energy company | 4 |
| | France | | Manufacturing of micro pieces of metal | Manufacturing of vehicle conversions Manufacturing of wood products | Vehicle conversion for disabled people Cheese manufacture | 5 |
| | Italy | | Production of screw cylinders and gears* | Production of automotive special parts* Production of doors* Production of elastic bands, fringes etc.* Production of hydraulic/pneumatic machines* | Manufacturing of saws Conveyer of belt designs* Production of drawn and ground steel* | 8 |

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| Sector | Country | Enterprise size (number of employees) | | | | Total |
|---|--------------|--|--|--|---|-----------|
| | | <5 | 5-9 | 10-19 | 20-49 | |
| Construction: construction of buildings and specialised activities | Romania | Manufacturing of metal | Production of paints, primers, glues etc. Production of clothes | Production of furniture | | 4 |
| | Sweden | | Printing, folding letters Manufacturing of industrial/household chemicals | Manufacturing of specialised instruments for material testing | | 3 |
| | UK | | Manufacturing of air-conditioners | Shop fit-out service | Printing of labels Supply of racking storage systems Tyre warehousing and distribution centre | 5 |
| | TOTAL | 2 | 9 | 14 | 14 | 39 |
| | Belgium | | | Internal demolition work, excavation, earthwork and renovation Window installations, sale of end products Renovation and new builds* | Carpentry* | 4 |
| | Denmark | | Electrical installations and repairs | | Carpentry and project management of new builds | 2 |
| | Germany | Planning, project management and capital raising | | Road and sewage conduit construction Renovation of damaged buildings | Electrical installations | 4 |
| | Estonia | General construction, renovation and project management* | Concrete installations | General construction and finishing | General construction and project management* | 4 |
| | France | | Carpentry, renovation, general construction | Roofing | Masonry and structural work* Masonry and structural work* | 4 |
| | Italy | | Installation of thermal, heating and air-conditioning systems and sanitary facilities* | General construction* | General construction* Electrical installation* | 4 |

Safety and health in micro and small enterprises in the EU: the view from the workplace

| Sector | Country | Enterprise size (number of employees) | | | | Total |
|--|--------------------------------|---|---|--|--|--|
| | | <5 | 5-9 | 10-19 | 20-49 | |
| Wholesale and retail trade: wholesale trade; maintenance and repair of motor vehicles; retail sale of pharmaceutical and medical goods, and of new goods in specialised stores | Romania | | General construction* Small new builds and renovations* Utility connection* | | Civil and industrial construction* | 4 |
| | Sweden | Glass work | | | Apartment renovation and new build | 2 |
| | UK | | Asbestos survey and removal | | Exhibition installation and fit-out Port construction Swimming pool design, construction and maintenance | 4 |
| | TOTAL | 3 | 8 | 8 | 13 | 32 |
| | Belgium | | Packaging machines wholesale | | DIY shop* Gas wholesale | 3 |
| | Germany | Optician* | Car repair | Car repair* | Pharmacy | 4 |
| | Italy | Car repair* Car repair* Carpentry showroom* | | | Car repair* | 4 |
| | UK | Pharmacy Car repair | | | | 2 |
| | TOTAL | 6 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 13 |
| | Transport: haulage and freight | Germany | Postal service | Haulage contractor | Freight forwarder | Logistics company, franking and sorting of letters |
| Estonia | | Haulage contractor | | Haulage contractor Haulage contractor | Haulage contractor* | 4 |
| Italy | | | | | Haulage contractor* Haulage contractor* | 2 |
| Sweden | | | | | Haulage contractor Port and terminal operator Freight forwarder | 3 |

Safety and health in micro and small enterprises in the EU: the view from the workplace

| Sector | Country | Enterprise size (number of employees) | | | | Total |
|--|----------------|---------------------------------------|---|---|---|-----------|
| | | <5 | 5-9 | 10-19 | 20-49 | |
| | TOTAL | 2 | 1 | 3 | 7 | 13 |
| Accommodation and food service activities | Belgium | | Catering/restaurant | Restaurant | Restaurant* Hotel* | 4 |
| | Denmark | | Hostel | Inn | | 2 |
| | Germany | Restaurant | Catering Snack bar | | Pastry shop | 4 |
| | Estonia | | Restaurant | Hotel* Coffee-shop/restaurant | Hotel | 4 |
| | France | Restaurant | Hotel | Restaurant Catering service | | 4 |
| | Italy | | Café* Catering* | Hospital catering* | Café* | 4 |
| | Romania | | Bed and breakfast* Hotel* Hotel* | Hotel* | | 4 |
| | Sweden | | Restaurant | Restaurant | | 2 |
| | UK | Cookery school | Restaurant | Pub | | 3 |
| | | TOTAL | 3 | 13 | 10 | 5 |
| Human health and social work: care provision for adults and children, dental and other clinical provision, and provision of training and activities | Belgium | | Activities | Sectoral training Activities Residential care for children | Residential care for children | 5 |
| | France | | Day care centre for adults with mental diseases Residential care home for elderly people | Residential care home for elderly people | Residential care home for elderly people | 4 |
| | Romania | Private dentist* Private dentist* | | Private clinic* | Residential care centre for occupational therapy* | 4 |
| | UK | | Day care for children* | Day care for elderly people Residential care home for elderly people Residential care for adults with learning difficulties | Day care services for adults with learning difficulties Residential care home for elderly people | 6 |

Safety and health in micro and small enterprises in the EU: the view from the workplace

| Sector | Country | Enterprise size (number of employees) | | | | Total |
|--------------------|--------------|---------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| | | <5 | 5-9 | 10-19 | 20-49 | |
| | TOTAL | 2 | 4 | 8 | 5 | 19 |
| GRAND TOTAL | | 19 | 42 | 50 | 51 | 162 |

* Not ESENER-2 participants.

DIY, do-it-yourself.

2.2 Fieldwork

Using an initial draft framework detailing the information we planned to seek in each case study, the research consortium developed a set of themes around which the case study interviews would be based. From this, interview guides for owner-managers and workers were produced. Given the experience of the consortium’s research teams and the need to be sensitive to and flexible about the various experiences and backgrounds of the study’s interviewees, these were not interview *schedules*. Rather, as *guides*, they were intended as a suggested framework for interviews with owner-managers and workers in the participating establishments.

Each guide also included prompts to the researchers to categorise establishments in a number of areas. These are detailed in Table 3, along with the criteria used by the researchers in each case. These are, of course, very crude measures based on the judgement of the (albeit very experienced) researcher(s) visiting the establishment. However, the intention was to try to distinguish between establishments that seemed to the researchers to be, for example, taking a low or high road approach¹⁷ (see Table 3). Each, therefore, represents an area around which we wanted to be able to make comparisons within and between countries, sectors and enterprise sizes. All categorisations were made on the basis of responses given by the interviewees to a range of questions during the course of their interview.

Table 3 Categorisation of establishments by their characteristics

| Characteristics | Categories | Criteria |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|--|
| Competition | Low | Competing on quality is the main priority |
| | Medium | Both price and quality are important |
| | High | Competing on price is the main priority |
| Dependence on clients | Low | Many potential clients available, so much room for choice and negotiation |
| | Medium | Somewhat limited |
| | High | Very limited, so little room for choice or negotiation |
| Dependence on suppliers | Low | Many potential suppliers available, so much room for choice and negotiation |
| | Medium | Somewhat limited |
| | High | Very limited, so little room for choice or negotiation |
| Employee vulnerability | Low | High job security, wages and education level |
| | Medium | Medium |
| | High | Low job security, wages and education level |
| Risk control | Low | Low levels of risk awareness, risk analyses, communication and worker participation |
| | Medium | Medium |
| | High | High levels of risk awareness, risk analyses, communication and worker participation |
| Overall strategy | Very clear high road | Clearly strong position economically, in terms of client/supplier dependency etc., competing on criteria other than just price, able to make long-term investments in staff and the business, focusing on expansion and growth |
| | Less clear high road | Less clear but still high road |
| | Middle | Mixed |
| | Less clear low road | Less clear but still low road |
| | Very clear low road | Clearly weak position economically and in terms of client/supplier dependency etc., competing solely on price, |

¹⁷ As detailed in the Introduction, a low road approach involves the implementation of development strategies characterised by increased pressure on wages, working conditions and so on (in contrast to the high road approach, which focuses on investment and innovation). This is the result of the linkage between bundles of organisational and business strategies and the multifaceted limitations on resources available to MSEs. See EU-OSHA (2016) for further details.

| Characteristics | Categories | Criteria | |
|-------------------------------|------------|--|---|
| Business vulnerability | | unable to make any investments in staff and the business, focusing solely on business survival | |
| | Low | Strong financial position, stable market position, high decision latitude | |
| | Medium | Mixed | |
| | High | Weak financial position, unstable market position, low decision latitude | |
| Company strategy | OSH | Reactive | Takes OSH action only in response to external pressure or following an incident |
| | | Mainly reactive | Mainly reactive but some proactive risk identification and prevention |
| | | Both | Fairly equal reactive and proactive mix |
| | | Mainly proactive | Mainly proactive but some risks addressed only following external pressure or an incident |
| | | Proactive | Identifies risks systematically |

Interviews were carried out face to face at each participating establishment. In most cases, this also allowed the interviewers to see at least some of the establishment’s operations in practice and discuss experiences more informally with those they met during their visit.

As described earlier, our aim was to ensure that both the owner-manager and a worker were interviewed, separately, for each case study, and for the most part this was achieved. However, there were a very few occasions on which the owner-manager and worker chose to be interviewed together or the establishment, on the day of the interview, was unable to make a worker available despite having agreed in advance to do so (this was usually because of pressure of work, often exacerbated by off-site working — such as in the construction sector). It should also be noted here that, while the researchers sought to influence the selection of the worker for interview (for example by requesting someone with substantial experience of the enterprise’s systems and approaches), in practice we often had little control over the that decision. This choice was generally made by the owner-manager. These factors will, inevitably, have affected the data we were able to collect. Similarly, as we have discussed elsewhere (EU-OSHA 2016), the data that could be collected were limited to the establishments that agreed to participate in the study. As described above, for about two-thirds of the sample this meant enterprises that had taken part in the ESENER-2 survey, agreed to be re-contacted about further research and then agreed to participate in this follow-up study. In effect, therefore, they were a more self-selected group than the ESENER-2 participants generally, and a sample of those enterprises that had successfully continued trading for at least the year or so between ESENER-2 and the fieldwork for the current study. Together these limitations mean that our data are likely to include a preponderance of those from the ‘better’ end of the spectrum of MSEs, in terms of their OSH management and business stability and longevity, and may tend towards the owner-manager viewpoint. These factors are, of course, common to all research of this nature, and do not mean that the findings and analyses presented in the following chapters cannot tell us anything about establishments from the other end of this spectrum. Rather, it is important that these factors are borne in mind and the findings interpreted appropriately. This said, our efforts to interview workers separately from owner-managers in each participating establishment distinguish this study from much of the previous work in the field, which assumes a set of shared views and experiences between owner-managers and workers and so focuses solely on the former. Furthermore, in doing so in 61 micro and 101 small firms, the study has generated a rich and complex dataset, which has been analysed to provide an in-depth ‘view from the workplace’ of EU MSEs.

2.3 Analysis

We used a thematic approach to identify common patterns, similarities and differences among the countries, sectors and establishment size bands covered in the study. The intention was two-fold. First, we wanted to identify the key issues emerging from the research and consider those issues in the national and sector reports. Second, we wanted to be clear about the key comparative issues for the

overarching analysis described in Part 3 of this report. Each consortium research team produced establishment reports, describing the findings of each case study they carried out, and a national report, drawing those findings together within their country. The findings and analyses presented in this report are based on the data and analyses described in these establishment and national reports.

Part 2: The experience of OSH in MSEs in seven sectors of activity

This part of the report presents the study's findings and analyses within each of the sectors on which the research focused. It takes the form of seven short chapters, each of which focuses on one sector and presents the findings from the case studies operating in various sub-sectors of that area of activity. These are followed by a final chapter summarising the findings. As described in Part 1, these seven sectors are all large and diverse, and our case studies were drawn from a range of branches of each sector. Each of the following chapters, therefore, begins by briefly outlining the contribution of MSEs generally to the sector it focuses on, before indicating the areas within which the case study enterprises were operating. The sectors covered included agriculture, manufacturing, construction, wholesale and retail, accommodation and food services, and health and residential care. It is important to be clear, however, that the cases chosen in each country were not intended in any way to be *representative* of the sectors concerned (at either national or European level). As emphasised in Chapter 2 (in Part 1 of this report), the approach taken to this research is one informed by qualitative case study methods and as such it is focused on understanding processes and relations that explain the OSH experiences we have identified. While, in doing so, it is important to take account of the setting and possible sector-based influences, this is quite different from a study that is representative of the total experience of a sector.

There are eight short chapters in Part 2. The first seven are each focused on one of the seven sectors in which the cases we have selected were situated. Each chapter then goes on to describe the case study establishments on which it is based in more detail. This is followed by sections outlining findings based on the OSH experiences and understandings described by our interviewees in four key areas: risk awareness and understanding, and OSH competence and knowledge; OSH management and practice; drivers; and worker participation.

The final, eighth, chapter provides an overarching summary of the analysis and its key findings.

As indicated in what follows, each of the sector chapters has been written by researchers from the core team of our consortium. Their findings and analyses are drawn from the establishment and national reports produced by the wider research team. To reiterate, therefore, although their focus is sectoral, these chapters are not intended to present solely those findings that are sector specific. Rather, their aim is to provide an overview of the findings of the case studies carried out within each sector. They all, therefore, include findings that may be sector specific (and in some instances branch specific), as well as those that might be considered cross-sectoral — that is, relevant to MSEs either generally, or from more than one sector. For clarity, we have tried to indicate when this is the case.

3 Agriculture: crop and animal production, forestry

3.1 Introduction

Eurostat estimates indicate that labour in the agricultural, forestry and fishing sector accounted for the equivalent of 8.8 million people working full-time across the EU-28 in the last quarter of 2017. The vast majority of the EU's farms are relatively small, family-run holdings. In addition, agriculture is characterised by seasonal labour peaks, during which extra workers are hired for relatively short periods of time. However, overall employment in the sector is falling, with a reduction in agricultural labour input of almost 20 % between 2005 and 2012¹⁸.

The analysis presented below is based on 15 case study companies: four each from Denmark, Estonia and Romania, and three from France. As is clear from Table 4, although these included three forestry companies, most (12) of the case study establishments were operating in the agriculture sector, in particular in crop and animal production.

Within the sample, one company had fewer than 5 employees, five had 5-9 employees, six had 10-19 employees and three had 20-49 employees. Most were independent companies, but two (one Estonian and one French) were subsidiaries of larger organisations, while another (also French) was a cooperative owned by a conglomerate that comprised five cooperatives (in total). As a result, this establishment was in effect more like a subsidiary than a traditional cooperative. The fact that one Estonian and two French case study companies were part of larger groups was significant, since these parent companies, in particular one of the French ones, made significant OSH demands on their subsidiaries, often including imposing an OSH management system. Furthermore, there was an OSH professional in the French group that owned the cooperative, giving this establishment access to more extensive OSH knowledge than was the case for many of the other participating firms.

For the most part (10 out of 15 participating establishments), the case study companies were operating in business-to-business (B2B) environments. This was not unexpected, as food is increasingly produced for and sold by large retailers or producers.

Table 4 summarises the 15 case study companies.

Table 4 Overview of case study establishments: agriculture (crop and animal production, forestry)

| Country | Size of company (number of employees) | | | |
|---------|---------------------------------------|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| | <5 employees | 5-9 employees | 10-19 employees | 20-49 employees |
| Denmark | | DK9: Pig producer | DK10: Forestry company DK7: Agricultural service supplier | DK8: Plant producer in horticulture |
| Estonia | | EE1: Dairy farm* | EE16: Plant nursery EE12: Grain cultivator* | EE10: Dairy farm |
| France | | FR11: Forest company FR16: Cattle sales | FR1: Arboriculture | |
| Romania | RO13: Agricultural farm 1* | RO16: Agricultural farm* | RO15: Pig farm* | RO14: Agricultural farm* |

* Case establishments *not* recruited via ESENER-2.

3.2 Sector specificities and the sample

The interviews indicated that, in relation to the work environment, OSH and OSH management, and education, some of the case study companies had what might be termed a 'fairly traditional' operating culture — in the sense that practice and approaches were mainly based on previous, generally long-standing, experiences and practices in the industry. This suggests that, where this was the case, new practices and ideas may be difficult to implement. In addition, in combination with the cultural and family-based bonds that are often found between

¹⁸ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/web/products-pocketbooks/-/KS-FK-13-001>

owner-managers and workers, particularly within micro and small firms, the result may be a less stringent approach to OSH. Of course, this combination of factors is not unique to agriculture, as the findings in a number of the following sections show. However, the interviews carried out here did confirm that this was the case in several of the case studies discussed below.

According to both the owner-managers and the workers we interviewed, the majority of the workers in our sample had only primary education (which our interviewees suggested was reflective of the industry in general). Often skills were picked up through experience and informal learning, especially in the smaller companies. This was, for example, the case in several Romanian case study companies, such as in one farm where there had been no formal agricultural training at all:

We work as we learn from one generation to another. (RO, worker, <5 employees)

Of course, this lack of formal training is again something that is common to a number of other sectors. However, within this sample, there was some variation by country. Owner-managers typically reported having both secondary education and vocational training, with educational levels highest in Romania and Estonia (where two out of four owners had a university degree). This, to some extent, reflects national differences, since in Denmark, although university degrees in agriculture are offered, the vocational route is the one more commonly followed.

As noted above, the sector is known for its high proportion of family-owned and family-based businesses. This was reflected in the case study companies across all four countries, in particular among the smallest participating establishments. Furthermore, relatives often worked in the participating firms; in fact in some of the Romanian cases all of the employees were family members. Some of the workers we interviewed, therefore, were related to the owner-manager interviewee, and this should be borne in mind when considering the findings on workers' perspectives.

Within the Danish, Romanian and Estonian companies, the owner-manager was actively engaged in the production process, but this was much less common in the French companies. In keeping with the findings of previous studies, and with those in a number of the other sectors described below, there was also a size effect here, with owner-managers of larger case study companies less often involved in production than their counterparts in the smaller participating firms.

In all of the case studies, the interviewees described the sector as being a high-risk one in which accidents and injuries were relatively common. Participants identified the main risks as including falling and slipping when working in changing settings and on uneven surfaces (for example in icy conditions in winter or in dirty stables); and cutting and other types of injury from moving machinery, tools (such as chainsaws) and heavy machinery. They also referred to numerous physical health and musculoskeletal risks, including exposure to strenuous postures and repetitive work. Furthermore, much of the work is performed outside, which interviewees explained exposes workers to extreme temperatures (both cold and heat) and changing weather conditions (wind, rain, sunshine, etc.). Many also work with large animals, which adds an extra occupational hazard, since they are heavy and strong and can behave unpredictably. Two case study companies (the French cattle sales company and the Danish pig producer) reported severe injuries following accidents with the animals — for example, very severe knee damage occurred at the Danish pig producer when a sow slipped and squeezed a worker's knee against a side-wall. The Romanian pig producers also reported less severe injuries from working with the animals. As one Estonian worker put it:

If I think about the risk ... well, yes, there's a chance that I may get caught between cow and milking parlour or the wall somehow when I go to help when a problem occurs, but I'm careful then. (EE, worker, 5-9 employees)

Additionally, interviewees referred to risks from the chemical agents (such as pesticides) and biological agents (such as manure) that are frequently used in the industry. Moreover, they explained that their work is often characterised by seasonal fluctuations in workload, with higher demands during the peak seasons such as harvesting and planting, which can lead to stressful working conditions. In some of the case study companies, particularly those in Romania and Estonia, the interviewees also referred to long-standing problems with alcohol consumption and alcohol-related work accidents among rural workforces. However, according to the owner-managers we interviewed, this appears to be changing, with alcohol consumption no longer accepted in most workplaces.

Interviewees from only four companies describing being in a tough competitive environment, while seven reported medium competition and the rest limited competition. This — despite the recent economic recession — translated into ‘neutral’ business prospects, with interviewees from only one of the case study companies reporting falling numbers of employees, while three were expanding and the rest were static. The Danish pig producer, despite facing a harsh competitive environment, was continuing to expand, and this approach was seen by the owner-manager as a survival strategy. Overall, however, despite the fact that competition was generally not described as tough, most owner-managers felt that their economic situation was difficult.

In terms of dependence on suppliers and customers, three companies were assessed by the researchers as being highly dependent and six as somewhat dependent on their customers’ demands, with a further six seen as somewhat dependent on their suppliers. Turning to the establishments’ survival strategies, the researchers considered that most took a broadly medium or high road approach, with only a few examples of clear low road strategic approaches¹⁹. These included two small Romanian family-run farms and one Estonian farm. The infrequent use of low road strategies among the case study companies also reflected the labour market vulnerability of the workers, with most assessed as having a limited to medium degree of vulnerability. Again, there were exceptions in the Romanian case study companies, where some of the workers were assessed by the researchers as being highly vulnerable, both in terms of having a precarious position in the labour market and in OSH terms.

Agricultural production varies across the different European countries, and this was, to some degree, reflected in the company case studies. However, across the EU (and beyond) the industry shares certain characteristics, such as a high degree of seasonality, and hence dependence on seasonal workers. The use of temporary workers on a seasonal basis was reported in all of the countries in our sample. The research literature indicates that temporary workers are often migrant workers, who may face linguistic challenges with respect to understanding both safety requirements and their rights (Rye and Andrzejewska 2010; Rogaly 2008; Gertel and Sippel 2014; Svensson et al. 2013). Within our sample, however, although a significant proportion of the workers in the Danish horticulture company were migrant workers, this was the exception, and most of the case study companies had very few, or no, migrant workers. Nevertheless, the temporary workers that were present in all cases tended to have limited work experience and knowledge of the safety requirements, and they were not unionised. This appeared to result in much poorer working conditions. For example, in one of the Romanian farms these workers had no contracts and were not given any safety instruction. However, this was not the case everywhere. In a Danish company which used Polish seasonal workers, their wages and working conditions were set in a collective agreement. However, although only limited information on temporary workers was provided by the interviewees, for the most part it appeared that these workers, particularly those in the Romanian and Estonian companies, suffered rather precarious working conditions and a poorer work environment than the regular staff. For example, one Romanian company hired local workers on a day-to-day basis to meet seasonal fluctuations. These workers were the poorest people from the local area, and they were not given any instruction in relation to work processes or OSH, clearly reflecting their precarious labour market position.

3.3 Risk awareness and understanding, and OSH competence and knowledge

Despite the diversity of our sample, and in common with the findings from a number of the other sector samples, the case study companies appeared to be dominated by the view that most risks were inherent to the industry. Interviewees — both workers and owner-managers — generally felt that there was only limited room for improving the work environment. This was also the case for many of the work processes themselves, many of which were physically hard and strenuous. For example, when asked about strenuous working positions, a Romanian worker said:

We are used to it. (RO, worker, 5-9 employees)

This reflected the typical approach, in particular among the workers we interviewed: one should not complain about the hardship. For example, in the Danish pig farm, workers continued to carry heavy bags even though a

¹⁹ These emphasise low costs, low innovation, very low wages, widespread use of contingent work, and low product differentiation (see EU-OSHA 2016).

wagon was available for moving them. Here workers saw this as part of the work culture, where one is expected to be able to carry heavy loads and handle them without complaining. This was also reflected in the understanding of working with animals described above. While there was national variation in this regard, in all four countries we found the perception that the risks are inherent and there is not much that can be done about them, although it was perhaps most profound in the Romanian and Estonian case study companies. In comparison with some of the manufacturing and construction companies, this attitude was particularly pronounced.

Risk awareness in many of the case study companies was dominated by the lack of a systematic or OSH-professional approach. Risk awareness, and indeed risk taking, was again often seen as an integral part of the trade rather than something that could be handled explicitly. However, this approach did not necessarily lead to lower risk awareness; in most of the case study companies the owner-managers in particular, but also the workers, were able to identify the main risks, despite the lack of any formal risk assessment. However, not surprisingly, those risks which were more subtle and/or had long-term implications, such as stress or repetitive work positions, were less well recognised. Nevertheless, most of the case study companies still recognised some of the long-term implications (although there was lower awareness of long-term implications in the Romanian case study companies). However, in some instances risks were recognised but there was no acknowledgement of or link to long-term problems. As an Estonian owner-manager put it:

Definitely, we do not have work-related stress. (EE, owner-manager, 10-19 employees)

This was in a company where workers worked almost all day during summer and autumn without any holidays, which strongly indicates that the owner-manager had a mistaken perception of the stress level among the workers in his company. In addition, physically hard tasks and seasonal fluctuations in workload were often not seen by owner-managers or workers as an OSH issue or, indeed, as part of the work environment that could be improved. This was most pronounced in the Estonian and Romanian case study companies, but it was also reflected in the French and Danish case study companies.

Most owner-managers ascribed accidents to a combination of technical and individual mistakes. Only two were able to acknowledge a more complex accident causation. These were from two of the biggest companies in the sample (French arboriculture and Danish horticulture), in which production was also based on specific worksites and achieved through standardised work processes — suggesting a difference by activity type as well as organisation size. Among the remaining establishments, three of the four Romanian owner-managers and one French owner-manager considered that the accidents that had happened had been caused by individual workers' mistakes.

This general 'common sense'²⁰ approach to OSH was also reflected in the owner-managers' own perception of their OSH knowledge. Most considered themselves to have an average or higher level of knowledge. This may have been the case based on their experience, but from a formal perspective it seemed to the researchers to be an overestimation, since it was clear that they often lacked knowledge of the formal requirements. In terms of OSH regulations, most of the owner-managers had at best a superficial understanding, with only those in the larger and more organised companies (such the French cooperative which was part of a larger group that also had an OSH professional) having substantial OSH knowledge. This reflects the fact that there are numerous managerial aspects of running a small enterprise, and most of the owner-managers did not prioritise the formal requirements regarding OSH.

Overall, the interviewees seemed to understand OSH less as something specific which companies can address, especially in comparison with those from the manufacturing and construction case study companies. Rather, risks were commonly seen as an inherent part of the work and thus to some extent unavoidable, in particular in relation to physically hard and strenuous work and the seasonal fluctuations in workload. This perspective was shared not only by owner-managers but also by workers. Risk awareness and OSH approach appeared to be bound by the traditions in the industry, although there was some variation in this by country. In the Danish case study companies there were indications that this was changing, with younger workers and managers often having a more nuanced perspective on, for example, workloads and work hours. Finally, the overall OSH

²⁰ As we describe in more detail in Part 3, 'common sense' refers to a shared perception and judgement which is appealed to as possessing authority and therefore not requiring debate. It is closely related to (but not the same as) tacit knowledge ('tricks of the trade') necessary to do a 'good job' and also to the adoption of routines that are deployed in daily working procedures. However, while routines are associated with actual operations and tacit knowledge refers to 'embodied' knowledge that is difficult to articulate, in common sense the emphasis is on perceptions and judgements of working situations, which anticipate (in this case safe or unsafe) behaviour and decisions.

approach was often based on a common sense and informal approach rather than a systematic and OSH professional approach; this was related to establishment size, with the larger companies having a more systematic approach.

3.4 OSH management and practice

In general, there was a lack of formalised routines regarding OSH (such as written risk assessments) in the case study companies. Most efforts to prevent accidents and improve the work environment had an ad hoc basis and were implemented through informal discussions, which tended to be embedded in more general discussions about production and productivity in everyday work. Only a few, and again the largest, of the firms had meetings at which workplace safety was the main topic. OSH management, as such, was apparent only in the largest French company (arboriculture), and even here this was mainly because the firm was owned by a larger enterprise which required a degree of systematic OSH management from its subsidiaries.

The majority of the companies were assessed by the researchers as following a reactive approach to OSH, where action was taken only if something had happened (see Table 3, Chapter 2); this was particularly the case for the smallest firms in our sample. One French manager summed it up:

I think we have never been aware of that issue because we never had to worry about it. (FR, owner-manager, 5-9 employees)

Only two of the case study companies were assessed by the researchers as following a proactive approach (see Table 3, Chapter 2) and again these were the largest French firm (arboriculture) and the large Danish horticulture producer. A reactive approach, however, does not necessarily result in a low level of risk control. In most of the case study companies the researchers considered that there was mediocre risk control, which tended to be based on experience and an ad hoc understanding of risks and how to control them. The companies with a high level of risk control were again the larger French arboriculture company and two of the Danish firms — that is, the companies that were characterised by a more systematic approach. In the French case, this again reflected the professionalisation and standardisation of OSH management within the larger corporate group and its consequent influence in the participating establishment. The companies where the researchers assessed that risk control was low were the smaller agricultural producers in Estonia and Romania, and the French bovine sales firm.

Within the case study companies, there was generally an informal understanding of work environment practices, and the same was true of their internal dissemination of safety knowledge, for example, to new workers. Even within those companies that were assessed by the researchers as having the most proactive approach to OSH, there was a tendency to rely on informal, oral communication and everyday practices regarding information, risk assessment, and training and information on safety procedures. Very few of the firms had any written OSH documentation or guidelines, and only the Danish horticulture firm and the Estonian plant nursery were considered by the researchers to have well-established written OSH documentation. Information on safety and health was therefore mainly given in an informal, oral manner as part of daily routines. Where there was any written information, this was typically on chemical substances. Several of the case study companies stated that they had no written risk assessment, despite this being mandatory. In addition, where it did exist, written risk assessment was often not used as an active tool or measure, but rather had been carried out simply in order to comply with legislation. However, in the Danish case study companies risk assessments had raised awareness among most of the owner-managers and also enabled more dialogue with their employees on OSH. In the French forestry company (which also had a social agenda of re-incorporating its workers into the labour market through their initial employment), management made workers sign a sheet stating that they would wear PPE and use technical equipment appropriately. This again provided management with an opportunity to discuss OSH matters with workers.

Very few of the firms in our sample collected any information on accidents or near-accidents, unless they were forced to do so (typically by labour inspectorates, generally only following a serious accident). In addition, it was unclear whether accidents that should have been reported to the authorities actually were, as this quote from an Estonian owner-manager suggests:

When the worker was near the tractor and pumped up the wheel, the wheel exploded and injured him. After a few weeks in hospital, he came back to work and I value him a lot, because of his expertise with different agriculture machines. ... No, we did not report this

accident to the Labour Inspectorate because the worker deals with the tractor next to his home and he said in the hospital that it was an off-the-job injury. (EE, owner-manager, 10-19 employees)

There were other examples where it was unclear to the researchers whether or not accidents were handled as prescribed by law. In addition, in some cases workers did not want to report accidents to the managers because they felt they were their own fault and/or would cause problems.

Practices for ensuring a good work environment were in general integrated into everyday work processes, but mostly in an informal way. For example, a French team leader in a forestry company explained that know-how and knowledge about safety were transmitted when mentoring workers, rather than through explicit OSH training. As we have indicated, in some cases, in particular where the level of risk awareness was low, OSH was perceived as inherent to the industry and to workers' experience. As a Romanian worker put it:

People have experience and know what the risks are; they do not have to be told. (RO, worker, 20-49 employees)

This is a rather extreme example. The majority of workers and owner-managers in our sample had a rather more nuanced perception of risks and how to handle them.

While there were numerous examples of work practices that had been improved, these mainly revolved around technical improvements. There were only few exceptions; for example organisational changes in the Danish horticulture company, where the ordering system had been changed to even out work pressures in the packing department. Many of the owner-managers, as well as workers (in particular in the Estonian sample, but also in the other countries), stated that they equated OSH improvements mainly with upgrades in technology, chiefly agricultural machinery, but also production facilities. A radical understanding, where the owner-manager seemed to completely ignore all other risks and OSH issues, was expressed by some:

The working conditions are not bad nowadays, because we have new machines. (EE, owner-manager, 10-19 employees)

Another said:

In such a modern cowshed, it's of course difficult to propose something better, but when some tools or machines have problems or they feel it's time to get a new one, they always approach me and state their opinion. (EE, owner-manager, 5-9 employees)

However, these technological improvements were rarely seen by the owner-manager as OSH improvements or investments in OSH, but rather as general investments in improving productivity and outcomes in the company. This was highlighted, for example, by the Danish owner-manager of a forestry company.

Seven of the 15 case study companies used an external OSH service provider, which is surprising since MSEs typically do not engage with OSH advisors very often compared with larger firms (EU-OSHA 2017a). The owner-managers' main motivation for this appeared to be to comply with legislation. A typical example was the Danish pig producer, who had used an external supplier to carry out written risk assessments in order to be in compliance with the legislation and hence avoid trouble with the Labour Inspectorate. In many cases, these kinds of procedures were left entirely to the external services; owner-managers, and so also workers, had no active engagement in, for example, written risk assessment. This was seen as allowing owner-managers to focus on the core tasks in their business.

In general, therefore, OSH risks and practices were addressed in an ad hoc and experience-based rather than systematic way. The ability to identify and handle OSH risks was based on industry experience and traditions rather than on a systematic and analytical approach.

3.5 Drivers

The company case studies indicate that owner-managers play an important role in OSH management, but in several of them OSH management was also strongly affected by external drivers. For instance, the Danish owner-managers in the sample were influenced by the presence of the Labour Inspectorate. While this did not

necessarily drive specific changes, inspections themselves, as well as the perceived risk of being inspected and the mere presence of the Labour Inspectorate, provided the case study companies with an OSH benchmark. For example, the owner-manager in the Danish agricultural service said that when he saw his employees working unsafely he asked them:

How do you think the Labour Inspectorate would assess this? (DK, owner-manager, 5-9 employees)

The risk of being inspected, therefore, increased OSH awareness and standards in the Danish case study companies. Here the regulatory regime, with its comparatively high number of inspections and strong institutional setting, had a substantial impact on the behaviour of both employees and owner-managers. In fact, the owner-managers of several of the companies, particularly those in Denmark and Romania, reported having frequent meetings with the labour inspectorate. However, they went on to explain that they generally did not receive OSH knowledge and information that they felt was particularly relevant to them at these meetings.

In the French cases, where the participating companies were part of a larger group, motivation for OSH initiatives was quite strongly driven by the parent organisation.

In all of the Estonian case study companies, two of the Romanian ones and one French one, the researchers considered that external pressure from legislation and regulation was the main driver for enforcing certain standards in the work environment. The three Estonian and two Romanian companies that were mainly motivated by inspections and legislation had all been recently inspected, in some cases numerous times. Here, therefore, inspections may have been, in effect, a precondition for the owner-managers to emphasise the legislation rather than their own values. In the two Romanian and two French case study companies which had not been inspected by the labour inspectorate, the researchers considered that the owner-managers themselves were the main driver for OSH. This suggests a pattern in which inspections increase extrinsic motivation, while companies that have not been inspected rely mainly on the owner-manager's intrinsic motivation. Within our sample, companies that had not been inspected had a low awareness of OSH. In addition, our interviewees also tended to acknowledge that:

with no law there would be chaos. (RO, worker, 20-49 employees)

This pattern is less clear in the Danish case study companies but, as discussed above, inspections did have an impact here as well. In one Danish company a manager explained that he felt the regulation could be somewhat annoying, although he claimed his company was compliant, but he also acknowledged the need for regulation, in particular to ensure a 'level playing field':

we are not the only company in the world. (DK8, manager, 20-49 employees)

In the cases where the owner-managers were mainly motivated by the legislation, these interviewees also expressed some degree of intrinsic value in having a safe work environment, although the extent to which they actually practised what they preached was, perhaps, arguable.

The literature also suggests that external partners within the value chain might function as drivers to improve OSH (EU-OSHA 2016). In this sample, however, such effects seemed to be rather limited. Two of the Romanian companies experienced a negative influence on OSH from the price pressure they faced within the value chain. This was reinforced by strong competition, including from imports, which further strengthened competitive pressure. This was also mentioned by interviewees in some of the Estonian cases, where the companies faced dire economic conditions. For example, a dairy farm with five employees was making a loss, and the owner-manager explained that this made it very difficult to prioritise safety and health.

In one of the Romanian case study companies there were some positive OSH impacts from the supply chain. These came from chemicals suppliers, which provided information on how to use their substances safely. In the French cases, as we have already noted, the OSH requirements of the parent companies had a positive impact.

Research also indicates that OSH certification is positively associated with a well-functioning management system (see, for example, Rocha 2010). However, most of the companies included in the study were not certified. They were, in general, too small and had insufficient OSH knowledge to be willing to invest time and resources in achieving certification.

3.6 Worker participation

In the OSH literature, highly mature and well-functioning OSH management systems are frequently characterised as being based on formal and active worker participation, regardless of sector (Walters and Nichols 2009). Only three of the case study companies (two Estonian and one Romanian) had an elected worker representative, and very few had other forms of informal worker involvement. For example, in the Danish horticulture company, workers were involved in areas such as finding solutions to OSH problems; this was something that was clearly valued by the worker we interviewed. While the Danish and French case study companies were, in many ways, the most organised in our sample — in terms of wages, working conditions and so on — none of these companies had formal OSH representative arrangements. This was despite the fact that two of them had more than nine employees, and so were legally obliged to have an elected OSH worker representative. In one of the Danish case study companies, both the employee and the owner-manager said that no one wanted to be elected as the OSH representative, despite encouragement. In this case, the owner-manager had taken the mandatory 3-day OSH representative training course himself, explaining that this meant that at least someone in the firm had been on the course. In the other company, which had the legal limit of nine employees, both the owner-manager and the worker stated that things would feel odd with a formal representative, since the company was characterised by very informal social relations. Taken together, these findings illustrate some of the problems faced in terms of employee representation. This said, the two largest Danish companies (the horticulture and the agricultural service supplier) had a collective agreement, so there was a strong union presence: the local union branch was involved in wage negotiations as necessary, which ensured formal worker representation, although this mainly related to labour relations rather than OSH.

All in all, the social relations in the case study companies were described by our participants as being informal, with apparently good social relations between owner-managers and workers. This is in keeping with previous research on MSEs (EU-OSHA 2016). It may also be a reflection of the ways in which the participating companies were recruited, which, as we have made clear, resulted in a sample likely to include many companies from the 'better' end of the spectrum, within which poor social relations are less likely. In general, the owner-managers emphasised the good social relations in their companies, as did the majority of the workers:

We feel like a big family. Our manager is taking good care of us. (EE, worker, 10-19 employees)

In fact, the quote above comes from a worker from a company that the researchers considered had rather poor OSH management and settings. Nevertheless, the metaphor of 'a big family' was used by both owner-manager and worker interviewees in many of our case studies, as was the case in a number of the other sectors. In addition, two of the smallest Romanian companies were actually family-run²¹.

In many instances, owner-managers also emphasised the fact that workers could always approach them with any requirements regarding the work environment. For them, this meant that there was, therefore, no need for formal representation. For the most part, workers backed this up. However, it was unclear if any would, or had, actually put this into practice. As one owner-manager put it:

We do not have workers' representatives because our company is small and I can talk to each worker every day if needed. (EE, owner-manager, 10-19 employees)

While social relations were described as informal and in general deemed to be good by our interviewees, some owner-managers also said that they found it difficult to get workers to engage in OSH matters. Again this was often confirmed by the workers we spoke to. For example, a Danish horticulture company manager (who was not a partner and perceived himself as an employee rather than a manager) seemed genuinely interested in finding an OSH representative but had been unable to do so, even though the position enjoys employment protection in Denmark. This was confirmed by the worker interviewee. Similarly, an owner-manager from an Estonian company talked about difficulties in getting workers to engage in written risk assessment:

²¹ Throughout the sector chapters we have tried to distinguish when the term 'family' is used in its most literal sense, to denote the kinship between those in our participating establishments, and when it is being used, as it often was, by our interviewees in its more colloquial sense to describe close and positive social relationships within their workplaces.

however, they [the workers] were not active. They are also not interested in the results of risk assessment; it seems that, for our workers, the most important thing is to receive their salary on time. (EE, owner-manager, 10-19 employees)

These findings indicate that some of the problems in relation to the lack of formal worker representation may stem from a low level of engagement from the workers' side. Often the argument was that, because of informal social relations and close 'family-type' bonds, workers did not deem it important or, in some instances, felt things would simply be awkward with a formal worker representative.

There was only one Estonian company in the sample where the owner-manager ascribed accidents mainly to the workers. In fact, the workers we spoke to generally had a stronger tendency to blame themselves and their colleagues than the owner-managers did. While two of the four Danish owner-managers acknowledged that OSH is mainly the employers' responsibility, the overall pattern in the remaining case study companies was that workers as well as employers were responsible for ensuring a safe work environment.

3.7 Conclusions

The MSEs in the agricultural sector studied in this project appear in general to be characterised by a rather traditional culture in which the approach to work organisation, work processes and hence also OSH is mainly based on previous experiences and practices in the industry. Many risks, both direct risks of accidents as well as indirect risks such as stress from seasonal workloads and long-term musculoskeletal injuries following strenuous and repetitive work tasks, were to some degree perceived as inherent to the industry, and thus hard to control, change or manage. The same understanding was reflected in work with animals, which can be dangerous, since they are large and can react in unpredictable ways, leading to accidents and injuries. These risks were understood as something one has to cope with in order to work in the industry, a point of view shared by many of the owner-managers and workers in the participating companies. The same can be said about the seasonal peaks in workloads. Agriculture is characterised by hard physical work and the understanding that this is an integral part of the industry continued to be dominant among the MSEs in our sample, although there was some perception that this was changing slightly among the younger interviewees. OSH measures or initiatives were seen not as separate from work processes, but rather as an integrated part of the work. Workers were often expected to learn through experience, and by applying 'common sense', how to avoid risks in their daily work, rather than through any type of OSH education or information.

In general, agriculture has also traditionally had a lower level of formalised working conditions and industrial relations than other sectors, which may make the establishment of formalised worker representation more difficult. Typically, social relations were described by both owner-managers and workers as good and informal, with strong bonds between owner-managers and employees. This, too, can hinder a more effective and formalised approach to the work environment. In addition, seasonal, temporary and contingent workers were frequently taken on in companies in our sample. In most countries, such temporary workers occupy a much more precarious position than their permanently employed counterparts. When it comes to OSH, these workers are in a substantially more vulnerable situation, generally receiving little or no instruction on safety matters and finding themselves in a far weaker position in terms of being able to speak up about perceived OSH concerns.

The smaller firms in the sample were more vulnerable and less organised in relation to OSH than their larger counterparts (20-49 employees). Here, the smaller size of a company implies that the owner and management (often the same person) do not feel they have enough time and resources to handle OSH matters, since they prioritise the daily operation of the company above any other issues. The result is a general lack of a systematic approach to solving and identifying problems and challenges in the work environment. Often such companies do not have — or do not prioritise — the necessary resources to address these problems and challenges.

There were some marked national variations within the four countries in the sample. Both owner-managers and employees were less attentive to the complex issues of OSH in the two eastern Member States, in particular Romania, but also to some extent Estonia. The case study companies in France and Denmark, on the other hand, could be seen as having a more regulated and organised approach to OSH. This may, at least in part, reflect differing contexts in relation to regulatory inspection. Within the sample, it seemed that the experience of inspection was an important driver for OSH standards and arrangements — with owner-managers themselves a main driver in the absence of this experience. In addition, the influence of requirements made and resources provided by parent companies on the OSH practices of subsidiaries, as compared with arrangements within independent establishments, was clear.

4 Manufacturing: manufacture of metal, food, wood, chemical, paper and textile products

4.1 Introduction

The majority of companies in the European manufacturing sector are MSEs. According to Eurostat figures for the EU-28 in 2015, about 83 % of manufacturing companies were classified as micro enterprises (employing fewer than 10 people), and these employed about 13 % of the total number of workers.

From 2008 to 2013 the number of manufacturing enterprises in the EU-28 decreased by about 5.3 % (European Commission 2014). Reasons for the shrinkage, which is expected to continue, include the economic crisis, but more importantly global outsourcing to and competition with developing countries, as well as the reduction in the importance of traditional manufacturing that goes along with the increasing importance of (business) services (EU-OSHA 2016).

Regarding OSH, the manufacturing sector is — generally speaking — characterised by a high exposure to physical health strains, and workers experience more negative health outcomes than those in other sectors (Eurofound 2015b). In 2014, almost 17 % of all fatal occupational accidents in the EU-28 occurred in the manufacturing sector, as did more than 20 % of non-fatal occupational accidents, which is the highest percentage of all sectors (Eurostat 2016a).

The analysis presented below is based on interviews with owner-managers and employees from 39 micro and small manufacturing companies across all nine of the European countries that were the focus of the project. Table 5 summarises the case study companies by size and country. As the table makes clear, the sample was largely made up of establishments manufacturing metal products, parts and machinery, but also extended to those manufacturing products including, for example, food, wood, chemical, paper and textiles. This, of course, means that a number of sub-sectors of this particularly diverse sector, such as the manufacture of coke and refined petroleum products, basic metals and so on, were not represented in our sample.

Table 5 Overview of case study establishments: manufacturing (manufacture of metal, food, wood, chemical, paper and textile products)

| Country | Size of company (number of employees) | | | |
|----------------|---------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| | <5 employees | 5-9 employees | 10-19 employees | 20-49 employees |
| Belgium | | BE1: Manufacturing of machines (for example lifting tables) | BE2: Installation and maintenance of plant and machinery | BE3: Supply of specialised spare parts BE4: Packaging of rolled steel |
| Denmark | | | DK1: Manufacturing of industrial cooling and ventilation equipment DK2: Manufacturing of dairy robots | |
| Estonia | | EE3: Printing company | EE1: Production of jam | EE2: Manufacturing of log cabins EE4: Heat energy company |
| France | | FR3: Manufacturing of micro pieces of metal | FR1: Manufacturing of vehicle conversions FR2: Manufacturing of wood products | FR4: Vehicle conversion for disabled people FR5: Cheese manufacture |
| Germany | DE2: Artists' forge | | DE1: Manufacturing of crab packaging | DE3: Production of paper testing technology DE4: Manufacturing of air-conditioning units |

| Country | Size of company (number of employees) | | | |
|---------|---------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| | <5 employees | 5-9 employees | 10-19 employees | 20-49 employees |
| Italy | | IT5: Production of screw cylinders and gears* | IT3: Production of automotive special parts* IT4: Production of doors* IT6: Production of elastic bands, fringes etc.* IT8: Production of hydraulic/pneumatic machines* | IT1: Manufacturing of saws IT2: Conveyer of belt designs* IT7: Production of drawn and ground steel* |
| Romania | RO2: Manufacturing of metal | RO1: Production of paints, primers, glues etc. RO4: Production of clothes | RO3: Production of furniture | |
| Sweden | | SE1: Printing, folding letters SE2: Manufacturing of industrial/household chemicals | SE3: Manufacturing of specialised instruments for material testing | |
| UK | | UK3: Manufacturing of air-conditioners | UK2: Shop fit-out service | UK1: Printing of labels UK4: Supply of racking storage systems UK5: Tyre warehousing and distribution centre |

* Case establishments *not* recruited via ESENER-2.

As indicated in Table 5, the sample included 11 micro and 28 small enterprises. Most were well-established companies, with 27 having been in the business for more than 10 years and only 4 for less than 5 years.

4.2 Sector specificities and the sample

The manufacturing sector is characterised by a great variety of tasks, from traditional production techniques (for example companies that manufacture musical instruments) to large-scale manufacturing of complex products (such as aeroplanes) (Eurostat 2017). Regulation in the manufacturing sector is high because of various industry standards (for instance regarding the size of windows or screws), but also because many companies work in the B2B market and thus have to coordinate with other companies or adjust their products to customers' needs. Bearing this in mind, the following section describes the specificities of our sample.

Twenty-nine of the participating firms were independent. Of the remaining 10, 7 were subsidiaries, 2 (both French) were part of cooperatives and 1 (Romanian) was a major shareholder in a larger enterprise.

The owner-managers were predominantly male; only five were female. Eighteen had tertiary and 9 secondary-level education, and a further 10 had vocational education²².

The owner-managers described competitive pressure, which can lead to corner-cutting, work intensification and excessive work hours and so impact on OSH, as follows. Ten stated that their companies experienced little competition, 15 said it was medium and 14 described competitive pressures from the market as tough. In order to remain competitive and fulfil customers' needs, several owner-managers reported engaging in a niche market, focusing on high-quality products or reducing prices. For example, the owner-manager of an artists' forge in Germany reported that competition was low. He went on to explain that it had decreased as a result of the company's engagement in a niche market and its development of long-lasting relationships with clients. This was typical of our case study companies: other owner-managers also felt that a good relationship with clients and specialisation had mitigated competitive pressures. There was one exception to this: a German company

²² Two did not provide this information.

that produced specialised air-conditioning for business clients but where the owner-manager felt that there was, as yet, no benefit to this specialisation because there were so many standard products in the market.

Most of the companies in our sample were expanding in size (16 companies) or were at least stable (14 companies), as opposed to contracting (9 companies).

The owner-manager of an Italian elastic band producing company felt that the financial crisis, coupled with low market demand due to an influx of foreign manufacturers with similar products, was the main reason for the reduction in staff in his firm. Many of the owner-managers also saw both high levels of competition and the difficulty of foreseeing market trends as problems, especially when they were active in sub-sectors with a rapidly changing market demand.

In contrast, investments during the crisis, industrial development, acquisition by case study companies of other companies in the same line of work, trading with foreign companies and working in a niche market were named as success factors by owner-managers of the companies in which numbers of employees were growing.

Just 4 of the participating companies were characterised by the researchers as low road companies (see Table 3, Chapter 2), with 22 assessed as following a high road and 13 a middle road strategy. The researchers also considered that 22 of the case study companies had low employee vulnerability.

Like employee vulnerability and competitive pressure, customer and supplier demands can also impact on OSH. Within our sample, owner-managers reported that dependency was high when there were only a few relevant clients, as well as when clients were from foreign countries, and thus different regulations applied, or when there were market fluctuations that were difficult to predict. In addition, seasonal work was associated with difficulties in some instances. For example, the owner-manager of a Romanian furniture firm explained that the company's clients tended to carry out renovations during the summer and, as a result, demand was high in that period of the year, whereas during the winter the company struggled to find work. All in all, 14 of the 39 case study companies were considered by the researchers to be highly dependent on clients' demands, and just 3 on suppliers' demands. For example, the owner-manager of an Italian company described suppliers as being 'fundamental' for their work because they did not produce anything 'in-house' and were thus reliant on high-quality products being delivered on time by their suppliers. Nonetheless, this owner-manager regarded the impact of the suppliers on OSH as non-existent, and saw it as limited to the production process. Moreover, several owner-managers stated that a change of suppliers was easily possible, indicating that dependency in this regard was low.

As indicated above, European manufacturing companies are subject to various regulations. In addition to OSH directives, the Machinery Directive 2006/42 EU applies industry standards as part of European and national standardisation. Some of the participating companies dealt with chemicals and so also had to follow relevant regulations in these areas, while those that worked in food production were subject to food hygiene regulations. The impact of these various regulations was strongly dependent on the type of work and substances involved. In some companies, owner-managers and employees reported that non-OSH regulations had a positive effect on OSH, because they included various measures that were also OSH-relevant.

In conclusion, the case study companies were very diverse in terms of both their tasks and organisation. Competitive pressure was moderate to high as a result of market trends and/or the financial crisis. Dedication to a niche market, a reduction in product prices and better product quality had been used as strategies to lower competitive pressure. There was higher dependency on customers' demands than on the demands of suppliers, but overall dependency on the value chain was estimated by the researchers to be moderate. Companies with a high dependency tended to have few clients or to struggle because of market fluctuations or varying requirements, for example from foreign companies they worked with. All the participating owner-managers had at least secondary education. Employee vulnerability was estimated by the researchers to be low to medium.

4.3 Risk awareness and understanding, and OSH competence and knowledge

As indicated in Table 5 and outlined in the previous section, the sample was very diverse. The occupational risks workers faced, therefore, also varied.

Almost all interviewees (owner-managers and workers alike) reported that there was a risk of slips, trips, bruises and cuts. In addition, some reported that working at height or on ladders was a risk for workers, as were falling

objects. Many suggested that some risks were inherent to the work itself and thus to some extent unavoidable. These hazards were perceived as being 'minor risks'.

Regarding physical and ergonomic strains, manual handling of heavy loads was most commonly reported by the interviewees. Back pain and musculoskeletal problems were seen as occurring frequently. In addition, repetitive work, strenuous postures, heat and noise were mentioned. For the most part, therefore, imminent and acute risks were recognised, whereas risks that affect health in the long term were less likely to be recognised. This, of course, is similar across many of the sector findings in this part of the report.

Our interviewees also reported a range of hazards in relation to exposure to chemical and biological agents. These mainly depended on the type of work involved, but included, for example, lime, acids, dust (for instance metal, paper or wood), cleaning agents, smoke and gases. However, some interviewees reported relatively limited exposure. Work involving high-risk materials or in high-risk areas was usually also covered by additional safety regulations or protective measures, and many interviewees suggested that workers' awareness of these acute risks was generally very high.

In addition, in some of the participating enterprises, work was carried out entirely or partly on clients' premises, exposing workers to additional associated risks. For example, respondents in a Swedish testing instrument manufacturing enterprise explained that workers faced problems travelling to or from clients' homes. Therefore, in addition to the risk their daily work imposed, they faced further risks when travelling and loading/unloading their vehicles. In contrast, other interviewees felt there was a benefit to changing workplaces, suggesting that it increased workers' risk awareness. For example, an Estonian owner-manager explained that they regularly held meetings, involving the safety representatives, owner-manager and a working environment specialist, at each new work site. He felt that working on varying sites had a positive impact on risk awareness:

When we go to sites, then the reps from other areas see and experience a variety of safety problems which they may not have faced in their own area before. (EE, owner-manager, 20-49 employees)

Overall, the researchers considered that risk awareness was medium to high, with only a few exceptions. Even though several owner-managers and workers perceived some risks as inherent to the work, they were still aware of them.

In addition, an owner-manager explained that his own risk awareness was high thanks to his participation in the daily production processes:

I have good knowledge of the risks in the company because even now I am actively involved in the daily work processes. (IT, owner-manager, 5-9 employees)

On the one hand, this statement conveys the advantage of owner-managers being involved in the production process. They experience the same risks as their employees and so are more aware of them. This was most common among the smallest companies in the sample. On the other hand, it is important to be clear that when this is accompanied by unsystematic risk management it can lead to a 'common sense' approach, in which sources of knowledge are previous work experiences and outdated job education, and frequently many, particularly of the more subtle, risks are not detected. Owner-managers' involvement in production, therefore, can have a positive influence when it is accompanied by systematic risk assessment, but when this is absent it may be more likely to have negative implications for OSH.

The impact of low risk awareness on OSH management was of concern. For example, in an Estonian company where the researchers assessed overall risk awareness as low, the worker explained that he and his colleagues based their knowledge on experience. They were left on their own, and felt that their owner-manager was not interested in OSH-related topics. As a result, the responsibility for risk prevention, and indeed OSH 'management', was individualised. This said, even when risk awareness was assessed as being high by the researchers, the case study companies did not necessarily implement the required OSH measures.

There were no participating companies in which the researchers considered that none of the acute risks were recognised. Among the 13 companies in which the researchers assessed that only a few of the acute risks were recognised, it was mainly the risk of physical hazards for which protective measures, such as PPE, were used that were underestimated. Some owner-managers, and also workers, thought that risks were then 'under control' and so regarded such work as safe. However, in some instances workers stated that they did not follow safety

procedures because the work was easier or quicker to carry out without, for example, PPE. As a worker from a jam production enterprise put it:

It's my own carelessness that I didn't wear the gloves when I accidentally poured pumpkin puree (90 °C) on my hands. Additionally, I have to admit that gloves are uncomfortable. It's easier and steadier to hold the bucket in my hands when I have no gloves. (EE, worker, 10-19 employees)

Similar statements were made by workers in some of the other case study companies. This notion was often accompanied by the view that accidents were workers' own fault — the result of individual mistakes. For example, there had been a fatal accident in an Estonian company and the owner-manager attributed it to three major mistakes made by the (very experienced) worker himself. As a result, no additional preventive measures were deemed necessary.

Some of the workers who were interviewed, therefore, saw it as their responsibility to take care of their own safety and health, rather the responsibility of management:

You receive all the necessary information to prevent OSH problems, the rest depends on you. (BE, worker, 20-49 employees)

I cleaned my machine and I fell off the stepladder. The footstool! I had a sprained ankle. It was my fault, I was a fool. Otherwise, there are no risks at our premises. (FR, worker, 5-9 employees)

It was evident, therefore, that responsibility for OSH was individualised in some of our case study companies. However, there were owner-managers who reported that accidents were investigated at an organisational level. In these instances, accidents served as a trigger for talking about OSH-related topics and increasing safety measures. As one owner-manager put it:

We gather all workers together and go through every single safety rule again (EE, owner-manager, 20-49 employees)

In some cases, risks were not spontaneously referred to by interviewees, although they were clearly aware of them when asked directly about particular risks. For example, an owner-manager of a Romanian clothing factory did not mention ergonomic risks, but was well aware of them. Similarly, neither the owner-manager nor the worker from a French manufacturer of metal pieces came up with any risks at all, but again they were aware when asked directly about individual risks. This suggests that employers and workers get used to risks over time, and start to regard them as simply part of the job.

In addition, some risks were acknowledged by the interviewees, but were not regarded as relevant in terms of OSH. For example, the owner-manager from the Romanian clothes producer referred to above stated that standing activities were 'no problem' because her mother stood as much as her employees. Here, therefore, even though the owner-manager was aware that her employees stood a lot, she did not recognise the need for any preventive measures, seeming to assume workers would use their common sense in this regard.

The researchers considered that, in virtually all cases, awareness of long-term risks was substantially lower than that of acute risks. This may, of course, reflect the greater difficulty in their detection, as well as the tendency to 'discount' risks seen as inherent to daily work, but it is likely that restricted resources for OSH also played a part here. Most strikingly, psychosocial strains were non-existent in the opinion of some owner-managers and workers. This was especially evident in the Italian companies. When psychosocial strains were reported, time pressure on employees was considered the most relevant hazard. Some also reported conflicts with clients, colleagues or suppliers. But others mentioned psychosocial strain without considering it a problem:

Does it get busy? Yes, before Christmas ... but we'll manage. Not at other times really. Problems between workers? No. We are like a family here. (EE, owner-manager, 5-9 employees)

In contrast, other owner-managers recognised and tried to address such problems:

A few weeks ago, a truck worker placed the particles in a wrong place. Another worker, who had to work near the area, got into a dangerous situation. A conflict arose which needed my

interference. Now, everything is solved, but it took some time and patience. I needed to use skills to solve it calmly. (EE, owner-manager, 20-49 employees)

However, the normalisation of stress was common. As one worker put it:

It is giving and receiving: the manager is flexible in planning and respecting our needs, and we take the necessary overtime to finish the work when needed ... It is never really in balance, but if you like your work, it will be in balance. (BE, worker, 10-19 employees)

Overall, though, as in other sectors, there was a strong tendency to underestimate psychosocial risks.

There was also a great variety of OSH competence and knowledge levels among the interviewees. Generally, owner-managers assessed their own OSH competence and knowledge levels as high. However, there were some exceptions, with five describing their knowledge levels as low. For example, an owner-manager from the United Kingdom had decided to acquire external support because he was overwhelmed by the scale of his OSH tasks. On the other hand, an Estonian owner-manager was simply not interested in OSH topics, and so also assessed his own level of knowledge as low. The owner-manager of a German crab packaging company said she had no OSH-related training at all because she had taken over the business after her spouse had passed away — but despite this she did not perceive her OSH knowledge as low. By contrast, the manager of a Romanian company had participated in a 720-hour OSH course, which he felt had given him a great deal of relevant information, and he thus assessed his level of knowledge as high. It was evident, therefore, that owner-managers' estimation of their own OSH knowledge was dependent on a range of factors and, in many cases, may not have been an accurate reflection of actual knowledge.

Owner-managers reported that their OSH competence was mainly derived from professional education, OSH-related training and work experience. In 21 of the 39 case study companies it was reported that the employees had participated in some kind of OSH training, although in four companies there had been no such training. In the remainder, OSH education was seen as part of professional competence and so no formal OSH training was given in addition.

Besides any OSH training they had received, the owner-managers mentioned several sources of OSH information. For several, the main such source was the labour inspectorate, which was seen both as a support and as a control mechanism. Others referred to leaflets (provided, for example, by external prevention services, insurance companies or sector organisations). In most of these instances, this was not information or support that owner-managers had actively sought. However, among those with a relatively high interest in OSH, there was more evidence of actively seeking OSH information. As might be expected, in comparison with owner-managers who did not actively seek such information, this was linked with both higher reported levels of OSH knowledge and the use of a greater number of sources of information. Where a private external OSH service provider had been contracted, owner-managers almost always regarded this as their main source of information, as we describe in more detail below. Some interviewees also elaborated on problems with trying to find a solution for a particular problem. For example, the OSH representative of a Danish company explained that he had asked the labour inspectorate about permitted heights for a forklift, but considered the answer he had received 'useless'. Regarding sources of information he said:

It is quite a jungle out there [information-wise]. (DK, worker, 10-19 employees)

In fact, while most of the owner-managers were able to point to a number of sources of OSH information when asked, many also indicated that they were overwhelmed by the volume of information and possible sources, particularly when they were looking for something specific.

In summary, as in other sectors, awareness in relation to acute risks was high to moderate in this sample, but there was an underestimation of long-latency risks, especially psychosocial risks. When accidents happened these were sometimes investigated at an organisational level, in which case they also served as an opportunity to talk about OSH at a company level. However, much more commonly interviewees individualised hazards and accidents.

OSH competence was derived from professional education, OSH-related training and work experience. This last was also referred to as 'common sense', and was most often referred to in companies with less systematic OSH management arrangements.

4.4 OSH management and practice

The sample encompassed a variety of structures in relation to OSH management, practices and routines. This section provides an overview of these structures.

4.4.1 Risk assessment

Five of the 39 case study companies reported that they did not have any written risk assessments. In four of these companies, the researchers also considered risk awareness, particularly in relation to psychosocial risks, to be generally low. Only the artists' forge in Germany differed: despite the lack of written assessments, researchers considered that the owner-manager was 'motivated to engage in OSH informally'. However, from another perspective, the presence of a written risk assessment did not necessarily correspond with a high level of awareness of risks. For example, the owner-manager of an Estonian case study company carried out risk assessments himself, but during the interview it became apparent that he was aware of only some risks while others were totally neglected:

We have nothing dangerous here. Slippery floors? Well, who doesn't after cleaning? I find it ridiculous. (EE, owner-manager, 5-9 employees)

The same manager also explained that he did not see the need for structured risk assessment in such a small company:

When I first started to write a risk analysis, I felt it's something rubbish! Small companies do not need to write something like this down. I don't want bureaucracy here! ... But this is what the labour inspector asked. So I did it — a long and dull document. Luckily, next time, another labour inspector visited us and he said we could leave all these unnecessary things out. (EE, owner-manager, 5-9 employees)

Thus, the owner-manager carried out the risk assessment because of external pressure and without understanding its purpose. In the end, he had a written assessment that seemed to be reasonable for him in terms of workload, but its use, and hence any impact on OHS, was questionable.

This was also apparent in relation to contracted external prevention services. Even though they frequently had a positive impact on the production of written risk assessments, the actual use of that assessment varied. Some owner-managers reported that the external service provider was contracted only in order to conduct an assessment and thus fulfil the legal obligation, rather than in order to improve OSH management:

I have never really understood the purpose of doing the risk assessment. (DK, owner-manager, 10-19 employees)

Various similar statements indicated that documentation was not (in 13 companies) or only seldom (in 5 cases) actually used in OSH management. In general, this was because its purpose was not clear to the management. When owner-managers perceived that they were still responsible for OSH even though they had contracted an external service, OSH management was more likely to be systematic as opposed to simply aimed at fulfilling legal obligations.

This range of approaches was also apparent in relation to other forms of risk assessment. Only two companies reported that they did not assess risks at all: an Estonian jam manufacturer and a United Kingdom printing firm. Even though the Estonian jam manufacturer had an informal approach towards OSH, the owner-manager stated that he was aware of the risks (detected via common sense or from previous work experience) and applied safety measures.

In general, the absence of formal approaches led to reactive and ad hoc measures. However, in the majority of case study companies, risk assessments were in compliance with the legislation.

4.4.2 Risk communication

Putting OSH on meeting agendas was quite common in the case study companies. In particular, owner-managers of companies that worked on clients' premises described discussing the day's work and, in some cases, the relevant protective measures, during daily pre-work briefings. As might be expected, the focus was almost always on acute risks and rarely extended to psychosocial strains. Such meetings also often reviewed experiences from the previous day:

We have to fill a small timetable if there was an accident or a problem ... Every morning the workshop manager takes notice of the situation with the team and we talk about what we experienced the previous day. (FR, worker, 20-49 employees)

Thus, where meetings were scheduled into daily processes and OSH was integrated into the discussion on other topics (for example about productivity), this could provide a basis for talking about OSH-related problems.

4.4.3 Control and overall approach

The overall level of risk control was assessed by the researchers as generally high or medium; there were only seven companies (from France, Italy, Romania and the United Kingdom) where it was assessed as low.

Again, however, there was some diversity in relation to overall company strategy. Almost half of the case study companies were assessed by the researchers as being reactive towards OSH, while the other half were either reactive and proactive or mainly proactive. For example, in a French producer of metal pieces where the approach was assessed as reactive, interest in OSH was considered by the researchers to be low, as was OSH knowledge, and there had been no inspectorate visit. There had been only one incident, which was attributed to individual mistakes, and thus neither the owner-manager nor the workers saw any reason to worry about OSH. In contrast, in a Danish company making ventilation systems that was considered as having a proactive approach towards OSH, the owner-manager was very keen to create a safe work environment. This company also had an OSH representative as well as a shop steward, both of whom were involved with OSH. In fact, numbers of workers at this firm had dropped below the threshold at which a shop steward is mandatory, but the role had nevertheless been retained.

Overall, the motivation of the owner-manager seemed to be decisive in relation to the instigation of a proactive approach towards OSH. However, the relevance of 'employees' common sense' was emphasised by most owner-managers, including those that were generally proactive.

In conclusion, some owner-managers reported having a structured approach towards OSH, and this was often accompanied by external support and good communication. The attitude of the owner-manager regarding responsibility for OSH was particularly significant in this regard. These findings were consistent across the business types and countries in the sample.

4.5 Drivers

A number of internal and external drivers of OSH were evident.

The need to comply with legislation and, in particular, to avoid sanctions, was clearly important to some of the owner-managers, especially those leading companies which the researchers considered had a reactive approach to OSH and lacked systematic OSH management.

About half of the case study companies had experienced at least one inspection by the labour inspectorate in the 5 years prior to the study. Some of these owner-managers reported that these inspections were supportive — for example, providing practical improvement tips to the owner-manager of a French vehicle conversion firm. Elsewhere they prompted consideration of and discussion about OSH — for example in an Estonian printing company where the owner-manager thought about OSH only every other year when there was an inspection. Inspections by other bodies were also important in some instances — for example, a French cheese factory was required to meet certain food hygiene standards, some of which were also OSH relevant.

In contrast, other owner-managers reported that inspections simply increased their workload because they resulted in lots of requirements, many of which were not viable:

In order for them [the OSH inspectors] to be on the safe side they have all kinds of requirements we cannot afford. (RO, owner-manager, 5-9 employees)

In some instances it was suggested that the impact of the labour inspectorate was dependent on the individual inspector. For example, the owner-manager of a Danish manufacturer of non-domestic cooling systems felt that the answers he was given to his questions were not clear and were, therefore, irrelevant. Similarly, the worker (and OSH coordinator) of a Swedish case study company explained that he had not found a recent inspection useful:

The workplace was not at all suitable for our work operations. We had this oven and when you started it, there were a lot of smelly fumes, and we didn't have any process of ventilation ... but they [the labour inspectors] didn't notice that. They looked at the weirdest things ... they completely missed the target. They missed all the big things, I can tell you. (SE, worker, 10-19 employees)

As we have noted above, where companies contracted an external OSH service provider, this was mainly perceived by owner-managers as a means of complying with the legislation rather than actually improving OSH. This may explain the fact that such services were rarely seen by owner-managers as a main OSH driver. For example, a Belgian owner-manager stated that the external prevention service provider was not important for OSH arrangements:

If we don't ask anything, we don't get anything [from them]. (BE, owner-manager, 20-49 employees)

Some of the case study companies had sector-specific certificates. This was the case for seven of the eight Italian companies, while a French company had an Occupational Health and Safety Assessment Series (OHSAS) 18001 certificate, and three others (from Italy, Sweden and the United Kingdom) had an International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 9001 certificate for quality management. For all three of the latter companies, owner-managers reported that they had no problems in fulfilling legal requirements on OSH because these were also included in the requirements of the certificate.

The influence of the value chain was assessed by the researchers as positive for approximately half of the case study companies, and negative for only a few (8 of 39), while in the remaining 12 researchers considered that there was no influence. As might be expected, value chain impact was generally higher where companies worked on clients' premises. Again, regulations were also influential in this regard:

Most of our suppliers are Swedish companies that must follow Swedish rules and regulations and all companies we buy from are ISO 9000 certified. We only have very few suppliers from outside the EU and then we have a special sub-contractor declaration form that they must sign. (SE, owner-manager, 10-19 employees)

In addition, a Belgian company reported that its customers required a Safety, Health and Environment Checklist for Contractors (*Veiligheidschecklist Aannemer, VCA*) certificate (indicating that workers and operational managers have been trained in the use of PPE, safety regulations and other OSH matters).

During the interviews, owner-managers were directly asked about their motivation for dealing with OSH. Among workers, this area was addressed indirectly, for example by asking about OSH-related changes. The attitude of the owner-manager seemed to be crucial in determining companies' OSH provision and approach. This is not surprising, but it is important to be clear here that high levels of owner-manager motivation did not necessarily correspond to better OSH. OSH knowledge, in conjunction with formal routines (for example regarding OSH communication), were also necessary for a positive influence on OSH management.

In addition, several owner-manager and worker interviewees mentioned a good social climate (often reported as family-type) as another relevant driver for OSH. This was seen as encouraging owner-managers to provide a safe work environment. For example, an Italian employer stated that he felt like a parent and thus wanted to keep his metaphorical 'family' healthy. There were only 11 employees in this company, and the relationship between the employer and all his employees was described in both interviews as being very close. As a result, communication on OSH-related topics was mainly informal. Of course this kind of motivation is not necessarily altruistic. The owner-manager of a French company that manufactured wood products stated that employees

are more productive and work more effectively when they are satisfied, and, in addition to labour inspectorate inspections, this was a main driver for him.

In some cases, motivation for implementing further OSH measures came from the experience of accidents. This also implies that the previous experience, in other companies and/or sectors, of owner-managers, workers, safety delegates etc. is important, but of course this is not a systematic way of managing OSH.

Reputation was also important in some instances. For example, the owner-manager of an Estonian company reported that it was known by clients as a reliable company that delivered good-quality products. He went on to explain:

We get a lot of visitors from our possible clients; especially foreign visitors (99 % of our production goes abroad). In the last few months many French people have been here. We know that, for clients, we have to look good; also our production and safety level should look satisfactory. So we have made our rules more explicit; we use more safety signs which are understandable for everyone and have marked all areas where trucks, lifts or other vehicles drive. (EE, owner-manager, 20-49 employees)

It was evident that there were also barriers to improving OSH. Limited financial and time resources were identified as main problems. For example, in an Estonian printing company the owner-manager explained that he was not motivated to invest time or monetary resources because he saw no successful future for the company.

In summary, the motivation of the owner-manager had a crucial influence on OSH. As in other sectors, for some a 'family-type' approach was significant in this regard. However, the fulfilment of legal provisions and improving productivity were also important. Labour inspectorates seemed to have a limited but generally positive influence, and value chain effects were most apparent among companies that worked on clients' premises.

4.6 Worker participation

Formalised arrangements for worker involvement were not common among the participating companies from France, Italy, Romania and the United Kingdom. There were no such arrangements in any of the Romanian companies, although there were some in two of the five French, three of the eight Italian and two of the five United Kingdom companies. In contrast, all of the case study companies from Germany, Denmark and Sweden and the majority of those from Estonia and Belgium (three out of four in each case) had some formalised worker involvement arrangements. In the German artists' forge, for example, there were frequent meetings with OSH on the agenda, even though there were only three employees. These differences, of course, at least in part reflect differences in the countries' regulations (see Part 1 of this report).

In contrast to some of the other sectors, over half of the case study companies had an elected worker representative for OSH. This was generally regarded as positive by the owner-managers, although a few of them indicated that the representative was there only to comply with the legislation. For example, in the Estonian jam producer, the worker who was interviewed made it clear that workers were not aware of their right to go to the representative with OSH-related problems, and the owner-manager said:

Safety is important to me, but I don't see that the worker [employees' 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 the information from them. (EE, owner-manager, 10-19 employees)

This clearly shows the significance of management support for ensuring that such arrangements can, in practice, make a positive impact.

Two owner-managers from Sweden and one from France reported that they had tried to encourage worker representation but had not succeeded, as motivation among workers was low.

Similarly, one of the French companies had a system where employees could report OSH problems anonymously, but the owner-manager regarded it as ineffective, explaining that it was infrequently used; and in a Belgian company with about 25 employees there was a so-called 'improvement suggestion form', but again the owner-manager said it was rarely used.

However, where companies were part of a wider group, the influence of the parent organisation could be particularly important for OSH, including in relation to worker participation. For example, interviewees in a United Kingdom company that had changed ownership from one multinational company to another explained that safety standards, which had been low under the original owner, had risen, and a safety committee and employee representatives had been introduced. As this example makes clear, influence of this kind could be positive or negative.

Of course, the size of the case study company was also important in relation to the presence or absence of formalised worker involvement arrangements — not least as reflected in national regulations in some cases, as we have already indicated. Larger companies in our sample were therefore more likely to have some kind of formalised worker involvement than their smaller counterparts. Despite this, there was great variety across the sample: from only limited oral and informal communication to standardised communication paths.

Even when there was no formalised OSH communication or involvement of employees, a good social relationship among colleagues and the manager was regarded as supportive by owner-managers and workers alike. Employees valued the fact that they could approach their manager directly:

The management is very open minded, if we have something to say, we say it, and they take it into account. If there is an OSH problem I just walk into the manager's office to discuss and solve it; this may be different in a bigger company. (BE, worker, 20-49 employees)

This was typical of many of our participants. In general, the social relations that were possible because of the company's size were seen as supporting the process of involving employees in OSH. This can be illustrated through statements from the interviewees from a Danish company with 12 employees, who mentioned several examples of how workers had influenced OSH by providing practical feedback to their employer. For example, workers had suggested storing wires and tubes on the ceiling rather than on the floor, where they caused a mess and a trip hazard, and these changes had been implemented. In addition, at the time of the interview, the management was in the process of finding a crane to move heavy products — another issue that had been raised by the workers. In contrast, in a French cheese manufacturer there was no open communication and the worker who was interviewed stated that most of the employees regularly had pains in their joints, but were afraid to speak out. This interviewee assumed that this was because they were afraid of losing their jobs if they reported their concerns. Similarly, a worker in another French company explained that he frequently asked for OSH to be added to the agenda, but to no avail. These examples show how an open working climate can facilitate the discussion and implementation of OSH measures, but also how poor relationships between management and workers can be a barrier to OSH.

Twenty-two of the owner-managers and 25 of the workers stated that OSH responsibility lay with both management and workers, while 11 owner-managers and 7 workers felt that they themselves were mainly responsible for OSH. However, as in other sectors, it was common for managers to be perceived as responsible for basic OSH arrangements and creating a safe work environment, but for the use of these arrangements and adherence to safety procedures to be seen as the responsibility of each individual worker.

In conclusion, although formal worker involvement was evident in some companies, there were also cases where such involvement was minimal. The former were usually characterised by good social relations and a combination of formal and informal communication paths. However, in interpreting these findings it is important to bear in mind, as we have already indicated, that the interviewed workers were selected by management. In addition, in some cases they were the elected safety representative.

4.7 Conclusions

The sample from which these findings are drawn was diverse. It comprised 39 companies, about three-quarters of which were independent. They were operating in different countries, in various sub-sectors of the manufacturing sector and in different market situations. They faced a range of competitive pressures and included a great variety of OSH knowledge and practices. Most were well established and many had developed strategies, such as a good relationship with clients, specialisation and good-quality products and/or services, which were seen by the interviewees as contributory to their business success.

The owner-managers were mainly male, 40-60 years of age and with at least secondary education. OSH-related information was mainly gathered during education, from OSH-related training and through experience. This last

was sometimes referred to as 'common sense' and, in particular among those who had not received any formalised OSH training, was sometimes regarded as an OSH 'instrument' by both owner-managers and workers.

Several of the case study companies experienced seasonal work and thus had phases of high and low workload, characterised by psychosocial and financial pressure and concern. In addition, some worked on clients' premises, which had implications for OSH.

In general, awareness of acute risks was assessed by the researchers as medium to high, with one major exception: psychosocial risks, which were underestimated by the vast majority. In addition, some risks were underestimated because they had become normalised and hence were perceived as 'minor' risks that were an unavoidable part of the work.

Overall, the motivation of owner-managers regarding OSH seemed to have a decisive influence on OSH in the case study companies. In addition, good social relations were significant, and were often found where there were greater levels of worker involvement. Approximately half of the case study companies had an elected worker representative, although in many instances this seemed to be more in order to comply with the legislation than as an aid to OSH. Relatedly, legislation and possible inspections on OSH, in particular the fear of penalties, were drivers in some cases.

Limited financial resources and time pressure were identified as barriers to OSH improvement, with some workers also citing poorly organised OSH management in this regard.

5 Construction: construction of buildings and specialised activities

5.1 Introduction

The construction industry is one of the most important in all of the EU Member States. It was hit particularly hard by the economic crisis and, as we pointed out in the literature review carried out in earlier in the SESAME project, the proportion of employment accounted for by construction has fallen in recent years (EU-OSHA 2016). Despite this, approximately 18 million people across the EU continue to work in the sector, which contributes to about 9 % of EU gross domestic product.²³ Construction is also one of the most dangerous sectors for EU workers, reflecting the multiple risks associated with the work. At 22 %, it had the highest percentage of fatal accidents at work in the EU-28 in 2012 — substantially higher than manufacturing, which, at 17 %, had the next highest percentage (Eurostat 2016b). This corresponds to incident rates per 100,000 persons employed of 6.08 for construction, 1.78 for manufacturing and 1.81 for all activities in 2014 in the EU-28²⁴. In addition, the industry is dominated by MSEs, with Eurostat figures suggesting that in 2013 98 % of enterprises in the sector in the EU-28 were micro or small businesses (94 % and 4 % respectively) (Eurostat 2016c).

5.2 Sector specificities and the sample

The findings that follow are drawn from 32 case studies of MSEs operating in the construction sector in nine Member States that were the focus of the study (Table 6). These establishments operated in a range of sub-sectors, but were primarily focused on the construction of residential and non-residential buildings and various specialised construction activities. The owner-managers of these enterprises were, on the whole, male (28) and reasonably well educated (18 had tertiary-level qualifications and a further 11 had both secondary and vocational qualifications). Eighteen worked in the production process of their enterprise (nine extensively and nine to a limited degree). As expected and in common with other sectors, this was more common within the smaller enterprises.

Table 6 Overview of case study establishments: construction (construction of buildings and specialised activities)

| Country | Size of company (number of employees) | | | |
|---------|---|--|---|---|
| | <5 employees | 5-9 employees | 10-19 employees | 20-49 employees |
| Belgium | | | BE1: Internal demolition work, excavation, earthwork and renovation BE2: Window installations, sale of end products BE3: Renovation and new builds* | BE4: Carpentry* |
| Denmark | | DK1: Electrical installations and repairs | | DK2: Carpentry and project management of new builds |
| Estonia | EE2: General construction, renovation and project management* | EE1: Concrete installations | EE3: General construction and finishing | EE4: General construction and project management* |
| France | | FR1: Carpentry, renovation, general construction | FR2: Roofing | FR3: Masonry and structural work* |

²³ http://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/construction_en

²⁴ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/health/health-safety-work/data/database>

| Country | Size of company (number of employees) | | | |
|----------------|---|--|---|---|
| | <5 employees | 5-9 employees | 10-19 employees | 20-49 employees |
| Germany | DE4: Planning, project management and capital raising | | DE1: Road and sewage conduit construction DE2: Renovation of damaged buildings | FR4: Masonry and structural work* DE3: Electrical installations |
| Italy | | IT1: Installation of thermal, heating and air-conditioning systems and sanitary facilities* | IT2: General construction* | IT3: General construction* IT4: Electrical installation* |
| Romania | | RO1: General construction* RO3: Small new builds and renovations* RO4: Utility connection* | | RO2: Civil and industrial construction* |
| Sweden | SE1: Glass work | | | SE2: Apartment renovation and new build |
| UK | | UK1: Asbestos survey and removal | | UK2: Exhibition installation and fit-out UK3: Port construction UK4: Swimming pool design, construction and maintenance |

* Case establishments *not* recruited via ESENER-2.

Turning to the enterprises themselves, they had a mix of clients — including private individuals, private organisations of all sizes, and public sector and state organisations — with 17 working mainly directly with consumers and 15 mainly with businesses. However, most (20) provided a specialised service and as a result had been able to position themselves in a relatively limited ‘niche’ area of the market. Despite this, 14 faced what researchers judged to be tough competition and a further 15 faced medium levels of competition. On the whole, dependency on customers’ demands was considered by the researchers to be medium (23 enterprises, with 4 and 5 having low and high dependency respectively). Researchers considered dependency on suppliers’ demands as generally low or medium (16 and 11 establishments respectively).

All but four of the enterprises were independent organisations. Eleven were micro enterprises, three of which had fewer than five employees. The remaining 21 were small enterprises — 8 with under 20 employees and 13 with fewer than 50 employees. Most (25) had been operating for over 10 years (including 10 which had been in business for over 20 years), and most were growing (18) or stable (8) in terms of numbers of employees.

The researchers who visited the enterprises considered that just seven had high levels of business vulnerability; the employees of only one were vulnerable; and only six were operating a low road strategy for their economic and business survival. These characteristics were, of course, linked. Four of the six enterprises categorised by researchers as taking a low road approach were also deemed to be highly vulnerable; and the enterprise in which employees were identified as highly vulnerable was also categorised as having high levels of business vulnerability and to be operating a low road strategy — that is, as discussed elsewhere (EU-OSHA 2016), an approach characterised by increased pressure on wages and working conditions as opposed to one focused on investment and innovation.

It is important to clarify some aspects of the contexts in which our case study enterprises were operating. Because construction is a particularly high-risk industry, sector-specific legislation, in addition to national legislation (see Part 1), is also significant. In general terms, there is a particular focus on conferring duties on all those involved, from clients and designers through to principal contractors, contractors and workers. This is in recognition of and response to the well-known consequences for OSH of the fragmentation of management

and responsibility that comes with temporary and multi-employer worksites. The overall aim, therefore, is to provide legally based encouragement to clients and principal contractors to positively influence safety and health management among their suppliers — and thereby to improve OSH throughout the supply chain. So, for instance, in the United Kingdom the sector is covered by the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations (2015)²⁵ (CDMR). For the enterprises in our study, this typically meant that clients could require enterprises to meet certain OSH management and performance criteria at the tender stage, provide their OSH management documentation (risk assessments, method statements etc.) for approval prior to starting work, and be inspected and meet various standards (in relation to safe work practice, use of protective equipment etc.) while on site. For some of our participants, it also meant applying these requirements and standards to their sub-contractors. Some felt CDMR had led to improved OSH in the sector:

I've seen health and safety change a lot in the time I've been here and I think everyone thinks it's for the good. Things do seem to be improving on every level basically ... Health and safety is one of these things that can be a bit of a pain and people think of it as a bit of a pain ... one chap is 65 and he's been doing it since he was 16 ... you can see with him his health and safety knowledge and care has changed. In the 1960s or 1970s when he first started it was turn up in shorts and a vest and that was it. Now he's taking a lot more care because you do have to. And I think the regulations came in which have sort of forced people to take more care and more attention to this sort of thing. It's gone down through the trades and the different workers so everyone seems to be taking it more seriously nowadays, which is only to be a good thing. (UK, manager, 20-49 employees)

In Estonia a worker in one construction firm said:

Many large construction companies are certified with ISO and OSHAS certificates and demand from sub-contractors that they fulfil the same safety requirements and these are prescribed in the contract. (EE, worker, <5 employees)

However, supply chain pressures, created by increased emphasis on outsourcing, work in both directions. There was also an awareness among workers and their representatives in the sample that the practices of sub-contracting that are commonplace in the sector created challenges for managing safety and health.

In France, one of the workers in an enterprise with 20-49 employees explained that outsourcing was 'a safety valve for the company' because it allowed the company to meet demand when there was extra workload, without hiring permanent employees, and thus created particular problems for OSH management in relation to such workers, who might be unfamiliar with the safety practices of the company. Interviewees in some of the United Kingdom cases made the same point. Another French worker argued that in a highly competitive market customers were able to put pressure on companies to cause them to claim they would complete contracts quickly, and this put additional pressures on their workers — working faster to get jobs completed more quickly added to the risks. He said:

When there is no work, companies lower their prices in order to access the market, and then, it's the staff that has to run faster, to do the same in a minimum of time. (FR, worker, 20-49 employees)

This obviously added to the risks, particularly among sub-contractors whose work was not adequately supervised or monitored by their customers.

Research in the United Kingdom (James et al. 2015) has broadly confirmed the improving effects of supply chain orientated regulatory measures on OSH performance in the construction industry, which goes some way to address these challenges. Although the same research points out that compliance at the tendering stage alone is insufficient to ensure good practice in the delivery of contract work. The continued monitoring and supervision of such work is important and failure of clients and principal contractors to do so adequately is usually the main limitation to the effectiveness of the regulation (James et al. 2015).

In addition, some countries have requirements relating to particular branches or areas of work (for example electrical work in Denmark and Romania), as well as the registration of some high-risk types of work (such as asbestos work in Estonia, Germany, Italy, Romania and the United Kingdom, and concrete and electrical work

²⁵ Replacing the 2007 CDM Regulations. Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2015/51/contents/made>

in Estonia, Italy and the United Kingdom), some of which are also covered by various standards and documentation requirements. The location of the work could also mean it was covered by specific regulations; for example, in Italy, work carried out in private dwellings must be overseen by a safety officer who is appointed by the client and is responsible for compliance, while in Sweden special provisions apply when construction work is being carried out in areas where there is traffic.

While the ISO standards relating to safety and health operate internationally, some countries also have various certification schemes that allow organisations to demonstrate competence in relation to OSH management, many of which are of particular relevance to enterprises in the construction sector (see, for example, the United Kingdom Contractors Health and Safety Assessment Scheme (CHAS) scheme, and similar schemes such as those in Belgium and Germany). All of these types of arrangements and schemes are regularly audited, with some also involving training for managers and/or workers, and, where they are an integral part of the way in which organisations select contractors, they can be crucial in determining which enterprises win — or are even eligible to apply for — certain tenders. These were a significant influence on some of the companies among our cases, causing them to include arrangements on safety and health such as holding safety meetings or undertaking regular risk assessments and having conspicuous reporting procedures, as is illustrated by the examples referred to in the following sections.

Although this is by no means an exhaustive description of the various sector-specific arrangements that can influence OSH management in the construction sector in the EU, it does give a flavour of those experienced by our participating enterprises. Of course, as we discuss below, the extent to which all of this is influential on workplace OSH *in practice*, as opposed to *on paper*, is of key importance.

5.3 Risk awareness and understanding, and OSH competence and knowledge

5.3.1 Acute physical risks

On the whole, those we interviewed felt that accidents and injuries were relatively infrequent in their enterprises in comparison with the sector average. Many struggled to recall any incidents at all, and virtually all of those that were remembered were described as fairly minor. This is probably linked, at least in part, to the perception among some interviewees — both owner-managers and workers — that some risks were ‘inherent’ to the job and consequently that minor injuries were inevitable — something that our case studies in other sectors have also highlighted. This may well mean that, as is the case in a various sectors, such incidents are, in effect, ‘ignored’ by workers and so are not even registered as occupational injuries by them, while major injuries are rare in individual enterprises and therefore generally not part of everyday consciousness. It also suggests a reliance on workers’ professional experience and their ‘common sense’ in avoiding hazardous situations. There was also an implication from some owner-managers and workers that, because their accident rates were seen as being lower than the sector average and lower than those of their close competitors, there was nothing to worry about. Furthermore, many seemed to feel that accidents were generally the result of someone not following OSH and/or operating procedures:

[Incidents and accidents are the result of] worker’s carelessness, such small incidents can happen also at home. (EE, owner-manager, <5 employees)

Workers also sometimes shared this view. For a French construction worker, looking out for hazards depended on the nature of people:

Me, when I’ve some guys that I see they are completely unaware, I don’t want to work with them, because these people create accidents; it’s often because people are stupid. Some people don’t see hazards; they don’t have this survival instinct which is there if someone is pretty savvy. (FR, worker, 20-49 employees)

This suggests a tendency towards individualisation and responsabilisation²⁶, and a lack of awareness of the potential for complex accident causation involving both individual and organisational factors. This in turn, of

²⁶ ‘Individualisation’ and ‘responsibilisation’ are used here to refer to the tendency to hold workers individually responsible for their own safety at work.

course, suggests that any accident investigations would be very unlikely to cover anything but the most immediate and direct individual factors.

This said, awareness in relation to acute physical risks was generally high. In addition, a great deal of the work took place on construction sites, which, by definition, were temporary workplaces. In this respect, there was also a recognition among many of those we spoke to of the potential additional risks of this aspect of their work (working in unfamiliar, sometimes confined or awkward, spaces and so on). For many of the owner-managers, this awareness came, at least in part, from having been (and in some cases continuing to be) involved in the day-to-day physical work of the enterprise. For some, it was also related to an awareness of the situation in the sector more generally — which was often seen as something the enterprise was dealing with better than most of its competitors:

The work environment is better now than it was, but it is not safer. The municipalities are only thinking of cutting costs, there is less time to do the job and more use of sub-contractors. There are so many fatal accidents now that you get nightmares. (SE, safety representative, 20-49 employees)

In relation to acute physical risks, three other aspects of the interviewees' experience are worth mentioning here. First, those working in particularly high-risk areas of construction, where there were often additional standards and requirements that were generally more closely enforced, were perhaps most aware of and prepared for the physical risks associated with their work (such as those working with concrete and asbestos). Second, a number of interviewees suggested that risks had lessened because of the increased availability and use of improved equipment and technology (such as lifting gear, PPE and so on). For example, a French construction worker, referring to his current employment, said:

This is a good enterprise, there are not that many [companies] like here. We, all the things we have, certain firms don't have [equipment] and they don't have the freedom we have indeed. (FR, worker, 20-49 employees)

This reflected an effort to supply PPE in most of the cases studied in the sector. However, interviewees suggested that such practices of replacement and ensuring good fit, and the relatively high level of risk awareness they imply, were not universal more widely in the sector. One French worker commented:

We have all the equipment to get to safety in any case ... For a small company it is really rare, I have never worked in a company, where, in all cases, we have something that fits. (FR, worker, 10-19 employees)

Thirdly, several interviewees commented on an age-related difference in relation to risk awareness, with older workers often seen as more reluctant to follow safety procedures and practices than their younger counterparts, perhaps reflecting an over-familiarity with and consequently lower awareness of risk:

But at the beginning, it was a nightmare with the former workers, they were used to carrying, it was their daily work to lift loads. (FR, owner-manager, 10-19 employees)

5.3.2 Longer latency risks

Turning to psychosocial and other longer latency risks, there was substantially less recognition and awareness:

In terms of how do we go about recognising stress, well we don't quite frankly. We haven't got a policy. Do we manage it? I wouldn't say we do particularly. (UK, manager, 5-9 employees)

This general lack of recognition was, perhaps, related to the focus on physical risks that is to be expected in a high-risk (and very male-dominated) sector such as construction. It may also have been connected to the inattention to (not to say ignoring of) risks to those not working on building sites (office-based staff and so on). Nevertheless, there were enterprises in which there was more awareness. For example, a Danish carpentry company had made changes to its work teams based on feedback about how workers felt about working with each other — something initiated by the OSH representative in response to problems within the workforce. Such

examples were most commonly found in the Danish and Swedish enterprises and, as this example indicates, in those where workers were represented (this is something we discuss in more detail below).

However, more generally in the enterprises where there was some awareness, again there was a tendency to individualise and responsabilise — perhaps to an even greater extent than for acute physical risks. As one owner-manager put it when asked if any prevention measures had been taken following the long-term absence of one worker with back problems:

Pain in the arms, the shoulders, etc. The one complains, the other one carries on. (BE, owner-manager, 10-19 employees)

Similarly, in an enterprise where ergonomic strain was recognised by the manager, there was an acceptance that there was little that could be effectively done to prevent it:

Theoretically, you can do something against it, you can tell the worker he should lift the load with an upright spine, but he would not do that, he forgets about it or is not aware. (DE, owner-manager, 10-19 employees)

5.3.3 Factors influencing risk awareness

There was also a tendency among some managers to suggest that psychosocial issues, such as stress, were mainly the result of external pressures and were more commonly felt by some groups than others — most often themselves and others in their enterprise dealing with clients and workers from other organisations (such as supervisors) — and that they could not be dealt with:

It [psychological strain] is caused by clients and other companies on site where the cooperation does not work out. There is time pressure but I do not believe that it will result in psychological strain or lead to burnout. Often the strain is endured in the office. We reassure the clients so the workers can do their work on site without stress or burden. (DE, manager, 20-49 employees)

In fact, in one enterprise the human resources (HR)/safety manager felt that most accidents in the sector, as well as in his own organisation, were the result of work pressure from last-minute requests from clients. This was echoed by an Estonian owner-manager:

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 on a real construction site and then would understand better what kind of deadlines would be humane. (EE, owner-manager, 20-49 employees)

These concerns clearly raise the issue of negative supply chain influences on OSH mentioned previously, which are of course also relevant to acute physical risks. For example, the manager of a German planning enterprise acknowledged the physical risks to workers on construction sites, but felt that these were not his responsibility, as he was unable to influence them beyond providing workers with protective equipment; while a United Kingdom manager felt that principal contractors often become less strict about enforcing compliance with safety procedures when under time pressure:

We do some big projects in London and to get on site in the first place ... you have to go through a whole load of hoops ... but as the project gets closer and closer to the deadline you do see those hoops sort of widen ... more of a blind eye is turned. Nothing ridiculously unsafe. (UK, manager, 20-49 employees)

On the whole, there was a generally good awareness of acute physical risks in our participating enterprises. But there were exceptions and these were, in particular, those enterprises taking a low road approach to their survival. For example, although he was unaware of the content of risk assessments or emergency plans, which had been drawn up by an external service, one owner-manager reported:

Danger is everywhere, but this type of work is not particularly exposed to risks. There's little to know and we know it. (IT, owner-manager, 5-9 employees)

In general, in these low road enterprises, there was some awareness of acute physical risks, but little beyond the most basic compliance with requirements (for example PPE) was done about it, and there was little or no awareness of any other risk type. In addition, accidents and incidents — which, as noted above, were described within the sample more generally as relatively infrequent and minor — were more commonly reported by those interviewed at these enterprises. This included one fatality, in which a worker was crushed by a vehicle on a building site — something our interviewee felt was the worker's own fault:

The worker who died was a person with a lot of experience and the site was absolutely free of hazards ... the operator had himself prepared all the equipment. I think it was carelessness. (IT, worker, 20-49 employees)

This tendency to blame workers for incidents and injuries was a clear theme within the enterprises taking a low road approach.

5.3.4 OSH knowledge and training

In terms of knowledge, most (21) of the participating enterprises provided some OSH training for their workers (and another provided training for the workers' representative) — although four provided none at all and a further six were described by the visiting researchers as viewing OSH training as part of professional competence. Where training was carried out, it frequently comprised induction training (training for newly employed workers), and often focused on what were perceived as the enterprise's main OSH risks. In addition, some interviewees referred to training, sometimes accompanied by certification, to use particular equipment. Regular refresher training was less common, but where it did take place such OSH training, particularly in the form of enterprise-wide events, was often commented on by workers and, where present, their representatives as being useful not only in terms of establishing common practices and standards, but also as an opportunity to meet and share experiences:

After every 2 years, we have an OSH extensive training for 2 days for all workers. Last time — in 2014, we had the first day where all occupational hazards were discussed by an OSH consultant and then the second day where a specialist in PPE described, how and why we need to wear PPE. I found it interesting and, since we were all together, a high-spirited discussion was developed among us workers. (EE, workers' representative, 10-19 employees)

In Romania, however, 6-monthly training is a requirement, although in high-risk workplaces, such as those in the construction sector, it is often carried out more regularly, frequently at the recommendation of an external service. In most of these participating enterprises, it seems to have been carried out and recorded primarily to achieve compliance and signal attention frequently being paid to OSH rather than to actually improve OSH understanding and practice.

While interviewees occasionally referred to training in relation to ergonomic risks, none mentioned psychosocial risk-related training.

Among enterprises that used an external prevention service, training was often provided or organised by the service, which many owner-managers also described as their primary source of OSH information. Other information sources included:

- sector-specific training (Belgium);
- sector-specific federations and employers' associations (Belgium, France and Sweden);
- union publications and sector-specific forums (Belgium, Sweden);
- visits from occupational health providers and legal organisations specialising in OSH advice (Belgium);
- suppliers' training courses (Germany, United Kingdom);
- suppliers' information sheets and instructional documentation (Germany and Romania);

- statutory insurance company training²⁷ and inspectors, accountancy organisations (Germany);
- the labour inspectorate and its website (Denmark, Estonia, France, Sweden, United Kingdom);
- OSH representatives, union-organised online forums for OSH representatives (Denmark);
- courses run by private training organisations (Estonia, United Kingdom);
- courses required by law for representatives and working environment specialists, labour inspectorate training courses, consultancy services and software, web portals²⁸ (Estonia);
- employers' association software and trade shows (France);
- branch-specific trade and employer organisation training and certification, and local forums (Sweden²⁹);
- external HR service providers and parent organisations (United Kingdom).

In addition, many owner-managers referred to searching for OSH information online (through Google and other general search engines — including in other countries³⁰).

However, it is important to be clear here that not all owner-managers actively sought out OSH information. Many did not. Rather, they acquired it from various sources, including those listed above, as it happened to filter through to them:

We have so much to take care of as a small company that OSH news and matters sometimes drown in the other information. (DK, owner-manager, 20-49 employees)

Even where they had sought information, for example by joining a professional association, and regarded the support as helpful in providing information about new rules, tools, materials and procedures, owner-managers often struggled to find time to make the best use of it:

I think I get an email from them every day and they arrange OSH training and breakfast seminars — it is just up to me to find time to participate. (SE, owner-manager, 20-49 employees)

This, of course, underlines the difficulty in reaching MSEs — an area that the SESAME project also focused on (EU-OSHA 2017a, b).

5.4 OSH management and practice

5.4.1 Risk assessment

On the whole, the enterprises in our sample had written documentation in relation to the OSH management arrangements in place. These included formal and systematic risk assessment procedures, with many of our participating enterprises reporting that risk assessments were made at the start of each project, with further assessments and adjustments made as work progressed. Where sector-specific legislation requires it, this could involve producing written documentation for clients and principal contractors, and checking the documentation of sub-contractors, at the tender stage, as well as in advance of starting work. For some, these documented systems were central to the enterprise's approach:

We made a connection between our written risk assessment document and our prevention plans. That means, we define the risks of the site. They are always related to the articles of the written risk assessment. It allows us to have a living document and, as soon as a new risk is identified on a site and is not linked to any article of the risk assessment document, we are

²⁷ For example, the manager of the German electrical installations company took part in the *Unternehmermodell*, in which small business owner-managers attend such training courses and can then act, to some extent, as OSH specialists within their own organisations (although these companies often also use an external OSH specialist working on a reduced contract, and are still obliged to contract an occupational physician).

²⁸ In this case jointly run by the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Labour Inspectorate, the Health Board and the National Institute for Health Development.

²⁹ Some of these are mandatory.

³⁰ Estonian interviewees referred to searching for information on Finnish websites.

obliged to create it on the document. So, that's good, well functioning, because often the risk assessment document stays in a corner of the company and we don't really know what's in it. (FR, owner-manager, 20-49 employees)

Of course, this was not always the case. For instance, a Belgian window installations enterprise had no formal written risk assessment procedures. Here, risk assessments were carried out informally — for example when the owner-manager visited a site and when workers talked things over with their colleagues. Similarly, in a German planning company, the risk assessment which had been carried out by the prevention service some years ago had not been updated and the manager was not quite sure where to find it. Others felt that their work lent itself to the production of 'standard' risk assessments that could be 'tweaked' to specific situations. In another German enterprise (specialising in conduit construction), where risk assessments were again carried out by the external prevention service, the owner-manager did not feel they actually added anything:

The measures are too general. Some are implemented, but these are the ones that are already internalised. For example, you must not stand near the excavator. I don't need a regulation to recognise this, this is pure common sense. When being trained in the profession, you learn how to behave — wearing PPE, not to stand under heavy loads, etc., to use checklists, in order not to forget anything. (DE, owner-manager, 10-19 employees)

The tendency to see formal, written risk assessment as something of a burden was expressed by a number of interviewees:

If I had a complaint to make, it would be this: nowadays, we need to formalise all things on paper and it is assumed that, at the time we wrote it, we take responsibility away and we have done our job ... I'd rather have a regular daily presence [on site] and I think it is much more effective on the number of claims or the percentage of risk and accidents. We must really be in the lower range, then, I don't want to glorify myself because it does not make sense but I'm sure there is a link. (FR, manager, 20-49 workers)

However, while in many cases this seemed to reflect a feeling that *risk assessment* per se was burdensome, for others it was the *written* aspect of the process that was the main problem. For example, although there was a formal, written risk assessment in compliance with the legislation in a Danish enterprise carrying out electrical installations and repairs, the owner-manager felt it made more sense 'just to solve the problem rather than putting it in a written risk assessment'. The result here was that, in practice, most risk analysis and prevention was based on the experience and input of those, including the owner-manager, actually working on the sites. Similarly, in another Danish company (carrying out carpentry work and project management), where the OSH representative was responsible for written risk assessment, both this representative and the owner-manager felt that meetings and discussions with the workforce were more useful and productive than documented risk assessments. These experiences seem to be a reflection of the emphasis on a participative approach to OSH management in Denmark and how that worked in practice in smaller enterprises — and it is important to be clear that in each case our researchers considered that the result was effective, albeit less systematic and formal, OSH management.

This was generally not the case where risk analysis itself was seen as being an unnecessary addition to (rather than an integral part of) an enterprise's core business — even though, in both these scenarios, formal compliance with the legislation on risk assessment had apparently been achieved. For example, in an Italian heating and air-conditioning company, written risk assessment was carried out by the external service provider to meet regulatory compliance — but the owner-manager was largely unaware of its content and the workers did not know it even existed. In fact, the interviewees in two of the other three Italian enterprises described similar situations in which risk assessments and safe working arrangements were really in place only to meet regulatory requirements, providing — in their view — no 'added value'. In the fourth Italian enterprise, where risk assessments were carried out by a manager with support from an external service if required, they were seen by the owner-manager as an injury prevention tool and, as such, as providing added value.

Similarly, in a Romanian civil and industrial construction firm, where risk assessments were carried out by the external service provider with little or no involvement from the enterprise's workers or owner-manager, they were primarily used as proof that legal requirements had been met, that risks were low and that no further measures were needed. Again, the situation was similar in two other Romanian firms, one working on new builds and renovations and the other on utility connection. In the former, prevention service generated risk

assessment documents were almost the same for all sites and were not frequently used in practice; and in the latter, although the documents (again generated by the prevention service) were used, they were also regarded by the owner-manager as an 'alibi' in relation to compliance. As discussed earlier, these Italian and Romanian organisations were among the minority in the sample that were identified by the researchers as operating low road strategies for their survival.

5.4.2 Control measures

All of our interviewees referred to PPE as part of their enterprise's safe and healthy working arrangements. The extent to which it was used and its use was enforced, however, varied:

The risk encounter is too small to wear this stuff [gloves and a helmet]. (BE, manager, 10-19 employees)

I can understand if the workers are not willing to go to the vehicle just to take the hearing protection. (DE, owner-manager, 10-19 employees)

Again, this seemed to reflect the extent to which individual workers were regarded as responsible for their own health, safety and welfare.

One or two of our interviewees also referred to actively trying to substitute materials, while several gave examples of learning from previous incidents and accidents and, as a result, putting new or revised prevention measures in place. For example, while talking about problems workers had experienced with some of the substances used in the company, an Estonian workers' representative said:

Some of the mixtures have caused some allergic reactions in our workers. We have discussed it and then changed the products. (EE, workers' representative, 10-19 employees)

However, as referred to earlier, many interviewees were aware that minor injuries were frequently not reported, while virtually all felt that near-miss incidents were hugely under-reported — reflecting the prevailing view among owner-managers and workers that such things were an inevitable part of construction work.

Overall, given this generally positive picture of risk analysis in our participating establishments, it is perhaps not surprising that our researchers considered that only four establishments had what was categorised as a low level of risk control.

5.4.3 Risk communication

In terms of risk communication, most enterprises took an informal approach. So, rather than regular, formal meetings, communication was often ad hoc, on site and specific to a particular task or situation. It was, therefore, generally done orally, although some interviewees explained that, for foreign workers, gestures and practical demonstrations were also sometimes used³¹. This, of course, generally reflects the enterprises' size and, in many cases, also the stability and close-knit nature of their workforces:

³¹ In relation to communicating with foreign workers, it is perhaps interesting to note here that the Swedish apartment renovation and new build firm (which is also one of the larger small enterprises) used an electronic support system for documenting its risk analysis routines and safety checks, which were also stored in a binder in paper form and signed off by the responsible manager and the safety representative. These binders were used for formal communication of OSH, as well as quality and environmental issues relating to each project, and all workers were obliged to read and sign them. As the enterprise used Estonian sub-contractors (as they are relatively cheap) as well as directly employed Swedish workers, the owner-manager had produced binders in Estonian to ensure that sub-contractor workers were also able to understand the information. However, a labour inspector visiting the enterprise had informed him that, legally, this was wrong, as the Estonian employer is responsible for developing a work environment plan for those workers (although the research points out that, in fact, it is the developer or person responsible for the construction work who holds this responsibility). As the owner-manager pointed out, if this is left to the sub-contractor organisation then he cannot be sure it contains the same information as the binder going out to the Swedish workers.

We understand each other without words. Everyone knows the rules. My men are experienced — we have not had a new worker coming in for 6 years. I trust all of them. Safety is a part of our work. (EE, owner-manager, 5-9 employees)

We are constantly talking about the risks. We are trained each time we start a new job. (EE, worker, 5-9 employees)

However, among the larger of our participating enterprises, communication also took place through supervisors and team leaders, who then relayed information to owner-managers. Some felt this worked well, while others felt that, despite regular meetings between workers, team leaders and owner-managers, it was less effective:

These meetings are a two-way communication: Team Leaders themselves can bring forward points. They list them on a sheet of paper, and I give them the floor. (BE, owner-manager, 20-49 employees)

Nobody is really aware of what could happen. Many are careless and not sensitive to the risks. (DE, manager, 20-49 employees)

In addition, where formal communication procedures were in place, they were sometimes subsumed by other matters, particularly among the smaller enterprises:

We do have health and safety meetings. They're not as often as we should do, to be honest. They tend to be a couple of times a year. Ideally we'd have them monthly. (UK, manager, 5-9 employees)

It's a bit of a standing joke ... we've got this thing, there's a health and safety meeting on Friday and it'll be forgotten, and then it'll be like another four or five Fridays ... then we'll sort of try to squeeze it in. So we'll have a quality meeting and a health and safety meeting at the same time ... but because we're such a small company ... we can see no-one's had an accident ... we see each other every day and if there's any issues they can be raised. (UK, worker, 5-9 employees)

In another United Kingdom establishment, while the manager was clearly proud of the safety meetings that had been introduced in compliance with safety certification, the worker interviewed was somewhat less enthused by the safety meetings. Although his account of what occurred at them broadly agreed with that of the manager, it differed in a couple of important aspects. He suggested, for example, that in fact these meetings took place only every 6 months, and not every 2 months as claimed by the manager. Asked if he considered those meetings to be helpful, he was also somewhat more cautious concerning their usefulness. The worker replied:

Um ... They do ... yeah, but it's usually half past three on a Friday afternoon when nobody wants to ask questions, because they just want to go home. If it was done on a Monday morning ... (UK, worker, 20-49 employees)

Many interviewees also referred to 'toolbox talks'. These were carried out at various times — sometimes at the start of a shift or project, and sometimes at given times during a year. In general, the former focused on specific risks and prevention measures relevant to the task in hand, while the latter dealt mainly with general rules and procedures such as keeping sites tidy. One or two interviewees said that such talks sometimes also included psychosocial issues such as work pressure, but these were very much the exception rather than the rule. Generally, such forms of communication appeared to be regarded as effective.

In some enterprises, workers were issued with handbooks detailing company procedures to which they could refer to at any time. Again, our interviewees suggested some variation in how these were used. Some were regularly updated and seemed to be well used — for example in a United Kingdom asbestos survey and removal company, which, as it operated in a particularly high-risk and closely controlled branch of construction, had to ensure workers followed standard procedures. More often, however, this approach in effect meant that workers were responsible for familiarising themselves with the contents, and seemed to reflect an approach in which heavy reliance was placed on professional competence.

5.4.4 Monitoring and compliance

Inspections and monitoring of compliance with safety procedures by owner-managers were less commonly referred to, although some did, for example, visit sites. However, in many cases owner-managers were on sites almost daily, since they took part, to varying degrees, in the day-to-day physical work of the enterprise, so monitoring was again something that was often seen as being covered informally. In addition, where enterprises were working on sites run by other contractors, they were often subject to monitoring and inspection by supervisors from those organisations, and those enterprises operating in particularly high-risk branches of the sector were often subject to standard working procedures, for which compliance was inspected with some regularity. On the other hand, where work was carried out in private clients' homes and/or when it involved particular trades (such as tiling) there was generally little oversight — although most interviewees in these enterprises referred to work being carried out in pairs much of the time.

In one enterprise, an Italian general construction firm, fines (deducted from pay) were imposed on those failing to follow OSH routines — something that seemed to stem from fear of possible sanctions by the authorities or bad publicity. In a Romanian general construction company, paid time off as a reward for finishing work on time and without incidents was seen by the owner-manager as motivating workers to work more carefully and to produce high-quality work, while a United Kingdom manager regarded not paying workers sick leave as an incentive to stick to safe working procedures:

If they injure themselves and they're off because of an injury they don't get paid for the first 3 days. Most of our guys are weekly paid and that's a big deal. That's going to hurt. They've all got families. They know if they do anything that daft and they break a leg, twist an ankle, shatter an elbow, bang their head, whatever, it's going to cost them. ... So there is a kind of other incentive. I got to make sure I don't do anything daft here. (UK, manager, 5-9 employees)

Of course, these kinds of strategies raise the possibility of encouraging workers not to report incidents (which many had suggested was already a problem) or sickness — but this was not something that seemed to be of concern to these interviewees.

Overall, the researchers visiting the enterprises concluded that only seven of the enterprises operated a reactive OSH strategy, with most either taking a mixed proactive and reactive approach (16) or a mainly proactive approach (9).

5.4.5 Prevention services

Across our sample, 22 enterprises used an external prevention service. Although a number of the Member States from which our sample was drawn require enterprises, even smaller ones, to use such services, this is not the case everywhere. In those countries without such legislation, the use of prevention services seemed to us to be high for a sample of MSEs (for example two of the four United Kingdom enterprises).

As described above, external prevention services often organised, or at least contributed to, enterprises' training arrangements³². They were also frequently seen as the primary source of information on OSH issues, including legislative requirements and changes. For some enterprises they also carried out audits and inspections of documentation, work in progress and workplaces (including building sites), as well as carrying out and updating risk assessments, identifying and implementing control procedures and providing specialist advice on particular jobs or tasks. In some countries they were also responsible for carrying out mandatory occupational health checks and medicals, as well as facilitating employees' contact with support services as appropriate.

One French enterprise used two external services — one for carrying out written risk assessments and keeping the company up to date with changes to the legislation, and the other for improving organisational aspects of the company, including communication between management and the workforce. This unusual arrangement seemed to have been the result of a combination of factors: the owner-manager's characteristics (young, dynamic and interested in trying new approaches) and his involvement with an active professional association (which offered employers the opportunity to meet a range of potential service providers). As this was a micro

³² It should be noted that in Germany accident insurance organisations were also sometimes involved in inspection and training arrangements.

enterprise, this perhaps further emphasises the fact that most of our sample were enterprises at the better end of the spectrum.

In Estonia, one enterprise had successfully worked with its external OSH expert to obtain a small grant to help with risk assessment, health inspection and so on. Similarly, in France one enterprise, which used a bipartite prevention organisation for support (including software) on risk assessment and achieved improved working conditions, had obtained funding from the organisation towards the purchase of safer scaffolding.

In general, there seemed to be a dichotomy in the contribution of prevention services to the sample enterprises' OSH management. In some cases, the service was seen as being there to deal with regulatory compliance for the enterprise, taking it out of the hands of the owner-manager. However, in others it was seen as a partner and advisor, and so supporting the enterprise to manage regulatory compliance itself. This is a finding also suggested by some of our case studies from other sectors, and something we return to in Part 3 of this report.

5.5 Drivers

A number of drivers for the OSH management decisions of our participating owner-managers were apparent. Although the distinction was not always clear-cut, the following sections consider those that originated from within the enterprises themselves and those that resulted from outside pressures.

It is perhaps not surprising that one of the key internal drivers was simply a desire to keep workers safe. This was expressed by management interviewees in various ways, pointing to both a pragmatic business case as well as a more personal and involved basis:

If one of my staff was hurt doing something that I'd asked them to do I don't know how I'd sleep at night ... we put this in place to protect our workforce. (UK, manager, 20-49 employees)

Better invest time and money in good prevention than missing a worker for 1 day. (BE, prevention advisor, 10-19 employees)

For many owner-managers, of course, the reality probably reflected a mix of these concerns.

Many of the workers we spoke to also emphasised the strength of their close working relationships with their colleagues, and their consequent focus on looking out for each other's wellbeing and safety at work. However, the nature of the work meant that, for some, contact with colleagues could be limited, with workers often spread over a number of different sites and spending very little time at the enterprise headquarters and with each other. This 'team spirit', seen by many as a particular advantage of their enterprise size, was also related to the confidence some interviewees expressed in each other — such that, in the main, workers said they had no problems in approaching management with OSH concerns and owner-managers said they were sure workers did come to them with these issues.

Similarly, the fact that many of the owner-managers had experience of the day-to-day physical work of the enterprise (including, in some cases, continuing to work 'hands on') was clearly influential. They had direct experience of the risks workers faced and could see the importance of prevention measures. However, this closeness to the core business sometimes also reflected a tendency — present among both owner-managers and workers — to feel that certain risks were inherent to the industry and so were impossible to safeguard against. For many, these were not even really seen as risks or accidents but were just accepted as part of the job. In addition, for some owner-managers, all this could be linked to a feeling that OSH was something that should be dealt with by workers' professional competence and capacity — reflecting an overall belief that individuals were ultimately responsible for their own safety and health.

A number of participating enterprises operated in niche markets and so faced relatively low levels of competition. While, as we have noted, this is not representative of the construction sector more generally, it was in many cases key to their being able to take a high road approach — including, for example, focusing on quality and allowing more resources (time and financial) for OSH. In addition, many of the owner-managers of these enterprises felt they were competing, at least in part, on reputation, including in relation to OSH and providing good working conditions. The former, in particular, of course, was sometimes also a reflection of sector-specific requirements and their consequences (see below) — such as those in the United Kingdom which led to OSH performance and management arrangements sometimes being assessed at the tender stage:

It's all part ... it is part of the brand as well that we're known for having a 100 % health and safety record that we're known to operate safe sites ... that definitely helps with our image ... So it's incredibly important to us. (UK, manager, 20-49 employees)

Risk management and risk assessment is what it's all about ... it's protecting the workforce primarily and then its protecting them [the managers/directors] from risk of prosecution and that's why they utilise my services ... they know as much as me that if anything goes wrong it will end up on their door ... that's why they want it as cut and dried and watertight as possible. (UK, OSH manager, 20-49 employees)

Here, this sometimes also meant that enterprises applied for certification (such as ISO 9001), as a way of enhancing their OSH appeal to potential clients, and invested in (non-mandatory) external services to support their efforts to achieve certification and meet what were seen as the all-important, client-driven, sector-specific legislative requirements.

Legislation was clearly an important influence in some cases. For some, this was very practical — for example in Belgium, where legislation requires that organisations with more than 20 workers must have a designated internal prevention advisor other than the owner-manager him-/herself. This tended to result in workers having more avenues for OSH support within the enterprise, with these avenues generally being someone closer to the worker's level and so, perhaps, more approachable. Similarly, when written risk assessments were made mandatory in Denmark the owner-manager of an electrical installations and repairs company was quite sceptical about them. However, since putting them into practice he felt the enterprise had benefited greatly from them. His view was that they had helped the company identify some risks and work more systematically on both identifying risks and preventing them. However, for some, legislation was seen as a potential threat — so OSH arrangements and, in particular, documentation were important as protection *from the law for owner-managers* rather than as *OSH protection for workers*:

[PPE is] in each delivery van, so in principle I am in order ... [Written work rules are mandatory] therefore I did it, for fear. (BE, manager, 10-19 employees)

This generally reflected a strong feeling among many that the legislation was burdensome and over-prescriptive and added little.

The influence of legislation is, of course, linked to enforcement and so to the role and effectiveness of the labour inspectorate, and here there was substantial variation by country. In some Member States, such as Denmark, Estonia, Romania and Sweden, all the participating enterprises had had at least one visit from the inspectorate in the previous 5 years, with some reporting at least annual visits. However, the extent to which these visits were regarded as supportive and/or of concern varied considerably. For example, in some enterprises — typically those in Denmark and Sweden — labour inspectorate visits were clearly identified as an important source of useful guidance and advice, as well as an important driver for OSH improvement. For example, in a Danish carpentry firm the inspectorate had recommended a particular piece of equipment, which the interviewees clearly saw as a concrete gain from their cooperation and good relationship with the inspectorate. In this enterprise, both the OSH representative and the owner-manager also referred to using the inspectorate as 'a lever' — suggesting that they asked workers what the inspectorate would say if they came across risky practice or conditions. They also felt that the frequent inspectorate visits kept them focused even on the smaller details, while their counselling meetings gave them very valued guidance, knowledge and advice. The owner-manager of a Danish electrical installations and repairs enterprise also regularly used the labour inspectorate as a point of reference, not only by accessing its website but also by calling it. He described having a very good relationship with the inspectorate, referring to one of the inspectors as 'our guy' — meaning the inspector they most often saw. However, elsewhere labour inspectorate visits were not always seen as making a positive contribution:

Here comes every year someone from the safety and hygiene [department]. He looks at the toilets, asks where people eat, says that we should actually have a separate room to eat, I answer that we have no room for it and he leaves. He has never had a look at a delivery van. (BE, manager, 10-19 employees)

And where inspectorates' focus had been on enforcement of legal compliance, without the provision of supportive advice, such as in Romania, the owner-managers often felt that, even if they asked for help, they were not provided with clear guidance.

In those Member States where inspection was less frequent, this was often seen as the result of deep cuts in inspectorate funding. While in some instances this made inspectors an irrelevancy from the past, some interpreted the lack of inspection as an indication of their successful OSH management, whereas others actively missed them, both for their support and advice, but also for ensuring a 'level playing field' in the sector:

Labour inspectors, there are some, but I've never seen them. I really would like to see the inspectors a little more, having them there, so that the rules are the same for everyone. (FR, owner-manager, 10-19 employees)

Sector-specific legislation or standards were often particularly influential over the way OSH management arrangements were made. Again, where this was seen by enterprises to be enforced (either by the inspectorate or by another body, such as the German accident insurance organisations or the Danish Safety Technology Authority), its influence was greater. As the owner-manager of an Estonian enterprise which frequently operated in Finland, where the construction regulations were particularly strictly enforced, put it:

If I don't deal with OSH, I'm not able to work with my company in this sector. (EE, owner-manager, 5-9 employees)

The support of external services was also important for some. As described above, many saw these services as their primary source of OSH information and support. In some countries, other external bodies were also potentially influential — including, for example, the accident insurance bodies in Germany³³, which carried out site inspections and required certification that enterprises were working to certain quality standards. However, as described above, external services could also be a means of fulfilling legal requirements and ensuring that management were covered against any eventualities, rather than of supporting enterprises in making OSH management central to their core business and truly protective of workers. Which of these scenarios prevailed seemed to be linked both to the enterprise's business survival strategy, and so to its wider context, and to the characteristics and priorities of the owner-manager.

Value chain influences were clearly important in some cases, and led to both positive and negative effects. For example, for those that worked in the homes of private clients, the workspace could be challenging, and some found having the clients themselves around stressful. Similarly, many felt that last-minute and unreasonable timeframe and price demands from clients of all sizes could create problems, although worryingly a number of owner-managers felt these were principally stress for themselves rather than risks (physical or otherwise) to the workers.

However, where suppliers offered, for example, water-based paints or improved (for instance lighter) materials as alternatives, this had a more positive influence. Similarly, where clients became actively involved in monitoring OSH standards and practices (such as in France, when large contractors hired external coordinators to apply safety measures and coordinate the sub-contractors on a site), standards could be driven up. However, in some instances clients' requirements in relation to OSH existed in name only, so checks were rarely made and the influence remained at the paperwork level. In addition, in Sweden there was a strong focus on cost-cutting and the absence of an accepted minimum hourly wage within the municipalities' system of managing public procurement of construction services, which interviewees (for example in the Swedish apartment renovation and new build company) felt had a significant negative impact on OSH.

It is important to note also, however, that in some instances there were no discernible supply chain influences, and enterprises seemed to have significant decision latitude. This generally reflected their status (as well-established, long-standing, successful businesses), which was closely linked to their identification of and function in a specialised or niche area of the market.

A few of our enterprises were subsidiaries and in these instances the parent company was influential — as of course is the case across sectors. Again, this could have both positive and negative effects. On the negative

³³ One enterprise (DE1) reported site visits when workers were approached and told to put on their helmets; these visits were not seen as supportive. Accident insurance body training courses were seen as useful by DE2.

side, in some instances parent companies exerted pressure to deliver certain levels of profit, while more positively parent companies sometimes required (and inspected and enforced) certain OSH standards.

In addition, as previously described, enterprises involved in work on larger sites could be subject to oversight, in terms of their OSH management arrangements and work practice, from clients and principal contractors — and in turn also oversaw the same among their sub-contractors. In an interesting variation on this hierarchical vertical approach, the ‘green construction sector’ in Belgium, which is subject to a number of specific regulations, functions with a more horizontal set of relationships between principal and sub-contractors, resulting in working in mixed construction teams. This promotes continuous communication between the organisations involved. It was also mirrored in the participating enterprise operating in this niche market (the carpentry company), which took a participatory approach that was particularly noteworthy for a small (20-49 workers) enterprise. In a number of countries, such as the United Kingdom, these arrangements were part of the requirements of sector-specific legislation.

Some felt that working conditions in the sector generally had improved physically (for example with the introduction of improved equipment and technology), but there was also a perception that work had intensified, in particular with the requirement for more documentation and increased pressure on temporal and financial resources. Furthermore, although very few of the enterprises had union members (see the next section), in some countries (such as Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Romania, Sweden) the sector is covered by a collective agreement, while in others (such as Denmark) membership of an employers’ association meant that enterprises had to sign a collective agreement — perhaps suggesting a general improvement (or at least consistency) in wage levels.

For some the impact of the financial crisis on the construction sector was crucial. This was perhaps particularly the case in Estonia and also in Romania, where respondents further linked it to central and local authority power and its associated corruption. Operating under such tough, competitive conditions meant that owner-managers could only focus on the survival of their business — taking a low road approach — leaving virtually no resource (temporal, financial or personal) for OSH.

5.6 Worker participation

Very few of our participating enterprises had any formal arrangements for either worker representation or worker involvement in relation to their OSH arrangements and very few were unionised, although there were some exceptions, mainly among Danish and Swedish enterprises. In fact, union support for OSH was mentioned in only one instance — where both the owner-manager and safety representative made it clear that they would have liked more support from the construction sector union:

The trade union is completely silent, they only talk about salaries — they could do so much more for the guys! Only time I hear from them is if a time report is missing. (SE, owner-manager, 20-49 employees)

As described above, on the whole all (OSH- and non-OSH-related) communication within the enterprises was informal and generally ad hoc. This, of course, tended to reflect the size of the enterprises and, as discussed earlier, was often seen by the participants (both workers and owner-managers) as an advantage. Many referred to feeling they were ‘one big, happy family’ which looked out for each other, and often went for a drink together at the end of the week — implying that there was really no need for formal participative arrangements. This, of course, makes the characteristics of the owner-manager particularly significant in determining what, if anything, is discussed in relation to OSH. However, there were exceptions. For example, although it did not have a joint safety committee as such, a Belgian carpentry establishment held formal meetings between management and workers every 3 months at which OSH matters were discussed, and took a participatory approach within its work teams (with team leaders reporting workers’ experiences and concerns to management). And, as the comments quoted previously from workers and managers in two of the United Kingdom cases attest, there were safety and health meetings held in these small firms too, where in at least one case they had been introduced as a consequence of seeking certification on OSH management in order to make the business more competitive.

In contrast, there were a few enterprises scattered across several countries which did not meet national legislative requirements in relation to representation — such as the Danish electrical installations and repairs company, which had no joint safety committee and no safety delegate even though it employed more than the 20-worker legislative threshold.

Where there were participative arrangements in place, much of their effectiveness seemed to be dependent on a combination of the format and origin of those arrangements and the personal characteristics of those involved. For example, where representatives had been elected by the workforce and were experienced workers who had volunteered for the role and had an interest in OSH, and where this coincided with management commitment to representative participation, our interviewees seemed to feel things worked well. This was the case, for example, in an Estonian general construction firm, where workers were actively involved in selecting PPE and identifying risks, received both induction and regular refresher training and took part in regular joint safety meetings. However, in a Romanian civil and industrial construction company, the OSH committee (which was in place even though it was not legislatively required because of the size of the enterprise) seemed to exist mainly to approve proposals made by the OSH representative in order to comply with the legislation rather than to provide a forum for joint discussion. Similarly, in a French company specialising in masonry and structural work, the representative's post had been vacant for some considerable time because nobody wanted to take up the role, while in most of the Italian enterprises (externally fulfilled) representative arrangements really existed in name only, to meet the legislative requirements.

Overall, the reality was that, where there were no *functioning and effective* representative or participative arrangements, this was part of and contributed to a culture of responsabilisation and individualisation of workers in relation to OSH issues. Again, the prevailing national context seemed to be significant here, with those enterprises in countries with strong bipartite traditions tending to show generally more participative approaches to OSH management and a greater awareness of management responsibility for workers' safety and health. These national-level influences of social dialogue and industrial relations traditions, as well as legislation, were clearly influential over workplace practice — something that was apparent in other sectors and is discussed further in Part 3.

5.7 Conclusions

The experiences of OSH in the predominantly independent micro and small firms studied exhibited a considerable range of scenarios that seem fairly typical of MSEs more generally and also broadly corroborate what might be expected from previous research on these types of establishments in this sector. The variety of these experiences makes generalisations difficult and we are cautious about making them, given the heterogeneity of what has been reported above. Occasionally, workers demonstrated a clear understanding of the economic contexts in which they were obliged to operate, and linked poor safety arrangements to these determinants:

Linking profitability and safety, honestly it is not obvious in the building sector. It [safety] is part of the price and, to be competitive, you are forced to ignore it, (FR, worker, 20-49 employees)

This said, it seems clear that most of the cases came from the 'better' end of the spectrum of micro and small firms involved in the construction industry. In these organisations, we would expect to find many of the preconditions that are associated with good practice, in terms of the operation of the business, the organisation of its work activity and the care of its workers. That is, for example, we might expect companies to be relatively financially secure, with clear business strategies and sound arrangements for the effective delivery of work they have contracted. Leadership might be expected to be reasonably well-educated, with appropriate levels of both business and practical competences combined with a keen sense of where the best interests of the business lie. Such owner-managers are more likely to see the safety, health and wellbeing of the workers (with whom they may also have close personal contact, as is the case for micro and small firms generally) as important to improved business success as well as for more personal reasons. Indeed, in the main, all of this seems to have been the case for the majority of the firms in our sample. Workers in such firms are likely to have appropriate competences, to be well motivated to undertake good-quality work and to realise the advantages of doing so safely and without risks to themselves or others. Again, this was broadly the case within our sample. Collectively, such workers and their employers/managers are therefore likely to be both aware of and responsive to regulatory requirements on OSH, as well as to the need to be seen to be capable of performing well in this respect in order to compete successfully for work.

6 Wholesale and retail trade: wholesale trade; maintenance and repair of motor vehicles; retail sale of pharmaceutical and medical goods, and of new goods in specialised stores

6.1 Introduction

The wholesale and retail sector is dominated by MSEs, with Eurostat figures suggesting that they accounted for 99 % of the sector in the EU-28 in 2015. Of these, 93 % were micro and 6 % were small companies. In terms of employment, Eurostat figures indicate that in 2015 about 59 % of workers in the sector were employed in an MSE; this equates to over 19 million people across the EU-28.

In comparison with their larger counterparts, MSEs in the sector were hit particularly hard by the 2007 economic crisis. According to Eurostat, their number went from 2,896,605 in 2007 to 2,719,146 in 2013: a decrease of 6 %.

With regard to OSH, the wholesale and retail sector is often defined as being particularly vulnerable, with a lot of ergonomic strains caused by repetitive movements and tasks, as well as lifting, carrying and standing. While its percentage of fatal accidents (8.6 % of the total in the EU-28) puts the wholesale and retail sector in fifth place (out of 21 sectors), it is of note that the sector had the second highest share of non-fatal accidents in 2014 (together with the construction sector), at 12.8 % of the total in the EU-28 (Eurostat 2016a).

As illustrated in Table 7, 13 companies took part in our study. Two of these were wholesale companies: both were Belgian, one selling packaging machines and the other gas. Of the other 11 case study companies, 6 were car repair businesses (1 in the United Kingdom, 2 in Germany and 3 in Italy), 2 were pharmacies (in the United Kingdom and Germany) and the rest were a Belgian do-it-yourself (DIY) shop, an Italian carpentry showroom and a German optician. Our sample, therefore, did not extend to retail trade.

Table 7 Overview of case study establishments: wholesale and retail trade (wholesale trade; maintenance and repair of motor vehicles; retail sale of pharmaceutical and medical goods, and of new goods in specialised stores)

| Country | Size of company (number of employees) | | | |
|----------------|--|-----------------------------------|------------------|--------------------------------------|
| | <5 employees | 5-9 employees | 10-19 employees | 20-49 employees |
| Belgium | | BE1: Packaging machines wholesale | | BE2: DIY shop* BE3: Gas wholesale |
| Germany | DE1: Optician* | DE2: Car repair | DE3: Car repair* | DE4: Pharmacy |
| Italy | IT1: Car repair* IT2: Car repair* IT3: Carpentry showroom* | | | IT4: Car repair* |
| UK | UK1: Pharmacy UK2: Car repair | | | |

* Case establishments *not* recruited via ESENER-2.

Regarding size, only one Belgian company (the packaging machines wholesale organisation) had seen its number of employees shrink over the previous decade. In five companies, (two Belgian, two Italian and one in the United Kingdom), the number of employees had increased, while for the rest employment levels remained stable. All but two of the companies were independent establishments. The others, which were the Belgian wholesale companies, were subsidiaries of larger organisations.

6.2 Sector specificities and the sample

Competition in the sample was assessed by the researchers as low to moderate, except in three companies (an Italian carpentry showroom, a German optician and a German car repair company). In general, competition in the car repair sub-sector is often high, but this was mitigated in our cases by the location of the companies

and the quality of the services they offered, both of which our interviewees suggested ensured that they had sufficient regular customers.

Regarding value chain dependency, none of the case study companies were considered by the researchers to be highly dependent on customers' demands, while the two Belgian wholesale companies were assessed as being highly dependent on their suppliers' demands, in particular in terms of OSH. As wholesalers, these establishments acted as the intermediary between suppliers and clients, and so had to transfer safety instructions for the products they sold. These safety instructions were also beneficial to our case study companies' workers, who of course had to handle the products.

The occupational risks identified by our interviewees seemed to be quite dependent on the products their company offered. Nevertheless, some commonalities emerged. Regarding *physical risks*, the risk of tripping as a result of stock and packaging being on the floor when deliveries were received and being processed, falling from a stepladder when trying to reach items stored on high shelves, falling objects, electrical and moving parts (especially in car repair and packaging machines wholesale), were all frequently identified by the interviews. The *ergonomic risks* they identified included stretching to reach items, lifting and manipulating heavy loads, working in awkward positions (especially in car repair), and noise and vibrations (also especially in car repair). The *chemical and biological agents* that interviewees described employees as being exposed to were highly dependent on the sub-sector they worked in. For example, pharmaceuticals were identified by those working in pharmacies; oil, fuel, cooling liquids, liquids for air-conditioners, solvents and spray vapour by those in car repair companies; explosive atmospheres by those in packaging machines in wholesale; and so on. Finally, *psychosocial risks* were reported by the interviewees as mainly coming from interactions with clients and consequent time pressure. Fatigue and work intensity as a result of busy periods and long working hours were also reported as being quite common, while, in the pharmacies in particular, interviewees made it clear that their potential vulnerability to robbery and associated violence was very real.

Most of the owner-managers were highly educated; the exceptions were three of the owner-managers from the car repair shops, all of whom had secondary-level education. In the micro companies, owner-managers took part in the production process, at least to some extent. With the exception of the German pharmacy and the Italian carpentry showroom, all the owner-managers were men, and none were immigrants.

Most of the participating companies (8 of 13) were assessed by the researchers as having a medium level of business vulnerability, with only four assessed as low. One of the latter was the Belgian gas wholesale company, where this low level of business vulnerability was explained by the company's structure. It was the subsidiary of an economically strong group which had an integrated management system for regulating safety, quality and environmental processes and procedures. Clear corporate targets, company structures, responsibilities, methods and processes were defined within this framework. In contrast, the manager of the Belgian packaging machines wholesale company — which was also the subsidiary of a larger group — reported that management decisions at group level were sometimes to the detriment of the subsidiaries. He explained that, in his company, employment and business functions had been substantially reduced over several decades, to the point where these had, at least in part, been outsourced to a larger subsidiary.

Another of the companies assessed by the researchers as having low business vulnerability was an independent car repair shop in the United Kingdom. Its success seemed to be primarily the result of its geographical and historical situation — it was the only garage in a village on the outskirts of a large town and, as a result of its long-standing presence in the community, had a relatively stable and loyal customer base:

We're in quite a fortunate position in that we've got a fairly good position in the middle of the village opposite the shops. Pretty well everybody in the village knows where we are and what we do ... people have moved away but still travel back to get work done ... we're not overly raking it in but we're surviving. (UK, owner-manager, 5-9 employees)

Other companies within the sample were considered by the researchers to have a medium level of business vulnerability. For many, this reflected the fact that they had survived previous economic difficulties.

Business vulnerability seemed to be associated with employees' vulnerability (as assessed by the researchers), with low levels of both often found together. Most of the employees in our sample had a very specialised (vocational) education, a permanent contract and relatively long service within the case study company they were employed by — which of course, at least in part, reflects the particular sub-sectors that our sample was drawn from. Working conditions were mostly considered good by both owner-managers and workers. No

serious accidents were reported, and the number of more minor incidents was also described by our participants as being very low.

Given this profile, it is perhaps not surprising that, while only one company — the Belgian gas wholesaler — was considered by the researchers to be following a clear high road strategy (in this case strongly influenced by its parent company), all of the other companies were assessed as taking a medium to less clear high road strategy. Although some faced difficult economic situations and relatively high competition, most of the case study companies offered high-quality products and services in an effort to mitigate these challenges. Regarding OSH, as detailed in the following section, the researchers considered that most of the companies did not have a clear and proactive approach to OSH management. However, they generally did not compromise on matters such as a good work environment. Finally, while wage levels were, for the most part, average, the case study companies nevertheless managed to offer employees permanent, mostly full-time contracts.

6.3 Risk awareness and understanding, and OSH competence and knowledge

Some trends in occupational risk awareness were apparent in the case study companies. For example, as in other sectors, there was a tendency among both owner-managers and workers to see some risks as ‘part of the job’, and so to consider them ‘normal’ and only partly avoidable. It was also clear that many safety mechanisms were in place, particularly in relation to equipment. However, there was a widespread view that most other risks were related to human behaviour and, as such, could be only controlled through experience, with workers using their common sense to avoid hazardous situations. As the manager of a German car repair shop put it:

There are little risks, because we don't have any heavy/height issues, it is all normal here, we just deal with small parts. Security depends in the first instance on thoughtfulness ... That's why I'm always saying 'Come to work well-rested, look out, have your thoughts on your work'. (DE, owner-manager, 5-9 employees)

In general, there was only limited awareness of psychosocial strains among both the owner-managers and the workers we spoke to. Some did mention psychosocial strains during their interviews, but often with little or no recognition of them as an occupational risk. For example, the worker in the Italian carpentry showroom said that he sometimes felt bored at work because of the monotony of the activity in which he was involved. However, he also mentioned high work pressure as a result of customers' last-minute requests. Similarly, in the Belgian do-it-yourself shop, the worker talked about multitasking as being challenging and, in some instances, overwhelming. She too recognised the pressure that came from direct contact with clients. These issues were also recognised by the owner-manager of the company, who said he regularly talked to the workers when he saw that they were under pressure.

Most of the owner-managers rated their OSH knowledge level as average to good. Only one manager, of a small car repair shop, evaluated his own theoretical OSH knowledge as poor, but he believed that it was quite good on a practical level, partly thanks to the national OSH certification courses he had voluntarily taken. This seems to reflect what has been observed in previous research on MSEs, that owner-managers mainly gain their OSH knowledge through work experience and training.

In one of the Italian case study companies, the rather general mandatory OSH training (as required by legislative decree 81/2008) was identified by the owner-manager as his only source of OSH knowledge. Similarly, in Germany, most of the owner-managers had received OSH training within the framework of the *Unternehmermodell*. The problem with these kinds of arrangements seems to be that owner-managers rely on this knowledge and do not seek to update it, in general because they assume that risks stay stable over time — something that may be reinforced by their relatively infrequent experience of accidents.

However, in addition to the *Unternehmermodell*, the owner-manager of a German car repair shop identified two professional periodicals (focused on new products and technologies) as sources of OSH information, which he also made available to workers in their social room:

if something strange [in terms of accidents] happened, then the papers report it [he points at Autofachmann], and then we communicate it to everybody [the workers]. So, the journal isn't bad. (DE, owner-manager, 5-9 employees)

This owner-manager also occasionally participated in congresses and round tables organised by the professional association Meisterhaft, at which OSH issues were also discussed.

External services were also an important source of information for some owner-managers. In the United Kingdom pharmacy, for instance, the owner-manager paid for an external service specific to pharmacy retail outlets through which he was able to obtain both information about workplace OSH and various tools including, for example, risk assessment and standard operating procedure documentation, as well as HR support. Similarly, the external service provider used by the owner-manager of the German pharmacy provided written materials and conducted staff training.

The Belgian companies, which were obliged to contract an external service, referred to, for example, their newsletters as a source of information, but this was generally passive knowledge acquisition. The two Belgian wholesale companies each had an internal prevention advisor, as is required in all Belgian companies with more than 20 employees. These internal prevention advisors — who were interviewed as managers in our study — had undergone the specific OSH training required to hold this position and, while working in close collaboration with their external prevention services, had taken over some tasks from them. The prevention advisor in the packaging machines wholesale company was also a member of the Association of Prevention Advisors, which publishes a monthly magazine with technical and legal OSH information.

The manager of the United Kingdom car repair shop referred to the trade body to which he belonged as his primary source of OSH information. He explained that this had a dedicated OSH section on its website, operated a helpline which would deal with OSH issues, and produced a regular newsletter, which was his main source of information about changes in the legislation and requirements:

We get newsletters from ... our trade body and when there are issues that come up, new bits of legislation come up, they're quite good at making sure that everybody knows about it and they ... have got a specific health and safety section on their website ... and they've also got a helpline ... which deals with HR issues, health and safety issues, legal issues, virtually anything that we're likely to come across. (UK, owner-manager, 5-9 employees)

Finally, in addition to the external prevention service, the manager at the Belgian gas wholesaler described its parent company as an important source of information. While OSH conditions were managed within the participating company, according to Belgian law, specific safety measures regarding the products it sold are part of the product training, which employees received from the German parent company. In this case, as noted above, the case study company also provided product safety training to its clients.

Regarding OSH training provided to employees, as illustrated in the previous example, this was often seen as part of the job. Only one case study company, the German pharmacy, provided regular OSH training for employees, conducted by the external service provider. In many of the other cases, especially the car repair shops, it was considered part of the vocational training which employees followed, as well as on-the-job training, as indicated by an apprentice:

Basic tools ... the guys made sure I knew what I was doing with them ... [More advanced tools] [the mechanic he works with] helps me, explains to me what to do, how to be safe with it ... when I first started I was just watching, then they gradually let me do the odd bit and now I'm capable of doing most of it but it took a while ... whilst they explained and helped me with everything ... and as well as college teaching you the health and safety side of it. (UK, apprentice worker, 5-9 employees)

As already mentioned, OSH knowledge was widely understood by our interviewees as 'practical' knowledge of measures to be taken to avoid risks which were specific to the job/product. In terms of awareness of what was required according to the regulation — that is, concerning the general OSH management of the company — there was a divide among the case study companies. The owner-managers of the three Belgian (two wholesalers and a DIY shop) and two of the German (the optician and pharmacy) cases seemed to have a good knowledge of the legislation, while the rest, which were nearly all car repair shops, had only a superficial and reactive awareness of the requirements. This may, in part, reflect the relatively low education level of the owner-managers, and their perception of risks as being an 'inevitable' part of the job. As we have noted several times, this was something also found in the case studies carried out in other sectors.

Although, for the most part, the owner-managers generally had a good understanding of the risks linked to their business' core activities, a wider view of workplace risks, including psychosocial risks, was less common. While

risks linked to the core business and equipment were, therefore, generally well controlled, other, more general risks were often ignored or viewed as part of the job. Workers were thus trained on product safety (mainly by suppliers), but had to rely on their vocational and on-the-job training to prevent other risks, for which they did not receive any further training or instruction. Owner-managers themselves often did not update the OSH knowledge they had picked up as part of any compulsory OSH training; where they did, this was often at the instigation of an external body such their external service provider, trade body or parent company.

The managers of the two Belgian wholesale companies, however, seemed to have better risk awareness, especially regarding technical risks related to the machines they sold because, as we have already indicated, they were the intermediary between suppliers and clients and were thus also responsible for transferring product safety knowledge to clients.

6.4 OSH management and practice

As the previous section suggests, the level of risk control was assessed by the researchers as low in 5 of the 13 companies, 4 of which were car repair shops, with the other the Italian carpentry showroom. As might be expected, where this was the case there were few or no written internal documents regarding OSH, and hence no formal, systematic risk assessment.

In fact, only the two Belgian wholesalers, the two pharmacies (operating in Germany and the United Kingdom) and the German optician had a well-documented OSH management system which seemed to be used in practice in their day-to-day risk management. Thus, these companies were compliant with the legislation regarding risk assessment. In each case, an external prevention service had been contracted, and in addition, of course, they operated in sub-sectors for which there are other specific requirements which businesses must meet to remain operational. This is likely to have made their owner-managers substantially more aware of regulation and the importance of compliance generally than some of their counterparts operating in other, less regulated, sub-sectors.

In the United Kingdom pharmacy, for instance, risk assessment was carried out solely by the owner-manager using documentation obtained from the external service. These risk assessments involved regular visual checks and completion of the paperwork using the template provided:

[It] takes you around all aspects of the pharmacy to work out what the risks are ... it's got to be reassessed every year to make sure things haven't changed. (UK, owner-manager, 5-9 employees)

In the German pharmacy, workplace risk assessment was carried out by the external service provider, which also provided written materials for OSH management. In the two Belgian wholesale companies, risk assessment was carried out by the internal prevention advisor, who had been trained in this area. In the Belgian packaging machines wholesale company, the results of risk assessments were saved into a database. Employees regularly received the list of risks for their workplace, which they had to comment on as part of a dynamic risk assessment process. Within the Belgian gas wholesale company, in addition to risk assessment, the internal prevention advisor was responsible for quality and safety norms, as well as the procedures and product information delivered by the parent company, all of which contributed to overall risk control.

Other companies, however, did not have an up-to-date formal risk assessment. In most cases, these owner-managers argued that risks were assessed informally, using common sense.

In addition, the owner-manager of one Italian car repair shop reported drawing up risk assessments after inspections and taking the necessary measures to reduce the risks identified by the inspections.

In conclusion, OSH management — especially in the car repair sub-sector — seemed to be minimalist and reactive. Although owner-managers would often describe their companies as following a 'standards must be met' approach, they generally did not strive to update their knowledge about what the standards were for the sector, relying instead on their own and their workers' vocational training and common sense. Among those companies which used external prevention services, or where this kind of support had been, in effect, internalised (as in Belgian companies with internal prevention advisors), levels of OSH management and risk control were generally assessed by the researchers as being higher than where such support was not in place. In addition, having some safety awareness related to the products which were being sold seemed to contribute

to better risk control — including in relation to occupational risks — as was apparent in the two wholesale companies.

6.5 Drivers

The role of legislation and inspection as drivers for OSH was unclear. While the legislation was mentioned by several owner-managers as a driver, they did not seem to take it into account much in practice. Similarly, while there seemed to be an underlying effect of the fear of inspections, only one owner-manager considered inspection (in this case by an insurance body) a source of concern:

Actually, when they come to us, there is always something wrong. (IT, manager, 5-9 employees)

Others reported having been inspected by the labour inspectorate or insurance body, but did not perceive it as supportive or helpful and hence as a pressure to improve their OSH management. As the owner-manager in the Belgian gas wholesale company explained, the inspectors 'just looked at non-essential things', such as toilets (which must be separate for men and women), but did not consider the warehouse, which was where the most substantial risks were to be found.

In fact, only the manager of this Belgian company (the gas wholesaler) reported strictly following EU directives regarding OSH. This was encouraged by the parent company, which had a legal department to make sure EU requirements were fulfilled, in particular those relating to product safety. Within the case study company itself, however, managers relied on these EU directives, and on legal requirements identified by their external services, but did not also try to stay up to date with national legislation.

External services, therefore, seemed to play a significant role in companies which used them, in particular in terms of keeping owner-managers updated on changes in the legislation. However, in some cases their services seemed limited to providing information. Indeed, the owner-manager of the Belgian gas wholesale company reported having asked the external prevention service to check the risk assessment it had set up, and to verify its quality and compliance with the law, but had not received any response at the time of the case study. This clearly illustrates missed opportunities for external prevention services to play a more substantial role in relation to driving OSH improvement in MSEs.

Regarding the impact of the value chain, clients were considered by the workers researchers spoke to, and by some of the owner-managers, a potential source of stress. This was, of course, sometimes linked to high levels of competition, with companies then having to accept short deadlines and consequent pressure on employees. Moreover, this kind of work intensity often leaves little time for management to think about OSH. However, for the most part these problems were not approached in a structured or systematic way within our case study companies.

Again, however, the story was slightly different in the two wholesale companies, which, as we have said, acted as intermediaries between clients and suppliers, including in relation to the safety of the products they sold and handled. Workers at these companies received hazard prevention instructions from suppliers and communicated them to clients. Moreover, when contractors were working in a hazardous work environment at the clients' premises, clients imposed their own rules regarding OSH and workers frequently had to pass a test in order to be allowed to work there, which of course also led to a certain level of risk awareness. In fact, most of the clients of the Belgian packaging machines wholesale company required a safety certificate. This company was ISO 9001 certified, and some of its workers followed VCA certification training. The requirements covered by these kinds of certification schemes often go beyond the legislation, at least in terms of physical risks. Safety audits, which also often go further than other inspections, are regularly organised by the certifying organisations, which puts extra pressure on management to get everything in order in practice, as well as on paper.

In terms of company characteristics, resilience seemed to be important: 11 of the 13 participating firms had been in business for more than 10 years. There seemed to be a general belief that workers and owner-managers gained experience and knowledge of the business over time, which allowed them to recognise and prevent hazardous situations:

We respect the laws and that's enough ... really, laws are not needed if one works intelligently. (IT, owner-manager, 20-49 employees)

Furthermore, owner-managers seemed to have a certain sense of responsibility towards their employees, which often stemmed both from the small size of the company and from working with the same staff for a long period of time. However, this led not necessarily to a sense of obligation to comply with the regulations, but rather to doing what the owner-manager considered would ensure a safe work environment.

Regarding management style, the close cooperation between owner-manager and workers, which was very apparent in these small family (in the literal or figurative sense) businesses, meant that, when OSH issues were identified, they were often discussed and dealt with immediately. Both owner-managers and workers felt that workers had an important role to play in this process, as their vigilance and working experience had an impact on their risk awareness and the way they managed risks.

In the two Belgian wholesale companies, subsidiaries of larger enterprises, the role of the parent company is not to be underestimated. Even though, as we have indicated, these subsidiaries worked autonomously, the influence of the parent company, including its guidelines regarding safety, was tangible.

Finally, the location of the company was mentioned in five cases as having an important effect on OSH. This was, in part, because market competition levels were seen as being lower when companies were located in a small town as opposed to a city. This was perceived as reducing financial pressure and, relatedly, time pressure. Moreover, the owner-manager of the DIY shop mentioned the 'culture' of the city where his company was located as facilitating good relations with clients.

In summary, with the exception of certification in the wholesale companies, there seemed to be few structural drivers. In the other participating companies, there seemed to be little motivation to start a comprehensive OSH management system. Rather, value chain and management characteristics led to ad hoc OSH measures. Moreover, current inspection systems did not seem to have had any effect on companies' OSH management; rather it seemed that owner-managers wished for a more supportive approach, as opposed to the simply controlling one they had so far experienced.

6.6 Worker participation

As expected, and in common with many of the other sectors, formal worker participation was rather weak among the participating establishments. Only one company (the larger Italian car repair shop) had an elected worker representative for OSH (an RSPP); and, in the German pharmacy, OSH was sometimes on the agenda of staff meetings, which took place once or twice a month. There were no other instances of formal worker representation or involvement in OSH management in any of the other participating establishments.

Company size — companies with fewer than 50 employees — of course plays an important role in this lack of formal arrangements for worker participation. In some countries (such as Belgium) the threshold for being required to set up a safety committee is 50 employees. In addition, in companies of this size, everyone knows each other. As a result, as was the case in our sample, informal participation is much more common, with workers often reporting being able to approach the manager through unofficial channels. However, the other side of the coin is that, if workers have concerns which they feel the manager is not dealing with adequately, they have very few alternative avenues open to them. Moreover, when workers work predominantly on their own, such as in car repair shops, social contacts are rarer and hence less communication, including on OSH, occurs. The lack of formal OSH management and communication arrangements also leads to the use of ad hoc OSH measures to solve workers' issues, rather than a comprehensive, proactive OSH strategy.

Again, the two Belgian wholesales companies were distinct from the other cases in this regard. They both systematically involved workers in risk assessment. In the packaging machines wholesale company, workers regularly reviewed risk assessments at the request of the owner-manager. The worker we spoke to also talked about being involved through contributing to the risks database (referred to earlier), which workers can fill in based on their observations and experience. This database seemed to be well used throughout the company. Similarly, in the gas wholesale company, the internal prevention advisor referred to involving workers in risk assessment because, in his view, they had the most practical experience of the work, particularly that carried out on clients' premises.

Regarding the interviewees' opinions on responsibility for OSH, half of the workers (of whom five were working in car repair shops and one in the Belgian DIY shop) felt that they themselves were responsible for OSH. This seemed to be the result of the high level of autonomy given to workers, as well as a general understanding that OSH was a question of 'common sense'. The following quote illustrates the reasoning of those owner-managers

who limited their responsibility to providing OSH information now and again, making workers responsible for everything else:

I have to provide the information and the worker has to put into practice what has been explained in the course. (IT, owner-manager, 5-9 employees)

The owner-managers and workers from the Belgian wholesale companies, the Italian carpentry showroom, the pharmacies (operating in Germany and the United Kingdom) and the German optician, on the other hand, felt that a substantial part of the responsibility for OSH lay with management. Here, the prevailing view was that supervisors and managers must not only give instruction, but also listen to workers, and take the necessary measures to prevent risks. However, they also acknowledged the responsibility of workers to be careful and use their common sense to avoid hazardous situations:

[The staff are] old enough and wise enough to not take unnecessary risks. They know what the consequences are both for themselves and for us if they don't follow the correct procedures ... got young children so they know how important it is ... they just use their common sense. (UK, owner-manager, 5-9 employees)

In conclusion, even where social relations were good in the participating companies, work and responsibilities were often individualised, including in relation to OSH. Not surprisingly, the researchers observed that a low acceptance of responsibility on the owner-manager's side seemed to be associated with a low level of risk awareness in the case study companies.

6.7 Conclusions

Before drawing conclusions, it is important to recall the specificity of the sample in this economic sector. Our findings are based on case studies of companies operating, for the most part, at the higher end of particular sub-sectors. Most, therefore, were resilient companies that had survived the economic downturn and were able to offer workers secure jobs. This is, of course, not reflective of the wholesale and retail sector as a whole.

In general, the analysis reveals little OSH awareness, and hence few companies with a comprehensive and systematic OSH management system. Both owner-managers and workers often assumed that their vocational training and common sense protected them from OSH hazards, and did not feel the need to renew their knowledge or formalise it in a risk assessment. Consequently, some risks were not recognised at all.

In some cases, particularly the car repair shops, regulation seemed to be the only relevant context in which OSH was managed, as no internal safety rules had been established. However, given the limited knowledge of OSH legislation of the interviewees and low level of enforcement by inspection, this often led to very minimalist approaches and consequently low levels of risk control. This was clearly illustrated by the fact that none of the six car repair shops had any formal risk assessment. Despite this, OSH management was participatory and communicative in these establishments, in the sense that any wishes and needs expressed by workers were the main source of OSH improvement. However, this led to ad hoc measures, rather than a global and comprehensive OSH management system.

The researchers considered that the level of risk control was better in the pharmacies (in Germany and the United Kingdom), the Belgian DIY shop and the German optician as well as in the two Belgian wholesale companies. These companies had OSH external support, and their OSH management approaches often relied heavily on these external services, which helped them, for example, with the risk assessment. However, this support was limited basic OSH management, rather than encouraging the MSE to go further and actually use these tools itself.

In the two wholesale companies, OSH requirements imposed by clients (which were often operating in high-risk industries) and safety guidelines from suppliers (to be transferred to client companies) seemed to be beneficial to OSH awareness. Indeed, the workers in these wholesale companies seemed well informed about and aware of the risks they faced. Furthermore, the ISO and VCA certification systems in which both wholesale companies had enrolled — as required by most of their clients — required systematic quality and safety management systems involving suppliers, clients, managers and workers. The safety audits organised by these certification instances put extra pressure on management to get everything in order in practice, as well as on paper.

7 Transport: haulage and freight

7.1 Introduction

As illustrated in Table 8, the vast majority of enterprises in the EU-28 transport and storage sector (NACE section H) are micro enterprises with fewer than 10 employees.

Table 8 Size class indicators in transport and storage in EU-28 (Eurostat figures for 2015)

| Size | Number of enterprises | Number of persons employed |
|------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| All enterprises | 1,188,633 | 10,841,283 |
| Micro (<10) | 1,077,010 | 2,081,938 |
| Small (10-50) | 90,718 | 1,807,035 |
| Medium (50-250) | 17,000 | 2,048,162 |
| Large (>250) | 3,500 | 4,712,404 |

The sector analysis described in this chapter presents the sample, procedures and a synthesis of the results of the interviews that were conducted and analysed within the transport sector. Interviews were carried out with owner-managers and workers in 13 MSEs across four Member States: Germany, Estonia, Italy and Sweden.

Table 9 summarises the case studies with regard to their size and main business functions.

Table 9 Overview of case study establishments: transport (haulage and freight)

| Country | Size of company (number of employees) | | | |
|----------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|--|--|
| | <5 employees | 5-9 employees | 10-19 employees | 20-49 employees |
| Estonia | EE3: Haulage contractor | | EE1: Haulage contractor EE4: Haulage contractor | EE2: Haulage contractor* |
| Germany | DE1: Postal service | DE2: Haulage contractor | DE3: Freight forwarder | DE4: Logistics company, franking and sorting of letters |
| Italy | | | | IT1: Haulage contractor* IT2: Haulage contractor* |
| Sweden | | | | SE1: Haulage contractor SE2: Port and terminal operator SE3: Freight forwarder |

* Case establishments *not* recruited via ESENER-2.

The case study companies can be divided in two main sub-sectors:

- Haulage contractors, offering national and/or international transport services, operating their own vehicles and drivers. Some of these companies had in-house workshop facilities for vehicle servicing and maintenance.
- Freight forwarders, acting as logistics experts and offering third party logistics services including storage and delivery of shipments for individuals and corporations. These companies did not operate vehicles of their own or employ any drivers.

In addition, the sample included three case study companies that differed from the others. These were a port and terminal operator in Sweden owned jointly by the local municipality and a holding company of sea transport buyers; a franchise company that offered postal services in Germany as part of a multinational logistics company; and a logistics company that offered franking and sorting of letters in Germany.

As is clear, the sample did not extend to passenger or air transport.

All but 2 of the 13 establishments worked mainly in the business-to-business market. The others, an Estonian haulage contractor, which was a subsidiary company that delivered household goods from the manufacturer to consumers, and the German postal service company, were active in the business-to-consumer (B2C) market. This, of course, reflects the specific sub-sectors of operations included in the sample.

Most of the establishments had been in business for a long time: nine had been running for over 20 years and none for less than 6 years. Considering the generally high turnover of MSEs³⁴, this suggests a preponderance of established and stable companies within the sample — as, of course, is to be expected in research of this kind.

Ten of the case study companies were classified as small (10-49 employees, see Table 9), with seven employing 20-49 people and another three 10-19 people. Only one case study company (an Estonian haulage contractor) had fewer than five employees at the time of the study. Overall, one-third of the participating companies were family-run businesses.

Interviews with owner-managers and workers were held separately, except in Sweden, where the interviews in all three case study companies were carried out with the owner-managers and workers jointly. This was entirely the choice of the respondents, and their willingness to discuss OSH matters together was seen by the researchers as an indicator of the non-hierarchical and communicative climate that prevailed in these case study companies. Of course, it may also have reflected a pragmatic decision to limit the overall time spent in the interviews in small enterprises with limited time and space resources. Importantly, there was no indication during the interviews that the presence of the owner-managers inhibited the workers in any way.

7.2 Sector specificities and the sample

It was clear from the interviews that all of the participating companies were experiencing generally high levels of competition and vulnerability. The nature of their operations requires long-term planning in relation to drivers, vehicles and cargo logistics. Planned operations are, however, subject to, and challenged by, events such as weather conditions, changes in infrastructure conditions and fluctuating fuel prices, as well as the national and regional political climates.

The European transport sector is also governed by national and supra-national legislative regimes and has recently seen an increase in environmental and OSH-related legal and societal demands. For instance, vehicles are expected to be fuel efficient and equipped with catalysts for the reduction of harmful air pollutants. Road transport vehicles must also be fitted with digital tachographs to track driving, working and rest hours during a trip.

Further, as the Estonian case studies in particular illustrate, the case study companies that were dependent on international business had been affected by the political situation in the Baltic Sea region³⁵. The owner of one of the Estonian haulage contractors (with 10-19 employees) stated that 'some big clients disappeared because of the political situation and relationships between Estonia and Russia'. The Estonian haulage contractors seemed to have benefited from the deregulation of transport that had occurred within the EU, offering regular transport services to the Scandinavian countries. In Germany, Italy and Sweden, however, respondents described increased competition from companies in other European countries that were competing with lower labour and other operating costs, such as fuel.

As a result of this deregulation, the owner-manager of the German freight forwarder had decided to focus solely on logistics solutions, and use only Polish drivers and vehicles. The competitive nature of the sector is further

³⁴ For example, 2,608 out of 307,740 limited companies with 1-49 employees became bankrupt in Sweden in 2016 (Statistics Sweden 2017).

³⁵ In particular the sanctions against Russia imposed by the EU in 2014 in response to the crises in Crimea and Ukraine.

illustrated by the fact that 9 of the 13 participating companies were assessed by the researchers as facing tough competition, while the remainder were considered to be facing medium competition.

Interestingly, despite this high level of competition, only the Estonian B2C haulage contractor was categorised by the researchers as suffering from high business vulnerability, with the rest assessed as facing medium to low business vulnerability. Similarly, the researchers considered that eight of the companies had adopted a very clear or less clear high road strategy, with just three assessed as taking a low road approach. Further, as we have already indicated, the case study companies had generally been in business for a long time.

As a way to deal with the challenges of their sub-sector, two of the case study companies (an Italian haulage contractor and the Swedish freight forwarder) had managed to identify and occupy their own niche markets, thus obtaining stable business performance by attracting loyal customers with specific requirements. In these two companies, together with the second Italian transport company, the Swedish haulage contractor and the German freight forwarder, there was evidence of positive value chain influence on company OSH management practices — especially from larger customers. In the Swedish freight forwarding company, it was primarily customers in the textile industry that required operations to follow certain standards, associated primarily with the clients' policies and business models on corporate social responsibility, which in many respects were closely related to OSH. No value chain effects were apparent in six of the other case study companies, while negative effects were evident in two of the case study companies. For instance, respondents from the German postal service described the pressure of standards imposed by their main supplier, German Federal Post, which they indicated limited the company's autonomy and decision-making and so impacted on OSH practices. They explained that German Federal Post imposed strict provisions about the time within which the letters must be sorted and delivered to the next service station. This left no leeway for coping with the increased workload and consequently even higher pressure on employees at the end of each month — the time at which many companies send out all their invoices and salary slips.

Not many other effects were evident on the supply side of the value chain within the case study companies. However, for a company operating its own vehicle fleet it is reasonable to assume that an important issue would be the performance and design of its vehicles. Vehicle manufacturers, as suppliers, have the opportunity of providing safe and ergonomic driving conditions, with low levels of noise and whole-body vibrations, as well as nice recreational areas in the larger vehicles to allow rest and sleep during long-haul trips.

Of the 13 case study companies, 9 were registered as independent enterprises, 3 as subsidiary companies and 1 as a franchise enterprise. As there were no common denominators across the four dependent companies, it is not possible to discuss the impact on OSH and OSH management of being dependent in some way on a larger organisation. Rather, within our sample, impact seemed to vary dependent on the owner-manager's interest in OSH.

The owner-managers we spoke to were generally well educated, with five respondents having tertiary education, and seven secondary education, often with additional vocational training. In addition, most owner-managers had received OSH training.

From the description given above, it is clear that some of the companies' characteristics point to the presence of various important preconditions for an interest in OSH and OSH management. These include being larger MSEs that are stable and are able to take a high road business strategy; this combination of factors provides the 'space' for owner-managers to take an interest in OSH, which might perhaps prompt them to take part in OSH education.

7.3 Risk awareness and understanding, and OSH competence and knowledge

The main occupational accident risks within a haulage contractor company are the drivers' risks of road accidents, slips, trips and falls when stepping into or out of vehicles, and accidents during loading operations. The main physical health risk is musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), especially in the lower back, neck and shoulders, from whole-body vibrations when driving, and from manual handling of cargo and lashing equipment. Exposure to chemical and biological agents is dependent on the type of cargo, but common for all drivers are the risks associated with handling fuel, lubricants and hydraulic oils, and exposure to emissions from diesel engine exhausts. Diesel exhaust is classified by the International Agency for Research on Cancer as carcinogenic to humans.

Psychosocial strains are commonly related to high work intensity and strains during peak periods and when trying to keep to time schedules under adverse weather conditions or traffic accidents. Long-haul drivers in particular may suffer from driver fatigue. To combat this, as we have noted, all vehicles should be equipped with tachographs that record driving and rest hours. The owner-manager of the Swedish haulage contractor was positive about this development in the industry:

Nowadays, we have these digital time recorders so it is no longer possible to cheat, like the old ones that could just be replaced. It is really good, you are not a safe driver if you don't stop and pause. (SE, owner-manager, 20-49 employees)

However, long working hours, sometimes having to spend extended periods on the road away from home, family and friends, can lead to temptations to violate working time rules, despite the risk of being caught out. As one worker explained:

I am working on Scandinavian destinations and often drive to Finland. In some cases, especially before Christmas or Easter holidays, I need to drive longer than allowed because I would like to catch a ship back home at a certain time, so I can have a rest at home instead of on board the ship. (EE, worker, 10-19 employees)

In addition, working away from the office and seldom having the chance to meet with managers and colleagues can make for weak risk communication arrangements — not least because taking mobile telephone calls or reading short text messages or emails is a risk in itself when working. This was apparent, in particular, among the road haulage contractors in our sample.

Like any other workplace, there is also be a risk of work conflicts, bullying and sexual harassment within the workgroup or in connection with other people. These risks were referred to by only the worker in the Swedish haulage company and the safety delegate in the Swedish freight forwarder. The former recalled an occasion on which a person had screamed unpleasant remarks at a driver because they were unable to pass the vehicle during loading on a street, and the worker discussed the ways in which situations like this could be dealt with. The fact that these kinds of situations were not referred to more widely during our interviews may be a reflection of a tendency to see incidents such as this as an inevitable part of the work rather than as an OSH issue.

Many similar OSH risks are found in warehousing. Here, the main accident risks are associated with working with forklifts and trolleys. The main physical health risk is MSDs from manual handling and repetitious carrying and lifting of heavy loads, often with the back bent and twisted.

The researchers considered that the case study companies generally displayed good awareness of the risks present in the various working environments, albeit with a primary focus on acute accident risks, with rather less awareness of the long-term health effects of a poor work environment. The Swedish sample differed slightly in this respect. In all three case study companies, unprompted by the interviewer, organisational and social issues and interpersonal relationships at work were discussed and elaborated on by both the owner-managers and the worker representatives that researchers spoke to. This may be because of new OSH provisions on psychosocial risk that had received unprecedented exposure in media all over Sweden prior to and around the time of the study. This included coverage in radio and TV commercials, YouTube films and various other outlets and platforms — something never before seen in relation to OSH provisions.

There had been serious occupational accidents in all but two of the participating companies. The researchers considered that seven of the owner-managers showed an understanding of accidents as being multicausal, and so including individual, organisational and technical causes. In both Italian companies, however, accidents were seen as being mainly caused by individual mistakes. This notion seemed to be shared by the owner-managers and workers. In one of the Italian haulage contractors, the owner-manager reported believing that everything possible was done to prevent accidents from happening and that, as a result, the only possible remaining causes were distraction or overconfidence on the part of the worker. Similarly, in the other Italian haulage contractor, the worker seemed to have a clear understanding of psychosocial risks, but did not see these as being related to safety. Rather, he accepted such risks as a natural part of the job. In terms of accidents, he said:

normally, a worker's accident is caused by human error. (IT, worker, 20-49 employees)

Here, therefore, the carelessness of the employee was again regarded as the only real cause of accidents.

As we have seen elsewhere, the case studies suggest a normalisation of certain working conditions, which in effect serves as an excuse for not taking action on some risks. This was clear, for example, in the German freight forwarding company, where the owner-manager stated that time pressure and difficult clients were 'the nature of the work'. She went on to say that she could cope with it very well — in effect leaving workers to fend for themselves in this regard.

However, the case studies also included several good examples of how MSEs can use OSH training for managers, workers and safety representatives to increase individual and organisational learning. In several companies, there was an explicit strategy of letting managers and workers take the same courses, and preferably at the same time, in order to establish a common understanding and encourage discussion on company OSH practices.

In addition to training, sources for acquiring OSH knowledge included information provided by the authorities, but also external OSH providers, as well as sector organisations and employers' trade associations. In Sweden, where the level of unionisation is higher than in the other three Member States in this sample, the trade unions were also mentioned as important sources of assistance and information.

7.4 OSH management and practice

The researchers considered that the case study companies generally had well documented OSH routines, including risk assessments, and that these documents were actually used in practice. The majority also seemed to the researchers to have good awareness of the OSH regulations. Nevertheless, the respondents did not seem to distinguish OSH management from the overall management of operations. The six case study companies³⁶ categorised as having a very clear high road overall business strategy were all also assessed by the researchers as having a proactive company OSH strategy. In addition, these case study companies seemed to the researchers to have well-documented OSH systems that were also acted on and put in practice, and to have arranged several OSH training sessions for managers and other personnel. Two of these six companies, an Estonian haulage contractor and the Swedish port and terminal operator, were ISO 9001 and 14001 certified for their quality and environmental management systems respectively. The Swedish port and terminal operator was also certified according to the Swedish provisions *Arbetsmiljöverkets författningssamling* (AFS) 2001:1 for work environment management, accredited by a third party classification society. Another three case study companies (both of the Italian haulage contractors and the German freight forwarder) were certified in accordance with a sector-specific standard. In all these cases, OSH management was implemented in an integrated management system that followed a similar structure for all kinds of operational decisions, complemented with specific objectives for OSH management. The Managing Director (MD) of the Swedish port and terminal operator explained how their management system served as a backbone for their OSH practices:

We have very good use of our certification of the other systems [ISO 9001 and 14001] for our OSH work. No matter how you put it, you have to take responsibility for your own actions, but we have good support from this system. For me, having the ultimate responsibility, it feels comforting to have this systematic way of working with OSH. (SE, managing director, 20-49 employees)

Acknowledging that an integrated management system such as this means an increased administrative burden, the MD stressed the importance of communicating the purpose of the OSH practices to employees:

It is important to convey the attitude that we are not doing this [routines, instructions and demands for protective equipment] to annoy our employees, but because we don't want anyone to get hurt. (SE, managing director, 20-49 employees)

Similarly, the worker representative in one of the Estonian haulage contractors described his view on how OSH and company operations were linked:

³⁶ The six case companies following a 'very clear high road' business approach in the transport sector are EE2, IT1, IT2, SE1, SE2 and SE3.

I know that safety is important and goes together with the quality of performed work. We are looking at these two issues together. (EE, workers' representative, 20-49 employees)

In contrast, the three case study companies that were categorised as following a low road strategy (an Estonian haulage contractor, the German postal service and the German logistics company) were assessed by the researchers as having a reactive OSH strategy — to the extent that no actual OSH strategy was discernible at all — a lower awareness of OSH regulations, few if any written OSH documents and limited or non-existent OSH training activities.

In general, however, as we have indicated above, risk awareness in the case study companies was assessed as being high, regarding both accident risks and more long-term occupational health risks. Most of the participating companies were compliant with national regulation on risk assessment. Only two of the German case study companies (the postal service and the haulage contractor) had not performed any risk assessments at all. For example, during the visit to the postal service, when the interviewer asked about risk assessments, the owner-manager stated that they 'talk about risks as a team' and continued to talk about emergency plans for possible assaults and emergency buttons to call the police.

In the Swedish cases, risk assessments were carried out within the company, although in some cases this was with the assistance of an external provider. However, even in these cases, it was still very clear that the company representatives saw themselves and not the external service as being 'in charge' of both the risk assessments and any subsequent actions that needed to be taken. This was unlike the participating companies from the other Member States, where external OSH consultants and even, in some cases, OSH inspectors seemed to play a more significant role than in-house personnel. Although there may be many benefits associated with external OSH providers and experts assisting MSEs in their OSH work, there are some inevitable drawbacks that follow this externalisation of risk assessment and subsequent risk control. For example, in one of the Italian haulage contractors the owner-manager was not able to provide any information regarding risk assessment during the interview. This was dealt with by the worker appointed as RSPP, together with an external consultant. Similarly, in the German logistics company, OSH knowledge was primarily provided by the parent company and an external OSH service provider. Here the researchers noted a striking difference between the manager's assessment of the risk levels in the company and her description of events at the workplace (including, for example, her perception of no ergonomic risk, despite that fact that at least one worker had to bend very low to do his work). Furthermore, she did not refer to the solvents used in the establishment, but the employee did. This was an indication that the manager was not aware of the risks at the workplace, or she did not classify them as risks, and was perhaps linked to the externalisation of risk assessment.

Risk communication within the case study companies was mainly oral and rather informal — even within the companies that had well-documented OSH management systems. In the interviews, there were several examples of how oral communication during more or less formal meetings and get-togethers was seen as a necessary and important complement to written documentation. For example, in the Swedish haulage contractor the owner-manager was clearly inspired by her previous experiences working as a nurse at a big hospital. She had developed a special 'OSH-binder' of all the routines, instructions and other supportive documents — although she was also well aware that workers may not read it very often, 'but at least it is there if someone wants to look something up'. She explained that at an inspection by the SWEA, the inspector had said that 'they have never seen this in a transport company like ours':

I adapted it from the one we had at the hospital; if it works there why wouldn't it work here? (SE, owner-manager, 20-49 employees)

Overall, despite being quite large (among MSEs), stable companies, and in many cases following a high road strategy, risk communication in the case study companies was rather informal and non-bureaucratic — they did not make much use of their written documentation in this respect, but rather relied on informal communication. This is in line with many MSEs in sectors where manual work, rather than intellectual and abstract work, is in focus. Some of the barriers to effective risk communication included lack of worker representation and participation in OSH practices (such as risk assessment), weak channels for communication (as noted above, in particular for drivers), limited access to OSH information, and differences in risk perception and responsibility for OSH between owner-managers and workers.

7.5 Drivers

The case study companies with the highest level of OSH management and risk control seemed to be largely driven by motivational factors other than mandatory OSH regulation and inspection. Clear motivations for company OSH practices were owner-managers' personal attentiveness to and knowledge of OSH, a participative management style and good relations between managers and workers, together with a clear organisational structure with short decision paths. The importance of owner-managers' personal norms and experiences is illustrated, for example, in the Swedish port and terminal operator, where the owner-manager's experience of a previous fatal work accident was influential over company OSH management and practice. Similarly, in one of the Italian haulage contractors, prior experience of safety and health incidents and their costs had increased the owner-manager's desire to avoid such incidents in the future.

Several of the companies had to meet client requirements that in some instances may have been more stringent than the legal OSH requirements and, of course, held the potential for loss of future business. Some customers also performed their own vetting inspections of company management practices more regularly than the labour inspectorate. Customer pressure can also be indirect, as reflected upon by one worker:

I don't remember any of our importers have ever asked about our health and safety. Clients do not seem to pay attention to it either; but of course, when we issue the products, they sometimes step in to our storage facilities and our environment should look safe and good to them. It gives a better impression of us. So, in a small way, I believe that maybe the clients influence our manager's wish to assure good conditions for us. (EE, worker, <5 employees)

In the German logistics company, several of the employees were physically or mentally disabled people that would have had difficulty finding other work and for whom some adaptation of the workplace had been necessary. Here, the norms and values behind the decision to employ disabled persons were a major motivation for OSH practices.

The role of and support from the authorities was limited, especially in Germany and Sweden, although these were of more importance in the Estonian sample. All the Swedish case study companies had been inspected by the SWEA at least once, but the inspections were not seen as having had any effect on OSH management and practices. The inspection protocols were seen by the owner-managers as a kind of check that everything was in order, but not as a driving force, and the SWEA was not mentioned as a source of OSH knowledge. Compliance with the OSH legislation was described by the interviewees as something 'natural', but not as the upper limit of what could be achieved. In contrast, in Estonia fear of being inspected by authorities seemed to reinforce the motivation of the owner-managers to deal with OSH issues.

The owner-manager in one of the Italian haulage contractors described the main OSH drivers as being requests from clients, standards, inspections by the authorities, and concern for the safety and health of his workers. Here again the owner-manager was critical of inspections:

Unfortunately only the companies that work openly are inspected. The entities involved in these activities [the inspections] try to avoid excessive work by preferring to go where everything works well rather than to those on the 'borderline'. (IT, owner-manager, 20-49 employees)

As discussed in the previous section, the owner-managers of the case study companies that had implemented integrated management systems and were accredited by a third party were also driven by the need to fulfil these standards. Likewise, there were other regional and supra-national regulations mentioned in the case studies that had an impact on OSH, such as the EU Directive on driving licences, which governs qualification, training and medical health checks of professional drivers; the European Agreement concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road that governs transnational transport of hazardous materials; and the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code on security arrangements for ports and government agencies, to mention but a few.

To conclude, internal drivers such as values and knowledge about OSH, in combination with good relations and cooperation with employees, seemed to support good OSH management. External factors played a role, but there were few concrete examples of clients' demands in relation to OSH and OSH management. Where inspections had been experienced, they also had an impact, although there was clear variation between countries in this regard.

7.6 Worker participation

Worker participation in the case study companies varied in line with national differences in industrial relations traditions. In Sweden, with its highly regulated labour market and traditionally high level of unionisation (even though this has decreased in recent decades), all of the case study companies had formalised OSH worker participation arrangements. In the only company that did not have an elected safety representative, respondents explained that this was because no one was willing to take on the assignment and that instead they had developed a very good working relationship with the regional safety representative for the transport union. Further, the workers in the Swedish case study companies were all covered by collective agreements and permanently employed. Employee vulnerability was assessed by the researchers as being low, and management style as non-hierarchical and communicative, in all three of these case study companies. Here, OSH practices seemed to be functioning formally as well as informally and the safety representatives were instrumental and appreciated in risk prevention work, as illustrated by the safety representative in a Swedish company who described the ease with which he could communicate with company managers by turning to the MD and saying:

I can talk to you in the same way I talk to anybody else in the company and I think it is damn nice that we can have such open dialogue. If I have 10 minutes to spare, I can just pop in to the boss and say 'hi, how are you doing, I think we need to look at this'. (SE, safety representative , 20-49 employees)

In the Estonian cases, only the largest haulage contractor had an appointed safety representative and formalised OSH worker involvement that included regular staff meetings with OSH on the agenda. There were no collective agreements and the level of unionisation was generally low. In this company and one of the smaller haulage contractors, management was assessed by the researchers as following an autocratic style, although this was, nuanced by consideration for workers' views, in what might be termed a kind of 'consultative paternalism'.

In Italy, where unionisation has been decreasing over the last decade, the two case study companies both had appointed worker OSH representatives, but were still seen by the researchers as lacking formalised OSH worker involvement. Even though the owner-managers in these two companies assumed responsibility for company OSH practices, they considered that any occupational accidents were caused by individual mistakes, thus placing a kind of informal responsibility for OSH outcomes on workers, without providing them with the necessary means and resources to reduce risks. This also reflected the owner-managers' lack of a proactive and systematic OSH management approach.

Levels of unionisation were very limited in the German case studies, and none had an appointed worker OSH representative or any formalised worker involvement in OSH. In the freight forwarding company, the worker was not aware of any safety and health risks present at the workplace, and rather was primarily concerned about measures and motivations for a healthy lifestyle. In the logistics firm, the worker had worked for many years as a firefighter and had a certain standing and influence, particularly in relation to preventive fire safety and medical first aid training, but not regarding proactive OSH work in a broader sense.

Turning to social relations, in general these seemed to be good in the case study companies, with interviewees describing various leisure and recreational activities that had been arranged in order to develop the social 'glue' between workers. In the Swedish haulage contractor, leisure activities were referred to as a way to reward workers when company performance was going well, and in the German postal service 'extras' such as birthday gifts and staff Christmas celebrations were considered to be 'very good for the atmosphere' (DE, owner-manager, <5 employees).

Overall, since some workers in a transport company have to perform work tasks alone and away from the office and management, there is a need to develop structures for participation adapted to this kind of work. Management need to handle the challenges of OSH worker participation when most of the workers seldom meet in person and mainly communicate through means other than meetings on site. Within our sample, there were striking differences in worker participation between countries. Nevertheless, social relations seemed to be good — although it was also clear that good social relations were not enough to prevent OSH problems, for which a good understanding of OSH and knowledge about risks and how they can be prevented are also needed.

7.7 Conclusions

Although they were small enterprises, several — although not all — of the largest companies in the sample were assessed by the researchers as having well-functioning OSH management systems and proactive OSH strategies. This may, at least in part, reflect the selection of case study companies, in that, for the most part, they were stable companies occupying a strong position in the market, following a clear high road business strategy and led by owner-managers who prioritised OSH and wanted to create a good and safe working environment for their employees — something they were generally able to achieve, as many of them had some OSH education.

However, such well-functioning OSH management arrangements cannot be interpreted as representative of the level of OSH management in the sector more widely. Nevertheless, the analysis is valuable in showing which factors have an impact on and support proactive OSH management.

The results primarily show the positive implications of having one or more individuals in the company — an owner-manager or a worker — acting as human dynamos for OSH management, especially when there is also a good working relationship between the responsible owner-manager and workers/worker representative. Such human dynamos were present in some, but not all, of the case study companies and they had a substantial impact on OSH. Practical examples of management commitment to OSH were also apparent in the companies that had allocated a dedicated budget and resources for OSH. Characteristics that seemed to facilitate owner-managers and/or employees functioning as human dynamos included stability, larger size (within the MSE range), occupying a strong position in the market and following a high road business strategy. However, the frequency of such human dynamos in MSEs more widely is questionable.

The implementation and integration of OSH practices and risk assessments into the overall management systems that guide day-to-day operations and decision-making were seen as beneficial in the case study companies that were certified according to ISO 9001, ISO 14001 or a similar sector-specific standard. However, in practice written documentation was not used very much; rather, it was seen as something that could be used if necessary. Personal communication seemed to be preferred to written communication.

Having customers with specific demands that had a clear impact on OSH management and practice also had positive effects on company OSH practices. However, this was rare in the case study companies, and there were generally few examples of a positive impact from clients on OSH and OSH management. In addition, there was a negative effect in one instance.

OSH regulations, inspections, support from inspection authorities and fear of inspections all had a certain impact in some cases, especially in the Estonian case study companies. Regulations with a focus other than OSH may also have had an impact, such as those governing professional drivers' qualifications, working hours, training and health, and other regulations concerning the transport of hazardous materials. The supervision of driving and working hours with a tachograph also had a substantial impact on OSH conditions related to working hours.

There were also some clear differences that, at least in part, reflected national context, industrial relations regimes and traditions. These included, for example, arrangements in relation to the involvement of workers in OSH.

More broadly, and in common with findings from other sectors and those relating to MSEs more generally, the findings suggest a risk of sub-optimisation when OSH practices lack a systems perspective and focus primarily on mitigating barriers and personal protective measures, rather than adopting a proactive and preventive stance. This was seen in some case study companies where owner-managers overestimated their own OSH knowledge and awareness while underestimating the risk of occupational accidents and, in particular, the long-term effects on health from adverse physical and mental working conditions and strains. This was not uncommon among the participating MSEs. The case study companies in which there was a good understanding of OSH and a more systematic and preventive approach illustrated what can be achieved in companies when the appropriate prerequisites for OSH and OSH management, such as owner-managers prioritising OSH, company stability, larger size, a strong market position and a high road business strategy, are in place.

8 Accommodation and food service activities

8.1 Introduction

The accommodation and food services sector employed 10.8 million people in the EU-28 in 2014^{37,38}. It is characterised by large numbers of part-time and seasonal workers, many working proprietors, and the widespread use of family workers (many of whom are unpaid). It is dominated by micro and small firms: the former made up nearly 90 % of enterprises and employed over 40 % of the sector's workforce in 2014. The sector is, therefore, of particular interest to our project.

The analysis that follows is based on 31 company case studies carried out in the nine countries that were the focus of the project (Table 10). The participating establishments were operating in two main sub-sectors: hotels and other types of accommodation (such as hostels and inns); and restaurants and other food vendors (such as cafés). Twenty-five of the establishments were independent; the remaining six were part of larger organisations. All the companies functioned primarily as business-to-consumer operations.

Table 10 Overview of case study establishments: accommodation and food service activities

| Country | Size of company (number of employees) | | | |
|----------------|---------------------------------------|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| | <5 employees | 5-9 employees | 10-19 employees | 20-49 employees |
| Belgium | | BE12: Catering/restaurant | BE13: Restaurant 1 | BE14: Restaurant 2* BE15: Hotel* |
| Denmark | | DK5: Hostel | DK6: Inn | |
| Estonia | | EE14: Restaurant | EE4: Hotel 1* EE6: Coffee-shop/restaurant | EE2: Hotel 2 |
| France | FR19: Restaurant 1 | FR8: Hotel | FR14: Restaurant 2 FR18: Catering service | |
| Germany | DE15: Restaurant | DE4: Catering DE3: Snack bar | | DE18: Pastry shop |
| Italy | | IT14: Café 1* IT16: Catering* | IT15: Hospital catering* | IT13: Café 2* |
| Romania | | RO11: Bed and breakfast* RO9: Hotel 1* RO12: Hotel 3* | RO10: Hotel 2* | |
| Sweden | | SE2: Restaurant 2 | SE1: Restaurant 1 | |
| UK | UK6: Cookery school | UK11: Restaurant | UK3: Pub | |

* Case establishments *not* recruited via ESENER-2.

8.2 Sector specificities and the sample

As indicated above, the sector is characterised by seasonal work, high staff turnover, heavy reliance on temporary and short-term workers, and irregular and long working hours. In addition, as already noted, smaller firms predominate, so the sector is further characterised by low levels of organised labour, including low levels of collective agreements on wages and working conditions, low levels of unionisation and high levels of low-wage work. Many of these characteristics were present in the companies that made up our sample.

³⁷ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/structural-business-statistics/data/database>

³⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Accommodation_and_food_service_statistics_-_NACE_Rev._2

In addition, the sector often has large numbers of migrant workers working as, for example, cleaners in hotels and restaurants, but also as chefs, kitchen staff and waiters, as well as owner-managers. In general, migrant workers tend to have limited experience and knowledge of national safety requirements, are typically not unionised, and face linguistic challenges in terms of understanding safety requirements and their rights (Nichols and Walters 2013; Sargeant and Tucker 2009). Among our interviewees, however, there were only two owner-managers with a migrant background (in one of the Swedish restaurants and the German restaurant), while the manager in one of the Estonian hotels was Russian-speaking, the worker in the Danish hostel was Polish and the worker in the Estonian coffee shop was also Russian-speaking. There were, of course, other migrant workers among the staff of the participating establishments.

In general, the participating companies seemed to the researchers to be above average in terms of OSH performance, industrial relations and work organisation — something that, as we have discussed elsewhere, is likely to be a reflection of our sampling approach. For example, a Swedish owner-manager said ‘let’s just say that I don’t like everything that is going on in the industry’ (SE, owner-manager, 10<20 employees, restaurant), referring to his view that his company was an outlier in the industry in terms of its generally better OSH performance and working conditions. Similarly, the owner-manager of a Belgian hotel reported being told by the labour inspectorate that it was the best company in terms of OSH that inspectors had seen in the sector.

The industry generally is very competitive, and more than half of the companies in our sample were assessed by the researchers as experiencing tough, and a further third medium, competition levels. The few case study companies that were considered to be experiencing low competition were all found in niche markets (for example one of the Belgian restaurants, which was situated in a university and was where most staff traditionally ate, and the Italian hospital catering establishment). However, the experience of tough competition did not seem to be connected to following a low road strategy. In fact, the participating companies fell into three equal groups in this regard, with researchers considering that 10 were following low road or less clear low road, 10 middle and 11 a high road or less clear high road approach. Based on the description of the sector more generally, more low road strategy firms might have been expected in our sample.

Most of the participating companies were also stable in terms of employee numbers, although workers’ vulnerability was assessed by the researchers as high or medium in most cases; there were only 10 companies in which workers’ vulnerability was considered to be low. Wage levels were also generally low compared with other sectors, with many workers paid the statutory minimum wage where this existed (for example in the Romanian case study companies). For the most part, wages and working conditions were described by our interviewees as being set at the firm level. In the few exceptions, companies followed a nationally set collective agreement (for example the Danish, Swedish, and some of the French and Italian case study companies).

However, there were certain groups of workers in the sample who were considered by the researchers to be more vulnerable in terms of OSH, wages, working conditions, job safety and job security. These included, in particular, migrants and foreign workers and those with non-standard contracts (including, for example, temporary and freelance working, other types of non-standard contract and ‘mini-jobbers’ in Germany). As noted above, the use of these non-standard forms of employment is widespread in the sector, not least because of its seasonality and general economic insecurity. Owner-managers, therefore, often find it difficult to plan ahead, and so increasingly rely on contingent workers. As the United Kingdom restaurant manager put it:

The number [of employees] fluctuates a lot. Currently we have only four part timers but that will go up to maybe 15 in the summer months. (UK, manager, 5-9 employees)

Similarly, a French worker in an enterprise with 5-9 employees explained that her temporary contract had been renewed numerous times during the 4 years she had worked at the company. Whether or not workers with non-standard contracts had chosen these themselves, and were satisfied with them, was not the focus of our interviews, but the literature suggests that this is often not the case (Grimshaw et al. 2016).

Employing migrant workers and workers with foreign backgrounds can lead to a number of challenges. For example, some of our interviewees referred to linguistic difficulties (such as between Estonian- and Russian-speaking workers in the Estonian case study companies, where OSH and other important information was often available only in Estonian). In other instances, interviewees explained that there was no written OSH information because many of the workers did not understand the national language(s) (for example in the Belgian hotel).

The owner-managers in the sample typically had a medium to high level of education, with the exception of those in the Italian sample, who mainly had secondary education. They were also actively involved in the production process in most of the companies; there were only four companies where this was not the case. This

may have been influential in terms of OSH, since workers saw the owner-manager as both a colleague and the boss. As a result, a commonly held view among the workers we spoke to was that, if the owner-manager could handle the various job pressures, then they should also be able to.

In all of the Member States in which the research was carried out, this sector is, to varying degrees, inspected by the food safety and hygiene authorities, and it was evident from our interviews that for many owner-managers this was closely related to OSH. Although these inspections did not address OSH matters, in some cases they seemed to have indirectly had a positive impact on the work environment, for example in relation to tidiness and awareness of organisational matters especially in kitchens and food-processing areas. This is something we return to in the sections that follow.

In terms of risk, in general the sector is characterised by a variety of physical, musculoskeletal, ergonomic and psychosocial risks and hazards, and many of these were discussed by our interviewees. The physical strains they referred to included burns and scalds, cuts, slipping on wet floors, and falling over steps and material stored in walkways, as well as falling from heights (such as steep stairs or terraces without adequate banisters, especially in old buildings). Other accident risks included the use of sharp knives and slicing machines, as well as heat burns, and the use of frying and boiling machines and other electrical equipment (which, as an employee in a Swedish restaurant had experienced, could result in electric shock when faulty). Working in changing temperatures (for example carrying goods into and out of the refrigerator), was also commonly referred to in the interviews, with interviewees also explaining that they were sometimes exposed to chemical and biological agents (such as oven cleaner).

Turning to the ergonomic strains our interviewees described experiencing, these included musculoskeletal disorders from lifting and moving heavy loads such as ingredients, vacuum cleaners and laundry, as well as from bending (for example when reaching into deep sinks), performing repetitive movements, standing for long periods of time and walking long distances.

In terms of psychosocial strains, as noted, the sector is characterised by long, late and irregular working hours, as well as heavy and often fluctuating workloads, all of which can be hard both physically and psychosocially for employees, not least in terms of their work-life balance. Again, these were all areas our interviewees talked about, as were violence and threats from clients, especially at night when some guests were drunk. Workload pressure can be particularly intense in gourmet restaurants, with an outstanding reputation to maintain (see Burrow et al. 2015). This too was confirmed by the worker that researchers spoke to in the Belgian catering firm, which was led by a famous chef. He explained that working for a company of that reputation was stressful because of the high expectations of staff and customers, and went on to indicate that some of his colleagues had been unable to handle the time pressure and workload and had resigned. Previous research has also reported high stress levels among chefs (Murray-Gibbons and Gibbons 2007; Burrow et al. 2015). Overall, however, stress levels in the sample seemed to be low, with many workers reporting that, while it could be stressful at times, they were generally able to cope. This may have been a reflection of the fact that high workloads and stressful working conditions were to some extent seen as inherent by some (although not all) of the owner-managers. As an extreme example, a Danish owner-manager said:

I don't really believe in stress as such. (DK, owner-manager, 10-19 employees)

Temporary workers may also face extra risks, since they are often not informed about safety matters and may work in various premises, for example if they do agency work or are hired only for single events, as was the case in the French catering firm. Furthermore, in catering there is additional risk even for more regular staff, associated with working on clients' premises, which of course may be unfamiliar, as was reported by interviewees from both the Belgian and French catering companies. However, the risk of bullying and harassment of both contingent and more traditionally employed staff was not reported by interviewees (who, as we have stated elsewhere several times, are likely to have been working in the better end of the sector).

8.3 Risk awareness and understanding, and OSH competence and knowledge

In general, among our interviewees, researchers considered that risk awareness was low in relation to both immediate and long-term safety and health risks. In fact, many of the interviewees (both owner-managers and workers) indicated that, in their view, risks were generally low and minor. As a rather extreme example, a French hotel manager considered that the discussion of OSH risks for receptionists was unnecessary:

Receptionists, they can burn themselves on a printer cartridge, fall off their chair, they can staple their own fingers, there are plenty of risks. Well, let me tell you, this is a bit absurd. A receptionist can hurt himself with a sheet of paper; I think that it is a bit too much. (FR, manager, 5-9 employees)

In some of the case study companies, in particular those in Italy, researchers considered that awareness levels were very low in terms of both immediate risks and long-term risks. For example, in one Italian café, the researchers considered that the management approach was closer to a complete rejection of the presence of any risks at all, rather than merely low awareness.

More generally, and in common with other sectors, long-term and less visible risks were least well recognised by our interviewees. Although the researchers assessed several owner-managers as able to identify many long-term risks (such as musculoskeletal disorders), they considered that around a third identified only a few, and a further third were simply unaware of such risks.

Overall, therefore, there was a great variety in risk awareness across the sample. In addition, some of the respondents (both owner-managers and workers) saw some risks and accidents as inherent to the sector. This view was perhaps less pronounced here than in some of the other sectors, such as agriculture. Nevertheless, some owner-managers and workers tended to perceive some risks, in particular small cuts and burns, time pressure and periodical high workloads, as part of the job. As an Estonian hotel worker put it:

Of course, sometimes the cooks and helpers cut their fingers. Who hasn't done that when she works in the kitchen? (EE, worker, 10-19 employees)

This was also the case in relation to long-term consequences, such as back pain from standing and carrying heavy loads, as a Danish owner-manager explained:

We all get worn out one day. (DK, owner-manager, 10-19 employees)

However, it is important to emphasise that this was not a consistent pattern across the case study companies. Many of the owner-managers and workers had a more nuanced understanding of the possibilities for reducing or even eliminating risks. That said, there were also many owner-managers and workers who had a rather basic understanding of OSH risks and accidents, which they mainly ascribed to individual mistakes rather than more complex organisational and technical causes. This approach was also reflected in owner-managers' perception of their own OSH knowledge, which most considered was average or slightly above average. While this may have been a correct assessment in some cases, for some it probably also reflects a common sense approach to OSH. As an extreme example, two of the Italian owner-managers, who the researchers considered had very poor risk awareness and OSH understanding, assessed their own OSH knowledge as excellent.

The same applies to owner-managers' knowledge of what was required by OSH regulations. Most of the owner-managers were assessed by the researchers as having superficial knowledge at best. The exceptions were generally found either in larger companies (with more than 20 employees), where a more systematic approach (for example with a manager in charge of OSH) was possible, or where the owner-manager took a special interest in OSH.

Formal OSH education was rare among the owner-managers. However, it was found, for example, in several of the Romanian and some of the German case study companies (where under the *Unternehmermodell* owner-managers receive OSH education and training to carry out risk assessments without involving an external OSH expert). But these were the exceptions, and in general the researchers considered that OSH education levels were low. Often OSH education had been undertaken in a previous position or company, with several of the interviewees indicating that, while they had had some sort of formal OSH education, they did not remember much of it (and in some cases were even unable to remember when it had taken place). However, as noted earlier, it is also probable that knowledge and understanding of the requirements in relation to areas such as food hygiene and customer safety and health, which are central to the operation and survival of businesses in the sector, had some overlap with OSH requirements, as we discuss further below.

8.4 OSH management practice

Most of the owner-managers we spoke to did not make any distinction between OSH management and the more general management of the company. In fact, there were very few companies with specific OSH management arrangements. These were generally companies where the owner-manager had a strong personal preference for ensuring a safe work environment, and often worried that there were areas that could be improved. As the Swedish owner-manager of one such establishment, where none of the employees wanted to take the position of safety delegate, put it:

I am sure we are doing too little. We try, but we have no safety delegate. (SE, owner-manager, 10-19 employees)

These exceptions aside, the participating companies' approach to OSH and OSH practices might be best described as lacking an overall systematic approach, with OSH issues typically afforded no specific attention by management or employees. In some cases, this lack of attention was ascribed (by both the interviewees and the researchers) to a lack of resources and/or management prioritisation. For example, the owner-manager of an Estonian hotel said that he was struggling to make ends meet financially and to attract new customers in order for the company to survive, and as a result did not feel there were any resources left for OSH.

As we have already indicated, some of the respondents in our sample saw a number of risks as inherent to the industry and, as described above, systematic approaches to OSH were rare. Despite this, the researchers considered that the majority of the companies actually managed to control and reduce at least the more obvious OSH risks, but this was typically achieved in an unsystematic, informal and ad hoc way. However, this clearly left gaps, particularly in relation to the less visible and/or the long-term consequences of a poor work environment. For example, the worker in the Danish hostel, which had an unsystematic approach to OSH, explained that some problems went unnoticed by the owner-manager. There was no systematic way of reporting these concerns and, although she felt social relations were good, the interviewee had not wanted to approach the owner-manager directly, and instead wanted to report them to the research team.

Relatedly, those companies that the researchers considered were following a low road strategy were generally also assessed by the researchers as having a reactive (or mainly reactive) approach to OSH. Of the 10 companies with a low road or less clear low road strategy, only 1 was considered to have a partly proactive approach to OSH. Further, all three companies that were assessed as following a high road strategy were also considered to have a proactive approach to OSH. In total, only seven of the case study companies were assessed as having a proactive approach to OSH, and again these were generally those where the owner-manager took a special interest in the work environment. Some good examples of proactive behaviour included a Romanian hotel where the housekeepers had had trouble reaching some big windows and felt unsafe working at elevated levels. Here the owner-manager decided that the company's electrician would do the window-cleaning because he was trained and authorised to work at heights. Similarly, job rotation was used to avoid repetitive work in a Swedish restaurant specialising in Asian food, with most staff able to alternate between working in the kitchen and serving staff. This reduced the continuous time workers spent chopping because, as the owner-manager explained:

Everything is shredded; you never get a whole piece of meat (SE, owner-manager, 10-19 employees)

A number of the case study companies received extensive external support, including from sources other than private service providers. In most cases this had led to the introduction of more effective OSH practices and risk control. For example, an insurance company had offered the United Kingdom pub the opportunity of a visit from an external OSH expert, which the owner-manager clearly felt had helped identify the establishment's OSH challenges. Similarly, a Belgian hotel, which seemed to the researchers to have a very well-organised work environment, received help from an external prevention service and from various industry associations. And a French catering company was assisted by two ergonomists for a period of almost a year, during which the company's work organisation and premises were redesigned in order to improve working conditions. The owner-manager emphasised that this had been a very positive collaboration. Two final examples of external support were apparent in the Estonian case studies. The owner-manager of a hotel had received help with general work processes from a business organisation, and felt that this had had positive implications for the work environment. In addition, the owner-manager of a coffee shop took part in a mentor club organised by a regional entrepreneurs' association, at which OSH issues were also discussed. Here again it was clear that the owner-

manager valued these discussions and believed they had prompted positive developments in the work environment.

Of course, external support also has significant resource implications, in particular when external service providers are contracted, and such companies may sometimes help companies only to meet the minimum legal requirements (such as filling out a risk assessment). This was reflected in our sample in that several of the owner-managers who had used such services described them as being too expensive for what they actually did.

Turning to risk assessment, the majority of the case study companies took a formal approach, although many seemed to aim only for minimum compliance. However, around one third relied on a non-systematic and informal approach, or in some cases simply did not perform any risk assessments at all (as was the case in two Italian companies — a catering company and a café — and two French companies — a restaurant and the hotel). Many owner-managers carried out risk assessment because it was mandatory, often using an external company to ensure that they complied with the legislation. As a French owner-manager put it:

The written risk assessment document, it is obviously related to a legal obligation; if there had not been this obligation, I would not have done that. (FR, owner-manager, 10-19 employees)

However, there were cases in which written risk assessments were actively used, and some cases where they had led to OSH improvements and changes. In a few instances, companies went further than the requirements. For example, the owner-manager of a Belgian catering firm visited clients' premises ahead of events in order to assess potential OSH risks and dangers and prepare workers.

In general, however, only a handful of the case study companies had well-documented accounts of their OSH activities and procedures. Again, the few companies with such systems were those where the owner-manager was very engaged in the work environment (such as a Swedish restaurant, the United Kingdom cookery school, the Estonian coffee shop, the Romanian bed and breakfast and the German pastry shop). In these companies, the written documentation was also actively used in practice. However, these were very much the exceptions, both within our sample and for the sector more generally.

Similarly, communication in relation to OSH within our sample was generally informal and mainly oral. In a few of the companies, there were employee newsletters, some sort of initial OSH information and training was provided for new employees, and meetings at which OSH was discussed were occasionally held (this last was the case, for example, in the German pastry shop and a Romanian hotel, but these were rare exceptions). Much more typically, all communication was informal, not least because changing work hours and working in shifts made it difficult to arrange formal meetings with all workers present:

I cannot bring everyone together, as we are open from 7.30 a.m. until midnight, we do not have a common working day with everyone. (FR, manager, 10-19 employees)

8.5 Drivers

As the sections above have made clear, some of the MSEs in this study had a well-functioning OSH setting, where most risks and challenges were identified and to some extent controlled. These 'top performers' in the sample were mainly driven by very dedicated and informed owner-managers. The owner-manager's approach to OSH, therefore, appeared to be an important driver for overall OSH outcome. Where the management was engaged and prioritised the work environment, the case study companies generally had a good work environment. A clear example was a Swedish restaurant, where the owner was the former chairman of a large national union, and so was very keen on having a well-organised company and a good and safe work environment.

However, in the case study companies where owners and management did not give priority to OSH, the approach tended to be very unsystematic and inadequate. In these instances, the low priority afforded to OSH was often a reflection of a lack of resources (financial, managerial and time), although there were also cases in which owner-managers simply did not see OSH as a topic that needed specific attention:

but it [OSH] always gets kind of put on the back burner because it's something that until something goes wrong you probably don't see the benefit of it and there's no real financial gain, there's no direct link financially for us. (UK, manager, 10-19 employees)

In the case study companies that did not prioritise OSH, legislation, inspections and regulatory requirements were generally the key driver for OSH. All four Italian case study companies serve as examples here, albeit perhaps rather extreme ones. In these companies, management had little or no interest in OSH and correspondingly low knowledge levels. Minimum requirements in the legislation, combined with the risk of being inspected (although this was rare), therefore were really the only motivation for having any OSH measures (for example complying with mandatory OSH education requirements). However, there were also instances of positive OSH outcomes linked to labour inspectorate visits, in particular in the Danish inn.

In this regard, somewhat surprisingly (in the light of their size), most of the case study companies had been inspected within the last 5 years. In fact, it was only in Germany and the United Kingdom that none of the case study companies had been inspected at all. However, in some cases respondents may have found it hard to distinguish these visits from other types of inspection, since, as we have made clear, the sector is also subject to food safety and hygiene inspections. There are, course, differences between countries regarding which institution carries out these inspections and how they do so, but it was evident from our interviews that, despite not focusing on OSH, they often had some positive implications for the work environment. For example, keeping the kitchen, storage and other work areas clean and tidy is required by food and hygiene safety regulations, but it also has a positive impact on OSH (by reducing trip hazards etc.); and the same was true of many of the other inspections common in the sector, such as those related to fire safety, electrical instalments, tourist and guest safety and so on. In addition, inspection of non-OSH issues can increase owner-managers' and workers' awareness of legal compliance generally. An owner-manager from the United Kingdom, where the risk of being inspected by OSH authorities was very low, even explicitly made the link between food safety inspections and safety and health, indicating that the former covered OSH in the absence of the latter:

But they are very strict. If you are good, no issues. But they can sniff out troubles — if you know what I mean. There is no health or safety here; the FSA [Food Standards Agency] are good enough to cover everything. (UK, manager, 5-9 employees)

Where case study companies had experienced OSH labour inspections, in countries with a strong regulatory tradition, these often led to significant changes in the work environment. For example, in the Danish historic inn, which otherwise had a very reactive approach to OSH, the owner-manager had installed height-adjustable working tables in the kitchen, an automatic locking system on a freezer (to avoid employees getting caught inside) and a ventilation system on the dishwasher (to tackle hazardous fumes). All these changes were the result of demands made by the labour inspectorate. Similarly, in an Estonian case study company, labour inspectorate visits were positively perceived:

we learned a lot from the labour inspector at that time. After the visit, we participated in safety training and prepared all required documents. (EE, manager, 20-49 employees)

In the absence (or very minimal presence) of OSH labour inspection, a private-based OSH initiative was highlighted in the United Kingdom pub example referred to earlier, in which OSH had been given more priority as a result of the offer of OSH assistance from (in this case the parent company's) insurance provider. This indicates that, in the absence of public regulation, different types of private regulation may fill some of the gaps.

Based on the findings of the literature review (EU-OSHA 2016), some supply chain influences on OSH were expected within our sample. However, for the most part the participating companies had good relations with their suppliers, on whom there was little dependency, and there were no apparent implications for OSH. Similarly, only a few of the case study companies were considered by the researchers to be highly dependent on their customers' demands, and even in these instances there was apparently no significant impact on their work environment or working conditions. Overall, therefore, the participating establishments' position in the value chain seemed to have only very limited impact on OSH. However, being part of a larger organisational group did have a positive impact in some cases. For example, in the German snack bar certain standards were imposed by the wider company, as was the case for the United Kingdom pub (which was one of a chain). On the other hand, none of the three Italian firms that were part of a larger group had experienced these kinds of demands, while, for the French hotel, being part of a larger group had had a detrimental effect, since the lead firm's management would not accept requests for OSH improvements.

8.6 Worker participation

There was very limited formal worker representation in any of the participating establishments. Only one company in Sweden, three in Estonia (of which one OSH representative was inactive) and two Romanian companies had an elected OSH representative. In each case, these representatives had a minimal role — they were often in post only to fulfil a legal requirement. Typically, therefore, they were not given any extra time or resources for their OSH representative role. As an Estonian OSH representative put it:

Unfortunately, my role is just formal and based on the paper requirements. I do not have more time to deal with OSH issues, because I need to administrate and manage work in my department and to find new workers. ... [I] was elected as a REP because it was required by the legislation, but practically, I do not fulfil these duties as a REP and I am not supported by top management. (EE, worker, 20-49 employees)

Similarly, formal measures to include the workers in OSH discussions were rare. Overall, therefore, formal worker representation in the sample was weak, as expected based on the traditions of low levels of worker organisation in the industry more generally.

Turning to the more informal inclusion of workers, the picture remained rather bleak, with the involvement of workers in OSH discussions and solutions also rare. In the exceptions where there was some informal worker involvement, this often seemed to have been the result of increased priority afforded to OSH generally, frequently in combination with good social relations within the establishment. However, in most of the case study companies, workers were not included in any way in discussions about or the management of OSH. In addition, for the most part, workers did not seem to be interested in taking part in OSH. This seemed to be the case even in the, albeit very rare, instances when management strongly encouraged them to do so (for example in the Swedish restaurant mentioned earlier, in which the owner-manager, who had previously worked in a national union, directly encouraged workers to become involved). As a United Kingdom manager put it:

none of the staff get excited about health and safety ... I try to take all the sort of boring stuff away from them ... so they are not spending all their time bogged down in paperwork. (UK, manager, 10-19 employees)

In addition, in some case study companies, owner-managers felt that workers preferred to work in ways that they thought were easier or faster, rather than in the prescribed, safe way. For example, the owner-manager of a Romanian hotel explained that the workers had removed the protection screen from a cutter and slicer in the kitchen to make it easier to operate.

In common with many of the other sectors covered by this study, social relations in the case study companies were generally described by both owner-managers and workers as good (although there were, of course, some exceptions, with some interviewees referring to tensions among workers and between workers and management). In addition, social relations appeared to be closer to a traditional employer/employee relationship than those in, for example, the agricultural sector. This seemed to reflect a less personalised quality to social relations.

In terms of the responsibility for OSH, the majority of both the owner-managers and workers understood this as shared. However, several of the owner-managers and workers, particularly in the Italian cases, perceived OSH accidents as mainly the result of workers' mistakes or carelessness.

In summary, the findings on workers' participation do not suggest any clear patterns. Indeed, formal participation might have been expected to be stronger in the more regulated labour markets such as Denmark, Germany, France and Sweden. However, this perhaps corroborates the suggestion that MSEs are often situated on the periphery of the industrial relations model.

8.7 Conclusions

Although there were many cross-country similarities between the participating establishments, some national differences were also apparent. For example, the Belgian and Swedish case study companies were more likely to have experienced regulatory enforcement.

Overall, the findings show that, in keeping with the sector more widely, those working in the participating MSEs experienced seasonal work, changing and long working hours, high and sometimes fluctuating workloads and work intensity, and non-standard contracts. The employment of migrant workers was also relatively common. In addition, wage levels were generally low, and many were in low-skilled jobs.

In terms of OSH, the priority afforded by owner-managers to securing a good work environment was identified as the key determinant in those MSEs in which a high degree of risk awareness and control had been achieved. That is, when owner-managers were dedicated to securing a good work environment, this was achievable — but these ‘top performers’ were not common within our sample and are even less likely to be so more widely. In contrast, among those companies where the owner-manager did not prioritise OSH, public regulation, including inspections and legislation, was the key determinant and driver for OSH. This included other regulatory inspections, such as those focused on fire safety and, in particular, food safety and hygiene, as well as those specifically concerned with OSH — and many owner-managers made no distinction between them. Nevertheless, non-OSH-focused inspections could and did have indirect, positive impacts on OSH. In addition, although some owner-managers and workers saw some risks (in particular, high workloads and minor cuts etc.) as inherent to the industry, the majority acknowledged these risks and went some way to mitigating them.

In some cases, this was related to substantial external support for OSH received, for example, from government agencies (in France), employers’ associations (in Belgium) and an insurance company (in the United Kingdom). Such support was often associated with significantly better OSH management arrangements and practices, and had frequently prompted changes in the organisational setting. This said, companies that used external OSH support from private service providers often aimed only for compliance with minimum requirements in order to avoid problems in connection with potential inspections by the authorities.

9 Human health and social work: care provision for adults and children, dental and other clinical provision, and provision of training and activities

9.1 Introduction

The human health and social work sector includes a wide range of activities, such as health care, residential care (which also involves a degree of health care) and social work activities (which do not involve health care professionals). In 2013, 22.8 million people were employed in the sector (European Commission 2014), which, unlike many others in the EU, grew between 2008 and 2015³⁹.

With regard to occupational accidents, while the sector accounted for 'only' 1.8 % of fatal accidents in the EU-28 in 2014, it had the fourth highest level of non-fatal accidents, at 11.5 % of the EU-28 total in the same year (Eurostat 2016a). This makes the sector particularly interesting for the SESAME project.

In total, 19 case studies were carried out in four countries: Belgium, France, Romania and the United Kingdom. The participating companies were operating in a range of sub-sectors, and so had varying working conditions and risk profiles. Nine provided care for children or adults. Four of these were day care centres, each with a different focus: children; adults with learning difficulties; adults with occupational diseases; and elderly people. The rest provided services to private clients. Three of these were private practices (two dental practices and one small clinic), two were activity centres and one was a sectoral training centre (the last three all operated in the sub-sector of social work activities without accommodation).

As shown in Table 11, the case study companies were distributed over the different size categories. Five had seen their workforce grow in the past decade, two had reduced their workforce and the others had remained stable.

Table 11 Overview of case study establishments: human health and social work (care provision for adults and children, dental and other clinical provision, and provision of training and activities)

| Country | Size of company (number of employees) | | | |
|----------------|--|---|---|---|
| | <5 employees | 5-9 employees | 10-19 employees | 20-49 employees |
| Belgium | | BE1: Activities | BE2: Sectoral training BE3: Activities BE4: Residential care for children | BE5: Residential care for children |
| France | | FR1: Day care centre for adults with mental diseases FR2: Residential care home for elderly people | FR3: Residential care home for elderly people | FR4: Residential care home for elderly people |
| Romania | RO1: Private dentist* RO2: Private dentist* | | RO3: Private clinic* | RO4: Residential care centre for occupational therapy* |
| UK | | UK1: Day care for children* | UK2: Day care for elderly people UK3: Residential care home for elderly people | UK5: Day care services for adults with learning difficulties UK6: Residential care home for elderly people |

³⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Employment_and_labour_demand

| Country | Size of company (number of employees) | | | |
|---------|---------------------------------------|---------------|---|-----------------|
| | <5 employees | 5-9 employees | 10-19 employees | 20-49 employees |
| | | | UK4: Residential care for adults with learning difficulties | |

* Case establishments *not* recruited via ESENER-2.

The researchers assessed the competition faced by the companies as low to medium, with one exception: a subsidised Belgian activity centre. Here the owner-manager talked about facing tough competition, in particular from private companies. However, most of the companies were dependent on public subsidies, and had seen increasingly tight financial constraints as a result of the austerity measures imposed by their various governments following the financial crisis.

9.2 Sector specificities and the sample

The Eurofound Working Conditions Survey suggests differences in working conditions and employment in MSEs in the sector's three main areas of activity: human health, residential care and social work (Eurofound 2015b). Human health is characterised by atypical and irregular working hours and high levels of job strain because of the generally high levels of work intensity combined with low levels of autonomy, while, in terms of physical risks, exposure to biological and chemical risks is prevalent. Employment is fairly evenly spread across enterprise sizes, with about a third of workers each employed in large (over 250 employees), small to medium (10-249 employees) and micro (under 10 employees) enterprises: 31 %, 34 % and 36 % respectively. Residential care, on the other hand, is also characterised by atypical and irregular hours, but here there is a relatively high prevalence of autonomous teamwork and a lower level of work intensity, and physical risks are, in particular, posture and movement related. In addition, it is dominated by SMEs (72 %), with 6 % and 23 % working in large and micro firms respectively. Finally, employment in social work is concentrated in micro workplaces (41 %) and SMEs (54 %), with only 5 % working in large companies.

All of the managers had vocational or tertiary education, and 12 were female — probably a reflection of the relative predominance of women in the sector generally.

The researchers considered that business vulnerability was low in half of the case study companies. However, three were assessed as having high levels of business vulnerability; two of these operated in the United Kingdom. In these cases, their vulnerability reflected their heavy dependence on local authorities, which were imposing increasingly tight financial constraints. As indicated above, this was also a concern in a number of the other companies, but at the time of the study their experience of it had been somewhat less extreme.

The researchers also considered that employees' vulnerability was high in those companies with high levels of business vulnerability, and this again reflected the companies' dependence on local authorities' financial decisions and their consequences for employing staff and investing in existing workers (in terms of training etc.). Despite this, all the participating establishments had a directly employed, permanent workforce, and sub-contractors were used in only a few cases for specialist work (such as delivering meals).

Five of the case study companies were considered by the researchers to be following a low road strategy, three (two Romanian dental practices and one French residential care home) a high road strategy, and the remaining 12 a middle road strategy. For the most part, the managers suggested that long-term planning was impossible because their companies were having to fight to survive in the current economic climate and, as a result, there was little or no margin for investment in matters such as employees' safety and health.

Overall, therefore, with the exception of the private practices in Romania, the case study companies were characterised by high dependency on public authorities, which had a substantial impact on their

financial and human resources. Despite this, they generally had stable workforces, with most workers directly employed on permanent contracts. This suggests that, like many of the other sectors in this part of the report, the sample includes a preponderance of those at the 'better' end of the spectrum.

9.3 Risk awareness and understanding, and OSH competence and knowledge

Based on our case study data, *physical risks* experienced by our interviewees included 'typical' risks — such as slips and trips, long periods of standing and a lot of walking — but also risks linked to clients (such as physical violence) and those that are common for the medical sector (such as cuts, needle stick injuries, burns and bruises). In addition, interviewees talked about the risk of exposure to *chemical and biological agents*, such as cleaning detergents (although many of the owner-managers said that organic products were used in order to limit these risks), disinfectants and contact with clients (bodily fluids, infections etc.) In terms of *ergonomic strains*, risks included lifting, moving and handling clients and equipment, strenuous postures, and vibrations and noise generated by machinery (in particular, hand-held devices in private dental practices). *Psychosocial risks* were also clearly quite prevalent: in addition to stress (as a result of time pressure and irregular working hours), interviewees referred to interactions with clients (and their carers); some had experienced verbal abuse, while others talked about the risk of becoming too emotionally involved. In addition, many of the managers we spoke to emphasised their own psychosocial risks, explaining that they had to deal with decisions taken by public authorities or trustees which they felt did not always take the day-to-day realities of their organisation into account, and so frequently led to the imposition of unrealistic targets.

Another important area of concern that is specific to the sector was the focus on the safety and health of clients. In fact, there was a very widely held view among the managers that we spoke to that, if their clients' safety and wellbeing were effectively managed, then those of their staff would be too, and there were clearly links and interactions here. For example, trip and slip hazards were carefully monitored and quickly addressed because of the risk they posed to clients, and this, of course, also benefited workers. As a United Kingdom care home manager explained:

The OSH of the workers is a matter of concern only if it is seen in the light of the care that we are trying to offer to clients. We cannot therefore have a separate OSH manual or system ... it must be part of the care system. (UK, owner-manager, 10-19 employees)

However, there was also some awareness that the focus on clients' wellbeing could compromise employees' safety and health:

I've been involved in people falling and lifting them up. Probably very badly, I have to say, because I think once you've got somebody on the floor the last thing that you think about is where are you putting your arms and where your knees and what you're doing with your back. (UK, worker, 20-49 employees)

In addition to the risks to workers, several of the managers talked about risks to their own wellbeing. As described above, many found themselves constantly trying to manage their business and staff with the limited resources assigned to them. In some cases, this led to a discrepancy between employees' and managers' perceptions of risks, as the following quotes show. When asked about her OSH concerns, a worker argued that:

This job is mentally and physically tiring — on some days my patience can be wearing thin — you have good days and bad days. It depends on the clients. Some clients are repetitive. They would do the same thing again and again and say the same words or make the same noise again and again and again. That could be mentally tiring. Especially when you are short staffed or not having enough pair of hands or having a lazy time — it can be very exhausting. We do everything we can — but it gets very physical and mental. (UK, worker, 10-19 employees)

But her manager said:

I think the workers' job is not a stressful one but my job is. The extent of paperwork that I have to do for each client and after each time the standard of the plan is amended.
(UK, owner-manager, 10-19 employees)

Turning to OSH knowledge, most of the managers considered their own knowledge level average (10) to rather poor (4). Only two, both from French residential care companies, rated their knowledge level as quite good. One of these was a social life and family economy graduate and had first worked as an external provider, conducting internal audits of companies' overall management (a legal requirement for public services since 2002), before starting the case study company. The other had worked as a nurse for about 15 years before taking a master's degree in the management of social health care institutions, part of which covered occupational hazards. Both these owner-managers, therefore, had substantial OSH experience.

However, in general the researchers considered that awareness of OSH regulations and requirements was superficial, with much of what was understood acquired as a result of inspections or external services. There were only five case study companies (all care centres operating in France and the United Kingdom) where researchers assessed awareness as good. Surprisingly, with the exception of one case (from France), this did not correspond with managers rating their own OSH knowledge level as high — perhaps reflecting the fact that, as OSH knowledge increases, managers increasingly understand the limits of that knowledge.

Sources of knowledge in relation to the regulation varied. For example, in the United Kingdom day care service for elderly people, the manager had considerable experience gained from managing care homes in very large organisations. Others referred to training (online, university or sector training), and the owner-manager of a day care service for adults explained that she subscribed to a sector-specific circular which regularly published a column on OSH. In terms of OSH information more generally, managers' main sources included the French National Institute of Research and Safety and the Regional Health Agency; the Care Quality Commission and Health and Safety Executive in the United Kingdom; and external service providers in Belgium and Romania. In addition, in one United Kingdom residential care home, which was part of a wider group, the manager described the parent company as her main source of OSH information.

Turning to OSH training for workers, there were some differences by country. In Belgium, only workers in the largest organisation (which provided residential care for children) had received any training on OSH and wellbeing (the latter included areas such as stress management, mindfulness and crisis management). This was not compulsory, but many workers chose to do it, as they regularly had to deal with violent children. In Romania, on the other hand, workers in most of the companies had received basic OSH training, often organised by the company's external prevention service. In France, managers in three of the four organisations reported promoting OSH training; of these, two used physical activities risk prevention (PRAP) action training⁴⁰. In the United Kingdom, workers in all the participating companies had received induction training, but its main safety and health focus was on the clients rather than the workers themselves.

Despite these various training arrangements, the majority of the workers we spoke to could not recall having actually undergone such training, and in many cases the managers were also unsure about when the most recent workers' training had taken place or what it had been about. This suggests a generally rather unsystematic approach within the participating establishments.

In summary, some risk awareness was evident from the interviews, but its contribution to OSH was generally marginal. For most, the focus was on risks to clients rather than employees and, while there was often some positive cross-over between the two, there were also instances where this focus was to the detriment of workers' health. Sector-specific risks, in particular in relation to contact with clients, were also often a concern to both workers and managers, with the latter in addition frequently experiencing stress as a result of the pressure of financial constraints. In terms of OSH knowledge,

⁴⁰ This is aimed at employees in sectors dominated by physical work and involves training one employee, who then becomes responsible for training his/her colleagues.

managers' knowledge was strongly influenced by their education and interest in the topic, while workers' training varied substantially by country and its provision was frequently unsystematically organised.

9.4 OSH management and practice

In general, OSH management seemed to the researchers to be minimal. In 16 of the 19 case study companies, there were very few written documents and, where these did exist, they were seldom or never used. The same applies to risk assessments, with what researchers considered to be good compliance apparent in only five of the participating companies, and no risk assessment at all in three of the companies. In the others, an informal or incomplete risk assessment had been done, but there was no evidence of any systematic review process. For example, in one case study company, about a year before the interview a trainee health manager had written up a risk assessment which established various OSH priorities and actions to be taken. However, it was evident from the interviews that there was no guarantee that the manager would actually use it as a basis for controlling risks.

In addition, it was clear that some managers confused OSH risk analysis with care plans for clients. In residential care services in particular, individual care plans are produced for each client. These generally consider all the relevant activities, tasks, constraints and care for that client, as well as associated risks. Of course, this could be used as the basis for an OSH risk assessment, but this rarely happened. As one worker put it:

You're always risk assessing in this job. It's not just what you've got on paper, you're mentally risk assessing where everybody is, what could that person do ... Our health and safety ... primarily it's about our service users and keeping them safe and everything else is secondary. We do have policies and procedures in place but very very seldomly do situations fit within those parameters. (UK, worker, 20-49 employees)

Similarly, staff meetings at which clients' care plans were discussed were often the only forum for workers to put OSH topics on the agenda. Otherwise, OSH communication was generally informal and oral. However, in two of the French companies (both providing residential care for elderly people), an external psychologist was available if staff wanted to discuss specific psychosocial issues.

In general, OSH management also seemed to be related to HR management. Employees often had substantial autonomy and task flexibility, and so were able to organise their own work in ways that allowed them to minimise stress. However, this was not always the case. For example, the worker in one French organisation (a residential care home for elderly people) explained that workloads were seen as being unequal, with perceived understaffing during the evening, at night and on weekend shifts, and this had created substantial tension within the workforce.

With regard to support from prevention services, as expected, clear national differences were again apparent. In Belgium and Romania, contracting an external prevention service provider is mandatory and all the case study companies had done so. In stark contrast, none of the French or United Kingdom companies used such services. However, where they were used, the prevention services seemed to have had very little impact. As one owner-manager put it:

The services proposed are mostly directed at large industrial companies and not adapted to our kind of structure at all (BE, owner-manager, 5-9 employees)

In some of the French cases in particular, this reflected a shortage of occupational doctors, the lower profitability of MSEs than their larger counterparts, and the fact that external services reach a far larger number of employees when visiting a large company than an MSE. Managers reported that, as a result, companies such as those in our study were often effectively ignored by external service providers. In addition, it was clear from the interviews in the Romanian case study companies that external services really offered only services aimed at achieving compliance with basic OSH legislation, rather than helping companies with the implementation of an effective and systematic OSH management strategy.

In terms of risk control, three of the five companies assessed as following a low road strategy (the Belgian sectoral training provider, the United Kingdom children's day care organisation and the

Romanian residential occupational therapy centre) were also considered by the researchers to have a low level of risk control. However, researchers considered that the three companies identified as following a high road strategy (a French residential care home for elderly people, and the two Romanian dentists) had only a medium level of risk control. In general, risk control levels seemed to be strongly influenced by companies' management structures. Decision-making power in relation to day-to-day management and the way the (limited) budget was spent often lay with a board of trustees rather than the operational staff. Such boards seldom allocated extra funding for OSH management, which was not seen as a priority, even in the (very few) cases where the operational manager had tried very hard to raise the board's awareness of the topic.

More generally, however, researchers considered that the companies were following a reactive OSH strategy, with measures to control risks often being set up only following an incident or near-miss. In addition, even where they were implemented, these measures were hardly ever systematically reviewed. This was partly due to the nature of the risks (for the most part the clients themselves) and the fact that, as noted above, many managers and workers struggled to distinguish occupational risks from risks to clients. Moreover, a chronic lack of financial and time resources were mentioned by all the managers we spoke to. For example, in France funding is available for companies that wish to improve OSH, but managers could not find the time to apply for it:

I could answer to calls for projects, there are some. The CARSAT [regional insurance related to the sector] offered to participate in a project, specifically to redevelop laundries. Well this is quite simple: I do not have time. (FR, owner-manager, 5-9 employees)

An atypical case study company, which was assessed by the researchers as having a proactive approach to OSH management, was a United Kingdom day care centre for elderly people, employing 11 workers. The manager had gained considerable experience working in larger organisations, and she encouraged constant feedback from workers in order to adapt prevention strategies:

We are constantly re-assessing, and we do this if there are issues raised by anyone — staff, volunteers, family members. We're always trying to plan ahead, to cover every eventuality. (UK, owner-manager, 10-19 employees)

In addition to this informal communication, formal communication arrangements in this company included a daily team meeting, held first thing in the morning, at which safety issues were addressed. A formal meeting with safety on the agenda, and at which all incidents and near-misses were discussed, was also held every 3 months, with workers, managers and some board members all attending. The manager was also in the habit of inspecting the workplace, ensuring that it was safe and checking for anything potentially hazardous, often with the help of the cleaner, who also reported anything she noticed.

However, this company was an exception. In general, in the other participating companies, particularly the residential and day care centres, although formal team meetings were held regularly, their focus was on the clients. In terms of informal communication, both managers and workers often referred to talking together, although again the focus was rarely on risks to workers rather than clients. However, this was not always the case. In a Romanian residential care centre for occupational therapy, the worker explained that she did talk about risks with her manager when she encountered them, but she qualified this by saying:

He [the manager] has other things to do. (RO, worker, 20-49 employees)

This was the exception, and in the other participating companies workers described management as being approachable. In addition, in two of the French case study companies, a day care centre for adults with mental illnesses and a residential care home for elderly people, OSH matters were part of the internal quality control process. The worker in another French residential care home for elderly people also reported that factsheets were used for reporting incidents. These relatively unusual examples indicate efforts to formalise risk communication.

9.5 Drivers

The main driver for dealing with OSH, which was mentioned by half of the managers we spoke to, was legislation and, in particular, the risk of sanctions. In addition, in 7 of the 19 cases, the managers' own values had led them to put OSH management arrangements in place. In two of the Belgian companies, in which there were actually very few OSH arrangements, employees' wishes and demands were the main driver for what ad hoc OSH management there was.

Our data, therefore, like in many of the other sectors, suggest that the manager is often of pivotal importance for good OSH management. Having someone who is knowledgeable, has extensive relevant experience and adheres to values such as integrity, respect and a participatory work environment seems to be key to high standards of provision generally, and perhaps particularly in relation to OSH. This is especially important in this sector, which has a high level of psychosocial risks that are less visible and predictable than physical risks. As the worker in a residential childcare organisation put it:

Solidarity among us, the possibility to pass on the baton when the pressure becomes too important, this is something important. (BE, worker, 20-49 employees)

As has been discussed elsewhere (see, for example, Chapter 8), sector-specific regulators can also have an important impact on OSH practices and management. Within our sample, this was evident, for example, in a day care centre for children in the United Kingdom which had regular contact with the care sector inspectorate and had gone to very extensive lengths to comply with its requirements. Although these requirements were not OSH focused, there was an indirect impact on OSH. Similarly, interviewees in one of the Romanian cases also reported that non-OSH legislation requiring workers to be qualified in hygiene and health care had an indirect positive influence on OSH. In France, since 2002, public services have been required to have both internal and external audits of their overall management arrangements, which again has had an impact on OSH. In all these cases, the companies' continued operation was dependent on ensuring that they met the requirements of these regulations and enforcement bodies.

Labour inspectorate visits, on the other hand, were generally not a determining factor; and in some cases the labour inspectorate's focus was described as being less on OSH and more on clients' wellbeing. In an exception to this, the manager of one French company had asked the labour inspectorate to visit in an attempt to convince the owner of their (rented) premises to renovate the kitchen in order to make it safer:

They were really kind, they clearly understood the situation because we were not meeting standards. We set up many things to improve working conditions while waiting for the renovation work. (FR, owner-manager, 5-9 employees)

However, reported labour inspectorate visits were relatively rare in our sample: only four other companies (three in Belgium, one in the United Kingdom) had been inspected in the past. In each case, this had led to small ad hoc adaptations, rather than providing the drive to move towards a better structured and more systematic OSH management approach.

Turning to external services, it was clear that, where these were used (which was mainly in Belgium and Romania), managers relied on them to ensure compliance and, as a result, were not directly involved in OSH themselves. The exception here was a Belgian activities provider, in which the manager understood the role of the external service provider as 'translating' the relevant OSH standards and regulations and helping to ensure that practices and management arrangements were in line with those requirements.

It was also evident that working directly with clients had a substantial impact on OSH in all our case study companies. Of course, this is not surprising, given that the welfare of their clients was the companies' main focus. For the most part, OSH was not regarded by managers as part of their company's core business and it was therefore often paid little attention. However, as the sections above have made clear, the focus on clients' welfare did indirectly impact workers' wellbeing and OSH, both positively and negatively. Positive effects included client safety measures also protecting workers (for example prevention of trip hazards). Here, organisational reputation was also important, as any safety

breaches would significantly impact the continued operation of the organisation. In addition, as we have indicated, many of the companies were dependent on non-OSH regulators for their operational licence. For example, in the United Kingdom the Care Quality Commission is the primary regulator for the sector. Although its focus is not on OSH, it does require that companies "have enough suitably qualified, competent and experienced staff to make sure they can meet" the fundamental standards for care, including in relation to their care users' safety. An impact on workers' safety and wellbeing here is effectively a spin-off from these overarching guidelines (see also EU-OSHA 2017a).

However, negative effects of the focus on clients' welfare included the fact that workers would often put clients' safety above their own (for example in relation to lifting or moving clients). Clients' family could also impact on workers' OSH. For example, in addition to the risk of verbal abuse, some of our interviewees explained that on occasion the information and instruction given to clients by workers and family members could be at odds, sometimes resulting in confusion and an increased risk of violence towards workers from clients.

It was also clear from the interviews that the role of the subsidising authorities and trustees, on which many of the participating companies were dependent, was significant. In particular, any budgetary allocation for OSH was rare. However, where trustees were supportive of effective OSH management and did sanction the necessary resources, this made a very substantial difference. Here, OSH regulation was sometimes used as an argument in support of any case for OSH investment put to trustees. Of course more direct, and more commonly experienced within our sample, was the effect of financial constraints imposed by authorities and trustees. As noted above, these were strongly influential over employment in the participating organisations, and sometimes led to understaffing and consequent increases in work pressure and stress for workers.

Finally, establishment size was a determining factor in relation to OSH. In some instances, smaller companies had greater decision latitude (within their imposed budget) with regard to areas such as staffing and working arrangements. Working as a close-knit and long-established team that was supportive of each member was also more common in these establishments. In each case, these factors could be positive for OSH. As an owner-manager who had resigned from a very senior post in a larger company explained, caring for both staff and clients was something that sometimes got lost in larger organisations:

It was all about the money, everything was spiralling out of control ... no one cared about clients or staff. (UK, owner-manager, 10-19 employees)

9.6 Worker participation

The researchers assessed general management style in the most of the case organisations as participative. However, for the most part, worker participation occurred mainly in a very direct and informal way, along very short communication lines. Social relations were often based on mutual trust and open communication, as the employee of a residential care home for elderly people indicated when talking about her manager:

It is not someone who is enclosed in her office, she is accessible at any time of the day. If we have a concern at any time of the day, we go and see her. (FR, worker, 5-9 employees)

Regular team meetings at which clients' cases were discussed were a feature in most cases. Although OSH was generally not on the agenda, these did provide opportunities for employees and managers to talk about a range of issues (clients' hazardous behaviour, work pressure, etc.), and perhaps (even indirectly) improve prevention. In addition, in the United Kingdom case studies, workers were sometimes involved in carrying out assessments, but here again the focus was on clients' safety and wellbeing rather than on OSH.

In terms of more formal arrangements for worker participation, only two of the case study companies had an employee who was officially tasked with helping with OSH management. One was a French residential care home for elderly people, where about a year before our study a health care assistant had been selected to help the manager with the company's quality and risk prevention systems. This

employee had followed PRAP action training, and as a result was responsible for training his colleagues, as well as for risk communication in general. The other was a Belgian residential child care organisation. Here the external prevention service had advised management to appoint an internal prevention advisor because of the high number of occupational accidents and incidents (most of which were the result of the clients' behaviour). The unit head had undertaken the prevention advisors' training and, at the time of the interviews, assisted the employer with by conducting risk analyses, organising OSH training for workers, and so on. In each case, these individuals also continued to work in their caring roles, allowing them to better understand the day-to-day realities their colleagues were experiencing. Researchers considered that the level of risk control in both of these companies was medium to high, and that their OSH management approach was broadly proactive.

In terms of responsibility for OSH, most respondents (15 employers and 13 workers) felt this was shared between employers and workers. The widespread view was that employers were responsible for putting everything in place to prevent risks, but workers also had to use their training, experience and common sense not to put themselves in hazardous situations, as well as reporting any additional risks so that they too could be addressed. As one worker put it:

The responsibility lies mainly with the management, who must understand what employees undergo everyday and does what is needed to avoid what is predictable, together with workers. (BE, worker, 20-49 employees)

None of the respondents ascribed responsibility solely workers, but four of the managers considered themselves responsible for OSH (none of the workers ascribed responsibility solely to management). Managers gave different reasons for this. For example, one argued that it was principally her responsibility to ensure a safe working environment with space for employees to discuss their concerns, while the manager of a Romanian dental practice (<5 employees) referred to it as a matter of 'ethics and common sense'.

9.7 Conclusion

The human health and social work sector is very client-oriented, and within our sample this was strongly reflected in safety and health management, which focused almost exclusively on clients rather than employees. Working directly with clients raised awareness in relation to risks which needed to be prevented for clients' wellbeing, and this had both positive and negative implications for workers' health, safety and wellbeing. Similarly, many of the risks experienced in the case study companies were linked to their clients both directly — for example verbal and physical violence, and emotional involvement — as well as indirectly — for example irregular working hours, in particular in residential care.

Risk control was also strongly influenced by the companies' management and financial structures. Most of the participating companies were dependent on decisions taken by trustees, who were not always aware of workplace realities, let alone OSH. In addition, most were heavily financially dependent on a public authority, making them vulnerable, particularly in relation to austerity measures and so on (the exceptions here were the private practices in Romania).

Despite this, the case study companies were characterised by stable workforces, with most workers directly employed on permanent contracts.

Managers and workers in all of case study companies were aware of at least some risks, particularly psychosocial risks. However, OSH management was generally minimal, with risk assessments being mainly directed at clients and, when they did exist for the staff, rarely reviewed or used for risk management. In addition, as in many of the other sectors, formal worker participation in OSH was rare, and informal, oral communication, or staff meetings to discuss clients' care plans, were often the only opportunity workers had to bring up any OSH concerns.

Consequently, and again in common with the findings from other sectors, the role of the owner-manager was particularly important. First, managers themselves had often been (and sometimes still were) care-givers driven by values such as integrity, respect and participatory environments. Moreover, many had

developed social competences which allowed them to listen to workers and detect possible psychosocial risks, which are of course typically less visible than other risks.

Although general OSH legislation and inspection did not seem to have much effect on OSH practices and management in the case study companies, sector-specific regulations did, even though this was an indirect effect. Inspections aimed at ensuring safe and appropriate services for clients often had spin-off effects for OSH. Crucially, they were also much more frequent than labour inspectorate visits, and were in many cases central to the organisation's continued operation.

Receiving support from an external prevention services also helped some of the participating companies to comply better with OSH legislation, although, of course, there was variation by country here (the use of such services is mandatory in Belgium and Romania). However, in some instances management had become reliant on these services, many of which aimed only to ensure that the minimum needed for compliance was in place, with the result that there was little in the way of continued development of OSH management and practices.

To conclude, if there is one lesson to learn it is to take more advantage of the awareness of and attention which is already paid to clients' wellbeing and safety — and which at the moment often trumps workers' health — and, in combination with staff's existing medical and social knowledge and awareness, extend this focus to embrace arrangements for the safety, health and welfare of workers.

10 A summary of the sector-based analysis

As the sector analyses presented in the previous seven chapters have made clear, the 162 MSEs that took part in our study were a diverse and heterogeneous group. This, of course, was expected given the findings of the literature review (EU-OSHA 2016). However, it is also important to be clear that the sample seems to have included more MSEs that were able to follow a high road strategy than might have been expected based on those earlier findings. That is, in all seven sectors our sample included a relatively high number of MSEs that were well-established businesses, with growing or at least stable and mostly permanently employed workforces. Many had also been able to mitigate the competition they faced by offering high-quality goods and services in niche markets and attracting business on the basis of their reputation, as opposed to having to compete solely on price. As we have already discussed, this kind of profile of respondents was not unexpected, given the well-recognised difficulties of reaching and including low road MSEs in research of this nature. Nevertheless, some MSEs taking a low road approach are represented in the sample and, taken together, they have provided a large and very rich source of data on the OSH views and experiences of owner-managers and workers in MSEs.

The findings presented in the previous chapters are strongly supportive of previous understandings of the OSH experiences in MSEs we reviewed at the start of the SESAME project (EU-OSHA 2016). They also suggest many cross-sectoral similarities, with findings common to MSEs in more than one, and often all, sectors, as well as some differences between sectors. This short chapter briefly summarises those findings, drawing out these sector-based differences and similarities.

10.1 Sense making concerning OSH risks and how to deal with them in the MSEs

For the most part, there was some risk awareness among the respondents in the participating MSEs. However, longer latency and less visible risks, in particular psychosocial risks, were much less well recognised than more acute and visible physical risks. In fact, in some instances, there was simply no recognition at all of, for example, stress. However, there was some variation here by both country and sector. In terms of the former, psychosocial risks were much more widely recognised in Member States where their regulatory inclusion and enforcement had a higher, or indeed any, profile. For example, at the time of our study, new legislative provisions on psychosocial risks had recently been introduced in Sweden and these had been the subject of unprecedented traditional and social media coverage. Consequently, awareness of psychosocial risks and, more importantly, recognition of the fact that such risks could and should be assessed and preventive measures put in place in the same way as is required for more traditional risks, was substantially higher in MSEs in Sweden than it was in those operating elsewhere. In addition, the management and workforce respondents from the MSEs in the human health and social work sector in particular were more likely than those in other sectors to recognise the psychosocial risks associated with their work. Specifically, stress (resulting from verbal abuse from, and emotional involvement with, clients and their families) was widely recognised by our interviewees in this sector. Despite this recognition, however, there was little evidence of any systematic attempt to assess or mitigate these risks. Rather, they were seen by many as inherent to the job, and so as something to be accepted and borne, and not as something that could be addressed. This tendency to see what were often the most common risks that workers were exposed to as inherent was one that was apparent, to a greater or lesser extent, in all of the sectors we studied. But for the most part the risks that were seen as inherent were acute, physical risks or, on occasion, those related to workload, work intensity and working hours. This tendency was particularly strong in agriculture, where hard physical labour in tough conditions was very much regarded as the norm, perhaps reflecting the strong traditions of long-standing practice that were evident in this family-business-dominated sector. However, wherever this was the case, owner-managers and workers generally considered such risks to be part of the job, and so unavoidable and to be approached with common sense. 'Common sense' was a term that our respondents frequently used in relation to their approach to workplace hazards more generally, reflecting the widespread informality and individualisation around OSH in our sample.

Given this broad-brush picture, it is perhaps not surprising that recognition of complex causation in relation to accidents was rare among our respondents. More commonly, there was a tendency towards

individualisation and responsabilisation, both in relation to incidents and in terms of OSH more widely, and this was common across all sectors.

10.2 Arrangements in place

Levels of formalised OSH routines (for example written risk assessments and OSH policy documents), therefore, were generally low among the sample. In addition, there were many MSEs in which written risk assessments did exist but were rarely used in practice. Rather, they were produced in order to comply with a legislative requirement, and were not seen as an OSH management tool. Relatedly, therefore, examples of systematic OSH management were rare. In addition, however, there was a size effect here, with levels of formalisation and systematicity decreasing with enterprise size. So, in general, the smaller the enterprise, the less likely the presence of formalised and systematic approaches to OSH management. This reflected the fact that the smaller firms in our sample had fewer resources (managerial, time, financial, expertise and so on) at their disposal than the larger firms, and as a result were on the whole more vulnerable both in a business sense and in terms of OSH. While this was common across sectors, it was also apparent that more formal and systematic approaches were more frequently found, across all MSE sizes, in higher risk sectors (such as construction and transport). This was the case, in particular, in sectors (such as construction) in which Member States also imposed sector-specific regulation which explicitly required elements of such approaches, often through the supply chain (see, for example, the United Kingdom's Construction (Design and Management) Regulations (2015)). These findings are, of course, consistent with widely recognised effects of size and sector on OSH-related practices and approaches in MSEs.

A number of the participating MSEs used external service providers for support with OSH. The level at which this occurred, of course, varied by Member State, reflecting national requirements. However, there were also clear differences in the ways these services approached their task and/or were used by the owner-managers of MSEs, both of which were important for the extent to which they influenced OSH. In some instances, in particular those where the use of such services was mandatory and the regulatory context was perceived as being more punitive than supportive (for example in Romania), there was a tendency for services to offer a 'minimum necessary for compliance' approach. In these circumstances, it was also common for owner-managers to regard OSH as the responsibility of the external service and so have little direct involvement with it — having, in effect, contracted this responsibility out — with the result that compliance was often limited to the paperwork level. On the other hand, there were instances where external services provided much more extensive support, with OSH improved above the minimum level necessary for compliance. For the most part, this was dependent on the owner-manager taking an interest and becoming actively involved in OSH.

10.3 Arrangements for worker participation

Similarly, there were very few instances of formal arrangements for worker participation in OSH within the participating MSEs. Of course, there was some national and enterprise size-related variation here, reflecting different Member States' legislative arrangements in areas such as worker representation and joint OSH committees and, in some cases, the workforce size thresholds at which these were applicable. In addition, it was clear that national industrial relations traditions, arrangements and contexts (such as union density and collective bargaining) were influential, with these kinds of arrangements much more common in countries with a long and strong participative tradition (for example Denmark and Sweden). Here again there was some sector variation, with levels of formal arrangements particularly low in sectors, such as agriculture, in which industrial relations traditions were least well developed, in comparison with, for example, manufacturing, where such traditions generally have a longer and more entrenched history. However, in a number of instances across the sectors, both management and worker respondents suggested that workers were reluctant to get involved in OSH in this way. This was clearly related to enterprise size, with many indicating that formal arrangements were unnecessary because their firm was small enough for everyone to know everyone, and going on to say that formalisation of this kind would be awkward, particularly given the good social relations and open and informal communication within their workplace. And good social relations and informal communication were widely reported among the participating MSEs in all sectors. As a result, meetings were generally rare, and those with OSH on the agenda even more so. However, here again, there was some variation

by sector, with OSH more regularly included in team meetings in high-risk sectors such as manufacturing and construction (for the latter, there was again a link with sector-specific legislation here).

10.4 Drivers

In terms of drivers for OSH in the participating MSEs, then, regulatory context was clearly important in some cases. Inevitably, this varied by country and sector. At a national level, inspection frequency, and the extent to which inspections were seen as a source of support and/or a potential source of punitive sanctions, varied with the traditions of the Member State. The former, therefore, was much more common in countries such as Denmark and Sweden, while the latter was more likely in Member States such as Romania. In addition, though, there were some important sector-level differences. The likelihood of a visit from the labour inspectorate varied, at least in some countries, with the inspectorate's current strategy. However, as a general rule, businesses in higher risk sectors were more commonly visited than those in lower risk sectors.

In addition, however, inspection by sector-specific bodies, which often determined companies' continued licence to operate, was often indirectly influential over OSH. For example, measures required of businesses in the food services and human health and social work sectors that are designed to protect clients are often also, in practice, protective of workers. Furthermore, these inspections (which some of our respondents struggled to distinguish from those related to OSH) are experienced by all those covered by the relevant legislation, and so may also have the effect of raising owner-managers' awareness of the need for compliance more generally.

Some of the participating companies were part of wider organisational groups and, where this was the case, their OSH arrangements were often influenced by their parent companies. In these instances, parent companies sometimes 'rolled out' OSH management systems and procedures to their subsidiaries and inspected their compliance with them, as well as providing OSH knowledge, expertise and support. However, there were also examples of a negative impact, such as when parent organisations or trustees (in the case of human health and social work) refused to allow MSEs' managers to invest in OSH.

Similarly, supply chain influences on OSH could be both positive (for example where clients required certain OSH standards or suppliers provided OSH information) and negative (such as when clients' demands led to tight deadlines). Here sector differences were apparent, with influences seemingly relatively limited in, for example, agriculture, but rather stronger in areas such as transport and construction (for the latter, this was sometimes related to sector-specific legislation, as indicated above). Relatedly, OSH certification was an important driver in some sectors (again, sectors such as construction and transport), particularly those where supply chain influences were strong and MSE owner-managers felt obliged to invest in such schemes simply to allow their firm to compete for business. Individual characteristics and attitude of the owner-manager more generally, of course, were of particular importance as an OSH driver — something that was consistent across countries and sectors and reflects the findings of many other studies (EU-OSHA 2016). Many of the interviewed owner-managers expressed the strong desire to keep their workers safe, often referring to them as 'family' (in some cases this was literally the case, but for many it was figurative). Of course, this closely relates to enterprise size, as well as to the kinds of MSEs that took part in our project — that is, those that were generally well established and had a stable and permanently employed workforce. Other owner-managers suggested a rather more pragmatic motivation, explaining that poor OSH outcomes were costly, as workers needed to take time off work and productivity could be reduced. For many, the reality was a mix of both these factors. However, where owner-managers took an interest in OSH and instigated a participative, inclusive and open approach, OSH arrangements, practices, awareness and so on were generally more in evidence and seemed to be more integrated into day-to-day process, practices and procedures. In some cases, this was in part related to the position of owner-manager (for example, those that were involved in production processes were sometimes better able to appreciate their workers' day-to-day experiences and to hear and take on board their concerns and suggestions). However, it was also closely related to their capacity. Those that led businesses that had the resources to follow a high road strategy were much more likely to be in a position to prioritise OSH, get involved and encourage their workers' interest and involvement in it. This is an area we return to in Part 3 of this

report, in which, as part of our comparative and overarching analyses, we consider typologies of MSEs in an effort to identify characteristics and contexts that are influential over their OSH practices and approach.

Part 3: Understanding the view from the workplace

In this final part of the report we present a further analysis of the experiences of OSH arrangements and practice that were explored in the cases of MSEs in Part 2. Here we focus on understanding these experiences in a comparative way through situating them within both sector and national contexts. The aim is therefore to provide both a comparative and overarching analysis of what constitutes the key elements of OSH practice in the MSEs we have studied and what in their makeup and that of the contexts in which they are embedded acts to influence this experience. In so doing, we further aim to provide an understanding of what is useful to know about MSEs and the influences upon them in order to inform more effective strategies to support OSH for workers in these enterprises

To achieve these aims, Part 3 is organised into three chapters. The first of these presents some key comparative understandings that emerge from our fieldwork findings on cases of MSEs spanning nine countries and seven sectors. We introduce the idea of typologies, in which we group MSEs in accordance with features of the behaviour, mainly of their owner-managers, in relation to OSH. In this chapter, we go on to explore the ways in which OSH practice was understood by many of the owner-managers and workers in the MSEs in our sample. We discuss the responsabilisation that occurs in these understandings and its consequences for practice. In the second chapter of this part of the report, we use the typologies mentioned previously as a means to understand and address the implications of owner-managers' perceptions and behaviours for prevention strategies aimed at MSEs. This leads to the final chapter, which draws some conclusions from the comparative analysis in this part of the report and links them to conclusions that have emerged in the other parts of the report, while at the same time discussing their implications for future research and policy to improve support for OSH in MSEs.

11 Workplace experiences and their contexts: making sense of the evidence

11.1 Introduction

The purpose of this report, as already mentioned in the Introduction, is to present an understanding of the experience of OSH in MSEs based on analysis of qualitative evidence obtained from the testimony of owner-managers and workers. This is the purpose of the present chapter. Hence it is 'a view from the workplace' in which the aim has been to examine and explore the experiences of workers and managers in a selection of MSEs from a range of countries and sectors, and thereby generate improved understanding of the problems they face in the control of OSH risk in MSEs. It was concluded in the review of research (EU-OSHA 2016), preceding the present study, that this understanding of experiences and viewpoints of both workers and owner-managers is important prerequisite knowledge to address both the possibilities of and the barriers to the development of efficient ways of supporting them to improve arrangements and outcomes for OSH in MSEs.

As previously explained, as is more often than not the case in field research, the selection of MSEs in our study was biased towards better functioning firms, with sufficient interest and capacity to participate in the research. The focus in this report has therefore mostly been on the quality of the experience and the organisation of OSH in these enterprises and the processes that determine them. Despite this, it is clear from the material presented in this chapter that many of these firms demonstrated considerable limitations in their capacities to address OSH effectively. If, as we suspect, they represent the 'better' end of such practice, we have reasoned that the messages that emerge from the study will have even greater salience in relation to many of the firms that have been beyond the reach of the present research. In this chapter, therefore, we first focus on identifying groups of firms that share characteristics, as a basis for understanding some of the reasons for poor OSH experiences in MSEs and the limitations of existing support strategies, as well as to provide pointers towards the development of more efficient and effective forms of support.

As our previous analysis of the research literature made clear, although MSEs are often discussed as a uniform group, in reality they are extremely diverse. As already discussed at some length in the review of the literature that preceded this report, it is widely agreed that, while MSEs may differ from large firms in many respects of their structure, operation, business contexts and performance, they also differ markedly from each other in these respects (EU-OSHA 2016). Indeed, not only are they quite heterogeneous, but arguably there are even more differences between them than there are between larger firms. As is well known from organisational theory, large organisations tend to have in common their professional management and often uniform organisational structures and management practices as a result of mechanisms of isomorphism (see, for instance, Beck and Walgenbach 2005) and rationalism (see, for instance, Brunsson 2006). In contrast, individuals — typically owner-managers — with their own personal background and views on their business, dominate MSEs. This heterogeneity makes it risky to formulate generalised statements about MSEs and we have cautioned before to take care to avoid 'one size fits all' explanatory frameworks and to seek a more nuanced understanding of the actors and processes within small firm employment relationships. While acknowledging this problem, it is nevertheless still possible to identify some common characteristics and achieve a better understanding of OSH workplace practices and experiences in MSEs that may inform policy development and contribute to the effectiveness of support activities related to the management of OSH.

Hence, in spite of their structural individual differences, we can observe some general characteristics that are shared by most MSEs. We summarise them in the first section of this chapter. Next, as argued above, MSEs can be grouped according to a number of characteristics, which are shared with some MSEs but not with others. In defining such groups, the principle we have used is to minimise variation within a group and maximise variation between the groups, in order to delineate 'types' of MSE as clearly as possible. Classifications of such types can be described as typologies.

When a group of MSEs in a typology is described according to a number of shared characteristics, this description is in fact an ideal type, such as that originating from Max Weber's seminal application of the term in scientific analyses (Swedberg and Agevall 2005). Despite being deduced from empirical observation, ideal types can be understood as hypothetical, abstract constructs bringing together essential and relevant characteristics that, in reality, will rarely if ever be observed in exactly that combination in any one firm. Although this may occasionally happen, as was made clear in Part 2 of this report and in the accompanying national reports, the wealth of case study material that the SESAME research teams have collected included huge variety and deviations from what might 'typically' be expected. To be clear, ideal types are theoretical constructs based on groupings according to a number of characteristics, and as such somewhat reductive of a complex reality. Nevertheless, we think their development in this analysis remains a useful way of structuring our empirical observations and hence improving our understanding of complex social phenomena where numerous mechanisms, factors and actors are at play, such as is the case with workplace OSH practices in MSEs in Europe.

Our case studies suggested four main typologies. Reflecting our approach to the research, there is clearly one typology based on sector. The choice of sectors included in the research was carefully considered because we expected to find substantial similarities among companies within sectors and substantial differences between companies operating in different sectors. The cases were therefore selected from a range of sectors covering private production and public and private services. Previous chapters in Part 2 of this report have demonstrated a number of sector-specific features and contexts that may be influential in determining approaches to OSH in the MSEs studied.

Relatedly, typologies based on business practice and enterprise size are also obvious further groupings and in the present chapter we have therefore presented typologies based on these characteristics. Lastly, MSEs may be grouped according to their national contexts — that is, the national institutional settings in which MSEs operate. It is clear that the national context and its characteristic OSH regulations and systems, industrial relations regime, economic environment etc. have a key impact on how companies, even very small ones, operate and on how they deploy (or not) a strategy and management practice concerning safety and health at work. We have already presented a detailed account of these national effects in Chapter 1 of this report, in which some of the effects of several important dimensions of the national regulatory contexts of each of the countries participating in this study were outlined, including those of the style and character of national regulatory regimes for OSH management and the extent of their focus on MSEs; the role, availability and competence of OSH services; information and training provision for MSEs; and the labour relations contexts of OSH in MSEs. Moreover, we further situated these dimensions of national contexts in relation to two further important dimensions: the features of social protection, health and welfare systems in relation to workers in MSEs in different countries and wider national political and economic structures and climates; and the position and role of MSEs within the structure and organisation of work and labour markets in the different countries. Also, for each of the participating EU countries in the study we have produced a report in which key national characteristics are described and considered in detail. Some of the elements of these contexts, and their similarities and differences, are suggestive of a further possible typology. Indeed, as we point out in Chapter 1, such typologies have been the basis for academic discourse around such 'varieties of capitalism' in recent decades, a discourse which helped inform the original choice of countries studied in this research. Here is not the place to debate the merits of the various standpoints that have emerged in this discourse, from Esping-Andersen's account of welfare capitalism (1990) and the social foundation of post-industrial economies (1999), to Hall and Soskice's 'varieties of capitalism' (2001) and the extensive and disputatious response to this last work. For our purposes, however, in brief, there is good reason to suppose the interplay of economic, regulatory and labour relations styles and structures, as well as those providing for social welfare and insurance arrangements within EU Member States, will help determine differences between Member States in the presence and quality of arrangements for OSH in micro and small firms. Comparative analysis of the determinants of OSH arrangements and outcomes is rare in the literature that addresses OSH issues directly. We have, therefore, found it necessary to merge the outlines of the systems described in the national reports with the wider comparative literature concerning the economy and the structure of work, regulation and public administration in EU Member States, in ways similar to that found in previous studies (see, for example, EU-OSHA 2013). The typology that results from this for the countries included in this study can be summarised as:

- Western EU: Belgium, Germany;
- Northern EU: Denmark, Sweden;
- United Kingdom;
- Southern/Latin EU: France, Italy;
- Central and Eastern EU: Estonia, Romania.

Unsurprisingly, comparison between practices observed in the MSEs studied in this research makes it clear that these national contexts have a significant impact on the approaches to OSH taken in the enterprises and affect the understanding of ‘what works for whom’. However, the detailed nature of these effects is beyond the scope of the research that has informed the present report.

In what follows, therefore, we first summarise some of the more prominent features of the experience of OSH that were evident in the cases studied in this research. In so doing we point to the synergies between these experiences, revealed in the interviews undertaken by research teams who visited MSEs in nine different EU countries and across seven different sectors, and the findings of previous research reviewed in the first report of this study (EU-OSHA 2016). That the findings from the cases do not present much that is startlingly new in relation to what is potentially harmful in work in MSEs should not be too surprising. Work in micro and small firms has long been associated with significant risks to OSH, the main reasons for which have already been identified and aired in the literature, as the previous review made clear (EU-OSHA 2016). Rather, what is more significant about the present analysis is its confirmation and corroboration of the key findings of previous research suggesting ways to improve the likely effectiveness of strategies and instruments aimed at ameliorating these risks. In this and the following chapter, therefore, we offer an analysis that situates the findings from the cases within the socio-economic and regulatory contexts that give rise to the potential for these poor outcomes, even at the better end of economic and business practice in MSEs. It does so through the use of typologies as described above, which serve to group common features of MSEs and allow a better understanding of the constellations of circumstances likely to lead to poorer outcomes. At the same time, the analysis highlights what support strategies need to address if they are to be more effective. To this end, we start with an outline of key findings from the cases and the literature, in which we demonstrate the priorities of owner-managers in their business practice and discuss their consequences for the social relations of OSH practice which lead to our observations concerning processes of responsabilisation that characterise the operation of arrangements for OSH we have observed in many MSEs across a range of countries and sectors. This is followed by an account of how we have arrived at typologies of business practice, size and sector as ways of understanding the consequences for OSH in MSEs. In each instance, within- and between-case analysis is used to enhance understanding, before the implications of the analysis for support strategies are considered. We conclude the chapter with some reflections acknowledging the limitations of the report in doing justice to the rich and heterogeneous empirical findings on which it is based. At the same time, we argue that both the analytical typologies and the understandings of the socio-economic and regulatory contexts presented help situate our findings in relation to previous studies and offer useful pointers for policies and strategies to help support MSEs in improving their OSH arrangements.

11.2 Synergies between the cases and the literature: making sense of the evidence from nine countries

11.2.1 *Business priorities, positions and OSH*

As explained in Chapter 2 on the methodology used in the research, the research teams undertaking the fieldwork reported on each MSE case according to a number of key characteristics which were related to business practice. By ‘business practice’ we are referring to both the way firms run their business and the way they manage OSH. This therefore means it includes issues of business vulnerability, dependency, employee vulnerability and so on as well as company strategy for OSH, and arrangements for OSH management. While variations in business practice and approach to OSH are found in different types of MSE, as will be explained in the next section, some aspects of business practice are shared across most MSEs. These shared characteristics deserve attention because they are part of the identification of MSEs as a specific economic group and they also partly underline political

and policy focus on MSEs, in particular concerning the management of OSH. Such general characteristics have already been studied in the literature analysed in EU-OSHA 2016 (see, for example, Baldock et al. 2006; Eakin 1992; Hasle et al. 2012; Hasle and Limborg 2006; Sørensen et al. 2007; Walters 2001). In essence, this literature indicates that, overall, workers in MSEs have a higher risk of serious occupational injuries and fatalities than those in larger organisations, and they and their managers have fewer resources to control the risks that lead to these outcomes. Indeed, it is this essential characteristic — higher risks combined with fewer resources — that accounts for much of the interest in MSEs shown by OSH policy-makers, regulators, social partners and researchers. In contrast, economic policy-makers and analysts focus more on their role as business entrepreneurs and employment creators. As we described in detail in our review of previous literature (EU-OSHA 2016), the tensions between these two perspectives have a substantial influence on overall policy in the firm responsible for running the business. The majority of firms in this study were independently owned firms managed by the owner-manager. However, their ‘independence’ is a relative matter, since their business practice is also determined by their positions in the economic and business contexts within which they are embedded, such as, notably, their position in supply chains. In this regard, MSEs are often found in positions of dependency and vulnerability, at the low value-adding ends of supply chains and subject to considerable price and delivery pressures from larger, more economically powerful buyers of their products or labour. Having said this, we also acknowledge that the situation for the small number of MSEs that were in fact subsidiaries of larger concerns that were also included in the sample was rather different. These firms were under more direct control of larger and often better resourced organisations, and as such received greater support. However, even among these firms the pressures of price and delivery margins were evident. Profit margins are tight and business security precarious. In sociological terms, following the well-known analysis of Nichols (1997), we might characterise both the owners/managers and the workers in these all these firms as inhabiting ‘structures of vulnerability’ in which personal, economic, social and regulatory circumstances, both within and surrounding the firm, combine to a greater or lesser degree in ways that heighten risks to the safety and health of workers.

In these situations, owner-managers, as testimony from the interviews with them across the range of sectors and in all countries confirmed, have as their main priority securing the business. At the same time, they are focused on taking care of the full spectrum of management tasks ranging from the planning and organisation of work to sales and accounting while, in many cases, also participating, along with the workers, in the practical production work of the enterprise. OSH management in these circumstances constitutes just a small task among many others and not necessarily one that the owner-manager has either the will or the capacity to prioritise. Management resources are, therefore, limited, which, together with the limited economic resources stemming from the size of the firm, makes MSEs more vulnerable to changes in the market and economy, as well as having greater dependence on their customers and suppliers. The same vulnerability forces some MSEs to adopt so-called low road strategies for their economic survival by trying to minimise business costs. Poor physical and psychosocial work environments for employees, lower job quality and increased risks of injuries and fatalities in comparison with larger firms characterise these low road strategies. The lack of resources (including time, finance, human resources management, knowledge etc.) to pursue sustainable and responsible management also extends to insufficient resources to successfully implement OSH measures and management.

Not all MSEs are in this position, however, and, as we found in our cases, others may follow more high road strategies, where they are able to offer better salaries as well as better and more secure employment conditions. They may have done so through identifying relatively stable niche markets in which to operate and/or they may have a more solid position in their local economy. Whatever the reason, these are firms that have secured a less vulnerable position and, as we have already pointed out, such firms were the predominant type among the cases we studied. However, as many of the cases also illustrate, such high road MSEs may nevertheless be hampered by owner-managers who have in common comparatively limited management and economic resources. In other words, the mere fact that these MSEs are in less vulnerable positions than the large group of low road MSEs that were beyond the reach of the present study does not on its own guarantee that they use more management and economic resources to manage OSH more effectively.

11.2.2 *Common sense and responsabilisation*

Another common characteristic is the fact that the size of the enterprise and the position taken by the owner-manager largely determine the relations between management and workers. These relations are often described in the literature as displaying features of informal, individualised and personalised social relations where issues and conditions are solved on an individual basis in informal communication between owner-manager and worker. This was frequently observed in the enterprises in the case study research on which the previous chapters are based. In some cases, well-functioning social relations are described as 'family-like', with the culture of social relations within the enterprise similar to those of a harmonious and loving 'family'. One consequence of such informal manager-worker relations, which is extensively described in the literature, is greater value given to their personal relationship by both managers and workers than is found in larger workplaces. Equally, it has been found in the literature and the present study that both managers and workers have a greater dependency on this personal relationship than is the case in larger organisations. This mutual dependency has important implications, not least for OSH. For example, arguably, one implication is a tendency for owner-managers to leave the responsibility for OSH to workers. Through delegating autonomy to workers, the owner-manager avoids taking personal responsibility for a possible accident (Eakin 1992; Hasle et al. 2009). This finding was often reported in the cases in the present study. Moreover, workers in the MSEs studied here tended to accept this responsibility, both because they appreciated the autonomy it apparently brought them and because their testimony suggested that they tended to accept that their own actions may have consequences. Of course, there were variations in these effects, and wider socio-economic factors also affect the outcome, as we explore further below in relation to our typology of business practices. However, it is evident from the sample of cases on which the previous chapters are based that, despite the so-called high road strategies of many, there were often cases in which researchers observed situations where owner-managers clearly believed that their workers bore the main responsibility for their safety and health, and the workers themselves largely accepted this responsibility.

Significantly, this finding persists despite the legal position and clear regulations in all countries and sectors which assign the responsibility to secure a safe and healthy workplace to the employer, a provision that is also enshrined in the basic principle of EU directives on OSH (such as EU Directive 361/89⁴¹). A caveat we need to make clear here is that, as mentioned in the methods chapter, employees interviewed in our study were frequently selected by the owner-manager of the case study company. This may have affected the widespread observation of a shared understanding between owner-manager and worker about the workers' responsibility concerning their OSH. Indeed, it is acknowledged that disagreements, tensions or conflicts are much more difficult to detect in cases in which it was possible to interview only two persons (the owner-manager and one employee) and the employee respondents were selected by the employer. However, a far more detailed qualitative study than was possible with the resources of this project would be required to test this further.

A further consequence of company size and the personal relationship between owner-manager and workers, which has been commented on in previous literature, is that, since arrangements for OSH tend to be seen as a peripheral issue by owner-managers, they are likely to be treated reactively rather than proactively. This means that action on OSH is often deployed only if an incident which is perceived to require action occurs. This reactive approach is reinforced by the practical experiences of both manager and workers with respect to OSH-related incidents and occupational diseases. The small number of workers employed means that serious injuries and recognisable occupational diseases rarely occur in any individual MSE, even though their risk may be real and high. As a result, practical experience suggests the opposite — that the risk of an incident or health issues in their enterprise is very low. The limited capacity of the owner-managers of MSEs to devote time to informing themselves of the reality about actual risks, along with the tendency of their workers to accept the status quo as part of the job, together imply that, in the main, neither party actively searches for knowledge on OSH. These observations were strongly evident in interviews across all the sectors, with both workers and managers typically describing their approaches to dealing with OSH as no more than 'common sense'. Obviously, this notion of 'common sense' is a socially constructed reality, which is nowadays increasingly contested

⁴¹ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:01989L0391-20081211>

in the more sociologically informed literature addressing the regulation of work-related risk (see, for example, Almond 2015).

Because this notion of 'common sense' was frequently brought up in the interviews with both owner-managers and employees, and was perceived by them to be clearly and obviously related to explaining workplace practice on OSH, it is worthwhile elaborating a little more on its importance. 'Common sense' refers to a shared perception and judgement which is appealed to as possessing authority and therefore not requiring debate. It is closely related to (but not the same as) tacit knowledge ('tricks of the trade') necessary to do a good job and also to the adoption of routines that are deployed in daily working procedures. However, while routines are associated with actual operations, and tacit knowledge refers to 'embodied' knowledge that is difficult to articulate, in common sense the emphasis is on perceptions and judgements of working situations, which anticipate (in this case safe or unsafe) behaviour and decisions. Moreover, a further significant difference between 'common sense' knowledge and tacit knowledge is that, while the latter is based on knowledge learned in practice and from within communities of practice, the former may include some of this, but in addition, embraces understandings received from a host of wider sources in the social milieu inhabited by workers and owner-managers both inside and beyond the enterprise. As Almond (2015) has pointed out and we discuss further below, such influences can lead to profound changes in the ways in which matters such as risk, safety and work are perceived by the public at large and the sources that inform the public, which can also further alter perceptions within workplaces.

Therefore, because of its authoritarian and shared nature, common sense is an important factor in OSH-related behaviour at the workplace. Common sense, like routines and tacit knowledge, originates in part from training and socialising into trades and professions. It may, however, also be acquired in the company itself and adopted from the owner-manager's work opinions and practices. Like routines and tacit knowledge, common sense becomes reinforced over time and is engrained through repetition and role following while at work, and it is influenced by colleagues and peers (see, for example, Knudsen 2009). While, overall, the development of common sense may lay the ground for working safely through a shared perception and judgement of what is safe, it can also include socialisation into a failed understanding and underestimation of risks, particularly where these are encouraged by wider influences on the public. Since it is difficult to refute the authority associated with common sense or to debate its legitimacy, it tends to be persistent. Moreover, when there is no experience of possible consequences of the misperception and misjudgement of risks in actual injuries or ill-health, as is often the case in MSEs, and when there are, in contrast, more ostensible advantages to 'risky' common sense, then such unsafe common sense tends to be perpetuated. In other words, the common sense in MSEs tends to be biased because incidents — even though risk is high — are rare, and both workers and owner-managers therefore have a personal experience of low risk. In addition, both owner-managers and workers tend to neglect incidents when they happen in order to avoid blaming each other (Hasle et al. 2009; Hasle et al. 2012; Eakin 1992).

Obvious examples of 'common sense' where risks are not perceived or working situations are wrongly judged as safe are workers failing to use PPE, the existence of a 'macho' culture which is rewarded with acceptance by workmates, employers failing to consider the introduction of engineering or environmental controls when it is 'common sense' that workers should avoid risks by their 'safe behaviour' etc. We encountered numerous examples of 'common sense' in virtually every case and in all sectors, and we have included many citations in the sector chapters in Part 2 of this report that refer to it. As might be expected from its definition, 'common sense' is mostly related to an organisation's core production process, since it is here that socialisation is most developed. In Horeca, for instance, we found 'common sense' associated with risks of cutting and burning, while in agriculture it was typically associated with working with animals and the seasonal fluctuations of workload. Another interesting example is the definition of common sense with respect to psychosocial risks, where it is assumed that workers know how to take care of themselves. This can be found in transport (lone working) but was most prominently reported in health and social work (intensive contacts with clients or patients).

As regulatory scholars have more recently argued, 'common sense' has another shade of meaning particularly in the case of safety and health (Almond 2015). The fact that it is difficult to debate and refute common sense, combined with the individualisation of work and its increased responsabilisation under the influence of change in the wider neo-liberal political economy (see, for example, Gray 2009), has been employed by both political and public discourse to increasingly question the fundamentals of the

traditional distribution of regulatory responsibilities and protections for workers' safety and health while at work. In this respect, notions concerning freedoms from so-called regulatory burdens on business occupy a prominent position in public discourse and are especially frequently applied to micro and small firms, where risks are seen in such discourse to be insufficient to require anything more than the application of 'common sense' by responsible workers to ensure they are properly accounted for. In this way of thinking, notions of 'common sense' may reinforce ideas concerning personal responsibilities for working safety. Again, as the quotes from the interviews undertaken in the small firms across the range of sectors in previous chapters make plain, such attitudes were found to be commonplace among both workers and managers in the firms we studied. In conclusion, not only risks themselves but also risk management are often easily replaced by a common sense approach, leading to a lack of understanding of the usefulness of OSH management.

11.2.3 A question of knowledge?

A final, and related, key issue that should be mentioned explicitly at this point is the role of knowledge. Owner-managers' and workers' OSH knowledge with respect to risks and behaviour, or perhaps more precisely the lack of such knowledge, emerged in nearly every case as a major factor influencing OSH management and conditions. A first important observation is that all those responsible for MSEs are to a certain extent aware of the basic and obvious risks and risks of accidents, as are their workers. In contrast, the more long-term and subtle risks, and especially those related to health (such as risk of strain injuries, and chemical or psychosocial risks, with the possible exception of stress), are much less well understood. Further, it is of particular concern that risk assessment, which is a core topic in OSH management, seems to be poorly understood in many companies. Also, as we will discuss in the following chapter, there are differences in understandings of risk among owner-managers and workers across the typologies of business practice, size and sector into which we group the MSEs we have studied.

Several examples also suggest that there is often confusion between OSH and other (albeit in some instances partly) related issues such as food safety, environmental care or care for the wellbeing, safety and health of patients or clients. Such confusion occurred more obviously in those companies where OSH management and practices were poorly developed. The consequence of such confusion, and the reason it should be explicitly acknowledged and addressed, is that these MSEs believe they are coping with OSH, while in reality they may not be. The implication here is that OSH management and practices are covering only those factors that are common with these other management domains (environment, food safety, care for patients and so on). While some regulators and their advisors have argued that encouraging such attitudes may in fact help improve the use of scarce resources in MSEs to cover OSH issues, it risks leaving many other OSH problems out of the sight, understanding and scope of managers, with possibly damaging consequences for workers' safety and health.

It is important to discuss how this lack of OSH knowledge can be improved. It is obvious from the cases, as well as from previous accounts, that owner-managers of MSEs with poor knowledge do not understand that their knowledge is poor and therefore are unlikely to ask for more knowledge, let alone proactively search for information. The third part of the SESAME project, which focuses on policies, instruments and tools for OSH management in MSEs, includes an inventory and analysis of a wide range of good practices. These show that there are several options available to address poor OSH knowledge, ranging from more innovative ways to improve access, relevance and availability of the sources of such through to the use of expert advice in a variety of innovative settings that boost both its reception and impact.

11.2.4 Summary and conclusions

The comparative findings of this research into workplace perceptions and experiences of OSH in MSEs reveal some remarkable similarities across national and sectoral boundaries. In particular, they demonstrate the pivotal role of the owner-manager's influence in the social and economic relations of OSH in MSEs and relate these to a focus on the business practices they feel obliged to adopt and prioritise in order to compete effectively in the wider economic contexts in which MSEs are embedded.

It is clear from our many cases and from the findings of previous studies that OSH seldom receives a high priority in owner-managers' strategies to meet these demands. One of the principal ways in which the contradictions of (often only dimly perceived) regulatory requirements on OSH and strategies to prioritise productivity in business practice are reconciled is through the process of responsabilisation for OSH in the social relations that underpin the production of the business. In this way workers take on responsibility for using their 'common sense' in adopting work practices to get things done in ways that meet the demands of business production but are perceived to be 'safe' regardless of what regulatory provisions or professional understandings of OSH management might require. In such scenarios, it is usually only when things go wrong and injuries or ill-health result that the requirements of regulation or wider good practice are found to have been breached and, in such cases, it is the workers' actions that are often the proximal cause of the breach. While the MSE's setting and its business context help to drive this process of responsabilisation, the process itself is not new and it has been described many times when the social relations of workplace injury have been studied from a sociological perspective in other situations, including those found in larger organisations. However, in MSEs, their business vulnerabilities in modern economic contexts and the insecurity of employment within them, along with the often low levels of knowledge concerning OSH among both workers and their managers, have helped to promote the adoption of these positions by the owner-managers and workers we have studied.

12 Some typologies of practice and related key elements of the approach to OSH in MSEs

While it was important to summarise some of the key characteristics influencing business and OSH practices at the workplace that seem to be shared by a majority of MSEs, the large sample of this study makes it also possible to find groups where MSEs shared some characteristics, distinguishing them from others in which different features predominate. These types have formed the basis for our development of several typologies based around business practices of MSEs, their size and their sector. In addition, as we have previously argued, a fourth typology can also be constructed around similarities and differences in national contexts. Since we have already explored this in Chapter 1 of this report, in the present chapter we focus on the three remaining typologies and their usefulness in explaining the approaches to OSH observed in MSEs.

12.1 A business practice typology

As described above, the ideal types comprising the typology are not intended to describe individual firms. In the preceding chapters, in which we have analysed workplace experiences drawn from 162 cases, we have mainly applied two distinctions: first, the difference between a low road and a high road strategy characterising the whole business practice of the enterprise, in which we have focused on business vulnerability, which in turn has strong implications for OSH; second, the difference between reactive and proactive firms regarding OSH. In the following analysis, we aim to further explore and link these two key dimensions of business practice. In so doing, we acknowledge that we are building on a literature in which suggestions for useful typologies can already be found. In particular, Vickers et al. (2005) use a typology for classifying compliance responses to OSH regulation among small firms, while Hasle et al. (2012) developed an expanded, but similar, typology with a focus on the general perceptions among owner-managers regarding OSH. Combining both typologies suggests a spectrum of four types of MSE characterising responses to OSH requirements. However, by using this framework for analysing the data collected in the present study, we have combined two types within this spectrum that we regard as essentially similar, allowing us to distinguish between three types, as shown in Table 12 below.

Table 12 Typologies for business practice in relation to OSH

| Vickers et al. (2005) | Hasle et al. (2012) | SESAME |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------|
| Avoiders/outsiders | Avoidance | Avoiders |
| Minimalist reactors | A necessary evil | Reactors |
| Positive responders | Standards must be met | |
| Proactive learners | Business strategy | Learners |

In our 162 cases, we have found examples of each of these three types. Given the bias in our sample towards the ‘better’ end of the MSE spectrum, it will not come as a surprise that the number of ‘avoiders’ we came across was limited. It is of course difficult to get research access to those companies that operate at the extreme end of the avoider type. However, it was also not common to find ‘learner’ types complying with all descriptive dimensions among the MSEs in the sample. Indeed, the description of the ‘learner’ suggests an almost ideal type of MSE with a high road strategy, a prosperous economic position, a stable workforce and a well-developed and proactive OSH approach. Below we will refer to sectors where we could identify MSEs which combine at least some dimensions of a high road business strategy with a proactive OSH approach, albeit in different constellations. However, it needs to be borne in mind

that the 'learner' type, like the other ideal types, remains a theoretical construct, even if inductively constructed based on empirical data, as was the case in this study.

It is also important to mention that in the type description some degree of coherence is assumed between on the one hand the economic business strategy and on the other the OSH approach of the company. However, in reality such coherence is not always fully present.

12.1.1 *Avoiders*

The typical avoider is characterised by the fact that the business setting is forced down a low road survival strategy, where the owner-manager has difficulties in making ends meet for the business and tries to reduce costs at all levels. He or she therefore closes his or her eyes to OSH risks, while at the same time trying to push workers to their productive limits. Social relations with workers may be tense as a result but, not infrequently, workers, who are most likely employed without the benefit of trade union representation and protection, will accept the poor conditions of their employment that result from the business vulnerability as preferable to losing their job altogether. Another type of avoider might be the older, well-established owner-manager who has been running the business for years, who has been fortunate enough never to have experienced any serious injuries and has neglected the minor ones. He or she believes him- or herself to be in full control of the business, which often includes the long-term employment of workers with whom the owner-manager may feel he or she has close personal relations, albeit with a strongly paternalistic management style being applied across all aspects of work and welfare in the enterprise, including OSH. In such a case, there may be an apparent acceptance of these conditions by the workers, who have remained in this employment sometimes for a long period and whose presence and attitudes are likely to influence acceptance of such an enterprise ethos by newer workers too.

The result is that preventive arrangements for OSH are neglected. When interviewed, the owner-manager tells a story about being in full control of OSH, with no experience of injuries, no visit by inspectors and no demands from workers, customers and suppliers. Legal requirements are — if known — generally dismissed as bureaucracy, which is just putting unnecessary burdens on MSEs, since they do control the risks. The owner-manager explains that OSH is just a question of following common sense in the trade and that the workers should behave as responsible adults who take care of themselves. If a (rare) visit by an inspector occurs, the owner-manager will most likely resent such an occasion and do the minimum required to meet any obligations the inspector might place on the enterprise to comply with minimum standards.

While there were not a lot of avoiders in our sample for reasons already established, several of the cases quite clearly bore the characteristics of avoiders in terms of both overall business vulnerability and OSH approach. The two sectors with the most illustrative cases for this type of business practice were construction and Horeca. In contrast, we encountered fewer avoider cases in the transport and storage and wholesale and retail sectors. In the construction sector, for example, several of the cases were classified as low road companies, with high business and employee vulnerability and an associated avoiding approach to OSH. Many cases had a high degree of business and employment insecurity, and rather than competing on quality for business were more likely to seek to do so in terms of price and delivery in order to survive. The key determinants of their OSH practices were quite different from those for the reactors or proactive learners and include a mix of financial and employment insecurity, poor awareness of OSH, in relation to both regulatory requirements and good practice, and relatively low levels of managerial competence. Their OSH approach included the prominent tendency to blame workers for injuries and accidents, despite the fact that in this sector there was overall a certain level of risk awareness and written risk assessment procedures (although these were generally seen as a burden).

In Horeca, many owner-managers and workers saw the risks in their companies as inherent to the trade, which therefore could be controlled or managed as such, which was problematic in terms of securing long-term OSH improvements. There was therefore also a tendency among both workers and owner-managers to understand the responsibility of safe working conditions as resting mainly with the workers, in particular when it came to risks such as cuts and burns, which were seen as either an inevitable part of the job or the result of failure to follow well-established safe working practices. In addition, risks more

aligned with work organisation, such as stress, time pressure and periodic high work pressure, were either not recognised or regarded by some owner-managers and workers as part of the work. The most predominant risks in this sector, musculoskeletal and ergonomic risks, were sometimes acknowledged and even dealt with by some owner-managers, but there was, in general, a low awareness and acknowledgement of these risks, in particular the indirect and more long-term risks. In Boxes 1 and 2, we illustrate one very typical avoider case from Horeca and one from wholesale and retail.

Box 1 An 'avoider' from Horeca

One example of a low-end company comes from the accommodation and food service sector. This catering business with fewer than 10 employees was characterised by its overall low road business strategy and had an organisational model with a low level of specialisation. According to the owner-manager, 'everyone does everything'. This included the owner-manager herself, who, although she was mainly occupied with administration, also helped to some extent in daily business. The OSH strategy was described by the researcher as reactive.

The owner-manager had secondary education and previous work experience in the sector but no leadership experience. She founded the business 5 years prior to our study. The business faced significant competition and the owner-manager said that price was the decisive factor in this regard. However, she saw her business as being in a financially stable position. The interviewed worker had a background in pedagogy but several years of work experience in restaurants. He worked on a regular full-time contract, like most of his colleagues, and payment was in accordance with collective wage agreements.

According to the owner-manager, no risk assessment had ever been made. There were no OSH routines and the owner believed that common sense was a good way to avoid accidents. The level of risk awareness was considered low by the researcher with regard to both acute and long-term risks. The owner-manager said that nothing ever happened and consequently saw no need for action. She also said that she trusted the workers to behave safely. She believed that individual mistakes were the main reason for accidents. Accordingly, she felt the workers had a high level of responsibility for safety and health while her own was rather low. The worker shared her views.

The company did not use OSH services and the owner-manager did not receive regular OSH information. However, she assessed her own level of knowledge as excellent and referred to the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) standard for product quality and food safety as well as to local health service training which the company received and which she believed had been helpful. In fact, both these supports were focused on hygiene and consumer safety. The only driver for OSH that she mentioned was the threat of inspection by the labour inspectorate.

Communication within the company was almost exclusively oral. The owner-manager said that the workers never reported their risks or near misses. The worker reflected this view by saying that he was not sure if rules were always communicated but he felt that in general the rules were followed. He explained that the only participation in discussion on safety took place in the annual mandatory checks. He did not mention any sources of information for workers from outside the company or any form of representation.

The worker was satisfied with working in the company. He appreciated the high level of informality, flat hierarchy and good collaboration with colleagues. He confirmed the absence of work-related accidents in the business and believed that the probability of an accident occurring was practically 'non-existent'. He said that contact with people was both 'a good and bad aspect of the job'. He felt more pressure when doing overtime, but he thought that he received adequate support within the business and was generally satisfied with his work in relation to colleagues and customers.

He said that he received sufficient information about safety and health and believed it was not necessary in terms of this business and his job. He did not see the potential for the owner-manager to take additional measures. He believed that the best way to reduce risks was to use common sense and added that the equipment he used was already standardised and safety checked.

In this case, it can be seen that the lack of OSH knowledge, the lack of self-reflection and the misperception of responsibility created a situation where the level of risk awareness and risk control was almost zero. Basic processes such as risk assessments were not done. Standards from other fields (hygiene) were confused with OSH standards and the owner-manager's attitude towards OSH was highly avoidant. The risk of accidents was attributed to individual misbehaviour. Risk communication between workers and the owner-manager was practically non-existent. Even though the owner-manager mentioned pressure from labour inspections, it was not clear if these really took place or had any substantive effects. The worker did not seem to question the situation at all and largely corroborated the view of the manager. The lack of OSH management and abrogation of responsibilities in this respect by the owner-manager did not play a role in the worker's considerations when he talked about good internal relations. Reasons for this might have included the absence of any additional sources of information on OSH and good working conditions such as might be provided by a trade union or through previous employment, or from worker representatives and better informed colleagues. It might also be the case that the working conditions and OSH management practices in any previous employment were similar or even worse.

Box 2 provides a similarly strong illustration of an 'avoider' from the wholesale and retail sector. Here, it is interesting to observe that the company was not situated at the lowest end of business vulnerability. Despite high competition, the economic situation was relatively stable and there was no lack of work. Nevertheless, the OSH strategy was equally poorly developed.

Box 2 An 'avoider' from the wholesale and retail sector — a car repair workshop

This example concerns a car repair workshop, which was a family business employing 10 workers. The owner-manager was mainly involved in administrative paperwork and dealing with clients and suppliers. The business environment of the company could be described as very competitive, which led in particular to high time pressure to get the work done. This was mentioned by the owner-manager as a reason why there was no time to engage in OSH measures. Wages were low and competition on the labour market high. However, overall, the company had a lot of work and therefore its business vulnerability was moderate.

While the owner-manager was aware of the fact that there were 'many' work-related risks, he named only a few (such as ergonomic risks and risks of dropping of heavy material). These were attributed to employee negligence. Perception of psychosocial risks was limited to the acknowledgement of work 'pressure'. He did not report the occurrence of any accidents or near-misses, in contrast to the interviewed worker, who reported that there were regular minor accidents (cuts). Overall, there was some risk awareness but the risks were considered a normal and mostly unavoidable consequence of the work.

Apart from during his early education and training in motor vehicle maintenance, the owner-manager had never participated in any OSH training and he never actively searched for information about risks or OSH. He considered that this was not necessary because in his view there had been no changes in risks since he started the business. There was no written documentation and the existing risk assessment was carried out only because it was seen to be legally required and it was done by an external service provider. The owner-manager had no intention of making use of this documentation in practice. It was considered annoying. The same went for inspections and statutory accident insurance staff, who were considered as living in an ivory tower and providing irrelevant suggestions.

There was no communication of risks or safety, except for instructions occasionally coming with new equipment. PPE and ergonomic support equipment were provided but only on demand by the workers. Such demands were the only communication on OSH that could be identified. Responsibility for safe behaviour was considered to lie with the workers, both by the owner-manager and by the worker himself. The overall OSH management approach was classified by the researchers as defensive, avoiding and minimalist.

12.1.2 Reactors

The reactors constituted the largest group of MSEs in the sample. It might be expected that such enterprises often have a relatively stable business situation, perhaps due to a solid position in a local market, but there may also be economic pressures likely to be pushing them towards more low road business survival strategies. Thus, they may be vulnerable to shifting towards a more precarious economic position as a consequence of unexpected events. They are rarely growth oriented but the owner-managers desire a stable business where, for example, they might typically respond to questions about their business or OSH strategies by saying 'why fix something which is not broken?' They react to business issues only when they perceive them and try to do what is needed to address them. The same goes for OSH issues, so they rarely initiate changes and improvements in risk handling.

In the accounts of the cases there were many examples across all sectors of owner-managers stating that before an incident occurred they had not been aware of a risk. Relations between owner-managers and their employees were typically described as personalised. Owner-managers claimed to attach importance to ensuring good conditions for their workers and also suggested that the trust between them was such that the workers could always raise any issues, which the owner-managers would do what they could to resolve. These owner-managers described the firm as a family, but it was clear that it was a family where the owner-manager took the decisions. In these firms, workers may give the appearance of sharing these beliefs, as Eakin (1992) suggests, as long as they are not the victim of an injury or work-related disease, and as long as no other major issue occurs that exposes them to hardships they may perceive to have been a result of their work. In the case study companies, it appeared that the workers in these firms generally appreciated the owner-manager's concern and themselves highlighted that they could raise any issue, including OSH-related issues, with the owner-manager if needed. However, in practice (and when asked about it) they indicated that they rarely did so.

Also in these firms owner-managers focused on compliance with formal OSH regulation. They rarely sought information, but if told what to do would try to be compliant. In a similar vein, these owner-managers sometimes copied what peer firms did, on the understanding that they were acting to 'stay on the safe side'. As (formally) required, they tended to keep a written risk assessment form in the office, but they rarely used it for any practical preventive purpose. Owner-managers and workers tended to agree that the employer has a responsibility for OSH, but that in practice a large part of the everyday responsibility rested with workers, who needed to take care of themselves and of their colleagues. When visited by inspectors or external advisors, these owner-managers tended to carry out what was suggested to them in order to stay compliant.

As can be seen from the sector chapters in Part 2 of this report, there were many examples of cases that could be classified as reactors.

For example, in the agriculture sector, partly due to the tradition-bound culture, many risks were seen as inherent to the business and therefore with only limited, if any, possibilities for change or improvement. Among some owner-managers and workers, the responsibility for a safe work environment was mainly attributed to the workers. Other owner-managers and workers saw the responsibility as shared between them. OSH was not perceived as an issue deserving particular attention and in general was dealt with in a reactive manner. There were typically no formal, written OSH documentation or activities and, in the rare cases where an external OSH advisor was used, it was to secure minimal compliance. The general pressure from inspections was a key driver for OSH activities in light of the generally reactive approach of most companies to OSH.

Also, most firms in the retail and wholesale sample seemed to be reactors in trying to follow external requirements from regulation, inspections, clients and/or compulsory external services, but not taking a proactive role on OSH. Part of the reason for this was that they believed they had sufficient knowledge of and control over OSH — a perception that may have been related to the professionalism of the crafts involved, such as in auto repair and pharmacies. Formal arrangements for representing workers' interests were rare, even among the larger small firms with more than 20 employees in the countries where such representation was a legal entitlement for workers.

The health and social work sector was interesting because of the dimensions of business practice the cases illustrated. Cases in this sector faced a substantial degree of financial insecurity, mainly due to austerity measures in the public sector, but at the same time the organisations in our sample had managed to maintain a relatively stable workforce and develop a fairly participative human resources management style. Nevertheless, the cases were mostly reactors demonstrating generally reactive OSH strategies, lacking a systematic approach, reacting to incidents or near-miss incidents, or on ad hoc requests from personnel, with no follow-up, only limited compliance to regulation (on which there was only superficial knowledge), no impact from external services, and no systematic training for staff. The role of the owner-manager seemed decisive to the extent that often he or she was knowledgeable, had relevant experience and adhered to values such as integrity, respect and a participatory work environment.

In our large sample it was not difficult to identify numerous MSEs that qualified as reactors, possessing several characteristics associated with this type. However, as previously suggested, it is important to bear in mind that each case also had some unique and deviating features, while still broadly belonging to this type. Nevertheless, we present in Box 3 an illustration from Horeca.

Box 3 A 'reactor' from Horeca

The restaurant had existed for more than 60 years. It had build up a reputation and had many regular customers, which made it less dependent on tourists and the weather than other restaurants in the neighbourhood. Therefore, the business vulnerability was relatively low compared with competitors and the company could be characterised as following a high road strategy.

Sixteen workers were employed on permanent, full-time contracts, with an additional eight workers in the summer season. The working time arrangements were worker-friendly compared with what is legally possible and usually practised in the sector. In general, the owner-manager indicated that he was concerned about his employees' wellbeing and wanted to behave as a good 'father' for his employees. According to the interviewed worker, the atmosphere in the enterprise was very good and there was a high level of trust between the manager and the workers. The owner-manager was mainly involved in the administrative paperwork and only occasionally helped in the dining room or kitchen.

There was a certain awareness of the typical risks of the sector (burns, cuts and ergonomic conditions). However, both the owner-manager and the interviewed worker seemed to focus on psychosocial risks (unpredictability of clients, flexibility requirements, etc.). The owner-manager emphasised the importance of a psychosocial risk strategy for his employees' wellbeing. In practice, this seemed to mean family-friendly working time arrangements, such as abolishing split shifts. The main driver for this was the owner-manager's experiences when he was a young father. Other important risks were ignored.

A risk analysis had been carried out but only because it was offered for free by the insurance company. However, this risk analysis seemed to be 'classified' and had not led to any action or prevention measure. The owner-manager had no experience with an external prevention advisor. In the past, he had received some warnings from the labour inspectorate. He checked with the legal department of his industry federation what he should do to comply with these warnings. He was in general concerned with food hygiene and client safety (for example fire exits) because the restaurant was regularly visited by both food inspectors and the fire brigade. Further, he (and a supervisor) undertook first-aid training every 2 years.

The 'OSH' strategy could be summarised as being limited to the introduction of family-friendly working time arrangements and a participative management approach. It did not exceed an attitude of 'standards must be met' when it came to legal requirements of all kinds. Physical risks were not explicitly addressed because 'there were never serious accidents'.

Despite the overall business situation of this company tending towards a high road strategy, we observed no indications of a proactive attitude or systematic OSH strategy, except when it came to taking care of employees' working time with family-friendly arrangements. The owner-manager tried to comply with what was required from a legal point of view and associated OSH with food hygiene or client safety, but he had no formal, identifiable OSH strategy. There were no active attempts to acquire more knowledge on OSH risks or how to prevent them. The risk analysis that existed had been done by chance, and remained a classified paper file that was not used in practice.

12.1.3 *Learners*

This group of MSEs constitutes the most proactive firms. As previously indicated, they are likely to focus on the development of their business and have a growth orientation, although control of the firm is important for the owner-manager. These enterprises can often be seen pursuing a high road strategy in order to secure the business and create the conditions for possible growth. The owner-manager again has personalised social relations, but in this case with a clearer management direction which may, nevertheless, maintain a high level of day-to-day autonomy for the workers, but with more explicit goals for performance and development.

'Learners' consider OSH to be part of their business strategy; they believe it is important to be fully compliant with legislation and to maintain a high level of OSH to secure their workers' safety and health and at the same time make sure that the firm is attractive for present and future workers as well as clients and customers. The owner-managers are therefore trying to learn from experience as well as make efforts to get new knowledge from external sources. They are also fully aware of the fact that the responsibility for OSH lies with the employer and therefore actively use OSH instruments such as risk assessment and external advisors to help secure a high standard of OSH. They may even seek to exploit their OSH management arrangements as indicative of their quality in seeking business. Workers in these firms tend to be highly motivated and often well aware of their labour market position. They may be long-term employees and consider themselves to share the interests and business strategies of their employer. Equally, they may regard their employment in the firm as an instrumental step in enhancing their career prospects and position in the labour market.

Illustrations of learners identified in our case studies included some of the companies in the agriculture sector (such as the French arboriculture company and the Danish pig farm) that had a relatively systematic and professional OSH approach. Although, as we illustrated previously, there were 'avoiders' found in the construction sample, the majority of the cases from this sector actually fitted more closely with the 'learner' type. In the wholesale and retail sector, even if psychosocial strains were generally not recognised as an OSH risk (which hampers a fully convincing classification in the learner type), our sample nevertheless included some learner cases, such as the wholesale retailers and, to a lesser extent, the pharmacy cases from the sample. In the transport and storage sector, six learners were found that demonstrated a high road business strategy that was also reflected in a proactive OSH approach. This was part of an integrated management system, where motivation to comply beyond mandatory regulations was based on general values and a policy of striving for good social relations and care for workers. In Horeca too, several cases were found with a strong OSH performance. Here, securing a good work environment was identified as the key determinant for a high degree of risk control as well as high risk awareness. It was nevertheless concluded that such 'top performers' were most likely not representative of the Horeca sector as a whole.

In Box 4 we present one example of what we would regard as a 'learner' from the health and social work sector.

Box 4 A 'learner' from health and social work

This example was a day care facility for the elderly, with 11 employees. It provided refreshment and entertainment (games, quizzes, activities, etc.) for its users throughout the day. As public subsidies had declined, the facility was dependent on fundraising activities and the support of 25-30 volunteers. Nevertheless, the researchers identified its business strategy as low to middle road, its business vulnerability as low to medium and its OSH strategy as proactive and communicative.

The manager, who had substantial leadership and OSH experience in a range of other settings of various sizes within the sector, had a high degree of OSH risk awareness, including in relation to both psychosocial issues and musculoskeletal disorders. Even though there had not been any work-related accidents, arrangements in relation to reporting and record keeping were rigorous, with near-misses recorded and reported to the board of trustees, where safety and health was a standing item on the meeting agenda. Such incidents were taken seriously and had led to improvement measures. In addition, risk assessments were compiled by the manager and a member of staff and updated regularly as well as following any incident.

The manager actively sought to keep her OSH knowledge up to date, for example by finding and attending courses and subscribing to sector-relevant newsletters etc. She felt that both management and workers had a high degree of responsibility for OSH, and was driven by her desire to create a safe and appropriate environment for the facility's users and its staff alike.

In some ways, the facility's workers were vulnerable, in that many had zero-hours contracts and did not need to hold formal qualifications. However, in practice, staff retention was high and all employees had long tenure, with the manager identifying staff continuity as important for the facility's users. Training in first aid, food handling and hygiene, manual handling (including of the facility's users) and dementia was provided for both staff and volunteers.

There were no formal worker representation arrangements and no safety committee. However, there were regular meetings between the workers, manager and trustees, at which OSH matters were discussed. In addition, there were daily discussions between the manager and staff that included informal communication about risk and its management, as well as detailed planning whenever a new user arrived or existing users' needs changed.

In this example, the OSH management included various elements that worked as mutual reinforcing factors for good practice. The manager was experienced in managing OSH from former posts and took these tasks seriously. Her drivers were to take care of the staff and to ensure job retention. Even though the business model indicated a shortage of financial resources, training was provided, including for 'zero hours' (and thus precarious and vulnerable) staff and volunteers. Risk assessment was conducted on a regular basis and mainstreamed into management. It was flanked by additional measures such as daily inspections and talks. Long- and short-term risks were both considered and there was evidence of proactivity. Communication included formal and informal patterns and crossed hierarchy levels. It also included direct access for workers to the board, where OSH was regularly on the agenda.

12.1.4 Summary: key elements of the approaches to OSH illustrated in the business practice typology

Despite the shared characteristics of most MSEs of each type, such as the general limitations in management resources, several key dimensions of OSH differ between the types, as summarised in Table 13. Such differences also provide indications for the tailoring of supportive strategies to better reach the different groups.

Table 13 Differences in business practice in relation to OSH among avoiders, reactors and learners

| Dimension | Avoiders | Reactors | Learners |
|---------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Understanding of risk | Unavoidable part of the trade | Unavoidable part of the trade | Can be identified and controlled |
| Responsibility | Mainly with workers | Shared with workers | With the employer |
| Risk assessment | Carried out only if obliged to, usually by external pressure | Carried out but not actively used | Carried out and actively used in risk prevention |
| External advisors | Avoided if possible | Used to secure minimal compliance if legally required | Used to secure OSH practice |
| Labour inspections | Hostile, but action taken on legal requirements or after incidents | Accepts and complies with inspectors' proposals | Wants to stay compliant before visit by inspector and to develop OSH further |
| OSH knowledge/perception | Common sense Does not look for new knowledge | Common sense Used if required or proposed by peers | Can be learned Actively looking for new knowledge |

12.2A typology according to size

It is useful to add a further dimension to the typologies to take some account of size differences within MSEs, since the number of workers in a company also determines several aspects of management in general and with respect to OSH.

In this research we have followed the common European practice of defining MSEs as those within the range of 1-49 employees, with micro enterprises having 1-9 employees and small enterprises 10-49 employees. However, it is important to bear in mind that there were fewer micro than small enterprises in our sample. There are large differences between the lower and upper ends of this scale, with the 'typical micro enterprise' at one end and the 'typical larger small enterprise' at the other; and around both of these there are different sets of characteristic features. As with other typologies, of course, these typical characteristics are not always all present in any single enterprise and in practice most MSEs have size-related features that place them somewhere along the spectrum between these two extremes.

One dimension, which is well known and which we also found to be of great importance in the case studies, is the managerial structure of the MSE. Most often the tipping point is somewhere close to the divide between MSEs, such that, when MSEs reach this size, they typically need to implement some sort of managerial structure which, potentially, can also address OSH issues or delegate OSH responsibilities to relevant employees. This obviously does not solve all OSH issues, but in general it does result in a more structured and organised approach to risk and OSH management — which has important implications for OSH outcomes in these firms.

There is also some evidence of a relationship between the business practice typology outlined in the previous section and a typology of MSEs according to their size, which was discussed in our previous review of the literature (EU-OSHA 2016). For example, the presence of more micro firms among 'avoiders' is likely to be related to their particularly limited management resources, which are in turn linked to these very small companies often being economically vulnerable and following a low road business strategy⁴². 'Learners' tend to be more concentrated among larger small firms, as they often

⁴² However, it should be noted here that this observation is also related to the selection of sectors in this research. In some of the literature on micro and small firms, a niche of innovative and fast-growing companies is identified — the so-called gazelle companies, which are typically found in IT and creative industries, and have business practices described as high road. This niche of MSEs was only rarely included in our research.

have somewhat greater resources available to them to allocate to OSH arrangements as well as other managerial tasks. These relationships between the business practices typology and size were found in many of the case study companies in our study. More general size-dependent characteristics emerging from the cases are briefly summarised in Table 14, which contrasts the extremes in relation to size. In this table, in the second column, by 'larger small firms' we broadly mean those with 20 or more employees, where, as the research literature already referred to makes plain, the presence of nascent management structures more typical of those in larger organisations is likely. In the first column, by way of contrast, we are referring to micro firms, where the complete absence of management structures is more likely, since, as the same literature indicates, the presence of these arrangements is inversely related to size.

Table 14 Differences in business practice in relation to OSH of micro and larger small firms

| Dimension | Micro firms (<10) | Larger small firms (>20) |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| Business strategy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More reactive and low road (in the sectors of this study) • Rarely growth ambitions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More proactive and high road • More often growth ambitions |
| Management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only owner-manager, who usually also participates in production | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often at least one more level of management, with supervisor taking care of the direct management of daily operations |
| Employees | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only one function, related to the business' core activity, which is quite often also the owner-manager's own occupation, sometimes outsourced support functions • Low division of labour | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often administrative and other supportive staff • Also division of labour in production |
| Social relations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close and personalised | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Owner-managers relate often through supervisors |
| Worker organisation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal, unlikely to be through trade union membership | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some evidence of union membership likely — may even be workplace organisation (depending on country regulations), although still not likely to be common |
| HR | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No formalities, personalised | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More formalised procedures |
| OSH | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Owner-manager takes care <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No OSH reps • Rarely any actions on OSH unless forced | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A staff member appointed as OSH officer, sometimes a committee and elected OSH reps (depending on country regulations) • The OSH officer and OSH reps active on OSH matters |

The implications of these findings are that if larger small firms have more resources for OSH, and are more inclined to use support from external advisors, from information made available on the internet or through participation in training activities, many supportive activities will tend to cater to these larger small firms. In contrast, micro firms will rarely benefit from such support, unless it is designed in a way that is tailored to their specific needs and resources. Typically, for example, larger small firms have

better options for releasing an employee or manager for OSH training or OSH information courses, while smaller firms find it difficult to be operational without an employee and have few options for replacing or rescheduling work processes to release an employee. Larger small firms might also have a manager already responsible for these issues, who has time set aside for this type of activity.

12.3A sector typology

The empirical investigations for this research project were conducted with a sector perspective in mind, and the chapters that form the backbone of Part 2 of this report present ample evidence of a rich diversity of experience at this level. There is insufficient space in this concluding part of the report to do proper justice to a full comparative analysis of this diversity. It must suffice to simply draw attention to the finding that sector remains a very important source of variation in the approach and performance of MSEs in relation to OSH. In addition, influences on the organisation of work and its consequences for OSH are mediated differently depending on the features of the different sectors in which MSEs operate, in particular in terms of risk, sector regulation, production setting and economic environment. Although we saw some variation within sector across the national settings, for example in relation to business strategies, technology, work organisation and labour processes, as well as differences between cases based on their historical trajectories, the sectors generally shared many important characteristics in common, which are also both confirmed and more developed in the wider literature through a more comprehensive overview than was possible in a qualitative study of hardly more than 160 cases overall. These sector settings, including, for example, production characteristics, regulation, work processes, work organisation, industrial relations, economic structures and competition, often represent important determinants for OSH outcomes in MSEs and even from the limited number of cases in our study there is empirical evidence in the sector chapters of differences across sectors in relation to the presence and effects of many of these variables. Table 15 presents a brief summary, by sector, of the findings that emerged from our fieldwork on four of these key characteristics:

- workforce: including characteristics such as skill level, the permanence or otherwise of contracts, and gender balance;
- sector-specific regulation: its extent and consequent impact in relation to, for example, licensing and inspection;
- economic environment: including, for example, seasonality, dependence on public/private financing, tendering/contracting for work and dimensions of competition;
- risks: key risks faced by workers, including those often considered by respondents 'inherent' to the sector.

The intention here is not to be exhaustive or comprehensive — that level of detail can be found in the relevant sector chapters in Part 2 of this report. Rather, the aim is to highlight the fact that multiple *combinations* of these characteristics were evident in our analysis of OSH and how OSH management is organised at the company level, and that these combinations varied substantially by sector (and in some cases by sub-sector). These differences are, of course, therefore also of central importance in relation to supportive strategies, as well as for regulation and regulatory inspection, all of which need to be adjusted to their specific sector settings. While some defining sector characteristics mainly relate to workplace and production organisation, others are related more to the specific culture in the industry. An example that could be considered here is the agriculture sector, which we found to be characterised by a quite conservative and tradition-bound work culture, which has implications for OSH in the sector, and which policies and initiatives need to take into account if they are to prove successful.

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Table 15 Sector characteristics with implications for OSH

| | Construction: construction of buildings and specialised activities | Accommodation and food service activities | Manufacturing: manufacture of metal, food, wood, chemical, paper and textile products | Agriculture: crop and animal production and forestry | Wholesale and retail trade: wholesale trade; maintenance and repair of motor vehicles; and retail sale of pharmaceutical and medical goods, and of new goods in specialised stores | Transport: haulage and freight | Human health and social work: care provision for adults and children, dental and other clinical provision, and provision of training and activities |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|---|--|--|---|---|
| Workers | Skilled and low skilled, many temporary, male dominated | Many unskilled, temporary, young, casual, family | Skilled and low skilled | Many unskilled, temporary, young, casual, family, male dominated | Skilled and low skilled | Skilled and low skilled, male dominated | Skilled and low skilled, female dominated |
| Sector-specific regulation | Emphasis on use of the supply chain to influence OSH standards, licensing and regular inspection for certain branches (for example asbestos) | Licensing and regular inspection | In particular in certain branches (such as those related to food and chemicals) | Use of particular substances, animal welfare, etc. | Licensing and regular inspection, but only for certain branches (such as pharmacy) | In relation to goods and security, but particular emphasis on drivers, including licensing and monitoring (for example tachographs) | Licensing and regular inspection |
| Economic environment | Tendering and contracts, multi-employer relations | Seasonality | Many branches | Seasonality, traditional | Importance of image | Tendering and contracts, multi-tier/outourcing relationships | Reliance on public funding |
| Indicative Risks | Working outdoors; on temporary/clients premises, falls (including from height), moving machinery/plant, lifting/carrying | Contact with public (can be unpredictable and potentially dangerous), long/irregular/unsociable working hours, repetitive work, kitchen work | Moving machinery/plant, lifting/carrying | Working outdoors, lone working, animals (can be unpredictable and potentially dangerous), moving machinery/plant, lifting/carrying | Contact with public, lifting/carrying | Working indoors/outdoors, lone working, moving vehicles (person-machine interface), lifting/carrying, long/irregular/unsociable working hours | Lone working, contact with clients and public (can be unpredictable and potentially dangerous), lifting/carrying |

The influence of sector was evident in relation to the perceptions of workers and owner-managers concerning the nature of the employment relationship. Here again it is possible that the economic and business position of the MSE may have been stronger in determining perceptions of this relationship, but nevertheless sector influences also played a part. For example, well-established and secure firms in manufacturing and to some degree transport often reported good relations and a high development of trust in relations between workers and owner-managers as positive benefits of working in small firms, whereas, in the less secure employment relations in the hotel and catering industry, as well as to some extent in the cases of seasonal work in agriculture, where more transactional relations were reported, trust was often neither highly developed nor valued in these sectors with high turnover and a preponderance of individualised short-term contracts. In construction, a mixed picture emerged. For at least some workers the motivation of their employers was clearly evident, and occasionally workers demonstrated a clear understanding of the economic contexts in which they were obliged to operate, and linked poor safety arrangements to these determinants, as this quote from a worker in a construction sector firm involved in masonry and structural work makes clear:

Linking profitability and safety, honestly it is not obvious in the building sector. It [safety] is part of the price and to be competitive, you are forced to ignore it. (FR, worker, 20-49 employees)

This quote is also interesting because it comes from a sector in which not only has the risk profile led to increased monitoring and surveillance from inspection bodies in recent decades, but it also has a complex structure of work and employment, where multiple employers with multitiered value chain relations operate at the same time on temporary worksites, numerically dominated by MSEs, and where undeclared work is also prevalent. These scenarios have led to new ways of regulatory thinking concerning the responsibilities for the management of risk in these complex relations, and all of the construction firms in our study were subject to the requirements resulting from this thinking and to their monitoring. As the cases we studied made plain, this scrutiny was a serious influence on OSH behaviours in the sector. Despite this, sector influences were also evident in the presence of temporary work sites as well as temporary work contracts, leading to both the positive and negative effects of business relations within service supply chains. As the quote above also illustrates, for at least some workers the overall effect of all of this did little to change their perception of a fundamentally production- and profit-orientated organisation of work in the MSE, in which the influence of profit still served to trump that of safety in the company's business priorities.

Of course, one of the many reasons for the paradoxes observed between firms can be found in the heterogeneity of MSEs that is frequently noted in this report. The so-called 'structures of vulnerability' that previous authors have suggested are inhabited by workers and employers in many smaller enterprises (see, for example, Nichols 1996) are related to the low road strategies they pursue in their approach to economic survival, and this and the factors that determine it are not sector specific, but far more determined by business and economic relations that apply across all sectors. Nevertheless, sector-specific effects do serve to mediate their consequences. For example, the risk profile of different sectors varies and under such circumstances safety and health outcomes for workers in firms that are characterised by low road survival strategies or dominated by 'structures of vulnerability' are likely to be more serious in sectors where work is intrinsically more physically risky. This was evident in the cases reported in Part 2 of this report, where, for example, in high-risk sectors such as construction and manufacturing, there seemed to be a stronger awareness of both the need for systematic OSH arrangements to be in place in the firms we studied, as well as an awareness of the physical risks they were intended to address and the likely consequences in terms of physical harm that would arise from failure to address them, while in other high-risk sectors, such as transport and agriculture, such awareness was considerably more ad hoc in the cases we studied.

A related element of risk profiles in the clusters of economic activities embraced by the accounts in Part 2 of this report concerns the awareness among workers and their managers of the nature of the risks in the sector risk profile. Overall, there was a bias towards physical risks, which was stronger where these risks were significant, such as in the construction and manufacturing case studies, but there were some sector-based differences in the appreciation of psychosocial risks. While it might be expected that workers in small firms with good social relations would experience fewer such risks, and indeed there was some suggestion of this among some of the 'better-end' cases in all sectors, there were also persistent differences in the extent to which such risks were recognised. In the cases operating in the

health and social care sector, for example, there was both a greater awareness of these risks and more evidence of arrangements to address them than in most of the other sectors. A further factor evident in a few instances concerned the very sector-specific nature of work-related risk. For example, working with animals and the natural environment was an obvious feature of agriculture, while caring for people was one of health and social care. Safety risks from customers and clients were strongly evident in the cases from sectors where work intersects closely with customers, patients and clients, while awareness of the risks of lone working was often also sector specific — such as in agriculture (crop and animal production, forestry), and some situations in human health and social work (care provision for adults and children, dental and other clinical provision, and provision of training and activities), wholesale and retail trade (wholesale trade; maintenance and repair of motor vehicles; retail sale of pharmaceutical and medical goods, and of new goods in specialised stores) and transport (haulage and freight), where it is also often a concern.

There is a conventional wisdom which suggests that there may be a positive relationship between a firm's pursuit of best practice arrangements for OSH and its business success, and this was seen in several examples of the activities of the 'best case' MSEs studied in all of the sectors. However, as already pointed out, it may be that sector differences in the regulatory framework and the practice of seeking compliance with it may also be influential here. There is variation in these approaches between sectors. As we have noted, it is the case that in construction, for example, MSEs have played a substantial role in supporting the performance of larger organisations in value chains in which the MSEs tend to occupy weak and dependent positions. Concerns about the OSH consequences of such business practices, in which (usually large and powerful) organisations outsource cost and risk burdens to smaller and economically weaker ones, have led to supply chain relations now being a focus for regulation in the sector in all EU Member States. Managers in some of the construction cases studied were acutely aware of the consequences of the increasing need to comply with the requirements from larger clients concerning their safety and health practices if they were to win their business. Other examples of differences between sectors concerning regulatory practice were seen in the apparently greater presence/awareness of inspection in sectors such as construction and manufacturing (which may be related to more frequent targeted inspection in so-called high-risk workplaces), compared with its relative scarcity in sectors such as agriculture and health care. A further feature of inspection notable in sectors such as the hotel and catering industry was the perception by owner-managers and workers of inspection of other matters, such as food hygiene, as being indistinguishable from that of safety and health — an observation with obvious implications for inspection strategies in relation to MSEs in such sectors in times of diminishing resources.

12.4 Summary

In summary, MSEs do not operate in a vacuum. They are embedded in national (and even supra-national) socio-economic and regulatory contexts that influence the conditions, terms and infrastructure in which they function. However, despite these overarching broad determinants and the diversity and paradoxes inherent in their effects, there are some useful commonalities in this experience concerning the influences on OSH arrangements, practices and outcomes in MSEs. In this part of the report we have used the creation of typologies of business practice, size and sector as a device to distinguish some patterns that may be present in the rich heterogeneity of MSE experience studied in the present research which are relevant to better understanding the root causes of poor OSH performance in these enterprises and which help to identify issues to be considered when planning strategies to support improved OSH arrangements and performance.

13 Conclusions

It is a commonly held idea that the distribution of risk to health, safety and wellbeing in societies is partly determined by a set of socio-economic factors that influence exposures to risk and its consequences. The distribution of occupational risks to safety and health can be seen as one element in this general pattern. The argument that emerged from the previous review of the literature concerning safety and health in micro and small firms was that this work environment contained a set of particular risks that were largely the product of socio-economic features of these workplaces and determined by a constellation of factors within and around them that created their risk profile (EU-OSHA 2016).

Informed by this argument, the research presented in this report has sought to examine in more detail this particular setting in which workplace risks are experienced. It has done so by exploring the arrangements for safety and health in 162 cases of MSEs in nine EU Member States and the relations within and around them that help to determine their outcomes for OSH. In this process, we have gathered a rich body of qualitative empirical data concerning the awareness, practice and experience of these arrangements and the contexts in which they occur, and what acts to determine them, across a range of different sectors, size bands, business practices and national regulatory and economic settings in the EU. Although our sample of workplaces has been heavily biased towards the 'better' end of the experience of work in MSEs, the data gathered here nevertheless broadly support the conclusions that emerged from the review of previous research. These suggested that work in a significant proportion of MSEs could be understood in terms of the experience of social and economic inequality in the distribution of risks to safety and health in the process of production operating in the EU economy. It is arguable that the restructuring of the EU economy in recent decades has contributed to this inequality. Further, a price has been paid for the unequal distribution of risk experienced in a substantial proportion of such workplaces, in which both workers and their employers disproportionately inhabit structures of vulnerability in the low road strategies they are obliged to follow to enable their businesses to survive.

This situation is evidenced by OSH outcomes such as the proportionally greater incidence of fatalities and serious injuries experienced by workers in these workplaces. Other significant trends in the structure and organisation of work, already well established over the past 30 years, such as patterns of increasing fragmentation, outsourcing and sub-contracting, as well as growth in non-standard forms of employment, and an increase in informal undeclared and irregular work, have produced effects on safety, health and wellbeing that are now well documented. In addition, their continuation over quite a long period has given rise to a level of societal acceptance of such change that has formed the basis for further patterns of insecurity and non-standard forms of employment. Nowadays, for example, workers are increasingly hired as independent contractors, forming part of a large and growing independent workforce, and often lack protections formerly afforded to full-time employees of larger corporate enterprises.

The research conducted in this project has provided a wealth of insights into OSH in MSEs, how workers and owner-managers in these enterprises experience it, and how they understand and perceive OSH in their work and business contexts. It has contributed both breadth and depth of qualitative knowledge drawn from the large number of cases in different national and sector settings that it has been able to study. While the research confirmed that MSEs are indeed a heterogeneous group, more so than larger companies, we have also shown in this part of the report that there are broad categories from which certain (ideal) explanatory types can be drawn. While no MSE features all the highlighted characteristics, the suggested types may help in understanding how to address various common OSH issues in MSEs.

Some MSE owner-managers have a proactive approach to OSH and some even see it as part of their business model. There are a number of obvious reasons for this that are strongly influenced by a constellation of factors embraced by the economic and business position of the organisation, the education and skills of the owner-manager and workers, and the risk awareness and capacities of both, as well as the visibility of the firm to regulators and other external influences. They lead to some MSEs being able to deliver the economic success stories predicted for them by many EU economic policy-makers, while others pursue low road strategies in their approach to economic survival, where achieving best practice in relation to OSH is unlikely to be a business priority. While generalisations concerning positive or negative OSH outcomes in relation to all MSEs and the contexts they inhabit remain somewhat perilous, this part of the report demonstrates that a typology accentuating common features and differences according to size, sector, business practice and nationality remains both possible and useful.

However, it needs to be borne in mind that the situation of MSEs is not a static matter. It is one that is dynamic and subject to change. In this respect, the structural features of the economies of most EU Member States and their past and present economic policies can act as supports and drivers of the processes helping to shape the delivery of strategies employed by the owner-managers of these firms to try to ensure their economic survival. They therefore contribute to those factors that help determine the extent to which a small or micro firm follows a low or high road approach to its economic survival and development and, as the present report makes clear, these structural features and economic policies also relate to the extent to which the owner-managers of these enterprises are able to factor OSH arrangements into this process.

It needs to be recognised that firms obliged to pursue low road strategies possess many features that place them outside the ambit of attempts to support OSH practice. Many fall into categories that we and previous researchers have labelled 'avoiders' and 'outsiders', while others would be seen, at best, as 'reactors' (Vickers et al. 2005). Thus, they exist largely beyond the reach not only of voluntary support to 'better themselves and their business' in terms of OSH, but also largely beyond the reach of regulatory agencies. It is no coincidence of course that it is among these organisations that are found those engaged in the pursuit of low road strategies to ensure the survival of their business. There is, therefore, a need to pose questions concerning the supports for OSH in MSEs that take some account of the contexts in which the harm experienced by workers in these firms occurs, when their effectiveness is to be evaluated.

Unfortunately, not only are these organisations beyond the reach of regulators and OSH support, it is evident from the nature of the sample of cases it has been possible to study in this project that they are often largely beyond the reach of researchers too. There are also paradoxes in relation to regulatory practices that influence both the nature and the uptake of OSH practice in MSEs. For example, the same vulnerabilities and the diversity of responses to them help to explain why some MSEs and the organisations representing them appear to regard regulation as a serious burden on their business, while at the same time research shows that regulatory inspection — or the threat of it — is in practice one of the most powerful determinants of the willingness of owner-managers in MSEs to act on OSH matters. This research further shows that face-to-face relations with regulatory inspectors are a powerful means of ensuring compliance with the requirements of good OSH practice. Yet, since it is widely accepted that the likelihood of such face-to-face contact occurring between inspectors and the potential subjects of their inspection in MSEs is quite limited, regulatory inspection strategies in most EU Member States are focused on reduced face-to-face contact between the regulatory inspectorate and duty-holders in MSEs and finding other ways to achieve impact with regulatory messages.

Indeed, this might cause us some reflection concerning whether or not trying to understand 'what works' in supporting OSH in small firms through undertaking research along the lines presented here is entirely successful in addressing the problem of inequality in the distribution of work-related risk, for such inequalities are shared by a host of forms of work in which MSEs often feature prominently and which have in common precariousness, insecurity and general inaccessibility to both regulatory inspection and voluntary forms of support for OSH. Moreover, it is probable that such situations lie outside the reach of mainstream OSH strategies at both national and EU levels. However, as the present research has found, while large-scale survey data might suggest such scenarios to be increasingly common, in the main they lie beyond approaches such as ours to researching OSH in micro and small firms. While, as we have argued, it is to some extent possible to assess the implications of findings from the more accessible better case scenarios that have been the majority of cases we have been able to study, for the work situations that are beyond our research, this is not an entirely satisfactory way of understanding what actually occurs in the situations that lie beyond the reach of conventional research methods. Moreover the growth and continuation of such situations over quite a long period has arguably helped give rise to a level of societal acceptance of them, which in turn has acted to support the 'normalisation' of further patterns of insecurity and non-standard forms of employment, along with their negative effects on the health, safety and welfare of the workers involved with them (Nichols and Walters 2013). Such forms of work either become part of the survival strategy adopted by the vulnerable firms or compete with these and other firms in the same markets.

Either way, such patterns in the organisation of work and their degradation of protections previously afforded to workers have occurred at the same time as other changes, such as those of individualisation and responsabilisation within workplaces, which serve to place greater responsibility for safety and health not on those whose business activities create risks, but on those who are obliged to work with such risks. Indeed, even among the better case scenarios forming the large proportion of cases on which this report has been based, we have suggested that the majority tend to have what they regard as a 'common sense' approach to OSH, whereby they often do not perceive OSH as something that has to be addressed specifically through its management in ways defined by statute. The effect of this approach means that risks tend to be experienced by those who work with them and responsibility for their avoidance is also assumed by such workers, rather than by those that the regulatory system indicates to be responsible — their employers. Arguably, such forms of 'participation' have added further to increased vulnerability for some workers, since they also contribute to the assumption of risk and its consequences becoming increasingly individualised — while being assumed (often disproportionately so) by vulnerable individuals. Much of this has taken place within the ambit of the economic environment populated by MSEs.

There are two further points of reflection that arise from this. The first concerns the nature of 'participation' of workers in OSH in MSEs. It is evident from the sector chapters in Part 2 of this report that arrangements for formal representative participation in our cases were rare and in most cases entirely absent. While this is understandable, in as far as it is well known that representative participation on OSH is unlikely in such informal settings, it does not mean that no participation occurred. In most of the cases, such participation was informal. But the real nature of this participation, and its drivers and the determinants of its quality, were far more difficult to discern. Given this, and the issues of individualism and responsabilisation alluded to in previous paragraphs, in the absence of autonomy associated with representative participation, the need to really understand these issues is important if a truly informed understanding of 'what works, for whom and in what contexts' is to be achieved concerning OSH in MSEs.

This leads to the second point of reflection, which concerns the way we study such participation and the processes and relations that help to determine it. As we have argued in previous chapters, there is a previous sociological literature that has to some extent explored the issues that surround the assumption of responsibilities for work-related risks by the workers who experience them. Although it has not done so to any great extent specifically in relation to OSH in MSEs, nevertheless we have found this work useful in seeking deeper insights into some of the qualitative experiences that have been related in the interviews with workers and their managers in the cases we have studied. However, as we also acknowledged in our review of the wider literature on OSH in MSEs (EU-OSHA 2016), there is a relative dearth of such study in relation to workers in MSEs. It was this finding that helped formulate one of the aims of the present study, which was to undertake qualitative research on OSH in MSEs that was somewhat more representative of the workers' standpoint than the vast majority of previous research on OSH in MSEs has been. While we think we have achieved this in part in the present study, we are obliged to acknowledge that the methods we have adopted here are really not sufficiently sociologically or ethnographically informed to be able to have explored these issues in the depth that is required to provide a full understanding of the issues behind the perceptions of workers and owner-managers recounted to researchers in the course of single interviews. More in-depth and focused, sociologically informed, qualitative research would be useful in enhancing better understandings of these processes and contexts that determine the perceptions and practices of OSH in MSEs.

In short then, in this report we have tried to make sense of a very rich set of empirical findings from a large number of cases of OSH practices in MSEs from nine EU countries that were visited during the course of the fieldwork. In so doing, we are aware of the limitations inherent in writing a report of this length in relation to such a heterogeneous group and we have acknowledged that we have been unable to entirely do justice to the variety and detail of the fieldwork findings. Indeed, we are acutely aware that, among the collection of separate accounts of each of the cases, there remains a rich reserve of empirical data that would lend itself to further analysis. Also, in the course of writing the present part of the report, we have alluded to the challenge of making sense of key elements of comparability in relation to OSH practices and outcomes across MSEs, while at the same time acknowledging the heterogeneity of the same enterprises. And we have further tried to contextualise these elements of comparability in relation to the socio-economic contexts in which they are situated. We are aware of the dangers of reductionism

in all of this. Despite all of our caveats and qualification, however, we think that the typologies we have created, as well as the broad understandings that we have presented of the socio-economic and regulatory contexts in which they occur, and of the processes that help determine the actions that are taken by both workers and owner-managers on OSH in MSEs, help to situate our findings in relation to previous studies and generally contribute to improved understandings across all these areas. At the same time, we think they offer some useful pointers for policies and strategies to help support MSEs in addressing the weaknesses in OSH arrangements to which they relate. In this respect, the research outlined in this report and the conclusions presented here provide the groundwork for both the analysis of strategies and tools to support MSEs (EU-OSHA 2017a, b), as well as the reflections made in the final report on the whole project (EU-OSHA 2018).

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