

Reference	OSH 29/ The minutes of the meeting
Submitted by	ITA in Coordination with the Chair

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Estonia: Eva Pöldis, Karin Reinhold
Finland: Owe Österbacka (chair), Päivi Hämäläinen (ITA)
Latvia: : Ivars Vanadziņš, Svetlana Lakiša
Lithuania: Lolita Pilipavičienė
Norway: Monica Varem Pettersen
Poland: Eliza Goszczyńska
Sweden: Annette Nylund
ILO: Claude Loisele

Wednesday 19 March 2026

1. Opening of the meeting and welcome

Chair Mr. Owe Österbacka opened the meeting at 9:11 and welcomed all to the OSH EG 29th meeting. Our host Eva Pöldis from Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communication welcomed all to the ministry's premises in Tallinn. She wished us a productive meeting day.

The agenda and the minutes of the previous meeting were approved as such.

2. Notifications from the NDPHS Secretariat

NDPHS Secretariat director Ülla-Karin Nürm presented current issues from the Secretariat. First, Estonia has politically decided to withdraw from the NDPHS, which creates challenges for Nordic-Baltic collaboration. The reasons remain unclear and largely political. The Secretariat has clear vision and a plan how to proceed. Latvia and Lithuania as well as Sweden are strongly committed and involved the work of NDPHS, but they do not know how Finland and Norway are thinking. The Secretariat continues discussion with member countries.

NDPHS continues cooperation through the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), where the Secretariat serves as Policy Area Health Coordinator. This role is crucial for ensuring health remains integrated into the strategy and for securing access to EU and other funding mechanisms. Health and social affairs have gained significantly higher visibility within the renewed EUSBSR action plan. Positive developments include Norway becoming a full member of the EUSBSR with voting rights, and Iceland potentially joining in the future.

The Secretariat has a new central focus, a resilience of people and communities, while continuing work on active and healthy ageing, health in all policies, wellbeing economy, and capacity building. For NDPHS mental health is the main priority moving forward, emphasizing non-clinical, community- and setting-based approaches involving schools, workplaces, municipalities, regions, and civil society

organizations. The Mental Health Platform aims to consolidate, scale up, and transfer results from EU-funded projects and translate them into policy-relevant outputs at national and EU levels. Experience from Finland showed that early and continuous involvement of policymakers and tripartite bodies was key to the success and visibility of mental health initiatives. This dual structure—combining expert work with direct policy engagement—was identified as a unique strength that supports both impact and funding success.

Claude Loiselle from ILO saw the situation and news sad. He however stressed that occupational safety and health cooperation must involve not only governments but also employers and workers. Such tripartite structures can protect collaboration from sudden political shifts and ensure long-term stability.

The chair acknowledged that even if Estonia is withdrawing from NDPHS, partners from Estonia are still most welcome in the OSH expert group, like Taltec.

3. Workshop Day - wrap-up from an OSH EG perspective

At first the chair asked participants to give their key takeaways from the (EPIC) workshop which was held the previous day. Participants reflected that the workshop was highly valuable but highlighted the complexity and breadth of crisis preparedness and occupational safety and health (OSH).

Key takeaways included

- the critical role of leadership before, during, and after crises,
- the need to learn systematically from past crises, and
- the challenge of turning lessons learned into concrete action.

Many emphasized the importance of

- cross-sector and cross-actor cooperation,
- better use of existing data, and
- early investment in preparedness, not only in resources but also in understanding roles and capacities.

Differences between countries, sectors, and organization sizes complicate solutions, but diverse perspectives—especially from new participants and real crisis experiences—were seen as a major strength. The participants were grateful to the NDPHS for creating space for deep reflection, fresh thinking, and dialogue, reinforcing the need to repeat such exercises when developing new concepts and policies.

After participants roundtable discussion, Lukas gave a **short summary from the workshop day**:

The discussion reflected on the workshop's high value but also its cognitive intensity, as topics ranged from national systems to individual and workplace levels. Participants appreciated the strong focus on the organizational and workplace context, including roles, actors, and stakeholders, as well as debates on legislative flexibility, democratic values, and real-life crisis experience, which added depth and realism to discussions.

Based on collected reflections, nine overarching themes were identified:

- system coordination and cooperation
- learning and knowledge transfer
- preparedness and workforce capacity

- protection of vulnerable workers and psychosocial health
- leadership and crisis management
- the role and capacity of occupational health services
- data and information sharing
- targeted support for vulnerable groups
- a system-level perspective that includes workers' voices.

OSH EG members agreed on the need **to focus and prioritize themes, continue reflection between meetings, and gradually translate broad discussions into clearer research or development questions.** Rather than concentrating immediately on funding, the group emphasized building **strong conceptual foundations now**, so they are ready to act when opportunities emerge.

In the next online meeting, we continue the work begun in the workshop. The chair encouraged members to follow-up discussions before the next online meeting and

- to share their views on which themes to focus on,
- why those themes matter, and
- how existing results and methodological perspectives could be used.

The chair also suggests that **a third workshop in Helsinki could be organised back-to-back with an EG meeting, allocating one full day to the workshop (workshop 23 September and OSH EG meeting 24 September).**

4. Mental Health Matters article

Karin Reinhold presented the current situation concerning the article based on the Mental Health Matters project. Method is using elements of a realist review to analyse how and why good practices for managing psychosocial risks function across different countries. Contributions have been received from Finland, Latvia, Norway and Poland, with discussions ongoing about including negative examples to highlight gaps between intentions and practice. Karin have not got any data or best practices from Lithuania or Sweden, but if they still want to contribute, information have to have Karin during week. Both countries want to contribute, but the timeframe might be too tight.

Country cases showed differing approaches: Estonia, Latvia and Poland rely more on awareness-raising, training and voluntary initiatives, while Finland and Norway have stronger institutional and regulatory systems but still face implementation challenges, particularly at workplace level.

The group discussed **next steps** for refining the comparative analysis, clarifying conceptual explanations for national differences, and identifying suitable academic journals for publication, while agreeing on timelines **and further contributions ahead of the next online meeting** and an in-person meeting planned for September.

5. Summary on key activities in Estonia

Eva Põldis, Karin Reinhold and Elina Soomets (Estonian Labour Inspectorate) presented current issues from Estonia. Please see presentations on meeting webpage.

- Estonia is preparing OSH legislative amendments to reduce administrative burden for employers while maintaining EU compliance and worker protection.

- Key changes include more flexibility in first aid arrangements, reduced reporting obligations for micro-enterprises, adjustments to workers' health examinations, and a legal basis for workplace intoxication testing.
- Digital solutions are being expanded to reduce paperwork, including integrated health and labour inspection information systems.
- New OSH awareness initiatives include elective labour law and OSH courses in high schools and a national e-learning programme for OSH specialists.
- Several OSH projects are ongoing, covering mentoring for companies, AI and the future of work, mental health, psychosocial risks, and innovative personal protective equipment.
- Differences between countries were noted in OSH training requirements and regulation of professional competence.
- The Estonian Labour Inspectorate highlighted risk-based, targeted supervision, prevention, guidance to employers, and strong regional cooperation.

6. Brief updates

OSH EG representatives

Latvia

- No major legislative changes expected; concern remains about possible reductions in occupational health examinations under administrative-burden reduction initiatives.
- Strong focus on research, information dissemination, and mental well-being initiatives (e.g. Mission Zero, conferences).
- Extensive human biomonitoring project underway, with early results indicating notable chemical exposures in the population.
- Multiple EU-funded projects addressing work–life balance, new forms of work, a four-day work week, and the use of AI in stress management and mental well-being.

Lithuania

- A new centre was established in July, with permanent leadership appointed recently; administrative workload remains high.
- Ongoing development of a procedure to recognise companies that promote employee health (politically important, but currently unfunded).
- Long-term project (2023–2028) to develop a systematic model for occupational health service provision.
- Pilot implementation of occupational health service algorithms in healthcare institutions; funding is available and dissemination events are planned.

Poland

- Significant legislative reform granting labour inspectorates authority to combat bogus self-employment and convert fictitious contracts through administrative decisions.
- The reform has triggered wide public and stakeholder debate.
- The labour inspectorate's role is evolving from a control body towards a supportive partner for employers.
- Long-standing survey research on employee and employer attitudes to health and psychosocial risks provides a strong evidence base for future scientific publications.

Sweden

- Mynak merged into Swedish work environment authority.
- Strategic focus shifting from health promotion towards a stronger risk-based approach.
- Increased attention to welfare services, education, and social and organisational factors.
- Ongoing challenges in sustained participation in international networks, although interest in cooperation remains.

ILO

- Severe financial constraints leading to staff reductions and significant internal reorganisation.
- Decision-making increasingly centralised; operational focus becoming more sector-oriented.
- Key ongoing and upcoming work includes psychosocial risks, chemical and biological hazards, and platform economy regulation.
- The World Congress on Safety and Health at Work is planned for Dakar in 2027.

Finland

- A new Finnish supervisory agency began operations at the turn of the year, with one of its departments being the Occupational Safety Department. The reform merged five regional occupational safety authorities into a single agency.
- Preparation is underway for a government change in a year's time, including the delivery of an official briefing. At this moment, we are not expecting major new government initiatives, but our minister launched two own initiatives: Women's Health package and Occupational Safety Programme for the education and social and healthcare sectors.
- The Work Life Development Strategy is nearing completion. It has been drafted jointly with the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, along with two additional ministries, labour-market organisations, and the third sector. The next step is preparing the action plan.
- The Finnish Institute of Occupational Health is relocating, causing some temporary disruption to operations.
- Wide-ranging research activity continues, particularly on artificial intelligence and work, including ethical and positive applications.
- Preparatory work on amendments to occupational health care regulation has begun through tripartite cooperation, though the process has been challenging.
- Legislative progress is expected to be slow, with no immediate parliamentary proposals anticipated.

7. Meeting schedule

Upcoming meetings are scheduled.

- Next meeting is online on June 11 at 13-15 (CET).
- The autumn face-to-face meeting is 23 – 24 September 2026, Helsinki, Finland.
- The last OSH EG meeting in 2026 will be online 3 December.
- The spring meeting host in March 2027 is still open. It might be Sweden, but we'll return and have confirmation regarding the hosting in the autumn meeting. A possible joint session with the PEROSH Well-being group has been suggested.

8. Other issues

No other issues

Closing the meeting at the latest 16.00 (CET +1).

The chair closed the meeting at 15.57.