



NEW OSH ERA

Memorandum of Common Understanding

**New and Emerging Risks in Occupational Safety and Health
- Anticipating and dealing with change
in the workplace through coordination of OSH risk research**

JUNE 2008

NEW OSH ERA

“New and Emerging Risks in Occupational Safety and Health - Anticipating and dealing with change in the workplace through coordination of OSH risk research”

Memorandum of Common Understanding

“Every worker has the right to working conditions which respect his or her health, safety and dignity.”¹

NEW OSH ERA “New and Emerging Risks in Occupational Safety and Health - Anticipating and dealing with change in the workplace through coordination of OSH risk research” is a project funded by the European Commission within 6th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development through the ERANET scheme.

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Editorial Group:

- Katalin Sas
- Spyros Dontas
- Dietmar Reinert
- Ilkka Tahvanainen
- Kai Savolainen
- Eusebio Rial Gonzalez

¹ CHARTER OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, Article 31-1

NEW OSH ERA “New and Emerging Risks in Occupational Safety and Health - Anticipating and dealing with change in the workplace through coordination of OSH risk research” is a project funded under the ERA-NET scheme in the context of the specific programme ‘Integrating and strengthening the European Research Area’.

NEW OSH ERA aims to increase the overall scale, effectiveness and quality of research into new and emerging risks through coordination of OSH research in Europe, in particular by developing a joint research programme involving common priorities, coordinated implementation and joint evaluation.

The first phase of the project consisted of information exchange activities and it included collecting national data on OSH research programmes related to new and emerging risks and on programme management approaches in the partner countries. It resulted in two reports, the “Report on Management approaches” and the “Overview of research funding programmes on OSH related new and emerging risks”.

The main objective of the second phase of NEW OSH ERA was to agree on the priorities for future joint activities and to develop a joint strategy. Complementarities, gaps and new opportunities in research on OSH-related new and emerging risks were examined and summarised in a report upon which the discussions on the priorities were based. A consultation process was initiated among the partners - and broadened subsequently to include the national networks, the Commission, the social partners and potential future NEW OSH ERA partners -aiming to define the future direction for NEW OSH ERA . The outcome of the consultation process is the present document, the Memorandum of Common Understanding, including the NEW OSH ERA Strategy for the years 2008-2012. The document is an expression of intention of the NEW OSH ERA Consortium Members and is not legally binding.

Members of the NEW OSH ERA Consortium

Coordinator

Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, FIOH, Finland

Partners

Finnish Work Environment Fund, TSR, Finland

Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Finland

Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, BAUA, Germany

Central Institute for Labour Protection - National Research Institute, CIOP-PIB, Poland

Project Management Organization at DLR, Project Management Organization for the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, PT-DLR, Germany

German Social Accident Insurance, DGUV, Germany

National Research Centre for the Working Environment, NRCWE, Denmark

Research Unit for the Improvement of Working Conditions DiOVA/DiRACT, General Directorate for the Humanization of Work, Ministry of Labour, FOD WASO, Belgium

Italian National Institute for Prevention and Safety at Work, ISPESL, Italy

Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research, FAS, Sweden

Hungarian Institute of Occupational Health, OMFI, Hungary

European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, EU-OSHA, EU

Hellenic Institute for Occupational Health & Safety, ELINYAE, Greece

Ministry of Employment and Social Protection, Greece

Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Germany

Ministry of Health, Italy

Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Poland

French Agency for Environmental and Occupational Health Safety, AFSSET, France

TNO, Netherlands

Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, Netherlands

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Introduction - The operating context of NEW OSH ERA

- **NEW OSH ERA links to Lisbon strategy**

During the meeting of the European Council in Lisbon (March 2000), the Heads of State set the Government Strategic goal for 2010 for Europe to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion."

The mid-term review held in 2005, resulted in re-launching the Lisbon Agenda with renewed focus on growth, innovation and employment and an emphasis on the social and environmental dimensions.

The European Research Area

The European Research Area (ERA) constitutes one of the core elements of the Lisbon Strategy. The concept includes the creation of an "internal market" in research, a restructuring of the European research fabric with the aim of overcoming the fragmentation of research activities and the development of a European research policy. One of the features that ERA should have is "well-coordinated research programmes and priorities, including a significant volume of jointly-programmed public research investment at European level involving common priorities, coordinated implementation and joint evaluation²." The ERANET scheme was designed as one of the instruments to achieve this goal.

Thus NEW OSH ERA can contribute in a twofold way to the achievement of the Lisbon objectives. Firstly, if successful, it furthers the creation of the European Research Area in the field of OSH by increasing the quality and the overall scale of the research into new and emerging risks through better coordination of research. Secondly, by doing so, it promotes the generation of scientific knowledge necessary for designing prevention measures and for making well-grounded policy decisions, as well as facilitates more effective dissemination and transfer of the research results to the workplaces. In this way it promotes well-being and productivity at work and contributes to the economic growth and employment.

- **Improving quality and productivity at work: Community strategy 2007-2012 on health and safety at work – NEW OSH ERA links to the Community strategy**

The cornerstone of the Occupational Safety and Health policy of the European Union is the Commission Communication on "Improving quality and productivity at work: Community Strategy 2007 – 2012 on health and safety at work". This proposes a strategy for promoting health and safety at work and sets this policy within the framework of the "Lisbon Growth and Jobs Strategy". The Strategy emphasises that lack of effective protection can result in absenteeism, accidents, occupational illnesses or permanent occupational disabilities. This has a considerable human dimension but also has a major negative impact on the economy. The enormous economic costs of problems associated with health and safety at work inhibits economic growth and affects the competitiveness of businesses in the EU.

² GREEN PAPER The European Research Area: New Perspectives
http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/pdf/era_gp_final_en.pdf

The Strategy points out that a number of challenges, including ageing of the working population, new employment trends, increasing number of migrants are continuing to grow in importance. In addition to these challenges the paper mentions certain types of occupational illnesses like MSD, infections and illnesses associated with psychological stress becoming more common. The hazards in the workplace are changing due to the acceleration of innovation, the emergence of new risk factors and transformation of work pattern. The Strategy also emphasises the importance of research into new and emerging risks for designing preventive solutions and points out that “scientific research provides arguments and evidence upon which policy decisions must be based”. It also suggests that more coordination between national research programmes is necessary.

NEW OSH ERA aims to increase the overall scale and effectiveness of the research into new and emerging risks carried out in the EU by coordination of national research programmes and to contribute in this way to a safer and healthier working life. Thus the link between the goals set by the Community Strategy with respect to research and NEW OSH ERA is obvious. By pursuing its objectives, NEW OSH ERA can significantly contribute to the implementation of the Community strategy.

The challenges and priorities for OSH research listed in the Strategy have been taken into consideration when defining the priorities for NEW OSH ERA joint activities and a joint research programme (see chapter on Priorities for joint activities).

- **OSH and other EU policies**

It is important to notice that § 5.4 of the Community Strategy 2007 – 2012 stresses the need for coherence between OSH policy and other policies at Community and national levels, in particular public health, regional development and social cohesion, public procurement, employment and restructuring. Two initiative examples of a wider scope were named with an impact on health and safety at work: The results of the consultation launched in 2007 by the Green Paper “Towards a Europe free from tobacco smoke: policy options at EU level” and the results of the consultation which was completed in May 2006 on “Promoting the Mental Health of the Population. Towards a strategy for mental health for the EU”. § 6.1 of the Community Strategy assigns to the European Agency the task to review the extent to which health and safety aspects have been incorporated into Member States’ vocational and occupational training policies.

With regards to the EU social policy, the Social Agenda, which covers the period up to 2010, is based on a number of principles, some of them directly or indirectly related to OSH. It is obvious that by promoting “quality of employment, social policy and industrial relations” or by taking into account the “cost of the lack of social policy” it is possible “to improve human and social capital”. Priority areas include the increase of quality and productivity of work and anticipation and management of changes, both impossible under bad working conditions. Health and safety at work are explicitly stated as an integral part of the social policy, to be tackled by a special strategy (the Community Strategy 2007 – 2012).

The general principles of EU policy on gender equality are stated in a number of articles in the Draft EU Constitution, for example Article II-83 and Article III-210. The Report from the Commission “On equality between women and men, 2005” is trying to ensure the rapid implementation of the Directive 2002/73/EC (On the principle of equal treatment for men and

women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions) where banning discrimination based on sex is considered a prerequisite for good working conditions.

The EU Health policy is described in the White Paper entitled “Together for Health: A Strategic Approach for the EU 2008 – 2013”. One of the principles titled “health in all policies (HIAP)” is highlighted in the Paper. Health and safety at work are explicitly stated as components of the population’s health. Fostering good health in an ageing Europe is considered a strategic objective. Part of this is the improvement of health of adults of working age. Actions were stipulated for the Commission to be undertaken.

• OSH Research Funding at EU Level

Being at the crossroads of medicine and social sciences, the responsibility for occupational health research funding often ends up on the borderline between the ministries of education/research, labour, health and social affairs. The same situation applies at the European level. No directorate or programme in the European Commission provides funding specifically targeting occupational health and safety research and it is not easy to find suitable research calls.

Most calls of interest derive from Research DG, but a few ad hoc calls come from the other directorates, such as Enterprise and Industry DG and Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities DG.

Research DG is the main source of funding for researchers of all disciplines. The Seventh framework programme (FP7) is divided in four basic modules: 1) Cooperation; 2) Ideas; 3) People; and 4) Capacities. The first module, Cooperation, is the largest, traditional block of the programme. It contains nine thematic priorities, of which none explicitly includes OSH research. Three of the thematic areas could potentially apply to OSH research: 1) Health; 2) Nanosciences, nanotechnologies, materials and new production technologies; and 3) Socioeconomic sciences and humanities. Area 2) Nanosciences, nanotechnologies (...) includes topics directly related to OSH. There have been already some calls within NMP priority concerning OSH in nanotechnologies as well as advanced PPE.

OSH is more clearly defined under the Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (PROGRESS) which is managed by DG for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, responsible for occupational safety and health issues in the European Commission. PROGRESS 2007-2013 was established to contribute to the Lisbon Strategy goals in the fields of employment, working conditions, gender equality, social protection & social inclusion, and non discrimination & diversity. The sub category “working conditions” actually mentions health and safety at work, but it is not a research funding scheme. The European Social Fund, also under DG Employment, finances education and training, but not research. Whereas *Progress* focuses on activities with a strong European dimension to ensure an EU added value, the ESF invests in the implementation of employment and social inclusion policies in the Member States,

The European Science Foundation (ESF) is a European research funding agency outside of the EU. It is an association of, and funded by, 77 member organisations from 30 European countries. Not surprising, OSH research does not really fit into the five main disciplinary

headings of ESF: 1) Humanities; 2) Life, Earth and Environmental Sciences; 3) Medical Sciences; 4) Physical and Engineering Sciences; and 5) Social Sciences.

It can be concluded, that OSH research funding is scattered, often lacking continuity both at national and European level and it is difficult for researchers to obtain an overview on funding opportunities. There is a lack of coordination of funding and implementation of OSH research which is needed to effectively meet the challenges for OSH in a changing work environment. NEW OSH ERA will address this demand for better coordination of OSH research funding.

- **Why NEW OSH ERA?**

The EU has made significant progress in reducing the toll of work related accidents and diseases and improving workers' safety and health. OSH research has generated the knowledge that served as the basis for the activities aiming at improving working conditions. During the last few decades, the workplace has been rapidly changing, which presents new challenges to protect workers' safety and health. The problems that OSH researchers face, while being similar in different countries, are increasingly complex, with many different factors involved. No single organisation has the resources necessary to meet these challenges and to conduct research on new and emerging risks to adequately serve the needs of the workplaces.

The NEW OSH ERA project will help to combine the strengths of the different EU Member States in OSH research. By increasing cooperation and coordination between OSH research programmes, NEW OSH ERA will increase the overall scale and effectiveness of the research carried out in the EU. The networking and integration of national programmes will facilitate the creation of scientific knowledge on the increasingly complicated OSH issues which is necessary for designing preventive measures and making sound policy decisions. In this way NEW OSH ERA can contribute to the well-being and productivity of Europe's workers.

NEW OSH ERA Strategy for 2008-2010 and beyond

Vision

A European OSH research funding network supporting research into new and emerging risks as a precondition for effective prevention and sound policies thus contributing to a safer and healthier working life.

Mission

To contribute to the development of the European Research Area in the field of OSH with a specific focus on new and emerging risks by reducing the fragmentation of research through the coordination of research activities carried out at national level and promotion of OSH research at European level.

Values

1. Welfare of the European workforce
2. Loyal cooperation, respecting partners' interests and the particularities of each organization
3. Professional and independent, common ethical principles in funding policies
4. Value of cultural differences
5. Networking and partnerships

Objectives

On the basis of the vision and mission statements, four strategic objectives have been formulated for NEW OSH ERA for the two remaining years of the project, 2008-2010, and beyond. The objectives are:

- To improve the quality and increase the overall scale of research related to new and emerging OSH risks in Europe by
 - creating a sustainable network of OSH research funding organisations covering all/most of the Member States
 - developing a jointly financed research programme involving common priorities, joint evaluation and coordinated implementation
 - facilitating effective dissemination and transfer of the research results to the workplaces
- To promote the exchange of information related to new and emerging risks making available scientific knowledge on new and emerging risks at work to policy makers and other stakeholders and to facilitate the information flow and collaboration between researchers, research institutions, OSH funding agencies and all interested parties.
- To set priorities for research on new and emerging risks in Europe and influence OSH research funding policies at European level

- To increase awareness of the importance of research into new and emerging risks as a precondition for effective prevention measures and sound policy decisions as well as to raise the profile of OSH research areas, leading to more EU/MS attention in terms of research funding and debate.

Strategies

The strategies formulated here are linked to the four objectives.

The long term and core objective of NEW OSH ERA is to improve the quality and increase the overall scale of research related to new and emerging risks in the field of OSH in Europe – more, better and more relevant research. It includes creating a sustainable network, developing a jointly financed research programme and facilitating dissemination of information on new and emerging OSH risks and efficient transfer of the research results to the workplaces.

Creating a sustainable network of OSH research funding organisations covering all/most of the Member States

At present, NEW OSH ERA has 21 partners from 11 Member States including the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work and the new partners, AFSSET from France and TNO and the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment from Netherlands. By the end of the project NEW OSH ERA committed to extend the network by 3-4 new members.

- To extend the network to cover all or most of the Member States, NEW OSH ERA will identify further potential partners and gradually involve more funding organisations from currently not covered Member States. A special emphasis should be given to involve new Member States.
- Creating sustainable structures: NEW OSH ERA will further strengthen and develop the management structures and communication channels (website, extranet, newsletter) created during the first two years of the project. Learning about each other and building trust are important aspects of the process. The options for maintaining the structures after the termination of EC funding will be examined (funding, infrastructures etc.). Having in place well established structures and procedures will ease the integration of new partners.
- NEW OSH ERA will still need financial support to be able to extend the network and carry on with its activities after the termination of the first funding period. Therefore, the current NEW OSH ERA partners and the potential future partners will prepare an application for extension within FP7 after having examined the different options. For this purpose a task group should be created from the representatives of the current and future partner organisations.

Developing a jointly financed research programme involving common priorities, joint evaluation and coordinated implementation

- In the long term, NEW OSH ERA aims at developing a jointly financed research programme involving common priorities, joint evaluation and coordinated implementation. NEW OSH ERA could take a stepwise approach to reach this objective, which means starting with a smaller scale of funding and limited range of activities and gradually increase the funding and broadening the scope of activities.

The stepwise approach would allow testing the functionality of systems and tools of transnational programme management, including the legal, contractual, financial and administrative framework as well as promote trust building between the partners.

- The first step in this process could be the launching of 1-2 pilot calls for research seminar series by the end of the funding period, i.e. April 2010. The aim is to support research networking within themes chosen from the list of priorities agreed by NEW OSH ERA partners. The outcomes of the seminar series can possibly be used in the development of the research plan for the joint research programme.
- The next step could be the launching of a joint pilot call for research project proposals on some of the topics from the NEW OSH ERA priority list with an increased volume of funding.
- By defining the priorities NEW OSH ERA has taken the first steps in developing a research plan – content - for a joint programme. The research community will be involved in the process of specifying the research themes through thematic groups, which will develop the content of each theme of the research programme. Involving the research community in the planning process will ensure active participation in the calls and good quality applications.
- An Advisory Group will be established, including representatives of social partners, to support and overview the process of development of the research programme.
- The links between OSH and other policy areas such as public health, environment, and employment will be taken into account when developing the content of the research programme
- Once the procedures for joint activities are elaborated (this task is part of the approved Work Plan, WP8) the implementation of joint activities in terms of content, participation, funding scale will be flexible within the jointly agreed framework.
- Issues which will be taken into consideration while planning joint activities are:
 - risk communication – e.g. as part of the projects or as a separate topic in the joint research programme
 - gender aspect – integrating it in the research
 - NEW OSH ERA will promote European networking (e.g. the participation of a minimum of 3 partner countries in the research project is required)
 - NEW OSH ERA will promote multidisciplinary and participatory research (Where the workers and their representatives or organisations are actively involved in the project, the methodological design, the implementation and the discussion of the findings of the research. In such a research the workers knowledge on working conditions and health is considered as a valuable source of information) – e.g. as evaluation/funding criteria
 - NEW OSH ERA will promote the participation of young researchers in the calls (e.g. by including the participation of young researchers in the research team as one of the evaluation/funding criteria)

Facilitating effective dissemination and transfer of the research results to the workplaces

- NEW OSH ERA will include the risk communication aspect in all its activities
- NEW OSH ERA will promote participatory research

Policy makers need to be informed about current issues in OSH and research results need to be “translated”/made available to policy-makers, including evidence for their benefit to

society. Therefore, communicating information related to new and emerging risks will be one of the key activities of NEW OSH ERA

Promoting the exchange of information related to new and emerging risks

- NEW OSH ERA will create a platform for exchange of information on new and emerging risks at work and make available scientific knowledge to policy makers and other stakeholders by
 - providing an opportunity for programme owners to present programmes/projects related to new and emerging risks, for researchers to present research results and their impact (implication) on workplaces beyond the research community, to a different target audience
 - providing an opportunity to present and discuss the results of foresight exercises related to new and emerging OSH risks and to discuss the measures that have to be taken to prevent those risks
 - facilitating the information flow and collaboration between researchers, research institutions, OSH funding agencies and all interested parties
- This will be achieved by initiating a Forum on new and emerging risks which will be organised yearly. The Forum will contribute to achieving all the NEW OSH ERA objectives.

The NEW OSH ERA Consortium is fully aware of the rapid changes in the working life and work environment and the continuous need to probe new and emerging risks at work.

Setting priorities for research on new and emerging risks in Europe and influencing OSH research funding policies at national and European level

- The world of work is changing continuously and risk and hazards at the workplaces are changing as well. Priorities for joint activities need to be evaluated and adjusted, which requires “looking forward”.
- As one of the future joint initiatives, NEW OSH ERA will extend foresight activities based on the experiences of the foresight study carried out as task 5.2 of the NEW OSH ERA project
- The aim is to network similar activities carried out at national level and to influence priority setting and funding strategies. Pooling the resources will allow an enlargement in the range and scope of these activities. It will be ensured that the foresight activities do not overlap with the activities carried out by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work.

Increasing awareness of the importance of research into new and emerging risks and raising the profile of OSH research are crucial for NEW OSH ERA in order to ensure the necessary political and financial support at national and European level as a precondition for success.

Increasing awareness of the importance of research into new and emerging risks and raising the profile of OSH research

- NEW OSH ERA will enhance communication and dissemination activities at the national and European level by all means that are available for the Consortium Members
- The Forum on New and emerging OSH risks will play an important role in achieving this objective

- Risk communication will be part and parcel of NEW OSH ERA joint activities including as a potential topic for seminar series or as an area on its own in the joint research programme.

The following strategies are related to networking, public relations and communication and are linked to all strategic objectives of NEW OSH ERA

Forming strategic alliances and partnerships

- Already identified potential partnerships – with social partners, PEROSH, ETPIS – will be further developed and other possibilities to form alliances or start cooperation e.g. with public and private insurance companies will be examined.
- The Consortium Members will further strengthen national networks, involving OSH research funding organisations and other relevant stakeholders.
- NEW OSH ERA will establish links with DG SANCO, DG Environment and the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC)
- NEW OSH ERA has been in touch with several other ERA-NETs exchanging information and learning from their experiences. NEW OSH ERA will continue cooperating with other ERA-NETs not only in terms of exchange of information and good practices, but also in terms of exploring possibilities for joint activities, e.g. exchange of project managers, study visits or including an OSH module in another ERA-NET call.

Public relations and communication

- Public relations (PR) and communication are crucial for NEW OSH ERA as it needs political and financial support in order to achieve its objectives. NEW OSH ERA will enhance PR activities and communication at European and national level to
 - promote the visibility of NEW OSH ERA
 - push OSH higher on the European political agenda
 - promote the integration of OSH in all relevant EU policies (health, environment, employment, research funding)
 - increase awareness of the importance of research into new and emerging risks
 - to involve OSH stakeholders at the policy level, social partners, and other interested parties so that they support the consortium to achieve its objectives

Priorities for joint activities

While defining the priorities for joint activities, the following were taken into consideration

- The results of the information exchange phase of the project and the two reports produced by NEW OSH ERA:
 - Report on Complementarities, gaps and new opportunities in research on OSH-related new and emerging risks
 - Overview of research funding programmes on OSH- related new and emerging risks
- The results of the foresight study: Foresight study on future challenges of OSH research
- Community Strategy 2007-2012 on health and safety at work
- The work of the Risk Observatory of the European Agency
- Social partners opinions
 - Written comments provided after the Strategic workshop

The priorities agreed are as follow:

- Combined exposure to multiple risk factors (the scope will be defined later; one possibility would be to focus on a sector, e.g. waste treatment and recycling)
- Specific health problems caused by dangerous substances (e.g. work-related cancers, cardiovascular diseases, reproductive health disorders, allergies and asthma)
- Psychosocial risks associated with organisational changes and new working and employment patterns (e.g. impact of precarious work), illnesses associated with psychological stress
- New groups at risk due to the demographic change and structural changes of the European workforce, including migrants, women, ageing and temporary workers
- Nanosafety and safe nanotechnologies
- Biological hazards in the work environment
- Complex human-machine interfaces

The topics will be further specified involving the OSH research community

We, the NEW OSH ERA Consortium Members, agree with the general ideas expressed in this Memorandum of Common Understanding. Furthermore, we commit ourselves to the objectives of NEW OSH ERA:

SIGNATURES:

For the Co-ordinator, the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health:

Done at Helsinki,

For the Finnish Work Environment Fund, TSR, Finland

Done at Helsinki,

For the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Finland

Done at Helsinki,

For the Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, BAUA, Germany

Done at

For the Central Institute for Labour Protection - National Research Institute, CIOP-PIB, Poland

Done at

For the Project Management Organization at DLR, Project Management Organization for the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, PT-DLR, Germany

Done at

For the German Social Accident Insurance, DGUV, Germany

Done at

For the National Research Centre for the Working Environment, NRCWE, Denmark

Done at

For the Research Unit for the Improvement of Working Conditions DiOVA/DiRACT,
General Directorate for the Humanization of Work, Ministry of Labour, FOD WASO,
Belgium

Done at

For the Italian National Institute for Prevention and Safety at Work, ISPESL, Italy

Done at

For the Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research, FAS, Sweden

Done at

For the Hungarian Institute of Occupational Health, OMFI, Hungary

Done at

For the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, EU-OSHA, EU

Done at

For the Hellenic Institute for Occupational Health & Safety, ELINYAE, Greece

Done at

For the Ministry of Employment and Social Protection, Greece

Done at

For the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Germany

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For the Ministry of Health, Italy

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For the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Poland

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For the French Agency for Environmental and Occupational Health Safety, AFSSET, France

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For TNO, Netherlands

Done at

For the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, Netherlands

Done at