

TECHNICAL NOTE 8

Germany

Strengthening the Farm Health and Safety Policy and Governance Framework in Germany



Farming remains one of the most hazardous occupations in Europe. A SafeHabitus analysis (2024) found that farm fatalities are underreported by at least 70%, highlighting the need for improved safety practices, equipment, and facilities. Improving farm health and safety requires action from many stakeholders, supported by strong policies and well-coordinated governance. SafeHabitus maps and evaluates policy frameworks in 11 EU Member States to provide recommendations for improving farm safety at both national and EU levels.

Policy and governance overview in Germany

With the implementation of the EU Framework Directive (Council Directive 89/391) into national law, the Occupational Safety and Health Act and its regulations have been the central piece of legislation governing occupational safety and health since 1996. Prior to this, there were numerous individual laws on specific aspects of protection, such as maternity protection, working hours and workplaces. With the introduction of statutory accident insurance in 1883, occupational safety has been firmly anchored in the system of statutory accident insurance to this day. The tasks of the accident insurance branches by law are to prevent accidents and illnesses, restore health in the event of damage and provide compensation in the form of cash benefits.

Germany therefore has a dual occupational safety and health system in which state and autonomous law interact (Fig. 1). The state (at state and federal level) enacts legislation and promulgates regulations and issues rules through state boards. After examination of their needs, and with the approval of the Federal and State governments, the accident insurance institutions release their own accident prevention rules.

Germany

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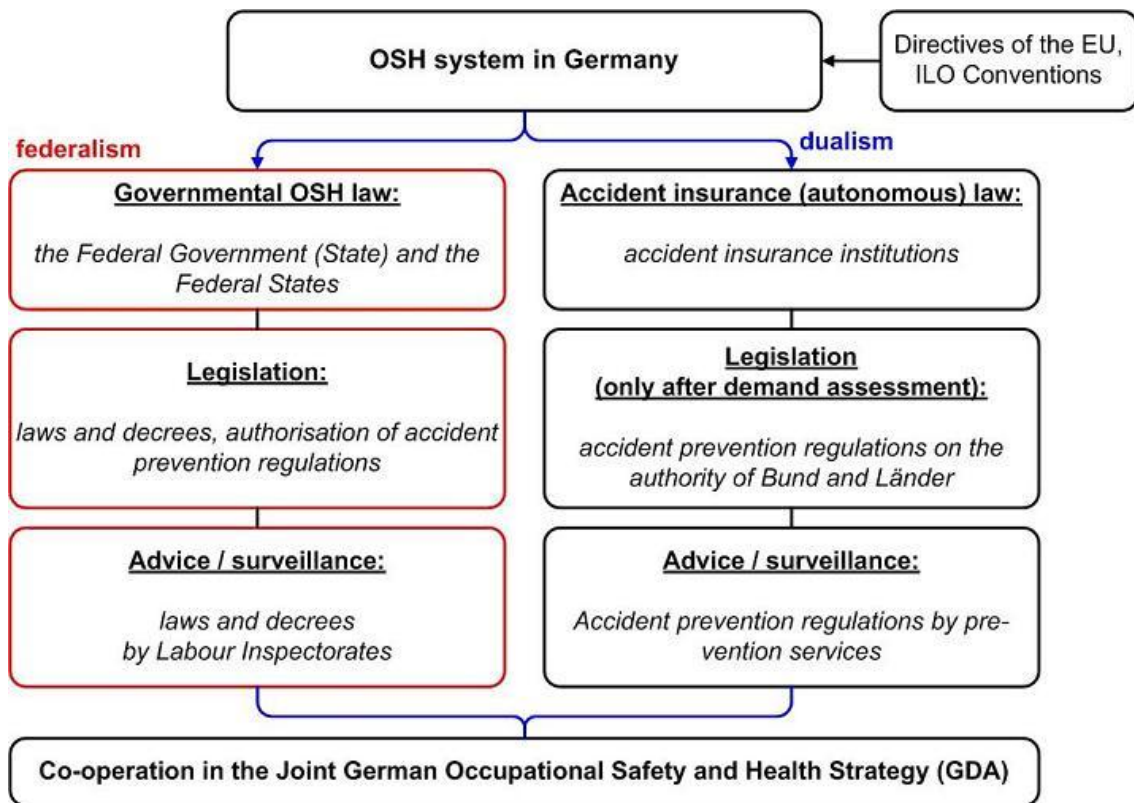


Figure 1: Legal framework of OSH system in Germany (Source: <https://oshwiki.osha.europa.eu/>)

Statutory accident insurance therefore plays a central role in the further development of occupational safety in various industries in accordance with requirements (needs and laws).

The legal basis for this can be found in Section 14 of Book Seven of the Social Code (SGB VII). It states:

Section 14

(1) The accident insurance institutions shall use all appropriate means to prevent occupational accidents, occupational diseases and work-related health hazards and to provide effective first aid. In doing so, they shall also investigate the causes of work-related hazards to life and health.

(2) The accident insurance institutions shall cooperate with the health insurance funds in the prevention of work-related health hazards.

(3) The accident insurance institutions shall participate in the development, implementation and updating of the joint German occupational safety and health strategy in accordance with the provisions of Section V of the Occupational Safety and Health Act and the national prevention strategy pursuant to Sections 20d to 20f of Book V.

(4) The German Social Accident Insurance Association shall support the accident insurance institutions in fulfilling their prevention tasks pursuant to paragraph 1. In particular, it shall perform the following tasks:

1. Coordination, implementation and promotion of joint measures and research in the field of prevention of occupational accidents, occupational diseases and work-related health hazards,

2. Clarification of fundamental technical and legal issues to ensure uniform application of the law in the field of prevention.

Through cooperation with state regulatory authorities, general protection goals can be defined in a targeted and needs-based manner, taking into account practical requirements.

The extent, to which occupational safety and health are promoted, supported, demanded or further developed by specific interest groups outside the state and accident insurance institutions can be determined by examining informal structures and governance. Actor mapping as a structured approach offers a good opportunity to gain insights into the socio-political field of interaction surrounding occupational safety and health.

Methodology of mapping the farm health and safety policy and governance framework

A structured methodology was developed to systematically map and evaluate FHS governance frameworks across 11 EU Member States. This process involved three key steps:

1. Desk research to identify existing policies and governance structures;
2. Expert meeting to refine and validate findings; and
3. Guided evaluation of the draft actor map during the first National Policy Dialogue (NPD).

A for this purpose developed actor map applied the **Importance, Influence, and Interest Matrix (IIM)**, categorising actors within the Quadruple Helix (QH) Model: (i) farmers, citizen groups, and NGOs, (ii) public organisations, (iii) private organisations, and (iv) research and education institutions.

The IIM, which was used in all 11 Member States as a standardised approach, provides a reliable basis for developing evidence-based recommendations to the EU institutions and supports improvements in national frameworks for health and safety in agriculture and in governance.

The process in Germany comprised an initial draft prepared by the Community of Practice (CoP) administration team using desktop analysis in accordance with the underlying IIM. Thanks to the knowledge available here as the responsible accident insurance provider, it has been possible to bring together sound expertise and practical experience in occupational safety in agriculture.

This initial draft of the IIM was presented for discussion not only in the German CoP and also at a workshop for OSH managers in the prevention department of the SVLFG (Image 1.).





Image 1.: Discussion on influence and interest of stakeholders between OSH managers and prevention experts at SVLFG - Used with permission

The development of the IIM has shown that many interest groups consider themselves particularly influential and interested, even though they are not actively involved in occupational safety or occupational health and safety programmes in agriculture. However, the participants, including members of various technical committees within the SVLFG, did not focus solely on the IIM, but also outlined important trend topics that will influence the strategic direction of prevention.

In this respect, the workshop also marked the beginning of a more comprehensive process that will shape future approaches to prevention work in the German green sector. The prevention department has thus become aware that it is exploiting occupational safety when it serves companies as a complacent service provider, which in a sense has a counterproductive effect on development processes within the companies.

Germany also deviated slightly from the originally intended format of the NPD. The reason for this lies in the fact that SVLFG already provides an established system offering social protection based on the relevant laws and regulations. Therefore, the approach was not to reach out to politics and stakeholders in order to address general needs in the field of occupational safety and health, but rather to discuss shortcomings within the existing system and network, so that gaps could be closed and cooperation further strengthened.

Against this background, the setting of the first German NPD took place during the Green Week in Berlin, from January 20–22, 2025. The International Green Week in Berlin takes place since 1926 as a trade fair for food, agriculture, and horticulture, attracting around 310,000 visitors annually as well as delegations from more than 50 countries.

Within this framework of Green Week in Berlin (the political heart of Germany) IIM was then presented to visitors from politics and agriculture, where it was scrutinized and discussed. The dialogues also focused on, at that time current topic, social conditionality and its implementation in Germany.

Leading representatives from the following institutions and organisations were reached in personal dialogues and discussion rounds at the SVLFG booth, where the SafeHabitus project as a whole was also promoted:

- Social Insurance for Agriculture, Forestry and Horticulture (SVLFG)



- European Network of Agricultural Social Protection Systems (ENASP)
- Federation of German Rural Youth (BDL)
- Agrarscouts Network
- Forum Modern Agriculture
- Leibniz Institute for Agricultural Engineering and Bioeconomy (ATB)
- Hanover Rural Women's Association (NLV)
- Hessian Rural Youth
- IG Bauen-Agrar-Umwelt (IG BAU), Trade Union
- Rheinischer Landwirtschaftsverband (RLV), State Farmers Association
- Ministry for Economy, Tourism, Agriculture and Forestry of the State of Sachsen-Anhalt German Bundestag
- German Farmers Association (DBV)
- Chamber of Agriculture Rheinland-Pfalz
- German Winegrowers Association (DWV)
- Chamber of Agriculture Niedersachsen



Image 2: Discussion with the Agrarscouts on OSH in agriculture and potential stakeholders during the first National Policy Dialogue in Germany - Used with permission



Image 3: From right to left – Martin Empl (SVLFG Chairman and ENASP President), State Minister Sven Schulze (Ministry for Economy, Tourism, Agriculture and Forestry of the State of Sachsen-Anhalt), and CoP Administrator Klaus Klugmann - Used with permission

The German Engagement Matrix developed in this way was then presented to the CoP at its sixth meeting on 15 April 2025 and then opened for discussion.

During the CoP meeting and discussion, the social partners (trade unions, employers' associations) were strongly classified as areas of high interest and high influence for the IIM. In addition, the role of new media (social media) in general was also highlighted, and the importance of influencers from the agricultural sector was emphasised. The CoP noted that occupational safety in agriculture is hardly represented in the competition for media attention on social networks.

The process shown in Figure 2 resulted in a consolidated picture that shows that occupational health and safety is universally valued by all stakeholders involved and enjoys broad, verbal support.



Figure 2: Incremental process of the Actor Mapping in Germany

The result was an IIM in which the majority of stakeholders see themselves as being in the high interest/high influence category. Formally, most stakeholders affirm the significance and importance of occupational health and safety when asked or when commenting publicly. However, when we look at the everyday activities and visibility of occupational safety and health among these actors and groups, a different picture emerges. Here, the statutory accident insurance system, with its statutory prevention mandate, is unanimously seen as the focus of active consultation, information and supervision. This results in an ambivalent picture in which occupational safety and health is fully endorsed, but at the same time delegated to the responsible statutory accident insurance provider on a fiduciary basis. In this context, no stakeholder has been identified that is progressively promoting occupational



safety and health to others for their own sake. Exceptions to this are paid consulting service providers and individuals with a mindset of moral duty of care, who can be found at all levels of society.

It was also not possible to fill an IIM field that took into account stakeholders with high interest and low influence. According to the statements of the representatives of the stakeholders involved, high interest usually always leads to the development of opportunities to exert influence. No interest group could be identified that has a high interest in occupational safety in agriculture with low or little opportunity to exert influence.

Coordination and leadership

The results of the desktop research, expert survey and NPD paint the picture described above. Statutory accident insurance is at the heart of all socio-political efforts to promote occupational safety. Occupational safety processes and developments are largely initiated, managed and directed by this institution. The legal basis for this is provided by Social Code 7, which, together with state occupational safety and health legislation, forms the basis for action. The SVLFG is the professional association for the green sector and is at the centre of all prevention activities, including the exchange of information on safety and health in agriculture with politicians. In Germany, when the term occupational safety and health is mentioned, the reflexive response is professional association (= statutory accident insurance).

Farmer Engagement

The profession has a significant influence on the self-administration of the SVLFG: in the representative assembly and executive board, elected representatives from agriculture, forestry and horticulture contribute practical knowledge, set priorities for prevention, decide on statutes, budgets and programmes, and accompany the implementation of accident prevention regulations. Technical and prevention committees advise on specific risks (e.g. machinery, animal husbandry, protection against chemicals) and initiate campaigns, training courses and advisory services right down to the farm level.

Farmers have the following tasks, among others:

- As entrepreneurs/insured persons, they elect the self-governing bodies and can take on mandates themselves (honorary self-government in accordance with SGB IV/VII).
- They are involved in the development of prevention goals, principles, budget decisions and priorities in occupational safety.
- Through committees and hearings, they contribute industry standards and practical experience to rule-making and programmes.

This is intended to establish processes and procedures in businesses such as:

- Carrying out risk assessments, providing instruction, providing and using PPE, and operating machinery and equipment safely.
- Reporting accidents and near misses, participating in SVLFG consultations/training courses, utilising occupational health and safety support.
- Setting an example in the workplace, promoting a culture of safety and continuously improving measures.

The SVLFG thus has the central legal and active task of developing working practices for effective prevention with the help of self-administration and managing the transfer of these practices into practice.

Recommendations

Regulation-based and institutionalised occupational safety and health in Germany has a long history and regulates the provision of advice and monitoring of agricultural businesses by the employers' liability insurance association by law (Social Code VII). This ensures that state occupational safety and health law is implemented in businesses in line with requirements and in coordination with the occupational safety and health authorities. This may have led to occupational safety and health being seen not as a separate task but as an institutional one, with the expectation that the issue will be addressed from outside. A continuing and challenging task in this context is to develop a rethink within sector organisations and companies, so that occupational safety and health is seen as a task for which they themselves are responsible, developed from within and not imposed on companies from outside, sometimes 'by force'.

Frank Gutheil, Head of Prevention at the SVLFG, summarised: 'Occupational safety must not be an unavoidable external obligation for companies. They need to rethink their approach and want to develop, integrate and implement prevention measures from within. Our task is to support this process with expertise and inspiration.'

As a first step, an additional workshop was held in March 2025 with farmers of the self-administrative body to initiate a process aimed at improving the effectiveness of professional self-administration as a multiplier in everyday practice. One of the outcomes of this workshop was the recommendation that all administrative and legal measures should be reviewed in terms of their practical effectiveness. In other words, whether they achieve anything in terms of improving occupational safety or whether they are just another regulation that has no effect and, in the worst case, only adds to the bureaucratic burden.



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