



European Construction Sector Observatory

Policy fact sheet

Spain

SME Plan 2018 in Occupational Risk Prevention for
companies in the Construction Sector in Aragon

Thematic objectives 2, 4 & 5

February 2020

In a nutshell

Implementing body	Labour Foundation for the Construction Sector in Aragon and the Government of Aragon
Key features & objectives	To contribute to better and secure working conditions in SMEs of the construction sector in Aragon
Implementation date	1996 - ongoing
Targeted beneficiaries	SMEs of the construction sector in Aragon
Targeted sub-sectors	Promoters, main contractors and subcontractors of the construction sector in Aragon
Budget (EUR)	Government of Aragon: EUR 16,800 Labour Foundation for the Construction Sector in Aragon and the Government of Aragon: EUR 4,200
Good practice	★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆
Transferability	★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆

Following the economic crisis in 2008, the number of new homes built in Spain fell sharply from 850,000 in 2007 to just 35,000 in 2013 and 2014. The sector then began to recover between 2013 and 2017, achieving a 26.9% growth in total turnover¹.

The construction sector in the community of Aragon also experienced positive developments over recent years. For example, the regional construction sector share of Aragon's total assets grew from 5.5% to 6.3% between 2018 and 2019².

However, this increase of construction activities was accompanied by a growth in the number of occupational accidents. As a result, health, safety and risk prevention are increasingly in the spotlight.

The number of occupational accidents in the construction sector in Aragon has increased each year since 2015. Data indicates that the majority of these accidents occurred within SMEs. In 2018, for example, 65-70% of all occupational accidents registered in Aragon (across all sectors) occurred within SMEs. It is also these types of companies that tend not to have an occupational risk prevention plan in place³.

To help reduce the number of accidents in the workplace, the Labour Foundation for the Construction Sector in Aragon and the Government of Aragon signed a framework agreement to develop the 'SME 10' Occupational Risk Prevention Plan for Construction Sector Companies in Aragon (*Plan de Prevención de Riesgos Laborales PYME 10 en el sector de la construcción en la Comunidad de Aragón*). The SME 10 Plan was first launched in 1996 and it has been continuously renewed since then.

The purpose of the SME 10 Plan is to help improve working conditions for SME employees in the regional construction sector. This is achieved by assessing SME compliance with health and safety regulations, using formal certification as a reward for those that comply and an incentive for those that do not.

In its 24th year of implementation, the SME 10 Plan achieved a moderate yet sustained success. Over 3,700 SMEs have participated in the SME 10 Plan, involving an average of 154 SME visits per year by risk prevention inspectors. With over 12,000 construction sector SMEs operating in Aragon, the SME 10 Plan has had a relatively modest impact on the regional sector, albeit valuable for the participants. That said, both the longevity of the scheme and stakeholder feedback point to the importance and relevance of the SME 10 Plan to the regional sector.

The scheme is still ongoing and is rolled out annually. Looking forward, it would benefit from increased resourcing, in terms of extra risk prevention inspectors. Greater numbers of inspectors would increase the SME visit and assessment rate.

1.

General description

The SME 10 Occupational Risk Prevention Plan for construction sector companies in Aragon is the product of a collaboration between the Government of Aragon (Department of Economy, Industry and Employment) and the Labour Foundation for the Construction Sector in Aragon. First launched in 1996, it is rolled out on an annual basis and is still ongoing. It aims to help create better and more secure working conditions in SMEs in the construction sector⁴.

The Labour Foundation for the Construction Sector was established in 1992 to give companies and workers the opportunity to create a more professional, secure, productive and prosperous construction sector in Spain. It is a national foundation with 17 territorial councils in different autonomous regions, one of which is Aragon⁵. In parallel to creating initiatives such as the SME 10 Plan, the Labour Foundation for the Construction Sector offers more than 200 training courses which are delivered through 48 training centres across the whole of Spain, with more than 1,400 collaborating professionals.

To participate in the SME 10 scheme, companies are required to complete an online questionnaire, providing basic contact information (company name, contact name, phone number and email)⁶. Participants must be SMEs operating in the construction sector, with no occupational safety and health certification acquired within the previous two years. Participation is free of charge⁷.

Once a company decides to participate, a qualified evaluator visits the company and performs an occupational risk prevention assessment. The evaluator verifies compliance with current regulations governing occupational risk prevention in the construction sector. Figure 2 lists the ten aspects of the risk prevention assessment that are evaluated.

Figure 1: SME risk prevention topics assessed



Source: Boletín Oficial de Aragón (BOA)⁸

During an assessment visit, a company will receive all the pertinent occupational safety and health material developed by the Labour Foundation for the construction sector free of charge⁹.

Once the assessment is completed, the results are delivered 'in situ'. If a company passes the assessment, an 'SME 10 Certificate' is awarded. Companies that do not pass the assessment do not receive a certificate but can request a second assessment following improvement actions¹⁰. Certification is intended to encourage SMEs to comply with health and safety regulations.

The SME 10 scheme is designed to:

1. Enable developers, contractors and subcontractors to certify their occupational risk prevention processes and measures as 'good practice' and compliant with regulations, to the benefit of companies and clients;
2. Provide a framework to guide and support occupational risk prevention in construction sector SMEs¹¹.

The annual overall cost of the SME 10 scheme is EUR 21,000. The Government of Aragon funds 80% of the total cost each year (EUR 16,800)¹².

2.

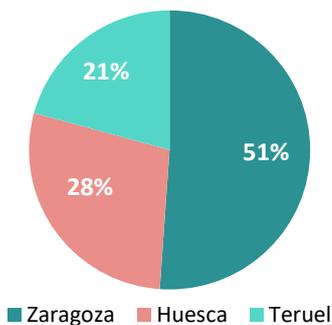
Achieved or expected results

Since the launch of the SME 10 Plan in 1996, over 3,700 occupational risk prevention assessment visits have been conducted. That equates to an average of 154 visits per year (over 24 years)¹³.

Participation in the SME 10 scheme is just the first step towards improving health and safety regulatory compliance for many companies. Achieving certification is not easy, as the annual success rates indicate. In 2017, for example, only 40% of participating companies (54 out of 135) passed the occupational risk prevention assessment and were subsequently certified. Three quarters of those that succeeded passed during their first time (i.e. after one assessment visit). The remaining quarter passed during their second time (i.e. they failed the first assessment but passed the second assessment, having implemented improvements)¹⁴. In the following year (2018), the success rate fell by just over 10 percentage points, with just 29% of participating companies achieving certification (37 out of 126)¹⁵.

Figure 3 shows the percentage of participating companies by province in 2017. Just over half of the 135 companies involved that year were located in the province of Zaragoza (51%), followed by Huesca (28%) and Teruel (21%)¹⁶.

Figure 2: Percentage of participating companies by province (2017)

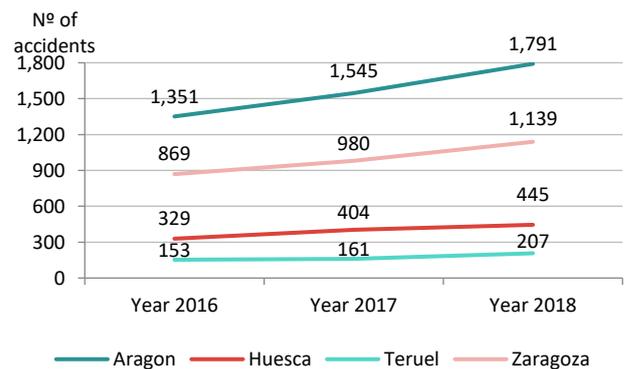


Source: Labour Foundation for the Construction Sector in Aragon¹⁷

In terms of company size, 94 of the 135 companies that participated in the SME 10 scheme in 2017 were micro-enterprises with up to 10 employees (70%), 34 were small companies with 11-49 employees (25%) and 7 were medium-sized companies with 50 and 249 employees (5%)¹⁸.

While a significant number of SMEs participated in the SME-10 Plan and got the 'SME 10 Certificate', the number of occupational accidents that occur in the regional construction sector increased. Figure 4 shows the number of occupational accidents between 2016 and 2018. The number has actually risen by an extra 200 each year, in spite of the work done by schemes such as SME 10. While this means that the sectoral impacts of the SME 10 Plan are more limited than anticipated, it does not mean that the number of occupational accidents increased in the companies, which obtained the 'SME 10 Certificate'.

Figure 3: Number of occupational accidents in Aragon in 2016, 2017 and 2018

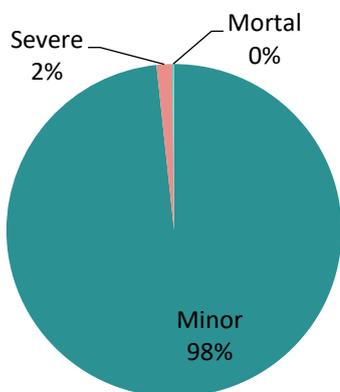


Source: Ministry of employment, migration and social security¹⁹

Figure 5 shows the percentage of occupational accidents by their degree of severity (minor, severe and fatal). Although the data only records the nature of accidents that occurred in 2018, it broadly reflects the general annual trend. Almost all of the accidents recorded are classified as minor accidents

(98.32%). By comparison, 3 occupational accidents resulted in fatalities in 2018 (0.17%).

Figure 4: Level of the severity the occupational accidents in Aragon in 2018.



Source: Ministry of Employment, Migration and Social Security²⁰

To help reduce the number of occupational accidents that are occurring, the Government of Aragon works with health and safety experts to propose improvement measures for each of the companies that are assessed through the SME 10 scheme. In 2017, for example, a total of 1,004 measures were recommended for implementation. In 2018, the number of measures proposed increased to 1,080. These improvement measures are recommended to enable participating SMEs to achieve SME 10 certification – i.e. they did not pass the first assessment. Those SMEs are then re-assessed to verify that the improvements have been implemented²¹.

3.

Perspectives and lessons learned

The SME 10 scheme is particularly appealing to micro-companies. They make up approximately two thirds of all participants. Micro-companies often lack the resources (human and financial) needed to create, implement and monitor an occupational risk prevention plan without external guidance. SME 10 is therefore an important opportunity for them, giving them access to practical advice and support, free of charge.

According to the Director General of Employment within the Government of Aragon, the SME 10 Plan is a key initiative because it targets micro-companies. Smaller companies account for the majority of occupational accidents. Helping these types of companies to develop and implement occupational risk prevention plans and measures is most relevant to reduce the overall number of accidents that occur²².

On the difficulties that smaller companies may face when considering whether to invest in an occupational risk prevention plan, the General Secretary of the Federation of Industry, Construction and Agriculture in Aragon (*FICA UGT Aragón*²³) argues that health and safety should not be seen as a cost, but rather as an investment that will benefit the company²⁴. It is hence important to raise awareness and help SMEs and micro-companies understand the tangible benefits of such investments. Not only does occupational risk prevention improve working conditions for employees, it also helps to improve quality, productivity and company reputation.

One of the companies recognising the advantage of being SME 10 certified is the demolition company, *Reciclados y Demoliciones San Juan*. The company underwent an occupational risk prevention assessment in 2014 and was subsequently awarded with the SME 10 certificate²⁵ by the Construction Labour Foundation in Aragon. The company's management team believes in the certification route as a means of validating the good practices

within their organisation. This, they contend, was sufficient reason to participate in SME 10. The commercial value of quality certificates is also an additional benefit²⁶.

The annual success rate for the SME 10 occupational risk prevention assessments is relatively low. Less than half of those that participate actually gain certification. In some years, the success rate was below 50%, even when including those that require two evaluations to gain certification²⁷. This indicates the size of the occupational risk challenge in smaller construction companies and the need for improvements.

To achieve zero accidents, according to the Director of Human Resources at Damm, a food and beverage producer and distributor, it is essential to make everyone aware of the need for occupational risk prevention, as well as the good practices in health and safety that make prevention possible. Improvement actions require the participation of the whole workforce²⁸.

In spite of the work being done by the SME 10 Plan, the number of accidents in the construction sector in Aragon continues to increase.

Some stakeholders point to issues with inspection and assessment procedures. In the case of the SME 10 Plan, an occupational risk evaluator visits a company once (or twice if the company fails the first assessment) before awarding an SME 10 certificate. The concern of some stakeholders is that some SMEs prepare themselves specifically for the on-site assessment, without partially (or fully) integrating the Occupational Risk Prevention Plan into the company's working processes and daily activities.

According to a Risk Prevention Technician, many companies (especially SMEs) consider risk prevention to be little more than a legal requirement. As long as companies do not understand the tangible benefits of prevention

measures, they will often invest minimal effort to ensure compliance with the law. Such companies tend not to integrate their prevention plan into the company, nor do they promote a prevention culture among their employees. In addition, they often operate in a 'paper supports everything' mode. They are used to generating large amounts of paperwork to justify compliance (procedures, instructions, plans); however their actual risk prevention procedures are often of limited quality²⁹.

There are insufficient numbers of risk prevention inspectors compared to the number of companies in need.

At national level, there were around 2,000 risk prevention inspectors and sub-inspectors in Spain in 2017, compared to more than 3 million companies in Spain that would benefit from inspection. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), Spanish risk prevention inspectors completed an average of 171 company visits per person in 2017. This is well above the levels of their counterparts in Germany (134) and France (59)³⁰. More inspectors are hence needed in Aragon and across Spain to promote prevention.

4.

Conclusion and recommendations

The SME 10 Plan has proven to be a moderately successful initiative in Aragon. It is particularly tailored to help smaller construction companies with limited resources and knowledge to understand the health and safety risks in their workplaces, and to develop, implement and manage a risk prevention plan.

The main target group (SMEs) for the SME 10 Plan is well defined. The key challenge, however, is one of resources. There are over 12,000 SMEs in the Aragonese construction sector³¹ and the Construction Labour Foundation in Aragon does not have the resources to visit, assess and assist all of them. Over the last 24 years, since the launch of the scheme in 1996, an average of 154 visits have been completed per year, reaching a total of 3,700. That is less than one third of the number of construction sector SMEs in the region.

There is some concern that many SMEs may have participated in the SME 10 risk prevention assessment and certification process in order to obtain certification (to gain prestige and commercial advantage), without fully committing to risk prevention and integrating their prevention plan into their company procedures. Although such a scenario is not optimal, one could argue that at least those companies have taken a step in the right direction. In addition, peer and customer pressure may encourage them to take further steps in the future.

A final concern about the SME 10 Plan is the relatively low success rate of the SMEs that have participated in the scheme. In average, less than half achieve certification each year. This emphasises the need for and value of the SME 10 scheme; however, much more needs to be done to reduce the increasing number of occupational accidents.

Looking forward, three recommendations are suggested to help improve the impact of the SME 10 Plan:

- To increase the number of SMEs visited as part of the SME 10 scheme, risk prevention inspector training programmes should be scaled up to increase the number of trained inspectors;
- Awareness raising campaigns are needed to communicate and reinforce the importance and benefit of risk prevention measures in the workplace. Changing attitudes and culture is not straightforward, but awareness campaigns are a useful starting basis for change. The 'Do you have what it takes? (*¿Tienes lo que hay que tener?*)' campaign³², developed by the Construction Labour Foundation, is one example of the type of campaigns that are needed to support actions such as SME 10;
- Many SMEs would benefit from risk prevention planning and management training to better enable them to integrate risk prevention plans into their company processes.

Overall, the SME 10 Plan is rated as a 3-star 'good practice' measure, on a scale from 1 (low) to 5 (high) stars

This score is based on the scheme's moderate yet sustained success over a 24-year period. The scheme has managed to reach over 3,700 SMEs in the region in that time; however, there are over 12,000 construction sector SMEs in Aragon.

The SME 10 Plan is rated as a '3-star transferable measure' on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high).

The SME 10 risk prevention and certification process may well be transferable to other regions and countries. However, the issue of resourcing (ensuring sufficient numbers of risk prevention inspectors) would need to be addressed.

Endnotes

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