



European Construction Sector Observatory

Policy fact sheet

Poland

'Construction Site! Stop the Accidents' Initiative

Thematic objective 2

September 2020

In a nutshell

Implementing body	National Labour Inspectorate (NLI) in collaboration with the Agreement for Safety in Construction
Key features & objectives	Awareness raising and training on safety and accident prevention in the construction sector
Implementation date	2014 - ongoing
Targeted beneficiaries	Employers and employees in the construction sector
Targeted sub-sectors	All construction sub-sectors, especially higher risk sub-sectors such as scaffolding or electrical installation
Budget (EUR)	Not published
Good practice	★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆
Transferability	★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆

According to the National Labour Inspectorate, construction is one of the most hazardous industries in Poland. Over the last decade, the sector has consistently recorded one of the highest risk of accidents of all sectors, as well as a high rate of violations of health and safety regulations¹.

Official data indicate that the construction sector ranks first in terms of fatal accidents at work, accounting for 28% of total fatalities². Some of the main causes are a lack of knowledge about safety procedures or their incorrect application. In particular, audit results show that working at height with inadequate protection is one of the most common concerns, causing 62% of fatal or serious accidents³.

To help reduce the accident rate in the construction sector, the National Labour Inspectorate launched

the ‘Work safely in construction – Falls and slips’ awareness raising campaign in 2009, in combination with more intensive supervision on large construction sites.

The campaign grew in importance and it was relaunched in 2014 as the ‘Construction Site! Stop the Accidents!’ (CSSA) initiative (*Budowa! Stop wypadkom!*). The new edition of the campaign continues to raise awareness on preventive measures in construction, combined with a much stronger focus on practical information and education⁴.

To date, the CSSA initiative continues to prevent accidents in construction by disseminating knowledge about the pervasiveness of accidents and the importance of safety procedures in the sector. To help construction companies create a safety culture in their organisations and on construction sites, the CSSA initiative offers occupational safety and health (OSH) and accident prevention trainings, awareness raising actions, training and awareness raising materials, and a ‘Safety Week’ organised in collaboration with the private sector.

The ‘Construction Site! Stop the Accidents!’ initiative trained more than 7,719 employees since its launch in 2014. The last two editions of the initiative’s main event, the Safety Week, have also attracted over 3,500 participants⁵.

Although injuries and fatalities in the construction sector remain a key concern, their numbers are decreasing year on year. This suggests that the CSSA initiative is relatively successful, gaining traction in the sector. As importantly, it is helping an increasing number of construction companies to create an OSH culture. The high level of stakeholder engagement achieved is a key success factor. Looking forward however, the lack of an impact evaluation framework is a key concern that should be addressed.

1.

General description

The 'Construction site! Stop the accidents!' (*Budowa! Stop wypadkom*) initiative is managed by the National Labour Inspectorate (NLI). The NLI is a government agency that is tasked with enforcing labour law, including health and safety regulations, by implementing targeted controls and preventive measures to limit the risk of accidents⁶.

The 'Construction site! Stop the accidents!' (CSSA) initiative specifically targets the construction sector because of the high risk of fatal and serious accidents in the sector. The goal is to raise awareness and educate stakeholders about the risk of accidents and the measures that can be implemented to prevent them. Ultimately, the aim is to improve the implementation of occupational safety laws and standards in the sector⁷. The initiative targets both construction employers and employees, as well as secondary school and university students.

The prevention programme integrates several action lines, including occupational safety training, a Safety Week and the production of training and awareness-raising materials. One of the key activities is the provision of occupational safety training for employers, employees and freelancers.

Occupational safety training is delivered free of charge by NLI regional offices throughout Poland. The training is designed to help employers, employees and freelancers to establish and practice safe ways of working in construction environments.

One of the most popular formats involves a combination of training and inspections. First, inspectors hold meetings and discussions with safety managers to identify the problems and challenges they face. Second, occupational safety training is provided onsite to address the issues identified. Third, follow-up safety inspections and

systematic checks are carried out to ensure correct adherence to regulations.

The topics addressed in training sessions include laws and regulations on occupational safety and health (OSH), safety procedures and good practices, the correct use of collective and individual protection measures, and specific guidelines for hazardous and high-risk forms of work, such as scaffolding, roofing, handling machinery, etc.

The NLI reports that, in many cases, security supervision is entrusted to young and inexperienced employees. For that reason, training is regularly provided to secondary school and university students that are looking to qualify for construction-related professions⁸.

An annual Safety Week event is organised in collaboration with the private sector, in particular, with the signatories of the Agreement for Safety in Construction (*Porozumienie dla Bezpieczeństwa w Budownictwie*).

The Safety Week is an initiative led by the private sector. There are 13 signatories, some of which are the main construction companies operating in Poland, such as Warbud, Eiffage, Unibep and Skanska⁹. As part of the Safety Week, onsite training sessions on health and safety at work are held at selected construction sites. Training activities during this event mainly include:

- Courses to improve employee qualifications;
- First aid training;
- Demonstrations of rescue procedures;
- Demonstrations of the use of modern technical construction solutions delivered by suppliers and producers of occupational safety and health equipment;
- Safety competitions¹⁰.

To support its initiative and the Safety Week, the NLI provides materials and publications on good practices and regulations for construction safety.

Guidelines and reports address topics related to safety in construction, as well as more hazardous activities such as working at height, electrical installations, handling of materials, working with chemicals, excavation work and roofing. Some examples are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Examples of guidelines and reports



Source: NLI¹¹

Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) cards provide a highly visual two-page summary of instructions and a checklist to enable companies to assess the implementation of security standards in specific activities. They also present visual examples of good practices of how to carry out certain activities or handle equipment. An example is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: OSH card example – ‘Working with electrical tools’



Source: NLI¹²

Safety cards are produced both in Polish and in Ukrainian, given the high number of Polish and Ukrainian workers in the Polish construction sector¹³.

Posters and visual materials are designed to raise awareness about the need for employers and employees to respect safety regulations. Two examples are shown in Figures 3 and 4.

Figure 3: Poster example – ‘Don’t be a victim, do your job professionally’



Source: NLI¹⁴

Figure 4: Poster example – ‘Respect life’



Source: NLI¹⁵

Articles on health and safety on a construction site are also produced and published. They include the roles and responsibilities of construction site operatives that are required to ensure compliance with preventive measures, as well as rules on the use of personal protective equipment¹⁶.

Local media is collaborating with this campaign by publishing NLI materials and information, and by helping to disseminate good practices in accident prevention in the construction sector¹⁷.

2.

Achieved or expected results

The 'Construction site! Stop the accidents!' (CSSA) initiative aims to create a safety culture and improve the implementation of safety regulations and good practices in the construction sector. Although no formal assessment of the initiative has been carried out, there are some indicators available on the initiative's achievements in recent years.

According to figures published by the NLI, the CSSA initiative had helped to improve working conditions in over 2,000 companies by the end of 2015¹⁸. In addition, the Agreement for Safety in Construction, which is closely involved with the CSSA initiative, reports that the Safety Week has also helped to prevent 2,300 accidents¹⁹.

Figures from NLI's annual activity reports provide a more detailed insight into the results of the initiative between 2014 and 2018, as shown in Table 1. During this period, the number of training sessions held fell by 35% (-93). However, the reduction did not negatively impact the number of attendees, with a rise of 14% (208) over the same period. This suggests a tendency towards fewer sessions but with greater capacity for attendance.

The number of inspections and training sessions, as a combination, reached an annual peak in 2016 (205) before falling over the following two years to 136, just below the number recorded in 2014 (138). This trend may indicate a reduction in demand by companies or a reallocation of resources to other activities by NLI.

The number of attendees for student training in 2018 was also down by 50%, compared to the number recorded in 2014. However, in the last three years for which data is available, the number of student attendees has been broadly stable. The high number recorded in 2014 may be an indication of the novelty of the initiative in its first year, with numbers levelling out in the following years, in line with demand and resources.

Table 1: Training activity results, 2014-18

Category	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
N° of training sessions	264	243	200	187	171
N° of attendees	1,421	1,574	1,576	1,546	1,629
N° of inspection + training	138	157	205	179	136
N° of attendees at training for students	1,600	500	930	930	808

Source: NLI²⁰

The total number of participants in the Safety Week grew slightly in 2018, compared to 2017, as shown in Table 2. In contrast, the number of training sessions for employers fell by nearly two thirds between 2017 and 2018. This reflects the general trend towards holding fewer sessions, but with greater participation.

Table 2: Safety Week results, 2017-18

Category	2017	2018
Total n° of participants	1,700	1,800
N° of training sessions for employers	300	110

Source: NLI²¹

Aside from the Safety Week, inspectors participated in 219 additional awareness raising events in 2018, an increase of 456% on the number recorded in 2017 (48). While comparable information on this indicator is not yet available for other years, resources dedicated to awareness raising events seem to be increasing.

Educational and training materials have been produced on a constant basis throughout the initiative. In terms of published results however, data on outreach is only available for 2017 (23,000) and 2018 (25,000), in terms of the number of materials disseminated, an annual rise of 8.5%.

The current initiative is building on the success of its predecessor, which first focused NLI's attention on safety issues in the construction industry. Between 2012 and 2014, the previous initiative ('Work safely in construction – Falls and slips') helped reduce injuries by 23% and fatalities by 33%. By comparison, the current initiative contributed to reducing injuries by 16% and fatalities by 13% between 2014 and 2018, according to the latest available data. The downward trend is therefore continuing, albeit at a slower pace.

Whereas the reduction in the number of injuries has been fairly gradual but constant, year on year, the number of fatalities has been harder to reduce. In 2015 and 2017, for example, there was an increase in the number of fatalities. The difference in both trends may be linked to the fact that, since 2015, companies have found it harder to recruit qualified construction employees in Poland²². This is relevant because fatalities or severe injuries are often linked

to high-risk, skilled activities such as scaffolding or roofing.

Table 3: Number of fatalities and injuries in construction, 2012-18

Category	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Fatalities	82	71	55	69	51	58	48
Injuries	8,145	6,712	6,265	5,766	5,468	5,390	5,274

Source: NLI²³

Overall, the figures shown in Table 3 are evidence that the number of injuries and fatalities in construction are decreasing, albeit at a slower pace than may have been expected. This suggests that the 'Construction site! Stop the accidents' initiative has achieved a certain degree of success, raising awareness about safety issues in the construction sector and the preventive measures that companies can take, and providing training to support their implementation.

3.

Perspectives and lessons learned

Building an effective and sustainable safety culture in the construction sector requires a long-term approach that nurtures cooperation with stakeholders.

The NLI succeeded in engaging stakeholders in the CSSA initiative. The NLI established close contact with staff members in charge of safety, provided information and training, and then followed up with systematic checks and inspections to ensure compliance. This supportive approach has been well received by the companies that have participated in the initiative. Inspections are particularly welcomed by participating companies because they help to push companies to improve their standards. According to the NLI, improved OSH standards are key to achieving long-term accident prevention²⁴. The organisation of the Safety Week in collaboration with major employers provides further evidence of NLI's success in engaging stakeholders.

The stakeholder engagement approach has enabled the CSSA initiative to tailor OSH training and materials to fit the interest and needs of specific employers and employees.

By working closely with stakeholders, the initiative is more effective at solving the problems faced by contractors. The approach also allows for discussions during the training sessions on specific solutions and the resolution of doubts about the potential impact of those solutions on ongoing work. Trade union representatives, for example, have expressed their support for the programme, highlighting the positive effect of OSH good practice dissemination and improvements in working and safety conditions²⁵.

The delivery of OSH training to upper secondary school and university students that are interested in joining the construction sector has been an important feature of the CSSA initiative.

NLI inspectors view the initiative's collaboration with universities and schools as having made an important contribution to the reduction of the accident rate on construction sites²⁶. New recruits in the sector are less experienced and more likely to suffer injury. Early stage OSH training is therefore a very important measure, providing potential new recruits with good practices to help them to work safely.

Stakeholder engagement is best achieved using a blended approach.

Companies are normally targeted by leveraging a combination of partner contacts, events, social media and invitation mailings. Stakeholders are invited by inspectors after performing checks, or by onsite managers, who provide space to conduct the training sessions. The NLI observed that invitations from onsite managers are a particularly effective way to attract employers to join the training, as they have the influence to urge their own subcontractors to participate²⁷.

Training content and delivery should provide clear messages and be highly practical.

A good example is the provision of onsite preventive training, where participants are shown good practices implemented on a real construction site. This practical approach to training has proven to be particularly popular during the Safety Week and is now applied in the majority of training provided.

In terms of publications and visual materials, a good example is the use of OSH cards. They include brief and clear instructions and checklists to enable companies to self-assess their own safety standards. They are particularly welcomed by SMEs and microenterprises. The NLI views these materials as one of the main strengths of the initiative. The NLI has consequently become a publisher of OSH materials for the construction sector²⁸, with a focus on providing information that is reliable, accessible and free of charge.

4.

Conclusion and recommendations

The 'Construction site! Stop the accidents!' (CSSA) initiative has built on the achievements of its predecessor by continuing to reduce the total number of injuries and fatalities in the construction sector. It has successfully engaged with investors, contractors, employees and trade unions. In turn, stakeholder engagement has enabled the initiative to better understand the specific OSH issues and challenges that each company faces and to develop tailored training and informative materials to meet specific needs.

The high level of engagement achieved with construction sector stakeholders has been welcomed by those involved in the initiative. In fact, it is considered to be an essential part of ongoing work to create a safety culture throughout the sector. The initiative is viewed as having achieved moderate success thus far in decreasing tolerance for unsafe practices and non-compliance with occupational health and safety regulations²⁹.

Compared to its predecessor, the current initiative has not achieved a similar level of reductions in both injuries and fatalities. The current initiative has reduced the number of injuries by 16% over 5-years (2014-2018) compared to a 23% reduction over three years (2012-2014) during the previous initiative. The difference in achievement is even more marked in terms of fatalities. The current initiative has reduced the number of fatalities by 13% over 5-years (2014-2018) compared to a 33% reduction over 3 years (2012-2014) during the previous initiative. At the same time, construction companies in Poland have experienced greater difficulty in recruiting qualified personnel since 2015. This may have contributed to increases in the number of fatalities recorded in 2015 and 2017.

Another weak point associated with the current initiative is the lack of an evaluation framework. According to the National Labour Inspectorate (NLI), measuring the results achieved by the initiative is complex, because it is dependent on the level of involvement of employers and employees, among other factors. The limited human resources available to the initiative is another challenge³⁰.

Looking forward, two recommendations are suggested to improve the CSSA initiative:

- An appropriate evaluation framework should be put in place to measure the results and impact of the initiative. Without such a framework in place, it will be difficult to understand how effective the initiative is and what improvements are needed to make it more effective;
- A more systematic approach to capturing stakeholder feedback and input is advised to aid the development and improvement of this and other measures. Currently, stakeholder feedback is largely captured by inspectors engaging directly with employers and employees during onsite activities. Although this is a very valid and useful source of information, it is somewhat limited in its reach. The use of complementary tools, such as periodic surveys, would enable the initiative to capture a much broader level of feedback from construction sector stakeholders. This would then help to inform improvement activities.

Overall, the 'Construction site! Stop the accidents!' initiative is rated as a '3-star good practice measure' on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high).

The score is based on the moderate success of the initiative compared to its predecessor, in terms of the overall reduction in the number of injuries and fatalities in the domestic construction sector. The lack of an evaluation framework is another contributing factor in the score.

The 'Construction site! Stop the accidents!' initiative is rated as a '3-star transferable measure' on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high).

The reasoning behind this score is similar to the scoring given for good practice. In its current form, having achieved moderate success and without an evaluation framework, the initiative as a whole is not considered to be particularly transferable.

However, there are elements of the initiative that do display potential for transferability:

- The stakeholder engagement, inspection and tailored training approach is one example of a potentially transferable method;
- The delivery of OSH training to upper secondary and university students that are interested in

joining the construction sector is an interesting and transferable concept;

- The 'Safety Week', which the NLI organises periodically in collaboration with important construction sector employers, is an example of a collaborative knowledge sharing instrument that could be easily transferable to other countries;
- The free of charge guidelines and visually informative materials produced by the initiative are a further example of potentially transferable outputs. They are particularly valued by SMEs and micro-enterprises. With less resources at their disposal, these types of support materials help them to self-assess and improve their own practices.

Endnotes

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