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LIGHT INDUSTRY

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Textil - Bekleidung - Schuh - Leder

Green Deal Leather



Towards Zero Impact of the European leather industry

Project 101051445

REPORT

WP2 - Study on Injuries/Accidents at the workplace



Funded by
the European Union

1. FOREWORD

Workplace safety in tanneries ranks among the highest priorities for the partners of the Social Dialogue of the European leather/tanning sector. These are not empty words. The EU Social Partners, COTANCE and industriAll European Trade Union (industriAll Europe), have dedicated significant efforts and concrete joint project activities to this topic. In 2011, in cooperation with EU OSHA and with the support of the European Commission, they developed the first version of the OiRA tool for Risk Assessment in tanneries. A practical and freely available instrument which is meant to assist tanneries, in particular Micro-enterprises and SMEs, to develop their own company Risk Assessment Reports & Risk Mitigation Plans. With this, the EU Social Partners sought to ensure that workplace health and safety became a core concern for both employers, and workers around the world. Very rapidly the Risk Assessment Reports & Risk Mitigation Plans tool has become one of the most popular tools within OiRA and has received the endorsement of UNIDO. OiRA for Tanneries was subsequently revised in 2017-2019 in the context of a new Social Dialogue project looking into Due Diligence for health and safety in leather supply chains.

Employers and workers in European tanneries very clearly do not want to be associated with the appalling practices in poorly managed businesses in some, less regulated, non-European countries, which use rudimentary, or even dangerous, equipment and processes which damage the public image of the global tanning and leather sector. European social partners want such unacceptable and outdated processes to become a thing of the past, because they are detrimental to both workers health and the environment. They also do not represent the practices in modern production sites, such as those in Europe, who are striving to be a model in both social and environmental performance. This is why European Social Partners have come together without hesitation to share any intelligence and best practice that can lead to this ambition.

This report is yet another practical step in this direction. It is again the result of a joint initiative of the EU Social Partners of the Leather/Tanning sector.

Every accident at the workplace is a failure which can have dreadful consequences for the victim, their family and the company. However, accidents can be avoided and sector-specific information and training for employers and workers are key for reducing their incidence.

By studying, understanding, and reporting openly on workplace safety in tanneries, Europe's leather industry not only demystifies the perception that people may have of the sector, but it contributes to a continued collective movement towards even higher levels of performance, both in respect to workers' safety and to the sector's attractiveness in the labour market.

Transparency and quality social dialogue are the best levers for improvement!

Gustavo Gonzalez-Quijano
Secretary General
COTANCE

Judith Kirton-Darling
Deputy General Secretary
IndustriAll Europe



Signature of the OiRA Memorandum: Brussels, 5 June 2012

Julia Flintrop
EU OSHA

Luc Triangle
IndustriAll-Europe

Gustavo Gonzalez-Quijano
COTANCE

2. A SOCIO-ECONOMIC OVERVIEW OF THE EUROPEAN TANNING INDUSTRY

The European tanning industry has played a leading role in the international sector for many years. The main reasons are the high level of maturity in terms of both the technology used and the quality achieved.

Human capital is essential for the European tanning industry: the combination of experience and youth is a key resource on which the competitiveness of the sector is based.

Tanneries in Europe are continuously committed to enhancing the ethical and social aspects of their business and see this factor as an important means to promote and strengthen their relationship with the various stakeholders: workers, customers, suppliers, banks, public authorities, civil society and the territory.

This introduction provides a picture of the social dimension of the European tanning sector, based on a selection of indicators: **age group, territorial origin, gender equality**.

The sector is deeply rooted in the local territory and strongly committed, in collaboration with the various partners and public authorities, to combining industrial growth with the continuous improvement of working conditions and the production of wealth for the territory with the improvement of the quality of life of local communities.

The social situation within the tanneries is characterised above all by the fruitful cooperation between the social partners. In addition to the institutional role that the representative bodies play in the social dialogue (e.g., during collective bargaining), both sides of the European tanning industry are committed to setting an example of how close collaboration helps to strengthen the industry and shields it against global competition, and to promoting the social values associated with European leather on world markets.

The European tanning industry employs more than 34,000 people in nearly 1,500 companies, with a total annual turnover of 7 billion € (2022 estimates).

The majority of the people employed in the sector are concentrated in the **35-55 age group** (around 57% of the total), but the younger age group is also well represented, with around one in three workers under the age of 36. The **over-55 age group** remains significant but small, with 17% of the total workforce.

Looking at the origin of the workforce, employees of **European** origin account for **almost all workers** in the tanning sector, while around 10% are of non-EU origin.

The gender breakdown sees **women** occupying **a quarter of the workforce in the tanning sector** at European level, a share that is progressively increasing.

3. DATA ANALYSIS ON ACCIDENTS IN THE EUROPEAN TANNING INDUSTRY

Foreword

The standard definition of an occupational accident contains the following elements:

- *fortuitous (accidental), sudden, or unexpected external event;*
- *during working hours/on the way to and back from the workplace;*
- *arising out of work performed in the course and the scope of employment;*
- *bodily harm;*
- *causal link between the event and the harm.*

*The fact that occupational accidents are **fortuitous, sudden, unexpected external** events allows making a distinction between accidents and diseases. Diseases are usually caused by a process extended over a longer period of time and not by a sudden event. Although this distinction seems straightforward it is not always the case. For instance, back problems may result from continuous exposure or be linked to a sudden event.*

***Occupational accidents** occur **during working hours** and/or on the way to and from the workplace. In a broad sense, occupational accidents also include commuting accidents. However, some Workers' Compensation Systems exclude this type of accidents.*

*The definition of an occupational accident also includes the fact that **the accident has to arise out of work performed in the course and the scope of employment**. This criterion often leads to discussions about accidents during activities in the workplace where the link with the scope of employment is somewhat questionable e.g. during excursions, doing private work or business at the workplace, etc. The criterion for injury usually comprises not only bodily harm, but also mental health problems caused by an accident.*

*Finally, the concept of an occupational accident is based on the fact that there has to be a **causal link between the event and the injury**. Only direct consequences of the occupational accident can be compensated. Thus, when a pre-existing disease is aggravated or accelerated by an accident, compensation is payable only for what is reasonably attributable to the accident" ([EU-OSHA source](#)).*

The elements constituting an accident at work are therefore:

- the injury;
- the cause;
- the occasion of work.

The concept of '**occasion for work**' requires that there is a causal link between the work and the occurrence of the risk to which the accident may lead. The risk considered is the specific risk determined by the very reason for the work.

The **causes of occupational accidents** are manifold and can be identified according to three orders of factors:

- **technical factors;**
- **human factors;**
- **accidental factors.**

The **work cycle** in tanneries is very specific, both in terms of the sequence of operations and the machinery used.

The process, after the preliminary preservation of the hides, through salting, pickling or cooling, can be divided into preparation steps (i.e. the beamhouse treatments), tanning and finishing. Most of the steps involves the use of large rotating drums in which the hides are subjected to chemical treatments that clean them of dirt and unwanted components (grease, hair), stabilise their molecular structure making them rot-proof, and define their performance and aesthetic characteristics.

Treatments outside of drums involve the mechanical removal of unwanted parts and the definition of certain characteristics such as thickness, texture, etc., while finishing processes complete the cycle, giving the material a varied range of effects and styles.

This processing has always involved the use of chemicals. Technological developments aimed at protecting workers' health have allowed the introduction of less hazardous products, as well as changes to machinery and processes to limit workers' exposure to risks. In addition, greater attention to the environment has led to the development of more resource-efficient manufacturing processes and improved process water purification treatments.

Regarding **technical risk factors**, it can be stated that technological progress has made it possible to design and build machinery and tools equipped with increasingly safer systems for the protection of workers and users.

The **human factor** occupies a position of pre-eminence over all other factors. Many accidents at work are caused by the great confidence that workers have in the manual and repetitive nature of their functions; this may result in a loss of concentration that can lead to potentially dangerous situations.

The **accidental risk factor** can never be completely eliminated but can only be concretely reduced if the other two factors, the technological and the human factor, are reduced to the minimum possible.

3.1. The number of accidents

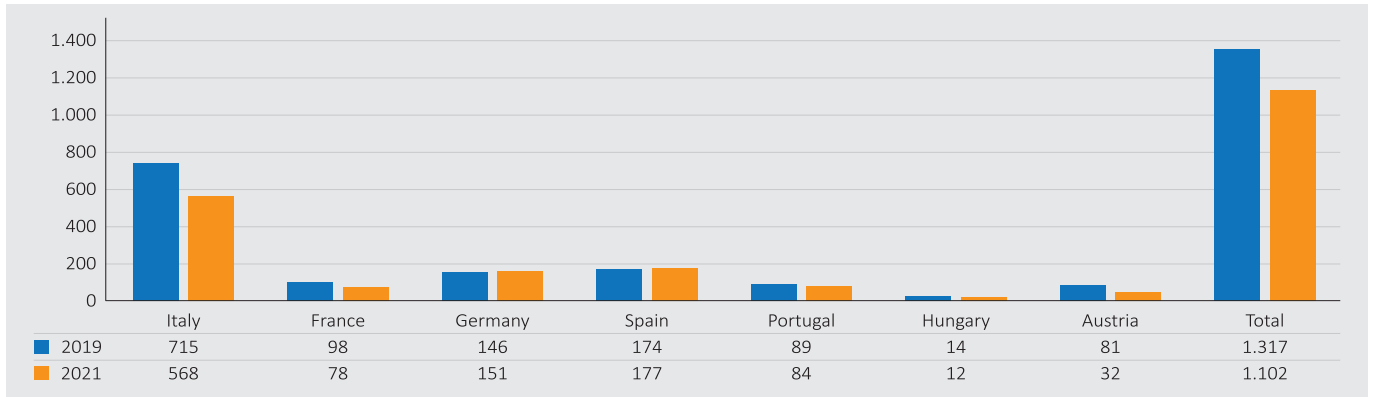
*The study provides a **snapshot** of the situation on the accident trend in the European tanning sector in the years 2019 and 2021. The analysis did not take 2020 into account as due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, this year cannot be considered as significant for the purpose of analysing the normal trend of accidents in the workplace.*

*The analysis is a **starting point**, a reference base for future investments aimed at the continuous improvement of health and safety conditions by companies in the sector.*

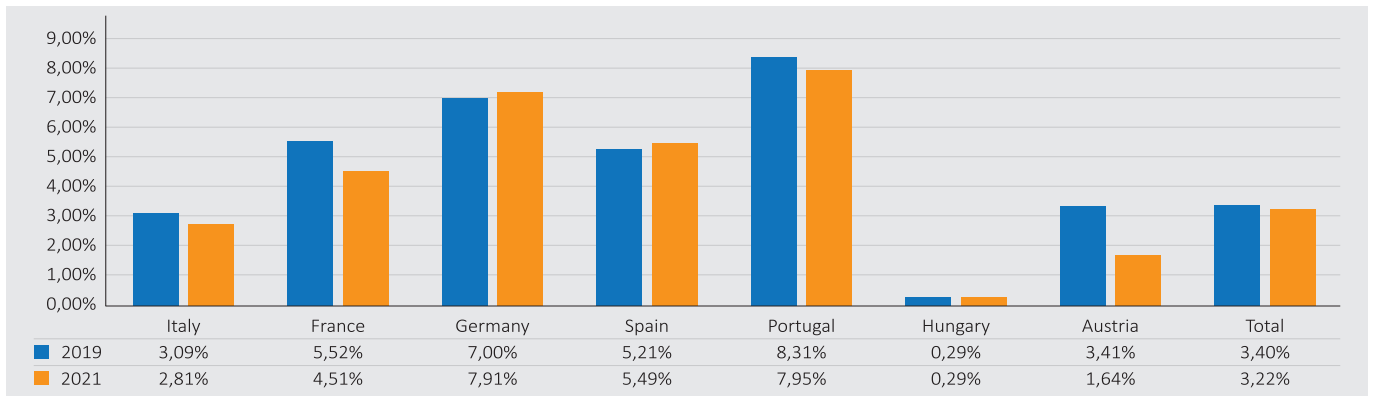
The analysis shows that the total number of accidents in the EU countries that took part in the survey (Italy, Spain, France, Germany, Portugal, Hungary, Austria) was **1,317** in 2019 and **1,102** in 2021. There is a significant decrease in accidents, with a 16% reduction in declared accidents in the two-year period of analysis.

In 2019, the incidence of accidents on total employees was **3.4%**, which fell in 2021 to **3.2%**. From the comparison between the two years, there is therefore a **slight decrease in accidents**, demonstrating that European tanneries are attentive to the ethical and social aspects of their activity and that, through continuous investments, they are able to progress towards higher levels of health and safety in the workplace.

Number of accidents



Rate of accidents on total number of employees



With reference to **fatal accidents**, one incident in the workplace was recorded in 2019, while three were recorded in 2021, one of which occurred "in itinere".

The registration of fatal accidents across the survey countries

Despite the legislative framework surrounding European Statistics on Accidents at Work (ESAS)¹, data on accidents at work cannot be strictly compared from one Member State to another. This situation results from differences in their insurance systems. In countries with a specific insurance system for occupational risks, coverage for accidents at work is often more comprehensive than in universal insurance systems that do not make a distinction according to the origin of the accident. This diversity could explain under-recognition of fatal accidents for specific insurance systems and under-reporting of non-fatal accidents for universal insurance systems. Indeed, some countries do not recognize some of the fatal claims as accidents at work.

In France as well as Italy, any death occurring in the workplace or related to professional activity is presumed to be a fatal work accident. In addition, there is no official time limit for the occurrence of death and therefore for the registration of the causal links between accidents and deaths.

In contrast, in Germany, accidents in which death occurs within 30 days of the day of the accident are to be recorded as fatal accidents. Furthermore, in Spain and Hungary, the accident is considered fatal insofar as the victim dies in the year following the accident, which is in line with the ESAS definition.

¹ Commission Regulation (EU) No 349/2011 of 11 April 2011 implementing Regulation (EC) No 1338/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council on Community statistics on public health and health and safety at work, as regards statistics on accidents at work Text with EEA relevance.

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32011R0349>

3.2. Accidents by mode of occurrence

An analysis of accidents over the two-year period by mode of occurrence shows that in both years **the vast majority** of accidents, **approximately 85%, occurred at the workplace**.

The remaining 15% refers to accidents occurring **“in itinere”**.

*“The **“in itinere”** accident is the” accidents that occur during the normal journey to or from home and place of work, i.e. road accidents that occur during the journey between the worker’s principal or secondary residence and the workplace, or while picking up children from school; accidents between home and a location attended for work-related training or between the workplace and a restaurant at which an employee habitually has lunch are excluded unless the restaurant is on company premises” (Eurostat).*

The comparison in absolute terms between 2019 and 2021 shows a **significant decrease in the phenomenon of both accidents occurring at the workplace** (-16%) and accidents **“in itinere”** (-18%).

3.3. Accidents by gender

The collected data also illustrate the breakdown of accidents on the basis of the **mode of occurrence**, according to the **gender of the injured persons**.

In detail, **female personnel** represent around **25%** of the European workforce.

Although there has been an increase in the number of female workers over the years, given the number of activities that requires a certain physical strength, it has been very difficult to achieve full parity in the number of employees.

The increase in female employees over the years is linked to the ongoing process of transformation and technological innovation of production processes, which has reduced the physical nature of some activities. Thanks to process innovation and the evolution of business models, the gender gap has narrowed, with





an increasing number of women working in the tannery. The introduction of new functions related to business relations management, communication and sustainability has also led to an increase in the number of professions with more opportunities for women.

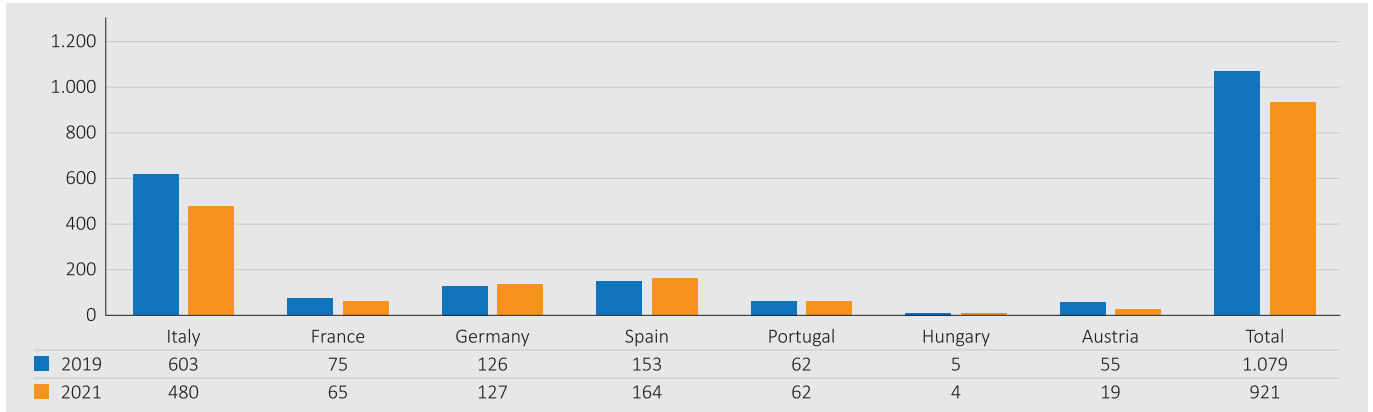
Of the total number of **accidents** reported for **2019**, **18%** involved **female workers**, a share that decreased to **16%** of total accidents in **2021**. As an explanation for this phenomenon, it should be noted that although the proportion of female workers has increased over the years, it is still much lower than that of men, so the risk of the female component of the tannery workforce is proportionately lower, partly because women are more often employed in lower-risk jobs (administration, marketing, communication) than their male colleagues.

Overall, the comparison between the two years under review shows an important reduction in the number of accidents involving female workers in absolute terms; **-28%** of accidents reported in the workplace, **-5%** of accidents occurring *in itinere*.

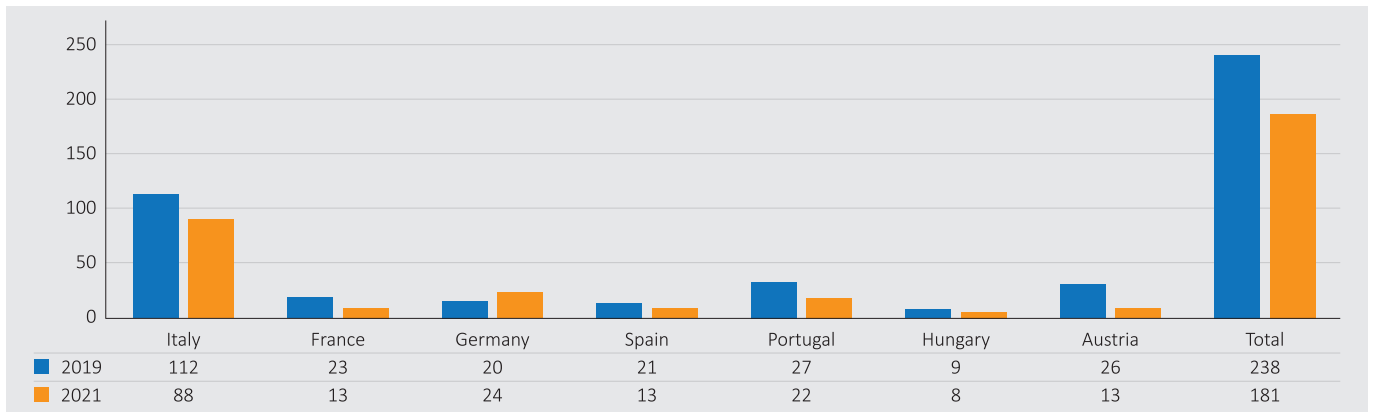
As far as the **male workforce** is concerned, the percentage share of accidents was **82%** of the total in 2019 and **84%** in 2021. However, overall, there was a decrease in the number of accidents, which fell by 15% between 2019 and 2021 in absolute numbers, with a significant decrease in both “in itinere (**-21%**) and at work (**-14%**).

In the case of the male workforce, accidents occurred predominantly at work, with between 85% and 86% of the cases recorded in the two-year period of analysis. On the other hand, there were fewer '**in itinere**' cases (on average between **14%** and **15%** of total accident cases).

Accidents - Male



Accidents - Female



3.4. Accidents by age group

The study also investigated the breakdown of injuries in the following **age groups**:

- 16 to 19 years old
- 20 to 24 years old
- 25 to 29 years old
- 30 to 34 years old
- 35 to 39 years old
- 40 to 49 years old
- 50 to 59 years old
- Over 65 years old.

In 2019, the age group with the highest number of cases was the **50 to 59 age group (27%)** followed by **the 40 to 49 age group (26%)**. By contrast, the incidence of accidents in the other age groups was lower: 11% in **the 20-24 age group**, 9% in the **25-29 age group**, and **10%** in the **30-34 and 35-39 age groups**. The accident incidence in the oldest age groups (**60-64 years**) was **5%**.

Again in 2021, the age group with the highest number of accidents was **the 50-59 age group (27%)** followed by **the 40-49 age group (24%)**, followed by accidents in **the 30-34 age group (12%)**, the **35-39 age group (10%)**, the **20-24 age group** and the **25-29 age group (both 9%)**. There was a slight increase compared to 2019 in the **60-64 age group (6%)**.

Accidents involving workers in the other age groups remained approximately in line in terms of frequency over the two years.

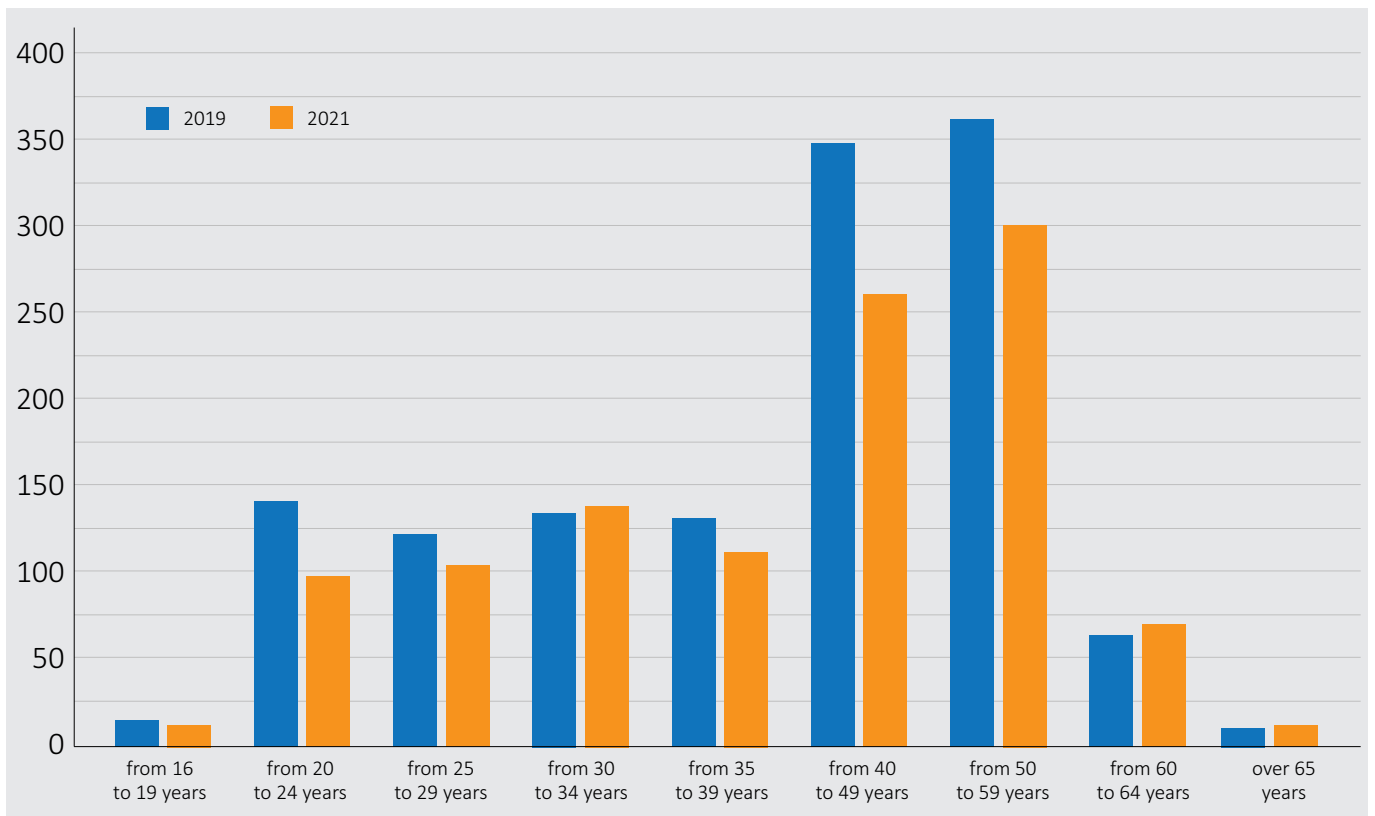
This result is primarily attributable to the fact that most of employees in the European tanning sector are over 35 years old¹.

¹ According to latest data from COTANCE latest Social and Environmental Report 2020

Accidents by age groups



Accidents by age groups



The gradual ageing of the workforce, in part due to the rising retirement age, coupled with the difficulty in generational turnover, is a vital issue that, if not managed properly, could jeopardise the future of the sector.

The economic growth, effectiveness and competitiveness of companies will increasingly depend on their ability to maintain and transfer the wealth of experience, knowledge and skills of older workers to the next generation and to attract qualified young people to work with them.

Comprehensive and effective action by the industry is increasingly needed to develop projects to improve

the image of the tanning sector, encourage more young people to work there and ensure the transfer of "know-how" from older and more experienced workers to younger ones.

The results of this study are also useful in promoting a positive image of the sector, including with regard to occupational safety and enhancing the technological and creative aspects of an activity that combines progress and tradition and plays a key role within prestigious supply chains.



3.5. Accidents by the geographical origin of the workers

The data collected also allows for an analysis of accidents based on the geographical origin of the workers².

Inclusiveness is a fundamental aspect of the European tanning sector which underpins the social dimension of sustainability.

Even if the vast majority of workers come from the EU (about 90%), the integration of immigrant workers is an important feature of the sector and the contribution of workers from non-EU countries is invaluable as they contribute to ensuring the future of the sector.

In both years analysed, a third of the accidents involved workers from outside the EU, while in the remaining cases involved workers from EU countries.

In the two-year period of analysis, a slight increase in the accident rate of non-EU workers was observed.

² The sample consists of data from Italy, Spain, Portugal, Germany, Austria and Hungary. France is not included

The costs of accidents

Accidents at work happen, **but what are their consequences?**

They are not often talked about and some of them are not well known. Economic costs are one thing, but there is almost always much more involved: pain, suffering, restrictions for the victims and their families.

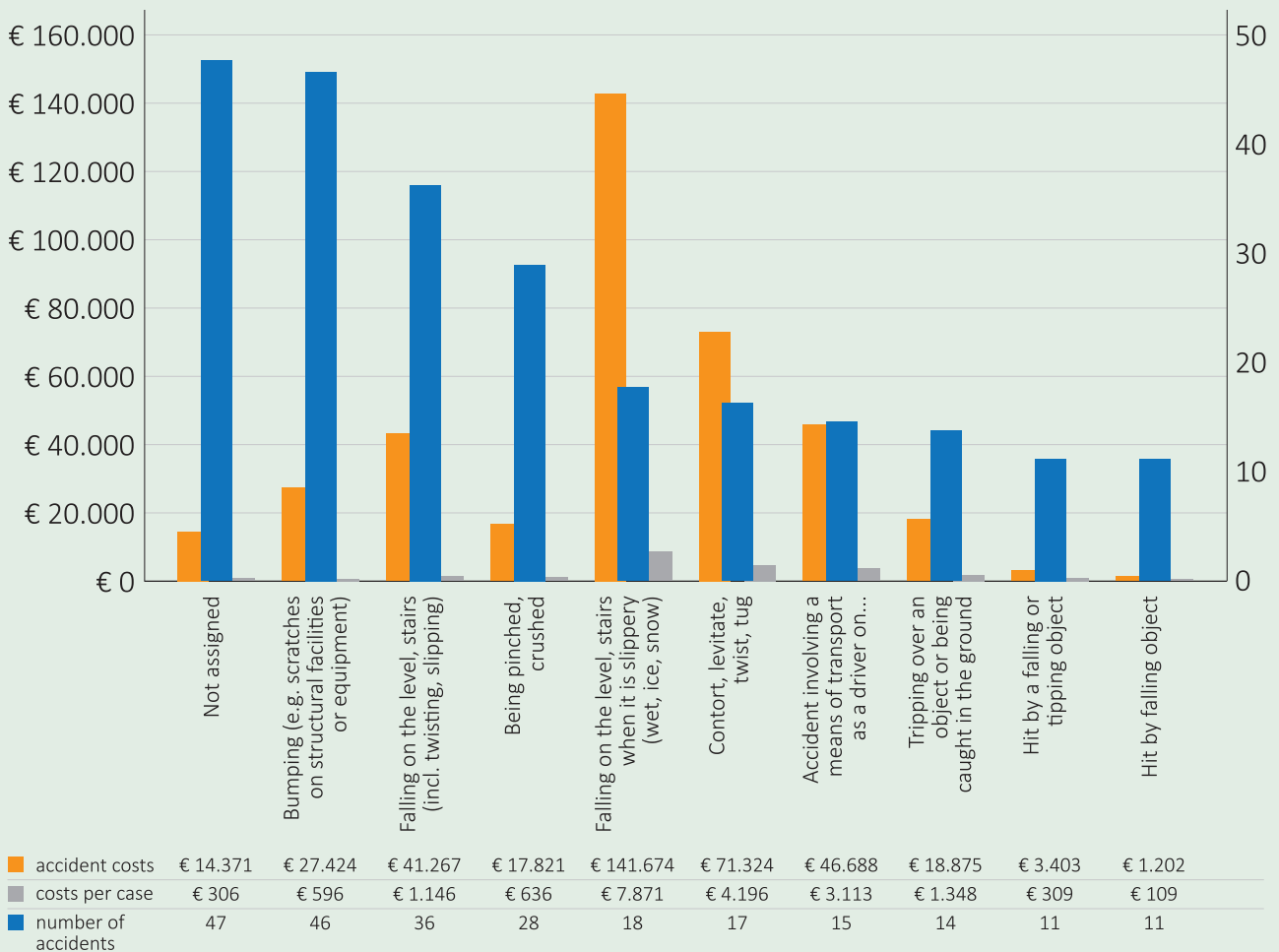
Here are the costs that may be caused by an accident at work:

- Personnel costs: deployment of first responders, clean-up, repair time, lost time of injured workers, deployment of replacement workers.
- Material costs: damage to materials, damage to machinery and equipment or other property.
- Loss of earnings and revenue: delay in delivery, quality defects, contractual penalties, compensation costs, etc.
- Penalty and court costs: industrial accidents can result in an administrative penalty, court costs and legal fees, restraints, etc.
- Treatment costs, rehabilitation measures, recourse costs, etc.
- Loss of image
- Suffering, pain, restrictions, including the relatives of the workers affected by the accident.

Avoiding accidents is always worthwhile!

Rehabilitation costs by accident type in the German tanning industry

Evaluation by accidents type



Source: BG RCI

3.6. Accidents by location and nature of injury

Over the entire period under review, most of the injuries concerned the **upper limbs** (47% in 2019 and 40% in 2021) followed by the **lower limbs** (17% in 2019 and 19% in 2021).

Also considering the particular nature of the tasks performed by tannery workers, it emerges that where more detailed data on the specific **location of injuries** was provided (year 2019), almost half of the upper limb injuries involved the **hand**.

Specific **postures** assumed during work also appear to be a cause of injury, since in both years about 10% of the injuries involved the **spinal column**.

The figure on the **nature of the injuries** is also a reflection of the typical activities carried out during the preparation of the raw material, which often consists of heavy rolls of leather, the tanning and the final processing of the materials using specific tools or machinery such as cutters, chisels and grinders.

In 2019, 49% of injuries were due to **wounds** (including superficial), followed by **contusions** (18%) and dislocations and sprains (18%). The nature of the remaining share of injuries was **fractures** (8%), and **wounds** and **injuries from other agents** (4%).

The figures for 2021, **although not as detailed as for 2019**, confirm the predominant nature of injuries due mainly to **wounds** (54%), followed by **dislocations, sprains** (19%) and **bruises** (14%).



A **wound** is defined as a break in the skin or mucous membrane with possible injury to the underlying tissue. Wounds may be superficial (when the first layers of the skin are affected), deep (when muscles or internal organs are affected) or penetrating (when the injury affects anatomical cavities).

A **contusion**, more commonly referred to as a 'bump' or 'bruise', is a more or less superficial injury caused by a traumatic event, such as a fall, the impact of an edge, a hard surface or a blunt object, which, while not causing an injury, results in compression and crushing of the underlying soft tissue.

A **sprain** is an injury to a joint without loss of contact of the joint ends.

Dislocation is a more serious injury, caused by trauma of a certain magnitude, consisting in the loss of normal joint relationships (e.g. shoulder joint, elbow joint, etc.) as a result of which the bone heads tend to come out of the joint capsule that contained them.

Fracture is, in general terms, the interruption of the continuity of a bone. It occurs when the force of the trauma exceeds the strength of the bone segment. It can be caused by striking an object or by violent trauma. Sometimes the fracture can occur without any apparent trauma (pathological fracture): this usually occurs in elderly individuals or those with severe osteoporosis. Depending on the intensity of the force of the trauma, the strength of the affected bone and the mode of injury, various types of fractures can occur.

3.7. Detail by injury severity

For those countries (Spain, Germany, Portugal, Hungary and Austria) for which it was possible to retrieve the criteria defining the severity of accidents, it emerges that in almost all cases, these are qualified as minor.

Details of the criteria on the severity of accidents are given in the box below.

In **Germany**, in both reference years, **the percentage of minor accidents is around 90%**.

In Germany, accidents are no longer defined as light, moderate and severe. To get the German data aligned with European reporting, accidents were defined as:

Light accidents: accidents are minor if they are not moderate, severe or fatal.

Moderate accidents: accidents are considered to be of medium severity if:

- a. the place of residence of the insured person is abroad,
- b. they involve dental injuries
- c. they involve appeal proceedings or are in first or second instance legal proceedings.
- d. accidents are also considered to be of medium severity if the injured person is receiving medical treatment but the accident is not classified as severe

Serious accidents: accidents are serious if

- a. it has resulted in the payment of a pension with an MDE (Reduction in earning capacity) of at least 80%
- b. or a death grant has been received
- c. or in the case of a head injury with a MDE of at least 50%
- d. or if there is an incapacity for work prognosis of at least 112 days
- e. or if it is a case of a serious injury.
- f. Similarly, accidents are serious if they involve upper arm shaft fracture, pelvic ring fracture, pelvic ring avulsion fracture, patella fracture, calcaneus fracture.

In **Spain** the figure for **light accidents** is 99% in 2019 and 98% in 2021.

For the classification of light/medium/serious incidents in Spain, the "*Ministerio de Trabajo y Economía Social*" states that the incident is classified as Mild, Serious or Fatal according to the criteria of the doctor who completes the sick leave notification.

That is, it depends on the criteria of the professional. An accident may be considered minor by a professional and the same accident, if evaluated by another doctor, will be classified as serious.

In **Hungary** all accidents are reported as minor, except serious accidents.

Serious accidents at work in Hungary:

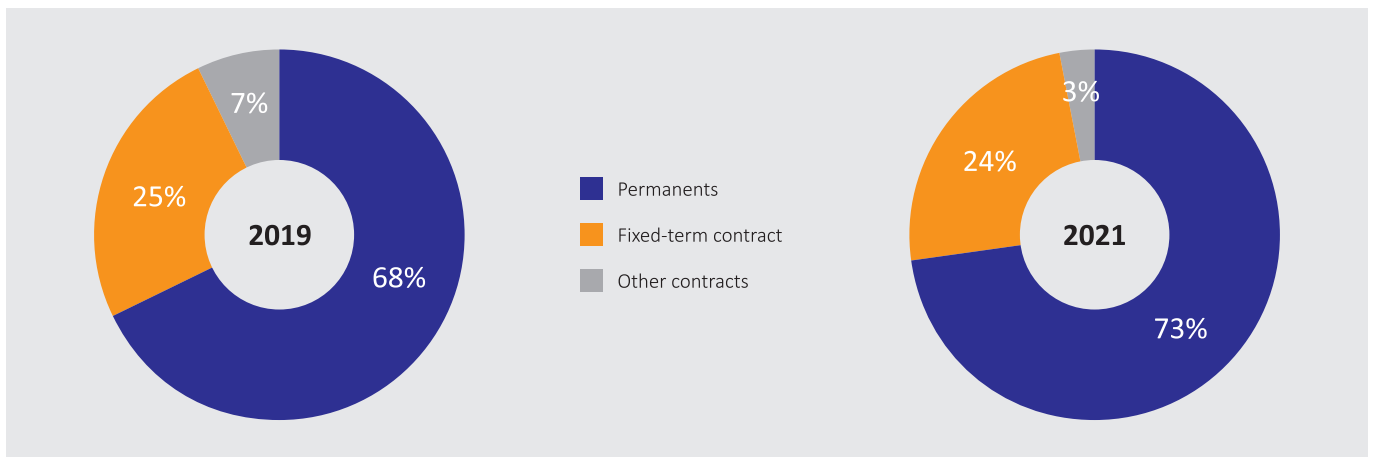
- caused the death of the injured person (a fatal accident at work is also an accident in which the injured person is medically assessed as having died within one year of the accident), the death of a foetus or newborn child, or permanent impairment of the ability to lead an independent life
- loss of a sense organ, sensory faculty or reproductive capacity, or significant impairment
- caused life-threatening injuries and damage to health, according to medical opinion
- loss of more than one thumb or two or more fingers of the hand or foot, and more severe disfigurement.
- caused loss of speech or noticeable distortion, paralysis or mental confusion.

3.8. Detail by contract type

For some countries (France, Spain, Portugal and Hungary), details of accidents by contract type were also provided.

For both years under review, the majority of accidents, more than 70%, involved workers employed on permanent contracts.

This figure is consistent with the organisational structure of European tanning companies, which are characterised by a general stability, demonstrating their commitment to creating consolidated working relationships with their employees. In fact, the permanent contract is the contractual form most used by companies in the sector.



3.9. Detail by days lost/compensated

For some of the countries monitored (Spain, Germany), the data also show details of the duration of the time lost due to accidents.

In Spain, the time lost for majority of accidents (27% in 2019 and 38% in 2021) was between 8 and 14 days.

In Germany, on the other hand, the majority of accidents in both years had an average number of days lost of 14 days.

While there was an increase in accidents in both countries between 2019 and 2021, there was an increase in days lost in Germany (+21%) and a decrease (- 7%) in Spain.

Twenty years of health and safety in the Italian tanning industry

The attention of Italian tanneries to the health and safety of their workers over the years has yielded important tangible results in terms of prevention, as has also been demonstrated by the data of INAIL, the National Institute for Accident Insurance at Work, which officially monitors these trends. INAIL data show that the number of accidents in the Italian tanning sector has been on a downward trend for 20 years.

The decrease in absolute terms, between 2021 and 2019, is 21% and 60% on 2003, while in terms of percentage frequency the decrease is 9% and 38% respectively. It is important to bear in mind that about a quarter of the reported accidents (23%) occurred 'in itinere', i.e. during the home-to-work journey (this incidence was 16% in 2003).

Health and safety in the national social dialogue or legislation

The continuous improvement of the level of health and safety is the common objective of the social partners in the national social dialogue.

In national bargaining, the importance of health and safety protection is emphasised, which is a specific duty of the company and the workers.

In the sectoral collective agreement applied in Portugal, it is emphasised that it is the employer's responsibility to provide the employee with good working conditions from a physical and moral point of view, ensuring continuously and permanently that the activity is carried out in safe and hygienic conditions, and providing the employee with adequate training and information to avoid the risk of accidents or occupational diseases. The employee must, in turn, comply with the employer's instructions concerning performance or discipline at work, as well as the rules protecting safety and health in the company.

In Italy and France, the prevention of accidents and occupational diseases and compliance with the relevant legal provisions are a precise duty of the company and the employees. The employer implements the necessary measures to ensure the protection of the safety and health of workers, who for their part must strictly comply with the measures established in this regard and the instructions received.

These measures include:

- risk prevention;
- information for workers on the risks and on the prevention and protection measures adopted, taking into account the workers' language, where necessary;
- the appropriate training of workers on the risks to which they are exposed in relation to the task being performed, including during both occasional and permanent job changes.

The company also:

- 1) is obliged to provide workers with appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) where the Risks rating document has deemed it necessary. These devices, which are provided at the company's own expense, are assigned directly to employees, if possible, must be maintained in an efficient state;
- 2) must require any contractors to adequately inform and train their workers on the safety, occupational hygiene and health protection provisions in force in the work environment in which they work.



4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

"A safe working environment is the fundamental prerequisite for doing business. It is only on the basis of respect for people's physical and psychological integrity that all subsequent personnel development activities can be thought of" (G. Zilli- Gruppo Mastrotto).

Although the study shows a gradually improving situation, accidents at work are still a reality in the industry.

The analysis is a **starting point**, which must be evaluated and improved through measures that encourage future investments.

At the level of social dialogue, it is essential that health and safety issues are treated and addressed with great care.

Due Diligence in the European tanning industry

Tanneries in Europe are modern and responsible enterprises. European tanners put people at the centre of their attention, whether they are workers, customers or suppliers. European tanners care about their staff! Furthermore, EU health & safety standards and regulations are among the highest and most comprehensive in the world.

In 2018, the EU social partners, COTANCE and industriAll-Europe, published the report of their EU-funded initiative, "[Due Diligence for Healthy Workplaces in the Leather Industry](#)". Based on a EU survey along the leather value chain, the report promotes best practices in occupational safety at tannery workplaces. The aim was to give safety and health at work the same priority as environmental protection in the due diligence debate in the leather value chain.

In a subsequent project, they published the second [Social and Environmental Report](#) of the European leather industry in 2020, showcasing the achievements of European tanners in both fields and again encouraging best practices.

European tanners and workers' representatives are striving to make compliance with high workplace safety standards a global priority.



The importance of the OIRA Tool

OIRA means Online Interactive Risk Assessment, a tool launched by the European Agency for Health and Safety at Work (EU-OHSA) that can be customized for various sectors.

In 2008, COTANCE and industriAll-Europe developed the tool intended for the leather industry. They updated it in 2018. The tool provides a practical risk assessment for tanneries. It is meant as a reference to give valuable information and suggestions to perform not only a risk assessment but an action plan in the factories in order to minimize and eliminate health and safety risks.

As in every industry workplace, processes and activities in the tanning industry bear occupational hazards to workers.

The most important risks are related to the use of machinery and other equipment, chemicals, and the work environment.

Occupational safety and health (OSH) management is essential not only to create healthy workplaces but also to reduce costs and other negative consequences of work-related accidents and sickness absence.

The tool covers the **following areas**:

- OSH Management
- Building and floors
- Workplace transport
- Emergency management- including fire risk
- Environmental conditions
- Physical workload
- Working with raw hides and skins
- Use of knives
- Use of machines
- Maintenance, mounting and cleaning of machines
- Use of chemicals
- Office workplaces
- Organizational aspect
- Employee involvement

OIRA is easy to use:

- It offers support to conduct a risk assessment in a tannery anywhere in the World
- It provides adequate proven control and prevention measures to specific situations.
- It encourages choosing measures and setting up an action plan based on the identified risks and the respective measures.

<https://oiraproject.eu/en/oira-tools?f%5B0%5D=sector%3ALeather%20%26%20tanning>

“Nowadays, it is not only about image towards customers, but above all towards consumers, who need to be sure that companies are working with all possible means for safety and good working practices” (M. Rios- Inpelsa).

A strategic role is played by prevention, which implies an all-round involvement of social actors and institutions and, therefore, also of workers. The construction of what the ILO defines as 'decent work' cannot disregard the activation of workers in the field of their own and others' safety.

It is important to have a set of behavioural standards and good practices to follow. Working according to occupational health and safety rules means observing the specific provisions for each company environment, wearing personal protective equipment and using the equipment correctly.

A worker's responsibility is not limited to the fulfilment of specific tasks; awareness of oneself and one's role in a social context also, and above all, stems from observing safety rules and adopting virtuous behaviour.

This means, for example, avoiding putting oneself in situations that may be dangerous from a technical as well as an organisational and behavioural point of view.

In spite of the valuable contribution of standards to the company's value enhancement in terms of safety, the worker himself is primarily responsible for his own safety. For this reason, it is important that everyone knows the rules and is moved by a sense of responsibility for himself and for others.

On the company side, effective risk prevention could be implemented by increasing the frequency and quality of inspections, especially by adopting effective policies aimed at the education and training of the workforce, so as to achieve full awareness of risk factors and thus a good degree of risk sharing and prevention.

It is therefore increasingly important to strive to spread and consolidate, a 'safety culture', through training, developing risk awareness and promoting responsible behaviours by all those who work within companies.

"This is a bit of the key to achieving this result and it is a bit of what differentiates the European tannery from tanneries outside Europe" (G. Zilli- Gruppo Mastrotto).

Companies must implement all measures to ensure maximum safety at work.

Training activities, defined on the basis of the company's specific needs, contribute to raising workers' safety awareness by reducing the risk of accidents and improving their health and safety knowledge.



Training focuses on workers as people, making them aware of the risks of their work and the working environment, enabling the company to improve risk assessment and prevention with the aim of reducing accidents at work and ensuring organisational well-being.

By actively participating in company life and feeling involved in organisational processes, workers will be able to understand the importance of their role within the company's safety organisation and quality system.

Training is an active and supportive tool for innovation processes. Through training, the strategic ability of human resources to orient themselves in the contexts in which they operate through the dimension of change is promoted, in addition to operational knowledge and skills.

Continuous training is a strategic objective for the development of competitiveness and the only tool that can guarantee the spread of a safety culture.

"It is fundamental that all companies continue to develop work in this area and that we succeed in giving an increasingly better and more sustainable image of the products made and the workplaces, so that the consumer can have this security when buying leather products" (S. Ferreira- Curtume Boaventura).

VISION ZERO prevention strategy

Accidents at work or in road traffic and occupational diseases are neither fated nor inevitable- they always have causes. If we work together to eliminate these causes, accidents and occupational diseases can be prevented.

The prevention strategy "**VISION ZERO. Zero accidents - healthy work!**" aims to ensure that the working environment in companies and production sites is designed in such a way that no one is killed at work or suffers permanent damage to their health as a result of serious injuries or illnesses. The strategy is based on the conviction that every accident can be prevented if supervisors and employees do the right thing in advance.

Successful prevention makes companies successful. Scientific studies on the "Return on Prevention" (ROP) show that every euro invested in safety and health brings about two euros of benefit in positive effects. Investing in safety and health makes sense because it avoids the often-higher additional costs caused by accidents, occupational illnesses, downtime, or operational disruptions.

One thing becomes clear at first glance: You do not always have to spend money to improve safety and health in your company. What is important is to act consciously and to manage consistently.

The seven golden rules of Vision Zero are:

1. live leadership
2. danger recognised- hazard eliminated
3. define goals- set up a programme
4. well organised- with a system
5. machines, technology, plants- safe and healthy
6. knowledge creates safety
7. motivate through participation

It is also advisable to make use of the tailor-made offers of the employers' liability insurance associations.

The European Commission recently published the EU strategic framework on health and safety at work 2021-2027. The strategy adopts the Vision Zero approach. This demonstrates how Vision Zero, developed by the International Social Security Association (ISSA), is moving from a campaign to become a strategic tool.

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52021DC0323&qid=1626089672913#PP1Contents>

As included in the European Pillar of Social Rights, occupational safety and health (OSH) is of high priority for the EU. The pandemic has demonstrated in a dramatic way the importance of ensuring workers' safety and health. The new strategic framework also makes OSH a crucial element in the EU's efforts to build back better from the COVID-19 crisis.

Figures show that before the pandemic, the EU had managed to make important progress in this area. Work-related deaths were reduced by 70 per cent between 1994 and 2018. Still, in 2018, there were 3.1 million accidents at work, of which 3,300 were fatal. The EU is therefore setting new ambitions and to achieve them will take the Vision Zero approach.

5. METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

The survey involved the active collaboration of seven national trade associations, members of COTANCE, representing the tanning industries in Italy, Spain, France, Germany, Portugal, Austria and Hungary.

The study reports an analysis of the accident data recorded with the aim of providing the broadest possible picture to facilitate risk reduction and management actions.

This is a very useful body of knowledge, which makes it possible to describe the main characteristics and causal factors of accidents in order to adopt increasingly effective prevention and protection measures.

The data were collected through a questionnaire, filled in by the associations, based on national statistical data, and- as in the case of Portugal- through the collaboration of the member companies (representing 50% of the national total).

The data collected at national level were aggregated at European level. This allowed the compilation of data from a highly significant sample, representing 99% of European tanneries, 95% of the workforce and 93% of turnover.

Specificities of the Hungarian leather sector and data

There are very few NACE 1511 companies in Hungary. Indeed, when filling in NACE statistics, even though some of their workers work with leather (as for instance “Fur and leather preparing machine operator”), leather working companies indicate the code of their main activity, e.g. real estate activities, wholesale and retail trade, etc. Even Eagle Ottawa Hungary, a renown tanning group, report data under NACE 1512 (Manufacture of luggage, handbags and like, saddlery and harness), although they have occupations for leather dyeing and finishing.

The actual number of leather workers in Hungary could therefore be different from the official statistics derived from the main NACE activity. Consequently, the reported incidents at the workplace may not reflect 100% the situation for leather workers in Hungary.

The Hungarian Statistical Office (KSH) only provides statistics aggregated for NACE 151, i.e. for “Tanning and dressing of leather (1511), but also the Manufacture of luggage, handbags, saddlery and harness; dressing (1512)”. No separate data is available for NACE 1511 only. Neither do they include data from companies with less than 5 employees.

For the purpose of the present study, data on occupational safety were obtained from the competent Ministry. They relate to companies that, although not mainly active in the leather industry, carry out leatherworking activities.

The following data were found for the years 2019 and 2021:

- 40 companies- with employees working with leather and having reported accidents at work
- 105 cases of accidents
- only 1 accident in a company belonging to NACE 1511
- 70 accidents in NACE 1512 companies (in Eagle Ottawa:25)

All other accidents happened in companies out of NACE 15, but with leather-related occupations.

These are companies with NACE codes 1629, 2015, 2211, 2562, 2932, 4120, 7112.



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COTANCE

Co-coordinator

industriAll European trade union

Partners

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- APIC (Portugal)
- FFTM (France)
- FV TBSL (Austria)
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