Work-related psychosocial risks in Europe

Fact-Finding seminar addressing psychosocial aspects and risks at work

William Cockburn
European Agency for Safety and Health at Work
European Union – regulation and policy

- The EU Framework Directive (89/391): legal obligation to protect workers by avoiding, evaluating and combatting risks to their safety and health

- EU Social Partners Agreements on:
  - Telework (2002)
  - Violence and Harassment at Work (2007)

- Safer and Healthier Work for All - modernisation of the EU occupational safety and health legislation and policy (EC, 2017)
  
  ‘Psychosocial risks and work-related stress are among the most challenging and growing occupational safety and health concerns’

- European Pillar of Social Rights (2017)
  Chapter II, 9 ‘Work-life balance’
  Chapter II, 10 ‘Healthy, safe and well-adapted work environment and data protection’
Member States – approaches to regulation, policy and support

- Specific regulatory provisions
  - Clarifying general obligation, defining terms and concepts, specifying inclusion in risk assessment and its scope, conferring rights on workers, defining competencies of preventive services, differentiating work time from private time
  - Stress, violence, bullying, discrimination

- Soft law measures
  - Social partner joint declarations, framework agreements (national and sectoral)

- Guidance and support
  - Guidance, checklists, ‘management standards’ or codes of practice for employers, online tools, advice service, guidance for labour inspectors, sector-targeted inspection, awareness raising

- Strategies
  - Setting targets and priorities, earmarking resources
Evidence of measures’ impact

- **Sweden**
  - EU-OSHA ‘SESAME’ research: MSEs more aware of psychosocial risks following the provisions introduced by SWEA in 2016 and associated awareness raising (*companies participating in a seminar or training course regarding the new provisions*).

- **Austria**
  - ESENER showed an increase in use of psychologist from 10% in 2009 to 20% in 2014 (18% in 2019) following legislation that included access to a psychologist in preventive services.

- **Italy**
  - ESENER showed an increase in companies having an action plan for stress from 17% in 2009 to 50% in 2014 (48% in 2019) following changes in legislation and publishing national guidelines.
The scale of the problem

- **Eurobarometer**: 27% of workers suffered from stress, depression or anxiety caused by or worsened by work during last 12 months (European Commission, 2014)

- **United Kingdom**: ‘work-related stress, depression and anxiety’ accounts for 37% of work-related ill health cases and 45% of days lost in 2015/16 (HSE, 2017)

- **Spain**: between 11% and 27% of mental disorders can be attributed to working conditions. Direct health cost estimated at €150-€372 million (UGT, 2013)

- **Germany**: job strain costs €29 billion annually; reduced performance estimated to cost twice that of absence (Bodeker & Friedrichs, 2011)
ESENER-3: Risk factors present in the establishment (% establishments, EU-28)

Base: all establishments in the EU-28.
**ESENER-3: Procedures to deal with psychosocial risks, 2019**
(% establishments, EU-28)

Base: establishments with more than 19 workers.
ESENER-3: Are psychosocial risks easier or more difficult to address than other risks? By country, 2019 (% establishments)

Base: establishments in all 33 countries that report at least one psychosocial risk factor to be present in their establishments.

www.healthy-workplaces.eu
ESENER-3: Use of a psychologist, in-house or contracted externally, by country (% establishments)

Base: all establishments.

www.healthy-workplaces.eu
ESENER-3: Providing employees with training on psychosocial risks (% establishments)

Base: establishments in all 33 countries.
EU-OSHA resources

- COVID-19 guidance, telework good practice recently published
- OSH Overview on Psychosocial Risks 2022-2025
  - Preparatory work in 2021
- Campaign 2020-2022 ‘Prevention of work-related MSDs’
  - Role of psychosocial risk factors in MSD occurrence and prevention
- ESENER – management of psychosocial risks in small companies
  - Data analysis + 120 interviews across six Member States
  - Survey dashboard https://visualisation.osha.europa.eu/esener#!/en
  
ESENER-2 follow-up studies
Worker participation in the management of OSH (2015-2016)

Key findings

- Confirmed positive impact of worker representation

- Psychosocial risks:
  - Often regarded as separate from OSH risks.
  - Different management strategies by different parts of the organisation.
  - ‘Traditional’ worker ‘safety representatives’ had little chance of representing workers on those matters.
  - Growing recognition that this is a significant problem, but perceived lack of solutions in which the worker representatives have role.


www.healthy-workplaces.eu
Nearly 99% of companies in the EU are micro and small firms (1-49 workers), they employ about half of the workforce.

Psychosocial risks are not taken into consideration in most MSEs. Common and shared perspective among managers and workers:

- Strong believe in ‘common sense’ and individual responsibility for being safe and healthy.
- OSH risks perceived as ‘part of the job’, health risks underestimated.
- Psychosocial risks are perceived as an individual issue and/or a problem created by the current ‘hard economic climate’, not a subject of workplace interventions.
Thank You!

EU-OSHA: www.osha.europa.eu
ESENER survey dashboard
https://visualisation.osha.europa.eu/esener#!/en
ESENER-3: Employee involvement in identifying causes of work-related stress, by country 2019 (% establishments)

Base: establishments with less than 20 workers.

www.healthy-workplaces.eu
ESENER-3: Measures to deal with psychosocial risks, by establishment size, 2019 (% establishments, EU-28)

- Reorganisation of work in order to reduce job demands and work pressure
- Confidential counselling for employees
- Training on conflict resolution
- Intervention if excessively long or irregular hours are worked
- Allowing employees to take more decisions on how to do their job
- None of these

Base: all establishments in the EU-28.

www.healthy-workplaces.eu
ESENER-3: Difficulties in addressing psychosocial risks, by establishment size, 2019 (% establishments)

Base: establishments in all 33 countries that report at least one psychosocial risk factor to be present in their establishments and that consider them to be more difficult to address than others.
ESENER-3: Employee involvement in measures to address psychosocial risks, by country (% establishments)

Base: establishments that report at least one measure to address psychosocial risks.

www.healthy-workplaces.eu