



EUROPEAN CAMPAIGN ON STRESS AND PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS

OUR MESSAGE

Employers across the EU are committed to protecting their workers' health and safety at the workplace, as part of ensuring a safe, healthy and productive workforce. This includes protecting workers from work-related psychosocial risks including stress.

We are convinced that good safety and health performance can help business competitiveness, where the benefits outweigh the costs and administrative burdens of workplace interventions.

Over the last years, there have been positive trends in the area of health and safety at work with a reduction of 27.9% in accidents between 2007 and 2011 and 85% of workers expressing high levels of satisfaction with their health and safety at work. At the same time, employers are faced with, in some cases, newer and more complex challenges at the workplace, including dealing with psychosocial risks.

But what actually causes such problems at the workplace?

There are certainly some factors which can lead to psychosocial problems, including stress at the workplace – for example poor working relationships, excessive workload, lack of clarity over roles, ineffective communication, lack of support from management or colleagues, or harassment and violence.

However, finding out what causes such problems is in fact very complex and it can be difficult to evaluate the possibility that workers are or will be exposed to such risks. This is because such problems are often caused by multiple factors. It can be difficult to identify whether the root cause or causes are at the workplace and/or in an employees' private life. Also, such risks are often very subjective, depending on individual factors, in particular in comparison to physical workplace risks. How someone deals with psychosocial challenges, including stress, and their individual attitude to them, will depend from one person, one job and one sector to another. Such issues are also often extremely sensitive and personal and cultural attitudes play a role.

At the same time, it is important for employers to look at these issues and to try to deal with them...

This can help avoiding high levels of staff absence, sickness and absenteeism, improving productivity and ensuring business continuity.

At company level a joint action of the Human Resources function and the working conditions/health and safety function seems to make sense.

Companies also need good advice and tools.



So what approach is needed to tackle psychosocial risks?

A preventive approach is needed, framed by an open culture at work floor level to find solutions. This should be based on a shared responsibility between employers, employees and co-workers.

This will be different for each workplace, depending on the national setting, sectoral specificities, cultural and individual attitudes, and company philosophy.

Psychosocial risks including stress are not best dealt with by specific legislation. Since it is often difficult to identify whether the risk is work-related, due to a situation in someone's private life or, as is often the case, due to a combination of factors, setting legislative obligations for employers in this case may not actually get to the root of the problem. Also, binding EU legislation is not appropriate to take into account the different, often personal specificities due to the very subjective nature of psychosocial risks at the workplace. Some jobs are inherently stressful – in which case it is not about preventing stress, but ensuring that it is well managed.

European social dialogue action has also proved useful, with the agreement and implementation by national social partners of the EU Social Partner Framework Agreements on work-related stress and harassment and violence at the workplace.

From a policy point of view, a stimulating, non-binding, broad, multi-stakeholder approach is preferable. Interventions from different fields of expertise are needed. An integrated approach taking into account the job content, working conditions, work environment, work relations, career perspectives, work-life balance as well as elements not strictly linked to the work situation (health, family situation, personality, etc.) is appropriate.

A better coordination and collaboration between employment, health, education and working conditions domains is indispensable. It is important to recognise the role of public health services and to clearly distinguish this from the workplace.

This is why we support the campaign...

As a way to engage the necessary fields of expertise, to allow for debate, to develop tools which can be adapted to different realities, and to help companies to deal with these issues in an efficient and effective way.

This message was drawn up as a conclusion of a seminar organised by BUSINESSEUROPE on 4 March 2015, as a contribution to the campaign. More information about the seminar is available on our dedicated [webpage](#).

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stress



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