



Tackling psychosocial risks in central government: a guide for action

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Contents of guide

- Introduction from social partners
- The extent and impact of psychosocial risks
- Psychosocial risks: the context for action
- The gender dimension
- Practical action
- References and sources of further information



Contents already covered

- The extent and impact of psychosocial risks
 - Varying definitions
 - Big impact
 - Has above-average effect on central government
- The context for tackling psychosocial risks
 - Legal
 - Institutional
 - Collectively agreed



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Gender dimension

- Large number of women in central administration
 - Around half: most in Nordic and Baltic states; fewest in Malta, Greece and Italy
- How does situation of women differ?
 - More likely to face “adverse social behaviour” (verbal abuse, unwanted sexual attention, threats or humiliating behaviour), except for threats (Source: EWCS 2015)
- Detailed information on women in central government in Sweden
 - Face discrimination on grounds of gender: 12% women – 3% men
 - Face much more sexual harassment: 9% women – 1% men (but all from outside)
 - Face less violence and threat of violence than men: 20% women – 25% men (but still a lot: private sector overall is 8%)
- Additional disproportionate threat for women: domestic violence
 - *Example from practice: equal opportunities policy in central government Spain, agreed with unions, includes section on gender-specific violence*



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Practical action: overall approach

- Traditional risk management framework
 - Assessing the risks
 - Developing a policy to deal with them
 - Implementing the policy
 - Evaluating the policy
 - Adapting the policy in the light of changes
- Three levels of action
 - Primary-level – eliminate or reduce risks at source
 - Secondary level – modify individual responses to risk (stress-management)
 - Tertiary level – support individuals damaged by risks (employee assistance programmes)
 - BUT all levels should be used



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Social dialogue and employee involvement

- Involve employees & their representatives at all stages

“Evidence indicates that interventions have a better chance of having an impact upon psychosocial working conditions and the health and well-being of employees if they follow a structured process that involves the active involvement and participation of employees and social dialogue.” – Eurofound/EU-OSHA
- Reasons:
 - Employees have legal rights and are “on-site” experts
 - Unions have expertise and have signed agreement
- “The positive association between the adoption of measures to deal with psychosocial risks and the existence of employee representation bodies is ... particularly strong in public administration”
 - *Example from practice: building in union involvement in risk prevention*
L'Agence Nationale de Santé Publique (France)



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Assessing the risks

- Typically surveys or focus groups (many tools available)
 - Can be done internally (47%) or by external experts (40%)
- Need to assess risks systematically and propose solutions
- Need to involve employee representatives in drawing up survey
- Should also be able to respond to specific incidents
- *Examples from practice:*
 - IEO (A Coruña, Spain)
 - External body carried out survey and produced detailed proposals
 - SPF P&O (Belgium)
 - Offers tailored surveys to government departments



Moving from assessment to action

- Organisations find it more difficult to deal with psychosocial risks
 - Up to three times more likely to say that they lack tools or information than for physical risks like noise or dangerous chemicals (Source: ESENER 2014)
 - Problem particularly great in public administration
 - 34% say lack expertise: 22% in economy as a whole
- Need to find ways round this
 - External experts or appropriate training if done internally



Primary-level measures

- Dealing with difficult users (third-party violence)
- Time pressures and workloads
- Lack of communication and cooperation
- Lack of influence over work pace and work process
- Job insecurity (includes reorganisation)
- Long or irregular hours
- Discrimination



Dealing with difficult clients/users (third-party violence and abuse)

- Practical measures
 - Organisational changes: ensuring that people are not isolated; limiting access
 - Building changes: video surveillance; better lighting; broad counters
 - Support for staff: training to defuse threatening situations
- Making it clear to users that violence and abuse will not be tolerated
- *Examples from practice:*
 - *Job Center (Hof, Germany): major changes in whole approach: organisational, building, staff support*
 - *Training for labour inspectors (Lazio, Italy): training to improve relations with users – defuse threats, understand dynamics*
 - *Protecting labour inspectors (Portugal): package of measures*



Time pressures and workloads

- Measures like better management of workloads, better support for staff and increasing employees autonomy
 - *Example from practice:*
 - *Ministry of Finance (Belgium), where workers can set their own hours*
 - *But concerns that workloads may become too large, and difficult to measure*



Lack of communication and cooperation

- Can be caused by tensions between employees or lack of clarity in organisation
- Need to make clear that bullying and harassment will not be tolerated
- Management should treat people fairly and value them
- *Examples from practice:*
 - *Education Ministry (Austria), which has guide on bullying,*
 - *Ministry of Agriculture (Lithuania), where union intervened with positive results,*
 - *Federal Police (Dortmund, Germany), where sport used for team-building*
 - *Civil Service (UK), where Leadership Statement requires clarity and need to be approachable*



Lack of influence over work pace or process (includes job content)

- Involve employees in decisions on work organisation and processes
 - *Examples from practice:*
 - *Tax Authority (Finland), where a pilot programme aims to increase involvement among over 55s*
 - *Federal Criminal Office (Germany), where workers' tasks are varied because of the very difficult nature of the work child pornography and Islamist extremism*



Job insecurity (includes organisational change)

- Restructuring has been constant
- Needs to be introduced in a transparent way and should limit impact on staff
 - *Examples from practice:*
 - *Central government (Bourgogne/Franche Comté, France), where working at a distance meant staff did not have to move*
 - *Interior Ministry (Bonn/Berlin Germany), where mobile working was extended*



Long or irregular hours

- Particular concern: contacts outside working time, need right to disconnect
 - *Example from practice:*
 - Labour Ministry (Germany), where principle of “least-possible intrusion” has applied since 2013 – no interruption during holidays
 - New legislation on right to disconnect in France means more examples likely



Discrimination

- Make clear that discrimination will not be tolerated
- Have policy to prevent it and measure progress
 - *Example from practice:*
 - Department of Health (UK) covered by public sector equality duty



Making strategy work

- Communicate it to employees and managers
 - *Example from practice:*
 - *Ministry of the Interior (France), where innovative publicity campaign was used*



Secondary-level measures

- Training to manage stress
 - Useful but *“most effective when coupled with primary-level interventions”*
 - *Examples from practice:*
 - *All levels of government (Luxembourg), staff are offered course on managing stress and emotions*
 - *Federal government (Belgium), offers courses on mindfulness*
 - *Central government (Hungary), website tips on eating and sport*



Tertiary-level measures

- Supporting those damaged by psychosocial hazards
 - Employee assistance and return to work programmes
 - *Examples from practice:*
 - *Highways England (UK), dealing with mental health problems*
 - *Prison service (Romania), online psychologists*
 - *Federal Criminal Office (Germany), counselling for those facing extreme risks*



Thank you for your attention!

- Questions and comments ...

