



Joint response to the public consultation on EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work

In addition to their individual responses, the members of the [EU Mental Health Alliance for Work and Employment](#) (EU MH Alliance) have decided to issue a joint statement on the [public consultation on EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work to stress the importance of psychosocial factors in occupational safety and health](#).

As the consultation primarily focuses on the evaluation and impact on the Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2014-2020, the EU MH Alliance would like to take the opportunity to highlight that such a Framework largely overlooked psychosocial factor.

We recommend the new EU OSH Framework to:

- Steer Member States to address mental health and psychosocial risks in their national OSH strategies, including adequate national resource allocation for preventative actions with specific focus on the high risk groups; top up to national resources from the relevant EU funds is recommended;
- Lay out an explicit role for the EU Steering Group on Health Promotion and Disease Prevention in this area to offer additional support towards ensuring high protection of mental health due to the changing nature of work;
- Strongly embed this area in the Terms of References for the new Joint Action on mental health and healthcare systems reforms, as well as the focus of a new stakeholder advisory group on 'Mental Health and Covid-19 impact' in preparation;
- Embed the new EU OSH Framework into the rights-based approach (guided by the Action Plan for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, EPSR) to reforms of national occupational health policies with the support from the Recovery and Resilience Facility (included in the Recovery and Resilience Plans, RRP);
- Include occupational psychosocial health and safety indicators in the Social Scoreboard of the EPSR as well as a Scoreboard developed for the national RRP's assessments;
- Promote a more integrated approach to address occupational mental health challenges through various sectors, services and settings, including community-based; invest in prevention-first approaches, boosting health literacy, competences and skills, including in mental health and emotional support, and including health professionals, teachers and employers;
- Encourage trade unions and employers to increase their efforts and understanding of mental health and workplace links to prevent and provide people with mental health problems with the right support to enter or remain in employment;
- Support European companies addressing psychosocial risks in their operational guidelines;
- Support addressing psychosocial risks in collective bargaining and in debates on ethics in digital transition and artificial intelligence; right to disconnect and to be forgotten;
- Following the [recommendation of the European Parliament](#), propose the introduction of a EU Directive on addressing psychosocial risks at workplaces.

In the past years, psychosocial risks and work-related stress have increasingly become a reality in many workplaces. The syndemic¹ nature of COVID-19 additionally unveiled the importance of good mental health

¹ "a syndemic approach reveals biological and social interactions that are important for prognosis, treatment, and health policy." In: Horton, R. (2020). Offline: the COVID-19 is not a pandemic. The Lancet. COMMENT| VOLUME 396, ISSUE 10255, P874,

and wellbeing at work as fundamental to ensure quality of life for every worker and their family. Indeed, the mental health toll the health crisis evoked is exponential. Any recovery and resilience building plan, including in the economic sphere, must realise that good mental health and the prevention of work-related stress have a positive and preventative/buffering impact on the economic outcomes of individuals, companies, communities and society as a whole.

The [latest data](#) show that costs related to reduced labour market participation and productivity due to mental health problems (i.e. lower employment rates for people with mental health issues, reduced productivity due to higher absenteeism and lower productivity at work - presenteeism) add up to over EUR 240 billion or 1.6% of GDP across EU countries in 2015.

Only if the European Commission firmly places psychosocial aspects of work at heart of the new EU OSH Framework for the years to come, workers across Europe will benefit from real and tangible benefits. Such approach is particularly relevant in light of the current pandemic, which has added new risks due to changed ways of working, rapid uptake of new (digital) technologies, to the more traditional ones, such as exposure to dangerous substances and risk of accidents at work. The COVID-19 context has already been established to [increase mental strain on current and future workforce](#), as well as further exclude already disadvantaged groups from the labour market. Moreover, we see [mental health problems among essential and frontline worker categories](#) key to the fight against the crisis, such as teachers, health and social care workers.