



Joint Practical Guidelines on How to Promote Joint Social Partner Initiatives at European, National, Regional and Local Level to Prevent and Combat Psychosocial Hazards in Education

Promoting decent workplaces in the education sector for a healthier working life

1. Introduction

Healthy and safe workplaces in the education sector are a prerequisite for quality education. Acknowledging the fact that work-related stress and psychosocial risks have negative effects on health and impose a significant financial burden on individuals, organisations and societies, this joint project encouraged social partners' initiatives regarding the promotion of decent workplaces in education for a healthier working life. The project helped to identify concrete and practical ways to prevent and combat work-related stress in education with a focus on joint social partner initiatives. The guidelines support the further implementation of Action Plans and policy papers of the social partners in education, the EU Strategic Framework on Health & Safety at Work 2014 – 2020 and the Directive 89/391/EEC on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in occupational health and safety in the education sector. For this purpose, two regional training seminars took place on 11 December 2015 in Madrid and on 29 January 2016 in London, where the outcome of the case studies in the four target countries and of the online survey amongst ETUCE and EFEE member organisations were presented¹.

These practical guidelines have been written within the framework of the project *Social Partners Promoting Decent Workplaces in the Education Sector for a Healthier Working Life*. They build on the project activities (an online survey amongst ETUCE and EFEE member organisations, interviews with education staff and social partner representatives in eight case study schools in Belgium, Finland, Germany and Romania and two regional training seminars) to which ETUCE and EFEE member organisations (education trade unions and education employers at all levels of education) actively contributed. The recommendations are aimed in the first instance at education employers and education trade unions in Europe and their affiliates, and focus on how to promote joint social partner initiatives at European, national, regional, and local level to prevent and combat psychosocial hazards in education.

In light of the joint work programme of the European Sectoral Social Dialogue in Education (ESSDE) and taking into account ETUCE's campaign partnership in the EU-OSHA campaign Healthy Workplaces Manage Stress, these guidelines continue the work that ETUCE and EFEE have undertaken in the area of occupational health and safety for education staff including school leaders. In past years, the social partners have successfully carried out various projects in this area,

¹ Good practices can be found at: <http://www.csee-etu.org/en/policy-issues/teachers-health-and-safety/work-related-stress/865-work-related-stress> and at <http://educationemployers.eu/our-social-dialogue-activities/>

e.g. on teachers' work-related stress and third-party-violence, but also on social dialogue issues, e.g. recruitment and retention in the education sector. With these guidelines, ETUCE and EFEE recognise the need to enhance further the commitment to healthy and safe workplaces in education and seek to continue to support the implementation of the European Social Partners' Framework Agreements on the prevention of work-related stress and on the prevention of violence and harassment at national level.

The guidelines address the EU priorities set out in the EU Strategic Framework on Health & Safety at Work 2014 – 2020, in particular as regards the recommended action to review the implementation of national OSH strategies in consultation with the social partners and as regards the strategic objectives to facilitate compliance with OSH legislation and address demographic change and the ageing of the workforce. They contribute to the EU employment and social policy objectives as stipulated in the Europe 2020 Strategy with its flagship initiatives for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

2. Definition

ETUCE and EFEE believe that education institutions should be safe and healthy places which promote success in teaching and learning. Education institutions - including all education levels and covering both teaching and non-teaching staff working in the education sector ((pre)-primary, secondary, vocational education and training, adult learning and higher education and research) - are the workplace of school leaders, teachers and other education staff, but foremost they are education institutions for students. The purpose therefore is to support the creation of an atmosphere where students can learn and teachers and other staff in education can carry out their work in a positive, healthy and safe setting.

According to the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA), psychosocial risks arise from poor work design, organisation and management, as well as a poor social context of work, and they may result in negative psychological, physical and social outcomes such as work-related stress, burnout or depression. It is important not to confuse psychosocial risks such as excessive workload with conditions where, although stimulating and sometimes challenging, there is a supportive work environment in which workers are well trained and motivated to perform to the best of their ability. A good psychosocial environment enhances good performance and personal development, as well as workers' mental and physical well-being.

Workers experience stress when the demands of their job are excessive and greater than their capacity to cope with them. In addition to mental health problems, workers suffering from prolonged stress can go on to develop serious physical health problems such as cardiovascular disease or musculoskeletal problems.

For the organisation, the negative effects include poor overall [work] performance, increased absenteeism and presenteeism (workers turning up for work when sick and unable to function effectively) and increased accident and injury rates. Absences tend to be longer than those arising from other causes and work-related stress may contribute to increased rates of early retirement. Estimates of the cost to workplaces and society are significant and run into billions of euros at national level.



This document reflects the work of ETUCE, EFEE and their member organisations on decent workplaces in the education sector for a healthier working life on which to develop further action at European, national, regional and local level.

With a view to bringing about a sustainable change that has a lasting impact on the education institution environment, steps to determine and strengthen the fundamental values in school (e.g. mutual respect, democratic citizenship) should start from early childhood education and involve all stakeholders in education, social partners, school leaders, teachers, students and parents alike. Therefore, efficient and targeted investment in quality education and training is needed at all levels to ensure healthy and safe education institutions as providers of quality education.

3. Aim

These practical guidelines seek to provide education authorities, education employers and education trade unions in Europe and their affiliates with concrete recommendations on how to promote decent workplaces in the education sector for a healthier working life through joint social partner initiatives at European, national, regional and local level to prevent and combat psychosocial hazards in education. They aim to assist the social partners in education and their affiliated members in developing concrete strategies and actions to increase awareness about the importance of the provision of healthy and safe working conditions in education institutions among the relevant stakeholders, including those dealing with education at European level. Essentially, these guidelines seek to help education authorities, education employers and education trade unions enhance and maintain decent and high quality working conditions in the education sector, with the ultimate goal of high quality education.

Rather than providing a one-size-fits-all approach, this set of guidelines should be understood as a tool to be assessed against and adjusted to the national settings concerning healthy and safe working conditions, specifically taking into account the circumstances of each individual workplace.

4. Recommendations – Make a start

The recommendations address three main levels (European, national and education institution level) for specific actions.

At European level it is important that the social partners in education

- Raise awareness amongst the social partners and education stakeholders at European and national level that investing in the health and wellbeing of education staff has a direct return on quality in education and reduces the huge costs otherwise caused through poor performance, absenteeism and long-term health impacts on staff;
- Encourage social partner organisations in education at national, regional and local level to pro-actively engage in preventing and tackling the issues of psychosocial hazards in social dialogue and collective agreements;
- Tackle the stigma of psychosocial hazards and work-related stress to inform those who remain sceptical about the issue that these hazards are not a problem for individuals but are related to the working environment and the organisation of work;



- Recognise, in the context of longer working lives, the need for a 'whole life approach', e.g. in relation to tackling stress as how young teachers are supported can affect their later working life;
- Promote the inclusion of the prevention of psychosocial hazards in initial teacher training and in continuous professional development both for school leaders and education staff;
- Establish a platform for the exchange of good practices and joint policy guidelines developed by social partners in education at national, regional and local level;
- Strengthen European collaboration and the cooperation of social partners on occupational health management in schools;
- Continue advocating the implementation of the Strategic Framework for OSH at national level in the education sector and the uptake of these in the country specific recommendations;
- Monitor and follow up on the implementation of these guidelines;

At national/regional level it is important that the social partners in education

- With a view to increasing the attractiveness of the teaching profession and to raising the status of education staff (including school leaders and teachers), establish clear guidelines on curriculum, teacher training and well-being (including the prevention of psycho-social hazards) that are embedded in a comprehensive strategy for the recruitment and retention of education staff;
- Take into account the impact of previous education reforms before introducing further change
- Further raise awareness of school leaders and education staff about the prevention of psychosocial hazards by including it in initial teacher training and in continuous professional development with a view, to sharing information about steps that can be taken to promote better work/life balance.
- Tackle the stigma of psychosocial hazards and work-related stress to inform those who remain sceptical about the issue that these hazards are not a problem for individuals but are related to the working environment and the organisation of work;
- Encourage and promote regular risk assessments as required by national law which address staff health and wellbeing at the workplace with a view to identifying the real needs of education staff, including the risks they face, and put in place appropriate measures that go beyond a paper strategy, e.g. involving staff in decisions about strategies to reduce work-related stress;
- Provide evidence and data on the health and wellbeing of education staff by, for example, calculating the return on investments for steps taken in relation to occupational health and safety in education ;
- When implementing reforms, measures or any actions concerning the education sector, take into consideration the positive impact these measures have in economic health terms;
- Make the case for labour inspections that include the prevention of psychosocial hazards and are carried out with the objective of supporting and encouraging education institutions to put in place appropriate measures to tackle work-related stress and to create a decent work environment that prevents psychosocial hazards;
- Evaluate the measures taken at regular intervals to ensure they are appropriate and work towards achieving the prevention of psycho-social risks;



- Encourage the development of national guidelines on concrete measures and steps to take to prevent and resolve psychosocial hazards, such as work-related stress in education institutions;
- Ensure that national committees for occupational health and safety include psychosocial hazards in the work programme and actively focus on the prevention of work-related stress;
- Focus on the process of achieving healthy and safe workplaces and seek to promote reasonable steps that can be achieved through joint social partner action and can be celebrated by all stakeholders involved;
- Promote a positive work culture both regarding reasonable expectations within the education system and education institutions and regarding the role of education staff;
- Encourage action at national level to support teachers, school leaders and other education staff in their professional development (including initial teacher training and continuous professional development) to include the prevention of psychosocial risks in their training in connection with occupational health and safety training and other relevant areas such as inclusion, special needs education, etc.;
- Engage all education stakeholders in a mentoring strategy and review the strategy at regular intervals;
- Promote the establishment of systems providing support for education staff returning to work after a period of long-term sick leave;
- Provide time and cooperation incentives for personnel support and establish multi-professional support teams embedded in the national/regional health programmes;
- Identify and apply for appropriate European, national and regional funding opportunities to sustainably support the work in this field at education institution level;

At local (education institution) level it is important that social partners in education

- Carry out risk assessments as required by law at regular intervals for each workplace that include psycho-social risks and ensure their follow-up through feedback and the development of appropriate measures with a view to reducing and preferably eliminating the risks;
- Promote an open-minded and team spirit culture among colleagues (e.g. through team teaching, cooperative learning and/or peer review) that allows signs of work-related stress and psychosocial hazards to be recognised and acknowledged at an early stage and seeks to positively respond to any concerns about well-being;
- Allow for and make use of exchanges on staff health and well-being, both in a formal setting (e.g. official health reporting procedures or a talk between school leader and staff) and in an informal setting (e.g. a chat among colleagues) with a view to promoting a positive culture of trust and fairness among and between staff and school leadership that allows for feedback and to trigger ownership of the prevention of psychosocial risks;
- Develop different ways of showing that staff are appreciated, both collective and individual.
- Provide opportunities for teachers to exchange their professional experience and views in a relaxed atmosphere, e.g. by setting aside time and/or providing rooms for this purpose;
- Encourage the development of a code of conduct for and with the whole school community (involving school leaders, teachers, students and parents) setting out clear expectations and roles for students, education staff, school leaders and parents based on mutual respect;
- Develop a pedagogical reference guide for the prevention of psychosocial risks, including specific areas such as special needs and teacher training;



- Take account of the physical state of the education institution's building, as well as the circumstances of the community which it serves, when considering steps to tackle stress. Promote use of schools' own powers to take active steps in implementing changes, e.g. encourage school leaders in neighbouring schools to share good practice on undertaking stress risk assessments and tackling work-related stress. Take into account that measures can comprise both material resources, e.g. staff rooms or rooms for relaxation and staff resources, e.g. support for children regarding special needs education or mentoring programmes that support teachers new to the profession and thus help to retain them in the teaching profession.
- Establish close cooperation with school trade union representatives/health and safety representatives and help them in undertaking their role by providing information and through consultation.

