

Psychosocial Risk Management - European Framework: Key Aspects

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Introduction

The European framework for psychosocial risk management at the workplace (PRIMA-EF) aims at providing a framework to promote policy and practice at national and enterprise level within the European Union (EU). The need for such a framework is particularly pressing due to recent EU data indicating the high prevalence of psychosocial risks to workers' health and an increase of problems such as work-related stress and workplace violence, harassment and bullying.

Work-related psychosocial risks concern aspects of the design and management of work and its social and organisational contexts that have the potential for causing psychological or physical harm. They have been identified as one of the major contemporary challenges for occupational health and safety and are linked to such workplace problems as work-related stress and workplace violence, harassment and bullying. Work-related stress is among the most commonly reported causes of illness by workers (European Foundation, 2007) affecting more than 40 million individuals across the EU. The same survey showed that 6% of the workforce had been exposed to threats of physical violence, 4% to violence by other people and 5% to bullying and/or harassment at work over the past 12 months.

Aim

PRIMA-EF identifies key aspects, stages and best practice principles and examples in psychosocial risk management at work. The framework is broad and aims at accommodating differences in approach and culture across EU member states. It can be used by countries and companies as the basis for the development of relevant policies, indicators and action plans to prevent and manage work-related stress and workplace violence, harassment and bullying. This guidance sheet presents the key aspects of the psychosocial risk management process and is meant to supplement the rest of the PRIMA-EF guidance sheets. It can be used as a reference point by enterprises, experts, employers' organisations, trade unions and policy makers.

Regulatory Framework

Psychosocial risk management is among employers' obligations to assess and manage all types of risk to workers' health as stipulated in the European Council Framework Directive on the Introduction of Measures to Encourage Improvements in the Safety and Health of Workers at Work, 89/391/EEC. Two agreements that have been concluded by the European Social Partners are also relevant: the framework agreement on work-related stress (2004) and the framework agreement on harassment and violence at work (2007). However, good psychosocial risk management also goes beyond legal requirements and offers many opportunities for businesses.



Key Aspects of Psychosocial Risk Management (PRIMA)

Good PRIMA is good business

Best practice in relation to PRIMA essentially reflects best practice in terms of organisational management, learning and development, social responsibility and the promotion of quality of working life. It leads to higher productivity, higher quality of products and services, greater attractiveness at the labour market, and greater capabilities for innovation.

PRIMA should be a continuous process, part of normal business operations

In every day practice, psychosocial risks have many causes. As a consequence there are no quick fix solutions; a continuous management process is required. To be effective it is important to understand the most important underlying causal factors before solutions are selected.

Ownership by all stakeholders

It is important that the main actors involved in PRIMA are responsible for the work to be done and have ownership of the process. They can be supported by internal or external experts or by external service providers but outsourcing ownership to service providers is a failure factor.

Contextualisation and tailoring

Tailoring the approach to its situation is a necessary part; it facilitates its practical impact and helps to make effective action plans. The size of the enterprise, its occupational sector, characteristics of the workforce (such as gender, age and contingent work) as well as the wider context of the country have to be considered.

Evidence-informed practice

PRIMA is a systematic, evidence-informed, practical, problem solving strategy. It should aim at producing a reasoned account of the most important psychosocial factors associated with ill-health for a specific working group and one grounded in evidence. Most important of all is that the solutions chosen are fit for purpose.

Participative approach and social dialogue

Inclusion of all parties in prevention efforts can increase participation, reduce barriers to change, and provide the first steps for prevention. PRIMA should involve actors in the prevention of psychosocial risks and not by requiring them to simply change their perceptions and behaviour. At the policy level, participation of workers' representatives, social dialogue and dialogue with external stakeholders are important.

Different levels of interventions with focus on measures at source

The emphasis in European legislation on health and safety is on primary risk prevention targeted at the organisation as the generator of risk. However specific actions targeted at the individual level can also play an important role depending on the extent and severity of the problem within organisations and its effect on employee health.

Ethics and corporate social responsibility

PRIMA is about people, their mental and physical health status and business and societal interests. Protecting the psychosocial health of people is not only a legal obligation, but also an ethical issue and falls within the remit of corporate social responsibility.

Capabilities at enterprise and macro levels

Policies and practice in PRIMA require capabilities, respectively at the macro and at the company level:

- adequate knowledge of the key agents (management and workers, policy makers)
- relevant and reliable information to support decision-making
- availability of effective and user-friendly methods and tools
- availability of competent supportive structures (experts, consultants, services and institutions, research and development).

Within the EU there are great differences in existing capabilities. In those countries where only minor capabilities are available, this is a major limitative factor for successful PRIMA practice as this is linked to lack of awareness and assessment of the impact of psychosocial risks on employee health and the healthiness of their organisations. It is also linked to inadequate inspection of company practices in relation to these issues.

Logic and Model

Psychosocial risk management incorporates five important elements: (i) a declared focus on a defined work population, workplace or set of operations, (ii) an assessment of risks to understand the nature of the problem and their underlying causes, (iii) the design and implementation of actions designed to remove or reduce risks (solutions), (iv) the evaluation of those actions, and (v) the active and careful management of the process.

The above key aspects of the PRIMA framework are relevant to both the enterprise and the macro levels. More information on the application of PRIMA-EF at these levels can be found through PRIMA-EF guidance sheets no. 02 and 03 (available at www.prima-ef.org).

More Information

www.prima-ef.org

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