Occupational health and safety risks for the most vulnerable workers

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A study by Milieu Ltd with the Institute of Occupational Medicine (IOM) for the European Parliament

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I. Background
Background

• Community Strategy 2007-2012 on health and safety at work:
  “...some categories of workers are still overexposed to occupational risks”

• EU2020 Strategy:
  “...the employment rate of the population aged 20-64 should increase from the current 69% to at least 75%, including through the greater involvement of women, older workers and the better integration of migrants in the work force.”
Health and Safety at Work in the EU

Accidental injuries, 1997-2007 (%)

Work-related health problems, 1997-2007 (%)

Work-related health problems have resulted in estimated **367 million lost working days** per year. Accidents alone cost over 0.6% of EU GDP in 2000 (Eurostat).
Background

• Terms of Reference:
  – Seven categories of workers:
    women, ageing workers (>55), young workers (18-25), workers with disabilities, migrant workers, temporary workers and low-qualified workers.
  – Identification of the specific OSH risks to these workers and relevant health outcomes
  – Identification of relevant strategies/initiatives in MS
  – Identification of possible actions at EU level
II. Main Findings
Women: OSH Risks

Risk Factors:

• Biological differences (i.e. reproductive health issues)
• Segregation in employment (i.e. 82.5% of working women in the service sector, fewer managerial positions, less rewarding jobs, interaction with third parties)
• Segregation with regard to domestic responsibilities (i.e. “double-shift”)

Health outcomes:

• Greater occurrence of work-related health problems than for men
• Most common problems: musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) and stress, depression and anxiety
• Victims of unwanted sexual attentions (in particular young women)
• Non-fatal accidents do not decrease with age/experience
Women: Issues for consideration

- Holistic approach to female (and male) reproductive health.
- Analysis and prevention of the effect on women’s health of the combined exposure to both paid and unpaid work such as housework.
- Causes and prevention of accidents among female workers.
- Best practices on the way to address exposure to psychosocial risks in female-dominated occupations/sectors (e.g. education, health sector).
Ageing workers: OSH risks

Risk factors:
- Natural deterioration of physical and mental capacities
- Longer exposure to risk factors

Health outcomes:
- greater risk of developing musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) and chronic health problems
- greater risk of fatal accidents, lesser risk of non-fatal accidents (except women)
- Longer recovery after accident/ health problem
Ageing workers: Issues for consideration

- Integration of *age management* into the general management of human resources by undertakings, looking at issues such as: work organisation; workloads; adaptation of work stations; and the transfer of skills and competences from older to younger workers.
- Guidance at EU level on the implementation of successful age management strategies in SMEs.
- Promotional activities on healthy working conditions for older workers for 2012 - the European Year for Active Ageing.
- Research on degenerative change to allow for earlier intervention.
Workers with disabilities: OSH Risks

Integrating and retaining workers with disabilities in appropriate work

Risk Factors:
• Diversity of risk factors, to include in appropriate risk assessment
• Often hold low-skilled jobs, part-time contracts, have less autonomy, face discrimination (e.g. lower salaries)

Health Outcomes
• No EU-wide data on work-related health problems for workers with disabilities
Workers with disabilities: Issues for consideration

• More *data* needed, but difficulties linked to different definitions

• Promote use of effective tools to assess work-related disability and OSH risks

• Improve management of prevention and re-integration after accident or health problems
Young workers: OSH risks

Risk Factors

• Lack experience and maturity, less cautious than older workers
• Overrepresented in certain sectors (hotels and restaurants) and more likely to work night shifts, overnight, week-ends, etc.
• Exposure when young can lead to later development of occupational diseases

Health Outcomes

• More non-fatal accidents than older workers
• More acute health problems (skin problems, headache, infectious diseases, burns, etc.) than older workers
• Fewer work-related health problems (but exposed less time)
Young workers: Issues for consideration

• Long-term risks of exposure to harmful substances and harmful work processes for workers when young

• Guidance on age management could also look at young workers

• Integration of OSH training and awareness-raising in different education and training contexts
Migrant workers: OSH risks

Risk Factors

• *Endogenous* ➔ include language barriers, over-qualification, fear of authorities, bullying
• *Exogenous* ➔ especially, prevalence in the “Three-D” sectors and jobs: Dirty, Dangerous and Demanding
• Migrant Domestic Workers
• Undocumented migrant workers believed to face the worst working conditions and greatest OSH risks.

Health outcomes:

• No EU-wide data but national studies show greater occurrence of occupational accidents and work-related health problems incl. psychosocial problems.
Migrant workers: Issues for consideration

• Addressing segregation of migrant workers in the labour market and their working conditions

• Implementation and enforcement of OSH legislation in high risk sectors

• Domestic workers

• Links to other policy areas
Temporary workers: OSH Risks

Risk Factors

• Less access to OSH trainings, less unionisation, over-representation in “3-D” jobs and sectors.
• Job insecurity → Likely to accept harder working conditions

Health Outcomes

• No EU-wide data but national statistics show positive relationship between temporary contracts and number of accidents/health problems
• Short but cumulative exposure to risks means difficulties to know causes of work-related health problems
• Higher risk of frustration, stress and depression
Temporary workers: Issues for consideration

• Address the long-term health surveillance of fixed-term workers.

• EU-wide surveys could address the working conditions and health of fixed-term workers.

• Training/training passports.

• Enforcement of existing legislation (e.g. exchanges of experiences and good practices among national labour inspection authorities on the role of inspectorates in the implementation of Directive 91/383/EEC).
Low-qualified workers: OSH Risks

Risk Factors

• In manufacturing, wholesale and retail, agriculture and construction sectors mostly → subject to OSH risks of these sectors
• Elementary occupations → exposed to repetitive tasks and tiring positions; harder physical conditions (vibrations, noise, hazardous substances, etc.)
• Less access to trainings

Health Outcomes

• Greater occurrence of work-related health problems, in particular MSDs
• High stress levels
Low-qualified workers: Issues for consideration

• Need for targeted OSH trainings and awareness-raising programmes for low-qualified workers and their employers

• Opportunities to integrate OSH training into up-skilling (included funded by the European Social Fund)

• Stress management
III. Conclusions
Relevance of the study

• Identification of OSH risks specific to certain categories of workers could promote better targeted policies and actions and improve effectiveness of OSH policy

• Identification of gaps and needs

• Strong cross-overs and links between the different groups
Review of options for EU action

• **Legislation and strategic options:** Domestic workers, Actions for migrant workers, MSDs

• **Implementation and enforcement:** Additional criteria on vulnerable workers in OSH guidelines / tools

• **Funding:** Higher investment on OSH in next ESF cycle

• **Research and data gathering:** Lack of EU-wide data on OSH situation of categories of most vulnerable workers

• **Awareness-Raising:** Campaigns on specific themes (MSDs, stress at work, etc.) to integrate actions targeted at categories of vulnerable workers
Links to other policies

• The study has shown that the occupational health and safety of vulnerable workers is linked to other policy areas.

• Opportunities for stronger integration between these policy areas and occupational health and safety.
Thank you for your attention!

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