



# Occupational health and safety risks for the most vulnerable workers

Presentation to the Employment and Social Affairs Committee of the European Parliament on 12 July 2011

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

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# I. Background



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# Background

- Community Strategy 2007-2012 on health and safety at work:

“...some categories of workers are still overexposed to occupational risks”

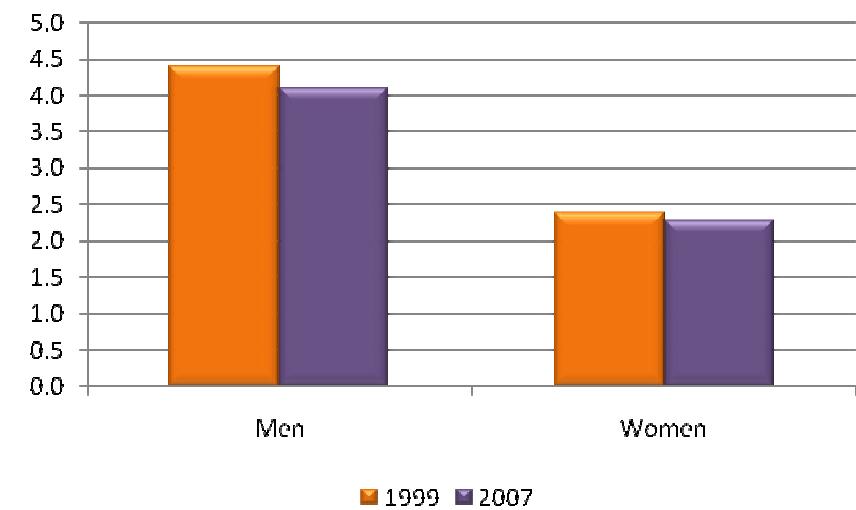
- EU2020 Strategy:

“...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.”

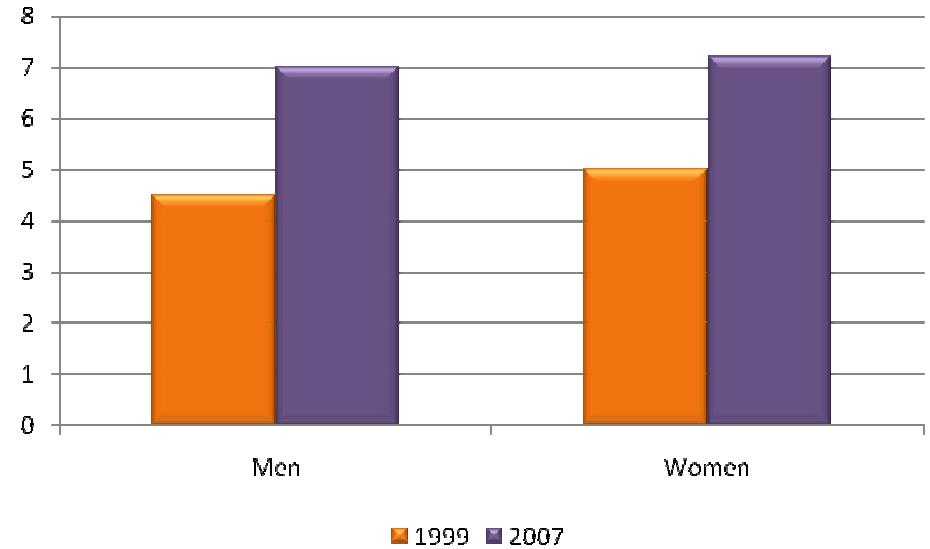


# Health and Safety at Work in the EU

**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



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# 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



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# 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



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# 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



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# 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



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# 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.



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# **Thank you for your attention !**

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