



OSH management in Human health and social work activities— what are European workplaces telling us?

4 May 2022



ESENER- Human health and social work activities

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Human health and social work activities – evidence from the European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER)

Keywords:

COVID-19, ESENER, Health Care, Policy Makers

This report examines the main occupational safety and health (OSH) risks for the human health and social work activities sector in Europe, including risks related to COVID-19. It analyses data from the three waves of the European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER). This analysis is complemented by interviews with key OSH experts and stakeholders from the sector.

It provides an overview of trends in the areas of OSH management, with a focus on ergonomic and psychosocial risks, drivers and barriers to OSH management in the sector and worker participation in OSH. The report presents the findings for the sector, providing a comparison between European countries and with other sectors. Based on the analyses and findings, potential learning points to improve OSH in the sector are also given.

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Executive Summary - Human health and social work activities – evidence from the European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER)

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Background to the study



- **Human health and social work activities sector is key for ensuring health and well-being of Europe's citizens.**
- **One of largest sectors, employing around 11% of workers in EU.**
- **Sector's key activities:**
 - **Human health activities:** hospital activities, medical and dental practice activities, other human health activities.
 - **Residential care activities:** residential nursing care activities, residential care activities for mental retardation, mental health and substance abuse, residential care activities for the elderly and disabled, other residential care activities.
 - **Social work activities:** social work activities without accommodation for the elderly and disabled, other social work activities without accommodation.
- **Impact of COVID-19.**



Workers in this sector are exposed to a range of OSH risks:

- **biological risks, including risks related to COVID-19**
- **chemical risks, such as those from drugs used in treatment of cancer and from disinfectants**
- **physical risks, such as from noise, slips, trips and falls, and ionising radiation**
- **ergonomic risks, for example lifting during patient handling**
- **psychosocial risks:**
 - violence and harassment, mobbing/bullying,
 - exposure to traumatic events, dealing with people at end of their lives
 - high workload, multi-task, burnout,
 - shift working, lone working, and lack of control over work

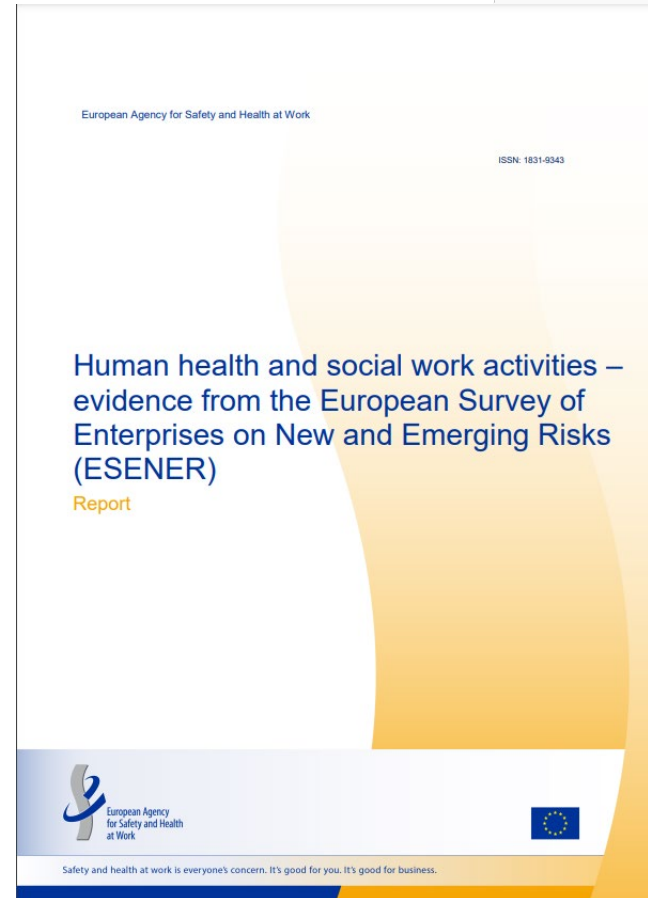
Human health and social work activities – evidence from ESENER

Published on 23 Feb 2022



Main research questions

- **What are the main OSH risk factors faced by the human health and social work activities sector?**
- **How is OSH managed in the human health and social work activities sector?**
- **What are the main factors influencing the management of OSH in the human health and social work activities sector?**
- **How are workers involved in the management of OSH in the sector?**





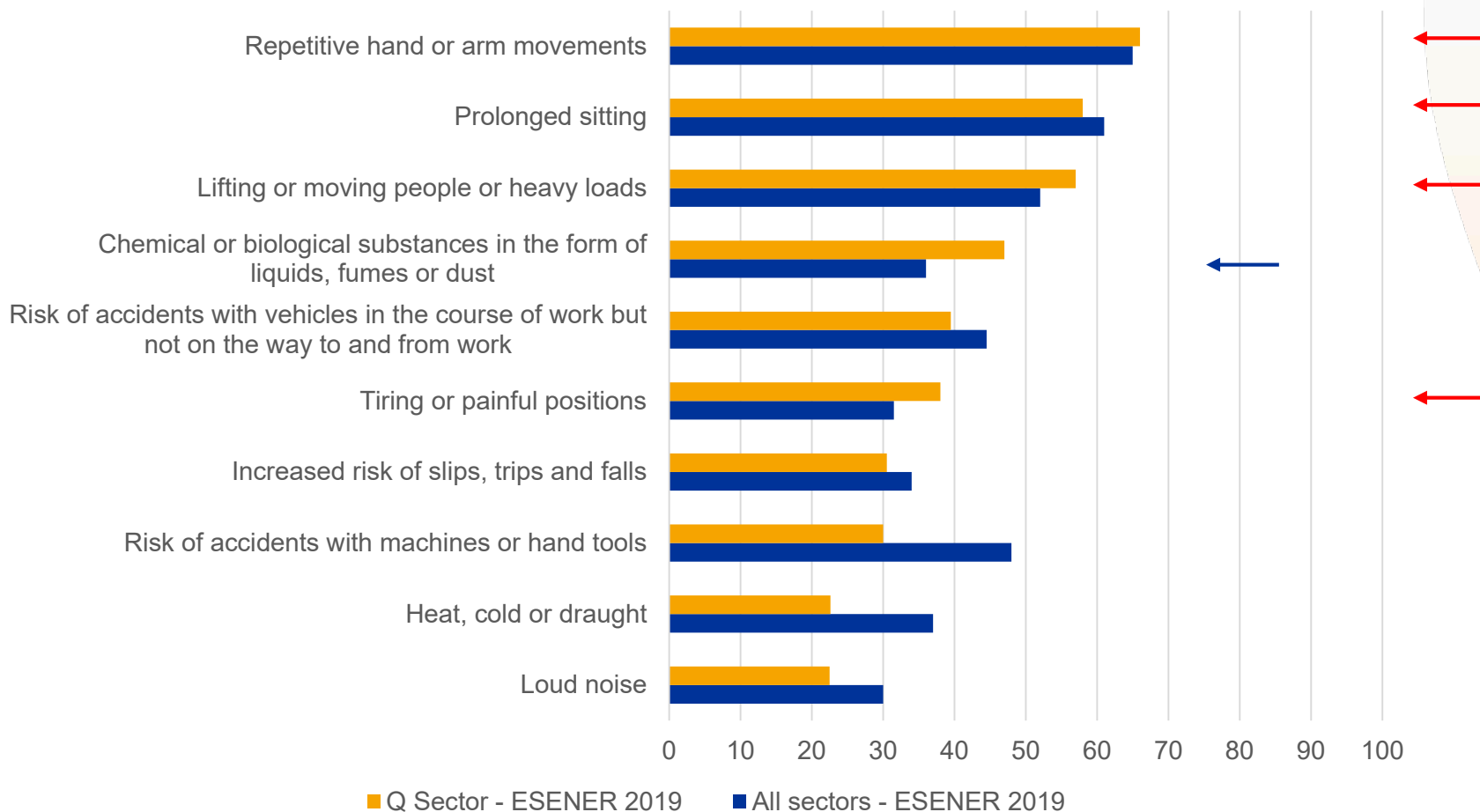
- **Literature review.**
- **Interviews with key informants.**
- **Descriptive analysis of ESENER datasets (2009, 2014 and 2019).**
- **Advanced statistical analysis (latent class analysis) of ESENER datasets**
 - determine typologies of companies in terms of OSH management

Research carried out by Ecorys Europe EEIG

Main findings: ergonomic risks



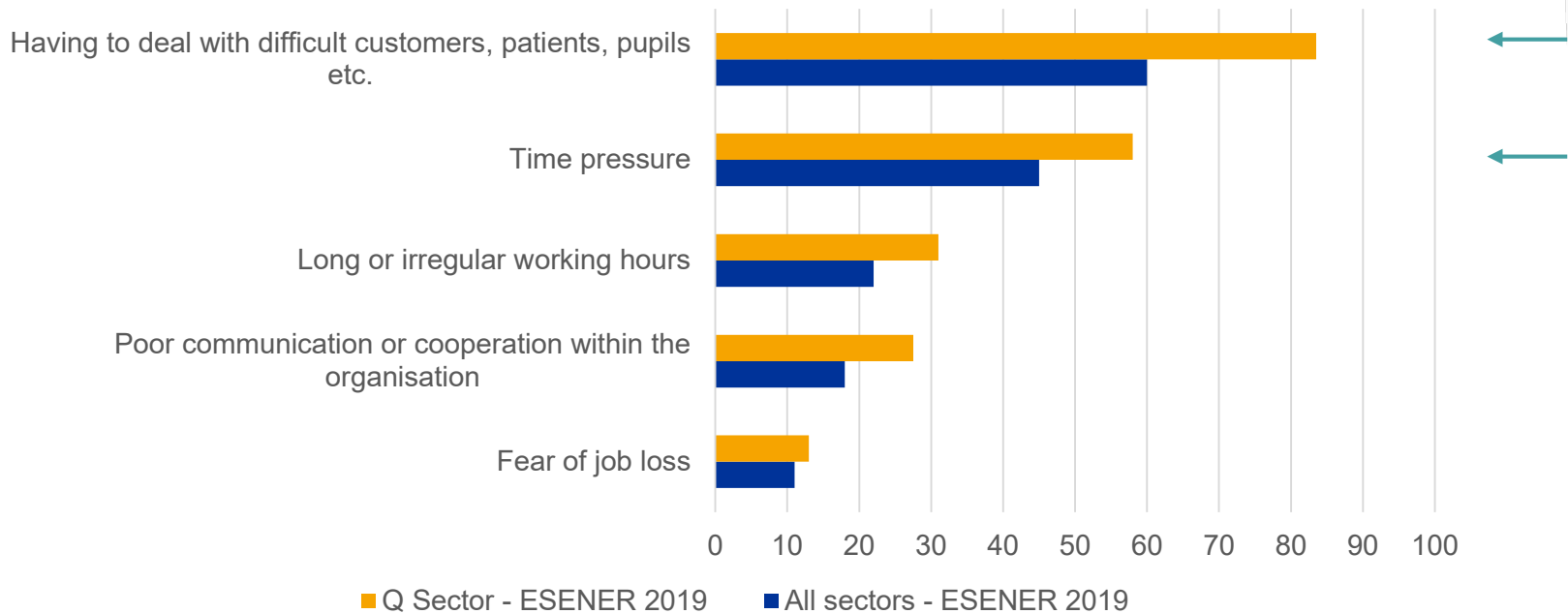
Risk factors in the workplace, % establishments in the EU27, 2019



Main findings: psychosocial risks



Psychosocial risk factors in the workplace, % establishments in the EU27, 2019



- **Over time, psychosocial risks have increased in the sector, with the exception of fear of loss of job - may be linked to increased workload**



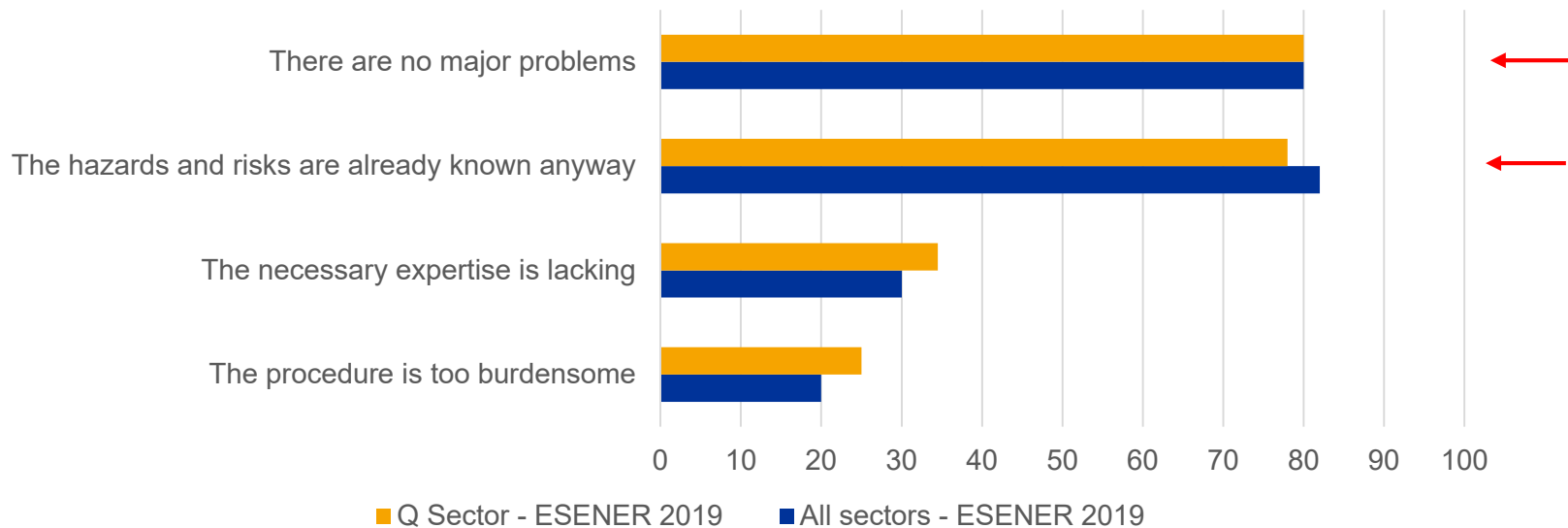
- **Significant in many different ways.**
- **Remarkable rise in stress for those working in the sector:**
 - Overwork due to increases in number of patients and staff shortages.
 - Lack of PPE in the first wave of COVID.
 - General anxiety about workers' own health due to potential exposure to COVID-19 at work, and general health of their families.
- **Reduced number of labour inspections**
 - shortages of labour
 - restrictions on entering workplaces due to biological risks

Risk assessments



- Higher than average share of sector workplaces report carrying out risk assessments in 2019: 78% vs. 75%
 - decreasing slightly since 2014
- Increase over time in use of internal experts for risk assessment

Reasons for not carrying out risk assessments, % establishments in the EU27, 2019



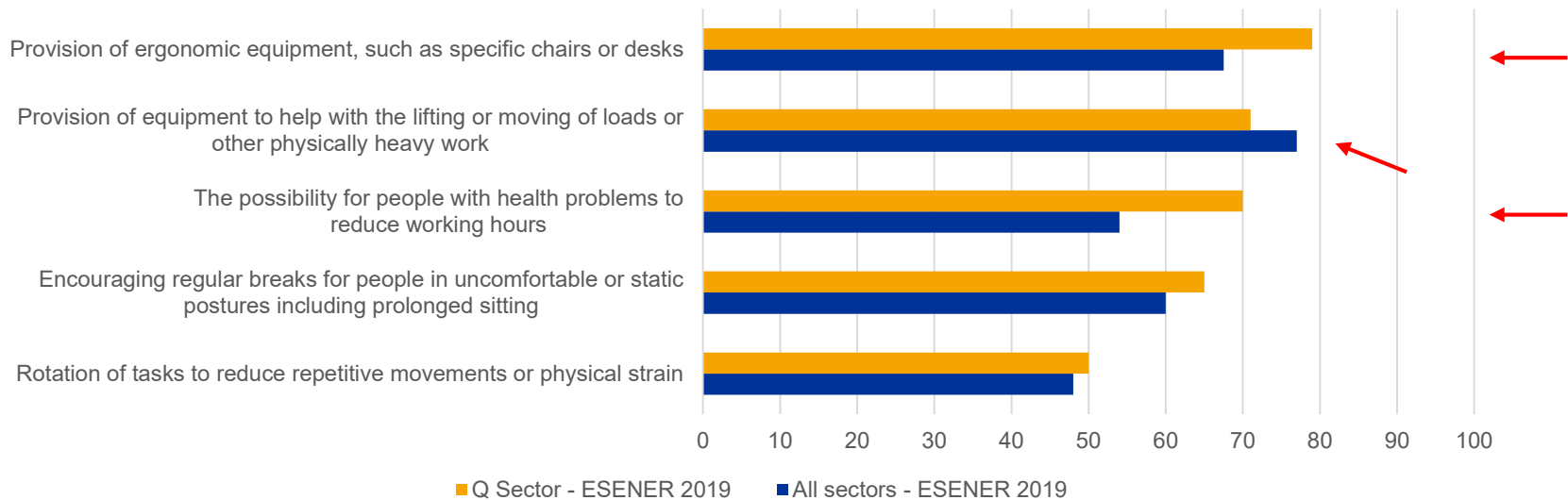
Base: workplaces in the EU27 reporting NOT carrying out risk assessments, 2019

OSH management measures



- Human health and social work activities sector firms are more likely to engage in OSH management, compared to firms in other sectors
- They are also more likely to rely on internal support for OSH management, compared to firms in other sectors

Measures to prevent MSDs, % establishments in the EU27, 2019



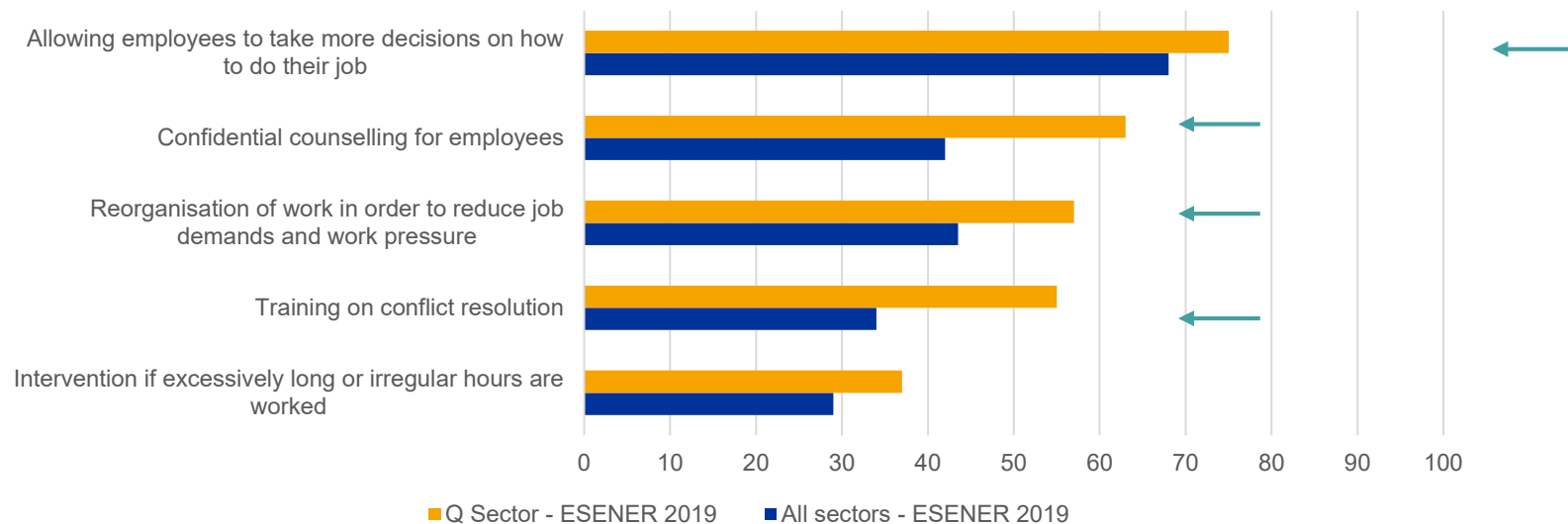
Base: all workplaces in the EU27 in 2019 except for (1) provision of equipment to help with lifting (only asked to those reporting presence of lifting people or heavy loads) and (2) rotation of tasks (only asked to those reporting presence of repetitive movements).



➤ Firms in this sector are more likely to have well-developed psychosocial risk management.

- Workplace stress: 49% vs 34%
- Bullying and harassment: 60% vs. 45%
- Threats and abuse from external parties: 75% vs 51%.

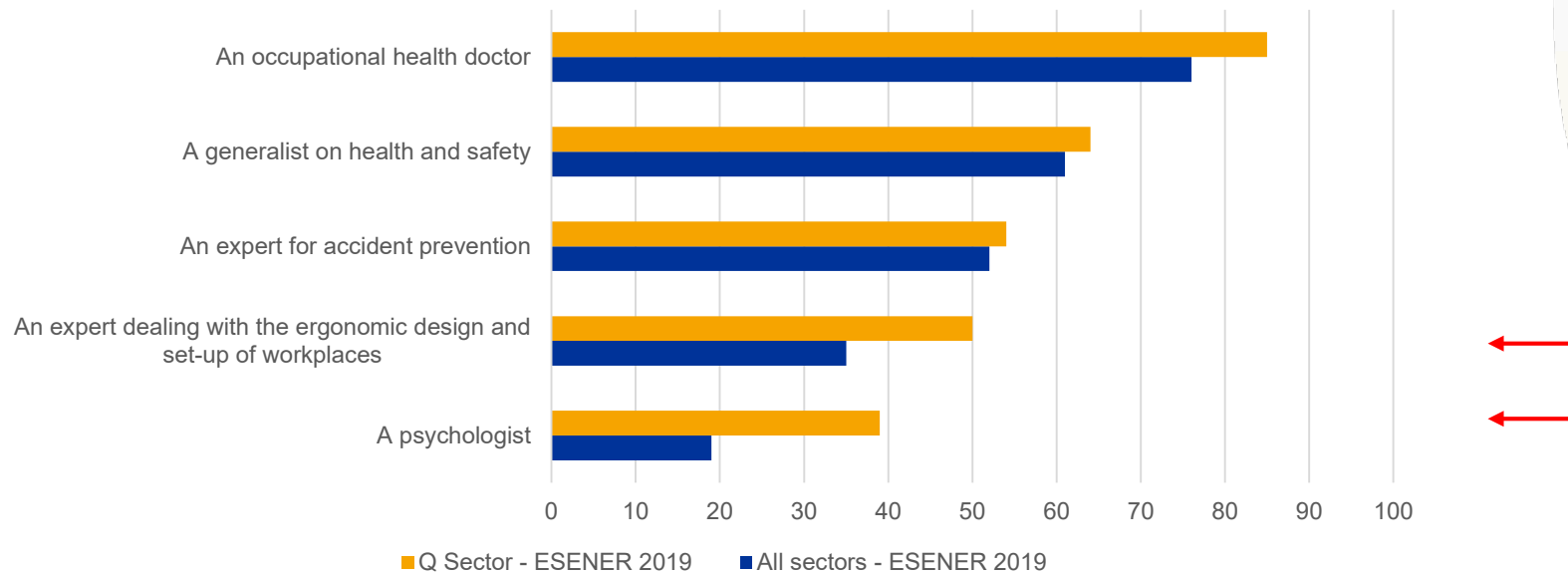
Measures to prevent psychosocial risks, % establishments in the EU27, 2019



Health and safety services and the labour inspectorate



Health and safety services used, % establishments in the EU27, 2019



- **Decreasing proportion of firms visited by the labour inspectorate in three years prior to the survey - across all sectors**
 - scarce resources in inspectorates, lack of training on specific risks, and the challenges of COVID

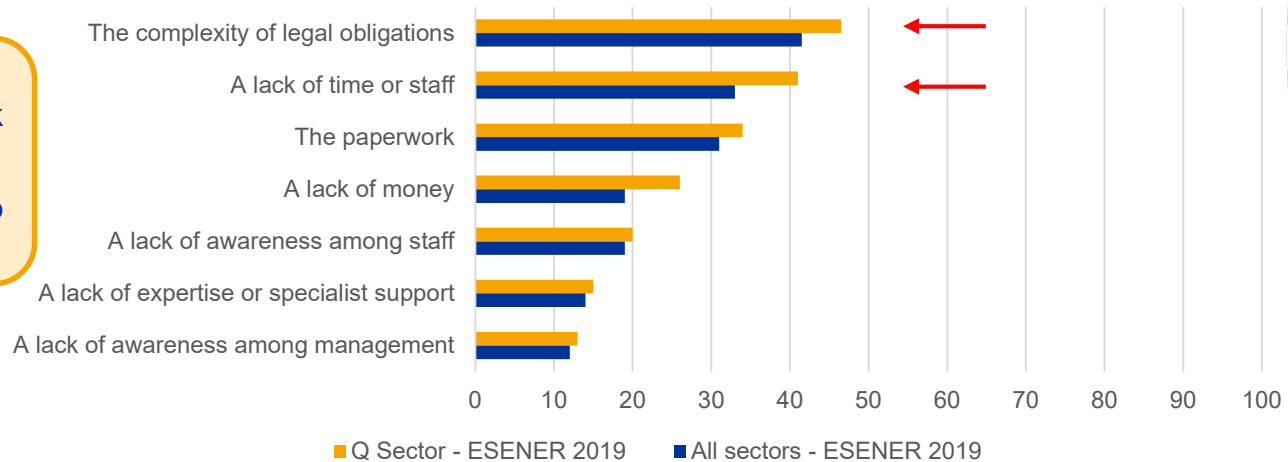
Barriers and drivers in relation to OSH



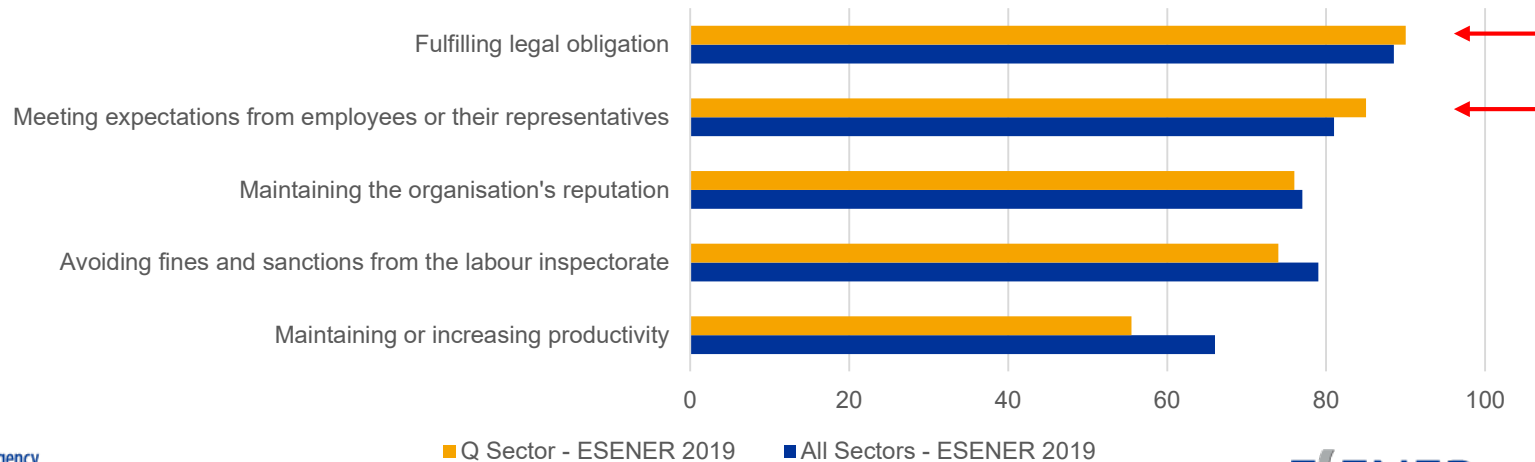
Major difficulties in dealing with OSH, % establishments in the EU27, 2019

Psychosocial risks

- reluctance to talk openly
- stigma attached to mental health



Major reasons for dealing with OSH, % establishments in the EU27, 2019

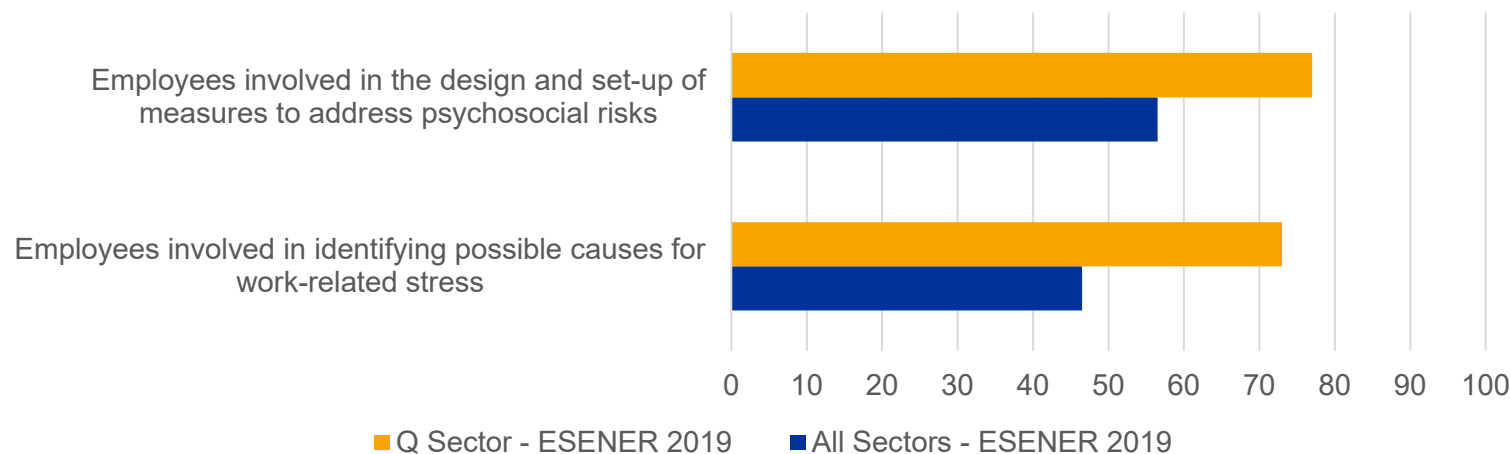


Worker participation in OSH



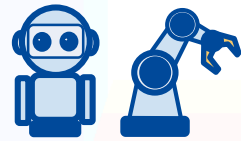
- Health and safety representatives are most common form of employee representation
- Higher than average discussions on OSH between employee representatives and the management.
- Health and safety representatives provided with training during working time slightly more often in the sector

Worker participation in psychosocial risk management, % establishments in the EU27, 2019

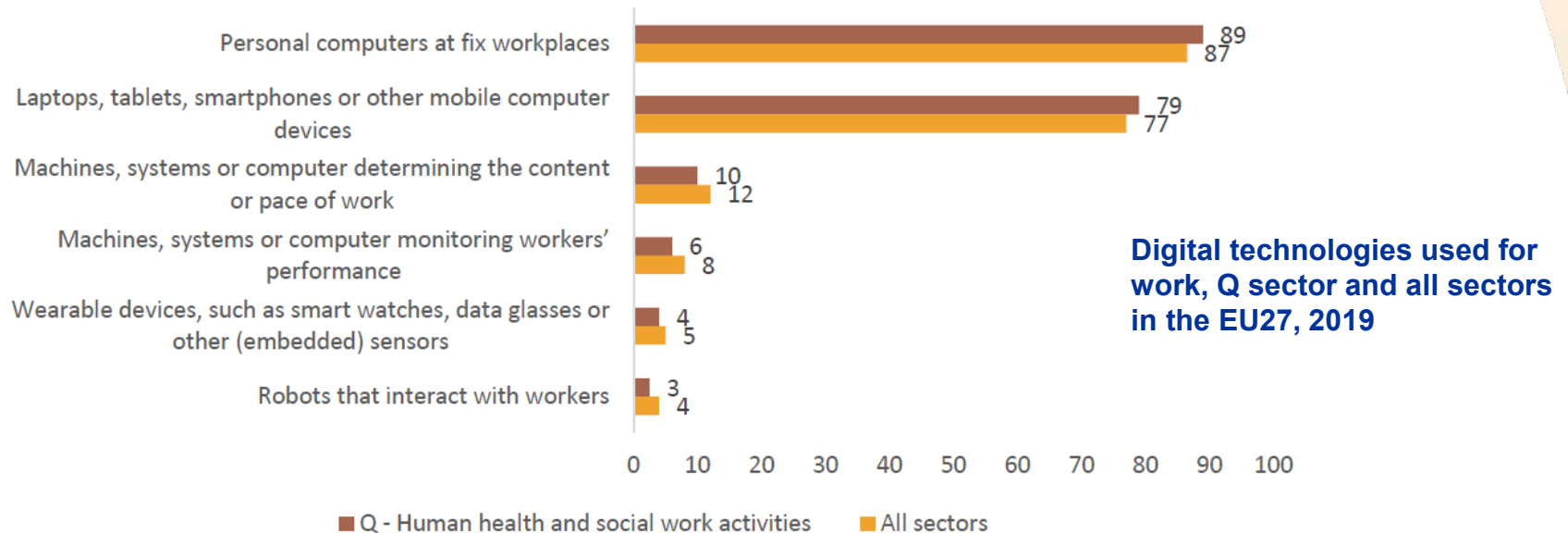


Base: workplaces in the EU27 (1) reporting at least one measure to prevent psychosocial risks (2) employing fewer than 20 people.

The role of digitalisation



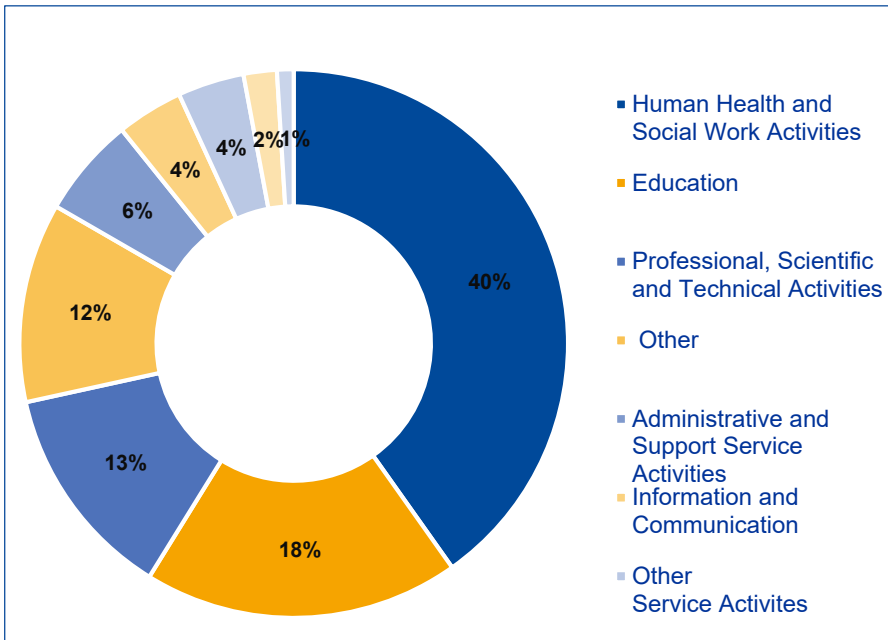
- It is likely that AI-based systems will increasingly be used in this sector in the future to automate tasks
- Drivers: increase in demand for staff, ageing workforce
- Opportunities for OSH:
 - reduce OSH risks
 - support OSH management
 - perform strenuous tasks such as patient lifting,
 - perform routine tasks, such as reporting of scans or needle insertion



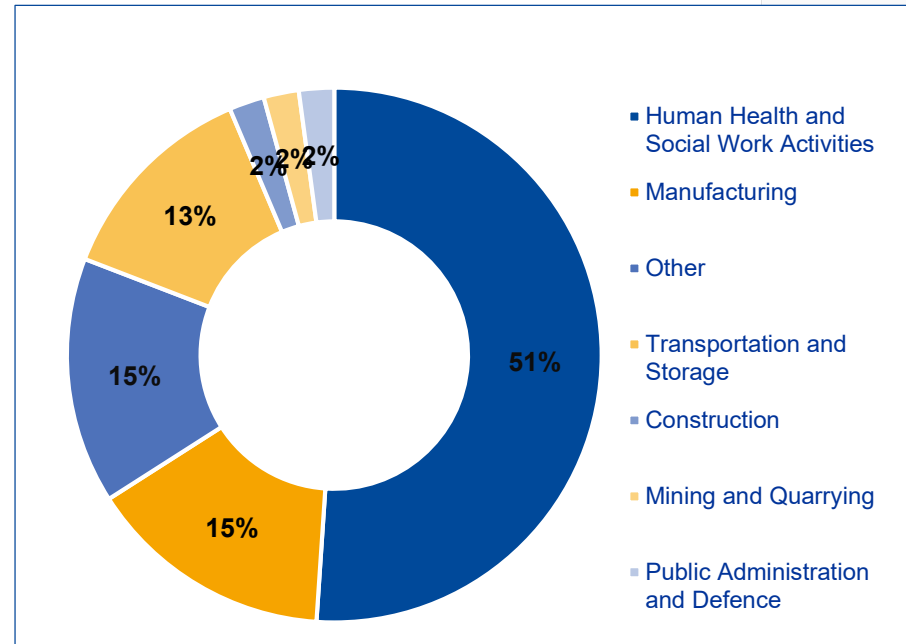
Automations through AI: Mapping of current and potential uses

NACE sector distribution according to scientific [literature](#)

Automation of cognitive tasks



Automation of physical tasks



Examples:

- **Medical Diagnosis via Decision Support Systems (X-ray analysis) / paired with a human radiologist**
- **Lifting of patients / paired with a human (nurse, physiotherapist, etc.)**

The technology only replaces parts of a job

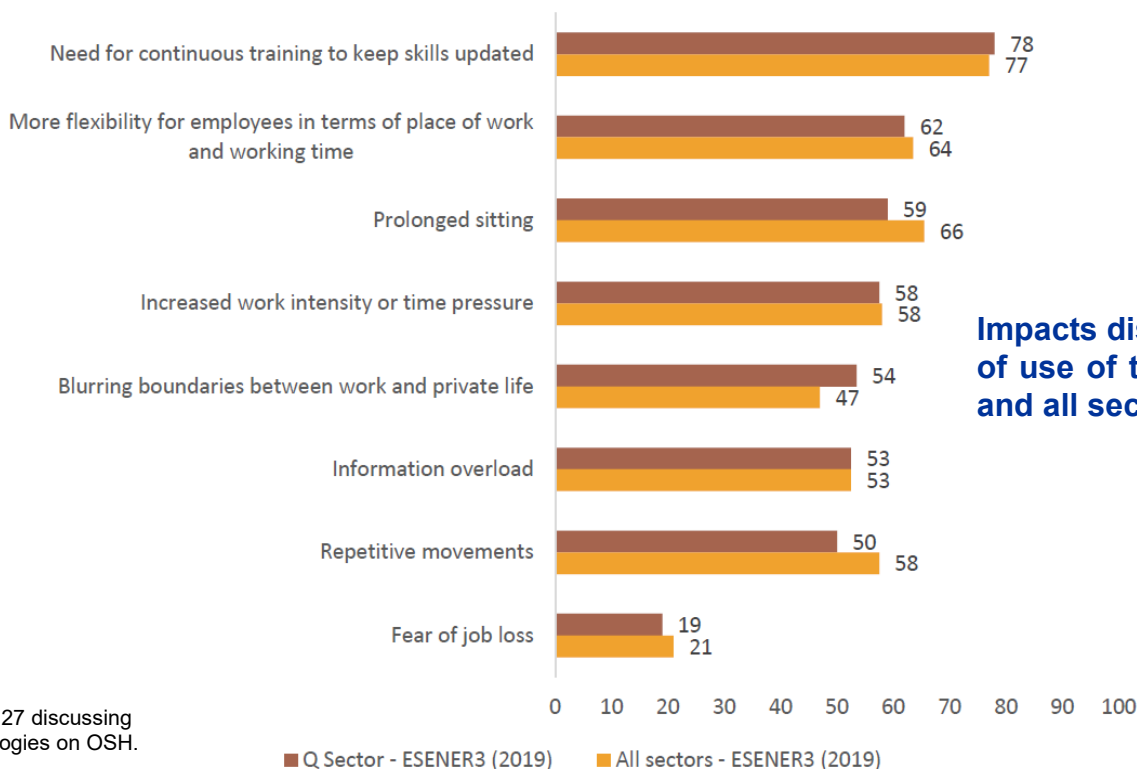
The role of digitalisation



➤ Challenges for OSH:

- psychosocial risks (working with such systems)
- fear of job loss,
- deskilling and lack of appropriate skills

➤ Potential impacts of various digital technologies on OSH were discussed in 28% of the establishments in the Q-sector (2019)



Impacts discussed in the context of use of technologies, Q sector and all sectors 2019 (%)

Base: workplaces in the EU27 discussing the impact of digital technologies on OSH.

Main learning points



- **Crucial to acknowledge psychosocial risks in the workplace**
 - Create open culture and reduce stigma of mental health issues
- **Mechanisation and digitalisation have an important role in preventing ergonomic risks in the sector**
 - Awareness of any potentially negative impacts
- **Sector should build on its solid basis of OSH prevention measures, particularly in the area of psychosocial risks**
- **Sector performs well in terms of providing training and awareness-raising of OSH issues**
 - Continue, particularly in non-residential care settings, where environment is less controlled

Main learning points



- **Sector also performs well in terms of communication on OSH and involving employee representatives in OSH discussions**
 - Should continue to be a focus
- **Exchange of good practice examples addressing issues within different subsectors**
 - Key for increasing knowledge and awareness of OSH
- **Impact of COVID-19 on the sector has been significant.**
 - Could be catalyst to improve OSH, based on increased sector profile and strengthened links between the sector and public health policy

THANK YOU!

Q&A

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