OSH management in the Education sector–what are European workplaces telling us?

26 April 2023
Education – evidence from the European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER)

Key points:
- A study by the European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks and a literature review of occupational safety and health (OSH) management in Europe’s education sector has revealed that OSH risks facing this sector are typically psychosocial and related to musculoskeletal disorders.
- The sector can benefit from stronger OSH management response and increased level of risk awareness as well as employee involvement, staff training and appointment of OSH representatives.
- The report also presents a series of sector-specific policy pointers for Member States and relevant stakeholders.

Related resources

Twin publications

Summary - Education – evidence from the European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER)

Type: Reports

10/18/2022

6 pages

Read more →
Sector accounts 7% of EU workforce (Eurostat, 2021)

Key to forming a skilled and productive workforce
  • Advancement of society in general

Sector’s key activities
  • NACE P (85) Education
    – Pre-primary education
    – Primary education
    – Secondary education
    – Higher education
    – Other education
    – Educational support activities

Impact of COVID-19
OSH risks in Education

Workers exposed to a range of OSH risks:

➢ Psychosocial risks:
  ➢ Having to deal with difficult pupils or parents
  ➢ Offensive (violent) behaviour
  ➢ Time pressure

➢ Musculoskeletal disorders
  ➢ Prolonged sitting
  ➢ Repetitive hand or arm movements

➢ Loud noise

➢ Intensification of risks due to COVID-19
  ➢ Digitalisation and MSDs
Main research questions

➢ What are the main OSH risk factors faced by the education sector?
  ➢ Psychosocial risks
  ➢ Digitalisation

➢ How is OSH managed in the sector?

➢ What are the main factors influencing the management of OSH in the education sector?

➢ How are workers involved in the management of OSH in the sector?

➢ Impact of COVID-19?
Methodology

➢ Literature review.

➢ Interviews with key informants.
  • EU sectoral social partners.
  • Five countries: Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland and Italy.


➢ Advanced statistical analysis (regression models) of ESENER datasets
  ➢ Key workplace characteristics ‘predict’ adoption of good OSH management measures?

Research carried out by Oxford Research
Main findings: ergonomic risks

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

- Prolonged sitting
- Repetitive hand or arm movements
- Loud noise
- Lifting or moving people or heavy loads
- Tiring or painful positions
- Increased risk of slips, trips and falls
- Heat, cold or draught
- Chemical or biological substances
- Risk of accidents with machines
- Risk of accidents with vehicles in the course of work

Education EU27
Main findings: psychosocial risks

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

- Having to deal with difficult customers, pupils, patients...
- Time pressure
- Long or irregular working hours
- Poor communication or cooperation
- Fear of job loss

➢ Over time, psychosocial risks have slightly increased in the sector, with the exception of fear of loss of job - may be linked to increased workload
Impact of COVID-19

- Intensification of risks.
- Digitalisation
  - Stress due to online teaching
    - Quick adaptation
    - Attention from pupils / Pressure from parents
    - Difference by subsector
  - Blended education to stay
  - Long working hours, social isolation, fear of infection..
- Positives of digitalisation – reduced commute / research work
  - 2019 findings, well positioned ahead of COVID-19?
    - Coverage of risk assessments
- MSDs
  - Appropriate equipment for home working?
Risk assessments

- Slightly higher than EU27 average: 77% vs. 75%
  - Increasing since 2014 (71%)
  - Focus and scope? Safety and chemical risks.
    - Not much on MSDs and psychosocial risks.

- Higher than average use of internal experts: 52% vs. 42%

- 19% workplaces at home / 40% workplaces outside the establishment:
  - 31% and 65%, respectively EU27 average

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

- There are no major problems
- The hazards and risks are already known anyway
- The necessary expertise is lacking
- The procedure is too burdensome

Base: workplaces in the EU27 reporting NOT carrying out risk assessments, 2019
OSH management measures: MSDs

- Workplaces in Education are less likely to engage in measures to manage MSDs than the EU27 average.
- Decreasing since 2014

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

- Provision of ergonomic equipment, such as specific chairs or desks
- Provision of equipment to help with the lifting or moving of loads or other physically heavy work
- The possibility for people with health problems to reduce working hours
- Encouraging regular breaks for people in uncomfortable or static postures including prolonged sitting
- Rotation of tasks to reduce repetitive movements or physical strain

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).
OSH management measures: psychosocial risks

- Workplaces in Education are more likely to have well-developed psychosocial risk management.
  - Workplace stress: 37% vs 34%
  - Bullying and harassment: 63% vs. 46%
  - Threats and abuse from external parties: 72% vs 52%.

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 workplaces 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 more difficult to manage than other OSH risks: 35% in Education (22% EU)

Psychosocial risks
- reluctance to talk openly
- stigma attached to mental health

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

Education
EU27

- Fulfilling legal obligation
- Meeting expectations from employees or their representatives
- Maintaining the organisation's reputation
- Avoiding fines and sanctions from the labour inspectorate
- Maintaining or increasing productivity
Worker participation in OSH

- Health and safety representatives are most common form of employee representation.
- Discussions on OSH between employee representatives and the management – slightly under EU27 average.
- 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.
### Health and safety representatives

- **Very important role – literature**
- **Management commitment – differences by country**

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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, reduce cognitive workload, efficiency
- Main opportunities for OSH:
  - reduce OSH risks (workload, time pressure, etc.)
  - support OSH management
  - tools for students’ assessment and supervision, (reducing teacher’s preparation time)
  - perform routine tasks, such as reporting

Digital technologies used for work, % establishments in the EU27, 2019
Cognitive automation: Mapping of current and potential uses

Examples:

- A system suggesting tailor-made lesson plans, materials and problem sets for different groups
- Use of Intelligent tutoring robots (ITRs) and systems, adjusting the complexity of content to the capabilities of the learner / teacher monitoring computer dashboards until a student is flagged (focusing on emotional communication)

The technology only replaces parts of a job

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The role of digitalisation

➢ Main challenges for OSH:
  ➢ fear of job loss,
  ➢ job transformation,
  ➢ loss of autonomy
  ➢ depersonalisation

➢ Potential impacts of various digital technologies on OSH were discussed in 30% of establishments in Education (2019)

Impacts discussed in the context of use of digital technologies, % establishments, 2019

- Need for continuous training to keep skills updated
- Prolonged sitting
- More flexibility for employees in terms of place of work and working time
- Increased work intensity or time pressure
- Repetitive movements
- Information overload
- Blurring boundaries between work and private life
- Fear of job loss

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

• Significant exposure to OSH risks: Psychosocial risks, MSDs, loud noise

• Awareness? Diverse across countries and workplaces
  • Differences across education subsector
  • Workplace size

• COVID-19 – intensification of risks:
  • Digitalisation, psychosocial risks and MSDs
  • Stress: motivating students/pressure from parents.

• Above average risk assessments.
  • Focus and scope?
  • Not much on MSDs and psychosocial risks.
  • Digitalisation and remote work – below average, not best positioned for COVID-19.
Conclusions

- Workplace health promotion
- Declining measures for sustainable working lives (MSDs)
  - Increasing exposure to MSD risk factors
- Limited supply of teachers and poor staff retention
  - Perception of working environment.
- Complexity of legal framework / difficulty managing psychosocial risks
  - Health and safety representatives
  - Training – particularly in some countries
THANK YOU!

Q&A

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