

SLOVENIA: INTEGRATING DIVERSITY INTO PSYCHOSOCIAL RISK PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT

Introduction

Slovenia has been progressively incorporating a gender and diversity perspective into psychosocial risk (PSR) prevention and management at work. This case study focuses on the development of guidelines for the effective prevention and management of PSRs in Slovenia. The guidelines exemplify the integration of a gender and diversity perspective into broader guidelines on PSRs, particularly emphasising awareness of gender- and diversity-sensitive risk assessment. An interesting feature of this approach is that the guidelines led to the training for occupational safety and health (OSH) experts and labour inspectors to encourage gender- and diversity-sensitive risk assessment, alongside the creation of a handbook on diversity mainstreaming in OSH.

Key takeaways

- The Senior Labour Inspectors Committee (SLIC) agreement and guidelines for labour inspectors (see EU-OSHA, 2026) have been a positive driver for these initiatives, showing the importance of EU-level initiatives and guidelines;
- Raising awareness, providing ongoing training, and building capacity for OSH experts and labour inspectors requires a long-term commitment and resources to embed awareness about diversity and PSRs;
- Many PSRs do not occur in isolation, and workers are often exposed to multiple risks simultaneously, which may accumulate over time. There is a significant gender and diversity dimension to exposure to PSRs, which can lead to mental health and physical health issues (musculoskeletal disorders, cardiovascular diseases, etc.);
- A high workload and a lack of support are among the factors that can lead to stress and burnout in a diverse workforce. Furthermore, unresolved conflict can develop into discrimination, bullying, harassment and sexual harassment, leading to heightened levels of stress at work, particularly for the most vulnerable workers;
- Building a strong business case on workforce diversity is considered essential for improving engagement with employers.
- Sharing good practices, learning, and building company networks are identified as key areas for future engagement on these issues.

Legal and policy context

The Occupational Health and Safety Act (ZVZD-1) specifies employers' responsibilities for maintaining a safe work environment. Under Article 24 of the Act, employers are required to implement measures to prevent, eliminate, and manage risks associated with poor work organisation, violence, bullying, harassment, and other PSRs. The Labour Inspectorate of the Republic of Slovenia (IRSD) oversees compliance with these regulations, including those related to PSRs. The Labour Relations Act prohibits discrimination, sexual harassment, harassment and bullying. Additionally, the Gender Equality Act and the Protection Against Discrimination Act are pertinent to preventing PSRs, as they prohibit discrimination in the workplace based on gender, age, disability and ethnicity.

The initiative described in this case is a key part of the objectives outlined in the Resolution on the National Programme of Health and Safety at Work 2018-2027, which includes, among others, OSH measures aimed at fostering a culture of prevention that considers workforce diversity.

In addition, gender mainstreaming was already part of the remit of the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and their extensive experience in gender mainstreaming in the workplace was applied to this initiative in the area of OSH.

Description of the intervention

Integrating diversity into workplace guidelines on managing PSRs

The 'Guidelines on the Effective Prevention and Management of Psychosocial Risks' (Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, 2024) were developed to raise awareness among occupational safety and health (OSH) experts and employers about the prevention and management of PSRs by identifying factors that influence their occurrence, frequency, duration and intensity. The guidelines recognise the multitude of factors that must be considered when addressing PSRs within the framework of employers' duties to prevent, eliminate and manage risks. They integrate a diversity perspective, offering a comprehensive suite of practical tools for identifying PSRs and enhancing the skills of those involved in risk assessment.

The guidelines address topics such as work-life balance and work-related risks affecting workers facing discrimination and vulnerability. Recognition is given to the benefits of a diverse workforce in fostering effective interpersonal relationships at work and an inclusive working environment for all workers. The guidelines also refer readers to a diversity-specific handbook which covers diversity mainstreaming in OSH risk assessment, developed as part of the diversity training programme (see below).

Workforce diversity is considered a key component of an inclusive and safe working environment, while diversity management is recognised as a key leadership quality for measuring and mitigating PSRs. Diversity is one of several issues addressed in the training of managers, covering effective communication, work organisation, priority setting, project management, diversity management, and the importance of reconciling private and professional life, as well as the right to disconnect, among other areas. Amongst the tools recommended is a questionnaire on relationships in the workplace, which addresses harassment and sexual harassment, making it clear that harassment '...occurs in the collective (because of age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic or racial origin, etc.)' (Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, 2024: p.44).'

The guidance makes several recommendations on the prevention of discrimination and sexual harassment by fostering a culture of respect for diversity. Examples are given of career-related issues (slower or disabled career development, precarious employment, poorer working conditions), health conditions (stress, cardiovascular health consequences), social issues (isolation in the working environment) and organisational issues (weaker reputation of the organisation, elimination of the consequences of inspections, low level of motivation). Specific actions recommended in order to promote gender equality include gender balance in decision-making positions, regular monitoring of legal obligations, search for good practices and their transfer into the organisation, and exchange of experience; workshops for identifying bias and training for employees on respectful communication, acceptance and respect for diversity, gender mainstreaming in organisational policies and practices, integration of the principle of diversity into organisational policies and practices, and surveying exposure to discriminatory practices.

Training on gender and diversity in OSH and risk assessment

Workshops for OSH experts: To build capacity and awareness of workforce diversity in the framework of the guidelines, the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities conducted thirteen workshops in 2022 and 2023, entitled 'Occupational Health and Safety Risk Assessment from the Perspective of Diversity,' targeting OSH experts. Each workshop lasted six hours and covered a combination of theoretical and practical/participatory exercises, using methods as the 'Six Thinking Hats.'¹ OSH experts and safety officers learnt how to integrate a gender and diversity perspective in risk assessment. An important part of this approach was to introduce participants to diversity, which, for many, was a new issue, and to break down misconceptions and misunderstandings about addressing the issue through OSH and risk assessment.

The workshops began by providing definitions of gender and diversity, as well as strategies for combating stereotypes and prejudices. The starting point was to raise awareness about gender

¹ <https://www.debonogroup.com/services/core-programs/six-thinking-hats/>.

stereotypes and bias, bringing a gender dimension into discussions about PSRs, workplace violence and harassment. The workshops also explored data about gender roles and how they intersect with age and migration, for example, by discussing the different types of exposure to PSRs for male and female migrant workers. The second part of the workshops explored how to implement a diversity perspective, focusing on gender, age, disability and migrant workers. Participants responded to various questions about how to assess risks by taking account of women's and men's social and biological differences, gender differences in exposure to stress and accidents at work, including MSDs, working with demanding clients and giving recognition to time pressures, while also addressing the state-of-play on reproductive and sexual health, and challenging the so-called 'typical' worker model who is male, middle aged, white and physically fit. The third part of the workshops focused on practical ways to enhance risk assessment by integrating a gender and diversity perspective from the outset. It concluded with participants committing to taking one action to implement their learning in risk assessment. At the end of the workshop, participants received a detailed handbook giving further information about gender and diversity issues in risk assessment, with practical guidance and checklists.

The handbook provides comprehensive advice on the law and employers' obligations, along with practical examples of diversity mainstreaming in OSH. It explores gender-specific psychosocial hazards and risks in the workplace, risk assessment, and awareness of risks related to age, migration and disability, among other topics. Prevention is addressed from the perspective of workers' circumstances and identities, with awareness raising about preventing direct and indirect discrimination, promoting equal treatment, and preventing harassment and sexual harassment. Specifically on gender, special attention is given to identifying gender-specific risks and hazards in the workplace, for example, regarding gender differences in exposure to risks leading to musculoskeletal disorders.

Workshops for labour inspectors: In addition, separate workshops entitled 'Psychosocial risks to occupational safety and health' were held for labour inspectors. The workshops had the following aims: how to empower inspectors to manage the stress they experience at work; how to strengthen their knowledge of the origin, dynamics and consequences of phenomena such as stress, burnout, workplace violence, bullying, harassment and sexual harassment; how to raise employers' awareness of PSRs; and how to monitor PSRs.

Success factors

- A strong legal framework, including specific PSR requirements, and a catalyst for inclusion of action in these areas was the inclusion of PSR and diversity in the national OSH strategy;
- The actions were underpinned by existing policy and expertise on gender mainstreaming in the Ministry;
- Recognition of the role of diversity management as an integral part of the management of PSRs, and not as an add-on;
- The integrated approach in the Guidelines, along with the related diversity training and handbook for OSH experts and labour inspectors, highlights the multiplicity of situations where psychosocial risk factors arise. The guidelines include practical tools to give an understanding of conscious and unconscious bias, gender and diversity stereotypes, as well as the effects of poor work organisation, leadership and interpersonal relationships, leading to stress, burnout, violence, sexual harassment, bullying, discrimination and conflict;
- The initiative was supported by training for OSH experts and labour inspectors, focusing on shifting perspectives and raising awareness of the relevance of gender and diversity to PSR assessment and prevention. A positive outcome of this initiative is the sharing of good practices and employer networking;
- Risk assessment is promoted as a tool to prevent PSRs, and includes a variety of diversity issues relating to TPVH, organisational issues and workplace culture.

Challenges

- Resistance from employers, particularly as PSRs and diversity are hard to measure in practice;
- Lack of awareness about gender-based discrimination and gendered stereotypes requires regular and ongoing training on these issues;
- Without a larger pool of experts, it remains challenging to ensure ongoing training and guidance for employers, unions and labour inspectors in this area;

- OSH policy and gender equality/non-discrimination policy operate in silos; better coordination and cross-learning are essential. OSH teams would benefit from a better understanding of gender equality and non-discrimination and *vice versa*.

Transferability

The approach in this case could be adopted in any EU Member State, given that it is adapted to the national situation, and resources are adjusted as necessary.

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