



GUIDE FOR ASSESSING THE QUALITY OF RISK ASSESSMENTS AND RISK MANAGEMENT MEASURES WITH REGARD TO PREVENTION OF PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS

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Inspectors*

*Senior Labour Inspectors' Committee
Working Group: New and Emerging Risks
(EMEX)*

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*N.B. All suggestions to labour inspectors in this document are only recommendations.
The respective member states' national legislation applies.*

1. Introduction

The Senior Labour Inspectors' Committee (SLIC) decided in May 2017 to set up a Working Group (WG) to consider new and emerging risks, called the WG Occupational Health and Safety Emerging Risks (WG EMEX). Its purpose is to address musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), psychosocial risks, as well as the demographic challenges faced by all EU Member States. The original background to WG EMEX was the communication from the European Commission in January 2017 that identified new and emerging risks as growing concerns for European employers and thus for National Labour Inspectorates (NLIs).

The main objective assigned to WG EMEX is to strengthen the enforcement of regulations governing ergonomics and psychosocial working conditions conducive to sustainable working environments for women and men, as well as young and old workers.

Representatives from Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Poland, Romania, and Sweden (chair) formed WG EMEX in September 2017.

The purpose of this guide is to help NLIs develop inspection procedures and to increase the confidence of labour inspectors when addressing the quality of risk assessments and risk management measures with regard to psychosocial risks.

2. Legal requirements

The Framework Directive 89/391/EEC obliges employers to implement preventive measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers. The employer is obliged to ensure the safety and health of workers in all work-related aspects, including psychosocial risks.

Some of the general principles of prevention listed in the Framework Directive are particularly relevant to psychosocial risks in the workplace:

- avoiding risks
- evaluating risks that cannot be avoided
- combating risks at source
- adapting work to the individual, especially as regards workplace design, choice of work equipment, and choice of working and production methods, with a particular view to alleviating monotonous work and work at a predetermined rate and to reducing their effects on health
- giving appropriate instructions to workers
- developing a coherent overall prevention approach that covers technology, work organisation, working conditions, social relationships, and the influence of factors related to the working environment.

Other specific occupational safety and health (OSH) directives that contain provisions related to the psychosocial working environment are the following:

- Council Directive 92/85/EEC on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding;
- Council Directive 90/270/EEC on the minimum safety and health requirements for work with display screen equipment; and
- Council Directive 2010/32/EU implementing the Framework Agreement on prevention from sharp injuries in the hospital and healthcare sector concluded by HOSPEEM and EPSU.

The Framework Directive has been transposed to national legislation in all EU Member States. It is a minimum directive, meaning that national law may exceed its terms. There are various approaches with regard to the prevention of psychosocial risks across Member States. Some Member States do not explicitly mention psychosocial risks in their occupational safety and health legislation, while others highlight the need to consider them as part of occupational safety and health. Some require psychosocial risk assessments, with a few advocating the involvement of experts. Some Member States have established guidelines on psychosocial risk prevention.ⁱ

Besides legislation, social dialogue drives the improvement of working conditions. European social partners have recognised the importance of psychosocial risks by signing the Framework Agreement on Work-related Stress (2004), the Framework Agreement on Harassment and Violence at Work (2007), and the Multisectoral Guidelines to tackle Third-party Violence and Harassment related to Work (2010). These agreements represent a commitment to the development and application of their content at the national level.ⁱⁱ

3. General perspective on psychosocial risks

3.1 Definitions

Psychosocial risks are defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in terms of their interactions among job content, work organisation and management, and other environmental and organisational conditions, on one hand, and workers' competencies and needs, on the other. These interactions can prove hazardous to workers' health through their perceptions and experience. A simpler definition is that psychosocial risks are those aspects of work design, organisation, and management, together with their social and environmental contexts, that have the potential to cause psychological, social, or physical harm. Psychosocial risk at work refers to the likelihood that certain aspects of work design, organisation, and management, together with their social and environmental contexts, may lead to negative physical, psychological, and social outcomes.ⁱⁱⁱ

Harassment is repeated and persistent attempts by one person to torment, wear down, frustrate, or get a reaction from another.^{iv}

Bullying is a situation in which one or several individuals persistently, over a period of time, perceive themselves to be on the receiving end of negative actions from one or several persons, in a situation where the target of bullying has difficulty in defending himself or herself against these actions.^{iv}

Third-party violence refers to threats, physical violence, and psychological violence (e.g., verbal violence) by third parties such as customers, clients, and patients receiving goods or services.^v

Stress is the response people may experience when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and that challenge their ability to cope.^v

3.2 Working conditions and psychosocial risks

Working life is changing quickly. Increased labour market flexibility means more part-time, temporary, and precarious employment. Information technology has changed the way work is carried out and how it is organised. Technology increases the possibility of working around the clock, and the 24-hour society is emerging. Changing working life means higher job demands and requires flexibility and knowledge of workers. Differentiating working time and free time is no longer straightforward. Advanced technology means increased productivity, but can also trigger stress and put workers' health at risk.

Work-related psychosocial risks are among the key emerging risks to health and safety and are linked to workplace problems such as harassment and bullying, violence at work, and work-related stress. Stress is related to poorer performance, higher absenteeism, and increased accident rates. Work-related stress may contribute to increased rates of early retirement. Excessive stress can threaten workers' health.

Around half of European workers consider stress to be common in their workplaces, and it contributes to around half of all lost working days. In Europe, 25% of workers say they experience work-related stress during all or most of their working time, with a similar proportion reporting that work affects their health negatively.ⁱⁱ Estimates of the cost to businesses and society are significant and run into billions of Euros at the European level. Work-related stress accounts for around half of lost working days as

stress-related absences are relatively long. Stress reduces work performance and can lead to accidents. About a fifth of staff turnover is related to stress at work.ⁱ

On the other hand, work can have positive consequences for individual health and well-being if working conditions that promote high job quality are present, such as social support, meaningful tasks, work–life balance, and the ability to influence how the work is organised. Work can provide individuals with purpose, financial resources, a source of identity, personal growth, social integration, and career development – all of which improve mental well-being.ⁱⁱ

Psychosocial risks arise from poor work design, organisation, and management, as well as a poor social context of work. When seen as organisational matters instead of individual problems, psychosocial risks can be as manageable as other safety and health risks at the workplace.

3.3 Examples of psychosocial risks

Many different types of psychosocial risks can have negative impacts on the health and well-being of workers. The most typical psychosocial risks are excessive workload and work pace and adverse social behaviour, such as violence or harassment.

Table 1. Examples of psychosocial risks (Esener 2010, ^{vi} adapted from Cox 1993 ^{vii})	
Job content	Lack of variety or short work cycles, fragmented or meaningless work, underuse of skills, high uncertainty, continuous exposure to difficult clients, patients, pupils, etc.
Workload and work pace	Work overload or too little work, machine pacing, high levels of time pressure, and continual deadline pressure
Working time	Shift work, night shifts, inflexible work schedules, unpredictable hours, and long or unsociable hours
Control	Low participation in decision-making, lack of control over workload, pacing, shift working, etc.
Environment and equipment	Inadequate equipment availability, suitability, or maintenance; poor environmental conditions, such as lack of space, poor lighting, and excessive noise
Organisational culture and function	Poor communication, low levels of support for problem solving and personal development, poor managerial support; lack of definition of, or agreement on, organisational objectives
Interpersonal relationships at work	Social or physical isolation, poor relationships with superiors, interpersonal conflict, lack of social support, harassment, bullying, poor leadership style, and third-party violence
Role in organisation	Role ambiguity, role conflict, and responsibility for people
Career development	Career stagnation and uncertainty, under-promotion or over-promotion, poor pay, job insecurity, and low social value of work
Home–work interface	Conflicting demands of work and home, low support at home, and problems relating to both partners being in the labour force (dual careers)

Psychosocial risks vary between sectors, workplaces, groups of workers, and occupations. Harmful psychosocial risks can occur at any workplace.

Table 2. Examples of typical psychosocial risks in different sectors
 (based on the Danish Working Environment Authority's work environment guides^{viii})

Sector	Psychosocial risk
Commerce	Work overload and time pressure Monotonous work Lack of influence on own work Customer contacts (lack of social support) Conflicts, bullying, and sexual harassment Thefts, violence, threats, and traumatic incidents Irregular working times; work in evenings and on weekends Lack of predictability at work Career stagnation
Offices	Work overload and time pressure Meaningless work and lack of variety Lack of influence on own work Lack of support Poor human-computer interaction Conflicts, bullying, and sexual harassment in contacts with clients Violence and threat of violence Job insecurity Career stagnation
Hospitals	Work overload, time pressure, and conflicting demands Lack of influence on own work Lack of support Conflicts, bullying, and sexual harassment High emotional demands Violence and traumatic incidents Irregular working times and night work
Construction	Work overload and time pressure Lack of influence on own work Lack of social support Bullying and sexual harassment Lack of information about major changes related to work Traumatic incidents
Education	Work overload and conflicting or unclear demands Lack of influence on own work Lack of social support Conflicts or bullying between teachers Conflicts with pupils Violence and traumatic incidents

3.4 Consequences of psychosocial risks

Poorly managed psychosocial risks can result in negative psychological, physical, and social outcomes, such as work-related stress, burnout, and depression.^{ix}

The reactions to the same circumstances may vary between people, some of whom can cope better with certain demands than others. Furthermore, depending on personal factors, the same person might even cope differently with similar circumstances on different occasions.ⁱⁱ

Work situations are experienced as stressful when they involve important work demands that are not well matched to the knowledge, skills, and needs of workers, especially when workers have little control over their work and receive little support to cope with the demands of the work.

There are several possible signs of stress that managers may recognise at an early stage. The causes may be work or personal factors, or a combination of these. The following are examples of organisational and individual indicators of work-related stress:^{ix}

Organisational indicators:

- absenteeism, high staff turnover, poor time-keeping, disciplinary problems, bullying, aggressive communication, and isolation
- reduced output or quality of products or service, accidents, poor decision making, and errors
- increased compensation or healthcare costs; referrals to health service.

Individual indicators:

- tobacco, alcohol, and drug abuse
- violence, bullying, and harassment
- sleep problems, anxiety disorders, depression, inability to concentrate, irritability, family relationship problems, and burnout
- back problems, heart problems, peptic ulcers, hypertension, and weakened immune system.

Workers under stress are not as productive and creative as they could be. Working under prolonged stress may result in concentration problems, mistakes, and negative behaviour. In addition, workers suffering from prolonged and excessive stress can go on to develop serious physical health problems, such as cardiovascular disease, and in extreme cases even commit suicide.^{ix}

There is also growing evidence linking musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) with psychosocial risks. For example, workers may work without rest breaks or have stress-related muscle tension, which can cause MSDs.



Figure 1. Hazard, risk, and harm (EU-OSHA, Drivers and barriers for psychosocial risk management, adapted from Cox, 1993^x).

When stress has triggered a mental or physical health problem, medical support is needed. The work might need adjustment to help the worker to manage. Employee assistance programmes, short-term counselling, and reintegration to work are useful remedial measures.

4. The quality of risk assessment of psychosocial risks conducted by the employer

4.1 Process of risk assessment of psychosocial risks

Psychosocial risks can be managed as systematically as can risks in the physical work environment. The main tools are the analysis and assessment of risks at work as well as good knowledge of these risks at management levels. According to the Framework Directive, the employer must possess a risk assessment, which should be kept up to date. This risk assessment should take account of all kinds of risks, both physical and psychosocial, at the workplace.

The objective of risk assessment is to prevent accidents at work and ill-health. The identification and consideration of the risk of harm is followed by the introduction and monitoring of preventive and protective measures, to ensure that the risks are adequately controlled at all times.

The methodology for conducting a psychosocial risk assessment is identical to that for assessing more traditional risks, though the main focus in this case is on psychosocial risks, which are often more difficult to detect than are physical risks. The risk assessment of psychosocial risks should be conducted according to national practices, for example, as part of the overall risk assessment of the workplace.

A high-quality risk assessment of psychosocial risks should contain the following steps:



Figure 2. Steps of the risk assessment of psychosocial risks.

4.1.1 Identifying psychosocial risks and the workers who may be exposed to them

The employer should investigate the psychosocial working environment, and assess and document any risk factors discovered. As psychosocial risks differ between sectors and between jobs, the employer must identify all psychosocial risks at the individual workplace. A high-quality risk assessment of psychosocial risks must be appropriate to the tasks carried out by the workers on a daily basis. All areas of work and groups of workers should be included. Examples of important groups are young and old workers, women and men, as well as temporary-agency workers.

The risk assessment should be methodically planned and carried out systematically. The risk assessment should be properly documented. It should be performed by the employer in cooperation with the workers. Investigations should be based not only on the experiences of individual workers but also on objective descriptions of the working conditions, such as facts and statistics.

If the employer does not have the appropriate knowledge to carry out the risk assessment within the organisation, appropriate external OSH services should be enlisted to assist. Whoever is to conduct the risk assessment must be competent for the task. They should understand the general approach to risk assessment and be able to apply this to the workplace and the tasks addressed. In the risk assessment of psychosocial working environments, medical or psychological expertise is often needed and useful.

The assessment must be suitable and sufficient and it should also be broad enough so it remains valid for a reasonable period.

4.1.2 Evaluating and prioritising risks

The identified risks should be listed in order of importance from a health perspective. The prioritisation should take account of the severity of the risk, the likely outcome of the risk, the number of workers potentially affected, and the time needed to take preventive and protective measures.

Questions to consider are:

- How likely it is that a risk will cause harm?
- How serious is the harm likely to be?
- How often and how many workers are exposed to the risk?

4.1.3 Deciding on preventive and protective measures and taking action

When the risks have been assessed, the employer should draw up an action plan and take appropriate preventive and protective measures. Preventive measures aim to improve the level of protection with regard to the safety and health of workers. The hierarchy of hazard control should be used in dealing with psychosocial risks. The primary measure is to eliminate the risk. This is not always possible, however, since the risk is often part of the work process. In that case, secondary interventions should aim at reducing the exposure to the risk. These measures should address the source of the risk (e.g., cause) and not just its effects. For instance, if the identified risk is excessive workload, the measures should be directed towards reducing the workload instead of improving stress control. Other secondary interventions can be changes in procedure and the training of employees. Tertiary interventions minimise the effects of exposure to psychosocial hazards through the management and treatment of symptoms of illness.

Measures to prevent and diminish the risks might be needed at different organisational levels. First, organisational measures are to be taken. Collective measures should be given priority over individual measures, since other workers may also work under the same conditions.

It is essential to consult the workers' representative, communicate the findings of the risk assessment to all workers, and ensure the commitment of all parties.

The responsibilities for carrying out the measures should be determined and the timetables as well as the participation should be agreed upon. Interventions to prevent and manage psychosocial risks and work-related stress are presented in section 5.

4.1.4 Monitoring and reviewing

The actions taken to minimise or prevent psychosocial risks should be systematically evaluated to assess whether they have an impact on the workers' well-being and organisational outcomes (e.g., cost-effectiveness, productivity, absenteeism, and presenteeism). Suitable improvements should be made when needed.

The risk assessment should be revised regularly whenever necessary, according to national legislation.

4.2 Risk assessment methods in order to prevent psychosocial risks

There are many ways to conduct and record the risk assessment, including by means of guides, surveys, interviews, observation, checklists, and templates. The following are examples of risk assessment methods that employers can use to address psychosocial risks:

- [Online interactive Risk Assessment OiRA](#) is a web platform created by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) that enables the creation of sectoral risk assessment tools in any language in an easy and standardised way.
- [E-guide of EU-OSHA to managing stress and psychosocial risks](#) is available in national versions. It provides information about work-related stress and psychosocial risks to foster awareness, understanding, and management of these issues in the workplace. The e-guide is designed to respond to the needs of employers and people working in small enterprises, who are starting to approach psychosocial risks in the workplace and who need guidance on the first steps.
- [Stress prevention at work checkpoints](#) by the ILO comprises easy-to-apply checkpoints for identifying stressors in working life and for mitigating their harmful effects. It also provides guidance on linking workplace risk assessment to the process of stress prevention. The checkpoints indicate good practice for enterprises and organisations in general, and are especially useful for companies and organisations that wish to incorporate stress prevention into their overall occupational safety and health policy and management systems. Each checkpoint describes an action, indicates why it is necessary and how to carry it out, and provides further hints and points to consider.
- [Prima-EF](#) provides best practice guidelines for psychosocial risk management at the workplace. It can be used by companies as the basis for developing relevant policies, indicators, and action plans to prevent and manage work-related stress and workplace violence, harassment, and bullying.

- The [Scandinavian QPS Nordic questionnaire](#) was created to improve the scientific quality and comparability of data on improving the psychological, social, and organisational work environment. The questionnaire encompasses the fundamental psychological and social factors at work and is suitable both for application in various workplace interventions and for research purposes.
- HSE in the UK has a [workbook for employers](#), to help them assess the risks from work-related stress; it gives advice and practical guidance on how to manage work-related stress. It promotes the management standards approach to tackling work-related stress. It uses a clear step-by-step method that includes checklists.
- There are also national guides, checklists, and tools provided by research institutions and NLI's. These tools are usually available only in the national language.

5. Examples of measures to prevent psychosocial risks

There is a huge variety of psychosocial risks (see Tables 1 and 2). Below are examples of measures to prevent the most common psychosocial risks.

5.1 Workload and work pace

- Jobs are designed to be within the capacities of workers and their skills. Abilities are matched to job demands. Workers have enough time to perform their tasks. Systems are in place to respond to individual concerns.
- Workers have clear tasks; they take part in meetings and the employer follows up their work situation regularly.
- Although workers are in principle accessible 24/7 via information technology, the employer sets boundaries on the accessibility of the workers.
- The employer ensures that teleworkers do not work excessive hours, and that they manage to separate work and private life.
- Employers and workers are educated in and aware of the causes and consequences of work-related stress. Employers monitor the workplace and the working practices to detect harmful workloads at an early stage.
- Work-related stress is combated by changing elements of how work is organised and managed, such as redesigning work, rotating difficult and challenging work, prioritising tasks, ensuring sufficient human resources, giving enough recovery time, and providing support and competence development. Workers are consulted when deciding on measures to be taken.

5.2 Third-party violence at work

- A workplace with a high risk of third-party violence has a code of conduct and guidelines for preventing and managing violence.
- The work environment and work practices are designed to prevent violence and protect workers. Security devices such as alarms are available. Escape routes are planned.
- Working alone, especially at night, and handling money are avoided.
- Workers are instructed in preventing and handling violent incidents and in using the security devices. Fear of violence is addressed and support provided.
- Violent incidents are systematically registered and analysed. The system supports the reporting of psychological violence as well.

5.3 Harassment and bullying

- Bullying at work is seen as a work environment problem, not as a personal problem between individuals.
- The workplace has anti-bullying policies and procedures to prevent and deal with bullying.
- Workers are encouraged to report unacceptable behaviour and bullying. Support is provided for affected workers.
- When a bullying case arises, it is handled and resolved immediately with those involved.

5.4 Other psychosocial risks

- Job content: Jobs are rotated or tasks are enriched.
- Control: Job descriptions are clear and responsibilities are defined. Workers are given control over their work and are allowed to participate in making decisions that affect them.

- Working time: Shift schedules are designed ergonomically if shift work cannot be avoided. This means, for example, that the shift periods are short and that there is enough time for recovery between the shifts.
- Organisational culture: Feedback is given. Workers are enabled to make complaints and these are taken seriously.
- Multicultural working groups: Workers from different countries of origin are integrated at the workplace. Employers deal with cultural diversity to overcome language and social barriers. Core information on OSH is provided in different languages, and information on safe working methods, risks, and unsafe circumstances is presented in pictograms. Employers and workers develop a safety culture together.
- Interpersonal relationships: Isolated workers and temporary-agency workers are given opportunities for social interaction.
- Environment and equipment: Excessive noise is eliminated and lighting is improved.

6. How to carry out an inspection using a preventive approach to psychosocial risks

Besides inspecting whether the employer is complying with the occupational safety and health regulations concerning the psychosocial working environment, it is recommended that the labour inspector should give guidance to the employer and workers.

When striving to prevent psychosocial risks, labour inspectors should take into account the fact that there is no single, across-the-board solution, and should recommend expert advice, for example, external OSH services, if needed for unusual or serious problems. A holistic approach is necessary in order to address psychosocial risks.

Subsections 6.1–6.3 describe how to carry out an inspection focused on assessing the quality of the risk assessment concerning psychosocial risks.

6.1 Planning the inspection

Before the inspection, the labour inspector should plan the goals, themes, and expected time needed for the inspection. There may be specific reasons for the inspection, such as complaints, anonymous reports, and focus actions, or the inspection may be a routine inspection. Inspections focusing on psychosocial risks are usually more time consuming than other inspections.

The labour inspector should get acquainted with the psychosocial risks to which the workers are likely exposed in the sector (see examples in Table 2) and gather information about the workplace and past performance, such as inspection reports, enforcement actions, and accident reports.

If, according to the NLI's procedures, the labour inspector can notify the employer of the inspection in advance, this might be an advantage, as notifying makes the inspection transparent and expeditious.

It is recommended that the following information be provided to the employer:

- time and place of the inspection
- what personnel the labour inspector would like to meet
- who will participate from the NLI's side
- what documentation should be available and what information should be sent to the labour inspector before the inspection
- information on specific methods to be used during the inspection (if relevant).

6.2 During the inspection

The inspection is carried out according to national practice. A recommended procedure is to divide the inspection into an initial meeting, a workplace round, and a final meeting.

In the initial meeting, the risk assessment documentation should be checked, in particular, to confirm that all aspects of the work, including psychosocial risks, have been covered. It is also important to check if all groups of workers are covered. Women and men, as well as young and old workers, often have different tasks, and thus are exposed to different psychosocial risks. In assessing the psychosocial risks, there are national methods especially prepared for labour inspectors, such as checklists, questionnaires, group interviews, individual interviews, and observations.

Using these methods, the labour inspector can assess what risks seem to be present at a certain workplace.

A non-exhaustive list of questions about psychosocial risk assessment suitable for use in any inspection is presented below:

1. Has the employer conducted a risk assessment?
2. Who participated in the risk assessment?
3. Was a checklist or another method used?
4. Did the employer use internal experts/external OSH services?
5. Were all groups of workers (e.g., different occupational groups, migrant workers, temporary-agency workers, young workers, elderly workers, women, men, part-time workers, and shift workers) included in the risk assessment?
6. Did the risk assessment cover all areas of work?
7. What psychosocial risks were identified and assessed?
8. Was an action plan drawn up and were responsibilities determined?
9. What preventive and protective measures were taken after the risk assessment?
10. Have the workers received instructions and training on how to prevent psychosocial risks?
11. Was the action plan evaluated to check the effectiveness of the measures?

Appendix 1 contains an extended version of the same questions.

In addition, statistics about work-related sickness absence, worker turnover, and work-related accidents and illnesses as well as information from internal experts or external services are useful sources of information. The labour inspector can also use other information concerning the workplace to identify psychosocial risks, such as questionnaires and job satisfaction surveys formulated by the employer. However, these questionnaires and surveys should not normally be accepted as risk assessment documentation, since they are meant for measuring attitudes and motivation and for collecting feed-back.

It is important to note that it is the employer's responsibility, not the labour inspector's, to examine and assess work-related psychosocial risks at the workplace. The labour inspector assesses whether the risk assessment has been carried out according to the legislation and whether it is comprehensive and adequate. The labour inspector does not assess the health or work ability of workers, which is the task of medical or psychological experts.

Depending on the employer's answers, the labour inspector will face different situations. If the risk assessment, actual action plan, and measures taken seem of sufficient quality, he/she can decide to conduct only a short workplace round. However, if the labour inspector feels that the quality is not sufficient, he/she should talk with various people at the workplace ranging from managers to workers. It is important to obtain information about the working conditions to assess whether the risk assessment covers the risks present at the workplace. Information from individuals, complaints or anonymous reports, and impressions gained during the inspection may point to the existence of work-related psychosocial risks. It is also essential to find out whether the workers have been acquainted appropriately with psychosocial risks.

If psychosocial risks have been identified and measures have been taken, the inspector should ask about the measures and their effectiveness and assess whether the measures are appropriate to prevent or diminish the risks.

In the final meeting, the labour inspector should, in line with national practice, communicate the observations and findings made and any stipulations, injunctions, or advice to be issued to the employer. Also, instructions and guidance can be given to the employer about relevant OSH websites, specially designed toolkits, training, and good practices.

6.3 After the inspection

The labour inspector should consider whether:

- the risk assessment is in accordance with national legislation and whether the relevant psychosocial risks have been identified;
- all fields of work (e.g., workplaces, organisational areas, and external work locations) and groups of workers are covered by the risk assessment; and
- appropriate measures, timetables, and responsibilities have been determined.

Labour inspectors in Europe have different ways of taking action to ensure that employers comply with occupational safety and health legislation. The labour inspector can prepare an inspection report, issue an improvement notice, and give instructions and/or guidance to the employer. The labour inspector can also impose measures with deadlines if he/she finds non-compliance with the national legal obligations. Prohibition notices are rarely used when inspecting the psychosocial working environment.

Examples of shortcomings and measures:

- If the risk assessment has not been carried out at all, the labour inspector could impose measures according to the national legislation (e.g., an improvement notice), obliging the employer to carry out the risk assessment.
- If a risk assessment has been carried out but psychosocial risks have not been assessed, the labour inspector could impose measures, according to the national legislation, on the employer to supplement the risk assessment. This also applies to situations in which other essential elements of the risk assessment are missing or incomplete, for instance, the psychosocial risks have not been assessed thoroughly enough. In the event of such shortcomings, the labour inspector could require the use of appropriate external OSH services.
- If the risk assessment is not up to date, the labour inspector could impose measures, according to the national legislation, to update the risk assessment.
- If no measures have been taken even though psychosocial risks have been identified, the labour inspector could require that the employer take preventive and protective measures.
- If the measures taken are not adequate to tackle the risks, the labour inspector could require new measures that are more effective.
- If the workers have not been instructed on how to avoid the risks, the labour inspector could require that the employer give instructions.

According to the national procedures, the labour inspector decides whether a follow-up inspection will be necessary to check the implemented measures and to verify that the action plan has been implemented in due time.

The inspection procedure should be finalised and reported according to the national practices.

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Useful publications and links

European Commission

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- Health and safety at work is everybody's business: Practical guidance for employers, 2016, <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/cbe4dbb7-ffdc-11e6-8a35-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF>
- Promoting mental health in the workplace: Guidance to implementing a comprehensive approach, 2014

Senior Labour Inspectors' Committee

- Fostering occupational safety and health culture in small businesses: Enabling businesses to create, maintain and live by good OSH culture – A guide for labour inspectors. Committee of Senior Labour Inspectors (SLIC), 2015,
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European Agency for Health and Safety at work (EU-OSHA)

- Psychosocial risks and stress at work,
<https://osha.europa.eu/en/themes/psychosocial-risks-and-stress>
- A practical e-Guide to managing psychosocial risks: Multi-lingual e-guide for employers and people working in small and micro enterprises to deal with psychosocial risks, <https://osha.europa.eu/en/tools-and-publications/e-guide-managing-stress-and-psychosocial-risks>
- Psychosocial risks in Europe: Prevalence and strategies for prevention. European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) and the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound), 2014,
<https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/reports/psychosocial-risks-eu-prevalence-strategies-prevention/view>
- Good practices at EU-OSHA website:
<https://osha.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/documents/healthy-workplaces-good-practice-awards2014-2015booklet.pdf>
- EU-OSHA Factsheets about psychosocial risks:
<http://www.osha.europa.eu/publications/factsheets>
No. 8 Stress at work
No. 22 Work-related stress
No. 23 Bullying at work
No. 24 Violence at work
No. 30 Accessing information on stress at work
No. 31 Practical advice for workers on tackling work-related stress
No. 32 How to tackle psychosocial issues and reduce work-related stress and its causes
No. 47 Prevention of violence to staff in the education sector
No. 74 Expert forecast on emerging psychosocial risks related to occupational safety and health
No. 102 Mental health promotion in the workplace. A summary of a good practice report

Other publications and links

- OSHwiki:
Psychosocial issues,
https://oshwiki.eu/wiki/Psychosocial_issues
Psychosocial risks and workers' health,
https://oshwiki.eu/wiki/Psychosocial_risks_and_workers_health
- Psychosocial working environment: Workplace inspection of the psychosocial working environment in the Nordic countries. Nordic Council of Ministers. TemaNord 2015:508,
<http://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:795004/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- Evaluation of risk assessment of psychosocial risks in control and advisory activities: Guidelines for the labour inspectorates. Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, Austria. Austrian Health and Safety Strategy 2007–2012.
- Tackling work-related stress using the Management Standards approach A step-by-step workbook, Health and Safety Executive, 2017,
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/wbk01.htm>

Risk assessment methods related to psychosocial risks

- European Agency for Safety Online Interactive Risk Assessment (OiRA),
<https://oiraproject.eu/en/oiraproject?page=9>
- E-guide of EU-OSHA to Managing Stress and Psychosocial Risks,
<https://osha.europa.eu/en/tools-and-publications/e-guide-managing-stress-and-psychosocial-risks>
- ILO Stress Prevention at Work Checkpoints,
http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_protect/@protrav/@safework/documents/instructionalmaterial/wcms_177108.pdf
- European Framework for Psychosocial Risk Management, Prima-EF,
<http://www.prima-ef.org/prima-ef-book.html>
- Scandinavian QPS Nordic Questionnaire,
<https://snd.gu.se/sv/catalogue/file/3228>
- Health and Safety Executive (HSE), UK, checklist,
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/equivalence.htm>

Appendix 1 – List of questions for assessing the quality of risk assessment and measures concerning psychosocial risks.

The labour inspector can pose the following questions to the employer and the workers' representative(s):

Part	Question	Yes	To some extent	No	Explanations/Comments
1.	Identifying risks and those at risk				
	Has the employer conducted a risk assessment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Was the risk assessment methodically planned?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Did the management participate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Which level?
	Did the workers' representative(s) participate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	What method was used?	<input type="checkbox"/> interviews <input type="checkbox"/> questionnaires <input type="checkbox"/> group discussions <input type="checkbox"/> other, which?			
	Were internal experts or external OSH services used?	<input type="checkbox"/> internal <input type="checkbox"/> external		<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Did the risk assessment cover the following groups of workers? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ young and old ▪ women and men ▪ migrant workers ▪ temporary-agency workers ▪ part-time workers ▪ shift workers ▪ teleworkers ▪ multicultural working groups ▪ other groups, specify: 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	
	Did the risk assessment cover all areas of work?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	A company can have many workplaces separate from each other.
	Did the risk assessment cover the following psychosocial risks? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ stress and workload ▪ violence and threats ▪ harassment and bullying ▪ sexual harassment ▪ working alone ▪ 24/7 working life ▪ other risks, specify: 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	
	Was the risk assessment properly documented?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Part	Question	Yes	To some extent	No	Explanations/Comments
2.	Evaluating and prioritizing				
	Have the levels of risks been assessed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Risk = probability x consequence
	Have risks been prioritised from a health perspective?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3.	Deciding on preventive and protective measures and taking action				
	Has the hierarchy of hazard control been used when deciding on measures?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Organisational measures should be prioritised over individual ones.
	Have responsible people and timetables been decided on?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Was/were the workers' representative(s) consulted?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Was an action plan drawn up?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Have preventive and protective measures been taken? If so, specify:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Have the workers received instructions and training on how to prevent psychosocial risks?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
4.	Monitoring and reviewing				
	Have measures taken been evaluated?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
5.	Final evaluation of the labour inspector				
	The risk assessment process is easy to follow and fit for purpose.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	The workers' representative(s) participated in the process to a sufficient degree.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	The main psychosocial risks were collected and assessed in an appropriate way.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	All groups of workers were covered.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	The documentation is appropriate in terms of form and content.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Measures have been taken or initiated and their effectiveness checked.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	The workers have received appropriate instructions regarding psychosocial risks.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Appendix 2 – List of SLIC EMEX Working Group member organisations

Member state	Representative
CYPRUS	Department of Labour Inspection P.O. 24855 1304 Nicosia Cyprus
DENMARK	The Danish Working Environment Authority Landskronagade 33 DK-2100 København Ø Denmark
FINLAND	Ministry of Social Affairs and Health Department for Work and Gender Equality P.O. Box 33, FI-00023 Government Finland
GREECE	Greek Labour Inspectorate Directorate for OSH Inspection of Athens-East Attica-Crete Coordination Department 10, Agisilaou Street, 10437, Athens Greece
POLAND	Chief Labour Inspectorate UL. Barska 28/30 02-315 Warszawa Poland
ROMANIA	Labour Inspection 14, Matei Voievod Street, 2nd district RO - 021455 Bucharest Romania
SWEDEN	Swedish Work Environment Authority International Affairs and Department of Inspections SE-112 79 Stockholm Sweden