



PRINCIPLES FOR LABOUR INSPECTORS

*With Regard To Diversity-
Sensitive Risk Assessment,
Particularly As Regards Age,
Gender, And Other
Demographic Characteristics*

*Non-Binding Publication For EU Labour
Inspectors*

*Senior Labour Inspectors' Committee
Working Group: New and emerging risks
(EMEX)*

Table of contents

1. Background to the publication.....	3
2. A holistic perspective on occupational safety and health (OSH)	4
2.1 Introduction	4
2.2 What can a labour inspector do to promote a holistic approach to OSH?	4
3. Risk assessment with a holistic approach	6
3.1 Introduction	6
3.2 Individual factors – individual differences	7
3.3 Ergonomic/technological approach to designing tasks/jobs	7
3.4 Organisational factors	8
3.5 Benefits of a holistic approach to risk assessment.....	8
3.6 What can a labour inspector do to assess both the quality of the risk assessment and the measures taken/planned?.....	9
4. An age perspective on OSH and risk assessment.....	10
4.1 Why an age perspective?	10
4.2 What is working life like for workers of different age groups in the EU?	10
4.2.1 The overall picture	10
4.2.2 Young workers.....	11
4.2.3 Older workers.....	11
4.3 Incorporating age issues in risk assessment.....	12
4.4 Examples of good practice	12
4.5 How to carry out an inspection applying an age-based approach.....	13
5. A gender perspective on OSH and risk assessment.....	17
5.1 Why a gender perspective?	17
5.2 What is working life like for women and men in the EU?	18
5.3 Taking account of gender issues in risk assessment	18
5.4 Examples of good practices.....	18
5.5 How to carry out an inspection applying a gender-based approach.....	19
Appendix 1 – A non-exhaustive list of questions about diversity-sensitive risk assessment.....	22
Appendix 2 – An extended list of questions addressing the gender perspective	23

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

1. Background to the publication

The Senior Labour Inspectors' Committee (SLIC) decided in May 2017 to form a working group (WG) to consider new and emerging risks, called the WG Occupational Health and Safety Emerging Risks (WG EMEX). Its purpose was to address musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), psychosocial risks, as well as the demographic challenges that all EU Member States face. A gender perspective was also expected. 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).

Representatives of seven Member States, i.e., Cyprus, Denmark, Greece, Finland, Poland, Romania, and Sweden (chair) formed the WG EMEX in September 2017.

The purpose of this publication is to help NLIs develop inspection procedures and to increase the confidence of labour inspectors when addressing diversity-sensitive risk assessment. Also, it is intended to enhance the effectiveness of labour inspectors' workplace interventions, particularly regarding age and gender issues.

The publication consists of four main chapters focusing on diversity-sensitive risk assessment. Chapter two explains why a holistic approach to occupational safety and health (OSH) is needed when dealing with new and emerging risks. Chapter three applies the same perspective to risk assessment. Chapter four clarifies why an age perspective on OSH and risk assessment is important when addressing the demographic challenge. Recommendations are given to labour inspectors on how they can prepare, carry out, and follow up inspections in order to promote this perspective. The last chapter presents a gender perspective on OSH and risk assessment, also making recommendations for labour inspectors.

A labour inspector will of course integrate questions from chapter two with age and gender aspects in her/his strategy when planning an inspection. He/she can also plan targeted inspections based on the suggested questions incorporating the age and gender perspectives, respectively. However, to clarify the importance of the different perspectives, it was decided to keep the information in separate chapters.

For further information, lists of references and suitable literature are provided at the end of the chapters.

2. A holistic perspective on occupational safety and health (OSH)

2.1 Introduction

To incorporate both a physical and psychosocial perspective, OSH issues at workplaces must be addressed using a holistic approach. According to the Framework Directive (89/391/EEC), which is implemented in every Member State's national legislation, an employer is, for example, obliged to:

- take the measures necessary for the safety and health protection of workers, including prevention of occupational risks and provision of information and training, as well as provision of the necessary organisation and means;
- be in possession of an assessment of the risks to safety and health at work, including those facing groups of workers exposed to particular risks;
- designate one or more workers to carry out activities related to the protection and prevention of occupational risks for the undertaking and/or establishment;
- take the necessary measures for first aid, fire-fighting, and evacuation of workers;
- keep a list of occupational accidents resulting in a worker being unfit for work for more than three working days; and
- consult workers and/or their representatives and allow them to take part in discussions on all questions relating to safety and health at work.

The term "OSH management system" is not used in the Framework Directive, but the very act of assessing a risk often leads in practice to the development of ideas for control measures, and thereby into the realm of risk management. This fact, together with a preventive approach, often means that an employer needs to create, maintain, and continuously develop procedures and activities as well as allocate tasks and resources in order to fulfil the requirements of the Framework Directive. Risk assessment is of course just one cornerstone of an effective OSH management system; the OSH policy of the employer (even if not mentioned in the Framework Directive), procedures for collaboration with the workers' representative(s), and OSH training are other important factors. The extent of an OSH management system varies depending on, for example, the size of the workplace, but a holistic approach is always needed.

N.B. In this publication, the term "OSH management system" does not refer to a purchased system, but to the OSH organisation within a company, however it is achieved.

NLIs can promote the development of OSH management systems in various ways, for example, by setting up awareness-raising campaigns, uploading information and tools to their websites, training labour inspectors, and holding dialogue with stakeholders (e.g., employers, social partners, workers' representatives, and OSH services).

2.2 What can a labour inspector do to promote a holistic approach to OSH?

Promoting a holistic approach to OSH management requires thorough examination of the workplace as a whole, taking account of and addressing all factors that could influence workplace safety and health. From this perspective, the labour inspector has a number of opportunities, as discussed below.

When planning an inspection the labour inspector can:

- Point out to the employer that he/she wants to discuss various aspects of OSH when inspecting, i.e., not focusing just on the risk assessment. This can be done by sending the employer a written agenda before the inspection. This initiative gives the employer a chance to both reflect and prepare her/himself. Also recommend that the employer initiate dialogue with safety representatives.
- If applicable, inform the employer about the NLI website, which contains information on various aspects of OSH.
- Remind the employer that the workers' representative(s) is/are supposed to participate in the inspection. Ensure that he/she/they also receive the agenda.

During an inspection the labour inspector can:

Ask questions about the employer's procedures for dealing with OSH issues at the workplace, including

- collaboration with workers' representatives;
- introduction of specific OSH training for new employees;
- when introducing new equipment or chemicals;
- when changing the organisational structure;
- reporting incidents and work-related accidents and injuries;
- when internal or external services are used;
- adaptation of workstations to specific, individual needs;
- when specific measures are needed to help an employee return to work after sickness absenteeism; and
- when procedures are followed up and revised (at least annually).

Ask the employer to present statistics about sickness absence as well as work-related accidents and diseases, including conclusions and proposed or taken measures.

Remember to ensure that the workers' representative(s) participate in any discussions.

After an inspection the labour inspector can:

- Stipulate or give advice according to the applicable national legislation. He/she should also point out that a holistic perspective on OSH together with a preventive approach will create better and more effective results.
- Depending on the severity of the actual deficiencies as well as the internal NLI rules, decide whether a follow-up inspection is needed.

Further information:

Fostering occupational safety and health culture in small businesses (SLIC/EC, Doc.87_EN). <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=148&intPageId=685>

3. Risk assessment with a holistic approach

3.1 Introduction

Currently, many risk assessments are based on workplace and work characteristics and on work factors. Less attention is paid to specific human characteristics, since risk assessments tend to be designed with the average human in mind.

A more holistic approach should take into consideration many factors, and be developed in line with corporate values and corporate safety culture. Risk assessment is a core element of the OSH management system concept. It has proved to be an effective way to raise the standard of protection against physical harm as well as to improve well-being in both the physiological and psychological senses.

To implement a roadmap to achieve this goal, one must start with policy and legislation. Based on specific provisions, a company carries out the risk assessment, bearing in mind work and workplace characteristics. The development and implementation of risk assessment requires employer commitment, a well-defined OSH management system, and a safety culture.

Considering and addressing new emerging risks takes risk assessment to a higher level and calls for appropriate OSH management processes and culture. However, in most cases such an approach is initially designed with the average human in mind. On second consideration, questions should be asked about whether all the processes, tasks, and measures mentioned in the risk assessment can be performed by everyone. In that sense, limitations posed by specific human characteristics, such as age, gender, and language, will be identified. Worker participation could be crucial at this stage, in which special attention is paid to human characteristics.

When considering the “human factor” in risk assessment, the three dimensions of matching the job to the person should be taken into account (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. The dimensions of matching the job to the person.ⁱ

3.2 Individual factors – individual differences

Physical differences (e.g., build, gender, health, and ability) as well as mental differences (e.g., attitude, motivation, and experience) need to be considered carefully when establishing controls for work activities. Some differences may limit individuals in performing certain tasks, or even exclude them altogether from these tasks (see Figure 2).

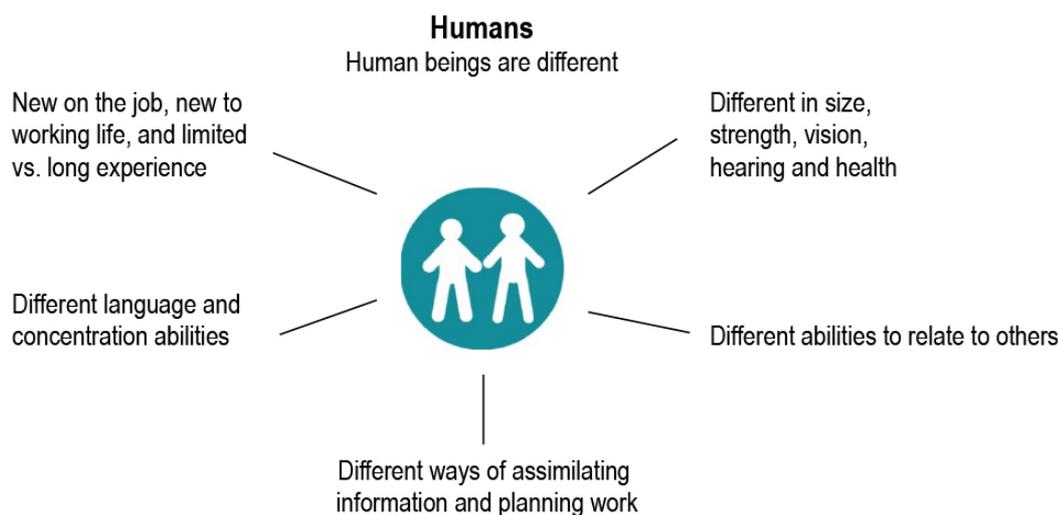


Figure 2. Individual factors.ⁱ

3.3 Ergonomic/technological approach to designing tasks/jobs

Tasks should be designed in accordance with ergonomic principles in order to accommodate limitations in human performance and physical ability. The main areas of interest are: critical task analysis, design of person-machine interfaces (e.g., displays and control devices), and ergonomic design of tools, programs, and work equipment" (see Figure 3).

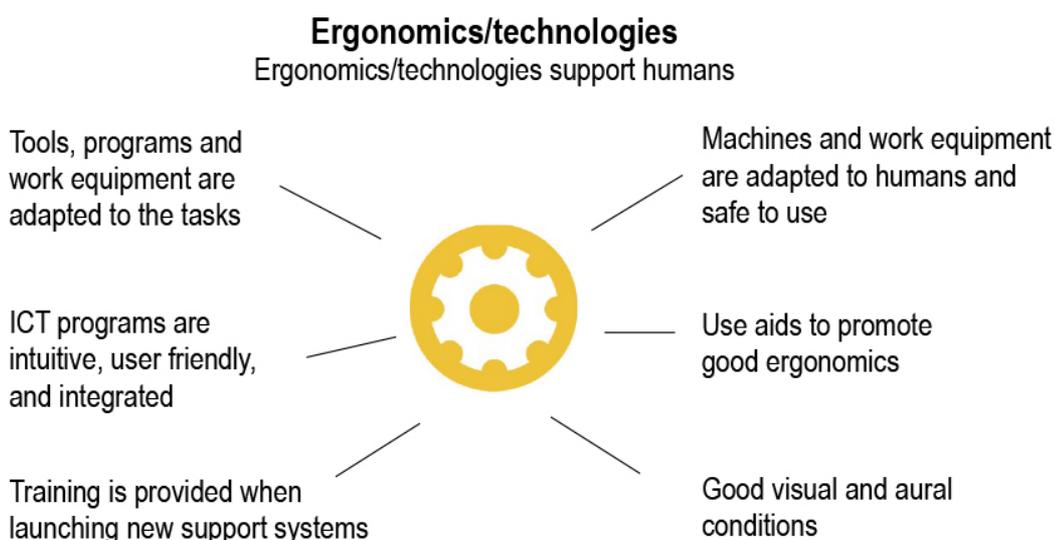


Figure 3. Ergonomic/technological approach.ⁱ

3.4 Organisational factors

The work culture should promote staff commitment to health and safety and emphasise that deviation from health and safety goals at any level is unacceptable. Organisational culture strongly influences human behaviour and can be critical in determining the well-being at work of sensitive groups of workers exposed to specific risks, such as psychosocial risks, bullying, and harassment (see Figure 4).

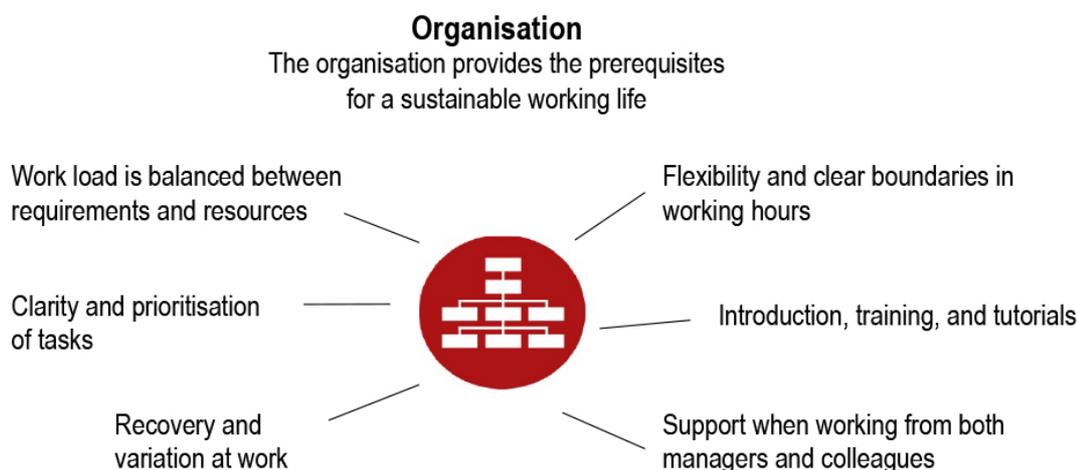


Figure 4. Organisational factors.ⁱ

3.5 Benefits of a holistic approach to risk assessment

The result of a holistic approach should be an improved risk assessment. The whole risk assessment process should be regularly repeated and evaluated to address managerial issues and organisational limitations, motivated by the company's safety culture and targeting the improvement of OSH management and OSH in general.

Employees should be seen as a diverse team comprising people with different and complementary characteristics. When working effectively, all team members collaborate on the same tasks, jointly accomplishing more than the sum of their individual efforts. Human factors should be seen as OSH areas that should be paid special attention; for example, older employees hold the keys to safety culture, business continuity, and internal processes, which are often held in the memory and not appropriately documented and described.

Companies usually learn only after incidents. However, they should proactively consider various good practices, look at what works, and develop their corporate risk management culture.

3.6 What can a labour inspector do to assess both the quality of the risk assessment and the measures taken/planned?

When planning an inspection, the labour inspector can:

- if possible according to national procedures, inform the employer that he/she wants to discuss their risk assessment practices (the content may vary depending on the sector, but should at least always address common sectoral risks, including MSDs and psychosocial risks); and
- if appropriate, inform the employer that the inspection will include a visit to a number of workstations.

During an inspection, the labour inspector can:

Ask questions, such as:

- Who conducted the risk assessment?
- Were the internal/external OSH services involved?
- How were the workers' representative(s) involved?
- What tool(s) was/were used?
- Did the risk assessment cover well-known risk areas, including MSDs and psychosocial issues?
- Did the risk assessment take into account statistics on work-related incidents, accidents, and diseases?
- Did the risk assessment cover all workers who may be at greatest risk, i.e., vulnerable groups such as pregnant women, migrant workers, younger and older workers, and temporary-agency workers?
- Have the planned measures been taken?
- If not, does an action plan with defined responsibilities and deadlines exist?
- Will the measures planned or taken prevent work-related accidents and diseases, according to your own experience?
- Do the actual measures correspond to the provisions of the applicable national legislation?
- Has the employer followed the hierarchy of controls, i.e., prioritising collective measures over individual ones?
- Have the results of the risk assessment been disseminated to workers and their representatives, workplace managers, etc.?

The labour inspector can visit a number of workstations, talk to several employees belonging to different work groups, and assess whether the risk assessment covers them and whether suitable measures have been planned or taken.

After an inspection the labour inspector can:

Stipulate/give advice according to the applicable national legislation that the employer must:

- complete the risk assessment by addressing, for example, workstations, groups not covered, and risks not assessed;
- use internal/external OSH services;
- allow the workers' representative(s) to participate in the work;
- consider who is responsible for future measures and applicable deadlines; and
- carry out concrete measures to eliminate non compliance with national OSH legislation.

References

ⁱ *Material to inspection campaign 2016-17, Healthy workplaces for all ages, Swedish Work Environment Authority, 2017*

4. An age perspective on OSH and risk assessment

4.1 Why an age perspective?

This chapter presents the age perspective on OSH, to help labour inspectors address age in relation to risk assessment at the workplace. The purpose is to help labour inspectors identify shortcomings and to supply information regarding the risk assessment of working conditions for women and men *of all ages*.

According to the EU OSH Strategic Framework 2014–2020, the ageing workforce is one of three major challenges. Sound health and safety for workers are necessary for a sustainable working life and active and healthy ageing, especially in light of the ageing working population and the extension of the working life. This requires the creation of a safe and healthy environment throughout the working life of an increasingly diversified workforce, as health in later life is affected by working conditions in earlier life. Applying a life course approach to OSH should be the goal of every employer, and an age-management system could be a tool for doing so. The promotion of a culture of prevention is also essential to achieving this.

The European Healthy Workplaces Campaign 2016–2017 chose not to focus on older workers but to stress the importance of promoting sustainable work and healthy ageing from the start of the working life, and of preventing health problems throughout the working life.

“The young workers of today are the older workers of tomorrow.”

4.2 What is working life like for workers of different age groups in the EU?

4.2.1 The overall picture

- Current demographic developments in Europe in relation to workforce ageing represent a huge challenge, taking into account that 19% of the EU-28 population was older than 65 years in 2016. By 2080, Eurostat estimates that around 29% of the “EU-28” population will be over 65 years of age.ⁱ
- Workforce ageing is a long-term trend reflected in an increasing number of older workers coupled with a declining number of working-age persons. From 2005 to 2015, the employment rate of older workers increased by more than 13% in EU-28, reaching 55% in 2016.ⁱⁱ On the other hand, 23% of young men and 21% of young women in the EU were unemployed in 2014, while the average unemployment of the total population stood at 10%.ⁱⁱ
- The average age at which workers leave the labour market in the EU is 61 years, significantly below the average official retirement age. Older workers are likely to face health problems, which could create difficulties for their full participation in the labour market. One reason why older people are more likely to experience poorer health is their longer exposure to risks in the work environment throughout their working life. At the same time, older workers’ experience and knowledge can compensate for decreasing physical capacity.ⁱⁱⁱ
- The proportion of younger people in the working population is decreasing significantly: in 1990, 56% of the working-age population was 15–54 years of age, whereas the estimated percentages for 2020 and 2040 are 51% and 46%, respectively.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Micro-enterprises tend to employ the highest proportion of employees aged 50 years or older, while large enterprises employ the highest proportion of young people.ⁱⁱⁱ

- According to EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) data, in the EU-28 in 2013, 33% of the employed population aged 55–64 years reported suffering from a long-standing illness or health problem, versus only 14% of those aged 16–44 years.^{iv}
- Young workers do more shift work and weekend work and have more irregular working hours than do workers as a whole.^{vii}
- There is no consistent evidence of an association between age and performance at work; rather, poor work performance is related to, for example, lack of recognition, work not being valued, conflict with supervisors, high job stress, and lack of support.^v

4.2.2 Young workers

OSHWiki^{vi} considers those aged 15–24 years to be young workers. Included in this age group are: workers in their first jobs, full- and part-time workers, temporary workers, young workers still in full-time education working part-time to supplement their income either year round or in vacation time only, apprentices contracted to an employer (usually full time), and trainees in non-contractual work.

Information about the special regulations for young persons under the age of 18 according to Directive 94/33/EC is not presented in this chapter, as it's assumed that all Member States already have legislation and procedures covering this matter.

Young workers are at risk of work-related accidents and injuries for a variety of reasons, such as:^v

- lack of experience, maturity, awareness of risks, skills, information, and training;
- unawareness of their OSH rights and of employers' responsibilities;
- overrepresentation in temporary agencies;
- reluctance to speak out about problems and desire to please their employers; and
- employers unawareness of the additional protection (e.g., introduction and OSH training) that young workers need.

4.2.3 Older workers

There is no commonly recognised age at which someone is considered an older worker, but the threshold is usually considered to be 60 years of age.^{vii} What should a labour inspector take into account in relation to older workers when inspecting a workplace? The following matters merit consideration:

- Older workers may be able to perform the same tasks as younger workers, but they may be working closer to their maximum performance level, especially from a physical perspective.
- The ageing process can affect the worker's ability to undertake extended heavy physical activity and can reduce the body's ability to adjust to hot and cold conditions (i.e., due to external temperature or physical work). When engaging in hard manual activity, older workers may become overheated more easily.
- Older workers tend to have fewer accidents than do younger ones, but when they do have accidents their injuries are often more severe and entail longer recovery times.
- During the ageing process, the human body loses range of motion and flexibility. Workers usually use a certain range of movements during their work tasks. Problems may arise for older workers when unpredictable situations require unusual movements.

- Older workers are more vulnerable to the negative effects of shift and night work: decreased ability to adjust the body clock to night work and increased sleep disturbances may cause poorer tolerance of shift work in older workers.
- Vision and hearing change with age: older workers may not be able to see/read from a certain distance or to hear as well at higher frequencies.
- Some cognitive functions decline with age; for example, information processing slows down. Older workers can compensate for this with their experience. Enormous variability exists between individuals in this regard.
- Other conditions, such as changes in work organisation and demands for new skills, can also affect older workers more than younger ones. Moreover, fatigue, the need for a slower work pace, and the need for rest generally increase with biological ageing, as do chronic health problems.

4.3 Incorporating age issues in risk assessment

In view of the above considerations, which are not exhaustive, workers of all ages need adequate training and supervision as well as a safe and suitable work environment matched to their skills and mental and physical abilities. For these reasons, EU legislation (89/391/EEC) requires that employers take special account of vulnerable groups of workers during risk assessment and apply appropriate preventive and protective measures.

Workforce diversity must be taken into account when assessing and managing risks. A systematic risk assessment should improve workplace safety and health for all workers, independent of age. An overly general approach to risk assessment and prevention without an age perspective can result in risks to younger/older workers and in other age groups being paid insufficient attention or even ignored.

"What's essential for one worker benefits all workers."

Key issues for age-sensitive risk assessment:^v

- fostering commitment and taking age issues seriously;
- examining the real working conditions of all workers;
- involving all workers, from different age groups, at all stages;
- avoiding prior assumptions about what the hazards are and who is at risk;
- especially valuing younger and older workers as assets and not as problems;
- matching work to the individual, independent of age;
- providing adequate OSH information and training, and tailoring training materials to workers' specific needs and characteristics; and
- receiving competent advice on addressing the risks faced by workers in different age groups from OSH services and authorities, occupational physicians, safety professionals, ergonomists, etc.

4.4 Examples of good practice

Keeping younger and older workers as well as all workers safe, healthy, skilled, and employed is a challenge in all European enterprises and relates to the system/institutional, organisational, and/or individual levels. Comprehensive and coherent active age-management approaches are often lacking in workplaces.

To overcome these challenges, good practices should be applied in workplaces, such as:

- tailoring learning/training approaches to the needs of various actual age groups – these approaches should be proactive and life course oriented, with measures tailored to the characteristics and needs of the targeted workers;
- implementing age-management strategies in order to help managers make the best use of the strength and potential of all generations;

- mixing work groups in enterprises so that they contain workers from different age groups, in order to increase efficiency and foster intergenerational learning (which includes mentoring, tutoring, and coaching) – by enabling interaction among people from different generations, all partners can learn;
- focusing on MSD prevention, for example, by implementing ergonomic work processes for workers of all ages;
- reducing the monotony of repetitive jobs by rotating work tasks between different age groups so that all have variation in their work;
- designing workstations so that they are easily adjusted to suit everybody's needs;
- promoting learning among older people in order to keep them skilled and employed, since their average participation in lifelong learning tends to be significantly lower than that of younger generations;
- developing and implementing appropriate ergonomic and preventive health programmes that promote physical, mental, and social health for workers of all ages;
- visualising negative stereotypes, building on positive perceptions of age (e.g., experience, loyalty, and reliability), and raising older workers' self-image as learners; and
- organising seminars, round tables, and other OSH awareness-raising actions involving workers from different age groups.

Age-management strategies should not be limited to younger or older workers, but must be proactive and consider workers of all age groups in an integrated manner.

4.5 How to carry out an inspection applying an age-based approach

When planning an inspection:

The labour inspector's role is important in raising OSH stakeholders' awareness of the benefits of applying an age perspective in risk assessment. The main goal is a well-planned inspection for which the labour inspector is well prepared with regard to age-related issues. Before the inspection, the inspector should get acquainted with the specific risks in the sector in question, especially from an age perspective. A non-exhaustive approach to how labour inspectors should address age-related issues in risk assessment at the workplace is presented below.

During an inspection:

The labour inspector will identify shortcomings in working conditions for workers of all ages, using one or more guiding questions, such as:

- How are the workers distributed in terms of age?
- What do statistics indicate regarding work-related sick leave, accidents, and diseases in different age groups?
- How many young workers are working in their first job?
- What work tasks do young workers normally have and what introduction procedures are in place?
- Do young workers receive adequate training and information on OSH matters?
- Are there any identified specific risks for workers of certain age groups, for example, younger or older workers?
- Do young workers receive written safety instructions when needed?
- Are workers from different age groups involved in the risk assessment process?
- Has some form of staff survey regarding psychosocial risks been conducted? If so, are statistics available regarding different age groups?

The answers to these questions can lead to ideas about how to address age-related issues. During the inspection, the labour inspector will probably visit a number of workstations. In that case, the inspector should ask workers from different age groups about what problems they face in performing their duties.

A non-exhaustive assessment of the quality of the risk assessment conducted by the employer should consider the answers to the following questions:

- Have age-related matters been taken into account in the risk assessment?
- Have the risks facing different age groups been properly assessed? For instance:
 - Have long-term health risks (e.g., high noise levels and exposure to hazardous substances) as well as emerging and less obvious risks (e.g., stress, harassment, and violence) been taken into account?
 - Has the risk assessment taken into account information from statistics on sickness absence and work-related accidents and diseases?
 - Has the risk assessment taken into account the cumulative effects of the tasks of some workers (e.g., loaders and stackers)?
 - Is the work divided into shifts (e.g., in the case of three shifts, are three workers exposed at the workplace/workstation for eight hours each)?
- Has the employer decided on preventive and protective measures to be taken, based on the age-related risks detected in the risk assessment?
- Has the employer nominated those responsible for carrying out the age-related measures?
- Have the age-related measures been carried out in due time?
- Has the employer followed up the effectiveness of the measures? Have the age-related risks been reduced?
- Have the supervisors been trained in identifying age-related risks?
- Have the workers received information and training on how to prevent age-related risks?
- Has the employer used internal or external OSH services?

A non-exhaustive list of questions about diversity-sensitive risk assessment, useful during inspections, is presented in Appendix 1.

After an inspection:

At the end of an inspection, the labour inspector has various ways of taking action, according to the national legislation of the Member State, to ensure that the employer complies with his/her legal obligations regarding risk assessment, taking into account that the groups of workers particularly at risk, such as younger and older workers, should be covered. The labour inspector can draft an inspection report, issue improvement notices, and give instructions and/or guidance to the employer.

The labour inspector can also impose measures with deadlines if he/she finds noncompliance with the national legal obligations regarding the risk assessment, such as:

- noncompliance with OSH legal provisions (e.g., no evidence that workplaces were subject to risk assessment, vulnerable groups exposed to occupational risks, and not all workplaces assessed);
- discrepancies between risk assessment documents and the current exposure situation of younger/older workers (e.g., some risks have not been assessed and younger/older workers have not been covered); and
- younger/older workers exposed to risks for which no action has been taken, whether or not these risks have been assessed.

The labour inspector can then agree on an action plan from the employer, establishing preventive and protective measures targeting age-related issues and specifying precise deadlines and persons responsible.

Also, the labour inspector can stipulate/give advice to the employer on age-related issues, including:

- providing information about OSH legal provisions regarding risk assessment and its updating;
- providing information about relevant risk assessment tools;
- providing information about relevant training related to the risk assessment process;
- giving advice on risk assessment completion;
- recommending specialised support from internal/external OSH services or consultants;
- permitting the workers' representative(s), including representatives of both younger and older workers, to participate in the process; and
- involving whoever is responsible for future measures and deadlines.

It is important to raise employer awareness of the need to include age issues in the risk assessments, given that addressing workforce ageing is an objective of the current EU Strategic Framework.

According to national procedures, the inspector will decide whether a follow-up inspection will be necessary in order to check the implemented measures targeting age-related issues and to verify that the action plan has been implemented in due time.

References

ⁱ *Population structure and ageing*, EUROSTAT, 2017,

http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Population_structure_and_ageing

ⁱⁱ *Employment rate of older workers*, EUROSTAT, 2017,

<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tsdde100>

ⁱⁱⁱ *Towards age-friendly work in Europe: a life-course perspective on work and ageing from EU Agencies*, EU-OSHA, 2017, <https://osha.europa.eu/en/tools-and-publications/publications/towards-age-friendly-work-europe-life-course-perspective-work/view>

^{iv} *Safer and healthier work at any age – Final overall analysis report*, EU-OSHA, 2016, <https://osha.europa.eu/en/tools-and-publications/publications/safer-and-healthier-work-any-age-final-overall-analysis-report-0/view>

^v *Workforce diversity and risk assessment – Ensuring everyone is covered*, EU-OSHA, 2009, <https://osha.europa.eu/en/tools-and-publications/publications/reports/TE7809894ENC>

^{vi} *Young workers*, Jennifer Webster, Health & Safety Laboratory, UK, OSHWiki, https://oshwiki.eu/wiki/Young_workers

^{vii} *Safer and Healthier Work for All – Modernisation of the EU Occupational Safety and Health Legislation and Policy*, 10.1.2017, COM/2017/012 final, European Commission, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2017:12:FIN>

Further information:

- A multilingual e-guide on managing safety and health at work for an ageing workforce, EU-OSHA, <https://eguides.osha.europa.eu/>
- OSH management in the context of an ageing workforce, EU-OSHA, <https://osha.europa.eu/en/themes/osh-management-context-ageing-workforce>
- Factsheets 61-67, 69, 70, 83, and 101, EU-OSHA, <http://osha.europa.eu/publications>
- Young people, EU-OSHA resources, <https://osha.europa.eu/en/themes/young-workers>
- Report – A safe start for young workers in practice, EU-OSHA, 2007, <http://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/reports/GPB06/view>
- *Magazine 9 – Safe start!*, EU-OSHA, <http://www.osha.europa.eu/publications/magazine/9>
- Report – OSH in figures: Young workers – Facts and figures, EU-OSHA, 2007, <http://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/reports/7606507/view>
- Analysis report on EU and Member States policies, strategies and programmes on population and workforce ageing, EU-OSHA, 2016, <https://osha.europa.eu/en/tools-and-publications/publications/safer-and-healthier-work-any-age-analysis-report-eu-and-member/view>
- Towards age-friendly work in Europe: a life-course perspective on work and ageing from EU Agencies, EU-OSHA, 2017, <https://osha.europa.eu/en/tools-and-publications/publications/towards-age-friendly-work-europe-life-course-perspective-work/view>
- Healthy workplaces for women and men of all ages, Knowledge compilation 2016:8, Swedish Work Environment Authority, <https://www.av.se/en/work-environment-work-and-inspections/knowledge-compilations/healthy-workplaces-for-women-and-men-of-all-ages-rap-20168-knowledge-compilation/>

5. A gender perspective on OSH and risk assessment

5.1 Why a gender perspective?

In a communication from January 2017, the European Commission concluded: “There is evidence that work-related risks to women’s safety and health have been underestimated and a gender-neutral approach has contributed to less attention and resources being directed towards prevention of work-related risks experienced by women”. This chapter is intended to constitute a knowledge base on gender issues, providing support for labour inspectors. The aim is that labour inspectors should be able to detect shortcomings and provide guidance on the risk assessment of working conditions *for both women and men*.

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) constitutes one of the main reasons for OSH problems at many workplaces. MSDs are a common cause of reported work-related injuries for both women and men. The exposure can differ between women and men. The organisation of work at a workplace has a great impact on the development of MSDs. Women and men often do different things at work, even if they have the same occupation, which is why their exposures differ. That is the most important reason why women experience more work-related pain and more MSDs.ⁱ Biological differences, on the other hand, play only a small role. Men generally have greater variation in their work tasks, while women often have more repetitive tasks. Men tend to do quick heavy lifting, operate machines, and use tools. Even when women and men carry out exactly the same work tasks, the physical load can differ because equipment and workplaces are often designed for the average man.

The notion that women are born with better ability for caring than men has, for example, led to the health-care and social-care sectors being dominated by women. In workplaces dominated by men, their perspectives and ways of working have become norms. Women more often than men lack the opportunity to influence their work situation. In addition, the higher the position in an organisation, the fewer the women. An employer can reduce the risk of discrimination, harassment, and conflict, and increase creativity and profitability, by actively striving for a more gender-equal workplace.

There are other health risks related to gender. Men and women are vulnerable to different types of toxins that affect fertility. Men and women also face different types of psychological stress: women are more exposed to harassment and discrimination, while men are more exposed to stress and are more prone to cardiovascular diseases.ⁱⁱ Furthermore, women who work on construction sites with dirty or inappropriate bathroom facilities often avoid using bathrooms by not drinking water, which could increase the risk of bladder and kidney infections.

Preventing ill health and promoting well-being at work are important for the quality of work of both women and men. Often, however, the design and organisation of work and related equipment, including personal protective equipment (PPE), are based on the modelled “average” man, even though the principle of matching work to workers is enshrined in EU legislation. Lightening the load for women will lighten the load for men too.

“Women and men have the same right to a good working environment.”

5.2 What is working life like for women and men in the EU?

The European-level literature, as presented below, notes both similarities and differences between women's and men's experience on the labour market.

- Women and men participate to varying degrees in the labour market (65% and 77%, respectively, in 2016).ⁱⁱⁱ
- The labour market is gender segregated. Women work mainly in sectors and occupations with many other women, and men in sectors and occupations with other men. Gender-mixed occupations are the exception rather than the rule. The health and education sectors are female dominated, as are some occupations, such as clerks, service workers, and sales workers. Construction, transport, industry, and agriculture remain highly male-dominated sectors.^{iv}
- On average, the employment rate of women is less than that of men, i.e., 61% versus 72%.^v
- Self-employment is male dominated, and women represent only 29% of entrepreneurs.^{vi}
- Part-time work is more common among women than men (32% of women work part time versus 9% of men).^{vii} In particular, mothers are more likely to work part time.^{vii}
- Women also, compared with men, have a less secure connection to the labour market, being more likely to have irregular forms of employment, such as indefinite employment, fixed-term employment, and other "no-contract" arrangements.^{viii}

5.3 Taking account of gender issues in risk assessment

Continuous efforts are needed to improve the working conditions of both women and men. However, taking a "gender-neutral" approach to risk assessment and prevention can result in risks to female workers being underestimated or even ignored altogether. Changing the situation by recognising and taking into account gender differences is a first step. When we think about hazards at work, we are more likely to think of men working in high-accident-risk areas, such as building sites or fishing vessels, than of women working in health and social care, on a filleting line in fish factories, or in facilities such as call centres. Careful examination of real work circumstances shows that both women and men can face significant risks at work. In addition, making jobs easier for women will make them easier for men too. It is important to include gender issues in workplace risk assessment and, moreover, "mainstreaming" gender issues in risk prevention is an objective of the European Community.^{ix}

Key issues in gender-sensitive risk assessment:

- have a positive commitment and take gender issues seriously;
- look at the actual working situation;
- use evidence-based risk assessment tools to visualise risks that are difficult to see;
- involve all workers, both women and men, at all stages of the assessment;
- consider risks prevalent in both male- and female-dominated jobs;
- avoid making prior assumptions about what the risks are and who is at risk; and
- avoid making initial assumptions about what is considered "trivial".

5.4 Examples of good practices

- Workplaces educated in dealing with differences and diversity perform several times better than do homogenous ones. Really innovative ideas are born in meetings and interactions characterised by differences. Creativity and efficacy increase with mixed work teams.
- Mix work groups so they include both men and women, as this can often increase productivity.

- Reduce the monotony of repetitive jobs by rotating work tasks between individuals of both sexes, so that all have variation in their work.
- Design workstations so that they are ergonomic and easily adjusted to suit both women and men.
- Ask both women and men if they experience stress or harassment, including sexually oriented harassment, to the same extent.
- Supply tools and PPE suitable for both men and women.
- Involve workers of both sexes to the same extent in efforts to improve the work environment.

5.5 How to carry out an inspection applying a gender-based approach

The labour inspector's role is important in raising the awareness of OSH stakeholders about the benefits of applying a gender perspective in risk assessment. Below are some examples of how a labour inspector could enter into dialogue with employers about the benefits of applying a gender perspective in risk assessment of the work environment. There are also several questions that the employer can be asked in order to help him/her notice and observe risks in the work environment related to gender and to detect possible shortcomings in the risk assessment.

When planning an inspection:

The main goal is a well-planned inspection for which the labour inspector is well prepared with regard to gender-related issues. Before the inspection, the inspector should get acquainted with the specific risks in the sector in question, especially from a gender perspective. A non-exhaustive approach to how labour inspectors should address gender-related issues in risk assessment at the workplace is presented below.

During an inspection:

Identify gender-related risks at the workplace; for example, look for both health and safety hazards as well as for "invisible risks" such as harassment, discrimination, excessive psychosocial workload, and threats and violence at work.

The following questions will help the labour inspector to identify and assess risks and shortcomings in the work environment, specifically as related to gender. The answers to these questions are expected to lead to ideas about how such risks and shortcomings can be addressed.

- How many women and men, respectively, work here?
- What work tasks do women and men have, respectively? Are they the same? Different?
- To what extent can the employees govern their working pace themselves? Are there differences between women and men in this regard?
- Are there any work tasks for which workers are bound to a certain place or workstation? If so, what are the proportions of women and men in these tasks? If they differ, what is the reason?
- How are safety equipment, protective clothing, protective equipment, work clothing, tools, and machinery individually adapted for women and men, respectively? How has the employer investigated this?
- What do work-related sick leave and accident statistics indicate when broken down by gender? What diagnoses dominate for women and men, respectively?
- Are there separate changing rooms for women and men? How are changing rooms/toilets distributed between women and men?
- Are workplaces individually and ergonomically adapted for women and men, respectively?

- Has the employer conducted some form of staff survey about psychosocial risks? If so, are there accessible statistics broken down by gender? And if so, are there any differences in how women and men experience stress, threats, violence, harassment, bullying, victimisation, and support at work?
- N.B. Counter questions can also yield valuable information, for example: "What risk factors were evaluated as non-relevant or negligible at workplaces employing women/men?"

A non-exhaustive list of questions about diversity-sensitive risk assessment, useful during inspections, is presented in Appendix 1. A more detailed checklist about gender issues is presented in Appendix 2.

If the labour inspector visits a number of workstations, he/she should if possible apply a gender-based approach to assessing the work environment. In a structured way, both female and male workers should be asked about what problems they encounter in their work. Encourage women and men to report issues that they think may affect their safety and health at work, as well as health problems that may be related to work.

Based on the replies of the employer, the labour inspector should assess the quality of the risk assessment conducted by the employer:

- Have gender-related matters been taken into account in the risk assessment?
- Have the risks facing both women and men been properly assessed?
- Have the "invisible risks", including sexual harassment, been assessed?
- Has the employer decided on measures to be taken based on the gender-related risks detected in the risk assessment?
- Has the employer nominated responsible persons to carry out the gender-related measures?
- Have the measures been carried out?
- Has the employer followed up the effectiveness of the measures? Have the gender-related risks been reduced?
- Have the superiors been trained in noticing gender-related risks?
- Have the employees been instructed in how to prevent gender-related risks?

After an inspection:

At the end of an inspection, the labour inspector has various ways of taking action, according to the national legislation of the Member State.

The objective is to ensure that the employer complies with his/her legal obligations regarding the risk assessment, taking into account the groups of workers of both genders who are particularly at risk. The labour inspector has the ability to draw up an inspection report, issue improvement notices, and give instructions and/or guidance to the employer.

The labour inspector can impose measures with deadlines if he/she finds noncompliance with the national legal obligations regarding the risk assessment, such as:

- completing the risk assessment by addressing, for example, workstations and tasks;
- using internal/external OSH services;
- allowing the workers' representative(s), both women and men, to participate in the risk assessment work;
- considering who is responsible for future measures and applicable deadlines; and
- carrying out concrete measures.

According to national procedures, the inspector will decide whether a follow-up inspection will be necessary in order to check the implemented measures targeting age-related issues and to verify that the action plan has been implemented in due time.

References

- ⁱ *Physical loads, gender and health in working life, The Swedish Work Environment Authority 2013:9*
- ⁱⁱ *How can the work environment be better for both women and men, The Swedish Work Environment Authority, ADI 690, <https://www.av.se/globalassets/filer/publikationer/broschyror/english/how-can-the-work-environment-be-better-for-both-women-and-men-broschyr-adi-690eng.pdf>*
- ⁱⁱⁱ *Basic figures on the EU, Third quarter 2017, Eurostat*
- ^{iv} *6th European Working Conditions Survey, 2017 update, Eurofound*
- ^v *The life of women and men in Europe – A statistical portrait, 2017 edition, Eurofound*
- ^{vi} *6th European Working Conditions Survey, 2017 update, Eurofound*
- ^{vii} *The life of women and men in Europe – A statistical portrait, 2017 edition, Eurofound*
- ^{viii} *Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016–2017, European Commission, Justice and Consumers*
- ^{ix} *Adapting to change in work and society: A new Community strategy on health and safety at work, 2002–2006, Communication from the European Commission, COM/2002/0118 final*

Further information:

- The European Agency for Health and Safety's report, Gender issues in safety and health at work – A review, provides more information about risks to women workers and their prevention. This report is available at: <http://agency.osha.eu.int/publications/reports/209/en/index.htm>
- Factsheet 42 summarising the report and Factsheet 43 on how to include gender in risk prevention are available at: <http://agency.osha.eu.int/publications/factsheets/>
- The European Agency for Health And Safety's website has a section providing links to further information related to women and occupational safety and health at: <http://gender.osha.eu.int>. Its contents are based on the publication How can the work environment be better for both women and men? from the Swedish Work Environment Authority.
- Gender equality, work and health: A review of the evidence, World Health Organisation, 2006, available at: <http://www.who.int/gender/documents/Genderworkhealth.pdf>
- Gender Equality, Work and Health: A Review of the Evidence, World Health Organization, 2006 <http://www.who.int/gender/documents/Genderworkhealth.pdf?ua=1>
- The Swedish Work Environment Authority has a lot of material (reports, short films etc. in English), <https://www.av.se/en/work-environment-work-and-inspections/work-with-the-work-environment/gender-equality-in-the-work-environment/>

Appendix 1 – A non-exhaustive list of questions about diversity-sensitive risk assessment

Purpose: These questions could be asked by labour inspectors at ordinary inspections.
Initial questions about the workplace:

- How are the workers distributed in terms of age and gender?
- Do women and men do the same jobs? Do their exposures differ?
- Are tools and equipment, including PPE, adapted to workers of different sizes and heights?
- What do statistics indicate regarding work-related sick leave, accidents, and diseases in different age groups and between women and men?

Questions about the risk assessment:

- Does the risk assessment cover different age groups of workers?
 - Does it cover young workers and their need for introduction and OSH training?
 - Does it cover older workers and their need for individual adaption?
- Does the risk assessment cover “invisible” risks such as stress, harassment (including sexually oriented harassment), violence, and threats?
- Does the risk assessment cover risks for both women and men?
- Does the risk assessment cover vulnerable groups (e.g., migrant workers, temporary agency workers, and pregnant women)?
- Does the risk assessment cover long-term health risks, such as high noise levels, exposure to dangerous substances, and musculoskeletal disorders?

Appendix 2 – An extended list of questions addressing the gender perspective

Purpose: When a labour inspector wants to deepen and broaden the gender perspective in his/her inspection, the following questions, which have three perspectives – i.e., human, ergonomics/technology, and organisation – can be used.

This appendix is based on the publication “How can the work environment be better for both women and men?”, number ADI 690, from the Swedish Work Environment Authority; available at:

<https://www.av.se/en/work-environment-work-and-inspections/work-with-the-work-environment/gender-equality-in-the-work-environment>

Human

- Does the OSH organisation incorporate a gender perspective?
- Is there a notion that certain tasks or areas are more suited to women and men, respectively?
- Do women and men have the same opportunities to influence and participate in questions concerning their work environment?
- Are there pictures, texts, or objects at the workplace that can be considered degrading? Is there use of language or jargon that can be experienced as degrading?
- Is the workplace inclusive or exclusive? Do staff members feel included, irrespective of gender?
- Is the workplace characterised by mutual respect and tolerance?
- Do women and men have the same opportunity for competence development?

Ergonomics/technologies

- Are tools at the workplace adapted for both small and large hands and bodies?
- Is there protective and work clothing that fits, irrespective of gender?
- Are there separate changing rooms for women and men?
- Are workplaces individually and ergonomically adapted? Are there differences between female- and male-dominated occupations when it comes to, for example, protective clothing, conditions, and tools?
- Are there machines or tasks that have been “gender stamped”, that is, that are used/performed only by women or men?
- Official statistics show that women are sick-listed more often than men are, and that more women than men are forced to end their working lives early because of ill health. Can this be linked to tools not being adapted for both women and men?

Organisation

- How many employees are there? How many are women? How many are men?
- What do the employed women and men do? Do women and men have the same positions?
- If women and men have the same positions, do they have the same work tasks?
- If women and men do different things, what risks do the women and men, respectively, face in their work tasks?
- Is there striving for more equal distribution of the numbers of employed women and men?
- What prerequisites do men and women have at the workplace to enable them to work on the same tasks? Do all employees have the opportunity to influence their own work situation? What employees are subjected to fast work pace, machine- or

client-determined work pace, lack of occupational development, or being physically bound to the workplace?

- How do different operational decisions affect women's and men's exposure to different risks and ill health?
 - Do women's and men's opinions and views of problems and improvements in the work environment receive the same attention?
 - If MSDs arise, can work rotation be a way to reduce and prevent injuries?
 - Have any employees chosen to go down to part-time hours due to shortcomings in the physical or psychosocial work environment? Are there differences between men and women in this regard?
 - What are the proportions of men and women in work groups, project groups, and development groups?
 - Does multiple discrimination exist, for example, against women speaking a different language?
-