



# **Peer Review on “Legislation and practical management of psychosocial risks at work”**

**Peer Country Comments Paper - Slovenia**

**Following the OSH Framework Directive - is that enough?**

**Stockholm (Sweden), 3-4 October 2019**

DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion



**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

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September, 2019

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Manuscript completed in September 2019

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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2020

PDF ISBN 978-92-76-22135-7

doi:10.2767/094206

KE-02-20-731-EN-N

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## Table of Contents

1	Introduction .....	1
2	Scale and nature of psychosocial risks at work.....	1
2.1	National data .....	1
2.2	International comparison.....	2
3	Legislation and practical management of psychosocial risks at work .....	2
3.1	Legislative framework .....	2
3.2	Psychosocial risks and labour inspection .....	3
3.3	Psychosocial risks and the occupational safety and health at work sector.....	4
3.4	Psychosocial risks and social partners .....	5
3.5	Case law in Slovenia about victimisation.....	5
4	Assessment of success factors and transferability of the host country example ....	6
5	Questions .....	8
6	List of references .....	9
	Annex 1 Summary table .....	10
	Annex 2 Example of relevant practice.....	12

## 1 Introduction

This paper has been prepared for the Peer Review on "Legislation and practical management of psychosocial risks at work". It provides a comparative assessment of the policy example of the Host Country (Sweden) and the situation in Slovenia. For information on the host country policy example, please refer to the Host Country Discussion Paper<sup>1</sup>.

## 2 Scale and nature of psychosocial risks at work

### 2.1 National data

In the last decade, more and more research has been conducted on psychosocial risks at work in Slovenia. This has helped in terms of getting a better picture of the situation regarding psychosocial risks at work.

According to the data of the National Institute of Public Health<sup>2</sup>, the institution responsible for collecting official data on sick leave in Slovenia (hereinafter referred to as NIJZ), the consumption of antidepressants in Slovenia has increased. Antidepressants are particularly prescribed to the adult population in the age range of 45 to 64 years.

The trend of sick leave related to mental disorders has been slightly increasing over the last 10 years. It is interesting to note that women were on sick leave due to mental problems more than twice as often as men. In recent years the sick leave caused by the mental disorders has been long lasting (on average 44 days) with slightly increasing trend. Unlike the prevalence of sick leave due to mental disorders (where women are more frequent), men stay on sick leave longer (47 days compared to 42 days). The following sectors are the most affected:

- *Manufacturing (C)* - the sick leave due to mental and behavioural disorders is by far the most common in this sector.
- *Education (P)* - among affected occupations, sick leave is the least frequent in the education sector.
- *Healthcare (Q)* - over the past decade, sick leave has slightly increased which puts healthcare as the second most affected occupation in the last three years.
- *Public administration (O)* - sick leave has been fairly constant over the years.
- *Trade, maintenance (G)* - a declining trend of sick leave in recent years has turned around and has been on the rise in the last three years.

Also worth mentioning is the Labour Inspectorate, which is responsible for collecting reports of occupational injuries and diseases. Inspectors receive annually over 300 reports on harassment and victimisation at the workplace.

It is also interesting that, unlike in the Swedish context, the Slovenian occupational safety and health system does not recognise psychosocial risks as an occupational disease. Consequently, there are no reports of occupational diseases caused by psychosocial risks.

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<sup>1</sup> Nilsson, B. (2019) How new legislation can change the approach to psychosocial risks at work, Host Country Discussion Paper – Sweden. Peer Review on 'Legislation and practical management of psychosocial risks at work'. Stockholm, Sweden, 3-4 October 2019. European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

<sup>2</sup> National Institute of Public Health RS, <https://www.nijz.si/sl/podatkovni-portal-zdravstvenih-podatkov-nijz>

## **2.2 International comparison**

### **2.2.1 The fifth European Working Conditions Survey in Slovenia**

Analysis of the fifth European Working Conditions Survey in Slovenia from 2010<sup>3</sup> supplements previous analysis which reveal the work intensity in Slovenia. The fifth analysis (instead of latest sixth analysis) was chosen because, at the request of the Slovenian Government, the sample size was increased, and also a special module was added for Slovenia with the goal to investigate harassment and victimisation at work.

Compared to the EU-27 average, employees in Slovenia work longer hours, including paid and unpaid work (especially women), are less satisfied with their working conditions, experience greater job insecurity and are less frequently absent from work. Most respondents experience stress (78.9 %) at work, and more than 40 % experience general fatigue. Compared to the EU-27 average, there are no significant differences regarding the forms of work-related physical violence / abuse experienced. However, Slovenian workers are less prone to report verbal abuse, but are more likely to report threats and degrading treatment. There is a slight increase in Slovenia in comparison to the EU-27 average in the levels of reported neglect and intimidation / harassment for both men and women.

The data obtained via the special module show that in the area of harassment and intimidation at work, respondents mostly report negative experiences related to overwork and poor organisation of work and less frequently psychological mistreatment and the least about physical violence.

One tenth of all respondents were exposed to psychological violence, slightly more women than men. The most frequently reported health-related and psychological problems were nervousness, sleeping disorders and muscle tension.

### **2.2.2 Pan-European opinion survey on occupational safety and health**

The respondents of the EU-OSHA's 2013 EU-OSHA Pan-European Opinion Survey on Occupational Safety and Health<sup>4</sup> cited the most common causes of work-related stress as workload, reorganisation or job insecurity, unacceptable behaviours (harassment, intimidation), lack of support from colleagues, limited ability to influence their own way of working and lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities. Frequent cases of work-related stress were reported by 72 % of respondents, which is well above the EU-27 average of 51 %. When dealing with work-related stress, 43 % of respondents favourably rated their ability to cope with stress in the workplace. Here again Slovenia is deeply below the EU-27 average which is 53 %.

## **3 Legislation and practical management of psychosocial risks at work**

### **3.1 Legislative framework**

Slovenian legislation is similar to the abandoned Swedish concept of psychosocial risks. It imposes an obligation on the employer to prevent and manage psychosocial risks but

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<sup>3</sup> Kanjuo Mrčela A and Ignjatović M, 2012. Psychosocial risks in the workplace in Slovenia. European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2012/slovenia/working-conditions/psychosocial-risks-in-the-workplace-in-slovenia>

<sup>4</sup> EU-OSHA. 2013. Pan-European opinion poll on occupational safety and health. Results for Slovenia. <https://osha.europa.eu/sl/surveys-and-statistics-osh/european-opinion-polls-safety-and-health-work/european-opinion-poll-occupational-safety-and-health-2013>

does not provide guidance on how to implement or regulate it. The employer is thus left to decide how to manage psychosocial risks at work.

The Ministry of Labour considers that the legal basis is sufficient and, **for the moment**, has no plans to amend or supplement the legislation. However, the lack of guidance for employers in the field of psychosocial risks at work has been identified. Therefore, in the next few years, the Ministry plans to establish mechanisms for early detection and assistance in cases of work-related mental disorders. This is one of the strategic goals in the Action Plan for the implementation of the Resolution on the National Program of Safety and Health at Work<sup>5</sup>.

The legislative framework for the prevention of psychosocial risks in the workplace is provided by the Health and Safety at Work Act (hereinafter ZVDZ-1)<sup>6</sup> and the Employment Relationships Act (hereinafter ZDR-1)<sup>7</sup>.

The ZVDZ-1 stipulates that the employer must take measures to prevent, eliminate and manage violence, victimisation, harassment and other forms of psychosocial risk that may endanger the health of workers.

According to ZDR-1 the employer is obliged to provide a work environment in which no worker will be subjected to sexual or other harassment or victimisation by the employer, superiors or co-workers. In order to achieve the above goals, the employer must take appropriate measures to protect workers from sexual and other harassment or from victimisation at work.

In 2011 the phrase *psychosocial risk* was introduced into the Slovenian legal system with the new ZVDZ-1 act, which was a legislative step forward as the OSH Framework Directive does not directly mention psychosocial risks. Previously, psychosocial risk was defined only indirectly with by-laws.

### **3.2 Psychosocial risks and labour inspection**

The Labour Inspectorate (hereinafter referred to as the IRSD) supervises the implementation of the above-mentioned legislative requirements. Within the Labour Inspectorate the tasks are divided between two departments: the Safety and Health at Work Inspection and the Employment Relationships Inspection.

Safety and Health at Work Inspectors supervise employers according to the ZVZD-1, which in practice means they are checking if employers have internal policies to regulate the psychosocial risks of their employees and if they take any measures to prevent, eliminate and manage psychosocial risks. Since it is a rather loose obligation for employers, the inspectors check whether the internal policies exist, but not the content of the policies. This is left entirely at the discretion of the employer.

However, the IRSD has conducted several campaigns in the field of psychosocial risks. In 2012 and again in 2018 the IRSD joined the European 2012 Campaign and implemented a survey among employers. Within their regular employer supervisions, inspectors responsible for the safety and health at work also monitor the fulfilment of obligations regarding psychosocial risks.

Complaints regarding psychosocial risk are virtually non-existent, however the few that do arise usually come from the trade unions and not directly from the affected persons.

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<sup>5</sup> Resolucija o nacionalnem programu varnosti in zdravja pri delu 2018–2027 (Official gazette of RS, No. 23/18). Resolution on the National Programme of Health and Safety at Work 2018–2027.

<sup>6</sup> Zakon o varnosti in zdravju pri delu (Official gazette of RS, No. 43/11). Health and Safety at Work Act.

<sup>7</sup> Zakon o delovnih razmerjih (Official gazette of RS, No. 21/13, 78/13 – amend., 47/15 – ZZSDT, 33/16 – PZ-F, 52/16, 15/17 – res. US and 22/19 – ZPosS). Employment Relationships Act.



In recent years, they have received five reports about work-related injuries as a result of stress, all from medical professionals. The IRSD does not keep a specific record of injuries caused by psychosocial risks.

Employment Relationships Inspectors supervise employers according to ZDR-1. Reports about harassment and victimisation in the workplace that are classified as psychosocial risks are therefore recognised by the Employment Relationships Inspection. The Employment Relationships Inspection receives annually over 300 reports about harassment and victimisation in the workplace (2016-300, 2017-389, 2018-309). It is interesting that more reports come from the public sector than from the private sector. Most submissions are anonymous. The reports indicate that workers repeatedly misunderstand the concepts of harassment and victimisation. Furthermore, the Employment Relationships Inspection has noticed that many employers regard the adoption of appropriate measures in the field of psychosocial risks merely as formal adoption of an internal policy, but do not implement its provisions. At the same time, they have also noticed that employees do not follow the internal policies for fear of retaliation. Inspectors are also aware of an increase in the number of extraordinary suspensions of the employment contract due to the lack of protection against harassment and victimisation in the workplace. The Employment Relationships Inspectors also have difficulty in assessing what are the minimum standards in the field of psychosocial risks and are seeking legal amendments with a more precise definition of required measures.

However, the IRSD launched in 2017, the Workplace Conflict Resolution project, which facilitates mediation of disputes between employee and employer. It is a six-year project aimed at strengthening the advisory and mediation role of the Inspectorate by encouraging the use and implementation of mediation in the settlement of disputes between employee and employer. The aim of the project is to organise workshops and to participate in consultations, mainly providing informal advice from the Inspectorate and increasing the number of mediations in disputes. The results of the project are encouraging and receive positive responses from both employers and employees.

The website of IRSD also provides access to useful material that can assist both employers and employees.

There are no specific measures in the field of psychosocial risks targeting gender, the self-employed or other groups. With its operations throughout the country, and the dispersed implementation of various activities within the framework of the Workplace Conflict Management project, the IRSD provides access to information for all employees and employers.

### **3.3 Psychosocial risks and the occupational safety and health at work sector**

The Ministry of Labour takes care of the preparation of laws and other regulations in the field of safety and health at work as well as cooperation with other ministries in the preparation of regulations through the Sector for Safety and Health at Work (hereinafter Sector). In addition to the ZVDZ-1, the Sector also prepared the Resolution on the National Programme of Occupational Safety and Health Protection 2018-2027<sup>8</sup> and the Action Plan for the implementation of the Resolution in the first three-year period, where strategic objectives in the field of psychosocial risks include measures such as:

- preparation of practical guidelines for early detection and aid in case of work-related mental illness;

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<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. 2018. Akcijski načrt za izvajanje Resolucije o nacionalnem programu varnosti in zdravja pri delu v obdobju 2018–2027 v prvem triletnem obdobju

- preparation and implementation of training programmes for executives regarding measures in the field of work organisation and management, aimed at improving the working environment and reducing psychosocial risks;
- preparation and implementation of a campaign programme aimed at identifying, detecting and assisting in the prevention of worker burnout;
- promoting research work on psychosocial risks in the workplace.

Between 2014 and 2015, the Ministry of Labour, as a EU-OSHA focal point for Slovenia, conducted an EU-OSHA Campaign "Managing stress and psychosocial risks at work". In addition to a series of media activities, an international conference "Managing stress and psychosocial risks for a healthy workplace" was held as part of the campaign. The campaign also involved a national competition in the field of safety and health at work, where two awards were given for good practices in implementing effective measures to manage stress and other psychosocial risks related to work.

OiRA has been developed by EU-OSHA as an open source web-based tool designed to be further developed by governing bodies and social partners for their needs. In Slovenia, the tool manager is the Ministry of Labour, which cooperates with social partners in the development of individual modules. Within the OiRA Workplace Risk Assessment Programme, the Sector has also developed a special module that includes psychosocial risks and is part of all 17 economic activities for which the bases for risk assessment have been prepared.

### **3.4 Psychosocial risks and social partners**

A free online e-tool for managing psychosocial risks and absenteeism should also be mentioned. E-OPSA is an e-tool providing comprehensive support for the promotion of employee health and is the result of the project "Assessing the Sources of Psychosocial Risks in Health, Social and other selected Public Sector Activities". This project was financially supported by the National Health Insurance Institute of Slovenia and designed by a research team of ZRC SAZU, Social and Medical Institute. It enables a development of risk assessment aimed to monitor problems related to psychosocial workload, including a range of measures.

The Ministry of Labour also co-financed research in the field of psychosocial risks, which was carried out in Slovenia<sup>9</sup>.

The Association of Employers of Slovenia and the Federation of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia are also active in the field of psychosocial risks through various projects which provide support to employers and employees in eliminating work-related stress and in reducing its harmful effects.

The NEXT project, managed by the PRIZMA Foundation in cooperation with the social partners, is co-financed by the Republic of Slovenia and the European Union from the European Social Fund. It aims to develop a Comprehensive Business Support Program for managing and preventing psychosocial risk factors in the field of social dialogue and cooperation. The planned project activities will improve the mental health of employees in the pilot companies, their management of psychosocial risks and interpersonal relationships in the workplaces. The project will provide training, psychological counselling and information to employees about mental health.

### **3.5 Case law in Slovenia about victimisation**

Interesting is the opinion of the Supreme Court, which has specified the practices that are classified as ill-treatment:

- assault against the expression and communication of the victim (e.g., restricting the ways of expression, interrupting speech, shouting, resenting, constantly

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<sup>9</sup> For example, Kanjuo Mrčela and Ignjatović, 2012.

criticising work or personal life, making vague comments, threats, avoiding direct contact);

- behaviours that threaten the victim's social contacts (when no one else talks to the attacked person, ignores them, moves them to workplaces away from other co-workers, or even a ban on talking to the victim);
- actions that constitute an attack on the victim's personal reputation (defamation, spreading false rumours, questioning the victim's business decisions, being forced to perform tasks that diminish the victim's self-esteem, misjudging or offensively evaluating work efforts);
- actions that constitute an attack on the quality of working life and the role in the organisation (the victim no longer receives work tasks or receives meaningless work tasks, difficult tasks, the victim is deprived of work tasks or assigned tasks below the level of qualification);
- attacks against health (a person receives tasks which may be harmful to health, intentionally causing psychological harm).

Case-law has also established the framework of compensations:

- approx. EUR 8 000 if there are specific psychological consequences;
- approx. EUR 2 000 in the absence of serious consequences and the short-term abuse (e.g. two months).

However, the implementation of ZDR-1 in 2013 brought slightly higher compensations, because ZDR-1 introduced a provision that the purpose of monetary compensation for non-pecuniary damages, in the event of a violation of the prohibition of discrimination or ill-treatment at work, is also to discourage the employer from repeated violations.

#### **4 Assessment of success factors and transferability of the host country example**

In Slovenia, stakeholders in the field of safety and health at work (employers, employees, trade unions, labour inspectors, etc.) face similar problems regarding legislation in the field of psychosocial risks, since the legislation does not provide tangible and clear guidelines. In practice, it is customary the employer regulates the field of psychosocial risks with internal regulations, which in reality are often not adhered to or enforced.

The tripartite system, in which the three social partners are equally represented, namely representatives of employees, employers and the government, also provides Slovenia with an appropriate framework, able to harmonise and agree on legislative requirements in the field of psychosocial risks through broad social dialogue.

The concept of an organisational and social work environment, rather than an individual one, seems to be good as it often happens in social dialogue that employers' and workers' representatives are far away with their standpoints.

The big challenge is how to get employers and employees interested in seeing such requirements as an opportunity to improve working conditions, not just as a new administrative burden. Thus, an increase of the counselling role of the Inspectorate appears to be the right way, as inspectors have daily contact with employers and employees, while also having authority over them.

The problem of implementing this approach in Slovenia is the underfunding of the whole safety and health at work system. The Safety and Health at Work Sector and the Labour Inspectorate are both underfunded and lack personnel. NGOs and associations are also struggling to survive. Consequently, this means that investments in development of the

field are inadequate and are merely sufficient to follow the requirements set by the EU. Without strong support from the NGO sector, it is difficult to reach all employers.

The current status of stakeholders in the field of occupational safety and health in Slovenia (Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Health, Labour Inspectorate, representatives of employers and workers, non-governmental organisations in the field of safety and health at work) has a limited possibility of successfully transferring the Swedish approach to psychosocial risk at work. Activities in the field of psychosocial risk at work are fragmented among individual stakeholders, and therefore they do not have a sufficiently deep reach among employers, especially not small employers. There is not enough joint collaboration of all stakeholders.

However, Slovenia has some special features that could be used to promote this concept. For example, every employer in Slovenia must have an appointed occupational medical doctor, and every employee must undergo a medical examination at least every five years. The appointed occupational medical doctors should be more actively involved in the work processes of employers and also in the field of psychosocial risks.

There are sufficient occupational safety and health experts in Slovenia to implement the Swedish approach, however, it would require a joint project involving all stakeholders. Given the underfunding of Health and Safety at Work, there is a need for additional funding and this is likely to be best implemented through EU funding.

## **5 Questions**

- In what ways have you involved NGOs in disseminating information? Have you financially supported NGOs or maybe provided them with experts on psychosocial risks?
- Did the NGOs independently produce the information? Has SWEA collaborated with NGOs in the preparation and dissemination of information on psychosocial risks, or have NGOs done it on their own?
- Who trained the inspectors? Labour inspectors are usually not experts in the field of psychosocial risks, where did you find experts who trained the inspectors?

## 6 List of references

- Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia, <https://www.zsss.si/projekti/psihosocialna-tveganja/>
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## Annex 1 Summary table

The main points covered by the paper are summarised below.

### Scale and nature of psychosocial risks at work

- Sick leave as a result of mental disorder is most common in manufacturing industry. Other occupations that stand out statistically regarding sick leave caused by a mental disorder are also education, health care, public administration and trade.
- Annually, the Labour Inspectorate receives approx. 300 reports regarding workplace harassment and victimisation.
- Slovenian workers (especially women) work more than the EU average and are less satisfied with working conditions.
- Between 70-80% of Slovenian workers experience stress at work. The ability of Slovenian workers to control stressful situations is below the EU average.
- There are no significant differences compared to the EU regarding the forms of psychosocial violence encountered.
- Bad experiences of employees are associated with the excessive amount of work and poor work organisation.

### Legislation and practical management of psychosocial risks at work

- The legislative framework is provided by the Health and Safety at Work Act and the Employment Relationships Act.
- The term *psychosocial risks* was introduced as a phrase into legislation in 2011.
- The Ministry of Labour plans to establish mechanisms for early detection and assistance in the case of work-related mental disorders in the next years.
- The Labour inspectorate is responsible for the supervision of the legislation and the Labour Inspectorate and Ministry of Labour have implemented several preventive campaigns on psychosocial risks.
- The non-governmental sector is also undertaking several activities in the field of psychosocial risks.
- Case law has been adopted for workplace victimisation.

### Assessment of success factors and transferability of the host country example

- Slovenia has a problem with non-specific legislation on psychosocial risks.
- The safety and health at work system is underfunded, and as a result, it barely follows the EU requirements.
- Slovenian employers are obliged to appoint occupational medical doctors and refer all employees to regular medical examinations which are mandatory to pass. Occupational medical doctors should more closely look into psychosocial risks.

### Questions

- In what ways have you involved NGOs in disseminating information? Have you financially supported NGOs or maybe provided them with experts on psychosocial risks?

- Did the NGOs independently produce the information? Has SWEA collaborated with NGOs in the preparation and dissemination of information on psychosocial risks, or have NGO's done it on their own?
- Who trained the inspectors? Labour inspectors are usually not experts in the field of psychosocial risks, where did you find experts who trained the inspectors?



## Annex 2 Example of relevant practice

Short summary of a relevant policy practice/example, key fields indicated below (max. 1 page)

Name of the practice:	Workplace Conflict Resolution project ( <i>Odpravimo konflikte na delovnem mestu</i> )
Year of implementation:	2016-2022
Coordinating authority:	Labour Inspectorate of the Republic of Slovenia ( <i>Inšpektorat RS za delo</i> )
Objectives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening the advisory and mediation role of the Inspectorate by encouraging the use and implementation of the mediation instrument in the settlement of disputes between employee and employer;</li> <li>• Empowering employers to provide decent work conditions for employees, especially in a safe and healthy work environment with a goal to prevent work disputes.</li> </ul>
Main activities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting the peaceful settlement of labour disputes throughout Slovenia via workshops, professional consultations, meetings and conferences of employers 'and workers' associations or organisations;</li> <li>• Mediation in labour disputes between employees and employers;</li> <li>• Professional assistance regarding employment rights and obligations;</li> <li>• Preparation of a manual with materials helping the implementation of mediation in the dispute between the employee and the employer.</li> </ul>
Results so far:	<p>Data for 2018, when the project is fully operational:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 292 employers or 1 534 participants were informed of the importance of providing decent work conditions (especially a safe and healthy working environment);</li> <li>• Through seminars and professional meetings 413 employers or 507 participants were informed about the mediation in disputes;</li> <li>• In fact, the number of employers who received information was even greater, since those who attended conferences and professional meetings were not recorded separately;</li> <li>• 47 dispute resolution initiatives.</li> </ul>

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