

## **EPSU and Social Employers Event on the Prevention of MSDs in Social Services**



(22 September 2021) Yesterday, in the framework of the EU-OSHA campaign, Healthy Workplaces – Lighten the Load, EPSU and the Federation of European Social Employers held a webinar on the prevention of Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSDs) in social services. The event highlighted the fact that MSDs are hugely prevalent in social services and more generally, but also that they are preventable when the right action is taken.

The webinar was a particularly timely event, as much more attention has been given to the social services sector at European level recently, in Council conclusions, by the WHO-Europe Region, and in both the EU Commission and Parliament. In the next year, we can expect a long-term care report and a new European Strategy on Care.

Together, the four speakers at yesterday's webinar gave a holistic picture of MSDs in the social services sector. Solveiga Eidukynaite-Gerard, Policy Analyst in DG EMPL Unit "Health and safety at work, EU-OSHA", explained the EU framework in relation to prevention of MSDs, including both legislation and policies. Lorenzo Munar, Project Manager, EU-OSHA provided a lot of data to show the impact of MSDs on workers across Europe. Simone Mohrs from HOSPEEM and Adam Rogalewski from EPSU outlined measures to prevent MSDs in the hospital sector. Lastly, Nico Knibbe, Senior researcher at LOCOmotion, spoke about some of the risks specific to homecare, identified through research. All of the speakers presented tools, guides and methods created to tackle MSDs.

In the social services sector, demographic changes and certain workplace trends are increasing the risks of MSDs for social care workers. The ageing population mean more people need long-term care. This in turn creates problems with staffing levels, and results in care workers working alone. Increases in obesity levels means that it is harder for care workers to lift and help move people. There is also a shift towards homecare, where care workers don't necessarily have the right equipment.

The main priorities outlined to tackle these risks were to raise awareness, increase understanding of the specific risks for social care workers, carry out and implement regular risk assessments with employers and employee representatives involved, and to focus on prevention and early intervention. It was also highlighted that MSD prevention must be seen as an investment, not a cost.

The positive takeaway from the event is that there are many existing examples of tools, guides, initiatives and measures to help prevent MSDs, to increase preparedness and raise awareness – both in the social care sector and more generally.

At EPSU, and with the Social Employers, we will continue to share good practices, share useful tools and guides with our affiliates, and monitor the emerging risks in light of things like digitalisation.

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