



Well-being and occupational safety & health  
(OSH) in central government administrations:  
tackling psychosocial risks at work

# Background study

## Contents

Introduction from social partners .....	5
Executive summary .....	6
Introduction: what are psychosocial risks? .....	6
The costs of psychosocial risks .....	6
Psychosocial risk factors .....	6
The framework for tackling psychosocial risks.....	7
Tackling psychosocial risks .....	8
Introduction: what are psychosocial risks? .....	10
The costs of psychosocial risks .....	11
Psychosocial risk factors .....	13
Table 1: Psychosocial risk factors and their impact on health and well-being .....	19
The extent to which psychosocial risk factors are present in central government .....	20
The new and emerging risks survey .....	24
Table 2: Psychosocial risk factors present in the establishment (% establishments, EU-28).....	24
Table 3: Psychosocial risk factors present in the establishment in public administration by country (% establishments) .....	26
BOX 1: Psychosocial risks in French central government.....	27
Table 4: The presence of different types of psychosocial risks in the private and public sectors in France: 2013.....	28
Box 2: Psychosocial risks in Swedish central government administration .....	29
Table 5: Presence of some psychosocial risk factors in central government and private sector: proportion of employees in 2015 (%).....	30
The framework for tackling psychosocial risks.....	31
Legal framework.....	31
Table 6: References to psychosocial risks or aspects of psychosocial risks in national legislation .....	32
Support in tackling psychosocial risks .....	35
Employee representation.....	35
Health and safety experts.....	36
Table 7: Use of health and safety services in public administration .....	37
Labour inspectors .....	38
Table 8: Visits by the labour inspectorate.....	39
Persons of confidence .....	39
Negotiated collective agreements .....	40
National level.....	40

Tackling psychosocial risks .....	42
Assessing the risk.....	42
Table 9: Risk assessments in public administration (%) .....	42
Table 10: Proportion of regular risk assessments in public administration, which cover these issues (%) .....	43
Moving from assessment to action .....	44
Table 11: Proportion of establishments identifying specific difficulties in tackling psychosocial risks (responses relate to establishments where at least one psychosocial risk exists) (%) .....	44
Table 12: Proportion of establishments in public administration which have an action plan on stress (%) .....	45
Dealing with difficult users .....	45
Table 13: Proportion of establishments in public administration with a procedure in place to deal with possible cases of threats, abuse or assaults by external individuals* (%) .....	46
Time pressures and workloads.....	47
Table 14: Proportion of establishments which have reorganised work to reduce job demands and work pressure over last 3 years (%).....	47
Lack of communication and cooperation .....	47
Table 15: Tackling interpersonal conflicts .....	48
Long or irregular hours.....	49
Table 16: Proportion of establishments in public administration where there has been intervention in the previous 3 years if excessively long or irregular hours are worked (%).....	49
Lack of influence over work pace or process, job insecurity and discrimination.....	49
Training and other forms of support.....	50
Table 17: Proportion of establishments in public administration providing training to prevent psychosocial risks (%) .....	50
Confidential counselling .....	51
Table 18: Proportion of establishments in public administration providing confidential counselling in previous 3 years (%) .....	51
The overall picture on action to tackle psychosocial risks .....	52
National differences .....	52



## Introduction from social partners

*This research has been produced by Lionel Fulton of the UK-based Labour Research Department, for the social dialogue committee for central government administrations, SDC CGA, that brings together unions and employers in central government from across Europe.<sup>1</sup>*

*In a context of accelerated digitalisation, restructuring and intensification of work, the committee wanted to look particularly at psychosocial risks and third-party violence in central government because they are now probably the most serious threat to employees' and civil servants' health and well-being. The research shows we were right to explore this subject as one of the key research findings is that in a number of countries and services those risks are not only real with a grave human, social and economic impact on employees and organisations but they are also on the increase.*

*The research is part of a wider EC-funded project. It helped lay the ground for the production of a guide which the committee hopes will help protect all those working in this area. It draws upon research from OSHA and Eurofound, the EU agencies for health and safety and for the improvement of living and working conditions respectively, from national public health and safety agencies, collective agreements and case studies. It is the first piece of EU-wide research that sheds light on psycho-social risks specifically in central governments.*

*The research shows that there is much room for improvement in dealing with psychosocial risks as almost three-quarters of public administrations carry out risk assessments but only around 40% of them integrate psychosocial risks. There are large national differences on the scale of the problems, and how authorities, social partners, labour inspectors tackle psycho-social risks and third party violence. However, the research reminds of our common legal framework that provides for common tools and principles not the least, an effective social dialogue, involvement of employees, training and regular health risk assessments at the workplace that are acted upon, all of which can make a positive difference.*

*In the short-term, the research together with a guide, available in many European languages, should contribute to raising awareness on the scale of the problem and solutions. They will be especially useful as the effects of digitalisation on employees' mental health and motivation need to be better acknowledged and prevented. We trust the research will also help strengthen or relaunch the national social dialogue on health and safety at work.*

*The committee would like to thank Lionel Fulton for this work that provides excellent background material for anyone interested in improving well-being at work, trade unionists, managers, health and safety representatives, labour inspectors and public authorities. It is not easy to research on central government that includes a vast diversity of jobs and services and cultures, it is even more of a challenge to try and reconcile views from management and trade unions. Despite this, Mr Fulton has fulfilled the task and succeeded in putting together a true and comprehensive picture of the situation and this can be deemed a great achievement in itself.*

*Brussels and Paris, 15 May 2017*

*Britta Lejon, TUNED spokesperson and ST President (Sweden) & Jean-Marc Chneider, EUPAE France, DGAFP*

The production of this guide has been financially supported by the European Union. The European Union is not responsible for any use made of the information contained in this publication.

---

<sup>1</sup> The social dialogue committee for central government administrations (SDC CGA) has representation from all 28 member states on the employees' side (Trade Unions' National and European administration Delegation – TUNED) through the European Public Service Union (EPSU) and the European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI), while on the employers' side (European Public Administration Employers – EUPAE) there are 11 full members, Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and the United Kingdom, and six observers, Austria, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Malta and Portugal. (EPSU is responsible for the TUNED secretariat [nsalson@epsu.org](mailto:nsalson@epsu.org); for EUPAE the project was coordinated by DGAFP [simon.loreal@finances.gouv.fr](mailto:simon.loreal@finances.gouv.fr) )

## Executive summary

### Introduction: what are psychosocial risks?

Changes in work in recent decades mean that more people are exposed to risks, such as stress, bullying, harassment and violence. In many countries these are described as “psychosocial risks”, and they are certainly present in central government.

### The costs of psychosocial risks

The costs of psychosocial risks can be very substantial. For individuals, prolonged exposure to these risks is associated with a wide range of negative outcomes, from anxiety and depression to poor immune function and cardiovascular disease. For organisations, they can lead to increased absenteeism, worsened performance and, in some cases reputational damage. For society as a whole, the result is high numbers of days lost through sickness at a cost of billions across the EU.

### Psychosocial risk factors

One of the earliest studies looking at psychosocial risks was published jointly by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 1984, and it identified six “psychosocial factors”, which may influence work performance, job satisfaction and ultimately health. Since then many national health and safety bodies have produced their own lists of the psychosocial factors, which potentially threaten workers’ health and well-being. The approaches in seven states are examined. Four states (France, Germany, Spain and Belgium) refer explicitly to psychosocial risk factors (“mental pressure” in the case of Germany), while three (the UK, Italy and Poland) talk about stress factors or stressors.

At European level, a 2010 report by Eurofound, the tripartite EU research agency on social and work-related issues, looked at how the issue was tackled across the EU. This approach was taken further in a joint report which Eurofound and the EU’s health and safety agency, EU-OSHA, produced in 2014. This examined the conditions considered to pose psychosocial risks to workers and, using the results of the fifth European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS), carried out in 2010, it was able to show how these elements affected workers’ health and well-being

### *The extent to which psychosocial risk factors are present in central government*

Looking at the five factors examined in the joint Eurofound / EU-OSHA report, it is clear these psychosocial risks are present in central government. Restructuring is ~~seen~~ found to be as one of the key concerns in the areas of **job content**, and this has been widespread across central government in recent years. An even more serious problem linked with job content is that employees are increasingly dealing with difficult service users and there are many services of central government where this is a major problem. Regarding **work intensity and autonomy**, there are certainly some areas where the amount of work may be excessive, although in the area of **working time and work life balance** central government appears to score better than other sectors of the economy. The picture is more mixed in the area of **the social environment at work**, a combination of support from colleagues, discrimination and what is known as “adverse social behaviour” – such as bullying, harassment and violence. However, although support from colleagues may be above average, central government employees face higher levels of third party violence and abuse. Finally, in the area of job insecurity and career development, the high number of central government jobs which have been lost in some countries means that those working in central government can no longer be seen to have secure employment.

Another examination of the presence of psychosocial risk factors is provided by the Second **European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER-2)**, undertaken by EU-OSHA. This provides comprehensive results broken down by country, although, unfortunately, the figures relate to public administration, rather than just central government. Looking at seven risk factors, combined in a slightly different way to the joint Eurofound / EU-OSHA report, ESENER-2 found that six of the seven risks were more likely to be present in workplaces in public administration than in the economy as a whole. The most common risk was “having to deal with difficult customers, patients, pupils etc.”. There were significant differences between countries in how frequently these risk factors are present.

The ESENER figures relate to public administration but two separate national studies, which provide information on parts of central government in **France** and the whole of central government administration in **Sweden**, confirm the picture for those working in central government. In particular, both studies emphasise the fact that many workers in central government have faced conflicts with the public and had tense relations with users.

## The framework for tackling psychosocial risks

This section sets out the context for tackling psychosocial risks, looking at existing legal protections, the range of institutional support that is available and the collective agreements that have been signed at different levels including the EU level. In each area, it first presents the situation at European level before looking at national examples.

### *Legal framework*

There is a comprehensive body of EU health and safety legislation, with the Framework Directive 89/391/EEC at its core. Psychosocial risks are not specifically referred to in the Framework Directive, but they are implicitly covered. There is also other EU legislation on equality and discrimination which is relevant to tackling psychosocial risks relating to harassment or discrimination. All EU member states have transposed the Framework Directive into their national law, and a majority of EU members (19 out of 28) have gone further, including a reference to psychosocial risks, or some aspect of psychosocial risks in their national health and safety legislation. The details of the legislation are set out in the section along with information on the extent to which there are limits on their application in the public sector. All member states have also transposed EU legislation on equality and discrimination, and again some have gone further.

### *Support in tackling psychosocial risks*

In every country there are a range of structures and individuals available to help employees and organisations tackle psychosocial risks. These include employee representatives, unions, health and safety experts, labour inspectors and others.

EU legislation guarantees rights to **employee representatives** in the area of health and safety, but the structures are determined by national legislation, and, as a result, there are important differences between countries.

The Framework Directive similarly refers to **health and safety experts**, workers carrying out “activities related to the protection and prevention of occupational risks”, but again the approaches taken to their role differ very substantially between states.

There is no European legislation on **labour inspectors** similar to the Framework Directive, although most EU member states have ratified ILO conventions on their use. However, despite this common ratification there

are major differences at national level in the role and size of the labour inspectorates in the 28 member states.

**Persons of confidence**, whose role is to give support to fellow employees who have suffered violence, bullying or sexual harassment, are not provided for in EU-level legislation, and they are only found in some countries.

### *Negotiated collective agreements*

There are two European Framework Agreements on psychosocial risks: the “Framework Agreement on Work-related Stress” (signed October 2004) and the “Framework Agreement on Violence and Harassment at Work” (signed April 2007). The two agreements are to be implemented by the signatory parties (unions and employers) and their respective national affiliates, rather than through an EU directive, and they have had an impact at national level.

National cross-industry agreements on both stress and violence and harassment at work have been reached in a number of countries, including France, Italy, Greece, Luxembourg, Romania, Spain and Slovenia, although not all countries have agreements on both topics. Collective agreements specifically for central government have also been signed in several countries, including Denmark, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden, although again not all countries have covered the whole range of psychosocial issues.

### **Tackling psychosocial risks**

This section of the report looks at what is being done to tackle some of the most important psychosocial risks in central administration. With no consistent European-wide source of information available on this level of government, it relies on the results of EU-OSHA’s 2014 ESENER survey, which provides information on public administration.

#### *Assessing the risk*

As with any other hazard, the first step in dealing with psychosocial risks is to assess what risks are present, and how prevalent and how serious they are. The ESENER survey shows that, across the EU, around three quarters (73%) of workplaces in public administration carry out regular risk assessments. On average a slightly higher proportion of assessments are carried out internally (47%) than externally (40%), with the remaining 13% split equally between the two. However, in this, as in other areas, there are major differences between countries, both in the proportion carrying out regular assessments and in who undertakes them.

These results relate to general risk assessments. To establish the extent to which psychosocial risks were included, the ESENER survey asked whether two issues, potentially linked to psychosocial risks – “supervisor-employee relationships” and “organisational aspects such as work schedules, breaks or work shifts” – were also assessed. The survey found a majority of risk assessments in public administration across the EU did include these issues, with 61% of establishments including organisational aspects in their risk assessments and 55% of establishments including supervisor-employee relationships.

#### *Taking action*

The ESENER survey provides some evidence that organisations find tackling psychosocial risks more difficult than tackling physical risks, as a higher proportion said they lacked information or tools to deal with psychosocial risks than said the same about physical risks. Public administration appears to face a particular difficulty in dealing with these risks.

On average, in public administration in the EU, only just over a quarter (28%) of establishments have an action plan to prevent work-related stress. Just over half of workplaces (51%) in public administration have a policy in place to deal with violence or abuse. However, this question was only asked in organisations where this was a problem so this figure is not comparable with other results in the ESENER survey.

Time pressure and excessive workloads were the second more frequently reported risk in public administration but the ESENER survey found that only a third of the public administration organisations (34%) had reorganised work in the last three years “to reduce job demands and work pressure” and so prevent psychosocial risks.

Almost half of the public administration organisations (47%) had a bullying and harassment procedure in place, while under a third (31%) had set up a conflict resolution procedure over the previous three years.

On average, 21% of public administration establishments had intervened in the previous three years if excessively long or irregular hours were being worked.

In public administration, on average across the EU, 41% of establishment provided training on “how to prevent psychosocial risks such as stress or bullying”, while 40% of establishments had used “confidential counselling for employees”.

### *National differences*

The 11 separate indicators in this section of the report show there are great differences between EU countries in the action they are taking to tackle psychosocial risks. In general, the three Nordic countries, plus the UK and Ireland, are close to the top of most tables, often joined by the Netherlands and Malta. Countries in Central and Eastern Europe plus sometimes countries in Southern Europe are generally among those where action is less common. Germany, France, Italy and Spain are normally in the middle of the tables.

## Introduction: what are psychosocial risks?

As work has changed in recent decades, with fewer people employed in agriculture and industry and more in the service sector, the risks to individuals' safety and health while they are at work have also changed. Fewer people are exposed to the physical risks associated with hard manual labour or arising from work with dangerous substances – although these hazards still exist – and more are exposed to the risks, such as stress, bullying, harassment and violence, more typically linked with the service sector.

These risks are often referred to as “psychosocial risks” reflecting the combined mental and social factors involved that affect workers' health and well-being.

A report by a group of experts produced for the French Ministry of Labour in 2011 defined psychosocial risks as “risks for mental, physical and social health caused by working conditions and organisational and relationship factors likely to interact with mental function”.<sup>2</sup> In other countries slightly different definitions have been used.

However, although the definitions may differ, and in some countries the phrase, psychosocial risks, is not widely used, the impact of these risks is evident across Europe and beyond. Workers experience stress and unhappiness at work, and can be subject to bullying, harassment (including sexual harassment) as well as violence or the threat of violence.

This report looks at the psychosocial risk factors which pose a threat to health and well-being at work, examining how widespread they are, particularly in central government. It looks at the framework in which these risks can be tackled, covering the relevant legislation, the institutional structures and the collective agreements that unions and employers have signed. It concludes with information on what is being done to tackle these risks. However, before this, it is worth looking at the costs, both human and economic, linked to psychosocial risks and this is set out in the next section.

---

<sup>2</sup> In French: “ les risques pour la santé mentale, physique et sociale, engendrés par les conditions d’emploi et les facteurs organisationnels et relationnels susceptibles d’interagir avec le fonctionnement mental” Mesurer les facteurs psychosociaux de risque au travail pour les maîtriser : Rapport du Collège d’expertise sur le suivi des risques psychosociaux au travail, faisant suite à la demande du Ministre du travail, de l’emploi et de la santé, 2011

## The costs of psychosocial risks

Although there are differences of definition and terminology, the potential damaging consequences to the individual of exposure to these risks – stress, burnout, cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal problems, depression and, in the very worst cases, even suicide – are known across Europe.

In 2014, EU-OSHA (the EU’s health and safety agency) published a review of the available literature from both national and international studies on the potential costs of psychosocial risks.<sup>3</sup> It defined a psychosocial risk as “the risk of detriment to a worker’s psychological or physical well-being arising from the interaction between the design and management of work, within the organisational and social context”.

The report found that, for an individual, the impact of exposure to these risks was potentially very severe. Short exposure could produce “sleep disturbance, changes in mood, fatigue, headaches and stomach irritability”. And things got much worse if exposure was extended. As the report noted: “Prolonged exposure to psychosocial hazards has been shown to be associated with a wide range of mental and physical health outcomes, including anxiety, depression, suicide attempts, sleep problems, back pain, chronic fatigue, digestive problems, autoimmune disease, poor immune function, cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure and peptic ulcers.”

For organisations, the EU-OSHA report stated: “The evidence shows clearly that work-related stress and psychosocial issues lead to increased absenteeism and staff turnover rates, along with decreased productivity and performance”. In its website on psychosocial risks, the official French health and safety body INRS sets out clearly how these risks can have a damaging impact on organisations and work teams, potentially leading to:

- an increase in absenteeism and staff turnover;
- difficulties in replacing personnel or recruiting new staff;
- an increase in accidents at work;
- demotivation and a fall in creativity;
- a decline in productivity and an increase in waste and defects;
- a deterioration in the social climate and a bad working atmosphere; and
- damage to the image of the organisation.<sup>4</sup>

In the case of one specific but very damaging psychosocial risk – external violence – the consequences for the organisation may also include avoidance by the public, calls for higher pay in compensation and failure to make progress on other fronts.<sup>5</sup>

For society as a whole, the EU-OSHA report included an updated European Commission estimate for the cost of stress of €25.4 billion in 2013, and the high negative impact of exposure to psychosocial risks is also indicated by data from Germany and the UK.

In the UK, the official health and safety body, the Health and Safety Executive, calculated that stress, depression and anxiety was the biggest single cause of days lost through work-related ill health in 2015-16,

---

<sup>3</sup> Calculating the costs of work-related stress and psychosocial risks – A literature review, EU-OSHA 2014

<sup>4</sup> Conséquences pour le salarié et l’entreprise, INRS <http://www.inrs.fr/risques/psychosociaux/consequences-salaries.html>

<sup>5</sup> See presentation by Yves Grasset (Violence Travail Environnement) at the EUPAE-TUNED seminar in Madrid “External violence in central government administrations”, 24-25 November 2016

accounting for 11.7 of the total 30.4 million days lost (38%).<sup>6</sup> In Germany, the 2015 report on safety and health at work, produced jointly by the labour ministry and the Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (BAuA), calculated that psychological and behavioural disorder accounted for 14.8% of days lost, second only to musculoskeletal disorders, which are often linked to psychosocial risk factors, on 22.0%.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Working days lost, HSE <http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/dayslost.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Sicherheit und Gesundheit bei der Arbeit 2015, Unfallverhütungsbericht Arbeit, 2016

## Psychosocial risk factors

Official international advice on the impact of psychosocial factors on workers' health goes back at least as far as 1984, when a joint report from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) "Psychosocial factors at work: recognition and control" was published in Geneva. Drawing on two decades of research, it pointed out that, "stressful psychosocial factors in the working environment are many and varied", and that these factors "interact and affect the psychological climate in the enterprise and the physical and mental health of workers".<sup>8</sup> In a chart it identified six "psychosocial factors", which may influence work performance, job satisfaction and ultimately health. These were:

- work environment;
- job content;
- organisational conditions;
- workers' capacities, needs and expectations;
- customs and culture; and
- personal extra-job conditions.

It is not the purpose of this report to examine how the concepts used to analyse and tackle psychosocial risks have developed over time. However, it is clear that there are similarities between the psychosocial factors identified in the ILO/WHO report in 1984 and the lists of potential risks factors currently being used by individual national occupational health and safety organisations.

The approaches in seven states are examined, including one (Poland) in Central and Eastern Europe. Four states (France, Germany, Spain and Belgium) refer explicitly to psychosocial risk factors ("mental pressure" in the case of Germany), while three (the UK, Italy and Poland) talk about stress factors or stressors.

The **French** occupational health and safety agency, INRS, identifies six categories of risk factors, based on the report by the group of experts, referred to above.<sup>9</sup> The categories are presented in the dossier on psychosocial risks published on the INRS website,<sup>10</sup> and they are set out below:

- **intensity of work and working time** – this includes the tempo of work, the targets set, which may be unrealistic, the need for skills the individual does not possess, contradictory instructions, the length of the working day or week, irregular and unexpected working hours, and overall work-life balance;
- **emotional demands**, where employees need to control and possibly hide their emotions – this includes the requirement always to present a smiling face, dealing with difficult members of the public, as well as being confronted with other people's suffering, and dealing with fear, both of making a mistake and third-party violence;
- **a lack of autonomy** – this can mean individuals being unable to organise their own work, as well as having no influence on decisions which directly affect them, together the extent to which individual abilities are used and developed;

---

<sup>8</sup> Psychosocial factors at work: recognition and control, Report of the Joint ILO/WHO Committee on Occupational Health, Geneva, September 1984

<sup>9</sup> Mesurer les facteurs psychosociaux de risque au travail pour les maîtriser: Rapport du Collège d'expertise sur le suivi des risques psychosociaux au travail, faisant suite à la demande du Ministre du travail, de l'emploi et de la santé, 2011

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.inrs.fr/risques/psychosociaux/facteurs-risques.html>

- **poor working relations** – this includes relations both with colleagues and management, and covers the feeling that workers’ efforts are not sufficiently appreciated or that individuals are treated unfairly, lack of career prospects, evaluation procedures and the employers’ overall attitude towards the well-being of staff .This heading also includes bullying and harassment;
- **value conflicts** – this can arise where the demands of work are in conflict with the personal or professional beliefs of the worker, for example, where they have to do work they see pointless or damaging; and
- **job insecurity** – where workers fear they will lose their jobs, be unable to maintain their pay or are on a temporary contract, and/or there is a risk of their jobs changing in a way that they cannot control.

The **German** approach is slightly different, talking primarily about “mental pressure” (psychische Belastung) at work rather than psychosocial risks. Mental pressure is defined as “the totality of all detectable external influences that affect an individual” (DIN EN ISO 100075-1)<sup>11</sup>. In its guide on recognising and dealing with mental pressure, the BAuA, the official institute dealing with health and safety at work, presents it as a normal and necessary part of life, including work. It is only if things go wrong, with, for example, too much or too little mental pressure that problems appear.<sup>12</sup>

This has been taken further in the Joint German Occupational Health and Safety Strategy (GDA), an initiative of the German government, the federal states ("Länder") and the accident insurance institutions, aimed at modernising the German health and safety system and strengthening workplace health and safety. Guidelines produced in November 2015, with the involvement of both employers and unions, included a checklist covering five areas of potential risk.<sup>13</sup> These were further broken down as follows, with examples of potential negative or problematic factors:

- **Work content and work tasks:**
  - Completeness of the task – individual does only part of the task;
  - Degree of freedom in carrying out the task – individual has no control over the content of the work or the way it is done;
  - Variation in the task – individual must repeat the same task frequently;
  - Information provided – too much or too little information provided;
  - Responsibility – unclear;
  - Level of qualification – individual is under or overqualified for the work;
  - Emotional involvement – individual has to deal with difficult emotional experiences (such as illness or death), has to respond constantly to the needs of others, has to hide their emotions behind an outer façade, faces the threat of violence.
- **Work organisation:**
  - Working time – long hours, problematic shifts, night work or being on call;
  - Working process – high work intensity, frequent interruptions, work rate predetermined;
  - Communications and cooperation – isolated workplace, lack of support, area of responsibility poorly defined.

<sup>11</sup> Ergonomische Grundlagen bezüglich psychischer Arbeitsbelastung - Teil 1: Allgemeines und Begriffe (ISO 10075:1991); Deutsche Fassung EN ISO 10075-1:2000

<sup>12</sup> Psychische Belastung und Beanspruchung im Berufsleben. Erkennen – Gestalten, Joiko, K.; Schmauder, M.; Wolff, G, Dortmund 2010

<sup>13</sup> Leitlinie Beratung und Überwachung bei psychischer Belastung am Arbeitsplatz, GDA, November 2015

- **Social relationships:**
  - With colleagues – too many or too few social contacts, frequent conflicts, lack of support;
  - With superiors – unqualified superiors, lack of feed-back and recognition, lack of support when needed.
- **Working environment:**
  - Physical and chemical factors – noise, lighting, hazards;
  - Personal physical factors – unsatisfactory ergonomic arrangements, hard physical labour;
  - Structure of the workplace and information – unsuitable work location, cramped space, inadequate signage;
  - Resources – lack or unsuitability of tools or resources, poor servicing or arrangement of equipment, software faults.
- **New forms of work:** geographical mobility, atypical working arrangements, flexible working time with fewer boundaries between work and private life.

The most recent detailed guide on psychosocial risks<sup>14</sup> produced by the **Spanish** national health and safety institution, the INSHT, does not contain a list similar to those produced by INSHT's French and German counterparts. However, the analytical tool that INSHT proposes should be used by organisations to investigate whether they have a problem in this area (FPSICO) includes a list of nine factors, comparable to those identified elsewhere. They are:

- **Working time** – including unsocial hours and work/life balance.
- **Autonomy:**
  - In relation to working time – including the ability to take breaks;
  - In decision-making – including about the way work is organised.
- **Workload:**
  - Time pressure;
  - Level of concentration – including the impact of interruptions;
  - The quantity and difficulty of the work.
- **Psychological demands:**
  - Intellectual demands – including the need to take the initiative or be creative;
  - Emotional demands – including dealing with people, the need for workers to hide their emotions and exposure to situations producing an emotional response.
- **Variety and content of work** – including whether the work is routine, whether the work makes sense, and whether the work is recognised by superiors, colleagues, clients and family.
- **Participation/supervision** – including whether the worker is involved in new developments, such as new ways of working or taking on new employees, and the degree of supervision in areas such as the way the work is done or its quality.
- **Workers' interest/compensation** – including the possibility of promotion or career development and satisfaction with the level of pay.
- **Performance of the role:**
  - The clarity of the role – whether the worker's tasks and responsibilities are clearly defined;
  - Conflicts in the role – including whether the worker is set unrealistic goals, is given contradictory instructions or faces moral dilemmas.

---

<sup>14</sup> Algunas orientaciones para evaluar los factores de riesgo psicosocial, 2015, INSHT

- **Social relations and support** – including the degree of support from a variety of sources, exposure to interpersonal conflicts, violence, both physical and psychological, sexual harassment and discrimination.

It is, however, important to point out that the FPSICO tool provided by INSHT is not the only method for evaluating psychosocial risks used in Spain. A large number of organisations have used the analytical tool CoPsoQ ISTAS 21, favoured by the CCOO union confederation.

In **Belgium**, where the law was changed in 2014, in part to give greater prominence to psychosocial risks as a threat to health, the agency responsible (SPF Emploi, Travail et Concertation sociale/FOD Werkgelegenheid, Arbeid en Sociaal Overleg) identifies five areas potentially containing psychosocial risks.<sup>15</sup> These are:

- **Work organisation** – including the structure of the organisation, the way tasks are allocated, working procedures, management tools and styles and the organisation’s overall approach;
- **Work content** – the nature of the work, including its complexity and variety, work intensity, emotional demands, such as working with the public, contact suffering and the need to hide one’s emotions, the mental and physical demands of the job and the clarity of the task to be performed;
- **Employment conditions** – the type of employment contract and the hours and time worked (including night work, posted work, and atypical work), training opportunities, career development and evaluation procedures;
- **Working conditions** – the physical work environment, the arrangements at the workplace, equipment, noise, lighting, substances used, working postures;
- **Interpersonal relationships at work** – relationships between colleagues, with line management and senior management, as well as with third parties.

The Belgian guidance also specifically mentions three additional direct risks. These are: **violence, sexual harassment and bullying and harassment**.

In the **UK**, the guidance published by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), primarily refers to the sources of stress, or stressors, rather than psychosocial risks, although the factors involved are essentially the same.<sup>16</sup>

It identifies six primary sources of stress at work.<sup>17</sup> These are

- **Demands** – this includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment.
- **Control** – how much say the person has in the way they do their work.
- **Support** – this includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.
- **Relationships** – this includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.

<sup>15</sup> See Risques psychosociaux au travail <http://www.emploi.belgique.be/defaultTab.aspx?id=564> and Les risques psychosociaux au travail: de la législation aux outils by Charlotte Demoulin et Mélanie Straetmans <http://archive.beswic.be/fr/topics/psychosocial-factors/securamars2015.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> This is made clear in a research report published for the HSE in 2001. It stated: “Throughout the document the term ‘psychosocial hazards’ is used to refer to work characteristics which could equally be termed ‘stressors’ or ‘sources of stress’”. A critical review of psychosocial hazard measures by Jo Rick, Rob B Briner, Kevin Daniels, Sarah Perryman and Andrew Guppy, 2001

<sup>17</sup> Managing the causes of work-related stress, HSE 2007

- **Role** – whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures they do not have conflicting roles.
- **Change** – how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.

This framework has also been adopted by the official **Italian** health and safety body INAIL, which after analysing the approaches of a number of EU countries decided to develop solutions based on the HSE model. Its guide, therefore, contains the same six primary sources of stress at work: **demands, control, support, relationships, role and change**.<sup>18</sup>

In **Poland**, the prevention and monitoring of health and safety risks, is one of the responsibilities of the Polish labour inspectorate (PIP) body, and its list of stressors is different again. It lists eight causes of stress.<sup>19</sup> These are:

- **An overload in the quantity of work** – this includes both significant physical exertion, but also being required to work quickly, perhaps with the pace of work set by machine, and having too much work to do, so that work is taken home or there is extensive overtime;
- **Work that is too demanding** – this can include the need to maintain high levels of concentration the whole time, undertaking difficult and complicated tasks, having responsibility for people and high value property, facing moral dilemmas, and needing to take decisions with far-reaching consequences;
- **Work that is not demanding enough** – this can be work which is simple, repetitive and monotonous, and possibly highly automated, as well as below the worker's capabilities;
- **Limited amount of control over work** – this includes fixed and unchanging working hours, the inability to take a break when needed, having no control over how the work is done, working under pressure from other people, constant changes in conditions, methods and organisation of work, a lack of understanding of the purposes of work and the feeling of being “a cog in the machine”, as well as having no information on the impact of the work and feeling that it is senseless;
- **Lack of a clarity** – this includes not knowing which tasks are to be carried out, or the extent of the worker's responsibilities, lack of knowledge of how to do the job, for example, because of insufficient training or inadequate induction;
- **Conflict in the role** – this can include inconsistent and changing demands of superiors, conflicting expectation of different people (superiors, clients and colleagues), contacts with dissatisfied customers, need for cooperation with several bodies, the influence of work on family life, through long hours, frequent or lengthy business trips, lack of opportunity to care for children, having to be constantly available, low social prestige of the job or profession, the lack of possibilities for promotion, development of higher pay, as well as working below one's aspirations;
- **Lack of support from colleagues and/or superiors** – this can include: motivational systems that rely on rivalry between workers; conflicts between colleagues; lack of information or the necessary materials to do the job; changes in the business; isolation; help which is not existent, inadequate or too late; difficulties in contacting superiors or colleagues; discrimination on the grounds of sex, age, disability, race, religion, nationality, political views, union membership, ethnic origin or sexual

---

<sup>18</sup> Valutazione e gestione del rischio da stress lavoro-correlato, INAIL, 2011

<sup>19</sup> Czym jest stres? PIP website <https://www.pip.gov.pl/pl/bhp/stres-w-pracy/6421,czym-jest-stres-.html> (Accessed 22.06.16)

orientation; temporary or permanent employment; physical violence from colleagues or superiors; and psychological violence from colleagues or superiors, including harassment, intimidation humiliation, ridicule, isolation and removal from the team; and

- **Physical working conditions** – such as noise, temperatures which are too high or too low and unpleasant smells, as well as the presence of substances which are inflammable, explosive, irritating, corrosive or poisonous.

This brief description of national health and safety institutes' varying approaches to psychosocial risks indicates that although the same issues – such as the content of the job, the ability to control how work is done, relations with customers and colleagues and prospects of career development – are found in most countries. The way they are grouped and classified and the importance they are given differ considerably.

A 2010 report on work-related stress by Eurofound, the tripartite EU research agency on social and work-related issues, looked at how the issue was tackled across the EU.<sup>20</sup> Combining the available information from the then 27 EU member states, it grouped the risk factors in eight areas, as follows:

- **quantitative demands** – time pressure or the amount of work;
- **qualitative demands** – including emotional and cognitive demands, as in public-facing roles and including work-life balance issues;
- **autonomy and control** – both over the content of work and how it is done;
- **employee involvement in organisational change;**
- **relations at work** – in particular support from managers and colleagues;
- **bullying and violence at work** – including sexual harassment;
- **the role of the employee and conflicts of value;** and
- **job insecurity** – especially for those in precarious forms of employment.

This approach was taken further in a joint report which Eurofound and the EU's health and safety agency, EU-OSHA, produced in 2014.<sup>21</sup> It examined the conditions considered to pose psychosocial risks to workers and, using the results of the fifth European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS), carried out in 2010, attempted to show how these elements affected workers' health and well-being. Five main factors were examined:

- **job content;**
- **work intensity and job autonomy;**
- **working time arrangements and work–life balance;**
- **social environment;** and
- **job insecurity and career development.**

These were measured against responses to questions in the EWCS on individual workers' views of their own health and well-being. These covered: whether work affected health negatively, sleeping problems, musculo-skeletal disorders, poor mental well-being, stress at work, absenteeism, the ability to do same job at 60 and dissatisfaction with working conditions.

---

<sup>20</sup> Work-related stress, Eurofound, 2010

<sup>21</sup> Psychosocial risks in Europe: prevalence and strategies for prevention: European Agency for Safety and Health at Work and Eurofound, 2014

The relationship between psychosocial risk factors and particular health and well-being outcomes is set out in the table. It is drawn from Chapter 1 of the joint EU-OSAH/Eurofound report, in particular Table 1.

**Table 1: Psychosocial risk factors and their impact on health and well-being**

<b><i>Psychosocial risk factor</i></b>	<b><i>Impact on health and well-being</i></b>
<b>Job content</b>	
Restructuring	Negative outcomes for overall health, sleeping problems, musculo-skeletal disorders and mental well-being, stronger correlation with work-related stress and absenteeism.
Monotonous tasks	Negative outcomes for overall health, sleeping problems, musculo-skeletal disorders, and mental well-being, correlation with absenteeism and being able to do the job at 60, and strong correlation with dissatisfaction with working conditions, although no significant effect for work-related stress.
Complex tasks	Greater likelihood of negative impacts on health, stress at work and sleeping disorders, no effect for poor mental well-being and dissatisfaction with working conditions. Those undertaking complex tasks are less likely to say that they will not be able to do the job at 60.
Repetitive tasks	Limited association with musculo-skeletal disorders and absenteeism; those doing repetitive tasks are less like to say they are dissatisfied with working conditions.
Need training to cope with duties	Associated with greater likelihood of reporting a negative effect of work on health, sleeping disorders, poor mental well-being, work related stress and dissatisfaction with working conditions.
Have skills to cope with demanding duties	Associated with lower levels of absenteeism but slightly higher levels of dissatisfaction with working conditions.
Dealing with angry clients	Almost doubles the chances of reporting work-related stress and increases, to a much lesser extent, sleeping disorders.
Job requires hiding feelings	More than double normal likelihood of reporting stress and negative outcomes for both mental well-being and being dissatisfied with working conditions.
Knowing what is expected at work	Less likely to report poor mental well-being or dissatisfaction with working conditions but more likely to report musculo-skeletal disorders and absenteeism, as well as saying that work affects health negatively.
<b>Work intensity and autonomy</b>	
High work autonomy	Less likely to say that they are dissatisfied with working conditions, will be unable to do the job at 60 or experience poor mental well-being, but more likely to report stress and musculo-skeletal disorders.
High work intensity	More likely to report a negative effect of work on health, sleeping problems, musculo-skeletal disorders, poor mental well-being, inability to do the job at 60 and dissatisfaction with working conditions. They are particularly likely to report work-related stress, almost three times more likely than the average and more than three times more likely than those reporting low work intensity
High job autonomy and high work intensity	Combining high work autonomy with high work intensity significantly reduces the negative effects. Workers in this position are less likely to report stress, absenteeism, dissatisfaction with working conditions and the view that they will be unable to do the job at 60.
<b>Working time and work-life balance</b>	
Part time (< 35 hr)	Part-time workers report lower levels of absenteeism, but are slightly more likely to say that they will not be able to do the job at 60.
Long hours (>47 hr)	Those working 48 hours or more are generally more likely to report negative health and well-being outcomes than those working 35 to 47 hours, with the largest differences found among workers reporting that work negatively affects their health, work-related stress and sleeping disorders. However, they are also slightly more likely to report dissatisfaction with working conditions, an inability to do the job at 60, and musculo-skeletal disorders. However, they are less likely to report absenteeism.
Irregular working	Irregular working hours are associated with poorer health and well-being outcomes, particularly

<b>Psychosocial risk factor</b>	<b>Impact on health and well-being</b>
<b>Job content</b>	
hours	with sleeping problems and musculoskeletal disorders. Responses on stress, inability to do the job at 60 and dissatisfaction with working conditions are also above average.
Good fit between work and private life	Workers in this position are much less likely to report negative outcomes for health and well-being; notably, they are more satisfied with work and experience less work-related stress. Improving work-life balance prevents negative health outcomes.
<b>Social environment</b>	
High social support	Workers reporting high levels of support from colleagues are less likely to report sleeping problems, poor mental well-being and job dissatisfaction. However, the relationship between levels of lack of support and health and well-being outcomes is not as strong as for the other two social environment risks: discrimination and adverse social behaviour.
Discrimination	Those who report experience of discrimination are more likely to report sleeping problems, musculoskeletal disorders, poor mental well-being, absenteeism and job dissatisfaction.
Adverse social behaviour	Those who have experienced adverse social behaviour are more than twice as likely to report a negative effect of work on health, sleeping problems and dissatisfaction with working conditions; they are also much more likely to report musculoskeletal disorders, poor mental well-being, absenteeism and inability to do the job at 60.
<b>Job insecurity and career development</b>	
Career prospects	Having good career prospects has a strong positive association with satisfaction with working conditions and, overall, decreases the likelihood of reporting negative outcomes for health and well-being, especially poor mental well-being.
Job insecurity	Job insecurity has a strong negative impact on satisfaction with working conditions and is associated with an increased likelihood of reporting negative outcomes, especially with poor mental well-being. It is associated with a slightly lower likelihood of reporting absenteeism.
Well paid for job	Being well paid for the job has very similar health outcomes to having good career prospects. Workers in this position are much less likely to report dissatisfaction with working conditions, and there is a lower likelihood of reporting negative outcomes for health and well-being, especially poor mental well-being.
Feeling of work well done	Those reporting that their job regularly gives them the feeling of work well done are also more satisfied with the job and are less likely to report poor mental well-being

In looking at this range of psychosocial factors, the EU-OSHA/Eurofound report makes it clear that some have a more significant impact than others. It states that adverse social behaviour, which includes bullying and violence at work, is the psychosocial factor “that has strongest associations with negative outcomes for health and well-being”. It goes on to say that, “Overall, adverse social behaviour, work–life balance, high work intensity and feeling of work well-done stand out”, as the factors that have the greatest impact, and also that where several negative factors are present at the same time, they can reinforce one another.

### **The extent to which psychosocial risk factors are present in central government**

Workers in central government in the EU are employed in a wide variety of occupations, from senior managers and professionals to elementary occupations, like messengers and doorkeepers. They are also in a wide range of workplaces, from prisons to the local offices of government departments and from border posts to ministers’ offices.

In these circumstances, it is clear that there is no single set of psychosocial risk factors which will apply evenly across central government.

However, looking at the seven factors examined in the EU-OSHA/Eurofound report it is clear that many of them are found in different parts of central government.

Restructuring is seen as one of the key concerns in the areas of **job content**, and this has been widespread across central government in recent years. In Ireland, for example, the Civil Service Renewal Plan, launched in October 2014, is described as representing “a fundamental new vision and direction for the Civil Service”.<sup>22</sup> In France, the government has been engaged in what it calls a “transformation of the organisation and functioning of state services” since 2012.<sup>23</sup> In Romania, the government is engaged in “central public administration reform, aiming to increase the efficiency, performance and stability of the public policy framework”.<sup>24</sup>

One particular change which has been universal across central government has been the accelerating introduction of new technology as part of the move to e-government. The 2016 benchmarking report from the Commission on the progress of e-government found that, on average across the EU, 81% of government services in seven key areas were available online in 2014/15, as compared with 72% two years earlier.<sup>25</sup> It pointed, however, to significant differences between those countries at the top of the table, where all or almost all of government services in these areas are available online – Malta (100% availability), Austria (98%), Portugal (98%) and Estonia (96%) – and those at the bottom of the table where online users have access to many fewer of these areas – Romania (54%), Greece (54%) and Hungary (55%).

Moving to online service provision has a wide range of impacts on the central government employees providing these services, potentially changing the character and content of their jobs, their relationships with users, the place where they work and the number of people needed. The experience of the tax authority in Lithuania, a country where the online availability of the services in the benchmarking report went up from 73% in 2012/13 to 84% in 2014/15, indicates some of the possible changes.<sup>26</sup>

The process of digitalisation in the Lithuanian tax authority, which began in 2004, had taken it from a system based on paper documents to the situation in the third quarter of 2016, where some 60% of tax payers were using e-services and the proportion of tax returns submitted electronically was 97.4% (2015) compared with 83.4% in 2011. As a consequence, the number of employees in the tax inspectorate, which had been 3,500 in 2000 and 3,550 in 2010, had fallen to 3,350, and the number of regional offices was being cut from ten to five. In terms of the impact on the type of work, there was less “front office” work and less paperwork. However, more resources were being put into e-services and there was more attention to tax compliance. Taxpayers with queries can now contact call centres or submit enquiries electronically. In terms of the changes to the working environment, tax officials no longer work with piles of paper. Instead their work is with screens. The impact on the grey economy and tax fraud and avoidance remains to be further explored.

Another and even more serious problem linked with job content found in central government is the need to deal with angry clients, present in areas such as welfare administration and the enforcement of regulations, as well as in areas such as policing or the operation of prisons.

In the worst cases, these difficult relations can lead to abuse and violence and there are certainly numerous examples in central government where this occurs. For example, in HMRC, the UK tax authority, there were 383 cases of violence and verbal abuse in 2015/16, and in DWP, the UK ministry dealing with most social

---

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.per.gov.ie/en/civil-service-renewal/>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.gouvernement.fr/les-fonctions-d-administration-generale>

<sup>24</sup> Romania: National Reform Programme 2016, Bucharest April 2016

<sup>25</sup> eGovernment Benchmark 2016 European Commission 2016

<sup>26</sup> See presentation by Vyngantas Ivanauskas, Deputy Head of the State Tax Inspectorate (VMI) at the EUPAE-TUNED seminar in Vilnius “The Impact of the use of new technologies”, 22-23 September 2016

benefits, there were 33,115 incidents of verbal abuse/threat in 2013/14 and 637 actual assaults.<sup>27</sup> In Spain, the latest report on health and safety in central government indicates that there were 461 cases of verbal abuse and 78 cases of physical assault in 2015, with more than 80% of them occurring in SEPE, the employment service with deals, among other things, with unemployment.<sup>28</sup> These figures do not cover Spanish prisons, where there were 424 assaults on prison staff in 2013, while figures from the UK prison service were even more alarming with assaults on prison staff more than doubling from 710 in the second quarter of 2010 to 1,724, and serious assaults going up three-fold in the same period from 64 to 209.<sup>29</sup>

In Germany, there were 68,212 attacks on police and rescue services (1.9% more than 2014), and of these 4,071 were attacks on police causing serious bodily harm (4.9% more than in 2014).<sup>30</sup>

Some central government jobs also require their holders to hide their feelings, another aspect of job content which the EU-OSHA/Eurofound report identifies as increasing stress and damaging mental well-being.

In the area of **work intensity and autonomy**, there are certainly some areas where the amount of work may be excessive. For example, the UK's annual Civil Service People's Survey, which measures central government employees' perceptions of their work, found in 2015 that overall 69% of the respondents considered that they had an "acceptable workload". However, this figure was much lower in some departments: in the Crown Prosecution Service it was 44%, in the Border Force it was 43% and in the Prison Service it was 45%. These departments also indicated that they had low levels of autonomy in how they do their work. In response to the statement "I have a choice in deciding how I do my work", overall 72% of UK civil servants agreed, but in the Crown Prosecution Service it was 54%, in the Prison Service 45% and in the Border Force just 34%. The EU-OSHA/Eurofound report concluded that "autonomy helps workers to cope with high levels of intensity",<sup>31</sup> so it must be of concern if there are workers who have a high workload but little choice in how to deal with it.

**Working time and work life balance** may be an area where central administration scores better. For example, in the UK's 2015 Civil Service People's Survey, 67% replied that they achieved "a good balance between my work life and my private life", and only one department scored less than 50% (the Border Force at 37%). Overall in Europe, public administration scores well on the "working time quality index", which was developed by Eurofound and combines four elements: duration, atypical working time, working time arrangements and flexibility. The Sixth European Working Conditions Survey, based on interviews with almost 44,000 individual workers in 2015, found that in the EU 28 public administration scored 73 (out of 100) on the index, second only to financial services (74) and above the overall average of 70.<sup>32</sup> It is, however,

---

<sup>27</sup> Annual reports HMRC and DWP

<sup>28</sup> Memoria 2015 Informe-Resumen sobre recursos y actividades desarrolladas por la Administración General del Estado Durante El Año 2015 en materia de prevención de riesgos laborales

<sup>29</sup> Safety in Custody Statistics - Summary tables (Self-harm and assaults to June 2016), ONS

<sup>30</sup> Die Kriminalität in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Polizeiliche Kriminalstatistik für das Jahr 2015

<sup>31</sup> Psychosocial risks in Europe: prevalence and strategies for prevention: European Agency for Safety and Health at Work and Eurofound, 2014

<sup>32</sup> Eurofound (2016), Sixth European Working Conditions Survey – Overview report, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

important to note that this figure relates to public administration as a whole and includes local and regional as well as central government.<sup>33</sup>

In the area of the **social environment** at work, a combination of support from colleagues, discrimination and what is known as “adverse social behaviour” – such as bullying, harassment and violence, it is clear that those working in central government face particular challenges. On the positive side, the Sixth Working Conditions Survey shows that the proportion of employees reporting social support from colleagues in the EU28 is above average in public administration, with 75% of respondents saying that they receive this compared with 72% overall. Social support from managers is also higher in public administration than overall, although lower than the level of support from colleagues.

Less positively, there does seem to be evidence of greater discrimination in public administration (see below) and as already noted, workers in central government face above average levels of third-party violence and abuse.

The last psychological risk factor identified by the EU-OSHA/Eurofound report relates to **job insecurity and career development**. In the past, those employed by central government might have been seen as having secure jobs with good career prospects but that has changed, at least in some countries, since the financial crisis which began in 2008. A number of countries have seen substantial reductions in the numbers employed in central government. In the UK, for example, between March 2009 and March 2016, the number employed in the Civil Service fell from 524,400 to 418,300, a drop of 20.2%.<sup>34</sup> In Spain, the number employed in the central state administration (personal al servicio del sector público estatal administrativo) fell from 632,124 in 2009 to 569,784 in 2015, a 9.9% decline.<sup>35</sup> And in Greece, the number of “ordinary staff” in the public sector, which includes local government, education and health, as well as central administration dropped from 692,907 in December 2009 to 566,913 in December 2015, an 18.2% fall. Even though, in many cases, these job losses were achieved without redundancy, the reduced size of central administrations has reduced career opportunities and increased insecurity.

As well as job losses, in some countries, there has been an increase in the number of central government staff who are employed on a temporary basis, or on non-standard terms, which are potentially less permanent. In the UK, a report by the House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts in 2016 found that “numbers of temporary staff employed by departments have been growing since 2011–12”, although data was not collected systematically.<sup>36</sup> In France, there are now 378,900 so-called “contractuels” – employees without civil service status – in the part of the public sector which includes central government (Fonction publique de l’État), although since 2012, those on temporary contracts have had access to permanent employment.<sup>37</sup> In Spain, one of the main reasons why the government and unions reached agreement in March 2017 on a major increase in new permanent posts across the public sector was that the level of temporary staff had become so high – around 25%.

---

<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately the standard industry breakdown used by most EU and national statistics does not identify central government separately and figures for public administration, defence and compulsory social security are the closest proxy.

<sup>34</sup> Civil Service statistics: 2016

<sup>35</sup> Personal al servicio del Sector Público Estatal: 2009 – 2015, Intervención General de la Administración del Estado

<sup>36</sup> Use of consultants and temporary staff, Thirty-sixth Report of Session 2015–16, House of Commons, April 2016

<sup>37</sup> L’emploi dans la fonction publique en 2015, INSEE

Public sector spending restraint has also led to pay cuts and/or pay freezes for central government workers in many countries, including the UK, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Greece, France, Ireland, Romania, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. As the EU-OSHA/Eurofound report notes, “having good career prospects and being well paid for the job have a strong positive association with satisfaction with working conditions and, overall, decrease the likelihood of reporting negative outcomes for health and well-being, especially poor mental well-being”. Feeling under-valued in monetary terms is likely to have the opposite effect. It is noticeable, for example, that UK’s 2015 Civil Service People’s Survey produced one of the lowest levels of agreement, just 25%, in response to the question “compared to people doing a similar job in other organisations I feel my pay is reasonable”. The level of agreement has also fallen since 2009, when it was 33%.

### The new and emerging risks survey

Another examination of the presence of psychosocial risk factors is provided by the Second European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER-2). This was carried out by EU-OSHA in 2014 and in contrast to the European Working Conditions Survey, which asks workers, ESENER-2 asks “those ‘who know best’ about safety and health in their establishment. These may be owners, managers, health and safety specialists without management function or occasionally employee representatives.

ESENER-2 looked at the prevalence of seven psychosocial risk factors across Europe. It found, not just that those working in public administration were exposed to these risks, but that, with a single exception, long or irregular hours, these psychosocial risks were more likely to be present in workplaces in public administration than in the economy as a whole (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Psychosocial risk factors present in the establishment (% establishments, EU-28)**

	Public administration	All
Having to deal with difficult customers, patients, pupils, etc.	68	58
Time pressure	49	43
Poor communication or cooperation within the organisation	27	17
Employees' lack of influence on their work pace or work processes	19	13
Job insecurity	19	15
Long or irregular working hours	19	23
Discrimination, for example due to gender, age or ethnicity	4	2

Source: ESENER-2 EU-OSHA, 2016 (based on interactive survey dashboard)

Having to deal with difficult customers, patients, pupils, etc. was the psychological risk factor found most frequently, with two-thirds (68%) of establishments in public administration reporting its presence. This was followed by time pressure, which half (49%) reported, and poor communication, reported by more than a quarter (27%). A fifth of establishments (19%) reported employees’ lack of influence over work organisation and the same proportion referred to long or irregular hours. Job insecurity was also reported to be present in 19% of establishments. This was a higher proportion than in the economy as a whole (15%), an indication that jobs in public administration are no longer secure. Even discrimination, at 4% of establishments, was reported more frequently in public administration than across the economy.

There were noticeable differences between countries in terms of the prevalence of the risk factors in each of the areas surveyed (see Table 3).

On the need to deal with difficult customers or service users, there were 10 countries (Estonia, Latvia, Malta, Hungary, Poland, Germany, the Netherlands, Bulgaria, the UK and Cyprus) where more than 75% of establishments reported this as an issue. At the other end of the scale only 50% of the establishments in Finland and 30% of those in Luxembourg reported this.

Similarly, time pressure is identified more frequently as a risk factor in some countries than in others. Almost all respondents (95%) see this as an issue in Denmark and in a further six countries, Finland, the Netherlands, Malta, Croatia, Sweden and Bulgaria, more than 70% of the replies said time pressure was present as a risk factor. However, there were another six, Slovakia, Spain, France, Italy, the Czech Republic and Lithuania, where fewer than 40% of the respondents identified time pressure as a risk factor.

Poor communication or cooperation was identified as a relatively common problem in the Nordic countries, with Sweden at the top of the table with 56% of establishments reporting this, while in the Czech Republic (3%) and Lithuania (0%), the problem appears barely to exist.

The position is similar with reference to employees' lack of influence over work pace and work process. This is again seen as a relatively common problem in Sweden, with 41% of establishments reporting it, and fairly usual in Denmark, Ireland and the Netherlands, all with rates above 30%. However, it is very rarely reported in Austria (6%) and Cyprus (2%).

The ranking on excessively long or irregular working hours is slightly different. Denmark is still near the top of the table with 42% of establishments reporting this, just behind Malta on 44%, but in this area, Sweden is lower down the table with just 28% reporting this as a problem. The countries where working time is least frequently seen as a problem are Spain on 8% and Poland and Italy, where only 7% see it as problem.

One of the most interesting areas where there is a clear difference between countries in the responses is in the area of job insecurity. There are some countries where this is frequently identified as a risk factor in public administration. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Greece is at the top of this list, with 58% pointing to job insecurity as a risk factor, but there are another four countries, Estonia, Latvia, the UK and Croatia, where more than 40% of respondents see job insecurity in this way. In contrast, there are four countries, Malta, Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg and Austria, where fewer than 10% of respondents say job insecurity is present as a risk factor.

However, it is also important to note that all these figures reflect the respondents' own estimates of the position and they may be influenced by national views of what is seen as acceptable.

This seems particularly clear in relation to discrimination, where the questionnaire asked whether "discrimination, for example due to gender, age or ethnicity" was present in the establishment. Overall only 4% of those replying said it was, but the highest results came from the UK (11%), the Netherlands (10%) and Sweden (8%), all countries where discrimination has a higher profile. It may therefore be this higher level of awareness, rather than the actual level of discrimination, which is reflected in the answers.

**Table 3: Psychosocial risk factors present in the establishment in public administration by country (% establishments)**

	Having to deal with difficult customer, patients, pupils etc.	Time pressure	Poor communication or cooperation within the organisation	Employees' lack of influence over their work pace or work processes	Job insecurity	Long or irregular working hours	Discrimination, for example due to gender, age or ethnicity
Austria	68	54	20	6	2	12	3
Belgium	74	47	29	21	9	23	5
Bulgaria	78	72	10	25	29	18	0
Croatia	66	75	19	9	41	20	1
Cyprus	76	59	27	2	21	34	7
Czech Republic	73	25	3	11	28	20	0
Denmark	73	95	48	37	39	42	4
Estonia	93	65	37	24	54	15	2
Finland	46	84	43	24	31	18	2
France	64	35	28	17	14	18	6
Germany	79	63	28	18	6	24	3
Greece	70	52	37	24	58	26	3
Hungary	80	43	9	14	22	18	1
Ireland	73	67	34	33	26	20	2
Italy	52	33	30	13	12	7	1
Latvia	83	54	20	28	46	32	3
Lithuania	65	21	0	10	36	10	0
Luxembourg	30	44	37	19	4	23	9
Malta	81	76	16	20	10	44	0
Netherlands	78	78	40	31	25	32	10
Poland	80	56	12	16	17	7	0
Portugal	59	41	26	20	32	22	2
Romania	62	47	22	12	17	23	1
Slovakia	55	39	11	13	21	24	0
Slovenia	60	51	24	23	16	23	0
Spain	62	39	31	21	15	8	0
Sweden	65	74	56	41	28	28	8
UK	78	66	34	26	42	33	11
<b>EU 28</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>4</b>
ESENER-2 EU-OSHA, 2016 (based on interactive survey dashboard)							

As already noted, these figures are for public administration as a whole. It is more difficult to obtain figures specifically for central administration. However, the conditions of employment survey undertaken in France

in 2013 and the Swedish Work Environment Survey do provide figures which allow a direct comparison to be made between the presence of psychosocial risks in central government and the private sector as a whole and some of the key elements of this comparison are set out in Boxes 1 and 2.

### **BOX 1: Psychosocial risks in French central government**

Those working in key parts of central government in France are generally more exposed to psychosocial risk factors than those working in the private sector. Indeed their rates of exposure are often higher than in the public sector as a whole. The comparisons are for three occupational areas, which are dominated by those working in central administration, public finances, justice and security and defence, which include police officers and the fire services, as well as the armed forces.<sup>38</sup>

Table 4 sets out the extent to which some of the psychological risks examined in the conditions of employment survey are present in the private sector, the public sector as a whole, and among those working in the public finances, justice and security and defence. It does not cover the responses to all the questions – in some areas the information is not available in the same way – but it gives an indication of the psychosocial risks faced in some key areas of central administration, as compared with the private sector.

The table shows that, with the exception of a single area – “Having to do things of which one disapproves” – these psychosocial risks are more prevalent in the public than in the private sector in France, although in the area of work intensity (“Having to hurry to do the work”) the difference is small.

Looking at the individual areas of the public sector, work intensity seems a particular problem in justice, with 65.7% reporting that they have to hurry to do the work, compared with 46.2% in the private sector, and slightly higher rates in public finances (47.7%) and security and defence (49.4%). This is confirmed by the responses to the question on whether individuals are able to take sufficient care over their work. Just over a quarter (26.9%) of private sector respondents said they had to rush their work, but a half (50.4%) of those in the justice area did so; the figure for public finances was 37.6% and for security and defence it was 31.8%. The figures for justice are more reassuring in terms of whether individuals felt they had to do things of which they disapproved: none said they did so. However, more than one in eight (13.3%) in public finances said that this was the case, as well as more than one in six (17.4%) in security and defence.

Job security appears not to be a problem in these individual areas, with public finances, justice and security and defence all reporting lower than average scores. However, this does not mean that those working in these areas have not experienced organisational change. The proportions reporting restructuring or a change of location in the previous 12 months are well above the private sector average (13.6%) for both public finances (22.9%) and security and defence (19.1%), although they are lower (6.3%) for justice. However, all three areas report a greater prevalence of technical changes than in the private sector.

The information on work relationships – relations with superiors and colleagues – is limited in terms of comparisons between the private sector and the areas of public finances, justice and security and defence. However, compared with the public sector as a whole, it seems that the situation is better in public finances, and especially justice, but worse, at least in terms of relations with superiors, in security and defence.

---

<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately for international comparisons, the whole of section of the French public sector that most closely corresponds to central administration, fonction publique d’État (FPE) cannot be used for comparisons as it also includes a large number of school teachers, who are not regarded as part of central administration in other countries.

However, it is in the area of the emotional demands that work places on individuals where the difference between the private sector and public finances, justice and security and defence is most marked. While just over a quarter (26.9%) of private sector workers have tense relations with the public, it is three-quarters (75.7%) in justice, more than half (53.4%) in security and defence, and 42.8% in public finances. Those working in the areas of justice and security and defence are also much more likely to have to hide their emotions, although this is not the case for those in public finances. The extent to which employees are in contact with people in distress is, however, higher in all three areas: two-thirds (66.7%) of those working in public finances report this, almost three-quarters (73.2%) of those in security and defence, and an enormous 84.9% of those working in justice.

One consequence of this is much higher levels of third-party violence and abuse. Verbal abuse from the public in the previous 12 months is almost twice as common in the public sector overall (28.6%) as in the private sector (15.4%) and among the central government occupation areas it is even more frequent – 33.2% in public finance, 44.1% in justice and 49.9% in security and defence. Physical and sexual assaults also run at around twice the level in the public sector (4.6%) as in the private sector (1.9%). These attacks are rare in public finances (0.4%) and appear not to take place at all in justice, but they are extremely common in security and defence with one in five (19.5%) reporting that they have been victims in the previous 12 months.

**Table 4: The presence of different types of psychosocial risks in the private and public sectors in France: 2013**

Type of psychosocial risk	Private sector	Public sector	Public finances	Justice	Security & defence
<b>Work intensity</b>					
Having always or often to hurry to do one's work	46.2%	46.7%	47.7%	65.7%	49.4%
<b>Autonomy and flexibility</b>					
Can choose how to achieve the objectives set	78.5%	83.7%	Na	Na	Na
<b>Work relationships</b>					
Not receiving the respect one's work merits	28.3%	31.5%	Na	Na	Na
Having tense relationships with superiors	Na	27.5%	25.8%	9.5%	37.8%
Having tense relationships with colleagues	Na	25.4%	21.3%	13.3%	25.8%
Suffered verbal abuse from colleagues or superiors in the last 12 months	12.2%	15.2%	9.9%	2.7%	16.9%
<b>Emotional demands and violence at work</b>					
Having tense relations with the public	26.9%	42.8%	42.8%	75.7%	53.4%
Suffered verbal abuse from the public in the last 12 months	15.4%	28.6%	33.2%	44.1%	49.9%
Been the victim of a physical or sexual attack by the public	1.9%	4.6%	0.4%	0.0%	19.5%
Having to hide one's emotions and appear to be in a good mood	29.1%	35.5%	32.1%	48.2%	41.5%

Type of psychosocial risk	Private sector	Public sector	Public finances	Justice	Security & defence
Being in contact with people in distress	37.9%	66.7%	67.5%	84.9%	73.2%
<b>Ethical conflicts</b>					
Having always or often to rush tasks which should be done more carefully	26.9%	30.6%	37.6%	50.4%	31.8%
Having to do things which one disapproves of	9.9%	9.5%	13.3%	0.0%	17.4%
<b>Economic insecurity and organisational change</b>					
Fear of losing one's job in the next 12 months	27.1%	15.2%	8.5%	0.0%	9.2%
Restructuring or a change in location in the last 12 months	13.6%	14.8%	22.9%	6.3%	17.5%
Technical changes in the last 12 months	13.7%	15.3%	27.8%	23.9%	19.1%
Sources: Coutrot, T., Davie, E., Les conditions de travail des salariés dans le secteur privé et la fonction publique, Dares Analyses n°102, décembre 2014 and Davie, E., Les risques psychosociaux dans la fonction publique, Rapport annuel sur l'état de la fonction publique, Faits et chiffres, édition 2014, DGAFF, décembre 2014.					

### Box 2: Psychosocial risks in Swedish central government administration

The Swedish Work Environment Survey, which is based on a large scale survey of the working population and is carried out every two years, also allows a comparison between central government (Statlig) and the private sector. It is particularly interesting because this survey, which is based on the responses of individual employees, makes it possible to look at differences between women and men (see Table 5).

Looking first at the difference between the private sector and central government, it is clear that in the area of stress there is little difference between the private sector and central government, although central government employees are less likely to be able to take short breaks than in the private sector (40% can do this in central government 49% in the private sector). Central government employees seem to get more encouragement from their managers and colleagues than those in the private sector, but they get less appreciation from users and colleagues, and are twice as likely to work with people who are ill or have problems (33% as compared with 15%). Perhaps shockingly, central government employees also seem more exposed to discrimination, at least in terms of gender and age, where the rates are approximately double those of the private sector – with 8% of central government employees facing discrimination on grounds of gender and 9% on grounds of age. They are also more likely to have been in clashes with colleagues and almost three times more likely to have faced violence or the threat of violence than their private sector counterparts – 22% in central government and 8% in the private sector. They are also somewhat more likely to have been bullied, with 12% of central government employees reporting this compared with 8% in the private sector.

Overall, the areas where central government scores worse than the private sector clearly outweigh the few areas where it scores better.

Examining the position of women and men within central government, the most striking differences are in the area of sexual harassment and discrimination on grounds of gender. In total 9% of women said that they had suffered sexual harassment in the previous 12 months, compared with 1% of men. However, one

noticeable aspect of this result is that all the cases came from sources other than their managers or colleagues. The gap between women and men was almost as large in the area of gender discrimination, which 12% of women reported and only 3% of men. Other notable differences were the fact that while more women than men reported that they could set their own work pace and take short breaks, they were also much more likely to say that they did not have time to talk or think of anything else and that work demanded their whole attention and concentration (50% of the women said this). Women seemed less likely than men to receive encouragement and information about priorities from managers, although they were less likely than men to have had clashes on conflicts with them. However, they were also more likely than men to have received encouragement from colleagues.

**Table 5: Presence of some psychosocial risk factors in central government and private sector: proportion of employees in 2015 (%)**

	Private sector	Central government		
	Total	Men	Women	Total
Stress				
Able to set your own work pace (at least half time)	49	42	49	46
Job is so stressful job that you do not have time to talk or think of anything but work	33	25	37	32
Can take short breaks (at least half time)	49	34	44	40
Work demands your whole attention and concentration (almost all the time)	43	29	50	40
Support and social relationships				
Rarely or never have opportunity to receive advice and support for difficult tasks	15	15	15	15
Rarely or never receive encouragement from manager	35	24	31	28
Rarely or never receive encouragement from colleagues	18	15	8	11
Rarely or never get information from managers or supervisors on which tasks to prioritise	34	31	40	36
Manager shows appreciation for work (weekly)	37	36	32	34
Other colleagues, users/customers etc.) show appreciation for work (weekly)	65	58	61	59
Work with people who are ill or have problems (weekly)	15	30	35	33
Discrimination				
Discrimination on grounds of gender	4	3	12	8
Discrimination on grounds gender identity	1	.	.	1
Discrimination on grounds of ethnic origin	2	3	4	3
Discrimination on grounds of religion/belief	2	.	2	2
Discrimination on grounds of disability	1	.	.	.
Discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation	.	.	.	.
Discrimination on grounds of age	5	8	10	9
Conflicts, violence, bullying and harassment				
Conflicts/clashes with manager in last 12 months*	26	33	24	28
Conflicts/clashes with colleagues in last 12 months*	31	43	39	41
Conflicts/clashes with others (users/customers) in last 12 months*	32	35	35	35
Violence or threat of violence in last 12 months*	8	25	20	22
Bullying (unpleasant words and actions) from managers or colleagues*	8	10	14	12
Sexual harassment from managers or colleagues in last 12 months*	2	.	.	.
Sexual harassment from others in last 12 months*	4	1	9	5
* On at least one occasion				

Source: The Work Environment 2015: Arbetsmiljöstatistik Rapport 2016 (Table 10.3)

## The framework for tackling psychosocial risks

This section sets out the context for tackling psychosocial risks, looking at existing legal protections, the range of institutional support that is available and the collective agreements that have been signed. As far as possible, in each case it first presents the situation at European level before looking at national examples.

### Legal framework

#### *European level*

Health and safety at work is a fundamental right in the EU as Article 31 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights states that “every worker has the right to working conditions which respect his or her health, safety and dignity”. There is a comprehensive body of EU health and safety legislation made up of the Framework Directive 89/391/EEC and a series of individual directives covering issues such as display screen equipment and noise.

There is no similar individual directive on psychosocial risks but the Framework Directive covers “all risks” (recital 15), and it imposes important obligations on employers. Article 5(1) states: “The employer shall have a duty to ensure the safety and health of workers in every aspect related to the work”, and Article 6(1) states: “Within the context of his responsibilities, the employer shall 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 organization and means.”

This means that under European law psychosocial risks must be addressed in organisations’ health and safety strategies, particularly as a European Court of Justice case found that health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing (ECJ, Case C84/94, UK v Council, para 15).

In addition to health and safety legislation, European legislation on equality and discrimination is relevant to tackling psychosocial risks relating to harassment or discrimination. The EU’s Gender Equality Recast Directive (2006/54/EC) and the two EU Anti-discrimination Directives, covering religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation (2000/78/EC) and racial or ethnic origin (2000/43/EC) all tackle discrimination, and include sections on harassment. All three define harassment in the same way as “unwanted conduct ... with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person and of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment”. This harassment is seen as discrimination and therefore prohibited when it relates to the various characteristics, such as race sex and age, covered by the directives.

#### *National level*

All EU member states have transposed the Framework Directive into their national law. This means that psychosocial risks are implicitly covered by national legislation in all member states. For example, in its guide on psychosocial risks, the Spanish labour inspectorate (ITSS) accepts that there is no specific Spanish legislation on these risks but it states they are implicitly included in the law on the Law on the Prevention of Hazards (Ley 31/1995, de 8 de noviembre, de Prevención de Riesgos Laborales), the legislation transposing the EU Framework Directive (89/391/EEC).<sup>39</sup>

However, a majority of EU members (19 out of 28) have gone further, including a reference to psychosocial risks, or some aspect of psychosocial risks in their health and safety legislation, as Table 6 shows. This leaves

---

<sup>39</sup> Guía de actuaciones de la Inspección de Trabajo y Seguridad Social sobre Riesgos Psicosociales, 2012

only nine states, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Greece, Ireland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and the UK, which have not done so.

In some cases, such as in Latvia and Malta, the references are limited to simply adding psychological risks to the list of other risks to be taken into account. In other countries only specific psychosocial risks are referred to: French legislation refers to harassment and sexist behaviour; Italian legislation to stress; Luxembourg legislation only to harassment and Polish legislation to bullying.

However, in most cases the legislation is more detailed in its treatment of psychosocial risks, often with a definition of the risk factors involved. Belgian legislation, for example, defines psychosocial risks as “the likelihood that one or more employee(s) may suffer mental harm, which may also be accompanied by physical harm, due to exposure to the elements of the work organisation, job content, working conditions, the conditions of working life and interpersonal relationships at work, on which the employer has an impact and which objectively pose a danger”.

One other noticeable point is that, in a number of countries, there have been recent changes in the legislation giving greater attention to psychosocial risks. This is the case in Austria, where the legislation was changed in 2012, Belgium (2014), Croatia (2014), Denmark (2013), France (where sexist behaviour was added in 2016), Germany (2013) and Slovenia (2011). In Luxembourg, new legislation is currently being developed which, among other things, will provide better protection for public employees who have been negatively affected by psychosocial risk factors. These developments suggest that legislators are increasingly seeing the need for a clearer legal framework to tackle psychosocial risks.

**Table 6: References to psychosocial risks or aspects of psychosocial risks in national legislation**

Country	Overall legal position
Austria	Changes in the employee protection law (ASchG) introduced in 2012 and in effect from 1.1 2013, have further reinforced the importance of mental health and the prevention of work-related mental stress in ensuring health and safety at work. These changes (See BGBl. I Nr. 118/2012) make it clear that health includes both physical and mental health. They include a requirement that an assessment of the adequacy of the measures in place should be undertaken after incidents, such as an attack or high levels of complaints.
Belgium	Significant changes on the law on psychosocial risks were introduced by the laws of 28 February 2014 and 28 March 2014, as well as by the Royal Decree 10 April 2014. These took effect from 1 September 2014. These placed psychosocial risks at the core of the risks to health at the workplace. Chapter Vbis, which previously referred only to violence, harassment and sexual harassment, now covers psychosocial risks at work including stress, violence, harassment and sexual harassment. The legislation defines psychosocial risks as “the likelihood that one or more employee(s) may suffer mental harm, which may also be accompanied by physical harm, due to exposure to the elements of the work organisation, job content, working conditions, the conditions of working life and interpersonal relationships at work, on which the employer has an impact and which objectively pose a danger”.
Croatia	Stress is covered in detail in Articles 51 and 52 of the law on health and safety at work (Zakon o zaštiti na radu NN 71/2014) adopted in 2014. This states that the employer should implement measures to prevent stress and in particular should consider: work organisation, including workload and the degree of workers’ autonomy; working conditions, including exposure to violence; communication on future changes; and subjective feelings relating to social pressures and the level of support.
Denmark	The 2010 Danish Working Environment Act was amended in 2013 to state that it “shall cover the physical and psychological working environment” and it covers “work-related violence, threats or other offensive behaviour”, even if they occur outside the workplace.
Estonia	The Estonian Occupational Health and Safety Act (1999) states that, “physical, chemical,

Country	Overall legal position
	biological, physiological and psychological factors present in the working environment shall not endanger the life or health of employees or that of other persons in the working environment”, and it defines psychological factors as “monotonous work or work not suitable to the abilities of an employee, poor work organisation, working alone for an extended period of time, or other similar factors that may gradually cause changes in the mental state of an employee”.
Finland	The Finnish Occupational Safety and Health Act (738/2002) sets out the need to eliminate hazards to the “physical and mental health of employees” (Section 1) and refers specifically to workloads, violence and harassment. It states that the employer must take action “if it is noticed that an employee while at work is exposed to workloads in a manner which endangers his or her healthy working conditions” (Section 25); that “jobs entailing an evident threat of violence shall be so arranged that the threat of violence and incidents of violence are prevented as far as possible” (Section 27); and that “if harassment or other inappropriate treatment of an employee occurs at work and causes hazards or risks to the employee’s health”, the employer should take appropriate action (Section 28).
France	The main French legislation on health and safety, contained in the Labour Code (Articles L.4121-1 to L.4121-5), does not refer specifically to psychosocial risks, although harassment (harcèlement moral) is added as one of the factors related to the working environment where employers need to develop a coherent overall prevention policy, and “sexist behaviour” (agissements sexistes) has been added by the 2016 Loi travail. However, as well as legislation, the government has extended two separate collective agreements on stress and harassment and violence (see below). It has also signed an agreement on psychosocial risks in the public sector.
Germany	The Occupational Safety and Health Act (ArbSchG) was changed in October 2013 and now specifically refers to the need to organise work in a way which, as far as possible, avoids mental and physical risks to health (§ 4), and adds psychosocial risks at work (“psychische Belastungen bei der Arbeit”) as one of the issues that have to be taken into account when conducting a risk assessment (§ 5).
Hungary	Changes introduced in January 2008 to the Act on Occupational Safety and Health No. 93/1993 (Munkavédelmi Törvény) introduced a new duty on the employer to take account of psychosocial risks (§ 54(1d)) as well as defining them (§ 87(1h)).
Italy	Legislation passed in 2008 placed an obligation on employers to take account of work-related stress, as defined in the 2004 European Agreement on the same topic (Article 28 of the Testo unico sulla salute e sicurezza sul lavoro –D.LGS 81/2008). This led, in further legislation (D. LGS 106/2009), to the inclusion of the evaluation of work-related stress as one of the elements to be included in the Safety Policy, which all employers must draw up. This requirement came into force on 1 January 2011.
Latvia	The 2001 Latvia Labour Protection Law states that in evaluating risks the employer shall take account of “the effect of physical, chemical, psychological, biological, physiological and other working environment factors”.
Lithuania	The Lithuanian Occupational Health and Safety Act No. IX-1672, July 2003, as amended, describes occupational health, among other things as “adapting of the working environment to physiological and psychological capabilities of workers”. Specific psychosocial assessment guidelines are set out in separate regulations, Order No. V-699/ A1-241, adopted in August 2005.
Luxembourg	Luxembourg legislation does not refer specifically to psychosocial risks. However, legislation passed in 2000 (Loi du 26 mai 2000 concernant la protection contre le harcèlement sexuel à l’occasion des relations de travail) outlawed sexual harassment at the workplace, extended to general harassment in 2006, and legislation passed in 2006 (Article 4) and specifically makes clear that it applies to civil servants (fonctionnaires).
Malta	The Maltese Occupational Health And Safety Authority Act (2000) sets out the “measures that need to be taken by an employer to prevent physical and psychological occupational ill-health, injury or death”.
Netherlands	The main health and safety legislation in the Netherlands (Working Conditions Act, 1999 as amended – Arbeidsomstandighedenwet or Arbowet) contains a specific reference to

Country	Overall legal position
	“employment-related psychosocial pressure” (psychosociale arbeidsbelasting), requiring the employer to operate a policy with the aim of preventing this, or limiting it, if prevention is not possible (Article 3.2). This was introduced in 2007.
Poland	The Labour Code does not refer to psychosocial risks. However, following an amendment in 2003 it does contain a requirement for an employer to act against bullying at work (Article 94.3).
Portugal	The main Portuguese health and safety legislation (Lei n.º 102/2009, 10 September 2009) refers specifically to psychosocial risks, adding the phrase “to reduce psychosocial risks” to the list of ways that the employer should adapt the work to the individual, as part of the general obligations (Article 15 (2)). This was further emphasised in later legislation passed in January 2014 (Lei n.º 3/2014), which requires the employer to ensure that exposure to “chemical, physical and biological agents and psychosocial risk factors do not constitute a risk to workers’ health and safety” (Article 14 (2)).
Slovenia	The Slovenian Health and Safety at Work Act (Zakon o varnosti in zdravju pri delu 43/2011) states: “The employer shall adopt measures to prevent, eliminate and manage cases of violence, bullying, harassment and other forms of psychosocial risks at the workplace which can pose a threat to workers’ health.”
Sweden	The main Swedish health and safety legislation, the Work Environment Act 1977, as amended (Arbetsmiljölöag), does not use the term psychosocial risks. However, it does refer to mental stress, stating: “Technologies, the organisation of work and the content of work must be designed in such a way that the employee is not subjected to physical strain or mental stress that may lead to illness or accidents” (Chapter 2, Section 1).

The legislation set out in Table 6 is for the employees under standard contracts and in most countries it also covers those working in central government. This is sometimes spelled out explicitly. In Sweden, for example, the Work Environment Act makes clear that it “applies to every activity in which employees perform work on behalf of an employer” (Chapter 1, Section 2). In the Netherlands, the main health and safety legislation (Working Conditions Act) applies in both the public and private sectors, as it defines an employer covered by the legislation as “the party on whose behalf another person is required to perform work in accordance with a contract of employment or appointment under public law” (Article 1).

However, there are some countries where this is not the case. In Austria, for example, the standard employee protection law (ASchG) does not apply to those working in central government who instead are covered by other specific regulations (§ 1 ASchG). However, in general in Austria, central government acts as though it were covered by the legislation.

Similarly, in Portugal, the main health and safety legislation (Lei n.º 102/2009) does not apply directly to the public sector, only the private, cooperative and social sectors (Article 3). However, the legislation governing the public sector (Lei n.º 35/2014) of June 2014 states that general employment legislation, including that relating to health and safety, applies to the public sector, subject to the specific provisions of the public sector law and any necessary adaptations (Article 4). It states further that public sector employers should respect applicable health and safety norms (Article 82).

There are also examples where the normal legislation generally applies to central government, but with some exceptions. In France, for example, the French Labour Code applies to employees employed under a normal contract in the public and private sectors, but subject to the particular provisions under which they are employed (Article L1111-1). The most frequently found exception is for those in the armed forces, police, and emergency services. This is the case in Germany, where the standard employee protection legislation applies explicitly to those with special employment status as government employees – Beamtinnen and

Beamte (§ 1 and 2 ArbSchG) – but exceptions are permitted, particularly in relation to armed forces, police and other emergency services (§ 20). There are similar exceptions in Italy, where the main health and safety legislation (Testo unico sulla salute e sicurezza sul lavoro – D.LGS 81/2008) otherwise applies to all sectors both private and public (Article 3), Romania (Legea securitatii si sanatatii in munca 319/2006 (Article 3)) and Spain (Ley 31/1995 (Article 2)).

Outside health and safety legislation, all EU member states have also transposed the gender equality and anti-discrimination directives into their national legislation so, when the problem is discrimination or harassment related to any of the characteristics covered by these directives, those affected potentially have a legal remedy in national legislation.<sup>40</sup>

Some countries also have more general legislation prohibiting bullying and harassment at work, irrespective of whether the individuals concerned are protected by equality or anti-discrimination law. In Spain, for example, the offence of harassment at work (acoso laboral) has been part of the criminal code (Article 173.1.II) since 2012, and some prison sentences have been imposed.

The criminal law can also be used against the perpetrators of violence, and in some cases those affected by violence may be entitled to damages from those who carried out the attacks. (In Germany, legislation introduced in 2016 extends civil servants' rights in this area. It provides that in some cases where civil servants have been awarded damages after an assault, but the perpetrator has insufficient funds to pay, the state will make up the difference.<sup>41</sup>)

## Support in tackling psychosocial risks

In every country there are a range of structures and individuals available to help employees and organisations tackle psychosocial risks. These include employee representatives, unions, health and safety experts, labour inspectors and others. This section sets out the various types of support which may be available.

### Employee representation

#### *European level*

The Framework Directive (89/391/EEC) imposes a duty on employers to “consult workers and/ or their representatives and allow them to take part in discussions on all questions relating to safety and health at work” (Article 11).

However, the directive does not set out in detail how this should be done, with the practical arrangements to be established “in accordance with national laws and/ or practices”.

#### *National level*

As a result there are many points of difference between national structures of employee representation for health and safety issues, reflect varying national approaches to the topic – many countries had their own

---

<sup>40</sup> For a detailed examination of the link between equal treatment/anti-discrimination law and health and safety law see Study on the implementation of the autonomous framework agreement on harassment and violence at work: Final report, by Emanuela Carta, Helen Frenzel, Inès Maillart, Tina Weber, Nora Wukovits, European Commission, July 2015

<sup>41</sup> Gesetz zur besseren Vereinbarkeit von Familie, Pflege und Beruf für Beamtinnen und Beamte des Bundes und Soldatinnen und Soldaten sowie zur Änderung weiterer dienstrechtlicher Vorschriften (19 October 2016)

lengthy history of legislation in this area before the 1989 directive – and overall national structures of employee representation.

The most frequently used model for employee health and safety representation is a combination of employee health and safety representatives, who have their own specific rights, plus a joint employee/employer health and safety committee. The members of this joint committee are typically the employee health and safety representatives on one side and, on the other, the employer (or a representative) plus the health and safety professionals in the company (works doctor, safety expert and so on) and, in some cases, other managers. The employee health and safety representatives are in some cases elected and in some cases chosen by the union, and this system is found in 12 countries (Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom).

A second approach is where employee health and safety representation is provided through the employee members of a joint employee/employer health and safety committee, and there are no separate health and safety representatives with their own rights. Five countries are in this group (Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, and Lithuania). In Belgium and France another existing body – the union in Belgium and the employee delegates in France – takes on health and safety functions where there are not enough employees to have a joint committee.

A third variant is where the structure provides only for employee health and safety representatives, not a joint employer/employee committee. Five countries use this model (the Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, Latvia and Malta), although in the case of Greece and Latvia, there is also an employee-only committee in larger workplaces. Although these countries do not have a joint committee as such, in two states the legislation provides for regular meetings between the employer and the employee health and safety representatives – in Greece they should be every three months, in Italy once a year.

The final model is where health and safety issues are primarily dealt with through the normal representative structures, the works council or a works council subcommittee. Five countries (Austria, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Slovenia) are in this group, although in central government in Austria and Germany the representative structures differ slightly from the works councils found in the private sector. (In Germany representation is through the staff council – Personalrat; in Austria it is through the office committee – Dienststellenausschuss.) The situation is also substantially different in central government in Luxembourg. In addition, in Austria and Germany, there is also a joint employee/employer health and safety committee and individual employees with particular health and safety tasks – these are not experts but employees enjoying the confidence of their colleagues.

## Health and safety experts

### *European level*

The Framework Directive states that “the employer shall designate one or more workers to carry out activities related to the protection and prevention of occupational risks for the undertaking and/ or establishment”, although if there are no appropriate employees to carry out this task, the employer can “enlist competent external services or persons”.

### *National level*

The approaches taken to health and safety experts differ very substantially between states. The situation in France, for example, where medical appointments for employees are obligatory at certain times (on being

initially appointed and thereafter at least every five years – and until 2017 it was every two) and where organisations of a certain size are obliged by law to have their own medical service, differs greatly from that in the UK at the other end of the spectrum, where there are no similar obligations.

Many countries have clear requirements on the appointment of health and safety experts. In Belgium, for example all employers must set up an internal occupational health department with one or more health and safety experts or cooperate with other employers in doing so. The extent of the internal service depends on the number of employees as well as the inherent hazards of the industry concerned and – in companies with fewer than 20 employees – the employer can be the health and safety expert if adequately qualified. The situation is similar in Poland, where an employer with more than 100 employees must create an occupational health service, which has an advisory and monitoring role. Employers with fewer than 100 employees can entrust this task to an external expert, and small employers (with up to 10 employees or 20 if the health and safety risks are low) can carry it out themselves, provided they have the appropriate training. On the other hand there are countries like Denmark or Ireland, as well as the UK, which have a less prescriptive approach.

One consequence of this is that there are major variations between countries in the health and safety services used by employers. This applies in public administration as elsewhere in the economy, as Table 7 taken from the ESENER-2 survey, shows. In nine countries the use of occupational health doctors is almost universal in public administration. The proportion of public administration establishments using doctors is 90% or above in Finland, Slovenia, Sweden, France, Poland, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands and Hungary. But there are seven countries (Ireland, Greece, Malta, Slovakia, Lithuania, Cyprus and Denmark) where fewer than half do so. The EU 28 average for the use of doctors is 85%.

The differences in the use of health and safety generalists in public administration are less marked, ranging from 96% in Slovenia to 28% in Malta, but with 15 states lying 15 percentage points either side of the EU 28 average of 66%.

**Table 7: Use of health and safety services in public administration**

Country	Doctor	Health and safety generalist
Austria	56	63
Belgium	96	76
Bulgaria	79	43
Croatia	74	82
Cyprus	18	73
Czech Republic	83	90
Denmark	16	64
Estonia	81	50
Finland	100	63
France	98	39
Germany	89	92
Greece	37	47
Hungary	92	72
Ireland	40	68
Italy	96	69
Latvia	89	53
Lithuania	30	46
Luxembourg	90	53
Malta	35	28
Netherlands	94	78

Country	Doctor	Health and safety generalist
Poland	98	81
Portugal	81	54
Romania	84	47
Slovakia	34	60
Slovenia	100	86
Spain	77	65
Sweden	100	96
UK	72	86
EU 28 average	85	66

Source: ESENER-2 EU-OSHA, 2016 (based on interactive survey dashboard)

## Labour inspectors

### European level

There is no European framework legislation on labour inspectors similar to the Framework Directive, although most EU member states have ratified two International Labour Organisation Conventions on industry and commerce (Convention No. 81) and agriculture (Convention No. 129), which refer to the role of labour inspectors in the enforcement of the legal provisions relating to workers' health and safety.<sup>42</sup>

### National level

However, despite this common ratification there are major differences at national level in the role and size of the labour inspectorates in the 28 member states. As a recent article by Professor David Walters of the University of Cardiff pointed out, "the structure and functions of different national inspectorates, as well as their position in the legal system, vary considerably between different EU countries".<sup>43</sup> Walters points out that while some countries, like France, Spain and Portugal, as well as the Netherlands and the Baltic States, have generalist inspectorates, concentrating on overall working conditions and legal and illegal work, the UK and Nordic countries have specialist inspectorates concentrating on health and safety. He also notes "a general trend towards reduced resourcing of inspection".

The differences between countries are reflected in the frequency with which workplaces are inspected, as shown by EU-OSHA's ESENER II survey, carried out in 2014. Looking at the economy as a whole, 90% of workplaces in Romania reported an inspection in the previous three years, but only 24% of workplaces in Luxembourg at the other end of the scale. The EU 28 average was 51% (see Table 8).

In public administration alone, the ESENER survey shows that on average inspections were less frequent, with 37% of workplaces in the EU 28 having been inspected in the previous three years. However, here again there are substantial differences between countries with Romania again at the top with 86% and Luxembourg again at the bottom with only 8% of workplaces in public administration being inspected. The national figures confirm that visits from the labour inspector are less likely in public administration than in the whole economy, sometimes much less likely, as in Austria, Croatia, Malta and Greece. But there are four countries, the Netherlands, Latvia, Estonia and Slovenia, where the opposite is the case.

<sup>42</sup> All EU states have ratified Convention 81 (industry and commerce) but Bulgaria, Lithuania and the UK have not ratified Convention 129 (agriculture).

<sup>43</sup> Labour inspection and health and safety in the EU by David Walters, HesaMag #14 autumn-winter 2016

Overall it is clear that while labour inspectors have a role to play in dealing with health and safety risks in general and psychosocial risks in particular in all EU member states, in practice the extent of their involvement varies substantially.

**Table 8: Visits by the labour inspectorate**

Country	Proportion of establishments inspected by labour inspectorate in the previous three years	
	Whole economy (%)	Public administration (%)
Austria	71	18
Belgium	71	67
Bulgaria	78	53
Croatia	62	20
Cyprus	65	63
Czech Republic	55	44
Denmark	81	76
Estonia	58	67
Finland	59	51
France	38	16
Germany	64	56
Greece	53	19
Hungary	50	33
Ireland	40	25
Italy	33	16
Latvia	62	81
Lithuania	43	27
Luxembourg	24	8
Malta	53	17
Netherlands	28	48
Poland	49	45
Portugal	48	42
Romania	90	86
Slovakia	47	40
Slovenia	52	53
Spain	48	35
Sweden	39	38
UK	49	45
<b>EU 28</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>37</b>

Source: ESENER-2 EU-OSHA, 2016 (based on interactive survey dashboard)

## Persons of confidence

### *European level*

These employees, whose role is to give support to fellow employees who have suffered violence, bullying or sexual harassment, are not provided for in EU-level legislation.

### *National level*

However, persons of confidence are found in some countries, particularly the Netherlands and Belgium.

## Negotiated collective agreements

### *European level*

There are two so-called European Framework Agreements on psychosocial risks, signed by unions and employers – the social partners – at European level. The first of these, the “Framework Agreement on Work-related Stress” was signed on 8 October 2004. The second, the “Framework Agreement on Violence and Harassment at Work”, was signed on 26 April 2007.

The European agreement on work-related stress states that its objective is “to identify and prevent or manage problems of work-related stress” and makes it clear that “it is not about attaching blame to the individual”. It points out there are a number of ways in which work-related stress can be identified, and once the problem has been identified, measures to prevent, eliminate or reduce it can be both collective and/or individual. It lists a range of possible measures to take:

- clarifying the organisation’s objectives and the role of workers;
- ensuring adequate management support for individuals and teams;
- matching responsibility and control over work;
- improving work organisation and processes; and
- improving working conditions and the environment.

It also proposes training managers and workers on stress and how to deal with it and informing and consulting workers and/or their representatives about the issue.

The European agreement on violence and harassment at work aims to increase awareness and understanding of the problem and “provide employers, workers and their representatives at all levels with an action-oriented framework to identify, prevent and manage problems of harassment and violence at work”.

It proposes that organisations should have a clear statement that “harassment and violence will not be tolerated” and should have procedures setting out how to deal with it, if it occurs. These should include support for the victims and appropriate measures against the perpetrators. The agreement also calls for appropriate training of both managers and workers. Although much of the agreement relates to harassment and violence carried out by managers or other employers, it also states that, “where appropriate”, its provisions “can be applied to deal with cases of external violence”.

The two agreements, which were negotiated within the legal framework provided by the Treaty for European Union (Article 154 TFEU), are to be implemented by the signatory parties (unions and employers) and their respective national affiliates, rather than through an EU directive, and they have clearly had an impact (see below).

### **National level**

In France, for example, unions and employers at national level reached cross-industry agreements on both stress and violence and harassment at work, which were both considerably more detailed than the European texts. At the request of the signatories, these agreements were subsequently extended by the government, becoming binding on all employers and workers. Italy also implemented the stress agreement, although not the violence and harassment agreement, through a national cross-industry agreement, which largely

reproduced the wording of the European text. The provisions of this agreement were then incorporated into Italian legislation, which is why this legislation refers only to stress.

National-level agreements or national-level recommendations to lower level negotiators were also signed in Greece, Romania, Spain and Slovenia (on stress) and Luxembourg and Spain (violence and harassment). In other countries there are industry-level agreements on both stress and violence and harassment, although it is not always clear whether they were a direct result of the European framework agreements.

Collective agreements specifically for central government have been signed in several countries, including Denmark (on stress in 2005 and on violence as part of the wider “Wellbeing Agreement” (Trivselsaftale) in 2008), France (on psychosocial risks in 2013), Ireland (where a new policy Dignity at Work – An Anti-Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Harassment Policy was agreed in 2015, replacing an earlier document agreed in 1999), the Netherlands (where a series of health and safety covenants (arboconvenanten) have been signed), Spain (on violence in 2015) and Sweden (on change in 2010 and with improvements in the area of violence and harassment in 2016).

In addition, there are local agreements covering parts of central government and dealing with specific psychosocial risks

## Tackling psychosocial risks

This section of the report looks at what is being done to tackle some of the most important psychosocial risks in central administration. With no consistent European-wide source of information available on this level of government, it relies on the results of EU-OSHA's 2014 ESENER survey, which provides information on public administration.

### Assessing the risk

As with any other hazard, the first step in dealing with psychosocial risks is to assess what risks are present, and how prevalent and how serious they are. This is part of the obligation placed on employers by the Framework Directive and the legislation implementing it at national level, as well as other national legislation which specifically addresses psychosocial risks.

The ESENER survey shows that, across the EU, around three quarters (73%) of workplaces in public administration carry out regular risk assessments.<sup>44</sup> This is a slightly smaller proportion of establishments than in the economy as a whole, where the figure is 76%

Latvia, the UK and Sweden were in the top three places, each with more than 95% and Greece at the bottom, at just 14%. However, a second question in relation to the risk assessment is whether it is done in-house, by an external body or by a combination of the two. Figures from the ESENER survey show that across the EU on average a slightly higher proportion of assessments are carried out internally (47%) than externally (40%), with the remaining 13% split equally between the two. However, there are considerable differences between the member states in this area, with countries like Denmark (83%), Sweden (83%), the UK (75%) and France (74%) overwhelmingly carrying out risk assessments internally, while in Slovenia (87%), Croatia (78%) and Spain (78%) they are overwhelmingly carried out externally (see Table 9).

**Table 9: Risk assessments in public administration (%)**

Country	Proportion of establishments carrying out regular risk assessments	Where risk assessments are carried out, are they carried out internally or externally?		
		Internal	External	Both internal and external equally
Austria	54	54	27	19
Belgium	71	42	34	23
Bulgaria	88	16	71	12
Croatia	58	12	78	10
Cyprus	43	51	27	23
Czech Republic	73	29	53	18
Denmark	91	83	9	8
Estonia	80	65	27	8
Finland	85	64	25	11
France	45	74	17	9
Germany	77	57	31	13
Greece	14	45	47	8
Hungary	64	19	74	7
Ireland	84	63	19	18

<sup>44</sup> There may, however, be some national differences in what the word "regularly" means. In response to the question when they had last carried out a risk assessment, 62% of workplaces in Slovenia said it has been in 2013 or 2014 (in other words within around a year of the survey) compared with 82% in Italy.

Country	Proportion of establishments carrying out regular risk assessments	Where risk assessments are carried out, are they carried out internally or externally?		
		Internal	External	Both internal and external equally
Italy	91	18	62	20
Latvia	97	56	38	6
Lithuania	36	33	62	6
Luxembourg	30	67	16	17
Malta	56	44	35	21
Netherlands	79	57	27	16
Poland	91	33	61	6
Portugal	63	20	69	11
Romania	77	39	56	5
Slovakia	42	34	55	11
Slovenia	93	7	87	6
Spain	93	12	78	10
Sweden	96	83	4	13
UK	97	75	9	16
<b>EU 28</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>13</b>

Source: ESENER-2 EU-OSHA, 2016 (based on interactive survey dashboard)

However, these figures are for general risk assessments, and do not reveal whether they included psychosocial risks. To establish the extent to which psychosocial risks were included, the ESENER survey asked whether two issues, potentially linked to psychosocial risks – “supervisor-employee relationships” and “organisational aspects such as work schedules, breaks or work shifts” – were considered alongside traditional risks, such as exposure to noise, vibrations, heat or cold. In public administration, the survey found a majority of risk assessments across the EU did include these issues, with 61% of establishments including organisational aspects in their risk assessments and 55% of establishments including supervisor-employee relationships. (These figures public administration figures similar to those for the economy as a whole, where around two-thirds of establishments (65%) and somewhat over half (54%) include supervisor-employee relationships.)

There were, however, large differences between countries (see Table 10), although figures are not available for all states. Looking at the two aspects together, Finland, the Netherlands, Bulgaria and the UK are most likely to include these two psychosocial risk factors in carrying out their risks assessments, while Greece, the Czech Republic and Slovakia are least likely to do so.

**Table 10: Proportion of regular risk assessments in public administration, which cover these issues (%)**

	Organisational aspects (work schedules, breaks or work shifts)	Supervisor/employee relationships
Bulgaria	87	61
Czech Republic	50	28
Denmark	63	75
Estonia	62	30
Finland	85	96
France	53	53
Germany	58	46

	Organisational aspects (work schedules, breaks or work shifts)	Supervisor/employee relationships
Greece	47	29
Hungary	65	56
Italy	53	50
Latvia	72	60
Netherlands	80	83
Poland	57	58
Portugal	64	63
Romania	62	58
Slovakia	54	28
Slovenia	69	58
Spain	64	60
UK	73	69
<b>EU 28</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>55</b>

Source: ESENER-2 EU-OSHA, 2016 (based on interactive survey dashboard)

### Moving from assessment to action

The ESENER survey provides some evidence that organisations find tackling psychosocial risks more difficult than tackling physical risks. It asked establishments whether they had sufficient information or adequate tools to deal effectively with risks, both psychosocial and physical, and the differences were clear. While only a small percentage said that they lacked information or tools to deal with physical risks – for example, just 7% for chemical or biological hazards and 9% for noise, much larger proportions said they lacked information or tools to deal with psychosocial risks – 29% for dealing with poor communication or cooperation within the organisation, 27% for dealing with job insecurity, 25% for employees’ lack of influence on the pace of work or work processes, 23% for discrimination and 21% for time pressure. (In each case the percentages are only for establishments which faced the risk concerned.) The two psychosocial risks where establishments were slightly less concerned about the information and tools at their disposal were long or irregular working hours, where 19% stated they lacked information and adequate tools and dealing with difficult customers, where 18% reported this.

Public administration appears to face a particular difficulty in dealing with psychosocial risks. The ESENER survey identified four specific barriers that appeared to prevent progress and asked whether they were present. These were: lack of awareness among management; lack of expertise or specialist support; lack of awareness among staff; and reluctance to talk openly about the issue. In all of these areas, the proportion of establishments reporting these difficulties was higher in public administration than in the economy as a whole, with the gap largest in the area of lack of expertise or specialist support – see Table 11. (In all cases questions were only asked about these potential barriers if at least one psychosocial risk was present. This means that the responses reflect the position of establishments where employees are exposed to psychosocial risks.)

**Table 11: Proportion of establishments identifying specific difficulties in tackling psychosocial risks (responses relate to establishments where at least one psychosocial risk exists) (%)**

	Whole economy	Public administration
Lack of awareness among management	17	23
Lack of expertise or specialist support	22	34
Lack of awareness among staff	26	29
Reluctance to talk openly about the issue	30	37

Source: ESENER-2 EU-OSHA, 2016

One indication of progress towards tackling psychosocial risks is whether the organisation concerned has a plan of action for dealing with them. The ESENER survey does not ask this precisely but it does ask whether the establishment has an action plan to prevent work-related stress.

On average, in public administration in the EU, just over a quarter (28%) of establishments have an action plan of this sort (see Table 12). However, this percentage is lower than the figure for the whole economy, where a third (33%) of establishments have an action plan on stress.

As in other areas, there are major differences between countries, ranging from 85% in the UK to none at all in both Lithuania and Croatia. However, one particularly striking aspect of this table is the large gap between the three countries at the top of the table – the UK where 85% of establishments report having such a plan, Denmark with 80% and Sweden with 74% – and the other countries in the table. In the next highest, Ireland, just 48% have an action plan.

**Table 12: Proportion of establishments in public administration which have an action plan on stress (%)**

Austria	6
Belgium	40
Bulgaria	22
Croatia	0
Cyprus	24
Czech Republic	6
Denmark	80
Estonia	5
Finland	39
France	18
Germany	12
Greece	4
Hungary	15
Ireland	48
Italy	34
Latvia	15
Lithuania	0
Luxembourg	14
Malta	35
Netherlands	25
Poland	8
Portugal	5
Romania	35
Slovakia	17
Slovenia	38
Spain	30
Sweden	74
UK	85
<b>EU28</b>	<b>28</b>
Source: ESENER-2 EU-OSHA, 2016 (based on interactive survey dashboard)	

### Dealing with difficult users

“Having to deal with difficult customers, patients, pupils, etc.” is identified by the ESENER survey as the most frequently found psychosocial risk factor in public administration, and, unfortunately, tensions with users may sometimes result in violence and abuse. The ESENER survey, therefore, asked whether there was a

procedure to deal with possible cases of threats, abuse or assaults by users, although – and it is important to emphasise this – this question was only asked in cases where the respondent had indicated that the organisation had to deal with difficult users.

On average across the EU, just over half of workplaces (51%) in public administration potentially facing this threat had a policy in place to deal with violence or abuse (see Table 13). This is slightly below the EU average for the whole economy, which was 55%.

However, there were major differences between countries in the extent to which such policies were in place in public administration. While the Netherlands (100%), the UK (99%) and Ireland (85%) and the three Nordic countries all scored above 80% (Sweden – 96%, Finland – 85% and Denmark 82%), there were seven countries where fewer than 30% of organisations dealing with difficult users had a policy in place to cope with threats, abuse or assaults. These were Lithuania, Italy and Poland (all on 26%), Greece (25%), Portugal (21%), Hungary (15%) and Romania (14%).

**Table 13: Proportion of establishments in public administration with a procedure in place to deal with possible cases of threats, abuse or assaults by external individuals\* (%)**

Austria	33
Belgium	80
Bulgaria	33
Croatia	71
Cyprus	68
Czech Republic	50
Denmark	82
Estonia	52
Finland	85
France	45
Germany	47
Greece	25
Hungary	15
Ireland	85
Italy	26
Latvia	40
Lithuania	26
Luxembourg	65
Malta	66
Netherlands	100
Poland	26
Portugal	21
Romania	14
Slovakia	44
Slovenia	74
Spain	60
Sweden	96
UK	99
<b>EU 28</b>	<b>51</b>
* Only asked where the organisation had to deal with difficult users	
Source: ESENER-2 EU-OSHA, 2016 (based on interactive survey dashboard)	

## Time pressures and workloads

Time pressure and excessive workloads are the second more frequently reported risk by public administration workplaces and the ESENER survey included a question asking whether the establishment had reorganised work in the last three years “to reduce job demands and work pressure” and so prevent psychosocial risks.

In public administration across the EU, only a third of the organisations (34%) responded positively to the question, saying that they had. (This is slightly lower than the figure across the whole economy, where 38% of establishments said they had.) As with the other measures to eliminate or reduce psychosocial risk factors, there are large differences between countries. Ireland (73%), Malta (68%) and Denmark (66%) are at the top of the table and Bulgaria (16%), the Czech Republic (16%), Poland (16%), Slovakia (15%) and Lithuania (14%) are at the bottom (see Table 14).

**Table 14: Proportion of establishments which have reorganised work to reduce job demands and work pressure over last 3 years (%)**

Austria	43
Belgium	46
Bulgaria	16
Croatia	38
Cyprus	44
Czech Republic	16
Denmark	66
Estonia	25
Finland	57
France	25
Germany	42
Greece	19
Hungary	36
Ireland	73
Italy	33
Latvia	48
Lithuania	14
Luxembourg	49
Malta	68
Netherlands	30
Poland	16
Portugal	30
Romania	23
Slovakia	15
Slovenia	27
Spain	41
Sweden	55
UK	53
<b>EU 28</b>	<b>34</b>
Source: ESENER-2 EU-OSHA, 2016 (based on interactive survey dashboard)	

## Lack of communication and cooperation

This area covers tensions between employees, potentially leading to bullying and harassment, as well as a lack of clarity and sometimes contradictions in what the organisation wants its employees to do.

The ESENER survey included two questions related to this area of psychosocial risk, although both dealt with interpersonal relations, rather than the clarity of the organisation’s internal communications. One asked whether establishment had a procedure in place to deal with bullying or harassment. The other whether it had set up a conflict resolution procedure in the last three years. Only a minority of respondents in public administration had done either of these two things, although, across the EU, almost half (47%) had a bullying and harassment procedure in place, compared with under a third (31%) who had set up a conflict resolution procedure over the previous three years. (These figures for public administration are the same or very similar to those for the whole economy where, across the EU, 47% had a bullying and harassment procedure in place and 29% had set up a conflict resolution procedure.)

As in other areas relating to psychosocial risks, there are again major differences between countries, with the Nordic countries, Ireland and the UK, the Netherlands and Malta near the top of both tables while countries in Central and Eastern Europe have the lowest scores, although in the case of conflict resolution procedures they are joined by Portugal (see Table 15). The gap between the top and bottom in the area of bullying and harassment policies in public administration is very wide. While all (100%) of establishments in the UK and Ireland report having this, as do 97% of establishments in Finland and 95% in Sweden, in Lithuania only 7% say they have such a policy in place, Hungary only 6%, in Estonia only 5% and in Romania only 4%.

**Table 15: Tackling interpersonal conflicts**

	Proportion of establishments with a bullying and harassment procedure (%)	Proportion of establishments which have set up conflict resolution procedure in last 3 years (%)
Austria	35	23
Belgium	93	58
Bulgaria	15	29
Croatia	61	19
Cyprus	32	48
Czech Republic	21	21
Denmark	74	47
Estonia	5	15
Finland	97	58
France	27	32
Germany	37	19
Greece	10	21
Hungary	6	20
Ireland	100	67
Italy	47	26
Latvia	23	26
Lithuania	7	6
Luxembourg	57	27
Malta	87	53
Netherlands	92	49
Poland	40	16
Portugal	13	8
Romania	4	39
Slovakia	14	21
Slovenia	81	23
Spain	55	35
Sweden	95	56
UK	100	57
<b>EU 28</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>31</b>

Source: ESENER-2 EU-OSHA, 2016 (based on interactive survey dashboard)

## Long or irregular hours

Having to work long or irregular hours can be a significant psychosocial risk factor, particularly if the consequence is a loss of work-life balance.

The ESENER survey asked whether the establishment had intervened in the previous three years if excessively long or irregular hours were being worked. In public administration across the EU, on average, 21% of establishments had intervened for this reason. This level is below the average for the whole economy, where 26% of establishments across the EU had intervened to tackle excessively long or irregular hours.

As with many other areas there are considerable differences between countries with the Nordic states plus Malta with the highest scores (most intervention) and Central and Eastern European countries with the lowest. It is, however, noticeable that this is an area where Germany scores relatively well (see Table 16).

**Table 16: Proportion of establishments in public administration where there has been intervention in the previous 3 years if excessively long or irregular hours are worked (%)**

Austria	22
Belgium	26
Bulgaria	6
Croatia	5
Cyprus	34
Czech Republic	11
Denmark	49
Estonia	6
Finland	44
France	16
Germany	35
Greece	14
Hungary	16
Ireland	54
Italy	15
Latvia	35
Lithuania	8
Luxembourg	24
Malta	50
Netherlands	23
Poland	8
Portugal	12
Romania	15
Slovakia	10
Slovenia	4
Spain	15
Sweden	48
UK	37
<b>EU 28</b>	<b>21</b>
Source: ESENER-2 EU-OSHA, 2016 (based on interactive survey dashboard)	

## Lack of influence over work pace or process, job insecurity and discrimination

Action on these issues was not included in the ESENER survey.

## Training and other forms of support

Training is a key part of any strategy aimed at tackling psychosocial risks. On the one hand, it may be an important part of so-called “primary-level interventions”, which aim to tackle problems at source by eliminating or reducing psychosocial risks. Examples of this sort of training are learning to defuse potentially violent situations, anti-harassment training or learning how to resolve conflicts between staff. On the other hand training may be a “secondary -level intervention” offered to allow individuals to cope better with the psychosocial risks they already face. Examples of intervention of this sort are stress management training or time-management training.

The ESENER survey does distinguish between these two different types of training, asking only whether the establishment provides employees with training on “how to prevent psychosocial risks such as stress or bullying”. In public administration, on average across the EU, 41% of establishment provided training of this sort. This is above the average for the economy as a whole, where only 36% of establishment provided training to prevent psychosocial risks.

As in other areas relating to psychosocial risks, there are considerable differences between countries, with almost three-quarters of establishments (73%) in public administration in the UK providing this type of training, while only 8% of establishments in Croatia do so. However, ranking in this area is somewhat unusual, as Poland and Slovenia, which often score poorly in other tables, are relatively high in this one, with 56% of establishments in Poland providing training and 55% in Slovenia. These are higher scores than both Denmark (54%) and Finland (51%) (see Table 17).

**Table 17: Proportion of establishments in public administration providing training to prevent psychosocial risks (%)**

Austria	20
Belgium	41
Bulgaria	37
Croatia	8
Cyprus	40
Czech Republic	21
Denmark	54
Estonia	41
Finland	51
France	28
Germany	35
Greece	13
Hungary	21
Ireland	63
Italy	47
Latvia	50
Lithuania	26
Luxembourg	39
Malta	39
Netherlands	54
Poland	56
Portugal	25
Romania	37
Slovakia	38
Slovenia	55
Spain	49

Sweden	57
UK	73
<b>EU 28</b>	<b>41</b>
Source: ESENER-2 EU-OSHA, 2016 (based on interactive survey dashboard)	

## Confidential counselling

Confidential counselling can be classed as a so-called “tertiary-level” intervention, aiming to help individuals who have already been damaged by exposure to psychosocial risks.

The question asked in the ESENER survey was whether in the previous three years the establishment had used “confidential counselling for employees”. The EU average for public administration which had done this was 40%, slightly above the EU average for the whole economy, which was 36%.

The countries where the highest proportion of establishments provided this training, were the three Nordic countries, all with figures above 70%, plus Ireland – 77%, the Netherlands – 67%, the UK – 63% and Malta – 61%, with Belgium (58%) and Germany (56%) not far behind. The Czech Republic, Poland and Italy, all on 14%, were the three countries where this support was least likely to be provided.

**Table 18: Proportion of establishments in public administration providing confidential counselling in previous 3 years (%)**

Austria	46
Belgium	58
Bulgaria	25
Croatia	27
Cyprus	45
Czech Republic	14
Denmark	73
Estonia	24
Finland	78
France	43
Germany	56
Greece	28
Hungary	27
Ireland	77
Italy	14
Latvia	49
Lithuania	17
Luxembourg	41
Malta	61
Netherlands	67
Poland	14
Portugal	20
Romania	25
Slovakia	18
Slovenia	22
Spain	38
Sweden	75
UK	63
<b>EU 28</b>	<b>40</b>
Source: ESENER-2 EU-OSHA, 2016 (based on interactive survey dashboard)	

## The overall picture on action to tackle psychosocial risks

This section attempts to pull together an overall picture of what the ESENER survey shows about progress in tackling psychosocial risks in public administration. It is based on EU 28 averages and so does not reflect individual national situations, which, as the next section indicates, vary considerably.

Overall risk assessments are widespread in public administration, with almost three-quarters of establishments carrying them out. The split between internal and external assessments is broadly even, but clearly more are done internally than externally (47% compared with 40%). However, only something between two-thirds and a half of all risk assessments in public administration involve examining psychosocial factors, so only around 40% of all public administration establishments carry out assessments on psychosocial risks.

Moving from assessment to action on psychosocial risks is generally seen as being more difficult than acting on physical risks, like noise or dangerous chemicals and this seems to be particularly the case in public administration. Perhaps as a result of this, only just over a quarter (28%) of establishments in public administration have drawn up an action plan on stress – a step which is one indication of progress being made.

Looking at individual risk factors, progress seems to have been greatest in tackling bullying and harassment, with almost half (47%) of establishments having a procedure to tackle this. Around a third of establishments (34%) state that they have reorganised work to reduce work pressure, and a similar proportion (31%) have set up conflict resolution procedures. However, only a fifth (21%) of establishments have intervened to tackle excessively long or irregular working hours. Some progress has been made on tackling third-party violence and threats – but still only a half (51%) of establishments facing this risk have a policy to deal with it. (This percentage cannot be compared with the other percentages for specific psychosocial risks as, unlike them, it only includes establishments where the risk has been recognised as being present.)

Training to prevent psychosocial risks is provided in 41% of public administration establishments and a similar proportion of establishments (40%) provide confidential counselling.

## National differences

The 11 separate indicators in this part of the report show there are great differences between countries in the action they are taking to tackle psychosocial risks. In general, the three Nordic countries, plus the UK and Ireland, are close to the top of most tables, often joined by the Netherlands and Malta. Countries in Central and Eastern Europe plus sometimes countries in Southern Europe are generally among those where action is less common. Germany, France, Italy and Spain are normally in the middle of the tables, although Spain and Italy are among the leaders in terms of the proportion of establishments regularly carrying out risk assessments and Germany has an above-average proportion of establishments where there has been intervention because of excessively long or irregular working hours. The individual tables provide an opportunity to see where each country lies in comparison with the others.