



## **Potential Impact**

### **Strategic impact of the project**

Since the early 1990s the incidence of both work-related stress and workplace violence has been on the rise. Worker well-being in its broadest sense is of acute interest to all organisations both large and small. Keeping workers healthy is strategically desirable from an individual, organisational and societal viewpoint. For the individual, working in an optimum fashion leads to better health outcomes; negative health effects of working within stressful or violent workplaces can be both physical and psychological. Research reports deleterious effects to health to be widespread from coronary heart disease (CHD), raised blood pressure or elevated cholesterol. Behavioural responses can include absenteeism, increased alcohol, smoking and drug use, disturbed sleep patterns, caffeine use and psychological distress such as anxiety and depression. This is unpleasant for the individual and costs both the organisational bottom line and society. The costs to society are related to medical costs and possible hospitalisation, benefits and welfare costs in connection with premature retirement as well as potential loss of productive workers. On the basis of figures from a number of countries, in total stress and violence at work may account for 1-3.5 % of GDP. The available data indicate that work-related stress costs the EU at least 20 billion euro per year in lost time and health bills. Over 50% of absenteeism in the EU has its roots in work-related stress.

Increasingly legislation, both national and European, is placing the onus on the workplace to understand and improve conditions for workers. Legislators are trying to engage companies in taking ownership of the problem and moving beyond mere compliance into 'best practice'. This type of approach is important in the psychosocial risk management arena as although the strategic advantage is similar for all companies, the ability to generalise needs from sector to sector is problematic. The duty of care placed on employers by legislation argues for research to find a practical way of assisting them. The development of a European psychosocial risk management framework relies on the development of tools that can give an account of the major likely stressors for any given work group. A major benefit of this is seen to be the ability to build on this approach in the form of 'innovation-related activities'. Many companies, particularly in the SME sector, have a willingness to be pro-active in this area but lack the in house skills to do so. The dissemination of the results of this research will be a primary and essential tool to help bridge such a gap.

Companies need assistance in assessing the impact of issues and working out strategies for improvement. A vehicle for helping to move voluntarism forward in this area is seen to be the use of the Corporate Social Responsibility framework (CSR). CSR in the area of occupational health and safety is about an organisation's ability to manage and improve the impact of work on all the relevant stakeholders; employees, suppliers, workers families and society, to provide healthy and safe workplaces that value their employees. The overarching concept necessitates a broad based view of the workplace when applying a risk management approach for psychosocial issues: covering issues relating to psychosocial well-being such as workload, communication, gender, discrimination, transparency, bullying and violence. The application of CSR as that of psychosocial risk management needs to be part of an ongoing cycle of good management at work; it does not represent a 'quick fix', and in this respect its use needs to be not only strategic but culturally bound into both the legislative framework and company policy. Hence, the establishment of a clear link between CSR and psychosocial risk management will promote best practice through continuous improvement of working life and work-related health within a framework of good business practice.

## **Added value for carrying out this work at the EU level**

What makes the programme of research unique is that it will not only offer an integrative European Framework for psychosocial risk management, but will also foster collaborative research in this important area. The bringing together of representatives from the many different disciplines in conjunction with the broad range of methods and personnel will provide a far richer, dynamic and attractive research programme than any single organization/School/Department could provide. Through the focused effort of PRIMA-EF, Europe will play a leading role in this important area. It is undoubtedly not in the interests of European research for effort to be duplicated and the cooperative participation of multiple institutes, including the provision of shared access to data and resources, is a positive contribution to a common financing of research facilities and will open up further funding opportunities. In the long term this will lead to a greater European cohesion in collaborative research and knowledge transfer between European researchers. This innovative project approach could not be adopted without a pan European network of collaborators across the various disciplines and social frameworks.

The major advantage of taking this work forward under the risk management framework is its substantial history in the health and safety field to date. This allows for wide-spread dissemination into the workplace across Europe. A primary benefit is the applicability of such a framework into any business: from an olive grower in Greece to an oil rig in the North Sea or a car manufacturer in Germany to a restaurant in France. As every business is unique in some aspects it is also generic in others, the mere employment of people at the European level places responsibility, but as such Europe's response can provide added-value. This is why it is particularly important for this work to be carried out at the EU level and a European framework to be defined.

Job content, workload and pace, schedules, control, environment and equipment, organisational culture and function, interpersonal work relationships, role, career development and work – home interface; all affect every worker in some aspect. The use of this framework will be based on principles such as social dialogue and participation, treating the worker as an “expert” in relation to their own job; this has the advantage that although the framework is not context specific once applied it becomes so due to its ownership of the organisation. The framework will be adaptable to account for change which as mentioned earlier is extremely important when considering the modern workplace. In the European context, this is important as it will allow uniformity whilst encouraging individuality. This benefit of the framework again helps to encourage dissemination as does the use of evidenced based best practice.

Both the moral and legal imperative to make workplaces more pleasant and healthier environments necessitate this work moving forward at the European level. For it is only by a positive drive by Europe that companies can be encouraged across the membership to adopt uniform practices, important as the mobility of workers increases and the needs of special groups become paramount.

## **Dissemination**

Dissemination of the project outputs is critical to the overall success of the project and a specific dissemination team is incorporated into the management structure of the project.

To ensure that the project will reach its full potential, a number of dissemination activities will be planned and promoted through the DG Employment, the ILO and the WHO. The results of the project will be disseminated widely through reports, guidelines, workshops,

scientific publications, presentations at scientific conferences, to stakeholders and social partners including small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This will be achieved with the support of the DG Employment, the WHO and ILO and their associated networks. In particular, the outputs of the project will be disseminated widely through the WHO/ILO International Occupational Health and Safety Information Portal, and the WHO Collaborating Centre Network Portal that is currently being finalized (prototype can be reached at <http://www.whoocchealthccs.org/>). The consortium will work in synergy with partners in candidate and third countries and national regulatory bodies to ensure a wide impact of the project outcomes and the initiation of the development of an international network of centres of excellence in psychosocial risk management.

In addition, the consortium will involve in their work as advisors national, European and international reputable bodies with a substantial background in this area. Members of the consortium are also contributing to ongoing initiatives in this area through the European Agency for Safety & Health at Work, the European Foundation, national health and safety bodies, the Partnership for European Research in Occupational Safety and Health (PEROSH) network, the ILO and the WHO. The work achieved through these national and international activities will be taken into account in 2 ways:

- a. by involving experts involved in these in the different phases of the project (by inviting them to attend workshops organized as part of the project and including them in the different research activities); and
- b. through the existing involvement of different members of the group in these activities and networks.

The work programme has been designed and structured so that PRIMA – EF will serve as the basis for the development of similar frameworks for psychosocial risk management on an international basis. As stated before, the work of the consortium will be supported by a network of liaison and dissemination support organisations that have significant expertise in the area of psychosocial risk management and have expressed an interest in the consortium's work and proposal for a European framework for psychosocial risk management. The liaison organisations include the US National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health, the University of South Australia, the Health & Safety Executive (UK), the Cyprus International Institute for the Environment and Public Health (Cyprus-Harvard International Initiative for the Environment and Public Health), the Institute for Social Analyses and Policies in Bulgaria and the Singapore Ministry of Manpower. As it is evident, the liaison organisations come both from different countries around the world where knowledge and expertise in relation to psychosocial risk management is or is not well developed. Their interest in the project clearly demonstrates the fact that psychosocial risks, work-related stress and violence and harassment issues at work are relevant to different contexts and countries and represent a priority for the improvement for the quality of working life and the health and safety for everyone concerned. The WHO is committed to the development of an international framework for psychosocial risk management through its newly developed 2006-11 work plan. The consortium members that are long standing members of the Network will lead this development in the future.

### **Contributions to standards**

The project will have far reaching effects on both national and international standards. This represents one of the major innovative aspects of this work. There are several reasons why this will be the case. Primarily the use of European standardisation in the area of occupational health supports the competitiveness of firms, as a healthier workforce has a direct impact on it.

Nearly one in three of Europe's workers, more than 40 million people, report that they are affected by stress at work. It is the cause of millions of lost working days every year. The figures speak for themselves, but far too many victims suffer in silence and too many companies do not realise the extent to which stress can affect their business performance. Concluding on the 'European Commission's Guidance on work-related stress: from words to action', Levi stated "there is an urgent need for preventive measures across societal sectors and levels, aimed at promoting "the healthy job" concept, and humanising organisational restructuring. The challenge to science of all this is to find out what to do, for whom, and how, and to bridge the science-policy gap. The corresponding challenge to all other stakeholders on the labour market is to implement existing evidence in coordinated and sustainable programmes for subsequent evaluation".

The proposed PRIMA-EF project will focus on the development of a European framework for psychosocial risk management with a special focus on work-related stress, and workplace violence (including harassment, bullying and mobbing) and meet the challenge to science by bridging the science-policy gap. The European framework will also enable all other stakeholders in industry to implement existing evidence in coordinated and sustainable programmes while providing appropriate measures for effective subsequent evaluation.

Currently there are three complementary European approaches to work stress and related ill health which have been outlined in three recent European documents: a. the European Commission's (CEC) Guidance on Work-Related Stress (2000); b. the European Standard (EN ISO 10075- 1&2) on Ergonomic Principles Related to Mental Work Load (European Committee for Standardization, 2000); and c. the European Commission's Green Paper on Promoting a European Framework for Corporate Social Responsibility (2001). These three approaches are based on different but related paradigms, which might lead to confusion and misinterpretation. The European framework for psychosocial risk management will also address this issue by unifying these approaches, which will then form the basis for developing European standards for psychosocial risk management focusing on work-related stress, and workplace violence.

Standards following this work are desirable as currently the problem with reporting for most companies is that it is financially driven, concentrating purely on one aspect of the business. The need to broaden accountability via standards has been driven by the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) agenda, leading to a wider base than profit-only reporting and including the environment and people. Recent moves by standard makers have been to 'roll this out' in order to give a more comprehensive overview of the situation. Examples of such standards include AA1000 – that focuses on securing the quality of social and ethical accounting and SA 8000 – the principles of this standard include 7 fundamental aspects: child labour, health and safety, freedom from association and union representation, sexual and racial discrimination, disciplinary action and working time. Social Accountability International developed a standard for workplace conditions and a system for independently verifying factories' compliance. This standard draws from established business strategies of ensuring quality (e.g. ISO 9000) and adds several elements that international human rights experts have identified as essential to social auditing. The extension of standards into the psychosocial aspects of work will increase business accountability and allow uniformity to spread through stakeholders. The growing move towards tri-partite representation (government, business, civil society) is particularly applicable for occupational health and safety and over-locking the European CSR agenda. A continuation of this drive to improve employee conditions via occupational health standards would facilitate improvements in the area.

Improved standards both on a national and international basis will be in line with the voluntary nature of both the proposed framework and the European Commission's aims on standards (EU, 2005). Standards should look to improve company reporting on occupational

issues including rates of absenteeism and the reasons surrounding it. Better measurement and reporting leads to a process whereby companies strive to improve performance as part of the normal processes of setting targets. This allows occupational health to be contextualised in relation to other business activities. For examples, research in the UK indicates SMEs becoming more engaged with work-life balance (WLB), as improving WLB brought business benefits to them. The standards that will be developed through the proposed framework for psychosocial risk management will support both its use and core legislation in the area. This is important as harmonisation is the ultimate goal of standard setting.

It is also important to note here that the recent development of the Management Standards for Work-related Stress approach in the UK by the Health and Safety Executive to reduce the levels of work-related stress reported by British workers has been acknowledged by the HSE as being largely based on research conducted by the leading institution of this consortium over the past fifteen years.

### **Contribution to policy developments**

Work-related stress has been identified at international, European and national levels as a concern for both employers and workers. Stress can potentially affect any workplace and any worker, irrespective of the size of the company, field of activity, or form of employment contract or relationship. Tackling stress at work can lead to greater efficiency and improved occupational health and safety, with consequent economic and social benefits for companies, workers and society as a whole.

European data from a variety of national and trans national surveys of those in work, or who have recently worked, have identified *stress-related problems* as among the most commonly reported sources of work-related ill-health. For example, the European Foundation's 1996 survey of Working Conditions in the European Union revealed that 57% of the workers questioned believed that their work affected their health. The costs to society are related to medical costs and possible hospitalization, benefits and welfare costs in connection with premature retirement as well as potential loss of productive workers. On the basis of figures from a number of countries, in total stress and violence at work may account for 1-3.5 % of GDP. The available data indicate that work-related stress costs the EU at least 20 billion euro per year in lost time and health bills. Over 50% of absenteeism in the EU has its roots in work-related stress.

The proposed PRIMA-EF project directly addresses the objectives of the priority. It aims to add to existing knowledge on the burden of work-related stress and evidence-based best-practice guidelines for preventing and reducing work-related stress. The primary focus will be the development of a European framework for psychosocial risk management with a special focus on work-related stress, and workplace violence, including harassment, bullying and mobbing. The promotion of a collective approach at a European level is essential to improve the quality of the work environment and the health of the European workforce. The project will develop best practice standards in relation to evidence-based interventions – with special relevance to SMEs – on the management of these issues at the workplace.

The project will be carried out in four phases combining a range of qualitative and quantitative research methods to ensure in-depth analysis of the issues of concern at a number of different levels and will address all the scientific and technical objectives of the priority area.

The first phase will concern the overview and analysis of psychosocial risk management approaches and best practice in Europe and the definition of the guiding principles and key

elements of the European framework for psychosocial risk management. Available methodologies will be analysed to evaluate the prevalence and impact of psychosocial risks at work and work-related stress, including physical and psychological workplace violence, harassment, bullying and mobbing.

A comprehensive European framework for psychosocial risk management will offer a scientific, legal and managerial framework to deal successfully with such issues at work and improve the health of the workforce, the competitiveness of European enterprises and the advancement of living standards in the EU. It will provide clarity and bring together in a comprehensive manner the state of the art in the area of psychosocial risk management, work-related stress and violence and harassment issues at work. It will also improve the current state of the art by linking aspects as diverse as policies and legislation, social bargaining and social dialogue, corporate social responsibility, measurement tools and indicators, best practice evidence-based interventions, and guidance and recommendations for different stakeholders.

The second phase will include separate and concrete but interrelated research work packages. The first of these will focus on a review and analysis of social policy, legislation, integrative infrastructure and guidance in relation to psychosocial risk management, work-related stress and violence and harassment at work (including bullying and mobbing). During this phase, stakeholder involvement in the project will be actively secured and their viewpoints will be explored through qualitative and quantitative research, after identifying appropriate means of collecting sensitive data in relation to these issues. Social dialogue principles will be applied under the guidance of the ILO's [Social Dialogue, Labour Law and Labour Administration Department \(DIALOGUE\)](#). The ultimate goal of this work package will be the development of social dialogue and corporate social responsibility indicators in relation to these issues that will be readily applicable on the European, national and enterprise levels. These will aim at promoting participation and collaboration among key stakeholders for the management of psychosocial issues at work.

The next research work package will focus on a comparative evaluation and analysis of available methodologies to evaluate the prevalence and impact of psychosocial risks at work and work-related stress, including physical and psychological workplace violence, harassment, bullying and mobbing. Trends in relation to psychosocial risks will be described and forecasting methods designed to identify emerging risks will be discussed. In addition appropriate means of collecting sensitive data in relation to these issues (including gender dimensions) will be identified and international standards and indicators on stress and violence at work will be developed on the basis of best practice evidence-based methods. The project will place special emphasis on high risk worker groups and occupational sectors and will address relevant gender issues and key issues relating to the implementation of best practice in the context of different enterprises and in particular SMEs. In addition, this phase will include an evaluation of cost benefit analysis methods that could be incorporated in the assessment of the impact of psychosocial risks, work-related stress and violence and harassment at work and the evaluation of relevant interventions as the relationship between these factors and economic performance are closely linked. All these assessment methods will be used to improve monitoring and understanding of the prevalence and impact of work-related stress and violence and harassment issues at work.

As a marked contribution for a dynamic knowledge-based economy with more jobs that are safer, healthier and more productive than the existing ones, it is crucial to prevent the impact of psychosocial risks and reduce their negative consequences. Therefore the next research work package of the project will provide detailed recommendations and evidence-based best-practice guidance on the management of these issues at the workplace. Different models of best practice interventions will be identified and evaluated across sectors, enterprise sizes and countries. Focus will be placed on SMEs, high risk occupational sectors and gender-friendly

interventions. Interventions at different levels will be analysed and a critical evaluation of their appropriateness and complementarity will be offered. Special emphasis will be made to approaches that promote best practice in occupational health and safety and the management of psychosocial risks through corporate social responsibility and social dialogue principles. Practical intervention tools and methods to manage psychosocial risks at the enterprise level with a particular emphasis on SMEs will be developed. Also, through this work package, methods for evidence-based evaluation of interventions will be analysed.