

Results of “The questionnaire for employers”

European campaign 2012 – supplementary information to the Country report II

I. Introduction

The Committee of Senior Labour Inspectors (SLIC) resolved to carry out the campaign. The campaign was prepared by a dedicated working group established for that purpose by the Committee and comprising 12 representatives of EU Member States including Poland.

The main task of the working group was to draft the schedule of the campaign and develop tools for examination of psychosocial risks (risk assessment) in order to put them to use in the course of the campaign and afterwards.

The campaign focused on the assessment of psychosocial risks, mainly in the following sectors:

- health sector and social care sector,
- service sector incl. hotels and restaurants,
- transport sector.

An objective was set in Poland that those companies which had included psychosocial risks in their risk assessments would make the target of the campaign. Contact data of those companies were obtained based on checklists used by labour inspectors who inspected another routine topic in 2012, namely “Occupational risk assessment”.

The overall number of checklists obtained in the course of inspections conducted in 2012 was 1461. The precondition of having taken account of psychosocial risk in the risk assessment was fulfilled by **684 companies** (47% of all companies where occupational risk assessment was inspected) representing the following branches:

- 1) industrial processing (273 companies),
- 2) trade and service (168 companies),
- 3) health care and social care (41 companies),
- 4) construction (40 companies),
- 5) services: hotels and restaurants (17 companies),
- 6) transport (13 companies).

(the underlined branches were pinpointed as preferable during the implementation of the campaign).

The remaining 132 companies belong to the following sectors:

- water supply (28)
- education (21)
- farming and forestry (18)
- professional activity (12)
- administration services (11)
- culture, entertainment and leisure (10)
- mining (6)
- energy production (6)
- other sectors (20)

II. Report

The tool:

Based on materials developed by the SLIC working group for organization of the psychosocial risks campaign a questionnaire was drafted by the Polish National Labour Inspectorate to be used as a tool for implementing the campaign.

The questionnaire is composed of two parts: A and B, with part A containing the data of the company which took part in the questionnaire. Part B contains questions on psychosocial risk factors. The questionnaire is attached to the executive report.

Part A of the NLI's questionnaire:

It contained questions concerning: the sector of activity (A1), regional coverage of the company's operation (A2), and the number of workers (A3).

The baseline for analysis of responses are the data obtained from the companies which responded positively to the question A4 (*Did the employer carry out occupational risk assessment in relation to psychosocial risks?*).

Part B of the NLI's questionnaire:

Question B1 of the questionnaire (question no. 2 of the country report template II):
Which psychosocial risks were taken into consideration in the assessment?

Considering the replies provided by the respondents it should be emphasized that all psychosocial hazards contained in the **country report template II** were mentioned by companies participating in the questionnaire:

- stress – 80% of companies participating in the questionnaire considered that factor to be the most commonplace in the working environment.

The other hazards were evaluated as follows:

- relations in the company – 47 % of companies participating in the questionnaire,
- shift work / night work – 46% of companies participating in the questionnaire,
- workload – 39% of companies participating in the questionnaire,
- threats, violence – 12% of companies participating in the questionnaire,
- diffuse expectations – 11% of companies participating in the questionnaire,
- frequent changes – 10% of companies participating in the questionnaire.

Remarks:

In question B1 participants of the questionnaire also mentioned other factors of the psychosocial risk which exist in the workplace. Those can be divided as follows:

- a) branch-specific factors, like: noise, professions of low social status or professions requiring contact with a client,
- b) general factors like: high responsibility, time pressure, work underload/overload.

While analysing the data at hand one can notice that 7% of respondents added "aggression in the workplace" to the point regarding threats and violence. Aggressive patterns of behaviour are triggered by frustration and can be directed outside that is onto the person causing the frustration. They can also be transferred onto other people (e.g. members of the family or colleagues) or even onto oneself. The existence of such patterns of behaviour in the workplace should be considered as highly undesirable.

Conclusions:

Considering the replies of employers one may conclude that stress which is connected with interpersonal relations and aggravated by the economic situation on the Polish market remains the most predominant factor of psychosocial risk in the workplace. Thus, it is essential that preventive, remedial and mitigating actions be taken with regard to aggressive behaviour because that pattern of interpersonal relations may be copied and may spread uncontrollably.

Question B2 of the questionnaire (question no. 3 of the country report template II): *Who participated in the risk assessment?*

Interviewed companies responded to that question in the following way:

- OSH services – 79% of companies participating in the questionnaire,
- workers' representatives – 58% of companies participating in the questionnaire,
- workers – 38% of companies participating in the questionnaire.

Remarks:

The following persons were also mentioned as participants of psychosocial risk assessment:

- management: 17% of companies participating in the questionnaire,
- occupational physician: 6% of companies participating in the questionnaire,
- social labour inspector: 4% of companies participating in the questionnaire,
- HR division representatives: 3% of companies participating in the questionnaire.

Question B3 of the questionnaire (question no. 4 of the country report template II): *Are there any actions needed concerning psychosocial risks?*

This question was answered in the following way:

- no – 60% of companies participating in the questionnaire,
- yes – 32% of companies participating in the questionnaire,
- no answer – 8% of companies participating in the questionnaire.

Remarks:

In spite of the fact that participants of the questionnaire acknowledge the widespread existence of psychosocial risk factors in the workplace, they do not take or do not declare taking any action in order to eliminate the existing hazards. Many factors can contribute to explaining that phenomenon, like: employers' lack of awareness or knowledge of psychosocial risk factors, regarding psychosocial risks as less important by employers as compared to risks factors connected with technical safety of work and the requirements to comply with labour law provisions, as well as general situation of the Polish labour market.

Question B4 of the questionnaire (question no. 5 of the country report template II): *What actions were taken by the employer following the risk assessment?*

This question was responded to as follows:

- preventive (prior to the occurrence of risk) – 88% of companies participating in the questionnaire,
- remedial (shortly after the occurrence of the risk – 19% of companies participating in the questionnaire,

- mitigating (after the risk had existed for a long time and its acute effects had been experienced) – 10% of companies participating in the questionnaire.

Remarks:

Based on the analysis of the questionnaire results one should conclude that emphasis is placed on prevention of undesirable phenomena in the workplace in companies participating in the questionnaire. This could also explain the wide prevalence of answer “no” to question B4 in which 60% of respondents stated that the existing risks did not necessitate any new actions, because their prevention is kept at a satisfactory level. Obtaining more minute data regarding the risk of psychosocial factors in the workplace and the way employers address them following occupational risk assessment which included those factors would require conducting more detailed studies of a larger group of employers.

Question no. 6 of the country report template (no corresponding question in the NLI’s questionnaire): *Did the risk assessment comply with the legal requirements?*

Polish legislation provides for a requirement to carry out and document occupational risk assessment and to inform workers of the existing risk and the ways in which to reduce the risk. General OSH provisions stipulate that all work-related factors of the working environment, including psychosocial factors have to be taken into consideration. The results of conducted inspections show that 47% of employers take account of psychosocial risk in their occupational risk assessment (data for 2012). The companies selected for implementation of the European campaign were those which had included psychosocial risks in their assessment. We resolved to omit that question in the NLI’s questionnaire as all selected companies conducted their assessments in compliance with legal provisions. At the same time, as results from the analysis of question B5 of the NLI’s questionnaire 25% of participating companies reviewed their occupational risk assessment and updated or broadened them accordingly with all (other than psychosocial) factors of the working environment.

Question B5 of the questionnaire (question no. 7 of the country report template II): *Actions taken by the labour inspection.*

In the NLI’s questionnaire the question regarding actions taken by the labour inspection in the companies that were questioned was adjusted to the specific nature of the influence which our authority exerts upon employers with regard to psychosocial factors. The participating employers indicated that labour inspectors covered their companies with the following actions:

- provision of advice – 37% of companies participating in the questionnaire,
- review of the risk assessment – 25% of companies participating in the questionnaire,
- training, conversation – 10% of companies participating in the questionnaire,
- invitation to take part in the NLI’s programme of prevention.

In the remainder of cases labour inspectors refrained from any of the above actions in the framework of the European SLIC campaign 2012. In connection with the implementation of an inspection topic “Occupational risk assessment” no measures referred to in point 7 of the country report template II were taken, i.e. injunctions, fines, inspection notices, prohibitions, or prosecution. Polish legislation does not provide for such measures in case of employer’s failing to take account of psychosocial risks in the occupational risk assessment.

Polish labour inspection concentrates its actions in the sphere on psychosocial risk assessment on provision of guidance, including training on managing teams of workers (for employers) and on stress management (for workers). NLI's programmes of prevention constitute an element of leverage to ensure employers provide adequate working conditions in compliance with legal provisions, including psychosocial risks.

The National Labour Inspectorate undertook the issue of psychosocial working conditions in 2006. At the time a dedicated programme was launched to counteract the negative effects of mental overload and stress in the workplace. The programme was implemented in the course of four years covering the whole country. Employers and workers of various sectors participated in the programme. Its two main objectives were to: educate by raising awareness of risks related to mental overload and stress in the workplace, and prevent by assessing stress level and counteracting its negative effects. Employers participating in the programme acquired adequate knowledge on how to identify sources of occupational stress and manage them, while workers were taught stress management skills. A dedicated *Questionnaire for evaluation of work features* was developed at the Institute of Labour Medicine in Łódź for implementing the preventive part of the programme, whose objective was to assess stress level. The questionnaire made it possible to measure the total of psychosocial loads present at a particular workstation (in terms of *low – medium – high*) for 10 selected features of work. The method applied was also helpful in pinpointing those risk factors which constituted the biggest source of stress at given workstation. Quantitative evaluation (34 basic questions) was supplemented by qualitative evaluation (10 additional questions) which supplied further information on psychosocial working conditions at a workstation. In this manner information on the level of stressfulness of individual features of work at given workstation was obtained, while workers could also learn about the most effective way of counteracting the negative effects of work-related stress. Approximately 1700 employers were covered with the NLI's actions in the period 2006-2009.

In 2011 National Labour Inspectorate commenced the implementation of a communication and prevention programme "*Stress in the workplace and other psychosocial factors related to work in corporations*". Research on stressfulness of various work features was still done on a voluntary and anonymous basis with the use of a tool developed by the NLI based on a Dutch labour inspectorate's "Questionnaire on work-related stress". In the questionnaire 24 forms of stress manifestation were included against 12 stressors (sources of stress) and respondents were asked 24 questions in about 15 minutes. In addition to the questionnaire, the toolkit of the programme circulated to all district labour inspectorates contained three educative PowerPoint presentations ("*On the NLI's programme*", "*Management of worker units*" and "*Stress management*"). The new tool helped to determine the stress level, incidence of stress symptoms in workers and to identify the sources of stress (stressors) in the working environment. The above factors were determined with regard to the whole group of researched workers against four age categories, sex, and the position held. The companies participating in the research were shown reports on the identified level of stress in the organization, its predominant symptoms and sources. Based on the reports preventive recommendations were made with regard to the most common symptoms and sources of stress. In 2011 some 282 employers were covered.

In 2012 the actions of NLI were continued in newly selected branches: education, trade, public administration, and industry" covering 486 employers (preliminary data).