

SURVEILLANCE AND PREVENTION POLICIES

HEALTH AND SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACT STUDY OF EUROPEAN INITIATIVES ON THE PREVENTION OF WORK-RELATED MSDS IN EUROPE

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Aims:

Work-related MSDs are covered by various Directives, some addressing specific risks such as working with computers or the manual handling of loads, and some addressing general topics. Not all MSD risk factors are covered by the EU Directives. Therefore, a new regulatory initiative was considered by the EU.

The aim of the present study was to estimate the health impact and socioeconomic impact of potential European initiatives to prevent WRMSDs, leading to recommendations on the EU regulatory or non-regulatory policy option that is the most promising approach.

Methods:

An impact assessment was conducted according to the impact assessment guidelines from the EU. Six policy options were formulated: 1) no policy change, 2) non-binding initiatives, 3) technical update of MSD-legislation, 4) technical update of MSD-legislation and non-binding initiatives, 5) simplifying MSD-legislation taking account of all risk factors, 6) simplifying MSD-legislation taking account of all risk factors and non-binding initiatives.

A literature study was carried out on the effectiveness of MSD prevention strategies at national and sector level and on prevention measures at company level. Also, an expert survey was conducted among 78 experts from 23 European countries. The experts were asked to review the impact of national initiatives and to estimate the specific impact of implementing EU policy options taking the situations in their own countries into account. In addition, a more detailed round of consultation was organised in nine countries.

Results:

Overall, option six (simplification of the legislation in combination with undertaking/enforcing non-binding activities) was preferred by the experts who filled out the expert survey and who were present at the country consultations. From the qualitative and semi-quantitative impact assessments based on literature and expert judgement, policy option six also seemed to be the option with the highest impact on indicators at national, sector and company level. We deducted from those results that this option in the end probably leads to the highest impact at individual level, such as the decrease of WRMSDs, because individual level indicators are all dependent on the actions taken at higher levels.

Conclusion:

Overall, option six was the most promising approach. However, there was no consensus on the results: there were differences between scientific researchers, employers' organizations and employees' organizations. There was also discussion in the country consultations on the exact interpretation of the issue of threshold levels in option six.

Keywords: Postures, physical exposure, Computer work, Public policy.

