

OSH4Edu 2nd Interactive Workshop – Panel Discussion 27 January 2021

The new Online Interactive Risk Assessment tools called OiRA tools for childhood education and care and for secondary education were launched in October 2019. The tools which are available today helps us assess occupational hazards for education personnel and then prevent and combat them.

Speaking about the hazards for health and safety of education staff we have to take under consideration the working environment, organisation of work, work/life balance and work-related stress. Psychosocial hazards involved in teaching profession should be at the heart of all institutions dealing with education and particularly social partners like trade unions, the government and local authorities.

The educational establishment is required by law to carry out on effective psychosocial risk assessment in schools, identify the real needs of education staff and take care of the staff health and wellbeing of the workplace. The OiRA tools are to provide the information about the sources of psychosocial hazards and suggest the appropriate measures to prevent them. As we know, psychosocial risks and their management are among employers responsibilities. EU regulations, directives, decisions and national pieces of legislation are the legal instruments which are based on the outcome of employing the OiRA tools. Using the OiRA tools sector of education can make recommendations, resolutions, opinions, proposals, conclusion for both EU and national institutions, as well as social partners involved in the development of education.

All stakeholders may engage in various actions, guidance, campaigns leading to the improvement overall quality of education, working environment and conditions, which should result in emotional and physical commitment of school staff, high attractiveness of the job, recruitment and retention of teachers. Employees are the ones who are the most aware of the psychosocial hazards they are exposed to. Although the risks seem to be the individuals subjective assessment, conducting the examination with the appropriate OiRA tools provides evidence and data on the health and wellbeing of education staff. Trade Unions, as the closet partners of teachers, insist on implementing measures and reforms that prevent and combat work-related risks.

There are still significant differences in perception of workplace hazards among the stakeholders such as employers, trade unions, parents councils who rather notice the physical aspects of dangers of work than risks to mental health like work-related stress, harassment and violence at work. Applying OiRA tools should have an effective impact on social dialogue on these issues and on the implementation of voluntary policy initiatives related to psychosocial hazards.

Rising awareness amongst the social partners and education stakeholders of the need to invest in the health and wellbeing of education staff benefits numerous programmes which promote a positive work culture both regarding reasonable expectations within the education system and education institutions and regarding the role of education staff. There are economic, social and moral arguments that work is the best form of welfare and the most effective way to improve mental health, wellbeing, building self-esteem and including in the society. The better working environment the more advantages for both the employee and the society.

Keeping in mind that the aim should be to engage all stakeholders in management of psychosocial hazards, prevention from work-related stress and combating occupational diseases possessing appropriate tools, using them effectively and improving regularly becomes the role of social partners in education.

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