



Preventing Psychosocial Risks in Education

Joint European GUIDELINES 2025



Glossary

Digitalisation

The broad adoption of digital technologies and digitised data facilitated by laptops, smartphones, other resources and tools, and digital infrastructure.

Mental health

A state of mental wellbeing that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community.

Psychosocial factors

Psychosocial factors are aspects of the work environment, organisation, and social context that can influence psychological and social well-being of a worker. Depending on how they are managed, they can have either a positive or negative impact.

Psychosocial hazards

Psychosocial factors that have the potential to cause harm to the health and well-being of workers, as well as affect organisational outcomes such as absenteeism, staff turnover, reduced performance, or lower quality of teaching and learning. Examples include excessive workload, role ambiguity, lack of support, bullying or harassment, and conflicts with students, colleagues, or management.

Psychosocial risks

Psychosocial risks are aspects of the design and management of work, and its social and organisational contexts, that have the potential to cause psychological or physical harm. A psychosocial risk is the likelihood that exposure to a psychosocial hazard will result in harm. Risks occur when hazards are not properly managed and have the potential to negatively affect well-being.

Stress

Stress itself arises from a perceived lack of control and support, resulting in a negative psychological state characterised by impact on both cognitive and emotional components.

Occupational Safety and Health (OSH)

The discipline dealing with the prevention of work-related injuries and diseases as well as the protection and promotion of the health of workers. It aims at the improvement of working conditions and environment.

Wellbeing

A multifaceted construct that draws on various social, economic, psychological, cultural, spiritual, and political dimensions.

Working conditions

Working time, workload, pressure at work, and available support and resources



These Guidelines have been developed in the framework of the [APRES COVID project](#), funded with support from the European Commission.



Introduction

The present Guidelines mark a significant revision of the [2016 Joint Practical Guidelines on How to Promote Joint Social Partner Initiatives to Prevent and Combat Psychosocial Hazards in Education](#) (2016). The Guidelines' revision is part of the outcomes of the social dialogue project '[APRES COVID](#)', co-funded by the EU. The project aimed at assessing the long-term impact COVID-19 crisis, and the related labour-market changes, on psychosocial risks in the education sector. Through a combination of research, social dialogue activities, and fieldwork carried out over two years, the project has reaffirmed the importance of addressing psychosocial risks as a central concern for occupational health and safety in education.

The findings of the APRES COVID project underline psychosocial risks among the most pressing hazards faced by education staff today. The COVID-19 crisis has not only intensified pre-existing challenges but also accelerated structural trends within the sector, such as digitalisation, growing social complexity reflected in the classroom, and rising incidents of disruptive behaviour, resulting in increasing educators' exposure to psychosocial risks.

In this context, it is therefore essential to adopt effective, preventive measures to safeguard the occupational well-being of all staff working in education. Ensuring safe, healthy, and supportive working conditions is not only a matter of workers' rights, it is also a prerequisite for providing high-quality education to learners across Europe. Education social partners play a crucial role in this endeavor.

The 2016 Guidelines were already a first attempt in supporting the implementation of European, national, regional and local measures to address psychosocial risks in education. The APRES COVID project has offered an important opportunity to evaluate their impact and identify ways to enhance their relevance and implementation.

This revised version builds on that foundation, drawing on the results of the APRES COVID project and from the broader work of the European Sectoral Social Dialogue in Education Committee. These Guidelines also reflect synergies with concomitant initiatives, including the development of a new Online interactive Risk Assessment tool for higher education and research (2024), and the revision of the European Multi-sectoral Social Partners' Guidelines on third-party violence and harassment (2025).

Nearly a decade after the initial adoption of the Guidelines, this revision signals a renewed commitment by the European social partners in education, ETUCE and EFEE. The revised Guidelines have been developed through a collaborative co-design process, engaging practitioners and experts from across Europe to ensure the outcomes are relevant, practical, and grounded in the realities of the workplace. The new Guidelines address, on the one hand, education social partners' need for more concrete and implementable tools that respond to the evolving needs of the sector. On the other hand, they also recognise that tackling psychosocial risks in education requires an insightful and reflective approach aimed at producing a long-lasting change in the workplace.

Aim

As healthy and safe workplaces in the education sector are a prerequisite for quality education, these revised Guidelines seek to provide education employers and education trade unions, particularly staff and representatives directly working on occupational health and safety, a practical framework for promoting healthy, decent, and safe working environments for all education staff at all levels of education.

They serve as a user-friendly, action-oriented resource that enables education social partners at national, regional, and institutional levels to take effective steps to prevent and manage psychosocial risks, ultimately contributing to more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable education systems for all. Rather than providing a one-size-fits-all approach, this set of guidelines should be understood as a tool to be adjusted to the national settings concerning healthy and safe working conditions, specifically taking into account the circumstances of each individual workplace.

To facilitate the implementation of the revised Guidelines, social partners have access to the source document, allowing them to adapt and tailor-made the guidelines to their respective context, legislative framework and practices.

Who are these Guidelines for?

These Guidelines are primarily intended for employers and trade unions at all levels (national, regional, and local), and in particular, those staff and representatives who are engaged in promoting safe, healthy, and decent working conditions in the education sector. In addition, the Guidelines can be an informative tool for all those who are interested in tackling psychosocial risks in education. The Guidelines provide a concrete framework enhancing the preventive measures for affected teachers, school leaders, education support personnel, and other staff across Europe.

Psychosocial risks. Occupational safety and health (OSH) issues

It is vital to recognise that psychosocial risks are occupational risks. They do not arise from individual shortcomings but from structural features related to the work environment—how work is planned, supported, and managed. It is equally important to mention that effective management and leadership in education institutions enhances well-being of staff and prevents possible occurrence of psychosocial risks.

Should they emerge, they must be addressed through collective, preventative strategies embedded in occupational health and safety practices. This requires a strong commitment to social dialogue and shared responsibility among education authorities, employers, and workers' representatives.

Understanding Psychosocial Risks in Education

Work-related health

It indicates not merely the absence of disease or infirmity; it also includes the physical and mental elements affecting health which are directly related to safety and hygiene at work. (Art. 3, ILO C 155)

Mental Health

A state of well-being in which every individual realises their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to contribute to their community. It is related to the promotion of overall health, the prevention of disease, and the treatment and rehabilitation of people affected by illness. (World Health Organisation, 2004)



Psychosocial risks

Psychosocial risks are defined as aspects of the design and management of work, and its social and organisational contexts (psychosocial hazards), that have the potential to cause psychological or physical harm.” (EU-OSHA, 2022). Psychosocial risks arise from three key work-related areas:

1. Work design and management (job context)

This includes factors like workload, deadlines, autonomy, role clarity, and work-life balance.

2. Work environment (organisational context)

The overall atmosphere infrastructure, and organisational culture of an organisation, including policies, leadership styles, and support systems, play a crucial role in employee preventing psychosocial risks.

3. Workplace interactions (social context)

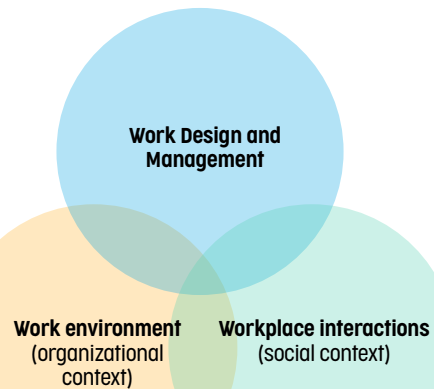
The way employees interact with colleagues and/or supervisors significantly impacts their mental state. Issues like workplace conflict, harassment, mobbing, or lack of social support can make the work environment more stressful.



These factors, either individually or in combination, contribute to **work-related stress**. However, when it becomes prolonged, chronic, or severe, stress can lead to two broad types of harm:

- **Psychological harm**, which includes burnout, anxiety, and depression. These conditions can severely affect an employee’s motivation, productivity, and overall quality of life.
- **Physical harm**, which includes cardiovascular disorders (such as high blood pressure and heart disease) and musculoskeletal disorders (such as chronic back or joint pain). Stress affects the body just as much as the mind, leading to long-term health complications.

Psychosocial Factors:



Can have a **POSITIVE IMPACT**
=
PROTECTIVE FACTORS



they contribute to healthy
and safe workplaces,
resulting in

- better educational outcomes
- job satisfaction
- less sick leaves
- better retention rate in the profession

Can have a **NEGATIVE IMPACT**
=
HAZARDS



STRESS

When prolonged,
chronic or severe

Psychological Harm

- Burnout
- Anxiety
- Depression

Physical Harm

- Cardiovascular Disorders
- Musculoskeletal Disorders

6



Challenge/Gap

Compared to physical hazards, psychosocial risks can be more challenging to identify

Take Action!

- ✓ Consult with education staff and their representatives and involve them in the policy development, implementation and follow-up
- ✓ Include preventive measures to avoid psychosocial hazards
- ✓ Put in place procedures for staff to seek support if they experience psychosocial problems at work.

LEVEL: Local

WHO: Employers



Also consider:

Psychosocial risks can evolve over the course of a career in education. They can be illustrated through the metaphor of the four seasons. Each phase brings opportunities, but also distinct challenges for occupational mental health and well-being:

Spring

Early career staff

New teachers, classroom assistants, school leaders or other support personnel are learning to manage responsibilities, navigate team dynamics and build confidence in their roles. Main risks include uncertainty, workload pressures and the challenge of finding a place within the institution.



Summer

Mid-career staff balancing work and personal life

Many staff at this stage juggle demanding professional responsibilities with busy home lives. Challenges include maintaining a healthy work-life balance, managing time effectively and coping with high expectations.



Autumn

Experienced staff seeking growth

Staff beyond the most intensive phases of their career may wish to share knowledge, mentor colleagues or take on specialised roles. Risks include limited opportunities for professional growth or insufficient recognition of their contribution.



Winter

Staff nearing retirement

Colleagues in later career stages bring valuable expertise but may struggle with rapid technological change, evolving policies or the physical and emotional demands of the job. Supporting and valuing their contribution is essential for well-being and morale.

Psychosocial risks across a career in education

This seasonal perspective highlights the need for flexible approaches to psychosocial risk prevention, recognising the diversity of staff roles and the changing nature of risks throughout a career.

Where to start?

1. Legislations and enforcement

Legislation plays a crucial role in ensuring that psychosocial risks are recognised and addressed as part of occupational health and safety in education. International instruments raise awareness on issues such as stress, harassment, and violence at work. At the European level, directives and strategies establish binding requirements for member states, including the integration of psychosocial risk prevention into occupational safety and health policies and workplace practices. National frameworks set out concrete preventing measures, define the responsibilities of education authorities and school leaders, and setting up enforcement mechanisms such as labour inspections and reporting systems.

4. Awareness and Education

Awareness and education are central to preventing and managing psychosocial risks for education workers. Misperceptions such as viewing stress, burnout, harassment, or violence as too sensitive or costly to tackle can delay action. Perceiving stress, burnout, harassment, or violence as overly sensitive or costly issues can hinder timely action. Training for both school management and teachers should be tailored to the specific roles and tasks of staff, recognising that education workers in different roles may face different stressors and challenges. Training should be continuous, with refresher courses and updates whenever procedures or risk factors change and complemented by accessible guidance and practical tools.

Special attention is needed for newly appointed or temporary staff, trainees, and interns, who may lack experience and familiarity with the work environment; mentoring or coaching can help them integrate safely. Training should also be inclusive, taking into account language barriers, disabilities, or other specific needs, so that all staff can benefit equally.

Maintaining up-to-date training records supports accountability and ensures that education workers are equipped to recognise, prevent, and respond to psychosocial risks. Effective awareness and education help integrate psychosocial risk management into daily professional practice, supporting the well-being and safety of teachers and education staff.



Workplaces in which workers actively contribute to health and safety often have a lower occupational risk level and accident rates.

2. Worker participation

Worker participation is essential for effective safety and health management. Involving and consulting with staff members and their representatives results in improved safety, health and well-being of workers. While employers have the duty to provide workplaces where risks to health and safety are properly controlled, the law also requires employees to cooperate.

As staff members have first-hand knowledge of work practices, they can provide valuable advice about risks and possible solutions and therefore, staff members and/or their representatives should have an active role in the risk assessment process.

The collection and dissemination of accurate information on hazards, including psychosocial ones, monitoring workplaces, controlling compliance with policies and good practice, and other related activities are central to the establishment and implementation of effective policies.

3. Risk assessment

It is the process of systematically evaluating risks to workers' safety and health caused from workplace hazards. In accordance with the European OSH directive, each employer must conduct regular assess all occupational risks, including psychosocial risks, and take actions to address them. The purpose of carrying out a risk assessment is to enable the employer to effectively take the measures necessary for the safety and health protection of workers. This is also an important opportunity to collect anonymous data and identify psychosocial hazards early on.

Regularly assessing and re-assessing workplace psychosocial hazards can help ensure that interventions remain relevant and targeted



Take Action!

- ✓ Encourage and facilitate the elections of OSH representatives
- ✓ Promote the involvement of the workers participation in OSH matters and within competent bodies (e.g., Work Council, OSH Committee, OSH Representatives etc.).
- ✓ Promote and organize the involvement of all staff members in deciding what measures will be effective and should be taken to prevent psychosocial risks.

LEVEL: **Local** **National** WHO: **Employers** **Unions**

The importance of legislation and working together

Preventing and managing psychosocial risks in education requires both a strong legal framework and effective cooperation between trade unions and employers. Legislation sets the foundation for a safe working environment. It plays a key role in setting clear standards, defining responsibilities, and protection mechanisms to safeguard the health, safety and wellbeing of education workers. However, legal measures alone are not enough. Their success relies on how they are applied in practice through ongoing dialogue, trust and joint commitment within the sector.

In education, working conditions are shaped by daily realities. Contemporary educational systems cope with increasing pressures such as workload, staffing shortages, digital demands, and classroom complexity that can pull teachers away from their core mission: to teach and support students' learning. When administrative burdens grow unchecked, and teacher autonomy is limited, stress and disengagement rise. This undermines not only staff occupational health and safety, but also the quality of education.

By working together, education social partners can take joint responsibility to create environments where staff are respected, supported, and given the professional space they need to focus on teaching. Collaboration makes it possible to alleviate various burdens, promote teacher agency, and ensure that efforts to prevent psychosocial risks are grounded in real workplace experience.

When legislation and collaborative action go hand in hand, they reinforce each other. They can build a culture of well-being where prevention is part of everyday practice and where school leaders, teachers and education staff are empowered to thrive in their profession.



Take Action!

- ✓ Pro-actively engage in preventing and tackling the issues of psychosocial hazards in social dialogue and collective agreements.
- ✓ Beyond existing legislations, promote a culture of prevention and collective ethos to address psychosocial risks in education
- ✓ Collaborate with labour inspectorates and advocate the inclusion of psychosocial hazards within the conduction of inspections with a supportive approach.

LEVEL:

Local

National

WHO:

Employers

Unions

As of 2022, the International Labour Organization (ILO) recognizes a safe and healthy working environment as a fundamental principle and human right.

Legislative frameworks:

International

International conventions only apply in countries that have formally ratified them and integrated their provisions into national law.

European

National

C155 – OSH Convention

- Covers all workplace health risks, including psychosocial hazards.
- Requires safe work environments and worker participation in OSH policies.

Other individual Directives of relevance for PSR

Some examples:

- Working time Directive 2003/88/EC
- Screen time Directive 90/270/EEC
- Directive 94/33/EC on the protection of young people at work
- Workplace Directive 89/654 EEC

Equality Framework Directive 2000/78/EC

It aims to ensure equal treatment of individuals and combat direct and indirect discrimination in employment and occupation based on the ground of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

OSH Framework Directive 89/391/EEC

It establishes general employers’ obligations OSH, including:

- Manage all types of risks, including psychosocial risks, through a preventive measures.
- Carry out risk assessment to identify and address workplace hazards in consultation with staff.
- Implement appropriate procedures and measures to prevent occupational accidents and diseases.

Article 151, TFEU

Requires members states to work towards the improvement of working conditions.

C187 – OSH Promotional Framework

- Promotes a preventive safety culture, including on emerging risks like psychosocial ones.
- Supports integration of mental health in national OSH systems.

C190 – Violence and Harassment Convention

- Directly targets psychosocial risks from violence, harassment, and bullying.
- Ensures a safe, respectful work environment, addressing occupational health and safety.

References to psychosocial risks in the national OSH strategies across EU

Check the mapping (p.65) [HERE](#)



Challenge/Gap

Existing inconsistencies in definitions and terminology relating to psychosocial risks (e.g., psychosocial risks, psychosocial hazards, psychosocial factors) which could lead to confusion at the policy level and in the workplace

Take Action!

✓ Call for and engage in the design and implementation of clear and holistic policy frameworks on psychosocial risks

LEVEL: Local National European WHO: Employers Unions

✓ Support school leaders and education personnel in understanding, recognising, and preventing psychosocial risks through provision of implementation guides and practical guidance

LEVEL: Local WHO: Employers Unions

Risk assessment

To determine psychosocial risks, it is important to examine all aspects of work that considers:

- what could cause injury or harm,
- whether the psychosocial hazards could be eliminated and, if not,
- what preventive or protective measures are, or should be, in place to control the risks

Source: https://osha.europa.eu/sites/default/files/Factsheet_81_Risk_assessment



Take Action!

- ✓ Ensure that psychosocial risk are assessed as part of a continuous risk management cycle.
- ✓ Make sure that risk assessment framework used in your contexts cover psychosocial risk
- ✓ If the general risk assessment doesn't allow a thorough identification of psychosocial risks, consider conducting an additional specific risk assessment for psychosocial risks.

LEVEL:

Local

National

WHO:

Employers

Unions



Challenge/Gap

In most countries, risk assessments mainly focus on physical risks.

Did you know?

OiRA tools are online free-of-charge tools to conduct risk assessment in your educational institution.

Check **HERE** if OiRA is available in your country and language.



What if OiRA is not available in your country?

As education social partners, you can ask and engage in transposing European OiRA tools to your national context.

Learn more!



OiRA
Online Interactive
Risk Assessment



Follow a 5-step approach to risk assessment

1

Psychosocial hazards are grouped into three main areas:

- **Work content hazards**
– High workload, lack of autonomy, unclear roles, and insufficient support create pressure and uncertainty.
- **Organizational hazards**
– Poor leadership, job insecurity, unfair treatment, multiple work premises and a negative physical environment contribute to a sense of instability and dissatisfaction.
- **Social hazards** – Bullying, harassment, poor communication, and workplace aggression damage relationships and create a toxic work culture.

2

- This includes estimating the existing psychosocial risks (the severity and probability of possible harm) and prioritising them in order of importance.

- Risk severity and probability may vary across and within education institutions.

- Some workers might be more exposed than others. Consider:

- The nature of the job and the specific professional role (e.g., teachers, education support personnel, academics, researchers, administrative staff).

- Workers' specific vulnerabilities (e.g., language, age, culture, disabilities) and their intersectional interactions.

3

- It requires identifying the appropriate measures to eliminate or control psychosocial risks within the appropriate time framework.

4

- Putting in place the preventive and protective measures through a prioritisation plan. Some actions might require the involvement of other actors such as students, and parents. Ensure that all actors of the education system are on board is essential to implement positive change in the sector.

5

- Educational contexts evolve very quickly and risks might change over time. That is why it is important that the assessment is reviewed at regular intervals to ensure that it remains up to date, to evaluate which measures worked and those requiring improvements.

Step 5: Monitoring and reviewing

Step 4: Taking action

Step 3: Deciding on preventive action

Step 2: Evaluating and prioritising psychosocial risks

Step 1: Identifying psychosocial hazards and those at risk

Implementation and follow-up

ETUCE and EFEE are committed to ensuring that these Guidelines become a useful and practical tool for all education social partners. To support this, both organisations will actively promote and disseminate the Guidelines among their national members. This may take place through joint initiatives or through separate actions at national or regional level. To help reach a broad audience, the Guidelines will also be translated into several European languages.

Alongside strong cooperation and social dialogue, ETUCE and EFEE further call on the EU institutions and national governments to ensure adequate funding and resources for education so that the implementation of these Guidelines is fully supported and sustainable

ETUCE and EFEE call on their member organisations to play an active role in sharing the Guidelines within their constituencies. Whether through union branches, employers' associations, training sessions or workplace meetings, we encourage all members to raise awareness and support the implementation of the Guidelines.

These revised Guidelines represent the beginning of a renewed, bottom-up approach to jointly work on occupational health and safety in education. Our ambition is to make the Guidelines a living instrument, a practical resource that evolves in response to the needs and experiences of those who use it.

To support this, ETUCE and EFEE welcome continuous feedback from their members. Suggestions for improvement, examples of good practice, and lessons learned from implementation are all valuable and can be submitted at any time. A dedicated feedback form is made available to ensure that contributions are collected in a structured and accessible way.

All feedback will be reviewed jointly by ETUCE and EFEE and presented yearly to the European Sectoral Social Dialogue in Education (ESSDE) Committee for further consideration.

In addition, an overall assessment of the implementation and impact of the Guidelines will be carried out in five years' time, in consultation with national members.



Have you used the Guidelines?

Give us your feedback



<https://emea.dcv.ms/ec014ixDVC>



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