

The Prevention of Work-Related Musculoskeletal Disorders

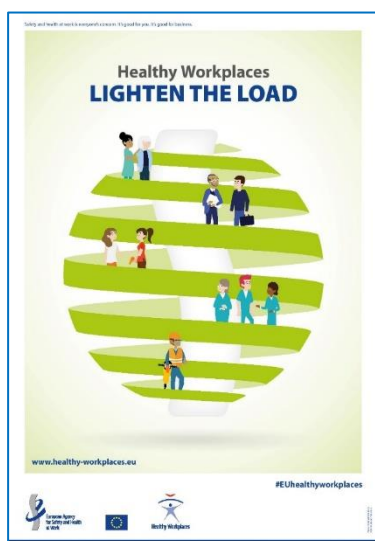
**A Two-Year National
Campaign**

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Occupational Health and Safety Authority (Malta)



The Prevention of Work-Related Musculoskeletal Disorders



'Healthy Workplaces Lighten the Load 2020-2022' is the theme of a two-year campaign run by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) which will address work-related musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs). MSDs is an umbrella term encompassing several impairments of bodily structures, such as, muscles, ligaments, joints, tendons, bones, cartilage, nerves, and localised blood circulation system. The campaign is coordinated at national level by EU-OSHA's focal points.

It is worthy to note that this topic has already been addressed by EU-OSHA way back in 2002 and 2007. So why run again such a campaign?

Extensive research on work-related MSDs commissioned by EU-OSHA highlights, amongst others, that work-related MSDs remain the most common work-related health problem in the EU, so much so that roughly three out of every five workers in the EU Member States reported work-related MSD complaints. The research also found that, of all workers in the EU with a work-related health problem, a shocking 60% identified work-related MSDs as their most serious issue. These findings confirm the importance of running once again such an important campaign.

The Campaign

The message of the campaign is clear – 'Work-related MSDs are preventable!' Preventing work-related MSDs is not only a legal obligation imposed on employers by OHS legislation, but it is also vital for the sustainability of work, especially in the context of an ageing workforce and the increase in employment rates among older age groups.

The campaign aims to raise awareness of work-related MSDs and to provide employers with the necessary tools and information on how work-related MSDs can be prevented like any other hazard. The campaign will also highlight how any arising work-related MSD can be prevented from becoming chronic by early interventions. In this regard, EU-OSHA has dedicated a new website with abundant information and helpful resources on work-related MSDs. Most of the information is also available in the Maltese language. Accessing such useful information will help employers to fulfil their legal obligations.



The Legal Aspect

OHS legislation imposes various onerous duties on employers to ensure the health and safety of workers at all times in every aspect related to work. In doing so, employers have to take the necessary preventive and protective measures which must be based on the general principles of prevention – a hierarchy of controls ordered to form the best practice approach to risk management, with priority being given to the avoidance of risk.



Since avoiding risks is not always possible, employers must identify hazards and evaluate the risks which cannot be avoided. This must be done through the carrying out of a suitable, sufficient, and systematic risk assessment which has to list the necessary preventive and protective measures to be adopted thereby ensuring a safe and healthy place of work. Such exercise must also include the provision of information, training, workers' consultation and participation, health surveillance, and finally, constant supervision to ensure that measures are being followed by whoever is obliged to do so.

Work-related MSDs are not addressed only by one specific regulation, but are addressed directly and indirectly through various OHS regulations, such as, but not limited to:

- The Occupational Health and Safety Authority Act, Chapter 424 of the Laws of Malta and the General Provisions for Health and Safety at Work Places Regulations, S.L.424.18 which provide a general framework for risk prevention;
- The Protection against Risks of Back Injury at Work Places Regulations, S.L.424.17 through specific provisions addressing the identification and prevention of back injuries by manual handling;
- The Minimum Health and Safety Requirements for Work with Display Screen Equipment Regulations, S.L.424.14 through specific provisions covering the identification and prevention of risks from work with display screen equipment;
- The Work Place (Minimum Health and Safety Requirements) Regulations, S.L.424.15 through the provision of minimum standards for workplaces concerning, amongst others, work station layout, lighting, and seating;
- The Minimum Requirements for the Use of Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations, S.L.424.21 which cover the suitability of personal protective equipment;
- The Work Equipment (Minimum Safety and Health Requirements) Regulations, S.L.424.35 which include specific provisions on ergonomics and occupational health; and

- The Work Place (Minimum Health and Safety Requirements for the Protection of Workers from Risks resulting from Exposure to Vibration) Regulations, S.L.424.31 which concern the risks related to hand-arm vibration and whole-body vibration.

The National Focal Point

Being the national focal point for EU-OSHA, the Occupational Health and Safety Authority (OHSA) will be actively involved in the running of the campaign on a national level by organising seminars/webinars, disseminating guidance documents and articles, carrying out an inspection campaign targeting work-related MSDs, media interventions, and other initiatives. OHSA will also be coordinating the Healthy Workplaces Good Practice Awards at a national level. As in all other previous EU-OSHA campaigns, OHSA is confident that the 'Healthy Workplaces Lighten the Load' campaign will contribute to increased awareness about work-related MSDs and how such disorders can be addressed through specific programmes and policies.

The Healthy Workplaces Good Practice Awards

The 'Healthy Workplaces Lighten the Load' campaign also features the 'Healthy Workplaces Good Practice Award' (GPA) competition. The aim of such a competition is to highlight and promote best practice in relation to the management of MSDs. The GPA will also serve as a platform for sharing and promoting good practices across Europe. In this regard, EU-OSHA is looking for examples that demonstrate a holistic approach to the management of occupational health and safety (OHS) whereby both employers and employees are committed to working together to prevent MSDs.

All entries will be first judged at the national level by EU-OSHA's Focal Points. National shortlisted examples will then be submitted to EU-OSHA to take part in the European competition. The submitted examples will be evaluated by a tripartite jury who will evaluate the examples in line with the criteria below.

Applications for the Maltese GPA are open and the closing date for entries is **30 September 2021**. Participants must fill in the specific Application Form and submit it via email to **Dr Melhino Mercieca (Focal Point Manager – EU-OSHA)** on melhino.mercieca@gov.mt

The application form can be downloaded from http://bit.ly/Application_Form_GPA or by scanning this code.



EVALUATION CRITERIA

Healthy Workplaces Good Practice Awards Competition 2020-22

Any **real-life examples of innovative and effective OHS management in the prevention and management of MSDs** can be entered. Entries should clearly **describe how good management practices have been implemented** in the workplace and what has been achieved, including aspects such as:

- how the risk assessment was organised in a comprehensive and effective way, covering all relevant risks for all groups of workers;
- the way in which the hierarchy of prevention was followed as a guiding principle (the STOP principle: substitution, technological measures, organisational measures, personal protection measures) and how the measures eliminated or significantly reduced the exposure of workers to dangerous substances, also including, if possible, the costs and benefits;
- the ways in which awareness was increased and a prevention culture encouraged.

The tripartite jury will be looking for evidence of the following criteria:

- **Relevance:** the information is directly relevant to good practice to eliminate/reduce MSD risks at work.
- **Focus:** the example is from the workplace or involves interventions aimed at work.
- **Coverage of measures:** the example shows the prioritisation of collective measures over interventions focusing on the individual.
- **Commitment of management:** the board/senior managers are fully committed to OHS and this is demonstrated in the example.
- **Worker participation:** the example demonstrates effective participation, including the involvement of employees/workers and their representatives.
- **Implementation:** the measures have been successfully implemented in practice.
- **Improvements/results achieved:** the intervention shows evidence of real and demonstrable improvements in safety and health in relation to the prevention and management of MSDs.
- **Consultation:** the example shows evidence of good consultation between management and trade unions/workers.
- **Sustainability:** the example shows evidence of the sustainability of the intervention over time.
- **Legislation:** the measures comply with the relevant legislative requirements of the Member State, and preferably even go beyond minimum requirements.
- **Transferability:** the intervention is transferable to other workplaces (including those in other Member States and to small and medium-sized enterprises).
- **Innovation:** the example is current/innovative. Preferably, it should add value to existing practices in the Member State providing the example.
- **Detail of information:** the information is provided in sufficient detail.
- **Clarity:** the example is clearly and simply described.
- **Timeliness:** the intervention should either be recent or not have been widely publicised.
- **Consensus:** the example is acceptable to all national network partners.



Further Information

More information on the 'Healthy Workplaces Lighten the Load 2020-2022' campaign can be obtained by accessing EU-OSHA's official website campaign on <https://healthy-workplaces.eu> and/or by contacting EU-OSHA's Malta Focal Point, Dr Melhino Mercieca, on **melhino.mercieca@gov.mt**

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