

# **Women and the ageing workforce: implications for occupational safety and health**

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CEPS – FACTAGE, Brussels, 25.06.2019



## EU-OSHA:

- An information Agency of the European Union
  - Scientific, technical, economic, good practice cases, tools
  - Analysis
- Management Board
- National Focal Points

# Older workers in Europe and OSH

- Will have to work longer
  - more exposure to OSH risks
- Will represent a greater proportion of the workforce
  - less younger workers to do the heaviest work
- Half of those aged 55-64 leave work before obligatory retirement age
  - many for work-related health reasons

# EU-OSHA Project – Safer and Healthier Work at Any Age: OSH in the **context** of an aging workforce: conclusions

- **Improved prevention for all** taking a life-cycle approach
- **Specific measures for older workers**
  - If and when necessary – depending on type of work, individual..
  - Avoiding stigmatization
- **Support for small businesses**
- **Holistic approach**
- **Integrated policy and services:**
  - OSH, employment, public health, social security.
  - Workplace- human resources, finance management...

# Gender, age, occupational safety and health review

## Men and women

- Different age-related challenges
- Sex- and gender-related differences in working conditions persist throughout the working life
- Must identify and understand differences to inform policy

# Don't underestimate the cumulative physical and emotional impacts of women's work

- Men and women in elementary jobs more likely to report not being able to do current job until 60
- Musculoskeletal disorders / physical work
  - Extent and need for reduction more recognised in male manual work
- Emotionally demanding work
- Increase attention to work-related stress and musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), in general and in women's work

# Sustainable work in a small kindergarten, Denmark

- Reducing MSDs, retaining experienced workers

## What was done

- Hydraulic, height-adjustable changing tables and chairs
- Individual advice
- Fathers move furniture for meetings
- Working time adjustment
- Low price exercise and physiotherapy

## Enabling factors

- Older workers valued
- Range of measures
- External support
- Prevention for all, adjustments as necessary, early intervention
- Worker involvement

# Flexible working and family carers

- More demanding than child care
- Less gender difference but majority of caring by women over 50
- Some workers do both!
- Flexible working aimed at childcare by women
- Extend and adapt schemes to cover all carers

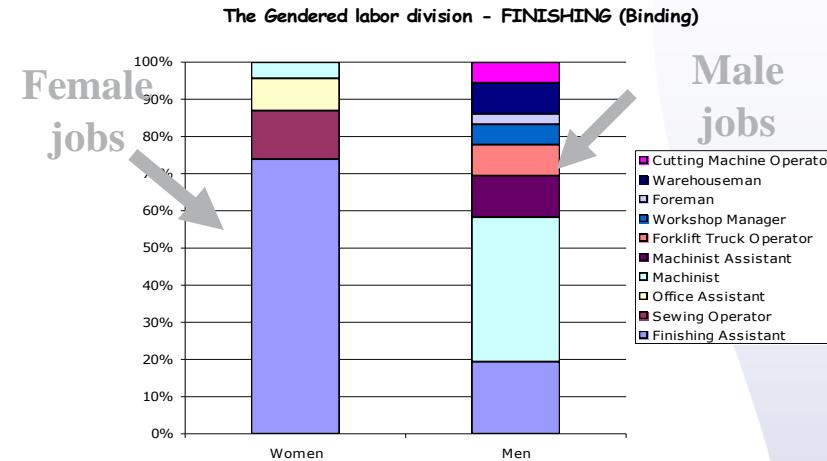
# Working through the menopause

- Still a taboo in society and workplace
- Simple non-stigmatising measures in the workplace include
  - Access to drinking water
  - Layered clothing for uniforms
  - Flexible working e.g to facilitate doctor's appointments
- Advice and awareness-raising needed

# Long periods in low-level jobs, without career promotion, can lead to long-term exposure to hazards

## French printing company

- Older women working in ‘finishing’ – high absenteeism from musculoskeletal disorders
- ⇒ ‘Standard’ ergonomic solutions e.g. alter workstations to avoid poor postures & repetitive tasks
- Women ‘trapped’ in finishing work, men quickly promoted -> longer exposure to poor conditions
- ⇒ Recommendations concerning career paths and skills recognition



# Integrate age and gender into risk assessment

87 EN FACTS European Agency for Safety and Health at Work

Workforce diversity and risk assessment: ensuring everyone is covered Summary of an Agency report

**Introduction**

Workers are not all exposed to the same risks and some specific groups of workers are exposed to increased risks (or are subject to particular requirements). When we speak about workers exposed to 'particular' or 'increased' risks, we refer to workers subject to specific risks due to their age, origins, gender, physical condition or status in the enterprise. Such people may be more vulnerable to certain risks and have specific requirements at work.

Health and safety legislation<sup>(1)</sup> requires employers to carry out risk assessments and emphasises the need to 'adapt the work to the individual'; the obligation for the employer to 'be in possession of an assessment of the risks to safety and health at work, including those facing groups of workers exposed to particular risks' and that 'sensitive risk groups must be protected against the dangers which specifically affect them'.

Diversity and diversity management in the workplace are important issues in occupational safety and health today; however, diversity has seldom been studied from the perspective of risk assessment. Practical risk assessment tools that take into account the specific risks faced, for instance by people with disabilities, migrant workers, older workers, women and temporary workers, are still rare. It is hoped that further research and development will lead to additional guidance materials in the future.

**Aim of the report**

The report produced by the Agency highlights the need to carry out inclusive risk assessment, to take into account the diversity of the workforce when assessing and managing risks. The main aim of this report is to describe why and how risk assessment can and should cover the whole workforce, and to increase awareness among those responsible for and affected by health and safety at work — employers, employees, safety representatives and occupational safety and health practitioners — about the importance of assessing the risks for all workers.

The first part of the report presents the main issues regarding the occupational safety and health of six categories of workers considered at increased risk: migrant workers, disabled workers, young and older workers, women (gender issues) and temporary workers. At the end of each subsection, links are provided to further information and practical guidance or risk assessment tools.

(1) Council Directive 89/391/EEC of 12 June 1989 on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers at work.

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## Bring actions together:

- ✓ Explicitly include diversity (age, gender,) in risk assessment
- ✓ Explicitly include OSH in workplace equality actions -gender, age, disability

## Some principles

- ✓ Improve prevention for all: 1. eliminate risks at source
- ✓ Adapt work to workers
- ✓ Avoid assumptions, consider everyone
- ✓ Take account of individual differences
- ✓ Look at real work done
- ✓ Consult women, older workers
- ✓ Diversity training
- ✓ Seek advice when necessary

# Labour inspectorates should have clear diversity strategies

- Labour Inspections need to systematically mainstream diversity into their strategy and activities
- Austria Labour Inspection
  - Training and inspection checklists for inspectors
  - Diversity included in campaigns, guides
  - Tools for SMEs e.g. workforce age projection
  - Gender and diversity impact assessments
  - Covers inspectors' employment conditions

# Women and rehabilitation

- Effective rehabilitation part of sustainable work
  - early intervention; focus on staying in work – treatment goal; tailored, coordinated multidisciplinary support
- Work-relatedness of illness needs recognising to enter some occupational rehabilitation programmes
  - may be less recognised in women workers
  - Issue for occupational health and public health
- Programmes need to be accessible
  - suitable times and tailored to women
- Access to occupational health services for early detection

# Final messages

- Bring together occupational safety and health, age equality and gender equality in policy and practice
- Occupational safety and health, gender and ageing: more research, more action

# Coming soon - 2020-22....



- European Healthy Workplaces campaign on campaign musculoskeletal disorders
- Resources will include:
  - Advice for workplaces on accommodating workers with chronic musculoskeletal health problems

# Thank you

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**European Parliament older worker project:**

<https://osha.europa.eu/en/themes/osh-management-context-ageing-workforce/ep-osh-project>

**Also see EU-OSHA webpages on  
Age and work  
Gender and work**