



## Health promotion among young workers A summary of good practice cases

According to data, the rate of non-fatal accidents at work is more than 40 % higher among those aged 18 to 24 than for the workforce as a whole. Young people are also more likely to suffer from an occupational illness.

However, instead of causing harm, workplaces can be an important setting for health promotion, offering the opportunity to improve workers' general health, thus also benefiting a company through reduced sickness-related costs and increased productivity.

### What can be done at the workplace?

This factsheet summarises 12 cases of workplace health promotion (WHP) from Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania and Sweden (1). The case studies feature a variety of initiatives and interventions to promote the health of young workers. Young workers were defined in different ways by the companies involved: while most defined such workers in terms of age, in some cases people who were new to the job were also classified as 'young' workers. These programmes were implemented in various enterprises, private as well as public. Most of the programmes involved workers with physically demanding jobs in the private sector.

### Key messages

- *Most of the health promotion programmes focused on the individual level, especially on lifestyle factors*

Most of the cases focused on individual factors. These initiatives and programmes mainly addressed lifestyle factors such as alcohol abuse, smoking, diet/nutrition and physical exercise. This is important because having healthier employees will also bring benefits for the company. Other factors addressed included the development of skills/personality, teambuilding, optimisation of the working environment and psychosocial issues. It is important to note that several cases included more than one topic. Of all cases, four were temporary actions whereas the rest concerned ongoing projects. This is significant, because ongoing projects show a greater promise of sustainability.

(1) EU-OSHA, practical solutions database, case studies on health promotion among young workers, <http://osha.europa.eu/whpyw>



- *A wide variety of approaches were used during the preparation and implementation phase, as well as in the follow-up*

Different approaches were used during the preparation, implementation and follow-up phases of all programmes reviewed. First, different stakeholders (e.g. employees, trainers and supervisors) participated in the preparation of nine of the 11 cases. Through interviews, meetings or surveys, they were given the chance to influence the content of the health promotion programme as well as contribute to practical strategies. When it came to the implementation of the health promotion programmes, five different components were distinguished: (1) training and mentorship, (2) activities, (3) incentives for young workers, (4) information and (5) policy. Each of these components was essential in ensuring the success of the health promotion programme. The majority of the cases included the component 'seminars, training and workshops'. Furthermore, the creation of networks was included in six cases as (a major) part of the health promotion programme. Examples of such networks are experience exchange groups, project teams or support groups. With regard to the follow-up phase, interviews, surveys and feedback loops were used.

- *Working together was important for health promotion among young workers*

These cases distinguished initiators from actors and drivers. Initiators are those companies or institutions that initiated the workplace health promotion, whereas actors and drivers support the preparation and the implementation of the programmes. Companies and governments of the participating countries were both initiators of the health promotion programmes. In cases where the government was the

initiator of the project, it was mainly the local government which initiated the programme. In all cases reviewed, actors and drivers worked together to a greater or lesser extent.

- *WHP not only improved the health of young workers but also benefited the company*

The workplace health promotion programmes had benefits not only for the employees but also for their companies. First, the companies benefited from the health promotion programme as the employees improved their health in terms of their mental and physical fitness. In addition to the gains in health and the quality of work, the workplace health promotion programme also benefited the company by improving its image and attractiveness for new employees.

- *Evaluation resulted in many improvements, but feedback may be overly positive*

In many cases, qualitative data obtained from interviews and workshops as well as quantitative data such as surveys and questionnaires were used for the evaluation. The evaluation was important to give an indication of the effectiveness of programmes and to improve the programmes for future implementation. The health promotion programmes brought about an improvement in the personal skills of the employees, increased awareness of their health status and decreased stress levels. The feedback was wholly positive. However, there are reasonable doubts about the invariably positive outcomes of workplace health promotion programmes. The method of reporting may lead to an information bias.

- *Key success factors of health promotion programmes among young workers were a broad programme and the participation of the workers*

In several cases, the involvement of the participants was an important success factor. In these cases, the programme was not only targeted to the needs of the employees but it also encouraged them to take part. In addition, a broad programme gave participants the opportunity to select a topic tailored to their specific problems at work. Other key success factors included open communication, the involvement of management and support at work.

## Overall conclusions

The workplace health promotion programmes among young workers focused mainly on individual factors such as lifestyle factors. More than half of the cases were initiated by the companies themselves, which could be seen as positive. A second strength of the health promotion programmes was that more



© EU-OSHA/Salus & Co cartoon

than half of them were ongoing projects, and it is known that such projects are more likely to lead to sustainable change among young workers. This is important because healthy behaviour learned at an early age is likely to last throughout the workers' lives and lead to better health in older age.

## Recommendations

- It is important to ensure that interventions are comprehensive and deal not only with individual but also with organisational-level factors.
- Within this process, it is essential to involve employees and to take into account their needs and views on how to organise work, the workplace and WHP activities.
- Future case studies should also focus on barriers, obstacles and lessons learned.

**More information** on **workplace health promotion** is available at <http://osha.europa.eu/en/topics/whp> and on **young workers** at [http://osha.europa.eu/en/priority\\_groups/young\\_people](http://osha.europa.eu/en/priority_groups/young_people)

This factsheet is available in 24 languages at: <http://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/factsheets>

## European Agency for Safety and Health at Work

Gran Vía, 33, 48009 Bilbao, SPAIN  
Tel. +34 944794360 • Fax +34 944794383  
E-mail: [information@osha.europa.eu](mailto:information@osha.europa.eu)

© European Agency for Safety and Health at Work. Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged. Printed in Belgium, 2011

