



# MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK

## OVERVIEW OF DEFINITIONS, REGULATIONS & FURTHER GUIDANCE



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# Preface

The mental health of the workforce is an emerging concern for both public and private enterprises in the Baltic Sea Region. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine, half of EU workers considered stress to be common in their workplaces, and it contributed to around half of all lost working days. Workplace-related psychosocial risks, if left unaddressed, can undermine the resilience of businesses by affecting employee well-being, productivity, engagement, and organisational culture. By proactively addressing these risks and fostering a supportive work environment, we can enhance people's resilience and the sustainability of businesses. Creating a safe and supportive work environment promotes a virtuous cycle: healthy, productive employees contribute to resilient organisations, which in turn support a robust and cohesive society.

This document provides an overview of definitions, regulations, and further guidance related to the national work on psychosocial work environments in Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, and Sweden.

The information has been gathered by the *MentalHealthMatters* project partners along with the Swedish and Lithuanian members of the Expert Group on Occupational Safety and Health, which operates under the Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being. These representatives come from:

- Department of Business Administration, Tallinn University of Technology, Estonia
- Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, Finland
- Institute of Occupational Safety and Environmental Health, Riga Stradiņš University, Latvia
- Institute of Hygiene, Lithuania
- Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority, Norway
- Nofer Institute of Occupational Medicine, Poland
- Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise, Sweden

For further reading, we recommend consulting the following documents produced through the *MentalHealthMatters* project:

- **Mental health at work: Discussion document on policy options** – A document that explores country-specific policy options and suggestions for addressing psychosocial factors and promoting mental health in workplaces in Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Poland and Norway. In addition, it highlights shared challenges in the Baltic Sea Region and proposes transnational collaborative solutions to create healthier and more resilient workplaces.
- **Mental health at work: Needed improvements** – A collection of country-specific technical reports from Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Poland and Norway, analysing the needed improvements regarding policies, regulations, data, and education that impact the management of psychosocial factors in the workplace.

# Estonia

## Legal and political frameworks

Currently, there is no government decree specifically addressing psychosocial risks in Estonia. However, aspects relevant to the psychosocial work environment are considered in the **Occupational Health and Safety Act**, which sets occupational health and safety requirements for work performed by employees and officials. Its scope includes defining the rights and obligations of an employer and an employee in creating and ensuring a working environment which is safe for health. In addition, it covers the organisation of occupational health and safety at the enterprise and state levels, the proceedings, and the liability for violating the requirements.

Article 9 of the Act is dedicated to psychosocial hazards. It stipulates that to prevent damage to health arising from a psychosocial hazard, the employer must take measures, including adapting the organisation of work and workplace to suit the employee, optimising the employee's workload, enabling breaks to be included in the working time during the working day or shift, and improving the enterprise's psychosocial working environment. Under Article 12 on general provisions, the Act states that employers' key obligation is to ensure that their workplace conforms with occupational health and safety requirements in every work-related situation. This responsibility includes planning and implementing preventive activities through internal control and risk assessment to minimise health risks. Employers are also required to organise and cover the costs of occupational health services and employee medical examinations when needed, as well as inform and instruct employees about hazards and safety measures.

In addition to the Occupational Health and Safety Act, the Ministry of Social Affairs has issued two strategic documents and policy papers that touch upon the topic of mental health at work:

- **The Green Paper on Mental Health** sets a short-term goal for the Ministry of Social Affairs to assist and support employers and occupational health service providers in identifying, assessing and implementing actions related to psychosocial risk factors.
- The **Population Health Development Plan 2020-2030** highlights the importance of prioritising maintaining and promoting mental health at work, noting that “healthcare management, working conditions, and psychosocial work environment must support the preservation of employees’ health and workability”.

## Definitions

The Occupational Safety and Health Act defines *psychosocial hazards* in § 9 as “work involving risks such as accident or violence, unequal treatment, bullying and harassment, work not corresponding to an employee's abilities, working alone for extended periods, monotonous work, and other management, organisation, and working environment factors that may affect an employee's mental or physical health, including causing work stress”.

## Guidelines and other recommendations

There are additional guidelines and recommendations developed to assist workplace actors in addressing psychosocial hazards. One of the most important ones is the **Work Life Portal**, developed by the Estonian Labour Inspectorate. It serves as the Inspectorate's main information channel and provides employers with guidelines, for example, on the identification, assessment and management of psychosocial risks.

## References

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- Ministry of Social Affairs. (2021). *Rahvastiku tervise arengukava 2020–2030* [Population Health Development Plan 2020–2030]. Retrieved from <https://www.sm.ee/rahvastiku-tervise-arengukava-2020-2030>

### *Guidelines, codes of practice, recommendations, and others*

- The Labour Inspectorate of Estonia. (n.d.). *Tööelu portaal* [Work Life Portal]. Retrieved from <https://www.tooelu.ee/en>

# Finland

## Legal and political frameworks

The pieces of Finnish legislation that touch upon psychosocial factors include:

- The **Occupational Safety and Health Act** (Act 738/2002)
- The **Occupational Health Care Act** (1383/2001)
- The **Government Decree on the principles of good occupational health practice, the content of occupational health care and the educational qualifications required of professionals and experts** (Decree 708/2013).

The **OSH Act 738/2002** functions as the main legal framework for occupational safety and health. Its primary objective is to improve the working environment and working conditions in order to ensure and maintain the employees' ability to work. It also aims to prevent occupational accidents and diseases, as well as to eliminate other risks from work and the working environment that could affect the physical and mental health of employees.

According to the OSH Act Section 8, employers have a general duty to oversee the safety and health of their employees by taking the necessary measures. For this purpose, employers are required to consider the circumstances related to the work, working conditions and other aspects of the working environment as well as the employees' personal abilities. Employers are expected to design, select and implement the measures necessary for improving the working conditions following the principles of risk prevention as far as possible.

Section 10 of the OSH Act requires employers to systematically identify and assess hazards and risks. A legislative amendment in 2023 clarified that both physical and psychosocial workload factors must be considered as part of the risk assessment. The employer must take into account "workload factors related to the content of work, the organisation of work and the social interaction of the work community". If the employer lacks the required expertise to conduct the risk assessment, external expert services must be used.

The Act also includes a general provision that takes workload factors into account in work design. Section 13 emphasises the need to balance the demands of work with employees' physical and mental capacities already during the planning and dimensioning phase. When designing and planning work, the section states that employees' physical and mental abilities must be considered. This is to prevent or reduce risks or hazards to their safety and health that might arise from workload factors.

In addition to general obligations, the Act specifically addresses certain psychosocial risks, including the threat of violence (Section 27), working alone (Section 29), night work (Section 30), and work pauses (Section 31). The Act also includes reactive obligations. Employers have a duty to act when an individual is suffering from health-endangering work-related strain at work (Section 25) and when harassment occurs at work (Section 28).

**The Occupational Health Care Act (1383/2001)** states that employers shall organise occupational healthcare at their own expense. This is done to prevent and control health hazards and risks related to work and working conditions, and to protect and promote the safety, health and ability to work of the employees. The statutory occupational healthcare includes workplace investigations conducted by occupational healthcare professionals, work-related health examinations, supporting and maintaining work ability, and investigating illnesses and symptoms that are related to work (section 12 of the Act).

The principles, methods, and implementation of good occupational health practice are further outlined in the **Government Decree 708/2013**. It specifies in Articles 3 and 4 how occupational health care should be planned and delivered in cooperation with workplaces, including assessing the psychological and social strain of the work as part of workplace investigations. The workplace investigation also includes the resources involved in the work, the work environment and the workplace community, as well as their impact on health and work ability. Based on these assessments, occupational health care providers are expected to recommend measures to the employer to improve work conditions, the working environment, and methods, as well as to prevent health risks and hazards. The role of occupational health care services is thus to cooperate and support the employer in managing the safety, health and workability at the workplace and the employee level, including psychosocial risks.

In addition to these pieces of legislation, multiple policy frameworks touch upon psychosocial work environment issues, mental health, and OSH:

- **The Policy for the Work Environment and Wellbeing at Work until 2030** sets the strategy of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. It guides the ministry and its administrative branch in ensuring healthy and safe work at all workplaces, regardless of the form of work.
- **The National Mental Health Strategy and Programme for Suicide Prevention 2020-2030** recognises the importance of mental health in a changing world and presents a comprehensive approach to mental health in society and its different sectors and levels.
- **Healthy Work: Framework Plan for Occupational Safety and Health Divisions 2024-2027** establishes the strategic goals of the occupational safety and health divisions of regional state administrative agencies.

## Definitions

The Finnish legislation does not provide a specific definition for psychosocial risks, hazards or factors. However, the OSH Act 738/2002 refers to *psychosocial workload factors*, which, according to Section 10, point 4, are related to the content of work, how work is organised, and the social functioning of the work community.

## Guidelines and other recommendations

In Finland, there are multiple guideline webpages and toolkits available for the occupational safety representatives, occupational health professionals, and workplace actors. **The Occupational Safety and Health Administration** offers a wide range of guidelines to assist employers in meeting the minimum legal requirements. Additionally, they have also developed a psychosocial workload factors survey, which the authority uses to investigate employees' experiences with harmful workload factors for OHS enforcement purposes. The **Finnish Institute of Occupational Health**, the **Centre for Occupational Safety**, and most of the **labour market organisations** also provide relevant guidance and support for employers and OSH actors.

As a part of the Mental Health at Work Programme (2021-2022), the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health developed a **Mental Health Toolkit**, which aims to strengthen the capacity of workplaces and work communities to support mental health and to respond to the demands of the changing work life in terms of mental work ability. It features a collection of tools for use in work communities. The tools were developed in collaboration with workplaces, occupational healthcare providers, and other relevant players in the field of working life. The Mental Health at Work Programme was financed and coordinated by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, and it was part of the implementation of the National Mental Health Strategy.

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- Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. (2020). *National Mental Health Strategy and Programme for Suicide Prevention 2020-2030* (2020:15). Retrieved from <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/162234>
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### ***Guidelines, codes of practice, recommendations, and others***

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- Occupational Safety and Health Administration in Finland. (2022). *Psychosocial workload factors survey*. Retrieved from <https://tyosuojelu.fi/en/safety-and-health-in-workplace/indicators/psychosocial-workload-factors-survey>
- Finnish Institute of Occupational Health. (n.d.) *The Mental Health Toolkit*. Retrieved from <https://hyvatyo.ttl.fi/en/mental-health-toolkit/tools>

# Latvia

Three pieces of Latvian legislation touch upon psychosocial risks and OSH, including:

- The **Labour Protection Law**,
- The **Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 660, concerning the internal supervision of the work environment**, and
- The **Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 219, concerning the procedures for the performance of mandatory health examinations**.

The **Labour Protection Law** acts as Latvia's primary OSH legislation and establishes a comprehensive labour protection system, including risk assessments, internal supervisions and employee consultations. It also outlines the roles and obligations of employers and occupational health services.

As stated in the Labour Protection Law, employers have the main responsibility for labour protection. As a part of this responsibility, employers must, among other duties:

- Establish the working environment in such a way as to avoid working environment risks or to reduce the effects of unavoidable risks
- Prevent the working environment risks at source, and
- Adapt the work to the individual.

In addition, employers are obliged to evaluate the working environment risks and, in this process, take into account that risks to the safety and health of employees may be caused by “the effect of physical, chemical, psychological, biological, physiological and other working environment factors”.

**Regulation No. 660 “Procedures for the Performance of Internal Supervision of the Work Environment”** stipulates more detailed procedures for workplace risk assessment. This regulation outlines how to conduct internal supervision of the work environment, identify existing workplace environmental factors, and determine which of these poses or may pose risks to employees’ safety and health. Its Annex I provides additional details for identifying and assessing workplace environmental factors. These factors are classified into seven categories: physical, biomechanical, psychological and emotional, dust aerosols, chemical, biological, and traumatic risk factors. The specific psychological and emotional factors mentioned in the Annex include:

- Working hours
- Shortage of working time
- Monotonous work
- Inability to influence the working procedures
- Work in isolation
- Increased responsibility
- Strained psychological atmosphere at work

- Violence
- Other psychological factors

The **Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 219, Procedures for the Performance of Mandatory Health Examinations**, establishes procedures for conducting mandatory health examinations for employees whose health is affected by harmful working environment factors, as well as for those working under special conditions. The regulations specify the required list of specialists and the laboratory or functional tests for the periodic health checks. The harmful workplace environmental factors are classified into six categories, including psycho-emotional factors that cover:

- Night work
- Increased responsibility, including frequent decision-making that may significantly impact human life, health, or the quality of life of many people, as well as responsibility for substantial material assets
- Other high psycho-emotional stress at work, including psycho-emotional overload

For individuals exposed to psycho-emotional factors, the regulations require a health check-up with an occupational physician, neurologist, psychiatrist, and psychotherapist, as well as tests including an electrocardiogram (ECG) and a complete blood count (CBC).

Latvia also has three policy documents that, to some extent, mention mental health and psychosocial risks:

- The **Public Health Guidelines 2021-2027** mention mental health issues of employed persons are briefly as a subobjective, emphasising resilience and work-life balance. However, the guidelines lack further explanation and do not comprehensively address the issue.
- The **Plan for Improving the Organisation of Mental Health Care (2023-2025)** focuses on the availability of mental health resources in Latvia and examines the mental health characteristics of the different population groups. However, it does not specifically address mental health issues related to employed persons.
- The **Social Protection and Labour Market Policy Guidelines (2021-2027)** provide a detailed overview of social protection and security measures. While they cover various aspects of labour market policies, they do not explicitly mention mental health concerns for employees.

## Definitions

The Latvian regulatory framework does not provide an explicit definition for psychosocial risks. However, it provides examples of psycho-emotional factors that may pose a risk to employees' safety and health in

Regulations No. 660 and No. 219. In addition, Article 1 of the Labour Protection Law defines 22 different terms used in the legislation, including:

- “*Working environment risks*” as the likelihood of harm to employees’ safety or health in the workplace and the potential severity of such harm.
- “*Working environment*” as the physical, chemical, psychological, biological, physiological, and other workplace factors to which employees are exposed while performing their work.
- “*Special risks*” as workplace risks associated with increased psychological or physical strain or an elevated risk to employee safety and health that cannot be eliminated or sufficiently reduced through other occupational safety measures, except by limiting the duration of exposure.

## Guidelines and recommendations

In Latvia, some online resources exist that support employers and OSH professionals in meeting the regulatory requirements. For example, the **Handbook for Assessing the Quality of Risk Assessment and Risk Management Measures Related to Psychosocial Risks** serves as a manual for the State Labour Inspectorate’s inspectors when evaluating risk assessments and the implementation of risk management measures by employees and occupational health and safety specialists. It also serves as a useful informational tool for employers and occupational health and safety specialists.

The **National Preventive Action Plan** also provides a wide range of useful materials and tools on various OSH issues, including those related to psychosocial risks, which are posted online on the website Strādā Vesels.

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- The Republic of Latvia. (2001). *Labour Protection Law* [Darba aizsardzības likums]. Retrieved from <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/26020-labour-protection-law>
- Cabinet of Ministers of Latvia. (2007). *Procedures for the performance of internal supervision of the work environment* [Darba vides iekšējās uzraudzības veikšanas kārtība]. (Regulation No. 660). <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/164271-procedures-for-the-performance-of-internal-supervision-of-the-work-environment>
- Cabinet of Ministers of Latvia. (2009). *Procedures for the Performance of Mandatory Health Examinations* [Kārtība, kādā veicama obligātā veselības pārbaude]. (Regulation No. 219). <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/189070-procedures-for-the-performance-of-mandatory-health-examinations>

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- European Commission. (2018). *Rokasgrāmata riska novērtēšanas un riska pārvaldības pasākumu kvalitātes novērtēšanai saistībā ar psihosociālajiem riskiem* [Handbook for assessing the quality of risk assessment and risk management measures related to psychosocial risks]. [https://stradavesels.lv/Uploads/2020/01/21/Rokasgramata\\_psihosociala\\_riska\\_novertejums\\_LV.pdf](https://stradavesels.lv/Uploads/2020/01/21/Rokasgramata_psihosociala_riska_novertejums_LV.pdf)

# Lithuania

## Regulatory and policy framework

The Lithuanian legislative framework builds on a set of laws, provisions, guidelines, and regulations that address occupational safety and health. The main legal documents within Lithuania's occupational health and safety legislation include:

- **Labour Code** of the Republic of Lithuania, approved by Resolution No. XII-2603 (consolidated version from 1 January 2025)
- **Law on Occupational Safety and Health** of the Republic of Lithuania, approved by Resolution No. IX-1672 (consolidated version from 1 November 2024)
- **General Provisions for Occupational Risk Assessment**, approved by Order No. A1-457/V-691 (consolidated version from 1 August 2022)
- **Methodological Guidelines for the Investigation of Psychosocial Risk Factors**, approved by Order No. V-699/A1-241 (consolidated version from 1 May 2019)
- **Model Regulations for Occupational Safety and Health Services in Enterprises**, approved by Order No. A1-266/V-575 (consolidated version from 17 June 2016)

The first two legal documents were approved by the Seimas (Parliament) of the Republic of Lithuania. The remaining three documents were adopted and approved by both the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Security and Labour.

Article 30 of the **Labour Code** stipulates that the employer must create a working environment in which an employee or a group of employees does not suffer hostile, unethical, degrading, aggressive, offensive, or insulting acts that infringe upon their honour and dignity, physical or psychological integrity, or are intended to intimidate, humiliate, or render the employee(s) defenceless and powerless.

Article 3 of the **Law on Occupational Safety and Health** stipulates that every employee shall be granted working conditions that are safe and not harmful to health. However, this law does not specifically identify, define, or address psychosocial risk factors.

The **General Provisions for Occupational Risk Assessment** stipulate that risk assessments must be arranged by a person representing the employer or someone authorised by the employer to act on their behalf. Such assessment must be carried out with the participation of employees or their representatives, including employees' occupational safety and health representatives. The provisions cover chemical, physical, biological, ergonomic, and psychosocial risk assessments.

The **Methodological Guidelines for the Investigation of Psychosocial Risk Factors** specify that the following workplace psychosocial risk factors must be assessed:

- Working conditions (for example, night work, shift work, or work involving exposure to chemical, biological, ergonomic or physical risk factors)
- Job requirements (for example, workload, work pace, time allocated to perform tasks, deadlines, responsibility, and emotional demands)
- Work organisation (for example, working hours, job role, pay structure, job security, training, career development, working alone, work-life balance)
- Work content (for example, influence over the work processes and outcomes, task monotony, and the perceived meaningfulness of work)
- Relationships between employees, the employer, and/or third parties (for example, support from colleagues and supervisors, interpersonal conflicts, and physical and psychological violence in the workplace)

According to these guidelines, psychosocial risk factors must be assessed by a competent person who has received training and holds a certificate confirming their competencies in the following areas:

- Psychosocial risk factors, workplace stress, its impact on the health and well-being of employees, and work capacity
- Guidelines from international organisations on investigating and assessing psychosocial risk factors
- Legal requirements in Lithuania for investigating and assessing psychosocial risk factors.
- Principles and methodologies for investigating and assessing psychosocial risk factors.

Psychosocial risk factors, according to the guidelines, must be assessed using best practices and/or methodologies that are either research-based or recommended by international organisations, with relevant examples provided.

The **Model Regulations for Occupational Safety and Health Services in Enterprises** detail the role of occupational health services, occupational health professionals, and occupational safety and health (OSH) specialists. Employers appoint or contract these individuals and services to assist in organising and implementing occupational health and safety measures. One key function of OSH specialists is organising, performing and coordinating occupational risk assessments within the company. While psychosocial risk assessment isn't explicitly mentioned in these Model Regulations, it is covered by the other legal acts previously referred to.

In addition, the 2022-2030 Health Preservation and Development Programme, approved by Resolution No. 66 (consolidated version from 1 January 2023), which covers the strengthening of employees' mental health to some extent.

## Definitions

The **General Provisions for Occupational Risk Assessment** define “*risk factors*” in point 3.10 as “a chemical, physical, biological, ergonomic, or psychosocial factor that poses or may pose a risk to the safety and health of an employee”.

The same legal document defines “*psychosocial risk factors*” in point 3.9 as “factors that cause mental stress to an employee due to working conditions, work demands, work organisation, content of work, relationships between employees or relationships between the employer and the employee”.

## Guidelines and other recommendations

The Institute of Hygiene has conducted a study on the situation related to the occupational risks and their prevention among Lithuanian home care workers. Data was collected on the factors that may pose occupational risks – including psychosocial risks – to healthcare workers when they move away from their traditional work environment. Based on this, methodological material **Emerging Work-related Risk: Occupational Risk and its Prevention for Home Healthcare Workers** was prepared.

Studies conducted at the Institute of Hygiene have also analysed the psychosocial work environment characteristics and burnout in personal healthcare institutions during a period of change. Based on these, methodological recommendations **Guidelines for Reducing Professional Burnout Among Employees of Personal Healthcare Institutions** have been developed.

To assess the well-being of various groups in general education schools, the **Methodological Recommendations for the Assessment of the Professional Well-being of the School Community** were developed. They include the Lithuanian version of the **Well-Being at Your Work Index** questionnaire, adapted by the Institute of Hygiene specifically for Lithuanian general education schools.

The Institute of Hygiene has also conducted an empirical study to evaluate the suitability of the *UK Health and Safety Executive’s (HSE) Stress Management Standards and Indicator Tool* for Lithuanian companies. Consequently, the **HSE Stress Management Standards**, including the **HSE Work-related Stress Questionnaire**, have been adopted into Lithuanian. This free instrument is accessible to all companies for assessing and managing psychosocial risks in the workplace. The methodology is cited as an example of good practice in the *Methodological Guidelines for the Investigation of Psychosocial Risk Factors*.

Contributing to the promotion of social partnership, consultation, public education, and the dissemination of positive behaviour norms in the workplace, the **State Labour Inspectorate** under the Ministry of Social



Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania has prepared and publicly released the following **recommendations**:

- Methodological Recommendations for the Prevention of Psychological Violence at Work (2022),
- Methodological Recommendations for Developing a Violence and Harassment Prevention Policy (2022),
- Methodological Recommendations for the Prevention of Psychological Violence in the Work Environment and the Improvement of Psychosocial Working Conditions (2021),
- Employee Guide for the Improvement of Psychosocial Working Conditions (2021).

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### Regulations and legislation

- Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania (2016). *Lietuvos Respublikos darbo kodekso patvirtinimo, įsigaliojimo ir įgyvendinimo įstatymas* [Law on the Approval, Entry into Force, and Implementation of the Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania]. (Resolution No. XII–2603). Retrieved from: <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/10c6bfd07bd511e6a0f68fd135e6f40c/qwPUbwgxGZ>
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## Policies and strategies

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# Norway

## Legal and political frameworks

The Norwegian legal framework concerning the psychosocial work environment includes the Norwegian **Working Environment Act** (Sections 4-2, 4-3, Chapter 6 Section 6-2, Chapter 10, Chapter 3 Section 3-3) and the **Regulation on the Performance of Work** (Chapter 23A).

The **Working Environment Act** is the main legislation covering occupational health and safety and psychosocial risks. Its purpose, as determined in Section 1-1, is to “secure a working environment that provides a basis for a healthy and meaningful work situation, affords full safety from harmful physical and mental influences and always has a standard of welfare consistent with the level of technological and social development of society”. The Act considers the working environment to be fully satisfactory “when the factors in the working environment that may influence the employees’ physical and mental health and welfare are assessed separately and collectively” and when the standards of safety and health are “continuously developed and improved in accordance with the developments in society” (Section 4-1).

The Act establishes specific requirements regarding the work environment in Chapter 4, with Section 4-3 being dedicated to the psychosocial work environment. These requirements specify that work shall be arranged to preserve employees’ integrity and dignity, and efforts must be made to organise work in a manner that enables contact and communication with other employees of the undertaking. In addition, the section states that employees shall not be subjected to harassment or other misconduct, and that they should be protected from violence, threats and undesirable strain as a result of contact with other persons.

In addition, Section 4-3 of the Act sets requirements regarding work arrangement, participation and development, which impact the psychosocial work environment. These stipulate that the design of each employee’s working situation shall “enable professional and personal development”. In addition, emphasis should be placed on “giving employees the opportunity for self-determination, influence and professional responsibility”, and the employees should, as far as possible, be given “the opportunity for variation and awareness of the relationships between individual assignments”.

From 1 January 2026, the requirements for the psychosocial work environment in Section 4-3 will be further clarified. The amendments intend to make it easier for employers to understand what is required and how they can ensure a safe and healthy working environment for their employees. They will specify that the requirements for a fully satisfactory working environment also applies to the psychosocial domain: “Work shall be organised and carried out in such a way that the psychosocial working environment factors in the undertaking are fully satisfactory, taking into account the employees’ health, safety and welfare.”

In addition, the upcoming amendments also provide further examples of psychosocial working environment factors that employers must consider, including:

- Unclear or conflicting demands and expectations in the work
- Emotional demands and strain in work involving people
- Workload and time pressure that result in an imbalance between the work to be performed and the time available
- Support and assistance in the work.

Regulations in this area are under development.

Currently, the Chapter 10 of the Working Environment Act stipulates requirements for working hours, establishing that “working hours shall be arranged in such a way that employees are not exposed to adverse physical or mental strain” (Section 10-2). It also establishes requirements, for example, regarding rights for breaks, night, shift and overtime work, as well as daily and weekly off-duty time.

Chapter 6 establishes requirements for safety representatives. In Section 6-2, it specifies their duties regarding the psychosocial work environment, stating that “safety representatives shall particularly ensure that the employees’ psychosocial working environment is safeguarded”.

The requirements regarding occupational health services are covered in Chapter 3, Section 3-3. The role of occupational health services is to "assist the employer, the employees, the working environment committee and safety representatives in creating a safe working environment that promotes good occupational health". All the occupational health services must be approved by the Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority, and to gain approval, the services must be able to document expertise in the psychosocial work environment.

The Working Environment Act is supplemented by **Regulations concerning the performance of work, use of work equipment and related technical requirements**. Chapter 23A states that employers are required to perform risk assessments to identify any work situations that may entail violence or the threat of violence towards an employee. The risk assessment is expected to pay particular attention to, for example, the organisation and facilitation of the work, work performed alone, location and organisation of working hours, exposure to (threats of) violence, staffing, competence/expertise, design of work premises and technical solutions, and the effect of implemented and planned preventive measures. Based on the risk assessment, the employers are required to implement necessary measures based on the identified health and safety risks. In addition, employers should provide their employees with the necessary information about these risk factors, training and drills for the prevention and handling of violence and threat situations.

## Definitions

The Norwegian legislation does not include a specific definition for psychosocial hazards, risks, factors or work environment. However, the legislation defines specific harmful behaviours that can be placed under the umbrella of these terms and provides requirements related to employee integrity, dignity, contact, communication, harassment, violence, threats, and other misconduct.

Section 4-3 of the Working Environment Act defines:

- *Harassment* as "acts, omissions or statements that have the purpose or effect of being offensive, frightening, hostile, degrading or humiliating".
- *Sexual harassment* as "any form of unwanted sexual attention that has the purpose or effect of being offensive, frightening, hostile, degrading, humiliating or troublesome".

Further informal definitions of key terms are provided by the Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority:

- *Violence and threats* are "incidents where employees are physically or verbally attacked in situations related to their work, and which involve an overt or implied threat to their safety, health or well-being".
- *Threat* is a "verbal attack or action aimed at harming or intimidating a person".
- *Violence* is "any act intended to cause physical or psychological harm to a person. It also includes incidents where the person who harms another person is not aware of or considers the consequences of their action, for example, due to intoxication, mental/somatic illness, mental and emotional state or similar".

## Guidelines and other recommendations

In Norway, there are several online resources that provide information about the psychosocial work environment. The **Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority** offers guidance and guidelines on several psychosocial topics, such as the psychosocial work environment, stress, violence and threats, harassment, sexual harassment, and bullying. They also provide information on the work-related health outcomes, such as mental health, musculoskeletal diseases, how to carry out a risk assessment on the psychosocial work environment, and how to carry out a risk assessment on violence and threats.

The **National Institute of Occupational Health in Norway (STAMI)** is a professionally independent research institute under the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion. STAMI combines research, surveillance, advisory work and education to the benefit of Norwegian working life.

The **Working Environment Programme in Norway**, established by the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, the Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority, STAMI, the Petroleum Safety Authority, and the

Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration, supports the goals of the *Inclusive Working Life (IA) Agreement* in reducing the number of sick leave days and early withdrawals from work. The programme focuses on developing and sharing knowledge, communication, and guidance related to preventive workplace measures. A key initiative resulting from this programme is the creation of the **Norwegian Work Environment Portal**, a digital resource providing knowledge-based tools, facts and figures on Norwegian working life as well as advice on preventive working environment measures. The programme has created three main toolkits, the first two being **A Great Day at Work** (En bra dag på jobb) and **NOA+**, which are both created by STAMI. The third one is the **Work Environment Helper** (Arbeidsmiljøhjelpen), developed by the Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority.

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# Poland

## Legal and political frameworks

The primary legal instruments governing occupational safety and health in Poland include:

- The **Labour Code**, which acts as the foundational piece of legislation stipulating the obligations and rights of both employers and employees in Poland.
- The **Regulation of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy on General Health and Safety at Work**, which sets out general workplace health and safety regulations.
- The **Regulation of the Council of Ministers on the Occupational Safety and Hygiene Services**, which provides details about the onsite safety and hygiene service that the Code mandates.
- And the **Act on Occupational Medicine Services**, which stipulates the role of the occupational health services.

The **Labour Code** obliges employers to tackle various work-related (occupational) risks. Employers are specifically obliged to assess and document work-related risks and apply the necessary preventive measures to reduce these risks. While psychosocial risks are not addressed separately in the Code, some examples, such as mobbing, discrimination in employment, and harassment, are mentioned. However, these only represent a fraction of all the potential psychosocial risks.

The **Regulation on General Health and Safety Regulations at Work**, issued based on the Labour Code, establishes generally applicable health and safety requirements for workplaces. They are applicable to:

1. Building structures and work premises;
2. Work processes;
3. And hygienic and sanitary premises and facilities.

However, this regulation is focused on the material working environment, defined by physical, chemical and biological factors, in which the work processes take place.

While the Labour Code mandates employers to create an on-site safety and hygiene service which serves as a counselling and supervisory body, the **Regulation of the Council of Ministers on the Occupational Safety and Hygiene Services**, issued based on the Labour Code, stipulates these services' scope of action. This scope is provided in the Regulation as a list of 22 activities. However, none of them specifically refer to psychosocial risks, as all work-related risks are grouped as one.

The **Act on Occupational Medicine Services** stipulates that the role of the occupational health services is to protect the health of the employees from the influence of adverse conditions of the working environment and work methods. While the Act assigns occupational medicine professionals, such as

The Polish part of the project is also co-financed by the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education under the programme entitled International Co-financed Projects.



doctors, nurses and psychologists, a broad role in information gathering and reducing work-related risks, it does not specifically address psychosocial risks.

Beyond legislation specifically addressing occupational safety and health, two key policy frameworks, the **National Health Programme for 2021-2025** and the **National Mental Health Protection Programme for 2023-2030**, promote the health of the Polish population by defining goals and tasks for strengthening public and mental health. However, these programmes do not include aims or tasks to enhance the role of employers, managers, or occupational health actors in managing psychosocial risks in workplaces and thus in strengthening the mental health of the working population.

## Definitions

Currently, the existing legal frameworks do not explicitly define work-related psychosocial hazards, risks, or factors. Additionally, there is no specific government decree focused exclusively on psychosocial risks in the workplace. The Labour Code includes examples such as mobbing, discrimination, and harassment, but these only represent a subset of the broader range of potential psychosocial risks.

## Guidelines and other recommendations

Although some aspects concerning psychosocial risks are covered by the Polish legislation, a comprehensive approach to the holistic management of psychosocial risks and support for workers' mental health is still lacking. This gap is, however, being filled by various commercial and non-commercial initiatives which are aimed at supporting workplaces in both processes. Currently, alongside activities aimed at the management of work-related psychosocial risks, more and more initiatives focus on the development of wellbeing strategies supporting the mental health of the employees.

These initiatives offer various forms of support, many available for free, including, for example:

- **Nationwide education and information campaigns**, such as *Closer Together*, *Well.hr* on relationships at work, and *Anti-stigma*.
- **Trainings and webinars**, such as the module “mental health and well-being” of the e-learning programme *Promoting the well-being, health and professional activity of employees* by Nofer Institute of Occupational Medicine; the training on counteracting stress and other psychosocial risks in the workplace organised as a part of the National Labour Inspectorate’s programme *Counteracting the negative effects of stress in the workplace*; the webinar *ISO 45003 without secrets* by a private service provider makowapracuje.pl; and the webinar *Determinants of mental health and its strengthening in the workplace* by Central Institute for Labour Protection – National Research Institute.

- **Manuals and guidelines**, such as *Prevention of psychosocial risks in the workplace – from theory to practice* and *Psychosocial risks at work, their consequences and ways of coping: judgemental guidance* by the Nofer Institute of Occupational Medicine; various guides by the National Labour Inspectorate covering topics relevant to psychosocial risks, their assessments and stress-related stress; as well as *A comprehensive prevention programme for employees' mental health problems* and other publications on stress and psychosocial risks developed by the Central Institute for Labour Protection – National Research Institute.
- **Consultations**, offered for example by the National Labour Inspectorate to analyse work-related stressors as a part of their programme *Counteracting the negative effects of stress in the workplace*, and by the Counselling Centre at the Nofer Institute of Occupational Medicine to support for the assessment of psychosocial working conditions and their impact on health, well-being, job satisfaction and work performance.
- **Questionnaires and tools**, such as the *Questionnaire for the assessment of subjective working conditions* developed by the Central Institute for Labour Protection – National Research Institute, and the *Psychosocial risk scale* co-developed by the Nofer Institute of Occupational Medicine and the National Committee of the independent self-governing trade union Solidarność.

In addition, there are various paid forms of support available, developed both by public and private institutions. These include, for example:

- Counselling services available for managers and employers.
- Internet platforms offering employers various ways to support their employees' mental health, such as workshops, training, psychological/psychiatric counselling and apps.
- Psychosocial and psychiatric support offered by medical service providers in the form of medical packages purchased by employers for their personnel.

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## Sweden

Sweden is striving towards a salutogenic perspective on the work environment; a coherent whole, a continuum of health and against disease, building on individual's and the organisation's resources for health, implying the interconnected development of individuals and organisations. The main legal framework in use is the **Work Environment Act**, which is supplemented by provisions. The focus is on preventing occupational illness and accidents, but it also stipulates that the work environment must be satisfactory and the working conditions good. Ten years ago, the **Provisions on Organisational and Social Work Environment** specific to psychosocial factors were issued.

The purpose of the **Work Environment Act** is to prevent occupational illnesses and accidents and to ensure a good work environment. It stipulates that the work environment must be satisfactory and that working conditions must be adapted to people's diverse physical and mental capabilities. In this process, the employees must be given the opportunity to participate in the design of their work situation and in the processes of change and development affecting their work. Overall, the Act mandates that technologies, work organisation, and work content must be designed to ensure employees are not subjected to physical or mental stress that could lead to illness or accidents, considering factors like remuneration and working time organisation. The Act also promotes avoiding or limiting closely controlled or restricted work and striving for work that offers variety, social contact, cooperation, coherence, opportunities for personal and professional development, independence, and professional responsibility.

The Work Environment Act requires employers to ensure that occupational health services appropriate to the relevant working conditions are readily accessible. According to Section 3 of the Act, these services function as an independent expert resource intended to support employers in promoting workplace health. Their primary responsibility is to identify, prevent, and eliminate health risks in the work environment. They must possess the competence to assess the interrelations between work conditions, organisational structures, productivity, and employee health.

The **Provisions on Organisational and Social Work Environment** complements the Work Environment Act. The purpose of these provisions is specifically to promote a good work environment and prevent risks of ill health due to organisational and social conditions. The employer has the overall responsibility to ensure that the provisions are met in workplaces, stipulating their responsibilities regarding:

- Systematic work environment management
- Managers' and supervisors' knowledge and skills to respond to unhealthy workloads and victimisation
- Setting up objectives for the organisational and social work environment
- Management of workload and working hours
- Elimination of victimisation

Furthermore, Sweden has launched the **National Strategy on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention for 2025-2034**. The strategy aims to promote good mental well-being and the prevention of mental illnesses and suicide by improving the living conditions of people living with various psychiatric conditions. This strategy includes a subgoal focused on creating an inclusive and sustainable working life that promotes good mental health, aiming to increase participation and knowledge about support in case of mental illness and/or disability. Another of the strategy's subgoals focuses on strengthening knowledge development, connecting research, policy and practice. It also covers the development of digital toolkits, and international cooperation.

The government's Work Environment Strategy for 2021-2025 will be followed by an updated **Work Environment Strategy for 2026-2030** under the sub-title "A good working environment for a changed working life". The proposal for a new strategy builds primarily on the government's strategy for 2021-2025 by starting fundamentally from the same vision and objectives: a sustainable working life, a healthy working life, a safe working life, and an innovative working life.

## Definitions

In Sweden, *organisational and social work environment* is the preferred term, and social work environment is defined as "the terms and conditions for the work that include social interaction, collaboration and social support from managers and colleagues".

**The Provisions on Organisational and Social Work Environment** also define the following terms:

Term	Definition
Demands of the job	Those aspects of the job that require repeated effort. Demands may include quantity of work, degree of difficulty, time limit, physical and social conditions. Demands may be cognitive, emotional or physical in nature.
Victimisation	Actions in an abusive manner against one or more employees that may lead to ill health or to exclusion from the workplace community.
Unhealthy workload	When job requirements exceed resources on a more than temporary basis. This imbalance becomes unhealthy if it is prolonged and if opportunities for recovery are inadequate.
Organisational environment	Terms and conditions for the work that include: 1. Management and governance



	2. Communication 3. Participation, latitude to act 4. Assignment of tasks 5. Requirements, resources, and responsibilities.
Resources for the job	Aspects of the job that help to: 1. Achieve the objectives of the job, or 2. Manage the demands of the job  Resources may be: working methods and equipment, skills and staffing, reasonable and clear goals, feedback on work performed, opportunities for control at work, social support from managers and colleagues, and opportunities for recovery.

## Guidelines and other recommendations

In addition to detailing the employers' responsibilities, the **Provisions on Organisational and Social Work Environment** provide general, legally non-binding recommendations for employers that can help ensure compliance with the regulations, developed by the Swedish Work Environment Authority.

There is a strong research base in Sweden that supports policy development. The Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise, for example, has prepared a report "*Psychosocial Work Environment: Health and Well-being – Two Systematic Reviews*" (Report 2020:2) that investigates the associations between psychosocial work environment factors and different health-related outcomes for employees and for the organisation. This review also included an assessment of the effects of workplace interventions intended to influence the psychosocial work environment and health-related outcomes for employees and for the organisation.

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### Regulations and legislation

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### **Policies and strategies**

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### **Guidelines, codes of practice, recommendations, and others**

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