

Time to move: EU-OSHA launches campaign to address Europe's most common work-related health problem



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Despite legislation and initiatives aimed at preventing them, around three in every five workers suffer from MSDs and they remain the most common work-related health complaint in Europe, affecting workers in all jobs and sectors. Repetitive movements, prolonged sitting and heavy lifting are just some of the risk factors that contribute to these conditions, which can affect the muscles, joints, tendons or bones. The negative impact that they have on workers' quality of life is clear.

At a press conference in Brussels to mark the official launch of the campaign, Nicolas Schmit, European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, highlighted the urgent need to take action:

The Commission wholeheartedly supports the campaign launched today by the European Agency for Safety & Health at Work (EU-OSHA) to tackle the issue of work-related musculoskeletal disorders. Ensuring the best possible work environment is critical for the health and wellbeing of the workforce, and therefore a duty of all employers. Many of us – 3 in 5 – have experienced backache, stiff muscles or a sore neck as a result of our work. This can severely affect our everyday lives, our productivity, and it can be detrimental to our physical and mental health. With the pandemic affecting how we live and work, we can all benefit from the guidance and resources published today.

The success of the campaign depends on the dedication of EU-OSHA's extensive pan-European networks — national focal

points, official campaign partners, media partners and the Enterprise Europe Network — who will promote the campaign and its messages across Europe, particularly among micro, small and medium-sized enterprises.

The support of social partners and European institutions is also invaluable, with the German Presidency of the Council of the EU recognising the need to act on MSDs and pledging its commitment. Hubertus Heil, German Federal Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, commented:

MSDs also incur significant costs for employers and national health systems. Christa Sedlatschek, EU-OSHA Executive Director, emphasised that:

In addition to the human suffering caused, workers miss out on so many fulfilling aspects of their private and working lives. Those workers with MSDs are absent from work more often and for longer periods, are likely to be less productive while at work and often take early retirement. This is bad news for businesses and a huge burden on national economies. This campaign will highlight that early intervention and rehabilitation are vital and entirely possible. By working together and adopting good practice now, we can prevent MSDs in future generations of workers.

Measures to prevent and manage MSDs are often simple and inexpensive, and this is one of the key messages of the Healthy Workplaces Lighten the Load campaign. The campaign will reach out to workers and employers across all sectors, with a particular focus on high-risk sectors, such as health care and early education.

Supporting workers with chronic MSDs to remain in work will also be a key focus, along with the need to consider psychosocial risks and worker diversity, and to adopt collaborative approaches to MSD management — involving workers, employers, healthcare providers and other stakeholders.

Special attention will be given to emerging risks, arising from, for instance, digitalisation and new technologies and ways of organising work. This is particularly timely in light of COVID-

19, which has forced many workers out of offices and into working from home. MSDs and home-based teleworking is a priority area for the campaign.

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