

Position Paper for the European Network for Workplace Health Promotion (ENWHP)

This paper describes the present and future potential of the European Network for Workplace Health Promotion (ENWHP) in the light of the Amsterdam Treaty, ratified in May 1999. This includes the utilisation, structure and operational capability of the ENWHP to support relevant policy development in Europe.

The European Network for Workplace Health Promotion (ENWHP) aims to develop strategies and policies in order to improve the health of people at work and to increase employability of those in and out of work in Europe. It co-ordinates the exchange of experiences and information on work and health within and between all fifteen EU member states and the three EEA countries. In view of future challenges and with the aim of expanding healthy workplaces and the employability of those in and out of work, the ENWHP regards the following as a basis for future activities:

- ***Developing and formulating policies and strategies for work, health and employability;***
- ***Defining problems relevant to health in the work environment by continuous monitoring of health determinants;***
- ***Initiating co-operation and communication between all different stakeholders;***
- ***Supporting Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) with adequate policies and strategies.***

1. Introduction

This paper describes the present and future potential of the European Network for Workplace Health Promotion (ENWHP) in the light of the new European Public Health Framework. This includes the utilisation, structure and operational capability of the ENWHP to support relevant policy development in Europe.

The *Treaty of Amsterdam* enlarged the scope, purpose and legal possibilities for Public Health Policy at EU level, very much along the lines asked for by the European Parliament. The new Article (Article 152), stipulates explicitly that „health

protection requirements shall form a constituent part of the Communities' other policies".

The Commission recently submitted a proposal for a public health policy to the Council and European Parliament suggesting a strategy and package of measures aimed at injecting greater coherence into Community policy.

The Commission has proposed three themes/policy strands:

- *Improving information for the development of public health*
- *Reacting rapidly to threats to health*
- *Tackling health determinants through health promotion and disease prevention.*

The ENWHP has provided an effective mechanism to ensure professional input into the implementation of the current public health programme. Pursuant to its own mission, the ENWHP should in future primarily be used to develop policy recommendations and strategies on health and the workplace. In this way the ENWHP will ensure that European initiatives will link intelligently with those in Member States.

2. The challenge

At the moment Europe is undergoing profound structural change which is reflected in the technological and economical developments in the labour market and in the entire social structure. New forms of work are increasing, for example, outworking, contract work, tele-working, long-term low paid work and fictitious self-employment. This is visible at the company level via changes in structure and organisation such as: decentralisation of production and customer service; outsourcing of company operations; virtual enterprises; external workshops; the establishment of small enterprises. The change is also evident in new framework conditions for companies such as: globalisation; single customers with individual product, delivery and quality requirements; rapid technological developments; new organisational structures; increased competition. Hierarchical structures are increasingly being replaced by a more flexible organisation; for example, an organisation which is based on teamwork, projects and processes and orientated towards the market and customers.

The aim is towards creating an organisational structure which can cope with the permanent pressure caused by the need for organisational flexibility.

Organisations are nowadays not only valued on the basis of their products or machines but primarily on the knowledge creating capacity of their workforce. In other words, the people who work for them, how they work and what work means to them. Maintaining and effectively managing human resources in the long term, which includes the health of employees, will be a crucial economic factor for Europe. 29% of workers in Europe consider that their work affects their health. The work-related health problems mentioned most frequently are musculo-skeletal complaints (30% of workers claim to suffer backache and 17% muscular pains in their arms or legs) and stress (28% of employees).

Europe's future social and economic success increasingly depends on highly qualified, motivated and healthy employees. Policies and strategies on health in the workplace will provide much needed answers for the changing circumstances in many organisations.

Millions of people in Europe are out of work and need to be integrated or re-integrated into work. In Europe, nearly 25% of the unemployed have health complaints/ill-health which reduces their employability dramatically. Being unemployed also results in an increase in mental and psychological problems. In order to increase employability people need to be supported by adequate health promotion measures to make them:

- fit for work
- fit for the company
- fit for coping with the current employment situation
- strengthen personal skills
- encourage personal development

The actors/key players in Workplace Health Promotion (WHP) will set up partnerships with all stakeholders and develop policies to deal with these issues. There is a need for intelligent policies which are coherent and effective throughout Europe .

3. Structure and Success of the European Network for Workplace Health Promotion

The ENWHP comprises network members in the fifteen member states and the three EEA countries. With its mission: healthy people in healthy organisations, all members and the different partners (European Commission, WHO, ILO, European Foundation in Dublin, European Agency for Safety and Health at Work in Bilbao) meet twice a year to develop common strategies to improve health in the work environment and employability. In developing policies and strategies, the national approaches are taken into account by a national network which is continuously monitored by the member of the network for his/her territory.

During the last few years, the ENWHP has developed successful and sustainable policies which influence and improve health in the workplace. These policies are:

- the development of success factors for workplace health promotion
- quality assurance of good practice
- the Luxembourg Declaration which, for the first time, defines a Europe wide commonly agreed concept for workplace health promotion. As established in the Luxembourg Declaration WHP is based on:
 - *participation of all staff*
 - *integration of health in all areas of organisations, including management*
 - *implementation of comprehensive strategies (combining individual directed and environment directed measures)*
 - *effective project management*
- the Cardiff Memorandum for providing successful practice in SMEs in which the Network proposes the following initiatives to promote WHP in SMEs:
 - *To increase awareness of the current priorities, health concerns and health actions undertaken by SMEs.*
 - *To identify and disseminate good practice in SMEs.*
 - *To promote the benefits of WHP in SMEs to all stakeholders.*
 - *To build alliances and partnerships with the small business sector and key representative organisations.*
 - *To support the development of appropriate WHP models and methods for increasing health and well-being in SMEs.*

4. Future perspectives

At a conceptual level WHP supports employability by encouraging the promotion of employee health to enable workers to fulfil an economically productive role for the duration of their working lives. It supports adaptability by enabling health audits of organisational change¹.

At a practical level, the ENWHP, with its' diverse membership (namely: occupational health, health promotion, policy makers and organisational development) can develop policy recommendations to improve and assist companies in creating healthier workplaces and healthier employees. The Network can be expanded to include other relevant stakeholders.

4.1 Future policy areas

The following strategies will be developed by this network:

- *WHP as behavioural prevention strategy in the work environment*
- *WHP as an essential component of a wide and modernised Occupational Health System (OHS)*
- *WHP as a strategy to influence health determinants in the work environment*
- *WHP as a strategy to reduce absenteeism*
- *WHP as an organisational development strategy*
- *WHP as a human resource management strategy to increase employability.*

4.2 Future role of the ENWHP

The European Network forms a professional and scientific platform for the development of coherent policies in the work environment relating to health and employability. It has established a solid infrastructure in all fifteen member states and

¹ The concepts of employability and adaptability are two of the four "pillars of action" identified in the Luxembourg Jobs Summit (November 1997) and described in the first employment policy guidelines of 1998.

in the three EEA countries and is therefore capable of identifying models of good practice and developing relevant strategies Europe wide. According to the extent to which they choose to participate, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe will be involved in network activities. The network will contribute to all aspects related to policies on work and health from a professional and scientific point of view and will assist policy makers at company, local, regional, national and supranational level to create healthier work environments.