

# **Towards a new EU initiative on ergonomics and WRMSDs**

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# My Presentation

- **Overview of the problem**
- **Content of the proposal**
- **Timeline for finalisation**

# What is the problem?

## The baseline scenario

### ■ Ergonomic-related risks:

– one of the major OSH problems in Europe

- responsible for work-related musculoskeletal disorders (WRMSDs) and display screen vision conditions (DSVCs);
- affect both women and men and all sectors of activity across the European Union

– a major cost burden for industry and society

# What is the problem?

## The baseline scenario

- **WRMSDs and DSVCs represent today more than 60% of all work-related health problems**
- **Account for 60% of all sickness absences in the EU and also for about 60% of all cases of permanent incapacity to work**
- **At least 11m workers are affected, i.e. 5% of the total EU working population**

# What is the problem?

## The baseline scenario

- **Total cost of WRMSDs and DSVCs across the EU**
  - can be estimated at over EUR 163bn on a two year time scale
    - main cost drivers are productivity losses incurred by employers (EUR 48bn)
    - and health-related quality of life losses incurred by workers (EUR 99bn)

# What is the problem?

## The baseline scenario

### ■ Impact of costs by stakeholders

- **Workers** the most affected: EUR 105.4bn (64.7% of total costs)
- **Employers** incur a total cost of EUR 53.9bn (33.1%)
- **Public authorities** contribute by EUR 3.6bn (2.2%)

# What is the problem?

## The baseline scenario

- Many initiatives have been taken both at EU and national levels, since the 1980s, to tackle ergonomic-related problems:
  - EU Directives 90/269, 90/270 and 2002/44
  - EU-OSHA, SLIC Campaigns
  - Several initiatives at national level

# What is the problem?

## The baseline scenario

- Nevertheless, information provided by Member States points towards an increasing trend in prevalence of WRMSDs in most Member States.
- According to the 2009 Scoreboard of the Community Strategy on Safety and Health at Work:
  - the only Member States reporting decreasing rates of WRMSDs are **Sweden** (both for 3- and 10-year trend) **Germany** (only for 10-year trend; 3-year trend is stable), **UK** (only for 10-year trend; no data for 3-year trend), **Finland** and **Spain** (both with downward 3-yr trend but upward 10-year trend). Austria and the Netherlands show stable rates both for 3- and 10-year trend. Only 5 MS show decreasing trends. 2 show stable rates. **The rest of Member States show consistently increasing trends**
- A similar variation in trends across the EU is also likely for screen vision problem as a result of the increasing use of computers in the workplace.



# How would the problem evolve, all things being equal?

## ■ Factors to be considered:

- demographic change
- changes in the sectorial composition of European economies, which may involve a
- different prevalence in exposure to risks
- restricted focus of existing legislation

# The Commission's Proposal

- **New individual Directive** within the meaning of Article 13(1) of the FW Directive 89/391
  - Would repeal and incorporate the existing Directives 90/269/EEC ("manual handling of loads") and 90/270/EEC ("DSE") while extending the scope of the EU legislation to include all major risk factors arising from poor ergonomic conditions at the work place and to cover all work situations

# The Commission's Proposal

- **Current exemptions in the DSE Directive would be cancelled and relevant provisions would be updated to match changes in the use of DSE at work in the last 20 years**
- **Approach would be "horizontal" and "goal-setting"**
- **Annex(es) would include a list of risk factors to be considered in conducting the risk assessment (biomechanical, risks specifically related to the use of DSE, risks related to the characteristics of the working environment, work equipment, workstation layout, and objects handled)**
- **No psychosocial risk factors included**

# Concerns for microenterprises and SMEs

- **Two-stage zoning approach**
  - Employers from microenterprises and SMEs would first be requested to conduct a simple observation-based analysis of the workplace supported, where appropriate, by basic screening tools such as check lists, to identify the work tasks where exposure to one or more risk factors is significant enough for work-related MSDs or DSVCs to occur.
  - Only work tasks considered problematic on the basis of this preliminary analysis would then be submitted to a complete risk assessment.

# Advantages of the two-stage zoning approach

- **A preliminary simplified form of risk assessment, which would entail:**
  - **the possibility to rely on in-house services for the preliminary simple observation-based analysis of the workplace; and**
  - **given the nature of the tasks, the frequency of exposure to risk factors and the less structured organisation of work in many micro and small enterprises, the possibility to avoid an extended risk assessment and all major costs related to the use for that (and for the possible implementation of necessary ergonomic preventive measures) of external technical expertise.**

# Advantages of the two-stage zoning approach

- Estimates of compliance costs per each enterprise size vary dramatically with regard to the use of in-house services or external consultants for risk assessment and risk management, so anything that makes it easier for small enterprises to comply in-house brings the expected cost towards the lower bound of the cost estimate.
- So, interviews in the engineering sector in the UK estimate the costs of familiarisation, assessment, and workplace changes resulting from introducing a new Directive to be between €120 and €1,600 for a small enterprise. The difference between lower and upper end of the range results from the use of in-house services or external consultants for the implementation of compliance activities. Considering that only 20% of smaller UK companies use external OHS consultants, the above cost may represent just about 0.8% of turnover for most of small enterprises in the UK.

# **Main advantages of the proposed Directive**

- **The new Directive would:**
  - a) extend the scope of European legislation**
  - b) simplify the process of transposition, implementation and enforcement of the new provisions**
  - c) reduce the number of reference texts**
  - d) introduce mitigating measures for microenterprises and SMEs**
  - e) be supported by non-regulatory initiatives**

# Timeline for the Commission's proposal

- IA Report discussed in March by the IA.
- Re-submission requested. Revised version submitted possibly in July.
- Adoption of the proposal by the College may take place in the last quarter 2012



**Ladies and Gentlemen**

**Thank you for your attention**