

POLICIES FOR  
THE WORK ENVIRONMENT  
AND WELL-BEING  
AT WORK UNTIL 2020

Policies for the work environment and well-being at work until 2020

Publications of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2011:14

ISBN 978-952-00-3174-9 (pb)

ISBN 978-952-00-3175-6 (PDF)

ISSN-L 1236-2050

ISSN 1236-2050 (print)

ISSN 1797-9854 (online)

URN:ISBN:978-952-00-3175-6

<http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-00-3175-6>

[www.stm.fi/en/publications](http://www.stm.fi/en/publications)

Publisher: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health

Layout and printed by: Juvenes Print - Tampere University Print 2011

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# I. BACKGROUND

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has in January 2011 adopted a strategy for social and health policy titled Socially Sustainable Finland 2020. The policies presented in this document specify the ministerial strategy. In the policies, special attention is paid to those areas of occupational safety and health that deal with the work environment and well-being at work.

This document incorporates the national policy referred to in the Convention of the International Labour Organization ILO, the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health (Convention no. 187 from 2006, which Finland has ratified in June 2008).

The Council of the European Union has in its resolution on the community strategy on health and safety at work emphasised drawing up and implementing national strategies. The strategy of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health as well as the policies for the work environment and well-being at work form the basis for defining Finland's position on the new strategy of the Commission.

Chapter 2 presents a vision of the work environment and well-being at work and chapter 3 sets key objectives for desired effects. Chapter 4 lists actions by which the vision and objectives are turned into reality. These policies for the work environment and well-being at work direct the development of working life and the guidance provided for the enforcement of occupational safety and health legislation.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health invites all partners that affect the working life to a goal-directed and successful cooperation for achieving the objectives set out in this document.

## 2. VISION OF THE WORK ENVIRONMENT AND WELL-BEING AT WORK

**Health, safety and well-being are important common values, which are put into practice in every workplace and for every employee.**

The activities of a workplace are guided by a common idea of good work and a good workplace. Good work means a fair treatment of employees, adoption of common values as well as mutual trust, genuine cooperation and equality in the workplace. A good workplace is productive and profitable. From the perspective of the work environment, a good workplace is a healthy, safe and pleasant place. Good management and leadership, meaningful and interesting tasks and a successful reconciliation of work and private life are also characteristics of a good workplace.

### 3. TARGET STATE

The policy for well-being at work also aims to encourage employees to continue in their work longer than today. This means improving employees' abilities, will and opportunities to work. Work must be attractive and it must promote employees' health, work ability and functional capacity. Good and healthy work environments support sustainable development and employees' well-being and improve the productivity of enterprises and of society.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has set a goal to extend employees' lifelong time at work by three years until the year 2020.

Several actions are needed to reach this goal. The following objectives are set from the health and safety perspective.

Target state in 2020, the figures show the difference as compared to the year 2010:

- The number of occupational diseases decreases by 10%
- The frequency of workplace accidents is reduced by 25%
- Work-related harmful strain is reduced:
  - Perceived physical strain is reduced by 20%
  - Perceived psychic strain is reduced by 20%.

### 4. ACTIONS

Creating good work environments and well-being presupposes that people in the workplaces have adequate and proper knowledge, will and competence needed for reaching the goals. Improving well-being at work ultimately depends on the actions taken in the workplace. The first step in fulfilling the vision and reaching the objectives is that the workplaces meet the minimum requirements of legislation and get the basic conditions in order. The regional occupational safety and health administration is responsible for supervising that employers fulfil their statutory obligations.

#### 4.1 Leadership, the corner stone of well-being at work

Leadership affects the person's ability and will to work. Challenges for leadership are posed by the many changes in the work environment and changing ways of working but also by the continuously specialising work

force and training needed by employees. Leadership has an important role in the simultaneous development of well-being at work, the quality of working life and the productivity of work.

Leadership is particularly important to mental well-being. Traditional organisation structures are continually changing. For example, adapting work and working conditions to the qualifications of immigrants and persons with limited work ability brings special challenges to leadership.

Employers ensure that employees are treated equally and promote the good relationships between management and employees. Also, employees take the responsibility for their health and the development of working conditions. Social interaction skills at work are very important. Partnership is a key element in developing working conditions.

*The quality of leadership in enterprises and other organisations will be improved together with interest groups and by influencing training and instruction. The conditions mentioned in the vision of these policies – health, safety and well-being – generally belong to a good leadership. Leadership will be developed with the object of creating a better safety climate. Improved leadership can be achieved mainly by cooperation and communication.*

## 4.2 Occupational health care, an efficient partner

Maintaining employees' work ability is a central challenge for occupational health care cooperation. Responsibility for ensuring a healthy workplace and for the conditions affecting work ability rests with the employer. The occupational health care system supports the prevention of health hazards, illhealth and accidents at the workplace. The expertise of occupational health care professionals also helps promote the health and safety of the work and the work environment and maintaining employees' health and work ability. Workplace surveys carried out by occupational health care professionals are important and ought to be utilized. The occupational health care system supports workplaces in their risk assessments and in improving workplace well-being. Occupational health care services are provided by law. The provision of the services is supervised and their availability is promoted.

Monitoring sickness absence rates and supporting persons returning to work after illness are essential parts of personnel planning and personnel management. A variety of opportunities to participate in working life are provided for those whose work ability and functional capacity temporarily or permanently are reduced, by strengthening their facilities for working life and by increasing flexibility at workplaces. Instead of the person's incapacity for work, attention is paid to supporting the remaining work ability.

*The preventive role of occupational health care will be strengthened. The impact of occupational health care will be appraised on the basis of occupational health care reports and by monitoring sickness absence rates, occupational accidents*

*and occupational diseases. To promote and support employees' work ability, models of early support will be put into practice at workplaces. Cooperation between the line management and experts for promoting health and work ability will be improved. Cooperation includes mutual awareness and common forms of action (e.g. workplace surveys, risk assessment expertise and early support to employees and management) as part of improving health and safety. Successful cooperation with occupational health care requires a smooth flow of information and awareness of the state of affairs.*

### 4.3 Knowledge, will and competence through cooperation

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is acting with and through other social institutions and influential actors when directing the policy for well-being at work. Labour market organisations play an important role as disseminators of information and creators of will. The Centre for Occupational Safety takes care of improving occupational safety and health knowledge and competence in workplaces. The Finnish Institute of Occupational Health and other research institutes produce and disseminate new information and enhance knowledge and competence in health and safety matters. Vocational institutions and universities ensure that working life skills are included in education.

The regional occupational safety and health authorities enforce compliance with the relevant legislation in workplaces using diverse methods. In this enforcement, impact-oriented objectives are emphasised. The competence of authorities meets the clients' needs and expectations. Occupational safety and health authorities transmit knowledge and give support to workplaces.

Good working conditions promote the productivity and health of work and are a common cause for all. This creates a concept for improving well-being at work. In terms of this concept all actors recognise their roles and work for reaching the goals commonly agreed. Close network cooperation and a clear division of work help enhance knowledge and competence in the field of work environment and well-being at work at all levels. The cooperation carried out within the European Union is increasingly important.

*A form of network cooperation for the work environment and well-being at work will be created for the different parties and actors, who all recognize their roles and tasks in the network. This occupational safety and health network operates in a result-oriented and efficient way for the work environment and well-being at work. It will be ascertained that the cooperation is functional both on the national and regional level and in workplaces as well.*

## 4.4 Effectiveness through communication

All actors participating in improvement of working conditions influence the development of well-being at work through communication. Effective communication enhances competence and strengthens positive attitudes in workplaces as well as disseminates knowledge of occupational safety and health legislation and of such methods of action and good practices that authorities expect of workplaces.

Communication is linked to authority enforcement and national projects. Part of the communication is targeted and interactive, whereas part of it includes campaigns intended for the public.

*Together with interest groups it will be investigated what kind of communication best corresponds to the needs and brings good results in different contexts. Communication will be intensified by using various means and channels.*

## 4.5 Good legislation, the foundation for the minimum level of working conditions

According to the Constitution of Finland, the public authorities shall take responsibility for the protection of the labour force. Finland has a modern and comprehensive labour legislation and collective agreements, which define the minimum rights for employees in working life. Finland's national norms are to a certain extent based on international norms, such as the conventions and recommendations of the International Labour Organization ILO. Finland takes an active part in the legislative work in the EU. Legislation and norms are prepared in tripartite cooperation.

The consequences of new legislation are evaluated. Legislation is being simplified and clarified by removing overlapping and outdated provisions. The level of a regulation is raised to the level of an act always when it concerns significant matters that affect occupational safety and health or setting an obligation.

*Occupational safety and health legislation will be prepared in close cooperation with labour market parties so as to make legislation up-to-date and meet the needs of working life. The up-to-dateness of decrees will be evaluated at least every fifth year and that of acts at least every tenth year from the date of entry into force. In the EU politics, Finland will support the efforts for simplifying directives and transferring the focus to the member states when this is possible without reducing the basic regulation, such as that on risk assessment and cooperation at workplaces.*

## 4.6 Competent occupational safety and health administration ensures enforcement of legislation

Working conditions are regulated by a comprehensive and multifaceted legislation that imposes obligations mainly on the employer. Workplaces are expected to have awareness, responsibility, motivation and competence in order to fulfil all the requirements of legislation. By carrying out inspections, occupational safety and health administration monitors that provisions and regulations are observed. The main objective of the enforcement activities is to make sure that the workplaces' occupational safety and health management systems meet the statutory minimum requirements.

Changes in working life make increasing demands on enforcement. The challenges brought by changes, such as the fight against black economy and monitoring the use of foreign labour, presuppose viable legislation and appropriate enforcement methods, and adequate resources for occupational safety and health administration. Authority-initiated enforcement is being targeted more carefully and the results of enforcement actions are being monitored. All clients' demands are met in reasonable time. Market control duties that belong to the occupational safety and health administration are carried out as part of occupational safety and health enforcement in terms of the European concept.

The quality of enforcement is guaranteed by uniform enforcement practices and by continually developing personnel's skills and enforcement methods. Productive and efficient occupational safety and health enforcement is also ensured by developing the data systems. The resources of the occupational safety and health administration and the competence required for the tasks are secured in order that the administration also in future will serve its clients (workplaces) as well and equally as possible.

*By developing enforcement practices and personnel's competence, the occupational safety and health administration ensures that enforcement is effective, competent and has a uniform quality. Evaluation of the impact of enforcement will be developed and the effects of the different actions monitored. Feedback from workplaces will be monitored by means of client questionnaires.*

## 5. IMPLEMENTATION AND FOLLOW-UP

The purpose of these policies is to make the different parties work for the objectives set out observing the agreed principles. Implementing the policies is everyday work and they are taken into consideration in all plans for the work environment and well-being at work. The annual budget of

the occupational safety and health administration is prepared in accordance with these policies. The performance targets for the regional occupational health and safety divisions at the Regional State Administrative Agencies are agreed upon on the basis on these policies. The policies are taken into account in the performance guidance of other agencies and institutions in the administrative sector of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. Network cooperation is directed according to the policies.

The European Commission monitors the implementation of the union's strategy on health and safety at work. The enforcement of occupational safety and health is also monitored by the European Union, for the EU's Senior Labour Inspectors' Committee carries out benchmarking of the activities of the member states' occupational safety and health administrations. The Finnish occupational safety and health administration will be reviewed in 2014.

Occupational safety and health authorities follow systematically, by means of certain indicators, together with partners and other actors how the policy objectives have been reached. The target state set for the year 2020 will be followed and specified when drawing up framework agreements and performance agreements, and when necessary, intermediate objectives will be set out. New indicators will be taken into use if they are considered to better describe working conditions that have changed. Follow-up takes place both in the long and short term.

# SUMMARY OF THE POLICIES

## Vision

- Health, safety and well-being are important common values, which are put into practice in every workplace and for every employee.

## Target state

- Employees' lifelong time at work will be lengthened by three years until 2020.

## Desired changes in comparison with 2010

- The number of occupational diseases decreases by 10%
- The frequency of workplace accidents is reduced by 25%
- Work-related harmful strain is reduced:
  - Perceived physical strain is reduced by 20%
  - Perceived psychic strain is reduced by 20%

## Actions

Leadership, the corner stone of well-being at work

Occupational health care, an efficient partner

Knowledge, will and competence through cooperation

Effectiveness through communication

Good legislation, the foundation for the minimum level of working conditions

Competent occupational safety and health administration ensures enforcement of legislation

## Strategy for social and health policy

Political decision making, changes in society

Changes in the living environment, changes in life expectancy

EU and international cooperation, globalisation

Changing attitudes, changing work

Knowledge base, production of statistics, innovations, technological development

## Implementation and follow-up