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Newsletter

Special number within the COVID-19 contex

ONLINE vs. OFFLINE

Following the context in which we find ourselves, most of the member states of the European Union have implemented a series of measures, initiated information campaigns, carried out controls, all to combat the spread of COVID-19. The labor market is strongly affected in this crisis, therefore all parts of society, from entrepreneurs, employers and social partners, must play a role in protecting employees, their families and society in general. In this sense, Publisind, within the Workin Index project, embraced the idea of adapting to the current situation and eliminating as much as possible, the submission to the lowest risk of contracting the disease. So, throughout this period, the meetings were held in online format, and the future activities initially provided in the classic format, in the meeting room, will be transposed in the same way, in online format. It is true that these sessions in an online format are a novelty for many organizations, which continue to insist on organizing them in face to face format, primarily due to the effort felt in transferring the methods of training / instruction / interaction, but with specific modern tools, this process can be much easier. Publisind is willing to implement this new format, at least until the current situation shows signs of improvement, ensuring that there will be no risk or blockage in achieving the proposed objectives.
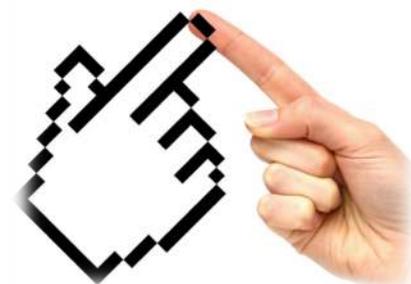
Evenimente - EPSU – 2020

EPSU (European Federation of Public Services), officially announced on July 6, that all events planned by the organization in the fall of 2020 (in September and October), will also be organized in online format, given the restrictions continuous and unpredictable travel. Regarding the activities planned for November and December 2020, the situation will be analyzed again at the beginning of October. Although the EPSU presidency expresses its desire to organize these meetings in a face-to-face format, it mentions that they will still remain cautious, adapting agendas, timing, methods of participation and decision-making procedures, in case the recommendations tend to organizing events in online format. Related to the activities from the beginning of 2021, the situation will be reanalyzed in November this year.

World Health Organization Recommendations

On the official website of the World Health Organization, we can find a page dedicated to recommendations and tips & tricks on health and safety at work in the context of COVID-19, updated on June 29, 2020. The questions and answers are of double interest, both for employees, as well as for employers. Can COVID-19 be transmitted to the workplace? How should employers decide when to open, when to close, when to reopen and / or when to suspend activities? What additional measures should be taken at work in medium risk conditions? What are the rights, obligations and responsibilities of employers? What about employees?

We will stop at an interesting question, namely, "Should I return to work immediately after lifting the restrictions?"

The WHO argues that the return to work should be carefully planned in advance, with preventive measures implemented according to the risk assessment for the various jobs and tasks. All possible safety and health risks should be assessed, as well as the risks resulting from the low maintenance of machines and installations during the closure period. If the return to work is done at a fast pace and not in a gradual manner, but also prudently, it can endanger the lives of employees, undermining efforts to restore social and economic activity.

What does a healthy organization mean?

A healthy organization is an organization that shows care for its people, being actively involved in their work life, not just theoretically and apparently. It is true that wellness programs have become increasingly popular and help to create a pleasant work environment, but a number of factors that define the organizational culture actually contribute to the well-being of employees. As terminology, "organizational culture" is defined as the set of beliefs, assumptions, values and ways of interaction that contribute to the unique social and mental environment of an organization. It includes the expectations, experience and philosophy of an organization, as well as the values that guide the behavior of its members, somehow reflected in the self-image of employees, in interactions with the outside world and future expectations. It is based on written or unwritten attitudes, beliefs, habits, and rules, developed over time and considered valid, including the organization's vision, values, norms, systems, symbols, language, assumptions, beliefs, and customs (Needle, 2004). The cultural model Deal & Kennedy, defines in simple words the organizational culture as "the way things are done here".

What would a healthy organization / company mean? A healthy job and "hunted" by employees. Following a little research, the most sought after characteristics of an organization that can be defined as healthy would be:

• Open communication with employees about its operations, plans and choices
• Involvement of employees, actively participating in decision making, planning, work design and finding solutions
• Continuous learning, the organization offering opportunities for employees to evolve
• Diversity is considered a source of stimulation and equal opportunities, both by the organization and by employees
• Institutional fairness, the organization promoting confidentiality, fairness, respect, and employees respecting company policies and practices
• Rewarding employees' performance, representing a fair recognition by the organization, and employees maintain their performance at a high level
• Common economic security, through which the organization recognizes that economic security and that of employees are the same
• Use of people-centered technology
• Adoption of measures to promote employees (physical and psychological), to ensure health and safety at work
• Organizing interesting, captivating, creative and diverse jobs, in which employees can perform high quality work
• Promoting balance, the organization recognizing that employees must balance family, work and leisure
• Environmental protection, the organization and the employees committing themselves to preserve and restore the health of the environment, getting involved in sound ecological practices
• Community responsibility, the organization investing in the public interest, employees assuming civic responsibilities

Robert H. Rosen, a psychological counselor, argues that "Healthy and involved people are more likely to build healthier, more productive organizations, and organizations are more likely to retain and inspire healthy people."

Project activities - past and future

Starting with 1st June, 2020, the following meetings of the project team took place within the Workin Index project - management and research (all in online format): 2nd June, 3rd June, June 11, June 18, June 30, 1st July, July 9, July 27, 3rd August, August 7. Furthermore, in the next period, for the completion of the methodology and the calculation of the indicator (decent work), 2 workshops of 25 participants will be organized, for the consultation of the interested factors. These workshops will include representatives of public authorities, trade unions, employers' organizations, NGOs, or companies with the role of validating the proposed methodology. Given the restrictions in the current context and the decision to replace the workshop scheduled to be held on 26.08.2020 with online sessions, it was discussed how to allocate sessions and the time allocated in the session so it was decided to schedule 3 online meetings, as follows : Social dialogue and social protection - 25.08.2020 (10:00 - 12:00), Vocational training and working time - 27.08.2020 (10:00 - 12:00), Health and safety at work, pay - 28.08.2020 (10:00 - 12:00). Other future meetings will be planned later, following the periodic reanalysis of the existing situation.

Work at home - the normality of the future

The COVID 19 pandemic, one of the most discussed topics at the moment, has generated significant changes in society. Obviously, the changes have also affected the way we work in the workplace. Whether we refer to the immediate and sometimes brutal need to digitize production flows or the provision of services, the relationship between employee and employer goes through fundamental changes during this period. Perhaps the most relevant example in this regard is working from home. In order to continue working during the state of emergency, many of the companies were forced to rethink their flows in a context in which employees work from home. Many of the companies that have experienced such an approach, especially those in the service area, have found, following studies, that productivity or business performance are not affected, in some places, they have even increased. For companies, working from home can generate savings in the area of location and utility costs, costs that in some situations can be significant. Basically, through work at home, companies have the possibility to transfer these costs to the employee in the sense that he, working from home, uses his own resources to carry out his activity. Work from home involves the use of own resources in the interest of companies, obviously during the development of activities in the interest of companies. Such an approach is considered to be at least immoral in the context in which the company did not contribute anything to the acquisition of these resources or equipment, but benefits from them.

Another important aspect regarding work at home concerns the legislation in the field, this being far from capturing all the relevant aspects regarding work at home. The way of organizing and carrying out work at home is currently done rather at the level of the relationship, collective or individual, between employee and employer. The concern for the permanence of such a way of working has become natural, especially from the companies, which position this way of work like a facility for employees. Employees' views on this way of working are divided as employees embracing this new approach while others are against it. Obviously, opinions differ depending on the characteristics of the work performed, the family situation or the housing situation of each. It is obvious that not all categories of occupations are suitable for work at home, respectively not all tasks that an employee performs can be performed exclusively from home. In fact, some companies prefer to use a hybrid system that encourages employees to be present at work for a period of one or two days a week, depending on the characteristics of the work performed. The family situation is another important factor that influences work at home because personal housing, in many cases, is not adapted for lucrative activities. Also, we must not neglect the fact that Romania is the country where the population lives in overcrowded homes, an inhabitant being assigned an area of approximately 24 square meters, one of the smallest in the European Union. The housing situation of Romanians is in deep opposition to the requirements of working from home, in the sense that working from home involves a room in which to work at home or many Romanians do not have this. The family situation, another element that influences the quality and opportunity of working at home, so that if there are dependents or one or more children in that family, the quality of work at home may suffer as well as family relationships in the background attention paid to work during working hours.

Working from home can be considered an option for both employees and employers, an option that will be found in the future in discussions aimed at the industrial relations system. Whether the impact on the company's efficiency is neutral or even beneficial, the exact impact on the employee's health and safety is not yet known and, last but not least, it becomes much more difficult to assess the conditions in which employees work. How work accidents are cataloged and determined, how black or gray work is determined, how decent working conditions are checked are just some of the unknowns. The use of personal space in the interest of an employer will make it increasingly difficult to disconnect employees in the conditions in which the right to disconnection is intensely discussed in certain countries. Debates on working from home are just beginning, but we can say that working from home is one of the major future challenges for the European industrial relations system.

Florian Marin – president of FSLR

If there is the option to work from home
...why not?!

As we know, the current trend in terms of work during the pandemic is moving the office home, of course where is possible. Perhaps for many employers the idea of moving the employees' office (physical space) to the online space is a novelty uncertainty viewed. In reality, the near future looks more and more like a digitized one, where work and meetings will move online through online communication platforms. This is the happy case, so far everything sounds good: the employees keep their job, so implicitly the salary, the only change being the location (of work). The less happy side of this whole process is the work that cannot be done at home: for example, the work of social workers, builders, tourism employees, performance athletes.

Many employees lost their jobs during the state of emergency, as well as currently during the state of alert period (some people were re-employed, others were noted on the list for technical unemployment support, others are still without a job in cause of pandemic effects); therefore, in this context, the discussion on work during the COVID 19 pandemic transcends the issue of working conditions and should move towards the issue of employability of people who lost their jobs during the state of emergency period as well as on support measures for employers and employees who encounter problems, difficulties in terms of work during the pandemic (salary cuts, the lack of support for employees who have children and who were forced to return to work in the context of closing nurseries, kindergartens, schools etc., provision of disinfectants).

Elena Marinescu – project researcher

Some figures and observations

The European Union has mobilized all available resources to help Member States coordinate their national responses, including providing objective information on the spread of the virus and measures taken to repair the economic and social damage caused by the pandemic. To help remedy the economic and social damage caused by the coronavirus pandemic, the European recharge that has begun and to protect and create jobs, the European Commission proposed on 26 May 2020 a major recovery plan for Europe, based on capitalizing on its full potential of the EU budget. On July 21, 2020, the leaders of the European Union agreed on this recovery plan and the multiannual financial framework for 2021-2027, leading to a way out of the crisis and laying the foundations for a modern and sustainable Europe. Negotiations with the European Parliament will now follow with a view to the urgent completion of work on specific procedures for drafting legal acts. Once adopted, the decision on own resources should be taken by the Member States as soon as possible, in accordance with their constitutional requirements.

According to official figures and reports published recently by statistical and research institutions, it appears that COVID-19 has led to a significant increase in employees who started working from home, from about 4% last year to almost 88% at present. The countries where work from home is the most common are Luxembourg, Finland and Malta, Romania being the situation in the top countries with the lowest percentage of employees working from home. It is estimated that the current situation could trigger an acceleration in the option of working from home in all sectors where this is possible. The process of change will take place in both the private and public sectors, proving that remote operation is a real possibility, although so poorly used and limited so far.

According to a survey conducted by buffer.com, a team of 85 people working from 15 different countries specializing in social media, resulted in the question "Would you like to work from home, the rest of your career?" , 99% of the respondents answered "yes". Another interesting statistic is given by the fact that 16% of the world's companies employ people only in the "telework" regime, operating online and thus not needing headquarters and the physical presence of employees, and 56% of global organizations allow work from home. Following a study and surveys conducted by FlexJobs (the leader of search engines on available jobs, with a team of a very large group of dedicated people who share the passion for job flexibility, helping employers in their recruitment efforts, as well as people who are looking for a job), the results on the benefits of working from home were interesting: telework attracts and retains talented people, telework helps to grow business, telework increases job satisfaction, those who work in telework are much more productive and ... healthier.

(www.europa.eu)

Harassment at work
Psychosocial risks, stress at work

Among the biggest challenges related to safety and health at work are psychosocial risks and stress at work, having a significant impact on the health of people, organizations and finally on national economies. Most of the time, in many organizations, perhaps with outdated cultures and values, terms such as psychosocial risk, stress at work, spiritual balance, mental health, healthy brain, are worthless terms, known but not treated at all separately. Many employers consider that maintaining an employee's mental health is not their responsibility. Wrong.

On August 7, 2020, in Romania, the law prohibiting harassment at work was promoted. In the official address regarding the exposition of the reasons for the modification and completion of GEO no. 137/2000 regarding the prevention and sanctioning of all forms of discrimination and of Law no. 202/2002 on equal opportunities between women and men, we mention a paragraph in which it is mentioned that "At the level of 2007, Romania had one of the highest degrees of incidence of violence or threat of violence at work, according to the study conducted in 2010 by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work. Regarding the incidence of acts of moral harassment at work, or bullying, Romania is also at the top, along with Turkey, Portugal and Norway. " It seems that the lack of a common European definition of the term "harassment at work" has also led to the European Parliament's signaling, "calling on the European Commission and the Member States to develop effective national strategies to combat violence." at work, based on a common definition of moral harassment in the 28 Member States. Thus, from a European perspective, the concern for ensuring safety and health at work is currently manifested in relation to psychosocial risks, which may be caused by the way in which work is designed, organized and managed."

"Harassment is considered a violation of the rights or dignity of the employee by deeds that can lead to deterioration of physical health and especially mental health, or that have the potential to affect his career, regardless of the form of manifestation - hostile conduct, actions and gestures or even comments verbal", according to the initiator of the project. Most employees, about half of European employees, consider stress to be a common factor in the workplace. Like other aspects that have a negative impact on mental health, stress is often misunderstood or stigmatized, but when viewed as an organizational issue and not as an individual problem, psychosocial risks and stress can be managed to the same extent as any other risk to health and safety at work.

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