



MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK

NEEDED IMPROVEMENTS IN LATVIA



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Institute of Occupational Safety and Environmental Health, Riga Stradinš University. 2025.

Preface

Mental health of employees is an emerging concern for the public and private enterprises in the Baltic Sea Region. People's mental health and ability to take individual and collective action are imperative for enterprises and societies to function during challenging periods. In the face of hardship, enterprises need resilience and resilient workforce.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Europe, half of European workers considered stress to be common in their workplaces, and it contributed to around half of all lost working days¹. In addition, 1 in 6 workers experience mental health challenges in the European Union (EU)². Combined with an already prevailing lack of qualified workforce in some key fields, such as health and social care, this puts the ability of enterprises and workplaces to withstand existing and future crises in jeopardy.

Protecting workers and preserving their work ability is the objective of Occupational Safety and Health (OSH). In the past, OSH legislation, standards and education have mainly focused on physical hazards and accident prevention. The MentalHealthMatters project wants to increase the attention given to psychosocial risk identification, assessment and prevention measures, addressing them as equally important as other workplace factors.

A key requirement for improving policies and practices related to psychosocial work environment and thus mental health of the workforce is to work across sectors. Therefore, in the framework of the project, the project partners from Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Norway, and Poland have set up National Communities of Practice, consisting of key experts from the health, labour, safety and education sectors. The core aim of the Communities of Practice is to uncover the concrete areas in need of improvement and to propose actions to address them. Each National Community of Practice has chosen its focus theme that encapsulates a key challenge in their countries. These range, for example, from the mental health of migrant workers in Norway to OSH education in Finland.

In the *MentalHealthMatters* project, the Communities of Practice have found out the needs for improvement related to (1) policies and regulations on mental health and working life, (2) knowledge and data related to the well-being of the workforce, and (3) education and competences of employers, workplace leaders and OSH professionals related to psychosocial factors at work. This report presents

¹ European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (2024) *Mental Health at work after the COVID-19 pandemic – What European figures reveal*. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/mental-health-work-after-covid-pandemic>

² European Commission (2023). *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a comprehensive approach to mental health*. COM(2023). European Commission. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX%3A52023DC0298>

the findings from Latvia where the focus has been on the awareness of employers on psychosocial risks.

Thematic focus

In Latvia, the *MentalHealthMatter* project highlights the key role of employers in fostering healthy psychosocial work environment. The aim is to explore ways to raise their awareness on psychosocial risks and to prioritise employee well-being in workplace policies and practices.

Traditionally, discussions around workplace health and safety in Latvia have focused on physical hazards and ergonomics. While these remain important, there is a pressing need to broaden the focus to include psychosocial risks. In Latvia, as in many other countries, the prevalence of psychosocial risk factors and mental health issues at work underscores the urgency for proactive interventions. This is also proven by the recently completed study "*Working conditions and risks in Latvia, 2019-2021*"³. Failure to address these issues not only jeopardises the health and productivity of employees but also imposes substantial economic costs on enterprises and society as a whole.

Recognising the equal importance of psychosocial and physical work environments, employers play a key role in creating workplaces that prioritise employee well-being and psychosocial resilience. By fostering collaboration among policymakers, employers, and other stakeholders, Latvia can navigate the complexities of the modern workplace landscape, fostering a culture of psychological safety and prosperity for all.

National Communities of Practice

The Latvian National Community of Practice was established by the Institute of Occupational Safety and Environmental Health at the Rīga Stradiņš University. It consists of representatives of employers, employees and national public authorities, namely from:

- State Labour Inspectorate
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Welfare
- Employers' Confederation of Latvia (LDDK)
- Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia (LBAS)

³ Vanadinš, I. et al. (2023). Study "*Working Conditions and Risks in Latvia 2019–2021*" Final Report. Rīga Stradiņš University. <https://dspace.rsu.lv/jspui/handle/123456789/14274>

In addition to these key stakeholders, insights have been gathered from market research experts, occupational physicians, OSH service providers, and thematic experts.

Through consultations with the members of the Community of Practice and a review of existing national standards and frameworks, the group has identified key gaps in employer awareness of psychosocial risks. Their findings highlight shortcomings in policies, regulations, and overall understanding of workplace mental health challenges, underscoring the need for systemic improvements in the short-, medium- and long-term.

Needs for improvement

The Latvian Community of Practice has identified three parallel processes that are needed to motivate employers to address workplace psychosocial risks:

1. **Policy advocacy:** Advocating inclusion of mental health and psychosocial risk factors in the future OSH policies and public health guidelines. Enhanced regulations that prioritise mental health can enable comprehensive interventions, support training, and secure financing for awareness raising campaigns and systematic data collection.
2. **Employer capacity building:** Through targeted capacity and awareness raising initiatives, equip employers with tools and resources to foster healthy psychosocial work environments and improve organisational resilience against a variety of internal and external risks.
3. **Data-driven insights:** Deepen the understanding of workforce mental health through detailed data collection, for example on the prevalence of psychosocial risks. Evidence-based insights can elevate political priority of workplace mental health and guide effective interventions.

Time frame	Needed changes
Long-term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Incorporating mental health and psychosocial risk factors in the future public health and work-life policy frameworks, including concrete objectives and commitments that are enforced in practice. ● Recognising mental health as a fundamental component of overall well-being, productivity and interpersonal relations at the political level. ● Strategically aligning and regulating OSH curricula across education providers.
Medium-term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Engaging and consulting social partners and policymakers to gather feedback, insights, and recommendations for improving policies and regulations. ● Integrating guidelines on identifying and addressing psychosocial risk factors into workplace risk assessment regulations. ● Developing clear, standardised procedures within regulations to guide OSH professionals in addressing mental health-related occupational diseases. ● Establishing a periodic workforce survey on mental health and psychosocial risk factors at work to guide evidence-based interventions and initiatives. ● Carrying out a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness and impact of ongoing awareness raising initiatives on mental health at work, including their outreach to key stakeholders, impact and results. ● Establishing a system for periodically revising existing OSH educational programmes and curricula. ● Including psychosocial risk prevention approaches and mental health promotion strategies in OSH educational curricula.
Short-term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Introducing a clear and mutually agreed upon definition of psychosocial risks in legislation. ● Emphasising preventive measures and early intervention strategies in addressing psychosocial risk factors in national guidelines. ● Increasing awareness of psychosocial factors, e.g. through informative campaigns, educational events and trainings, among employers and employees ● Improving knowledge of employee mental health by creating a comprehensive approach to gather data on risks, well-being, and overall mental health. ● Strengthening the integration of mental health and psychosocial factors into the education of all OSH professionals, including practical training on psychosocial risk identification. ● Expanding optional education modules for undergraduate OSH students on organisational psychology, human resource management, workplace mental health, and psychosocial factors.

Table 1: The needed improvements as identified and agreed by the Latvian Community of Practice.

Data and knowledge

"We still have little knowledge about mental health at work. Even if the existing surveys cover working conditions at large well, there is little consideration of mental health related factors in them [...] It would be necessary to carry out a specific, even if small, survey on the mental health of employees."

*Director, Institute of Occupational Safety and Environmental Health,
Rīga Stradiņš University*

Latvia lacks comprehensive data that effectively characterises the mental health of employees, including insights into the prevalent psychosocial risk factors. To gain valuable information for evidence-based interventions aimed at promoting the mental well-being of the Latvian workforce, a new periodic survey delving deeper into the psychosocial risks in workplaces would be needed.

Although the *Working Conditions and Risks in Latvia*¹ survey has been conducted since 2006, it provides limited insights into psychosocial risks. The results point towards an alarming increase in these risks in workplaces, but the survey's questions lack depth, reducing its practical applicability. To maintain comparability of the results on working conditions and risks in the Latvian workplaces over time, revising the survey and adding a sufficient range of key questions regarding psychosocial risk factors is not feasible. Therefore, establishing a new survey to address this gap is needed.

While workplace-specific data on psychosocial risks and mental health is limited, broader insight exist regarding the mental health of the population at large, even in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Such studies have been commissioned, for example, by the Ministry of Health. Moreover, Latvia has been included in several international work environment studies that shed light on how Latvia compares to other countries. However, due to their large scopes of focus, these studies are limited in usefulness for the development of workplace practices and OSH policies on psychosocial risks.

Additionally, there is room for improvement in the recording of mental health related occupational diseases. Some data is recorded in the Register of Occupational Diseases – however, only a small fraction of cases is considered severe enough to meet the criteria of an occupational mental health disorder. Milder cases often go unrecorded, creating a fragmented picture⁴. Furthermore, the registry typically omits details about patients' occupations or work sectors. Including this information in the Registry would help generate more comprehensive information on the mental health situation of the workforce.

⁴ Thematic appendix of the study "Working conditions and risks in Latvia 2019–2021", "Psycho-emotional factors of the working environment". DSpace at Riga Stradiņš University: Pētījuma "Darba apstākļi un riski Latvijā 2019–2021" tematiskais pielikums "Psihoemocionālie darba vides faktori" (rsu.lv)

Latvia is at a crossroads where better data on workforce mental health is urgently needed. Until there is clear data demonstrating the seriousness of the situation and unveiling intricacies of psychosocial risk factors, mental health of employees will unlikely gain political priority. This lack of attention perpetuates low employer awareness of psychosocial risks, hindering workplace actions that strengthen workplace resilience and productivity.

Policies and regulations

“Labour protection is regulated by 60 to 70 regulatory acts. Instead of introducing new regulations, it is necessary to improve the existing ones.”

External Occupational Safety and Health Service Provider

In Latvia, mental health is mentioned in several policy documents related to public health, mental health care, and labour market. However, the attention given to the topic in these documents, particularly in connection to working life, is currently unproportionate to the scale of the societal challenge. Therefore, they are considered by the Latvian National Community of Practice as incomplete and lacking in practical impact.

Policy document	Summary
Public Health Guidelines 2021-2027	The guidelines acknowledge the impact of working life in the mental health of people in paragraph 3, setting it as a priority to <i>“improve the mental health of the population [...], strengthen the emotional and psychological resilience of the population in various crisis situations, as well as to promote the skills of employees and employers to balance work and rest time in order to reduce the risk of physical and mental burnout.”</i> However, no further actions or guidelines on this are provided.
Plan for Improving the Organisation of Mental Health Care for 2023-2025	The plan focuses on the resources available in Latvia for mental health care and on the characteristics of mental health of different population groups. Mental health issues of the workforce and psychosocial risks in workplaces are not mentioned in the plan.
Social Protection Labour Market Policy Guidelines for 2021-2027	The guidelines detail social protection and security extensively but does not mention workforce mental health or workplace psychosocial risks.

Table 2: Summaries of the main policy frameworks in Latvia.

Moreover, the existing regulatory frameworks guiding workplace practices have notable limitations. *Regulation No. 660 "Procedures for the Performance of Internal Supervision of the Work Environment,"*⁵ and *Regulation No. 219 "Procedures for the Performance of Mandatory Health Examinations,"*⁶ require amendments to their first annexes, as they fail to incorporate or comprehensively address psychosocial factors. Additionally, there is no detailed guidance on the identification and mitigation of these risks in workplaces, leaving a significant regulatory gap.

Despite growing awareness of psychosocial risks, the lack of a formalised policy framework, strategy, or regulations remains a significant gap in occupational health and safety. Without clear guidelines, policymakers, employers, and OSH professionals struggle to prioritize mental health initiatives and coordinate resources effectively.

To drive meaningful action, stronger national regulations are needed, particularly for employers who may not address these risks voluntarily. The Latvian National Community of Practice advocates for refining existing frameworks to establish a more comprehensive approach to preventing and managing psychosocial risks. This would create clearer incentives for workplace action and contribute to a healthier, more resilient workforce.

Education and training

Occupational safety and health specialists

The role of Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) specialists is crucial in creating safe and healthy work environments, as they are responsible for identifying workplace hazards, implementing preventive measures, and ensuring compliance with safety regulations. In Latvia, all workplaces are required to have a person dedicated to serving as an OSH specialist. Workplaces generally have two options for fulfilling this role: (1) directly employing an OSH specialist under an employment contract, or (2) contracting an external service provider for this role. In SMEs, employers can be responsible for OSH if the company operated in a non-hazardous industry or has fewer than ten employees in a hazardous industry. In these cases, employers must have at least basic-level OSH education from accredited educational institutions or specialised training centres.

However, Latvia's current training programmes lack consistent emphasis on addressing psychosocial risks and mental health challenges. Both basic and higher-level education programmes for OSH

⁵Regulation 660/2007. *Cabinet Regulation No. 660 Procedures for the Performance of Internal Supervision of the Work Environment.* <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/164271>

⁶Regulation 219/2009. *Cabiner Regulation No. 219 Procedures of Mandatory Health Examinations.* <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/189070>

specialists require updates to ensure comprehensive training that reflects modern occupational safety needs.

OSH specialists are required to meet specific educational standards based on the workplace that they are serving. The educational requirements are divided into two distinct levels: basic and higher-level education. Higher-level education is mandatory for specialists working in hazardous industries with more than 10 employees and for those employed by external OSH service providers. In contrast, the basic education is sufficient for roles in non-hazardous industries and in hazardous industries with 10 or fewer employees.

Higher-level education involves obtaining level I (college education) or level II (bachelor's and master's degrees) professional education. This equips OSH specialists with advanced knowledge for managing complex safety systems in hazardous industries and prepares them to lead health and safety initiatives in various organisations. However, there is limited standardisation across the available education programmes in the depth and scope of training on psychosocial risks and mental health, creating inconsistencies in specialist competencies. Adjusting curricula to align with evolving workplace challenges and emphasising psychosocial risk factors is essential to ensure comprehensive training.

Basic-level education, on the other hand, is geared toward individuals seeking foundational knowledge in occupational safety and health. This level of education is provided through professional development programmes offered by accredited educational institutions or specialised training centres. The structure of the basic-level education has evolved over time. In 2013, the training duration was reduced from 160 to 60 hours, limiting the time available to address psychosocial risks thoroughly. While additional 40-hour specialisation modules are available to complement the training based on specific work duties, they remain optional, leaving critical areas like psychosocial risk management underexplored. Expanding and updating these training programmes is necessary, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), where tailored guidance on psychosocial risks is often lacking.

OSH specialists face different recertification requirements depending on their employment. External OSH specialists must undergo recertification every five years to maintain their competencies. This process involves 80 hours of compulsory training and a comprehensive exam to assess their knowledge and skills. While recertification is not mandatory for internal OSH specialists (those employed directly by a company), they are strongly encouraged to participate in ongoing professional development. The National Preventive Action Plan, for example, offers thematic training sessions specifically on psychosocial risks and mental health in the workplace. While not obligatory, there are numerous education opportunities for OSH specialists to stay informed about new trends, emerging risks, and regulatory updates, thereby enhancing their ability to maintain a safe and healthy workplace.

Context	OSH Specialist with BASIC education	OSH Specialist with HIGHER education
A company does not operate in a hazardous industry	160h/60h training + an employment contract at the company.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OSH specialist with level I or II higher education in OSH + an employment contract. • External OSH specialist with level II higher education + recertification once in 5 years + a service contract with the company.
Hazardous industry company with no more than 5 employees	160h/60h training + an employment contract + 40h specialisation training module recommended.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OSH specialist with level I or II higher education in OSH + an employment contract. • External OSH specialist with level II higher education + recertification once in 5 years + a service contract with the company.
Hazardous industry company with 6-10 employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 160h/60h training + an employment contract + additional 40h specialisation training module required; or • 160h training + a higher education in natural sciences, engineering, health protection or law + at least five years of work experience in OSH + an employment contract. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OSH specialist with level I or II higher education in OSH + an employment contract.
Hazardous industry company with 11-249 employees	Can't provide OSH services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OSH specialist with level I or II higher education in OSH + an employment contract.
Hazardous industry company with 250 and more employees	Can't provide OSH services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External OSH service provider. • 2 or more OSH specialists, at least one with level I or II higher education in OSH + an employment contract; the rest of the specialists can have basic education + 40 h specialisation training module.

Table 3: Detailed educational requirements for OSH specialists, depending on the company's profile or industry.

Although psychosocial risks are included in OSH education, the current framework does not adequately address them in practice. Expanding training programmes to focus more on psychosocial risks is essential, particularly on effective communication techniques for identifying these risks and implementing intervention strategies in small and medium-sized enterprises. Moreover, significant variations exist in the quality and content of training on psychosocial risks and mental health issues across education programmes. These inconsistencies create gaps in the knowledge and skills of OSH specialists, hindering uniform competency and performance. Establishing a standardised train-the-trainers programme could ensure consistency and deliver high-quality training for all OSH specialists

Occupational physicians

Occupational physicians are vital in diagnosing workplace-related health issues and raising awareness of psychosocial risks. However, there is a need to expand their education to include more comprehensive coverage of psychosocial risks. Strengthening both theoretical and practical training in this area is essential to improve workforce well-being and address gaps in occupational health care.

In Latvia, the postgraduate medical training program for occupational physicians is a comprehensive process designed to equip medical university graduates with specialised knowledge in occupational health. This training pathway typically includes five years of specialised residency in occupational health, culminating in a certification exam. To ensure up-to-date competencies, occupational physicians are required to undergo a recertification exam every five years, which includes the completion of 250 hours of continuing education, with at least 150 hours focused on the OSH specialisation.

Despite the robust training, there is limited focus on psychosocial factors. Existing training includes one lecture and one practical lesson on psychosocial risks, which fails to prepare physicians to address this topic effectively. While practical experience is offered at P. Stradiņa Clinical University Hospital's Centre for Occupational and Radiation Medicine, the limited emphasis on psychosocial risks during formal training highlights a pressing need for curriculum adjustments. Specifically, there is a need for more in-depth training on how to effectively communicate with patients to uncover psychosocial risks, as well as instructions on the tools and surveys that can be used to detect these issues early.

Occupational physicians play a key role in raising awareness of psychosocial risks among employees. As external health professionals, they are uniquely positioned to educate workers, identify risks early, and support disease prevention through timely diagnosis and treatment. Dedicating a part of patient consultations to psychosocial risks and mental health would ensure these critical issues receive consistent attention. Enhancing both theoretical and practical training in this area would boost physician competency and workforce well-being. Future efforts should balance shortening training programs (e.g., from five to four years) with adapting content to modern workplace challenges.

Labour inspectors

Labour inspectors are at the forefront of ensuring compliance with occupational safety regulations, including managing psychosocial risks. However, the current training for State Labour Inspectorate (SLI) inspectors in Latvia places limited emphasis on practical skills for identifying and addressing these risks. Enhancing both the depth and applicability of training in psychosocial risk identification and assessment is crucial for strengthening their role in promoting workplace well-being.

The training and qualification process for inspectors at the SLI is designed to ensure that these civil servants possess the necessary skills and knowledge to uphold workplace safety and compliance with labour regulations. This entails a series of structured training modules that comprise two core components: Module A and Module B. Module A consists of three weeks of internal training provided by the SLI, followed by two weeks of external training. This module serves as a foundation, equipping new inspectors with the essential knowledge required for their roles. Module B focuses on specialisation, enabling inspectors to develop expertise in specific industries or sectors, depending on the focus of their future inspections.

As part of their continuous professional development, it is recommended that inspectors also complete Modules C and D, which are geared toward developing soft skills. Although they are not mandatory and do not require certification or exams. Despite the absence of formal certification requirements, regular training is essential to ensure inspectors remain informed about new developments in the labour market and workplace safety practices.

Training on psychosocial risks is incorporated into both theoretical and practical aspects of the inspectors' education. In the Module A, external training includes a lecture on psychosocial and organisational risks, providing inspectors with foundational knowledge on these issues. The optional Module C goes further, offering 12 hours of lectures and practical training specifically focused on psychosocial risks, reflecting the growing importance of mental health and well-being in the workplace.

While the theoretical training on psychosocial risks is generally sufficient, there is room for improvement in the practical application of this knowledge. Incorporating more hands-on training, such as on-site exercises and mentoring, would enhance inspectors' ability to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings. Practical templates and checklists for psychosocial risk assessment could further support effective inspections. This approach ensures inspectors not only grasp the theory but also develop the practical skills necessary to address workplace psychosocial risks comprehensively.

Employers and Managers

Employers and managers bear a fundamental responsibility for ensuring not only the physical safety but also a psychosocially healthy workplace. However, a significant gap exists in their understanding and ability to address the psychosocial work environment effectively. Training efforts remain sporadic and insufficiently targeted, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) where awareness and resources are often limited.

Employers in non-hazardous industries are permitted to assume the responsibilities of an occupational safety specialist after completing basic training consisting of either 160 or 60 hours of training. The

duties of an OSH specialist can also be appointed to an employee that has gone through the same training. In hazardous industries, smaller companies with less than five employees can appoint an internal OSH specialist, granted that they have complemented the basic training with 40 hours of specialised training.

Many employers remain focused on physical safety, with limited awareness of mental health challenges. There are no specific legal requirements for continuous training, but it is strongly recommended that employers increase their knowledge and competence by attending thematic training seminars, particularly those related to emerging workplace risks, such as psychosocial hazards.

A data-driven approach, based on the analysis of statistical workforce data (e.g., labour force surveys), would be particularly valuable in identifying priority sectors where additional training modules on psychosocial risks and mental health should be introduced. By focusing on these priority areas, training efforts can be concentrated on sectors where the need for addressing mental health concerns is most urgent.

Nevertheless, the need for regular education and awareness-raising across all sectors cannot be overstated. Employers need continuous access to practical tools, including detailed information on psychosocial risks, surveys, and diagnostic tests to detect mental health concerns. These resources help employers and OSH professionals address risks early, creating safer, more supportive workplaces. To meet this need, a European Social Fund project focusing on psychosocial risk training is planned for 2025–2029, which provides a good starting point for action.

Improving Latvia's psychosocial work environment

This report has provided an overview of the current state of psychosocial work environment in Latvia, identifying both areas of progress and persistent challenges. While positive developments are evident, there remains a clear need for increased awareness, improvements in OSH education, and proactive measures to effectively address psychosocial risks and enhance the well-being of Latvian employees.

Findings from the *MentalHealthMatters* project, with its emphasis on employer awareness in Latvia, highlight the importance of:

- **Strengthened policies and regulations:** Clearer legislative frameworks and enforcement mechanisms are required to ensure that employers prioritise and proactively manage psychosocial risks within their organisations.
- **Enhanced knowledge and data collection:** Systematic data collection and analysis are essential for gaining a comprehensive understanding of the prevalence and impact of psychosocial risks

across various sectors. This data-driven approach will enable the development of targeted and effective interventions.

- **Targeted education and training initiatives:** Employers, managers, and OSH professionals need access to comprehensive training programs that equip them with the knowledge and skills to identify, assess, and mitigate psychosocial risks. This includes fostering a workplace culture characterised by open communication and mutual support.

By prioritising these key areas, Latvia can make significant progress in cultivating well-being and mental health at work. This will not only benefit employees on an individual level but also contribute to increased productivity, reduced absenteeism, and overall economic growth.

Creating thriving workplaces is an ongoing process that requires sustained commitment and collaboration from all stakeholders. By prioritising mental well-being of employees, Latvia can foster a resilient and thriving workforce equipped to meet the challenges of the future.

Further reading

For further reading from Latvia, we recommend consulting the following documents produced through the *MentalHealthMatters* project:

- **Mental health at work: Discussion document on policy options** – A document that explores country-specific policy options and recommendations for addressing psychosocial factors and promoting mental health in workplaces in Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Poland, and Norway. In addition, it highlights shared challenges in the Baltic Sea Region and proposes transnational collaborative solutions to create healthier and more resilient workplaces.
- **Mental health at work: Legal overview on definitions, regulations & further guidance** – A document compiling definitions, legislation, policies and guidance on psychosocial factors in the workplace in the Baltic Sea Region Countries.