

# Sicily Decalogue

Implementation of WHP in Southern European  
Countries

**Strategy Statement and Action Plan**

*In memory of a friend and  
colleague Fiorella Chierichetti*

## **A summary of the recommendations**

**Recommendation 1:** To clearly identify the roles of the various public bodies at central, regional and local level and ensure effective partnership between them in regard workplaces and to coordinate the activities of the various administrations

**Recommendation 2:** To develop tailor made intervention programmes that respond to the specific needs of different countries, regions and localities, in keeping with national regulations

**Recommendation 3:** To strengthen collaboration and enhance cooperation between all stakeholders

**Recommendation 4:** To establish good co-ordination between the initiatives of the stakeholders

**Recommendation 5:** To produce tools for promoting health that are target specific, easy to use, simple and low in cost

**Recommendation 6:** To provide operative services with adequate human and technical resources

**Recommendation 7:** To include workplace safety and health promotion in the curricula of professional courses such as occupational medicine, health and safety and HR management

**Recommendation 8:** To develop specific training and information programs for employers and employees

**Recommendation 9:** To market workplace health promotion to all stakeholders

**Recommendation 10:** To make advisory facilities effective and easy to reach

## **Introduction**

Health and safety in the workplace is a priority action that is being addressed across all levels of society by the European Commission, national governments, health and labour institutions, social organizations. These organisations are united in their actions to make work safe, enhance the quality of working life and prevent occupational diseases, work related accidents and deaths.

Since its foundation the aim of the European Network for Workplace Health Promotion (ENWHP) has been to facilitate and co-ordinate the exchange of experiences and information on work and health both within and between all fifteen EU Member States. This has been done in order to encourage the development of common strategies, policies and processes that will lead to improvements in the health and safety of people at work, healthier lifestyles and enhanced levels of employability across Europe.

This emphasis on the promotion of employee health and well being makes workplace health promotion such an important element of employment practice. Keeping people fit and healthy, maintaining their ability to work and remaining active and productive members of society is a goal that can be achieved through the development of robust workplace health promotion programmes. These programmes enhance and extend existing occupational health, safety and hygiene procedures and most importantly, contribute to the well being not only of the employees but also of the organisations in which they work.

The work of the ENWHP has brought to light significant differences in practice between the countries of northern and southern Europe. However in order to achieve the optimum development of workplace health promotion in Southern European Countries it is vitally important that the socio-cultural conditions and existing workplace health policies, services and infrastructures are taken fully into consideration.

In general, social-cultural models that originated in the Northern and Central European Countries have had the strongest influence on the developing theories of workplace health promotion and health promotion. In transferring these principles and theories to the Southern European Countries it is necessary for them to be adapted to the social and cultural context of those countries and to be implemented in a way that takes into consideration the different service developments that have occurred in Southern countries in recent years.

This document has been prepared with the intent of enhancing the development of workplace health in Southern European Countries according to those considerations. It does this through:

- Providing support for the re-orientation of occupational health services
- Facilitating the harmonization of European policies across all Member States
- Spreading the culture of prevention and workplace health promotion
- Developing policies designed to improve employability, increase adaptability and reduce inequality, particular attention being paid to specific population groups such as the elderly, the underemployed and unemployed, immigrants in Southern European Countries.

All the Southern European Countries have enforced and are implementing the Framework Directive. This is being done through the development of national laws and decrees and proposals of new policies and health and safety measures. However while great progress has been made on the development of a legal and policy led framework, at the implementation level much remains to be achieved.

Of particular concern is the lack of active stakeholder and social partner involvement in the transition from a traditional occupational health and safety led system to a system based on the principles of workplace health promotion.

A series of meetings have been held between the National Contact Offices for Workplace Health Promotion in Southern Europe. These meetings took place so that the issues associated with the transition from a traditional occupational health and safety led system to a system based on the principles of workplace health promotion could be discussed and the particular factors which influence the development of workplace health promotion in Southern European Countries could be identified and addressed.

The outcomes of those discussions are set out below. They take the form of 10 recommendations, which, if implemented, would lead to enhanced levels of workplace health promotion and consequently a fitter, healthier and more productive workforce, together with more efficient and profitable working practices.

The Aim of this document therefore is to move all stakeholders from health protection to health promotion, from legal obligation to personal commitment and from single respect of legislation to excellence.

**Recommendation 1: To clearly identify the roles of the various public bodies at central, regional and local level and ensure effective partnership between them with respect of workplaces and the promotion of health and well being at work**

Working practices, working life and the labour market are undergoing major changes. The process of globalisation has a universal impact and Governments should seek to ensure that work with a potentially adverse effect on health (due to low pay, poor conditions, “dirty” or hazardous work for example) is not exported to developing countries. The concept of health being benefited by work, when it is ergonomically planned and executed, as well as being adversely affected by it when the exigencies are not compatible with the capacities and abilities of the workers, need to be recognised by all the stakeholders, and responsibility for health and well being at work in these changing circumstances should be clearly defined.

While employers have a statutory obligation to *protect* the health and safety of everyone at the workplace, there is no such statutory basis to *promote* employee health and well being. The links between health protection in the workplace and workplace health promotion need to be highlighted and strengthened and the duties of employers with respect to both clarified and reinforced.

**Recommendation 2: To develop tailor made intervention programmes that respond to the specific needs of different countries, regions and localities, and are in keeping with national regulations**

A strategy for the protection and promotion of health in the workplace should be developed within each country. The strategy should clearly identify the various stakeholders and the roles in the implementation of the strategy as well as determining clear lines of accountability for workplace health. The strategy should lead to the development of clear short, medium and long-term action plans which address the specific circumstances to be found in each country.

It is felt that it would be inappropriate to develop further legal measures to protect and promote health at work at this time. A preferred option would be the development of clear guidelines, agreed by all the stakeholders (employers, employers associations, professional bodies, social partners etc), leading to the enhancement of workplace health promotion activities. An area of particular concern is that of the promotion of health in and through SMEs and it is strongly recommended that the representatives of employees and employers in the SME sector are fully involved in the development of guidelines and action plans. The role of the labour inspectorate should be extended to facilitate the developments necessary to address the needs of SMEs.

Organisations providing local services should be oriented towards meeting the needs of SMEs and should pay particular attention to the well being of sole workers, familial agricultural and craft workers, disadvantaged groups and those who work outside the protection of legal employment.

**Recommendation 3:**

**To strengthen collaboration and enhance cooperation between all stakeholders**

The situation, in terms of stakeholders, is consistent across all the Southern European Countries with each having two Government Departments with a major responsibility for health in the workplace – namely the Ministries of Labour and Health, although many Government departments also have some responsibility. To these central government departments must be added the regional and local tiers of government, the health services and non-governmental organisations such as the representative bodies of employers and employees.

Each of these organisations should place workplace health firmly on its agenda and discussion and dialogue on issues relating to health in the workplace between these organisations should be encouraged and promoted. In order to do this, common priorities and needs should be identified and all the stakeholders should accept the positive role of workplace health promotion in addressing these priorities and needs.

It is important therefore that the tangible benefits and positive outcomes of workplace health programmes are made clear and demonstrated to the stakeholders.

It is imperative to gain the commitment of all the agencies to the process of collaborative working - of having shared agendas, action plans and responsibility for employee health if the full potential of workplace health promotion is to be realised, and employees, their employers and the wider community are to benefit from the improvements in health which result.

Article 123 of the Amsterdam Treaty gives a high status to the process of Social Dialogue and maximum use should be made of it. However the role of government, be it central government, regional or local government should not be underestimated. Government has an important role to play in promoting dialogue between the stakeholders and in identifying and making available resources for the promotion of health through the workplace. These would include specific research funds, funds for the production of information and training tools, incentives to promote employee health and the reduction of taxes on investment.

A further important role for central Government is that of encouraging pan-European agencies such as the EC and the World Health Organization to recognise the importance and benefits of workplace health promotion.

In these contexts tripartite discussions still have a valuable contribution to make to the development of workplace health promotion as they bring together and facilitate discussion between policy makers, decision takers and those with responsibility for implementing workplace measures. Such discussions are helpful as responsibility for health at work is shared by so many different organisations each of whom has an important role to play in the protection and promotion of employee health and well being.

#### **Recommendation 4:**

##### **To establish good co-ordination between the initiatives of the stakeholders**

Mechanisms should be put in place to encourage information exchange, the determination of common priorities between Countries and within and between all levels of government and other stakeholders. Good co-ordination leads to a more efficient developmental process and allows for more rapid progress to be made. Special attention needs to be paid to coordinating the actions of official agencies such as the Ministries of Health and Labour with official functions such as those of the health and safety advising bodies, public health services and the labour inspectorate.

#### **Recommendation 5:**

##### **To produce tools for promoting health that are target specific, easy to use, simple and low in cost**

While there is a clear legislative framework, which acts as a foundation for health related activity in the workplace, this legislation needs to be fully enacted. This process will be enhanced through the development of guidelines and practical tools for implementing workplace health related activity together with the identification and dissemination of models of good practice. The development of these resources should be considered as a matter of priority. The establishment of local networks, which support the exchange of

information and experience, should be encouraged. Such networks can be useful tools in disseminating good practice and in identifying solutions to common problems.

**Recommendation 6:**

**To provide operative services with adequate human and technical resources**

The provision of the resources necessary to protect and promote health in the workplace is an issue of fundamental importance. In this context, resources include not only financial measures but also technical support, materials and manpower. Each of these should be provided at a sufficient level to enable the promotion of health through the workplace to reach its full potential. Technical support such as the provision of advice and guidance, the provision of written materials, be they for use in training or as sources of information for employees for example, are important tools in the development of interventions to protect and promote employee health. Their provision requires a funding commitment from one or more of the stakeholders, but rather than viewing this as a cost it should be seen as an investment for health.

The use of financial facilities such as subsidies and bonus systems has been shown to be effective elsewhere in Europe and there is scope through government action and links with service supporting companies such as work accident funds and insurance companies to pilot innovative schemes in Southern Europe. One of the options in this type of scheme is for the Insurance Companies to offer a discount on the premiums paid by employers for whom they provide sickness or accident cover, once the employers have introduced workplace health promotion programmes of a certain scope and quality. Politicians, at National and European level are interested in financial and social benefits of WHP, more figures and data should be produced and supplied.

These schemes can be developed at a local or a national level and can be tailor made to meet the requirements of the partners involved and with particular concern on SMEs.

**Recommendation 7:**

**To include workplace safety and health promotion in the curricula of professional courses such as occupational medicine, health and safety and human resource management**

Training is a key factor in the development of sustainable workplace health initiatives. Training programmes should address the specific functions of professional groups working in this setting and should focus on the potential role of such groups in workplace health promotion as well as issues such as leadership and communication for example.

**Recommendation 8:**

**To develop specific training and information programs for employers and employees**

It is widely recognised that the level of awareness of employers (especially proprietors of SMEs), managers and employees on matters relating to occupational health and safety and the promotion of health in the workplace is very low. Whilst it can correctly be argued that



the general training of employees is largely the responsibility of the employer, measures must be introduced to improve the levels of training on health and safety and the promotion of health at the workplace for employers, managers and employees, with special attention being given to the training needs of owners and employees in SMEs.

It is essential to have tools and products that can be used to support the promotion of health at the workplace so that if the concept is marketed there are resources available to enable the process to begin and continue. Employers in the SME sector do not usually invest in such a process and so it will be necessary to identify and allocate resources to SMEs in order to facilitate the development of good practice in occupational health and safety and workplace health promotion in this sector.

Specific training professionals who can provide training for trainers and training organisations at the regional and local levels need to be identified and specific courses developed and marketed. Courses that are developed should be inclusive in nature, i.e. they should include all the necessary elements to plan and develop workplace health promotion actions that will meet the actual needs of the companies.

Training programmes should be developed on the basis of a needs assessment, and all training should be practically oriented and participative in nature. It should also equip those being trained to take a leading role in the promotion of health and well being at the workplace. To support these training programmes new curricula and training materials need to be developed and resources should be identified for this.

Preparing young people for the world of work is an important element of their schooling. Workplace health is of essential importance and materials and courses should be made available for teachers in schools to equip them to raise young people's awareness of the importance of health and safety at work.

Agencies with a legitimate role in the provision of training include universities and professional institutions, employers groups and associations, trades associations and the trades unions, government institutions and health service bodies.

Within the WHP network a sub network of trainers should be developed, as training is not a competence of the European Agency based in Bilbao. the main activities of which concern OSH, information collection and dissemination.

### **Recommendation 9:**

#### **To market workplace health promotion to all stakeholders**

The benefits of workplace health promotion and proactive health and safety practice should be identified and used to gain the necessary commitment of policy makers and decision takers.

The term "workplace health promotion" is not yet fully understood and many organisations might be undertaking the practice of workplace health promotion without realising that they are doing so. Raising awareness on workplace health promotion will be a gradual process, and a long term view needs to be taken. However in the meantime, the message that workplace health promotion has an important contribution to make to

employee health and well being and in turn the well being of organisations must be clearly stated and tailored so as to achieve the most positive outcome from employers and employees

Key questions that need to be answered in relation to the marketing of workplace health promotion are:

1. Who will do the marketing?

This is the responsibility of national institutes, national and regional agencies and social partners, in fact every professional group involved in workplace health promotion and occupational health and safety are equally responsible. Agencies within the international community such as the World Health Organization, the European Commission and the International Labour Organization should make workplace health promotion a priority and ensure it on the agenda of the governments they work with.

2. To whom will the message be conveyed?

The primary targets are employers and employees, together with decision makers at both national and local level. Other key groups who need to be targeted with this message include: health and workplace experts, human resource professionals, politicians and the general public. Politicians are an important group because of their influence over resource allocation. In working with politicians it is important to demonstrate the need for action through the development of strong health, social and economic arguments.

3. How will the message be conveyed?

There are many ways in which this important message can be conveyed. These include face-to-face discussions, training events and seminars, the publication of research and the promotion of resources for workplace health promotion and the World Wide Web. The National Contact Office Websites provide a good, attractive means of communication that can be used by a range of professional groups and individuals. Journalists for example can access the information for their own research and articles.

The WWW sites are extremely useful sources of information for those who spread the message to others such as occupational health physicians and labour inspectors as well as employers and employees. Consequently the web sites must contain a wide range of relevant, up to date information and should be promoted as widely as possible. There is considerable potential in the use of downloadable material, discussion forums etc. Yet there is also a need for the development of practical information on how health promotion can be built up. This could be achieved through a benchmarking exercise.

4. What should be marketed?

The issues which could form part of a marketing strategy include, the concept of workplace health promotion and its benefits, the approaches and processes which can be used and the results that might be expected.

This might be complemented by practical guidance on the development and implementation of workplace programmes adopting a staged approach sensitive to the needs of the target groups.

## **Recommendation 10:**

### **To make advisory facilities effective and easy to reach**

Access to good quality information is essential if the promotion of health through the workplace is to continue. Key frontline occupational health and safety services can play an important advisory role to those seeking to develop and implement measure to promote and protect employee health.

All the guidance and advice that is provided should be consistent and based on sound principles and practice. The identification of information centres would help to ensure a consistent approach. Models of good practice, and the principles and foundations for success must be identified and promoted.

### **In conclusion**

These recommendations are suitable not just for Southern European Countries but also for the rest of Europe and beyond. The challenge is to translate them into action in Southern European Countries with their specific economic, social, cultural and political situations.

It is also imperative to gain the active participation of all the key stakeholders in this process, so that they in turn will promote the development of a participatory culture in which all interested parties can be involved. It is particularly important to encourage and facilitate the active involvement of stakeholders in the SME sector as this will aid the introduction of a health and safety management system as set out in the Framework Directive.

Once this level of participation is reached it will be possible to develop models for the overall management of health within an organisation – a position that would be strengthened if it conveys the message that workplace health promotion is an effective business investment. A future step would see the sharing and dissemination of health management within a company to the wider environment, a process that could be encouraged through Governmental support. Such action would benefit the workplace and additionally bring about social and economic benefits.

The potential of workplace health promotion to enhance the life not only of workers, but also their families and the communities in which they live should be an incentive to governmental bodies and all the other stakeholders to give their full support to the promotion of health and well being through the workplace and to become more fully involved in the process.

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*The content of the document does not reflect the opinion of EC., but only of the authors.*

*Authors: Briziarelli Lamberto, Chierichetti Fiorella, Durão Alvaro, Griffiths John (rapporteur), Galanopoulou Elisabeth, Masanotti Giuseppe, Perticaroli Sergio and Maria Dolores Solé.*