

The Belgian Federal Police: An Integrated and Multi-Disciplinary Organisation of Prevention

Background

Following a recent reform, the Police Force in Belgium now operate at two levels: “Federal” (or national) and “local”. The Federal Police employ around 12 000 police officers and roughly 2 500 other workers.

As required by law, the Federal Police set up an internal service for prevention and protection at work. The service that has been created, the DPP, comprises prevention specialists and is entrusted with accompanying the Dynamic System on Risk Prevention every Belgian employer must implement. The system covers the seven legally-determined fields of OSH:

- Occupational safety;
- Health protection;
- Psychosocial factors;
- Ergonomics;
- Occupational hygiene;
- Embellishment of the workplace;
- Environment.

Establishment of co-operation structures

The Federal Police were legally required to set up a global and multi-disciplinary OSH promotion system, based on risk assessment, and compatible with existing initiatives.

The law specifically required risk assessments concerning the workplace. However, given the very nature of police work, an officer’s workplace is rarely limited to the police station alone.

A “platform” was consequently created to coordinate cooperation between the services dealing with health and safety:

- Internal Service for Prevention and Protection at Work (DPP);
- Directorate for Internal Relations (DPI);
- Occupational Medicine Service (DPMS).

This platform monitors the multi-disciplinary and systematic nature of the actions of these services and is made up of:

- The Global Integrated Prevention and Protection System Council
- The Thematic Platform
- Basic Platforms

How the project works

■ The Global Integrated Prevention and Protection System Council

The Global Integrated Prevention and Protection System Council is the first level of the platform and is a “think-tank” operating at Federal level. It brings together the Heads of the DPP, the DPI, and the DPMS, and is also responsible for taking global decisions related to issues of occupational safety and health. The platform enables the Heads of the DPP, the DPI, and the DPMS to come together and coordinate and integrate the work of their different services.

Recommendations concerning policy are made within the framework of the Council. These recommendations are then presented to the Senior Department for Human Resources within the Federal Police, as well as to the Commissioner General, who is the Head of the Federal Police. Five-year “global prevention plans” and one-year “action plans” are then drawn up as frameworks for the implementation of policy. In turn, these proposed plans are submitted to “Prevention Committees” for

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approval. The Prevention Committees are joint committees bringing together staff members and their representatives.

■ **The Thematic Platform**

The Thematic Platform also operates at Federal level. Its primary tasks are to carry out analyses on specific themes and to take more precise and detailed OSH decisions (c.f. The Global Integrated Prevention and Protection System Council). The platform brings together the following individuals or their representatives:

- The Head of the Expertise Department within the DPP;
- The Coordinator of the Stress Team within the DPI;
- The Chief Physician of the Occupational Medicine Service within the DPMS.

The platform can deal with the following general topics or themes:

- Conflict management;
- Use of violence in interventions;
- Asbestos programmes;
- Vaccination programmes;
- Actions to combat illegal immigration;
- Different forms of mobbing.

■ **Basic Platforms**

These platforms are established with the objective of carrying out analyses and taking decisions, primarily in the front-line. Unlike the Global Integrated Prevention and Protection System Council and the Thematic Platform, the Basic Platforms operate at local level. They consist therefore of individuals who work mainly in the frontline when it comes to health and safety. This means specifically:

- The "Prevention Advisors" of the DPP;
- Social Workers and Psychologists working within the framework of the DPI;
- Occupational physicians working for the DPMS.

These experts deal with specific topics and develop limited-duration action programmes that have a restricted geographic focus.

Information exchange

The exchange of information between the partners at different platform levels ensures that quality work is carried out within the structures that have been established. It is made clear that at each level it is the duty of the all those partners involved to transmit information in their possession to the various representatives of the other directorates or services. This either takes place on their own initiative or on the basis of simple procedures that are laid down in the Global Integrated Prevention and Protection System. Meetings must allow the partners:

- To assess the situation regarding health and safety, as far as persons or services are concerned;
- To take urgent measures;
- To adapt wherever and whenever necessary the objectives of the Global Integrated Prevention and Protection System and the action plans. This priority is less urgent than the other two.

Depending on the level of urgency, it is assumed that, when a partner receives information, he will quickly transmit it to the other partners at the appropriate level and will do this using any suitable means.

After an initial analysis of the transmitted information, the specific member of the department that receives it is obliged to bring the corresponding platform level into action. He does this through any means that he may have at his disposal and can, for example, carry out an assessment of the problem, formulate his own recommendations or propositions relating to the issue, or take any specific decisions he deems to be necessary.

Following this, the platform appoints a case manager who is responsible for the coordination of activities, and in particular those concerning the transmission of information to the relevant members of staff.

Drawing conclusions

An instrument has been put in place to enable the performance and activity of the platform to be assessed every year. It is too early to have a full evaluation at the moment, but initial indications are positive. Should the annual assessments decide the platform is not operating according to requirements, corrective measures may then be taken.

Among the initial positive results, it appears that thanks to the creation of the platform it has been possible to establish an overall strategic objective for the Federal Police. According to the wording of the strategic objective, the Federal Police must endeavour as far as possible:

- To promote, within the Federal Police, the most favourable social climate and working environment that respects the statutory provisions in the domains of occupational safety and health.