



International  
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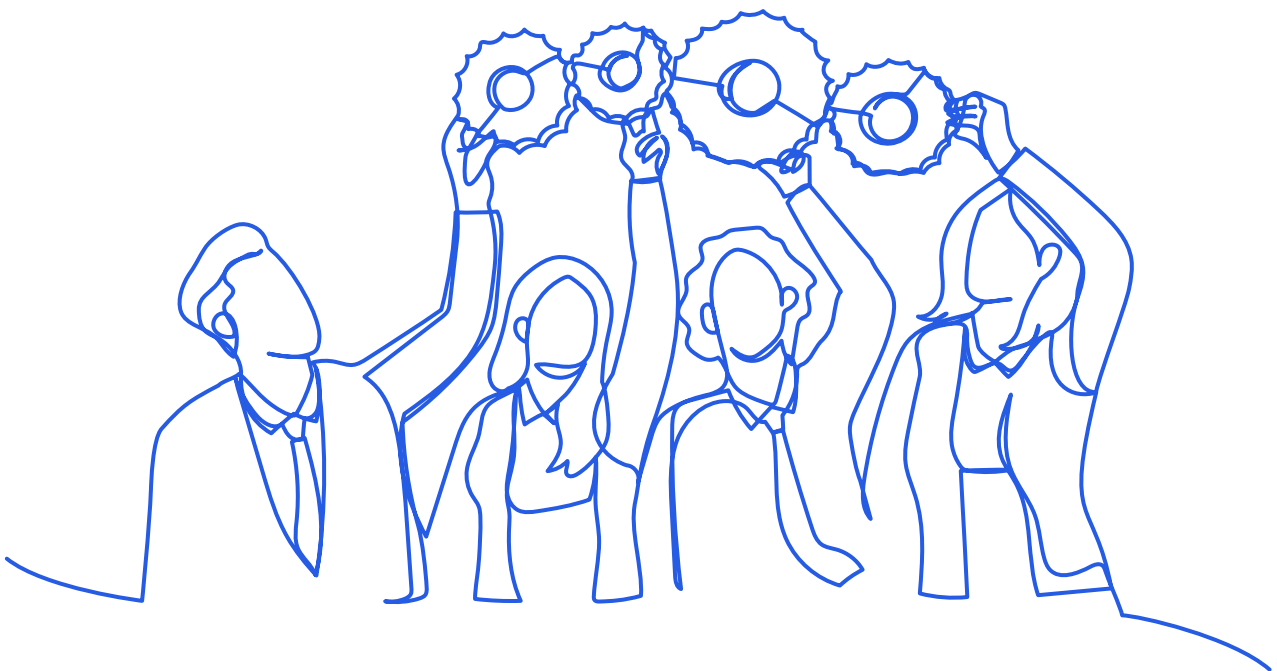
MOVING FORWARD  
TOGETHER

## **With care for everyone**

Psychosocial support at the workplace  
in war and post-war times

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# **Information material for enterprise and trade union leaders**



Information toolkit on psychosocial support at the workplace in war and post-war times



Having ratified a whole range of the ILO Conventions on occupational safety and health and having undertaken to approximate its national provisions to the EU standards (within the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement framework), Ukraine must promote safe and healthy working conditions<sup>1</sup>. Care for mental<sup>2</sup> health of workers is a component of occupational safety and health, promoting business sustainability.

War, like any other external danger or threat, is a factor which arises outside work but its consequences may affect both human working ability and productivity and the world of work in general.

Consequences of war will have a long-term impact on the working population's mental health as well as on the young generation that is yet to enter the labour market. Enterprises and organizations will therefore need not only to provide support of the psychologically healthy working environment but also to improve and strengthen that support on a continuous basis.

### ► Why is a programme of psychosocial support at the workplace important?

According to the WHO estimate, global economy's losses due to reduced productivity because of anxiety and depression amount to 1 trillion USD per year<sup>3</sup>. Each USD 1 investment into promotion of workers' mental health returns 3-5 USD<sup>4</sup>. Problems of psychological and social nature affect an individual, a work team and business. They result in loss of working time due to absenteeism<sup>5</sup> and presenteeism<sup>6</sup>, entail increased risk of occupational accidents, and create a tense atmosphere in the team.

*Psychologically healthy workers are an indication of a healthy working environment. When training on psychological recovery and stress management skills is built into the enterprise's activities, workers feel valued and supported, which is also influences increase in their psychological resilience and productivity level amid such an emergency crisis as war.*

For psychosocial support to be systemic, occur on a permanent basis and have a preventive character, an appropriate system is required: a policy and an action programme supporting the policy. Systemic care for mental health is as important as care for a person's physical condition because it can save life, prevent occupational injuries, preserve human resources, increase motivation and productivity, as well as become an additional attractive factor for jobseekers and investors alike.

Besides, implementation of a psychosocial support programme will reinforce significance of prevention of other psychosocial risks at work and open the way to such prevention.

- 1 On 10 June 2022, delegates of the International Labour Conference (ILC) adopted a resolution to include the principle of a safe and healthy working environment in the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.
- 2 According to the WHO definition, mental health is a psychological state in which a person can realize his/her potential, overcome life stresses, work productively and contribute to his/her community.
- 3 Mental Health and Substance Use. Mental health in the workplace.
- 4 Creating a mentally healthy workplace: Return on investment analysis. PwC, beyondblue, Australian Government National Mental Health Commission, and The Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance.
- 5 Absenteeism means the total number of working days (or hours) lost, or frequency of absence from work.
- 6 Presenteeism means the practice of coming to work despite diseases, injuries, troubles, etc., which leads to decline of productivity.



Psychosocial support is part of the measures which can be integrated into the general policy and programme of occupational safety and health. They supplement the preventive measures aimed at eliminating and controlling the psychosocial risk factors.

### ► What is the meaning of the “psychosocial risks and their factors” concept?

According to the ISO 45003:2021 standard<sup>7</sup>, psychosocial risks are any risks related to the hazards which emerge in the work organization process, due to social factors and working environment aspects, and are able to cause psychological, social or physical harm.

Psychosocial risk factors are aspects of work planning or management which increase a risk of adverse impact leading to work-related stress or stronger non-work-related stress, or affecting health and well-being of individual workers<sup>8</sup>. War is a hazard and factor of emergence of miscellaneous probable risks for workers and the world of work, which in turn leads to stress. Therefore, enterprise leaders can manage psychosocial risks (such as excessive workload, conflicting demands, ineffective communication (vertical/horizontal), lack of support from management, workers having no right in decision-making, insecurity at work, etc.) and mitigate consequences via the workplace by taking relevant measures at organizational and individual levels.

### ► What is the meaning of the “psychological safety at work” concept?

A psychologically healthy working environment is a healthy and safe environment that promotes productive work, personal growth, mental and physical well-being of workers.

Psychological safety is a key ingredient of happy work teams. In such teams, workers express concerns earlier and are more resilient to changes caused by external threats or hazards, like for example COVID-19 and war.

Shaping and maintaining a psychologically safe working environment is more about preventing problems than about the ways of addressing them. It is rather a proactive approach than a reactive fragmentary solution. That is why psychosocial support at the workplace includes, inter alia, formulation of an “open-door” policy adhering to the principle of confidentiality. It is an opportunity to show oneself well at work and tell about problems and needs without any fear of negative consequences. It is an atmosphere of openness where workers are free to talk to their manager about their physical and mental state and needs, express their opinions, discuss concerns and challenges, ask questions, not being afraid of any backlash in terms of judgement, stigma, distrust, adverse changes in work, etc. A psychologically safe working environment enables managers to act early and make corrections to prevent or minimize psychosocial and other occupational risks.

The psychological safety factor plays a huge role in maintenance of psychological resilience of both an individual worker and the entire team. Indeed, if you are free to share your fear with someone then the fear diminishes. The message “We are together, and if we are together we are strong” becomes a driver in hard times. At the workplace, it is leaders who translate this message and have every opportunity to create a culture of psychological safety and inclusion.

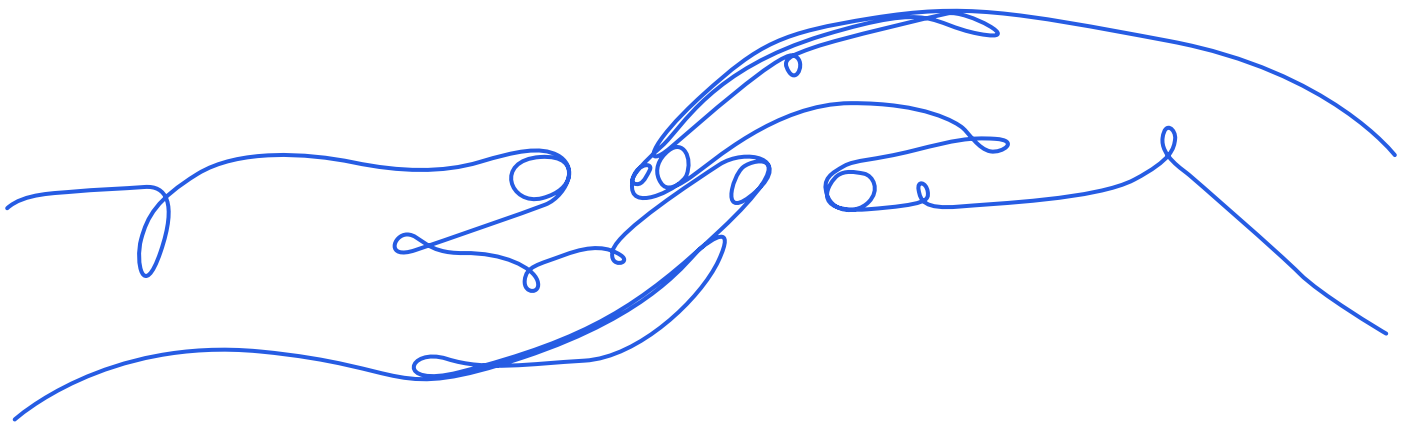
<sup>7</sup> ISO 45003:2021 “Occupational health and safety management – Psychological health and safety at work – Guidelines for managing psychosocial risks” (<https://www.iso.org/obp/ui/#iso:std:iso:45003:ed-1:v1:en>)

<sup>8</sup> IOSH (<https://iosh.com/health-and-safety-professionals>)



► **How can enterprise leaders crease a psychological safety culture?<sup>9</sup>**

- Maintain a positive social relationship with the team.
- Research confirms that positive social relationships with the management lead to the fact that people get sick less often, recover after an injury twice as quickly, are less likely to fall into depression, learn faster, endure discomfort better, and have a 70% less risk of premature death.
- Show empathy. Leaders demonstrating compassion for their workers promote individual and collective resilience in hard times.
- Do their best to help a worker who needs it. Research shows that workers helped by their manager are more likely to cooperate, more committed and productive.
- Encourage workers to be open. Amy Edmondson's studies<sup>10</sup> indicate that this factor is the main one in shaping psychological safety at work and it leads to better results at individual and team levels.



<sup>9</sup> Harvard Business Review

<sup>10</sup> Amy C. Edmondson is the Novartis Professor of Leadership and Management at the Harvard Business School



### ► What are goals of a psychosocial support programme at the workplace?

- Recognize psychosocial consequences of war for a person and for the world of work.
- Strengthen positions of the employer and trade union as a leader oriented on workers' well-being.
- Shape a psychologically safe environment where the principle of confidentiality and the absence of stigma and discrimination are of priority importance.
- Teach workers to identify signs of psychological problems to prevent occurrence of severe mental and behavioural consequences.
- Teach stress management methods and psychological recovery skills.
- Prevent emotional and professional burnout.
- Teach workers skills of psychological first aid provision.
- Provide access to external resources of professional psychological aid.
- Become more open to talks about mental health and to initiatives concerning psychosocial support at the workplace.

### ► What are key elements of a psychosocial support programme at the workplace?

- A written policy.
- An action programme – preventive measures within the policy.
- A regular and transparent system of internal communications for assessment of priority needs of workers and their support in crisis conditions.
- Periodic monitoring and evaluation to improve the psychosocial support programme.

### ► Why is a written policy on psychosocial support at the workplace is necessary?

Psychosocial support at the workplace should be based on a policy which includes clear messages, comprehensible to every worker, stating that impact of war on an individual and on the world of work is recognized and that psychological well-being of every man and woman worker is a priority. It's a clear action plan, a strategy, and a system of activities.

A written policy is a good way to start a conversation about mental health and demonstrate support from the management. It's a tool that informs about opportunities, guarantees protection, and demonstrates that psychosocial well-being of staff is the greatest value. Research shows that the vast majority of staff may not know about existence of the workplace policies, therefore the next step following development of the policy is to introduce all the enterprise staff to it.

An effective policy is not just a piece of paper on the manager's table. It is a culture of relations in a team, which inspires, supports and motivates. Such a policy is aimed at creating a proper atmosphere in work teams where everyone knows about it and is able to be involved in decision-making concerning support of the staff's psychological well-being.



► **What are main components of a written policy on psychosocial support of workers?**

- 1. Statement of intentions.** It is important to formulate a short written Statement that will demonstrate the management's commitment to psychosocial support of workers.
- 2. Goals of the policy.** It is important to state the policy goals and emphasize priority importance of the staff's safety and health in order to ensure effective communication and involve the staff in programme activities as part of the policy.
- 3. Definitions of key terms.** It is important to write in the policy the meaning of the concepts "mental health", "reasonable accommodation", "psychological first aid", "psychological counselling and psychotherapy", "stigma and discrimination". Being informed about the essence of the concepts will help improve internal communication and increase the rate of recourses to mental health care services.
- 4. Scope of application.** The policy should apply to staff of all position categories. Besides, preventive measures within the policy may cover suppliers, contractors, clients, interns, applicants and volunteers if the sector's specifics so require (for example, psychological first aid in education may be required by pupils or their parents directly in an educational institution; in retail trade it may be required by customers; in a health care facility by patients). Contact information on delivery of specialized psychological and social aid services must be available to all the categories of persons mentioned in the policy.
- 5. Obligations.** As part of the policy, every member of the work team must care for him/herself and for other work team members. The obligation to adhere to the principles of ethical conduct, confidentiality and reasonable accommodation is a basis for shaping a culture of general support and creates a psychologically safe workspace where workers feel being able to discuss top-priority mental health needs and problems openly with their managers and/or authorized persons at the enterprise, without fear of stigma and blame. Every worker has the right to contribute to improvement of the policy and programme of activities and to provide feedback.
- 6. Communication.** An effective policy must have communication support, transparent and timely. All the staff and other categories of persons covered by the policy must know about it and its capabilities. All the staff must be informed about any preventive measures within the framework of the policy and about any changes in it. It is important to notify all the staff of available options of psychosocial support at the workplace. The notices can be distributed by email, at the intranet websites, on bulletin boards, or discussed during meetings. The main point is to convey that to all the staff. Initiatives within such a programme have a single common goal – to prevent or avert occurrence of psychosocial risks for a person at work, namely reduce the degree of stress caused by war and in post-war time, and rule out development of severe stress disorders, PTSD, depression, suicide, addictions, and other problems. The policy provides for a respective action programme. It's a "menu" of the programme: what activities and in which forms are carried out, what means of support can be provided by the employer and/or trade union to all the staff and to certain vulnerable worker groups.
- 7. Policy monitoring and review.** The written policy must be reviewed, for example once a year, for adjustment and supplementation. Efficiency of the policy may be evaluated by feedback (interviews, surveys, etc.) from staff, managers, and a representative for occupational safety and health, by reports on results of implementation and delivery of informational, training and other supportive activities, and by working results of a hotline if it exists at the enterprise or in the sector.



**Important!**

*Before developing a written policy, it is worth analyzing the situation in terms of the policies, programmes, codes of conduct, and provisions concerning support of workers in collective agreements and contracts existing at the enterprise or in the given sector. The analysis of the situation will show whether it is worth drafting a separate policy or, perhaps, it would be sufficient to add some provisions to an existing programme for workers support. Besides, the analysis may include an anonymous survey of staff concerning existing psychosocial needs and stress assessment. This stage also envisages establishment of a committee or coordinating section that will develop the policy, implement the programme of activities, maintain regular and transparent communication, and evaluate results.*

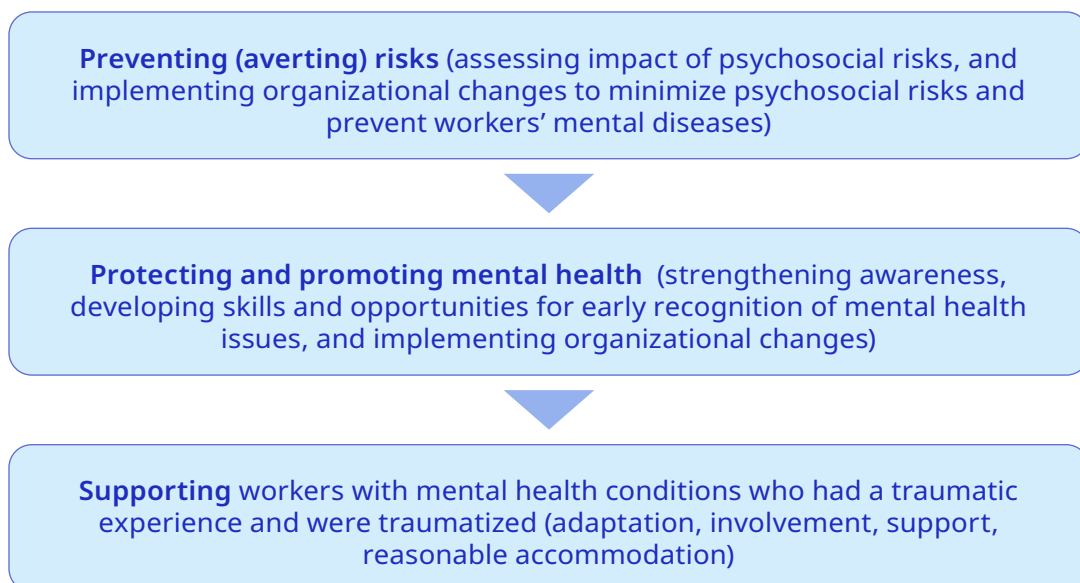
To develop an enterprise's written policy on psychosocial support, you may use the [example](#).

► **Where and how are workers introduced to the policy?**

If a policy has been written but nobody knows about it and takes part in training activities, it is a “dead” policy. The employer and its team as well as the trade union must decide about the way in which a worker can read the policy, ask questions, and sign it.

► **What are ways of improving workers' mental health?**

Improvement of workers' mental health requires relevant actions aimed at preventing mental disorders, protecting a resourceful state and strengthening mental health, and supporting full and equal participation of all workers in work.

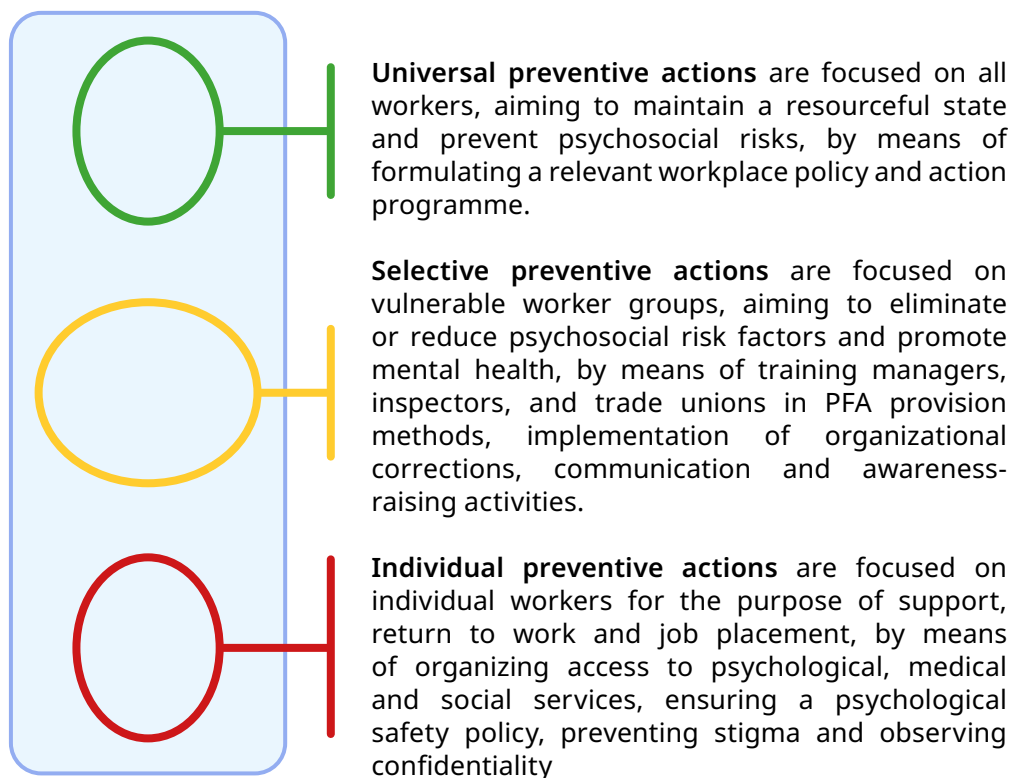




## ► What preventive measures (interventions) at the workplace can be included in a psychosocial support program?

The measures in the psychosocial support programme for workers correspond to three strategies of preventive interventions: universal (at the level of the entire enterprise and all workers), selective (at the level of a workplace or certain worker groups), and individual (at the individual worker level). All these strategies include actions aimed to prevent, protect, promote and support workers' mental health by means of organizational changes (working conditions, workplace design, workload, etc.), information and training activities, and access to medical, psychological and social services.

## ► Preventive strategies according to the WHO guidelines<sup>11</sup>



<sup>11</sup> <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240053052>





## Universal preventive measures

Universal preventive measures (the “green” strategy) are intended for the whole work team and aimed at maintaining the staff’s resourceful state and preventing occurrence of emotional and behavioural problems by means of a variety of organizational, informational and training activities.

Mental health-related preventive measures should become part of the occupational safety and health policy and must include psychosocial risk assessment and control to prevent mental disorders and to ensure timely internal communication concerning work process changes. In view of the war and post-war context, it is necessary to assess psychosocial risk factors caused by work reorganization to overcome staff shortage, business relocation, work process changes, workload planning, economic impacts resulting from stress, communication strategies and leadership.

Information and training activities provide a basis for this action strategy. An employer or trade union should provide all workers access to safety trainings (actions in case of air-raid alert, chemical attack, shelling, finding oneself under debris, physical and sexual attack, being in an occupied territory, etc.), information on recognizing early signs of psychological problems, training methods of stress management and basic skills of providing psychological first aid, etc. Trainings on physical health maintenance are important, for example concerning prevention of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, because war is about sexual violence as well. It is important to motivate people to use diagnostic and treatment services in time.

Subject to resources available at the enterprise, universal psychological support of workers may be provided in the form of a specially equipped space for emotional relief (a recreation room, ideas for which can be suggested by workers themselves), an opportunity of attending sports clubs, freely using meditative programmes and mobile apps for mental health support, etc.

## Selective preventive measures

Selective preventive measures (the “yellow” strategy) are aimed at supporting vulnerable worker groups (IDPs, pregnant women, workers with disabilities, workers with physical and mental problems, workers having relatives in areas of active hostilities, workers who came under shelling, lost their relatives and property, workers returning to work after a traumatic experience), and include assistance for meeting urgent problems, creation of convenient working conditions for their effective adaptation at the workplace, organization of remote work, and activities for psychological recovery, for example a training on prevention of alcohol or drug problems or on mindfulness, a training on dealing with a loss, self-help groups, trainings for parents, etc.

## Individual preventive measures

Individual preventive measures (the “red” strategy) are intended for workers who show signs of mental and behavioural problems and whom contacts for obtaining free professional psychological or other aid can be offered. It is important to respect confidentiality and prevent any manifestation of stigma and discrimination during an individual conversation with a worker. It is important to remind all the staff from time to time of available internal resources (a full-time psychologist) and/or external resources for provision of professional psychological aid. The enterprise’s key goal is to facilitate access to health care and psychosocial support in coordination with national authorities and local partners.



One of important measures in the “yellow” and “red” preventive interventions strategies can be a method of psychological first aid provision. During the war, we can find ourselves in the situations at and outside the workplace when a person needs emergency psychological support but there is no psychologist around. It is not necessary to have psychological education to deliver psychological first aid but one must surely know how to do that correctly to avoid doing any harm and be efficient. Find more information on this subject in [“With care for everyone: psychological first aid to workers in war and post-war times. Practical tips”](#).

As part of the programme of psychosocial support at the workplace, activities can be implemented which indirectly improve the psychological state of workers, for example: financial support, awarding of teams, “tasty” gifts, assistance in relocation, improvement of working conditions, etc. 53% of respondent workers in the US would most likely quit their current job if they were offered a new job with considerably greater benefits for mental health support, for example counselling, therapy or yoga.

Workers whose loved ones are nearby or in the epicentre of active hostilities need to be in constant touch with them. The management may allow temporary changes in the working schedule to promote that, for example change the work starting and ending time or provide longer breaks. Perhaps, it is reasonable to revise the worker’s duties and responsibility. One of the ways to demonstrate commitment and care for workers’ psychological well-being may consist of organization of a separate space (room), safe for private calls, to ensure confidentiality when providing psychological first aid. Such a facility may be particularly useful to the persons working in open-floor offices.

In some cases, workers may need not only psychological but also social and legal support if their problems concern a loss (death of a close person, destroyed housing, formalization of paternity). In such circumstances, appropriate support may be provided, for example financial aid, leave, legal support etc.)

Volunteering is an important component of preventing psychosocial risks and shaping a culture of support at work during and after the war. The enterprise may provide such support wherever possible as well as encourage the staff to undertake such activities. Helping and caring for others distracts attention from personal disturbing thoughts, thereby reducing the level of stress and fear. Subject to available resources and capacity, work teams may decide about forms and means of possible organization of such assistance to others.

### ► **What signs and symptoms of psychological problems may be a signal for a manager or authorized worker’s early intervention?**

If signs and symptoms of psychological problems are well-understood, it may prompt early intervention, hence prevention of development of distress. Exchange of information about mental health can also help workers detect signs, especially early, in themselves and seek support. Some of the typical signs can be harder to find in persons working remotely, therefore it is worth using structured [questionnaires for self-assessment of the emotional state](#).



Behavioural and emotional changes, which were not characteristic of a person before, may be typical signs of likely psychosocial problems, for example:

- changes in appearance;
- reduced productivity;
- being late for meetings and/or work;
- social withdrawal;
- irritability, aggression;
- excessive vigilance;
- attention focusing difficulties;
- increased duration of work (working without breaks);
- absence due to a disease;
- distraction and embarrassment (frequent errors in work);
- abuse of psychoactive substances (alcohol, drugs, medicines).

If one of these signs is observed, it does not automatically mean that the person is feeling bad but it must prompt the manager (or an authorized person) to talk about mental health. It is important during a conversation to avoid any assumptions and diagnoses as well as to respect confidentiality. As a good practice within the enterprise's policy on psychosocial support, managers and authorized workers should be taught not only to identify signs of distress but also to talk with a worker effectively about that, adhering to ethical behaviour.

### ► **Why is being in contact with workers important, and how can a system of internal communications within the programme be organized?**

Being open and in constant contact is an inseparable component of the policy of psychosocial support at the workplace. It's a change management plan, that is how an enterprise or organization can work in view of certain limitations because of war. It's a clear plan concerning provision of safe working conditions. The manager's regular communication with the staff and a possibility for a worker to report his/her needs without fear ensure better conditions for return to work and adaptation.

Talking about mental health can be uncomfortable to many workers, especially to men. A personal example of a colleague or manager concerning mental health support may promote shaping a trustful and inclusive culture at work.



Communication is necessary for the entire staff to realize that the management support talks about mental problems as well as acknowledge that care for psychosocial well-being of every man and woman worker fosters creation of a more sensitive working environment and reduces stigma that can pose an obstacle to openness and timely psychological aid.

Leaders can share their own experience of stress management in the war context via communication with personnel. Such behaviour signals to the workers that the same is expected of them.

Fear of the unknown and uncertainty concerning the working process may be one of the reasons of considerable stress. In the situation of war, there must certainly be a clear action plan, specific exactly for the given enterprise or the entire sector. It must be definitely presented to all the staff. Awareness of the situation and further steps, and availability of an emergency action plan will help reduce the level of anxiety and strengthen psychological resilience of staff in such difficult times.

Managers can use individual meetings with staff once a week to learn in person about their emotional state and priority needs. Communication with vulnerable worker groups is especially important. It can increase trust in the management, improve the atmosphere in the work team, maintain people's general spirit amid the war, and prevent occurrence of adverse consequences.

Communication can be ensured by means of offline and online meetings, social media groups, chatbot, teambuilding, challenges, volunteering, etc. Besides, it is extremely important to have informational support for the programme in one place. People are overloaded by the volume of information due to the war, therefore placing everything (a written policy, information for mental health support, an emergency action plan, success stories of colleagues, links to support services, etc.) in one place will make communication and use of information materials much easier.

### ► **What are indicators and tools of the programme monitoring and evaluation?**

#### **Recommended indicators for measurement:**

- Workers' stress level.
- Workers' information needs.
- Effectiveness of all initiatives within the programme.
- Number of requests, activities, services received (for example, recourses to a full-time psychologist, to a colleague trained to provide FPA, calls to a hotline), etc.
- Service provision quality (number of good and bad responses).
- Result of trainings delivered (qualitative and quantitative indicators).
- Number of leaves because of stress or a mental disorder/disease.



**Recommended monitoring and evaluation tools:**

- Anonymous structured surveys.
- Reports on calls to an internal hotline on occupational safety and health.
- Needs box.
- Focus groups.
- Reports on the extent of use of internal and external resources for mental health.
- Individual interviews with staff.
- Involvement of external specialists to measure efficiency of the programme.

**► What programme efficiency criteria can be used?**

Once the programme has been successfully integrated in the enterprise's work, it is expedient to review its implementation efficiency on a regular basis (for example, once a quarter or annually). The following questions may be criteria of the programme efficiency:

- Does this policy/programme guarantee that all the actions within its scope do not cause harm to workers, promote psychological safety, and are grounded on respect, trust (personal reports are confidential) and flexibility?
- Does the programme offer all possible forms for the staff to receive useful information and methods for teaching basic skills of psychological recovery?
- Do all workers have the right and opportunity to take part in training activities and use psychosocial support resources?
- How frequently does training on psychological health support take place?
- How many workers of the enterprise are trained to provide psychological first aid?
- How often have workers resorted to psychological first aid provision services during the month?
- Is the enterprise's hotline working, and are staff's requests analyzed?
- Does the enterprise provide space for psychological relief and self-recovery of the staff, for example a separate room with necessary equipment, longer breaks, access to physical health support, access to sports halls, etc.?



- Do all workers know where to obtain contact data of crisis centres and professionals providing psychological, psychiatric, medical and social aid?
- Does every man and woman worker have the right to take part in development and evaluation of the psychosocial support programme? Are everyone's comments considered?
- What items of the policy/programme need correction?

Successful experience of psychosocial support at the workplace in Ukraine is of extreme importance because there are enterprises who have had workers' health support programmes since long time ago. Such new challenges to Ukraine as COVID-19 and the war make adjustments to the programmes existing at enterprises and in organizations, as well as require introduction of relevant policies and programmes of psychosocial support in all economic sectors and at enterprises of any size. In war and post-war times, exchange of successful practices and tripartite and bipartite negotiations of social partners will help formulate a national policy concerning psychosocial support in the world of work.

