Establishing Networks for Mentally Healthy Workplaces

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SMEs working for mental health in the workplace – the Well@SME project

Studies highlight a growing incidence of work-related mental diseases together with increased absence from work and early retirement due to mental illness in most European countries (European Framework for Action on Mental Health and Well-being, 2016).

This is a challenge that need to be tackled, to ensure mentally healthy workplaces across Europe.

Our project, WELL@SME, responds to the specific needs of employees and managers/owners of SMEs by designing and making available tailor-made resources, tools and strategies to prevent and contrast work-related stress and negative mental health impact of working conditions. This methodology is thus one of these tools.

This methodology focuses on how to build and maintain a network for mentally healthy workplaces and will allow you to best leverage the combination of tools, purpose, need, and commitment to make a change in your local workplace, community, or country.

This methodology can assist you with the following:

1. Establishing a network
2. Development of networks following an organised path
3. Articulate purpose and goals, ensuring common understanding
4. strategies for engaging potential partners
5. Processes for assessing the performance and impact

Hopefully, by following the steps in this methodology, you will be able to establish a network, focusing on supporting, building, and maintaining, mentally healthy workplaces.

From the WELL@SME team, we would like to thank you for your interest in mental health in the workplace

Danish Committee for Health Education

European Health Futures Forum
The future of health and healthcare now

ENAIMH
EUROPEAN NETWORK OF
ACTIVE LIVING FOR MENTAL HEALTH

ANS
Anziani e non solo
Società cooperativa sociale

mieli
Mental Health Finland

έδρα social cooperative activities for vulnerable groups

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Methodology for establishing networks for mentally healthy workplaces

Purpose of having a methodology for creating networks for Mental Health in the workplace

This methodology can provide a structural guidance and systematic approach to build a local, regional, or national network for mentally healthy workplaces through a step-by-step guideline, from identifying potential partners to formalising collaborations. It ensures that the development of the network follows a logical and organised path, increasing the likelihood of success, of course, considering local and cultural variations.

The methodology also helps you articulate the purpose and goals of the network, ensuring that all involved parties share a common understanding of the network's mission. This clarity fosters alignment among participating companies and enhances the effectiveness of collaborative efforts. To help you, the methodology includes strategies for engaging potential partners, communicating the benefits of collaboration, and maintaining ongoing communication within the network. It emphasises the importance of transparent and consistent communication to build trust and commitment among participating companies.

The methodology also incorporates processes for assessing the performance and impact of the network. It defines key performance indicators and evaluation criteria to measure success. By regularly evaluating the network's effectiveness, adjustments can be made to address challenges, seize opportunities, and ensure long-term sustainability. If you want to look at the effects of the processes, you have to invest in indicators.

Establishing a network of companies serves to provide structure, clarity, effective communication, and a framework for ongoing evaluation, and to do this, the methodology helps you ensure that the network is purposeful, well-aligned, and capable of adapting to the evolving needs of its participants. Thus, ensuring that the network is well suited to address work-related stress and negative mental health impact of working conditions.

For more information on the project, including resources, tools and strategies to prevent and contrast work-related stress and negative mental health impact of working conditions, please visit https://www.mentalhealth4work.eu/

1. Involve key stakeholders

When starting to build a network for supporting mental health in the workplace, it is important to involve the right stakeholder to ensure a successful and impactful partnership.

- SME leaders,
- HR professionals
- People/organisation peers with lived or organisational experience of both successes and challenges regarding mental health in the workplace.
- Mental health first aiders in the workplace (or ambassadors as mentioned in the next section)

It is very important to include these stakeholders early in the process and ensure their buy-in and commitment to fostering a mentally healthy workplace.

It is also recommended to reach out to government agencies, such as labour, health, and business agencies, amongst others, depending on the local context. It is advised to explore these agencies' (existing) support or funding mechanisms for health promotion/building mental health skills in their SME communities. This should also cover industry organisations and strong corporate partners – either with leadership, supplier, or client perspective on SME performance and wellbeing.

Also, academic institutions should be approached as neither the data gathering mechanisms, the development or training of these skills, nor the research skills are part of current practices among SMEs. We can also recommend involving both legal experts and ethical advisors to ensure you can provide good, basic information about local processes.

Examples from Europe:
- Ireland: Healthy workplace Ireland.
- Portugal: Pacto Para a Saude Mental
- Latvia: Seminars on Mental Health at Work

2. Train ambassadors/network

In order to be able to grow the network, and to have something tangible to offer to company CEO's, C-level executives, building a network of ambassadors can be utilized. This enables you to offer an upskilling framework for the work ahead, regarding ensuring better mental health and well-being in the workplace.

In order to make a training programme as close to the local or national context as possible, and to have an activity to engage the network in, you can choose to build your own training programme, However, there are several different programmes already developed, such as the WELL@SME E-learning platform, and other European and national programmes. Find one that fits your local
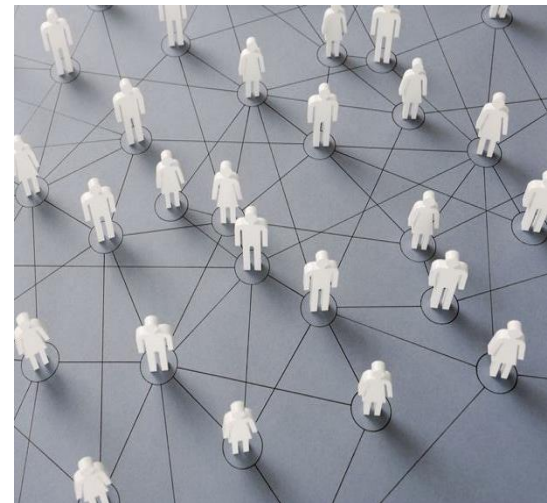
context and consider how it can be implemented through your newly established network. You can also refer to the [Well@SME database](#), for guidance and information

You can also take inspiration from these examples of ambassador trainings in Europe:

Examples from Europe:
- Latvia: [Trainings for ambassadors](#)
- Portugal: [Pacto Para a Saude Mental](#)
- Finland: [Business Mentor System](#)
- United Kingdom: [Mental Health First Aiders](#)

Should you choose to build a similar tool, make sure to collaborate with mental health professionals to ensure accuracy and depth in the training content.

This training programs should be built for potential peer supporters (in practice eg HR professionals, middle managers, dedicated HSEQ workers or similar), focusing on active listening, empathy, and basic mental health awareness. Collaborate with mental health professionals to provide insights into common workplace mental health issues.

Some of the elements to consider in such a training programme should include mental health awareness training, including information on common mental health disorders, stigma reduction, and the importance of early intervention.

This training should also involve communication and active listening skills to boost needed skills for empathy, confidentiality, and the ability to guide individuals to appropriate resources. It should include insights into common SME dynamics, such as limited resources, tight deadlines, and the close-knit nature of small teams. And for the same reason, also contain some crisis intervention training to help them handle situations where immediate intervention is required and guide individuals to professional help. Thus, here, the primary emphasis is on knowing quickly who to contact and how to act if a crisis strikes.

For added quality, training in cultural sensitivity and diversity would be essential as mental health concerns also need to be addressed in a culturally competent manner which respects perspectives and backgrounds.

For local/organisational purposes, training in networking and relationship-building strategies would be very helpful as connections with key stakeholders in both the company and the community (including SME leaders, HR professionals/networks, and local community organisations) will enhance the reach and impact of the network for mentally healthy workplaces.

And if you also have time and opportunity, the use of simulation exercises and role-playing during any physical training sessions is recommended. This allows ambassadors to practise their skills in a controlled environment. This can help build confidence and ensure that ambassadors are well-prepared for real-life situations.

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3. Build an assessment/incentive mechanism and ensure a feedback/regulation mechanism

It is vital to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the company network and the peer support programme through quantitative and qualitative measures. Use this data to make adjustments to strategy, network, or communication and to expand the programme, and address emerging needs. (look also at point 7 and 8 – as this also enables a future data-driven approach).

In addition to considering the use of individual based mechanisms like using micro-credit system for incentivization of employees/peers using the programme, we also suggest setting up data gathering initiatives for the following three areas:

- **Employee Engagement with network for mentally healthy workplaces:** Percentage of Employees Utilizing Peer Support Services: This measures the engagement level of employees with the network for mentally healthy workplaces. A higher percentage indicates that employees are aware of and comfortable using the support services, reflecting the success of the network in creating a culture of openness around mental health.
- **Mental Health-Related Absenteeism and Presenteeism Rates:** Reduction in Absenteeism and Presenteeism: By tracking changes in absenteeism (days taken off due to mental health issues) and presenteeism (employees working while dealing with mental health concerns) rates. A decrease in these rates can be indicative of the positive impact of the network for mentally healthy workplaces on employee mental well-being and overall workplace productivity.
- **Employee Satisfaction and Retention:** Employee Satisfaction and Retention Rates: By measuring employee satisfaction through surveys and retention rates to assess the impact of the network for mentally healthy workplaces on overall job satisfaction and commitment to the organisation. A higher satisfaction level and improved retention can be linked to the effectiveness of the network in supporting employees' mental health needs.

Monitoring these areas will provide a well-rounded view of the success of a network for mentally healthy workplaces for SMEs working with mental health in the workplace, capturing both the utilisation of support services and the broader impact on organisational metrics related to productivity, absenteeism, and employee satisfaction.

Establish a system for regular check-ins and supervision sessions for peer supporters to discuss challenges, share experiences, and receive additional training if needed. Also define and communicate strict confidentiality guidelines to peer supporters to create a safe and trusting environment for employees seeking support.

Please consider which of these areas will be suitable to implement for your context. You should keep in mind that these feedback methods should not be too heavy to implement, as this will create a risk of them not being properly implemented, or using more resources than what is is available.

Examples from Europe:
- Greece: 4peoplematters - Assessment tool
- Finland: Mental Health Friendly Workplace ® label
- Portugal: Pacto Para a Saude Mental

4. Describe a national/regional structure w governance mechanism

By designing a governane framework of your mental health in the workplace network, you will be able to offer access to trainers for designated peer supporters for different teams or departments. make sure to ensure geographical and hierarchical representation to foster inclusivity.

Describing a governance framework for the company network of SMEs working with mental health in the workplace SMEs and the network for mentally healthy workplaces in the actual workplaces is very helpful, not just as a governance framework provides a structured approach to implementing and managing the network for mentally healthy workplaces. One can also then outline roles, responsibilities, and processes, ensuring that the programme is organised, efficient, and aligned with the organisation's objectives at a local level.

This could also ensure your network has accountability and oversight, adding to the ability to measure progress and ensure a broad risk management strategy, identifying potential challenges and providing a plan for mitigating risks. This is crucial in managing sensitive matters related to mental health and ensures that potential issues are addressed promptly and appropriately.

The national governance network will thus improve your ability to train and develop the network for mentally healthy workplaces and possibly give you the option of a quality assurance programme to help maintain the quality and effectiveness of the peer support services.

The framework should also incorporate legal and ethical considerations related to mental health support. This would not (likely) include actual counselling, but include the most relevant advice and references to more material when needed. The objective is not to include all, but to ensure a base level of information to ensure users are referred/offered good legal/ethical advice when needed. This also ties to the need for transparency and open communication about the governance, development, and results of the network – as this also fosters a culture of openness and trust.

A governance framework should also provide some ideas or a roadmap for the sustainable implementation of the network for mentally healthy workplaces. It considers long-term planning, resource allocation, and strategies for continuous improvement, ensuring that the program remains relevant and impactful over time, ensuring the program remains effective in different phases of the organisation's development.

In summary, a governance framework is essential for the successful implementation, management, and sustainability of a network for mentally healthy workplaces for SMEs working with mental health in the workplace. It provides a structured and organised approach, addressing various aspects critical to the program's success and the well-being of employees.

Examples from Europe
- Ireland: [Government vision for a Mental Health Policy](#)
- Portugal: [Pacto Para a Saude Mental](#)

5. Build a communication platform for peers/trainers

To ensure streamlined and easy communication between the partners in the network, it would be a good idea to Implement an accessible communication channels for peers and trainers to extend their collaboration and knowledge sharing. If possible/needed at company level, also enable methods for employees to connect with peer supporters, such as anonymous hotlines, online forums, or in-person drop-in sessions, such as informal events, for example virtual morning coffees or virtual walks together etc.

Ensure ease of access to support and make sure your choice of platform offers a super-high level of security in relation to the sensitive issues it involves. It is a very tricky topic, but the peers and trainers also need support and knowledge sharing to continue their vital role.

Examples from Europe:
- Greece: [HiWell App](#)
- Portugal: [Pacto Para a Saude Mental](#)

6. Create an awareness campaigns among the SMEs

IN order to create awareness about the importance of focusing on mental health and well-being in the workplace, as well as awareness of your network, it can be beneficial to Launch a comprehensive awareness campaign within the SME, promoting the network for mentally healthy workplaces and emphasising its role in destigmatising mental health discussions.

Considering the purpose of the network it is recommended to include a focus on storytelling and personal narratives. By encouraging employees to share their personal experiences with mental health challenges as testimonials, the campaign helps humanise the issue, reduce stigma, and create a supportive culture where individuals feel comfortable discussing their mental health. It is also important to highlight cases where mental health strengthening (not only challenges) work has yielded results. These can serve as important examples for others. The same applies for leadership endorsement; Obtaining personal stories or endorsements from company leaders who openly share their support for mental health initiatives enhances the credibility of the campaign and signals a commitment to fostering a mentally healthy workplace.

This campaign can also use internal communication channels, such as newsletters, intranet, and company-wide emails, to regularly share mental health-related information and campaign updates. In addition it is a good idea to organise local campaign events, such as mental health awareness days, where employees can participate in activities, attend informative sessions, and engage in open conversations about mental health.

Example from Europe:
- Denmark: Tryg Jobstart - Campaign on supporting newly employed young people

7. Connect with existing, national/European entities

To further build and ground your network, consider Integrating your network into existing employee assistance programmes and wellbeing initiatives to create a holistic approach to mental health in the workplace. This includes connecting to ESG reporting units to enable a mechanism of accountability and benchmarking.

Collaboration with European entities allow the learning from experiences in different countries that can provide valuable insights and innovative approaches that enhance the effectiveness of the network for mentally healthy workplaces. It will also support the development of a more robust and internationally informed network for mentally healthy workplaces for SMEs.

It also gives a lot of networking opportunities with potential collaborators, including organisations, experts, and advocates in the mental health field. This can lead to valuable partnerships, shared resources, and collaborative initiatives that strengthen the impact of the network for mentally healthy workplaces – including both policy Insights and advocacy in regional/European policies, but also be a pathway for national visibility as European activities can also be a good way to make progress via other means. At a global level, this would also help to share and gather success stories, and contribute to a collective movement aimed at prioritising mental health on a global scale.

European collaboration might also be a very useful pathway towards sharing knowledge on potential funding mechanisms to help boost local action in practice and research.

Examples from Europe:
- Greece: National Workplace Health Promotion Network - Neaygeia
- Latvia: Mental Health Matters

8. Initiate research based on the data collection mechanism

If there are research partners in your network, it could be beneficial to further establish the importance of your network, and collaborate on creating new knowledge, which is vital to further strengthen the work with creating a better mentally healthy workplace across Europe.

We have listed 5 areas that we think could be beneficial to investigate, but feel free to consider additional areas, if it is suitable for your context.

- **Measuring Impact on Employee Well-being:** Conduct research to assess the impact of the network for mentally healthy workplaces on the mental health and well-being of employees within SMEs. Utilise surveys, interviews, and mental health metrics to quantify changes in stress levels, job satisfaction, and overall mental well-being over time.
- **Workplace Productivity and Performance Metrics:** Investigate the correlation between the implementation of a network for mentally healthy workplaces and workplace productivity and performance indicators. Analyse key performance metrics, such as absenteeism rates, presenteeism, and job performance, to determine if there are positive effects on overall business outcomes.
- **Cost-Benefit Analysis:** Conduct a thorough cost-benefit analysis to evaluate the economic impact of the network. Assess the costs associated with implementing and maintaining the program against the potential savings from reduced absenteeism, turnover, and healthcare expenses. This analysis can provide valuable insights into the economic viability and return on investment of the peer support initiative. Here it is also important to consider the wider return on investment, as people who have a higher level of well-being are able to support their community more, thereby reducing loneliness, as well as other wider impacts a heightened level of wellbeing has on communities and societies.
- **Employee Engagement and Satisfaction:** Explore the relationship between the network for mentally healthy workplaces and employee engagement and satisfaction levels. Use employee surveys and focus groups to gather qualitative data on employees' perceptions of the support network, its effectiveness, and the overall impact on their job satisfaction and sense of belonging within the organisation.
- **Long-Term Sustainability and Evolution:** Research the long-term sustainability and evolution of the network for mentally healthy workplaces. Evaluate how well the programme adapts to changing workplace dynamics, and assess its ability to address emerging mental health challenges. Consider the scalability of the initiative and its potential to evolve based on the evolving needs of SMEs and their workforce.
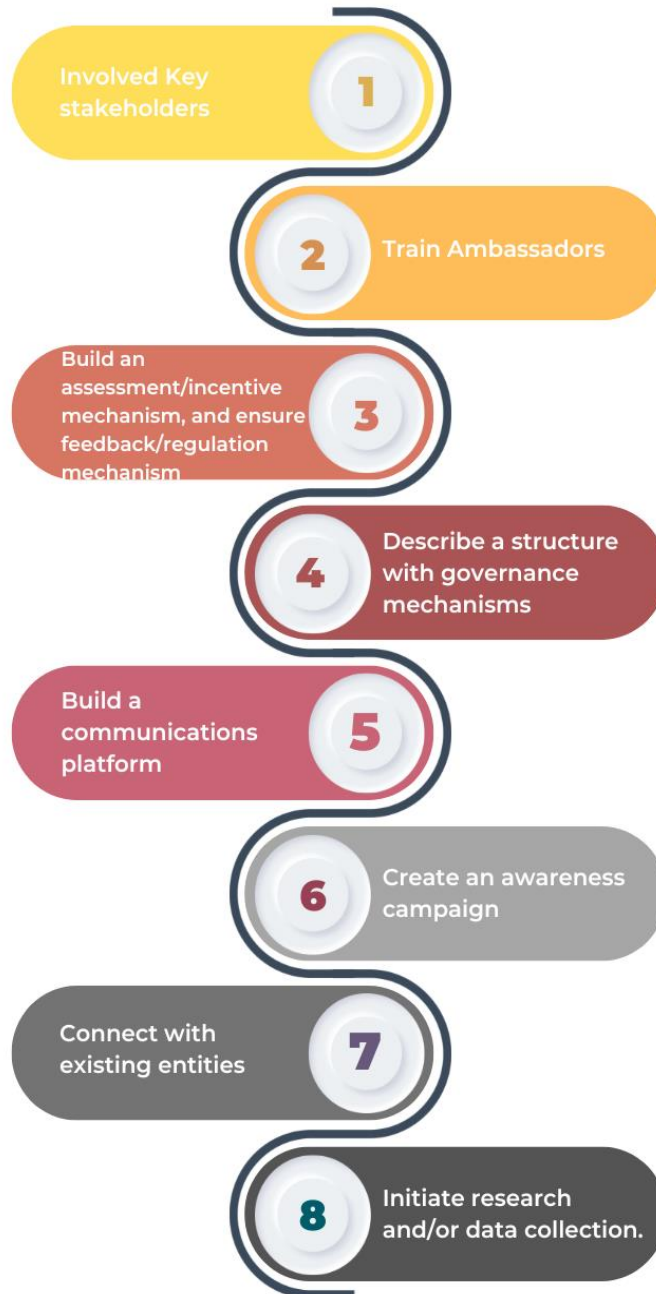
By focusing on these key points, researchers can provide a comprehensive understanding of the outcomes of a network for mentally healthy workplaces for SMEs working with mental health in the workplace, helping organisations make informed decisions about the continuation and refinement of such initiatives.

Examples from Europe
- Finland: Collaboration with National institute for occupational health
- Greece: Collaboration on health equality and quality

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Summary of Process

Involved Key stakeholders

1

2

Train Ambassadors

Build an assessment/incentive mechanism, and ensure feedback/regulation mechanism

3

4

Describe a structure with governance mechanisms

Build a communications platform

5

6

Create an awareness campaign

Connect with existing entities

7

8

Initiate research and/or data collection.

Country Reports

To get a sense of the situation for mentally healthy workplaces in the countries of the partners included in the project, each country has developed a country report, to provide a state of affairs, when it comes to mental health in the workplace. The partner involved in the WELL@SME project represent the countries of Finland, Ireland, Greece, Denmark, Portugal, Italy, and Latvia.

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Country Report - Well@SME

Purpose	to highlight the current state of affairs when it comes to Mental Health practices for SME's in Finland

Employer initiatives and programmes

☐ Mental health first aid® training, Implemented by: MIELI Suomen Mielenterveys ry

Goal: To train mental health first aid skills at workplaces, so that employees know how to recognize mental health challenges and offer support.
Measures: Trainings that teach how to recognize mental health problems and provide first aid, as well as refer to professional help.

☐ Work ability program, Implemented by: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (STM)

Goal: Improve work ability and employment, especially for those with mental health problems or risk of disability.
Measures: Training of work ability coordinators, employment support services and development of cooperation with employers.

☐ Model of early caring, implemented by: Several employers
☐ Short therapy, implemented by: Some employers
☐ Auntie service (online meetings with mind professionals), implemented by: Some employers
☐ Pension insurance companies have many actions to promote mental health, such as work ability payment categories for companie

In Finland we have an Institute of Occupational Health. The institute created a Mental Health Toolkit (project 2023–2025), which focuses on the means and methods of supporting mental health as well as various professional fields. The aim is to strengthen the capacity of workplaces and work communities to support mental health and to respond to the demands of changing work life in terms of mental work ability. https://hyvatyo.ttl.fi/en/mental-health-toolkit/about

Legislation and policies

In Finland, the legal framework and policies related to mental health in the workplace consist of several laws, regulations and guidelines. Summary of these:

☐ Occupational Safety Act (738/2002): Key content: The Occupational Safety and Health Act obliges employers to take care of the safety and health of employees at work.
☐ Occupational Health Care Act (1383/2001): Key content: The Occupational Health Care Act requires the employer to organize preventive occupational health care for all employees.
☐ Equality Act (1325/2014): Key content: The Equality Act prohibits discrimination in working life and requires the promotion of equality.
☐ Employment Contracts Act (55/2001): Key content: The Employment Contracts Act regulates the relationship between employer and employee.
☐ Annual Leave Act (162/2005): Key content: The Annual Leave Act regulates employees' right to annual leave and the salary paid for it.

At least there is room for improvement in the implementation of the Equality Act

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Stigma reduction and awareness campaigns	Research and data gaps
Several educational campaigns, training programs and initiatives have been implemented in Finland, which aim to reduce the stigma of mental health and promote a mental-friendly culture. Here are few excamples: ☐ The Handprint of Mental Health project, Implemented by: Institute of Occupational Health Goal: Improve workplace mental health and reduce stigma. Actions: Workplaces are offered concrete tools and operating models to promote mental health. Trainings and workshops for employers and employees. ☐ Workplace Mental Health Program Implemented by: Institute of Occupational Health Goal: Promote mental health at workplaces and create mental-friendly work environments. Actions: Training programs for managers and employees to support mental health. Assessment and management of psychosocial risks. Good practices and operating models for promoting mental health in the workplace. ☐ Mental health week, Implemented by: MIELI Suomen Mielenterveys ry Goal: To increase awareness of mental health issues and reduce the stigma associated with them. Measures: During the campaign, events, seminars and discussions will be held all over Finland. The week's themes vary each year and deal with different topics related to mental health. ☐ Individual support and advice at workplaces, Implementer: Several occupational health service providers Goal: Provide employees with support in mental health matters. Actions: Services of an occupational health psychologist or therapist. Crisis management services and support groups. Personal counseling services and support chats.	☐ Research on the mental health problems of different population groups and their needs in working life. Understanding the Situation of Different Population Groups. Current research may overlook the mental health challenges of particularly vulnerable groups, such as immigrants, aging workers, minorities, and part-time workers. ☐ A broader study of psychosocial risk factors in different workplace environments and their effects on employees' mental health. ☐ Experimental research on the effectiveness of various preventive measures and best practices for promoting mental health in the workplace. ☐ Research on the effects of digital work tools and remote work on mental health, especially in the long term.

Current Landscapes and Trends

☐ In recent years, mental health challenges have increased in Finnish working life. In 2020, mental health reasons became the most common reason for sickness leaves in Finland. In 2023 there was more than 100,000 people who were on sick leave for mental health reasons (National Pension Institute). The most common reason are socio-emotional factors and especially cognitive load. The experiences of community at work are polarized, around one in four experiences a strong sense of community at work (Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, 2024).

☐ In recents years, acts promoting mental health in workplaces in Finland has been done more than previously. The trend is that in the future, even more will be invested in this.

Country Report - Well@SME

Purpose	to highlight the current state of affairs when it comes to Mental Health practices for SME's in Greece

Employer initiatives and programmes

- ☐ Some organizations are conducting workshops and training sessions to equip managers and staff with the skills to identify and address mental health concerns early.
- ☐ To reduce stress and promote work-life balance, many SMEs offer flexible working hours and remote work options.

Legislation and policies

- ☐ Law 3850/2010: This law outlines general principles for the health and safety of workers, including mental health.
- ☐ National Strategy for Mental Health (2014-2020): This strategy includes measures specifically targeting workplace mental health

Despite these regulations, enforcement is often lacking, and there is a need for more specific guidelines and stronger oversight to ensure compliance.

Stigma reduction and awareness campaigns

- ☐ Government and non-profit organizations regularly run campaigns to raise awareness about mental health issues.
- ☐ Collaboration between government agencies, non-profits, and private organizations has been crucial in driving these initiatives.

However, stigma remains a significant barrier, and ongoing efforts are needed to shift cultural perceptions and encourage open discussions about mental health.

Research and data gaps

- ☐ There is a lack of comprehensive data on the prevalence of mental health issues among SME employees.
- ☐ More research is needed to understand the unique challenges faced by different sectors within the SME landscape.
- ☐ Studies on the long-term effectiveness of current mental health programs and initiatives are scarce.

Current Landscapes and Trends

- [ ] There is an increasing recognition of the importance of mental health, driven by both public and private sector initiatives.
- [ ] Mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, and depression are common, particularly among employees in high-pressure roles.
- [ ] Common challenges include high workload, lack of job security, and insufficient support systems.
- [ ] The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of remote work and flexible schedules, which has had a mixed impact on mental health.

Overall, while progress has been made, there is still significant work to be done to create a supportive environment for mental health in Greek SMEs.

Country Report - Well@SME

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Purpose	to highlight the current state of affairs when it comes to Mental Health practices for SME's in Ireland

Employer initiatives and programmes	Legislation and policies
A large number of commercial employee assistance programmes available offering largely online and telephone support and some face to face. These range from access to councillors and psychotherapists to health and wellbeing coaches. Small business often though do not have regular access to commercial suppliers and rely on the individual using traditional health services and online resources through charities	☐ Under the Employment Equality Acts (2015), employers must protect the health, safety, and welfare of your staff. And this includes physical, mental, and emotional health.. It applies if they are currently experiencing mental health difficulties or if their experience of mental health difficulties was in the past. The application of equality law to people with mental health difficulties is broad. ☐ The act tends to be well enforced especially where employees are members of unions and larger employers. However a degree of unconscious discrimination is not uncommon. The main issue is access to support to bring a case to tribunal. In addition employees often feel unable to voice concerns unless employers work at creating a culture where mental health is not stigmatised

Stigma reduction and awareness campaigns	Research and data gaps
Despite efforts to raise awareness and challenge stereotypes, many people still associate mental illness with shame and personal failure. For instance, **68% of people in Northern Ireland** believe that being treated for a mental health difficulty is seen as a sign of personal failure. Similarly, a **2020 survey** found that **63% of people** in Ireland perceive mental health treatment as a sign of personal failure [Findings from 2020 mental health stigma survey (stpatricks.ie)](#) ☐ **See Change**: Established in 2010, See Change is a national partnership working to change minds about mental health problems. They aim to reduce stigma and discrimination associated with mental health issues through community-driven efforts [See Change	Say No To Mental Health Stigma](#) ☐ **Stigma Reduction Programs**: Various organizations and campaigns focus on raising awareness and challenging stereotypes. For instance, the "Walk in My Shoes" campaign addressed how stigma can manifest in different ways and with regard to different mental health condition [Walk in My Shoes mental health campaign](#)	☐ 1. **Longitudinal Studies**: more long-term studies to track mental health changes over time. These could explore factors like work-related stressors, coping mechanisms, and the impact of workplace policies. ☐ 2. **Intersectionality**: Research should consider the intersection of mental health with other identities (e.g., race, gender, disability). Understanding how these intersecting factors affect mental health experiences at work is essential. ☐ 3. **Remote Work**: With the rise of remote work, research on its impact on mental health. Factors like isolation, work-life balance, and digital fatigue warrant investigation. ☐ 4. **Organizational Culture**: Studies should look at organizational culture, including stigma, support systems, and leadership's role in promoting mental well-being. ☐ **Effective Interventions**: with a large number of private suppliers of employee assistance programmes need more evaluation of the effectiveness of workplace interventions (e.g., mental health programs, flexible work arrangements. Especially AI and other online interventions

Current Landscapes and Trends

☐ An extensive landmark study by **University College Cork (UCC)** surveyed over 1,500 businesses in Ireland. ([UCCCUBSHealthyWorkplaceIrelandReport_Mar2023.pdf](#)) It found that:

☐ 1 in 5 Irish firms have experienced mental health-related issues in the past year.

☐ Mental health-related absenteeism is on the rise.

☐ 60% of employees now report feeling even more stressed.

☐ **Lack of Investment**: Surprisingly, **80% of employers in Ireland** do not invest in workplace mental health. Only **20% of employers** have a dedicated budget for mental health initiatives: **https://phys.org/news/2023-03-mental-health-well-being-irish-workplaces.html**

☐ **Employee Well-Being Responsibility**: While **76% of employers** see employee mental health and well-being as their responsibility, only **32%** have an organizational response to mental health and well-being

Country Report - Well@SME

Purpose	to highlight the current state of affairs when it comes to Mental Health practices for SME's in Portugal

Employer initiatives and programmes

EDP Mental Health Practices: "Mind Your Mind" Campaign

- ☐ Objective: Raise awareness about mental health, dispel misconceptions, support symptom identification, and encourage seeking help with psychological support.
- ☐ Key initiatives: - Launch in 2020: Initiated during the pandemic, the campaign includes conversations and challenges that convert activities into donations.- Global Expansion: Since 2021, it impacts over 3,000 employees in 10 markets, featuring events and discussions with specialists and notable figures. - Partnerships: Collaboration with the José Neves Foundation and utilisation of the 29k app to provide support tools. - Focus on Psychological Safety: In 2022 and 2023, emphasis was placed on workplace psychological safety, with mindfulness sessions and expert talks. - Leadership and Continuity: EDP leadership adopts commitments to maintain a healthy work environment.
- ☐ Impact: - Investment: €82,508.85. - Beneficiaries: 12,265 employees

Delta Cafés - Mental Health Practices: Delta Feel Good

- ☐ Objective: Promote the physical and mental well-being of employees.
- ☐ Key Initiatives: Focus on Mental Health - Future Activities: Nature trails, yoga, life coaching workshops. - Preventive Actions: "No meeting days" on Thursdays and training for hybrid team managers. - Support Line: Holistic support for employees.
- ☐ Impact:: Increasing participation and positive feedback, strengthening well-being and interpersonal bonds.

Legislation and policies

- ☐ Portuguese Labour Code: The Portuguese Labour Code includes provisions for the protection of employees' mental health, such as the right to psychological support in case of work-related accidents or illnesses (Article 283)
- ☐ Law No. 102/2009: This law establishes the legal regime for the promotion of health and safety at work, which includes measures for the prevention of psychosocial risks.

Stigma reduction and awareness campaigns	Research and data gaps
☐ Não há Saúde sem Saúde Mental" (There's no Health without Mental Health): Launched by the Portuguese government, this campaign aims to reduce stigma around mental health and encourage people to seek help. ☐ · "Vamos falar" (Let's talk): The Portuguese Psychologists Association has various initiatives and campaigns to raise awareness about mental health in the workplace and on mental health related to different conditions and adversities in life (e.g., sexual harassment; disability). "	Main identified gaps: ☐ Lack of Longitudinal Studies in Portugal ☐ Data on Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) on managing mental health issues ☐ Impact of remote work in Portuguese workers

Current Landscapes and Trends

Current state and trends:

☐ Increased Awareness Post-COVID-19: The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly raised awareness about mental health in the workplace. Many organizations have started to recognize the importance of supporting their employees' mental well-being.

☐ Workplace stress: A survey by the Portuguese Psychologists Association, in 2022, indicated that 65% of Portuguese employees feel stressed due to work demands.

☐ Absenteeism and Presenteeism: Mental health issues are a significant contributor to absenteeism and presenteeism. The same survey (Portuguese Psychologists Association, 2022) noted that about 20% of employees took sick leave due to mental health problems within 2021.

☐ Telework Legislation: The Portuguese government introduced new regulations to support remote work, emphasizing the need for mental health considerations in telework arrangement (Law No. 83/2021)

☐ Corporate Social Responsibility: More companies are integrating mental health into their CSR strategies, recognizing the role of mental well-being in overall business success.

Factors Affecting Mental Health in the Workplace:

☐ High levels of anxiety and depression: National Institute of Statistics reported prevalence of anxiety disorders among workers around 18%, and depression rates are around 12%. These rates have increased post-pandemic.

☐ Workplace stress: High job demands, lack of control over work processes, and inadequate support from management are common stressor.,

☐ Work-life Balance: The blurring of boundaries between work and personal life, especially with the rise of remote work, has exacerbated stress and burnout.

☐ Stigma and Accessibility: Stigma around mental health issues persist, making it difficult for employees to seek help. Additionally, access to mental health services can be limited, particularly in SMEs and companies situated in rural areas.

☐ Policy Changes: Recent legislative changes have focused on improving working conditions and mental health support, such as the new telework laws require employers to ensure the mental well-being of remote workers.

☐ Corporate Programs: There has been a noticeable increase in corporate wellness programs that include mental health components.

☐ Technology and mental health: The adoption of mental health apps and digital platforms has grown, providing employees with more accessible mental health resources.

Country Report - Well@SME

well@sme
Mental Wellbeing in SMEs

Purpose	As in Europe in general, companies in Italy are paying more attention to mental health through the introduction and implementation of corporate welfare actions. However, in the Italian context this often turns out to be an ethical and revolutionary choice, which falls to the free choice of business owners and managers, and in practice there are still few companies that actually do something for their employees. This is also more difficult when we talk about SMEs, whose resources may be more limited.

Employer initiatives and programmes

In Italy, SMEs that aim to promote their employees' mental health often collaborate with specialized associations or local healthcare facilities. The services offered include Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), psychological counselling, stress management training, mindfulness sessions, and self-help groups. Statistics indicate that employees highly appreciate "flexible benefits," which include meal vouchers, shopping vouchers, medical assistance and support for dependants family members. Companies can also adopt online welfare platforms, enabling employees to book services and access a network of affiliated businesses to use their welfare credits.

Legislation and policies

The Working Conditions Act was passed in 2008, but it is only since 2021 that a series of regulations and guidelines have been introduced that detail the legal framework for mental health in workplaces. These texts formally address and regulate issues related to the working environment, such as work-related stress, harassment and abuse, and psychosocial risk management. Despite the existence of legislation, there are few tools and incentives for business owners and managers to prioritise mental wellbeing in the workplace. Moreover, the process of protecting mental health in the workplace is very cumbersome and employees often feel discouraged from asserting their rights.

Stigma reduction and awareness campaigns

Within the Italian context, several mental health awareness and anti-stigma campaigns can be found, those initiatives involve institutions, associations, research centres, and enterprises of all sizes. Some of these programs include events and contests for companies committed to protecting, preventing, and promoting mental health in the workplace*.
According to recent research**, only 29% of employees consider their company has an inclusive organizational culture that actively supports psychological well-being and combats associated stigma. Therefore, it is important that initiatives such as awareness campaigns, mental health training, and the promotion of a culture of acceptance and support are integrated into the corporate culture to establish a healthy and inclusive work environment.

*https://insiemeperlasalutementale.it/ceoforlife-lundbeck-awards/
**BVA-Doxa, "Osservatorio sul benessere psicologico dei lavoratori in Italia", 2023

Research and data gaps

Research from 2023 shows that in organisations without mental health support, up to 75% of employees would welcome the introduction of such a service*. In addition, a Harvard University study confirmed that happy, mentally healthy employees are on average 31% more productive than less satisfied colleagues.

It is therefore crucial to raise awareness of the invisible cost of mental disorders in the workplace and to provide concrete support to Italian companies to implement mental health policies and improve the productivity and well-being of their employees.

In this respect, it could be useful to:

- Encourage SME associations to promote psychological well-being from an inter-company and network perspective and to facilitate the matching of supply and demand.
- Promote the alliance between the company and services to facilitate the use of services offered in the territory or in the public system.
- Promote the transfer and sharing of welfare services from large companies to SMEs.

*BVA-Doxa, "Osservatorio sul benessere psicologico dei lavoratori in Italia", 2023

Current Landscapes and Trends

According to a 2022 report*, over 68% of Italian SMEs have achieved a good level of corporate welfare, demonstrating its role as a resilience factor. In fact, the study delves into the correlation between corporate welfare levels and positive economic outcomes following the pandemic.
 However, the overall picture in Italy reveals that most workers are dissatisfied with how mental health is managed in companies. A recent survey** on workers' emotional and psychological well-being found that 92% of respondents believe that companies should actively take care of their employees' psychological well-being, while 85% think their mental health is closely linked to their work well-being and vice versa.

* Welfare Index PMI, Rapporto 2022, Generali.

**BVA-Doxa, "Osservatorio sul benessere psicologico dei lavoratori in Italia", 2023

Country Report - Well@SME

Purpose	to highlight the current state of affairs when it comes to Mental Health practices for SME's Latvia

Employer initiatives and programmes

- ☐ Mission ZERO – an initiative from socially responsible companies, prioritising psychosocial risks and mental well-being as crucial aspect for good business (www.misijanulle.lv);
- ☐ Initiative from Latvian Association of psychiatrists to rise awareness about the depression including easy to use self-diagnostic tests (www.depresija.lv).

Legislation and policies

- ☐ Mental health is not specifically prioritised in regulatory framework, however psychosocial risks are clearly recognised as one of workplace risks;
- ☐ On policy level several strategic documents refer to mental well-being at workplaces, e.g. "Public Health Guidelines 2021-2027" and "Social Protection and Labour Market Policy Guidelines for 2021-2027".

Stigma reduction and awareness campaigns

- ☐ Campaign by Mission ZERO "*Human being*" – 3 events aiming to rise awareness on various aspects of employee well-being and mental health;
- ☐ Designated web platform – ESparveselibu.lv established as part of EU Social Fund project on health promotion containing a wide variety of materials and tools also intended for mental well-being.

Research and data gaps

- ☐ Psychosocial risks recognized among top-five risks both by employers and employees, "Development plan for the field of occupational safety and health";
- ☐ Targeted research activities on mental well-being at workplaces shall be provided periodically for evidence-based interventions and initiatives.

Current Landscapes and Trends

- ☐ The rising prevalence of psychosocial risk factors at work and increasing in diagnosed stress related occupational diseases in Latvia underscores the urgency of proactive intervention;
- ☐ Traditionally, discussions around workplace health and safety in Latvia have mainly focused on physical hazards and ergonomics. There is a pressing need to raise awareness among Latvian employers and policymakers of psychosocial risks as well as one of the priorities;
- ☐ Mental health at work considerations have to be more adequately integrated into regulatory framework, the core objectives and action plans of strategic initiatives.

Country Report - Well@SME

Mental Wellbeing in SMEs

Purpose	to highlight the current state of affairs when it comes to Mental Health practices for SME's in Belgium

Employer initiatives and programmes	Legislation and policies
☐ In Belgium they use scientifically-validated tools which detect and take action at the earliest signs of psychological distress. ☐ In Belgium, specific initiatives have been developed which promote the mental well-being of the self-employed, providing tailor-made support.	☐ The "National Action Plan to improve the well-being of workers in the performance of their work for 2022-2027", which outlines strategic measures for improving mental health and preventing psychosocial risks in Belgian workplaces. ☐ The Law of 28 February 2014, which supplements the Law of 4 August 1996 on the welfare of employees at work, addressing in particular issues of violence, harassment and sexual harassment at work. ☐ The Law of 28 March 2014, which amends the Judicial Code, and the Royal Decree of 10 April 2014 cover the prevention of psychosocial risks at work. Belgium has a proactive, rather than reactive, system for preventing psychosocial risks. It would be more effective, if it is supported by key players, including labour inspectorates, social partners and occupational health and safety experts.

Stigma reduction and awareness campaigns	Research and data gaps
☐ In Belgium, various awareness campaigns and educational programmes are implemented by the Government as well as by NGOs and private companies, with the aim to reduce the associated stigma attached to mental health problems and to promote mental wellbeing. ☐ For example, the government is promoting a mini-series of podcasts on mental wellbeing at work, as a continuation of the awareness campaign to make mental wellbeing at work a topic of discussion. In the podcasts people talk about their experiences of burn-out and discuss with experts on mental well-being at work. Each of the 3 episodes deals with a central theme, starting with the importance of prevention and the recognition of symptoms of chronic stress or burn-out. ☐ Moreover, "Te Gek", a Flanders-based organization provides information and runs campaigns to reduce stigma and increase awareness about mental health, among others in the workplace.	☐ In Belgium, in the last five years, the number of burn-outs and long-term depressions has increased by 46%. Women account for more than two thirds of those suffering from burnout, particularly those aged 50-64. But the biggest increase in long-term disability due to depression is among the self-employed, aged 25-39: +20% in 2021, +151% over 5 years. ☐ Based on those data, it would be very useful a further research on the mental health issues from a gender perspective; also, a research on the prevalence and the impact of mental health issues in all types of employment statuses and across various industries. Finally, it is recommended to study and highlight the effectiveness and the social and economic benefits of mental health initiatives in reducing absenteeism and increasing productivity.

Current Landscapes and Trends

☐ According to the Belgian national surveys on working conditions, conducted in 2015 among 2,500 Belgian employees and in 2021 among 4,198 Belgian employees, over the past 12 months:

33% of employees usually or always experience stress at work (2015);

9% intimidation, violence or bullying (2021);

11% verbal abuse or threats (2021);

2% unwanted sexual behavior (2021).

The origin of these risks lies in the working conditions and the work organization.

☐ Belgium is considered a pioneer as regards the promotion of mental health in the workplace, having adopted important initiatives and also having developed a series of concrete measures with the federal plan for mental well-being at work. In the recent High-Level Conference on Mental Health and Work, organized in January 2024 under the 2024 Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the Belgian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Public Service Petra De Sutter highlighted Belgium's holistic approach, describing how four ministers had joined forces in a programme for the mental wellbeing at work of workers, civil servants and the self-employed. This plan has enabled the recruitment of more inspectors, investment in scientific research, and the provision of free-of-charge risk analysis tools. Moreover, the public sector has introduced the right to disconnect, which quickly inspired the private sector. Additionally, a first-line support service has been set up for the self-employed. Lastly, a federal network for mental health at work was established, bringing together the various government departments responsible for this area.