

## PRINCIPLE 10

# Healthy, safe, and well-adapted work environments, and data protection

“Workers have the right to a high level of protection of their health and safety at work. Workers have the right to a working environment adapted to their professional needs and which enables them to prolong their participation in the labour market. Workers have the right to have their personal data protected in the employment context.”

- [Principle 10 of the European Pillar of Social Rights](#)



## Work places and data protection as determinants of health

We spend a large part of our lives at work. While the negative impacts of poor working conditions on our health are generally well understood, the public health field has not yet fully recognised the positive contribution workplaces can play as health-enabling ‘infrastructures.’

But **workplaces are increasingly being used more and more as a setting for health promotion and preventive health activities** – not only to prevent occupational injury and disability, but to assess and improve people’s overall physical **AND mental health**.

### Work environments and mental wellbeing

A healthy workplace is one in which workers and managers collaborate to protect and promote physical and mental health, safety and wellbeing of all workers, and the sustainability of the workplace.

**Around half of European workers consider stress to be common in their workplace**, and it contributes to **around half of all lost working days**. Like many other issues surrounding mental health, stress at work is often misunderstood or stigmatised. However, when viewed as an organisational issue rather than an individual trait, psychosocial risks and stress can be just as manageable as any other workplace safety and health risk. Wellbeing should not be a luxury restricted to upper end highly-skilled sectors.

### Occupational wellbeing and the climate

While this Flashcard does not necessarily concern greening and sustainability aspects of workplaces and their effects on occupational mental health and psychosocial wellbeing, it warrants attention. As the world now largely recognises the extreme detrimental effects of the climate crisis on the environment, as well as on physical and mental health, providing tools and skills to managers and employees to support them in this transition is of equal importance. It links well with **creating and boosting sustainable ways of working, greener interior office infrastructure, and commuting to/from work can secure a triple win** across all of these areas while also raising awareness.

Equally, there are ways to **green-up manufacture and manual work, and essential services**, while protecting and promoting good mental health of people working in those sectors. Good psychosocial wellbeing should not be a luxury restricted to upper end highly-skilled sectors.

Considerations for environmental improvements can be embedded in all approaches to enable sustainability of health and safety at work, while simultaneously boosting employees' health. Current approaches in business and enterprises often use the [economic doughnut model](#) to achieve an overarching [Economy of Wellbeing](#), as also seen in [public administration of some cities and regions across Europe](#).



## Putting a price tag on occupational mental health

A wealth of data demonstrates that in the long term, **companies that promote and protect workers' health are among the most successful and competitive and enjoy better rates of employee retention**. Workers' health is an important business asset for any company.

**Psychosocial risks** affect workers' health and wellbeing and can have a significant economic and fiscal impacts. [In 2018](#), the economic costs of mental ill-health were estimated at more than 4% of the EU's GDP. Over a [third of work-related morbidity and mortality can be attributed to mental illness](#) with, for example, the cost of work-related depression estimated at 620 billion EUR a year.

In European Union (EU) Member States, [44% of workers note that stress has increased](#) in the workplace as a result of the pandemic and 46% of workers consider stress to be common in their workplace. In addition, [psychosocial problems may cost twice that of absences](#) from the workplace due to the reduction in the quality of workers' performance.



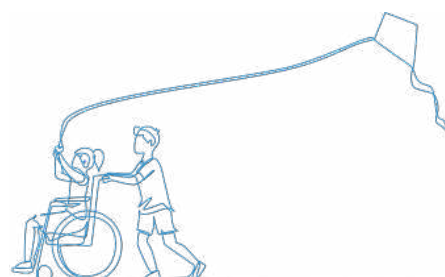
## Who's most vulnerable in the workplace?

Workers experience stress when the demands of their job are excessive and greater than their capacity to cope with them. In addition to mental health problems, workers suffering from prolonged stress can go on to develop serious physical health problems such as cardiovascular disease or musculoskeletal problems. Equally, it is critical to adequately address psychosocial factors of health and safety at work.

The **rapid digitisation of workplaces** and options of online data storage come with many opportunities, allowing some workers to shift partially or entirely to work remotely and increase flexibility of working hours. However, there is a **distributional impact on various vulnerable population groups, individuals with lower digital literacy and those with poor time management skills**. [This includes older workers, people with disabilities or chronic conditions, workers in the so-called gig economy or women](#).

For example, early research through interviews finds that [sex workers experienced positive effects on their financial and physical well-being from shifting from in-person to online services](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic, but that shift introduced new digital and mental health risks through sharing publicly visible explicit content.

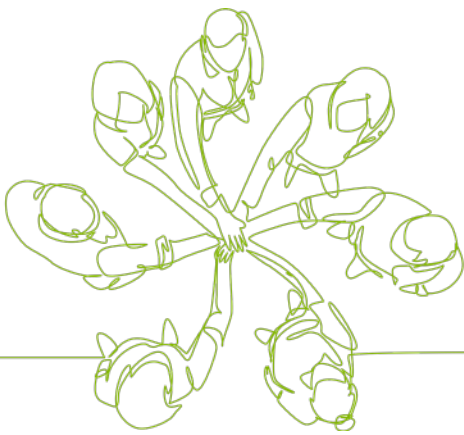
**Sectors with high physical demands and high customer and client orientation and occupations with a lower skill level report lower wellbeing and satisfaction levels**; they report a good health status but fewer expectations to be able to work in this occupation until the age of 60 years. Increasing psychosocial impacts of work are also related to work-life balance where conflicts between professional and personal commitments (for example informal care duties) occur.



It was a step in the right direction for the European Commission to pay explicit attention to healthy workplaces in their [strategic political framework 2019-2024](#). The inclusion of the workers' right to a high level of protection at work to safeguard their health and safety served as a notable prompt for this move as outlined in Principle 10 of the European Pillar of Social Rights.



## What does the EPSR Action Plan say?



The [EPSR Action Plan](#) sets out several overarching goals for EU Member States in the field of social rights more generally:

- ⓧ At least 78% of the population aged 20 to 64 should be in employment by 2030.
- ⓧ A reduction of at least 15 million in the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion.
- ⓧ At least 80% of those aged 16-74 should have basic digital skills, a precondition for inclusion and participation in the labour market and society in a digitally transformed Europe.
- ⓧ Social partners should explore measures to ensure fair telework conditions and measures to ensure that all workers can effectively enjoy a right to disconnect.
- ⓧ Member States need to invest in health and care workforce, improving their working conditions and access to training.

## Where are we now?

The [European Union Information Agency for Occupational Safety and Health \(EU-OSHA\) Flash Eurobarometer survey](#) found that a number of workplace initiatives are being used across the EU to address stress at work. Findings showed that:

- ⓧ 42% of workers have access to information and training on wellbeing and coping with stress.
- ⓧ 59% of workers are aware of information on safety and health via their workplaces.
- ⓧ 38% of employees have access to counselling or psychological support via their workplaces.
- ⓧ 43% of workers are consulted about stressful aspects of their work.
- ⓧ 50% of workers would be concerned to disclose mental health condition in fear of dismissal or other negative impact on their career.

## Trends in fatal accidents at work

While an indicator of “fair working conditions” is mainly monitored by employment rates, “fatal accidents at work per 100,000 workers” is one of the key EU indicators contributing to the measurement of the progress on the goal of achieving decent work and economic growth.

While the overall statistics show a **steep drop in the numbers of fatal accidents at work since the mid-1990s, this positive development slowed down significantly after the 2010s**. The incidence rate of non-fatal work accidents, while more than halved in general since the 1990s, still accounts for a large part of all work-related accidents and injuries – including of psychological in nature.



## Stress and mental wellbeing in the workplace

In addition to objective markers, self-reporting is an important tool to capture the subjective perception and, therefore, wellbeing of workers. These reveal insights into sector and age-specific demands and burdens. For example, EU OSHA finds that “sectors with high physical demands and high customer and client orientation and occupations with a lower skill level report lower wellbeing and satisfaction levels; they report a good health status but fewer expectations to be able to work in this occupation until the age of 60 years.”

The **psychosocial ‘injuries’ and mental ill-health chronic conditions at work, on the other hand, have been growing** since yet are not taken up in the Social Scoreboard. Work-related stress is the second most reported work-related health problem in Europe. Around half of European workers consider it to be common in their workplace, with about 45% of European workers exposed daily to psychosocial risk factors affecting mental wellbeing.



## What are public health actors doing?

The following actions taken by public health actors at (sub)national level can support the implementation of this EPSR principle.

### Slovenia - promoting healthy lifestyle habits and preventing and managing chronic diseases in the workplace

[“STAR-VITAL—Joint Measures for the Vitality of Older Workers”](#) in Slovenia. A five year publicly funded workplace health promotion programme (WHPP) started in Slovenia in 2017 aimed at **promoting healthy lifestyle habits and preventing and managing chronic diseases in the workplace (SMEs in particular)**. The programme teaches the older workers stress management techniques and educates them to develop better interpersonal relationships and intergenerational cooperation.

Interventions range from the development of e-platforms to share information, to workshops, coaching and mentoring services, the creation of a STAR-VITAL Wiki page and a website with over 160 measures for a healthier working environment, conferences, and then media appearances.



## Finland - The Mental Health Support Toolkit & the Mental Health at Work Programme

### Mental Health at Work Programme

Supporting mental health at work requires that both workplaces and occupational healthcare update their cooperation practices and are willing to learn together. As a result of the Finnish Mental Health at Work Programme, a model has now been published where **mental wellbeing is promoted through cooperation between workplaces and occupational healthcare by strengthening the resources of work communities.**



The model for occupational healthcare cooperation brings together the elements of occupational healthcare cooperation that promote mental health. It helps workplaces and occupational healthcare services find ways to develop together, with emphasis on measures that support both mental health and the business activities of workplaces. The core idea of the model built by the [Finnish Institute of Occupational Health](#) and [MIELI Mental Health Finland](#) is that assessing and identifying mental resources is at least equally important as assessing and identifying stress and risk factors.

### Workplace Supportive Toolkit

Based on this approach, a workplace-supportive toolkit was developed. It provides **different resources aimed at line management, Human Resources personnel, and to general employees with the aim to be used to engage in genuine development through joint discussions, strengthen competence and prevent problems.**

For example, the toolkit includes case studies of how workplaces have made use of occupational healthcare's expertise in planning and implementing training or campaigns. It also includes an example of low-threshold occupational health review meetings between workplaces and occupational healthcare, and an early support model for workplaces. Finally, to support managers, good practices to facilitate cooperation, improving access to support and space for their management duties are presented.

The model is based on the work done and approaches piloted by over 20 workplaces in collaboration with occupational healthcare and various experts. In a survey among these workplaces, participants indicated that they were now better prepared to identify early signs of mental ill-health and highlighted an improved awareness of factors affecting mental wellbeing.

## Germany - Occupational health and safety: a competence of the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

Occupational health and safety, including addressing psychosocial risks at work are a competence of the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. Interesting **cross-sectoral collaboration on physically and mentally healthy workplaces** exist.

For example, corporate tax credits incentivise employers to invest in workplace health and wellbeing. In Germany, employers can receive a tax exemption for expenditures up to EUR 600 (USD 710) per employee per year to promote health at the workplace, with measures eligible including programmes to promote healthy diets, physical activity, stress management and addiction treatment ([Federal Ministry of Health, 2022](#)).





## Italy - Reducing insurance premiums for employers participating in programmes that promote health in the workplace

Employers with a better record of ensuring worker health and safety can benefit from **accident insurance premium reductions**. In Italy, the [National Institute for Insurance against Accidents at Work \(INAIL\)](#) provides a reduction in the insurance premium for employers participating in a programme to promote health in the workplace through measures such as healthy diets, and subsidies for projects to promote health and safety in the workplace.



## Sweden - The Swedish Work and Environment Act

The Swedish Work and Environment Authority's [Organisational and Social Work Environment Act 2015](#) clearly states that employers are obliged to prevent psychological health problems just like as they are obliged to prevent accidents and physical illness.

The provisions have been developed in consultation with the labour market partners and have a focus on preventive work environment management. An overall provision is that the employer must ensure that managers and supervisors have knowledge on how to prevent and manage an unhealthy workload and how to prevent and manage victimisation.

The Act foresees measures such as having organisation's objectives on promoting health and increasing the ability to counteract ill health, checking if resources are adapted to the demands of work, counteracting scheduling of working hours leading to ill-health among the workers and conditions that could give rise to victimisation.

To implement the Swedish Work and Environment Act the HR department within the Swedish Region of Västra Götland has developed a [roadmap for Health and Work environment](#) (in Swedish). A guide supporting three perspectives on how to work on; 1) health promotion to strengthen what is already a healthy workplace, 2) health prevention to prevent accidents and unhealthy workplaces 3) support when the injury has already happened.



## EU Joint Action on Chronic Diseases (JA CHRODIS+)

The Joint Action on Chronic Disease (CHRODIS PLUS) (2017-2020) developed a [Training Tool and Toolkit for Workplaces](#) with **127 evidence-based, concrete means** to: (1) foster wellbeing, health, and work ability of all employees; (2) prevent the development of chronic diseases; and (3) help individuals, such as older people with chronic health problems to continue working.

The Toolkit is categorised into seven domains, each important to overall wellbeing and health: nutrition, physical activity, ergonomics, mental health and wellness, recovery from work, community spirit and atmosphere, and smoking cessation and reduction of excess alcohol consumption.



## WHO Healthy Workplaces: A model for action

A healthy workplace according to WHO includes the following aspects:

- **Health and safety concerns in the physical work environment:** The physical work environment refers to the structure, air, equipment, machinery, furniture, products, chemicals, material, and production processes in the workplaces.
- **Health, safety, and wellbeing concerns in the psychosocial work environment, including organisation of work and workplace culture:** The psychosocial work environment includes organisational culture as well as attitudes, values, beliefs, and daily practices that affect the mental and physical well-being of employees. It implies the responsibility to maintain good mental health and recover in case of ill-health is not on the individual workers, but implies their workplace as a system to do so.
- **Personal health resources in the workplace:** Health resources are the health services, information, resources, opportunities, flexibility, and otherwise supportive environment, settings, and a system around, provided to workers to monitor and support their physical and mental health.
- **Participating in the community to improve the health of workers, their families, and other members of the community:** Enterprise community involvement refers to activities in which an enterprise might engage, or expertise and resources it might provide to support the social and physical wellbeing of a community in which it operates.



[Find the WHO Healthy Workplaces model here.](#)

## EU tools that help implement Principle 10

There are EU policies and instruments that can help relevant actors in the field, including public health, to work together to achieve EPSR Principle 10.

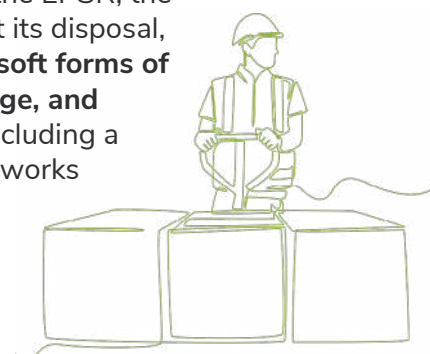
More information about the EU institutions and programmes is available on EuroHealthNet's [Health Inequalities Portal](#).

### EU Strategic Framework for Health and Safety at Work – underpinning EU-wide common understanding of occupational health protection

Improving health and safety at work has, for decades, been one of the leading social policy objectives for the sustainable, equal and just development of the EU. To achieve this objective, the EU has a set of **legal tools at its disposal, setting minimum standards for the protection of the health of workers**. These tools also encourage the exchange of information and best practices on physical health and safety (including occupational health) between Member States.

To fulfil the work-related commitments included in the [EU Treaty](#) and the EPSR, the European Commission can use different forms of **legislative powers** at its disposal, such as regulations, directives, and recommendations. It can also use **'soft forms of cooperation' to encourage the exchange of good practices, knowledge, and experience**, as it is the case with [EC Expert Group on Public Health](#) (including a sub-group on mental health), [EU Health Policy Forum](#), its thematic networks and various advisory groups.

Such exchange can be further supported through the Commission's various funding programmes, such as the [European Social Fund+](#) and the [EU4Health Programme](#).



## The Strategic Framework Directive on Health and Safety at Work 2021-2027

The Strategic Framework Directive on Health And Safety at Work 2021-2027 sets the **key principles and objectives for coordinated action of Member States, social partners, and other stakeholders** to improve the health and safety of workers. It creates a legal obligation on employers to protect their workers by avoiding, evaluating, and combatting risks to their safety and health.

In relation to work-related stress prevention, national transposition of this Directive vary across EU Member States – in Denmark, Finland, Greece, and Sweden psychosocial risks are specifically mentioned in the national legislation, while in Bulgaria, Germany, Latvia, Portugal, and the UK psychosocial risk assessments are required. Austria and Belgium advocate for the involvement of a psychosocial risk expert in worksite health and safety planning.

The Strategic Framework takes a tripartite approach — involving EU institutions, Member States, social partners and other stakeholders — and focuses on three key priorities:

- anticipating and managing change in the context of green, digital and demographic transitions;
- improving the prevention of work-related accidents and diseases, and striving towards a Vision Zero approach to work-related deaths;
- increasing preparedness to respond to current and future health crises.

The success of the framework depends on its implementation at EU, national, sectoral and enterprise levels, with effective enforcement, social dialogue, funding, awareness-raising and data collection being key. Through its extensive network of partners, EU-OSHA prepares, collects, analyses and disseminates information on occupational safety and health (OSH) issues, with the aim of improving OSH in workplaces across the EU.

EU-OSHA's foresight studies and overview projects aim to anticipate risks and identify priorities, to inform the development of OSH practice and policy in areas such as digitalisation and green jobs, and stress and psychosocial risks. EU-OSHA also provides resources to help workplaces put prevention into practice, with a [wealth of guidance being produced to help keep workers safe during the pandemic](#).

## Healthy workplaces in the digital age

### European Skills Agenda

The European Skills Agenda is a five-year plan to help individuals and businesses develop more and better skills and to put them to use. A massive investment in skills is needed. In addition to money from enterprise and governments, the EU is prioritising investing in people and their skills in their budget. EU has invested 0.5 billion EUR in the Digital Europe programme.

### BeWell - Upskilling and reskilling of the health workforce

BeWell is an EU project to promote the upskilling and reskilling of the European health workforce. Between 2022-2026 they will develop a green and digital skills strategy for the health ecosystem that can be implemented at a local, regional, national, and ultimately at the European level through the [Pact for Skills](#).

### The Right to Disconnect

[The right to disconnect](#) refers to a worker's right to be able to disengage from work and refrain from engaging in work-related electronic communications such as email or other messages during **non-work hours**. There is currently no European legal framework directly defining and regulating the right to disconnect but there is an ongoing negotiation within the Commission. The right to disconnect is related to attaining a better work-life balance, an objective that is at the core of this Principle 10.



## The accelerated digitalisation of workplaces

[The accelerated digitalisation](#) of workplaces also puts the spotlight on issues related to surveillance, the use of data, and the application of algorithmic management tools. Artificial intelligence (AI) systems are often applied to guide recruitment, monitor workloads, define remuneration rates, manage careers, or increase efficiency of processes and when performing high-exposure tasks. Addressing the challenges of algorithmic decision-making, notably the risks of biased decisions, discrimination, and lack of transparency, can improve trust in AI-powered systems, promote their uptake and protect fundamental rights. [Artificial Intelligence Act](#) proposed by the European Commission has a mental health component.

### Teleworking

[Teleworking](#) has become the norm for many because of the pandemic, and it is likely to remain common in the long-term. Being able to work from anywhere at any time has been crucial for business continuity. Telework offers opportunities for synergies and efficiencies on work-life balance: reduced travel and fatigue, as well as more flexible organisation of professional and private life can lead to productivity gains and to a positive green impact. At the same time, generalised teleworking raises the need to reflect, for example, on the boundaries of contractual working time, and the balance between work and personal life.



### [Preventing and managing health and safety risks in digital platform work: examples of initiatives, practices and tools.](#)

Digital platform work is typically linked to lower access to occupational safety and health provision. With over 500 digital labour platforms (DLPs) currently active in the EU, there is an ever-pressing need to effectively protect platform workers in online and on-location platform-mediated work.

## An EU comprehensive approach to mental health in the EU

The EU takes a **comprehensive approach to mental health which requires a shift of prioritisation towards prevention**: to tackle behavioural risk factors and social, environmental, and commercial determinants and to have more ambitious actions on mental health promotion and prevention of mental ill health. In June 2023, the Commission adopted the [Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health](#), which will help Member States and stakeholders to take swift action to deal with mental health challenges. The new approach recognises that mental health is about more than just health and, therefore, strongly involves areas such as education, digitalisation, employment, research, urban development, environment, and climate. On page 16 within the document there is a paragraph that explores tackling the psychosocial risks at work.

## Europe's Beating Cancer Plan

**Reducing exposure to hazardous substances and radiation** will contribute significantly to cancer prevention. It is particularly important to improve the safety of products for consumers and professional users alike. Reducing the exposure to carcinogens in specific settings such as the workplace is vital as 52% of annual occupational deaths in the EU are attributed to work-related cancers.

The new Occupational Safety and Health Strategic Framework 2021-2027 will set strong commitments to reduce occupational exposure to chemicals. EU-OSHA will also [further develop the workers' exposure](#) survey on cancer risk factors in Europe to help reduce work-related cancer.

[More about Europe's Beating Cancer Plan.](#)



## Available resources

### Available EU funding

- [EU Funding explained](#) - A EuroHealthNet Briefing
- [EuroHealthNet's E-guide on Financing Health Promoting Services](#)

### Contact points for further assistance

- [OSHmail newsletter](#)
- [EU Alliance for Mental Health: Work and Employment](#)
- [International Labour Organization Safety and Health at work](#)
- [WHO/Pan-European Mental Health Coalition](#)
- [Eurofound](#)
- [National Focal Points](#)
- [EuroHealthNet's National Focal Points for EU Programmes, instruments and networks](#)
- [EU-OSHA technical support](#)



### Technical resources

- [Smart digital monitoring systems for occupational safety and health: uses and challenges](#) provides insights into what works and what is still needed going forward. It offers insights for policy, research and companies, and underlines the importance of workers' participation and human-centred design.
- [Healthy Workplaces LIGHTEN THE LOAD 2020-22. \(healthy-workplaces.eu\)](#)
- [Psychosocial Risks & Older Workers' Health – Strategies for healthier workplace.](#) This policy brief from EuroHealthNet offers a compilation of public health strategies to create a healthier workplace and protect and improve older workers' health and mental wellbeing.
- [WHO's guidelines on mental health at work](#) facilitate national and workplace level actions in the areas of policy development, service planning and delivery in domains of mental and occupational health.
- [OECD Promoting Health and Well-being at Work: Policy and Practices.](#) This report analyses policy levers to incentivise employers to promote health and wellbeing at work in ten countries.
- [Workforce Disclosure Initiative:](#) an OECD analysis of 114 companies worldwide participating in the 2020 Workforce Disclosure Initiative shows that health and wellbeing programmes usually offer support for various risk factors for NCDs. Mental health and stress programmes were the most often reported programmes, although the data do not report the uptake by or experiences of employees.
- [European Labour Inspection Systems of Sanctions and Standardised Measures.](#) This discussion paper reviews labour inspection and different systems of sanctions in the EU. It offers best practices for labour inspectors to persuade enterprises to improve compliance, underlining the effectiveness of balancing persuasion and enforcement during inspection visits.

## Have your say

Does your public health institute have any promising policies or practices in place that support the implementation of this EPSR principle? Reach out to our EuroHealthNet colleague [Dorota Sienkiewicz](#).

## References and more flashcards

All EPSR flashcards are available at [epsr-flashcards.eurohealthnet.eu](https://epsr-flashcards.eurohealthnet.eu). Scan the QR code to view more flashcards and to access the links to the references in this flashcard.



# The European Pillar of Social Rights

## Flashcard tool

- A guide for public health professionals and decision-makers

### What is the European Pillar of Social Rights?

The EPSR sets out 20 key principles, agreed upon by EU Member States, to **achieve sustainable and inclusive societies**.

The **EU Action Plan on the EPSR** sets out actions at European level to turn the principles in concrete actions. It also proposes headline targets for the EU to reach by 2030.

The EPSR sets the **aspiration and implementation priorities for a more social Europe for all**. A more social Europe paves the way for a healthier Europe. By addressing the underlying determinants of health, the European Pillar of Social Rights can be considered a **European Pillar for Health**.



### About the EPSR flashcards

The flashcards are designed to **demonstrate how EPSR principles can contribute to achieving health and wellbeing**. Each flashcard explores a different principle and sets out what public health authorities across Europe are doing to help build progress.

Each flashcard sets out

- ✓ How the EPSR principle is relevant to public health
- ✓ Concrete goals set out by the EPSR Action Plan
- ✓ The EU tools available to implement the EPSR principle
- ✓ What European public health authorities across Europe are doing to implement the principle
- ✓ Available EU funding and contact points for further assistance

### About EuroHealthNet

**Building a healthier future for all by addressing the determinants of health and reducing inequalities.**

EuroHealthNet is the Partnership of public health agencies and organisations building a healthier future for all by addressing the determinants of health and reducing inequalities. Our focus is on preventing disease and promoting good health by looking within and beyond the health system.

Structuring our work over a policy, a practice, and a research platform, we focus on exploring and strengthening the links between these areas.

Our approach focuses on integrated concepts to health, reducing health inequality gaps and gradients, working on determinants across the life course, whilst contributing to the sustainability and wellbeing of people and the planet.

To find out more about us, visit [www.eurohealthnet.eu](http://www.eurohealthnet.eu).



[www.health-inequalities.eu](http://www.health-inequalities.eu)

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