

## 4 National policy responses to the issue of burnout

In national policies, burnout is addressed under a wide variety of headings. The main policy anchor for burnout is work-related stress, suggesting that burnout is assessed as prolonged exposure to chronic job stressors. In many countries, references are made to the ‘European autonomous framework agreement on work-related stress’ and its associated implementation reports.<sup>9</sup> In its booklet, *Health and safety at work is everybody’s business – Practical guidance for employers*, the European Commission shares a similar approach, stating that ‘stress at work may have negative psychological, physical and social impacts and result in burnout, depression and in extreme cases even suicide’ (European Commission, 2016).

A second anchor is mental health in the workplace, emphasising the consequences of burnout on mental health (conditions such as depression, generalised syndrome of anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and so on).

A third anchor is excessive working time, underlining the dimension of exhaustion in burnout. Burnout also features in numerous national occupational safety and health strategies.

Finally, in some countries, the focus remains on specific sectors and occupations.

Table 7 (below) summarises the wider policy debate on burnout in EU Member States, including the main areas in relation to which the topic is addressed.

**Table 7: Coverage of burnout as part of the wider policy debate in EU Member States**

Country	Areas in relation to which burnout is addressed	Details
Austria	Stress, work intensification, work without boundaries	Burnout is mentioned in the early intervention programme as part of the Austrian Health and Safety at Work Act ( <i>ArbeitnehmerInnenschutzgesetz</i> ) 2011. The Work and Health Act ( <i>Arbeits- und Gesundheitsgesetz</i> ) was implemented in Austria at national level.
Belgium	Well-being at work and humanisation of work, work-related health and safety issues	This is covered in the 1996 law on well-being at work on the execution of work and prevention of psychosocial risks, including violence and harassment in the workplace.
Bulgaria	Mental health	The action plan included in the National Health Strategy 2014–2020 (under policy 1.5) is geared towards the protection and the improvement of mental health in the workplace. Burnout is recognised as a work-related disease mainly in the healthcare, education and social work sectors.
Cyprus	Mental health in the workplace	There is no policy anchor addressing burnout.
Czech Republic	Stress in the workplace	Discussions among the social partners took place in relation to a draft amendment proposal on a provision to the Labour Code regarding the issue of work-related stress and risk of violence in the workplace, but raised concerns from employers and trade unions. The amendment has not been approved by the parliament. However, national and sectoral social partners organise awareness-raising actions and training seminars on the risks of burnout.
Germany	Mental health and stress at work	The 2013 Occupational Health and Safety Act ( <i>Arbeitsschutzgesetz</i> ) stipulates the assessment of risks to mental health. Mental health is debated among the social partners and addressed in the psychological strategic programme of the German joint strategy on occupational safety and health.

<sup>9</sup> The Framework agreement on work-related stress was signed on 8 October 2004 by the EU-level social partners: European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), Union of Industrial and Employers’ Confederations of Europe (UNICE) – now known as BusinessEurope – the European Association of Craft Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (UEAPME) as well as the European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation and of Enterprises of general Economic Interest (CEEP).

Country	Areas in relation to which burnout is addressed	Details
Denmark	Mental health and psychological working environment (injuries, stress, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder)	The Danish Working Environment Act indicates sanctions that can be applied when there are issues in relation to the psychological environment and controls that can be carried out in companies when there is a high risk of mental overload.
Estonia	Mental health issues and work-related stress	The Estonian National Health Plan 2009–2020 briefly covers the topic of mental health. One of the measures regarding the state of mental health was to promote people's awareness and knowledge, including turning attention to the early identification of depression and ensuring the availability of services.
Finland	Mental health and working life	Well-being at work in general featured distinctly in the Finnish government programme 2011–2014.
France	Psychological risk and stress at work	This is an emerging policy concern in France and there have been some attempts to develop a comprehensive answer to the issue. For instance, the French Confederation of Management (Confédération Française de l'Encadrement), composed of federations and trade unions, has published a practical guide on the identification and prevention of the <i>syndrome d'épuisement professionnel</i> (professional exhaustion syndrome), including proposals to facilitate the recognition of burnout in work-related negotiations and the financial implications for social security.
Greece	Health and excessive working time	There is no policy anchor addressing burnout.
Hungary	Work-related issues	There is no policy anchor addressing burnout.
Ireland	Mental health at work, workplace stress and work–life balance	Addressed in relation to specific sectors or occupational groups (doctors, nursing staff).
Italy	Work-related stress	Addressed in relation to specific sectors or occupational groups (nursing staff, staff working in education, women and older workers).
Luxembourg	Stress, working time, absenteeism, bullying issues	Addressed in relation to exposure in specific sectors (such as cleaning), to sick leave linked to stress and its resulting costs for social security. Trade unions have addressed the issue by bringing support to employees suffering from stress ( <i>Stressberodungsstell</i> ) and extended the service to sufferers of burnout. The peak-level employers' organisation l'Union des Entreprises Luxembourgeoises encouraged prevention in companies at the ninth annual forum on health and safety in 2015.
Malta	Mental health and staff shortages in hospitals	The Malta Union of Midwives and Nurses has elevated the issue to a general nationwide policy debate and the Parliamentary Secretary for Health has expressed his intention to work with all stakeholders, such as the Faculty of Health Sciences, the union representing nurses and management at both public and private hospitals in order to find ways to reduce levels of stress.
Netherlands	Work-related disease; health and labour conditions	National policy is mainly restricted to legislation and enforcement. Employers have financial incentives to pay wages in case of absenteeism for the first two years of sickness (sometimes not up to 100%, in particular in sectors with blue-collar workers).
Norway	Mental health in the workplace (depression, anxiety, minor mental disorders)	There is no policy anchor addressing burnout.
Poland	Working conditions, overtime, sick leave due to accidents	There is no policy anchor addressing burnout.
Portugal	Work-related stress	The media have reported a political willingness to update the list of occupational diseases and to include burnout and other work-related mental health problems, namely those linked to moral and sexual harassment.

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Romania	Work overload, overtime, stress management and psychological risk in the workplace	Following the case of the death of a female worker due to exhaustion in 2010, a modification of the Romanian Labour Code now includes a procedure to resolve disagreements between employers and trade unions via arbitration. The text (renumbered as art. 132) provides that, if there are no legal rules on workloads, they are established by the employer after consultation with the representative union or, where appropriate, with employee representatives. Therefore, 'agreement' has been replaced with 'consultation', meaning the opinion of the trade unions may not be taken into account when the employer establishes the workloads. Additionally, the country's national health strategy for 2014–2020 contains a component dedicated to improving mental health in the workplace. The territorial labour inspectorates have initiated and organised actions at local level with the aim of raising awareness and informing on stress management and psychosocial risks in the workplace, in order to ensure safe and healthy jobs for workers. However, burnout remains unaddressed by employers and trade union organisations, who are not involved in the debates on the issue.
Spain	Psychosocial risks at work	There is no policy anchor addressing burnout. Initiatives on 'digital rights' (i.e. digital disconnection outside working time) are valued by trade unions, who have requested the topic be included in the workers' statute and the occupational risks prevention law, but due to reservations from employer organisations, the proposal has not been developed further.
Sweden	Mental health in the workplace and costs resulting from long-term sick leave, work-related stress	The social partners are also involved in the debate. In the municipal sector, where stress-related disorders are common, the social partners have agreed on an action package to improve health in the workplace. The package includes annual accounts of working environment risks, awareness-raising initiatives targeting politicians and special support to municipalities with especially high rates of sick leave.
Slovakia	Mental health in the workplace, work-related stress, work-life balance	This is not a priority topic for political discussion. Political representatives do not specify initiatives directly focused on solutions to the problem of burnout. However, these solutions are part of some strategic documents such as the country's occupational safety and health strategy for the period 2016–2020 and the strategic framework for health for the period 2014–2030.
United Kingdom	Work-related stress, mental illness	The topic is addressed in relation to specific sectors or occupational groups (doctors, nursing staff, social workers, public service).
<b>Countries where burnout is not covered in the wider debate</b>		
Croatia	The topic is of interest to the general public and media on an ad hoc basis.	There have been no systematic policy responses or discussions in relation to burnout. However, the social partners in Croatia, with the aid of the European Trade Union Confederation, have translated and published a stress interpretation guide, and linked it to the Croatian conceptual framework of occupational stress. Since the Croatian accession to the EU in 2013, the social partners at national level have been working on its implementation in Croatia. The social partners have been analysing and negotiating the conceptual framework for telework, but the framework relating to burnout is in the pipeline in the near future. Through the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, the social partners in Croatia actively participated in 2014–2015 campaign 'Healthy workplaces manage stress', in which the psychological risks at work and possibilities for their reduction were clearly explained in the Croatian language.
Latvia	Burnout has been recognised as an occupational disease (diseases caused by overload) since 2007. The topic is not under significant debate but since 2004 has featured regularly in research and in media: in both, working conditions are seen as one of the causes for burnout, while predisposition for burnout is believed to be linked to the individual.	The social partners are not involved in the debate; only health professionals keep data on the incidence of burnout and provide information about prevention. Specific policy responses or specific tools to address burnout have not been identified.
Lithuania	Burnout has recently been included in the International Classification of Diseases	Policy responses are provided in relation to recommendations included in scientific findings from experts in the field.