Tele-WASH

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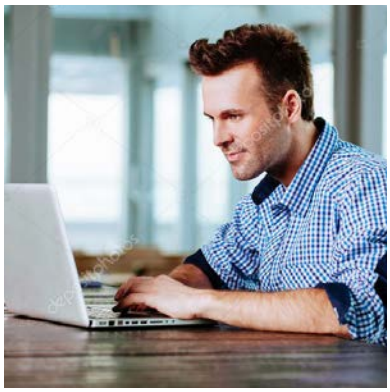

GUIDE ON TELEWORKING DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

(A PRACTICAL GUIDE ON OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY & HEALTH)

ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΕΡΕΥΝΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΚΑΙΝΟΤΟΜΙΑΣ
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Διαρθρωτικά Ταμεία της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης στην Κύπρο

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Guide on Teleworking during COVID-19 Pandemic

Tele-WOSH

This Guide and the Tele-WOSH mobile application (www.telewosh.com) for risk assessment have been developed by the Team of the Centre of Excellence in Risk and Decision Sciences (CERIDES) of the European University Cyprus (EUC), under Tele-Working and Occupational Safety & Health during COVID-19 Pandemic (Tele-WOSH) project. The said project belongs to the Research and Innovation Foundation Programs for Research, Technological Development and Innovation "RESTART 2016 – 2020".

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Guide on Teleworking during COVID-19 Pandemic

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to introduce a new form of work into our daily lives, the teleworking, with many of us experiencing unprecedented situations, which inevitably involve physical, musculoskeletal and psychosocial risks.

Fortunately, or not, the COVID-19 Pandemic has imposed a new reality on us, while basically forcing us to "discover" a new form of work extremely rarely known and used in Cyprus. Teleworking nowadays tends to prevail as a new alternative form of work, which from rarely used becomes a necessity, offering benefits such as the preservation of several job positions and productivity. At the same time, it is considered as a huge challenge, mainly due to the urgent need for immediate and without the suitable equipment and knowledge, adaptation of employers and employees to the new conditions it creates.

PURPOSE OF THE GUIDE

This Guide, due to the unexpected and rapid intrusion of teleworking into our working life, aims to fill the gap in knowledge and experience and to point towards the safety, health and well-being of employees. This Guide eases our transition into this new form of work, by providing guidance on identifying and addressing new and emerging risks, recommending the appropriate preventive and protective measures to ensure safety, health and well-being of employees, facilitating the compliance of employers with their legal provisions and at the same time, safeguarding the sustainable development of the companies / organizations.

HOW TO USE THE GUIDE

The Guide might be used during COVID-19 pandemic, any other pandemic or a natural disaster, which are situations that require emergency response, while at the same time business continuity needs to be ensured by employees staying at home and becoming teleworkers. The risk assessment developed by using this Guide might become an integrated part of the Occupational Health and Safety Management System of the company/organization.

Moreover, this Guide might also be used during under ‘normal’ circumstances, since all of the issues exploited as well as the recommendations entailed, are applicable on teleworking in general.

The Guide might be used by teleworkers coming from both public and private sectors and helps the reader to understand what is a risk assessment and why is necessary to develop and implement one, during teleworking. Hazards are analyzed based on the 6 main categories if hazards (ergonomics, physical, safety, biological, chemical, psychosocial), while the reader is guided in such a way, so as to be able to develop the risk assessment by identifying the hazards and the current measures, while additional measures are recommended in order to ensure the safety, health and well-being of the teleworkers.

The Guide also includes good practices, that might be implemented and facilitate the effort made to ensure that the home workstation will pose no hazards to the teleworker.

It must be noted that the use of this Guide is optional and the list of hazards and measures is not exhaustive, therefore the reader who is going to conduct the risk assessment and implement the recommended measures, should take into consideration that additional hazards might exist and extra measures might be applied. It must be stressed out that, for every risk assessment is different since it is developed and implemented taking into consideration different places, people and working requirements.

The appropriate development and implementation of measures derived from the risk assessment, it is ensured by providing the teleworkers with the appropriate training on safety and health at work. Teleworkers should be trained to understand the emerging risks, identify the hazards and select and apply the appropriate preventive and protective measures to eliminate occupational accidents, diseases and other unwanted incidents at their home work station.

1. TELEWORKING & COVID-19 PANDEMIC

1.1 WHAT IS TELEWORKING

According to the information provided by European and International Organizations, such as the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA), the International Labor Organization (ILO), EUROFOUND, etc., teleworking is defined as the work performed outside the employer's premises, through the use of information and communication technologies such as smartphones, tablets, laptops and desktops. In general, teleworking is a form of work that is performed remotely, outside the premises of the company / organization. For the purpose of this Guide, teleworking is considered as the work performed from home.

1.2 STATISTICS

The rapid shift towards teleworking was revealed by surveys carried out by EUROSTAT and EUROFOUND, illustrating the percentage of teleworking from year 2019 until before COVID-19 pandemic. At European level (EU-27), the percentage of teleworking before COVID-19 pandemic, did not exceed 15%, including regular and occasional teleworkers. The lowest percentages ranged from 2 to 3%, with some countries reaching up to 36-37%. Regarding Cyprus and Greece, percentages of around 2-3% and 5-6%, respectively, were recorded (1).

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and based on data collected in April 2020, the lowest percentage of teleworking was 18%, while 58% was the highest. The rapid increase in percentages, illustrates the significant impetus for teleworking, which has become the new way of working, for millions of employees and employers both in the European Union and worldwide, without them having the necessary knowledge and experience to ensure safety, health and well-being of teleworkers.

It must be stressed out , that although teleworking is a new form of work for many employers, they are not relieved of their obligation to comply with the provisions of the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Legislation, which among other things, sets an obligation for the development and implementation of a written risk assessment, while risk assessment is considered to be the most important tool for the prevention of occupational accidents, diseases, dangerous occurrences and other unwanted incidents at workplace.

1.3 OSH LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON TELEWORKING

With regard to teleworking, at the moment there are not specialized European Directives or National Regulations in Cyprus to regulate occupational safety and health issues. Nevertheless, the provisions of OSH Legislation apply during teleworking, from the moment that teleworking is carried out under the instructions of the employer and after consultation with the employee.

With review of the provisions of the Safety and Health at Work Laws of 1996 to 2020 applying in Cyprus, the employer must ensure the safety, health and well-being at work of all the employees. Among other things, the employer should provide the appropriate equipment, training and information to the employees and maintain their working environment, safe and risk-free.

Based on the provisions of the Management of Safety and Health Issues at Work Regulations of 2002, the employers have as a legal obligation, to take into account the nature of their business activities, to assess the risks threatening the safety and health of their employees and to have at their disposal a written risk assessment. In addition, and in accordance with the provisions of the Minimum Requirements for Safety and Health at Work with Visual Display Screen Equipment Regulations of 2001, each employer must carry out an analysis of each working position, in order to evaluate the safety and health conditions and in particular the ones regarding to the potential risks to vision, physical problems and mental strain, and thus to take the necessary and appropriate protection and prevention measures.

At EU level, apart from the Framework Directive for Occupational Safety and Health (89/391/EEC) (2) and the other Directives, such as Display Screen Equipment (90/270/EEC) (3), Workplace Requirements (Directive 89/654/EEC) (4), etc., that apply during teleworking, there is also a framework agreement on telework that was negotiated in 2001/2002 and is the first agreement to be implemented by the social partners at national level. The social partners, see telework both as a way for companies and public service organizations, to modernize work organization and as a way for workers to reconcile work and social life, giving them greater autonomy in the accomplishment of their tasks. It should be noted that Cyprus was not involved in the procedures concerning this agreement and therefore the social partners have not signed it.

Goal

Help employers and employees address hazards related to teleworking

Risk Assessment

Conduct a risk assessment

Improve H&S standards

By applying the recommended measures, H&S standards of organizations are improving along with productivity and employees' satisfaction

2. RISK ASSESSMENT FOR TELEWORKING

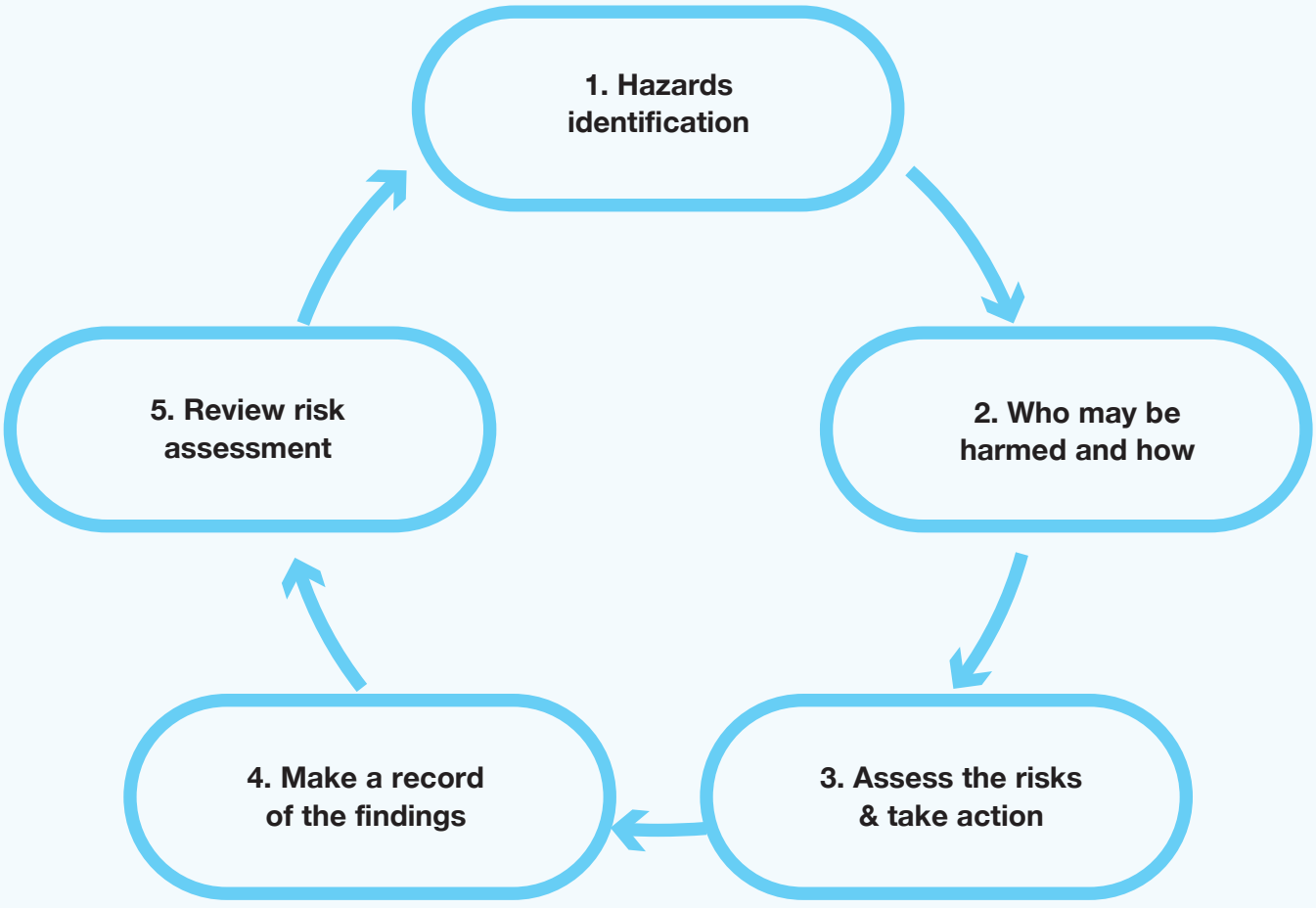
2.1 RISK ASSESSMENT

The main objective of this Guide, is to provide guidance so that a holistic risk assessment to be able to be conducted, based on the identification of hazards (ergonomic, physical, safety, biological, chemical and psychosocial), related to teleworking.

In order to perform a risk assessment, the teleworker should go through the following 5 important steps:

1. Identify hazards (anything that may cause harm)
2. Decide who may be harmed, and how
3. Assess the risks and take action
4. Make a record of the findings
5. Review the risk assessment

Figure 1 - Five Main steps to conduct a risk assessment



Risk Assessment is the process for hazards and risk factors identification, that have the potential to cause harm, followed by an analysis and evaluation of risks associated with the hazard (risk analysis and risk evaluation) (5). Risk assessment is one of the most significant tools for the prevention of occupational accidents, diseases and other unwanted incidents at work.

The evaluation of risk might be performed in several qualitative and quantitative ways. For the purpose of Tele-WOSH project, the qualitative method has been chosen in order to be easier for the teleworker to evaluate each of the existing hazards. Thus, only three options are given, as it can be seen in Figure 2. The risk rating (Low, Medium or High) depends upon the likelihood of an event to occur and the severity of the injuries that might arise if the event does occur.

Figure 2 - Evaluation of risk

LOW RISK: **EXISTING MEASURES SHOULD BE MAINTAINED AND CONTROL MEASURES SHOULD BE REVIEWED**

MEDIUM RISK: **EXISTING MEASURES SHOULD BE REVIEWED AND ADDITIONAL CONTROL MEASURES MIGHT BE NECESSARY**

HIGH RISK: **OPERATIONS SHOULD BE POSTPONED AND THE HAZARD SHOULD BE RE-EXAMINED**

Note:

Risk assessment is considered to be the most significant tool for the prevention of occupational accidents, diseases and other unwanted incidents at workplace. However, what is of utmost importance is the identification and implementation of measures to ensure health, safety and well-being of teleworkers.

2.2 ERGONOMICS

The main purpose of the ergonomics process, is to reduce the exposure to work hazards and develop such conditions for workers, which might reduce physical workload, improve body posture, leading to job satisfaction and wellbeing of workers, along with higher productivity for employers. This might be achieved by improving the interactions between users and equipment (6). Potential amendments of the workstation design, would make workers feel more comfortable. Changes might also be applied between worker's body and its physical surroundings.

'Ergonomics is the application of scientific information concerning human beings to the design of objects, systems and environments for human use' (7)

Ergonomics is all about designing and/or arranging workplaces, products and systems in order to fit with the people using them, aiming to create safe, comfortable and productive working environments.

Psychosocial issues and Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSDs) are some examples of impacts related to bad ergonomic design and working methods, affecting the work effectiveness (8,9).

2.2.1 CHAIR

The office chair is one of the most frequently used equipment and is essential to be stable, at the right height and with supportive backrest. Regular inspections of the office chair before its use, consists of a good practice, so as to minimize the risk of harm or injury. It is very important the chair to be able to adopt to the physical characteristics of the user.

	Hazards	Impacts	Measures
Chair	Non Ergonomic Chair	MSDs	Stable (recommended to have a five-star base)
			Right Height (Recommended to have adjustable seat in height (up-down) and depth (seat sliding forward-backward)
			Supportive backrest (Recommended to be adjustable in height (up-down) and angle (inclining forwards-backwards)
			✓ Upholstered seat and backrest with breathable fabric
			✓ Two armrests (Recommended not to be too long and at least adjustable in height, allowing the chair to go under the desk/work surface
			Training
	Defective Chair	MSDs	In good condition allowing the user to work comfortably (no defects).
			Regular inspections of chair's condition before its use
			Fixing or replacement of damaged/defective parts of the chair
			Training

2.2.2 DESK

A suitable working desk should be in line with the individual's characteristics. Thus, it might be adjustable in height, while in order to avoid glare, the surface should be non-reflective. Furthermore, provision of adequate space under the desk, might satisfy the user's need for regular feet stretching.

	Hazards	Impacts	Measures
Desk	Non Ergonomic Desk	MSDs Visual Problems Injuries	Appropriate desk height based on the individual characteristics of the user
			Desk mechanically or electrically adjustable in height (fixed-height desks provide limited flexibility to the worker)
			✓ Adjustable height to enable to choose and switch between sitting and standing position
			Adequate space for documents and equipment (e.g., screen, keyboard and mouse)
			Non-reflective surface
			Adequate space under the desk to enable safe and comfortable placement and movement of the legs
			Training

2.2.3 SCREEN

The use of display screen is essential for the execution of teleworking. Screen must be stable, adjustable, anti-glare and placed at the eye-level, keeping a distance of approximately 60cm from face. The screen must swivel and tilt easily and freely to suit the needs of the user. Regular breaks away from the screen, are important to avoid eyes strain and sore eyes.

	Hazards	Impacts	Measures
Screen	Prolonged Use of Display Screen Equipment	MSDs, Visual problems (e.g., eye strain, sore eyes) Headaches Psychosocial Problems	Screen at eye-level
			Distance of screen approximately 60cm from face
			Regular breaks away from the screen (up to 10 minutes for every one hour of work)
			✓ Use of font size of at least 12, on the screen
			Adjustable screen in the tilt angle and screen brightness and contrast (see next)
			Training
			✓ For sore eyes: Restraining from rubbing the eyes, focusing on an object in the near distance (preferably green in colour), blinking can encourage the moistening of the eye, drinking water regularly, looking away from the screen periodically to rest the eyes the eye, drinking water regularly, looking away from the screen periodically to rest the eyes
	Screen Glare	Visual Problems (e.g., eye strain, sore eyes)	Anti-glare/ matte screens
			Reposition of the desk away from sources causing glaring (e.g., lightings, skylight or windows)
			Training
	Non-Adjustable Screen	MSDs, Visual Problems (e.g., eye strain, sore eyes)	Adjustable screen to help the user to avoid glare
			Adjustable screen to get the correct height for the user - either using a separate base or an adjustable table helping the user holding the head at a neutral, upright position and eyes looking slightly downwards
			Screen showing clear characters with enough spacing
			Screen showing a stable image with no flickering
			Screen with easily adjustable brightness and contrast controls
			Training

2.2.4 KEYBOARD

Keyboard is important to be adjustable and separated from the screen, so as to allow the user the appropriate space to work comfortably, and be able to rest hands and arms. A matt surface for the keyboard, is suggested, to avoid reflective glare. The use of an ergonomic keyboard might eliminate the risk of MSDs.

	Hazards	Impacts	Measures
Keyboard	Continuous Use of Keyboard	MSDs (e.g., tenosynovitis)	Tilt-Adjustable Keyboard
			Keyboard separated from the screen to allow user to work comfortably, having enough space in front of them, allowing them to rest hands and arms
			Use of ergonomic-designed keyboard
			Short breaks and ergonomic stretches and exercises

2.2.4 MOUSE

Repetitive movements due to the continuous use of the mouse, could be considered as a hazard for all computer users. The extended use of the mouse might lead to tenosynovitis, which is the most common and well-known health problem, negatively affecting the wrist of the user (10). Examples of preventive measures that might be applied to reduce the risk, is the use of an ergonomic-designed mouse, having short breaks between tasks and placing the mouse next to keyboard and not far from the user.

	Hazards	Impacts	Preventive Measures
Mouse	Repetitive Movements	MSDs (e.g., tenosynovitis, carpal tunnel syndrome)	Use of ergonomic-designed mouse
			Short breaks and ergonomic stretches and exercises
			Mouse is next to keyboard

2.2.5 DOCUMENTS

The use of hard copy documents might be part of the teleworking process. Documents should not be placed between the keyboard while using the keyboard, as this increases the reach distance to the keyboard and may result in excessive bending of the neck in order to be able to read the documents. The work desk or work surface, is important to have a sufficiently large surface and allow a flexible arrangement of the screen, keyboard, documents and related equipment. In any other case, it is suggested the user to keep the documents off the work surface, while using the computer.

	Hazards	Impacts	Preventive Measures
Documents	Wrong placement of Documents	MSDs	Documents shouldn't be placed between the keyboard while using the keyboard, as this increases the reach distance to the keyboard and may result in excessive bending of the neck to look at documents
			Use of document holders, easily accessed
			Documents regularly used are not kept at height

2.2.6 TELEPHONE

Receiving or making of phone calls might be more frequent during teleworking, since it is one of the most common and easy ways to communicate. A good practice to eliminate the risk from the frequent use of the telephone, would be the use of an appropriate headset, facilitating the user to comply with the rules of ergonomics and eliminate the risk of MSDs by keeping the right body posture.

	Hazards	Impacts	Preventive Measures
Telephone	Wrong use of Telephone	MSDs, Headaches	Use of a headset that helps the teleworker to keep the right body posture, while using the phone and taking written or electronic notes at the same time

2.2.7 POSTURE

Maintaining the right posture is one of the greatest challenges during teleworking. What is recommended besides the use of the appropriate ergonomic equipment, is to avoid prolonged sitting at the workstation (10 minutes walking/ exercising every 1 hour is suggested), which could minimise the risk of MSDs.

	Hazards	Impacts	Preventive Measures
Posture	Wrong Posture in the Work-station/ Prolonged Sitting	MSDs	Keeping the right posture
			Avoiding sitting at the workstation for long periods (10 minutes walking/ exercising every 1 hour is recommended)
			Items regularly used are within easy reach
			✓ Use of a footrest
			Training

2.2.8 LAPTOP

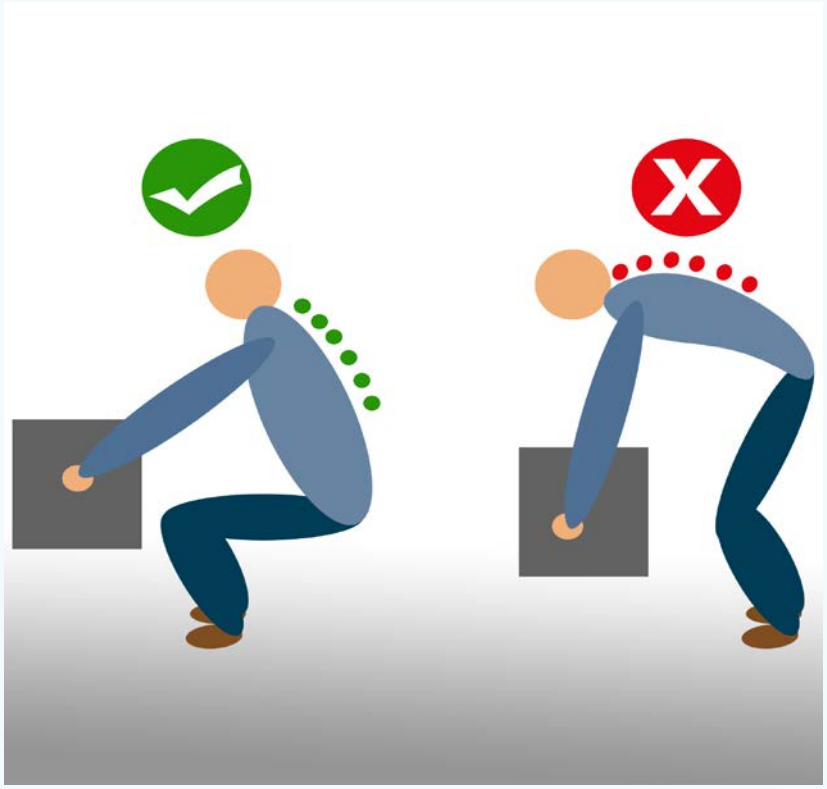
Laptops were originally designed for short-term or mobile use. Lack of adjustability of the screen and keyboard may potentially result in MSDs, if this position is adopted frequently. A good practice would be to avoid the prolonged use of laptops, by connecting them with an adjustable screen and an external keyboard and mouse.

	Hazards	Impacts	Preventive Measures
Laptop	Prolonged Use of Laptop	MSDs, Visual Problems (e.g., eye strain, sore eyes)	Avoiding prolonged use of laptop
			Regular short breaks
			Use of laptop on stable surface
			Use of laptop at ergonomic workstation

2.2.9 MANUAL HANDLING

Manual handling includes lifting, pushing, pulling, carrying or moving loads. In order to avoid MSDs, the use of the right posture during manual handling, is of major importance. In addition to that, before lifting the load, the teleworker should be aware of the right lifting method and the maximum weight of the load. The use of manual handling equipment is suggested to be used, if there is an availability.

	Hazards	Impacts	Preventive Measures
Manual Handling	Lifting of Heavy Files / Documents / Books	MSDs	Use of right posture during load lifting
			Assessment of the weight to be carried and divide the load if needed



2.3 PHYSICAL

Physical hazards exist due to environmental conditions, that may harm the employees at their working environment. Inadequate lighting, high noise level and bad air quality, are the most frequent hazards that may negatively affect the safety and health of the teleworkers.

2.3.1 LIGHTING

Good and adequate lighting is important for the safety and health of teleworkers, since it is very important amongst other, to be able to quickly identify and avoid a hazard. Poor lighting may affect the health of the teleworker by causing besides slips and trips, eye fatigue and headaches, resulting in increased absenteeism and reduction of work quality and productivity.

	Hazards	Impacts	Preventive Measures
Lighting	Poor Lighting	Eye Fatigue, Headaches, Slips/ Trips, Falls	Daylight from windows, doors and skylights (natural daylight which helps in carrying out work more comfortably and promotes good working conditions)
			Windows are fitted with adjustable sunscreen/ curtains. Control of the direct sunlight in the office/ work area in order to prevent the room from heating up and to prevent direct reflections and screen glare
			Workstations are not placed against the window, in order to avoid glare, reflections from surface and contrast (difference between dark and light)
			The most common type of lighting is fluorescent, halogen or LED, providing different qualities of light, such as white, warm, natural or daylight, as for designing lighting for office/workstation environments
			Regular checks and maintenance of lighting system
			✓ Regular window cleaning

2.3.2 TEMPERATURE

The temperature during working hours must be kept at reasonable levels, providing comfortable working conditions for the teleworkers. Regular checks with thermometers around the workstation may facilitate the keeping of stable comfort levels.

	Hazards	Impacts	Preventive Measures
Temperature	High/ Low Temperature & High / Low Humidity	Tiredness, Eyes' discomfort, Headaches	Regular checks and maintenance of air-conditioning system
			Temperature is maintained at a stable comfort level
			✓ Use of dehumidifier
			✓ Regular measurements of temperature and humidity
			The temperature is checked regularly with thermometers
			Workstations are not located directly in front of or under the air conditioning outlets

2.3.3 NOISE

Continuous exposure to high levels of noise may cause severe hearing damage and other health problems like headaches and stress. During teleworking it is of major importance to be able to evaluate and control the noise levels coming either from internal or external factors.

	Hazards	Impacts	Preventive Measures
Noise	Noise	Headaches, stress, Hearing-Loss (depends on the level of noise)	Noisy equipment is isolated
			The most quiet room is selected as workstation
			Repair/Maintenance of noisy equipment
			✓ Regular measurements of the level of noise, using a sound meter or mobile applications
			✓ Use of earplugs

2.3.4 INDOOR AIR QUALITY

Indoor air quality at workplaces is important not only for the comfort of teleworkers, but also for their health. Poor indoor air quality is interconnected with symptoms like headaches, stress, shortness of breath fatigue, etc. Good natural ventilation is one of the most effective measures amongst other, to improve air quality during teleworking.

	Hazards	Impacts	Preventive Measures
Indoor Air Quality	Poor Ventilation	Headaches, Stress, Shortness of Breath, Fatigues	Use of sufficient and free of any contaminant (e.g., vehicle exhaust), natural ventilation
			Use of mechanical ventilation, if natural ventilation is not applicable
			Mechanical ventilation system is regularly inspected and maintained
			The windows and skylights open sufficiently in order to allow sufficient natural ventilation
			✓ Opening of the windows and skylights is easy and harmless
			Printers or copying machines are located outside the workstation or at a good ventilated position

2.4 SAFETY

Safety hazards are considered to be the ones that may create unsafe conditions at the working environment. The main safety hazards identified during teleworking are related to inappropriate corridors and walkways, electricity hazards, wrong use of ladder, damaged furniture and defective or slippery floor. The existence of these hazards, unless not early identified, may result in the injury of the teleworker.

2.4.1 CORRIDORS/ WALKWAYS

Poor housekeeping especially for corridors/walkways, entails trip hazards that may result from minor to major injury of the teleworker. Worn or torn surfaces, slippery or wet surfaces, full of obstacles must be avoided. A good organization of potential boxes/wires etc., in combination with adequate lighting may tremendously eliminate the risks.

	Hazards	Impacts	Preventive Measures
Corridors / Walkways	Boxes/ Items/ Cables placed in Corridors and Walkways	Trips and Falls	Corridors and walkways are free from obstacles
			Corridors and walkways have sufficient lighting
			Items are stored in storage room

2.4.2 ELECTRICITY

The risk of injury from electricity exists during teleworking since the teleworker is using electrical equipment. Contact with live parts may cause shock and burns, defective equipment and wires may cause fire, while special attention should be paid if there is a wet environment. Visual checks of the equipment and the wires may eliminate the risks.

	Hazards	Impacts	Preventive Measures
Electricity	Electrical Equipment Malfun ction/Poorly Maintained Equipment and Installation	Trips, Falls, Electric Shocks, Electric Burns, Electrical Fires and Explosions	Regular checks of the cables of equipment
			Equipment with defective cables or other defects is immediately unplugged. Stop using equipment immediately if it appears to be faulty or the cables are damaged
			The equipment used is CE marked
			Electrical plugs and extensions are not overloaded
			Regular maintenance of electrical equipment
			Check of electrical installation by competent person (electrical engineer)
			✓ Installation of Residual Current Device (RCD) of maximum 30mA
	Trailing & Live Cables	Trips, Falls, Electric Shocks, Electric Burns, Electrical Fires and Explosions	There are no trailing and long cables around the room
			Cables are gathered together with cable ties
			Equipment with defective cables or other defects is immediately unplugged. Stop using equipment immediately if it appears to be faulty or the cables are damaged
			✓ Installation of Residual Current Device (RCD) of maximum 30mA
	Use of Electrical Equipment in Wet Environment	Trips, Falls, Electric Shocks, Electric Burns, Electrical Fires and Explosions	The use of electrical equipment in wet environment is avoided, e.g., near the sink, during mopping of the floor, in the bathroom or near the pool
			✓ Installation of Residual Current Device (RCD) of maximum 30mA

2.4.3 LADDER

The wrong use of ladder is one of the most frequent cause of accidents tied up with fall from height. The use of ladder is recommended for works with short duration and should be used only for situations that provide safe conditions. A 3-point contact is essential, while the ladder before the use should be checked for any defects.

	Hazards	Impacts	Preventive Measures
Ladder	Improper use of a ladder	Falls, Slips, Injuries	Undertake as much work as possible from the ground
			Use 3 points of contact to climb ladder
			Always face ladder when climbing
			The ladder is only used for a very short period of time
			The use of the top two steps is avoided
			The use of the ladder when the teleworker is alone at home, is avoided
	Use of Defective Ladder	Falls, Slips, Injuries	The equipment is suitable, stable and strong enough for the job, maintained and checked regularly

2.4.4 FURNITURE

The furniture of the workstation should be able to minimize the risk of injuries. The use of non-defective furniture that are regularly inspected for defects, facilitates the elimination of accidents.

	Hazards	Impacts	Preventive Measures
Furniture	Sharp Edges on Furniture	Injuries	✓ Furniture have rounded corners with no sharp edges
			✓ Regular checks and repairing of defective furniture
			✓ Furniture positioning in the room allows safe movement within the room

2.4.5 FLOOR

Slips and trips usually occur due to wet, greasy, uneven or defective floor. Proper housekeeping, avoiding using wet surfaces and proper lighting are simple measures that may prevent the accidents.

	Hazards	Impacts	Preventive Measures
Floor	Slippery / Defective Floor	Trips and Falls	The room is not used when the floor is wet
			Regular checks of the floor for defects and repairement
			The room has sufficient lighting

2.5 BIOLOGICAL

No workplace is immune of biological hazards. Sources of biological hazards may include, bacteria, viruses, fungi, etc., causing several health problems like fever, dry cough, tiredness, mould sickness and many more. Implementation of control measures may significantly reduce the risks from biological hazards.

2.5.1 BACTERIA & VIRUSES

COVID-19, legionella and fungus are the most frequently identified hazards during teleworking. The teleworker must be alert for potential symptoms and proceed with the immediate implementation of preventive and protective measures.

	Hazards	Impacts	Preventive Measures
Bacteria & Viruses	COVID-19	Fever, Dry Cough, Tiredness, Difficulty in Breathing MSDs	Regular cleaning of frequently touched surfaces (door handles, mouse, keyboard)
			Frequent hand-washing with soap
			Self-isolation of a person who shows symptoms
			Frequent opening of windows for ventilation
			Use of tissues when coughing or sneezing
			Mask Wearing if there is a visit for work purposes
			Regular cleaning of ventilation and filtration provided by heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning (HVAC) systems
	Legionella	Cough, Shortness of Breath, Fever, Muscle Aches	Regular checks and maintenance of water supply system
			Disinfection of water supply systems
			Regular cleaning of ventilation and filtration provided by heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning (HVAC) systems
	Fungus	Mould Sickness - Cough, Nose Stuffiness, Red or Itchy Eyes, Skin Rash, Sore Throat	Healthy humidity levels are kept
			Regular opening of windows to increase ventilation
			Regular checks and maintenance of walls, floors and ceilings

2.6 CHEMICAL

Chemical hazards entail risks arising from the use of chemicals. Exposure to chemical hazards through inhalation, absorption through the skin, or ingestion and swallowing, may harm the health of the teleworker.

Information on the identity and hazards arising from the use of chemicals, must be available and understandable to teleworkers, to ensure chemical safety in their workplace. Safety Data Sheets where applied, must be available for consultation.

2.6.1. DUST AND VOLATILE COMPOUNDS AND CLEANING PRODUCTS

The most frequently identified chemical hazards during teleworking, are dust and volatile compounds interconnected with the printer toners, as well as the chemical products used for cleaning purposes. What is of major important, is the user of the products to be informed on their correct use, management and storing.

	Hazards	Impacts	Preventive Measures
Dust and Volatile Compounds and Cleaning Products	Dust and Volatile Compounds (printer toners)	Respiratory Problems, Skin Irritation	Printers and copiers are located at a distance from the worker
			Use of protective gloves when changing the printer ink
			Opening of windows for ventilation during printing process
	Use of Cleaning Products (detergents e.g., chlorine bleach)	Respiratory Problems, Skin Irritation	Buying products with the appropriate labelling
			Following the instructions of use
			Use of gloves and face masks
			For further information, refer to DLI and ECHA websites http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/dli https://echa.europa.eu/el/home

2.7 PSYCHOSOCIAL & WORK ORGANIZATION

Undeniably, teleworking may provide opportunities for flexibility to take care of children or other members of the family. However, teleworkers may be under tremendous stress, if they are forced to simultaneously handle both work and personal life (e.g., family). Establishing work and personal life balance, is one of the greatest challenges of the teleworkers, while imbalance may cause several negative impacts on teleworkers health e.g., MSDs, anxiety, stress, sleeping problems, etc.

2.7.1 WORK ORGANIZATION

Work organization, demands work time to be adjusted to home responsibilities and family needs.

	Hazards	Impacts	Preventive Measures
Work Organisation	Unknown & New Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Procedures	MSDs, Anxiety, Stress, Sleeping Problems	Teleworkers are trained on how to use ICT equipment
			Teleworkers are provided with the appropriate hardware and software equipment
	Heavy Workload	MSDs, Anxiety, Stress, Sleeping Problems	Redistribution of work amongst employees
			Workload assessment and set of priorities
			Priority is given on the most important tasks
	Work Under Pressure	MSDs, Anxiety, Stress, Sleeping Problems	Setting of realistic expectations to complete tasks
			✓ Flexible working times
			Sufficient breaks are taken based on workload and working time
			Priority is given on the most important tasks
			✓ Relaxation exercises are done like stretching or recreational activities
	Unspecified Working Hours	MSDs, Anxiety, Stress, Sleeping Problems	Consultation between employer and employee to define starting/ finishing times
	Large Number of Online Meetings	MSDs, Anxiety, Stress, Sleeping Problems	✓ Limited online meetings
	Large Number of Emails or Phone Calls	MSDs, Anxiety, Stress, Sleeping Problems	✓ Avoiding phone calls during non-working hours
			✓ Email notifications are limited to working hours

2.7.2 COMMUNICATION

Bad communication during teleworking may result in teleworkers' social isolation, something that might prove detrimental to their psychological health and performance. The establishment of good and frequent communication with the use of the appropriate means, is essential for the sharing of information, exchange of ideas, or showing interest and support of teleworkers, enhancing the sense of belongingness.

	Hazards	Impacts	Preventive Measures
Communication	Bad Communication with Colleagues & Clients	MSDs, Anxiety, Stress, Sleeping Problems	Regular consultation of employer with teleworker
			Teleworkers know when and how can reach their Supervisor
			✓ Communication with teleworkers includes social aspects as well
	Prolonged Isolation	MSDs, Anxiety, Stress, Sleeping Problems	✓ Communication with teleworkers includes social aspects as well
	Non-Clear tasks	MSDs, Anxiety, Stress, Sleeping Problems	Clearly defined tasks and responsibilities
	Over Controlling Management	MSDs, Anxiety, Stress, Sleeping Problems	Respect of the right to disconnect
			✓ Good work performance is valued and recognized
			✓ Open communication between teleworkers and managers is encouraged

2.7.3 PRIVACY

Interfering of work into private life is one of the most frequently identified hazards. Employers should be able to understand and respect the boundaries, whereas these boundaries should be set after consultation with the teleworker, concerning the working hours. Teleworking does not mean 24-hours availability of the teleworker.

	Hazards	Impacts	Preventive Measures
Privacy	Imbalance between Work & Personal Life	MSDs, Anxiety, Stress, Sleeping Problems	Consultation between employer and employee to define starting / finishing times
			✓ Limiting overtime hours
			Disconnect from work at specified times reserved for rest and personal life
			Setting boundaries between working time and personal obligations
			✓ Use of a separate working room limited from destructions
			✓ Professional mental health support is provided, if needed
			✓ Teleworkers are encouraged to adopt a routine for healthy sleeping
	Disruptions from External Factors (e.g., children, noise, etc.)	MSDs, Anxiety, Stress, Sleeping Problems	✓ Dedicated workspace free from disruptions
			Sufficient breaks are taken based on workload and working time.
	Lack of Privacy	MSDs, Anxiety, Stress, Sleeping Problems	✓ Dedicated workspace free from disruptions
			✓ Avoiding phone calls during non-working hours
			Respect of the right to disconnect

2.7.4 VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

Domestic violence and cyber bullying might have an impact on the teleworkers' health and safety, productivity and morale. The employer/manager is important to be vigilant for signs, raise awareness and provide support and assistance to affected teleworkers.

	Hazards	Impacts	Preventive Measures
Violence and Harassment	Cyber Bullying	MSDs, Anxiety, Stress, Sleeping Problems	Access control, firewalls and anti-virus software are available
			Workplace policy on violence and harassment is implemented
	Domestic Violence	MSDs, Anxiety, Stress, Sleeping Problems	Workplace policy on violence and harassment is implemented
			Regular consultation of managers with teleworkers to find out if violence and harassment occur
			Professional mental health support is provided, if needed

Note:

The measures shown with a ✓ are suggested measures, over and above the required measures.

3. GOOD PRACTICES

This Guide aiming to facilitate the 'forced' and urgent transition of many organizations to teleworking, also provides some good practices to enhance this effort. It must be noted that, the following suggestions are not obligatory and definitely the list is not exhaustive. Employers and teleworkers may choose the most applicable to them based on the activities of their organization.

3.1 SUGGESTED GOOD PRACTICES

› Provision of clear instructions, as well as a written agreement containing the contact details of the legally responsible employer and the rights and obligations of both the employer and the teleworker.

It is essential the written agreement to entail the following information:

- Nature of the work
- Working hours
- Costs to be covered by the employer
- Procedure to be followed in case of disagreement between the 2 parties (employer and teleworker)

› Provision of materials and equipment, so that teleworkers to be able to perform their work efficiently and in a safe manner and where necessary, training to be provided for the safe use of equipment. This process should also include the equipment used to meet the needs of teleworkers with disabilities.

› Clear agreement between teleworkers and their supervisors, regarding work requirements and procedures to be followed in the event of changes or unexpected problems.

› The possibility of teleworking should be given equally to all employees and discrimination on the grounds of sex or disability should be avoided. Any work that does not require physical presence, then it might be an option for teleworking.

› The choice for teleworking should be voluntary, thus no employee should be forced to telework against their will.

› The success for managing teleworking relies heavily on mutual trust. Teleworkers' supervisors should be trained in the use of modern management techniques, which include reciprocal arrangements for setting goals and identifying appropriate efficiency assessment measures.

› If possible, both teleworkers and their supervisors might be trained in the use of effective communication methods. Supervisors should make such arrangements to communicate systematically with each teleworker, individually. It is important to set clear procedures for communication purposes and teleworkers should know who and how they will get in contact, in the event of a work problem. With the aim to avoid any unwanted intrusion into the personal and family life of the teleworker, the hours during which the teleworkers will not be called, should be agreed. As a good practice, the use of voice and text messages ensures good communication and privacy of teleworkers.

› It is important teleworkers and their supervisors to be reminded that teleworking is not a solution to childcare problems and that simultaneous childcare and teleworking, are almost impossible.

› Teleworking should not favor the extension of working hours. Teleworkers should have the right to refuse to work outside working hours without prior notice and any working executed outside working hours should be considered as overtime.

› Employers should develop and implement clear health and safety policies and insurance coverage, including procedures to ensure that teleworkers are insured against the occupational risks arising from teleworking. At the same time, teleworkers and their supervisors should be aware of their rights and obligations.

4. THE FUTURE OF TELEWORKING

This Guide as mentioned before, was developed to facilitate the urgent transition into teleworking, during COVID-19 pandemic, while ensuring the safety, health and well-being of teleworkers. However, it might be also used effectively and in the after COVID-19 era. Teleworking seems to have been established and many employers are now considering to adopt it, as a new type of work. Both private and public sectors are considering of having a more significant portion of their workforce teleworking beyond the pandemic, since the spread of the coronavirus led to a better understanding of the actual potential of telework in the economy of the future.

The success factors of teleworking consist of:

› The development and implementation of a teleworking Policy, which amongst other, maintains the level of productivity, increases the level of flexibility for employees, reduces the cost of office space, reduces environmental pollution, maintains operations in case of an emergency, and many more.

› The safeguarding of eligibility by assessing the needs in the infrastructure, considering capabilities and competencies of employees, identifying the job positions that might be able to telework under minimal supervision, and by even considering the possibility of setting a trial period for teleworking.

› The creation and maintenance of a successful teleworking environment by setting clear performance objectives, maintaining good channels of communication and oblige with the legal provisions, regarding occupational safety and health during teleworking.

As previously mentioned, the provisions of this Guide, might also be applied in the post COVID-19 era, helping in the development of specific checklists that will ensure the correct implementation of the teleworking policy and the application of appropriate protective and preventive measures to ensure safety, health and well-being of teleworkers, and at the same time, the sustainability of the organization, during teleworking.

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