Declaration of Brussels
04.04.2019

EU Project ErgoHair VP/2016/001/0050

This project was developed with the support of the EU Commission.
Preamble

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are widespread among the working age population. Depending on the frequency, duration or intensity of the biomechanical stress factors during the occupational activity and the individual constitution of the workers, they can lead to reduced ability to work, absenteeism due to illness, lower job and life satisfaction or high staff turnover.

In comparison to other occupational groups, hairdressers report more frequently on MSDs. The most affected areas are the lower back, neck, shoulders and hands. Several studies of hairdressers show that MSDs are often the main reason for early career dropout. Risk factors that can reduce work ability and increase MSD include working with arms raised above shoulder level, frequent repetitive movements, high exertion, bending and twisting of the upper body, static posture, high mechanical stress and standing.

The effect of these risk factors can be exacerbated by a lack of adequate breaks, a high workload and general distress. Sickness absenteeism does not only lead to high costs for the personnel-intensive, predominantly small-business hairdressing trade, but also to a reduction in work ability and satisfaction.

This circumstance prompted the social partners Coiffeur EU and UNI Europa Hair & Beauty within the framework of the European social dialogue to highlight MSDs as a sector-specific risk in addition to skin diseases in the social partner agreement (23 June 2016) and in the supplementary declaration (17 May 2016). The objective agreed therein is to contribute to the development of a consented, scientifically based European template for the protection of health and safety in the hairdressing sector. For this reason, a catalogue of preventive measures was jointly developed to apply to all hairdressers in the sector. Furthermore, in the context of the strategic framework on health and safety at work 2014-2020, the Commission has agreed to support the hairdressing trade in this effort.

The following projects were in the centre of attention:

1) The prevention of skin diseases that are common in the hairdressing sector.
   The EU funded the research projects SafeHair 1.0 and 2.0, produced significant indications and suggestions for work-related skin protection measures.

2) Transnational European Social Fund project ‘A Close Shave’
   The EU funded this project to raise awareness of good ergonomics and skin prevention measures among start-up hairdressers.

3) The prevention of work-related MSD through ergonomic measures.
   In view of the MSD problem, the EU has agreed to financially support the research project ErgoHair from 2016 to 2019 (VS 2017/0077). Project partners at European level are Coiffeur EU, UNI Europa Hair & Beauty and at national level UBB/UCB (Hairdressing Employers Organisation in Belgium and project promoter), Les institutions de la Coiffure (Accident Insurance for Hairdressers in France) as well as CVCare, UKE (Competence Center for Epidemiology and Health Services Research for Healthcare Professionals at the University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf in Germany).
   During the project, two-day workshops were held in Hamburg (12-13 Oct. 2017) and Paris (11-12 April 2018) and a one-day workshop was held in Brussels (4 April 2019).
   The project builds on the European framework agreement on the protection of occupational health and safety in the hairdressing sector, signed in 2016. The project contributes to the harmonization of occupational health and safety with a particular focus on ergonomic workplace design and equipment. Furthermore, it aims to help promote effective, ergonomic work processes. The overarching goal is to raise awareness of the stresses and strains faced by hairdressers and consequently reduce the number of work-related MSDs in this sector throughout Europe by developing and disseminating preventative ergonomic measures in a target group-specific fashion.
   The collected information shows that hairdressers are disproportionately affected by MSDs. It was also discussed and evaluated whether European standards can be achieved in the development of ergonomic furniture and tools. Finally, it was discussed which strategies for disseminating the findings can be successful for small and micro enterprises (SME). On the basis of the study results described in the medical reference document, as well as the presentations, field reports and discussions with professionals, occupational physicians and salon furnishers given in the workshops, the social partners decide on the following declaration.
Joint Declaration of the Social Partners

1) The social partners note that the ErgoHair project has produced essential findings on the prevention of MSDs. The partners involved are confident that the localization of the problem areas and the consequences to be drawn from it will significantly contribute to a reduction of sickness and significantly reduce the cost of staff absences. The medical reference document developed within the project and the large number of studies on the topic involved are regarded by the partners as a reliable basis for developing a healthy and safe working environment in hairdressing.

2) Organizational aspects of work such as ensuring a variety of activities, adherence to regular breaks, ensuring a positive working atmosphere, paying attention to a healthy work-life balance, and teaching employees how to work in an ergonomically friendly manner and how to behave in a preventive manner make a significant contribution to preventing or reducing MSDs in the hairdressing sector.

3) The social partners recommend that risk information on MSDs should be communicated during occupational health examinations. Occupational physicians should be made particularly aware of this. The medical reference document provides the basis for this.

4) The social partners are of the opinion that the conclusions of the ErgoHair project should lead to concrete guidance for hairdressers. They recommend close cooperation between health insurers and occupational accident insurers at national level to develop appropriate strategies.

5) The social partners recommend that the OIRA tool of the European Occupational Health and Safety Agency OSHA, which has already been developed for the hairdressing trade, should be further developed with a view to avoiding MSD and that its use in salons is further promoted.

6) In the training plans of the vocational schools as well as the practical training there should be sufficient resources for knowledge transfer on healthy working practices and methods on MSD prevention. Target group-oriented teaching units should take place at the beginning of hairdressing training. In the case of professional certifications, final examinations and entrepreneurial performance assessments, the observance of appropriate preventive measures by the examination candidates should be taken into account and be evaluated.

7) An ergonomic design of the salon reduces the risk of developing MSD at work. The social partners are in favour of an initiative to harmonize ergonomic criteria in the manufacture of hairdressing equipment and tools, including standards and certifications, to the extent that this is possible. Manufacturers of hairdressing equipment and tools should inform of ergonomic criteria in their product descriptions.

8) It should be taken into account that the hairdressing trade is predominantly carried out in SME's. The social partners therefore recommend, where feasible, to have the combination of teaching of preventive measures together with the practical, collective and individual support of experts.

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