

Promoting employees participation to reduce health and safety risks in SMEs in the catering trade by means of cross-border networks

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The described project was financially supported by the European Agency for Safety and Health in the framework of the SME Accident Prevention Funding Scheme 2001.

Within this project the value of networks has been recognised. Networks and partnerships were systematically created to get the prevention message across to as wide an audience as possible. Focused on the hotel and catering sector, the activities spanned three countries: Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands, where hundreds were directly trained and several thousand enterprises were contacted through the information campaign.

Who organised this project?

Berufsgenossenschaft Nahrungsmittel und Gaststätten (BGN). The Berufsgenossenschaft Nahrungsmittel und Gaststätten (BGN) in its function as statutory accident insurance institution has the statutory task of compensation, rehabilitation and prevention of work-related accidents and diseases in the horeca sector and foodstuff industry.

In the Netherlands, the project has been supported by the royal association MKB-Nederland, in particular by MKB-Noord. MKB-Nederland is the biggest employer organisation in the Netherlands. It represents the interests of over 125 000 enterprises from 125 industrial sector associations and 400 regional employer associations.

The main organising institution in Belgium was the private institution PREVENT, which works in the field of prevention of occupational accidents and occupational diseases, the promotion of quality of working conditions as well as the improvement of work organisation and cooperates closely with other institutions in the area of prevention at the workplace.

Partner organisations:

In each of the participating countries a network has been implemented which consists of representatives of the statutory accident insurance carriers, the health insurance companies, employer and employee representatives, employers and employees in SMEs, occupational training schools, state institutions, and other important partners associated with SMEs. Within these networks, which ruled the project by means of “round table” meetings, the requirements of SMEs has been analysed and specific measures were elaborated and implemented.

AOK (Allgemeine Ortskrankenkasse) Rheinland, Germany

Bundesanstalt fuer Arbeitsschutz und Arbeitsmedizin (BAuA)-Initiativbuero Neue Qualität der Arbeit, Germany

COK, Belgium

Commit Arbo BV, The Netherlands
CZ-Group, The Netherlands
FED. Ho. Re. Ca Vlaanderen, Belgium
Friesland College, The Netherlands
Gesundheitsamt Emden, Germany
ISSA (International Social Security Association)
Koninklijk Horeca, The Netherlands
Koninklijk Technisch Atheneum Turnhout, Belgium
Koning Willem I College, The Netherlands
UNIZO, Belgium

What was the project about?

The catering sector in the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany was the target of this project, aimed at reducing accident and health risks in SMEs. In the long term, the competitiveness of these small businesses will be reinforced. Through the creation of a diverse network of 15 partners, among them prevention experts, SME bodies and worker representatives, and educational establishments, a synergy was created to reach the target group. Within a network, small enterprises and their representatives had greater opportunity to actively participate in the development and implementation of prevention measures and to adapt these to their requirements.

Project aims and objectives

The main objective of the project was to reduce the risk of accidents and health risks caused by working in small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs), especially in small and the smallest of businesses operating in the catering trade and hotel industry, by means of an awareness campaign, aimed at employers and employees, on the issues of industrial safety and health protection.

Additional objectives were:

- Analysis of requirements for, and possibility of implementing preventive measures by, small businesses.
- Requirement-oriented qualification of employees and entrepreneurs with regard to issues related to safety and health promotion in businesses.
- Identification and training of multipliers. This will lead to an increase in the number of people whom the project reaches and will also increase the sustainability of the project.
- Facilitating of access to companies and employees and an increase in acceptance for the project and safety and health protection in the workplace due to participation of employees and employers.
- Use of synergy effects and promotion of exchange of experiences with regard to preventive work by preventive institutions, representatives of small businesses and state networks by forming networking.
- Promotion of good competitive characteristics for SMEs and illustration of use of preventive measures with regard to the success of the company, and creating of quality by combining specialist practical and preventive content.

- Improved access to information with regard to the possibility of promoting safety and health protection in the workplace and its use by means of cross-border preparation of possible consultative measures, promoting dialogue between preventive institutions and SMEs within the framework of the project and targeted public relations work.
- Provision of assistance when European guidelines are being implemented.

Which activities took place?

Because of the high numbers of partners and the high amount of activities, which took place under the auspices of this project, the organisers adopted the brand name “Switch” (Safe Work: Innovative Tools for the Catering and Hotel Industry)

Opportunities for advanced training in the field of occupational health and safety were offered to enterprises free of charge, specifically at groups with a multiplier effect, in particular entrepreneurs and their spouses, trainees, other employees as well as company trainers and teachers.

Workshops

The training workshops were an integral part of this project, bringing together people from different countries. In Belgium, 12 workshops were organised, in Germany one training course and one workshop. In the Netherlands, some 100 participants attended the launching event, and overall, 16 workshops were organised.

The modular system contained the following topics: Application of European guidelines, e.g. hygiene (HACCP) and risk assessment, safe working in kitchen and service, back diseases, ergonomics, stress management, time management, successful leadership, communication with employees, colleagues and customers. The topics were partly combined with vocational techniques, e.g. concerning filleting and carving, table decorations or safe handling of beverage dispensing systems. The training courses which were provided were mainly daytime courses (duration 8 hours) with a maximum of 16 participants in each course.

Mailing Actions

Several mailing actions within the scope of the project reached more than 17.000 enterprises.

Bullying Hotline

One influential German health insurance company offered a bullying hotline as part of the project.

Conclusion

The factors of successful approaches for more safety and health in SMEs are the creation of networks and the participation of SMEs in order to provide further education initiatives and consultative opportunities which are linked to the requirements and interests of these businesses. The benefit of the participation of small businesses when preventive measures are being drawn up and implemented is illustrated within the framework of this approach, while co-operation between businesses and accompanying institutions is promoted above and beyond the duration of the project.

Through close co-operation with representatives from small business organisations the participating institutions optimise their processes with regard to improving the way they approach their customers and thus emphasise their service character.

The sector-oriented procedures and use of modules allow the outcomes to be transferred to other European member states as well. The proposed prevention mechanisms can certainly be transferred to other sectors and trade branches if the contents are modified accordingly.

The knowledge-exchange management between the participating partners is documented and has been performed successfully in relation to other subjects.