

Greece takes steps to improve mental health at work, using WHO¹ guidance

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Recognizing the critical link between mental health and work, Greece has taken impressive steps to support employees in Athens. In a pioneering move, the nongovernmental organization Thalpos Mental Health, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health of Greece, established the first-ever national Workers' Day Center in 2023. The Center aims to prevent mental health conditions, promote mental well-being and support mental health at work, following WHO guidelines.

"It's a new era for mental health at work in Greece, and we are at the forefront of shaping it. Our aim is to assist businesses and workers in realizing their full potential by prioritizing their mental well-being," explained Athina Passiou, President of Thalpos Mental Health.

Mental health at work in the spotlight

In recent years, mental health at work has been catapulted into the spotlight, a trend sharply intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic accelerated the transition to remote work, e-commerce and automation, fundamentally reshaping labour markets and heightening financial instability. For many people, these transformations have introduced new psychosocial risks and exacerbated existing ones.

A policy brief produced by WHO and the International Labour Organization reveals that, in 2019, approximately 15% of working-age adults were living with mental health conditions. Common conditions such as depression and anxiety cause suffering for individuals and families, but they also lead to significant productivity losses and economic burdens for countries. In the WHO European Region alone, mental ill health results in staggering productivity losses amounting to US\$ 140 billion annually.

Work is a crucial social determinant of mental health. Meaningful employment promotes mental well-being by providing a sense of purpose, confidence and income, while also facilitating the recovery and integration of people with psychosocial conditions.

On the other hand, adverse working conditions, unsafe environments, organizational issues, poor workplace relationships, unemployment or economic instability can worsen mental health or exacerbate pre-existing mental health conditions. This can result in reduced productivity, absenteeism and personal hardships.

As the workplace landscape evolves, addressing mental health challenges has never been more critical. Creating supportive work environments and addressing the

¹ World Health Organization

psychosocial risks associated with modern labour trends are essential for fostering both individual and community well-being and economic stability.

Supporting employees' quality of life

The Workers' Day Center caters to employees seeking support to enhance their mental health and well-being, address mental conditions, manage psychosocial risks in the workplace, change organizational culture and access social welfare services.

Tailored to support self-employed individuals and employees of small and medium-sized enterprises, the Center offers accessible and free mental health services. These services are particularly valuable for individuals facing specific challenges, including higher levels of insecurity, risky behaviours, loss of work–life balance, conflicts, and chronic stress stemming from demanding work, social isolation and financial pressures.

“Thalpos Mental Health and, more specifically, the employees of the Workers' Day Center have greatly contributed to helping me encounter issues both in my personal and my professional life. As a result, my everyday quality of life has increased significantly,” shared an individual who used the services of the Center.

This initiative is aligned with the eighth axis of the Greek National Action Plan for Mental Health 2021–2030, which encompasses policies and interventions for the promotion, protection and enhancement of mental health for the population, and especially for vulnerable groups.

“Working at the Center is immensely rewarding. Providing assistance, fostering a supportive environment and witnessing positive transformations in individuals' mental well-being are deeply fulfilling experiences,” expressed Lena Ravanapoulou, a social worker at the Center.

<https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/10-10-2024-greece-takes-steps-to-improve-mental-health-at-work--using-who-guidance>

Read the text again and choose the best answer.

1. What was a key factor in highlighting the importance of mental health at work according to the text?

- A. The founding of Thalpos Mental Health
- B. The establishment of Workers' Day Center
- C. The COVID-19 pandemic
- D. The introduction of e-commerce

2. What role does meaningful employment play in mental health, as discussed in the text?

- A. It creates psychosocial risks
- B. It exacerbates existing mental health conditions
- C. It leads to economic instability
- D. It promotes mental well-being

3. How much productivity loss does mental ill health cause annually in the WHO European Region?

- A. US\$ 1.4 billion
- B. US\$ 140 billion
- C. US\$ 14 billion
- D. US\$ 100 billion

4. What is highlighted as a potential consequence of adverse working conditions?

- A. Enhanced economic growth
- B. Reduced productivity
- C. Increased financial stability

D. Improved workplace relationships

5. What type of individuals does the Workers' Day Center specifically aim to support?

A. Self-employed individuals and employees of small and medium-sized enterprises

B. Employees of large corporations facing routine work challenges

C. Children and adolescents in educational settings

D. Retired persons seeking leisure activities

6. What is a notable benefit experienced by an individual using the services of the Workers' Day Center?

A. Opportunity for travel and recreation

B. Enhanced ability to manage financial investments

C. Significantly improved everyday quality of life

D. Increased professional workload

7. Which national plan is the Workers' Day Center aligned with?

A. Greek National Action Plan for Mental Health 2021–2030

B. Greek National Education Improvement Strategy

C. Greek National Tourism Development Plan

D. Greek National Environmental Protection Program

8. What does Lena Ravanapoulou find rewarding about working at the Center?

A. The generous salary and benefits

B. The opportunity to organize large public events

C. The exclusive clientele consisting of high-profile professionals

D. Witnessing positive transformations in individuals' mental well-being