



MUNICIPAL URBAN CLEANERS ON HEALTH AND SAFETY FOR BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE AND WELL-BEING

1st Newsletter of MUC Training for Health, Erasmus+ Project 2020-2023



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THE EU PROJECT

Health for Municipal Urban Cleaners

The MUC training for health project aims to improve the health and well-being of municipal urban cleaners by developing training on risk awareness and expand their knowledge on related occupational health and safety (OHS) issues. The project addresses the lack of standardized occupational health training with the aim to reduce the risks associated with waste collecting and municipal urban cleaning, therefore making urban cleaning employees less susceptible to occupational diseases. Especially now more than ever, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, urban cleaners are considered front line in terms of exposure, so there is an urgency to this situation.

The MUC training for health is a three-year project (01/11/2020 - 31/10/2023) funded by the ERASMUS+ Programme of the European Union. The project consortium comprises municipalities and organizations from 5 European countries: Varna Economic Development Agency (Bulgaria), Center for Social Innovation (Cyprus), Athens Development and Destination Management Agency (Greece), Prolepsis Institute (Greece), Comune di Andrano (Italy), IKM Pro Sakowska, Michalowska, Lyszkiewicz spolka jawna (Poland).



“The high-risk municipal urban cleaners face during their work in terms of exposure to infectious diseases such as various forms of hepatitis, combined with the lack of adequate training opportunities on occupational health and safety, make the MUC-training for health program of crucial importance.”

Prof. Athena Linos, President of the Prolepsis Institute.

UNDERSTANDING THE TRAINING NEEDS AND GAPS OF MUCS IN OHS

Summary

Prolepsis Institute as the leader of the Intellectual Output 1 along with all partners, focused all efforts into developing and delivering the Conceptual framework report. The report contributed to acquiring an in-depth understanding of the training needs and gaps of MUCs regarding the knowledge and skills concerning OHS and available training opportunities. This was accomplished through the implementation of an extensive EU level wide literature research, the collection of country specific evidence for MUCs from partner countries including mapping of existing training opportunities as well as through the implementation of participatory research and focus group discussions with the target groups.

All partners contributed by providing data on the characteristics of the MUC population, existing OHS legislation relevant to MUC workers and OHS risks and hazards faced by MUCs in the consortium countries. The literature review and country profiles showed that people working in the cleaning sector of cities and municipalities, appear to be insufficiently trained in regards to their health and safety during their work.

Some of key findings from the desktop-based research are:

- Municipal cleaning sectors mainly involves men, with a mean age of 45 years and most workers are unskilled or low-skilled.
- The waste management sector is placed third in the list of occupations with the highest probability of workers having an accident during their work.
- Workers in the cleaning sector face many health problems such as dermatological problems, respiratory disorders (asthma and rhinitis), musculoskeletal disorders and gastrointestinal problems.
- Risks are either related to the nature of waste i.e. chemical or biological hazards, to the workplace i.e. noise, turbulence, abrasions from sharp objects, or to the absence of organization at work.
- Most reported risks apart from chemical hazards, include the collection of sharp objects, falls and accidents, hearing impairment, exposure to extreme temperatures, UV exposure, vehicle throbs and heavy lifts.
- Adequate staff training on risks and hazards can minimize exposure to biological chemicals and physical agents as well as musculoskeletal problems.



"Do we have to wait for a horrible accident in a work environment to happen to take action and get the training that we need to prevent accidents? Prevention is the best safety approach and the training can help with this."

Focus Group, Cyprus



KEY FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUPS RESEARCH

Summary

The focus groups highlighted that OHS constitute a major issue in all participating countries, and that OHS is directly linked to MUCs' physical health and wellbeing, with a spillover effect on MUCs' families. Analysis of the qualitative data showed three different categories of barriers towards OHS: (1) structural barriers related to Municipality policies and organization (State), (2) individual barriers (MUCs), (3) barriers related to citizens (public).

- Some of the barriers at state/municipality level that were identified were substandard work facilities for MUCs, poorly maintained cleaning instruments, lack of technologically advanced cleaning instruments, less than needed quantity of cleaning equipment, being understaffed, causing heavy workload and stress to the MUCs and lack of commonly imposed policy regarding departmental health and safety measures.
- Individual barriers include the low sensitisation level of some workers regarding knowledge of and compliance with health and safety measures resulting in "neglectful" attitudes towards wearing Personal Protective Equipment.
- At the society level, were found a remarkable lack of sensitivity and a necessity to raise awareness among citizens regarding waste management i.e. a discriminatory behaviour against MUCs.

In conclusion, all participants consider MUC's training in health and safety issues to be of vital importance.

The research from Intellectual Output 1 highlighted the necessity for delivering this innovative training on OHS that can affect in a positive way MUC' health and well-being, as well as give a new perspective on the protection of public health.

The modules under development with hands-on training will empower MUCs to identify and control OHS hazards including protective measures and to help them build ownership in safety culture, including principles and practices for health promotion, mental health and work-life balance.



"Maintaining healthy and safe conditions at the workplace, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, is of paramount importance to the municipal leadership."

Focus Group, Italy



KEY ACTIVITIES FROM PARTNERS

Qualitative research identified several gaps in the training of MUCs, as well as barriers and difficulties they face during their work. The results of the participatory research were presented during the 2nd Panhellenic Congress on Occupational & Environmental Medicine organised on 5th and 7th of November, 2021 by the Hellenic Society of Occupational & Environmental Medicine in Athens, Greece. The audience that consisted mainly of occupational health professionals, showed high interest in the project and in the results of the conducted research.

The Bulgarian partner Varna Economic Development Agency (VEDA) used every opportunity to disseminate information for the MUC project at country level with the aim to raise project publicity and to make synergy with other Erasmus+ funded project and results. For the purpose, VEDA included MUC project presentation during the two face-to-face meetings with 30 local stakeholders altogether, held in Varna on November 9th and 12th 2021. The events were part of the Erasmus+ Coaching Maps project Multiplier event and were considered as an appropriate venue to share part of the MUC focus groups' results. Information for the upcoming development of MUC training program, expected to be released by the partnership during the summer 2022, was also shared with the participants. Part of the attendees in the events – municipal officials, showed interest towards the data presented as well as to be involved in the training modules.



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