

# BOO STRESS

Boosting the skills of youth to deal  
with stress at work



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## BooStress eBook

Health and Safety Skills  
Ecosystem and  
Methodological  
Framework

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## Introduction to the BooStress eBook

This *Health and Safety Skills Ecosystem and Methodological Framework* eBook constitutes the first intellectual output of the BooStress project. The purpose of this intellectual output is to present the findings from the European and national research activities undertaken by BooStress project partners. The BooStress project is currently being developed and implemented by partners in Cyprus, Ireland and Spain. All participating partner organisations from these countries completed an extensive research process at the beginning of the BooStress project, with the aim of presenting the state-of-the-art in relation to stress management policies, procedures and resources that are currently in practice among the European workforce. Specifically, through our research activities, we aimed to identify ICT tools which currently provide stress management training and support to young professionals; to highlight gaps in the provision of stress management supports to this target group and lastly to assess the needs of the target groups in the partner countries and in other EU Member States.

As well as presenting the ICT tools, gaps in provision and needs of the target group; this eBook also includes a review of recent research on the topic of workplace stress and the impact it has on European businesses. Additionally, in the appendices to this eBook, a short profile of specific good practices and examples of stress management tools and resources for young professionals is presented.

As well as presenting the findings from our desk-based and empirical research, the BooStress eBook also makes recommendations that will impact the future development of the project and will advise how the educational tools and resources are designed and piloted with the target group. Specifically, this eBook now acts as a reference document for all partners in developing the BooStress products by guiding and informing the development of all other intellectual outputs, as follows:

- IO2 – BooStress Curriculum and Toolbox of Key Skills Acquisition Resources
- IO3 – BooStress Multifunctional and Interactive Platform – Open Educational and Training E-Resource and Mobile Application
- IO4 – BooStress Skills Assessment, Validation and Recognition Tools
- IO5 – Infusion of the BooStress Package in the labour market – Adaptation and Policy Package

The content of the eBook is based on the findings presented in the Transnational Report which has been produced by FIPL as coordinator of this first intellectual output. The findings presented in this Report reflect the outcomes from the three national and one EU report produced by project partners during this initial stage of the project. To develop these respective reports, partners completed a literature review to present the state-of-the-art in relation to stress management in their own countries and undertook empirical research with local members of the project target group; namely, young professionals under the age of 35, and employers and stakeholders who work to support this target group. As such, research reports were produced which present the situation for young professionals in Cyprus, Ireland and Spain.

As part of this project, research was also completed by partners at European level, specifically in EU Member States that are not represented in the project consortium. The purpose of completing research at European level was to complement the research undertaken by project partners at national levels and to elicit comparable results from other European countries. The research process ensured that partners were better informed to understand how young professionals are supported to manage stress in other countries and to identify suitable best practices in other EU Member States where available.

Additionally, this European research ensures that, throughout the project and also for the exploitation of our results, the resources and tools developed by the BooStress project consortium will be transferrable to young employees in other EU Member States; adding to the impact that the BooStress project can have at European level.

## Stress in the European Workplace

Work-related psychosocial risks and stress, together with their associated negative health and business outcomes affect a remarkable number of European workplaces (EU OSHA, 2014). Despite this effect, research shows that 70% of businesses in Europe have no procedures or systems in place for dealing with workplace stress (EuroFound, 2010). While employers have a legal responsibility to reduce risks including psychosocial risks, to workers' health and safety stemming from the Framework Directive (89/391/EEC), in many organisations there is a misconception that addressing psychosocial risks is challenging and will incur additional costs when, in fact, the evidence suggests that failure to address these risks can be even more costly for employers, workers and society in general (EU-OSHA, 2000; Bond et al. 2006).

In a recent EU-funded project carried out by Matrix (2013), the cost to Europe of work-related stress was estimated to be €617 billion annually. The total was made up of costs to employers resulting from absenteeism and presenteeism (€272 billion), loss of productivity (€242 billion), health care costs of €63 billion and social welfare costs in the form of disability benefit payments (€39 billion).

Another study conducted in the United Kingdom in 2007 by the Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health estimates that the overall cost to British employers of stress, anxiety and depression amounts to "£1,035 per employee per year (€1,220). Of this total, £335 (€400) (32.4 %) is due to absenteeism, £605 (€710), or 58.4 %, to 'presenteeism' and £95 to staff turnover (9.2 %)." These studies highlight the impact that workplace stress, anxiety and other psychosocial issues can have on individual employees and employers, and yet little is being done to address this issue on a practice-level.

With the dearth of resources available to professionals to help manage their workplace stress, the incidence of workplace stress also appears to be on the increase; affecting evermore employees across Europe and adding to the problem that the European workforce and employers are facing. In February 2018, the University of Bath, Bristol, Exeter, Southampton and Surrey published the result of a study they lead to identify the main factors causing stress among students and professionals in Great Britain and to ascertain the effects this is having on the health of British citizens. What they found is that on average 85% of British adults experience regular stress; with 54% of these individuals worrying about the effect it is having on their health. This research also highlighted that in general women suffer more from stress than men do, with women typically experiencing stress on 3 days more per month than men. Additionally, the researchers found that young adults suffer more from stress than any other age group; with 18-24 year olds experiencing stress on 12 days per month and 69% of these young people worrying about the impact that it is having on their health. When the study assessed the factors which contribute to rising stress levels among young professionals in the UK, it found that in general those aged 18-24 worry most about money and those aged 25-34 worry most about factors related to their employment and careers (Forth with Life, 2018). This study shows the impact that financial and professional stress and anxiety are having on young adults and young professionals and our research confirms that the trends that are presented in the findings from this study are comparable across other EU Member States.

On a European level, according to the EU Labour Force Survey, in 1999–2007 nearly 28% of respondents, corresponding to approximately 55.6 million European workers, reported that their mental well-being

had been affected by exposure to psychosocial risks. Among workers with a work-related health problem, 'stress, depression or anxiety' was reported as the most serious health problem by 14% (EU OSHA, 2014). There have been significant changes in workplaces in recent times resulting in new occupational safety and health challenges. Increased globalization, advances in information and communication technology, new types of contractual and working time arrangements as well as significant demographic changes (EU-OSHA, 2007) have all contributed to work intensification, constant time pressure, multitasking and the need to learn new things just to maintain the status quo (Rosa, 2013). The 2009 Austrian Employee Health Monitor revealed that 42% of white-collar workers taking early retirement do so because of work-related psychosocial disorders (EuroFound, 2010). However, this is not only an issue which affects experienced employees who are finding it hard to cope with an emerging European working-culture that is making the task of work-life balance ever more difficult.

There are many of today's young workforce for whom the transition from education to employment is one that has proved incredibly problematic. With youth unemployment at unprecedented levels and significant shortages of employment opportunities as different industrial sectors contracted, the focus for many young people in the last 10 years has just been on finding a job; without necessarily finding employment that aligns with their level of education or their potential. As the EU economy continues to recover, many young people remain trapped in unsuitable employments with many working below their qualification level in sectors where their skills and competences are undervalued. For those young professionals, particularly those with limited professional experience due to the European economic downturn of the last decade, they lack the coping skills and strategies to be able to manage their work-related stress.

Today, there are approximately 217 million workers in the EU and work-related psychosocial risks and stress affect more than 40 million workers each year (EuroFound, 2013). The biggest stress factor identified is concern around possible job loss. Modern working life creates tremendous personal and occupational pressures, which need immediate management and successful resolution. Stress must be managed with a rational, calm and controlled approach. It is in view of supporting young professionals to adopt this new approach to stress management, that the BooStress project is being developed.

## **Stress Management in Europe**

Within the European labour market, at present, there are 17 million young people aged between 20 and 34 who are classed as neither in employment nor in education and training (NEETS). While figures for this age group are not readily available at a European level, 35% of Europe's aged 15-24 are currently engaged in employment on a full- and part-time basis; and 79.9% of adults aged 25-54 are currently in employment (OECD, 2018). Research shows, and European policy highlights, that paid employment is crucial for ensuring sufficient living standards for European citizens and it contributes to economic performance, quality of life and social inclusion. Despite the awareness of the importance of meaningful and secure employment for ensuring the future economic prosperity of Europe, and the well-being of its citizens, in 2016, 10.8 million people across Europe worked in occupations below their qualification level. Education attainment levels contribute to the disparities in employment rates between different labour groups within the European economy; with employment rates generally higher for more educated young people. Young professionals from disadvantaged backgrounds generally have participation rates of 64% in the labour market in Europe. Here the term 'disadvantaged' is defined as individuals who are 'at risk of poverty, material deprivation, low work intensity and social exclusion' (Eurostat, 2018).

When conducting desk-research to find initiatives that specifically address the stress management of young professionals, no such initiatives were identified by project researchers. Instead initiatives and programmes identified at European level tend to address employers and managers; supporting them to recognise the cost of employee stress to their business and highlighting steps and strategies that they can employ to mitigate the impact of employee work-place stress on their business. This is also the case when we undertook research to identify online training materials and resource. From the desk-research, it is evident that most resources for workplace stress management are primarily aimed at employers and owners of SME companies, with employees and young professionals identified as secondary target groups for these resources. Nonetheless the examples below are useful in the context of BooStress as framework documents and those of most note are listed below:

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work has developed an E-Guide (2018) to Managing stress and psycho-social risks providing information about work-related stress and psychosocial risks to foster awareness, understanding and management of these issues in the workplace. National versions are available for Ireland, UK and Malta.

*Healthy Workplace, Healthy Society - Blueprint for Business Action on Health Literacy* (2013): aims to stimulate businesses to engage in the advancement of health knowledge and competencies among employees and organisational change by creating health-friendly work environments that improve the health literacy levels of employees, in order to empower them to become healthier and achieve a better quality of life at work. The Blueprint supports the Europe 2020 strategy and the renewed EU strategy for Corporate Social Responsibility 2011-2014. The Blueprint includes a Toolkit of resources of which a number focus on Stress and Mental Health.

From our analysis of EU labour market policy initiatives, we can say that in all cases, the focus is on the integration of young people into the labour market to address structural issues such as high levels of youth unemployment and underemployment. As such this is the primary focus of EU policy initiatives with little or no specific focus on workplace stress management for young workers and professionals. Through our desk research, it is apparent that creating more and better jobs is one of the main goals of the Europe 2020 strategy. The European employment strategy (EES), with its employment guidelines and supporting programmes such as the Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) programme, is designed to contribute to growth and jobs, labour mobility and social progress.

The European Social Fund (ESF) also supports a broad range of labour market policy initiatives in the Member States, and in February 2013, the European Council agreed to create the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), with a budget of €8.8 billion for 2014-2020. The YEI targets young people aged 15-24 who are neither in employment nor in education or training (NEETs) in regions particularly affected by unemployment. These and other European funding instruments help to support policy initiatives in the field of employment, such as the:

- Council Recommendation on establishing a European Youth Guarantee (April 2013), which aims at ensuring that all young people under the age of 25 receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education;
- European Alliance for Apprenticeships (launched in July 2013);
- Council Recommendation on a Quality Framework for Traineeships (March 2014).
- Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (October 2017).

In February 2016, the European Council adopted the Commission's proposal on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market. Its focus is on registration with an employment service, an individual in-depth assessment and a job integration agreement.

The New Skills Agenda for Europe, a policy package issued by the Commission in June 2016 brings together ten key actions to equip citizens with skills relevant for the labour market. Of most relevance to the BooStress Project is the priority for action titled: *Building resilience: key competences and higher, more complex skills*. Whilst not explicitly addressing workplace stress management for young professionals, this EU policy communication does recognise that formal education and training should equip everyone with a broad range of skills which opens doors to personal fulfilment and development, social inclusion, active citizenship and employment. Early acquisition of these skills is highlighted as the foundation for the development of higher, more complex skills which are needed to drive creativity and innovation. These skills need to be strengthened throughout life, and allow people to thrive in fast-evolving workplaces and society, and to cope with complexity and uncertainty. The resources and outputs proposed by BooStress should address support young people to cope with this "complexity and uncertainty" that is very present in today's market place.

From our analysis it is evident that there are considerable gaps in the provision of stress management training and resources for young professional across Europe. At EU policy level, there is a lack of focus on the issue of stress management and its impact on the workforce especially young people. Pan-European research and surveys consistently highlight the cost to European economies of workplace absences due to employee stress and anxiety; yet this issue is not addressed in the policy initiatives reviewed as part of the BooStress desk-research process. Workplace stress management policies, procedures, training and resources are mainly targeted at employers and relate to compliance issues vis-à-vis employment and health and safety laws and regulations. There are a number of EU initiatives, highlighted previously, that are attempting to introduce whole company approaches to address the issue of stress identification, mitigation and management, however there still remains the gap in provision that the project is seeking to address. Since the project application was approved, there have been no significant changes to EU or national initiatives in the partner countries and the need for the project remains highly valid in Cyprus, Spain and Ireland and indeed across Europe. BooStress needs to address the implementation gap that currently exists in relation to the training materials and resources available that have been identified in the desk-based and field-research conducted by partners. Building the competences of young workers and professionals of "how to" be resilient, self-confident and thus manage their stress is a key gap that the project should address.

## Stress Management in Cyprus

Based on a pan-European survey conducted by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work in late 2012, we can deduce that work-related stress is more common in Cyprus than anywhere else in Europe, although half the workforce believes they are well-controlled at their workplace. Despite the prevalence of workplace stress in Cyprus, there are currently no state agencies or service providers providing support specifically to young professionals in Cyprus.

In Cyprus, the only instrument in place to measure stress at organisational level is a study by the Department of Labour Inspectorate entitled "Assessment of the Situation in Cyprus: Physical and Mental Disorders of Working People". However, the study does not provide any positive actions.

In 2012, the Labour Inspection Division ran a campaign on psychosocial risks at work with the agreement of the Senior Labour Inspectors (SLIC). The campaign in Cyprus was carried out as part of a working group, coordinated by Sweden, with representatives from 12 Member States. The working group started the campaign planning in 2011 and its main task was to develop tools (based on the needs



of all member states) aiming at the assessment of psychosocial risks; these tools were used during and after work. The target groups of this campaign were: health sector, including social welfare (private and public); the service sector, e.g. hotels and restaurants; and the transport sector.

What is noteworthy that Cyprus harmonized the Occupational Safety and Health Laws 1996 to 2011 and the Occupational Safety and Health at Work Regulations 2002 with the European Directive 89/391/EEC. The definition of "Health in Safety" and "Health at Work" Laws state that "health, in relation to work, implies not only the absence of disease or disability, but also the physical and mental health factors that have a direct link to occupational safety and hygiene ". According to the article 13 of the Occupational Safety and Health Laws, each employer must ensure the safety, health and well-being of all his employees (Department of Labour Inspection – Psychosocial risks at work, 2018).

Moreover, in 2004, the European Social Partners (Employers and Trade Unions) reached the Framework Agreement on work-related stress. The article 4 of the Agreement states that if a problem of work-related stress is identified, action must be taken to prevent, eradicate or reduce it. Responsibility for determining the appropriate measures lies with the employer. According to the Article 6 of the Agreement, the measures include the following:

- Management and communication measures
- Training of managers and employees
- Providing information and consulting with employees

In Cyprus, a Joint Policy Statement on the Framework Agreement in relation to work-related stress was signed among the social partners in June 2008, expressing their willingness to enforce the provisions of the Framework Agreement. The Statement was co-signed by the Minister of Labour and Social Insurance. Building on this, the Department of Labour Inspection (DLI) set a goal of inspecting approximately 60 workplaces. These were workplaces in the health sector, including social care providers, both private and public; and in the service sector, e.g. hotels and restaurants; and transport sector. The aim of conducting these inspections was to disseminate to as many employers as possible information about their obligation to assess the psychological risks of their employees as well. Other goals included the awareness-raising of employees and the training of inspectors (Department of Labour Inspection – Psychosocial risks at work, 2018).

## Stress Management in Ireland

In Ireland, workplace stress, and the health conditions that can occur as a result of it, is not officially classified as a "reportable incident" by the national Health and Safety Authority (HSA). The HSA sets policy for employers in Ireland and supports them to ensure the health and safety of their employees. In addition, they also act as the regulatory authority where all accidents, illnesses and incidents caused as a result of employment in Ireland can be reported and investigated. However, while illnesses are reportable to the HSA, stress is not seen as an illness by the Authority. Therefore, employers in Ireland are not required to report absenteeism as a result of stress, anxiety or other psychosocial illnesses to the HSA. However, while there is no duty for employers to report workplace stress, they are bound under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005, to ensure the protection of their employees from all hazards which can lead to injury. In this sense, the HSA identify factors which increase stress and anxiety as potential hazards, which can lead to personal injury in the form of poor mental health. As such, the HSA advises employers to ensure that stressors are included in all risk assessments conducted in the work environment; and they should implement control measures to mitigate the impact of stress on their employees. However, despite this recommendation, there is no apparatus in

place to monitor the effectiveness of these preventative measures in managing workplace stress or to assess employer's adherence to these recommendations (Health and Safety Authority, 2018).

In 2015, Mercer Consultants undertook a study of over 2,000 employees in Ireland and the Great Britain to capture the incidence of workplace stress and to determine the factors that are contributing to employee stress. This study found that 82% of Irish employees surveyed experience regular stress and 4 out of 5 adults surveyed stated that their stress levels are on the rise. As a result of this study, Mercer's analysis highlights that the stress and anxiety experienced by Irish employees is contributing to reduced concentration (64%), reduced job satisfaction (59%) and lower employee productivity (44%). When asked about the factors which contribute to their stress, survey respondents listed "health, providing for family, planning for retirement, and meeting the cost of household bills" as the main issues which influence their level of stress; with 60% employees who were surveyed stating that they would welcome more support from their employer in helping them to manage their stress. When asked to identify the types of supports that would help, these employees mentioned support with financial planning and budgeting (61%), advice on pensions and support in planning for retirement (59%); and access to online training and development (58%) as some of the key supports that employers could provide to help to reduce their level of work-related stress (Mercer, 2015).

When we analyse the results of a study on workplace stress commissioned by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) in Ireland in 2016, we learn that in 2013, musculoskeletal disorders (MSD) - affecting different parts of the body used for movement including the skeleton, muscles, tendons and ligaments - is responsible for the overwhelming majority of absences, at 50%. This was followed next the rate of absenteeism resulting from work-related stress, anxiety and depression (SAD), which stood at 18% of all absences in 2013. Findings from this research estimate that the average length of absence in 2013 was 17 days for SAD and 15.9 days for MSD; with the average duration for all other types of work related illness was 12.8 days. This study used data from Quarterly Household surveys from 2002 until 2013, inclusive, to analyse the factors contributing to the rate of absenteeism as a result of SAD and MSD. Here, researchers found that in general, women are at higher risk than men of developing SAD as a result of their work; with 5.8% per 1,000 female employees reportedly suffering with work-related SAD; compared to only 4% per 1,000 male employees. Employees in the education sector, followed by health, public administration, transport and "other services", including finance, information and communications are at highest risk of developing work-related illnesses. The sectors of agriculture, construction and industry have the lowest risk levels, while individuals who are self-employed have a lower risk of SAD than employees. This study also found that employees who work over 50 hours per week are 3 times more likely to experience SAD than those working less than 30 hours. And employees who work shift-hours are at the greatest risk of developing SAD illnesses. This extensive survey conducted by ESRI also makes recommendations to address the rise in incidence of workplace stress, anxiety and depression in Ireland. Specifically, ESRI researchers recommend that there is a need to highlight the importance of positive mental health among Irish employees and also to address the "long-hour" culture that is becoming increasingly common in Irish workplaces (Russel, Maitre & Watson, 2016).

## Stress Management in Spain

The economy of Spain is primarily a service-based economy with almost three quarters of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) being generated in the services sector; with the sectors of industry and energy responsible for almost 18% and the agriculture and fishery industry making up approximately 2.5% of GDP (Economy, 2016). One major issue affecting the economy in the past few years is that the construction industry has seen a stark decline since the property market collapsed in 2007. This problem was exacerbated by the economic recession which followed in 2009. These two factors

contributed to the reduction of GDP generated by the construction industry in Spain; which shrunk from its double-digit percentages of the GDP in the 2000s (11.6% of GDP and 13.8% of the workforce in 2005) to less than half by 2013 (5.6% of GDP, 6.1% of the workforce). However, the rise in unemployment at this time was not limited to the construction industry in Spain, as nationally employment rates fell from over 20.7 million individuals employed in 2007 to just under 17 million at the beginning of 2014 (INE, 2014).

These figures provide some insight into how the Spanish economy was impacted by the economic recession which hit many European economies in the late 2000s, and the effects of this recession are still being felt by some EU Member States. As such, measures to help employees to face and manage their stress, anxiety and depression as a result of all they have experienced in their employment is needed in countries who were worst affected by the economic downturn. In Spain, the department for social security (Seguridad Social) requires that employers must inform their employees about stress-related risks and have a registered partner of the social security inspect their workplace environment and give advice to employees and employers on how to improve the climate at work.

In relation to specific measures which address workplace stress of young professionals, the government in Spain offers Garantía Juvenil (Youth Guarantee). This programme supports employers to hire individuals under the age of 25, who have no prior work experience. This programme runs for one year, and provides graduates and young people with limited work experience with access to part-time employment. While this programme tackles the issue of youth unemployment, and also underemployment, it does not directly address the stress management of young professionals; only that it provides them with practical experience in the workplace which will ultimately build their competence and resilience as employees.

In relation to specific training programmes and resources that could be used to develop workplace stress management skills of young employees, no such resources were identified during the literature review exercise in Spain. While there are programmes on “Mindfulness” that are popular in Andalusia; these programmes are fee-paying and so they can often be inaccessible to low-paid, young professionals who perhaps most need this support. Researchers in Spain were able to identify one resource which can be used by these young professionals to help them to manage their stress. This is a guidebook on stress management by the Spanish association of specialists in work-related medicine, Asociación Española de Especialistas en Medicina del Trabajo – AEEMT. The book details the how to diagnose stress and how to treat it and so it can be a useful resource for young employees (AEEMT, 2016).

In terms of resources and supports that are available in Spain to help young employees to manage their stress, researchers were not able to identify any training programmes or supports. However, as is noted by the Spanish researchers, while there exists some awareness among medical experts (like the AEEMT), the general public seems to not attribute much importance to the issue; with their focus mostly targeted at creating jobs and sustainable employment opportunities, rather than how to management workplace stress and anxiety.

## **Undertaking Empirical Research in Europe**

To complete empirical research on a European level, BooStress project partners implemented online surveys with young employees in other EU Member States, and FIPL conducted information focus group sessions with 5 relevant stakeholders from across Europe. As the BooStress project aims to develop a suite of training materials to support young Europeans to develop their skills and competences to be able to manage stress in the workplace more effectively; it was necessary to conduct some research

with young professionals to elicit their opinions on the topic of stress management. In these questions, the project team aimed to assess how these employees manage stress in their current job; if they have ever undertaken stress management training; what supports are currently available to them from their employers to help manage stress and to identify other coping strategies which could inform the development of our BooStress training materials. Conducting interviews with European stakeholders enabled partners to contextualize the findings from the research questionnaires with young professionals and to provide the perspective from employers and regional policy-makers.

Completing research questionnaires and stakeholder interviews on a European level has had two distinct outcomes. Firstly, it has allowed partners the opportunity to gain insight into stress management strategies, supports and resources in other EU Member States and to identify gaps in these areas in participating countries. The findings from this research will be used to inform the development of the BooStress training materials and resources, meaning that project outputs will be relevant to young professionals in other EU countries, adding to the transferability and impact that the BooStress project will have at a European level. Secondly, conducting field-research in other EU Member States raises the awareness of the project, and the topic that it is addressing, with colleagues across Europe. Due to the nature of the work we undertake, the majority of those contacted to complete these research questionnaires were organisations who participate in other EU-funded programmes, such as Erasmus+. This has contributed to the exchange of knowledge and best practice between like-minded professionals and organisations.

The research with European stakeholders was completed through telephone interviews and online questionnaires. These stakeholders included employers, mentors and trainers who managed young employees under the age of 35 and they were based in the Czech Republic, Poland and Portugal. The BooStress Online Questionnaire was completed by 25 young employees from across Europe. To reach this target, project partners reached out to colleagues and contacts within their vast networks of European companies, with whom they have previously collaborated on similar EU-funded initiatives. Young professionals who completed the online questionnaire were aged between 24 and 34 years and lived and worked in Greece, Italy, France, Austria, Poland, Malta, Poland, Switzerland and the UK.

The field-based research process, conducted on a European level, was then replicated on a national level by project partners in Cyprus, Ireland and Spain to inform the development of their national reports. The following sections provide an overview of the findings from empirical research activities implemented on a pan-European scale by the BooStress project team, and also in each of the partner countries.

## **Findings from Empirical Research in Europe**

When conducting field-based research with young professionals and stakeholders in Europe, research found the outcomes of the research implemented with both target groups was comparable and complementary. For example, of the 25 young professionals who were surveyed across Europe, only 1 respondent out of the 25 young professionals surveyed stated that they have undertaken training previously, which has helped them to manage stress in work. All other 24 respondents answered in the negative to this question. When asked to provide details of the training that was attended, the respondent explained that they participated in a yoga class, and also mentioned that they had received supervision in their job that has helped them to manage stress. When a similar question was asked to stakeholders who were interviewed, the 5 stakeholders all agreed that they were not aware of any targeted, quality tools and training resources for young professionals to help them to manage stress. While both target groups mentioned various online platforms and apps where young professionals

could access meditation, relaxation and guided breathing exercises, these were only known by some research participants (4 young professionals and 2 stakeholders) and all agreed that it was generally up to the employee to find these resources and to use them; that support for these activities in developing coping strategies for stress management were not supported by employers. There has also been no formal study to assess the effectiveness of these apps and platforms in supporting young professionals to manage and overcome stress.

Despite the lack of support, even among our small research group, the issue of workplace stress is apparent; with 20 respondents (80%) answering that they experience stress in their current job. When asked if they were aware of any training programmes available online or through face-to-face delivery that aim to help young professionals to manage their stress; only 1 respondent stated that they are aware of “lots of training courses offered on managing your stress”; but this survey respondent did provide any details of any specific courses or programmes. As a follow-up to the previous question, young professionals were next asked if they had any knowledge of existing online resources that could be used to help young workers in Europe to manage their stress. Similar to the responses to the previous question, the 96% of respondents stated that they are not aware of any such online resources, and only 1 respondent stated that they are aware of online tools and resources, which included some guided meditations on YouTube and using some apps to practice Mindfulness.

While stakeholders were also aware of some apps - Calm; Relax – Meditate, Sleep, Calm; Prana Breath and Sleep Sounds - none of the stakeholders interviewed had any previous experience of using these online tools to support young professionals they work with. During the online and telephone interviews, stakeholders highlight that while work-place stress is addressed in national labour policies, there is no support for the individual employers to provide support to their employees; so therefore, if employees are given time off for personal development and training in stress management, employers are not compensated for this time off; which is a major factor that impacts especially SMEs who typically have a small staff team. In relation to training, stakeholders specifically highlighted the need for training in task and time management for young employees. From their experience of working with and managing young professionals, in their view the main difficulty young employees experience with managing their stress is that they may become overwhelmed by their work-load; when, with proper planning and scheduling of their up-coming tasks, they would eliminate their stress over these issues. They also highlighted that often young employees who come straight from a university environment have little practical work-place experience; and so, they can become stressed over issues such as managing professional relationships; working in an office environment; working in a transnational environment; working through a second-language (English was mentioned); event management and planning, etc. These stress-inducing factors should be borne in mind when the BooStress project team is developing their suite of training materials to support young professionals to manage stress in Europe.

## **Findings National Empirical Research**

In this section, comparable results from the empirical research completed in each partner country are presented.

### **Empirical Research Findings from Cyprus**

Young professionals who participated in the focus group in Cyprus stated that they use different methods to cope with stress in their working environment, which include: trying to put aside the stress and then concentrate and set goals in order to manage it; trying to turn stress into something positive; asking for help from their colleagues, etc. However, most respondents stated that they do not follow

any specific method, they just react emotionally based on their instincts, e.g. “I freeze, I become inert, I lose control, and I laugh”, “I smoke, and I drink water”, “I call to a friend and I talk with them”. While most participants do not know any resources that can help them to manage workplace stress, a few referred to books that they use to help them manage stress; others say that they get support from a psychologist, psychotherapy, friends; while others practice meditation, pilates, work-outs in the gym, music, dancing and positive thinking to overcome stress.

Young professionals who participated in the focus group were not aware of any ICT tools that can help them to manage work-related stress and thus have never used such tools to improve their stress management skills. Moreover, they are not aware of any training programs that could help them to improve their stress management skills. These exact responses were provided by stakeholders and trainers who participated in the second focus group in Cyprus. Nevertheless, the stakeholders referred to other tools and techniques that they use to help young professionals to develop their stress management skills. These include: educating them through examples and scenarios from the working environment (“orientation techniques”); providing advice on how they must behave towards clients, employers, colleagues, and helping them to grow in confidence to discuss their ideas and problems; developing their collaboration skills so that they can share knowledge, experiences and feelings for their work with colleagues; advising them to do sports, gym and other hobbies during their leisure time; suggesting they read books about emotional intelligence at work; and accessing support from psychologist therapists and other professionals if needed.

According to the group of young professionals involved in the focus group, the main challenges affecting young employees today include their working relations with other employees and their employers, clients and patients, time management due to workload and team building. Most of the participants feel that they do not receive enough support from older employees, because – in their opinion - older employees feel competition with younger employees in their workplace. As a result, they feel that they lack adequate support at work. In comparison, most of the stakeholders answered that time pressure, workload, fatigue, as well as the lack of motivation and adequate opportunities for young employees prevent them from participating in a training programme on how to deal with work-related stress. In addition, different ways of thinking between the management and the young employees as well as the lack of resources (or unwillingness on behalf of managers to pay) for such educational programmes are other barriers which hinder young professionals in developing stress management skills and competences in Cyprus.

In relation to the young professionals who completed the online questionnaire in Cyprus, 73% of respondents stated that they experience stress in their current job, while only 27% said that they do not. The frequency of stressful experience varies, but it is notable that only 21% never feel stressed in work. In spite of the fact that most of the participants feel stress in their current job, the vast majority (91%) have never undertaken training to help them to manage stress in work; with the remaining 9% stating that they had undertaken training in the form of private workshops (two responses) or from their family (one response). Moreover, the 85% have never been offered support or training by their employer; 15% replied that they received support (3 participants further commented that they were supported and only 1 participant attended a 6-hour seminar); the support received as part of the training offered by the employer was useful to help to manage stress in work or at work for only 18% of the participants. Despite the high levels of work-related stress, most participants (58%) do not use any specific tools or resources to help them to manage stress and 73% do not have any specific strategies in place to help them to manage stress.

Certain recommendations and suggestions about the format, usability and content of the BooStress Training Package emerged from the results of the online questionnaires distributed to young

professionals and the discussion with the Cypriot focus groups' members. In relation to the BooStress training package format, Cypriot participants asked for user-friendly online courses with music in the background and images, photos and interactive videos included; as well as a layout like well-known and frequently used social media for "maximum user-friendliness". Moreover, respondents stated that educational games and quizzes could make the package more attractive to users and thus help them to deal with stress in a more efficient and pleasant way. A blended learning programme is the preferred format for training materials and resources, however providing training fully online were also popular, especially among those who have limited time to give to attending training. It was also recommended that the BooStress modules are kept short, simple and free of technical and scientific terms, well-structured and follow modern educational and instructional design principles (e.g. role-play, real work-based scenarios, etc.). Furthermore, it was suggested that the modules are available for smartphones through an application and ideally downloadable so that it can be viewed or read off-line at a later stage if needed. Lastly, including visuals and audio, such as a narrator, was seen as necessary for those young employees with hearing and visual impairments.

When it comes to the content of the modules, participants asked for the development of skills that will allow them to maintain good working relations with their colleagues, partners, clients, employers, etc., as well as the development of organisational, time management and general stress management skills, including the skill to control stress and learn how to live with stress in a positive way. Young professionals prefer to receive practical guidelines and advice and learn specific techniques that will help them to deal with work-related stress. Lastly, discussion groups in the form of "blind" chat rooms through which participants will be able to share their thoughts, experiences and feelings with their peers were also highlighted by the Cypriot focus group members; however, this is out of the scope of this project. Overall, participants requested knowledge and skills that will increase their self-esteem at work and give them clear role and existence which will finally help them to manage stress at work.

Research activities have shown that, on the one hand, young professionals in Cyprus suffer from increased work-related stress and they feel that they do not receive any substantial support by their employers or colleagues; and on the other hand, that trainers and stakeholders (as well as young professionals) are unaware of ICT tools and training programmes on how to deal with stress –apart from a few face-to-face seminars offered by private universities. In addition, employees' lack of time and resources prevent them from attending such training and employers are unwilling to commit their own time and resources to allow their employees to attend training, as they consider the development of stress management skills to be of secondary importance.

The research conducted at national level in Cyprus has also shown some important gaps in the provision of training on stress management as well as the lack of certain skills among young professionals that will help them to deal efficiently with stress. While the Republic of Cyprus laws (on Occupational Safety and Health Laws, 1996 to 2011, and the Occupational Safety and Health at Work Regulations, 2002) have been harmonized with the EU Directive 89/391/EEC, insufficient measures have been adopted to substantially help young professionals, and all employees, to work in a healthy, safe and stress-free environment.

## Empirical Research Findings from Ireland

The focus group sessions in Ireland were conducted with five young employees aged from 26 to 33 years. Focus group participants worked in a range of different areas; 1 was a retail assistant, 1 a photographer, 1 an administrator, 1 a community development worker and the final participant was a project manager. All five respondents were female, and they all stated that they experience stress to varying degrees in their current jobs. These respondents used a variety of coping strategies to help to

manage stress, including talking with friends and colleagues, practicing meditation, prioritising tasks and making to-do lists and one respondent mentioned that when she gets stressed in work she “stops what she is doing, takes a deep breath and works out a time-plan to complete [her] work”. When asked if they had ever undertaken training to support them in managing stress, only one participant mentioned that she had taken part in training. When asked to provide details of the training, she mentioned attending a workshop on mindfulness and a seminar called ‘less stress at your desk’. She mentioned that both workshops were useful but as they were once-off events, their impact on her work-related stress was limited and that she would require on-going support to make meaningful difference to how she manages stress in work. When asked to identify the main challenges facing young employees in Ireland today, the focus group participants mentioned the following issues: mental health problem due to stress, financial pressure, juggling work-life balance, getting the most out of your work day, maintaining positive mental health and trying to manage workload. Focus group participants were not aware of any online tools or resources that they could access to help them to manage stress. When asked to provide recommendations for the BooStress training materials, they proposed including case studies of stress management that young employees could relate to, opportunities for self-reflection, guidance on how to identify stress and some people might not be aware when they are stressed and that partners should consider presenting material in the form of an eBook that is available on Kindle. One participant also recommended that this eBook be developed as an audio book that young professionals could download and listen to when they are stressed or when they are trying to switch-off after work.

Of the stakeholders who completed the research survey or took part in a focus group in Ireland, the majority (80%) were not aware of any online tools and resources to help young employees to manage stress. Where 1 employer was aware of an online tool, they mentioned that Calm App; however they did not have any experience of using this app with young professionals in their company. When asked if they provide training or support to employees, stakeholders answered that training, support and discretionary time off for sick leave are available to employees in need; however they were not able to mention any specific training or support that they have provided. When asked to identify the type of training that is available, stakeholders mentioned that general training in the areas of ‘well-being and stress management’ are available, and one employer mentioned that staff in their company attended a half-day seminar with an Irish psychologist and public speaker called: ‘the psychology of happiness’ which provided employees with support on how to practice ‘positive psychology’ and how to ‘get more flow’ in their lives. When asked to identify gaps that exist in the provision of additional training to young professionals, employers mentioned that there is a lack of financial resources within companies to provide this training and support on an ongoing basis. They also mentioned that releasing staff for training can be expensive and costly. Additionally, employers agreed that there is a general lack of awareness as to the tools and resources available to support employers in this area; however they also mentioned that they would like to see more training for employers on how to manage stress within the workplace. When asked to identify the primary training needs of young professionals from their experience of working with and managing this cohort of staff, two employers mentioned that their young employees need training in work-readiness skills and that this needs to be “linked to real-world work ethic”. They further agreed that there is “sometimes a lack of capacity and resilience amongst young professionals to cope with the demand of work pressures.” Lastly, stakeholders were asked to make recommendations and suggestions to inform the development of the BooStress training materials. Here, stakeholders recommended that training be provided in online formats and they should be free to use. One employer also advised that the BooStress partners need to consider the legal context in which companies operate when developing content and that training materials should be “employer-friendly i.e. cost neutral to implement.”



Of the 20 young professionals who responded to the research questionnaire in Ireland, 35% or, 7 out of 20, stated that they do not currently experience stress in their job; with the remaining 65% of respondents experiencing stress as part of their work. Of those young people who stated that they do experience stress in the workplace, 5 stated that they experience stress on a 'weekly' basis, 4 on a 'daily' basis, 3 on a 'monthly' basis and 1 young employee stated that they experience stress in work every hour. Of this research group, 95%, or 19 out of all 20 respondents, stated that they have never completed training to help them to cope with stress. The one respondent who did complete training on this topic further explained that when she worked on a yacht, there was a psychologist on-board who coached them to work with difficult people and customers. 85% of respondents had never received support from their employer to help them to manage stress; and of the remaining 3 respondents, only 2 individuals mentioned that they have completed a short one-day course on stress management provided by their employer, when asked to provide information on the support they received. They did not provide any additional information on the topic or purpose of the training. When asked if this support was helpful to the employees to support them in managing stress; one individual stated that this was not helpful because 'it was not comprehensive enough'.

Survey respondents were next asked to mention any online resources or tools that they were aware of to help young people to manage their stress. This question received limited responses with only 10%, or 2 respondents out of 20, stating that they were aware of any online tools; and of these respondents 1 mentioned the BooStress project as an online resource that they are aware of, and the other stated: 'there are plenty of courses and relaxing techniques that can be applied for people to reduce stress at work: online training, books, sport or gym sessions, swimming, listening to music, relaxation classes involving breathing, etc.' but they did not provide any specific details of online resources. However, when asked if they were aware of any specific tools and resources to help them to manage their stress, 7 out of 20 young professionals answered positively to this question; and when probed, they listed the following resources: stress app on my phone; meditation app on my phone; guided meditation through YouTube; relaxing at home; hobbies; football; meditation - learning to control your mind and learning that other people's opinions or attitudes have nothing to do with you; rule your mind or your mind will rule you; regular exercise as it relieves stress so as not to bring the stress home. While these responses show the different strategies and coping mechanisms which young people use to help them to overcome and manage their stress, this question did not elicit the type of responses that was intended among the research group in Ireland; as we do not have a comprehensive list of available tools and resources for young people to help them in managing stress.

As a follow-up question, young professionals were asked if they had any coping strategies in place for when they experience stress. As indicated by previous responses, almost half of all survey respondents (45%) had strategies in place. These included meditating ever day at lunch break or in the evenings; regular physical exercise; prioritizing and making to-do lists to manage work load; talking to friends and family for support when stressful situations arise; practicing breathing techniques to calm down when stress occurs; dealing with one stress source at a time; taking a break and looking at a problem from the broader perspective helps. This shows the range and scope of coping strategies that young employees in Ireland are already using to manage their stress.

Next survey respondents were asked to comment on more practical issues related to developing the BooStress training materials. They were asked to highlight their training needs in relation to stress management, to rank the top 3 skill areas where they would like to receive additional training and to comments on their preferred format for training materials. While these recommendations are included in the latter section of this eBook, the general feedback from the Irish survey respondents included that they would like additional training in the areas of: talking to an employer about stress; the impact of stress on health; strategies for coping with stress; strategies for managing long-term stress; maintaining

work-life balance and how to not bring workplace stress home; how to analyse what causes stress and deal with factors; crisis/conflict management, time management; managing relationships in work and managing conflict. In relation to their preferred format of training materials, Irish respondents stated that they would prefer training materials to be presented as self-assessment tests (50%), online training (45%) and handbooks and guidelines (45%).

## Empirical Research Findings from Spain

For the focus group findings, researchers in Spain discovered mostly that awareness of stress management among both young professionals and stakeholders was quite limited. The situation which emerged from the focus groups with young professionals and stakeholders were very similar; namely that young employees are mostly left to deal with stress by themselves and that, similar to the results of the online questionnaire with young professionals, stress management for the most part consists of approaches like short walks, drinking water, having a positive attitude to cover up the stress, listening to music and playing Candy Crush. What we learn from these supposed coping strategies is that young professionals in Spain might be questioned on their ability to adequately deal with stress. When asked about causes of stress, young professionals stated that they think a lot of their stress stems from having to decide early in their lives what careers they would like to pursue; and so they often end up in jobs that are not enjoyable, but which they must do because they feel compelled to by external factors, including adults in their lives who influence their career choice or the economic situation. Stakeholders mentioned that the main stress-related issue affecting young people is unemployed and threats to their job security. According to stakeholders involved in the focus group, young people are also not familiar with Social Security, contracts or payrolls work and they are unaware of their employment rights. As such, the Social Security website was mentioned by stakeholders as a useful online resource for young employees because on this site, they can find information about types of contracts, professional categories and other information relevant to their job and legal rights. Another issue which could cause stress among young professionals in Spain was highlighted by one stakeholder who mentioned that in businesses in Spain there are no induction programmes for new employees; so therefore, young professionals with limited work experience may find it difficult to adapt to their new work environment and this could cause them considerable stress. As a result, young professionals learn through trial-and-error on their own, without proper training in a specific company. To overcome this, and as a means of mitigating workplace stress for young employees, one stakeholder recommended that employers organise a mentoring programme, where more experienced employees mentor new employees or particularly young professionals with limited work experience.

Another issue which emerged through the focus group sessions is a lack of knowledge about stress: young people generally don't know how to recognise their own stress; they don't know when they are stressed because they lack self-consciousness, referring only to "feeling frustrated" and they also lack the ability to manage their own emotions. As such, training in emotional intelligence might be beneficial to young employees. Other gaps in skills and competences in young people that were identified by the focus groups in Spain included training in social skills and interpersonal relationships; training in how to use ICT in a professional capacity and training in personal development and self-esteem.

When asked about ICT tools that can be used by young professionals to develop stress management skills, stakeholders mention online Mindfulness-based programmes which aim to support employees to reduce their stress; with one of the stakeholders also explaining how effective mindfulness is on stress management. Despite its effectiveness, two stakeholders stated that they have never used mindfulness-based tools with young professionals; and one said that it is still very new to them, but that it should be used, especially in the Education System with young people and children.

Among those young professionals who completed the online questionnaire in Spain, 65% of all participants reported stress at their current workplace, with over half of these (53.8%) stating that they experienced it daily and just under one-quarter of respondents (23.1%) experiencing stress on an hourly basis or only weekly.

Of this group, only 20% stated they have previously taken part in training to help with stress management, of which most seemed to be related to practicing Mindfulness. All participants who took part in this type of training were offered the training by their employer; however only half of all those who took part in the training (2 out of 4) found it useful. Similarly, only 10% of all participants were aware of any training or support that specifically addresses work-related stress management among young workers and only 5% knew of online tools on the subject. Percentages are higher when participants were asked about whether they have specific coping strategies for dealing with stress. Here, 40% named an activity that they do to overcome bouts of stress; while 30% stated they had a strategy for dealing with stress, though, these typically included meditation, yoga, respiratory exercises or simply “positive thinking”. And none of the young professionals surveyed in Spain mentioned that they had ever taken part in self-help groups.

Over half (55%) of all survey respondents in Spain expressed their interest in participating in a BooStress training programme; as such their input into the design and format of the BooStress materials is valuable for the consortium. In relation to the preferred topics, survey respondents were interested in developing “skills for stress management” (14 votes), “stress management techniques” (11 votes), and “intervention for stress management” (10 votes). Other topics received varying degrees of interest, typically attracting between 5 and 7 votes each; with the topics of “how to recognise stress” and “what is stress” the least popular among respondents in Spain, receiving 1 vote and 0 votes respectively. In terms of the format of these training materials, only blended learning resources (12 votes) and online learning (10 votes) received votes from at least half of the research participants. Other formats, such as online games (9 votes), manuals/guidelines (8 votes) and online advice via an online platform (8 votes) received comparatively high scores as well, while worksheets/brochures (3 votes) and podcasts (1 vote) drew the least interest among young professionals in Spain.

## **Recommendations & Suggestions for the BooStress Project**

The aim of this eBook is to present the findings from the transnational research activities undertaken by BooStress project partners and to make recommendations, based on the outcomes from our research activities, which will highlight key gaps in the provision of stress management training and support for young professionals, and will inform the future development of the BooStress project outputs.

What we have learned from the extensive literature review process undertaken by all partners that in all participating partner countries, and also more generally across Europe, there are several gaps at both policy and practice level to support young professionals to develop stress management skills; further supporting the rationale for the BooStress project in Europe. We also learn that there is a differing attitude to stress among professionals working in each partner country; with professionals in Spain more preoccupied with tackling incidence of unemployment and underemployment rather than managing stress; employees in Ireland suffering quite extensively from increased levels of work-related stress but unable to access support or report it to their employers as an ‘illness’ impacting their ability to perform their work; and employees in Cyprus also regularly experiencing stress but not feeling the

impacts of it as much because they believe they manage their stress well, despite the lack of support and resources to help them.

From our combined desk-research activities, we can recommend that the BooStress project needs to address the implementation gap that currently exists in relation to the training materials and resources available that have been identified in the desk and field research conducted by partners. In addition, we also recommend that BooStress partners also try to raise awareness in general about workplace stress and the negative impact that stress can have on employee's health. Raising awareness of this issue would be particularly beneficial to young employees in Spain who lack consciousness of this issue. As we have learned from the desk-research conducted in Ireland, the majority of Irish professionals who experience stress also worry about the impact that it is having on their health; therefore, we also recommend that the BooStress learning resources should address preventative measures to overcome bouts of stress before they occur. These can be simple instructional videos or tip-sheets which show how to practice breathing techniques when stress occurs in the workplace.

- With the aim of ensuring that the outputs developed by the BooStress project teams are of sufficient quality and relevance to the target group, the following specific recommendations will be considered by project partners when planning the future development of the project outputs and results:
- Young professionals in Cyprus want resources that will teach them to live with stress in a positive way through stress management games or quizzes.
- Respondents from Cyprus also mentioned that they would like to see more meetings and partnerships established between “young and old employees” in order to share knowledge, experience, thoughts and feelings; and to develop “soft skills”, i.e. effective communication and collaboration with other colleagues, among both parties. While this is outside the scope of the project, it could be used as an innovative approach by partners when piloting the resources of the BooStress project.
- Research participants in Spain highlighted the need for training in the area of “social abilities” for young people to prepare them for a professional workplace. These include training in the areas of:
  - interpersonal conflict resolution
  - problem-solving
  - communication skills
  - teamwork
  - client support
- Among young professionals surveyed in Ireland, the most common training needs were in the areas of how to ‘switch-off’ once work has ended, how to identify stress, how to maintain a health work/life balance, how to talk to an employer about stress and understanding the impact that stress is having on one's own health.
- In Ireland, young professionals showed a preference for training materials presented in the format of a handbook or guidelines, which was not as popular among young professionals in Spain or Cyprus.

- Across the consortium, young professionals expressed a training need in the following areas:
  - time management
  - organisational skills to be able to deal with their workload
  - stress management techniques
  - skills for stress management
  - how to control my stress at work
  - recognising stress
- Young professionals surveyed prefer to learn through:
  - Blended learning
  - Online training
  - Video lectures
  - Self-assessment tests
  - Online games
  - Handbook and or Guidelines
- The least popular formats for providing training through BooStress included ‘online counselling’, ‘worksheets/hand-outs’ and ‘podcasts’.
- Resources should be available online and accessibly through an app on smartphones and devices so that individuals can develop their stress management skills and techniques at a time and place that is convenient to them.
- BooStress training materials should include case studies of stress management that young employees could relate to, opportunities for self-reflection throughout the training materials.
- If possible, BooStress partners should develop training material in the form of an eBook that is available on Kindle and also an audio book, which young professionals could download and listen to when they are stressed or when they are trying to switch-off after work.
- Employers recommended that training materials should be “employer-friendly i.e. cost neutral to implement.”
- One recommendation from the European research group is that if a support group is established by the BooStress project team to support young professionals to develop coping strategies to manage stress, it is recommended that this support group is facilitated online through Skype or other online communication channel so as to reach all interested parties who may live in other EU countries or regions.
- European stakeholders also recommended that before undertaking any training, young employees should be guided through a self-assessment process so that they can better understand what is triggering their workplace stress.

In addition, as well as providing a training package that will help young employees to identify, manage and overcome stress, respondents from Cyprus also recommended that the BooStress team aim to provide trainers with a comprehensive and completed training programme and tools on how to deliver workshops and training on stress management. The training programme should provide the end-users with the necessary guidelines on how to identify and deal with stress, as well as with various techniques and ICT tools to both, young professionals and trainers, for the development of stress management skills through work-based scenarios, case studies and real examples. While this recommendation was made by the research group in Cyprus, it highlights the need to provide a complete suite of resources and a holistic approach to tackling the issue of stress management among young professionals, whereby all actors are supported to address the skills and competences required to effectively manage and overcome workplace stress in our modern working environment.

## Conclusion

The risks associated with workplace stress and psychosocial issues are among the most challenging for employers and professionals alike in Europe. Anxiety, depression and other psychosocial products of work-related stress can have a significant and lasting negative impact on the health of professionals across Europe; while also costing European employers and economies in terms of absenteeism and treatment for stress-related illnesses. Research shows that approximately half of all European employees consider workplace stress to be common. Stress is so prevalent across the European workplace that it is estimated to contribute to approximately half of all lost working days. As with many issues related to mental health and well-being, workplace stress and anxiety can be misunderstood by employers and managers, and even stigmatized. However, research shows that the impact that not addressing stress on an organisational level can end up costing the employer more in terms of employee productivity and absenteeism than if they provided support and training to employees to manage their stress. Through the BooStress project, participating partner organisations are aiming to raise awareness among employers about the negative impact that stress can have on their companies and how they can support their young employees to develop stress management skills. The project team primarily aims to support these young employees to identify when they are stressed, to manage their stress-levels in work and to develop coping strategies so that their health is not impacted by stress as a result of their work.

What we have learned through our research activities, both through our literature review and our extensive consultation with target group members across Europe, is that workplace stress is a prevalent issue which impacts the health and well-being of young employees across the continent. While the situation differs for employees across the project consortium, the occurrence of stress is common in all countries. The cause of stress may differ between countries also, with youth unemployment, underemployment and access to secure employment affecting the stress levels of young people in Spain, for example; whereas the impact that stress has on health is more of concern among young professionals in Ireland. Despite these differences, young professionals in each country can be supported to develop transferrable and transversal skills that will help them to identify, manage and overcome stress, regardless of what their personal triggers for stress are. Following on from this research process, and with consideration for the outcomes of the research activities of partners, the work of the BooStress project team can now be supported by up-to-date and robust evidence base to guide the development of all project outputs; and the findings from our research can add to the conversation on workplace stress among the European workforce.

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## Appendices: Examples of Best Practice in Managing Stress

The following section details nine best practice examples of ICT tools, online programmes and training resources which aim to build the stress management competence of young workers across Europe; with three focused on best practices from outside of the countries represented in the partner consortium; and two national examples provided by each partner. This allows us to present a brief comparative study between the approaches that are being taken to tackle work-place and employee stress across Europe, with specific examples that are relevant to each of our national contexts.



## Best Practices presented by Caminos

### AschG Law

<b>Name and contact details of lead organisation:</b> The ArbeitnehmerInnenschutzgesetz "AschG-Novelle (BGBl. I Nr. 118/2012) law is controlled by the labour inspectorate and it has to be implemented by each employer.
<b>Type of Best Practice:</b> National Law in Austria
<b>Purpose/Aim of the Tool/Programme/Resource:</b> The AschG aims to ensure that employees are not subjected to unnecessary physical and psychological hazards and strains. It is mandatory for employers to review the workplace of their employees and document the findings, as well as to undertake the necessary measures.
<b>Short description of the methods/output and how they were implemented:</b> Apart from stating what hazards are to be looked out for, the AschG (in its version of 2013) requires employers to conduct reviews of workplace security. The AschG explicitly states that psychological hazards are also to be considered. These reviews must be conducted regularly, but also specifically after significant changes have been made to the workplace, such as the introduction of new machinery and working materials that could pose a hazard. These evaluations can be conducted externally, and the findings are reported to the employer, who should take them into account to improve the health at the workplace. For this, interviews are being conducted and inspections are done by external experts, Employers who decline taking recommended measures must suggest viable and adequate alternatives if they do so.
<b>Provide an overview of the outcomes and lessons learned which are relevant or transferable to the BooStress project:</b>  This model might be helpful for the BooStress project, as it helps provide an example also for stakeholders and legislators in other countries should they consider similar legislation to ensure the continued mental health of employees. There are guidelines how to measure psychical stress and which measures employers must undertake to reduce or avoid these hazards. It concerns requirements, work organisation, working hours, social relations, work environment.
<b>Links/references to relevant websites/reports etc.:</b>  AschG (in German): <a href="https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&amp;Gesetzesnummer=10008910">https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&amp;Gesetzesnummer=10008910</a>  Videos (in German): <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jEuNqL54MsU">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jEuNqL54MsU</a> and <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9un5m-BBE5M">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9un5m-BBE5M</a>

## Best Practices presented by CARDET

### Risk Assessment Techniques

<p><b>Name of lead organisations:</b> European Risk Observatory; OHS stakeholders in Europe such as health and safety agencies; HSE in Great Britain (HSE, 1998); INRS in France (INRS, 2004); International organizations such as the European Council, the European Commission (EC, 1996); International Labour Organization (ILO, 2001)</p>
<p><b>Type of Best Practice:</b> Handbook/Guidelines, Self-Assessment Tests and Risk assessment tools and interviews through focus group</p>
<p><b>Purpose/Aim of the Tool/Programme/Resource:</b> The INRS in France recommends the intervention of external experts to help conduct the risk assessment (INRS, 2007). External experts can use a variety of tools to conduct the risk assessment, including observation, surveys (e.g. stress surveys), health-related indicators (e.g. blood pressures, drug consumption), individual or collective interviews.</p>
<p><b>Short description of the methods/output and how they were implemented:</b> As underlined by Leka and Cox (2010), risk assessment comprises six steps: hazard identification; assessment of harm; identification of likely risk factors; description of underlying mechanisms; audit of existing management systems and employee support; drawing conclusions about residual risk and priorities. According to them, the combined use of these tools facilitates the identification of psychosocial hazards, the assessment of harms, and the association between hazards and harms. Questions focus particularly on common interventions and how common risk factors are dealt with in an organization.</p>
<p><b>Has a study or assessment been undertaken to evaluate the effectiveness of this tool/programme/resource in helping professionals to manage stress?</b></p> <p>Yes:</p> <p>The results show that several of the psychosocial risk management measures have low frequencies: the consultation of a psychologist and the existence of procedures to deal with psychosocial risks have the lowest frequency across all establishments included in ESENER; knowing whom to address on the topic of psychosocial risk management and the existence of training are the most frequent measures.</p> <p>The findings of our empirical analysis also expose that practice still differs greatly among Member States with relatively few frequent measures shared across a range of Member States. Nonetheless, some more frequent measures, such as the use of information or support from external sources on how to deal with psychosocial risks at establishment level, could in part be seen as a response to the importance given to this issue at the European and national levels.</p>
<p><b>Provide an overview of the outcomes and lessons learned which are relevant or transferable to the BooStress project:</b></p> <p>Tools to conduct the risk assessment</p> <p>Observation, surveys (e.g. stress surveys)</p> <p>Individual or collective interviews.</p> <p>Identification of psychosocial hazards (and the interrelations between them)</p> <p>Assessment of harms</p> <p>Identify the association between hazards and harms risk indicators</p>

**Links/references to relevant websites/reports etc.**

Management of psychosocial risks at work: An analysis of the findings of the European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER) European Risk Observatory  
European Agency for Safety and Health

## Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

**Name and contact details of lead organisation:** Ministry of Health (Psychotherapy Department)

**Type of Best Practice:** Training Programme, with Support Group, Personal support

**Purpose/Aim of the Tool/Programme/Resource:** The INRS in France recommends the intervention of external experts to help conduct the risk assessment (INRS, 2007). External experts can use a variety of tools to conduct the risk assessment, including observation, surveys (e.g. stress surveys), health-related indicators (e.g. blood pressures, drug consumption), individual or collective interviews.

**Short description of the methods/output and how they were implemented:** Cognitive Therapy addresses unhealthy thinking styles which may prolong or exacerbate the experience of distress, and behavioural therapy promotes the development of healthy and positive coping behaviours to decrease the duration and intensity of distress and to increase self-confidence in the ability to cope with stressful situations. Finally, through cognitive behaviour therapy, the desired behaviour change may be affected through cognitive change.

**Provide an overview of the outcomes and lessons learned which are relevant or transferable to the BooStress project:**

Development of healthy and positive coping behaviours to decrease the duration and intensity of distress and to increase self-confidence in the ability to cope with stressful situations

Change the way of thinking by focusing to the positive thinking

Learning Techniques of how you can recognize and manage your negative thoughts

Techniques to put your thoughts into a hierarchy

Breathing and Body techniques to control your thoughts

**Links/references to relevant websites/reports etc.:** [www.aiginiteio.gr](http://www.aiginiteio.gr), [www.ipsepa.com](http://www.ipsepa.com), [www.moh.gov.cy/moh/moh.nsf/contact](http://www.moh.gov.cy/moh/moh.nsf/contact), [www.online-therapy.com](http://www.online-therapy.com)

## Training Courses in Stress Management for Health Care Providers and other employees

**Name of lead organisation:** Health Care Training, Ministry of Health; Human Resources Development Authority; Personal Coaches for Stress Management

**Type of Best Practice:** Training Programme, with Handbook/Guidelines which include role plays, scenarios from the work environment, Communication Techniques, Focus in Problem Solution Technique

**Purpose/Aim of the Tool/Programme/Resource:** Stress management courses aim to help health care workers to understand and manage their stress stimuli and associated reactions. Formal training in stress management will help health care workers to understand what and how they can change it and the limits to their control.

**Short description of the methods/output and how they were implemented:**

Courses range in style from formal, technique-focused instruction to a more introspective take to self-guidance and management. Whether the preferred approach is introspective or focused on logistics, a strategic and systematic approach is essential.

Above all, stress management courses are centered in transparency – teaching participants to understand the sources of their stress, themselves and the reasons that such stimuli or circumstances cause them stress.

The ultimate goal is to increase an individual's confidence to acknowledge and actively manage stressful situations into productive activity.

Motivational and coaching training is excellent in this aspect as it presents an opportunity for people to get to know themselves on a profound level.

They will learn their strengths and weaknesses in what makes them tick and what sorts of solutions to stress work best for them.

**Provide an overview of the outcomes and lessons learned which are relevant or transferable to the BooStress project:**

Learning techniques about how to recognize their stress, to understand the sources of their stress, to understand themselves and the reasons that such stimuli or circumstances cause them stress.

- Techniques how to manage their stress into proactive way
- Motivational Techniques and Coaching techniques
- Intervention to work stress
- Role play with real situation and problems from the working environment
- Power point and Handouts / Worksheets

**Links/references to relevant websites/reports etc.**

- Health Care Training
- Conicon Training Company
- Ministry of Health, Department of Health Education
- European University of Cyprus

## Best Practices presented by FIPL

### Best Practice in Work-related Stress Management Interventions

**Name and contact details of lead organisation:** Institute of Work, Health & Organisations, University of Nottingham, Level B International House, Jubilee Campus, Wollaton Road, Nottingham NG8 1BB, UK.

**Type of Best Practice:** Handbook/Guidelines with Guidance Sheets

**Purpose/Aim of the Tool/Programme/Resource:** The guidance sheet presented in this best practice provides an overview of the key principles of best practice concerning work-related stress management interventions as defined through the European framework for psychosocial risk management (PRIMA-EF). The aim of these guidance sheets is to act as a reference point for organisations, policy-makers, business owners, managers and employees who wish to implement these best practices in Europe. These sheets provide guidance for all actors to implement different approaches to work-related stress prevention and management in all businesses in Europe and internationally.

**Short description of the methods/output and how they were implemented:**

- PRIMA-EF undertook to complete a pan-European review of risk management approaches and tried and tested best practice interventions for work-related stress and based on the outcomes of this review, the guidance sheets were produced.
- These sheets highlight “key aspects and best practice principles for strategies to prevent and manage work-related stress, reflective of the European perspective.”
- The content of these guidance sheets presents the content, implementation and evaluation of work-related stress management interventions that have been tested and positively evaluated in Europe.
- As an example, the following are presented as best practice interventions in managing workplace stress:
- Raising awareness and educating managers and employees on the causes and consequences of work-related stress is essential.

- Knowledge, competencies and skills on continuous psychosocial risk prevention and management at the workplace should be developed through appropriate training for managers and workers.
- The intervention aims, and its overall importance, should be clearly understood and agreed upon by both management and employees.
- The overall support and commitment of the organisation (e.g. allocation of resources) and the active participation of management throughout the intervention – in its design, implementation and evaluation – should be determined.
- Employees should participate actively and be consulted in the development of the intervention strategy.
- Continuous and active communication among all key stakeholders in the intervention process (e.g. employees, managers, occupational physician and/or other occupational health experts, trade unions) should be developed.

**Has a study or assessment been undertaken to evaluate the effectiveness of this tool/programme/resource in helping professionals to manage stress?**

- Due to the nature of the pan-European review process that was undertaken to compile these best practice guidance sheets, the examples of best practice presented in these sheets represent the outcome of this study and assessment.
- As these sheets are presented as ‘best practices’ for stress management, their effectiveness in helping professionals to manage stress is safeguarded.

**Provide an overview of the outcomes and lessons learned which are relevant or transferable to the BooStress project:**

- The best practice principles identified through this review process relate to “the content, the implementation and the evaluation of work-related stress management interventions.” As such, there are ample examples of best practice from this analysis that can be used to support the development of the BooStress project outputs.
- The best practices profiled in this guidance sheet also provide an overview of lessons learned from this process, which can be used to inform how BooStress is developed. These lessons learned highlight the following key issues for success, which should be considered by BooStress partners when working with employers and managers:
  - Organisational readiness to change;
  - Realistic intervention strategy;
  - Comprehensive intervention strategy;
  - Supporting continuous improvement.

Links/references to relevant websites/reports etc.

[http://www.who.int/occupational\\_health/publications/09\\_Stress%20Interventions.pdf](http://www.who.int/occupational_health/publications/09_Stress%20Interventions.pdf)

## Calm Smartphone App

**Name and contact details of lead organisation:** Calm App – developed by British entrepreneurs, Michael Acton Smith OBE and Alex Tew in 2013.

**Type of Best Practice:** Online Resource – Smartphone Application

**Purpose/Aim of the Tool/Programme/Resource:** The Calm App aims to “make the world happier and healthier” by providing types, tools, exercises and resources to help users to practice mindfulness, meditation and calming breathing techniques. According to their blog, Calm is the number one app for mindfulness and wellness and it has over 22 million downloads worldwide.

**Short description of the methods/output and how they were implemented:**

Calm is a smart phone application that is available to download for free from the Google Play Store for Android devices and from the iTunes Store for Apple smart devices.

The App provides a plethora of mindfulness techniques, resources and exercises for users to practice; including daily mindfulness tasks to help users to increase their mindfulness practice incrementally; a sleep journal where users can record the length and quality of their sleep and a mindfulness journal where users can track their progress in developing their mindfulness practice.

According to the description of their app: “Calm sessions are based on mindfulness meditation principles. Mindfulness is the practice of paying attention to our thoughts, emotions, and experiences without judgment. Some of our sessions introduce specific practices that lie within the umbrella of mindfulness, such as Vipassana and Loving-Kindness - practices to develop awareness and equanimity.”

As well as generally encouraging people to practice mindfulness, the app also includes guided meditations and breathing techniques which users can access on-the-go when stressful situations arise and they need support to help to maintain calm.

Users are recommended to start using the Calm App “with the 7 Days of Calm” programme which is a free introductory programme that offers the basics of meditation. Building on from this session, users are encouraged to access the library of resources, sessions and specific programmes on the app which “address themes such as sleep, focus, and gratitude.”

The app also includes the “Daily calm” programme, which encourages users to start each day with a 10-minute session. The topic and theme of these sessions varies from day to day so it allows users to slowly build up a regular practice of mindfulness.

In addition, the app includes a library of 50+ “Sleep Stories” which can help users to get to sleep. These include resources such as “classic literature, nature essays, children's tales, scientific articles, etc. This library provides these articles in the format of audio-tracks and they are updated every week so that users have access to regular new material.

As well as all of these resources, the app also provides users with access to ‘master class’ sessions on specific topics related to health and well-being. Introductory sessions are available through the blog, with full masterclass sessions accessible through the app. These sessions deal with positive mental health and are delivered by medical doctors and psychologists, adding to the credibility of the app’s content.



**Provide an overview of the outcomes and lessons learned which are relevant or transferable to the BooStress project:**

The Calm App is useful for the BooStress project because it provides a full suite of relaxation, meditation and mindfulness resources. Throughout the research process, these were topics where young professionals continually showed an interest in receiving further support and training. As such, some of the tools and resources available through the app could be transferred to young professionals who participate in the BooStress project. As the BooStress partners are not experts in the domain of mindfulness, it is useful for partners to be able to refer young professionals to this app, so that they can receive the support they need.

The Calm App includes some useful tips and techniques that could be integrated into the BooStress training programme. Through the implementation of the BooStress training, partners could include some of these practices, for example, taking 10 seconds to close your eyes and breathe in and out; or starting each training session with a 10-minute mindfulness session rather than participating in an ice-breaker. These are useful, tried and tested methods that could easily be adopted by the BooStress team when delivering our training to young professionals.

Additionally, BooStress partners could take inspiration from the App by providing short, topic-specific masterclass sessions to young professionals online – this is a very popular feature among users.

The Calm App was highlighted by some of the research participants in Ireland, and so it is a good idea to adopt some of the approaches used in this App when designing our training materials for young professionals as these are popular approaches among young professionals.

**Links/references to relevant websites/reports etc.**

<https://www.calm.com/>

## Headspace Smartphone App

**Name and contact details of lead organisation:** Headspace App – developed by Andy Puddicombe and Rich Pearson in 2010.

**Type of Best Practice:** Online Resource – Smartphone Application

**Purpose/Aim of the Tool/Programme/Resource:** The Headspace App uses science-based techniques to encourage users to practice mindfulness. The App has been developed by Andy Puddicombe, who is an ordained Buddhist monk, and so he developed the App with the aim of cultivating “compassion so we can better understand both the mind and the world around us.” To encourage users to practice mindfulness, the app includes a range of guided meditations and breathing techniques. While it is similar to the Calm App, the Headspace App places more of a focus on educating users on the health benefits of regular meditation and also provides a lot of guidance on the science behind meditation which is interesting. Headspace has also launched specific supports for employees, advocating that employers use Headspace practices in their workplaces to spread ‘happiness’ among their work force. These are all described in the following section.

**Short description of the methods/output and how they were implemented:**

The Headspace App aims to support users to 'learn to live mindfully'. To achieve this aim the App provides users with a library of over 100 themed sessions on topics from managing stress to getting quality sleep.

The App is also innovative in that it provides resources in "bite-sized" meditation sessions that can be used by busy employees on the go, and also "SOS exercises in case of sudden meltdowns" which can be particularly useful for young professionals who may be new to stressful workplace situations.

The app aims to teach users how to meditate. It explains that the benefits of meditation include increasing compassion; boosting concentration and focus in work, and managing stress.

**Has a study or assessment been undertaken to evaluate the effectiveness of this tool/programme/resource in helping professionals to manage stress?**

- According to the Headspace blog: "a number of studies have... found that online mindfulness training does produce results similar to in-person training. There's also a large body of evidence backing in-person mindfulness-based training programs like Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy. These programs have proven effective in supporting both healthy populations suffering routine stress and clinical populations experiencing disorders or pathology including anxiety, depression, insomnia, cancer, and chronic pain.
- To date there is no specific study undertaken to assess the effectiveness of the Headspace App in particular; however the App has been developed in line with best practice in online mindfulness training, meaning that the benefits of the App for users are comparable to other online mindfulness training resources which have been assessed in various studies.

**Provide an overview of the outcomes and lessons learned which are relevant or transferable to the BooStress project:**

- The Headspace App is useful for BooStress because it has specific resources that are aimed at stressful workplaces. It also encourages employers to recognise the cost to their companies, and their employees, of prolonged stress and to adopt regular mindfulness and meditation practices in the workplace.
- Additionally, the Headspace App provides support, resources and techniques to help users to manage stress in short 'bite-sized' formats. This is considered to be a very effective technique for delivering support to busy young professionals and so it should be adopted when developing the BooStress resources and materials.
- Lastly, the section of the App's resources which provides fast relief to users when stressful situations arise and they can't cope could be very useful for BooStress learners. One key advantage of the Headspace App is that it is based on scientific and reliable meditation practices, and so it is credible for BooStress partners to refer learners to use it, where additional support is required.

**Links/references to relevant websites/reports etc.**

<https://www.headspace.com/>

# BOO STRESS

Boosting the skills of youth to deal with stress at work



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