

WELLBEING AND MENTAL HEALTH OF CSO'S WORKERS AS LABOUR LAW PROBLEM IN THE EU

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Civil society organizations (CSO) in the European Union (EU) play a crucial role in promoting fundamental rights, and so contribute to the functioning democracies. The EU Fundamental Rights Agency cooperates and regularly consults with such organizations. They increasingly report that it has become harder for them to support the protection, promotion and fulfillment of human rights within the Union – due to both legal and practical restrictions.

While challenges exist in all EU Member States, their exact nature and extent vary across countries. How strongly these challenges are felt also varies depending on the type and size of organization involved, and on domestic historical contexts of civil society development.

The lack of available data and research – including comparative research – on this issue is striking. For instance, most Member States do not have overviews of how much money – stemming from national or EU public funds – they spend on project implementation or to directly fund human rights civil society inside the EU. Furthermore, there are no data in the public domain across the EU regarding attacks and incidents against civil society activists.

The agency's look at the different types and patterns of challenges faced by civil society organizations is therefore particularly timely.

Expert interviews and reports indicate that burnout, depression, 'compassion fatigue' and 'helping-induced trauma' is prevalent among civil society activists, not only in disaster and war zones, but also in western societies. There are a multitude of reasons for this, ranging from direct contact with severely traumatized people to advocating for difficult issues, sometimes against majority views or state positions. Further reasons include feeling personally attacked by negative a safe space for civil society discourse and smear campaigns, working long hours and a lack of recognition [2].

Despite various surveys [1; 7, p. 93-96; 8, p. 71-79], mental health effects on human rights workers and advocates in the EU are under-researched and likely to be underestimated. Mental health should be protected and promoted by states as part of workers' right to health, which is protected by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and other international instruments. More research is needed on the mental health and wellbeing of civil society advocates and activists in the EU [3 – 5].

Compassion fatigue or secondary traumatic stress is fairly common among individuals who work directly with trauma victims and Civil Society Organizations' activists often face issues similar to police officers, social workers or doctors. Sufferers can exhibit several symptoms, including hopelessness, a decrease in experiencing pleasure, constant stress and anxiety, sleeplessness or nightmares, and a pervasive negative attitude. However, trauma symptoms are not always recognized.

A refugee support volunteer reports from Greece: "As a volunteer, it was impossible to separate myself from the trauma and heartache of the refugees, and I saw this inability in other volunteers too. (...) Many of the volunteers, short-term and long-term, are exhausted and unable to establish boundaries to keep their own mental and physical health in check. (...) Volunteers, like myself, are ill-equipped to deal with these serious mental health issues. We can only do our best to hold space for the refugees, and, eventually, we all go home"¹.

There are resources available to activists, some of which are free. Along the Balkan refugee route, a volunteer network of psychotherapists offer psychological support to volunteers via Skype. However, generally speaking, there seems to be insufficient psycho-social support available for organizations and volunteers operating inside the EU, and the topic appears to be taboo [6].

Thus:

1. Mental health effects on human rights workers and advocates in the EU so as in Ukraine devote to medical conditions of work and refer to labour law subject. Consequently, Civil Society Organizations' activists often face issues similar to police officers, social workers or doctors, i.e. servants or employees.

2. The psycho-social support available for organizations and volunteers operating inside the EU, similarly to Ukraine, is insufficient despite provision that mental health should be protected and promoted by states as part of workers' right to health, guaranteed both – by UN (ILO) and EU Acts.

3. Presented medically-labour relations' problem requires not furthermore investigations, but the Code on Labour, Medicine and Social Welfare immediate creation [9, p. 135] with provisions about workers' mental health protection and promotion taking in account.

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¹ Keep as continue of link # 2.

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СОЦІАЛЬНІ ОРІЄНТИРИ ДЛЯ УКРАЇНИ

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Рух до громадянського суспільства і правової держави, входження в сім'ю демократичних європейських країн, є одним із основних напрямів розвитку України, оскільки громадянське суспільство виступає своєрідним фундатором правової демократичної держави. У свою чергу, становлення та розвиток громадянського суспільства нерозривно пов'язані, насамперед, із забезпеченням належних