



Independent agency approved by the French Ministry of Labour  
[www.technologia.fr](http://www.technologia.fr)

## European Patent Office

• • •

# Enquiry into the psychosocial risks conducted for the Staff Union of the EPO

• • •

*Questionnaire 2016 – 3rd Edition*

- April 2016 -

# Executive Summary

*An enquiry by questionnaire...*

... to which the responses were collected from 15 February 2016 to 14 March 2016 inclusive. Of the 6770 employees of the Office, 2649 participated, being 39.1% of the personnel.

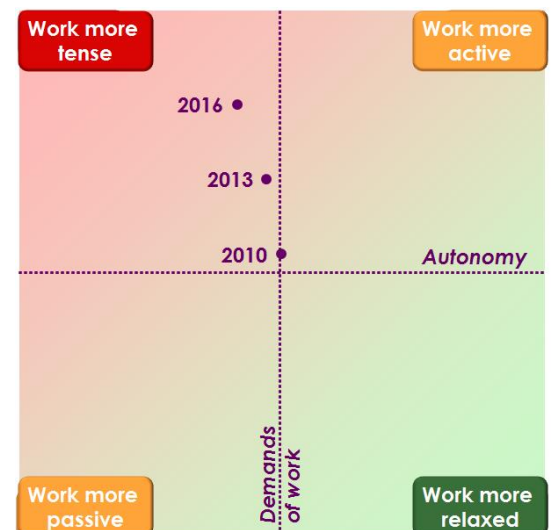
The questions are almost in their entirety identical to those of the 2010 and 2013 surveys. The results have been made the object of a statistical processing procedure aimed at establishing their reliability in order for them to be truly representative of the structure of the population of the Office (age, Directorate-General, type, grade, etc).

*The analysis of the results is organized along three lines...*

## 1. What is the evolution of the levels of the psychosocial risks at the EPO?

The levels of the psychosocial risks were measured by way of validated models (Karasek, Siegrist), which indicate the following evolutions:

- The work is carried out in a more and more tense atmosphere, i.e. under the pressure of an intense demand work which leaves little margin for manoeuvre for staff to organize themselves,
- The efforts made in order to bring the work to a successful conclusion very evidently meet with little recognition,
- The sense of meaning behind the work has become appreciably weakened,
- The support provided by peers and the immediate superiors remains a protective factor in the face of the increase in the other levels of risk.



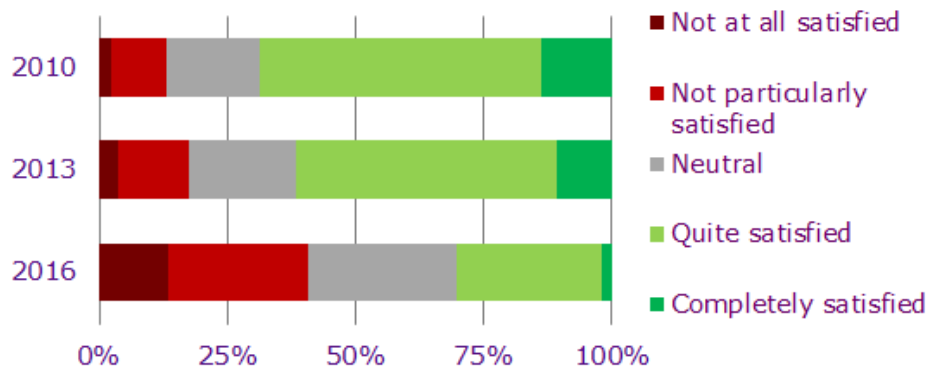
Accordingly, **the psychosocial risk has intensified in a significant manner at the EPO**, in overall terms but also at each of the different sites, the Directorates-General, and whatever the grade of the employees.

## 2. How does the staff perceive this evolution?

The degradation of the situation at the EPO is clearly perceived by the personnel.

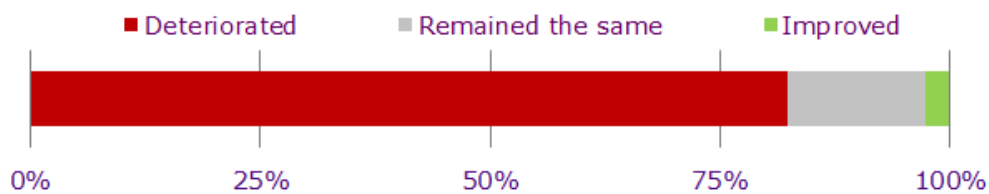
The proportion of the employees who are satisfied with their professional life is markedly low. This can be associated with a very striking fall in recognition of the efforts and a significant decrease of the meaning of work.

Q167. Considering my overall work situation, I am:



As well as this, **82% stated that their working conditions have deteriorated in the course of the last 3 years.**

Q112. In the last three years, your working conditions have:

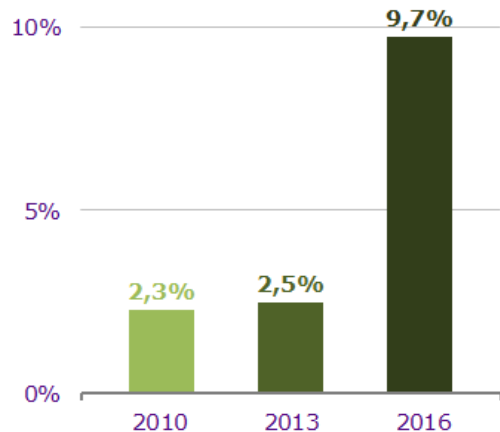


While their health remains good or very good for 2/3 of the staff, **58% nevertheless perceived a negative impact of the work on their health** (figures in progression in relation to the 2013 survey).

The items relating to the frequency of appearance of situations of anxiety, depression, irritability, and cognitive problems have revealed that the **proportion of employees encountering psychological distress is 9.7% in 2016, being close to four times more than in 2013.**

These situations favour the occurrence of stoppages at work due to illness (excluding accidents at work or maternity) of 10 days or more.

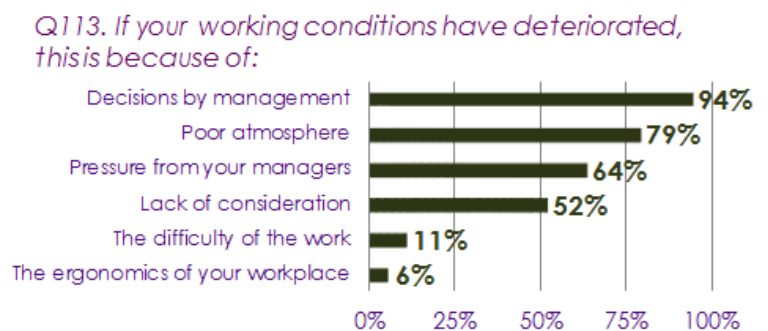
Proportion of staff members encountering psychological distress



### 3. Why is the situation worsening at the EPO?

An analysis of stress at work reveals an overall increase in the factors that impede employees in achieving work of good quality. These factors are not exactly the same depending on the sites, grades, or Directorates-General, but lack of time is always cited as a very major element. The quality of the work is therefore heavily affected. **The impossibility of carrying out tasks properly and providing work of good quality is likewise having an effect on the health of the staff, in particular in terms of psychological distress.**

The factors cited by the staff to explain the degradation in working conditions are primarily associated with the management, the environment, the hierarchical pressure, and the lack of consideration.



**The strategy defined by the top management is not supported by the staff**, including a part of the management itself, and the higher they stand in the hierarchy the less the level of confidence in the persons concerned. The meaning of the work is consequently affected by this conflict of values; the feeling predominates that the EPO is not functioning in a fair and just manner, and that **the work is being carried out to satisfy the evaluation criteria of the hierarchy and not to meet the needs of the profession.**

In this context, **the working environment is perceptibly deteriorating. It is above all described as tense, but also confrontational, malevolent, and aggressive, reflecting the tensions inherent in the organization of the work and the conflicts of values.**

May 2016

The experts point out that the questionnaire is only one of the existing sources of information for determining the psychosocial risks within the Office. Consequently, more elaborate qualitative analyses (interviews and observations) are essential in order to characterize with greater precision the operational factors that determine the levels of risk.