



WHAT CAN EMPLOYERS DO?

COVID-19 Impact Report on Women, LGBTQI, Roma & Disabled People



While it may seem that we are all in this together, the truth is that it does not impact everyone the same way. We examined how the economic and social consequences of the coronavirus pandemic affect various different minority groups. We present these findings, data and tips for employers in the hope of avoiding a greater ill and to prepare employers for the possible next phases of the pandemic.

We welcome additional expert groups and employers who wish to join this shared initiative.

WHAT THIS IS

The economic and social impacts of the coronavirus pandemic affect everyone worldwide, but studies show that while we may want to believe that we are “all in this together,” in fact the crisis does not affect everyone in the same way. Exclusionary attitudes may be amplified as a result of the crisis. The negative impacts of the pandemic include, among other things, an increase in contempt toward other cultures and racism, or increased pressure on women resulting from home care work. Various minority groups experience the consequences of the pandemic in different ways: groups which are vulnerable to begin with end up in even more difficult positions.

We recognise that the situation today is difficult for everyone, but we believe it is important to discuss the multi-dimensional nature of the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic. For this reason, we have initiated a collaborative project with Hungarian nonprofit organisations to show, together, the differing impact the pandemic is having on different minority groups. With Amnesty International Hungary, the Bagázs Association, the Háttér Society and the Salva Vita Foundation, we have prepared a report incorporating expert opinions, data and specific tips for employers. The Háttér Society provides assistance supporting the acceptance of LGBTQI persons; Amnesty Hungary works to promote gender equality; the Salva Vita Foundation supports persons with disabilities; and the Bagázs Association works to advance the acceptance of the Roma. Each organisation is able to rely on many years of experience and expertise. We are disseminating the final report jointly: we are sharing it with the more than one thousand employers belonging to the OPEN Community, and we are making it available for all on the website nyitottakvagyunk.hu as well as through the social media channels of organisations participating in the drafting of the report.

Our hope with this project is that simply by calling employers' attention to certain important phenomena and ways of addressing these, we may help prevent or lessen some of the more serious effects of the pandemic.

We consider this report to be the beginning, and we hope it will serve as thought-provoking material and the first item in an entire toolset. We welcome and invite to join us any expert groups and employers who wish to support and inspire others by sharing data or their own experiences.

On the following pages, organisations participating in the project will share their opinions and advice, focusing on specific areas.

WEAREOPEN:

ON THE CHANGING ROLE OF EMPLOYERS, ON OPEN COMPANY CULTURE AND ON THE EVOLUTION OF DIVERSITY EFFORTS

1) The role of company managers is changing: they are expected to take the lead on important matters.

According to global research by Edelman, already before the pandemic, three out of four persons expected company leaders, to take the lead and set an example on important social change – including in the elimination of discrimination.

In Hungary, hundreds of company leaders have joined WeAreOpen initiatives in recent years and campaigned for openness and support to various minority groups; the positive effects of this are already showing. While the coronavirus epidemic is an extraordinary situation, the role, opportunity and obligation of leaders to act responsibly and set an example – and thereby earn the trust of their communities – has remained not only unchanged, but has in fact increased.

TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS:

Company leaders should continue to represent, in a consistent and credible way, values for which they have stood in the past. It is a good idea to involve in this process not only the company leader, but the company's entire senior leadership, as their role may serve as an example within the company and beyond. It helps if companies join forces: our experiences show that in questions important from a societal perspective, it is important even for some of the biggest competitors to choose to collaborate rather than compete.

DATA:

The Edelman Trust Barometer Global Reports for 2019 and 2020 highlight that people expect company leaders to take action for change that is important to society.

SOURCES:

edelman.com, edelman.com

2) Crisis situations also put organisational culture to the test.

It is critical for organisations which had already considered openness an important value to continue to pay attention to members of minority groups. Based on conversations with several dozen company heads, we are seeing that, fortunately, the employers most active in this respect continue to treat the establishment and maintenance of a diverse, open company culture as a priority.

TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS:

While it is clear that the majority of organisations are implementing cost-cutting measures, it would be important for employees to experience that even in a crisis situation, their company continues to provide the same support to them as before. We should keep in mind that in many cases, employees choose to join a company precisely for the diverse, open company culture there. Companies should continue to treat investment in organisational culture as priorities, so as to remain credible and able to preserve their inclusive cultures.

DATA:

Based on a survey by the British organisation D&I Leaders, 82% of professionals dealing with diversity believe that the crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic is also an opportunity for organisations to advance a company culture of openness and diversity.

SOURCES:

dileaders.com

3) Diverse groups make better decisions in an open community and open organisational culture

The diversity of opinions and experiences, along with a company culture which supports these, has been proven to help make better decisions; it thus also supports overcoming crises more effectively. Of the current situation, we also hope that the general strengthening of new ways of organising work, collaboration and the role of small communities will lead to an experience in which even those who in the past had not dealt consciously with the establishment of an open organisational culture will come to see the opportunities in this approach.

TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS:

The presence of different perspectives helps the decision-making process result in better decisions. It is particularly important to provide data and practical experiences to managers working at different levels of responsibility, to prepare and support them in making better decisions despite the pressure posed by the crisis, and so as to be able to further advance an open organisational culture.

DATA:

In their report entitled Diversity Matters, McKinsey & Company describe how a higher ratio of women and ethnic minorities in senior management helps advance problem solving, by contributing a broader toolset and a more comprehensive approach and thus achieving better solutions.

SOURCES:

catalyst.org, mckinsey.com

4) Trust may be one of the keywords of 2020.

What an employer communicates about themselves and how they treat their employees during a crisis tells a lot about their trust and culture. People will trust a company if, even in difficult times, it does not turn its back on values which it had held important in the past. According to Kantar's survey connected to the coronavirus, people may be influenced in their later decisions regarding a company by how the given company is managing the situation today.

TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS:

It is important for companies to maintain their credibility during these times, and to communicate about the background of decisions made during the crisis in a transparent manner. Employers should take action to ensure the safety and well-being of employees also in these critical times, recognising that employees with different backgrounds may have different needs.

In this process, one important element is the preparation of managers working at different levels of responsibility and informing them, among other things, of how the coronavirus-pandemic is affecting members of various different minority groups.

DATA:

Kantar's survey, primarily examining brands but also highly indicative of expectations vis-à-vis companies, also showed that 78% of people expect companies to pay attention to the health of their employees, and to make flexible working hours possible. Additionally, 3 out of 4 people believe that advertisers should not exploit the crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic to advance their business goals.

SOURCES:

warc.com

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AMNESTY HUNGARY: ON THE SITUATION OF WOMEN

1) Women represent a higher proportion of those working in the front lines; in the current situation, they are shouldering additional burdens, and as a result of their increased participation, they are also more exposed to the threat of infection by the disease.

A significant proportion of front-line workers, including shop salespersons and healthcare employees, are female; compared to population averages, more of them may become infected as a result of potentially coming into direct contact with coronavirus infectees. Because of the pandemic, these employees must expect extra tasks and a great deal of overtime work; additionally, they are on low salaries. In many cases, workers employed in these fields must choose between work and their families because of the risk of infection; for instance, many of those working in elder care have moved into the home of the individual they are looking after or into nursing homes. In addition to the extraordinary pressure, many of them must cope with very high levels of stress and anxiety.

TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS:

Employers should assess what type of protective equipment and in what quantities their employees may need, and should then ensure that appropriate equipment is procured. Employers should provide hazard pay to employees exposed to increased risk for the duration of the pandemic. The tremendous pressure and stress front-line workers are exposed to places a great burden on them, so employers should provide them with opportunities to seek professional help (psychologists or coaches).

DATA:

According to the latest study by the Institute for Economics of the Centre for Economic and Regional Studies, 57% of front-line workers are women: the majority of nurses in the healthcare sector, shop salespersons, pharmacists, janitors, social workers and live-in nursing home staff are female. The study has also shown that among front-line professions, retail and shop salespersons represent the largest group in terms of employee numbers, accounting for 25 percent of the high-risk group. According to Central Statistical Office data, in 2019, 67 percent of those working in retail were women, as were 79 percent of those employed in healthcare and social services. According to the World Health Organization, approximately 21 percent of the some 8000 SARS cases detected worldwide in the early 2000s were registered among healthcare workers. In Hungary, 13 percent of all infectees registered to date are healthcare workers.

SOURCES:

ksh.hu, ksh.hu, nytimes.com, 444.hu

2) The workload associated with childcare and household chores increases, and the majority of it falls to women.

Women have already tended to the majority of child care and household chores (cooking, cleaning etc.), along with emotional housework (primarily organisational tasks related to family life and day-to-day activities), but with daycares, preschools and schools being closed, these tasks have increased in number during the coronavirus pandemic. Because of social expectations, inflexible workplaces and their salaries being lower than men's, many women are forced to change their working routine, or even suspend their work, for as long as their children are unable to attend preschool or school. This can translate into a long-term loss of salary for them; later, they have a more difficult time returning to the job they had earlier, or they may even lose it as such. Inadequate child care support provided by employers during the COVID-19 crisis may contribute to a further drop in the labour market participation of women; this is especially true in the case of single mothers.

TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS:

Employers should assess what percentage of their employees are affected by the closure of daycares, preschools and schools, and if necessary, or when the pandemic situation allows, should provide a child care service for employees' children; alternatively, employers should provide financial assistance to be used for securing child care.

Employers should assess what conditions employees require to be able to work from home (do they have a computer at home; are their children able to participate in distance learning while parents work; do they have adequate internet access), whether or not they would like to work reduced hours (if possible, this should not mean a cut in salary); or what hours they are able to work (for instance, the employer may designate a set of core hours, when all employees must be reachable, and outside these hours, employees should be free to work hours that are most appropriate for them). Employers should strive to find fair solutions to all needs for tools, problems and employee requests to reduce working hours.

Employers should be more open, and should consider, for instance, that due to restrictions, many are only able to take care of shopping during working hours and that male employees also participate in household and child care tasks.

In the interest of employees' mental health, employers should provide an opportunity for staff to seek out professionals (psychologists or coaches) to discuss any difficulties arising from the need to tend to workplace and household/child care duties simultaneously.

DATA:

Women perform far more invisible work than men: in countries of the European Union, in the case of couples with children under 7 years old, women spend an average of 32 hours a week performing paid work, and 39 hours of unpaid work, while in the case of men, these figures are 41 hours of paid and 19 hours of unpaid work. A time-balance study by the Central Statistical Office for 2009-2010 reveals that Hungarian women spend 250 minutes with invisible work each day, while men spend an average of 115 minutes. In Hungary, child care, household and care duties are primarily considered the tasks of women: for instance, if a child is ill, 80 percent of the time it is the mother who stays home with them. Some companies in South Korea have reduced the salary of female employees who were unable to go to work because of a lack of child care when schools closed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

SOURCES:

abcug.hu, ksh.hu, theguardian.com, theatlantic.com

3) Unpaid care work typically performed by women has increased in load.

Due to gaps in public services, caring for elderly relatives or family members living with disabilities has tended to fall to families – and typically women. During the coronavirus pandemic, it has also fallen to women to care for elderly family members who had been instructed to stay home or were released from hospital when beds were being emptied. Nursing homes did not take on new residents during the pandemic, and many families cannot afford to pay for a nurse or a caregiver. Home care poses not only a serious financial burden to relatives, it may also place those performing the work under significant psychological stress.

TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS:

Employers should assess the extent to which their employees perform care duties, and whether or not they are in need of support.

Companies should consider what support they are able to provide to employees performing care duties, especially so as to avoid female employees dropping out from work.

In the interest of employees' mental health, employers should provide an opportunity for staff to seek out professionals (psychologists or coaches) to discuss any difficulties associated with the need to tend to workplace and care duties simultaneously.

DATA:

In the EU, almost one quarter of households depend on informal care provided by family members or friends. According to the International Labour Organization, women perform 76.2 percent of unpaid care work, a figure more than three times higher than in the case of men. According to Central Statistical Office data for 2012, 30,000 people have given up their jobs in Hungary in order to care for a family member; the majority – more than 26,000 people – were women.

SOURCES:

eige.europa.eu, index.hu, abcug.hu, index.hu, merce.hu

4) Women may be at greater risk of long-term salary cuts and unemployment.

A greater percentage of women work in underpaid jobs or in part-time jobs than men, and on average they receive lower wages than men. For this reason, their savings are likely to be lower, or they may not have savings at all. Women raising children are in a particularly vulnerable position, and make less to begin with than women without children or their spouses. As a result of increased care work duties, many women have had to give up their paid jobs (with this interruption to their careers further decreasing their salaries) or have had to request sick pay, being unable to find any other solution to child care and other care work. The salary, however, that is used to determine the amount of sick pay is low in the case of many female employees. According to the latest data, the economic crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic affects the two genders in a different way, and has an adverse impact primarily on women: it is among women that unemployment increased in Hungary.

TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS:

Should layoffs become necessary, employers should consider employees' special situations when making their decisions. They should consider social aspects – e.g. single parents or parents with young children –, and in the case of mothers should strive especially to find alternative options, such as reorganising working hours or the employee's specific responsibilities.

When reducing wages, employers should not automatically reduce the salaries of all employees by the same percentage, but should instead consider that employees earning lower wages are in much more vulnerable situations.

Employers should consider the possibility of supplementing sick pay paid to employees choosing to go on sick leave.

Employers should focus on reducing wage inequality between genders, as this would greatly reduce the vulnerability of women in similar situations. As a first step, employers should join Amnesty International Hungary's One Step Closer campaign.

DATA:

According to research studies, epidemics affect the salaries and unemployment rates of men and women differently. For instance, the 2014 outbreak of Ebola in West Africa affected everyone's salaries, but after the pandemic, men's wages returned to earlier levels more quickly than those of women. Other research suggests that the wage gap between the two genders increased as a result of the 2008 financial crisis. According to Central Statistical Office data, men in Hungary earned an average of 68,000 HUF gross more per month in the first six months of 2019 than women. In Hungary, unemployment increased in March due to the coronavirus pandemic among women, those over 55 and persons with only an elementary school education (or lower). Single parents raising young children, and women in particular, are especially vulnerable. In Hungary, 31 percent of children live in single-parent families. According to the Central Statistical Office's 2016 micro census, mothers accounted for almost 86 percent of single-parent families, while 35 percent of single parents raising children were living in income poverty. Parents neglected to pay child support payments for one quarter of affected children.

SOURCES:

napi.hu, edition.cnn.com, money.cnn.com, amnesty.hu, demografia.hu

4) Domestic violence has increased during the coronavirus pandemic.

That domestic violence has become more frequent may be connected to the fact that people are spending far more time in isolation at home. The coronavirus pandemic makes it more difficult for victims, however, to seek help, because they are constantly in the same living space with their abuser. Reporting latency is typical in cases of domestic violence, with many instances remaining permanently undetected; during the pandemic, this may be particularly true, as victims rarely meet individuals who might notice and report the abuse. Because of the potential financial uncertainty, it may become even more difficult for women to leave their abuser once the crisis passes.

TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS:

Seek assistance if you believe your colleague or subordinate has become the victim of domestic violence or is in an abusive relationship and needs help. If urgent assistance is needed, call the National Crisis Management and Information Telephone Service (OKIT) at the telephone number +36-80-20-5520, or reach out to the crisis clinic of the Hungarian Interchurch Aid located closest to the affected employee's place of residence. Women's rights NGOs PATENT and NANE are also reachable on the telephone, at +36-70-220-2505 and +36-80-505-101, respectively.

DATA:

According to NGOs, almost a quarter million women live in abusive relationships in Hungary. The National Crisis Management and Information Telephone Service (OKIT) states that the number of individuals seeking help for abuse has doubled since the coronavirus pandemic, and the centre is receiving more and more calls related to abusive relationships. In March, domestic violence in Hungary increased one and a half times compared to the average.

SOURCES:

444.hu, segelyszervezet.hu, patent.org.hu, nane.hu

5) A greater percentage of women rely on public transportation, and use it more frequently, than men, which means they are at a greater risk of being infected by the virus. Additionally, the new regulations pertaining to public transportation or any reduction in public transportation services poses a greater inconvenience for women.

There are significant differences between men's and women's transportation habits: men tend to use motor vehicles more often, while women are more likely to use public transportation; additionally, women make more trips per day than men, who generally go to work in the morning and return home in the afternoon. For this reason, more women may become infected by the virus, and the mandatory wearing of face masks on public transportation vehicles presents additional costs for them. Furthermore, restrictions on movement and any reduction in public transportation makes the lives of those (the majority of whom are women) more difficult who rely only on these services. This is an even more serious problem in the case of single parents, a significant number of whom are women.

TIPS:

Employers should make it possible for those employees to work from home who otherwise use public transportation to commute to work.

If working from home is not possible, employers should arrange a safe way for employees to travel to work, and should provide them with appropriate protective equipment, such as gloves and masks.

DATA:

According to Central Statistical Office data for 2012, 78 percent of the drivers of personal motor vehicles were men; women tended to use personal vehicles as passengers, and also relied more on urban public transportation. According to a study by EIGE, 18 percent of single parents in Europe said that public transportation is their sole mode of transportation; women represent a higher share of single parents: in Hungary, for instance, 86 percent of single parents are women.

SOURCES:

g7.hu, ksh.hu, eige.europa.eu, ec.europa.eu

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BAGÁZS PUBLIC BENEFIT ASSOCIATION:

ON THE SITUATION OF ROMA

1) The Roma are overrepresented among those living in deep poverty; their situation is particularly adversely affected by the coronavirus and its economic consequences.

For decades, the situation of the Roma has been characterised by compounded problems, economic and social marginalisation and underdeveloped infrastructure. Problems related to employment, education, healthcare and housing, along with social differences, have only become more severe because of the crisis. Roma living in poverty do not have the means to stockpile food, work from home or engage in digital learning, and in many cases do not even have the means to use soap to wash their hands.

It is important to highlight that inadequate housing and low levels of education among the Roma population are not features unique to their ethnicity: this is a socio-economic situation, and as a component of this, geographic location may also push individuals toward poverty.

TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS:

As a member of the majority society, the first step you can take is to raise awareness and educate about the situation of Roma people: to include this issue in social responsibility activities (awareness campaigns, presentations, promotion of volunteer work, improving the culture of donation).

DATA:

In Hungary, 84% of people exposed to poverty and social exclusion are of Roma origin (EU-SILC, 2014). This is about three and a half times higher than the national average. The majority of the Roma population is still affected by severe material deprivation; every second Roma person experienced material deprivation in 2017 (KSH, 2017).

SOURCES:

euractiv.com, npr.org, badurfoundation.org, ksh.hu

2) One third of the Roma population do not have adequate living conditions, and as a result they are particularly vulnerable to the coronavirus.

Mostly because of their low employment rate and low income, the housing situation of the Roma population is significantly worse than that of the average population: nearly 30% of the Roma live in low quality (dilapidated) homes as opposed to the corresponding value of 8% in the average population. Worse sanitary conditions increase the likelihood of the spread of the virus, and because of the usually more crowded living conditions, social distancing is more difficult.

There are approximately 1,600 slums and Roma settlements in the country altogether, with a total of 280,000-315,000 people living in such places. In these segregated areas often there is no running water, which makes it difficult for people living in such households to wash their hands and wash themselves more frequently.

TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS:

Donations (of soap, detergents, etc.) provide immediate help, but a long-term solution requires support and funding for the social inclusion programmes of NGOs.

DATA:

Of the Roma households, 18% has no running water, 30% has no bathroom and 78% has no heating (KSH, 2011). A standard index of housing poverty comes from measuring the availability of space: while non-Roma households have approximately 1.2 persons per room, in Roma households the average number is 2.2 (UNDP/World Bank/EC-FRA 2012).

The life expectancy of Roma people is, on average, 10 years shorter than that of the non-Roma (Delphoi Consulting, 2004).

SOURCES:

reuters.com, fra.europa.eu

3) Increasing unemployment, a result of lay-offs and the crisis, affects the Roma more than the majority society, as they are, on average, less educated.

On average, the Roma have lower educational attainment levels and less work experience, so they are the ones most affected by unemployment. The same happened during previous crises (and after the political transition of 1989), and as a result generations grew up without work. Many work in the black economy or have odd jobs (usually in the processing industry, in construction and agriculture), and if they lose their job, they can't apply for state benefits. At such workplaces, working conditions are often inadequate, which increases the risk of the spreading of the virus.

Roma people living in poverty don't have savings, either, so whole families can be driven into extreme poverty if someone loses their job.

TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS:

When downsizing and reducing working hours, the differences in wages and in social background should be taken into consideration. Comply with disease control measures: where working from home is not an option (and the jobs with a larger proportion of Roma workers are typically like this), provide everyone with personal protective equipment.

Cooperate with NGOs in the long term, take part in labour market integration programmes and in mentor programmes by providing blue collar and white collar job opportunities.

DATA:

The unemployment rate among the Roma is 5 times higher than among the non-Roma population (Tárki, 2017); only 35% of Roma women are employed. 58% of Roma people have completed 8 years of primary education or less, and only 18% have finished secondary school (KSH, 2011).

SOURCES:

index.hu, tarki.hu

4) Digital distance learning poses a challenge to many Roma families who live in extreme poverty, which significantly increases the risk of dropping out and may have permanent negative effects on students.

Many Roma families living in poverty have no computers and no skills to use them. In Roma settlements, often there is no fixed internet connection and they can't get internet service because of previous debts.

Even when children try to keep up with the curriculum working on printed worksheets, parents with low educational levels can't help them. The fact that in Roma households there are almost twice as many people in a room than in non-Roma households doesn't make it any easier.

TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS:

A large number of devices (notebooks, tablets) are still needed in many areas of the country, even used ones are welcome. In addition, the promotion of volunteer work (distance teaching, providing support to teachers) can help disadvantaged students as they try not to fall behind.

Telecommunications companies should provide cheaper internet access to families with children, and the conditions for signing a contract should be eased for those with previous debt.

DATA:

Data estimations based on the 2017 National Assessment of Basic Competencies suggest that nearly 20% of students in grades 5 to 8 in elementary school have practically no access to education. There are no national data available on the digital exclusion of the Roma, but our own research (Bagázs, 2017) shows that in the Roma settlements in Bag and Dány, on average 1 in 4 homes has a (single) computer, and only 20% of the adults use the internet.

SOURCES:

szocio.atlatszo.hu, bagazs.org

5) The pandemic may result in increasing racism and discrimination against the Roma.

Many young Roma people who worked in Western Europe lost their job and returned to their hometown when the pandemic started, which prompted several European media outlets to blame them for "bringing the virus home".

In addition, in several Eastern European countries the state introduced disproportionate or militarised measures, targeting areas where the Roma live. Some of these measures are driven by a racist narrative which depicts Roma people as a collective health and security threat.

TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS:

Sensitivity training for colleagues/employees: organise presentations and discussions, and involve Roma NGOs.

DATA:

N/A

SOURCES:

hrjournal.org, bbteszocioblog.blogspot.com

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HÁTTÉR SOCIETY: ON THE SITUATION OF LGBTQI PERSONS

1) LGBTQI employees and entrepreneurs face a particularly high risk of unemployment and long term loss of income.

LGBTQI people are significantly overrepresented in industries that have been particularly hit by the coronavirus, for example the service sector, and among entrepreneurs, which entails a less secure income than being employed. As a result, they are at a high risk of losing their job and steady income.

TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS:

Companies should pay particular attention to equal opportunities and non-discrimination when decisions are made about retaining employees, about work schedules and about orders placed at suppliers and businesses working for them.

DATA:

In Hungary, 37% of LGBTQI people work in the industries that have been hit by the crisis the most (in restaurants and the food industry, in health care, education and the retail sector).

A Hungarian survey from 2016 shows that many LGBTQI people are forced to work as entrepreneurs because of a homophobic/transphobic work environment.

SOURCES:

hrc.org, stonewall.org.uk, stonewall.org.uk

2) The period of isolation may have a particularly negative effect on the mental health of LGBTQI workers.

Many young LGBTQI workers who have moved from their rented home to their parents or family members may realise that their families don't accept them and they may be exposed to verbal abuse because of their LGBTQI identity. Those who have already come out to at least some of their colleagues and have been able to take part in informal office conversations with them like anybody else have now lost this supportive environment. It may be an additional source of stress if they have to take part in online work meetings regularly with expressly homophobic or transphobic colleagues in the group without the opportunity to talk to supportive colleagues to ease the tension.

TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS:

Companies should make special efforts to create an inclusive work environment. It is a good idea to share awareness raising materials with employees in this period, to provide them with information on the LGBT+ and ally employee group or to conduct a survey on experiences in the work environment. Additionally, they can direct the attention of the employees to the services of the Háttér Society: <http://hatter.hu/tevekenysegunk>

DATA:

In Hungary, less than 50% of LGBTQI people have come out to their immediate family: 46% have talked about their LGBTQI identity to their mother, and 31% to their father. However, for those who have come out it was often a negative experience: 37% of mothers and 46% of fathers disapproved or didn't want to talk about it. In Hungary, 44% of the population would feel ashamed to have a gay or lesbian relative.

SOURCES:

hatter.hu

3) Certain employers may suspend their activities aimed at promoting equal opportunities and supporting the creation of an inclusive work environment, while the stress induced by the crisis may increase exclusionary attitudes towards minorities, including the LGBTQI community.

During the pandemic, employers may think it is enough to focus only on their primary economic interests, and there are no adequate opportunities to deal with employee groups, equal opportunities, and sensitivity and professional trainings anyway. At the same time the stress induced by the crisis (changed working conditions, worrying about losing your job, etc.) may also increase exclusionary attitudes towards LGBTQI people.

TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS:

This period can be considered as some sort of test of the corporate culture. It is important that you should remind employees that diversity and inclusion are still priorities for the company, and that you should also let potential employees know about this so that it is the most committed and most suitable candidates that will apply for a job at the company in the future as well.

DATA:

"COVID-19 is not just a health issue; it can also be a virus that exacerbates xenophobia, hate and exclusion," said Fernand de Varennes, the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues.

SOURCES:

weforum.org, news.un.org

4) The situation of trans employees is particularly unsecure, which increases the pressure and stress they experience.

In late March, the Hungarian government proposed a new law that would make it impossible for transgender people to have their gender legally recognised and their names and documents changed. The examination of such applications has been suspended for over 3 years now in Hungary, which puts trans employees in a depressing situation: they either hide their transgender identity or they must find employment and work with documents and names that do not reflect their gender identity and appearance. This constitutes a constant source of stress as day-to-day activities like receiving mail or making purchases may lead to humiliating situations.

TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS:

Follow what is happening to the bill. Tell your employees that trans colleagues can still count on your support in the future. Prepare workplace policies that allow employees to use a name that reflects their gender identity (on frequently used platforms like company emails and access cards, but it is also important to make the hiring process safe), and respect their gender identity in every situation.

DATA:

24 of the 27 Member States of the European Union allow transgender people to officially change their gender.

70% of Hungarians believe that trans people should be allowed to have their gender legally recognised.

SOURCES:

socialworker.com, hatter.hu

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SALVA VITA FOUNDATION:

ON THE SITUATION OF PERSONS WITH CHANGED WORKING CAPACITY

1) Persons with changed working capacity are at an increased risk of getting infected by the coronavirus.

It is a difficulty at the workplace that it is not always clear that someone belongs to a vulnerable group, as many individuals don't have a medical certificate that says they are more susceptible to infections (even though they are). In addition, it is also possible that someone has not discussed their health problem with their employer so far since their condition has not had any negative impact on their work whatsoever. As for indirect effects: for many people sufficient financial means allowing them to stay at home is not available, and neither is a job where they can work from home. As difficult financial situation and poor health often go hand in hand, it is those who need to self-isolate the most to avoid getting infected that cannot afford to do so. In addition, for people with disabilities and impaired health who need care or help from others in their day-to-day life or work it is also difficult or even impossible to self-isolate.

TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS:

As an employer, conduct a risk analysis for all your staff if you can. Engage your occupational health service provider and review available medical documentation and medical certificates recently submitted by the employees to identify those whose health condition puts them at extreme risk in this pandemic. Colleagues who are classified as high risk according to the analysis should stay at home. If this is not possible, introduce precautionary measures that minimise contact among the employees and provide them with personal protective equipment. As an employer, also pay attention to those who don't have extensive medical documentation but are highly exposed, and take their special requests and needs into consideration.

DATA:

Approximately 20% of the Hungarian population has a chronic condition that can multiply the risk of infection. In addition, the current situation may indirectly keep individuals living with a disability or impaired health from taking sufficient protective steps against the coronavirus.

SOURCES:

sokszinumunkahely.hu, forbes.com, sokszinumunkahely.hu, mandiner.hu

2) Certain groups in society, for example those affected by psychosocial issues, may experience above average distress as a result of social isolation. People who feel they are more vulnerable than others because of their underlying condition can also experience anxiety on a daily basis.

In recent weeks, many difficulties have come up that can increase the level of anxiety in the members of the groups concerned. It is important to note that it is not only the fear of getting infected that can lead to frustration on a daily basis. Many persons with changed working capacity have difficulty getting the medication they need for their underlying condition. Treatments, operations, check-ups and appointments to a specialist made 2 or 3 months ago are delayed or cancelled. There is a shortage of certain medications. All this can have negative effects on the general health of those concerned. Another problem is that despite massive communication campaigns there is a lot of uncertainty about the nature of the virus and the effects of the pandemic, and some groups find it more difficult to manage the anxiety resulting from this. Those who live alone have an even harder time than others. The fear of losing one's job is another source of frustration, and it can be more pronounced in case of persons with changed working capacity, especially because of past experiences and negative experiences with discrimination.

In extreme cases, stress and anxiety may increase so much that they lead to loneliness, depression, excessive alcohol consumption and drug use or even self-harming behaviours.

TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS:

Be attentive and considerate, and if you see behaviour or symptoms that suggest an employee is increasingly distressed, try to be supportive. Warning signs may include when a colleague complains about physical symptoms regularly or starts acting unusually, and these atypical, previously uncommon behaviours persist for a longer period.

Some important steps you can take to ease stress: try to maintain frequent contact with your employees to support them. Discuss the key measures taken and the information available about the pandemic together, and provide opportunities to share concerns regarding this situation. The fact that there is too much information and not all of it comes from reliable sources may play a major role in the development or escalation of stress in those concerned.

Regular and active communication can help your employees if you provide them with clear information: this can ease despair and restore the sense of security they may have lost. If the situation calls for it, provide colleagues experiencing increased distress with an opportunity to consult relevant specialists or professional organisations that can provide professional help to deal with the situation.

DATA:

In the EU, over 7% of the population suffer from depression and 4% of deaths are caused by mental disorders. In 2020, psychiatric diseases constitute the second largest burden of disease in the EU after cardiovascular diseases.

SOURCES:

kepmas.hu, businessdisabilityforum.org.uk, euro.who.int, fszk.hu, forbes.com

3) As a result of the changes brought about by the coronavirus, employers may develop the trust they have been lacking so far, the trust needed to shift to remote work. In the long term this may widen the opportunities of persons with changed working capacity on the labour market.

There are hundreds of thousands of people with changed working capacity in Hungary. For many, their physical limitations or immobility make it very difficult or impossible to commute to work. These difficulties often prevent people from finding employment. The social distancing the majority society is now experiencing has been everyday reality for many disabled people.

We hope that the pandemic will result in a change of attitudes at companies, and as they realise that working from home can be effective, the employment of disabled people will not be hindered by inaccessible office buildings in the long term.

TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS:

Take active steps to ensure that solutions, good practices and working conditions that were implemented during the pandemic and made remote work possible will be available in the future as well. Especially for those who can only find employment if these conditions are met. Be open to find and implement alternative solutions for employment so that you can make sure that present and future colleagues with changed working capacity can take part in the life of the organisation like the rest of the staff.

DATA:

Previous studies have shown that employers do not have enough confidence in their employees and they are concerned whether employees will perform the tasks assigned to them when they work from home. In a survey conducted by Dreamjobs, nearly one third of company leaders and HR executives were pessimistic in this regard. This may now change as companies have been forced to shift to remote work.

SOURCES:

hrportal.hu, quantumworkplace.com, marketing.quantumworkplace.com, forbes.com, forbes.com, linkedin.com

4) The pandemic has disrupted the decision-making processes of companies, and in this crisis organisations may, willingly or unwillingly, neglect the current needs of special-needs employees, and certain company measures aimed at promoting equal opportunities may be overshadowed.

Persons with changed working capacity may often feel that the framework defined by the employer for working from home is highly restrictive. Accessibility issues may also arise when these employees are working from home: those with impaired vision or hearing, for example, may need accessible communications devices or software programmes, and some people, on the autism spectrum for example, may need help in organising work.

TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS:

Ask persons with changed working capacity what they need. If the employees concerned want it, give them sufficient freedom of choice, allow them to express what they need and to make decisions about things that make them feel safe or help them work effectively in the current situation. Provide freedom of choice as needed, but be present and give support when necessary, and provide the devices required for their work.

DATA AND FACTS:

The situation is transforming and changing really fast, employers must make many prompt decisions and, as a result, in the decision-making process they sometimes may not consider thoroughly what can guarantee sufficient/effective work for their employees with special needs as they work from home. Workers with changed working capacity who, for example, need much more time to adapt to new situations than the average may find it difficult to accept new customs, solutions or measures in the organisation that apply to all the staff equally.

SOURCES:

businessdisabilityforum.org.uk, sokszinumunkahely.hu

5) In our experience, persons with changed working capacity cannot always articulate the special needs that emerge in a crisis, or they cannot express these in an adequate way or to the right extent.

This is caused, on the one hand, by their difficulty to assert their interests and, on the other hand, previous negative experiences may also play a part in this.

TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS:

Professional organisations providing support to persons with changed working capacity are the direct link between people with disabilities and/or impaired health and the majority society. They provide support in issues of day-to-day life and employment, and also offer useful advice to the immediate environment (family, workplace, friends) of those concerned. A supportive organisation that knows how to communicate with persons with changed working capacity, knows about their needs, provides help during the adaptation process and can mediate between the two parties can take a lot of burden off companies that employ such individuals.

As a result, the adaptation process will take less time.

As an NGO, we must make sure the support we provide is always more than just giving specific directives to persons with changed working capacity about what they should do in specific situations. What we want to achieve (in general and in the current pandemic as well) is that the individuals concerned can articulate the solution that is the best for them in a given situation. NGOs can support this process, for example by sharing viable solutions, ideas or advice.

During the COVID-19 pandemic this can be very important as the situation requires extra fast response from everyone, especially from employers.

SOURCES:

salvavita.hu, fszk.hu

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