SERP
SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE RESTRUCTURING PROCESSES – REINFORCEMENT OF THE ROLE AND CAPACITY OF WORKERS' ORGANIZATIONS

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SERP PROJECT

# A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO DEALING WITH CHANGES IN HEALTHCARE SERVICES WHILE PROTECTING WORKERS AND PATIENTS

European healthcare systems are going through a period of profound change. Digitalisation, staff shortages, an ageing population and budget constraints are driving reorganisations, mergers, outsourcing and workforce changes.

These processes do not only affect the organisation of healthcare facilities. They also have an impact on working conditions, the well-being of professionals, and the quality and safety of patient care.

To help address these challenges, the SERP project has developed the Change Management Handbook for Employee Representatives: Sectoral Action Plan for Healthcare Services. The document provides practical guidance, procedures and tools to enable employee representatives to intervene in restructuring processes in an informed and constructive manner.

**Anticipating change to avoid irreversible decisions**

One of the key messages of the handbook is that worker representation should not be limited to reacting when a decision has already been made. Their involvement should begin in the early stages, when it is still possible to identify risks, consider alternatives and propose solutions.

To this end, the document highlights the importance of recognising the early signs of a possible restructuring: unexpected organisational changes, a hiring freeze, a reduction in resources, the outsourcing of services, or a deterioration in employment indicators.

Early detection makes it possible to analyse problems before they become situations that are difficult to reverse and facilitates more effective involvement of workers' representatives.

## Information and analysis

**to negotiate on a sound basis**

Timely access to comprehensive and reliable information is another cornerstone of the handbook. Understanding reorganisation plans, the financial situation of the centre, staffing needs and the potential impact on healthcare is essential when assessing proposed changes.

The document recommends using objective data, employment indicators, risk analyses and different scenarios to assess the consequences of each measure.

Before approving a restructuring, it is necessary to examine issues such as workload, continuity of services, patient safety, staff retention and training needs. Alternatives to job losses should also be considered, such as internal mobility, task reorganisation or the acquisition of new skills.



**A change process with clear stages**

The handbook proposes a structured model for managing restructuring in a responsible manner. This model comprises six main stages:

- Diagnosis and early warning: identifying problems and signs that indicate upcoming changes.
- Impact and risk analysis: assessing the consequences for staff and patients.
- Design of alternatives: studying different options before making a final decision.
- Negotiation and consultation: involving workers' representatives and seeking agreements.
- Implementation and monitoring: overseeing the implementation of the measures and compliance with the commitments.
- Evaluation and correction: reviewing the results and making adjustments where necessary.

This approach aims to make transformations transparent, predictable and evidence-based, rather than responding solely to cost-cutting targets.



**Social dialogue as a tool for finding solutions**

The handbook stresses that effective trade union involvement is not just about opposing change. It also involves putting forward proposals, negotiating guarantees and helping to design solutions that meet the real needs of healthcare services.

Issues that can be addressed in negotiations include maintaining employment where possible, preventing compulsory redundancies, redeploying professionals, training, transfer conditions, and measures to preserve the quality of care.

The document also stresses the importance of agreed commitments being verifiable and having monitoring mechanisms. When dialogue does not lead to a solution, representatives should be aware of the avenues for mediation, grievance and legal protection available in each national context.

**Mergers, outsourcing and artificial intelligence: specific challenges**

The handbook does not merely set out general principles. It also addresses situations that can profoundly transform the operation of healthcare facilities.

These include hospital mergers and consolidations, the outsourcing of support services, digitalisation and the implementation of artificial intelligence, as well as staff cutbacks.

In each case, it is essential to assess the impact on employment, professional skills, data protection, workload and patient safety. Technological transformation must be accompanied by appropriate training and safeguards, preventing changes from creating new inequalities or worsening working conditions.

The handbook also highlights the value of collaborating with patient associations and other civil society organisations. Linking working conditions with the quality of care allows the debate to be placed in its broadest context: the promotion of safe, accessible and sustainable healthcare services.

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# A European tool adapted to different national situations

The handbook brings together the work of experts and trade union representatives from the organisations involved in the SERP project, with contributions from bodies in various European countries. Its approach combines references to European and International Labour Organisation frameworks with practical recommendations for trade union action.
National experiences show that there is no one-size-fits-all answer for all healthcare systems. Measures must be tailored to the conditions of each country, its institutions, its industrial relations and its staffing needs.
The document therefore promotes the sharing of good practices, the training of workers' representatives and cooperation between trade unions, authorities, employers and other stakeholders in the sector.

**Towards a socially responsible transformation of healthcare**

The handbook developed within the framework of the SERP project aims to strengthen the ability of workers' representatives to anticipate changes, defend labour rights and actively participate in the development of solutions.
Its message is clear: healthcare restructuring should be assessed not only in terms of its economic outcomes, but also in terms of its impact on the people who work in the sector and on those who rely on its services.
Early information, data-driven negotiation, ongoing training and social dialogue can help to reduce the negative effects of change and to find fairer and more sustainable alternatives.

The aim is for change not to result in a loss of rights, quality or safety, but rather to be an opportunity to strengthen European healthcare services and ensure a fairer future for workers and patients.

The handbook has been developed within the framework of the SERP project (Socially Responsible Restructuring Processes – Strengthening the Role and Capacity of Workers' Organisations), co-funded by the European Union.



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