

Men of Steel

Holistic solutions to enhance the wellbeing and quality of life in the steel industry



On June 2 of 2019 the OptimaSteel consortium started a project aiming to identify the workers' needs and areas for improvement. A questionnaire was elaborated and presented to 100 workers with +50 years old on Groupe STELLANTIS - Mangualde Plant, to define the base for the necessities for these older steelworkers.

The questionnaire was designed to cover the four pillars of concern for the project, workplace ergonomics, stress management, physical training and nutritional balance, aiming to identify the workers' needs and areas for improvement.

The world is facing a new paradigm shift in its demography. On one hand, the dwindling population growth is inverting the pyramid, with the elderly soon outnumbering the younger generations. Secondly, with medical and lifestyle improvements, people can expect to have longer, healthier and productive lives, no longer limited on their working age. Together, these demographic shifts require sustainable long-term solutions for countries and states' economies alike. **The main goal of the project's partners was to build on state-of-the-art solutions from top-end technology developers and research institutes across the EU,** to provide well-balanced and holistic solutions that are able to meet the steel industry needs and offers benefits and an enhanced quality of life for older adults at the workplace.

The results gathered were a reflection of that. Generally, working in an automotive industry, as STELLANTIS, the type of working is characterized by a high number of hours standing, repetitive movements, and carrying heavy loads in hot environments and exposed to chemical substances. Stellantis have an occupational health and safety policy that helps to improve working conditions, ergonomics and the environment, however there is space to improve comfortability and at the same time ensuring safety.

The cost of inaction is a challenge that companies cannot ignore. If no action is taken, economies will be less and less able to keep an ageing workforce active, coupled with the costs of caring for an ever larger population of retirees. **The solution to the current health, safety and wellbeing of the steel industry workforce, therefore, does not rely on a single technology or a new development.** A holistic approach to improve the wellbeing and quality of life at the workplace of older adults can be developed only by combining physical, ergonomic, nutritional and stress management aspects.

An extensive list of solutions to be implemented was thus identified, however, Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) emerged and changed the possibilities of integrating several solutions by social distance constraints. The project resorted to traditional means of communication as posters to spread important and valuable information, while at the same time promoting the use of mobile applications as significant solutions to address the employees' needs.

Final post-pilot surveys showed that those who installed the suggested apps and noticed the tips on the walls found them helpful to modify their choices, regarding nutritional balance, physical training and stress management, and the majority of the participants have also felt health progresses. **As for the pillar of ergonomics, the work developed proved to be extremely important and will certainly influence the decision making at the industrial plant level.**

Despite the limitations found, these results proved to be crucial for the implementation of modifications in the steel industry to provide a better quality of life for the older employees.

You can find more information by visiting, www.optimasteel-project.eu. The project partners include: INOVA+ (www.inova.business), PSA Group (www.site.groupe-psa.com), Joanneum Research (www.joanneum.at/digital/) and EWF (www.ewf.be).



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