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OSHAFRICA PRESS RELEASE: WORLD DAY FOR SAFETY AND HEALTH AT WORK 2026

A CALL TO ACTION ON MENTAL HEALTH IN AFRICA

While the African region joins the rest of the world to mark the 2026 World Day for Safety and Health at Work 2026 with the theme “Ensuring a Healthy Psychosocial Working Environment”, it has become so important to look inward Africa to examine how we have thrived positively along the line of the theme of the year’s event.

It is important to first establish contextually the keywords “Psychosocial Working Environment”, which transcends beyond physical hazards that address machineries and chemicals but addressing invisible factors that affect mental health and wellbeing of employees. This covers how work is designed, organised and managed.

According to several reports, Africa is currently facing a prevailing pandemic influenced by the new world of work which is characterised by increasing job demand such as workload, work pace and elongated working hours. Above these, also is fair treatment and clarity in roles, job autonomy, workplace violence and harassment and many more. These factors are fast heightening the mental health of employees across the African region with approximately 64% of countries in Africa lacking dedicated mental health legislations or rely of laws that are “custodial” rather than “therapeutic”. The “lunacy” legacy prescribed by the pre-colonial laws which focuses on locking patients away from people rather than protecting their rights as employees and citizens as seen still in use in countries like Sierra Leone and Gambia. While a number of African countries have updated their mental health laws with very good examples being shown by countries like Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, Kenya, Egypt and Cape Verde, we need more countries to emulate these positive steps in the overall interest of its citizens.

Approximately, 15% of working age adult in Africa have mental health conditions at any given time with a high number of employees working even when mentally unwell. With the growth of digital exposure and the fast economic growth across many African countries, there are clear indications that this prevalence will increase proportionately in years to come. Stress, burnout, fatigue, anxiety disorders and cardiovascular diseases will steadily grow along with this prevalence. Yet, Africa currently has the world’s youngest population that has been projected to be the largest workforce in the world by 2035. If the mental health of this population is not protected, the burden of mental health conditions that will come out of this population will be too much for us all to manage.



CALL TO ACTION




We call on African Policy Makers, Business Executives and Institutional Leaders to:

- **Modernize the Law:** Most Mental Health Laws in Africa are completely outdated; we need countries to repeal the custodial legislation and champion right-based mental health laws that not only protect the right of workers from discrimination, but also legally protect workers from psychosocial hazards and mandates reasonable accommodation.
- **Advocate for Promotion of Mental Health Laws:** Some African countries have been able to draft and sign in to law, modern day mental health legislations. These laws are most times not promoted, employers of labour hardly know about these laws and this makes implementation a huge concern. The Nigerian Mental Health Act, 2023 is a clear example.
- **Improved Capacity Building for Mental Health Management in Africa:** Africa currently has only 1.4 mental health workers per 100,000 people, compared to the global average of 9 per 100,000. For every 500,000 people in Africa, there is an average of only 1 Psychiatrist, this needs to improve significantly through training.
- **Improved Budgetary Allocation to Mental Health and increase in the number of Mental Health Centres:** A vast majority of African countries allocate only 1% of their total health budget to mental health against the 5% - 10% global average. This has grossly led to poor funding of mental health across Africa and 80% of this funding is channelled towards developing mental health centres in Urban cities while rural areas are only sparsely funded.
- **Recognition of Digital Exposure as a Mental Health Hazard:** With the fast rate of digital acceleration in Africa, the digital tools adoption rate in Africa is currently at a rate of 10% higher than their global peers. Africa needs implementation of enforceable guidelines for the supervision of extremely high digital exposure in workplaces.
- **Redefine Workplace Safety:** The inclusion of Psychosocial Risk Assessments should be mandated into organisational Quality Management Systems (QMS) while mental health must also be treated with same urgency as physical safety and physical health.



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- **Mandatory Training of Managers:** Workplace culture must shift from the existing culture of silence to a culture of support. Organisational leaders and managers must be trained not to be therapist, but to be “Empathetic First Responders” who are able to recognise early signs of burnout before employees’ breakdown.

While we collectively mark the World Day for Safety and Health at Work 2026 with events holding across countries and cities in Africa, it is important to keep in mind the inherent difficulties that exist in ensuring healthy psychosocial working environment with the huge mental health knowledge gap and outdated mental health legislations in Africa. We recommend immediate actionable interventions at regional, country and enterprise levels that are focused on the psychosocial health and wellbeing of employees across the African continent. We call on the African Union, Sub-regional economic blocs, policy makers, governments’ ministries, departments and business leaders to lead this process towards ensuring healthy psychosocial working environment in Africa.

Signed

Ehi Iden, President
For: OSHAfrica Board