Mental Health in the Digital World of Work

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The European Parliament adopted by 501 votes to 47, with 85 abstentions, a resolution on mental health in the digital world of work.

Mental health and digital work: lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic

Members pointed out that the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent economic crisis have taken a heavy toll on the mental health and well-being of all citizens, but especially employees, the self-employed, young people, students in transition to work and older people, with an increasing prevalence of work-related psychosocial risks and higher rates of stress, anxiety and depression.

Regretting that mental health has not been given the same priority as physical health, Parliament called on the EU institutions and Member States to recognise the scale of work-related mental health problems in the EU and to make a strong commitment to measures to regulate and develop a digital working environment that helps prevent mental health problems, protect mental health and a healthy work-life balance and strengthen social protection rights in the workplace.

An **EU strategy for mental health** should aim to require Member States to (i) integrate mental health with physical health because of their close interrelationship, (ii) provide effective, evidence-based and human rights-based care, (iii) increase the number of services so that more people can access treatment, and (iv) help people to find or stay in work, among other endeavours.

Commending the essential and frontline workers who sacrificed their own well-being to help save lives during the pandemic, the Commission is invited to give special attention to essential and frontline staff in its forthcoming proposals on mental health at work.

Digital transition and mental health

Given that the digital transformation can lead to isolation and social exclusion, Members stressed the importance of all workers, especially older workers and people with disabilities, having **access to lifelong learning** and vocational training tailored to their individual needs.

Members noted that AI has the potential to improve working conditions and quality of life, including work-life balance and better accessibility for people with disabilities. However, they warned that AI can also raise concerns about privacy, health and safety at work.

Parliament stressed that AI solutions in the workplace must be **transparent and fair** and avoid any negative consequences for workers' health and safety, and that they must be negotiated between employers and workers' representatives, including trade unions. In this respect, it called on the Commission and the Member States to develop a **legislative proposal on AI at work** to ensure adequate protection of workers' rights and well-being, including mental health, and fundamental rights, such as non-discrimination, privacy and human dignity, in an increasingly digitalised workplace.

Pointing out that only 60% of Member States have specific legislation to **combat bullying and violence at work**, Members called on the Commission and Member States to propose targeted mandatory measures to tackle and curb this growing problem at work.

Parliament noted the shift to teleworking during the pandemic and the flexibility it has brought to many employees and the self-employed. However, it recognised that telework has also been accompanied by difficulties, especially for the most disadvantaged and single-parent households.

The Commission is invited to:

- **propose a legislative framework to establish minimum requirements for telework** throughout the Union, without prejudicing the working conditions of teleworkers. Such a legislative framework should specify working conditions and ensure that telework is voluntary and that the rights, work-life balance, workload and performance standards of teleworkers are equivalent to those comparable on-site workers;

- propose, in consultation with the social partners, a **directive setting minimum standards and conditions** to ensure that all workers are able to effectively exercise their right to disconnect, and to regulate the use of existing and new digital tools for work purposes.

Telework is not yet accessible to all workers. To **tackle the digital divide in Europe**, Members called for more targeted investment in digital skills provision, especially for the most digitally excluded groups. They called on the Commission and Member States to provide measures on accessibility and inclusive technologies for persons with disabilities.

Health and safety at work

Parliament called for workplaces to facilitate access to mental health support and outpatient services, prevention, early detection and treatment of employees at risk of mental health problems and to put in place **plans to prevent mental health risks in the workplace**. It stressed the importance of including an anti-harassment policy in health and safety measures in the digital workplace and of helping companies to put anti-harassment policies in place.

The Commission is invited to put in place mechanisms to prevent anxiety, depression and burnout and to enable the reintegration into the workplace of people affected by psychosocial problems.

A modern world of work for the well-being of workers

The Commission is encouraged to **launch education and awareness-raising initiatives** on mental health in the workplace and in school curricula, to mobilise EU funding for the development of digital platforms and applications in the field of mental health, to explore the feasibility of setting up a common EU helpline for mental health support and to designate **2023 the EU Year of Good Mental Health**. Member States are invited to assess the possibility of setting up mediation services for psychosocial risks at local or regional level.

Recalling that in 2021, 64% of young people aged 18-34 were at risk of depression due to lack of employment and financial and educational prospects, as well as loneliness and social isolation, Parliament called on the Commission to address the issue of interrupted access to the labour market, which puts young people at greater risk of mental health problems, and to take measures to help young people access and maintain adequate employment.