



**WELLBEING  
AT WORK** 2022

**WELLBEING IN  
HECTIC TIMES**

**13 – 15 June 2022**

**www.waw2022.pl**

## Some highlights from the PEROSH 2022 Wellbeing at Work Conference, titled **Wellbeing in Hectic Times**<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

A series of conferences on wellbeing has been organised by the PEROSH network since 2010. Recent circumstances, in particular the context of accelerated disruption the world is experiencing, were investigated for their impacts on occupational health in the sixth edition, organised by CIOP-PIB (online) in June 2022. Papers on the preservation of mental health in the face of increasing remote working and remote management will be discussed here, as will some contributions related to job sustainability and health and some related to technostress. Some reflections on the evolution of the concerns for well-being at work throughout the conference cycle will introduce this paper.

### Context and themes

The Wellbeing at Work conference is part of a cycle of conferences, led by the group of researchers in the PEROSH network<sup>2</sup>, who have coordinated on the topic of occupational wellbeing since 2010. The first conference took place in Finland, at a time when this country was world leader in mobile telephony which was rapidly expanding with Nokia and had full employment and remarkable economic

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<sup>1</sup> Wellbeing at Work: Wellbeing in Hectic Times (conference held online from 13 to 15 June 2022)

<sup>2</sup> Since 2003, the PEROSH (Partnership for European Research in Occupational Safety and Health) network has brought together 13 European OSH institutions totalling more than 1,000 researchers and experts who are active in the field of occupational health.

development. Finland, at that time, probably due to this economic context, was the trendsetter regarding wellbeing at work issues<sup>3</sup>.

In 2019, the last edition to date was held in France, organised by INRS. The topic selected by the PEROSH group and INRS, dealt with the impacts of societal changes on the world of work and occupational health/wellbeing at work (Wellbeing at Work in a Changing World. Opportunities and Challenges).

In 2022, the topic selected by the PEROSH group, and our Polish colleagues was “Wellbeing in Hectic Times”. This topic can be seen as an extension of the previous topic, since we switched from wellbeing in a changing world to wellbeing in chaotic, disrupted, unstable times. This topic also appears to be in tune with the European and global events over the last three years, which modified the backdrop to how health and occupational wellbeing should be addressed. Attention is therefore paid to the consequences and impacts of the currently unstable times on the world of work and the health of workers.

The upheavals identified by the research presented during this conference were linked to the Covid-19 pandemic (confinement of populations, therefore remote work, work under the constraint of health risks, etc.) but also in connection with the ageing of the working population, anxieties relating to the prospect of climate change, and the growing importance of digitisation in the way we work.

We could have added fears and disruption of the world of work in connection with the war in Europe, but the dates selected for presentations, prior to the outbreak of the conflict, made this impossible, although CIOP-PIB and Poland (who steered the organisation) were particularly affected at the time.

The period of intense and multi-form upheavals encourages us to re-question occupational health and wellbeing in a world that is losing its bearings. Here, we think of traditional salaried work challenged by new forms of employment; work time and workplaces challenged by the sometimes imposed implementation of remote work and digitisation which break down the borders between working life and private life, etc.

Examined positively, from a wellbeing perspective, the topic of the conference drew in presentations which goals were to clarify how and to what extent the world of work can play a role to stabilise and

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<sup>3</sup> To face the rapid economic expansion and the full employment situation, it was necessary to maintain a motivated and healthy work force all throughout their lives and to increase the presence of female workers.

anchor workers, proposed by speakers who considered themselves affected, like all citizens, by these geostrategic, health, organisational and existential instabilities. How has the unplanned expansion of teleworking and work at home been experienced by employees and how can it in hindsight be used to accommodate to these new situations and make them a new pillar of wellbeing? How were new balances sought, experimented, tested between working life and private life, between family and professional constraints in different countries?

These increasing key challenges to occupational health and wellbeing research were featured in the session themes and the choices made by invited speakers. Moreover, these were the topics of many presentations at the conference. The following topics were addressed: the transformations of work practices caused by the pandemic and the assessment of their impact on occupational health; new forms of work and employment, digitisation of exchanges, the means to be implemented to enhance inclusion at work and acceptance of diversity to combat all discrimination; the characteristics of a healthy organisation during trying times (topic associated with the fight against occupational burnout); the advantages or disadvantages of factory 5.0<sup>4</sup> for wellbeing, mental health of young people in the long term, the effects of remote management on wellbeing.

Invited speakers addressed the five topics below:

- Living, Working and COVID-19: findings from Eurofound's e-survey on work and wellbeing following the COVID-19 pandemic
- Enhancing mental capital and wellbeing at work
- Industry 5.0: a viable strategy for well-being at work in hectic times?
- A life course approach to young adults' mental health and early working lives
- Psychosocial safety climate as a leading indicator of wellbeing at work

For reasons of brevity, we will partly address the first two and the last topics. Readers may consult the book of abstracts if they so desire.

### **Increase in institutional concerns for mental health at work – solution avenues.**

Several speeches and presentations<sup>5</sup> pinpointed the increasing concern in different countries about workers' mental health. For example, in the United Kingdom, a 2021 report notes that stress, depression and anxiety rates are significantly higher compared to levels prior to the pandemic; the associated disorders currently represent 50% of all health-related problems at work (HSE, United

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<sup>4</sup> Barely ten years after industry 4.0, industry 5.0 (or "fifth industrial revolution") refers to people working alongside robots and intelligent machines (source = <https://iotindustriel.com/tendances-de-liot-industriel/lindustrie-5-0-cest-quoi/>).

<sup>5</sup> Daphne N. Ahrendt (Eurofound) and Cary Cooper (University of Manchester).

Kingdom, 2021<sup>6</sup>; see Figure 1). British researchers state, however, that many businesses are aware of the problem, and that an increasing number of organisations in Great Britain now take measures to promote mental health and fight against work-related stress (CIPD, 2020<sup>7</sup>).

### New and long-standing cases of work-related ill health by type, 2020/21

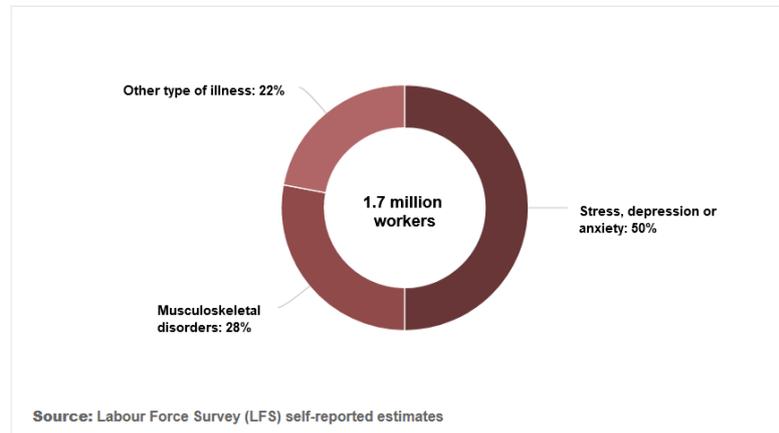


Figure 1. British figures concerning the relative weight of mental health problems at work.

In the same vein, the working conditions survey<sup>8</sup> by Eurofound (Dublin), partly done online in 2020-2021, identifies an increase in mental health concerns during the pandemic<sup>9</sup>. The wellbeing levels presented in the graph (see Figures 2 and 3) are built using WHO's wellbeing scale. In addition, Daphne N. Ahrendt (Eurofound)<sup>10</sup> believes that the geopolitical situation in Ukraine can once more deteriorate the mental health indicators of this scale. However, being employed remains a health factor, as shown by comparisons between employees, independent workers and unemployed persons or persons declared unfit for work. Moreover, sector-related differences are considerable: while certain professions see an improvement in their indicators between spring 2021 and spring 2022, for others, the situation is deteriorating (deterioration for jobs in the health sector and in agriculture, and improvement for teaching and transport jobs for example). Eurofound's work made it possible to cross mental health parameters with, on the one hand, teleworking (based on three categories: exclusive teleworking, no teleworking and hybrid work), and on the other hand, the individual preferences

<sup>6</sup> See: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/overall/hssh2021.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> See: <https://www.cipd.co.uk>, Association for human resource management professionals

<sup>8</sup> *Living, Working and COVID-19: findings from Eurofound's e-survey on work and wellbeing following the COVID-19 pandemic.* (see Find out more).

<sup>9</sup> All respondents scoring below 50 are considered to be at risk of depression.

<sup>10</sup> European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions.

expressed. Gender-based analyses show a marked deterioration in mental health for women, who would have preferred work at home or a hybrid solution, but do not have that possibility. The most positive scores are those of women who are in a hybrid situation and state that they prefer to work in the company. Globally, it is the possibility of teleworking part of the time (hybrid form) that appears as the most favourable form of work. Several plausible interpretations of these figures can be made. We can now refer to a more complete document published recently<sup>11</sup>.

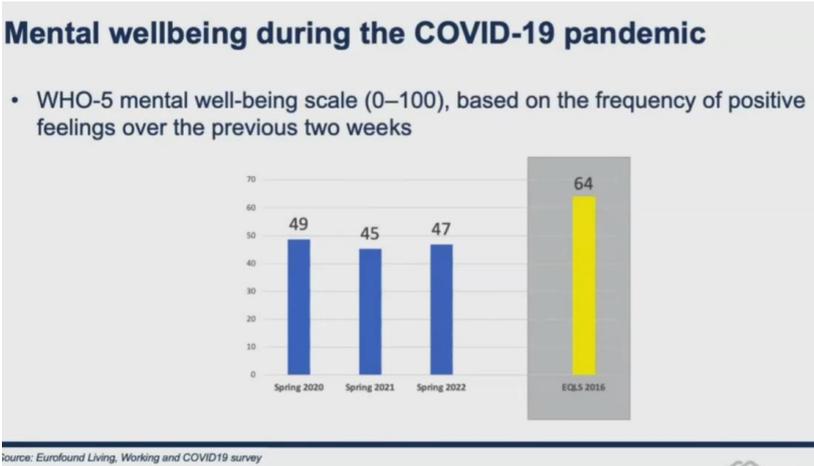


Figure 2. Level of wellbeing of European workers according to the last survey by Eurofound.

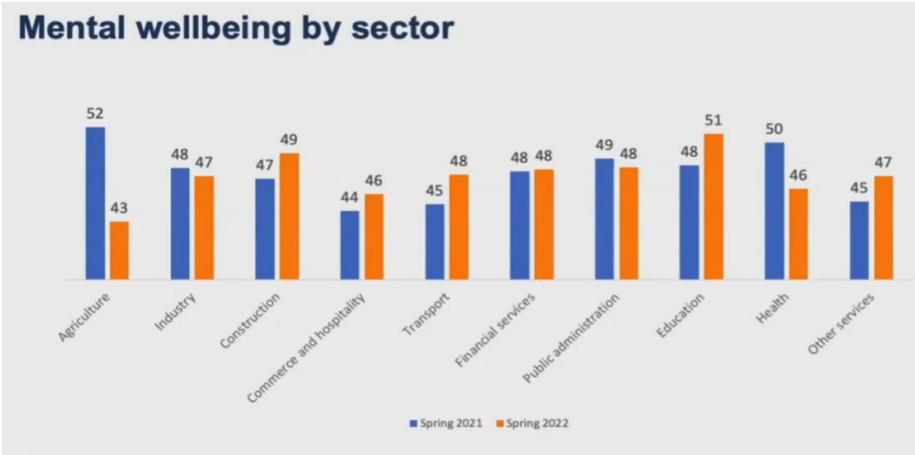


Figure 3. Level of wellbeing of European workers by sector (Eurofound survey)

Going back to this matter from the British point of view, Prof. Cooper (University of Manchester, United Kingdom)<sup>12</sup> quotes figures from researchers across the Channel, according to which 50% of health

<sup>11</sup> See (October 2022): *High risk of depression persists following COVID-19 pandemic: Data behind the mental health crisis* <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/blog/high-risk-of-depression-persists-following-covid-19-pandemic-data-behind-the-mental-health-crisis>.

<sup>12</sup> “Enhancing mental capital and wellbeing at work.” (see Find out more).

problems reported in connection with work are related to stress, depression or anxiety. He continues by stating the cost of this problem representing 4.5% of British GDP and notes that this is also reflected in the fact that only two out of five employees are fully invested in their work. He considers that too many companies continue to implement measures only once the situation has deteriorated, which goes against the principle of prevention. Unsurprisingly, compared to other papers by the same author, when Prof. Cooper mentions the most effective factors for prevention of psychosocial risks, he stresses the quality of the relationship with one's hierarchy, proposing that managers must be systematically involved in training programmes that cover the relational dimension, and that such programmes should be part of businesses' prevention and wellbeing policies. According to the speaker, managers play an essential role in the wellbeing of employees, particularly by making sure that the workload and deadlines given to perform tasks are appropriate. They must provide clear objectives and give constructive feedback, in a trusting relationship with staff. They must have the necessary skill to have conversations about sensitive subjects that could generate intense emotions for the collaborators they supervise and to offer support and flexibility if a member of the team requires some adaptations. In addition, he notes that 40% of British companies have implemented such a wellbeing policy and have sick leave scores 30% lower than other companies and see an improvement in work motivation. The Association for Human Resource Management Professionals (CIPD<sup>13</sup>) contributed significantly to this topic. It promotes the introduction of such policies in companies and notes that those that do so aim mainly to promote quality work, improvement of collective relations and social dialogue, physical health, and initiatives geared towards ethics and values.

### **Wellbeing, telework and management**

The presentation is completed by a few considerations about the matter of wellbeing and telework and on the importance of establishing a clear "psychological contract"<sup>14</sup> with employees. Prof. Cooper highlights that the confinement period confirmed, for countries where the practice of teleworking had not yet been widespread, that employees remain reliable, even remotely. Other research work presented cross the matter of management and remote work. It seeks in particular to respond to a question blatantly highlighted by the confinement period: for example, Hipli Kangas and his colleagues (Vaasa University, Finland) ask: how to ensure healthy exchanges between managers and their

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<sup>13</sup> *Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.*

<sup>14</sup> Psychologists consider that when a person joins a company, in addition to signing the work contract which formally outlines the details about the job, they also informally enter into a psychological agreement stating what they can legitimately bring to the company and what they can legitimately expect in return. If, subsequently, the employee considers that this contract has been broken, either because they are being asked to do something else, or if they do not receive what they feel they should, they will consider that they have the right to change their commitment or that it is in their interest to leave. The change in one of the expectations by the shift to teleworking provides an opportunity to investigate these expectations in their two dimensions (value and benefits).

collaborators when the majority of these exchanges are done at a distance?<sup>15</sup> Drawing on substantial work on this matter, Finnish researchers begin by highlighting the inherent difficulties of managers who must give feedback to their collaborators. These managers might have difficulties because emotional skills, sometimes lacking, are necessary to make a critical assessment of collaborators' work in such a way that the collaborator receives it favourably. From an emotional point of view, this task can generate uneasiness for the manager, but it can also trigger negative emotions in the person receiving the feedback, if their perception of their work quality is different to that of their manager. However, managers must understand that work involvement, like teams' wellbeing, are on the line: these two elements can be significantly affected within this framework. Researchers also note that the pandemic has, to some extent, changed the context in which feedback is given and received, almost daily and formally face to face. The pandemic made work interactions more formal, and this way of operating has become hard to implement. The conclusions of the study emphasize the advantages of management based on trust<sup>16</sup>, but also notes the appearance, in some of the people questioned, of a "discomfort threshold", i.e. a minimum level of difficulty as from which a collaborator will accept to contact their manager to request support to deal with a problem. In the case of a traditional work configuration onsite, this threshold was hardly present or visible, with the employee letting off a little steam in the hallway, at the coffee machine, etc. Distance mode, even when a climate of trust predominates, therefore creates a new challenge for micro-management of daily issues. The surveys conducted show that this generates a feeling of solitude in employees which the comfort brought by increased autonomy and trust does not offset.

Another study, by Liisa Mäkelä (FIOH, Finland), also looked into the difficulties raised by remote management. The study establishes that work commitment will be directly improved and collaborators' stress indirectly reduced by sufficient managerial support<sup>17</sup>. It underlines the importance, for employees confronted with a brutal change in work constraints (as was the case during confinement), to be able to express their difficulties and need for support. The researchers concluded their presentation by stressing the need for organisations to build training plans taking into account the new skills and abilities managers must acquire to be effective from a distance.

Among the other presentations relating to the topic of mental health at work, it is interesting to note:

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<sup>15</sup> *"The art of staying in touch – Exploring daily feedback interactions between a leader and a subordinate in remote work"*. (see Find out more).

<sup>16</sup> Predominant in Finland (see presentation on the Nordic example: *Anette Nylund, Swedish Agency For Work Environment Expertise*).

<sup>17</sup> See: *"Leading brainwork: Relationship between supportive supervisor, cognitive strain and well-being at work."* (see Find out more).

- the presentation of an American questionnaire on thriving from work, considered as a factor for health preservation, by Susan Peters (Center for work, health, and well-being at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, USA)<sup>18</sup>;
- a study by Leah Derham-Boyce (Sheffield University Management School, United Kingdom) on the difficulties encountered by autistic workers, granted the Young Researcher Award. One of the contributions of the study is the identification of difficulties felt acutely by these people, which can affect the general population less intensely. Paying attention to these employees can therefore serve to identify sub-acute stressors which can nevertheless be reduced for the benefit of all.
- A presentation by Teun Sluijs (TNO, the Netherlands)<sup>19</sup> also points out increasing mental health concerns in the world of work such as burnout, and notes at the same time that only 16% of companies have implemented a wellbeing at work policy. A public-private partnership in that country enabled the launch of an innovation in workplace wellbeing (IWW) initiative. It is about designing interventions, configured specifically based on the characteristics of work environments, which cover several levels: that of the company as a whole, that of teams and that of individuals (see Figure 4), in a systemic approach close to what INRS has produced for more than ten years<sup>20</sup>.

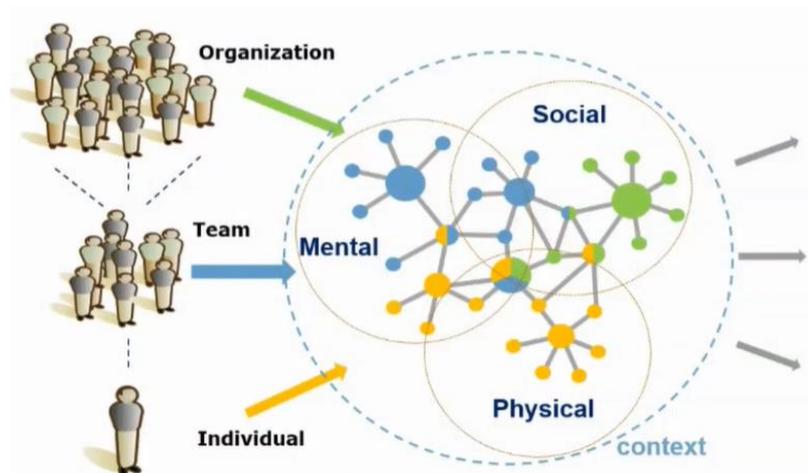


Figure 4. An intervention targeting all levels (TNO)

<sup>18</sup> See: "Thriving from Work: the development of a novel measure of work-related well-being." (see Find out more).

<sup>19</sup> "An innovative application in the method of System Dynamics that captures relative changes in determinants of workplace wellbeing to develop more personalized interventions". (see Find out more).

<sup>20</sup> See for example: PARMENTIER C. – Démarche systémique d'amélioration des conditions de travail. Les pratiques systémiques de Palo-Alto dans une PMI de sous-traitance automobile. *Hygiène & Sécurité du Travail*, 2011, ND 2341- 222-11.

### ***Implementation of participatory methods to develop occupational health in a long-term perspective: case study in Italy<sup>21</sup>***

Sara Calicchia, researcher at INAIL<sup>22</sup>, made a presentation devoted to participatory intervention methods. The matter in question is that of sustainable employability.

The initial observation is that occupational health questions in Italy continue to be too often addressed from the point of view of compliance with legal requirements, whereas what is referred to under the term “promotion of health at work” or “wellbeing at work policy”, involves transcending this framework, adopting a more proactive stance, building a genuine policy to preserve human resources over the long term, which is beneficial for the company and for the country. Italian OSH experts note that when this is implemented, it is generally within a framework that is not perceived as part of the company’s occupational health and safety policy. As such, it is seen, perhaps regrettably, that it is not associated with organisational and collective measures. However, based on what is established in the USA by NIOSH<sup>23</sup> for example, with the “total worker health<sup>24</sup>” approach, or what is emphasized by WHO with its “healthy workplaces programme”<sup>25</sup>, Italian researchers identified two driving elements for interventions clearly situated within the scope of work organisation: the involvement of hierarchy (leadership commitment) and employee commitment. The objective sought is therefore to address health as a whole, which includes considering work conditions in such a way that they are favourable to health and approaching health matters with a long-term perspective and not as simply avoiding manifest effects (accidents and diseases).

The study is based on Amartya Sen’s capability model (Nobel Prize in Economics, 1988, promoter of the economy of wellbeing and development); it draws on a participatory canvas where, for

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<sup>21</sup> *“Participatory methods in intervention research: a case study in Italy.”* (see Find out more).

<sup>22</sup> Italian national institute for insurance against accidents at work. Sustainable employability is also a concern in France, where the matter of job retention, falling within the scope of occupational health, does not refer to sustainable development concepts, more often associated with environmental concerns.

<sup>23</sup> National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (USA)

<sup>24</sup> This is defined as “policies, programs, and practices that integrate protection from work-related safety and health hazards with promotion of injury and illness-prevention efforts to advance worker wellbeing” (2). The TWH approach is integrated and very focused on the organisational context, rather than on more traditional individual efforts to promote and protect health and wellbeing. In addition, workers’ wellbeing is chosen as the main objective of the approach. Within the context of TWH, workers’ wellbeing must be seen as an integrative concept which characterises quality of life regarding an individual’s health and environmental, organisational and psychosocial factors related to work. It is about experiencing positive perceptions and the presence of constructive work conditions which enable workers to thrive and reach their full potential.

<sup>25</sup> See the publication *“Healthy workplaces: a model for action. For employers, workers, policy-makers and practitioners”* (2010). Accessible on WHO’s website. WHO defines a healthy workplace as “one in which workers and managers collaborate to use a continual improvement process to protect and promote the health, safety and wellbeing of all workers and the sustainability of the workplace by considering the following, based on identified needs:

- health and safety concerns in the physical work environment;
- health, safety and wellbeing concerns in the psychosocial work environment, including organisation of work and workplace culture;
- personal health resources in the workplace; and ways of participating in the community to improve the health of workers, their families and other members of the community.”

researchers/practitioners, it is a matter of enabling workers to increase the ability to take action concerning their health and professional context. Concretely, meetings and exchanges are organised with employees and supervisors during which collective intelligence techniques are to:

- analyse the situation and bring up the dissatisfactions/margins for progress regarding the work context,
- then collectively decide on objectives to increase autonomy<sup>26</sup> and the way to achieve them.
- and lastly, implement a concrete action plan.



**Figure 5: Using graphic facilitation to discuss the desirable future of work**

Graphic facilitation techniques (see illustration in Figure 5), among other techniques, are used, and different facilitation methods encourage employees to reflect about the company in the long term, to imagine a transformative future for themselves, embodying psychosocial health and a collective functioning they consider to be healthier. One of the key methods used is that known as “the hero’s journey”<sup>27</sup>. Currently, researchers are assisting the Italian branch of a French multinational company<sup>28</sup> with this approach. It is too soon to conclude whether this mix between research and intervention goals, aimed at building a work environment favourable to health, will have been sustainably productive. Nevertheless, the vision upheld by the Italian researchers is that organisational health, healthy organisation, are most effectively pursued at the same time as the health of each employee concerned. They are also convinced that prospective and creative methods are adapted to these

<sup>26</sup> This association between health and power to act corresponds both to the Amartya Sen model and the meaning of the word “health” as established by the Ottawa Charter: it refers to the extent to which a group or individual can, on the one hand, realise aspirations and satisfy needs, and on the other hand, cope or change with the environment.

<sup>27</sup> This method is also used in France to carry out actions in organisations.

<sup>28</sup> The company Tarkett

objectives, and should be explored in addition to prevention built around the risk assessment or the health effects. In the case of the company presented, the avenues for progress and the prevention solutions which employees and managers agreed on, during this assistance, mainly covered decision-making processes and quality, work life/private life balance, the organisation of work processes and work times, listening to needs and the integration of top-down and bottom-up information. Participatory processes are therefore – as for example in France – used to question and upgrade organisational choices. For researchers, one of the major outcomes of the intervention is to make room for the matter of health in all of the companies' decisions. The example analysed proves that job sustainability is a relevant starting point for progressing towards healthy environments, where listening to employees and supervisors is a priority. Other presentations, such as that by Kerstin Nilsson **(Lund University, Sweden)** address the topic of job retention from the sustainability angle<sup>29</sup>.

### **The effectiveness of the implementation of the right to disconnect to reduce techno-stress**

The presentation by Lina Siegel (Manchester University, United Kingdom) raised the question of the real value, in terms of health, of implementing actions in businesses to ensure that employees actually allow themselves to disconnect from their professional e-mails outside of working hours. The study covered different stress markers in connection with techno-overload, such as mental and physical fatigue, professional life/private life conflicts, the ability to feel detached from work outside working hours. In addition, researchers were able to verify that employees who had been made aware of the right to disconnect and its benefits did indeed connect less outside of working hours. However, it must be noted that the experiment only lasted six weeks and therefore, it cannot be known whether the effects continued over time. The study also identifies the key role of culture change regarding e-mail consultation, which will be facilitated if team managers and senior leaders are themselves exemplary in this matter. The study was conducted in the public sector with workers present onsite; the current situation, with the increase in teleworking agreements, drives the study promoters to want to reproduce the study with workers particularly concerned by teleworking.<sup>30</sup>

With regard to this topic, Eurofound recommends (Dublin, Ireland) taking into account the risks related to work transformations concerning teleworking, new challenges for work–life balance, sustainability of jobs both for people with particular difficulties and for older workers. This can lead to the implementation of specific awareness raising actions focused on new ways of working which integrate gender-related differences into society's expectations addressed to men and women. The right to disconnect deserves attention from OSH experts since monitoring the border between both worlds

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<sup>29</sup> *"Toward a sustainable working life for all ages – the swAge-model"*. (see Find out more).

<sup>30</sup> *"The right to disconnect: An intervention study to examine the effect of constant connectivity through work emails on work-life balance, recovery, burnout and performance"*. (see Find out more).

(work and family life) is partly the responsibility of the company and management, but also partly related to employees' perception concerning what they consider they can or must do.

## CONCLUSION

This conference gave visibility to several topics currently worked upon by researchers and connected with major developments affecting the world of work.

At the same time, the PEROSH network might wish to investigate how its analysis frameworks and study topics could better respond to all these upheavals and anticipate the consequences of global instability and of instability in the world of work in particular, in a context where instability seems to have become the norm.

In some sectors, workers have to comply with work intensification and demand of flexibility due to the changes that the world has been through (for example, for workers in the health sector). The occupational health and safety officer may therefore feel obliged to navigate on a "ridge" in order to meet the increased needs without jeopardising the health of the workers. [We are confident that cooperation within the PEROSH community could contribute to this challenging ambition.](#)

[To find out more](#)

The abstracts in English are available on the conference [website](#).

**On mental health and work**, see Eurofound's report:  
Eurofound (2021), [Living, working and COVID-19 \(Update April 2021\): Mental health and trust decline across EU as pandemic enters another year](#), Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

And more recently: (October 2022). [High risk of depression persists following COVID-19 pandemic: Data behind the mental health crisis](#)

Tóth MD, Ihionvien S, Leduc C MENTUPP Consortium, *et al*  
Evidence for the effectiveness of interventions to reduce mental health related stigma in the workplace: a systematic review.  
*BMJ Open* 2023;**13**:e067126. [doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2022-067126](#)

**On technostress** see:  
Eurofound (2022), [Telework in the EU: Regulatory frameworks and recent updates](#), Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

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