



2021/2098(INI)

4.2.2022

DRAFT REPORT

on Mental Health in the Digital World of Work
(2021/2098(INI))

Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

Rapporteur: Maria Walsh

CONTENTS

Page

| | |
|--|---|
| MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION..... | 3 |
|--|---|

MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on Mental Health in the Digital World of Work (2021/2098(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU),
- having regard to Articles 4, 6, 9, 114, 153, 169 and 191 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), in particular Article 168 thereof,
- having regard to Articles 14, 15, 21, 31, 32 and 35 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,
- having regard to its resolution of 17 April 2020 on EU coordinated action to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences¹,
- having regard to the United Nations Mental Health and Well-being Strategy of 2018,
- having regard to the World Health Organization (WHO) manifesto for a healthy and green COVID-19 recovery,
- having regard to the WHO World Mental Health Day 2021 ‘Mental health care for all: let’s make it a reality’,
- having regard to its resolution of 10 July 2020 on the EU’s public health strategy post COVID-19²,
- having regard to the Commission green paper entitled ‘Improving mental health of the population - Towards a strategy on mental health for the European Union (COM(2005)0484),
- having regard to its resolution on 21 January 2021 on recommendations to the Commission on the right to disconnect³,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021 establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility⁴,
- having regard to the Eurofound report of 9 November 2021 entitled ‘Impact of COVID-19 on young people in the EU’,
- having regard to the Commission’s 2021 report on employment and social developments in Europe entitled ‘Towards a strong social Europe in the aftermath of the

¹ OJ C 316, 6.8.2021, p. 2.

² OJ C 371, 15.9.2021, p. 102.

³ OJ C 456, 10.11.2021, p. 161.

⁴ OJ L 57, 18.2.2021, p. 17.

COVID-19 crisis: Reducing disparities and addressing distributional impacts’,

- having regard to its resolution entitled ‘Fair working conditions, rights and social protection for platform workers – New forms of employment linked to digital development’⁵,
- having regard to Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers⁶,
- having regard to Directive 89/391/EEC on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers at work⁷,
- having regard to Directive 89/654/EEC concerning the minimum safety and health requirements for the workplace⁸,
- having regard to Directive 90/270/EEC on the minimum safety and health requirements for work with display screen equipment⁹,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 28 June 2021 entitled ‘The EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2021-2027 – Occupational safety and health in a changing world of work’ (COM(2021)0323),
- having regard to the report of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) of 2020 entitled ‘Preventing musculoskeletal disorders in a diverse workforce: risk factors for women, migrants and LGBTI workers’,
- having regard to the EU-OSHA report of 2011 entitled ‘Mental health promotion in the workplace - a good practice report’,
- having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee of 12 December 2012 entitled ‘European Year of Mental Health - Better work, better quality of life’,
- having regard to the 2021 opinion of the Expert Panel on Effective Ways of Investing in Health entitled ‘Supporting Mental Health of Health Workforce and other Essential Workers’,
- having regard to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) health policy study of 2021 entitled ‘A New Benchmark for Mental Health Systems: Tackling the Social and Economic Costs of Mental Ill Health’,
- having regard to EU-OSHA report of 2014 entitled ‘Psychosocial risks in Europe: Prevalence and strategies for prevention’,

⁵ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2021)0385.

⁶ OJ L 188, 12.7.2019, p. 79.

⁷ OJ L 183, 29.6.1989, p. 1.

⁸ OJ L 393, 30.12.1989, p. 1.

⁹ OJ L 156, 21.6.1990, p. 14.

- having regard to the Willis Towers Watson 2021 Employee Experience Survey,
 - having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (A9 0000/2022),
- A. whereas the right to physical and mental health is a fundamental human right; whereas the WHO defines mental health as ‘a state of mental well-being in which people cope well with the many stresses of life, can realise their own potential, can function productively and fruitfully, and are able to contribute to their communities’¹⁰;
 - B. whereas the pandemic has changed working conditions for many workers in Europe, highlighting new and current issues related to well-being in the workplace;
 - C. whereas the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected the mental well-being of those facing financial uncertainty, as well as of vulnerable populations, including ethnic minorities, the LGBTI+ community, the elderly, persons with disabilities and young people;
 - D. whereas before the pandemic it was estimated that 25 % of EU citizens would experience a mental health problem in their lifetime¹¹;
 - E. whereas workplace issues that affect mental health include job burnout, harassment, violence, stigma and discrimination; whereas one in four European workers feel work has a negative impact on their health¹²;
 - F. whereas the costs of mental ill health are estimated at more than 4 % of GDP across all EU Member States; whereas the cost of work-related depression has been estimated at EUR 620 billion a year, resulting in EUR 240 billion lost economic output¹³;

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

1. Regrets that during the COVID-19 pandemic mental health has been affected by many factors including education, health, economic, employment and social inclusion policies and poverty; calls for mental health to urgently be tackled by cross-sectional policies;
2. Stresses that the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent economic crisis have caused a huge strain on the well-being of EU citizens, with higher rates of stress, anxiety and depression;
3. Calls for the EU institutions and Member States to recognise the high levels of mental health issues across the EU and commit to actions regulating and implementing a world

¹⁰ [WHO, *Mental Health: strengthening our response* \(Fact sheet, No. 220\), 2018.](#)

¹¹ [European Network for Workplace Health Promotion, *A Guide for Employers. To Promote Mental Health in the Workplace*, 2011.](#)

¹² [Eurofound, *6th European Working Condition Survey*, 2017.](#)

¹³ [Opinion of the Expert Panel on Effective Ways of Investing in Health \(EXPH\): ‘Supporting mental health of health workforce and other essential workers’, 2021.](#)

of work which protects workers' mental health and social protection rights;

4. Regrets the fact that the TEU allows for more EU action on health than has actually been taken; considers mental health to be the next health crisis and that the Commission must examine all relevant possibilities to tackle this, including the urgent creation of an EU Mental Health Strategy;
5. Recalls that the pandemic demonstrated the need for coordinated EU-level action to respond to health emergencies, revealing shortcomings in foresight, including in preparedness and response tools;
6. Applauds the frontline staff who sacrificed their own well-being to perform life-saving work during the pandemic; calls for Member States to ensure that they have immediate access to adequate mental health resources;

The digital transition and mental health

7. Recognises that employment can provide individuals with purpose and a sense of identity; emphasises the positive relationship between good mental health and work productivity;
8. Recalls that proactive approaches to digitalisation, such as flexible work hours and establishing employee assistance programmes, can help to mitigate work-related stress; notes that artificial intelligence systems may provide further options for this;
9. Welcomes Directive (EU) 2019/1158 on work-life balance for parents and carers as it provides flexibility and alleviates work-related issues; stresses however, that women continue to be disproportionately affected;
10. Notes that the shift to teleworking during the pandemic and the flexibility it provided to employees could improve work-life balance; encourages companies to provide clear and transparent rules on teleworking arrangements;
11. Considers the right to disconnect essential to ensuring the mental well-being of employees; reiterates its calls on the Commission to propose legislation requiring line managers to set minimum requirements for remote working;
12. Notes that the Directives on the minimum safety and health requirements in the workplace and for work display screen equipment may open up opportunities for improving the protection of workers using digital devices, including platform workers;

Workplace health and safety

13. Is concerned about the disconnect between current policy on mental health and attitudes in the workplace creating stigma; emphasises that due to stigma and discrimination, employees often feel unable to discuss mental health issues; recognises that employees who return after mental health leave are often poorly accommodated; calls for workplaces to provide clear information about their in-house mental health support services;

14. Believes that the measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers are not effective for the assessment and management of psychosocial risks; calls on the Commission to recognise anxiety, depression and burnout as occupational diseases, to establish mechanisms for their prevention and the reintegration into the workplace of those affected and to move from individual-level actions to a work organisation approach¹⁴;
15. Calls on the Commission to propose, in consultation with the social partners, a directive on psychosocial risks and well-being at work aiming to effectively prevent psychosocial risks in the workplace; considers that occupational safety and health prevention policies should also involve employees in the identification and prevention of psychosocial risks;
16. Considers that it is essential for managers to be provided with the psychosocial training required to adapt to work organisation practices and foster a deep understanding of negative mental health and the workplace;

A modern world of work for healthy and resilient labour

17. Underlines that given the lack of sufficient mental health support and policies in the workplace, employees often have to rely on services provided by non-governmental organisations (NGOs); calls for workplaces to ensure employees have access to in-house mental health support and remedies;
18. Encourages the Commission to launch education and awareness initiatives on mental health in the workplace; urges the Commission to make 2023 the EU Year of Good Mental Health to achieve this;
19. Recognises that the lack of statistics on the prevalence of mental health issues within the workplace undermines the need for urgent intervention; calls for Eurostat to gather statistics which include mental ill health and its negative impacts;
20. Is concerned that entrepreneurs and SMEs in particular are in need of support to promote mental health awareness in the workplace and calls for EU-level efforts to assist them in risk assessment and the implementation of good practices;
21. Points out that 64 % of young people between 18 and 34 were at risk of depression in 2021 due to lack of employment, financial and educational prospects, as well as loneliness and social isolation; calls on the Commission to address the disruption in access to the labour market which has put young people at greater risk of experiencing mental health issues¹⁵;

o

o o

¹⁴ European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (2021), *Telework and health risks in the context of the covidoid-19 pandemic: evidence from the field and policy implications*, 2021.

¹⁵ [OECD, Supporting young people's mental health through the COVID-19 crisis, 2021](#), and [European Youth Forum, 'Beyond Lockdown: The 'Pandemic Scar' on Young People'](#).

22. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.

Explanatory Statement

This report addresses the long-overdue political recognition of the crisis we face with citizens' mental health in the EU. Lack of efficient mental health services, supports and investments across Member States has resulted in pervasive mental health issues and alarming suicide rates over decades. Even before COVID-19 pandemic, the multitude of citizens affected by mental health were disturbing, due in large part to the disconnect between education, health, economics, employment, social inclusion and poverty. Therefore, there is a strong need for a comprehensive EU Mental Health Strategy, which takes a cross-sectional approach to mental health issues.

The pandemic had an incredibly dramatic impact on the lives of millions of Europeans, compounding the effects of mental health, resulting in higher rates of stress, anxiety and depression. With suicide being the second-highest cause of death of citizens under the age of nineteen, mental health is our current European health crisis. It is time to take these issues seriously and examine what EU action can be taken. Ignoring this call of action will jeopardize our younger generations, in particular, who are our future leaders and workforce.

The current EU-level legislation and policies in this area do not address the growing crisis of mental health amongst our workforce. With many citizens now spending an excessive portion of their lives due to the pandemic 'connected' to work - remotely, this has and will continue to contribute to negative mental health, through job burnout, harassment, violence, stigma and discrimination. It is of utmost importance that workers can expect a proper level of protection for both their physical and mental wellbeing.

What seemed impossible previously has resulted in different models of work, for employer and employee. Advantages of increased flexibility of teleworking and the Work-Life Balance Directive favour some, but there is a need to update the current legislation on occupational safety and health legislation to respond to the new realities of the digital age. It should not be left to 'some' companies and countries facilitating good mental health practices, we need to ensure collective mental health work practices are put in place to signpost our workforce.

The economic costs for Member States of mental ill health cannot be ignored, not only financing reactive care but also the lost economic output when workers are unable to participate in driving an ambitious labour force. The principle of prevention at the workplace must be formally integrated in policies at EU, national and company level.

Ultimately, there is an increased momentum for strong actions to be taken to ensure better mental health at work. This requires appropriate education and awareness initiatives on mental health, training for employers and better research and data collection at the European level. To achieve these aims, an EU Year of Good Mental Health in 2023, would ensure that the EU focuses on the prevalent mental health issues our citizens face.

Finally, ensuring that all mental health supports and services available within the workplace are clearly signposted, will alleviate issues of stigma and discrimination. Fostering workplace environments that are supportive both before and after mental health issues are crucial to successfully preventing mental ill health. There is still far more we can do at both Member State and EU-level to protect our workers and promote the importance of positive mental health.