



SwitchOff

Supporting worker's well
being during remote work

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Consolidated Report



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MINDSHIFT
Talent Advisory



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Consortium

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Project Information

SwitchOff Consortium is constituted by seven (7) partners (P1: Akademia Humanistyczno-Ekonomiczna w Lodzi/ Poland, P2: University of Verona/ Italy, P3: Institute of Development LTD/ Cyprus, P4: MindShift Talent Advisory/ Portugal, P5: HAPPSY/ Greece, P6: CARDET/ Cyprus, P7: CREA/ Spain) from five (6) different countries (Poland, Italy, Cyprus, Portugal, Greece and Spain). The Project duration is 24 months (01/11/21 - 01/11/2023).

The SwitchOff project aims at helping **managers and VET trainers acquire the appropriate competencies and knowledge on how to facilitate and promote recovery in the workplace** and **help teleworkers disconnect from work and restore their personal resources** (emotional, cognitive, physical) at the end of their working day. A toolkit addressing the effective use of digital technologies and other practices for fostering employees' ability to disconnect from work during non-working hours will be developed. In addition, a Training Programme for teleworkers, HR Professionals and managers will be created, focusing on best practices, strategies, policies, and procedures through managers and HR professionals can support their worker's right and effort to disengage from work at the end of their working day. The resources will be easily and freely accessible to all those interested and their adaptability will contribute to proper exploitation and sustainability beyond the project's life cycle.

These objectives will be pursued through the development of the following main results:

- 1. Training Package for HR Professionals and managers:** development of an innovative quality training material, resources and OERs for HR practitioners and managers to promote remote worker's ability to disconnect from work. The development of this training package also aims to build HR professionals and managers' capacity on the right of employees to disconnect, learn the threats of not disconnecting, and be introduced to best practices and evidence-based strategies and tips in order to be able to create the appropriate conditions to promote employees' right to disconnect.

- 2. SwitchOff Toolkit for teleworkers, HR Professionals and managers:** development of a practical and innovative toolkit that will support companies, SMEs, managers, HR professionals, trainers and remote workers in adopting best practices for teleworking and effectively using digital technologies and ICTs. The toolkit will comprise resources for learning material, case studies, practical tips, and a collection of OERs activities.
- 3. Platform/ e-learning platform (including self-evaluation tool):** development of an innovative quality learning material, resources and OERs for HR practitioners and managers to promote remote worker's ability to disconnect from work, as well as to provide an accessible to all remote workers E-learning Platform. The objective of this platform will be to help managers and remote workers learn how to effectively use digital technologies to foster psychological detachment, and their ability to disconnect and switch-off from work. Ultimately, this can help remote workers from feeling 'used-up' at the end of their working day and reduce outcomes relating to insufficient recovery. The e-learning platform will also include the self-evaluation tool for remote workers and managers to assess their current practices and behaviours in relation to disconnecting from work.

Introduction to the Report

The purpose of this report is to present the findings of the primary research conducted at national level by all project partners, in order to explore the needs of the target groups of this project. Each country's results were captured in national reports, the findings of which are summarized below.

The primary research at national level was conducted by administering an online survey, but also by conducting focus groups by all partners in order to identify the needs of the project's target groups (teleworkers, HR professionals, managers).

Their needs were explored in relation to the challenges they face in terms of disconnection from work, their current use of ICT, the practices they have in place that help them to detach from work, their awareness of the debate that is developing at European and local level on the right to disconnect from work, as well as the relevant legislation and other issues that concern them and are relevant to the purpose of the project.

This consolidated report will be a starting point for the development of a toolkit for teleworkers, HR professionals and managers. More specifically, this toolkit will be a step-by-step guide for the effective use of digital technologies and other practices (e.g. boundary setting) based on empirical evidence for fostering employees psychological detachment, and ability to disconnect and switch-off from work during non-working hours. The guide will contain two main modules. Module 1 will aim to support managers, team leaders, HR professionals in adopting best practices, strategies and also adjusting/or implementing organizational policies that will support their employees' "right to disconnect. Module 2 will aim to provide remote workers with the necessary tips for effectively using ICTs and practices on how to psychologically detach from work.

The findings collected from the online survey and the focus groups conducted by all partners at national level are presented below. A total of 182 people from all partner



countries (Greece, Cyprus, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Portugal, Poland) participated in the online survey and 111 people participated in the focus groups conducted.

This report initially presents the secondary research results (“desk research”) by providing an overview of the context of workplace well-being at the National level. Specifically, the sections provide a brief presentation of National policies and initiatives, some key recent findings from relevant scientific articles, relevant professional articles from HR Associations and online blogs, formal national statistics and data, description of successful national practices and best-case scenarios, as well as relevant national and EU projects.

POLAND

Introduction

The pandemic situation has radically changed the employers' approach to working from home. It is becoming an increasingly common form of work in many organizations. More and more employees are consciously opting to work from home, as they view it as a more effective way of combining career with family life. However, working from home is often an obstacle in maintaining a work-life balance. Different areas of life often get mixed up, household and domestic matters can make it difficult to perform professional duties. Employees often lack the discipline to effectively perform work tasks at home and they might find it difficult to stick to a daily schedule and often the implementation of work tasks extends throughout the day. Finally, the work of an employee at home is often subject to abuse on the part of the employer. Supervisors might occasionally contact their subordinates outside of their normal working hours and may assign them more tasks without monitoring the time employees need to spend to complete these tasks. As a result, employees might end up working more hours and be unable to disconnect not only physically but also psychologically from work. For this reason, it is important for organizations to create formal policies regulating work from home commissioned to their employees. The provisions of EU and national law are important here, but also the work regulations of individual companies. Collections of good practices should also be created, which could be a base of information for employees who, by their own choice or by the company's decision, work from home.

Policies and national/EU initiatives on the ‘right to disconnect’ National policies & initiatives

The amendment to the Polish Labor Code is related to the adjustment of Polish law to the following directives of the European Parliament and of the Council (EU):

- Directive (EU) 2019/1152 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on transparent and predictable working conditions in the European Union
- Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers.

Below we present the most important changes in the regulations that will result from the amendment to the Polish Labor Code. Polish regulations on remote work are included in the amendment to the Labor Code. The Sejm adopted this amendment on January 10, 2023. It will enter into force in the Labor Code from March 1, 2023. These provisions are to regulate remote work permanently, and not just for the period of the pandemic, as has been the case so far. The new law provides employees with the option of full-time or hybrid remote work. According to Polish law, "Remote work according to the regulations is the performance of duties in whole or in part in a place indicated by the employee and each time agreed with the employer (submission of an application is necessary), including at the employee's place of residence, in particular using means of direct remote communication."

With the consent of the organization, an employee may be eligible and permitted to work remotely during pregnancy, when raising a child up to the age of four or if they are taking care of a family member.

The employer has obligations towards an employee working remotely in the form of:

- provide the equipment necessary for work,
- covering the costs of electricity, internet used for work,
- providing necessary training or technical support,
- paying the equivalent for using your own equipment for business purposes.

The employer also has the option of checking an employee working remotely in terms of:

- place of work (the employee declares the place of remote work and the employer has the right to check whether he/she is staying in this place),
- safety and hygiene (e.g. the employer has the right to check the employee's sobriety while performing remote work)
- work or data security.

The general outline of the new Polish law on remote work in no way regulates the actual care for the well-being of employees working remotely and creates formal grounds to ensure work-home balance. Practical solutions related to ensuring a balance between work and personal life are on the side of employers. Companies create internal policies regulating employee behavior related to work-life balance, e.g. they do not allow taking a company computer home, etc.

National/EU Practices and Best-case scenarios

Work-life balance good practices in Poland for remote workers are still scarce. In many organizations, the opportunity to work from home is considered a privilege. Company policies regulating the behavior of employees working remotely are needed. It seems important to pay attention to the monitoring of working time, because remote employees often work more hours and do not control the time of work, work is often intertwined with professional duties. Remote work is often associated with the loneliness of an employee who has limited social contacts, which also requires attention from the organization. It is also necessary to regulate communication with employees working remotely, it often happens that superiors contact them outside the specified working hours. Remote work, often working at a computer, also causes problems related to the skeletal system. Employees working remotely are often completely deprived of movement and physical activity, which poses a threat to their health. It is therefore essential that companies implement prevention programs for both mental and physical health. Examples of interesting activities in the area of caring for the well-being of employees that can be transferred as practices of disconnecting remote employees from work are:

- Credit Suisse: financial support for bottom-up employee networks in organizing thematic workshops or meetings with experts, such meetings may also address work-life balance for remote workers.
- Santander: 1) organization of mindfulness training for employees 2) the holistic "Be Healthy" program, which introduces activities and educational activities aimed at supporting mental and physical health, building successful relationships, and financial education.
- Bouygues Immobilier Poland: organization of a series of webinars on supporting employees in the area of: "mind, body, spirit and emotions"
- Ergo Hestia: "OdNOWa" a wellbeing program supporting employees in their return to health after the autumn-winter period.
- A4BEE: integration trips without computers or without access to the Internet, combined with active recreation (mountain trips, team orienteering, kayaking, etc.).

National report based on key primary findings - online questionnaire & Focus group

30 people from enterprises based in Poland took part in the survey. All respondents declared that they were employed in middle and senior management positions, one respondent indicated that he was the owner of the company. The figures below present the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Figure 1. Gender

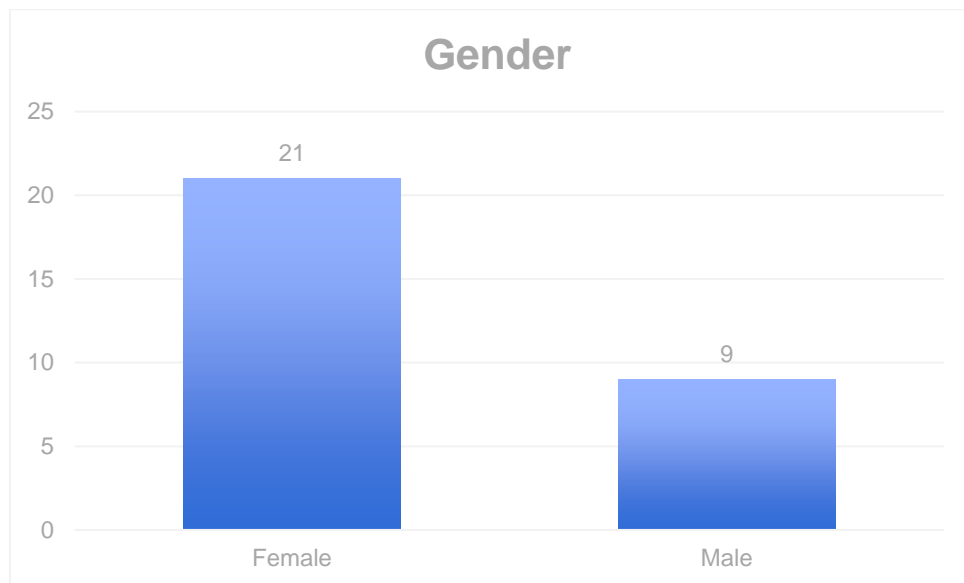


Figure 2. Age

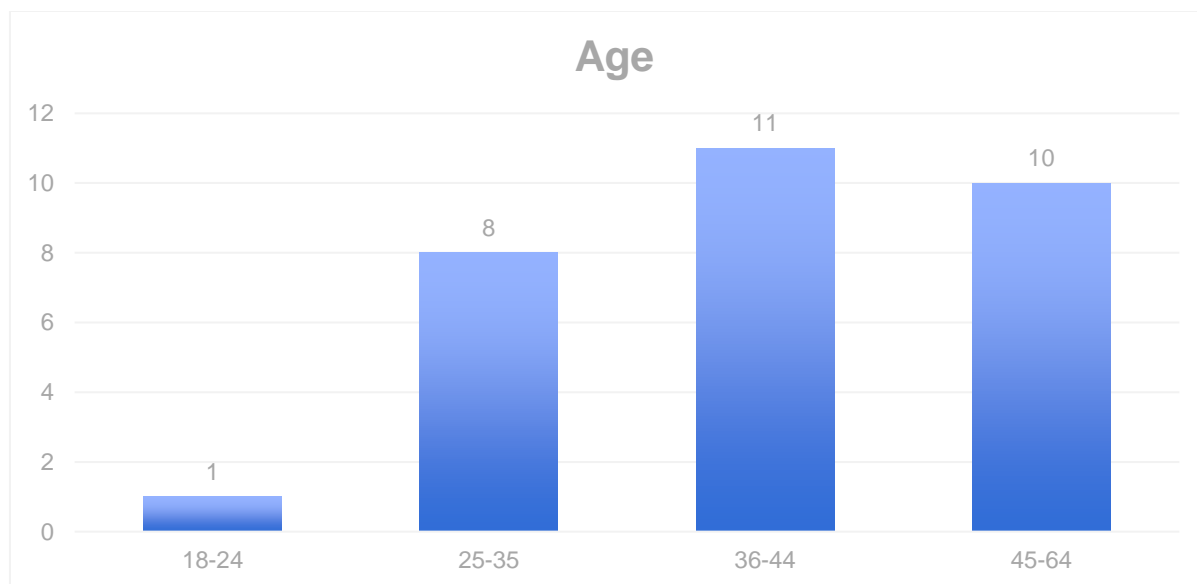


Figure 3. Level of education

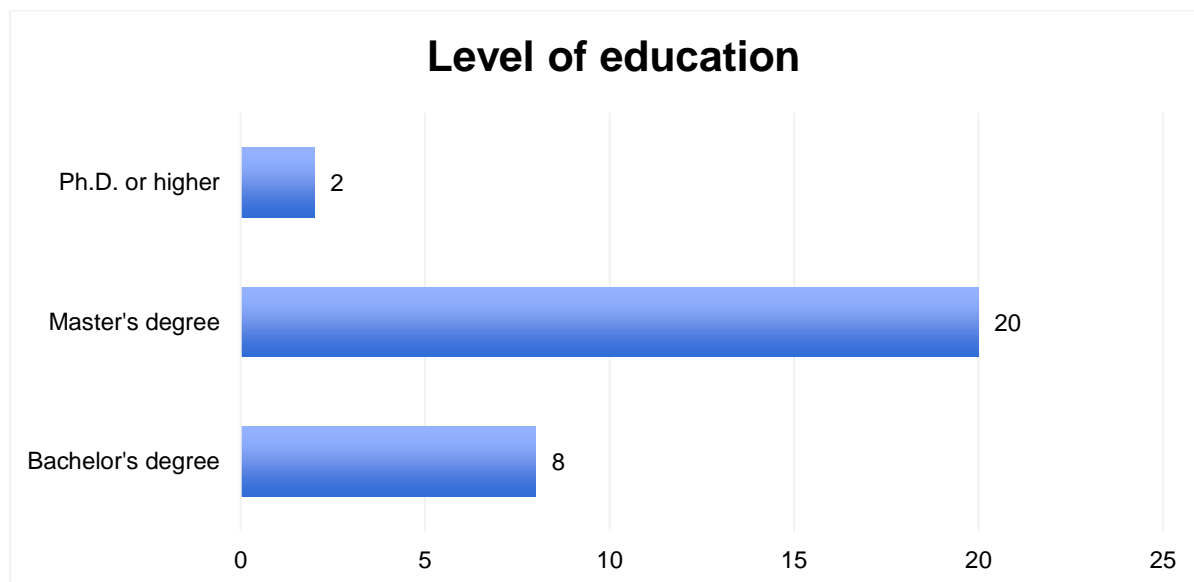


Figure 4. Seniority

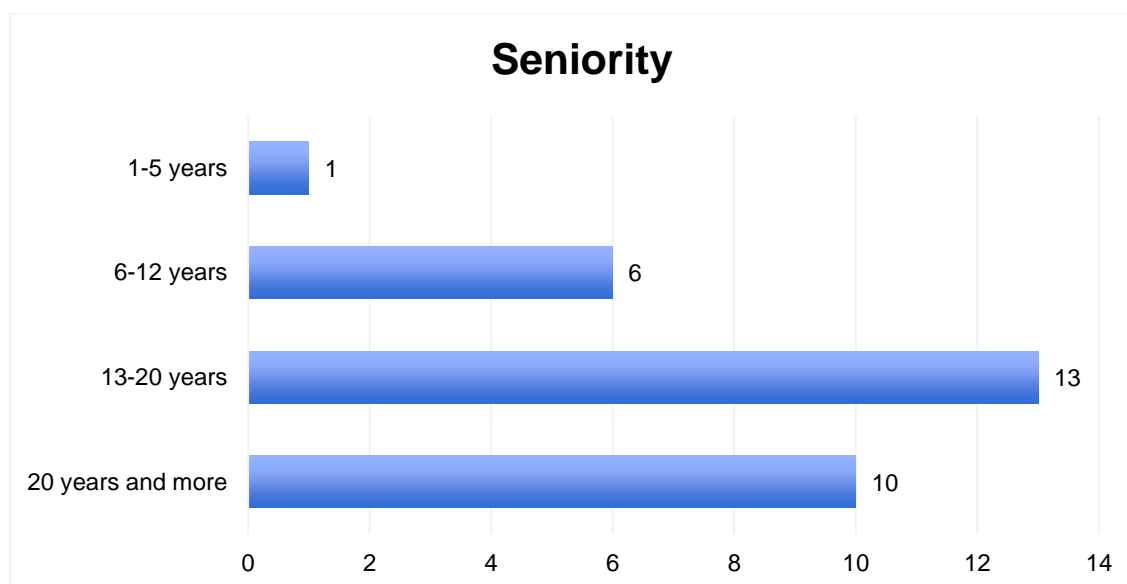
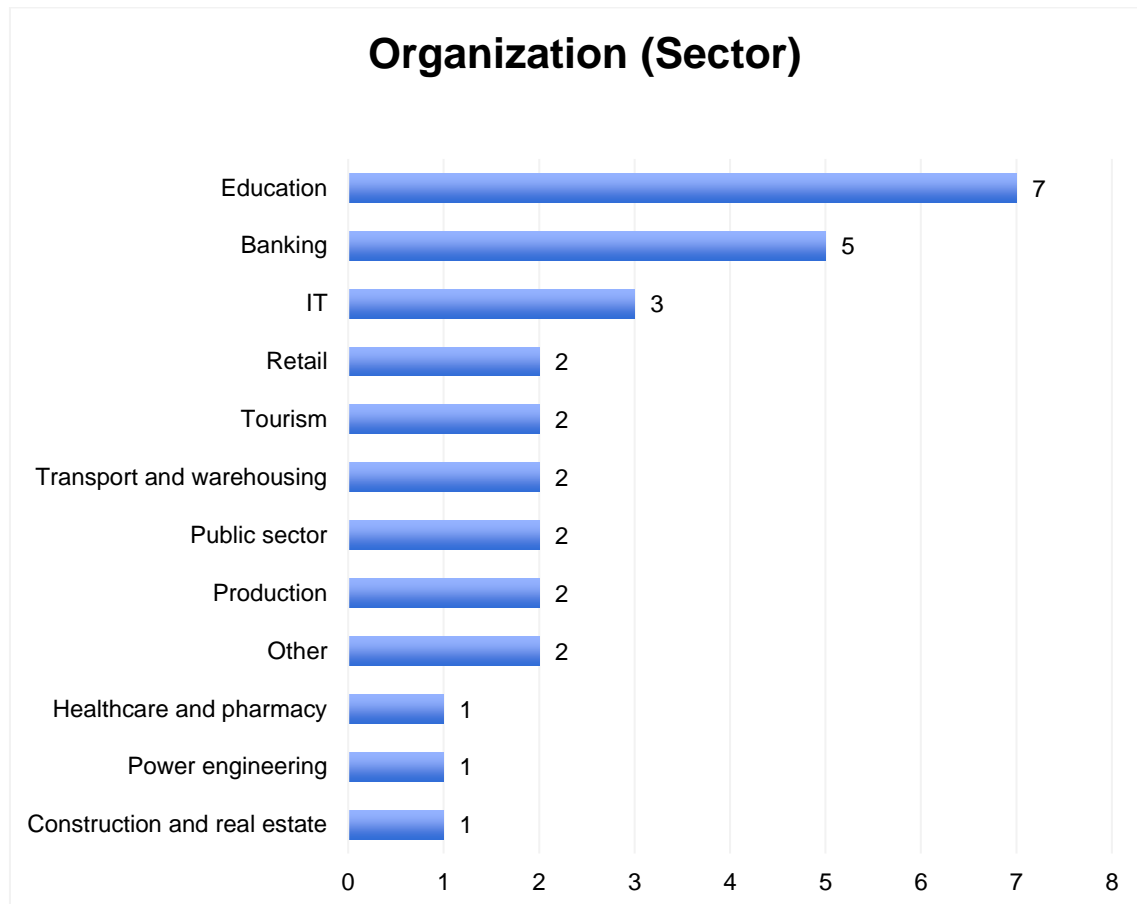


Figure 5. Organisation (Sector)



27 respondents declared that they work remotely, 3 people did not declare remote work. The respondents also indicated the number of days they spend on remote work. The figures below present information on the performance of remote work by the respondents.

Figure 6. Are you working remotely?

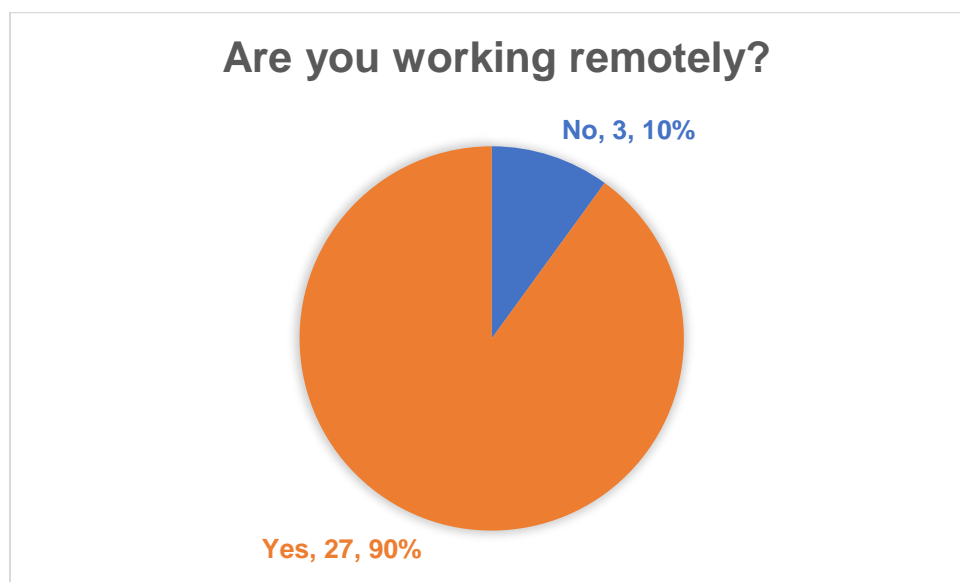


Figure 7. How many days per week do you work remotely?

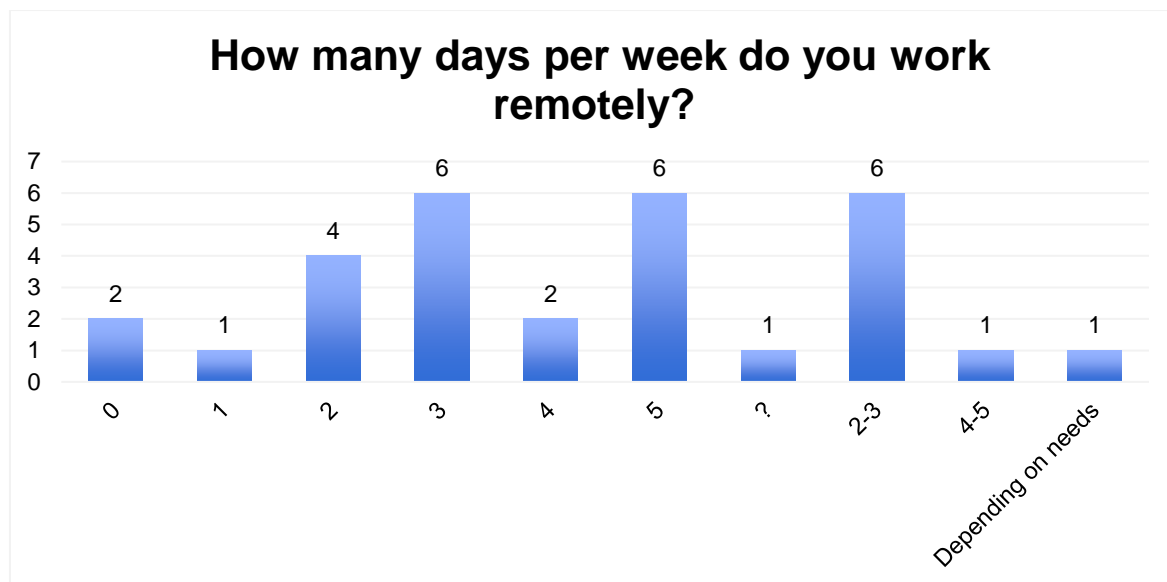


Figure 8. Has Covid-19 impacted the remote work policies of your organization

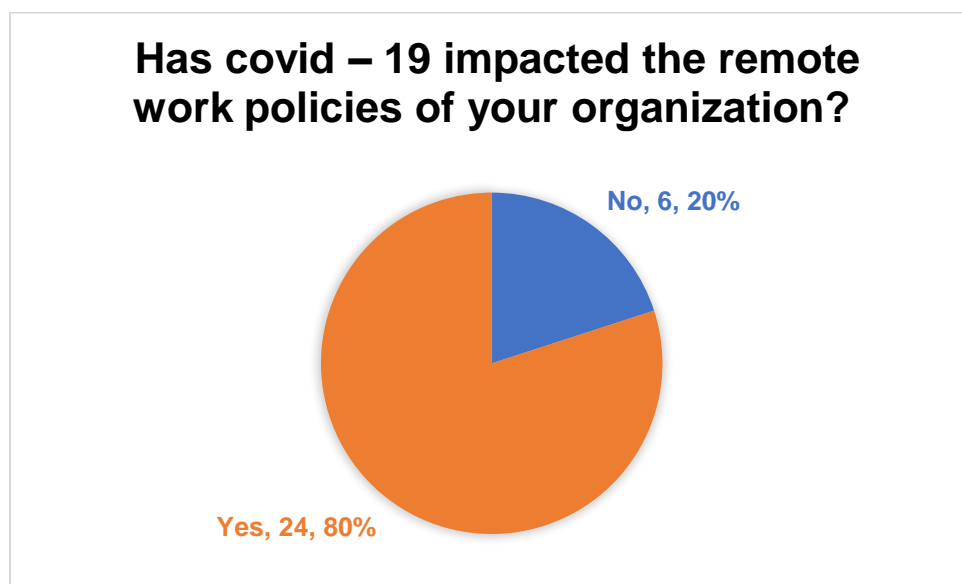
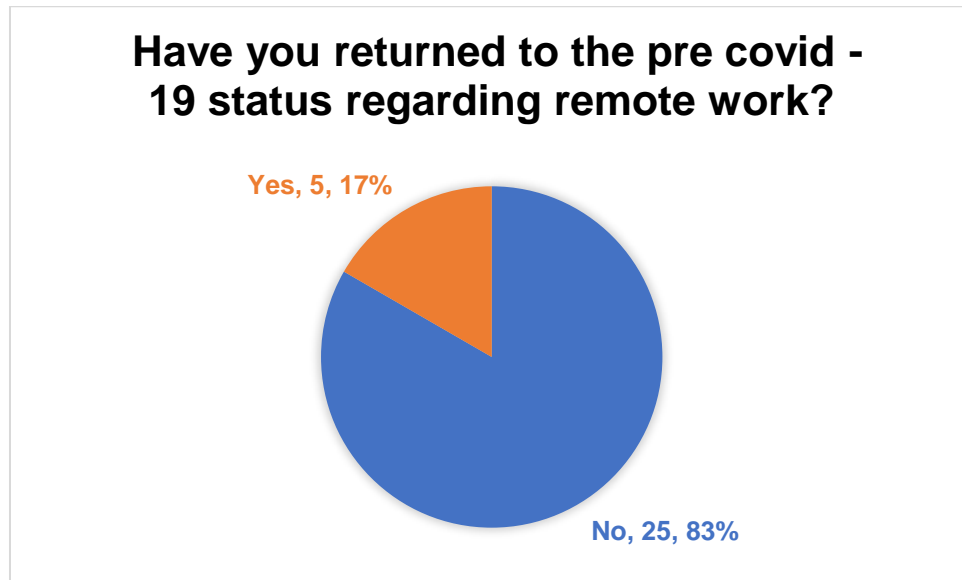


Figure 9. Have you returned to the pre Covid-19 status regarding remote work



The respondents also commented on the differences they see in their work after the end of the Covid 19 pandemic:

- "More activity takes place online. There is more permission and acceptance for online gatherings and meetings. However, many activities have returned to stationary mode. My job is a combination of online and stationary work."
- "Before there was no possibility to work remotely - possibility of hybrid operation - my case is individual."
- "I can work remotely for a whole week due to a change of residence. Other employees work remotely 3 or 4 times a week, on other days they work from the office, which was reduced during the pandemic."
- "More remote work (obligation to be in the office 2 times a week), earlier work in the office 5 days a week - more time to work from home."
- "More of the training I conduct is online and not in the classroom."
- "I meet with clients more and more often online; I deal with more official matters via the Internet I also worked remotely before covid home office is allowed."
- "Many companies, not only the one in which he works but also those with whom he cooperates, have understood that many issues can be solved remotely and see huge benefits and savings in it."
- "At the moment, remote work is available on selected days under the new guidelines resulting from the Labor Code Before Covid-19, I didn't work remotely, only stationary."
- "Remote work to a greater extent - full-time remote work - greater openness of the employer to remote work, e.g. meetings - we do part of the work in the office, but you can also work from home - one day of remote work per week for paperwork."
- "I still carry out some tasks online, e.g. meeting with the team, some classes - before the pandemic, I worked partly remotely, now there are even more remote days - nothing it's no different, even in covid I didn't work remotely."

The following figures are a presentation of the respondents' statements on disconnection from work and the factors that are associated with this phenomenon.

Figure 10. Are you aware of the current EU and local level discussions on the right to disconnect

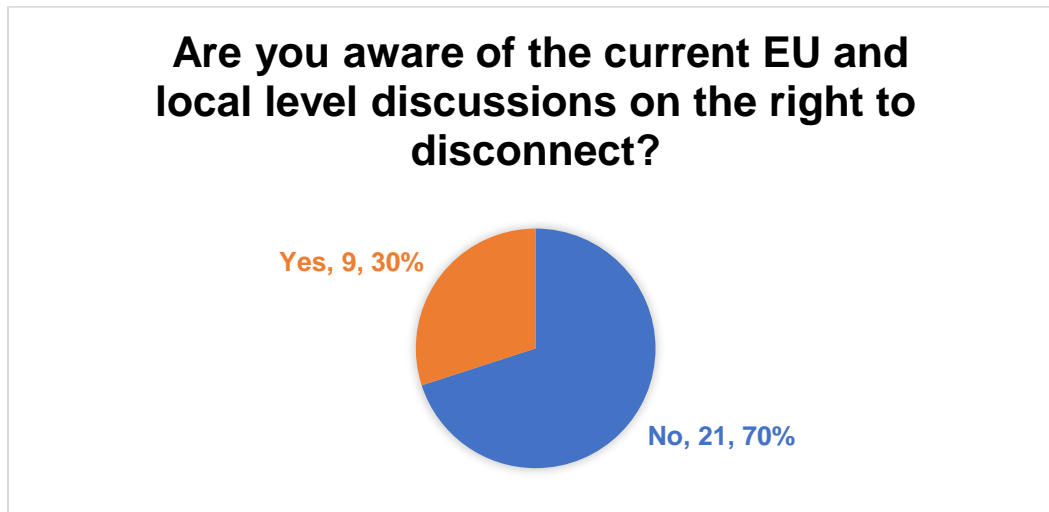


Figure 11. The EU legal framework that defines and regulates the right to disconnect can set boundaries between work and personal life

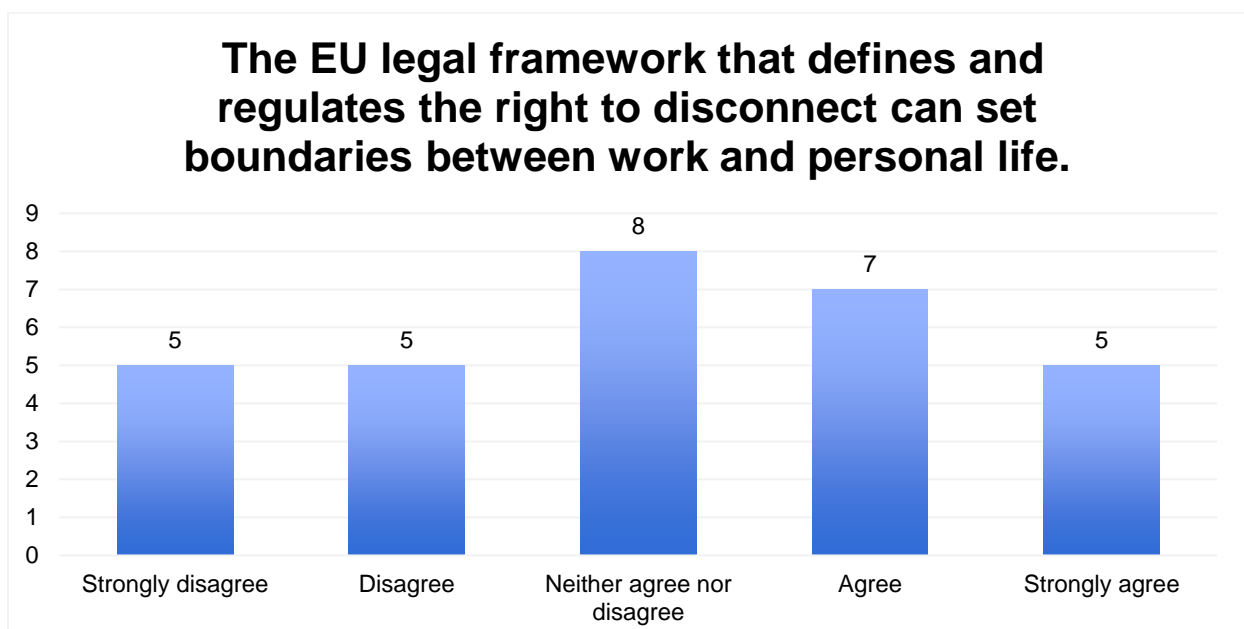


Figure 12. How often, as a manager do you encourage your team to disconnect from work

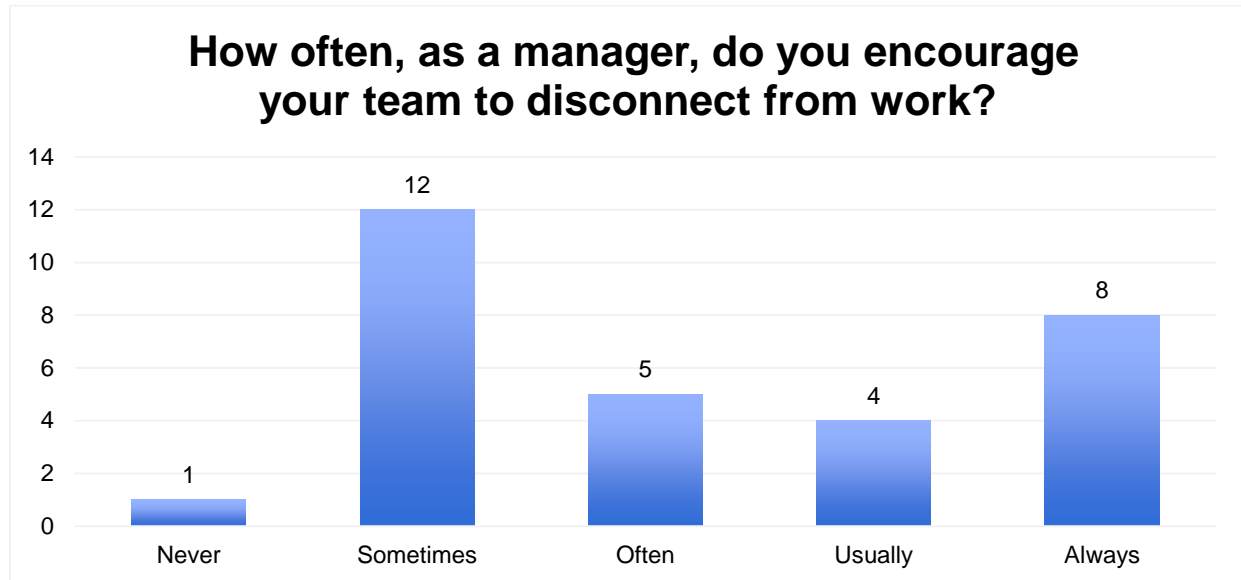


Figure 13. How often as a manager do you expect your team to be available outside of normal working hours

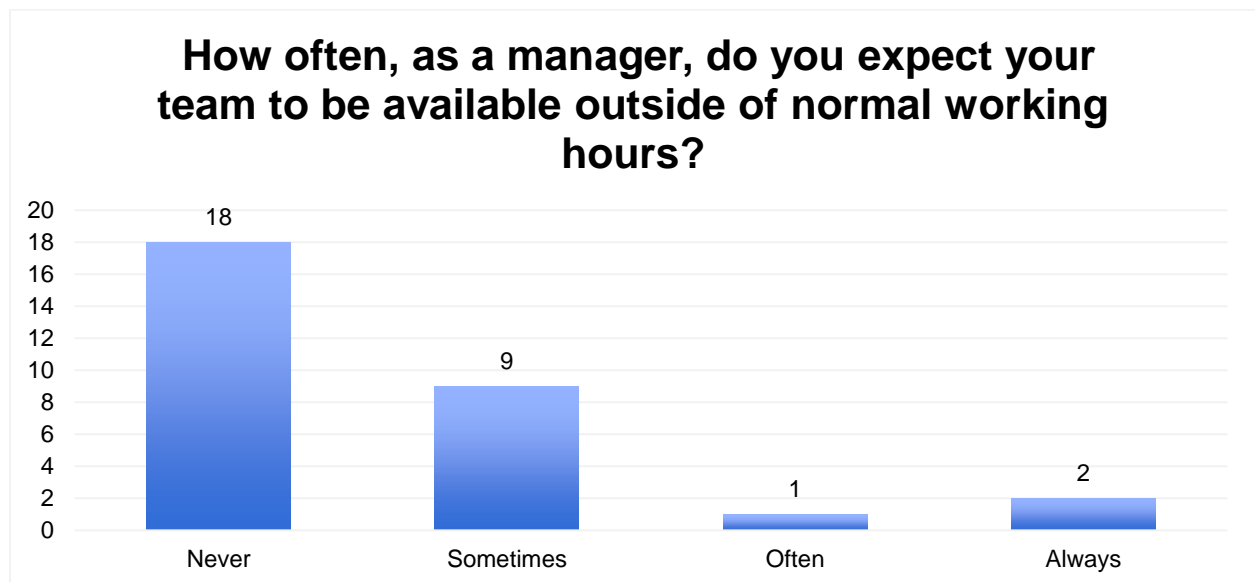


Figure 14. How important is it to you to not be occupied by work related duties during off job time

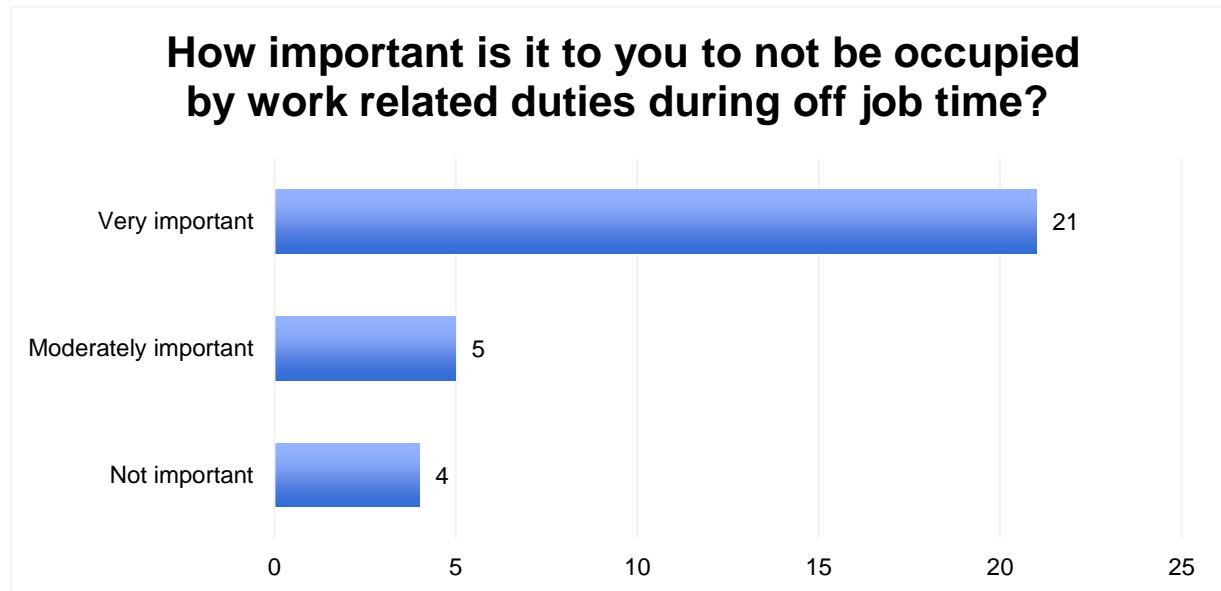


Figure 15. Although physically away from work I do not manage to disengage myself mentally

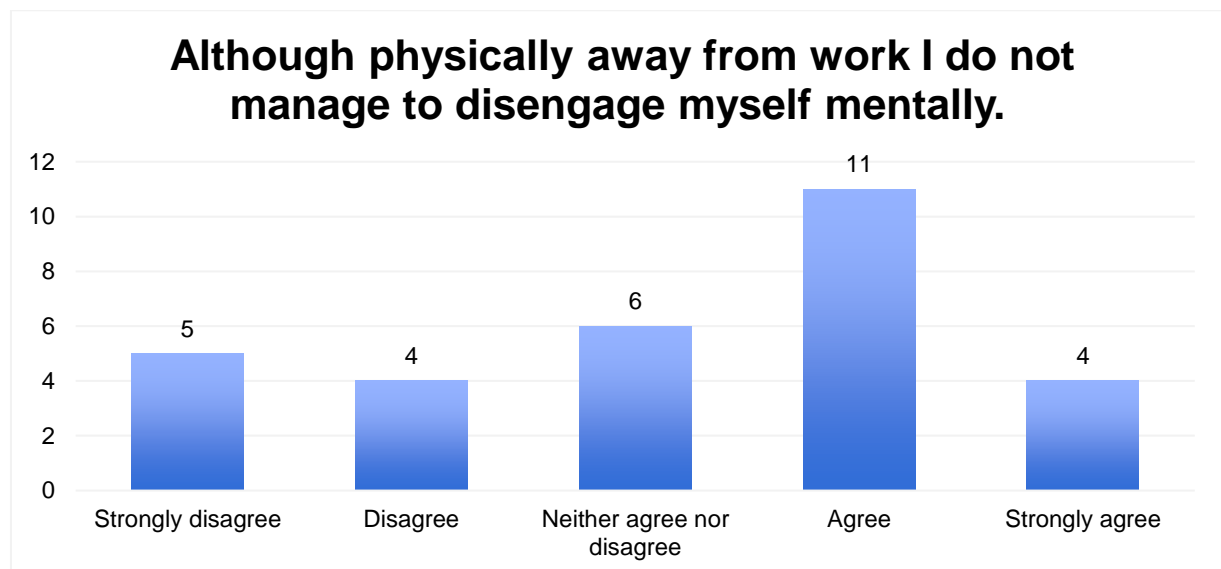


Figure 16. The right to disconnect can contribute significantly to a better work-life balance

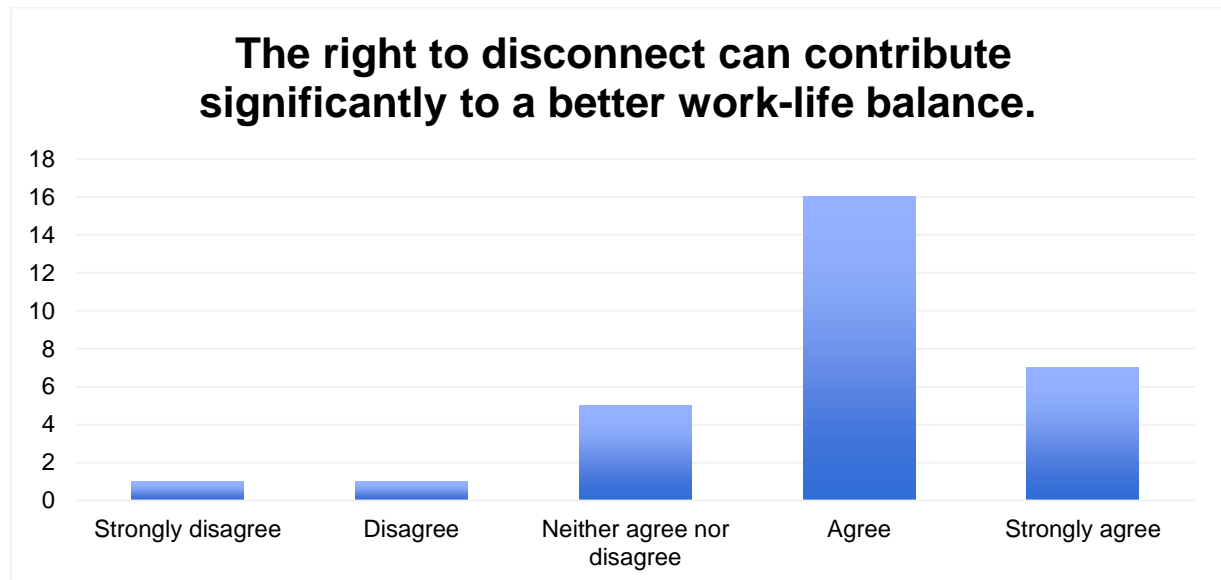


Figure 17. I believe I have the right to disconnect from work after normal business hours

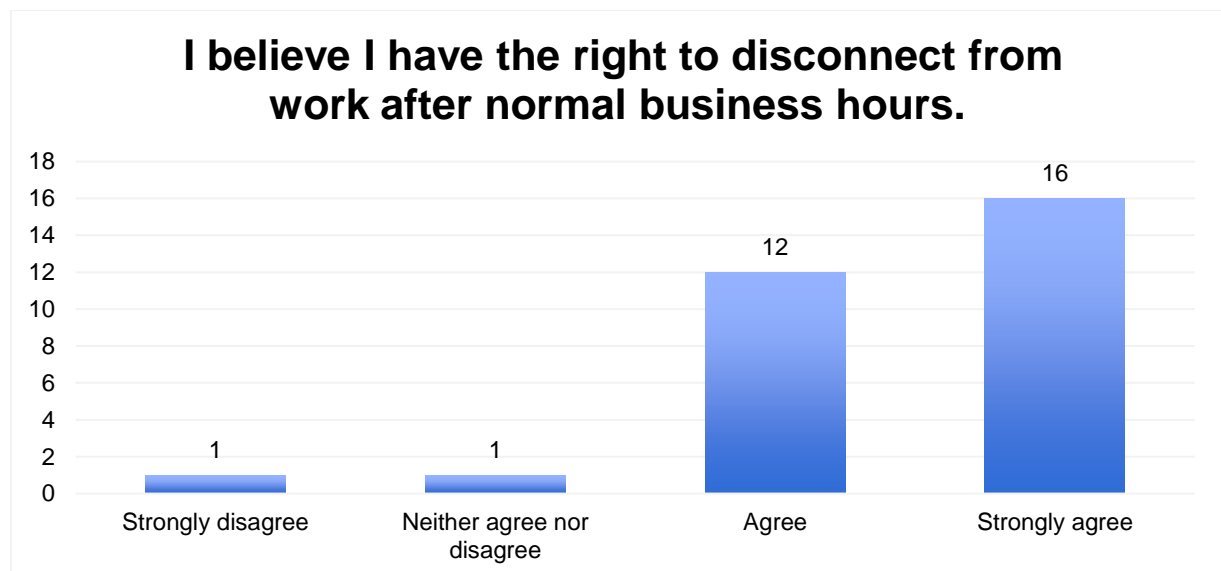


Figure 18. I am concerned that if I disconnect from work after normal business hours, I will face repercussions

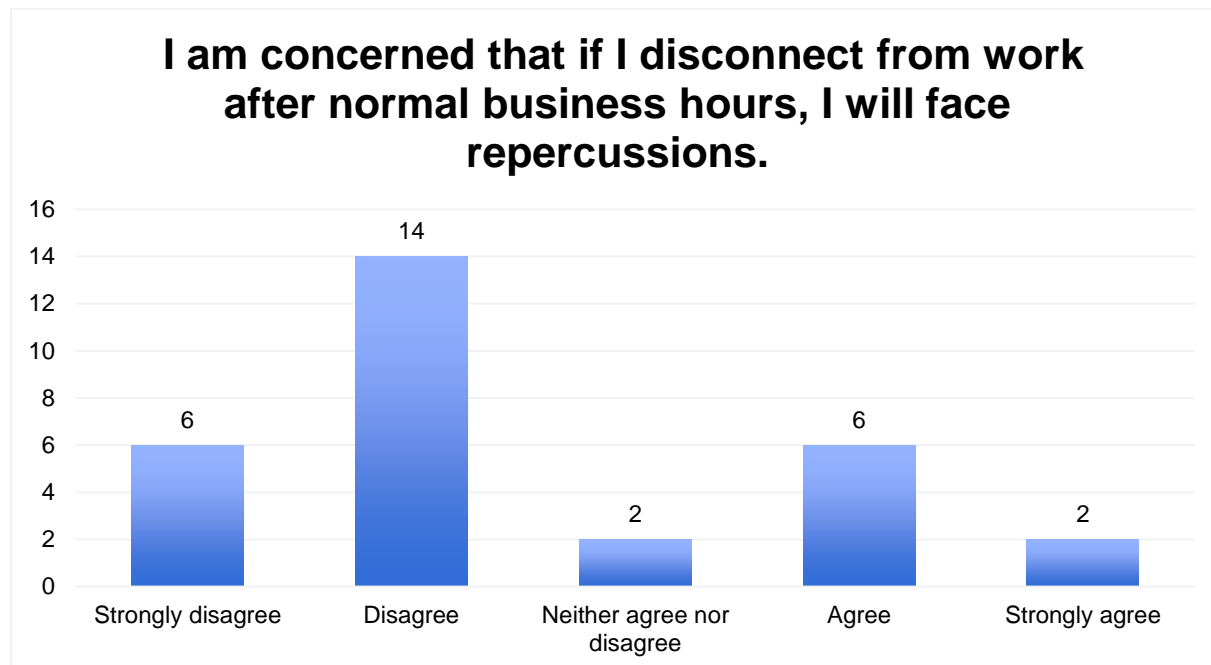


Figure 19. Outside of normal business hours I feel obligated to be available and responsive

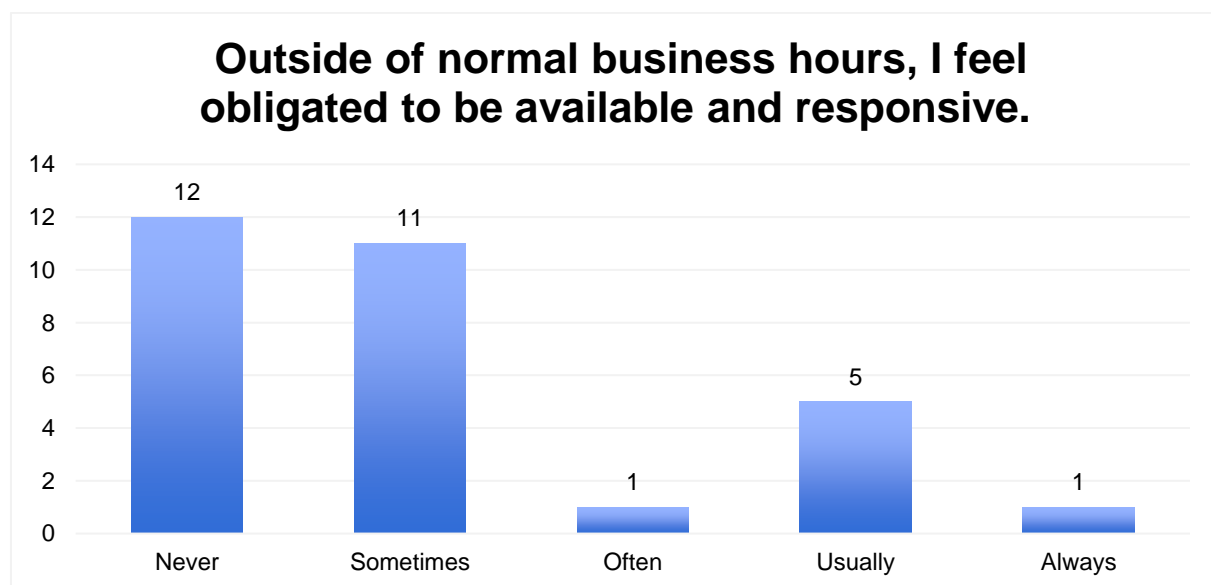


Figure 20. How often do you email a coworker or subordinate after business hours

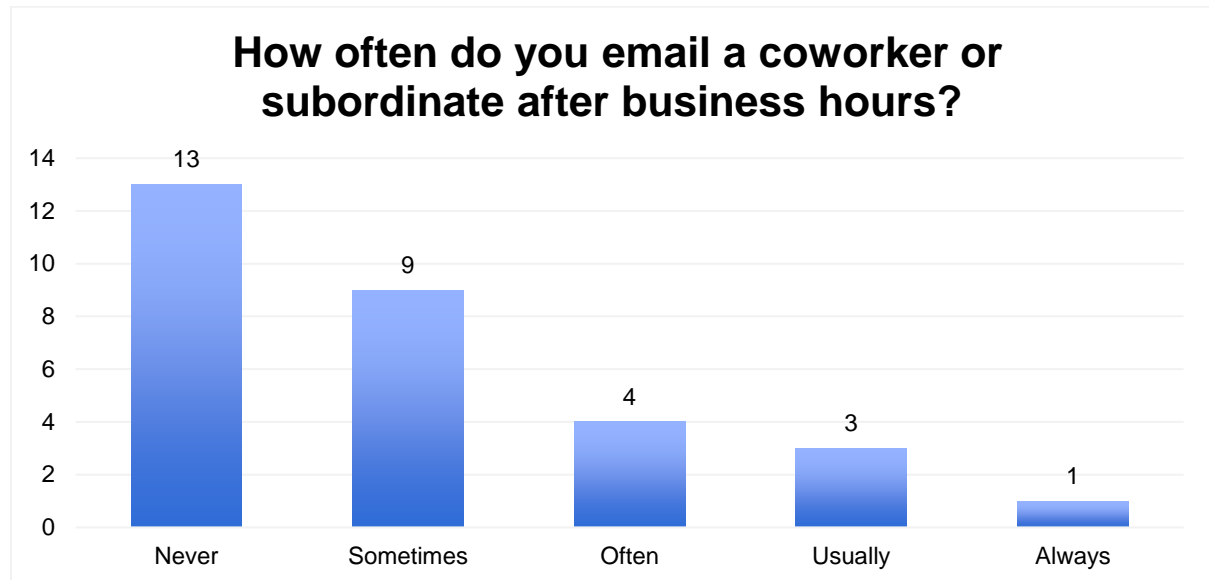
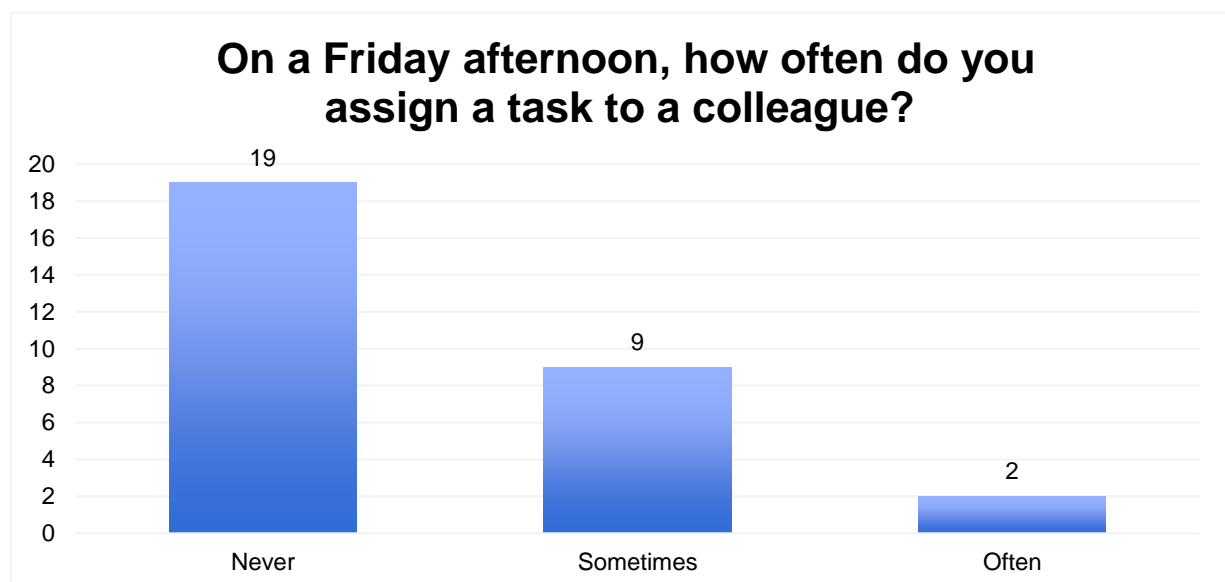


Figure 21. On a Friday afternoon how often do you assign a task to a colleague



The respondents were also asked about the policies that are applied in organizations in the area of supporting the well-being of employees, in particular, activities in the area of supporting the right to disconnect from work.

Figure 22. My organization takes positive action on the right to disconnect

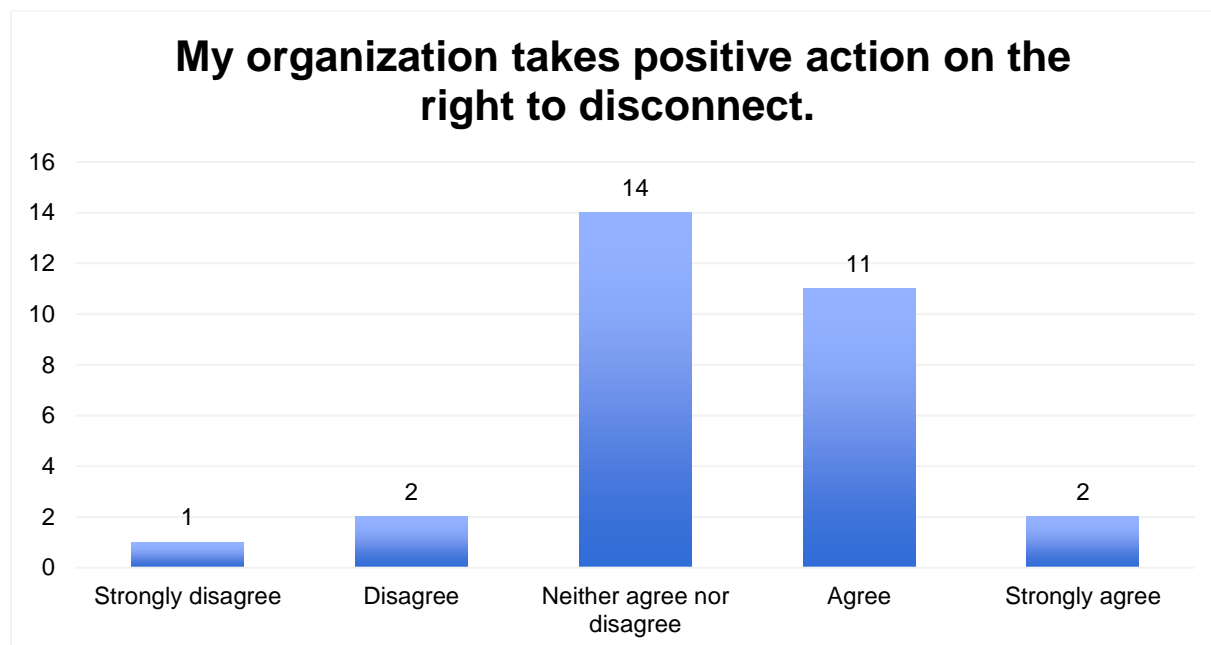


Figure 23. My organization recognizes the significance of employees right to disconnect

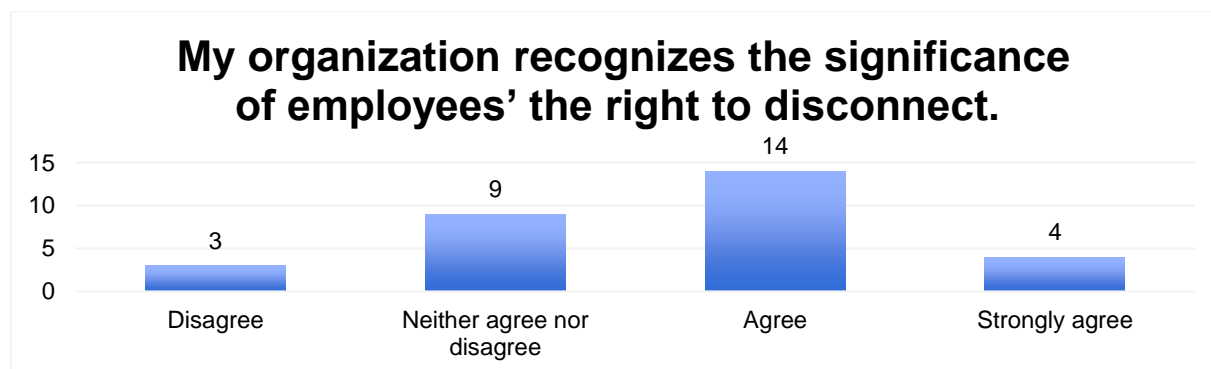


Figure 24. My organization adopts policies on the right to disconnect

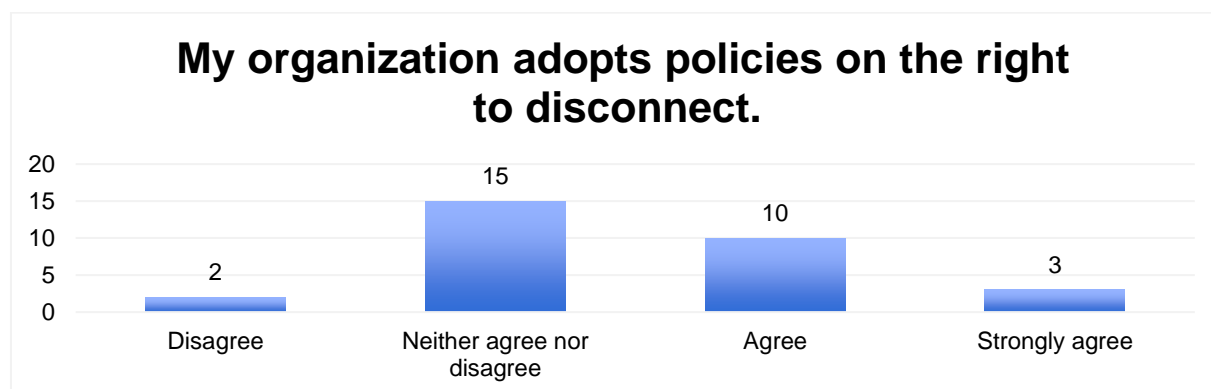


Figure 25. My organization has a manageable workload

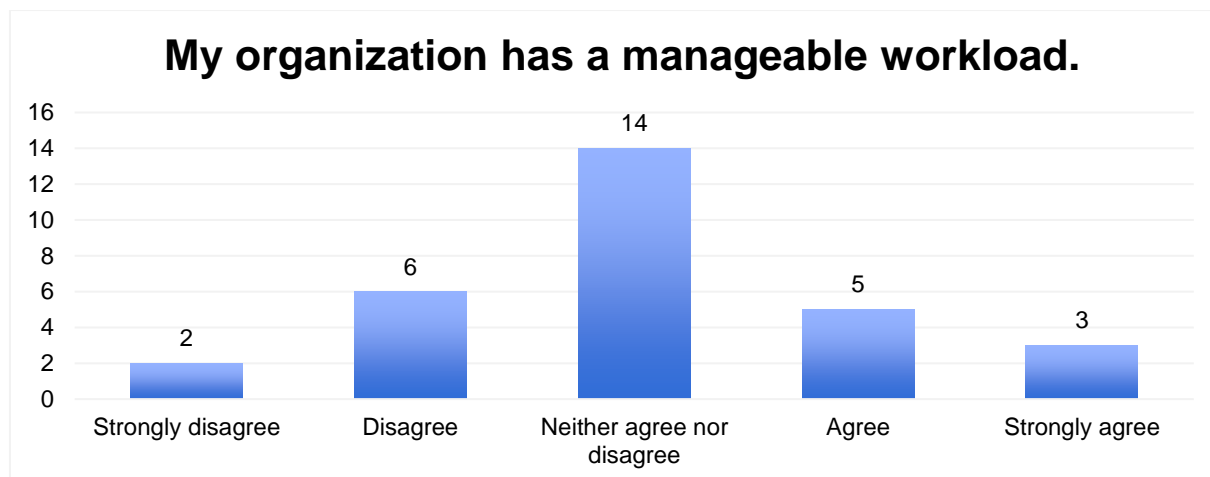


Figure 26. My organization adopts policies to help employees detach psychologically from work

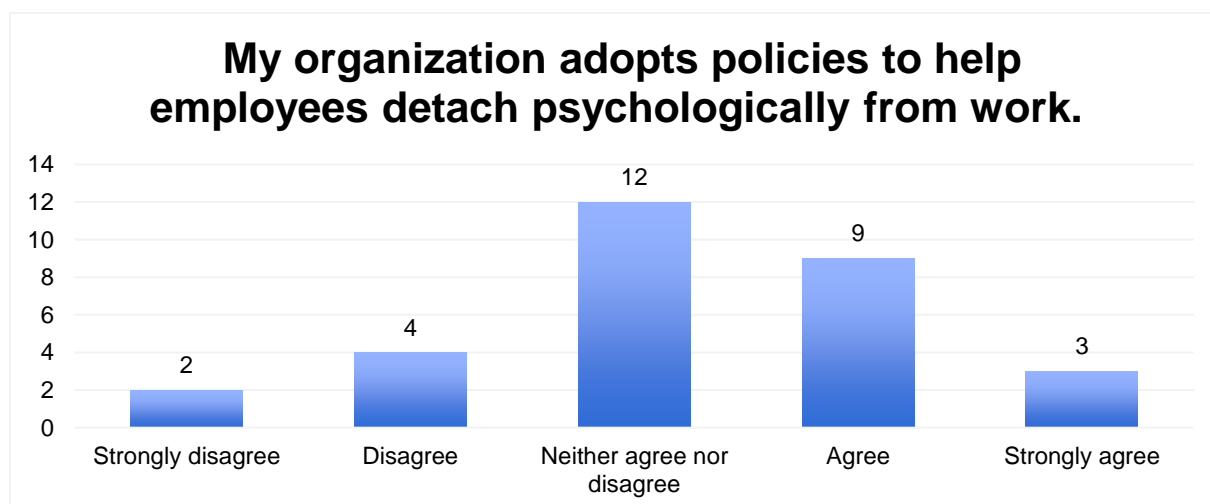


Figure 27. My organization organizes extracurricular events to help employees relax/unwind after normal business hours



Figure 28. If you want to implement for the first time a program to help employees switch off from work which of the following factors will hinder your effort

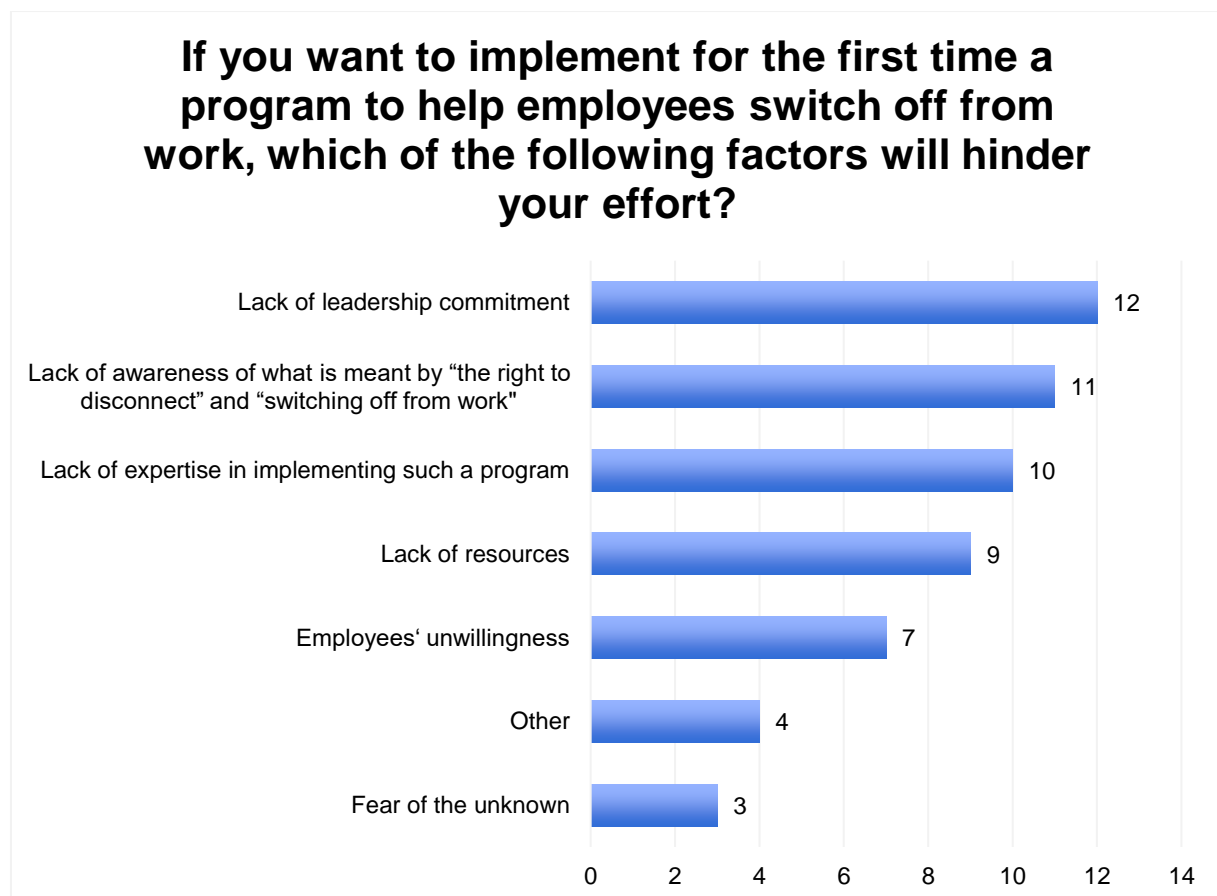


Figure 29. Is there an interest in receiving training in psychological detachment issues in organizations

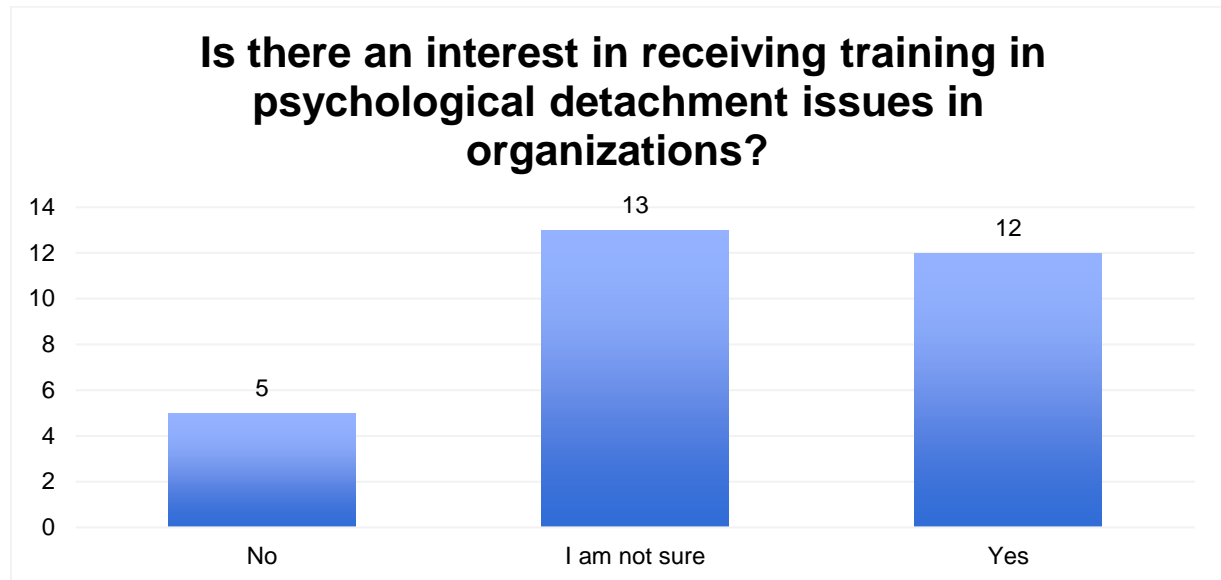
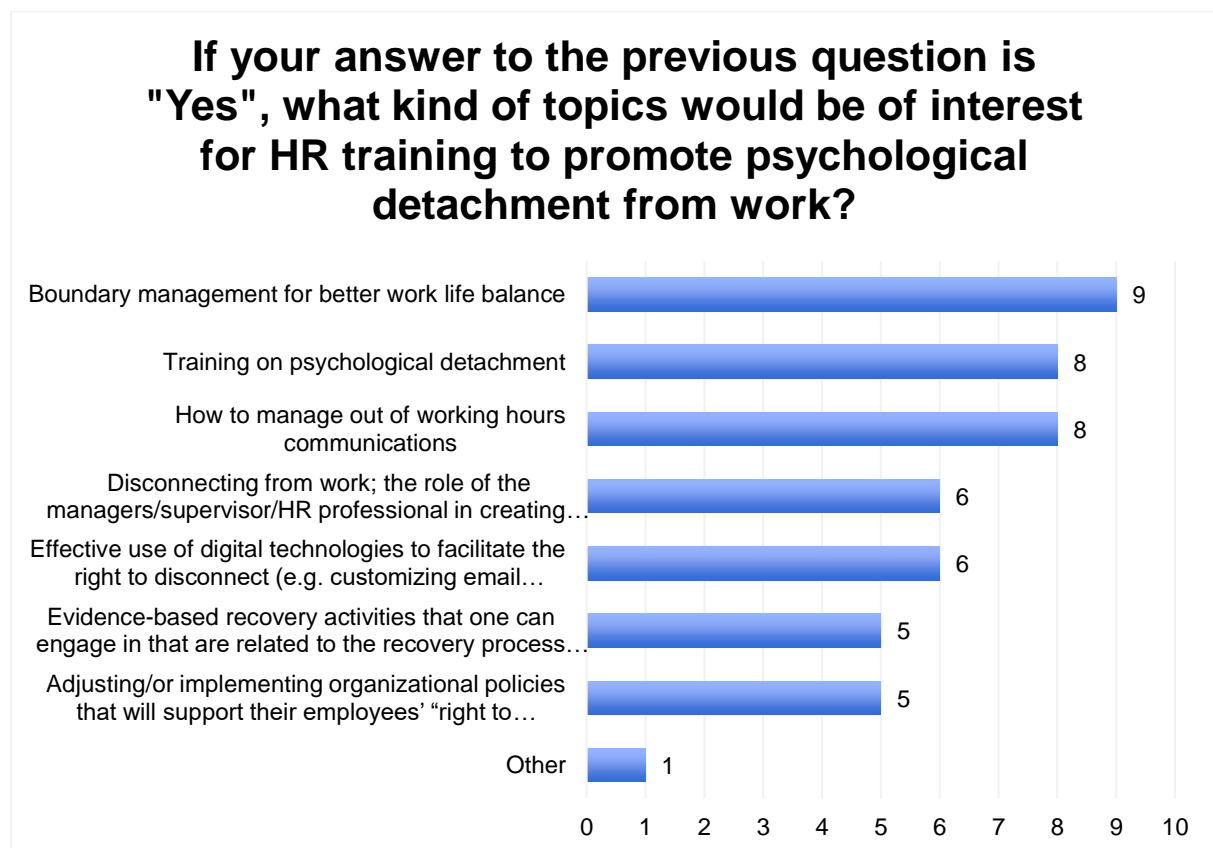


Figure 30. If your answer to the previous question is “yes” what kind of topics would be of interest for HR training to promote psychological detachment from work



Key findings from Focus group

The focus group meeting was held on two dates, May 17, 2023, and June 5, 2023. Each meeting lasted about 45 - 60 minutes. The focus group was attended by 5 people (2 people took part in the first meeting, 3 people in the second). They were employees performing their professional duties partially or completely online. Among them there were people representing such professions as: IT specialist, accountant, marketing specialist, graphic designer, project management specialist. All respondents represented higher education (bachelor's or master's degree). Each of the meetings was carried out in accordance with the previously adopted study scenario.

First question:

How would you describe your ability to detach psychologically in off job hours? (Psychological detachment refers to an individual's experience of being mentally away from work, to make a pause in thinking about work-related issues, thus to "switch off").

Participants of the meetings agreed that they had no problems with taking a break from work. There are situations when a more difficult project or task is being implemented, which is given more attention. However, usually after finishing work, they try not to think about it and pursue private matters. Participants declared that they manage to maintain a balance between work and personal life.

How much does this relate to the fact that you work remotely?

Participants admitted that the possibility of maintaining a balance between work and personal life is greater since they can spend more time working remotely. Thanks to this, they organize their time on their own without the interference of the employer. It is more flexible. For the participants, what was most important was saving time (e.g. due to no need to travel to the office). Two people declared that looking for a new, future job will be related to the possibility of working online.

Main part-Exploratory

Do you believe your company takes any steps to facilitate your right to disconnect from work after normal business hours?

All participants indicated that their employers respect their private time and there is hardly a situation where they would work beyond the specified, agreed working time. If necessary, this is agreed with the employer and remunerated accordingly.

What is the primary reason for your inability to disconnect from work?

Participants declared that they could not disconnect from work very rarely. This is related to important projects or deadlines in the companies where they work.

One person admitted that it was difficult to disconnect from work when she was working in an office. This was due to greater involvement in social contacts, which consumed time, a lot of time for commuting, the inability to focus on work in the bustle of the office, which meant that work was done longer.

Is it expected of you to be available to respond to emails or other work-related requests after hours? Do you feel obligated to be available and responsive outside of normal business hours?

None of the participants confirmed that they were expected to be available after working hours.

How do you make sure you have time to disconnect from work after regular business hours?

Each of the employees declared that they have their own hobbies, which they pursue after decent work, spend time with family and friends, as well as travel or pursue culture and entertainment. The best indicator of taking a break from work is being able to pursue your passions.

Is your workplace encouraging you to disconnect from work after hours?

In some workplaces, programs are implemented to support the interests of employees, e.g. sports teams are organized. Another example is fitness passes, cinema or theater vouchers. One of the participants declared that his organization organizes yoga and mindfulness classes for employees.

Does your company have a policy in place outlining employees' rights to take time away from work? If yes, please elaborate.

A good practice of one organization is to implement a system to support the well-being of employees. One of the elements of the system will be the appointment of a person responsible for supporting employees in the area of their work-life balance. Currently, surveys and focus groups are being conducted in the organization to determine the needs of employees and the scope of their potential support.

Are there any precautions in place to protect employees from burnout as a result of overwork? If yes, please elaborate.

Participants declare that there are no specific policies to prevent burnout in the workplace. Training on this topic was held in several places. Participants declare that they rather take care of themselves to ensure their free time. The key to this activity is effective time management.

How do you manage expectations with your boss and coworkers regarding work/life balance and contacting you after normal working hours?



Be assertive when contacting someone outside of working hours. Of course, there are crisis situations, but you cannot allow your supervisor or co-workers to abuse the possibility of contacting you outside working hours. Assertiveness is the most important competence here.

When it comes to disconnecting from work, how do you deal with stress and other work-related pressures?

People said that the most important thing is planning and time management, if tasks are well planned, it is easier to control stress.

Do you have any personal strategies to disengage yourself mentally from work in off job time? If yes, please tell us more about it.

Participants indicate different strategies. They were mainly related to interests, e.g. reading books, walking, favorite sports, etc.

How do you feel about being disconnected from work and not receiving or responding to work-related emails, phone calls, or messages after normal business hours?

This is a normal situation that every employee deserves. Employees should be guaranteed this by the employer, but if employers are unable to arrange it, then regulations should be implemented.

Are you concerned about any negative consequences if you disconnect from work after normal working hours?

None of the participants expressed such concerns

Can an EU legal framework that defines and regulates the right to disconnect set boundaries between work and personal life?

Such regulations can be useful and provide guidelines for the organization's activities.

Focus group summary

The people who took part in the focus group are specialists in their fields with many years of experience. They seem to be people who consciously decide about their working conditions and have the ability to negotiate them with employers. Remote work is no longer treated by such people as a benefit, but as a basic employee right. These premises seem to be the condition that explains the information obtained during the meeting. People who took part in the study work completely or partially remotely and consciously manage their time. They also expect opportunities and conditions from employers that will secure their needs related to remote work. Participants explicitly declare that remote work is a condition for them to cooperate with the employer and that they are able to manage professional tasks in such a way as to effectively break

away from work when it is time to perform their duties. The study therefore presents a fragment of the reality of online work, as it concerns a narrow group of highly qualified employees.

Recommendations

Designing programs supporting employee well-being becomes the responsibility of employers across the European Union. Conscious employees expect that their right to maintain a balance between personal and professional life will be not only respected, but also supported by employers. That is why it seems so important to implement comprehensive systems of disconnection from work in organizations.

Polish employees working remotely no longer treat this opportunity as a benefit. It is an equivalent form of work, often preferred in the context of the comfort of performing professional duties. It is important, however, that employers offering telecommuting also offer disconnection schemes. The conducted research shows that many Polish employers respect the private time of their employees, and employees consciously and effectively manage their own time, but not all. That is why it is so important to carry out educational activities in organizations and make employers aware of what work-life balance and disconnection from work are.

It is also worth reaching both employers and employees with information on occupational burnout and its serious consequences for the mental and physical health of employees, but also for the employers themselves. Another conclusion that can be drawn on the basis of the above research results is the need to train employees in the field of social and personal competences. Experienced employees emphasized the importance of time management, stress management and assertiveness for effective functioning in a remote work situation. These are the competencies that all employees can acquire at the same time they shape the competencies to disconnect from professional work. maintaining a high level of mental hygiene.

Increasing the awareness of employees and employers about the phenomenon of disconnection is a process. Properly prepared information and educational programs can, however, support both sides in shaping the well-being of employees and thus influence the benefits for both.

ITALY

Introduction

As Eurofound data reveal, 41.7 million people teleworked across the EU in 2021. This number represents double the number of 2019, as COVID-19 restrictions and changes significantly impacted the work culture and the work organisation (2022). Even if there was a small decline in 2022, this growing trend in teleworking is set to keep up. This, thanks to the fact that technological developments are increasing the number of jobs that are adaptable to a remote procedure, and thanks to the advantages it implicates (Eurofound, 2022). Despite that, the widespread shift to remote work has led to an increase in the blurring of boundaries between work and personal life and this often

leads to working outside from the working schedule. Empirical evidence collected from European workers inquiries who worked remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic period (March 2020 until the end of 2021), showed that they worked a longer number compared to the usual hours, for instance, they worked outside a 9:00 to 17:00 (Eurofound & ILO, 2017; Gschwind & Vargas, 2019; Eurofound; 2020).

Notably, studies reveal that approximately half of the interviewed teleworkers reported working more hours than before the pandemic: France (63%) Belgium (50%), Croatia (50%), Germany (50%), Ireland (49%) and Portugal (48%) (Anact, 2021; Hans-Böckler-Stiftung, 2020; Acerta, 2021; Huršidić Radulović et al, 202; Mental Health First Aid Ireland, 2020; Pereira et al, 2021). This working condition, if preserved for long periods, can lead to not only physical fatigue, but can also have a negative impact on the psychological detachment. Psychological detachment from work during off-job time refers to the process of temporarily disengaging from work during afterwork hours and not thinking about it during nonwork time (Sonnentag et al., 2010). The impossibility to psychologically detach from work might increase stress levels (Sandoval-Reyes et al., 2021), burnout (Hayes et al., 2020), and can also imply a decrease in one's general well-being (Bellmann & Hübler, 2020).

Policies and national/EU initiatives on the 'right to disconnect'

The above-mentioned data and the alarming consequences they lead to, put the spotlight on the need for a European legal framework to define and regulate the right of employees to disconnect (ETUC, 2021), as currently, this right has not been legalized in the EU law yet. According to Eurofound, the "right to disconnect" refers to a worker's right to disconnect from work and to not engage in work-related electronic communication, such as emails and other messages, during non-work hours and days off (Eurofound, 2022).

Therefore, the European Parliament has called for the right to disconnect to be included in EU legislation. In the meanwhile, EU Commission has launched an initiative called the "Work-Life Balance Directive," which aims at providing employees with the right to disconnect to protect them from excessive stress and burnout. This initiative has not been adopted yet, but once the directive is applied, member states will have to ensure that the rights and measures proposed in the directive are implemented in their national legislation. Even if there is no decreed regulation (Eurofound, 2022) that directly addresses the right to disconnect, there are several articles and directives that indirectly protect employees' work-related comparable rights. In particular, the definition of what working time is, maximum working hours, and the minimum daily and weekly rest periods that are required to safeguard workers' health and safety. For instance, articles 153 and 154 Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), represent the basis for the adoption of directives setting out minimum requirements, as well as supporting and complementing the activities of the Member States in working conditions. Moreover, The Working Time Directive (WTD,

2003/88/EC), defines working time, maximum working hours, and minimum daily and weekly rest periods that should be respected in order to safeguard workers' well-being and safety.

On a European level, there are different scenarios. Eurofound (2020) classifies the provisions regarding e-working in several Member States as follows:

“Balanced promote-protect” approach in which there is specific legislation introducing a legal framework for the right to disconnect. This approach is adopted in Belgium, France, Italy, and Spain;

“Promoting approach” in those countries such as Czechia, Lithuania, Poland, and Portugal where legislation on the use of telework provides support to teleworking with provisions identifying its potential advantages but ignoring its potential threats;

“General regulatory” approach, referring to those countries condition where only general legislation is regulating the use of tele/remote work: Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Croatia, Hungary, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia;

“No specific legislation governing tele- or remote working” referring to Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, and Sweden.

The case of Italy

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of remote work and made it more important than ever for companies to establish guidelines around the right to disconnect, and for the government to legally regulate it. Italy was one of the countries hit hardest by the pandemic, therefore, immediate acts have followed by both government and companies. As a result, Italy may provide valuable insights into how companies can balance the need for remote work with the need for work-life balance.

Act No. 81/2017 introduces the concept of 'smart working' (lavoro agile) as a working modality bound to targets or steps rather than to pre-set working time and space, one that is intended to boost competitiveness and promote work–life reconciliation.

Such arrangements, often defined in literature as ICT-based mobile work, have been triggered by advances in technology that allow easy access to the web and the use of portable devices (smartphones or tablets) for work. In recent years, several collective agreements or internal regulations have been implemented in large companies, albeit within an unclear legal framework. Smart working is now legally defined as a working modality, possibly entailing the use of technological devices, in which tasks are performed partially outside a company's premises and with flexible working time patterns, within the sole limit of the maximum duration of working time, generally 48 hours per week. The act specifies that smart working should be considered as a modality of subordinate employment relationships, therefore preventing employers from considering 'smart workers' as self-employed. The agreement can be permanent

or fixed-term and can be terminated by either party provided the notice period is observed, or there is a justifiable reason. The act entitles smart workers to receive the same wage and to enjoy the same employment conditions as comparable 'standard' workers in the relevant company. It also delegates collective agreements to introduce further clauses to promote smart working. In conclusion, smart workers are covered by insurance against accidents at work in their chosen place of work and, with some exceptions, during the travel to and from work.

In conclusion, the right to disconnect is an important aspect of protecting the well-being of employees, maintaining a healthy work-life balance, and ensuring that all employees are treated fairly and without discrimination. Currently, there are no specific EU-wide laws that regulate the right to disconnect. However, the European Parliament has called for the right to disconnect to be included in EU legislation, and the EU Commission has launched an initiative called the "Work-Life Balance Directive," which aims to provide employees with the right to disconnect, as well as other measures such as parental leave and flexible working arrangements. At the national level, some EU countries have implemented laws or guidelines on the right to disconnect, such as Italy, France, Spain, Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands while others delegate this to general national laws.

National/EU Practices and Best-case scenarios

Several European companies have implemented strong "right to disconnect" policies, but one notable example is the German company Volkswagen Group. In 2021, Volkswagen Group, one of the largest automobile manufacturers in the world, producing a wide range of vehicles, including cars, vans, trucks, and buses, introduced a global "Work Smart, Live Smart" (Volkswagen Group, 2021) policy which includes guidelines to ensure employees' right to disconnect from work after working hours. This policy recognizes the importance of work-life balance and aims to promote employee well-being and productivity. Under this policy, Volkswagen Group has implemented measures to reduce the frequency of after-hours communications, such as blocking access to the company email system outside of designated working hours. The company has also established clear expectations for communication and response times and encouraged the use of digital tools to manage workload. Volkswagen Group has also introduced training programs for managers and employees to raise awareness about the importance of work-life balance, stress management, and healthy work habits. Additionally, the company has launched an employee assistance program to provide support and resources to employees who may be experiencing work-related stress or other challenges.

In the European scenario, as above mentioned, Italy was one of the first countries to legislate the "right to disconnect" through their "Smart Working" law in 2017. This law required companies to negotiate policies around remote work and communication

outside of working hours with their employees. As a result, many Italian companies have implemented policies around the "right to disconnect," making it an interesting case study for other countries and companies looking to establish similar policies. The regulation of connection and disconnection periods in the company Barilla, an Italian food company that produces a variety of pasta, sauces, and other food products and founded 1877 in with global presence and operates in over 100 countries, is a clear example on how this issue was addressed, in Italy, first autonomously at company level, and then updated according to the contents of the Law No. 81 of 2017. Barilla, introduced in 2015, through a collective agreement negotiated with the internal works council, the possibility to work outside the company's premises for full-time and part-time employees appointed with tasks suitable to be carried out remotely (so called 'smart working regime'). This possibility was available for 32 hours per month, extended to 64 hours for some workers with children or caring duties. During the period spent working away from the office, the workers were allowed to freely determine working hours during the day, within the limits of working time set by the law. Nonetheless, the agreement stated that they were requested to be available to be contacted by the employer only during the period in which the company premises were open. To avoid an interference with private life, in addition, they could be contacted only through company devices. Outside this period, therefore, they could not be reached by the employer. More specifically, here are the main assumptions the company adopts in order to guarantee a healthy environment to its employees:

"Training": Barilla has provided training for its employees and managers to promote the right to disconnect. The training covers topics such as the importance of work-life balance, time management, and how to communicate effectively.

"Technology": Barilla has implemented several technological tools to help employees manage their workload and avoid the need to work outside of work hours. For example, the company has implemented an email management tool that automatically deletes emails sent outside of work hours, to discourage employees from working during their personal time.

"Culture": Barilla has created a culture that values work-life balance and employee well-being, therefore encourages its employees to take time off when they need it and has implemented a flexible work policy that allows employees to work from home or adjust their schedules to better suit their personal needs.

Another Italian company that has been recognized for its strong "right to disconnect" policies is Enel, a multinational public company, which is listed on the Italian Stock Exchange (Borsa Italiana) and is majority-owned by the Italian government. In 2020, Enel introduced a global "smart working" policy that includes clear guidelines on work hours and encourages employees to disconnect from work outside of their designated work hours (Enel, 2020). This policy was recognized by the Italian Ministry of Labor as a best practice for "right to disconnect" policies, and the company was awarded the

Top Employers Italia 2021 certification for its efforts in creating a healthy and productive work environment. Enel's approach to "right to disconnect" policies includes training managers and employees on the importance of disconnecting from work outside of designated hours, encouraging the use of digital tools to help manage workload, and setting clear expectations for response times and communication during non-working hours. Enel's "smart working" establishes clear guidelines regarding several aspects of the regimentation of remote working, such as: providing "digital tools" including online calendars and task management apps; "stress management" providing resources and support for employees to manage stress and maintain their well-being, such as access to counselling services; and as for the case mentioned above, "training" for both managers and employees.

In conclusion, the cases of Enel, Volkswagen, and Barilla provide interesting examples of companies implementing policies related to the right to disconnect. These companies have recognized the importance of ensuring that their employees are able to maintain a healthy work-life balance and have implemented measures to limit after-hours work and reduce the stress associated with constantly being connected to work.

Descriptive Data Analysis

General Information

The present study employed the SwitchOff questionnaire, administered via Google Forms, to gather data from a sample of 25 teleworking professionals in Italy, encompassing individuals in managerial and HR roles. Of the respondents, 17 identified as female, while 8 identified as male. The primary objective of the survey was to assess participants' perspectives on the right to disconnect from work, with the aim of contributing to the development of a comprehensive "SwitchOff" guide that promotes the effective utilization of digital technologies and other strategies to enhance work-life balance.

Demographic information pertaining to the participants was also collected. The age range of the respondents spanned from 18 to 64 years, with the majority falling within the 36 to 44 age bracket (Figure 1). Regarding educational attainment, the largest proportion (40%) possessed a master's degree, followed by 32% who held a bachelor's degree, 24% with a high school diploma, and 4% holding a Ph.D. (see Figure 2). Concerning their tenure at their current place of employment, 32% reported 1-5 years of experience, while 40% reported 6-12 years, 16% reported 13-20 years, and 12% reported over 20 years (see Figure 3).

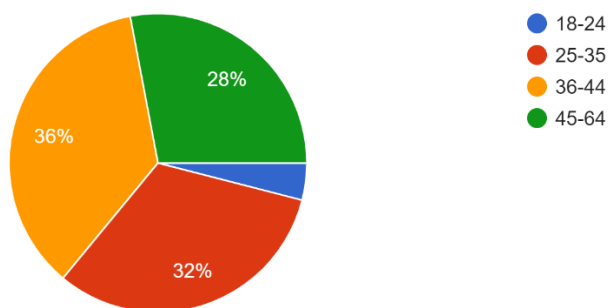


Figure 1 – Age of participants

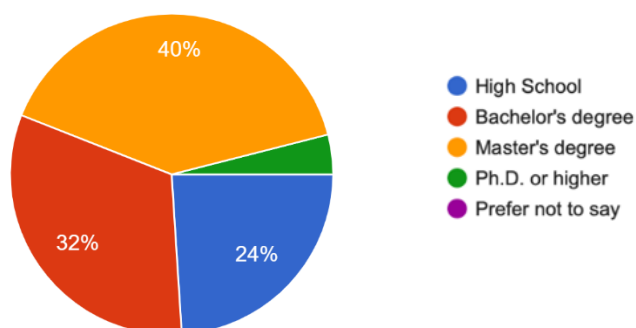


Figure 2 – Educational background of participants

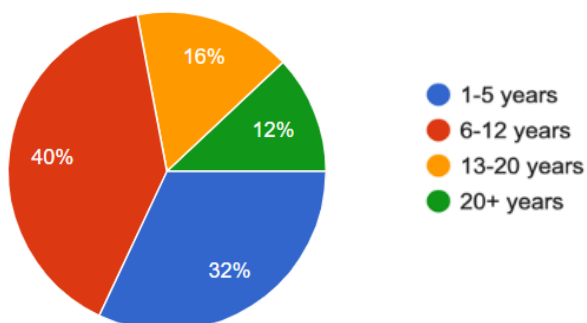


Figure 3 – Tenure at the current employer

The impact of Covid-19 on organisational remote work policies

The majority of participants (96%) acknowledged that their organization's remote work policy was influenced by the Covid-19 pandemic. Among these, 72% indicated that they continue to adhere to the remote working policies implemented during the pandemic. Conversely, 28% reported that their organization reverted to the pre-Covid working conditions once the emergency situation subsided.

EU policies on the right to disconnect

The awareness levels regarding the prominence of the right to disconnect within both national and European contexts were noted among 80% of the respondents. Additionally, a significant proportion (60%) expressed agreement or strong agreement with the notion that an EU legal framework, effectively defining and regulating the right to disconnect, has the potential to establish clear boundaries between work and personal life (Figure 4).

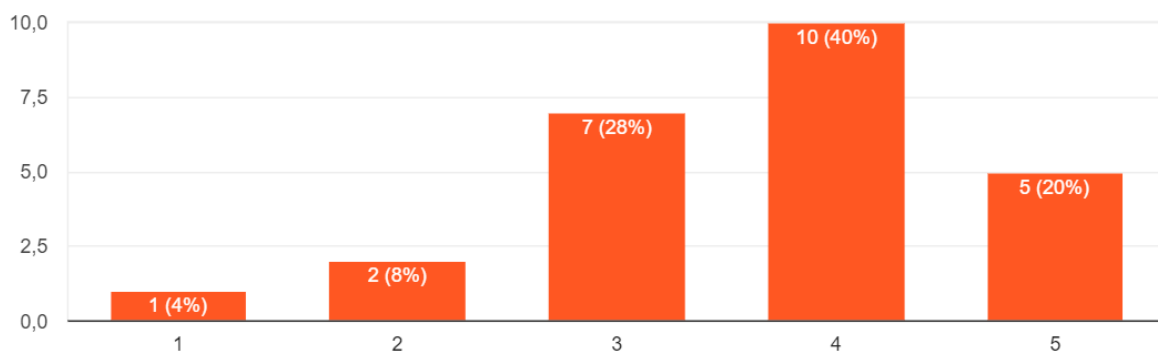


Figure 4 – the EU legal framework that defines and regulates the right to disconnect can set boundaries between work and personal life

Managers' perspectives on the right to disconnect

A considerable majority of managers (76%) reported to often or always their teams to disconnect (refer to Figure 5). Regarding expectations for availability outside of regular working hours, 48% of managers indicated that they rarely or never require their team members to be accessible during those times (Figure 6). However, 52% acknowledged occasionally or frequently expecting availability outside of normal working hours. Furthermore, a significant portion of respondents (64%) reported rarely or never sending work-related emails to colleagues or subordinates after business hours (Figure 7). Similarly, 64% of respondents confirmed rarely or never assigning tasks to colleagues on Friday afternoons (Figure 8).

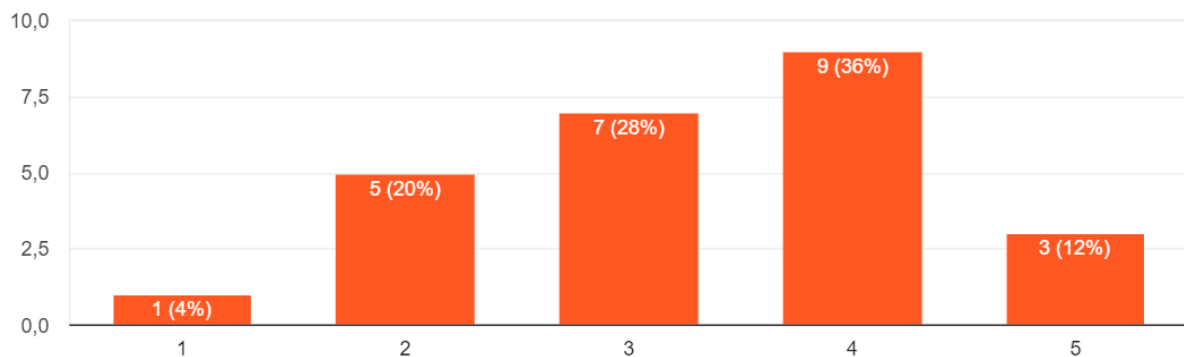


Figure 5 – How often, as a manager, do you encourage your team to disconnect from work?

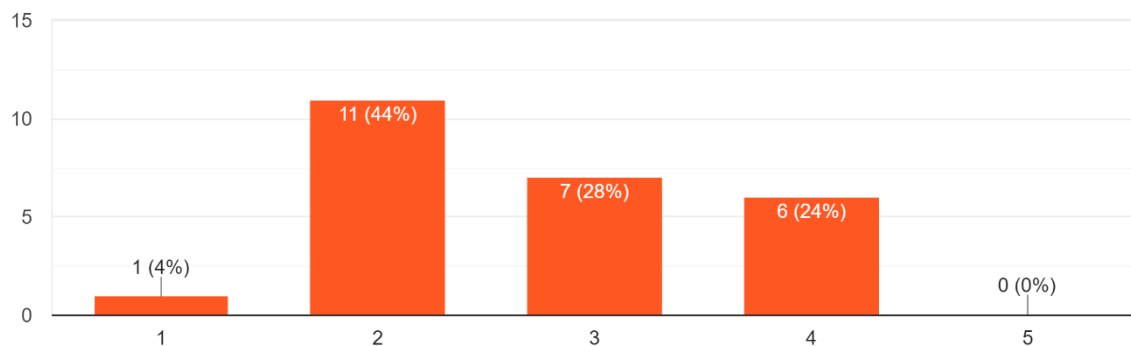


Figure 6 – How often, as a manager, do you expect your team to be available outside of normal working hours?

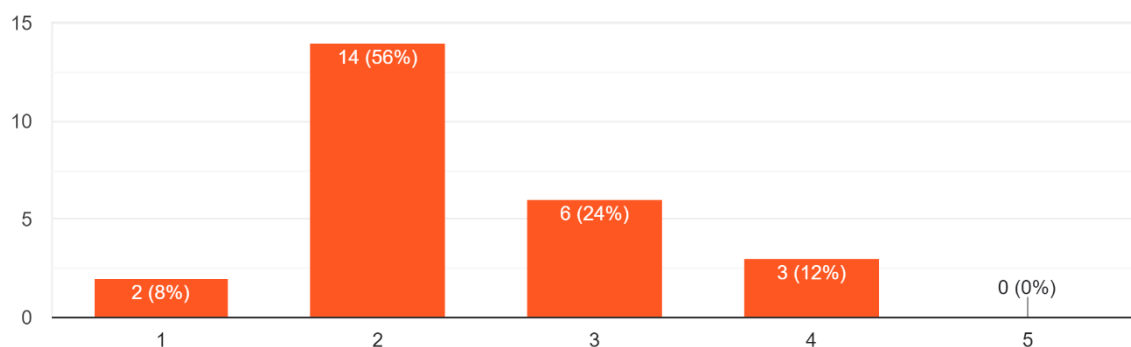


Figure 7 – How often do you email a co-worker or subordinate after business hours?

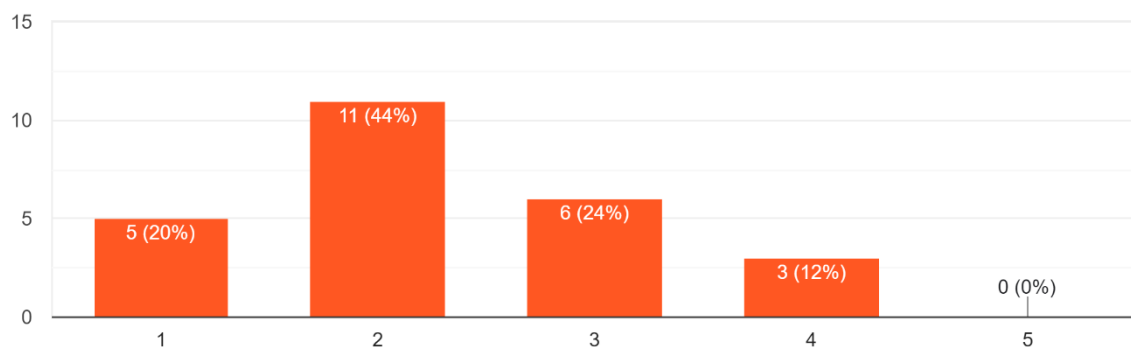


Figure 8 – On a Friday afternoon, how often do you assign a task to a colleague?

The significance and the challenges of the right to disconnect

Approximately half of the respondents (48%) emphasized the high significance of being free from work-related activities during their non-working hours. In contrast, another 48% considered it moderately important to have such a separation (Figure 9).

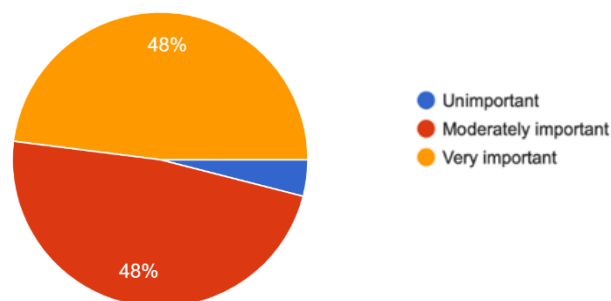


Figure 9 – how important is it not to be preoccupied with work-related duties during off-hours

Furthermore, a significant majority of respondents (80%) express agreement or strong agreement that the right to disconnect can make a significant contribution to achieving a better work-life balance (refer to Figure 10). Additionally, a slight majority of participants (56%) agree or strongly agree that even when they are physically away from work, they still find it challenging to mentally disengage (11). Moreover, a significant majority of respondents (80%) agree or strongly agree that they possess the right to disconnect from work after regular business hours (Figure 12).

Interestingly, a majority of respondents (60%) do not hold concerns about facing negative consequences for exercising their right to disconnect, while 36% of participants express such concerns (Figure 13). Additionally, 40% of the participants

agree with the notion that they must be readily available and responsive outside of normal working hours (Figure 14).

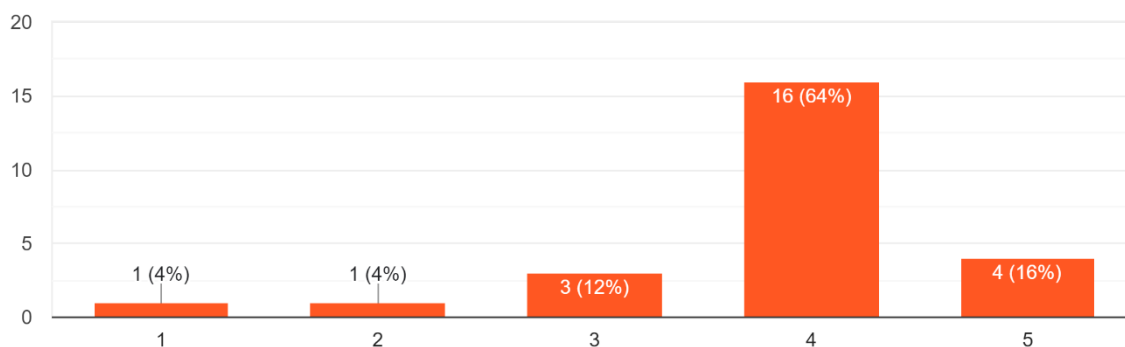


Figure 10 – The right to disconnect can contribute significantly to a better work-life balance

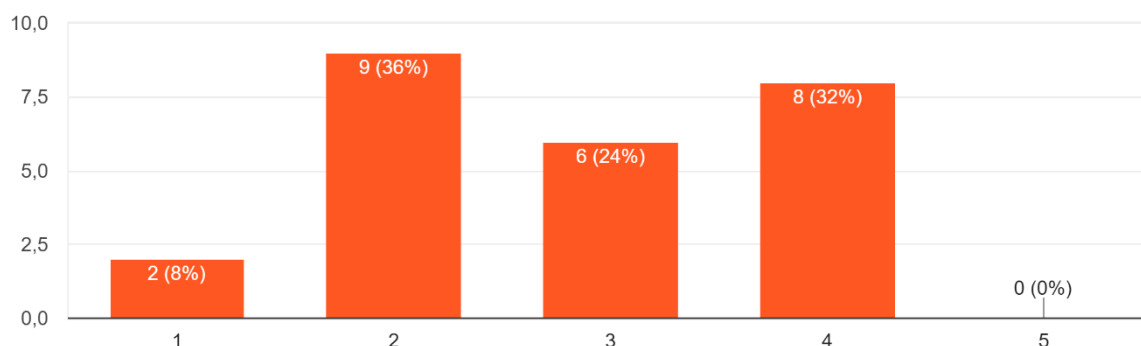


Figure 11 – Despite being physically away from work, I am unable to mentally disconnect

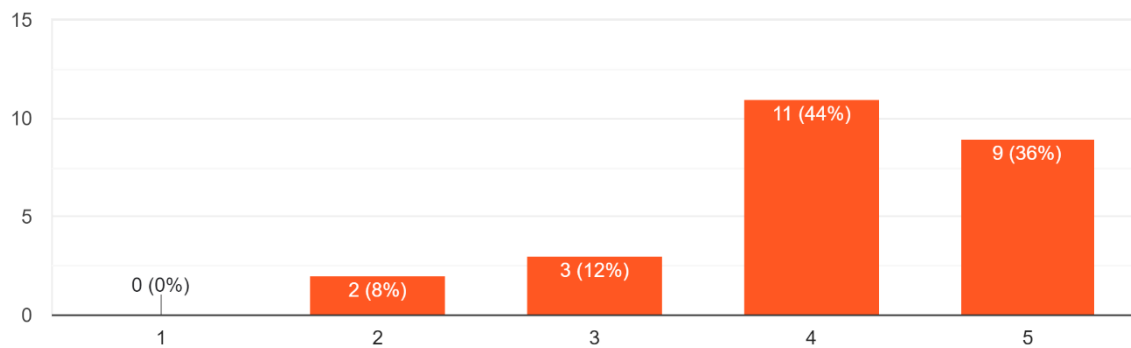


Figure 12 – I believe I have the right to disconnect from work after normal business hours

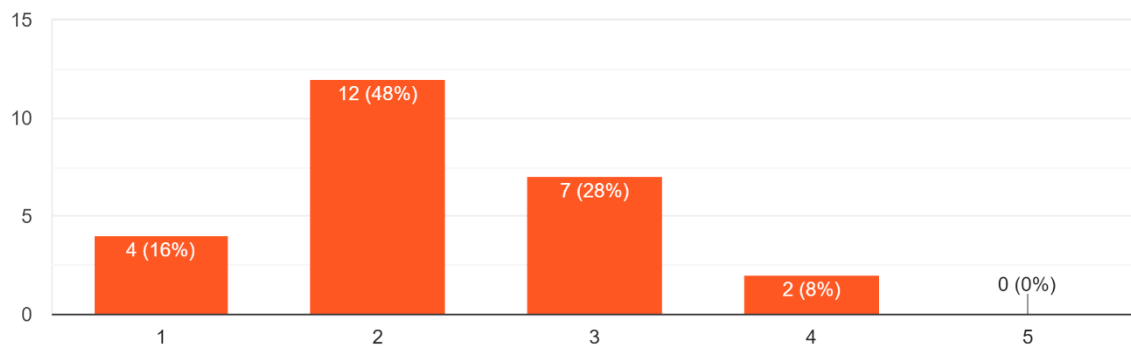


Figure 13 – I am concerned that if I disconnect from work after normal business hours, I will face repercussions

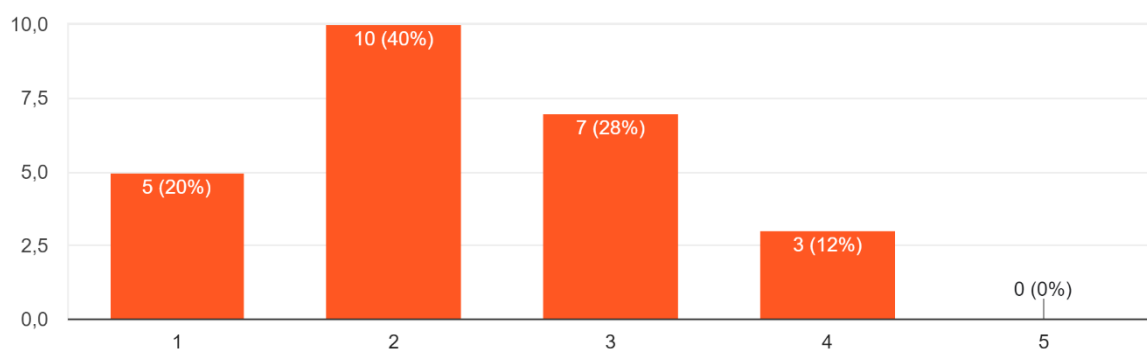


Figure 14 – Outside of normal business hours, I feel obligated to be available and responsive

Organisational perspectives on the right to disconnect

A notable majority of respondents (60%) agree or strongly agree that their organization acknowledges the importance of their employees' right to disconnect (Figure 15). Additionally, 12% of participants agree or strongly agree that their organization takes affirmative steps to support and uphold that right (Figure 16).

Regarding the implementation of policies specifically addressing the right to disconnect, 36% of respondents agree or strongly agree that their organization has such policies in place, while 32% disagree or strongly disagree (Figure 17). Furthermore, only 12% of participants disagree or strongly disagree that their organization maintains a manageable workload, whereas a substantial majority of 72% agree or strongly agree with this notion (Figure 18).

In terms of policies aimed at assisting employees in mentally detaching from work, 32% of respondents disagree or strongly disagree that their organization adopts such policies, while 36% agree or strongly agree (Figure 19). Moreover, a mere 20% of participants stated that their organization organizes extracurricular events to facilitate employee relaxation or unwinding after regular business hours, while 60% disagree or strongly disagree with this statement (Figure 20).

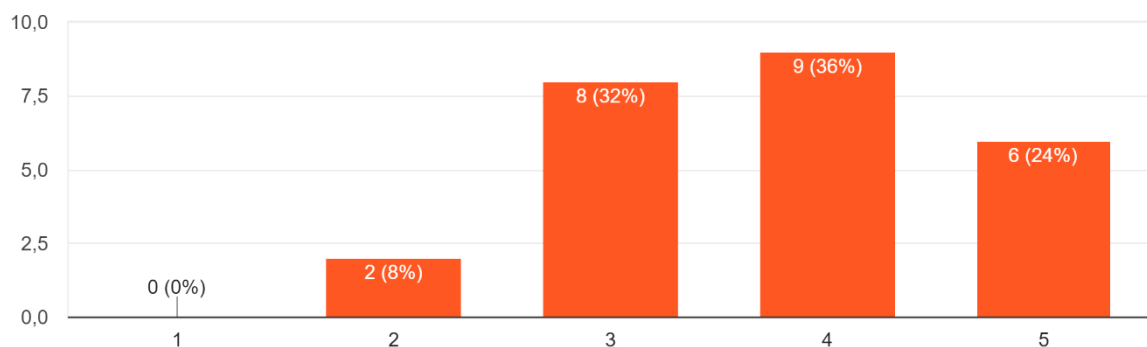


Figure 15 – My organisation recognizes the significance of employees' the right to disconnect

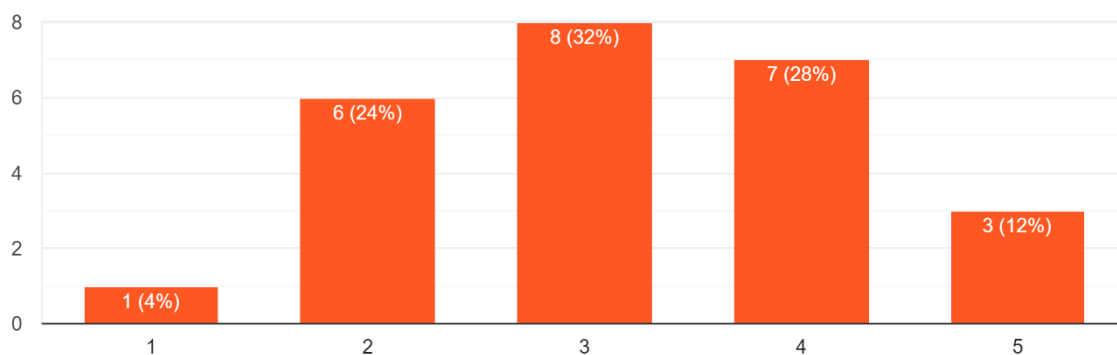


Figure 16 – My organisation takes positive action on the right to disconnect

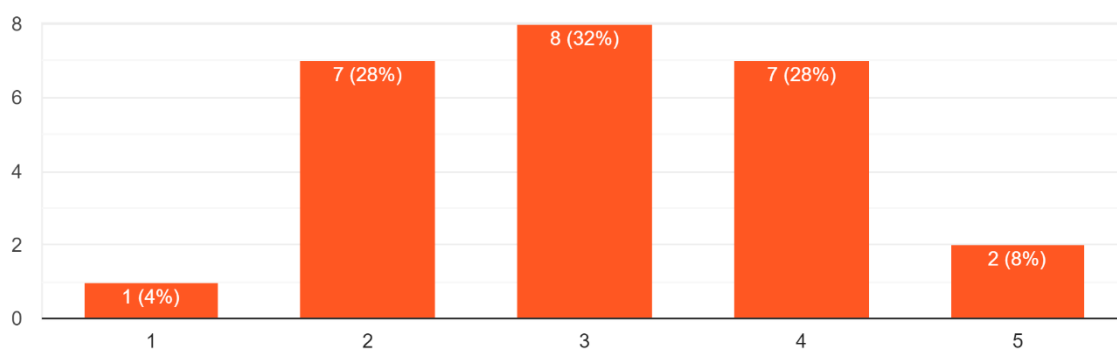


Figure 17 – My organisation adopts policies on the right to disconnect

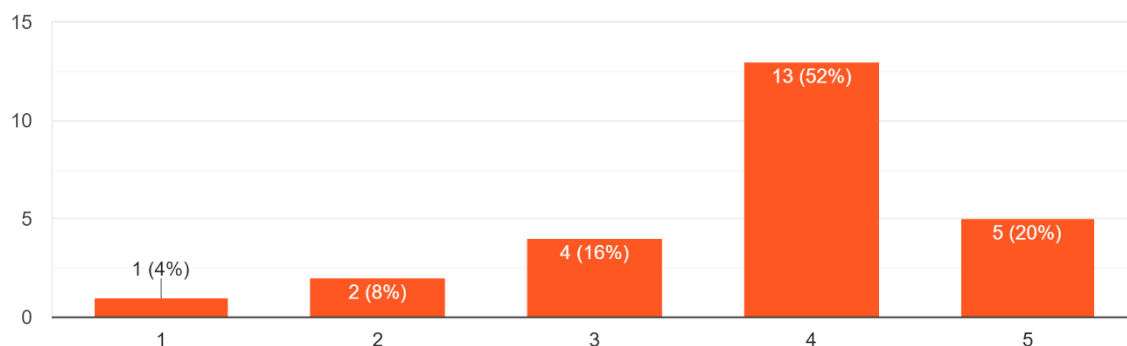


Figure 18 – My organisation has a manageable workload

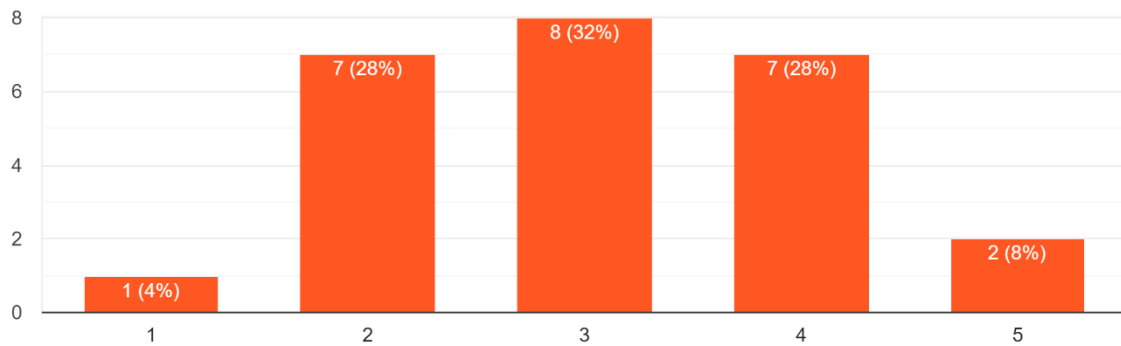


Figure 19 – My organisation adopts policies to help employees detach psychologically from work

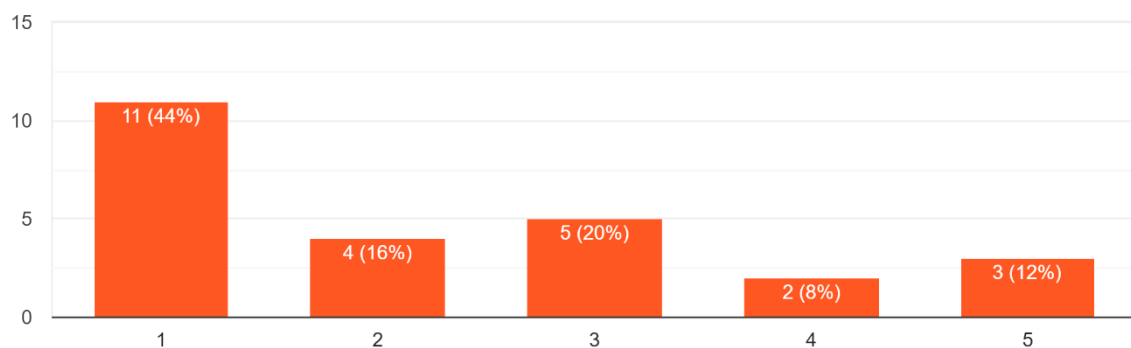


Figure 20 – My organisation organises extracurricular events to help employees relax/unwind after normal business hours

Initiatives/programmes/actions/processes/policies that promoted/facilitated psychological detachment from work at the organisations the last five years

Most of respondents indicated that the HR department assumes responsibility for overseeing employees' well-being, whereas a minority of respondents reported that the owner of their respective company holds this role. While a few participants mentioned the absence of any implemented initiatives aimed at promoting psychological detachment, the following initiatives, programs, actions, processes, and policies have been recognized as contributors to fostering psychological detachment from work within their organizations over the past years:

- **Training programs:** training on the effective use of digital technologies to facilitate the right to disconnect (e.g., personalization of e-mail notifications, effective use of online calendars for better meeting management, activation of automatic response when taking leave).
- **Individual or group-based coaching:** access to psychological support for stress management, mentoring and personal development sessions and webinars; enrolment/invitation to volunteer work; availability of games for break moments at the company's facilities; workshops about burn-out, access to meditation applications and beneficial materials/articles about wellness, relaxation, stress recovery, and psychological detachment during off-work hours; training on time management and work-life balance.

Factors impeding the effort to implement a programme to assist employees in switching off from work.

Respondents identified several key challenges that hindered the implementation of a program aimed at helping employees switch off from work. The main challenges mentioned include:

- Lack of resources: 52% of respondents expressed this as a significant obstacle, indicating insufficient resources to allocate towards implementing such a program (Figure 21).
- Lack of expertise in implementation: 44% of participants highlighted a lack of expertise or knowledge in effectively implementing a program to facilitate work disconnection (Figure 21).
- Lack of leadership commitment: 36% of respondents cited a lack of commitment from organizational leadership as a hindrance to the implementation of a program addressing work disconnection (Figure 21).

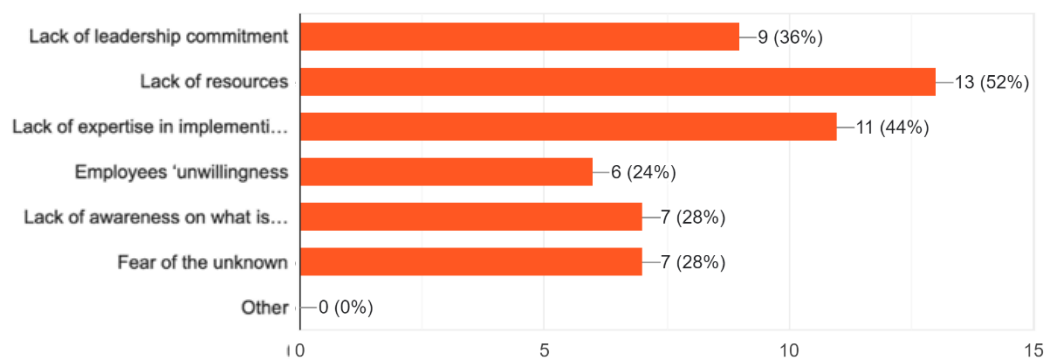


Figure 21 – Factors that hinder the effort to implement a programme to help employees switch off from work

Training on the right to disconnect and how to promote psychological detachment from work

Only a limited proportion of respondents (20%) indicated that they had undergone training specifically focused on the principles of the right to disconnect and strategies for fostering psychological detachment from work (Figure 22). In contrast, a significant majority (80%) expressed their keen interest in receiving training programs addressing psychological detachment concerns within organizational settings (Figure 23).

Regarding the pertinent subjects for human resources (HR) training aimed at promoting psychological detachment from work, respondents identified several key areas:

- Boundary management to enhance work-life balance (56%).
- Training on the psychological aspects of detachment (48%).
- Strategies for managing communication beyond regular working hours (32%).
- Implementing or adjusting organizational policies to support employees' right to disconnect (28%).
- Optimizing the effective use of digital technologies to facilitate work disconnection. This includes customizing email notifications, employing online calendars for improved meeting management, and activating automatic responses during periods of annual leave (28%).
- Engagement in evidence-based recovery activities that promote the recuperation process. This encompasses pursuits such as hobbies, mindfulness practices, exercise, and time management (28%) (Figure 24).

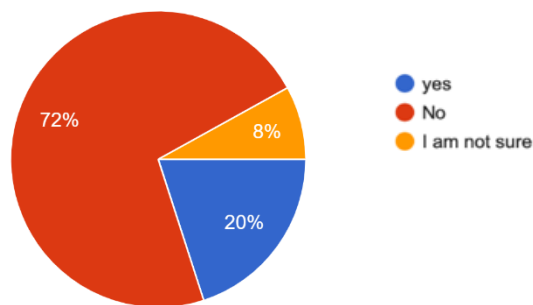


Figure 22 – Training on how to promote psychological detachment from work or on policies relating to the right to disconnect

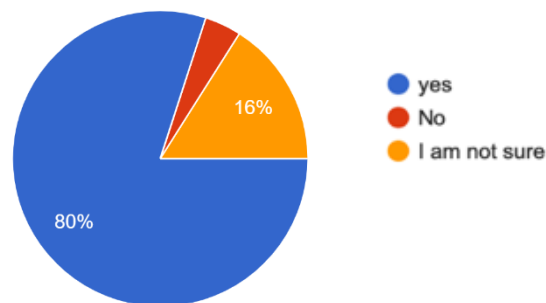


Figure 23 – Interest in receiving training in psychological detachment issues in organisations

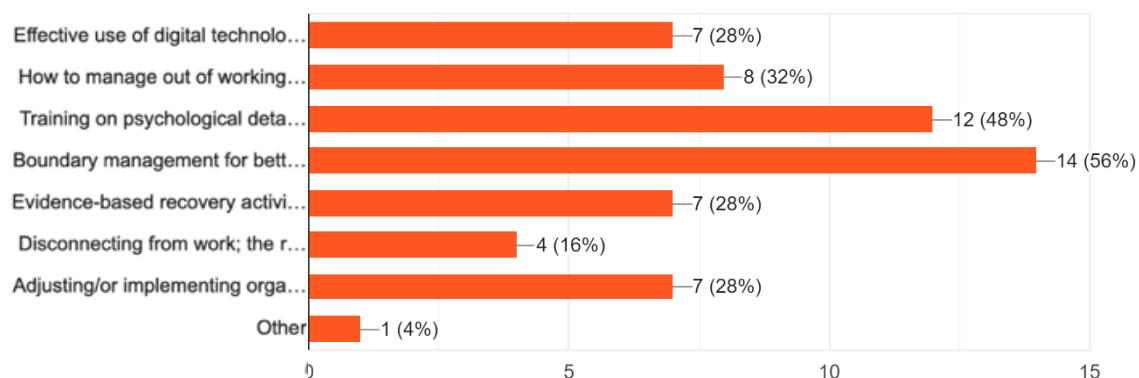


Figure 24 – Topics of interest for HR training to promote psychological detachment from work

Summary of results

The survey conducted among Italian teleworking workers, including HR professionals and managers, provided valuable insights into their perceptions and experiences regarding the right to disconnect and psychological detachment from work. The findings shed light on various aspects of the topic. In terms of organizational impact, it was observed that a significant majority of respondents reported that their organizations had been influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of remote work policies. While some organizations continued to adopt remote working policies, a portion of respondents noted a return to pre-pandemic working conditions once the emergency subsided. The awareness of EU policies on the right to disconnect was found to be relatively low among the respondents. However, a substantial majority agreed that an EU legal framework defining and regulating the right to disconnect could establish boundaries between work and personal life. When it came to managerial practices, it was encouraging to see that a significant proportion of managers indicated their support for encouraging their team members to disconnect from work. However, there was a split opinion on the expectations of availability outside of regular working hours, with a portion of managers occasionally or often expecting their team to be accessible during those times. The respondents expressed the importance of being free from work-related activities during off-work hours, with half of them considering it very important. Furthermore, a substantial majority agreed that the right to disconnect significantly contributes to a better work-life balance. However, a significant proportion also acknowledged that they may not always be mentally disengaged even when physically away from work. The respondents' views on their organization's recognition of the right to disconnect were mixed. While a majority agreed that their organization recognizes its importance, a smaller percentage felt that positive actions were taken to support it. The adoption of policies on the right to disconnect varied, with a significant proportion of respondents indicating their organizations had such policies, but a notable minority disagreed. Challenges in implementing programs for promoting work detachment were identified, including lack of resources, expertise, and leadership commitment. These factors hindered the successful implementation of initiatives aimed at helping employees switch off from work. Training played a crucial role in addressing the right to disconnect and psychological detachment. While a minority of respondents reported having received training on these topics, a majority expressed their interest in receiving such training. The preferred training topics included boundary management, psychological detachment, managing out-of-working-hours communications, organizational policy adjustments, effective use of digital technologies, and evidence-based recovery activities.

In summary, the survey highlighted the significance of the right to disconnect and psychological detachment from work in promoting work-life balance. It also identified areas for improvement, such as increasing awareness of EU policies, addressing

managerial expectations, overcoming implementation challenges, and providing training to support employees in achieving better work detachment.

The results of the Focus Group

The Italian session of the focus group was held on the 20th of April 2023. The total group was composed of 6 participants with an average age of 35 years old, one moderator to conduct the session and one assistant to take notes of the discussion. The average age of the participants was 35, they were all based in Italy, and were selected to represent diverse professional backgrounds within the fields of communications, data protection, consultancy, and marketing. The session was conducted online to accommodate the participants strict working schedules. Prior to the focus group, explicit permissions were obtained through email correspondence, and participants were required to sign consent forms. The session lasted for approximately one hour and a half, during which in-depth discussions were held to gather rich qualitative insights. The entire focus group session was recorded to ensure accurate capturing of participant contributions and to facilitate subsequent analysis. These rigorous measures were implemented to uphold ethical standards and protect the confidentiality of the participants' responses. The objective of this focus group was to explore the perceptions of remote workers regarding their ability to detach from work and disconnect, as well as to investigate their views on the supportiveness of their respective companies in facilitating their right to disconnect.

Psychological detachment: individual perspectives

The insights gathered from the participants' perceptions of psychological detachment revealed a range of experiences. While some participants admitted to thinking about work even during non-working hours, particularly during stressful periods, they also acknowledged the ability to disconnect more easily during lighter workloads. The work environment was identified as a factor influencing detachment, with a comfortable setting facilitating the process. Additionally, participants noted differences in detachment between weekdays and weekends, finding it easier to disconnect on specific remote working days, such as Fridays. The flexibility to choose remote working days was highlighted as beneficial. However, some mentioned challenges in fully disconnecting due to their personal investment in their businesses and work-related discussions extending into personal time. Another participant emphasized the need for detachment as a parent, with thoughts revolving around family and household matters. Regarding the impact of remote work on psychological detachment, participants expressed mixed perceptions. Some participants found remote work, including having designated remote working days, to facilitate detachment by reducing fatigue and stress. Factors such as avoiding traffic and the ability to finish work earlier contributed to a quicker sense of detachment. However, other participants felt that remote work did not significantly influence their ability to detach. They attributed detachment more to factors like commute and work-related phone calls rather than the work setting itself.

Challenges were also noted, including blurred boundaries between work and family responsibilities when working remotely and the absence of a clear separation between work and personal life while working from home. Overall, participants had diverse experiences and viewpoints regarding the impact of remote work on their psychological detachment from work. These findings shed light on the importance of recognizing individual differences and circumstances when considering psychological detachment from work. While some participants reported challenges and the need for specific strategies, others found certain aspects of remote work to be beneficial for detachment. These insights highlight the complexity of achieving psychological detachment and emphasize the need for organizations to foster a supportive environment that considers individual needs and promotes work-life balance.

When it came to mentally disconnecting from work during leisure time, the participants shared their personal strategies. Some participants mentioned engaging in hobbies and sports as a way to shift their focus and create a mental break from work. These activities provided them with a sense of enjoyment and served as a distraction from work-related thoughts. Others mentioned that having children and family commitments naturally helped them detach from work and prioritize personal time. The responsibilities and joy associated with their family roles provided a valuable reprieve from work-related stress. However, it is important to note that a few participants mentioned that they did not have specific strategies in place. Instead, they relied on their ability to adapt their approach based on their current schedule and commitments. For instance, one participant highlighted the importance of socializing and spending time with friends and family as a means to mentally detach from work. Another participant mentioned enjoying crocheting as a personal hobby that provides relaxation. These diverse strategies indicate that individuals employ various approaches to achieve psychological detachment based on their personal preferences and circumstances.

When it came to the participants' feelings about disconnecting from work after hours, there was a range of emotions expressed. Some participants felt relieved and enjoyed the opportunity to focus on personal time and activities when disconnected. However, some admitted to feeling guilty or anxious about not being available and occasionally checked their phone to alleviate these feelings. Nevertheless, the majority expressed positive sentiments about disconnecting, emphasizing the importance of finding a balance between work and personal life. Participants mentioned learning to manage the distinction between work and personal commitments, which helped them disconnect in a more peaceful manner. They also noted that detaching did not negatively impact their work performance. These responses highlighted the varying emotions individuals may experience when detaching from work and their evolving ability to manage work-life boundaries.

Importantly, the participants unanimously expressed confidence in their decision to prioritize personal time and believed they would not face negative consequences for disconnecting after working hours. They emphasized the importance of maintaining boundaries and not creating expectations of availability outside of designated working hours. Some participants mentioned being cautious about setting precedents to establish clear work hours. Overall, the participants demonstrated a healthy understanding of work-life balance and a commitment to prioritizing personal time, reinforcing the significance of psychological detachment from work. The responses emphasize that participants' workplaces do not have specific policies in place to regulate psychological detachment. Additionally, it highlights the participants' confidence in prioritizing personal time and maintaining work-life boundaries, without fear of negative consequences. Overall, this information offers insights into the participants' attitudes towards work-life balance and their ability to manage their availability and well-being outside of working hours.

The influence of companies and the managers on psychological detachment

The participants had varying perceptions regarding whether their companies encourage psychological detachment from work. Some participants reported that their colleagues, supervisors, and senior colleagues actively supported their right to disconnect, respecting their personal time and ensuring they did not receive work-related disturbances after hours. This support made them feel empowered and reassured in their ability to detach from work. However, other participants mentioned that their companies did not directly promote detachment and the expectations for availability outside of regular working hours depended on their roles and responsibilities. These participants emphasized the importance of setting their own boundaries, practicing personal discipline, and not feeling obligated to respond to work-related matters outside of working hours. While some workplaces took measures to support detachment, such as closing the office earlier for parents, there was a recognition that the level of encouragement to disconnect varied. Some managers were attentive and proactive in promoting work-life balance, while others, such as company founders or presidents, had difficulties differentiating between personal and work matters. Overall, participants acknowledged the need for balance and had a mutual understanding with their superiors about managing availability.

Psychological detachment and the EU legislation

The participants shared various perspectives on whether a legal framework at the EU level defining and regulating the right to disconnect could establish boundaries between work and personal life. Some participants believed that such a framework would help protect workers, especially in preventing burnout and setting clear limits. They suggested that it could provide support to individuals who struggle with setting boundaries on their own and alleviate concerns about negative consequences for not responding outside of working hours. However, others expressed the view that while a

legal framework could provide guidelines, the primary responsibility for disconnecting lies with the individual. They emphasized the importance of personal awareness and self-care in achieving work-life balance. One participant mentioned that the existing regulations already address practical aspects of disconnection rather than psychological detachment. Overall, the participants acknowledged the potential benefits of a legal framework but highlighted the significance of individual consciousness and self-management in achieving effective disconnection. The responses indicate that while there might not be specific formal measures or guidelines in place, there is a general awareness and attention to preventing employee burnout due to excessive work. Managers and colleagues are attentive to the workload and are willing to support each other as needed, with an informal understanding to share responsibilities and distribute the workload evenly among team members. The focus is also on considering personal needs, such as family and vacation time, to ensure a healthy work-life balance. This emphasis on mutual support, collaboration, and maintaining a manageable workload alleviates the pressure of expectations from managers and colleagues to respond or work during employees' time off. Overall, the participants' experiences reflect a workplace culture that values well-being and recognizes the importance of balancing work and personal life.

Discussion

The participants in the study shared valuable insights regarding their strategies for managing stress and work-related pressures when it comes to disconnecting from work. Various approaches were mentioned, including not dwelling on work-related matters during off-hours, engaging in different activities such as sports or cooking to shift focus, and replacing work commitments with personal ones for a mental break. Participants emphasized the importance of engaging in activities that provide personal fulfilment to mentally detach from work. When it comes to the difficulty of detaching from work, participants mentioned a strong sense of duty and feelings of guilt as factors hindering their ability to disconnect. They expressed a deep commitment to their work and a sense of responsibility towards their job responsibilities. However, they also acknowledged that family commitments may facilitate detachment, although it may not lead to complete relaxation. The participants' responses varied regarding whether their company encourages psychological detachment. While some participants mentioned that their colleagues, supervisors, and senior colleagues actively support their right to disconnect, others indicated that the company itself does not directly promote detachment. The level of expectation for extra work or availability outside of regular hours varied depending on the role and level of responsibility. However, participants highlighted the importance of personal discipline and establishing boundaries to manage availability after hours. In terms of ensuring time to disconnect from work, participants mentioned self-regulation, setting boundaries, and physically disconnecting from work devices. They generally expressed that they are not obligated to be constantly reachable outside of their designated work hours and have the



autonomy to prioritize personal time. The participants had mixed emotions when it comes to being disconnected from work. While some felt good and relieved, enjoying the opportunity to focus on personal activities, others admitted to feeling guilty or anxious at times. Nonetheless, the majority expressed positive sentiments about disconnecting, emphasizing the importance of work-life balance. They noted that disconnecting did not negatively impact their work performance. Overall, the participants conveyed a sense of confidence in their decision to prioritize personal time and separate it from work responsibilities. They believed in the importance of maintaining boundaries and not creating expectations of availability outside of designated working hours. While there may not be specific formal measures in place, there is a general awareness and attention to preventing burnout through mutual support, collaboration, and maintaining a manageable workload.

These findings provide valuable insights into individual coping mechanisms, workplace dynamics, and the importance of work-life balance. They highlight the need for organizations to foster a supportive environment that encourages detachment and respects employees' personal time, ultimately promoting employee well-being and productivity.

Conclusions

In conclusion, participants' responses shed light on the strategies and challenges of disconnecting from work. They emphasized personal fulfilment and mental breaks, while some experienced support from colleagues and supervisors, others lacked direct promotion of psychological detachment by their companies. However, participants recognized the significance of personal discipline and boundary-setting. Emotionally, some felt relieved, while others experienced guilt or anxiety. Nevertheless, most recognized the positive impact on work-life balance without perceiving negative consequences. Creating a supportive work environment that respects personal time is crucial. Though formal measures may be lacking, a general awareness of preventing burnout and promoting work-life balance exists through mutual support and effective workload management. These insights aid organizations in fostering employee well-being, productivity, and success.

CYPRUS

Introduction

The use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has allowed some industries to continue business operations and maintain employment levels during the COVID-19 pandemic by allowing workers to perform their duties remotely. However, this increased use of ICTs has led to a blurring of the lines between work and personal time, as workers may be expected to be available outside of traditional working hours and may feel pressure to work during their free time. This can be exacerbated by a work culture that prioritises long hours and heavy workloads. The SwitchOff project addresses this need for psychological detachment with emphasis on remote workers for whom clearly defining personal and professional boundaries at home might not be feasible.

This document has been developed in the framework of the “SwitchOff: supporting worker's well-being during remote work” funded by the ERASMUS+ programme under Cooperation partnerships in Vocational Education and Training, implemented during the period between 1/12/2022 – 30/11/2024.

This document presents the **current state of the art report for Cyprus** developed under the *Project Result 1: SwitchOff Toolkit for teleworkers, HR Professionals and managers*, aiming to develop a practical and innovative toolkit that is expected to support companies, SMEs, managers, HR professionals, trainers and remote workers in adopting best practices for teleworking and effectively using digital technologies and ICTs. The toolkit will initially include an introductory section with the **current-state of the art** where current **national and EU policies** on the right to disconnect and **best practices** implemented will be described based on desk research conducted by **all partners**. The purpose of this research is to draw conclusions and develop recommendations that will consist of the basis for the development of the other project activities and results.

Secondary research results are presented, providing an overview of the context of the right to disconnect from work at National (Cyprus) and EU level. Specifically, the sections provide a brief presentation of National and EU policies on the right to disconnect and **best practices** implemented will be described based on desk research conducted by **all partners**.

Primary research results from data collected through an online survey and focus group, for VET trainers (HR Managers) and remote workers, aiming to examine their perceptions and viewpoints concerning the importance of psychological detachment, the challenges they face in disconnecting from work, the identification of best practices and their intentions in developing practices that will enable employees' disconnection from work, are also presented.

Policies and national/EU initiatives on the 'right to disconnect'

EU initiatives & policies

Eurofound data suggest that remote workers are twice as likely to exceed the 48-hour working time limit and work in their free time (non-working hours). This data has put the spotlight on the need for a European legal framework directly defining and regulating the right of employees to disconnect (ETUC, 2021), as currently this right has not yet passed into EU law. However, different challenges relating to the right to disconnect such as working time limits, workers' health and work-life balance are addressed in different EU legislative texts, without specifically referring to the 'right to disconnect'. Such EU legislative texts are applicable to employees in general and not necessarily only remote workers.

For example, the Working Time Directive (Directive 2003/88/EC), refers to a number of rights that indirectly relate to similar issues, in particular the minimum daily and weekly rest periods that are required to safeguard workers' health and safety. Furthermore, the right to disconnect is related to attaining a better work-life balance, an objective that has been at the core of recent European initiatives – for example, Principle 9 ('Work-life balance') and Principle 10 ('Healthy, safe and well-adapted work environment and data protection') of the European Pillar of Social Rights, as well as the Work-Life Balance Directive – although they do not refer specifically to the right to disconnect.

Several EU member states have taken action to pass the right to disconnect into their national laws and have set legal precedents to protect workers from engaging in work-related electronic communications, such as emails or other messages, during non-work hours. For example, Belgium has passed a new national law that gives the right to public-sector employees to disconnect from their work emails, texts and phone calls received out of hours, without fear of reprisals. The legislation came into effect on 1 February 2022 and plans are being discussed to extend the new laws to employees in the private sector as well.

National initiatives & Policies

At a national level, members of the Cypriot parliament are at the preparatory stage of introducing such legislation. More specifically, MPs have proposed a legislation that will regulate work-from-home in an attempt to secure workers' rights, which appeared to have been affected during the coronavirus pandemic and the shift to remote working. According to the latest update on this matter provided by the Ministry of Labor, members of the parliament are waiting for the relevant directive from Brussels in order to adapt the Cypriot legislation to it. The legislation will concern both private and public workers. This delay however, has caused great frustration of parliament members as

the need to regulate and safeguard the rights of workers and employers and especially their right to detachment from work is growing.

Cyprus however, has also adapted the *European Working Time Directive*, meaning that weekly working hours are set to 38. With regards to working days, in Cyprus the five-day week has been enshrined in law, both for the private and for the public sector, with the exception of retail sales, where there is a six-day week due to the nature of the trade. Cyprus has also adopted the EU Work-Life Balance Directive which aims to promote a work-life balance for parents and carers while aiming to close the disparity between the genders when it comes to childcare as well as the lack of incentives for fathers to take parental leave for their children.

It is also worth mentioning that the Cyprus Ministerial Council has approved in December 2021 the new Health and Safety strategy 2021-2027 of Cyprus aiming at improving health and safety at the workplace. More specifically, this strategy includes 10 pillars covering, among others, the promotion of prevention and the establishment of a positive safety and health mentality; closer cooperation with the social partners and other involved stakeholders; the integration of issues related to safety and health at work in other policy fields; improvement of the Institutional and legal framework in compliance with EU policies. It is noteworthy that one of the pillars of this Strategy is the improvement of the work inspection system, including providing training to work inspectors for the existing and new challenges deriving from new forms of employment, such as telework, part-time work, and workplace digitalisation.

National/EU Practices and Best-case scenarios

Regardless of the challenges that emerged from teleworking, companies and organisations can take steps to prevent burnout or mental health issues, and promote employees' right to psychologically disconnect from work. Introducing and promoting simple tips and suggestions on daily practices on how to improve their well-being and recover from work during their leisure time is crucial. Workplace technological advancements have led to increased efficiency, yet this shift has led to a "24/7 always on culture" having as such a toll on remote worker's well-being. Therefore, there is a great need for employers to facilitate their employees' recovery from work and enhance their ability to disconnect. What is evident however so far is that companies have mostly focused on implementing well-being programs in general without specifically addressing the need for disconnecting from work.

Several Cyprus companies and organisations started to develop strategies on how to support their employees' well-being. New practices were introduced and new approaches were followed in order to prevent or manage mental health issues such as depression, anxiety and productivity fluctuations. PwC Cyprus, a private sector organisation, adopted the programme 'Be Well, Work Well' as part of the organisation's global approach to well-being. With this programme, PwC Cyprus supports its employees by investing in their physical, emotional, mental and spiritual well-being.

Additionally, the organisation offers their employees professional advice on nutrition, free fruit on a daily basis, physical therapy sessions on a weekly basis, medical services twice a month, sessions on work stress management, better time management and also created various activity clubs such as football, squash, basketball, dancing, bowling, outdoor activities etc.

Another successful example from the private sector is Parimatch Tech which was included in the Europe's Best Workplaces 2021 list and won many HR brand awards such for excellence in facilitating Workplace Wellbeing and Work-life balance. In fact, the organisation categorises well-being into employee, mental, financial and physical and explains the importance of each. The organisation offers to its employees the possibility of working remotely anywhere in the world, the services of three insurance companies each providing two types of insurance policy and covers all expenses of one choice from a list of different benefits such as gym, dentistry, car maintenance, psychology services, kindergarten for employees' children. Additionally, Parimatch Tech offers financial support on qualification improvement courses and other benefits such as free webinars, tickets for concerts, performances and music festivals, sports clubs for volleyball, hockey, running, football, basketball and other activities such as hiking and swimming.

However, despite the fact that Cyprus' companies and organisations focus on employees' well-being, there is still a great need for introducing practices that relate to work-life balance and specifically to the right to disconnect from work. Based on a guide on teleworking during COVID-19 pandemic, that was developed by the Centre of Excellence in Risk and Decision Sciences (CERIDES) of the European University Cyprus (EUC), there is a list of preventive measures that organisations can implement in order to avoid or manage the negative impacts of various hazards on teleworkers health. Such hazards are the heavy workload, the unspecified working hours, large number of online meetings, emails or phone calls, and the introduction of new ICT procedures.

On the EU level, several large companies have taken the initiative to grant their employees the right to disconnect. One example is Lidl in Belgium and Luxembourg that implemented a delay for internal emails that are sent after 6pm, meaning that these emails will not be delivered to the internal recipient until 7am the next day. Another example is the initiative taken by BMW and Daimler in Germany, to include in their company rules the right for employees not to answer work-related emails after working hours.

National report based on key primary findings - online questionnaire & Focus group

Descriptive Data Analysis

General Information

A total of 27 Cypriot teleworkers (hybrid or remote) including HR professionals and managers (20 females, 7 males) completed an online questionnaire which was available on Google forms. The aim of this online questionnaire was to assess their needs (e.g., challenges they face in disconnecting from work, current use of ICTs, practices that help them unwind from work), in order to contribute to the development of a “SwitchOff” step-by-step guide for effective use of digital technologies and other practices for fostering employees’ psychological detachment from work.

Additional demographic information about the respondents was collected. Participants’ age ranged from 25 to 64 years, with the majority being between the ages of 25 and 35 (Figure 1). About the participants highest educational qualification held, the majority (63%) hold a master's degree (Figure 2). In terms of tenure of the respondents at their current employer, nearly half (48.1%) of the respondents have been working at their current company for 1-5 years (Figure 3).

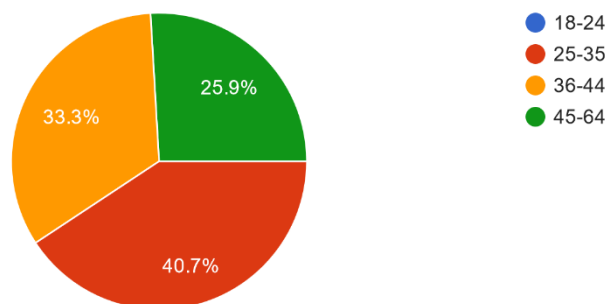


Figure 1. Age of participants

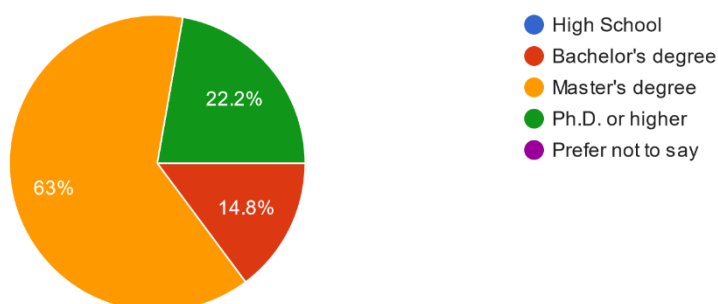


Figure 2. Educational background of participants

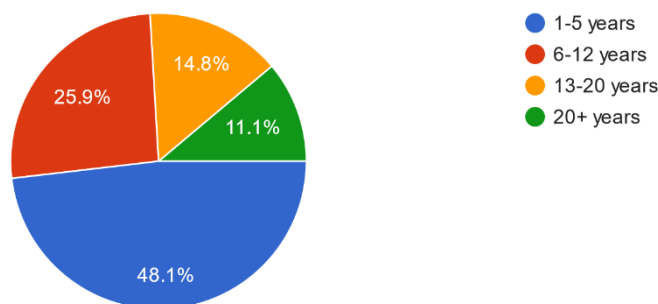


Figure 3. Tenure at the current employer

The impact of Covid-19 on organisational remote work policies

The majority of respondents (77.8%) reported that the Covid-19 pandemic had an impact on their organization's remote work policy, while 55.6% stated that they were still not back to their pre-Covid-19 status in terms of remote work. Following the Covid-19 pandemic, organisations adopted a flexible hybrid working approach and working from home is an option now for most companies, whereas in the past this was not. Participants also reported that although they now have more flexibility, they end up working longer hours.

EU policies on the right to disconnect

The majority of respondents were not aware of the current EU discussion on the “right to disconnect” (70.4%). Yet, 74% of participants agree or strongly agree that an EU legal framework that defines and regulates the right to disconnect can establish boundaries between work and personal life (Figure 4).

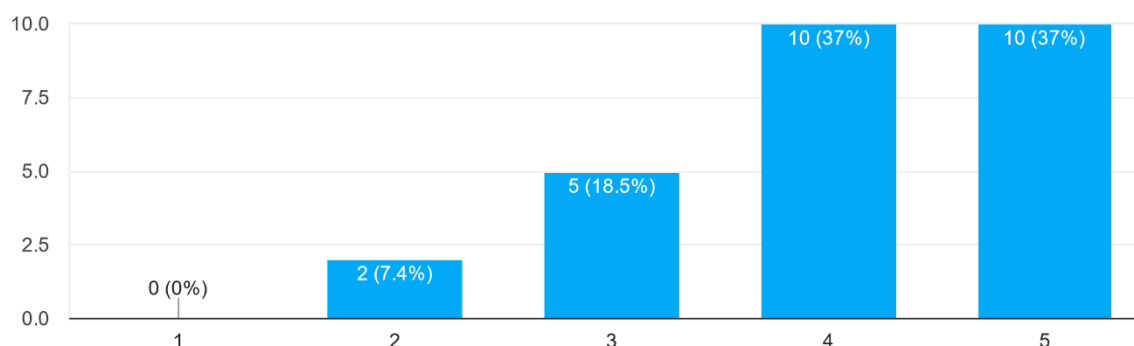


Figure 4. The EU legal framework that defines and regulates the right to disconnect can set boundaries between work and personal life

Managers' perspectives on the right to disconnect

The majority of managers (62.9%) answered that they often or usually encourage their team to disconnect from work (Figure 5), whereas the majority of managers (96.3%) stated that they rarely or never expect from their team to be available outside of normal working hours (Figure 6). Moreover, about half of the respondents (55.6%) rarely email a co-worker or subordinate after business hours (Figure 7), and 77.9% rarely or never assign a task to a colleague on a Friday afternoon (Figure 8).

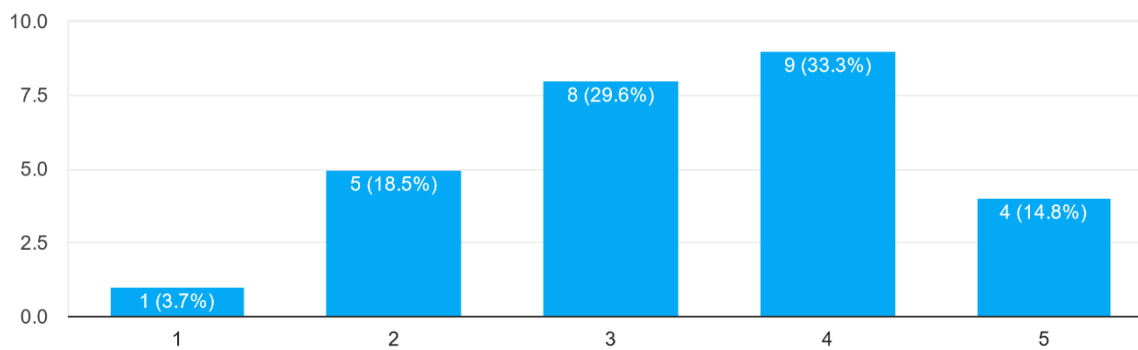


Figure 5. How often, as a manager, do you encourage your team to disconnect from work

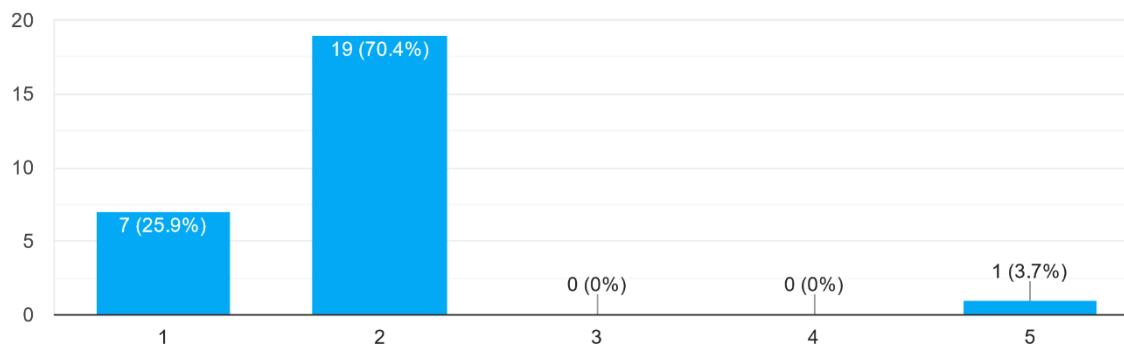


Figure 6. How often, as a manager, do you expect your team to be available outside of normal working hours

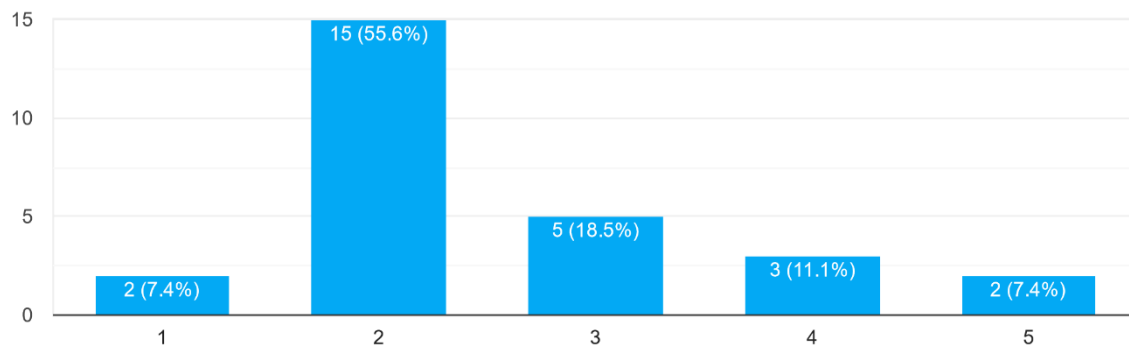


Figure 7. How often do you email a coworker or subordinate after business hours

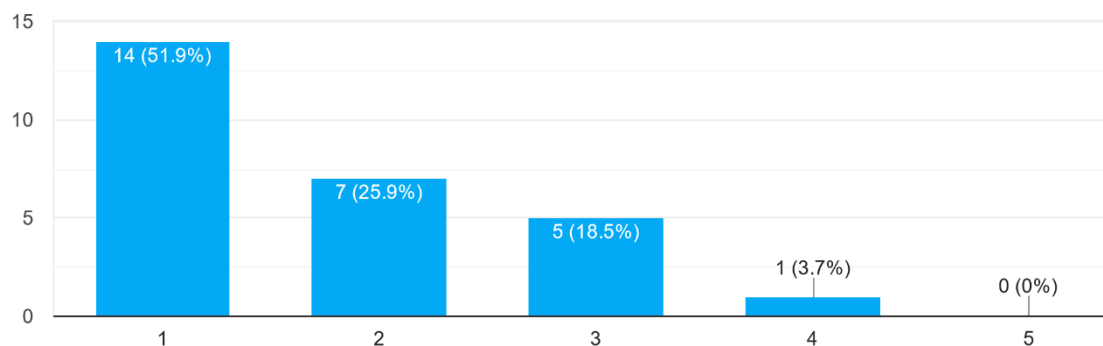


Figure 8. On a Friday afternoon, how often do you assign a task to a colleague

The significance and the challenges of the right to disconnect

The majority of respondents (74.1%) stated that being free of work-related activities during off-work hours is very important, while 22.2% stated it is only moderately important (Figure 9).

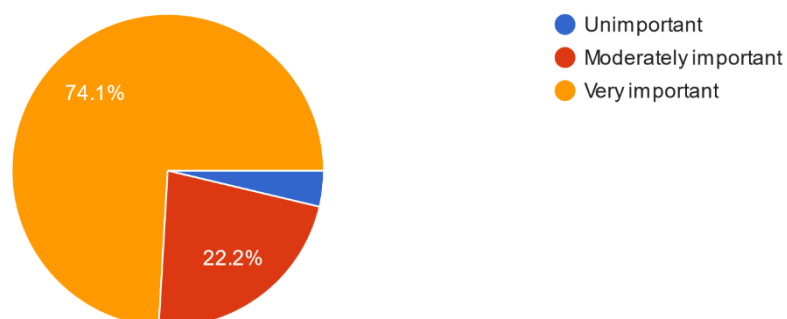


Figure 9. How important is it not to be preoccupied with work-related duties during off-hours

Moreover, the vast majority of respondents (92.6%) agree or strongly agree that the right to disconnect can significantly contribute to a better work-life balance (Figure 10), while the majority of respondents (48.1%) agree that even when they are physically away from work, they are not mentally disengaged (Figure 11). Furthermore, 92.6% of respondents agree or strongly agree that they have the right to disconnect from work after normal business hours (Figure 12), while the majority of respondents (70.3%) are not concerned that doing so will result in repercussions (Figure 13). In addition, 44.4% of participants agree with the belief that they must be readily available and responsive outside of regular business hours (Figure 14).

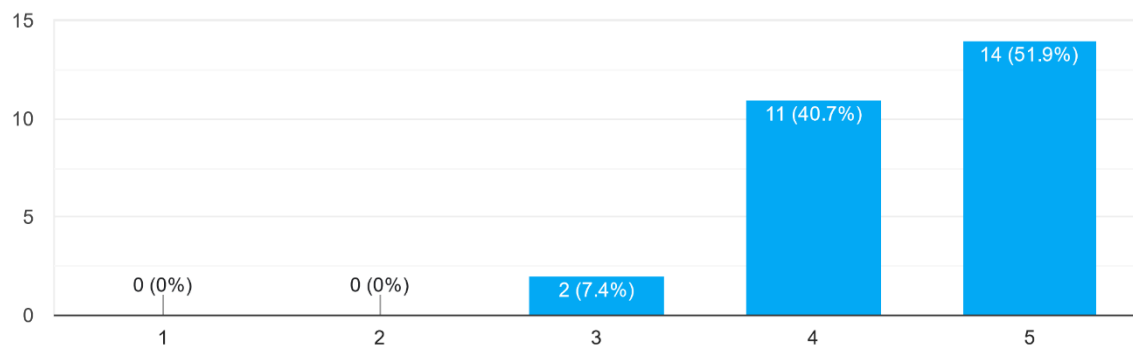


Figure 10. The right to disconnect can contribute significantly to a better work-life balance

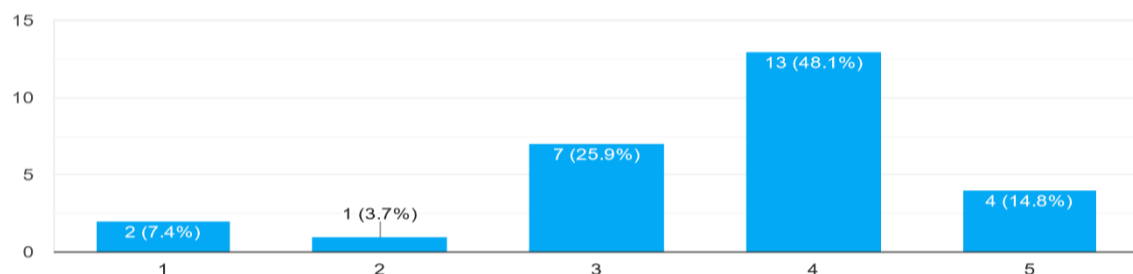


Figure 11. Despite being physically away from work, I am unable to mentally disconnect

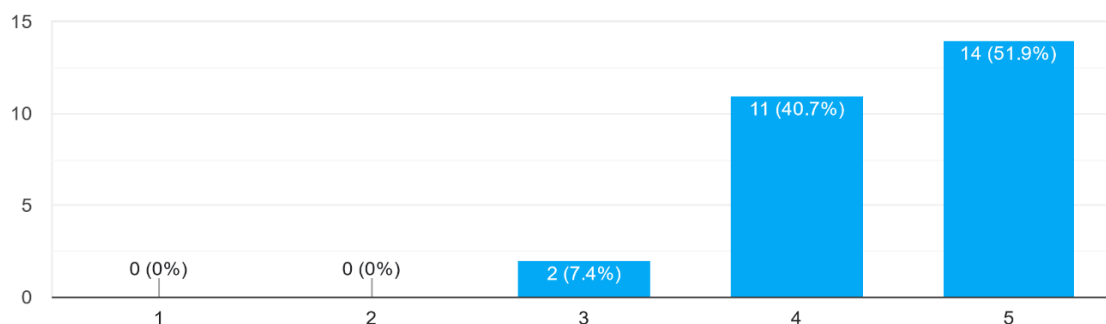


Figure 12. I believe I have the right to disconnect from work after normal business hours

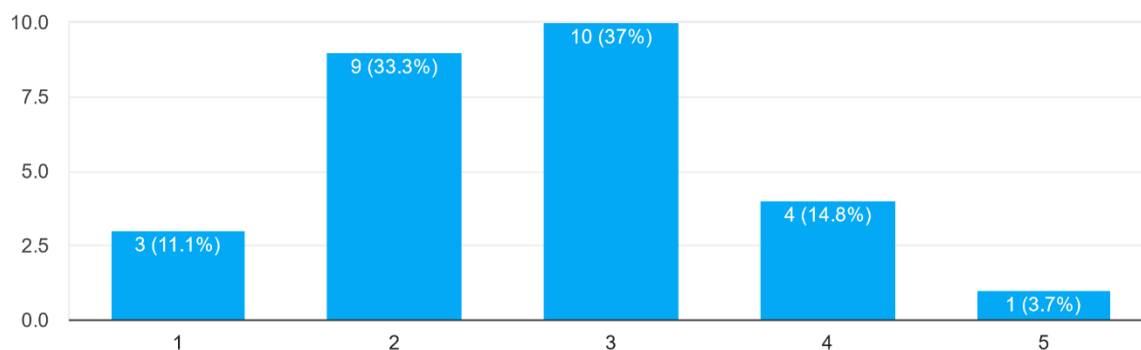


Figure 13. I am concerned that if I disconnect from work after normal business hours, I will face repercussions

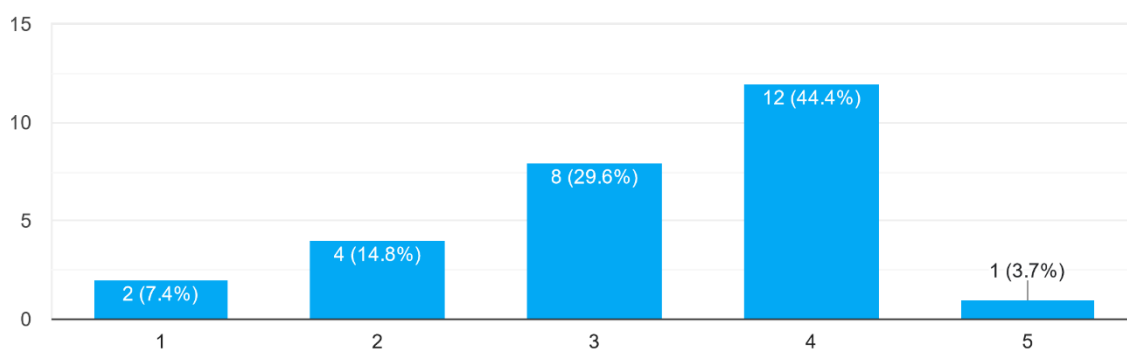


Figure 14. Outside of normal business hours, I feel obligated to be available and responsive

Organisational perspectives on the right to disconnect

The majority of respondents (37%) neither agrees or disagrees that their organisation recognizes the importance of its employees' right to disconnect and disagrees with the notion that their organisation takes positive action on that right (Figure 15,16). Furthermore, 40.7% of the respondents disagree that their organisation takes any positive action on the right to disconnect, while only 18.5% agree or strongly agree that their organisation takes any positive action on the right to disconnect (Figure 17). Also 44.4% of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree that their organisation has a manageable workload, whereas 25.9% agree or strongly agree (Figure 18). In addition, 51.8% of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree that their organisation adopts policies to help employees detach psychologically from work (Figure 19). Moreover, only 25.9% of the respondents agreed or disagreed that their organisation organises extracurricular events to help employees relax/unwind after normal business hours, whilst the majority of participants (51.8%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement (Figure 20).

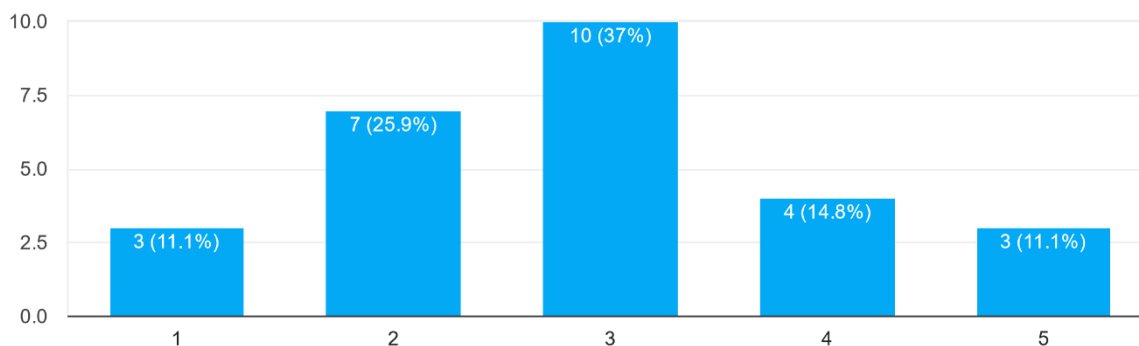


Figure 15. My organisation recognizes the significance of employees' the right to disconnect

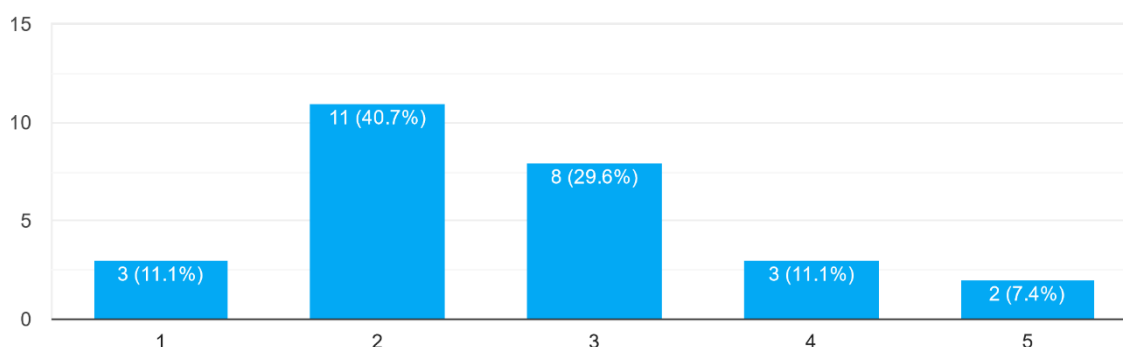


Figure 16. My organisation takes positive action on the right to disconnect

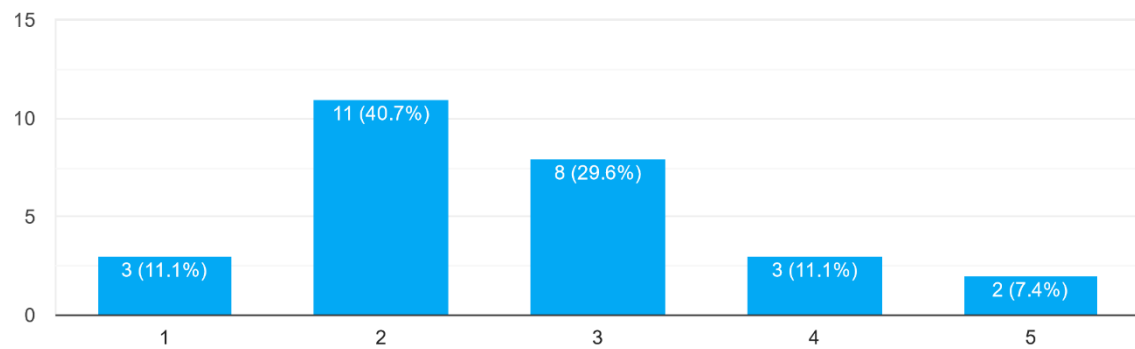


Figure 17. My organisation adopts policies on the right to disconnect.

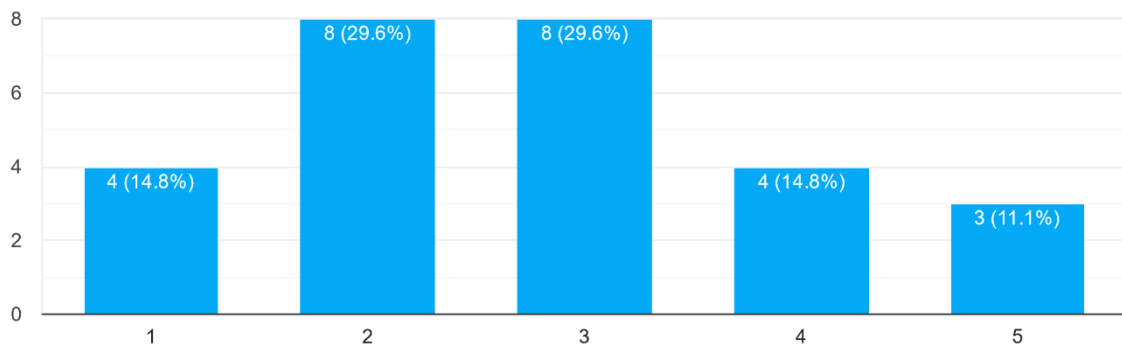


Figure 18. My organisation has a manageable workload

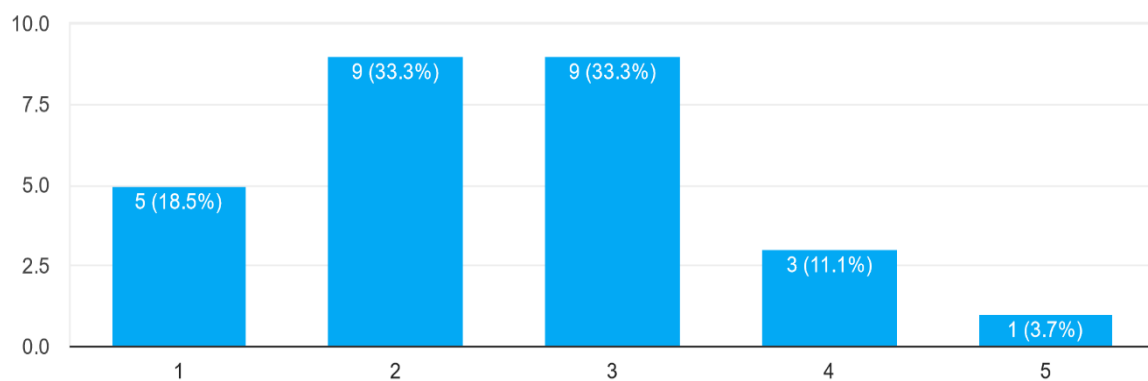


Figure 19. My organisation adopts policies to help employees detach psychologically from work

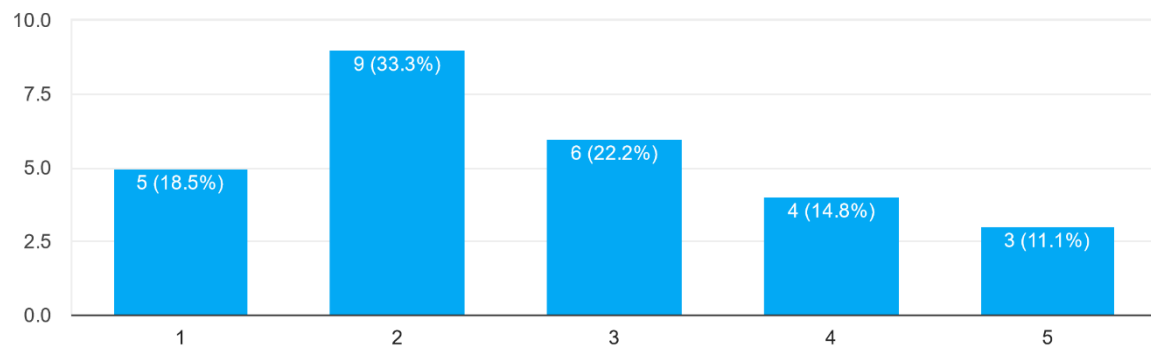


Figure 20. My organisation organises extracurricular events to help employees relax/unwind after normal business hours

Initiatives/programs/actions/processes/policies that promoted/facilitated psychological detachment from work at the organisations the last five years.

The majority of respondents stated that the HR department is in charge of employees' well-being in their organisations, and that various initiatives/programs/actions/processes/policies had promoted/facilitated psychological detachment from work at their organisations over the previous five years: Some examples include:

Wellbeing initiatives such as stress management workshops, mindfulness sessions, boundary management for a healthy work life balance, mental health awareness talks, and individual sessions with a psychologist, extra days off around religious holidays, recharge days.

Team Work activities such as activities in nature (e.g. hiking, swimming, yoga), brunch with their families and colleagues, access to online library for reading books and relaxing, outings at restaurants, two nights stay at hotels with their families, Staff and management organise regular get together/parties/after hour drinks/dinners for bonding outside of working hours.

Factors impeding the effort to implement a programme to assist employees in switching off from work.

The main challenges mentioned by respondents as impeding efforts to implement a programme to help employees switch off from work were: Lack of leadership commitment (66.7%), lack of expertise in implementing such a program (55.6%), lack of resources (44.4%), and lack of awareness on what is meant by "the right to disconnect" and "switching off from work" (44.4%), fear of the unknown (33.3%), employees' unwillingness (18.5%) and other factors (14.8%) such as lack of support from top management and concerns about feasibility of such programme (Figure 21).

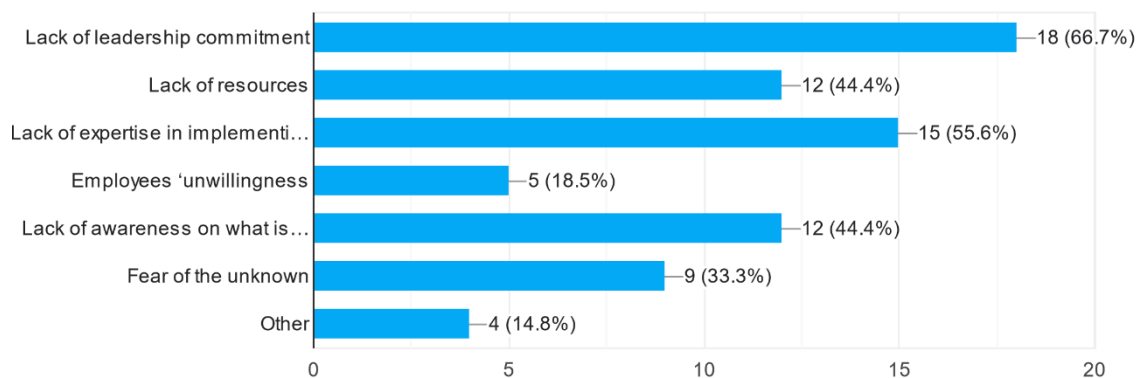


Figure 21. Factors that hinder the effort to implement a program to help employees switch off from work

Training on the right to disconnect and how to promote psychological detachment from work

Only 11.1% of respondents reported having received training on the right to disconnect and how to encourage psychological detachment from work (Figure 22), while 70.4% stated that they are interested in receiving training on psychological detachment issues in organisations (Figure 23). Moreover, the most prevalent topics for HR training to promote psychological detachment from work were: Boundary management for better work life balance (74.1%), disconnecting from work; the role of the managers/supervisor/HR professional in creating the appropriate conditions to promote employees' right to disconnect (74.1%), how to manage out of working hours communications (70.4%), training on psychological detachment (74.1%), and effective use of digital technologies to facilitate the right to disconnect (e.g. customizing email notifications, effective use of online calendars for better management of meetings, activation of automatic response when taking annual leave) (66.7%), evidence based recovery activities (59.3%), and adjusting/or implementing organisational policies that will support their employees' 'right to disconnect' (70.4%) (Figure 24).

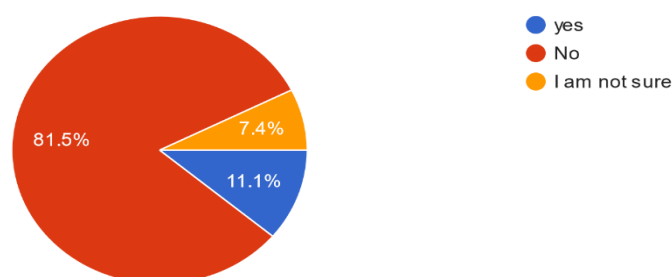


Figure 22. Training on how to promote psychological detachment from work or on policies relating to the right to disconnect

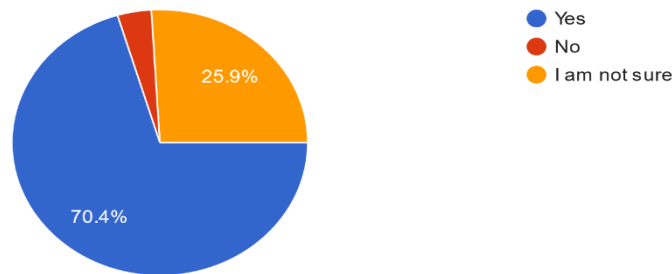


Figure 23. Interest in receiving training in psychological detachment issues in organisations

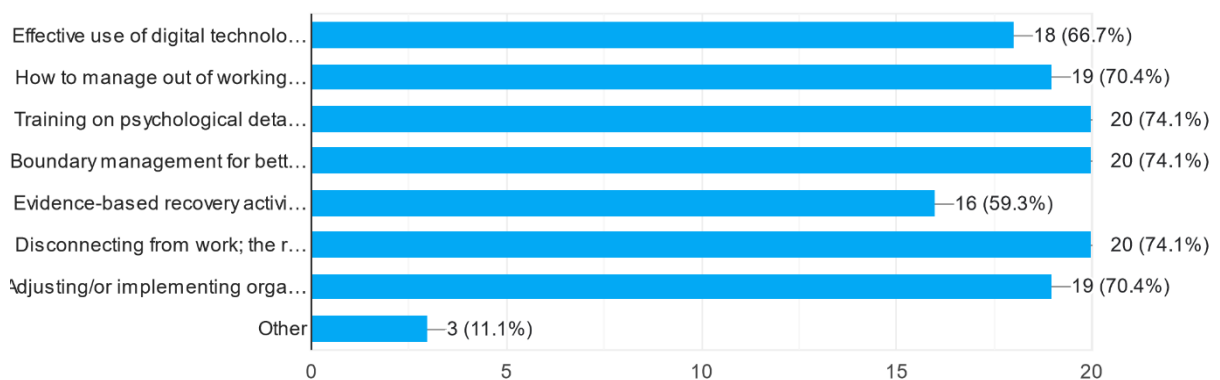


Figure 24. Topics of interest for HR training to promote psychological detachment from work

Summary of Results

The present study aimed to assess HR professionals' perceptions and viewpoints on the importance of switching off and psychologically disconnecting from work, challenges they face during these efforts, and the needs they might have in implementing practices and policies that will help themselves but also their employees unwind from work. is to identify the demographic characteristics of the remote workers (teleworkers), managers and HR professionals in Cyprus, as well as to examine their needs and challenges in disconnecting and "switching off" from work during non-working hours.

Findings indicated that the majority of respondents are not aware of the current EU and local level debates on the right to disconnect but the majority agrees and strongly agrees that an EU legislative framework may help with setting more clear boundaries between work and personal life.

Furthermore, in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, respondents reported that remote working policies in their organisations have been impacted. More specifically,

participants reported that following the Covid-19 period the majority of employees prefer to work remotely or at least work from home some days per week (hybrid working arrangement). Also, organisations now seem to be offering more flexibility to their employees and do understand that work can now be completed from home also. However, the results showed that organisations although they somehow recognise the importance of their employees' right to disconnect, they do not seem to take positive action on that right, and this finding is in line with the fact that the majority of respondents stated that their organisation does not adopt any policies to help employees detach psychologically from work.

Moreover, the findings revealed that although respondents believe they have the right to disconnect from work, yet the majority feels obligated to be available and responsive after normal business hours. Still, they do not feel that they will face any repercussions if they disconnect from work after normal business hours. With regards to their ability to psychologically disconnect from work, the majority of respondents claimed that even when they are physically absent from work, they are not mentally disengaged from it. They do however acknowledge that disconnecting from work can help them maintain a healthier work-life balance.

Although the majority of respondents have not been trained on how to promote psychological detachment from work or on policies relating to the right to disconnect, a strong interest was expressed in receiving training in psychological detachment in organisational settings. The topics they expressed the most interest in receiving training in were: Boundary management for better work life balance, disconnecting from work; The role of the managers/supervisor/HR professional in creating the appropriate conditions to promote employees' right to disconnect, Training on psychological detachment, how to manage out of working hours communications and adjusting/or implementing organisational policies that will support their employees' 'right to disconnect'. Respondents also reported some of the most important factors that could hinder their efforts in implementing for the first time a program to help employees switch off from work and mentally disconnect from work after working hours. The most important hindering factors were: a lack of leadership commitment, a lack of resources, a lack of expertise in implementing such a programme, and a lack of understanding of what "the right to disconnect" and "switching off from work" meant.

Focus group Analysis

A total of 9 Cypriot teleworkers (hybrid or remote) participated in an online focus group completed via Google Meet. The purpose of this focus group was to identify the needs of people that work remotely and any difficulties that they may be facing in psychologically detaching from work. Through productive discussions and individual perspectives, participants responded to questions related to detachment from work. Please find below the main points of discussion for each focus group question:

**How would you describe your ability to detach psychologically in off job hours?
(Psychological detachment refers to an individual's experience of being mentally**

away from work, to make a pause in thinking about work-related issues, thus to "switch off").

Based on participants' responses, the ability to psychologically detach from work outside working hours heavily depends on individual characteristics (e.g. if someone is stressful in general) and on the business culture.

How much does this relate to the fact that you work remotely?

Remote working, especially after the Covid-19 has strong relation with difficulties in psychological detachment as the majority of workers have access to their working platforms using their mobile phones. This sets them on a standby mode and makes it difficult for them to switch off psychologically from work.

Do you believe your company takes any steps to facilitate your right to disconnect from work after normal business hours?

This matter also depends on the business culture. Some businesses are implementing practices related to the wellbeing of their employees and some others do not really take action on implementing practices that ease the process of disconnection from work.

What is the primary reason for your inability to disconnect from work?

Some of the main reasons for participants' inability to disconnect from work is their position in the business as some positions 'expect' you to be standby sometimes (e.g. managers, team leaders). Also some participants mentioned the importance of the manager's attitude and expectations as key reasons for their inability to disconnect. Some managers might for example expect from their employees to be available outside their normal working hours.

Is it expected of you to be available to respond to emails or other work-related requests after hours?

This also depends on the seniority level and the work schedule of the employees as in some positions the employees are expected to be responsive during off job hours.

How do you make sure you have time to disconnect from work after regular business hours?

The most effective way to disconnect from work according to the participant is by turning off the notifications from mobile phones.

Do you feel obligated to be available and responsive outside of normal business hours?

For some of the participants this was a yes whereas for others was a no. Again this depends on the seniority level and the business culture.

Is your workplace encouraging you to disconnect from work after hours?

Some businesses are very encouraging in disconnecting from work as they actively show their respect to their employees off hours by not sending any emails or calling while others do not follow the same approach. This strongly depends on business culture.

Does your company have a policy in place outlining employees' rights to take time away from work? If yes, please elaborate.

Some businesses do have a policy about their employees' wellbeing in general and only a few had some code of conduct regarding employees' right to disconnect. This again depends on the business culture but also on the level at which co-workers understand and communicate with each other. Another point to note is that there are cases where the work of some employees depends on the work of other employees. In these cases, a balance between the two must be found in order to avoid working during off job hours.

Are there any precautions in place to protect employees from burnout as a result of overwork?

In some businesses multiple actions are taken to avoid burnout. Examples of such actions are free yoga sessions, offers for fitness classes and extra days off. However, this doesn't apply to all businesses and depends on business culture.

How do you manage expectations with your boss and coworkers regarding work/life balance and contacting you after normal working hours?

This is on each employee to set boundaries and let their boss and coworkers understand the importance of work/life balance. Another important way is to be organised and set deadlines so that both the boss and coworkers know when the tasks will be completed.

When it comes to disconnecting from work, how do you deal with stress and other work-related pressures?

Some examples on how participants deal with stress and other work-related pressures include working out, reading, playing video games, cooking, having sessions with a psychologist, keeping a diary, making a list of tasks with deadlines.

Do you have any personal strategies to disengage yourself mentally from work in off job time? If yes, please tell us more about it.

Some of the actions that participants take to mentally disengage from work is to arrange meetings with friends and family after work so that they keep in mind a deadline at which they will have to stop working. Another practice is to schedule a class of a hobby (e.g. sports, arts) that you can commit to in order to be motivated.

How do you feel about being disconnected from work and not receiving or responding to work-related emails, phone calls, or messages after normal business hours?

This is very relieving and lets employees relax and enjoy their off job hours. It is something that employees demand from their working environment.

Are you concerned about any negative consequences if you disconnect from work after normal working hours?

Some employees expressed some concerns about their performance reviews being negatively impacted when not being available after working hours. The majority of participants however reported no concerns.

Can an EU legal framework that defines and regulates the right to disconnect set boundaries between work and personal life?

An EU legal framework will take time but eventually it will help, especially for smaller countries such as Cyprus as it will put pressure on companies to start implementing policies. It will be easier for companies to respect employees' job off hours and value human assets. It will also force companies to change their culture and help protect the rights of the employees. However, in order for this process to succeed, businesses need to be audited and somehow regulated so that they properly follow the legal framework so that businesses that do not comply with it, will face some negative consequences. Another very important part is to receive feedback from employees. Finally, the role of managers and the top to bottom changes, is crucial as they will have to lead by example.

Summary of Results

The present focus group aimed at identifying the needs of people that work remotely and any difficulties that they may be facing in psychologically detaching from work. From participants' responses it was indicated that remote workers find it difficult to disconnect from work. Especially after the Covid-19, when the majority of employees were expected to be connected online to work. This resulted in having employees connecting their business email on their mobile and other personal devices in order to receive notifications. However, in an after-Covid-19 era, employees seem to remain connected and this leads to difficulties in disconnecting from work during off job hours.

Another main factor for problems in disconnecting from work strongly relates to business culture and how each business approaches the work/life balance. In some cases, businesses actively show their respect to their employees off job hours and wellbeing while others expect their employees to be on standby at any time within the day. This also showed to be related to the seniority level as in some positions it is harder to disconnect from work.

One important point from the discussion with remote workers is that it is also part of their responsibility to set boundaries and control their schedule by setting deadlines

and effectively communicating their needs to both their manager and coworkers. Additionally, following some best practices or personal strategies to help them disengage from work is part of their responsibility towards their work/life balance.

Finally, respondents stated that having a legal framework related to disconnection from work will definitely benefit the process, support employees' work/life balance and avoid burnout. This legal framework cannot stand alone though. Continuous evaluation and control need to take place in the process in order to ensure that all businesses comply with it properly.

Recommendations

Both primary and secondary research findings in Cyprus presented in this report indicate that there is very limited efforts and commitment, by companies, to promote the right of employees to disconnect from work. Organisations although they somehow recognise the importance of their employees' right to disconnect, they do not seem to take positive action on that right, and this finding is in line with the fact that the majority of respondents stated that their organisation does not adopt any policies to help employees detach psychologically from work.

Some conclusions and recommendations that can be drawn from the research results are:

- Raise awareness of what is meant exactly by "the right to disconnect" and "switching off from work" and the benefits of doing so for the individual and the organisation. This could be achieved by promoting examples of good practices both on a national and international level.
- Managers/supervisor/HR professionals need to be trained on how they could create the appropriate conditions to promote employees' right to disconnect. Leadership commitment on all levels is necessary
- Policies should focus on the right of employees to disconnect after normal working hours. To do so, a more solid definition of what is meant exactly by this should be adopted by policymakers, stakeholders and companies, with great emphasis on the ways with which manage out of working hours communications can be managed and controlled and how organisational policies can be adjusted accordingly in a way that will support their employees' 'right to disconnect'.

PORTUGAL

Introduction

Employees have the right to disconnect from work-related technology and communication while they are not working, which is referred to as having the right to disconnect. Nevertheless, the boundary between work and personal time has faded in the era of digitalisation, making employees more stressed and burned out.

This state-of-the-art report aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the status of the right to disconnect in Portugal and in the European Union (EU), including national and European policies and initiatives. In order to implement the right to disconnect, this report also intends to identify best practices and best-case scenarios to assist the right to disconnect's adoption in businesses and society by raising awareness of its significance.

Policies and national/EU initiatives on the 'right to disconnect'

A public discussion about the need for a more flexible work environment and for mixed on-site and remote working possibilities has gained relevance since the beginning of COVID-19, driven by the growing awareness of the impact of technology on work-life balance.

To ensure a better work-life balance for citizens, which was put even more at risk since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic due to remote work and hybrid work contexts, the Portuguese Government approved a new law in this regard, in December 2021. The law states that, in the case of remote work, the "employer has the duty to refrain from contacting the worker during the rest period, except in situations of force majeure" and that the violation of this consists of a serious offense (Law n. ° 83/2021 of 6 December). In practice, this law means that a remote worker has the right to turn off the company's computer and mobile phone when the workday ends and to not turn them on until the following workday begins. This legal provision determines that any less favourable treatment given to an employee because he/she exercises the right to rest consecrated in this law constitutes a discriminatory action, and he/she may not be prejudiced, namely, in his/her career progression or working conditions. It was considered one of the most employee-friendly laws in Europe by *The Financial Times* and *The Guardian* (Observador, 2021) as, besides being a right of the worker, it constitutes a duty of the employer.

In addition to government-led initiatives and hybrid work in the public sphere, there have also been private-sector initiatives aimed at promoting the right to disconnect. For example, some major companies in Portugal, such as EDP and Galp, have implemented flexible work arrangements, such as remote work and flexible hours, which can help employees to better manage their work-life balance. These companies have also established clear policies and guidelines to support employees in disconnecting from work outside of work hours, such as setting expectations for



responding to work-related communication outside of work hours and providing employees with the tools and support they need to manage their work-life balance.

Despite these important initiatives and policies, Portugal's right to disconnect still needs to be widely implemented. There are concerns about the absence of enforcement measures to make sure that companies follow the rules, and some employees still feel pressured to react to work-related communications outside their working hours.

The right to disconnect is of course also growing across Europe. In 2019, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU adopted a recommendation on work-life balance for parents and carers, which encouraged EU member states to take measures to support the right to disconnect. This included implementing legal frameworks supporting this right, encouraging employers to adopt flexible working arrangements, and promoting awareness on this subject. As the pandemic unfolded challenges in balancing work and personal life, European legislation was improved, and the EU initiatives contributed to member states adopting laws supporting the right to switch off. Nowadays, European workers have more recognised rights on this area than just some years ago, although some countries were concerned about it long before the COVID-19 pandemic, such as France.

France is considered a pioneer in legally recognising the right to disconnect. A national cross-sectoral agreement on quality of life at work was first published in 2013, and it urged companies to minimise any intrusion into their workers' personal lives by establishing times when devices should be turned off. The French labour code now regulates this right under article L.2242-17, after it was later made a law on the 8th of August 2016. Other EU nations have been somewhat motivated by France's strategy. Nevertheless, this right is not of direct and immediate application, since that, to acquire practical effects, it requires negotiation with trade union structures. This also happens in other countries.

Regardless of some positive initiatives, the status of the right to disconnect varies across the EU. Some countries fully recognise it in the law, while in others governments only encourage companies to adopt clear policies and guidelines for managing work-related communication out of work hours and work-life balance.

National/EU Practices and Best-case scenarios

One good practice in the Portuguese public sector regarding the right to disconnect is the implementation of regulation on remote work and working hours – rigid, flexible, or half-time. This allows employees to better balance their work and personal life and reduces the expectation to constantly be available outside of regular working hours. This not only respects the right to disconnect but can also improve work-life balance and overall job satisfaction.

Remote work was already a possibility in the legal system, but in practice it was residually implemented before the COVID-19 pandemic. It is now mandatory to have a quota of 25% of public employees in remote work. Since 2020, the legislation has been adapted and remote work has become a clearer right, and in certain administrations it is now possible for parents of small children to request remote work for three years. In 2023, remote work was approved for those who are informal caregivers and/or have children with disabilities.

In the Portuguese private sector, an example of a well-being practice is the LiveWell app, made available by Zurich Portugal for its 500 workers. The goal of the company with this app is to promote a healthy lifestyle and alert to the importance of an active life. Through the app, the company intends to reinforce its concern for the holistic well-being of its employees in various dimensions, namely physical, mental, social, and financial. It also aims an adjusted conciliation between the personal, family, and professional lives, as this conciliation is essential for the workers' happiness. With the LiveWell app, Zurich Portugal wants to be closer to their employees, contributing in a simple, practical, and relaxed way to reinforce or introduce small daily gestures so that they become healthy and happy routines, not only for the employees but also for their families. The app contains personalised tips and content, to be more attractive. In practice, it invites users to set one of five available health goals – energy, fitness, happiness, weight loss, or stress – and define their main interests, such as sleep, financial health, mental health, relationships, parenting, or alternative medicine, as well as the indicators to measure.

At a European level, Airbus (France) is considered a top employer. Among other reasons, this happens because it values the development of its employees and offers a wide range of training and career growth opportunities. To develop leadership and teamwork abilities, all employees have access to a wide range of development programmes, courses, blended learning solutions, conferences, learning trips, events, team workshops, and coaching through the Airbus Leadership University. This university encourages experiential learning and goes beyond conventional training methods.

Airbus also respects diversity and inclusiveness, and actively works to create a workplace culture that supports and celebrates difference. Airbus provides a supportive and healthy work environment by promoting its staff well-being, with programmes and initiatives designed to develop physical, mental, and emotional health. The company has a strong corporate culture that is focused on teamwork, collaboration, and mutual respect, which contributes to a positive work environment and high levels of employee engagement.

National report based on key primary findings – online questionnaire & Focus group

Descriptive Data Analysis

General Information

The SwitchOff questionnaire, provided through Google Forms, was completed by 34 Portuguese teleworking professionals (hybrid or remote), including HR professionals and managers. 23 respondents were female and 11 were male. Through this survey they assessed their needs on the right to disconnect from work to contribute to the development of a “SwitchOff” step-by-step guide for effective use of digital technologies and other practices for fostering work-life balance.

Additional information about the respondents was gathered. They ranged in age from 18 to 64 years, with the majority being between the ages of 45 and 64 (Figure 1). Most of them (47,1%) hold a master's degree, 38,2% hold a bachelor's degree, 8,8% hold a high school diploma and 2,9% hold a Ph.D. degree (Figure 2). In terms of tenure of the respondents at their current workplace, 52,9% have 1-5 years, 23,5% have 6-12 years, 11,8% have 13-20 years, and 11,8% have more than 20 years (Figure 3).

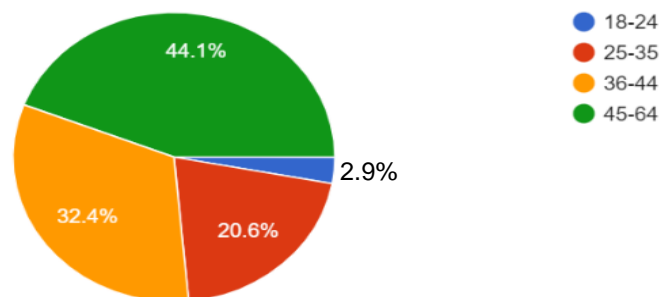


Figure 1 – Age of participants

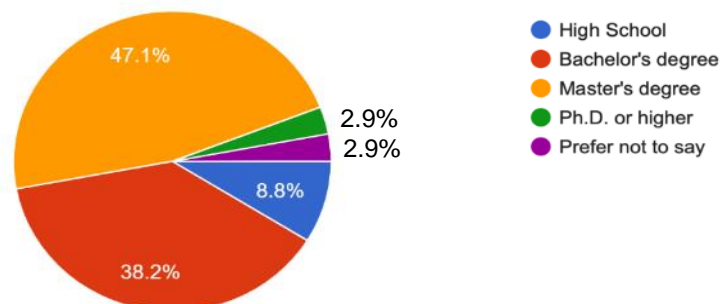


Figure 2 – Educational background of participants

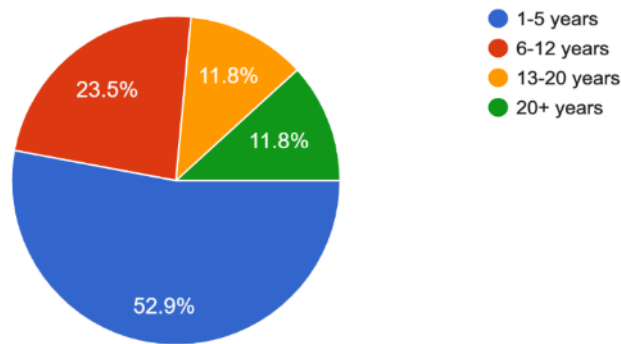


Figure 3 – Tenure at the current employer

The impact of Covid-19 on organisational remote work policies

Most respondents (91,2%) reported that the Covid-19 pandemic had an impact on their organisation's remote work policy, while 75,8% stated that they were still not back to their pre-Covid-19 status in terms of remote work. After the pandemic, organisations adopted flexible measures regarding remote working and in some cases, this even became the standard regime.

EU policies on the right to disconnect

The large majority of respondents (94%) agree or strongly agree that an EU legal framework that defines and regulates the right to disconnect can establish boundaries between work and personal life (Figure 4), while 58,8% of participants are aware of the current EU and local level discussions on the right to disconnect.

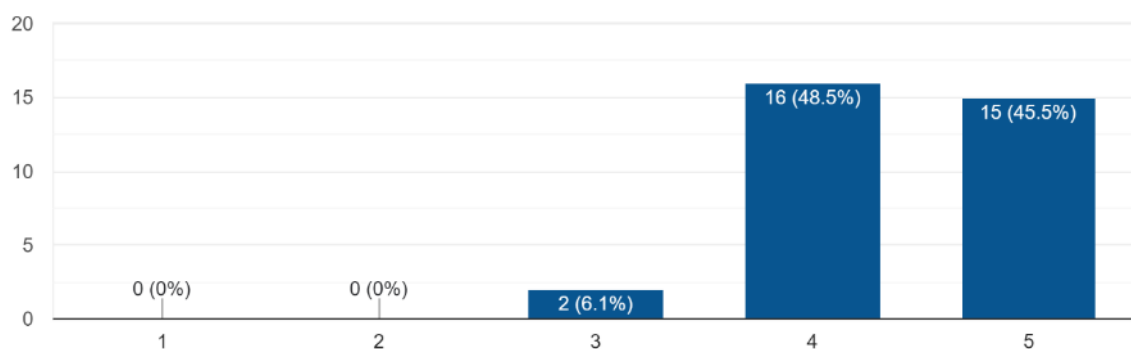


Figure 4 – the EU legal framework that defines and regulates the right to disconnect can set boundaries between work and personal life

Managers' perspectives on the right to disconnect

The majority of managers (70,8%) answered that they often or always encourage their team to disconnect from work (Figure 5), 87,5% stated that they rarely or never demand their team to be available outside of normal working hours (Figure 6). Moreover, most of the respondents (61,8%) rarely or never email a co-worker or

subordinate after business hours (Figure 7) and 82,2% rarely or never assign a task to a colleague on a Friday afternoon (Figure 8).

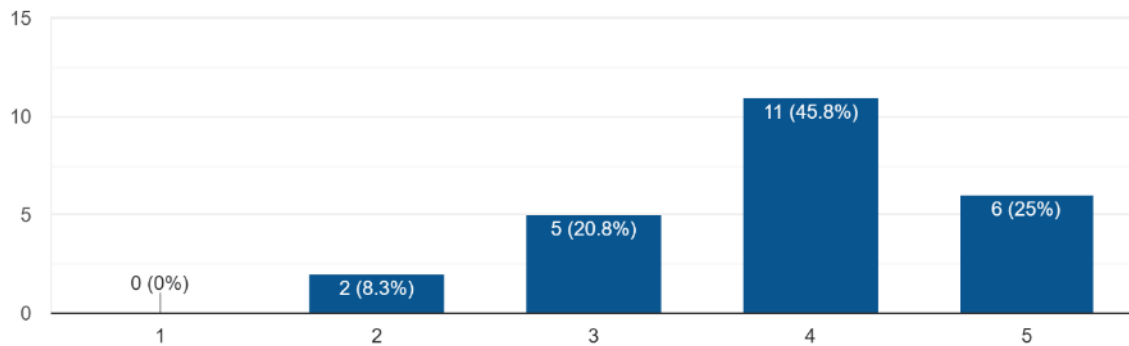


Figure 5 – How often, as a manager, do you encourage your team to disconnect from work?

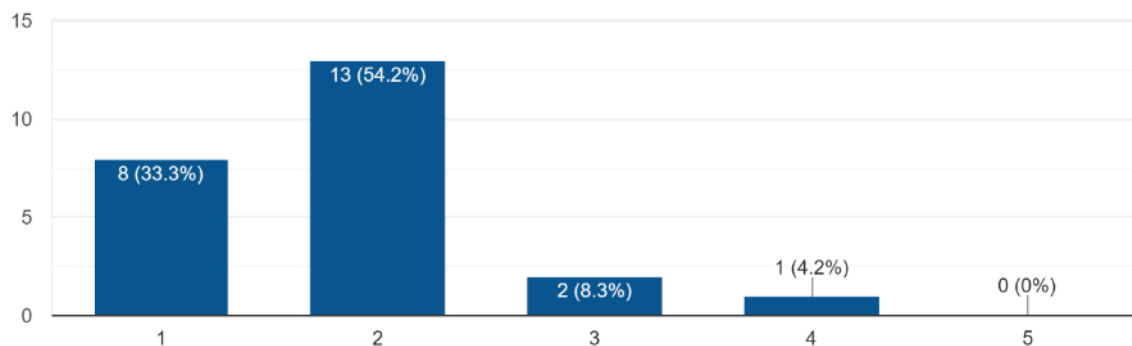


Figure 6 – How often, as a manager, do you expect your team to be available outside of normal working hours?

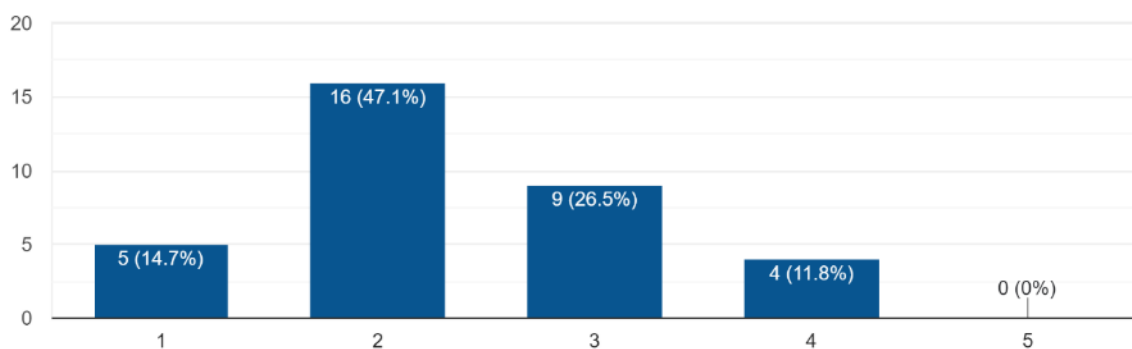


Figure 7 – How often do you email a co-worker or subordinate after business hours?

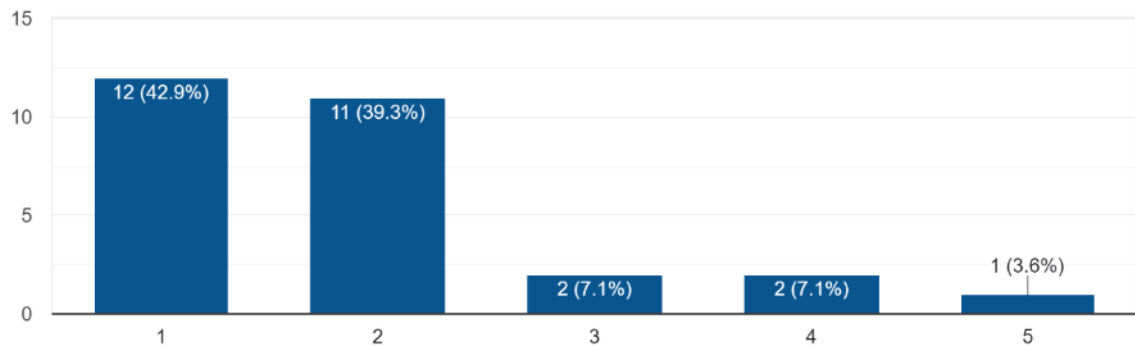


Figure 8 – On a Friday afternoon, how often do you assign a task to a colleague?

The significance and the challenges of the right to disconnect

Most respondents (67,6%) stated that being free of work-related activities during off-work hours is very important, while 20,6% stated it is only moderately important (Figure 9).

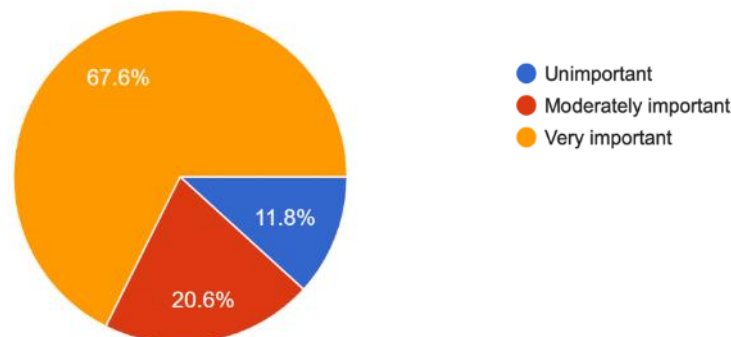


Figure 9 – how important is it not to be preoccupied with work-related duties during off-hours

Moreover, almost all respondents (97%) agree or strongly agree that the right to disconnect can significantly contribute to a better work-life balance (Figure 10), while a slight majority of respondents (52,9%) agree or strongly agree that even when they are physically away from work, they are not mentally disengaged (Figure 11). Furthermore, 94,1% of respondents agree or strongly agree that they have the right to disconnect from work after normal business hours (Figure 12), while most respondents (64,7%) are not concerned that doing so will result in repercussions, which is held by 23,5% of participants (Figure 13). In addition, 50% of participants disagree with the belief that they must be readily available and responsive outside of regular business hours, which is held by 29,4% of participants (Figure 14).

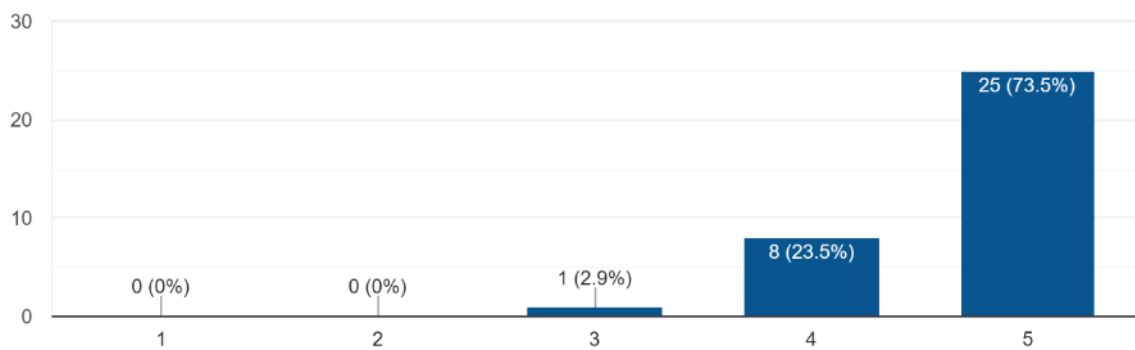


Figure 10 – The right to disconnect can contribute significantly to a better work-life balance

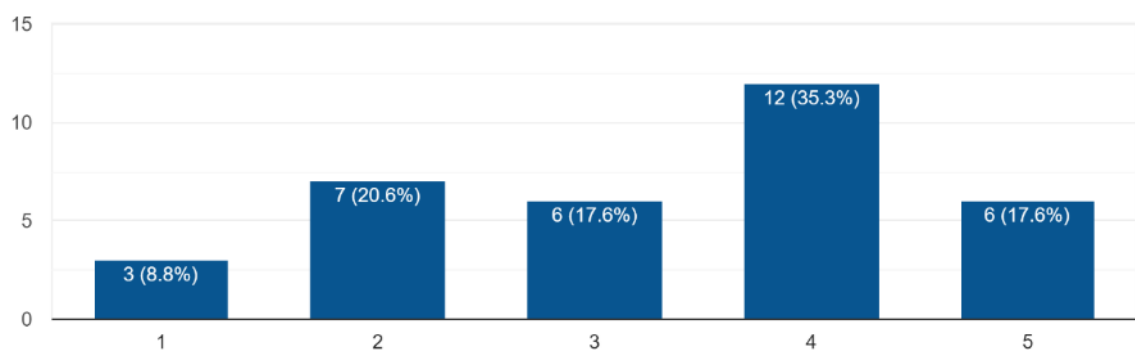


Figure 11 – Despite being physically away from work, I am unable to mentally disconnect

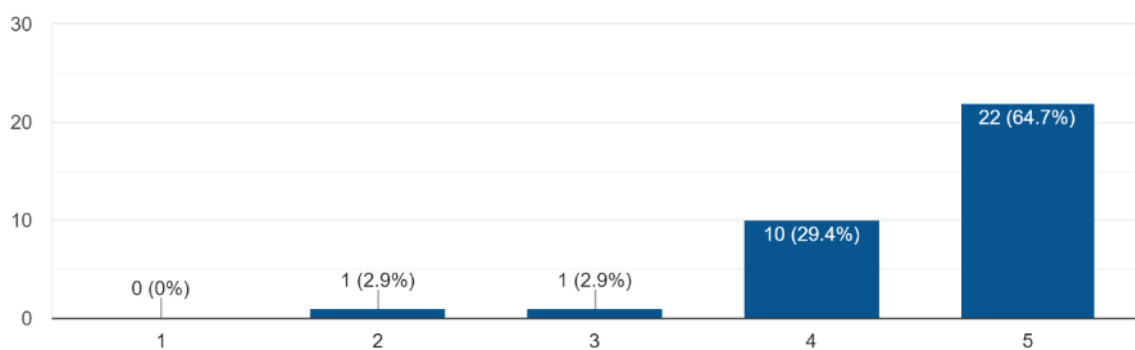


Figure 12 – I believe I have the right to disconnect from work after normal business hours

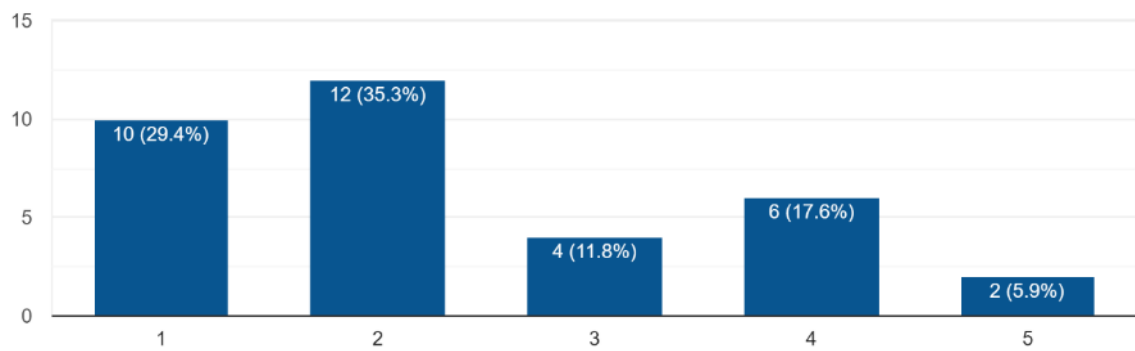


Figure 13 – I am concerned that if I disconnect from work after normal business hours, I will face repercussions

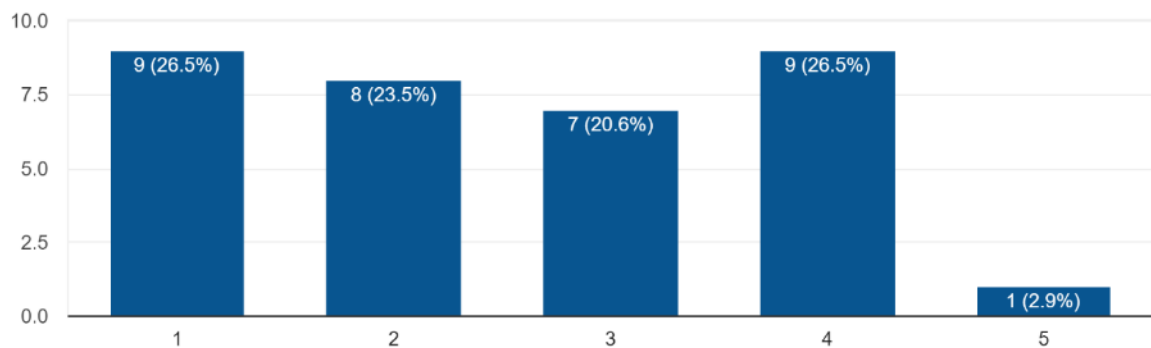


Figure 14 – Outside of normal business hours, I feel obligated to be available and responsive

Organisational perspectives on the right to disconnect

47% respondents agree or strongly agree that their organisation recognises the importance of its employees' right to disconnect and 35,3% agree or strongly agree that it takes positive action on that right (Figures 15 and 16). Furthermore, only 26,5% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that their organisation adopts policies on the right to disconnect, while 35,3% disagree or strongly disagree (Figure 17). Also 29,4% of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree that their organisation has a manageable workload, whereas 47,1% agree or strongly agree (Figure 18). In addition, 47,1% of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree that their organisation adopts policies to help employees detach psychologically from work, and just 17,6% agree or strongly agree (Figure 19). Moreover, 20,6% of the respondents stated that their organisation organises extracurricular events to help employees relax/unwind after normal business hours, whilst 58,9% disagree or strongly disagree (Figure 20).

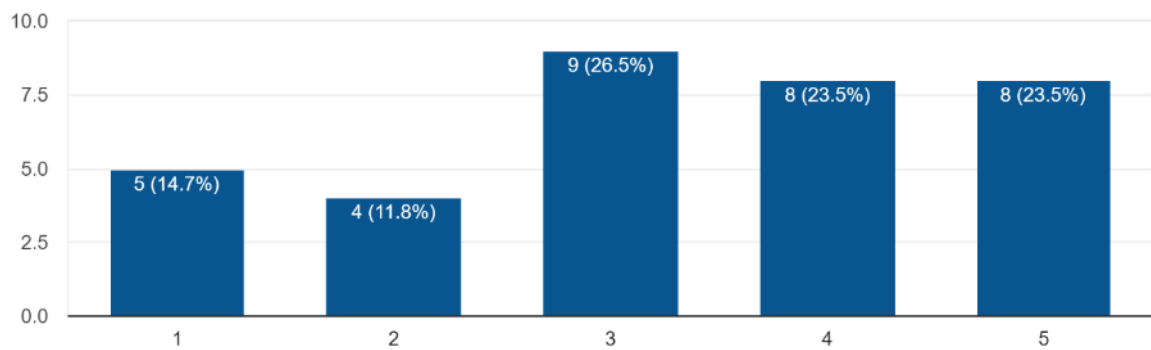


Figure 15 – My organisation recognizes the significance of employees' the right to disconnect

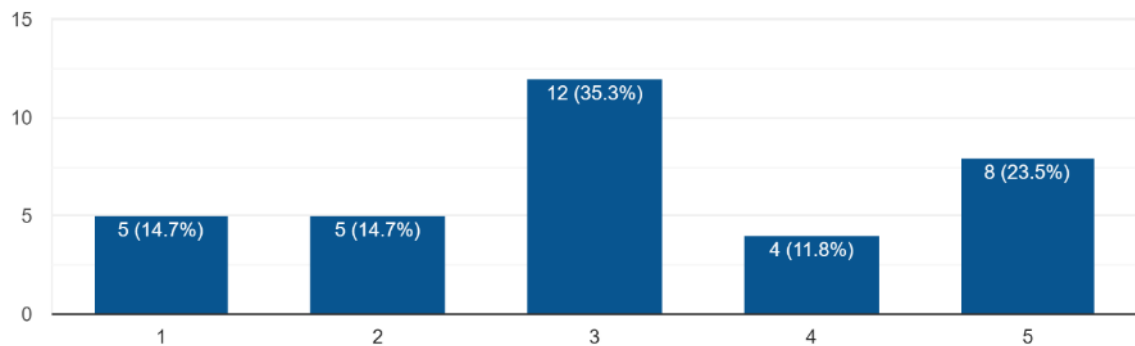


Figure 16 – My organisation takes positive action on the right to disconnect

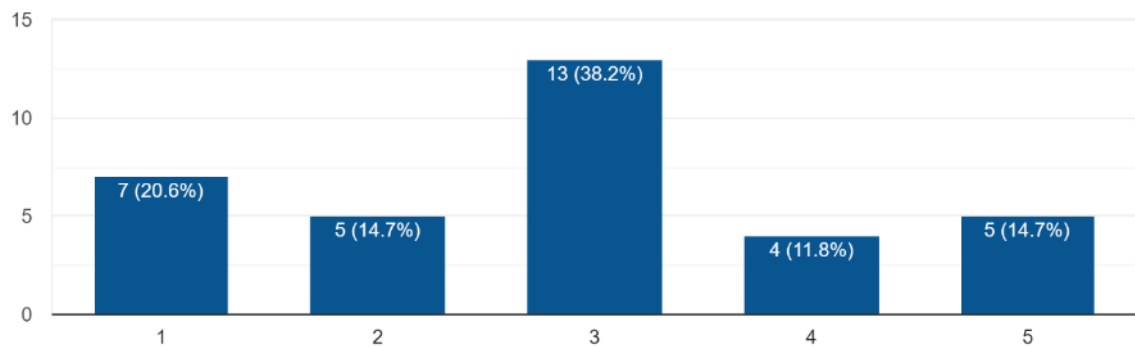


Figure 17 – My organisation adopts policies on the right to disconnect

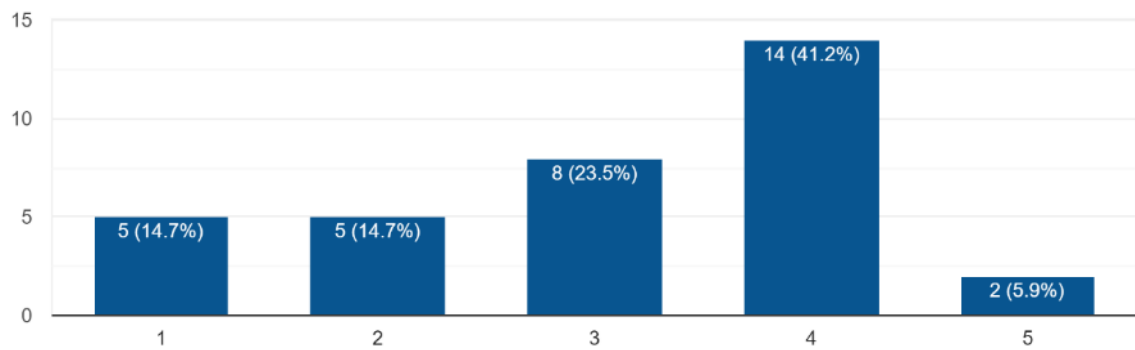


Figure 18 – My organisation has a manageable workload

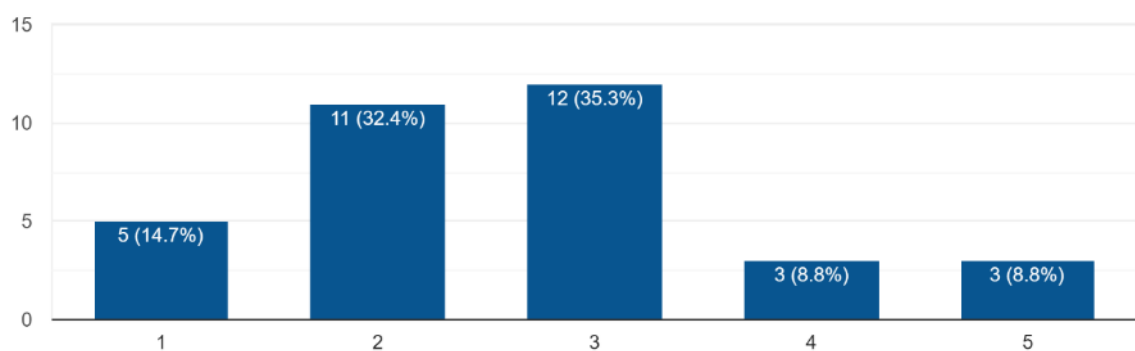


Figure 19 – My organisation adopts policies to help employees detach psychologically from work

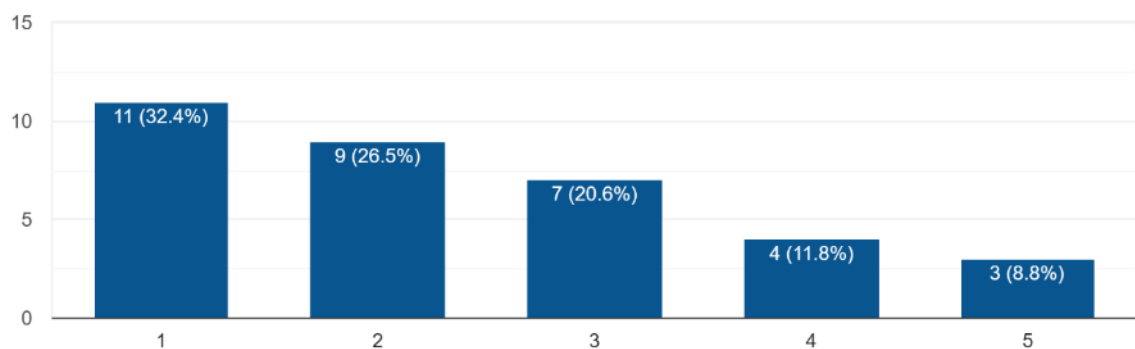


Figure 20 – My organisation organises extracurricular events to help employees relax/unwind after normal business hours

Initiatives/programmes/actions/processes/policies that promoted/facilitated psychological detachment from work at the organisations the last five years

Most respondents stated that the HR department oversees employees' well-being, but many are not aware of any department/people in their organisation in charge of these

issues. Although some respondents stated that no initiatives of any kind were implemented with this purpose, the following initiatives/programmes/actions/processes/policies had promoted/facilitated psychological detachment from work at their organisations over the previous five years:

- **Team bonding activities:** social gatherings, sports activities, outdoor excursions and activities;
- **Policies on the right to disconnect:** customising email notifications, effective use of online calendars for better meeting and work management, activation of automatic email response while taking annual leave, no meeting zones, and work travels only during week days;
- **Individual or group-based coaching:** access to psychological support for stress management, mentoring and personal development sessions and webinars; enrolment/invitation to volunteer work; availability of games for break moments at the company's facilities; workshops about burn-out, access to meditation applications and beneficial materials/articles about wellness, relaxation, stress recovery, and psychological detachment during off-work hours; training on time management and work-life balance.

Factors impeding the effort to implement a programme to assist employees in switching off from work.

The main challenges mentioned by respondents as impeding efforts to implement a programme to help employees switch off from work were: lack of expertise in implementing such a programme (58,1%), lack of resources (29%), lack of awareness on what is meant by “the right to disconnect” and “switching off from work” (25,8%) (Figure 21).

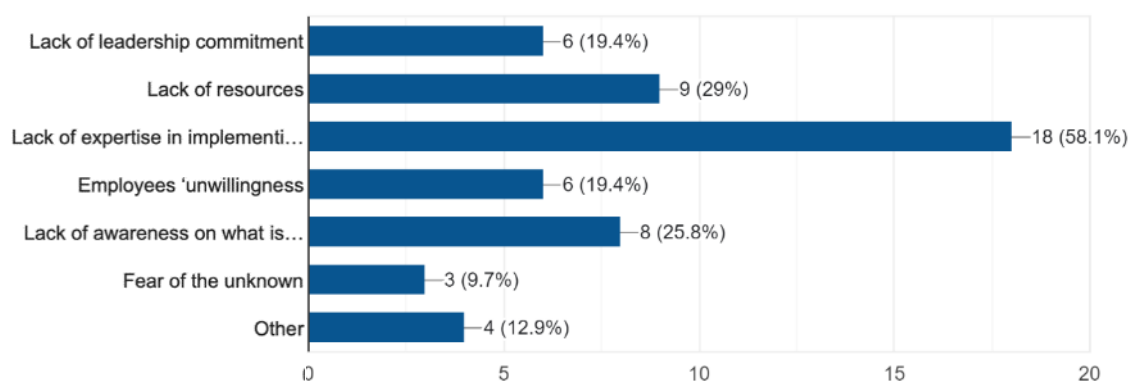


Figure 21 – Factors that hinder the effort to implement a programme to help employees switch off from work

Training on the right to disconnect and how to promote psychological detachment from work.

Only 15,2% of respondents reported having received training on the right to disconnect and how to encourage psychological detachment from work (Figure 22), while 78,8%

stated that they are interested in receiving training on psychological detachment issues in organisations (Figure 23). Moreover, the topics for HR training to promote psychological detachment from work were: training on psychological detachment (69,2%); adjusting/or implementing organisational policies that will support their employees' "right to disconnect" (57,7%); effective use of digital technologies to facilitate the right to disconnect (e.g. customising email notifications, effective use of online calendars for better management of meetings, activation of automatic response when taking annual leave) (53,8%); how to manage out of working hours communications (53,8%); boundary management for better work life balance (50%); evidence-based recovery activities that one can engage in that are related to the recovery process (e.g. hobbies, mindfulness, exercise, time management) (50%); and disconnecting from work, the role of the managers/supervisor/HR professional in creating the appropriate conditions to promote employees' right to disconnect (42,3%) (Figure 24).

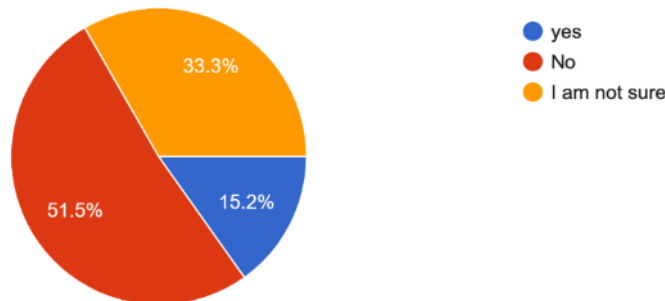


Figure 22 – Training on how to promote psychological detachment from work or on policies relating to the right to disconnect

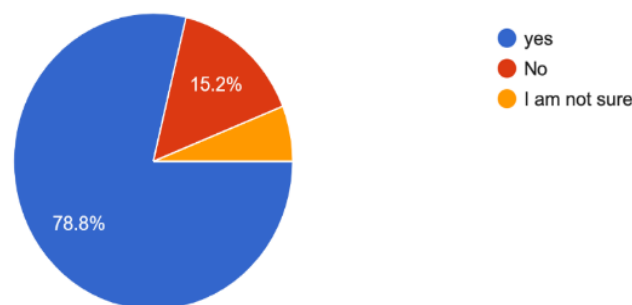


Figure 23 – Interest in receiving training in psychological detachment issues in organisations

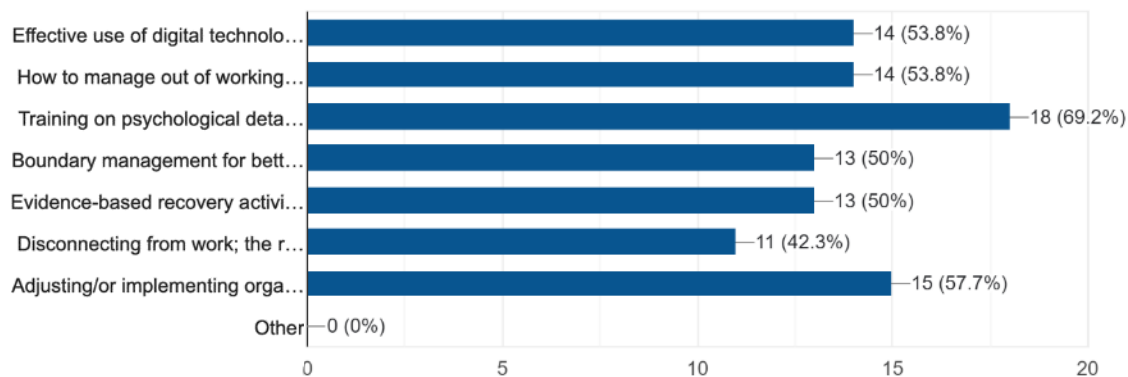


Figure 24 – Topics of interest for HR training to promote psychological detachment from work

Summary of results

The purpose of the present field research was to identify the demographic characteristics of the remote workers (teleworkers), managers and HR professionals in Portugal, as well as to examine their needs and challenges in disconnecting and switching off from work during non-working hours.

According to the findings, most respondents are aware of the current EU and local level debates on the right to disconnect and clearly agree that an EU legislative framework may enforce boundaries between work and personal life.

Furthermore, in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, respondents reported that organisations adopted flexible measures regarding remote working and in some cases, this even became the standard regime. Additionally, the results showed that organisations recognise the importance of their employees' right to disconnect and take positive action on that right, even though most respondents stated that their organisation does not have policies in place to help employees detach psychologically from work.

Moreover, the findings revealed that respondents strongly believe they have the right to disconnect from work and not be available and responsive after normal business hours, which can significantly contribute to a better work-life balance because they value being free of work-related activities during off-work hours as very important. However, many respondents claimed that even when they are physically absent from work, they are not mentally disengaged from it, and a significant percentage of respondents are concerned that switching off from work will have consequences.

The surveys also show that, despite a strong interest in getting training on the right to disconnect and how to support psychological detachment from work, there is a lack of such training offer. The most common topics on this subject are exactly “training on psychological detachment”, “adjusting/or implementing organisational policies that will support their employees’ right to disconnect”, “effective use of digital technologies to facilitate the right to disconnect (e.g. customising email notifications, effective use of online calendars for better management of meetings, activation of automatic response

when taking annual leave)", and "how to manage out of working hours communications". Furthermore, the main barriers to implementing a programme to help employees switch off from work are, according to respondents, the lack of expertise in implementing such kind of programmes, the lack of resources, and the lack of awareness on what is meant by "the right to disconnect" and "switching off from work".

These results are invaluable for, from them, we will have a closer sense of reality about the needs that remote workers, HR professionals and managers have about the right to disconnect from work and will allow us to develop a more useful and efficient step-by-step guide.

Focus Group Analysis

A total of 10 Portuguese teleworkers (hybrid or remote) participated in an online focus group completed via Google Meet. The purpose of this focus group was to identify the needs of people that work remotely and any difficulties that they may be facing in psychologically detaching from work. Through productive discussions and individual perspectives, participants responded to questions related to detachment from work. Please find below the main points of discussion for each focus group question:

How would you describe your ability to detach psychologically in off job hours? (Psychological detachment refers to an individual's experience of being mentally away from work, to make a pause in thinking about work-related issues, thus to "switch off").

According to the answers, in general, participants do not entirely manage to disengage mentally from work.

How much does this relate to the fact that you work remotely?

Remote work demands self-management skills and the availability of means of contact makes difficult to detach.

Do you believe your company takes any steps to facilitate your right to disconnect from work after normal business hours?

It depends on the business culture, but most organisations still do not take concrete measures on the right to disconnect.

What is the primary reason for your inability to disconnect from work?

The difficulty in establishing a boundary between work and personal life seems to depend on the position of the person but also the personal characteristics.

Is it expected of you to be available to respond to emails or other work-related requests after hours?



Most respondents answer “no”. Participants think they have no obligation to be available after working hours.

How do you make sure you have time to disconnect from work after regular business hours?

Participants try to establish a boundary with family/leisure activities that obliges them to have a schedule beside work.

Do you feel obligated to be available and responsive outside of normal business hours?

Participants were split between those who feel obliged to be available and responsive and those who feel they shouldn't.

Is your workplace encouraging you to disconnect from work after hours?

With a few exceptions, workplaces are not yet really encouraging disconnection from work.

Does your company have a policy in place outlining employees' rights to take time away from work? If yes, please elaborate.

Most companies do not have a switch off policy in place, but at SONAE, for example, the servers are switched off, which prevents the exchange of emails and most tasks for those working from home.

Are there any precautions in place to protect employees from burnout as a result of overwork?

Although not many organisations have measures in place to prevent burnout, some examples are inspiring. In Teleperformance there is a wellness coordinator to take care of workers wellbeing; there is a team of psychologists to establish a wellness programme adapted every year. This team uses an open communication with the employees in a bottom-up procedure. They organise wellness sessions during work, like game sessions, relaxation technics sessions, advice workshops dedicated to burnout or depression, for example, are common and free.

How do you manage expectations with your boss and coworkers regarding work/life balance and contacting you after normal working hours?

Some participants find it very difficult to manage the expectations of their superiors and undermine their rights.

When it comes to disconnecting from work, how do you deal with stress and other work-related pressures?

Most participants would like to deal better with stress from work. The other aspects of life, like family issues, help some to disconnect from the stress of their job outside of working hours.

Do you have any personal strategies to disengage yourself mentally from work in off job time? If yes, please tell us more about it.

Most participants do not have actual strategies to disengage mentally from work and feel that they need help for this, not mastering strategies to deal with the possible stress of work outside working hours. Some try to have an active social life, to schedule family activities, to read or meditate.

How do you feel about being disconnected from work and not receiving or responding to work-related emails, phone calls, or messages after normal business hours?

Most participants feel the ideal situation is being disconnected from work and not receiving work-related contacts.

Are you concerned about any negative consequences if you disconnect from work after normal working hours?

Most participants are not concerned about any negative consequence of disconnecting after working hours as they recognise it as a right and they know the law protects them, but some reveal some fear of being disadvantaged in their evaluation or career progression if they assertively exercise their right to disconnect.

Can an EU legal framework that defines and regulates the right to disconnect set boundaries between work and personal life?

Participants agree that a legal framework must define and regulate the right to disconnect and set the boundaries between work and personal life. Such framework exists already in Portugal, where employers are prohibited by law to contact the employees after working hours. Of course, that it would be better to have also the pressure of an European law in the same regard and to have all Europeans workers protected in the same way.

Is there anything else you would like to add about the topic discussed?

Most participants agree that training is essential to implement the right to disconnect and to develop skills on how to psychologically detach from work, and they are interested in receiving such training.

Recommendations

By conducting these research findings, we can conclude that, in Portugal, despite the giant advance of the law, forbidding the employers to contact the employees since 2021, the right to disconnect still needs to be widely implemented. There are concerns

about the absence of enforcement measures to make sure that companies follow the rules, and some employees still feel pressured to react to work-related communications outside their working hours, as the questionnaire and focus group consultations confirmed.

Developing well-being programs and fostering a positive organisational culture is crucial for the overall success and wellbeing of employees. This research was certainly a useful departing point to achieve this.

In view of the data collected, it is important to get commitment from the leadership regarding these workers' rights and their well-being. Leaders should lead by example and actively participate in well-being initiatives within their organisation. They should help to define a clear definition of well-being in their organisation – considering physical, mental, emotional, and social aspects – and well-being programmes (e.g., fitness programs, mental health support, stress management workshops, mindfulness training, and work-life balance initiatives among other possibilities). This will only work if the workers are also engaged in the process, by giving their input, ideas, and preferences about their needs and interests.

According to the research, workers tend to feel more relaxed and happier when there is flexibility and understanding. Flexible policies that support well-being, such as flexible working hours, remote work options, and time-off policies that promote work-life integration are something to consider.

Well-being practices must be integrated into the daily routines and organisational policies. Integrating welfare considerations into performance evaluations, goal setting and decision-making processes may also be a good idea.

GREECE

Introduction

Paid employment was even before Covid 19, not confined to designated hours carried out in a specified place. Greater technological connectivity, facilitated this process by enabling work to be carried out wherever workers happen to be and whatever the time (Messenger & Gschwind, 2016). The Pandemic, made this shift from regular, “office – based” working time patterns to remote work, really remarkable. A Eurofound survey carried out in April 2020 found that 37% of workers had started to work from home because of the health implications of the crisis.

This shift towards ICT – based flexible work in the form of telework, has many advantages. The flexibility it provides offers opportunities for improving work-life balance and can contribute to increased productivity. Moreover, it has environmental benefits resulting from reduced commuting. However, this type of employment has also many disadvantages. Clearly, there is a disruption in the boundaries between work and personal life, between job hours and leisure time as well as a blur between private and professional physical spaces.

At that point, both needs are accentuated: the need to learn how to switch off psychologically and the need to promote legally “the right to disconnect”. The scientific term for a “Switch off” is the concept of **Psychological Detachment**. Psychological detachment refers to mental disengagement from work during off-hours. Being psychologically detached from work involves avoiding job-related activities (e.g., not checking professional e-mails) but also not thinking about job-related issues (e.g., temporarily forgetting about a significant project) during off-job time (Sonnentag, Cheng & Parker, 2022). **The right to disconnect** refers to legislation that allows employees to disconnect from their jobs and not receive or respond to work-related emails, phone calls, or messages after normal business hours. It establishes boundaries between a person's work and personal life and protects them from any potential negative consequences.

Policies and national/EU initiatives on the ‘right to disconnect’

The world of work has transformed in just a few years, with remote work allowing many people to continue working in their field during unprecedented times. However, one point of contention has emerged: the right to disconnect (EUROFOUND, 2020).

In EU, remote working and the right to disconnect are not new concepts (EUROFOUND, 2020). Indeed, many European countries have long had some form of right to disconnect legislation in place (Lerouge & Trujillo Pons, 2022). However, the number of people working from home continuously in Europe has increased dramatically since the pandemic, putting strain on people's work-life balance. As a result, the need to debate and implement right to disconnect legislation has become a regional priority (Directive 2003/88/EC, Directive (EU) 2019/1158).

People's personal and professional lives became entwined during the pandemic, and as a result, they worked longer hours (Directive 2003/88/EC, Directive (EU) 2019/1158). While productivity was high for a while, working long hours continuously can have negative consequences for the worker, such as the “burnout” syndrome in the workplace which is characterized by inability to concentrate, over-intensity, insomnia, and a (chronic) feeling of exhaustion or overtiredness (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022).

With the growing 'always on' culture in which employees are expected to respond to emails, phone calls, and texts after work hours, more legislation for disconnecting from work is required.

The EU context

Currently, there is no EU legal framework that defines and regulates the right to disconnect. However, the Working Time Directive (Directive 2003/88/EC) refers to a number of rights that are indirectly related to similar issues, most notably the minimum daily and weekly rest periods required to protect workers' health and safety.

Furthermore, the right to disconnect is linked to achieving a better work-life balance, an objective that has been at the heart of recent European initiatives - for example, Principles 9 ('Work-life balance') and 10 ('Healthy, safe, and well-adapted work environment and data protection') of the European Pillar of Social Rights, as well as the Work-Life Balance Directive - despite the fact that they do not specifically refer to the right to disconnect.

The European Parliament adopted a resolution in support of the right to disconnect on January 21, 2021, requesting that the Commission draft a directive that permits employees who work digitally to disengage outside of working hours. This directive shall also specify working conditions, hours, and rest intervals, as well as establish minimum requirements for remote employment.

While the EU currently lacks a legal framework governing the right to disconnect, many EU countries have already implemented national right to disconnect legislation:

France

At the national level, France is seen as a pioneer in recognizing this new right through the law. A nationwide cross-sectoral agreement on workplace quality of life was established in 2013 and encouraged employers to avoid interfering with their employees' personal lives by establishing times when devices should be turned off. Following its enactment on August 8, 2016, this right is now covered by Article L.2242-17 of the Labour Code. France's strategy has helped other EU nations by serving as inspiration in several ways.

Italy

Following the publication of the French legislation, Italy was the second nation to enact a right to disconnect in 2017. According to the law (Law 81/2017), only remote employees have the freedom to disconnect from digital devices and online services without facing any repercussions for their employment status or pay. The right to disconnect is also covered by sector- and company-level collective agreements.

Spain

The EU General Protection Regulation (GDPR) was incorporated into Spanish law in 2018 (Law 3/2018), along with the introduction of a new set of digital rights. Employees in the public and private sectors have the option to disconnect to preserve their work-life balance.

Belgium

In 2018, the law made it mandatory for businesses with more than 50 workers to discuss with the committee for workplace health and safety about the issue of disconnection and the use of digital technologies (Act of 26 March 2018). A new law in Belgium was passed in 2022 (Labour deal/2022) that gives public employees the

freedom to turn off work emails, texts, and phone calls received after hours without worrying about facing consequences. Employers with at least 20 employees would be required to respect the right of employees to be “offline” after working hours. The idea of extending the new legislation to workers in the private sector is being discussed.

Portugal

The Portuguese parliament passed new legislation on remote employment in December 2021 (Law 83/2021). The right to privacy was one of the laws that became operative in January 2022. Except in cases of force majeure, the Labour Code now mandates that these employers refrain from contacting employees while they are on rest. Businesses who violate this right risk receiving fines of up to €4,080. Employers are now guilty of a major crime if they invade an employee's privacy.

Greece

Following the lead of other EU nations, the Greek government included a clause addressing this issue in the scope of labor law (Law 4808/2021), which was approved by the Parliament in June 2021. The regulation's goal is to provide the worker with legal protection so that they are not required to spend hours after their job is over glued to a screen. Additionally, it is explicitly mentioned that it is forbidden to treat an employee unfairly just because they exercised their right to disconnect.

The legal basis for the right to disconnect has been discussed in the EU parliament, but nothing further has been implemented.

Organizational initiatives

Numerous company-level initiatives try to control the potential detrimental effects of communication technology on employees' life, in addition to the formal and legal acknowledgement of a right to disconnect. For instance, on September 27, 2016, the French telecom operator Orange signed a business collective bargaining agreement. In connection with the group's digital transition, this agreement gave employees the option to disconnect (EUROFOUND, 2020). Moreover, Volkswagen was the first business in Germany to institute a company-wide ban on after-hours emails in 2012.

A few multinational corporations have also reached transnational agreements that include rights to disconnect clauses. In its global framework agreement on digital transformation, the Belgian chemical company Solvay emphasized that it "actively supports the basic notion of disconnecting outside of working hours" (Solvay: Global framework agreement on digital transformation). To ensure that workers may adhere to their regular working hours, the Italian bank UniCredit and its European Works Council adopted a joint declaration on remote working that includes a right to disconnect (UniCredit: Joint declaration on remote work)

National/EU Practices and Best-case scenarios

New legislative initiatives

Permanent telework legislation has been adopted since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in Austria, Greece, Latvia, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain. The unprecedented rise in telework and the anticipation that the pandemic will hasten existing trends toward the digitization of work and expanding flexibility in work arrangements have served as the primary impetuses for the reforms in each of these nations. Legislative reforms in this context have updated and modified prior legislation to introduce specific provisions addressing teleworkers in various legal texts (for example, in Austria) or to provide a more thorough and equitable regulation for both employers and employees with regard to certain important topics. Social partners have had a mixed involvement in the legislative changes; while they have been involved in some countries (Austria, Portugal, Slovakia, and Spain) either through tripartite agreements or in consultative processes, in others, legislative changes were unilaterally designed (Greece, Latvia and Romania).

Regulations adopted following the Pandemic

Greece, Luxembourg, Portugal, and Slovakia are the four new nations that have implemented laws granting citizens the right to disconnect since the pandemic's start. A code of conduct regarding the right to disconnect has also been adopted in *Ireland*. The pre-pandemic laws protecting the ability to disconnect have been enhanced in Spain by new telework regulations (Royal Decree-Law 28/2020). According to this new law, risk prevention should pay particular attention to psychosocial and organizational issues connected to working time allocation, availability restrictions, and breaks. As required by the analogous law in France that has been in effect since 2017, the 2020 ANI clearly specifies the right of employees to disengage from work-related digital instruments outside of working hours to protect their personal and private lives, vacation time, and rest periods.

With the passage of Law No. 4808-19-06-2021, a comprehensive labor market reform in **Greece** included new telework regulations. The new law guarantees full teleworking regulation, including the ability to disengage. In this regard, the law stipulates that employees must have the right to disconnect, which includes the right to completely forgo engaging in any work-related activities and the right to refrain from answering calls, emails, or other types of correspondence outside of working hours or while on leave. A teleworker cannot be discriminated against for exercising their freedom to disconnect, according to the law.

In **Luxembourg**, a clause on the right to disconnect was added as part of Bill No. 7890, which amended the Labor Code. It was delivered to the Chamber of Deputies on September 28, 2021, and it reflects the Economic and Social Council's viewpoint. To

require employers to define a specific regime ensuring respect for the right to disconnect when employees use digital technologies for work purposes, this bill proposes to add a new section (Section 8) named "Respect for the right to disconnect."

The right to respect rest times and holidays was one of many key reforms made to telework in **Portugal** by Law No. 83/2021 of December 6, 2021. The text does not use the phrase "right to disconnect" specifically, but it does specify that employers are prohibited from contacting any employee during rest intervals, regardless of location of employment, unless there is an extreme circumstance.

A change of the labor code (76/2021) in **Slovakia** concerns telework and governs the ability to disconnect, among other things. Each employee who works from home will have the option to disconnect under this reform. Employees who work from home will be allowed to refrain from using work-related technology (or from being logged in or connected) during their daily breaks or on holidays. Additionally, if workers do not complete their work during those rest hours, employers cannot discipline them.

The situation in **Ireland**, where a code of conduct for employers and employees on the right to disconnect was passed in 2021, is also noteworthy. The code of practice offers sample autoreplies and auto-signatures urging recipients of emails to hold off on responding until their regular working hours in an effort to foster a new workplace culture. A code of practice is also admissible in evidence and any provision may be taken into consideration when deciding issues in court proceedings, according to Irish law.

Patterns of work time

The extent to which national legislation and national-level collective agreements contain specific provisions on breaks, rest times, and rights or entitlements relating flexible working hours or working schedules is examined in this analysis.

Countries having special legislation and/or statutory definitions

9 of the 22 nations in this group of nations (*Austria, Croatia, Germany, Latvia, and Luxembourg*) only establish that the general working time regulation applies to teleworkers or that general legislation applies unless collective bargaining agreements or individual written agreements specify specific conditions for teleworkers (*Belgium, Estonia and Malta*). In addition, three nations—*Poland, Portugal, and Slovenia*—take a similar stance in light of the lack of relevant laws.

In contrast, 10 nations have laws that allow teleworkers to partially control how they schedule their working hours (*Czechia, Hungary, Italy (only for agile/smart work), Lithuania, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia (modified in 2021), and Spain (modified in 2020)*) or give them autonomy over how they schedule their breaks and downtime while they are working (*Bulgaria and France*). In the instance of *Italy*, where "agile work" is regulated, the work is divided between the company's facilities and the outside,

with no restrictions on working location or time beyond the maximum hours set by law or collective bargaining.

Additionally, the new *Luxembourg* convention calls for the employer to guarantee the extraordinary character of overtime and stipulates certain working time arrangements to provide teleworkers additional freedom. Employees are able to select their own working hours under the *Estonian* remote work agreement (Kaugtöö kokkulepe), provided that working hours comply with the law. This is consistent with Article 9 of the EU Framework Agreement on Telework, which specifies that teleworkers control how their working hours are scheduled.

In some nations, sectoral agreements (as reported in *Germany and Lithuania*) or business collective agreements (examples recorded in *France, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, and Spain*) play a part in defining working hours for telework arrangements. The collective agreements governing working time patterns range from providing employees with greater temporal flexibility through telework (for instance, agreements recorded in *Germany and the Netherlands*) to maintaining common legislative working hour regulations for teleworkers (for example, agreements reported in *Italy, Lithuania and Spain*).

Countries without legislation or statutory definitions

There are no special rules for teleworkers in the *Nordic nations*, where working hour patterns are addressed by either working time legislation (*Sweden*) or OSH legislation (*Finland and Norway*).

The Occupational Safety and Health Act (Työturvallisuuslaki 2002/738) in *Finland*, Chapter 5, states that "if the work requires staying continuously in one place or is continuously stressful, an opportunity for breaks during working hours shall be provided, allowing short-time absence from the workstation."

In the case of *Norway*, the Working Environment Act states that workers should work 40 hours a week, and not exceed 48 hours a week on average within four months with overtime included. For those partly working from home, the total working time must not exceed this limit.

In the case of *Sweden*, the Working Hours Act states that the same rules on working time apply to teleworkers.

Similarly, *Danish* regulation sets out that general working time rules apply to teleworkers. However, a *Danish* national report notes that there is a tacit understanding that teleworkers can deviate from this rule when they work from home, because one of the possibilities when working from home is to be more flexible in the organization of one's workday.

Finally, considering the examples of both Lidl and Volkswagen who are trialing a ban on all work emails at weekends and between 6pm and 7am, there is no doubt that these initiatives should be taken by Greek companies as well.

National report based on key primary findings - online questionnaire & Focus group

Descriptive Data Analysis

General Information

In this survey, 34 Greek teleworkers (hybrid or remote) including HR professionals and managers (21 females, 12 males, and 1 other) completed an online questionnaire (google form) to assess their needs (e.g., challenges they face in disconnecting from work, current use of ICTs, practices that help them unwind from work), in order to contribute to the development of a “SwitchOff” step-by-step guide for effective use of digital technologies and other practices for fostering work-life balance.

Additional information about the respondents was gathered. They ranged in age from 18 to 64 years, with the majority being between the ages of 45 and 64 (Figure 1). The majority (73,5%) hold a master's degree, 14,7% hold a bachelor's degree, 2,9% hold a Ph.D, 2,9% hold a high school diploma, and 5,9% choose not to say (Figure 2). In terms of tenure of the respondents at their current workplace, 47.1% have 1-5 years, 26.5% have 6-12 years, 14.7% have 13-20 years, and 11.8% have more than 20 years (Figure 3).

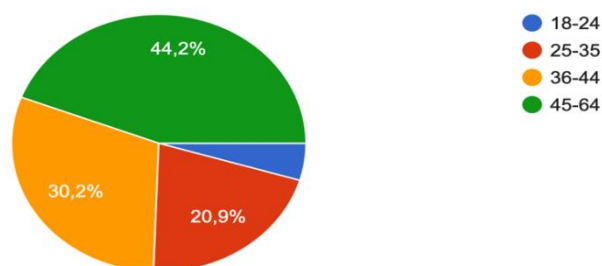


Figure 1. Age of participants

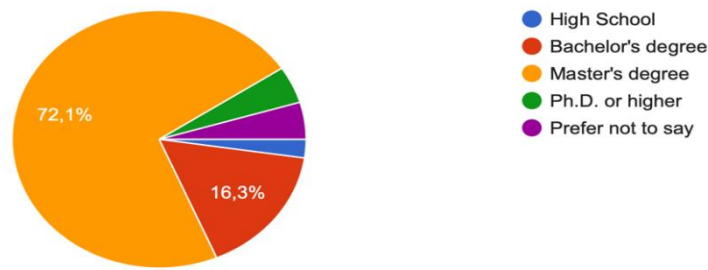


Figure 2. Educational background of participants

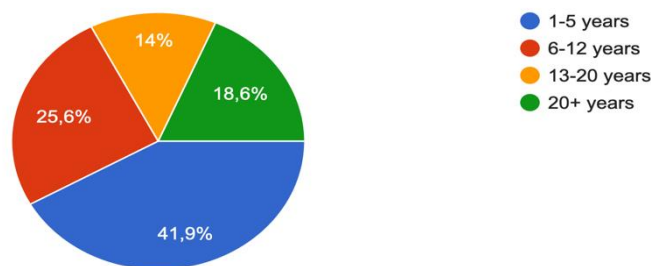


Figure 3. Tenure at the current employer

The impact of Covid-19 on organisational remote work policies

The majority of respondents (85,3%) reported that the Covid-19 pandemic had an impact on their organization's remote work policy, while 79,4% stated that they were still not back to their pre-Covid-19 status in terms of remote work. Following the Covid-19 pandemic, organisations adopted a flexible hybrid working approach, and participants report a significant demand for online events and meetings.

EU policies on the right to disconnect

The majority of respondents (70,6%) agree or strongly agree that an EU legal framework that defines and regulates the right to disconnect can establish boundaries between work and personal life (Figure 4), while 61,8% of participants are aware of the current EU and local level discussions on the right to disconnect.

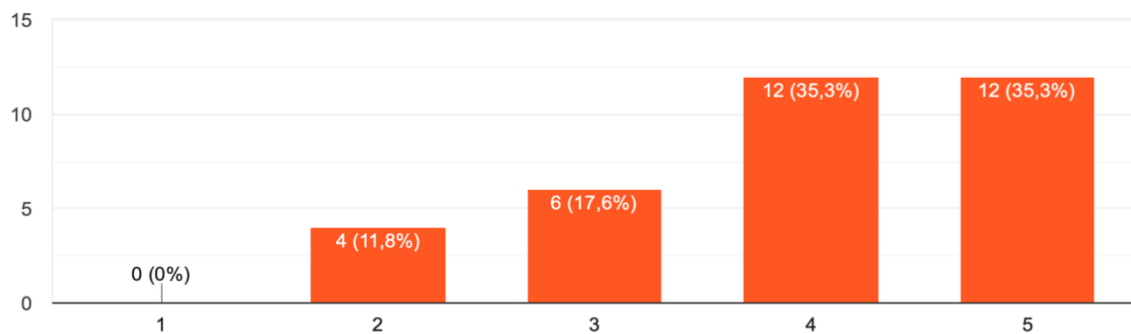


Figure 4. The EU legal framework that defines and regulates the right to disconnect can set boundaries between work and personal life

Managers' perspectives on the right to disconnect

The majority of managers (61,7%) answered that they often or always encourage their team to disconnect from work (Figure 5), whereas the majority of managers (88,2%) stated that they rarely or never demand their team to be available outside of normal working hours (Figure 6). Moreover, the majority of the respondents (64,7%) rarely or never email a coworker or subordinate after business hours (Figure 7) and 88,2% rarely or never assign a task to a colleague on a Friday afternoon (Figure 8).

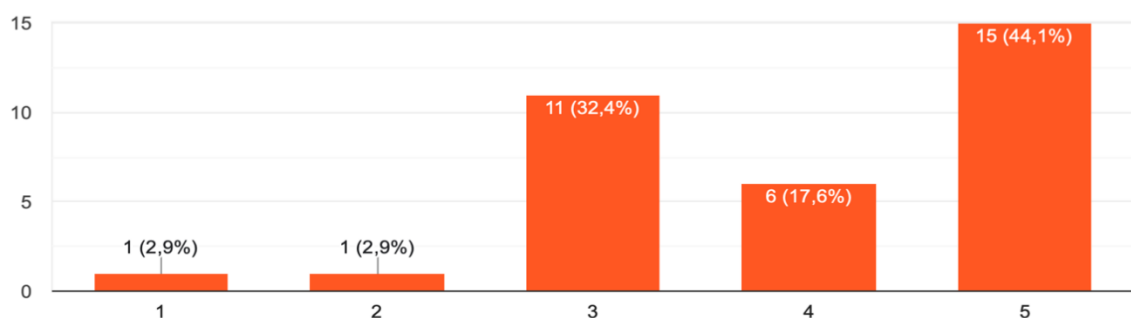


Figure 5. How often, as a manager, do you encourage your team to disconnect from work

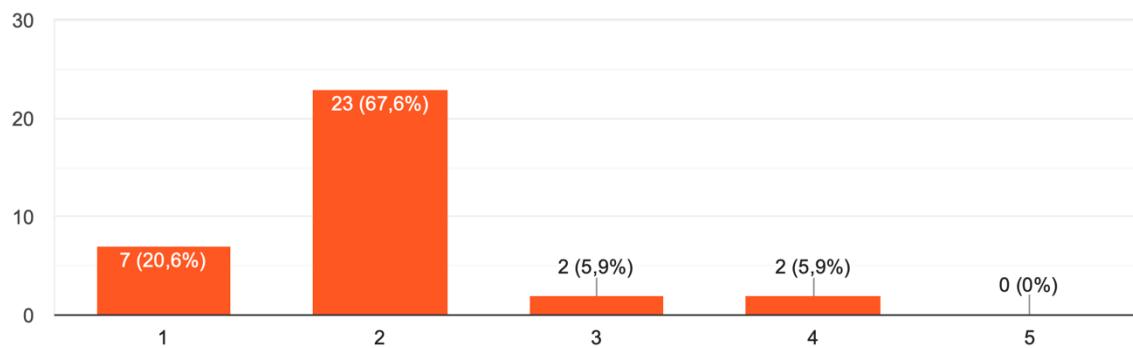


Figure 6. How often, as a manager, do you expect your team to be available outside of normal working hours

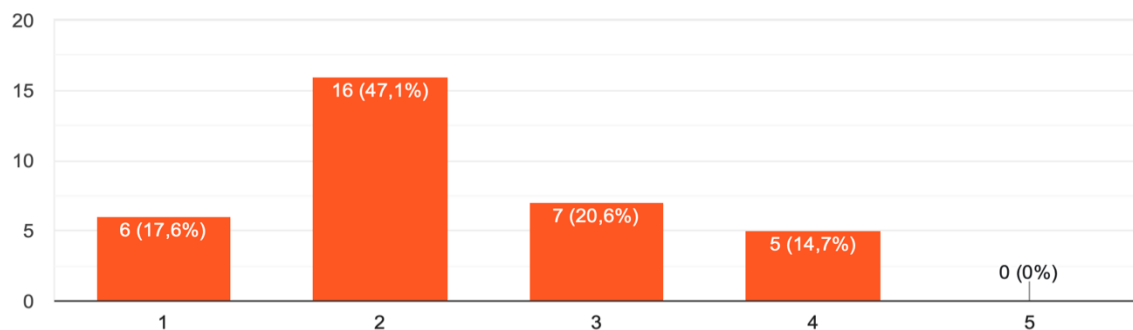


Figure 7. How often do you email a coworker or subordinate after business hours

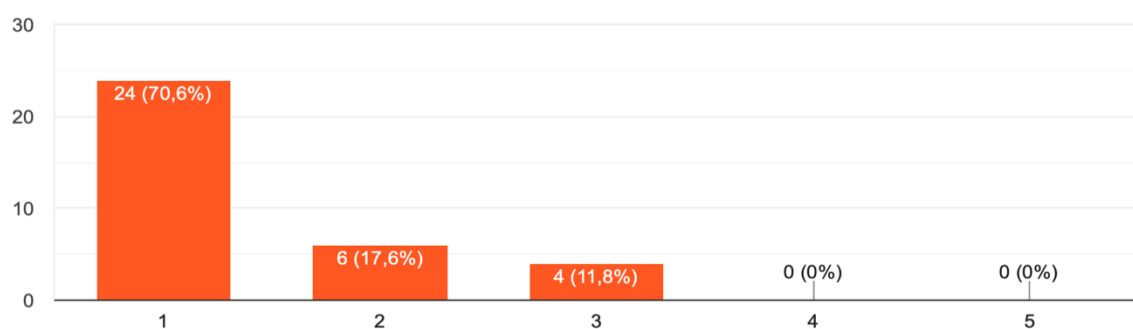


Figure 8. On a Friday afternoon, how often do you assign a task to a colleague
The significance and the challenges of the right to disconnect

The majority of respondents (79.4%) stated that being free of work-related activities during off-work hours is very important, while 17.6% stated it is only moderately important (Figure 9).

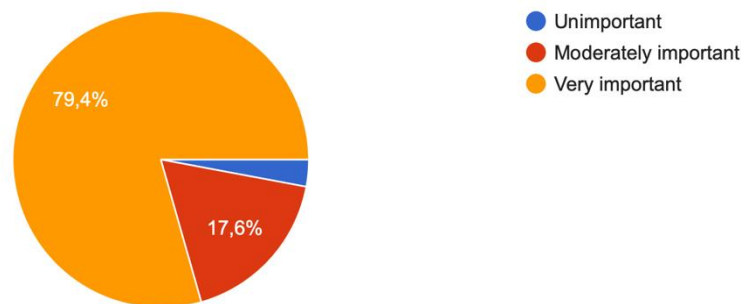


Figure 9. How important is it not to be preoccupied with work-related duties during off-hours

Moreover, the vast majority of respondents (88,3%) agree or strongly agree that the right to disconnect can significantly contribute to a better work-life balance (Figure 10), while the majority of respondents (53%) agree or strongly agree that even when they are physically away from work, they are not mentally disengaged (Figure 11). Furthermore, 94% of respondents agree or strongly agree that they have the right to disconnect from work after normal business hours (Figure 12), while the majority of respondents (55,9%) are not concerned that doing so will result in repercussions, which is held by 20,5% of participants (Figure 13). In addition, 44.1% of participants disagree with the belief that they must be readily available and responsive outside of regular business hours, which is held by 32.3% of participants (Figure 14).

Organisational perspectives on the right to disconnect

The majority of respondents (53%) agree or strongly agree that their organisation recognizes the importance of its employees' right to disconnect and takes positive action on that right (Figure 15,16). Furthermore, 44,1% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that their organisation adopts policies on the right to disconnect, while 38,2% disagree or strongly disagree (Figure 17). Also 44,1% of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree that their organisation has a manageable workload, whereas 20,6% agree or strongly agree (Figure 18). In addition, 35,3% of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree that their organisation adopts policies to help employees detach psychologically from work, whereas 26,4% agree or strongly agree (Figure 19). Moreover, 44,1% of the respondents stated that their organisation organises extracurricular events to help employees relax/unwind after normal business hours, whilst 32,4% agree (Figure 20).

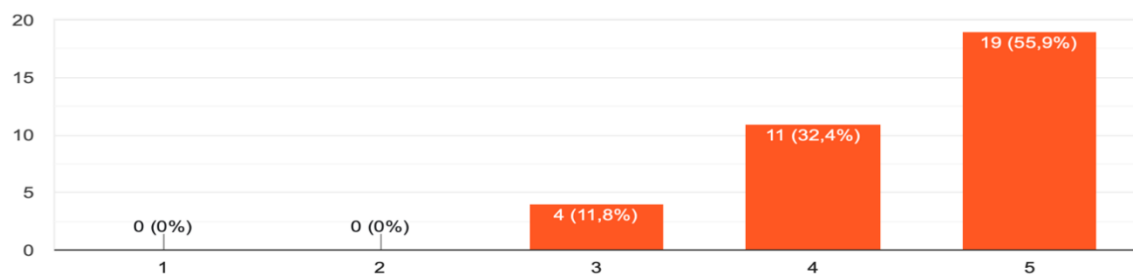


Figure 10. The right to disconnect can contribute significantly to a better work-life balance

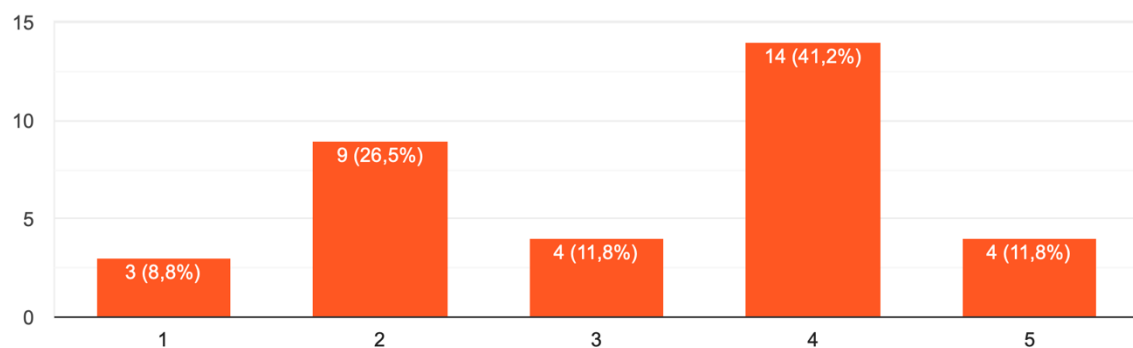


Figure 11. Despite being physically away from work, I am unable to mentally disconnect

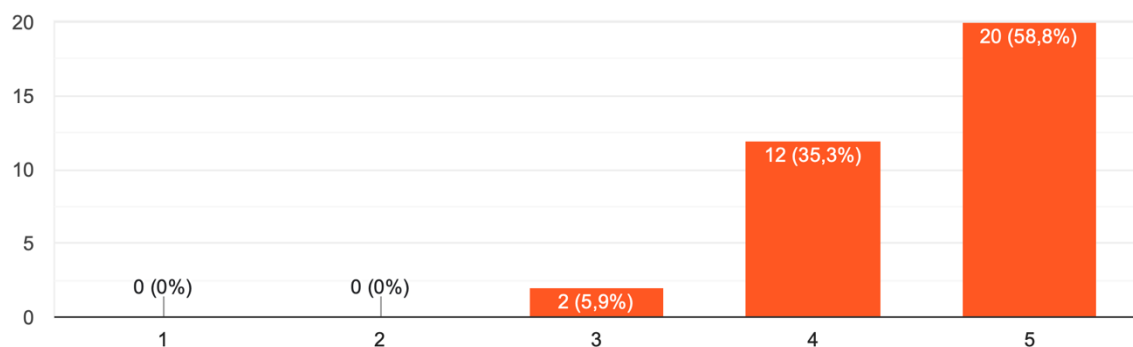


Figure 12. I believe I have the right to disconnect from work after normal business hours

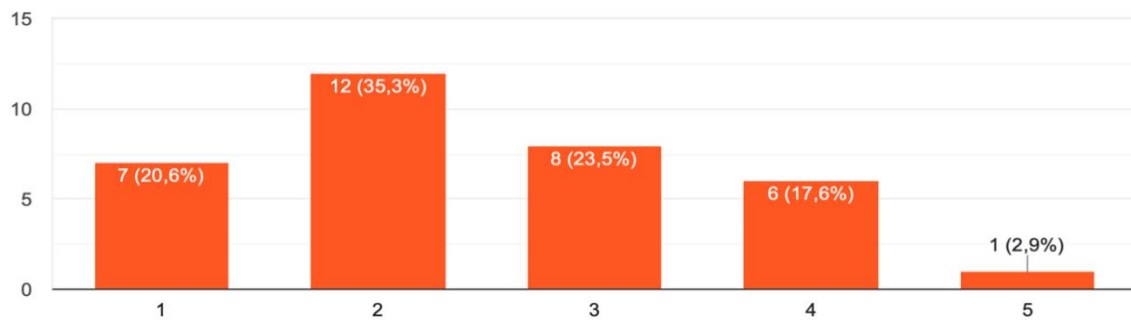


Figure 13. I am concerned that if I disconnect from work after normal business hours, I will face repercussions

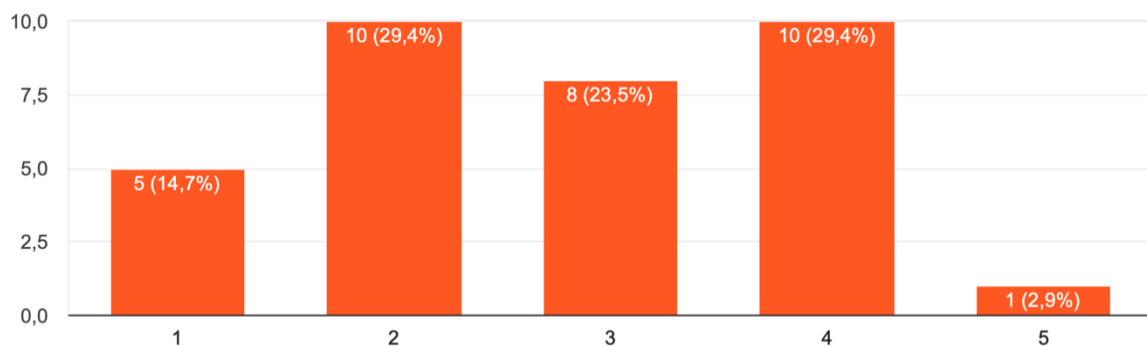


Figure 14. Outside of normal business hours, I feel obligated to be available and responsive

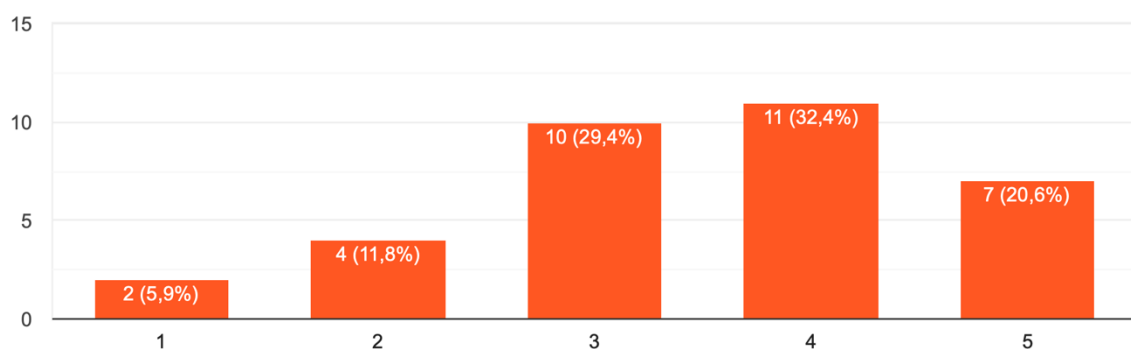


Figure 15. My organisation recognizes the significance of employees' the right to disconnect

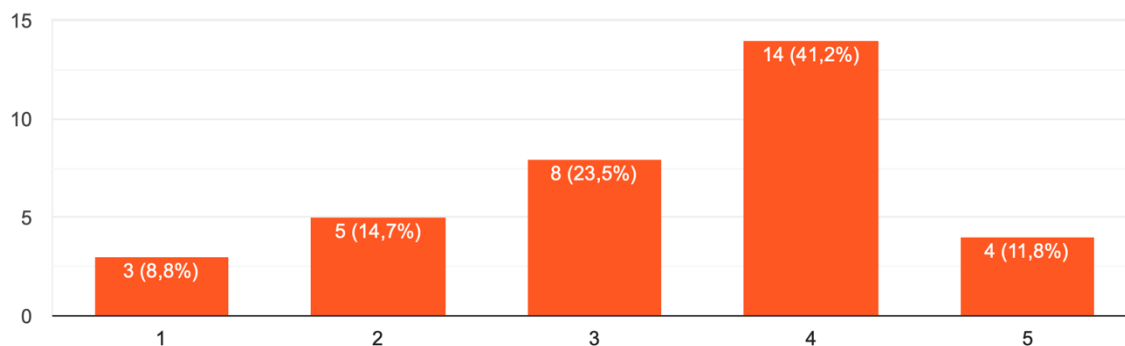


Figure 16. My organisation takes positive action on the right to disconnect

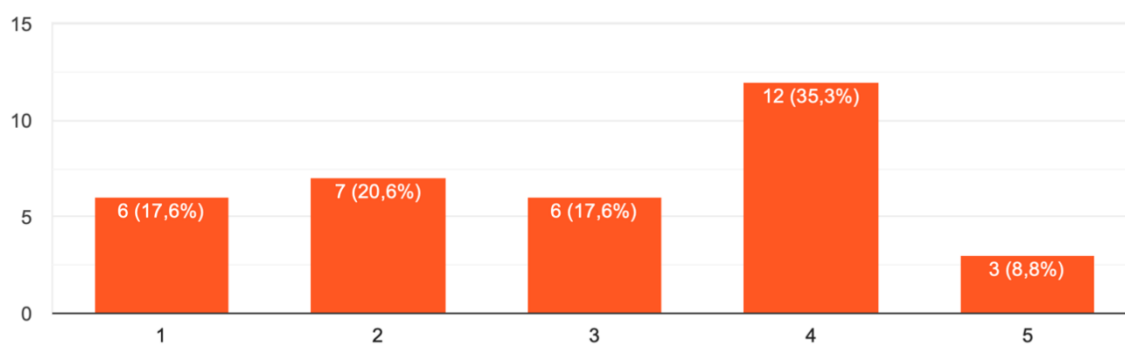


Figure 17. My organisation adopts policies on the right to disconnect.

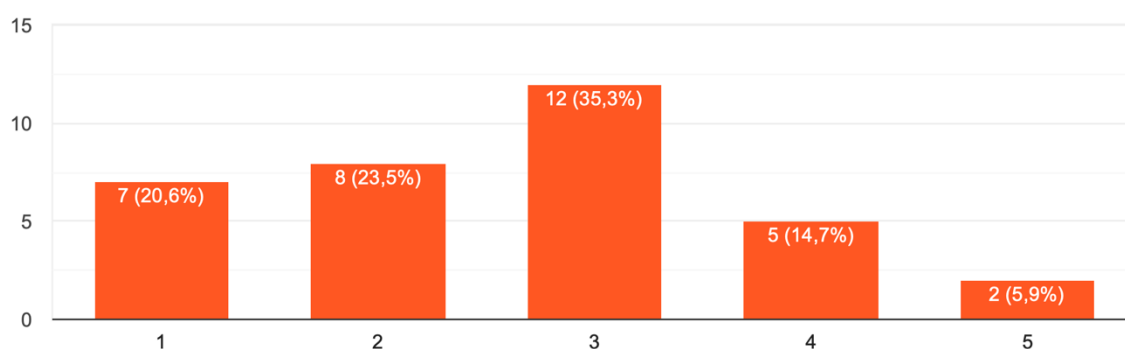


Figure 18. My organisation has a manageable workload

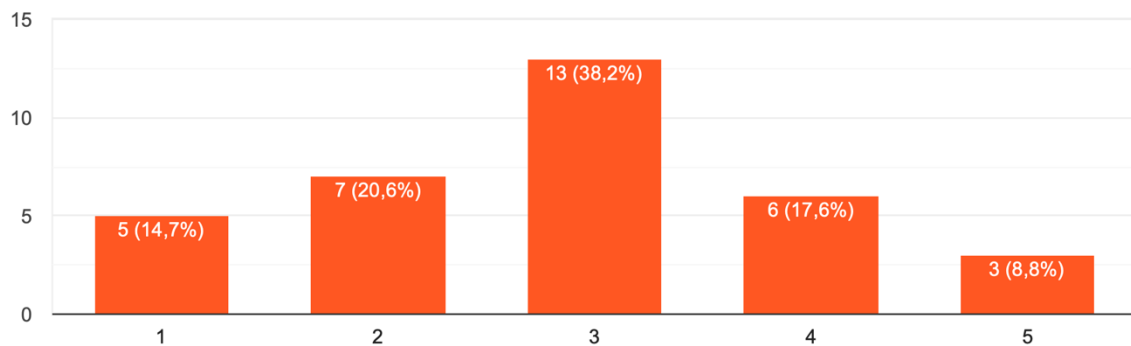
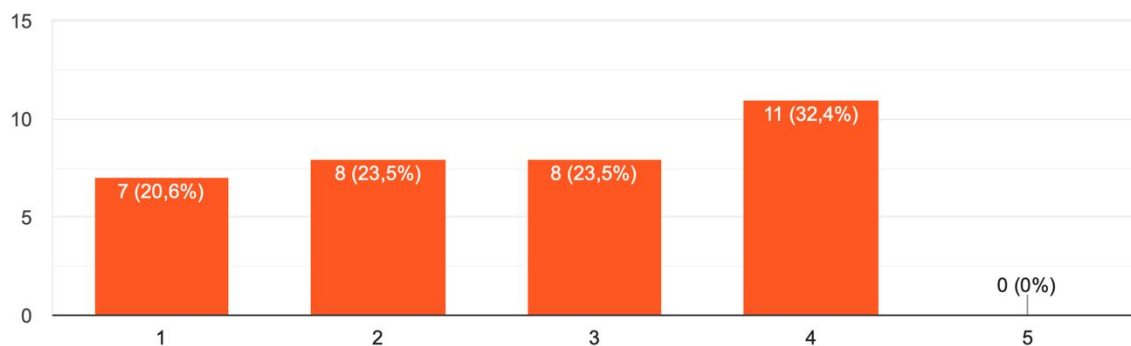


Figure 19. My organisation adopts policies to help employees detach psychologically from work



20. My organisation organises extracurricular events to help employees relax/unwind after normal business hours

Initiatives/programs/actions/processes/policies that promoted/facilitated psychological detachment from work at the organisations the last five years.

The majority of respondents stated that the HR department is in charge of employees' well-being in their organisations, and that the following initiatives/programs/actions/processes/policies had promoted/facilitated psychological detachment from work at their organisations over the previous five years:

Team bonding activities: Social gatherings, sports activities, outdoor excursions and activities, and volunteer work.

Policies on the right to disconnect: Customizing email notifications, vpn disconnects after 8 hours online, effective use of online calendars for better meeting management,

activation of automatic email response while taking annual leave, and no meeting zones.

Individual or group-based coaching: Individual appointments with a psychologist, spirit days, virtual fitness, psychology webinars and seminars, pilates and yoga courses, access to meditation applications and beneficial materials/articles about relaxation, stress recovery, and psychological detachment during off-work hours, training on time management and work-life balance, as well as reminders to "switch off" before vacations.

Factors impeding the effort to implement a programme to assist employees in switching off from work.

The main challenges mentioned by respondents as impeding efforts to implement a programme to help employees switch off from work were: Lack of leadership commitment (44,1%), lack of resources (32,4%), Lack of expertise in implementing such a program (29,4%), and Lack of awareness on what is meant by "the right to disconnect" and "switching off from work" (29,4%) (Figure 21).

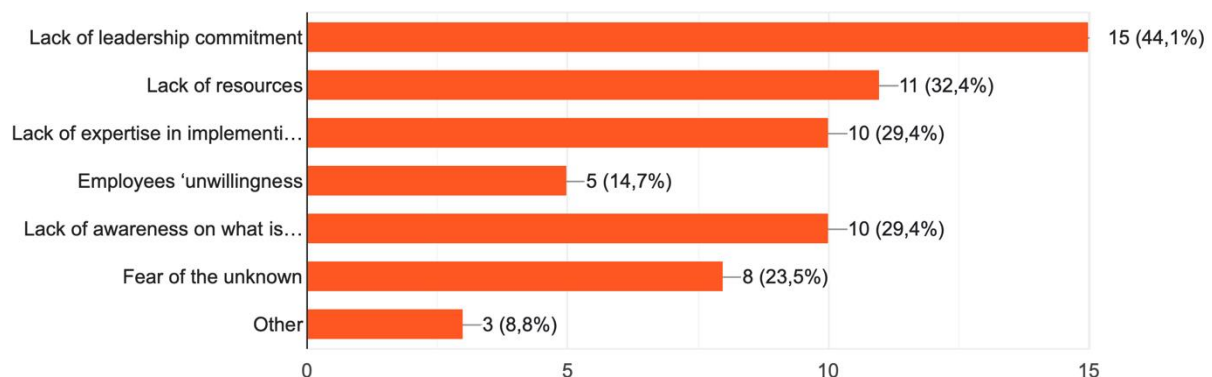


Figure 21. Factors that hinder the effort to implement a program to help employees switch off from work

Training on the right to disconnect and how to promote psychological detachment from work

Only 17.6% of respondents reported having received training on the right to disconnect and how to encourage psychological detachment from work (Figure 22), while 41.2% stated that they are interested in receiving training on psychological detachment issues in organisations (Figure 23). Moreover, the most prevalent topics for HR training to promote psychological detachment from work were: Boundary management for better work life balance (58,8%), disconnecting from work; the role of the managers/supervisor/HR professional in creating the appropriate conditions to promote employees' right to disconnect (50%), how to manage out of working hours

communications (50%), training on psychological detachment (47,1%), and effective use of digital technologies to facilitate the right to disconnect (e.g. customizing email notifications, effective use of online calendars for better management of meetings, activation of automatic response when taking annual leave) (44,1%) (Figure 24).

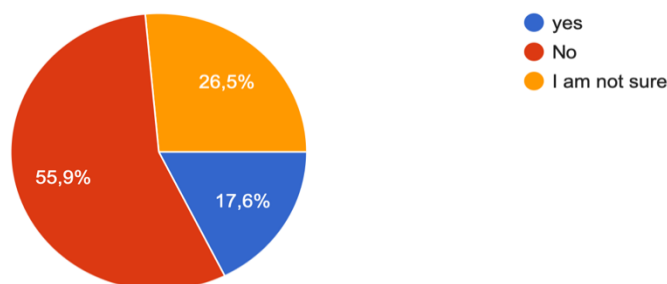


Figure 22. Training on how to promote psychological detachment from work or on policies relating to the right to disconnect

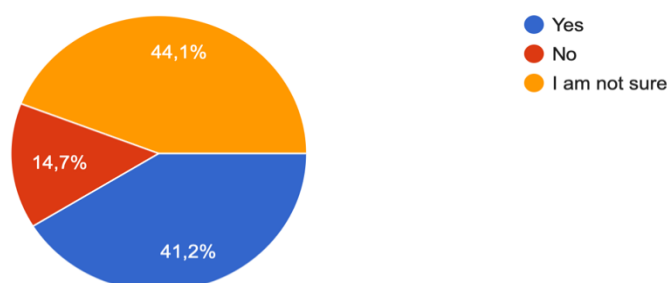


Figure 23. Interest in receiving training in psychological detachment issues in organisations

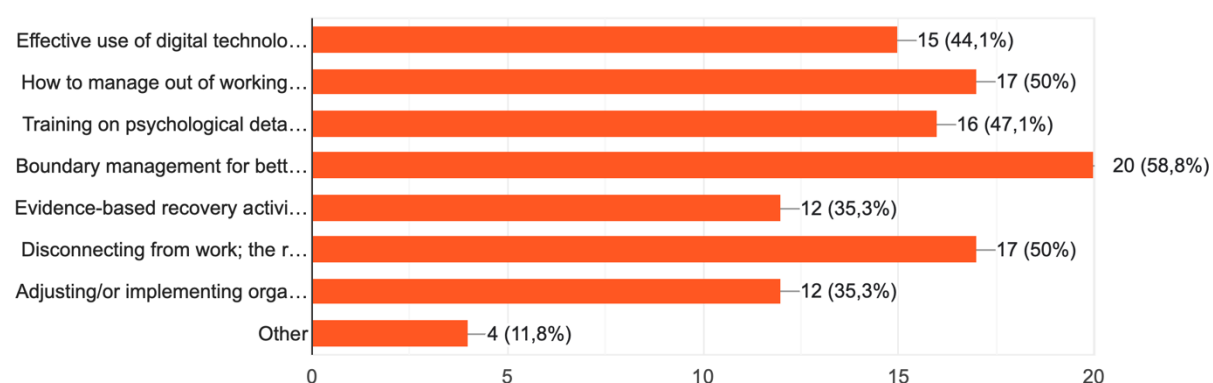


Figure 24. Topics of interest for HR training to promote psychological detachment from work

Summary of Results

The purpose of the present study is to identify the demographic characteristics of the remote workers (teleworkers), managers and HR professionals in Greece, as well as to examine their needs and challenges in disconnecting and switching off from work during non-working hours.

According to the findings, the majority of respondents are aware of the current EU and local level debates on the right to disconnect and agree that an EU legislative framework may enforce boundaries between work and personal life.

Furthermore, in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, respondents reported that organisations adopted a flexible hybrid working model, and there is a high demand for online events and meetings. Additionally, the results showed that organisations recognise the importance of their employees' right to disconnect and take positive action on that right, despite the fact that the majority of respondents stated that their organisation does not have policies in place to help employees detach psychologically from work.

Moreover, the findings revealed that respondents believe they have the right to disconnect from work and not be available and responsive after normal business hours, which can significantly contribute to a better work-life balance because they value being free of work-related activities during off-work hours as very important. However, the majority of respondents claimed that even when they are physically absent from work, they are not mentally disengaged from it, and a significant percentage of respondents are concerned that switching off from work will have consequences.

The findings also show that there is a lack of training on the right to disconnect and how to support psychological detachment from work, despite a strong interest in getting such training. The most common topics on this subject are boundary management for better work-life balance, the role of managers/supervisors/HR professionals in creating the appropriate conditions to promote employees' right to disconnect, how to manage out-of-work communications, psychological detachment training, and the effective use of digital technologies to facilitate the right to disconnect. Furthermore, the main barriers to implementing a programme to help employees switch off from work were a lack of leadership commitment, a lack of resources, a lack of expertise in implementing such a programme, and a lack of understanding of what "the right to disconnect" and "switching off from work" meant.

Focus group Analysis

Hellenic Association of Positive Psychology held a focus group on the 6th of May involving 5 employees from different areas, including Insurance International Market, Food Industry and Gambling Company. Through this focus group, HAPPSY gathered information to help generate data regarding the situation of remote workers in Greece.

The discussion was designed to gather information from the employees regarding the following outcomes:

- 1. Legal framework in Greece and Europe regarding remote work and disconnecting in off job time**
- 2. Ethos in work environments concerning disconnecting**
- 3. Personal strategies of remote workers to ensure switch off**
- 4. Suggestions and ideas for switching off from work**

Participant Demographics

Five (5) people took part in the focus group:

4 women and 1 man

3 out of the 4 women were between the age of 25 and 35 years old

1 woman was over 40 years old

The man in the group was in the age group of between 25 and 35 years old

Participants' Perspectives

Outcome 1. The necessity of a legal framework in Greece and Europe regarding remote work and disconnecting in off job time

Questions asked during focus group:

- "How much (the difficulty to disconnect) does this relate to the fact that you work remotely"
- "Can an EU legal framework that defines and regulates the right to disconnect set boundaries between work and personal life?"

Although there exists a legal framework regarding the limits put to employers when workers are occupied on site, (ERGANI), ¹this framework does not apply to remote work.

Therefore, there is no official legal context on a national level that secures the right of Greek employees to disconnect from work after normal business hours.

On the other hand, all five participants agreed that a legislative basis at European level would be very helpful, since this would mean that there would be a uniformity for people working on Multinational companies.

- Participant 1 said: *"There is no legal framework implemented in remote work. No context for ensuring that I do not work off job hours"*
- Participant 2 said: *"I wish a legal framework could be applied also in remote work (as there is Ergani in on site occupation) so as to feel more secure"*
- Participant 3: *"It is very important to have an international legislation in order to set limits to Multinational companies"*

1

2. Ethos in work environments concerning disconnecting

Questions asked during focus group:

- *“Do you believe your company takes any steps to facilitate your right to disconnect from work after normal business hours?”*
- *“Is it expected of you to be available to respond to emails or other work-related requests after hours?”*
- *“Does your company have a policy in place outlining employees' rights to take time away from work? If yes, please elaborate.”*
- *“How do you manage expectations with your boss and coworkers regarding work/life balance and contacting you after normal working hours?”*

In this realm, 4 out of 5 participants, said that there is no policy in their company to facilitate disconnection from work in off job hours. It all depends on the manager that regulates. any specific task/project and his/her stress management ability. Participants emphasized how important this is: when the manager is stressed out the work hours are extended.

Additionally, they underlined, that when the manager is allowing or encouraging working outside of normal work hours it is difficult to resist due to an internal fear that this may influence negatively one's career.

Participant 1: “I am negatively impacted by the pressure exerted”

Participant 2: “I feel that if I do not respond positively in the extra work I am asked to do, this may impact negatively my career”

On the other hand, one of the 4 women of the group stated that there is a special policy in their company regarding “Work – Life Balance”. This framework, has several practices that help employees not overwork and thus be better able to switch off. One example was that if you commence an e-mail during off – job hours there is an automatic response stating “Are you sure you want to send this? It's outside normal hours”.

3. Personal strategies of remote workers to ensure switch off

Questions asked during focus group:

- *“How would you describe your ability to detach psychologically in off job hours? (Psychological detachment refers to an individual's experience of being mentally away from work, to make a pause in thinking about work-related issues, thus to “switch off”)”*
- *“How do you make sure you have time to disconnect from work after regular business hours?”*

All participants described a process, from full Covid -19 period where there was confinement and full-time remote work to the hybrid work of these days. The all

managed gradually to improve their personal strategies in order to be able to disconnect.

The strategies described can be divided in the following categories:

A. Personal psychological coping mechanisms

In here, participants mentioned different cognitive statements that they say to themselves in order to help them disconnect with no remorse i.e *“There is no task that cannot be transferred to the next working day”* or *“I am not a better professional if I work more, especially since from a point on I am not productive”*

B. External arrangements

Participant 1 said: *“I created the appropriate work conditions by myself, by setting a special work setting and a special different place for rest in my house”*

Participant 2 said: *“I use a timer for rest in the pc, in my mobile phone and my watch”*

Summary of Results

In the present focus group, we tried to delineate the impact of remote work for employees in the aftermath of COVID -19. We discussed how they balance work and personal life and if and how they manage to disconnect mentally and practically in their off – job hours.

Most participants stated that there is no official policy of the company regarding switch-off from work. The “right to disconnect” depends largely on the senior employee that regulates any specific task/project and his/her stress management ability. Also, the ethos of each company is a crucial factor for the establishment of work – life balance in the everyday schedule of employees. The report of one employee that in her workplace, there are specific regulations set by the company to ensure work- life balance, stirred the discussion to the fact that a framework put from the business itself is always helpful.

Moreover, they all agreed that an official European legal framework would be very helpful if it existed, especially in cases where the business is multinational.

Participants in the group, finally, underscored the importance of developing one’s own personal strategies for disconnecting from work. These strategies range from personal psychological coping mechanisms to practical arrangements done at home to facilitate switch off.

Recommendations

Both primary and secondary research findings in Greece reported in this paper reveal that business organizations are making very little effort and commitment to encourage employees’ right to disconnect from work. Organizations, while acknowledging the

importance of their employees' right to disconnect, do not appear to take positive action on that right, which is consistent with the fact that most respondents stated that their organization does not have any policies in place to help employees detach psychologically from work.

The following are some conclusions and recommendations that can be drawn from the research findings:

- Policies should emphasize employees' right to disconnect after normal working hours. To that end, policymakers, stakeholders, and businesses should adopt a more concrete definition of what is meant by this, with a focus on how out-of-office communications can be managed and controlled, and how organizational policies can be adjusted accordingly to support their employees' 'right to disconnect.'
- It is necessary to train managers, supervisors, and HR specialists on how to foster the right to disconnect among their workforces. Leadership commitment at all levels is required, and businesses must place a strong emphasis on how to manage and control communications that take place outside of normal business hours as well as how to adjust organizational policies in a way that will support their employees' "right to disconnect."
- Organizations should offer resources to aid employees in efficiently switching off from work, such as email filters, notification management, and team-building exercises.
- Integrating welfare considerations into performance reviews, goal-setting, and decision-making processes are examples of how well-being practices must be incorporated into daily activities and organizational regulations.
- Support and execution of initiatives for work-life balance, stress management seminars, exercise programs, mental health services, and mindfulness training.
- Organizations should cultivate a work culture that prioritizes work-life balance and assists people in properly disconnecting from work (supporting leadership approach, encouraging regular breaks, time off, and self-care activities).

SPAIN

Introduction

The right to digital disconnection is a labor right of employees not to connect to any digital device during non-working hours and vacations. The right to digital disconnection also concerns the right of employees not answering to calls, WhatsApp messages, emails, video calls, or any other type of digital communication, outside normal working hours. At the same time, it is the right of workers to turn off these devices once the workday is over. In practice, once work hours have ended, the employer must not contact the worker for any work-related issues (e.g. assignment of

new work task, or request for meeting). They have to respect their employees' right to disconnect and wait for the next working day to contact them. In the event that the employer contacts the worker for professional purposes, the latter has the right not to reply outside of his working day.

Technological changes in recent decades have caused structural changes in the field of labor relations. It is undeniable that today the phenomenon of "*digital inter-connectivity*" is influencing the forms of work execution, changing the scenarios of development of work occupations towards environments outside the classic productive units: companies, centers and jobs. In this context, the place of labor provision and working time, as typical configuring elements of the framework in which the work activity is carried out, are being diluted in favor of a more complex reality in which permanent connectivity prevails, affecting, without doubt, to the personal and family environment of the workers. This is the situation that has prompted the legislator to recognize the right to digital disconnection once the working day has ended, as a right of workers not to answer emails or professional messages outside of their working hours, in order to guarantee workers' rest and vacation time.

Policies and national/EU initiatives on the 'right to disconnect'

At the state level, in Spain, the right to digital disconnection is regulated in article 88 of Organic Law 3/2018, on the Protection of Personal Data and guarantee of digital rights; in article 18 of Royal Decree-Law 28/2020, on remote work.

After several non-legal proposals for its regulation, in the transposition into the Spanish legal system of the European General Data Protection Regulation (RGPD), with effect from December 6, 2018, Organic Law 3/2018 of December 5 (LOPDGDD) has introduced measures to guarantee the right to digital disconnection outside working hours.

The art. 88 of the LOPDGDD (referring to both workers and public employees) includes:

- 1. "Workers and public employees will have the right to digital disconnection in order to guarantee, outside of legally or conventionally established work time, respect for their rest time, permits and vacations, as well as their personal and family privacy.*
- 2. The modalities of exercising this right will attend to the nature and purpose of the employment relationship, will promote the right to reconcile work activity and personal and family life and will be subject to what is established in collective bargaining or, in its default, as agreed between the company and the workers' representatives.*
- 3. The employer, after hearing the representatives of the workers, will prepare an internal policy addressed to workers, including those who hold managerial positions, in which they will define the modalities of exercising the right to disconnection and the*

training and awareness actions. of staff on a reasonable use of technological tools that avoids the risk of computer fatigue. In particular, the right to digital disconnection will be preserved in the cases of total or partial completion of remote work as well as at the home of the employee linked to the use of technological tools for work purposes. (Organic Law 3/2018, of December 5, Protection of Personal Data and guarantee of digital rights. - Official State Gazette of 06-12-2018)

The main points of this article are that the employer must set the criteria for the use of digital devices through internal protocols and must have the collaboration of the workers' representatives in the preparation of these policies. Likewise, it is expressly indicated that the nature and purpose of the employment relationship will be taken into account, so the sector of activity, technological means, roles, types of employment, etc. must be taken into account. Basically, it could be defined as the limitation of the use of technologies to guarantee rest time, leaves and vacations for employees and personal and family privacy, so that, for example, outside working hours, employees would not be obliged to answer calls, SMS, text messages or work emails.

The right to digital disconnection was created to adapt the rights of workers to the new reality of the digital age with the aim of guaranteeing respect for rest time, permits and vacations, outside of legal work time, as well as respecting the personal and family privacy of workers. In this way, workers are protected from intrusions by the company in the hours dedicated to private or family purposes. It is also a measure to prevent occupational risks, such as mental overload due that the lack of mental/psychological disconnection from work. Hyperconnectivity and always being aware and worried about work can lead to stress and anxiety. Better time management leads to higher worker motivation and better results in terms of productivity and performance. Workers (including those in management positions), as well as public employees, have the right to digital disconnection. The right to digital disconnection can be especially important for remote workers, for whom defining personal and professional boundaries at home might be more challenging.

The employer not only has to respect the right to digital disconnection but also guarantee its effective exercise through the development of an internal company policy. A protocol in which, after hearing the representatives of the workers, the modalities of exercising this right and the training and awareness actions of the personnel on a reasonable use of technological tools must be defined.

However, the Law regulates that, depending on the nature and purpose of the labor relationship, workers can enjoy the reconciliation of work activity and personal and family life as established in the collective bargaining, that is, in the agreement's collective agreements or, failing that, in the agreements between the company and the workers' representatives (Union Sindical Obrera, 2021).

The Spanish law recognizes "the right not to respond to calls, messages or emails received outside of working hours", but it does not prevent the company from sending work related messages/emails and trying to reach its employees outside normal

working hours, since it does not 'punish' it for it. This is due, among other things, to the fact that here the closing of the timetable agreements is still an individual agreement, even though the framework is the collective agreement.

As the latest data from the InfoJobs Digital Disconnection Report indicates, currently 82% of Spanish workers answer calls or emails outside working hours, while before the health crisis broke out - specifically February 2020 - this same percentage was 63%. To get an idea of the impact, then in just three months this figure rose 7 points, thus touching 70% in June. Even more alarming is that, according to the InfoJobs study, almost 1 in 2 Spanish workers say they do not disconnect because they feel they have to respond, while 36% say their job requires it. 74% also answer calls or emails during vacations or weekends. (*Infojobs, 2021.*)

In Spain, 6 out of 10 companies acknowledge that they do not carry out any measure to promote the digital disconnection of their employees, beyond specific agreements with employees and managers. Therefore, the solution to this problem is not only to review existing regulations and establish new control mechanisms, but also to promote a change of mentality within companies.

National/EU Practices and Best-case scenarios

With the explosion of remote work during the pandemic and the hybrid telework-office model that is taking shape, the need to implement initiatives to guarantee the right to digital disconnection of employees outside of their working hours has been accentuated.

With the remote or hybrid working arrangements, the boundaries between personal and professional life have become blurred. Also, such arrangements, entails the danger of permanent connection and can subsequently contribute to increasing stress and work overload in employees and, as a consequence, reducing their commitment to the organization.

From the first moment of the crisis, the best organizations have intensified the implementation of good practices to guarantee digital disconnection, which they had already begun to implement even before the sudden shift to remote working due to the pandemic. According to data from the Top Employers HR Best Practice Survey (Busquets, 2021) 56% of the 103 Top Employers companies in Spain already have initiatives to avoid sending emails or making calls outside working hours, which represents 23%. In addition, 41% of these organizations apply policies to secure their employees' right to disconnect and not be disturbed by their employers or managers during the holidays, an increase of 16% over 2021. These measures take the form of company agreements with employees, awareness campaigns, disconnection protocols, advice offered with innovative communication formats or computer platforms that offer information to each employee about their digital connection habits so that they can improve them.

ING and AXA are good examples of companies that have implemented a wide variety of measures to ensure digital disconnection.

In 2017, AXA was the first company in Spain to include the right to disconnection for employees in its Collective Agreement and, months later, signed the Protocol on the right to digital disconnection to guarantee rest time and conciliation. In them, guidelines are established such as not sending messages or making calls outside working hours, the maximum start and end times for meetings or turning off the lights in the AXA buildings at 7:00 p.m. In addition, during the months of remote work (Covid-19 pandemic situation), practices for efficient time management have been reinforced in terms of calling meetings (duration, punctuality, attendees, planning...), preferred communication channels between teams or the use of technology as an ally to gain agility.

With Ework, ING Spain's 100% free work model, professionals can choose where and when to work with flexibility, two essential aspects for conciliation and well-being. In addition, they have carried out a series of measures that contribute to digital disconnection, that accompany and facilitate the working day. The flexible entry time is contemplated between 7 a.m. and 10 a.m. and departure between 4 p.m. and 7 p.m. They also limit the hours for meetings between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. and recommend that they be a maximum of 45 minutes, to promote efficiency and effectiveness in the management of the work times of each professional. And finally, they establish a restricted schedule for sending emails and calls. (Busquets, 2021)

National report based on key primary findings - online questionnaire & Focus group

Descriptive Data Analysis

General Information

In this survey, 32 Spanish teleworkers (hybrid or remote), including HR professionals and managers (12 females, 18 males and 2 others), participated by completing an online questionnaire (Google Form). The objective was to assess their needs, such as the challenges they face in disconnecting from work, their current use of ICTs, and practices that help them unwind from work. The purpose was to contribute to the development of a "SwitchOff" step-by-step guide aimed at promoting work-life balance through effective use of digital technologies and other practices. Additional information about the respondents was also gathered. The age range of the participants varied from 18 to 64 years, with the majority falling between the ages of 36 and 44 (Figure 1). In terms of educational background, the majority (71.9%) held a master's degree, 12.5% held a bachelor's degree, 9.4% held a Ph.D., 17% held a high school diploma, and 6.3% chose not to disclose their educational attainment (Figure 2). Regarding tenure at their current workplace, 21.9% had 1-5 years of experience, 40.6% had 6-12 years, 37.5% had 13-20 years of experience (Figure 3).

Figure 1. Age of participants

3) Age
32 responses

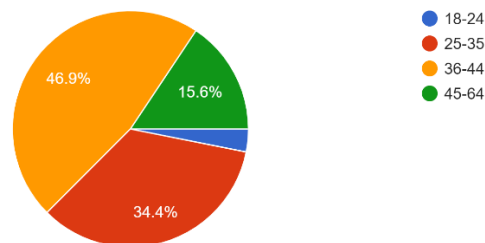


Figure 2. Educational Background of participants

4) Nivel de estudios más alto
32 responses

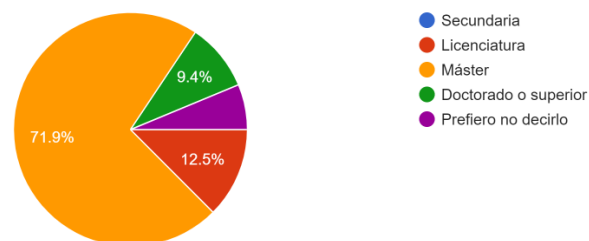
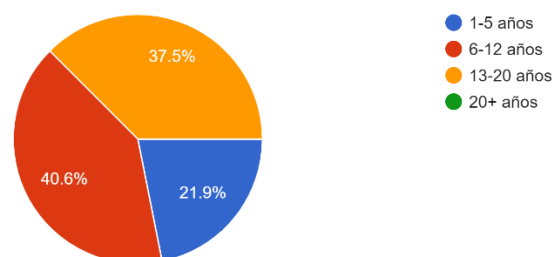


Figure 3. Tenure at the current employer

5) Permanencia en la empresa actual
32 responses



The impact of covid-19 on organisational remote work policies

A significant majority of participants (78.1%) acknowledged that their organization's remote work policy was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Additionally, 71.9% stated

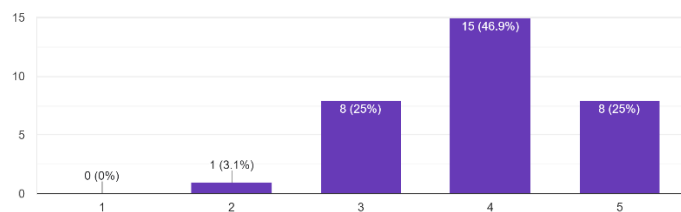
that they had not fully returned to their pre-Covid-19 remote work status. In response to the pandemic, organizations adopted a flexible hybrid working approach, catering to both in-person and remote work arrangements. Notably, participants expressed a substantial demand for online events and meetings as part of this new working paradigm.

EU Policies on the right to disconnect

A significant majority of respondents expressed agreement (46.9%) or strong agreement (25%) regarding the establishment of an EU legal framework that defines and regulates the right to disconnect, enabling clear boundaries between work and personal life (Figure 4). Furthermore, 67.7% of participants indicated awareness of ongoing discussions at the EU and local levels regarding the right to disconnect.

Figure 4. EU legal framework that defines and regulates the right to disconnect can set boundaries between work and personal life

El marco jurídico de la UE que define y regula el derecho a la desconexión puede establecer límites entre el trabajo y la vida personal. 1. Totalmente en desacuerdo 4. De acuerdo 5. Totalmente de acuerdo
32 responses



Managers' perspectives on the right to disconnect

Among the managers surveyed, a significant majority (43.8%, Figure 5) indicated that they neither agree nor disagree to encourage their team members to disconnect from work. Frequently 37.5%, or always 15.6%, encourage their team members to disconnect from work. Additionally, a majority of managers (40.6%, Figure 6) reported that they sometimes expect their team to be available outside of regular working hours. Moreover, most respondents (40.6%, Figure 7) stated that they often or sometimes 37.5% send work-related emails to their colleagues or subordinates after business hours. In line with this, a considerable majority (87.5%, Figure 8) mentioned that they sometimes or never assign tasks to their colleagues on a Friday afternoon.

¿Con qué frecuencia envías correos electrónicos a un compañero o subordinado fuera del horario laboral? 1. Nunca 2. A veces 3. A menudo 4. Normalmente 5. Siempre
32 responses

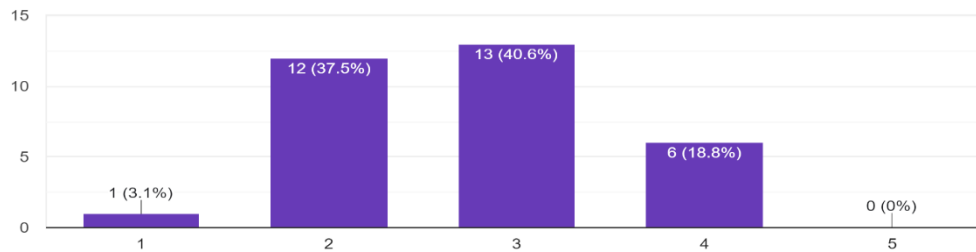


Figure 5. How often, as a manager, do you encourage your team to disconnect from work

Como directivo, ¿con qué frecuencia anima a su equipo a desconectar del trabajo? 1. Totalmente en desacuerdo 2. En desacuerdo 3. Ni de acuerdo ...sacuerdo 4. De acuerdo 5. Totalmente de acuerdo
32 responses

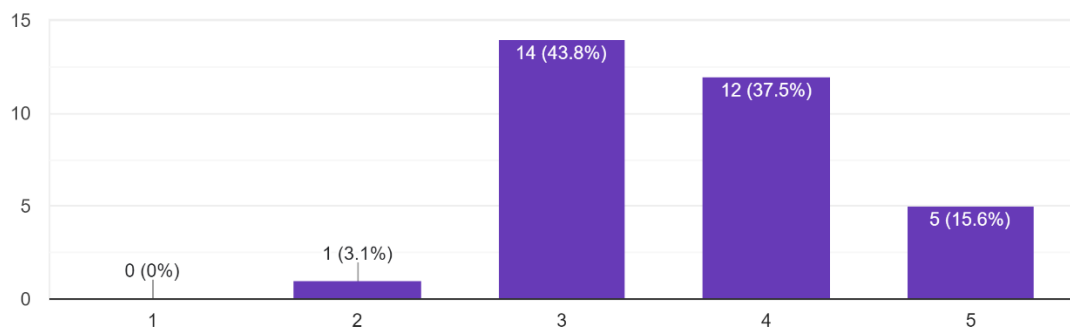


Figure 6. How often, as a manager, do you expect your team to be available outside of normal working hours

Como directivo, ¿con qué frecuencia espera que su equipo esté disponible fuera del horario laboral normal? 1. Nunca 2. A veces 3. A menudo 4. Normalmente 5. Siempre
32 responses

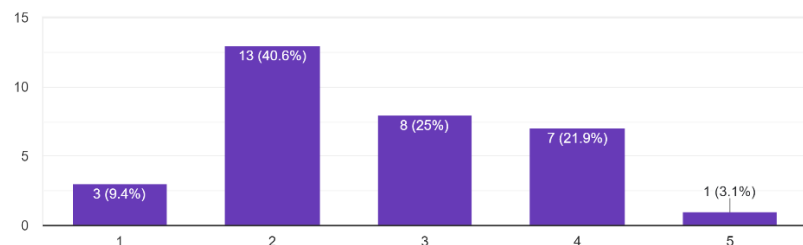
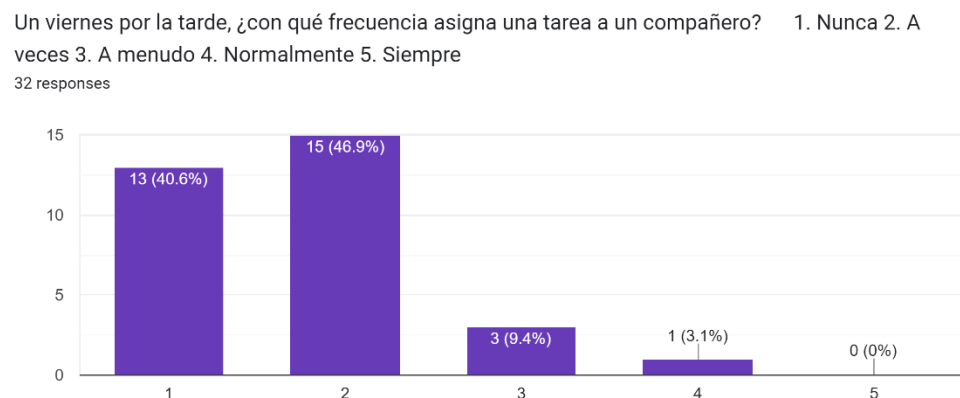


Figure 7. How often do you email a coworker or subordinate after business hours

Figure 8. On a Friday afternoon, how often do you assign a task to a colleague



The significance and the challenges of the right to disconnect

A significant majority of participants (83.9%) emphasized the high importance of being free from work-related activities during their off-work hours. In contrast, a smaller proportion (16.1%) considered it to be only moderately important (Figure 9). Additionally, an overwhelming majority of respondents (87.5%) expressed agreement or strong agreement regarding the significant contribution of the right to disconnect to achieving a better work-life balance (Figure 10). Moreover, a majority of participants (71.9%) agreed or strongly agreed that even when they are physically away from work, they still feel mentally engaged (Figure 11).

Furthermore, an impressive 87.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they have the right to disconnect from work after normal business hours (Figure 12). It is worth noting that the majority of participants (40.6%) are concerned and 15.6% strongly concerned about potential repercussions for disconnecting, while 6.3% hold such concerns (Figure 13).

Moreover, 68.8% of participants agreed with the notion that they must be constantly available and responsive outside regular business hours, while 15.6% of participants held this belief (Figure 14).

Figure 9. How important is it not to be preoccupied with work-related duties during off-hours

¿Qué importancia tiene para ti no estar ocupado con tareas relacionadas con el trabajo durante el tiempo libre?
31 responses

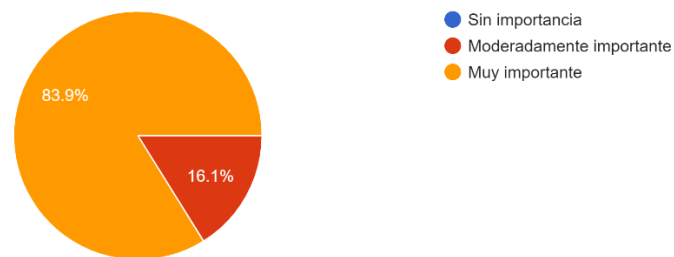


Figure 10. The right to disconnect can contribute significantly to a better work-life balance

El derecho a desconectar puede contribuir significativamente a un mejor equilibrio entre la vida laboral y personal. 1. Totalmente en desacuerdo 2. En desacuerdo 3. Ni ...sacuerdo 4. De acuerdo 5. Totalmente de acuerdo
32 responses

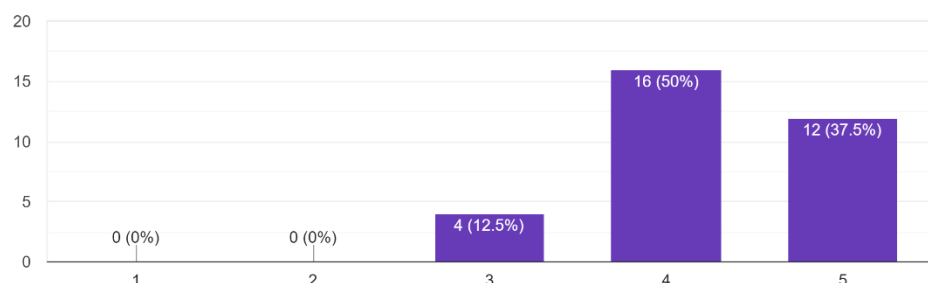


Figure 11. Despite being physically away from work, I am unable to mentally disconnect

Aunque físicamente esté lejos del trabajo, no consigo desconectarme mentalmente. 1. Totalmente en desacuerdo 2. En desacuerdo 3. Ni ...sacuerdo 4. De acuerdo 5. Totalmente de acuerdo
32 responses

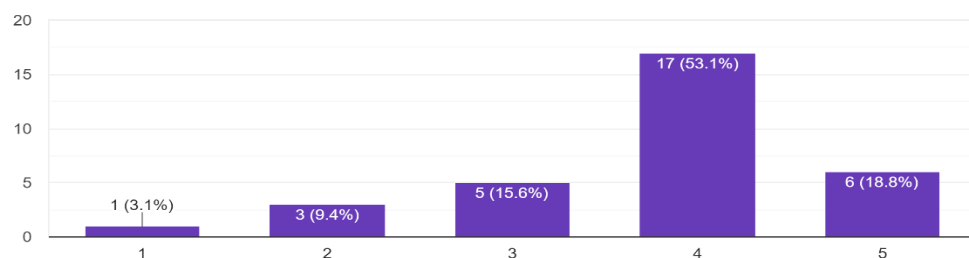


Figure 12. I believe I have the right to disconnect from work after normal business hours

El derecho a desconectar puede contribuir significativamente a un mejor equilibrio entre la vida laboral y personal. 1. Totalmente en desacuerdo 4. De acuerdo 5. Totalmente de acuerdo
32 responses

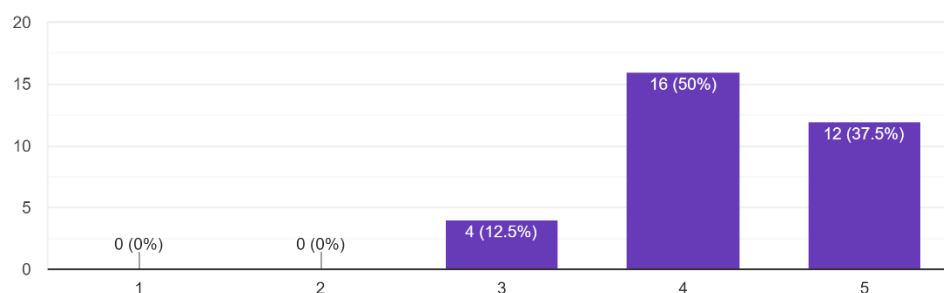


Figure 13. I am concerned that if I disconnect from work after normal business hours, I will face repercussions

Me preocupa que si me desconecto del trabajo fuera del horario laboral, pueda sufrir repercusiones. 1. Totalmente en desacuerdo 2....esacuerdo 4. De acuerdo 5. Totalmente de acuerdo
32 responses

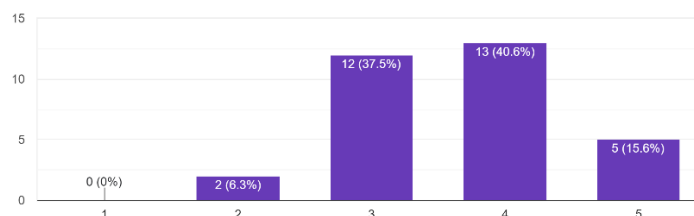
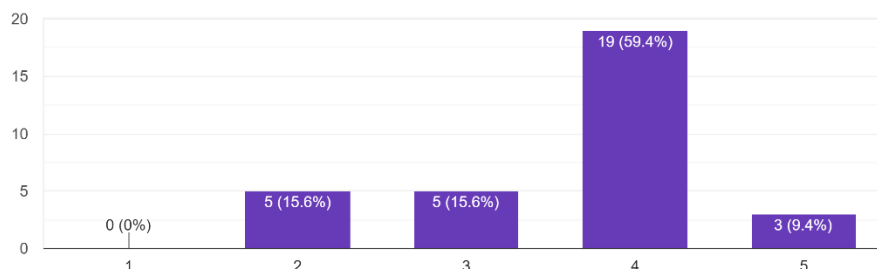


Figure 14. Outside of normal business hours, I feel obligated to be available and responsive

Fuera del horario laboral, me siento obligado a estar disponible y a responder. 1. Totalmente en desacuerdo 2. En desacuerdo 3. Ni de acuerdo ni e...sacuerdo 4. De acuerdo 5. Totalmente de acuerdo
32 responses



Organizational perspectives on the right to disconnect

The survey also examined the organizational perspectives on the right to disconnect and the measures taken by organizations to support their employees in achieving work-life balance and psychological detachment from work. The results provide insights into the attitudes and actions of organizations in relation to the right to disconnect.

When asked whether their organization recognizes the significance of employees' right to disconnect, the majority of respondents (68.8%) neither agreed nor disagreed, indicating a neutral stance. Only 15.6% of participants stated that their organization agrees with the significance of the right to disconnect. This suggests that there is room for improvement in terms of organizational recognition and understanding of the importance of allowing employees to disconnect from work. In terms of positive action taken by organizations regarding the right to disconnect, the results were similar, with 68.8% of respondents indicating a neutral stance. However, a slightly higher percentage (15.6%) agreed strongly that their organization takes positive action to support the right to disconnect. This suggests that while some organizations actively support their employees in achieving work-life balance, a significant proportion have yet to take concrete actions. Regarding the adoption of policies on the right to disconnect, the results were more varied. Nearly half of the respondents (46.9%) neither agreed nor disagreed, indicating a lack of clarity on whether their organization has specific policies in place. However, 31.2% of participants stated that their organization does adopt policies on the right to disconnect, demonstrating that a considerable number of organizations recognize the need for formal guidelines in this area. The survey also explored whether organizations provide a manageable workload for their employees. The majority of respondents (59.4%) neither agreed nor disagreed, suggesting that there is room for improvement in ensuring that workloads are reasonable and balanced. However, 21.9% of participants indicated that their organization agrees with having a manageable workload, indicating that some organizations are making efforts to address this aspect.

When it comes to policies aimed at helping employees detach psychologically from work, the results were similar to the previous questions. The majority of respondents (68.8%) neither agreed nor disagreed, indicating a lack of clarity or consistent implementation of such policies. However, 15.6% of participants stated that their organization agrees with having specific policies to facilitate psychological detachment, indicating that some organizations are taking steps in the right direction.

The survey also examined whether organizations organize extracurricular events to help employees relax and unwind after normal business hours. Just over half of the respondents (51.6%) neither agreed nor disagreed, suggesting that such initiatives are not consistently implemented across organizations. However, 35.5% of participants stated that their organization agrees with organizing extracurricular events to support employee relaxation and unwinding after work. This indicates that some organizations recognize the importance of providing opportunities for employees to rejuvenate outside of working hours.

Figure 15. My organization recognizes the significance of employees' the right to disconnect

Mi organización adopta medidas positivas sobre el derecho a la desconexión. 1. Totalmente en desacuerdo 2. En desacuerdo 3. Ni de acuerdo ni e...sacuerdo 4. De acuerdo 5. Totalmente de acuerdo
32 responses

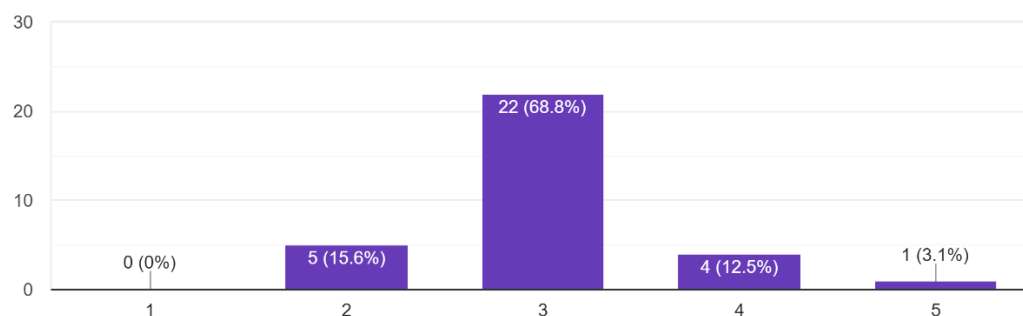


Figure 16. My organization takes positive action on the right to disconnect

Mi organización adopta medidas positivas sobre el derecho a la desconexión. 1. Totalmente en desacuerdo 2. En desacuerdo 3. Ni de acuerdo ni e...sacuerdo 4. De acuerdo 5. Totalmente de acuerdo
32 responses

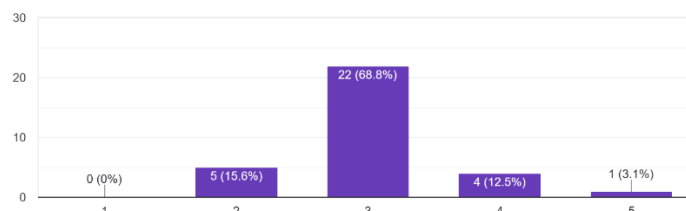


Figure 17. My organization adopts policies on the right to disconnect

Mi organización adopta políticas sobre el derecho a la desconexión. 1. Totalmente en desacuerdo 2. En desacuerdo 3. Ni de acuerdo ni e...sacuerdo 4. De acuerdo 5. Totalmente de acuerdo
32 responses

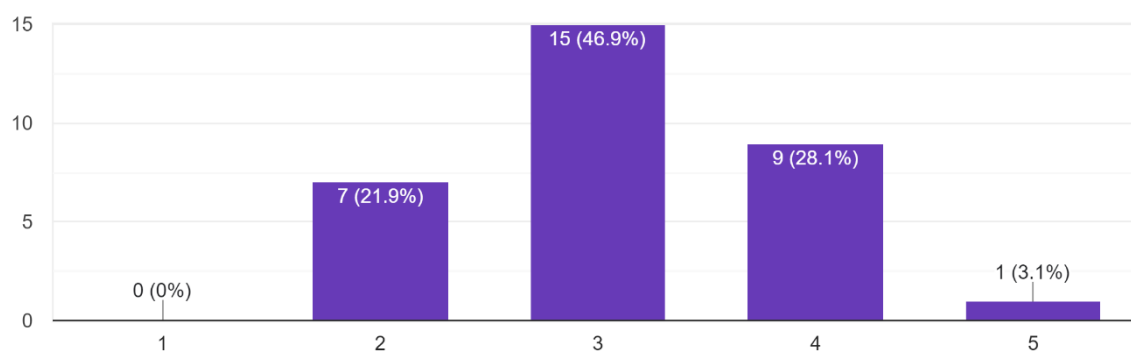


Figure 18. My organization has a manageable workload

Mi organización tiene una carga de trabajo manejable. 1. Totalmente en desacuerdo 2. En desacuerdo 3. Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo 4. De acuerdo 5. Totalmente de acuerdo
32 responses

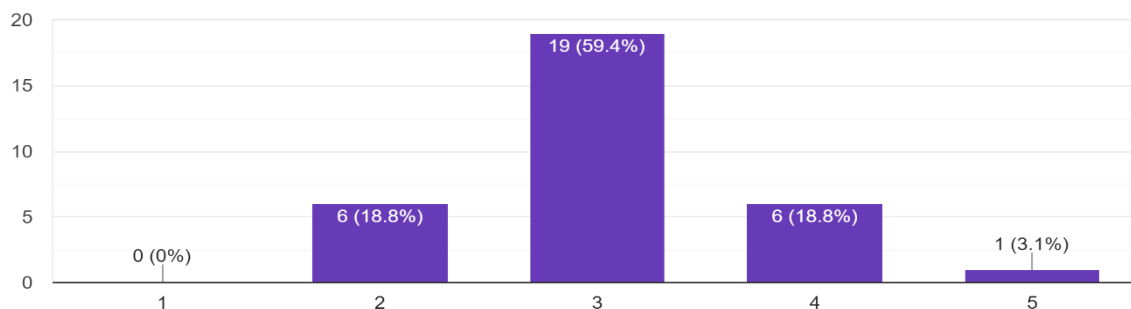


Figure 19. My organization adopts policies to help employees detach psychologically from work

Mi organización adopta políticas para ayudar a los empleados a desvincularse psicológicamente del trabajo. 1. Totalmente en desacuerdo 2. E...desacuerdo 4. De acuerdo 5. Totalmente de acuerdo
32 responses

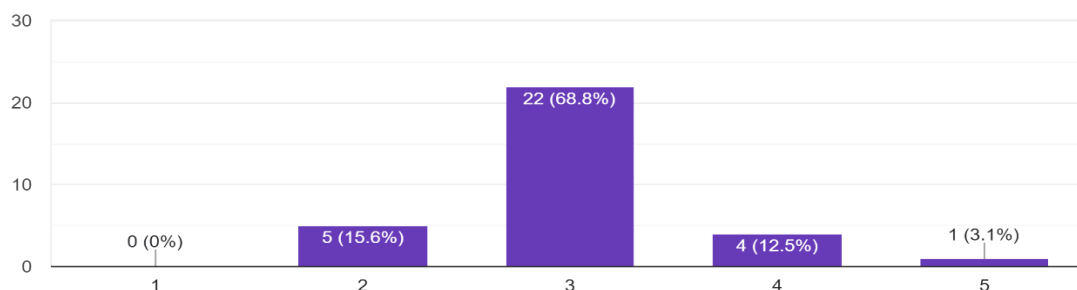
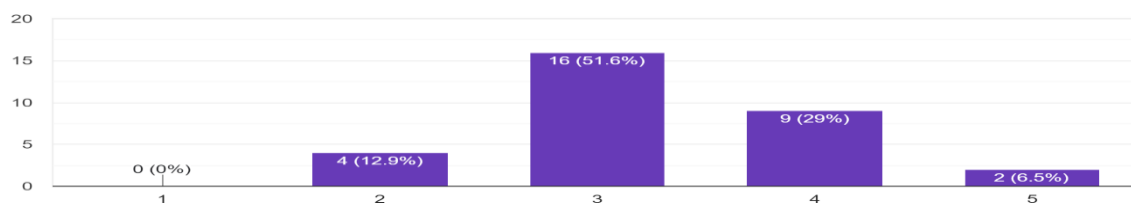


Figure 20. My organization organizes extracurricular events to help employees relax/unwind after normal business hours

Mi organización organiza eventos extracurriculares para ayudar a los empleados a relajarse/desconectar después del horario laboral...esacuerdo 4. De acuerdo 5. Totalmente de acuerdo
31 responses



Initiatives/programs/actions/processes/policies that promoted/facilitated psychological detachment from work at the organizations the last five years.

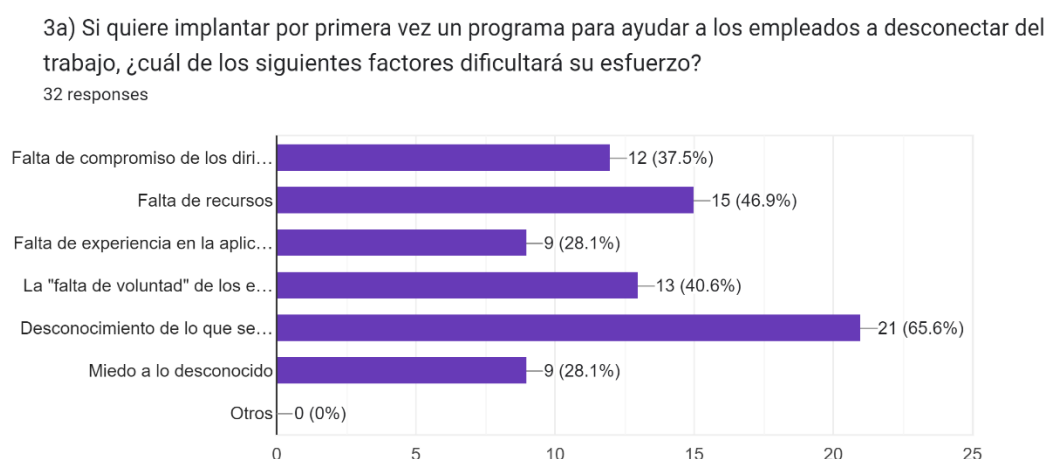
Most respondents indicated that the responsibility for employees' well-being within their organizations lies with the HR department. The following initiatives, programs, actions, processes, and policies were identified as promoting or facilitating psychological detachment from work over the past five years:

1. Team bonding activities: This includes social gatherings, engaging in sports activities, organizing outdoor excursions and activities, as well as participating in volunteer work.
2. Policies on the right to disconnect: Organizations have implemented several policies to support work-life balance, such as customizing email notifications to reduce constant interruptions, no calls after 18h, no calls during the weekend.

Factors impeding the effort to implement a program to assist employees in switching off from work.

The main challenges mentioned by respondents as impeding efforts to implement a program to help employees switch off from work were: Lack of leadership commitment (37.5%), Lack of resources (46.9%), Lack of expertise in implementing such a program (28.1%), Lack of awareness on what is meant by "the right to disconnect" and "switching off from work" (65.6%), Fear of the unknown (28.1%) (Figure 21).

Figure 21. Factors that hinder the effort to implement a program to help employees switch off from work



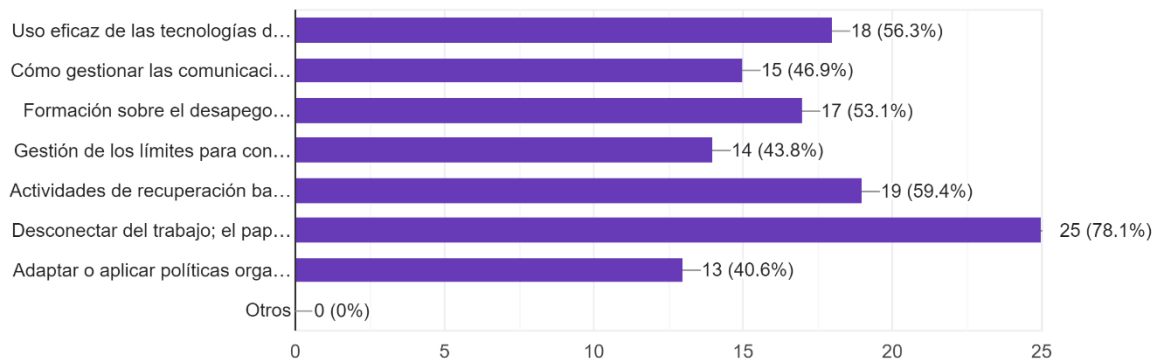
Training on the right to disconnect and how to promote psychological detachment from work

On the question: Have you or someone else in your organization received training on how to promote psychological disconnection from work or on policies regarding the right to disconnect, (65.6%), answered that they haven't received any training, 25% are not sure and 9.4% answered that they have received the training regarding the right to disconnect (Figure 22), while 96.9% show the interest in receiving training on issues of psychological detachment in organizations (Figure 23). The most prevalent topics for HR training to promote psychological detachment from work were: disconnecting from work; the role of the managers/supervisor/HR professional in creating the appropriate conditions to promote employees' right to disconnect (78.1%), Effective use of digital technologies to facilitate the right to disconnect (e.g. customizing email notifications, effective use of online calendars for better management of meetings, activation of automatic response when taking annual leave) (56.3%), Evidence-based recovery activities that one can do that are related to the recovery process (eg, hobbies, mindfulness, exercise, time management) 59.4%. Boundary management for better work life balance (43.8%), how to manage out of working hours communications (46.9%), training on psychological detachment (53.1%) (Figure 24).

Figure 24. Topics of interest for HR training to promote psychological detachment from work

6) Si su respuesta a la pregunta anterior es "Sí", ¿qué tipo de temas serían de interés para la formación en RRHH para promover el desapego psicológico del trabajo?

32 responses



Summary of results

The survey results provide valuable insights into the needs, challenges, and attitudes of Spanish teleworkers and HR managers regarding work-life balance, disconnecting from work, and the right to disconnect, as well as the organizational perspectives on these issues.

From the HR's and teleworkers' perspective, it is evident that establishing clear boundaries between work and personal life is of paramount importance. The majority of participants expressed a strong desire for a legal framework that defines and

regulates the right to disconnect, enabling them to effectively disconnect from work and achieve a better work-life balance. However, the survey also highlighted concerns about potential repercussions for disconnecting and the expectation of constant availability outside regular business hours, indicating the need for organizations to address these concerns and promote a healthy work-life balance culture. The HR managers and teleworkers identified various initiatives and policies that promote psychological detachment from work, such as team bonding activities and specific policies on the right to disconnect. However, they also highlighted several challenges that hinder the successful implementation of programs aimed at helping employees switch off from work. These challenges include a lack of leadership commitment, resources, expertise, awareness, and fear of the unknown. To create an environment that supports work-life balance and effective disconnection from work, organizations must address these barriers and provide the necessary support structures.

From the organizational perspective, the survey revealed a range of attitudes and actions towards the right to disconnect. While some organizations demonstrated awareness and took positive action, a significant number remained neutral or lacked clear policies and initiatives. This highlights the need for organizations to prioritize work-life balance, psychological detachment, and the right to disconnect. It is crucial for organizations to adopt explicit policies, ensure manageable workloads, and organize extracurricular events that help employees relax and unwind after work. The findings from both perspectives underscore the importance of creating a work environment that values work-life balance and supports employees in effectively disconnecting from work. By recognizing and addressing the challenges identified by teleworkers and taking proactive measures, organizations can foster a healthier and more productive work culture. This includes providing training and resources, implementing clear policies, and promoting a supportive leadership approach.

The survey results emphasize the significance of addressing work-life balance, psychological detachment, and the right to disconnect for both teleworkers and organizations. These insights can guide the development of interventions, policies, and guidelines aimed at promoting work-life balance, supporting teleworkers in achieving a healthy disconnect from work, and cultivating a positive work environment that prioritizes employee well-being and productivity. By taking these actions, organizations can create a thriving workplace where employees can achieve a harmonious integration of work and personal life.

The results of the focus group

The focus group aimed to explore the needs of remote workers and delve into the challenges they face in psychologically detaching from work. In an increasingly digital and interconnected world, where remote work has become more prevalent, understanding the experiences and perspectives of individuals working remotely is essential. The focus group comprised six participants from various Spanish companies, including Aseid, Exportory, Euro cities, Jovempa L'Alcoia-El Comtat, and Crea360 themselves. The participants were chosen to represent a range of industries and roles within remote work settings. The goal of the focus group was to gain insights into the participants' ability to detach psychologically from work during off-job hours, with a specific focus on the impact of remote work on this process. Through qualitative discussions and individual perspectives, the aim was to identify the challenges faced

by remote workers in achieving psychological detachment and to explore strategies employed to establish boundaries between work and personal life.

Psychological Detachment Challenges: The participants highlighted various challenges they face when trying to detach psychologically from work during off-job hours. These challenges include the use of mobile phones and work-related apps, constant communication from clients or partners, and the blurring of boundaries when working from home. However, they also mentioned strategies such as going outside, engaging in activities unrelated to work, setting specific work hours, and creating a designated workspace to help them disconnect and establish clear boundaries.

Remote Work Impact: Remote work was acknowledged as both a blessing and a curse. While it provides flexibility and freedom, it also poses challenges in terms of maintaining a clear separation between work and personal life. Participants emphasized the need to consciously combat the stress generated by remote work and highlighted the importance of going outside, establishing a work schedule, and engaging in offline activities to disconnect from work effectively. The participants recognized the importance of psychological detachment and expressed their efforts to establish boundaries and engage in activities that help them disconnect from work. They also acknowledged the difficulties posed by factors such as technology, high availability expectations, and the nature of remote work itself.

These findings highlight the need for organizations and individuals to develop strategies and adopt practices that support psychological detachment and work-life balance, particularly for remote workers. Creating awareness about the challenges faced by remote workers and implementing measures to promote clear boundaries and downtime can contribute to the overall well-being and productivity of individuals in remote work settings.

The insights gathered from the focus group shed light on the participants' perceptions regarding their company's efforts to facilitate their right to disconnect from work after normal business hours. While experiences varied, it became evident that remote work presents unique challenges in achieving psychological detachment due to the lack of physical separation between work and personal space. Some participants highlighted their personal strategies to establish boundaries, such as creating a dedicated workspace and adhering to a specific work schedule. By doing so, they aimed to switch off at the end of the day and minimize the temptation to engage in work-related activities during their off-job hours. Additionally, they emphasized the importance of refraining from checking work emails or messages unless absolutely necessary.

On the other hand, participants from organizations that actively prioritize work-life balance acknowledged their company's efforts to facilitate the right to disconnect. These companies implemented policies that restrict the sending of work-related communications outside of working hours. They also embraced tools and technologies that enhance time management and productivity, enabling employees to disconnect effectively and rejuvenate outside of work. However, it was recognized that certain projects, clients, or specific circumstances may make it challenging to fully detach from work. In such cases, despite the company's attempts to promote disconnection, participants acknowledged the persistence of work-related demands outside of normal business hours.

While participants expressed a range of experiences, it is evident that companies must navigate the unique challenges posed by remote work to effectively facilitate the right to disconnect. Balancing the need for productivity and responsiveness with the

importance of employee well-being is crucial. Implementing clear policies, providing guidance and support, and fostering a culture that values work-life balance are essential steps that organizations can take to promote healthy detachment from work and enhance the overall remote work experience.

The participants identified various reasons for their inability to disconnect from work, which can be attributed to the nature of their work, personal preferences, and external pressures. While some participants mentioned the lack of separation between work and personal devices as a contributing factor, others emphasized the desire to meet expectations, maintain high standards, and seek approval from others as primary reasons for their difficulty in switching off from work. The pressure to meet targets and deadlines, along with a work culture that emphasizes constant availability, were identified as additional factors that hinder psychological detachment. Participants expressed a sense of responsibility and a desire to stay on top of their tasks, leading them to continuously think about work-related matters even outside official working hours. The nature of project management work and the importance they place on the outcome of their work also influenced their ability to disconnect. These insights highlight the complex interplay of personal motivations, external expectations, and work-related demands that contribute to the challenge of disconnecting from work. Employers should be aware of these factors and take proactive measures to support their employees in achieving a healthy work-life balance. This could include providing clear guidelines on work boundaries, encouraging regular breaks and time off, and fostering a culture that values and respects employees' well-being.

The responses from the participants indicate that, in general, their companies prioritize work-life balance and do not expect them to be readily available to respond to work-related emails or requests after normal business hours. Clear boundaries are encouraged, and employees are encouraged to disconnect from work during off-hours to prioritize their personal well-being. While there may be instances where out-of-hours availability is necessary due to urgent matters or specific projects, these situations are agreed upon in advance and appropriately compensated. Participants emphasized the importance of effective communication and ensuring that personal time off is respected while still meeting project objectives. The participants' experiences suggest that their companies have a positive approach to maintaining work-life balance and acknowledge the importance of disconnecting from work outside of working hours. This approach allows employees to recharge, engage in personal activities, and foster a healthier work-life integration.

The participants employ various strategies to ensure they have time to disconnect from work after regular business hours. They emphasize the importance of setting clear boundaries between their work and personal life. This includes establishing specific work schedules and refraining from checking work-related messages unless absolutely necessary. Engaging in activities unrelated to work, such as exercising, reading, or spending time with loved ones, also plays a crucial role in their ability to disconnect. The companies represented in the focus group promote a healthy work environment and work-life balance, encouraging employees to take regular breaks and prioritize self-care outside of working hours. Scheduling non-work-related activities into their day helps participants maintain a sense of balance and fulfillment. Some participants also use technology disconnection tools, such as archiving chats or minimizing email notifications, to reduce the temptation of work-related communication during their designated personal time.

The participants' perspectives on feeling obligated to be available and responsive outside of normal business hours varied. While some participants expressed a sense of responsibility and commitment to their work, they did not necessarily feel obliged to be available outside of designated working hours. Work-life balance is actively encouraged in the represented companies, emphasizing the importance of respecting personal time and disconnecting from work. However, some participants did experience feelings of guilt or anxiety when unable to respond to work-related messages or requests outside of regular business hours, even if they were not urgent. This can contribute to difficulties in fully disconnecting from work and potentially lead to burnout and stress. To address this, participants prioritize urgent tasks, set aside time for non-work activities, and make conscious efforts to establish boundaries.

The participants' responses regarding whether their workplaces encourage them to disconnect from work after hours varied. While some participants mentioned that their current office environment supports and encourages disconnection, others felt that the encouragement was more prevalent when working in a physical office rather than from home. In companies where work-life balance is promoted, policies are in place to limit work-related communication outside of working hours. Employees are encouraged to take regular breaks, manage stress and workload, and are provided with resources for effective time management. These measures aim to foster a healthy and balanced work environment that prioritizes employee well-being. Some participants highlighted the importance of creating a defined workspace at home, separate from personal areas, to aid in disconnecting from work. This physical separation helps establish boundaries and facilitates the ability to mentally detach from work responsibilities. However, there were also participants who expressed that their workplace does not actively address the issue of disconnecting from work after hours, lacking specific policies or practices in this regard.

The participants provided mixed responses regarding whether their companies have policies in place outlining employees' rights to take time away from work. Some participants mentioned that their company has established policies promoting work-life balance and the right to disconnect. These policies may include provisions for paid holiday days, sick days, and special leave, and aim to create a healthy and balanced work environment that prioritizes employee well-being.

On the other hand, there were participants who stated that their company does not have comprehensive policies beyond legally mandated vacation and sick leave. Some participants expressed the desire for additional policies that provide more flexibility, such as flexible work arrangements or mental health days.

The responses provided by the participants indicate that there are varying degrees of precautions in place to protect employees from burnout as a result of overwork. Some companies have implemented policies and procedures that promote work-life balance, provide paid vacation days, sick days, and special leaves of absence, and emphasize the right to disconnect from work outside of business hours. These measures aim to safeguard employees' well-being and prevent burnout. However, other participants noted that their companies may not have specific measures in place to prevent burnout. They suggested the need for additional resources and support, such as stress management programs, well-being initiatives, and improved workload management to alleviate the mental exhaustion that can contribute to burnout.

To manage expectations with their bosses and coworkers regarding work-life balance and contact outside normal working hours, the participants employ various strategies.

These include setting clear boundaries between work and personal time, communicating their needs and limitations, and finding mutually beneficial solutions. They emphasize the importance of respectful communication, adhering to agreed-upon rules, and prioritizing urgent matters while respecting personal time. Some participants also highlight the benefits of work flexibility and compensatory time off to manage periods of high work stress.

When it comes to disconnecting from work and dealing with stress and work-related pressures, the participants employ various strategies. They emphasize engaging in activities that help them relax and unwind, such as running, reading, listening to music, or spending time in nature. Some participants also highlight the importance of not discussing work-related matters when with others and consciously trying not to think too much about work problems during their personal time. Engaging in physical activities, such as sports, is mentioned as an effective way to disconnect from technology and work-related devices. Seeking support from family and friends outside of work is also mentioned as a way to vent and alleviate work-related stress. However, a few participants acknowledge the challenge of separating work pressures from their personal lives, expressing a tendency to transfer work-related stress to their free time. This indicates a need for further work on maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

The participants employ various personal strategies to disengage themselves mentally from work during their off-job time. These strategies include engaging in activities they enjoy, maintaining a healthy routine, and using relaxation and meditation techniques. They prioritize their personal well-being and make a conscious effort to avoid discussing work-related issues with others during their personal time. Engaging in sports, spending time with friends and family, and seeking leisure activities outside of work are mentioned as effective ways to disconnect from work and promote a healthy work-life balance. Some participants also highlight the importance of disconnecting from screens and technology to achieve mental disengagement. The participants value their personal time and prioritize activities that bring them happiness and fulfillment outside of their work responsibilities. Additionally, taking breaks and having extended periods of rest, such as weekends, is mentioned as beneficial for mental disengagement from work.

The participants have varying opinions regarding being disconnected from work and not receiving or responding to work-related communications after normal business hours. However, overall, they recognize the importance of disconnecting and having personal time for relaxation and self-care. Some participants express feeling relaxed and good when disconnected from work, highlighting the benefits of recharging, resting, and enjoying free time. They believe that employers should promote a work culture that encourages work-life balance and respects boundaries between work and personal life. While some participants acknowledge occasional feelings of anxiety or guilt about not being available for urgent work matters, they still prioritize their personal time and understand the importance of setting clear boundaries. They emphasize the need for mutual understanding between colleagues regarding different schedules and the expectation of responding to work-related communications outside of working hours.

The participants have varying concerns, or lack thereof, about negative consequences if they disconnect from work after normal working hours. While some express worries about potentially missing important communications or falling behind on work, others believe that prioritizing personal well-being and maintaining a work-life balance is

essential for effective work performance. There is a recognition that employers should foster a work culture that promotes work-life balance and respects employees' personal time. Participants who feel comfortable with disconnecting from work emphasize the importance of separating work and personal life, understanding that work is an important aspect but should not dominate their entire lives. While some participants may experience occasional concerns or difficulty disconnecting after challenging workdays, they generally view disconnection as a positive practice and believe that it should not result in negative consequences. They highlight the importance of acknowledging personal responsibilities while still prioritizing their well-being.

The participants acknowledge the potential benefits of an EU legal framework that defines and regulates the right to disconnect. They believe that such a framework could establish clear boundaries between work and personal life, improve work-life balance, and reduce work-related stress and burnout. However, they also highlight some challenges in implementing such a framework, particularly in the context of globalization, digital connectivity, and remote work. The varying work schedules, international collaborations, and the nature of certain industries may make it difficult to adhere to specific work schedules and fully disconnect from work. Nevertheless, participants emphasize the importance of establishing boundaries, prioritizing employees' well-being, and recognizing the potential impact on mental health and personal lives.

They suggest that an EU legal framework could provide guidelines and promote healthier work environments, but cooperation and compliance from both employers and employees are crucial for its success.

Recommendations

In today's digital age, where work has become increasingly interconnected and remote work has gained prominence, maintaining a healthy work-life balance has become more challenging than ever. The constant accessibility to digital devices and the blurring of boundaries between work and personal life have led to an increased need for establishing clear guidelines and regulations regarding the right to disconnect. Recognizing the importance of ensuring the well-being and work-life integration of employees, the concept of the right to digital disconnection has emerged as a crucial labor right.

In the following text you can find some recommendations based on research results, including survey findings and insights from a focus group, shedding light on the current state in Spain regarding the policies and practices surrounding the right to digital disconnection. The recommendations aim to guide organizations in creating a supportive work environment that promotes work-life balance, psychological detachment from work, and the right to disconnect. The recommendations focus on addressing the needs and challenges identified by both HR managers and teleworkers, taking into account the perspectives of employees and the organizational context. The survey results underscore the desire for a legal framework that defines and regulates the right to disconnect, enabling employees to effectively disconnect from work and achieve a better work-life balance. However, concerns about potential repercussions for disconnecting and the expectation of constant availability outside regular business hours highlight the importance of organizations addressing these challenges and

promoting a culture that supports work-life balance. Insights from the focus group provide valuable perspectives on the experiences of remote workers and the challenges they face in psychologically detaching from work. The participants emphasized the need for organizations and individuals to develop strategies that support psychological detachment and work-life balance. The unique challenges posed by remote work, such as the lack of physical separation between work and personal space, highlight the importance of implementing clear policies and practices to facilitate the right to disconnect.

Based on these research findings, the following recommendations are presented to organizations operating in Spain to promote a harmonious integration of work and personal life, enhance employee well-being, and create a productive work environment that values work-life balance and the right to digital disconnection.

- There is a strong desire among employees and HR managers for a legal framework that defines and regulates the right to disconnect. It is recommended to establish clear laws or regulations that protect employees' right to disconnect from work-related communication during non-working hours and vacations. These laws should clearly outline the boundaries and expectations for both employers and employees.
- Organizations should adopt explicit policies that promote work-life balance and the right to disconnect. These policies should clearly state that employees are not expected to answer work-related calls, messages, or emails outside of their regular working hours. It is important for organizations to communicate these policies effectively to all employees and ensure their understanding.
- Organizations should address the challenges identified by teleworkers and HR managers in implementing programs aimed at helping employees disconnect from work. This includes providing leadership commitment, allocating resources, raising awareness, and addressing the fear of the unknown. Training programs and resources can be developed to educate employees and managers about the importance of work-life balance and the right to disconnect.
- Organizations should provide support structures to help employees effectively disconnect from work. This can include implementing technology disconnection tools, such as email filters or notifications management, to reduce the temptation to engage in work-related communication outside of working hours. Additionally, organizations can organize team bonding activities and encourage employees to engage in non-work-related activities to promote psychological detachment from work.
- Organizations should foster a work culture that values work-life balance and supports employees in effectively disconnecting from work. This can be achieved by promoting a supportive leadership approach, where managers lead by example and respect employees' right to disconnect. Creating a work environment that encourages regular breaks, time off, and self-care activities will contribute to a healthier and more productive workforce.
- Organizations should provide training programs and resources to help employees manage their work-life balance effectively. This can include

- workshops on time management, stress management, and establishing boundaries between work and personal life.
- Organizations should raise awareness among employees about the importance of work-life balance and the right to disconnect. This can be done through internal communications, workshops, and educational materials that highlight the benefits of disconnecting from work and taking time for personal well-being. Employees should be encouraged to prioritize their mental health and create a healthy work-life balance.
 - Organizations should regularly evaluate the effectiveness of their policies and initiatives related to the right to disconnect. Feedback from employees should be gathered to assess the impact of these measures and identify areas for improvement.

The presented recommendations provide valuable guidance for organizations in Spain to navigate the challenges posed by the digital age and promote a healthy work-life balance through the implementation of the right to digital disconnection. Recognizing the importance of work-life integration and valuing the well-being of their employees, organizations can create a work environment that supports psychological detachment from work, fosters work-life balance, and ultimately cultivates a healthier and more productive workforce. Implementing these recommendations requires a multifaceted approach that involves not only the establishment of clear policies and practices but also a cultural shift within organizations. Organizations need to actively promote and communicate the importance of work-life balance and the right to disconnect to all employees. It is crucial to foster a culture that encourages employees to prioritize their well-being and enables them to effectively disconnect from work without fear of repercussions or the expectation of constant availability.

Concluding Remarks

In the framework of “SwitchOff: supporting worker's well-being during remote work”, all partners developed a national report based on desk research and findings collected through an online survey and a focus group. The desk research aimed to describe the current-state of the art where current national and EU policies on the right to disconnect and best practices implemented. The online survey and the focus group conducted with participants who are remote workers, managers and HR professionals aimed to help the consortium address the needs of the target groups (e.g. challenges they are facing in disconnecting from work, current use of ICTs, practices that they apply and help them unwind from work). In this consolidated report the findings and results from the six national reports of the six partner countries (Poland, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal) were reported. This section will summarize the conclusions drawn from each country's national report.

Poland

In Poland, employees expect their employers to recognize and support their right to a balanced personal and professional life. Working remotely is frequently favoured when it comes to the convenience of carrying out professional obligations. It is believed that employers who provide telecommuting must also provide disconnection plans and both employers and employees must be warned about “burnout” and its detrimental effects on workers' mental and physical health. Employees stressed the significance of

assertiveness, time management, and stress management for productive functioning in remote work settings. Finally, information and instructional programmes can influence the well-being of employees.

Italy

Regarding Italy's national report, the pandemic of COVID-19 altered organisations' remote work strategies. The respondents' understanding of EU policies on the right to disconnect was found to be fairly limited. They believe that an EU legal framework establishing and regulating the right to disconnect may help define the line between work and personal life and that employees should be encouraged to disconnect from work. Respondents emphasized the significance of having no work-related duties during off-work hours and that the right to disconnect contributes significantly to a better work-life balance. Participants stated that they are not always psychologically disconnected, even if they are physically absent from work. Organisations in Italy recognise the importance of their employees' right to disconnect, yet only a minority of participants believe that enough steps have been taken to support it. Barriers in developing a programme to assist employees in mentally disconnecting from work are: lack of resources, expertise, and leadership commitment. Participants expressed an interest in learning about the right to disconnect and the psychological detachment and emphasized the need of psychologically detaching from work by engaging in activities that offer personal fulfilment. They described a strong sense of commitment as well as feelings of guilt as barriers to disconnecting and recognized the positive impact on work-life balance without perceiving negative consequences.

Cyprus

Respondents from Cyprus are unaware of the current EU and local level debates on the right to disconnect and believe that an EU legislative framework could help to establish more distinct boundaries between work and home life. They prefer a hybrid working arrangement following the Covid-19 period. They stated that they feel required to be available and responsive after normal business hours and they are not mentally separated from their work even when they are not present physically. Disconnecting from work can help employees maintain a healthy work-life balance. There was a lot of interest in learning about psychological detachment in business settings. Furthermore, organisations understand the value of their employees' right to disconnect, but they don't appear to take proactive steps to protect that right. Some barriers to developing a programme to assist employees in mentally disconnecting from work are: a lack of leadership commitment, a lack of resources, and a lack of experience in administering such a programme. It is important to raise awareness about the right to disconnect and the benefits (promoting examples of good practices both on a national and international level). Managers/supervisor/HR professionals need to be trained on how to promote employees' right to disconnect (Leadership commitment on all levels is necessary). Policies should focus on the right of employees to disconnect.

Portugal

Respondents of the Portuguese national report are aware of the current EU and local level debates on the right to disconnect and agree that an EU legislative framework may enforce boundaries between work and personal life. In the aftermath of the Covid-

19 pandemic, organisations adopted flexible measures regarding remote working. Organisations recognise the importance of their employees' right to disconnect, even though most respondents stated that their organisation does not have policies in place. Respondents strongly believe they have the right to disconnect from work, which can significantly contribute to a better work-life balance because they value being free of work-related activities during off-work hours as very important. They also claimed that even when they are physically absent from work, they are not mentally disengaged from it, and are concerned that switching off from work will have consequences. There is a lack of training offered on the right to disconnect and how to assist psychological detachment from work, despite a great demand in acquiring such training. Lack of resources, lack of competence in executing such programmes, and lack of understanding of what is intended by such programmes are the primary obstacles to adopting a programme to assist employees in switching off from work. The right to disconnect still has to be widely established. On top of that, there are concerns regarding the lack of enforcement. Developing well-being programs and fostering a positive organisational culture is crucial for the overall success and wellbeing of employees. Leadership support and implementation of well-being activities (fitness programmes, mental health assistance, stress management seminars, mindfulness training, and work-life balance initiatives), feedback from employees regarding their needs and interests, flexible policies that support well-being (flexible working hours, remote work options, and time-off policies) as well as well-being practices must be integrated into the daily routines and organisational policies (Integrating welfare considerations into performance evaluations, goal setting and decision-making processes).

Greece

Regarding the Greek national report, respondents are aware of the current EU and local level debates on the right to disconnect and agree that an EU legislative framework may enforce boundaries between work and personal life. In the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, organisations adopted a flexible hybrid working model. Organisations also recognise the importance of their employees' right to disconnect. However, organisations do not have policies in place to help employees detach psychologically from work. Respondents believe they have the right to disconnect from work which can significantly contribute to a better work-life balance. They value being free of work-related activities during off-work hours as very important. Respondents claimed that even when they are physically absent from work, they are not mentally disengaged from it. There is a lack of training on the right to disconnect and how to support psychological detachment from work, despite a strong interest in getting such training. The most common training topic is boundary management for better work-life balance. Respondents believe that the main barriers to implementing a programme to help employees switch off from work are: a lack of leadership commitment, a lack of resources, and a lack of expertise in implementing such a programme. Both primary and secondary research findings in Greece reveal that business organizations are making very little effort and commitment to encourage employees' right to disconnect from work.

Spain

In Spain's national report it is concluded that there is a strong desire among employees

and HR managers for a legal framework that defines and regulates the right to disconnect. It is recommended to establish clear laws or regulations that protect employees' right to disconnect and that organizations should adopt explicit policies that promote work-life balance and the right to disconnect. It is important for organizations to communicate these policies effectively to all employees and ensure their understanding. Organizations should also address the challenges in implementing programs aimed at helping employees disconnect from work (leadership commitment, allocating resources, raising awareness, and addressing the fear of the unknown). They should also provide support structures to help employees effectively disconnect from work (email filters, notifications management, team bonding activities) and foster a work culture that values work-life balance and supports employees in effectively disconnecting from work (supportive leadership approach, create a work environment that encourages regular breaks, time off, and self-care activities). Additionally, they have to provide training programs and resources to help employees manage their work-life balance effectively (workshops on time and stress management) and raise awareness among employees about the importance of work-life balance and the right to disconnect (workshops, educational material). Finally, organizations should regularly evaluate the effectiveness of their policies and initiatives related to the right to disconnect (Feedback).

Overall key findings

- There is a strong desire among employees and HR managers for a legal framework that defines and regulates the right to disconnect.
- In the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, organisations adopted flexible measures regarding remote working.
- It is recommended to establish clear laws or regulations that protect employees' right to disconnect.
- Organizations should adopt explicit policies that promote work-life balance and the right to disconnect.
- It is important for organizations to communicate these policies effectively to all employees and ensure their understanding.
- Respondents strongly believe they have the right to disconnect from work, which can significantly contribute to a better work-life balance because they value being free of work-related activities during off-work hours as very important.
- Respondents claimed that even when they are physically absent from work, they are not mentally disengaged from it, and are concerned that switching off from work will have consequences.
- There is a lack of training offered on the right to disconnect and how to assist psychological detachment from work, despite a great demand in acquiring such training.
- Organizations should address the challenges in implementing programs aimed at helping employees disconnect from work.
- Organizations should provide support structures to help employees effectively disconnect from work (email filters, notifications management, team bonding activities).
- Organizations should foster a work culture that values work-life balance and

supports employees in effectively disconnecting from work (supportive leadership approach, create a work environment that encourages regular breaks, time off, and self-care activities).

- Organizations should provide training programs and resources to help employees manage their work-life balance effectively.
- Organizations should raise awareness among employees about the importance of work-life balance and the right to disconnect (workshops, educational material).
- Organizations should regularly evaluate the effectiveness of their policies and initiatives related to the right to disconnect (Feedback).
- Lack of resources, lack of competence in executing such programmes, and lack of understanding of what is intended by such programmes are the primary obstacles to adopting a programme to assist employees in switching off from work.

General comment

Summarizing the findings of all the national reports, it appears that people in some countries are aware of the current EU and local level debates on the right to disconnect, while the majority of them agree that an EU legislative framework may enforce boundaries between work and personal life. In addition, most of the respondents stated that they recognize the importance of feeling free from work during non-working hours, but at the same time they claimed that, even when they are physically absent from work, they are not mentally detached from it. They acknowledge the possibility of psychological detachment from work as a way of balancing professional and personal life. On the other hand, it appears that organizations also recognize employees' right to psychologically disconnect from work, but at the same time do not adopt specific policies and strategies to enable and promote it. In general, it is believed that organizations need to provide training programmes and information resources for employees on how to disengage from work. The main barriers that prevent organizations from moving in this direction include: a lack of leadership commitment, a lack of resources and a lack of expertise. Therefore, it is essential to develop training programs that will protect and enhance employees' ability Switch off work. It is suggested that these training initiatives target the organizations' executives and the employees.

EU Policy recommendations

The importance of the right to disconnect and psychological detachment from work in achieving work-life balance was highlighted in both primary and secondary study findings. This section of the consolidated report aims to provide policy recommendations that will be relevant to policy-makers and decision-makers at government level (e.g. national and EU MPs, Chambers of Commerce, Employers' Associations, social partners, Trade Unions, Ministries of Labour and National HR Associations). Such policies could also be used by HR professionals/managers who wish to apply such policies in their organisations aiming to facilitate their employees' right to disconnect from work.

Policy recommendation 1: Raising awareness of EU policies

It is crucial to educate employers and remote workers about the current EU policies in

order to support the right to disconnect. Employers must be aware of their legal responsibilities and show respect for their workers' set off-duty times. On the other side, remote employees should be made aware of their rights, with a focus on the value of setting boundaries and switching off from work during non-working hours.

Policy recommendation 2: Providing Support structures to help employees effectively disconnect from work.

Organizations can create support systems that motivate staff to take regular breaks and abstain from reviewing work-related emails or texts after hours in order to allow effective psychological detachment. Employers must guarantee that staff members are not penalized for taking time off to rest and recharge, for example by actively encouraging them to use their vacation days.

Policy recommendation 3: Fostering a work culture that values work-life balance.

Work-life balance should be given priority in organizations, and should be reflected in their basic principles. This entails encouraging a positive work environment where long working days are not celebrated and staff are not required to be accessible round-the-clock. For instance, managers could set a good example by respecting their own downtime and motivating their colleagues to do the same.

Policy recommendation 4: Dealing with managerial expectations.

Managers play a key role in setting expectations for their staff and influence the culture in the workplace. The importance of teaching managers how to combine goal achievement with promoting the wellbeing of their staff needs to be emphasized. For example, managers can learn how to set realistic goals for their employees, encourage employees to check in frequently to discuss workload and stress levels to identify potential problems and ensure that they feel supported in achieving a healthy work-life balance.

Policy recommendation 5: Resolving implementation obstacles.

Despite the existence of EU policies, their practical implementation can be challenging for some organisations. Employers should work closely with HR departments and employee representatives to identify and address any barriers to the implementation of work-life balance measures. This may include reviewing existing workplace policies, providing resources to support mental health and offering flexible working arrangements to meet individual needs.

Policy recommendation 6: Providing training to help employees achieve better work detachment.

Training programmes should be designed to help workers develop effective detachment strategies. These programmes may, for example, focus on strategies for time management, setting clear boundaries between work and personal life or even teaching mindfulness techniques to reduce stress. By empowering employees with disconnection skills, organisations can create a more engaged and satisfied employee workforce.

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