# Digital work tools surge highlights mental health risks and need for better support



Five years after the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the work-from-home model, initially a response to urgent global needs, has evolved into a significant organisational framework and welfare priority for many workers. In Italy, this shift is evidenced by recent statistics from the Smart Working Observatory of the Polytechnic of Milan, which indicate that the number of remote workers rose from 570,000 in 2019 to 3.55 million in 2024, with projections suggesting a further increase to 3.75 million in 2025.

This professional and cultural transformation hinges on the crucial role of digital technologies. Tools such as instant messaging, web conferencing, and devices enabling remote access to work-related services have facilitated collaboration and mobility, enabling workers to operate independently of fixed locations.

The increasing digitisation of the workplace, however, has sparked important discussions regarding its impact on workers' mental health. On 12 December 2024, a key conference titled “Connected Minds, Caring Workplaces: Addressing Mental Health in the Digital Era” was held at the European Parliament in Brussels. The event explored the ways digital transformation is influencing the health of European workers, emphasising the urgent need to prioritise mental health as a central concern for individuals and European institutions in the years ahead.

The integration of advanced technologies such as robotics, intelligent digital systems, digital work platforms, and artificial intelligence has substantially redefined work environments and organisational structures. While these innovations provide flexibility and support for remote and smart working—contributing to improved work-life balance—they also bring challenges. These include blurred lines between professional and private life, constant connectivity, and communication complexities, particularly in remote settings where adapting to new tools requires continuous learning. Such factors can increase pressure on workers and alter their expectations and working times.

Psychosocial risks arise from various dynamics linked to these changes. Isolation is notably an issue, particularly for workers over 55 and younger employees in Generation Z. A survey referenced by the Italian newspaper Il Corriere della Sera revealed that 77% of respondents in these age groups dislike working from home, with 60% preferring to return to full-time office work. Furthermore, 47% of 16-24-year-olds and 80% of individuals aged 45-54 reported feelings of abandonment and loneliness due to distance from colleagues and employers.

The culture of constant connectivity fostered by digital collaboration tools has also been identified as a concern. Debated by the European Parliament as early as 2021, the "right to disconnection" was recognised as essential to mitigate risks of depression, anxiety, and burnout. The Parliament encouraged EU countries to take measures, including collective agreements, to protect workers' ability to disconnect and maintain private life boundaries.

The surge in online meetings associated with hybrid work models further complicates matters. Time spent in virtual meetings has increased by 252% without clear productivity gains. According to the Work Trend Index, employees spend 57% of their time communicating via meetings, emails, and chats, with 68% worldwide feeling they lack sufficient time for focused work, leading to stress and frustration. In response, some multinational companies have implemented measures to manage meeting schedules. For instance, Shopify has eliminated recurring meetings involving more than three people, restricted larger meetings to specific days, and designated meeting-free days.

The adoption of robotics, automation, and artificial intelligence also introduces uncertainties and anxieties for workers concerning job security and workload.

According to survey data from 2023, workers expressed various fears linked to these new working conditions: 21% feared prolonged isolation at home, 15% feared excessive solitude, 14% feared working across different time zones from colleagues, 11% feared inability to regulate working hours, 9% feared overwork and concentration difficulties, and 8% were concerned about communication challenges.

The impact of digital technologies on mental health is underscored by statistics from the Healthy Workplaces 2023-2025 campaign and the OSH Pulse Survey 2022. Nearly half of workers (46%) reported strong time pressure or work overload related to digital tools, while 44% acknowledged that these technologies contribute to work isolation. Workers using digital devices regularly reported higher incidences of stress and mental health issues (27%), general fatigue (37%), and increased workload (one in three), alongside a 19% report of reduced autonomy.

Addressing these challenges, the Healthy Workplaces campaign advocates the principle STOP, encompassing Substitution of harmful digital processes with safer alternatives, Technical Protective Measures to safeguard privacy and manage cognitive stress, Organisational Protective Measures to establish clear work-hour boundaries and supportive environments, and Personal Protective Measures promoting access to mental health resources and self-care tools.

Effective corporate strategies involve regular assessments targeting psychosocial risks associated with digitisation. Collaboration between HR and management is recommended to foster open communication, mental health support, and a healthy work-life balance.

In this context, the organisation UNEBRAVO is highlighted as a potential partner for companies aiming to balance mental health and productivity. UNEBRAVO offers training and psychological support services, both individual and group-based, designed to cultivate corporate wellness cultures and support sustainable organisational growth.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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