



PEACE AT WORK
PERSONAL EMPOWERMENT AND CARE ENHANCEMENT

BENCHMARKING REPORT

**Benchmarking report on the research of perceptions
regarding well-being in CZ, LT, GR**

10/2025



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Transparency in Research and AI Usage

The preparation and drafting of this report utilized an Artificial Intelligence tool (specifically, NotebookLM) to assist in the drafting process and the categorization of qualitative results. This approach was implemented primarily to maximize time efficiency during the analysis phase and, crucially, to maintain a high degree of objectivity by striving to ensure findings were not excluded based on inherent researcher biases. Sources were chosen by the PEACE Partnership and data comes directly from the project's activities.

We acknowledge that the use of AI in this context might be perceived as alienating from the deeply interpretive and human-centered nature of qualitative research. However, the core advantage of this methodology was leveraging the AI's capacity to present an unbiased account and consistent summary of the rich, multifaceted perspectives shared by participants. Our goal in employing this tool was to transform the collected data into a comprehensive and rigorously transparent resource for other researchers, especially given the project's focus on the complexity and relational dimension of well-being.

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Preface

Since ancient times, humanity has grappled with the profound question of what constitutes a ‘good life’ and genuine happiness. In ancient Greece, Aristotle theorized that happiness, or eudaimonia, is not merely fleeting pleasure, but a state of living well and doing well, characterized by activities in accordance with virtue and human flourishing. Before that, in ancient China, Lao Tzu had already come up with a similar concept that defined happiness not as a destination to be pursued greedily, but as a state achieved through balance, simplicity, and living in harmony with the way of the world.

This timeless inquiry has evolved considerably, transitioning from purely individualistic or passive notions of fortune to multidimensional, structural, and humanitarian perspectives in modern times. Progressive frameworks emerged, such as the Capability Approach, which focuses on whether individuals have the capacity to lead the kind of lives they value, moving beyond mere wealth. Similarly, psychological research introduced the importance of eudaimonic fulfillment—the process of realizing one’s potential through dimensions like autonomy, personal growth, and positive relationships with others.

Crucially, contemporary scholarship highlights that most well-being models originate in the wealthy contexts of the Global North, often neglecting the context, power dynamics, and social and political barriers essential for understanding well-being in diverse environments marked by poverty and inequality. A progressive, humanitarian approach today demands an understanding of well-being as intrinsically relational, emphasizing how health, purpose, and dignity are interconnected across individuals, communities, and the broader social and natural environment. This structural perspective recognizes that fundamental elements like security, balance, and health must be treated as essential rights. Furthermore, contemporary motivational science emphasizes that achieving lasting, sustained societal change, such as promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), requires fostering intrinsic motivation and supporting the universal psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness rather than relying on external pressure or coercion.

This rigorous, modern, and structural inquiry remains at the heart of the PEACE (Personal Empowerment and Care Enhancement) Project. The PEACE Project, implemented under the Erasmus+ framework, aims to contribute to the vast analysis on well-being through the lens of work and employment. While we acknowledge that this is a perspective that has been widely reviewed, our approach differs from the fact that we do not aim merely to address how to make workplaces foster well-being, but rather to understand how the perception of well-being inside work influences the perception of well-being in a person’s general life, and vice versa, how the existing values affect the perception of well-being. Well-being is approached as a complex, multidimensional construct theorized through various disciplines, and this project explores its manifestations across three interconnected levels: the personal, the workplace, and the broader society.

Introduction

The PEACE (Personal Empowerment and Care Enhancement) Project aims to support well-being through an approach that addresses three critical, interconnected levels: personal, workplace and societal. The aim is supported by the creation of a safe online space with comprehensive tools and inspirational examples for an active, balanced and satisfying life, ultimately providing a non-academic basic education for personal well-being. The project partners from the Czech Republic, Lithuania and Greece, aim to deliver outcomes including a comprehensive knowledge base, a training and empowerment program, and an action plan for practical implementation.

This initiative is particularly relevant in the current European context, where a series of overlapping crises continue to impact the quality of life. By early 2024, the lasting effects of the pandemic were still evident, with many Europeans struggling with ongoing health issues, poor mental health, and weakened social connections. This situation has been further impacted by parallel challenges such as the war in Ukraine, rising utility costs, and the overall increase in the cost of living, which have intensified existing problems like housing shortages and reactionary politics. Eurofound's e-survey results from 2024 indicate a notable decline in overall quality of life, with financial challenges worsening, especially for low- and middle-income households and middle-aged groups in southern and eastern Member States. Mental well-being reached its lowest point in 2021, and negative feelings like anxiety and depression increased between 2023 and 2024 across most age groups, except for those over 65. Optimism levels have also fallen considerably since 2020 and decreased notably from 2023 to 2024. Furthermore, individuals with disabilities face disproportionately higher rates of financial struggles, unmet medical needs, lower life satisfaction, and significantly poorer mental well-being, with these gaps widening significantly since 2021 and 2023.

This benchmarking report, the results of the activities of Work Package 2, presents comprehensive findings from an online survey, focus groups and expert interviews conducted across Czech Republic, Lithuania and Greece. Our research collects perceptions, needs and attitudes regarding wellbeing within these three partner countries. It examines concepts that range from the hedonic experience of pleasure (maximization of pleasure) to the eudaimonic pursuit of meaning and fulfillment (flourishing and fulfilling natural needs), and the subjective evaluation of life (cognitive and affective components). It critically assesses how these elements interact, recognising that well-being is not an isolated phenomenon but rather a dynamic system where personal circumstances, organizational policies and societal conditions profoundly influence one another.

Our research methodology aimed to be comprehensive and focused on collecting original input from different people, so its primary action was to conduct field research. To analyze the results, however, we compared these findings by conducting basic desk research. Both cases are limited in their approach to provide a comprehensive and all encompassing review that

doesn't repeat existing knowledge, for the fact that it had a very small implementation and research window but also aimed to address a small (yet achievable) number of people who were not very heterogenous. Despite these limitations though, we were happy to observe a significant diversity of opinions, many also considering different perspectives, although we still lack in terms of societal diversity, and especially concerning underrepresented voices. To counter this gap, we'll try to bring attention (where possible) to elements and expectations that are formed from more conventional life paths.

Research identity

The PEACE project's Work Package 2 (Analysis) employs a **multi-faceted field research methodology** to gather comprehensive and up-to-date information on well-being needs and challenges across Czechia, Lithuania, and Greece. The overarching objective of this research is to identify needs and propose innovative practices at three interconnected levels: **personal, workplace, and societal**. To achieve this, the project utilizes three primary tools: an online survey, focus groups, and expert interviews. These activities are crucial for guiding the subsequent Work Packages 3 and 4, which involve the development of training content and a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC).

Research Tools and Protocols

1. Online Survey (WP2.1)

The online survey is the first activity of Work Package 2, focusing on the **personal (micro) level of well-being**. Its primary purpose is to identify individual well-being needs, common topics of concern, how individuals seek help, and their preferred problem-solving methods. It also aims to uncover similarities and differences in these needs across the three partner countries.

Target Group

The survey targeted adults from the general public in each partner country who are interested in well-being and are currently employed, potential employees, or available for employment. There are no limitations on the geographical location as long as respondents live and work in one of the partner countries, with an aim to verify and update larger-scale surveys.

Requirements and Strategy

Each partner organization was expected to collect at least 20 responses, with a minimum acceptable of 16 responses if crucial issues arose, aiming for a project-wide sample of at least 60 diverse individuals. The strategy suggested was to employ **stratified random sampling**

principles to ensure heterogeneity in terms of gender, origin, disability affect, and work status, reflecting the population balance of their city or country. Partners were encouraged to approach respondents through available contact registries, open channels, or by engaging relevant organizations to promote the questionnaire.

Questionnaire Content

The questionnaire included sections on overall well-being (life and work satisfaction), specific well-being needs related to workload and stress, work-life balance, physical and mental health, communication and support, and organizational culture. It also gathered information on personality traits, goals and intentions, and detailed demographic profiles including gender, age, social situation, geographical area, educational background, nationality, employment type, and work arrangement.

Timeline

The questionnaire was developed at the end of 2024 and was used to collect feedback in a span of 2 months (mid Jan to mid Mar 2025).

2. Focus Groups (WP2.2)

Focus groups constitute the second activity, concentrating on **well-being at the workplace (meso-level)**. The discussions aim to identify key well-being aspects for both employees and employers, exploring common issues, priorities, communication dynamics, existing methods for addressing needs, and the link between workplace and personal well-being.

Target Group

Participants are employees, HR experts, and employers from the geographical area of each partner's location. A crucial aspect is ensuring **heterogeneity** among participants across various parameters such as work domains, positions, company sizes, age, gender, ethnicity, roles, and work arrangements. While a 50%-50% balance between employees and employers/HR experts was aimed for balanced discussion, it is acknowledged that this does not reflect actual population division.

Requirements and Methodology

Each partner was required to implement one focus group with 10 participants, totaling 30 participants. The methodology involved a **mixed approach**, combining plenary discussions with work in two separate groups: one for employees and one for employers/HR experts. The focus group scenario includes an introduction, a plenary "Priority Mapping" activity, split-group discussions (e.g., SWOT analysis for employers, "well-being blueprint" for employees), a joint workshop for case study development, and a synthesis session. Interactive elements, ground rules, and immediate feedback mechanisms are integrated to enhance participation.

Timeline

The development of the workplan and tools was completed by beginning of April 2025, with focus groups planned and implemented by mid May 2025.

3. Expert Interviews (WP2.3)

The expert interviews are the third activity, designed to gather in-depth insights from professionals on well-being at the **societal level**, connecting personal and workplace experiences with broader life patterns.

Target Group

The interviews engage experts such as psychologists, therapists, mental coaches, life coaches, and other relevant professionals. Ideal interviewees have direct experience with well-being initiatives, represent diverse backgrounds (sector, discipline, culture), are open to critical reflection, and can speak from practice or research.

Requirements and Methodology

Interviews are semi-structured, lasting 45-60 minutes, conducted either online or in person based on availability. Audio recording or note-taking is done with explicit consent, and anonymity is respected. Each partner aimed to conduct at least 7 interviews by June 20, 2025, with a goal of reaching 10 interviews by September 10, 2025. The interview questions cover background information, perceived challenges in the workplace and societal factors, interventions and solutions, the interconnectedness of well-being levels, and health monitoring.

- **Timeline:** The interview questions were approved by end of May 2025, with interviews implemented by mid July 2025, and national reports drafted by end July 2025 (with possibility for additions by mid September 2025).

Research Limitations

It is crucial to acknowledge significant **limitations** of this research:

Small Sample Size

The online survey yielded 76 responses in total (24 from Czechia, 27 from Lithuania, and 25 from Greece), and focus groups and interviews involved similarly limited numbers of participants. This **small sample size, especially when compared to the actual populations of the cities or countries involved, means that the findings are preliminary and indicative**

rather than conclusive, potentially overlooking important nuances that a larger, more representative sample would capture.

Homogeneity of Respondents

All respondents across these initial activities were employed or self-employed. This **limits the findings from capturing the well-being needs and challenges of unemployed individuals or other populations**, whose perspectives could significantly differ and offer distinct insights into societal well-being.

Professional Concentration

There was a noticeable concentration of respondents in specific professional sectors, predominantly **education, healthcare, and business/corporate**. This concentration **restricts the generalizability of the findings to other sectors** that may have unique workplace dynamics and well-being concerns not represented in this sample.

Gender Imbalance

The online survey had a significant majority of female respondents (76%), the Lithuanian focus groups and Greek interviews were exclusively female. This gender representation imbalance might not fully represent the experiences and well-being needs of all genders, although we believe that most respondents did their best to reflect not only from a personal perspective but also in relation to their environment, as the research questions gave a lot of importance to relations and interactions with others.

It is important to acknowledge these characteristics and limitations, especially in our interpretation of the results. It is also crucial to recognize that a more diverse respondent pool would probably be possible by changing the methodology of our field research, as well as the available timeline dedicated to its implementation.

However, we are content with the results as respondents seemed to express multifaceted opinions and were genuinely involved in the process. What was also positive is that the topic of wellbeing didn't limit participants' replies to more "mainstream" ideas, but rather all respondents seemed to have a unique interpretation.

Finally we also received a significant criticism in regards to terminology. As a Czech interviewee also mentioned, the term "well-being" has become a bit of a "buzzword" and evokes negative reactions especially among teachers in Czech schools. Similarly the participants in the Greek focus group, most of whom work in corporate-like environments, indicated a similar discomfort towards the term "wellbeing", associated primarily with enforced activities aiming to "strengthen the group" rather than providing actual support and understanding towards employees that deal with objective issues of wellbeing.

Socio-political context of project countries

European Semester – 2025 reports

The European Semester Country Reports for Czechia, Greece, and Lithuania in 2025 provide a wealth of socio-economic information that offers significant context and comparative data for the well-being themes explored in the WP2.1 questionnaire, WP2.2 focus groups, and WP2.3 interviews. These reports comprehensively outline realities influencing personal, workplace, and societal well-being in each country.

Czechia

Socio-economic Information

In Czechia, the labor market is tight with a low unemployment rate of 2.6% and a high employment rate of 82.3% in 2024. However, job transition rates are among the lowest in the EU at only 1%, hindering worker mobility to more “productive” roles. This is compounded by the high cost of urban housing, which acts as a significant barrier to labor mobility, with 14.1% of people in cities spending over 40% of their income on housing. The tax system is not progressive enough, disproportionately burdening low-income earners and discouraging young mothers from returning to work, leading to a substantial gender employment gap of 36.1 percentage points for women aged 25-34. While the overall risk of poverty is low (11.3% in 2024), child poverty is on the rise, increasing by 55,000 children between 2019 and 2023. Tertiary educational attainment (33.7%) is far below the EU average. Finally although energy poverty remains comparatively low, many households face higher energy prices.

Work and Life Reality

Labour Market

Labour mobility is hampered by the affordability of housing in cities. Czechia has one of the widest **gender employment gaps** for women aged 25-34 (36.1 pps vs EU 25.2 pps). Job transition rates are low, influenced by **low unemployment support**, a high proportion of specialised education, and barriers to professional certification. Adult participation in lifelong learning is low. A substantial portion of workers (50%) report their work not matching their qualifications. The report also mentions that the country has the fifth highest absenteeism rate in the EU24.

Well-being Infrastructure/Policies

The tax system's burden on low-income earners and young mothers directly impacts financial well-being. Public healthcare spending is projected to increase, with **improvements in access**

to preventive and mental healthcare. However, **childcare access remains a challenge**, with only 7.3% of children under 3 in formal childcare compared to the EU average of 39.2%. While overall poverty risk is low, **social integration of the Roma minority and Ukrainian refugees presents challenges**, with many working below their qualifications. The care sector faces a deficit in community-based places and low salaries. **Life expectancy in good health is below the EU average**, coupled with a high rate of preventable mortality and low spending on prevention.

Organizational/Societal Culture & Support

Trust in government is below the EU average. Performance in developing and evaluating legislation is weak, often with low quality impact assessments and many exceptions. Social partners have raised concerns about policy transparency. Digitalisation of public services is progressing but remains below the EU average.

Greece

Socio-economic Information

Greece sees improvements in its labor market, with the unemployment rate declining to 9.5% in late 2024, yet this remains substantially above the EU average. Women and young people are disproportionately affected by joblessness, and the country faces persistent structural challenges including skills gaps (overqualification) and inadequate childcare and elderly care infrastructure. Adult participation in training is among the lowest in the EU at 15.1%, limiting opportunities for work progress and skill development. The risk of poverty and social exclusion remains high at 26.9% in 2024, significantly above the EU average, with a notable impact on children, whose poverty rate is 27.9%. Two-thirds of the population reported difficulty making ends meet in 2024. Housing affordability is a major concern due to rising prices and rents, leading to high housing cost burdens, where 28.9% of the population faced high housing costs in 2023. Energy poverty is increasing, with 19% of the population unable to keep their homes adequately warm, and nearly one in three facing arrears on utility bills. The healthcare system faces significant challenges, including substantial self-reported unmet needs for medical care (12.1% in 2024).

Work and Life Reality

Labour Market

While the **unemployment rate has significantly decreased** (below 10% in late 2024), it remains relatively high, and the **long-term unemployment rate is substantially above the EU average** (5.4%). **Female employment rates are among the lowest in the EU**, compounded by

insufficient childcare, long-term care services, limited work-life balance opportunities and discrimination or extra pressure due to caregiving activities. Young people also face low labour market participation and high unemployment rates. **Over-qualification is a structural issue**, with a significant portion of highly educated workers in positions not requiring their skills. **Working conditions are described as challenging**, making job quality improvement a priority.

Well-being Infrastructure/Policies

Greece has a **high risk of poverty and social exclusion** (26.9% in 2024 vs EU 21%), with two-thirds of the population struggling to make ends meet. Child poverty rates remain above the EU average. The **long-term care system is underdeveloped**, and self-reported unmet needs for healthcare are notably high (12.1% in 2024 vs EU 2.5%). Life expectancy at birth has rebounded to the EU average, but **preventable mortality is high**, partly linked to heavy smoking and environmental factors.

Organizational/Societal Culture & Support

Trust in public institutions is below the EU average. The quality of legislation is negatively impacted by very short adoption times and frequent amendments. Social dialogue and involvement of social partners need strengthening. Administrative procedures generally take longer than the EU average. The justice system faces significant challenges regarding the length of proceedings. The Corruption Perceptions Index score is below the EU average.

Lithuania

Socio-economic Information

Lithuania experienced a **strong economic recovery in 2024** (2.8% GDP growth), but **geopolitical risks weigh on economic decisions**. Unemployment increased in 2023-2024 (7.1%) and the job vacancy rate is high, indicating **labour market mismatches**. There is a reported significant need for **skilled staff**. Public debt is projected to rise due to a rapidly ageing population, with age-related public expenditure expected to increase significantly by 2070. **Regional disparities in labour productivity are considerable**, with Vilnius and Kaunas performing much better than less developed counties. Student results show large disparities, and **adult participation in lifelong learning is low**. While individual learning accounts are gaining traction, concerns remain about their capacity, targeting, quality, and labour market relevance. Tertiary enrolments in STEM fields have declined despite labour market demand. Skills forecasting is fragmented and weak.

Work and Life Reality

Labour Market

While the employment rate is high, **structural skills mismatches and shortages persist**. **Participation in Active Labour Market Policy measures is low**. **Youth employment has deteriorated**, with increasing unemployment rates and particular vulnerability for low-skilled youth. The **disability employment gap is substantially above the EU average** (39.9 pps in 2024 vs EU 24 pps). Income inequality remains among the highest in the EU. The workforce is adapting to green and digital transitions, but shortages exist in specific fields like water management.

Well-being Infrastructure/Policies

Lithuania's **health outcomes are among the EU's poorest**, with high rates of treatable and preventable mortality and low life expectancy. **Older people, the unemployed, and persons with disabilities face significant poverty risks** due to coverage gaps and low adequacy of social benefits. **Child poverty has increased**. **Housing affordability is a growing concern** due to sharply rising real estate prices. The long-term care system is underdeveloped. **Accessibility challenges remain for preschool for under 3-year-olds**.

Organizational/Societal Culture & Support

Trust in public institutions is below the EU average. **Concerns exist about the quality of information and tight deadlines in consultations with social partners**. Digital public services are highly developed and generally perform above the EU average. The justice system is efficient, with low disposition times. The Corruption Perceptions Index has improved.

Eurofound e-survey 2024

Czech Republic

Czechia presents a more nuanced picture, showing some areas of relative strength compared to the EU average. In terms of the cost of living, while not among the highest, about 29% of respondents in Czechia reported difficulty making ends meet in 2024, with housing insecurity around 9%.

Regarding remote work, Czechia demonstrates moderate adoption. Approximately 31% of men and 27% of women in teleworkable jobs in Czechia reported never working from home. This means a considerable portion of teleworkable jobs in Czechia do offer hybrid or fully remote options, offering potentially better work-life balance than countries with lower rates.

Trust in institutions and satisfaction with democracy in Czechia have seen **positive developments**, with satisfaction with democracy increasing by 1.1 points from 2021 to 2024, reaching 5.0 in 2024. This is notably higher than the EU average of 4.58. This indicates a

relatively stable or improving perception of societal governance. Czechia's life satisfaction score in 2024 was 6.2, and 44% of respondents reported being optimistic.

Lithuania

Lithuania's well-being indicators show some improvements but also areas for concern. For the cost of living, Lithuania reported approximately 31% of respondents having difficulties making ends meet in 2024.

Regarding remote work, Lithuania, similar to Greece, has relatively **high rates of respondents in teleworkable jobs who never work from home**. Specifically, 58% of men and 56% of women in teleworkable jobs in Lithuania reported never working from home. This suggests that opportunities for flexible work arrangements are less prevalent compared to some other EU countries.

In terms of societal well-being, Lithuania experienced a **slight increase in satisfaction with democracy**, rising from 4.6 in 2021 to 5.0 in 2024, matching Czechia's 2024 score. However, Lithuania's life satisfaction score in 2024 was 5.0, and 38% of respondents reported being optimistic.

Greece

Greece appears to face **significant challenges across multiple well-being indicators** in 2024. In terms of the cost of living, Greece reported the **highest proportion of respondents with difficulties making ends meet** among EU Member States. A concerning 22% of respondents in Greece stated they might need to leave their accommodation in the coming months due to inability to afford it, the highest percentage recorded. This financial strain on low-income households in Greece saw increasing difficulties between 2023 and 2024.

Regarding work-life balance and remote work, Greece exhibits **very low rates of teleworking** compared to other EU countries. A substantial 70% of men and 63% of women in teleworkable jobs in Greece reported never working from home. This suggests a workplace landscape with limited flexibility, which could impact overall work-life balance and personal well-being.

Furthermore, respondents in Greece reported the **lowest levels of optimism** in 2024, at just 20%. This aligns with the country also having the **lowest life satisfaction score** in the EU, at 4.5 out of 10. Trust in institutions also shows a concerning trend, with satisfaction with democracy declining from 3.6 in 2021 to 3.2 in 2024. These indicators collectively point to a challenging overall quality of life in Greece.

Field research findings

Analysis

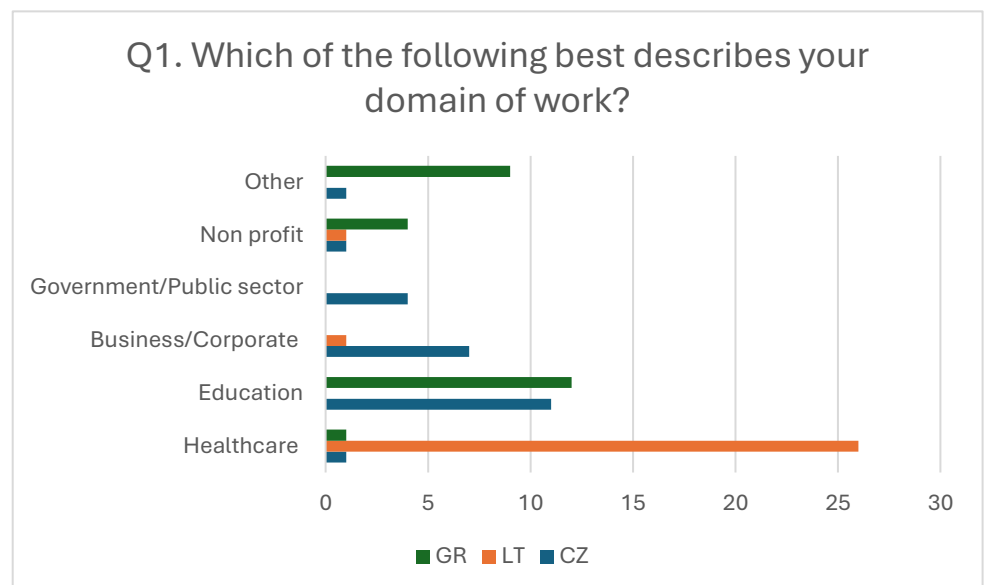
A. Perceptions and work-based challenges affecting personal well-being

In this part we explore adult respondents' perceptions of personal well-being and the challenges they face in achieving an active, balanced, and satisfying life.

Based on the data from the questionnaire results, a total of **75 responses** were recorded, with individual data points collected across various well-being, workload, work-life balance, communication, organizational culture, personality traits, and demographic questions. The questionnaire itself aimed to understand personal perceptions of well-being across general, psychological, and holistic levels.

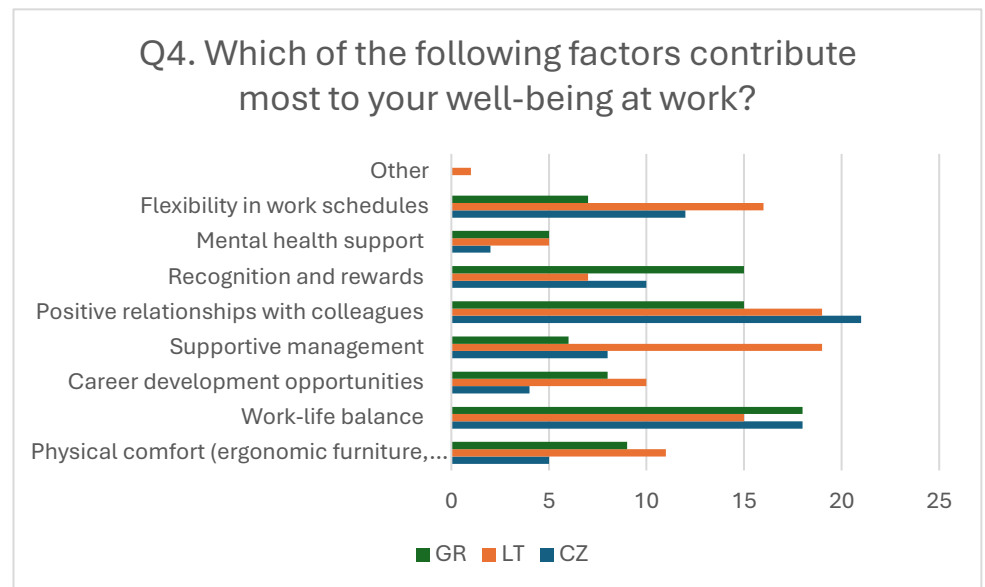
Demographic Overview:

The majority of respondents were **female (57 out of 75)**, while 18 were male. Age distribution showed **41 respondents over 45 years old**, followed by 29 aged 26-44, and 5 under 25. The responses were collected from **24 individuals in the Czech Republic**, **27 in Lithuania**, and **24 in Greece**.



Many respondents reported being **married with children (29)**, followed by those with a partner (16), and single individuals (9). Geographically, the **vast majority lived in urban areas (64)**, with 9 in suburban and 2 in rural areas. Educational backgrounds primarily included **University/Licensed professional (45)** and Master/PhD degrees (16). The **dominant employment type was "employee/worker" (57)**, and most had been in their current employment for **3+ years (52)**. The most common work arrangement was **in-office/on-site (52)**, with 17 in hybrid arrangements and 6 working remotely. Regarding job industry, a significant number of replies came from **Education (24)** and **Healthcare (21)**, with other fields like Business/Corporate, Non-profit, Government/Public Sector, and 'Other' also represented.

Well-being and Satisfaction: For **satisfaction with life as a whole (Q3.1)**, responses ranged from 1 to 5, with **4 being the most frequent score** (29 times), followed by 3 (21 times). For **overall well-being at work (Q3.2)**, scores also ranged from 1 to 5, with **4 being the most common rating** (38 times). When asked about factors contributing most to well-being at work (Q4), **work-life balance** was the most frequently selected option (37 times), followed by **positive relationships with colleagues** (31 times), and **supportive management** (29 times).



Workload and Stress: Regarding **manageable workload (Q5.1)**, scores were predominantly 4 (28 times) and 5 (18 times), suggesting a generally positive perception. Similarly, for having **enough time to complete tasks without excessive pressure (Q5.2)**, scores of 4 (29 times) and 3 (21 times) were frequent. Most respondents indicated that their **responsibilities were clearly defined (Q5.3)**, with scores of 4 (28 times) and 5 (23 times) being common. However, for **organizational resources or support for stress management (Q5.4)**, responses were more mixed, with 3 (26 times) and 4 (22 times) being common, but also 2 (15 times). Regarding how often respondents **work beyond regular hours to meet deadlines (Q7.1)**, 34 respondents reported "Sometimes," 24 "Rarely," 15 "Often," and 2 "Always". For **feeling stressed or overwhelmed at work (Q7.3)**, 36 respondents indicated "Sometimes," 20 "Often," 18 "Rarely," and 1 "Always".

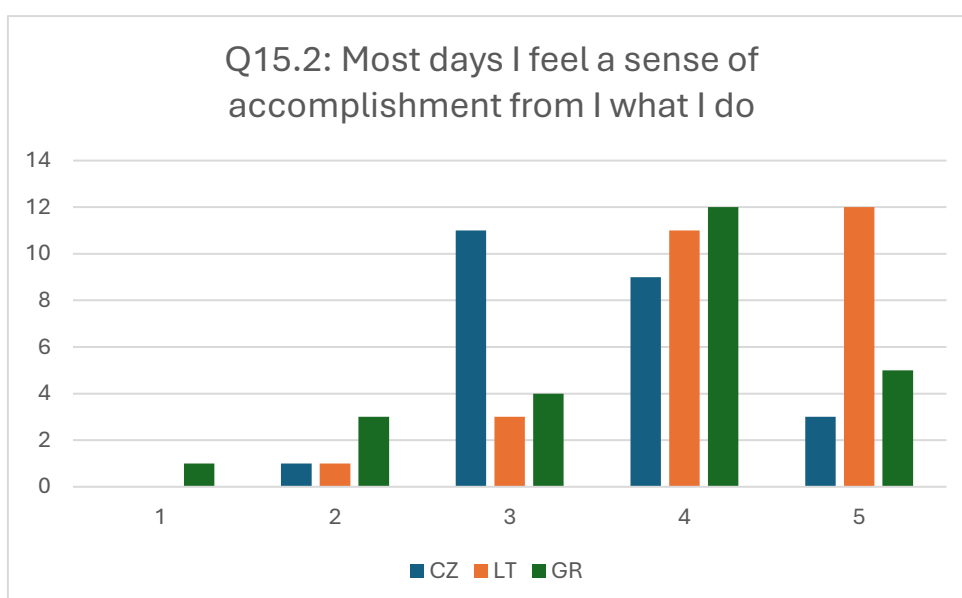
Work-Life Balance: A majority of respondents indicated that their **organization supports a healthy work-life balance (Q9.1)**, with scores of 4 (29 times) and 5 (24 times) being dominant. However, for having **enough time to take breaks and recharge (Q9.2)**, scores were more varied, with 3 (25 times) and 4 (24 times) being most common, but also 2 (15 times). Responses for being **able to set boundaries between work and personal time (Q9.3)** were spread, with 4 (28 times) and 5 (22 times) being common. Many respondents reported feeling

comfortable negotiating flexible hours or remote work options (Q9.4), with scores of 5 (30 times) and 4 (23 times) being most frequent.

Physical and Mental Health: Most respondents felt their **workspace was designed to feel safe (Q10)**, with 4 (33 times) and 5 (29 times) as dominant scores. The majority of respondents (58 out of 75) stated they **felt confident in incorporating self-care into their daily routine (Q12)**, while 17 did not. When asked if **training on maintaining physical and mental well-being would help (Q14)**, 56 respondents said "Yes," and 19 said "No".

Communication and Support: Respondents generally reported positive experiences for **feeling free to express ideas & opinions (Q15.1)**, with scores of 4 (35 times) and 5 (25 times). Similarly, most felt a **sense of accomplishment (Q15.2)**, with 4 (37 times) and 5 (25 times) as frequent scores. Many also felt that **people in their workplace cared about them (Q15.3)**, indicated by scores of 5 (31 times) and 4 (30 times). However, comfort in **discussing well-being concerns with managers or HR (Q15.4)** was more varied, with 4 (27 times) and 3 (20 times) being common, and 2 (13 times) also present. For **systemic issues preventing efforts from being recognized (Q17)**, 43 respondents answered "No," while 32 answered "Yes". Regarding **policies or practices undermining motivation (Q19)**, 45 respondents said "No," and 30 said "Yes". In terms of **workplace conflict handling (Q21)**, the most common response was that conflicts are usually resolved, though the process could be more transparent, timely, or empathetic (41 responses). 20 respondents hadn't experienced or noticed how conflicts are handled, while 13 reported that resolution tends to be delayed, biased, or lacks follow-up.

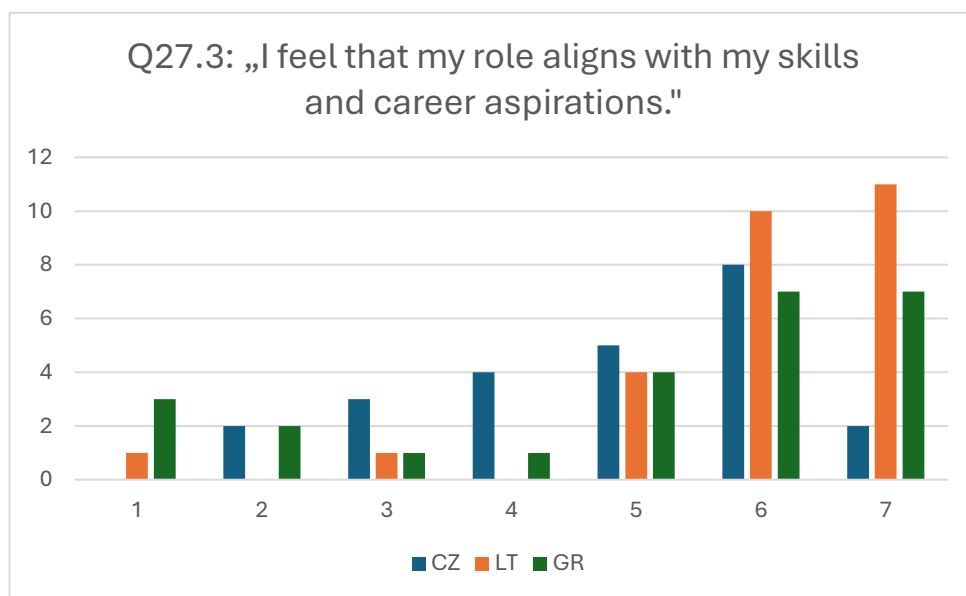
When asked if **stress management or resilience-building programs were available (Q22)**, 28 respondents answered "I don't know," 25 said "Yes," and 22 said "No".



Organizational Culture: Responses for whether **well-being is a priority in the organization's culture (Q24.1)** were mixed, with 3 (24 times) and 4 (23 times) being common, alongside 2 (16

times). For **all employees being equally supported in their well-being (Q24.2)**, scores were varied, with 4 (27 times) and 5 (19 times) being frequent, but also 3 (17 times) and 2 (10 times). When selecting the two most relevant aspects of organizational culture (Q25), **strong and supportive working relationships with colleagues** was chosen most often (44 times), followed by **collaboration and teamwork being actively encouraged and rewarded** (34 times).

Personality Traits, Goals, and Intentions: On a 1-7 scale for **personality traits (Q26)**, respondents generally reported higher agreement (scores of 5-7) for traits such as being **sympathetic/warm, open to new experiences/multifaceted, and calm/emotionally stable**. Conversely, scores were generally lower (1-3) for traits like **critical/argumentative, anxious/easily upset, reserved/quiet, disorganized/careless, and conventional/uncreative**. For **goals and intentions within the organization (Q27)**, responses were largely positive on a 1-7 scale. Most respondents reported seeing **opportunities for advancement and professional growth (Q27.1)**, receiving **constructive feedback and recognition (Q27.2)**, feeling their role **aligns with their skills and career aspirations (Q27.3)**, and having a **sense of belonging within their team or organization (Q27.4)**, with scores predominantly ranging from 5 to 7 for all these statements.



Initial observations highlight several key points. For instance, a **"very obvious interesting point" was identified regarding respondents from Czechia** in terms of their overall satisfaction and well-being at work. Further, respondents from Czechia repeatedly showed **"indications of alienation" from the significance of their work and their relationships with colleagues**, and appeared to be dealing with **"issues in regards to 'healthy work-life balance' and the ability to take adequate breaks"**. Well-being being a priority in the organization's culture also emerged as a **"tricky issue for organisations in Czech Republic,"** with few positive responses. In contrast, a "significant issue" was noted for Greece concerning the professional fields represented, with many replies from education but none from the

government/public sector. Lithuanian respondents, similar to Czechia, were "almost equally divided" when assessing their ability to take adequate breaks during work.

Generally, the majority of respondents seemed to have a **good experience with their workload**, although a comparison with written input suggested the numerical data presents a "much more positive reality". While most respondents reported experiencing working beyond regular hours and feeling stressed, this did not appear to be a consistent reality for the majority. The initial results for workspace safety were generally positive, yet it was deemed "interesting" that some respondents totally disagreed with the statement, especially given that most work in an office setting. For self-care, most were "somehow" confident in incorporating it into their routines, often perceiving it as "mainstream wellness". A significant number of respondents who disagreed with the need for well-being training "probably indicates the need for more structural changes, instead of hinting at personal efforts". Additionally, conflict handling in the workplace revealed "very different experiences" among respondents, suggesting it might be an issue needing later attention.

Demographically, the survey indicated a **vast majority (76%) of female respondents**, with Greece showing the most balanced gender distribution. Age distribution varied, with most Czech participants aged 26-44, while most in Lithuania and Greece were over 45. The majority also reported having established families and children. These demographic factors are considered "significant issues to consider at the next stage of the analysis" to explain observed trends. Finally, the questionnaire itself was generally well-received, and the finding that most respondents could realistically dedicate **15-30 minutes daily to learning** about well-being topics suggests that **microlearning "might be a good option"** for developing future content. The preliminary report deliberately excluded the rich qualitative text input, which is reserved for the ongoing in-depth analysis.

B. Practices and needs for workplace wellbeing

In this part we examine the understanding and practices of workplace well-being, as identified through discussions with employers, HR experts, and employees

Across all partner reports, there is a **diverse understanding of well-being**, initially differing between employees and employers. Employees consistently emphasized **mental health, work-life balance, physical comfort, interpersonal relationships, and psychological safety**. Employers, on the other hand, initially tended to associate well-being more with **benefits, safety compliance, or productivity**. However, following the presentation of survey insights, some HR participants revised their definitions to include crucial aspects like **emotional safety**. The discussions highlighted that true well-being goes beyond superficial benefits, requiring a fundamental shift in workplace culture and leadership approach.

Common workplace well-being challenges and unmet needs emerged consistently from employee perspectives. These include **high workload and lack of clear role division**, often leading to employees performing tasks outside their competence or job description. A significant issue is the **lack of time for recovery and reflection**, with employees struggling to take proper breaks or process emotions, especially in emotionally intense professions, leading to sustained mental load. **Emotional loneliness and disconnection** are prevalent, with many working alone or lacking opportunities for genuine team interaction and shared reflection. Furthermore, **poor work-life boundaries**, exacerbated by digital connectivity and client demands, mean employees find it difficult to disconnect from work. **Underappreciation and lack of recognition**, often not tied to financial reward, lead to feelings of being unseen and undervalued. Finally, **inconsistent and vague work structures, coupled with frequent structural changes**, especially in the public sector, create uncertainty and stress. From the employer perspective, urgent challenges include **staff shortages, high burnout risk** (especially in social care roles), and **low employee engagement in well-being initiatives** despite efforts.

Employers and HR experts reported implementing a variety of **well-being practices and measures**. These include providing **flexible working models** such as hybrid work, self-scheduled breaks, and full remote flexibility. **Financial and growth-oriented benefits** are common, such as performance bonuses, additional holidays, voucher schemes, funding for professional development, seminars, and even financial support for housing loans. Many organizations focus on **creating a supportive environment** through renovated offices, company parties for bonding, outdoor group activities, and regular communication (e.g., weekly meetings, chat groups, one-on-one sessions, confidential questionnaires). Some have introduced **Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)**, counselling sessions, mental health services, and private insurance. There is also an emphasis on **employee involvement in planning and strategy**, allowing input before changes are made. Innovative examples mentioned include **monthly "well-being check-ins"** during team meetings, a "no meetings after 3 pm" policy, and internal peer-support networks with basic mental health first-aid training.

Despite these efforts, significant **barriers hinder the effectiveness of well-being initiatives**. A primary barrier is **low employee participation and engagement** in offered programs, often due to **stigma surrounding mental health** (employees fear judgment) or simply being unaware of available resources. Employers also face **budget constraints**, particularly in SMEs, and **management resistance**, where well-being is still perceived as a "soft topic" rather than a strategic business priority. **Communication gaps** mean employees may not read emails, misunderstand offerings, or distrust the anonymity of feedback channels like surveys. There's a notable **lack of consistent feedback from employees on what truly works**, making it difficult for HR to tailor programs effectively. Furthermore, **overwork and staff shortages** limit the time and energy employees have to engage in well-being programs.

The **communication strategies for needs and support-seeking behaviors** reveal critical insights. Employees overwhelmingly rely on **trusted colleagues and personal networks (friends, family)** as their first line of emotional support, often bypassing formal HR channels which are perceived as intimidating or a last resort. Some employees approach their direct supervisors if the relationship is positive and transparent, but this varies greatly depending on the manager's soft skills. When formal channels are inaccessible or untrusted, employees turn to **informal avenues like social media groups or the internet** for information. Employers utilize various methods such as one-on-one meetings, group discussions, confidential questionnaires, and digital suggestion boxes, but their efficacy is often undermined by **employee mistrust regarding anonymity and follow-up**. A critical finding is the **gap between formally offered support and emotional accessibility**, where employees often hesitate to use benefits like mental health days without a "real" reason due to perceived stigma or fear of judgment. This highlights the need for **leadership to model vulnerability and create psychologically safe spaces** where employees feel comfortable expressing their needs without fear of reprisal.

The focus groups also provided examples of **innovative practices and case studies** that directly address these needs. EPIONE facilitated the co-creation of a case study on **"Improving Social Well-being,"** proposing bi-monthly, non-task-oriented peer reflection meetings to foster emotional support, community, and reduce burnout. BIT CZ developed a case study focusing on **"Empowering Employees & Reducing Micromanagement in a Manufacturing Company,"** which included solutions like manager training in coaching and delegation, "safe to speak" moments in daily meetings, non-punitive error reporting, and employee ideas boxes, all aimed at building psychological safety and trust.

In conclusion, the findings from all three partners underscore that **workplace well-being requires a holistic, systemic, and culturally sensitive approach**. While policies and benefits are important, their true impact hinges on fostering **psychological safety, genuine recognition, flexible structures, and effective, trust-based communication**. These insights are directly aligned with the "expected outcomes" of the report, providing a robust foundation for defining workplace happiness, collecting transferable good practices (such as manager training, peer support systems, and flexible policies), understanding the societal and organizational factors influencing well-being, and identifying concrete means to facilitate a happier and healthier work environment.

C. Societal factors influencing well-being

In this part we analyze **societal factors influencing well-being and the interconnectedness of personal, workplace, and societal well-being, informed by the perspectives of mental health and other relevant experts**

Perceived challenges in the workplace

Prevalent Wellbeing Issues Encountered by Individuals in the Workplace

Experts widely identified **burnout and chronic stress** as the most frequent and significant issues encountered by individuals in the workplace. This chronic stress is often linked to **high production demands, intense work that extends beyond working hours, and an inability to disconnect** from digital overstimulation. These factors lead to symptoms such as emotional detachment, a loss of professional efficacy, sleep disturbances, anxiety, and depression rooted in the work environment.

Another pervasive issue is **work-life imbalance**, characterized by blurred boundaries between personal and professional life and a strong expectation that work comes first, especially for those in higher positions with significant responsibilities. This often leaves individuals with insufficient time for social life, hobbies, adequate rest, or even basic self-care.

A significant number of experts also highlighted the **lack of support from employers and colleagues**, poor communication, an absence of belonging, and poor working environments (e.g., noise, inadequate lighting, lack of ergonomic aids, or relaxation spaces). This contributes to feelings of being undervalued, unappreciated, and a general lack of human connection.

Job insecurity and financial instability emerged as major stressors, with experts noting anxiety about job stability due to factors like automation, project-based contracts, and low wages. This financial pressure is so great that it can prevent employees from fully dedicating themselves to work as personal struggles weigh on their minds. Furthermore, issues such as **toxic or incompatible corporate cultures** (e.g., gossip, pressure, lack of transparency) and toxic productivity cultures were frequently cited as leading to emotional exhaustion, a sense of disconnection, and resentment.

Experts also pointed to a **lack of opportunities for personal development and recognition**, where employees feel their skills are not fully utilized, leading to boredom and lack of interest. Other specific challenges include an **overdeveloped sense of responsibility, perfectionism, an inability to name or process emotions (emotional illiteracy)**, poor boundary setting, and parenting pressure, particularly on women. In some sectors, like caregiving, the emotional toll of interacting with vulnerable individuals and carrying those emotions into personal life was noted as a distinct issue. Insecurity also stems from a lack of stable strategic planning, unclear professional roles, and a lack of clear guidance from superiors.

Significant Societal Factors Currently Impacting Individual Wellbeing

A wide array of external societal factors significantly impact individual well-being, often exacerbating workplace issues. **Economic instability and financial hardship** were highlighted as pervasive concerns, encompassing inflation, the rising cost of living, housing insecurity, and

insufficient wages. These pressures make it difficult for individuals to cope, plan for the future, or focus on anything beyond immediate survival.

Geopolitical uncertainty and conflicts, such as the war in Ukraine (especially for Lithuania and the Czech Republic due to proximity), broader political instability, and collective anxiety, were frequently mentioned as significant stressors, leading to fear for the future, especially among parents.

The **influence of social media and digitalization** was cited as a major contributor to well-being challenges. Experts observed that social media promotes "unrealistic pressure to be 'perfect and successful,'" leading to constant comparison, FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out), digital overstimulation, and feelings of inadequacy, demotivation, and distress.

A decline in basic civility and empathy, **societal polarization, and a loss of trust** in institutions and the state (due to unstable laws and economic conditions) were also noted. Experts also pointed to the **lack of access to affordable mental health services**, insufficient legal provisions (e.g., short maternity leave, lack of flexibility for parents), and scandals in public services as contributing to a broader sense of insecurity and unmet needs.

Societal pressure for **constant performance, productivity, and "making it big"** creates unrealistic expectations, often leaving individuals feeling inadequate or like failures if they do not meet these ideals. Specific groups, such as women (especially mothers), youth (feeling excluded from decisions), and older workers (facing digital divides), were identified as particularly vulnerable to these pressures. The educational system's emphasis on competition over cooperation and an instrumental approach to knowledge (prioritizing economic gain over holistic understanding) were also seen as negatively impacting well-being. Other factors include climate anxiety, the fast pace of living, the stigma around mental health, and the weakening of traditional support systems like the family, leading to increased loneliness.

Interplay Between Workplace and Societal Challenges Exacerbating One Another

Experts overwhelmingly affirmed a **deep, reciprocal, and often negative interplay** between workplace and societal challenges, creating a reinforcing loop that intensifies issues at both levels.

A primary mechanism is the **spillover and amplification of societal burdens into the workplace**. Economic insecurity, political instability, family issues (such as childcare), housing crises, and collective anxieties from societal events directly impact employees' ability to focus and perform at work. Individuals often arrive at work already exhausted, anxious, or demotivated, making them more susceptible to workplace stressors like burnout.

Conversely, **workplace issues significantly affect personal and societal levels**. A rigid, unsupportive, or excessively demanding workplace can exacerbate personal stress, lead to burnout, and strain family relationships. Toxic work cultures, by prioritizing productivity over

human well-being, can even erode empathy and social responsibility, impacting broader societal well-being.

The **lack of trust in the state, unstable laws, and informal business practices** at a societal level directly contribute to a lack of clear roles, transparency, and support within workplaces, fostering pervasive feelings of insecurity among employees. Societal norms that glorify constant productivity and success translate into workplace cultures that normalize overworking and burnout, leaving little room for emotional expression or rest. Economic pressures can force employees to overwork or accept unfavorable conditions, making them feel "held hostage" in their jobs.

Furthermore, **societal job insecurity** (e.g., fixed-term contracts) can prevent individuals from making long-term personal plans, such as buying a home, severely limiting their quality of life and future outlook. The economic struggles of businesses, often linked to broader societal factors, mean they are unable to invest in employee training and development, which contributes to employee boredom and a lack of professional growth within the workplace. The experts consistently emphasized that **personal, workplace, and societal well-being are "inseparable" and "mutually influential,"** with issues in one area almost certainly affecting the others. The overall social reality is seen as the primary "lever" influencing workplace conditions and opportunities.

Interventions and solutions

Effective Employer Interventions to Support Employee Wellbeing

Experts emphasize that effective employer interventions are multifaceted, prioritizing **mental health support, creating a positive and flexible work culture, and investing in personal and professional development**. Many highlight the importance of **mental health education and training for managers** to recognize signs of burnout, coupled with ensuring access to **psychological support** and fostering a culture that **respects boundaries and work-life balance** [i01]. Prevention is considered more effective than reaction, gaining attention before problems escalate to the point of needing therapy [i01, i02].

A crucial element is for companies to demonstrate **genuine care by actively listening to employees** through feedback systems and ensuring visible, funded follow-up such as vouchers for therapy, coaching, or massages, while also establishing **psychological safety and transparency** [i05]. Implementing **hybrid mental health support**, flexible work shifts, and **mental health days** are frequently suggested, along with manager training to detect early warning signs and **financial literacy workshops** to alleviate money-related stress [i06].

Building a strong **corporate culture** with clear vision, goals, a sense of belonging, and safety is paramount [i07]. This is complemented by health support programs (stress management, burnout prevention), **personal and professional development programs** (training, workshops, IT literacy), and promoting physical activities. Experts also advocate for **flexible**

working conditions, including home office options, shortened working hours, and ensuring **financial security** through timely and fair remuneration and benefits [i07]. **Clear communication, clarity, and safety** are seen as foundational, along with empathetic managers who foster human connection and build trust [i14]. Employers should also invest in **psychological training for leaders and employees** to develop emotional intelligence and understand diverse individual needs, moving beyond just technical skills [i16, i17]. Creating **psychologically safe environments**, including offering group therapy or coaching spaces with qualified facilitators, educating staff on emotional regulation, and modeling vulnerability, is considered essential [i18]. The idea of providing tools for self-reflection, rather than just time, is also highlighted [i18]. **Clear job profiles and boundaries** for roles are crucial to reduce ambiguity and stress [i21]. Some experts also emphasize the need for **mandatory, humanitarian-focused training for employers themselves**, encompassing organizational management, communication, and understanding that employees are not "expendable" but "vulnerable beings" [i22]. This should be accompanied by structured well-being monitoring through questionnaires and open, bilateral discussions [i22].

Broad Societal Initiatives to Enhance Individual Wellbeing

From a societal perspective, a wide range of initiatives are proposed to foster overall individual well-being, often extending beyond the workplace. **Government-funded access to therapy**, nationwide awareness campaigns, and **labor laws that promote mental health protection** are believed to have a significant impact [i01]. There is a call for media to reduce sensationalist negative news and promote pragmatic, collaborative role models, shifting away from superficial influencers [i02, i05].

Education is a recurring theme, with calls for **well-being to be an integral part of children's education** from primary school, promoting self-reflection, respectful relationships, and even balanced nutrition [i03, i04]. Experts also suggest a societal reset of values, moving from status-driven performance towards authenticity, inner stability, and human connection [i05].

Key initiatives include **affordable mental healthcare, more inclusive labor laws, financial aid for working parents**, and broader public awareness about mental health [i06]. Support for vulnerable groups, flexible workplaces, affordable housing, and investments in public spaces like playgrounds and parks are also mentioned [i07]. The inclusion of young voices in decision-making, financial education, and stronger support structures for life challenges like housing and mental health are advocated for [i10].

Economic stability and increased financial support are seen as fundamental, particularly addressing **insufficient maternity leave, lack of flexibility for parents, labor insecurity, and stagnant wages** in demanding sectors like caregiving [i21]. Experts also suggest fostering trust and openness by combating non-transparent employment practices and the "grey" perception of work [i22]. A society that **prioritizes human-centric values and inclusivity**, respects

nature, illness, and disability, and avoids creating "two-speed citizens" is crucial [i22]. Enhancing societal education and critical thinking, promoting cooperation over competition, and strengthening traditional support systems like the family are also highlighted as vital [i22, i23]. Furthermore, organizing community-level institutions, promoting volunteerism, and fostering cultural events that encourage collective consciousness and shared joy are believed to contribute significantly to societal well-being [i24].

Successful Examples of Wellbeing Interventions

Experts shared diverse examples of successful well-being interventions, spanning both organizational and societal levels:

- An intervention at a hospital implemented a **'burnout response protocol'** involving monthly reflection sessions and access to on-call psychologists, which resulted in a **35% drop in reported burnout symptoms and decreased turnover** within a year [i01].
- The **Czech company** successfully extended coaching from management to general employees, leading to a **positive impact, high demand, increased mental clarity, and confidence**, demonstrating the value of "mental hygiene" [i02].
- A **"Wellbeing Ambassadors" network**, where trained workers guided colleagues to support, led to a **40% increase in Employee Assistance Program (EAP) usage** and a reduction in stress-related sick leave [i06].
- During the pandemic, one company responded to high anxiety in logistics by **reducing shift lengths, providing stress training, and offering extra mental health support**, effectively preventing a severe burnout wave [i06].
- An employee, after experiencing burnout, started an **informal wellbeing club** that met monthly to discuss stress reduction and productivity, which brought colleagues closer and prevented further burnout cases [i14].
- One company, after conducting a survey, significantly **raised its employee satisfaction score** by addressing culturally unfit individuals, coaching managers in people skills, and having HR act as a mediator for deadlines [i16].
- An interviewee's organization successfully implemented **flexible working hours for mothers**, allowing them to attend to their children's needs without penalty, fostering a sense of support [i21].
- A greek business as highlighted as a successful organizational example due to its integrated well-being approach, employee-centric benefits (open discussions about family problems), and recognition for policies on equality and well-being, embodying the philosophy that "all people move forward together" [i22].
- At a societal level, interviewees mentioned the **Scandinavian welfare models** were cited for their high happiness levels, attributed to factors like flexible work breaks, guaranteed basic income, and inflation-adjusted wages, which foster security and trust

[i23]. Another reference concerning, **Belgium's burnout pension** was mentioned as a strong societal commitment to mental health [i23].

- **Community-level cultural associations and traditional events** (like festivals) were described as powerful tools for fostering unity, volunteerism, and collective consciousness, leading to feelings of renewal and being "recharged" [i24].

Connection between wellbeing levels

In this section interviewees consistently highlighted the profound and intricate connections among personal, workplace, and societal well-being. Experts largely characterize these three levels not as isolated domains, but as forming a **complex feedback system** where each profoundly influences and is influenced by the other?. As many experts note, if society fails to protect individuals, the workplace suffers; if workplaces do not support well-being, individuals suffer, thus weakening the entire system. This can create a **vicious cycle**, where stress at home impacts work focus, and poor work performance causes anxiety at home [i11].

Characterizing the Connections Among Personal, Workplace, and Societal Wellbeing

A common perspective among the interviewees is that these levels are deeply intertwined. VT (i22) views **societal well-being as the "shell" or overarching environment** that significantly shapes both personal and workplace experiences. She explains that a societal lack of trust in the state, stemming from unstable laws, economic instability, or opaque information, generates a general sense of **insecurity that permeates into the workplace and personal lives** [i22]. MA (i21) further reinforces this, stating that the overall "social reality" acts as the **primary "lever" influencing workplace conditions** [i21]. Furthermore, societal education and prevailing values, such as an emphasis on cooperation versus competition, greatly influence the "social education" that individuals bring into their workplaces [i22, i24].

Given that work constitute more than half of a person's everyday life, a **positive work environment is seen as directly and significantly contributing to personal well-being** [i16, i22, i23]. A respectful, flexible workplace that encourages dialogue and values employees can greatly enhance an individual's quality of life [i22]. Conversely, an individual's personal background, psychological makeup, and "value priorities" - what they seek from work, be it pleasure, recognition, or economic satisfaction - profoundly influence their experience and satisfaction in the workplace [i22, i23]. Unmet personal needs can negatively impact other life aspects, blurring the lines between work and personal dissatisfaction, as individuals bring their "whole lives" to work [i11, i13, i15, i22, i23]. P.V. (i23) emphasizes that humans are **"multi-dimensional beings,"** whose roles as individuals, in society, and at work are all "very important" and cannot be rejected or separated. She highlights that well-being development should flow both **"from inside out" (from the individual) and "from outside in" (from communities, schools, and family)** [i23].

Beneficial Effects of Workplace Enhancements on Personal and Societal Wellbeing

Experts overwhelmingly agree that **workplace enhancements can have a significant beneficial effect on both personal and societal well-being** [most interviews]. Many highlight a "**ripple effect**" where positive organizational practices extend outwards, benefiting families and communities from healthier, more empowered individuals [a third of respondents]. Workplaces that prioritize mental health can **reduce strain on healthcare systems** and improve family dynamics [i01, i06, i24]. Handling conflicts, regulating emotions, or practicing self-awareness at work, are skills that can be **transferred also to personal lives and social interactions**, leading to better relationships and reduced stress [i03, i14, i18]. A workplace that fosters meaning, personal agency, and balance contributes to individual resilience and healthier social behavior [i10].

When employees feel supported, valued, and find their work meaningful, it enhances their self-esteem, mental and physical health, and overall life satisfaction [i07, i08, i20, i22, i23]. This positivity spills over into personal lives, improving family relationships and social interactions, and leading to greater energy for hobbies, volunteering, and active community participation [i07, i12, i13, i20, i23, i24]. A positive workplace culture can also act as a "**role model**," influencing an individual's approach to life beyond work and potentially transferring to their family, friends, and broader neighborhood, thereby benefiting societal well-being [i23, i25]. V.T. (i22) further emphasizes that because work occupies so much of life, a pleasant, respectful, and flexible work environment directly contributes to personal happiness. Workplaces that demonstrate empathy, understand and prevent personal crises, and reduce anxiety and stress by protecting employees' vulnerability contribute significantly to their physical and mental health [i22]. Ultimately, a workplace sensitized towards employee well-being can help individuals feel calmer, safer, and more secure during a significant portion of their day, and this positive interaction with the work environment can even reshape and positively influence the broader societal system [i25].

Ways Societal Wellbeing Might Affect Personal and Workplace Wellbeing

Conversely, societal well-being profoundly impacts personal and workplace well-being through direct and multifaceted interplay. **Economic instability and financial hardship** are paramount societal stressors [almost half of the respondents]. Inflation, rising costs of living, housing insecurity, and stagnant wages (especially in demanding sectors like caregiving) directly impact individuals' capacity to cope, affecting their personal lives and subsequently their work performance and ability to focus [about a third of the respondents].

The **political environment and global issues** also play a significant role. Geopolitical uncertainty, wars, political instability, and even misinformation create fear, anxiety, and a sense of insecurity that transfer into personal lives and the workplace, leading to decreased

engagement and productivity [half the respondents]. An **inadequate institutional and legal framework** is another major factor, with insufficient legal provisions like short maternity leave, lack of flexibility for parents, and an unstable institutional framework for labor rights creating significant challenges [i21]. **Labor insecurity**, where employees fear job loss if they assert their rights, leads to stress and reduced happiness at work [i21, i23, i24].

A pervasive **cultural lack of trust with the state** due to continuous changes in laws and an unstable institutional framework for labor rights creates a general feeling of insecurity [i22]. The spread of false information and a "grey" perception of work further hinder critical understanding and contribute to an environment of mistrust [i22]. **Societal polarization, a decline in basic civility and empathy, and social media's influence** promoting unrealistic expectations contribute to disconnection and stress [i05, i09, i10, i11, i17, i19, i20]. An educational system that promotes competition over cooperation, and an instrumental approach to knowledge, can lead to a loss of human connection and dialogue, affecting workplace dynamics and overall well-being [i23, i24]. Loneliness and difficulty in forming social connections also manifest in poor communication and team cohesion at work [i23, i24]. When societal systems fail (e.g., healthcare, education, transportation), they **transfer the burden to individuals and employers**, leading to absenteeism, turnover, and chronic health issues [i06, i08, i25]. Societal pressures can be particularly heavy on groups like women who want to become mothers [i13, i18, i24].

Essential Signs of a Robust and Interconnected Wellbeing System

A robust and interconnected well-being system across personal, workplace, and societal levels is characterized by several key signs:

1. It ensures **consistent and accessible support** at all levels [almost half of respondents]. This includes government-funded psychological and physical care, community support, and interventions that are continuous, customized, and authentic, moving beyond surface-level generic surveys [i01, i02, i05, i08, i21, i22, i23].
2. There is **shared responsibility and collaboration** between employers, healthcare systems, and public policy, with systems complementing rather than opposing each other [i01, i02, i06, i08, i14, i21, i23, i25]. This includes strong collective organizations, like unions, advocating for employees' comprehensive insurance and financial planning guidance [i23].
3. The system adopts a **proactive and preventative approach** [i01, i06, i21, i22, i23]. This means having early-warning systems for identifying stress and burnout, preventative care, continuous education, and proactive health monitoring by employers (e.g., regular assessments and medical checks) to prevent health crises [i01, i06, i21, i22, i23].
4. A robust system cultivates **trust and psychological safety** [more than a third of respondents]. This is evident in non-stigmatizing environments for discussing mental

health, and a societal and workplace culture built on trust, safety, and open dialogue, where employees feel valued and heard [i01, i05, i08, i17, i18, i20, i22, i23].

5. **Open communication and active listening** are paramount [i07, i08, i15, i17, i22, i23, i25, i26]. This involves regular communication among key stakeholders, open channels within workplaces, flexible and supportive work environments, and a culture that promotes work-life balance and mutual respect. Leadership that actively listens to employees and acts on their feedback is crucial [i02, i05, i07, i15, i17, i22].
6. **Clear roles and boundaries** are vital to prevent overwork and reduce ambiguity and stress [i21, i22, i25, i26]. This includes clear organizational structures and defined boundaries for employee availability [i22, i25].
7. Well-being is **integrated into daily functioning** across all levels, not treated as a separate "add-on" or luxury [i09, i13, i23]. This means embedding well-being into schools and policies from an early age [i13, i19, i23].
8. A society that **values human beings above all**, respects nature, illness, and disability, and avoids creating "two-speed citizens" is crucial [i22, i23]. This is supported by education that cultivates philosophical depth and human connection, moving beyond purely instrumental knowledge for economic gain [i22, i23].
9. Societal structures provide **economic and social security** [i21, i23]. This includes flexible work breaks, guaranteed basic income, and inflation-adjusted wages, ensuring basic needs are met and individuals feel valued [i21, i23, i24, i25].
10. The system fosters **empowerment and development**, allowing individuals to shape their own paths and encouraging employers to invest in employee development, skill enhancement, and opportunities for growth [i09, i23].
11. A robust system demonstrates **adaptability and resilience**, encouraging continuous learning and the pursuit of fulfilling roles, even if it means changing paths [i23, i29]. The family's ability to act as a secure buffer during crises and an active, engaged citizenry contributing to the social whole are also key signs [i23].

Health monitoring

Organizations employ a diverse array of methods and tools to monitor employee health and wellbeing, frequently combining formal and informal approaches. **Surveys and questionnaires** are commonly used, including annual anonymous wellbeing surveys, employee satisfaction and engagement surveys, and more frequent "pulse surveys" (sometimes quarterly) which serve as avenues for employees to express their psychological state and needs. Beyond surveys, **individual consultations and conversations** with managers, HR representatives, or external psychologists are prevalent, often used to monitor engagement and loyalty, and are highly valued for fostering personal trust and facilitating direct problem clarification. Some organizations integrate **coaching and structured reflection** sessions to help employees process decisions, alleviate pressure, and gain clarity. Clinical psychologists, for their individual clients, use **clinical interviews and validated burnout**

inventories, such as the Maslach Burnout Inventory, and recommend these for organizational use. Furthermore, some organizations track **Employee Assistance Program (EAP) usage trends** and absenteeism to gain insights into employee needs. Flexible policies, such as **not requiring justification for up to three days off for any health issue** and allowing health appointments during working hours, are also noted as supportive practices. While a few technological solutions like the **Empower App** and mental health apps like **Mindletic** were mentioned, many workplaces largely depend on **informal observation**, with managers often expected to identify issues through casual check-ins and by "observing mood". One interviewee specifically highlighted the prevalence of **informal monitoring** where employers intuitively recognize employee problems.

Regarding formal systems for tracking physical or mental health indicators, their presence and scope vary significantly. Many organizations implement **mandatory annual physical health checks**, often conducted by an **occupational doctor**, typically involving blood tests and physical examinations to monitor indicators like cholesterol and sugar levels. However, there is a general **lack of systematic mental health monitoring**. While some larger corporations do have **biometric and mental health tracking systems** or assistance programs, insight into mental health often stems from one-on-one communication rather than formal psychological tools. Formal surveys and pulse checks are used by some, but their depth in capturing mental health issues is questioned. A clinical psychologist noted that their clinic tracks emotional exhaustion and other burnout indicators, partnering with organizations for anonymized reports. Examples from other regions include Australia's use of **statistical indicators** linking overtime hours and work conditions to potential health risks for prediction and prevention, and Belgium's **comprehensive state health insurance** (mutuelle) that covers all health-related aspects, reducing the need for workplace-mandated tracking due to privacy concerns. Many interviewees noted that mental wellbeing is frequently **under-monitored**, or that smaller companies rely on informal observation or nothing at all. One expert stated they would be against workplace-mandated health monitoring due to privacy concerns and potential employer bias.

The perceived effectiveness of these methods in identifying early signs of health issues among employees is mixed, with a strong emphasis on **trust and human connection**. Many interviewees asserted that **individual coaching and direct conversations are the most effective**, as they enable individuals to open up and gain self-awareness, which generic surveys often fail to achieve. The "human connection" and managers truly "seeing the person" are considered crucial. Surveys, while useful for assessing general mood, are often seen as **failing to reach those most in need** or providing sufficient depth for early identification, and their anonymity can hinder assessment of individual impact. The effectiveness of any method is contingent on a **culture of trust**; if employees do not feel safe being honest, data will be inaccurate due to fear of information being used against them. When applied consistently and professionally, **psychological screenings are considered quite effective** in catching early signs that traditional medical checkups might miss. However, some believe methods are **not**

very effective unless someone already shows visible signs of crisis, with many companies missing early-stage burnout or anxiety. It was noted that, for example, Lithuanian employees often exhibit high pain tolerance and hide emotions until it is too late. An interviewee highlighted that current methods are **not fully effective because they are limited to physical indicators** and lack comprehensive mental/emotional wellbeing monitoring, advocating for integrated mental health tracking for a holistic understanding.

Several interviewees shared examples where health analysis tools helped prevent or manage health risks, though some noted a lack of direct experience with formal tools. In the realm of **burnout prevention**, one clinical psychologist recounted how routine screening flagged an emotionally disengaged client, and **early therapy prevented full-blown burnout**, also preventing "entire team collapses" through timely intervention. During the pandemic, surveys at one organization revealed high anxiety in logistics, prompting **reduced shift lengths, stress training, and mental health support**, which successfully prevented a severe burnout wave. An individual example involved a manager noticing a performance drop, engaging in conversation, and granting time off to an employee, thereby avoiding burnout. Other examples included group psychotherapy sessions in a friend's company and one-on-one sessions with a manager that helped an employee realize the need for a job change to avoid burnout. For **addiction and crisis management**, one person recounted an employee with an addiction signaling a crisis during a conversation, leading to time off for treatment and a successful return to work. Regarding **mental health support**, providing a **Headspace App subscription** reportedly led to a "general better mood and efficiency" and likely prevented some employees from quitting. Early therapeutic conversations, even without formal tools, were noted to help employees avoid burnout by addressing underlying issues like toxic work environments.

The frequency of employee health assessment varies widely across organizations. Many conduct **annual comprehensive wellbeing assessments** or physical health checks. Some implement **surveys every six months**, or **quarterly "pulse surveys"** to monitor stress levels. Ideally, assessment should be **monthly for managers/team leaders** or embedded in regular check-ins and performance reviews. Emotional health check-ins are often verbal and **based on need**, while in clinics, clients are assessed every session. In Lithuania, health assessment is **yearly as regulated by law**. However, some organizations reported **no regular assessment** or that it was largely informal. One expert suggested questionnaires twice a year (or at least annually) as ideal.

There is a clear trend towards, and strong advocacy for, including mental and emotional wellbeing in health analysis, though **physical health often still dominates**. Many interviewees stated that their analysis **includes mental and emotional wellbeing** or that it is increasingly being discussed and included, especially in bigger companies, with some even having dedicated wellbeing managers. However, a significant number indicated that health analysis is **primarily limited to physical health**, often because companies are "afraid of what they'd do with findings related to mental or emotional issues," or mental health is dismissed as "private

matters" Experts strongly advocate that health analysis **should always include mental and emotional wellbeing**. MA (i21) explicitly called for yearly psychological tests due to the "soul-destroying" nature of caregiving work, and CG emphasized that monitoring "cannot remain solely on cholesterol and sugar indicators" and needs "corresponding sessions related to mental health". In some instances, physical health is assessed yearly by doctors, while emotional health is addressed in separate annual or semi-annual talks with HR or managers.

Other reflections

Several significant **gaps in current wellbeing approaches** were identified across various levels, acting as barriers to achieving these outcomes. A prominent issue is that **mental health support is often reactive**, with companies and systems waiting for crises before intervention, rather than focusing on prevention, continuous education, and leadership training [i01]. This reactive stance hinders the exploration of happiness perceptions by failing to address early signs of distress. Wellbeing is frequently treated as a "trend or luxury" rather than a structural necessity, often benefiting only senior managers and lacking systemic tools to manage stress for all employees [i02]. This superficiality directly impacts the definition of workplace happiness, as it is not genuinely embedded in the culture [i05,]. There's a notable **managerial gap**, where leaders often lack the training, support, or even permission to address emotional wellbeing, and formal initiatives often don't translate into actual cultural change [i05, i09, i10, i14]. This absence of equipped leadership impedes the creation of workplaces that foster wellbeing.

Furthermore, a pervasive **stigma surrounding mental health** means employees are reluctant to seek help, believing therapy is only for "problems" [i13], and mental health is often dismissed as "private matters" [i05]. This lack of awareness and destigmatization is a major obstacle to understanding individual wellbeing and the role of mental health experts. Societal factors such as economic insecurity, inadequate institutional frameworks, and labour insecurity intensify workplace stress, making it difficult for individuals to achieve personal and professional balance [i21, i23, i24]. The education system's "instrumental approach" also neglects holistic understanding, impacting critical thinking and human connection, thereby limiting one's capacity to "learn to be happy" [i22, i23]. The lack of open information, trust, and genuine social connection exacerbates these issues, reinforcing a "grey perception of work" and hindering overall wellbeing [i22, i23].

In response to these challenges, interviewees offered **actionable advice to employers** aimed at fostering a culture of wellbeing. Key recommendations include to **normalize psychological support** by integrating it into the work culture as a standard practice, rather than an "add-on," and to invest in creating safe, emotionally intelligent workplaces [i01, i18]. Employers should **know their people**, understanding individual needs and preferences (e.g., generational differences in benefits) before implementing wellbeing programs [i02]. Crucially, **leadership must take responsibility for emotional health** within their teams, requiring investment in

manager training for emotional intelligence, basic psychology, and people skills, and a willingness to model vulnerability [i05, i10, i15, i16, i18]. Wellbeing should be treated as a **strategic business priority**, not a "soft benefit" or an HR checkbox, embedded in decision-making, budgeting, and daily operations to ensure genuine care and transparency [i03, i06, i14]. Providing resources such as real spaces for processing emotions, self-reflection tools, and a budget for wellbeing activities like therapy or coaching is also essential [i05, i06, i13, i16, i18, i20].

Looking to the **future of wellbeing in complex environments**, interviewees highlighted the enduring challenge of **burnout** in an intensifying, digitally blurred work world, calling for structural changes that rethink workloads, redefine productivity, and place mental health at the core of decision-making [i01]. There's a strong call for **greater emotional education** to foster a better understanding of inner dynamics and a shift in public discourse towards vulnerability, connection, and mental resilience [i02]. Leaders with emotional intelligence are seen as crucial, moving beyond technical skills [i02, i05]. The rise of technology, particularly AI and social media, presents both challenges and opportunities; it is vital to ensure digital wellbeing while counteracting the loss of real human connection by creating **embodied, in-person relational spaces** at work and in society [i06, i13, i18]. The vision emphasizes building **resilient systems**, not just resilient individuals, integrating wellbeing into all organizational processes rather than treating it as a separate department [i08, i09]. This holistic, future-oriented perspective is crucial for understanding the factors influencing happiness and identifying means to facilitate it.

The **interviewee feedback** further refines these insights. Most interviewees felt the questions allowed them to express their views deeply [i01, i06, i14, i22], but some suggested additional areas for exploration. Critically, there was a call for more attention on **supporting managers and leaders** who are themselves at high risk of burnout [i01, i06, i04]. Suggestions for **alternative language** to "wellbeing" (e.g., "mental comfort," "inner stability") were offered to overcome discomfort or "buzzword-like" perceptions [i02], which is valuable for exploring happiness perceptions effectively. The need for more focus on **specific methodologies** like movement, dance therapy, and body-based approaches [i13], as well as the importance of **relationships** as the foundation of wellbeing [i16], directly informs how to facilitate "learning to be happy" and identifying good practices beyond traditional methods.

Concepts in exploration

Here we make an effort to deepen the analysis of the survey, focus groups and interviews insights based on the concepts we aimed to explore , specifically: Overall Happiness and/or life satisfaction, Contentment, Hedonic level of affect, Good Life, Wellbeing, Autonomy, Competence, Relatedness, The Maslow Hierarchy of Needs, and Eudaimonic tradition in psychology and social policy.

Overall Happiness, Life Satisfaction, Contentment, and Hedonic Level of Affect (including Subjective Well-Being - SWB)

Interviews and focus groups frequently touched upon components of happiness, life satisfaction, and contentment, often linking them to both personal and workplace factors.

V.T. (i22), a program manager focusing on empowerment and quality of life, emphasized that a positive work environment directly fosters **personal happiness** and contributes significantly to an individual's **quality of life**. She believes work should be a source of **joy, strength, and connection**. The discussions indicated that feelings of satisfaction often stem from being heard, valued, and having a sense of mutual support, which can contribute to a healthier and more connected populace.

Conversely, the absence of these elements, such as financial insecurity, can profoundly impact happiness. M.V., a CEO in one focus group, explicitly stated that "**salary generates stress and insecurity, which is why it serves a crucial role**". This highlights how fundamental economic factors can directly influence an individual's hedonic (fulfilment) state and overall life satisfaction.

P.V. (i23) reflected on societal happiness, noting that Scandinavian countries achieve high **happiness levels** due to factors like flexible work breaks and guaranteed basic income, but critically observed that loneliness and high suicide rates can persist even in economically prosperous nations, suggesting that material well-being alone does not guarantee overall happiness or a good life. A.G. (i25) echoed a broader philosophical concern, questioning the possibility of finding "**ethical happiness under capitalism**" given current global issues.

Participants in the EPIONE focus groups frequently expressed a desire for a sense of belonging and in-person interaction, indicating that these social connections were vital for feeling less burnt out and generally better, implying a direct link to positive affect and contentment. Similarly, the BIT CZ focus group observed that employees define well-being in terms of **mental health, work-life balance, physical comfort, and interpersonal relationships**, all of which contribute to an individual's overall sense of happiness and contentment.

Good Life and Eudaimonic Tradition in Psychology and Social Policy

The concept of a "good life" or eudaimonia, which focuses on living well, purpose, and the realization of human potential, was a strong undercurrent in many discussions. This aligns with Self-Determination Theory's (SDT) emphasis on intrinsic goals, autonomy, awareness, and basic psychological need satisfaction as paths to eudaimonic living.

V.T. (i22) strongly advocated for a human-centric approach, where work is seen as a source of **joy, strength, and connection** rather than just a necessity. Her vision for a "good life" involved a society that values human beings above all, respects nature, illness, and disability, and creates inclusive institutions. She emphasized **lifelong self-reflection and understanding of life's challenges**, fostering critical thinking, and questioned the singular focus on "excellence" in education, suggesting more holistic approaches to **happiness and fulfillment**. This deeply resonates with the eudaimonic tradition's focus on flourishing and purpose beyond mere pleasure.

Several interviewees highlighted the importance of **personal growth and development** as central to a good life. For instance, i03 (Trainer) discussed "personal development, clarifying personal priorities and life expectations, letting go of mental models that are burdensome". M.V. (CEO) in a focus group, along with G.P. (Economist), emphasized not only independence and job security but also **skills evolution through seminars and learning opportunities** as contributing to overall well-being and a sense of progress.

M. (i10) shared her personal journey through burnout, underscoring the importance of **self-awareness**, testing different recovery tools, and a "shift in perspective" to regain a sense of purpose and well-being. She also used the metaphor of "put your own mask on first" for teachers, suggesting that systemic well-being starts with **personal and relational self-care** at every level. This aligns with eudaimonic pursuits that benefit both the individual and the collective.

I.Z. (Deloitte consultant) underscored the significance of **career advancement chances** and fair compensation, not just as financial rewards, but as "expressions of gratitude for employees' efforts" that improve psychological wellness. P.A. (Junior Recruitment Consultant) specifically noted that Generation Z prioritizes diversity and inclusion policies, seeking workplaces where they can "truly be themselves without fear or prejudice". This speaks to the eudaimonic value of authentic self-expression and living in alignment with one's identity.

The EPIONE focus group participants desired **flexibility and autonomy** in structuring their work, as well as **recognition and validation** for their efforts. These elements, when present, foster a sense of mastery, purpose, and self-worth, which are key indicators of eudaimonic well-being.

Wellbeing (Comprehensive Perspective)

Well-being was a central theme, explored through its definition, current challenges, and potential interventions across personal, workplace, and societal levels.

Defining Wellbeing: Interviewees offered diverse yet interconnected understandings. i09 (Consultant) considered well-being a "**transversal theme across all aspects of her work and life**". i01 (Clinical Psychologist) emphasized a feedback system where personal, workplace, and societal well-being are interdependent: "If society doesn't protect individuals, the workplace suffers. If workplaces don't support wellbeing, people suffer. And when people are unwell, the whole system weakens". This holistic view also permeated V.T.'s (i22) insights, where she connected workplace challenges to broader societal conditions, stating that "**what happens in the workplace is not unrelated to what generally happens in the reality that surrounds us**".

Challenges to Wellbeing: A recurring challenge was the **high workload and lack of clear role division**, leading to employees doing "more than their role requires". The **lack of time for recovery and reflection**, especially in emotionally intense professions, resulted in perpetual mental load. **Emotional loneliness and disconnection** were significant, with many feeling isolated due to solitary work with clients or patients. **Frequent structural changes and instability**, particularly in the public sector, contributed to exhaustion and confusion. **Poor work-life boundaries** were a major stressor, with work intruding into personal time. Additionally, **underappreciation and lack of recognition** for efforts were widely cited.

Gaps in Current Approaches: Several interviewees pointed out that mental health support is often **reactive rather than preventive**. Well-being is frequently treated as a "trend or luxury" or a "soft topic," rather than a structural need integrated into organizational culture. There's a **lack of consistent follow-through** from formal structures, with mid-level managers often unprepared to address emotional well-being. The **stigma associated with mental health** and seeking psychological help remains a significant barrier.

Effective Interventions for Wellbeing: Interviewees suggested a shift towards a more human-centric, transparent, and structured approach. Key recommendations included:

- **Prioritizing employer education and training** in organizational management, communication, and humanistic understanding of work, recognizing that "people are not expendable".
- Implementing mechanisms for **genuine care by actively listening to employees** through feedback systems and ensuring visible follow-up, potentially with therapy vouchers.
- Fostering **psychological safety and transparency** where employees feel comfortable expressing concerns without fear.
- Offering **flexible work arrangements** and clear boundaries to promote work-life balance.

- Providing **individualized support and development paths** through coaching and training, tailored to individual needs.
- Building **team cohesion and community** through activities and regular reflection meetings that focus on emotional sharing, not just tasks.
- Investing in **managerial training** on detecting burnout, empathy, active listening, and mental health basics.
- Implementing **proactive and systematic health monitoring** that includes mental and emotional well-being, with strict confidentiality.
- Establishing **clear job profiles and responsibilities** to reduce ambiguity and stress.
- Actively working to **destigmatize mental health** and raise awareness about its importance.
- Leveraging **community and collective voice** to address systemic challenges.

Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness (Self-Determination Theory - SDT)

These three basic psychological needs were consistently highlighted as crucial for well-being and motivation, aligning with the core tenets of SDT.

Autonomy: The desire for choice and volition was evident. M.V. (CEO) emphasized **full remote flexibility** and additional annual leave, promoting employee independence. Similarly, the EPIONE focus group underscored that giving employees the **freedom to organize their work** as they need to significantly increases motivation and reduces stress. Interviewee i09 expressed a strong preference for **individual development paths** where people can define their own goals and select support tools accordingly, rather than relying on generalized training. In the BIT CZ focus group, employees prioritized **flexible working conditions**. The broader SDT framework suggests that by enabling individuals to take responsibility for their own change and respecting their autonomy, change becomes more lasting.

Competence: The need to feel effective and capable in one's environment was frequently discussed. G.P. (Economist) highlighted **skills evolution through seminars and learning opportunities**. i03 (Trainer) focused on "implementing educational and development programs for employees" to foster growth. Offering opportunities for new employees and creating development conditions were also seen as crucial by V.T. (i22). In the EPIONE focus group, employer priorities included providing **growth and financial incentives** through training and professional development. The importance of clear role definitions and structured responsibilities, as noted by BIT CZ employees, implicitly points to the need for clarity to feel competent in one's tasks. Supporting self-efficacy through practical skills and genuine affirmations was seen as key to fostering this sense of competence.

Relatedness: The need for connection and belonging emerged as a critical component of well-being. G.P. (Economist) emphasized the significance of "**relationships with colleagues and the general work environment**". M.V. (CEO) mentioned organizing company parties "to bond" and creating offices with large shared tables "that encourages immediate interaction". The EPIONE focus group revealed profound **emotional loneliness and disconnection** among employees, leading to a strong desire for more **team connection, debriefing, and shared presence**. Peer support was identified as the primary source of emotional and informational help. V.T. (i22) explicitly advocated for cultivating an environment of understanding, empathy, and **emotional support among colleagues and management to prevent feelings of alienation**. Building rapport, listening non-judgmentally, and engaging in reflective dialogue are all strategies that foster relatedness by making individuals feel understood and valued.

The Maslow Hierarchy of Needs

While not explicitly named in the interviews, the concepts underlying Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs - from basic physiological and safety needs to self-actualization - were constantly discussed, often highlighting the challenges in fulfilling lower-level needs before higher ones could be addressed. This implicitly aligned with critiques of Maslow's rigid hierarchy by showing how needs are interconnected and often unmet.

The "Towards A Dynamic Model of Human Needs" source offers a direct critical analysis, noting that Maslow's theory is a **rigid hierarchical framework** based on personal observations, lacking empirical evidence, and is ethnocentric. It is criticized for **oversimplification**, not accounting for societal influences like economic downturns or wars, and failing to include new dimensions of needs like digital connection.

Interviewees frequently raised issues related to Maslow's foundational levels:

- **Physiological Needs:** The CEO, M.V., highlighted that "**salary generates stress and insecurity**". Interviewee i18 noted that for lower and middle classes, **money is still a problem of "how to thrive and not only survive,"** directly linking to basic economic security. V.T. (i21) underlined that "**economic stability and increased financial support are fundamental,**" as personal financial struggles directly impact an employee's ability to dedicate themselves to work. These comments suggest that basic financial needs, equivalent to physiological needs, are often unmet and a primary concern.
- **Safety and Security Needs:** M.V. (CEO) prioritized **job security** and ensuring employees "feel safe and not threatened by the fear of being fired". Interviewee i16 explicitly named **insecurity** as a major theme affecting everyone, leading to anxiety about resources and safety. The high cost of living and housing crisis were also mentioned as societal factors impacting well-being. The constant **structural changes**

and instability in the public sector, as noted in the EPIONE focus group, created a lack of safety and predictability for employees. The need for psychological safety, where employees can speak up without fear, was also a significant theme in the BIT CZ focus group.

- **Love/Belonging Needs:** This was a strong theme, as discussed under "Relatedness." The profound **emotional loneliness and disconnection** in the workplace and the emphasis on **peer support, team connection, and community** highlight the strong need for belonging.
- **Esteem Needs:** The widespread feeling of **underappreciation and lack of recognition** directly speaks to unmet esteem needs. I.Z. (Deloitte consultant) noted that career advancement and fair compensation act as "expressions of gratitude for employees' efforts", contributing to their sense of worth and esteem.
- **Self-Actualization Needs:** While some employees and employers discussed **personal growth, skills evolution, and individual development paths**, these were often framed in the context of broader well-being rather than a pinnacle of a fixed hierarchy. V.T. (i22) questioned the emphasis on "excellence" in education and advocated for holistic approaches to "happiness and fulfillment", reflecting a more fluid view of self-actualization as a continuous process rather than a static goal, as suggested by the critical analysis of Maslow. The Maslow's Hierarchy of Inequity source highlights that for many, basic needs remain so pressing that higher-level concerns like "fulfilling my life's purpose" are inaccessible.

The collective interview data, much like the "Towards A Dynamic Model of Human Needs" source, implicitly supports a more **dynamic and interconnected view of needs**, where various needs can be pursued concurrently, and fulfillment at one level can influence others, rather than a strict sequential progression. The solutions proposed, such as addressing financial instability, promoting psychological safety, fostering strong relationships, and enabling personal growth, tackle multiple levels of needs simultaneously.

Analytical tools

Human-Centric Foundations: Security, Balance, and Health as Rights

The concept of "Human-Centric Foundations: Security, Balance, and Health as Rights" is central to understanding individual and collective well-being, emphasizing that fundamental needs related to safety, work-life harmony, and physical and mental health are crucial for human flourishing. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) posits that **eudaimonic living, or living well, is characterized by the pursuit of intrinsic goals, autonomous behavior, mindful awareness, and the satisfaction of basic psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy**. This contrasts with a purely hedonic approach focused solely on pleasure, arguing that eudaimonic pursuits lead to more stable and enduring happiness, as well as positive outcomes like vitality, intimacy, and health. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, while foundational, has been critiqued for its rigid, hierarchical structure and Western-centric bias, with newer models like "Belal's Model of Human Needs" proposing that needs are dynamic, interconnected, and can be pursued concurrently, rather than in a fixed sequence. Qualitative research methods are particularly well-suited to exploring the "whys and hows" of these complex human experiences, providing a deeper understanding of individuals' perceptions, feelings, and lived realities.

Security: Financial, Job, and Psychological Safety

Economic and Job Security are consistently highlighted as fundamental. Maslow's hierarchy places basic security needs as a precursor to higher-level needs, encompassing physical safety and protection from harm, a safe environment free from violence, and access to healthcare for a sense of well-being. However, this hierarchy is often challenged, as individuals may prioritize self-actualization or social belonging even while struggling with physiological or safety needs. Empirical findings show that **economic insecurity is a significant societal factor impacting individual well-being**, intensifying burnout risks alongside the pressure to perform and constant digital availability. For many, wages are crucial not just for survival, but for the ability to thrive.

In the workplace, **salary generates stress and insecurity**, underscoring its critical role. Unstable institutional labor rights frameworks, continuous changes in laws, and unofficial work, especially in family businesses, contribute to a **pervasive lack of trust in the state and a "grey" perception of work**. This insecurity permeates personal and workplace well-being, hindering effective communication and cooperation. Young professionals, particularly Generation Z, prioritize working environments where they can be authentic without fear or

prejudice, emphasizing the importance of diversity and inclusion policies for emotional safety and mental well-being.

Psychological safety in the workplace is identified as a critical unmet need, enabling employees to express ideas and opinions without fear of judgment. Managers' empathy and ability to create safe spaces are crucial, as is addressing issues like bullying, favoritism, and poor communication that undermine this safety. Without a culture of honesty and care, even well-intentioned benefits like mental health days can feel "hollow" or underutilized due to stigma.

Balance: Work-Life Integration and Flexibility

The struggle to maintain **work-life balance** is a prevalent well-being challenge. Intense work that extends beyond working hours, coupled with blurred boundaries between personal and professional life, leads to burnout, relationship conflicts, exhaustion, and reduced productivity. Employees frequently report a lack of time for proper breaks or to mentally disengage from work, even after their shifts end. Rigid work structures often fail to accommodate personal needs like caregiving duties or health-related appointments, especially in human-centered professions.

Flexible working conditions, such as hybrid work models, adjusted hours, and self-scheduled breaks, are highly valued and contribute significantly to improved psychological wellness and general well-being. Policies that support these aspects are seen as expressions of gratitude for employees' efforts. However, implementing such flexibility requires management support and cultural integration to be truly effective. Organizations are encouraged to introduce "well-being boundaries" policies, such as limits on after-hours emails or calls, and to educate teams about digital hygiene to support recovery time.

Health: Physical, Mental, and Supportive Systems

Mental health is frequently disregarded in workplaces, with a notable absence of frameworks or facilities for discussing psychological health without judgment. Similarly, physical health, including ergonomic workspaces and initiatives for physical activity, is often overlooked. SDT highlights the importance of basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, relatedness) as foundations for personal growth and well-being, suggesting that a supportive social environment is crucial for both physical and mental health.

Interviewees and focus group participants emphasize the urgent need for **mental health education, manager training to recognize signs of burnout, and ensuring access to psychological support**. Companies should demonstrate genuine care by actively listening to employees and funding support services such as therapy vouchers or coaching. Confidentiality

is paramount for any health monitoring or support system, especially concerning mental health, to ensure employees feel safe to engage.

Current health analysis tools in many organizations are **limited primarily to physical health indicators** (e.g., blood tests, physical examinations for workplace accidents) and often fail to include systematic monitoring of psychological health. There is a strong call for comprehensive health monitoring that extends to mental and emotional well-being, with strict confidentiality and "non-classical type" doctors or sessions focused on psychological health. Some organizations are starting to implement annual well-being surveys, pulse checks, and manager training for early warning signs, but many traditional workplaces lack such initiatives.

Employees frequently rely on **informal support systems** such as friends, family, and coworkers as their primary source of emotional and informational help, even when institutional assistance is available. This highlights a "glaring discrepancy between the way employees view and utilize the well-being programs that are provided". There is a desire for structured, easily accessible assistance programs that recognize both physical and mental wellness, moving beyond the perception of well-being as an optional bonus or "nice-to-have". Promoting collective voice and community is also seen as a powerful tool to address challenges, as organizations and individuals can find resonance and sustainability together.

In conclusion, fostering human-centric foundations means recognizing that security, balance, and health are not mere benefits but essential elements for individuals to thrive. This requires a shift from reactive to proactive, holistic approaches that are deeply embedded in organizational culture and societal policies, supported by authentic leadership, flexible practices, and comprehensive, confidential support systems for both physical and mental well-being.

Building flourishing cultures

Building flourishing cultures hinges on fostering **trust, belonging, and meaning** across individual, workplace, and societal levels. These elements are deeply intertwined with eudaimonic well-being, a concept rooted in Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and ancient philosophy, which prioritizes the process of living well through the pursuit of intrinsic goals, autonomous behavior, mindful awareness, and the satisfaction of basic psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy.

Trust: A Foundation for Openness and Security

Trust is paramount at all levels, from individual interactions to institutional frameworks. A significant challenge highlighted in the sources is the **pervasive lack of trust in the state and**

an unstable institutional framework for labor rights. This societal mistrust can hinder effective communication and cooperation within organizations.

Within the workplace, **psychological safety** is identified as a critical unmet need, allowing employees to express ideas and opinions without fear of judgment. Many employees fear consequences for speaking up or making mistakes, necessitating a shift from control-based to trust-based leadership. Factors contributing to workplace trust include empathetic managers, clear communication, and a culture of honesty and care. Building rapport through non-judgmental listening, open-ended questions, and reflective listening is crucial for facilitators in contexts like Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) trainings, as it reduces defensiveness and fosters trust. Without a culture of genuine care, even well-intentioned benefits can feel "hollow". Employees often turn to informal support systems like friends, family, and coworkers as their primary source of help, partly due to a lack of trust in formal institutional assistance. A robust well-being system is characterized by trust in both the system and the government.

Belonging: The Core of Human Connection

The need for **belonging, or relatedness** in SDT, is a fundamental human psychological need. It encompasses feeling close and connected to others, being trusted, and feeling understood. Humans are inherently social beings, with an innate desire for interpersonal relationships and to be part of a group.

In the workplace, positive relationships with colleagues are frequently cited as key contributors to well-being. Employees express a desire for community connection, a sense of belonging within their team or organization, and non-formal spaces to bond. **Diversity and inclusion policies are seen as crucial for creating environments where young professionals, especially Generation Z, can be authentic without fear or prejudice.** Feeling accepted by an out-group, for instance, has been shown to increase autonomous motivation to reduce prejudice. Conversely, a lack of social connection can lead to loneliness, isolation, and negative mental health outcomes. Societal polarization and loss of trust can also contribute to this. Promoting collective voice and community is considered a powerful tool for addressing shared challenges and fostering sustainability. Strengthening peer support systems through buddy programs or shared reflection spaces can also significantly enhance belonging.

Meaning: Purpose, Values, and Personal Growth

Meaning in life is a direct outcome of eudaimonic living, which involves actively striving for what is intrinsically worthwhile and of inherent human value. SDT distinguishes between intrinsic goals (e.g., personal growth, deep relationships, community contribution, physical health) and extrinsic goals (e.g., wealth, fame, image). Pursuing intrinsic goals, which are considered "first-order values" (irreducible and good in themselves, like love), consistently

leads to greater well-being, self-actualization, positive affect, and vitality, while reducing depression, anxiety, and physical symptoms. A sense of purpose is essential, with a lack of it being a common struggle for employees.

At work, meaning is derived from feeling a sense of accomplishment, having one's role align with skills and career aspirations, and perceiving work as meaningful and useful, which strengthens self-esteem and inner value. The concept of **self-actualization**, Maslow's highest need, is viewed in Belal's Model of Human Needs not as a static endpoint but as a **continuous process of personal development and potential realization**. Mindfulness and reflection are integral to eudaimonic living, facilitating autonomous self-regulation, reducing materialism, and promoting intrinsic values. Education should cultivate a holistic understanding of human existence, moving beyond an instrumental approach focused solely on economic gain, to one that values philosophical depth and human connection.

Balance: work-life integration and flexibility

Work-life integration and flexibility refer to the ability to manage professional responsibilities and personal life in a way that promotes overall well-being and allows for the pursuit of intrinsic goals such as personal growth, relationships, community, and health. It is about creating conditions where individuals feel a sense of choice and volition (autonomy) in how they structure their work and personal time, rather than being controlled by external pressures or internal guilt. The goal is a more stable, enduring happiness, vitality, and a sense of meaning that comes from actively striving for what is intrinsically worthwhile. This also includes the emerging need for **digital connectivity and online belonging**, which must be balanced to avoid negative impacts on mental health and social connections.

Societally, **economic insecurity, rising costs of living, and the pressure to be constantly available**, especially digitally, intensify stress and burnout risks. Inadequate institutional and legal frameworks, such as short maternity leave in the private sector or a lack of flexibility for parents with disabilities, severely impact work-life balance. The continuous societal changes and an unstable institutional framework for labor rights contribute to a broader lack of trust in the state and a "grey" perception of work, which then spills over into workplace insecurity. Loneliness is also a significant issue, with rapid technological changes, automation, and online spaces perceived as replacing genuine human connection. There's also a critique that the educational system often takes an "instrumental approach," prioritizing economic gain over a holistic understanding of human existence, philosophical depth, and human connection, which contributes to workplaces that undervalue the "human dimension" of employees. This instrumental focus potentially fosters a competitive, rather than collective, spirit from an early age, impacting individuals' predisposition towards well-being.

Effective interventions at the workplace level include implementing flexible work practices such as hybrid work models, full remote options, adjusted hours, and self-scheduled breaks, which are highly valued for psychological wellness and work-life balance. Establishing clear "well-being boundaries," like limits on after-hours emails or calls, and educating teams about digital hygiene are crucial for promoting recovery time. Comprehensive well-being programs should provide mental health education, access to psychological support (e.g., on-call psychologists, internal coaches, group therapy), and mental health days. Policies allowing up to three days off for any health issue without requiring justification, or permitting health appointments during working hours, are proactive measures for well-being. Fostering community and recognition through non-formal bonding, regular reflection meetings, and genuine appreciation is also vital for social well-being and reducing isolation.

From a societal perspective, **policy reform and stability** are essential, including addressing job insecurity (e.g., fixed-term contracts) and declining wages to enable individuals to plan their future. Improving institutional and legal frameworks regarding maternity leave and flexibility for parents with disabilities is also necessary. **Accessible support systems** like affordable mental healthcare, on-site childcare facilities, and financial aid for working parents are vital societal initiatives. Promoting trust between citizens and the state, combating the "grey" perception of work, and fostering transparency in employment opportunities are fundamental. This also includes cultivating a **holistic education** system that values philosophical depth and human connection over purely economic gain, and emphasizing teamwork and a collective spirit. **Community and collective voice**, through organizations like unions and volunteer initiatives, can foster a sense of contribution and shared purpose, while intergenerational programs can help reduce isolation.

A robust and interconnected well-being system is characterized by consistent access to psychological and physical care, shared responsibility among employers, healthcare systems, and public policy, and a culture that promotes work-life balance and mutual respect. This includes proactive care, continuous education, and accessible support services at all levels. For individuals, this translates to feeling a sense of choice and control (autonomy), having time for personal relationships and community (relatedness), and feeling effective and capable in managing their lives (competence).

Challenges to Achieving Balance

Achieving work-life balance is fraught with challenges at individual, workplace, and societal levels:

Workplace-Level Challenges:

- **Overwhelming Workload and Unclear Boundaries:** Many employees report overwhelming workloads, unrealistic deadlines, and a lack of clarity in task distribution,

often doing more than their role requires or tasks outside their competence. There is a pervasive issue of **poor work-life boundaries**, with employees being contacted after hours and struggling to disconnect mentally, leading to constant work intrusion into personal time.

- **Lack of Time for Recovery and Recognition:** Employees express a significant lack of time for breaks, downtime, or processing emotions, especially in emotionally intense professions. Some feel "invisible" or undervalued, with a lack of genuine appreciation and recognition for their efforts, beyond just financial reward.
- **Rigid Structures and Insufficient Flexibility:** Rigid working hours and unrealistic expectations often clash with the unpredictable nature of human-centered professions, with policies failing to account for the need for flexibility. A significant gap is the **lack of flexibility for individual needs**, as systems are often not built to accommodate diverse rhythms, caregiving duties, or health-related requirements.
- **Toxic Productivity Cultures and Psychological Safety:** Toxic productivity cultures contribute to emotional exhaustion, a sense of disconnection from self and others, and the absence of emotional safety at work. Employees often fear consequences for speaking up or using entitlements like annual leave, which can feel more like a "privilege than a right".
- **Managerial Gaps:** Managers often lack the training or permission to address mental health topics, leading to a disconnect between formal policies and actual support. Micromanagement and a focus on solely task-oriented management rather than supportive leadership also hinder well-being.
- **Perceived Unimportance of Well-being:** Well-being is frequently dismissed as "soft" or unnecessary, only gaining attention when problems escalate. Initiatives like therapeutic art sessions or self-care programs often face **low employee participation** due to overwork, staff shortages, or a lack of motivation to engage.

Societal-Level Challenges

- **Economic Insecurity and Pressure:** Economic instability, rising costs of living, and societal pressure to constantly perform and be available (especially digitally) intensify stress and burnout risks.
- **Inadequate Institutional and Legal Frameworks:** Insufficient legal provisions, such as short maternity leave (particularly in the private sector) and a lack of flexibility for parents with dependent family members (e.g., mothers of children with disabilities), severely impact work-life balance. The constant environment of societal change and an unstable institutional framework for labor rights contribute to a broader **lack of trust in the state** and spills over into workplace insecurity.

- **Societal Norms and Loneliness:** Society often normalizes burnout and overworking, leading workplaces to reflect these norms. Rapid technological change, automation, and online spaces are seen as replacing real human connection, contributing to increased loneliness and a struggle for meaning and fulfillment, especially among younger generations.
- **Educational System and Values:** An "instrumental approach" to education, prioritizing economic gain over a holistic understanding of human existence, philosophical depth, and human connection, contributes to workplaces that undervalue the "human dimension" of employees.

Solutions and Interventions for Balance

Effective interventions require a holistic approach addressing individual, workplace, and societal factors:

Workplace-Level Solutions:

- **Flexible Work Practices:** Implementing **hybrid work models, full remote flexibility, and self-scheduled breaks** are highly valued for psychological wellness and work-life balance. Flexible working hours are crucial, particularly for employees with family obligations or those pursuing further education. Policies accommodating personal needs, such as adjusting schedules for family or health reasons, play a key role in supporting well-being.
- **Clear Boundaries and Role Definitions:** Establishing **clear job roles, responsibilities, and boundary-setting policies** (e.g., "no emails or calls after 7 PM unless urgent") helps employees disconnect and manage workload. Organisations should define clear boundaries for employee availability to prevent overwork, especially for those who struggle to set limits themselves.
- **Manager Training and Support:** Training managers in empathy, active listening, and people skills is critical for fostering a supportive environment and building trust. Leaders should be stable, confident, and balanced themselves to make employees feel safe.
- **Comprehensive Well-being Programs:** Providing **mental health education, access to psychological support (e.g., on-call psychologists, internal coaches, group therapy), and mental health days** are essential. Some organizations implement policies like not requiring justification for up to three days off for any health issue, or allowing health appointments during working hours without limitation, as a proactive measure for well-being.

- **Fostering Community and Recognition:** Creating non-formal spaces for employees to bond, fostering positive relationships with colleagues, and organizing regular reflection meetings or social gatherings are important for social well-being and reducing isolation. Recognition and appreciation, not just financial rewards, are also crucial.
- **Investment in Human Potential:** Offering personal development opportunities, coaching, financial literacy workshops, and support for skill evolution not only benefits the individual but also boosts loyalty and retention. Proactive health monitoring can help prevent health crises and demonstrates genuine care for employees.

Societal-Level Solutions:

- **Policy Reform and Stability:** Reforming social policies to address job insecurity (e.g., fixed-term contracts) and declining wages is crucial for enabling individuals to plan their future and meet daily needs. Improving institutional and legal frameworks regarding maternity leave and flexibility for parents with disabilities is also necessary.
- **Accessible Support Systems:** Ensuring access to affordable mental healthcare, on-site childcare facilities, and financial aid for working parents are vital societal initiatives.
- **Holistic Education and Values:** Shifting the educational paradigm from an instrumental approach focused solely on economic gain to one that cultivates a holistic understanding of human existence, philosophical depth, and human connection is advocated. This includes emphasizing teamwork and collective spirit over competition.
- **Promoting Trust and Inclusivity:** Fostering trust between citizens and the state, combating the "grey" perception of work, and promoting transparency in employment opportunities are fundamental. Societies should value human beings above all, respecting nature, illness, and disability, and creating inclusive institutions.
- **Community and Collective Voice:** Strengthening collective organizations (like unions) that advocate for employees and promoting volunteer and participatory actions within communities can foster a sense of contribution and shared purpose. Intergenerational programs can help reduce isolation and share resilience strategies.

Individual-Level Strategies:

- **Self-Care and Mindfulness:** Individuals can benefit from incorporating self-care routines, mindfulness, and reflective practices into their daily lives to manage stress and foster awareness of their needs.
- **Boundary Setting:** Actively setting boundaries between work and personal life is important, though this is often difficult without organizational support.
- **Emotional Regulation:** Learning emotional regulation and understanding one's own triggers can help individuals navigate complex environments and prevent burnout.

Interconnections and the Role of Well-being Systems

The personal, workplace, and societal levels of well-being are **deeply intertwined and form a feedback system** where issues in one area inevitably impact the others. For example, societal stressors like economic instability or lack of support for families directly bleed into the workplace, affecting employee performance and relationships. Conversely, a supportive and flexible work environment, where employees feel heard and valued, enhances individual quality of life, allowing individuals to bring positive energy into their personal and social lives.

A **robust and interconnected well-being system** is characterized by consistent access to psychological and physical care, shared responsibility between employers, healthcare systems, and public policy, and a culture that promotes work-life balance and mutual respect. This includes proactive care, continuous education, and accessible support services at all levels. Such a system should allow for individualized support, where people feel seen and heard, and managers take responsibility for team well-being.

Work-life balance directly contributes to the satisfaction of SDT's basic psychological needs:

- **Autonomy:** Flexible work arrangements and the ability to set boundaries enhance a sense of control and choice over one's life.
- **Relatedness:** Having time for personal relationships and community involvement outside of work is crucial for feeling connected and cared for by others. The emotional loneliness and disconnection observed in workplaces highlight a significant unmet need for relatedness.
- **Competence:** Effectively managing work and personal life, and having the skills and resources to do so, contributes to a sense of efficacy and accomplishment.

The future of well-being in complex environments demands **structural changes**, including rethinking workloads, redefining productivity, and placing mental health at the heart of decision-making. It necessitates creating safe spaces for reflection and emotional processing, especially given the blurring digital boundaries and the challenge of loneliness.

Target groups

Profile of respondents

The target audience for the PEACE project's preliminary research activities, including the online survey, focus groups, and interviews, consisted of a relatively small and specific demographic group, primarily employed individuals in certain professional fields across Czechia, Lithuania, and Greece. It is important to acknowledge that the **limited number of respondents, especially when compared to the broader populations of the cities or countries involved, means these findings are indicative rather than conclusive.**

Online Survey Respondents

The online survey, which took place from February 25, 2025, to March 20, 2025, gathered a total of 76 replies.

- **Czech Republic:** 24 replies.
- **Lithuania:** 27 replies.
- **Greece:** 25 replies (23 in Greek, 2 in English).

All partners successfully exceeded their baseline of 20 replies per country. The professional fields represented in the survey varied, but there was a **significant overrepresentation from the educational field in Greece**, with no replies from the government/public sector for that country, despite the two often intersecting. Overall demographics for the online survey showed that the **vast majority of respondents were female (76%)**, with the remaining being male, except for one person who chose "other" to express disagreement with limited gender options.

- **Age Distribution:**
 - **Czech Republic:** Primarily between 26-44, followed by over 45, with no respondents under 25.
 - **Lithuania:** Majority over 45, followed by 26-44, with one respondent under 25.
 - **Greece:** Followed a similar trend to Lithuania, with three respondents under 25.
- **Social Situation:** The majority of respondents were individuals with families and children.

Focus Group Respondents

Three separate focus group activities were conducted, each providing distinct insights into their respective target audiences.

- **Greece (DAFNI KEK):** The focus group included 9 participants: a CEO, an Economist/Accountant/B.I. Consultant, a Consultant, a Digital Marketing Trainee, a Junior Recruitment Consultant (internship), a Secretary (Psychology Graduate), a Customer Service Partner Specialist (Psychology Graduate), a Data Analyst, and an Assistant Accountant. A notable observation was the **predominance of employees (7 participants) over employers/managers (2 participants)**.
- **Lithuania (EPIONE):** These focus groups involved a self-employed professional in self-development/well-being, two managers, two employees, and one employer from the healthcare sector, and one employee from a municipality. A striking observation was that **all participants across the three Lithuanian focus groups were female**, which sparked discussions about gender and emotional labor. The facilitator also noted the **difficulty in gathering participants for virtual focus groups**, with no single group reaching the desired number of 10 attendees, and many expressing a preference for in-person interaction to foster a sense of belonging.
- **Czechia (bit cz training s.r.o.):** This focus group comprised 11 participants: 5 employees and 6 HR professionals/CEOs/employers.

Interview Respondents

A diverse group of 30 professionals were interviewed, reflecting a wide range of expertise related to well-being. These included:

- Clinical Psychologists/Psychotherapists/Therapists.
- Trainers/Coaches (in adult education, team development, soft skills).
- Consultants (organizational, social worker/fundraiser, public mental health, career change).
- Wellbeing Managers/Social Managers/Program Managers.
- HR Professionals/Head of Education.
- Eco-art therapist.
- Caregiver/Yoga teacher (for children with disabilities).
- Senior Project and Policy Coordinator .
- Customer Service Partner Specialist.

Summary of findings

The **online survey (Activity 1)** focused on identifying individual (personal) well-being needs, common topics, sources of help, and problem-solving methods. It is important to acknowledge that the online survey is not fully representative of the entire population due to its self-selection nature and dependence on internet and social media access. A total of 76 replies were received across the three countries (24 from Czechia, 27 from Lithuania, and 25 from Greece). While efforts were made to ensure diversity, the respondent pool was not comprehensive enough to provide a holistic view of the respective societies. For instance, a significant overrepresentation from the educational field was observed in Greece, and the vast majority of respondents (76%) were female. Despite these limitations, preliminary observations revealed interesting insights, such as indications of **alienation from work among Czech respondents** and prevalent issues with work-life balance and work breaks in both Czechia and Lithuania. Overall, while many reported positive experiences, a high number of neutral responses, and significant disagreement regarding the helpfulness of training, suggested a need for more structural changes to well-being initiatives.

The **focus groups (Activity 2)** aimed to gather insights from employees, HR experts, and employers on important aspects of well-being in the workplace. These discussions were structured to identify common well-being issues, differentiate priorities between employees and employers, understand communication dynamics, and explore current measures and their links to personal well-being.

- In **Lithuania**, participants highlighted urgent challenges including **high workload, unclear role division, lack of time for recovery, unstable policies, insufficient community building, poor work-life boundaries, and underappreciation**. Peer support emerged as the primary source of help, and social well-being was identified as a top priority. Notably, all participants in the Lithuanian focus groups were women, indicating a potential gendered dynamic in engagement with well-being topics.
- The **Czech focus group** identified key well-being issues as **mental health stressors** (e.g., workload pressure, unrealistic deadlines), **interpersonal problems** (e.g., bullying, poor communication), ergonomic issues, lack of recognition, and unclear work-life boundaries. Employers tended to prioritize well-being in relation to retention and productivity, while employees sought more direct and human-level support beyond formal policies. A significant **gap between formal support and emotional accessibility** was observed, with trust and psychological safety being recurring themes.
- In **Greece**, discussions revealed that **salary, workplace pressures, and work-life balance were crucial stressors, alongside interpersonal relationships and unpaid overtime**. The importance of diversity and inclusion, particularly for Generation Z's psychological safety, was emphasized. A key finding was the **preference for informal**

support systems (friends, family) **over corporate online help measures**, which was also influenced by cultural and geographical disparities. Overall, mental health was identified as a significant demand that is still not adequately addressed by many companies.

Finally, the **expert interviews (Activity 3)** sought in-depth insights from professionals such as therapists, psychologists, and life coaches on the multifaceted nature of well-being across personal, workplace, and societal contexts. These experts confirmed that **economic insecurity, performance pressure, lack of affordable mental health services, and social isolation significantly intensify burnout risks**. Societal factors like ongoing conflicts, declining civility, power dynamics, societal polarization, housing crises, and climate anxiety were identified as broadly impacting individual well-being. There was a strong consensus that **personal, workplace, and societal well-being are deeply interconnected, forming a feedback system** where issues in one area exacerbate problems in others. Experts highlighted numerous gaps in current well-being approaches, including reactive mental health support instead of prevention, inadequate training for managers, superficial initiatives, and a pervasive lack of trust. Key advice for employers included normalizing psychological support, understanding employee needs, acting genuinely, and investing in care and relationships. Looking ahead, experts foresee burnout remaining a central challenge, emphasizing the need for structural changes, emotional education, revaluing humanities, and fostering real human connection in increasingly complex environments.

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