

OSH Pulse - Occupational safety and health in post-pandemic workplaces

Flash Eurobarometer

Summary

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on safety and health at work on a number of levels. First, the pandemic situation involved risks for workers' health. Workplaces have been a source of concern for contagions during the pandemic, which resulted in most European governments to order workers who could work from home not to go to the usual workplace. In addition, workers have been stressed by the overall emergency situation, the forced lockdowns and the increased demands and work pressure (especially in the case of front-line workers), which are associated to mental health issues. Second, the crisis has emphasised the importance of effective occupational safety and health (OSH) management. Lastly, the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to change the way workers perceive safety and health at work, the importance they give to feeling protected and safe at work and the way they are familiarised with existing measures in their workplace.

In a context in which the emergence of new digital technologies is rapidly changing the nature and organisation of work, the pandemic may have contributed to accelerate the process of digitalisation. Digitalisation may bring new opportunities for both workers and employers, such as increased flexibility and remote work, which so much contributed to the economy not coming to a complete halt in many European countries during COVID-19 lockdowns. Nonetheless, the digitalisation of the workplace may also create new challenges and risks for OSH, including increased work pressure and stress, which require to be recognised and addressed.

In this context, the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) commissioned a Flash Eurobarometer in April 2022 with the aim of gaining more insights on the state of OSH in the post-pandemic workplaces. The focus of this Eurobarometer is on the mental and physical health risks workers are confronted with (including the digital technologies currently used in the workplace) and the OSH measures in the workplace.

A representative sample of workers (employees and self-employed), aged 16 and over, in each of the 27 Member States of the European Union, as well as in Iceland and Norway, was interviewed by Ipsos European Public Affairs. Between 25 April and 23 May 2022, 27 250 interviews were conducted over the telephone (mobile phones). Survey data are weighted to known population proportions. The EU27 averages are weighted according to the size of the 16+ employed population of each EU Member State. Due to rounding, the percentages shown in the charts and tables do not always exactly add up to the totals mentioned in the text.

The country abbreviations used in this report correspond to:

BE		Belgium	FR		France	NL		Netherlands
BG		Bulgaria	HR		Croatia	AT		Austria
CZ		Czechia	IT		Italy	PL		Poland
DK		Denmark	CY		Rep. of Cyprus*	PT		Portugal
DE		Germany	LV		Latvia	RO		Romania
EE		Estonia	LT		Lithuania	SI		Slovenia
IE		Ireland	LU		Luxembourg	SK		Slovakia
EL		Greece	HU		Hungary	FI		Finland
ES		Spain	MT		Malta	SE		Sweden

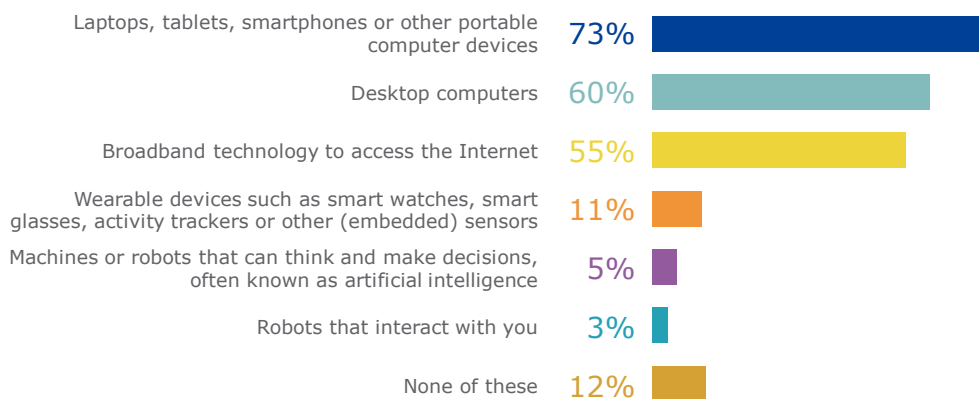
* Cyprus as a whole is one of the 27 EU MS. However, the 'acquis communautaire' has been suspended in the part of the country which is not controlled by the government of the Republic of Cyprus. For practical reasons, only the interviews carried out in the part of the country controlled by the government of the Republic of Cyprus are included in the 'CY' category.

Section 1. Digital technologies at the workplace

Digital devices and technologies most frequently used in the workplace are **laptops, tablets, smartphones or other portable devices** (73% across the EU), followed by **desktop computers** (60%) and **broadband technologies to access the Internet** (55%).

Workers working from home are the most likely to use laptops, tablets, smartphones or other portable computer devices (90% vs 61% to 77% of respondents working in other locations) and to use broadband technology to access the Internet (67% vs 36% to 55% of respondents working in other locations).

DX6 Do you use any of the following digital devices for your main job? (Multiple answers allowed, %)

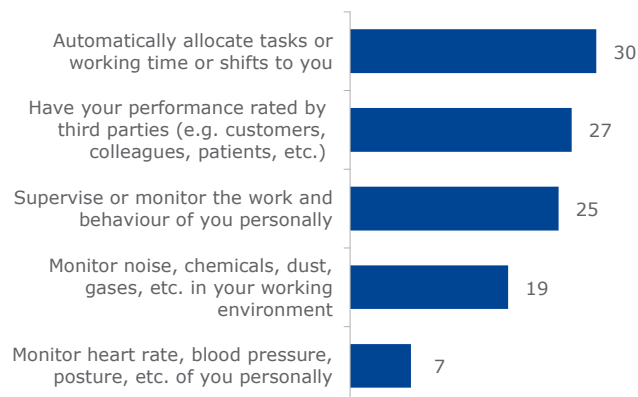


Base: all respondents, EU27 (n=25 683)

Three in ten respondents (30%) across the EU say that their organisation uses digital devices to **automatically allocate tasks or working time or shifts to them**. A slightly lower number (27%) reply that digital devices are used to **have their performance rated by third parties** (e.g. customers, colleagues, patients etc.) and 25% to **supervise or monitor their work and behaviour**. About a fifth of respondents (19%) say that digital devices are used to **monitor noise, chemicals, dust, gases, etc. in their working environment**. Fewer respondents (7%) answer that digital devices are used in the workplace to **monitor their heart rate, blood pressure, posture, etc.**

Automatic allocation of tasks or working time or shifts is most common for skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled manual workers and farm workers (32%), followed by workers in clerical, sales or service jobs (26%); this figure decreases to 22% for workers in professional, technical or higher administrator jobs.

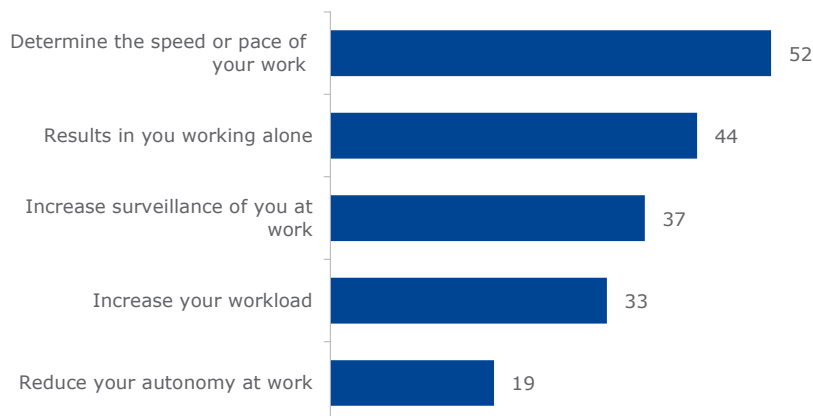
A2 To your knowledge, does the organisation where you work use digital devices such as a tablet, smartphone, computer, laptop, app or sensor to...? (% 'yes')



Base: all respondents, EU27 (n=25 683)

A slim majority of respondents across the EU (52%) answer that **the use of digital technologies in their workplace determines the speed or pace of their work** and one in three (33%) reply that these technologies **increase their workload**. Over four in ten respondents (44%) say that **digital technology results in them working alone** and just under four in ten (37%) that **the use of digital technologies increases surveillance of them at work**. Finally, 19% of respondents say that **the use of digital technologies reduces their autonomy at work**.

A1 Would you say that the use of digital technologies in your workplace...? (% 'yes')



Base: all respondents, EU27 (n=25 683)

In 21 of the countries surveyed, a majority of respondents say that the use of digital technologies in their workplace determines the speed of their work. At the national level, this rate varies from 33% in Iceland and 43% in Poland to 74% in Cyprus. In six countries, at least half of respondents say that the use of digital technologies results in working alone, with the overall highest share being seen in Slovenia (69%). In Denmark (31%) and Lithuania (32%), on the other hand, just over three in ten respondents say the same. The overall lowest proportion is observed again in Iceland (21%).

Close to six in ten (57%) of professional, technical or higher administrator occupations and 54% of clerical, sales or service occupations report that the use of digital technologies determines the speed of their work, compared to 42% of skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled manual workers and farm workers; a similar pattern of differences is also seen for increasing one's workload.

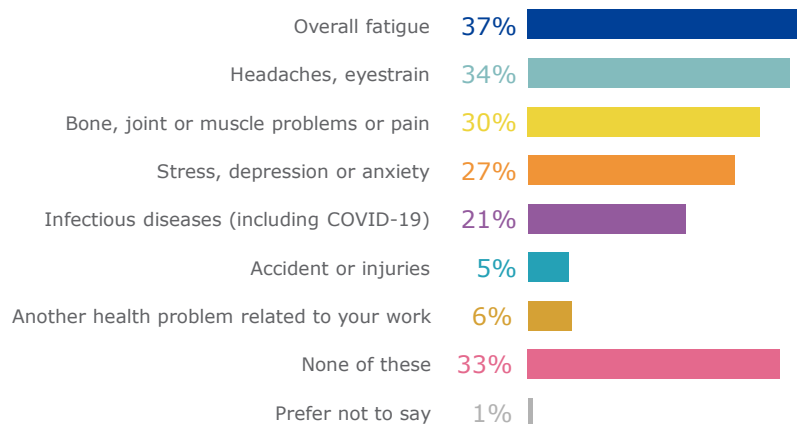
Section 2. Health issues and psychosocial risk factors

2.1. Workers' health status

Rating their health compared to that of colleagues and co-workers of the same age, 28% of respondents across the EU say that their health is 'very good' and 51% that it is 'good'. In all EU Member States (and in Iceland and Norway), over six in ten respondents say their health is 'good' or 'very good' compared to that of their colleagues or co-workers of the same age.

Across the EU, **overall fatigue is the most-cited health issue caused or made worse by work** (37%), followed by **headaches and eyestrain** (34%), **bone, joint or muscle problems or pain** (30%), **stress, depression and anxiety** (27%) and **infectious diseases** (including COVID-19) (21%).

C2 In the last 12 months, have you experienced any of the following health problems caused or made worse by your work? [MULTIPLE ANSWERS] (%)



Base: all respondents, EU27 (n=25 683)

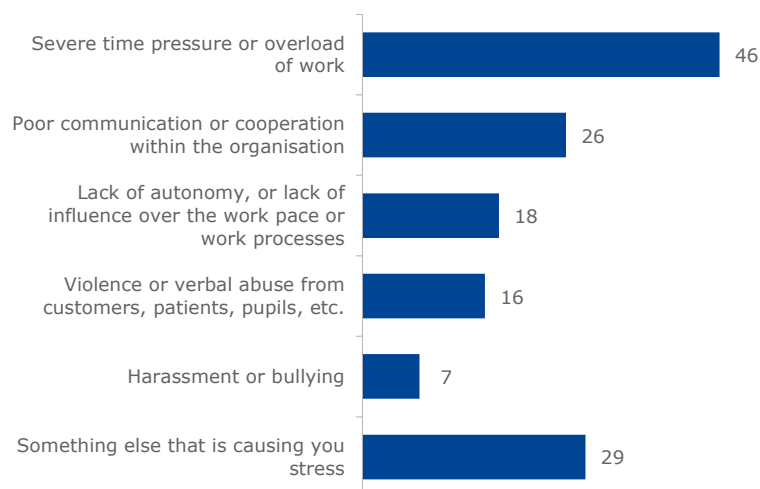
In 17 of the 27 EU Member States, and in Iceland, the most-frequently (or joint most-frequently) listed work-related health problem is overall fatigue. The proportion indicating this health problem is the highest in Poland (62%), followed by Lithuania (52%), Spain and Latvia (both 51%).

Higher-educated respondents are more likely to mention headaches and eyestrain caused or made worst by work (36% vs 25% of the least-educated respondents), but they are less likely to have experienced bone, joint or muscle problems or pain (28% vs 41%, respectively). A similar pattern of differences is seen when comparing professional, technical or higher administrator occupations and skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled manual workers and farm workers.

2.2. Exposure to psychosocial risk factors

Close to one in two respondents across the EU (46%) answer that they are exposed to **severe time pressure or overload of work**. About a quarter (26%) say the same about **poor communication or cooperation within their organisation** and 18% about **a lack of autonomy, or lack of influence over the pace of work or work processes**. **Violence or verbal abuse from customers, patients, pupils etc.** is mentioned by 16% of respondents, and 7% say they are exposed to **harassment or bullying at work**.

B1 Would you say that at work you are exposed to the following factors? (% 'Yes')



Base: all respondents, EU27 (n=25 683)

In line with the EU average results, **the largest share of respondents across all countries answer that they are exposed to severe time pressure or overload of work.** This stress factor is mentioned by 31% of respondents in Romania and 32% in Lithuania, and then increases to more than 50% in Cyprus, Slovenia, and Iceland (all 51%), France (52%), Finland and the Netherlands (both 54%) and Greece (55%).

Respondents working in medium-sized (20-249 employees) and large companies (250+ employees) are the most likely to be exposed to severe time pressure or overload of work (50%); this figure decreases to 46% in small companies (10-49 employees) and to 39% in micro companies (<10 employees).

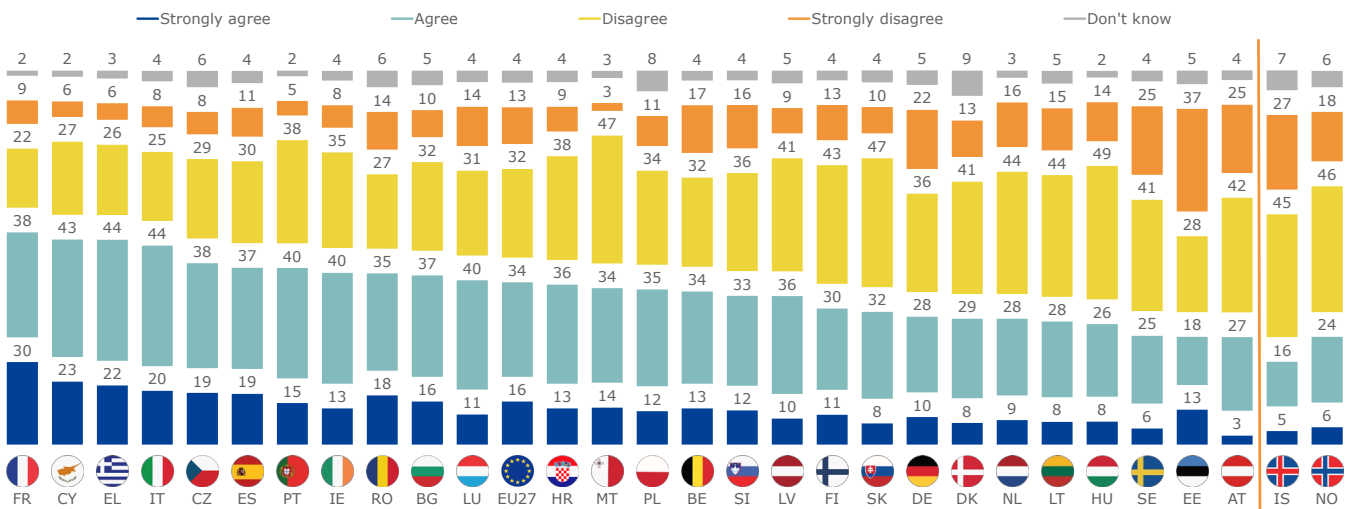
Section 3. Mental health in the workplace

3.1. Speaking about mental health in the workplace

Respondents across the EU are divided in their view whether disclosing a **mental health condition would have a negative impact on their career**: 16% 'strongly agree' and 34% 'agree' vs 13% who 'strongly disagree' and '32%' who 'disagree'. Nonetheless, close to six in ten respondents agree that **they would feel comfortable speaking to their manager or supervisor about their mental health** (18% 'strongly agree' and 40% 'agree').

In eleven Member States, a majority of respondents 'strongly agree' or 'agree' that disclosing a mental health condition would have a negative impact on their career. The proportion agreeing with this statement is particularly high in Italy (63%), Cyprus (66%), Greece (66%) and France (68%).

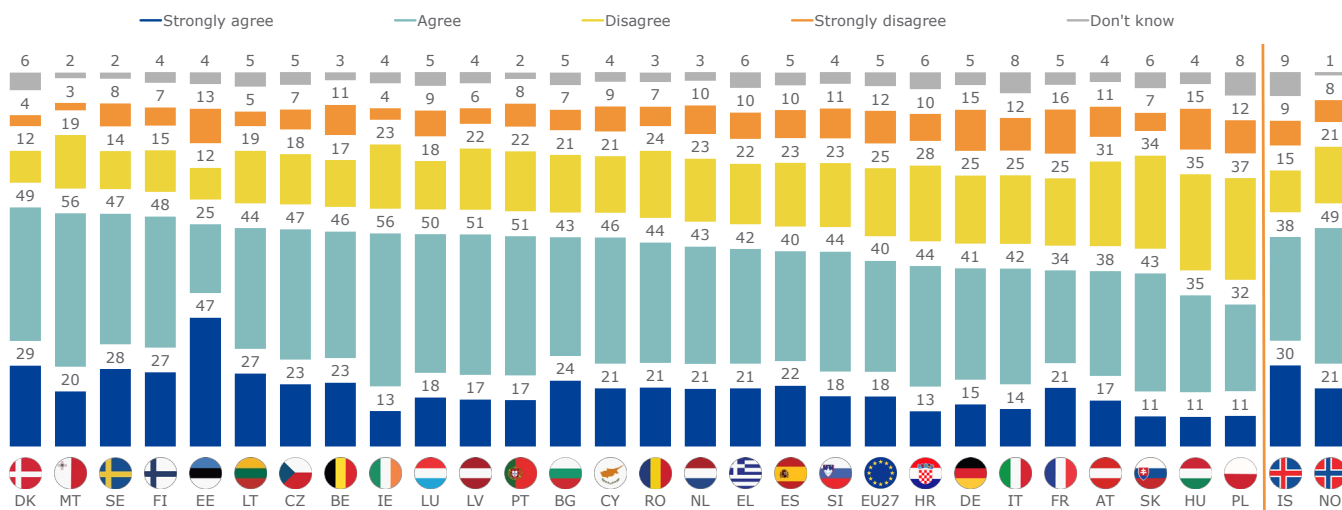
E2_1 Disclosing a mental health condition would have a negative impact on my career (% by country)



Base: all respondents (n=27 250)

In four countries, three quarters – or more – of respondents ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ that they would feel comfortable speaking to their manager or supervisor about their mental health: Finland (75%), Malta (76%), Sweden (76%) and Denmark (78%). In sharp contrast, in Poland and Hungary, less than half of respondents agree that they would feel comfortable speaking to their manager about a mental health problem (43% and 46%, respectively).

E2_2 I would feel comfortable speaking to my manager or supervisor about my mental health (% by country)



Base: all respondents (n=27 250)

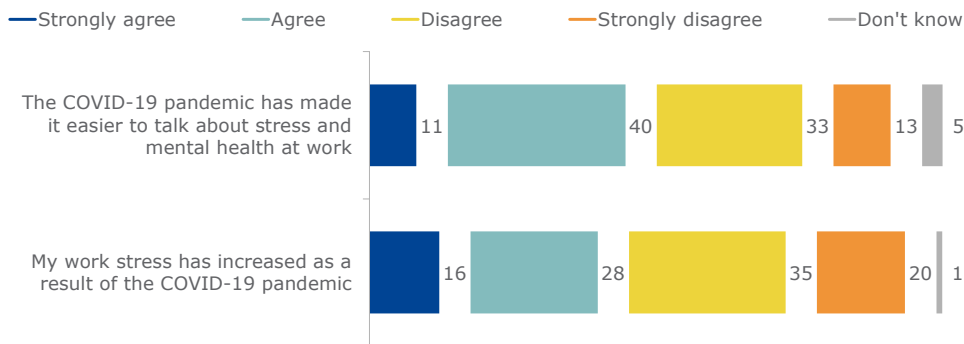
Lower-educated respondents are not as comfortable speaking to their manager about mental health issues as respondents with a higher level of education. While 53% of respondents who completed their education by age 15 agree with this statement, this figure goes up to 59% for respondents who stayed in education longer.

Respondents working in micro companies (<10 employees) also tend to feel less comfortable speaking to their manager about mental health issues (52%), in contrast to respondents working in larger size companies (61%-62%).

3.2. Impact of COVID-19 on stress and mental health

More than four in ten respondents across the EU agree that **their work stress has increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic** (16% 'strongly agree' and 28% 'agree'). About one in two respondents agree that their **COVID-19 pandemic has made it easier to talk about stress and mental health at work** (11% 'strongly agree' and 40% 'agree').

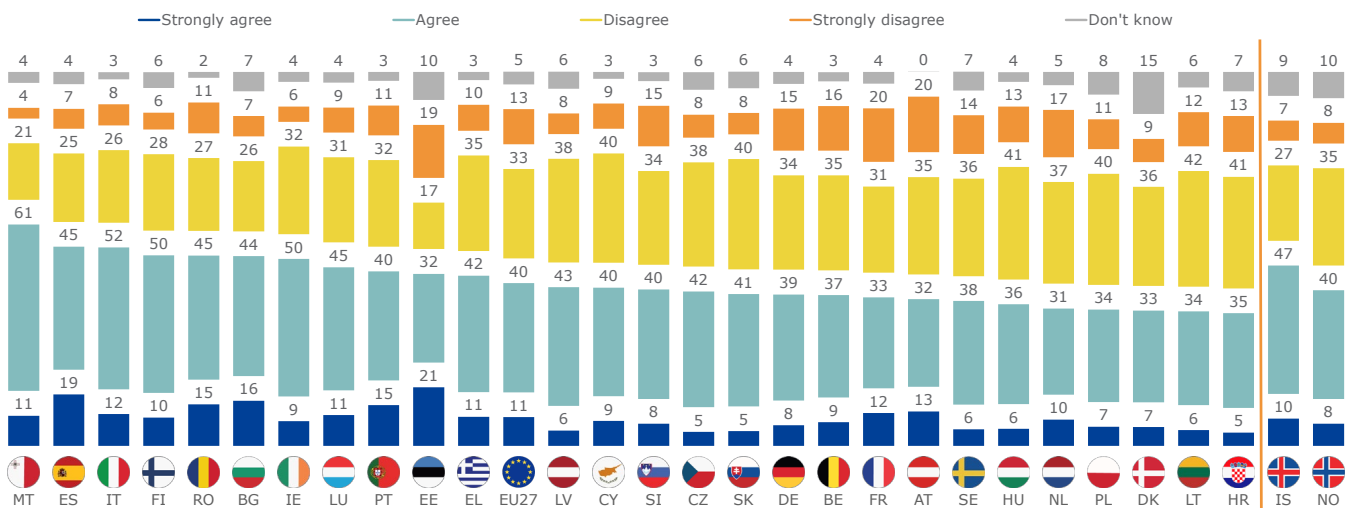
E2 Do you agree or disagree with the following statements on stress and mental health in your workplace? (%)



Base: all respondents, EU27 (n=25 683)

In Malta, 72% of respondents agree that the COVID-19 pandemic has made it easier to talk about stress and mental health at work; other countries at the higher end of the country ranking include Italy (63%) and Spain (64%). At the lower end of the ranking, however, not more than four in ten respondents agree that the COVID-19 pandemic has made it easier to talk about stress and mental health at work – e.g. 39% of the respondents in Croatia and 40% in Lithuania.

E2_3 The COVID-19 pandemic has made it easier to talk about stress and mental health at work (% by country)

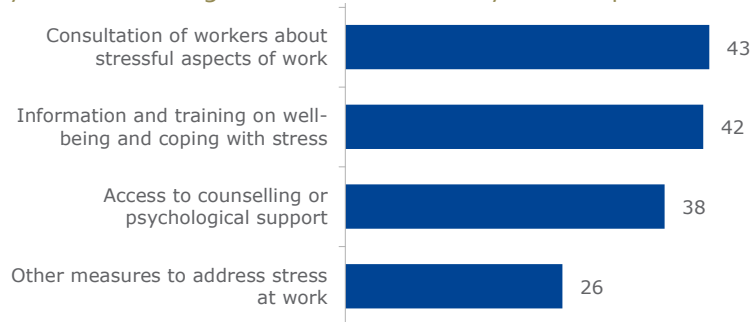


Base: all respondents (n=27 250)

3.3. Initiatives to address stress and mental health in the workplace

Available initiatives to prevent psychosocial risks and mental health issues in the workplace include **access to counselling or psychological support** (mentioned by 38% of workers), **information and training on well-being and coping with stress** (42%) and **consultation of workers about stressful aspects of work** (43%). The largest variation across countries is seen for **access to counselling or psychological support**. In Finland, 74% of respondents reply that they have access to counselling or psychological support to reduce or manage stress at work; this proportion is 68% in Denmark.

E1 Are any of the following initiatives available in your workplace? (% 'Yes')



Base: all respondents, EU27 (n=25 683)

Section 4. Managing safety and health at work

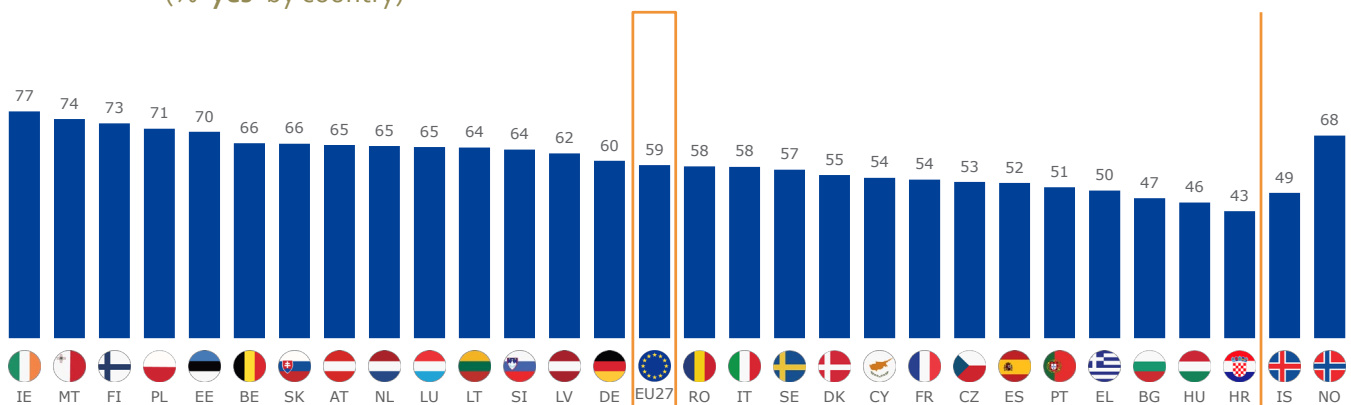
4.1. Workers' views on safety rules in the workplace

Across the EU, 81% of respondents agree that **implementing safety rules at their place of work is a good thing to have**, compared with 10% who reply that the safety rules at their place of work **make their job more difficult to do**.

Across most countries, a majority of respondents say that, at their workplace, **awareness raising or other activities** are being organised **to provide information on safety and health**, with the highest proportions being observed in Finland (73%), Malta (74%) and Ireland (77%). Only in three countries, less than half of respondents provide an affirmative answer: Croatia (43%), Hungary (46%) and Bulgaria (47%).

E1 Are any of the following initiatives available in your workplace?

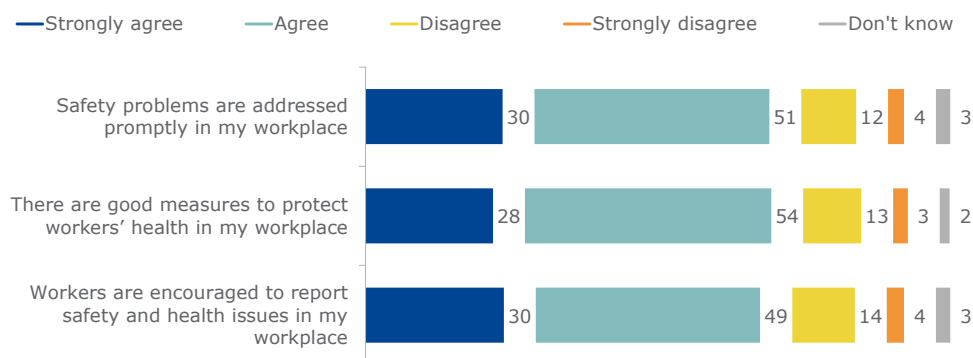
Awareness raising or other activities to provide information on health and safety (% 'yes' by country)



Base: all respondents (n=27 250)

A majority of respondents agree that **safety problems are addressed promptly in their workplace** (30% 'strongly agree' and 51% 'agree') and a vast majority of respondents agree that they **are encouraged to report safety and health issues in their workplace** (30% 'strongly agree' and 49% 'agree'). Similarly, respondents are very likely to agree that **there are good measures to protect workers' health in their workplace** (28% 'strongly agree' and 54% 'agree').

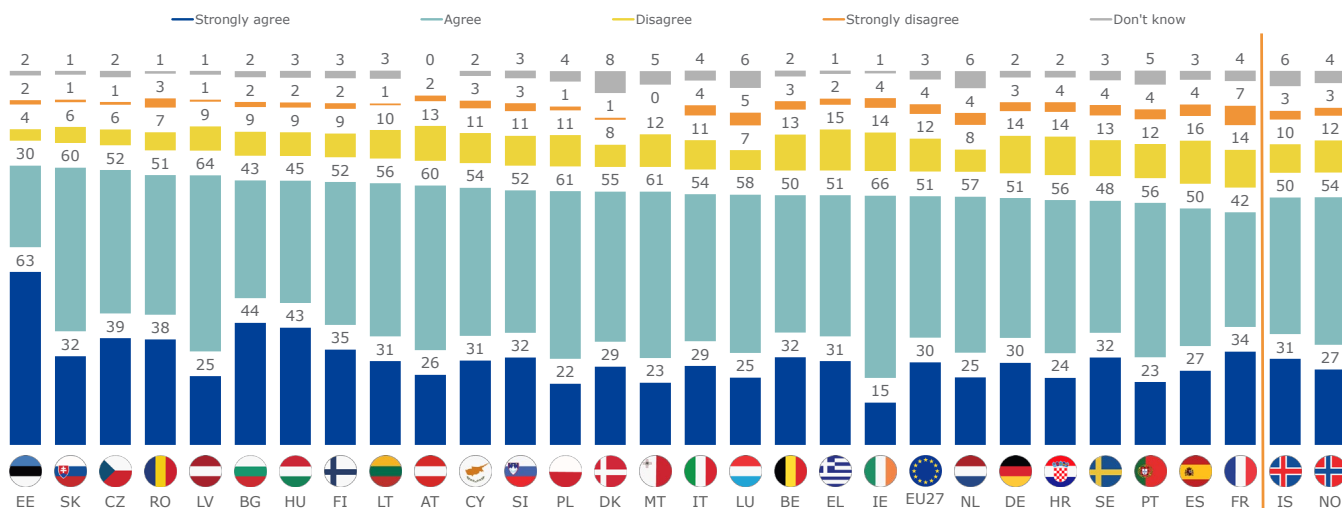
F2 Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (%)



Base: all respondents, EU27 (n=25 683)

In all countries, more than three quarters of respondents 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that **safety problems are addressed promptly in their workplace**, with the overall highest share of respondents being found in Czechia (91%), Slovakia (92%) and Estonia (93%). The proportion of respondents 'disagreeing' or 'strongly disagreeing' with the statement is the highest in Spain (20%) and France (21%), followed by Croatia and Ireland (both 18%).

F2_1 Safety problems are addressed promptly in my workplace (% by country)



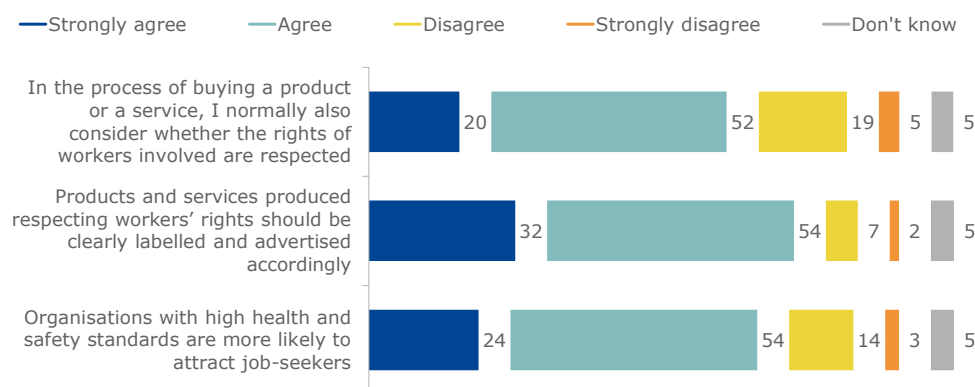
Base: all respondents (n=27 250)

4.2. General attitudes towards safety and health as an asset

Safety and health can also be seen as an asset to take into account when buying a product or applying for a job, as it can make a difference. About seven in ten respondents agree that, in the process of buying a **product or service, they normally also consider whether the rights of workers involved are respected** (20% 'strongly agree' and 52% 'agree').

A large majority of respondents also agree that **products and services produced respecting workers' rights should be clearly labelled and advertised accordingly** (32% 'strongly agree' and 54% 'agree'). Furthermore, over three quarters of respondents agree that **organisations with high health and safety standards are more likely to attract job-seekers** (24% 'strongly agree' and 54% 'agree').

F2 Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (%)



Base: all respondents, EU27 (n=25 683)

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