



WORKPLACE WELLBEING

TRENDS 2025

Introduction

Wellbeing at work is rapidly making its way to the top of the agenda within many organisations – you may have noticed? While lagging behind the UK, Irish employers are starting to invest more in support for their workers to enhance health, wellbeing and work-life quality.¹ While this is promising, there is room to improve in the approach and efficacy of these efforts.

There is a strong consensus among researchers and policy makers that employers need to evolve beyond a health-behaviour focus (e.g. gym access and mindfulness apps), towards addressing more work-related matters, widely proven to directly impact employee wellbeing. The largest ever workplace wellbeing study published in 2023 was pivotal in bringing this to the fore of public attention, highlighting that work-related determinants of wellbeing required more attention for real impact on worker wellbeing.²

Advocacy to focus on developing a healthier workplace culture and tackling workplace practices does not however in any way negate the immense value of health promotion, rather it suggests the need to do both in tandem with one another.³ While work-related impacts on employee wellbeing can be complicated for employers to address – recent EU directives⁴, and ISO psychological health and safety standards⁵, enforce the necessity for reform in this domain and call for the implementation of more sustainable work practices.

So what does this mean for workplace wellbeing in 2025?

While mapping trends in a meaningful way can be a big challenge given the wide variety of work contexts – there are some ubiquitous themes we anticipate will get more attention in the year to come.

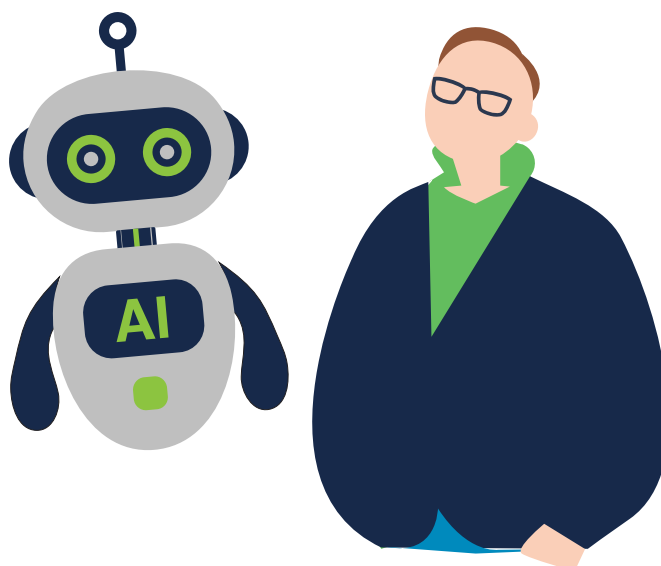


01 Supports to navigate AI Integration, advanced tech adoption and scaling automation

AI adoption is accelerating globally, an estimated 75% of knowledge workers use it regularly, however uptake among Irish professionals appears to be lagging slightly behind global counterparts at 29%.⁶ A recent PwC survey reported 69% of Irish employers are in the early stage of exploring and pilot testing.⁷

While employee sentiment is reportedly optimistic and generally workers are keen to utilise AI⁶ - there are reservations and anxieties about impending changes on the horizon, which is understandable due to the many unknowns regarding the integration of AI agents and advanced robotics in the workplace - leaders are trying to strike a balance between resilience and risk, agility and security.⁸

Additional supports will be required for workers - from digital upskilling opportunities, supports to navigate job insecurity, and exploring innovative ways to foster adaptability at individual, team and organisational level.⁶ This year saw the highest movement of employees to new employers in the last 3 years, with younger generations being the quickest to leave - and so these supports are fast becoming an imperative to retain staff.⁹



02 Evolving work models to meet both employee and business needs

Despite the increase in mandates to return to work onsite full-time in the past year – according to a recent report by Indeed, job postings for remote and hybrid roles in Ireland have reached a record high, up by 17.5% at the end of 2024, increasing to four times that before the pandemic. ¹⁰

While many employers are eager for staff to be onsite at least two and three days a week to support culture, innovation and collaboration – a survey by Gartner advised great care and consideration was necessary, as mandated return onsite can be risky for businesses, lowering employee intent to stay, with high-performers, women and millennials being the greatest flight risk. ¹¹

While remote and hybrid work is backed by legislative support and employee flexibility is a growing expectation, research indicates mixed findings on the long-term impact of remote work.

On one hand, flexible work arrangements provide parents and carers with greater autonomy and agency, enhancing their ability to participate in the workforce. On the other hand, there is evidence suggesting that individuals working from home are more likely to experience loneliness, highlighting the need for managers to receive training on how to best support them. ¹²

Organisations are likely to continue experimenting to find which work-models best support employee wellbeing, as well as optimise engagement, performance and retention. A recent CIPD report found 40% of Irish organisations had over half of the workforce working in a flexible/hybrid manner. ¹³



03 Refined mental health (MH) support and tailored interventions for vulnerable groups

Research indicates that stress, anxiety, depression and loneliness remain widespread among both the general and working population, and certain demographics appear to be more vulnerable.¹⁴

According to the most recent Gallup survey, 41% of employees experienced a lot of stress on the previous day and 20% experienced daily loneliness – the report found younger employees under 35 were experiencing more challenges than older colleagues.¹⁵

In the EU, a Eurofound survey reported approx. 50% of young to middle-aged adults (under 50) are frequently tense or anxious, 35% frequently lonely and 38% feeling depressed or downhearted all or most of the time – significantly more than adults over 50.¹⁶

Closer to home, while the most recent Healthy Ireland survey found the Positive MH score is marginally increasing since the pandemic, and the incidence of probable MH issues has declined - it appears that many individuals are still struggling.¹⁷ The most recent Irish Life Health of the Nation survey found 1 in 4 respondents reported feeling stressed all or most of the time – and only 42% believed their workplace is supportive of MH.¹⁸ The Laya Healthcare Workplace Wellbeing Index reported 1 in 5 respondents experiencing depression – and 1 in 10 having an official diagnosis.¹⁹

A recent extensive survey of Irish workplaces found more than 50% of employers reported absenteeism due to mental ill-health had increased.¹ Fortunately there is growing awareness regarding psychosocial hazards in the workplace, and in 2025 we expect to see psychological health and safety risk assessments becoming more commonplace.

Additionally, further progress is needed in understanding and providing more tailored MH support for higher risk demographics including women, carers and parents, members of the LGBTQ+ community, neurodiverse individuals, Gen Z and marginalised groups.^{13, 16, 19.}

Multiple reports also highlighted the growing need and appetite for managerial training and resources to build confidence in supporting team mental health and wellbeing.^{21,22.}

04 Increased focus on the quality of work relationships and enhancing social connection

Belonging and connection at work has been identified as one of the strongest drivers of employee wellbeing.²

While great progress has been made in reducing the incidence of workplace bullying, inequities and harassment – unfortunately microaggressions and subtle harassment are still pervasive. A recent CIPD survey reported 5% of employees experienced discrimination at work, negatively impacting many employees, especially in marginalised groups.²⁰

This is highly relevant for Irish employers as the national workforce has become increasingly multicultural in recent years. In 2024 there were 149,200 immigrants which was a 17-year high – 62,400 were returning Irish, EU and UK citizens, the remaining 86,800 were citizens of other countries.²³

While diversity is something to be celebrated it also comes with challenges. Individuals from different ethnic backgrounds can have very different worldviews, values, customs and norms – as such, supporting the integration of global workers is likely to become a growing area of focus to enhance work-life experience for all.

Some avenues to support healthier work relationships include identifying and addressing personal biases, enhancing communication skills, developing healthy conflict resolution and building the confidence to speak up. Psychological safety is an increasingly recognised term that describes that capability and willingness to express ideas, objections, mistakes and feedback freely at work – and there is mounting evidence indicating the positive correlation with employee wellbeing.²⁴ Supporting workers at all levels to give and receive constructive feedback and navigate common relational tensions will likely get more focus this year.



05 Continued evolution of holistic wellbeing programme planning

As mentioned, the growing emphasis on tackling work-determinants of wellbeing does not negate the benefit of offering support to enhance employee health behaviours such as physical activity, dietary behaviour, sleep hygiene, stress management and more. A recent McKinsey report highlights the need for employers to address both drivers and enablers of wellbeing at work, and adopt an increasingly holistic approach to supporting the diverse needs and preferences of the workforce. ³

A strong word of caution when interpreting media reports that espouse the inefficacy of workplace health promotion - media can sensationalise these reports with broad generalised statements without looking closer at the evidence. ²⁵

General population statistics indicate an ongoing need for the continued provision of support to tackle health-related challenges in the workplace. According to the most recent Healthy Ireland report, the majority of adults report good/very good health (81%), and good/very good quality of life (86%) - however preventable chronic health conditions are pervasive (41%), and approx. 60% of the adult population is overweight/obese. ^{17, 18.}

Employee input in planning the annual programme topics and events is proven to enhance engagement with health promotion initiatives, a collaborative approach empowers workers to find solutions to challenges and pain points that matter most. ²⁶

Last year themes such as financial stress surrounding the cost of living were recurrently cited as taking a significant toll on employee mental health at global, European and national levels. ^{14,16, 18, 19.} Providing employees with support to enhance their financial wellbeing could be just one impactful element to include within a 2025 annual wellbeing programme.

Additionally the provision of demographic-specific supports such as menopause awareness, men and women's general health, and life-stage specific training and resources are likely to feature more in programming in alignment with global awareness day campaigns.

06 Growing pressure for transparent reporting on employee health and wellbeing

Lastly the topic of measurement and reporting on employee health and wellbeing is expected to get more focus in the year to come.

This is driven in part by growing awareness of the importance and value of ESGs, and their contribution to meeting the UN SDGs which is currently off track.²⁷ In addition to growing expectations among investors to see evidence of sustainable practices in this area and the rise of voluntary reporting through groups such as B-Corp and GRI.²⁸

While there is much debate over the optimal methodology, which is beyond the scope of this article, there is however an overwhelming consensus on the value and need to measure, monitor and periodically review employee wellbeing metrics.

Intergovernmental agencies such as the OECD are strongly advocating for a collaborative and multipronged approach to ensure more robust and transparent reporting across all member states and at all tiers.



CONCLUSION

As mentioned at the outset of the article, providing a meaningful depiction of workplace trends that applies broadly is somewhat of a challenge in the current climate – but these six areas are likely to get more attention in the year to come.

The Healthy Ireland - Healthy Workplaces Programme is here to provide continued direction and guidance to participating employers on ways to optimise wellbeing supports for workers.

What trends are you seeing in your workplace? Let us know!

email us at info@healthyworkplace.ie



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