

Well-Being and Happiness in the Workplace in a Globalised Economy: Comparative Perspectives on Labour-Market Structures and Employee Rights

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Abstract

Labour law has undergone profound transformations over the past decade due to digitalisation, workforce mobility, and the increasing flexibility of employment relationships. As a result, workplace well-being and employee happiness have become priorities in a globalised economy. Globalisation has redefined the dynamics of employment relationships, bringing to the forefront the need to strike a balance between personal and professional life, ensure active employee participation in decision-making processes, and provide a safe working environment. In this context, interactions between the main socio-economic actors are evolving towards more flexible forms, characterised by innovative social dialogue aimed at identifying solutions to achieve a widely recognised ideal: creating a work environment that supports happiness and well-being. At the same time, integrating employees' aspirations, demands, and expectations into organisational strategies is becoming an essential condition for the efficient functioning of any business entity. The focus is increasingly shifting towards the human dimension of work, by valuing employees' experiences and ensuring job satisfaction and happiness. Against the backdrop of these transformations, labour law faces significant challenges generated by globalisation, which intensifies competition and directly impacts organisations' ability to adapt and maintain long-term viability. In the context of economic globalisation, concern for employees' well-being and happiness has become a strategic tool, not merely a social objective. Consequently, organisations have developed policies aimed at balancing economic performance with the quality of working life.

Keywords: global challenges, employee well-being and happiness, comparative labour law, strategies.

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1. Well-Being and Happiness – New Paradigms in the Regulation of Labour Relations

Before analysing the legal regulations in the field of labour law, as well as the highly complex judicial practice, it is necessary to define and understand the main concepts with which we will operate in this research, as well as the main social phenomena.

The concept of happiness, although extremely vague, remains a fundamental ideal of human existence, found not only in the personal sphere but also in the legal, political and social spheres.

According to Ed Diener and Robert Biswas-Diener, happiness is not a ‘destination’, but rather a ‘continuous process’; it is ‘a way of travelling the road’, and not its ‘end point’. The two authors argue that individuals who feel engaged and satisfied at work generally tend to perform better and be more efficient in their work.⁴

From Bentham to Rawls, via Mill and right through to existentialist reflections, happiness remains an essential philosophical concept that brings together ethics, politics and psychology. It is a ‘Greater Good’ that involves not merely pleasure or comfort, but a meaningful life, in harmony with personal and social goals and values. This integrative vision prepares us to understand contemporary paradigms of happiness and associated public policies.⁵

From a general perspective, happiness is often understood as a state of well-being, of inner contentment. The Universal Dictionary of the French Language (Nodier and Verger) defines it as a state in which nothing is lacking for the satisfaction of life’s needs and for securing its benefits, comforts and pleasures.⁶

⁴ Renata Tomaszewska and Aleksandra Pawlicka, “Seeking Happiness in Consumer Society: Inspirations for Pedagogy,” *Labor et Educatio* 8 (2020): 282, <https://doi.org/10.4467/25439561LE.20.015.13006>.

⁵ Ananda Majumdar, “The Pursuit of Happiness in Humanity,” in *2nd International Siirt Conference on Scientific Researches: Conference Proceedings Book* (Siirt, Turkey, March 21–23, 2022), 753–54, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/359690830_Pursuit_of_Happiness_in_Humanity (accessed February 15, 2026).

⁶ Charles Nodier and Victor Verger, *Dictionnaire universel de la langue française, rédigé d’après*

Thus, happiness appears as a profoundly personal matter, the legal regulation of which is debatable. Through a legislative device, however, it can be considered that this subjective state acquires legal relevance, being classified as a legal fiction – that is, a construct which, although not entirely corresponding to reality, produces legal effects.⁷

In recent times, happiness and well-being have become interdisciplinary concepts, with broad applicability in the field of labour law.

In social law, although happiness and well-being are not enshrined as legal norms per se, they can be regarded as fundamental principles guiding developments in labour and social protection.⁸

The measurement of well-being appears in a large number of international surveys, which have revealed interesting results. Most international surveys conclude that personal income is the main explanatory variable for well-being at a cross-sectional and microsociological level: the higher the income, the higher the household's disposable income, and the greater the sense of happiness and satisfaction among family members.⁹

In the context of a globalised economy, this raises the question: to what extent do the aspirations and expectations of each of us evolve in relation to the income we earn? Analysing today's society, we can say that these aspirations and expectations are evolving at an ever-increasing pace, which might explain the famous paradox of happiness. From this perspective, an improvement in material conditions does not necessarily lead to an increase in the level of happiness or satisfaction.

Another line of thought, supported by Easterlin's theory¹⁰, highlights the role of adaptation mechanisms: individuals tend to get used to rising incomes relatively quickly, which diminishes their positive impact on subjective well-being. In a globalised environment, this adaptation effect may even be amplified. Therefore, to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between income and well-being in the workplace, an analysis is required that goes beyond traditional economic indicators and incorporates the dimension of individuals' social perceptions. Perceptions regarding equity, social justice and one's own position within the labour market significantly influence the level of satisfaction experienced. Thus, labour market structures and employees' rights become determining

le dictionnaire de l'Académie (Legare Street Press, 2023).

⁷ Tiberiu Viorel Popescu, "Happiness between Ideal and Real," in *European Culture of Human Rights: The Right to Happiness*, 7th ed. (Bucharest: Universul Juridic, 2020), 272–73.

⁸ Félicien Lemaire, "Le bilan du projet BonDroit (2016–2019)," *Revue Juridique du Bonheur*, no. 3 (2021), <https://univ-angers.hal.science/hal-03211969> (accessed March 15, 2026).

⁹ Simon Langlois, "Bonheur, bien-être subjectif et sentiment de justice sociale au Québec," *L'Année sociologique* 64, no. 2 (2014): 390, <https://doi.org/10.3917/anso.142.0389>.

¹⁰ Ruut Veenhoven and Floris Vergunst, "The Easterlin Illusion: Economic Growth Does Go with Greater Happiness," *International Journal of Happiness and Development* 1, no. 4 (2014): 311–43, <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJHD.2014.066115>.

factors not only for income distribution, but also for the configuration of subjective well-being in a globalised economy.

Another interesting aspect is highlighted by the rise of consumerism, which underscores the link between the way society is organised and the dynamics of the labour market. A consumerist society inevitably produces collateral damage.

Arlie Russell Hochschild captures one of the most significant forms of ‘collateral damage’ caused by the spread of consumerism with a phrase that is as evocative as it is concise: ‘the materialisation of love’. Consumerism contributes to maintaining an emotional reversal between work and family. Exposed daily to a constant stream of advertisements, the individual is led to feel that they need more and more things. To satisfy these needs, they need money, and to get money, they work harder. Spending less and less time at home, they try to compensate for their absence from the family by giving gifts that involve financial costs. Thus, love ends up being expressed through material goods. And this mechanism perpetuates itself in a continuous cycle.¹¹

The reality of consumer practices does not substantially alter the prevailing view that work is regarded by the majority of the population (between 60% and 75%) in Northern countries as a positive necessity that facilitates access to happiness. This view contributes to legitimising a genuine ‘investment in work’, even in the context of contemporary working conditions characterised by a high degree of demand, intensity and stress.¹²

In this context, well-being and happiness emerge not merely as abstract ideals, but as emerging normative benchmarks, capable of reconfiguring the balance between flexibility and protection in the regulation of labour relations.

2. The Emerging Triad: Labour Law, Well-Being and Happiness at Work

Labour law provides a set of legal instruments to promote well-being and happiness at work. Various factors, such as housing policies, mobility or related social services (e.g. childcare), indirectly contribute to shaping employees’ well-being.

Governments influence happiness through political and institutional decisions, but the reverse is also true: citizens’ level of happiness influences support for different types of regimes.¹³

¹¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 120.

¹² Jean-Pierre Durand, “Comment re-penser le travail?” *L’Homme & la Société*, no. 162 (2006): 13, <https://doi.org/10.3917/lhs.162.0011>.

¹³ Vasile Miltiade Stanciu, “In Search of Solutions to the Triad: State–Global Society–Happiness,” in *European Culture of Human Rights: The Right to Happiness*, 7th ed. (Bucharest: Universul Juridic, 2020), 285.

Globalisation is a phenomenon that brings about many changes. It is thus transforming the world into a single entity, through social and economic institutions and policies. And economic globalisation gives rise to a unique social dialogue among economic actors to ensure the well-being of employees in the workplace.

As part of the BonDroit project¹⁴ at the University of Angers, numerous experts have examined the link between law, public policy and the pursuit of happiness across various branches of law, exploring how legal norms can incorporate this social objective. Thus, by analysing happiness and labour law, it was concluded that legal frameworks – whether European Union law, national legislation or collective agreements – impose obligations on employers regarding quality of life at work, both to prevent psychosocial risks and to promote employees' personal development. Although these aspects were initially regulated through state intervention, they are now shaped through collective bargaining at the company level.

In this regard, an extremely interesting development can be observed. We are witnessing a shift from a rigid approach to quality of life at work, centred on legal norms, towards a much more flexible approach, in which socio-economic actors play an essential role in defining standards for quality of life at work, thereby seeking to achieve this new universal goal: happiness and well-being at work.

Labour law and organisational policies must move beyond a formal approach and incorporate psychosocial dimensions in order to genuinely promote well-being at work.

Pierre Garner and Patrice Laroche presented the findings of their research in the paper 'The effects of self-efficacy on the relationship between work-life balance and job satisfaction. *New models of HRM?*'¹⁵ This research focuses on the relationships between work-life balance, feelings of self-efficacy and job satisfaction. A questionnaire was administered to a sample of 232 SME managers in the Lorraine region. The study's results show, on the one hand, that work-family conflict – linked to stress – is negatively associated with job satisfaction and, on the other hand, that the sense of personal efficacy significantly moderates the negative effects of work-family conflict on job satisfaction. The analysis highlights two dimensions related to the sense of personal efficacy that appear to act differently on the work-family conflict linked to stress and job satisfaction. Thus, perceived self-efficacy feedback – that is, an individual's perception of how their

¹⁴ Centre Jean Bodin, "BonDroit: Bonheur & droit," accessed March 11, 2026, <https://centrejeanbodin.univ-angers.fr/fr/les-projets/projets-acheves-2/bondroit.html>.

¹⁵ Pierre Garner and Patrice Laroche, "Les effets du sentiment d'efficacité personnelle sur la relation entre l'équilibre travail-famille et la satisfaction au travail," paper presented at the 26e Congrès de l'AGRH, Montpellier, France, November 2015, <https://hal.science/hal-03029956> (accessed March 15, 2026).

superiors judge their work performance – appears to accentuate the negative effects of work-family conflict on job satisfaction.

It is also worth noting that perceptions of fairness and happiness vary depending on cultural, social and generational contexts. Different generations define happiness and its relationship with fairness in different ways.

For those born from the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s – the Baby Boomers – the essence of their happiness lies in leaving behind a legacy that will shape the future – of the world and of their successors. Generation X – born from the mid-1960s to the late 19 s of the 1970s – believes that happiness lies in the mundane, with an emphasis on personal and domestic progress. Millennials or Generation Y – born from 1980 to the mid-1990s – believe that the basis of happiness lies in the journey towards success. Consumerism dictates the path to happiness, effectively stripping it of its abstract meaning and transforming it into a hedonistic trend – what is sold to you is everything your heart desires, or everything your heart desires is available for purchase. Happiness becomes a chain of circumstances, a mere limitation, a lack of horizons – paradoxically, whilst we find ourselves in a period of the zenith of human civilisation. Generation Z (born from the mid-to-late 1990s to 2010) – the most ethnically and racially diverse society to date – is determined to find happiness through the opportunity to make a positive impact. All generations have the right to be happy.¹⁶

With regard to perceptions of happiness at work, a study conducted by Irena Bakanauskienė and Gustė Zagurskytė in the Lithuanian market reveals some extremely interesting findings¹⁷. The study's results identified the most important factors determining the sense of happiness at work among members of Generations Z, Y and X living in Lithuania. The survey data shows that Generation Z prioritises relationships with colleagues, the feeling that they can grow and develop within the organisation, as well as the opportunity for promotion within it, whilst Generation Y emphasises relationships with colleagues, achieving the organisation's set goals and self-confidence at work. For Generation X, however, the most important aspects are achieving the organisation's objectives, a good relationship with their manager, and the fact that the organisation provides all the tools necessary to carry out their work.

Having already outlined the general framework of the working environment and its key elements – namely happiness, well-being and rights – we must now turn our attention to analysing the tools at our disposal to effectively achieve this objective.

¹⁶ Ioana Alexandra Curcă, "Addressing the Issue of Happiness in the Context of Generational Change over the Last Century," in *European Culture of Human Rights: The Right to Happiness*, 7th ed. (Bucharest: Universul Juridic, 2020), 147–48.

¹⁷ Irena Bakanauskienė and Gustė Zagurskytė, "Different Generations' Expectations of Happiness at Work: The Case of Lithuania," *Management of Organizations: Systematic Research* 88, no. 1 (2022): 28, <https://doi.org/10.2478/mosr-2022-0010>.

3. From Collective Bargaining to Digitalisation: Key Leverage for Improving the Quality of Working Life

Currently, promoting well-being and happiness in the workplace is no longer solely an objective pursued by state authorities and private sector players, in their capacity as employers, but is increasingly becoming an active concern for employees. This is because, in the current context, they have an increasing number of rights, tools and mechanisms through which they can influence working conditions, whether we are talking about collective bargaining or social dialogue, or about labour market mobility or capitalising on the opportunities offered by digitalisation.

The employee is thus transformed from a passive beneficiary of welfare policies into an active participant in defining their own living conditions, an individual who seeks to humanise the working environment. This shift reflects a rebalancing of labour relations as well as an adaptation of the legal framework and organisational practices, which are increasingly geared towards recognising individual needs and creating a safe working environment that balances personal quality of life with professional performance.

Globalisation has brought about profound changes in the world of work, with both positive and negative effects. Consequently, there has been an increase in the number of jobs in certain sectors, such as IT or finance, and the international expansion of companies has contributed to the diversification of career opportunities. However, these developments have led to the disappearance of some traditional jobs, as certain sectors have moved to countries where labour is much cheaper.

And as change in this field shows no sign of stopping, employees must acquire new skills to adapt and remain professionally relevant, with the help of modern tools to enhance well-being in the workplace.

Collective bargaining at the company level thus becomes central to the regulation of these matters. Quality of life at work is a particularly telling example of this process. Initially promoted at the sectoral level and subsequently enshrined in law, quality of life at work has now become a subject of mandatory negotiation within companies. It functions as a comprehensive tool for regulating work organisations. A certain degree of control over employees' behaviour is also developing, extending beyond the strictly professional sphere. Thus, issues such as diet, physical activity, sleep management or tobacco use, although they pertain to private life, are integrated into organisational concerns, as they can influence performance and the working environment. A continuum is thus emerging between professional and personal well-being, which favours the emergence of a logic of 'behavioural support'.¹⁸

¹⁸ Lemaire, "Le bilan du projet BonDroit," 3–5.

Let us take the example of France, where quality of life and working conditions are governed by an extremely complex legal framework. The national interprofessional agreement of 19 June 2013 on a policy to improve quality of life at work and professional equality¹⁹ stipulates that this concept of quality of life at work covers working conditions, professional recognition and work-life balance, in close connection with the principle of equality. It contributes directly to the performance and competitiveness of organisations through social dialogue and employee engagement.

Law No. 2015-994 of 17 August 2015 on social dialogue and employment²⁰, also known as the Rebsamen Law, introduced the obligation to negotiate on quality of life at work. Decree No. 2017-1387 of 22 September 2017 on the predictability and security of employment relationships²¹ – the Macron 3 Decree – restructured collective bargaining into three blocks, one of which concerns professional equality and quality of life at work. These have facilitated teleworking and reorganised social dialogue by grouping together mandatory topics, particularly those relating to gender equality.

Law No. 2021-1018 of 2 August 2021 on strengthening prevention in the field of occupational health²² has reinforced this framework, placing the emphasis on the health, safety and performance of employees.

The French National Agency for the Improvement of Working Conditions notes that among the most common issues in collective bargaining on quality of life at work are work-life balance (part-time work, teleworking, additional leave, flexible working hours), the establishment of forums for dialogue and the right to disconnect, as well as age management, difficult working conditions, health and safety, equal opportunities, diversity and the integration of people with disabilities.²³

¹⁹ France, “Accord national interprofessionnel du 19 juin 2013 relatif à une politique d’amélioration de la qualité de vie au travail et de l’égalité professionnelle,” extended by Arrêté du 15 avril 2014, *Journal officiel de la République française*, April 23, 2014, https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/conv_coll/id/KALITEXT000028216997/ (accessed March 10, 2026).

²⁰ France, Loi no. 2015-994 du 17 août 2015 relative au dialogue social et à l’emploi, *Journal officiel de la République française*, no. 0189, August 18, 2015, <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loi/id/JORFTEXT000031046061> (accessed March 10, 2026).

²¹ France, Ordonnance no. 2017-1387 du 22 septembre 2017 relative à la prévisibilité et la sécurisation des relations de travail, *Journal officiel de la République française*, no. 0223, September 23, 2017, <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000035607388> (accessed March 10, 2026).

²² France, Loi no. 2021-1018 du 2 août 2021 pour renforcer la prévention en santé au travail, *Journal officiel de la République française*, no. 0178, August 3, 2021, <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000043884445> (accessed March 11, 2026).

²³ Agence nationale pour l’amélioration des conditions de travail (Anact), “Négociateur sur la qualité de vie et les conditions de travail à La Réunion: dynamique collaborative et résultats des accords,” June 26, 2025, <https://www.anact.fr/negociateur-sur-la-qualite-de-vie-et-les-conditions-de-travail-la-reunion-dynamique-collaborative-et> (accessed March 9, 2026).

Another example worth examining is the recent legislation in the UK. The Employees' Rights Act 2025²⁴ represents one of the most comprehensive reforms of British labour law in recent decades and is a long-awaited reform. Its main objectives are to modernise the legislative framework, strengthen worker protection and support economic growth, all of which inevitably lead to an increase in employees' well-being and happiness. Employees' rights are significantly expanded, with the law introducing major changes, such as amendments to holiday entitlement and social security, reform of the unfair dismissal regime, strengthened protection against harassment, and regulation of zero-hours contracts.

With regard to collective bargaining, the law aims to strengthen the role of trade unions and social dialogue, bringing the British model closer to European systems based on extensive collective bargaining, such as the French example outlined above. Overall, the reform aims to improve the quality of work, increase the security of employment relationships and strike a balance between flexibility and protection in a modern economy.

A highly insightful analysis of this legislative reform in the UK can be found in a research paper by Jane Parry and Patrick Brione. The Employees' Rights Act 2025 addresses a matter of paramount importance for employees' rights, namely collective bargaining. This Act represents a radical departure from the previous British model, where negotiations usually took place at company level. The Act thus introduces a mechanism for specific categories, such as teaching assistants and social care workers, through fair pay agreements and the reactivation of dedicated negotiation bodies. The aim of these measures is to improve working conditions and reduce staff turnover in the sectors concerned²⁵.

Over the past few decades, the proportion of workers covered by collective agreements has fallen on average, by around 25% in OECD countries, although there are significant differences between countries: whilst France and Italy have very high coverage rates (nearly 100%), in the United States and Japan, these are below 20%. Countries where collective bargaining takes place at the sectoral or national level tend to maintain more stable and extensive coverage. OECD analyses indicate that well-organised collective bargaining systems, based on social dialogue, are associated with higher-quality working conditions and a higher level of worker protection.²⁶

A particularly significant period for the major changes that have taken place in the field of labour law was the time when society was grappling with the

²⁴ United Kingdom, *Employment Rights Act 2025*, 2025, c. 36, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2025/36/contents> (accessed March 13, 2026).

²⁵ Jane Parry and Patrick Brione, 'Good Work' and the *Employment Rights Bill*, Research Briefing CBP-10307 (London: House of Commons Library, September 24, 2025), 41–42, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10307/> (accessed February 12, 2026).

²⁶ Parry and Brione, 'Good Work' and the *Employment Rights Bill*.

COVID-19 pandemic. During this period of crisis, happiness meant feeling safe and in solidarity with others. Employers and managers had to understand that well-being improves performance and, therefore, taking into account the decisions adopted by national or international institutions/organisations, adopt appropriate tactics, taking small steps to halt the collapse of businesses and revitalise them.²⁷

Many of the measures taken during this period, however, have proved extremely beneficial; they are still used today by numerous organisations to maintain high levels of employee happiness, as they have proved to be highly effective. Among these measures we can list remote working, the right to disconnect, and flexible working hours, which have demonstrated that ensuring a happy working environment that prioritises employees' needs can be an extremely important source of motivation for staff, perhaps at times even more important than financial incentives.

Another aspect that needs to be examined is digitalisation. Technology, and in particular artificial intelligence and automation, represent some of the most significant challenges currently facing the labour market.

In recent years, around 80% of British companies have adopted such technologies, and estimates suggest that nearly 39% of current skills will become obsolete within the next five years. Although technology can improve the quality of work, it also poses significant risks, such as job losses, increased control over employees and the exacerbation of inequalities. In this context, the essential role of organisations and legislative regulation in the responsible use of technology is highlighted so that the quality of work is protected and a fair distribution of its benefits is ensured.²⁸

In conclusion, collective bargaining remains an essential tool for balancing labour relations, whilst digitalisation is emerging as a driving force for transformation; both are capable of redefining both working conditions and protection standards, making a decisive contribution to improving the quality of working life in the contemporary economy. Employees play an extremely important role, evolving from the status of passive beneficiaries of welfare policies to that of active participants in shaping their own living and working conditions.

4. Legislative Models and Happiness at Work: International Studies and Examples

In this section, we will attempt to observe different values depending on culture, legislative regulation and the strategies adopted at an institutional level.

²⁷ Alexandru Trifu, "Happiness Facing to the Perfidious and Invisible Challenge of COVID-19," *Business Excellence and Management* 10, special issue 1 (2020): 65–66, <https://www.cceol.com/search/article-detail?id=895170> (accessed March 18, 2026).

²⁸ Parry and Brione, 'Good Work' and the Employment Rights Bill, 48.

We will see how the concepts of happiness and well-being vary across different cultures and legal systems.

The results of surveys conducted by the European Data Journalism Network show that job satisfaction in Europe is influenced by a combination of factors such as contract type, working time flexibility, sector of activity, professional status and socio-demographic characteristics. Overall, the majority of European workers report high levels of satisfaction, with significant differences between countries. Flexible working hours emerge as one of the most important factors for satisfaction, even more so than remote working, and those with permanent contracts and higher education tend to be more satisfied. Furthermore, self-employed workers in certain countries report high levels of satisfaction, though this depends on the voluntary nature of the work. The surveys also highlight variations by gender, age and sector, but emphasise the difficulty of comparing perceptions across countries and the fact that there is no universal formula for happiness at work.²⁹

In this overview of applicable labour laws, as well as the tools available to each organisation to ensure happiness and well-being at work, we would like to begin by mentioning some innovative organisational initiatives, which have been proliferating increasingly in recent times.

In 2013, Venezuela created the post of Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Supreme Social Happiness, and Ecuador appointed a Secretary of State for *'buen vivir'* or *'living well'*. But what does the institutionalisation of happiness mean? Some say it means the authorities' concern for the happiness of an ever-increasing number of people, that governments are changing or adopting strategies and priorities in an attempt to become increasingly competitive, and that alongside physical and mental health (in the most developed economies), we should also be concerned about people's emotional well-being.³⁰

The Minister of Happiness in the United Arab Emirates, Ms Ohood Al Roumi, believes that *'The government's most important task is to create happiness. In 2011, the UN encouraged member states to view happiness as a holistic approach to development.'* Ms Al Roumi said in an interview with CNN that *'The government's role is to create an environment in which people can flourish, reach their potential and choose to be happy.'*³¹

²⁹ Ana Ruiz and Marta Ley, "The Job Satisfaction Map: These Are the Countries Where Workers Live Best," *European Data Journalism Network*, December 12, 2022, https://www.europeandatajournalism.eu/cp_data_news/the-job-satisfaction-map-these-are-the-countries-where-workers-live-best/ (accessed March 20, 2026).

³⁰ Mariana Nicolae, "Fericirea instituționalizată... de la indicatorul fericirii la Ministerul Fericirii," INACO, <https://inaco.ro/fericirea-institutionalizata-de-la-indicatorul-fericirii-la-ministerul-fericirii/> (accessed May 25, 2024).

³¹ Amna Ehtesham Khaishgi, "'Happiness Is a Serious Job': UAE's Minister of Happiness Embraces New Role," *The National*, March 20, 2016, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/uae/government/2016/03/20/happiness-is-a-serious-job-uae-minister-of-happiness-embraces-new-role/>

In recent decades, alongside various initiatives and recommendations, a system inspired by Buddhism has been developed in Asia, known as GNH (Gross National Happiness). It proposes a holistic assessment of well-being, integrating both objective and subjective indicators. GNH aims for a balance in development at both societal and organisational levels, promoting a long-term vision and stability. The model is based on four essential pillars: good governance, sustainable socio-economic development, the preservation and promotion of culture, and environmental protection. Both the principles and the measurement methods reflect the same values, but from two complementary perspectives: employee well-being and organisational capacity.³²

Another aspect that needs to be examined is the balance between family life and one's career. Leisure time is essential for cultivating the higher faculties of the human mind (reading, reflection, family life), not merely for passive recreation.

In 2023, the average actual working week for people aged between 20 and 64, in their main job, in the European Union, was 36.1 hours. A closer look at EU countries reveals notable differences. The longest working weeks were recorded in Greece (39.8 hours), Romania (39.5 hours), Poland (39.3 hours) and Bulgaria (39.0 hours). In contrast, the shortest working weeks were recorded in the Netherlands (32.2 hours), Austria (33.6 hours) and Germany (34.0 hours).³³ In 2024, it is observed that the actual number of weekly working hours remains the same in Greece, Poland and Bulgaria, whilst Romania has reduced this figure by almost one hour. The Netherlands, Germany and Austria remain among the countries with the shortest working weeks, joined; however, by Denmark with 33.9 hours.³⁴

We therefore propose, *de lege ferenda*, a statutory reduction in working hours to promote family and intellectual life.

Another extremely important phenomenon that emerged as a result of COVID-19, but which has persisted to this day, is 'false' self-employment, which refers to situations where workers are obliged by the organisations that pay them to register as self-employed, even though they lack essential elements of genuine self-employment.

The study's findings suggest that self-employment, although often asso-

ment/happiness-is-a-serious-job-uaes-minister-of-happiness-embraces-new-role-1.201750 (accessed May 24, 2024).

³² Andrea Bencsik, "Measuring Organisational Well-Being and Happiness Based on GNH Logic," *Economics and Sociology* 15, no. 3 (2022): 272, <https://doi.org/10.14254/2071-789X.2022/15-3/15>.

³³ Eurostat, "How Many Hours per Week Do Europeans Work?," May 30, 2024, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20240530-1> (accessed May 14, 2025).

³⁴ Eurostat, "People in the EU Worked on Average 36 Hours per Week," May 14, 2025, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20250514-1> (accessed May 14, 2025).

ciated with autonomy, is characterised by longer working hours, apparent flexibility but lower quality of working time, and increased stress levels, particularly among entrepreneurs who employ staff. This pressure can influence decisions regarding business development, with many entrepreneurs preferring to remain on a small scale to maintain a better work-life balance, although this may limit the positive economic and e impact of entrepreneurship. At the same time, high levels of stress and poor quality of working time can have negative consequences for health and productivity, though these may be offset, in some cases, by a higher level of job satisfaction. In this context, the study highlights the need to rethink traditional models of entrepreneurship by promoting alternative forms, such as part-time work, the sharing of responsibilities or team-based entrepreneurship, as well as the need for future research to analyse in greater depth the relationship between working hours, stress, satisfaction and well-being.³⁵

A key issue regarding the status of independent contractors (as claimed by platforms) in relation to workers on mobile apps is that the control exercised by platforms has been recognised by several national courts as a factor that may justify the existence of a relationship of subordination. A landmark ruling for this category of workers is that of the UK Supreme Court, handed down on 19 February 2021, which recognises Uber drivers as workers³⁶. Firstly, it is important to note that ‘worker’ status represents an intermediate category between self-employed contractors and employees, entitling workers to the minimum wage, compliance with working and rest time regulations – including paid annual leave – as well as protection in the event of public interest whistleblowing. The UK court considers that the platform exercises significant control over drivers, evidenced by five main factors: it unilaterally sets the price of journeys and, by implication, remuneration; it imposes contractual terms without negotiation; it monitors the rate of journey acceptance and may temporarily suspend activity in the event of repeated refusals; it uses a rating system that can lead to sanctions or exclusion; and it restricts communication with passengers, prohibiting contact outside the platform. On the basis of these findings, the UK Supreme Court held that there was a relationship of subordination to Uber, as well as a state of economic dependence, given that the only way in which drivers can improve their financial situation is to devote more time to the work carried out on the platform.³⁷

³⁵ Joern H. Block, José M. Millán, Alexandra Moritz, and Juan D. Ramos-Poyatos, “Working Hours, Working Time Flexibility and Stress at Work of Different Types of Entrepreneurs,” *Revue de l’Entrepreneuriat/Review of Entrepreneurship* 21, special issue 2 (2022): 85–86, <https://doi.org/10.3917/entre.hs2.0059>.

³⁶ *Uber BV and Others v. Aslam and Others*, [2021] UKSC 5, <https://www.supremecourt.uk/cases/uksc-2019-0029> (accessed March 11, 2026).

³⁷ Albert Albanezi, “The ‘Uberisation’ of Work: Is the Digital Labour Platform a Mere Intermediary, Given the Significant Control Exercised on ‘Platform Workers’?” *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Iurisprudentia* 68, no. 2 (2023): 106–19, [https://doi.org/10.24193/SUBBIur.68\(2023\).2.4](https://doi.org/10.24193/SUBBIur.68(2023).2.4).

In contrast, in Case C-62/19 *Star Taxi App v*³⁸, the Court of Justice of the European Union ruled that the service provided constitutes an information society service, as the platform does not exercise decisive control over the conditions of transport provision, limiting itself to facilitating contact between users and licensed taxi drivers, who carry out their activities independently.

The distinction between classifying digital platforms as transport service providers or as mere intermediaries in the information society is based, essentially, on the criterion of the degree of control exercised over service providers. Consequently, the comparative analysis highlights the fact that the intensity of the platform's control is the determining criterion for distinguishing between subordination and independence, with direct consequences for the legal status of workers and their level of professional autonomy, including implications for their well-being and satisfaction within atypical employment relationships.

Another issue relates to working from home. Some companies have already decided to do away with offices altogether. However, this approach risks overlooking significant potential negative effects of working exclusively from home. Such a change may undermine social and intellectual capital, which could have long-term consequences for both companies and employees. Although previous research has highlighted clear benefits in terms of productivity when working remotely, building meaningful relationships with colleagues, particularly with management, is essential for professional and personal satisfaction, and working exclusively from home does not allow these to develop to the same extent as when working in the office. Work is more than just a source of income; it is an important component of individual identity. Studies show that, in the event of job loss, approximately half of the negative impact on well-being is not caused by the loss of income, but by the loss of social relationships, identity and the routine associated with work. During the pandemic, flexibility has become an even more important factor in wellbeing at work. Even attending the office just one or two days a week can provide employees with the networks, routine and sense of identity needed to support their wellbeing and happiness. Thus, a flexible hybrid working model, which allows for face-to-face interactions, collaboration and socialising, can help rebuild social and intellectual capital and boost productivity, whilst also providing a framework for the development of society in the post-pandemic era.³⁹

All these issues have been analysed in Eurostat's statistics on work-life

³⁸ *Star Taxi App SRL v. Unitatea Administrativ Teritorială Municipiul București*, Case C-62/19, EU:C:2020:980, judgment of December 3, 2020, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:62019CJ0062> (accessed February 1, 2026).

³⁹ Maria Cotofan, Jan-Emmanuel De Neve, Marta Golin, Micah Kaats, and George Ward, "Work and Well-Being during COVID-19: Impact, Inequalities, Resilience, and the Future of Work," chap. 7 in *World Happiness Report 2021* (2021), 153–90, <https://www.worldhappiness.report/ed/2021/work-and-well-being-during-covid-19-impact-inequalities-resilience-and-the-future-of-work> (accessed March 3, 2026).

balance, which highlight the fact that achieving a balance between work and private life is a major challenge for European Union citizens, particularly for those with care responsibilities. The data show that having children significantly influences labour market participation, particularly for women, who frequently resort to part-time work or flexible working arrangements to cope with these responsibilities. Flexible working hours, teleworking and the ability to adapt work arrangements are essential factors in facilitating this balance, but limited access to care services (such as nurseries) and their high costs remain significant obstacles. At the same time, gender disparities persist, with women being more affected by work-life balance difficulties, which influence both the employment rate and the quality of professional and personal life.⁴⁰

The comparative analysis in this section of legislative models and studies highlights the fact that happiness at work is not a uniform concept, but is profoundly influenced by the regulatory framework and the institutional policies adopted, which calls for a flexible approach to the regulation of employment relations, geared not only towards legal protection but also towards the effective promotion of professional well-being.

5. Conclusions and Research Directions

Following this research, we have found that well-being and happiness at work must be fostered through the adoption of uniform legislation at a global level, whilst also taking into account cultural and societal particularities, as well as through the adoption of standardised practices by well-structured organisations.

In this regard, according to a study conducted in Turkey on a sample of 222 workers from various sectors (sales, marketing, healthcare, banking, finance and education), employees' mental health and positive psychological resources should be strengthened through the implementation of a wider range of practices.⁴¹

The two dominant objectives of labour law are protection and economic regulation. Working life is not merely a calculation to minimise fear and maximise the efficiency of time and effort expended, but also encompasses other essential dimensions of the work experience, such as satisfaction and enjoyment. In this context, greater attention should be paid to how labour law can contribute to

⁴⁰ Eurostat, "Reconciliation of Work and Family Life—Statistics," accessed February 1, 2026, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Reconciliation_of_work_and_family_life_-_statistics.

⁴¹ Seçil Taştan, Burcu Aydın Küçük, and Serin İşıaık, "Towards Enhancing Happiness at Work with the Lenses of Positive Organizational Behavior: The Roles of Psychological Capital, Social Capital and Organizational Trust," *Postmodern Openings* 11, no. 2 (2020): 192, <https://doi.org/10.18662/po/11.2/170>.

creating the conditions necessary for people to be happy in their professional lives.

Understanding well-being as a multidimensional and intercultural construct provides essential guidelines for global human resource management and public policy-making. What is the role of labour market segmentation and individualism in shaping well-being? How can intercultural management practices contribute to fostering a ‘high employee well-being profile’?

This perspective suggests that happiness should not be viewed as a static outcome that can be definitively achieved, but rather as a dynamic experience, built daily through employees’ interactions, motivations and perceptions. In this sense, organisations play a vital role in creating an environment that fosters engagement, autonomy and professional recognition. A positive working climate not only supports employees’ well-being, but also contributes to increased productivity, reduced staff turnover and the strengthening of long-term organisational performance.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which initially focused primarily on the economic and monetary aspects of well-being, now recognises the importance of the subjective component. This organisation emphasises the measurement and assessment of subjective well-being and identifies three components of this state of being: hedonic well-being (self-perception of autonomy, skills, life goals, and locus of control, i.e. the aspects and events over which a person believes they have control), positive and negative states (experiences of joy, happiness, pride and anxiety, sadness, pain) and life evaluation (job satisfaction, sense of security).⁴²

Whilst in this study we have focused more on the analysis of legislative regulations and case law, it would be of interest to extend this research to highlight the link between happiness and well-being at work and the way in which society correlates these aspects from a psychological perspective.

In the United States, levels of happiness rise slightly, on average, from the age of 18 until mid-life, after which they begin to decline gradually. This pattern, which applies to the general population, is the combined result of different trends in satisfaction across various areas of life: financial situation, family life, health and work. The moderate increase in happiness up to mid-life is mainly explained by greater satisfaction with family life and work, factors which offset the gradual decline in satisfaction with health. After this stage, the level of happiness begins to decline slightly, as the continued decline in satisfaction with health is accompanied by a reduction in satisfaction with family and work. However, these negative trends are partly offset by a significant increase, in later life, in satisfaction with financial circumstances. These conclusions are based on an

⁴² Zoé Perron, Julia Buzaud, Kevin Diter, and Claude Martin, “Approaches to Well-Being: A Multidimensional Field of Research,” *Revue des politiques sociales et familiales*, no. 141 (2021): 237, <https://doi.org/10.3917/rpsf.141.0231>.

analysis of data from the General Social Surveys in the United States, using the ‘synthetic panel’ technique specific to demography.⁴³

Although there are currently a few studies analysing levels of happiness in healthcare professions, such as the assessment of happiness levels among physiotherapists in the private sector in South Africa⁴⁴, or the happiness of nurses⁴⁵, studies linking happiness to specific professions remain insufficient on a global scale. In this context, there is a need to develop a greater number of studies correlating happiness with various fields of work, in order to better understand the impact of well-being on professional performance.

In terms of labour market structures, this transformation is not uniform: it can accentuate differences between categories of workers, depending on their position in the professional hierarchy and their bargaining power. Consequently, access to well-being and favourable working conditions becomes unevenly distributed, raising issues of social justice and the effectiveness of employees’ rights. Consequently, the analysis of well-being at work must incorporate not only the legal dimension, but also the socio-economic and cultural dimensions, given that work remains a fundamental element of identity and social integration, but also a potential source of vulnerability. From this perspective, policies on employment, labour market integration and social protection become essential for ensuring a balance between economic performance and respect for human dignity, as the foundation of genuine well-being.⁴⁶

Happiness varies greatly from one country to another. Whilst in the first section of this study we focused on general definitions of happiness, we shall now attempt to formulate a definition of well-being and happiness in the workplace, taking into account the different ways of looking at life. In any case, variations in happiness can be explained very well by the significant differences in the living conditions of each nation.

It would be impossible to formulate a definition of this concept without it being, to a greater or lesser extent, rooted in a particular moral outlook; in other words, without it reflecting a specific cultural context. The dimensions of well-being do not differ fundamentally between regions; rather, variations arise in the relative importance attached to each of them.⁴⁷

⁴³ Richard A. Easterlin, “Life Cycle Happiness and Its Sources: Intersections of Psychology, Economics, and Demography,” *Journal of Economic Psychology* 27, no. 4 (2006): 463, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joep.2006.05.002>.

⁴⁴ Michael Elliot, Margaret D. M. Cullen, and André P. Calitz, “Happiness among South African Private Sector Physiotherapists,” *South African Journal of Physiotherapy* 74, no. 1 (2018): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajp.v74i1.421>.

⁴⁵ Eda Ozkara San, “Concept Analysis of Nurses’ Happiness,” *Nursing Forum* 50, no. 1 (2015): 55–62, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nuf.12099>.

⁴⁶ Lemaire, “Le bilan du projet BonDroit.”

⁴⁷ Sophie Szymkowiak and Jordane Creusier, “Le bien-être au travail conçu et ressenti par les salar-

Well-being at work is a universal concept with global relevance, yielding benefits in terms of philanthropy, public health and the economy. Although there are cultural differences, the basic structure of workplace well-being remains relatively consistent from one country to another. To improve organisational performance – particularly in international contexts – intercultural management must adopt tailored practices capable of promoting high levels of well-being. Furthermore, further research is needed, particularly in emerging economies, to deepen our understanding of the phenomenon and optimise its application globally.

A social-democratic society provides essential services, offers protection against life risks (accidents, illness, unemployment), regulates social functioning (labour legislation, environmental legislation, etc.) and provides various social programmes (social assistance, pensions and other benefits). All these elements contribute to the well-being and happiness of individuals.

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