



Digitalisation and job quality in the hospital and health sector

DIGIQU@LPUB main findings

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Patterns and incidence of digitalisation in the sector

- In the hospital and health sector, digitalization takes many forms: electronic health records, watches or sensors for real-time monitoring of health parameters, robots that operate on patients (e-surgery), health services provided via digital platforms, and interactive websites for the training and retraining of medical staff.
- The use of mobile devices and ICT is widespread:
 - 78.2% of respondents from the hospital and health sector confirmed regular use of tablets, laptops and smartphones in their daily tasks.
 - The use of ICT is widespread as 93.9% of respondents from the hospital and health sector reported regular use of ICT.
 - Only 25.7% of respondents reported the use of machines operated by digital commands to perform certain operations (for example, lifting heavy loads or persons, monitoring equipment or persons)

The impact of digitalisation on work organisation

- The perception of the impact of digitalisation on work organisation features is **mainly negative**.
- FG and interviews emphasised the positive contribution of digitalisation, in terms of centralisation, exchange and consultation of patient information in near-real time and the detailed procedures to be followed.
- Negative aspects of digitalisation reported include:
 - the failure to fully replace traditional administrative tasks with digital tasks more related to maintaining and updating the digital information base in real time;
 - the risk of overconfidence in digital tools;
 - the permanent and omnipresent monitoring of individual worker performance;
 - the risks of downskilling and de-professionalisation of nurses, because of the time devoted to digital tasks.

The impact of digitalisation on working time

- The main perception voiced by workers in the DGQS survey is that digitalisation has **not changed the features of their working time**.
- Among the respondents assessing a more negative impact of digitalisation on their working time features, some point to an increase in the number of working hours set in their contracts but also in unsocial working time or overtime hours, either paid or unpaid. 24.5% of the respondents report a strong or partial reduction in the number and/or duration of break periods.
- The interviews and FG underscore that **overtime and overload are not the outcome of digitalisation** but result from other structural factors.
- Reference is also made to systems existing in the sector to cope with the chronic understaffing. Through dedicated web platforms, emails from managers or professional WhatsApp groups, specialised workers (notably nurses) may be allowed to access overtime hours at any time in other hospitals.

The impact of digitalisation on work-life balance

- The respondents to the DGQS express **a neutral assessment** of the impact of digitalisation on the work-life balance.
- Nearly half of the workers disagree that digitalisation has not changed the amount of time outside the workplace or has increased personal and family time.
- The role played by specific digital tools in the blurring of working and private life boundaries is mentioned in the national reports as **a particular feature of the sector**. Dedicated web platforms or instant messaging apps allow medical technicians, and particularly nurses, to apply to work supplementary hours in other services or units in order to compensate for the chronic understaffing in the sector. While this enables these workers to maintain or improve their income, it does so **at the expense of their personal time**.
- Another specific feature of the sector is the greater **unpredictability of working hours**, which can also significantly affect the work-life balance.

The impact of digitalisation on physical and mental health

- The majority of the respondents to the DGQS survey did not notice an impact of digitalisation on their state of health, reporting that they have **not experienced any changes** in their physical (52%) and especially mental (68.9%) health that could be related to digitalisation.
- However, 39.3% of workers declared that digitalisation of work has caused them **physical problems**, while **mental health** issues are reported by 28.2% of the respondents.
- About half of the workers report increased exposure to **psychosocial risks**.
- The impact of digitalisation on the mental health is commented on in some reports, mainly **the issue of stress arising from time pressure** and its potential effects on mental health.
- Stress factors highlighted include increased workload and pace of work, permanent remote monitoring of work and patients in a context of growing isolation of workers, anxiety generated by demanding work, possible malfunctions of tools, undertraining and the need to stay permanently connected.

The impact of digitalisation on skills and learning

- While the majority of respondents perceive digital training as a necessity, **not all of them in fact receive adequate training from their employer.**
- In the sector, **54% of the public workers stated that they had received training from their employer to acquire or develop new digital skills.** No less than 42.7% of workers report that they have not received any training from their employer. Of these, 19.9% have not received any training at all and 22.8% say that they learned informally at work.
- For 16.3% of the respondents, the training offered **fully matched their perceived needs.** For the majority of respondents, the match was partial but regular updates are necessary (55.7%). Around one in five workers felt that the digital training received had not well matched their individual needs.
- The views expressed by the trade unionists and workers interviewed contained in the national reports, are very much in line with those mentioned above for the other public sectors covered by this project.

The impact of digitalisation on job security and career prospects

- Within the public hospital and health services, the polarisation observed differs from that in the other public services considered in the project.
- A large proportion of respondents still consider that digitalisation has **not affected their job security or career prospects** (37.7 to 53%, depending on the items proposed).
- But for a larger proportion of workers in this sector, the view is **more pessimistic than in the other public services** (29.1 to 42.3% negative opinions) and positive perceptions are less frequently expressed (17.9 to 31.8%).
- It is worth noting that in the national reports, the issue of job security and future prospects of public service workers is barely discussed by the trade unionists and participants in the focus groups from the three public services.

The impact of digitalisation on worker's right

- Around half of the workers stated that they **did not know** whether a formal information/consultation procedure had been organised in their workplace.
- Almost one in four workers stated **more affirmatively that no information** and consultation procedure on the implementation of digitalisation had been organised in their workplace.
- Fewer than 10% of workers state that they have benefited from a formal information/consultation procedure, whether at individual level, through the unions or through a combination of the two methods.
- As for the right to disconnect:
 - just **36.5% in hospitals** feel pressure to be permanently or frequently connected
 - The vast majority of respondents from the three public services emphasise the importance of this right to disconnect as a workers' right, and the need to include it in labour law and social dialogue at all levels, from cross-industry to the workplace level.