

Quick overview of DIGIQU@LPUB findings for the public administrations sector

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Some cross-cutting aspects of digitalisation impact in public sectors

Mutually feeding sources in the project : workers (web survey (DGQS) + sectoral focus groups) + trade unions (interviews) + scholar and grey literature

Ambivalent effects of digitalisation on work: positive >< negative

- **Positive impacts:** greater flexibility in time and space (remote work), more autonomy at work, reduction of routine repetitive tasks, better work-life balance, improved collaboration, communication and knowledge sharing with colleagues and users, reduction of absenteeism and physical and mental health outcomes.
- **Negative impacts:** work intensification, de-personalisation of service tasks ('social time'), individualisation of work relationships with colleagues and managers, control and monitoring of workers and their job tasks, blurring of boundaries between work and private life, physical and mental health hazards

→ **tensions in public work and for public workers**

- greater flexibility in time and space vs. respect of effective contractual working hours / work-life balance vs. hyper-connectivity / individualised work vs. team work / enhanced information vs. information overload / increased autonomy vs. increased control / upskilling vs. deskilling / better public services vs. distancing from the users.

Prevalence of 'no change' and positive assessments in DGQS seems to indicate **that digitalisation is perceived by public workers as an additional factor, rather than the cause** of fundamental changes in the quality and organisation of work. in the public services.

- Changes are the outcome of pre-existing packages of reforms implemented as part of the process of privatising public services, the overwhelming application of the 'New Public Management' organisational paradigm in a context of constrained austerity of public expenses, including limitations of public workforce size.

Digitalisation and public administrations (PA)

- **Digitalisation in PA includes** the digital management of documentation and workflow, the use of communication tools, the setting-up of platforms for collaboration, telework, videoconferencing tools, 'chat' tools for officials and users, online training, corporate software and networks, digital time and attendance systems.
- **PA shows highest incidence of digitalisation from the 3 sectors:**
98,6% ICT tools - 83,5% mobile devices - except digitalised machines only 7,1%
(DGQS survey: total sample of 2726 respondents of the sector)

Impact on work organisation (WO)

- Spectacular **upsurge of teleworking in PA**
 - Sector with highest incidence of teleworking: (DGQS) 59,4% - either partly (34,1%) or totally (25,3%)
- In DGQS: impact digitalisation on WO in PA generally perceived as positive (34.7 to 57.8% according to item) or neutral (18,8 to 41%); negative perceptions 19,8 to 28,7% of respondents
- **Mixed perception of impact on work intensity and pace of work** in national reports.
 - Work intensity has increased and generated overtime and overload bc in several countries process of decentralisation of activities, which has led to increased responsibilities and workloads in regional and local administrations, without the required budgets necessarily being available. This has provoked an excess burden on workers in some public administrations
 - Risks of relying on **external private resources** to make digitalisation operational. Moreover, these external operators generally lack the practical experience of working in public administrations that would enable efficient and smooth implementation of work in the digital age.
 - **Autonomy paradox**: digitalisation has been accompanied by the substitution of new digital tasks for old analogue ones, sometimes with the addition of new tasks to remedy the technical problems associated with digitalisation.
 - Digitalised work, notably teleworking, has **increased individualisation of work and responsibilities**. It has also fostered a **feeling of isolation from colleagues and users of PS**, but also **blurred the hierarchical relationship** between managers and workers.
 - As a consequence, digitalisation, and teleworking in particular, is viewed with suspicion by managers. As working from home is more difficult for managers to monitor, this can lead to a tendency to overload teleworkers' work agendas.
 - Rise of risks associated with the management of the increased real-time monitoring of work and workers brought about by digitalisation

Impact on working time

- Main overall perception of impact in DGQS is neutral (55,5 to 87,3%). One item positively assessed: the reduction of commuting time from and to workplace (teleworkers) (40,7%). Main negative aspects: reduction nbr/duration break periods (30,5%) and increase unsocial hours and working time (around 20%)
- Interviews and focus group opinions from the PA sector: **limited reference to the issue of overtime in itself, but rather point to the influence of both increased work intensity and work overload already pointed for work organisation previously.** In addition to understaffing and underfinancing, various reasons are discussed in national reports :
 - The massive flow of monitoring and reporting information generated in real time by digitalisation.
 - The rise in the number of cases dealt with due to devolution of competences from the national level to sub-national levels.
 - The cut in the numbers of support staff, as these tasks are now performed directly by the workers themselves in the digital world of work.
 - The strong boost of teleworking among workers in the public administration - generated by the surge of the COVID-19 pandemic - which occurred without proper preparation, training or learning of self-management.
 - A tendency to give more work to people who are teleworking because of distrust among managers. The resulting overload leads numerous workers to withdraw from the teleworking system to alleviate their workflow.
 - The limited possibilities, or impossibility, for teleworkers to benefit from regulated working time slots based on in-out-clocking systems.

Impact on work-life balance

- In the DGQS, respondents from the PA are broadly equally distributed between the three kinds of assessments, without marked differences between the levels of neutral, positive or negative perceptions of the impact of digitalisation on the work-life balance – around one-third each.
- In the national reports, the issue of work-life balance is mainly discussed in relation to the increased volume of telework in the public administration sector. Some critically underline the limited but nevertheless welcome existence of legal tools (laws, collective agreements) framing the use of telework and the protection of private life (right to disconnect).

Outcomes on physical and mental health and psychosocial risks

For the majority of respondents to the DGQS from the public administrations sector, the **digitalisation of work has not impacted their state of health**. Thus, **44%** of respondents stated that they had not noticed any physical health problems due to the digitalisation of their work, and this rate rose to **67.1%** for mental health problems.

Nevertheless, a worrying share of workers have experienced negative consequences on their health. **About half of the respondents (46.7%) report physical health issues (new or worsened) related to the digitalisation of work, while 27.7% of workers also state the existence of new or worsened mental health disorders.**

- The main physiological issues reported by workers in the public administrations sector relate to vision problems (17.6%), neck pains (19.2%) and back pains (17.2%).
- The main psychological problems reported are mental fatigue (21.5%) and stress (20.7%), followed to a lesser extent by demotivation (12.6%), anxiety (12.5%), burn-out (10.5%) and the difficulty of dealing with overwhelming emotional demands (9.4%).

Half of the respondents from the public administrations sector also report increased exposure to psychosocial risks: harassment or bullying by colleagues and managers (50.8%), but also exposure to verbal or even physical violence from colleagues and managers (50%) or from users of public services (54.4%).

Main health outcomes discussed in the national reports concern the impact on workers' mental health of the increased flexibility in work organisation, particularly with the surge of teleworking:

- Individualisation of work inherent in teleworking can have consequences for workers' mental health, generating, for example, **stress and mental exhaustion**, with damaging outcomes such as nervous breakdowns or burn-out.
- Several reports underscore the need for adequate training and organised learning in the self-management of working time, as well as for the establishment of regulatory frameworks (right to disconnect), to avoid digital flexible work – and particularly teleworking – causing overwork, physical exhaustion and even burn-out.
- Breakdowns, malfunctions or incompatibility of digital tools can also exacerbate stress and mental exhaustion.
- Proper adequate internal resources (material and human) are often lacking in the public administrations, as well as in the other public services, to mitigate rapidly these sources of stress and mental problems.

Outcomes for skills and learnings -1

Are digital skills needed?

most respondents from the public administrations sector acknowledged this need in the DGQS. They either had to acquire both general and specific digital skills (21.7%) or specific skills related to the digital tool used (40.2%). 31.3% of the workers answer that they already had the required digital skills through their educational background.

Was digital training provided to PA workers?

42.3% of the workers from the PA sector report in the DGQS that they had received training from their employer to acquire or develop new digital skills. This share is significantly lower than those observed in the two other public services. Almost as large a proportion of workers (38.4%) reported no training from their employer (15.7%) or that they learned informally at work (22.7%).

Was the training received in adequacy with workers' need?

Only 17.8% of the respondents in the PA feel that the training fully matched their needs. For the majority of respondents, the match was partial but regular updates are necessary (53%). Around one in five workers felt that the match was not good, either because new training opportunities are necessary (12.9%) or because not enough resources and time had been devoted to the training of public sector workers (10.5%)

Outcomes for skills and learnings - 2

On the whole, the main thrust of the comments and observations made by the trade unionists and workers from the PA sector in the national reports are very similar to those mentioned for other public services in the project:

The use of digitalisation for training and learning (e-training, virtual reality programmes) is seen as a **positive contribution** because of the flexibility of access and the wide range of training on offer.

However, some **negative aspects** are also highlighted:

- the individualisation of the responsibility for planning the learning process but also of the training process in itself, as e-training deprives workers of the dynamic of learning through direct interaction with the trainer and also with colleagues;
- the lack of certification of many digital training modules, which does not encourage career progression;
- the risk of overtime and unpaid working hours, because training courses have to be taken during the working hours;
- the lack of internal training resources and the need to outsource training at great expense, and
- the potential deepening of inequalities between workers, for instance between older staff and younger workers already at home in a digital culture.

Job security and career prospects

In the DGQS, the when they are questioned about their job security and career prospects through several propositions related to job security and future prospects (digitalisation is positive for my future; I am more confident in future prospects, digital learning opens up career opportunities within and outside the current institution). Perceptions of PA workers are polarised between

- neutral perceptions of the impact of digitalisation (31.8 to 50.7%),
- more positive view of the future (28.7 to 48%), and
- negative assessment of their future prospects in their current job (20.2 to 32.1%).
- Moreover, 49.4% of PA workers feel that digital skills reduce their future job security.

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.

Workers' rights

Formal information/consultation procedures at workplace

(on the reasons to digitalise work, the practical possibilities, or the process of implementation of digital working methods and tools in itself)

- around half of the workers stated that they did not know whether a formal information/consultation procedure had been organised
- almost one in four workers stated more affirmatively that no information and consultation procedure on the implementation of digitalisation had been organised
- 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

Right to disconnect

Public service workers were also questioned in the DGQS about a new workers' right closely linked to the digitalisation of work, particularly the increase in remote working.

- A significant share of workers in the PA feel pressure to be permanently or frequently connected (42.9%)
- When asked about the importance to them of this right to disconnect as a workers' right, the vast majority of respondents in PA (generally more than 80% of respondents) emphasise its importance as well as the need to include it in labour law and social dialogue at all levels, from cross-industry to the workplace level.

THANK YOU !!!