

HR RESEARCH SERIES 2026 - REPORT R45 OF 10 (EXTENDED)

Wellbeing and Mental Health in the Workplace 2026

What the evidence says about supporting employee mental health, and how it connects to hiring, retention and performance.

Employee mental health has moved from a welfare concern to a strategic talent issue. With 74% of European professionals ranking mental health support as an important employer evaluation criterion, and burnout the leading cause of healthcare-sector departures, organisations that invest genuinely in wellbeing gain measurable talent advantages.



Published: May 2026 - tenperzent.com - Report R45 of 10 (Extended)

This report distinguishes genuine investment from performative wellness theatre, and provides a framework for a strategy that improves both employee outcomes and business performance.

The business case for wellbeing investment

Dimension	Current EU cost	ROI of investment	Note
Mental health absence	EUR 1,280 per employee/yr	3-5x	Most commonly measured
Presenteeism (under-functioning)	EUR 2,400 per employee/yr	4-7x	Most overlooked, larger than absence
Voluntary turnover	EUR 24,000+ per departure	5-9x	Healthcare and tech leaders are burnout
Performance / engagement	Variable	2-4x	Compounds over time

What actually works

- **Manager training**, the single highest-impact intervention, good managers reduce burnout by 41% regardless of workload.
- **Workload calibration**, sustainable workloads outperform any bolt-on wellness benefit.
- **EAP, actively promoted**, utilisation rises from 6% generic to 22% when destigmatised and championed.
- **Genuine flexibility**, control over time and place is more protective than yoga or apps.
- **Psychological safety culture**, employees who can speak up early prevent escalation.

The manager role

The most effective single workplace mental health intervention is manager quality. Good managers reduce burnout by 41% regardless of workload. The implication: invest in manager development before you invest in any wellness app, mindfulness platform or fruit basket. Nothing in the wellness market matches the protective effect of a competent, supportive line manager.

Designing a genuine programme

Element	Performative version	Genuine version
Manager capability	Awareness webinar	Mandatory training, ongoing coaching
Workload management	Resilience training	Workload audits, role design changes
EAP	Listed in handbook	Promoted, normalised, leadership use
Time off	Annual leave only	Mental health days, predictable leave
Leadership signalling	CEO video on mental health	Visible leader behaviours, taking own leave

Wellbeing as a talent attraction signal

Candidate question	What they assess	How to answer credibly
What do you do for wellbeing?	Genuine vs. theatre	Specific programmes, not slogans
What does work-life balance look like?	Leadership behaviour	Examples of leaders taking leave
How are workloads managed?	Operational reality	Workload review processes, not platitudes
What are your sickness absence rates?	Honesty signal	Share data; transparency builds trust

Measuring effectiveness

Metric	What it measures	Target signal
Mental health absence rate	Visible problem signal	Below sector average, declining
EAP utilisation	Programme reach	15%+ in genuine programmes
Manager NPS	Manager quality proxy	Above 30, distribution analysis
Burnout pulse score	Population risk	Quarterly, action thresholds
Voluntary turnover (regrettable)	Outcome metric	Falling year on year

Forward outlook 2026-2030

EU corporate sustainability reporting expands wellbeing disclosure in 2026, manager mental-health-first-aid becomes a near-mandatory norm by 2027, AI-driven workload monitoring with privacy safeguards reaches mainstream by 2028, and by 2030 wellbeing reporting is standardised at company level and visible to candidates as part of employer brand.

Built for what's next.

tenperzent.com is the AI-native ATS designed for European hiring in 2026 - GDPR by default, EU AI Act compliant, free to start, €79/month to scale.

Start free at tenperzent.com