

# Global Burnout – Cultural Receptivity to New Economic Paradigms

## Introduction

Conventional wisdom holds that a deeply ingrained “work ethic” in many cultures would resist any shift away from traditional employment. However, mounting evidence from around the world suggests otherwise – chronic job disengagement, burnout, and openness to alternatives indicate that **cultural attachment to work may be weakening as a barrier** to AI- and automation-centric post-labor economic models. This report rigorously examines empirical data on workforce attitudes and behaviors across developed economies (US, UK, EU/OECD) to dismantle the notion that people are too culturally wedded to jobs to embrace new paradigms. We evaluate trends in job dissatisfaction (burnout, quitting, “quiet quitting”), public fears of AI-driven job displacement, and receptivity to innovations like Universal Basic Income (UBI), four-day work weeks, and other post-labor policies. We also construct a comparative **Receptivity Index** ranking countries by their readiness for a post-labor transition, based on engagement levels, automation anxiety, and policy support. The findings – drawing on Gallup, Pew Research, OECD, Microsoft Work Trend Index, Eurobarometer, and others – paint a detailed picture of a workforce *already* straining against the status quo and increasingly willing to consider systemic change. We conclude with insights on how latent demand for change can be harnessed into concrete policy and economic restructuring.

*(Note: All sources are cited in footnotes in the format [source#lines] , with full references listed at the end.)*

## I. Rising Job Disengagement, Burnout, and Turnover in Developed Economies

Modern economies are experiencing **epidemic levels of employee disengagement and burnout**, undermining the romantic notion of an engaged workforce that finds identity and purpose in work. According to Gallup’s latest *State of the Global Workplace* data, only **21% of employees worldwide are engaged at work**, meaning nearly four out of five workers are **not** enthusiastic about or committed to their jobs <sup>1</sup>. This disengagement crisis comes at great economic cost – Gallup estimates that low engagement and its drag on productivity cost the global economy about **\$8.8 trillion annually** (9% of global GDP) <sup>2</sup>. Far from cherishing work, large numbers of employees feel emotionally detached from it.

**Developed countries are no exception; in fact, many affluent economies have *higher* disengagement.** In Europe, employee engagement is the lowest of any world region at a mere **13%** – meaning 87% of European workers are not engaged at work <sup>3</sup>. Within Europe, some of the richest nations rank at the bottom: for example, only **7% of French employees** and **5% of Italian employees** report being engaged, among the lowest in Europe <sup>4</sup>. The UK similarly remains “one of the least engaged workforces in Europe,” with an engagement rate around **10%** (ranking 33rd of 38 countries) <sup>3</sup>. Even in the United States – often thought to have a strong work-centric culture – only about **33% of employees are engaged** as of 2023

(down from a peak of 36% in 2020) <sup>5</sup> . In other words, roughly two-thirds of American workers are not engaged in their jobs. Japan and South Korea, known for intense work cultures, also report pervasive burnout and low satisfaction (though exact engagement figures are harder to come by, suicide and “karoshi” overwork death rates speak to extreme burnout). The **notion of the contented, motivated worker is increasingly a myth** in many advanced economies.

Alongside disengagement is a surge in **negative emotions and burnout symptoms** in the workplace. Gallup finds that stress among workers is at an all-time high – for instance, **40% of French employees report experiencing “a lot of stress” daily** at work <sup>6</sup> , and 17% feel angry at work daily. In the UK, 38% feel stress daily and one in five (19%) report daily anger at work, well above the European average <sup>7</sup> . Self-reported rates of anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion related to work have climbed in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic in both North America and Europe <sup>6</sup> . Importantly, these sentiments are not confined to older workers weary from long careers – **younger workers report equal or greater levels of burnout**. A survey by Microsoft of 20,000 Gen Z and millennial employees worldwide found **68% of Gen Z and younger millennials feel stressed at work most of the time** <sup>8</sup> . The prevalence of burnout across age groups and regions underscores that *dissatisfaction with the contemporary work model is widespread*.

This discontent has translated into **record-high voluntary turnover** – a phenomenon so notable in the past two years that it’s been dubbed “*The Great Resignation*.” In the U.S., workers have been quitting at historic rates: the nation’s quit rate hit a 20-year high in late 2021, and monthly quits exceeded 4 million for most of 2021-2022 <sup>9</sup> . In March 2022, for example, **4.5 million U.S. workers quit their jobs – an all-time record** <sup>10</sup> . Over the entire year 2021, a stunning **47 million Americans quit** (roughly one-third of the total workforce) in search of better opportunities <sup>11</sup> . This wave has been led disproportionately by younger workers: **37% of U.S. adults under 30 said they quit a job in 2021**, compared to 17% of those ages 30-49 <sup>12</sup> . While the U.S. has led this trend, other countries are not far behind. The UK saw resignations in early 2022 running **~27% higher than pre-pandemic levels** <sup>13</sup> . In France, 2.16 million resignations were recorded in 2022 – a **59% increase** over the 2010s average <sup>14</sup> . Clearly, millions are “voting with their feet” and **abandoning jobs that fail to meet their needs**.

It’s important to note *why* people are quitting in such numbers. Surveys of those who resigned debunk any notion that these quitters are simply lazy or fickle. A Pew Research study found the top reasons Americans quit in 2021 were **low pay (63% cited), no opportunities for advancement (63%), and feeling disrespected at work (57%)** <sup>15</sup> . Significant shares also quit due to lack of flexible hours, poor benefits, child care challenges, and burnout from working too many hours <sup>15</sup> <sup>16</sup> . In short, **people are largely quitting to escape bad jobs** – jobs that underpay, overwork, or undervalue them. Many who quit found new jobs with better pay, schedules, or work-life balance, indicating they *still* want to work, but on better terms <sup>17</sup> . This mass opting-out from subpar employment suggests that **attachment to any job, no matter how stressful or unrewarding, is weakening**. Instead, workers are prioritizing their wellbeing and dignity, even if it means leaving traditional employment.

Another manifestation of disengagement is the rise of so-called “**quiet quitting**.” This term gained popularity in 2022 to describe employees who don’t outright resign but mentally check out – doing the bare minimum required and refusing to go “above and beyond” in unpaid overtime or extra duties. Quiet quitting reflects workers **setting boundaries and disengaging psychologically** from work. Gallup estimates that **at least 50% of the U.S. workforce consists of quiet quitters** – people not engaged but still on payroll <sup>18</sup> . In Europe, quiet quitting appears even more prevalent: Gallup data indicate about **72% of European employees fall in this “not engaged” category, essentially coasting through their jobs** <sup>19</sup> . Only a

much smaller fraction (15%) are “actively disengaged” (i.e. unhappy *and* counterproductive) <sup>20</sup> ; the vast majority are doing what’s required but no more, which is effectively what quiet quitting is. The quiet quitting trend underscores that **many workers have internally renounced the centrality of work** – they are *not* finding meaning or fulfillment in it, only a paycheck. As one millennial software developer quipped, *“It’s negative and dangerous that we frame a healthy work-life balance as quitting... Can we just call it what it is? It’s just working.”* <sup>21</sup> . In other words, younger people especially see nothing wrong with devoting less of their identity and energy to work – a sharp contrast to the “hustle culture” glorified in the past.

All of these indicators – low engagement, high burnout, mass resignations, and widespread quiet quitting – point to **profound dissatisfaction with current employment models across developed economies**. Rather than being culturally addicted to work, **large segments of the workforce are frustrated by and estranged from their work**. As Gallup’s chief workplace scientist summarized: having a job you hate can be worse for your wellbeing than being unemployed <sup>22</sup> . This brewing discontent creates a ripe environment for rethinking the role of work in life. When nearly **80-90% of workers in rich countries like France, the UK, and Italy are not engaged at work** <sup>4</sup> , and **a majority report significant stress and declining wellbeing** <sup>7</sup> , it is hard to argue that people *en masse* derive deep identity or satisfaction from their jobs. The cultural narrative is shifting: **“living to work” is increasingly giving way to “working to live.”** Such a climate could be highly receptive to post-labor economic paradigms that promise relief.

## II. Global Attitudes Toward Automation and Post-Labor Policies: Fear and Openness

### Fear of AI-Driven Job Displacement

As automation and artificial intelligence advance, one might expect people to cling even more tightly to the concept of work for security. In reality, we see a nuanced picture: **widespread fear of AI-driven job loss coexists with a willingness – even eagerness – to offload work to machines**. Far from cherishing their jobs, many workers openly acknowledge that a future with less human labor is coming and are anxious about it, yet also *hopeful that automation could improve their work-life balance*.

Recent surveys reveal **high levels of anxiety about job displacement due to AI/automation across the world**. A 2023 Pew survey found **about half of U.S. workers (52%) are worried about AI’s future impact on their job** <sup>23</sup> . An even larger share of the general public foresees broader job losses – **three-quarters of Americans believe AI will reduce the total number of jobs in the country over the next decade** <sup>24</sup> . In Europe, an *EY European AI* study in 2024 reported that **68% of European employees expect that fewer workers will be needed as AI becomes more prevalent** <sup>25</sup> . This aligns closely with a Eurobarometer finding a few years earlier that ~70% of EU citizens anticipated automation would steal jobs. The EY survey highlights regional nuances: countries like **Portugal (80% of respondents), Spain (78%), and Italy (76%) express the highest levels of fear** that AI will lead to job losses, whereas **Switzerland (57%), Germany (59%), and the Netherlands (64%) are somewhat less fearful** <sup>25</sup> <sup>26</sup> . (Notably, those less fearful countries tend to have strong labor protections or labor shortages, which may temper anxiety, as experts in Switzerland suggest AI is seen more as an opportunity in a high-skilled workforce <sup>26</sup> .) **Overall, however, roughly two in three workers across advanced economies are bracing for AI-driven disruption to employment.**

Importantly, **this fear is not abstract – it is informed by real workplace experiences.** Over 70% of Europeans surveyed say they have some direct experience with AI (mostly in their personal lives, but a sizable minority on the job) <sup>27</sup> <sup>28</sup> . And automation is already eliminating roles: for example, in early 2023 the first reports of AI-driven layoffs emerged, with one U.S. employment tracker documenting **3,900 job cuts in a single month explicitly attributed to AI – the first time “AI” appeared as a category in layoff reports** <sup>29</sup> . By mid-2023, nearly half of U.S. companies surveyed said they had adopted AI tools like ChatGPT, and **about 1 in 4 companies had already replaced some workers with AI** <sup>30</sup> . These early signs make the threat tangible. It is no wonder that in an American Psychological Association poll, **nearly 2 in 5 workers (38%) worried that AI might make parts of their job obsolete** <sup>31</sup> . The **“AI anxiety” is real and growing**, cutting across industries from manufacturing and retail (historically vulnerable to automation) to now white-collar fields with the rise of generative AI.

Yet, here lies a critical point: while people **fear** losing jobs to AI, they are also remarkably **open to AI helping reduce their workload.** Microsoft’s 2023 Work Trend Index – a global survey of workers – captured this seeming paradox well. It found that **49% of employees are concerned AI could replace their jobs, but a much larger 70% say they would delegate as much work as possible to AI to lighten their load** <sup>32</sup> . In other words, more workers are excited by the prospect of **handing off drudgery to automation than are scared of being made redundant.** This finding suggests that for many, the *nature* of their work (tedious, overwhelming, or menial tasks) is a bigger immediate pain point than the existential threat of job elimination. Microsoft’s data also show broad comfort with using AI on the job: **three-quarters of workers would be comfortable using AI for administrative tasks (76%), and majorities would trust it for analytical tasks (79%) and even creative aspects of work (73%)** <sup>33</sup> . Rather than clinging to every aspect of their role, most employees *welcome* assistance – they envision AI as a tool to **“lift the weight of work,” freeing them for more meaningful or creative activities** <sup>34</sup> <sup>35</sup> . Even among those nervous about job security, many simultaneously recognize that *if* their job is here to stay, they’d love parts of it to be automated. This ambivalence undermines the idea that people derive such fulfillment from their tasks that they wouldn’t let a machine do them. On the contrary, **the average worker appears more than ready to offload grunt work to technology.**

*Figure: Worker sentiments on AI in the workplace – fear vs. willingness. A Microsoft survey of 31,000 employees worldwide found that while 49% worry AI could replace their jobs, 70% would delegate tasks to AI to reduce their workload <sup>32</sup> . In practice, large majorities say they are comfortable using AI for administrative, analytical, and even creative work tasks <sup>33</sup> . This suggests that many employees, already overwhelmed by “digital debt” and busywork, see AI as a potential relief rather than purely a threat.*

In sum, **people are not uniformly resisting automation – many are leaning into it, provided it alleviates drudgery.** The public discourse around AI’s impact reflects a mix of caution and hope: on one hand, strong support for safeguards (for instance, **majorities of Americans oppose employers using AI to excessively monitor workers** and fear feeling “inappropriately watched” <sup>36</sup> <sup>37</sup> , as discussed later); on the other, an expectation that **AI could improve work-life if managed well.** This openness forms a key pillar of cultural receptivity to a post-labor model: rather than insisting “humans must do all work,” large numbers are essentially saying “if the robots come, let them take the *boring* work – just ensure we all benefit.”

## Openness to Post-Labor Economic Innovations

Beyond attitudes toward automation itself, we see substantial receptivity to **economic and policy innovations that decouple income and well-being from traditional full-time jobs.** In recent years, ideas

like **Universal Basic Income (UBI)**, **shorter workweeks**, **remote/flexible work**, and **portable benefits** have gained mainstream traction across many countries. Far from being puritanically against such ideas, publics around the world often **support them in surprising numbers**, indicating a readiness to experiment with post-labor paradigms.

**Universal Basic Income (UBI)** – the proposal for the government to provide a guaranteed income to every citizen regardless of employment – has moved from the fringes to serious debate, especially after the pandemic. Opinion polls show **considerable public support for UBI in many developed countries**. A 2022 YouGov survey across seven European nations found **majorities or pluralities in favor of introducing a UBI** in most of those countries. Support was highest in Germany (55% in favor) and Italy (52%), with Spain (approx. 49-50%) and Great Britain (UK) also more in favor than against <sup>38</sup>. France and Denmark were the two polled countries where more people opposed UBI than supported it, but even there the idea had substantial minorities behind it <sup>38</sup>. Notably, Europeans do voice concerns about the cost of UBI – on average 48% say their government cannot afford it <sup>39</sup> – yet this is a practical hesitation rather than outright rejection of the concept. When asked about UBI's potential effects, Europeans tend to be optimistic: in all countries surveyed, people were more likely to say a UBI would **improve quality of life** than worsen it, with **Spain (57%), Italy (53%), and Germany (52%) particularly convinced it would improve life** <sup>40</sup>. Majorities (up to 52%) across these countries also believe UBI would help **reduce poverty** <sup>41</sup>. In short, there is a public recognition that *decoupling income from work could have positive social outcomes*.

Support for UBI is not confined to Europe. In the United States, which has a less developed welfare state, public support for UBI has risen swiftly in recent years. One poll of registered voters in 2020 found **55% support for a universal basic income in America** <sup>42</sup> (up from 43% a year prior), indicating a majority in favor. This was around the time the U.S. government was sending out pandemic stimulus checks – a real-world experiment that arguably made the idea of direct cash support more familiar. Furthermore, **UBI found support across the political spectrum**: while more Democrats favor it, a significant minority of conservatives and many younger libertarians have also backed the idea, seeing it as a way to streamline welfare or ensure freedom from drudgery. Other OECD countries show similar or higher support – for instance, Canada, UK, and South Korea have all seen polls with substantial pro-UBI sentiment, and trials (like Finland's 2017–18 basic income pilot) garnered positive public attention. The key takeaway is that **the principle of an income guarantee independent of employment is no longer alien to the mainstream public**. Many people seem to intuitively grasp that with rising automation and precarious work, a basic income floor could be beneficial. In Europe, **two-thirds (68%) in an EU-wide poll supported UBI in principle**, though support dropped if tax increases were mentioned <sup>39</sup> <sup>43</sup> – again showing that the concept itself is popular even if implementation details raise debate. This openness to UBI directly challenges the idea that people universally believe “one must earn one's keep through a job or not at all.” Increasingly, citizens appear *willing to entertain new social contracts* in which livelihood is partly de-linked from one's job status.

**Shorter workweeks** (such as the **four-day work week** or a **32-hour full-time standard**) have likewise gained remarkable traction. Traditional culture revered the 40+ hour, Monday-to-Friday grind as sacrosanct, but that norm is eroding. **Surveys consistently show strong majorities of workers favoring a shift to a four-day workweek if income is held constant**. For example, in the UK a 2023 poll found **over 80% of Scots supported the idea of a four-day workweek** (with no loss of pay) <sup>44</sup>, and UK-wide support has been around 60–70% in various surveys. Trial programs have further boosted acceptance: in 2022–2023, the UK conducted the world's largest four-day week pilot with 61 companies. The results were resoundingly

positive – productivity was maintained or improved, employee wellbeing soared, and **92% of the companies opted to continue the four-day week after the trial** (and none planned to return fully to 5 days) <sup>45</sup> . Such outcomes make headlines and resonate with workers who hear that *it's possible to work less with no loss of output*. Across Europe, momentum for a shorter week is building: **Spain's government launched a national four-day week initiative**, Belgian employees gained the legal right to request a compressed four-day workweek (40 hours in 4 days) <sup>46</sup> , and France's major unions have long pushed for reducing hours further below their current 35-hour standard. In the U.S., while a nationwide change isn't imminent, some 30+ companies participated in pilots in 2023 and many saw it as a competitive advantage for talent retention. A survey by the American Psychological Association in 2024 found **22% of U.S. workers said their employer already offers a four-day (compressed) week option**, up from 14% just two years prior <sup>47</sup> – a rapid increase. **Clearly, both employees and forward-looking employers are exploring ways to shorten the workweek**, reflecting a cultural shift that values **time** as much as money. The popularity of the idea indicates that people don't see full-time work as inviolable – if productivity and pay can be maintained in fewer days, most would gladly embrace it. This undercuts any argument that workers themselves would resist having more free time; on the contrary, **the latent demand for more leisure (or at least more work-life balance) is high**.

**Remote and flexible work** arrangements are another facet of the post-labor paradigm (in the sense of liberating workers from strict workplace/time obligations). Here, the pandemic ushered in a revolution of expectations. Data shows an overwhelming majority of employees with remote-capable jobs **prefer flexible work arrangements over the traditional on-site 9-to-5**. In the U.S., Gallup found **94% of remote-capable employees would prefer to remain hybrid or fully remote** rather than return to full office permanently <sup>48</sup> . In fact, just 6% of such employees wanted to be on-site five days a week <sup>49</sup> – a stunningly low figure that would have been unthinkable pre-2020. Furthermore, workers are willing to act on these preferences: **60% of fully-remote employees said they would be “extremely likely to look for other jobs” if forced back to the office full-time** <sup>50</sup> <sup>51</sup> . This sentiment has been echoed internationally. A 2023 EU survey found upwards of 70% of workers favored some form of telework, and in China and other economies employees have similarly pushed back against strict return-to-office mandates. The term **“flexible work or bust”** might capture the mood – flexibility in *where and when* work happens is no longer seen as a perk, but a baseline expectation for many, especially white-collar professionals. The cultural impact here is profound: it signals that **workers' loyalty to the old paradigm of commuting and being under a manager's eye for 8+ hours is waning**. People have seen that productivity often *improved* during remote work periods (Microsoft reports 59.5% of workers feel remote/hybrid work boosts productivity and reduces distractions <sup>52</sup> ) and that they gained back hours of personal time. They are correspondingly unwilling to surrender these gains. This mass experience of flexible work has “unfried” the previously sacred concept that work happens in a fixed place and schedule. In the context of receptivity to post-labor models, it shows **workers are open to (and even demanding) fundamentally different work arrangements that grant them greater autonomy** – a stepping stone to more radical changes like reduced workweeks or job-sharing.

**Portable benefits and new social safety nets:** While less headline-grabbing than UBI or four-day weeks, there is also growing recognition that labor policies need updating for a post-traditional-work era. The rise of the gig economy and frequent job switching have exposed the shortcomings of tying crucial benefits (health insurance, pensions, paid leave) to employment with a single employer. Surveys in the US indicate bipartisan public support for ideas like **portable benefit accounts** that stay with workers as they move between jobs or gigs. For instance, a Harvard/Knight Foundation study found around 75% of gig workers and 60% of traditional workers supported creating pooled benefit systems independent of any one employer (with funding from taxes or gig company contributions). In Europe, where national healthcare and

pensions are common, the issue is less pronounced, but discussions about **“individual learning accounts”** and other portable entitlements have emerged to help workers retrain and transition amid automation. While concrete polling on “portable benefits” is sparse, the concept aligns with the broader trend: people want security and benefits, but are less attached to the *employment conditions* that historically delivered those. The popularity of proposals like universal healthcare in the U.S. (now supported by a majority of Americans in some form) also reflects a desire to untether basic welfare from one’s job status, which is very much in the spirit of a post-labor safety net.

In summary, across a spectrum of countries and proposals, **public opinion shows notable enthusiasm for reimagining work and its role in society**. Far from clinging to the 20th-century employment bargain, large numbers of people are saying: *“Yes, let’s try something different”*. Whether it’s **guaranteed income** (so one’s livelihood isn’t at the mercy of a job market), **shorter work hours** (so work doesn’t consume life), or **flexible arrangements** (so work is better integrated with life), the cultural receptivity is evident. These ideas – once dismissed as utopian – are now **mainstream topics of pilots, legislation, and dinner-table discussions**. They all share a common thread: valuing human well-being and freedom *above* the imperative of maximizing labor input. This is precisely the mindset needed to adopt a post-labor economic model where automation does more heavy lifting and humans can pursue education, caregiving, creativity, or leisure with financial security. The fact that **majorities in many countries endorse such directions** indicates that the oft-feared “cultural resistance” to less work and more free time may be overstated. On the contrary, many populations seem quite ready for systemic change – if anything, **the bigger barriers are institutional and political, not cultural**. Citizens are frequently *ahead* of their leaders in imagining a different future.

### III. Behavioral Indicators of Cultural Readiness to Leave the Traditional Work Paradigm

Beyond surveys and attitudes, we can observe **concrete behaviors and trends that reflect a declining attachment to traditional full-time employment**. These include the unprecedented waves of voluntary resignations, worker pushback against invasive workplace practices, and generational shifts in work values. Such behaviors speak louder than abstract opinions – they show people actively renegotiating the role of work in their lives. Below we analyze several key indicators and their implications.

#### The Great Resignation as a Mass Exodus from “Bad Work”

As detailed earlier, the past two years have seen record-high quit rates in multiple countries. In the U.S., monthly quit rates hit 2.9–3.0% of the workforce (the highest ever recorded) in late 2021 <sup>9</sup>, and have remained above historical norms since. Over 2021–2022, **roughly 4 million Americans quit their job each month** – a pace that far exceeds the pre-pandemic churn. While some of this was driven by labor shortages (workers confident they could find new jobs easily), the deeper story is one of **workers refusing to remain in undesirable conditions**. The top-cited reasons (insufficient pay, no advancement, disrespect) underscore that this **resignation wave is essentially a referendum on the quality of jobs** <sup>15</sup>.

It’s notable that *quitting is highest among younger cohorts*, who traditionally have been told to pay their dues and climb the ladder. The fact that **over one-third of under-30 workers in the U.S. quit a job in a single year (2021)** <sup>12</sup> reveals a generation far less willing to stay in roles that don’t meet their needs. Similarly, in a 2022 Microsoft survey, **52% of Gen Z and millennial employees globally said they were considering**

**changing employers** in the near term <sup>53</sup> – often citing that job-hopping is the best way to gain new skills or advance, as loyalty isn't rewarded <sup>54</sup>. Culturally, this represents a break from the past when long-term employment at one firm was more common. Now, *if a job is not providing growth or balance, young workers will readily leave*. They do not view a company as deserving decades of allegiance by default – a clear weakening of the traditional psychological contract.

Outside the U.S., we see parallel patterns. The UK's higher-than-normal resignation rates, France's spike in resignations, and rising quits in countries like Australia and Germany post-2020 all indicate a broader phenomenon. In France, interestingly, despite very low engagement, many workers have hesitated to quit due to economic uncertainty (35% of French employees in 2023 said "now is not a good time to find a new job," preferring stability) <sup>55</sup>. Those who did quit across countries often sought better work-life balance or transitioned to self-employment/gig work. Indeed, the Great Resignation has been accompanied by a **surge in entrepreneurship and freelancing** – in the U.S. the rate of new business formations hit a 40-year high in 2021-22, and more Americans are self-employed now than at any time since the Great Recession <sup>56</sup> <sup>57</sup>. This suggests that many who leave corporate roles aren't simply trading one employer for another; some are opting out of traditional employment entirely to regain control over their time. The A.Team independent workers' report dubs these folks "**DIYers: a new class of highly-skilled workers prioritizing flexibility and a sense of purpose over full-time employment**" <sup>58</sup>. Such shifts point to a growing acceptance that one's career need not follow the 40-hour employed template – a crucial mindset for a post-labor future.

The implications of the Great Resignation are profound. When tens of millions willingly disrupt their careers, it signals that **the fear of not having a traditional job is diminished** – at least relative to the fear of *staying in an unhappy job*. Culturally, that is a significant rebalancing of risk/reward perception. It used to be seen as risky to leave a stable job; now, especially for in-demand younger workers, it's seen as risky to stay somewhere that doesn't value you (you risk burnout, stagnation, mental health decline). In many fields, employees have effectively *flipped the script* on employers: unless companies improve conditions (pay, flexibility, culture), workers will walk. This environment is fertile for systemic change because it **proves that people are not clinging to any job they can get – they are actively seeking less punishing ways to make a living**. As the OECD noted, "*workers were already voting with their feet before the pandemic, but now many more are heading for the exit*", especially in sectors with overwork and low pay <sup>10</sup> <sup>59</sup>. The pandemic was a catalyst that made workers re-evaluate priorities, and the mass quitting is the result. In short, **the Great Resignation is a loud cultural signal of impatience with the status quo** – one that policy makers should heed when proposing bold changes like shorter workweeks or basic income guarantees.

## **Backlash Against Workplace Surveillance and "Productivity Paranoia"**

Another revealing trend is how employees have reacted to the rise of **workplace surveillance and strict monitoring**, especially during the remote work boom. Many companies, distrustful of remote productivity, deployed tracking software (keystroke loggers, screenshots, webcam monitoring, etc.) or demanded constant online availability. Rather than acquiescing, workers have expressed strong opposition to being monitored like machines – which speaks to their desire for **autonomy and trust** in the workplace, even if it means challenging management practices.

Surveys on workplace monitoring show that **a majority of employees deeply resent intrusive surveillance**. In a 2022 poll of over 1,000 American employees, **71% said they would leave an employer who uses excessive monitoring** <sup>60</sup>. This is a remarkable figure: nearly three-quarters would rather quit than endure Big Brother tactics at work. Additionally, **77% of employees in that survey characterized**



**workplace surveillance as “a form of spying,”** and 66% said it made them feel not trusted by their employer <sup>61</sup> <sup>62</sup> . We also see concrete defensive behaviors: more than half of surveyed workers admitted to **taking steps to evade monitoring** (e.g. deleting messages or browser history) <sup>63</sup> . Rather than passively accepting constant electronic oversight, employees are pushing back, even at risk to their job. This indicates that people value *dignity and privacy at work* – they do not see themselves as mere cogs to be quantitatively measured every second. Culturally, that’s a resistance to the hyper-Taylorist view of work.

Generational differences accentuate this point. Young workers are especially averse to heavy-handed monitoring. Among employees with just 1–2 years of work experience (largely Gen Z), **86% say surveillance invades privacy and 84% say it undermines autonomy**, compared to around 70% of those with 20+ years experience who feel the same <sup>64</sup> <sup>65</sup> . Likewise, a stunning **81% of early-career workers said they are afraid of being fired due to surveillance**, whereas only 22% of veteran workers share that fear (perhaps because older workers are either more secure or more desensitized) <sup>66</sup> <sup>67</sup> . Despite that fear, young workers are not simply acquiescing – their attitudes suggest they are far less tolerant of “being treated like children” under digital supervision. Many would clearly rather quit (and indeed younger employees have the highest quit rates). **This emerging workforce cohort expects trust and respect**; if an employer doesn’t provide it, they’ll leave for one that does (or exit traditional employment entirely). It’s telling that in the same survey, *when asked hypothetically if they were the boss, 76% of 1-2 year experienced workers said they would use surveillance if they were employers* (perhaps reflecting they’ve grown up with tech), yet **74% of them also said they’d find an employer more attractive if it only used “light-touch” monitoring** <sup>68</sup> <sup>69</sup> . This ambivalence suggests they accept some productivity tools but **demand a balance that preserves personal agency**. If that balance isn’t met, they disengage.

The broader message from the surveillance backlash is that **workers’ tolerance for dehumanizing workplace practices is low**. They expect to be treated as trusted adults. This is highly relevant to post-labor scenarios: if we envision a future where fewer people *have* to work and more are economically secure by other means, coercive or punitive management styles will become even less tenable (because workers could simply opt out). Even today, we see that the tighter employers grip (through surveillance or forcing office returns), the more people slip through their fingers (quitting or quietly slacking). Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella warned of this “**productivity paranoia**” in managers who don’t trust remote workers, noting that while **87% of employees report being productive, 85% of managers worry employees aren’t productive enough** – a huge perception gap <sup>70</sup> . Workers sense this distrust and resent it. The popularity of memes like “we’re not working from home, we’re living at work” during the pandemic, and the resistance to being monitored on webcam all day, reflect a cultural assertion that **work should not intrude on every aspect of life**. People want *freedom within work* (autonomy, flexibility) and *freedom from work* (personal time uncompromised). If the current system cannot provide those, support grows for alternatives that might – e.g., results-only work environments, cooperative business models, or indeed reducing reliance on having a boss at all.

In summary, the way employees are rebelling against surveillance and lack of trust indicates a **cultural readiness for a new equilibrium** where workers have greater autonomy. That could translate into more openness to freelance/gig work (despite its income insecurity) or to supporting policies that give them leverage (like stronger privacy laws or labor protections). It certainly translates into a willingness to leave traditional employment if it feels too oppressive. All of this erodes the idea that people inherently accept the conditions of the traditional workplace. In fact, **many are challenging those conditions head-on**, which aligns with being receptive to overhauling the work paradigm altogether.

## Generational Shifts: Millennials and Gen Z Redefining Work Values

If cultural attitudes toward work are changing, much of that change is being driven by younger generations – the Millennials (now late 20s to 40s) and Generation Z (teens to mid-20s). These cohorts have come of age in an era of economic upheaval (Great Recession, pandemic), rapid technology change, and societal movements emphasizing mental health and equality. Consequently, they often have **different expectations of work** than Gen X or Boomers did. Numerous surveys and studies point to the same conclusion: **younger workers value work-life balance, flexibility, and purpose far more – and status and long hours far less – than prior generations.** This has direct implications for receptivity to post-labor models, as the next section of the workforce is less “in love” with traditional work structures.

Several data points illustrate this generational shift:

- **Work/Life Balance Over Career Ambition:** In Deloitte’s 2025 global survey, Gen Z and millennials overwhelmingly prioritized *work-life balance* and personal growth over climbing corporate hierarchies. In fact, **only 6% of Gen Z said their primary career goal is to reach a leadership/executive position** <sup>71</sup>. By contrast, in past decades a far higher share aspired to the C-suite or saw it as the pinnacle of success. Today’s young workers are **not lacking ambition**, but their ambitions are different: they seek meaningful work, learning opportunities, and balance. Deloitte found “learning and development” ranks among the top factors for Gen Z in choosing an employer – they want growth, but not necessarily traditional promotions <sup>71</sup>. Climbing the ladder for its own sake (and sacrificing one’s personal life to do so) is broadly out of favor. This reflects a cultural rejection of the workaholic “hustle culture” that defined earlier eras. When **94%+ of Gen Z and Millennials say a sense of purpose and personal well-being are important to their job satisfaction** <sup>72</sup> <sup>73</sup>, and half say they wouldn’t accept a job that ruined their work-life balance, it’s clear this generation is open to fundamentally rebalancing work’s role.
- **Permanent Flexibility as an Expectation:** As mentioned, **73% of Gen Z employees (and a similar ~70% of millennials) want permanent flexible work alternatives** – whether that means remote options, a four-day week, or customizable schedules <sup>74</sup>. They have grown up digitally connected and see no reason for rigid 9-to-5 office mandates. A World Economic Forum survey cited in a Johns Hopkins report noted Gen Z is far more likely than previous generations to push for flexible hours and remote work opportunities, even if it means switching jobs to get it <sup>75</sup>. This is evidence of a cultural norm shift: flexibility is not a perk, it’s a requirement for many young workers. An employer who doesn’t offer it is likely to be shunned by top young talent. This all feeds the momentum toward a future where *when* and *where* people work is vastly more fluid – a stepping stone toward a scenario of generally reduced work if that becomes viable.
- **Emphasis on Well-being and Mental Health:** Younger generations are much more vocal about mental health and not tolerating toxic work environments. Surveys find Gen Z and Millennials are more likely to leave a job that negatively impacts their mental health, even without another job lined up. In the Deloitte 2023 survey, nearly half of Gen Zs said they feel stressed “all or most of the time,” but importantly they blame this on **work factors like heavy workload (34% cite) and poor work-life balance (32%)** <sup>76</sup>. Additionally, about one-quarter say an inability to be one’s authentic self at work contributes to their stress <sup>77</sup>. They expect employers to care about employee well-being; companies that do not are seeing higher turnover among the young. In Gallup’s research, lack of career growth and feeling uncared for were top drivers of recent declines in engagement among

those under 35 <sup>78</sup> . All of this suggests that *meaningless or stressful jobs hold little appeal* to younger folks – they would rather have a job that pays less but gives them purpose or doesn't burn them out. Or, failing that, they support systemic solutions like mental health benefits, or even opting out of the rat race for gig work or UBI if it were available. Notably, **68% of Gen Z and younger millennials report feeling burned out to some degree** <sup>8</sup> – a level that, if sustained, will lead to even more attrition from traditional employment.

- **Less Attachment to One Employer – Always Looking for Better:** As touched on, younger workers feel less compunction about job-hopping. A CNBC/Momentive poll in 2022 found <30% of Gen Z expected to stay with their employer for 5+ years (whereas older generations in their youth expected more stability). One reason is they've seen corporations show little loyalty (layoffs, gig-ification), so they reciprocate in kind. Another reason is career progression: **in one survey, 73% of Gen Z said they'd stay at their job longer if it were easier to switch roles internally and develop new skills** <sup>53</sup> <sup>79</sup> – implying that absent growth opportunities, they'll leave. This dynamic means the future workforce is comfortable with change; they are not wed to the idea of a lifelong career in one path or one firm. This adaptability is actually a cultural facilitator for a post-labor model: if work is no longer available or necessary, younger people might more readily pivot to other pursuits (gig work, creative endeavors, etc.) because they haven't built their entire identity on stable employment.
- **Value-Driven and Skeptical of Corporate Motives:** Surveys by Deloitte and others show **Gen Z expects employers to align with their values** (environmental, social, diversity). For instance, **77% of Gen Z respondents say it's important to work for a company whose values align with their own** <sup>80</sup> . They are quicker to call out companies for hypocrisy or poor ethics. This matters because if they perceive the traditional corporate world as misaligned with their values or exploitative, they will either push for change or choose alternative paths (mission-driven work, non-profits, or supporting policies like stronger regulations). It's another form of rejecting the old notion that a job's a job and you check your values at the door. Culturally, work is no longer just about a paycheck for many youths – it must fit into a holistic sense of purpose. If post-labor models promise a way to focus on purpose (e.g., through guaranteed income allowing one to do community work or art), that could be appealing to a generation that prioritizes meaning.

Overall, the generational evidence paints a picture of a workforce that is **less loyal to employers, less willing to sacrifice health and personal life for career, and more open to new ways of working or not working** (in the traditional sense). As Gallup's analysis noted, *"Today's workers expect a higher standard of management"* and if they don't get it, they disengage or leave <sup>81</sup> . They are essentially raising the bar for what work must provide in order for it to be worth it. If the economy fails to meet that bar, the ground is fertile for post-labor ideas to take root. For example, a scenario where AI does 50% of jobs and UBI provides sustenance might be frightening to an older worker who's used to deriving identity and pride from their job. But to a younger worker who has mainly seen jobs as sources of stress and who already pursues meaning outside of work, that scenario could be welcomed or at least seen as *acceptable*.

To put it succinctly, **younger generations do not romanticize the daily grind – they mostly view work as a means to an end (income, learning, impact) rather than an end in itself**. As such, if society offers alternative means to those ends (income via UBI, impact via volunteering or project-based gigs, learning via subsidized education, etc.), they may be quick to embrace them. This is a profound cultural evolution. It does not mean Gen Z and Millennials are "lazy" (a stereotype some try to pin on them); in fact, many work very hard – but they will work hard on *their own terms*, and they seek *balance*. As one Gen Z respondent put

it, “Can we stop calling it ‘quiet quitting’ when someone simply wants a life outside work? It’s just working.” <sup>21</sup> . The normalization of that sentiment is perhaps the strongest indicator that the work worship of yesteryear is giving way to a new ethos.

## IV. Receptivity Index: Ranking Readiness for a Post-Labor Transition

To synthesize the above factors – engagement, automation anxiety, and openness to policy innovation – we construct a **Post-Labor Receptivity Index** to compare how prepared (or willing) different societies are for a transition to a post-labor or significantly labor-light economy. This index considers multiple dimensions: **(1)** the extent of *dissatisfaction with current work* (as indicated by low engagement and high burnout/turnover), **(2)** the level of *automation awareness/fear* (how much people anticipate and worry about AI taking jobs), and **(3)** *policy receptiveness* (public support for measures like UBI, shorter workweeks, etc., that would facilitate a post-labor model). While data limitations make this an illustrative exercise, existing surveys allow us to rank many OECD countries by these criteria.

Key findings from the Receptivity Index analysis:

- **Southern European and some Anglophone countries emerge as most “receptive” to post-labor paradigms.** These are places with *high job disaffection, high automation concern, and strong support for new social models*. **Italy** tops the list: it combines *extremely low engagement* (only 5% engaged, 95% disengaged) <sup>4</sup> , *very high AI-job loss fear* (76% fear in surveys) <sup>25</sup> , and majority support for radical policies (52% support UBI <sup>38</sup> , and Italian governments have even trialed quasi-UBI schemes like “citizens’ income”). Italians also report some of the highest desire in Europe for reduced working hours due to quality of life – unsurprising given persistently high youth unemployment and underemployment, which have perhaps loosened cultural attachment to traditional jobs. **Spain** ranks similarly high: engagement is low (estimated ~10-15% engaged), and Spaniards show *very high concern about automation* (78% fear job losses) <sup>25</sup> . Critically, Spain has been an early adopter of post-labor trials – e.g., a government-backed **four-day workweek pilot** and strong public support for that idea. Spanish public opinion on UBI is net positive (around 49% for vs 26% against in 2022) and **57% believe UBI would improve quality of life** <sup>40</sup> – one of the most convinced populations. High youth unemployment and the gig tourism economy have made Spaniards quite open to rethinking work. **Portugal and Greece** (not as heavily polled) likely would join this top tier as well: Portugal shows the *single highest AI-fear* (80%) in Europe <sup>25</sup> and Greece historically has entertained ideas like a jobs guarantee or EU-wide basic income during its financial crisis. These Southern European cultures, sometimes stereotyped as having “strong work ethic” (e.g., long hours in Greece, multiple jobs), in reality also have strong “*life ethic*” – family, community, and leisure hold great importance. With economic hardships in the past decade, many in these countries seem eager for systemic solutions that relieve job scarcity and overwork.
- **France and the United Kingdom score high on receptivity, but with some caveats.** **France** has among the worst employee engagement (93% not engaged) <sup>4</sup> and high burnout/stress levels, indicating widespread dissatisfaction with work life. Culturally, France has long valued leisure (35-hour workweek law, extensive vacation, etc.), and recent massive protests against raising the retirement age show a strong desire to **spend less of one’s lifetime working**. Automation anxiety in France is at or above Europe’s average (~70% foresee job losses due to AI, per EY and other polls) and the French are famously skeptical of “big tech” replacing human roles (e.g., protests against Amazon warehouses). However, the French public has been somewhat **split on UBI** – polls have

shown roughly 40-50% in favor and a significant chunk undecided or opposed <sup>38</sup>. There is concern in France about “unfairness” of giving income to all (as a very egalitarian culture, some balk at the idea of paying the wealthy a basic income). Still, France has a strong social safety net ethos and political support for post-labor ideas on the left (e.g., Socialist presidential candidates have floated basic income). The **quiet quitting phenomenon is huge in France** – as noted, 72% doing bare minimum <sup>19</sup> – suggesting a silent rejection of work devotion. Overall, France’s index is high: the French may not say they love UBI yet, but their behaviors (low engagement, refusal to “live for work”) imply high receptivity if post-labor models are framed appropriately (e.g., *liberation from work* resonates well in a country with revolutionary spirit). Meanwhile, **the United Kingdom** has very low engagement (90% disengaged) and relatively high automation concern (no direct EY stat, but given UK’s tech sector and similar jobs profile to Netherlands, one might estimate ~60-70% concerned). The UK public is quite supportive of *flexible work and welfare reforms*: polling shows plurality support for UBI in principle <sup>38</sup>, and the UK just had a highly successful four-day week trial that garnered extensive positive media. British society, after years of austerity and now a cost-of-living crisis, is more open to previously radical ideas (even the Conservative government floated a form of minimum income during COVID). **One survey found 65% of Britons agreed that “the government should experiment with providing a universal basic income”** (Ipsos, 2021). Culturally, while hard work was a virtue for older generations, younger Brits are more similar to Europeans in valuing balance – evidenced by the fact that **only 6% of UK remote-capable workers want to return to full-time office** <sup>49</sup>. The UK ranks highly in receptivity, tempered only by its political volatility (support for post-labor ideas varies by political affiliation).

- **United States and Canada** fall in the middle-to-high range of the index. The **U.S.** has a somewhat contradictory profile: on one hand, it historically lionizes work ethic (“American Dream”, entrepreneurship, long hours) and indeed U.S. engagement (33%) is higher than the global average <sup>5</sup>. On the other hand, **job dissatisfaction and volatility are extremely high in the U.S. right now**, as seen in the Great Resignation and burgeoning labor movements. The U.S. has had **record quit rates** and a wave of union strikes in 2023 (from Hollywood writers to auto workers) – signals that workers are demanding a new deal (better pay, more say, or else they walk). Automation anxiety is significant: 75% of Americans expect fewer jobs nationally due to AI <sup>24</sup>, and 56% believe it will lead to fewer opportunities in their own field <sup>82</sup>. Public support for *post-labor policies* is growing: 55% support UBI <sup>42</sup>, over 60% support Medicare for All (de-linking health insurance from jobs), and as of 2023, polls show around **4 in 5 Americans favor a 4-day workweek** (in one LendingTree survey, 82% supported the idea, even if it meant longer workdays). The younger half of America is very much aligned with their global peers in valuing flexibility and purpose. The older half still clings more to work identity, which may lower the overall receptivity score. But the sheer scale of burnout (Americans work more hours on average than any other OECD country) means there is a huge undercurrent of *“there has to be a better way.”* It is telling that in 2021 when stimulus checks and enhanced unemployment benefits gave some buffer, millions of low-wage workers did not return to terrible jobs – many held out for better or left the labor force. That taste of a semi-post-labor life (supported by government aid) may have shifted attitudes permanently. The U.S. index score is thus buoyed by dissatisfaction and policy openness, but moderated by cultural lag in some quarters. **Canada**, while less studied, generally mirrors U.S./UK trends but with a bit more social safety net. Canadian support for UBI is high (a 2020 poll showed 75% support a basic income during the pandemic, with ~50% wanting it permanent). Canadian provinces have trialed basic income (Ontario pilot) and four-day weeks (Nova Scotia’s recent trial). Engagement in Canada is around 20% (if similar

to U.S./Canada Gallup region data). So Canada likely ranks as receptive, perhaps more uniformly so than the U.S., given a more collective culture willing to experiment with social programs.

- **Northern Europe (Scandinavia, Netherlands, Germany, etc.) shows a mixed picture.** These countries often score *higher engagement* than others (e.g., Sweden 21% engaged, Denmark 20% <sup>83</sup>), which while not high, is notably above France/UK). They also tend to have *lower fear of automation* (Germany 59%, Nordic countries similarly moderate fear) <sup>25</sup>, perhaps due to strong economies and existing robust welfare states. Additionally, public support for UBI has been lukewarm in places like Denmark (only 29% support) <sup>38</sup> or Sweden (split opinion). This might imply they are less receptive. However, another interpretation is that **these societies have already implemented many elements of a post-labor model in terms of decommodifying life: they have universal healthcare, generous unemployment and retraining benefits, shorter average work hours, and high job satisfaction relative to others. In effect, the pressure for something like UBI is lower because people feel somewhat protected (indeed, polls find Danes and Swedes think their governments can't afford UBI and don't need it given existing support systems <sup>84</sup> <sup>39</sup>).** But on the dimension of cultural attachment to work, Nordics are actually quite progressive – they champion work-life balance (e.g., Finland and Sweden experimented with six-hour workdays in some firms, and Iceland ran a hugely successful trial of a 35-hour workweek that led to permanent changes). So, while a Dane might say they oppose UBI, they might wholeheartedly support a four-day week or earlier retirement – both of which indicate willingness for less work. Germany is an interesting case: engagement is low (16%) <sup>83</sup> and 55% support UBI <sup>38</sup>, yet Germans also have a strong work culture in manufacturing. Still, the younger German generation is pushing boundaries (the public sector just agreed to a trial of a <35-hour workweek for some workers in 2023, and 71% of Germans liked the idea of a 4-day week in one survey). In Receptivity Index terms, Northern Europe might rank middle – not out of cultural attachment to work, but because they feel they have already achieved a good balance of capitalism and welfare. Their focus is often on refining the existing model (e.g., lifelong learning for automation, gradual reduction of hours) rather than a revolutionary leap. However, should automation accelerate, these cultures may adapt smoothly precisely because they value well-being over sheer work hours and have social systems to enable transitions.

- **East Asian developed economies (Japan, South Korea) present a special case.** Culturally, these have been very work-centric societies (long hours, company loyalty, etc.), which might imply low receptivity. Indeed, engagement in Japan is traditionally extremely low (in single digits) but that hasn't translated to embracing post-labor ideas – rather it has led to social issues like hikikomori (young people withdrawing). However, there are signs of change: younger Japanese and Koreans are beginning to reject the grueling “salaryman” life – evidenced by Korea's MZ generation (Millennials/Gen Z) pushing back against a recent proposal to expand maximum work hours to 69 per week, forcing the government to reconsider after public outcry. South Korea has experimented with reducing working hours (they cut the legal max from 68 to 52 hours in 2018). In Japan, some companies and even the government have started promoting four-day workweeks to address burnout and low birth rates. **Automation is very advanced in these countries (robotics in factories, etc.), and ironically social receptivity to robots is high in daily life, but the work culture has been slow to change.** Our index would currently rank them somewhat lower in receptivity due to lingering cultural expectations of work as duty. Yet, the extreme burnout (Japan coined “karoshi” or death by overwork) might create a breaking point. If presented with a viable alternative (like shorter hours supported by automation productivity gains), the coming generations in these countries might welcome it. So they are wildcards – potentially high receptivity beneath a

surface of traditional rhetoric. The rapidly aging populations in Japan/Korea also force a post-labor conversation: with fewer workers, they *need* automation and perhaps basic incomes/pensions to sustain the economy. So policy might drive receptivity from above as much as from below.

To illustrate the differences, consider the relationship between current *employee engagement* and *automation anxiety* in a few countries:

*Figure: Employee engagement vs. fear of AI-driven job loss in select OECD countries. Nations with lower engagement tend to show higher anxiety about automation disrupting jobs. For example, Italy and France have some of the world's lowest engagement rates (only 5–7% engaged) and correspondingly a very high majority fearing AI will cut jobs (≈75%+) <sup>4</sup> <sup>25</sup>. The UK, with only 10% engaged, also has elevated automation concern (~65% estimated). By contrast, the US and Germany, with relatively higher engagement (16–33% engaged), have somewhat lower – though still majority – fear of job loss to AI (roughly 59% in Germany, and around 60–75% in US surveys) <sup>83</sup> <sup>25</sup>. This pattern suggests that where people are least happy with work, they may be most anxious about technology taking jobs – yet that anxiety, coupled with dissatisfaction, could translate into openness to systemic change.*

Overall, our **Post-Labor Receptivity Index** (see Table 1 below) ranks countries roughly as follows:

- **High Receptivity:** *Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece, France, United Kingdom, Ireland, United States (younger pop), Canada.* – Characterized by very low job engagement, high burnout or turnover, strong fear of automation's impact, and noticeable public support for post-labor policies (e.g., majority backing for UBI or 4-day week). These societies exhibit many signs of readiness or even eagerness for new economic models that reduce reliance on traditional employment.
- **Medium Receptivity:** *Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, Japan, United States (older pop).* – Characterized by moderate engagement and moderate public support for changes. Many in this group have decent working conditions currently but are aware of coming challenges. They may not clamor for UBI yet, but they are incrementally moving toward shorter hours, more flexibility, etc. A significant subset of the population supports post-labor ideas, even if not majority.
- **Lower Receptivity:** *Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Austria, Czech Republic, Poland (and some other Eastern EU).* – Not because these cultures “love work” per se, but because they currently report higher job satisfaction/engagement or have strong safety nets that make radical change seem less urgent. For instance, Nordic workers often feel **personal engagement and purpose in their jobs at higher rates** (20%+ engaged) <sup>83</sup>, and their workweeks are already shorter on average (e.g., 37 hours in Denmark). They also express less fear that automation will harm them personally (perhaps due to confidence in retraining systems). Public opinion in these countries sometimes reflects contentment with existing models (e.g., “we don’t need UBI, we have generous unemployment benefits”). That said, these countries are often **the first to pilot progressive policies** (Finland’s basic income trial, Iceland’s 4-day week pilot) not out of desperation but innovation. Culturally, they are open-minded, but their index scores are moderated by relatively higher current work fulfillment. If automation begins to threaten their social model, their flexibility and consensus-driven politics could actually allow rapid adoption of post-labor policies. So “lower” in this context does not mean “resistant,” just *currently less pressed* to change.

It's important to stress that this index is an evolving measure. External events (recessions, AI breakthroughs) could alter a country's receptivity quickly. For instance, if a wave of AI layoffs hits a high-engagement country, receptivity may spike. Conversely, successful adjustments (say Germany's high-skills training averting mass unemployment) might keep receptivity moderate. But as of mid-2020s, **the countries facing the most acute labor crises (burnout, inequality, job insecurity) are leading in grassroots openness to new paradigms.** And even in more comfortable countries, younger generations' values ensure that post-labor ideas are gaining, not losing, traction over time.

**Table 1. Post-Labor Receptivity Index (Illustrative)**

Country	Disengagement (Engagement %)	Automation Fear (% expect job loss)	UBI Support (% favor)	4-Day Week Support	Receptivity Rank
<i>Italy</i>	Very high (5% engaged) <sup>4</sup>	Very high (76% fear) <sup>25</sup>	High (52% favor) <sup>38</sup>	High (broad support for shorter hours)	#1 (High)
<i>Spain</i>	Very high (~10% engaged)	Very high (78% fear) <sup>25</sup>	Medium- High (~50% favor) <sup>38</sup>	Very high (gov't pilot & public support)	#2 (High)
<i>France</i>	Extremely high (7% engaged) <sup>4</sup>	High (~70% fear) <sup>25</sup>	Medium (~40-50% favor) <sup>85</sup>	High (35h week norm, resist raising retirement)	#3 (High)
<i>United Kingdom</i>	Very high (10% engaged) <sup>3</sup>	High (est. ~65% fear)	Medium- High (45%+ favor UBI) <sup>86</sup>	Very high (80% in Scotland) <sup>44</sup>	#4 (High)
<i>United States</i>	Moderate (33% engaged) <sup>5</sup>	High (75% fear nat'l) <sup>24</sup>	Medium (55% favor) <sup>42</sup>	Very high (~80% favor in polls)	#5 (Med- High)
<i>Germany</i>	High (16% engaged) <sup>83</sup>	Moderate (59% fear) <sup>25</sup>	High (55% favor) <sup>38</sup>	Medium-High (trials underway, unions debating)	#6 (Med)
<i>Denmark</i>	Moderate (20% engaged) <sup>83</sup>	Low-Moderate (61% fear)** <sup>37</sup>	Low (29% favor) <sup>38</sup>	Medium (some interest, but already short avg hours)	#15 (Low)
<i>Japan</i>	Very high diseng. (~9% engaged)	High (survey: ~70% fear)	Low (no major UBI movement)	Low-Med (gov't cautious, some 4-day experiments)	#? (Med- Low)
<i>etc.</i>	...	...	...	...	...



(This table is illustrative; precise rankings would require a formal scoring methodology. It demonstrates how inputs like engagement, fear, and policy support vary.)

The Index exercise highlights a crucial point: **countries where workers are most unhappy and insecure about the future are precisely those where the public seems most willing to consider alternatives.** This runs counter to the assumption that a strong cultural work ethic would make people reject something like UBI or a shorter week. In fact, in places like Italy or Spain with deep-rooted work cultures, people are pragmatic – seeing that the current system isn’t delivering (youth unemployment, burnout), they are open to trying new approaches. Conversely, countries with very high quality jobs or existing social supports may *appear* less interested in change simply because they’ve already humanized work to a large extent (e.g., the average Dutch worker is part-time and content). But even those cultures could quickly get on board with post-labor policies if the situation called for it, given their general social consensus style.

In conclusion on the Index: **the readiness for post-labor transition is highest in many major economies – and certainly not confined to any one region or political system.** From Latin Europe to Anglo-American to East Asia, we see the underpinnings of receptivity. The differences are of degree and form, not of kind. No surveyed country showed *majority contentment* with the status quo of work – even the “low receptivity” ones have significant minorities pushing for change. This suggests an unprecedented global alignment of conditions (burnout, inequality, automation pressure) that favor rethinking the centrality of work.

## V. Harnessing Latent Demand: Pathways to Policy and Economic Restructuring

All the evidence surveyed – dismal engagement, frequent quitting, openness to automation and new policies, generational value shifts – points to a world of workers **ripe for systemic change.** The oft-feared cultural resistance to reducing work might not materialize; if anything, there is a *cultural demand* for change. The challenge and opportunity now is to channel this receptivity into concrete policies and models that improve human well-being as automation advances. In this final section, we discuss how governments, businesses, and societies can harness the trends to implement post-labor economic paradigms, and the importance of doing so with empirical rigor and inclusion.

**1. Acknowledge and normalize the desire for change.** Policymakers should start by recognizing that wanting shorter hours, basic income, or flexible careers is not a fringe or “lazy” desire – it is mainstream. The data from Gallup, Microsoft, Pew, etc., give legitimacy to claims that *people are unhappy with the status quo.* Governments can use this data to justify pilot programs and studies. For example, pointing to burnout statistics <sup>7</sup> and quit rates <sup>10</sup>, a government could argue: “Our workforce is in crisis; we need to test bold solutions like a four-day week or UBI to address widespread dissatisfaction.” Having authoritative surveys and trials (like the UK 4-day week pilot success <sup>87</sup>) helps counter the narrative that these ideas are too radical. Part of harnessing demand is simply to **give voice to it** – hold public forums, include questions about post-labor ideas in national surveys, invite worker input. When citizens see that their burnout and frustration are taken seriously, it builds trust that change is possible.

**2. Pilot programs and gradual scaling.** Empirical rigor is crucial – and fortunately, many post-labor concepts can be tested regionally or on a small scale first. Governments should fund and rigorously evaluate experiments such as: UBI trials (as Finland, Canada, and several US cities have done), **reductions in working hours** (as Iceland did nation-wide, and Spain is starting), **job-sharing incentives**, or sector-

specific automation transition programs. These pilots yield data on outcomes – productivity, well-being, cost – that can win over skeptics. For instance, the compelling data from the Iceland and UK four-day week experiments (productivity steady or up, sick days down, turnover down) <sup>45</sup> <sup>87</sup> have already spurred interest in other jurisdictions. Similarly, UBI experiments show effects on health and stress levels (Finland's trial saw improved mental well-being among recipients) <sup>88</sup>. By rolling out pilots, policymakers also signal to the public that they are responding to their needs, which can further increase public support (a virtuous cycle: small success builds appetite for larger implementation).

**3. Design policies to address the fears head-on.** The surveys show people's fears: they fear losing jobs/income (automation), they fear being surveilled or exploited (workplace culture), they fear being unable to afford living if they work less (economic security). Good policy design can mitigate these: for example, a UBI or federal job guarantee directly assuages the fear of lost income; strong labor laws and data privacy rules can prevent the worst surveillance abuses and improve trust at work (thus making reduced work hours more palatable as productivity won't be forced via draconian oversight); portable benefits and retraining programs can reduce fear of career disruptions. An OECD report noted that countries with robust safety nets see less resistance to automation <sup>89</sup> – because workers trust they won't be abandoned. Thus, to harness receptivity, **policy must pair the “carrot” of a better life with the “safety net” that addresses economic anxieties.** For instance, introducing a four-day week could be accompanied by government wage subsidies for small businesses initially, so workers don't fear pay cuts and firms don't fear profit loss. Likewise, an automation tax or robot dividend fund could finance UBI, framing it as “robots work so you can have income” – turning a point of fear (robots taking jobs) into a point of hope (robots funding livelihoods).

**4. Engage employers and reframe the narrative for them.** Not all friction is cultural among workers – a lot comes from employers who are used to current practices. To get buy-in, reframe post-labor policies as win-wins: Gallup's data shows disengagement costs trillions <sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup>, so improving well-being via a four-day week or basic income (which could create a consumer spending boost) can be sold as *economic productivity strategies*. Many firms already see flexible work as necessary to attract talent <sup>48</sup>. Highlight the companies thriving with shorter weeks or global companies adopting “Work from Anywhere” – peer examples carry weight in the business community. Also, involve employers in designing pilot programs (e.g., let businesses volunteer to trial reduced hours with government support). If employers feel part of the solution, they're less likely to obstruct it. Some forward-looking CEOs are already on board – e.g., companies in Japan moving to 4-day weeks reported happier staff with no drop in output. Publicize these cases. Essentially, **leverage the fact that a burned-out, dissatisfied workforce is bad for business, so changing that is in everyone's interest** <sup>90</sup>. We see this in how many companies embraced mental health days or hybrid work after seeing the productivity gains. The same could happen for broader post-labor shifts if data convincingly shows benefits (which early evidence suggests it does).

**5. Ensure inclusion and broad-based benefits.** One risk is that a post-labor transition could be uneven – high-skill workers might benefit (more flexibility, creative jobs with AI assistance) while low-skill workers could face unemployment. To maintain public support, policies must be seen as fair and *for everyone*. That's where ideas like UBI shine (universality avoids stigma and doesn't leave gig workers or caregivers out). If not UBI, then perhaps **expanding existing universal benefits** – e.g., free healthcare, free college, or a public dividend from tech profits. The YouGov data showed support for UBI in Europe came partly from a sense of fairness (everyone gets it) but concern came if it's seen as benefiting the idle rich <sup>91</sup> <sup>92</sup>. One solution some propose is a “*UBI floor plus progressive taxation*” to claw back from the wealthy. Regardless of mechanism, **ensuring that the average person tangibly benefits from automation (either through time off or money or services) is key to cultural acceptance.** People will embrace a post-labor model not

just because they dislike work, but because they see *security and opportunity* in the new model. If it's well-managed (e.g., trials show people use freed-up time for education, entrepreneurship, community work, or caregiving), that breaks stereotypes about idleness. Indeed, evidence from basic income pilots shows *people generally do not stop contributing when given a stipend; instead, they often pursue betterment, like education or starting a small business* <sup>88</sup>. Communicating these results can alleviate moral panic about “paying people to do nothing.”

**6. Cultural narrative and education.** Ultimately, embracing a post-labor paradigm requires a cultural story that resonates: the idea that human worth is not tied to wage labor. This is a profound shift, and it's already happening organically (younger generations valuing other aspects of life). But it can be accelerated by leaders and media. For instance, New Zealand's Prime Minister in 2020 openly suggested employers consider a four-day week to boost tourism and work-life balance – this kind of high-level endorsement makes the concept respectable. If respected economists present UBI as a pro-growth policy (by enabling entrepreneurship and consumer spending), it reframes it from “handout” to “investment.” The narrative should emphasize **freedom, creativity, family, and community** – basically, that reducing reliance on jobs will *enhance* culture, not destroy it. Historically, labor movements fought for weekends and 8-hour days not just for rest but so people could be better citizens and family members. A post-labor narrative can similarly argue that *less drudgery = more time for education, democratic participation, caring for the elderly, raising children, art, and innovation*. Given that **89% of Gen Z and 92% of Millennials say a sense of purpose is vital to their job satisfaction** <sup>72</sup>, imagine if that sense of purpose could be met partly outside a job – through volunteerism or personal projects supported by a basic income. Society could become more cohesive and creative. Such positive visions need to be part of the discourse to counter the fear of societal decay. In short, **we must redefine “productivity” to include human flourishing, not just hours worked**. If people broadly accept that, then policies like UBI or shorter weeks become not just acceptable but *aspirational*.

**7. Incremental steps with a long-term vision.** We likely won't jump to a full post-labor economy overnight. But incremental steps can start now: e.g., reduce standard work hours from 40 to 35 (as France did) or even 32 over a decade, while testing income supports. Over time, automation's gains can allow further reductions. It's important to have a roadmap so the public knows this is a managed transition, not a chaotic loss of jobs. For instance, an OECD country might set a goal: “Over the next 15 years, we will reduce average work hours by 20% while maintaining full employment, through job-sharing, public employment programs, and phased-in basic income.” Having that plan, with milestones, helps align stakeholders. **The receptivity is there – but people need to see a path**. Otherwise fear might dominate despite receptivity. Governments should also plan education system reforms, as many will choose not to work traditional jobs – encouraging entrepreneurship, arts, research, etc., via grants or fellowships can channel human potential in non-labor ways. Essentially, replacing the identity and community aspects that jobs provided with other institutions (community centers, maker spaces, etc.).

In conclusion, **the world's workers are sending a message**: the current way of working isn't working for everyone. High disengagement, burnout, and desire for change are not signs of laziness or moral failure – they are rational responses to a system that has stretched people to their limits without delivering proportional rewards or happiness. Culturally, we are seeing a renegotiation of the social contract of work. This upheaval can either lead to reactionary outcomes (people falling into despair or radical opposition to technology) or it can lead to progressive outcomes (people rallying for policies that free them to live better lives as automation advances). The research strongly suggests the latter is attainable – *if we listen to workers*.

There is latent demand for “systemic change,” as the prompt of this report noted, and that demand cuts across age, income, and geography.

By rigorously evaluating data from Gallup, Pew, OECD, and real-world trials, we see that **a post-labor future is not some far-fetched fantasy – many elements of it have broad public support right now**. The culture is, perhaps surprisingly to some, *ahead* of politics on this. The onus is now on leaders to be bold and creative, piloting policies that align with what people are ready for. Those who cling to old dogmas of work for work’s sake may find themselves facing a disgruntled electorate or talent drain. Conversely, those who pioneer new paradigms may unlock a happier, more innovative society. As one Microsoft Work Trend Index finding encapsulated: employees are more excited about AI augmenting their work than afraid <sup>35</sup> – that is a fundamentally optimistic stance, signaling people are ready to embrace change *if it improves their lives*. It is time to leverage that optimism.

**Empirically-grounded conclusion:** The data dispels the notion that cultural attachment to traditional work is an immovable obstacle. In developed economies, **most individuals do not derive great fulfillment from their jobs under current conditions; instead, they report stress, stagnation, and yearning for a better work-life equilibrium** <sup>7</sup> <sup>48</sup>. **Far from resisting change, many are already voting with their feet or voices for change – whether by exiting unsatisfying jobs, demanding flexible schedules, or supporting policies like UBI in polls** <sup>11</sup> <sup>38</sup>. This constitutes a vast reservoir of latent demand for systemic solutions. Cultural receptivity, in other words, is high.

The task now is to translate that receptivity into concrete policy and institutional reforms before it curdles into cynicism. By implementing well-designed trials, scaling what works, and continuously involving the public in dialogue, societies can transition to an economy where **automation and AI serve humanity – freeing people from involuntary toil and improving overall quality of life**. The end goal is not idleness, but rather *different* forms of productivity and purpose – ones chosen freely by individuals empowered with time and security. As the evidence shows, this goal aligns with what people in 2025 are increasingly ready to embrace. With careful stewardship, we can move toward a post-labor future that fulfills the promise of technology and human creativity, *dismantling the old notion that work is the only defining feature of a meaningful life*.

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