



But we all know that the effects go beyond the individual and his or her family. Employers feel the costs in terms of low productivity, absenteeism, high rates of staff turnover, increased costs of recruiting and training and, ultimately, reduced profits. Where the person in difficulty is the owner, especially of a small enterprise, the ultimate price may be business collapse. For governments, there are the costs of health care and insurance payments and the loss of income at the national level.

Our research in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and Finland shows that what we are dealing with is not at all a marginal phenomenon. On the contrary, it is a significant and growing problem which needs to be checked. The human cost is high enough in the countries I mentioned - but imagine what the situation is like where there are no disability pensions, no protection against such contingencies, no social support systems. The majority of working age people do not have access to the kind of assistance and institutions that may be available in the developed world. I think that we must also deal with the realities of developing countries which are equally touched by these problems.

Today, we are operating in a particularly challenging environment for work and mental health. The global economy has triggered a widespread malaise. There is a sense of insecurity and uncertainty and these feelings are often connected to work. People are having to deal with issues such as the informalization of employment, the loss of jobs, the precariousness of new jobs or the plain absence of new jobs. The opportunities opened up by new technology also come with new stress factors. At the same time, old social protection mechanisms are coming under threat.