



ADVANCING
PUBLIC
TRANSPORT

› REPORT

MARCH | 2025

UNDERSTANDING ABSENTEEISM IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT OPERATIONS



International Association of Public Transport (UITP)
Rue Sainte-Marie, 6 | B-1080 Brussels | Belgium

Tel: +32 2 673 61 00
info@uitp.org
www.uitp.org

© UITP – International Association of Public Transport, 2025

All rights reserved / No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without the written permission of the International Association of Public Transport

TABLE OF CONTENTS

— 3 —

Introduction

Context 4

Foreword 4

Methodology 5

— 6 —

Review: absenteeism in numbers

— 8 —

Consequences of absenteeism

— 9 —

Understanding the different types of absenteeism

Persona 1: Sick/injured –short-term 10

Persona 2: Sick/injured – long-term 10

Persona 3: Elderly worker 11

Persona 4: Carer 11

Persona 5: Extreme worker 11

Persona 6: Disengaged worker 12

Persona 7: Multiple job worker 12

Persona 8: Absence strategist/opportunist 12

— 13 —

Action plans and illustrations

Action 1: Health, safety, well-being, and prevention 14

Action 2: Work organisation (scheduling, flexibility, double shifts, etc.) 15

Action 3: Management and engagement 16

Action 4: Control/fight against absenteeism fraud 17

Action 5: Adapting HR policies 18

Action 6: Understand, measure, and steer absenteeism & support initiatives 20

— 21 —

Conclusion

Summary 21

Perspectives within UITP 21

— 22 —

Acknowledgements

INTRODUCTION

CONTEXT

THE AIM OF THIS PAPER IS TO HIGHLIGHT THE RESULTS OF RESEARCH CONDUCTED ON THE TOPIC OF ABSENTEEISM.

Absenteeism has been a persistent challenge for public transport (PT) companies. While the 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic exacerbated the problem, it is not the only factor. The pandemic highlighted more fundamental drivers such as job satisfaction, the attractiveness of the profession, and evolving attitudes towards work, all of which have played a role in increasing absenteeism. This issue is now directly affecting the ability of transport networks to meet growing demand.

Beyond the immediate operational challenges, absenteeism raises important questions about the long-term sustainability of PT services. With rising demand for mobility and growing pressure to meet sustainability targets, understanding absenteeism's impact on service continuity is crucial. This issue reflects broader dynamics that require careful analysis and targeted responses.



FOREWORD

The transport sector, like other sectors in the economy, particularly services, has been experiencing difficulties in attracting employees since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many transport companies have seen a significant increase in absenteeism due to illness or accidents at work.

While many agree that the arduous nature of the profession, with its atypical working hours and risk of aggression, is a key factor in explaining the rise in absenteeism, this is not the only explanatory factor. The COVID-19 pandemic incited a profound change in people's relationship to work, even if a majority of employees were never absent before or after the pandemic. Furthermore, there is a consensus that declining tensions on the job market and individual aspirations for a better work-life balance are also contributing to absenteeism.

Therefore, first and foremost, better understanding and analysis of absenteeism is essential to avoid simplistic answers or quick-fix solutions based on a hasty or even subjective assessment of the situation. Gaining a deeper understanding of the rise in absenteeism is crucial to developing appropriate responses.

Based on the results of a survey carried out between late 2023 and early 2024 among twenty operators from the International Association of Public Transport (UITP) Business and Human Resources Management (BHRM) Committee, this report aims to describe the causes and impact of absenteeism and identify possible courses of action to address the issue, taking into account the action plans put in place by transport companies.

Going beyond these actions and best practices, the report concludes by emphasising the need to involve all stakeholders (executive committee, trade unions, local management, etc.) in preventing or fighting absenteeism in the workplace, as interests must be shared to ensure the sustainability of our solidarity and social protection systems.

This paper was produced with significant support from Eurogroup Consulting and the BHRM Committee's dedicated working group, composed of representatives from Keolis, Riga Municipality, ATM, Transport for London (TfL), New Jersey Transit, GVB, Alsa, FGC, Eurogroup Consulting, and RATP.

A Guyot, Vice-Chair, UITP BHRM committee

METHODOLOGY:

Between late 2023 and early 2024, the UITP BHRM committee, composed of over 50 members, established a dedicated working group with eleven participants to conduct a study on absenteeism in the public transport sector. The working group included representatives from Keolis, Riga Municipality, ATM, TfL, New Jersey Transit, GVB, Alsa, FGC, Eurogroup Consulting, and RATP. The objective was to get a better understanding of the various factors influencing absenteeism and provide actionable insights for member organisations.

There were several limitations in this study. First, the data collected was based on self-reported insights from UITP members, meaning that there may be inconsistencies across responses. Second, differences in the number of employees considered, modes of transport (such as metro vs. bus), and organisational structures (groups vs. subsidiaries) create variations in how absenteeism is perceived and managed. Finally, approaches to managing absenteeism naturally vary from country to country, shaped by each region's specific legal, social, and cultural contexts.

A questionnaire was developed and distributed to the members of the BHRM Committee. A total of twenty public transport organisations across 13 countries responded. These organisations, representing a wide range of operational environments, ensure a broad and diverse perspective on absenteeism.

The survey was designed to gather factual data on several key areas related to absenteeism:

➤ Understanding absenteeism:

- Analysis of absenteeism rates among staff in 2022 based on years of service
- Exploration of the causes and impacts of absenteeism on service delivery and operations
- Examination of the social security frameworks in place, including compensation structures for absent workers
- Insights into evolving perspectives on absenteeism within the sector

➤ Absenteeism strategies:

- Action plans to fight and prevent absenteeism
- Challenges in preventing and fighting absenteeism and initiatives to overcome them
- Sharing of good practices and successful interventions to reduce absenteeism rates

➤ Well-being and stress management:

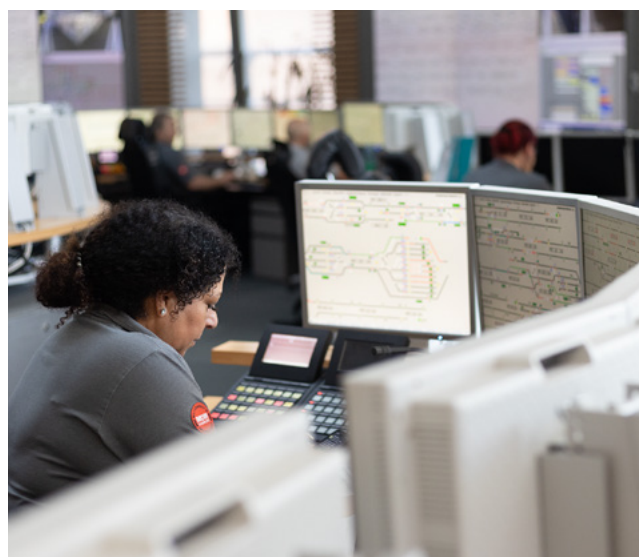
- Key performance indicators (KPIs) related to employee well-being
- Mental health and physical well-being programmes that have been implemented
- Insights into hours worked and overtime by drivers, including potential links to absenteeism.

The objective of this questionnaire was to provide a comprehensive overview of absenteeism, allowing member organisations to benchmark their own absenteeism data, identify the root causes, and adopt or refine strategies to address this issue.

Following the data collection phase, several meetings were held with the participating transport operators. These sessions allowed participants to examine the survey data, share experiences, and discuss strategies to tackle absenteeism. By bringing together diverse perspectives, these collaborative discussions allowed participants to refine their understanding of absenteeism dynamics and jointly develop more effective strategies. The feedback gathered from these meetings also helped enrich the analysis and ensured the study's recommendations were grounded in practical, real-world experiences from the field.

It should be noted that we were unable to address the topic of social security compensation in the workshop held in June, as we lacked sufficient data and results to have a comprehensive discussion on this aspect.

The countries covered in this study included Austria, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Mexico, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States (U.S.), ensuring a rich and diverse range of perspectives across different regions and organisational contexts.



REVIEW: ABSENTEEISM IN NUMBERS

The trends in absenteeism in the transport industry reveal both the short-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and long-term structural issues within the workforce. The pandemic significantly contributed to a spike in absenteeism, with average rates rising from 8.7% in 2019 to 10.8% in 2022, a total increase of 2.1% over four years. However, the pandemic merely accelerated an existing trajectory rather than initiating it, as deeper issues such as job dissatisfaction and changing employee expectations & labour market dynamics have long contributed to the increase in absenteeism.

Before delving into the details, it should be noted that the data represented here is self-reported, and there may be variations in how absenteeism is measured by each organisation. As such, the focus should not strictly be on the absolute values, but rather on the overall trends and ranges. This allows for a clearer understanding of the broader patterns impacting the sector.

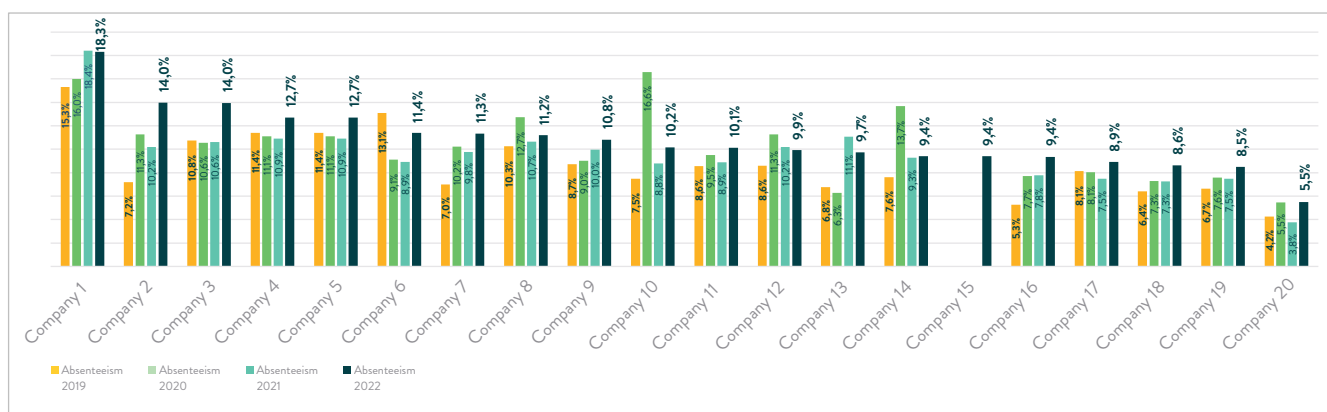
The following graph illustrates the absenteeism rates across various anonymised transport organisations between 2019 and 2022, highlighting the sharp rise during and after the pandemic.

In the graph, we can see a variety of trends across different companies. While some organisations have managed to maintain relatively stable absenteeism rates, others have experienced sharp increases, reflecting both the direct impact of the pandemic and underlying operational challenges. For instance, some companies experienced a significant jump in absenteeism, with 3-4% increases between 2019 and 2022.

The sharpest rise was recorded in Company 10, where absenteeism went from 7.5% in 2019 to 16.6% in 2020, primarily driven by the immediate effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

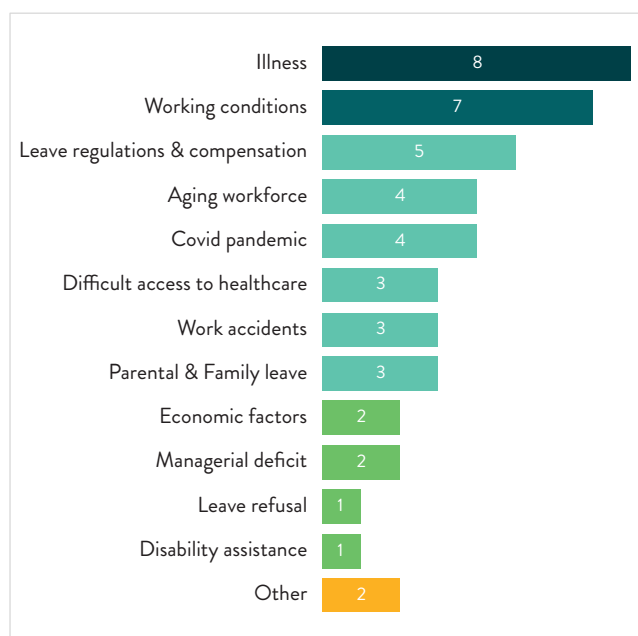
Absenteeism is driven by various factors, with the following highlighted by the organisations surveyed:

- 40% of organisations identified **illness** as the main cause of absenteeism.
- 35% attributed absenteeism to **working conditions**, with challenging environments contributing to higher absence rates.
- 25% mentioned **leave regulations and compensation** as contributing factors, reflecting potential dissatisfaction with company policies.
- 15% pointed to **difficult access to healthcare, work accidents, and parental or family leave** as additional contributors.
- 10% of organisations identified **economic factors, social conflicts, and managerial deficits** as reasons behind absenteeism.
- Finally, 5% of organisations linked absenteeism to **leave refusal and disability assistance**.



▶ Absenteeism rates across UITP organisations, 2019-2022

The following graph shows the main causes of absenteeism, as reported by the organisations surveyed.



► Main causes of absenteeism

This breakdown reveals the wide range of challenges affecting absenteeism rates. While illness remains the most cited cause, working conditions, access to healthcare, and family leave policies are also critical factors. This indicates that organisations need to address both health-related issues and workplace conditions to effectively reduce absenteeism.

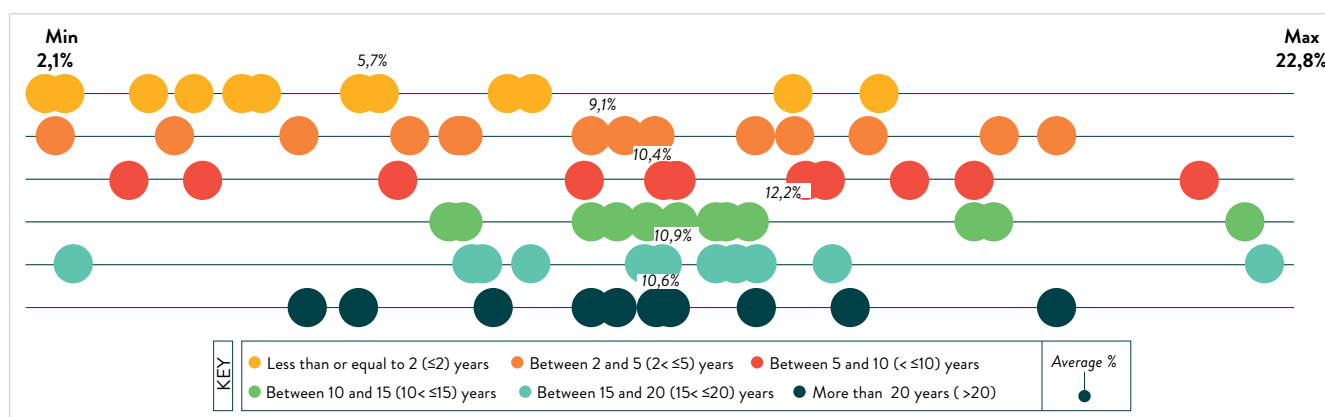
Absenteeism is also significantly influenced by seniority in the organisation. The graph below illustrates absenteeism rates in relation to employee seniority across various organisations. The data indicates that absenteeism trends shift based on years of service, with distinct patterns for newer employees and those with longer tenure. It should be noted that the data points represent averages across

multiple organisations, providing a comprehensive view of how seniority correlates with absenteeism in the transport sector.

Employees with less than two years of service in a company tend to have the lowest absenteeism rates, with an average of 5.7 percent. This rate increases to 9.1% for employees with 2-5 years of service and continues to rise for employees with more seniority. For instance, employees with 10-15 years of service have the highest average absenteeism rate, at 12.0%, with one operator peaking at over 22% for employees with 10-20 years of service. In comparison, other operators exhibit more stable profiles, with absenteeism rates ranging from 8% for employees with 10-15 years of service to just 5.5% for those with over 20 years of service.

Generational shifts and labour market dynamics also play an essential role in absenteeism trends. Younger workers, who tend to prioritise work-life balance and flexibility, are less committed to traditional job loyalty, leading to higher turnover and absenteeism rates. These workers are increasingly becoming “price-makers” in the labour market, exerting greater control over their employment conditions. Moreover, frontline jobs in the transport sector have become less attractive due to demanding working conditions and relatively low compensation, encouraging many to seek more favourable opportunities elsewhere.

While some organisations maintain relatively low absenteeism rates, particularly among employees with less than 10 years of service, the sector as a whole is facing a significant challenge in addressing the underlying causes of absenteeism. The rise in absenteeism, especially among long-term employees, highlights the need for targeted interventions to improve job satisfaction, working conditions, and overall employee well-being in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of transport services.



► Absenteeism rates based on years of service in a company

CONSEQUENCES OF ABSENTEEISM

The impact of absenteeism in PT is significant, affecting transport companies' financial stability, service quality, and internal operations. It leads to increased costs and operational inefficiency, while simultaneously reducing customer satisfaction and affecting employee well-being.

Based on data collected from various operators, the main consequences can be categorised as follows:

➤ Economic consequences:

Absenteeism leads to significant financial strain on transport companies, which must manage increased costs related to staffing and operations. In 35% of surveyed organisations, financial burden was cited as a critical impact of absenteeism. The financial consequences include:

Overtime pay: When regular drivers are absent, companies must rely on the remaining staff to cover additional shifts, leading to increased overtime payments.

Increased operating costs: Absences often result in less efficient operations, requiring companies to spend more on fuel, scheduling, and logistics to maintain service levels.

Recruitment and training costs: For 65% of surveyed organisations, absenteeism has led to the need for increased recruitment to fill gaps. Recruiting new drivers is not only costly but also time-consuming, with additional investment needed to train new hires.

Loss of revenue: Reduced service output, such as fewer kilometres driven and lower service frequency, can lead to decreased fare collection and, consequently, a reduction in income.

Furthermore, some operators face the need to compensate employees for cancelled days off or incentivise them to work additional shifts, further exacerbating the financial toll.

➤ Customer-related consequences:

Absenteeism can negatively affect service quality and reliability, leading to customer dissatisfaction. This has been observed in 10% of the organisations surveyed. Some of the direct consequences include:

Reduced service quality and frequency: 55% of surveyed organisations reported a decrease in service frequency and overall service quality. A reduction in the number of drivers inevitably results in longer waiting times for passengers, overcrowded buses or trains, and a corresponding decline in customer satisfaction.

Unmet customer needs: As service quality declines,

customers become more frustrated, particularly in areas where PT is their primary means of mobility. This can lead to a loss of trust in PT systems and a potential decrease in ridership.

Safety concerns: 5% of surveyed organisations reported increased safety risks due to absenteeism. Hiring new drivers to cover absent employees can introduce safety issues, as less experienced drivers are statistically more likely to be involved in accidents. For example, some data indicates that new drivers have four times more accidents than their more experienced counterparts, and the accident rate among newly hired drivers increased by 52% between 2022 and 2023.

This decline in service and safety leads to increased customer dissatisfaction, with riders often feeling underserved and inconvenienced, which can damage the overall perception of the PT network.

➤ Internal impacts on PT organisations:

Absenteeism has a significant impact on transport organisation operations, both externally and internally. It can create a ripple effect that leads to stress and difficulties for the remaining employees and managers. The internal impacts of absenteeism include:

Decreased employee well-being: In 35% of the organisations, absenteeism was linked to employee well-being-related challenges. Drivers who remain on the job are often required to work additional hours, leading to an increase in overtime, stress, and burnout. This overwork can lead to long-term morale issues, as employees feel overburdened by the need to compensate for absent colleagues. In some cases, employees have to give up planned vacation days to cover shifts.

Operational challenges: Around 30% of organisations noted operational challenges as a direct consequence of absenteeism. Managers have to constantly adjust schedules on short notice to accommodate unexpected absences, which affects the team's overall productivity. These last-minute changes can cause delays and inefficiencies in service delivery, creating a domino effect that further complicates day-to-day operations.

Recruitment difficulties and turnover: Increased absenteeism necessitates recruitment of additional staff. However, many transport companies struggle with recruitment due to lower employer attractiveness, as employees perceive the sector as stressful and demanding. This can lead to higher turnover rates, because employees opt for less demanding jobs in other sectors, further worsening the absenteeism cycle. 65% of the organisations surveyed identified recruitment challenges as a significant impact of absenteeism.

The wide-ranging impacts of absenteeism in PT highlight the need for a more thorough and focused analysis. Absenteeism creates significant costs for operators, from increased overtime and recruitment expenses to negative effects on employee well-being and customer satisfaction, making it a strategic issue for the sector.

This study aims to go beyond surface-level symptoms to identify the root causes of absenteeism. This will give transport operators the insights needed to shift from reactive solutions to proactive strategies, ensuring more resilient operations, improved employee conditions, and enhanced service quality in the long term.



UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF ABSENTEEISM

Following the identification of the wide-ranging consequences of absenteeism, a deeper analysis was conducted to uncover its root causes in PT organisations. This analysis draws on the collective expertise of the working group members who collaborated on this study and who have faced similar challenges in their own organisations. By sharing their experiences, the group created personas that reflect the diverse factors influencing absenteeism across the sector.

Several factors were identified as significant contributors, each affecting employee retention and overall service quality. Illness, including both physical and mental health issues, emerged as the leading cause of absenteeism, cited by 40% of the organisations surveyed. Working conditions, such as challenges related to work-life balance, high stress, and long shifts, were mentioned by 35% of organisations. Furthermore, 25% identified leave regulations and compensation policies as critical factors, especially in relation to sick pay and family leave entitlements. Other contributing elements included poor access to healthcare (15%), work accidents, and broader economic and social factors such as financial pressure, social conflicts, and managerial deficits. Moreover, incidents of violence against employees by passengers have also been recognised as a source of physical and psychological stress, leading to an increase in absenteeism due to the negative impact on employee well-being.

To gain further insight into these causes, personas representing different types of staff have been created to better understand the distinct factors contributing to absenteeism. Mapping these personas facilitates the identification of specific levers for action, enabling transport operators to develop more targeted and effective strategies.

While absenteeism is a serious concern, it does not affect all employees equally. A significant number of workers are never absent throughout the year, and some only take short absences, usually for one or two days, due to minor illnesses or fatigue. Such brief absences are not the primary drivers of absenteeism within organisations. The analysis here focuses on a smaller group of employees whose longer or more frequent absences have a more substantial impact on operations and service delivery.



► Overview of staff personas

PERSONA 1: SICK/INJURED – SHORT-TERM

This persona represents employees who experience short-term absences due to non-chronic illnesses or minor job-related injuries. Typically, these absences occur 2-3 times per year, each lasting around 7 days. Common causes of absence include illnesses such as colds, influenza, or other infections, as well as minor work-related injuries requiring temporary leave for medical treatment or rehabilitation. In some cases, employees may also take advantage of sick leave to rest, extend a weekend, or attend medical appointments.

► Potential causes of absence:

- **Non-chronic illness:** Colds, influenza, and infections requiring brief medical leave
- **Job-related injuries:** Minor injuries sustained during work that necessitate short-term medical care or rehabilitation
- **Opportunity for rest:** Some employees use sick leave to rest or extend time off over weekends, even when not critically ill.

This type of absence is common and can affect any employee. A key challenge faced by employees in this category is accessing medical care promptly, as many struggle to secure timely appointments. In response, some PT organisations have implemented self-declaration

systems, allowing employees to report their own illnesses without immediate medical validation. While this approach can streamline absence management, it relies heavily on trust between employees and management, which can lead to absenteeism fraud. This persona includes both genuinely ill employees and those taking advantage of the system for opportunistic reasons.

PERSONA 2: SICK/INJURED – LONG-TERM

This persona represents employees who have long-term absences due to chronic illnesses, serious job-related injuries, or burnout. The definition of long-term absence varies by region, with some organisations considering it to be more than a few weeks, while others define it to be a minimum of several months. Employees in this category often require more than 90—even up to 180—days off per year, depending on the severity of their condition. These absences result from long-term illnesses, serious injuries that require extended recovery periods, or ongoing medical treatment and rehabilitation.

► Potential causes of absence:

- **Chronic illness:** Conditions requiring regular medical appointments and treatment over extended periods
- **Job-related injury:** Severe injuries sustained at work, necessitating long-term medical care, rehabilitation, and recovery
- **Burnout:** Health issues related to work stress, requiring significant time off for recuperation.

Managing long-term absences is particularly challenging due to the different definitions and regulations across countries. Each nation has its own approach to defining long-term leave, which complicates the process for organisations operating in multiple regions. PT organisations must find effective ways to manage these absences and prevent potential misuse of the system. Some operators are advocating for policy changes to help streamline processes and ensure a fair balance between supporting employees and maintaining operational efficiency.

PERSONA 3: ELDERLY WORKER

This persona represents older workers who are more prone to health-related absences due to age-related issues or chronic illnesses. Absences in this category are often predictable but prolonged, as they are linked to regular medical appointments, surgeries, or recovery periods. Older workers may also experience exhaustion and sickness, requiring longer recovery times.

➤ Potential causes of absence:

- **Health-related issues:** Chronic illness and age-related health concerns
- **Frequent medical appointments:** Regular doctor's visits and recovery periods
- **Exhaustion and sickness:** Likely to take longer leaves of absence for recovery from illness or surgeries due to physical wear.

As the workforce ages, organisations face the challenge of adapting work environments and schedules to better accommodate older employees. Measures such as adjusted schedules and better work-life balance practices can help prevent exhaustion and sickness in this group. However, many companies currently do not have specific measures in place to address the needs of older workers. This is partly due to varying retirement ages across different regions, which affects the urgency of these policies. As retirement ages increase, companies are recognising the need to implement new policies to support older employees and prevent prolonged absences due to health-related issues.

PERSONA 4: CARER

This persona represents employees who take absences due to family responsibilities, including parental leave and caregiving duties for children, elderly parents, or disabled family members.

➤ Potential causes of absence:

- **Parental leave and childcare responsibilities:**

Absences related to childbirth, early childcare, or attending to children's needs

- **Care for sick or disabled family members:** Short-term absences to provide care for children or other dependents with health issues
- **Elderly care:** Absences related to the care of aging parents or disabled relatives.

Absences in this group are often spontaneous and unpredictable, which complicates workforce planning. The need to care for children or family members, including elderly parents or dependents with disabilities, can arise suddenly, making it challenging for organisations to manage staffing. Providing flexibility and support to these employees is key to helping them balance their work and family responsibilities.

PERSONA 5: EXTREME WORKER

This persona represents employees with extreme jobs or irregular shifts, often working outside of regular working hours, including night shifts, weekend shifts, or very long shifts. These workers are exposed to safety concerns, work-life balance challenges, and shift fatigue, which increases the likelihood of absenteeism. Absences can be either short-term, due to immediate fatigue from long hours, or longer-term, related to mental health issues caused by sustained stress and lack of rest.

➤ Potential causes of absence:

- **Safety concerns and fatigue:** Long or irregular shifts, such as late-night or extended hours, lead to physical exhaustion and increased safety risks.
- **Work-life balance:** Working unsocial hours often disrupts personal life, contributing to stress and mental health challenges.
- **Extreme shift length:** Absenteeism tends to be higher during or after very long shifts, where workers can be on duty for extended hours without adequate rest.

Absenteeism rates can vary depending on the type of shift worked. For example, night workers may be less prone to absences in some regions due to higher wages and incentives, while extreme shifts (sometimes lasting up to 13 hours) are more likely to lead to fatigue-related absences. Shift length can differ from country to country, but absenteeism is notably higher for workers with extreme or irregular schedules. Transport companies are beginning to address these challenges by adjusting shift lengths to reduce fatigue and improve work-life balance.

PERSONA 6: DISENGAGED WORKER

This persona represents employees who become disengaged from their work due to a lack of motivation, job dissatisfaction, or poor work-life balance. This situation can occur at any stage of an employee's career, regardless of their years of service. It is particularly common among younger generations who have different expectations from their employers and place a higher value on work-life balance. These employees may remain with the company due to the stability or benefits their position offers, but they are not fully engaged at work.

➤ Potential causes of absence:

- **Job dissatisfaction:** Employees may take frequent leaves of absence because they feel disconnected or unhappy with their job.
- **Work-life balance issues:** A desire for a better balance between personal life and work can lead to unpredictable absences.
- **Lack of engagement:** Employees remain with the company but are not motivated, resulting in sporadic attendance.

Re-engaging disengaged workers is a significant challenge for companies. Younger employees may have different expectations in terms of flexibility and workplace culture, which can lead to absenteeism when those expectations are not met. Companies must find ways to re-engage these workers and create an environment where employees feel motivated to contribute meaningfully. Without proactive solutions, some employees may remain in their roles simply for job security, leading to lower overall productivity and higher absenteeism rates.

PERSONA 7: MULTIPLE JOB WORKER

This persona represents employees with more than one job, making their absenteeism difficult to predict and manage. Employees in this category work freelance or part-time for several companies. This creates scheduling challenges, as they balance commitments between jobs. This persona often faces burnout and fatigue due to excessive working hours, which can also increase the risk of accidents.

➤ Potential causes of absence:

- **Secondary job commitments:** Employees may take leave to fulfil responsibilities related to their secondary job(s).
- **Economic opportunities:** Workers may pursue freelance or part-time work to supplement their income, leading to unplanned absences.
- **Burnout and exhaustion:** Juggling multiple jobs often leads to fatigue, increasing the likelihood of absenteeism and decreasing overall performance.

Managing employees with multiple jobs is a growing challenge for companies, especially since regulations and labour laws vary by region. Some organisations have introduced exclusivity contracts to address these issues, but ensuring adherence to such clauses is difficult, especially when employees are working freelance. Furthermore, certain regions have implemented systems to track hours worked across multiple jobs, yet compliance remains a significant challenge. The debate over multiple employment also raises questions about corporate responsibility and the risks associated with overwork. Allowing multiple employment can expose workers to greater risk of accidents and fatigue, making it crucial for companies to explore solutions that safeguard both employees and operations.

PERSONA 8: ABSENCE STRATEGIST/OPPORTUNIST

This persona represents employees who strategically exploit the company's leave policies. They are fully aware of the rules regarding sick leave, family care leave, and other permissible absences and take full advantage of these opportunities without violating any regulations. Any employee can have this persona, regardless of years of service, as it is more a matter of understanding and leveraging company policies to their benefit.

➤ Potential causes of absence:

- **Exploitation of company policies:** Employees take frequent leaves of absence because they know they can do so without affecting their salary or facing repercussions.
- **Maximising leave benefits:** Employees use all available leave options to maximise time off without compromising their employment status.

Managing this type of absenteeism is particularly challenging for organisations because employees are not technically breaking any rules; rather, they are simply taking advantage of existing policies. This makes it difficult for companies to address the issue without seeming punitive. To manage this, organisations must find ways to strengthen their leave negotiation systems and implement better employee oversight, ensuring that leave policies are fair but not easily exploited. Striking the right balance between employee rights and operational needs is key to mitigating the impact of this behaviour.

This persona analysis has provided valuable insights into the diverse causes of absenteeism across different employee profiles. Through the identification of specific behaviours and patterns, it has become clear that targeted actions can be developed to address the challenges faced by each group. This understanding will allow organisations to implement tailored strategies, from improving work-life balance to better managing multiple job commitments and re-engaging disengaged employees. Ultimately, this analysis serves as a foundation for creating effective, long-term solutions to reduce absenteeism and improve workforce productivity.



ACTION PLANS

An action plan has been developed based on the persona analysis. It offers a versatile framework for organisations to address absenteeism through targeted strategies. This plan emphasises the importance of grounding efforts in data and qualitative insights. By conducting internal analyses and organising focused discussions, organisations can develop a comprehensive understanding of absenteeism patterns, which can, in turn, enable them to find ways to effectively tackle this issue.

Building on the abovementioned personas and insights, this action plan provides a framework designed to guide organisations in addressing absenteeism in a targeted, strategic manner. Rather than serving as a one-size-fits-all solution, it invites each organisation to adapt these actions to its own specific context. This plan should be seen as a flexible canvas, enabling self-assessment and strategic alignment with each organisation's unique needs and goals.

To effectively adopt this approach, we encourage taking a data-driven perspective, which involves the collection of relevant data, focus group discussions, and a deep dive into the organisation's absenteeism patterns. This canvas offers a starting point, highlighting themes and actions that can aid in the development of tailored absenteeism strategies. By engaging with the identified personas and action areas, organisations can develop a nuanced view of how their existing measures align with best practices and where adjustments could further support their goals.

Using this approach, each organisation can create its own personas based on internal data to better customise its action plans. The traditional categorisation of employees often lacks the granularity needed to capture absenteeism nuances, especially in cases that impact operations the most. Personas provide a clearer view of specific behaviours and patterns, which is essential for identifying and addressing high-impact absenteeism.

Not all actions will be equally feasible or relevant for every organisation. This action plan is intended to be used as a broad framework, offering a comprehensive overview of possible interventions and thematic areas. It can be viewed as a self-evaluation tool, i.e. a checklist to assess current practices and identify gaps. Serving as both a roadmap for setting goals and a means of tracking progress, this plan can help organisations establish tailored approaches to absenteeism that align with their unique challenges and opportunities.

Overview of the action plans:



Health, safety, well-being and prevention

Address mental health issues, improve access to healthcare, and enhance workplace safety

1. Develop health and well-being plans
2. Foster a safety culture
3. Conduct regular safety training
4. Implement safety inspections and audits



Work organisation (scheduling, flexibility, double shifts, etc.)

Optimise work schedules to improve worklife balance and job satisfaction

1. Improve shift management
2. Introduce flexible shift policies



Management and engagement

Foster a supportive management culture to reduce absenteeism

1. Reinforce management & provide manager training
2. Develop employee engagement



Control/fight against absenteeism fraud

Minimise fraudulent absenteeism through strict controls and clear policies



Adapting HR policies

Improve employee retention and attract talent with improved HR strategies

1. Enhance employer brand
2. Develop and deploy improved recruitment strategies
3. Define policy for double jobs
4. Adapt salary based on work presence



Understand/measure/steer absenteeism and support initiatives

Better understand absenteeism patterns and implement measures to address them

1. Monitor KPIs and attendance patterns
2. Deploy employee centred initiatives
3. Conduct absenteeism data analysis
4. Govern absenteeism

ACTION 1: HEALTH, SAFETY, WELL-BEING, AND PREVENTION

Ensuring the physical and mental well-being of employees is a critical factor to reduce absenteeism and maintain operational efficiency. By focusing on mental health, improving access to healthcare, and fostering a safe working environment, organisations can proactively prevent many of the issues that lead to absenteeism.

A. Develop health and well-being plans

To effectively address both physical and mental health issues, companies should focus on implementing comprehensive health and well-being plans tailored to their workforce's needs. This involves a range of preventative measures, access to medical services, and support for mental and physical health.

Focus on preventative health measures: Regular health assessments and screenings should be implemented to identify common health concerns such as high blood pressure, cholesterol levels and diabetes risk. These initiatives help detect potential health issues early on and prevent long-term absences. Some organisations have also introduced voluntary medical check-ups and even in-house healthcare services like physiotherapy or nursing support, ensuring employees have quick access to care.

Promote physical well-being: Encouraging fitness challenges, offering gym memberships, and providing access to fitness classes can significantly boost physical health, reducing stress and absenteeism. Some companies have integrated these initiatives into their employee well-being programmes, creating a culture of health and fitness in the workplace. Promoting nutritional education can help employees make healthier lifestyle choices. Dedicated break, relaxation, and coworking areas can be established, as some organisations have done, to help employees manage stress and maintain their physical and mental well-being during the workday. Organisations can adjust their approach based on their workforce's specific needs and preferences.

Support mental health: Establishing mental health support systems is crucial to tackling issues like stress and burnout. Companies can create mental health hotlines or online counselling platforms or offer referral services to mental health professionals. In some cases, organisations have developed extensive mental health awareness programmes, including online training and trauma support groups, to help employees manage work-related stress and other mental health challenges.

Facilitate employee access to healthcare: Companies may establish partnerships with medical professionals or offer in-house medical services to reduce the time employees have to spend seeking care. Some organisations have developed in-house medical centres or arranged for medical tours to ensure that workers have swift access to necessary treatments and consultations. In certain cases, flu vaccination campaigns or other health initiatives have been introduced to safeguard employees' health and reduce absenteeism.

By implementing these comprehensive health and well-being plans, companies can proactively address their workforce's physical and mental health needs, contributing to a healthier, more engaged, and more productive workforce.

B. Foster a safety culture

Promoting a culture of safety within the workplace is essential to improve employee well-being. To achieve this, companies should recognise safe behaviour, establish clear priorities, and embed safety practices into daily routines and long-term strategies.

Recognise and reward safe behaviour: Recognising and rewarding safe behaviour is a crucial part of fostering a safety culture. By acknowledging employees' commitment to safety, organisations create a positive environment where workers feel valued for their efforts to maintain a safe workplace. Open communication about safety issues should also be promoted, allowing employees to report concerns without fear of reprisal and fostering a culture of transparency.

Establish priorities and embed practices: Safety must be integrated into the company's long-term vision and daily operations. This includes setting clear priorities for safety practices and embedding them into the company's routines and incentive plans. Leadership plays a key role in ensuring these practices are consistently applied throughout the organisation. Some organisations include safety goals in their long-term incentive plans to ensure sustained commitment and compliance across all levels.

Embedding safety into the company's core values and rewarding safe behaviour can help organisations create a sustainable safety culture that not only reduces accidents but also enhances overall employee well-being.

C. Conduct regular safety training

Regular safety training is essential to ensure that all employees, from newcomers to experienced staff, are well-prepared to handle potential safety risks in the workplace.

Train new employees on safety protocols: It is crucial for newcomers to receive comprehensive safety training upon joining the company. This training equips them with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate safety risks from day one. Some organisations have developed specific programmes such as safe driving courses and conflict management training to ensure new employees are well-versed in both general safety practices and role-specific risks.

Provide ongoing training for all employees: Organisations must offer regular refresher training for all employees. These sessions serve as reminders of key safety protocols and introduce updates to practices where needed. Safety training must also account for psychological risks, especially in environments where employees are exposed to trauma or high-stress situations. In certain cases, companies implement advanced programmes such as trauma risk management (TRiM) to help employees manage and recover from traumatic incidents.

By conducting regular safety training, organisations not only ensure compliance with safety protocols but also create a more resilient workforce capable of managing both physical and psychological risks.

D. Implement safety inspections and audits

Companies must implement regular safety inspections and audits to maintain a safe working environment and continuously improve safety protocols. This process helps identify potential risks, ensures compliance with safety standards, and promotes proactive measures to address safety concerns before they lead to incidents.

Establish a safety reporting system: A robust reporting system is essential to ensuring that safety concerns and near-miss incidents are addressed swiftly and effectively.

Conduct regular safety audits and inspections: Routine safety audits and inspections are necessary to assess workplace conditions, ensure adherence to safety protocols, and identify areas for improvement.

ACTION 2: WORK ORGANISATION (SCHEDULING, FLEXIBILITY, DOUBLE SHIFTS, ETC.)

Optimising work schedules is crucial to improving both work-life balance and overall job satisfaction. By providing more flexible scheduling options, better managing double shifts, and addressing employee needs through adaptable work arrangements, companies can create a more supportive and efficient work environment.

A. Improve shift management

Effective shift management is essential to balancing operational demands with employee well-being. Shift optimisation can help enhance work-life balance, increase job satisfaction, and minimise absenteeism.

Involve employees in the scheduling process: Taking employee preferences into account helps create a more personalised and satisfactory work experience. Some organisations allow employees to indicate their preferred shifts at the beginning of the month; if they do not, they waive the right to complain about assigned shifts later. This process fosters transparency and gives employees a greater sense of control over their schedules.

Implement predictive scheduling software: Using advanced scheduling tools such as predictive software allows organisations to allocate shifts more efficiently, based on real-time demand and workforce availability. This minimises the occurrence of unexpected double shifts and ensures better resource allocation. Investing in such technologies can significantly improve scheduling processes, although employee adoption of new technologies can sometimes be challenging.

Balance shift lengths and protect rest periods: Ensuring that shifts are neither too long nor too frequent is essential to maintaining employee well-being. Companies should enforce mandatory rest periods between shifts, particularly after double shifts, to reduce fatigue and improve performance. Protecting rest periods and vacation days is a priority, as it is often more acceptable to adjust shifts than touch rest or vacation periods.

Establish welfare facilities for employees: Installing proper welfare facilities such as break rooms or relaxation areas helps improve employee well-being between shifts. These spaces provide employees with opportunities to rest and recharge, contributing to better performance and satisfaction.

Encourage the use of technology in shift management: Many companies are investing in shift management technology, such as mobile apps or marketplaces where employees can swap shifts, facilitating communication and flexibility. However, making sure employees are comfortable using these tools remains a challenge. Organisations should encourage adoption by demonstrating the benefits and ease of use, ensuring that new systems are well-integrated into daily operations.

If companies adopt these strategies, they can improve transparency, efficiency, and flexibility in shift management, ultimately leading to greater employee satisfaction and a more balanced work environment.

B. Introduce flexible shift policies

To enhance work-life balance and accommodate employees' diverse personal commitments, companies can introduce flexible shift policies. These policies allow employees to adjust their work schedules as needed, providing the necessary flexibility to manage responsibilities such as childcare, medical appointments, and other personal obligations.

Offer flexible scheduling for personal commitments: Flexible scheduling enables employees to adjust their working hours when personal commitments arise, ensuring they can maintain a balance between their professional and personal lives. This flexibility is particularly important for workers with caregiving responsibilities or need to attend medical appointments. Allowing employees to modify their shifts in a structured manner helps reduce absenteeism caused by personal conflicts.

Adapt schedules for elderly workers: It is essential to implement measures that meet the specific needs of older employees. Offering more flexible schedules for elderly workers helps prevent exhaustion, reduce sickness, and maintain productivity. Flexible hours or part-time work options can also help these workers achieve a healthier work-life balance, ultimately improving job satisfaction.

Some organisations already offer flexible working hours or assign specific shifts to promote better work-life balance, while others offer job rotation and part-time work options to reduce monotony and accommodate individual needs. These measures create a more adaptable and supportive work environment, contributing to employee well-being and reducing the likelihood of burnout.

ACTION 3: MANAGEMENT AND ENGAGEMENT

A strong and supportive management culture is key to reducing absenteeism and fostering a positive work environment. By engaging employees and ensuring that management practices are focused on well-being, organisations can create a workplace environment where employees feel valued and supported.

A. Improve management and provide managerial training

Effective management is critical to reduce absenteeism, by fostering strong relationships with employees and ensuring a supportive work environment. Companies can significantly enhance employee engagement and well-being through the provision of targeted training and active involvement of managers.

Offer targeted training for managers: Companies should provide comprehensive training programmes to help managers improve their leadership, communication, and employee engagement skills. This includes specific training on how to handle sensitive conversations such as those with employees who have been repeatedly absent. Some organisations have developed leadership frameworks to clearly define what is expected from managers, ensuring they approach such conversations with confidence and respect.

Involve managers in preventing absenteeism: Managers should play an active role in helping employees return to work after long absences. In some organisations, it is mandatory for managers to meet with employees who have been absent for extended periods, while others have implemented more frequent meetings, regardless of the length of the absence. These one-on-one interactions provide an opportunity to address any underlying issues and encourage employees to return to work sooner.

Improve the absenteeism intervention process: Managers should be equipped to ask the necessary questions in a way that respects legal boundaries while helping shed light on the employee's situation. This requires continuous improvement of training programmes for managers, ensuring they are prepared to handle these conversations with care and professionalism. Some organisations have implemented frameworks where managers conduct interviews after every absence, enabling consistent employee feedback and engagement.

Reinforcing management practices and ensuring that managers are properly trained and involved can aid organisations to foster stronger relationships with employees, reduce absenteeism, and improve overall engagement.

B. Foster employee engagement

Employee engagement is a key factor in job satisfaction and productivity. By actively measuring engagement and encouraging open communication, organisations can address employee concerns, motivate teams, and create a more positive work environment.

Measure and track employee engagement: Regular employee engagement surveys are a valuable tool to gather feedback on workplace satisfaction and areas for improvement. This feedback can be used to drive meaningful changes within the organisation and address concerns that may impact employee morale. Engaged employees are more likely to stay committed and have lower absenteeism rates, contributing to the overall success of the company.

Improve communication with employees: Clear and frequent communication between management and employees helps keep everyone informed and aligned with organisational goals. This can be achieved through newsletters, emails, or dedicated communication platforms. Some companies have implemented digital tools to facilitate communication between HR and employees, ensuring that all staff are updated on key matters and feel connected with the broader team.

Introduce recognition and incentives: Recognising and rewarding employees for their performance and presence is a powerful way to boost engagement. Introducing bonuses for productivity, as well as incentives tied to absenteeism-related KPIs, can motivate employees to maintain consistent attendance.

For instance, one organisation identifies “top performers” in its workforce based on specific KPIs, including maintaining at least 250 days on duty, with no more than five days of sick leave, and getting high performance evaluations. Employees with clean disciplinary records of over five years qualify for this recognition, covering roles such as bus, tram, and metro drivers. As part of the programme, HR and management meet the top performers directly in their work environments (in buses, trams, or metro stations), fostering informal and open exchanges that reinforce the organisation's values. Known as the “Values on Tour” initiative, this programme aims to promote company values at every location, motivating employees to embody these principles and contribute positively to the organisational culture. This approach has successfully created a culture of solidarity and ambition, with employees motivated to become ambassadors of company values and engage fully in their roles.

Some organisations have found value in creating systems that not only recognise individual attendance but also encourage team-based accountability for attendance. For example, one organisation has implemented a collective attendance bonus, rewarding teams that maintain full attendance over a set period. This approach fosters solidarity within teams, as team members become jointly responsible for achieving attendance goals. Social partners (e.g. unions) have acknowledged the positive effects of this system, and discussions are underway to expand this collective approach to other teams in need of re-engagement.

ACTION 4: CONTROL/FIGHT AGAINST ABSENTEEISM FRAUD

Fraudulent absenteeism can significantly impact productivity and operational efficiency. To minimise this, organisations must implement strict control measures and enforce clear policies that discourage abuse. By reinforcing oversight and establishing transparent procedures, companies can better manage absenteeism and ensure that the system is not misused.

A. Verify and control absences

To minimise absenteeism fraud, organisations must implement robust verification and control mechanisms. Closely monitoring sick leave and verifying that absences are legitimate can reduce fraud and ensure that support is directed to employees who truly need it.

Strengthen absence verification processes: It is crucial to check the legitimacy of sick leave to prevent fraud. This can be achieved through regular medical checks or by leveraging the social security system, depending on the regional regulatory framework. Some organisations have engaged investigator agencies to monitor suspected fraudulent activity. In certain regions, healthcare professionals can perform checks on employees during sick leave, and disciplinary procedures may be initiated if fraud is detected. For instance, one organisation has chosen to focus on employees who strategically misuse sick leave, often following denied day-off or shift-change requests. This organisation identifies these “top offenders” through KPIs such as 24 or more sick days per year and tracks “strategic absences” as a marker of potential fraud.

Hold regular check-ins for long-term absences: Regular check-ins can help verify affected employees’ condition and ensure they receive the support needed for their return to work. Some companies have introduced mandatory meetings with employees after 30 days of leave, providing an opportunity to assess the legitimacy of their absence and plan for their reintegration.

Leverage data analytics and KPIs: Data analytics can be used to identify potential fraud. Companies can develop KPIs and use predictive models to spot patterns of suspicious behaviour. With data analysis, organisations can focus their anti-fraud efforts on high-risk cases, ensuring that investigations are conducted efficiently and cost-effectively. In some cases, social media monitoring has also been employed to verify the status of employees suspected of abusing sick leave policies, although this approach can require a lot of resources.

One organisation piloted a data-driven approach to monitor absenteeism abuse among 118 bus and tram drivers, 5 metro drivers, and 21 frontline metro employees. This project led to the issuance of disciplinary letters to identified “top offenders” for strategic sick leave misuse. Following consultations with its legal centre of expertise, the organisation activated 45 disciplinary actions, resulting in nine sanctions, including salary withholding and suspension from service. In August 2024, this approach led to the resignation of a high-absence employee who had accumulated 29 sick events totalling 52 days of leave in one year.

Implementing these measures can significantly reduce fraudulent absenteeism and ensure that their absence policies are applied fairly and transparently.

ACTION 5: ADAPTING HR POLICIES

To improve employee retention and attract new talent, organisations must continuously adapt their HR policies to meet their workforce’s evolving needs. This entails refining recruitment processes, offering competitive benefits, and fostering an inclusive workplace culture.

A. Enhance employer brand

To attract and retain the best talent, companies need to strengthen their employer brand. By emphasising a strong commitment to work-life balance and employee well-being, companies can establish themselves as employers of choice in their respective industries.

Develop internal and external campaigns: It is important to develop both internal and external campaigns that emphasise the company’s dedication to promoting work-life balance. These campaigns should highlight the company’s support for flexible working arrangements and employee well-being programmes, helping potential candidates and current employees understand the organisation’s values.

Make information readily available: Companies should ensure that information about absenteeism support programmes and other employee benefits is easily accessible. This can be achieved by featuring clear and concise details on the company’s website, career pages, and job advertisements. Candidates are more likely to be attracted to organisations that transparently communicate the support available to employees.

Leverage digital platforms: Regularly sharing resources and updates related to employee well-being and absenteeism management on social media platforms and in company newsletters can further reinforce the employer brand. By maintaining an active and informative

presence online, companies can engage both current and prospective employees, demonstrating a commitment to their workforce.

Through implementation of these strategies, organisations can effectively enhance their employer brand, making themselves more attractive to both potential hires and existing employees and positioning themselves as leaders in employee well-being.

B. Improve recruitment strategies

Enhancing recruitment strategies is crucial to attracting and retaining high-quality candidates, particularly in roles prone to absenteeism. By tailoring recruitment efforts and using innovative tools, organisations can identify candidates who are well-suited for the work environment, reducing turnover and absenteeism rates.

Tailor recruitment messages for critical roles: Recruitment campaigns should emphasise the organisation's commitment to managing absenteeism and supporting employee well-being. This can be particularly effective for roles with higher absenteeism rates, where potential candidates may be attracted by the organisation's proactive approach to work-life balance and support programmes.

Leverage partnerships: Establishing partnerships with educational institutions, community organisations, and professional networks can help companies reach a wider pool of talent, including people who may be more in tune with the company's values and work culture.

Implement employee referral programmes: This helps attract candidates to positions with high absenteeism rates. Employees can help bring in individuals who share similar values, particularly in terms of managing absenteeism and valuing a supportive work environment.

Improve recruitment processes: This helps companies select better candidates who are a good fit for the organisation. Tools such as psychometric testing to assess candidate behaviour and minimise turnover can also be implemented. This approach also makes it easier to identify potential risk factors, increasing the likelihood that new recruits will remain committed and motivated.

Refining recruitment strategies and leveraging both internal and external resources can aid organisations in attracting top talent, improving employee retention, and reducing absenteeism across key positions.

C. Define policy for multiple jobs

As multiple employment is becoming more common, organisations must establish clear policies to manage the potential challenges associated with employees holding multiple jobs. By defining expectations and implementing appropriate measures, companies can protect productivity and reduce conflicts of interest.

Establish multiple job policies: Organisations should clearly specify whether employees are permitted to hold additional jobs outside of their primary employment. This should address key areas such as working hours, conflicts of interest, and the impact on performance. If multiple jobs are allowed, conditions should be set to ensure they do not negatively affect the employee's primary work. Some companies already engage in discussions about the implications of multiple jobs, including the responsibilities of the employer in managing this issue.

For cases where employees breach the multiple job policy, organisations must establish clear consequences. This may include disciplinary measures for infractions such as reductions in benefits, suspension, or termination, depending on the severity of the violation. Having well-defined penalties helps ensure that the policy is respected and that multiple job holders understand the importance of prioritising their primary employment.

By establishing a well-defined and enforceable policy on multiple jobs, companies can minimise the risks associated with divided attention or overwork, while simultaneously maintaining a focus on productivity and employee well-being.

D. Adjust salary based on work presence

To encourage regular attendance and discourage absenteeism, organisations can implement policies that adjust salaries based on employee presence.

Implement salary adjustments for absenteeism: Some organisations have chosen to reduce the salaries of employees who are frequently absent, creating a link between attendance and compensation. This method can help ensure that employees prioritise their responsibilities and remain committed to their work. By establishing a salary gap between employees who are present and those who are frequently absent, companies can create a more equitable system that rewards dedication and presence.

Other organisations have implemented bonus systems that reward employees based on productivity and/or consistent attendance to encourage employees to maintain high performance and remain engaged. Bonuses tied to employee productivity or work presence create a financial incentive to reduce absenteeism.

The use of tools to track the hours worked by each employee also allows organisations to accurately monitor attendance and enforce salary adjustments or penalties. Some companies have introduced systems that track hours and automatically apply penalties for excessive absenteeism, ensuring transparency and consistency in how these policies are implemented.

Salary adjustment based on work presence can help companies establish a culture of fairness and transparency, as this encourages employees to maintain consistent attendance while aligning their compensation with their contributions.

ACTION 6: UNDERSTAND, MEASURE, AND STEER ABSENTEEISM & SUPPORT INITIATIVES

Effectively managing absenteeism requires a comprehensive understanding of its patterns and causes in an organisation. Measuring absenteeism rates and identifying trends enables companies to develop targeted initiatives that address the root causes and reduce unnecessary absences.

A. Conduct absenteeism data analysis

Comprehensive data analysis is essential for gaining insight into the reasons for absenteeism and developing effective solutions to address it. By methodically gathering and examining absenteeism data, organisations can identify key trends, allowing them to devise more effective strategies for reducing unnecessary absences.

Collect and analyse absenteeism data: Absenteeism data collection and analysis allows companies to monitor patterns and trends across the organisation. While quantitative data provides insights into absenteeism trends, qualitative data is also needed to identify the root causes of absenteeism. Surveys and employee interviews can also help uncover the factors contributing to frequent absences, such as workplace conditions, personal health challenges, or work-life balance issues. This deeper understanding can enable organisations to tailor their absenteeism reduction strategies to their workforce's specific needs. Implementation of monthly reporting and monitoring systems can help organisations stay proactive in managing absenteeism and identifying areas that require immediate attention.

Regular absenteeism data analysis provides companies with a better understanding of the factors driving absenteeism and enables them to implement strategies that address the specific challenges their workforce faces.

B. Monitor KPIs and attendance patterns

To effectively manage absenteeism, it is essential to regularly monitor attendance data and develop KPIs that provide insight into patterns of absence. This helps companies address issues proactively and reduce unnecessary absenteeism.

Develop and track absenteeism-specific KPIs: Absenteeism-specific KPIs can provide valuable insights into overall attendance trends and help companies assess the effectiveness of implemented initiatives. Regular reviews of absenteeism data allow organisations to stay informed and respond promptly when patterns shift.

Define KPI alerts for immediate action: This can be implemented to trigger immediate action when KPI values exceed acceptable levels. These alerts ensure that managers are notified when absenteeism spikes, allowing them to intervene early and address potential issues before they escalate. This system helps organisations stay proactive in managing attendance challenges.

Conduct systematic audits of attendance records: This can help identify patterns of absenteeism, including potential fraudulent absences. Systematically reviewing attendance records can help companies detect irregularities, track habitual absentees, and take corrective actions when necessary.

Use data analytics to detect unusual patterns: Data analytics is a powerful tool for identifying unusual or concerning patterns. Through data analysis, HR teams can spot potential issues early on and intervene before they escalate. However, while tools and analytics are valuable, they can also be costly and time-consuming; HR teams need to have a deep understanding of definitions and data to maximise their effectiveness.

Close monitoring of KPIs and attendance patterns can aid organisations in ensuring they are taking the right steps to manage absenteeism, detect irregularities, and reduce unnecessary absences through timely interventions.

C. Deploy employee-centred initiatives

Creating initiatives that focus on employee feedback and personalised support is essential to tackling the root causes of absenteeism. By engaging employees directly and tailoring solutions to their individual needs, organisations can foster a supportive work environment that reduces absenteeism.

Gather employee feedback through questionnaires and surveys: Conducting regular employee surveys on experience with absenteeism-related policies and workplace conditions provides valuable insights into the challenges employees face. This feedback helps identify

areas for improvement, ensuring that absenteeism strategies are both relevant and effective. Furthermore, employee feedback empowers organisations to make data-driven decisions that are aligned with the workforce's needs and expectations.

Develop personalised absenteeism action plans: For employees with higher absenteeism rates, personalised monitoring and action plans can provide tailored support. Working closely with these employees can enable HR teams to better understand the reasons for their absences, whether due to personal challenges, health issues, or workplace conditions. Personalised plans should include specific interventions such as flexible scheduling or targeted wellness programmes to help address the employee's needs and encourage consistent attendance.

By deploying employee-centred initiatives that combine feedback collection and personalised support, organisations can address the diverse causes of absenteeism and create a more engaged workforce.

D. Create a governance structure for absenteeism

Clear governance of absenteeism through well-defined policies is essential to ensure transparency and fairness across the organisation. Key stakeholders such as social partners and executive leadership should be involved to develop sustainable approaches that align with social protection systems and operational needs.

Develop clear absenteeism policies: Clear policies are needed to ensure transparency and fairness across the organisation. These policies should define acceptable reasons for absences, outline reporting procedures, and specify the consequences for excessive absenteeism. Standardising these policies across the organisation promotes consistency and ensures that employees understand both their responsibilities and what is expected of them. To be effective, the policies must address both short-term and long-term absences. These policies should be easily accessible and regularly communicated to help employees stay informed, reduce misunderstandings, and foster a supportive environment.

Engage social partners and the executive committee: To ensure the long-term sustainability of social protection systems, regular discussions on absenteeism should take place with labour unions and other social partners. This collaboration helps ensure that absenteeism policies are balanced and fair, while simultaneously supporting the broader framework of social protection. These discussions should be elevated to the executive committee level, so that leadership is actively engaged in shaping and endorsing these policies. Regular exchanges

between management, unions, and social partners can help organisations anticipate and resolve potential issues, reinforcing their commitment to fairness.

CONCLUSION

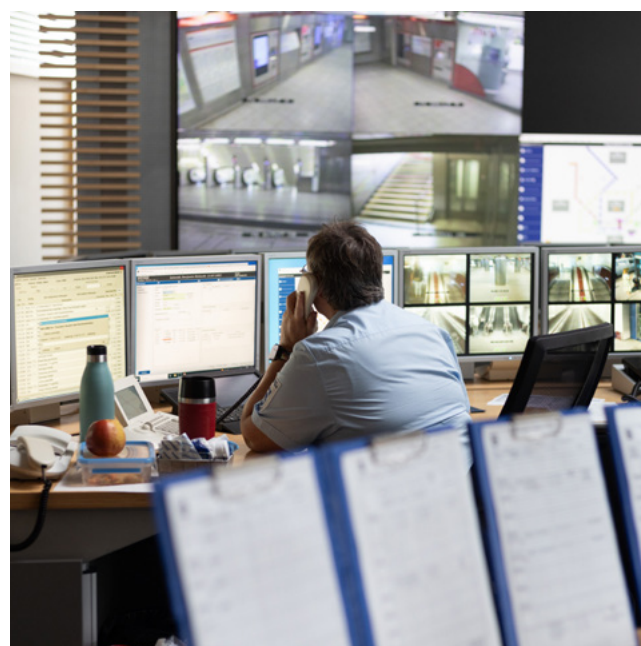
SUMMARY

Absenteeism presents significant challenges for PT organisations, impacting financial performance, service quality, and employee well-being. Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive understanding of its root causes, coupled with targeted strategies that focus on improving work conditions, supporting employee health, and enhancing management practices. By shifting from reactive solutions to proactive approaches, organisations can build more resilient operations, better engage their workforce, and ultimately improve service quality for their customers.

PERSPECTIVES WITHIN UITP

The contributors to this report are at UITP's disposal to share the analysis and conclusions with other UITP committees or working bodies and disseminate their findings.

The members of the UITP BHRM Committee are also invited to use this report as a self-assessment tool for organisations at all levels or as an aid for management reviews/reporting on absenteeism in transport operations.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was prepared by the UITP Business and Human Resources Management Committee, with special acknowledgement to Eurogroup Consulting and RATP, as well as the members of Absenteeism working group. This study would not have been possible without the support and active participation of the UITP members who contributed their time and knowledge to the survey. For more information, please contact christel.goossens@uitp.org.

This is an official Report of UITP, the International Association of Public Transport. UITP represents the interests of key players in the public transport sector. Its membership includes transport authorities, operators, both private and public, in all modes of collective passenger transport, and the industry. UITP addresses the economic, technical, organisation and management aspects of passenger transport, as well as the development of policy for mobility and public transport worldwide.

This Report was prepared by Business and Human Resources Management Committee.



MARCH | 2025

Rue Sainte-Marie 6, B-1080 Brussels, Belgium | Tel +32 (0)2 673 61 00 | Fax +32 (0)2 660 10 72 | info@uitp.org | www.uitp.org