

Assessing the Need for Right-to-Disconnect Policies to Enhance Work-Life Balance in India

Tanmay Manish

Research scholar, P.G. Department of Commerce, Munger University, Munger, Bihar

ABSTRACT

The expansion of digital technologies has fundamentally altered the nature of work, dissolving temporal and physical boundaries between professional and personal life. In India, prolonged working hours, increased smartphone use and the normalization of hybrid and remote work have intensified expectations of constant availability of the employee. This study undertakes a descriptive analysis of the need for Right-to-Disconnect (RTD) policies in India using secondary data from government sources, international organizations, academic literature, and current developments in media and public policy. By examining global standards, Indian labour conditions, ongoing legislative efforts, and corporate practices, the paper evaluates whether formal legal recognition of the RTD is necessary. Findings indicate that India's long working hours, rising burnout complaints, and digital over-engagement highlight a compelling need of the policy. The study concludes with policy recommendations aimed at balancing economic productivity with employee well-being.

Keywords: Right to Disconnect, Work-Life Balance, Digital Labour, India, Policy Analysis, Burnout

Introduction

Technological innovations have reshaped workplace practices worldwide. Email, messaging platforms and mobile devices enable real-time communication, enhancing collaboration and responsiveness. However, such technologies also force an “always-on” culture, whereby employees remain connected to work beyond formal office hours (Derks et al., 2014). In India, this trend overlaps with existing work patterns marked by long hours and growing digital involvement.

While countries such as France, Spain, and Portugal have already enacted formal RTD protections, India has not yet codified such a right despite ongoing legislative efforts and public debate. There is urgent need to establish work-life balance in India. Work-life balance can be understood as an individual's ability to manage professional responsibilities and personal life effectively. Researchers emphasize that healthy balance contributes to psychological well-being, relationships, and productivity (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011).

The Right-to-Disconnect is a policy framework that supports work-life balance, designed to regulate communications outside conventional work hours. It protects employees from being compelled to answer emails, messages, or calls related to work during personal time. By setting clear boundaries between work and personal life, it promotes mental well-being and a healthier, more balanced lifestyle. The first statutory model was introduced in France in 2017, requiring companies with over 50 employees to negotiate communication norms and respect off-duty boundaries (Eurofound, 2018).

Research Objectives

This study aims to:

1. Describe trends in working hours and digital connectivity in India.
2. Analyze international RTD policy precedents.

3. Examine current efforts toward RTD policy in India.
4. Evaluate the necessity of an RTD policy in the Indian context.
5. Identify challenges and formulate policy recommendations.

Methodology

This research adopts a descriptive research design using secondary sources only to analyse patterns and policy developments. Sources include:

- Reports from international organizations (ILO, OECD)
- Government publications and labour statistics
- Media coverage of Indian RTD debates
- Academic journals on digital labour and work-life balance
- Parliamentary records and legislative tracking platforms

India's Work Environment Issues and Digital Connectivity

India's work environment is evolving rapidly, driven by technology, globalization, and changing business practices. Employees now enjoy more flexibility, access to digital tools, and opportunities for collaboration across locations. While these changes bring flexibility and growth opportunities, they also create challenges for employees. The below mentioned are the highlights that needed to be address the hidden drawbacks of India's modern work environment behind those advantages.

i. Long Work Hours and Digital Engagement

According to the data of International Labour Organization (2024), many Indian works around 46.7 hours per week which places the country among the nations with relatively high weekly work hours globally. Additionally, the ILO data shows that over half of India's workforce (about 51 %) regularly works more than 49 hours each week, indicating that extended workweeks are common for many workers. Growing smartphone usage and remote work arrangements have increased expectations for after-hour responsiveness, leading to extended work engagement beyond physical workplaces. This constant digital engagement through emails, messaging platforms, and video meetings makes it harder for workers to fully disconnect and contributes to pressure to remain active beyond scheduled work hours, affecting their ability to balance professional and personal life.

ii. Remote and Hybrid Work Patterns

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of remote and hybrid work. As of recent data, about 12.7 % of fulltime employees work entirely from home, while roughly 28.2 % follow a hybrid model that blends remote and inoffice work, showing how flexible work has become more common than before (Forbes, 2024). While remote work offered flexibility, it also contributed to blurred boundaries between work and personal life. Employees reported checking emails late at night and on weekends, reflecting an expectation of constant availability turns what was meant to be a benefit into a source of stress.

iii. Digital Burnout

Digital burnout refers to the physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion that results from excessive use of digital technologies and constant connectivity. A study on workplace digital behaviours suggests that constant connectivity exacerbates stress and reduces leisure time quality (Derks et al., 2014). More Studies show that digital tools such as messaging apps, virtual meetings, and continuous email alerts can overwhelm employees, making it difficult to switch off after work and Fades distinction between work and home life (Baurai et al., 2025).

iv. Cultural Pressure and Overachievement

The modern workplaces follow a culture that prizes high productivity and achievement can drive innovation and competitiveness, but it also creates cultural pressure that pushes employees to prioritise work over personal health and life responsibilities. The need to remain continually engaged and responsive, reinforced by organizational norms and societal expectations of achievement, undermines worklife balance and increases the risk of longterm mental health consequences (Baktash & Pütz, 2025).

International RTD Policy Examples

- **France**

In 2017, France introduced the Right to Disconnect as part of the Labour Code reforms. The regulation requires companies particularly those with 50 or more employees to implement measures that allow workers to refrain from engaging with work-related digital communications outside official working hours, such as emails, calls, or instant messages. The goal is to protect employees' personal time, rest periods, vacations, and family life, addressing the negative effects of constant digital connectivity on mental health and work-life balance.

To comply, companies must either negotiate an annual agreement with employee representatives defining how the right to disconnect will function or, if no agreement is reached, create a charter outlining practical rules for after-hours communication and the responsible use of digital tools. While the law does not impose direct penalties for noncompliance, it emphasizes creating organizational practices that respect employees' personal boundaries and reduce stress caused by always-on work expectations. France's RTD regulation is considered a pioneering step internationally, highlighting the importance of balancing modern digital work demands with employee wellbeing (Gouvernement.fr, n.d.; Library of Congress, 2017).

- **Spain**

In Spain, the Right to Disconnect was established through Royal Decree-Law 28/2020 to improve work-life balance, particularly for companies with 50 or more employees. Under this law, employers are required to implement a written policy that defines when employees are not obligated to respond to work-related communications such as emails, calls, or messages outside normal working hours. Workers cannot be penalized for ignoring communications during their personal time, and the policy is typically developed in consultation with employee representatives or unions. Enforcement is carried out through labour inspections, and companies may face fines for non-compliance.

- **Portugal**

In Portugal, the Right to Disconnect is incorporated in the Labor Code (Law 93/2019) and applies to both public and private sector employees. Employers must create internal rules regulating the use of digital tools to ensure that workers are not obliged to respond to work communications outside their regular hours. The law emphasizes respecting employees' rest periods and encourages flexible arrangements, with violations reportable to labour authorities, which can impose fines or sanctions for repeated breaches. While both countries aim to safeguard workers' personal time in the digital era, Spain's regulations focus more on larger companies, whereas Portugal applies broadly across sectors.

Necessity of RTD Policy In India

After reviewing the hidden disadvantages of modern work culture the necessity of a Right to Disconnect (RTD) policy in India is clear and urgent. With long working hours, constant digital connectivity, and cultural pressures to overachieve, employees face growing risks of burnout and compromised work-life balance. International examples from France, Spain, and Portugal demonstrate benefits of that legally protecting personal time improves mental health, reduces stress, and sustains productivity without harming organizational performance. These examples collectively illustrate that structured legal frameworks for disconnecting from work not only safeguard mental health and reduce stress but also support sustained productivity and organizational effectiveness showing a viable model that India could adapt to its own workforce challenges. For India, implementing RTD would formalize boundaries around after-hours communication, promote sustainable work practices, and align the country with global labour standards, making it a crucial step for employee wellbeing and long-term workplace balance.

Current Efforts on RTD Policy in India

India has currently intensified policy discussion on establishing a statutory "Right to disconnect" to safeguard employees from work – related communication beyond official working hours. On 15th December 2025, a private member's bill titled the Right to Disconnect Bill, 2025 was introduced in the Lok Sabha by Supriya Sule. The bill will be extended to entire country and aims to give employees a clear legal right to disconnect from work-related calls, emails, and messages outside their officially defined working hours without facing any disciplinary action or retaliation. (Parliament of India, Lok Sabha, 2025). The main proposals regarding the bill are:

- i. **Creation of Employees Welfare Authority :** To implement these provisions, the Bill proposes the creation of an Employees' Welfare Authority, which will be constituted by the Central Government. This Authority will include key officials such as ministers, secretaries, the Chief Labour Commissioner, and the Director General of the Labour Bureau. Its functions include formulating a charter for after-hours communication, conducting baseline studies on the use of digital tools outside work, and guiding states, companies, and societies in implementing the Bill's provisions. The Authority also serves to ensure that the rights guaranteed under the Bill complement other employee welfare schemes and policies.
- ii. **Agree on terms :** Companies and societies with more than ten employees are required to negotiate mutually agreed terms regarding after-hours communication, and individual entities must produce a formal Charter outlining these provisions.
- iii. **Overtime Pay :** The bill balances the rights of employees with operational needs by allowing overtime pay if employees are required to work during agreed or requested out-of-work hours.
- iv. **Creation of Employees Welfare Committees:** To support the rights of the employees, the bill mandates to create Employee welfare committees within the organizations to represent employees during negotiations and oversee implementation of out-of-hours policies.
- v. **Policies for remote working :** The bill requires entities to establish clear policies for employees working remotely while recognizing the changing nature of work which includes remote and telework.
- vi. **Digital detox centres:** It also encourages awareness programs, counselling services and digital detox centres to promote mental health and work-life-balance.
- vii. **Penalty for non-compliance:** organization that fails to comply with the provisions of the Bills can face penalties up to 1% of the total employee remuneration, ensuring accountability and enforcement.

Overall, the Bill aims to create a structured framework that protects employees from overwork, supports their well-being and fosters a healthier , more sustainable work culture in India's increasingly digital economy.

Challenges in Policy Implementation

- **Informal Sector Prevalence** - A significant portion of India's workforce operates in the informal economy where work hours are irregular, and digital engagement is less structured. Applying RTD protections in such contexts poses enforcement challenges and may require sector-specific adaptations.
- **Cultural Expectations of Availability** - Indian work culture often equates long hours with commitment and diligence. Overcoming entrenched perceptions requires awareness campaigns and employer incentives, not merely legislative mandates.
- **Enforcement and Oversight Mechanisms-** Effective implementation would require institutional mechanisms, such as labour inspectors or digital communication audits, to ensure compliance. Without monitoring capacity, RTD provisions could remain symbolic.

Policy Recommendations

To address the need for a balanced work environment, the following recommendations are offered:

1. **Integrate RTD Protections into Existing Labor Codes:** Amend existing labour laws to explicitly include RTD provisions for formal employees.
2. **Sector-Specific Guidelines:** Develop separate RTD frameworks for different industries formal sectors like IT and corporates may require statutory mandates, while informal sectors may benefit from awareness and voluntary guidelines.
3. **Corporate Best Practice Frameworks:** Encourage employers to adopt internal policies limiting non-urgent after-hours communication and to provide employee training on digital well-being.
4. **Awareness and Education Initiatives:** Launch public campaigns and HR training programs that emphasize the importance of boundaries between work and personal life.

Conclusion

India's dynamic labour landscape, marked by high work hours and digital integration, highlights the pressing need for policies that protect work-life balance. The Right-to-Disconnect concept provides a promising framework to regulate

after-hours communication and uphold employee well-being. Although legislative and enforcement challenges exist, ongoing policy efforts, corporate initiatives, and public discourse demonstrate growing acknowledgment of this issue. A balanced policy approach that combines legal safeguards, organizational practices, and cultural change could significantly improve work–life harmony in India’s workplaces.

References

- Derks, D., van Duin, D., Tims, M., & Bakker, A. (2014). Smartphone use and work–home interference: The role of social norms and employee work engagement. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 19(1), 74–87. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035071>
- Eurofound. (2018). *The right to disconnect in the EU: Approaches and practices* (EF18013). Publications Office of the European Union.
- Greenhaus, J. H., & Allen, T. D. (2011). Work–family balance: A review and extension of the research. In J. C. Quick & L. E. Tetrick (Eds.), *Handbook of occupational health psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 165–183). American Psychological Association.
- International Labour Organization. (2023). *Working time and work–life balance around the world*. ILO Publications.
- Baurai, S., Sekhar, C., Kumar, D., & Raj, A. (2025). Digitalization and employee wellbeing: A fuzzyTISM approach of remote work stressors. *Journal of Management & Organization*, 31(6), 3004–3028. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2025.10059>
- Baktash, M.B., Pütz, L. Detach to Thrive: Psychological Detachment from Work and Employee Well-Being. *J Happiness Stud* 26, 54 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-025-00883-7>
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2022). *OECD employment outlook 2022*. OECD Publishing.
- Right to Disconnect Bill, 2018 (India). (2018). *PRS Legislative Research*. <https://prsindia.org>
- Right to Disconnect Bill tabled in Lok Sabha: Which other countries enforce work–life balance? (2025). *Moneycontrol*. <https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/india/right-to-disconnect-bill-tabled-in-lok-sabha-what-is-it-and-which-other-countries-enforce-work-life-balance-13716138.html>
- Ministère du Travail et des Solidarités. (2025, December 4). *Right to disconnect*. <https://travailemploi.gouv.fr/ledroitladeconnexion>
- Parliament of India, Lok Sabha. (2025). *The Right to Disconnect Bill, 2025 (Bill No. 51 of 2025)*. <https://sansad.in/getFile/BillsTexts/LSBillTexts/Asintroduced/51%20of%202025%20AS125202592416PM.pdf?source=legislation>