



Working conditions and sustainable work

**Working conditions in telework
during the pandemic and future
challenges**

[Telework in the EU: Regulatory
frameworks and prevalence](#)

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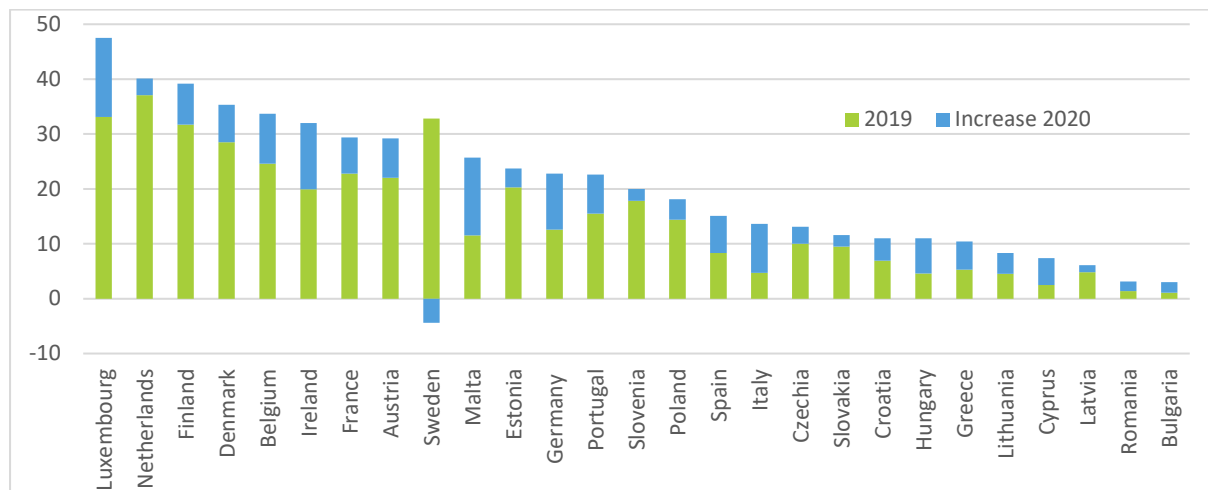
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1 - Introduction to the report

A growing number of working tasks in Europe's economy are enabled by Internet connectivity and can be performed anywhere at any time with the help of information and communication technologies (ICTs). The rise in the use of ICTs for work is coupled with an increasing demand for flexible working time and flexibility as regards the place of work. In addition, the rapid increases in female labour market participation have augmented the number of dual earner households. This transformation has created a growing demand for the ability to arrange paid work and private life flexibly by all working household members across space and time. It is in this context that telework has grown during the last decade.

Eurostat had estimated that during 2020, the first year of the pandemic, telework increased in most EU countries but to different extents. Figure 1, which charts data gathered by the European Union Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) on working from home, shows that the rise in this arrangement was relatively higher in countries in southern and central-eastern Europe.

Figure 1: Percentage of workers working from home in 2020, distinguishing between 2019 and the increase during 2020, by Member States



Source: EU-LFS

The objective of this report is to consolidate the contributions provided by Eurofound's national correspondents on the experiences and challenges experienced by employees while teleworking in their respective countries during the pandemic, as well as on the identification of those issues that will continue to be relevant in a post-pandemic world characterised by higher level of flexibility as regards the place of work, including working from home.

From a methodological perspective, the information is based on an extensive list of policy, academic and scientific research carried out in the Member States and collected/reported by the national correspondents (Network of Eurofound Correspondents) in the time period October-November 2021 according to an ad-hoc questionnaire developed by Eurofound services. As a general rule, the national studies presented in this report are based on representative national samples, unless otherwise mentioned.

Specifically, the report is structured around seven main sections (including this introductory one). Section 2 deals with working time and connectivity issues, including a discussion on the ability by employees to disconnect during non-working time. Meanwhile, section 3 deals with monitoring and privacy issues, whereas section 4 explores the topic of work relations and hybrid work, including a section on productivity issues. Section 5 analyses other working conditions issues related to telework during the pandemic, including the consequences for work-life and health, as well as the main advantages/disadvantages of telework experienced by employees and employers. Lastly, section 6 explores the existing expectations related to the future of teleworking and derived from the pandemic experience and, finally, section 7 provides some final conclusions stemming from the whole research.

2 - Working time and connectivity

Working time issues during the pandemic

Longer working hours amongst teleworkers during the pandemic period

There is an overwhelming amount of empirical evidence across the European countries suggesting that workers in telework practices during the COVID-19 pandemic period have worked a longer number of (unusual) hours in comparison to working from the office before the crisis. This situation has implied important consequences on teleworkers (higher pressure and stress, feeling of burnout, difficulties to disconnect, etc.), that are discussed in further sections of this report.

In this sense, several studies from Belgium, Croatia and Germany suggest that approximately half of teleworkers report to work more hours in comparison to the pre-pandemic situation (Acerta, 2021; Huršidić Radulović et al, 2021; Hans-Böckler-Stiftung, 2020). Similarly, half (49.3%) of the Irish teleworkers reported in July 2020 that long hours were a feature of working at home with respondents working an average of 9 hours in addition to their contracted hours of work (Mental Health First Aid, 2020). In Portugal, almost half of the workers (48%) state that their working time increased in the telework regime (33% reported that they worked longer and 15% worked much longer), and only 10% said that worked fewer hours than their usual working time (Pereira et al, 2021).

Meanwhile, in a French survey conducted in 2021, 63% of the respondent teleworkers declare having the feeling of working more and longer than before the pandemic, where 26% suggest to work a lot more (ANACT, 2021). In Italy, a survey conducted amongst employees of national research centres in second quarter of 2020 shows that around 40% of the respondents reported having worked more while working remotely, while only less than 20% of them perceived having worked less (Cellini et al, 2020). Also in Italy, a research reports that 39% of the respondents experienced more days in which they worked longer working hours (more than 10 per day) compared to working in presence (Azzolari et al, 2021). In Luxembourg, a survey shows that teleworking results in a high level average number of hours worked so workers on site are more likely to work 36-40 hours a week in comparison with teleworkers who are more inclined to work 46 hours or more per week (Schütz & Thiele, 2020). In The Netherlands, 74% of consulted experts suggest that a large group of workers that work from home are exposed to experiencing longer working days and shorter and/or less breaks (TNO, 2021a), and a Swedish report suggests that teleworkers reported longer working hours than before the pandemic as a result of always being close to opening their work computer outside of core hours (Sveriges Ingenjörer, 2020).

According to some Spanish authors, 35% of teleworkers and 30% of regular teleworkers extended their working time during the pandemic, due to several factors, including flexible working hours, the absence of time recording schemes or the introduction of results to be achieved (thus extending the working day until these expected results were achieved) (Molina et al, 2020). A French study also suggests the multiplication of digital communication channels with the company and workmates as another source of increasing working time (Clouet, 2021).

Higher presence of unsocial and atypical working hours, flexible hours

In addition to longer working hours, there is a large extent of evidence suggesting a high presence of unsocial and atypical working hours during teleworking in the pandemic period. For instance, over half of the Austrian employees (54%) state that during the pandemic lockdown they worked at times they would usually not work (e.g. late evenings/nights, weekends) (IFES, 2020). In Belgium, half of teleworkers report that they still worked after 6 pm (ACV Puls, 2021). In Germany, a survey amongst company representatives shows that 66% and 30% of them believe that employees teleworked more often during unusual hours and on the weekends, respectively (Hofmann et al, 2020). In Italy, 31% of teleworkers experienced an increase in the number of Saturdays worked and 18% of Sundays during the period March-May 2021 (Azzolari et al, 2021). In Portugal, 38% of workers report that they often or always worked outside working hours (Pereira et al, 2021), and surprisingly in Norway, 58% of employees report working from home outside normal working hours (8% daily, 36% several days per week and 14% once a week) (Ingelsrud & Bernstrøm, 2021).

Evidence from several countries also shows that home-office has led to more flexible working hours (starting the working day earlier or later, working late into the evening, shifting work to the weekend), often to respond to personal needs of teleworkers themselves. For instance, Italian research shows that 69% of respondents were able to decide autonomously the distribution of their working hours (where in 34% of cases this flexibility resulted in longer hours) (FPA, 2020). In Czech Republic, 70% of those working from home had the freedom to determine their own working schedules (Kreidl et al, 2021). In Austria, 52% of employees and 47% of employers suggest that working hours had become more flexible with the introduction of telework practices during the pandemic where these deviating organisation of working hours was acceptable for the vast majority of both employees and employers (Bachmayer & Klotz 2021). In France, 78% of French telework employees respondents declared to have the possibility of adapting their work schedule during the 2020 lockdown (ANACT, 2020). Notwithstanding this result, some authors suggest the negative consequences of this flexibility in terms of blurred working patterns, mental balance or impact on personal lives (Vanadzijaš, 2021).

Long working hours and overtime payment

Also, there are a number of studies and surveys showing a relatively high percentage of workers working longer hours but not benefitting from overtime pay, although important differences can be appreciated amongst countries, particularly between Northern and Southern ones. Thus, and in Finland, 19% of teleworkers suggested in 2020 to occasionally work overtime without being paid (Keyriläinen, 2021). Also, 14.7% of Latvians who worked remotely reported that their overtime work was not paid (Kruks et al, 2021). In Greece, 52.3% of Greek private sector employees report to have worked longer hours when teleworking without being paid for overtime (while only 5.4% worked more hours and were paid for it) (Nikos Poulantzas Institute, 2021). Similarly, and in Lithuania, around a third (32%) of the survey respondents working remotely reported regularly working unpaid overtime, while 36% reported sometimes working unpaid overtime and around 32% reported not working unpaid overtime (Naprys, 2021).

Partial evidence also on shorter working hours

Notwithstanding these results, there is also limited empirical evidence showing that working hours in telework during the pandemic have been similar/even lower in comparison to the pre-pandemic situation. Thus, a Belgian survey conducted in March-April 2020 shows that Belgian workers spent an average of 10 hours less working during the crisis per month, and people also maintained a similar regime/schedule as when people were working from office (Glorieux, 2020). In Denmark, some studies show that longer working hours have not been more prevalent in Denmark during the pandemic,

where this result is probably explained by a combination of existing work culture and long tradition in telework (Rockwool Fonden, 2021). A Greek survey points to a decrease in working hours, so 42.1% of respondents reported to have worked less hours per day during the lockdown in comparison to 19.2% who reported to work more hours (Vatavali et al, 2020). A Swedish report shows that the majority (57%) of teleworkers work the same number of hours in 2020 as before the pandemic, whereas 20% experience working longer hours during telework and another 20% worked shorter hours (half of them due to having reduced hours by the employer) (Andersson et al, 2020).

Differing perspectives on the issue of working hours by groups of workers

On the other hand, it is interesting to notice a different perspective on this issue of working hours between different groups of workers. Thus, Danish and French research suggests that those workers with children and homeschooling particularly experienced longer working hours to accommodate both work and care needs (MESA, 2021; Clouet, 2021). Linked to the previous point, Belgian, Greek and Italian evidence shows that women have been particularly affected by long/irregular working time (Glorieux, 2020; Vatavali et al, 2020; Azzolari et al, 2021). For instance, 65.7% Italian women had the feeling of working more when working remotely in comparison to 56.9% amongst men (Azzolari et al, 2021). Meanwhile, French research shows that the feeling of increased working hours is more important amongst teleworkers of the private sector, workers above 45 years old, those who already teleworked before the crisis and, finally, managers themselves (66%, 65%, 67% and 64%, respectively (ANACT, 2021). A Lithuanian survey shows that teleworkers reporting longer working hours were more likely to have higher income, higher education level and live in larger cities (Naprys, 2021).

Differing perspectives on the issue of working hours between employees and employers

There is some evidence that shows the experience of employers in relation to working hours, which seems to be a bit different from the experience of employees themselves during the pandemic. Thus, Austrian evidence suggests that while more than a third (36%) of teleworkers state that they had worked more hours in the home-office than before at the site, only 13% of employers suggest that employees worked more hours (Bachmayer & Klotz 2021). By way of contrast, 66%, 65% and 35% of the German managers reckon that employees in telework worked in the pandemic during unusual hours, worked overtime or at the weekends, respectively. These unusual working time patterns are attributed to the specific situation during the pandemic with employees having to shoulder home office duties and home schooling or other tasks at the same time (Hofmann et al, 2021).

In Norway, legislation on telework requires signing a written agreement on working time. Elected worker representatives in Norwegian businesses/agencies where employers had urged all employees to work from home if possible, when the pandemic started, were asked in a survey if such written agreement had been considered or put in place. 19% of workers' representatives stated that a written agreement about working time at the home office had been considered, and only 4% stated that a written agreement had been put in place

Source: Ødegård & Andersen, 2021

According to French telework employees, issues and problems concerning the work schedule is amongst the less frequent topics addressed by supervisors (only 14% suggest to have dealt with these issues in 2020) (ANACT, 2020).

Availability and ability to disconnect

Availability for colleagues, clients or superiors and ability to disconnect

The previous section has shown that long and flexible working hours, combined with unpaid overtime, seem to have characterised working patterns during telework practices in the pandemic. Related to this, one of the key elements of discussion related to telework practices refers to the ability of individuals for not being available for third parties and disconnect from (tele)work during non-working hours¹.

In this sense, there is extensive evidence that shows that it is not clear that teleworkers benefitted from the ability to disconnect during the pandemic, which could extend working time beyond desirable (as shown in the previous section). For instance, up to 44% of Austrian employees suggest being available for their employer at times when they would not otherwise work (IFES, 2020). In France (UGICT-CGT, 2020 & 2021), a representative study performed during lockdown in 2020 and 2021 reports that up to 78% of teleworkers did not benefit from a formalised right to disconnection in 2020 (60% in 2021), whereas only 18% have defined hours for being reached (45% in 2021). Moreover, the same study suggests that, in 2020, two thirds of the respondents reported receiving professional solicitations outside working hours via different means (emails, SMEs, etc), and 69% of respondents declare working at least occasionally outside working hours. Similarly, up to 24% of Finnish employees suggest to have been contacted on a daily basis outside of working time in matters relating to work, in comparison to 23% that have never been contacted outside of working time (Keyriläinen, 2021). In France, 64% of teleworkers feel they are “over-connected” (ANACT, 2021).

Meanwhile, 31.7% of the Greek teleworkers suggest to be compelled by their employer to remain available outside working hours, even if not deemed necessary (Nikos Poulantzas Institute, 2021) and one Greek worker in five states that they were often called upon to work outside their normal working hours (Ta Nea, 2021). In Ireland, 14% of teleworking employees report that their employer was not giving them the right to disconnect outside working hours (McCarthy et al, 2021), and only 36% of respondents state that they did not respond to emails outside of work hours (McCarthy et al, 2020). Meanwhile, up to 25% of German teleworkers suggest taking shorter or much shorter breaks in home office in comparison to office work (Pfnür et al, 2021), while 52% of the French teleworkers indicate to take less breaks during the day while teleworking and 46% suggest that those breaks were shorter (UGICT-CGT, 2020). Also, 65% of Slovenian teleworkers feel as if they had been available all the time via e-mail or other electronic media, where a similar percentage wish their employers would limit access to work e-mails outside working hours (Černe and Aleksić, 2020). In Italy, up to 40% of teleworkers suggest to have answered to emails, phone calls and work messages during the lunch break in the pandemic period (Azzolari et al, 2021).

Specific groups particularly exposed to higher difficulties to disconnect

Interestingly, several studies show that these difficulties to exercise the disconnection are particularly experienced by managers and workers with high hierarchical positions in the companies. This is confirmed by French and Luxembourgish studies (Flamand et al, 2020; Erb and Reynaud, 2021; Schütz

¹ Currently, the Right to Disconnect (R2D) exists only in 9 Member States, namely France, Italy, Belgium, Spain, Ireland, Slovakia, Greece, Portugal and Luxembourg. For an extensive discussion on existing legislation on the topic please refer to Eurofound (2020) Right to disconnect in the 27 EU Member States, Dublin (<https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/observatories/eurwork/industrial-relations-dictionary/right-to-disconnect>; <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2021/right-to-disconnect-exploring-company-practices>)

& Thiele, 2020). Just to give some data, only 19.1% of the Luxembourgish directors, senior managers and managers have a high ability to disconnect from work outside working hours, in comparison to an average of 38.3% for all workers. In France, the overwhelming use of the “forfait jour” for managers (which does not define a number of working hours but rather a number of working days) is the main explanation for this result.

Reasons underpinning difficulties to disconnect

Generally speaking, these difficulties experienced by employees to disconnect are explained to a large extent by the absence of a Right to Disconnect (R2D) culture at company level. For instance, up to 20% of the Austrian companies agree that it is expected from most employees to be available for work issues also during their free time, where this percentage increases to 55% of companies in the case of managers (Deloitte Consulting, 2020). Also in Austria, approximately half (46%) of company representatives state that no rules regarding telework practices (use of work equipment, working time regulations, form of recording working time, etc) were introduced or made more concrete in their companies for coping with the COVID-19 home-office work (Deloitte Consulting, 2020). In Spain, a recent study (Cotec Foundation, 2021) shows that only 36% of workers are employed at a company recognising the right to disconnect (via sectoral or company agreements or internal agreements or protocols), where this result may show that the ability to disconnect amongst teleworkers improves if there is a company agreement/culture in this regard.

Looking at company culture, Spanish research found that two company models of implementing telework can be distinguished in the Spanish labour market: the life sustainability company model and the so-called presence-based company model. On the one hand, the life sustainability company model is characterised by adequate technological support, clear work–life balance programs, self-management of working time, autonomy, better job performance and lack of sanctions due to physical absence. On the contrary, the presence-based company model is linked to minimal technical support, consideration of telework as a benefit for managers and a trap for staff (meaning more working hours), lack of self-control work–life balance, 24/7 availability, and measurement of responsibility and commitment based on physical presence. The first company model is particularly present amongst larger companies and companies with clear corporate social responsibility policies

Source: Gálvez et al, 2021

In other cases, it is the employees themselves who reckon to have difficulties to differentiate working and resting periods. Thus, a study conducted by the Confederation of Danish Industry shows that some employees say it was more difficult to relax and decouple from work during pandemic telework because their computer and home office was within sight and reach, and tasks got piled up (Confederation of Danish Industry, 2021). An Irish study shows that up to 42% of public sector workers in teleworking stated that it was harder for them to disconnect from work/phones and email (Forsa Trade Union, 2020). In Norway, almost 60% of academic employees in telework agree to the statement “I find it hard to separate work and spare time when I work from home” (Jordell, 2020), and 27% of Norwegian teleworkers stressed to still think about work after a working day (in comparison to 24% of teleworkers who do not think at all) (Ingelsrud & Bernstrøm, 2021). All in all, the importance of the disconnection from work is clear for most workers. For instance, evidence from Latvia shows that 68.2% of remote workers suggest that this ability to disconnect is important for them, where this importance is more perceived by women and youngsters (Vanadžiņš 2021).

Concluding remarks:

This chapter has shown that, as a general rule, workers in telework practices during the COVID-19 pandemic period have worked a longer number of hours in comparison to working from the office before the crisis (between 35 and 65% of respondents, depending on the countries), coupled with an increasing presence of unsocial and atypical working hours (late evenings/nights, weekends). Remarkable country differences were also found in the presence of unpaid overtime work practices in Southern versus Northern countries. Flexible working hours (often to respond to personal needs of teleworkers themselves), absence of time recording schemes, the multiplication of digital communication channels or the implementation of telework goal-based monitoring are at the root of these developments. The chapter also shows that teleworkers have had important difficulties to disconnect from work during the pandemic, extending working time beyond desirable. The absence of a R2D culture in many companies combined with the own difficulties of teleworkers to differentiate working and resting periods are at the heart of the problem.

3 - Monitoring and privacy

Telework and monitoring

Telework and monitoring practices during the pandemic

There is mixed evidence on any increase in monitoring and control practices for teleworkers during the pandemic. Thus, and on the one hand, there are several studies showing no significant changes. A Finnish study about telework during the first months of the pandemic shows that a large majority (72%) experienced there was no change in monitoring of work after the shift to telework. Only 4% said that they experienced that monitoring has increased. It is worth highlighting that experiences of increased monitoring were more common among respondents whose education level was low (primary education) (11%) (Kovalainen et al, 2021). Research among French workers shows that intrusive control practices, such as software to measure time spent on the computer or random calls from line management, were rather exceptional and mainly restricted to the initial period of enforced telework (EU-OSHA, 2021). An Italian survey amongst ICT workers shows that the majority of respondents (55%) declared that they had never been controlled, enjoying the full trust of management; 33% felt controlled the same as in the traditional way onsite, while only around 10% felt more controlled, either by IT tools (6%), or by management (6%) (Gaddi, 2021).

A Maltese research report that teleworkers were not subject to different monitoring and supervision methods than non-teleworkers, so all of them were primarily appraised by the quality of their work and timesheets (Borg, 2020). Similarly, a survey conducted in Norway among people working from home revealed that 65% of respondents reported experiencing no change in the degree of control from the employer when working from home, 20% reported experiencing less control and 4% reported experiencing more control (Ingelsrud and Bernstrøm, 2021). Interestingly also, results from Spanish research show noteworthy differences in the age distribution, with a greater absence of implementation of any kind of monitoring mechanism as age increases, while younger workers were more regularly monitored by their superiors through calls and e-meetings (Molina et al, 2020).

By way of contrast, other research available shows that companies have introduced a number of specific practices for the control and monitoring of teleworkers, both traditional ones (such as micro-management and excessive supervision, calls, messages and e-meetings) as well as new ones (i.e. specific software tools) . Thus, a Hungarian online survey on telework in March-April 2020 shows that 36% of respondents said that communication with their bosses was more frequent since the outbreak of the pandemic, basically intended at reinforcing management control, including clear task management and monitoring of work (Bakonyi & Kiss-Dobronyi, 2020). Another Spanish study shows that the main telework management monitoring mechanisms during confinement were supervising objectives and results (46%); calls, messages and e-meetings with superiors (28%); and calls, messages and e-meetings with co-workers (16%). Only 12% stated their organisations implemented specific performance monitoring tools (Molina et al, 2020).

In Finland, online-monitoring (the employer monitors the screen or the keyboard) was suggested to be used by only 3% of teleworkers, whereas 24% of them suggested to be monitored by employers in relation to working time issues (specially in relation to checking what time the employee logged into the company IT system) (Kovalainen et al, 2021).

In some Member States, the issue of monitoring and surveillance is subject to labour legislation or works agreements, In Austria, the introduction and maintenance of monitoring measures or

technical systems for the control of workers affecting human dignity is based on the consent of the works council in the form of a works agreement (or individual consent if no works council is in place). Moreover, regulations on the type, scope and qualitative provisions about work must be laid down in the employment contract before the start of teleworking, including basic principles of data security or ways to assess performance. In Denmark, following the Management Law (legislation on managerial rights, or ‘Ledelsesretten’), employers have certain rights to monitor employees, but any control must be justified and should not go beyond what is necessary. In Sweden, the Law on Co-Determination in the Workplace (which regulates the right to co-determine through collective agreement, among others) requires the process of digital surveillance to be subject to employee discussion, where surveillance has to be done in a transparent way.

Source: national contributions

Concerning software-based monitoring tools, there is some limited evidence on this. Thus, and in the Netherlands, research among 1,200 home workers shows that around 13% of home workers were aware that they were being monitored with software by their employer (in practice, this could be even more since not every worker was familiar with the software). Additionally, 8% of respondents stated that their employer was frequently checking whether the employee was available/connected via mail/chat or other ways of communication (CNV-onderzoek, 2021). As well as this, another study carried out in the Netherlands by a software company showed that 38% of the employees worked for a company that uses Employee Monitoring Software (EMS) to track employees, where 22% of the companies introduced this software during the pandemic (GetApp, 2021). Finally, a survey among 451 Spanish teleworkers shows that 64% of the teleworking respondents stated that their organisations had installed remote work management mechanisms, and feared being supervised using technology in a remote environment (through specific real-time productivity metrics or others monitoring software) (Capgemini Research Institute, 2020).

Employees’ attitude towards monitoring

The installation of monitoring software and other surveillance mechanisms is often perceived by employees as a lack of trust of managers on their employees (Capgemini Research Institute, 2020). For instance, 51% of Dutch teleworkers suggest that the use of EMS harms the trust-culture in the company, while 39% think that it causes a more stress among employees, 29% identify a negative influence on the morale of the employees, and 25% stress that these practices cross the ethical boundaries (GetApp, 2021). In The Netherlands too, 33% of the teleworkers perceive being monitored as uncomfortable (Unisys, 2021), where some practices (i.e. checking of microphone, use of facial recognition to verify a worker’s presence, monitoring of starting and closing time, use of video recordings and screenshots and location tracking) are felt as particularly unpleasant for employees when used (GetApp, 2021; Unisys, 2021). In Finland, 17% of the Finnish teleworkers perceive these monitoring practices as something negative, whereas the largest percentage (64%) have a neutral opinion and only 11% consider them as necessary (Kovalainen et al, 2021).

Privacy issues linked to telework

Privacy and telework during the pandemic

The sudden transformation of the home to a workplace can unintentionally expose personal data of people working from home, so privacy protection has become a critical issue when teleworking. Unfortunately enough, there is not much information on this element.

According to an online survey conducted in Greece, 81.4% of respondents believe that respect for online privacy by employers should play an essential role in choosing a new job, thus confirming the importance of organizations' respect for workers' privacy. Although the findings do not suggest that Greek employers require workers to keep their camera on, with 63.7% of respondents answering that they have never faced such a requirement, 1 out of 3 argues that they have been asked at least sometimes to keep their camera on when holding a videoconference. To protect their personal space, almost half of the Greek workers (47.9%) chose to keep their cameras off, thus protecting the privacy of the home space (Ta Nea, 2021).

Meanwhile, a study conducted in Norway reveals that 69% of Norwegian teleworkers did not receive any guidelines from their company on private data information displayed in digital meetings (e.g. use of camera, use of background images, etc) (in comparison to 14% who have received some instructions in this regard) (Ingelsrud & Bernstrøm, 2021). A Portuguese research identifies the violation of the worker's privacy as a harmful effect felt by teleworkers themselves, where this negative perception is higher (35%) among the workers that tend to reject telework than among those who advocate for a more regular use of telework (18%) (Pereira et al, 2021).

Last but not least, up to 80% of Irish companies are aware that the move to mass remote working patterns during the pandemic has created additional risks from a GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) point of view. Notwithstanding these risks and challenges, 83% of Irish companies believe that GDPR compliance is beneficial for individuals and 75% believe GDPR compliance benefits their relationship with their employees and other stakeholders, where 80% of Irish companies state they are fully or materially compliant with the GDPR (McCann FitzGerald and Mazars, 2021).

Concluding remarks:

This chapter shows no clear-cut results on an increase in the use of monitoring and control practices on teleworkers during the pandemic. When a use has been reported, they include a combination of traditional methods (e.g. micro-management and excessive supervision, calls, messages and e-meetings) with new ones (e.g. specific monitoring software and surveillance tools). The chapter has also shown that teleworkers perceive the violation of their privacy as particularly harmful, negatively influencing their morale and stress levels. Companies are increasingly aware of the additional risks brought by mass remote working patterns from a GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) point of view. No conclusive country differences were identified in this respect

4 - Work relations and hybrid work

Telework and productivity

Positive impact of telework on productivity from the perspective of teleworkers

Generally speaking, the majority of existing evidence suggests that employees reckon a direct positive (or at least neutral) impact of telework practices during the pandemic on productivity levels, either in terms of the quality of work and/or the amount of work per hour. There are many examples of national evidence that confirm this result. Thus, up to 58% of Austrian employees state a positive effect on their productivity, in comparison to a 16% who rate this impact as negative (Bachmayer & Klotz, 2021). In Belgium, the majority of employees (53%) feels that telework has a positive impact on their productivity, in comparison to 14% who reckon negative effects (SD Worx, 2021). Also, 41% of Czech teleworkers considered that full remote working exerted a positive impact on productivity and 30% felt that there were neither positive nor negative effects, whereas only a 27% of respondents identified a negative impact (IPSOS and Welcome to the Jungle, 2021).

Similarly, 43% of Finnish teleworkers suggest that the shift to telework had increased their productivity levels at work (Kovalainen et al, 2021). In Germany and Ireland, up to 56% and 51% of teleworkers felt more productive when working at home in comparison to working at the office, respectively (DAK, 2020; Forsa Trade Union, 2020). Also in Ireland, 65% of teleworkers report that they complete tasks more quickly than before they worked remotely and 68% report that remote working increases their productivity (McCarthy et al, 2021). Interestingly also, approximately half of those Greek employees in telework reported that their productivity was the same as before the pandemic, where a 14% suggest that they were more productive (Vatavali et al, 2020). In Italy, a survey carried out among workers in the ICT sector shows that about two out of three respondents (65%) declare that productivity did increase during the months of remote work, while for 23.6% remained unchanged and only for 4.1% decreased (Di Nunzio, 2021), whereas another study shows that 66% of respondents suggested to maintain the same level of productivity when teleworking during the pandemic in comparison to a 28% who identified lower levels of productivity (Confindustria Digitale, 2021). In Luxembourg, 39% of teleworkers declared to be more or much more productive during the lockdown in April 2020 in comparison with the normal situation of February 2020, whereas 23% declared to be less or much less productive than before the lockdown (38% suggesting “stable”) (Dijst, 2021). Also, 44% of Maltese employees reported their productivity increasing whilst working remotely (PWC, 2020a). A Dutch review on studies on the effects of working from home during the pandemic shows that for the most part (55% to 70%) people feel that their productivity is steady while working from home (Kennisinstituut voor Mobiliteitsbeleid, 2020).

Reasons underpinning this positive impact of telework practices on productivity include higher concentration on work, less disturbances and interruptions from co-workers and the office in general, higher discipline during formal meetings, less small talk in comparison to face-to-face meetings, better work environment, simpler organisation of work and leisure time, more flexible working hours, empowerment/trust to make work-related decisions or time savings due to reduced commuting times (Capital media, 2021; CCCP, 2020; FAOS, 2020; Grossmann et al, 2021; KPMG, 2020-2021; MPSV, 2021; Pereira et al, 2021; Swedbank, 2020). Last but not least, French evidence stresses that teleworkers have experienced a gain in productivity between 2020 and 2021 since individuals with little/no previous experience in telework have been subject to a particularly complex and time-consuming

learning transition for creating new routines, rearranging spaces or mastering new tools (such as teams, zoom etc) (ANACT, 2021).

Differences amongst groups of employees

Notwithstanding this positive perspective, the available evidence shows important differences amongst different groups of teleworkers. For instance, Belgian research underlines that teleworkers in knowledge-intensive and less routine jobs see the biggest productivity benefits from telework (SD Worx, 2021). Similarly, a Czech survey shows that teleworkers with higher education levels reported higher productivity levels in comparison to other less educated groups (Grossmann et al, 2021). Also, a Dutch study suggests that people who state to have a good workplace at home report better productivity levels (Kennisinstituut voor Mobiliteitsbeleid, 2020). A Czech report identifies that part-time remote teleworkers suggest a higher positive increase in productivity levels in comparison to their full-time counterparts (IPSOS and Welcome to the Jungle, 2021).

From a gender perspective, there are several studies that suggest that this positive perception of telework on productivity is more acute amongst women in comparison to men (Grossmann et al, 2021; Kovalainen et al, 2021; KPMG, 2020-2021; Schütz & Thiele, 2020; Swedbank, 2020). For instance, 26% of Greek male teleworkers report that their productivity has been negatively affected as a consequence of telework practices introduced during the pandemic, whereas the corresponding percentage for women is 17% (KPMG, 2020-2021). From a parental perspective, Danish and Dutch research suggests that teleworking employees who have children at home have experienced being less productive during the pandemic (PFA, 2020; Kennisinstituut voor Mobiliteitsbeleid, 2020). Meanwhile, and from an age perspective, there are several studies that suggest that the percentage of respondents experiencing increased productivity seems to be lower among young people (Kovalainen et al, 2021; Grødem, 2020), where this result is probably explained by the most limited work experience of younger workers, who usually require more frequent contact with colleagues and managers to clarify work tasks and facilitate transfer of information and competence in comparison to older, more experienced workers (Grødem, 2020).

Interestingly also, a German study shows that mobile workers' productivity seems to be directly affected by the digital competences of their superiors, so mobile workers with superiors with strong digital/virtual management skills stated that their productivity rose by 10% in comparison to mobile workers with superiors with low digital management skills (Barmer, 2020). Last but not least, several studies suggest the positive effect of trust (with workmates and with superiors) on productivity gains during the telework pandemic experience (Groenewegen & Hardeman, 2021; PWC, 2020a).

Positive impact of telework on productivity from the perspective of employers

This generally speaking positive perspective of telework on productivity and performance is also shared by employers. Thus, up to 36% of Austrian employers suggest a positive effect on their productivity in comparison to a 20% who value this impact as negative (Bachmayer & Klotz, 2021). Also, more than half (66%) of Czech managers believe that the performance of employees working from home has been comparable or higher to that of working in the office or workplace (MPSV, 2021). In Italy, over six out of ten companies that have activated remote working during the pandemic suggest not having detected any effect neither on productivity nor on efficiency (62% and 60% of the respondents, respectively), where negative effects were more perceived by companies with less than 50 employees in comparison to larger ones (Istat, 2020). Interestingly also, a Maltese survey shows that slightly more than half of managers (56.8%) report that remote working improved productivity, and only 3 (6.8%) replied negatively, with 16 (36.36%) unsure (Zammit, 2020).

In Portugal, a survey carried out by the Confederation of Portuguese Industry shows that the large majority (43%) of the companies consider that the productivity of workers has not been affected during the pandemic by telework practices, where only a 16% believes that productivity levels have worsened (CIP, 2021). In Spain, 66% of surveyed large organisations report increases in productivity due to remote working during the third quarter of 2020, mostly due to reductions in commute time and adoption of virtual collaboration tools (Capgemini Research Institute, 2020). Similarly, another Spanish study suggests that this enhance of efficiency felt by companies can be related to the improvement of task-focus work and the lack of interruptions usual in traditional work environments, together with a goal-based organization of work (Galvez et al, 2021)

Some limited evidence of negative impacts of telework on productivity levels

Notwithstanding these positive views on the impacts of telework practices on productivity, there are also several surveys that seem to contradict this assessment. For instance, 45% of Belgian organisations stated that telework has had a negative influence on the productivity of the company, whereas 12.7% noticed an increase (Vandenberghe, 2021). In Denmark, 24 % of employees experience being more productive and 36 % estimates having had lower productivity than normal (PFA, 2020). In Hungary, up to 42.3% of teleworkers said they were less productive than before the pandemic (Huawei, 2020). Interestingly also, a Norwegian study suggests that telework can be also a hinder to creative processes and the exchange of ideas between individuals (Rambøll, 2021)

Lack of cooperation with colleagues, fusion of work and private life (parenting/household tasks, etc.), increased difficulty in getting important documents or other working material, concentration problems, technical problems derived from the use of digital devices or a lack of adequate training or work equipment are mentioned among the reasons for productivity losses (DAK, 2020; Grossmann et al, 2021; KPMG, 2020-2021; Kruks et al, 2021; TNO, 2021a; Swedbank, 2020). For instance, a survey carried out in Latvia showed that 25.5% of workers who worked remotely needed additional knowledge and skills in remote work (Vanadzīņš, 2021b). Meanwhile, a French study reports that 65% of the workers experienced changes in their tasks due to the health crisis, and 31% declared problems to adapt their work to telework (UGICT-CGT, 2020). In Belgium, one fifth of teleworkers state that they did not receive support from their organisation/employer to help them in the transition to telework practices (BDO, 2020).

In France, only 28% of teleworkers have benefited from specific training on telework (ANACT, 2021) and, also in France, more than a third of employees had not received any equipment by the month of April 2020 (that is, two weeks after the beginning of the lockdown) (Erb and Reynaud, 2021). A Norwegian study suggests that the sudden switch to telework at the onset of the pandemic was easier for businesses that already had work laptops for employees or a longer tradition of digital meetings (Grødem, 2020). Meanwhile, a Portuguese study suggests that 66% of teleworkers declared that they did not have enough assistance and training from their company to develop skills to work at home (Sousa-Uva et al, 2021). Finally, only 20% of French teleworkers benefited from a financial contribution from the employer for the use of their domestic digital tools (ANACT, 2021). In this respect, those EU Member States with a long tradition of telework practices (e.g. Nordic countries were most likely better prepared to telework in terms of existing skills/technical equipment at home.

Telework and relations between employees and with managers

Effects of telework on relations between employees and colleagues

Concerning relations between individuals, and particularly regarding interaction with co-workers, social isolation and lack of social contact with colleagues is one of the most frequently mentioned negative impacts of telework, as shown by the revised literature. To start with, an Austrian study reveals that a negative side effect derived from telework practices during the pandemic and mentioned by employees is the lack of social interaction in the home-office (Bachmayer and Klotz, 2021), whereas in Malta social isolation and detachment from the workplace were found to be key challenges associated with working remotely (PWC, 2020a). Another Austrian study suggests that 42% of company representatives state that the cooperation with others worked worse from home, where only 20% state it worked better (Deloitte Consulting, 2020). A Danish study shows that some employees felt that during the pandemic they were losing contact with co-workers and the organization (Copenhagen Municipality, 2020).

Along these lines, in Hungary, the majority (53.1%) of teleworkers stress that it was interactions with colleagues that they missed the most when working from home during the pandemic (Huawei, 2020), whereas in Slovenia 80% of respondents answered that they were troubled by the fact that they had no physical contact with their co-workers (Černe and Aleksić, 2020). Similarly, a study carried out among Danish workers (working from home during lockdown) shows that 46% of participants answered 'totally agree' to the sentence 'I miss my co-workers' (YouGov, 2021). A Polish study reveals that the most serious inconvenience related to massive telework practices during the pandemic was lack of social contacts, followed by absence of direct communication with colleagues and workmates (Mierzejewska & Chomicki, 2020). Also, in Greece, 42% of workers reported feeling socially cut off and another 37% isolated from the team at remote work (KPMG, 2020-2021). Actually, 53% of Greek workers willing to fully or partially return to the workplace indicated that the most significant reason for that was the lack of interaction with colleagues (Randstad Greece, 2021).

A French study found out that, in 2020, 45% of teleworkers reported lacking interaction and information from their colleagues (UGICT-CGT, 2020). Moreover, data from French literature shows a degradation of the relationships more severe in 2021 than in 2020. It is remarkable that 71% of teleworkers reported having 'unchanged relationships' with colleagues in 2020 (55% in 2021), 12% felt an improvement (7% in 2021) and 17% a degradation (37% in 2021) (UGICT-CGT, 2020) (UGICT-CGT, 2021), where this degradation is probably explained by longer time working remotely on a "permanent" basis.

In addition to this, working remotely from home seems to have had a (negative) impact on coordination and teamwork among co-workers, which at the same time may have led to difficulties in getting support from colleagues and workmates to solve work issues or doubts on how to carry out the work. Thus, data available show that 43% of Austrian employees who telework assess the impact of home-office work on cooperation and teamwork as unfavourable (27% as favourable), whereas 40% consider the impact on support with problems as unfavourable (21% see it favourable) (Bachmayer and Klotz, 2021). Similarly, in Czech Republic, almost half of teleworkers (45%) stated that the effectiveness of cooperation with colleagues was worse when working remotely, in the sense that it was more difficult for employees to solve routine work issues when working from home (MPSV, 2021).

On the other hand, lack of social contact with colleagues may lead to a possible poorer team spirit, or even lower sense of belonging to the company. Austrian research shows that 47% of employees rated

the impact of home-office work on the sense of team cohesion as unfavourable (20% as favourable) (Bachmayer and Klotz, 2021). In France, a study reported that in 2020, 37% of the respondents felt that relationships have deteriorated in the work team (27% that they have improved) and 47% that the “team spirit” has decreased (17% that it has improved) (UGICT-CGT, 2020).

Some limited evidence on neutral (positive) impacts of telework on communication and teamwork

However, there is also some evidence in the revised literature showing that telework has not necessarily had a negative effect on communication and teamwork among employees. For instance, a survey carried out in Cyprus reveals that although communication and collaboration between off-side and on-side colleagues was often mentioned as a difficulty, the majority (74%) of the participants working remotely reported that the quality of communication remained the same when teleworking during the pandemic (17% reporting better and 9% worse communication during teleworking) (FinExpertiza, 2020).

In Italy, a survey carried out among employees of national research centers showed that few respondents mentioned “the difficulty of carrying out complex operations with one or more work groups operating remotely” (18% of women and 23% of men) or “the complexities of remote dialogue with colleagues and managers” (18% both for women and men) as negative aspects of remote working (Cellini et al, 2020). Similarly, according to a survey among Italian ICT workers, only around 10% of the respondents reported a deterioration of the cooperation between colleagues or with workers and supervisors connected to remote working (Di Nunzio, 2021), where this percentage is probably higher in other sectors/jobs less familiarised with ICTs and virtual environments.

Moreover, in Denmark, available research shows that, although some coordination has been difficult, teamwork has not suffered greatly during lockdown, in the sense that the room for error and experiments has been expanded, which has led to better teamwork and coordination (FAOS, 2021). Additionally, concerning the support got from colleagues, a Finnish study did not find much difference among teleworkers and non-teleworkers, so 74% of people working from the physical workplace said they get support from colleagues; in the case of hybrid work, this figure was 78% and in the case of distance-work, 73% (Hakanen & Kaltiainen, 2020). Both results suggest that remote work does not make a big difference in relation to support in Scandinavian work cultures, where they are more used to work remotely.

Telework and relations between employees and employers/managers

With regard to how employees assess support and communication with superiors and managers, there is mixed evidence on this. On the one hand, some available literature shows that employees have felt generally not fully supported by their superiors and employers. For instance, a Greek survey shows that teleworkers believe that they are supported in telework primarily by colleagues and secondarily by managers and employers (Athens University of Economics and Business, 2021). Lack of mutual trust and communication problems between employees and their manager is also mentioned in other studies, together with problems related to disconnection and detachment with the organization (PWC, 2020a; Raisiene et al, 2020; Rupčić, 2021) and problems in coordinating work with supervisors (LCSS, 2020; Pereira et al, 2021). For instance, 24% of Irish teleworkers state that communication from management was poor during the teleworking period in pandemic, and 47% said it was harder to find out what was going on in work (Forsa Trade Union, 2020).

By way of contrast, other studies show a more positive view on this. Thus, a study carried out in Malta revealed that 64% of remote workers felt supported by their organisations (information and tools to

carry out work), although 22% felt there was room for improvement (the rest were unsatisfied). An Irish study concludes that the surveyed employees are overall very positive about how their employer did handle remote working from organisational standpoint (McCarthy et al, 2021). A Dutch survey shows that the social support that employees experienced from their superiors did not decrease due to the pandemic, so nine out of 10 of teleworkers felt supported by their superiors (TNO, 2021b).

From a gender perspective, Swedish research shows a more negative perception among women. Thus, a survey of 2,000 members of the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees revealed that about 20% of women felt that their relationship with the manager worsened during the pandemic, compared to 10% for men (Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise, 2021).

The perception of managers/employers on telework and relations with employees

Looking at managers' point of view, and generally speaking, managers and employers seem to have been negatively affected in their relations with employees, particularly in relation to social relations and ability to manage individuals. Thus, an Austrian study reports that 60% of employers with home-office work assess its impact on cooperation and teamwork as unfavourable (only 11% as favourable) (Bachmayer and Klotz, 2021). In Italy, less than half of the interviewed companies reported no effects of remote working on interpersonal relations, whereas the rest did report a deterioration (Istat, 2020). Research in Malta concludes that managers had important difficulties to both monitor and motivate workers via online methods (Bezzina et al, 2021). In Norway, about 50 % of businesses stated that it was harder to manage employees with the use of telework (NHO, 2021), whereas in Belgium, 45.7% of organisations stated that the exchange of ideas or networks were more difficult because of telework (Vandenberghe, 2021). In Sweden, interviewed supervisors stated that, under telework conditions, it was more difficult to discover if employees were experiencing any issues such as personal problems, inadequate workload, working too little or too much, etc (Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise, 2021).

In relation to this, it must be noted that several pieces of literature highlight that the challenges for managers are more social and not so much technical. A French study revealed that 74% of managers felt the implementation of telework in their team was fairly easy, and 78% found easy to identify the tasks that could be teleworked. However, 40% found it difficult to manage a team remotely and 49% to support their employees psychologically (ANACT, 2021). Similarly, for Irish managers, the challenges are more linked to building personal connections, which is an item identified as a challenge for half of managers. In contrast, finding effective ways to complete the work as a team was as a challenge for only 32% of managers (McCarthy et al, 2021).

On the opposite side, a study carried out in Czech Republic shows that 94% of managers were satisfied with communication with teleworking employees working from home during the pandemic. The satisfaction of managers in smaller organisations with up to 50 employees was found to be higher than amongst managers in larger organisations (MPSV, 2021). Against this background, some companies have tried to find solutions to face isolation and support social networks. According to a survey on 41 Romanian large companies, 59% did develop an online team space (specific groups using internal systems or social networks), 32% implemented virtual coffee time to prevent employee isolation, and 7% delivered small presents to employees, among others. However, stakeholders pointed out that many companies – particularly multinationals – were already implementing some of these measures before the COVID-19 pandemic (PWC, 2020c).

Experiences in relation to hybrid work

Preference for hybrid forms of telework, due to advantages of flexibility

There are several studies and surveys that show that hybrid models of work or partial telework (combining telework and office work) are particularly appreciated both by employees and employers. In this sense, almost one out of two surveyed Bulgarian and Greek workers prefers the hybrid employment model since this form of employment is perceived to allow high levels of flexibility both for the company and employees while allowing for high levels of employee satisfaction (Capital Media, 2021; Randstad Greece, 2021).

In Germany, up to 73% of workers are in favour of working half of their time from home and half of the time from the office, and nearly one third of respondents prefer working 75% or more of their working time from home (Pfnür et al, 2021). Similarly, another German study (Kunze et al, 2020) also finds that most employees favour a mixture of working two to three days at home and the rest of the week at the premises of the employer. In Latvia, 43% of Lithuanians prefer a hybrid model of work (i.e. combining distance working with coming into the office), while 33% of respondents prefer working only in the office and 19% prefer working just from home (Swedbank, 2020). In The Netherlands, most teleworkers (between 60-70%) are in favour of hybrid working (Kennisinstituut voor Mobiliteitsbeleid, 2020). In Belgium, teleworking employees with a high degree of hybrid working arrangement supported by electronic communication have a lower risk of burn-out in comparison with colleagues with no hybrid working possibilities (IDEWE, 2021).

A global online survey conducted across 25 countries worldwide between May and June 2021 by Adecco recruiting firm shows that both workers and employers agree on the benefits of hybrid working, with 8 in 10 agreeing that employees as well as businesses benefit from having increased flexibility around the time spent at the office and remote working (Adecco Group, 2021). Moreover, the majority believe that hybrid working patterns offer opportunities for creating a more diverse and inclusive workforce that benefits particularly those with disabilities (75%) or working parents (75% and 73%, respectively) (Adecco Group, 2021). Linked to the previous point, hybrid forms of work are primarily perceived by employees as a flexibility tool. In this sense, 78% of surveyed Norwegian teleworkers state that they want to work from home when they themselves want to, where 16% want to have certain days a week reserved for telework, and only 6% want to work from home more permanently (Jordell 2020). Youngsters and women are particularly in favour of these forms of hybrid forms of work (KPMG, 2020-2021; Profesia Job Portal, 2021).

Concluding remarks:

This chapter has shown that both employees and employers reckon in general a positive impact of telework practices on productivity levels during the pandemic. Reasons underpinning this positive impact include higher concentration on work, less disturbances and interruptions from co-workers, higher discipline during tele-meetings, less small talk in comparison to face-to-face meetings, better work environment, simpler organisation of work and leisure time, more flexible working hours, empowerment/trust to make work-related decisions, time savings due to reduced commuting times or reductions in commute time, amongst other reasons. The study also shows the importance of sustaining employees with the adequate skills and telework equipment to underpin productivity gains, and element where those Member States with a longer telework tradition might have had an advantage over others.

Meanwhile, social isolation and lack of social contact with colleagues is one of the negative impacts of telework most frequently mentioned, negatively affecting coordination and teamwork among co-workers, as well as the ability of individuals to get support from colleagues. Managers and employers have also experienced increasing difficulties in their relations with employees, particularly in relation to social relations and ability to manage/control individuals performance. Not particularly definitive differences were found in this respect amongst EU Member States.

Finally, a very large percentage of workers in most EU Member States (between 40% and 75%, depending on the countries) are in favour of hybrid forms of telework that combine telework and presence-based office work.

5 - Other working conditions and outcomes

Telework and consequences for work-life balance during the pandemic

Mixed evidence on consequences for work-life balance: Positive outcomes

One of the key elements mostly affected by the forced lockdown and the recourse to telework practices during the pandemic situation refers to the impact on the work-life balance of the European working population.

In this regard, there is a huge amount of empirically-based evidence that shows that telework and home-based work practices during the pandemic have positively impacted on the reconciliation between work and family/private life. Thus, and in Austria, a representative online survey amongst employees shows that 43% of them suggested a positive impact on this reconciliation, in comparison to a 23% who suggested a negative effect (ÖGB, 2020). Similarly, another Austrian study stresses that particular advantages of home-office work are seen with regard to free time, coping with household tasks and overall quality of life (Bachmayer & Klotz 2021). In Denmark, a study conducted by the Danish trade union HK shows that most employees were enjoying working from home since they found that working from home helped them obtaining a better work/life balance, in the sense that employees felt closer to their families because they had more time at home (HK, 2021).

In Germany, most home-office workers (77%) reported an improved work-life balance, although 60% of them also stated that the existing boundaries between working and private life became more blurred due to home office (60%) (Hans-Böckler-Stiftung, 2020). In Italy, 45% of ICT workers in the Lazio region suggest that remote working significantly favoured their work-life balance (Di Nunzio, 2021), where similar positive results are also identified in other Italian studies (Osservatorio Smart Working, 2021 & FPA, 2020).

Other studies confirm this positive perspective. Thus, 69% of remote workers in Malta described remote working in May 2020 as a positive experience, particularly explained by a better work-life balance, including workers' commitments outside work (e.g. children, family, etc) (PWC, 2020a). In Norway, 32% of those with home office reported a good work-life balance in comparison to 13% reporting a poor work-life balance (Ingelsrud & Bernstrøm 2021). A survey shows that those Portuguese employees who had achieved a better work-life balance is higher in comparison to those who believed to experience more difficulties to balance work and personal life (OSP, 2021). Also, 53% of Slovenian professional employees working at home in the second half of March 2020 suggest that they found it easy to coordinate their work and home obligations (Černe and Aleksić, 2020), and 60% of the Swedish teleworkers experienced a better work-life balance during telework (Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees, 2021).

Mixed evidence on consequences for work-life balance: Negative outcomes

Notwithstanding this positive view on the consequences of telework and home-based work practices on the reconciliation between work and family/private life, there is also an important number of studies that contradict this positive view. In this regard, three quarters of the surveyed white collar employees in Flanders (Belgium) suggest that working from home has a negative impact on their work-life balance, in comparison to 28% that feel a positive one (ACV Puls, 2021). In Croatia, those employees who worked from home reported a greater conflict between family and business

obligations in comparison to those who did not work from home (Ružojčić et al, 2020). In France, 61% of teleworkers declared difficulties in balancing between their professional and private lives (UGICT-CGT, 2020). Meanwhile, 42% of Irish employees agreed that managing the boundary between work and home life was very difficult for them, and almost one third of respondents (31.7%) reported not being happy with their current work-life balance (Mental Health First Aid Ireland, 2020). In Spain, 13.4% of people who felt worse because of the changes in their daily life stated that the main cause was the difficulty to balance (tele)work-life (only lockdown (33.1%) and emotional discomfort about the general situation (29.6%) were higher as a cause of distress) (Borràs and Moreno, 2021). Interestingly, 90% of consulted Dutch experts suggested that employees were not able to mentally distance themselves from their work during the pandemic (TNO, 2021a), where this difficulty to draw boundaries between work and life commitments is also mentioned by other Latvian and Maltese studies (Vanadžiņš, 2021; Bezzina et al, 2021). No

Particularly difficult for individuals with children/family duties and for women

The existing evidence shows that this negative perception is particularly felt by those individuals with children and family duties. For instance, a survey conducted amongst Hungarian teleworkers with children shows that the biggest challenge for this group, mentioned by 50% of respondents, was keeping a work-life balance, well above other elements such as adaption to new daily routines or lack of personal contact (25% in both cases) (LifeTraining, 2021). In France, difficulties of conciliating professional and family lives were particularly felt by parent of children under 15 and even more so for single-parent families (Flamand et al, 2020). A Latvian study identifies that approximately 1/3 of respondents admitted that their work/life balance did deteriorate, particularly for those workers with children who had to combine work with assistance to children (for instance in education) (Vanadžiņš, 2021). Similarly, 41% of Lithuanian employees felt a worsening of their work-life balance after starting working remotely, where a significant worsening of the work-life balance was related to the need to take care of children, especially of pre-school ones (Swedbank, 2020). In France, up to 10% of workers declare that the relationships with their children has degraded during the 2020 lockdown (Lambert et al, 2020).

A French study, based on socio-anthropological fieldwork with 80 employees in a 900 employees publicly-run water management facility suggests that the familial configuration crucially influences the repartition of the work schedule, the length of working hours and its psychological repercussions on workers. The pressure workers with families felt from hierarchy was added to the pressure from family life, with family members becoming “time regulators”. However, family members have suffered more from time fragmentation, with frequent solicitations and interruptions during the day preventing them from concentrating on their tasks, especially women who are more solicited by children and have more domestic workload. Depending on the ability of cohabitants to cooperate or to be in competition (for the share of the internet connection, the access to a close workspace, etc.), telework can be more or less difficult and create domestic conflicts. For some interviewees, working at home did become so difficult that they implemented strategies to go back to their workplace “clandestinely”. Some directors being aware of this practice did even confess to go on-site several times a week to “drive people out and send them back home”.

Source: Clouet, 2021

Linked to the previous point, the available evidence shows a clear gender divide, in the sense that most studies shows that female workers experience more difficulties to reconcile work and

family/private life². For instance, a French study conducted in 2020 reveals that women working at home have been faced 'with a more pressing expectation to prioritize domestic responsibilities over their role as a paid worker' during lockdown (Recchi et al, 2020). As a result, they did more unpaid work and less paid work than men. Another French study shows underlines a rise in domestic labour of more than 4 hours per day for 26% of men and 47% of women (UGICT-CGT, 2020). A Greek online survey conducted in November 2020 found that women were less positive about their telework experience compared to men (Nikos Poulantzas Institute, 2021), where similar results are also shown by Czech research (Kreidl et al, 2021). In Latvia, a survey shows that teleworking women reported experiencing more work-related stress and more frequent decrease in work satisfaction as compared to men (Swedbank, 2020). Also, in Latvia, 60% of women teleworking suggest having experienced increasing difficulties for reconciling work and family responsibilities in comparison to 20% amongst men (Kruks et al, 2021).

Interestingly also, as many as 82% of Polish women who are mothers of minors indicated the presence of children at home, taking care of them and learning with them as a difficulty in working remotely at home, which by far exceeds the share of men complaining about similar problems (Dolot, 2020). Similarly, Portuguese and Spanish research shows that women reported poorer conditions for telework than men due to their overload with unpaid care work and greater difficulties in work-life balance (Silva et al, 2020a; Borràs and Moreno, 2021). In Romania, a study points out that 78% of those who reported interrupting their work to deal with house and family duties were women (Wisemetry and Impact Hub Bucharest, 2020). All these studies confirm that women usually bear the brunt of childcare and household responsibilities, which resulted in an added difficulty for them while teleworking. It is interesting to point out the lack of Nordic studies pointing out these gender-based differences, which may reflect a much more egalitarian culture within the Nordic societies in this respect.

Telework and consequences for health during the pandemic

Mixed evidence on consequences for mental health and well-being: Negative outcomes

One of the key health consequences of the forced telework practices linked to the COVID-19 pandemic situation refers to its consequences on mental health and well-being (stress, anxiety, burnout) of the European working population.

In this sense, there are a number of studies showing that a high percentage of Europeans have been affected by mental distress linked to forced telework practices and undesired consequences (longer working hours, difficulties to disconnect, blurred limited between work and private life, etc). For instance, 64% of Belgian employees suggested to have experienced higher work pressure compared to the situation before the pandemic. More than half (54%) of Greek employees did suffer from burnout in the last 12 months (Adecco Group, 2021)), and in France, up to 31% of teleworkers experienced anxiety (Erb and Reynaud, 2021). In Ireland, some 40% of Irish employees reported loss of sleep due to work-related worries and half said they experienced more fatigue than usual (Mental

² The only exception to this is study conducted in Sweden, which shows that teleworking women experienced a better work-life balance during telework than their male counterparts (Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees, 2021).

Health First Aid Ireland, 2020). In Luxembourg, 47.1% of female and 37% of male employees felt under constant pressure, and 41.6% and 36.6% of female and male teleworkers felt unhappy or depressed during the lockdown (Dijst, 2021). Another Luxembourgish study shows that mental load, emotional demands and mobbing have been more felt by teleworkers during the pandemics (Schütz & Thiele, 2020).

Meanwhile, Spanish teleworkers in the social services sector suggest to have experienced a feeling of “being overcome” by the situation, despite their perception of having adequate resources and measures to deal with the situation (Morilla-Luchena et al, 2021). A Polish study conducted amongst teachers of primary and secondary schools of the city of Radom confined to remote working shows a correlation between remote teaching and growing symptoms of professional burnout, including feeling overloaded by tasks, work-related stress and fatigue (Mazur-Mitrowska, 2021). In Sweden, a survey conducted amongst members of the trade union Swedish Association of Graduate Engineers shows that 30% of them reported higher stress levels (Sveriges Ingenjörer, 2020), where other studies show that frequent telework is associated with increased stress among academics (Heiden et al, 2021).

Interestingly, information from Finland shows that HR-managers reckon that their ability to follow and promote teleworking employees’ well-being did decrease during the pandemic (Habito Health, 2021). Thus, 67% of the respondents said that following up employees’ wellbeing was more difficult and 19% said it was significantly more difficult, where promoting wellbeing was experienced as being more difficult by 53% of the respondents and 18% said it is a significantly more difficult. A Maltese study (PWC, 2020b) did ask managers what initiatives they planned to implement to improve workers wellbeing. The most common were, ‘more guidance on managing mental health, stress, well-being and workloads (68%); increased methods to connect with others for emotional support (44%); and increased investment in tools for better and more frequent communication as well as collaboration with management and colleagues (52%).

Mixed evidence on consequences for mental health and well-being: Positive outcomes

By way of contrast, evidence from some countries shows that telework practices introduced during the pandemic have resulted in positive mental health outcomes. Thus, and in Denmark, a study conducted with the participation of 2,500 teleworking employees shows that 33% of them reported feeling less stressed than normal, 40 % said they experience the same stress-level as normal, and 27 % experienced a higher level of stress (PFA, 2020). In Ireland, 86% of respondents report that working remotely did make their life easier and 59% report that it reduced work related stress and 54% suggested to make their job easier (McCarthy et al, 2021).

In Malta, some authors highlight that remote working has resulted in reduced levels of stress, in particular linking this to reduced levels of commuting (Bezzina et al, 2021). Also, a representative survey amongst 2,501 German employees shows that home-office workers reported less often to have suffered from mental health problems in comparison to workers who were not able to work from home (Waltersbach et al, 2021). In Norway, a survey conducted amongst academic employees shows that approximately 65% of respondents agreed to the statement “I enjoy working from home”, and a 62% agreed to the statement “working from home gives me a less stressful day” (Jordell, 2020). Also in Germany, only 4% of company representatives reported that employees often suffered from health problems due to the blurred working time boundaries or work overload (Hofmann et al, 2021).

Impacts on mental health and well-being: Differences by groups of employees

Notwithstanding these results, the available evidence shows that the levels of stress, burnout and work pressure are not equally perceived by individuals, depending on their personal circumstances (if they live with a family or with small children who demand attention, the self-discipline and resilience of individuals, their work/financial stability, their position in the company or their sense of perceived loneliness/detachment from work and colleagues, amongst other factors) (Martinsone et al, 2021; Bezzina et al, 2021; Borg, 2020; PWC, 2020a). For instance, some Finnish authors suggest that the relevance of personal resilience may have increased during the pandemic because of the constant need to cope with novel and changing stressors (being quarantined, fear of contracting coronavirus, novel job demands derived from telework, etc) (Mäkinieni et al, 2021).

Evidence from France shows that the vulnerabilities associated with teleworked jobs mainly affect managers, so up to 81% have been exposed to increased work load and hyperconnectivity in response to emergencies (Flamand et al, 2020). Up to 55% of Greek employers and company managers describe the general mood of their middle and senior managers as characterized by anxiety/stress vis-à-vis the conditions of telework (ManPower Group, 2021).

A Hungarian survey identified higher levels of stress amongst teleworkers with children (69% of them are affected by the problem) (LifeTraining, 2021), and in Bulgaria, the percentage of women who were considering saying goodbye to their current employer due to overload reasons was significantly higher than that of men (62.3% compared to 26.1% for men) (Capital Media, 2021). Interestingly also, a German study shows that mobile workers' health seems to be directly affected by the digital competences of their superiors, so mobile workers' whose superiors had strong digital/virtual management skills stated that their stress levels decreased by over 15% in comparison to mobile workers with superiors with low digital management skills (Barmer, 2020).

In Portugal, the experience of stress was mostly identified by those workers that tend to reject telework, compared to those who advocate a more regular use of telework (46% and 22% of the cases, respectively) (Pereira et al, 2021). Meanwhile, evidence from the Baltic countries of Lithuania and Latvia shows that work-related stress levels have significantly increased during the pandemic among older teleworking employees, supposedly indicating the greater challenges for them due to their more insufficient ICT skills (Kruks et al, 2021; Swedbank, 2020; Vanadžiņš, 2021). By way of contrast, a Belgian study shows that employees with a high degree of hybrid working arrangement supported by electronic communication had a lower risk of burn-out in comparison to those who have limited to no hybrid working possibilities (IDEWE, 2021)

Consequences for physical health

There is some evidence that the physical health of workers has been also affected by telework practices generated by the forced lockdown situation under the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, a Belgian report identifies weight gain due to lack of movement and back issues as the two most important physical health elements derived from the teleworking experience during the pandemic (ACV Puls, 2021). In Greece, 4 out of 10 teleworkers workers stress that their physical health has deteriorated in the last 12 months (Adecco Group, 2021) and over 40% of Irish teleworking employees have reported increases in back, shoulder and neck pain. Also in Ireland, diet and exercise have been impacted, with just under one quarter (24.9%) of respondents admitting to an increase in alcohol consumption, nearly a third (30%) eating a less healthy diet and two fifths (40%) acknowledging that they were exercising less (Mental Health First Aid Ireland, 2020). In Norway, about 33% of academic employees working from home identified to have more physical ailments due to working from home (Jordell, 2020), and a survey amongst Polish teachers forced to switch into remote mode of working due to school closures

shows that back pain was a major problem for them (Zyznawska & Bartecka, 2021). Similarly, and in Sweden, a survey conducted by the central trade union Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees (TCO) shows that 27% (32% for women and 22% of men) of respondents had experienced back, neck or shoulder pain that they did not experience before the pandemic (Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise, 2021).

In this sense, one of the main reasons behind these health problems refers to the lack of suitable ergonomic conditions at homes, with a direct effect on physical conditions (for instance, the lighting and noise conditions in the home, the size of the home, the availability of office-style ergonomic furniture, etc). Thus, up to 38% of Belgian employers stated that their employees do not have a proper teleworking space at home (Vandenberghe, 2021). Some Danish teleworkers stress that they don't have the same computer and ergonomic equipment at home as when at work (FAOS, 2020 & HK, 2021) and a Maltese study suggests that 14% of remote workers did not have a dedicated chair/desk that could be used at any time, and 27% did not have a private space to work in (MBB, 2021). In Norway, only 38% of teleworkers had a designated room for teleworking, where 12% report working from their living room, kitchen or other room together with somebody else (Nergaard, 2020). A Swedish report particularly stress elements such as absence of height-adjustable desks, sitting close to the screen and bad lighting conditions (Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise, 2021). Last but not least, only 5% of Norwegian businesses agree that telework did make easier for them to cater for employees' physical needs (NHO, 2021).

Advantages/disadvantages of telework

General satisfaction with telework during the pandemic

Generally speaking, both employees and employers seem to be satisfied with their experience of telework and home-office during the COVID-19 crisis. National evidence from several Member States confirms this positive view. Thus, up to 90% of Austrian employees argue that home-office worked mostly very or rather well, despite being introduced mostly at short notice (Bachmayer & Klotz, 2021). In Greece, 88% of employees working remotely assessed telework as satisfactory or very satisfactory (KPMG, 2020-2021), and 71% of Irish employees report a positive or very positive experience of home working (Forsa Trade Union, 2020). In Malta and Portugal, up to 69% report being satisfied or very satisfied with their telework experience, and describe their remote working as a positive experience (PWC, 2020a; Sousa-Uva et al, 2021). In Spain, the majority of Spanish teleworkers express being fairly (42.3%) or very satisfied (26.5%) with their experience of remote working during 2020, so up to 75.7% of respondents believe that teleworking is a good way to organise and perform work beyond the pandemic (CIS, 2020).

Sustaining the previous positive view, there is an extensive array of studies and surveys at Member State level that show on a comparative basis not only the main advantages but also the disadvantages/challenges experienced both by employees and employers in relation to telework practices during the COVID-19 pandemic period. These results are shown next.

Advantages/disadvantages experienced by employees

Thus, and in relation to the experience of employees, the existing literature identifies a number of clear advantages and disadvantages derived from telework practices and identified by them.

In this regard, and focusing on the advantages, one of the most important ones refers to the elimination of the need to travel elsewhere for work related reasons, resulting in clear advantages in terms of elimination/reduction of several costs (travel, parking, lunch costs), more time for other activities or less travel-related stress. For instance, up to 37% of Belgian teleworkers see the elimination of the need to travel elsewhere for work related reasons (37%) and a reduction in stress because of travel time (30%) as being the most important advantages of telework (Telewerken.be, 2021). In Germany, up to 68% of employees point out to time savings due to reduced commuting times as the main advantage (DAK, 2020), and in Greece 79% of respondents suggest reduction in time spent commuting to work as the main advantage (KPMG, 2020-2021) .

Another important advantage relates to the possibilities opened up by telework practices to flexibly organise working day/working time according to the own needs and preferences of individuals. In this sense, 33% of Hungarian employees particularly value this flexibility (LifeTraining, 2021). In Ireland, 55% of respondents report increased work flexibility as an advantage for telework (Forsa Trade Union, 2020), and in Lithuania, 59% of the respondents who teleworked during the lockdown stressed as the main advantage the flexibility given by telework in planning work and leisure time (LCSS, 2020). The flexibility in time management, both workwise as well as in the articulation of work with personal needs is also particularly stressed by Portuguese teleworkers (Pereira et al, 2021). Other advantages identified include the advantages related to home comfort, the potential to work away from home (e.g. at the country cottage) or sanitary reasons related to the lack of fear of being infected with coronavirus in the workplace (Finexpertiza, 2020; Grossmann et al, 2021).

Table 1: Main advantages/disadvantages identified by teleworkers

Advantages	Mixed evidence	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elimination of the need to travel/commute for work related reasons and associated advantages (elimination/reduction of travel/parking/lunch costs, more time for other activities) • Greater freedom/flexibility to organise working day/working time according to own needs/preferences • Home comfort, potential to work away from home (e.g. at the country cottage) • Sanitary reasons (no fear of being infected with coronavirus in the workplace). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work-private life balance • Productivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of social interactions with colleagues, absence of normal “live” direct communication with colleagues, lack of an inspirational work atmosphere • Isolation, feelings of disconnection/detachment with the organisation. Difficulties in coordinating work both with supervisors and with colleagues • Lack of equal advancement opportunities for those in telework, doubts regarding manager’s evaluation on the work done. • Lack of necessary physical infrastructure at home, unsuitable workplaces, lack of ergonomic equipment, lack of separate spaces for work and rest • Lack of necessary work documentation and materials when teleworking

Source: Own elaboration based on different studies

Meanwhile, and regarding the main disadvantages experienced by employees in relation to telework practices during the pandemic, one of the most important ones refers to the lack of social interactions

with colleagues and absence of normal “live” direct communication with colleagues (LifeTraining, 2021; LCSS, 2020). For instance, 65% of Belgian respondents suggest the lack of social contact between colleagues as the main disadvantage related to telework (Telewerken.be, 2021). Similarly, 68% of Polish teleworkers suggest that the major disadvantage of remote work is the lack of social contacts with other colleagues (Dolot, 2020). This absence of social contacts results often in a lack of an inspirational work atmosphere, where ideas cannot be easily exchanged amongst colleagues and superiors (Raisiene et al, 2020).

Another important disadvantage relates to the feelings of isolation/lack of social contacts, disconnection and detachment with the organization, often as a result of poor communication with colleagues and management (Mierzejewska, & Chomicki, 2020; KPMG, 2020-2021; PWC, 2020a). For instance, 48% of German teleworkers stress difficulties in communication with colleagues (DAK, 2020). Related to this, other Irish, Lithuanian and Portuguese studies stress the existing difficulties derived from telework in coordinating work both with supervisors and with colleagues (Harnett & Kieran, 2020; LCSS, 2020; Pereira et al, 2021). Some Greek and Lithuanian studies also suggest that working from home may pose important career constraints, partially linked to the doubts regarding manager’s evaluation on the work done (Athens University of Economics and Business, 2021; Raisiene et al, 2020).

Other studies stress the disadvantages related to having to work at home with houses poorly prepared for teleworking (lack of necessary physical infrastructure at home, unsuitable workplaces, lack of ergonomic and technical equipment, lack of separate spaces for work and rest, etc) (Telewerken.be, 2021; Kruks et al, 2021; LCSS, 2020). A Czech report also stresses the difficulties for some employees to have all the necessary work documentation and materials when teleworking (MPSV, 2021).

Last but not least, there are two elements where the available information shows contradictory evidence, this is, work-private life balance and productivity issues. These topics have been already discussed in a previous ad-hoc section of this report

Differences amongst groups of employees

These perceived advantages and disadvantages related to telework during the pandemic are also differently recognised amongst different groups of individuals. Thus, a Belgian study shows that the lack of social contact between colleagues is particularly felt amongst highly educated teleworkers in comparison to lower educated respondents, whereas the elimination of the need to travel elsewhere for work related reasons is particularly felt by people living in the Brussels Capital Region (Telewerken.be, 2021). Meanwhile, a Bulgarian research stresses that the advantage of saving money from daily expenses is particularly felt amongst the youngest groups of teleworkers (Capital media, 2021). A Czech study stresses that advantages related to time flexibility and contact with family are particularly appreciated by women with children under 12 and by respondents with higher education levels, whereas older age groups perceived more the opportunity to concentrate more on their work as an advantage (Grossmann et al, 2021). Similarly, a Hungarian non-representative survey shows that care-givers give higher scores to flexible working time and saving time on commuting, particularly those looking after elderly people (Kazainé 2020).

A Lithuanian research stresses the difficulties particularly experienced by older people to master employed technologies, particularly those related to online meeting platforms (Zoom, Teams, etc) (Straksiene et al, 2021). Interestingly also, another Lithuanian survey also suggests that respondents teleworking only during the lockdown tended to appreciate less the teleworking’s benefits compared to those who were teleworking before the lockdown (Raisiene et al, 2020). In the same line of

reasoning, the difficulties in coordinating work both with supervisors and with colleagues are particularly felt among those Portuguese workers who reject telework (51%), compared with 40% of workers who advocate a more regular use of telework (Pereira et al, 2021).

In 2020, Raisiene et al carried out a survey which aimed at exploring how Lithuanian employees evaluated the advantages and disadvantages of telework during the lockdown. The results of the study from the gender perspective show that women particularly appreciate the opportunity to work from home in comparison to men.

Thus, men were significantly more likely than women to: (i) state that other members of the household disturbed when working from home; (ii) question whether their supervisors would properly assess their competencies, performance, and achievements while working from home; (iii) argue that working from home poses career constraints due to limited opportunities to demonstrate exceptional skills. As negative aspects of telework, men also highlighted information overload, time-consuming asynchronous communication, and tension due to the distribution of attention between work tasks and intense communication. Finally, men were more likely than women to face self-organising challenges, i.e., experienced difficulties in identifying start and end of several simultaneously implemented tasks.

The authors conclude that men consider their career to be more successful when they have the opportunity for a traditional “masculine” life. When caught up in a stereotypically feminine situation (where it is necessary to combine home and work responsibilities and therefore allocate time productively to work and non-work responsibilities), men begin to feel the threat to their work success.

Source: Raisiene et al, 2020

Advantages/disadvantages experienced by employers and managers

In addition to the perspectives of teleworkers, employers and company managers have their own views on the main advantages/disadvantages derived from telework practices for the company, particularly during the pandemic. In this sense, the available evidence (Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce, 2021; CIP, 2021; Rupčić, 2021; Sliz, 2020; Talentor, 2021) provides some insights into these questions. Thus, some of the most common telework-related advantages suggested by employers/managers include the possibility for employees to flexibly organise their working time, a better private-business life balance or cost savings (derived from limited travel costs, reduced rent of office space, reduction of work-related clothing and footwear, etc). By way of contrast, main identified disadvantages include a limited communication with employees and the lack of adequate regular surveillance/monitoring of employees (resulting in poor organisation and dedication to the job).

Table 2: Main advantages/disadvantages identified by employers/managers

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower overhead costs (e.g. reduced rent of office space, travel costs, work-related clothing and footwear for work, etc) • Flexible organization of time and work tasks by employees themselves • Increased efficiency and productivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to regulate the requirements and rules for remote work • Lack of self-control of work-life balance • Limited communication and feedback/support to employees • Deteriorated teamwork • Limited surveillance/monitoring of employees • Motivation problems amongst employees

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better balance of private and business life • Attraction of new groups of people (e.g. young employees) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties in risk assessment and ensuring healthy and safe working conditions • Provision of the necessary equipment
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Source: Own elaboration based on different studies

For instance, Austrian employers value positively the impact of home-office work on productivity and performance (36% of employers value it positively), whereas the impact on other aspects of work is valued negatively, particularly the impacts on cooperation and teamwork, on the organisation of work, on the capacity to support the team in case of problems or on the possibility to control and provide feedback to employees (60%, 50%, 45% and 37% of respondents, respectively) (Bachmayer & Klotz 2021). Bulgarian information shows that reducing overhead costs (72%) and creating flexible forms of work (67%) are the biggest advantages of telework for employers, together with the possibility to attract young employees who prefer this type of work (28%) and increasing efficiency and productivity (22%). By way of contrast, main disadvantages felt by employers include deteriorated teamwork, the need to regulate the requirements and rules for remote work and the provision of the necessary equipment to employees to work at home, followed by the inability to effectively monitor and report on work, communication and feedback difficulties with the team, difficulties in ensuring healthy and safe working conditions for employees or, finally, motivation problems (Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce, 2021).

Meanwhile, 27% of Portuguese managers suggest the reduction of operating/facility costs as the main advantage of teleworking, whereas the lack of self-control of work-life balance, the lack of communication between colleagues and the lack of monitoring the work are the main disadvantages pointed out (43%, 30% and 15% of responses, respectively) (CIP, 2021). 71% of Polish managers suggest that “No direct contact with other employees” is the most serious disadvantage of remote work (Sliż, 2020), and nearly half of Irish managers suggested building personal connections and effective collaboration as the biggest challenges for them during the telework pandemic situation, including difficulties in motivating/engaging the team and “read the room” (McCarthy et al, 2021).

Concluding remarks:

This chapter has shown mixed evidence on the consequences of telework on the work-life balance of the European working population, so whereas a significant amount of studies identify a positive impact on family/private life (including more free time, closeness to their families and overall quality of life), other studies show increasing conflicts to balance and manage blurred boundaries between (paid) professional and (unpaid) private duties.

Meanwhile, the consequences derived from telework practices during the pandemic on the mental health and well-being (stress, anxiety, burnout) of the European working population are not clear enough, although some groups seem to have been particularly affected by mental distress linked to obligatory telework and undesired consequences (including individuals in middle and high hierarchical positions, women or teleworkers with (small) children, amongst others). By way of contrast, physical health seems to have been negatively affected due primarily to poor ergonomic conditions at home, including weight gain and less healthy diet, increasing alcohol consumption, less exercise or back/shoulder/neck pain problems.

All in all, both employees and employers seem to be mostly satisfied with their experience of telework and home-office during the COVID-19 crisis. Main identified advantages include the elimination of the need to travel/commute for work and associated cost savings, a greater freedom/flexibility to organise the working day/working time according to own needs/preferences, increased efficiency and productivity, higher home comfort or sanitary reasons, amongst others. By way of contrast, main identified disadvantages linked to telework include limited communication and social contacts with colleagues and superiors, feelings of isolation, disconnection and detachment with the organization, perception of decreased career advancement opportunities, difficulties to effectively monitor work or, finally, difficulties in ensuring healthy and safe working conditions at homes poorly prepared for telework, amongst others.

6 - Expectations for the future of teleworking derived from the pandemic experience

Positive expectations on future development of telework practices amongst workers

Looking at the future, the existing evidence shows that a very large number of workers foresee/would like an increase in the use of telework practices, either full-time or in combination with office (hybrid work). For instance, a majority (65%) of Belgian employees believe that their employer will continue to facilitate telework after the Covid-19 crisis has passed (BDO, 2020). Up to 45% of the Lithuanian employees would like to work remotely in the future (LCSS, 2020). In Luxembourg, up to 51.7% of those who telework several times a month are totally in favour to continue teleworking after the health crisis is over, and 27,6% do agree to some extent, whereas 13.5% of employees are not entirely in favour of and 6.9% are fully against the idea of continue teleworking (Schütz & Thiele, 2020). Meanwhile, 66% of Norwegian academic employees say that they want to work more from home after the pandemic in comparison to 22 % who suggest not to want to work more from home after the pandemic (Jordell, 2020). In Portugal, 92% of workers would like to telework in the future (mostly combining presence work and telework, 60%) (Sousa-Uva et al, 2021), and in Slovenia, 75% of workers suggest that they would like to continue with telework when the pandemic ends (Černe & Aleksić, 2020).

This positive expectation on the extension of telework practices in the future is more extended in some specific groups, although the available evidence is not conclusive in this respect. For instance, a Belgian survey suggests that employees in larger organisations and those in private companies expect a continuation of telework practices in the future (BDO, 2020). In Luxembourg, older workers are more reluctant to continue teleworking in the future (in comparison to youngsters, civil servants or residents in Luxembourg) (Schütz & Thiele, 2020). By way of contrast, public sector employees in Lithuania are more likely to prefer teleworking than private sector employees (LCSS, 2020). Interestingly also, women seem to be more interested in continuing in telework practices than men (Kis, 2020; MBB, 2021)

Notwithstanding this positive view on telework practices, there is also evidence from other Member States showing a much more negative attitude towards extending telework practices in the future. This is the case of Greece, where up to 53.4% of Greek workers consider that the possible extension of telework in the future is a negative development, compared to 37.7% who believe it is a positive one, where one third of respondents argue that they would not want to work at home at all in the future (Nikos Poulantzas Institute, 2021). In Latvia, up to 21% of workers do not want to continue in remote work after the pandemic, in comparison to a 17% in favour of this (Kruks et al, 2021).

Positive expectations on future development of telework practices amongst employers

This positive perspective is also shared amongst employers themselves. For instance, up to 60% of Croatian private enterprises report the intention to provide the opportunity to their workers to continue working from home after the pandemic is over, in comparison to 18% who totally excluded this possibility (American Chamber of Commerce in Croatia, 2021). In Cyprus, up to 30% of Cypriot companies intend to continue practicing teleworking in the near future (FinExpertiza, 2020). In Finland, three out of four companies believe that COVID-19 will have a permanent impact on telework

policy at the workplace (Habito Health, 2021). Also, 32% of the Maltese companies expect to continue teleworking as it is, whereas 10% state they will increase it in the future in comparison to 33% who plan to reduce it (20% are undecided) (MEA, 2020). In Norway, about 50% of employers suggest that they want to continue using telework after the pandemic (NHO, 2021).

Preference for hybrid models in the future

The evidence in several countries also shows that a large share of workers are in favour of developing hybrid models (mixture of telework (at home) and work at the premises of their employers) in the future, where this positive perception is often above 50% in most EU Member States. Thus, and in Austria, more than two thirds of the employees see the future of working in flexible working between office and home-office (Bachmayer & Klotz, 2021). Meanwhile, 52% of Irish employees would like to work remotely several times a week and 10% would like to work several remotely times a month, whereas 32% would like to work remotely on a daily basis and only 4.5% do not want to work remotely after the crisis (McCarthy et al, 2021). Another survey in Ireland shows that 86% of respondents are interested in working remotely in the future with 80% of these preferring some sort of hybrid arrangement (Forsa Trade Union, 2020). Also, 44% of Lithuanian workers would prefer a hybrid work model in comparison to 32% that would like to go to the office after the lockdown and 24% who would prefer to work only remotely (Bite, 2020).

Conversely, 51% of Maltese workers state that their ideal future way of working would be to split time between working from the office and working remotely – only 19% prefer to fully work from a workplace (PWC, 2020a). In Norway, only 5 % of the Norwegian workers suggest a desire to work from home every day in the future, while 14 % want to work from home 3-4 days a week, 30 % twice a week, 21 % once a week, 25 % more rarely and 5 % never (Ingelsrud and Bernstrøm, 2021). Similarly, an hybrid model, with occasional weekly work from home, is the preferred option for 30% of the Portuguese workers in the future (Pereira et al, 2021). In Slovakia, 54 % of teleworkers suggest they would like a combination of working from home and working at the workplace in the future (Profesia Job Portal, 2021).

This preference for future hybrid forms of employment is also shared by employers themselves. For instance, 78% of Greek large companies plan to introduce an hybrid model in the future, primarily to maximize employee satisfaction (KPMG, 2020-2021). Interestingly also, 50% of Portuguese companies advocate for some form of hybrid work in the future, with 2 or 3 days of telework per week (CIP, 2021). Last but not least, 79% of Slovak companies support some form of hybrid work in the future, and a large percentage of them (45%) want to regulate when employees take home office and when they are in the office so companies can plan the optimal use of space and the necessary human and material resources (Deloitte Slovakia, 2021).

Concluding remarks:

This chapter shows that, in general terms, both workers and employers are in favour of continuing with telework practices in the coming years, where there is a higher preference for developing flexible hybrid models that combine working between office and home-office and may make compatible the individual preferences of workers with the needs of companies to optimally use their workplaces and human and material resources.

7 - Main conclusions and policy pointers stemming from the research

Main conclusions

- There is a very large amount of empirical evidence suggesting that workers in telework practices during the COVID-19 pandemic period have worked a longer number of (unpaid) hours in comparison to working from the office before the crisis. This extension of working time is likely linked to several factors, including flexible working hours, the absence of time recording schemes, the multiplication of digital communication channels with the company and workmates or the implementation of telework goal-based monitoring, amongst other reasons.
- This extension of working time has been aggravated by a high presence of unsocial and atypical working hours during teleworking in the pandemic period (late evenings/nights, weekends). This is partially explained by a trend towards a flexibilisation of working hours (starting the working day earlier or later, working late into the evening, shifting work to the weekend), often to respond to personal needs of teleworkers themselves during the pandemic. Private sector employees, workers in hierarchical positions and workers with children and home-schooling seem to have been particularly affected by these longer/atypical working hours. It is not clear whether employers are fully aware of this pattern of longer/atypical/unpaid working hours felt by employees in telework.
- There is also extensive evidence showing that teleworkers had difficulties to disconnect during the pandemic, which extended their availability for their employers (via emails, phone calls, virtual meetings, etc.) and therefore working time beyond desirable. The absence of a R2D culture in many companies combined with the own difficulties of teleworkers to differentiate working and resting periods are at the heart of the problem. Managers and workers with high hierarchical positions in the companies have suffered from special difficulties to exercise the ability to disconnect.
- There is mixed evidence on the increase in monitoring and control practices on teleworkers during the pandemic. Where some studies show no significant changes, others identify an increasing use of these practices. In this last case, traditional systems (such as micro-management and excessive supervision, calls, messages and e-meetings) are particularly extended, although new ones (i.e. specific software tools) have been also introduced in some cases. The violation of the worker's privacy is felt by teleworkers as harmful, where the installation of monitoring software and surveillance mechanisms is often perceived by employees as particularly unpleasant and a lack of trust from managers, negatively influencing their morale and stress levels. Meanwhile, companies are increasingly aware that the move to mass remote working patterns during the pandemic has created additional risks from a GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) point of view.

- On the good side, a very large part of existing evidence suggests that both employees and employers reckon a positive (or at least neutral) impact of telework practices during the pandemic on productivity levels, either in terms of the quality of work and/or the amount of work per hour. Reasons underpinning this positive impact, as suggested by teleworking employees, include higher concentration on work, less disturbances and interruptions from co-workers and the office in general, higher discipline during meetings, less small talk in comparison to face-to-face meetings, better work environment, simpler organisation of work and leisure time, more flexible working hours, empowerment/trust to make work-related decisions or time savings due to reduced commuting times. Teleworkers in knowledge-intensive and less routine jobs, teleworkers with higher education levels, aged teleworkers and people with no family duties reported higher productivity levels in comparison to other groups, as well as those workers whose superiors have strong digital/virtual management skills and those who feel trusted by their company. Meanwhile, employers stress elements related to reductions in commute time and adoption of virtual collaboration tools, the improvement of task-focus work or the lack of usual interruptions in traditional work environments, amongst other reasons. All in all, one major difficulty related to telework refers to the inability of some teleworkers to properly use ICT tools, coupled with a lack of adaptation and skills to work in a virtual (new) environment.
- Concerning relations between individuals, and particularly regarding interaction with co-workers, social isolation and lack of social contact with colleagues is one of the most frequently mentioned negative impacts of telework, where some literature points out to a degradation in time of these social elements due to longer time working remotely on a “permanent” basis. Also, working remotely from home seems to have had an adverse effects on coordination and teamwork among co-workers, which at the same time may have led to difficulties in getting support to solve work issues or doubts on how to carry out the work, as well as to poorer “team spirit” or lower sense of belonging to the company.
- Meanwhile, there is mixed evidence regarding how employees assess support and communication with superiors and managers during telework during the pandemic, whereas the existing evidence suggests that managers and employers have experienced increasing difficulties in their relations with employees, particularly in relation to social relations and ability to manage/control individuals from the distance.
- There is mixed evidence on the consequences of telework during the pandemic situation on the work-life balance of the European working population. In this regard, there is a significant amount of empirically-based evidence that shows that telework and home-based work have positively impacted on the reconciliation between work and family/private life, including more free time, closeness to their families and overall quality of life. Notwithstanding this, there are also an important number of studies that contradict this positive view, with greater conflicts to balance and manage blurred boundaries between (paid) professional and (unpaid) private lives. The available evidence shows that this negative perception is particularly felt by those individuals with children and family duties, especially those with smaller kids.

- Similarly, there is mixed evidence on the consequences derived from the telework practices during the pandemic on the mental health and well-being (stress, anxiety, burnout) of the European working population. In this sense, there are a number of studies showing that a high percentage of Europeans have been affected by mental distress linked to obligatory telework and undesired consequences (longer working hours, difficulties to disconnect, blurred limited between work and private life, etc.), where managers reckon decreasing capacity to follow and promote teleworking employees' well-being during the pandemic. By way of contrast, other available evidence shows that telework practices introduced during the pandemic have resulted in positive mental health outcomes, including reduced levels of stress and higher levels of satisfaction at work. Once again, some groups of employees have been particularly affected by poorer mental health and unwell-being, including individuals in middle and high hierarchical positions, teleworkers with (small) children, older workers, teleworkers whose superiors have weak digital/virtual management skills, teleworkers under hybrid models or those who tend to reject telework, amongst others.
- Finally, the physical health of workers has been also affected by telework practices generated by the forced lockdown situation under the COVID-19 pandemic, including weight gain and less healthy diet, increasing alcohol consumption, less exercise or back/shoulder/neck pain problems. The lack of suitable ergonomic conditions at home (lack of a proper teleworking space, absence of dedicated chair/desk, bad lighting conditions) is at the root of these negative consequences.
- Generally speaking, both employees and employers seem to be mostly satisfied with their experience of telework and home-office during the COVID-19 crisis. Both employees and managers/employers have experienced a number of advantages but also disadvantages/challenges derived from these telework practices. Thus, and in relation to the main advantages, teleworking employees suggest several, including reasons related to the elimination of the need to travel/commute for work, a greater freedom/flexibility to organise the working day/working time according to their own needs/preferences, higher home comfort or sanitary reasons (no clear evidence on work-private life balance issues). Meanwhile, the main advantages experienced by employers and managers include the possibility for employees to flexibly organise their working time and place of work, a better private-business life balance or cost savings (derived from limited travel costs, reduced rent of office space, reduction of work-related clothing and footwear, etc.) or an increased efficiency and productivity of the workforce (in general).
- By way of contrast, the main disadvantages experienced by employees include the lack of social interactions with colleagues and absence of normal "live" direct communication with colleagues, feelings of isolation/lack of social contacts, disconnection and detachment with the organization, important perceived career advancement opportunities in some cases or the disadvantages related to homes poorly prepared for telework. From the perspective of employers, the main identified disadvantages include a limited communication with employees, the inability to effectively monitor and report on work, communication and feedback difficulties with the team, difficulties in ensuring healthy and safe working conditions for employees or, finally, motivation problems, amongst others. It is important to underline

that these advantages and disadvantages related to telework during the pandemic are differently perceived by the different groups of individuals, according to their professional and personal characteristics.

- The information presented in this report does not permit to obtain clear country patterns in terms of telework practices and responses during the COVID pandemic period. In this regard, it is important to remember that the pandemic period has resulted in a unique large-scale experiment where mass telework was made compulsory for a time in most EU Member States for a large number of sectors and activities and in a very uncertain period for the humankind as a whole. Notwithstanding, this report has shown the importance of existing different company cultures (also within the same countries) for explaining different telework implementation patterns, particularly in relation to respect for disconnection and work life balance, trust and support towards employees, autonomy at work and self-management of working time or, finally, presentism and 24/7 availability of workers before management.
- From a specific gender perspective, the available information shows that female teleworkers seem to have been particularly affected by longer and atypical working time patterns during the pandemic as well as increasing difficulties to reconcile work and family/private life (particularly women with family duties and small children). In this regard, the collected evidence confirms that women are more involved with unpaid care work duties and bear the brunt of childcare and household responsibilities, which results in added difficulties for them while teleworking. Not surprisingly, female teleworkers tend to report higher levels of stress and poorer mental and physical health/well-being than men, and they seem to be more aware of the importance of being able to disconnect from telework. Despite all difficulties, female teleworkers tend to report higher productivity levels in comparison to their male counterparts, and they particularly appreciate the opportunity to work from home in comparison to men, especially in relation to hybrid forms of telework (combining remote work at home with presence work).
- Looking at the future, both workers and employers are in favour of continuing with telework practices in the coming years, either full-time or in combination with office attendance (hybrid work). Some groups of workers seem to be more in favour of increasing telework, such as employees in larger organisations, younger workers or female workers. There is a higher preference for developing hybrid models that combine flexible working between office and home-office, with different arrangements based on the preferences of individuals and the desire of companies in order to plan the optimal use of space and human and material resources. Notwithstanding, it is an open issue what the response of companies and countries in fostering future telework practices will be.

Some policy pointers

- This report has shown the important challenges opened up by a massive introduction of telework practices amongst workers and companies, as many of them had very limited experience and were poorly prepared for telework. In this sense, this widespread telework experience has underlined the need to better control a number of conflictive issues, including

longer and unsocial/atypical working hours, difficulties to limit the availability of teleworkers for third parties and their ability to disconnect from work, conflictive monitoring and privacy issues, difficulties on work-life balance or undesired consequences on the health and well-being of teleworkers. Social dialogue and collective bargaining at different levels (company, sector, national) is a key instrument in better regulating all these conflictive employment and working conditions issues.

- The report has also shown a widespread desire both amongst workers and companies to further continue with telework practices in the future, particularly under hybrid forms that may combine remote telework with office attendance. From a policy perspective, this situation will require the development at company level of clear and transparent rules about different work organisation issues, including the jobs/tasks that are tele-workable, availability of equipment and costs, the intensity and patterns of telework, the ability and right to disconnection or the establishment of limits on the availability of the workforce beyond regular working hours. In this regard, social dialogue and collective bargaining at company level should play a more relevant role in regulating telework arrangements.
- In addition to social dialogue and collective bargaining practices at different levels, regulations at national/regional level are particularly relevant for assuring a minimum level of protection for workers against any telework-related risks. Subsequently, it is key to ensure that these regulations are effectively implemented and enforced at company and sector levels, for which social dialogue has to play again a key role.

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